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Whitman, Ginsberg, and the Long Line

Thesis presented by Elisa Sabbadin for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

University College Cork
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2023

Whitman, Ginsberg, and the Long Line

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Abstract

This thesis explores Walt Whitman's long lines, Allen Ginsberg's long lines, and the line of the long line in American poetry. As a frame of reference for the long line, the thesis discusses open form. Whitman and Ginsberg did more than herald the first and the second free verse revolutions: they initiated and promulgated the tradition of open form – organicism, in Whitman's early term. Their long lines were a conscious stylistic choice, shaped so as to encode domains which extended beyond form: politics, society, and, above all, spirituality. Or was it perhaps the other way around: that in exploding the constraints of poetic content, these poets accordingly shaped the long line? This thesis explores the long line in various senses: in its implications, origins, and, crucially, in the exchanges which occur, in Whitman's and Ginsberg's poetry, between form, content, and meaning. The long line emerges as a form in which surface boasts meaning, and through which the meaning which moulded it may be glimpsed; as a place of playfulness and contradiction, at least in the hands of Whitman and Ginsberg, perhaps the two most playful and contradictory American poets; and as a phenomenon both carefully crafted and, simultaneously, wild at heart.

Just as Whitman's and Ginsberg's personas and personalities were larger than life, the long line is larger than the page: it is a line that hungers, eats, digests, expels, unravels, fertilises, orgasms, dissolves, evades, and merges. As the democratic Romantic and the democratic Beat were 'everyone's poets,' the long line is also appropriately an 'everything line': it adds, includes, transforms, eludes, overcomes boundaries, embodies organicity, and multiplies its layers. However, this thesis shows that, in spite of its break with conventional form and its ostensible formlessness, Whitman's and Ginsberg's long line is solidly built – take Ginsberg's description of *Howl* as "really built like a brick shithouse" (Morgan 133). Far from being a formless representation of formless concepts, the long line is an informed formal choice. The long line is a largely unnoticed form, and one which has received scant scholarly attention. This thesis elevates the long line as the premise of an underground American poetics which employs it as a socially and spiritually charged medium, and complements the formal tradition of the long line with attention to an alternative critical tradition which, in particular in Ginsberg's case, accompanies its emergence and development. Whereas close reading has been traditionally associated with apolitical ways of reading, and extra-literary contexts have been effaced by formalist traditions, this thesis explores

how form informs, shapes, and embodies content, showing that poetic form is inherently political.

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Introduction

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It is not easy to define 'the long line' precisely, and few scholarly attempts have been made to do so. References to the long line punctuate blogs and websites, usually in reference to Whitman's poetry, as in a piece on poets.org which suggests: "Long lines are oceanic. They wash over you like waves, one after another, each of them full of shells and sand and fish and surfboards, sometimes pieces of wrecks and the bodies of sailors" (Berger n.pag). The author proceeds to define the long line as a long breath, daringly implying that the line is a unit of breath. Such descriptions of the long line tend to be impressionistic and atheoretical. This thesis devises its own descriptions and definitions of the long line, understanding it as a longing line, a leaking line, a monstrous line, a hungry line, and a meditative line. It may be that the intrinsic nature of the long line is to elude definition with the same ease with which it evades traditional poetic constraints. Even *The New Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics* baulks at defining what *makes* for a long line, albeit presenting "The Alliterative Long Line" as an entry in the Middle English section and making such remarks as "the term ['heptameter'] is applicable mainly to the long line of William Blake's later Prophetic Books" (Preminger and Brogan 355, 516). Other generic poetry-centered resources similarly refer to 'long lines' when germane to their discussion, without previously defining the concept. The *Dictionary of Poetic Terms*, for instance, mentions the long line only vaguely and occasionally, finally embedding the phrase in the context of Ginsberg's 'mind breath' measure in its entry on rhythm-creating units in free verse poetry (Myers 311).

Whitman, Ginsberg, and Blake are names which appropriately accompany the long line in some of these reference sources, which suggests a clear enough perception of what the long line is, but bypassing the need for technical elaboration. "The Long Line in Contemporary American Poetry," Daniel McGuinness's 1989 article, similarly summarises some common associations of this form in its opening paragraph: "In lines, as in life, there are long ones and short ones. Until lately they knew their places: long lines were public lines, short lines were private lines. Expansiveness broadcasts

and contraction intensifies"; "What mattered, really, was rhythm," McGuinness continues, "either the regular beat of prosody or the syncopations of free verse" (269). These connotations, not expanded upon in the article, are examined in the first chapter of this thesis, which explores the line of the long line in American poetry. This tradition of open form, the first chapter illustrates, is a fluid and democratic one. It should be noted that, unfortunately, this still largely corresponds with a white male tradition; however, the line's formal inclusivity also reflects a growing literary inclusivity. Although this thesis focuses on Whitman and Ginsberg, female poets are referenced in the first chapter; moreover, this thesis proposes a queering of the (long) line in these poets' – especially Ginsberg's – works by considering how this form embeds a radical homosexuality. Finally, although many of the origin myths of both open form and the long line are discussed in the first chapter, some threads remain unpulled, for the reason that there are so many. For instance, together with its public and shamanic roots, the long line also has biblical roots: for Whitman, in the King James Bible, and for Ginsberg, in the Old Testament.

In the same way that Whitman wrote about everything, it seems that everything has been written about Whitman. Like Whitman's catalogues, the secondary literature is vast and contains multitudes: the Walt Whitman Archive presents 15,925 sources on Whitman in its bibliography. Moreover, Whitman scholarship has been ongoing since the 1850s. The areas of interest have shifted, although some have unsurprisingly remained the same, such as an exploration of the poet's concept of self and a focus on the national scope and impact of his poetry, its role in (and dialogue with) the United States, as a democracy and with reference to the Civil War. Equally unsurprisingly, this latter topic is now more critically scrutinised, as articles such as Jack Turner's recent "Whitman's Undemocratic Vistas: Mortal Anxiety, National Glory, White Supremacy" (2023) suggest. Over the last decades, the focus of Whitman studies, as of American Studies more broadly, has shifted to transnationalism. Over just the last three years, articles or books have been published concerning Whitman's influence on poets or literary or political movements in: Brazil, the Caribbeans, Cuba, the Czech Republic, Bosnia, Serbia, the Dominican Republic, the Suez Canal, the (generic) East, Russia, Ireland, the United Kingdom, and, in particular, Italy (see Wynn 2005; Krieg 2020; Anzini 2021; Bernabe 2021; Bernardini 2021; Esteban and Poláková 2021; Aćamović 2022; Avramović 2022; Camboni 2022; Cohen 2022; Ghazoul 2022; Nori

2022; Rumeau 2022; Folsom 2022). Again, the list of transnational connections which have been studied with regard to Whitman resembles one of Whitman's own long enumerations. Following closely on this transnational turn, translations and analyses of translations of Whitman's works have abounded in the 21st century.

Other areas which have seen a renewed interest in Whitman studies are ecopoetics, with books such as Jimmie Killingsworth's *Walt Whitman and the Earth: A Study in Ecopoetics* (2004) and Christine Gerhardt's *A Place for Humility: Whitman, Dickinson, and the Natural World* (2014) (see Theado 2019), and (queer) sexuality, with studies on 'homonationalism' and 'homopolitics,' sensuous poetics, queer ecology, and trans-human kinship (see Chu 2022; Murray 2022; Kajiwara 2023) and books such as Mark Maslan's *Whitman Possessed: Poetry, Sexuality and Popular Authority* (2001), Vivian Pollak's *The Erotic Whitman* (2000), Catherine Davies's *Whitman's Queer Children: America's Homosexual Epics* (2012), and Michael Wilson's *Masculine Beauty: A Collection of Walt Whitman's Poetry of Same-Sex Affection* (2014). Another emerging area of interest in Whitman criticism seems to concern empathy and compassion, perhaps because of our urgent global concerns, with a renewed focus on diversity, sympathy and community, communitarian sentimentalism, healing and radical empathy, empathic connection, and compassion in Whitman (see Folsom 2003; Mullins 2008; Schöberlein 2018; Shaddock 2019; Marsden 2020; Munger 2022; Young-Mason 2022). This thesis also contributes to such an understanding of Whitman, looking at these themes through form, affectivity, and reader response theories.

Concerning form, some early formal analyses of Whitman's poetry were carried out in the 1940s and 1950s. After this peak, there was a resurgence of formal focus in the 1980s and 1990s, with studies either foregrounding the originality and investigating the nature of Whitman's free verse or identifying prosodic and metric tendencies in his lines (see Miller 1982; Gates 1985; Bollobas 1986; Gates 1990; Avi-Ram 1992; Finch 1993). More recently, a few scholars have enquired into the connections between form and content in Whitman, challenging the dichotomies between form and politics, form and history, form and meaning. Among recent studies which have endeavoured to trace the reciprocal influence between Whitman's free verse and politics, Peter Bellis's *Writing Revolution: Aesthetics and Politics in Hawthorne, Whitman, and Thoreau* (2003) stands out. Erin Kappeler's chapter

"Constructing Walt Whitman: Literary History and Histories of Rhythm" (2019) alternatively traces how the historical debate on Whitman's measure was political in nature, a suggestive approach which looks towards the history of literary criticism rather than Whitman's writing per se, as this thesis does, but which assumes from the start the political nature of (his) form.

Although much has been written about Whitman's poetry, this thesis presents an innovative angle in its investigation into free verse open poetry as form-ful, rather than merely formless, supporting this investigation with original close readings. Formal readings of Whitman's – and Ginsberg's – works have often focused on the poets' dismissal or repudiation of form and on their works' formlessness, rather than on the presence of a different type of formal rationale. This thesis combines formal with historical and extra-literary readings to explore the dynamics of the long line as an understated but revelatory and inspired poetic form which offers a fertile field of fresh enquiry.

Moreover, this thesis values and embeds poet-criticism, the kind in which open form practitioners such as Ginsberg, Williams, Olson, and even Whitman engaged. Where Whitman propagated free verse in modern literature with his proposition of organic writing, poets who would come after him picked up on and theoretically framed this line of inheritance, contributing to an alternative but rich tradition of American poetics. Ginsberg in particular placed himself and his peers in this tradition of open form (and of the long line), striving to bring it to larger relevance in the literary circles of his day. In 1977, Ginsberg began to teach the course 'Literary History of the Beat Generation' at the Naropa Institute, demonstrating his commitment to ensure continuity in the expression of his friends' ideals (Schumacher 667). The transcription of these lectures, *The Best Minds of My Generation* (2017, edited by Bill Morgan), exemplifies one significant attempt to show the literary critical side of Ginsberg. As Ginsberg immortalised the initial sensibilities of the Beat movement, he often mythologised or revised (literary) history.

It has long been claimed that the Beats have mythologised their history. Personal mythologies abounded, for the reason that these writers were such close friends. In the 1970s, Ginsberg spoke of 'paranoia-criticism' with regard to the group's foundational years in Columbia, borrowing the phrase from Salvador Dalí: "I define the paranoia-critical method as a great art of playing upon all one's own inner

contradictions with lucidity by causing others to experience the anxieties and ecstasies of one's life in such a way that it becomes gradually as essential to them as one's own," states the Surrealist artist, continuing: "I very early realized, instinctively, my life formula: to get others to accept as natural the excesses of one's personality and thus to relieve oneself of his own anxieties by creating a sort of collective participation" (qtd. in Simpson 50-51). This was, indeed, the case with the Beats: they followed the 'life formula' of the New Vision which Lucien Carr, a fellow Columbia student and the glue of the early Beats, had formulated; each other's lives became essential to them, in a shared experience of ecstasies and anxieties, as in the infamous Carr-Kammerer murder case; and they constantly discussed their interiorities, considering themselves extraordinary (Simpson 51).

However, mythologisation works both ways: studies and books published about the movement often fall into the category (error) of Beat exceptionalism, sustaining the mythical history which the group had established and which, at the same time as celebrating their lives, undermined scholarly engagement with their texts. Another dominant approach within Beat Studies has been biographical criticism: together with landmark biographies such as Barry Miles's *Allen Ginsberg: Beat Poet* (1989), Michael Schumacher's *Dharma Lion: A Biography of Allen Ginsberg* (1992), and Bill Morgan's *I Celebrate Myself: The Somewhat Private Life of Allen Ginsberg* (2006), multiple editions of Ginsberg's correspondence have been published, testifying to a growing interest in the private life of the poet: *Straight Hearts' Delight: Love Poems and Selected Letters, 1947-1980* (1980, edited by Winston Leyland), *Family Business: Selected Letters Between a Father and Son* (2002, edited by Michael Schumacher), *The Letters of Allen Ginsberg* (2008, edited by Bill Morgan), *The Selected Letters of Allen Ginsberg and Gary Snyder, 1956-1991* (2009, edited by Bill Morgan), *Jack Kerouac and Allen Ginsberg: The Letters* (2010, edited by Bill Morgan and David Stanford), Marc Olmsted's *Don't Hesitate: Knowing Allen Ginsberg: Letters & Recollections* (2014), and *Don't Hide the Madness: William S. Burroughs in Conversation with Allen Ginsberg* (2018, edited by Steven Taylor).

It is worth noting, however, that scholarship on the literary letter tends to unsettle the distinction between life and work, so that the letter comes to occupy a middle ground between the two. After J. D. Salinger sued Ian Hamilton for copyright infringement when Hamilton quoted, for a biography of the author, several of his

letters, the U.S. Court of Appeals for the 2nd circuit found that letters do in fact constitute creative nonfiction (Aycock 55). Critics of this genre also seem to agree that writers are performers, so that letters exhibit an epistolary persona which blurs the distinctions between the personal and the professional, privacy and autobiography (see Jolly and Stanley 2005; Aycock 2003).

Unsurprisingly, Beat writers initially received scant attention or denigration from the academy, with famous critiques found in such texts as Norman Podhoretz's "The Know-Nothing Bohemians" (1958). As institutional channels rejected the Beats, the writers turned to underground networks and little magazines (Theado Introduction 5). While the New Critics of the 1950s were outraged by the movement, Beat writers began to be taken more seriously when concrete social developments, often encouraged or supported by Beat authors, accompanied the group in the 1960s and 1970s: the movement's social influence then prompted critics to consider the authors' literary achievements (Theado "Beat Generation Literary" 747-48). Notably, Ginsberg was eager to discuss his and his peers' writings with critics and writers, providing them with original material. His efforts to sustain the formation of a critical discourse surrounding the Beats resulted in the publication of several books in the 1970s and 1980s. After dropping again, interest in the works of Beat writers has seen a resurgence in recent years, especially after the establishment in 2010 of the Beatdom Books press, which has published, among other titles, Marc Olmsted's *Knowing Allen Ginsberg* (2014), Eliot Kats's *The Poetry and Politics of Allen Ginsberg* (2016), Bob Rosenthal's *Straight Around Allen: On the Business of Being Allen Ginsberg* (2018), and David Wills's *World Citizen: Allen Ginsberg As Traveller* (2019).

Accompanying this resurgence, scholars have been progressively researching Beat writing, so that, as Matt Theado presciently noted in 2004, Beat writers are now considered serious authors who made valuable contributions to the literary world ("Beat Generation Literary" 748). This engagement has only grown in the past 20 years, and recent monographs such as Steven Belletto's *The Beats: A Literary History* (2020) repurpose Beat literary history through a radically extended canon. However, some critical areas of Beat Studies remain less explored, such as formal analysis of Beat writing and poet-criticism. This is specifically relevant with reference to Ginsberg, who has often analysed prosody and applied his study to his own work. *The Best Minds of My Generation* partially fills the gap, together with *Talking Poetics from*

Naropa Institute: Annals of the Jack Kerouac School of Disembodied Poetics (1978, edited by Anne Waldman and Marylin Webb), which also consists of lecture transcripts, and Donald Allen's famous anthology *The New American Poetry* (1960), which includes, at the end, the writers' "Statements on Poetics," their theories on writing. Another contribution to this area is *Composed on the Tongue: Literary Conversations, 1966-1976* (1980, also edited by Donald Allen), a collection of Ginsberg's journal entries, interviews, and conversations on poetics. The recent collection *The Beats, Black Mountain, and New Modes in American Poetry* (2021, edited by Matt Theado) also provides invaluable formal insights into Beat and Black Mountain poetics, in its fluid analysis of form, its interactions with content, and poet-criticism. This thesis' chapter on Ginsberg provides an original contribution to this field in Beat Studies and Ginsberg scholarship, centring the discussion on the long line and marrying practice and theory, form and content.

Like Whitman's and Ginsberg's poetry, this thesis attempts in its methodology to unite opposites. It has traditionally been considered impossible for the literary critic to focus on both formal and extra-formal elements such as history, politics, contents, and contexts. Tendencies and theories alternated; New Criticism was superseded first by Post-Structuralism and then by New Historicism, which was in turn opposed by New Formalism. In the late 20th century, New Formalism posited a new combined attention to form and content; however, the movement promoted a return to form, engaging politics through traditional structures such as the sonnet. This research proposes a peace to the 'poetry wars' of form versus history, form versus politics by exploring the manifold connections and connectivities between form and content, style and meaning, and it does so with specific reference to free verse poetry, a form more often considered a 'non-form.'

This thesis draws on several methodological frames of reference and theoretical paradigms. With the Russian Formalism of the 1920s, it shares a view of literature as a linguistic phenomenon, although this is understood in this thesis in a much more fluid and unconstricting sense. With the New Criticism of the mid-20th century, it shares a predilection for close reading. However, this research also employs reader response criticism, which is anathema to New Criticism (the former's focus on the reader's impressions and understanding of the text corresponds to the latter's 'emotional fallacy'). With stylistics, it shares the methodology of analysing how the

linguistic features of a text build towards its larger meanings. However, this thesis has more in common with pre-1980s stylistics, discourse analysis, which was more eclectic and used other criticisms; modern stylistic analysis is more objective and scientific. Considering close reading as too impressionistic and intuitive, and texts as stand-alone entities, stylistics employs language to systematically analyse how literary meanings are made, looking at such linguistic features as grammar and sentence structure. The most common critique that has been made against stylistic analysis concerns the hermeneutic gap between linguistics and interpretation. Filling in this gap, this thesis employs stylistics, close reading, and reader response criticism as its dominant methodologies.

This thesis also shares much with New Aestheticism, a critical theory movement of the 1990s-2000s which conjoins modern theory with an assumption of the instability of texts, of language, and even of identity (although the matter of identity has more recently been forcefully resurrected with identity politics). New Aestheticism re-establishes literature's autonomy and uniqueness, aiming to create a dialogue in which the critic listens to the text before imposing interpretations. There are many understandings of this theory, moving from the philosophical to the practical; the most relevant, for this thesis, is "as a 'new formalism' which foregrounds the formal features of the text and the effect of those features on the reader" (Barry 302). This thesis lets poetry speak, following formal features into non-formal contexts and vice versa, tracing relationships between content and form, language and meaning. It shares Isobel Armstrong's view that close reading can never be 'close enough,' that it should be 'closer than close,' observing the emotional effects of the text as well, exploring it intimately (see Armstrong 1995). Reader response criticism is also often employed in this analysis, together with cognitive poetics, accompanying discussions on affectivity in open form poetry. On germane occasions, this thesis also employs digital methods of text mining, using the computer to perform the common task of identifying patterns (in this case, counting how many times a certain phrase is repeated in a text) when the poem is remarkably long, as with *Song of Myself*.

Concerning Whitman's work, and with particular relevance to *Song of Myself*, it is important to note at the outset that this thesis references the 1891-92 edition of *Leaves of Grass*; when poems are taken from different editions, this is noted. This final edition of *Leaves of Grass*, also known as the 'death-bed edition,' is appropriate to the

concerns of this thesis, since this edition, more than its predecessors, embodies the poet's preoccupation with death and the spirit. More affective, this is also the version of his poems which Whitman himself viewed as definitive. In 1891, he wrote to the executors of his will: "I place upon you the injunction that whatever may be added to the *Leaves* shall be supplementary, avowed as such, leaving the book complete as I left it […] I am determined to let the world know what I was pleased to do" (qtd. in Allen Introduction xix).

This thesis begins by tracing the tradition of open form and the line of the long line in American poetry. The first chapter explores organicism, open field poetics, projective verse, spontaneous writing, and other manifestations of open form from different angles, including: the personal and the public, and the intersections between these two worlds; the role of the unconscious in open form; openness and contact with the world; affectivity; and Williams's proposition of the Whitmanian tradition. This chapter also includes Diane di Prima, Denise Levertov, and Michael McClure. The second chapter investigates how Whitman's long lines embody, reinforce, are inspired by, and inspire content and meaning, reviewing the poet's organic theory and analysing such formal features as lists and catalogues, parallelism, expressive form and imitative rhythm, affectivity, and poetics of contact. The third chapter explores the ways in which Ginsberg's long lines embody content and meaning, analysing the poet's theories on composition and breath and on formal elements or techniques such as the recreation of switches in consciousness, the catalogue, syntax, 'auto poesy,' expressive form, and grotesqueness. A coda concludes this thesis, presenting a poem by Ginsberg which appropriately summarises the spirit of the long line and of open form composition: in this poem, Ginsberg traces an alternative critical tradition from Whitman, to Williams, to himself in his exposition of his motivations for writing poetry. Thereby, he brilliantly combines *why he writes* with *how he writes*, the form of the long line with its essence. The appendix finally reports lines from *Song of Myself* which figure the phrase 'I am,' collected through methods of digital text-mining, and "Some Different Considerations in Mindful Arrangement of Open Verse Forms on the Page" (1977), a short essay by Ginsberg which the first chapter of this thesis references.

Chapter 1

Open Form: The Line of the Long Line

You'll find that your lies are heavier than your intentions. And your confessions lighter than Heaven.
Otherwise, who wants to read?

Jack Kerouac

The public and the private

The Federal Bureau of Investigation opened a file on Allen Ginsberg in 1964, when the poet was planning to travel to Cuba to participate in a writers' conference in Havana. His file, 90 pages long, identifies him as a "[s]ubversive" who exhibits, among other behaviors, "[e]xpressions of strong or violent anti-U.S. sentiment" ("Irwin Allen Ginsberg" 29). Other marked categories include "member or participant in communist movement," "[e]vidence of emotional instability," and "antipathy toward good order and government" (29). Homosexual, communist, Jewish, Buddhist, of Russian descent, and often drug-fueled, Ginsberg was an unsurprising public enemy in the golden era of capitalism and conformity. In his poetry and life, he would loudly and celebratorily oppose Cold War policy and ethos, engaging with countercultural social and political movements (the Beat Generation, the sexual liberation movement, the psychedelic movement, and the hippie movement, among others), advocating for "a political liberty that could only be defended by free, bold humorous imagination, open field mentality, open field poetics, open field democracy" (Ginsberg "When the Mode of the Music" 154).

As the FBI compiled his file, Ginsberg plotted counter-strategies. "The best antipolice state strategy was total exposure of all secrets," one of his journal entries reads: "Unclassify everybody's private life," he incites, "President Johnson's as well as mine" ("Encounters with Ezra Pound" 14). To escape surveillance, Ginsberg would hide in plain sight. Thus, the poet became a pervasive public personality, and embodied this notion in his poetics. "Poetry is not an expression of the party line. It's that time of night, lying in bed, thinking what you really think, making the private world public, that's what the poet does" he says ("Allen Ginsberg" n.pag). As this thesis' chapter on Ginsberg illustrates, the Beat poet achieves this, in his works, in

several ways, at different levels. How private is private? For Ginsberg, the line does not exist. As he fought against censorship, he fought against self-censorship as well. His poetry exposes his own repressions: "So my problem is to get down the fact that I want to fuck my mother or whatever," he exemplifies: "I'm taking the most hideous image possible, so there will be no misunderstanding about what area of the mind you are dealing with: What is socially unspoken, what is prophetic from the unconscious" ("Craft Interview" 301-02).

"I thought I wouldn't write a *poem*," Ginsberg confesses of his composition of *Howl*, "but just write what I wanted to without fear, let my imagination go, open secrecy, and scribble magic hues from my real mind – sum up my life – something I wouldn't be able to show anybody" (*The New American Poetry* 415, emphasis in original). In his use of form, too, Ginsberg 'opens secrecy,' revealing himself (and his self) on the inside out: his lines aim towards a coincidence of his thought with his breath, and a symbiotic expression of his feelings. One way in which he achieves this accordance is in his 1960s experiments with 'auto poesy,' which consisted of self-recording sessions on an Uher tape recorder. He would later copy the poems down, pursuing a more precise adherence to his thought and breathing patterns. More, however, underlies this practice: as Kathryn Winner notes, "We could see Ginsberg's obsession with self-recording as strategic, an effort to counteract repressive invasions of privacy by preëmptively surrendering everything to the eyes and ears of everyone" (n.pag). In the 1970s, Ginsberg would further develop this into extemporaneous composition, improvisation on the spot, a practice encouraged by his guru, Tibetan lama Chögyam Trungpa Rinpoche. Thus Ginsberg hides in plain sight spiritually as well as politically: combining his life and his poetry in a pervasive public persona which stands up to the Cold War ethos, and turning his mind and his spirit inside out, laying them open through poetry, exposing himself and his self. He achieves 'total exposure of all secrets' through the method of open form.

This accordance between the personal and the communal, the private and the public, pertains to an American tradition of open form, or open field poetics. This lineage suggests some of Ginsberg's most significant influences. The idea of 'making the private world public' did not originate, in American poetry, with Ginsberg. Among his precursors, the poet especially acknowledges Charles Olson and Walt Whitman, the latter his closest literary model. So begins his essay "On Walt Whitman, Composed

on the Tongue" (1980): "There was a man, Walt Whitman, who lived in the nineteenth century, in America, who began to define his own person, who began to tell his own secrets" (285). With Whitman, Ginsberg begins to trace an American line of inheritance.

"Private is public, and public is how we behave," Ginsberg declares on the occasion of Timothy Leary's arrest in Switzerland, quoting from fellow poet Charles Olson ("Declaration of Independence" 116). In "Public Solitude" (1966), he pushes this idea further, proposing a revolution in public behaviour, so that this might more closely align with people's personal explorations of desire. He suggests, for instance, "moral codes and standards which include drugs, orgy, music and private magic as worship rituals – educational tools," so that one might "endorse publicly the private desire and knowledge of mankind" (131-32). Crucially, desire was for Ginsberg the main casualty of the Cold War ethos: "the whole cold war is the imposition of a vast mental barrier on everybody, a vast antinatural psyche. A hardening, a shutting off of the perception of desire and tenderness which everybody *knows*" (Ginsberg "*Paris Review* Interview" 285, emphasis in original).

The poet always equated this desire with nakedness. On October 30, 1956 (the year of the publication of *Howl and Other Poems*), for instance, he stripped naked at a public reading in Los Angeles. According to one account, a drunken member of the audience had challenged Ginsberg to a fist fight, asking: "What are you guys trying to prove?" to which Ginsberg had immediately yelled back: "Nakedness!" – "The poet always stands naked before the world" (Miles 212). As Ginsberg stripped and stood naked in front of the audience, the drunk left the room. "The way he did it was so violent and direct," recounts Anaïs Nin, who attended the reading, in her diary; "it had so much meaning in terms of all our fears of unveiling ourselves" (qtd. in Miles 213). The poet continued to make his nakedness a public affair, as his self-portraits and photographs of him also document. Equating it with natural desire and tenderness, Ginsberg makes of the naked body a powerful, symbolic opposition to the arms race and pervasive wars of the Cold War. The open form of the long line constitutes, for Ginsberg, the ideal medium to replicate this nakedness and openness in poetry.

This perspective is commonly shared by Beat writers and Ginsberg's contemporaries. In her poem "Revolutionary Letter #65," Beat poet Diane di Prima employs a very long line in her sympathetic plea to 'make the private world public.'

Like Ginsberg's "Declaration of Independence for Dr. Timothy Leary," her poem is dedicated to the psychedelic advocate and psychologist, and her epigraph quotes from Olson: "*Let everything private be made public. – Chas. Olson*" (79, emphasis in original). Her short poem presents a simple structure, in which the second and second-to-last lines are very long, much longer than the others, and therefore mirror each other. The first half of the 11-line poem evokes authoritarian regimes, and the second half proposes an alternative strategy; the line in the middle, also broken in half with a slash, states: "we have already seen this movie & it don't look better / in color" (6). The affective power of the poem is mostly carried in the second and second-to-last long lines, because of the contrast which their length creates with the other lines, their crucial content, and their opposite placing in the poem. "We have had enough of secrecy, paid assassins, radio controlled robots, mysterious disappearances, planted evidence, men's doubles arrested in their stead in funky rooming houses whose landladies disappear," reads the first, and the second reads: "We'll have a press conference in the form of ancient confession where each can absolve his fellow. It may take a decade but in the end: No prisons, no schools, no madhouses, no IRS, no IBM, no ITT, no government!" (2, 10).

Like di Prima, Ginsberg relates such an openness to substance use through Timothy Leary. In the 1960s and 1970s, Leary was arrested 36 times, mostly on drug charges. A "hero of American consciousness," according to Ginsberg ("Prefatory Remarks" 110), Leary led the psychedelic era, advocating for an expansion of consciousness. Leary's arrests foreshadowed an emerging war on drugs as psychedelics became illegal. On the occasion of LSD's first outlawing (1966), Ginsberg wrote an address to the Senate discussing the substance: here, he compares banning LSD to censoring personal development and positive, peace-generating states of consciousness. "I am taking the word from our prophet, Walt Whitman" he states, arguing that "our democracy was framed to be a social structure where maximum development of individual person was encouraged": "This is the tradition of the Founding Fathers, this is the true myth of America […] That each man is a great universe in himself" ("New York City Hearings" 68). He attributes to LSD the ability to break through that 'vast mental barrier,' the Cold War: he believes that acid helps "break down the fear barrier" and "has made [him] more peaceable" (73). With Olson's invocations that 'private is public' and 'let everything private be made public,'

Ginsberg and di Prima call for a manifestation, in the world, of such personal expansions in consciousness. Leary's release would correspond with the liberation of a new consciousness which would help bring about nonviolence and compassion (and, in di Prima's poem, a peaceful sort of anarchy).

When Ginsberg says 'making the private world public, that's what the poet does,' this is what he means: exposing, in poetry, the nakedness of the interior realms as they would the nakedness of the body. These internal worlds comprise his mind, thought and breathing patterns, emotions, and physicality. A characteristically long line, this thesis proposes, has been used by fellow American poets Ginsberg and Whitman, among others, to convey their internal worlds. In 1989, McGuinness's article "The Long Line in Contemporary American Poetry" innovatively proposed a hybrid 'private long line' in the works of Charles Wright and Jorie Graham: "Whether the public short line is the next innovation remains to be read," the author sardonically adds (269-70). "The long line, generally, has been traditionally a public line," he explains, "a symptom of the showman or the shaman, the poet on a raised surface: altar, stage, soapbox" (273). That the long line is a public line is a shared point of view: James Nolan's *Poet-Chief* similarly defines American poetry as deriving from two traditions, the 'paternal' and the 'maternal,' the one stemming from European literary tradition and the other from a nativist, oral tradition (28). With the latter, he associates open form, a populist persona, and a tribal, public voice, as opposed to the former's closed forms, detached, romantic persona, and individual, private voice (28).

As the title of his monograph suggests, Nolan proposes Whitman and Pablo Neruda as 'poet-chiefs': public, shaman-like figures who use language ritualistically. Admittedly, Nolan's nativist aesthetic draws on and arguably appropriates the oral culture indigenous to the United States; 21st-century identity politics render Nolan's premise problematic and perhaps untenable. Following such considerations, the long line may be deemed, by some, the formal equivalent of westward expansion and imperialism, with formal expansiveness equating to political and ideological expansionism. Like Mary Austin's *The American Rhythm* (1923), *Poet-Chief* looks to Native American arts and notions to frame and inspire an understanding of Whitman's and non-colonial poetry and form. This thesis also discusses such influences in Whitman, noting some controversial nodes in this matter. Moving back to McGuinness's discussion of the long line in American poetry, the critic analyses Jorie

Graham's *The End of Beauty* (1987) looking at the writer's use of the long line. Interestingly, McGuinness remarks that "the Whitman scholars and the Ginsberg scholars must be wondering already: A woman takes up the cudgel-like line of the virile bard? What's this? The long line of the interior poem? This is contrary" (273).

Arguably, 'cudgel-like' and 'virile' are not words which Whitman and Ginsberg scholars immediately associate with the two poets and their writing. The Transcendentalist and the Beat often seem to admire virility in other men or boys, escaping a clichéd macho poetics in their explicit homosexuality. They also often write in long, vulnerable, even sentimental lines. Scholars have suggested that Whitman's 'grand American expression' may be parsed as sentimentalism (see M. L. Kete 2000). Consider, for instance, this line from *Howl*, in which Ginsberg is remarkably exposed and vulnerable, declaring that he aimed "to recreate the syntax and measure of poor human prose and stand before you speechless and intelligent and shaking with shame, rejected yet confessing out the soul to conform to the rhythm of thought in his naked and endless head" (75). Also consider, as another example, these lines from *Song of Myself* – the first of which is the longest line of the poem – in which Whitman intimately converses with his own soul: "And I said to my spirit *When we become the enfolders of those orbs, and the pleasure and knowledge of every thing in them, shall we be fill'd and satisfied then?* / And my spirit said *No, we but level that lift to pass and continue beyond*" (1221-22, emphasis in original).

Whitman's and Ginsberg's long lines are both public and private, lines which 'let everything private be made public.' The two poets enrich their long line with formal features which invoke, exalt, and reflect the social and spiritual contents and meanings of their poetry. As the Beats petitioned to make consciousness public through writing, more counter-cultural icons such as Leary endeavoured to externalise and bring about a new consciousness. The following sections outline open form by discussing Olson's concept of open field poetics and analysing aspects of Michael McClure's projective verse. As it probes into open form, this chapter highlights three mainstays of this poetic mode: the role of the subconscious, a poetics of contact, and affectivity. These are interconnected in the dynamics of open form.

The reach of the unconscious

Arguably, consciousness is the core theme in both Whitman's and Ginsberg's oeuvres. Whitman, and sometimes Ginsberg, use the word 'soul' in place of consciousness. The poets dedicated their writing and, to different extents, their lives to exploring these elusive notions, carrying out this search through their poetry as well: their writing presents several exchanges with consciousness, which also take place at the level of form. Although form is ostensibly dry, it can be complex and surprising. In fact, in open form poetry, the unconscious and the subconscious play a significant role.[1] Ginsberg, for instance, would employ his unconscious mind in his writing often and even methodically, as in auto poesy or meditation. The practice began with *Howl*, one of the most prominent features of which is an association between unconscious and conscious phrases or words (an unconscious adject or adverb and a conscious noun or verb), as in 'hydrogen jukebox.' Whitman, before him, explored notions of a collective unconscious, which his poetry often reflects formally.

The two poets' focus on the unconscious aptly demonstrates how their long line is both a private and a public line. What is there more private than the personal unconscious mind? Their answer might be: 'What is there more public?' Beliefs in equality and democracy underlie their understanding of the unconscious. This exemplifies the public and private nature of the long line, and the deep reaches of open form and the long line. Other poets, when discussing the subconscious in poetry, take a less universal, more individual-specific approach. McClure, for instance, focuses on the unique, intimate, unconscious worlds of the poet, while also closely following Olson's pronouncements on projective verse and open field poetics.

Projective verse presents another angle through which to consider the role of the unconscious in a poem. Olson's manifesto "Projective Verse" was published in 1950 and is extensively quoted in William Carlos Williams's *Autobiography* (1951). Olson's thought owes much to Williams's: in fact, Olson's open field poetics and composition by field, the main propositions of projective verse, are derived almost directly from Williams's essay "The Poem as a Field of Action" (1948), which proposes a new, relative measure in poetry, the variable foot. Neither Williams nor Olson were technically adept as critics. As Marjorie Perloff notes in *The Dance of the*

[1] It is worth noting that many writers, both lay people and scholars of psychology, employ the terms 'unconscious' and 'subconscious' interchangeably. However, if one wants to make one differentiation, the main one lies in the level of accessibility: whereas the subconscious may be more or less easily accessed, the unconscious lies deeper.

Intellect (1985), Williams often contradicts himself: 'Free verse isn't verse to me,' he declares, for instance, time and again, proceeding to write in free verse, only to call it 'the American idiom' (89). "There is no such thing as 'free verse,'" he also contends in "The Poem as a Field of Action," although what he advocates for in effect equates to free verse. At times, Olson's poems also diverge from their theoretical underpinnings. In keeping with the spirit of open form poet-critics, this thesis does not dismiss contrasting notions as falsifying the theories behind them. An essential element of this mode of writing and of thought – "open field mentality, open field poetics" (Ginsberg "When the Mode of the Music" 154) – is its playfulness, contradiction, focus on a continuous exploration rather than results, refusal of poetic or ideological constraints, and assertion of, in Ginsberg's words again, a "free, bold humorous imagination" (154).

One of the notions proposed in Olson's essay is 'objectism.' A play on older models of objectivism and subjectivism, objectism proposes a consideration of the person themselves as an object, removing a certain distance which he believes has come to lie between the poetic line and its composition. Here, the subconscious mind comes into play in the formation of the poem. "Objectism is getting rid of the lyrical interference of the individual as ego, of the 'subject' and his soul," he explains ("Projective Verse" 59). If this occurs, then the poet "ventures into FIELD COMPOSITION – puts himself in the open – he can go by no track other than the one the poem under hand declares, for itself" (52). This creation is premised on a degree of autonomy from the poet's control. The Black Mountain poets (and those associated with the *Black Mountain Review*, such as Duncan, Creeley, Williams, Levertov, Blackburn, and Snyder) discuss the creative process as an act of energy. Following Olson, "the poem itself must, at all points, be a high-energy construct and, at all points, an energy-discharge" (52). After the poet's ego has been removed from this equation, an unconscious energy leads the poem to its composition, one which the author does not rationally mould.

Michael McClure's *Dolphin Skull* (first published in 1995, in *3 Poems*) provides an excellent example of projective verse. The poet flags up the method from the outset, in his Preface, and, in the poem, puts theory into open form practice. This section closely looks at McClure's poetry, as the Beat writer also discusses and exemplifies the role of the subconscious in this mode of poetry. *Dolphin Skull* does

not dip in energy from the beginning to the end of its 69 pages. The poem is divided into two parts: the first, "Stanzas in Memory," is written "directly from the unconscious," in the sense that, the poet says, "what I saw was simply there"; the second, "Portrait of the Moment," rehashes thoughts and images of the first to "very *consciously* and spontaneously explore that single moment" ("Author's Preface" xvii, emphasis in original). Tellingly, the first and second parts do not differ in style: a subconscious exploration of internal worlds resembles, in expression, a wholly conscious exploration of one moment. This is, for instance, how the final section of "Stanzas in Memory" begins:

YOU ARE HAMLET WITH A BLADE OF GRASS
in your teeth like an old farmer
with a piece of straw. Cracker barrels
where the dog pissed. This is all a string of pearls
with reflections of reflections in the opulent
glimmering surface of endless flaws (35).

This is how "Portrait of the Moment" begins, after repeating word-by-word a long section from the previous part:

Round yellow seeds among hailstones
on the gray wet planks.
The self coming out like CLOUD,
CLOUD of FACES
and shoulders.
Big cloud. Bulk. Made
out of meat (38).

Although these short extracts do not allow for a full comparison, they show how the poem's form remains 'consistent,' with capitalised phrases, unconventional spacing, and fragmented sentences. The formal placing of the poem, which is centered mid-page and which often presents capitalised words – a modernist technique, as in the Futurist manifestos and poetry of Ezra Pound – written vertically, one letter per line, also remains constant until the end of the poem. Although this is representative of the poet's characteristic style, it also suggests that he is still employing an unconscious energy to propel his writing. The main difference between the two parts

is that the first tends to play with a number of images, revisiting them in a spiral in which the poet comes back to and expands on an image, while the second tends to be more linear and less circular, more philosophical and less random. Both parts attempt to capture consciousness deeply and extensively: "let it be a big picture / made in all imaginable senses" (48-49).

"When consciousness expands, you can make the unconscious conscious," remarks director David Lynch in one of his lectures on transcendental meditation (49:29). Arguably, this is what McClure achieves in his poem. In 1976, at a lecture at Naropa Institute, the Buddhist school founded by lama Trungpa, McClure instructed the students to create a 'personal universe deck' by writing down 100 words, concrete words pertaining to the five senses, which signify their past, present, and future, their good and their bad sides (see McClure's lecture in Waldman's *Talking Poetics from Naropa Institute*). Theoretically, this would help them access their subconscious, and subsequently allow them to externalise, in writing, a deeper level of consciousness and of self: their own mythical worlds, history, and imagination. In opposition to this deeper, purposeful exploration, however, the unconscious associations in *Dolphin Skull* are quick and relentless. They elude time in their simultaneous occurrence, 'there and somewhere else': "THERE IS NO CONFLICT IN MEMORY while the bell rings. / Free association is a red-blue tongue / up the ass. She looks like / Elizabeth Taylor. It's a penthouse / and the mind is there and somewhere else" (*Dolphin Skull* 27).

In his Introduction to *3 Poems*, lyricist Robert Hunter also points out the extra-temporal nature of McClure's poetry: "The work does not progress towards some distant apex of excellence. It simply inhabits that excellence and accumulates" (xi). Such a view echoes Joseph Frank's elaborations in "Spatial Form in Modern Literature" (1945), in which the critic contends that modern literature (meaning, for him, T. S. Eliot, Ezra Pound, and James Joyce) moves towards taking a shape in which "the reader is intended to apprehend their work spatially, in a moment of time, rather than a sequence" (225). In "Afterword to 'Portrait of the Moment,'" McClure elaborates on time in the poem. This is not linear but self-contained, as in William Blake's "Auguries of Innocence": "a World in a Grain of Sand […] Eternity in an hour" (1, 4). "[I]t became progressively clear that *the moment* is every moment and is all moments in all times and places […] The moments before the invention of time were as close to me as the moments of the present and the moment of the new future,"

McClure remarks; “I was meat. I was memory” (“Afterword” 70, emphasis in original).

Exploring the countless facets of consciousness in one instant in time, McClure’s poem attempts the simultaneous presence and overlapping of thoughts and impressions. Formally, therefore, the poem reflects its semblance before it is written, as thoughts or impressions occur in the poet’s consciousness. For instance, in this extract, McClure adds what seems to be a second voice which exists in parallel to the first one:

YOU
THINK
WE
ARE
BODIES
WALKING
UP Kissing.
TO Holding hands.
ONE
ANOTHER
AND
SPEAKING (25).

This seems to mirror the simultaneous existence of more than one internal ‘voice,’ or train of thoughts. With a degree of precision, McClure attempts to capture something which mutates at speeds which are too rapid for us to perceive: unconscious and subconscious thought, inner voices and strings of images. “So there we are, fast, there’s the dogma,” concludes Olson in “Projective Verse” after his reflections on open field writing: “always one perception must must must MOVE, INSTANTER, ON ANOTHER!” (53). In this line of thought, both Olson and McClure are indebted to D. H. Lawrence’s poetic directions: in “Poetry of the Present,” an essay which particularly praises Whitman, published as Preface to *New Poems* (1920), the poet declares that “There must be mutation, swifter than iridescence, haste, not rest, come-and-go, not fixity, inconclusiveness, immediacy […] There must be rapid momentaneous associations of things which meet and pass on the forever incalculable

journey of creation" (v). McClure's "Author's Preface" itself alludes to Lawrence's essay: "there must be ebullience, hunger for freedom, and imagination" (xv).

Dolphin Skull, especially in its first part, presents fragmented sentences in irrational, quick succession. These aim to capture the movements of McClure's subconscious mind. However, the Beat poet anchors much of his affective power in words: the specific words, the right words, the words from his 'personal universe deck.' Consider, for instance, as Paul Nelson suggests (see "Inside Dolphin Skull"), the first line of the long poem: "SO THE OWL HOOTS: Turquoise. Musk. White linen" (3). The three sensuous words stand alone, in a highlighted separation which increases their solidity and affective power, evoking sensations, smells, consistencies, colours, sounds, and perhaps even memories in the reader. Of his poem *Dark Brown*, published in the same collection, McClure explains that it "contains words from Old English and dictionaries of archaisms and argot. This was a search for language to describe the states for which I could not find contemporary words" ("Author's Preface" xvi). As Williams declares in "The Poem as a Field of Action," "Vocabulary opens the mind to feeling" (284).

Often, Ginsberg makes a similar use of words in his poetry, employing an 'intentional meter,' rather than a stress-based meter, when reading his poems out loud. In fact, rather than relying on a rhythm created by a specific alternation of stressed and unstressed syllables, he stresses or unstresses whole words. Ginsberg traced this practice back to Pound, noting that in his performance of his poetry, every syllable is pronounced with intention: "It's not pay-attention-to-the-tone, but you can pay attention because EACH THING… MEANS… SOME… THING," he remarks ("Improvised Poetics" 32-33). In McClure's poetry, this manifests as a precision in vocabulary, and faithfulness to what may be captured of the individual subconscious. This exactness of vocabulary allows for spiritual precision, which Hunter defines as the poet's specialty (xi). Adhering, in his writing, to this accuracy of perception, the poet productively employs the projective method. In fact, because of its unconscious energy and scope, his composition requires an attempt at a coincidence with the subject matter of the poetry, which is, in Hunter's words, the "primordial ecstasy in the life of the biological organism, the visions of its biologic mind, and its essential animal spirit" (x-xi). This corresponds to Olson's objectism and removal of the 'lyrical interference of the individual as ego.' In *Dolphin Skull*, McClure exposes both his

biological body and his animal mind, his subconscious, on the inside out: he is the writer and the language, the subject and the object. As he tells in *Dolphin Skull*: "I / HAVE / BLOWN UP! / Blown up and cooked myself over a fire" (10).

Openness on the world

This chapter has focused on McClure's poetry because it places itself so firmly in the tradition of open form, presenting ties with the Beat Generation, projective verse, Lawrence's poetry-criticism, and Williams's teachings. McClure's ritualistic use of words and his access to a spontaneous, unconscious energy in writing prompts reflections on the role of the subconscious in open form poetry, and how this can manifest formally. Such a consideration of *Dolphin Skull* also allows for a further overview of topics which this thesis elaborates upon in the next chapters: contact and affectivity. These two are intimately connected, as the Whitman chapter, in particular, illustrates: where affectivity is the primary aim, a poetics of contact is essential. In Whitman, contact is invoked through the tropes of translation of self, organicity, intimacy between speaker and reader, and ultimately death and rebirth of the speaker in the reader. However, contact is also attempted at a different, more experimental level: in the sheer length of the line, which seemingly outstretches from the page towards the reader. "Touch me, touch the palm of your hand to my body," Whitman persistently calls to the reader ("As Adam Early" 131).

Opposing the allusive poetry of the American poets who moved to England, Williams resurrects the idea of contact through the small magazine *Contact*. He makes 'contact' a buzzword for an American poetics which comes from direct experience and perceptions, and which is anchored in a sense of place. In his essay "Williams in a World of Objects" (1976), Ginsberg reinforces such an understanding of Williams, which coincides with the common, popular view of the poet as a man who was deeply set in his time and place, poetically concrete and humane, a common man. "Williams was a square," he remarks, though affectionately (340). By profession, Williams was a medical doctor, sketching poems on prescription papers, which endowed him with a less metaphorical, and more literal, grasp on life; "He was dealing with actual birth rather than literal birth, actual eyes, hair, etc." Ginsberg notes (340). "He wanted to know his roots, know who the iceman and fishman were; know the housewife; he wanted to know his town," continues the Beat poet, leading the reader on to Williams's "fantastic discovery: that you can actually make poetry by dealing with this universe

instead of creating another one" (340-41). Williams's opus, in fact, comprises exactly what Ginsberg lists. His epic poem *Paterson* (1946-58) evokes a provincial city, not an 'Unreal City' like the London of Eliot's *The Waste Land*; his much-anthologised "To Elsie," to name another example, is dedicated to his housemaid:

> a girl so desolate
> so hemmed round
> with disease or murder
>
> that she'll be rescued by an
> agent –
> reared by the state and
>
> sent out at fifteen to work in
> some hard-pressed
> house in the suburbs –
>
> some doctor's family, some Elsie" (31-40).

In her individual and cosmic significance, Elsie also embodies an intersection between the private and the public worlds and experience (Tapscott 4).

A line of inheritance concerning contact understood in this sense can also be traced back to Pound. For Pound, contact was not the motion of an outstretched hand, as it was for Whitman, but an adherence to his own world; as Perloff suggests, in Pound, 'the thing' does not point to symbolic equivalents or significance, but is based on what Pound himself called his 'constatation of fact' (*The Dance of the Intellect* 9). D. S. Carne-Ross, whom Perloff admires for his analysis of the *Cantos*, remarks that: "Not merely does the thing, in Pound's best verse, not point beyond itself: *it doesn't point to us*" (38-39, emphasis in original).

Contact in its Whitmanian sense results as an essential aim and effect of projective verse: in fact, this type of poetry is defined as a transference of energy: "A poem is energy transferred from where the poet got it […] by way of the poem itself to, all the way over to, the reader" ("Projective Verse" 52). As one of the mainstays of open form poetry, contact also evokes the distinctions which scholars have traced

between a public and a private line, a maternal and a paternal tradition in poetry. Where the private line epitomises 'closed form,' the public long line exemplifies an open form which is based on a poetics of contact: it starts from somewhere to *go* somewhere; coming from an oral tradition, it is meant to be read out loud, to reach an audience. If perhaps simplistic, one more distinction is implicit in Nolan's categorisation: the paternal tradition is more intellectual, and the maternal tradition is more emotional. This resonates with the nativist descent of the maternal line, the European descent of the paternal line, and their respective political connotations. Emotionally to touch and move an audience, the line needs to rely on affective power. Affectivity, contact, and the long line are reciprocally implied.

In his chapter "A Theory of Organic Reading," John Wrighton proposes a new way of relating to organic writing, 'organic reading.' He bases his discussion on Denise Levertov's theories of organic writing and open form, which often take place in dialogue with the formal considerations of Olson and other Beat and Black Mountain poets such as Robert Duncan and Robert Creeley. More precisely than Olson or Williams, Levertov elaborates on the dynamics between content and form in open form poetry, calling this mode organic poetry. In "Some Notes on Organic Form" (1965), she notes: "A partial definition, then, of organic poetry might be that it is a method of apperception, i.e., of recognizing what we perceive, and is based on an intuition of an order, a form beyond forms, in which forms partake"; of this perceived internal world, she explains, "man's creative works are analogies, resemblances, natural allegories. Such poetry is exploratory" (67-68). The poet therefore captures these hidden forms, and 'crystallises' them, using her term, in their writing. The role of the personal unconscious is crucial in Levertov's conceptions of open form poetry as well: in this, the poet is largely influenced by Gerald Manley Hopkins's mystic notion of 'inscapes,' a sort of sub-strata of individual identity, and 'instress,' the apprehension thereof.

Wrighton's proposition for this type of poetry is an organic and open reading, one in which the reader employs their own subjectivity: "a new approach to close reading, one not dependent upon academic reference, but rather on an ethical commitment that is reverent and celebratory," one in which "[t]he open form of her poetry may be complemented by an 'open' approach to reading the poetry" (165). As

Isabel Armstrong insists, close reading can never be 'close enough,' and the reader must explore the text emotionally as well as intellectually (see Armstrong 1995).

Significantly, the interaction with the world which open form presents, together with its inherent pathos, renders it an ideal vehicle for social and political messages. Levertov herself exhibited a strong political turn in her poetry, which accompanied her activism and which her poetry and use of form accommodated. Whitman and Ginsberg, this thesis shows, also make such a use of the long line in their affective poetry. "I follow you whoever you are from the present hour, / My words itch at your ears till you understand them," teases the speaker of *Song of Myself*, exemplifying Whitman's intense, sometimes extreme, poetics of contact with the reader (1245-46). The reader often plays an active role in open form poetry. "What is urgent is not the *quantity* that is understood as one reads a poem," states McClure in his Preface to *3 Poems*, "but how much one uses the richness of one's being to have the experience of the poem" (xvi, emphasis in original). Of *Dolphin Skull*, he makes the interesting pronouncement that "Perhaps it will please someone else and they may appropriate it for their own consciousness" ("Afterword" 71). Considering such an appreciation for the role of the reader, projective verse, together with other shades of open field poetics, lends itself to interpretations which employ reader response criticism, cognitive poetics, and affective theory.

"But is there a poetry open on the real and a poetry closed on the words?" asks René Nelli in *Poésie Overte Poésie Fermée* (qtd. in *Olson's Reading* 84), a question which Olson invites in "Projective Verse" when discussing 'closed verse' as opposed to open verse, or open field poetics. Open form may be considered 'open on the real' because of its interaction with the extra-textual, its dialogue with an audience, and its rootedness in place. The sheer length of the long line embodies a movement of openness, of connection between literature and the world. This dynamic of relationality and openness is replicated in other forms besides the long line, such as Kerouac's spontaneous prose. His novel *Doctor Sax* (1959), for instance, opens with a five-line long sentence which simultaneously introduces and exemplifies one of Kerouac's precepts: "dont stop to think of words when you do stop, just stop to think of the picture better – and let your mind off yourself in this work" (3). In the novel, sentences are often paragraphs or pages long; in the second chapter, for instance, full stops only feature in the second-to-last and last sentences, one page and a half in.

Kerouac and other Beats would emphasise vision over (and often at the expense of) self-awareness in composition. In this sense, open form can be considered as the diametric opposite of 'closed on the words' and as rather 'open on the real.' The second chapter, however, shows how much of the emotional power in Whitman's poetry comes from his ritualistic use of language and words, a dynamic which this chapter has identified in McClure. In a sense, therefore, 'open on the real and closed on the words' does not comprehensively describe this mode. Words can be, for open form practitioners, an essential preoccupation and a magic tool. A form which is open, like a theory which is open, intrinsically opens itself to contradiction and divergent features.

A tradition of organicism

At the heart of this thesis lies the notion that open form remains, essentially, form. These sections have investigated the theoretical backgrounds and concrete applications of open form and the long line. The following chapters show how the openness of open form and the freedom of free verse do not contrast with the concept of form but are rather instrumental to an exchange between form and content which endows this poetry with meaning and effectiveness. What has been considered formless is shown to be, on the contrary, form-ful. Such considerations in modern American poetry necessarily commence with Whitman, the American father of free verse. Whitman's theory of the organic emergence of poetry became a starting point for later views on open form to further develop. The following section looks at some understandings of open form and free verse, passing through Williams in pointing out relationships between Whitman's organicism and open field poetics.

William Carlos Williams and T. S. Eliot represent a binary in poetics, a polarisation posited by Williams himself. However, the two poets express, at times, similar opinions on free verse, especially on the first half of the phrase. "It is a battle cry for freedom, and there is no freedom in art," says Eliot of free verse in 1917 ("Reflections on *Vers Libre*" 32), remarking elsewhere that "There is no method except to be very intelligent" ("The Perfect Critic" 55). Williams similarly states, of free verse, that "because we have worked in a careless mood along hidden channels would be a poor excuse for any declaration of freedom. The only freedom a poet can have is to be conscious of his manoevres" ("America, Whitman" 1). Still, Williams often writes in what could only be called free verse, although he employs different

nominations (the variable foot, the American idiom, the relative measure). Whereas Eliot borrows from other idioms, as in *The Waste Land*'s "thirty-five quotations in seven languages" (Williams "The Poem" 285), Williams's essay "The Poem as a Field of Action" suggests creating "a new language […] the mass in which some other later Eliot will dig" (285).

Whereas Eliot barely acknowledges Whitman, Williams exhibits a complex relationship with him. He knows that his own proposition of "sweeping changes from top to bottom of the poetic structure" is not new, and that he is carrying on a tradition of poetic revolutions: "It may be said that I wish to destroy the past. It is precisely a service to tradition, honing it and serving it that is envisioned and intended by my attack, and not disfigurement – confirming and *enlarging* its application" (284, emphasis in original). Olson's "Projective Verse" builds upon Williams to define free verse in a formally novel manner. At its most physiological (and perhaps philosophical), Olson proposes writing by lead of the ear and the breath: "the HEAD, by way of the EAR, to the SYLLABLE / the HEART, by way of the BREATH, to the LINE," in order to "engage speech where it is least careless – and least logical" (55). Denise Levertov helpfully explains this contention: "Head (intellect) and ear (sensuous instinct) lead to syllable, which has intrinsic meaning but has not rhythm. It is when heart (emotion, feeling) influence the operation of breath (process) that we are led to the line (the phrase, the rhythmic, emotive grouping of syllables)" ("Notebook Pages" 28).

Furthermore, in composition by field, the poet "can go by no track other than the one the poem under hand declares, for itself" (52). Significantly, both Williams and Olson base their thought on the image of the field, expanding on Whitman's theory of organicism (which Levertov directly repurposes through her organic writing); in this theory, the Transcendentalist poet was, in turn, influenced by Romantic considerations of poetry based on nature. This line of inheritance is fully explored in the second chapter. In the natural imagery which they apply to poetic composition, Williams and Olson therefore resurrect Whitman's theory of organicism, according to which poetry emerges spontaneously, like leaves from a plant, from the consciousness of the poet. The essential point of the organic theory, which, as this chapter has illustrated, poets such as Williams, Olson, McClure, Levertov, and Ginsberg share, is a focus on the innermost workings of composition, composition in its first occurrence:

its seed, growth, and blooming onto the page. The emphasis of open form theorists and practitioners, in other words, lies less on what the poem's form is or should be than on the process of composition itself.

Whitman's theory of organicism underlies, as a guiding inspiration, organic and open field visions of form and of writing. McClure pushes the trope of the organic emergence of poetry and brings it to its logical conclusion: that poetry itself emerges as an organism. The poet struggled to reconcile form and poetry's formless essence, its 'biological' nature and life, in other words, as he deeply engaged with the organic world in its most essential biological breakdowns. "I wanted to write a poem that would come to life and be a living organism," he states of his poem "Rant Block" (*Scratching the Beat Surface* 89). McClure wrote "Rant Block" while pondering Olson's manifesto and Robert Creeley's contention that "Form is never more than an extension of content" (n.pag) – to which Levertov responded that "Form is never more than a *revelation* of content" ("Some Notes" 73, emphasis in original). At the time, he was also discussing the problem of form with Ginsberg, who would maintain that 'Mind is shapely, Art is shapely,' following Kerouac's contention that "If the mind is shapely, the poetry is shapely" (Ginsberg "Mind Is Shapely" n.pag). This was unsatisfactory to McClure, who yearned for a stronger connection to the body, the 'shape,' recalling Diogenes's remark: "*I have seen Plato's cup and his table but I have not seen his cupness and his tableness*" (qtd. in *Scratching the Beat Surface* 88, emphasis in original).

"Rant Block" begins with the assertion: "THERE IS NO FORM BUT SHAPE!" (1). The poem presents a struggle between inside worlds and their expression, exemplified by a burning fire which eventually creates a hell: "I AM FIRE AND I MOVE IN AN INFERNO / sick I smolder / and do not burn clear"; the confinement is "The form and talk of form as if flames obeyed without / dwindling" (29-31, 75-76). At the end, the poem comes back to its first statement, that form is merely shape, almost a bidimensional side effect of the expression of the poem, of the poet's internal worlds. If the poem itself becomes endowed with the metaphorical fire (of life), then it is a living organism and form stops acting as a constricting factor. In this sense, 'there is no form but shape.'

But this is the crux of free verse, of open form, of the long line: the formless is not formless, but form-ful. Even a denial of form employs form for its expression. The

poem looks like a poem. Whitman's and Ginsberg's poetry, lawless as it may sometimes appear, also makes use of a series of formal tools which shape poetry from the inside out. Open form writers do not follow pre-set forms, but rather let the poem assume its own form organically. However, this does not mean that they do not shape it in a conscious, deliberate effort, refining their craft and composition. One need only consider how many of these poets engaged with literary criticism and theory. Kerouac even compiled a how-to guide for writing spontaneously, the "Essentials of Spontaneous Prose," which suggests that this mode of composition is not as casual as it sounds. "To write spontaneously does not mean to write carelessly," notes McClure; "In fact, there must be a vision and a poetics that are alive and conscious" ("Author's Preface" xv). In his letter to Richard Eberhart, defending *Howl*'s long line, Ginsberg similarly declares: "As in all things a reliance on nature and spontaneity (as well as much experience writing and practicing arriving at spontaneity which IS A CRAFT not a jerk-off mode, a craft in which near-perfection is basic too)" (Morgan 133). Levertov also elaborates that the verbal shaping of the poem, the use which the poet makes of language to crystallise their internal visions, does not preclude organic form, but rather complements it, adding a layer of adherence to these visions:

> It seems to me that the absorption in language itself, the awareness of the world of multiple meaning revealed in sound, word, syntax, and the entering into this world in the poem, is as much an experience or constellation of perceptions as the instress of nonverbal sensuous and psychic events. What might make the poet of linguistic impetus appear to be on another tack entirely is that the demands of his realization may seem in opposition to truth as we think of it; that is, in terms of sensual logic. But the apparent distortion of experience in such a poem for the sake of verbal effects is actually a precise adherence to truth, since the experience itself was a verbal one ("Some Notes" 73).

Whitman and Ginsberg epitomise the double nature of the 'open' poet's engagement with form: the two poets wrote spontaneously but meticulously. Whitman was a tireless reviser of his poetry; indeed, he published six (or nine, depending on how one counts them) editions of *Leaves of Grass*. Though a strong proponent of 'first

thought, best thought' as a method, Ginsberg would also often edit and revise his poems. Moreover, like his fellow American poet-critics, he was deeply if creatively engaged in the study of prosody and literary criticism. A particularly interesting piece in this regard, which concerns Ginsberg's direct observations on open form and its various possible expressions, is "Some Different Considerations in Mindful Arrangement of Open Verse Forms on the Page" (1977). This text can be found in its entirety in this thesis' appendix (p. 227). Here, the Beat poet originally and insightfully suggests ways in which open form verse may be organised, including count of syllables, breath stop, division of thoughts, typographical topography, heartbeat, mouth phrasings, and many more.

From Williams to Whitman

Like many myths and lore, the Whitmanian tradition was invented backwards. Feeling that he was lacking his own tradition, and that Pound and Eliot already had one, Williams proposes the Whitmanian tradition, one which he actively continues through his definition and contribution (Bloom 6). As this thesis shows, Beat (and San Francisco Renaissance) poets also promulgate this underground tradition, bringing it *overground*. Pound would be invoked, especially by Ginsberg, as another link in this line of inheritance. As Donald Davie notes, referring to the Black Mountain group, "these poets, as Americans, use Pound (to bypass Eliot) so as to re-establish contact with the great American poet of the last century, Walt Whitman. (The line of descent from Pound to Olson can be traced in more detail through two other American poets," he adds, "William Carlos Williams and Louis Zukofsky)" (x).

Scholars concur that the main Whitmanian inheritances for Williams lie below matters of style and meter (see Breslin 1967; Davie 2000). James Breslin aptly identifies a few qualities which Williams, following Whitman, embodies: "radical independence, emotional exuberance, bodily energy, and self-admiration – qualities that link him with the comic extravagance and self-reliance of Whitman" ("Whitman and the Early Development" 613). An early poem by Williams, "Danse Russe" (1916), inspires this assertion:

> If when my wife is sleeping
> and the baby and Kathleen
> are sleeping

and the sun is a flame-white disc
in silken mists
above shining trees, –
if I in my north room
dance naked, grotesquely
before my mirror
waving my shirt round my head
and singing softly to myself:
"I am lonely, lonely.
I was born to be lonely,
I am best so!"
If I admire my arms, my face,
my shoulders, flanks, buttocks
against the yellow drawn shades, –
Who shall say I am not
the happy genius of my household? (1-19).

Breslin therefore identifies, among the rest, self-reliance and a perspective of 'intimacy-and-distance' as Williams's main response to Whitman's example. These qualities are well expressed in *Song of Myself* and in lesser known poems such as *Calamus*' "I Saw in Louisiana a Live-Oak Growing" (1860). Here, the speaker admires the tree's radical independence as well as its manifest joy, although he admits to needing more companionship than the oak:

I saw in Louisiana a live-oak growing,
All alone stood it and the moss hung down from the branches,
Without any companion it grew there uttering joyous leaves of
dark green,
And its look, rude, unbending, lusty, made me think of myself,
But I wonder'd how it could utter joyous leaves standing alone
there without its friend near, for I knew I could not (1-5).

Another crucial Whitmanian legacy for Williams and for other American poets after Whitman concerns the turn of the individual consciousness inwards in a search for form, rather than outwards: as Joel Conarroe notes in his analysis of Williams, "The action of the poem has moved from the external to the internal world, and its

point of view becomes a central consciousness in dialogue with its universe" (548). This was certainly the case for the Beats, especially in concomitance with the Buddhist and/or the psychedelic turns of many Beat Generation writers; see Ginsberg's preoccupation: "My poetry is now approaching the place where it is dangerous, when what I say may represent a real spirit talking to Universe in Universe thru Universe" (*South American Journals* 198). Open form poets therefore embrace and even theorise this intimate dialogue between the poet and the self, with the self as a universe; this conversation and search brings about a new form, in which private and public worlds merge.

Whereas poets such as Ginsberg shape their ethos, poetry, and persona around this intimate honesty and spiritual nakedness, others deride this attitude, in a stance which, beginning from Whitman, extended to Williams and the Beats. "Williams is the most embarrassing poet in the language, surpassing even Whitman," notes Davie, who was an English Movement poet and critic, in "A Demurral" (1987) (64). "[U]nashamed is what he now forces himself to be, like a man who compels himself to strip in public, though he hates it. And for us who are present at the performance, observing it, what would be more uncomfortable? We blush for him; we don't know where to look," he continues; "This condition is often described (and applauded) as 'nakedness' – as if there were nothing to put the rest of us out of countenance when, fully clothed ourselves, we meet a man with no clothes on […] Since 'naked' obviously means 'disarmed,' is it therefore disarming?" (64-65). Davie also reports Yvor Winters's contention that Williams was "incapable of consecutive thought," that 'anti-intellectual' does not appropriately define him as the poet does not even know what the intellect is (see Davie 2000). Notably, 'anti-intellectuals' was a routine label applied to the Beat writers. On another occasion, Davie similarly defines the Black Mountain poets as 'the anti-university' (see Davie 2000). However, these poets would not have considered themselves as 'anti'-anything in this particular sense. Honesty and nakedness, one may say, are presupposed natural human conditions. Is being naked 'anti-clothes'? Is being honest 'anti-fakeness'? Are clothes, is artifice, more inherent to humanity than its own vulnerable spirit? Moreover, albeit naïve, these poets were hardly clueless. In response to Davie's question, nakedness is, indeed, disarming. It is both a matter of candor and a conscious stance. This thesis sets out to explore Whitman's and Ginsberg's candid – and crafted – poetry with similar candor

– and scrutiny. “There was a man, Walt Whitman, who lived in the nineteenth century, in America […] who began to tell his own secrets” (Ginsberg “On Walt Whitman” 285).

Chapter 2

Walt Whitman: Endless Poetry

Part I: "Walt Whitman, a kosmos"

I'm making myself seek to find the wild form, that can grow with my wild heart… because now I know MY HEART DOES GROW.

Jack Kerouac

The shape of organicism

"He *is* America," writes Ezra Pound in "What I Feel About Walt Whitman" (1909); "He knows that he is a beginning" (191, emphasis in original). As he struggles with feelings of rejection and acceptance towards Whitman – "he is the 'voice triumphant.' He is disgusting" (191) – Pound acknowledges Whitman's role in revolutionising American literature and inciting continuous innovations. Pound's poetry, although radically different from Whitman's, thereby still owes him a debt: "I honor him for he prophesied me," Pound writes, conceding a closer relation between him and his "spiritual father" than he would like to admit: "I am a Walt Whitman who has learned to wear a collar and a dress shirt" (191, 192).

Before the catchphrase 'Make It New!' became imperative in the first half of the twentieth century with the avant-gardes, Whitman inaugurated the 'tradition of the new,' to borrow a phrase from art critic Harold Rosenberg (see Rosenberg 1959). Several scholars have observed that this 'anti-tradition tradition' pertains to American literature specifically: "The American poetic 'tradition,'" notes for instance Stephen Tapscott, "appropriately, is a paradoxical tradition of rebelliousness against tradition" (63). Whitman's break from convention was so compelling that American poets following him must have felt, as William Carlos Williams remarks in "America, Whitman, and the Art of Poetry" (1917), that "the only way to be like Whitman is to write *unlike* Whitman" (1, emphasis in original). Therefore, Whitman becomes the father figure who enables rebellion (Greenspan 198): "Still though the one I sing," Whitman exclaims, "I leave him revolt, (O latent right of insurrection!" ("Still Though the One" 1, 3). This happens at an ideological as well as Oedipal level, and concretely, for American poets following Whitman, stylistically, in terms of continuous innovations. This contributed to the fact that Whitman's specific variety of long line

would not explicitly re-emerge until around one hundred years later, with Allen Ginsberg.

The significance of the break between what preceded Whitman and what followed Whitman has been compared by Nolan, in *Poet-Chief*, to that between aboriginal incantation and white American colonial, iambic poetry (2). In spite of what he sees as a pervasive fragmentation in the American poetic voice, Nolan finds Whitman to be one of those points of discontinuity which ultimately allows for "a uniquely American synthesis that occurs in the final pages of recent anthologies" (2). This consideration reflects the characteristic Whitmanian tendency towards syntheses between opposing ideals and situations, which this chapter notes as essential to his poetics (see, among the rest, Lalli 1998; Aspiz 2005). Nolan therefore recognises the disruption which Whitman's poetry created in the American literary landscape as pivotal in combining the native, as in aboriginal, with the modern in a way which shaped contemporary American poetry.

Much has been written concerning how Whitman's poetry borrows from indigenous cultures. Famously, D. H. Lawrence wrote, of Whitman: "the true rhythm of the American continent speak[s] out in him. He is the first white aboriginal" (*Studies in Classic* 172). One review from the first edition of *Leaves of Grass*, which Whitman liked so much as to include it in the following printing, stated that his poems "resemble nothing so much as the war-cry of the Red Indians" (qtd. in Price 44). Using Rachel Rubinstein's words, Whitman would embody the trope of the 'imaginary Indian': according to Rubinstein, this would allow American poets to uniquely define themselves as 'modern' and 'American' at the same time (see Rubinstein 2006). This comports well with Whitman: in terms of form, the poet combines stylistic elements which traditionally pertain to indigenous traditions, such as chanting and parallelism, with a radically innovative way of conceiving of form in poetry, reinventing the role of the shaman as that of the poet-shaman.

Such attitudes on the part of poets and critics would today be deemed problematic, considering the rise of identity politics in literature and ensuing preoccupations with cultural appropriation. Nolan's *Poet-Chief: The Native American Poetics of Walt Whitman and Pablo Neruda*, published in 1994, would not be published under that title today. In recent years, some American literature scholars have identified a nationalistic impulse behind the tendency of 19th-century white

writers to identify with Native Americans (Whitley 105) in a process of national self-definition and grounding of national identity in the continent (Whitley 107; Scheckel 8). Others have suggested that even Whitman's style consists of an appropriation of Native American spirit to the purpose of a democratic language experiment (see Gerhardt 2006). This thesis is aware of the nativist motive which may underpin Native American influence in Whitman's poetry.

After little sombreros were handed out at a tequila party at Bowdoin College and this was deemed as ethnic stereotyping, writer Lionel Shriver succinctly and controversially noted, at the Brisbane Literary Festival, that "The moral of the sombrero scandals is clear: *you're not supposed to try on other people's hats*" (qtd. in Shivel n.pag, emphasis in original). She also applies this maxim to identity politics in literature. Provokingly, Shriver wore a sombrero at the festival, as she spoke against the fear of cultural appropriation, of trying on other people's hats (or putting oneself in other people's shoes), in writing. Whitman, one may say, tries on other people's hats. In his role of writer, he often wears a feathered headdress. As the speaker, he tries on bonnets, cowboy hats, turbans, sailor hats, berets, caps, and hats of all sorts. His poetics is one of identification with the variety of humanity, as his long lists in *Song of Myself* exemplify. This chapter acknowledges suggestions of nationalistic impulses behind these tendencies, but it does not condemn the poet's identifications. Rather, while noting the problematics of Whitmanian empathy, the chapter focuses on exploring their formal implications and their ontological significance in Whitman's poetry.

When Whitman's poetry enters the American literary scene, it does so with a degree of violence and urgency.[2] Through anonymous self-reviews of his first edition of *Leaves of Grass* (1855), the poet begins to create a mythology and a buzz around his persona and his writing. In one of these anonymous self-reviews, printed in the 1856 edition, he suggests that *Leaves of Grass* had not been influenced by any other author or work, emerging as spontaneously as a literal leaf of grass: "Nature may have given the hint to the author of 'Leaves of Grass,' but there exists no book or fragment of a book which can have given the hint to them" (qtd. in Price 10). Ironically, this thought is not quite 'original' itself, as Whitman is already alluding to John Keats's

[2] "Unscrew the locks from the doors! / Unscrew the doors themselves from their jambs!" (*Song of Myself* 501-02).

remark that "If poetry comes not as naturally as the leaves to a tree it had better not come at all" (84).

As Whitman broadcasts his poetry and his literary innovations, writers and scholars struggle to find an appropriate reaction to his poetry. Its reception was polarised, eliciting either admiration, as in Ralph Waldo Emerson's famous response letter,[3] or denigration. A review from 1855 printed in *Putnam's Monthly* magazine exemplifies a first attempt at considering Whitman's form:

> Our account of last month's literature would be incomplete without some notice of a curious and lawless collection of poems, called *Leaves of Grass* […] The poems, twelve in numbers, are neither in rhyme nor blank verse, but in a sort of excited prose broken into lines without any attempt at measure or regularity, and, as many readers will perhaps think, without any idea of sense or reason (Norton qtd. in Whitman *Leaves of Grass (1856)* 368-69).

Perhaps to guide his contemporaries towards a better comprehension and appreciation of himself and his poetry, Whitman explains his aims and intentions, together with the form of his poems, in his prefaces to the different editions of *Leaves of Grass*. Introducing the 1876 edition, he states: "My form has strictly grown from my purports and facts, and is the analogy of them" (qtd. in Bradley 458). Form would therefore come from, and imitate, his personality and person. In a more poetic elaboration, in the Preface to the centennial edition (1876), Whitman uses natural imagery to define his organic theory:

> Poetic style, when address'd to the soul, is less definite form, outline, sculpture, and becomes vista, music, half-tints, and even less than half-tints. True, it may be architecture; but again it may be the forest wild-wood, or the best effect thereof, at twilight, the waving oaks and cedars in the wind, and the impalpable odor (356).

[3] Which begins: "I am not blind to the worth of the wonderful gift of 'Leaves of Grass.' I find it the most extraordinary piece of wit & wisdom that America has yet contributed" (*The Selected Letters* 383).

As Gay Wilson Allen points out, as much as Whitman's poems were original and unique in their form, the poet was probably inspired by other authors' theories on writing, especially Emerson's and Samuel Taylor Coleridge's (*A Reader's Guide* 157-58). In 1842, Whitman was a twenty-two-year-old journalist who attended Emerson's lecture 'The Poet,' which was published as an essay two years later. The speech made a deep impression on Whitman, who called it "one of the richest and most beautiful compositions… we have heard anywhere, at any time" (qtd. in Klatt 321). Its influence on Whitman's development and practice as an artist is evident in many of the conceptions which the two poets share, including those on form. In his lecture, Emerson states that:

> it is not metres, but a metre-making argument that makes a poem, – a thought so passionate and alive that like the spirit of a plant or an animal it has an architecture of its own, and adorns nature with a new thing. The thought and the form are equal in the order of time, but in the order of genesis the thought is prior to the form ("The Poet" 315).

Both Emerson and Whitman embrace the idea that "expression is organic, or, the new type which things themselves take when liberated" (Emerson "The Poet" 323), believing that "the expression of the American poet is to be transcendant and new" (Whitman Preface to the 1855 Edition 4). Another simple phrase of Emerson's may have particularly inspired Whitman's elaborations: "ask the fact for the form" (qtd. in Foerster 197). Furthermore, in "The Poet," Emerson makes reference to another writer with a similar approach to form, quoting a passage from Edmund Spenser's "An Hymn in Honour of Beauty" (1596). In these lines, 'body' may be finally understood as 'body of work' as well:

> So every spirit, as it is most pure,
> And hath in it the more of heavenly light,
> So it the fairer body doth procure
> To habit in, and it more fairly dight,
> With cheerful grace and amiable sight
> For, of the soul, the body form doth take.
> For soul is form, and doth the body make (127-33).

Both Emerson and Whitman are, in turn, indebted to Coleridge with regard to the imagery and conceptualisation of the organic theory. Significantly, Coleridge's idea of organicity differs from Whitman's: in *Biographia Literaria* (1817), the English Romantic equates organic form with beauty, understanding beauty as harmony and perfection (Milne 139). Although both poets are inspired by nature in their understanding of organicity, Whitman does not assign equal emphasis to the aesthetic dimension of beauty. However, the Transcendentalists would have endorsed Coleridge's formulations on the relation between form and content. In one of his Shakespeare lectures (1811-12), Coleridge states that:

> form is mechanic, when on any given material we impress a pre-determined form, not necessarily arising out of the properties of the material, – as when to a mass of wet clay we give whatever shape we wish it to retain when hardened. The organic form, on the other hand, is innate; it shapes, as it develops, itself from within, and the fullness of its development is one and the same with the perfection of its outward form. Nature, the prime genial artist, inexhaustible in diverse powers, is equally inexhaustible in forms; – each exterior is the physiognomy of the being within (46).

What, then, gives shape to Whitman's form? It is not always clear whether his poetry emerges from a subject matter which expresses itself naturally and without intervention – Emerson's notation to 'ask the fact for the form' – or whether it is in itself a force which is in movement – Coleridge's suggestion that form 'shapes, as it develops, itself from within.' English as a language may not provide an adequate conceptual vocabulary. Whitman may have wanted to use, for instance, something like the Potawomi word *puhpowee*, which indicates "the force which causes mushrooms to push up from the earth overnight" (Kimmerer 49). Sometimes, in fact, the poet appears to discuss a natural and creative energy of cosmic proportions. In *Braiding Sweetgrass* (2013), Robin Wall Kimmerer compellingly reflects on this word: "In the three syllables of this new word I could see an entire process of close observation in the damp morning woods, the formulation of a theory for which English had no equivalent," she writes; "The makers of this word understood a world of being, full of unseen energies that animate everything" (49).

Certain lines of *Song of Myself* provide an alternative elaboration on organicism, or a justification of the theory. Here, a relation emerges between natural forms and intentionality in a manner which suggests an affirmation of the value of organic theory. Turning his gaze towards the birds, the speaker remarks:

> I believe in those wing'd purposes,
> And acknowledge red, yellow, white, playing within me,
> And consider green and violet and the tufted crown intentional,
> And do not call the tortoise unworthy because she is not something else (239-42).

By emphasising the purposefulness and intrinsic worth of nature, the speaker implies that any natural object is valuable in its mere condition of being. This is not an evaluation: every animal, like every organic occurrence, is different and not to be compared, as with the tortoise, to something else. This chapter will return to this conception, discussing Whitman's lists and his emphasis on the particular as well as the universal.

The tortoise as symbol of an essential and valuable existence is repurposed by D. H. Lawrence in the 'tortoise' poems of *Birds, Beasts and Flowers* (1923), Lawrence's most Whitmanian collection and one in which the bard is directly invoked, albeit also rebuked. The tortoise of Lawrence's poems is disconnected from its surroundings and yet, in its aloneness, is representative of the whole: "You know what it is to be born alone," begins "Baby Tortoise" (1-2), ending with a heroic and mythical vision of the creature: "Challenger, / Little Ulysses […] All life carried on your shoulder, / Invincible forerunner" (54-55, 79-80). "Tortoise Family Connections" reiterates the natural and almost divine isolation and importance of the tortoise: "On he goes, the little one, / Bud of the universe, / Pediment of life"; "He doesn't know he is alone; / Isolation is his birthright" (1-3, 38-39). The creature is ultimately depicted as "Wandering in the slow triumph of his own existence" (57). In Whitman's *Song of Myself*, the tortoise may suggest a way in which the poet thinks of his own poetry, or of poetry as 'organic': as unique and distinctive in its natural existence, yet as belonging to a cosmic whole which it also symbolises.

Among other critics, Donald Allen points out that it is illogical to accept Whitman's theory of organicism, because any author is by necessity an active maker in the creative process: surely, planting a seed of inspiration into the fertile soil of consciousness is not enough for a poem to grow organically, like a plant (*A Reader's Guide* 159). Whitman's poetry does not emerge unaltered from his unconscious: "Whitman was a 'maker' in the literal sense of the term, sensing, experimenting, and revising incessantly until he had achieved a structure in language which satisfied his rational judgement" (159). This chapter understands Whitman's acknowledgment of form as secondary in that it appears to be derivative of a force which goes beyond language structures, which comprises nature and his own unconscious and which emerges out of a dialogue between the subject matter of his poetry and the movement of this creation. At the same time, Whitman also crafts his poetry carefully and consciously, beyond the wildness and spontaneity of its organicism. This is the crux of this chapter and of this analysis of Whitman: Whitman's long line presents a generative tension between organic shaping and formal crafting. It is this exchange between spontaneous, free form and deliberate, effective (and affective) formal elements which ultimately 'gives shape' to Whitman's distinctive long line. Through the form of the long line, the poet both organises and imitates content in an original manner.

As Tony Tanner notes in *The Reign of Wonder* (1965), Transcendentalist writers employ a novel style in order to convey fresh, different perspectives (12, 67). Points of view which reject 'tradition' in the narrow sense are thereby expressed in a style which rejects traditional formal approaches. "A new vision clearly requires a new style to transmit it," Tanner remarks, as "style *is* vision. It concentrates on certain aspects of reality and omits, ignores and neglects others. It determines focus and distributes emphases" (12, emphasis in original). A clear example of this, and one which this chapter also explores, is syntax, which "reveals the way a man chooses to order his perceptions and thus offers us important insights into his angle of vision" (12). Whitman's free verse long lines propose "a new unobstructed perspective on the world, a new way of indicating and annotating reality" (67). As these verses from *Song of Myself* illustrate, Whitman's poetry exemplifies a merging of form and content in lines which, unconstrained by formalities, assert the poet's mission to explore reality and consciousness in similarly unconstrained and imaginative ways:

I fly those flights of a fluid and swallowing soul,
My course runs below the soundings of plummets.

I help myself to material and immaterial,
No guard can shut me off, no law prevent me (800-03).

This chapter explores this symbiotic relationship between form and content in Whitman's poetry. Firstly, it examines the poet's conscious use of formal devices and the role they play in his layered organisation of meaning and poetics of affectivity. Secondly, it employs cognitive poetics to inquire, starting from form, into his affective poetics. Lastly, in an inverse manner, it discusses the spiritual meanings of his poetry, specifically as concerns death, the self, and the soul, noting how these are organised by formal elements and mirrored in the poetics of his long line. This first section specifically examines Whitman's lists, parallelism, and expressive form as devices which exemplify reciprocal exchanges between form and content. Lists and parallelism are formal devices which shape the content of the poems following certain structures; moreover, the two are shown to also be imitative structures and to influence affectivity.

Lists and parallelism

Lists are one of Whitman's mainstays of poetic expression. It is worth mentioning that this discussion favours the term 'list' over 'catalogue,' as catalogues imply a more methodical, systematic approach than lists, which are less planned out, and therefore more akin to Whitman's ethos and style. Catalogues, however, are mentioned with regard to catalogue rhetoric, a term employed by scholars such as Lawrence Buell. Before moving onto Whitman's use of the list, it is important to consider that the list is an ancient artistic device which is transhistorical and transcultural. The archetype of the list is found in sections of the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, which dates the form at least to the 7th century B.C.E., according to most scholars. In *The Infinity of Lists* (2009), Umberto Eco makes reference to a multitude of artists throughout time as cataloguers, including: Aristotle, Hesiod, Ezekiel, Dante, Goethe, Shakespeare, Rimbaud, Twain, Whitman, Joyce, and Wilde. The ways in which lists have been used in history would form a very long and open-ended list in itself. However, writers and scholars alike have identified some connotations commonly carried by the form.

William Gass's observations on literary lists compellingly apply to Whitman. "The list is the fundamental rhetorical form for creating a sense of abundance, overflow, excess. We find it so used in writers with an appetite for life," Gass writes, elaborating: "Desire is never dampened by its dampening, but grows only greater, and its object is not consumed by its consumption but is multiplied, and pleasure is not lessened by its repetition but enriched and revered" (35). "The desire that is satisfied is not a great desire," Yeats suggested in a similar spirit (415). Indeed, lists recreate a sense of abundance and excess: they constitute an accumulation, in quantity and/or quality, through added layers of meaning and repetition. As Gass points out, this sense of overflow particularly accords with states such as desire and pleasure. These are associated with a certain yearning and hunger, an 'appetite,' which can feel inextinguishable or which can fuel itself through irrational processes and escalations. The list of emotions which fall into this category may be expanded to include states such as love, hate, panic or fear, uncontainable joy, and inconsolable sadness.

Whitman's long lines are an ideal medium for the expression of the poet's insatiable appetite. The speaker of *Song of Myself* shows awareness of this hunger: "[I k]now my omnivorous lines and must not write any less" (1084). The word 'omnivorous' here points to a hunger or desire which feeds indiscriminately and on a wide variety of things. The speaker often acknowledges his poetics of feeding on all that surrounds him, from nature to humanity: "All this I swallow, it tastes good, I like it well, it becomes mine," he states at the end of a long list (831). The form of the long line optimally allows the poet to prolong his thoughts and phrases without metrical, thematical, or rhythmical constraints until the lines and the poet's mind are, in a sense, satiated, satisfied.

The sheer accumulation which the list creates reflects the poet's omnivorousness. The beginning of 'Section 2' of *Song of Myself* illustrates that the speaker's appetite inhabits multiple levels which move, as indicated by the different lexical sets in these lines, between the sensual, the amorous, the physical, and the sexual:

> The atmosphere is not a perfume, it has no taste of the distillation, it is odorless,
> It is for my mouth forever, I am in love with it,

> I will go to the bank by the wood and become undisguised and naked,
> I am mad for it to be in contact with me.
> The smoke of my own breath,
> Echoes, ripples, buzz'd whispers, love-root, silk-thread, crotch and vine (17-22).

After the more emotional and lyrical first lines of this selection, the last line specifically, with its list of allusive words, points towards a sense of voluptuousness and the sensual, sexual abundance and appetite. New York School poet John Ashbery expands on the eroticism of the long line in ways that speak to Whitman's long lines and to the speaker's sexual yearning. "I am he that aches with amorous love," writes Whitman in another poem, "Does not all matter, aching, attract all matter? / So the Body of me, to all I meet, or know" ("I Am He" 1-3). Ashbery notes:

> I use a very long line very frequently in my poetry which I feel gives an expanded means of utterance, and saying a very long thing in place of what might originally have been a much shorter and more concise one is an over-flowing of the meaning. It often seems to me to have almost a sexual quality to it in the sense that the sexual act is a kind of prolongation of and improvisation on time in a very deep personal way which is like music, and there's something of the expansiveness of eroticism in these lines very frequently for me, although that's by no means a conscious thing that I undertake in writing them (qtd. in McGuinness 273).

However, the speaker's hunger is not only physical, but also metaphysical. For example, lines from 'Section 46' of *Song of Myself* exemplify a strong spiritual yearning. Here, after turning towards the sky, the speaker interrogates his soul in what is, significantly, the longest line of the long poem:

> This day before dawn I ascended a hill and look'd at the crowded heaven,

> And I said to my spirit *When we become the enfolders of those orbs, and the pleasure and knowledge of every thing in them, shall we be fill'd and satisfied then?*
> And my spirit said *No, we but level that lift to pass and continue beyond* (1220-22, emphasis in original).

This long line suggests that the line itself – and, by extension, the poem's form – cannot be 'fill'd and satisfied': verses are continued, extended, continuously transcended. This also leads the speaker to the realisation that his longing itself cannot be 'fill'd and satisfied,' and that he needs, therefore, to 'pass and continue beyond.' In these lines, Whitman combines form, content, and meaning suggestively, foregrounding his formal poetics of hunger and his insatiable spiritual quest.

It is commonly acknowledged that Whitman's lists primarily serve the purpose of celebration. They sing and praise the poet himself – as the title and opening line of *Song of Myself*, "I celebrate myself, and sing myself," declare (1) – while also celebrating existence in all its forms – "The mere fact consciousness, these forms, the power of motion, / The least insect or animal, the senses, eyesight, love" (Whitman "Beginning My Studies" 3-4), goodness as well as wickedness, the body as well as the soul, and life as well as death. As Seamus Perry observes, "writers usually choose to write about something and not something else, but Whitman became Whitman when he realized that his subject was everything" (n.pag). He perfectly illustrates Whitman's abstract inclusivity: "'To think that the sun rose in the east … that men and women were flexible and real and alive … that every thing was real and alive': Whitman's ellipses aren't marking something left out so much as indicating everything that could, in principle, be let in" (n.pag).

Moving beyond Whitman's optimistic aim of celebrating totality, it is worth considering Brian Dillon's observations on the dark sides of lists. Dillon believes that lists derive from an underlying anxiety or sadness, that they manifest an attempt at control:

> Is there such a thing as a happy list in literature? The blithe verbal sum of possessions, achievements or experiences? Isn't the very act of setting such things down evidence of some vexation, a clue that something is missing? The collector's

> catalogue, the merchant's tally, the seducer's black book: they are all examples of compensating control. Compensation for what? For a scouring anxiety, or cumbrous melancholy? (28).

Could this apply to Whitman's enumerations, to the poet who states that "Each moment and whatever happens thrills me with joy" (*Song of Myself* 545)? Lawrence also points out the dark side of Whitman's exultant union with all that surrounds him, noting that the poet's multiplications and additions always result in Walt Whitman himself, and finally suggesting that the poet's principle of all-inclusiveness, of 'Allness,' is egotistically flawed:

> DEMOCRACY. EN MASSE. ONE IDENTITY.
> The universe, in short, adds up to ONE.
> ONE.
> 1.
> Which is Walt.
> His poems, *Democracy, En Masse, One Identity*, they are long sums in addition and multiplication, of which the answer is invariably MYSELF (*Studies in Classic* 268, emphasis in original).

Moreover, Lawrence believes that this Allness is based on an essential ignorance of the Other, which Whitman reveals in his poetic expositions of selfhood:

> As soon as Walt *knew* a thing, he assumed a One Identity with it. If he knew that an Esquimo sat in a kayak, immediately there was Walt being little and yellow and greasy, sitting in a kayak.
> Now will you tell me exactly what a kayak is?
> […]
> Walt wasn't an Esquimo. A little, yellow, sly, cunning, greasy little Esquimo. And when Walt blandly assumed Allness, including Esquimoness, unto himself, he was just sucking the wind out of a blown egg-shell, no more. Esquimos are not minor little Walts. They are something that I am not, I know that. Outside the egg of my Allness chuckles the greasy little

> Esquimo. Outside the egg of Whitman's Allness too (268-69, emphasis in original).

The merging with existence which Whitman describes may be diagnosed as an underlying anxiety as to the impossibility of actually and intimately *knowing* all the variations of existence: if, that is, one subscribes to a vision of the self as being limited in its experience, which Whitman did not. As concerns Whitman's possible flaw of egotism, this may constitute an attempt at control inasmuch as everything that the poet considers ends up constituting himself. Over and against Whitman's ignorance of what is Other to the self, the poet's catalogue rhetoric also suggests that he believes in a collective unconscious, in which everything belongs together without distinctions. Lastly, this is also a manifestation of his poetics of hunger; "I know perfectly well my own egotism, / Know my omnivorous lines," Whitman declares (*Song of Myself* 1083-84). In this sense, Whitman's lines are long in that they *long*, they are longing, aiming to be all-inclusive in their relentless attempts at satiation. The long line, with its lack of restraints, specially allows for this expression of desire, accumulation (of words and worlds), and attempts at assimilation, metaphorical bites. It also well accommodates lists, a form which, like the long line itself, tends towards a continuous addition and expansion.

So far, this section has shown how Whitman's long line, through its lists, embodies the poet's poetics of hunger. Formally, lists further allow the poet to make social points; in fact, lists uniquely allow for a division into singular items, and for equal consideration of these particulars. "They tend to confer equality on their members," writes Gass, explaining this process of de-hierarchisation: "The list of the ten wonders of the world does not imply that the wonder given as #1 (at the front or the top) is #1. The thousand and three ladies on Don Giovanni's were equally enjoyed, the list presumes, all equally" (21). Though lists may be given an order, in fact, this has not traditionally been the case: hierarchization in lists seems to be a modern obsession (22). The equality which Whitman assigns to his items reflects an ideological stance. As Ezra Greenspan notes, Whitman's lists can be seen as the poet's innovative formal embodiment of his political and cultural principle of all-inclusiveness (100).

These lines from 'Section 33' of *Song of Myself*, which mainly consists of lists, illustrate a democratic, de-hierarchising approach:

> The disdain and calmness of martyrs,
> The mother of old, condemn'd for a witch, burnt with dry wood, her children gazing on,
> The hounded slave that flags in the race, leans by the fence, blowing, cover'd with sweat,
> The twinges that sting like needles his legs and neck, the murderous buckshot and the bullets,
> All these I feel or am (832-37).

Here, the poet enhances the equality which lists assign to their items by including and accommodating subjects who are classically marginalised, who would otherwise be Other: the martyrs, the witch, the slave. The repetition of the article 'the' also dispenses equality to the different lexical sets of the lines (Al-Nawas 217): here, the subjects are all on the same level, and so are their experiences.

Whitman's theoretical principle of social democracy is a matter of critical consensus. However, Vincent Bertolini suggests that the syntactical serialisation of the items of the list does not only bestow equality upon the items, but also suppresses the actual power dynamics – the relations of dominance and submission – which exist in the extra-poetic world (1052). On the other hand, Whitman's extra-historical perspective may at the same time suggest the proposition of a radically different way of considering identity; as Bertolini also suggests, this may illustrate Whitman's commitment to the idea "that however much identities are products of history and ideology, individuals can gain a perspective upon identities as such, a process that can unlock new subjective power in them" (1056). This would support an understanding of Whitman as innovatively foregrounding, even above historically social matters, a radical morality. Be it controversially participating in history or moving beyond it, Whitman's sensitivity focuses on the equality, and therefore the sameness, of individual identity. This, in turn, is underscored by a belief in a collective unconscious which this chapter later discusses.

While Whitman's lists emphasise the uniqueness of the particular, the poet constantly zooms out to remind the reader of the importance of the whole. Where his form suggests an interest in the singular manifestations of existence, his poetry commonly affirms universality. Considering Whitman's Transcendentalist belief in immanence – "I will make the poems of materials, for I think they are to be the most

spiritual poems" (Whitman "Starting from Paumanok" 71) – the particular is for the poet a doorway into the universal. In turn, the universal to which he makes reference is the soul: "I will make poems, songs, thoughts, with reference to ensemble […] And I will not make a poem nor the least part of a poem but has reference to the soul" (173, 175).

'The soul' may comprise both his own soul and that of all people, what Lawrence would name Whitman's 'One Identity.' This concept is similar to that which Emerson previously named the 'Over-Soul': in his words, "that Unity, that Over-Soul, within which every man's particular being is contained and made one with all other […] within man is the soul of the whole; the wise silence; the universal beauty, to which every part and particle is equally related" ("The Over-Soul" 262). Highlighting the singularity of the numerous possibilities of existence, Whitman taps into the universal soul, a sort of collective unconscious. A movement emerges, which the list facilitates, from the particular to the universal, and from the individual self to the collective self. "Whoever degrades another degrades me, / And whatever is done or said returns at last to me," the speaker of *Song of Myself* declares (503-04), revealing his access to a collective unconscious. He also draws on what others repress and hide: "Through me forbidden voices, / Voices of sexes and lusts, voices veil'd and I remove the veil" (516-17). These matters of consciousness and collective unconscious are therefore already embodied in Whitman's form: they are revealed, mirrored, and accommodated by the lists which pervade his long lines.

Another way in which the poet gives formal expression to his principle of democracy through his lists is in his persistent use of the conjunction 'and.' This word appears 848 times in the 1346 lines of *Song of Myself* (1891-92), and operates as an anaphoric word in sections 5, 6, 10, 13, 23, 30, 31, 45, and 48. 'And' is a simple conjunction which does not indicate subordination, which bestows equality upon the listed items. When 'and' is omitted, what remains is parataxis, the syntax of lists. With parataxis, clauses are coordinated without conjunction or subordination, which leads to an even simpler style, the kind children use, which echoes Whitman's child-like spontaneity and enthusiasm. Whitman predominantly uses both of these styles in his poetry.

Gertrude Stein would subsequently adopt a cognate style based on repetition and simple syntax, and her form would also come to be identified as 'democratic.' She

describes this style in “Poetry and Grammar” (1935): “After all the natural way to count is not that one and one make two but to go on counting by one and one and one” (29). Stein notes that this is the natural style for poetry specifically: “poetry is essentially the discovery, the love, the passion for the name of anything” (30). This echoes Whitman’s celebratory lists, and the special importance which he assigns, with evident affection, to their individual items. This simple, name-centered syntax, which also shapes Whitman’s enumerations and celebrations, may have been what made William Carlos Williams wonder: “Have we broken down far enough? Are we ready to build? Have we elaborated enough substance to work on or must we carry Whitman further on until by mere force of mass we are able to say we are rich?” (“Whitman, America” 2).

The list requires a certain effort towards completeness: “Nothing seems simpler than making a list, but in fact it’s much more complicated than it seems: you always leave something out, you’re tempted to write etc., but the whole point of an inventory is not to write etc.” (Perec 14). Where some writers might find this enterprise problematic, the quantitative space which the list provides may be what makes it a favourite form of Whitman’s. The poet’s visual appetite and yearning find appropriate expression in this form, especially when paired with his characteristic long lines. Whitman accumulates, and does so ad infinitum, as life is infinite in its possibilities – “Always the procreant urge of the world […] always a breed of life” (*Song of Myself* 45, 47). Notably, the literary list carries this sense of infinity in itself. In Eco’s words, the list “as a form of representation suggests infinity almost *physically*, because in fact *it does not end*, nor does it conclude in form” (17, emphasis in original). Eco reiterates that this infinity is concrete and formal:

> It is not that form cannot suggest infinity, and the entire history of aesthetics reiterates this but we must not play with terms. The infinity of aesthetics is the *subjective* feeling of something greater than us, it is an emotional condition; instead, the infinity we are talking about now is an *actual* infinity, made up of objects that can perhaps be numbered but that we cannot number – and we fear that their numeration (and enumeration) may never stop (15, emphasis in original).

Indeed, Whitman's loose, free verse long lines reflect the endlessness of the subjects of his poetry, particularly nature and his self. The poet's lyrical descriptions of existence and of the 'systems' of the universe could also describe his lines: "Wider and wider they spread, expanding, always expanding, / Outward and outward and forever outward" (*Song of Myself* 1185-86); "All goes onward and outward, nothing collapses" (129). As Buell notes, this stylistic profusion requires a degree of emotional abandonment on the part of the reader: the catalogue "is essentially an outpouring, intended to stir up, not to settle," he states, proposing that Whitman's characteristic apostrophe to his readers aims to engage them in a suspension of their critical faculty (339). This sense of abandonment may in turn stimulate in the reader an expansion in awareness and a liberation of the imagination, two likely further purposes of Whitman's lists. Indeed, *Song of Myself* may be understood as a dialogue between the self and the world, or reality, with the two emerging as merged by the end, a process in which catalogues accompany an expansion in awareness. As the potential formal infinity of the list echoes the infinity of nature and of the self, formal expansion also invites an emotional expansion in awareness.

Significantly, such an increase in awareness depends on the speaker's senses of sight and of space: his self finds expansion through vision and movement. This dynamic is aptly expressed in Whitman's lists, as these are often accompanied by phrases related to seeing or by a movement of flying over, or through, the globe. 'Section 8' of *Song of Myself* contains such actions, as the speaker observes different lives as he 'views from the top' and 'comes and departs':

> The youngster and the red-faced girl turn aside up the busy hill,
> I peeringly view them from the top.
>
> The suicide sprawls on the bloody floor of the bedroom,
> I witness the corpse with its dabbled hair, I note where the pistol has fallen.
>
> The blab of the pave, tires of carts, sluff of boot-soles, talk of the promenaders,

> The heavy omnibus, the driver with his interrogating thumb,
> the clank of the shod horses on the granite floor
> […]
> Arrests of criminals, slights, adulterous offers made, acceptances, rejections with convex lips,
> I mind them or the show or resonance of them – I come and I depart (150-55, 165-66).

Here, the aerial movement of the speaker reflects the free imaginative force which accompanies an expansion of awareness. As Richard Gray notes with reference to Marianne Moore, another cataloguer, the close observation of single items may be used to trigger an expansion in vision and a release of the imagination (187). This dynamic is comparable to that of gaining access to the universal by starting from the particular, and is threaded through modern American literature, passing through the rhetoric of the (Imagist) haiku, Williams's poetry, and Ginsberg's long lines. Ginsberg specifically would resurrect a sense of vision as coming from sight: an anchoring to place would allow the poet to access a new, visionary sensibility (see "Ode to the Setting Sun," "Transcription of Organ Music," "Sunflower Sutra," and "Siesta in Xbalba") (Portugés 75).

The manner in which Whitman and other American Renaissance authors employ the literary list carries noteworthy implications in terms of both meaning and form. Buell notes that Transcendentalists uniquely and innovatively fuse catalogue rhetoric and the principle of plenitude, the idea that creation contains and produces all possibilities of existence, as this form is both infinite and inexhaustible (334-35). He therefore refers, in turn, to the Transcendentalist exaltation of nature in all its forms, the kind Whitman enthusiastically sings. Significantly, Buell finds the combination of the list and the principle of plenitude in Transcendentalist writing to be closely related to the theory of organicism. He notes that:

> Emerson, Whitman, and Thoreau all regarded art pragmatically, that is, as properly the expression of something beyond itself – call it vision, truth, or what you will; they were, in short, not trying to write poems but nature; and they were therefore convinced that the secret of design in art rested rather

> in the ability to perceive the natural order than in imposing an aesthetic order upon their perceptions (335).

The natural order which the Transcendentalist observes would therefore not be subordinate to the stylistic order which the poet may be inclined to impose on a work. The absence of traditional structure in Whitman's poems again suggests a stance with philosophical resonances. In this sense, organicism itself emerges as a conscious strategy on the part of the poet. Tanner similarly notes that Whitman's loose, cataloguing line is purposefully, almost morally, determined by the poet:

> Things are allowed to lie separate and undisturbed: no plan is imposed, no deductions are made, no nets of theory draw together in compound sentences. This would be a falsification just as to tighten the poem into a regular scheme would be a falsification, since that would disturb the holy order in which the world entered the eye and interpose the meddlings and severings of the mind (*The Reign of Wonder* 71).

Here, vision as sight emerges once again as the foremost sense for the Transcendentalist. In Whitman, indeed, it is the eye – which flies over the world, observing, witnessing – that compiles the list, rather than the mind. After the eye, beyond sight, comes Whitman's speech: his long, often rambling, listing, longing line:

> My voice goes after what my eyes cannot reach,
> With the twirl of my tongue I encompass worlds and volumes of worlds.
>
> Speech is the twin of my vision, it is unequal to measure itself,
> It provokes me forever, it says sarcastically,
> *Walt, you contain enough, why don't you let it out then?* (*Song of Myself* 564-68, emphasis in original).

Without mentioning lists, in "Notes for a Comparison Between American and European Romanticism" (1968), Tanner provides general observations on American Transcendentalism in opposition to its European counterpart, offering additional lenses through which this form might be viewed in Whitman. Tanner highlights the Transcendentalist tendency to privilege the sense of sight and the sense of space. These

two preoccupations may be related to one another, and to catalogue rhetoric. Tanner points out that, geographically, American authors have been exposed to a sense of vastness which their European counterparts could not imagine, and which is reflected in a centrifugal tendency towards expansion into the surrounding space (86). Writing becomes then the anchoring action which allows the poet to control this diffusion (87). This sense of vastness comes not only from geographical features, but also from the internal variety of the United States: "The wondering vision was adopted as a prime method of inclusion and assimilation" (Tanner *The Reign of Wonder* 10).

Moreover, where the European Romantics, owing to their revolutionary social context, incorporate in their works a movement within time and a sense of memory, community, and utopian thinking, the American Romantics appear to move out of time and into an isolation in a different type of space (Tanner "Notes for a Comparison" 100-03). "WHAT SCARED YOU ALL INTO TIME?" William S. Burroughs would ask Allen Ginsberg in 1960: "ALL COME OUT OF TIME AND INTO SPACE. FOREVER…" (*The Yage Letters* 60). In "Projective Verse," Olson also presents a preoccupation with space, especially with that which the poet occupies physiologically: discussing breath and language, the poet states that "when a poet rests in these as they are in himself (in his physiology, if you like, but the life in him, for all that) then he, if he chooses to speak from these roots, works in that area where nature has given him size, projective size" (60). Coupled with the spatial expansion of the speaker is a certain appetite for vision – a 'voluptuousness of looking,' in Mario Rossi's phrase, which Wallace Stevens popularised in his epigraph to "Evening Without Angels." Necessarily, in their extension into surrounding space, the speaker encounters a greater number of items as their range of vision enlarges. Whitman catalogues and absorbs these items in his long-lined long lists, which recreate his characteristic sense of urgency and visual, sensual, and spiritual hunger. Finally, Tanner also notes, that due to their lack of a concrete social and communal dimension, American Romantics tend to isolate and observe their environment, developing a strong visual relationship with nature: "American writers have been predominantly watchers" ("Notes for a Comparison" 88-89). Similarly, Gray, after Lawrence, identifies the predominant theme in American literature as the isolated self, the lonely consciousness and 'I' (180).

The speaker's movements in space emerge as central to Whitman's lists. "[A] space of time is a natural thing for an American to always have inside them as something in which they are continuously moving," remarks Stein ("The Gradual Making" 161). This dynamism finds appropriate expression in the present participle, a tense of which Whitman makes frequent, especial use. Tanner notes that this tense emphasises how, in Whitman, "people or animals are discerned in an act but not watched through a complete action" (*The Reign of Wonder* 70). The focus, therefore, falls onto the movement of the eye and the speaker's action of watching, more than on what the speaker actually sees. This dynamic is clear in lists such as those of 'Section 33' of *Song of Myself*:

> Far from the settlements studying the print of animals' feet, or the moccasin print,
> By the cot in the hospital reaching lemonade to a feverish patient,
> Nigh the coffin'd corpse when all is still, examining with a candle;
> Voyaging to every port to dicker and adventure,
> Hurrying with the modern crowd as eager and fickle as any,
> […]
> Walking the old hills of Judaea with the beautiful gentle God by my side,
> Speeding through space, speeding through heaven and the stars,
> Speeding amid the seven satellites and the broad ring, and the diameter of eighty thousand miles,
> Speeding with tail'd meteors, throwing fire-balls like the rest,
> Carrying the crescent child that carries its own full mother in its belly,
> Storming, enjoying, planning, loving, cautioning,
> Backing and filling, appearing and disappearing,
> I tread day and night such roads (783-87, 790-97).

These lines are characterised by a sense of swift movement, which the anaphoric 'speeding' enhances, together with verbs of movement such as 'voyaging,' 'hurrying,'

'carrying,' and 'tread.' In his voyage through time and space, humanity and the cosmos, the speaker sees but glimpses. Once more, it is worth highlighting how the long line, with its continuous formal expansion and lack of traditional metric or rhythmic restraints, is particularly apt to convey a sense of movement and dynamism. Here, as well, form embodies and enables meaning.

According to Greenspan, Whitman's constant and consistent use of the present participle aims to "carry the potentiality of the persona forward and onward without limitation" (93-94). The speaker's action of moving appears egotistically to serve the speaker's own self more than anything else: "In me the caresser of life wherever moving, backward as well as forward sluing / To niches aside and junior bending, not a person or object missing, / Absorbing all to myself and for this song" (*Song of Myself* 232-34). The present participle also dynamically opens the poetic space of Whitman's poems (Greenspan 102). So do Whitman's insatiable long lines and the speaker himself: "Myself moving forward then and now and forever, / Gathering and showing more always and with velocity" (*Song of Myself* 696-97). The ultimate reality of the speaker and of the poem is that "All goes onward and outward" (129).

Together with lists, parallelism is another salient feature of Whitman's poetry. Formally speaking, the concept of parallelism questions the democratic structure which has been observed in Whitman's poems. Where lists are non-hierarchical and establish the poet's ideals of equality and democracy, parallelism seems to create other hierarchies. This section further explores how parallel structures may be related to imitative rhythm. Where Whitman's free verse long lines have been associated with a disregard for the formal crafting of his poetry, especially by New Critics such as R. P. Blackmur and Yvor Winters, parallelism emerges as another doorway into Whitman's organisation of meaning and content in his poetry.

Parallelism may also be called parallel structure, thought rhythm, or clausal prosody. All these terms suggest an underlying structure with identifiable occurrences – a rhythm – which assumes as its unit something longer than a foot or syllable and shorter than a sentence. A combination of these phrases, 'thought prosody,' emphasises the thought as a unit which carries meaning in itself, together with such prosodic elements as meter and rhythm. This definition underlines the rather fluid and ambiguous nature of this structure. The term 'prosody' is significant, as its study assumes that various formal elements are employed "for conveying information about

the meanings and structure of an utterance" (Bansal 244): analysing Whitman's thought prosody supports the idea that Whitman engages in a conscious formal crafting of his poetry.

Gay Wilson Allen's definition of Whitman's parallelism is that of a "prosodic system […] based on a pattern of statements: his verse-unit was not the metrical foot of conventional prosody or the phrase of *vers libre* but the statement, usually an independent clause" (*A Reader's Guide* 166, emphasis in original). The statement, as a unit, falls somewhere between the thought and the clause. With this verse-unit, rhythm is achieved on different levels in the poem. Thoughts rhyme, as they echo each other through repetition, allowing for the proliferation of rhythms: this repetition of thought usually entails repetition of words, and therefore of sounds (166-67). Moreover, parallelism may be understood as the 'rhyming' of worlds as well, a concept which encompasses tribal approaches to poetry or song and acknowledges that parallel statements can allow the poem's sense to emerge. In fact, indigenous song and poetry manifest, echo, and help to understand reality, their rhythm creating meaning: "Instead of rhyming words (the poem as unifying technique), the [Native American] songs rhyme perceptions, moods, natural objects, the world as word (the poem as unifying association)" (Lincoln 47).

This chapter has argued that lists are democratic in character in that they are non-hierarchical and, through simple punctuation or the conjunction 'and,' confer equality on their constituent items and lexical sets. Chanting is different in kind; where parallelism confers grammatical equality on the poem's clauses, in fact, chanting creates other hierarchies:

> Although the repetitively conjunctive linking of elements in a chant is democratic in that all manner of unrelated phenomena may be included with unsubordinated grammatical equality, therefore perhaps defining a quintessentially American poetic form, parallel structure is a means of repetition used to establish the complex hierarchies between these elements existing within a given group (Nolan 99).

Hierarchy emerges within the poet's thoughts, not within the individual items of his lists. Democracy and equality remain the organising principles in Whitman's poetry

grammatically, as lists are based on repetition and on separate units which remain unsubordinated to one other. Parallelism is a deeper organising principle, operating at the levels of content and meaning. Parallelism figures prominently in poetries other than the indigenous oral tradition. In *Poetry of Grammar and Grammar of Poetry* (1962), Roman Jakobson points out that scholars have paid attention to biblical parallelism, which is based on ancient Canaanite traditions, and Chinese verse and poetic prose (39). However, the patterns of parallel structure play significant roles in the literatures of other cultures, especially in the written and oral poetry and song of the Finno-Ugric, Turkic, Mongolian, and Russian peoples (40).

In considering Whitman's parallelism, Allen's framework of different types of parallel structures may be helpful. He distinguishes four types of parallelism: synonymous parallelism, antithetic parallelism, constructive parallelism, and climactic parallelism ("Walt Whitman: The Search" 409). Over a hundred years earlier, in his *Journals and Papers* (1865), Gerard Manley Hopkins had similarly distinguished parallelism in kinds "where the effect is sought in likeness of things, and antithesis, contrast, and so on, where it is sought in unlikeness" (85). These coincide with synonymous and antithetic parallelism, in which thoughts or statements either reinforce or contrast with each other. Constructive and climactic parallelism are similar in that thoughts or statements complete each other, with the difference that in the former, the first line is complete and constructed upon, and in the latter, the first line is incomplete without the lines that follow.

In *Song of Myself*, instances of constructive parallelism include: "Through me forbidden voices, / Voices of sexes and lusts, voices veil'd and I remove the veil" (516-17); of synonymous parallelism: "Whoever degrades another degrades me, / And whatever is done or said returns at last to me" (503-04); of climactic parallelism: "Space and Time! now I see it is true, what I guess'd at, / What I guess'd when I loaf'd on the grass, / What I guess'd while I lay alone in my bed" (710-12); and of antithetic parallelism: "I am the poet of the woman the same as the man, / And I say it is as great to be a woman as to be a man, / And I say there is nothing greater than the mother of men" (425-27). These examples illustrate that parallel structure depends not only on paired syntactic structures, but on anaphora and repetition of words, and therefore of sounds, as well.

An excellent case study of Whitman's parallelism may be found in the second stanza of 'Section 3' of *Song of Myself*, which Biancamaria Lalli identifies as a typical example of the Whitmanian poetic process (66):

> There was never any more inception than there is now,
> Nor any more youth or age than there is now,
> And will never be any more perfection than there is now,
> Nor any more heaven or hell than there is now (*Song of Myself* 40-43).

These lines exhibit different types of oppositions in their parallel statements. There is one horizontal pairing of *youth* with *age* and *heaven* with *hell*, which is in turn internally paired in a vertical manner as *youth* with *heaven* and *age* with *hell*. Moreover, there is one vertical pairing of *inception* with *perfection* which is in turn conditioned by all the other pairings, and manifests the opposite of *inception* as *perfection* (Lalli 67). This pairing finds thematic evidence throughout Whitman's works, as the poet celebrates continuous beginnings and expansion, neither ever ending: "The smallest sprout shows there is really no death, / And if ever there was it led forward life" (*Song of Myself* 126-27). Whitman may in this stanza also intend to connect *inception* to both *youth* and *age*, and *perfection* to both *heaven* and *hell*.

The second stanza of 'Section 3' illustrates how parallel structure relies on anaphora – 'than there is now' – at the end the lines, and on repetition – 'Nor any more' – at the beginning of the lines. This allows for the key words or phrases *inception*, *youth or age*, *perfection*, and *heaven and hell* to stand out and stimulate the aforementioned associations in the reader. Apart from the obvious rhymes of the repeated words, *inception* and *perfection* also rhyme, reinforcing their vertical pairing. The illustrated parallelism strengthens, as mentioned, the content of the poem as a whole, especially if accepting the proposition that Whitman intended an internal pairing of *youth* with *heaven* and *age* with *hell* and an additional pairing of *inception* to both *youth* and *age* and of *perfection* to both *heaven* and *hell*.

Claudio Guillén elaborates on the ways in which the structure of parallelism operates on different layers, stating that parallel structure can be

> a provisional frame for the development of a meaningful tension between the design of the poem and its individual

> components – between order and process. We do not have a *systeme clos*, but rather a plexus of interactions that allow for the mutual intensification of the different strata of the message: syntactical, prosodic, semantic, phonic, and morphological. This stratification is essential in poetry (503, emphasis in original).

This valuable understanding of parallelism finds support in theories of cognitive poetics. Cognitive poetics understands Guillén's 'order and process' in terms of 'texture' and convergent or divergent structures, drawing on psychologists' differentiation between convergent and divergent thinking. Reuven Tsur, the father of cognitive poetics, argues that the relations which exist between the different layers of the poem determine this texture. Convergent structures emerge when the poem's syntactical, prosodic, and phonetic patterns are tightly interwoven; when the poem presents accented syllables in strong positions; when it has a conclusive tone; and when its parallel structures support and reinforce each other (Tsur "Cognitive Poetics and Speaking" 6). Convergent structures are often associated with a rational, witty quality (6). Divergent structures present a diffuse, ambiguous, and emotional quality, and emerge when the poem's tone is 'suspensive,' as in indeterminate; when its parallel structures are unpredictable and operate on more than one level; and when the syntactical, prosodic, and phonetic patterns of the poem are not tightly connected but strain the attention span of the reader (6).

Considering that poems as a whole contain a variety of tendencies and tensions, Tsur refrains from absolute categorisation and advises the reader to search for the predominance of one model over the other, without excluding their co-existence. With its technicalities, cognitive poetics creates a vocabulary which allows for the expression of persistent preoccupations of literary theorists. This discussion applies cognitive poetics theories to Whitman's poetry with regards to conveyance of meaning and affectivity. When considering parallelism from a merely formal angle, it may be helpful to employ Guillén's simpler distinction between parallelistic or antiparallelistic impulses in a poem. In this case, convergent structures may be paired with parallelistic impulses, and divergent structures with antiparallelistic ones. It may be argued that Whitman's works present strong antiparallelistic impulses, as it exhibits many occurrences of divergence: its conclusive tone often becomes suspensive; its

emotional quality often overpowers its witty or rational quality; and its free verse long lines tend to strain the short-term memory of the reader, in spite of their strong parallelisms. Notably, the length of the lines and the number of lines in long poems such as *Song of Myself* allows for wide formal and stylistic variation. Guillén suggests that the poetic effect significantly depends "on the tension, interaction, or contrast among the parallelistic impulses and the antiparallelistic (or perhaps nonparallelistic) ones" (9).

The very first lines of *Song of Myself* may be taken as an example of convergent parallelistic impulses. From the outset, the poem establishes repetition and synonymous parallel structures, both inside each line and between lines:

> I celebrate myself, and sing myself,
> And what I assume you shall assume,
> For every atom belonging to me as good belongs to you (1-3).

However, *Song of Myself* also offers ambiguity and parallel structures which do not clearly converge but rather weaken each other. 'Section 6,' for instance, establishes a suspensive tone with a rare non-rhetorical question and an admission of ignorance in response to the child's "*What is the grass?*" – "How could I answer the child? I do not know what it is any more than he" (99-100, emphasis in original). The first half of the section is based on a scheme of question-and-answer in which the speaker's statements are charged with insecurity and doubt. The speaker uses, as anaphora, the indecisive phrases "I guess" (*Song of Myself* 101, 102, 105, 106) and "It may be" (112, 113, 114). Lalli notes that this uncertainty ultimately reflects on the second part of the section, tainting and weakening the conclusive tone of assertions such as "there is really no death" (75) (*Song of Myself* 126).

Because anaphora and repetition of thought are so prominent in Whitman, parallelistic impulses are persistent in *Leaves of Grass*. This section has focused on examples of synonymous parallelism, but other categorisations of Whitman's paired statements and thoughts are noteworthy. For instance, Guillén notes that Whitman's parallelism resembles biblical and Chinese poetic parallelism: two thoughts, A and B, are connected through a seconding process and disconnected from the following lines in this manner: __A__ / __B__ // (505). Parallelism of this type does not consider in which way B follows A, but the fact that B intensifies, supports, and emphasises A

(Guillén 505; Kugel 51). This seconding process may recall the previously discussed qualities of lists: lists thrive on multiplication, addition, and accumulation, both in quantity and in quality. This tendency is repeated within Whitman's parallel structures. This process, in which the second part of the line echoes and reinforces the first part, may be noted, for instance, in the above-mentioned opening lines of *Song of Myself*, or in these lines from 'Section 3':

> Clear and sweet is my soul, and clear and sweet is all that is not my soul.
> […]
> Welcome is every organ and attribute of me, and of any man hearty and clean,
> Not an inch nor a particle of an inch is vile, and none shall be less familiar than the rest (52, 57-58).

Scholars have noted indigenous poetry and song, biblical prose, and Chinese poetry and poetic prose as the types of parallelism which Whitman's parallelism most resembles. Another origin may be observed for Whitman's thought prosody, considering time relations rather than spatial relations. In fact, the flourishing of Whitman's parallelism may be attributed to a historical retreat from meter and rhyme: the medieval repetition of the line was followed by syntactic parallelism, which was followed by alliteration and final rhyme, which signalled a retreat of parallelism (Guillén 508; Žirmunskij 390). A further retreat from loose rhyme and syllabism caused parallelism to strengthen: "Because rhyme and strict counting of syllables has been abandoned, everything happens as if verbal and thematic reiteration had replaced the missing forms and interrelations" (Guillén 511). Similarly, Whitman's use of alliteration and assonance, constant although unsystematic, may be attributed to his abandonment of the metrical system (Allen *A Reader's Guide* 165-66).

Parallelism also organises meaning in Whitman's poems by acting as an imitative structure. Because of its expressive form, Whitman's poetry has been widely criticised by New Critics. In Winters's critique, Whitman's free verse is technically formless in order to express a formless content; the critic denounces "the Whitmanian tricks of writing loose poetry about a loose country" (*In Defense of Reason* 143), or the idea of "employing a disintegrating form in order to express a feeling of disintegration" (*Primitivism and Decadence* 136). However, this does not reflect a

laziness on Whitman's part. Allen notes the deliberate nature of expressive form in Whitman's poetry, stating that "*expressive form* tells more about the nature and function of Whitman's poetic form than does its freedom from rhyme and meter" (*A Reader's Guide* 160, emphasis in original).

Can parallelism echo and reinforce imitative rhythm? Without going into detail, Manahil Ahmad Al-Nawas suggests that the parallel structures of 'Section 5' of *Song of Myself* seem to reflect and strengthen the speaker's expressed belief in the unity of the universe (216). The following proposes an original analysis of how, in this section of the poem, thought rhythm and imitative rhythm may overlap. In fact, 'Section 5' becomes increasingly peaceful and harmonious. The speaker begins by recounting the union of his soul and his body in suggestive, erotic lines:

> I mind how we once lay such a transparent summer morning,
> How you settled your head athwart my hips and gently turn'd over upon me,
> And parted the shirt from my bosom-bone, and plunged your tongue to my bare-stript heart (87-89).

The section builds on this unusual connection to present another union, that of his soul and the universe:

> Swiftly arose and spread around me the peace and knowledge that pass all the argument of the earth,
> And I know that the hand of God is the promise of my own,
> And I know that the spirit of God is the brother of my own,
> And that all the men ever born are also my brothers, and the women my sisters and lovers,
> And that a kelson of the creation is love,
> And limitless are leaves stiff or drooping in the fields,
> And brown ants in the little wells beneath them,
> And mossy scabs of the worm fence, heap'd stones, elder, mullein and poke-weed (91-98).

In these lines, one synonymous parallel structure may be that of employing, twice, the dynamic of uniting two different concepts: firstly, the soul and the body, and secondly, the soul and the universe. In this case, the second part of the structure,

which may be understood as __A__ / __B__ //, builds upon the first, to the general effect that meaning is enhanced by this repetition: the second union may emerge all the more complete because of the emphasis on the process of conjunction. Further, the parallel structures present within these lines both reinforce and imitate content and meaning. Lines 92-94 present strong synonymous parallelisms both within the line and between lines; their anaphora and repetition simultaneously suggest confidence and harmony. The anaphora "And I know" (92, 93) is implicit after line 93, with "And that" in its place (94, 95), and finally merely "And" (96, 97, 98). The same sentence structure is maintained, but not all words are made explicit: this decrease in verbal expression mirrors the growing sense of calm which the speaker announces at the beginning of the extract, "the peace and knowledge that pass all the argument of the earth" (91).

Expressive form

Whitman's notion of organic poetry already entails expressive form. Insofar as Whitman's poetry is derivative of his soul, following Transcendentalist notions of organicism, it may be considered to be, to some degree, imitative of his soul as well. Whitman's free verse long lines do more than sing and celebrate the poet and his personality: they reflect him. Their lack of prosodic, syntactical, and thematic constraints mirrors the freedom of the poet's soul, its endlessness: "To be in any form, what is that?" he wonders, and remarks: "I know I have the best of time and space, and was never measured and never will be measured" (*Song of Myself* 611, 1201). Whitman eschews limits of time and space in terms of meter and conventional line length. At the same time, however, he also artfully employs formal features and structures, opening a fruitful exchange between form and content. With lists and parallelism, this section has shown so far, he reflects, organises, and informs content and meaning in his poetry. Lists provide insights into the poet's democratic, egalitarian ethos; his poetics of feeding and longing; his take on the particular and the general, in view of a collective unconscious; and his poetics of endlessness, which the lists reflects formally, as an imitative structure. Parallelism organises meaning in terms of thought hierarchy, influences the affective power of the poem, and can also act as an imitative structure.

The following sections further explore expressive form. Here, the terms 'expressive form' and 'imitative rhythm' are used interchangeably, as form is

understood to be expressive of content through degrees of imitation. Imitative or expressive form is a suggestive definition of Whitman's poetics, which is often too easily relegated to the catch-all category of free verse. Allen, among other scholars, attempts to circumvent the vagueness of nominating Whitman's form 'free verse' – "all this term tells us is that the poem is not in rhyme and meter" (*A Reader's Guide* 160) – and defines Whitman's works instead in terms of expressive form, in the belief that the organising principles of his poetics are "imitative sound, imitative or symbolic rhythm, and often 'expressive' syntax" (160). Expanding on Allen, the passages discussed below exemplify the relevance of expressive form and imitative rhythm to the organisation of content and conveyance of meaning in Whitman's poetry.

'Section 26,' the 'listening' section of *Song of Myself* – opening with the line "Now I will do nothing but listen" (582) – aptly illustrates Whitman's tendency towards imitative rhythm and form. After the description of an orchestra of noises emanating from the world, the speaker introduces an ecstatic instrumental orchestra. The lines begin harmoniously, in a mixture of melodious iambic and anapaestic verse:

> I hear the violoncello, ('tis the young man's heart's complaint,)
> I hear the key'd cornet, it glides quickly in through my ears,
> It shakes mad-sweet pangs through my belly and breast (596-98).

The verse-narrative then becomes more metrically irregular but reliant on repetition and alliteration: "A tenor large and fresh as the creation fills me, / The orbic flex of his mouth is pouring and filling me full" (601-02). The lines also become longer, apart from line 607, which is appropriately foreshortened, as the speaker states "I lose my breath."

The section's climax is a *petite mort* as the speaker, in ecstasy, finds his "windpipe throttled in fakes of death" (608) before the lines recuperate a tranquil, prose-like tone to conclude the section:

> The orchestra whirls me wider than Uranus flies,
> It wrenches such ardors from me I did not know I possess'd them,

> It sails me, I dab with bare feet, they are lick'd by the indolent waves,
> I am cut by bitter and angry hail, I lose my breath,
> Steep'd amid honey'd morphine, my windpipe throttled in fakes of death,
>
> At length let up again to feel the puzzle of puzzles,
> And that we call Being (604-10).

It can be noted here how alliteration moves from the mellow *w*, used however in forceful words such as *whirl* and *wrench*, to the more violent *b*, *t*, and *d*, which become almost onomatopoeic in line 607 – "I am cut by bitter and angry hail, I lose my breath"; this line sounds spat out, because of the speaker's loss of breath. In turn, the length and furious metrical irregularity of the following long line suggest that it is pronounced with the last available breath, caused by 'fakes of death.' A stanza break signals the recuperation of breath after an imagined orgasmic – 'steep'd amid honey'd morphine' – death, and the last line presents a new, calm, harmonious tone – "And that we call Being" (610). This passage is telling in terms of meter, rhythm, repetition, and sound: formally, as well as through content, it reports the chaotic music of existence. Firstly, its concern with rhythm and sound reflects the fact that it is based on the sense of hearing and the action of listening. Secondly, its rhythm and sound reflect the speaker's journey as he describes the orchestral frenzy and how this affects him.

Another poem which employs a distinctive imitative rhythm is "Crossing Brooklyn Ferry" (1856), a much-discussed poem in terms of form. This poem weaves numerous formal devices, especially parallelism, repetition, use of tenses, and expressive form to express and imitate its content and meaning. In fact, Whitman conveys, both formally and in terms of message, the sense of an eternal journey, a 'crossing' in which the poet transcends time by showing it as simultaneously static and in movement. Whitman may aim to actuate in this poem what he announces the 'great American poet' is to do in his 1855 Preface to *Leaves of Grass*:

> Past and present and future are not disjoined but joined. The greatest poet forms the consistence of what is to be from what has been and is […] he places himself where the future becomes present. The greatest poet does not only dazzle his

> rays over character and scenes and passions… he finally ascends and finishes all… he exhibits the pinnacles that no man can tell what they are for or what is beyond… he glows a moment on the extremest verge (vi).[4]

"Crossing Brooklyn Ferry" exemplifies, in a sense, an 'extreme verge' in its novel and imaginative approach towards time. Scholars tend to argue that the poem primarily concerns the immortality of art in a Keatsian, 'Ode on a Grecian Urn' manner (Allen *A Reader's Guide* 187; Lalli 454), but it may be argued that the poem also celebrates common human identity and spiritual unity (Orlov 15), together with the immortality and continuity of the soul.

From the beginning – in fact, from the very title of the poem – Whitman establishes the importance of the action of crossing, and therefore the importance of motion. This is significant as the poem presents two contrasting acts: that of transiting through the water, which is itself flowing and moving as well, and that of standing on the ferry; this opposition results in the paradox of stillness in motion (Lalli 454). To this, Whitman adds the notion of simultaneous movement and stillness in time rather than in place. In sections 1 and 2, the speaker positions himself in the present, the past, and the future, and addresses readers both in the past, the present, and the future. He begins and ends 'Section 1' by making a double use of the pronoun 'you' in lines 4 and 5, which indicates that his addressees inhabit different times, the present and the future:

> Flood-tide below me! I see you face to face!
> Clouds of the west – sun there half an hour high – I see you also face to face.
> Crowds of men and women attired in the usual costumes, how curious you are to me!
> On the ferry-boats the hundreds and hundreds that cross, returning home, are more curious to me than *you* suppose,

[4] Perhaps honoring such a conception of the poet, Lawrence describes Whitman as inhabiting a sort of verge: "Whitman, the one pioneer […] His wide, strange camp at the end of the great high-road. And lots of new little poets camping on Whitman's camping ground now. But none going really beyond. Because Whitman's camp is at the end of the road, and on the edge of a great precipice. Over the precipice, blue distances" (*Studies in Classic* 171).

> *And you* that shall cross from shore to shore years hence are more to me, and more in my meditations, than you might suppose (1-5, emphasis added).

'Section 2' refers to 'others,' the men and women who will cross the river just like the poet himself, but in the future. In his description of the various sights that these people will admire from the ferry, the speaker implies that others are seeing them as well, in the present:

> Others will watch the run of the flood-tide,
> Others will see the shipping of Manhattan north and west, and the heights of Brooklyn to the south and east,
> Others will see the island large and small;
> Fifty years hence, others will see them as they cross, the sun half an hour high,
> A hundred years hence, or ever so many hundred years hence, others will see them,
> Will enjoy the sunset, the pouring-in of the flood-tide, the falling-back to the sea of the ebb-tide (14-19).

The image of the sunset, and of the 'sun half an hour high,' weaves the poem together, through different moments in time, by being repeated at different points, both in 'Section 1' and 'Section 2.' Significantly, "Crossing Brooklyn Ferry" was originally titled "Sun-Down Poem." The flood-tide and the ebb-tide are also repurposed throughout the poem, as in 'Section 9,' which begins: "Flow on, river! flow with the flood-tide, and ebb with the ebb-tide!" (101). These parallelisms emphasise both stillness in time and particularity – the moment of sunset – and movement in time and universality – the flow of the water. Stasis emerges from motion, and vice versa.

The beginning of 'Section 2' offers a glimpse into Whitman's complex message, which builds on these paradoxes:

> The simple, compact, well-join'd scheme, myself disintegrated, every one disintegrated yet part of the scheme,
> The similitudes of the past and those of the future,

> The glories strung like beads on my smallest sights and hearings, on the walk in the street and the passage over the river (7-9).

The paradox here is one of individuality and unity, of separateness – in personality and in time – and of sameness – in personhood and in time. The different moments are beads on the string of time; they are the same, simultaneous in essence if not in the course of time. As Paul Orlov elaborates, "what this awareness of being 'disintegrated yet part of the scheme' means, here and throughout the poem, is that time and space distinctions must be recognised and in constant focus, paradoxically enough, in order to be hidden and blurred" (15-16).

Sections 7 and 8 push the speaker further 'on the extremest verge' which Whitman mentions in the 1855 Preface, the verge on which the poet "places himself where the future becomes present" (vi). The speaker addresses future readers intimately:

> What thought you have of me now, I had as much of you – I laid my stores in advance,[5]
> I consider'd long and seriously of you before you were born
> […]
> Who knows, for all the distance, but I am as good as looking at you now, for all you cannot see me? ("Crossing Brooklyn Ferry" 87-88, 91).

He identifies with these future readers as well as with his present companions, and assumes a reciprocal understanding: "What is more subtle than this which ties me to the woman or man that looks in my face? / Which fuses me into you now, and pours meaning into you? // We understand then do we not?" (96-98). The last lines of the poem address all future manifestations of existence, reiterating his message:

> We fathom you not – we love you – there is perfection in you also
> You furnish your parts toward eternity,

[5] Placing himself in an obvious continuous dialogue with Whitman, Ginsberg begins "A Supermarket in California": "What thoughts I have of you tonight, Walt Whitman" (1).

> Great or small, you furnish your parts toward the soul (130-32).

That of “Crossing Brooklyn Ferry” is a typically Whitmanian message in terms of its vast proportions, high ambitions, and paradoxical nature. However, the poem entails a careful use of form, not only to express, but also to imitate, its content and meaning. Whitman offers contrasting emphases on stillness and movement, on particularity and universality, and on the present as containing past, present, and future. In typically Whitmanian manner, this is, also, a message of commonality, completeness, and perfection.

Part II: "Will you speak before I am gone?"

I'm going to try speaking some reckless words and I want you to listen to them recklessly…

Chuang Tzu

Cognitive poetics remarks on affectivity

As the first chapter of this thesis has proposed, affectivity is implied in open form poetry, or open field poetics, of which Whitman's poetry is a prime example. Affectivity is an essential preoccupation in Whitman in terms of both content and form, so that a close interplay between different layers in Whitman's poetry may be observed. Theories of cognitive poetics offer a valuable lens through which to view the relationship between form, content, and meaning in poetry, and can be fruitfully applied when exploring Whitman's poetics of affectivity. As Tsur explains, cognitive poetics provides theories that account for the exchanges which happen between the structures of literary works and the effects they have on the readers ("Cognitive Poetics and Speaking" 1). The formal organisation of content determines affectivity, or the affect which literature can produce on the reader. This chapter has argued that Whitman's poetry presents tendencies towards theories of both convergence and divergence as understood by cognitive poetics. As noted above, parallelism, in particular, has the potential to render the text more or less convergent or divergent, depending on whether the text exhibits a predominance of parallelistic or antiparallelistic impulses.

This section considers how divergent aspects in Whitman's poems contribute to the emotional quality of his poetry, and may therefore affect the reader's emotions. Scholars have defined Whitman's poetry as sentimental, noting the ways in which it aims to arouse pathos (see Schöberlein 2018). As argued above, poetry which presents divergent tendencies emerges as emotional, whereas poetry with a predominance of convergent tendencies emerges as rational or witty. Cognitive poetics specifically studies the ways in which literary texts convey emotional states, transferring language processing from the left hemisphere of the brain, where language operates, to the right hemisphere of the brain, where emotions reside (Tsur "Cognitive Poetics and Speaking" 11). Divergent poetry renders the message of a text particularly diffused (or 'diffuse,' using Tsur's terminology) and affective on the right hemisphere of the

brain. As Robert Ornstein's study of consciousness (1975) shows, the right brain hosts such vaguer perceptions as the sense of orientation in space, feelings, and mystical experiences; semantic features exist there, but their information is structurally simultaneous and integrated, "*as it appears in consciousness*" (Tsur "Cognitive Poetics and Speaking" 11, emphasis in original).

Constructions which give Whitman's poetry a divergent and emotional nature include deixis and abstraction. Deixis constitutes a type of reference the interpretation of which depends on extra-linguistic contexts. Deictic words include, for instance, 'me,' 'you,' 'here,' and 'there,' as their meaning depends on that which needs previous specification. Deixis acts upon abstraction, or lack of stable visual shapes, and therefore makes the reader construct an imaginary situation (Tsur "Deixis and Abstraction" 41). Verbs can also be deictic, especially when in the imperative mode, and verbs which refer to the mental processes of perception and are in the imperative mode, such as 'look' and 'listen,' are particularly deictic (Tsur "Cognitive Poetics and Speaking" 11). Verbs in the imperative tense give a command to someone who is either there or imagined to be there, and verbs of perception, in particular, command the reader sensually to imagine situations and recreate sensations.

Significantly, Whitman's poetry favours both the imperative tense, verbs which refer to sensorial perception, and deictic words. Deixis especially abounds in Whitman's poetry in the form of the personal pronouns 'I' and 'you.' Whitman appears to aim to stimulate the capacities of abstraction and the imagination of his readers. In fact, his praise of philosophical thought, spirituality, and ideals is reflected in, and triggered by, his use of abstraction and deixis. Whitman's "Song of the Open Road" (1856) features an interesting use of deictic words, especially personal pronouns, and abstraction. The first lines of the poem open with the poet's customary use of the 'I' as an only vaguely contextualised and specified first person:

> Afoot and light-hearted I take to the open road,
> Healthy, free, the world before me,
> The long brown path before me leading wherever I choose (1-3).

From the beginning, Whitman establishes an imaginative space which is free of limitations or borders. Although the speaker's 'I' is repeated throughout the poem, it

is notable that, unlike in *Song of Myself*, the pronoun 'you' recurs more frequently (87 times) than the pronoun 'I' (75 times) in "Song of the Open Road." Moreover, this 'you' does not always refer to the same person, object, or concept. It is not until the end of 'Section 6' that, through his 'you,' the speaker finally addresses the reader. In fact, the first 'you' is the road which the speaker travels, followed by a selection of abstract nouns, concrete objects the speaker encounters, the open road again, and men and women the speaker may encounter. Finally, 'you' is used in a general sense, as in 'one,' before referring to the reader.

'Section 3' figures most of these addressees. 'You' is the anaphoric word for the whole section, which begins with:

> You air that serves me with breath to speak!
> You objects that call from diffusion my meanings and give them shape!
> You light that wraps me and all things in delicate equable showers!
> You paths worn in the irregular hollows by the roadsides! (25-28).

A process of 'Othering' seems to emerge towards the various objects which the speaker addresses before turning towards the reader. As Stephen Railton notes, Whitman's 'you' is the only other person in his poetry: the 'I' seems to include everything else apart from the 'you' (8). This may be compared to a process of Othering of the 'you'; in fact, Whitman's 'I' boasts the all-inclusiveness of every facet of existence. As discussed below, the tension between the 'I' and the 'you,' the speaker and the reader, is essential to Whitman's poetics. The 'I' is always dependent on the 'you' (9). Whitman's all-comprehensive first person always longs for the Other, what is not known to him, what he does not (metaphorically and physically) possess – the 'you,' the reader. "Passing stranger! you do not know how longingly I look upon you," begins Whitman's poem "To a Stranger" (1867), ending: "I am to see to it that I do not lose you" (1-10). Towards the 'stranger,' a clear example and manifestation of Otherness, the speaker looks with a longing that melts into lust. The concluding remark similarly sounds like a declaration of need, underscoring the dependency between the 'I' and the 'you,' the speaker and the Other.

It therefore becomes important to investigate what the two deictic pronouns indicate, as they make the reader imagine and reconstruct the situation of the poem, together with positioning themselves, and therefore finding a role, in the poem. As mentioned, the first sections of "Song of the Open Road" are peculiar in that their 'you' does not address the reader. As the speaker's surroundings become the various 'you's, the reader seems to take residence inside the 'I': in other words, the perspective of saying 'you' seems to come from a first person singular. The speaker, in turn, had previously announced in 'Section 1' that people reside in him always, thereby justifying this inclusion of the reader's subjectivity into his and into his process of Othering: "I carry them, men and women, I carry them with me wherever I go" ("Song of the Open Road" 13). However, this does not as yet lead to a 'we.' Men and women, referred to in the third person, are comprised within the speaker on undefined grounds. The reader, too, is comprised within the speaker in terms of form, rather than content. This becomes perplexing as Whitman uses the same word, 'you,' to 'Other' the objects surrounding him and to include (rather than Other) the reader. The reader may be confused as to their place in the poem. It is only at the end of 'Section 6' that, finally, Whitman addresses them with his familiar and emotionally intimate apostrophe:

> Only the kernel of every object nourishes;
> Where is he who tears off the husks for you and me?
> Where is he that undoes stratagems and envelops for you and
> me? (88-90).

These lines illustrate the way in which Whitman's 'you' as a deictic word affects the right hemisphere of the reader's brain. The pronoun pushes the reader to use their capacity of abstraction, imagination, and, most notably, their sense of space with regard to how they may place themselves in relation to the speaker. Whereas deixis indicates the need for previous specification, Whitman navigates the pronoun and the possibilities it offers without providing descriptions or specifications: as Nolan notes, Whitman's 'you' and 'I' are always in flux, adapting to different objects and situations (161). The meaning of the apostrophe changes, affecting the reader even before they are called forth personally, in an exchange which grows in intensity throughout the poem. The last line of the poem celebrates the emergence of a 'we' of (wished for) absolute, eternal boundedness: "Shall we stick by each other as long as we live?" ("Song of the Open Road" 231).

Another feature which may be noted and which theories of cognitive poetics relate to divergence is abstraction. Tsur connects abstraction and abstractness with space perception, noting that these features enhance the feeling of the suspension of boundaries and arouse lowly differentiated and non-conceptual perceptions ("Cognitive Poetics and Speaking" 8, 10). He also notes that, even with concrete objects as subjects of the sentence, the focus may be placed on abstractness when the adjective becomes an abstract noun, as in 'the height of the hills': in this construction, the attributes, rather than the concrete objects, are the 'psychological subject' of the sentence (13-14). There are relatively few examples of this structure in "Song of the Open Road," but it may be noted that Whitman does, at times, emphasise the abstract quality of adjectives and nouns in his sentences. For instance, he may place adjectives after the noun, charging them with additional importance, as in: "Going where I list, my own master total and absolute" ("Song of the Open Road" 54). He may also employ lines almost exclusively comprised of abstract nouns, as in: "Allons! with power, liberty, the earth, the elements, / Health, defiance, gayety, self-esteem, curiosity" (127-28).

Abstraction pervades Whitman's texts, rendering them lowly differentiated and diffused, unclear and unspecified. Lines in 'Section 5' abound in abstract nouns and concepts, which are, again, deictic but not previously specified:

> From this hour I ordain myself loos'd of limits and imaginary lines,
> Going where I list, my own master total and absolute,
> […]
> Gently, but with undeniable will, divesting myself of the holds that would hold me.
> I inhale great draughts of space,
> The east and the west are mine, and the north and the south are mine.
>
> I am larger, better than I thought,
> I did not know I held so much goodness (54-55, 58-62).

Examples of abstract deictic phrases from this extract include 'the holds that would hold me,' 'where I list,' and 'the east and the west.' The lack of specification and

description in these lines makes them very vague: the speaker emerges as ‘large’ and ‘good,’ inhaling ‘space,’ moving towards an unspecified direction, and free from something that would otherwise have held him. These lines rely on abstraction, emotions, unlimited perceptions of space, and integrated perceptions of vague concepts. However, what Whitman says may well be understood on an emotional, intuitive, imaginative level.

What makes these lines, and much of the poem, especially abstract is the lack of description and specification which deictic words require. The reader needs to rely on their imagination and liberation from stable visual perceptions in order to understand how the speaker is, for instance, large and good. The space of the poem also remains unspecified and highly abstract. It seems to be, like the speaker, ‘loos’d of limits and imaginary lines,’ presenting a mere indication of the four cardinal points. Indeed, the road emerges, by ‘Section 13,’ as a metaphorical road:

> Allons! to that which is endless as it was beginningless,
> To undergo much, tramps of days, rests of nights,
> To merge all in the travel they tend to, and the days and nights they tend to,
> Again to merge them in the start of superior journeys,
> To see nothing anywhere but what you may reach it and pass it,
> To conceive no time, however distant, but what you may reach it and pass it,
> […]
> To know the universe itself as a road, as many roads, as roads for traveling souls (169-74, 183).

The space of the road is the space that “[t]he Soul travels” (184). Lawrence recognises that the soul itself belongs to the road; the two may be considered as extensions of each other:

> The Open Road. The great home of the Soul is the open road. Not heaven, not paradise. Not “above.” Not even “within.” It is a wayfarer down the open road.

> Not by meditating. Not by fasting. Not by exploring heaven after heaven, inwardly, in the manner of the great mystics. Not by exaltation. Not by ecstasy. Not by any of these ways does the soul come into her own.
> Only by taking the open road (*Studies in Classic* 171).

Whitman reiterates the idea of an infinite, abstract space through his repetition, throughout the poem, of the word 'open' in the phrase 'the open road,' which constitutes a paradox in that roads cannot be open, as they are characterised by their delimited layout. The metaphor of the road constitutes then a bridge between Whitman's formal arrangements and Whitman's meaning in terms of abstraction and spirituality.

An opposition emerges throughout the poem in terms of form and content between the open road and the closed book, between two forms of materiality which are opposed. One refers to the physical life, the sensual and sensorial life, the life based on first-hand experience, the concrete life of the soul; the other refers to the intellectual life, the materialistic life, the life based on second-hand knowledge. Poetry, even his own, the speaker concedes, belongs to the second category. There is one instance in the poem of the word 'unopened,' which opposes the 'open' of the open road, and it is used in reference to literature: "Let the paper remain on the desk unwritten, and the book on the shelf unopen'd!" (223). This opposition between experience and literature is carried out throughout the poem. "O public road […] You shall be more to me than my poem" (45, 47); "I and mine do not convince by arguments, similes, rhymes, / We convince by our presence" (139-40).

This contrast is sustained throughout the poem. In the previously mentioned lines composed of abstract nouns – "power, liberty, the earth, the elements, / Health, defiance, gayety, self-esteem, curiosity" (127-28) – the nouns accompany the abstract quality of the road, praising the value of imaginative expansion, spiritual elevation, and strong physicality and spirit. On the other side, there lie (as corpses lie) priests and the keepers of sets of beliefs, 'formules,' who are both materialistic, blind – excluded from the life of the senses – and dead – excluded from the life of the body. In terms of content and form, the abstract is opposed to the material:

> Allons! with power, liberty, the earth, the elements,

> Health, defiance, gayety, self-esteem, curiosity
> Allons! from all formules!
> From your formules, O bat-eyed and materialistic priests
>
> The stale cadaver blocks up the passage – the burial waits no longer (127-31).

The road, however, does not remain obstructed. Towards the end of "Song of the Open Road," the soul emerges as victorious over the material world, widening its spatial dimension even further, annihilating materiality, solidity, and superficiality in an ultimate praise of the power of what is abstract and spiritual. The line is almost breath-taking in its length, suggesting freedom and liberation:

> All parts away for the progress of souls,
> All religion, all solid things, arts, governments – all that was or is apparent upon this globe or any globe, falls into the niches and corners before the procession of souls along the grand roads of the universe (187-88).

Poetics of contact and resurrection

Whitman's belief in the power of words underscores his formal crafting, to the extent that Whitman's poetics may be identified as based on the significance of language (Nolan 73; Manganelli IV). The poet imbues words with a power which acts in different realms: the personal, with pertinence to each reader; the social and political; and the spiritual and magical. Language, even written expression, allows for a manifestation of the voice of Others, people or entities which usually remain unheard: in the case of the socialist poet, these may be the outcasts of society; in the case of the shaman, spirits (Gray 158). For Whitman, they are both: "Melange mine own, the unseen and the seen" ("Starting from Paumanok" 143).

Whitman may be defined as a poet who, through his utterances, aims to manifest the reality of which he speaks. "The primitive function is to evoke by naming," remarks Nolan (72), proposing a way in which to view Whitman's vocalism. Having stated that "Amelioration is one of the earth's words," the speaker remarks: "I utter and utter […] To bear, to better, lacking these of what avail am I?" ("Song of the Rolling Earth" 17, 25, 27). Words emerge as the physical tools for the creation of a

metaphorical literature, which may be a new social and spiritual language – "the dictionaries of words that print cannot touch" (101) – and of concrete future realities – "Delve! mould! pile the words of the earth! […] When the materials are all prepared and ready, the architects shall appear" (122, 125). In Whitman, words substantiate the physical and the human realms.

Unsurprisingly, then, Whitman has been read as a New World Adam, who calls the world into being by naming it (see R. W. S. Lewis 1955; G. B. Handley 2007). The concepts of Adamic language and Adamic imagination remain invaluable to a comprehensive consideration of Whitman's voice. In 1955, R. W. S. Lewis's monograph *The American Adam* set out to explore American writers' relationship and engagement with the Adamic myth in their writing (between 1820 and 1860). As Lewis notes, for American writers, the United States was something of a tabula rasa, a blank slate of possibility, without history. This promoted an association with Adam, the first, archetypal man: "His moral position was prior to experience, and in his very newness he was fundamentally innocent. The world lay all before him. He was the type of creator, the poet par excellence, creating language itself by naming the elements of the scene about him" (Lewis 5). The American Adam's moral position was certainly not one of innocence, and he did have a past, but such were the Adamic, American pioneering delusional narratives. As Lewis notes, proposing different categories for the American Adam based on the prototype's relationship with his past, Whitman presents himself as a particularly naïve Adam, the archetypal creator, past-less, who delves into the future with grandiose sentiment. Since Lewis, the critical promotion of the Adamic Whitman has also served the purpose of electing Whitman the national poet of a utopian New World.

Although the myth of the American Adam lends itself to nationalist approaches and discussions, it can suggest literary approaches as well, as when considering the American poet's relationship to language. Like Nolan, Jonathan Bate imbues the act of speaking with indigenous connotations, referring to the "pre-scientific magic of naming," according to which naming acts upon the existence of objects, and speaking acts as a vehicle for magic (175). According to G. B. Handley and Lewis, this corresponds to the Adamic function, the creative – as in *creating* – purpose of speaking (see Handley 2007; Lewis 1955). Handley's interest lies in the connections between the Adamic imagination and nature, society, and history; in this, the author draws

parallels with Adam's location in the prelapsarian Garden. The American Adam emerges as the poet who, through naming, brings nature into history, creating a sense of *place*, as in a space where human history and natural history combine (Handley 50). This dynamic suggests an ecocritical as well as nationalist approach to the American Adam, which could be fruitfully applied to readings of Whitman.

In his essay "My Book and I" (1886?), Whitman reminisces about *Leaves of Grass*, the volume's composition and role in literature. Here, the poet clearly exemplifies his New World Adam poetics, elaborating on how he aimed, in *Leaves of Grass*, to depict and give life to his time and country, endowing it with a new language, with new words. In the essay, here quoted from the original manuscript, the poet states that: "Plenty of songs had been sung – beautiful, matchless songs – adjusted to other lands than these, other days, another spirit and stage of evolution – but I would sing, and leave out or put in, solely with reference to America" (7). He further explains that:

> For grounds for "Leaves of Grass," as poetry, I have abandoned the conventional themes, which do not appear in it – none of the stock armamentation, or choice plots of love or war, or high exceptional personages of Old World song – nothing, as they say, for beauty's sake – no legend, or myth, or romance – nor euphemism, nor rhyme. But the abundant average of humanity and its identities in the now ripening Nineteenth Century – and especially in each of their countless examples and practical occupations in the United States to-day (8).

Through his song, his voice and expression, Whitman therefore manifests a new narrative which is that of his nation, of America, acting as a New World Adamic poet.

Whitman's evocations and utterings are magical speech acts, for the poet-shaman; creative and historicising speech acts, for the poet-Adam; performative speech acts, for the linguist. On different levels, Whitman aims to give life and actuality to ideas. In particular, the audacious intimacy which the speaker creates with the reader underlies Whitman's poetics of contact. As mentioned above, this intimacy compares to a longing towards the 'you,' the unknown (and future) reader, the 'stranger,' the physical and metaphysical Other. This yearning has been referenced

with relation to lists, as visual hunger, or a 'voluptuousness of looking'; to the sensual and erotic nature of the long line as a literary form, and Whitman's 'omnivorous lines'; and to the spiritual yearning of the speaker. This longing, which inhabits different spheres, is one of the most embodied contents in Whitman's form. It is also mirrored in the potentially infinite, sprawling, cumulative, and unrestrained nature of the poet's long line.

The matter of contact pervades Whitman's poetry – it is "[t]he impalpable sustenance of me from all things at all hours of the day" ("Crossing Brooklyn Ferry" 6). One manifestation of its importance can be found in the poet's Transcendentalist focus on the visual imagination and observation of the particular, which has been noted with relation to lists; as Tanner remarks, "the particularizing faculty [is] that faculty which develops the closest relationships between man and the natural world" (*The Reign of Wonder* 45). Another instance of contact concerns the effect – and affect – of Whitman's poetry on his readers. Scholars have noted that the space between the reader and the speaker is the space in which the poem takes place (see Railton 1995; Bertolini 2002; Pease 1981). This is where Whitman aims to transform the reader. As noted in the first chapter, contact is one of the thematic priorities of open form generally, and one which reflects formally in long lines and poetics of affectivity. McGuinness remarks the same: "That's what the long line of the lyric does […] remind us forcefully of the space between the page and the eye, the place where the poem really is" (285).

This space between speaker and reader is dynamic and electric, like the bodies Whitman celebrates in his poetry (see "I Sing the Body Electric"). "Perhaps, since only the sexual urge approaches the intensity of the consequent desire for union, Whitman uses sexuality as the appropriate metaphor for that desire," remarks Pease, noting that this eroticism is one of the ways in which the poet channels his subjectivity in an exchange with the reader (78). However, Whitman's reaching out can be traced back to more than sexual fantasies, the expansive curiosity of his own self, or communication. Significantly, the sensual bodies which he sings as 'electric' are, ultimately, manifestations of the soul, as the last line of "I Sing the Body Electric" reveals: "O I say now these are the Soul!" (165). Through both form and content, Whitman foregrounds this erotically and spiritually charged space between speaker and reader. In fact, reading Whitman comprises more than the usual entrance into the

space of the text on the part of the reader; it entails the leave-taking of the speaker from the pages. “So Long!” (1860), one of the concluding poems in the third edition of *Leaves of Grass* (1860), reminds the reader with an intimacy which, by the end of the anthology, feels familiar, that literature and the pages of the book are not meant to be the speaker’s residence:

> My songs cease, I abandon them,
> From behind the screen where I hid I advance personally solely to you.
>
> Camerado, this is no book,
> Who touches this touches a man,
> (Is it night? are we here together alone?)
> It is I you hold and who holds you,
> I spring from the pages into your arms (51-57).

These lines employ an intimate tone to affect the reader: they are flattering, teasing, affectionate, and trusting – whether the reader welcomes this intimacy or whether they feel uncomfortable with it. ‘Everything passes through me, even you,’ the speaker sings throughout the collection of poems, concluding: ‘Everything can pass through you too, even me.’

The fact that Whitman prepares the ground for an exchange between speaker and reader in a formal way suggests that something essential needs to happen there. Affectivity emerges as perhaps the most fundamental of Whitman’s aims. The poet’s belief in the power of words and, therefore, communication faces towards the reader because they are the ones who need to be affected by, embody, and thus ultimately ‘realise’ his poems. Where one of the parties in this communication is clear – the reader, the other – the speaker often remains mysterious or unspecified. It is worth further exploring who the speaker really is.

This thesis has employed the terms ‘the speaker,’ ‘the poet,’ ‘the author,’ and ‘Whitman’ interchangeably, and has used the pronouns ‘he’ and ‘him’ for the speaker. This may be easier to justify with Whitman than with another author, as speaker and poet are often indistinguishable throughout *Leaves of Grass*. In fact, the speaking voice of *Song of Myself* itself provides biographical details which allow for an

identification with Walt Whitman. For instance, editions following the first one figure this line which emphasises the native roots of the poet in the United States (Lalli 60-61): "Born here of parents born here from parents the same, and their parents the same" (*Song of Myself* 7). This line is followed by the similarly autobiographical "I, now thirty-seven years old in perfect health begin, / Hoping to cease not till death" (9). Moreover, 'Section 24' begins with a list of personal self-definitions and a much-changed line through different editions, though the proper name always remains, either as 'Walt Whitman' or 'W. W.' (Lalli 130): "Walt Whitman, a kosmos, of Manhattan the son, / Turbulent, fleshy, sensual, eating, drinking and breeding" (*Song of Myself* 497-98).

Bertolini notes that Whitman continuously tempts the reader to identify himself, the author, as the speaker of the poem, only to continuously deflect those identifications and determine his existence somewhere between the speaking voice and the reader (1048). This process would pertain to an ethical and political rhetoric according to which the author would bring the reader to realise both the poems and the speaker through their own participatory agency (1048). This suggestion also supports the thesis that the main purpose of Whitman's poetry is affectivity. Moreover, it may additionally explain the pervasiveness and urgency of the poet's apostrophe to the reader, and his use of the future tense to this purpose. The *Chants Democratic* cluster version of "Poets to Come," published as "Chants Democratic 14" (1860), exemplifies an attitude of expectancy on the part of the speaking voice towards the future readers – an expectancy which is clearly social and ethical:

> Poets to come!
> Not to-day is to justify me, and Democracy, and what we are for,
> But you, a new brood, native, athletic, continental, greater than before known,
> You must justify me.
>
> Indeed, if it were not for you, what would I be?
> What is the little I have done, except to arouse you?
>
> I depend on being realized (1-7).

The speaker therefore coincides not with Walt Whitman, but with an expanded or composite entity which encompasses the reader as well. The reader needs to embody and actuate the speaker's social ideals: the dependency between the 'I' and the 'you' is often moral and political. By the end of the poem, the speaker appears to declare the reader the unofficial speaker of his poetry, as he will be complete when the reader understands and actuates his vision:

> I am a man who, sauntering along, without fully stopping,
> turns a casual look upon you, and then averts his face,
> Leaving it to you to prove and define it,
> Expecting the main things from you (14-16).

This results in what Bertolini names a compounded self, made of both speaker and reader, which is both abstract and physical, in that poetry is able to excite it as a body may be excited (1048). If the speaker is a compound, it follows that he cannot be considered completely known or knowable. The reader needs to contribute to the completion of the speaker. Adding another layer of mystery to the speaker, Whitman remarks that it is not possible for the reader to know him simply by reading his words. This may suggest a deflection of the possibility of biographical knowledge through poetry, a resistance to be defined as mere speaker, or a refusal to be defined at all. These suggestions may also be simultaneously valid. "Whoever You Are Holding Me Now in Hand" (1855) confronts these matters: "I am not what you supposed, but far different" (4). The speaker affirms the reader's impossibility of knowledge of himself; it may be said that the speaker is now the Other:

> But these leaves conning you con at peril,
> For these leaves and me you will not understand.
> They will elude you at first and still more afterward, I will certainly elude you,
> Even while you should think you had unquestionably caught me, behold!
> Already you see I have escaped from you (27-31).

The reference to leaves, the pages of *Leaves of Grass*, hints at the collection of poetry from a literary, and consequently intellectual, point of view. The attempt to thus understand the book would be futile, an idea that is supported by the rest of the poem:

the speaker suggests that the reader carries his book in contact with their body, under their clothes – "Where I may feel the throbs of your heart or rest upon your hip" (22) – or outside, in nature, alone – "For in any roof'd room of a house I emerge not, nor in company, / And in libraries I lie as one dumb, a gawk, or unborn, or dead" (14, 15-16). That between the open space of nature and the closed space of a room is a familiar opposition, as noted in "Song of the Open Road." The speaker therefore exhibits a refusal to be understood intellectually, or through analysis: an exchange on a different – physical, emotional, spiritual – level needs to happen between speaker and reader which opens the space to a different kind of knowledge, one which is embodied. Moreover, Whitman may also argue in favour of an individuality so vast and unexplored that it would be impossible to claim knowledge over personality and subjectivity. "I too am untranslatable," states the speaker towards the end of *Song of Myself* (1332), protecting the reader's mysterious individuality as well as his own.

'Being translated' is a recurring trope in *Leaves of Grass*. "And I swear I will never translate myself at all, only to him or her who privately stays with me in the open air," declares the speaker (1251), once more foregrounding the spirit and situation in which an encounter between reader and speaker may happen – in nature, the two alone. The conclusion of "So Long!" presents a compelling use of the trope of translation, which supports Bertolini's conception of the speaker as both a physical entity, presenting a body which excites and which is excitable, and a purely abstract entity (1048). In the compounded self of speaker and reader, the speaker tends to take on disembodied, invisible, and impalpable dimensions, and the reader tends to grow in physicality, agency, and compactness (1053). This process may be compared to one of resurrection in the death of the speaker and the rebirth of the reader:

> Dear friend whoever you are take this kiss,
> I give it especially to you, do not forget me,
> I feel like one who has done work for the day to retire awhile,
> I receive now again of my many translations, from my avataras ascending, while others doubtless await me,
> An unknown sphere more real than I dream'd, more direct, darts awakening rays about me, *So long!*
> Remember my words, I may again return,
> I love you, I depart from materials,

> I am as one disembodied, triumphant, dead ("So Long!" 64-71, emphasis in original).

This formal death of the speaker reflects a literal, though imagined, death of his self. Investigating Whitman's sense of self becomes essential to an understanding of his poetry when affectivity emerges as one of its primary aims. As outlined above, the importance of an exchange between reader and speaker determines the identity of the speaker as relevant to the action which the reader is supposed to embody and perform. The next section explores Whitman's conceptions of his self and identity, and later his notions of the soul and death. Formally, the poet has prepared the ground for a communication and foregrounding of these concepts by rendering his poetry emotional, affective, abstract, and layered. These features allow Whitman's poems, as theories from cognitive poetics illustrate, to be more effortlessly understood by the right hemisphere of the brain, which hosts emotions, mystical and spiritual experiences, the sense of orientation in space, and simultaneous, integrated concepts and perceptions which require less intellectual and linguistic processing.

The matters of affectivity, emotionality, and contact directly relate to each other in the purpose of effectuating a change in the perception of the reader. Creating and maintaining a space between speaker and reader allows the poet to establish a bridge through which to affect the reader. It may be that poetry per se has the affective power emotionally to touch the reader. Recent neurological and psychophysiological studies illustrate the extent of this phenomenon: while reading unfamiliar poetry, 100% of the poetry-enthusiastic participants, and a noteworthy 77% of the participants who consider themselves naïve towards poetry, experience chills (Wassiliwizky et al. 1237). These studies further investigate the temporal organisation of the emotional experiences (considering chills and alterations in facial expression), showing that they tend to occur at the end of textual units such as lines and stanzas and in conjunction with markers of social address such as the pronouns 'you' or 'your' (1237, 1236). As noted, the speaker's apostrophe to the reader through such pronouns abounds in Whitman's poetry. Furthermore, cognitive poetics analyses of Whitman's poems have noted that parallelism tends to create strong and convergent structures within lines and stanzas, including in closure positions, which enhance affectivity. On the other hand, Whitman's lines are long and frequently present enjambments: the focus of the (long) line is found not in closure but in its sheer and unusual length.

Where parallels and connections may be easily drawn between affectivity, emotionality, and contact, abstraction seemingly contrasts with these. However, as theories of cognitive poetics note, the latter quality similarly contributes to emotionality in poetry, as it renders the meaning of the poem less specified and more diffused. This may be brought back to a matter of rationality as opposed to irrationality and (emotional) intuition. Where concreteness may provide a grounded-ness to the reader, abstraction may stimulate more imaginative, and less linguistically processed, understandings of a poem. Abstractness therefore contributes to the poem's affective power, although it might be more traditionally associated with intellection.

The emotionality of Whitman's poetry may also be interpreted as sentimentality, which arouses pathos in order to fulfil social, political, and ethical purposes. Whitman's 'grand American expression' may be understood, as M. L. Kete suggests, as sentimentalism (626). The poet's emotional and sentimental thrust would then emerge as another conscious strategy through which he aims to encourage the reader to feel, and therefore embody, ideals which are essentially moral and political in nature, especially social democracy (Schöberlein "Walt Whitman's Communitarian" 451). Ultimately, Whitman's dynamics of affectivity aim to powerfully communicate with the reader, and bring about a spiritual and social transformation of awareness: in the reader and, consequently, in the world.

Part III: "To be in any form, what is that?"

> I want to work in revelations, not just spin silly tales for money. I want to fish as deep down as possible into my own subconscious in the belief that once that far down, everyone will understand because they are the same that far down.
>
> Jack Kerouac

Leaves of death

This thesis has presented a reading of Whitman's theory of organicism, according to which poetry emerges spontaneously, not in accordance with predetermined forms or frames, but rather following 'natural,' spontaneous forces such as the poet's unconscious. It has suggested that this theory inherently comprises the notion of expressive form: poetry emerges as reflective of those larger, more mysterious forces, hence its characteristic 'shapelessness.' However, Whitman's poetry boasts a variety of formal devices which shape its long lines and which underlie a deliberate crafting of his poetry, including lists, parallelism, imitative rhythm, and poetics of contact. The tension which emerges between a 'cosmic' shapelessness and a conscious thought process on the part of the poet renders Whitman's long line a fertile field of inquiry. This discussion has also contended that Whitman's long line aims to communicate specific meanings and messages affectively and powerfully. The following part explores the relations between the form of the long line and these meanings and messages: specifically, death, the self, and the soul.

Whitman's theory of the organic occurrence of poetry is, once more, the formal starting point for an exploration of content. Whitman's explorations of (his) consciousness, the place from which his poetry comes, consist perhaps of the main repository for spiritual meaning in his poetry. Whereas the previous sections of this chapter use form as a starting point to extrapolate content and meaning, this part operates in an inverse manner, discussing content and subsequently analysing its form. Cognitive poetics is once again employed in this formal analysis. In fact, the following illustrates the significance of conceptual metaphor in Whitman's poetry of death – the grass and the leaves, together with the sea and the night, are shown to constitute sustained and layered conceptual metaphors throughout Whitman's volume. Moreover, these sections illustrate Whitman's theory of organicism in practice: beyond his theoretical thesis concerning the emergence of poetry, in fact, the poet

concretely explores organic dimensions to both literal and symbolic purposes in discussing death. Together with this organic perspective, this section also investigates the poet's focus on death through its relations to sexuality, its poetics of reunion with the mother, or M/Other, and thoughts on immortality.

Whitman's theory of organicism inherently suggests that poetry resembles, and embodies, *life*. The force which shapes poetry organically, from the inside out, necessarily emerges as a vital force: a *creative* energy which pervades both the poet and the universe. When describing the theory of organicism in the 1876 Preface to *Leaves of Grass*, Whitman uses natural imagery to discuss poetry, opposing it with the stillness and rigidity of crafts such as architecture and sculpture:

> Poetic style, when address'd to the soul, is less definite form, outline, sculpture, and becomes vista, music, half-tints, and even less than half-tints. True, it may be architecture; but again it may be the forest wild-wood, or the best effect thereof, at twilight, the waving oaks and cedars in the wind, and the impalpable odor (356).

The poet's imagery here is suggestive and sensual. This celebration of the emotional power of nature, and, by extension, life at large, informs Whitman's poetics of the long line. The poet's idea of organicism can be further illuminated by reference to Blackmur's critique of Whitman's expressive form: the New Critic believes, in stark contradistinction to Whitman, that "poetry is life at the remove of form and meaning; not life lived but life framed and identified" (*Form and Value* 339). Lawrence, in contrast, argues for a distinctly Whitmanian conception of poetry; one which, like Whitman's, foregrounds the 'organic' movements of life through natural imagery:

> Do not ask for the qualities of the unfading timeless gems. Ask for the whiteness which is the seethe of mud, ask for that incipient putrescence which is the skies falling, ask for the never-pausing, never-ceasing life itself. There must be mutation, swifter than iridescence, haste, not rest, come-and-go, not fixity, inconclusiveness, immediacy, the quality of life itself […] Whitman's is the best poetry of this kind ("The Poetry of the Present" v).

Although Whitman has always been famous for his celebrations of life in all its parts and qualities, Whitman may be regarded as the poet of death as much as the poet of life. In fact, where organicism has been the clue to an understanding of his works as the poetry of life, it may be the clue to framing them as the poetry of death, too. Whitman focuses exclusively neither on life or death, but rather on the larger cycle which comprises both, the cosmic process according to which all life ends in death and, in turn, all death brings new life. He consistently elaborates this vision in *Song of Myself*, with lines such as "Every condition promulges not only itself, it promulges what grows after and out of itself, / And the dark hush promulges as much as any" (1181-82). Organicism further emerges as significant beyond theory – *as practice* – when considering the poet's investigations into the organic reality which comprises life and death in terms of composition and decomposition, creation and destruction.

Although long poems such as *Song of Myself* expose themselves to potentially endless interpretations, much of Whitman scholarship points out that the poem may be understood as the journey of the individual, or the soul, towards some sort of death. Indeed, as Harold Aspiz points out, its concluding parts, sections 47-54, illustrate a growing preoccupation with mortality and an abandonment towards death (*So Long!* 34, 68). Indeed, the word 'death' appears over 200 times in *Leaves of Grass* (1891-92), albeit that Whitman's emphasis on, and attitude towards, death change throughout both his oeuvre and individual poems. As Aspiz notes, Whitman "looked at death (as he looked at everything) from every possible angle; hence *Leaves of Grass* explores the many meanings and resonances of death" (3). As acknowledged above, contradictions, paradoxes, and playfulness pervade Whitman's work and colour his poetics and philosophy.

It may be even said that Whitman exhibits a preference for death over life, although he tends to keep the term 'death' general and vague. "O I think it is not for life I am chanting here my chant of lovers – I think it must be for Death," he sings, for instance, in "Scented Herbage of My Breast" (1860), further self-identifying as the poet of death:

> Through me shall the words be said to make death exhilarating,
> *Give me your tone therefore, O Death, that I may accord with it,*

> Give me yourself – for I see that you belong to me now above all, and are folded together above all – you Love and Death are,
> Nor will I allow you to balk me any more with what I was calling life,
> For now it is conveyed to me that you are the purports essential,
> That you hide in these shifting forms of life, for reasons – and that they are mainly for you (13, 29-34, emphasis added).

The term 'purport,' which expresses meaning and sense, becomes the poet's word of choice when discussing the greater significance of death in comparison to life: "Has Life much purport?" he reflects in the last line to "Great Are the Myths" (1871), "– Ah, Death has the greatest purport" (49). In "Faith Poem" (1856), also published as "Assurances," he even refers to death as "Death, the purport of all Life" (9).

Finally, it is worth noting that Whitman's consideration of death can appear uncertain or incomplete. Doubting suppositions sometimes accompany the poet's assertions; for instance, in "Scented Herbage," confident lines which are addressed to death, such as "I see that you belong to me now" and "now it is conveyed to me that you are the purports essential" (31, 33), are followed by less confident statements which are still subordinated, grammatically, to line 33's 'For now it is conveyed to me.' The various iterations of 'perhaps' and 'maybe' undermine the power of this prophecy: "That you will one day, perhaps, take control of all, / That you will perhaps dissipate this entire show of appearance, / That may be you are what it is all for" (37-39).

The second of the *Calamus* poems, "Scented Herbage," brings to the cluster an integrated understanding of life, love, death, and art. In the poem, leaves constitute the connecting image. As the following illustrates, they constitute a conceptual metaphor which the poet sustains throughout his works. Thanks to a swiftly moving perspective, "Scented Herbage" opens showing the speaker lying on the ground, possibly in his tomb: "Scented herbage of my breast, / Leaves from you I yield, I write, to be perused best afterwards, / Tomb-leaves, body-leaves, growing up above me" (1-3). The growth of these leaves represents the continuous expansion which both life and death create, together with the poet's immortality through his art – the continuity

of the body of work as a substitute for the physical body. In *Studies in Classic American Literature*, Lawrence addresses Whitman's poems in a similar manner: "No, no, don't lay this down to poetry. These are post-mortem effects. And Walt's great poems are really huge fat tomb-plants, great rank graveyard growths" (164). Although Lawrence is denouncing Whitman's identification with everything as ultimately void, and therefore 'dead,' he also acknowledges the potency of Whitman's poetics through these same images, anticipating praise of the poet's treatment of death.

Song of Myself, too, proposes leaves and, by extension, grass imagery when discussing death, as in the reflections of 'Section 6' which are spurred by the child's question "*What is the grass?*" (99, emphasis in original). "I guess the grass is itself a child, the produced babe of the vegetation," suggests the speaker, moving immediately from birth to death via the grass: "And now it seems to me the beautiful uncut hair of graves" (105, 110). 'Section 6' ultimately proves to be about death:

> The smallest sprout shows there is really no death,
> And if ever there was it led forward life, and does not wait at the end to arrest it,
> And ceas'd the moment life appear'd.
>
> All goes onward and outward, nothing collapses,
> And to die is different from what any one supposed, and luckier (126-30).

Towards the end of *Song of Myself*, as the speaker begins to embrace death more concretely, leaves and the grass are reiterated as the symbols for growth and perpetual transformation which encompass, but also move beyond, life and death:

> And as to you Corpse I think you are good manure, but that does not offend me,
> I smell the white roses sweet-scented and growing,
> I reach to the leafy lips, I reach to the polish'd breasts of melons.
>
> And as to you Life I reckon you are the leavings of many deaths,

(No doubt I have died myself ten thousand times before.)
2
I hear you whispering there O stars of heaven,
O suns – O grass of graves – O perpetual transfers and promotions (1294-1300).

Psycholinguistic research shows that conceptual metaphors may be considered as a mode of thought, as they influence the way in which people understand certain conceptual domains in terms of others. This rhetorical device has been researched by the cognitive sciences, in particular psycholinguistics, which has shown that conceptual metaphors often underlie human thought, as in the popular examples of TIME IS MONEY, LOVE IS A JOURNEY, GOOD IS UP, and BAD IS DOWN.[6] This means that, for example, the domain of money is understood through metaphors which pertain to the domain of time, as expressions such as 'buy some time,' 'lose time,' and 'time is gold' show. A recent study on the topic, Carina Rasse et al.'s "Conceptual Metaphors in Poetry Interpretation: A Psycholinguistic Approach" (2020) explores conceptual metaphors in poetry processing, employing research from the intersections between cognitive linguistics and literary studies: cognitive poetics and neurocognitive poetics. The study shows that, indeed, people gain access to conceptual metaphors while reading poetry, and that these influence their understanding of the poems (311). In Whitman's poetry, leaves and the grass constitute a complex and sustained conceptual metaphor.

A first conceptual metaphor may be GRASS IS LIFE, owing to the general association of nature (and grass) with spring, generation and regeneration. Another may be GRASS IS THE BOOK or, more generically, GRASS IS ART, owing to Whitman's title *Leaves of Grass* and to the fact that he often calls the pages of his book 'leaves.' Significantly, the last section of *Song of Myself*, 'Section 52,' presents the speaker's departure and disappearance through, once more, the image of the grass. After having been foregrounded throughout poems such as "Scented Herbage" and *Song of Myself* (1891-92), together with the title of the collection, the grass becomes equated with the speaker himself in the third to last stanza of the poem. "I bequeath myself to the dirt to grow from the grass I love," the speaker says, "If you want me again look for me

[6] Conceptual metaphors are conventionally written in small capital letters.

under your boot soles" (1339-40). Ultimately, therefore, the spirit of the speaker becomes embodied in the grass. This may be understood as another metaphor, GRASS IS THE SOUL, which would underlie the others (GRASS IS LIFE and GRASS IS ART) and which would allow the poet to highlight the supremacy and immortality of the soul.

The nature of Whitman's preoccupation with death varies over his career. For example, Aspiz notes that his volumes of *Leaves of Grass* become progressively more concerned with the soul, immateriality, mortality (and immortality), and death, with a definitive change becoming evident after the Civil War (*So Long!* 10). The poem "Eidólons" (1876) exemplifies this 'immaterial turn,' as the title suggests; 'eidólon' means 'phantom; ideal' ("Eidolon"), and the poem treats the apparition of ideas and their representation. The matter is highly abstract. The speaker writes about impalpable worlds, which are also the realm of the soul: "Not this the world, / Nor these the universes, they the universes […] And thee my soul, / Joys, ceaseless exercises, exaltations, / Thy yearning amply fed at last, prepared to meet, / Thy mates, eidólons" (57-58, 73-76). Clearly, here, the speaker does not consider reality as wholly tangible, or the tangible reality as truth.

The poet's preoccupation with mortality, death, and the soul may also have biographical reasons, such as his declining health and strokes beginning in the 1870s, or his years of experience as a volunteer in hospitals during and after the Civil War. In the course of his adult and writing life, Whitman becomes increasingly concerned with his own mortality, which may in turn lead him to grow more preoccupied with the soul. The last, 'death-bed' edition of *Leaves of Grass* (1891-92) is profoundly concerned with these matters. Despite his famous line "I am the poet of the Body and I am the poet of the Soul" (*Song of Myself* 422), Whitman may be considered as the poet of the soul (and of mortality/immortality); as Aspiz notes with regard to the line mentioned above, "this assumption is contradicted in his many attempts to develop an ideological synthesis that could embrace all phases (or stages) of existence" (*So Long!* 105).

Organicism occurs in Whitman in different ways, at different layers: moving from his theory of the organic emergence of poetry, to the presence of organic realities in the content of the poems, to organicism as practice and poetics, which the following discusses. As has been noted, the leaves in "Scented Herbage" grow from the body of the poet towards the sky, comprising: the speaker lying in his grave in the grass, with

leaves growing above him; the speaker composing poetry which continues to exist after his death, in the leaves which are pages; the leaves as a symbol for the regeneration of life which nature manifests through its cycles – "O the winter shall not freeze you delicate leaves, / Every year shall you bloom again, out from where you retired you shall emerge again" (3-4) – and consequently as a symbol for immortality and eternity; and the leaves as standing for his book specifically, *Leaves of Grass*. It may be noted that *Leaves of Grass*, as a collection of poetry, presents itself to an understanding of its dynamics as natural, 'organic': throughout the years, the volume grows and mutates; different editions shed poems, modify others, and incorporate new ones.

Because of its changing, fluid nature, *Leaves of Grass* has been compared to the biological entity of the digesting body by scholars such as Sean Meehan (see Meehan 2011). In fact, the phases of digestion consist of assimilation and excretion, and Whitman's body of work, with its continuous addition and expulsion of poems, operates in a similarly organic manner. For this reason, Whitman's poetic corpus may be understood as an organic phenomenon, in practice and in theory. Digestion is also a trope which Whitman himself favours in his discussions of poetry, and which contemporary critics have related to Whitman, particularly in his opposition to Ralph Waldo Emerson: scholars such as Lewis Hyde, Robert Martin, and John Burroughs, for instance, have opposed Whitman and Emerson as the disembodied and the embodied; the bloodless and the 'flesh and blood'; the intellect and the viscera (Meehan 98). For instance, Whitman's bodily self-definition as "Walt Whitman, a kosmos, of Manhattan the son, / Turbulent, fleshy, sensual, eating, drinking and breeding" (*Song of Myself* 497-98) may be opposed with Emerson's famous self-identification as a disembodied transparent eyeball: "I become a transparent eyeball; I am nothing; I see all; the currents of the Universal Being circulate through me" ("Nature" 6).

In the 1876 Preface to the two-volume edition of *Leaves of Grass*, which includes *Two Rivulets* and celebrates the centennial of the Declaration of Independence, Whitman makes reference to 'chyle,' a bodily fluid which is formed in the small intestine during digestion: the poet publishes this edition of *Leaves of Grass* and *Two Rivulets* "as chyle and nutriment to that moral, indissoluble union, equally representing all, and the mother of many coming centennials" (353). This intellectual

digestion compares with a consumption of poetry in which the mind absorbs its 'nutrients,' so that poetry may become literally embodied in the readers. Digestion further fits with the volume in terms of content. As Meehan notes, the process of digestion is dynamic and contradictory; it is based on a co-dependency of destruction and creation, decomposition and composition, and transformations from food, to nutrients in the blood, to waste (112). These themes are reflected in Whitman's works: the poet assumes the reciprocal necessity and origination of life and death, creation and destruction. Finally, the poet organically inspects death and processes of composition and decomposition, exhibiting a poetics of organicism, most notably in "This Compost" (1856).

This poem explores the poet's struggle with the material realities of death. 'Part 1' presents the speaker's abjection with reference to corporeal waste and decomposition: he grows terrified, disgusted, and incapable of accepting these dimensions, rejecting them both physically (he removes himself from what upsets him) and intellectually (he cannot mentally grasp what upsets him):

> Something startles me where I thought I was safest,
> I withdraw from the still woods I loved,
> I will not go now on the pastures to walk,
> […]
> How can you furnish health you blood of herbs, roots, orchards, grain?
> Are they not continually putting distemper'd corpses within you?
> Is not every continent work'd over and over with sour dead?
> (1-3, 8-10).

The speaker's language here illustrates his physical repulsion when he realises that the dead are buried in the same ground which he has otherwise thought of as a terrain where life grows: these bodies are "carcasses" and "foul liquid and meat" (11, 13). And yet, as so often in Whitman, the poem figures a sudden and unexpected change in mood and feeling: 'Part 2' celebrates the purity of the life which sprouts from the rotting bodies.

Whitman effectively (and affectively) plays with the reader's expectations. The grass as unifying metaphor in Whitman's oeuvre is multi-layered. The poet overlaps two seemingly contrasting equations: GRASS IS LIFE and GRASS IS DEATH are presented as simultaneously valid, supporting an understanding of Whitman's perspective and way of thinking as based on the acceptance and assertion of opposing conceptions. As Lalli suggests, Whitman strives to achieve, in his poems, a balance between opposing conceptual metaphors, an overarching realisation which determines opposing ideas as true, rather than a dialectical synthesis of opposites (325). Significantly, in 'Part 2' of "Scented Herbage," the speaker does not deny the abject realities of death and decomposition and their mixture with the grass which he more often celebrates. Words and phrases which express disgust are still present, such as 'strata of sour dead' and 'fetor'; however, they oppose equally strong but positive words like 'innocent' and 'exquisite' in those same lines: "The summer growth is innocent and disdainful above all those strata of sour dead"; "It distils such exquisite winds out of such infused fetor" (30, 45). This opposition of destruction (putrefaction) and creation (regeneration) brings Whitman to a harmonious and peaceful realisation which encompasses both:

> That all is clean forever and forever,
> […]
> Now I am terrified at the Earth, it is that calm and patient,
> It grows such sweet things out of such corruptions,
> It turns harmless and stainless on its axis, with such endless successions of diseas'd corpses,
> […]
> It gives such divine materials to men, and accepts such leavings from them at last (36, 42-44, 47).

These sections have shown how of the dimensions of physical reality which Whitman analyses with relation to death is the biological, or organic. Another dimension is sexuality, which Whitman often depicts with relation to pain and pleasure, under the image of a sensual threat of death. In fact, Whitman often pairs, in an almost Freudian manner, death and sex – or love – in both physical and symbolic ways. An example may be found in "Out of the Cradle Endlessly Rocking" (1859), Whitman's 'formation of the artist' poem, where love and death are combined in the

story of two mocking-birds which a boy encounters; as one of the two disappears, the other laments her absence in a song. The speaker (as a boy) becomes so emotionally inspired by the power of the bird's melody as to realise his calling, which is to become a writer: "For I, that was a child, my tongue's use sleeping, now I have heard you," he tells the bird, "Now in a moment I know what I am for, I awake […] O solitary me listening, never more shall I cease perpetuating you" (146-47, 151).

The fulcrum of this long poem unravels when the boy pleads for meaning, for the answer to the mystery of sorrow and existence; his initially vague question is eventually directed to the sea:

> O give me the clew! (it lurks here in the night somewhere,)
> O if I am to have so much, let me have more!
>
> A word then, (for I will conquer it,)
> The word final, superior to all,
> Subtle, sent up – what is it? – I listen;
> Are you whispering it, and have been all the time, you sea-waves?
> Is that it from your liquid rims and wet sands? (158-64).

The sea now moves to the foreground, providing the young speaker with the answer: the word 'death.' From the water, death emerges as "the key, the word up from the waves, / The word of the sweetest song and all songs" (179-80). In the sea, layers of meaning overlap, making reference to the Freudian 'oceanic sense' of communion and oneness with the world and the M/Other. The main concepts that converge in the sea are the unconscious, the night, death, love, and the mother. Most prominently, death and love, including sexuality and sensuality, are paired in this poem.

The way in which the meaning of the sea washes over the speaker – this meaning being the realisation of death – moves beyond the intrinsically metaphoric act which it represents to a sensual occurrence. Several elements illuminate the amorous connotations of this understanding of death. Among them are the way in which the sea wraps around the body of the boy, 'softly' and 'all over'; the alliteration in the lines, in soft sounds such as *s* and *th* – sounds both seductive and imitative of

the sea and the waves; and the vocabulary set employed by the speaker. The sea visits the boy with almost a lover's touch:

> Whisper'd me through the night, and very plainly before day-break,
> Lisp'd to me the low and delicious word death,
> And again death, death, death, death.
> Hissing melodious, neither like the bird nor like my arous'd child's heart,
> But edging near as privately for me rustling at my feet,
> Creeping thence steadily up to my ears and laving me softly all over,
> Death, death, death, death, death (167-73).

In the poem, the connection between death, sexuality, and sensuality is fortified by the sense of touch, especially in the way the sea wraps around the boy, with phrases such as 'laving all over,' 'creeping up,' and 'rustling.' The sense of touch plays an important and ambivalent role in Whitman's poetry. It usually brings physical excitement in the speaker and calls for a strong author-reader connection, as poems like "So Long!" reveal in such amorous lines as:

> Camerado, this is no book,
> Who touches this touches a man,
> (Is it night? are we here together alone?)
> It is I you hold and who holds you,
> I spring from the pages into your arms (53-57).

As Maire Mullins observes, touch may also emerge as dangerous in Whitman's poetry, bringing death as much as excitement (225). In "To One Shortly to Die," for instance, as the speaker lays a hand upon a patient in a hospital, this person dies. The speaker here is priest-like, ceremonious – "I absolve you from all except yourself spiritual body, that is eternal" (8) – and brings death as a gift – "I do not commiserate, I congratulate you" (15). Touch is especially important in the middle of the poem; it is not the touch of compassion, but the touch of actual death, however spiritual and ceremonious the action appears to be. However, in Whitman's works, generally speaking, touch more often brings physical and emotional excitement to the speaker

himself. In *Song of Myself*, visions of the senses bring about reveries of sexuality and death during which the speaker explores his 'tactile imagination' (Aspiz *So Long!* 48, 50). For instance, in the 'listening' section of *Song of Myself*, discussed above, the speaker's ecstatic experience brings him physical feelings related to touch – strangulation – which both excite him and threaten him with death:

> The orchestra whirls me wider than Uranus flies,
> It wrenches such ardors from me I did not know I possess'd them,
> It sails me, I dab with bare feet, they are lick'd by the indolent waves,
> I am cut by bitter and angry hail, I lose my breath,
> Steep'd amid honey'd morphine, my windpipe throttled in fakes of death (604-08).

Pain and pleasure go hand-in-hand in some of Whitman's more sensually intense moments. This type of near-death experience specifically – death by strangulation – may be particularly significant with regard to Whitman, as the poet characteristically self-identifies with his 'singing,' speaking, and vocal expression. As Aspiz notes, the musical beauty of the 'listening' section "converges with the persona's fantasies of possible rape and of death by strangulation, for those 'fakes of death' are, literally, ropelike coils wound around his throat that can strangle him and silence the voice that he equates with is selfhood and his immortality" (*So Long!* 50). After these moments, the speaker regains his ability to speak normally, or more calmly, as he does when he praises universal harmony after the reported long line ending with 'fakes of death' and a stanza break: "At length let up again to feel the puzzle of puzzles, / And that we call Being" (*Song of Myself* 609-10). This change in tone may be attributed to the relief of having escaped death or, alternatively, to the relief of an orgasm which is both metaphorical and, in Whitman, represented as physical (see Aspiz 1984 and 2004) – a *petite mort*, or 'little death.'

Aspiz coins the term 'spermatic trope' to describe the inspired vocalism which characterises Whitman's writing when and after his persona becomes sexually and emotionally aroused ("Walt Whitman: The Spermatic" 379). Although the concept of 'spermatic utterances' is intrinsically masculine in its phallicism, it pairs the idea of death with that of sexuality in the convergence of the two in orgasm. The spermatic

trope may also be employed as another way through which to consider Whitman's long lines: the longer lines coincide with the moments of highest excitement in the speaker, and the following, shorter lines with the calmer moments which follow. Finally, this trope posits the fertilising of the reader's mind (381), which is appropriate insofar as, in Whitman's time, it was a common belief that sperm came from the mind of the man. This leads back to the trope of digestion: whether the process is one of impregnation with ideas, or absorption of poetic nutrients, there remains the notion of something spreading and being absorbed into the reader or audience. Naturally, this also leads back to the matter of contact, which this thesis has noted both in Whitman and in other open form theory-practitioners. Williams's instructions on how to experience a poem strongly resonate with Whitmanian tropes of contact with the reader. According to Williams, who also defines contact in spermatozoic terms,[7] the poem is something which comes out of the page like water, able to physically access the reader: "Listen! Never mind, don't try to work it out. Listen to it! Let it come to you!" he incites with relation to poetry; "Let the thing spray in your face. Get the feeling of it" (*Voices & Visions 13* 3:50).

Crucially, the processes of digestion, fertilisation, orgasm, death, and decomposition all involve leaking, an exchange between the inside and the outside of the body. The trope of the leaking body pertains to the grotesque body – a corporeal reality which is open, receiving from the outside and welcoming to the inside. In *Rabelais and His World* (1968), Mikhail Bakhtin, the theorising father of the grotesque, defines the grotesque body through, among other ideas, the principle of degradation, which foregrounds a grotesque emphasis on materiality. Furthermore, another characteristic of the grotesque body is its fluidity, as this body relates with the world – indeed, leaking – through its openings and cavities, and through the acts which happen there (eating, drinking, vomiting, defecating, copulating, and birthing, among others): "these acts are performed on the confines of the body and the outer world […] In all these events the beginning and end of life are closely linked and interwoven" (Bakhtin 317). The tropes which characterise Whitman's poetics of the long line can be therefore said to also pertain to the realm of the grotesque.

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[7] See Williams's "Comment" in the fourth issue of *Contact*: "This achievement of a *locus*, Contact has maintained, is the one thing which will put [the artist's] work on a comparable basis with the best work created abroad. Before the approach to anything of a serious character there must be this separate implantation of the sperm in each case" (18, emphasis in original).

These physical processes may be further equated to their metaphorical counterparts: specifically, the dissolution of the self, or identity, which the following section explores in Whitman. “Walter, what have you done with it? What have you done with your self? For it sounds as if it had all leaked out of you, leaked into the universe”: so Lawrence addresses the poet, concluding: “The individuality had *leaked out of him*” (*Studies in Classic* 164, emphasis added). As Bakhtin points out in his study, in relation to the body, processes of life, death, and rebirth are set in motion in concurrence with the overcoming of borders. The process of leaking determines the ‘death’ of an entity which would otherwise have been considered stable and defined; following, it may be seen as a conjunction with something *more* or as a dissolution into something *less*. These dynamics of fluidity and merging may be applied to Whitman’s conceptions of (the death of) the self and the soul as well.

Leaves of identity

This thesis supports an understanding of Whitman as, above all, the poet of the soul. This term is here understood as the spirit, the spiritual and immaterial part of humans, which is commonly considered to be immortal. This does not deny his engagement with the self, but rather can help point out how these two concepts enter into contradiction, converge, and even constitute each other. As noted, Whitman’s poetics aims not towards a synthesis but towards an acceptance of opposing ideas. The poet acknowledges multiple different, sometimes contradictory, notions as true. Therefore, consideration of Whitman’s approach to abstract concepts should also remain open to varied and fluid interpretations. These sections discuss the poet’s explorations of identity and of (his) self, including consciousness. Some of Whitman’s notions of death, which this chapter has observed, intimately relate to his understanding of the self and the soul, especially when considering dynamics of merging and immortality.

For example, a key dynamic, in Whitman, with relation to the self and the soul is the death of the self as the expansion, or rebirth, of the soul. In fact, this dissipation of the self produces what Lawrence names ‘Allness,’ the state in which Whitman assumes a common identity with everything:

> DEMOCRACY. EN MASSE. ONE IDENTITY.
> The universe in short, adds up to ONE.

> […]
> Which is Walt.
> His poems, *Democracy, En Masse, One Identity*, they are long sums in addition and multiplication, of which the answer is invariably MYSELF.
> He reaches the state of ALLNESS (*Studies in Classic* 165-66, emphasis in original).

Allness coincides with the death of the self, as this loses its integrity and merges with the rest of existence; however, this state may also coincide with the maximum 'amount' of self, following Lawrence's proposition: a sense of self, or identity, which has swallowed up everything else, so much so that it is no longer recognisable as the entity it originally was.

Such readings of Whitman invite different theoretical approaches in their perspectives on identity. This discussion therefore benefits from an exploration of these perspectives. For instance, the idea of the existence, or dissipation, of the self may be understood in the context of Julia Kristeva's theories on the formation, maintenance, and disruption of the subject. Her volume *Powers of Horror* (1980) discusses the subject's preoccupation with maintaining an existence which is delineated by clear borders; here, the subject is defined by a continuous expulsion of what it cannot accept as part of itself, which then becomes abject. Subjectivity is therefore perceived as a stable and delineated nucleus owing to this process of exclusion. However, Kristeva shows that this is an illusion, as all that the subject expels through the dynamic of abjection was previously integrated. The borders between the subject and the abject – which coincide with those between the self and the Other – are ultimately imaginary.

Parallels with the dynamic of abjection may be found in pre-Oedipal experience, as the first form of abjection occurs when the child separates from the mother – the M/Other – and gains subjectivity. This moment of individuation, and of beginning and maintenance of the sense of subjecthood, further determines what Kristeva, following Sigmund Freud, calls the fantasy of the return to the mother, the 'oceanic feeling.' This consists of an ecstasy, a sense of oneness with the world, an osmosis with the universe which is both physical and metaphysical (Kkona 176-77). In relation to Whitman, these theories suggest that an all-encompassing self, an all-

inclusivity, would at least theoretically indeed be possible, as everything may be integrated if not rendered Other through rejection and abjection. Whitman's self, in moments of complete communion with the world outside him, may be understood as pre-Oedipal: one with the mother (or M/Other), undifferentiated, before subjecthood and separateness. It may be suggested, as Whitman does, that this was the state of the 'individual' (or rather of their immortal soul) before birth or after death.

In *Gender Trouble* (1990), Judith Butler recognises Kristeva's theories of abjection as notions of boundary-constituting taboos, similarly believing that identity bases itself on a process of Othering of what would otherwise be integrated (169). Although her focus is on gender and sexuality, Butler is also concerned with the formation and disruption of identity, arguing that this is a socially instituted and maintained notion, challenged, for example, by gender and sexual fluidity. The abject, or the Other, is always fluid and eschews categorisation. In her analysis, the boundary between the identity and the Other, and the 'outside' and the 'inside,' emerges therefore as an instrument of social regulation and control. Significantly, one of Kristeva's definitions of the abject is, in fact, "what disturbs identity, system, order. What does not respect borders, positions, rules" (4). In his poem "As I Lay With my Head in your Lap Camerado," Whitman shows awareness of a similar power, associating his discussions of death with what would come to be known as the abject (the utmost manifestation of which is death):

> I know I am restless and make others so,
> I know my words are weapons full of danger, full of death,
> For I confront peace, security, and all the settled laws, to unsettle them,
> I am more resolute because all have denied me than I could ever have been had all accepted me (3-6).

Here, Whitman's discussion of his own disruptiveness recalls Butler's and Kristeva's recognition of boundaries as mechanisms of social regulation. The abject, or Whitman's unsettled nature and words "full of death" (4), similarly challenge people's settled nature and the established order, "peace, security, and all the settled laws" (5).

Theories of abjection overlap with the grotesque body, as this trope is defined by what happens on the margins. In both the theory of abjection and the grotesque

body, the focus lies on whether boundaries are inflexible, in which case there is a definitive difference between outside and inside, or whether the two reciprocally leak into each other. Whitman's poetry may productively be read in terms of Kristeva's and Butler's theories: in fact, the poet emphasises the disruptions and transformations of the self into the Other. This, in turn, symbolically corresponds with bodily processes of leaking. Moreover, as noted above, a poetics of contact also lends itself to such a reading, because of the reciprocal exchanges which occur between different realms. The place between the reader and the speaker is liminal, unspecified, crossing over and eschewing both boundaries. The compounded self which emerges from an intersection between speaker and reader also constitutes an example of grotesqueness: it is a convergence between two identities, neither of which remains stable.

Whitman's ecstatic identification with the world, what Lawrence calls Allness, seems to coincide with the Freudian oceanic feeling, the communion with all parts of existence. This Whitman celebrates through his lists, which reinforce an impression of endlessness. When considering Whitman's lists, one complicating factor emerges. His Allness is not merely an indistinct blob of everything-ness: as the poet celebrates a joyful unity, he also acknowledges the importance of the singular entities which constitute it, praising their individual value. The reality in which Whitman participates, which corresponds with the expansion of his self, therefore contains two contradictory situations at the same time: it includes (theoretically) all the elements of existence – or (practically) the elements the speaker *sees*, and it distinguishes between their various identities, considering them in their individuality.

In *The Reign of Wonder*, Tanner notes the contradictoriness and abstractness of American Romantics such as Whitman, proposing that: "The Transcendentalists themselves could hold everything together by mystical generalizations" (24). However, this inclusivity should not be dismissed, as it may reflect a Transcendental acknowledgment of "a doubleness which is inherent in almost everything […] an emphasis which points both to the importance of particulars *and* the unmistakable presence of general truths," in the belief that "the world is both a mosaic *and* a unified picture which admits of no fragmentation" (28, emphasis in original). Notably, Whitman scholarship has tended to compare *Song of Myself* to a mosaic: in fact, certain sections differ from the others as though they were meant as separate poems, which have been added later, and others may appear out of place altogether. At the same

time, scholarship has also tended to describe *Song of Myself* as a coherent and complex whole, which presents a plot or, at least, the appearance and forward movement of a journey.

The individual sections which comprise the long poem may be seen as the parts which form a whole. As with the items on Whitman's lists, each is valued, and as constitutive of the poem as Whitman's and Lawrence's tortoise is of existence – "[I] do not call the tortoise unworthy because she is not something else" (*Song of Myself* 242); "Bud of the universe, / Pediment of life" ("Tortoise Family Connections" 2-3). Whitman weaves these parts into one creation, the poem, illustrating the reciprocal necessity and origination of the whole and the details. "And of these one and all I weave the song of myself," he writes (*Song of Myself* 329), recalling the image of himself weaving leaves of grass – and *Leaves of Grass* – through his vocalism. The existence he praises equates with the image of an endless field, constituted of individual leaves of grass. The conceptual metaphor of the grass as GRASS IS LIFE, GRASS IS ART, GRASS IS DEATH, and GRASS IS THE SOUL acquires one more layer: GRASS IS EVERYBODY.[8]

The long poem's form, however, does not resemble woven leaves: Whitman's free verse notoriously eschews order and categorisation. Significantly, Tanner pairs Whitman's loose and expressive form, which this research has associated with his thesis of organicism, with an observation of existence which is simultaneously both general and particular:

> An ordered perspective is something the wandering poet Walt Whitman cannot afford to appear to have: yet some sense of dominant and sustaining purpose is something no work of art can afford to be without. The question really is this: what sort of organizing form the strategy of naive wonder and empathy can provide for its local responses. Clearly it will be a form which is loose, permissive, tending more to omnivorousness than parsimony; a form not like a containing shell but like a hidden spine which controls and yet facilitates a maximum of movement (*The Reign of Wonder* 76).

[8] "A fair field full of folk," in William Langland's Middle English poem *Piers Plowman* (5).

Organicism emerges once again as a conscious strategy on the part of the poet, in that this approach allows for a loose and spontaneous freedom of expression and for a less organised quality to Whitman's celebrations. This allows the poet's lists to be non-hierarchical and democratic, and makes room for a vague, large sense of unity to surface in the poems in the place of an artificially imposed order.

Whitman's focus on death might be mistakenly seen as posing a contradiction with his focus on selfhood and personhood. The Whitmanian modus operandi resembles what Mexican poet Octavio Paz writes about as the dynamics of poetic thought at large: "The operative mode of poetic thought is imagining, and imagination consists, essentially, of the ability to place contrary or divergent realities in relationship. All poetic forms and all linguistic figures have one thing in common: they seek, and often find, hidden relationships. In the most extreme cases, they unite opposites" (158). Whitman often achieves an ultimate concordance by uniting opposing thoughts and images. Contradictions and contrasting notions characterise his discussion of identity as well.

Cyclically, Whitman achieves some totality with the rest of the world – he becomes porous, and his self and the Other leak out of and into each other. "All these tend inward to me, and I tend outward to them," he states, for instance, at the end of a long list in *Song of Myself*; "In me […] not a person or object missing, / Absorbing all to myself and for this song" (327, 232-34). When Whitman achieves this equation with the One Identity, his own identity dissipates and, in a sense, dies. Considering that much of Whitman's poetry defends the self and personhood both in and beyond life, this seems to be a paradox. "I will effuse egotism and show it underlying all, and I will be the bard of personality," states the speaker of "Starting from Paumanok" (164), reiterating the importance of personal identity even after death in "To Think of Time" (1872): "It is not to diffuse you that you were born of your mother and father – it is to identify you; / It is not that you should be undecided, but that you should be decided; / Something long preparing and formless is arrived and form'd in you" (72-74).

This is the same paradox of universality and particularity, of vastness and minuteness, which characterises Whitman's lists. The poet's contrasting thoughts on the immortality of identity, and on matters such as the self, should not be overlooked but considered together. The speaker may be sometimes merely manifesting his wish, as Aspiz puts it, to 'have it both ways' – to be 'O, living always, always dying,'"

quoting from Whitman's 1860 poem of the same title (*So Long!* 160) ("O, Living Always" 1). In this poem, the speaker presents himself as both alive and dead, clearly metaphorically; however, his reference to the physical world through words such as 'burial' and 'corpse' renders the poem more paradoxical: "O living always, always dying! / O the burials of me past and present […] To pass on, (O living! always living!) and leave the corpses behind" (1-2, 6). Although the speaker continuously embraces death, his last line emphasises that his prominent reality ultimately remains that of life, of this world, as he emerges as "living! always living!" (6).

As noted above, *Song of Myself* seems to describe the journey of the individual and the soul towards death, with a final dissolution of the speaker into the surrounding world, the air and the ground. Though this may be understood in an organic manner (as with processes of burial and decomposition or cremation), the last lines suggest a death which is abstract: the speaker instructs the reader to "Missing me one place search another, / I stop somewhere waiting for you" (1345-46). Similarly, "So Long!" – in the collection *Songs of Parting*, a title which highlights the poet's focus on dying – compensates the speaker's abandonment towards death with a reassurance for the reader, at the end of the poem, at the moment of this death, that he is *not really* dying:

> An unknown sphere more real than I dream'd, more direct,
> darts awakening rays about me, *So long!*
> Remember my words, I may again return,
> I love you, I depart from materials,
> I am as one disembodied, triumphant, dead (68-71, emphasis in original).

Although death is 'more real' than he had imagined, the speaker prophesises that he "may again return" (69), and makes use of a simile to describe death – "I am *as* one disembodied" (71, emphasis added): thereby, death becomes figurative (Aspiz *So Long!* 159).

The paradoxes which Whitman presents therefore include his simultaneous emphases on the condition of Allness and personal identity; the dissipation of the self and the importance of personality; and universality and particularity, as exemplified in his lists. As noted above, this owes to the poet's willingness to consider topics from different angles and to accept diverging situations as simultaneously true. This may in

turn derive from his yearning and hunger for both quantity and variation of experience, his tendency towards over-arching inclusiveness, and, perhaps, his wish to have 'the best of both' opposing situations, as shown in his depiction of his death and departure, which ultimately affirms these as less real than the fact of his life. For all these reasons, Whitman's beliefs about his sense of self often emerge as confusing or contradictory. V. K. Chari, who studies Whitman's self in the light of Vedantic mysticism, understands Whitman's identity as a 'mystic' identity, which oscillates between opposites: expansion and retraction, enlargement and self-immersion (see Chari 1964). Chari argues that, after an awareness of an observant and self-sufficient self, another, larger sense of self grows at deeper levels in Whitman:

> Following on self-knowledge comes the consciousness that "I am all." Since identification or expansion is a centrifugal movement, it gives rise to an internal dynamism; limitless pools of energy are released from within, and they result in creative activity. This phase marks the return of the spirit from its inner recesses into the world of dynamic activity, even as it is inevitably followed by a return to itself – withdrawal and self-immersion (95).

Therefore, Whitman's more superficial sense of self would stimulate the creation of a more profound and borderless sense of self, which determines Whitman's many identifications and expanded awareness.

Another lens through which Whitman's sense of self may be fruitfully read is that of the ecological self, as later theorised by Arne Naess. Although Whitman wrote before the emergence of a global ecological awareness, Whitman's sense of self appears to follow a path similar to that of the ecological self. In his lecture "*Self* Realization: An Ecological Approach to Being in the World" (1986), later published in the seminal volume *Thinking Like a Mountain* (1988), Naess posits the notion of ecological or metaphysical self. This is the self which, on a basic level, undergoes expansion following an "inescapable process of identification with others" (20). The self would mature and progress through phases: from ego, to social self, to metaphysical self, following larger degrees of identification (20). Naess therefore proposes that the self equals that with which a person identifies: self-realisation coincides with *self* realisation, which is a deepening and widening of the sense of self.

This understanding deeply resonates with Whitman's poetics of identification, most consistently expressed in *Song of Myself*. As previously noted, in the long poem, Whitman extensively catalogues humanity in his lists, expanding his identification to a large variety of people: for example, after many long lists, 'Section 33' figures declarations such as: "All this I swallow, it tastes good, I like it well, it becomes mine / I am the man, I suffer'd, I was there," and "All these I feel or am" (831-32, 837). Bite by bite, Whitman's self becomes larger. Just as Naess believes that an identification with the ego is a vast underuse of the human potential, Whitman moves far beyond the reaches of his individual ego and self, opening it up to the universe.

This metaphysical and ecologic consciousness corresponds with – employing a more Whitmanian and Beat vocabulary – a cosmic consciousness. Deep time and outer space are intrinsic in deep ecology. "I visit the orchard of spheres," tells the speaker of *Song of Myself*, enlarging the reach of his consciousness' journey beyond humanity and the earth's atmosphere; "Speeding through space, speeding through heaven and the stars" (798, 791). Significantly, the ecological self is characterised by joy, the state which Whitman's poetry predominantly sings. Befittingly, Naess remarks that: "Part of the joy stems from the consciousness of our intimate relation to something bigger than our own ego, something which has endured for millions of years and is worth continued life for millions of years" (29). Whitman's inclusion of deep space in his poetry is relevant when discussing his ideas on immortality as well as on the self, as this chapter later discusses. A final remark on the ecological self concerns what Vandana Shiva would understand as its diametrical opposite: the mechanical mind (see Shiva 2018). The mechanical mind, which is based on separation and violence, is most notably condemned not by Whitman but by Ginsberg, throughout his oeuvre and in such verses as the 'Moloch' section of *Howl* – "Moloch whose mind is pure machinery" (83). Ginsberg's definitions of the Cold War also include the notion of a mechanical mind, which he extends to a 'mechano-universe,' as the poet denounces the "mind-illusion mechano-universe of un-feeling time in which I saw my self my own mother and my very nation trapped desolate our worlds of consciousness homeless and at war" ("How *Kaddish* Happened" 169).

In an effort to freshly conceive, in yet another manner, of Whitman's self, this research proposes a collection of the lines of *Song of Myself* (1891-92) which figure the phrase 'I am.' These lines are collected through digital methods of text-mining.

They are included in their totality in the appendix (pp. 225-26), where they are reported in the sequence of their appearance in the poem, so as to facilitate an observation of the poet's perspective on himself. Together, these lines may be said to present an 'anthology of ontology.' They illustrate different perspectives on Whitman's considerations on his self. They may be roughly divided into three clusters: moments in which the speaker discusses his self as his own, separate from the rest of the world; moments in which he empathises and identifies with other people, especially with their pain; and moments in which his sense of self emerges as both his own and comprising everything else, therefore enlarged and layered.

The first (six) lines which figure 'I am' suggest the existence of a separate, observant self which the poet acknowledges as his own, with phrases and sentences such as "while they discuss I am silent," "I am satisfied," and, most notably, "apart from the pulling and hauling stands what I am" (56, 59, 75). The following (six) lines suggest a slightly larger identification with humanity, with phrases which refer to a variety of people such as "I am the mate and companion of people," "such as it is to be of these more or less I am," and "I am of old and young, of the foolish as much as the wise" (137, 328, 330). However, here the speaker does not yet fully reveal his empathy. The following (seven) lines bring back the focus on the speaker and his sense of being a definite, stable entity with phrases such as "I am solid and sound," "I am deathless," and "I exist as I am, that is enough" (403, 406, 413).

The following, longer group of (twenty-two) lines mainly comprises affirmations of empathy, sympathy, and identification with other people, so that the speaker's self effectively merges or coincides with that of others, as shown by sentences such as "I am integral with you," "I am he attesting sympathy," "I am the man, I suffer'd, I was there," "I am the hounded slave," "I am the mash'd fireman," "I am an old artillerist," "I am there again," "Not a mutineer walks handcuff'd to jail but I am handcuff'd to him," and "I am embodied in them" (458, 461, 637, 823, 838, 847, 858, 859, 952, 957). There are also lines in this cluster which indicate a growing awareness in the speaker of his identity as an all-encompassing personality, most notably "They show as the dial or move as the hands of me, I am the clock myself" (857). The cluster which concludes this selection (and the poem) suggests a different movement: the emergence of an elevated and complete self, which is also mysterious

in its inclusivity. This sense of identity simultaneously embraces all and detaches itself from others, becoming abstract and ultimately leaving both the world and the reader:

> *I am* an acme of things accomplish'd, and *I am* encloser of things to be.
> *I am* the teacher of athletes,
> (No array of terms can say how much *I am* at peace about God and about death.)
> (*I am* large, I contain multitudes.)
> Will you speak before *I am* gone? will you prove already too late?
> *I too am* not a bit tamed, *I too am* untranslatable,
> You will hardly know who *I am* or what I mean (1148, 1234, 1280, 1326, 1330, 1332, 1341, emphasis added).

This final 'I am,' in particular, may puzzle the reader. Where *Song of Myself* presents itself as a continuous discovery and revelation of selfhood, the poem's last lines contradict this tendency. As the poem begins with the pronoun 'I,' it ends with the pronoun 'you,'[9] and ultimately drastically dissolves the reader's possible final understanding of Whitman:

> You will hardly know who I am or what I mean,
> But I shall be good health to you nevertheless,
> And filter and fibre your blood.
>
> Failing to fetch me at first keep encouraged,
> Missing me one place search another,
> I stop somewhere waiting for you (1341-46).

Ultimately, *presence* emerges as the one definite quality which the poet attributes to his mutable, elusive self: this exists in different forms at different times, always being centrally present. Even after his departure, the speaker suggests that he continues to exist. In fact, Whitman's poetry of life and of death asserts the poet's presence in every part of existence, in life, and after death, in eternal continuation. As

[9] A movement from the speaker to the reader is observable: "I celebrate myself, and sing myself," begins the poem; "I stop somewhere waiting for you," it concludes (*Song of Myself* 1, 1346).

discussed above, poems such as “Crossing Brooklyn Ferry” may be understood as concerning, among the rest, the immortality of art in a Keatsian, ‘Ode on a Grecian Urn’ manner (Allen *A Reader’s Guide* 187; Lalli 454). The leaves of *Song of Myself* and “Scented Herbage” similarly suggest the continuity, in time, of art – and, by extension, the continuity of the life of the author. As Adam Bradford notes in *Communities of Death* (2014), the intimacy which Whitman creates and sustains with the reader also aims to assert the poet’s – as well as, by extension, the reader’s – ultimate immortality (111-14). As seen above, Whitman’s poetics of contact is often dependent on his characteristic use of apostrophe to the reader. The resulting intimacy creates the sense that the speaker is present when the reader reads his lines, even after the death of the author. An example may be found in lines such as: “Who knows, for all the distance, but I am as good as looking at you now, for all you cannot see me?” (“Crossing Brooklyn Ferry” 94).

To this effect (and affect), Whitman determinately places himself outside of time. As previously noted with “Crossing Brooklyn Ferry,” in fact, – “What is it then between us? / What is the count of the scores or hundreds of years between us?” (57-58) – the speaker addresses people in the past, the present, and the future, and *from* the past, the present, and the future. “I know I have the best of time and space, and was never measured and never will be measured,” the speaker similarly assures the reader in *Song of Myself* (1201). Whitman is kept alive, after his death, through his art, through immortality, and through an embodiment in the reader, pending reader participation. In Bradford’s words, *Leaves of Grass* is a “death-defying cryptext. It sought to serve as a talisman, medium, and repository corpus, but also ‘enliven’ that corpus in the reader’s presence, ensuring a perpetual connection and communication between reader and Whitman” (116). Time and death therefore emerge as closely related in Whitman’s poetics, and as the fulcrum of his poetics as well.

As Aspiz elaborates, the belief in immortality, or in mortality, regulates one’s sense of time in a large, extended way (*So Long!* 52; Hoffman 349-50). This may be viewed through the lens of deep time as well. Deep time is often understood as geological time, the time of the Earth. It may also correspond with what historians call the *longue durée*, or ‘slow tempo’ (slow time). Deep time rejects chronological time to view duration in a wider sense, considering systems of relations which are transhistorical, transnational, and which happen on very large scales. As Wai Chee

Dimock notes, the deep time of the planet Earth is not comparable to that of the humanities: geology, for instance, works with 600 million years, and astronomy with 14 billion light-years (6). Whitman does not shy away from an enlarged view of time, but rather represents it often throughout his works, placing both himself and humanity in the large picture, in deep time. "We see, as in the universe of the material kosmos, after meteorological, vegetable, and animal cycles, man at last arises, born through them" he writes, for instance, in "Democratic Vistas" (5). Similarly, he places humanity as within one of the epochs of the Earth in "Great Are the Myths":

> Great is the Earth, and the way it became what it is;
> Do you imagine it has stopt at this? the increase abandon'd?
> Understand then that it goes as far onward from this, as this is
> from the times when it lay in covering waters and gases, before
> man had appear'd (18-20).

Above-mentioned lines from 'Section 33' of *Song of Myself*, which shows the speaker's self as shifting and traveling between different people, times, and spaces, also illustrate how the poet places himself transtemporally: he is "Hurrying with the modern crowd as eager and fickle as any" as well as "Walking the old hills of Judaea with the beautiful gentle God at my side" and "Speeding through space, speeding through heaven and the stars, / Speeding amid the seven satellites and the broad ring, and the diameter of eighty thousand miles, / Speeding with tail'd meteors" (787, 789-93). He later adds: "I visit the orchards of spheres and look at the product, / And look at quintillions ripen'd and look at quintillions green" (798-99).

Whitman enhances this sense of deep time through mathematical words such as 'thousands,' 'millions,' 'quintillions.' As Stefan Schöberlein argues, Whitman – having worked as a math teacher in a Long Island schoolhouse – purposefully and consistently employed arithmetic in his poetry (see Schöberlein 2016). Specifically, he would use mathematical terms to facilitate an understanding of the material world, which would then be related to the spiritual world: "The spiritual and the material are one in Whitman, and arithmetic is the language that allows him to make this claim" (Schöberlein "Incalculable, Unaccountable, Indivisible?" 175). The vastness of time and space inevitably prompts the poet to move from the material to the spiritual world. The previous mentioned lines – "I visit the orchards of spheres and look at the product, / And look at quintillions ripen'd and look at quintillions green" – are immediately

followed by an immaterial shift in which he becomes elevated, spiritually and physically, flying like a bird: "I fly those flights of a fluid and swallowing soul" (*Song of Myself* 798-99, 800). The notion of deep time leads Whitman directly to the belief in a deep time of the soul, which can be understood once again as immortality.

"To Think of Time" exemplifies this correspondence of the universe and the soul in the depth of time. The poem begins by arguing that, as time is composed of an immense past and an immense future, personal life also continues indefinitely in this amplitude, not halting at death:

> To think of time – of all that retrospection,
> To think of to-day, and the ages continued henceforward.
>
> Have you guess'd you yourself would not continue?
> Have you dreaded these earth-beetles?
> Have you fear'd the future would be nothing to you?
>
> Is to-day nothing? is the beginningless past nothing? (1-6).

At the end, the poem transposes this realisation wholly on the spiritual realm: "I swear I think now that every thing without exception has an eternal soul! […] I swear I think there is nothing but immortality!" (117, 119). Deep time is also used to make a point about the immortality of all things in *Song of Myself*, notably in sections 44-46. "The clock indicates the moment – but what does eternity indicate?" asks the speaker: "We have thus far exhausted trillions of winters and summers, / There are trillions ahead, and trillions ahead of them" (1137-39). "There is no stoppage and never can be continued," he argues (1190), adding thoughts which sustain the idea of infinity as a continuous creation:

> Every condition promulges not only itself, it promulges what
> grows after and out of itself,
> And the dark hush promulges as much as any.
>
> I open my scuttle at night and see the far-sprinkled systems,
> And all I see multiplied as high as I can cipher edge but the
> rim of the farther systems.

> Wider and wider they spread, expanding, always expanding,
> Outward and outward and forever outward (1181-86).

The individual soul, abiding to the same cosmic dynamics, recognises its nature in the eternal cycles of creation: "Let your soul stand cool and composed before a million universes" (1276).

Whitman's ideas of immortality emerge as based on the poet's belief in a deep time for the soul, which imitates the deep time of the Earth and the cosmos, and in a continued presence after death. Whitman's presence is achieved through both an embodiment in his readers and the existence of his works. Whitman's characteristic ambivalence, however, also applies to his views on immortality. On the one hand, Whitman argues for the eternity of the soul as a non-specified life force, or energy – in Aspiz's words, a "nonindividual continuing vitality" (*So Long!* 44) – and on the other hand, he argues for the continuation of personal identity – the "persistence of the person" (44). The poet's representation of a collective unconscious may be contrasted with his certainty in the eternity of identity, which can be found in poems such as "To Think of Time": "You are not thrown to the winds, you gather certainly and safely around yourself, / Yourself! yourself! yourself, for ever and ever!" (70-71).

This section has shown how identity, immortality, and consciousness constitute some of the most significant contents of Whitman's poetry. The following considers how he reflects and embodies these contents in his poetry, how they formally show through the poetics of the leaking long line. A sense of immortality and presence, for instance, is recreated through the use of personal pronouns and apostrophes to people who have died (as in odes) or who are not present, which suggests a communion with the dead (see Bradford 2014). Whitman's job as editor for the New York magazine *Aurora* provides early examples of the poet's tendency to recreate a sense of community (Bradford 107). Where in his poetry a closeness with the reader is most often achieved through the pronoun 'you,' his *Aurora* editorials show that he recreated a sense of community through plural pronouns such as 'we' as well. His editorial of April 6, 1842, for instance, reads:

> Reader, we fear you have, by way of novelty, a *poor Aurora*
> this morning […] Well (are you interested, dear reader?) in

> due time we arrived at the ponderous iron gates which give ingress to the Battery […] And at half past 8, P.M. (fifteen minutes before this present writing) the chilling consciousness came over us that we hadn't written anything for a leader. And so we concocted the foregoing (what were you about, at half past 8, last night, dear reader?) (qtd. in Bradford 107, emphasis in original).

Here, this sense of community does not include the reader, but Whitman's highly intimate addresses, in parentheses, to the 'dear reader' contribute, indeed, to a sense of closeness between all parties.

In poems such as "Song of the Open Road," Whitman uses the plural pronoun to include the reader too: "Allons! the inducements shall be greater, / We will sail pathless and wild seas, / We will go where winds blow, waves dash," incites the speaker, further using the pronoun 'we' until the last section concludes the poem with the pressing question: "Shall we stick by each other as long as we live?" (124-26, 231). The union which the speaker creates with the reader powerfully evokes both parties in the text. In other previously mentioned lines, in which the speaker addresses his spirit, the speaker employs a 'you' with which the reader may also identify. The lines, in fact, are strongly erotic, so that they seem to be addressed to a physical person as well rather than just to an incorporeal entity:

> I mind how we once lay such a transparent summer morning,
> How you settled your head athwart my hips and gently turn'd over upon me,
> And parted the shirt from my bosom-bone, and plunged your tongue to my bare-stript heart,
> And reach'd till you felt my beard, and reach'd till you held my feet (*Song of Myself* 87-90).

As Bradford elaborates, this "intimate sexual communion between speaker and reader establishes a sense that individual identity can be perpetuated despite material absence, a sense that is itself quickly parlayed into a discourse on the immortality of all things" (111). In fact, by presenting himself as alive, at any moment in which the reader may read his poetry, Whitman suggests that his presence is independent of his corporeal

existence. The company he maintains – immortally – resides in the pages of his book, and is spiritual as much as it is material, emotional, and erotic.

As suggested above, Whitman embodies himself in his books, wishing to become embodied in the reader through his works. The long line has been proposed as: the longing line, which hunger for variety is embodied in the form of the list; the impregnating line, which 'spermatic utterance' fertilises the mind of the reader; and the longing line which yearns for contact. This is another way in which Whitman's long line aims to break free from extra-formal constraints: the long line may also be seen as a bridge between speaker and reader, an out-stretched hand. In Whitman, at its best, contact brings to touch. Meehan suggests that the book – the body of work – metonymically relates to the poet – the body of the author, and specifically the author's hand (102). The movement of expanding in order to move out of the space of the book and into that of the reader is embodied in the long line, because of its outward movement and length, together with the associations of hunger and contact suggested by its formal elements. In all these cases, the long line may also be understood as the leaking line, because of its liquid overcoming of borders.

"Camerado! This is no book; / Who touches this, touches a man," says the speaker of "So Long!" (55-56), exemplifying the rhetorical relation between the volume and the poet. Instances in which Whitman plays with the association of book and hand abound in *Leaves of Grass* (1891-92), from poems such as "Whoever You Are Holding Me Now in Hand" to lines such as "Touch me, touch the palm of your hand to my body" ("As Adam Early" 131). If the book is the out-stretched hand of the poet, poet and reader emerge then as ultimately holding hands, as by the end of poems such as "So Long!" – "It is I you hold and who holds you" (58) – and "Starting from Paumanok":

> O camerado close! O you and me at last, and us two only
> […]
> O now I triumph – and you shall also;
> O hand in hand – O wholesome pleasure – O one more desirer and lover!
> O to haste firm holding – to haste, haste on with me (266, 269-71).

The long line as bridge between speaker and reader has also been discussed as the impregnating, fertilising line which allows the speaker to plant seeds of inspiration into the reader's mind and consciousness. This understanding has supported affectivity as the main aim of Whitman's poetry: his works would ultimately create a moral, spiritual, and social transformation in the reader and in turn, through the reader's actions, in the world. "Calamus 45," also known as "Full of Life Now," the last poem of the *Calamus* cluster, suggestively represents what has been discussed above as the death of the speaker and the rebirth of the reader. The long lines of the poet move towards the reader, looking for them, in order to be gestated:

> To you, yet unborn, these, seeking you.
>
> When you read these, I, that was visible, am become invisible;
> Now it is you, compact, visible, realizing my poems (4-6).

Leaves of the unconscious

The following sections analyse Whitman's poetics of immersion with relation to the fantasy of the return to the mother – and M/Other. This union is also seen as another variant on the theme of death. Whitman's line may be thematically associated with both merging and immersion. Where merging has been noted above in relation to the poet's ecstatic communion with existence, in a sort of death of the self, immersion allows the speaker to access a collective unconscious instead. Once more, Whitman employs conceptual metaphors to layer and connect his thoughts in his poetry. The following later analyses what, according to Harold Bloom, constitutes Whitman's most comprehensive trope: the fourfold metaphor of death, the night, the mother, and the sea (235).

Much of this thesis has focused on how the long line, inasmuch as it moves forwards and outwards, may be understood as a public line. Symbolically, the line which unrolls in length corresponds to the public line because of its movement towards explicitness, rather than closure and implicitness, as in the case of the symbolist line. The above mentioned distinction between two American literary traditions further associates a public voice with the 'nativist' tradition, which exhibits a populist persona, a public and tribal voice, colloquial language, and a transparent style (Nolan 28). Though most poets belong to both traditions, 'nativist' and 'European,' some

American writers, like Whitman and other open form practitioners, may be said predominantly to belong to the former. However, in spite of this association with the public sphere, Whitman's booming and resounding line is also intimate and private, when conveying the poet's investigations into his soul and sense of self. As his organic theory suggests, poetry spills out of his consciousness, and also reflects it. Indeed, this discussion has proposed that the poems' origins, contents, meaning, and form are all inspired by and imitative of each other in Whitman's poetry.

A poetics of merging and immersing may further help unravel the poet's view on the self and the soul, which are further understood in the terms of death, especially death of the self. Lawrence notes the same: Whitman's treatment of death is often metaphorical – perhaps one of Whitman's most complex and sustained metaphors. Although in *Studies in Classic American Literature* Lawrence is critical of Whitman's poetics of the dissolution of the self, he also recognises that the poet's representations of death have higher purposes:

> Whitman is a very great poet, of the end of life. A very great post-mortem poem, of the transitions of the soul as it loses its integrity […]
> But we have all got to die, and disintegrate.
> We have got to die in life, too, and disintegrate while we live.
> But even then the goal is not death.
> […]
> Only we know this much: Death is not the *goal*. And Love, and merging, are now only part of the death-process. Comradeship – part of the death-process. Democracy – part of the death-process. The new Democracy – the brink of death.
> One Identity – death itself (169, emphasis in original).

As Lawrence points out, death is, for Whitman, not literal; rather, it constitutes an integral element of the poet's proposed allegorical journey of the soul.

The merging of the self with the rest of existence has been noted in Whitman with regard to his ontology of being, as with his list of lines which figure the phrase 'I am' in *Song of Myself*. The dark counterpart of Whitman's expansion of self and

inclusion of everything corresponds to the dissipation of his self, that which Lawrence denounces:

> Your mainspring is broken, Walt Whitman. The mainspring of your own individuality. And so you run down with a great whirr, merging with everything.
> […]
> "And of these and all I weave the song of myself."
> Do you? Well then, it just shows you haven't *got* any self. It's a mush, not a woven thing. A hotch-potch, not a tissue. Your self (*Studies in Classic* 164, emphasis in original).

In *The Spirit of Romance* (1910), Ezra Pound likewise satirises Whitman's porous self and large identifications:

> Whitman is the voice of one who saith:
> "Lo, behold, I eat water melons. When I eat water melons
> the world eats water melons through me.
> When the world eats water melons,
> I partake of the world's water melons.
> The bugs,
> The worms.
> The negroes, etc.,
> Eat water melons;
> All nature eats water melons.
> Those eidolons and particles of the Cosmos
> Which do not now partake of water melons
> Will at some future time partake of water melons.
> Praise be Allah!"
> They call it optimism, and breadth of vision (191).

Whitman's self is grotesque in the sense that it is fluid, unstable, and defined not by borders but rather by its lack thereof, which allows it to indefinitely expand and grow through absorption of variety. This variety proves to be essential. In fact, as David Bromwich notes, Whitman's conceptions of his self finally emphasise difference over

anything else (518). This variety is the same that allows for the continuous creations of life. It is the source of energy and growth:

> Urge and urge and urge,
> Always the procreant urge of the world.
>
> Out of the dimness *opposite equals advance*, always substance and increase, always sex,
> Always a knit of identity, always distinction, always a breed of life (44-47, emphasis added).

Chari examines the movements of the speaker's self in *Leaves of Grass*, identifying phases of expansion into contact with others – and the Other – and phases of retraction. Sections 27 and 28 of *Song of Myself* present examples of the occasional withdrawals of the speaker: "To touch my person to some one else's is about as much as I can stand" (618); "Enough! enough! enough! / Somehow I have been stunn'd. Stand back!" (959-60). However, the long poem is predominantly centered on the expansion of the speaker and his merging with the variety that surrounds him. This is the creative phase of the self: "expansion is a centrifugal movement, it gives rise to an internal dynamism; limitless pools of energy are released from within, and they result in creative activity" (Chari 95). Chari also identifies the volume *Leaves of Grass* with this creative phase, supporting Whitman's theory of organic writing: "Whitman the cosmic poet is the creative phase of the self; *Leaves of Grass* is the embodiment. The work has grown out of an irresistible impulse, the cosmic urge for creation. The poet and the book are identical" (95). This phase further corresponds to the movements of 'systems' of the universe: "Wider and wider they spread, expanding, always expanding" (*Song of Myself* 1185). As this thesis suggests, this equation may be enlarged to include the movements of Whitman's form, as exemplified by his long line.

After this creative, expansive urge, Whitman's spirit undergoes "a return to itself – withdrawal and self-immersion" (Chari 95). Whitman does not only merge: he also immerses himself into his self, and into the bigger self which exceeds his own consciousness. Etymologically, *merging* and *immersing* have the same root and, at first, carried the same meaning. *To immerse* began to be used in the 1550s, meaning 'to plunge into (a fluid),' and *to merge* began to be used a century later, meaning 'to

plunge or sink in (to something)' ("Immerse"; "Merge"). From the eighteenth century, *to merge* began to be used as 'to disappear into something else, be swallowed up, lose identity' ("Merge"). This research also understands this sense of Whitman's merging, especially as 'to lose identity,' but it might be useful to remember the earlier association of the verb with plunging or sinking into something. In this sense, merging is very similar to immersing (the difference being the presence of a liquid), and entails some integrity remaining in the self rather than a loss of identity. The opposite dynamic may be true as well: that immersion, in Whitman, may entail merging, or some form thereof.

These possibilities are all worth exploring as Whitman revels in paradoxes and exercises of the imagination. One way in which immersion seems to bring about a merging, in Whitman, may be found in the poet's fantasies of death by water. Where the long line as a spermatic utterance has been associated with death by strangulation, the long line as a leaking and liquid line may be associated, alternatively, with death by water or the unconscious line. The following discussion analyses "The Sleepers" (1855), "As I Ebb'd with the Ocean of Life" (1860), and "Out of the Cradle Endlessly Rocking" (1860; initially published as "A Word Out of the Sea"), drawing correspondences between the sea, the Other, the mother (and M/Other), the collective unconscious, and death. Significantly, both "As I Ebb'd" and "Out of the Cradle" are in most editions part of the section of *Leaves of Grass* entitled *Sea-Drift*. SEA emerges as the conceptual metaphor which organises meaning in this cluster of poems.

In all these poems, the dynamic of abjection, which has been previously noted with regard to earthy matters such as compost and decomposition, may be noted, albeit with reference to water rather than soil. This dynamic of fear is observed when the speaker is confronted with the concrete realities of death; now, it may be observed in their more abstract counterparts. In poems such as "This Compost," the attraction towards merging which understanding presents is stronger, and overcomes the speaker. This is true of these poems with the exception of "As I Ebb'd," throughout which the speaker maintains feelings of abjection and division, without successfully reaching a familiar, joyful union or understanding.

"As I Ebb'd with the Ocean of Life" maintains a sorrowful, hopeless tone. 'Part 1' introduces a different state of consciousness in the speaker, one which is almost subterranean, or sub-marine, and as mysterious as the sea: "As I ebb'd with the ocean

of life […] [I w]as seiz'd by the spirit that trails in the lines underfoot" (1, 8). 'Part 2' shows the speaker's realisation of his insignificance in comparison to the ocean: nature, in an English Romantic manner, overwhelms him with its vastness and Otherness:

> As the ocean so mysterious rolls toward me closer and closer,
> I too but signify at the utmost a little wash'd-up drift,
> A few sands and dead leaves to gather,
> Gather, and merge myself as part of the sands and drift (21-24).

Where in the previously discussed poems the conceptual metaphor of choice was GRASS, in these poems it is SEA. One association here is that SEA IS OTHER, with the specification that OTHER IS NATURE. The difference between humanity and nature seems to concern language: the speaker's poems, which the poet has considered as the gateway to immortality, are now a source of shame. The speaker reprimands himself – "Oppress'd with myself that I have dared to open my mouth" (26) – and continues to deepen the divide between himself and the sea, the Other, with a self-disgust which his long lines effectively express, almost in a torrent:

> I perceive I have not really understood any thing, not a single object, and that no man ever can,
> Nature here in sight of the sea taking advantage of me to dart upon me and sting me,
> Because I have dared to open my mouth to sing at all (32-34).

In Whitman, it is also the case that the SEA IS UNDERSTANDING. In spite of his misery, the speaker at one point pleads with the ocean not to abandon him, revealing that SEA IS MOTHER. 'Part 4,' in fact, begins with the imploration: "Ebb, ocean of life, (the flow will return,) / Cease not your moaning you fierce old mother, / Endlessly cry for your castaways" (41-43). The mother may be here understood as M/Other, when taking into consideration that abjection is also a pre-Oedipal experience which first happens when the child gains subjectivity, thereby considering the mother Other. Following Freud, the fantasy of the return to the mother has been discussed by scholars such as Kristeva as the fantasy of the oceanic feeling in which the individual rejoins the M/Other and, in ecstasy, experiences oneness with the world and the universe,

regressing to a time preceding identification. The angst which the speaker of this poem experiences seems to underlie an impossible yearning to merge with the sea, the M/Other, which would put an end to his psychic sufferings.

In a twist, the poem ends with an address to the reader, the apostrophic 'you' which Whitman saves for his future readers. This discussion has previously noted that the speaker yearns, both physically and spiritually, for the 'you' – the Other, the stranger, the reader. The last lines of the poem address 'whoever you are,' a familiar expression which Whitman has employed to address the reader in poems such as "Whoever You Are Holding Me Now in Hand." Significantly, here, the speaker employs a 'we' which does not include the reader, but rather Others him by signifying only "Me and mine" (47):

> We, capricious, brought hither we know not whence, spread
> out before you,
> You up there walking or sitting,
> Whoever you are, we too lie in drifts at your feet (59-61).

The speaker's poems are no longer leaves of immortality, but *sea-drifts*. As opposed to the positively charged associations of SEA IS UNDERSTANDING and SEA IS MOTHER, SEA IS also OTHER in the sense that OTHER IS UNKNOWN, which here comprises the reader. The speaker cannot partake in the realities of the sea, or of the Other. Once again, Whitman layers a conceptual metaphor with ambivalent meanings, including both positive and negative associations and emotions. The reader, who may feel hopeful for the speaker at the loving association of SEA IS MOTHER, is once more dejected and rejected with the final SEA IS YOU, as the final words mark: "we too lie in drifts at your feet" (61).

The previous discussion of "Out of the Cradle" noted the poem's association of SEA IS MEANING, together with the sensual, sexual, and amorous connotations of the sea for the boy, therefore also suggesting that SEA IS LOVER. In the poem, the sea reaches the young speaker, who pleads for the answer to the fact of existence. This is the word 'death,' which the sea whispers sensually, embracing the boy with meaning; death is "the key, the word up from the waves" ("Out of the Cradle" 179). The boy describes the way in which the sea conveys this understanding: the sea is "creeping thence steadily up to my ears and laving me softly all over" (182). The sea almost

drowns the boy with meaning; this is a sweet fantasy of drowning, as the boy joyfully receives "The word of the sweetest song and all songs, / That strong and delicious word" (190-91). As with "As I Ebb'd," SEA IS UNDERSTANDING. As this is Whitman's 'formation of the artist' poem, another relation may be drawn: SEA IS DEATH, considering that this moment seems to represent the 'death' of the young speaker as a boy and his 'birth' as a writer. Moreover, in the poem, as may be inferred from the title, SEA IS also MOTHER. It is in fact repeatedly represented as a "fierce old mother incessantly moaning" and as a "savage old mother incessantly crying" (133, 141), and is compared, in the last lines of the poem, with an archetypal 'mother of mothers': "some old crone rocking the cradle, swathed in sweet garments, bending aside" (182).

"The Sleepers" (1891-92) complicates an understanding of the sea as M/Other by adding new layers to the metaphor, including that of a collective unconscious and death, through the image of the night. The poem stages a different state of consciousness from that of the waking mind from the opening line, "I wander all night in my vision" (1), which suggests a visionary, dreaming, or supernatural mood. Several visionary activities unravel in "The Sleepers," which opens with the speaker trying to understand what is happening to him:

> I wander all night in my vision,
> Stepping with light feet, swiftly and noiselessly stepping and stopping,
> Bending with open eyes over the shut eyes of sleepers,
> Wandering and confused, lost to myself, ill-assorted, contradictory,
> Pausing, gazing, bending, and stopping (1-5).

The speaker employs verbal repetition, maintained throughout the poem, which does not really create parallel structures here, but rather suggests a confused mind. The action of *wandering* is repeated in lines 1 and 4, that of *stepping* in line 2 (where 'stepping with light feet' and 'swiftly and noiselessly stepping' carry the same meaning), that of *stopping* in lines 2 and 5, and that of *bending* in lines 3 and 5. This repetition creates redundancy and a sense of the drowsiness of the speaker, more than the incantation or parallelisms which have elsewhere been noted in Whitman's poetry and which allow new orders to emerge. In the poem, it soon becomes clear that the speaker is dreaming; the verse-narrative too plays out like a dream.

The speaker then experiences a communion with all the sleepers: the unconscious mind becomes the setting, in darkness, of the poem; NIGHT IS THE COLLECTIVE UNCONSCIOUS. The speaker, using emphatic repetition once again, has access to everybody's mind and dreams. There are no distinctions, no delineations between people and dreams; he seems to find himself in the undifferentiated blob of everything-ness, Allness, One Identity, with which his identity mixes in *Song of Myself*:

> I go from bedside to bedside, I sleep close with the other
> sleepers each in turn,
> I dream in my dream all the dreams of the other dreamers,
> And I become the other dreamers ("The Sleepers" 29-31).

The speaker then identifies and, indeed, *becomes* all of the sleepers in turn. Paradoxically, his self merges with that of everybody, at the same time, and with that of individual people, one at a time. His communion with their spirits and with the darkness in which they all float is sometimes reflected in a physical communion with them, and at other times *as* them. "Darkness! you are gentler than my lover, his flesh was sweaty and panting" (53) he says at one point, revealing his intimacy with both night and a man. Significantly, the setting and the speaker's tone shed their dreamy qualities as he faces, and identifies with, the dead – "A shroud I see and I am the shroud" (77).

At this point, a dynamic of abjection takes place; the speaker rejects the idea of death in a way that suggests an additional pairing of NIGHT IS DEATH. He now yearns for 'light and air,' which oppose the dark night in which the poem unravels:

> It is dark here under ground, it is not evil or pain here, it is
> blank here, for reasons.
>
> (It seems to me that every thing in the light and air ought to be
> happy,
> Whoever is not in his coffin and the dark grave let him know
> he has enough (78-80).

If the speaker's verse-narrative is in itself a dream, this fear of death triggers nightmares. In fact, parts 3 and 4 describe death by drowning, first that of a single

man, and then of a whole crew. These are terrors, rather than fantasies, of death by water, and prompt the additional conjunction NIGHT IS THE SEA. At length, 'the light and air' are remembered again: "an amour of the light and air […] will go gallivant with the light and air myself […] O love and summer! you are in the dreams and in me!" (136, 138, 140). As so often with Whitman, the poem swiftly changes in mood: it becomes more explicit, positive, and joyously spiritual after the dark confusion of the previous parts.

The night bestows equality on all the sleepers, who become items in long lists and finally merge together, "Elements merge in the night" (143). "I swear they are averaged now," the speaker states at the end of these lists, "one is no better than the other, / The night and sleep have liken'd them and restored them" (162-63). The deep sense of belonging and collectivity which the speaker experiences reveals to him the sameness and oneness of humanity, which is in turn finalised in death: "The diverse shall be no less diverse, but they shall flow and unite – they unite now" (180). The dream-vision of the speaker comes to an end as he awakens. His last association is that NIGHT IS MOTHER: "I too pass from the night, / I stay a while away, O night, but I return to you again, and love you," says the speaker, now awake and in the daytime, "I love the rich running day, but I do not desert her in whom I lay so long […] I will duly pass the day, O my mother, and duly return to you" (197-98, 201, 204). With another example of a complex, sustained conceptual metaphor, Whitman therefore elaborates on the soul and consciousness in "The Sleepers": NIGHT IS THE COLLECTIVE UNCONSCIOUS, DEATH, THE SEA, MOTHER, and OTHER.

Part IV: Conclusion

Whitman always a mountain too vast to be seen.

Allen Ginsberg

Whitman's poetry breaks through the poetic constraints of European-derived verse with violence, unscrewing "the locks from the doors!" and "the doors themselves from their jambs!" (*Song of Myself* 501-02). The poet proposes new ways in which to explore identity, death, and consciousness, writing in equally new ways, merging content and form through features such as lists, parallelism, expressive form, affectivity, and poetics of contact. These formal qualities of his poetry are intentional and organise the poems at deep stylistic levels, opening the text to extra-literary worlds. This chapter has looked at both the poet's theory of the organic emergence of poetry, how form embodies meaning, and, conversely, other ways in which meaning relates to form.

Lists and parallelism are two prime examples of the interchanges between form and content in Whitman's poetry. Lists as a form suggest infinity, accumulation, desire, addition, and multiplication. Lists aptly embody Whitman's poetics of hunger, of a longing which is, in true Whitmanian fashion, both physical and metaphysical, corporeal and spiritual, and even erotic. The long line cradles the form of the list, accommodating for its sheer extent in length and expansive tendencies. This chapter has also shown how the list assigns equality to its items, a matter which reflects Whitman's (at least theoretically) democratic stance; here, as well, politics goes hand in hand with ideology and spirituality: the poet's thoughts on the self and the soul follow similar courses, supporting an understanding of collective unconsciousness. Finally, the potential formal infinity of the list reflects, in Whitman's poetry, the infinity of the self and of nature (following the Transcendentalist principle of plenitude); at the same time, the poem's formal expansion invites an expansion of consciousness in the reader.

Analyses of parallelism in Whitman's poetry trace different hierarchies in the texts, orders which lie at the level of thought and organisation of thought. The discussion here employs theories from cognitive poetics in order to observe how parallelism contributes to convergent or divergent structures. Whitman's use of parallelism creates, in a typical Whitmanian dynamic of refusing exclusion and

choosing everything, both convergent and divergent structures – convergent in their imitative rhythm, anaphora, and tight parallel patterns, and divergent in their elusive tone, prolonged nature, and emotional quality. This last element is especially significant to this discussion because it informs affectivity, which, as the first chapter has noted, is one of the primary aims of open form poetry and, indeed, of Whitman's long line. A poetics of hunger and longing merge with the intense poetics of contact which pervade Whitman's poems; these are in turn enhanced by such divergent constructions as deixis and abstraction, which endow the poems with an emotional property. Where affectivity is promoted by abstraction, however, the speaker's attempts at contact underscore a wish to render the ideas of the text, not abstract, but tangible and concrete: often reflecting an imagined death of the speaker, the reader is supposed to embody the speaker themselves, and actuate his poems, perceiving a change in their own consciousness which may be reflected and actuated in the world.

Beginning once again from the poet's theory of organicism, the chapter has proceeded to explore the bard's reflections on death, identity, and the soul, foregrounding the content aspect of these matters, tracing their paths back to form. Organicism emerges as practice as well as theory: in fact, the poet engages, when discussing death, with the organic realities of decomposition (and creation) in his spiritual observations. The grass as a complex conceptual metaphor exemplifies the multi-layered nature of the poet's considerations on life and personality: in *Song of Myself*, grass equates with both the soul and identity, both life and death, simultaneously. Death is additionally paired to romantic or sexual love, a dynamic which suggests an additional understanding of the long line as a spermatic, or orgasmic, line, as other tropes, such as that of fertilisation, also propose. These suggestions tend to pertain to the domain of grotesqueness, as do the dynamics of fluidity and merging which pervade Whitman's discussions of the self and the soul.

Often, Whitman's poetry celebrates an all-inclusive, porous self which expands beyond the limits of individuality, to comprise all the manifestations of humanity and life. At its most daring, this coincides with the pre-Oedipal experience of undifferentiated-ness, of oneness with the mother, the Other, and the M/Other. Once identification with this One Identity, occurs, however, identity technically dissipates, leaving the reader with one of Whitman's many paradoxes, that of individuality and absolute commonality. An analysis of the lines of *Song of Myself* which figure the

phrase ‘I am’ suggests that the main feature which Whitman relates to identity is that of continuous, everlasting presence. This further moves this discussion to the soul. Fluidly, the long line overcomes intellectual borders and underscores, with its formal poetics of liquidity and merging, further conceptual poetics of immersion. Here, the chapter employs the sea as another conceptual metaphor. “Out of the Cradle Endlessly Rocking” and “As I Ebb’d with the Ocean of Life” overlap and combine several aspects of this metaphor: the sea equals the mother, the Other, understanding, the unknown, meaning, and death. “The Sleepers” contributes to this conceptual set with the image of the night: the night, associated with the sea in the poem through more fantasies of death by water, represents, together with death, the collective subconscious as well.

The poet’s philosophical considerations are like his long lines: from their spontaneous emergence, they develop in multiple directions, untroubled by paradox, unrestrained ideologically as well as stylistically. Similarly, they include and embody, both formally and in terms of content, the variety of existence, the contradictions and yearnings of identity, the need for contact and connection, the complexity and unadulterated mystery of the soul. Almost one hundred years after Whitman first unravelled his long line in *Song of Myself*, Ginsberg picks it up once more, and unsheathes it in his own comprehensive, contradictory, exploratory, insatiable, grotesque, ecstatic, naked, and multi-faceted meditations on the soul, the universe, and death. Between the two poets, the line has become part of a longer line of inheritance, but it is Ginsberg who resurrects it in its most Whitmanesque incarnation, both in terms of spirit and in terms of form. In Whitman’s “So Long!,” the speaker comes out of the page to be touched, as a book may be touched, by the reader’s fingers: “O how your fingers drowse me! […] I feel immerged from head to foot” (58, 60). In “A Supermarket in California” (1955), Ginsberg responds to the bard, eagerly following his magic instructions: similarly, he evokes his “dear father” by touching his book: “I touch your book and dream of our odyssey in the supermarket and feel absurd” (12, 9).

Chapter 3

Allen Ginsberg: Out of Line

Part I: "Bard out of New Jersey"

Allen Ginsberg's genius for public life should not obscure his genius as an artist or his study of his art.

Robert Pinsky

Poetic influence

Consideration of Ginsberg's poetic influences has long allowed critics to situate the poet within a legitimate literary tradition. Where his initial reception refused to place him within an academic and literary context, even deeming his poetry 'anti-intellectual,' his redemption in scholarship since has often come from acknowledging his debt to other poets, his belonging and contributing to a (specifically American) poetic discourse. This dynamic was perhaps initiated with the *Howl* obscenity trial, in 1957, when accomplished critics and writers testified to the controversial poem's literary value. As part of the defence, *Howl* was often compared with painting, especially surrealist and dadaist art, in defences mounted by Mark Schorer and Herbert Blau, or placed within literary traditions. For instance, reviews by Kenneth Rexroth acknowledge Lindsay, Sandburg, and T. S. Eliot as Ginsberg's literary predecessors, and Vincent McHugh notes Ezra Pound, Dante, and Homer as influences in the poem (Schumacher 258, 262). Pointing out the rootedness of Ginsberg's works in literary history has become a familiar way of defending the value of his poems against the shock factor of their content and form. In a 1969 *Poetry* review of *Planet News* (1968), for instance, Bill Berkson remarks: "To say 'Blake' or 'Whitman' is to be in on the gossip and to study his inspiration partially […] To say 'Pound' is to begin to trace a nearer lineage of conscientious, which is to say, solid technique" (252).

Critics therefore began to trace Ginsberg's influences to help the writer and the Beat movement gain respectability. This work is not finished; as noted in this thesis' introduction, Ginsberg scholarship has yet to fully appreciate the author's role in understanding, shaping, and discussing literature as a poet-critic. His interactions with Williams, essential to his poetry, have been largely recounted in biographies. Poetic influence in general has been influentially examined by Harold Bloom: following *The*

Anxiety of Influence (1973), *The Anatomy of Influence* (2011) expands on the dynamics of poetic succession and inspiration. In the latter, Bloom suggestively observes that "poetic influence need not be an affair of stylistics. It works in the depths of image and idea, and produces intricate evasions that nevertheless bud and bloom" (238). Acknowledging that poetic influence is not strictly limited to form opens up the potential for a more intuitive study, an approach which this thesis endorses. Bloom's own short analysis of Whitman's influence is itself rather irrational and instinctual: "Whitman is an undersong in Pound, and emerges again in *The Pisan Cantos*," he writes; "In Eliot, Whitman is the corpse planted in the garden, and resurrects in *The Waste Land*, and *Four Quartets*, while in Stevens the American bard is a drowned swimmer who rises up to break the water's surface so often that the reader learns to expect him" (238).

Ginsberg amply discussed the origin myths of his poetic practice, leaving hundreds of journals, diaries, and interviews which help to unravel his nets of inspiration. A consideration of Ginsberg's opinions prompts a re-evaluation of his contribution to theory and further illuminates the aims of his writing. The Beat poet positions himself within two specific poetic traditions: that of open form, the approach which this thesis foregrounds, and that of the spiritual breakthrough in consciousness. In a 1974 conversation with Paul Geneson following a class at Naropa Institute, Ginsberg discusses the lines of inheritance of the long line in American literature. When Geneson asks whether this form has been a major feature of American poetry, Ginsberg confirms this, listing diverse writers, American and European, who were involved in or inspired the form: Jack Kerouac, Thomas Wolfe, Herman Melville, Walt Whitman, Shakespeare, Rabelais, Sir Thomas Browne, Robert Burton, Robinson Jeffers, Edward Carpenter, Marsden Hartley, John Ashbery, and Kenneth Koch ("A Conversation" 96). Other influences, listed by Ginsberg in an earlier essay, include Hart Crane, Federico Garcia Lorca, Percy Bysshe Shelley, Guillaume Apollinaire, Antonin Artaud, Vladimir Mayakovsky, Pound, Williams, and Christopher Smart ("When the Mode of the Music" 150). The poet continuously revisited this expanded and expandable catalogue: "And the ignorance of the technical accomplishment and spiritual interests is disgusting," he laments compiling his list; "and who to say I don't know about 'poetic tradition'?" (150).

The writers who influenced Ginsberg were not all practitioners, or consistent practitioners, of the long line in poetry; as Ginsberg explains, for him, the "long line is an open form […] or spontaneous style" which as a mode comprises lines, both short and long, which capture the "great inclusiveness of the mind that can enjamb – put in one breath a great many associations" ("A Conversation" 96-97). The length of the line and the openness of the form therefore refer to the large spans of the mind in thought. This is a matter which Ginsberg notes Eliot had discussed with regard to Milton's movement between heaven and hell in a single line – "in one sentence, in one *think*, in one breath" – and which was also practiced by Melville, Crane, Whitman, and Kerouac, among others: "It was this tremendous beauty of outpouring, really, the full heart" (97, emphasis in original). This tradition, Ginsberg notes, was one of concrete teachings and meetings: for example, between Gary Snyder and Philip Whalen and Williams; himself and Williams; Robert Duncan and Charles Olson and Pound and Williams; Robert Creeley and Pound; and Philip Lamantia and André Breton and the Surrealists ("The New Consciousness" 92-93). "We were carrying out a tradition, rather than being rebels. It was completely misinterpreted," the poet states; "The academic people were ignoring […] most of the major rough writers of the Whitmanic, open form tradition in America. But we had that historical continuity, from person to person. There is no gap" (93).

This transmission of poetic teachings from an older to a younger generation was accompanied, according to Ginsberg, by "a comradeship, a Whitmanic adhesiveness from generation to generation" which supported the transmission of a different consciousness – a new way of coming together, or democratic awareness (93). Referring to different traditions and groups of writers, Ginsberg emphasises how, although separate in time and space, they conjoin in a prophetic understanding of life; "The only poetic tradition is the voice out of the burning bush. The rest is trash, and will be consumed" (When the Mode of the Music" 150). As Paul Portugés remarks in *The Visionary Poetics of Allen Ginsberg* (1978), a book the second half of which consists of transcribed conversations with Ginsberg, the Beat poet believed he took part in a tradition which devoted itself to the study of consciousness, one which includes such poet-visionaries as William Blake, Antonin Artaud, and Christopher Smart, together with mystics such as Plotinus and St. John of the Cross, whom Ginsberg mentions in *Howl* and studied in the 1950s (3). This inheritance is therefore

markedly spiritual. Before Kerouac and Williams, Ginsberg claims that, in America, Whitman and, later, Gertrude Stein systematically studied consciousness in questions such as: "What does the mind really think? What is the poetry of pure mind?"; "It actually was a main tradition in American letters from Whitman on," he states in a 1978 interview, continuing: "Whitman said, 'We don't have to pay the immensely overpaid accounts on the Battle of Troy anymore. The muse is here in America. She's here installed amidst the kitchenware'" (Baizer et al. n.pag).

The kernel of this literary tradition is a combination of social and spiritual ideals, from which come the terms Ginsberg favours and employs – 'democratic awareness,' 'breakthrough in consciousness,' 'spiritual democracy.' This latter phrase specifically would often be used by the poet with reference to Whitman and Williams. In a 1957 letter to his father, written after an encounter with W. H. Auden and his literary friends, Ginsberg laments a lack in the continuation of Whitman's democratic spiritual heritage. "All this gives me the conviction, or strengthens the conviction I have had, that the republic of poetry needs a full scale revolution and upsetting of 'values,'" he resolves:

> With great names like Auden and Marianne Moore trying to be conservative, and Eliot ambiguous and Pound partly nuts, Williams stands out as the only beautiful soul among the great poets who has tearfully clung to his humanity and has survived as a man to bequeath in America some semblance of the heritage of spiritual democracy in indestructable individuality – heritage established and handed down by Whitman (*Family Business* 70).

More directly and vigorously than Williams, Ginsberg would endeavour to resurrect Whitman's spirit – "I Allen Ginsberg Bard out of New Jersey take up the laurel tree cudgel / From Whitman" he declares in an early version of "America" (*Journals: Early Fifties* 91). Notably, Ginsberg would also repurpose and continuously explore Whitman's wished-for explosive, joyous, and pervasive sexuality – one which was wide open: homosexual, masturbatory, and even, albeit to a lesser extent, bisexual and heterosexual. This pervasive sexuality is embodied in Ginsberg's long line, which, as this chapter illustrates, takes after Whitman's 'spermatic,' orgasmic expression.

Especially in the 1960s and 1970s, with the ferment of cultural and social movements and the beginning of the sexual revolution, Ginsberg would equate open sexuality with open governance – "a political liberty that could only be defended by undaunted, free, bold humorous imagination, open field mentality, open field poetics, open field democracy" ("When the Mode of the Music" 154). The form for this spirit was open form. Ginsberg finds a personification of this ideal spiritual and social sexuality – and of the fact that, in Jean Cocteau's words, "sexuality is the basis for all friendship" (Fifield n.pag) – in Neal Cassady, whose (mainly heterosexual) sexual prowess had been celebrated in Kerouac's *On the Road* (1957) and in other works by Kerouac and Ginsberg. "There was an element of esthetic prowess but there was also an element of faith in sexual intercourse and intimacy as an ultimate exchange of soul. That's certainly why I fell in love with him and that's why he responded to me," Ginsberg explains ("The New Consciousness" 84). "It was a restoration of tenderness through the person of a definitely macho and masculine ideal western tough kid," he continues, elaborating on Cassady's sexual generosity:

> That aspect of emotional generosity and "adhesiveness" as Whitman called it was precisely the portion of Adam which had been extirpated from American public life, and even from private consciousness, in the years between Thoreau and Whitman and the post-war generations, through the development of a competitive macho capitalist selfish ethic. So Cassady was recovering a tradition of generosity of emotion and magnanimity of body and soul that were praised by Whitman (84).

This adhesiveness, Ginsberg argued, was the foundation for democracy, for a society built on cooperation and love rather than competition and hatred: "As long as men are separate from each other and can't even touch each other, then how can they collaborate together in building a political structure?" he reasons: "All they can do is build […] this giant, robotic, criminally-dominated city culture that actually not only exploits men but in which men exploit each other, exploit women and also exploit nature" (84-85).

Ginsberg's testimony at the Chicago Seven trial further elaborates on this issue. When asked about the religious significance of "Love Poem on a Theme by

Whitman" (1954), the poet replies that "Whitman said that unless there was an infusion of feeling, of tenderness, of fearlessness, of spirituality, of natural sexuality of natural delight in each other's bodies […] there would be no chance for spiritual democracy to take root in America," further explaining that Whitman's idea of tenderness between men – 'adhesiveness' – is part of the American "democratic heritage […] that men could work together not as competitive beasts but as tender lovers and fellows" (qtd. in Docherty "On 'Love Poem" n.pag). As this section has begun to illustrate, Whitman's admixture of social and spiritual ideals is a persistent inspiration for Ginsberg. This chapter assesses the relationship between content and form in Ginsberg; specifically, between revolutionary content and revolutionary form, between an open mind and an open poetics. How does Ginsberg's uses of the long line employ and combine formal elements, meaning, and affectivity? The following sections of this chapter place Ginsberg in a complex chain of inheritance, at the same time noting the poet's uniqueness and literary innovations.

Although Whitman and Williams have dominated the discussion of Ginsberg's influences, Ezra Pound is a key if more peripheral figure. As noted above, Ginsberg's debt to Pound has on occasion been acknowledged, especially in defence of the literary merit of his poetry. When Ginsberg met Pound in Venice, in 1967, as the older poet was turning 82, the two discussed poetry and poetics between Pound's extended silences. When Pound, in hindsight, denigrates his oeuvre – "stupidity and ignorance all the way through" (Ginsberg "Encounters with Ezra Pound" 7-8) – Ginsberg expands on the importance of Pound's works to American poetry; indeed, his journal entries testify to a vast admiration for the older poet. The expression of his own perceptions, he tells Pound, had been "strengthened by the series of practical exact language models which are scattered thruout the *Cantos* like stepping stones – ground for *me* to occupy, walk on – so that despite your intentions, the practical effect has been to clarify my perceptions" (8, emphasis in original). When Pound expresses regret over past choices such as his anti-Semitism, Ginsberg redeems him, telling him that he had managed honestly to transpose his interiority in his writing in "*a model of mind process*," so that it was all "part of the drama – you manifest the process of thoughts – make a model of the consciousness, the great accomplishment was to make a working model of your mind – I mean nobody cares if it's Ezra Pound's mind – it is

a *mind*, like all our minds, and that's never been done before" (8-9, emphasis in original).

This perspective might evoke modernist conceptions of poetry which prioritise an attention to the present moment and a stream of consciousness. Ginsberg seems to echo D. H. Lawrence's "Poetry of the Present" (1920), in which the writer declares that "The seething poetry of the incarnate Now is supreme, beyond even the everlasting gems of the before and after. In its quivering momentaneity it surpasses the crystalline, pearl-hard jewels" and that "There must be mutation, swifter than iridescence, haste, not rest, come-and-go, not fixity, inconclusiveness, immediacy, the quality of life itself, without dénouement or close" (v). Acknowledging an artistic debt to Whitman, Lawrence continues: "This is the unrestful, ungraspable poetry of the sheer present, poetry whose very permanency lies in its wind-like transit. Whitman's is the best poetry of this kind. Without beginning and without end, without any base and pediment, it sweeps past forever" (v). Ginsberg discusses Pound's poetry in similar terms: he tells the older poet that "it is an open-ended work, that is, epic, 'including history,' of movement of your mind and record of focused perceptions, existing in *time*, and changing in time" ("Encounters with Ezra Pound" 12, emphasis in original).

Ginsberg's perspective is intriguing, given that Pound's poetry is often considered hermetic and obscure – "too little presentation and too much reference" the poet himself says of his *Cantos* (Ginsberg "Encounters with Ezra Pound" 7). However, Pound has also long been coupled with another tradition which precedes that of open form, 'the other tradition,' in a term coined by Marjorie Perloff. In *The Poetics of Indeterminacy* (1981), Perloff defines the other tradition in terms of its indebtedness to 'the French connection' of Rimbaud and cubist, dada, and early surrealist visual art. She employs the terms 'undecidability' and 'indeterminacy' to discuss a quality of nonreferentiality in the texts of the poets of the other tradition (Stein, Williams, Beckett, Pound, Ashbery, John Cage, and David Antin), which may be understood as openness – especially as, in Ashbery's words, an "open field of narrative possibilities" (qtd. in Perloff *The Poetics of Indeterminacy* 11). She also frames the *Cantos* in terms of open form in *The Dance of the Intellect*, drawing on the criticism of M. L. Rosenthal and Eva Hesse, who discuss the *Cantos*' form as "intimate, fragmented, self-

analytical, open and emotionally volatile structure" and as a "means of discovery – for poet and reader alike" (Rosenthal 6; Hesse 23).

Ginsberg's similar interpretation of Pound's poetry as transient and open may also serve to illuminate the Beat's own ideal poetics, revealing the extent of the debt that he owes the older poet. On finding that Pound had not read any of his poetry, Ginsberg comments: "Well, oddly, it might even please you" ("Encounters with Ezra Pound" 14). The notion of Pound's poetics as described by Ginsberg, as the creation of 'a model of mind process,' would often be employed by Ginsberg in relation to his own poetry, as this chapter illustrates. In fact, the poet's writing would refocus, time and again, on reflecting the mind's spontaneity and movement in an organic yet accurate manner.

Another generative tension within Ginsberg's poetry, one which concerns a different type of poetic influence, occurs between various genres in poetry. As Jahan Ramazani notes in *Poetry and Its Others* (2014), poetry characteristically presents a dynamic interplay with nonpoetry, a feature that has become more pronounced as the pervasiveness of the media has grown. With Ginsberg, poems such as "Wichita Vortex Sutra," "Television Was a Baby Crawling Toward That Deathchamber" (or "TV Baby"), *Kaddish*, and even *Howl* demand a consideration of their dialogue with other genres. This chapter considers the ways in which Ginsberg draws on and employs 'poetic others' such as the news in terms of both content and form. At its core, this chapter highlights how the poet has periodically endeavoured, in different manners, to shift the focus from the abstract and the general to the concrete particular, and to stimulate a change in consciousness. The sections that follow explore different phases of the poet's experimentation with form, from the *Empty Mirror* poems, to the howling long line of *Howl* and *Kaddish*, to the cut-up technique and Whitmanian tones of "Wichita Vortex Sutra" and "TV Baby," and to the breathing techniques of "Ego Confession." Because Ginsberg wrote all his (long) life, often employing a long line, this research can only emphasise some of the noteworthy changes in his formal techniques and use of the long line. This chapter, like that on Whitman, relates form to content, extrapolating meaning from an analysis of formal elements, and illustrating the connections between open form and open contents, revolutionary form and revolutionary meanings.

This chapter also notes a progressive aesthetic of embodiment in Ginsberg's poetry, which underlies its chronological progression. Moving beyond the disembodied, obscure meditations of his early poetry, Ginsberg depicts, in *Howl* and *Kaddish*, a pained embodiment which results in a transgression of both form and the body. In his collage and cut-up poems, he experiments with the destruction of the body (of the poem) and the dismemberment of his line and of his psyche, although he maintains a 'magic' belief in the power of language, through which he aims, like Whitman, to affect the reader. His later, Buddhist-inspired, poetry reflects a different kind of embodiment, one where consciousness becomes equated with breath, and the poet transcends the world through a meditation which renders him metaphysically and physically open. As this chapter shows, the relationship between the physical and the formal in Ginsberg's poetry is remarkably tight: indeed, the physical and the formal often coincide.

Early experimentation

At the end of March 1950, Ginsberg wrote a letter which would change his life and oeuvre. The letter was addressed to William Carlos Williams, an established poet from Paterson, New Jersey, from an ambitious young poet from Paterson, New Jersey. Almost one hundred years earlier, in 1856, Whitman had written a similar letter, which included a first version of *Leaves of Grass*, to Emerson. Ginsberg's letter marked the beginning of a lifelong friendship and mentorship. "Williams got this letter and then wrote back saying, 'I'm going to put this in my book, do you mind?' And I said, 'Gee, I'm going to be immortal,' because I thought he was immortal," the Beat recalls (*The Best Minds* 360). Williams, who was then writing his epic poem *Paterson* (1946-58), was impressed by a young poet from Paterson making himself known – "This place is as I say my natural habitat by memory," Ginsberg wrote of the city in his letter, "I know you will be pleased to realize that at least one actual citizen of your community has inherited your experience in his struggle to love and know his own world-city, through your work, which is an accomplishment you almost cannot have hoped to achieve" (qtd. in Williams *Paterson, Book 3* 204). For Williams, Ginsberg observes, it was as though Paterson was speaking back to him (*The Best Minds* 360). The poetry which Ginsberg had included in the letter did not, however, impress Williams, who replied that "in this mode, perfection is basic, and these aren't perfect" (qtd. in Ginsberg "The Tradition of Reznikoff" n.pag).

Interestingly, the letter shows how, as early as 1950, Ginsberg conceives that his poetry follows Williams's axiom 'no ideas but in things' in different ways, at different levels:

> All that I have done has a program, consciously or not, running on from phase to phase, from the beginnings of emotional breakdown, to momentary raindrops from the clouds become corporeal, to a renewal of human objectivity which I take to be ultimately identical to no ideas but in things (qtd. in Williams *Paterson, Book 3* 204).

This assertion holds true throughout his life and work, as Ginsberg reinvents and explores, time and again, his early statement. This chapter specifically illustrates how this often takes the shape of a progressive embodiment in his poetry.

Not discouraged by Williams's reaction, Ginsberg put together a different set of poems in his following letter. These were often based on dream and journal entries, as the poet had attempted to extrapolate from Williams's lessons and adapt them to his own sensibility and poetry. Of this period, Ginsberg says:

> I was working under the influence of William Carlos Williams' example, who said "direct contact with external phenomenal world is the only way […] you can make a coordinate point where others can see, compare their perceptions with your perceptions." If you describe accurately what you see outside of yourself, you will transmit your mind that way rather than try to do it by means of symbolic rehash of esoteric symbols, but direct contact with the external world will give you a coordinate to work with other people's perceptions (*The Best Minds* 367).

Together with the direct treatment of the object, Ginsberg was working with techniques or notions discussed by Williams, such as the observation of particulars, a colloquial style, an interest in the ordinary mind, and a ludic experimentation with line breaks. The poems in this cluster were enthusiastically received by Williams, who wrote back: "This is it! Have you got any more of these?… I shall see that you get a book" (qtd. in Ginsberg "The Tradition of Reznikoff" n.pag). Many of these poems,

written between 1947 and 1952, would be published with an introduction by Williams in 1961 in the volume *Empty Mirror: Early Poems*. Before moving on to these, however, it is worth considering Ginsberg's earlier poetry to evaluate his understanding and application of Williams's ideas.

Discussing an object or phenomena concretely and in detail constituted a significant innovation for Ginsberg, as his early poetry had been heavy with an oblique, opaque symbolism which rendered it hermetic and unintelligible to others. Only Kerouac or intimate friends would occasionally be able to decode Ginsberg's highly personal symbolism, and even the poet himself admitted that he quickly forgot what his symbols stood for (Raskin 72). This early poetry was profoundly influenced by Blake, whom Ginsberg wanted to emulate, as seen in poems such as "The Eye Altering Alters All" (1948), a short, rhymed epigram for Blake,[10] or "Vision 1948" (1948):

> And if not love, why, then, another passion
> For me to pass in image:
> Shadow, shadow, and blind vision.
> Dumb roar of the white trance,
> Ecstatic shadow out of rage,
> Power out of passage.
> Dance, dance, spirit, spirit, dance! (8-14).

Of this poem, Ginsberg would acknowledge that "since the poetry was a remanipulation of old images and old symbols that were traditional and classical there was no offering of direct perception of whatever it was that was seen and so there is no way to interpret […] It's just a rehash of words like 'light' and 'power'" (*The Best Minds* 349).

Another poem displaying an unsustainable symbolism is "The Last Voyage" (1945), a hermetic piece modelled after the "Voyage" section of Baudelaire's *Les*

[10] Many seek and never see,
anyone can tell them why.
O they weep and O they cry
and never take until they try
unless they try it in their sleep
and never some until they die.
I ask many, they ask me.
This is a great mystery (1-8).

Fleurs du Mal, Rimbaud's "Drunken Boat," and Poe's "Descent into the Maelstrom." Though this poem is confused and confusing, with symbols either too obscure or clichéd, it is notable as an early, complex attempt to convey what would become one of Ginsberg's main themes: the switch between the world as known and alternative modes of consciousness (Schumacher 52). In 1950-51, Ginsberg realised that Williams was, in effect, applying Blake's lesson: "Williams [was] living, actually living in eternity observing the detail of eternity, refusing to talk about it in poetic terms, refusing to talk about it symbolically," he remarks (Portugés 33). Blake's "To see a World in a Grain of Sand / And a Heaven in a Wild Flower" (1-2) came, for Ginsberg, to be exemplified in Williams's 'no ideas but in things.' In a 1975 lecture at Naropa, Ginsberg further correlates Williams's statement with Pound's contention that "the natural object is always the adequate symbol" ("An Exposition" 122).

On another occasion, Ginsberg remarks that he was drawn to Williams after hearing him read for the first time: Williams was reading the poem "The Clouds," which ends: "lunging upon / a pismire, a conflagration, a…" (110-11). It was as though the poet had grown irritated towards the end of the sentence, and had shrugged the thought away: such a tone had never been expressed on a page before (Ginsberg "Improvised Poetics" 53). In the poem, Williams is radically resisting closure, both conceptual closure of the thought and image and syntactic closure of the poem and line. Ginsberg admires Williams's refusal to resort to artifice in composition: in a recording of *The Desert Music*, he similarly notes how, on one occasion, Williams leaves a line open and ambiguous, not finding appropriate words: "Their ships / should be directed / inward upon" and at this point, Williams does not know upon *what*, and therefore just adds a full stop: "inward upon . But I / am an old man" (qtd. in Ginsberg "Improvised Poetics" 55). In "The Clouds," Williams similarly left another one of his thoughts open to uncertainty: "something that does not eat but flies by the propulsions / of pure – what? into the sun itself" (73-74). Ginsberg would also make this stylistic choice in poems such as "Transcription of Organ Music" (1955), where, for instance, this line remains unfinished and suspended: "Saw the red blossoms in the night light, sun's gone, they had all grown, in a moment, and were waiting stopped in time for the day sun to come and give them…" (15). This dedicated loyalty to the mind's movements stems from the poet's belief in exactness and particularity: as Williams writes in his *Autobiography* (1948), "That is the poet's business. Not to talk

in vague categories but to write particularly, as a physician works, upon a patient, upon the thing before him" (391). Ginsberg adopts this dictum, which applies to the observation and recording of interiority, as well as of external objects.

The Beat poet also endorses Williams's use of line breaks to specific and often ludic effect. Poems such as "To Daphne and Virginia" (1958), Ginsberg notes, might have been written in prose, but the line breaks allow for a subtle subdivision which better imitates spontaneous American speech – because of its anapaestic tendency, which Williams identified as the 'American' meter for speech – and which allows humour to emerge (*The Best Minds* 385). In the opening, for instance, the line subdivision in the run-on lines enhances the wittiness and playfulness of the poem:

> The smell of the heat is boxwood
> when rousing us
> a movement of the air
> stirs our thoughts
> that had no life in them
> to a life, a life in which
> two women agonize (1-7).

Ginsberg would employ this technique in early poems which feature short and carefully divided lines; for example, in "The Terms in Which I Think of Reality" (1950), the first part of which presents idyllic, harmonious thoughts such as: "Time is Eternity, / ultimate and immovable; / everyone's an angel" and "It's Heaven's mystery / of changing perfection: / absolute Eternity // changes!" (5-7, 8-11). The second part provides a humorous contrast, subtly introduced and highlighted by the choice of line and stanza breaks; the structure of the poem does not change from the previous, harmonious stanzas, but the tone does:

> Next: to distinguish process
> in its particularity with
> an eye to the initiation
>
> of gratifying new changes
> desired in the real world.
> Here we're overwhelmed

with such unpleasant detail
we dream again of Heaven.
For the world is a mountain

of shit: if it's going to
be moved at all, it's got
to be taken by handfuls (24-35).

Ginsberg often discussed his choice of line breaks: this was one of the topics he discussed the most, and is central to this research, as line breaks help determine the length and structure of the line. As this chapter shows, Ginsberg's poetry cannot be defined solely in terms of the long line: his long line and its development must be placed within the context of his overarching poetic theory. However, the long line represents the most remarkable, well-known, and sustained exemplification of his poetics.

Corresponding with Williams signified for Ginsberg the beginning of a new era in his poetic practice. "[I was] thinking that, o.k., I can't make it by juggling symbolic language," Ginsberg says about that time, "so the only thing I can do is attempt to describe what I actually see, or actually saw, to pay attention to detail. To pay attention to minute particulars" (Portugés 33). This would prove an essential switch in perception. The poet's attention to *attention* further developed alongside his practice of Zen Buddhism, which favours the attention-based state of mindfulness. Lawrence had earlier similarly understood poetry as an act of attention, contending that attention would bring to a state of vision, of meaning, which he refers to as divination: "All it depends on is the amount of *true*, sincere, religious concentration you can bring to bear on your object. An act of pure attention, if you are capable of it, will bring its own answer. And you choose that object to concentrate upon which will best focus your consciousness" ("Painted Tombs of Tarquinia" 97-98, emphasis in original).

Ginsberg's focus on attention would often overlap with the matter of 'observation over function,' or the prioritisation of description over judgement or craft. This chapter notes this preoccupation with relation to both poems from *Empty Mirror* and later verse such as "Wales Visitation" (1967). The seeds for this type of

thinking might then be found in Williams's notion of the direct treatment of the object (and, consequentially, of thought). This preoccupation corresponds to the 'ordinary mind,' a term used by both Williams and Ginsberg, and might be said to consist in paying attention so as to find the visionary, the illumination, in ordinary life: "So I try to write during those 'naked moments' of epiphany the illumination that comes every day a little bit. Some moment every day, in the bathroom, in bed, in the middle of sex, in the middle of walking down the street, in my head, or not at all," Ginsberg explains, "So if it doesn't come at all, then that's the illumination. So then I try and write in that too […] I try to *pay attention all the time*" ("Craft Interview" 66, emphasis in original).

Williams's approval of Ginsberg's second set of poems further prompted Ginsberg to explore the ordinary mind, as these pieces often consisted of dream recollections and journal entries. Williams's Introduction to *Empty Mirror* provides some insights into this exploration. According to Williams, Ginsberg's lines are all alike in an imitation of the monotony of everyday life; in the monotonous, however, one can find the 'mystical measure' of human passions (Introduction v-vi). Ginsberg is then "drawn as Dante was to see the truth, undressed, and to sway to a beat that is far removed from the beat of dancing feet but rather finds in the shuffling of human beings in all the stages of their day, the trip to the bathroom, to the stairs of the subway" (vi). In this mode, the poet must speak in simple, colloquial terms, so that everybody can understand them: "He must so disguise his lines, that his style appear prosaic […] It must be prose but prose among whose words the terror of their truth has been discovered," Williams writes – and indeed, many of the *Empty Mirror* poems were originally in prose – further explaining: "Here the terror of the scene has been laid bare in subtle measures, the pages are warm with it. The scene they invoke is terrifying more so than Dante's pages, the poem is not suspect, the craft is flawless" (vii).

The notion of the ordinary mind, and of direct, particular observation seemingly entails an emphasis on affectivity as one of the primary aims of poetry. In fact, describing the ordinary mind, the poet must speak plainly, and convey the world as they perceive it so that it may be understood by other people and resonate with their perceptions. A 1975 lecture on Williams illuminates the affective purpose of his (and their) poetry. Here, Ginsberg states:

> [Williams was] working with perceptions that are indistinguishable from the actual perceptions of our ordinary

> mind; but which when recognized, and appreciated consciously, transform the entire feeling of existence to a totally new sympathetic universe where we're at home, where we're playful, where we're generous, because the mind overflows with its perceptions, and the perceptions are all generous because they're not blocked by anger ("An Exposition" 151).

This chapter will return to the topic of affectivity in discussing Ginsberg's conception of the power of language, which is itself a quality of the long line, and which, beginning with Whitman's belief in the magical, manifesting power of words, is repurposed by Ginsberg. Ginsberg also trusted words to be able to actuate a change in consciousness, and a liberation of the imagination, and he charged his poetry with this affective aim, as his open form predecessors had done. As Williams says, "A new world / is only a new mind" ("To Daphne and Virginia" 34-35), and as Ginsberg adds, "And a new mind is only new words" ("An Exposition" 151).[11]

Some of Ginsberg's *Empty Mirror* poems are crafted and philosophical, and more closely resemble the poet's earlier writing. These poems are often vague and intellectualising – "I am flesh and blood, but my mind is the focus of much lightning […] All work has been an imitation of the literary cackle in my head" he admits in "Psalm I" (1949) (2, 5), accentuating the lack of embodiment in his poetry. Some pieces, as their titles suggest, are highly abstract, such as "In Death, Cannot Reach What Is Most Near," "This Is About Death," or "Metaphysics" (1949):

> This is the one and only
> firmament; therefore
> it is the absolute world.
> There is no other world.
> The circle is complete.
> I am living in Eternity.
> The ways of this world
> are the ways of Heaven (1-8).

[11] "And the mind and the poem / are all apiece" (Williams "To Daphne and Virginia" 36-37).

On the other hand, *Empty Mirror* also abounds in poems which foreground the ordinary mind and life and which observe (or 'pay attention') without imposing interpretation or metaphysical discussion on the observed phenomenon. As its title tells us, for instance, "The Bricklayer's Lunch Hour" (1947) depicts a bricklayer eating a sandwich during his break. The poem is highly descriptive: "He / has on dungarees and is bare above / the waist; he has yellow hair and wears / a smudged but still red cap / on his head" (9-13). There is no judgement or comment imposed on the observation. There is no lesson here. "Marijuana Notation" (1951) also reports a perceived reality, but now an internal one, before switching back to exterior reality in its conclusion:

> How sick I am!
> that thought
> always comes to me
> with horror.
> Is it this strange
> for everybody?
> […]
> It is December
> almost, they are singing
> Christmas carols
> in front of the department
> stores down the block on
> Fourteenth Street (1-6, 21-26).

As Ginsberg acknowledges in his lectures, this is a Williams-inspired recording of a switch of perception: the poet, after smoking marijuana, is struck by his own change in perception when reconnecting with his setting; so, a poem influenced by pot is, also, "very much under the influence of William Carlos Williams's clamp the mind down on objects or get to actuality" (*The Best Minds* 364-65).

"The Bricklayer's Lunch Hour" operates a similar shift in perception towards the end of the poem, which opens the space of the piece to a larger perspective:

> A small cat walks to him
> along the top of the wall. He picks

it up, takes off his cap, and puts it
over the kitten's body for a moment.
Meanwhile it is darkening as if to rain
and the wind on top of the trees in the
street comes through almost harshly (21-27).

"It's a jump of attentiveness of the mind from a small thing to awareness of a giant panorama," Ginsberg explains (*The Best Minds* 369). Similar jumps in thought, or in perception, can be observed throughout Ginsberg's poetry from this moment onwards. His poetics repurposes this 'jump' to different ends, on different occasions: to charge the line emotionally, to expand the awareness of the reader as that of the speaker also expands, to imitate mental processes, or to charge the line with a visionary quality. Often, these shifts inform the poet's subject matter, too. The relation, at the end of the poems, to the setting also becomes increasingly significant in the poet's practice. As Portugés remarks, Ginsberg employs a connection to place to anchor him in the more visionary poems – and, on occasion, to force himself into vision (75). Early examples include "Ode to the Setting Sun" and "The Trembling of the Veil" (later "Transcription of Organ Music"), and later instances are "Sunflower Sutra" and "Siesta in Xbalba." The focus on place would anchor Ginsberg to his thoughts and emotion and ultimately lead him to 'true vision,' which for him coincides, ultimately, with the sense of sight (75).

Ginsberg's focus on context at the end of the poem represents another switch from the general and abstract to the concrete and particular, to a version of 'no ideas but in things.' As this section has illustrated, this switch to particularity emerges in Ginsberg's early writing, under the mentorship of Williams. However, the poet would continue to progressively move towards an embodiment in his poetry, an emphasis on concreteness, reality, and physicality which manifests, as the following sections show, as both an exploration of the body and an embodiment *of* his poetry as well, in form: in a coincidence between physicality and line. The next section follows the developments of Ginsberg's long line in his long, long-lined poems *Howl* and *Kaddish*, discussing the relationships and exchanges between the physiological and the formal in the poems.

Part II: "Look what I have done with the long line"

How easily we could spell if we could follow,
Like thread looped through the eye of a needle,
The grooves of light. It resists. But we stay behind, among them,
The injured, the adored.

John Ashbery

The howling long line

"Look what I have done with the long line," writes Ginsberg in a letter to Williams in December 1955, sending him a few poems – *Howl*, "A Strange New Cottage in Berkeley," "A Supermarket in California," and "Sunflower Sutra" – and explaining the latest changes in his writing and theories:

> In some of these poems it seems to answer your demand for a relatively absolute line with a fixed base, whatever it is… all held together within the elastic of the breath, thought of varying lengths. The key is in the jazz choruses to some extent; also to reliance on spontaneity & expressiveness which long line encourages; also to attention to interior unchecked logical mental stream. With a long line comes a return, (caused by) expressive human feeling […] The release of emotion is one with the rhythmical buildup of long line (Miles 199).

Although only five years had passed since his first letter to Williams, much had changed in life experience for Ginsberg, who now lived in Berkeley, San Francisco, with Peter Orlovsky. Between the *Empty Mirror* poems and *Howl*, Ginsberg's writing would be closely informed by Kerouac's notion of spontaneous writing: "He taught me everything I knew about writing," Ginsberg acknowledges of Kerouac in those years ("The New Consciousness" 80). A more spontaneous expression was a challenging experiment for Ginsberg, who suffered from excessive self-consciousness and self-doubt in composition and therefore wrote and revised slowly, and with difficulty. Around 1953-54, however, he began experimenting with more spontaneous forms of writing (together with more psychoactive substances, which might have helped him overcome his inhibitions); he found Kerouac's "Essentials of Spontaneous

Prose" (written in 1953) so important and useful that he hung a copy above his desk for inspiration.

The "Essentials of Spontaneous Prose," printed in *The Black Mountain Review* in 1957, provided a bridge for Ginsberg to the long line in poetry. One of Kerouac's essentials, for example, reads: "CENTER OF INTEREST Begin not from preconceived idea of what to say about image but from jewel center of interest in subject of image at moment of writing, and write outwards swimming in sea of language to peripheral release and exhaustion" (227). The last part of this sentence in particular, 'swimming in sea of language to peripheral release and exhaustion,' suggests an unravelling in length which is the major characteristic of the long line. Ginsberg also strictly followed another of Kerouac's precepts: "PROCEDURE Time being of the essence in the purity of speech, sketching language is undisturbed flow from the mind of personal secret idea-words" (226). This Ginsberg understood to mean that the subject matter of writing should be the flow and action of the mind, *thought itself* as it happens. This conception would become key to his poetics, having already emerged in his *Empty Mirror* poems as attention to thought processes and to the mind itself.

At this point, the poet's conception of form undergoes significant changes from his early poetry, which had presented a strict meter and form and an obscure, encoded content. Under the mentorship of Williams, with a more natural arrangement of form – often with a verse rendition of prose – came an ordinary, yet visionary, content which prioritised observation over judgement and faithfulness to reality as perceived and to thought as conceived. The most remarkable step in the liberation of form which Ginsberg undertook consisted of the development of the long, howling line which poems such as *Howl* and *Kaddish*, together with many other poems from the 1950s and 1960s, present. Indeed, *Howl* (1955) is the culmination of Ginsberg's early attempts at spontaneous expression; the long line which the poet discovers with this piece remains the mainstay of his poetic expression. For example, poems which depart from the long line in treating (substance-induced and spiritual) changes in consciousness, like "Laughing Gas" (1958) and "Aether" (1960), emerge as comparatively weak in their use of an expressive form which aims to replicate, in (dissolving) structure, the altered (dissolving) state of mind; other poems, such as

"Magic Psalm" (1960) and "The Reply" (1960), are clearer and stronger, thanks to the poet's return to the form of the long line (see Schumacher 331).

As expressed in his letter to Williams, the long line enabled Ginsberg to better access spontaneity and expressiveness, often through a tuning in with his breath and emotions. It is therefore side by side with his exploration of the long line that Ginsberg embarks on a progressive embodiment, in his poetry, of physical realities and concreteness (although this project had begun with the *Empty Mirror* poems). The poet's abandonment of abstract, metaphysical lines in favour of an emphasis on the physical and concrete finds expression, this chapter shows, in an embodiment *of* his poetry as well, so that themes which pertain to the body, especially a transgressive sexuality and the grotesque body, are reflected in the poet's use of the long line, which duly becomes a grotesque, leaking line. This 'leaking' quality has been noted above in Whitman's poetry, and here Whitman's influence seeps into Ginsberg's long line. This section begins by discussing some prominent formal elements and principles of the long line as employed by Ginsberg in *Howl*, and moves on to highlight the specific qualities of his howling line and the line's role in facilitating exchanges between the physical and the formal in the poem, here analysing *Kaddish* as well. Specifically, it discusses physical embodiment in *Howl* and *Kaddish*.

A study of Ginsberg's long line is facilitated by the Beat's eagerness to discuss his poetics and his theory of the long line. For Ginsberg, spontaneous form does not annihilate form, but, on the contrary, may be strictly related to it, as in haikus and blues (Ginsberg "First Thought" 116). Although it is spontaneous and often expressive, the long line maintains, for Ginsberg, integrity and solidity. For the poet, this form is based upon, above all, a loyalty towards his own rhythms of breath, thought, and emotion. Formal discipline, he notes, consists in knowing one's own mind – which is important, since otherwise "you'll be observing the idea and trying to rationally create an extension of the idea or an image to fit things in," creating something fake and stale (116). As this section displays, one of the ways in which the long line demands and exhibits discipline is in presenting deliberate formal elements such as anaphora, repetition, the list, and surrealist juxtaposition of words.

In a 1968 conversation, Michael Aldrich asks Ginsberg whether this mode of writing, one which imitates thought and thought processes, should be considered romantic-expressionistic (what New Critics dismissed as the fallacy of expressive

form). Ginsberg replies that the opposite is the case: "I see it as absolutely logical scientific notation of event […] the practical, pragmatic, common-sense form of notation of thought, was the surrealistic one, because that's the way the mind works" ("Improvised Poetics" 55). In this sense, the poem is a graph of the mind. Ginsberg takes as an example lines from "New York to San Fran" (1968):

> Being filled with drumbeats and total
> orchestra shaking Ascensions
> Crane'd've come to Forever
> If he could – (320-23).

Ginsberg notes how indentation works: here, the lines which are indented modify the previous lines, or add to them (as the second and third lines quoted do with the first, and the fourth with the third) ("Improvised Poetics" 19). This adding of continuous sub-notes coincides with the idea of continuing the sentence, the thought, even after it is exhausted, in order to exhaust it still further; this, then, is the long line, but subdivided into shorter lines in a format which attempts accurately to reproduce, on the page, the poet's thinking.

This process operates on a more rudimentary level in the poet's earlier work as well, often accompanied by anaphora. 'Part III' of *Howl*, for instance, begins:

> Carl Solomon! I'm with you in Rockland
> where you're madder than I am
> I'm with you in Rockland
> where you must feel very strange
> I'm with you in Rockland
> where you imitate the shade of my mother
> I'm with you in Rockland
> where you've murdered your twelve secretaries (94-101).

The repetition of the phrase 'I'm with you in Rockland' provides Ginsberg with a base of thought and emotion to which the poet returns and expands upon: arguably, the repetition of words or phrases accounts for the cumulative emotional intensity of the poem. Both on the page and in public readings, Ginsberg gathers energy and momentum as the repetition establishes itself, almost as an incantation, a catalyser. 'I'm with you in Rockland' is the base, and the following 'where,' which is also

repeated until the second-to-last line of the poem, provides sub-notes to the main thought and emotion. As Portugés suggests, Ginsberg also realised, after reading *Lamentations of Jeremiah*, a 586 BCE litany, that the form of the list naturally allows for free associations between thoughts, which would further allow him to explore consciousness unrestrained (83). This freedom largely comes from the repetition of an anaphoric phrase, which provides unity and logic, so that the mind comes back to anchor after wandering far and wide in between these fixed lines. Anaphora enables thinking which is non-linear, but which operates at a more irrational, instinctual, and spontaneous level throughout the poem. A pronouncement of Robert Frost's, quoted by Louis Ginsberg at a 1966 reading with his son, might well apply here: "Freedom is moving easily in harness" (Gilroy "Poetry Society Hears Ginsbergs" n.pag).

Anaphora is the dominant device not only in 'Part III,' but also in parts I and II of the poem and in "Footnote to Howl." 'Part I' includes 60 lines which begin with 'who,' with some exceptions proving the anaphoric rule in which the poet follows another line of thought and then returns to the base word. As is the case with Whitman's use of anaphora, this choice reflects upon meaning, suggesting that the poem implies, through its sentence structure, a view of reality in which "the many parts of the world simply exist, next to each other, without conflict and without hierarchy of greater and lesser, and they are unified not by complex relations among the parts, but by a simple and all-embracing relation between any part and the whole" (Breslin "On 'Howl'" n.pag). In fact, repetition helps Ginsberg as much as it helps Whitman to give some formal unity to a series of thoughts which are otherwise entirely dispersive (in keeping with the quality of the list). Word repetition also supports the creation of rhythm, which renders the long line more frantic, the poem faster-paced. It is worth mentioning that, because of the length of the line, the poem tends towards a certain speed a priori: if every line coincides with one breath exhale, as occurs when a poem is read out loud, when the lines get longer, the poem goes faster so that it might be pronounced in one out-breath (which then becomes, effectively, a *howl*).

Furthermore, as Ginsberg also notes, anaphoric words unify the poem by hanging it all on one thought ("Improvised Poetics" 44-45). In *American Beauty* (1984), Stephen Tapscott argues, almost echoing Pound's previously mentioned observation on *Paradise Lost*, that Milton's epic poem proved that a celebrated self is hard to control, in form as much as in content, as it tends to dominate the page: "The

problem for the long American poem […] is one of comprehensive form," he concludes (29). What Whitman (and Williams) attempted, he continues, was to recognise a formal link, in poetry, between an expanded place and an expanded sense and expression of self – that 'the mind is its own place' (29). This Tapscott names the Whitmanian tradition: one which "defines the motion of the poem as a search for an appropriate form: the new poem will invent both a new giant Self and a place for that Self to inhabit" (66). This applies in equal measure to Ginsberg, in whose case, as in Whitman's, the list (commonly aided by anaphora) is one mode through which the immense poem moves towards a 'habitable' form.

Another technique that Ginsberg employs in his long line is the surrealist juxtaposition of words or of thoughts. This Ginsberg develops directly from *Empty Mirror* poems such as "The Bricklayer's Lunch Hour" and "Marijuana Notation," where there is a juxtaposition, usually at the end of the poem, with a different perspective which stimulates or imitates a switch in perception (and, Ginsberg suggests, in consciousness). This gap would become more explicit and surrealist in Ginsberg's poetry throughout the 1950s. Around 1954, before writing *Howl*, Ginsberg resolved to write as Cézanne painted: in his opinion, in a way which juxtaposed different images so that the audience, attempting to capture them at the same time – the foreground, the background, the separate parts – would feel an 'illuminative flash' as the mind put the painting together (see Schumacher 197). What Ginsberg says of Cézanne may also be applied to the disparate but associated images of the haiku and of dadaist and surrealist notions of breaking down consciousness through a broken-down artwork. Ginsberg wanted to reproduce, in his writing, these flashes of recognition (or 'eyeball kicks,' as he and Kerouac would name them), opposing different images and words and letting the readers themselves fill in the gaps (197). This technique renders *Howl* distinctly surrealist. During the *Howl* obscenity trial, when the judge asked for a prose rendering of the poem so that it might be easier to understand, professor and critic Mark Schorer suggestively replied: "You can no more translate this book into logical prose English than you can say what a surrealist painting means in words" (qtd. in Schumacher 261).

The notion of a "gap between thoughts, or the gap between words" (Ginsberg *The Best Minds* 388-89) – or between worlds – which must be completed by the reader's mind works particularly well, for Ginsberg's purposes, when the brain needs

to reconstruct or imagine the relationship between very different words. As with the most experimental *Empty Mirror* poems, this switch endows Ginsberg's poetry with a visionary element; according to the poet, this technique was his basic principle in the composition of *Howl* (391). Ginsberg's favourite phrase in the poem is 'hydrogen jukebox': here, he wanted to find an adjective which would electrify the pairing subconsciously: "Take an adjective, an unconscious intuition, and yoke it with a conscious noun or a conscious verb. Make it a surrealist or unconscious or imaginative adject or adverb and yoke it next to a conscious noun or verb" he instructs (396-97). This technique is deployed throughout *Howl*, in associations such as "incomparable blind streets" (12), "Peyote solidities of halls" (13), and "submarine light" (15). Ginsberg also applies this notion to thoughts, disseminating dashes through his works as signifiers of 'jumps' between disparate ideas. He began using the dash in his early, pre-*Howl* composition of haikus, and continued employing the device in his later poetry, as he did in haikus, to the purpose of relating diverse perceptions (Simpson 71). This practice was encouraged by Kerouac, who had already praised the dash as the only legitimate punctuation in his "Essentials of Spontaneous Prose": "No periods separating sentence-structures already arbitrarily riddled by false colons and timid usually needs commas – but the vigorous space dash separating rhetorical breathing" (226). Tellingly, Ginsberg's working title for the collection which came to be published as *Reality Sandwiches: 1953-1960* (1963) was *Hiccup*, a word which evokes these gaps and jumps between words and thoughts.

It is fruitful to consider how this surrealist technique functions in Ginsberg's poetry in terms of cognitive poetics, which differentiates between the convergent and divergent structures in poetry as described above. Following Tsur, when the poem's syntactical, prosodic, and phonetic patterns are tightly interwoven, and when parallel structures support and reinforce each other, convergent structures emerge ("Cognitive Poetics and Speaking" 6). When the poem's syntactical, prosodic, and phonetic patterns are not tightly connected but strain the reader's attention, and when parallel structures are unpredictable, operating on more than one level, divergent structures emerge (6). This distinction is useful in examining the relationship between form, content, and meaning in poetry, as these theories provide a vocabulary which accounts for the exchanges which happen between the text's structures and affectivity. Significantly, cognitive poetics studies the transfer of language processing – which

then determines how the texts convey emotional states – from the left hemisphere of the brain (where language operates) to the right hemisphere of the brain (where emotions reside) (11). The left hemisphere of the brain hosts perceptions which are less expressed (or expressible) in words, such as orientation in space, feelings and emotions, and mystical experiences.

Reflections in the previous chapter of this thesis concerning the list and parallel structure in relation to Whitman's long line may also be applied to Ginsberg. Anaphora and repetition are more prevalent still in Ginsberg's long line, as may be noted in the three parts of *Howl*, which heavily rely on anaphoric words or sentences: 'who' in 'Part I,' 'Moloch' in 'Part II,' 'I'm with you in Rockland' in 'Part III,' and 'Holy!' in "Footnote to Howl." Ginsberg's lines in *Howl* are significantly longer than Whitman's lines in, for instance, *Song of Myself*. In terms of cognitive poetics, as has been noted with Whitman, line length suggests a certain divergence, in that the attention of the reader becomes strained: 'Part I,' for instance, consists of one extended sentence occupying 78 lines. It is hard to remember where the focus lies, for example, in the following lines:

> Pilgrim State's Rockland's and Greystone's foetid halls, bickering with the echoes of the soul, rocking and rolling in the midnight solitude-bench dolmen-realms of love, dream of life a nightmare, bodies turned to stone as heavy as the moon,
>
> with mother finally fucked, and the last fantastic book flung out of the tenement window, and the last door closed at 4 A.M. and the last telephone slammed at the wall in reply and the last furnished room emptied down to the last piece of mental furniture, a yellow paper rose twisted on a wire hanger in the closet, and even that imaginary, nothing but a hopeful little bit of hallucination –
>
> ah, Carl, while you are not safe I am not safe, and now you're really in the total animal soup of time –
>
> and who therefore ran through the icy streets obsessed with a sudden flash of the alchemy of the use of the ellipsis

> catalogue a variable measure and the vibrating plane (70-73).

On the other hand, the strong anaphora and repetition of these parts – especially of 'Part II' and 'Part III,' in which the lines are shorter and more broken down – allows for the construction of strongly convergent structures. An extract from 'Part III' illustrates how focused the lines are, in comparison to the more diffuse lyricism of 'Part I':

> Moloch the incomprehensible prison! Moloch the crossbone soulless jailhouse and Congress of sorrows! Moloch whose buildings are judgment! Moloch the vast stone of war! Moloch the stunned governments!
>
> Moloch whose mind is pure machinery! Moloch whose blood is running money! Moloch whose fingers are ten armies! Moloch whose breast is a cannibal dynamo! Moloch whose ear is a smoking tomb! (82-83).

Finally, the fact that the poem relies on emotional power, which often derives from repetition, adds to an understanding of the structure of the poem as divergent, and so more easily received in the right hemisphere of the brain.

With regard to the surreal gaps between words and worlds, these might be considered as another formal element which renders Ginsberg's poetry divergent. At the level of words, the patterns are not tightly connected, but rather move in opposite directions: the brain reacts by filling in the space between these associations in an instinctual, irrational manner. The term 'hydrogen jukebox,' for instance, may be understood in different ways, with different connotations, by different people. The imaginative effort that it takes for the reader to take in such combinations of words and of thoughts employs thinking which searches for convergence where this is not clear or intuitive. In this technique, Ginsberg may have been influenced by his meeting, in Paris in 1957, with dadaist and surrealist painters, photographers, and poets, including Tristan Tzara and Marcel Duchamp. These groups were already experimenting with associations of disparate images in ways which challenge rationality and straightforward notions of consciousness.

In that year, Ginsberg began to write *Kaddish*, drafting some sections of the poem, glimpsing the power of unchecked emotion channelled into his writing: "I write best when I weep," he wrote Kerouac in a letter after such a discovery; "I wrote a lot of that [*Kaddish*] weeping anyway, and got idea for huge expandable form of such a poem, will finish later and make big elegy, perhaps less repetition in parts, but I gotta get a rhythm up to cry" (Morgan 230). Indeed, *Kaddish* is less dependent on repetition, for rhythm, than *Howl*. As the poet later comments with relation to "TV Baby," repetition works like crutches in helping to establish rhythm and move the poem forward; in poems such as *Kaddish* and "Sunflower Sutra," Ginsberg was attempting, already, "to fly without crutches," "to fly all the way" ("Improvised Poetics" 46). With *Kaddish*, it appears that he comes more consciously to appreciate that emotion and thought could coincide in the line, and be catalysts for a renewed, even larger, expansion in form.

It is significant to note here that Ginsberg's own theories contain some contradictions and unclarified points. For instance, the poet remains ambiguous on whether *Howl*'s sentences are strictly breath units or units of thought as well. Luke Walker addresses this issue, pointing out that Ginsberg's theorisation already contains its own problematisation: the 'breath unit' is more of an ideal rather than a practice (45). In his statement on poetics included at the end Allen's *The New American Poetry*, indeed, Ginsberg remarks that "Ideally each line of Howl is a single breath unit. Tho in this recording it's not pronounced so" (416). "My breath is long," he then concedes, "that's the Measure – one physical-mental inspiration of thought contained in the elastic of a breath" (416). It therefore remains unspecified whether the poet's idea of a mind-breath unit is to be taken more literally or more metaphorically, as breath or as 'physical-mental inspiration of thought' (Walker 45). In the best cases, these two views seem at least theoretically to coincide: in fact, Ginsberg defines the long line as a form that captures the "great inclusiveness of the mind that can enjamb – put in one breath a great many associations" ("A Conversation" 97). Definitively, both breath and thought are consistently the focus of Ginsberg's poetics of embodiment in his long line.

Returning to Ginsberg's embodiment, the study of Buddhism further prompted the poet to align physiology with thought in the line. This process had already begun with Kerouac's guidance in spontaneous writing and through reading poetry out loud

(at first to friends, and, from the Six Gallery reading onwards, in public). Ginsberg was coming to realise that line length determined breath and also, at the same time, suggested the combination of the emotional states physically felt during the composition of the poem (Schumacher 209) – or, in his words, that "the rhythmic units that I'd written down were basically breathing exercise forms which if anybody else repeated would catalyze in them the same pranyic breathing physiological spasm I was going through, and so would presumably catalyze in them the same affects or emotions" (Portugés 77). Again, affectivity emerges as an essential aim of Ginsberg's poetry, as it had begun to emerge with his interest, exhibited in *Empty Mirror*, in how other people could best relate to his own perceptions, which led him to direct treatment of the object and observation of particulars. "The long line seems for the moment to free speech for emotional expression and give it a measure to work with," Ginsberg remarks, highlighting emotional power as the catalyst of the long line (Morgan 139). The aim of conveying a physiological state also underlies Ginsberg's project of physical embodiment in the line, one which the poet would often come back to and aim to reproduce, especially in his later, meditation-inspired works. The roots of this coincidence between physiology and the line can be found in *Howl*.

To study how the poet aims towards affectivity, theories from cognitive poetics may once more be employed. The preceding chapter has noted, with regard to Whitman, how the poet renders his poetry divergent so that his readers might understand it in a more emotional, intuitive, and spiritual, abstract manner. The same holds true for Ginsberg, who, more concretely and explicitly than Whitman, aims to transmit messages which are social and political, although these are often also spiritual. Ginsberg wanted his readers to be affected by his poetry, spiritually and emotionally. In neither case does this entail a primary use of rationality. The Beat specifically challenges the same rationality which dominates the world of institutions and determines who and what is and is not 'sane.' As he sees his country embroiled in materialism, paranoia, aggressive policies, and fear of the Other or the different, he determines that what his nation needs is a 'spiritual infusion,' an openness, a different type of 'sanity,' one based on compassion and acceptance: "Whitman long ago complained that unless the material power of America were leavened by some kind of spiritual infusion, we would wind up among the 'fabled damned,'" Ginsberg writes in a letter to his father; "We're approaching that state as far as I can see" (*Family Business*

115). “What seems ‘mad’ in America,” he would identify in another letter, “is our expression of natural ecstasy” (Morgan 130). In his critique, where ‘natural ecstasy,’ the type especially exemplified in *Howl*, is a ‘sane’ perception, it clearly emerges that society is, in opposition, ‘sick.’

It follows that the transmission of this ‘natural’ state of ecstasy – which might seem ‘insane’ to conventional morals – would not be rational either, and indeed Ginsberg’s long line is expressive, frantic, insatiable, confessional, howling, and emotional. This rendered it almost illegible for contemporary reviewers. For instance, Gerrit Henry writes: “This isn’t poetry, but melodrama” (n.pag), and according to James Dickey, “Confession is not enough, and neither is the assumption that the truth of one’s experience will emerge if only one can keep talking long enough in a whipped-up state of excitement. It takes more than this to make poetry. It just does” (n.pag). In underground poetic (and critical) circles, however, Ginsberg’s non-standard expression emerged as all the more powerful: as McClure records, Ginsberg’s first reading of *Howl* left the audience “knowing at the deepest level that a barrier had been broken, that a human voice and body had been hurled against the harsh wall of America and its supporting armies and navies and academies and institutions and ownership systems and power-support bases” (*Scratching the Beat Surface* 29). To these sensibilities, Ginsberg’s poetry was not ‘mad,’ but accurate in its critique and perceptions, representing “a standard for morality, in a sense, or for a normal state of mind, a standard you can measure your own perceptions and sanity against,” as Ginsberg said of William’s poetry (“An Exposition” 151).

With respect to Ginsberg’s attempt to coincide, in his poetry, thought, emotion, and breath, a brief analysis of the three main parts of *Howl* illustrates the poet’s first important steps towards poetic embodiment. The three different parts indicate that they were written in three different emotional and mental states. ‘Part I,’ as previously shown, presents very long lines which rely both on the repetition of ‘who’ and on the juxtaposition of opposed images, words, or thoughts, through a surrealist combination of words or through the dash. These two main techniques may be noted from the beginning, which sets the tone for the whole first section:

> angelheaded hipsters burning for the ancient heavenly
> connection to the starry dynamo in the machinery of night,

> who poverty and tatters and hollow-eyed and high sat up smoking in the supernatural darkness of cold-water flats floating across the tops of cities contemplating jazz,
> who bared their brains to Heaven under the El and saw Mohammedan angels staggering on tenement roofs illuminated,
> who passed through universities with radiant cool eyes hallucinating Arkansas and Blake-light tragedy among the scholars of war (3-6).

Here, the anaphoric 'who' unifies and equalises all the subjects celebrated, and the surrealist juxtaposition of words such as 'starry dynamo' and 'Blake-light tragedy' charges the line with a visionary quality and facilitates a more emotional, instinctual exchange with the reader.

'Part II' relies on much shorter sentences, although the lines remain long. The continuous exclamations, the repetition, and the monosyllabic words suggest a furious, screaming, spitting tone. Following the introductory line, almost all words are accented:

> What sphinx of cement and aluminum bashed open their skulls and ate up their brains and imagination?
> Moloch! Solitude! Filth! Ugliness! Ashcans and unobtainable dollars! Children screaming under the stairways! Boys sobbing in armies! Old men weeping in the parks!
> Moloch! Moloch! Nightmare of Moloch! Moloch the loveless! Mental Moloch! Moloch the heavy judger of men! (79-81).

The end of the section leads back to the first line of the poem in a desperate and hysterical – as the exasperated humour of these lines suggests – denunciation of the destruction of 'the best minds of [his] generation':

> Visions! omens! hallucinations! miracles! ecstasies! gone down the American river!
> Dreams! adorations! illuminations! religions! the whole boatload of sensitive bullshit!
> […]

> Real holy laughter in the river! They saw it all! the wild eyes!
> the holy yells! They bade farewell! They jumped off the
> roof! to solitude! waving! carrying flowers! Down to the
> river! into the street! (90-91, 93).

'Part III' presents a short, repeated base and an elaboration on that base, indented, which begins with short phrases – "where you're madder than I am," "where you must feel very strange" (95, 97) – and progressively becomes longer, more complex, and more intense:

> I'm with you in Rockland
> where you drink the tea of the breasts of the spinsters of
> Utica
> I'm with you in Rockland
> where you pun on the bodies of your nurses the harpies of
> the Bronx
> I'm with you in Rockland
> where you scream in a straightjacket that you're losing the
> game of the actual pingpong of the abyss
> I'm with you in Rockland
> where you bang on the catatonic piano the soul is innocent
> and immortal it should never die ungodly in an armed
> madhouse (110-17).

The last two lines of the poem are the longest of the third part. This accumulated emotional intensity finds an outlet in the second-to-last line of the poem, which provides a strong release from the body of the poem in the form of a liberation – from the prison of madness, and from "Moloch the incomprehensible prison! […] Moloch whose name is the mind!" (82, 85). The last line provides an idyllic, Whitmanian conclusion to the long howl:

> I'm with you in Rockland
> where we wake up electrified out of the coma by our own
> souls' airplanes roaring over the roof they've come to drop
> angelic bombs the hospital illuminates itself imaginary
> walls collapse O skinny legions run outside O starry-

spangled shock of mercy the eternal war is here O
victory forget your underwear we're free
I'm with you in Rockland
in my dreams you walk dripping from a sea-journey on the
highway across America in tears to the door of my cottage
in the Western night (128-31).

Through different sentence structures and formal elements, therefore, the three main parts of *Howl* exemplify different emotional and mental states. However, they also exemplify different physical states. One way in which this is achieved is the reproduction, through syntax, of a breathing pattern which, when enacted, would stimulate certain emotional responses. Examples may be found in the long, lyrical, protracted, howling lines of 'Part I'; in the short, broken, angry phrases of 'Part II'; and in the growing lines of 'Part III,' where the lines progressively increase in length after a short, repeated sentence which gives focus to the section. Clearly, in *Howl*, form is a conscious preoccupation. In a famous letter of response to Richard Eberhart, who criticised Ginsberg's poem for lack of technique, the poet mounted a defence of the form of the long line. "What seems formless tho effective is really effective thru discovery or realization of rules and meanings of forms and experiments in them. The 'form' of the poem is an experiment. Experiment with uses of the catalogue, the ellipse, the long line, the litany, repetition, etc.," he explains, remarking that "The poem is really built like a brick shithouse" (Morgan 133).

Another way in which physicality and concreteness are embodied in the sections of *Howl* may be noted in the creation, in the poem's lines, of concrete sensations of spaces and motions which pertain to imprisonment and breaking free. James Breslin argues that one structuring dynamic in the poem is that of people (and situations) being pushed to their maximum limits; after this complete exhaustion, there follows a redemption which is limitless, unconstrained by the previous suffocating margins. The critic notes that:

> Again and again, the young men are left "beat" and exhausted, alone in their empty rooms, trapped in time – at which point they gain glimpses of eternity. "Howl" constantly pushes toward exhaustion, a dead end, only to have these ends twist into moments of shuddering ecstasy. In one of the poem's

> metaphors, boundaries are set down, push in on and enclose the self – then suddenly disintegrate. At such times terror shifts to ecstasy; the "madman bum" is discovered to be the angelheaded hipster (*From Modern to Contemporary* 98).

This resonates with other common understandings of the Beat Generation itself and of Ginsberg's poetry. In his Introduction to *Howl and Other Poems*, for instance, William Carlos Williams presents the text with the ominous warning: "Hold back the edges of your gowns, Ladies, we are going through hell," describing the poem "a howl of defeat" (7-8). Williams, however, also notes that Ginsberg emerges from that hell: "he proves to us, in spite of the most debasing experiences that life can offer a man, the spirit of love survives to ennoble our lives if we have the wit and the courage and the faith – and the art! to persist" (8). Similarly, in his iconic "This Is the Beat Generation" (1952), John Clellon Holmes defines the term 'Beat' according to a similar concept of exhaustion, highlighting the accompanying feeling of claustrophobia: "More than a mere weariness, it implies the feeling of having been used, of being raw. It involves a sort of nakedness of mind, and, ultimately, of soul; a feeling of being reduced to the bedrock of consciousness. In short, it means being undramatically pushed up against the wall of oneself" (58-59). This abstract dynamic is reflected, in *Howl*, in continuous references to spaces which close in on the poem's subjects, feelings of suffocation and disintegration of the person and the self, and representations of a liberation from these claustrophobic contexts.

From the outset of the poem, the self, or the locus of the mind, is depicted as a concrete location in the line "who were expelled from the academies for crazy & publishing obscene odes on the windows of the skull" (7). This sense of confinement is enhanced by the following line, which builds on the previous reference to the head as a room (via the windows) and shows the subjects' reaction to this enclosure: "who cowered in unshaven rooms in underwear, burning their money in wastebaskets and listening to the Terror through the wall" (8). This section continues to depict the most exasperated and hopeless situations, proposing a long list of physical horrors; significantly, these are remarkedly connected to the body and its most grotesque aspects (bones, blood, genitals, tears, physical breakdowns, and bodily dysfunctions): "who broke down crying in white gymnasiums naked and trembling before the machinery of other skeletons," for instance, or "who howled on their knees in the

subway and were dragged off the roof waving genitals and manuscripts" (33, 35). This dynamic is even more explicit as the section approaches an ending, introducing Carl Solomon:

> who threw potato salad at CCNY lecturers on Dadaism and subsequently presented themselves on the granite steps of the madhouse with shaven heads and harlequin speech of suicide, demanding instantaneous lobotomy,
> and who were given instead the concrete void of insulin Metrazol electricity hydrotherapy psychotherapy occupational therapy pingpong & amnesia
> who in humorless protest overturned only one symbolic pingpong table, resting briefly in catatonia,
> returning years later truly bald except for a wig of blood, and tears and fingers, to the visible madman doom of the wards of the madtowns of the East (66-69).

However, 'Part I' also reveals, intermittently, in unexpectedly luminous and joyful lines, the spiritual counterpart, and active antithesis, to bodily breakdowns: "who studied Plotinus Poe St. John of the Cross telepathy and bop kabbalah because the cosmos instinctively vibrated at their feet in Kansas, / who loned it through the streets of Idaho seeking visionary indian angels who were visionary indian angels" (24-25), and "who fell on their knees in hopeless cathedrals praying for each other's salvation and light and breasts, until the soul illuminated its hair for a second" (62).

The 'concrete void' of the series of medical and psychiatric treatments the speaker mentions might be also understood in the material sense of 'concrete' as cement, which would echo the closely following line: "Pilgrim State's Rockland's and Greystone's foetid halls, bickering with the echoes of the soul, rocking and rolling in the midnight solitude-bench dolmen-realms of love, dream of life a nightmare, bodies turned to stone as heavy as the moon" (70). These lines evoke solidity and walls in their mentions of concrete and stone, and further relate to "the granite steps of the madhouse" (66). In institutions like Pilgrim State Hospital (where Ginsberg actually met Solomon) and Rockland, the individual is annihilated both in spirit and in body; this is the industrial-capitalist complex the speaker denounces in 'Part II': "Moloch whose mind is pure machinery!" and "Moloch whose eyes are a thousand blind

windows! Moloch whose skyscrapers stand in the long streets like endless Jehovahs! Moloch whose factories dream and croak in the fog! Moloch whose smoke-stacks and antennae crown the cities!" (83, 84). By the end of the poem, this repetition of the concept of heaviness (through the references to grey, heavy materials) becomes a predominant parallelism which enriches and strengthens the poem by accumulating layers of meaning.

The first vision of Moloch in 'Part I' as the psychiatric institution in which people like Ginsberg and Solomon were confined, is followed by the longest line of the poem. The line which precedes the longest line is: "Pilgrim State's Rockland's and Greystone's foetid halls, bickering with the echoes of the soul, rocking and rolling in the midnight solitude-bench dolmen-realms of love, dream of life a nightmare, bodies turned to stone as heavy as the moon" (70). This line, in its depiction of misery, heaviness, and closure, builds towards the longest line, the poem's actual culmination of despair in its extremes (see the incest taboo). It evokes, once again, walls and constricted spaces, as empty as the self is empty – or rather, as the self has been emptied:

> with mother finally fucked, and the last fantastic book flung out of the tenement window, and the last door closed at 4 A.M. and the last telephone slammed at the wall in reply and the last furnished room emptied down to the last piece of mental furniture, a yellow paper rose twisted on a wire hanger in the closet, and even that imaginary, nothing but a hopeful little bit of hallucination – (71).

At this point, however, Breslin notes that, reinforcing the dynamic of openness and freedom after extreme exhaustion, "the poem's mood dramatically turns and the concluding lines of Part I affirm the self's power to love and to communicate within a living cosmos" (*From Modern to Contemporary* 99). In fact, empathy, hope, and strength are renewed in the statement which follows the line: "ah, Carl, while you are not safe I am not safe, and now you're really in the total animal soup of time –" (72). The barriers of the closed, empty room are therefore ultimately broken down and overcome by the spirit, which remains sympathetic and active, and able to rise above all limitations in renewed spurts of energy.

This dynamic is more generally repurposed in 'Part II' and 'Part III,' in another parallelism of thought which reinforces the whole poem. In 'Part II,' the constant repetition of 'Moloch' creates a claustrophobic feeling of the pervasiveness of that baleful entity – who, in fact, represents at large that which is all-encompassing such as society, with its institutions and systems. This suffocating feeling is further underlined by phrases like "Wake up in Moloch!" "Moloch the incomprehensible prison!" and "Moloch in whom I sit lonely!" (87, 82, 86), and is further reflected in the aforementioned descriptions of empty rooms. The end of this section, however, remains angry and helpless, howling with a blind rage which ultimately turns against the self suicidally, in a manner similar to the way in which people like Solomon had ended up "with shaven heads and harlequin speech of suicide, demanding instantaneous lobotomy" (66) (Breslin *From Modern to Contemporary* 102). As Breslin notes, this happens because rage, although perhaps a necessary step towards liberation, still pertains to the destroying domains of Moloch; it takes a renewal in love – signalled by 'Part III''s anaphoric 'I'm with you in Rockland' – to turn things around and break down the barriers which oppress the self (102). 'I'm with you in Rockland' is repeated throughout the final section, leading the speaker (and Solomon) to turn rage into playful acceptance as they commune affectionately with the previous oppressor, as they "hug and kiss the United States under our bedsheets the United States that coughs all night and won't let us sleep" (127).

The two "wake up electrified out of the coma by our own souls' airplanes" as "imaginary walls collapse" (129) in an ultimate liberation of both the spirit and the body (in fact, in the last line of the poem, the speaker imagines Solomon physically showing up at his cottage). The second-to-last line itself is one of the longest of the poem, and interestingly presents longer spaces between sentences, possibly mirroring longer in-breaths between these utterances. This may reflect having to catch one's breath to read this line after the long 'howls' of the previous verses, as if after a run (or in this case an emotional marathon), in an exhaustion which follows relief, finally having the chance to slow down:

> where we wake up electrified out of the coma by our own souls' airplanes roaring over the roof they've come to drop angelic bombs the hospital illuminates itself imaginary walls collapse O skinny legions run outside O starry-spangled

> shock of mercy the eternal war is here O victory forget your underwear we're free (129).

The poem therefore exemplifies a physical overcoming of barriers – walls which pertain to the mind and the self, as with the 'imaginary walls' of madness, and walls which exemplify Moloch and the oppression of dehumanising institutions, among them psychiatric institutions. Through love, openness, and acceptance, the poem therefore breaks down oppressing borders just as it had left the audience, upon its first famous Six Gallery reading, "knowing at the deepest level that a barrier had been broken, that a human voice and body had been hurled against the harsh wall of America" (McClure *Scratching the Beat Surface* 29).

Ginsberg's poetry further embodies physicality by embedding, in its lines, themes which pertain to the body; often, the grotesque body. This section will firstly focus on sexuality in *Howl*, and will secondly assess examples of grotesque embodiment in *Kaddish*. The sexuality which *Howl* presents is, like the long poem's form, decidedly subversive. The subversiveness of the sexual acts depicted is their homosexual nature: in the United States, during the Cold War, homosexuality was the most radical act of rebellion. This owes to various factors: homosexuality's illegal status; its association with communism; its proposition of alternative visions of 'freedom,' the American buzzword par excellence; the associations of the anus in the male body; and homosexuality's inherent challenge to existing hierarchies.

Homosexuality was not only considered a perversion of standard morality: it constituted a felony in every state until 1962, and homosexual intercourse was only nationally decriminalised in 2003, with the Supreme Court ruling *Lawrence v. Texas*. Homosexuality was further rejected because of a cultural association with communism: the idea, which Edelman named 'momism,' was that over-indulgent mothers would raise homosexual sons, who would in turn be weak in their resolve against communism, not embodying the macho, 'American,' straight ideal which would instead effectively fight and eradicate communism in the United States (see Trigilio 1999). Moreover, homosexuality proposed alternative visions of freedom which challenged the mid-century American ethos. As American capitalism scholar Stuart Ewen notes, "The vision of freedom which was being offered to Americans was one which continually relegated people to consumption, passivity, and spectatorship" (215). Sexual liberation proposed visions of freedom which were not based on

passively following the mainstream media's suggestions of consumerism, but rather on personal exploration, individual desire, and communion between men. As Catherine Stimpson argues, unfettered, uncensored sexuality was the reflector of an unfettered, uncensored life; the homosexual was the rebel who legitimised individual desire (374-75). The radical act consisted of moving from the conventionally accepted (and enforced) to individually explored and reclaimed realities.

The importance of sexual freedom in the poem is underlined by the fact that all heroes of *Howl* are sexual heroes (see Selby 1996), especially Neal Cassady, whose bisexuality is, however, obfuscated by his more impressive heterosexual prowess:

> who went out whoring through Colorado in myriad stolen night-cars, N.C., secret hero of these poems, cocksman and Adonis of Denver – joy to the memory of his innumerable lays of girls in empty lots & diner backyards, moviehouses' rickety rows, on mountaintops in caves or with gaunt waitresses in familiar roadside lonely petticoat upliftings & especially secret gas-station solipsisms of johns, & hometown alleys too (43).

Sexual exploration and experimentation, especially in male homosexual terms, would also underlie human relationships based on communion rather than on exploitation, further challenging the capitalistic ethos. As previously mentioned, Ginsberg directly refers to Whitman's ideals of adhesiveness and cooperation between man and man in his discussions. He maintains that, as Whitman believed, "unless there was an infusion of feeling, of tenderness, of fearlessness, of spirituality, of natural sexuality of natural delight in each other's bodies […] there would be no chance for spiritual democracy to take root in America" (qtd. in Docherty "On 'Love Poem" n.pag). Men, he reasons, could not effectively build a democracy in the United States as long as there would be no tenderness between them; "All they can do is build […] this giant, robotic, criminally-dominated city culture that actually not only exploits men but in which men exploit each other" ("The New Consciousness" 84-85).

Additionally, depicting homosexual intercourse would have been particularly shocking to the American sensibility because the male body is culturally closed, and the anus is culturally dirty (see Frontain 1999's discussion on this). The female body

is more easily considered culturally 'open' in that it is often represented, exposed, and sexualised; the male body, however, is less often represented in the public domain. Moreover, following Kristeva's (and Bakhtin's) considerations of the abject and grotesqueness, the female body more strictly pertains to the domains of the grotesque than the male body because of its more frequent exchanges with the outside world and transgressions of borders in biological functions such as menstruation and childbirth. Where the female body is more fluid, the male body is more rigid and closed, maintaining the "identity, system, order […] borders, positions, rules" (Kristeva *Powers of Horror* 4) which the grotesque (and the abject) disturb and do not respect.

In opening the male body to the public, specifically through sodomy, Ginsberg revolutionises this site as fluid and grotesque – penetrated, as well as penetrating – and simultaneously challenges common conceptions about homosexual pleasure. A telling line in *Howl* is "who let themselves be fucked in the ass by saintly motorcyclists, and screamed with joy" (36): here, the subjects are perhaps not strictly homosexual, as 'let themselves' suggests a less common abandonment of control, but the reaction to the experience is ecstatic. Ginsberg's annotations to *Howl* for this line in the 1986 anniversary edition of the poem illustrate the poet's attempt to change the mainstream narrative concerning sodomy: "'And screamed with joy': Popular superstition had it that one screamed with pain in such circumstance. 'Howl''s enthusiastic version is more realistic. For its time the iconoclastic 'shocker' of the poem, this verse reversed vulgar stereotype with a statement of fact" (*Howl: Original Draft* 126).

Furthermore, sodomy, Raymond-Jean Frontain elaborates, symbolises "the rejection of society's civilizing power, a deliberate defilement or sinking back into the dirt from which the species arose" (86). This is due to the long-standing negative associations of the anus with something dirty, to be hidden, and 'primeval' in a way which opposes it to sophistication, civilisation, and culture. Because it is an orifice which allows for exchanges between the outside and the inside of the body, the anus also challenges the idea of a closed, defined body and emblematises fluidity and grotesqueness. Grotesque bodily realism challenges hierarchical notions of both society and sexuality: sodomy revolutionises established and implemented notions and norms and sets new hierarchies, with a process comparable to the carnivalesque as conceived by Bakhtin (see Frontain 1999). Homosexual intercourse then reclaims the anus as an active site of pleasure and relinquishes the authority of the phallus, which

is both social and sexual, additionally undermining existing hierarchies because, with no possibility of procreation, sodomy inherently undermines the idea of the family (Frontain 86). Similarly, the procreative functions of sex are disregarded by the 'angelheaded hipsters' of *Howl*, "who let themselves be fucked in the ass by saintly motorcyclists, and screamed with joy, / who blew and were blown by those human seraphim, the sailors, caresses of Atlantic and Caribbean love," and "who balled in the morning in the evenings in rosegardens and the grass of public parks and cemeteries scattering their semen freely to whomever come who may" (36-37, 38).

For all these reasons, embedding sexuality – and especially homosexuality – in the poem constituted a subversive act at the time of the composition of *Howl*, sexually and politically. Ginsberg would famously equate both an open form in poetry and an open sexuality with an open, more progressive society, advocating for "a political liberty that could only be defended by undaunted, free, bold humorous imagination, open field mentality, open field poetics, open field democracy" ("When the Mode of the Music" 154). This subversiveness reflects that of the form of the poem, which, with its long, howling lines, challenges received notions of poetry and poetics. The long poem's lines are similarly 'scatter[ed] freely to whomever come who may,' ecstatic in their length and affectivity, and embodying the spirit of the carnivalesque in their disregard of poetic conventions. The length of the lines further suggests an unravelling, in form, which imitates orgasm. The second chapter of this thesis has noted a similar tendency in Whitman, in his 'spermatic utterances,' where an inspired vocalism accompanies or represents a sexual or emotional arousal – often followed by some form of orgasm – which takes place in the poem.

Similarly, Ginsberg's long lines are moved by an inspired vocalism which may metaphorically represent orgasm. As mentioned, the poet was profoundly inspired, in his composition of the early and mid-1950s, by Kerouac's notions of spontaneous writing, especially as outlined in the "Essentials of Spontaneous Prose." One of these axioms proposes an adherence to the 'laws of orgasm': "write excitedly, swiftly, with writing-or-typing-cramps, in accordance (as from center to periphery) with laws of orgasm, Reich's 'beclouding of consciousness.' *Come* from within, out – to relaxed and said" (228, emphasis in original). This concept also comports with the notion of 'alluvials' as formulated by Kerouac. In his statement on poetics which figures at the end of *The New American Poetry*, Kerouac instructs: "Add alluvials to end of your

line when all is exhausted but something has to be said for some specified irrational reason, since reason can never win out, because poetry is NOT a science" (414). Ginsberg also employs and discusses alluvials: "Add extra phrasing, extra tongue mouthings, extra thoughts, just to finish the thought completely and to exhaust the thought spurt" (*The Best Minds* 393).

Whitman's spermatic expression, this thesis has noted, fell in line with theories, outlandish even in their time, which maintained that sperm came from the brain and mind of the man. Another major influence for Ginsberg, Ezra Pound, similarly opined that "The mind is an up-spurt of sperm" (Aspiz "Walt Whitman" 383). A masculine (and masturbatory) inheritance can therefore be traced behind the notion of an unravelling, self-exhausting and exhausted long line in prose or in poetry. Beat Generation writers such as Ginsberg and Kerouac, however, appear to abandon the predominantly male, sperm-related nature of this line. Even more than Whitman, Ginsberg queers the long line, opening it beyond its traditional male – macho and heterosexual – associations. More generically, Beat writers can be said to associate the long line with orgasm. In fact, the long line can be considered a leaking line in a manner which, especially in *Kaddish*, opens to an Other which is also female. Its very grotesqueness lends the form to fluid understandings which eschew gender dichotomies.

Fluidity and grotesqueness

This section has noted that *Kaddish*, Ginsberg's elegy for his mother, allows the poet to tap into unhindered emotion and channel it into writing: "I wrote a lot of that weeping anyway, and got idea for huge expandable form of such a poem," he tells Kerouac in a letter (Morgan 230). The expansion in form of this poem, spearheaded by a very long line which is constantly interrupted by multiple dashes, allows for breath, mind, and emotion to coincide still more closely in the poem. The first lines of the poem immediately establish a rhythm, one which is carried throughout the poem, as the long text is unified by its form and tone; this rhythm is dictated and inspired by the speaker who has been 'up all night, talking, talking,' and listening to prayer and music:

> downtown Manhattan, clear winter noon, and I've been up all night, talking, talking, reading the Kaddish aloud, listening to Ray Charles blues shout blind on the phonograph
> the rhythm the rhythm – and your memory in my head three years after – And read Adonais' last triumphant stanzas aloud – wept, realizing how we suffer –
> And how Death is that remedy all singers dream of, sing, remember, prophesy as in the Hebrew Anthem, or the Buddhist Book of Answers – and my own imagination of a withered leaf – at dawn – (2-4).

The abundance of dashes intuitively suggests an interruption in breath which mirrors the poet's crying while writing, but it also invokes the image of the speaker 'talking, talking' continuously and the notion of alluvials, of adding thought-spurts after the main thought is exhausted, when another one comes up, as in "as in the Hebrew Anthem, or the Buddhist Book of Answers – and my own imagination of a withered leaf – at dawn" (4). Whitman seems to have employed this technique himself, which may be considered a 'natural' side effect of a long line (both in poetry and in prose). In the Preface to the centennial edition of *Leaves of Grass* (1876), for instance, he says of poetic style: "True, it may be architecture; but again it may be the forest wild-wood, or the best effect thereof, at twilight, the waving oaks and cedars in the wind, and the impalpable odor" (356), seemingly prolonging the sentence with spontaneous thoughts which accumulate in the sentence via commas. In Ginsberg's case, the dash would correspond to the comma and to the indentation which the Beat previously utilised to introduce a new thought in poems such as "New York to San Fran." In these instances, one can see how the long line can be differently shaped. Referring to another poem, "TV Baby," Ginsberg recalls his use of commas and dashes in the lines to a similar, orgasmic purpose which overlaps with expressive form: "it's like a series of staccato comes, spurts, within the line," he explains; "the breathing there, if read aloud, would be like a heavily labored breathing, with like a gasp for breath after each comma" ("Improvised Poetics" 22).

Furthermore, *Kaddish*'s long lines embed a grotesque physicality which, as the line unravels, underscores an unravelling of the poem's subject, Naomi, Ginsberg's mother, in both her body and her mind. The long lines of the poem thereby mirror a

movement of fluidity and openness to a grotesqueness which may be equated with Otherness, as it spans female-hood, different states of mind, and monstrous bodies. This Othered grotesqueness further corresponds with the abject, which this thesis has been previously noted with regard to Whitman's poetics of the dissolution of the self. In *Powers of Horror*, Kristeva explores the different realms of abjection, which span from the social, to the political, to the psychoanalytical, to the metaphysical, and to the physical. In a physical, concrete manner, the abject concerns corporeal realities, such as open wounds, human flesh, and, especially, corporeal waste. In its portrayal of bodily disintegration, *Kaddish* closely deals with grotesque and abject realities, together with their metaphysical counterparts, especially mental illness: a mind which has lost its stability and integrity.

The elegy focuses on the mother's history of mental illness, beginning with her arrival in the United States, through breakdowns, mental institutions, and ultimately her death. As Loni Reynold notes, Beat Generation writers were part of a historical shift which began in the 1940s, with the institutionalisation of mental difference, and continued in the 1960s, with the anti-psychiatry movement (155). While difference was still suspect, the Beats' works would allow for safe identification with it (156). Ginsberg also underlines how difference was considered pathological and treated as an individual ailment, decontextualised from the social, historical moment (Linton 162), and addresses, as stated in his account of "How *Kaddish* Happened," that it was not only his mother's issues he was discussing, but also the "mind-illusion mechano-universe of un-feeling time in which I saw my self my own mother and my very nation trapped desolate our worlds of consciousness homeless and at war" (169). Cold War scholars have indeed noted that indeed, often, the literature of the 1950s reflects an age of anxiety: the breakdowns, traumas, and neuroses of the characters are national as well as individual (see Alves 2001).

Together with detailing the mental deterioration of his mother, Ginsberg details her physical deterioration too, as caused by her hospitalisation – "I'm getting fat – I used to have such a beautiful figure before I went to the hospital," Naomi says on one occasion (*Kaddish* 147). Her physical breakdowns recount a body which unravels and becomes entirely grotesque, both in a modern sense and in the Bakhtinian sense. Lines such as these herald an almost complete opening of the body to the world,

one in which the individual has no control, no borders, and not even the luck, or mercy, of losing consciousness. Naomi becomes entirely fluid and liquid:

> One night, sudden attack – her noise in the bathroom – like croaking up her soul – convulsions and red vomit coming out of her mouth – diarrhea water exploding from her behind – on all fours in front of the toilet – urine running between her legs – left retching on the tile floor smeared with her black feces – unfainted – (140).

The mother's physicality is consistently represented as monstrous throughout the poem, with an emphasis on her "scars of operations, pancreas, belly wounds, abortions, appendix, stitching of incisions pulling down in the fat like hideous thick zippers" (158), but she is doubly monstrous, because of her mental illness as well: as Katherine Kellett notes, following Nuzum's monster theories, "any individual or group that can be marginalized or viewed as standing outside the norm may be monstrosized" (208).

Naomi's body is rendered monstrous specifically in its sexuality, which borders on incestuous in situations which are then grotesque in themselves, as incest constitutes a universal, timeless taboo. In one of the longest lines of the poem, the speaker recalls the mother attempting to seduce him, and focuses on the grotesqueness of her body and genitals:

> One time I thought she was trying to make me come lay her – flirting to herself at sink – lay back on huge bed that filled most of the room, dress up round her hips, big slash of hair, scars of operations, pancreas, belly wounds, abortions, appendix, stitching of incisions pulling down in the fat like hideous thick zippers – ragged long lips between her legs – What, even, smell of asshole? I was cold – later revolted a little, not much – seemed perhaps a good idea to try – know the Monster of the Beginning Womb – Perhaps – that way. Would she care? She needs a lover (158).

Here, the line is so long and full of alluvials that, like its subject, it becomes grotesque, leaking, fragmented but fluid. Presented with his mother's genitals, the speaker

exhibits a common reaction of abjection – revulsion – but promptly embraces grotesqueness and searches for a larger spiritual connection with the mother. At the same time, the speaker subsequently attempts to cleanse himself of the incestual thought: in an almost purifying act, this line is immediately followed by a prayer uttered in Hebrew: "Yisborach, v'yistabach, v'yispoar, v'yisroman, v'yisnaseh, v'yishador, v'yishalleh, v'yishallol, sh'meh d'kudsho, b'rich hu" (159). Whereas scholars cannot help but highlight the Oedipal nature of the relationship between Naomi and her son, as told in the poem, *Kaddish* also attempts to rewrite the mother-son roles. In this sense, it follows an impulse antithetical to the Oedipal motive of establishing the father: as Tony Trigilio notes, the speaker aims to essentially reclaim the mother, further redeeming her madness through an analysis of its history and causes (784-85). This attempt to redeem the mother may suggest, indeed, a redemption, on the part of the speaker, of the female principle as well; whereas *Howl* propounds male comradeship, Trigilio suggests, *Kaddish* embodies female divinity (773).

The mother's grotesque body and mind – liquid and undone – become then the focus of the long prayer, being depicted in their monstrosity but simultaneously being reclaimed and redeemed. In lines such as these, Naomi is depicted as an unravelling woman: "One hand stiff – heaviness of forties & menopause reduced by one heart stroke, lame now – wrinkles – a scar on her head, the lobotomy – ruin, the hand dipping downwards to death –" (206). *Kaddish*'s long, prolonged lines reflect the fluid, leaking movements of Naomi towards the world (or, indeed, 'dipping downwards to death'), of the speaker towards his mother, and of an invoked openness towards difference and Otherness, as found in sections of the poem such as 'Hymmnn.'[12]

This section has shown that Ginsberg's long line in *Howl* reflects the movements of thoughts, tapping into the mind's irrational and visionary associations, and the movements of emotions, more or less painfully unravelling in prolonged, exhaustive and yet persistent long lines. Additionally, the length of the sentences and phrases of the lines suggests different breathing patterns for the three parts which accompany these emotions. Although the bardic use of anaphora provides some unity

[12] "In the house in Newark Blessed is He! In the madhouse Blessed is He! In the house of Death Blessed is He!
Blessed be He in homosexuality! Blessed be He in Paranoia! Blessed be He in the city! Blessed be He in the Book!" (238-39).

to an otherwise dispersive, immense, rambling form, these features often render the poem divergent in structure, which, in turn, renders the poem highly affective. The poem further exemplifies physiological states through the recreation of physical environments and dynamics which relate to imprisonment and liberation. Exchanges between the physical and the formal are also facilitated by Ginsberg's long line through the embedding of themes which pertain to the grotesque body: *Howl*'s lines reflect an unruly, unfettered, and profoundly subversive sexuality which is that of the male homosexual body. Ginsberg's long line further embodies physicality in its form, as the line itself leaks, in its length and orgasmic unravelling, reflecting unboundedness. *Kaddish*'s lines, for instance, reflect a fluid, unfinished, grotesque nature, which finds embodiment in Naomi's mental and physical condition. The leaking, unravelling lines accompany the leaking, unravelling body and mind of the mother, and underscore an openness to Otherness and difference which includes female-hood together with mental illness. In both *Kaddish* and *Howl*, subversiveness in form accompanies subversiveness in content.

It would take much more space more exhaustively to analyse *Howl*'s or *Kaddish*'s form and content. However, this section has presented some of the formal elements of Ginsberg's longest line which prove essential to an understanding of his writing. *Howl* can be said to represent the first culmination of Ginsberg's ongoing experimentation with the long line; its frontiers shift throughout his oeuvre. Soon after the composition of *Howl* and *Kaddish*, Ginsberg begins to employ poetry to convey alternative states of consciousness. One curious breakthrough of consciousness happens in 1958, while Ginsberg takes nitrous oxide because of dental treatment: "Kerouac, Snyder and Whalen are all correct as far as I can see," he reports in a letter to Ferlinghetti, "The whole fabric of existence is illusion […] I never saw anything like *that* before – whole friggin cosmos slipped into the void like lizard's tail into crack in black wall. Sort of immense obvious cosmic joke" (qtd. in Miles 252, emphasis in original). Triggered by this and similar experiences, Ginsberg's long line would soon be used in poems such as "Magic Psalm" or "The Reply," aiming to recreate, as Burroughs was attempting to do in prose, altered states of being: "My poetry is now approaching the place where it is dangerous, when what I say may represent a real spirit talking to Universe in Universe thru Universe" (Ginsberg *South American Journals* 198). His poetry from the second half of the 1960s continues both the project

of expressing different consciousnesses and the project of the long line. Poems such as “Wales Visitation,” “TV Baby,” and “Wichita Vortex Sutra” embody thought and breath in the lines in different ways; whether through formal elements, as in “TV Baby” and “Wales Visitation,” or through the use of recording equipment, as in “Wichita Vortex Sutra,” so that thought, breath, and line coincide. These are the poems which the following section explores.

Part III: "Making noise as poetry"

> "Form" is what happens. All considerations are elements of a single "discipline" which is MINDFULNESS or conscious appreciation and awareness of the humours of line arrangements on the page, intelligence in relation to the mental conception of the page and its vocalization.
>
> Allen Ginsberg

Experiments with and beyond language

The affectivity of political poems such as *Howl* suggests an ambitious scope: Ginsberg wants the reader to be affected by his poems' emotional intensity, and to challenge contemporary notions of 'sanity.' To this purpose, he writes lines which, in his words, "if anybody else repeated would catalyze in them the same pranyic breathing physiological spasm I was going through, and so would presumably catalyze in them the same affects or emotions" (qtd. in Portugés 77). Before becoming overtly social and political, however, Ginsberg's poetry would remain personal, a self-confession, as in *Howl*: "I began typing, not with the idea of writing a formal poem, but stating my imaginative sympathies, whatever they were worth. As my loves were impractical and my thoughts relatively unworldly, I had nothing to gain," he recalls of the famous poem, "only the pleasure of enjoying on paper those sympathies most intimate to myself and most awkward in the great world of family, formal education, business and current literature" (*Howl: Original Draft* xii). At first, the poet explains, it was necessary for him to go from 'public' to 'personal,' which meant experimenting with his own sense of identity: "finding out different modalities of consciousness, different modalities of sexuality, different approaches to basic identity, examination of the nature of consciousness itself" ("The New Consciousness" 76).

After meeting in Columbia, the early Beats developed a group consciousness, 'mythic' and tending towards mythologisation, and observed, beginning with language, how interactions in official environments, such as the university, differed from their personal interactions. "Consciousness within the academy was narrowing down, becoming more anxious and rigid, and it was the initiation of the cold war theoretics for them, the beginning of that grand international paranoia" the poet remembers; "all we knew was that we were making sense to each other […] everybody else around us was talking like some kind of strange lunar robots in business suits.

Everybody sounded like the police in some funny way, even the professors at the university" (70-72). Ginsberg would equate these "Ionescoesque hallucinations of language" and "hallucinatory public consciousness" (71, 72) with a national crisis in consciousness, a 'syndrome of shutdown' from which the United States as a nation was suffering at its nervous and emotional core. "The whole cold war is the imposition of a vast mental barrier on everybody, a vast antinatural psyche," according to Ginsberg; "A hardening, a shutting off of the perception of desire and tenderness which everybody *knows* and which is the very structure of… the atom!" ("*Paris Review* Interview" 285, emphasis in original). Commenting on the emotional closure of the Cold War, the poet even writes a letter to the *Wall Street Journal* in 1966: "Every American wants MORE MORE of the world and why not, you only live once," he writes, "But the mistake made in America is persons accumulate more and more dead matter, machinery, possessions and rugs and fact information at the expense of what really counts as more: feeling, good feeling, sex feeling, tenderness feeling, mutual feeling" ("Letter to the Wall Street Journal" n.pag).

It is this cultural situation, and its effects on non-conforming individuals, that Ginsberg powerfully denounces in the early howling long line of *Howl* and *Kaddish*. As Cold War literature scholars argue, American poetry written in this period becomes a locus for challenging and negotiating the boundaries between public and private, between state and self (see Brunner 2001; Nelson 2002). This resonates with Ginsberg's long line in both form and content. The bardic, Whitmanian long line, abounding in repetition, parallelism, and emotion, evokes the poet-prophets of the cultures and literatures in which it has been employed; as noted with reference to Whitman, chanting is an essential feature of indigenous expression. McGuinness also remarks that "The long line, generally, has been traditionally a public line, a symptom of the showman or the shaman, the poet on a raised surface: altar, stage, soapbox" (273). This section discusses developments in Ginsberg's line in his poetry from the 1960s. The poems which this section considers, especially "Wichita Vortex Sutra" and, to a lesser extent, "TV Baby," exemplify a different poetics, one which engages in a dialogue with the public sphere at a formal level. This brings Ginsberg to experiment with language and beyond language.

As the previous section has illustrated, poems such as *Howl* and *Kaddish* exemplify a crucial stage in Ginsberg's development of the long line, one in which the

poet finds an appropriate form for the sustained expression of strong emotion: the poems are unified by anaphora and repetition, and tap into the subconscious of the reader through visionary associations. Moreover, Ginsberg begins to consciously align breath, thought, and emotion in his works, incorporating aspects of physiology into his writing. He facilitates a coincidence between the formal and the physical in his poetry by embodying themes of the grotesque, leaking body in his unbound, subversive long lines. *Howl* mirrors an exuberant sexuality and *Kaddish* an unravelling body and mind. Ginsberg's works from the following decade ally composition and physiology in different ways; for example, more closely aligning breath and the line through different techniques, which include tape recording to facilitate the composition of the poem; paying increased attention to breath; and employing imitative rhythm (or expressive form) to reflect, in the poem, bodily movements and rhythms. Firstly, this section explores developments in Ginsberg's long line from a strictly formal point of view, in order to provide an insight into the poet's understanding and transformation of the long line over time.

Specifically, this section explores new formal changes to the long line in collage or cut-up poems. As Ramazani suggests, one valuable way of understanding twentieth-century American poetry is through its vexed relationship and dialogue with the genre of the news (123). Ginsberg's aim is to create new ways of understanding language, consciousness, and reality which elude the 'hallucinatory public consciousness' superimposed on individual 'natural' consciousness. "Quarrel with yourself. Your quarrels with yourself often make the best poems. Tell yourself your own secrets, and reveal yourself," Ginsberg insists: "The purpose of art is to provide relief from your own paranoia and the paranoia of others. You write to relieve the pain of others, to free them from the self-doubt generated by a society in which everyone is conniving and manipulating" (qtd. in Raskin xvi). The dive into the singular psyche leads Ginsberg to investigate the external influences of the 'hallucinatory public consciousness' on the individual; hence the exploration of the public sphere through the news. William Carlos Williams had already begun to incorporate the news into his poetry, stating that it offered "the precise incentive to epic poetry, the poetry of events" (Weaver 120) and to further ground poetry in its locality (see Ramazani 119). However, Ginsberg appears to employ the formal dialogue between poetry and the news in a manner that rather echoes Wallace Stevens's idea that poetry has the power

to resist the violent pressure of reality (especially in the context of war), that "It is a violence from within that protects us from a violence without. It is the imagination pressing back against the pressure of reality" (*The Necessary Angel* 36).

"Wichita Vortex Sutra" (1966), published in *Planet News: 1961-1967*, is arguably Ginsberg's most successful anti-war poem. Written in a collage of impressions and voices, the poem intermingles Ginsberg's own fantasies and thoughts with landscapes, advertising, and extracts from the radio. The poem was recorded on an Uher tape recorder while he was sitting in the back seat of the car, as Orlovsky drove through Kansas with the radio turned on:

> Thru Hickman's rolling earth hills
> icy winter
> gray sky bare trees lining the road
> South to Wichita
> you're in the Pepsi Generation Signum
> enroute
> Aiken Republican on the radio 60,000
> Northvietnamese troops now infiltrated but over 250,000
> South Vietnamese armed men
> our Enemy – (159-67).

The poem is particularly effective as a denunciation of the media's biased coverage of the war in Vietnam because, through the technique of the collage, it incorporates, and therefore reveals, that same language. In its reinterpretation and rearrangement of these impressions, it aims "to expose and demystify the warmakers' attempts to create public support for the conflict through media spin-doctoring and factual obfuscation" (Katz 152). At the same time, the poem creates a new language with which to speak of the Vietnam War, one which envisions a different future and which liberates itself from the news bombardment with which it has come to be identified. When the speaker says:

> I search for the language
> that is also yours
> almost all our language has been taxed by war ("Wichita Vortex Sutra" 485-87),

the speaker also means: “I call all Powers of imagination / to my side in this auto to make Prophecy” (515-16) so as to resist this taxation which has plagued language. This may be seen as a continuation of Williams’s “A new world / is only a new mind” (“To Daphne and Virginia” 34-35): “a new mind is only new words” (“An Exposition” 151).

As Rona Cran elaborates, in the poem, Ginsberg’s mind represents the national mind: it is always invaded by language – biased, charged language – but it attempts to resist, taking control of the fragmentation and abstraction of speech which is employed to obfuscate the facts of the war (680). Eliot Katz further suggests that the political distortions and advertising slogans that Ginsberg records were infiltrating American consciousness (and the speaker’s mind) in the same way that the United States was infiltrating Vietnam (152). The focus on language of the poem therefore originates from the speaker’s replication of the language of war and his attempts to formulate a new language. The technique of the collage, which operates on a basic linguistic level, highlights this relationship between form and content.

In depicting the invasion of a different language into the individual and collective psyche, the poem represents the violence perpetrated both on a concrete, large-scale, and (more or less) public level in Vietnam and the violence imposed on a more subtle level on the individual, through the media of communication technologies and journalism. The struggle for liberation from the latter affirms a liberation from the former at the climax of the poem, in which the speaker’s voice rises and resounds with exclamations, capitalisations, a prevalence of monosyllabic, accented words, and strong affirmation:

> I lift my voice aloud,
> make Mantra of American language now,
> I here declare the end of the War! (“Wichita Vortex Sutra” 545-47).

This is a magic language, just as “The war is language, / language abused / for Advertisement, / language used / like magic for power on the planet: / Black Magic language” (283-88). Navigating the power of words, Ginsberg brings in fragments of truth which challenge the war and its morality – “in 1954, 80% of the / Vietnamese people would’ve voted for Ho Chi Minh / wrote Ike years later” (177-79) – alongside

sadly representative contemporary fragments of journalism – "Omaha World Herald – *Rusk Says Toughness* / *Essential For Peace* […] Lincoln Nebraska morning Star – / *Vietnam War Brings Prosperity*" (216-17, 219-20, emphasis in original). As Ginsberg employs words to juxtapose truth and lies, he both reports the language of media of communication and formulates his own magic language – 'magic' in the sense of performative and Adamic in Whitman's sense, creative because creat-*ing*.

Germane to the purpose of this thesis is the way in which Ginsberg adopts and adapts Whitman's poetic language. "All words are spiritual," Whitman writes in *An American Primer* (1904), and "*names* are magic" (1, 18, emphasis in original). As scholars point out, Whitman's preoccupation with the power of words underlies his poetics (see Nolan 1994; Manganelli 2013). Whitman was in a sense the "primitive conjurer" (Matthiessen 556), the poet-shaman who utters and, through his utterance, brings to life: "The masters know the earth's words and use them," he writes in "Song of the Rolling Earth" (1856) (16). This poem is preoccupied with the essence of words, as the first lines already declare:

> A song of the rolling earth, and of words according,
> Were you thinking that those were the words, those upright lines? those curves, angles, dots?
> No, those are not the words, the substantial words are in the ground and sea,
> They are in the air, they are in you (1-4).

Whitman's treatment of words is therefore imbued with magic and incantation, exceeding linguistics in a narrower sense. Language emerges as the speaker's medium to extrapolate another – and Other – unutterable language:

> All merges toward the presentation of the unspoken meanings of the earth,
> Toward him who sings the songs of the body and of the truths of the earth,
> Toward him who makes the dictionaries of words that print cannot touch (99-101).

As Nolan notes, the magic and manifesting power of words is ancient and basic in essence: "The primitive function is to evoke by naming, as Adam does in the

prelapsarian garden" (72). This process corresponds to what John Langshaw Austin named performative language in his lectures *How to Do Things with Words* (1962): where constative speech acts are mere statements of facts, performative speech acts do not describe but rather perform, and aim to produce an effect. Whitman also incites the readers to follow him in his magic speech acts – an action which would not only contribute to making 'the dictionaries of words that print cannot touch,' but which would also enable humanity to build a new world:

> Say on, sayers! sing on, singers!
> Delve! mould! pile the words of the earth!
> Work on, age after age, nothing is to be lost,
> It may have to wait long, but it will certainly come in use,
> When the materials are all prepared and ready, the architects
> shall appear ("Song of the Rolling Earth" 121-25).

For Whitman, the importance of words and of speaking is related to voice: verbal expression, even in written form, allows the individual to give voice to those who would otherwise be unheard. These unheard ones may be spirits, in the case of the shaman, or the outcasts of society, in the case of the socialist poet (Gray 158). For Whitman, they seem to be both; the poet engages in constant exchanges with both the material world of humanity and the immaterial world of the spirit:

> Melange mine own, the unseen and the seen,
> Prophetic spirit of materials shifting and flickering around me,
> Living beings, identities now doubtless near us in the air that
> we know not of,
> Contact daily and hourly that will not release me ("Starting
> from Paumanok" 143-47).

In *Song of Myself*, Whitman gives voice to entities and people who would not usually find space in poetry. For instance, he reports the words of his soul as this speaks to him, as in the lines "And I said to my spirit *When we become the enfolders of those orbs, and the pleasure and knowledge of every thing in them, shall we be fill'd and satisfied then?* / And my spirit said *No, we but level that lift to pass and continue beyond*" (1221-22, emphasis in original). Through empathy and identification, he also reports the point of view of marginalised Others, such as slaves, as in the lines "I am

the hounded slave, I wince at the bite of the dogs, / Hell and despair are upon me, crack and again crack the marksmen" (838-39).

Ginsberg's use of language borrows from but also drastically differs from Whitman's. The main point of convergence lies in their shared belief in the power of words and in words' ability to change the world: to actuate a change in consciousness, in the reader and, by extension, in the world. Where Whitman seeks to achieve this *with* words – through the shamanic authority of his tone and utterance – Ginsberg also attempts to move *beyond* words, with the collage technique, which employs words in an active reinvention of meaning and reality. As Cran notes, collage is based on tearing apart and subsequently reassembling existing phenomena: the technique embodies a layered (physical, intellectual, and emotional) relationship with the environment on the part of the artist (670). Moreover, as a form, collage is an inherently deeply political practice, as it "subvert[s] traditional methodologies of reading and interpretation" and "evokes the performance of an autopsy, a historically public act of constructive mutilation dependent on incision and scrutiny to bring about the destruction of one accepted body (of meaning) and the creation of another" (671-72).

Collage also creates a "dialogic mass of voices" (Banash 89), opening the space (by cutting it up) to a multiplicity of perspectives. Where Whitman had begun to incorporate different voices in his work through an identification with them, Ginsberg reports these voices without that identification, but as they occur in reality. Ginsberg's poetry is thereby set more solidly in time and space – as a 'poetry of events,' to use Williams's phrase. Whereas Whitman's absorbent self includes all voices and selves – "And such as it is to be of these more or less I am, / And of these one and all I weave the song of myself," the poet states at the end of a long list of humanity (*Song of Myself* 328-29) – Ginsberg's voice maintains an individuality and concreteness. At the poem's culmination, his voice becomes stronger, more defined, and elevates itself above all others: "I here declare the end of the War!" ("Wichita Vortex Sutra" 547).

The speaker's voice reflects the struggle of the individual amid media noise. To show how overwhelming the news is, the poet lets it invade and occupy much of the poem; to show how biased it is, he juxtaposes it with facets and fragments of hidden truth; to show the personal attempt at liberation from this influence and control, he raises his voice among the others periodically, prophetically, in these moments

taking control of – and power over – all other voices, too. In this sense, the speaker's voice corresponds to "the violence from within that protects us from a violence without […] the imagination pressing back against the pressure of reality" (Stevens *The Necessary Angel* 36). When he began experimenting with collage, around 1961, Ginsberg was considering the problem of finding individual integrity amidst media chaos, in a '*planet news*':

> How escape rigidification and stasis of consciousness when man's mind is only words and these words and their images are flashed on every brain continuously by the interconnected networks of radio television newspapers wire services speeches decrees laws telephone books manuscripts? How escape control of Reality of the masses by the few who want and can take power, when this network is now so interconnected? ("Prose Contribution" 142).

Throughout the collage poem, the speaker's voice, with its Whitmanian authority, is heard. In 'Part I' of "Wichita Vortex Sutra," after introducing the setting, reflections, and fragments of landscape – "Turn Right Next Corner / *The Biggest Little Town in Kansas* / *Macpherson*" (1-3, emphasis in original) – the speaker's thoughts coalesce into a louder, more prophetic voice. Early on, this voice references Whitman – "Blue eyed children dance and hold thy Hand O aged Walt / who came from Lawrence to Topeka to envision / Iron interlaced upon the city plain" (25-27) – and progressively comes to *sound* like Whitman, with the same bardic self-proclaimed authority and sentiment: "O Man of America, be born! […] I am I / the lone One singing to myself / God come true –" (72, 119-21). "What if I opened my soul to sing to my absolute self," the speaker further wonders, "What if I sang, and loosed the chords of fear brow? […] I am the Universe tonite" he declares, taking on Whitman's tone and vocabulary (see words like 'One,' 'singing,' 'absolute,' 'self,' 'Universe') (124, 127, 130). Ginsberg further adds some of his own characteristically dryer and cynical humour: "What if I sang till Students knew I was free / of Vietnam, trousers, free of my own meat […] freer than Nebraska, freer than America –" (133-34, 136).

The speaker's language and tone become progressively stronger and sharper in 'Part II,' aiming to shake and emotionally affect the reader; "Has anyone looked in the eyes of the dead?" he asks:

Has anyone looked in the eyes of the wounded?
Have we seen but paper faces, Life Magazine?
Are screaming faces made of dots,
electric dots on Television –
fuzzy decibels registering
the mammal voiced howl (241, 248-53).

The next stanza opens, relentlessly, with a powerful opposition: "Stop, and eat more flesh. / 'We will negotiate anywhere anytime' / said the giant President" (258-60). Words such as 'flesh' and 'mammal' draw on the biological and animal world and still more strongly evoke dehumanisation. This technique is also deployed in *Howl*, in lines or phrases which refer to animals, and more specifically to animals as food, such as "the total animal soup of time," "who ate the lamb stew of the imagination or digested the crab at the muddy bottom of the rivers of Bowery," "who cooked rotten animals lung heart feet tail borsht & tortillas dreaming of the pure vegetable kingdom / who plunged themselves under meat trucks looking for an egg," and "Despair! Ten years' animal screams and suicides!" (72, 47, 52-53, 92). The language of the later poem is more visual, and apt to make deeper impressions on the reader, as it describes a dismemberment in which humans become livestock: "Flesh soft as a Kansas girl's / ripped open by metal explosion […] caught in a barbed wire, fire ball / bullet shock, bayonet electricity / bomb blast terrific in skull & belly, shrapneled throbbing meat" ("Wichita Vortex Sutra" 347-48, 350-52).

Whitman continues to be evoked throughout the poem, often with pathos: "Three five zero zero is numerals / Headline language poetry, nine decades after Democratic Vistas / and the Prophecy of the Good Grey Poet / Our nation of the 'fabled damned' / or else…" (269-73).[13] Before reaching its climax, "make Mantra of American language now" (546), the poem incorporates, as another facet of its collage, mantric elements and religious references which lend it a spiritual charge, create an

[13] "I say of all this tremendous and dominant play of solely materialistic bearings upon current life in the United States, with the results as already seen, accumulating, and reaching far into the future, that they must either be confronted and met by at least an equally subtle and tremendous force-infusion for purposes of spiritualization, for the pure conscience, for genuine esthetics, and for absolute and primal manliness and womanliness – or else our modern civilization, with all its improvements, is in vain, and we are on the road to a destiny, a status, equivalent, in its real world, to that of the fabled damned" (Whitman *Democratic Vistas* 128).

incantatory rhythm, and provide a larger (as large as civilisations, the poet suggests) perspective: the speaker calls upon Buddhist and Hindu holy men and deities, William Blake, and "merciful Chango judging our bodies / Durga-Ma covered with blood / destroyer of battlefield illusions / million-faced Tathagata gone past suffering / Preserver Harekrishna returning in age of pain / Sacred Heart my Christ acceptable / Allah the Compassionate One" (532-38). This new tone combines Whitman's chanting, repetitive rhythms with Ginsberg's polytheistic, chaotic spiritual drive to the result of a powerful, if violent, invocation which grows in emotional intensity. Throughout the poem – indeed, beginning with the title – there is a coexistence of East and West, as exemplified by lines such as "*Prajnaparamita Sutra* over coffee – Vortex / of telephone radio aircraft assembly frame ammunition / petroleum nightclub Newspaper streets illuminated by *Bright* / *EMPTINESS*" (39-42, emphasis added). Moreover, while Wichita commonly exemplifies conventional Americana, the sutra is a form of Buddhist wisdom literature based on Buddha's sermons. At least on the page, the poet can call forth an encounter between East and West which is intense and charged (*vortex*), but peaceful (*sutra*).

Concerning collage, writers such as Burroughs, Corso, O'Hara, and Pound had already been using this technique, which Burroughs called cut-up, underlying an even more physical relation with the text: the older Beat, in fact, would literally cut it up and rearrange it. Ginsberg's major inspiration for experimenting with this technique came from Burroughs, when he visited him in Tangiers in 1961: "I met someone I didn't know […] he was cutting up all known human feelings between us, and cutting up the newspapers, and cutting up Cuba & Russia & America & making collages; he was cutting up his own consciousness" he reports in "Prose Contribution to Cuban Revolution" (141). The title of this essay is misleading, as the poet has little insight into the Cuban Revolution, but rather expresses a distrust of language and society which leads him to argue for a complete revolution in consciousness: "Can any good society be founded, as all have been before and failed, on the basis of old-style human consciousness?" (142). His only imaginable solution to the failure of society is "widening the area of consciousness in all directions feasible" (143). He therefore suggests a cut-up in consciousness, which would be accompanied by a literal cut-up in words and in thoughts. Ginsberg's insight into this technique at the time illuminates

how he employs it in "Wichita Vortex Sutra," reaping the power of words by moving beyond their traditional use:

> It meant dropping language itself, *words*, as medium of consciousness. It meant literally altering consciousness outside of what was already the fixed habit of language-inner-thought-monologue-abstraction-mental-image-symbol-mathematical abstraction. It meant exercising unknown & unused areas of the physical brain […] But that's what I thought Poetry was doing all along! *But* the poetry I'd been practicing depended on living inside the structure of language, depended on words as the medium of consciousness (141, emphasis in original).

He even adds: "Perhaps we've reached point in human or unhuman evolution where art of words is oldhat dinosaur futile, & must be left behind" (142).

Ginsberg would not embrace the cut-up technique in Burroughs's extreme and impersonal manner. The two writers had different aims and purposes, and a different poetics, in spite of their collaborations and friendship. When Ginsberg's voice emerges among the collage of voices of "Wichita Vortex Sutra," it does so in a prophetic, Whitmanian tone, proclaiming himself "U.S. language chief" (qtd. in Schumacher 462) and announcing the end of the war. This underlies a profound belief in language and in words: Ginsberg cannot eschew the structure of language – after all, he still writes a poem which looks like a poem – but rather employs it in an innovative manner. Ginsberg's conception of language is Adamic and manifesting, a notion which was inspired by Whitman's poetry but also by his trip to India in 1963, where he observed the 'language of spirituality,' in stark contrast with the 'language of war' of the United States (Schumacher 460-62). His request in "Wichita Vortex Sutra" to "make Mantra of American language now" (456) comes from his experience of Hindu mantra. As he explains, in mantras, the names of the gods do not evoke the gods: they are *identical* with the gods themselves ("Reflections on the Mantra" 148). Ginsberg wanted to create a sequence of syllables and words which would correspond to and become identical with an imagined historical event, the end of the war ("Improvised Poetics" 46).

On an abstract, theoretical plane, this means creating a "force field of language which is so solid and absolute as a statement and a realization of an assertion by my will, conscious will power, that it will contradict – counteract and ultimately overwhelm the force field of language pronounced out of the State Department" (46). On a practical plane, it means giving people the opportunity to hear something with which they could identify and follow, releasing in them a recognition of the same thought, allowing the latent to come to the surface so that it might be acted upon. He wanted to make people say "*Oh yeah! That's what I think too! Why didn't I say that before? I didn't think you were supposed to say that, I thought you were supposed to think about it maybe, but not say it, publicly…*" and, essentially, "to see if that *one* assertion of language will precipitate another consciousness to make the same assertion, until it spreads and finally until there's a majority of the consciousnesses making the same assertion" (49, emphasis in original). Calling upon this practical magic, then, Ginsberg charges language – every word – with intention and purpose.

Together with bringing about the end of the Vietnam War, the poet aims to evoke and make real other situations; throughout his life, Ginsberg brought non-conforming topics and subjects to the mainstream sensibility, spanning madness, drugs, and homoeroticism, among many others. Like "Wichita Vortex Sutra," poems such as "Please Master" (1968) also make a new reality manifest; in this case, that of homosexual intercourse. The terms in which Ginsberg describes the act in the poem are both affectionate – of love and tenderness – and outspoken, so as to affirm that reality further, to let normally unspoken words and sentences enter public consciousness, so that people can say 'Oh yeah! That's what I think too! Why didn't I say that before? I didn't think you were supposed to say that,' and so on. The detailed visuality of the poem achieves the possibility of identification with gay intercourse, or any part of the intercourse described. Moreover, it normalises both the act and the accompanying feelings: no body part, action, emotion, or desire is taboo to the speaker. As these extracts show, the speaker celebrates sex and love between men, in an affirmation of the fact that no element of homosexuality (and sexuality at large too, as the sado-masochistic relationship here described also suggests), should be taboo:

> please master push me up, my feet on chairs, till my hole feels
> the breath of your spit and your thumb stroke
> please master make me say Please Master Fuck me now Please

> Master grease my balls and hairmouth with sweet vaselines
> please master stroke your shaft with white creams
> please master touch your cock head to my wrinkled self-hole
> […]
> O please master do fuck me like that
> in your rhythm thrill-plunge & pull-back-bounce & push down
> till I loosen my asshole a dog on the table yelping with terror
> delight to be loved
> Please master call me a dog, an ass beast, a wet asshole
> & fuck me more violent (26-30, 49-53).

The heavy reliance on repetition of the poem makes 'please master' a mantra, almost a song or a prayer. The poem effectively develops a chanting, incantatory structure and rhythm which celebrates homoeroticism and, like Hindu mantras which evoke deities and render them real in their chants, powerfully asserts homoeroticism as a reality (Schumacher 507).

Returning to "Wichita Vortex Sutra," the way in which the poem is written illustrates another stage in the development of Ginsberg's long line. The collage technique, which fragments the poem, cuts up the long lines into shorter units, repurposing a version of the use of indentation which Ginsberg used in other poems. In this poem, the method of composition and transcription dictates the spacing of the lines. Ginsberg first noted the piece using a tape recorder he had purchased with a $600 gift from Bob Dylan; this method was the same for most of the *Planet News* (1968) and all of *The Fall of America* (1973) collections. Ginsberg would click the microphone of the recorder on and off and on again when he had something to say; the clicks equate these pauses, which he would then transcribe with a longer or shorter indentation based on the length of the pause (Ginsberg "Improvised Poetics" 29-30). The result is a fidelity to the thought process which the poet had been attempting to recreate in his earlier poetry, now more accurately performed through technology. This method of composing poetry, which Ginsberg calls 'auto poesy,' allows him to both write more spontaneously and to be more accurate in the transcription of his thoughts. The lines, he explains, "are arranged according to their organic time-spacing as per the mind's coming up with the phrases and the mouth pronouncing them […] In other words this is like a form of Yoga: attempting to pronounce aloud the thoughts

that are going through the head" (29-30). Ginsberg's long line seems at this stage then to find a balance between Whitmanian swoop, Kerouacian notions of spontaneous expression, Williamsian fidelity to phenomena, and Poundian exactness and precision.

It is worth noticing how, in "Wichita Vortex Sutra," the line moves all over the page: its zig-zag from left, to right, to the center of the page reflects the lone consciousness of the poet driving through Kansas – both his physical movements and the movements of his thoughts. This also coincides with a cultural mapping, one which reports the press and the media landscapes of the Midwest. Indeed, Ginsberg describes *Planet News* as:

> chronicle taperecorded scribed by hand or sung condensed, the flux of car bus airplane dream consciousness Person during Automated Electronic War years, newspaper headline radio brain auto poesy & silent desk musings, headlights flashing on road through these States of consciousness (*The Fall of America*).

The equation of the 'states' of the United States with 'States of consciousness' points towards even more than a cultural, personal, and physical mapping: it suggests a mapping of the American psyche. A psychic mapping of sorts had been one of his preoccupations since his early exchanges with Williams, following the older poet's example and, later, following Kerouac's instructions for writing. Kerouac had been experimenting with transcribing tape recordings as (part of) his own writing since much earlier than Ginsberg, as he did in his book *Visions of Cody* (written in 1950-51, published in 1972), the second part of which consists largely of a transcription of recorded conversations with Neal Cassady. "Pray for me Jackie," Ginsberg told his tape recorder in 1965, revealing how much the recording method owed to his friend, "All I can do is think like you, write like you" (qtd. in Winner n.pag).

As in "Wichita Vortex Sutra," so, throughout the 1960s, Ginsberg's poetics expands to include elements of collage, experimentations beyond language *and* with the power of words, and observations on the relations between the individual and national mind. Other poems which may be discussed alongside "Wichita Vortex Sutra" include "TV Baby" (1961) and "Wales Visitation" (1967). "Wales Visitation" was not written in the cut-up technique, but was likewise composed in a reporting,

observational spirit. The poem is almost the opposite of a cut-up, as it is moved by a great unifying swoop, as this rolling, prolonged sentence demonstrates:

> A solid mass of Heaven, mist-infused, ebbs thru the vale,
> a wavelet of Immensity, lapping gigantic through Llanthony Valley,
> the length of all England, valley upon valley under Heaven's ocean
> tonned with cloud-hang,
> – Heaven balanced on a grassblade.
> Roar of the mountain wind slow, sigh of the body,
> One Being on the mountainside stirring gently
> Exquisite scales trembling everywhere in balance,
> one motion thru the cloudy sky-floor shifting on the million feet of
> daisies,
> one Majesty the motion that stirred wet grass quivering
> to the farthest tendril of white fog poured down
> through shivering flowers on the mountain's head (33-43).

Nature itself is the protagonist of the poem, which Ginsberg wrote in Wales and under the influence of LSD. The substance allowed the poet to eschew his habitual self-consciousness and self-doubt and calmly embrace both his surroundings and his own mind: "It had always seemed that *observation impeded function*," Ginsberg explains to Portugés in an interview, "in the sense that the desire to write a tremendous visionary poem on acid always plunged me into self-conscious hell" (121, emphasis in original). On the contrary, "Wales Visitation" achieves what the poet had been formally attempting in the late 1940s and early 1950s, with the *Empty Mirror* poems, that is, recording external phenomena without imposing judgement or interpretation. "I guess what I had come to was a realization that me making noise as poetry was no different from the wind making noise in the branches. It was just as natural," Ginsberg recalls; "for the first time I was able to exteriorize my attention instead of dwelling on the inner images and symbols […] The Wales trip was the first time there were no

heavy judgements to be made – it's just open consideration of the reality in front of me" (122).

Where "Wales Visitation" presents a lyrical long line, "TV Baby" ("Television Was a Baby Crawling Toward That Deathchamber") presents a more expressive form, albeit one which, like "Wichita Vortex Sutra," relies on media chaos and news bombardment in both its content and formal structure. One major difference is that, whereas, in "Wichita Vortex Sutra," the news is scattered throughout the text and juxtaposed with personal reflections, prophecy, landscapes, and religious invocations of deities, "TV Baby" directly superimposes a prophetic voice on what seems to be an unstoppable, unspooling stream of media expression. However, "TV Baby" may be also considered a cut-up poem, as several different voices are heard amid the prophetic tones (Schumacher 348). The poem figures a long, rambling line which length, as in *Howl*, corresponds to the vast, exhaustive span of thought and to the depth and 'spasm' of emotion. Similarly, it also corresponds to the gathering and exhalation of air necessary to pronounce it in one breath.

"TV Baby" employs one of the longest lines in Ginsberg's oeuvre, one which was also stimulated by a cocktail of heroin, methedrine, and psylocibin before writing. As the poem reveals at the very beginning, it presents 'a long train of associations' and thoughts as these come:

> It is here, the long Awaited bleap-blast light that Speaks one red tongue like Politician, but happy its own govt.,
> either we blow ourselves up now and die, like the old tribe of man, arguing among neutrons, spit on India, fuck Tibet, stick up America, clobber Moscow, die Baltic, have your tuberculosis in Arabia, wink not in Enkidu's reverie –
> it's a long Train of Associations stopped for gas in the desert & looking for drink of old-time H_2O – (1-3).

The poem, Ginsberg explains, imitates this train of associations in rhythm too, "a train that goes chugging on until it hits high speed" ("Improvised Poetics" 21). At the beginning, he illustrates, the lines are heavier, but they build up length and momentum until, towards five-sixths of the poem, they become shorter and broken up into halves;

then, the point of maximum intensity of the poem corresponds to an orgasm (21-23). These lines commence the section of "TV Baby" which precedes the climax:

> Now all sentience broods and listens – contemplative & hair
> full of rain for 15 years inside New York – what millions know
> and hark to hear, & death will tell, but –
> many strange magicians in buildings listening inside their own
> heads – or clouds over Manhattan Bridge – or strained thru
> music messages to – I Am from the central One! Come
> blow the Cosmic Horn to waken every Tiglon & Clown
> sentience throughout the vasting circus – in the Name of God
> pick up the telephone call Networks announcing Suchness
> That –
> I Am mutter a million old Gods in their beards, that had been
> sleeping at evening radios – cackling in their Larynx – Talking
> to myself again
> said the Messiah turning a dial to remember his last broadcast
> – I scare myself, I eat my hand, I swallow my own head, I stink
> in the inevitable bathroom of death this Being requires – O
> Widen the Area of Consciousness! (127-31).

In this passage, the dash combines thoughts which become increasingly disparate, and which are related through increasingly far-fetched and irrational connections. The effect is that the line appears to grow manic, hysterical, and that the poem's movement becomes faster and faster. In the terms of cognitive poetics, this renders the poem radically divergent. As noted above, the surrealist gaps between words which the poet pervasively employs in *Howl* render the poem divergent, but also stimulate the reader to find points of convergence, employing their subconscious and irrational thinking. In poems such as "TV Baby," these gaps become chasms that the common reader's mind can only attempt to bridge. Divergence is pushed to the limit. Spirituality and the media, two areas which do not usually overlap or interact, are expertly mixed in this section, as they are throughout the poem.

The dash as form of punctuation also suggests that a little breath may be taken, where the dash occurs, between sentences. Following the dashes, in the climactic section of the poem, the poet switches to an abundance of commas, so that "it's like a

series of staccato comes, spurts, within the line" and "the breathing there, if read aloud, would be like a heavily labored breathing, with like a gasp for breath after each comma" (Ginsberg "Improvised Poetics" 22):

> I am masturbating in my bed, I dreamed a new Stranger touched my heart with his eye,
> he hides in a sidestreet loft in Hoboken, the heavens have covered East Second Street with Snow,
> all day I walk in the wilderness over white carpets of City, we are redeeming ourself, I am born,
> the Messiah woke in the Universe, I announce the New Nation,
> in every mind, take power over the dead creation,
> I am naked in New York, a star breaks thru the blue skull of the sky out the window,
> I seize the tablets of the Law, the spectral Buddha and the spectral Christ turn to a stick of shit in the void, a fearful Idea ("TV Baby" 150-55).

In fact, immediately after the reference to masturbation comes an orgasmic release, which Ginsberg identifies as beginning with 'the heavens have covered East Second Street with Snow.' The poem then proceeds in alternating commas and dashes as punctuation, prolonging the orgasmic flow of thoughts until the end of the poem. Only after this long, orgasmic section do tranquillity and quietness return, as the speaker places himself back in his external surroundings, grounding himself in reality:

> That much illusion, and what's visions but visions, and these words filled Methedrine – I have a backache & 2 telegrams come midnight from messengers that cry to plug in the Electrode Ear to
> my skull downstreet, & hear what they got to say, big lives like trees of Cancer in Bronx & Long Island – Telephones connect the voids island blissy darkness scattered in many manmind – (177-78).

Poems such as "TV Baby" and "Wichita Vortex Sutra" – in fact, most of the poems from *Planet News: 1961-1967* and *The Fall of America: Poems of These States,*

1965-1971 – exemplify a key development in Ginsberg's poetics of the long line and in his conception of form. In "Wichita Vortex Sutra," Ginsberg establishes a prophetic, Whitmanian voice accompanied by a Whitmanian belief in the power of language, which he employs amidst the cacophonous, mediatic chaos of the news during the Vietnam War. This is achieved through the technique of collage. In "TV Baby," the prophetic voice is directly superimposed on mediatic – and mediatised – chaos. Like Whitman, Ginsberg takes on a shamanic, prophetic role, especially in "Wichita Vortex Sutra," in that his poetry aims to bring about a concrete change in the world; in this case, the end of the Vietnam War. The poet writes in accordance with the shamanic notion that "Art is the community's medicine for the worst disease of the mind, the corruption of consciousness" (Collingwood 336). Ginsberg's self-appointed role also corresponds to what Anne Waldman – a fellow poet and friend of Ginsberg's – would name the 'outrider': "The Outrider rides the edge – parallel to the main-stream, is the shadow to the mainstream, is the consciousness or soul of the mainstream whether the mainstream recognizes its existence or not […] the Outrider is a kind of shaman, the true spiritual 'insider'"; like a shaman, this individual "travels to edges of madness and death, and comes back to tell and enact the vivid stories" (185).

This section has traced how Ginsberg advanced, in the 1960s, in his project of embodiment in the long line. As noted above, "Wichita Vortex Sutra" was composed through a transcription of the poet's thoughts by means of a tape recorder, a technique which allowed him to arrange the lines "according to their organic time-spacing as per the mind's coming up with phrases and the mouth pronouncing them" (Ginsberg "Improvised Poetics" 29). This enabled a closer and more accurate coincidence than in *Howl* between breath, thought, and the line. In the poet's words, this was "like a form of Yoga" (30), which as a statement also anticipates more profound explorations of the embodiment of breath in his works, as the next section illustrates with reference to poems from *Mind Breaths*. Ginsberg refers to the wind as an analogy for breath to discuss his composition in "Wales Visitation," stating that he had understood that "me making noise as poetry was no different from the wind making noise in the branches" (Portugés 122). This poem embodies breath and consciousness in a spontaneous form which manifests as a long, swooping line which presents the reality the poet witnesses without imposing judgement on the scene. In "Wales Visitation," Ginsberg lets himself be overwhelmed by the external world and transcribes it as it comes to him;

in early poems, like "Marijuana Notation," Ginsberg had similarly attempted to transpose occurring phenomena and thought processes, as they happened, on the page.

An additional attempt at equating breath, thought, and emotion in the poem may be noted in "TV Baby," the remarkably long lines of which mirror a rambling and continuing span of thought, a frantic mental and emotional state, and, through expressive form, the physical occurrence of orgasm too. The line's length further corresponds to the inhale and exhale of one long breath, with punctuation such as dashes and commas indicating subtler breathing patterns as well as supporting imitative rhythm in the poem. These poems show how, although the formal identity of the long line changes over the decades, the poet's aim and intentions remain consistent. In these poems, too, Ginsberg's long line remains profoundly influenced by Williams and Pound, for attention to and precision in the recording of phenomena and thought, and by Kerouac, for orgasmic exhaustion in length and spontaneous expression.

Mind breaths all over the place

In discussing Ginsberg's formal developments of the long line, it might be worth noting that, in writing poetry, Ginsberg was, on many occasions, under the influence of psychoactive substances. Naturally, these affected his writing in different ways. It is to Portugés that he begins to explain the relations between the content and form of his poems and the drugs he was using while writing. Benzedrine, for example, led him to endless circular revisions which rendered the poems impossible to work with; cannabis rendered him more mindful of shifts in attention and consciousness; heroin made his poems mellow and, together with morphine, inspired many of his political poems in the 1960s (Portugés 109-14). It is not possible to know for sure if the poet was under any influence with some of the poems that this chapter has discussed, such as "Wichita Vortex Sutra." However, Ginsberg's early *Empty Mirror* poems were often composed under the influence of marijuana (and possibly other substances such as amphetamines); *Howl* was composed between ingesting peyote and amphetamines such as dexedrine; *Kaddish* was written under the influence of morphine, speed, amphetamines, and methamphetamines; writing "Wales Visitation," the poet was on LSD; and when composing "TV Baby," he was intravenously consuming heroin, methedrine, and psylocibin. In this sense, throughout Ginsberg's life, formal experimentation also equals experimentation with substances. Though the topic has begun to be explored with regard to Burroughs (see Harrop 2010), not much

aside from what has been said in interviews (as with Portugés 1978) has been noted on the connections between writing and substance use in Ginsberg. This may owe to the fact that Burroughs discussed his relationship with substances much more comprehensively, both in his life and in his works, clearly embedding the topic in his poetics. For the purpose of this thesis, it is worth noting that, in his poetry from the 1970s, Ginsberg becomes involved with a spiritual search which employs, rather than stronger mind-altering substances (he would continue to smoke cannabis), meditation and breathing techniques. Accompanied or spurred by Buddhist studies, it seems that he attempts to define, in his poetry, a more physiological and 'naturally occurring' embodiment in his lines.

After coming back from a long journey (of over two years) through India and Japan, which concluded with "The Change: Kyoto-Tokyo Express" (1963), Ginsberg read his works at a poetry conference in Vancouver. Fellow poet Robert Duncan pointed out that he was not using his body as much, in poetry, as he was when chanting mantras; this prompted Ginsberg's resolve to employ his body more, the more effectively to break "the barrier of fear of energy, or fear of expression" which was obstructing, for him, a more complete expression and embodiment of poetry (Ginsberg "First Thought" 106). One way to do this was to value breathing, in composition and expression, which the poet resolved to do in the following years and decade. In *Howl*, Ginsberg had begun, at least theoretically, to combine the length of the line, the thought, and the breath. He continued to do this, in a more practical manner, through the use of a tape recorder, with collections such as *Planet News* and *The Fall of America*. As Stefanie Heine notes, Ginsberg's contention that the length of the thought coincided with the length of the breath in his poetry is problematic, and his theories are often grounded in discourse, rather than in actual physiology (95). In fact, when writing poetry by hand, or on the typewriter, the poet would not have had the chance to overlap the physical need of drawing a breath with the span of the thought, because thoughts may be further prolonged, in the mind; therefore, Ginsberg's auto poesy experiments are the first instance in which he really embraces a technique of oral composition (93-95). After meeting and beginning a long friendship with Tibetan lama Chögyam Trungpa Rinpoche, in 1971, Ginsberg starts to experiment more deliberately with oral poetry. The teacher would spur the poet towards extemporaneous

composition, often pushing him to improvise on the spot, in both private and public contexts.

Another way in which Ginsberg attempts to foreground physiology in his poetry is through a focus on vocalisation, and employing the whole body in his readings. Mantra chanting would become the poet's cornerstone in any public appearance, and led him directly, almost naturally, into songwriting and singing, via the focus on the articulation of vowels of chanting (Portugés 131). Chanting, together with improvisation, helped him foreground a poetics which increasingly became oral and public. The long line, as the first chapter of this thesis has illustrated, is an ideal medium for this purpose. Ginsberg would show an emphasis on poetry as spoken through the use of intentional, rather than stress-based, meter when performing poetry (as found by Patrick Dunn's study of several performances of Ginsberg's; see Dunn 2007). Ginsberg would trace this 'intentional meter' back to Ezra Pound. Referring to tapes he had found of Pound reading his poetry, Ginsberg notes how, in his performance, "every syllable is intentional" and the line is condensed to its essential elements: "If you condense it all down to what you mean to say, then you can make a music out of the intentional and significant… syllables. And you can *pay attention to the tone-leading of the vowels*," he remarks; "It's not pay-attention-to-the-tone, but you can pay attention because EACH THING… MEANS… SOME… THING. And that […] gives a density to the line" ("Improvised Poetics" 32-33, emphasis in original). This intentional meter Ginsberg named 'vowel-length consciousness,' owing to the intentionality and purpose of every syllable in this mode (which he finally equates with 'good poetry' in general) (36-37).

Vocalisation might be considered another step in the process of externalisation and attention to what happens *outside* of the body. As noted, the poet had begun to develop this focus with poems such as "The Bricklayer's Lunch" or "Wales Visitation." Whereas in the former he refrained altogether from judgement or superimposition of thought, in the latter he allowed the mind and his attention to freely, 'naturally,' externalise, in the realisation that, in his words, "making noise as poetry was no different from the wind making noise in the branches" (Portugés 122). In an interview discussing mantra chanting, Ginsberg and Portugés agree that chanting consists of a sort of surrender to the surrounding (empty) space; "surrendering to the inevitability of day or night and seeing other people there," adds Ginsberg (132).

Surrendering, and opening, to empty space becomes the norm for the poet: in meditation, in chanting, and in poetry. From 1972, under the guidance of Trungpa, Ginsberg specialises in samatha meditation. This consists of the practice of mindfulness, or wakefulness, with the addition of a specific attention to the breath as it leaves the nostrils, moves into the surrounding space, and finally dissolves, beginning anew from the nostrils; in this sense, it is a meditation of egolessness (as it focuses on what happens outside of the body, rather than inside) and an exercise in continuous attention (135-36).

A simple poem which well exemplifies this exercise in constant awareness and observation is "On Cremation of Chögyam Trungpa, Vidyadhara" (1987), which Ginsberg wrote on the occasion of the cremation ceremony of his guru. Of the poem's 34 lines, 27 commence with the anaphora 'I noticed' (or, sometimes, 'Noticed' or 'I've noticed'), and of the other seven, four still contain the anaphoric word further down in the line. Here, as in *Howl*, anaphora anchors Ginsberg's thought; in this poem, however, the device presumably owes to the Buddhist focus of 'paying attention to paying attention' rather than a unifying impulse. Here, Ginsberg is a disciple who mourns and records, rather than a young poet preoccupied with composition. The poem begins with a view of the setting and surrounding: "I noticed the grass, I noticed the hills, I noticed the highways, / I noticed the dirt road; I noticed the car rows in the parking lot" (2). The poem focuses on the concrete details of the ceremony, capturing various sights, but also includes thoughts which pass through the speaker's mind, such as, in the middle of the poem, "I noticed the guru was dead" (16), and a mindful return to the personal physiology, "I noticed my own heart beating, breath passing through my nostrils" (22). This poem shows, to some extent, a coincidence between breath, thought, and the line. For instance, "I noticed the guru was dead" (16) is the shortest line in the poem, significantly shorter than the other ones: it reads like a renewed realisation, an almost breath-taking revelation. It takes place in the middle of the poem and it lies at the center – the heart – of the poem as well. After this line, the poem resumes its longer breaths and thought rhythms.

With regard to breath and line length, this thesis has previously suggested that an expansion into space may be considered a characteristic feature of American writing. As Tanner remarks, American authors exhibit a centrifugal movement into surrounding space which comes from their exposure to a sense of geographical sense

of vastness ("Notes for a Comparison" 86). Moreover, the internal differences of the United States also stimulate the writer to expand (through 'the wondering vision,' which finds form in the catalogue) into surrounding space as a method of inclusion, the assimilation of variety (Tanner *The Reign of Wonder* 10). Ginsberg's poems from *Mind Breaths: Poems, 1972-1977*, as the title poem ("Mind Breaths All Over the Place") suggests, reflect exactly such an expansion 'all over the place' through breath, meditation, and long lines – and some coincidence between these three. "Mind Breaths" (1973) exemplifies thought and lines moving externally, outwards, from the nostrils of the speaker, through the streets outside the window, through the geographical United States, to the other sides of the ocean and every corner of the world, and finally back to the speaker in Teton Village. The poem reflects the exercise in attention which, in meditation, is brought to the breath, its exhalation, movement, dissolution, and new beginning; the poem begins and ends in the same place, in a renewal of attention to the speaker's physiology.

The poem starts by briefly setting the speaker in place and time and by shifting the focus to his breath. Significantly, this appears to become longer as the lines also progressively become longer throughout the poem. Thus, a first coincidence between line and breath, through length, is established:

> Thus crosslegged on round pillow sat in Teton Space –
> I breathed upon the aluminum microphone-stand a body's length away
> I breathed upon the teacher's throne, the wooden chair with yellow pillow
> […]
> breathed outward over aspen twigs trembling September's top
> yellow leaves twilit at mountain foot (1-3, 8).

The first lines employ 'I breathed' or 'breathed' as anaphora, but after eight lines the word becomes implicit, leaving only the prepositions of place and movement which normally follow the word. The prominent use of these prepositions echoes Whitman's lists, employed by the poet to highlight both an overhead vision and large spans of movement, especially in 'Section 33' of *Song of Myself*, which contains the longest and most descriptive lists of the long poem. Anaphoric or repeated words which

Whitman uses throughout ‘Section 33’ include ‘over,’ ‘along,’ ‘by,’ ‘upon,’ ‘at,’ ‘down,’ ‘to,’ and ‘through.’ This may be noted, for example, in this extract:

> Under Niagara, the cataract falling like a veil over my countenance,
> Upon a door-step, upon the horse-block of hard wood outside,
> Upon the race-course, or enjoying picnics or jigs or a good game of base-ball,
> At he-festivals, with blackguard gibes, ironical license, bull-dances, drinking, laughter,
> At the cider-mill tasting the sweets of the brown mash, sucking the juice through a straw (749-53).

The lines of “Mind Breaths” are similarly descriptive and detailed, but do not continuously use strict anaphora or repetition at the beginning of the line, resulting in still greater spontaneity:

> out towards Reno’s neon, dollar bills skittering downstreet along the curb,
> up into Sierras oak leaves blown down by fall cold chills
> over peaktops snowy gales beginning,
> a breath of prayer down on Kitkitdizze’s horngreen leaves close to ground,
> over Gary’s tile roof, over Montgomery Street, pigeons flutter down before sunset from Washington Park’s white churchsteeple (15-19).

After following the journey of his breath, the poet returns to the first image of the poem, re-setting the time and place; Teton Village, September:

> a breath returns vast gliding grass flats cow-dotted into Jackson Hole, into a corner of the plains,
> up the asphalt road and mud parking lot, a breeze of restless September, up wood stairways in the wind
> into the cafeteria at Teton Village under the red tram lift
> a calm breath, a silent breath, a slow breath breathes outward from the nostrils (51-54).

In this way, Ginsberg achieves a coincidence between breath and line not only in the content, but also in the form of the poem. He achieves this through embodying, in the length of the line, the length of the breath, and through imitating, in the poem, what happens in his breathing meditation: focus originates in the exhalation of breath through the nostrils, moves into the surrounding empty space in Whitmanesque motion of recording of existence, and comes back to the nostrils with a new breath.

Another poem in which Ginsberg emphasises movement in vision, in a manner similar to Whitman, is "Thoughts on a Breath" (1975). In this poem's lines, the poet foregrounds the prepositions of place by removing syntactical elements such as conjunctions, which might hinder the flow, and by predominantly using verbs which indicate movement (such as 'slide,' 'roll up,' 'roll,' and 'rise'):

> Cars slide minute down asphalt lanes in front of Dallas Hilton Inn
> or roll up toward the city's squared towers under electric-wire trestles gridded cross countried trees brown bare in December's smog-mist towards the water tower
> distanced under cloud streak crossed with fading vapor trails.
> Majestic rolling in a skirt of human fog, building blocks rise at sky edge (1-4).

Significantly, "Thoughts on a Breath," like other poems in *Mind Breaths* such as "News Bulletin" (1973) and "Thoughts Sitting Breathing" (1973), continues to incorporate the news into its lines, as Ginsberg's poems from the 1960s characteristically did. "Thoughts on a Breath" (1975) depicts a meditating mind angered by current affairs: after describing meditative practices – "I sat again to complete the cycle, eyes open seeing dust motes in the eye screen" (6) – the speaker's mind wanders: "What Was it I began my meditation on? // Police state, Students, Poetry open tongue, and the anger and Fear of the Cops, / the oil Cops, the Rockefeller Cops, the Oswald Cops, the Johnson Cops the Nixon Cops the president Cops" (13-15). As in other poems such as "TV Baby," the mention of orgasm (although, in this case, a less pleasant one) reflects a climax in the poem; here, one in which a mounting, overwhelming rage starts to transform into compassion and understanding:

> Nothing but massive metal bars about, monster machines that eat us, Controlled by the army the Cops, the Secret police, our own thoughts!
> Punishment! Punish me! Punish me! we scream in our hearts, cocks spurting alone in our fists!
> What thoughts more flowed thru our hearts alone in Dallas? (21-23).

The poem then concludes on an elevated, renewed note: "Sentient beings are numberless I vow to liberate all" (53).

"Thoughts Sitting Breathing" is exemplary of the incorporation of the news, or of contemporary political and social contexts, into an openly spiritual poem. Structurally, this poem comprises three sections, the lines of each of which begin with a syllable from *om manipadmi hum*, a mantra associated with Avalokiteshvara and the path of compassion. With every mantra chanting cycle, the speaker becomes calmer and reaches some form of conciliation with the current state of affairs. The first chant is the angriest: an excerpt reads: "OM – the pride of perfumed money […] MA – How jealous! the million Pentagon myrmidons with dollar billions […] DMI – alone the misery, the broken legs of carcrash alcohol, gimme another cigarette, I ain't got a dime for coffee," and "HUM – the pigs got rocks in their head, C.I.A. got one eye bloody mind tongue […] hate Gook Heaven, hate them hippies in Hell" (1, 2, 5, 6). The second chant transcends the first one and becomes more compassionate or understanding: "OM – Give it all away, poetry bliss & ready cash […] MA – sit down crosslegged and relax […] DMI – I forgive thee Cord Meyer secret mind police," and "HUM – Miserable victims flashing knives" (7, 8, 11, 12).

The third chant further transcends rage and both calls for and embraces a spiritual elevation, repeating at the end of each line the anaphoric phrase 'free space for Causeless Bliss' like a prayer, or an invocation:

> OM – the Crown of Emptiness, relax the skullcap wove of formal thought, let light escape to Heaven, floating up from the heart thru cranium, free space for Causeless Bliss –
> MA – Speech purified, worlds calmed of alcoholic luxury & irritable smoking […]

> NI – How vast, how brightly empty and how old, the breath within the breast expands threefold, the sigh of no restraint, sigh love's release, the rest and peacefulness of sweetheart's ease, from Heart to Heart – free space for Causeless Bliss! (13-15).

The third and final mantra cycle also presents an imagined physical release and liberation in the final syllable of the mantra:

> HUM – I shit out my hate thru my asshole, My sphincter loosens the void, all hell's legions fall thru space, the Pentagon is destroyed
> […]
> I loose my bowels of Asia
> I move the U.S.A.
> I crap on Dharmakaya
> And wipe the worlds away (18, 23-26).

This adds an element of humorous release to the poem and might also (again humorously) suggest the speaker's own *physiological* creation of 'free space for causeless bliss,' which then becomes a literal as well as metaphysical action. Moreover, the grotesque body seems in this case to accompany a grotesque individuality, as in *Kaddish*, but more positively: where in *Kaddish* the dissolution of the body was accompanied by the dissolution of identity in the sense of madness, here it is rather related to a dissolution of the self into empty ecstasy, or enlightenment.

As this thesis has noted, grotesqueness and the unravelling of the body are commonly symbolic of processes which occur within the self. This unravelling finds a reflection in form, as these lines break the form of the poem, which was otherwise neatly structured following the syllables of the mantra in three chants, with the use of anaphora at the end of each line in the last cycle. Looseness in the body therefore accompanies looseness in form, in the lines. "Thoughts Sitting Breathing," similarly to *Howl* and *Kaddish*, therefore embodies physicality in different ways: through expressive form at the end of the poem, in a grotesque physical, emotional, and spiritual release, and by cleverly combining form and content in the lines so that the repetition of a mantra accompanies a transcendence in the speaker's mind. Associated

with the path of compassion, the Hindu mantra *om manipadmi hum* brings about a renewed compassion in the speaker as he utters and breathes each syllable and each line.

This process of self-transcendence in poetry, which the poet primarily achieves through breathing exercises and meditation, was probably inspired by Trungpa's analogy of the telescope. Ginsberg's guru, Trungpa instructed the poet to employ meditation to build on and layer thoughts, comparing the practice to continuously opening a telescope, further enlarging the same image (Schumacher 577). This may clearly be noted in "Thoughts Sitting Breathing," as the repetitive structure of the poem also indicates a repetition in thought which slowly changes each time. The telescope technique may also be noted in "Mind Breaths," as, in the poem, each breath leads the speaker a little further in the world, and each line builds upon the preceding one as it moves both the speaker and the poem further on. Another poem in which this effect may be observed is "Ego Confession" (1974). Here, the speaker constantly transcends himself (or rather attempts to transcend himself), with humorous contradiction – "I want to be known as the most brilliant man in America," he begins, later repurposing this as "his extraordinary ego, at service of Dharma and completely empty" (1, 14). "I want to be the spectacle of Poesy triumphant over trickery of the world," he also declares; "– All empty all for show, all for the sake of Poesy" (18, 31). In a 1978 review of *Mind Breaths*, American poet Hayden Carruth similarly describes "Ego Confession" as an example of self-transcendence. The poem, he believes, consists of a relentless mockery, both of confessional poetry, of the poet, and of the reader; "Yet the mockery transcends itself," he continues, "not at the end of the poem, but all the way through, each statement moving in a process of self-transcension toward the higher compassionate understanding that makes our silliness sane, our pathos holy, our 'ego confessions' authentic significations of human spiritual desire" (n.pag).

A final, clear exemplar of the technique of the opening telescope as envisioned by Trungpa may be found in "Teton Village" (1973):

> Snow mountain fields
> seen through transparent wings
> of a fly on the windowpane (1-3).

Like the longer lines of other *Mind Breaths* poems, these lines build upon each other, reflecting an expansion into space of the vision of the speaker which is accompanied by a deepening attention and a sharper focus. The lines of this collection are *all over the place*, literally, as they expand in length and expand into space, coinciding with the poet's breath and consciousness with a new mindful, embodying, transcending and self-transcending quality.

Part IV: Conclusion

> It's an old tradition in the West among great poets that poetry is rarely thought of as "just poetry." Real poetry practitioners are practitioners of mind awareness, or practitioners of reality, expressing their fascination with a phenomenal universe and trying to penetrate to the heart of it.
>
> Allen Ginsberg

"All that I have done has a program, consciously or not, running on from phase to phase," Ginsberg wrote in his letter to William Carlos Williams in 1950, "from the beginnings of emotional breakdown, to momentary raindrops from the clouds become corporeal, to a renewal of human objectivity which I take to be ultimately identical to no ideas but in things" (qtd. in Williams *Paterson, Book 3* 204). This statement precedes the composition of most of the poems published in *Empty Mirror*. However, throughout his life, Ginsberg continued to value Williams's advice and the older poet remained an important influence, as later poems such as "Written in My Dream by W. C. Williams" (1984) suggest. Often, in the more experimental poems of *Empty Mirror*, Ginsberg's lines follow Williams's instruction to find 'no ideas but in things' through a direct treatment of the object or phenomena observed, which does not attempt to impose judgement or philosophy, as in "The Bricklayer's Lunch." Other poems, such as "Marijuana Notation," exemplify the poet's attempt to describe thought processes as they occur, paying attention to internal realities and landscapes. These poems exhibit a switch, towards the end, in perception: often, a switch from a smaller, or internal panorama to a larger, or external panorama. Significantly, this process recalls the analogy of the opening telescope which has been discussed with relation to the poems from *Mind Breaths*.

According to Ginsberg, this switch emulates and stimulates a switch in consciousness. This technique develops and becomes more surrealist in later poems such as *Howl*, where the poet pairs words, such as 'hydrogen jukebox,' which do not rationally match, charging them with a visionary quality. The reader must deploy their imagination to combine them, finding convergence in an emotional, irrational divergence. The long line of *Howl* therefore calls for and brings forth more subconscious, visionary instincts. This line is expressive in that its length coincides, at least in theory, with thought, emotion, and breath; according to the poet, "Ideally each line of Howl is a single breath unit… – that's the Measure, one physical-mental

inspiration of thought contained in the elastic of a breath" (Allen *The New American Poetry* 416). Some lines which are dedicated to Carl Solomon, such as "returning years later truly bald except for a wig of blood, and tears and fingers, to the visible madman doom of the wards of the madtowns of the East" (69), or "I'm with you in Rockland / where you bang on the catatonic piano the soul is innocent and immortal it should never die ungodly in an armed madhouse" (116-17), testify to the poem's emotional power, which is maximised in that the lines' expressions of feelings prolong themselves in a long 'howl,' through alluvials, in spermatic exhaustions of 'thought spurts.'

Moreover, following Whitman, Ginsberg employs the form of the list with the aid of anaphora: this provides unity to the poem, which allows the poet to explore his mind and feelings freely in the lines. At the same time, this enables the poem, which would otherwise be dispersive, to assume a more 'habitable' form. Repetition also establishes rhythm, and, enhanced by irrational, non-linear thinking, helps sustain the characteristically frantic quality of Ginsberg's long line. The poet includes, in the poem (here referring to himself), a compelling definition of his technique and practice at this time:

> and who therefore ran through the icy streets obsessed with a sudden flash of the alchemy of the use of the ellipsis catalogue a variable measure and the vibrating plane,
> who dreamt and made incarnate gaps in Time & Space through images juxtaposed, and trapped the archangel of the soul between 2 visual images and joined the elemental verbs and set the noun and dash of consciousness together jumping with sensation of Pater Omnipotens Aeterna Deus
> to recreate the syntax and measure of poor human prose and stand before you speechless and intelligent and shaking with shame, rejected yet confessing out the soul to conform to the rhythm of thought in his naked and endless head (*Howl* 73-75).

More concretely, Ginsberg combines thought and breath in his compositional method, which he names auto poesy, in the *Planet News* and *The Fall of America* collections: here, he records his poetry before transcribing it onto the page, attempting

to recreate, formally and visually, through indentation, the poem as it was composed in his mind. “Wichita Vortex Sutra,” from *Planet News*, represents the consciousness of the speaker as he drives through Kansas, intermingling physical, mediatic, and mental landscapes. The poem emerges as a map both of the United States (the physical nation, the national consciousness, and the dominant culture) and of the speaker (his movements, his utterances, and his psyche). Ginsberg’s attention to the particular manifests in this poem in the detailed, objective transcribing of external phenomena and of consciousness. The dialogic mass of voices, belonging to the media, invades the poem through the form of the collage, which allows for the representation of an individual voice, the speaker’s, as it struggles to liberate itself from the mediatic confusion. This voice, with its Whitmanian tone and belief in the power of language, rises above all others, taking control of chaos and fragmentation, prophetically declaring the end of the war. Words and intention coincide.

Like “Wichita Vortex Sutra,” “TV Baby” embeds the genre of the news in the poem; however, rather than reporting a variety of voices, it superimposes the prophetic, Whitmanian tone on the stream of media ramble. The interplay between this voice and this style creates a manic, humorous, almost hysterical long line. The form of the poem is expressive in that it imitates, in rhythm, the increasing speed of a train and of pleasure: in fact, the poet also recreates, through syntax (especially punctuation) and line length, the impression of a sexual climax. Moreover, the frantic quality of the poem owes to gaps between words, phrases, and sentences which are even more divergent than in *Howl*: the visionary purpose is maintained, but the associations are farther apart, more irrational and unconscious. “Wales Visitation” more closely follows Williams’s axiom ‘no ideas but in things,’ through detailed observation of the external world, specifically nature, and of the mind’s movements in nature, the speaker’s thoughts: as the poet recalls, “I was able to exteriorize my attention” (Portugés 122).

Throughout the 1970s, Ginsberg refines this process of ‘exteriorisation of attention’ through samatha meditation, which consists of a breath-focused meditation on expansion into the surrounding empty space. The poet begins to combine the physiological notions of breath and vocalisation with his thought as his poetry becomes “expression in really the easiest and most natural way of your own nature, which is by breathing, and making a sound while breathing. Just like the wind makes

a sound in the leaves" (Ginsberg "First Thought" 109). The long line expands on the space of the page as breath expands into the surrounding space; following Trungpa's suggestion, like a telescope which opens endlessly. Thoughts and lines build upon each other, layer after layer, as can be seen in "Mind Breaths."

This chapter has also shown how, alongside exploring and formally developing the long line, Ginsberg continues to experiment with embodiment in his poetry. Moving beyond the hermetic, disembodied nature of his early poems, he begins, in *Howl* and *Kaddish*, to embody his breath, thought, and emotion in the line, attempting to replicate, in form, breathing patterns which convey specific feelings. In *Howl*, the poet further embeds physicality in the poem by supporting his free, boundless line with visions of liberation and of exuberant (homo)sexuality. In *Kaddish*, the physicality described is more grotesque, as it depicts the physical – and psychological – undoing of the poet's mother. The poem's line here reflects, in its own prolonged unravelling, a grotesque transgression of limits and an openness to difference. In "Wichita Vortex Sutra," as in *Howl*, the poem's line maps the psyche of the speaker, together with his movements across the country. In this poem, this is accomplished through recording the poem as it comes to the mind and then transcribing it on the page accordingly. Ginsberg further experiments with language by embedding, in the poem, the chaotic stimuli of the news, as he also does in other poems such as "TV Baby." Through expressive form, "TV Baby" reflects a broken, frenzied physicality which climaxes in an imagined orgasm; "Wales Visitation," on the other hand, expressively attempts to represent the movements of the mind in the surrounding space. This attempt is made again in the *Mind Breaths* poems. These Buddhist-inspired poems faithfully follow both the mental and breathing processes of the speaker, replicating these on the page through line length and mindful recording of thoughts. In "Thoughts Sitting Breathing," meditation allows the poet to transcend both reality and himself in a final, humorous grotesqueness which renders both his self and his body wide open. Ginsberg's long line facilitates exchanges between the physical and the formal in the poem, allowing these realms, in their most successful moments, to coincide.

A tension emerges in the shifting balance, across the poet's oeuvre, between the personal and the political, the private and the public, the internal and the external, the particular and the universal, the spiritual and the social. The poet's continuous

search for an increasingly open form progresses alongside his explorations of open topics, in which the facts of existence, death, politics, consciousness, the individual, society, the news, and sexuality intermingle. The long line becomes Ginsberg's preferred medium exactly because it allows him to capture this variety, vastness, and depth – of life as much as of thought and of heart – the "great inclusiveness of the mind that can enjamb – put in one breath a great many associations" ("A Conversation 96). In the poet's words, the tradition of the open form, indeed, "was this tremendous beauty of outpouring, really, the full heart" (97). "Ginsberg has made 'too much' the affair of his life," aptly comments Paul Zweig; "Like Whitman, Blake, Traherne, Rabelais, he has enacted what he means to say: 'I am the greatest lover in the Universe.' It is the mystery of seeing, not judging, of understanding, and not discriminating" (196).

Coda

Improvisation in Beijing

I write poetry because the English word Inspiration comes from Latin Spiritus, breath, and I want to breathe freely.
I write poetry because Walt Whitman gave world permission to speak with candor.
I write poetry because Walt Whitman opened up poetry's verse-line for unobstructed breath.
I write poetry because Ezra Pound saw an ivory tower, bet on one wrong horse, gave poets permission to write spoken vernacular idiom.
I write poetry because Pound pointed young Western poets to look at Chinese writing word pictures.
I write poetry because W.C. Williams living in Rutherford wrote New Jerseyesque "I kick yuh eye," asking, how measure that in iambic pentameter?
I write poetry because my father was a poet my mother from Russia spoke Communist, died in a mad house.
I write poetry because young friend Gary Snyder sat to look at his thoughts as part of external phenomenal world just like a 1984 conference table.
I write poetry because I suffer, born to die, kidneystones and high blood pressure, everybody suffers.
I write poetry because I suffer confusion not knowing what other people think.
I write because poetry can reveal my thoughts, cure my paranoia also other people's paranoia.
I write poetry because my mind wanders subject to sex politics Buddhadharma meditation.
I write poetry to make accurate picture my own mind.
I write poetry because I took Bodhisattva's Four Vows: Sentient creatures to liberate are numberless in the universe, my own greed anger ignorance to cut thru's infinite, situations I find myself in are countless as the sky okay, while awakened mind path's endless.
I write poetry because this morning I woke trembling with fear what could I say in China?

I write poetry because Russian poets Mayakovsky and Yesenin committed suicide, somebody else has to talk.

I write poetry because my father reciting Shelley English poet & Vachel Lindsay American poet out loud gave example – big wind inspiration breath.

I write poetry because writing sexual matters was censored in United States.

I write poetry because millionaires East and West ride Rolls-Royce limousines, poor people don't have enough money to fix their teeth.

I write poetry because my genes and chromosomes fall in love with young men not young women.

I write poetry because I have no dogmatic responsibility one day to the next.

I write poetry because I want to be alone and want to talk to people.

I write poetry to talk back to Whitman, young people in ten years, talk to old aunts and uncles still living near Newark, New Jersey.

I write poetry because I listened to black Blues on 1939 radio, Leadbelly and Ma Rainey.

I write poetry inspired by youthful cheerful Beatles' songs grown old.

I write poetry because Chuang-tzu couldn't tell whether he was butterfly or man, Lao-tzu said water flows downhill, Counfucius said honor elders, I wanted to honor Whitman.

I write poetry because overgrazing sheep and cattle Mongolia to U.S. Wild West destroys new grass & erosion creates deserts.

I write poetry wearing animal shoes.

I write poetry "First thought, best thought" always.

I write poetry because no ideas are comprehensible except as manifested in minute particulars: "No ideas but in things."

I write poetry because the Tibetan Lama guru says, "Things are symbols of themselves."

I write poetry because newspapers headline a black hole at our galaxy-center, we're free to notice it.

I write poetry because World War I, World War II, nuclear bomb, and World War III if we want it, I don't need it.

I write poetry because first poem Howl not meant to be published was prosecuted by the police.

I write poetry because my second long poem Kaddish honored my mother's parinivana in mental hospital.
I write poetry because Hitler killed six million Jews, I'm Jewish.
I write poetry because Moscow said Stalin exiled 20 million Jews and intellectuals to Siberia, 15 million never came back to the Stray Dog Café, St. Petersburg.
I write poetry because I sing when I'm lonesome.
I write poetry because Walt Whitman said, "Do I contradict myself? Very well then I contradict myself (I am large, I contain multitudes.)"
I write poetry because my mind contradicts itself, one minute in New York, next minute the Dinaric Alps.
I write poetry because my head contains 10,000 thoughts.
I write poetry because no reason no because.
I write poetry because it's the best way to say everything in mind within 6 minutes or a lifetime.

Allen Ginsberg, 1984.

Appendix

Lines from *Song of Myself* which figure the phrase ‘I am’:

It is for my mouth forever, I am in love with it,
I am mad for it to be in contact with me.
Knowing the perfect fitness and equanimity of things, while they discuss I am silent, and go bathe and admire myself.
I am satisfied – I see, dance, laugh, sing;
Apart from the pulling and hauling stands what I am,
I believe in you my soul, the other I am must not abase itself to you,
I am not an earth nor an adjunct of an earth,
I am the mate and companion of people, all just as immortal and fathomless as myself,
I am there, I help, I came stretch’d atop of the load,
I am enamour’d of growing out-doors,
And such as it is to be of these more or less I am,
I am of old and young, of the foolish as much as the wise,
I know I am solid and sound,
I know I am deathless,
I know I am august,
I exist as I am, that is enough,
I am the poet of the Body and I am the poet of the Soul,
I am the poet of the woman the same as the man,
I am he that walks with the tender and growing night,
I am integral with you, I too am of one phase and of all phases.
I am he attesting sympathy,
I am not the poet of goodness only, I do not decline to be the poet of wickedness also.
I am cut by bitter and angry hail, I lose my breath,
I am given up by traitors,
I am afoot with my vision.
I am a free companion, I bivouac by invading watchfires,
I am the man, I suffer’d, I was there.
I am the hounded slave, I wince at the bite of the dogs,
I am the mash’d fireman with breast-bone broken,

They show as the dial or move as the hands of me, I am the clock myself.
I am an old artillerist, I tell of my fort's bombardment,
I am there again.
In at the conquer'd doors they crowd! I am possess'd!
Not a mutineer walks handcuff'd to jail but I am handcuff'd to him and walk by his side,
(I am less the jolly one there, and more the silent one with sweat on my twitching lips.)
Askers embody themselves in me and I am embodied in them,
I am not to be denied, I compel, I have stores plenty and to spare,
I am he bringing help for the sick as they pant on their backs,
This is the city and I am one of the citizens,
I am aware who they are, (they are positively not worms or fleas,)
I am sorry for you, they are not murderous or jealous upon me,
I am an acme of things accomplish'd, and I am encloser of things to be.
I am the teacher of athletes,
(No array of terms can say how much I am at peace about God and about death.)
(I am large, I contain multitudes.)
Will you speak before I am gone? will you prove already too late?
I too am not a bit tamed, I too am untranslatable,
You will hardly know who I am or what I mean (18, 20, 56, 59, 75, 82, 136-37, 171, 255, 328, 330, 403, 406, 409, 413, 422, 425, 433, 458, 461, 463, 607, 637, 716, 817, 832, 838, 847, 857-59, 946, 952-53, 957, 999, 1007, 1021, 1075, 1079, 1145, 1148, 1234, 1280, 1326, 1330, 1332, 1341).

"Some Different Considerations in Mindful Arrangement of Open Verse Forms on the Page"

1. Count of syllables (Marianne Moore, Kenneth Rexroth) (Creeley's mono syllabics)
2. Count of accents (traditional iambic etc. foot)
3. Measurement of vowel length: quantity (classical Greek and Latin, Swinburne experiments, Pound, Campion)
4. Breath stop (Creeley, Olson, Williams) (new breath, new line) (pause)
5. Units of mouth phrasing (pauses within same breath) (Ginsberg, Olson)
6. Divisions of mental ideas (Corso, Williams)
7. Typographical topography (aesthetic balances on page, symmetry, asymmetry)
8. Heartbeat (Duncan)
9. Conditions of original notation (line-length, verse length, bloc-shape) and writing materials (pocket notebook, booksize journal page, napkin, tape, typewriter, matchbook etc.) (Olson, Ginsberg etc. Kerouac especially)
10. Chance (arbitrary choice, impulse, fatigue, accident, interruption, sudden impatience or energy)

"Form" is what happens. All considerations are elements of a single "discipline" which is MINDFULNESS or conscious appreciation and awareness of the humors of line arrangements on the page, intelligence relating to the mental conception of the poem and its vocalization.

Allen Ginsberg, written in 1977, first published in *Composed on the Tongue* in 1980.

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