

First-Person Participation in Dante's *Commedia*

Katherine Lucy Powlesland

Pembroke College

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I dedicate this thesis to my parents, and to my dear friend Bill Marshall.

Abbreviations, Editions, and Translations

The following editions, translations, and abbreviations are used throughout:

- Bible *The Holy Bible*, Douay/Rheims Version, available at
<<http://www.drbo.org>> [last accessed 2 September 2017]
- Commedia* *La Commedia secondo l'antica vulgata*, ed. by Giorgio Petrocchi, 2nd
edn, 4 vols (Florence: Le Lettere, 1994)
- Inf.* *Inferno*, in *La Commedia*
- Par.* *Paradiso*, in *La Commedia*
- Purg.* *Purgatorio*, in *La Commedia*

Commentaries on the *Commedia*:

The following commentaries on the *Commedia* are cited according to the *Dartmouth Dante Project* <<http://dantelab.dartmouth.edu>> [last accessed 30 July 2018]:

- Jacopo Alighieri (1322)
L'Ottimo Commento (1333)
Francesco da Buti (1385-1395)
Anonimo Fiorentino (circa 1400)
Natalino Sapegno (1955-1957)
Umberto Bosco and Giovanni Reggio (1979)
Ernesto Trucchi (1936)
Anna Maria Chiavacci Leonardi (1991-1997)
Robert Hollander (2000-2007)
Nicola Fosca (2003-2015)

The following commentary is cited from the Project Gutenberg e-book
<<http://www.gutenberg.org/files/30766/30766-h/30766-h.htm>> [last accessed 30 July 2018]:

Jacopo Alighieri, *Chiose alla cantica dell'Inferno di Dante Alighieri*

The following commentaries are cited from the printed editions below:

The Divine Comedy, trans. by Robert M. Durling, introduction and notes by Ronald L. Martínez and Robert M. Durling, 3 vols (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996-2011)

The Divine Comedy, trans. and ed. by Robin Kirkpatrick, 3 vols (London: Penguin, 2006-2007)

The Divine Comedy, trans., with a commentary, by Charles S. Singleton, 3 vols (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press/Bollingen, 1980)

Preface

This dissertation is the result of my own work and includes nothing which is the outcome of work done in collaboration. This dissertation is not substantially the same as any that I have submitted, or is being concurrently submitted, for a degree or diploma or other qualification at the University of Cambridge or any other university or similar institution. I further state that no substantial part of this dissertation has already been submitted, or is being concurrently submitted, for any such degree, diploma or other qualification at the University of Cambridge or any other university or similar institution. This dissertation does not exceed 80,000 words.

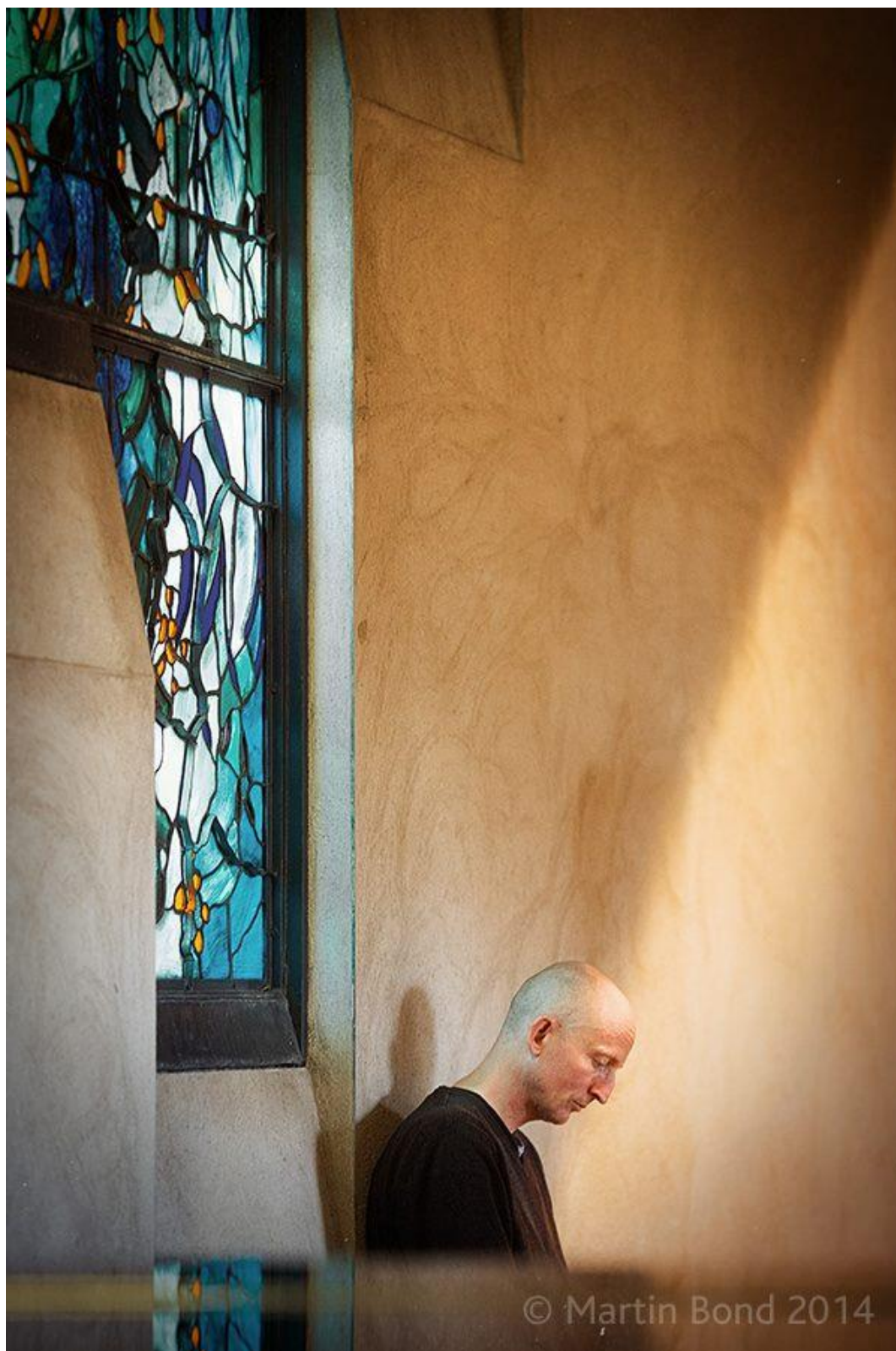


Image of one of the seven artists who contributed new work for *Dante's Paradise: Imagining the Divine*, a participatory event involving sixty members of the public, organised by the writer of this thesis and held at Robinson College Chapel, 25 October 2014 as part of the Cambridge Festival of Ideas.

<https://www.facebook.com/imaginingthedivine/>

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Chapter 1: Reading Interactively¹

This thesis sets out a new model of reader participation in Dante's *Commedia*, exploring how participation may be invited through mechanisms of narrative transmission, such as immersion, world creation, narrative perspective, narrative mediation, and narrative indeterminacy (the similes, ellipses and other 'gaps' in the fabric of a narrative text that invite individual cognitive work and serve to render a text 'open' to a greater or lesser extent).² The question of reader involvement is not new in Dante studies, with work on the so-called 'direct addresses' to the reader perhaps its most visible narratological face to date.³ However, recent advances in two discrete fields that both foreground the role of the body in constructing meaning – cognitive neuroscience and the young field of videogame critical theory – offer us, I propose, new tools to consider in textual literary theory, inviting fresh perspectives on the centrally important question of how to read Dante's poem.

The subject of modes of reading is powerfully evoked in Gianfranco Contini's 1965 essay, *Un'interpretazione di Dante*, in which he asks a 'semplice e drastica domanda': whether anyone today actually 'reads' the poem, 'se si legga ancora la *Divina Commedia*':

Questo è il sincero esame di coscienza di uno a cui è stata attribuita qualche responsabilità, o magari custodia, di cose dantesche; e che perciò deve cominciare dalla semplice e drastica domanda: se si legga ancora la *Divina Commedia*. Non, naturalmente, per obbligo scolastico o per dovere culturale; ma per la libera e ilare scelta di chi s'induca a ripercorrerne il racconto da un capo all'altro, concedendo la sua

¹ An earlier version of this chapter has been published as 'Invitations to Participate: Bernard's Sign', *Le Tre Corone*, 4 (2017), 97-115.

² Wolfgang Iser's indeterminacy hypothesis proposes that '[t]he written part of the text gives us the knowledge, but it is the unwritten part that gives us the opportunity to picture things; indeed, without the elements of indeterminacy, the gaps in the text, we should not be able to use our imagination'. Wolfgang Iser, *The Implied Reader: Patterns of Communication in Prose Fiction from Bunyan to Beckett* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1974), p. 283.

³ As Simone Marchesi writes: 'That Dante's text is inviting an active hermeneutic engagement on the part of its readers and, in so doing, negotiates its fictional status, are all stable acquisitions of the current critical discourse.' Simone Marchesi, *Dante and Augustine: Linguistics, Poetics, Hermeneutics* (Toronto; New York: University of Toronto Press, 2011), p. 4. My interest is in extending this debate through defining some of the central narrative mechanisms through which such active engagement may be invited.

fiducia al narratore, prestandosi al suo gioco, combaciando con le sorprese preparate, come si fa tutti i giorni per i poemi omerici e l'*Eneide*, per il *Furioso* e il *Chisciotte*, per i *Promessi sposi* e ogni grande romanzo dell'Ottocento, per la *Recherche du temps perdu* e *Ulysses*.⁴

'Reading' the poem, it becomes clear, means from end to end, 'da un capo all'altro', respecting its mechanisms ('concedendo la sua fiducia al narratore, prestandosi al suo gioco'), exactly as one would with any other of the great European literary narratives.

In narrative theory, this experiential mode is usually described in broad terms as *immersive* (although there are important differences between types of immersion); an experience of such deep absorption in an alternative reality that the 'real' or physical world fades from conscious awareness.⁵ This is an experience Dante describes in *Purgatorio* XVII when he writes of our deafness to even a thousand trumpets in the midst of an imaginative transportation:

⁴ Gianfranco Contini, *Un'idea di Dante: saggi danteschi* (Turin: Einaudi, 1976), p. 69. Contini's essential shift of focus is away from Benedetto Croce's famous formulation of two elements that are both within authorial production – '[la] problematica crociana di "struttura" e "poesia"' (p. 71) – and instead towards the responsibility of the reader to read as directed by the text, asking '[s]e dunque l'opposizione, piuttosto che tra supporto e oggetto poetico, è tra modo e modo di leggere' (p. 72, my emphasis); a binary not within artistic production alone, but that integrates production and reader reception.

⁵ For a discussion of different types of immersion (spatial, epistemic, temporal, emotional), see: Marie-Laure Ryan, 'From Narrative Games to Playable Stories: Toward a Poetics of Interactive Narrative', *Storyworlds: A Journal of Narrative Studies*, 1 (2009), 43-59. The differences between Ryan's four categories of immersion might crudely be summarised as follows: spatial immersion depends on 'sense of place' (p. 54); epistemic immersion on 'the desire to know' (p. 55); temporal immersion on 'curiosity, surprise, and suspense' (p. 55); and emotional immersion on 'empathy' (p. 55). Ryan is a media theorist and leading authority on digital narrative theory and immersion, arguably best known for her 2001 monograph, *Narrative as Virtual Reality*, revised and republished in 2015 as *Narrative as Virtual Reality 2: Revisiting Immersion and Interactivity in Literature and Electronic Media*, 2nd edn (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2015). Other key publications include *Avatars of Story* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006); *Possible Worlds, Artificial Intelligence, and Narrative Theory* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991); the co-edited volumes, *The Johns Hopkins Guide to Digital Media*, with Lori Emerson and Benjamin J. Robertson (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2014), and *Storyworlds Across Media: Towards a Media-Conscious Narratology*, with Jan-Noël Thon (Lincoln; London: University of Nebraska Press, 2014); and numerous articles on narrative theory in digital media, including 'Transmedial Storytelling and Transfictionality', *Poetics Today*, 34, 3 (2013), 362-88.

O imaginativa, che ne rube
 talvolta sì di fuor ch'om non s'accorge
 perché dintorno suonin mille tube,
 chi move te, se 'l senso non ti porge? (*Purg.*, XVII. 13-16)⁶

In videogame critical theory, a new model of immersion known as ‘presence’ is gaining traction, as I explore in detail later in this chapter. Widely understood, in a definition attributed to cognitive neuropsychologist and digital media theorist Wijnand IJsselsteijn, as ‘the experiential counterpart of immersion’, presence describes an experience of a perceptual illusion of realistic embodied interaction in a virtual world, not simply as spectator but as agential participant.⁷ Contini’s own language of a roaming back and forth across the narrative’s contours – ‘ripercorrerne il racconto’ – seems to suggest precisely such a physical, embodied, present entering-in to the virtual space of the narrative, rather than a critically evaluative position of external observation; and his metaphor might evoke the deeply personal and bodily modes of interaction with devotional texts associated with medieval practices of affective piety, to which I return in Chapter 2.

Certainly, a mode of experiential learning – learning by actively doing – lies at the very heart of the *Commedia*, motivating Dante’s own journey, as Beatrice explains in *Purgatorio* XXX:

‘Tanto giù cadde, che tutti argomenti
 a la salute sua eran già corti,

⁶ Commentaries have tended to focus on the question of divine intervention in this process, leaving largely untreated the question of immersion and narrative technique. For a typical reading, see, for example, Dino Cervigni, ‘Dante’s Poetry of Dreams’, *Pacific Coast Philology*, 17, 1-2 (1982), 24-30 (p. 25).

⁷ Wijnand A. IJsselsteijn, *Presence in Depth*, published dissertation (Eindhoven: Eindhoven University of Technology, 2004). IJsselsteijn is a cognitive scientist and specialist in affective computing, and a recognised authority on human cognitive experience in immersive media and the phenomenon of presence, with numerous peer-reviewed scientific articles and book chapters on presence alone (12,000 citations). His formal definition of presence in 2004 was preceded by an exploration of the concept of ‘presence’ in relation to different media technologies in his 2003 essay, ‘Presence in the Past: What Can We Learn from Media History?’ in *Being There: Concepts, Effects, and Measurement of User Presence in Synthetic Environments*, ed. by Giuseppe Riva, Fabrizio Davide, and Wijnand A. IJsselsteijn (Amsterdam: IOS Press, 2003), pp. 17-41 (see especially pp. 32-35).

fuor che mostrarli le perdute genti.’ (*Purg.*, XXX. 136-38)⁸

All attempts to *tell* Dante what he needed to understand, all ‘argomenti’, says Beatrice, had failed; and this is why Dante had to be sent to encounter – that is, directly experience through personal interaction – the ‘perdute genti’ for himself. As Christian Moevs observes: ‘The point of the *Comedy* is that understanding *is* practical.’⁹

However, a critically evaluative mode of external objectivity – undeniably a position of ‘great intellectual pleasure’, as Zygmunt Barański has written – is one into which I would suggest the generous discursive commentary tradition has powerfully invited the Dante scholar from its earliest days of Jacopo Alighieri’s stated intention to explicate the poem’s ‘profondo e autentico intendimento’, and that this has led to a lack of focus on individual participation as an important and complementary mode of reading the poem.¹⁰ The

⁸ My interest in modes of interaction again diverges from more established readings in commentary that focus on Beatrice’s words as an invitation to dwell on the consequences of sin (the ‘orribili pene’, in Trucchi’s words). Fosca, for example, suggests the intention is to ‘suscitare in lui quel timore della pena’; Chiavacci Leonardi that seeing the damned will ‘riscuoterlo dal suo errore’. Trucchi, gloss on *Purg.*, XXX. 136-38; Fosca, gloss on *Purg.*, XXX. 136-41; Chiavacci Leonardi, gloss on *Purg.*, XXX. 138.

⁹ Christian Moevs, *The Metaphysics of Dante’s ‘Comedy’* (New York; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), p. 171 (emphasis in original). The question of experiential understanding in the *Commedia* has of course been raised by others. Denys Turner writes that ‘the language of the *Commedia* [...] enacts that of which it speaks’. Denys Turner, ‘How to Do Things With Words: Poetry as Sacrament in Dante’s *Commedia*’, in *Dante’s ‘Commedia’: Theology as Poetry*, ed. by Vittorio Montemaggi and Matthew Treherne (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2010), pp. 286-305 (p. 286). John Took proposes of the *Convivio* that ‘Dante sets out, not merely to *inform* [...], but to *transform*, to bring home to his readers the fullness and incontrovertibility of their presence in the world as creatures of orderly intellection and of moral determination’. John Took, ‘Style and Existence in Dante’, in *Language and Style in Dante: Seven Essays*, ed. by John C. Barnes and Michelangelo Zaccarello (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2013), pp. 197-222 (p. 199, emphasis in original). Jeremy Tambling proposes that the model of active readership invited in the *Commedia* differs from the passive reader of the *Vita Nuova*. Jeremy Tambling, *Dante and Difference* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), p. 7.

¹⁰ ‘To dismantle Dante’s poetics can be a source of great intellectual pleasure, but so too can be the contemplation of the poem in its entirety.’ Zygmunt G. Barański, ‘Dante’s (Anti-)Rhetoric: Notes on the Poetics of the *Commedia*’, in *Moving in Measure: Essays in Honour of Brian Moloney*, ed. by Judith Bryce and Doug Thompson (Hull: Hull University Press, 1989), pp. 1-11 (p. 11). Jacopo Alighieri, *Chiose alla cantica dell’Inferno di Dante Alighieri* (Proemio, Libro Primo, 43). For an analysis of the commentary tradition in Dante studies see, for example: Deborah Parker, ‘Interpreting the Commentary Tradition to the *Comedy*’, in *Dante: Contemporary Perspectives*, ed. by Amilcare A. Iannucci (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1997), pp. 240-58; and *Interpreting Dante: Essays on the Traditions of Dante Commentary*, ed. by Paola Nasti and Claudia Rossignoli (Notre

Commedia, I shall propose, is an exceptionally participatory text (within what may be a relatively limited canon of such texts) as a result of Dante's deployment of a range of particular narrative strategies. My position is that this is an important feature of the poem that has been neglected in Dante scholarship.

My interest in this thesis is technical narrative strategy: the narratological mechanisms in the poem that can serve as observable (therefore discutable, whether the reader interacts with them or not) cues to reader presence and 'participation' in the *Commedia*. My aim is to describe what constitutes such a participatory mode of reading; to identify the mechanisms in the text that invite it; and through replicable and quantified evidence, to demonstrate that such a mode of reading is strategically invited throughout the poem.

1.1 Narratological approaches to the *Commedia*

With a few significant exceptions, the narrative mechanisms of Dante's text have remained relatively under-examined. In the 1950s, three separate essays, by Hermann Gmelin, Eric Auerbach, and Leo Spitzer, took up the question of the direct address to the reader, noting its potential to mediate a 'new relationship' between poet and reader – although the nature of this new relationship remains unexplained in their essays.¹¹ However, in focusing on only 'the most accessible' (to appropriate Barański's phrase) of the poem's invitations to participate – those that serve to invite the reader out of the narrated space in order to exercise her cognitive faculties at a conscious level ('pensa', 'ricorditi', 'imagini') – none of the essays takes account of the several ways in which a text can beckon a reader agentially further *in* by recruiting her cognitions at a pre-rational or unconscious level: by varying her

Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2013). Contini suggested in 1969 that this scholarly tradition has yielded 'oceans of exegesis', identifying 'the vexation of anyone who, undertaking to read Dante's great poem, is obliged to cope with the inescapable preliminary task of technically ascertaining the exact meaning of the text'. Gianfranco Contini, 'Philology and Dante Exegesis', *Dante Studies*, 87 (1969), 1-32 (pp. 1-2). More recently, Barański has observed that the *Commedia* is a text 'overwhelm[ed]' by its own scholarship (Zygmunt Barański, 'On Dante's Trail', *Italian Studies*, 72, 1 (2017), 1-15 (p. 2).

¹¹ Hermann Gmelin, 'Die Anrede an den Leser in Dantes *Göttlicher Komödie*', *Deutsches Dante-Jahrbuch*, 29-30 (1951), 130-40. Erich Auerbach, 'Dante's Addresses to the Reader', *Romance Philology*, 7 (1953), 268-78. Leo Spitzer, 'The Addresses to the Reader in the *Commedia*', *Italica*, 32, 3 (1955), 143-65. Spitzer and Auerbach both use the phrase 'a new relationship': Spitzer, p. 144; Auerbach, p. 268. The essays focus on description of the addresses rather than analysis of its narratological mechanisms.

depth and modality of immersion, her sense of location, her perceptual frame or line of sight, and her sense of personal agency in the narrated space.¹²

Yet the question of some kind of unbidden reader identification with the mobile, mutable ‘io’ of Dante’s protagonist, with this ‘figure that we see here now, *standing in the body on this shore*’, in Charles S. Singleton’s terms (my emphasis), is observable in the work of a vast number of scholars, including in the early commentaries.¹³ William Franke’s return to the question of the direct addresses in 1991 indeed asks whether in fact ‘it is possible to read the whole poem as leveraged from [the direct addresses] [...], and to hear an implicit address to readers right from the reference to “*our life*” in the very first line of the work’.¹⁴

¹² Barański, ‘Dante’s (Anti-)Rhetoric’, p. 7. Barański’s focus – invitations to exegesis – is the intellectually interpretative foil to my participatory one, but the notion of the addresses as the visible face of a larger strategy is the same: ‘[Dante’s] addresses to the ubiquitous *lettore* are simply the most accessible examples of this design [that of ‘[working] at deciphering his poem’]’ (p. 7). Specifically: ‘*pensa*’: *Inf.*, VIII. 94, *Inf.*, XX. 20, *Purg.*, X. 110, *Purg.*, XXXI. 124, *Par.*, V. 109; ‘*ricorditi*’: *Purg.*, XVII. 1; ‘*imagini*’: *Par.*, XIII. 1, 7, 10.

¹³ There is considerable evidence in scholarship that Dante’s ‘io’ has been experienced as disruptive by readers, and difficult to understand in analytical terms. In ‘Style and Existence in Dante’, Took talks of ‘the anxious “I”’ (p. 202). In his essay, “‘Trasmutabile per tutte guise’: Dante in the *Comedy*”, Pertile offers an analysis that suggests that ‘[d]uring the weeklong journey, the character Dante does *not* change, except superficially and temporarily as required by the circumstances in which he happens to find himself. He may show joy and sadness, pity and cruelty, curiosity, fear and rage, but these are passing feelings and emotions, which attest to his “transmutability” but do not transform him in any permanent way’. Lino Pertile, “‘Trasmutabile per tutte guise’: Dante in the *Comedy*”, in *Dante’s Plurilingualism: Authority, Knowledge, Subjectivity*, ed. by Sara Fortuna, Manuele Gragnolati, and Jürgen Trabant (London: Legenda, 2010), pp. 164-78 (p. 167). I partially agree with Pertile as will become evident in my analysis of the journeying Dante protagonist as fulfilling an avatar function for the reader, a mediating body through which she may experience the virtual world and encounters of the poem; but I also disagree with his conclusion, in that I think the journeying Dante protagonist *does* change, as part of this function. I explore this in Chapter 5, in which I seek to offer a fresh way to think about the Dante protagonist(s) as a combination of strategic functions mediating the reader’s experience. In *Dante and Difference*, Tambling suggests that ‘the unity of the subject [across Dante’s works] is a fictional one’ (p. 165), suggesting we can therefore read Dante as standing in opposition to the Cartesian *cogito* and the belief in a stable, single identity. This stands in interesting relation to Pertile’s suggestion of a transmutable self that is ‘inconstant, uncertain, capricious, subject to the fluctuations of desire and to the changes of time and place’ (p. 165). The Singleton reference is from ‘Allegory’, writing of the line, ‘Poi ch’ei posato un poco il corpo lasso’ (*Inf.*, I. 28). Charles S. Singleton, ‘Allegory’, in *Dante Studies I: ‘Commedia’: Elements of Structure* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1954), pp. 11-12.

¹⁴ William Franke, ‘Dante’s Address to the Reader in Face of Derrida’s Critique of Ontology’, in *The Poetry of Life in Literature, Analecta Husserliana*, 69 (2000), ed. by Anna-Teresa Tymieniecka, pp. 119-31 (p. 119).

Certainly, Robin Kirkpatrick's work (beginning in the 1970s and continuing today) on reader agency and intellectually informed creative interaction suggests precisely such a response to a call within the text, consistently according due emphasis to engaging both from within and without the narrative.¹⁵ From the 1990s, Teodolinda Barolini's work on narrative form has – crucially, as far as a narrative poetics is concerned – kept the question of the poem's so-called 'truth claims' on the table, and more recently has opened important new discussions on reality and realism.¹⁶ To my mind, however, the overtly narratological strand of scholarship established in the 1990s created something of an 'anti-collaborative' detour in the application of narrative theory to the poem, detecting in Dante's narrative strategies artful persuasion of a credulous reader,¹⁷ and an author occupied with his own authority;¹⁸ and advocating instead that 'we' '[stand] resolutely outside of the fiction's mirror games [...], the formal structures that manipulate the reader so successfully' (Barolini).¹⁹

¹⁵ See the opening of Chapter 4, 'Independence and the Reader of the *Paradiso*', in Robin Kirkpatrick, *Dante's Paradiso and the Limitations of Modern Criticism: A Study of Style and Poetic Theory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978), particularly pp. 108-14. Further, in *Dante's Inferno: Difficulty and Dead Poetry* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), he writes: 'I shall argue that only an active – even "creative" – reading of the *Commedia* can do justice to the work as Dante has written it' (p. 3). Further, in the Introduction to his translation of *Paradiso*, he proposes that: 'In a certain sense, the *Paradiso* may best be read as a pure exercise in imagination and intellect or, in other words, as a game.' *Dante: The 'Divine Comedy'*, 2nd edn (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), p. lxii.

¹⁶ Barolini opens her argument in *The Undivine Comedy: Detheologising Dante* by citing Bruno Nardi's *Dante profeta*: 'Chi considera la visione dantesca e il rapimento del profeta al cielo come finzioni letterarie, travisa il senso'. Teodolinda Barolini, *The Undivine Comedy: Detheologising Dante* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), p. 3. More recently: Teodolinda Barolini, 'Dante and Reality/Dante and Realism (*Paradiso*)', *Spazio Filosofico*, 8 (2013), 199-208. See also in Moevs, *The Metaphysics of Dante's 'Comedy'*, pp. 178-79, particularly: 'One thing is clear: one cannot reduce such claims [to truth] to some notion of objectively reporting prior spatiotemporal events' (p. 178).

¹⁷ In *The Undivine Comedy*, Barolini characterises the writer as 'exploiting his poetic genius' (p. 13), deploying 'poetic cunning' (p. 13); she cautions sensitivity to 'our narrative credulity' (p. 16); and writes of 'the formal structures that manipulate the reader so successfully' (p. 16). Later, Geryon is described as a 'weapon in a massive and unrelenting campaign to coerce our suspension of disbelief' (p. 61).

¹⁸ Albert Russell Ascoli, *Dante and the Making of a Modern Author* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008). Ascoli sets himself the task of understanding 'why Dante might find it difficult to attribute the role of *auctor* and the quality of *auctoritas* to himself and his works, despite his evident valorisation of, and desire for, them' (p. 9). I discuss this further in Chapter 5, n. 20.

¹⁹ Barolini, *The Undivine Comedy*, p. 16. Further, 'Detheologising [...] signifies releasing our reading of the *Commedia* from the author's grip, finding a way out of Dante's hall of mirrors'

It is this stance of locating oneself ‘resolutely outside’, of not entering in at all, that I would query. Whilst I am not sure that it is possible for even the best-intentioned scholar to wholly resist some capitulation to mechanisms of immersion, on the one hand Barolini of course is absolutely right: the scholar is a particular kind of reader, one with an ‘obbligato scolastico’, a ‘dovere culturale’, a responsibility to perspicacity both in interpreting the meaning of the text and identifying the methods by which such a meaning is constructed.²⁰ And deep immersion, it has long been held, can impede critical consciousness; a condition sometimes referred to as ‘semiotic’ or ‘inattentional blindness’.²¹ But without immersing, without conceding ‘la sua fiducia al narratore’, in Contini’s terms, how does the reader trip the mechanisms in the text that, I shall propose, may invite participation?²²

My interest is in identifying and examining the narratological mechanisms that invite reader participation. A key criterion for the scholar in identifying and recognising those mechanics at all is, I propose, a sensitivity to the possibilities of such a participatory mode of reading. The mechanisms that invite participation are subtle, complex and largely invisible to the external observer seeking a recognisable device (completely different to the self-heralding direct addresses). Instead, mechanisms of participation typically generate their effect through a juxtaposition or sequence of narratological devices that in isolation would be unremarkable (a run of focal view shifts, for example, as I will explore later in this chapter), but which cumulatively, or in combination, produce their effect (a single dissonant shift in the sequence). As such, the reader will very often discover that something is at work in the text only once she has triggered its mechanism and is rewarded with a visceral, somatosensory, or affective response.²³ In the *Commedia*, I shall propose, such events run into the thousands of instances and a progression is often visible in their deployment across the canticles, lending

(p. 17). Tracing back Barolini’s ‘we’ to its source in the chapter, I take it to refer to ‘all readers of Dante’s poem’ (p. 4).

²⁰ Contini, *Un’idea di Dante*, p. 69.

²¹ Ryan discusses semiotic blindness in *Narrative as Virtual Reality 2*, p. 6. On inattentional blindness, see: Arien Mack and Irvin Rock, *Inattentional Blindness* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1998).

²² Contini, *Un’idea di Dante*, p. 69.

²³ I clarify, in case of any doubt, that under my terms a participatory reading necessitates a generative relationship between the rational and the pre-rational cognitions, the imagination, affect, and the intellect. As I hope to make clear in my analysis of the functioning of these mechanics in the narrative, I fully support Kirkpatrick’s observation that ‘[c]ertainly, the story which Dante is telling will call into play an extremely wide range of emotions and an even wider range of imaginings. And all of these will have their value: but only if guided by intelligent discrimination and an eye for the analysis of fact’. *Dante: The ‘Divine Comedy’*, p. 14.

weight to an argument that they are the product of a strategy rather than a simple accident of literary production.

Secondly, I would propose that unilateral reader resistance to the formal structures of the narrative is unnecessary. Dante, I will suggest, deploys his narrative strategies in pursuit of working *with*, not against, the reader: to facilitate, not to manipulate; beckoning her in when experiential understanding will deepen her grasp of the journey to revelation; encouraging her out again when agential cognitive work (judging and reasoning, but also frame-by-frame remembering and imaginative construction) is required.²⁴

As Paola Nasti and Claudia Rossignoli observe in *Interpreting Dante: Essays on the Traditions of Dante Commentary*, the commentary tradition has accommodated a plurality of exegetical practices and constant evolution, including what they refer to as ‘methodological osmosis’, or the integration of tools from other disciplines.²⁵ My approach borrows from emerging theories in videogame criticism of embodied interaction in a virtual space, which I propose offer to textual literary theory the possibility of a substantial new lexicon of narrative mechanisms inviting embodied participation rooted in invitations to different types of presence and in the device of the avatar.²⁶

Such a reverse-engineered approach – reading videogame critical concepts back into textual narrative theory – is new: to my knowledge, my applied, sustained narratological work on Dante is the first of its kind in any field of Western printed literature.²⁷ There is, however, a growing body of work in Dante scholarship in areas that intersect with my approach: particularly, in embodied cognition or the virtual body (including Heather Webb,

²⁴ Michele Barbi has suggested that the poem is not an allegory but a revelation. Michele Barbi, *Dante: vita, opere e fortuna* (Florence: Sansoni, 1933), p. 98.

²⁵ In *Interpreting Dante*, they cite specifically Iacomo della Lana’s importing of tools from the sciences (p. 5) and conclude: ‘The focus of Dante readers moves from theology to science, from science to politics, from style to sources; and each of these moves perpetuates the story both of Dante and of his readers, proving what we have come to expect – that a text is also the history of its reception’ (p. 10). See also Dronke on the ‘otherness’ of medieval poetry for which, he suggests, contemporary scholarship has no critical terminology. Peter Dronke, *Dante and Medieval Latin Traditions* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), pp. 1-8.

²⁶ The division of the phenomenon of presence into three types is usually credited to Lee. Kwan Min Lee, ‘Presence, Explicated’, *Communication Theory*, 14, 1 (2004), 27-50 (just under 1000 citations). I set out each of these types of presence in Chapters 3, 4 and 5. I discuss the avatar in relation to narrative mediation and the experience of reader identification with the protagonist in Chapter 5.

²⁷ At the time of writing (August 2018), I have not been able to identify any publications in this area either in Dante studies or more widely in literary theory.

David Gary Shaw, Daniel T. Kline),²⁸ and on spatiality (including Bill Brown, Aarati Kanekar, John Kleiner, Michael Sinding).²⁹

In this chapter, then, I will set out one example of what I propose to be such an invitation to reader participation, in the instance of Bernard's sign – ostensibly for the journeying Dante – in *Paradiso* XXXIII. In exposing the mechanisms of such an invitation, its near invisibility from a perspective of external observation, and its range of effects, I hope to demonstrate the benefits to the scholar of this proposed mode of participatory reading or, to borrow Contini's terms, of a freely chosen entry into Dante's narratological 'gioco'.³⁰

1.2 Bernard's interaction *manquée*

The final dramatised interaction between characters in the *Commedia*, Bernard's signal to Dante to look upwards in *Paradiso* XXXIII, might be described as an interaction *manquée*:

Bernardo m'accennava, e sorridea,
perch'io guardassi suso; ma io era
già per me stesso tal qual ei volea:
che la mia vista, venendo sincera
e più e più intrava per lo raggio
de l'alta luce che da sé è vera. (*Par.*, XXXIII. 49-54)³¹

²⁸ Heather Webb, *Dante's Persons: An Ethics of the Transhuman* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016). David Gary Shaw, 'Embodiment and the Human from Dante through Tomorrow', *Postmedieval*, 1, 1-2 (2010), 165-72. Daniel T. Kline, 'Digital Gaming Re-Imagines the Middle Ages' in *Digital Gaming Re-Imagines the Middle Ages*, ed. by Daniel T. Kline (London; New York: Routledge, 2014), pp. 1-13.

²⁹ Bill Brown, 'The Dark Wood of Postmodernity (Space, Faith, Allegory)', *PMLA*, 120, 3 (2005), 734-50. Aarati Kanekar, 'Detours Through Autonomy: Mismapping the *Divine Comedy*', *Perspecta*, 46 (2013), 262-83. John Kleiner, 'Mismapping the Underworld', *Dante Studies*, 107 (1989), 1-31. Michael Sinding, *Body of Vision: Northrop Frye and the Poetics of Mind* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2014).

³⁰ *Un'idea di Dante*, p. 69.

³¹ In *Dante and the Mystical Tradition: Bernard of Clairvaux in the 'Commedia'* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), Steven Botterill offers a compelling reading of Bernard's appearance in the text. His reading points out not only the surprise of Bernard's involvement (p. 65), and the withholding of Bernard's identity for nearly forty lines (p. 67), but also reminds the scholar not to 'underestimate its immediate impact on an unprepared reader – which is to astonish. Such "professionals" have, in a sense, forgotten that they ever did *not* know that this event was going to take place, and have lost the ability to react to it as ordinary readers – the kind to whom the *Commedia* is addressed – surely must' (p. 66). But

Bernard and the journeying Dante protagonist are in the Empyrean and are, we can assume (allowing for the complexities of spatial representation there), near one another with the celestial Rose encircling them. Bernard gestures and smiles at Dante, but Dante is already doing what Bernard wants – looking upwards – even as Bernard signals his desire, ‘ma io era | già per me stesso tal qual ei volea’ (50-51).³²

For the reader who is moved to stop and consider this, it may come as something of a surprise to find that for a split second she seems to be looking the wrong way – at Bernard – at the very moment at which Dante first turns his gaze on the divine image. Can her gaze really have lagged his, however minutely, at such a key point in the narrative, the moment at which the journeying protagonist finally begins his encounter with the divine? She may wonder if she has misread, but there seems no doubt: her attention is clearly directed first to the gesturing Bernard: ‘Bernardo m’accennava, e sorridea’ (49), then to the journeying Dante, only to find that whilst she was looking at Bernard, Dante was looking elsewhere. And not looking just anywhere, but melding his gaze with the holy ray, ‘ma io era | già per me stesso tal qual ei volea’ (50-51), beginning his ‘breakthrough’, as Robert Hollander puts it, his own unmediated encounter with God.³³

By bringing to conscious awareness the sequential mental models invited in the sequence, this type of frame-by-frame analysis highlights an effect of cognitive dissonance, or ‘the existence of non-fitting relations among cognitions’ in social psychologist Leon Festinger’s definition.³⁴ Whilst most readers, I propose, will have no conscious awareness of

Botterill’s focus is not on narrative mechanics, so he does not appear to spot – at least, he does not comment on – the decoupling of the reader’s gaze from the protagonist’s, which will be my primary focus here (and which supports Botterill’s own commitment to reading as directed by the mechanisms of the text).

³² The early commentaries generally agree ‘tal qual ei volea’ to indicate a mode of acting or doing; for example, L’Ottimo Commento: ‘quale colui desiderava, cioè che la virtù divina lo attraeva a quella sì come a sua perfezione’ (L’Ottimo Commento, gloss on *Par.*, XXXIII. 49-51). Anonimo Fiorentino’s gloss proposes instead a mode of being, ‘contento e quietato’, but this is not a common interpretation (Anonimo Fiorentino, gloss on *Par.*, XXXIII. 49-51).

³³ Hollander comments: ‘The poet could not be more precise. Up to now his powers of sight have improved so that he can finally see God’s reflection in the universe perfectly, an ability that was far from his grasp when the poem began. Now he will see Him as Himself [...]. In the next tercet we realise that he has recorded his breakthrough. No Christian except for St. Paul has seen so much – or such is the unspoken claim the poet makes us share.’ Hollander, gloss on *Par.*, XXXIII. 52-54.

³⁴ For an account of how a reader ‘experiences’ a narrative world by constructing a mental model, see Philip N. Johnson-Laird, *Mental Models: Towards a Cognitive Science of Language, Inference, and Consciousness* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983).

such dissonance, this sequence troubled Charles Singleton to such an extent that he was led to conclude that Dante had actually made a mistake in his handling of narrative perspective (one, he says, of just two in the poem), writing in his commentary that:

Strictly-speaking, the poet is [...] guilty of a momentary slip in maintaining the point of view [...], for if, as is affirmed, he was ‘already such as Bernard desired’, he was indeed already completely intent on gazing into the light, and therefore could not have seen that Bernard was gesturing and smiling to urge that he do so.³⁵

Accepting Singleton’s conclusion might throw Dante’s poetic authority into question: if the Dante who is present at that moment in the Empyrean didn’t see Bernard’s sign, having already turned his eyes towards God, then how can the returned poet, back on earth, narrate the event, other than by retrospective inference – that is, by making it up? Of course ‘artifice’, to borrow Christian Moevs’ term, is inherent in any compelling and convincing retrospectively reconstructed textual narrative account.³⁶ However, when the narrative mechanisms that underpin such reconstruction become perceptible, there is a risk to reader immersion, and in this case, Singleton’s urge in response has been to dismantle the text to

Leon Festinger, *A Theory of Cognitive Dissonance* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1962). I explore this notion further in Chapter 2, particularly in relation to affective devotion.

³⁵ Singleton, gloss on *Par.*, XXXIII. 49-51. Singleton defines the other such ‘slip’ to be at *Purg.*, XXI. 10-14 (Singleton, gloss on *Par.*, XXXIII. 49-51); that is, the arrival of Statius: ‘Ci apparve un’ombra, e dietro a noi venìa, | dal piè guardando la turba che giace; | né ci addemmo di lei, sì parlò pria, | dicendo: “O frati miei, Dio vi dea pace.” | Noi ci volgemmo sùbiti [...]’. I suggest there to be at least one further instance, in *Inferno* XXV (the arrival of the ‘tre spiriti’): ‘Mentre che sì parlava, ed el trascorse, | e tre spiriti venner sotto noi, | de’ quai né io né ’l duca mio s’accorse, | se non quando gridar: “Chi siete voi?”’ (34-37), and probably more.

³⁶ Moevs, p. 183. The framework of reader participation offers a clear opportunity, I suggest, to further explore the highly productive relationship between narrative construction and truth claims, as I investigate in my further research. For now, it is perhaps sufficient to have in mind Moevs’ presentation of the tension: ‘We can imagine that Dante would smile appreciatively at Singleton’s famous phrase, “the fiction of the *Divine Comedy* is that it is not fiction,” but he would answer: “you have not seen the point, the *punto*.” The poem’s poetics, its typological and anagogical thrust, the basis of its claim to prophetic truth and its claim on the reader is grounded in its metaphysical ontology: in the self-experience of the subject of all experience, the awakening to what is not in the world, but lies outside it. The thrust of the *Comedy* is that its letter is ontologically continuous with Scripture, physical reality and history, while at the same time it also points to itself as artifice, representation, *fictio*, myth, a body or veiling of soul or spirit’ (p. 183). The well-known Singleton reference comes from Charles S. Singleton, ‘The Irreducible Dove’, *Comparative Literature*, 9 (1957), 129-35 (p. 129).

locate a reason for his discomfort, identifying – correctly – an anomaly in its construction, and concluding – incorrectly, in my view – that this anomaly is a mistake of narrative technique.

So, what has happened? We might characterise the process as follows. Mentally modelling the first-person perspective of the narration, Singleton has ‘felt’ something in the text – the dissonance of the lag in modelling turning his eyes to God. This apparently unconscious experience of cognitive dissonance has triggered an instinct to interrogate the sequence: critically or intellectually, in Singleton’s case. He has sought a mechanism to explain what has drawn his attention but has not been able to identify a recognisable one. (In fact, the mechanism is a dissonant switch in focal view, one that narratologist Gérard Genette’s work on ‘mood’ helps us identify, as I will show in the next section).³⁷ Instead, Singleton concludes that Dante has made a mistake, one that – with no obvious mitigation for such visible artifice – exposes the ‘made’ (*fictio*) nature of the poem, not only potentially undermining its alleged claims to truth, but fully rupturing Singleton’s immersion in the narrative.

That Singleton experienced the sequence as cognitively dissonant seems clear. But not all readers, I suggest, will have a similar experience of dissonance in response to the same mechanism in the text, particularly those who are too far ‘in’, or too far ‘out’, of the text – that is, engaging with the text at an extreme of immersion. To borrow Marie-Laure Ryan’s classifications of immersion, the ‘epistemically immersed’ are most likely to be too far ‘in’ – too immersed – to notice any dissonance. Epistemic, or plot-driven, immersion (the desire to know what comes next, and the characteristic mode, I shall suggest, of the ‘*desiderosi d’ascoltar*’),³⁸ can make the reader feel profoundly gripped in the narrated events, but it does not require that she imaginatively enter in to the narrated space on her own account – essentially, the reader is watching events happen to other people, without any meaningful transfer of virtual experience from protagonist to reader. This leaves her dependent on narrative mediation – being told what happens next – rather than collaborating in her own production of meaning. This is the type of immersion that, as mentioned earlier, leaves the reader at risk of semiotic blindness, or an obliviousness to signs in the text. Festinger accounts for this in his theory of cognitive dissonance by suggesting that since the brain experiences mild cognitive dissonance as ‘uncomfortable’, its automatic response is ‘to try to

³⁷ Gérard Genette, *Narrative Discourse: An Essay in Method*, trans. by Jane E. Lewin (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1980), pp. 161-211. I discuss focal view further in Chapter 5.

³⁸ *Par.*, II. 2.

reduce the dissonance and achieve consonance’ – a phenomenon referred to in cognitive science as ‘autocorrection’.³⁹ So, the epistemically immersed reader is unlikely to register any dissonance because her brain automatically compensates for it at a pre-rational level, without troubling her immersion in the narrative.

The second group is composed of those readers who are standing ‘resolutely outside’ the formal mechanisms of the poem: reading analytically, effectively disabling the poem’s formal mechanisms (a bit like repeatedly pressing the pause button when watching a film or playing a videogame). Without entering in to the narrative space to trigger the mechanism of the dissonant focal view switch, such a reader is very unlikely to register its existence, and since it is an almost invisible device, she would have to systematically examine each of the five thousand or so (mostly consonant) focal view switches in the poem in order to detect from outside the presence of one dissonant switch. However, as suggested earlier, in practice this is likely to be an unusual position since even the most self-consciously resistant reader will almost certainly yield to Dante’s mechanics of immersion at some point. Most scholars will find themselves, I suggest, shifting somewhere on a continuum between these two extremes, the dissonance of the mechanism inviting, at the very least, a brief pause or hiatus in narrative processing. Of more significance, perhaps, then, are the differences in how those readers *respond* to the experience of dissonance. My suggestion is that there are two main classes of response: the critically evaluative or intellectual response (as I shall suggest Singleton’s to be); or the participatory.

In the processing of cognitive dissonance, cognitive science allows for an alternative response to autocorrection, one termed ‘intrinsic motivation’, or a response of agential curiosity.⁴⁰ In such cases, the dissonance serves to introduce a small gap into the immersive tissue of the text, inviting a momentary surfacing into critical consciousness or pre-consciousness. Sensing the dissonance, then, Singleton may have experienced a piquing of

³⁹ Festinger, p. 3. On autocorrection in cognitive theory, see for example: Lawrence A. Pervin, ‘Theoretical Approaches to the Analysis of Individual—Environment Interaction’, in *Perspectives in International Psychology*, ed. by Lawrence A. Pervin (London; New York: Plenum Press, 1978), pp. 67-86 (p. 71).

⁴⁰ See Richard Ryan and Edward Deci, who define ‘intrinsic motivation’ as ‘doing something because it is inherently interesting or enjoyable’ (compared with ‘extrinsic motivation’, which ‘refers to doing something because it leads to a separable outcome’. Richard M. Ryan and Edward L. Deci, ‘Intrinsic and Extrinsic Motivations: Classic Definitions and New Directions’, *Contemporary Educational Psychology*, 25, 1 (2000), 54-67 (p. 55). This phenomenon is elegantly expressed in William Carlos Williams’ poem *Paterson*: ‘Dissonance | (if you’re interested) | leads to discovery’. William Carlos Williams, *Paterson. Books I-V* (London: McGibbon and Kee, 1964), IV. 2.

his curiosity – ‘what’s going on here?’ – and an instinct to pause, to step outside the narrative, and to deploy his curiosity in dismantling the text to locate a reason for his discomfort, a technical cause for the pull on his attention. By contrast, the reader whose habit is to read in participatory mode has, I propose, a different instinct: she unconsciously deploys her curiosity to redouble her engagement *within* the narrated world, engaging with the sign in the text itself – Bernard’s sign – and redoubling her own *imaginative* work: a response of, ‘wait a minute, if I’m looking over here, what’s *he* looking at?’⁴¹ This is an instance of narrative indeterminacy – a gap – that invites the reader in participatory mode to directly reproduce, or simulate, the protagonist’s experience for herself, bridging the gap that the narration has opened up by the dissonant focal view shift, imaginatively ‘standing in the [protagonist’s] body’ herself.⁴²

To respond in such a participatory mode is not easy, but I contend that the poem as a whole functions strategically to invite the progressive refinement of the requisite cognitive skills in the responsive reader, so that by the time the reader reaches Bernard, such a habit of cognitive ‘curiosity’ rather than ‘autocorrection’ may have become naturalised.⁴³ Before proceeding further, however, it may be helpful to establish precisely how the technical mechanism at play in Bernard’s sequence functions, and how it serves as an *invitation* to a response of some kind.

1.3 Focal view switching

The device responsible for triggering a potential experience of cognitive dissonance in Bernard’s interaction *manquée* is, as mentioned above, an unexpected switch in focal view.⁴⁴

⁴¹ In ‘Un’interpretazione di Dante’, Contini talks of feeling the ‘teeth’ of the imagination bite: ‘Nel movimento “allegro” delle terzine, nello scorrimento lubrificato, a ruota libera, dell’avventura escatologica le grandi sequenze si sciolgono e un po’ si attenuano, le parole lapidarie, incise da secoli nella memoria nazionale, si distendono e allentano un tanto della loro presa. Ma il lettore che allora rallenti, indugi, e di fatto ritorni alla tecnica dello strappo, súbito sente mordere il dente dell’immaginazione, soccombe alla sopraffazione dell’intensità verbale. Presso gli appassionati il discreto prevale sul continuo’ (p. 69).

⁴² Singleton, *Dante Studies I*, p. 11.

⁴³ I set out a model of ‘narrative training’ in Chapter 5 to propose how such refinement of the cognitions is invited throughout the poem.

⁴⁴ The definition of *focal view* is in flux as narrative theory continues to expand across media. *The Living Handbook of Narratology* cites Genette’s definition in *Narrative Discourse*, and I adhere to this in my analysis in this section: ‘A selection or restriction of narrative information in relation to the experience and knowledge of the narrator, the characters or

Focal view ('mood', in Genette's terms), is one of the two main components of narrative perspective ('voice' being the other).⁴⁵

For the purposes of analysing Bernard's gesture – and without wanting to oversimplify a sophisticated narratological device – it is sufficient to understand focal view as the visual or perceptual frame through which the reader perceives the events of the narrative. In the case of the *Commedia*, the two main focal characters through whose eyes events are usually framed are the *journeying Dante* protagonist (familiar as the 'Pilgrim' in the 'Pilgrim–Poet' binary that took hold in Dante scholarship in the second half of the twentieth century), and the returned narrating poet, the *narrating Dante* ('Poet').⁴⁶ These two focal characters, the journeying Dante and the narrating Dante, have different sight and knowledge privileges, and they occupy different locations: an inner story world, in which the younger journeying Dante travels through the three realms of the afterlife, framed by an outer story world in which the returned poet ostensibly performs the writing of his poem concurrent with the reader's reception of it. I discuss this further in Chapter 5.⁴⁷ This bi-location construction, twin

other, more hypothetical entities in the storyworld'. 'Focalisation', *The Living Handbook of Narratology* (rev. 24 September 2013).

⁴⁵ See Genette, pp. 161-211, and pp. 212-62. *Mood* ('Who sees?', in Genette's shorthand) and *voice* ('Who speaks?') need not be identical, especially in a retrospective first-person narrative like the *Commedia*, in which only the narrator can 'speak' directly to the reader, whilst events can be shown to her both through his eyes (looking back retrospectively) and through the eyes of the journeying protagonist (as events unfold). I discuss this further in Chapter 5.

⁴⁶ I discuss the history of this binary and set out my argument for a re-labelling of the two focal characters as the *journeying Dante* and the *narrating Dante* in my further research. I use these two terms throughout this thesis.

⁴⁷ Whilst here I distinguish just these two focal characters for clarity in developing my argument in relation to Bernard's interaction, I set out in Chapter 5 a more nuanced and complete proposal that the narrating Dante focal character is in fact a composite of three 'narrating instances' (applying Genette's concept of 'narrating instances' (pp. 212-15)), that I label and outline as follows: (1) an *Embodied Narrator* narrating instance, located in the outer story world with subjective glossed knowledge (having undertaken the journey) and an authenticating focus on his own embodied cognition; (2) an *Implied Author* narrating instance, of no fixed location and with total knowledge/omniscience, including prophesy, conferring *auctoritas*; and (3) a *Zero-Focalised Narration* narrating instance, whose purpose is neutral propulsion of narrative action, and who has omniscient sight within the inner story world but no knowledge privileges (that is, he sees, but does not interpret). So, rather than Kenelm Foster's two Dantes that differentiates a pagan and a theologian whilst assuming the two unify in some way (Kenelm Foster, *Two Dantes And Other Studies* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1977), I propose a total of three Dantes whose framing of the action can influence or direct the reader's participation in the narrative; or four if we also include the focal character of the journeying Dante protagonist, located in the inner storyworld with restricted sight and knowledge.

protagonists, and past and ostensibly present time zones gives the author the device of a *frame narrative*.⁴⁸

Focal view affects where the reader feels herself to be located in relation to the protagonist: looking *with* him or through his eyes (internal focal view, typical in first-person narratives), or looking *at* him from a position of outside observation (external focal view, third-person narratives). The narrating Dante – back on earth and already ‘knowing the end’, as Singleton puts it – observes events in the inner story world from an external viewpoint, and has access to omniscience: he can show the reader what is going on behind the journeying Dante’s back, as he does in Singleton’s other noted ‘slip’, the arrival of Statius in *Purgatorio XXI*, or outside his line of sight, in the case of Bernard.⁴⁹ By contrast, the journeying Dante has restricted and highly subjective sight, able to see or experience only what his mortal perceptual faculties allow: he cannot see in the dark (on the thick black smoke-enveloped terrace of Wrath, for example, in *Purgatorio XVI*), or events that happen beyond his visual field.⁵⁰ But when the reader looks through his eyes, she sees precisely what he does at that particular point in his physical, spiritual, emotional and cognitive journey.

Dante’s narrative frame device gives him the flexibility to switch between an external, omniscient mode and an internal, subjective mode, thereby inviting the reader to feel sometimes as if she is watching the journeying Dante from the outside, inferring his experience from what he says (although he speaks rarely, as I discuss in Chapter 4) and from his narrated body states; and at other times as if she is located inside his head, with direct access to his inner perceptual experience. Dante deploys such switches constantly throughout the poem, typically locating them at the junction of *terzine*, which allows the brain to

⁴⁸ I further explore this device in Chapter 5.

⁴⁹ In relation to the narrative structure of the *Vita Nuova*, Singleton writes: ‘With the death of Beatrice, a circle is closed. We know again what we began by knowing. And we stand at a point where we can see the movement along this line of action is not movement in a single direction. The current is alternating, which is something one had already seen in the figure of a poet–protagonist become two persons according to a situation in time: the one being he who, though ignorant of the end, moves always towards the end; and the other he who, knowing the end, is constantly retracing the whole line of events with the new awareness and transcendent understanding which such superior knowledge can give.’ Charles S. Singleton, *An Essay on the ‘Vita Nuova’* (Baltimore; London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1977), p. 25. Note that the narrating Dante is omniscient only in his *Implied Author* narrating instance incarnation, not in either the *Embodied Narrator* or *Zero-Focalised Narration* narrating instances.

⁵⁰ ‘Buio d’inferno e di notte privata | d’ogne pianeto, sotto pover cielo, | quant’ esser può di nuvol tenebrata, | non fece al viso mio sì grosso velo | come quel fummo ch’ivi ci coperse, | né a sentir di così aspro pelo, | che l’occhio stare aperto non sofferse’ (*Purg.*, XVI. 1-7).

assimilate them largely unconsciously without much threat to immersion. In the sequence with Bernard, however, one of these focal view switches is rendered perceptible (at a pre-rational rather than a conscious level, as I have argued), and it is this perceptibility that creates the instance of cognitive dissonance. Expanding the sequence slightly for context, I will try to explain how and why.

The first *terzina* recounts the journeying Dante's condition in the moments just before Bernard's gesture:

E io ch'al fine di tutt' i disii
 appropinquava, sì com' io dovea,
 l'ardor del desiderio in me finii. (46-48)

This *terzina* is focalised through the journeying Dante. The reader is effectively located inside the journeying Dante's head as the narration evokes an internal state (the feeling of approaching and then reaching the end of all desire) that the reader could not deduce through external observation. The personal tone and reference to subjective experience is further characteristic of the journeying Dante's perceptual frame.

Next comes the half-*terzina* account of Bernard's sign:

Bernardo m'accennava, e sorridea,
 perch' io guardassi suso; (49-50)

This is technically focalised through the narrating Dante.⁵¹ Bernard's gesture is presented as an action that anyone present could have seen, with none of the internal markers characteristic of the journeying Dante's focal view. However, because narrated events in the immediately preceding *terzina* were strongly focalised through the journeying Dante, and because of the very light touch of the external focal view that here facilitates an ambiguity in focalisation, the reader may quite naturally feel as if she continues to see the action through the journeying Dante's eyes – and my contention is that the narrative invites precisely this – thereby quite reasonably inferring that she is looking with the journeying Dante directly at Bernard.

⁵¹ Specifically, the *Zero-Focalised Narration* narrating instance.

However, the second half of the *terzina*, relating how Dante feels his vision gradually align with the holy ray, powerfully challenges such an inference:

[...] ma io era
già per me stesso tal qual ei volea. (50-51)

The reader might feel a jolt of surprise. The journeying Dante is apparently looking elsewhere, and has been all along; and indeed, if we trace back his line of sight in the text, we realise that his eyes have been directed upwards without interruption since the last part of *Paradiso XXXI*, ‘Io levai li occhi’ (118). But now, the reader might sequentially infer, she really *is* looking with the journeying Dante, experiencing an unmediated vision of God with him. In technical terms, then, this feels like the journeying Dante focal view. In reality, however, this half-*terzina* is one of the rare instances when either focal view can technically be inferred, thanks to the contextualising data of the reader already knowing what ‘tal qual ei volea’ (51) means. The ambiguity opens up a gap in the text that accommodates the reader who is inclined to pause in her consumption of the narrative.

Finally, the reader is returned unequivocally to the journeying Dante’s focal view as his sight progressively intertwines with the divine light, becoming ‘sincera’ (52), a subjective personal experience that could not be known from the outside:

ché la mia vista, venendo sincera,
e più e più intrava per lo raggio (52-53)

and in the last line (and not material for my argument here but included for completeness), focal view switches back to the narrating Dante, marked by a change in tone from the personal to the authoritative:⁵² ‘de l’alta luce che da sé è vera’ (54).

To summarise:

E io ch’al fine di tutt’ i disii
appropinquava, sì com’ io dovea, - *journeying Dante*
l’ardor del desiderio in me finii.

⁵² Specifically, the *Implied Author* narrating instance.

Bernardo m'accennava, e sorridea, perch' io guardassi suso;	- feels like <i>journeying Dante</i> but technically <i>narrating Dante</i>
ma io era già per me stesso tal qual ei volea:	- feels like <i>journeying Dante</i> but technically either
ché la mia vista, venendo sincera, e più e più intrava per lo raggio de l'alta luce che da sé è vera.	- <i>journeying Dante</i> - <i>narrating Dante</i>

The switch of particular interest, then, occurs between the first and the second *terzine*, but only becomes apparent midway through the second, heralded by the narratively pugnacious 'ma' at the caesura (50).⁵³ It is this lag that creates the dissonance. The reader may quite justifiably feel herself invited to look directly at Bernard through the journeying Dante's eyes, but the contextualising information that follows – that Dante is already looking elsewhere – alerts the reader to an error in the construction of her mental model. As the second half of the *terzina* unfolds, the reader might begin to sense that something odd has happened: the 'già' (51) that follows inverts the order of action, meaning that she misses the journeying Dante's crucial visual action (shifting his gaze from Mary to the divine light), until a split second afterwards when the narrating Dante supplies the information from an external focal view.

But if Dante's focal view switch really is not the mistake Singleton suggests, then this raises two further questions. Firstly, as mentioned earlier in relation to the poet's authority, how does Dante know what Bernard is doing if he doesn't actually look at him? And secondly, why might the reader need to look at Bernard if Dante doesn't?

1.4 Bernard's object

⁵³ The word 'ma', often preceding a narrative shock and therefore inviting an experience of surprise in the reader, is likely, I suggest, to be an indicator of a rupturing of Ryan's third form of immersion, *temporal* immersion, so merits investigation in terms of invitations to participate. It is beyond the scope of this particular project, but I explore it in my further research, along with 'già', which I expect to carry a similar function.

Singleton, as we saw earlier, was exercised by the practical difficulty of the journeying Dante being able to look in two directions simultaneously. Whilst there may be other interpretations for Dante's perceptual capacity that Singleton has perhaps not explored, my interest is in mechanisms of narrative mediation, so I focus here only on the narrative data provided in the text.⁵⁴ Some modern commentators resolve the question by simply making Bernard vanish, inferring that the sequence enacts the journeying Dante's mental separation from tutelage. Anna Maria Chiavacci Leonardi and Nicola Fosca conclude that Dante now stands alone in his encounter with God ('Dante è solo sulla scena di fronte a quel Dio a quale è rivolto', writes Chiavacci Leonardi; and Fosca, that 'Dante [è] solo di fronte a Dio').⁵⁵ However, Dante has given no suggestion that the Empyrean is a space in which interlocutors might just disappear. Robert Hollander, more productively as far as my position is concerned, finds Bernard still present but held within the protagonist's inner world: 'He has not outrun his need for guidance so much as he has internalised his guide.'⁵⁶

There is considerable narratological work to do here to more fully excavate the question of the poem's 'fiction' that lies beyond the current scope of this thesis, but with which I propose premises of embodied cognition and Virtual Reality can further productively assist. There is, for example, the question of the virtual and the material real: the journeying Dante may not have 'seen' (in any concrete terms) Bernard's sign, but may have 'sensed' it as a 'subjective inner reality', as Singleton writes of the visions in *Purgatorio* XV.⁵⁷ Further,

⁵⁴ Such alternative interpretations might include, for example, whether it is possible that the journeying Dante can somehow see Bernard in his peripheral vision (although tracking the precise eye movements and locatives for each character from the moment Bernard took Beatrice's place in *Paradiso* XXX suggests that Bernard would need to be located some considerable distance forwards and up from Dante, so almost certainly not). Or again, whether Dante could infer Bernard's gesture through the phenomenon of *joint attention*, defined by Andrew Pinsent as: 'a triadic person-person-object scenario in which the object is the focus of attention of both persons', and of which I suggest there is an example involving Bernard, Dante and Mary at *Par.*, XXXI. 118-42. Andrew Pinsent, *The Second-Person Perspective in Aquinas's Ethics: Virtues and Gifts* (New York; London: Routledge, 2012), p. 44. To a certain extent, this depends on how the reader mentally models Bernard's *cenno* in *Paradiso* XXXIII: is it a gesture of the hand (as Singleton seems to infer)? A smile? This would be more typical of the lexicon of signs in Paradise, although it would be tautologous in this case. Or could this, too, be a 'visual' gesture, a turning of the eyes? If the latter, then the phenomenon of joint attention might be mooted, but neither of the former two could be 'read' without being seen under normal modes of human perception. What is certain though is that by *not* specifying the nature of the sign, Dante creates another gap in the narrative, since each interpretation is possible.

⁵⁵ Chiavacci Leonardi, gloss on *Par.*, XXXIII. 50-51; Fosca, gloss on *Par.*, XXXIII. 49-54.

⁵⁶ Hollander, gloss on *Par.*, XXXIII. 50-51.

⁵⁷ Singleton, gloss on *Purg.*, XV. 115-17.

whilst inference as a mechanism of production might point to the ‘made’ (*fictio*) quality of the poem, we need not conflate something that is ‘made’ with something that is ‘made up’ or invented.

But if the journeying Dante doesn’t need to see Bernard’s sign, why does Dante choose to include the information of the sign at all? The sign makes no difference to the journeying Dante’s actions, so in terms of narrative understanding, it is redundant. But Dante *does* include it, and this inclusion *does* invite the reader to look directly at Bernard on her own account, acting independently of the protagonist.

The central factor, as I see it – and the mitigation for Dante’s narratorial inference, that Singleton missed and that forced him into his conclusion of Dante’s ‘slip’ of perspective – is that Bernard’s interaction *manquée* functions as *an invitation to the reader*. I have suggested that the dislocation of focal view creates a gap into which the reader is invited to unconsciously ‘insert’ herself in a mode of imaginative participation. The dissonant focal view switch, then, is ‘made’ in service of reader participation: it is not an error, but an invitation. And this invitation, I propose, is played out not only at the level of the signified, but it has an even more overt message. Is it possible, reader, that every time you read this sequence, Bernard is signalling directly to *you*?

1.5 Bernard’s double frame violation

Such a possibility would require that Bernard commit a narrative frame violation – indeed, a double frame violation: stepping out of the inner story world and gesturing transparently through the medium of the outer story world to engage the attention of the reader directly in her own world.⁵⁸ This might seem far-fetched to the twentieth- and early twenty-first century reader, habituated as she is to the notion of the text as closed artefact.⁵⁹ However, I would

⁵⁸ On the principle of narrative frame violations, see for example: Debra Malina, *Breaking the Frame: Metalepsis and the Construction of the Subject* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2002). She writes: ‘Even at its mildest, metalepsis disrupts the boundary of a fictional narrative – the one between inside and outside, between story and world. When a text repeatedly indulges in such subversion, the result is inevitably jarring, and its effects run the gamut from startling diversion through destabilisation and disorientation to outright violation’ (pp. 2-3).

⁵⁹ Separating ‘fabula’ (story) and ‘syuzhet’ (plot), Vladimir Propp defined in 1928 the essential condition of a narrative text as being that it is ‘closed’: events are already over at the time of their narrating. Vladimir Propp, *Morphology of the Folktale*, 2nd edn, ed. by Louis A. Wagner (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1968).

argue that it is a less novel idea for the twenty-first century videogamer, although admittedly she might expect her interlocutor to try to shoot her rather than smile or wave at her.

But there are certainly precedents for such an idea in medieval narrative artefacts. The second-person narration model of the medieval gospel meditation, for example, is characterised by repeated metalepses wherein the narrator or authorial voice addresses the reader directly (imagine this, think that, and so on), as I discuss at some length in Chapter 2. Further, visual metalepses were not uncommon in manuscript illuminations. ‘As a container, the medieval [picture] frame often seems rather leaky,’ in the words of art historian Stuart Whatling, as illustrated in the illumination below (*Figure 1*) from the Book of Revelation in the *Getty Apocalypse* (1255-1260).⁶⁰

*Fig. 1.*⁶¹



From a position external to the frame, St John witnesses the visions represented within it. Such a form of inward-looking metalepsis might remind us of the *visibile parlare* in Dante’s *Purgatorio*, the marble bas reliefs on the terraces of the mountain. Of the first, Dante relates in *Purgatorio* X that he recognises (‘conobbi’, 29) the event of the Annunciation, experiencing the Archangel as vividly as though he were present at the scene: ‘dinanzi a noi pareva sì verace | quivi intagliato in un atto soave, | che non semiava imagine che tace’ (37-39). By

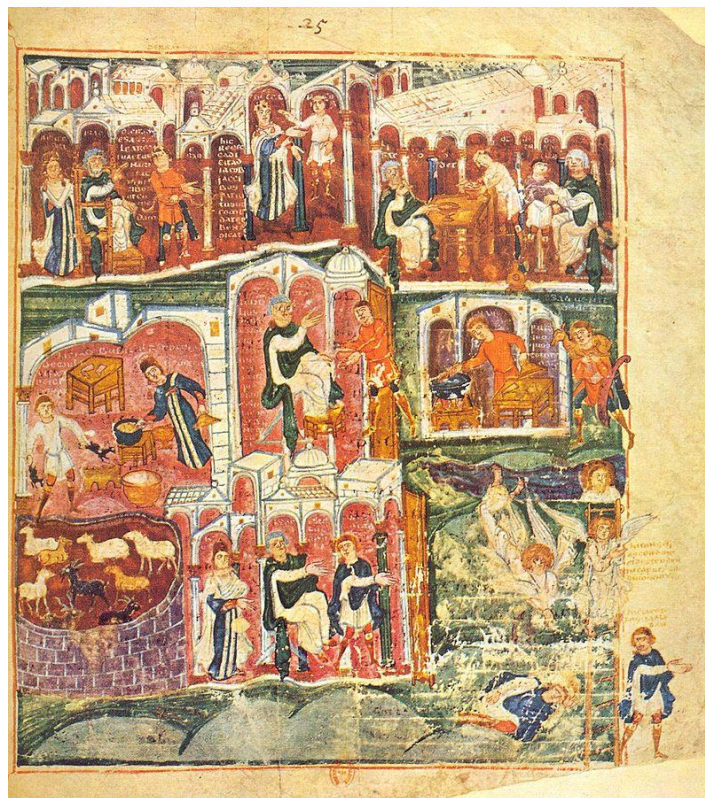
⁶⁰ Stuart Whatling, ‘Narrative Art in Northern Europe, c.1140-1300: A Narratological Re-appraisal’ (unpublished doctoral thesis, Courtauld Institute of Art, 2010), p. 84.

⁶¹ Detail from *The Massacre of the Two Witnesses by the Beast*, from *Illuminating the End of Time: The Getty Apocalypse Manuscript*. Los Angeles, Getty Center, MS Getty Apocalypse.

Paradiso XXXII – and raising interesting questions for the reader’s own sense of location or movement across frames at that point – the journeying Dante will have breached this ‘frame’, recognising himself as directly present at an eternal simulation of the Annunciation as he gazes at Gabriel descending once again to Mary: ‘e quello amor che primo li discese, | cantando “*Ave, Maria, gratia plena,*” | dinanzi a lei le sue ali distese’.⁶²

There are also examples in narrative art of characters stepping *out* from narrative frames. The Ashburnham Pentateuch’s illustration of Jacob’s dream of the ladder, for example (*Figure 2*) shows how on awakening, Jacob, in Whatling’s words, ‘steps right out of the picture frame and into the border, ready to walk off in the way of the Lord’:⁶³

*Fig. 2.*⁶⁴



And for most of the *Commedia* (until the ascent of the celestial ladder in *Paradiso* XXII is completed), the reader experiences the narrating Dante repeatedly ‘gesturing’ verbally out of the text at her through the device of the direct address, inviting her to import her own memories, judgments and imaginings into his narrative system in a collaborative approach to

⁶² *Par.*, XXXII. 94-96.

⁶³ Whatling, p. 86.

⁶⁴ Paris, Biblioteque Nationale, MS nouv. acq. lat. 2334, Ashburnham Pentateuch.

the construction of meaning.⁶⁵ Might we then similarly conceive of Bernard's externally directed metalepsis as a gesture *out* of the text, at the reader? Is it possible to read this as a collapsing down of narrative layers to a single point, a *punto*, a direct interaction between inner story world character and reader?

My suggestion is that this dissonant shift in focal view can invite the reader to switch momentarily in her mental modelling from a mode of spectatorship focused on the journeying Dante protagonist into a mode of agential participation, acting independently to mentally turn her eyes to God, thereby briefly, I shall propose, electively identifying as the 'io' of the text. The temporary dislocation of her line of sight from the journeying Dante's opens a *gap* in the narrative that the reader must herself bridge. The encounter with God, as the narrating Dante repeatedly reminds us, defies narrative: it is unsayable. As Barański notes in his essay, 'Dottrina degli affetti e teologia: la rappresentazione della beatitudine nel *Paradiso*', 'tra i dantisti, la questione di come il poeta abbia affrontato il problema dell' "essenza della beatitudine" in *Paradiso* XXXIII sia da tempo controversa e, direi, irrisolta'.⁶⁶ What happens at the point of the divine encounter remains an open question both in theological terms (as Barański explores in detail) and also, I suggest, in terms of the narrative mechanisms that support it. Whilst guided by the former, my particular focus in this thesis is the latter: indicating the existence of this gap in narratological terms, identifying the web of invitations to reader participation upon which it depends, and setting out as a result my proposal for the reading mode I shall describe as *first-person participation*.

1.6 From immersion to presence: a new framework for reader response criticism

The goal of this thesis is to arrive at a definition of this newly proposed concept of 'first-person participation'; a provisional term I offer in the apparent absence of an existing notion in reader response theory. Its key innovation is the uncovering of a series of narratological mechanisms in the *Commedia* through which I propose this mode of reading to be invited.

⁶⁵ I discuss the mechanism of the direct address in Chapter 5.

⁶⁶ Zygmunt G. Barański, 'Dottrina degli affetti e teologia: la rappresentazione della beatitudine nel *Paradiso*', in *Dante e la cultura religiosa medievale. In ricordo di Anna Maria Chiavacci Leonardi, Atti del Convegno Internazionale di Studi* (Ravenna, 28 novembre 2015), a cura di Giuseppe Ledda (Ravenna, Centro Dantesco dei Frati Minori Conventuali, forthcoming 2018), section '*Cognitio Dei e/o affectus in Deum: problemi di metodo*'.

First-person participation is a mode of interaction with a narrative artefact that may be triggered through a sustained experience of a particular form of embodied immersion known as *presence*. I explore this foundational notion of embodiment in Chapter 2. As mentioned earlier in relation to Contini's 'ripercorrere il racconto', presence is widely understood in the field of videogame criticism, in IJsselsteijn's definition, as 'the experiential counterpart of immersion'.⁶⁷ Immersion is a subjective feeling of deep absorption that need not involve the sensorimotor system, but instead can be triggered by the desire to *know* – as with a so-called 'page-turner' novel, where the reader can feel lost to the outside world for the duration of her reading but does not necessarily experience a sense of personal transformation afterwards, as I shall argue is the case in relation to presence. Being primarily a mental phenomenon, the experience of immersion is difficult to discuss other than retrospectively by self-report. The physically-rooted responses inherent in presence, by contrast, as I shall set out in the three main technical sections of this thesis, can be linked to particular triggers or mechanisms in the text. Presence is *embodied* and *experiential* because it requires the involvement of bodily systems in re-presenting, within the reader, the narrated body states; and the involvement of these systems is triggered by specific mechanisms in the text. So, whether one reader consciously feels or experiences something and another does not – as discussed above in relation to Singleton's perceptible experience of dissonance in response to the narration of Bernard's sign – the *existence* of such textual triggers can be objectively identified in particular narratological mechanisms. This is the root of the notion in this thesis of *invitations to participate*.

Textual literary theory does not yet have a full lexicon to describe the phenomenon of embodied interaction in a virtual environment. For this reason, I propose we turn to critical theory in another narrative medium which foregrounds the involvement of the human body in constructing a meaningful interpretation of a virtual world: videogames.

A necessary preliminary question is whether there is any merit in comparing a narrative text with a videogame since each is based in a different semiotic system. My stance in this thesis is one of informed experiment. I do not seek to make any general claims in relation to cross-media narrative theory. Instead, taking the *Commedia* as my model for exploration, I follow W. J. T. Mitchell on the principle of careful analytical experimentation at 'the borders

⁶⁷ See Chapter 1, n. 7.

between “textual” and “visual” disciplines’: namely, that this ‘ought to be a subject of investigation and analysis, collaboration and dialogue, not defensive reflexes’.⁶⁸

My reasons for suggesting this experiment are three-fold. Firstly, cognitive neuroscience increasingly offers evidence that the brain does not distinguish between the so-called ‘real’ (that is, physical, material, or real-world cues) and the ‘imagined’ (virtual) at a neural level, *provided the imagined or virtual data is sufficiently realistic*. Different theories of embodied cognition have converged on an understanding that so-called ‘off-line cognition’ – the kind of cognising we do in imagining, daydreaming, dreaming, reading, and in virtual reality – involves the same neural mechanisms we use in cognising the physical world (as I further explore in Chapter 2).⁶⁹

Secondly, and directly related to this new neurobiological understanding, VR gives us tangible, observable evidence of this phenomenon when we observe a player wearing a VR headset making dramatic movements – such as falling over – that are inappropriate for the player’s real-world physical situation but instead mirror her avatar’s experience in the virtual space.⁷⁰ According to Jeremy Bailenson, director of the Virtual Human Interaction Lab at Stanford University, this is because ‘VR can be stored in the brain’s memory centre in ways that are strikingly similar to real-world physical experiences. When VR is done well, the

⁶⁸ W. J. T. Mitchell, ‘Word and Image’, in *Critical Terms for Art History*, ed. by Robert S. Nelson and Richard Shiff (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), pp. 51-61 (p. 53).

⁶⁹ Prominent scholar of embodied and visual cognition Margaret Wilson proposed in 2002 that the ‘most powerful’ of embodied cognition’s new claims is that ‘*Off-line cognition is body based*. Even when decoupled from the environment, the activity of the mind is grounded in mechanisms that evolved for interaction with the environment – that is, mechanisms of sensory processing and motor control’. Margaret Wilson, ‘Six Views of Embodied Cognition’, *Psychonomic Bulletin and Review*, 9, 4 (2002), 625-36 (pp. 625-26, formatting in original; over 3,300 citations). To clarify: ‘[o]ff-line aspects of embodied cognition [...] include any cognitive activities in which sensory and motor resources are brought to bear on mental tasks whose referents are distant in time and space or are altogether imaginary’ (p. 635). Specific models in support of this notion include: Gallese et al’s 1996 ‘mirror mechanism’ (discussed in Chapter 2 of this thesis; see: Fadiga, Luciano, Leonardo Fogassi, Vittorio Gallese, and Giacomo Rizzolatti, ‘Premotor Cortex and the Recognition of Motor Actions’, *Cognitive Brain Research*, 3 (1996), 131-41); Revonsuo’s 2006 ‘world simulation model’, which proposes that we do not experience the physical world directly but instead via a simulation, precisely as we experience a dream (Antti Revonsuo, *Inner Presence: Consciousness as a Biological Phenomenon* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2006)); and Jeannerod’s 2001 ‘neural simulation of action’ (Marc Jeannerod, ‘Neural Simulation of Action: A Unifying Mechanism for Motor Cognition’, *NeuroImage*, 14, 1 (2001), 103-09).

⁷⁰ There have been numerous reports in the media of this phenomenon; see, for example, ‘Oculus Miffed: When VR is so Immersive You Fall Flat on Your Face’, *Guardian* (30 November 2016), <<https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2016/nov/30/oculus-vr-immersive-fall-face-plant-virtual-reality>>.

brain believes it is real'.⁷¹ When the player experiences presence in the virtual world, the virtual data over-rides proprioceptive data from the real world: your body still falls, even though you 'know' you are physically located in the real world. In relation to printed texts, I am not proposing that the reader responds through observable motor reflexes, but instead through more subtle forms of embodied response including the visceral and the neural.

Thirdly, I suggest that Biocca's 'Book Problem' indirectly invites us to explore the mechanisms by which written texts create their effects in readers.⁷² In 2003, leading scholar of communications theory and cognitive scientist Frank Biocca asked why books, he observed, could be as immersive as the real world, given the freshly emerging understanding that presence is based on sensorimotor data, and that books – he assumes – cannot cue such sensorimotor data. He writes:

If sensorimotor immersion is the key variable that causes presence, then how do we explain the high levels of presence people report when reading books [...]? Books are very low fidelity, non-iconic media and are extremely low on all sensorimotor variables identified as causing presence: extent of sensory data, control of sensors, and ability to modify the environment.⁷³

My suggestion is that Biocca's assumption about the 'low fidelity' nature of books is wrong, in the case of the *Commedia* at least. Medieval scholars in the field of affective devotion have long discussed the ability of texts to invite powerful and even directly observable responses in readers, as I set out in detail in Chapter 2. We might perhaps uncritically assume this to be somehow linked to the mental constitution of the medieval reader rather than any particular mechanism in the text itself. But as Bailenson has pointed out, virtual data '*done well*' (my emphasis) is extraordinarily powerful in VR; that is, when it deploys mechanics that invite a sustained experience of reality.

⁷¹ Communications scholar Jeremy Bailenson is author of the 2018 monograph, *Experience on Demand: What Virtual Reality Is, How It Works, and What It Can Do* (New York: Norton, 2018). Bailenson cited from online news article: Sandee LaMotte, 'The Very Real Health Dangers of Virtual Reality', *cnn.com*, 13 December 2017.

⁷² Frank Biocca, 'Can We Resolve the Book, the Physical Reality, and the Dream State Problems?' Paper presented at *EU Future and Emerging Technologies Presence Initiative Meeting* (Venice, May 5-7 2003). Biocca's work on communications theory and presence has been cited more than 19,000 times.

⁷³ Biocca, p. 4.

My proposal in relation to the *Commedia* is that we simply have not yet looked for the particular mechanisms – deployed in such an expert, unusual, or innovative way that the effect really is ‘done well’ – that might invite the same such ‘realistic’ experience in a textual narrative like the *Commedia*. Videogame criticism focuses strongly on mechanisms of embodied experience and presence, so my suggestion is that, with caution and respect for working assumptions and terminology differences across the two fields, we borrow certain ideas and theoretical approaches from videogame criticism as models for thinking in relation to written texts, and start exploring some of its mechanisms for potential textual analogues to see whether there may be invitations not just to immersion but to embodied presence in Dante’s poem.

My interest is particularly in the mechanics that support the experience of player participation in games that are played in first-person mode, a mode of play found across videogame genres, from action–adventure games like *Mirror’s Edge: Catalyst*, puzzle-platform games like *Portal 2*, and the more widely recognised first-person shooter genre like *Half Life 2*, in which the player typically controls an avatar.⁷⁴ As I discuss in Chapter 5, the avatar, the game’s protagonist, furnishes the player with what videogame critic and discourse analyst James Paul Gee refers to as a ‘surrogate body’ in the virtual space of the game, through which the player experiences the virtual environment of the game in an embodied way.⁷⁵

⁷⁴ Jarrad Trudgen, Viljar Sommerbakk, *Mirror’s Edge Catalyst* (2016), Xbox One, PlayStation 4, Origin for PC <http://www.mirrorsedge.com/en_GB/>. Valve Corporation, *Portal 2* (2011), multiple platforms <<http://www.thinkwithportals.com/>>. Marc Laidlaw, *Half Life 2* (2004), multiple platforms <<http://orange.half-life2.com/hl2.html>>. I have experimented with some primary research on *Mirror’s Edge* in Chapter 3 which has been productive and suggests opportunities to use such an approach in my further work. But for the most part, my interest in this thesis is on adapting and building from existing theory in videogame criticism. In addition, my focus is on so-called ‘interestingly hard’ videogames (a term coined by Margaret Robertson, a leading game design theorist and pioneer of the concept of ‘serious games’, where the primary purpose of the game is not entertainment but to train or teach) that foreground ‘the rich, cognitive, emotional and social drivers which gamifiers are intending to connect [players] with’. Margaret Robertson, ‘Can’t Play, Won’t Play’, *hide&seek* (2010), <<https://kotaku.com/5686393/cant-play-wont-play>>. Such games are typically released by independent game designers, by contrast with mainstream blockbuster games or those that focus on gamification and pointsification. This notwithstanding, the core principles discussed in this thesis of presence and the avatar are common to both.

⁷⁵ James Paul Gee, *Unified Discourse Analysis* (Abingdon; New York: Routledge, 2015). Gee writes that the first function of the avatar is to provide ‘a *surrogate body* for the player in the game world [...], determining what and how the player can see and sense’. Two further functions, are to provide: ‘an *identity* that a player inhabits [...]. When we play a game, we

In a well-designed game played by an attentive player, two transformations in the player's participation in the game world will happen. The first is that the player's brain will begin to respond to the virtual world in the same way that it responds to the real world, because the well-designed game world is programmed to provide the same sort of reciprocal feedback to her neural system as the real world does. This invites the reader to move beyond epistemic immersion and into a mode of present participation; specifically, I propose in this thesis, through *spatial* and *social presence*.⁷⁶

The second transformation is that the gap between avatar identity and player gradually lessens as the player progressively naturalises the skills she has learned through the medium of the avatar; this is the basis of what I later describe as *self-presence*. As a result, the reader becomes more cognitively adept, I shall suggest, in switching between the two identities, experiences and worlds.⁷⁷ Gee names this phenomenon 'projective identity', describing it as when 'players [...] create, by their play, a mesh among the character (avatar), the character's goals and now their own, too, and the virtual world'.⁷⁸ Gordon Calleja's 'alterbiography of

play as the avatar ...] [or] in the spirit of the avatar'; and 'a *tool-kit*. The avatar, in terms of his or her skills, powers, and devices, offers the player a set of tools with which to accomplish goals and solve problems in the game' (pp. 17-18). Gee is considered one of the founders of the field of New Literacy Studies that seeks to draw together linguistics, history, anthropology, rhetoric and composition studies, cultural psychology, and education.

⁷⁶ This is the root of the illusion of interactivity in a virtual space, feeling *as if* you are there and *as if* your body has agency in the game world (you act; the world and the objects within it act reciprocally on your body). See Marie-Laure Ryan on 'the many forms of interactivity' in *Narrative as Virtual Reality 2*, pp. 160-85.

⁷⁷ There is a conflict in current videogame critical theory as to whether these separate identities 'meld' (Gee, p. 94) or whether a gap is maintained between them, as Tom Boellstorff maintains in 'Virtuality: Placing the Virtual Body: Avatar, Chora, Cypherg', in *Companion to the Anthropology of the Body and Embodiment*, ed. by Frances Mascia-Lees (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011), pp. 504-20 (p. 513). I follow Boellstorff, as I discuss in Chapter 5. Boellstorff is a digital anthropologist who has pioneered ethnographic research approaches in digital environments and has authored numerous articles, book chapters, and several edited volumes and monographs. He is best known for the monograph, *Coming of Age in Second Life: An Anthropologist Explores the Virtually Human* [2008] (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015), and for the co-edited volume, *Ethnography and Virtual Worlds: A Handbook of Method*, with Bonnie Nardi, Celia Pearce, and T.L. Taylor (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012).

⁷⁸ Gee writes: 'Good videogames create a "projective identity". They create a double-sided stance to the world (virtual or real) in terms of which we humans see the world simultaneously as a project imposed on us and as a site onto which we can actively project our desires, values and goals' (p. 94).

self’, ‘where players interpret the events in the game as happening to *them* specifically, rather than to an external character’, describes a very similar phenomenon.⁷⁹

In Gee’s terms, this ‘gives rise to a new sort of being’: one that is not boundaried by its own perceptual, cognitive, and social habits but that instead, through the prosthetic medium of the avatar–protagonist, has been able to explore and try out new cognitive and perceptual habits in the safe space of the game world, ‘[inserting] themselves – their own desires, values and goals – into the [designed] mesh’ of the game, writes Gee.⁸⁰ It is an outcome that media scholar Bob Rehak describes as ‘[merging] spectatorship and participation in ways that fundamentally transform both activities’.⁸¹

This is why I propose a participatory mode of reading the *Commedia* to be so important as a generative companion mode to the critically evaluative mode more commonly associated with scholarship. It is, I propose, the essential key to revealing important invitations to the reader that might otherwise remain unexperienced, undetected, and under-discussed in Dante scholarship. In the case of Bernard’s sign, the instance of dissonance thins the immersive tissue just sufficiently to trigger a change in cognitive mode, inviting a highly agential deployment of the imaginative faculty, stretching the reader’s cognitive capabilities beyond epistemic immersion in the plot or a primarily intellectual engagement with the text’s meaning, and instead engaging in a sustained act of imaginative elaboration. My suggestion is that Dante has programmed such a development path for the cognitions into the narrative mechanics of the *Commedia* so that the poem functions not only as a single enunciation – a truthful account of one man’s experience of the journey, real or virtual, to revelation – but also as a *system* that invites others to mentally simulate their own journey. Bernard’s redundant sign to the protagonist to look up completes, I propose, Dante’s poem-long invitation to the reader to look for God on her own account.

⁷⁹ A videogame criticism theorist specialising in digital immersion and affective participation, Calleja writes: ‘Alterbiography is the ongoing narrative generated during interaction with a game environment [...]. [T]he generation of alterbiography can feature the character as a separate entity controlled by the player or can be considered as being about the player in the world [...]. The *alterbiography of self* is most commonly evoked in first-person games [...], where players interpret the events in the game as happening to *them* specifically, rather than to an external character.’ Gordon Calleja, *In-Game: From Immersion to Incorporation* (Cambridge, MA; London: MIT Press, 2011), pp. 124-25.

⁸⁰ Gee, p. 94.

⁸¹ Bob Rehak, ‘Playing at Being: Psychoanalysis and the Avatar’, in *The Video Game Theory Reader*, ed. by Mark J. P. Wolf and Bernard Perron (New York: Routledge, 2003), pp. 103-28 (p. 103).

1.7 Structure of the thesis

Following on from the analysis of Bernard's sign in Chapter 1 and an introduction to the embodied phenomenon of *presence*, Chapter 2 sets the scene for an analysis of the *Commedia* as an exceptionally participatory text, with a discussion of embodiment in the twin contexts of contemporary cognitive science and medieval models of reading.

The main part of the thesis then focuses on technical analyses of a series of narratological features of the *Commedia* that, I propose, invite the perceptual illusion of presence in the responsive reader; that is, the reader who reads as directed by certain narratological mechanisms of the text. I have identified invitations to three different types of presence in the poem: *spatial presence*, *social presence*, and *self-presence*. Chapters 3, 4, and 5, discuss each of these in turn.

In Chapter 3, I develop a model of spatial presence that is rooted in theories of situated cognition and propose a narrative strategy I term *narration through situated body states*. In Chapter 4, I explore social presence through a new lens of kinesic intelligence from theories of embodied cognition, proposing a strategy of *narration through kinaesthetic empathy*. In Chapter 5, I address the as yet little-theorised phenomenon of *self-presence*, proposing a series of five mechanisms that operate along what I suggest to be a continuum of invitations to the reader, from the direct addresses to the reader at one end, to a vast system of 'gaps' or spaces in the poem into which the reader might import her own cognitive data at the other. Specifically, I propose a new model for the *Commedia* of *narrating instances* that reveals the presence of not two but four Dantes in the poem; a mechanism I term *narration through mobile camera view* which supports an illusion that the reader has some degree of autonomous mobility of perspective in the narrated space; a new reading of the function of the *direct addresses to the reader*; a model of progressive cognitive rehearsal in the text that I term *narrative training exercises*; and lastly, a model of *narration through the gaps in the text* constituted by the extensive system of similes and narrative ellipses that underpin the exceptional openness of the poem. Finally, in Chapter 6, as the conclusion of this experimental narratological exploration of the *Commedia*, I propose that systematic and sustained responsiveness to these invitations to individual reader presence in the poem constitutes a mode of reading I term *first-person participation*. I set out what I understand to be the characteristic markers of this mode of reading, and its complementary, generative function alongside established scholarly modes of reading.

Chapter 2: Embodiment in Context

2.1 A fresh return to embodiment

My proposal for the reading mode I term ‘first-person participation’ is rooted in a model of embodied cognition that began to emerge with the so-called affective turn of the mid-1990s in the humanities and social sciences, and that is increasingly recognised in medieval scholarship as representing a return, at least in part, to medieval models of theory of mind, as I shall set out in this section.¹ In second-generation cognitive science, a new theory of *embodied cognition* challenges the Cartesian separation of mind from body that has come to dominate models of thought over the last four hundred or so years.²

Descartes’ *cogito* has been, in the terms of Lakoff and Johnson, ‘of special catastrophic significance’ in influencing subsequent theory of mind.³ They argue that Descartes presents as a ‘philosophical truth’ an assumption about cognition rooted in an unconscious metaphor: namely, that ‘knowing is seeing’.⁴ This metaphor forces him, they write, to a ‘model of deduction as a single act of vision that encompasses what is really a *series* of cognitive acts’,⁵ ultimately leading him to the conception of a disembodied mind in which all thought is conscious and where there is an objective external world to be cognised.⁶ Cognitive science

¹ For an introduction to the affective turn, see: *The Affective Turn: Theorising the Social*, ed. by Patricia Clough and Jean Halley (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2008).

² For a specifically humanities-oriented introduction to second-generation cognitive science, see Karin Kukkonen and Marco Caracciolo, ‘What is the “Second Generation?”’, *Style: Special Edition: Cognitive Literary Study: Second Generation Approaches*, 48, 3 (2014), 261-74. For a general introduction to second-generation approaches to embodied cognition, see, for example: Margaret Wilson, ‘Six Views of Embodied Cognition’; Raymond Gibbs, *Embodiment and Cognitive Science* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006); *The Routledge Handbook of Embodied Cognition*, ed. by Lawrence A. Shapiro (New York: Routledge, 2011). Descartes’ *cogito* formulation was first published in 1637.

³ George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, *Philosophy in the Flesh: The Embodied Mind and its Challenge to Western Thought* (New York: Basic Books, 1999), p. 400. On the Cartesian legacy, see especially Chapter 19, ‘Descartes and the Enlightenment Mind’, pp. 391-414.

⁴ Lakoff and Johnson, p. 394; p. 393. ‘We cannot doubt “what we can clearly and perspicuously behold and with certainty deduce”’ (p. 395, citing Descartes’ *Rules for the Direction of the Mind*, V).

⁵ Lakoff and Johnson, p. 399 (emphasis in original). Their full exploration of the consequences of this metaphor unfolds over pp. 393-400.

⁶ On disembodiment in the *cogito*, see *Meditations*, 78: ‘Thus, simply by knowing that I exist and seeing at the same time that absolutely nothing else belongs to my nature or essence except that I am a thinking thing, I can infer correctly that my essence consists solely in the

now offers us, in Lakoff and Johnson's terms, 'overwhelming evidence that the mind does not work like this'.⁷ But so appealing and common-sensical is this metaphor, with its illusion of a human-centric universe to be mastered, that it has endured, shaping the way we encounter the world and separating us, I shall propose, from certain medieval habits of cognition that affect the way we engage with texts like the *Commedia*. In a Cartesian world we have come to privilege the visual and the deductive over the sensual and the intuitive, narratives of resolution over revelation, and meaning over presence.⁸

Prominent medievalist and historian of perception Brian Stock observed in 2001 that the modern humanities encounter texts as objects to master, commenting that '[c]ontemporary criticism has considerably obscured the relationship between reading and contemplation practice that was deliberately incorporated into many late ancient and medieval readings on the self'.⁹ More recently, medieval historian Sara Ritchey has observed that '[the medieval] affective means of interpretation and understanding has [...] lost its place of importance in contemporary humanistic programs of study which have instead [...]

fact that I am a thinking thing. It is true that I may have (or, to anticipate, that I certainly have) a body that is very closely joined to me. But nevertheless, on the one hand I have a clear and distinct idea of myself in so far as I am simply a thinking, non-extended thing; and on the other hand, I have a distinct idea of body, in so far as this is simply an extended, non-thinking thing. And accordingly, it is certain that I am really distinct from my body and can exist without it'. René Descartes, *Meditations on First Philosophy*: Latin-English edition, ed. and trans. by John Cottingham (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), p. 109.

⁷ Lakoff and Johnson, p. 414. Damasio's widely accepted 'somatic marker hypothesis' offers neurobiological evidence that reason is indivisible from affect (over 26,000 citations). Antonio Damasio, *Descartes' Error: Emotion, Reason, and the Human Brain* (New York: Putnam, 1994). Quantum mechanics, via phenomenology, has radically challenged the common-sense notion of an objective external reality. For a lay introduction to the constructed nature of human cognitive experience in the context of quantum theory (so-called 'first-person reality'), see, for example: David Hoffmann, *Visual Intelligence: How the Mind Creates Visual Worlds* (New York; London: Norton, 1998).

⁸ On these tensions, see Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht, *The Production of Presence: What Meaning Cannot Convey* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2004). I explore a notion of *presence*, as foregrounded by Gumbrecht, as a tool for the modern reader in encountering the *Commedia* throughout this thesis. On presence, see also Stephen Milner, in his essay "'Bene comune e benessere'": following Gumbrecht, Milner proposes that 'the aesthetics of presence' 'has seen an attempt to foreground "being" rather than "meaning" in the description of affects rather than the reading of texts, privileging phenomenology over hermeneutics'. Stephen J. Milner, "'Bene comune e benessere": Rhetoric and the Affective Economy of Communal Life', in *Emotions, Passions, and Power in Renaissance Italy*, ed. by Fabrizio Ricciardelli and Andrea Zorzi (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2015), pp. 237-51 (p. 237).

⁹ Brian Stock, *After Augustine: The Meditative Reader and the Text* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2001), p. 23.

promoted a distanced, measured hermeneutics'.¹⁰ My suggestion in this thesis is that second-generation cognitive science's model of embodied cognition helps us defamiliarise essential differences between medieval modes of cognising that are instrumental in the practice of reading, and the Cartesian model through which modern scholarship has long been reading the *Commedia*, opening a path to a more historically sensitive way of interacting with the poem.

In Margaret Wilson's synthesis, and in opposition to a Cartesian disembodied mind, embodied cognition is born of an understanding that 'human cognition, rather than being centralised, abstract, and sharply distinct from peripheral input and output modules, may instead have deep roots in sensorimotor processing'.¹¹ This belief is rooted in new neurobiological evidence of a phenomenon of *exaptation*: that is, the discovery that the mind adaptively co-opts or 'piggyback[s]'¹² on neural circuits originally designed for bodily action, out of evolutionary efficiency.¹³ Human perceptual and motor systems share the same neural circuits. When we *act*, the muscles are excited and movement is observable; when we *perceive*, this motor execution is inhibited; or, in the terms of prominent neuroscientist Vittorio Gallese, in perception, 'action is not produced, it is only *simulated*'.¹⁴

¹⁰ Sara Ritchey, 'Manual Thinking: John Mombaer's *Meditations*, the Neuroscience of the Imagination and the Future of the Humanities', *Postmedieval*, 3, 3 (2012), 341-54 (p. 342).

¹¹ Wilson, p. 625.

¹² Lakoff and Johnson, p. 20.

¹³ *Exaptation* is defined in Oxford Dictionaries as follows: '[Biology:] The process by which features acquire functions for which they were not originally adapted or selected' (<<https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/exaptation>>). Originally a Darwinian notion ('preadaptation'), the term *exaptation* was coined by Stephen Jay Gould and Elisabeth Vrba in 1982. Neuroscientist Vittorio Gallese explains exaptation as follows: 'Key aspects of human social cognition are produced by neural exploitation, that is, by the exaptation of neural mechanisms originally evolved for sensory-motor integration, later on also employed to contribute to the neurofunctional architecture of thought and language, while retaining their original functions as well.' Vittorio Gallese, 'Mirror Neurons and Art', in *Art and the Senses*, ed. by Francesca Bacci and David Melcher (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), pp. 455-64 (p. 457). Further, in Andy Clark's well-known formulation: 'Biological brains are first and foremost the control systems for biological bodies.' Andy Clark, 'Embodied, Situated, and Distributed Cognition', in *A Companion to Cognitive Science*, ed. by William Bechtel and George Graham (Oxford: Blackwell, 1999), pp. 506-17 (p. 506). Clark's revolutionary research into robotics in the 1990s (and continuing into the present) foregrounded a notion of emergent interaction that opened the path to the models of *presence* in virtual worlds that I discuss in this thesis.

¹⁴ '[T]he [neural] circuit structures action execution and action perception, imitation, and imagination, with neural connections to motor effectors and/or other sensory cortical areas. When the action is executed or imitated, the corticospinal pathway is activated, leading to the excitation of muscles and the ensuing movements. When the action is observed or imagined,

It is now widely accepted in cognitive science that this phenomenon of embodiment extends beyond sensory perception into the other cognitive functions, such as memory, attention, language, learning, reasoning, and judgment.¹⁵ In Lakoff and Johnson's terms, '[t]he same neural and cognitive mechanisms that allow us to perceive and to move around also create our conceptual systems and modes of reason'.¹⁶ In some cases, this re-use of bodily systems becomes perceptible: in the motoric expression of language through gesture, for example, or in the offloading of a short-term memory function like enumeration by counting on the fingers. Sometimes, it is the viscera that are implicated: 'gut feel', perspiration, raised heart rate, for example. Lakoff and Johnson further define an additional type of embodiment in relation to the cognitions, one that functions at an almost entirely unconscious level. They categorise this as 'neural embodiment', describing it as 'all those mental operations that structure and make possible all conscious experience'.¹⁷ These are *unconscious* mental operations: neurons that fire without our conscious involvement: for example, in the way we unconsciously receive feedback from places and people that makes us feel 'present' – as if we are physically there – and that makes these interactions feel 'realistic'; in automatic imitation of others (known as neural mirroring); or in the unconscious leaps we make to bridge gaps in consciousness (such as inferring a person has a lower body when we see them sitting behind a desk). Such unconscious mental operations frame the way we cognise our world. This is the type of embodiment that is of particular interest to me in this thesis.

Descartes' logic framed reality as, in the words of Francisco Varela et al, 'the representation of a pre-given world by a pre-given mind'; it naturalised a worldview of external observation that the communication technologies of print and screen reflected and endorsed.¹⁸ Embodied cognition frames the processes of cognition instead as *enactive* – that

its actual execution is inhibited. The cortical motor network is activated (though, not in all of its components and, likely, not with the same intensity), but action is not produced, it is only simulated' (Gallese, 'Mirror Neurons and Art', p. 457, my emphasis, above).

¹⁵ Based in Damasio's work on affective reason and Lakoff and Johnson's notion of 'concepts', amongst others.

¹⁶ Lakoff and Johnson, p. 4. That is, 'the same neural system engaged in *perception* (or in bodily movement) plays a central role in *conception*', modelling relationships between things and performing abstract inferences (p. 38, emphasis in original).

¹⁷ Lakoff and Johnson, pp. 102-03; p. 104.

¹⁸ Francisco Varela, Evan Thompson, and Eleanor Rosch, *The Embodied Mind: Cognitive Science and Human Experience* [1991] (Cambridge, MA; London: MIT Press, 1993), p. 9. In *Consciousness Explained*, Daniel Dennett describes as the 'Cartesian theatre' this notion of an inner mental stage upon which metaphorical objects (our ideas) are observed by a

is, dynamic and rooted in sensorimotor processing; and *extended* – that is, constantly emerging as a result of interactions with people and with the environment.¹⁹ In their foundational text on embodied cognition, *The Embodied Mind*, Varela, Thompson, and Rosch describe it as ‘the enactment of a world and a mind on the basis of a history of the variety of actions that a being in the world performs’.²⁰ ‘To understand the mind’s place in the world’, suggests Susan Hurley in *Consciousness in Action*, ‘we should study these complex dynamic processes as a system, not just the truncated internal portion of them.’²¹

My suggestion in relation to the *Commedia* is that Dante’s text recruits not only the reader’s conscious cognitive processes (the ‘think’, ‘remember’, ‘imagine’, of the direct addresses), but also strategically targets the reader’s unconscious mental processes, inviting participation at a level of neural embodiment. Specifically, I mean that there are mechanisms in the text that invite the reader’s brain to accept the narrated space, the interactions within it, and the reader’s own presence there, as ‘realistic’; in a way, and to an extent, that we might consider unusual, and indeed innovative, in a textual artefact. Lakoff and Johnson characterise these unconscious mental operations as ‘the massive portion of the iceberg that lies below the surface, below the visible tip that is consciousness’.²² Their iceberg metaphor may be useful as a means to hold in mind the notion of a continuum of invitations to the reader’s cognitions in the *Commedia*. If the direct addresses represent the visible tip of the iceberg, inviting the participation of the conscious mental processes of thinking, remembering, imagining, my suggestion is that the vast bulk of the poem’s invitations to embodied participation in fact constitute the hidden portion of the iceberg: the unconscious mental processes that shape our individual perception of reality and drive our unique behaviours.

metaphorical spectator (our faculty of understanding). Daniel C. Dennett, *Consciousness Explained* (London: Little, Brown, 1991), p. 107.

¹⁹ A so-called ‘4E’ model distinguishes between ‘embodied’, ‘enactive’, ‘embedded’, and ‘extended’ cognition. For an introduction, see: Richard Menary, ‘Introduction to the Special Edition on 4E Cognition’, *Phenomenology and the Cognitive Sciences*, 9, 4 (2010), 459-63. In this thesis, I share cognitive literary theorist Emily Troscianko’s position that *embodied* cognition essentially contains the other three: ‘a body being inherently situated [embedded/extended], and always in action [enactive]’. Emily Troscianko, *Kafka’s Cognitive Realism* (New York: Routledge, 2014), p. 24. My exploration of spatial presence (Chapter 3) primarily foregrounds principles of extended cognition; social presence (Chapter 4), both extended and enactive; self-presence (Chapter 5), primarily enactive.

²⁰ Varela, Thompson, and Rosch, p. 9.

²¹ Susan Hurley, *Consciousness in Action* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998), p. 2.

²² Lakoff and Johnson, p. 103.

2.2 Medieval theory of mind

An analysis of late medieval understanding of cognition is not straightforward. The rediscovery of Aristotle in the late twelfth century fuelled the development of varying theories of mind by thinkers including Avicenna, Thomas Aquinas, Albertus Magnus, Roger Bacon, Peter Olivi, and William of Ockham.²³ However, what is evident is that cognition was widely held to be embodied: ‘the mind–brain complex an integrated, dynamic system’, in the terms of medieval historian Corinne Saunders and developmental psychologist Charles Fernyhough; the resultant *phantasmata* ‘dripp[ing] with sensory qualities and emotional charge’.²⁴

In “‘Bene comune e benessere’”, Stephen Milner identifies in late medieval Italy three significant points of discussion relating to the cognitions that, we can infer, would have been in the air when Dante was writing the *Commedia*. The first is a shift towards an Aristotelian understanding of cognition as *dynamic*, away from the Platonic species theory of cognition.²⁵ The second was a re-focusing on cognition as *social*, through an appreciation of the self as

²³ For an introduction to individual thinkers and theories, see: Robert Pasnau, *Theories of Cognition in The Later Middle Ages* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), which focuses particularly on Thomas Aquinas and subsequent challenges to his models by Peter John Olivi and William Ockham; Leen Spruit, *Species Intelligibilis: From Perception to Knowledge, Vol. 1: Classical Roots and Medieval Discussions* (Leiden: Brill, 1994); Simon Kemp, *Medieval Psychology* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1990), including an account of the inner senses and of memory (pp. 53-76). For a short introduction to the mechanics of medieval cognition for non-specialists, see: Corinne Saunders and Charles Fernyhough, ‘The Medieval Mind’, *The Psychologist*, 29 (2016), 880-83.

²⁴ Saunders and Fernyhough, p. 880.

²⁵ Milner writes: ‘[A]s Dante put it in *Convivio* citing Aristotle: “vivere è l’essere de li viventi” [*Conv.*, IV, 7, 11]. The faculties of the soul were what furnished the “motus” or engine of movement’ (p. 239). On this shift from what Simon Kemp describes as the ‘generally held’ medieval Platonic metaphor (the so-called ‘tablet metaphor’) of stored mental representations as ‘preserv[ing] the form or species of objects or events’, to William of Ockham’s claim that ‘mental representations are not stored but instead constructed on the basis of past learned experiences’, see: Simon Kemp, ‘Medieval Theories of Representation’, *History of Psychology*, 1, 4 (1998), 275-88 (p. 275). See also: Mary J. Carruthers, *The Book of Memory: A Study of Memory in Medieval Culture* [1990] (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, rev. edn 2008), especially pp. 18-19. Dante explicitly deploys the wax tablet metaphor in the *Commedia* several times (including at *Purg.*, XVIII. 39; *Purg.*, XXXIII. 79; *Par.*, I. 41; and *Par.*, XIII. 67, 73). My suggestion is that the enactive model is, additionally, powerfully encoded into the mechanisms of the text.

contingent upon and shaped by interactions with others.²⁶ The third point of discussion was an understanding of cognition as rooted in *interaction with the environment*: the self ‘a porous and sensate body that impinges, and is impinged upon, by the world in the accumulation of experience’.²⁷ Milner concludes that ‘[a]s it moves through time and space, such a self is radically contingent as it is called into being through its bodily motility and sensitivity to different environments and encounters as a self in community’.²⁸

In each of these three points, I suggest, we might explore resonances with a modern understanding of embodied cognition: in the first, Varela et al’s *enactive* model of a body in action; in the second and third, the notion of cognition as *extended*, and contingent upon social relations and spatial interactions. The medieval conception of cognition, as outlined by Milner, and our own contemporary model of embodied cognition seem to have in common a notion of a contingent, dynamic, interactive ‘self in society’: in both models, the body, as Suzannah Biernoff has expressed it, ‘a hinge between self and world’.²⁹

Rediscovering such parallels offers an opportunity, I would suggest, to rethink the way we have approached the *Commedia* through an inherited lens of Cartesian disembodiment, and to map together a contemporary and a medieval model of cognition in a way that scholarship on the medieval cognitions has arguably not had the tools to do in the past. Much of the canonical scholarship in medieval theory of mind (Kemp, Tweedale, Yates, for example, who were all writing in the second half of the twentieth century) was a product of first-generation cognitive science. Such scholars were therefore constrained by accident of context to try to read medieval theories of mind through the Cartesian legacy of computational mentalism, rather than through embodied cognition, arguably coming up against certain theoretical dead-ends as a consequence.³⁰ In 2012, Jane Chance observed that,

²⁶ Milner proposes that ‘medieval Aristotelianism [...] furnished a sophisticated but coherent psychological, physiological, and ethical interpretative framework that sought to make sense of the “self in society” while acknowledging the susceptibility of the self to external stimulus [...]. This framework conditioned how contemporaries read the world and sought to make sense of human interaction, from Dante to Machiavelli’ (p. 238).

²⁷ Milner, p. 239.

²⁸ Milner, p. 239.

²⁹ Suzannah Biernoff, *Sight and Embodiment in the Middle Ages* (New York: Palgrave, 2002), p. 48.

³⁰ For example, Patrick Hutton comments that Frances Yates’ rendering of the role of the art of memory suggests ‘an arcane method in an errant search for divine wisdom. Such an interpretation, however, marginalised the topic by characterising it as a line of intellectual inquiry’. Patrick H. Hutton, *History as an Art of Memory* (Hanover, NH; London: University Press of New England, 1993), pp.11-12. Such scholarship, I would suggest, could now very productively be re-examined in the light of second-generation cognitive science.

to date, there had been ‘few advances in understanding what might be termed the “medieval brain”’; and that ‘few [...] medievalists have grasped the potential importance of a cognitive theoretical and neuroscientific approach to the late Middle Ages, particularly given the significance of the rise in affective spirituality beginning in the thirteenth century’.³¹

But there is growing evidence of change. An emerging body of analysis in the humanities now seeks to read medieval theory of mind through the fresh lens of embodied cognition. Milner is a leading exponent, explicitly finding a relationship between medieval theory of mind and the mid-1990s affective turn; and writing that this turn ‘can be read as little more than the re-establishment of the premodern link between cognition and sensation, a return to the long-held assertion of the interdependence of psychology and physiology in the reading of human behaviour’.³² Saunders and Fernyhough suggest of the manifold developments in theory of mind by medieval writers that ‘[their] writings offer sophisticated and complex ways of understanding the [medieval] relation between brain and mind in the era of neuroscience’.³³ Performance theorist Jill Stevenson, writing on the English Passion plays, concludes that contemporary neuroscience invites us to ‘[revisit] medieval notions of perception’s material interactivity’.³⁴ And in the field of medieval affective piety, Michelle Karnes has newly highlighted in relation to some of the most popular Italian gospel meditations a phenomenon of neuroplasticity that could radically extend an understanding of the purpose and ambition of such texts in terms of individual behaviour change.³⁵

In the next section, I set out briefly some observations relating to medieval scholarship on the cognitions in which embodiment is already indicated in different ways: specifically, in the areas of *rhetoric*, *gesture*, and *memory*. Afterwards, I turn to the field of *affective piety*, additionally offering some context on medieval practices of reading, and suggest that with

³¹ Jane Chance, ‘Cognitive Alterities: From Cultural Studies to Neuroscience and Back Again’, *Postmedieval: A Journal of Medieval Cultural Studies*, 3, 3 (2012), 247-61 (p. 251, p. 252).

³² Milner, p. 238. Indeed, Milner suggests, the turn from Cartesianism can be read as a mirror of the medieval turn away from Scholasticism towards affective spirituality and a new vernacularity: ‘In many ways Cartesian method shared much in common with the scholastic method as carried out in the medieval classroom which privileged logical and dialectical argumentation in the analysis of set questions’ (p. 238).

³³ Saunders and Fernyhough, p. 883.

³⁴ Jill Stevenson, *Performance, Cognitive Theory, and Devotional Culture: Sensual Piety in Late Medieval York* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), p. 26.

³⁵ Michelle Karnes, *Imagination, Meditation, and Cognition in the Middle Ages* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011). I discuss this further in the section on Affective Piety in this chapter.

affective piety's focus on recruiting the cognitions in service of changing individual behaviour, and its dependence on virtual (that is, textual, as opposed to real life) sensory input data, new thinking about embodied cognition offers some extremely interesting perspectives for my exploration of invitations to embodied participation in the *Commedia*.

2.3 Approaches to medieval cognitive theory: rhetoric, gesture, memory

2.3.1 Rhetoric

In “Bene comune e benessere”, Stephen Milner explores the prominent role of the emotions in medieval rhetorical argumentation and invention, foregrounding a foundational role for affect in the rhetoric of the Middle Ages.³⁶ He writes that ‘[r]hetoric called on the irrational forces of emotion to move the will, requiring the orator to possess a level of emotional intelligence if he was to carry the hearts, as well as the minds, of his audience’;³⁷ and its purpose was to move (*per-suadere*, to strongly urge or induce) individuals and communities:

As the handmaiden to ethical discourse, [rhetoric] delivered right reason concerning the obligations and duties of the good citizen in persuasive form, stressing the virtue of action over the attainment of knowledge, the primacy of the good over the identification of the true. Unlike logical and dialectical argumentation, rhetorical

³⁶ Earlier approaches to an understanding of rhetoric in the late medieval period may be found in, for example, Rita Copeland, *Rhetoric, Hermeneutics, and Translation in the Middle Ages: Academic Traditions and Vernacular Texts* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991); Suzanne Reynolds, *Medieval Reading: Grammar, Rhetoric, and the Classical Text* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996); *Medieval Grammar and Rhetoric: Language, Arts, and Literary Theory, AD 300-1475*, ed. by Rita Copeland and Ineke Sluiter (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009). For other recent and varied perspectives in relation to Dante and rhetoric, see, amongst others: *Dante e la Retorica*, ed. by Luca Marcozzi, (Ravenna: Longo Editore, 2017); Joseph P. Zompetti, ‘A Theory of Vernacular Rhetoric: Reading Dante’s *De Vulgari Eloquentia*’, *Inquiries Journal*, 9, 4 (2017); Ronald Martínez, ‘Rhetoric, Literary Theory, and Practical Criticism’, in *Dante in Context*, ed. by Zygmunt G. Barański and Lino Pertile (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), pp. 277-96; Claire Honess, ‘The Language(s) of Civic Invective in Dante: Rhetoric, Satire, and Politics’, *Italian Studies*, 68, 2 (2013), 157-74.

³⁷ Milner, p. 244.

argumentation and invention were far more suited to the contingent world of communal political and social life.³⁸

It did so by ‘engag[ing] the senses’; by an ‘appeal to the sensitive soul and the channelling of its desires and appetites’.³⁹ The methods of rhetoric as he describes them are highly evocative of the *enactive* and *extended* models of embodied cognition, Milner arguing that ‘rhetorical argumentation was applied and situated’ and that ‘[r]hetoric put the specificity of situation [*extended* cognition], [and] the contingency of action [*enactive* cognition], back into the frame as it uses emotions to affect judgment’.⁴⁰

I suggest that Milner’s reading of medieval rhetoric through a frame of affective reason reinforces the importance, in considering the *Commedia*, of fully allowing that the rhetorical figures of the poem seek to engage the reader’s emotions as well as her intellect. To be persuaded, the reader must first *feel*, and indeed yield to ‘the irrational forces of emotion’. I return to what this might mean in practice in the section on affective piety.

2.3.2 Gesture

In *Gestures and Looks in Medieval Narrative*, John Burrow sets out the distinction in Augustine’s theory of signs (in *De Doctrina Christiana*) between gestures and postures consciously adopted to encode and express a specific meaning or intention (which would come under the classification of *signa data*), and non-verbal messages unconsciously communicated (*signa naturalia*).⁴¹ Barański has demonstrated that Dante had a sophisticated appreciation of learned thinking about *signa*,⁴² and of course there is much evidence in the

³⁸ Milner, p. 243.

³⁹ Milner, p. 243, p. 244.

⁴⁰ Milner, p. 244, p. 243.

⁴¹ Citing Augustine (*De Doctrina*, II, 5), Burrow describes the distinction as follows: *naturalia*: “those which without a wish or any urge to signify cause something else beside themselves to be known from them”, including in his examples facial expressions where they are involuntary signs of emotion’; *data*: “those which living things give to each other, in order to show, to the best of their ability, the emotions of their minds, or anything they have felt or learnt”. John A. Burrow, *Gestures and Looks in Medieval Narrative* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), pp. 1-2.

⁴² Zygmunt G. Barański, ‘Dante’s Signs: An Introduction to Medieval Semiotics and Dante’, in *Dante and the Middle Ages: Literary and Historical Essays*, ed. by John C. Barnes and Cormac O. Cuilleánáin (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 1995), pp. 139-80. More generally on signs in Dante’s works, see Zygmunt G. Barański, *Dante e i segni: Saggi per una storia intellettuale di Dante Alighieri* (Naples: Liguori, 2000). On gesture in Dante, see Burrow,

text of embodied utterance in the *Commedia*, both in terms of the often explicit encoding of postures of penitence in *Purgatorio* recently discussed by Heather Webb in *Dante's Persons: An Ethics of the Transhuman*,⁴³ and the arguably less conscious leakage of body language (Farinata's raised eyebrows in *Inferno X*, or Malacoda's expression of contempt in *Inferno XXI*, for example), as I explore in Chapter 4.⁴⁴

My proposal is that embodied cognition offers a fresh lens for exploring embodied utterance in one particular way that might alter engagement with the poem; namely, that gesture, posture, and facial expression are fundamental mechanisms of intersubjectivity at an unconscious level.⁴⁵ The notion of neural embodiment offers a new model for thinking about this in relation to a mechanism of 'neural mirroring', which proposes that we unconsciously, or 'directly', read an other's actions or intentions through their so-called 'body language' by automatically simulating the same neural activity that underpins such body language ourselves.⁴⁶ Gallese names this phenomenon *embodied simulation*. In a 2011 essay co-authored with literary theorist Hannah Wojciehowski, Gallese and Wojciehowski write:

Gestures and Looks, for a broad survey (pp. 156-79); for more detailed analysis, see Heather Webb, *Dante's Persons*, Chapter 2.

⁴³ Heather Webb, 'Postures of Penitence in Dante's *Purgatorio*', *Dante Studies*, 131 (2013), 219-36; and see also in *Dante's Persons*.

⁴⁴ Although I would suggest that the two categories and their respective degree of apparent intentionality or consciousness overlap substantially in the *Commedia*.

⁴⁵ Further, and beyond the scope of this particular study, new scientific evidence suggesting that gesture helps us *think* and *remember* might also invite new perspectives on gesture in the *Commedia*. See, respectively: David McNeill, *Hand and Mind: What Gestures Reveal About Thought* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996); John Sutton and Kellie Williamson, 'Embodied Remembering', in *The Routledge Handbook of Embodied Cognition*, ed. by Lawrence A. Shapiro (New York: Routledge, 2014), pp. 315-25. See also: Katinka Dijkstra, Michael P. Kaschak and Rolf A. Zwaan, 'Body Posture Facilitates Retrieval of Autobiographical Memories', *Cognition*, 102, 1 (2007), 139-49, proposing that retrieval of a memory of a past experience is facilitated if the body posture assumed during the past experience is re-enacted.

⁴⁶ There is now a large body of replicated research and associated literature on the phenomenon of neural mirroring and the mirror mechanism that supports it, of which a useful synthetic introduction can be found in Giacomo Rizzolatti and Laila Craighero, 'The Mirror-Neuron System', *Annual Review of Neuroscience*, 27 (2004), 169-92. For a list of publications that shows the wide range of recent applications of mirror neuron theory (for example, on yawning, smiling, empathy, Theory of Mind), see Jan Plamper, *The History of Emotions*, trans. by Keith Tribe (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), n. 234 and n. 235 (p. 219). The presence of so-called 'mirror neurons' was originally observed in macaques in 1996 by neuroscientist Vittorio Gallese and others at the University of Parma, and reported in *Brain* journal (Vittorio Gallese, Luciano Fadiga, Leonardo Fogassi, and Giacomo Rizzolatti, 'Action Recognition in the Premotor Cortex', *Brain*, 119, 2 (1996), 593-609). Gallese has since become a key international figure in understanding the relationship between action–

Embodied simulation creates internal non-linguistic ‘representations’ of the body-states associated with actions, emotions, and sensations within the observer, as if he or she were performing a similar action or experiencing a similar emotion or sensation [...]. [It] is a mandatory, pre-rational, non-introspective process – that is, a physical, and not simply ‘mental’ experience of the mind, emotions, lived experiences and motor intentions of other people.⁴⁷

It is pre-rational and unconscious because ‘mirror neurons allow a *direct* form of action understanding’, and it occurs constantly in real life when we observe and come into interaction with other people.⁴⁸ It is ‘direct’ because ‘it does not require any inference by analogy or other more cognitively sophisticated and explicit forms of mentalisation. When we see someone acting or expressing a given emotional or somatosensory state, we can directly grasp its content without the need to reason explicitly about it’.⁴⁹ Embodied simulation is increasingly widely accepted to be the root of empathy and catharsis; and the mirroring upon which it is based, a plastic skill: that is, one that can be refined.

Crucially, for a new understanding of user participation in a virtual artefact like a text, Gallese also suggests that embodied simulation is triggered *not only* when we observe such body states in real life, but can also be triggered when we *imagine* observing them; that is, in

perception and cognition in humans. He has published over two hundred peer-reviewed scientific papers, together with numerous interdisciplinary papers in the emerging field of cultural neuroscience, with over 75,000 citations in total. The same mirror mechanism was discovered in humans in 2010 (Christian Keysers and Valeria Gazzola, ‘Social Neuroscience: Mirror Neurons Recorded in Humans’, *Current Biology*, 20, 8 (2010), R353-54). There has been debate about the extension of mirror neuron theory into certain of the higher cognitive functions, but my work rests only on widely accepted evidence relating to the sensorimotor circuit (see Plamper, pp. 220-22).

⁴⁷ Vittorio Gallese and Hannah Wojciehowski, ‘How Stories Make Us Feel: Toward an Embodied Narratology’, *California Italian Studies*, 2, 1 (2011), 1-35 (p. 14). Further: ‘Mirror neurons [...] typically discharge both when a motor act is executed and when it is observed being performed by someone else [...]. | Observing an action causes in the observer the automatic activation of the same neural mechanism that is triggered by executing that action oneself [...]. [For example], [w]atching someone grasp a cup of coffee, biting an apple, or kicking a football activates the same cortical regions of our brain that would be activated if we were doing the same thing’ (pp. 12-13). They go on to propose that this is true not only for *motor action*, but also for *emotion* and *sensation*: ‘When we perceive others expressing a given basic emotion such as disgust, some of the same brain areas are activated as when we subjectively experience the same emotion’ (pp. 13-14).

⁴⁸ Gallese and Wojciehowski, p. 12.

⁴⁹ Gallese and Wojciehowski, p. 12.

response to appropriate virtual data: imagined, remembered, or mentally modelled in response to narrated information in a text. He and Wojciehowski write that:

Embodied simulation [...] can also occur when we *imagine* doing or perceiving something [...]. [B]rain imaging studies show that when we imagine a visual scene, we activate the same visual regions of our brain normally active when we actually perceive the same visual scene.⁵⁰

As a result, they hypothesise, ‘the border between real and fictional worlds is much more blurred than one would expect’.⁵¹ There are manifold examples in the *Commedia* of narrated gesture, posture, and facial expression, including some instances of explicit mirroring between interacting characters. My suggestion is that a new sensitivity to the mechanism of neural mirroring – as made manifest in narration of behaviours in the text – might invite us to consider the possibility that gesture, appropriately and realistically rendered through narrative data of observed bodily behaviour, may have the neurobiological potential to work metaleptically in a text. By this I mean that it may be possible to build a case in relation to the *Commedia* (as others already have in relation to other texts, as I discuss later) to argue that the reader’s own mirror mechanism may fire in response to what she reads, setting up the possibility of an additional level of ‘direct’ understanding by the reader of the intentions and body states of the characters in the poem. I return to this in Chapter 4.

2.3.3 Memory

It is well rehearsed in medieval scholarship that in the Middle Ages memory was accorded a different status to that which we give it today. In 1966, Frances Yates alluded famously to ‘[w]e moderns who have no memories at all’;⁵² ‘we moderns’ having made a virtue of developing technologies designed to offload or externalise most memorial work, from pen and paper note-taking to photography, paper archives, and now satellite navigation, Google searching, and cloud data storage. In 1993, cognitive neuroscientist Merlin Donald commented that: ‘Cognitive evolution is not yet complete: the externalisation of memory has

⁵⁰ Gallese and Wojciehowski, p. 15.

⁵¹ Gallese and Wojciehowski, p. 16.

⁵² Frances A. Yates, *The Art of Memory* [1966] (London: Ark Paperbacks, 1984), p. 4.

altered the actual memory architecture within which humans think.’⁵³ It is well established that we must interrogate our modern assumptions about this cognitive function when we try to engage with a medieval conception of memory.

Scholarship on medieval conceptions of the memorial faculty suggests that memory was seen as a trainable tool; a notion we also embrace today in the principle of neuroplasticity and so-called ‘brain training’. Significantly, for medieval thinkers, training of this faculty was seen as a virtue. Mary Carruthers writes that memory was identified with ‘creative thinking, learning (invention and recollection), and the ability to make judgments (prudence or wisdom)’.⁵⁴ Memory training served, then, not only to support the convenience and wellbeing of better recall, but also underpinned a crucial *ethical* purpose: providing and continually strengthening the mental architecture that supports good judgment and the capacity for virtuous and independent thought.

Medieval people also sought to offload cognitive memorial work to a certain degree. However, rather than the prosthetic technological externalisation we embrace today, medieval offloading focused primarily on mnemonics to trigger retrieval of units of remembered data. These included such embodied practices as the spatial model of the ‘memory palace’, rooted in the classical method of *loci*; or in certain of the so-called spiritual exercises often outlined in devotional literature that sought to create associations between tapping a certain body part and bringing to mind a particular affective state.⁵⁵ But, importantly, there is the suggestion in

⁵³ Merlin Donald famously wrote in 1991 that we have adaptively used parts of our bodies, our surroundings, and technology to offload and externalise memory storage. Merlin Donald, *Origins of the Modern Mind: Three Stages in the Evolution of Culture and Cognition* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1991). Donald later commented: ‘the externalisation of memory has altered the actual memory architecture within which humans think. This is changing the role of biological memory and the way in which the human brain deploys its resources’; for example, ‘increasing the degree to which our minds share representations’. Merlin Donald, ‘Précis of *Origins of the Modern Mind*’, *Behavioural and Brain Sciences*, 16 (1993), 737-91 (p. 737, p. 748).

⁵⁴ *The Book of Memory*, p. 195. She writes that this association of memory and ethics was a cultural one, and not simply a technological one: ‘[T]he valuing of *memoria* persisted long after book technology itself had changed. That is why the facts of [newly-available] books in themselves [...] did not profoundly disturb the essential value of memory training until many centuries had passed’ (p. 9). For further discussion on the question of the ethics of memory, see Spencer Pearce, who comments on medieval memory training as ‘the fundamental educational requirement [...] needful for salvation’. Spencer Pearce, ‘Dante and the Art of Memory’, *The Italianist*, 16 (1996), 20-61 (p. 20).

⁵⁵ On the medieval memory palace, see Carruthers, *The Book of Memory* (including on the influence of Thomas Aquinas), and Yates, *The Art of Memory* (on medieval ‘artificial memory’, and the classical method of *loci*). On the practice in medieval affective devotion of

medieval scholarship that books, too, could also be seen as mnemonics; and I propose that this notion may offer another contextualising model for thinking about cognitive participation in the *Commedia*.

Carruthers writes:

A book is not necessarily the same thing as a text. ‘Texts’ are the material out of which human beings make ‘literature’. For us, texts only come in books, and so the distinction between the two is blurred and even lost. But, in a memorial culture, a ‘book’ is only one way among several to remember a ‘text’, to provision and cue one’s memory with ‘dicta et facta memorabilia’. So a book is itself a mnemonic, among many other functions it can also have.⁵⁶

Considering a book as a cue to individual memorial work opens up the possibility of doing all sorts of cognitive work in interaction with it, in the same way that a memory palace furnishes a system for then placing and retrieving all the objects that are the ultimate focus of the cognitive memorial work. Under this model, a book is not simply a narrative in itself as we might habitually perceive it today, but rather a system of stimuli to independent, personal, cognitive work; a device for cueing retrieval of other ‘objects’ from personal memory, that might include personal sensory experiences (emerging from hill-fog into watery sun, for example), or might include other foundational texts, particularly Scripture, as I discuss in Chapter 5. Under such a model, we might perceive that the *Commedia* invites and requires a very different form of highly individuated cognitive engagement than today’s readers might habitually expect to deploy in reading a narrative text: much more active engagement of the memory and importing of remembered experiences, resulting in a much more personal, participatory mode of reading.⁵⁷

The *Commedia* has already been proposed as mnemonic. Harald Weinrich suggested in 1994 that Dante’s three realms ‘composent [...] un vaste système mnémonique’, supported

creating associations between specific body parts and affective states, see Ritchey, ‘Manual Thinking’.

⁵⁶ Carruthers, pp. 9-10.

⁵⁷ Interestingly, Spencer Pearce proposed of memory in 1996 – in the early stages in the revival of thinking of cognition as enactive – that the art of local memory is most effective when images interact *dynamically* (p. 40), concluding that: ‘[w]e may begin to appreciate the activity of memory – or at least of the memory-image – if we discard the notion that mental images are somehow akin to photographic reproductions of past perception’ (p. 41). Thus, Dante’s poem ‘is not simply a design, it is an enactment’ (p. 48).

by ‘les images les plus attachantes, accueillantes ou répugnantes’.⁵⁸ Frances Yates famously wrote in 1966: ‘That Dante’s *Inferno* could be regarded as a kind of memory system for memorising Hell and its punishments with striking images on orders of places, will come as a great shock, and I must leave it as a shock.’⁵⁹ She offers little elaboration, but it is apparent that she envisages the mnemonic function as inviting the participation of the imagination:

In this interpretation [of the *Commedia* as mnemonic] the principles of artificial memory, as understood in the Middle Ages, would stimulate the intense visualisation of many similitudes in the intense effort to hold in memory the scheme of salvation, and the complex network of virtues and vices and their rewards and punishments.⁶⁰

Yates appears to suggest that the principal memorial work is spatial in nature: firstly, holding in mind ‘the scheme of salvation’ – the structure of the three worlds of the afterlife as they appear to the journeying Dante, and the equivalent, I suggest, of building the ‘rooms’ of the memory palace; then, secondly, appending to this architectural schema the taxonomy of ‘virtues and vices and their rewards and punishments’; that is, visualising the objects and interactions contained in Hell, Purgatory, and Paradise. I wonder if, through the lens of embodied cognition, we can push this model further. Rather than focusing on using the text to build the rooms of the memory palace and then furnish them with observable paraphernalia such that the schema becomes memorable at a visual level – a working spatial model and the events that play out in it observed from a position of exteriority – perhaps instead the *Commedia* can be understood to function as a mnemonic for retrieval of personal *feeling*, cueing remembered *experience* of interactions, even if those interactions were or are virtual rather than taking place in the real world.⁶¹ As I explore further in Chapter 5, a hypothetical

⁵⁸ Harald Weinrich, ‘La Mémoire linguistique de l’Europe’, *Langages*, 114 (1994), 13-24 (p. 16).

⁵⁹ Yates, p. 95. William Franke issued a corrective to Yates’ claim to novelty in 2012, observing that ‘taking Dante as the culmination of the ancient rhetorical tradition of the *ars memorativa* is actually an idea that has a considerable history in critical theory and comparative literature’. William Franke, *Dante and the Sense of Transgression: “The Trespass of the Sign”* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2012), p. 6.

⁶⁰ Yates, p. 95.

⁶¹ Justin Steinberg makes the very interesting and arguably endorsing point in *Accounting for Dante* that in the *Commedia*, Dante may be seeking ‘to influence the books of memory of his urban readers’: ‘For Dante, the book of memory is a psychic container as real as the material spaces of contemporary books. Indeed, the complicated formal structures, rationalised topography, and heightened visuality Dante employs in his work can be seen as a means of

reader engaging with the text in the mode I describe in this thesis as first-person participation would import her own remembered experiences into the fabric of the text in service, I propose, of simulating her own journey through the virtual space of Dante's afterlife. In subsequent revisiting of each virtual room in memory, what will be recalled are not simply events observed (watching the journeying Dante's interactions), but rather feelings experienced. The point of remembering then becomes not only to *see* again but also to *feel* again.

Affective piety may offer a model for better expressing the individually transformative purpose of remembering a virtual experience, so I turn to this next.

2.4 Medieval affective piety

2.4.1 New medieval models of reading

The practice of reading underwent a period of substantial change in Europe in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. There was a major shift in communication technologies as a textual tradition gained traction alongside oral, visual and performance traditions, yielding a fertile period of multi-modality in reception that continued well after Dante's lifetime.⁶²

Consequently, practices of reading a written text were very often informed by both visual and

maintaining spatial–textual integrity within the “place” of the memory of individual readers, a sort of memorial transmission that rivals and might even replace the unstable material circulation that he would have witnessed in the early dissemination of his lyrics. If the vernacular poet cannot control the new methods of book production, perhaps he can influence the books of memory of his urban readers’ (p. 10). Justin Steinberg, *Accounting for Dante: Urban Readers and Writers in Late Medieval Italy* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2007).

⁶² On this technology change see, for example, Armando Petrucci, *Writers and Readers in Medieval Italy: Studies in the History of Written Culture* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995); and Brian Stock, *The Implications of Literacy: Written Language and Models of Interpretation in the Eleventh and Twelfth Centuries* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983). Stock prefers to speak of ‘the occasioned use of texts’ rather than ‘literacy’, because ‘one can be literate without the overt use of texts, and one can use texts extensively without evidencing genuine literacy’ (p. 7). It is also interesting to consider the medieval ‘read and hear’ model of concurrent modes of reception: *legere* and *audire* were ‘used as synonyms’, according to Giles Constable. Giles Constable, *Culture and Spirituality in Medieval Europe* (Aldershot: Ashgate Variorum, 1996), p. 48. The narration of the poem switches between the two modalities on several occasions, most obviously in *Inferno* XXII: ‘O tu che leggi, udirai nuovo ludo’ (*Inf.*, XXII. 118, my emphasis); and *Inf.*, XXV. 47; and *Inf.*, XXII. 118.

oral or performative cognitive behaviours and habits. Jessica Brantley, for example, has discussed ‘the diagramming of the Lord’s Prayer as a visual object’ in the fourteenth-century English Vernon Paternoster, concluding that the modality of reading invited in its tabular form ‘is far from a static looking – it is as various, as contingent, as active, as any oral performance could be’.⁶³ Brantley suggests that this tabular form disrupts ‘the left-to-right protocols of modern silent reading’, operating instead as ‘a matrix, or a network, or even a hypertext, for it provides multiple reading paths that link dispersed nodes or chunks of meaning to others in a variety of ways’.⁶⁴ Similarly, in *Textual Situations: Three Medieval Manuscripts and Their Readers*, Andrew Taylor warns against an habitual deprivileging of the body in contemporary reading practices compared with medieval habits, writing that ‘[t]he influence of print and its dominant mode, silent reading, may encourage us to think that questions of performance can be ignored’.⁶⁵ He goes on to add that ‘we have read medieval texts as if they belonged to the world of print, divorcing the works from their codicological context and thus from the music and conversation that once surrounded them, from their institutional situation, and from the lives they helped shape’.⁶⁶

Alongside this technology change was an explosion in new reading communities. Sabrina Corbellini has recently listed a number of factors driving this new turn to reading.⁶⁷ Coinciding with what she terms the ‘media revolution’ that ‘changed the way books were copied and made accessible as well as the networks of diffusion of texts and manuscripts’, Corbellini includes the twelfth century development of the advanced schools and universities, a widespread increase in literacy in the laity, a vast translation movement bringing established texts within reach of new readers, and the emergence of new writers, including women, and new genres of writing, including quest narratives, so-called vernacular theology, and the spiritual exercises of affective devotion.⁶⁸

⁶³ Jessica Brantley, *Reading in the Wilderness: Private Devotion and Public Performance in Late Medieval England* (Chicago; London: University of Chicago Press, 2007), p. 202, p. 212.

⁶⁴ Brantley, p. 212, p. 208.

⁶⁵ Andrew Taylor, *Textual Situations: Three Medieval Manuscripts and Their Readers* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2002), p. 21.

⁶⁶ Taylor, pp. 24-25.

⁶⁷ See: Sabrina Corbellini, ‘Introduction’, in *Cultures of Religious Reading in the Late Middle Ages: Instructing the Soul, Feeding the Spirit, and Awakening the Passion*, ed. by Sabrina Corbellini (Turnhout: Brepols, 2013), pp. 1-12.

⁶⁸ Corbellini, p. 5. For more on the emergence of new reading communities, see also Petrucci, esp. pp. 133-37. Specifically, on the earlier shift from monastic models of reading to scholastic, see Malcolm Parkes’s essay, ‘Influence of the Concepts of *Ordinatio* and

From these new reading communities emerged new models of reading, as more people had greater direct access to books as material objects with which to interact, and more opportunities to read alone or in private; a mode of ‘silent reading’ that, in practical terms, privileged reading at your own pace, re-reading, and cross-referencing one section or text with another.⁶⁹ And reading alone also gave the time and space for a deep affective response to a text that sometimes manifested in bodily responses, both observable through sensorimotor gesture, and the invisible but felt sensations of somatic and visceral responses.⁷⁰

Compilatio in the Development of the Book’, in *Medieval Learning and Literature: Essays Presented to R. W. Hunt*, ed. by Jonathan J. G. Alexander and Margaret T. Gibson (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1976), pp. 35-70. Peter Hawkins points out that the Franciscans influenced a turn ‘to narrative, emotion, and the language of the marketplace’ (Peter Hawkins, ‘Religious Culture’, in *Dante in Context*, ed. by Zygmunt G. Barański and Lino Pertile (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), pp. 319-40 (p. 327)). In his essay ‘Philosophy and Theology’ in the same edited volume (pp. 137-58), Andrea A. Robiglio points out that ‘the trope of the “quest” – ‘the pursuit to understand oneself and one’s relationship to God’ – ‘take[s] us away from the world of the universities’ (p. 153). In *Augustine the Reader*, Brian Stock writes that Augustine conceived of the act of reading as ‘a critical step in a mental ascent: it is both an awakening from sensory illusion and a rite of initiation, in which the reader crosses the threshold from the outside to the inside world. This upward and inward movement takes place when the appropriate text is transformed into an object of contemplation. *Lectio* becomes *meditatio*’. Brian Stock, *Augustine the Reader: Meditation, Self-Knowledge, and the Ethics of Interpretation* (Cambridge, MA; London: Harvard University Press, 1996), pp. 1-2. For an outline of medieval reading practices, see also: Joyce Coleman, ‘Reading Practices’, in *The Encyclopaedia of Medieval Literature in Britain, Vol. IV*, ed. by Sian Echard and others (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2017), pp. 1573-74. She describes the multi-stage monastic reading practice of *lectio divina* as follows: ‘First came private (though usually vocalised) reading of scripture and related Latin works, in order to grasp their literal meaning and to commit them to memory. The reader then proceeded to meditative reading, pondering the text and its spiritual messages. From there, he or she moved on to prayer and, ideally, to contemplation of the divine’ (p. 1573). Scholarly practices, and then public reading, she observes, invited commentary and glossing (p. 1573). But there was also a practice of lay silent reading: ‘nothing prevented any literate person from also taking up the book in some quiet moment to read it privately’ (p. 1574). Finally, ‘[d]evotional reading among the laity [...] descended from earlier monastic practices but [was] augmented by the late medieval emphasis on projecting oneself into the Passion story (a practice known as “affective piety”)’ (p. 1574).

⁶⁹ On silent reading, see especially: Paul Saenger, *Space Between Words: The Origins of Silent Reading* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997).

⁷⁰ In *The Wings of the Doves*, Elena Lombardi writes that ‘[t]he act of reading involved the body and the person’s emotions much more than today. Not only were books touched, kissed and caressed, but reading was also held to stimulate intense responses such as happiness, anger, shame, and even sexual arousal’. Elena Lombardi, *The Wings of the Doves: Love and Desire in Dante and Medieval Culture* (Montreal; Ithaca: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2012), p. 214. Further, elaborating a notion of ‘affective literacy’, Mark Amsler has conceived medieval writing and reading practices as ‘a semiotic matrix of acts and bodies’, denoting ‘a range of emotional, spiritual, physiological, somatic responses readers have when

Heather Blatt has recently drawn attention to what she proposes to be models of invited ‘bodily experience’ in medieval reading practices, in focusing on practices of emendation, non-linear reading, and the negotiation of physical architectural spaces.⁷¹ Simultaneously, there was an increase in public reading or oral performances which, as Stock writes, invited commentary and interpretation: the group members ‘must make the hermeneutic leap from what the text says to what they think it means; the common understanding provides the foundation of changing thought and behaviour’.⁷² In total, it is evident that reading was not the primarily mental and solitary process of cognitive assimilation of information that we might assume today. Barański has written that ‘[d]uring the course of his life, Dante displayed a coherent yet continually evolving and increasingly original understanding of the nature of writing, which culminated in the composition (and exegesis) of the *Commedia*’.⁷³ I suggest we might add to Barański’s synthesis that Dante also demonstrates an evolving and original understanding of the flowering of different modes of *reading* and, as I shall argue in this thesis, invites active participation in those different modes. Perhaps the most interesting and instructive of these for my purposes is the medieval model of affective piety.

2.4.2 Affective piety

In his 1996 survey of the Passion narratives and devotional meditations of the late Middle Ages, Thomas Bestul locates the ‘full flowering’ of the affective piety movement ‘in the Franciscan spirituality of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries’, observing that its

reading or perceiving a text, such as crying, laughing, imagining, or becoming aroused’. Mark Amsler, *Affective Literacies: Writing and Multilingualism in the Late Middle Ages* (Turnhout: Brepols; Abingdon: Marston, 2012), p. 101, p. 103.

⁷¹ Heather Blatt, *Participatory Reading in Late-Medieval England* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2018), p. 12. Blatt and I share a conviction that digital media studies and its model of participation is a powerful tool for exploration of medieval practices of reading (p. 3). However, our respective focus is different, Blatt exploring motor practices alone (emendation, sitting, walking), and with a thematic rather than my technical narratological focus.

⁷² *The Implications of Literacy*, p. 522.

⁷³ Zygmunt Barański, ‘Dante Alighieri: Experimentation and (Self-)Exegesis’, in *The Cambridge History of Literary Criticism, Vol. 2*, ed. by Alastair Minnis and Ian Johnson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), pp. 559-82 (p. 563). Further, ‘he expected his readers to follow his metaliterary suggestions and be actively involved in interpreting his “new” poem [...]. Exegesis was central to the medieval literary experience, and in the *Commedia* Dante called his readers to this in ways which would have been immediately recognisable’ (p. 576).

subsequent diffusion through the aristocratic laity and amongst women led to ‘a great demand for devotional texts’.⁷⁴ Such texts functioned as devotional icons for the pious laity, modelling meditations for the reader’s use, in service of providing an interactable framework to support a powerfully vivid and visceral imaginative reconstruction of Christ’s Passion: the final events of his life from his entry into Jerusalem to the crucifixion. Bestul refers to this process of vivid imaginative reconstruction through the multiple senses as ‘affective meditation’.⁷⁵ Sara Ritchey retrieves from Ludolph of Saxony’s *Vita Christi* [1374] the terms *recordatio* (‘dramatic visualisation in the imagination’) and *compassio* (‘an emotional response to the imagined past’).⁷⁶

Arguably the best known of these meditations is the pseudo-Bonaventuran *Meditationes Vitae Christi* [MVC], written by an Italian Franciscan in Tuscany to a Poor Clare sometime between 1336 and 1364.⁷⁷ Immensely popular, it was translated into all the major European vernaculars. But if the most popular texts for affective devotion came after Dante, it seems certain the model was already established in texts familiar to Dante.

Bestul traces the model for the Passion narrative back to Bernard of Clairvaux who, whilst writing ‘no independent treatise on the Passion’, demonstrated ‘unremitting zeal for affective meditation on the Passion of Christ as a way toward spiritual perfection’.⁷⁸ The meditation model itself, suggests Bestul, derives directly from Bonaventure:

To stimulate the emotions, Bonaventure relies on the techniques of ‘vivid representation’ he commended to his readers as a meditative strategy. The work has many concrete, visual evocations of the events of the Passion, employing an intimate, affective, apostrophic style [...] [and is] notable for its attention to the physical details of Christ’s suffering, bleeding body, deformed by pain and injury.⁷⁹

⁷⁴ Thomas H. Bestul, *Texts of the Passion: Latin Devotional Literature and Medieval Society* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1996), p. 35. More recently, see also: Sarah McNamer, *Affective Meditation and the Invention of Medieval Compassion* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010).

⁷⁵ Bestul, p. 38.

⁷⁶ Ritchey, p. 350.

⁷⁷ On dating and authorship of the MVC, see Karnes (p. 8, p. 145), and Bestul (p. 48). More widely, see: Sarah McNamer, ‘The Origins of the *Meditationes Vitae Christi*’, *Speculum*, 84, 4 (2009), 905-55.

⁷⁸ Bestul, p. 38. Bestul references specifically Bernard’s Sermons 20 and 43.

⁷⁹ Bestul, p. 44, within a wider section on Bonaventure, pp. 43-56.

What is crucial about this imaginative work of ‘vivid representation’ is that its goal is not solely to *see*, as external observer, the events of the Passion (arguably a ‘Cartesian theatre’ model of mental representation), but also to *feel* the associated emotions: to imaginatively participate in Christ’s suffering, imagining its details so vividly that the subject begins to simulate those same emotions herself. Emotions, particularly those directed towards Christ, writes Bestul, ‘are not regarded as deleterious but are esteemed as a means of opening the way toward spiritual perfection’.⁸⁰ Writing on Ludolph’s *Vita Christi*, Ritchey describes this as a process of ‘enscript[ing] Christic emotions’.⁸¹ The point of this process of imaginatively representing in your own person the pain of Christ’s suffering is to ‘*incorporate* the subjectivity of another’; that is, to simulate in your own body the physical and emotional pain experienced by Christ in the Passion.⁸² Such embodied affective acts, Ritchey proposes, are ‘designed ultimately to lead to new ethical, emotional, and physical dispositions’.⁸³ My suggestion is that second-generation cognitive science would classify this precisely as an act of embodied projective identification: that is, a representation of the body states of the other (Christ, in this case) in the reader’s own body in an enactive model of imaginative representation. In exploring this potential parallel we might, with an alertness to contextual authenticity, find a way to begin to make use of contemporary theories of embodied cognition to newly defamiliarise those mechanisms in the text that I propose constitute invitations to reader embodied participation in the *Commedia*. This is what I address in the main, technical, section of this thesis.

⁸⁰ Bestul, p. 35.

⁸¹ Ritchey, p. 350. ‘Meditation for Ludolph is thus a self-perpetuating loop of autoconstitution in which the practitioner enscripts Christic emotions by journeying through the past then redelivering the meditant to the present’ (p. 350).

⁸² Ritchey, p. 341 (my emphasis). Further on this question of embodied participation in the Passion, see Kerstin Pfeiffer’s discussion of ‘tactile empathy’ in her essay ‘Feeling the Passion: Neuropsychological Perspectives on Audience Response’. Writing of the later (fifteenth-century) N-Town Second Passion Play and the York Crucifixion, she proposes that: ‘Unlike purely static depictions of Christological suffering such as crucifixes, which foreground the wounds left by the buffeting and scourging, the captivating [enacted] images of violence against the body of the actor standing in for Christ in the N-Town trial pageants re-create for the audience the sensation of painful touch. *By allowing the spectator to see blow after blow land on the body of an actor standing in for Christ, these pageants allow him or her to feel the pain they cause not only vicariously but also personally because the feeling is reproduced in them.*’ Kerstin Pfeiffer, ‘Feeling the Passion: Neuropsychological Perspectives on Audience Response’, *Postmedieval: A Journal of Medieval Culture Studies*, 3 (2012), 328-40 (p. 335, my emphasis).

⁸³ Ritchey, p. 341.

Crucially, the text of the *MVC* provides a step-by-step script for representing these emotions in the meditator's body. Such guidance is helpful, and even necessary, suggests Bestul, because the Gospels themselves provide little detail for the reader requiring assistance to identify with Christ's suffering, being 'meagre in the specifics of Christ's sufferings and death'.⁸⁴ Devotional texts help to plug this gap for the reader struggling to project herself into the virtual space of the gospel narrative by providing cues to the reader to help her elaborate physical and affective details for herself. These manifest both in the form of explicit prompts to imagine ('Hora torniamo a miser Iesù Cristo, il qualle va solo. Or vâtene cum lui. Ma di che viveva miser Iesù per camino?');⁸⁵ and particular details to model (Bestul offering as an example 'that Christ's hands were bound so tightly that blood burst from his fingernails').⁸⁶

The goal is presence – in Latin, *praesentia*: the perceptual illusion of direct participation in the events of the Passion themselves via an experience of an embodied (somatic, visceral) projection into a virtual (imagined) space. Bestul notes the *MVC*'s 'frequent exhortations to visualise the scene in the mind's eye as if one were actually present at the events';⁸⁷ Ritchey again cites Ludolph: "Read therefore about what was being done as if it were being done. Place before your eyes these past things as if they were present. [Lege ergo quae facta sunt tanquam fiant; pone ante oculos gesta praeterita tanquam praesentia]".⁸⁸

The expressed purpose of such meditations was affective, in the sense of feeling greater love for Christ. In Karnes' words, 'creating vivid mental images of Christ's sacrifice of himself for mankind heightens affection for him'.⁸⁹ This affective purpose is well established in medieval scholarship. But Karnes further proposes something new.

Karnes' thesis in *Imagination, Cognition, and Meditation in the Middle Ages* is that the gospel meditations may have had a *cognitive* purpose in addition to their affective purpose.

⁸⁴ Bestul, p. 27.

⁸⁵ *Meditations on the Life of Christ: The Short Italian Text*, ed. by Sarah McNamer (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2018), p. 70.

⁸⁶ Bestul, p. 27.

⁸⁷ Bestul, p. 48. Further, from the *MVC*, Chapter 12: 'Unde quando tu aldi dire de miser Iesù alcuna opera per lui decta o facta, o in el vangelo overo in predicatione o per altri modi, fà che tu le meti denançi gli occhi della mente tua et ripensale, però che el me pare che in questi cotal pensieri di facti de miser Iesù Cristo sia maçore dolçeça et devotione che in altri modi. Et tuto il fondamento del spirito me pare che stia in çìò: che sempre in ogni luocho riguardi lui cum li occhi della mente tua, cum devotione in alcuna sua operatione [...]. Adonca considera tuti li soi acti et costumi, et specialmente contemplando la sua faça, se la pòi contemplare – la qualle cosa mi pare malagievole sopra tute le altre cose, ma credo che questo te saria la maçore consolatione che tu potesti bonamente havere' (p. 82).

⁸⁸ Ritchey, p. 349.

⁸⁹ Karnes, p. 10.

By this, she means specifically the engagement of the imagination as ‘a trainable tool’.⁹⁰ Neuroscience tells us that the cognitions are plastic. Karnes asks whether the act of repeatedly participating in the cognitive work of the meditations was in fact designed to train the faculty of imagination to ever greater heights of sustainable and immersive realism.

The writer of the *MVC*, she notes, ‘could not be clearer that meditation occurs in the mind, specifically, the actively thinking mind. The meditant who maximises the activity of the mind thus *augments the imaginative power of meditation*’.⁹¹ ‘Training’ the imagination will furnish an extraordinary level of ‘imaginative vivacity’, an unleashing of its ‘greatest potential’, which is to render the imagined ‘real’; that is, to make the absent Christ present to the meditant.⁹²

The components that make for successful meditation according to the *MVC* [are]: invention, detail, mental labour, emotion, and rational deliberation. Their ultimate effect is to create imaginative vivacity [...]. Only a fully activated imagination can realise its greatest potential, which is to turn the merely imagined presence of Christ

⁹⁰ Karnes, p. 20.

⁹¹ Karnes, p. 174, my emphasis. Note that Karnes’ analysis explicitly invites a revision of conventional (Cartesian) scholarship in relation to the medieval concept of the imagination. Twentieth-century medieval scholarship largely cleft to the view that imagination was less esteemed than memory in the theocentric culture of the Middle Ages. Perceived as ‘prone to fanciful inventions’, the imagination ‘was a mental faculty run amok’ (Karnes, p. 2); only released from its divine shackles to the full human power of its inventiveness and creativity with the Enlightenment, in the common view. Karnes proposes a significant corrective in favour of a medieval rich inner life. She argues that in fact the late Middle Ages saw the imagination ‘invested [...] with a new authority’ (p. 3). She roots this development in the twelfth century’s return to Aristotle and specifically his notion that the imagination is ‘involved centrally in every act of knowledge acquisition. As Aristotle famously said, “The soul never thinks without an image”, an image provided by imagination (*De Anima* III. 7, 431a 16-17)’ (p. 3). In relation to her field of interest in the gospel meditations of the period, she concludes that ‘imaginative meditations on Christ were more ambitious and purposeful than the scholarship on them has recognised’ (p. 5). The notion of a medieval distrust of the imagination has arguably been foregrounded in Dante studies; see, for example, Spencer Pearce on the imagination’s ‘distorted representations of reality’, in ‘Dante and the Art of Memory’ (p. 29). My suggestion is that in her reformulation, Karnes offers a new and considerably more nuanced picture of the medieval notion of imagination that may much more sympathetically reflect the *Commedia*’s complex relationship with the human imagination in its relationship to the divine. This potentially opens a new and productive path for Dante studies in relation to the faculty of the imagination, but one that extends much further than my preliminary analysis here.

⁹² Karnes, p. 177.

into real, spiritual presence, in turn enabling the meditant to conform to him.

Imagination thus acts creatively, cognitively, and affectively.⁹³

The goal of this imagination ‘training’ through the guided steps offered by the meditations is to ‘become capable of sharing, eventually, [Christ’s] journey to heaven, finding in such meditation a path toward salvation’.⁹⁴ The meditation functions, then, in Karnes’ formulation, as a ‘means to fulfil [the] Pauline prescription, and to fulfil it particularly well’.⁹⁵ For Karnes, the *MVC*:

promises nothing less than *direct access to Christ*, who will appear to the dutiful meditant in the same way that he appeared to his disciples after his resurrection.

Referring to Christ’s post-resurrection appearances, the author [of the *MVC*] writes, ‘I think that if you knew how to share in his sufferings ... you would realise an Easter in each and every one of these appearances’.⁹⁶

I stop far short in this thesis of a suggestion that the programme of invitations to participate in the *Commedia* may directly facilitate an encounter between the reader and the divine. As Barański sets out in ‘Dottrina degli affetti e teologia’, the question of whether it is possible or impossible for a mortal human being still *in via* to ‘see’ God face-to-face has a long and complex history.⁹⁷ My thesis begins from the premise that only God can elect the very few to this possibility (Moses, Saint Paul, the Apostle John). The narration of the *visio Dei* represents *not* the event of the encounter itself; rather, the profoundly flawed memory of the

⁹³ Karnes, p. 177.

⁹⁴ Karnes, p. 20.

⁹⁵ Karnes, p. 20. Karnes notes that Paul’s Epistles encourage communities to suffer with Christ in order to rejoice with him: ‘God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ’ (Gal. 6:4), and cross-references the *MVC*: ‘A person who wishes *to glory in the passion and cross of the Lord* (Gal. 6:4) should persevere in earnest meditation on it’ (p. 154, emphasis in original).

⁹⁶ Karnes, p. 154, my emphasis. Further: ‘Meditation enables the meditant to share Christ’s suffering, and Christ appears to her as a result’ (p. 154). She sees the same purpose in the meditations of James of Milan (see pp. 155-61), whose meditation, she suggests, makes the human mind capable of ‘travel[ing] a mental pathway from Christ’s humanity to his divinity’ (p. 155); and in those of Ludolph (see pp. 166-67).

⁹⁷ Barański, ‘Dottrina’, particularly the section ‘*Cognitio Dei e/o affectus in Deum: problemi di metodo*’. As mentioned in Chapter 1 (n. 33), Hollander comments in his gloss on *Par.*, XXXIII. 52-54 that ‘the poet [...] can finally see God’s *reflection* in the universe perfectly, an ability that was far from his grasp when the poem began’ (my emphasis).

protagonist's experience. It is a memory trace of a signal experienced: narrative cannot call into being the divine, but only a representation of the divine.⁹⁸ The purpose of the programme of invitations in the *Commedia*, I suggest, is to burnish in life, in the living human individual, the desire for this encounter.

The key point in Karnes' proposal in relation to my thesis for the *Commedia* is that she finds in the meditations a qualitative, plastic, element to the fulfilling of the Pauline prescription. Some meditants will 'fulfil it *particularly well*' (p. 20, my emphasis). Some, by extension, will do a bare minimum and achieve the sketchiest of imaginative experiences of participation in the journey to salvation. But those who have finessed their capacity to imagine vividly, immersively, sustainably entering into a realistic illusion of presence, will – according to Karnes – experience Christ resurrected: 'direct access to Christ' (p. 154). 'Training' – repeated finessing of the plastic capacity of the imagination – is the key.

Karnes roots this element of plasticity in Bernard of Clairvaux's conceit of an exceptional level of imaginative capability, available only to the precious few possessed of 'angelic purity'.⁹⁹ She writes of 'the ideal of imageless devotion espoused most notably by [...] Bernard of Clairvaux [...]. Bernard admits the near-impossibility of attaining this ideal – he reserves it for those precious few with "angelic purity" (*angelicae puritatis*) and endorses image-based devotion as profitable for the masses – but imageless devotion nevertheless remains his ideal'.¹⁰⁰ Perhaps some Dante scholars may find a resonance in the *Commedia*, with the invitation in *Paradiso* II to make a personal judgment about readiness to read the third canticle, an act counselled only to '[v]oialtri pochi che drizzaste il collo | per tempo al pan de li angeli' (*Par.*, II. 10-11). Whilst the *Commedia* pre-dates the *MVC*, it is subsequent to the works of Bernard and Bonaventure in which Karnes finds the basis for her claim to a cognitive purpose. It is not unreasonable, I would therefore suggest, to ask whether the *Commedia* also indexes a similar model of strategic invitations to finessing of the imaginative capacity that for some will yield a realistic, fully credible, persuasive mental experience of present participation in their own journey of desire for the encounter with the divine.

⁹⁸ 'Nell'esaminare la beatitudine nella *Commedia*, come l'intero impianto metafisico del poema, è essenziale riconoscere che abbiamo a che fare non col divino ma con *la rappresentazione* del divino.' Barański, 'Dottrina', towards the end of section '*Cognitio Dei e/o affectus in Deum: problemi di metodo*' (my emphasis).

⁹⁹ Yates proposes a similar plasticity in relation to memory, writing of the classical sources in which she bases her medieval 'art of memory' that they 'seem to be describing inner techniques which depend on visual impressions of *almost incredible intensity*' (p. 4, my emphasis).

¹⁰⁰ Karnes, p. 17.

Finally, I propose a further innovation in Dante's model for inviting such participation. The gospel meditations are made up to a large degree of their framework of instructions to the meditator's conscious cognitions, written in the second person: imagine this, think about that. Dante instead constructs a narrative of an event, a *story* (even if the reader accepts it as a truthful account of a lived personal experience): the *Commedia* is a first-person immersive narrative. Within this story, there are some twenty metalepses explicitly inviting the conscious cognitive participation of the reader (the direct addresses, as I discuss in Chapter 5). The narrative of this story is exceptionally open: full of similes inviting imaginative comparison of narrated phenomena in Dante's virtual world with phenomena the reader is likely to have personally experienced in the material world (also set out in Chapter 5).

Karnes is of the belief that narrative is more powerful in inviting the participation of the imagination than factual information. Referencing Hume's *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, she concludes: 'The key variable is narrative: because imagination associates like ideas, it transfers to one literary scene the passions elicited in another. As a result, literature can derive more vividness from imagination than, to use Hume's own example, history.'¹⁰¹ Albertus Magnus and Aquinas were of the same belief, as Frances Yates also writes in relation to memory. Albertus Magnus suggested in regard to poetic similes, in Yates synopsis, that 'the wonderful moves the memory more than the ordinary'; Aquinas' first precept for memory proposes 'choosing striking and unusual images as being the most likely to stick in memory'.¹⁰²

This framework of a first-person narrative permits Dante, I shall argue in this thesis, to invite the participation not only of the conscious cognitions, through the device of the direct address that models the step-by-step instruction format of the gospel meditations; but also to invite the participation of the unconscious cognitions, of those mental operations that function beneath the surface of consciousness and construct our sense of presence, of reality, and of personal agency, and that shape our beliefs and our behaviours.

2.5 The embodied reader

¹⁰¹ Karnes, p. 169. Hume suggests that the imagination works better with literary images: 'The imagination [...] is more enlivened, and the passions more enflamed than in history, biography, or any species of narration which confine themselves to strict truth and reality.' David Hume, *Essays and Treatises on Philosophical Subjects*, ed. by Lorne Falkenstein and Neil McArthur (Peterborough, Ontario: Broadview, 2013), p. 81.

¹⁰² Yates, p. 66, p. 75.

The narrating Dante, we might note, makes explicit mention of the reader's body. This body permits her to sit on a bench, for example: 'Or ti riman, lettore, sopra 'l tuo banco, | dietro pensando a ciò che si preliba, | s'esser vuoi lieto assai prima che stanco' (*Par.*, X. 22-24);¹⁰³ her act of reading is a material event in the physical world: 'ma leggi Ezechiele [...] | e quali i troverai ne le sue carte | tali era quivi [...] (*Purg.* XXIX. 100, 103-04; my emphasis). She is in possession of specific sensory and somatic modalities. She has a voice capable of speech (even if she is asked to withhold that speech): 'Com' io divenni allor gelato e fioco, | nol dimandar, lettore, ch'i' non lo scrivo' (*Inf.*, XXXIV. 22-23). She has ears, permitting her to hear the narrator's oral performance: 'O tu che leggi, udirai nuovo ludo' (*Inf.*, XXII. 118); 'Se tu se' or, lettore, a creder lento | ciò ch'io dirò [...]' (*Inf.*, XXV. 47). And she has eyes that are invoked not only in metaphorical expressions of attention (for example, 'Aguzza qui, lettore, ben li occhi al vero', *Purg.*, VIII. 19), but can also be materially directed, in an act of situated co-presence ('meco') alongside the narrating Dante, jointly attending to the same night sky: 'Leva dunque, lettore, a l'alte rote | meco la vista, dritto a quella parte | dove l'un moto e l'altro si percuote' (*Par.*, X. 7-9).

Whilst such references are few in number, they correlate with the direct addresses with a consistency that might alert us to the possibility of a strategy at work. We can, of course, ask whether the reader is to conceive of these bodily actions as literally intended, rather than simply metaphorical constructs (a question arguably along the same lines as whether we are really to break off reading the poem in order to re-engage with the Scriptural intertexts, or really to do the cognitively demanding imaginative and memorial work invited in the direct addresses). The reader has a choice about the extent to which she wishes to vividly model these embodied images: will she really imagine herself outside on a bench with the narrator, investing cognitive energy in *recordatio*?¹⁰⁴ Or will she mentally skip over this image as a figure of speech superfluous to an understanding of what the poem *means* at this point? Under the terms of embodied simulation, though, the narration of such an action or body state (sitting on a bench, turning a page, hearing speech, looking upwards alongside someone),

¹⁰³ In *Accounting for Dante*, Justin Steinberg discusses 'the university-standard *libro da banco* (desk book) implicit in *Paradiso* 10' (p. 9). It is worth pointing out that the reader has immediately previously been invited to lift her eyes to the night sky along with the narrating Dante (*Par.*, X. 7-9), so either this *banco* needs to be assimilated as being positioned outside, or the reader needs to rapidly switch locations in her mind, from outside looking at the night sky, to being inside a library. Preliminary analysis suggests that in the *Commedia*, the reader's body is typically characterised as very mobile across worlds, suggesting a strategy is at play and meriting further research.

¹⁰⁴ Ritchey, p. 350.

even when not acted upon, is nonetheless registered as data that can trigger the same neural pathways in the attending reader. Regardless of whether the reader chooses to attend, Dante has embedded this narrative datapoint in the text: it is an observable mechanism, an invitation to cognitive participation.

Importantly, the narrating Dante also gives us an indication of the purpose of vivid imagination of these body states. Such a reader, he explicitly suggests on at least two occasions, will attain some quality of simulation of the journeying Dante's own felt experience at key points. Arguably the best example of this is in *Paradiso* XIII. Here, in the direct address that opens the canto (lines 1-21), the narrating Dante sets out a sequence of astral phenomena for the reader to imagine for herself, reconfigure, then animate; a set of components that, together, could help to evoke the protagonist's experience of being encircled by the twenty-four theologians in the Heaven of the Sun. 'Imagini [...] | imagini [...] | imagini' (1, 7, 10), the reader is invited; then, following successful modelling of this data,

[...] avrà quasi l'ombra de la vera
 costellazione e de la doppia danza
 che circolava il punto dov' io era. (*Par.*, XIII. 19-21)

The reader who has vividly imagined each astral component and then set them into dynamic interaction will finally have an 'ombra' (19) of the journeying Dante's own experience; an analogue or approximation of the journeying Dante's body state; personal experience of how it feels to be at the still centre, 'il punto' (21), of this 'vera | costellazione' (19-20), the dynamic 'doppia danza' (20) that encircles him.

Similarly, in *Purgatorio* XVII, the reader that vividly brings to mind an embodied experience of being caught in the hills in a fog (seeing through your skin, like a mole) will 'see', says the narrating Dante, 'in giugnere a veder' (8), just how the journeying Dante re-saw the sun, 'com' io rividi | lo sole' (8-9), on emerging from the blackness of the terrace of Wrath.¹⁰⁵ In fact, this deployment of the reader's own body to model, step by step, the

¹⁰⁵ 'Ricorditi, lettor, se mai ne l'alpe | ti colse nebbia per la qual vedessi | non altrimenti che per pelle talpe, | come, quando i vapori umidi e spessi | a diradar cominciansi, la spera del sol debilmente entra per essi; | e fia la tua imagine leggera | in giugnere a veder com' io rividi lo sole in pria, che già nel corcar era. | Sì, pareggiando i miei co' passi fidi | del mio maestro, usci' fuor di tal nube | ai raggi morti già ne' bassi lidi' (*Purg.*, XVII. 1-12).

journeying Dante's reported experience, is directly invited in most of the direct addresses: modelling his discomfitedness in *Inferno* VIII (94-96), for example; his distress and struggle not to cry in *Inferno* XX (20-21); his liminal state of feeling neither dead nor alive in *Inferno* XXXIV (25-27); his wonder at the gryphon in *Purgatorio* XXXI (124-26); his desire to see the conditions of the blessed in *Paradiso* V (109-14); his sense of the speed of his ascent in *Paradiso* XXII (106-11). Essentially, it seems, in these instances the reader's body is invoked as a mechanism by which the reader may reconstruct or simulate the journeying Dante's embodied experience, or body state, in her own body; that is, precisely as Gallese sets out in his model of *embodied simulation* that allows us to project ourselves into another's experience, to feel what they feel.

2.6 Personal response and subjectivity

The history of the practice of affective devotion in the Middle Ages establishes a precedent for invitations to a personal response to a text; one that might lead to the possibility of individual behaviour change. Such responses are normally understood to be subjective: a unique individual interaction between one person's accumulated experiences or apperceptual frame and particular units of content in the text, experienced as a particular feeling or feelings. Often such feelings will be emotions or visceral signs, rendered perceptible to others by self-report – although the medieval model of affective piety also invites us consider a set of observable behaviours as external evidence of affective response, including weeping, swooning, or kissing, which arguably has offered some basis for discussion of replicated responses. Essentially, though, subjective response is problematic as a basis for analysis because the strongly bipartite nature of the interaction means the data is not replicable: just because one person, with their own particular triggers, has one particular response, it does not follow that another person will have the same.

However, whilst it is difficult to find reliable objective terms through which to discuss the personal response, I suggest it is extremely important that we try in relation to the *Commedia*. An experience of presence is rooted in knowledge that is mediated through the body, rendering it inherently personal: each reader feels present on their own account; each reader experiences the journey as realistic to a greater or lesser degree only through their own response. This question of experientiality was central to medieval meditative practices. Ritchey writes that 'the practice of meditation as it was taught in later medieval schools and religious houses [...] was a means of interpreting and comprehending a text through

experiencing it'.¹⁰⁶ Bernard of Clairvaux wrote: 'I believe what I have experienced: certain things you find better in the forest than in books. Woods and stones will teach you what you cannot hear from the teachers.'¹⁰⁷ John Wyclif describes 'the truth of Holy Scripture', in Mary Carruthers' synthesis, such: 'A work is not truly read until one has made it part of oneself [...]; the writing must be transferred into memory, from graphemes on parchment or papyrus or paper to images written in one's brain by emotion and sense'.¹⁰⁸ An experience of self-presence in particular, as I shall explore in Chapter 5, cannot be rendered through an experience of external observation or spectatorship, but is contingent upon individual participation.

Milner points towards an idea that a return to an understanding of a medieval 'embodied self', through the current 'turn to the senses', allows us to conceive of the reader as 'freestanding instrumental philosopher'.¹⁰⁹ In "'Bene comune e benessere'", he suggests that:

Particular, contingent, and socialised, such a self sought to understand the nature of its being less through abstract philosophical speculation than as a freestanding instrumental philosopher who was repeatedly called upon to make his/her own judgments within a demanding and unstable social world.¹¹⁰

Each reader of the *Commedia*, I suggest, is invited to act as precisely such a 'freestanding instrumental philosopher', repeatedly offered cues to simulate in her own body the experience of the virtual world of the afterlife and the interactions within it, and thereby finessing her ability to make her own judgments based on the certainty of embodied knowledge.

As discussed in Chapter 1, my proposed solution to the problem of the instability of subjective response as a basis for discussion is to focus *not* on reported feelings but instead to

¹⁰⁶ Ritchey, p. 1 (my emphasis).

¹⁰⁷ 'Experto crede: aliquid amplius invenies in silvis, quam in libris. Ligna et lapides docebunt te, quod a magistris audire non possis'. *Epistolae* 106, *Sancti Bernardi opera*, ed. J. Leclercq and others, 8 vols (Rome: Editiones Cistercienses, 1957-1977), 7:266. English translation quoted from Thomas J. Heffernan and Thomas E. Burman (eds), *Scripture and Pluralism: Reading the Bible in the Religiously Plural Worlds of the Middle Ages and Renaissance* (Leiden: Brill, 2005), p. 118.

¹⁰⁸ Carruthers, p. 11.

¹⁰⁹ Milner, p. 240.

¹¹⁰ Milner, p. 240.

look for the specific mechanisms in the text that cue or invite the possibility of some form of response, regardless of whether one reader has a response and another does not.¹¹¹ Being *observable*, such mechanisms are objectively perceptible and therefore operate as stable units for discussion and analysis, as, for example, in the example set out in Chapter 1 of Singleton's subjective response of discomfort in relation to the narration of Bernard's sign, at the root of which we can identify the observable mechanism of a dissonant focal view switch. I focus only on mechanisms that appear repeatedly – hence the repeated exercises of quantification in this thesis – and in relation to which a strategy can therefore reasonably be proposed. To confirm, this thesis has no interest in constructing a defence of subjective readings, but rather aims to identify a series of observable narratological mechanisms that invite the participation of the cognitions, as a proposed basis for discussion of individual response as a crucially important complementary mode for reading the *Commedia*.

¹¹¹ There are growing efforts to seek to quantify replicated reader responses to texts, as for example Giulia Cartocci's "NeuroDante Project", but this is not my interest in this thesis. Giulia Cartocci et al, 'The "NeuroDante Project": Neurometric Measurements of Participants' Reaction to Literary Auditory Stimuli from Dante's *Divina Commedia*', in *Symbiotic Interaction: 5th International Workshop, Symbiotic 2016* (Padua, 29-30 September 2016), 52-64.

Chapter 3: Spatial Presence

3.1 ‘Tu non se’ in terra’: being transported

Dante’s journey through Paradise begins with Beatrice telling Dante not where he is (transiting from the Earthly Paradise to the heaven of the Moon) but rather where he *isn’t*:

‘Tu stesso ti fai grosso
col falso imaginar, sì che non vedi
ciò che vedresti se l’avessi scosso.
Tu non se’ in terra, sì come tu credi;
ma folgore, fuggendo il proprio sito,
non corse come tu ch’ad esso riedi.’ (*Par.*, I. 88-93)

In *Paradiso*, the journeying Dante is entering a new space in which expectations or assumptions rooted in earthly laws of physics such as perspective and gravity no longer apply, and where the false application of such assumptions, resulting in ‘falso imaginar’ (89), can act as an impediment to understanding.¹ The journeying Dante is gazing into the sun, ‘e fissi li occhi al sole oltre nostr’ uso’ (*Par.*, I. 54), when suddenly, the narrating Dante writes, it was as if God had adorned the sky with a second sun: ‘come quei che puote | avesse il ciel d’un altro sole addorno’ (62-63). Beatrice has intuited his wonder at seeing what appears to be the sun and the moon occupying the same sky above him, but this wonderment is misplaced: he misinterprets what he sees – ‘non vedi | ciò che vedresti [...]’ (89-90) – because he has presumed an erroneous standpoint: he assumes that he is still on Earth.²

¹ As Beatrice will clarify in relation to Dante’s mode of travel at the end of the canto: ‘Non dei più ammirar, se bene stimo, | lo tuo salir, se non come d’un rivo | se d’alto monte scende giuso ad imo’ (*Par.*, I. 136-38). Hollander comments: ‘He thinks of what his senses are experiencing as though it were sensed on earth.’ Hollander, gloss on *Par.*, I. 88-90.

² From a physical standpoint on the surface of the earth, this would infer a transgression of the diurnal cycle, the earthly natural law by which the moon appears luminously visible only once the sun has set. See Hollander on discussion in the commentaries regarding whether the ‘altro sole’ is understood as the moon (my reading here) or the sphere of fire: Hollander, gloss on *Par.*, I. 61-63.

His spatial understanding has been challenged before, perhaps most notably in his transit out of hell, when the unexpected rotation around the ‘punto’ of Satan’s hips left him disorientated and confused, seeing Satan’s legs apparently above him:³

Io levai li occhi e credetti vedere
Lucifero com’ io l’avea lasciato,
e vidili le gambe in sù tenere. (*Inf.*, XXXIV. 88-90)

But whilst in *Inferno* XXXIV Virgil did little to clarify what seeing differently might mean, with his extended narrativised observation of how he, Virgil, effected the physical transition for Dante, ‘Di là fosti cotanto quant’ io scesi; | quand’ io mi volsi, tu passasti ’l punto | [...]’ (109-10), here in *Paradiso* Beatrice instead frames the notion of seeing anew as a *principle to be embodied*, inviting Dante to understand the distorting effects of mistaken perception through physically enacting, attentively, this new standpoint for himself. Were he on earth, it would indeed be extraordinary to see ‘un altro sole’ (63) alongside the first. But his physical standpoint now is different: he is no longer on Earth as he imagines, ‘tu non se’ in terra’ (91), but rather – and travelling faster than a bolt of lightning – he is in return transit to his ‘principio’ (111).

Aristotle writes in the *Metaphysics* of ‘the delight we take in our senses; for even apart from their usefulness they are loved for themselves; and above all others the sense of sight’.⁴ But in the same way that optical illusions remind us that our eyes can deceive us, so Dante’s experience here invites the reader, I propose, to consider that human visual perception is cognitively mediated, rendering it essentially subjective.⁵ And if this process of mediation rests on an inappropriate inference, then we may misconstrue what we see.

So, the mediated nature of visual perception makes our grasp of place potentially fallible. However, a human understanding of place is based on more than just the physical, or what appears to be materially present through visual perception. Place is also *relational*, constituted by our relationship with it and other objects in it. Indeed, as Lakoff and Johnson

³ The ‘punto’ is referred to at *Inf.*, XXXIV. 77 and 109.

⁴ Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, Book I, Chapter I, trans. by W. D. Ross (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1924).

⁵ This is a basic tenet of Merleau-Ponty’s *Phenomenology of Perception*. Visual perception consists of two key processes: light hits the retina and is converted into neuronal signals; the visual association cortex combines these signals and performs *inferences* derived from prior experience (such as the perspectival assumption above) in order to derive meaning.

proposed in *Metaphors We Live By*, this quality of spatial relationality is so essential in human understanding that it pervades our language in many of the metaphors we use: ‘These spatial orientations arise from the fact that we have bodies of the sort we have and that they function as they do in our physical environment.’⁶ Maurice Merleau-Ponty wrote of a body as not ‘a thing in objective space, but as a system of possible actions, a virtual body with its phenomenal “place” defined by its task and its situation. My body is wherever there is something to be done’.⁷ More recently, theories of *situated cognition* have identified this continually emerging relationality of body and place as the basis of human understanding. Cognitive scientists Wolff-Michael Roth and Alfredo Jornet proposed in 2013 that:

The central aspect of the situated cognition hypothesis is that intelligent behaviour arises from the dynamic coupling between intelligent subject and its environment rather than only from the agent’s mind (brain, control system) itself.⁸

Further, place is *experiential*, encountered not only through the eyes but through the other senses and bodily systems; a phenomenon that many theorists have referred to as ‘sense of place’, or a figurative notion of atmosphere or *Stimmung*.⁹ On the evocativeness of place, in *The Image of The City*, Kevin Lynch suggested that ‘a sense of place in itself enhances every human activity that occurs there, and encourages the deposit of a memory trace’.¹⁰ In *The Poetics of Space*, Gaston Bachelard explored a notion of lived experience or personal interaction with space, writing, for example, that ‘a house that has been experienced is not an

⁶ George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980), p. 14. They accord spatial, or orientational, metaphor foundational importance in this text.

⁷ Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception* [1945], trans. by Colin Smith (London: Routledge, 2002), p. 291.

⁸ Wolff-Michael Roth and Alfredo Jornet, ‘Situated Cognition’, *Wiley Interdisciplinary Reviews: Cognitive Science*, 4 (2013), 463-78, (p. 465, emphasis in original). Roth is a cognitive scientist, with almost 30,000 citations of his work. His monographs include: *First-Person Method: For a Rigorous Approach to the Study of Living/Lived Experience* (Rotterdam: Sense Publishers, 2012), and *Meaning and Mental Representation: A Pragmatic Approach* (Rotterdam: Sense Publishers, 2013).

⁹ Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht has extensively written on the notion of reading as a process of experiencing different moods and atmospheres. See, for example: Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht, *Atmosphere, Mood, Stimmung: On a Hidden Potential of Literature*, trans. by Erik Butler (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2012).

¹⁰ Kevin Lynch, *The Image of The City*, (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1960), p. 119.

inert box. Inhabited space transcends geometrical space'.¹¹ But there is also the question of a literal experience of atmosphere or the 'aerial medium', to borrow Tim Ingold's term, with which individuals interact when not contained within built architecture, and which includes weather conditions, atmospheric pressure, temperature, and air quality, for example.¹² Such atmospheric phenomena, writes Ingold, 'fundamentally affect [the situated individual's] moods and motivations, their movements, and their possibilities of subsistence'.¹³

Importantly for my argument in this thesis, such phenomena are experienced not only through visual perception, and the other senses, but also through the *visceromotor* system, which underpins affective response to a place – Bachelard's house that is no longer an 'inert box', Lynch's experience of a 'memory trace'; and through the *somatosensory* system, which processes sensations on or in the body, including those that derive from Ingold's 'aerial medium', such as temperature, pressure, and pain, and also an awareness of the body's position in space and movement, or proprioception.

Visual perception, as discussed earlier, is fallible because it relies on an unconscious process of inference in the brain. In real life, an understanding of place is constructed not only via the visual and wider sensorimotor system, but also the somatosensory and visceromotor systems; that is, the 'feel' of it, in the broadest sense. It is these systems that convert data of temperature, airflow, local threat, and proprioception into an embodied understanding of a place as hot, windy, frightening, and one through which we are falling at speed, for example.

In relation to a virtual rather than a real-life space my suggestion, rooted in Gallese and Wojciehowski's observation that 'embodied simulation [...] can also occur when we *imagine* doing or perceiving something', is that the same 'realistic' sense of place can be invited in the reader of a text, *provided that* the text reproduces the same stimuli to not only the reader's sensorimotor system (most commonly visual data, but also sound, smell, touch), but also to

¹¹ Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*, trans. by Maria Jolas (Boston: Beacon Press, 1969), p. 47.

¹² In 'Bindings Against Boundaries', Ingold proposes that: 'To progress beyond the idea that life is played out upon the surface of a furnished world, we need to attend to those fluxes of the medium we call weather. To inhabit the open is to be immersed in these fluxes. Life is lived in a zone in which earthly substances and aerial media are brought together in the constitution of beings which, in their activity, participate in weaving the textures of the land. Here, organisms figure not as externally bounded entities but as bundles of interwoven lines of growth and movement, together constituting a meshwork in fluid space.' Tim Ingold, 'Bindings Against Boundaries: Entanglements of Life in an Open World', *Environment and Planning*, 40, 8 (2008), 1796-1810 (p. 1796).

¹³ Ingold, p. 1802.

her somatosensory and visceromotor systems.¹⁴ These systems, I propose, serve to authenticate the readily observable visual data, reassuring the reader's brain of the 'realism' of the place narrated.¹⁵

A feeling of genuine transportation into a narrated world – what I describe in this chapter as *spatial presence* – is rooted, I suggest, in a *direct, embodied* experience of place constructed through a combination of the sensory, visceral, and somatic systems of the body. Narratives that deliver a less convincing sense of place, by contrast, I suggest, tend to rely only or primarily on visual description. The provision of multi-sensory data, particularly sight, sound, and smell to evoke a sense of place is not uncommon in well-constructed narrative texts, but Dante's innovation in relation to setting and spatial evocation, I will suggest, is to have found ways to consistently invite the illusion of spatial presence in the reader. Further, he deploys this mechanism specifically in service of assisting the Earth-bound reader to arrive at a new understanding of place as relational and *emergent*, rather than fixed; and of the virtual as every bit as 'real' as the material, enabling the reader to conceive of Paradise not as 'there', a specific end or destination, but rather as 'here': that is, simultaneously present with the reader's living experience of the physical world.¹⁶

3.2 Literary setting versus spatial presence

In *Story and Discourse*, textual and film narrative theorist Seymour Chatman defined 'literary space' as more than simply place or 'setting', suggesting it also includes landscapes, climatic conditions, domestic spaces: everything that can be conceived of as spatially located.¹⁷ More recently, Marie-Laure Ryan insisted on separating the experiential and the orientational,

¹⁴ Gallese and Wojciehowski, p. 15.

¹⁵ Or indeed to contradict it, creating dissonance, and a trigger to stop and excavate the text.

¹⁶ Emergence is an important phenomenon in videogame criticism, as well as in theories of consciousness. See, for example, the definition offered by videogame and performance theorist Ragnhild Tronstad: 'Associated with complexity and unpredictability, a general notion of emergence depicts a situation or phenomenon that evolves in a direction that could not have been predicted beforehand by studying the agents and rules involved [...]. Digital games stand out in showing a particular disposition towards emergence in its many configurations [...]. [G]ames of emergence are characterised by the combination of few and simple rules leading to varied and unexpected outcomes.' Ragnhild Tronstad, 'Emergence', in *The Johns Hopkins Guide to Digital Media*, ed. by Marie-Laure Ryan, Lori Emerson, and Benjamin J. Robertson (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2014), pp. 180-81.

¹⁷ Seymour Chatman, *Story and Discourse: Narrative Structure in Fiction and Film* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1980). See particularly pp. 96-106 and pp. 138-45.

writing that ‘a sense of place is not the same thing as a mental model of space: through the former, readers inhale an atmosphere; through the latter, they orient themselves on the map of the fictional world’.¹⁸ Videogame criticism, I propose, now gives us a new tool for thinking about how these two elements combine in a fictional narrative, as they do in the real world, through the notion of *spatial presence*.

One of the three forms of presence defined in 2004 by interaction theorist Kwan Min Lee, and by far the most commonly discussed, spatial presence is commonly defined in videogame criticism as ‘the subjective experience of being in one place or environment, even when one is physically situated in another’ (Witmer and Singer, 1998);¹⁹ or, simply, the sense of ‘being there’.²⁰ This sense of feeling oneself to be somewhere other than where one rationally knows one’s body to be is recognised as a ‘perceptual illusion of non-mediation’ that occurs ‘when a person fails to perceive or acknowledge the existence of a medium in his/her communication environment and responds as he/she would if the medium were not there’.²¹ The literary notion of immersion and the videogame notion of spatial presence have often been unhelpfully conflated.²² However, my analysis of the mechanisms in the *Commedia* that invite spatial presence strongly supports IJsselsteijn’s definition of presence as ‘the experiential counterpart of immersion’, confirming that the key difference between a notion of immersion in a sense of place and spatial presence is the trigger to *embodied simulation* that sparks a sense of dynamic reciprocal interaction between body and location.²³

¹⁸ Ryan, *Narrative as Virtual Reality*, 1st edn, p. 123.

¹⁹ This definition comes from an early experiment but has endured: Bob G. Witmer, and Michael J. Singer, ‘Measuring Presence in Virtual Environments: A Presence Questionnaire’, *Presence: Teleoperators and Virtual Environments*, 7, 3 (1998), 225-40 (p. 225).

²⁰ International Society for Presence Research, ‘The Concept of Presence: Explication Statement’, ISPR (2000).

²¹ Matthew Lombard and Theresa Ditton, ‘At the Heart of it All: The Concept of Presence’, *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, 3, 2 (1997), section ‘Presence Explicated’.

²² Debate is ongoing in videogame criticism about the differences between immersion and spatial presence. Summarising the debate in 2013, Farrow and Iacovides concluded: ‘There is persistent ambiguity within the literature on virtual realities and games over “immersion, engagement and presence” [...], since the terms are often used interchangeably.’ Robert Farrow and Ioanna Iacovides, ‘Gaming and the Limits of Digital Embodiment’, *Philosophy & Technology*, 27 (2013), 221-33 (p. 233).

²³ IJsselsteijn writes: ‘The experience of presence appears to be a complex perception, formed through an interplay of raw multisensory data, spatial perception, attention, cognition, and motor action, all coupled through a constant dynamic loop of sensorimotor correspondence [...]. The perception of ourselves as part of an environment, virtual or real, critically depends on the ability to actively explore the environment, allowing the perceptual systems to construct a spatial map based on sensorimotor dependencies. Provided the real-time, reliable correlations between motor actions and multisensory inputs remain intact, the integration of

Pioneer of VR theory Brenda Laurel observed in 1993 that VR offers the player the potential to ‘[take] your body with you into worlds of the imagination’.²⁴ In this chapter, I will seek to establish that this transformation depends on the brain being given cues in the narration that suggest Dante’s narrated virtual world is like, or behaves like, the real world. Specifically, this means that the reader encounters data that repeatedly engages her diverse bodily systems, and the world responds to her presence in it; that is, in Calleja’s terms, ‘having one’s [...] presence [...] acknowledged by the system itself’.²⁵

3.3 A mortal human body in a virtual space

It is a commonplace that place is evocative; and this is a notion that applies to the virtual places of narrative as well as to the physical world. Mandler and Johnson reported in 1977 that ‘setting’ is the most frequently remembered component of a textual narrative;²⁶ Marie-Laure Ryan adds that setting promotes ‘emotional attachment’ in a narrative experience.²⁷

In the *Commedia*, there is a vast amount of data related to spatial evocation: a preliminary tally suggests at least twelve hundred instances in the poem in total, or an average of twelve references to location per canto.²⁸ These instances range from real and fictional named locations, landscape features, architectural structures, astronomical coordinates, environmental and atmospheric conditions, and spatial and orientational metaphors (‘qui’, ‘là’, ‘giù’, ‘su’) – that is, all the components of spatial evocation discussed above: physical, relational, and orientational. At around four hundred references per canticle, the distribution of spatial data might be surprising in its consistency, given the apparently much more substantial nature of the pit of Hell and Purgatory’s mountain. It becomes perhaps less surprising, though, when we consider the distribution of the different types of spatial evocation in each canticle: a dominant focus on physical features (geographical and architectural) in *Inferno* and *Purgatorio*; but on spatial metaphor instead in *Paradiso*,

telepresence technologies into our ongoing perceptual–motor loop can be usefully understood as a change in body image perception – a phenomenal extension of the self.’ Wijnand IJsselsteijn, ‘Towards a Neuropsychological Basis of Presence’, *Annual Review of CyberTherapy and Telemedicine: A Decade of VR*, 3 (2005), 25-30 (p. 25).

²⁴ Brenda Laurel, ‘Art and Activism in VR’, *Wide Angle* 15, 4 (1993), 13-21 (p. 14).

²⁵ Calleja, p. 22.

²⁶ Jean M. Mandler and Nancy S. Johnson, ‘Remembrance of Things Parsed: Story Structure and Recall’, *Cognitive Psychology*, 9, 1 (1977), 111-51 (p. 144).

²⁷ Ryan, ‘From Narrative Games’, p. 54.

²⁸ Provisional, based on a first detailed count.

particularly orientational metaphor. Another major difference is in the openness and relational nature of each world with the other realms and with the *mondo mortal*, suggesting differences in the ability within each world to conceive of and enact the integration of ‘here’ with ‘there’. Hell is rendered essentially separate and contained, not only through the sealed (dark, starless) nature of its geography, but also by its oppressive weather systems (that account for around a tenth of all spatial evocation data in *Inferno*). Purgatory is constantly connected with the mortal world through the naming of known cities and regions, and with the heavens through astronomical references; and Paradise with the physical world both in time and in eternity, and through the naming of specific locations and via a totalising notion of the world, ‘il mondo’, ‘il mondo mortal’, as that with which it is always and fundamentally in relation. There is a great deal of productive work to be undertaken in relation to further mapping and analysis of this spatial data and its cumulative effect in the poem, but the practical demands of space in this thesis means that this chapter focuses only on establishing the principle of the particular textual narrative mechanics by which spatial presence may be invited.²⁹

The familiar, apparently material features of Hell (including even a material city) make it a place that at first glance would seem highly relatable and interactable through the medium of the body, as our own physical world is. Purgatory, too, with its mountain, its stone fabric interwoven with the penitents’ aerial bodies, its *intagli*, its steps and narrow fissures, seems, on the surface at least, rich with physically interactable features. And by writing what he has seen on his journey through these realms, as Beatrice instructs the journeying Dante in the Earthly Paradise – ‘quel che vedi, | ritornato di là, fa che tu scrive’ – and writing, too, what he hears, touches, smells, senses through his body, experiences, and feels, as he comes into relation with other objects and forces, the narrating Dante can re-mediate these places for the reader in the same perceptible terms.³⁰

But in *Paradiso*, of course, there *are* no physical features or locations to see, touch, feel, smell, so the reader’s transportation to Paradise will rest much more fully on successfully experiencing the perceptual illusion of spatial presence – feeling herself ‘there’,

²⁹ I have also focused here only on spatial evocation in the inner story world – that is, the three realms of Hell, Purgatory, and Paradise, but there is further work to be done on spatial presence in relation to the narrating Dante’s outer story world.

³⁰ *Purg.*, XXXII. 104-05. In fact, Dante surpasses Beatrice’s instruction, I shall suggest, privileging narration of bodily sensation (the multiple senses, or *how it feels* to be there), over external observation or what can be *seen* (‘quel che vedi’), as I will discuss throughout this chapter.

rather than relying on seeing what it looks like. One of the many challenges for the reader in *Paradiso* will be to come to experience space not as material but as relational, a medium that houses, or emerges as the site of, interactions. The interactable objects which will underpin her experience of spatial presence will be not geographical or architectural features, but the souls of the blessed. The possibility of profoundly and meaningfully grasping such an understanding, I suggest, is greatly enhanced when the reader can experiment with experiencing it for herself through the mechanisms, in the narrative, of spatial presence.

In the next two sections, I explore two sequences in the poem that I suggest powerfully illustrate the mechanisms by which Dante invites reader spatial presence, catalysing a capacity to participate: firstly, the descent on Geryon in *Inferno* XVII; and afterwards, the ascent of the celestial ladder in *Paradiso* XXII.

3.4 ‘Being there’: Geryon

The action of the flight on Geryon, a descent narrative or *katabasis* within the *katabasis* of *Inferno* as a whole, takes place at the end of *Inferno* XVII.³¹ Dante and Virgil are at the top of the abyss that will take them into Malebolge; Geryon, ‘sozza imagine di froda’ (7), filthy image of deceit, has been summoned from the depths by Virgil to carry them down. With echoes of mythological over-reaching and failure resonating throughout the episode, Dante imagines the terror he feels as he realises they are in mid-air, ‘ne l’aere d’ogne parte’ (113), on the back of this monstrous vehicle to be similar to that experienced by Phaeton and Icarus at the point at which their own vehicles of flight began to fail.³² From the handily-remembered cord around Dante’s waist that facilitates the initial sounding of the abyss to the notionally terrifying city-wall-and-weapon-shattering monster who eventually comes in to land with all the grace of a sulky captive falcon, ‘disdegnoso e fello’ (131), the episode is a

³¹ John Freccero aligns *katabasis* with the pursuit of knowledge in his essay ‘Infernal Irony’: ‘In the ancient world, [the] descent in search of understanding was known as *katabasis*.’ John Freccero, *The Poetics of Conversion*, ed. by Rachel Jacoff (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1986), p. 107.

³² See medievalist Nick Havely: ‘Geryon is thus a powerful example of how, when imagining evil, Dante outdoes his traditional sources. The precariousness of his venture, balancing between due audacity and over-reaching pride, is evident in the fearful way he imagines the novelty of the experience of flight on the monster’s back at the end of the Geryon canto [...]. Yet even here the poet is busy invoking and outdoing Ovid and classical myth.’ Nick Havely, *Dante* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2007), p. 163.

challenge to the reader's sense of realism.³³ Hollander proposes it to be 'perhaps the single most melodramatic and implausible narrative passage in the *Comedy*'; yet, as Barolini writes, it is 'remarkably successful' in engendering 'willing suspension of disbelief'.³⁴ In their commentary, Bosco and Reggio credit Dante's realism, noting 'la straordinaria forza della fantasia dantesca, nel rappresentare come un'esperienza provata ciò che allora non era quasi neppur concepibile'.³⁵ The episode is undoubtedly epistemically immersive: there is both suspense (will fraudulent Geryon deliver them safely?) and mystery (what horrors are causing the screams from below?). But I propose that what really makes this implausible descent so compellingly plausible, despite the preposterousness of the vehicle, are Dante's invitations to the reader to feel spatially present: as though she, herself, is physically 'there'.

The narration of the descent is as follows:

Come la navicella esce di loco
 in dietro in dietro, sì quindi si tolse;
 e poi ch'al tutto si sentì a gioco,
 là 'v' era 'l petto, la coda rivolse,
 e quella tesa, come anguilla, mosse,
 e con le branche l'aere a sé raccolse. (105)

Maggior paura non credo che fosse
 quando Fetonte abbandonò li freni,
 per che 'l ciel, come pare ancor, si cosse;
 né quando Icaro misero le reni
 sentì spennar per la scaldata cera,
 gridando il padre a lui 'Mala via tieni!' (111)

³³ 'Io avea una corda intorno cinta, | e con essa pensai alcuna volta | prender la lonza a la pelle dipinta. | Poscia ch'io l'ebbi tutta da me sciolta, | sì come 'l duca m'avea comandato, | porsila a lui aggroppata e ravvolta. | Ond' ei si volse inver' lo destro lato, | e alquanto di lunge da la sponda | la gittò giuso in quell' alto burrato' (*Inf.*, XVI. 106-14). According to Virgil, at least: 'Ecco la fiera con la coda aguzza, | che passa i monti e rompe i muri e l'armi! | Ecco colei che tutto 'l mondo appuzza!' (*Inf.*, XVII. 2-3). 'Come 'l falcon ch'è stato assai su l'ali, | che senza veder logoro o uccello | fa dire al falconiere "Omè, tu cali!" | discende lasso onde si move isnello, | per cento rote, e da lunge sipone | dal suo maestro, disdegnoso e fello; | così ne puose al fondo Gerione | al piè al piè de la stagliata rocca' (*Inf.*, XVII. 127-33).

³⁴ Hollander, gloss on *Inf.*, XVII. 115-26. Barolini, *The Undivine Comedy*, p. 61.

³⁵ Bosco and Reggio, gloss on *Inf.*, XVII. 115-17.

che fu la mia, quando vidi ch'i' era
ne l'aere d'ogne parte, e vidi spenta
ogne veduta fuor che de la fera.

Ella sen va notando lenta lenta;
rota e discende, ma non me n'accorgo
se non che al viso e di sotto mi venta. (117)

Io sentia già da la man destra il gorgo
far sotto noi un orribile scroscio,
per che con li occhi 'n giù la testa sporgo.

Allor fu' io più timido a lo stoscio,
però ch'i' vidi fuochi e senti' pianti;
ond' io tremando tutto mi raccoscio. (123)

E vidi poi, ché nol vedea davanti,
lo scendere e 'l girar per li gran mali
che s'appressavan da diversi canti. (*Inf.*, XVII. 100-26)

The relative absence of *visual* description is arresting. The flight, of course, as we are told at the end of canto XVI is in the dark, through 'aere grosso e scuro' (130), so the journeying Dante cannot actually see for most of the descent, despite the four uses of 'vidi' (seeing that he is in mid-air, 112; that, recursively, all sight is extinguished, 'vidi spenta | ogne veduta' (113-14); seeing the fires, 'vidi fuochi (122); and seeing the 'gran mali', 'vidi poi [...] | lo scendere e 'l girar per li gran mali' (124-25)). And even were the thick dark air visually penetrable, Geryon's body gets in the way: 'vidi spenta | ogne veduta fuor che de la fera' (113-14), unless the journeying Dante leans his head out. It is only as they come in to land that we have some visual description of the environment: the 'gran mali' (125), the walls of the abyss. But even this is evoked not through material description – they are defined through metaphor – but instead by the dynamic sensation of their pressing ever closer, 'li gran mali | che s'appressavan da diversi canti' (125-26). The reader, then, has very little data with which to construct a precise visual image of the place. All she knows is that Geryon backed out into the space like a ferry; that Dante and Virgil, on Geryon's back, descended in circles towards cries and fires beneath; that the abyss gets tighter the closer they come to the bottom; and that Dante is terrified. She knows nothing of the depth, fabric, shape, or colour of the abyss. This is nothing like the God's-eye perspective that will open *Inferno* XVIII, allowing the reader to

construct a visual model of the place from a position of external observation.³⁶ Here, if the reader wants to get an idea of what this place is like, she will need not simply to try to visualise it but to simulate in her own body *how it feels* to be there.

Cognitive narrative theory suggests there is a strategic benefit to this paucity of visual description. An excess of spatial data diverts the brain from the other mental operations, particularly imagining, that assist the reader to generate a more personal mental model of the text and that is said to be indicative of the ‘skilled’ reader.³⁷ And this paucity of visual data is not just a feature of the *Geryon katabasis*. It is characteristic of *Inferno* generally, although it has been little commented on in scholarship – testament, I would suggest, to its success as a narrative strategy. In *Inferno*, there are many geographical and architectural objects located in the space – battlements, gates, walls, valleys, woods, sands, ditches, bridges, towers, giants – but the descriptions are almost always neutral, even bland. The battlements are high (‘alti’, IX. 133), the wall, high (‘alto’, XXXII. 18), the ditches, high (‘alte’, VIII. 76), the sink or ‘burrato’ from the depths of which Geryon will emerge, high (‘alto’, XVI. 114). Elsewhere, the broken bridge is simply ‘vecchio’ (XVIII. 79); the ‘valle’ just ‘buia’ (XII. 86); the ‘margini’, ‘duri’ (XV. 1); the ‘riva’ is just a ‘riva’ (XVII. 9), the ‘rena’ simply ‘rena’ (XVII. 33 and 35), as too the ‘fosso’, ‘scoglio’ and ‘abisso’ (XXII. 183, XXVII. 134, XXXIV. 1, amongst others). Things are generally tall, dark, hard, old, numbered, or just themselves in their least evocative form; not vividly visualisable places but rather signs denoting relatable objects.

As a strategy, this has its risks: for the less imaginative or ‘skilled’ reader, it may feel disappointingly spare (perhaps leading such a reader to lean more heavily on illustrations). For the reader in participatory mode, though, I suggest this pictorial or visual sparseness is liberating (indeed, Botticelli reproduces it extremely effectively in his line drawings in his illustrations for the poem): it both invites active imaginative collaboration between reader and text, and also, importantly, invites the reader to dedicate cognitive resource to attending to the

³⁶ The unusual use of an extended diegetic visual description to open *Inferno* XVIII functions, I suggest, to restate narratorial authority after what I will propose to be a highly participatory ending to canto XVII.

³⁷ ‘The text representation is likely to include inferences that specify (a) spatial relations among objects, (b) goals and motivations of characters [...], and (c) causal relations among events, actions and episodes. Thus, the ability to make knowledge-based inferences is viewed as an important component of skilled reading.’ Jonathan M. Golding and Deborah Long and others, ‘The Role of Inferential Processing in Reading Ability’, in *Models of Understanding Text* [1996], ed. by Bruce K. Britton and Arthur C. Graesser (New York; Hove, England: Psychology Press, 2014), pp. 189-214 (p. 191).

human interactions unfolding at that site. The journeying Dante's interactions in *Inferno* are with the sinners; the notionally material nature of Hell as place is relevant and meaningful only insofar as it situates these interactions, and indeed collaborates in the punishment of the sinners in their eternal damnation, a continually emergent medium of punishment. In fact, unimplicated in any such punishment, the journeying Dante very rarely interacts with or disturbs the fabric of Hell at any material level.³⁸ Instead, he operates in a kind of 'safe' mode (a phenomenon even more apparent in relation to social presence, as I discuss in Chapter 4): remaining notably *on*, rather than engaging *with*, its features – standing on a bank, on an edge, crossing a river (in a boat), standing above a ditch, and even being carried by Virgil, protecting him from contact with the surface of the place.

But whilst the journeying Dante might not be interacting much with the material fabric of Hell, the participatory reader needs to be able to construct a series of mental models that simulate the experience of 'being there'. In the episode with Geryon, it becomes evident that Dante's focus is on narrating *not* what the descent through the abyss looks like to the external observer, but instead on *how it feels* to be there. He will achieve this by a mechanism I shall refer to as *narration through situated body states*.

What spatial data is available to the reader in the sequence? The marked-up text below identifies triggers to each of the three bodily systems discussed earlier: sensorimotor data (data received via the senses; marked up here in **bold type/blue**), visceromotor data (viscera, like blood flow and breath; underlined/orange), and somatosensory data (sensation, like temperature and movement; *italics/green*).³⁹

Come la navicella *esce di loco*
in dietro in dietro, sì quindi si tolse;
 e poi ch'al tutto si sentì a gioco,
 là 'v' era 'l petto, la coda rivolse,
 e quella tesa, *come anguilla, mosse*,
 e con le branche l'aere a sé raccolse. (105)

³⁸ Notable exceptions include when his body weight troubles the still-loose stones from the landslide triggered during the Harrowing of Hell (XII. 29-30), and the craggy rock-face of lower hell with its surface tissue that requires careful manhandling, as Virgil advises: 'Sovra quella poi t'aggrappa; | ma tenta pria s'è tal ch'ella ti reggia' (XXIV. 29-30).

³⁹ In one instance, more than one system is indicated ('al viso e di sotto mi venta'), as I explore later.

Maggior paura non credo che fosse
 quando Fetonte abbandonò li freni,
 per che 'l ciel, come pare ancor, si cosse;
 né quando Icaro misero le reni
sentì spennar per la scaldata cera,
 gridando il padre a lui 'Mala via tieni!' (111)

che fu la mia, quando **vidi** ch'i' era
 ne l'aere d'ogne parte, e **vidi spenta**
 ognè veduta fuor che de la fera.
 Ella sen va *notando lenta lenta;*
rota e discende, ma non me n'accorgo
 se non che *al viso e di sotto mi venta.* (117)

Io **sentia** già da la man destra il gorgo
 far sotto noi un **orribile scroscio,**
 per che con li occhi 'n giù la testa sporgo.
 Allor fu' io più timido a lo stoscio,
 però ch'i' **vidi fuochi** e **sentì' pianti;**
 ond' io tremando tutto mi raccoscio. (123)

E **vidi poi,** ché nol vedea davanti,
lo scendere e 'l girar per li gran mali
che s'appressavan da diversi canti. (*Inf.*, XVII. 100-26)

I discussed the visual earlier, but there is other *sensory* data too that describes the interaction of the journeying Dante's body with the physical conditions of the space: the sound of the 'orribile scroscio' (119) and the 'pianti' (122); the haptic sensation of the double wind, both coming up vertically from the bottom of the sink, and the wind in the journeying Dante's face as Geryon pierces the thick air, and which indeed is what alerts him to the fact of their rotational descent (115-17) (I shall come back to this). There is *visceromotor* data that conveys his response of terror to being in that space: the explicit analogy with Phaeton and Icarus' fear (beginning at line 106 and resolved at 112) that is particularly powerfully embodied in Icarus' experience of the progressive melting of the wax that held together his feathers of flight ('sentì spennar', 110); there is his fear of falling ('Allor fu' io più timido a lo stoscio', 121), that triggers the visceral trembling that triggers in turn the motor response of the gripping of his thighs ('ond' io tremando tutto mi raccoscio', 123). And there is

somatosensory data that narrates, particularly, the experience of movement through the space, or *vection*: the feeling of being on a reversing ferry (‘in dietro in dietro’, 101), an embodied sensation many readers may be able to retrieve from memory; feeling Geryon stretch out beneath him like an eel (‘quella tesa, come anguilla, mosse’, 104); and Geryon’s slow, slow swimming round and down through the thick air (‘Ella sen va notando lenta lenta; | rota e discende’, 115-16) – data the narration *does* provide to the reader, so she *may* mentally model it for herself (exactly as we saw in Bernard’s redundant invitation, in Chapter 1), even if the narration does instantly offer a corrective in relation to the protagonist’s experience of the event (the equivalent of the ‘già’ in relation to Bernard’s sign): ‘ma non me n’accorgo | se non che al viso e di sotto mi venta’ (116-17).

In summary, then, it is an extremely rich, well-observed, *realistic* description of the dynamic effect of a terrifying descent on the body. It is dynamic because it invokes the continuous loop of human perception–action: sensory, visceral, and somatic data is explicitly linked with the resulting motor responses through repeated conjunctions: ‘per che’ (120), ‘allor’ (121), ‘però ch’i’ (122), ‘ond’ io’ (123). By bringing to consciousness the body’s processing of the event in the form of a sequence of discrete steps, Dante effectively slows down, separates and invites the reader to attend to these separate components of a normal embodied process usually experienced as automatic. I propose that the reader who attentively seeks to reproduce each step, through imaginative enactment (and re-reading), and becomes ‘skilled’ in so doing, will find herself rewarded by experiencing for herself a sense of how it feels to be there, spiralling down through that abyss on the terrifying monster’s back.

This is the first component of spatial presence, I propose. But there is a second, mentioned earlier: the question of reciprocal feedback or ‘having one’s [...] presence [...] acknowledged by the system itself’.⁴⁰ For the reader’s brain to accept the virtual world as ‘real’, that world needs to behave in a ‘realistic’ way, responding to her body’s presence in it by proving feedback data: that is, acting reciprocally on her body as her body acts on it.

There is a single detail in the episode with Geryon, I suggest, that triggers this second component of the illusion. It is a detail that has drawn the attention of many commentators but so far without a clear explanation of what this detail does that is so powerful, and by what mechanism. This is an instance in which an understanding of the mechanisms of spatial presence in videogames is particularly able to help us, I suggest; so perhaps the best way to

⁴⁰ Calleja, p. 22.

try and explain it is by examining one particular videogame that was an innovator in constructing the illusion of spatial presence: the game *Mirror's Edge*.

Originally released in 2008 and considered a classic, *Mirror's Edge* is a first-person action–adventure game set on the rooftops of a futuristic dystopian city.⁴¹ The player controls a female avatar called Faith and uses free-running or *parkour*-style movements to navigate the rooftop game space. The game is famous for inducing motion sickness and is critically rated for its immersive properties.⁴² A short clip of a play-through on an Oculus Rift by game blogger TCTN Gaming ('Tony') is available [here](#).⁴³

⁴¹ I discuss here the original: Thomas Andersson, *Mirror's Edge* (2008), Playstation 3, Xbox 360, MS Windows. A sequel, *Mirror's Edge Catalyst*, was released in May 2016.

⁴² See: Alison McMahan, 'Immersion, Engagement and Presence: A Method for Analysing 3-D Video Games', in *The Video Game Theory Reader*, ed. by Mark J. P. Wolf and Bernard Perron (New York: Routledge, 2003), pp. 67-86.

⁴³ TCTN Gaming ('Tony') is Serbian game blogger Nenad Krstic, who has over a million subscribers to his YouTube channel. Link to play-through: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3v9snDQ_dV8> [accessed 30 July 2018].

The main point of interest for the purposes of this chapter is sixty-three seconds into the clip, when the player has to get his avatar, Faith, across a narrow pipe that stretches



between two high rooftops. The player fails (above), so Faith falls, and the player can be heard crying, ‘Don’t fall, don’t fall, don’t fall, no, oh, crap, no!’ as his avatar crashes to the ground. In the webcam view of the player, inset into the top left corner of the screen, we can see him hold his hands to his chest, breathing quickly (below). He whispers, ‘OK, right, never



again’, kicks a box over the edge experimentally, and exhales an ‘ohhhh’ as he watches it fly down. This visual and aural evidence of a strong visceral reaction suggests an apparent transfer of bodily sensations from avatar to player – that is, that Gallese’s mode of *embodied simulation* has been triggered. And indeed, just watching the clip may be enough for you to find your own stomach seems to lurch upwards as Faith plummets. This being the

case, we could conclude that the player has attained Lombard and Ditton’s ‘perceptual illusion of non-mediation’: that is, his brain is engaging with the space as though it were ‘real’, with the result that the player feels spatially present in the game world.

There are several mechanisms in the game design that could be implicated in this illusion.⁴⁴ Firstly, and most obviously, there is so much *visual data*, rendered realistically (comprehensive, and consistent with material laws such as perspective) that even though the world is clearly not ‘real’, the player’s brain has no trouble in constructing a credible mental model of how it looks: all the imaginative work has been done, freeing the player’s cognitive processes to attend fully to experiencing the space. This is not an option available to the author of a textual narrative artefact, of course: it would take pages and pages of visual description to render a similarly detailed mental model, taxing the reader with visuo-spatial complexity and making the episode unreadable. As discussed earlier, Dante doesn’t even try.

The second tactic the game employs in terms of mechanics of spatial presence is to



make it very easy for the player to enter the mode of embodied simulation. This is because the game makes it extremely easy to identify with the body of the avatar. The primary illusion is a visual one: through the first-person camera view, the player sees exactly what the avatar sees (left), including the visual data of the player’s (surrogate) body – bits of ‘your’ legs, hands, torso in line with your

movement.⁴⁵ Controlling Faith’s movements, you *are* Faith’s body; you and your avatar are already operating, in Gallese’s terms, a ‘shared motor code’.⁴⁶ The other senses are evoked too, such as the sound of your breath as you run, and your gasp as you fall, but also, and particularly innovatively in *Mirror’s Edge*, the sense of *proprioception* – the perception of the position of the body in space. This is invoked particularly by the game’s unusually sensitive freedom of camera movement that is designed, say the game’s creators, to ‘transmit

⁴⁴ Lombard and Ditton suggested a range of potential mechanisms for assisting in the rendering of spatial presence in videogames, all of which, I propose, merit investigation in relation to literary texts, and most of which by coincidence I already cover in this thesis. Their list included: image size and viewing distance, motion and colour, dimensionality variables, camera techniques, direct address to camera, rapid PoV movement, over the shoulder shots, conversation off, body movement (vection), tactile stimuli (haptic), and force feedback. Lombard and Ditton, ‘At the Heart of it All’, section ‘Causes and Effects of Presence’.

⁴⁵ I discuss further the question of embodied identification with a game avatar in Chapter 5.

⁴⁶ Vittorio Gallese and Michele Guerra, ‘The Feeling of Motion: Camera Movements and Motor Cognition’, *Cinema et Cie*, 14 (2014), 103-12 (p. 106).

motion' from the avatar's body to yours (and this is what contributes to motion-sickness in some players).⁴⁷ In the *Commedia*, as we have seen, this same mechanism of embodied simulation is triggered through narration of situated body states, although the restrictions of the textual medium mean that the reader is required to actively collaborate through engaging her imagination to catalyse the narrated data.

This brings us to the third mechanism in the game: the illusion of reciprocal feedback – the main reason that your brain is prepared to accept the game space as 'real'. *You* act on the environment, by falling; the environment acts reciprocally on you, responding to your weight, your acceleration, your changing location. This is how a human body (an object with mass) experiences the material world: twigs that break underfoot in a wood, the resistance against your arms and legs as you paddle through water; or the triple phenomena of acceleration, rotation, and upward force responsible for that uncanny feeling of your stomach lurching upwards when you fall through the air.

In the material world, this latter happens because your organs experience a reduction in the gravitational force normally exerted on them by the ground, via your feet, when you are the right way up, and this gives the illusion that they are lifting upwards. When you are playing (or watching a play-through of) a game like *Mirror's Edge*, of course there *is* no reduction in the force acting on your stomach; you are not physically plummeting through gravitational space. But your brain is sending neural messages *as if* you really were present there, despite being 'physically situated in another [place]' (Witmer and Singer): as if, in Beatrice's words, 'tu non se' in terra'.⁴⁸

⁴⁷ '*Mirror's Edge* is intended to convey realism and physical contact with the environment [...]. This is achieved not only by freely moving around the stage, but also by linking the movement of the camera with character movement, such as the speed at which the camera moves up and down to increase as Faith builds up momentum while running or turn the camera rolling when Faith does a barrel roll after landing. Moreover, the arms, legs, and torso are prominent and visibility is used to transmit motion and momentum, such as when Faith's arms go up and down and her increased stride length when walking.' *Mirror's Edge Wiki*, 'Gameplay', <http://mirrorsedge.wikia.com/wiki/Mirror%27s_Edge> [accessed 2 September 2017]. See also the mechanism of *Steadicam* in Chapter 5.

⁴⁸ *Par.*, I. 91.

In the game, reciprocal feedback data is primarily rendered through graphics – that is, visual means. Velocity is evoked through the illusion of the ground rushing up to meet you – graphically represented by distant objects getting progressively larger. In the episode with Geryon, Dante’s narration of the effect of the ‘gran mali’ coming closer (‘s’apressavan’, 126) is equivalent visual environmental feedback data doing essentially the same job, notwithstanding the characteristic ‘gappy’ presentation mode of textual narrative.⁴⁹ My own research into the graphical rendering of effects in *Mirror’s Edge* suggests that rotation is rendered by successive representations of parts of your shadow (below), evoking its twisting as you fall.⁵⁰ This is an effect so subtle it only becomes perceptible to the naked eye when the



game is advanced frame-by-frame. The poem also evokes rotation, gappily: Geryon ‘rota e discende’ (116) – although, as discussed, the journeying Dante only registers it as a result of the wind on his face.⁵¹ In the game, these two devices – the ground rushing up, your shadow twisting – are sufficient to persuade the brain that you really are falling, and hence the response of your stomach leaping upwards, together with other observable visceromotor reflexes in the player, such as his touching his chest and his breath coming short.

However, where the game differs from the text is that the game is able to update this reciprocal feedback data constantly (usually sixty times a second).⁵² The poem simply cannot

⁴⁹ I explore a notion of textual ‘gappiness’ in Chapter 5.

⁵⁰ See for example on the clip at 1’37”-1’41”.

⁵¹ Even though the journeying Dante is not technically free-falling here, the strategic narrative choice to render Geryon’s style of winged descent as wheeling is highly evocative of the natural rotation of a body in free-fall.

⁵² Standard frame rate for a game engine of *Mirror’s Edge*’s era is 60 frames per second.

offer this quantity of repeated update information in a text. There is the mention of rotation and descent ('Ella sen va [...] | rota e discende', 116). But there is a further narrative device, I propose, that invites the imaginatively responsive reader to experience the descent as dynamic and happening in time.

This is the device of the *wind* – 'se non che al viso e di sotto mi venta' (117): the double wind that hits your face and signals Geryon's speed as he circles down through the filthy air, and the wind that blasts up from the sink below, catching you as you lean out. *You* act on *it*, by being in its path; *it* acts on *you*, by striking your face. It is a tiny detail of the body's reciprocal relationship with the environment in which it is situated and one that has drawn much attention in the commentaries but without necessarily, I would suggest, any conclusion previously being offered as to why it is so powerful an observation for the reader's experience of the sequence. Sapegno notes that the dearth of the visual means that it is only the wind that communicates the sense of spiralling descent: 'Allorché si rendeva conto dello scendere e del girare solo per l'altare del vento, senza che il senso visivo potesse appoggiarsi ad un qualsiasi punto di riferimento.'⁵³ Bosco and Reggio note the doubling of sensation of the wind, from both in front and below: 'Gerione rota e discende (v. 116) e quindi determina una duplice ventilazione: al viso per effetto del movimento rotatorio, di sotto per la discesa.'⁵⁴ And Da Buti's use of the *si passivante* might suggest that he himself has experienced the neural triggering of embodied simulation (not unlike Tony clutching his hands to his chest), the transfer of sensory response from protagonist's face to reader's: "'Se non che al viso e di sotto mi venta.'" 'Pone qui una cagione, per la quale si puote l'uomo avvedere del discendere, quando sentisse ventarsi al volto, come avverrebbe a chi si calasse giù per una fune.'⁵⁵

My suggestion is that the power of this detail of the wind lies, firstly, in its conferral of the illusion of reciprocal feedback from the environment to the subject; and secondly, in the suggestion of dynamism: that the wind is a continuously emerging factor, constantly in Dante's face as they cut through the air, constantly experienced from below ('al viso e di sotto mi venta', 117), and, we might feel invited to infer, a blast even more powerfully experienced when he leans his head out, face down, to hear the racket below: 'Io sentia [...] | sotto noi un orribile scroscio, | per che con li occhi 'n giù la testa sporgo' (118-20).

⁵³ Sapegno, gloss on *Inf.*, XVII. 124-25.

⁵⁴ Bosco and Reggio, gloss on *Inf.*, XVII. 115-17.

⁵⁵ Da Buti, gloss on *Inf.*, XVII. 115-26.

This detail, I suggest, completes the invitation to spatial presence in this sequence. The narration of the descent offers an unusual level of data evoking *how it feels* to move through that space. This invites not simply immersion in the narrated event of the journeying Dante's progress, but instead provides cues for the responsive reader to neurally simulate the journeying Dante's embodied experience as he descends through the black space: a transfer of effect that, 'done well',⁵⁶ temporarily invites the reader's brain to experience the narrated space as 'real'.

The 'responsiveness' of the reader is key. As discussed in Chapter 2, the model of embodied simulation described here is rooted in a pre-rational, automatic, 'direct' neural response in the reader's brain to virtual cues to spatial presence; that is, it is an unconscious process of neural embodiment.⁵⁷ Some readers, we might suppose, are simply more sensitive to this than others, and so somehow 'naturally' more adept in feeling transported. However, as discussed in relation to affective devotion and spiritual exercises in Chapter 2, the ability to imaginatively elaborate on given narrative data is a *plastic* skill that can be refined with practice. In this instance of the descent on Geryon, the reader is representing in her own body not Christic emotions in modelling the Passion, but the journeying Dante's visceral experience of the terrifying rotational journey. The reader of the *Commedia* who seeks to more vividly and more realistically model this visceral experience of 'being there' can finesse her skills in the same way as the reader of the spiritual exercise: by consciously responding, in step-by-step narrative sequences like the descent on Geryon (and also, as I discuss later, in certain of the ascents in Paradise), to cues in the text to imaginative elaboration of body states rendered modellable through very specific narrative detail. With practice, such responsiveness becomes second nature: the reader becomes increasingly skilled in entering the perceptual illusion of spatial presence; the first cognitive building-block, I suggest, to developing the skill to read in the mode of first-person participation.

To summarise, the illusion of spatial presence is invited through a compound narratological mechanism I have described as *narration through situated body states*, whose twin components I set out below.

Firstly, the narration triggers embodied simulation in the reader by evoking situated body states, that is, the responses of the protagonist's sensorimotor, visceromotor, and somatosensory systems in relation with the environment. This includes not only what can be

⁵⁶ Bailenson (see Chapter 1, n. 71).

⁵⁷ Gallese and Wojciewski, p. 12.

seen (flames), heard (cries), and felt (wind), but also his ‘looped’ embodied response: fear causes trembling, trembling results in his thighs gripping more tightly.⁵⁸

Secondly, the experience is then *animated*, inviting the reader to construct not a static pictorial mental model but a *dynamic* one. This comes in part from the narratively redundant initial information of Geryon’s spiralling motion through the space, ‘Ella sen va notando lenta lenta; | rota e discende’ (115-16), in which the gerund (‘notando’), the present tense (‘sen va’), and the repetition (‘lenta lenta’) all invite the reader to mentally model this sequence as extending in time, so she imagines not a static picture of one moment in Geryon’s rotating descent but the animated sequence of rotations as he spirals down. But this is rooted in propositional understanding rather than embodied understanding. The second key element in animating the sequence in an enactable way is the detail of the wind that invites the reader to infer dynamic, constant feedback from the environment onto the protagonist’s body. If the reader has successfully animated her mental model, a sense of the wind may be imaginatively experienced continuously both on the face and from below; even if she is not yet fully proficient in this mode of imagining, the narration of the head movement to look down constitutes another reminder of its effect. Like the piecemeal, constantly altering shadow in the game, the wind, I suggest, provides the dynamic environmental feedback necessary for the brain to accept the space as interactable, and therefore realistic, inviting the experience of spatial presence.

For all the apparent materiality of Hell, in the narration of the descent on Geryon a sense of place is evoked *not* through interaction with the features and objects of a landscape, but instead through narration of how it feels to move through that space: this is a narration of *vection*. The poem has invited a sense of being ‘there’ without the requirement that ‘there’ should have any material anchors. As such, and as I will explore next, it offers the reader an excellent rehearsal space for the real challenge of modelling spatial presence in Paradise.

3.5 Creating ‘here’: the celestial ladder

The journeying Dante will only gain Paradise proper when he attains the Empyrean – the gathering of all the blessed – in *Paradiso* XXX. Prior to that, in *Paradiso*, he will experience instead a temporary reconfiguration of the Empyrean, linearised and quasi-materialised, and

⁵⁸ See IJsselsteijn on the integration of ‘telepresence technologies’ into the ‘perceptual–motor loop’ (this chapter, n. 23).

rendered by the paradisiacal phenomenon of *condescension*, as Beatrice will explain in *Paradiso* IV.⁵⁹ Condescension makes Paradise interactable for the still-mortal journeying Dante in terms of his interactions with the blessed: he will encounter the souls within the linear structure of Aristotle's nine concentric crystalline planetary heavens, each sphere acting as a medium for his interactions with the blessed.

The spheres themselves are perceptible in so far as they have shape, movement (rotation), and some form of substance, being crystalline ('cristallo', *Par.*, XXI. 25),⁶⁰ but they are not materially interactable in the sense of offering sense data to the eyes, the hands, or the feet, as the landscapes of Hell and Purgatory were, to be climbed over or squeezed through. There are spatial 'features' in condescended Paradise – the cross, skywriting, the eagle – but these are contingent, ephemeral structures, constructed of the lights of the blessed themselves; dynamic, constantly and visibly in motion, and reconfiguring through mutual correspondence.⁶¹ Such spatial features, then, progressively depict place in Paradise as the nexus of dynamic force, the intersection of divine and human energies, coming into being through reciprocal action; and always returning to the engagement of individual with individual through the necessity of human perception, as Dante observes in the Heaven of Jupiter: 'parea ciascuna rubinetto in cui | raggio di sole ardesse sì acceso, | che ne' miei occhi rifrangesse lui'.⁶² Indeed, this epitomises *situated cognition* as set out by Roth and Jornet;

⁵⁹ In relation to the souls manifesting in the sphere of the Moon, Beatrice explains: 'D'i Serafin colui che più s'india, | Moïse, Samuel, e quel Giovanni | che prender vuoli, io dico, non Maria, | non hanno in altro cielo i loro scanni | che questi spirti che mo t'appariro, | né hanno a l'esser lor più o meno anni; | ma tutti fanno bello il primo giro, | e differentemente han dolce vita | per sentir più e men l'eterno spiro. | Qui si mostraro, non perché sortita | sia questa spera lor, ma per far segno | de la celestīal c'ha men salita' (*Par.*, IV. 28-39). On the notion of condescension as a performative act, see Elena Lombardi, *The Syntax of Desire* [2007] (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2016), p. 154.

⁶⁰ They are therefore 'real' in so far as the Aristotelian model of the Universe was accepted to be so in medieval Italy, being material (made of ether), observable, and located in time.

⁶¹ The cross, made of light, shows itself to the journeying Dante as he and Beatrice rise imperceptibly from the Heaven of the Sun to the Heaven of Mars (canto XIV), 'm'apparvero splendor dentro a due raggi' (95), blazing out Christ, 'quella croce lampeggiava Cristo' (104), before lights begin to trace the shape: 'Di corno in corno e tra la cima e 'l basso | si movien lumi, scintillando forte | nel congiugnersi insieme e nel trapasso' (109-11). In the travelling of the lights, Dante highlights the mutuality and the self-reflexivity of the fleeting interconnections: '*con-giugner-si*' (XIV. 111, my emphasis); it is an event both of individual and mutual force.

⁶² *Par.*, XIX. 4-6.

namely that ‘information exists not prior to, but emerges from, and is a function of, the organism–environment relation (coupling)’.⁶³

For most of *Paradiso*, then, the journeying Dante will experience Paradise not in its ‘real’ form, but in its ‘realistic’ form, to borrow Barolini’s terms; that is, as a temporary spatial illusion.⁶⁴ But the Empyrean, too, represents a challenge to a mortal human understanding of place: whilst it *appears*, as narrated in *Paradiso XXXI*, to have form – a rose ‘in shape’ – ‘In forma dunque di candida rosa | mi si mostrava la milizia santa | che nel suo sangue Cristo fece sposa’ (1-3) – it is constructed of pure light, ‘Fassi di raggio tutta sua parvenza’ (XXX. 106); and the shape of the rose emerges constantly as a result of the ceaseless inter-relations of light energies, the eternal transfer of love.⁶⁵

Different to an earthly manifestation of place then (material, observable, fixed), in *Paradiso* place will ultimately need to be understood as a quality of *emergence*: contingent, relational, coming into being at the point of intersection of reciprocal forces or energies. In this largely abstract space, the features or ‘objects’ with which the journeying Dante will interact will be not geographical or architectural objects; rather, the relational ‘objects’ in this space that will underpin the experience of realism and presence will be the souls of the blessed. However, in this otherwise spatially abstract place, there is a series of specific opportunities by which the reader may experience a sense of place; and that, as with Geryon, is through the narration of *vection* – as much a subjective experience as a visually observable phenomenon of movement. In *Paradiso*, the journeying Dante will make ten ascents through the spheres. This time, though, the reader will be entirely dependent on visceral and somatic data, without even the scant supporting visual and environmental data of *Inferno*.

But this may not be such an improbable leap for the Earth-bound reader as it sounds. In fact, the reader could be argued to share the same combination of orders of reality as the journeying Dante himself: both still-mortal embodied subjects in a virtual space. The journeying Dante, like the reader, will continue to use his senses, viscera, and somatic responses in his journey through the heavens, but he will largely suspend his motor

⁶³ Roth and Jornet, p. 466.

⁶⁴ Barolini, ‘Dante and Reality’, p. 199.

⁶⁵ In *The Syntax of Desire*, Lombardi discusses the arrangement of the blessed in the Rose in terms of ‘a sentence’, its components arranged in order ‘according to the rules of contiguity (binding) and hierarchy (government)’ (p. 172). Mazzeo points out that: ‘The rose [...] undergoes transformations. It becomes successively a garden, a kingdom, an empire. As a flower it has two roots; but it also has a stairway and keys.’ Joseph Anthony Mazzeo, *Structure and Thought in the ‘Paradiso’* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1958), p. 48.

functions.⁶⁶ He enters the temporary virtual spatial illusion of condescended Paradise as the reader enters the virtual (imagined) space of Dante's narrative. This combination of a motorically suspended sensate body operating in a virtual space is one we experience when dreaming and is also a waking experience now made manifest through VR technology. I explore this next, but would first briefly suggest here that permitting these two orders of reality to intersect in this way (real body, virtual world) may perhaps offer new terms by which we could begin to consider afresh the so-called 'truth claims' of the poem: 'a culturally fractious issue that raises the question of the reader's beliefs', in Barolini's words, such truth claims historically depending on an argument that has focused on whether Dante invites the reader to believe in a 'real' experience (a real body in a real place), or a fiction or vision (a virtual body in a virtual place).⁶⁷

The journeying Dante will make ten ascents in *Paradiso*. A mutuality of forces – a yielding, rather than autonomous agency – will characterise each: rising imperceptibly, being lifted up, collected, finding himself within, impelled, and arriving.⁶⁸ I propose that one of these ascents – coincident with the final direct address to the reader – offers the reader, as in the narrative of the descent on Geryon, a step-by-step rehearsal to construct, through the mode of embodied simulation, an experience of spatial presence, even in the largely abstract,

⁶⁶ The journeying Dante will not need to use his body for independent movement through the space: his motor system will not function as it does on earth. Instead, as Beatrice tells him in *Paradiso* I, the independent motile agency necessary for transportational movement on Earth here gives way to the instinctual impulse of all things to return to their source, to which Dante must simply yield: 'Non dei più ammirar, se bene stimo, | lo tuo salir, se non come d'un rivo | se d'alto monte scende giuso ad imo' (136-38). This represents a radical shift in thinking for the embodied human being: on Earth, motor agency bears an association with effort and will, enacted in the notion of the pilgrimage, but here, such autonomous action is redundant.

⁶⁷ Teodolinda Barolini, *Dante and the Origins of Italian Literary Culture* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2006), p. 2.

⁶⁸ This reciprocal action of forces is characteristic of most of the ascents, as the verb deployed usually illustrates: thus, the sphere of the Moon: 'ricevette' (II. 35) – the Moon receives them; Mercury: 'corremmo' (V. 93) – corporeal but rendered metaphorical by its inclusion within the simile of an arrow fired; Venus: an upward impulsion, 'salire' (VIII. 13) – but registered only retrospectively; the Sun: similarly, 'salire' (X. 34); Mars: of having been lifted up, 'levato' (XIV. 85); Jupiter: of having been 'collected', 'ricolto' (XVIII. 69); Saturn: of having been lifted, 'levati' (XXI. 13); Fixed Stars: of being within, 'fui dentro' (XX. 111); Primum Mobile: impelled by Beatrice's glance, 'm'impulse' (XXVII. 99); the Empyrean: having left and arrived, 'siamo usciti fore | del maggior corpo al ciel ch'è pura luce' (XXX. 38-39).

virtual space of Paradise. This opportunity occurs in the eighth ascent: the ascent of the celestial ladder in *Paradiso XXII*.

The eighth ascent takes the journeying Dante from the heaven of Saturn into the constellation of Gemini in the heaven of the fixed stars by means of the celestial ladder. The ascent is described as follows:

La dolce donna dietro a lor mi pinse
 con un sol cenno su per quella scala,
 sì sua virtù la mia natura vinse;
 né mai qua giù dove si monta e cala
 naturalmente, fu sì ratto moto
 ch'agguagliar si potesse a la mia ala. (105)

S'io torni mai, lettore, a quel divoto
 trionfo per lo quale io piango spesso
 le mie peccata e 'l petto mi percuoto,
 tu non avresti in tanto tratto e messo
 nel foco il dito, in quant' io vidi 'l segno
 che segue il Tauro e fui dentro da esso. (*Par.*, XXII. 100-11)

A vast distance, as Dante reminds the reader in the *catascopia* at the end of the canto, is covered at unimaginable speed.⁶⁹ With a single sign, 'un sol cenno' (101), Beatrice triggers an impulse in the journeying Dante ('mi pinse', 100) to mount the ladder, a trigger to the yielding he is still learning.⁷⁰ He then experiences a sense ofvection comparable to no force of gravity or upward ascent on earth, 'qua giù' (103) but that is approximated in a metaphor of flight, 'la mia ala' (105). The narration of the action pauses for a moment for the returned poet, back in his own physical location on earth, to avow his desire to return (107-08). Finally, in the poem's last direct address to the reader, the narrating Dante proposes that you,

⁶⁹ Specifically, 'e tutti e sette mi si dimostraro | quanto son grandi e quanto son veloci | e come sono in distante riparo'. (*Par.*, XXII. 148-50, within the wider narration of the episode, lines 133-53).

⁷⁰ Peter Hawkins points out that in every ascent, '[Dante] makes these transitions by looking into the face of Beatrice'. Peter S. Hawkins, "'By Gradual Scale Sublimed": Dante and the Contemplatives', in *Dante's Testaments: Essays in Scriptural Imagination* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999), pp. 229-244 (p. 230). It is interesting to note that here her *cenno*, like Bernard's in *Paradiso XXXII*, as discussed in Chapter 1, is an open sign of a nature that can be mentally modelled as the reader desires.

reader, could not have stuck your finger in and out of a fire (109-10) in the time it took him to arrive in his natal constellation.

As Bosco points out, unusually amongst the other paradisiacal ascents, the eighth occurs in time, even if that time is almost imperceptible: a near-simultaneous departure and arrival, but it does have a duration, even if infinitesimal, as Bosco writes.⁷¹ This, I suggest, allows Dante to invite the triggering of embodied simulation in the reader, by presenting as discrete steps the dynamic processes of sensory perception and embodied response, as we saw in the descent on Geryon but with greater subtlety: the journeying Dante sees Beatrice's sign and reflexively begins to ascend the ladder; he sees the constellation of Gemini then feels himself present within it. In the real world, these steps happen so quickly as to appear virtually simultaneous – precisely as the simile of pulling your finger from a fire illustrates.

In total, Dante offers the reader eight instances of modellable body state data in the sequence, heavily privileging the somatosensory (sensations in or on the body, including proprioception and vection), as marked up below. I use the same coding system as with the Geryon sequence: sensorimotor data in **bold type/blue**, visceromotor data underlined/orange, and somatosensory data in *italics/green*.

La dolce donna dietro a lor *mi pinse*
con un sol cenno su per quella scala,
 sì sua virtù la mia natura vinse;
 né mai qua giù dove *si monta e cala*
naturalmente, fu sì ratto moto
 ch'agguagliar si potesse *a la mia ala*. (105)

S'io torni mai, lettore, a quel divoto
 trionfo per lo quale io piango spesso
 le mie peccata e 'l petto mi percuoto,
 tu non avresti in tanto *tratto e messo*
nel foco il dito, in quant' io **vidi** 'l segno
 che segue il Tauro e *fui dentro* da esso. (*Par.*, XXII. 100-11)

⁷¹ 'La salita è velocissima ma non istantanea; non è uguale ad alcun moto naturale, neppure a quello con cui si ritrae immediatamente un dito dal fuoco, ma può essere a questo paragonato; ha dunque una durata, sia pure infinitesima.' Bosco, gloss on *Par.*, XXII, 100-11.

There are two instances of visual data: the implied sighting of Beatrice's 'cenno' (101), and when he sees, 'vidi' (110) that he has attained Gemini. There is one notable visceromotor body state: his sensation of being overcome, 'vinse' (102), by Beatrice's 'virtù' (102). And then there are five instances of somatosensory body states, all associated with vection or proprioception: the sense of being impelled, 'mi pinse' (100); the retrieved experience of gravity on Earth, 'dove si monta e cala | naturalmente' (103); the sense of flight, 'la mia ala' (105); the imagined experience of sticking your finger in a fire and pulling it out again, 'tratto e messo | nel foco il dito' (109-10); and finally, the experience of being 'in', 'dentro' (111), the eighth sphere. Unrelated to vection, there is one further instance of motor data that I propose has a different strategic purpose in relation to the Embodied Narrator narrating instance of the narrating Dante character,⁷² to which I will briefly return later: the narrator's reported self-flagellation, weeping and beating his chest (107-08) in his longing to return to the 'devoto | triunfo' (106-07).

What is particularly important and interesting here is that almost all the body state data is deployed figuratively or comparatively, as metaphor or simile. Yielding, Dante feels himself 'pushed' up the ladder by Beatrice's sign, but there is no motor force from Beatrice; he feels vanquished, 'vinse' (102), but not by her physical strength but rather her 'virtù' (102). Vection is described initially through a null comparison with earthly motion ('né mai qua giù dove si monta e cala | naturalmente, fu sì ratto moto | [...]') (103-04), that might help the reader propositionally understand what Dante *means* – it was an astonishingly rapid movement – but arguably, as a null comparison, it will not help her experience it for herself. His second effort invokes the metaphor of flight ('la mia ala', 105): whether avian or angelic, this requires imaginative projection since the reader is neither. Finally, he offers the comparison of the earthly experience of pulling your finger from a fire, a simile that functions by inviting an embodied, enactive, dynamic memory (not a static visual picture): if the reader can retrieve a similar dynamic felt experience from memory, she will understand not only what he *means* but can also simulate the same dynamic body state, experiencing it for herself in an embodied way. In this ascent, the physical, the corporeal, is almost entirely invoked in support of enactive imagination, not as a reality in itself. Motoric progression from A to B is not the point: what *is* important is to participate in the same body states as the journeying Dante, co-present with him in this space, not observing him from a position outside.

⁷² My model of Narrating Instances, outlined in Chapter 1, is set out fully in Chapter 5.

The ladder itself, like Geryon, is a vehicle of travel, but rather than evoking physical interaction (the locking of the thighs on Geryon), it functions here instead as a site of spatial metaphor and relationality: Dante travels up, ‘su per quella scala’ (101), behind the ‘collegio’, ‘dietro a lor’ (100). But interestingly, in this paradisiacal space of ephemerality and emergence, when the ladder was first encountered in canto XXI, it was evoked in terms that leave open what seems to be a clear possibility of materiality, certainly by contrast with the other spatial features of *Paradiso*: the cross, the skywriting, the eagle. Dante describes it in the following terms:

Dentro al cristallo che ’l vocabol porta,
cerchiando il mondo, del suo caro duce
sotto cui giacque ogne malizia morta,
di color d’oro in che raggio traluce
vid’ io uno scaleo eretto in suso
tanto, che nol seguiva la mia luce.

Vidi anche per li gradi scender giuso
tanti splendor, ch’io pensai ch’ogne lume
che par nel ciel, quindi fosse diffuso. (*Par.*, XXI. 25-33)

Gold in colour, ‘di color d’oro’ (28) and stretching up as far as his eyes can see (‘eretto in suso | tanto, che nol seguiva la mia luce’, 29-30), the ladder is composed of rungs, ‘gradi’ (31) that seem very clearly to offer reciprocal feedback to the lights of the contemplatives as they dance down it, their percussive interactions with each step, ‘si percosse’ (42) seeming to send up a shower of sparks:

tal modo parve me che quivi fosse
in quello sfavillar che ’nsieme venne,
sì come in certo grado si percosse. (*Par.*, XXI. 40-42)

Such interactions suggest materiality, inviting a special capacity for this particular ladder to be both material (as here) and immaterial (as in canto XXII). This capacity for simultaneous reality and virtuality perhaps mirrors the much more widely discussed duality of the ladder in Christian thought; Bosco, for example, commenting on ‘l’immagine fisico–allegorica della scala’, being both physical apparatus and signifier of the path of the Christian ascent to

God.⁷³ My suggestion in relation to the reader's spatial experience of the journey is that this dual nature of the ladder allows and invites the reader to conceive of it as both material and virtual, both 'there' (with its percussive contemplatives) and 'here': a place she need not enter physically but can always access virtually, that is, through the imagination.

For, we might recall, Dante himself is not only in one place in the poem. The *journeying* Dante, of course, is located in this inner story world. But the *narrating* Dante is also *situated*: located not 'there', in the inner story world, but instead in his own 'here'; an outer story world, somewhere in Italy, some short time after his journey of Easter 1300. (The reader herself, of course, is physically situated in yet another 'here', her own physical reality.) And in the ascent of the celestial ladder, the narrating Dante reminds the reader very powerfully of his own 'here', with his disruptive and powerful observation of his weeping and flagellation back on earth:

S'io torni mai, lettore, a quel divoto
trünfo per lo quale io piango spesso
le mie peccata e 'l petto mi percuoto. (*Par.*, XXII. 106-08)

Like Bernard's perspectively disruptive sign, this intrusion from another world – at a point of such powerful spatial presence in the first – seems paradoxical: a wilful threat to the reader's immersion. But again, as with Bernard's sign, I would suggest this dissonant disruption has a strategic function.

My suggestion is that this interjection from another world opens up a space for the reader to experiment with holding different orders of reality concurrent in her mind – the real world and the virtual space of her imagination or belief – or more accurately, in the terms of cognitive processing – switching very rapidly between them. The more the reader practices such a skill, the more adept she will become at investing equivalent mental resources to each, not privileging one as more 'real' than the other simply because it is more easily perceptible (the physical world), or disfavoured the other (any virtual world, including the afterlife) because it places a higher load on the cognitive functions, particularly the imagination.

Peter Hawkins writes of the narrating poet's interjection in this episode that it 'places Benedict's ladder and all it represents outside the sphere of fiction and into that world in

⁷³ Bosco, gloss on *Par.*, XXII. 100-11. More widely on this point, see Hawkins, "By Gradual Scale Sublimed". Note too that the poem itself alludes to the figurative or virtual manifestation in Benedict's own references to his *Rule* (*Par.*, XXII. 73-75).

which the poet writes and reader reads – the world in which we live’.⁷⁴ Indeed, Hawkins talks not of the reader feeling present ‘there’, in Dante’s narrated world; but rather of an outcome in which Dante’s world is transposed to ‘here’, the present world of each one of us.⁷⁵ My understanding is that by holding the two ‘reals’, the material and the virtual, in balance, the reader may find that an idea of Paradise becomes accessible on Earth. In Dante’s deployment of the mechanics of spatial presence, then – triggering embodied simulation through narration of situated body states, and then animating that experience – I propose that the poem supports the reader in passing through a realistic experience of embodied transportation (the ‘being there’ of videogame criticism, entering one world by leaving another behind) to a fluid, dynamic ‘here’ that emerges in dynamic relationship with others; feeling herself located, in Merleau-Ponty’s terms, ‘wherever there is something to be done’.⁷⁶

⁷⁴ Hawkins, *Dante’s Testaments*, p. 243.

⁷⁵ This finds an echo in Luke, 17: 20-21: ‘And being asked by the Pharisees, when the kingdom of God should come? he answered them and said: The kingdom of God cometh not with observation. Neither shall they say: Behold here, or behold there. For lo, the kingdom of God is within you’.

⁷⁶ Merleau-Ponty, p. 291.

Chapter 4: Social Presence

In the previous chapter, I explored how the poem invites the reader to experience the illusion of *spatial* presence in the virtual worlds of Dante's afterlife through a mechanism of neural embodiment triggered by multi-sensory environmental feedback data in the narrative. In this chapter, my focus moves to whether and how the narration of the poem also invites the reader to feel present at the many *social* encounters of the poem, through a further process of neural embodiment, in this instance linked to the mirror mechanism in the brain.

To establish some parameters in terms of how a subject may experience a virtual social encounter, I borrow from discourse analysts Clark and Carlson's 1982 model of 'hearer roles' in relation to a speech act in real life, that identified three key roles: *addressee*, *overhearer*, and *participant*.¹ I bracket for now the first two: *addressees*, defined by Clark and Carlson as 'the ostensible targets of what is being said', to which I return in Chapter 5 in relation to the direct addresses to the reader by the narrating Dante;² and *overhearers*, defined as being neither directly nor indirectly addressed but 'nevertheless listening in'; a stance I would align with that of the epistemically immersed reader of the *Commedia*, spectating on the protagonist's encounters but not expecting to participate in the ways I set out in this thesis.³

Clark and Carlson's third category, *participants*, is particularly interesting, I suggest, in relation to a discussion of reader social presence. In Clark and Carlson's model, a participant need not be directly addressed but is nonetheless an intended recipient of the propositional content of the speech act, distinguished from overhearers in two key ways: one, if he or she feels electively addressed; and two, 'by physical arrangement' or, in my terms, if they feel spatially co-present: 'the people must be near each other relative to the space available'.⁴ My

¹ Herbert H. Clark and Thomas B. Carlson, 'Hearers and Speech Acts', *Language*, 58, 2 (1982), 332-73.

² Clark and Carlson, p. 344.

³ Clark and Carlson, p. 343.

⁴ Clark and Carlson, p. 346. In relation to feeling 'electively' addressed (my term), Clark and Carlson suggest this is triggered in real life situations 'by the history of the ongoing conversation': if the subject has felt addressed in the past, and there is no indication to the contrary, 'they can assume' continuing participation (p. 346). I discuss in Chapter 5 how this might work in relation to a virtual interaction, but for the purposes of my discussion here in relation to social presence I rely on an innovation by cognitive theologian Kirsten Marie Hartvigsen, who transforms Clark and Carlson's model from one of 'speaker intention' to one of 'elective audience participation' in her analysis of audience involvement in an oral performance of the Gospel of Mark. On the basic premise of audience participation, she writes that: 'From the position they construct for themselves in the conceptual world,

hypothesis is that if the reader can experience the illusion of spatial presence, then she may also be able to experience the illusion of being a *participant* in social discourse in a very particular way in the medium of a narrative text.

In the 1970s, when social presence was first theorised as a communications phenomenon, Short, Williams, and Christie defined it as the degree of salience, usually understood in terms of richness of awareness, between two communicators using a communication medium.⁵ Face-to-face interaction was generally considered to invite the richest experience and text the least rich. Since then, computer-mediated interaction has revolutionised the possibilities for rich and realistic social interaction in a virtual medium, regardless of where the participants are physically located (we can see and hear one another in real time, interact in virtual groups, explore alternative realities together, and we can even choose to experience these interactions as an alternative self by adopting different avatars). Consequently, definitions of social presence are in flux but have evolved to include the possibility of social presence between a human and a *virtual* other (Lee's definition of social presence as 'a psychological state in which virtual [...] social actors are experienced as actual social actors in either sensory or non-sensory ways'); and between a human and a *non-human* other (Lee's 'virtual social actors' can include any 'virtual social objects' or 'other intelligences' co-located at the designated site of interaction).⁶ In videogame criticism terms, this allows for the illusion of realistic interaction with bots and cyborgs and other artificial intelligences; in terms of the *Commedia*, it gives us a model of social presence that can tolerate the particular and varying phenomena of the souls of the dead in Dante's afterlife.

I root my analysis of social presence in leading presence theorists John Waterworth and Giuseppe Riva's 2014 definition designed expressly to take account of, and apply equally to,

audience members are allowed to hear most speech acts [...] [and] will probably process them as if they are side-participants who are intended to hear these speech acts. Consequently, *they are informed by these speech acts, but they will not respond by attempting to carry out the suggested actions* [...]. Audience members who are not transported to the narrative world may also process speech acts uttered by characters as side-participants [...]. Because these audience members are not immersed in the narrative world, they will not consider the possibility that they are addressed by these speech acts.' Kirsten Marie Hartvigsen, *Prepare the Way of the Lord: Towards a Cognitive Poetic Analysis of Audience Involvement with Characters and Events in the Markan World* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2013), p. 64 (my emphasis).

⁵ John A. Short, Ederyn Williams, and Bruce Christie, *The Social Psychology of Telecommunications* (New York: Wiley, 1976), p. 48, p. 65.

⁶ Lee, p. 45.

social interactions both in the real world and in the virtual space of a mediated artefact like a videogame. Crucially, their definition characterises social presence not simply as an awareness of another human being ('salience'), but specifically a recognition of the other's *intention*. They propose social presence to be:

the sensation of 'being with other Selves' in a real or virtual environment, resulting from the ability to intuitively recognise the intentions of others in our surroundings.⁷

This understanding of intention is key. In real life, our interactions with others give us the opportunity to gather information by which we may come to understand, and potentially even share, their intentions, and as such is the foundation of community. In real life, we will often achieve this through conversation: but the turn-taking mechanism of real-time conversation has never authentically been reproduced in a narrative artefact, from early efforts using algorithms in Interactive Fiction to procedurally generated videogames.⁸ Indeed, in videogames, believable player–character dialogic interaction has been referred to as 'the hard AI problem'.⁹ 'To properly engage in a conversation', Penny Sweetser has written, 'the character [in a videogame] must have an awareness of the state of the game world, an attitude towards the player, a memory of previous interactions, their own motivations and goals, and

⁷ John A. Waterworth and Giuseppe Riva, *Feeling Present in the Physical World and in Computer-Mediated Environments* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), p. 81. Giuseppe Riva is a neuropsychologist who conducts empirical research into the cognitive processes involved in user experience both in virtual worlds and the physical world, and has published several hundred papers, book chapters, and edited or co-authored volumes, with over 17,600 citations. John Waterworth is an experimental psychologist and interaction theorist.

⁸ Ian Bogost explains: 'To write procedurally, one authors code that enforces rules to generate some kind of representation, rather than authoring the representation itself. Procedural systems generate behaviours based on rule-based models; they are machines capable of producing many outcomes, each conforming to the same overall guidelines.' Ian Bogost, *Persuasive Games: The Expressive Power of Videogames* (Cambridge, MA; London: MIT Press, 2007), p. 4. Further: '[the arguments of] procedural rhetoric [...] are made not through the construction of words or images but through the authorship of rules of behaviour, the construction of dynamic models' (p. 29). Bogost is a videogame criticism theorist focusing on social and affective outcomes in games. With Nick Montfort, he is series co-editor of MIT Press's *Platform Studies*, and has authored multiple publications including the monographs, *Unit Operations: An Approach to Videogame Criticism* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2006); *How to Do Things With Videogames* (Minneapolis; London: University of Minnesota Press, 2011); and *How to Talk About Videogames* (Minneapolis; London: University of Minnesota Press, 2015).

⁹ Naomi Alderman, 'Why Can't We Talk To The Characters In Games? Careful What You Wish For...', *Guardian*, 11 January 2016.

appropriate reactions to the player's conversation choices'.¹⁰ Even the slightest dissonance in generated content or delivery – saying something that is not quite what you might expect a human to say in a given context – can trigger a sense of the uncanny, risking rupture of player immersion.

But as Waterworth and Riva indicate, there is another key source of data by which we may grasp one another's intention: that is, through the medium of the *body*. In the experience of social presence, they propose, this recognition of intention is 'intuitive': that is, pre-rational, automatic, and immediate. As such, like the experience of spatial presence, it qualifies as another example of Gallese's 'direct' form of action understanding, one where 'when we see someone acting or expressing a given emotional or somatosensory state, we can directly grasp its content without the need to reason explicitly about it'.¹¹

Videogames focus on the *body* as the principal site of interactive social understanding between player and characters, with direct discourse largely restricted to character monologue or expositional dialogue in cutscenes. Emergent embodied utterance is much easier to script than believable speech, requiring, as leading videogame designer Rob O'Neill has observed, only a 'small amount of performance randomness' to give the illusion of autonomous, responsive characters that are 'alive'; so there is simply less data from which internal conflict (a disruptive sense of the uncanny) might arise.¹² Further, it increases the player's possibility of participation in the production of meaning: she can *infer* character intention based on her reading of embodied utterance.

Commonly, in real life, this phenomenon of embodied utterance is referred to as 'body language'. In literary theory, Adam Kendon has termed it 'visible action as utterance'.¹³ It is

¹⁰ Penny Sweetser, *Emergence in Games* (Boston, MA: Charles River Media, 2008), p. 101. Videogame designer and theorist Sweetser is a pioneer of the notion of *emergence* in games; that is, games whose design is not fully scripted, but rests instead on a rule-based system that creates gameplay through endless combinations of existing game elements; somewhat akin to the way generative grammar works.

¹¹ Gallese and Wojciehowski, p. 12.

¹² Digital animation theorist and leading practitioner at Dreamworks Animation O'Neill writes: 'Unlike blended animation, all motion [for 'fully procedural characters'] is procedurally generated, so the engine never produces the repetitiveness seen in game engines that call the same mocap [motion capture] clips over and over. The small amount of performance randomness gives the character more of a sense of being alive, in that the same action will be performed differently every time.' Rob O'Neill, *Digital Character Development: Theory and Practice*, 2nd edn (Boca Raton, FL: CRC Press/Taylor & Francis, 2016), p. 239.

¹³ Adam Kendon, *Gesture: Visible Action as Utterance* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), p. 2. Kendon refers specifically to gesture but in this chapter, I will seek to

a phenomenon Dante explicitly recognises in *Paradiso* XXVI when he compares the way in which Adam's joy is transmitted through his dazzling 'coverta' (101) to the way an animal transmits its inner 'affetto' (98) through the movement of its covering:

Talvolta un animal coverto broglia,
 sì che l'affetto convien che si paia
 per lo seguir che face a lui la 'nvoglia;
 e similmente l'anima primaia
 mi facea trasparer per la coverta
 quant' ella a compiacermi venìa gaia. (*Par.*, XXVI. 97-102)¹⁴

For Dante, the process is subjective: 'mi facea trasparer'. In *The Style of Gestures*, literary theorist Guillemette Bolens offers a new understanding of a narrative mechanism that triggers this phenomenon of embodied simulation when we encounter narration of an embodied utterance: a mechanism she terms 'kinaesthetic empathy'. She writes:

I cannot feel the kinaesthetic sensations in another person's arm. Yet I may infer his kinaesthetic sensations on the basis of the kinesic signals I perceive in his movements.

extend his definition to include other related phenomena: posture, carriage or gait, and facial expression. For Kendon, gesture 'is a label for actions that have the features of manifest deliberate expressiveness' (p. 15). Importantly, though, '[w]hether an action is deemed intended or not is something that is dependent entirely upon how that action appears to others' (p. 15). The question of consciousness in intention is a vast subject with which cognitive neuroscience is just beginning to engage, and this is why it is so helpful and productive in discourse analysis, as discussed above in relation to Hartvigsen's re-working of Clark and Carlson's 'model of hearer roles', to explore not *intention* but *reception*. Further, in his essay 'How to Do Things With Words', Denys Turner writes that 'Our bodies are caught up into language whether we like it or not, which is why bodies are something we have to read' (p. 291).

¹⁴ Durling and Martínez point to the openness of the simile (helpfully, for my discussion of semantic retrieval), noting: 'Some commentators see a hooded hawk or caparisoned horse implied, but Dante's language is generic.' Durling and Martínez, gloss on *Par.*, XXVI. 97-102. Chiavacci Leonardi sets out the same argument in her own gloss, concluding that 'il paragone è secondo noi volutamente indeterminato', and that 'non si tratta dunque di una "similitudine bizzarra" (Sapegno), ma della più precisa possibile, come osserva il Poletto'; and precisely because, her interpretation seems to suggest, its indeterminacy requires the reader to focus on the movement itself and its effect rather than visualising the nature of the animal. Chiavacci Leonardi, gloss on *Par.*, XXVI. 97-102, *nota integrativa*.

In an act of kinaesthetic empathy, I may internally simulate what these inferred sensations possibly feel like via my own kinaesthetic memory and knowledge.¹⁵

The key for Bolens is that when a gesture, posture, or facial expression is narrated, the ‘kinesically intelligent reader’ – that is, one with the practice or habit of assimilating and responding to the narration of kinesic signals in the text – unconsciously reactivates earlier personal instances of the experiences she reads such signals as expressing. The reader reflexively finds a match between what she perceives in the character’s narrated body state and a stored prior experience of her own – a process Bolens terms ‘semantic retrieval’ – and from this is able, ‘directly’, to read or infer intention in the Other.¹⁶ Because this depends on finding a match with personal experiential data, it is subjective (we may misread, or over-read); but it also, I suggest, invites the possibility of a powerful participatory experience of social presence. We can get better at it – misread less, intuit more accurately – if we attend well, read carefully, and refine and exercise our judgment, to modify immediate reflex inferences. Imaginative simulation through the medium of a text provides one route to doing this.

In this chapter, I will suggest that in a large number of episodes in the *Commedia*, the narration invites the reader to experience an illusion of social presence at the encounters in the poem. This invitation is constituted through strategic narration of embodied utterance that allows the reader to empathically infer the intention of the speaker and, where strategically invited, to share in it. Not all embodied actions constitute ‘utterances’: walking, reaching for an object, stopping, looking, can all be semantically neutral. Some are more clearly encoded, socially or culturally: raising the eyebrows, making the sign of the cross, bowing the head.¹⁷ Some can be rendered utterance by elaboration through simile (such as ‘stetti come l’uom che teme’, *Inf.*, XIII. 45), or a qualifier that suggests an emotional association – reaching out a hand *a little*, ‘un poco’, as I shall explore in this chapter in relation to the narration of a

¹⁵ Guillemette Bolens, *The Style of Gestures: Embodiment and Cognition in Literary Narrative* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2012), p. 3.

¹⁶ Bolens, p. 2.

¹⁷ Heather Webb has written extensively on the reading of gesture and posture in the poem, both in her essay ‘Postures of Penitence’, and in *Dante’s Persons*, particularly Chapter 2, ‘Gestural Persons’. In the latter she writes: ‘I would suggest [...] that the gestures of persons as narrated in the *Commedia* are intended not only to be shown to act upon and together with the group that surrounds them within the frame of the narration; the gestures are intended to act upon us as readers in particularly compelling ways, bringing us into the space of the event’ (p. 35).

gesture in the Wood of the Suicides. I propose that the text frequently narrates not semantically neutral actions but instead transforms such actions into gestures, postures, gait or carriage, and facial expression; a mode of narration to which I shall refer (acknowledging my debt to Bolens), as *narration through kinaesthetic empathy*. I have mapped and quantified the instances of such narration in the poem but for reasons of economy my focus, as usual, is to establish a principle – that of a strategic programme of invitations to social presence in the poem – and to set out its mechanisms in the narration.

4.1 Readable bodies in the *Commedia*

In 1929, Erich Auerbach wrote that the gestures of the figures encountered in the *Commedia* are never ‘an idle display of naturalistic observation’.¹⁸ But Dante’s dead – the damned, the penitential, the blessed – are not, of course, equipped with bodies in the same way that the mortal human reader understands and experiences her own body. Their souls are presently separated from their mortal body in the afterlife, and will remain so until the Day of Judgment, after which body and soul will be reunited to greater ‘perfection’.¹⁹ The souls have, nonetheless, a visible, embodied form: a shade or aerial body (although embodied utterance is largely invisible in *Paradiso* where the aerial body is sheathed in progressively more dazzling light); and in *Purgatorio* XXV, Statius sets out how this aerial body is formed when, once ‘spatially’ arrived in the afterlife (‘Tosto che loco li circunscrive’, 88), the soul radiates out a kind of substitute body from itself, a ‘forma’ (99). This ‘forma’ is sensible (‘e quindi organa poi | ciascun sentire infino a la veduta’, 101-02), so in theory the shade or soul

¹⁸ Erich Auerbach, *Dante: Poet of the Secular World*, trans. by Ralph Manheim (New York: NYRB, 2001), p. 152.

¹⁹ Dante follows Aquinas, who follows Aristotle, on natural perfection: ‘Anima autem, cum sit pars humanae naturae, non habet naturalem perfectionem, nisi secundum quod est corpori unita’ [Now the soul, as part of human nature, has its natural perfection only as united to the body]. *The Summa Theologica of St Thomas Aquinas*, Part 1, trans. by Fathers of the English Dominican Province (London: Washbourne, 1912), q. 90, a. 4, resp. (p. 256). In Virgil’s terms (*Inf.*, VI. 94-111), this means feeling an absolute (good or pain) more intensely; in Solomon’s terms, set out in *Paradiso* XIV, it means an intensification related to a generative expression and experience of love: ‘Tanto mi parver sùbiti e accorti | e l’uno e l’altro coro a dicer “Amme!” | che ben mostrar disio d’i corpi morti: | forse non pur per lor, ma per le mamme, | per li padri e per li altri che fuor cari | anzi che fosser sempiterno fiamme’ (*Par.*, XIV. 61-66); the souls desire their bodies not just for themselves but for those they love – that is, *in relation* (this is what Virgil forgets).

can still communicate via the body in such a way that intention may be intuitively recognized or inferred.²⁰

But can it? In *Purgatorio* and *Paradiso*, as Webb writes, ‘the aerial body permits the shades to act as persons, as if they had their animate bodies, and as individuals that can love and be loved in return’.²¹ The journeying Dante, and the reader, can reliably read the embodied utterances of the penitents and the blessed as authentic. But reading the bodies of the shades in *Inferno*, I suggest, is more problematic. As Webb writes, infernal bodies are ‘parodic’: sensate but not, I suggest, communicating authentically and consonantly in the way that a mortal human being’s body does.²² Authentic intention is communicated when word, gesture and sign generatively endorse one another, as Virgil demonstrates for example on the shores of Mount Purgatory when, ‘con parole e con mani e con cenni’, he urges the journeying Dante to demonstrate his reverence to Cato.²³ The verbal testaments of the souls are only one element in fully grasping an intuitive understanding of the souls’ condition; they must be *authenticated* through empathic reading of gesture and signs.

The poem is dense with instances of narration of embodied action, with a preliminary count suggesting some eleven hundred in total.²⁴ Some are simply unqualified actions which invite no inference of emotional association, and these are often verbs of linear progression (setting off, walking, stopping). For example, compare, on one hand, the semantically neutral narration of Virgil and Dante’s starting out in *Inferno* I, ‘Allor si mosse, e io li tenni dietro’

²⁰ But the sensible *forma* has no material substance as manifested in the failed embraces in *Purg.*, II. 78-81, and a limited capacity for autonomous motor agency (see Chapter 3). For a full exploration, see Manuele Gragnolati, ‘From Plurality to (Near) Unicity of Forms: Embryology in *Purgatorio* 25’, in *Dante for the New Millennium*, ed. by Teodolinda Barolini and H. Wayne Storey (New York: Fordham University Press, 2003), pp. 192-210. Gragnolati notes Dante’s innovation in this respect: ‘Dante goes further than Aquinas and does not wait for the resurrection in order to reactivate the “human” part of the person’ (p. 200).

²¹ Webb, *Dante’s Persons*, p. 14. For more on Webb’s analysis of the aerial body, see pp. 22-23. Further, in his essay ‘Polemics of Praise’, Kirkpatrick writes: ‘In *Paradiso* [...], human beings are *being* human – displayed, that is, through their activities rather than in pseudo-monumental attitudes of self-aggrandisement.’ Robin Kirkpatrick, ‘Polemics of Praise: Theology as Text, Narrative, and Rhetoric in Dante’s *Commedia*’, in *Dante’s ‘Commedia’: Theology as Poetry*, ed. by Matthew Treherne and Vittorio Montemaggi (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2010), p. 14-35 (p. 24). See also Lombardi, *The Syntax of Desire*, p. 170.

²² ‘The experience of the loss or parodic distortion of the body is continually dramatised throughout *Inferno*.’ Webb, *Dante’s Persons*, p. 5.

²³ *Purg.*, I. 50.

²⁴ Provisional, subject to further analysis.

(136), that narrates a physical action, with, on the other hand, narration of their progress along the shore of mount Purgatory:

Noi eravam lughesso mare ancora,
come gente che pensa a suo cammino,
che va col cuore e col corpo dimora. (*Purg.*, II. 10-12)

This second is both more elaborate but also explicitly – through the simile – invites a reading or recognition of the inner body state (glossed by Singleton as ‘the proper spiritual condition of the Christian pilgrim’); and indeed, so powerful is the semantic retrieval expected to be that the reader may infer the inner body state from the outer even though, in fact, the two describe a paradox, the heart pushing ahead as the body delays.²⁵ But the vast majority are narrated as embodied utterances, such as when the journeying Dante lowers his eyes following Francesca’s eloquent first speech, ‘china’ il viso’ (*Inf.*, V. 110), and keeps them downturned for so long that Virgil cannot help but notice and explicitly asks for clarification: ‘e tanto li tenni basso | fin che ’l poeta mi disse: “Che pense?”’ (110-11).²⁶ Under Bolens’ model of kinaesthetic empathy, Dante’s lowered eyes are not simply propositional information about *him* and how he might have looked to the external observer at that moment in time; via semantic retrieval, the reader can access through embodied simulation his inner body state for herself: she can imagine how he *feels*.

The embodied actions of the souls are often visually evocative and memorable, and especially so in *Inferno*: the yielding passivity embodied in the lustful, wafted like birds on the wing, ‘di qua, di là, di giù, di sù li mena’ (*Inf.*, V. 43), Farinata’s thrusting chest and brow in which the narrating Dante explicitly infers (‘*com*’ avesse’) disdain, ‘ed el s’ergea col petto e con la fronte | com’ avesse l’inferno a gran dispetto’ (*Inf.*, X. 35-36); Ulysses’ wrenching and thrashing flame, ‘come fosse la lingua che parlasse’ (*Inf.*, XXVI. 89). Auerbach writes: ‘they wish to speak and must speak [...]: it is their torment and effort that gives their words and gestures such compelling power’.²⁷ But it is important not to be seduced into reflex

²⁵ As discussed in relation to Bolens’ semantic retrieval, there is often an element of subjectivity in classifying an embodied action as simply action or as ‘utterance’. Singleton, gloss on *Purg.*, II. 11-12.

²⁶ The journeying Dante, we might recall, makes explicit his reflexive pity for the shades, saying: ‘Oh lasso | quanto dolci pensier, quanto disio | menò costoro al doloroso passo!’ (*Inf.*, V. 112-14).

²⁷ Auerbach, *Dante, Poet*, p. 140.

inference by the visual alone. The bodies of the penitents in *Purgatorio* speak of greater integration between outer and inner, communicating their practices of penitence: the weeping, prostrate bodies of the avaricious amplify their barely audible verbal utterance: ‘I cleave to the ground’, ‘*Adhaesit pavimento anima mea*’ (*Purg.*, XIX, 73). The sustained penitence of the gluttons reveals (at least, to those who read in this way, qualifies the narrating Dante, ‘chi nel viso de li uomini legge omo’, 32) the ‘m’ of the ‘omo’ enscribed in their faces.²⁸ And in *Paradiso*, the focus is on dynamic, relational embodied utterance; the temporary emergence of compound bodies in constant, ecstatic configuration and re-configuration. There is the cross that suddenly blazes out Christ, ‘quella croce lampeggiava Cristo’ (*Par.*, XIV. 104); the so-called sky-writing of canto XVIII where the souls of the Just spell out, with the dazzling intensities that constitute their visible presence, the words ‘*DILIGITE IUSTITIAM [...] / [...] / QUI IUDICATIS TERRAM*’ (91-93); and the breadth and intensity of intention intuitable within the narratively economical, polysemous, gesture of the smile.²⁹

However, the souls account for fewer than half of all the instances of narrated embodied action in the poem. The other half, in fact, is accounted for by the journeying Dante protagonist.³⁰ Some of his embodied utterances may be easily recalled: his swoon at the end of *Inferno* V (‘e caddi come corpo morto cade’, 142); reaching down to Brunetto Latini’s face, ‘chinando la mano a la sua faccia’ (*Inf.*, XV. 29); and perhaps, too, his grief at his loss of Virgil in the Earthly Paradise, expressed twice through allusive narration of inner physical sensation becoming outer manifestation, an embodied utterance in slow-motion

²⁸ ‘Com’ io nel quinto giro fui dischiuso, | vidi gente per esso che piangea, | giacendo a terra tutta volta in giuso. | “*Adhaesit pavimento anima mea*” | sentia dir lor con sì alti sospiri, | che la parola a pena s’intendea’ (*Purg.*, XIX. 70-75). ‘Ne li occhi era ciascuna oscura e cava, | palida ne la faccia, e tanto scema | che da l’ossa la pelle s’informava | [...] | Parean l’occhiaie anella senza gemme: | chi nel viso de li uomini legge “omo” | ben avria quivi conosciuta l’emme’ (*Purg.*, XXIII. 22-24 and 31-33).

²⁹ The cross blazing out Christ is notably coincident with the narrating Dante’s invocation to any follower of Christ, suggesting an invitation to the reader to electively identify, a principle of participation I discuss further in Chapters 5 and 6. The sky-writing, too, is arguably another metaleptic invitation to the reader to electively identify and participate. The many instances of the smile and laugh in *Paradiso* include that which is readable in Piccarda’s eyes, ‘occhi ridenti’ (*Par.*, III. 42); in Cacciaguida’s otherwise-hidden person (*Par.*, XVII. 36); Mary’s smile (*Par.*, XXXI. 134); Bernard’s (*Par.*, XXXIII. 49); and, of course, Beatrice’s (including *Par.*, II. 52, III. 24, VII. 17, X. 61, XV. 71, XVI. 14, XVIII. 19, XXV. 28, XXVII. 96, XXIX. 7, XXXI. 92).

³⁰ The souls account for 40%; Beatrice for 5%; and the highly gestural Virgil for a further 9%. The journeying Dante accounts for 46%.

visible in its constituent parts, as in his description of bursting into tears as a process of ice melting in his heart and issuing through mouth and eye, ‘lo gel che m’era intorno al cor ristretto, | spirito e acqua fessi, e con angoscia | de la bocca e de li occhi uscì del petto’.³¹ But in general, the journeying Dante’s lexicon of embodied actions is much more modest and less visually memorable than that of the souls, consisting largely, as I shall explore later, of *giving attention*: pausing, turning, looking.³²

In Hell, in the same way that the shades can be perceived to interact with place only insofar as it constitutes part of their suffering, so, I propose, the infernal shades are *not* evoked in the narration as authentically interactive social beings. The question of whether they recognise the journeying Dante as an ‘intelligent other’ (Lee) is moot: certainly, we might observe that they recognise a *presence*. But this recognition often seems generic, or somehow biological.³³ Francesca senses a fellow being, classified not as human or person but simply ‘animal’ (‘O animal grazioso e benigno’); Farinata recognises an accent, ‘O Tosco’.³⁴ In *Inferno*, in stark contrast to the repeated expressions of amazement and curiosity in *Purgatorio*, few recognise or seem to care that the journeying Dante is still mortal.³⁵ Indeed, as the journeying Dante penetrates further into hell, the illusion of any kind of reciprocity in the encounters collapses altogether. Prefigured perhaps in Ciaccio’s marionettish squint-and-collapse routine in *Inferno* VI (‘Li diritti occhi torse allora in biechi; | guardommi un poco e

³¹ *Purg.*, XXX. 97-99 and then further at XXXI. 19-21.

³² For a discussion of the giving of attention in the poem, see Webb, *Dante’s Persons*, Chapter 4, ‘Ardent Attention’.

³³ This is a quality we might associate with the most elementary of Antonio Damasio’s three levels of the self in human consciousness, the *proto-self*: ‘a [temporarily] coherent collection of neural patterns which map, moment by moment, the state of the physical structure of the organism in its many dimensions’. Antonio R. Damasio, *The Feeling of What Happens: Body, Emotion, and the Making of Consciousness* (London: Vintage, 2000), p. 154. Damasio’s model, I suggest, offers potentially interesting grounds for further exploration of selfhood and social presence in the poem in its contrasting of the proto-self with a ‘core’ and an ‘autobiographical’ self.

³⁴ *Inf.*, V. 88. *Inf.*, X. 22.

³⁵ For example, in *Purgatorio*, the newly arrived souls on the shores of the mountain collectively blanching at the realisation that the stranger is a mortal man (II. 67-69), drawing back at the sight of his shadow (III. 88-91), and the ‘Miserere’ that turns to an ‘oh!’ (V. 22-27). In *Inferno*, Phlegyas is one of the few to acknowledge his condition, ‘Chi se’ tu che vieni anzi ora?’ (*Inf.*, VIII. 33), but immediately inauthenticates his apparent curiosity by showing no interest in reciprocal exchange, wanting to talk only of himself: ‘Vedi che son un che piango’ (36). The narrating Dante reports that the protagonist is recognised by Brunetto Latini, ‘fui conosciuto da un’ (*Inf.*, XV. 23); and Bertran de Born recognises (albeit without any curiosity) that Dante is still alive, ‘tu che, spirando, vai veggendo i morti’ (*Inf.*, XXVIII. 131).

poi chinò la testa: | cadde con essa a par de li altri ciechi', 91-93), bodies in the bottom of hell seem to participate in what might be deduced to be an on-demand, unilateral display; the journeying Dante merely the object that trips the automated performances of Maometto, Pier da Medecina, Mosca.³⁶ Finally, even this parody of embodied utterance fails: locked under the ice, the shades weep without being able, physically, to weep: 'Lo pianto stesso li pianger non lascia'.³⁷

The shades of Hell, I suggest, are simply not able or equipped to recognise the journeying Dante (or any passing intelligent being) as an intentional other. Not only this, they lack the integrated human 'wiring' to have or express meaningful intention. Different to empathy-enabled real human bodies (including the journeying Dante's body), the *parole*, *mani*, and *cenni* of infernal bodies are not consonant and generatively endorsing. Instead, I suggest, in *Inferno* the reader is directed by the mechanisms of the text to model *not* what the parodic bodies of the damned 'say', but instead to model how the journeying Dante mediates these encounters for the reader through his own body. This distinction is directed in the text, I shall propose, through different modes of narration: one mode, narration of gesture, that invites neural mirroring of a visceral body state and triggers semantic retrieval in the reader (deployed to narrate the journeying Dante's body language); and another, narration of semantically neutral action, that invites only a visual mental model (narration of the shades in Hell).³⁸

³⁶ Pertile seems to nod towards a similar idea in his recent essay, 'Works'. He writes: 'What is deeply disturbing is the relentlessness of the conditions in which victims and tormentors are *caught by the eye of the passing visitor*: the notion that, for instance, Count Ugolino will always gnaw at the skull of Archbishop Ruggieri.' Lino Pertile, 'Works', in *Dante In Context*, ed. by Zygmunt G. Barański and Lino Pertile (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), p. 499 (my emphasis).

³⁷ *Inf.*, XXXIII. 94.

³⁸ This raises the question of why many scholars experience certain of the encounters in *Inferno* as moving and pitiable, as for example in Auerbach's reading of *Inferno* X, which moves him to write that '[w]hen we hear Cavalcante's outburst: non fiere li occhi suoi il dolce lome? [...] we experience an emotion which is concerned with human beings and not directly with the divine order in which they have found their fulfillment'. Erich Auerbach and W. R. Trask, 'Farinata and Cavalcante', *The Kenyon Review* 14, 2 (1952), 207-42 (p. 241). My understanding based on examination of the narratological devices at work is that whilst this is a very human interpretation, it is one that *exceeds* the reading as it is directed by the mechanisms of the text, as I seek to demonstrate in technical terms in the next section. Cavalcante's rhetoric is powerful, but *mani* and *cenni* do not authenticate it. The purpose of modelling only the journeying Dante's body states in *Inferno*, rather than experiencing social presence directly with the shades is precisely, I suggest, to protect the reader from the cloudy reflex of pity that might inhibit her progress on the journey to clear-sighted desire for God.

In *Purgatorio* and *Paradiso*, my suggestion is that the reader is then progressively invited to participate in an illusion of social presence directly with the *souls* themselves, reflexively reading and ultimately sharing in their intentions. The journeying Dante remains available as mediating body, should the reader need or want it as model for well-judged reading of and participation in the intentions of another, but with increasing intermittence.

In the next section, I offer an example of how the invitation to social presence is set up through the mechanism I describe as *narration through kinaesthetic empathy*, in an exploration of the encounter between the journeying Dante and Pier della Vigna in *Inferno* XIII.

4.2 Narration through kinaesthetic empathy

Pressing through the Wood of the Suicides, Dante becomes so bewildered by the apparently disembodied cries around him that his thoughts spiral into nested inferences ('Cred'io ch'ei credette ch'io credesse', 25) of people hidden in the vegetation, and Virgil invites him to confront his thoughts by breaking off a twig, a 'ramicel' (32), from a hawthorn bush. But when the bush shrieks and bleeds, the journeying Dante quickly discovers that the twig belongs to the vegetative embodiment of a human soul, the suicide Pier della Vigna. Poised with the twig still in his hand as Pier speaks, Dante finally lets it fall to the ground, terror-struck, 'come l'uom chi teme' (45). The event is narrated as follows:

Allor porsi la mano un poco avante
 e colsi un ramicel da un gran pruno;
 e 'l tronco suo gridò: 'Perché mi schiante?'

Da che fatto fu poi di sangue bruno,
 ricominciò a dir: 'Perché mi scerpi?
 non hai tu spirto di pietade alcuno?' (36)

Uomini fummo, e or siam fatti sterpi:
 ben dovebb' esser la tua man più pia,
 se state fossimo anime di serpi.'

Come d'un stizzo verde ch'arso sia
 da l'un de' capi, che da l'altro geme
 e cigola per vento che va via, (42)

sì de la scheggia rotta usciva insieme
 parole e sangue; ond' io lasciai la cima
 cadere, e stetti come l'uom che teme. (*Inf.*, XIII. 31-45)

There are six instances of embodied character action in the narration: two pertaining to Pier, and four to the journeying Dante.³⁹ Under the schema outlined above, I suggest that both of Pier's embodied actions are semantically neutral, unqualified actions inviting no clear inference of an emotional association that might trigger semantic retrieval in the reader. The first action is the issuing of blood; the second, the issuing of words and blood. Both are narrated as straightforward observations of visual phenomena: 'Da che fatto fu poi di sangue bruno' (34); 'sì de la scheggia rotta usciva insieme | parole e sangue' (43-44). If the damage incurred by Pier della Vigna's vegetative body seems vivid and memorable it is not, I will suggest, because there is an invitation in the narration to kinaesthetic empathy. Further, the simile that is offered to help the reader elaborate Pier's condition – the bloody verbal issue that recalls a firebrand whistling with sap (43-45) – might aid the aural imagination of the onlooker, but is just not modellable as an inner experience for the reader possessed of a human rather than a vegetable body.⁴⁰ She might be able to aurally imagine hearing it, but not to experience for herself how it feels to whistle with sap; just as being able to imagine *seeing* something is not the same as imaginatively *experiencing* an inner body state for yourself. Pier's words, too, bear no explicit emotional charge, even if the sympathetic human reader may be inclined to read into them emotional or physical pain. Instead, Dante's narration records two requests for information: 'Perché mi schiante?' (33), 'Perché mi scerpi?' (35); a rhetorical question: 'non hai tu spirto di pietade alcuno?' (36); and a sarcastic observation: 'ben dovrebb' esser la tua man più pia, | se state fossimo anime di serpi' (38-39). Consistent with all the damned, as I have proposed, Pier is not able to reflexively or directly invite empathic identification in the reader. Instead, I suggest, it is the journeying Dante who mediates the opportunity for social presence for the reader in this encounter, as I shall now seek to demonstrate.

³⁹ Consistent with my parameters throughout this chapter, I exclude from the analysis Pier's two *verbal* actions of shouting (33) and speaking (35); these, too, are unqualified actions.

⁴⁰ Spitzer writes: 'The fact that Dante chose to describe a hissing, guttering fire-log by way of characterising the genesis of speech in his *uomini-piante* shows that he conceived this as representing a purely physical process: the issue of blood and cries is on the same low "material" level as is the issue of sap and hissing sound from a fire-log.' Leo Spitzer, 'Speech and Language in *Inferno XIII*', *Italica*, 19, 3 (1942), 81-104 (p. 89).

The journeying Dante's four narrated embodied actions are: reaching out his hand a little, 'Allor porsi la mano un poco avante' (31); breaking off the twig, 'colsi un ramice' (32); letting the twig fall, 'lasciai la cima / cadere' (44); standing like someone terrified, 'e stetti come l'uom che teme' (45). I would classify two of these as unqualified actions: breaking off the twig; then letting the twig fall (reading as directed by the text in relation to the latter in particular; that is, if we separate this action from the subsequent contextual revelation of Dante's terror). I would classify the other two as Kendon's embodied action as utterance: reaching out his hand a little (a gesture) and standing like a man terrified (a posture whose associative affect is rendered explicit by the qualifying simile). I will focus on the first of these, the gesture, to explore why the narrative choice to qualify the journeying Dante's action of reaching out his hand *a little*, 'un poco', is so significant, and why I propose it to be part of a wider narrative strategy in the poem.

What is described is a very small movement: 'Allor porsi la mano un poco avante', but its very smallness is key: the modifier 'un poco' is what transforms an unremarkable action – reaching out, as we all do every day, to pick up a cup of coffee, to take a book from a shelf – into a *gesture* loaded with potential for associative interpretation: hesitance, anxiety, trepidation. Via Bolens' process of semantic retrieval, the reader may infer how the journeying Dante feels through kinaesthetic empathy – re-experiencing a moment when she, too, reached out a hand 'un poco'; anticipating that the interaction will not end well.

And indeed, it does not. The reader's empathic trepidation is paid off in the narrative thirteen lines later when the journeying Dante finally lets the broken-off tip fall to the ground, transfixed and terror-struck, 'e stetti come l'uom che teme' (45). If the reader has accessed and explored her own feelings of trepidation she is rewarded: Dante was feeling the same. The reader has just, briefly, experienced social presence in the encounter with Pier della Vigna, sharing the same affective experience or body state as the journeying Dante, as if she were there responding to Pier on her own account, an active participant rather than an onlooker.

The sheer number of instances where an action is qualified such that it is transformed into an embodied utterance that invites kinaesthetic empathy (the majority of the eleven hundred instances of narrated embodied action in the poem) encourages me to propose this to be a strategy rather than narrative accident on Dante's part. But I have also focused on the example of Pier for another reason that becomes clearer when we compare Virgil's own narration of Dante's source event. In Book III of the *Aeneid*, a text Virgil will claim in *Inferno XX* that Dante knows inside out, 'tutta quanta', historical poet Virgil narrates a

similar event when Aeneas tears up a number of saplings that turn out to be the remains of Polydorus.⁴¹ After Dante's horrified reaction to the train of events he set off by plucking Pier's twig, Virgil addresses Pier, 'anima lesa' (47), in a kind of *captatio benevolentiae*, saying of the journeying Dante:

‘S’elli avesse potuto creder prima’,
rispuose ’l savio mio, ‘anima lesa,
ciò c’ha veduto pur con la mia rima,
non averebbe in te la man distesa;
ma la cosa incredibile mi fece
indurlo ad ovra ch’a me stesso pesa’. (*Inf.*, XIII. 46-51)

Virgil says that the journeying Dante could have predicted that would happen, had he only believed, ‘s’elli avesse potuto creder prima’ (46), what he had read in Virgil's own ‘rima’ (48). But the ‘cosa’, the thing, continues Virgil, is beyond belief, so he had to induce Dante to do the deed so that he could see for himself. But what is this ‘cosa’ that is ‘incredibile’? For early commentators such as Da Buti, it was fairly straightforwardly the notion that a twig could spurt words and blood: ‘Incredibile è che del troncone uscisse sangue e parole.’⁴² However, Teodolinda Barolini raises a different point rooted in a premise that supposes Pier to be just as much a fictional construct as Polydorus, and therefore questions why Dante thinks his reader should believe in *his* construct of the vegetal Pier but not in Virgil's sapling-man, Polydorus. ‘Why’, she asks, ‘is Pier della Vigna less incredible than his prototype, Polydorus?’⁴³

My suggestion is that this credibility is rooted in *kinesic narrative style*. Narration through kinaesthetic empathy, and specifically in this instance through gesture, is believable and transformational, because experiential (through embodied simulation); narration through

⁴¹ Virgil says: ‘Euripilo ebbe nome, e così ’l canta | l’alta mia tragedia in alcun loco: | ben lo sai tu che la sai tutta quanta’ (*Inf.*, XX. 112-14). In the sequence with Pier, the journeying Dante is depicted explicitly in the narration as *reader* of Virgil's text, so we might want to pay very careful attention to how he models this process of reading for us. Spitzer observes that in fact Dante borrows here from both Virgil and Ovid; the transformation of man into sapling ‘is not Virgilian: Polydorus does not become the myrtle tree’ (*Speech and Language*, p. 83).

⁴² Da Buti, gloss on *Inf.*, XIII. 46-54.

⁴³ Teodolinda Barolini, *Dante's Poets: Textuality and Truth in the 'Comedy'* (Princeton; Guildford: Princeton University Press, 1984), p. 212.

unqualified action, locating the reader firmly outside the exchange as spectator, is forgettable. This is the basic tenet of experiential learning: you remember better what you experience for yourself, even if that experience is virtual, than what you are told. This, as discussed earlier, is why the journeying Dante had to be shown the ‘perdute genti’ for himself.⁴⁴ But whilst the journeying Dante’s encounter with Pier is narrated through *gesture*, inviting kinaesthetic empathy, Aeneas’ with Polydorus, I suggest, is narrated through *action*. Consider Aeneas’ account (in Latin then McCrorie’s English translation below, picking out Aeneas’ key verbs of action):

forte fuit iuxta tumulus, quo cornea summo
 virgulta et densis hastilibus horrida myrtus.
 accessi viridemque ab humo **convellere** silvam
 conatus, ramis tegerem ut frondentibus aras, 25
 horrendum et dictu video mirabile monstrum.
 nam quae prima solo ruptis radicibus arbos
vellitur, huic atro liquuntur sanguine guttae
 et terram tabo maculant. mihi frigidus horror
 membra quatit gelidusque coit formidine sanguis. 30
 rursus et alterius lentum **convellere** vimen
 insequor et causas penitus temptare latentis;
 ater et alterius sequitur de cortice sanguis.
 multa movens animo Nymphas venerabar agrestis
 Gradivumque patrem, Geticis qui praesidet arvis, 35
 rite secundarent visus omenque levarent.
 tertia sed postquam **maiore hastilia nisu**
adgredior genibusque adversae obluctor harenae,
 (eloquar an sileam?) gemitus lacrimabilis imo
 auditur tumulo et vox reddita fertur ad auris: 40
 ‘quid miserum, Aenea, laceras? iam parce sepulto,
 parce pias scelerare manus. non me tibi Troia
 externum tulit aut cruor hic de stipite manat.
 heu fuge crudelis terras, fuge litus auarum:

⁴⁴ *Purg.*, XXX. 136-38.

nam Polydorus ego. hic confixum ferrea textit 45
 telorum seges et iaculis increvit acutis'.
 tum vero ancipiti mentem formidine pressus
 obstipui steteruntque comae et vox faucibus haesit. (*Aeneid III.*, 22-48)⁴⁵

[By chance a nearby hilltop was covered with copses, | cornel trees and myrtle, bristling
 densely | with spikes. I approached, **tried uprooting** some saplings | to cover the altar
 with green branches and leaflets, | and saw an omen. I shudder and wonder to tell you: |
 the first sapling's roots that **I tore** from the humus / began to bleed—black-red drops
 had already | stained and clotted the soil. A shuddering, chilling | dread ran through my
 body—my own blood was congealing. | Yet I tried once more. **I tore up** a second |
 tough shoot, probing deep for the cause of the omen. | Black-red blood flowed from the
 bark of the second. | Profoundly stirred I prayed to the Nymphs of that woodland, | to
 Lord Grandivus, presiding in Thracian farmland, | to make the omen auspicious, to
 lighten our vision. | But after I came to a third shoot and **engaged it / with greater
 effort, my knees in that soil resisted** – | how can I say this? or stay silent? – I heard a
 pathetic | moan deep in the ground, a voice restored to my hearing: | ‘Why do you tear
 my wretched body, Aeneas? | Spare my burial! Keep your hands from pollution. | They
 bore me: no foreign blood runs from your sapling. | Leave this cruel shore, run from the
 greed of this country! | I’m Polydorus. Here an iron harvest of weapons | covered and
 pierced me. Now they sprout into thorn points’. | My mind teetered. Awe completely
 possessed me, | my hair stood up, my tongue stuck in my throat, I was speechless.]

Aeneas' actions are consistently described by Virgil as unqualified actions. The repeated verb is that of tearing up, uprooting (*convellere, vellitur, vello*): a large, physical action but with nothing equivalent to the 'un poco' to trigger the kinaesthetic empathy that gives the reader a window into Aeneas' inner body state or state of mind, through which she might simulate the experience mentally for herself. And importantly, while there *is* narration of affect (and lots of it), it is divorced from the verbs of action and is even explicitly diegetic: 'I shudder and wonder to tell you' (26); 'A shuddering, chilling | dread ran through my body' (29-30); 'My mind teetered. Awe completely possessed me, | my hair stood up, my tongue stuck in my

⁴⁵ Virgil, *Aeneid*, trans. by E. McCrorie (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1995), pp. 59-60.

throat, I was speechless' (47-48). Inner and outer body states are not integrated and made manifest in the gestures and postures that invite mental simulation in the observer. The reader of the *Aeneid* may listen and observe, but she has not been given the necessary data to *model* Aeneas' body states or experience for herself. It is no wonder then, I suggest, that the journeying Dante 'was not able to believe' what happened in Virgil's text ('S'elli avesse potuto creder prima | [...] | cio c'ha veduto pur con la mia rima', as Virgil says in *Inferno* XIII); or that he has not retained a meaningful mental simulation of the experience; and that instead he is required to experience it for himself in the Wood of the Suicides.

And finally, in the encounter in the *Commedia* we might observe that Dante points to this directly in the words he puts in his Virgil-character's mouth. The journeying Dante's gesture is initially narrated using the verb 'porgere' ('porsi la mano un poco avante', 31), a rich verb open to figurative interpretation in medieval texts in the context of praise or instruction (*porgere lode*, *porgere ammaestramento*), fear or belief (*porgere paura*, *porgere fede*), or in acting to connote a certain type of modulated delivery that can include gesture.⁴⁶ This densely associative gestural hand movement is re-cast, in Virgil-character's subsequent *captatio* to Pier, as unqualified *action*, Virgil-character being made to use the verb 'distendere', a stretching-out rooted in the physical, in muscle and nerves: 'non averebbe in te la man distesa' (49).⁴⁷ So, when Virgil-character is made to say, essentially, 'well, on the strength of my text, he should have known that was coming', he is made to point to a limitation in his own kinesic narrative style.⁴⁸

Peter Hawkins suggests in his essay, 'For the Record: Rewriting Virgil in the *Commedia*', that Dante's interest is in a rewriting of the *Aeneid* in a new context of Christian authority:

The *Aeneid* provides Dante with the wonder of a bleeding stalk and a voice from the beyond. The author of *Inferno* XIII, however, takes that legacy and runs with it, increasing our sense of amazement, complicating the conversation with the dead [...],

⁴⁶ <<http://www.treccani.it/vocabolario/porgere/>>

⁴⁷ <<http://www.treccani.it/vocabolario/distendere/>>

⁴⁸ Referring to the first meeting of Dante and Virgil in *Inferno* II ('tu duca, tu signore e tu maestro', 140), Elena Lombardi writes of a 'submissive relation between pupil and guide [that] conceal[s] the sadistic dismantling of the old author by the new one'. Elena Lombardi, 'Plurilingualism *sub specie aeternitatis* and the Strategies of a Minor Author', in *Dante's Plurilingualism: Authority, Knowledge, Subjectivity*, ed. by Sara Fortuna, Manuele Gragnolati, and Jürgen Trabant (London: Legenda, 2010), pp. 133-49 (p. 143).

and projecting the entire encounter against the theological background of Last Things. [...] Reinterpretation is finally not enough: the *Aeneid* must be rewritten.⁴⁹

I would propose that Dante rewrites Virgil's narrative event in all the ways Hawkins describes, but additionally, and crucially, transforms it from a *narrative of action* to a *narrative of gesture*. It is this fundamental shift in kinesic narrative style that invites the reader to *participate* in the illusion of social presence in the interaction with Pier, not only witnessing the journeying Dante's experience but simulating the protagonist's inner experience for herself. We are not just more amazed; we engage our own personal, idiosyncratic higher cognitive faculties of memory and imagination in a way that helps us learn how to participate, memorably, not solely by externally *observing*, empathising, maintaining an aesthetic distance – knowledge that depends on the intellect for retention – but by imaginatively *experiencing*, recruiting the integrated embodied mind, the semantic retrieval of experiential memory, and identifying with the protagonist's experience in an agential, participatory way by recreating an experience of our own.

4.3 Progression in *Purgatorio* and *Paradiso*

In *Inferno*, I suggested that the reader learns to appreciate the condition of the soul in Hell through intuitively reading and mirroring the responses of the journeying Dante as, guided by Virgil, he progresses in understanding. His early reflexive sympathy with the shades of the lustful is partially repeated in the interaction with Pier: he experiences such pity ('*tanta pietà m'accora*', 84) that he has to ask Virgil to speak for him; but by the time he encounters the bush of the unknown Florentine suicide who has just been stripped of his leaves by black dogs ('*e quel dilaceraro a brano a brano*', 127), at the end of the canto, his emotional response is tempered. His gesture of gathering together the leaves is poignant but bears an explicit correction: it is for love of home that Dante makes this gesture, not blind sympathy:

⁴⁹ Peter Hawkins, 'For the Record: Rewriting Virgil in the *Commedia*', *Studies in the Literary Imagination*, 36 (2003), 75-97 (p. 85, p. 88). See also Marchesi, pp. 15-16. Further, Hawkins writes in '*Moderno Uso*' that '[Dante] used an old world [Virgil's] to construct something new, something that answered the call of *moderno uso*.' Peter Hawkins, '*Moderno Uso*', *Arion*, 13, 1 (2005), 161-84 (p. 184).

Poi che la carità del natio loco
 mi strinse, raunai le fronde sparte
 e rende'le a colui, ch'era già fioco. (*Inf.*, XIV. 1-3)

Experiencing social presence with the journeying Dante, then, permits the reader to learn in parallel with the protagonist in *Inferno*. However, in *Purgatorio* and *Paradiso*, I suggest, there are progressively more opportunities for the reader to experience social presence directly in relation to the souls of the penitents and the blessed.

The journeying Dante is (almost) always present throughout the entire poem to channel the reader's attention: stopping, turning, looking. He gazes fixedly at Manfred, for example, 'Io mi volsi ver' lui e guardail fiso' (*Purg.*, III. 106); turns his feet to see another narrative in the *intagli* of the *visibile parlare*, 'I' mossi i piè del loco dov' io stava, | per avvisar da presso un'altra istoria' (*Purg.*, X. 70-71); looks at Beatrice looking up, 'Beatrice in suso, e io in lei guardava' (*Par.*, II. 22). This arguably designates his function, in part at least, and to borrow Elena Lombardi's comment on *Purgatorio* as whole, as 'a gigantic act of pointing'.⁵⁰ And he is also often present as a model for kinaesthetic empathy, as just set out in relation to Pier; that is, he supports the progressive refinement of the reader's capacity to intuitively read another's intention by explicitly modelling, step-by-step, his own responses of kinaesthetic empathy with the souls.

However, he also begins to step out of the way altogether, on occasion, leaving a gap in the text that, I propose, invites the reader to directly experience social presence with the souls in her own right. I briefly offer here two examples to illustrate this. The first sets out how on the terraces of Pride (*Purgatorio* X to XII), the reader is progressively assisted to participate in modelling the journeying Dante modelling Oderisi's outer posture that models, in turn, Oderisi's inner condition of humility as he practises repentance of his pride. The second considers what I propose to be an invitation to the reader to independently and autonomously participate – separately from the journeying Dante – in the flush of St Peter in *Paradiso* XXVII.

⁵⁰ Lombardi, *The Syntax of Desire*, p. 153. My own analysis suggests that in *Purgatorio*, pointing evolves to indicate full relationality: from initial self-identification (Manfred pointing out his wound, III. 111), recognition of the co-presence of an intelligent other (an unnamed soul points at the journeying Dante, realising he is mortal, V. 3), to triangulating one individual with another individual through a deictic form of joint attention (Guido pointing out Arnaut Daniel to the journeying Dante, XXVI. 116).

In *Purgatorio* X, the journeying Dante initially struggles to identify the prideful as human, ‘non mi sembian persone’ (113), but Virgil guides him to recognise the breast-beating bodies under the stones: ‘Ma guarda fiso là, e disviticchia | col viso quel che vien sotto a quei sassi: | già scorger puoi come ciascun si picchia’ (118-20). The journeying Dante succeeds, to the extent that at the end of the canto, he is even able to explicitly intuit verbal speech in the actions of one of them, ‘e qual più pazienza avea ne li atti, | piangendo pareva dicer: “Più non posso”’ (138-40). Twice in the narration of the same sequence, the narrating Dante breaks the frame: the first time with a direct address to the reader to engage her imagination not in the physical ‘forma del martire’ (109), but to find in this physical enactment an intention:

Non attender la forma del martire:
 pensa la succession; pensa ch’al peggio
 oltre la gran sentenza non può ire. (*Purg.*, X. 109-11)

The second breaking of the frame is an invitation to humility addressed to ‘superbi cristian’ (121), which constitutes not a direct address to the reader but an invitation nonetheless (as I shall suggest in Chapter 5) to those who electively identify as prideful Christians to recognise themselves and the opportunity to practise rehearsal of their own penitence here. With this direct and indirect invitation, I would suggest that in this sequence, the narration has explicitly set up a model of participation for the reader in relation to the terraces of Pride and what she will encounter there over the three cantos.

In canto XI, the journeying Dante explicitly models the process of kinaesthetic empathy, mirroring Oderisi’s bent posture:

e videmi e conobbemi e chiamava,
 tenendo li occhi con fatica fisi
 a me che tutto chin con loro andava. (*Purg.*, XI. 76-78)

He maintains this mirrored posture, the two of them yoked up like oxen, ‘Di pari, come buoi che vanno a giogo’ (*Purg.*, XII. 1), until Virgil (correctively) advises him that each must find their own mode of progress, ‘Lascia lui e varca; | ché qui è buono con l’ali e coi remi, | quantunque può, ciascun pinger sua barca’ (4-6). But the residue of modelling the posture is made explicit in the narration: the journeying Dante’s inner body state has followed his outer

(‘souls follow bodies’, in Jean Gerson’s fifteenth-century formulation), and he mentally models humility:⁵¹

dritto sì come andar vuolsi rife’ mi
con la persona, avvegna che i pensieri
mi rimanessero e chinati e scemi. (*Purg.*, XII. 7-9)

Physical enactment of kinaesthetic empathy has worked for the journeying Dante: he now briefly participates in Oderisi’s humility, empathically sharing his intention not only outwardly but also reflected in a mental condition of humility in his thoughts.⁵²

We might take this further, as Heather Webb has invited us to, in considering whether there is even a very rare instance here of an invitation to the reader to *motorically* enact this empathy for herself. In relation to the acrostic contained in *Purgatorio* XII’s narration of the examples of pride carved into the marble pathway of the mountain, Webb points out that the repeated initial letters of each *terzina* that progressively spell out the word ‘man’, VOM, over the space of twelve *terzine* from line 12 to line 60, invite the reader to ‘bend our necks in order to look swiftly down the sweep of the page’.⁵³ In this way, the reader mimics the attitude of humility – ‘[w]e will literally bow our heads’ – thus participating, independently of the journeying Dante, in a facsimile of the posture of the penitents on the terraces of Pride, making a space, potentially, in which her own soul may ‘follow’ its body.⁵⁴

Different to Oderisi’s humility that is powerfully written in his posture, in *Paradiso* there is, of course, no motor gesture or posture with which to kinaesthetically empathise in order to model the inner body state of the souls of the blessed. However, St Peter, I suggest,

⁵¹ Jean Gerson, *De mystica theologia pratica*, in *Jean Gerson: Early Works, On Mystical Theology, Second Treatise*, trans. by Brian McGuire (New York: Paulist Press, 1998), p. 293.

⁵² Chiavacci Leonardi: ‘anche se il corpo è raddrizzato, i pensieri, cioè l’animo, resta chino, cioè umiliato, e scemo, cioè privo, svuotato della vana superbia di cui era prima riempito (cfr. XI 118-19)’. Chiavacci Leonardi, gloss on *Purg.*, XII. 9. Hollander introduces the notion of *recognition*, that is (in my terms), a bringing to consciousness of a pre-rational phenomenon: ‘In other words, even if he has finally straightened up and begun walking as a confident human being, his thoughts remain bowed under the burden of the recognition of his pridefulness.’ Hollander, gloss on *Purg.*, XII. 7-9.

⁵³ Webb, *Dante’s Persons*, p. 103.

⁵⁴ Webb, *Dante’s Persons*, p. 103.

models *viscerality* in the form of a flush that, as Dante explains in an initial visual simile, turns him from white to red (or red to white; the possibility is left open).⁵⁵

e tal ne la sembianza sua divenne,
qual diverrebbe Iove, s'elli e Marte
fossero augelli e cambiassersi penne. (*Par.*, XXVII. 13-15)

His flush is contagious. St Peter himself remarks, ‘Se io mi trascoloro, | non ti maravigliar, ché, dicend’ io | vedrai trascolorar tutti costoro’ (19-21). And indeed, all of heaven flushes with him, as Dante narrates: ‘vid’ io allora tutto ’l ciel cosperso’ (30); Beatrice flushes, ‘così Beatrice trasmutò sembianza’ (34). The flush is rendered imaginatively enactable for the reader through two further similes: the visual simile of the cloud that paints the evening or morning sun (28-31); and, in relation to the contagion that has affected Beatrice, a visceral simile of the ‘*donna onesta*’ who flushes empathically with another’s fault, ‘E come donna onesta che permane | di sé sicura, e per l’altrui fallanza, | pur ascoltando, timida si fane’ (31-33).⁵⁶ The only participant at the event who is *not* narrated as co-participant in this global flush is the journeying Dante himself, and his absence liberates the reader: she is invited to experience participation in social presence with St Peter and the blessed on her own account, without mediating the experience through his body as model.

In *Paradiso*, the journeying Dante’s absence is intermittent (I return to this in Chapter 5). We are introduced to this propensity for the narration to absent the journeying Dante early on in the canticle when it is narrated that he makes clear in gesture and word, ‘con atto e con parola’ (*Par.*, III. 94) that he wishes to hear more of Piccarda’s story; but whilst Piccarda, notionally physically co-present with him in the Heaven of the Moon, directly witnesses his

⁵⁵ My preliminary suggestion, for further development, is that in *Paradiso*, the reader is invited to model social presence through an experience of the viscera rather than a gesture or posture: an intensity, a vivacity, that in the early cantos speaks explicitly of pleasure or ardent attention, as for example in Justinian’s increasing brilliance when he comes into relation with the journeying Dante, ‘ond’ ella fessi | lucente più assai di quel ch’ell’ era’ (*Par.*, V. 131-32), or Carlo Martello’s pleasure at their interaction, ‘E quanta e quale vid’ io lei far piùè | per allegrezza nova che s’accrebbe, | quando parlai, a l’allegrezze sue!’ (*Par.*, VIII. 46-48).

⁵⁶ Hollander comments: ‘What probably makes the passage more difficult than it really should be is the adjective *timido*, understood by the early commentators as “ashamed” (a word readily associated with blushing), while modern ones think it means “timid” (an adjective more likely associated with facial pallor).’ His reading makes the empathic reading I suggest easier still (whilst an understanding of ‘*timida*’ as ‘timid’ would conflict more with a kinaesthetically empathic reading). Hollander, gloss on *Par.*, XXVII. 13.

gestures and words, narrative ellipsis means the reader must imagine it for herself.⁵⁷ His absence allows the reader to rehearse intuiting, and sharing in, the intention of the penitents and the blessed on her own account. But it also, I suggest, creates a *gap* for independent reader participation. And if the reader truly wants to participate, reading and sharing the intention of the blessed, she needs to become highly skilled at enacting presence at the encounters of the poem on her own account. In the next chapter, I will set out more fully exactly what constitutes such gaps, and the mechanisms by which the reader is invited to fill them, through a model I term *self-presence*.

4.4 Coda: The language of praise

There is a further point to which I would like to gesture in relation to social presence, and that is the question of *reciprocity*. I do not include this discussion in the body of this chapter because it is part of a different and much wider discussion of the language of *praise*, into which I do not enter here, but I would like at least to note it as offering considerable scope for further research on the *Commedia* in working with theories relating to AI, emergence and generativity in videogame critical theory. In this chapter, I have focused on how a subject (the journeying Dante, or the reader) may intuitively recognise the intention of an other. But in real life, social presence is reciprocal: we expect not only to understand the other, but to have the other reciprocally engage in understanding our intention. Conversation – the turn-taking model of oral discourse – is the most obvious way in which this is achieved. And Calleja, as discussed in Chapter 3, defines true interactivity in an artefact as ‘having one’s [...] presence [...] acknowledged by the system itself’.⁵⁸ In videogame criticism terms, conversation is generative and is an emergent behaviour: different every time, in dynamic relation to the input of others (‘producing many outcomes, each conforming to the same overall guidelines’, in Ian Bogost’s words).⁵⁹ The experience of social presence as I have set it out here takes account, then, of only half of the potential for participatory interaction in the social encounters of the text.

⁵⁷ ‘Ma sì com’ elli avvien, s’un cibo sazia | e d’un altro rimane ancor la gola, | che quel si chere e di quel si ringrazia, | così fec’ io con atto e con parola, | per apprender da lei qual fu la tela | onde non trasse infino a co la spuola’ (*Par.*, III. 91-96).

⁵⁸ Calleja, p. 22.

⁵⁹ Bogost, p. 4.

But how is the reader of a text to reciprocally communicate her intention in turn, if even AI cannot find a solution to this in a much more open artefact such as a videogame? Dante, I suggest, astonishingly, is able to provide a solution, one that requires a shift in thinking similar to that observed in relation to place in Chapter 3 – from place as fixed and material, to place as relational and emerging temporarily as the site of dynamic interaction. In his commentary, Singleton refers to a ‘change in gravitation’ in the reader’s understanding, using the term (coincidentally with my reading above) in relation to the description of the ‘inverted snowstorm’ in *Paradiso* XXVII: ‘the swarm of bright lights [that return] to the Empyrean – “just as our air flakes downward with frozen vapours” in midwinter when the sun is in Capricorn’.⁶⁰ He continues: ‘These inversions [...] are contributing to an experience which the reader will undergo as he passes, with the pilgrim Dante, from time to eternity, from the universe with earth at the centre to a universe that has God at its centre: a complex change in gravitation, from the material to the spiritual.’

In *Paradiso*, my suggestion is that such a ‘change in gravitation’ is required to reconceptualise a notion of human discourse. We may commonly conceive of speech as the locus of emergent meaning in communication: the subject expresses herself through a system of language that allows her to combine words in conventional ways such that she can set out what she means.⁶¹ The oral verbal utterance – the combination of words – constitutes the emergent element of communication, being different every time. In the poem, Dante invites the reader – as videogames do – to become more alert to *embodied* utterance. The external sign is economical (there is a smaller lexicon of embodied utterances than is supported in language), but the process of Bolens’ ‘semantic retrieval’ in the reading of such utterances relocates the site of emergence, I suggest, inwards: my internal body state – how I feel when I read your embodied utterance – is unique to that specific interaction. Other observers will experience their own internal body state in response.

And in Paradise, other than when the condescended souls are exceptionally in conversation with the journeying Dante, the mode by which intention is shared is a generative, authenticating combination of the physical (dance), the visceral (generative *ardore*; ‘caldo suo caler’, *Par.*, XXXI. 140), and the verbal (choric praise: psalms, hymns,

⁶⁰ Singleton, gloss on *Par.*, XXVII. 67-72.

⁶¹ Both expression and understanding are of course imperfect and approximate, since speech, being based in signs, is a mediated form of communication.

prayers).⁶² In *Paradiso*, we communicate reciprocally by manifesting that we *share* the communal intention. Different to mortal speech, what the reader progressively comes to experience for herself in *Paradiso*, I suggest, is that whilst the utterances of praise are choric and scripted (psalms, hymns, prayers), it is the *inner* body state, the individual inner conversation with God, that is the locus of emergence: individual, dynamic, different every time, in every interaction with divine love.

⁶² In relation to Justinian's explanation in *Paradiso* VI that 'diverse voci fanno dolci note' (124), Lombardi writes in *The Syntax of Desire* that 'Being part of such a choir, the voices of the blessed are a mere recreation tool (a "trastullo") in heaven' (p. 153).

Chapter 5: Self-Presence

This chapter explores whether and how the poem actively seeks to make the mental model of the narrated journey particularly personal to the individual reader, setting out a number of narratological devices in the poem that in combination, I propose, invite an experience of the perceptual illusion of *self-presence*.

Self-presence was defined in 2004 by presence theorist Lee, in rather broad terms, as ‘a psychological state in which a virtual [...] self/selves [is/]are experienced as the actual self’.¹ Literary theory has traditionally engaged with a subjective experience of *identification* with a protagonist; but identification has also eluded tight definition, especially in terms of the mechanics that invite it, and its cognitive complexity is encapsulated in Georges Poulet’s observation that ‘whenever I read, I mentally pronounce an *I*, and yet the *I* which I pronounce is not myself’.²

My interest in this chapter is to explore, in technical narratological terms, whether it is in some way possible to ‘participate’ in the ‘io’ of the text through the construction of a perceptual illusion of self-presence. In the absence of a clear definition of self-presence for textual literary theory, I propose to try to approach one through examination of the mechanics in the poem that appear to invite a particular form of embodied reader identification. I identify two particular narrative strategies in the poem that I propose open the way for this.

The first explores the poem’s treatment of *narrative perspective* that builds into the ‘io’ of the text a strategic mutability that, I propose, opens up a space for the reader (my *narrating instances* model), and that further invites the reader to participate in the illusion that she can look around in the virtual space, receiving narrated visual data as though she were turning her own head (a mechanism of *narration through mobile camera view*).

The second, exploring the handling of *narrative mediation* in the poem, is related to, but radically extends, I propose, affective devotion’s model of personal imaginative elaboration, as set out in Chapter 2. I propose a new reading of the *direct addresses to the reader* as constitutive of just one end of a continuum of invitations to participate that establishes a model of participation through conscious, guided cognitive activity invited in the second-person voice. Then, in line with Karnes’ new reading of the gospel meditations as

¹ Lee, p. 46.

² Georges Poulet, ‘Phenomenology of Reading’, *New Literary History*, 1, 1 (1969), 53-68 (p. 54).

‘serving a *cognitive* function through recruitment of the imagination as a ‘trainable tool’,³ I suggest that such cognitive participation is rendered habitual and intuitive through a sequence of *narrative training* exercises that progressively refines a ‘fully activated imagination’.⁴ At the other end of this continuum of invitations, I propose, is the vast network of gaps in the text constituted by the poem’s similes and narrative ellipses, which the reader may *elect* to ‘fill’, or imaginatively elaborate, to a greater or lesser degree depending on her habit, motivation, and cognitive skill.

Again, I shall suggest that videogame critical theory might be useful for thinking about self-presence in a text. I put forward two reasons. Firstly, in theoretical discussions of the avatar, or playable character, videogame critical theory tends to foreground the notion of identification with the *body* of the protagonist as the interface through which the player participates in the events and interactions of the virtual space. I propose that this helps us separate the effects of embodied identification, explored here in my concrete focus on narratological mechanisms, from more slippery philosophical questions of selfhood and consciousness. Gee, as noted in Chapter 1, proposes that the avatar ‘is a surrogate body for the player in the game world [...], [determining] what and how the player can see and sense in the game world’.⁵ Cultural and literary theorist Kris Pint writes that by controlling the avatar, ‘a gamer can “incarnate” in cyberspace, and is able to perform a set of actions in a world he cannot physically enter’.⁶ Through Gallese’s *embodied simulation*, we understand the processes by which we can neurologically identify with another’s body (experiencing a ‘shared motor code’, in Gallese’s terms) in the medium of a narrative artefact, as already set out in relation to spatial and social presence in Chapters 3 and 4. I use this model again here to explore how a perceptual illusion related to the reader’s visual sensory perception in the virtual space may help to invite an experience of self-presence.

The second reason is that videogame theory helps us think about individual subjectivity as being not static and fixed but dynamic and ceaselessly constituted in relation to others. Debate has recently started to open up in videogame criticism around the question of whether the player somehow ‘merges’ her identity with the notional identity of the avatar (Gee’s stance), or whether in fact a gap is maintained between player and avatar, as Tom Boellstorff

³ Karnes, p. 177.

⁴ Karnes, p. 177.

⁵ Gee, p. 17.

⁶ Kris Pint, ‘The Avatar as a Methodological Tool for the Embodied Exploration of Virtual Environments’, *Comparative Literature and Culture*, 14, 3 (2012), paragraph 6.

proposes.⁷ The key insight for my thesis is born of Boellstorff's suggestion that it is the 'movements across' this gap that constitute the player's virtual experience. He writes:

There is a clear and ontologically foundational gap between an avatar and an actual-world person [...]. Ideas, metaphors, power relations, and even forms of materiality routinely move across this gap between the virtual and the actual, but it is the gap and attendant movements across it – works of *techné* – that make the virtual possible at all.⁸

My suggestion in this chapter is that the narration constantly invites precisely such movement between the virtual and the actual through the mechanism of the highly mutable 'io' of the poem, and that this is the basis of self-presence in the *Commedia*: an experience of the reader's own selfhood in the virtual space that is constantly in balance with embodied identification with the protagonist's experience as the text invites her to continuously switch between the two.

5.1 Narrative perspective

In this section, I propose two new narratological models relating to *narrative perspective*. The first is a new model of *narrating instances*, rooted in Genette's theory of the same name but designed specifically for the *Commedia*, that exposes four different 'faces' of the narrating Dante character. I propose that the constant cycling through this subtle multiplicity of standpoints prevents the reader from simply *identifying* with the journeying Dante and instead opens up, in a foundational way, a model of reader participation in the poem. The second is a mechanism of narrative perspective that I have borrowed and develop from film theory, and that I term *narration through mobile camera view*. I propose that through strategic direction of the reader's line of sight, and a periodic strategy of narration that constantly brings new objects into view, Dante intermittently invites the reader to participate in an illusion that she has the ability to turn her own head in the space of the virtual environment, powerfully reinforcing the illusion of an experience of personal agency.

In the 1970s, narratologist Gérard Genette distinguished within the mechanism of narrative perspective two central components, *voice* and *mood*, seeking to mitigate what he

⁷ Gee, p. 94; Boellstorff, p. 513.

⁸ Boellstorff, p. 513.

referred to as ‘a regrettable confusion [...] between the question *who is the character whose point of view orients the narrative perspective?* and the very different question *who is the narrator?* – or more simply, the question *who sees?* and the question *who speaks?*’⁹

The question in the *Commedia* of ‘who speaks?’ is relatively straightforward. The poem is narrated in the first-person; in the terms of discourse analysts Labov and Waletzky, it is a ‘personal experience narrative’.¹⁰ Along with many critics, we might note the immediate surprise of the poem’s opening line that uses the first person plural – ‘Nel mezzo del cammin di *nostra* vita’ (my emphasis) – but this instantly resolves in the next line into the first person singular, ‘*mi* ritrovai’, that will sustain the trajectory of the poem; a resolution into authoritative personal testimony that is reinforced with a repeated ‘io’ and a spatially locating ‘vi’: ‘ma per trattar del ben ch’i’ vi trovai, | dirò de l’altre cose ch’i’ v’ho scorte. | Io non so ben ridir com’ i’ v’intra [...]’ (*Inf.*, I. 8-10).

This first-person voice is attached to a specific character, the narrating Dante, who has an identity (the returned journeying pilgrim, now scribing poet); a geographic location (somewhere in Italy) that constitutes an outer story world different to the inner story world of the three realms of the afterlife; a temporal location (beginning soon after his return from his journey in Easter 1300 and ending presumably before the author’s historical death in 1321); and, intermittently, evidence of a sentient body as he imaginatively relives the emotional and physical rigours of his journey with the renewed visceral and cognitive reactions this engenders (‘Ahi quanto a dir qual era è cosa dura | esta selva selvaggia e aspra e forte | che nel pensier *rinova la paura!*’, for example).¹¹ The narrating Dante speaks a great deal (his narration accounts for almost half the verses of the poem), and he sometimes speaks metaleptically, addressing the reader, ‘lettor’, directly.¹²

Importantly, the narrating Dante is not identical in terms of voice with the journeying Dante. The journeying Dante never ‘speaks’ in Genette’s sense of narrative voice. Instead, he can speak *only* through the medium of direct discourse when cited verbatim by the narrating Dante (for example, on meeting Virgil in *Inferno* I: “Miserere di me”, gridai a lui, | “qual che tu sii, od ombra od omo certo!””, 65-66) – and he does so only rarely, averaging only eleven

⁹ Genette, p. 186 (emphasis in original).

¹⁰ William Labov and Joshua Waletzky, ‘Narrative Analysis: Oral Versions of Personal Experience’, *Journal of Narrative and Life History*, 7, 1-4 (1967), 3-38 (p. 3).

¹¹ *Inf.*, I. 4-6 (my emphasis).

¹² The poem consists of 14,233 verses. By my count, narration occupies 6,590 verses, or 46% of the total verses of the poem.

lines of direct speech per canto.¹³ (He can also ‘speak’ by inference through his readable body states, which he does much more commonly, as discussed in Chapter 4.) But whilst the journeying Dante protagonist is ostensibly identical with the narrator in terms of mortal human *persona* (the same person but pre-‘evental’, in William Burgwinkle’s term),¹⁴ the journeying Dante is *not* a first-person character; in common with all the souls in Dante’s afterlife, he is narrated as a third-person character.

As discussed in Chapter 1, this construction gives the author the device of a frame narrative, with its resulting temporal and spatial flexibilities. He has two story worlds between which to switch: the *outer* story world of the scribing location in Italy, and the *inner* story world of the three realms of the afterlife. There is both a *closed* event in the journey through the afterlife, now completed; and a *still-open* event, that of the narrating Dante imaginatively re-constructing those earlier events through the process of writing them down. And there are two ‘Dantes’: a post-evental Dante, who has seen and experienced everything involved in the journey to the divine encounter, and to whom I refer as the *narrating Dante*, and a pre-evental Dante, the travelling pilgrim or my *journeying Dante*, who as a mortal man is accumulating all and only the knowledge that it is possible for him to accumulate on his journey. The strategic deployment of these varying sight and knowledge privileges is something Genette’s notion of ‘mood’ – ‘who sees?’ – can help us better understand.

Mood is perhaps most readily understood as an effect of the ‘eyes’ in the narrative through which the reader is shown events and encounters. However, since all human perception, including the visual, is partial and subjective, the reader’s perception of events is necessarily coloured at a reflexive or pre-rational level by the knowledge, beliefs, and assumptions of the character through whose eyes she is seeing. Mood, as described by Genette, is an *effect*; the mechanism by which it is achieved is focalisation, so from here, consistent with my approach throughout this thesis, I refer not to the effect but to its mechanism, *focal view*.

In the *Commedia*, there is only one narrating voice (the narrating Dante’s) but there are two focal characters: the narrating Dante and the journeying Dante. When the reader’s gaze is mediated through the *narrating Dante* as focal character, she observes the narrated world, the

¹³ Mean number of verses per canto of journeying Dante direct speech: *Inferno*: 13 verses; *Purgatorio*: 9; *Paradiso*: 10.

¹⁴ William Burgwinkle, ‘Modern Lovers: Evanescence and the Act in Dante, Arnaut, and Sordello’, in *Desire in Dante and the Middle Ages*, ed. by Manuele Gragnolati and others (Oxford: MHRA; Leeds: Maney, 2012), pp. 14-28 (p. 15).

journeying Dante protagonist, and his encounters, from an external position of apparent omniscience. A particularly powerful example of this focal view is the rare example of extended diegesis in the sequence that opens *Inferno* XVIII where, from a God's-eye view, the narrating Dante sets out the plan of Malebolge, beginning: 'Luogo è in inferno detto Malebolge, | tutto di pietra di color ferrigno, | come la cerchia che dintorno il volge' (1-3); extending over six *terzine*, before a return to the present narrative action.¹⁵ But action is also focalised for the reader through the eyes of the *journeying Dante* protagonist himself, who has the restricted, subjective sight of a normal mortal human being, and whose focal view invites the reader to feel as if she is located inside his head, strongly identifying with his subjective perceptual experiences and internal feelings. For example, in *Inferno* III, as the journeying Dante hears the laments of the shades as he and Virgil pass through the gates of Hell, the reader has access to his inner state, through the evocative detail of his head feeling banded with the horror of his experience: 'E io ch'avea d'orror la testa cinta, | dissi [...]' (31-32); or in *Paradiso* XV, when he encounters Cacciaguida and, on reading Beatrice's smile, feels his will strengthen: '[Beatrice] arrisemi un cenno | che fece crescer l'ali al voler mio' (71-72). The reader, then, can see through the journeying Dante's eyes (journeying Dante focal view), but she can also observe him very powerfully from outside (narrating Dante focal view). This means that sometimes she can *identify* with him and his experience; but equally, sometimes she can maintain *her own* identity in the narrated space. Her opportunities to identify directly with the journeying Dante protagonist are essentially controlled, mediated through the narrating Dante.

Further, what the reader perceives in the virtual world of the narrative is dependent at any one time on what the specific focal character *knows* (*knowledge privileges*), what and how much the focal character can physically *see* (*sight privileges*), as well as how the focal character responds to or perceives what is encountered. Together, these elements subtly shape the reader's response to what is shown by affording different knowledge and sight privileges, but all mediated through the sole first-person voice of the narrating Dante.

And whilst a change in voice would be obvious and easy to identify – if Virgil or Beatrice were to take over the narration, say (which of course never happens) – switches in focal view generally go unnoticed by readers, at a conscious level at least, becoming perceptible only when their deployment is dissonant, as discussed in Chapter 1 in relation to

¹⁵ Continuing to line 18, before the narrative recommences at line 20: 'e 'l poeta | tenne a sinistra, e io dietro mi mossi' (20-21).

Bernard's sign. But skilful handling of focal view shifts allows the writer to weave into the narration variations in privileges of sight, knowledge and tone, manoeuvring the reader into instinctively shifting, cognitively, into a corresponding relational space. It is this mechanism, I suggest, that allows Dante to convey both deep authentic, personal experience, and total authoritative omniscience through the same narrative voice.

So how can the authoritative omniscience of the focal view that, in the first line of *Inferno*, situates the protagonist as 'nel mezzo del cammin di nostra vita' be made to appear wholly identical with the intimate, emotional, subjective focal view for whom even the very thought of the experiences in the wood renews his fear, 'rinova la paura', just five lines later? Another of Dante's major innovations in the *Commedia*, I shall argue in the next section, is to construct a seemingly coherent narrator character that is in fact possessed of multiple faces, achieved through the construction and deployment in the *Commedia* of a sophisticated model of *narrating instances*.

5.1.1 A new model of narrating instances for the *Commedia*

In Genette's terms, a narrating instance is an 'act of narration' that arises at the intersection of 'the entire set of conditions (human, temporal, spatial) out of which a narrative statement is produced'.¹⁶ On the basis of my analysis for the *Commedia*, I suggest we can delimit Genette's notion of 'the entire set of conditions' to key strategic variables: *focal view*, incorporating *sight privilege* and *knowledge privilege*; *experiential location*; and *tone*, including idiosyncratic habits of speech. A model of narrating instances is particularly helpful in relation to the *Commedia*, I propose, because it allows us to define different 'faces' of the narrating Dante character (the sole voice of the narration) with different strategic functions, helping us to think in a new way about how we engage with the poem's 'io' and liberating us from discussions of intentionality and autobiography.

I have identified four narrating instances, set out below, through which I suggest the narration to cycle (largely) seamlessly throughout the poem. As a narrative strategy, this invites the reader to experience a plurality of views, or 'multiplicity of standpoints' to borrow Wolfgang Iser's term, that, I shall suggest, discourages the reader from simply *identifying* with the journeying Dante protagonist and instead invites active *participation*; a shift, in

¹⁶ Genette, p.31, n. 10.

Iser's terms, from 'representative illustration of one view' towards an invitation to an 'experience of the self'.¹⁷

My model is a preliminary and pragmatic one developed for this thesis, based on a line-by-line analysis of the narration sequences – that is, excluding direct speech – in the first and last cantos of the poem, *Inferno* I (sixty-eight verses of narration) and *Paradiso* XXXIII (one hundred and six verses of narration).¹⁸ Each of the four narrating instances is discrete, defined by a different focal view and therefore different sight and knowledge privileges, and each inviting a different effect in the reader. It is a model of *narration* so the journeying Dante – who never narrates but speaks only in direct discourse, as discussed above – is represented only as mediated by the narrating Dante, based on his focal view as remembered and retrospectively voiced by the narrating Dante.

I term the four narrating instances: the *Experiencing I* narrating instance (retrospective narration of the journeying Dante's inner mental processes, or his feelings *then*); the *Embodied Narrator* narrating instance (narration of the narrating Dante's feelings in the outer story world *now*); the *Implied Author* narrating instance (omniscient authority); and the *Zero-Focalised Narration* narrating instance (neutral, often gappy, propulsion of narrative action).¹⁹

Figure 3 (below) offers a summary of the key differences between the four narrating instances for reference as I explore each in the text that follows. All narrating instances are present in both cantos examined. The epistemically immersive *Experiencing I* and *Zero-Focalised Narration* instances dominate in *Inferno* I, establishing reader engagement with the

¹⁷ In *The Implied Reader*, Iser characterises Thackeray's *Henry Esmond* as 'the autobiography of a fictional character', whose 'various [narratological] perspectives [...] are constantly interacting throughout Esmond's narrative' (p. 130). This interaction, writes Iser, 'brings about an almost kaleidoscopic succession of mobile standpoints, from which there emerges the gradual self-illumination of subjectivity [...]. It is only the plurality of views which can give rise to an adequate picture of subjectivity. A single standpoint would merely transform the life recorded here into the representative illustration of one view formed almost independently of experience, whereas the multiplicity of standpoints shows that possibilities of judgment must arise first and foremost out of experience of the self, which must come to terms with its own subjectivity' (pp. 133-34).

¹⁸ Ideally the model would be based on a census of narrating instances in the entire poem, but this is the work of another project. These cantos have been selected as likely to be indicative of the range of narrating instances afforded to both the newly arrived reader and the reader who has undertaken the entire journey of the poem.

¹⁹ The term 'Experiencing I' is borrowed from Franz Stanzel; see: F. K. Stanzel, *Theory of Narrative* [1979] (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984). 'Embodied Narrator' is my own term. 'Implied Author' and 'Zero-Focalised Narration' are reception commonplaces.

journeying Dante's personal experience narrative as spectator; whilst in *Paradiso XXXIII*, the dominant narrating instances are the authoritative Implied Author and the Embodied Narrator, struggling to reconstruct in language his earlier experience of the encounter with God; and both of which narrating instances, I shall suggest, invite not spectatorship but the co-presence of the participatory reader.

Fig. 3. Summary of proposed model of narrating instances in the *Commedia*, derived from analysis of *Inferno I* and *Paradiso XXXIII*.

<i>Narrating instance:</i>	Experiencing I	Embodied Narrator	Implied Author	Zero-Focalised Narration
Description	Retrospective narration of the journeying Dante's internal mental processes (his feelings <i>then</i>)	Scribing poet persona	Authoritative <i>autore</i> persona	Neutral propulsion of action
Voice (Who speaks?)	<i>Narrating Dante</i>	<i>Narrating Dante</i>	<i>Narrating Dante</i>	<i>Narrating Dante</i>
Focal view (Who sees?)	Experiencing I (journeying Dante <i>then</i>)	Embodied Narrator (narrating Dante <i>now</i>)	Implied Author	(none)
Sight privilege (viewpoint)	Restricted	Restricted	Total omniscience	Omniscient within story world
Knowledge privilege	None (own perceptions only)	'Reasonable knowledge': glossed/ <i>lectio</i>	Total, including prophetic: <i>auctoritas</i>	None (sees, doesn't interpret)
Experiential location	Inner story world	Outer story world	Unlocated (transhistorical)	Unlocated
Tone	Personal, subjective (intimate)	Personal (emotional)	Authoritative	Neutral
Other characteristics	Temporal locatives Doubt/uncertainty	Temporal locatives References to body & memory References to being in a historical, material reality	Most metaphor and simile Apostrophe	Diegesis Narration of that which can be externally observed
Effect				
Function	Story engagement / epistemic immersion	Authenticating ('true story')	Authority and universalisation	Narrative action propulsion; realism: invites inference re causality
Disadvantage of sole use	Invites spectatorship not participation	Highly cognitively demanding of the reader (not immersive)	Risk of detachment and perceived didacticism	Limited engagement of affect
Incidence, as % of narrated content: <i>Inf. I</i>	High (31%)	Low (6%)	Medium (26%)	High (37%)
Incidence, as % of narrated content: * <i>Par. XXXIII</i>	Medium (30%)	High (35%)	High (42%)	Negligible (3%)

* Note includes some 'melded' (inseparable) instances in *Par., XXXIII*.

Experiencing I

The *Experiencing I* narrating instance provides retrospective narration, as recalled and voiced by the narrating Dante, of the journeying Dante's internal mental processes – his thought and feelings – at the time of the events and encounters of the journey, *as if* the narrating Dante were still pre-evental and did not know the outcome. It is a highly relatable narrating instance, offering the reader direct, intimate, highly personal access to the protagonist's internal thoughts, feelings, and beliefs, and thereby supporting reader identification with the journeying Dante through the narration. However, used in isolation there is a danger that the reader becomes stuck in enjoyable spectatorship, rather than feeling invited to participate in the narrative in her own right. In a standard, unframed first-person narrative, the Experiencing I will be the dominant, even sole, narrating instance, but Dante's frame device liberates him from this monocular focal view and allows him to introduce the other narrating instances that invite the potential for reader participation.

Since the journeying Dante protagonist is still notionally a living human being, in terms of sight and knowledge privileges the Experiencing I narrating instance has access only to what he already knows and can gather along the way, and can see or perceive only what is physically available to the senses of a mortal human being in that space. He cannot see in the dark, for example, as is evident at the start of *Purgatorio* XVI, where the journeying Dante has to rely on Virgil to physically lead him:

Sì come cieco va dietro a sua guida
per non smarrirsi e per non dar di cozzo
in cosa che 'l molesti, o forse ancida,
m'andava io per l'aere amaro e sozzo,
ascoltando il mio duca che diceva
pur: "Guarda che da me tu non sia mozzo". (*Purg.*, XVI. 10-15)

Compare this to the omniscience of the opening of *Inferno* XVIII, the diegetic description of the layout of Malebolge. This narrating instance is a vivid and highly engaging mode of narration, a narration of the protagonist's feelings *then*, as he experienced them in the space of the inner story world, inviting empathy and identification (we model how *he* feels). Characteristic features include expression of feelings, uncertainty, temporal locatives, repeated use of 'io', and sensory impressions (particularly *parere*). For example, in *Inferno* I,

the statement ‘tant’ era pien di sonno a quel punto’ (11) can be attributed to the Experiencing I narrating instance. It offers the reader, by self-report, information about an inner state that could not be deduced by observation (unless narrated as a posture of somnolence, which is not the case here), narrating the protagonist’s feelings *then*, not now (so not attributable to the Embodied Narrator), and is personal and subjective (so cannot be the authoritative, omniscient Implied Author narrating instance). Similarly, in *Inferno* I, ‘ma non sì che paura non mi desse | la vista che m’apparve d’un leone’ (43-44), is narration of an inner experience of fear; it narrates the protagonist’s feelings *then*, so cannot be the Embodied Narrator, and it narrates subjective perception (‘m’apparve’), so cannot be the Implied Author. Further examples in the two cantos examined include:

questa mi porse tanto di gravezza
con la paura ch’uscita di sua vista,
ch’io perdei la speranza de l’altezza. (*Inf.*, I. 52-54)

E io ch’al fine di tutt’ i disii
appropinquava [...]
l’ardor del desiderio in me finii. (*Par.*, XXXIII. 46-48)

[...] parvermi tre giri
di tre colori e d’una contenenza;
e l’un da l’altro come iri da iri
parea riflesso, e ’l terzo pareo foco
che quinci e quindi igualmente si spiri. (*Par.*, XXXIII. 116-20)

veder voleva come si convenne
l’imago al cerchio e come vi s’indova (*Par.*, XXXIII. 137-38)

These narrate, respectively, loss of hope, ardour, a dynamic visual impression, and a desire to make sense of that visual impression, delivering immediacy, intimacy, authenticity, a human warmth, and above all identifiability. The journeying Dante protagonist is not so dissimilar to us; it will be enjoyable and meaningful to witness his experiences. But if the reader is not to be seduced into simply spectating, the other narrating instances will be necessary to multiply

her standpoints, to observe the journeying Dante from the outside, and to experience herself in the narrative space as different to, and separate from, him.

Embodied Narrator

The Embodied Narrator narrating instance represents the embodiment of the historical, flesh-and-blood scribing poet, self-consciously reconstructing, through his memory, the experience of his earlier journey to the encounter with the divine. Reliving the journey such that he can write it down revives affect that is typically expressed through body states: he re-experiences his fear ('nel pensier rinova la paura', *Inf.*, I. 6), but also retains the residual sweetness of his encounter ('e ancor mi distilla | nel core il dolce che nacque da essa', *Par.*, XXXIII. 62-63). Returned from his journey, he is now located in an outer story world back on earth, 'qua giù', at a point in historical time between Easter 1300 and the narrating Dante's inevitable death as a mortal human being.

This outer story world, of course, is itself a fictive construct separated from the reader's own real world by virtue of historical time and location. But a key function of the Embodied Narrator narrating instance is to authenticate the narrating Dante's account as at least 'truthful', if not necessarily 'true' in the sense of verifiable in empirical terms. Through repeated exposition of the narrating Dante's body states, this narrating instance invites the reader to identify with a real person who made the journey and has returned; a person who lives and breathes and is still affected by both how awful and how transformative his experience was.

Still reflecting a mortal and human experience, this narrating instance has restricted sight: reasonable human knowledge (*lectio*) based on what he has learnt and felt. He is 'post-evental' but still subject nonetheless to the limitations of mortal human perception – memory and language will eventually fail him – rather than possessed of the total omniscience of the Implied Author. 'Io non so ben ridir', he says (*Inf.*, I. 10); and 'pur a quel ch'io ricordo' (*Par.*, XXXIII. 107).

The first occurrence of the Embodied Narrator narrating instance, 'Ahi quanto a dir qual era è cosa dura' (*Inf.*, I. 4), immediately establishes the intimate, embodied presence of this face of the narrating Dante. The Embodied Narrator narrates the feelings *now* of the narrating Dante (not the feelings *then*, which is the Experiencing I narrating instance). The tone is emotional, subjective, and rooted in embodied sensation (different to the disembodied

authority of the Implied Author). The other examples, as discussed, of this narrating instance include:

che nel pensier rinova la paura! (*Inf.*, I. 6)

cotal son io, ché quasi tutta cessa
mia visione, e ancor mi distilla
nel core il dolce che nacque da essa. (*Par.*, XXXIII. 61-63)

La forma universal di questo nodo
credo ch'i' vidi, perché più di largo,
dicendo questo, mi sento ch'i' godo. (*Par.*, XXXIII. 91-93)

There is the re-experienced fear as he recalls the dark wood; the affective residue as he tries to retrieve his experience of the divine; and an experiencing of joy redoubled as he re-sees with certainty the 'volume' (86) manifest in his encounter with God. These all authenticate this personal experience narrative, inviting inference of autobiography; but very clearly, under this model, this is just one discrete strategic face of the narrating Dante character.

Implied Author

With a sight privilege of total omniscience, the Implied Author narrating instance supplies what *is*, or the universally 'true' (as opposed to subjective experience, the role of the Embodied Narrator and Experiencing I narrating instances), and what is universally *known* (as opposed to what can objectively be observed, the role of the Zero-Focalised Narration narrating instance). It takes the *lectio*, glossed knowledge of the Embodied Narrator, this latter's sight still restricted by his mortality and humanity, and re-frames it within *auctoritas*, an authoritative re-situating of one event, one journey to God, within what *perfetto veder* will finally reveal to be the universal event or journey. Unlike the Embodied Narrator narrating instance, the Implied Author narrating instance is disembodied and unlocated geographically and in time; it is transhistorical.

It is authoritative in tone, with total knowledge (including the ability to prophesy), and poetic *ingegno* (it is the narrating instance that constructs the similes that are so critical to the invitation to self-presence, as I discuss later, making it responsible for some of the most

sustained lyrical sections of the *Commedia*). The Implied Author can tell us with certainty in *Inferno* I, for example, that the path the journeying Dante had abandoned was the ‘*verace via*’ (12; my emphasis); and that the sun leads all on the right path, ‘*mena dritto altrui per ogni calle*’ (18). And it is an important narrating instance in the final encounter with God in *Paradiso* XXXIII, where things are *known*, either because ‘this is how it *is*’ – in the perfect sight of the Implied Author; or because ‘this is how it felt *for me*’ – in the powerful subjective experience of the Embodied Narrator. The Implied Author reflexively intuits the meaning of the expression in Mary’s eyes, for example: ‘*Li occhi da Dio dilette e venerati, | fissi ne l’orator, ne dimostraro | quanto i devoti prieghi le son grati*’ (*Par.*, XXXIII. 40-42); it knows that the ‘*alta luce*’ ‘*da sé è vera*’ (54); and it engages directly with the divine: ‘*O somma luce che tanto ti levi | da’ concetti mortali*’ (67-68).

For the reader, then, this narrating instance provides the standpoint that liberates the poem from being a single account of one person’s journey (autobiography, or a personal experience narrative) and locates it instead within a frame – a *system* – of *all* journeys, across all time. With its authority, though, comes a risk of didacticism and detachment if used as sole focal view, since it does not offer the identifiability and immersive effect of the Experiencing I or the intimate authenticating function of the Embodied Narrator. But as one of the four faces of the narrating Dante character, it provides the eternal and universal setting within which the discrete and personal may meaningfully be situated.²⁰

Zero-Focalised Narration

²⁰ The necessary separation of the Implied Author and the Embodied Narrator may, I propose, offer a new way of thinking about the question of *auctoritas* in the *Commedia* as set out by Albert Ascoli in *Dante and the Making of a Modern Author*. Ascoli finds it so frustratingly difficult to find evidence to prove his own theory of Dante’s desire to lay claim to a status of *auctor*, noting that Dante ‘never applies the words *autore* and *autorità* to himself [in the *Commedia*]’ (p. 303), and I would suggest that the constant switching between narrating instances, particularly the having and not-having authority instances of the Implied Author and the Embodied Narrator in particular, might form the basis for some kind of new resolution of Ascoli’s question by opening the possibility that Dante’s narrative strategy precludes the kind of stability in narrator character necessary for the attribution of a quality of *auctoritas*. The Implied Author narrating instance stands ‘outside time’, with its global omniscience and its authoritative, unequivocal tone that gestures towards Ascoli’s ‘transhistorical truths’. Compare this with the flesh and bone fictive construct of the Embodied Narrator narrating instance, situated *within* time, and which for this reason alone can have no claim to *auctoritas*.

The last of the four narrating instances, *Zero-Focalised Narration*, provides neutral, omniscient narration of the action within the inner story world, serving to drive forward the events of the story. This narrating instance sets out events without inferring causality, thereby leaving open the possibility of interpretation by the reader herself. In *Zero-Focalised Narration*, only that which is objectively perceptible within the inner story world can be narrated; and this instance is possessed of no specific knowledge privilege, so there is neither personal interpretation (different to the Embodied Narrator and Experiencing I narrating instances), nor authoritative comment (different to the Implied Author). For example, in *Inferno* I: ‘ripresi via per la spiaggia diserta, | sì che ’l piè fermo sempre era ’l più basso’ (29-30). This is neutral description of what happened, inviting no identification and without subjective interpretation or description of allied affect (as we would see in the Embodied Narrator or Experiencing I narrating instances); nor is there any authoritative comment about the meaning of the action (as would be supplied in the Implied Author narrating instance). Of course, the reader’s reflex may be to infer meaning in the leading foot being the lower, perhaps even piquing her curiosity to break off and explore the notion, but the narration does not impose such a response on her.

Other examples of this narrating instance in the two cantos examined include:

Temp’ era dal principio del mattino,
e ’l sol montava ’n sù (Inf., I. 37-38)

Allor si mosse, e io li tenni dietro. (Inf., I. 136)

indi a l’eterno lume s’addrizzaro (Par., XXXIII. 43)

This narrating instance is heavily used in *Inferno* I, particularly in relation to the sequence involving the three beasts where its neutrality is highly effective as a mode for the ‘sketching’ that leaves open the possibility of allegorical interpretation.²¹ By contrast, it is almost absent in *Paradiso* XXXIII, when the sketch or frame inviting interpretation necessarily gives way, as I have proposed, to individual, personal, felt experience. But its neutrality does not mean that this narrating instance cannot be evocative and poetic. *Inferno* I’s hill has ‘spalle |

²¹ *Zero-Focalised Narration* is responsible for the swift depiction of the journeying Dante’s attempted ascents of the mountain in *Inferno* I, providing rapid movement through the action.

vestite' (16-17) by the sun's rays, for example. The Zero-Focalised Narration narrating instance supports powerful mental modelling because it is usually mimetic rather than diegetic (so it is emphatically not a case of being hard to identify with because it is 'bad' writing, as can happen in some other texts).

But its core function is to liberate the reader from necessarily experiencing the virtual world as mediated through another's eyes, instead offering her an illusion of the real world in which objects come into view piecemeal and the reader's brain automatically makes inferences about their significance, exactly as it does in real life. This will be important, as I shall discuss later, in constructing the illusion of the reader's agency to turn her own head in the space. As the fourth face of the narrating Dante, then, Zero-Focalised Narration facilitates and underpins the reader's experience of autonomous participation.

I include in *Figure 4* below, for reference, a fully marked-up version of these narrating instances as identified in the narration sequences in *Inferno* I and *Paradiso* XXXIII. I offer the caveat that the identification of these narrating instances relies on qualitative assignment, using the framework outlined here, and some classifications will be less clear-cut than others. As the poem approaches its conclusion, it becomes increasingly possible to argue for allocation of a given narrative unit to more than one narrating instance, either because of ambiguities that are subsequently resolved in the text (such as the seemingly dissonant shift in focal view described in relation to Bernard's sign in Chapter 1), or because Dante's touch is so light that it is possible to perceive a 'melding' of two or more narrating instances (in the mark-up below, these instances are highlighted in red).

Fig. 4. Mark-up of narrating instances, Inferno I and Paradiso XXXIII.

Key: Experiencing I Embodied Narrator Zero-Focalised Narration Implied Author
 Melded narrating instance Direct speech (no highlighting)

Inferno 1

Nel mezzo del cammin di nostra vita mi ritrovi per una selva oscura, ché la diritta via era smarrita.	3	è una lupa, che di tutte brame sembiava carca ne la sua magrezza, e molte genti fé già viver grame,	51	e ha natura sì malvagia e ria, che mai non empie la bramosa voglia, e dopo 'l pasto ha più fame che pria.	99
Ahi quanto a dir qual era è cosa dura esta selva selvaggia e aspra e forte che nel pensier rinova la paura!	6	questa mi porse tanto di gravezza con la paura ch'uscìa di sua vista, ch'io perdei la speranza de l'altezza.	54	Molti son li animali a cui s'ammoglia, e più saranno ancora, infin che 'l veltro verrà, che la farà morir con doglia.	102
Tant'è amara che poco è più morte; ma per trattar del ben ch'i' vi trovai, dirò de l'altre cose ch'i' v'ho scorte.	9	E qual è quei che volentieri acquista, e giugne 'l tempo che perder lo face, che 'n tutti suoi pensier piange e s'attrista;	57	Questi non ciberà terra né peltro, ma sapienza, amore e virtute, e sua nazione sarà tra feltro e feltro.	105
Io non so ben ridir com' i' v'intraí, tant'era pien di sonno a quel punto che la verace via abbandonai.	12	tal mi fecé la bestia senza pace, che, venendomi 'ncontro, a poco a poco mi ripignevé là dove 'l sol tace.	60	Di quella umile Italia fia salute per cui morì la vergine Cammilla, Eurialo e Turno e Niso di ferute.	108
Ma poi ch'i' fui al piè d'un colle giunto, là dove terminava quella valle che m'avea di paura il cor compunto,	15	Mentre ch'i' rovinava in basso loco, dinanzi a li occhi mi si fu offerto chi per lungo silenzio parea fioco.	63	Questi la caccerà per ogni villa, fin che l'avrà rimessa ne lo 'nferno, là onde 'nvidia prima dipartilla.	111
guardai un alto e vidi le sue spalle vestite già de' ragzi del pianeto che mena dritto altrui per ogni calle.	18	Quando vidi costui nel gran diserto "Miserere di me," gridai a lui, "qual che tu sii, od ombra od omo certo!"	66	Ond' io per lo tuo me' penso e discerno che tu mi segui, e io sarò tua guida, e trarrotti di qui per loco eterno;	114
Allor fu la paura un poco queta, che nel lago del cor m'era durata la notte ch' i' passai con tanta pietà.	21	Rispuosemi: "Non omo, omo già fui, e li parenti miei furon lombardi, mantoani per patria ambedui.	69	ove udirai le disperate strida, vedrai li antichi spiriti dolenti, ch'a la seconda morte ciascun grida;	117
E come quei che con lena affannata, uscito fuor del pelago a la riva, si volge a l'acqua perigliosa e guata,	24	Nacqui sub Iulio, ancor che fosse tardi, e vissi a Roma sotto 'l buono Augusto nel tempo de li dèi falsi e bugiardi.	72	e vederai color che son contenti nel foco, perché speran di venire quando che sia a le beate genti.	120
così l'animo mio, ch'ancor fuggiva, si volse a retro a rimirar lo passo che non lasciò già mai persona viva.	27	Poeta fui, e cantai di quel giusto figliuol d'Anchise che venne di Troia, poi che 'l superbo Ilión fu combusto.	75	A le quai poi se tu vorrai salire, anima fia a ciò più di me degna: con lei ti lascerò nel mio partire;	123
Poi ch'èi posato un poco il corpo lasso, ripresi via per la piazgia diserta, sì che 'l piè fermo sempre era 'l più basso.	30	Ma tu perché ritorni a tanta noia? perché non sali il dilettoso monte ch'è principio e cagion di tutta gioia?"	78	ché quello imperador che là sù regna, perch' i' fu' ribellante a la sua legge, non vuol che 'n sua città per me si vegna.	126
Ed ecco, quasi al cominciar de l'erta, una lonza leggiera e presta molto, che di pel macolato era coverta,	33	"Or se' tu quel Virgilio e quella fonte che spandi di parlar sì largo fiume?" rispuos' io lui con vergognosa fronte.	81	In tutte parti impera e quivi regge; quivi è la sua città e l'alto seggio: oh felice colui cu' ivi elegge!"	129
e non mi si partia dinanzi al volto, anzi 'mpediva tanto il mio cammino, ch' i' fui per ritornar più volte vòlto.	36	"O de li altri poeti onore e lume, vagliami 'l lungo studio e 'l grande amore che m'ha fatto cercar lo tuo volume.	84	E io a lui: "Poeta, io ti richeggio per quello Dio che tu non conoscesti, a ciò ch'io fugga questo male e peggio,	132
Temp'era dal principio del mattino, e 'l sol montava 'n sù con quelle stelle ch'eran con lui quando l'amor divino	39	Tu se' lo mio maestro e 'l mio autore, tu se' solo colui da cui' io tolsi lo bello stilo che m'ha fatto onore.	87	che tu mi meni là dov' or dicesti, sì ch'io veggia la porta di san Pietro e color cui tu fai cotanto mesti."	
mosse di prima quelle cose belle; sì ch'a bene sperar m'era cagione di quella fiera a la gaetta pelle	42	Vedi la bestia per cui' io mi volsi; aiutami da lei, famoso saggio, ch'ella mi fa tremar le vene e i polsi."	90	Allor si mosse, e io li tenni dietro.	136
l'ora del tempo e la dolce stagione; ma non sì che paura non mi desse la vista che m'apparve d'un leone.	45	"A te convien tenere altro viaggio," rispuose, poi che lagrimar mi vide "se vuo' campar d'esto loco selvaggio;	93		
Questi parea che contra me venisse con la test' alta e con rabbiosa fame, sì che parea che l'ere ne tremesse.	48	ché questa bestia, per la qual tu gride, non lascia altrui passar per la sua via, ma tanto lo 'mpedisce che l'uccide;	96		

Paradiso 33

“Vergine Madre, figlia del tuo figlio, umile e alta più che creatura, termine fisso d’eterno consiglio, tu se’ colei che l’umana natura nobilitasti sì, che ‘l suo fattore non disdegnò di farsi sua fattura. Nel ventre tuo si raccese l’amore, per lo cui caldo ne l’eterna pace così è germinato questo fiore.”	3	Bernardo m’acennava, e sorridea, perch’ io guardassi suso; mia io era sù per me stesso tal qual si voleva, ché la mia vista, venendo sincera, a più e più intrava per lo raggio de l’alta luce che da sé è vera.	51	Così la mente mia, tutta sospesa mirava fissa, immobile e attenta, e sempre di mirar faceasi accesa.	99
Qui se’ a noi meridiana face di caritate, e giusto, intra ‘ mortali, se’ di speranza fontana vivace.	6	Da quinci innanzi il mio veder fu maggio che ‘l parlar mostra, ch’ a tal vista cede, e cede la memoria a tanto oltraggio.	54	A quella luce cotai si diventa, che volgersi da lei per altro aspetto è impossibil che mai si consenta;	102
Donna, se’ tanto grande e tanto vali, che qual vuol grazia e a te non ricorre, sua distanza vuol volar sanz’ ali.	9	Qual è colui che sognando vede, che dopo ‘l sogno la passione impressa rimane, e l’altro a la mente non riede,	57	però che ‘l ben, ch’è del volere obietto, tutto s’accoglie in lei, e fuor di quella è defettivo ciò ch’è lì perfetto.	105
La tua benignità non pur soccorre a chi domanda, ma molte fiata liberamente al dimandar precorre.	12	Cotal son io, ché quasi tutta cessa mia visione, e ancor mi distilla nel core il dolce che nacque da essa.	60	Onai sarà più corta mia favella, pur a quel ch’io ricordo, che d’un fante che bagni ancor la lingua a la mammella.	108
In te misericordia, in te pietate, in te magnificenza, in te s’aduna quantunque in creatura è di bontate.	15	Così la neve al sol si disigilla, così al vento ne le foglie levi si perdea la sentenza di Sibilla.	63	Non perché più ch’ un semplice sembante fosse nel vivo lume ch’io mirava, che tal è sempre qual s’era davante;	111
Or questi, che da l’infima lacuna de l’universo infin qui ha vedute le vite spiritali ad una ad una, supplica a te, per grazia, di virtute tanto, che possa con li occhi levarsi più alto verso l’ultima salute.	18	O somma luce che tanto ti levi da’ concetti mortali, a la mia mente ripresta un poco di quel che parevi, e fa la lingua mia tanto possente, ch’una favilla sol de la tua gloria possa lasciare a la futura gente;	66	ma per la vista che s’avvalorava in me guardando, una sola parvenza, mutandom’ io, a me si travagliava.	114
E io, che mai per mio veder non arsi più ch’i’ fo per lo suo, tutti miei prieghi ti porgo, e priego che non sieno scarsi, perché tu ogne nube li dislegghi di sua mortalità co’ prieghi tuoi, si che ‘l sommo piacer li si dispiegghi.	21	Oh abbondante grazia ond’ io presunsi ficcar lo viso per la luce eterna, tanto che la veduta vi consunsi!	69	Ne la profonda e chiara sussistenza de l’alto lume parvermi tre giri di tre colori e d’una contenenza;	117
Ancor ti priego, regina, che puoi ciò che tu vuoi, che conservi sani, dopo tanto veder, li affetti suoi.	24	Nel suo profondo vidi che s’interna, legato con amore in un volume, ciò che per l’universo si squaderna;	72	e l’un da l’altro come iri da iri parea riflesso, e ‘l terzo pareo foco che quinci e quindi igualmente si spiri.	120
Vinca tua guardia i movimenti umani: vedi Beatrice con quanti beati per li miei prieghi ti chiudon le mani!”	27	Un punto solo m’è maggior letargo che venticinque secoli a la ‘mpresa che fé Nettuno ammirar l’ombra d’Argo.	75	Oh quanto è corto il dire e come fioco al mio concetto! e questo, a quel ch’i’ vidi, è tanto, che non basta a dicer “poco.”	123
Li occhi da Dio dilette e venerati, fissi ne l’orator, ne dimostraro quanto i devoti prieghi le son grati; indi a l’eterno lume s’addrizzaro nel qual non si dee creder che s’inviò per creatura l’occhio tanto chiaro.	30	Io credo, per l’acume ch’io sofferesi del vivo raggio, ch’i’ sarei smarrito, se li occhi miei da lui fossero aversi. E’ mi ricorda ch’io fui più ardito per questo a sostener, tanto ch’i’ giunsi l’aspetto mio col valore infinito.	78	O luce eterna che sola in te sidi, sola t’intendi, e da te intelletta e intendente te ami e arridi!	126
E io ch’al fine di tutt’ i disii appropinquava, si com’ io dovea, l’ardor del desiderio in me finii.	33	La forma universal di questo nodo credo ch’i’ vidi, perché più di largo, dicendo questo, mi sento ch’i’ godo.	81	Quella circolazione che si concetta pareva in te come lume riflesso, da li occhi miei alquanto circunspecta, dentro da sé, del suo colore stesso, mi parve pinta de la nostra effigie; per che ‘l mio viso in lei tutto era messo.	129
	36		84	Qual è ‘l geometra che tutto s’affigge per misurar lo cerchio, e non ritrova, pensando, quel principio ond’ egli indige, tal era io a quella vista nova; veder voleva come si convenne l’imago al cerchio e come vi s’indova;	132
	39		87	ma non eran da ciò le proprie penne; se non che la mia mente fu percossa da un fulgore in che sua voglia venne.	135
	42		90	A l’alta fantasia qui mancò possa; ma già volgeva il mio disio e ‘l velle, si come rota ch’igualmente è mossa, l’amor che move il sole e l’altre stelle.	141
	45		93		145]
	48		96		

To conclude then, the four faces or discrete narrating instances that constitute the narrating Dante focal character function to discourage the responsive reader from *identifying* solely with the journeying Dante character. The first-person narrating Dante character offers the reader a viewpoint of external observation on the journeying Dante, and this viewpoint is constantly shifting between four discrete focal views: the immersive identifiability of the pre-ventual Experiencing I, the embodied authentication of the post-ventual Embodied Narrator, the omniscient authority of the Implied Author, and the gappy, inference-provoking realism of Zero-Focalised Narration. This constant shifting, I have suggested, invites the reader to inhabit a multiplicity of standpoints from the very start of the poem, including the freedom to introduce her own; and I suggest this to be the basis for the mutable ‘io’ of the poem, inviting both identification and participation.

In the next section, I shall suggest that Dante takes this one step further, reinforcing the invitation to the reader to inhabit her own standpoint by creating the illusion that, on occasion, she has the freedom to direct *her own* line of sight in the narrated space. I shall suggest that this invites the reader to perfect a reflex of looking, when invited, not through a focal character but directly for herself.

5.1.2 Directing line of sight: narration through mobile camera view

In 2014, Vittorio Gallese co-authored an article with film scholar Michele Guerra entitled ‘The Feeling of Motion: Camera Movements and Motor Cognition’ that reported findings from empirical EEG (electroencephalogram) research exploring how camera movements are processed in the brain of a viewer of a film.²² Their research built on film theorist Vivian Sobchack’s 1982 model of movement in moving pictures, focusing particularly on the difference between movement of the camera lens from a *fixed position* through use of zoom (pulling focus in and out) or dolly (movement on fixed tracks), by comparison with *naturalistic movement* of the camera in space through the technology of Steadicam, in which the camera is attached to the body of the camera operator and simulates his or her movement through space.²³

Gallese and Guerra discovered that Steadicam invited a ‘stronger form of simulation’ for the viewer, effectively functioning as prosthetic eye that ‘simulates human vision’, in the terms of Steadicam inventor Garrett Brown.²⁴ This is because the naturalistic human movement of Steadicam (attached to its moving operator) means that missing visual and proprioceptive data is constantly provided to the viewer’s brain, mimicking the brain’s experience of visual processing in the physical world and triggering the mechanism of embodied simulation in the viewer. Gallese and Guerra write that:

The [Steadicam] moving camera not only implements our experience by adding kinaesthetic, bodily, tactile cues as well as the sense of balance and gravity, [but] also

²² Vittorio Gallese and Michele Guerra, ‘The Feeling of Motion: Camera Movements and Motor Cognition’, *Cinema et Cie*, 14 (2014), 103-12.

²³ Vivian Sobchack, ‘Toward Inhabited Space: The Semiotic Structure of Camera Movement in Cinema’, *Journal of the International Association for Semiotic Studies*, 41, 1, 4 (1982), 317-35.

²⁴ Gallese and Guerra, p. 106; and p. 111, citing Brown’s article: Garrett Brown, ‘The Moving Camera. Part 1’, *Zerb* (2003).

gives the impression that the movie is to some extent *live*, that there is an intentionality which endows it with peculiar bodily functions and subjectivity.²⁵

The same effect is *not* replicated in the fixed camera views of the zoom and dolly, which tend to be associated with ‘fake [or] abstract’ movement, by contrast with Steadicam’s ability to optimise the viewer’s sense of participation through ‘the capacity of the camera to simulate the virtual presence of the viewer inside the movie’.²⁶ The central element in achieving this, they propose, citing Brown again, is *movement*: ‘In the movies, when the camera begins to move, we are suddenly given the missing information as to shape and layout and size. *We are there*.’²⁷ By having her focal view mediated through Steadicam’s naturalistic movement, the viewer experiences the illusion of *presence* (‘*we are there*’) in the film space.

And not only is the viewer ‘there’: crucially, she also has the illusion of *agency*. Gallese and Guerra write of how the camera ‘explores the profilmic space by turning its “head” and by focusing on details or accomplishing movements both related and unrelated to the characters’ behaviour’.²⁸ Reflexively mirroring this fluidity of ocular movement through embodied simulation, the viewer achieves, say Gallese and Guerra, the illusion of autonomous, ‘free’ movement, ‘following both the characters *and his own curiosity*’ (my emphasis):

The sense of immersion is of course provided by the fluidity of the [camera] movement that conveys a very ecological approach to the scene [...], but it is provided as well by the motor engagement of the viewer, which has the impression to move freely inside the shot, following both the characters and his own curiosity.²⁹

My suggestion is that Dante deploys focal view in the *Commedia* to a similar end: realistically *simulating human vision* through directing the reader’s line of sight in such a way that the constant movement and updating of visual data can invite the realistic sense of presence (triggered by Gallese’s embodied simulation). If the brain accepts this dynamic provision of visual data as realistic, it invites in the responsive reader the illusion of free

²⁵ Gallese and Guerra, p. 112; p. 106 (emphasis in original).

²⁶ Gallese and Guerra p. 112, p. 103.

²⁷ Gallese and Guerra, p. 107 (my emphasis), citing Brown.

²⁸ Gallese and Guerra, p. 111.

²⁹ Gallese and Guerra, p. 111.

autonomous movement of her own line of sight in the virtual space of the narrative, or the sense that she can freely turn her own head to look around the space.

I shall briefly illustrate what I mean with four examples from the poem. Again, my focus is on establishing a principle and a progression. In this case the mechanism is relatively simple and self-evident in each instance, so I provide only a brief commentary whilst citing each text in full so the interested reader can experiment with imaginatively modelling this behaviour him- or herself.

The first example is in *Inferno* IV, when the journeying Dante emerges onto the lawn of Limbo with Virgil and, finding a vantage point, ‘loco aperto, luminoso e alto’ (116), takes in the souls beyond (‘mi fuor mostrati’, 119), from a static wide angle. Note how little data is provided to the reader in this sequence for her to allocate each soul to a location in her mental model:

Traemmoci così da l’un de’ canti,
in loco aperto, luminoso e alto,
sì che veder si potien tutti quanti.

Colà dritto, sovra ’l verde smalto,
mi fuor mostrati li spiriti magni,
che del vedere in me stesso m’essalto. (120)

I’ vidi Eletra con molti compagni,
tra ’ quai conobbi Ettòr ed Enea,
Cesare armato con li occhi grifagni.

Vidi Cammilla e la Pantasilea;
da l’altra parte vidi ’l re Latino
che con Lavina sua figlia sede. (126)

Vidi quel Bruto che cacciò Tarquino,
Lucrezia, Iulia, Marzia e Corniglia;
e solo, in parte, vidi ’l Saladino.

Poi ch’innalzai un poco più le ciglia,
vidi ’l maestro di color che sanno
seder tra filosofica famiglia. (132)

Tutti lo miran, tutti onor li fanno:
quivi vid’ ò Socrate e Platone,
che ’nmanzi a li altri più presso li stanno;

Democrito che 'l mondo a caso pone,
 Dïogenès, Anassagora e Tale,
 Empedoclès, Eraclito e Zenone; (138)

e vidi il buono accoglitor del quale,
 Dïascoride dico; e vidi Orfeo,
 Tulio e Lino e Seneca morale;
 Euclide geomètra e Tolomeo,
 Ipocràte, Avicenna e Galieno,
 Averois che 'l gran comento feo. (144)

Io non posso ritrar di tutti a pieno,
 però che sî mi caccia il lungo tema,
 che molte volte al fatto il dir vien meno. (*Inf.*, IV. 115-47)

The reader is not asked to do much in the way of arduous spatial cognitive work here: there is a list of souls at which she is invited to sequentially look (and to whom she may dedicate greater or fewer cognitive resources of recognition), but there are no associated spatial directions. Further, the narration is mostly Zero-Focalised Narration (neutral description of what can be seen), allowing the reader to dedicate her cognitive resources primarily to the act of looking for herself rather than through the eyes of the journeying Dante protagonist.³⁰ The result is that the reader has an opportunity to practise moving her own line of sight around the narrated space but in this early instance, few demands are made of her in terms of following spatial choreography. She need only sequentially imagine each soul, rather than imagine and then place them spatially.³¹ This is a good starter exercise for practising mentally populating a virtual space with a list of narrated objects.

The second example is in *Purgatorio* XII, in which the journeying Dante's line of sight is trained on successive dynamic scenes in the animated marble bas reliefs of the *visibile parlare*. In a kind of hyper-attentive slow motion, the protagonist turns his head one way, 'da l'un lato' (27), and then the other, 'da l'altra parte' (29):

³⁰ Switching into the Embodied Narrator at line 120-21 and 145-47; the Experiencing I at 122 and 130; and (arguably) the Implied Author at 132-33.

³¹ The one exception is the spatial detail that Socrates and Plato are the closest to Aristotle: 'quivi vid' ïo Socrate e Platone, | che 'nmanzi a li altri più presso li stanno' (134-35).

ed el mi disse: ‘Volgi li occhi in giù:
 buon ti sarà, per tranquillar la via,
 veder lo letto de le piante tue’.

Come, perché di lor memoria sia,
 sovra i sepolti le tombe terragne
 portan segnato quel ch’elli eran pria, (18)

onde lì molte volte si ripiagne
 per la puntura de la rimembranza,
 che solo a’ pïi dà de le calcagne;
 sì vid’ io lì, ma di miglior sembianza
 secondo l’artificio, figurato
 quanto per via di fuor del monte avanza. (24)

Vedea colui che fu nobil creato
 più ch’altra creatura, giù dal cielo
 folgoreggiando scender, da l’un lato.
 Vedëa Briàreo fitto dal telo
 celestïal giacer, da l’altra parte,
 grave a la terra per lo mortal gelo. (30)

Vedea Timbreo, vedea Pallade e Marte,
 armati ancora, intorno al padre loro,
 mirar le membra d’i Giganti sparte.

Vedea Nembròt a piè del gran lavoro
 quasi smarrito, e riguardar le genti
 che ’n Sennaar con lui superbi fuoro. (36)

O Nïobè, con che occhi dolenti
 vedea io te segnata in su la strada,
 tra sette e sette tuoi figliuoli spenti!

O Saùl, come in su la propria spada
 quivi parevi morto in Gelboè,
 che poi non sentì pioggia né rugiada! (42)

O folle Aragne, sì vedea io te
 già mezza ragna, trista in su li stracci
 de l’opera che mal per te si fé.

O Roboàm, già non par che minacci
 quivi 'l tuo segno; ma pien di spavento
 nel porta un carro, senza ch'altri il cacci. (48)

Mostrava ancor lo duro pavimento
 come Almeon a sua madre fé caro
 parer lo sventurato adornamento.

Mostrava come i figli si gittaro
 sovra Sennacherib dentro dal tempio,
 e come, morto lui, quivi il lasciaro. (54)

Mostrava la ruina e 'l crudo scempio
 che fé Tamiri, quando disse a Ciro:
 'Sangue sitisti, e io di sangue t'empio'.

Mostrava come in rotta si fuggiro
 li Assiri, poi che fu morto Oloferne,
 e anche le reliquie del martiro. (60)

Vedeva Troia in cenere e in caverne;
 o Ilión, come te basso e vile
 mostrava il segno che lì si discerne! (*Purg.*, XII. 13-63)

The reader is invited to imagine these mini-narratives unfolding in a situated way, her line of sight tightly melded to that of the journeying Dante's, as set up in Virgil's explicit invitation to him to look, 'Volgi li occhi in giùe' (13). This melding of experience is highly characteristic of the mode of co-present mirroring in *Purgatorio* as a whole (discussed in Chapter 4): the reader is in cognitive 'learning' mode, her line of sight tightly bound to the journeying Dante's as she simultaneously experiences the kinaesthetic cues that invite autonomous embodied participation, mentally turning her head in the space alongside him.

The last two examples are in *Paradiso* and each invites independent participation in a different way. In *Paradiso* XVIII, Cacciaguida instructs the journeying Dante to observe the cross in wonder, 'mira ne' corni de la croce' (34), as the lights of Joshua, Maccabeus, Roland, Charlemagne, William, Reynald, Godfrey, and Roberto Guiscardo make their dynamic appearances along its beams:

El cominciò: ‘In questa quinta soglia
 de l’albero che vive de la cima
 e frutta sempre e mai non perde foglia,
 spiriti son beati, che giù, prima
 che venissero al ciel, fuor di gran voce,
 sì ch’ogne musa ne sarebbe opima. (33)

Però mira ne’ corni de la croce:
 quello ch’io numerò, lì farà l’atto
 che fa in nube il suo foco veloce’.

Io vidi per la croce un lume tratto
 dal nomar Iosùè, com’ el si feo;
 né mi fu noto il dir prima che ’l fatto. (39)

E al nome de l’alto Macabeo
 vidi moversi un altro roteando,
 e letizia era ferza del paleo.

Così per Carlo Magno e per Orlando
 due ne seguì lo mio attento sguardo,
 com’ occhio segue suo falcon volando. (45)

Poscia trasse Guiglielmo e Rinoardo
 e ’l duca Gottifredi la mia vista
 per quella croce, e Ruberto Guiscardo.

Indi, tra l’altre luci mota e mista,
 mostrommi l’alma che m’avea parlato
 qual era tra i cantor del cielo artista. (*Par.*, XVIII. 28-51)

The challenge to the reader is not only to model the significance of each name, but, simultaneously, to model its dynamic visual movement in space. Once again, Zero-Focalised Narration is the dominant narrating instance, with a switch into the Experiencing I at line 39, where the journeying Dante explicitly models his cognitive resources being occupied *first* by tracking the movement and only subsequently by recognition of the soul: ‘né mi fu noto il dir prima che ’l fatto’ (39).³² Afterwards, the reward for such cognitive dexterity is modelled by

³² There is also a brief switch into the Implied Author narrating instance with the simile at line 45.

the journeying Dante: he experiences a clarification in both sight (as he looks into Beatrice's eyes, 'e vidi le sue luci tanto mere, | tanto gioconde, che la sua sembianza | vinceva li altri e l'ultimo solere' 55-57) and understanding (the double use of 's'accorgersi', in lines 60 and 61).³³ He is seeing progressively more perfectly and autonomously, as too, I propose, will be the reader who fully participates in such demanding acts of dynamic imaginative reconstruction.

Lastly for this section, in *Paradiso* XXXI the journeying Dante observes the celestial Rose, unbidden by Beatrice but instead autonomously and spontaneously, as pilgrims do, 'quasi peregrin' (43), when they reach the long-sought 'tempio'. Liberated, he directs his own line of sight through the blessed co-ordinates that constitute the Rose, following his own dynamic path, 'mo sù, mo giù e mo recirculando' (58), 'in nulla parte ancor fermato fiso' (54):

E quasi peregrin che si ricrea
nel tempio del suo voto riguardando,
e spera già ridir com' ello stea,
su per la viva luce passeggiando,
menava ïo li occhi per li gradi,
mo sù, mo giù e mo recirculando. (48)

Vedëa visi a carità süadi,
d'altrui lume fregiati e di suo riso,
e atti ornati di tutte onestadi.

La forma general di paradiso
già tutta mio sguardo avea compresa,
in nulla parte ancor fermato fiso. (*Par.*, XXXI. 43-54)

The simile liberates the reader too, I propose, to electively identify as pilgrim in this space, freely turning her head to see *not* the precise analogue of what the journeying Dante sees – since what he sees is elided, 'menava ïo li occhi per li gradi, | mo sù, mo giù e mo recirculando' (47-48) – but instead to do her own creative work, to participate in constructing her own vision of the Rose. In this way, she is no longer bound to *identify* with the journeying

³³ 'E come, per sentir più diletanza | bene operando, l'uom di giorno in giorno | s'accorge che la sua virtute avanza, | sì m'accors' io che 'l mio girare intorno | col cielo insieme avea cresciuto l'arco, | veggendo quel miracol più addorno' (*Par.*, XVIII. 58-63).

Dante but instead is invited to *participate* on her own account: no longer imagining what *he* sees and how *he* feels but looking for herself. Again, the journeying Dante models an outcome, as this freedom to ‘move his own head’ yields a re-inflaming of his will as he turns to Beatrice ‘con voglia riaccesa’ (55).³⁴

There is, of course, one final, extended, diagrammatic choreographing of focal view, by Bernard in *Paradiso* XXXII as he locates the blessed in the Rose (*Par.*, XXXII. 1-39 and 115-51). I return to this in Chapter 6. Before this, though, I set out the second set of mechanics that I propose to invite self-presence in the poem: the continuum of direct and indirect invitations to imaginatively fill in the gaps in the poem.

5.2 Narrative mediation: the continuum of invitations to participate

In this section, I set out three new models related to *narrative mediation*. Firstly, a new reading of the mechanism of the *direct address to the reader*, radically extending the work of Auerbach, Gmelin, and Spitzer beyond a reading of intermittent reader involvement at key points to a reading that defines the addresses as a foundational strategy that catalyses a vast system of different types of invitations to the reader to participate. Secondly, I propose in the poem a systematic model of *narrative training*, a programme of nine exercises embedded in the text that I propose to invite rehearsal of the reader’s cognitive skills in a heavily mediated way; a model already familiar in the second-person address of the medieval gospel meditation, as discussed in Chapter 2. Thirdly, I suggest a strategy of *narration through gaps* in the text, rooted in invitations to the reader to import her own cognitive data in response to the manifold similes and narrative ellipses in the poem. This strategy of narration and its remarkable prevalence (similes alone occupying one fifth of all the verses of narration in the poem) is what underpins, I suggest, the extraordinary ‘openness’ of the poem.

5.2.1 The direct addresses to the reader

³⁴ Only to find, of course, that Beatrice has been replaced by Bernard (‘Uno intendea, e altro mi rispuose’, 58). As discussed in Chapter 1, this is one of the great narrative surprises of the poem. Pertile has written of this surprise that it ‘does not seem to be narratologically cogent’, going on to ‘conjecture’ that ‘Saint Bernard may not have been in Dante’s original plans for the conclusion of his poem’. Lino Pertile, ‘Does the *stilnovo* go to Heaven?’, in *Dante for the New Millennium*, ed. by Teodolinda Barolini and H. Wayne Storey (New York: Fordham University Press, 2003), pp. 104-114 (p. 111). My reading of Bernard’s sign offers a different possible model to Pertile’s, suggesting a specific narratological strategy to be at work.

The device of the direct address, deployed around twenty times in the poem (the first in *Inferno* VIII, ‘pensa, lettore’ (94); the last in *Paradiso* XXII, ‘S’io torni mai, lettore’ (106)), typically invites the reader to break off from her consumption of the narrative and to consciously and actively engage in a particular cognitive activity: thinking (‘pensa’), remembering (‘ricorditi’), imagining (‘imagini’), reading (‘leggi’), directing her gaze (‘aguzza [...] li occhi’, ‘leva [...] la vista’), not asking (‘nol dimandar’), or switching between cognitive modes ‘non attender [...] | pensa [...]’.³⁵

But is the reader really to *act* on such exhortations? When the narrating Dante says to the reader, ‘pensa per te stesso | com’ io potea tener lo viso asciutto’ (*Inf.*, XX. 20-21), or ‘leggi Ezechiele’ (*Purg.*, XXIX. 100), or triply instructs her in the construction of a dynamic virtual event involving certain of the stars of the northern hemisphere in *Paradiso* XIII (1-21), is she really to stop reading the poem and think for herself how Dante might have kept himself from weeping; is she to actually go to her bookshelf and compare Ezekiel and John’s accounts with Dante’s; is she really to stop, envision the night sky from memory, pick out the twenty-four stars Dante describes, mentally set them into two counter-rotating circles around her, in order to experience for herself just a trace of how it feels to have the lights of the theologians dancing around you in the Heaven of the Sun?

I suggest this is precisely what the participatory reader will increasingly find herself impelled to do, and that it establishes a model of cognitive participation paid off in a vast programme of more subtle indirect and elective invitations to participate through the pre-rational cognitions in the rest of the poem. Whilst Franke raised the question of ‘leverag[ing]’ the direct address in order to discover ‘an implicit address’, the question of how this might be achieved in the text, and of what might constitute an ‘implicit address’, has not previously been explored, including in the three famous essays on Dante’s direct address of Erich Auerbach, Leo Spitzer, and Hermann Gmelin. However, I would suggest that these three critics might inadvertently point us towards precisely a resolution of Franke’s question through their failure to agree on the precise number of direct addresses in the poem.

The three scholars broadly agree on the functions and constitution of the direct addresses in the poem. The direct address is a rhetorical device designed to ‘create a feeling of intimacy between author and reader’, writes Spitzer; it disrupts the reader from the

³⁵ ‘pensa’: *Inf.*, VIII. 94, *Inf.*, XX. 20, *Purg.*, X. 110, *Purg.*, XXXI. 124, *Par.*, V. 109; ‘ricorditi’: *Purg.*, XVII. 1; ‘imagini’: *Par.*, XIII. 1, 7, 10; ‘leggi’: *Purg.*, XXIX. 100; ‘aguzza’: *Purg.*, VIII. 19; ‘nol dimandar’: *Inf.*, XXXIV. 23; ‘non attender’: *Purg.*, X. 109.

immersive spell, directing understanding or ‘intensify[ing] [...] attention’, writes Auerbach; and it serves to reinforce the poet’s authority (Auerbach again).³⁶ Further, I propose, this metalepsis sets up the illusion of the possibility of social interaction, or social presence, between the narrating Dante and reader. Of course, the reader may not respond through the normal turn-taking mechanism of direct speech as she would in a real-life conversation but instead, I suggest, the direct address invites reciprocal response through *action*: the reader reciprocates and participates in the exchange by *doing*: thinking, looking, imagining. In this regard, the narrating Dante’s direct address to the reader constitutes an innovative model of social reciprocity in a text.

The direct address in the *Commedia* is typically constituted by a vocative (usually ‘lettor’) and an imperative (most commonly ‘pensa’, but also ‘nol dimandar’, ‘aguzza [...] li occhi’, ‘non attender’, ‘ricorditi’, ‘leggi’, ‘leva [...] la vista’, ‘imagini’).³⁷ It can be distinguished from the classical apostrophe, I propose – bypassing Auerbach’s arguably unnecessarily complex argument for the terms of my analysis – on the simple basis that the reader does or might reasonably *electively* feel herself to be the addressee.³⁸

Where the critics really diverge is on the tally of direct addresses in the poem – Auerbach proposing eighteen, Spitzer ‘nineteen sure examples’ (p. 146), and Gmelin twenty. My suggestion is that the presence of certain inconsistencies in the characteristics of the direct addresses – evident across not only the disputed instances but even some of the cases on which there is consensus – invites us to think about a notion of a *continuum* of invitations to the reader, as I shall set out below. For reference, *Figure 5* summarises the tally as far as the qualitative nature of the three essays reasonably allows, including the core verse(s) of each sequence, the verb that forms the imperative, and – importantly – the vocative used.³⁹

³⁶ Spitzer, p. 150. Auerbach, p. 268.

³⁷ See *Figure 5*, following. Note there is no imperative in the addresses at *Inf.*, XXV. 46, *Purg.*, XXXIII. 126, and *Par.*, XXII. 106.

³⁸ Auerbach, p. 270.

³⁹ Tallying each critic’s counts is unfortunately made somewhat more difficult by their highly qualitative approaches, together with one or two typographical errors regarding line and canto numbers.

Fig. 5. Survey of addresses to the reader: Auerbach, Spitzer, Gmelin, compared.

				Classified as direct address?			
Core of sequence				Auerbach	Spitzer	Gmelin*	Vocative
Inferno							
Inf.	VIII	94-96	Pensa, lettore, se io mi sconfortai	Yes	Yes	Yes	lettor
Inf.	IX	61-63	O voi ch'avete li 'ntelletti sani, / mirate la dottrina	Yes	Yes	Yes	voi
Inf.	XVI	127-30	e per le note / di questa comedia, lettore, ti giuro,	Yes (1)	Yes	Yes (1)	lettor
Inf.	XX	19-24	Se Dio ti lasci, lettore, prender frutto / di tua lezione, or pensa per te stesso	Yes	Yes	Yes	lettor
Inf.	XXII	118	O tu che leggi	Yes	Yes	Yes	lettor / tu
Inf.	XXV	46-48	Se tu se' or, lettore, a creder lento	Yes	Yes	Yes	lettor
Inf.	XXXIV	22-27	Com'io divenni allor gelato e fioco, / nol dimandar, lettore [...] // pensa oggimai per te, s'hai fior d'ingegno, / qual io divenni, d'uno e d'altro privo	Yes	Yes	Yes	lettor
Inf.	XXXIV	30-33	vedi oggimai quant' esser dee quel tutto / ch'a così fatta parte si confaccia.	No	Yes	No	tu
Purgatorio							
Purg.	VIII	19-22	Aguzza qui, lettore, ben li occhi al vero	Yes	Yes	Yes	lettor
Purg.	IX	70-72	Lettore, tu vedi ben com' io innalzo / la mia matra	Yes	Yes	Yes	lettor
Purg.	X	106-11	Non vo' però, lettore, che tu ti smaghi [...] / Non attender la forma del martire: / pensa la successione; pensa ch'al peggio [...]	Yes	Yes	Yes	lettor
Purg.	XVII	1-9	Ricorditi, lettore, se mai ne l'alpe / ti colse nebbia per la qual vedessi / [...] / e fia la tua imagine leggera / in giugnere a veder	Yes	Yes	Yes	lettor
Purg.	XXIX	98-103	A descriver lor forme più non spargo / rime, lettore; [...] / [...] / ma leggi Ezechiele	Yes (1)	Yes	Yes	lettor
Purg.	XXXI	124-26	Pensa, lettore, s'io mi maravigliava	Yes	Yes	Yes	lettor
Purg.	XXXIII	136-39	S'io avessi, lettore, più lungo spazio / da scrivere	Yes	Yes	Yes	lettor
Paradiso							
Par.	II	1-21	O voi che siete in piccioletta barca, / desiderosi d'ascoltar, seguiti [...] / tornate [...] / non vi mettete [...] // Voialtri pochi che drizzaste il collo / per tempo al pan de li angeli / [...] / metter potete ben per l'alto sale / vostro navigio [...]	Yes	Yes	Yes	voi
Par.	V	109-14	Pensa, lettore	Yes	Yes	Yes	lettor
Par.	IX	10-12	Ahi anime ingannate e fatture empie	No (2)	No (1) (apostrophe)	Yes	[voi] anime ingannate
Par.	X	7-27	Leva dunque, lettore, a l'alte rote / meco la vista [...] // Vedi come [...] // Or ti riman, lettore, sopra 'l tuo banco / dietro pensando a ciò che si preliba / [...] / omai per te ti ciba	Yes	No ("hidden address" within simile)	Yes	lettor
Par.	XIII	1-21	Imagini, chi bene intender cupe / quel ch'i' or vidi – e ritegna l'image, // immagini quel carro [...] // immagini la bocca di quel corno [...] // e avrà quasi l'ombra de la vera / costellazione [...]	No (2)	Yes	Yes	chi bene intender cupe
Par.	XXII	106-11	S'io torni mai, lettore, a quel divoto / trionfo [...] // tu non avresti in tanto tratto e messo / nel foco il dito, in quant' io vidi [...]	Yes	Yes	Yes	lettor
TOTAL				18	19	20	

(1) but recorded with a line or canto tipo

* as recorded by Auerbach

(2) Auerbach notes that Gmelin includes these two in his first footnote, giving Auerbach the "some twenty" in total that he eventually claims

There are four instances of apparent disagreement between the three critics, highlighted in red and amber on the figure. Two of the disputes, I suggest, can be bracketed for the purposes of this discussion on the grounds of clerical rather than strategic disagreement (highlighted in amber). In *Inferno* XXXIV, Spitzer treats 'nol dimandar' (23) and 'vedi oggimai' (30), as separate addresses, whilst Auerbach and Gmelin count only one direct address here. In *Paradiso* X, Spitzer somewhat confusingly excludes 'Leva dunque, lettore, a l'alte rote | meco la vista' (7-8) on the grounds that it is a 'hidden address' within a simile;

but since he classifies it as an address nonetheless, I do not count it here as truly disputed. There is a third, perplexing, exclusion, this time by Auerbach, of *Paradiso* XIII, ‘Imagini, chi bene intender cupe’ (1). He simply fails to mention this sequence in his essay, but offers no apparent reason for its exclusion, so for the purposes of this analysis I conclude for now that this is an oversight.

This leaves one instance which is genuinely disputed in my view, in *Paradiso* IX:

Ahi anime ingannate e fatture empie,
che da sì fatto ben torcete i cuori,
drizzando in vanità le vostre tempie! (*Par.*, IX. 10-12)

Following Carlo Martello’s account in *Paradiso* VIII of how, in the journeying Dante’s words, bitterness can issue from sweet seed, ‘com’ esser può, di dolce seme, amaro’ (93), the narrating Dante reflects at the start of canto IX that grief will follow the harm ‘you’ wreak, ‘pianto | giusto verrà di retro ai vostri danni’ (5-6), then issues this metaleptic castigation to ‘self-deceiving souls’, ‘anime ingannate’. Gmelin includes this as a direct address; Auerbach and Spitzer do not.

The first thing we might observe is that it does not use the vocative ‘lettor’ but instead addresses a second-person plural group, arguably directing us towards exclusion on the grounds that it is an apostrophe. However, the three scholars allow other instances of addresses to a second-person plural group to be classified as addresses; in fact, the vocative ‘lettor’ is used in indeed only sixteen of the twenty instances included. An interesting question arises: how does the reader cognitively process the pronoun ‘you’ in a first-person narration? Is it always in the same way? When does ‘you’ actually mean ‘you, reader’; and when does it mean ‘other people outside this text but who aren’t you’?

There are four instances in the sample of direct addresses collected between the three critics where the vocative ‘you’ (‘voi’ or ‘tu’) is used. The first is in *Inferno* IX, ‘O voi ch’avete li ’ntelletti sani’ (61), which all three critics allow as a direct address. The second is in *Paradiso* II, with the double ‘voi’ vocative, ‘O voi che siete in piccioletta barca’ (2) or ‘Voialtri pochi’ (10), which again all three allow as direct address. There is the disputed one above, in *Paradiso* IX. And lastly, there is the second-person singular instance in *Paradiso* XIII, ‘Imagini, chi bene intender cupe | quel ch’i’ or vidi’ (1-2, and following), which only Auerbach (seemingly inexplicably) excludes.

But if the reader is to feel herself directly addressed as one of those with the ‘intelletti sani’ in *Inferno IX*, or one of either ‘voi che siete in piccioletta barca’ or ‘voialtri pochi’ in *Paradiso II*, why not as one of the ‘anime ingannate’ in *Paradiso IX*? Is the reader in this case to experience it as an apostrophe directed at a specific group of *others* of which she has no part?

Spitzer rejects it as an address on the grounds that it ‘is in truth only an “apostrophe” in the ancient sense’ (p. 154). But Gmelin includes it; and whilst Auerbach does not include it in his own list, in fact Spitzer writes that Auerbach ‘accepts’ Gmelin’s reading. Spitzer continues that:

Dante is surely here not addressing his reader (whom it would be singularly tactless to identify with *anime ingannate e fatture empie*), rather is he using an apostrophe directed against persons who become ‘present’ only by his castigation. We may compare a similar invective of Dante’s against earthly sinners, uttered at the moment when he sees the punishment of the proud in Purgatory (*Purgatorio X*, 121): ‘O superbi cristian, miseri lassi | Che, della vista della mente infermi, | Fidanza avete ne’ ritrosi passi; | Non v’accorgete voi, che noi siam vermin | Nati a formar l’angelica farfalla ...?’ Surely no one in his senses would advocate the identification of Dante’s readers with the *superbi*!⁴⁰

Spitzer’s argument rests on an appeal to politeness and tact that I would suggest to be a cultural over-reading. Further, I would suggest the strategic function of the narrating Dante would never allow the imposition of any sort of identity on the reader, including a pejorative one, but rather would *invite* personal identification where appropriate. Of course, we might argue that the participating reader who has actively modelled the rehearsal of penitence in *Purgatorio* is unlikely to realistically identify at this point in *Paradiso* as an ‘anima ingannata’. But not all readers will have been reading in such a way (for example, any of the ‘desiderosi d’ascoltar’ who have not heeded the warning to turn back), and I suggest the text certainly leaves open the possibility for elective identification in this way at this stage.

I would argue, then, that in technical terms we could read it either way – as an address or as an apostrophe – but that the key factor is that to be read as an address, it depends on the reader *electively identifying* herself as part of such a group. My suggestion is that the direct

⁴⁰ Spitzer, ‘The Addresses’, pp. 145-46.

addresses, in their explicit and overt invitations to the reader to actively find herself present as subject in the text by virtue of her interlocutory relationship with the narrating Dante, function as a model to invite the reader to habituate herself to a practice of elective identification as subject even when the invitation is not explicit.

Elective identification within the context of the direct address, I propose, then opens up my proposed notion of a *continuum* of invitations to the reader. The reader who has become accustomed to reciprocal engagement through *doing* in the outer story world may then feel primed to do the same in the inner story world, reciprocally engaging with the blessed not only when directly addressed but also by voluntary, elective inference. Might such a reader not then also find herself electively addressed in some of the many instances when Beatrice uses an imperative ‘tu’? ‘Or drizza il viso a quel ch’or si ragiona’ (*Par.*, VII. 34), for example? Or even imaginatively co-present in the narrating Dante’s ‘noi’, as for example in the Heaven of the Sun in *Paradiso* XIII: ‘Compié ’l cantare e ’l volger sua misura; | e attesersi a noi quei santi lumi, | felicitando sé di cura in cura’ (28-30); and in Bernard’s ‘noi’ in his praise of Mary in *Paradiso* XXXIII: ‘Qui se’ a noi meridiana face | di caritate’ (10-11)?

In a participatory model of reading, then, perhaps the question more radically becomes: why, when the narrator addresses all of, or any subset of, the mortal and post-mortal human community, should we imagine we are *not* implicated, that we stand only as external observers to those guilty of sin or engaged in the journey to God as we encounter them in their present incarnation in the three realms of the afterlife? If we begin to think in this way, we might question why we as readers of this poem, here, now, would excuse ourselves from finding ourselves addressed in a present way in Dante’s ‘conversation’. Historical and temporal distance is no reason: the text invites us to consider post-mortal, transhistorical, transcultural connectivity, the penitents of *Purgatorio* XI praying across time for *us, now*: ‘Quest’ ultima preghiera, signor caro, | già non si fa per noi, ché non bisogna, | ma per color che dietro a noi restaro’ (22-24).⁴¹

I return to the continuum of invitations later but first will consider how, having established a principle of cognitive participation, the poem invites the reader to reinforce this behaviour through a series of guided rehearsals in the text, a device I term *narrative training*.

5.2.2 Narrative training

⁴¹ See Vittorio Montemaggi, ‘Afterword: Forgiveness, Prayer, and the Meaning of Poetry’, *Literature Compass*, 11, 2 (2014), 138-47 (see particularly pp. 139-41).

Following Auerbach, I suggested earlier that one of the functions of the direct address to the reader is to disrupt epistemic immersion. My proposal in this section is that in certain instances of the direct addresses (around half, as I shall quantify later), such strategic disruptions precede sequences in which the narration of certain perceptual or cognitive events is radically slowed down such that the process of the successive mental models that constitutes the dynamic sequence of action becomes discernible.⁴² This constitutes, I suggest, a narratological strategy I term *narrative training*, in which the frame-by-frame mode of narration invites the responsive reader to defamiliarise her reflexive mode of constructing a dynamic mental model, and to experiment with a different, more powerful, model of imaginative work.⁴³

In literary and creative writing theory, we might traditionally have thought of the imagination in terms of skills particularly of *visualisation*, but my suggestion is that in fact Dante's innovation is to invite the reader not simply to become more expert in *pictorial* mental modelling – constructing a static image in the form of a picture – but in the mode cognitive neuroscience and cognitive literary theory is beginning to define as *enactive*, as discussed in Chapter 2.⁴⁴ Enactive mental modelling seeks to construct not just a visual

⁴² There is further interesting work to be done to determine if there are any patterns in the cognitive responses invited by the direct addresses that do not precede a narrative training exercise.

⁴³ I have chosen the term 'narrative training' because it most clearly reinforces the link I wish to make between narratological device and reader outcome. However, from the general standpoint of participation, I am sensitive that 'training' might imply intentionality. We might also say 'cognitive rehearsal' or think in terms of Joshua Landy's notion of 'formative fictions'; that is, 'texts whose function it is to fine-tune our mental capacities'. Joshua Landy, *How to Do Things with Fictions* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), p. 10.

⁴⁴ In *Simulating Minds*, Alvin Goldman distinguishes a visceral, embodied, dynamic 'enactment imagination' from a more sketchy 'suppositional imagination', defining enactment imagination as 'enacting, or trying to enact' the mediated or narrated content itself, whilst suppositional imagination involves 'merely supposing' that particular content obtains without trying to 'create a mental surrogate' of it. He gives as an example of content the notion of elation, so in suppositional imagination we would retrieve a grasp of what we understand 'elation' to *mean*, but it would only be through enactment imagination that we might actually re-experience *how it feels*: that is, through a visceral simulation. Alvin Goldman, *Simulating Minds: The Philosophy, Psychology, and Neuroscience of Mindreading* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), pp. 47-48. Goldman is a cognitive scientist most famous for his model of so-called 'mindreading', rooted in mental simulation, and whose monographs also include: *A Theory of Human Action* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1970), and *Epistemology and Cognition* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1986). See also: Vittorio Gallese and Alvin Goldman, 'Mirror Neurons and the Simulation Theory of Mind-Reading', *Trends in Cognitive Sciences*, 2, 12 (1998), 493-501. In literary theory,

mental representation, but to embody it by incorporating the multiple senses, and to mentally animate the representation, sustaining it across time – a cognitive skill the narrative encourages most explicitly in its invitation to the reader to construct a complex dynamic mental model of the counter-rotating circles of the lights of the theologians in *Paradiso XIII*, as I shall discuss in a moment. Such an enactive model of representation mimics much more accurately than the pictorial the dynamic processes of human consciousness, supporting the illusion that the virtual input data is *realistic*, reinforcing the reader's experience of self-presence in the virtual space.

The practice of enactive mental modelling, or visceral imaginative elaboration, has a precedent in the medieval gospel meditation, as discussed in Chapter 2. However, whilst the narrative of the gospel meditation focuses on engagement of the rational cognitions through conscious direction of attention, I suggest that the *Commedia*'s innovation is to leave partially intact the immersive spell in these narrative training exercises, recruiting the pre-rational cognitions and thereby changing or honing reflexive or unconscious – intuitive – behaviours.⁴⁵

Cognitive neuroscience is beginning to equip us with new understanding about how cognitive rehearsal can change not only rational behaviours (as used in, for example, elite sports coaching and cognitive behavioural therapy) but also pre-rational behaviours and intuitions. Gallese uses the term *cultural neuroscience* to define a field of research that explores how such effects can be reproduced through the medium of an artefact,

Emily Troscianko has summarised and continues to extend an analysis of the current state of play of the so-called 'imagery debate', separating pictorial, propositional and enactive theories of mental modelling. I explore this more fully in the next section in this chapter, on indirect invitations. Emily Troscianko, 'Reading Imaginatively: The Imagination in Cognitive Science and Cognitive Literary Studies', *Journal of Literary Semantics*, 42, 2 (2013), 181-98 (pp. 181-83).

⁴⁵ We know that something we see, hear, or experience can make us change our minds at a conscious level, modifying our understanding or beliefs. But we can also experience modification of our *unconscious* reflexes that support our habitual behaviours and beliefs. Philosopher of psychology Tamar Gendler terms these *aliefs*, writing: 'Alief is a more primitive state than either belief or imagination: it directly activates behavioural response patterns (as opposed to motivating in conjunction with desire or pretended desire'. Tamar Szabò Gendler, 'Alief and Belief', *The Journal of Philosophy*, 105, 10 (2008), 634-63 (p. 634). Waterworth and Riva refer to a similar principle but define it in terms of a *rendering intuitive* of the reflexes. Giving the example of the way in which we internalise the steps necessary to drive a car, they suggest that: 'intuition is not only innate [as it has long been considered]. Research on perceptual-cognitive and motor skills shows that they are automatised through experience [and practice] and thus rendered intuitive'. Waterworth and Riva, p. 37.

acknowledging a particular debt to Elaine Scarry who, in *Dreaming by the Book*, writes of a poem or novel as ‘a set of instructions for mental composition [...]. The “instructional” character is key, because it allows the image to come into being by an agency not one’s own’.⁴⁶ In 2012, comparative literature scholar Joshua Landy published an applied analysis of a very similar phenomenon, writing of texts that function not to ‘teach’ but to ‘train’; and proposing that in fact a minority of texts (‘only a relative handful’) deliver this level of cognitive transformation in the reader.⁴⁷ Certain texts, he writes:

function as *training grounds for the capacities*: in engaging with them, we stand to become not more knowledgeable or more virtuous but more *skilled*, whether at rational thinking, at maintaining necessary illusions, at achieving tranquillity of mind, or even at religious faith. Instead of offering us propositional knowledge, these texts yield know-how; rather than attempting to instruct by means of their content, they hone capacities by means of their form; far from seducing with the promise of instantaneous transformation, they recognise, with Aristotle, that change is a matter of sustained and patient practice.⁴⁸

For Landy, as for my proposal, training is ‘gradual’; ‘skills are burnished through repeated exercise in a benevolent spiral’; and whilst ‘we simply begin by reading and listening’, with what he terms a *formative fiction*, ‘there is always a moment at which the stakes become apparent, a moment at which we realise that we are not just being told a story, a moment at which a crucial offer is put before us’.⁴⁹

My proposal in relation to the *Commedia* is that in each of the putative narrative training exercises, the discrete cognitive steps of the usually intuitive process of constructing a mental model are rendered perceptible, defamiliarising to the participatory reader her automatic habits of perception and interpretation; and then providing her with a framework, through the mechanism of an imaginative enactment exercise embedded in the narrative

⁴⁶ Gallese and Wojciehowski, p. 8; Elaine Scarry, *Dreaming by the Book* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), p. 244.

⁴⁷ Landy, p. 202; p. 182. Most usefully for my purposes here, in Mark’s Gospel, Landy explores the ‘ostentatiously figurative language [of Jesus’s speech]’ that trains the receiver’s capacity to ‘dwell in metaphor’, ‘train[ing] one’s mind to pass from letter into spirit, from immanence into transcendence, from human concerns to the point of view of God’ (p. 60).

⁴⁸ Landy, p. 167 (emphasis in original).

⁴⁹ Landy, p. 194; p. 195.

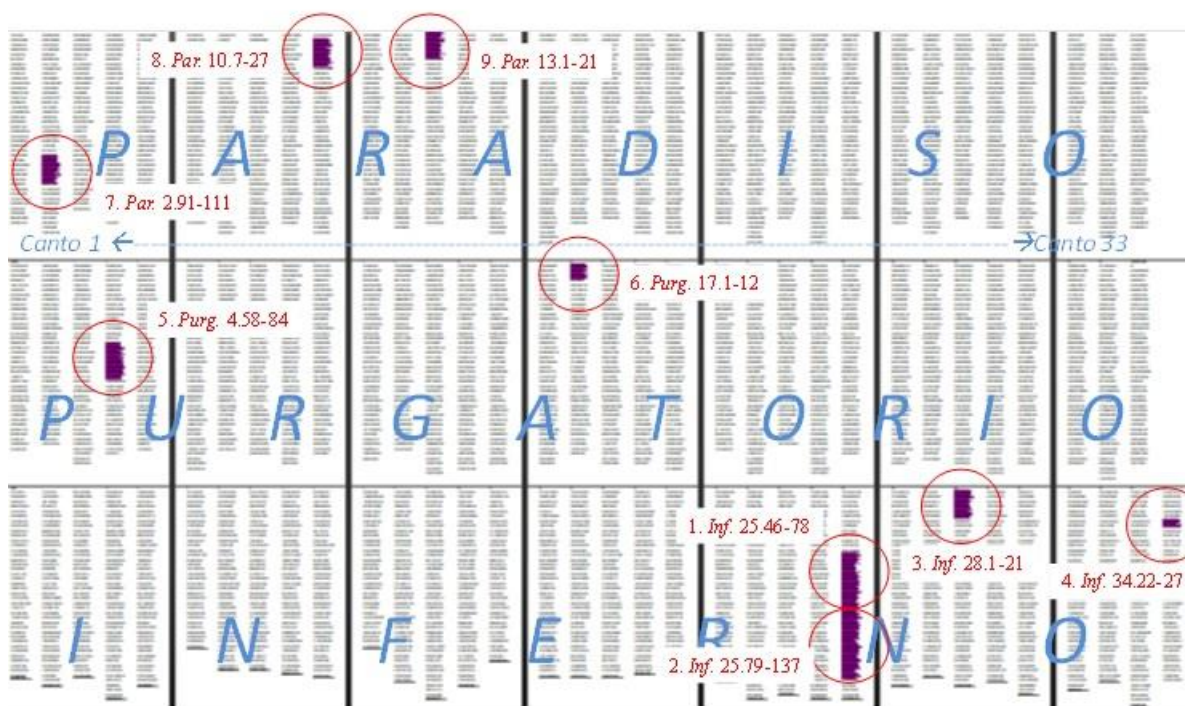
sequence, to hone her capacity to imagine narrated events so vividly, enactively, and sustainedly, that her brain may experience them as ‘realistic’. The exercises are typically rendered in a kind of ‘stop-motion’ mode of narration, whereby the particular mental event – the thing seen, experienced, or imagined by the protagonist – is narrated frame-by-frame in the text at a level of unusual detail or vividness. Such a mode requires that the reader slow down if she is to process the highly detailed data without becoming overwhelmed, to withhold her own imaginative habits and inferences, and that she construct instead a series of mental models based on the precisely observed data provided in the text. Over the course of the exercises in the poem, I suggest, the reader is trained to extend and refine her reflexive mode of imagining from a model of relatively straightforward *visualisation* (prevalent in *Inferno*), towards multi-sensory embodied or *visceral* reconstruction (*Purgatorio*), and finally, to an expert intuitive model of dynamic, *enactive* imagination (*Paradiso*) that will equip her to cope with the extremely demanding requirements of imagining in the abstract essential in *Paradiso*; that is, without rooting everything in the data of the senses. Ultimately, I propose, this skill of imaginative enactment in the abstract will equip her to imagine things she has never seen and to viscerally and realistically experience for herself things that cannot be conveyed in words, a practice that will become essential if she is to complete the journey on her own account when words will finally fail the narrator.

I propose there to be nine such narrative training exercises in the poem, mapped in *Figure 6* below.⁵⁰ There are four in *Inferno*: the second and third of the three serpent–shade transmutations in *Inferno* XXV that radically slow the reader’s pace of reading and invite sustained and detailed attention to an algorithmic reconstruction of complex visual events; the extended simile of the battlefield body parts in *Inferno* XXVIII (1-21), inviting the reader to visualise and composite a count of body parts from five battles in Southern Italy; and then the protagonist’s loss of bodily sensation in *Inferno* XXXIV (22-27), which is uncharacteristically short but constitutes, I suggest, a preliminary exercise in enactive imagining from abstraction, because there *is* no sensory input data; Dante is completely numb. There are two exercises in *Purgatorio*, both mental acts that recruit *embodied* experience: Virgil’s visual compositing exercise in *Purgatorio* IV (58-84) which offers a guided inversion of common perception; and an invitation in *Purgatorio* XVII (1-12) to reconstruct, through the simile of a mole, a synaesthetic embodied experience of ‘seeing’ through the skin as the sun gradually penetrates the hill-fog. And finally, there are three in

⁵⁰ Provisional, based on preliminary analysis.

Paradiso, each a guided rehearsal in constructing a *dynamic, enactive* mental model: Beatrice's discussion of the science of optics in *Paradiso* II (91-111); the constructed simile of the universe at *Paradiso* X (7-21) that deploys natural phenomena to guide the imaginative construction and animation of a model of the universe; and finally, in *Paradiso* XIII (1-21), the most demanding, requiring near-simultaneous engagement of all the higher cognitive functions in a guided enactment imagination exercise. Rather than simply visualising descriptive data, it invites the reader to imaginatively construct for herself, from the constituent stars in the night sky, a multi-dimensional, dynamic, embodied simile against which she might then understand, by analogy, the contemporaneous experience of the journeying Dante as the lights of the theologians circle him in the heaven of the Sun.

Fig. 6. Map of the nine proposed 'narrative training' exercises in the 'Commedia'.



It may be argued that most of the similes in the poem similarly carry an invitation to cognitive rehearsal, and also that much of the narration of *Paradiso* consists of exercises in abstract reasoning, but I suggest that two key elements differentiate the narrative training exercises. The first is the direct address to the reader that signals each exercise, disrupting epistemic immersion and strategically priming the reader's cognitions, I propose, for a shift

into a more active, participatory engagement with the text. The second is their algorithmic construction, that in computational theory of mind would signal a *learner* mode (and makes the exercises typically longer than the three to six verses of the majority of Dante's similes).⁵¹ My focus here is to establish the principle and mechanics of the narrative training model, so I explore as an example the last of the shade-serpent transmutations in *Inferno* XXV.

In the seventh bolgia, where the thieves are punished, in a narration that spans *Inferno* XXIV and XXV, the journeying Dante and Virgil look on from their vantage point on the arch that straddles the seventh ditch as the shades are subjected to repeated physical ambush by serpents and serpent-derivatives.⁵² Each ambush catalyses a relentless cycle of transmutation, either of degeneration and regeneration through fire into ash that spontaneously reanimates (described in the first short sequence in canto XXIV, lines 97-105), or by progressive mutual transformation into one another's form, as in the second and third transmutations, evoked at greater length and with much greater demands on the cognitions, in canto XXV (lines 46-78 and 79-137 respectively).

The full narrative event of the third transmutation extends across fifty-eight lines, of which the central frame-by-frame narration sequence occupies over half (thirty-three lines, from line 103 to 135). The event begins when a tiny *serpentello*, 'livido e nero come gran di pepe' (84), punctures the belly-button of the last of the three shades, triggering the algorithmic procedure of the transmutation that is explicitly signposted in the narration, 'Insieme si rispuosero a tai norme' (103), and then enacted in the narrative as the reader's visual frame is directed metronomically from *serpentello* to shade to mentally model each step in turn. The schema in *Figure 7* below illustrates the dexterity necessary in the reader's mental modelling of visual perception, sometimes switching between frames even in the middle of a line:

⁵¹ Phenomenologist Hubert Dreyfus discusses a 'learner' mode in *What Computers Can't Do*, in terms of the different cognitive tasks implied in learning a skill and deployment of that skill as expert. Hubert Dreyfus, *What Computers Can't Do: A Critique of Artificial Reason* (New York: Harper and Row, 1972), p. xxii.

⁵² A reptilian six-legged variety in the second transmutation ('un serpente con sei piè', XXV. 50); a miniature serpent in the third ('un serpentello', XXV. 83).

Over the course of these thirty-three lines, twenty-five individual processes are described: a vast amount of data for the reader to process. We start by watching the serpent bifurcate his tail; then are invited to look across to see the shade, ‘*l feruto*’ (105), dragging his legs together; we continue looking to see his legs knit together at the thigh; then look back to see the serpent’s bifurcated tail complete its morphing into human lower limbs. And so on, through the arms/front limbs, the mid-section, the growth/loss of hair, the sudden exchange of stance from prone to erect and vice versa (‘*l’un si levò e l’altro cadde giuso*’, 121), through the nose/snout, the facial flesh, the ears, and finally the tongue.

The repeated swinging of the reader’s visual frame across the horizontal plane makes the sequence uncomfortable to read, like watching a tennis match at overly close quarters; and once the lateral motion has been established, a series of swings through the vertical axis is added, sending the reader’s eye up and down, up and down (121, as the creatures switch postures, then at 124 and 130), and then a zoom, from wide shot to close-up as their heads morph (124-26 and 130-32). Different to the authentic verisimilitude offered by a technique such as Steadicam, discussed earlier, this is akin to the distancing effect of the fixed track camera using the zoom or the overly enthusiastic amateur cameraman using a hand-held camera to relentlessly pursue action and response with no thought for his viewer’s experience. The journeying Dante protagonist is explicitly left with a sense of visual confusion, ‘*E avvegna che li occhi miei confusi | fossero alquanto e l’animo smagato*’ (145-46), and the reader may very well feel the same, particularly if she has tried to read the sequence at the same apparently real-time pace at which it is narrated.⁵³

However, the overload of information, I propose, is designed precisely to invite the reader to radically slow her pace of reading. If she reads at real-time pace, the sheer volume of visual data makes it very hard to engage anything but her suppositional imagination, sketching only an outline, getting just an approximate idea of the specific processes of the transmutation; and relying on a propositional pay-off at the end to explicitly *tell* her what it all means. But by slowing her pace and modelling each data point frame-by-frame, taking time to visualise, to look properly, to see what is really there, she experiences a different way

⁵³ Of course, the narrator himself is *not* confused, fully able to re-create, from memory, and with tremendously detailed observation, the entire experience. Interestingly, whilst ‘*abborra*’ is normally considered in its sense of ‘to wander’ or ‘to be confused’, this evidence perhaps lends support to E. G. Parodi’s etymological tracing of ‘*abborra*’ to the dialect word *abbarrucciare*, meaning ‘to throw things around in confusion’, with its emphasis on wilful and deliberate obfuscation (as noted in Singleton’s gloss on *Inf.*, XXV. 144), lending further support to my proposal that this authorial attention to the reader’s cognitions is strategic.

of imagining, one more likely to trigger the embodied simulation necessary for a realistic illusion of self-presence in the narrated space. In inviting the reader to practise the construction of her own realistic illusion of self-presence in a highly-mediated way on these nine occasions in the text, the poem prepares the reader, I suggest, to learn how to independently and autonomously participate in the construction of meaning in the abstract space of *Paradiso*. In addition to these nine ‘learner mode’ exercises, the poem is full of other elective opportunities to spontaneously deploy her new cognitive skills, in the manifold gaps in the text, as I shall explore next.

5.2.3 Narration through gaps in the text: similes and ellipses

Literary theorist Wolfgang Iser’s indeterminacy hypothesis proposes that ‘the written part of the text gives us the knowledge, but it is the unwritten part that gives us the opportunity to picture things; indeed, without the elements of indeterminacy, the gaps in the text, we should not be able to use our imagination’.⁵⁴ All narrative texts are inherently ‘gappy’ to a certain extent, because it is neither possible (in terms of volume of description) nor desirable (in terms of reader engagement) to describe every detail of the people, places and events evoked; so in any text, readers must constantly make inferences to fill in these gaps to establish coherence.⁵⁵ However, in this section I shall propose that Dante’s deployment of two particular types of ‘gap’, the *simile* and the *narrative ellipsis*, radically goes beyond this narrative convention of essential readability and instead reveals itself to be a strategy that invites progressively more agential and creative reader participation, supporting the exceptional ‘openness’ of the *Commedia*.

To understand why we might be able to consider the narration of gaps in the *Commedia* in a new light, I borrow from cognitive theorist Emily Troscianko on recent developments in the so-called ‘imagery debate’ to consider how this might change our understanding of how readers construct mental models. Troscianko writes that mental models have traditionally

⁵⁴ Iser, p. 283.

⁵⁵ I borrow the term ‘gappy’ from Ellen Spolsky. See: Ellen Spolsky, *Gaps in Nature: Literary Interpretation and the Modular Mind* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1993). Spolsky herself develops this notion and terminology of ‘gappiness’ in relation to the construction of meaning from a text from Dennett’s work on consciousness. Further, on inference and coherence, see Graesser: Arthur Graesser and others, ‘Constructing Inferences during Narrative Text Comprehension’, *Psychological Review*, 101, 3 (1994), 371-95.

been assumed to be either ‘pictorial’ [Kosslyn, 1980] or ‘propositional’ [Pylyshyn, 2003].⁵⁶ Pictorialists such as Stephen Kosslyn pursued ‘a theory of mental imagery based on pictorial, or analogue representation’ (p. 181) – a ‘depictive’ model (p. 182); Propositionalists like Zenon Pylyshyn proposed instead that the content of visual and imaginative experience is encoded in a language-like (rather than analogous) form. However, an emerging line of thought in cognitive poetics, attributed to Nigel Thomas (1999, 2014) and rooted in the embodied models of cognition discussed in Chapter 2, now suggests instead that mental models also carry perceptual and motoric information, making them *embodied* and *dynamic* in form; or *enactive*, in Troscianko’s terms.⁵⁷ This leads Troscianko to conclude that ‘we need to get away from the notion of representation – pictorial or propositional – as the explanatory medium and think about imagining as enactive, that is, as a way of acting’ (p. 181). In this enactive account, ‘the role of representation is reduced to the neural encoding of instructions for exploring the world, with knowledge of [...] how the visual input would change if I or the object I’m looking at were to move’ (p. 184). ‘Imagining isn’t about building up a picture in the head, but is a form of ongoing exploration just as is seeing’ (p. 186).

This is consistent with current thinking in neuroscience. Crucially, ‘Images are not just visual’, writes neuroscientist Antonio Damasio, nor static; and nor are they always conscious.⁵⁸ Rather than conceiving of a mental model primarily as something we *see* – a

⁵⁶ Troscianko, ‘Reading Imaginatively’, p. 181-83. The referenced works are: Stephen M. Kosslyn, *Image and Mind* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1980), and Zenon Pylyshyn, *Seeing and Visualising: It’s Not What You Think* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2003).

⁵⁷ Nigel J.T. Thomas, ‘Are Theories of Imagery Theories of Imagination? An Active Perception Approach to Conscious Mental Content’, *Cognitive Science*, 23, 2 (1999), 207-45.

⁵⁸ Damasio writes: ‘*Images Are Not Just Visual*: By the term images I mean mental patterns with a structure built with the tokens of each of the sensory modalities – visual, auditory, olfactory, gustatory, and somatosensory. The somatosensory modality [...] includes varied forms of sense: touch, muscular, temperature, pain, visceral, and vestibular. The word “image” does not refer to visual image alone. There is nothing static about images either. The word also refers to sound images such as those caused by music or the wind, and to the somatosensory images that Einstein used in his mental problem solving [and refers to as ‘muscular’ images]. Images in all modalities “depict” processes and entities of all kinds, concrete as well as abstract. | Images may be conscious or unconscious. It should be noted, however, that not all the images the brain constructs are made conscious. There are simply too many images being generated and too much competition for the relatively small window of mind in which images can be made conscious – the window, that is, in which images are accompanied by a sense that we are apprehending them and that, as a consequence, are properly attended.’ *The Feeling of What Happens* (pp. 318-19; formatting in original).

kind of projected image or picture in the mind that we view as external observer (like the Cartesian theatre model) and come to understand through deciphering its meaning – we might conceive of it instead as something we experience or *feel*: a dynamic, multi-sensory, multi-modal series of cognitive operations that in combination support the re-presentation or simulation of a particular ‘body state’, or feeling in the body.

Troscianko noted, in 2013, that the enactive view that ‘has so far failed to break the deadlock’ of the imagery debate, probably because the historical primacy of visual representation in (Cartesian) culture has created a ‘folk-psychological understanding of vision and imagination as working pictorially’.⁵⁹ But I would suggest that in terms of cognitive narrative theory, this is precisely where the notion of embodied simulation is taking us; towards an understanding of an interaction with the text based on a dynamic, enactive simulation, rather than mentally representing a sequence of static images.

Further, I suggest that precisely such a progression from pictorial to enactive mental modelling is one that the poem invites the reader to make over the course of the narrative, through the mini frameworks instantiated by the hundreds of similes and ellipses in the poem that invite progressively more dynamic work, and support a capacity to sustain an increasingly realistic internal model of the interactions with the blessed.⁶⁰ The ‘gappiness’ that Dante’s similes and ellipses constitute in the *Commedia*, I suggest, invites the brain to do the work of making inferences dynamically, just as we do in real life, and in this way underwrite the illusion of realistic self-presence in the virtual space of Dante’s afterlife.⁶¹

In the next two sections, I set out the principle and a preliminary quantification of the instances of such gaps in the poem to indicate the scale of Dante’s narrative strategy of inviting the reader to import her own cognitive data into the space of the poem from both memory and imagination, examining firstly how Dante deploys the *simile* as invitation to participate, and secondly, the *narrative ellipsis*.

Similes

⁵⁹ Troscianko, p. 181, p. 187.

⁶⁰ The *Commedia* might be a particularly interesting text to explore in these terms, not only because of the way it might help us understand reader reception and how this has changed over time from oral to print to screen, and now digital, cultures, but also because we need to more properly understand how a Cartesian habit of thinking critically in pictorial terms might have influenced scholarship.

⁶¹ I would propose that as a strategy, ‘gappiness’ really works when deployed with the requisite skill: consider the ‘preposterousness’ (Hollander’s term) of the descent on Geryon that convinces nonetheless (see Chapter 3).

A simile is a figure of speech that invites the reader to compare one thing with another whereby ‘A remains A and B remains B’, in Spitzer’s phrase.⁶² In the *Commedia* similes are typically signposted by such connecting words as ‘come [...], così [...], ‘qual è [...], cotal [...], ‘si [...], così [...]’ and occasionally ‘similmente’ or ‘non altrimenti’. Such connectors are mildly disruptive; much less forcefully so than the mechanism of the direct address, but sufficient nonetheless to signal a switch in cognitive mode to the reader’s brain.

A simile serves to make a phenomenon vivid, recognisable and imaginable, facilitating the construction of a mental model by giving the reader components she can composite from memory: if she has seen a ferry backing out from a quay, if she has been up a hill in the fog and witnessed a watery sun breaking through, if she has ever stuck, or thought about sticking, her finger in a fire, she can begin, respectively, to visualise the movement of Geryon as he prepares for downward flight, to feel how the journeying Dante felt as he re-emerged into the sun from the darkness of the terrace of Wrath, to experience what it means to ascend the celestial ladder.⁶³ The reader is beginning to populate the simulation of Dante’s narrated events with her own recreated experiences and her own embodied knowledge: not only in terms of the visual, but the sensory, the motor, the visceral, and ultimately, the fully experiential in a virtual sense. In inviting the reader to hold in balance two concepts in her mind, using one to imaginatively construct the other, the simile constitutes another kind of ‘gap’ in the tissue of the text, inviting the reader to use things she knows – body states, experience of events, phenomena witnessed – to enrich her grasp of phenomena or experiences she does not, or cannot, know directly in our material reality.

The simile has traditionally been characterised in narrative theory as a *comparison statement* (Aristotle’s *Rhetoric*; I.A. Richards’ *Philosophy of Rhetoric*), but it has proven remarkably difficult to establish from a literature review for the purposes of my analysis of

⁶² In ‘The Addresses’, Spitzer writes: ‘It may be noted that Dante’s favourite device is not the metaphor in which A becomes B, but the simile in which A remains A and B remains B; indeed, the whole *Commedia* could be said to be one great simile in which A (the Beyond) is explained in terms of B (this earth)’ (p. 153). Of metaphor, Mazzeo comments: ‘Both poetry and philosophy use metaphor to express truths which would be otherwise inexpressible. There is a considerable difference between this view and the conception in the *Convivio* of poetic metaphor as a beautiful lie embellishing a truth, sweetening some abstract moral idea’ (p. 41).

⁶³ The descent on Geryon in *Inferno* XVII (100-01); the journeying Dante’s experience of emerging from the darkness of the terrace of Anger into the sun again, in *Purgatorio* XVII (1-12); the journeying Dante’s experience of his ascent up the celestial ladder in *Paradiso* XXII (109-11), respectively.

the *Commedia* how readers actually understand or make meaning from similes (by comparison with an extensive body of work on metaphor including conceptual metaphor theory and embodied theories of metaphor), and how similes invite an effect in the reader.⁶⁴ My hypothesis in relation to the *Commedia* is that similes are deployed (as already discussed in relation to narrative training) to invite and hone in the reader the skill of dynamic, enactive mental modelling, but also to support the reader in learning to incorporate the cognitive data from her own experiences into the model, thereby re-experiencing old memories in a new context or creating new memories. I propose this because I find evidence, as I shall outline below, of a progression in Dante's narration from a prevalence of similes rooted in natural phenomena that are observable but not directly modellable (the *vehicle* – the figurative expression – is not an entity the human protagonist can fully simulate; for example, a whistling fire-brand), to an increasing presence of similes based in visceral human body states that the reader can directly reproduce in her own right.⁶⁵ I suggest that Dante achieves this by deploying a particular mode of *narration through simile*, evidenced both through the quantity and deployment of similes and the progression in the type of imaginative work they invite the reader to do.

Whilst there is a rich history of commentary and scholarship relating to individual similes in the *Commedia* and some important work classifying different perceived categories of similes, there does not appear to have been any assessment of the cumulative and progressive effect of deployment of the simile as mode of narration or an analytically productive quantification (rather than the straightforward census popular with late nineteenth

⁶⁴ A recent doctoral thesis by Adam Gargani on this subject, *Poetic Comparisons: How Similes are Understood*, finds that 'there has yet to be a monograph published in English on the topic of how similes are understood' (p. 1), suggesting that '[t]here is some confusion in the field of figurative language studies over the definition of simile. Moreover, metaphor is often conflated with simile. I claim that these two factors have led to a situation which is not conducive to research on how similes are understood' (p. 2). Gargani concludes that there is a requirement for simile theory to better understand the effects of specifically *poetic* language (as opposed to literal comparisons). Adam Gargani, 'Poetic Comparisons: How Similes are Understood' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Salford, 2014). There is certainly further work that could be done in relation to similes in the *Commedia* to explore some of Gargani's ideas and to seek to add to discussions about the differing effects of metaphor and simile on reader understanding and participation.

⁶⁵ I borrow the term *vehicle* here from Richards' work on metaphors, in which the *vehicle* is the thing, or figurative expression, that constitutes the comparison, and the *tenor* is the subject. For example: 'Come le rane [*vehicle*] innanzi a la nimica | biscia per l'acqua si dileguan tutte, | fin ch'a la terra ciascuna s'abbica, | vid' io più di mille anime distrutte [*tenor*]' (*Inf.*, IX. 76-79). I. A. Richards, *The Philosophy of Rhetoric* [1936] (London: Oxford University Press, 1965).

century critics).⁶⁶ However, the vast quantity of similes in the poem – they occupy more than a fifth of all the verses of narration in the poem – makes narration through simile such an extraordinarily prevalent mode in the *Commedia* that it seems essential (and arguably remarkable in its omission hitherto) to explore whether there is a strategy at work.

The poem, as mentioned earlier, consists of some fourteen thousand verses, of which narration occupies just under half (the balance accounted for by the direct speech of the interacting souls, Virgil, Beatrice, and the journeying Dante). Similes occupy almost thirteen hundred verses, or about twenty per cent of all the poem's verses of narration.⁶⁷ In *Inferno*

⁶⁶ Important studies include Madison Sowell's essay (Madison U. Sowell, 'A Bibliography of the Dantean Simile to 1981', *Dante Studies*, 101 (1983), 167-80), which rues 'the paucity of books relating to this subject' (p. 170); James Applewhite's essay (James Applewhite, 'Dante's Use of the Extended Simile in the *Inferno*', *Italica*, 41, 3 (1964), 294-309), that opens with a series of remarks about the peak in scholarship in 'tabulation of the similes' at the end of the nineteenth century, including Giovanni Franciosi's 'compilation', and Luigi Venturi's more elaborate 'explication' that 'arrives at an indication of the newness of many of Dante's similes, as well as the accuracy of the descriptive power of the poet' (p. 294); C. S. Lewis' essay (C. S. Lewis, 'Dante's Similes', *Nottingham Medieval Studies*, 9 (1965), 32-41), which defined four types of Dantean simile, 'Virgilian or Homeric', 'pictorial', 'psychological', 'metaphysical'; Richard Lansing's study (Richard Lansing, *From Image to Idea: A Study of the Simile in Dante's 'Commedia'* (Ravenna: Longo, 1977)), in which he concludes that 'Dante's similes present images that are immediately comprehensible in a visual sense, but at the same time their full significance cannot be comprehended without reference to a wider context' (p. 168); and Eric S. Mallin's essay (Eric S. Mallin, 'The False Simile in Dante's *Commedia*', *Dante Studies*, 102 (1984), 15-36) that explores a notion of a type of simile – his eponymous 'false simile' – that, he suggests, effectively compares A with A; a type of simile he proposes to be identical with Lansing's 'pseudosimile' and C. S. Lewis' 'psychological simile'. This is a very interesting discussion that I explore in my further work as I read the function of Mallin's 'pseudosimile' in a different way.

⁶⁷ More precisely, as previously discussed: the poem consists of 14,233 verses; narration occupies 6,590 lines, compared with 7,643 verses of direct discourse. If similes occupy 1,285 lines of the poem (my provisional count), this equates to 21% of the poem's narration, or 9% of the total poem. As with all quantitative analysis of narrative devices in the *Commedia*, necessary judgments have been imposed on, for example, where a simile precisely starts and finishes. It is interesting to note that Dante uses similes only very rarely in direct speech with, on this preliminary analysis at least, only eight instances where this happens, seven of which occur in *Paradiso*: Gerard (*Purg.*, XVIII. 58-59); Beatrice (*Par.*, I. 133-35, IV. 82-84, XVIII. 35-36); Cacciaguida (*Par.*, XVII. 46-48); the Justice Eagle (*Par.*, XIX. 58-63); the journeying Dante protagonist to St Benedict (*Par.*, XXII. 55-57); and St Bernard (*Par.*, XXXII. 139-41). Further research is needed to explore why this should be the case, but we might make a preliminary inference that in conversation, we immediately and directly simulate how something feels through present and reciprocal interaction via mechanisms such as kinaesthetic empathy (as set out in Chapter 4), whilst in retrospective narration this is not possible, so this present simulation is aided instead by recruiting the reader's own previous lived experience. In fact, 97% of all the instances of similes noted in this analysis occur in the poem's narration; and primarily in the Implied Author narrating instance (see the section on

and *Purgatorio*, the single-terzina simile is more prevalent (accounting for forty-four per cent of all cases across the poem in total); in *Paradiso*, the double-terzina simile is more common (thirty-seven per cent); and in one in five cases (nineteen per cent), the comparison is extended over three or more terzine (found at similar levels across all three canticles).⁶⁸ This equates to a total of over two hundred similes in the poem (229), meaning the reader encounters on average between two and three similes per canto.⁶⁹ Such prevalence, I suggest, means that the way the reader habitually engages with the simile as narrative device – with greater or lesser cognitive effort, and with more or less imaginative skill – will have a major impact on her overall interaction with the poem, and it seems surprising then that such relatively little attention seems to have been paid to narration through simile as a mode of narration.

In his analysis of the ‘curious comparison’ relating to the speed of the sky in *Paradiso* II, Charles Singleton alludes to the highly concentrated cognitive effort of the visual imagination, of counter-factual reasoning (imagining how things could be otherwise), and of dynamic enactive imagination, that can be required to truly grasp the comparison in many of Dante’s similes. In the single-terzina simile that ends the lengthy direct address to the reader in *Paradiso* II, Dante narrates that his thirst to arrive at the encounter with God bears him on almost as rapidly as the movement of the skies seen down here on earth:

La concreata e perpetua sete
del deiforme regno cen portava

narrating instances in this chapter): when the reader participates in the construction of similes, she is principally interacting with the omniscient, lyrical, authoritative creator of the poem as system.

⁶⁸ We might infer that the increase in double-terzina similes in *Paradiso* more explicitly invites the reader to award equal weight to each component of the simile, both the material analogue and the after-life subject. This establishes, I propose, a mental oscillation between the two phenomena that supports a sense of holding two concepts simultaneously in her mind, honing her capacity for rapid cognitive switching that is so important in balancing the reader’s sense of identification with the journeying Dante protagonist with her own experience of participation in the events of the virtual space.

⁶⁹ I have included only those comparisons where Dante clearly sets out the qualities of the phenomenon with which he is inviting comparison; I have excluded for now those cases, of which there are only a handful, and which normally do not extend beyond a single verse, where the qualities are not explicit and must be inferred. I exclude for now and set aside as a further significant piece of work, the compact lyrical evocation of metaphor, such as Charon’s ‘occhi di bragia’ (*Inf.*, III. 109), or the ‘tristo sacco’ that is Maometto’s colon (*Inf.*, XXVIII. 25).

veloci quasi come 'l ciel vedete. (*Par.*, II. 19-21)

Singleton observes in his commentary that:

we are not ordinarily conscious of the sky's motion. If, however, we follow the position of a heavenly body from hour to hour, we discover that in a very brief period it traverses an immense distance. The sky, without seeming to move at all, is really travelling with inconceivable velocity; and so we were doing.⁷⁰

Like the embodied enactment of a different standpoint discussed in Chapter 3 in Beatrice's reminder to the journeying Dante that 'tu non se' in terra' (*Par.*, I. 91), if the reader is to grasp the true nature of this simile she will need to pause and dynamically visualise this phenomenon of the apparently moving sky (which may involve cognitive activities of remembering, thinking about, or going out and observing for herself in real time, 'follow[ing] the position of a heavenly body from hour to hour') in order to enact the necessary adjustment in perception that will enable her to imaginatively construct the analogy by which she can understand the journeying Dante's experience ofvection in this space.⁷¹ To do so fully requires no small investment of cognitive resource and time and this, I suggest, is what the strategy of narration through simile both invites and rewards.

Further, whilst we do not see a sizeable increase in the *number* of similes in *Paradiso* compared with *Inferno* (as perhaps might have been expected), there *is* an important way in which the reader's interaction with the simile is invited to change radically as the poem progresses. This progression is consistent with that seen in the narrative training exercises; that is, from a relatively straightforward model of visualisation, or what is observable, in *Inferno*, to a dynamic, enactive model in *Paradiso*, that hones and rewards a capacity for enactive imagination based in a reproduction of the generative processes of consciousness

⁷⁰ Singleton, gloss on *Par.*, II. 21.

⁷¹ It is worth noting here that the narration explicitly separates the reader(s) from not only the journeying Dante but also the narrating Dante through the plural vocative 'voi' ('vedete', 21), rather than 'noi'. Of course, there is already a choice of 'voi's with which the reader might electively identify: the 'voi' in the 'picciolletta barca' (1), counselled to turn back; the 'voialtri pochi' (10) who are fit to set out across the waters of *Paradiso*. The participatory reader, we might infer, might put greater cognitive resources behind imaginatively enacting this comparison, the more fully to simulate the journeying Dante's experience for herself; the spectating reader, by contrast, may be more anxious simply to sketch the meaning and turn the page to know where Dante's journey will take him next.

that underpin the experience of realistic self-presence, even in the abstract interaction with the divine.⁷² Amongst the powerful visual images of observable phenomena in *Inferno*, for example, we might consider the Minotaur in the first circle of hell, described as jerking about – ‘qua e là saltella’ – like a mortally wounded bull:

Qual è quel toro che si slaccia in quella
c’ha ricevuto già ’l colpo mortale,
che gir non sa, ma qua e là saltella,
vid’ io lo Minotauro far cotale. (*Inf.*, XII. 22-25)

The reader, I suggest, is invited to model *not* the experience of either *vehicle* or *tenor* (direct modelling; that is, to experience for herself what it feels like to be a wounded bull or a jerking minotaur), but instead to model the journeying Dante’s experience of *seeing* this sight: spectating; that is, experiencing how such a sight might make her feel. Further, there is the extended simile in *Inferno XXI* of the busy scene of Venetian shipbuilders boiling up pitch (vehicle) and working away on boat hulls that is used to convey – with an arguably deliberately obfuscating superfluity in the data of individual industry – the detail of the thick black substance, the ‘pegola spessa’ (17) (tenor), that bubbles and splashes onto the banks in Malebolge.⁷³ The journeying Dante is reduced to simply staring, mesmerised (‘la giù fisamente mirava’, 22): his cognitive resources too occupied with the visual data before him to pay attention to the approaching threat of the ‘diavol nero’ (29). Further, in *Inferno XXI*, the dog unleashed to chase a thief, the chefs’ boys forking simmering meat, the dogs rushing on a pleading tramp; and in the very pit of Hell, Antaeus’ posture that has its analogue in the optical illusion of the Garisenda tower that looks like it is falling when a cloud passes behind, the Danube that was never so thickly frozen as Hell’s ice lake, the experience of the first sight of Satan compared with seeing the looming appearance of a windmill turning in thick fog or

⁷² The progression is by no means wholly linear: there are instances of each of the different modes of simile in all cantos, and there are opportunities for enactment imagination throughout the poem.

⁷³ ‘Quale ne l’arzanà de’ Viniziani | bolle l’inverno la tenace pece | a rimpalmare i legni lor non sani, | ché navicar non ponno – in quella vece | chi fa suo legno novo e chi ristoppa | le coste a quel che più viaggi fece; | chi ribatte da proda e chi da poppa; | altri fa remi e altri volge sarte; | chi terzeruolo e artimon rintoppa –: | tal, non per foco ma per divin’ arte, | bollia là giuso una pegola spessa, | che ’nviscava la ripa d’ogne parte. | I’ vedea lei, ma non vedëa in essa | mai che le bolle che ’l bollor levava, | e gonfiar tutta, e riseder compressa’ (*Inf.*, XXI. 7-21).

black night: all powerful images inviting deployment of and burnishing the reader's visual imagination, all supporting the illusion of spatial presence, but not yet fully exercising the reader's capacity to experience herself as *tenor* and to directly model the *vehicle* in her own right.⁷⁴

Proficiency in the skill of visual imagination is an essential first step, I propose, to becoming adept in the more challenging skill of *enactment* (dynamic, embodied) imagination. In *Paradiso*, I suggest, the emphasis shifts towards directly modellable and enactable similes. Some of the more self-evident cases of such similes include, for example, the compound simile of the paralysing effect of making a choice between two comparable options that opens *Paradiso* IV, as the journeying Dante is prevented from speaking by an inner tension of doubt and desire:

Intra due cibi, distanti e moventi
d'un modo, prima si morria di fame,
che liber' omo l'un recasse ai denti;
sì si starebbe un agno intra due brame
di fieri lupi, igualmente temendo;
sì si starebbe un cane intra due dame:
per che, s'i' mi tacea, me non riprendo,
da li miei dubbi d'un modo sospinto,
poi ch'era necessario, né commendo. (*Par.*, IV. 1-9)

Even distinguishing what is *tenor* and what is *vehicle* here is not straightforward. The usual order – *vehicle*, *tenor* – is inverted, and there appear to be two *vehicles*, which in combination express the inner conflict and the complexity of the paradox: the vulnerable lamb that stands between two wolves; the hound rendered powerless between two does. The *tenor*, then, is the impersonal 'si' (2), qualified in the next verse with 'omo' (3): a person: 'prima *si* morria di fame, | che liber' omo l'un recasse ai denti' (2-3). Through the twin *vehicles*, the reader is invited to model a complex visceral experience (an inner conflict of doubt and desire), requiring *enactment* imagination rather than visualisation alone; but importantly, the *tenor*, the universal 'omo', opens a space into which she can directly project her own identity. She is

⁷⁴ *Inf.*, XXI. 43-45; 55-57; 67-71, respectively. In the pit of hell: *Inf.*, XXXI. 136-40; XXXII. 25-30; XXXIV. 4-7, respectively.

invited to imagine *for herself* how it would feel to starve to death through paralysis of choice; then to elaborate this visceral feeling imaginatively through modelling the lamb and the hound; and only then is she invited to project this back onto the journeying Dante in order to empathise with and participate in his experience. We might consider too the invitation to visceral enactment through the simile of the dancers whose exultation momentarily quickens their gestures, that evokes the intensified movement of the lights of the Christian philosophers in the Heaven of the Sun when Beatrice speaks; or the speed at which a lady's blush subsides that expresses the journeying Dante's experience of his sixth ascent; or the instinctual stretching upwards of the lights in the Heaven of the Fixed Stars with love towards Mary that is compared to the suckling baby that, replete, holds out its arms to its mother; or, in the Empyrean, the 'barbari' stupefied at seeing the treasures of Rome, the pilgrims that gaze freely around the temple, and the Croatians come to view the Veronica.⁷⁵ In each case, I suggest, the narration invites the reader to independently model the associated visceral body state for herself, but this takes real cognitive work, time, and skill.

My suggestion, then, is that the strategy of narration through simile in the *Commedia* is deployed to repeatedly open up spaces in the text for increasingly enactive acts of imaginative participation, maximising the reader's 'personalisation' of the journey. Finally, I turn to the second major component in Dante's strategy of narratological 'gappiness' as an invitation to self-presence: the narrative ellipsis.

Ellipses

With deceptive simplicity, Mieke Bal characterises the narrative ellipsis as 'that which has been omitted'.⁷⁶ In this section, I shall propose that Dante's deployment of narrative ellipses in the *Commedia* is more complex: some ellipses invite and reward participation (yielding greater understanding or opportunities for participation with a community); others are distractions or blind alleys (a Ulyssean pursuit of knowledge for its own sake). To engage well with the ellipsis, then, the reader must also deploy her skills of judgment and reasoning.

As discussed previously, all texts, of necessity, deploy narrative ellipsis in the interests of readability. The human brain, being adapted to storytelling as a means of making meaning,

⁷⁵ *Par.*, XIV. 19-24, XVIII. 64-68, XXIII. 121-25, respectively. In the Empyrean; all in XXXI, 31-40, 43-48, 103-11, respectively.

⁷⁶ Mieke Bal, *Narratology: Introduction to the Theory of Narrative*, 3rd edn (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2009), p. 101.

is adept in handling the gaps that narrative ellipses frame without disrupting immersion in the narrative, making inferences as required in order to support what cognitive psychologists McKoon and Ratcliff have termed ‘local coherence’, or an essential understanding of narrated events.⁷⁷ However, I would suggest that Dante frequently *points* to his ellipses, to the extent that on many occasions the ellipsis highlights or draws attention to the very thing it ostensibly excises. Consequently, we might infer a strategy to be at work.

In *Inferno* IX, for example, Virgil reveals the astonishing information that he has travelled through Hell before. But his account is cut short by a narrative ellipsis: ‘E altro disse, ma non l’ho a mente’ (34), writes the narrating Dante, turning instead to the fire leaping from the top of the gates of Hell that is now occupying the journeying Dante. Such a transition could have been effected with minimal disruption with a simple jump-cut, as occurs elsewhere in the poem.⁷⁸ It is the announcement of the ellipsis that disrupts the reader’s automatic processes of cognitive assimilation, rendering present – and thereby significant – the narrating Dante’s silencing of Virgil, inviting questions. What did Virgil say? Why is the narrating Dante – Virgil’s former pupil in the afterlife and now returned and re-presenting his experience – so casually dismissive of the significance of Virgil’s earlier journey? There are some three hundred ellipses that draw attention to themselves in some way in the poem.⁷⁹

I suggest that narrative ellipses are usually deployed in the *Commedia* for two purposes. The first is the simple reinforcement of a principle that imaginative participation in an artefact is more powerful than spectatorship, since any first-person narrative account will be necessarily selective, subjective, and partial – as set up from the very beginning of *Inferno*: ‘ma per trattar del ben ch’i vi trovai, | dirò de l’altre cose ch’i v’ho scorte’ (*Inf.*, I. 8-9; my emphasis). Of necessity, things will be excluded. This is a failure of convention to which all mediated narrative accounts are subject. Encountering something in person, as discussed in Chapter 1 in relation to the journeying Dante’s own necessary physical interaction with the ‘perdute genti’, will always yield a more powerful form of experience; this is the principle

⁷⁷ See McKoon and Ratcliff’s ‘minimalist hypothesis’: Gail McKoon and Roger Ratcliff, ‘Inference during Reading’, *Psychological Review*, 99, 3 (1992), 440-66 (p. 440).

⁷⁸ Compare, for example, several *terzine* later, the much more conventional jump-cut between the *Messo*’s departure and the re-commencement of the journey: ‘Poi si rivolse per la strada lorda, | e non fé motto a noi, ma fé sembante | d’omo cui altra cura stringa e morda | che quella di colui che li è davante; | e noi movemmo i piedi inver’ la terra’ (*Inf.*, IX. 100-04).

⁷⁹ My preliminary count for this thesis suggests a total of 336, distributed across the canticles as follows: *Inferno*, 35%; *Purgatorio*, 45%; *Paradiso*, 20%. We might hypothesise that the peak in *Purgatorio* is consistent with a mode of communal participatory learning in this canticle.

upon which I have proposed invitations to presence in the *Commedia* to rest. In *Inferno* XIV, Virgil enacts this principle himself, explicitly excising his own words, stopping himself from describing to the journeying Dante how the three rivers of hell all pool together in Cocytus, on the grounds that Dante will *see it for himself*, ‘tu lo vedrai, però qui non si conta’:

‘infin, là ove più non si dismonta,
fanno Cocito; e qual sia quello stagno
tu lo vedrai, però qui non si conta.’ (*Inf.*, XIV. 118-20)

By becoming skilled at and habituated in deriving inferences from narrative ellipses, the reader supports her own capacity to experience the illusion of realistic presence, liberating her from the spectatorship of the ‘desiderosi d’ascoltar’. This cognitive skill becomes progressively more important in *Paradiso* as the journeying Dante’s internal experience is increasingly elided in the narration, inviting the reader to construct more by inference than by simple embodied modelling the same body states herself. In *Paradiso* IV, for example, the narrating Dante reports that the journeying Dante’s desire is displayed on his face, ‘l mio disir dipinto | m’era nel viso’ (10-11); but crucially, because his face is not (visually) perceptible to the reader as it is (intuitively) perceptible to the blessed, the reader must rely on him to tell us how he feels. But in an explicit ellipsis, he is silent: ‘Io mi tacea’ (10). The reader must imaginatively model his desire independently.

Secondly, I suggest the ellipsis in the *Commedia* invites the reader to refine her skill in making judgments about the ‘gaps’ into which she will invest cognitive resource.⁸⁰ Not every invitation to participate will be benign or productive, and blanket cognitive participation – in the virtual world of the narrative as in the real world – would be overwhelming. Instead, the reader can learn to allocate attention and cognitive resource with *judgment*. In *Inferno* IX again, for example, we observe the destructive nature of unrestrained imaginative inference, or speculation, when the ellipsis (Virgil’s ‘parola tronca’) that follows his failure to gain access to the City of Dis sends the journeying Dante into imagining the worst without due cause, as he now acknowledges: ‘io traeva la parola tronca | forse a peggior sentenza che non

⁸⁰ As Zygmunt Barański remarks in his essay ‘The Temptations of a Heterodox Dante’, ‘Whenever Dante leaves things vague, it is because he wants us to employ our “intelletti sani” (*Inf.*, 9. 61).’ Zygmunt Barański, ‘The Temptations of a Heterodox Dante’, in *Dante and Heterodoxy: The Temptations of Thirteenth Century Radical Thought*, ed. by Maria Luisa Ardizzone (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2014), pp. 164-96, (p. 167).

tenne' (14-15).⁸¹ *Inferno* is rich in such opportunities to dally, be side-tracked, or lose the capacity for rational judgment as thoughts spiral out of control.

By contrast, *Purgatorio* repeatedly offers a model of the ellipsis that invites and actively rewards cognitive investment, including one particular type in the form of citations of openings to the psalms, hymns and prayers of the liturgy. As Helena Phillips-Robins has written in relation to the singing of the first psalm encountered in *Purgatorio* II, cited below, Dante repeatedly invokes, then immediately elides, the content of these familiar texts in *Purgatorio*:⁸²

'In exitu Isrâel de Aegypto'

cantavan tutti insieme ad una voce
con quanto di quel salmo è poscia scripto.

Poi fece il segno lor di santa croce;
ond' ei si gittar tutti in su la spiaggia:
ed el sen giù, come venne, veloce. (*Purg.*, II. 46-51)

Whilst the singing of only the first line of the psalm is explicitly and mimetically narrated in the text, the event of the singing of the entirety of the psalm is implied in the summary narration of line 48, 'con quanto di quel salmo è poscia scripto'; constituting, for Phillips-Robins, 'an implicit invitation to call to mind the rest of the psalm' (p. 12). Observing that 'the shades are blessed and set foot in Purgatory as soon as they have finished the psalm', she asks: 'What happens if we pause our reading of the canto to recite, sing, or open a Bible and read the whole of the psalm?' (p. 12). Her conclusion is that 'we are given a space in which to perform the psalm, to arrive at the souls' blessing with the same words on our lips, and to experience corporeally the shades' processional movement' (p. 16). The reader, then, who 'fills' this gap by breaking off reading and rehearsing for herself the psalm in full with her own virtual experience of the event will return to the poem, contemporaneous with the other penitents, at the same point of blessing, mentally receiving the same sign of the cross from

⁸¹ '[Virgil:] "Pur a noi converrà vincer la punga," | cominciò el, "se non... Tal ne s'offerse. | Oh quanto tarda a me ch'altri qui giunga!" | I' vidi ben sì com' ei ricoperse | lo cominciar con l'altro che poi venne, | che fur parole a le prime diverse; | ma nondimen paura il suo dir dienne, | perch' io traeva la parola tronca | forse a peggior sentenza che non tenne' (*Inf.*, IX. 7-15).

⁸² Helena Phillips-Robins, "'Cantavan tutti insieme ad una voce": Singing and Community in the *Commedia*', *Italian Studies*, 71, 1 (2016), 4-20 (p. 12).

the angel, ‘Poi fece il segno lor de la santa croce’ (49). The ellipsis has opened a very particular space for the reader’s direct participation, inviting her to imaginatively simulate her own experience of this element of the journey, imaginatively co-present with the other newly arrived penitential souls.

Many texts deliver a vivid empathic experience of identification with a protagonist, the sense of ‘your own heart beating inside their clothes’, in Flaubert’s terms in *Madame Bovary*. In the *Commedia*, the reader has access to the thoughts and feelings of the journeying Dante (and occasionally the narrating Dante too) through self-report, and additionally through the mechanism of embodied simulation that invites empathic identification with the journeying Dante’s personal experience through the interface of the body. Through the mechanisms of spatial presence, the poem invites the reader to experience the perceptual illusion of realistic presence in the narrated space; through those of social presence, it invites her to experience the illusion of presence at the encounters that take place there. In this chapter, I have suggested that the illusion of presence can be taken even further, with the reader invited to experience an illusion of personal agency in the virtual space: she can look *at* the journeying Dante, from outside, as she would in real life, but also directly through his eyes in an act of identification, switching constantly between focal views (the *narrating instances* model); she may on occasion experience the illusion that she can turn her own head in the narrated space, through narration of new objects constantly coming into her line of sight (*narration through mobile camera view*); she can experience the illusion of a reciprocal social relationship across virtual worlds (the mechanism of the *direct address to the reader*); she can hone her skills of imagination to transform the virtual into a powerful and sustained experience of an alternative reality (the *narrative training exercises*); and in response to the massive network of gaps in the text, she can constantly deploy components from her own memories and imagination, reframing and reformulating her own cognitive data to enrich and personalise her virtual experience.

Defining an experience of *selfhood*, presence theorists Waterworth and Riva propose that:

the basis for a conscious self is a feeling state that arises when organisms represent a largely non-conscious proto self in the process of being modified by objects [...]. This

gives the feeling, not just that something is happening, but that something is happening *to me*.⁸³

My suggestion is that the reader who responds to the invitations in the poem to self-presence maximises her likelihood of feeling ‘modified’ in some way or of experiencing a *change to the self* as a result of her interaction with the poem; a change in understanding, perhaps, or behaviour; or perhaps most powerfully, a change in belief.⁸⁴

So far, I have suggested that opportunities for participation in the *Commedia* are always mediated by the writer, through the deployment of narratological devices used strategically to invite participation at a particular point in the narrative and in a particular way.

In the last chapter of this thesis, I shall suggest that in fact the poem offers the reader to take participation one stage further: not waiting for an invitation to participate, but reflexively and electively identifying as personally implicated in the narrative, not just in the ‘noi’, ‘voi’, and ‘tu’ of the direct addresses, but even, ultimately, in the poem’s ‘io’.

⁸³ Waterworth and Riva, p. 14 (my emphasis).

⁸⁴ In digital culture terms, we might think of this as an event of ‘modding’ (modifying), and in terms of ‘hacking’ our own unconscious.

Chapter 6: First-Person Participation

‘First-person participation’, as I have conceived it in relation to the *Commedia*, is a *mode of reading* in which the reader responds to invitations to a particular form of enactive, or neurally embodied, imaginative elaboration, that leads to an unusually ‘realistic’ experience of the virtual world and the encounters within it, potentially yielding a powerful affective residue and a retrospective sense of some degree of personal transformation. We might recognise this effect as being similar to the dynamic and visceral imaginative participation in Christ’s suffering observed in the practice of medieval affective devotion. My suggestion is that the *Commedia* is full of explicit propositional cues and implicit visceral triggers to model the narrated body states and cognitive behaviours that emerge at the site of the encounters in the poem and which increase the desire in the individual for God.

Modelling is a powerful mode of experiential learning. As Moevs writes of the *Commedia*, ‘the point [...] is that understanding *is* practical’.¹ In a text, I propose that this effect can be triggered by particular models of narration that evoke not only a visual representation, but also, crucially, invite the reader to model or simulate how a particular experience *feels*.² This involves narration of visceral and somatic *body states*, such as the response of the narrated subject’s sensorimotor, visceromotor, and somatosensory systems to the environment, evoking how it feels to ‘be there’, rather than describing setting primarily through the visual; narration of gesture, posture, and facial expression to evoke affective states, rather than describing feelings through omniscient narration or character self-report; and highly mobile narration of point of view, inviting an illusion of personal agency in directing line of sight. In the responsive reader who is investing cognitive effort in imaginative elaboration as directed by the mechanisms of the text, body state narration invites the neural mirroring that triggers the same body state in the reader, opening a space for her to feel what the subject feels;³ the poem further invites her to personalise that experience

¹ Moevs, p. 171.

² Pertile has recently written that: ‘Having placed Paradise beyond the confines of human memory and language, what the poet claims to describe is not the reality of perfect bliss, but *his experience of approaching it*, the desire that propels him from the heaven of the Moon to the Empyrean – for the fulfilment that lies beyond that desire is also beyond the limits of poetry.’ ‘Works’ (p. 500, my emphasis).

³ Lakoff and Johnson link such an experience of imaginative projection with a notion of *transcendence*. They write that ‘[a] major function of the embodied mind is empathic. From birth we have the capacity to imitate others, to vividly imagine being another person, doing

through importing into the vast network of gaps in the text her own cognitive memorial and imaginative data.

First-person participation, I have suggested, is a *complementary mode of reading*. It is not a substitute for, but is in interplay with, other modes of reading, including the classic immersive storytelling mode of identification with a protagonist, and also with analytical and scholarly modes of reading.

It is an *elective*, not mandatory, mode of reading. The propositional content of the poem (what it means) can be grasped without reading in this mode; first-person participation layers upon this propositional understanding a grasp of how it feels to experience the journey to desire for the encounter with the divine, experienced through the viscera and the intuitive certainty of embodied knowledge (Gallese's 'direct' action understanding).⁴

It requires an alertness to the possibility of a *personal* productive cognitive interaction with a text: that is, an openness to finding oneself individually implicated in the poem's explicit invitations to model specific cognitive behaviours ('think', 'imagine', 'remember', 'read'...), and a willingness to invest creative cognitive effort in imaginative elaboration of the situations and encounters set out in the text.

First-person participation is a mode of reading that is *not commonplace* in the modern humanities with its habituation towards 'a distanced, measured hermeneutics', but in late medieval culture a similar mode of reading had become an established and widespread reading practice through the model of 'affective meditation' on spiritual texts.⁵ Such devotional texts invited active and personal cognitive engagement with the manifold gaps in the gospel narratives, yielding a notion of text as 'mnemonic' or system for retrieval of the individual's own memorial data,⁶ in support of the creation of new, individuated, 'realistic' virtual experiences of the imagination. For medieval readers (as also for modern readers dishabituated to such a practice), this was a mode of cognitive engagement that must be actively cultivated, requiring a conception of the imagination as a highly plastic 'trainable

what that person does, experiencing what that person experiences. The capacity for imaginative projection is a vital cognitive faculty. Experientially, it is a form of "transcendence". Through it, one can experience something akin to "getting out of our bodies" – yet it is very much a bodily capacity'. *Philosophy in the Flesh*, p. 565.

⁴ Gallese and Wojciewowski, p. 12.

⁵ Ritchey, p. 342; Bestul, p. 38.

⁶ Yates, p. 95.

tool', whose 'greatest potential' is unleashed in making the absent present and the virtual personally transformational at the level of affect and behaviour.⁷

In this thesis, I have suggested that Dante's innovation exceeds the model of affective devotion, since the *Commedia* rests not on the second-person address of the gospel meditations (although it deploys this mechanism in the direct addresses), but also uses the model of an immersive first-person 'personal experience narrative'.⁸ This offers the reader the opportunity to deeply and empathically experience other standpoints in a sustained and present way and means that in addition to recruiting the cognitions at a conscious rational level (burnishing the will through propositional learning), the poem can also invite the participation of the cognitions without rupturing the reader's immersion in the narrative of the poem, shaping the desire, preparing those for grace to whom grace will ultimately be granted.⁹

First-person participation is a mode of reading that is *strategically invited*, not accidental: it depends on a consistent and cumulative strategy of invitations to the reader to read in this way. The key to realistic simulation of body states in the reader, I have proposed, is an experience of the perceptual illusion known as *presence*: a familiar concept in videogame criticism, where presence is understood as an embodied form of immersion (IJsselstein's 'experiential counterpart of immersion'),¹⁰ and also expressed in medieval affective devotion's goal of *praesentia*.¹¹ I have suggested there to be three types of presence at work in the poem: spatial, social, and self-presence.

Spatial presence, understood as the perceptual illusion of 'being there', is invited through a strategy I describe as *narration through situated body states*. This involves evocation of the narrated subject's body states in dynamic relation to the phenomena of his or her environment. This is constructed in the poem, I suggest, through a cumulative sequence of narrative effects. Most immediately evident is the narration of perceptual data through the *multiple senses* (sight, sound, smell, touch, taste, and proprioception), a strategy common to many well-written narrative texts. The poem's innovation, I propose, is to layer on top of this perceptual data the effects of the dynamic interaction of the body with the phenomena of the

⁷ Karnes, p. 20, p. 177.

⁸ Labov and Waletzky, p. 3.

⁹ 'Trasumanar significar *per verba* | non si poria; però l'esempio basti | a cui esperienza grazia serba' (*Par.*, I. 70-72).

¹⁰ See Chapter 1, n. 7.

¹¹ Ritchey, p. 349.

space: by narrating *sensorimotor correspondence* data (how the protagonist's body responds to the perceptual data; that is, evoking the perception–action loop); and by narrating dynamic *environmental feedback* data, as exemplified in the narration of vection in relation to the descent on Geryon and the ascent up the celestial ladder.

Social presence, defined as the sense of being with other selves in a shared environment that invites the possibility of reflexive understanding of the another's intention, is invited in the poem by *narration through kinaesthetic empathy*. By consistently narrating *gesture or posture* that 'utters', rather than omniscient description of feeling, the text invites 'semantic retrieval' of a similar experience in the (reading) observer,¹² triggering body state simulation in the reader, leading to 'direct' understanding of the subject's affective state or intention.¹³ This mimics in the narration the dynamic neural processes of empathy in real life. Bolens has identified a similar model of invitations to kinaesthetic empathy in Proust. Dante's innovation, I suggest, is to have constructed a strategy of invitations to social presence as just one part of a wider strategy to invite active reader participation.

The final form of presence I have identified is *self-presence*, characterised as the sense that something is happening *to me*; that the reader is changed in some way by the virtual experience in which she is invited to participate. I have identified five narrative strategies in the *Commedia* that underpin the exceptional openness of the poem, and that in combination with the invitations to spatial and social presence render the poem, I propose, an exceptionally participatory text by design. The first strategy is a model of *narrating instances* specific to the *Commedia* that reveals four different 'faces' of the narrating Dante's 'io'; in combination, these four faces prevent the reader from simply identifying with the journeying Dante protagonist and instead establish a possibility of participation through multiple subjectivities. Secondly, a mechanism of *narration through mobile camera view*, in which the reader's line of sight is intensively directed around the narrated space, yielding an illusion of new objects constantly moving into view that invites the brain to infer personal agency in the virtual world through a capacity to turn the head. Next, I define a new continuum of invitations to the reader, marked at one end by the *direct addresses* that establish a model of social reciprocity between reader and narrator. The direct addresses additionally signpost a series of *narrative training exercises*, whose invitations to frame-by-frame reconstruction of the narrated event enable the reader to learn advanced cognitive skills of sustained enactment

¹² Kendon, p. 2; Bolens, p. 2.

¹³ Gallese and Wojciewski, p. 12.

imagination. Finally, I propose, at the other end of the continuum of invitations to participate lies a vast system of indirect and elective invitations, including the many similes that account for a fifth of all the narration in the poem, and narrative ellipses, and which together constitute a strategy of *narration through gaps in the text* that invites the reader to radically personalise her experience of the journey to desire for the divine. The combination of direct and indirect invitations to cognitive participation in the poem offers, I propose, a *system* for the progressive finessing of the reader's capacity for vivid imaginative elaboration of the protagonist's journey, refining her desire for God through imaginative projection of her own *mortal body* into the *virtual space* of Dante's narrated afterlife, successfully combining different orders of reality.

An awareness of having experienced instances of reading in the mode of first-person participation is conferred, I propose, through *retrospective recognition*: the reader feels personally changed in some intuitive way; that, in the terms of Waterworth and Riva, 'something [has] happen[ed] to me'.¹⁴ Indeed, this sense is modelled by the narrating Dante himself when he recounts his own experience of the sweetness that remains in his heart following the imaginative reconstruction of his journey, comparing it with the affective residue of a dream:

Qual è colui che sognando vede,
che dopo 'l sogno la passione impressa
rimane, e l'altro a la mente non riede,
cotal son io, ché quasi tutta cessa
mia visione, e ancor mi distilla
nel core il dolce che nacque da essa. (*Par.*, XXXIII. 58-63)

The content of the dream – another kind of virtual experience – has become elusive, 'e l'altro a la mente non riede', but an affective residue remains, 'e ancor mi distilla | nel core il dolce che nacque da essa'. The dreamer, like the post-evental narrating Dante, has been *transformed* by his experience.

¹⁴ Waterworth and Riva, p. 14.

My hypothesis is that the strategic interplay of these seven strategies – in several cases, narratological innovations in their own right – is what supports the innovation of the particularly mobile ‘io’ of the *Commedia* and constitutes its status as exceptionally participatory text.

The key to this mobile ‘io’, I suggest, lies in the invitation to both spectate on the journeying Dante’s narrated journey and to participate in her own; a process of constant oscillation between personal and collective subjectivities. In narratological terms, the end effect of this mode of reading, I propose, is to invite *spontaneous elective self-identification in a plural narrative ‘io’*. Instead of waiting for the explicit invitation to participate indexed in the ‘tu’ of the direct addresses, the reader instead begins reflexively to identify spontaneously as implicated in the ‘tu’, the ‘voi’, and even the ‘noi’ of the utterances of the blessed. Eventually, I propose, she may glimpse herself in certain of the ‘io’s of the poem, participating as first-person protagonist in her own right. I suggest we may observe this in the treatment of the ‘io’ in the narration of the de-coupling of the reader’s gaze from the journeying Dante’s in response to Bernard’s sign in *Paradiso XXXII*, as I set out next.

In the Empyrean, in *Paradiso XXXI* and *XXXII*, Bernard points out the identities of the blessed in the celestial Rose in an explicit diagrammatic choreographing of the journeying Dante’s line of sight. This is the last of the extended sequences of narration through mobile camera view (discussed in Chapter 5), in which the constant dynamic movement through vertical and lateral axes means that new ‘objects’ (in the form of the named blessed) are narrated as constantly coming into view. The sequence starts, I suggest, at the point of Bernard’s lyrical invitation in canto *XXXI* to the protagonist to fly with his eyes through the garden before him, ‘vola con li occhi per questo giardino’ (97) and continues with two further extended sections in canto *XXXII* (1-39 and 115-51). The reader who invests sustained cognitive effort in imaginatively elaborating the succession of mental images for herself is being invited by the text to neurally simulate a constant dynamic re-orientation of her line of sight on the basis of Bernard’s directions, thereby participating across media in the phenomenon of *joint attention* with the journeying Dante and Bernard.¹⁵

¹⁵ Psychologists Peter Mundy and Lisa Newell propose that ‘joint attention’ is an innately social behaviour that promotes fellowship, writing that ‘joint or shared attention is a foundational skill in human social interaction and cognition. It is defined as re-orienting or re-allocating attention to a target because it is the object of another person’s attention. Shared attention plays a critical role in a wide range of social behaviours: it sets the stage for learning, facilitates communication, and supports inferences about other people’s current and

This sustained experience of joint attention, I propose, makes the sudden decoupling of the reader's line of sight from that of the journeying Dante's all the more shocking when Bernard makes his narratologically dissonant sign, as I set out in Chapter 1:

Bernardo m'accennava, e sorridea,
 perch' io guardassi suso; ma io era
 già per me stesso tal qual ei volea:
 ché la mia vista, venendo sincera,
 e più e più intrava per lo raggio
 de l'alta luce che da sé è vera. (*Par.*, XXXIII. 49-54)

The reader turns her eyes upwards just a split second after the journeying Dante does, triggering an instance of perceptual dissonance as she experiences the decoupling of her gaze from his.

But the decoupling, I propose, reveals the gap in the text for the reader's own 'io'; a momentary distillation of her own 'io' from all the other narrating instances that constitute the plural 'io' of the text. My suggestion is that in the half-terzina that describes the moment when the reader finds she is looking the wrong way, we can discern a division of the repeated 'io' into two discrete and distinct 'io's, each with a different subject.

The first 'io', invited by Bernard to look up, 'perch' *io* guardassi suso', is the reader, electively identifying as Bernard's interlocutor, reading in a mode of *first-person participation*, ready to look up on her own account. The second 'io', 'ma *io* era | già per me stesso [...]', already looking up, is the journeying Dante protagonist, in the flow of his experience. Momentarily, in that first case, 'the *I* which I pronounce' is 'myself' (to subvert Poulet); the plural 'io' of the narrative first-person fleetingly perceptible in its constituent parts: 'Bernardo m'accennava, e sorridea, | perch' io guardassi suso; ma io era | già per me stesso tal qual ei volea' (49-51). Bernard's choreographing of the protagonist's gaze through the celestial Rose in *Paradiso* XXXI and XXXII binds protagonist's and reader's lines of sight unusually tightly; and then its sudden rupturing in the shock decoupling of the reader's

future activity, both overt and covert'. Peter Mundy and Lisa Newell, 'Attention, Joint Attention, and Social Cognition', *Current Directions in Psychological Science*, 1, 5 (2007), 269-74 (p. 269). Further: 'Hominid binocularity entails limited visual field, but humans typically spend time around conspecifics. This affords the expansion of our field of vision by proxy, as it were. When one human orients to a new target or location, others who see the action tend to become interested, and reorient to that region' (p. 270).

gaze from the protagonist's that is triggered by Bernard's sign, momentarily exposes, I propose, the reader's own 'io' written into the text. Such a recognition, I suggest, invites a radical re-reading of the poem, instantiating an intuitive new sensitivity to invitations to electively identify as one of a kaleidoscope of 'io's that constitutes the agency of the first-person subject in the text.¹⁶

My approach and proposed model of a participatory mode of reading offers many opportunities for further research. I have included in footnotes the many discrete opportunities for further analysis of each form of presence yielded by the massive datasets I have collected in order to build a proposal for this thesis for each model of presence.

The piece of work I would most like to undertake next on the *Commedia* is to map instances of the elective 'io' (and its counterparts, the elective 'noi', 'voi', and 'tu') throughout the poem, to evidence more fully and more finely the proposal for my model of first-person participation, perhaps as a basis for a critical edition on invitations to participate in the poem. To re-read the poem with this sensitivity quickly shows that not every 'io' opens a space for the reader: she can learn from and enjoy identification with the journeying Dante's experience; but when there are consonant opportunities to participate, these reveal yet further dimensions in the poem, and the exciting integration of self and others (as in the immediate mobility implicit in the switch at the start of *Inferno* between 'nostra vita' and the 'io' who self-identifies as located in the dark wood).

There is an obvious opportunity to extend research into the existence and functioning of first-person participation as a mode of reading to other likely texts. The work of Marie Hartvigsen, and Joshua Landy, separately, already strongly suggests a similar model to be at work in the Gospel of Mark.

Videogame criticism and the mechanics that support embodied experience in a virtual space offers many more potential models to reverse-engineer onto the *Commedia*. The primary areas of theory that interest me in relation to Dante involve *emergence* and

¹⁶ Minnis and Scott point to what might be another instance of a perceptibly participatory 'io' in *Paradiso* 1, writing of the *terzina* 'Nel ciel che più de la sua luce prende | fu' io, e vidi cose che ridire | né sa né può chi di là sù discende' (4-6), that: 'Perhaps these lines, with their dramatic juxtaposition of the fantastically fictive ("In the heaven [...]") and the bluntly factual ("fu' io", a past historic of untranslatable force), mount the most urgent and tantalising challenge to interpretation that Dante ever threw out.' Alastair Minnis and A. B. Scott, *Medieval Literary Theory and Criticism c.1100-c.1375* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), p. 444. My suggestion is that the 'untranslatable force' of the 'fu' io' is linked to its status as participatory 'io'.

generativity; a hypothesis that I have already developed alongside my primary focus on presence in this thesis is that Dante has authored a system that invites and supports emergent behaviour in a way that is very similar to the procedurally-generated models of the latest generation of open world videogames. There is also much more to uncover, I propose, in relation to the notion of *affordances* and *perceptual opportunities* in videogame critical theory, and of course to advance discussions of identification and participation in relation to the *avatar*. There are also many further discrete opportunities to research and identify mechanisms specific to videogames whose analogues we could look for in textual narrative.

More broadly, I would suggest, the digital turn invites a re-thinking of what the mind has the capacity to achieve. In *The Implications of Literacy*, Stock wrote in 1983:

When texts were introduced into communities hitherto unfamiliar with writing, they often gave rise to unprecedented perceptual and cognitive possibilities: they promised, if they did not always deliver, a new technology of the mind.¹⁷

The participatory nature of videogames that is shaping the way young people expect to interact with narrative artefacts across media returns us, I suggest, to a medieval model of reading we might now consider as cognitive co-creation. In 2013, in collaboration with Erin Reilly and Ritesh Mehta, leading digital scholar Henry Jenkins set out a new ‘participatory model of reading’, one that ‘emphasises a personal approach to reading in collaboration with expert perspectives on the text’.¹⁸ He continues: ‘Young people who join online forums engage in close reading practices and apply them to unconventional texts, such as popular music or cult television shows [...]. They are turning the act of reading into a process of cultural participation. A participatory model of reading encourages students to identify their own motives for engaging with a text, and to use those motives in collaboration with others to build knowledge about the work collectively [...]. Nothing motivates readers more than the prospect of becoming authors or performers of their own new texts.’¹⁹ I suggest there is an imperative to better understand this not only in educational theory but also in narrative theory across media, and in approaches to both scholarship and teaching in the humanities.

¹⁷ Stock, p. 10.

¹⁸ Erin Reilly, Ritesh Mehta, and Henry Jenkins, *Flows of Reading: Engaging with Texts* (e-book: OER Commons, USC Annenberg Innovation Lab, 2013), Section, 1.1 ‘Towards a Participatory Model of Reading’.

¹⁹ Jenkins and others, Section 1.1, ‘Towards a Participatory Model of Reading’.

Finally, in more practical terms, there is an education project, I propose, to turn the components of my theoretical model of presence and participation into a set of teachable narrative mechanics for writers, to support the development of narratological *ingegno* that can help narrative text compete with videogames as exciting, immersive, and potentially cognitively beneficial artefacts that burnish, at an individual, applied level, the plastic human skills of empathy and reasoned judgment, thereby supporting loving civic interaction in this world.

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