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“Language is not a vague province”:

Mapping and Twentieth-Century American Poetry

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**“Language is not a vague province”:
Mapping and Twentieth-Century American Poetry**

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**“Language is not a vague province”:
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In recent years, the terms “mapping” and “cartography” have been used with increasing frequency to describe literature engaged with place. The limitation of much of this scholarship is its failure to investigate how maps themselves operate—how they establish relationships and organize knowledge. In this document, I offer a rigorous examination of the structural and epistemological parallels between the fields of poetics and cartography. I argue that William Carlos Williams, Elizabeth Bishop, and Robert Hass can rightly be named cartographic poets, not only because they are invested in

places, nor because they write evocatively about maps, but because, while maintaining the commitments to order and analogy long associated with both poetry and mapping, they deliberately challenge the traditional sources of their poetic authority, which include an emphasis on visual mastery and the singular, “authentic” voice of the lyric poet. By offering these challenges, they participate in what J. Hillis Miller identifies as twentieth-century American poetry’s desire to “abandon the will to power over things,” or the “emerging skepticism toward all mastering discourses of vision and voice” that Barbara Page discusses.

While each of these poets calls up specific geographical frames of reference—New Jersey, Brazil, Northern California—geographic presence is not, in and of itself, enough to qualify their texts as maps. Maps contain an important dual potential: to master and control what they depict, and to serve as testaments and invitations to exploration. My discussion of cartographic authority, particularly in claims to objectivity, draws on the works of J.B. Harley and Mark Monmonier. Maps, however, allow us to explore not only physical territories, but conceptual ones as well; and it is in the investigation of these potentials I turn to the works of theorists such as Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, Frederick Jameson, and James Corner.

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Introduction

References to mapping and comparisons between literary works and cartographic ones have played an increasing role within literary studies in recent years.¹ The map now makes appearances not only in the discussion of works typically characterized as travel literature, but as an explanatory metaphor for multiple forms of textual representation. This proliferation of cartography-inflected discourse is not limited to the study of literature—maps are called on to explain the representational and epistemological activities of many fields, including comparative education, cultural studies, sociology, and ethnography, as well as Marxist economic discourse, to name only a few—leading prominent geographer Denis Cosgrove to comment, the “fashionable fascination with the map within the humanities and cultural studies is widespread; the ‘cartographic trope’ is seemingly ubiquitous in intellectual enquiry” (*Mappings* 3). While some comparative work is being done within literary study—looking at synchronic textual and cartographic production and the cultural contexts these collectively reflect—the majority of references draw upon a more generalized or abstracted sense of what mapping means.

Within literary criticism, the seductions of the terms associated with cartography—map, mapping, itinerary, travelogue, guide, discovery, exploration, power, representation—are palpable. In part, the lure of the map can be attributed to the breadth

¹ The MLA online bibliography currently lists 273 articles published between 2000 and 2005 alone containing the word “mapping” in their title. One hundred and sixty three articles published during this same time period include the words “map” or “maps” in their titles (exclusive of those that use the term mapping). Forty-four entries include the words “cartography” or “cartographies” in their titles. This same trend is evident in the number of professional conferences and panel sessions that have been dedicated to topics related to mapping and cartography in recent years.

and richness of the fields of inquiry to which mapping gives us access: nationalism (and with it, colonial and post-colonial histories); studies of landscape and environment; urban studies; aesthetics; the intersections of science, rhetoric, and art; systems theory; cognitive theory; and, of course, geography and travel.

Unfortunately, well-versed as we are with simile, analogy, and metaphor, it is almost too easy for literary critics and scholars to say “This maps X onto Y,” or “This text is a map of that culture or that experience.” The limitation of much of this literary scholarship is its failure to investigate how maps themselves operate—not only what they describe, but how they establish relationships and organize knowledge. The familiarity of the map as a tool may lend itself to this vague approach—the assumption being that we all know what a map is, how it works. But because literary scholars so rarely offer a clear or thorough definition of how they are using their cartographic terms, they remain unaccountable for their claims that specific works should be considered acts of cartographic literature.

If, as the preponderance of mapping metaphors and references suggests, we are already using terms pertinent to other fields of inquiry, we would do well to investigate those terms, and their usages further, to determine the scope, and possible limitations of their applications to our own field. This is my project in the following pages. I examine both the structural and epistemological parallels between the fields of poetics and cartography, arguing that, within American poetry from the post-war era to the present, we see poets negotiating the authority of their medium in ways that can be productively compared to negotiations of cartographic authority in various twentieth-century mapping

practices. Both poets and map makers are creators of and subjects to tradition and authority. And the works they produce contain an important dual potential: to master and control what they depict and to serve as testaments and invitations to exploration.

I argue, specifically, that the American poets William Carlos Williams, Elizabeth Bishop, and Robert Hass can rightly be named cartographic poets, not only because they call up specific geographical frames of reference—New Jersey, Brazil, Northern California—nor because they write evocatively about maps, but because, while maintaining commitments to image, order, and analogy long associated with both poetry and mapping, they deliberately challenge the traditional sources of their poetic authority, which include an emphasis on visual mastery and the singular, “authentic” voice of the lyric poet.

Many of the works I discuss here share in the radical philosophical and political commitments of early and mid-twentieth century Europe and America—ways of thinking and acting that seek to challenge traditional social and epistemological hierarchies, to emphasize movement and multiplicity, while disrupting visually-mediated mastery. Among other things, they are indebted to the legacies of Einsteinian relativity, Perspectivism, and Cubism. As did the practitioners of each of these movements, the poems afford us the opportunity to examine the interplay of experience and authority in representation.

Cartographic scholars of the 1980s and 1990s recognized the map and the text as correlates. Borrowing tools from literary and linguistic study, J.B. Harley, Denis Cosgrove, and others saw mapping as a language act, and began to analyze and

deconstruct the map as text. My own work is, in a sense, a borrowing back of these methodologies. While poetry (at least for the uninitiated) is often assumed to be esoteric and illegible, maps are assumed to be the opposite: objective documents designed for ease of reading. Our assumption that maps “tell it as it is” suggests a lack of active shaping on the parts of their makers. As I will explain, despite its historical uses and forms, mapping, too, is capable of challenging a singular, anthropocentric sense of perspective and scale: by shifting orientations, inverting familiar forms, altering means of measurement that, in turn, challenge assumptions about size and importance, and experimenting with multiple, mobile, fragmented or immersed perspectives. These “alternative” mapping practices and their effects are among the most important to this project.

By identifying the ways in which maps and poems have been similarly vested with authority, I am able to pinpoint the areas of poetic tradition that these twentieth-century poets seek to revise, in their efforts to become “anti-mastery” masters (akin to the “anti-conquest” colonial voices Mary Louise Pratt studies). For example, while visual clarity facilitated cartographers’ claims to objectivity, and Romantic poets’ claims to access the sublime, an emphasis on sight may become, in these works, an affirmation of subjectivity and the fragmentary quality of consciousness.

Among the operations of the map often discussed in these works (be it a map of physical or conceptual territory, and frequently both), there are three cartographic ways of asserting authority or structuring knowledge that are particularly significant to the interdisciplinary study of maps and poems. These are: (1) maps articulate boundaries; (2)

they delineate paths; and (3) they establish relationships. Often a single map will combine these operations (as a path may be understood as the linear articulation of a series of relationships from point A to B, B to C, etc, or might serve to bound or divide territories). Within the study of cartography, each of these operations is understood as functioning most effectively toward certain ends. This is why maps that articulate boundaries are often said to lay claim, formulating territories that can be contained, ruled, inscribed onto, or “read.” Maps that mark paths may be associated with narrative and exploration, since they trace the path of the traveler, inviting others to follow. And maps that reveal or establish relationships (functioning both at micro and macro levels) lend themselves to the expression of matrices and networks—emphasizing connections and proximities. These maps are of particular interest in this project, because of their anti-hierarchical or anti-authoritarian potential and their ability to challenge the ways in which the world has previously been understood and organized.

In actuality, all maps are about relationships. A straight line drawn on the page is not a map until something relates to it—another line, a point of reference, a body of knowledge. Only in relation to one another do these elements suggest orientation, scale, and point of view—fundamental components of any map, and how it can be used. Maps make tangible the relationships between forms of thinking, forms of representing, and the forms of the physical world.

Like mapping, I would argue, poetry is an often misunderstood medium—and this is why I am drawn to writing about and teaching it. By reputation, poetry is difficult to access, elitist, or irrelevant. The study of prosody tends to be narrowly focused—

allowing us to discuss issues of aesthetics and craft, but rarely to consider the epistemological implications of these poetic forms. For new readers of poetry, in particular, an over-reliance on the taxonomic codification of poetry's parts can prove sterile and alienating, especially if it does not engage students in thinking about why such structures are relevant. I am interested in discussing poetry in terms of its actions, including its ability to draw the reader into the processes of the poem, as well as its structures—how it organizes its knowledge and asserts or undermines the authority of its claims. Twentieth-century poetic form, in particular, represents not only the enunciations of an aesthetics, but also of ways of thinking, particularly, as I will discuss, certain modern and post-modern anti-authoritarian modes of thought.

I have grappled with a language adequate to describe the material composition of poetry in the ways in which I mean it here, one that encompasses both structural and epistemological concerns. There are limitations to “prosody” as there are to “poetics.” The first, as I have already suggested, is very narrowly defined. Prosody examines metrics; it does not address larger questions of order or the textures of the language used within the poem beyond syllabic stress (such as the sounds of words, their consonance or assonance). Poetics, by its application to so many fields outside the confines of the poem, has lost some of its specificity—it can mean an elegance with language, an elegance with space, etc. As it happens, I am concerned with both language and space in this project; but I am also aware that the term “poetics” does not explain itself. I enjoy the term “lyric logic,” used by a friend and colleague, Laura Smith, to distinguish the work of the poem from the “narrative logic” of prose. “Lyric logic” brings together the elements of the

poem associated with its lyric/song past, as well as indicating the “logos” of poetry—the structures of its reasoning (or, the “shape of its understanding” as Robert Hass has said).

Rather than perpetuating the presumed conflict between modernist or new critical concerns and those of post-structuralism, I understand poetic structuring as necessarily linked to the operations of language in the world. Challenging the critical distinctions drawn between “high modern” poetry and the poetry of the late twentieth century, I focus on the continuities between poets, based not on inheritance, but on a sense of collective endeavor and the strengths or capacities of their medium.

In my first chapter, “Telling It Slant” I discuss poetic and cartographic bases of authority—and how these are subverted by twentieth-century practitioners of each. Like artists and geographers who have intervened into traditional mapping materials and means of representation, Williams, Bishop, and Hass intervene into their traditional poetic materials to offer new potentials for exploration revelation and discovery. Here, I look at two “interventionist” maps—one made by the conceptual artists and urban planners, the Situationists, and Robert Hass’s poem, “Maps”—both of which defamiliarize the terrain they describe, and the medium through which they describe it, via the manipulation of traditional materials.

Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari offer the conceptual groundwork for a discussion of mapping practices that offer alternatives to linearity or hierarchy, in their work, *A Thousand Plateaus*. The movement intrinsic in mapping as they understand it—bringing unexpected materials into productive contact with one another—is important to understanding my own methodology, reading the poem as a process, a way of thinking,

rather than an artifact. It is significant in the classroom as well, where we can acknowledge the productive and unexpected contacts between student and poem.

My second chapter, “Mapping *Paterson*,” considers Williams’s concept of “contact,” where language and world are brought together, as expressed in his book-length poem, *Paterson*. I compare the ramifications of Kenneth Burke’s suggestion that *Paterson* be read as a Baedeker guide book, with my own sense that Williams’s “triple-piled” analogy between city, text, and poet produces a system of mapping akin to Deleuze’s and Guattari’s “rhizome.” Describing structures of interconnection, immersion, wandering, and escape, the rhizomic map accounts for the intertextuality of Williams’s poem and its ability to enact *Paterson* both as place and text.

Elizabeth Bishop’s poems document the coasts of Nova Scotia, the United States, Europe, and Brazil. In my third chapter, “The Coast is Never Clear,” I compare her depictions of the coast with the coastal maps of earlier centuries discussed by Simon Ryan and Paul Carter. In “Brazil, January 1, 1502,” Bishop makes explicit the connection she perceives between herself, a twentieth-century tourist, and the Portuguese conquerors who had arrived over four-hundred years before. I investigate the extent to which Bishop’s poetry does, and does not, recapitulate the cartographic perspectives of earlier European explorers. While the authority of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century maps lay in their claims to certainty, and in cultural assumptions that what the coast revealed was indicative of the interior character of a place, Bishop’s poems insist on ambiguity, and the unreadability of the coast. This insistence allows her to challenge her own authority as viewer and to accurately depict the coastline’s constant flux. These emphases on

movement and uncertainty echo her consistent use of shifting perspectives (as documented by Barbara Page and Bonnie Costello) as a means of representing the movements of mind.

In “The Artifacts of Passage,” my fourth chapter, I turn to Robert Hass’s long poem “Songs to Survive the Summer,” considering the role of maps in way-finding or establishing paths. Speaking of poetic form in *Twentieth Century Pleasures*, Hass says, “The metrical line proposes a relationship to order. So does a three- or four-line stanza. Imagine, it says, a movement through pattern.” Because he maintains a three-line stanzaic form throughout this poem, we move through its consistent pattern, reminding us of the ordered nature of the poetic act. But its regularity throws into relief other types of movement within the poem: the seemingly random clusters of tercets out of which the poem’s larger form emerges, the imagery of being lost at sea, and the entropic action of death that is one of the poem’s principal subjects. It is the combination of the ordered, contained tercets with these seemingly organic “movements,” and Hass’s own description of his poetry as “time islanded” that lead me to describe the piece as an “archipelago poem.” A chain of “islanded” moments, the poem is designed to map a safe passage across a difficult summer, to allow the speaker and his daughter to arrive on a “clement shore in fall.”

My final chapter, “Reading Maps, Reading Poems,” addresses the pedagogical implications of reading poems cartographically, and draws on my experiences in the classroom. Students often express resistance to poetry, feeling that poems deliberately withhold meaning—as an act of elitism, a trick, or a code. Poetry *can* encode information

for transmission, but unlike the encryption practiced by military agencies, poems are designed to be interpreted, not impenetrable. A map, too, is an encoded text—but one that students find useful and inviting. The familiarity of the map and its invitation to explore makes it a significant tool in helping students understand the experience of poetic encoding. This chapter closes with a conversation between Williams and Kenneth Burke about poetry, authority, and the collaboration between author and reader—emphasizing the agency of the student reader in the process of working with the poem.

Chapter 1: Telling it Slant—Negotiating Poetic and Cartographic

Authority

Tell all the Truth but tell it slant—
Success in Circuit lies
Too bright for our infirm Delight
The Truth's superb surprise
As lightning to the Children eased
With explanation kind
The Truth must dazzle gradually
Or every man be blind—

-Emily Dickinson

The problem of writing: in order to designate something exactly, an exact expressions are utterly unavoidable. Not at all because it is a necessary step, or because one can only advance by approximations: an exactitude is in no way an approximation; on the contrary, it is the exact passage of that which is under way.

-Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 20

I. TELLING IT PLANE: CARTOGRAPHIC AUTHORITY

As contemporary map users, we are likely most familiar with plane maps, that is, those told from an aerial point of view. This perspective has been suggestively described as a “God’s-eye view,” because of its evocation of ultimate authority and objectivity. In surveying contemporary scholarship on maps and mapping, however, it quickly becomes evident that, while the power of many maps may be derived from their claims to objectivity, the systems of representation at work in maps are complex, and they do not, ultimately, give us access to an “objective” picture of what they describe.

The specific works to which I refer in this study reflect a change in the scholarship of mapping and the history of cartography, which began in earnest in 1980s.

No longer predominantly concerned with the material production of maps, nor the scientific advancements reflected by developments in mapping, cartographic scholars began using tools from literary and linguistic study—tools that allowed them to recognize mapping as a language act, to analyze the map as text. Among the works reflecting these methodologies are Harley's and Woodward's monumental *History of Cartography* (the first volume of which was published in 1987); *The Iconography of Landscape* (1988), edited by Denis Cosgrove and Stephen Daniels; Dennis Woods's *The Power of Maps* (1992); Simon Ryan's *The Cartographic Eye* (1996); Matthew Edney's *Mapping an Empire: The Geographical Construction of British India, 1756-1843* (1997); the anthology of essays entitled *Mappings* (1999), also edited by Dennis Cosgrove; and J. B. Harley's *The New Nature of Maps* (2001).

Understanding map making as a rhetorical practice, these scholars and critics demonstrate that there is no map that does not reveal the interests of its maker, be it ever-so-technically produced. And borrowing from post-structuralist discourse, they examine both what the map reveals, despite itself, and what the map conceals or cannot say—what it obscures or overwrites, i.e., the map as a form of discourse engaged in the administration of power.

Visual mastery, as I discuss with regards to Elizabeth Bishop's poetics, is one of the ways in which both poetry and cartography are imbued with authority. Simon Ryan's study of the exploration of Australia is particularly significant in this regard, in that it establishes a continuum between cartographic and textual representations of exploration, understanding both as part of a collective project, bound together not only by shared

goals, but, as the title of his book suggests, by a shared way of seeing. For Ryan, the project in which map and text collaborate is the European “discovery,” erasure, and re-inscription of the Australian continent. As both *The Cartographic Eye* and Pratt’s *Imperial Eyes* indicate, the kinship between mapping and literature is often initially established by the rhetorical significance of what is “seen” in maps.

Perspective and projection each play a role in the map’s claims to power or authority. Perspective is the point of view from which the map is “told.” Projection is a systematic, though not universally accurate, means of translating the three-dimensional world onto the two-dimensional page.² Via projection, maps have the power to affect our perceptions and influence our senses of relative size, distance, proximity, and ultimately, value. In response to the impact of mapping on how we understand the physical world, many critics and cartographers themselves have worked to reveal the knowledge-structuring mechanisms operating within cartography. Two prominent examples of this are Dennis Wood’s *The Power of Maps* and Mark Monmonier’s *How to Lie with Maps*. Woods, Monmonier, and others, describe and propose alternative projections and alternative perspectives from which to construct a map—and generally caution the map user to remember that the map is an artifact as well as a tool: that it is never a transparent or “innocent” representation of the terrain it covers.

² For contemporary world maps (as distinct from globes), the Mercator projection is likely the most familiar—used by many *National Geographic* and classroom maps. In an attempt to keep distances within the central band of the Northern Hemisphere relatively accurate, the Mercator map greatly distorts the landmasses of the far Northern and Southern Hemispheres, emphasizing width of continents over their length. One of the consequences of this distortion is to give those of us who dwell within the Northern Hemisphere a greatly inflated sense of the size of Europe and North America, at the same time that Africa and South America are diminished.

In discussing maps, it is easy to talk about the work of authority, since maps dictate national boundaries, legal proceedings, battle fields . . . The authority of the poem, however, may be less obvious. In this chapter, I examine the bases of authority granted to maps and poems; and recognizing an anti-authoritarian bent in American poetry, as well as in certain twentieth-century mapping practices, I pay specific attention to the radical interventions made into those forms of authority. I argue for the significance of experience to the production of cartographic and poetic representations, and to our use of these cultural objects.

II. TELLING IT PLANE: POETIC AUTHORITY

Traditionally, poetry has been granted cultural weight based on its claims to carrying forward the interests of high culture, the elite status of its authors, and assertions of its ability to “make” and to make manifest the utterances of an authentic voice. Lyric poetry has, historically, been associated with this univocal utterance—the voice, concerns, and perspectives of a “self.” Like a plane or scale map told from a single perspective, at a remove from the world it describes, this self and its singular perspective can function as an agent of mastery—producing a totalizing voice or vision that imposes the perspective of the one over the possible multiplicity. This, in simplified form, is Bakhtin’s critique of poetry.

Anthony Flinn’s work is useful for framing a discussion of the operations of poetic authority. He identifies two potential sources, easily identified with cartographic authority as well: “authenticity and the speaker’s detachment” (13). Authenticity is

linked to an intrinsic, experiential or “ego-based” authority, responsible for documenting the particulars of perception, or the “felt realities of experience.” Detachment, on the other hand, emphasizes an extrinsic or “logos-based” authority that rests on claims to an atemporal objectivity or value (Flinn 15).

The history of poetic authority, according to Flinn, constitutes a fluctuating negotiation of these two poles, and in *Approaching Authority* he traces the movements between these two strains from Milton to Modernism. As one source of authority is challenged, it is supplanted by another: “when an authority is perceived to be fictional, serving interests other than the culture’s need to understand and enhance itself, it is no longer an authority The new interpretive structure becomes an affirming presence—and thus an authority” (16). This supplanting of one authority with another is one way of understanding how anti-authoritarian poets may continue to work within the realm of authority, how there can be “anti-mastery masters”: by protesting or resisting a traditional authority, they may reinscribe new authoritative sources.

Early twentieth-century Modernism challenged contemporaneous sources of bourgeois authority (“patriotism, virginity, bourgeois prosperity, military glory,” Flinn tells us) (15). Examining Modernism’s giants, he sees their negotiations of poetic authority as responding to their cultural context:

It is a primary contention in modernist poetry that “true” authority resides in high culture, that is, in atemporal values lodged in the greatest works of artistic and religious thought . . . these implicitly admonitory values were a means of ordering the disruptive forces damaging the fabric of society and the life of the mind. (17)

The twentieth century, in many ways, was characterized by world-obliterating threats, figured in two world wars, the atomic bomb, the speed of change facilitated by technology, the disappearance of wilderness, and of civilization, according to some. While the world as it had been known disintegrated, poets like Eliot and Pound founded their own authority in an assertion (or reassertion) of classical values. Advocating detachment, in the sense Flinn gives it, these poets returned to Greek and Roman ideals, “to find those transcending measurements and rules, which acknowledge that earthly life and the individual” cannot adequately make value judgments,” that “a perspective beyond the temporal and partisan is necessary” (20).

While the British or anglophile Modernists sought recourse in detachment and “high” culture, the same is not true, I would argue, for their American counterparts, and those who would follow. These poets, too, experienced the dissolution of the world: this is the “gone world” of Hass’s poem, “Songs to Survive the Summer,” for instance, where “everything / rises and dissolves into air,” or the dissolving world of “Meditation at Lagunitas,” in which the speaker reflects on the role of words as “elegies to what they signify.” A poet of the post-modern era, Hass engages with structuralist and post-structuralist discourse about language; but there is another level at which his poetry, and that of many of his predecessors and contemporaries, is an attempt to celebrate and preserve an endangered or disappearing world. These are what Bonnie Costello terms the “roots and ferns” group. As Hass himself expresses, the impulse to know and name the items constituting the organic world within a poem is an attempt to stop that world from

disappearing.³ This explains why, in an interview, he identifies the role of the poem as “to anchor and clarify” (Shillinger 1).

“Anchoring” suggests an antidote to that modern, dissolving world far different from the detached remove of the atemporal authority—it suggests rooting downward, not flying up to get “a perspective beyond the temporal.” And “clarifying” invokes a principal source of authority for many twentieth-century American poets—that “acuity of observation” and “vivid imagery” for which Hass’s first book *Field Guide* was praised, the particularity of observation and detail that Williams and Bishop also shared (Marshall 126). Rather than grounding the authority of their work in its relationship to high culture, these poets “hew to experience,” to use Sherman Paul’s phrase—expressing their experience in large part through the particularity of their descriptive language. This links them, as Paul, Elisa New, and others have observed, to a long tradition of American pragmatism.

There is, however, an ongoing struggle within this poetry between careful observation, taking the world on “its own terms,” and the will to order. Visual mastery is no less problematic than that of cultural hierarchy. The question is, How can the poets maintain acuity of observation, without dominating what they depict visually, or to put it

³ The interest expressed in many poems, particularly from the 1970s onward, in Native American histories and cultures is also linked, I think, with the sense of a disappearing world, not only because of the popular association of American Indians with a heightened awareness of the natural world, but because Indians function emblematically as those most experienced with the losing of worlds. At the end of Hass’s poem “Maps,” Ishi, the last of the Yahi Indians, is a harbinger for this disappearing world: looking on a crowded San Francisco beach in 1911, he sees only a world of ghosts.

in Dickinson's terms, How can they tell the "truth," but tell it slant, that is, in a way that does not attempt to master that which it describes.

We can use J Hillis Miller's work in *The Poets of Reality* (1965) to explore these questions further. Although Pound and Eliot were tremendous innovators, their search for an atemporal, detached authority reaffirmed hierarchies, and resulted in a strain of conservatism, both intellectual and political. The American poets took a different tack. According to Miller twentieth-century American poetry sought to abandon the "project of dominion" associated with nineteenth-century thought, science, and Imperialism, "abandoning the will to power over things" (8). In part, their discomfort with domination and the gestures of empire emerged out of a post-war self-consciousness. It was during this time, as Robert von Hallberg describes, that many American poets began to travel extensively and to consider the ramifications of the burgeoning American empire on the world at large. As the U.S. developed into, in Hass's words, "the center of empire," the poets' concerns about the complicity between visually-mediated mastery, order, and empire grew, as did their attempts to resist the totalizing potentials of their own medium.

For Miller, William Carlos Williams is one of the central figures in the shift away from the project of dominion. Subsequent critics point to evidence of the eschewal of totalizing power in the works of later poets, as well. Barbara Page, for one, describes "an emerging skepticism toward all mastering discourses of vision and voice" in the poetry of Bishop; and Hank Lazer characterizes Hass's work as participating in the contemporary poetic "distrust [of] didacticism" (Page, "Stops" 14, Lazer 235).

III. TELLING IT SLANT: POETIC AND CARTOGRAPHIC RESISTANCE TO AUTHORITY

One means of escaping the role of master or didact is to seek recourse in conditionality and ambiguity. In “Shifting Islands: Elizabeth Bishop’s Manuscripts” Barbara Page discusses Bishop’s process of revision as one that, rather than striving toward certainty, replaces assertions with possibilities and questions; or, as she says elsewhere, “Among Bishop’s revisionary practices as she composed her poems . . . is the move from greater to lesser security . . . until the poem achieves a hairline balance between affirmation and denial” (“EB: Stops, Starts and Dreamy Divagations” 15). Todd Marshall notes a similar progression in Hass’s work: “a steady turn . . . from the authoritative to the hesitant,” moving from poems written in the “indicative” mood to poems written in the “conditional” (Marshall 125). Even Williams, known for the particularity of his language, is described in similar terms, when Joel Conarroe comments on his “general tendency in cutting away material during revision . . . to move from fairly overt ‘statements’ to what Wallace Stevens calls ‘the ambiguity produced by bareness’” (Conarroe 55).

Indeed, much of my discussion of Bishop’s poetic practices centers around her deliberate ambiguity. The tension inherent in “ambiguity” as a means of escape—whether construed as an effect of poetic diction or as a philosophical position with regards to representation—is, as Williams’s tells us in *Paterson*, that “Language is not a vague province” (110). Nor do these poets consider the world around them as vague. As I have already said, Williams, Bishop, and Hass are committed to the acuity of their

observations of the world, and celebrated for the specificity of their language—its ability to capture the subtle textures of daily life.

Miller argues that this attention to the quotidian is the very means by which twentieth-century poets escape from the centrality of the ego and its will to dominate. So, in this sense, they are paralleling the move Flinn identifies with the Modernists—away from the individual, toward some extrinsic source of authority. In order for the world to “emerge on its own terms” within the poem, Miller says the new poet must “step, as Wallace Stevens puts it, ‘barefoot into reality’” (7). Here, however, we see a distinction between the American’s and their contemporaries: instead of stepping away from dailiness, they step into it. The examples Miller gives of such barefoot pedestrianism include Williams’s attention to the wheelbarrow, his Queen Anne’s lace, his bits of green bottle glass.

Carried to its extreme, Miller’s position suggests “a poetics of surrender” (to borrow a phrase from Richard Streier), in which “instead of making everything an object for the self, the mind must efface itself before reality or plunge into the density of an exterior world,” (a plunge evocative of Sam Patch’s leap into the Passaic Falls, in *Paterson*):

To abandon its project of dominion the will must will not to will. Only through an abnegation of the will can objects begin to manifest themselves as they are, in the integrity of their presence. When man is willing to let things be, then they appear in a space which is no longer that of an objective world opposed to the mind (Miller 7-8).

What is curious, here, is that the plunge into the world produces detachment. Miller calls up the myth of the poem as transparent medium, through which the essence of the world

shines, unimpeded—allowing the things of the world to express their own, atemporal authority.

Only a few pages later, however, Miller's own explanatory framework breaks down, when he states, "In [these poets'] work reality comes to be present to the senses, present to the mind which possesses it through the senses, and present in the words of the poems which ratify this possession" (11). This is a return to experience as a source of knowing (a return to the internalized authority of the senses). The greater problem, however, is that Miller now tries to attribute liberation from the urge to dominate to a process of "possession" (to use his own word), which returns the poet to a position of totalizing power.

The notion of "possession" seems distinctly out of place here, given Miller's overarching emphasis on abdicating the will to power over things. While I agree with his larger premise of the poets' eschewal of mastery, I think their means of achieving it are not quite as he describes. Certainly poets of the early twentieth century (particularly the Objectivists) wanted to allow the things of the world to be manifest in poetry, somehow on their own, rather than the poet's terms, "to find some basis for avoiding the tyranny of the symbolic without sacrificing the fullness of imagery," as Williams wrote to Burke (*Humane* 122). But even so, the poets whose work interest me here could not turn away from an awareness of their own agency (or "will") in engaging with the world. Nor do I see an "effacing of the mind" as a part of their poetics, quite the opposite, in fact—an awareness of the movements of mind becomes essential to their anti-authoritarian practices.

I have already agreed that these poets emphasize the role of the organic world in their poetry—nature’s specifics are part of the world they “plunge into.” They are not limited to an interest in botanizing, though. It is in Williams’s celebration of both the built and natural particulars of Paterson, New Jersey, that we see the articulation of his poetics of place. In *Paterson*, he reconciles the organic and the made by finding in the city the vital structures of a living organism—always collapsing and rebuilding—as well as the structures of a living poetics.

There is an additional, and very significant level on which American poetry of the twentieth century attends to organic structures, and that is by documenting movements of mind, or as Elizabeth Bishop explained, “not a thought, but a mind thinking” (quoted by Page, “Stops” 19). Hass’s work, too, has been described as “duplicat[ing] the mind’s own wandering,” depicting “a mind making discoveries as it goes from thought to thought” (Lazer 239, Shapiro 86). Other poets, such as Robert Pinsky have been associated with this movement, as have Creeley and Ashbery, who, von Hallberg tells us, sought “to render . . . the ways a mediating mind actually moves through confusions, distractions, and banalities” (54). Like cognitive mappings, the poetic processes used in these poems reveal the connections made by the conscious and unconscious mind—between the internal world of the poet, and the external world which she or he observes and through which she or he circulates.

Whether traditional or experimental, both maps and poems promote movement beyond the confines of their own two-dimensionality. This is one way in which they may challenge the potential rigidity of their status as representations. The connection between

cartography and movement is obvious—maps have traditionally been the products of movement, as well as being guides and invitations to exploration on the part of their users. Slightly less obvious may be the connections between poetry and movement. There is, of course, a large body of poetry—spanning centuries—that documents movement through geographies. But the poem itself, particularly as an utterance, is a movement through time. And, as I discuss here, the poem may function as a movement of the mind.

It is by examining and evoking the connections the mind makes that the poets are able to maintain their attention to particulars, to the image, without being domineering. We see a concrete, structural example of this in their construction of analogies, and ultimately, of lists. The analogy (like its siblings, metaphor and juxtaposition) allows for specificity of language and imagery, without being dictatorial. It opens a space of structured “wandering,” with a designated beginning and ending point, but myriad paths in between. This is a space of interpretation, which the reader must enter and navigate for her or himself. Analogy is, in itself, a form of “mental mapping,” translating seemingly disparate ideas into a network of unexpected connections, challenging conventional systems of organizing knowledge. In the creation of lists, the poets take this process one step further, using non-directive enumerations of the particulars of the world, not only to represent the movement of their own minds, but to evoke movement in their readers’.

In this sense, ambiguity, as it is practiced by Bishop, for instance, is not absolutely a step away from authority, it is a shifting of the basis of authority of the kind Flinn describes, since it offers an “authentic” reflection of the experience of the mind as

it negotiates the world: offering us a sense of the poet's mental fluidity and adjustments. This is also why I have chosen the epigraph from Deleuze and Guattari: as they argue, "anexactitude" should not be confused with vagueness—"anexactitude" documents the "exact passage of that which is under way"—it carries the authority of exactitude. Although what it documents is that which is in process or in between, the poets' anexactitude accurately captures processes of understanding, or our mental movements.

Mapping Lightning, or the "ZigZag Flash"

Philosopher and critic Kenneth Burke indicates the importance of mental movement, and the significance of analogical thinking to a critical examination of how meaning is imposed, upheld, or invented, in his correspondence with Williams. In 1947, he wrote to his friend about some unusual mental movements (or "damnable" symptoms) he had experienced for a period of time:

When I read certain words, I would "hear" totally different words. I recognized the word as it was, but at the same time I "heard" this other one. . . I do, in spite of my resolve [to ignore the linked words], remember one such outlawry, such dissociate association: every time, in the newspaper, I read "industry," along with this word, I heard "insanity," just as clearly as though it had symptoms of the same sort: I would wake up in the night, for instance with the suddenness of a shot; some word had been spoken, and this word awoke me. And then something would occur which I can best suggest by calling it a zigzag flash of lightning. For of a sudden, spontaneously, I would remember a whole series of "connected" things (things that I had never before thought of as connected, or often things I had not remembered at all, but that seemed "connected" from the standpoint of this "key" word that had awakened me). The zigzag might connect, for instance, something that had happened yesterday, something I had written in a review, something I had said in an argument or as a wisecrack, some hitherto unexplained response to another person, something out of my novel, something out of my childhood, etc. (*Humane* 123-124)

Burke then associates this experience with the roots of his own critical practice: “for better or worse, there was the start, in personal experience of all my concern with ‘equations’, ‘clusters’ of ‘key’ terms, etc.” (124).

During their long correspondence, Burke often called upon Williams’s professional opinions—both medical and literary; it is curious to note that, in this letter, he couches his readerly, critical experience in terms of a medical or neurological condition—one with extremely important, but uncomfortable “symptoms,” for which he follows a self-imposed rest cure: “Though I know I had something here, I was really too frightened to encourage the dislocation by taking notes on it. Rather ‘waste’ it, I thought, and try to kill it, than ‘cultivate’ it, perhaps to my permanent confusion” (124).

Burke’s physiological explanation for the phenomenon may not have been entirely off the mark, at least in so far as neurologists specializing in synesthesia are concerned. A recent study published in *Scientific American* reflects on the human mind’s capacity for thinking analogically—that is, for taking seemingly unrelated sets of data (visual and auditory, for instance) and understanding a productive correlation between the two. The authors go so far as to suggest that metaphor may be a highly developed neurological capacity that facilitates abstract thought among human beings.⁴ Whether or not we accept a physiological explanation for the evocative subtleties of metaphor,

⁴ Michel de Certeau notes a similar finding among the scientists whose work Bourdieu studied: “. . . Bourdieu rediscovers . . . the very “use of analogy” which the scientists whose works he collected in 1968 (Duhem, Bachelard, Cambell, et al) held to be the essence of theoretical creation” (Certeau 55, citing *Le Metier de sociologue*, 257-264).

Burke's affinity for the reading and analysis of poetry may very well have been linked to his powerful abilities (voluntary or involuntary) at analogical connection-making.

Williams, Bishop, and Hass each have poems in which listing calls into being a similarly disorienting series of zig-zag flashes, as our minds struggle to understand what the connections between fragments are. These are what Bonnie Costello refers to as "paratactic poems," which follow a scheme of enumeration and sequence as opposed to hierotaxis or subordination (Costello 135). Terrence Doody, too, discusses poems of this kind, explaining that "they build by juxtaposition and accretion . . ." (Doody 53).

Not all critics are fond of such poems. Calvin Bedient, for instance, complains of their "resistance to coherence, climax, and closure" (221). "With Hass," he says "poetic form succumbs to a melancholy displacement of connectives," finally defining Hass as "a poet of plateaus with neither beginnings nor ends . . ." (Bedient 221). That is precisely the point. If only Bedient knew how closely his description would evoke Deleuze's and Guattari's terminology in *A Thousand Plateaus*, in which they explore the power of non-hierarchical, non-"climax"-driven organizations of knowledge. Paratactic poetics are not beholden to coherence or closure, or other systems of order and control—they challenge the traditions of form, to make possible a map of the intersections between mind and world.

Reading "Maps" as a Paratactic Map

Robert Hass's first collection, *Field Guide*, includes a poem entitled "Maps." Although no explicit reference to cartography is made within the piece, its title is

justified, not only by the poem's documentation of California's "rational geometries of viticulture," "intricate erosion of . . . cliffs," and "seas grown bitter / with the salt of continents," but because our reading of the poem connects three and a half pages of fragments into a map or our understanding. This is a paratactic poem, one that evokes the mental movement of the zigzag flash.

To begin with, the poem emphasizes California's abundance—its native ways of nourishing (wine, bread, fruit), and its products of trade (fur, aromatic woods, delicacies of the sea). The poem opens:

Sourdough french bread and pinot chardonnay

*

Apricots—
the downy buttock shape
hard black sculpture of the limbs
on Saratoga hillsides in the rain.

*

These were the staples of the China trade:
sea otter, sandalwood, and bêche-de-mer (7)⁵

It moves, however, to topics less bucolic. The presence of the Chinese construction workers, brought to America "to carve old Crocker's railway out of rock," and later in the poem Kit Carson, and eventually the Vietnam War, all suggest that the poet has his eye on history—especially American histories of empire and dominion.

⁵ If we think about it, Pound's poem, "In the Station of the Metro" is a micro-cosmic version of the paratactic map. It is easily brought to mind here by Hass's "black sculpture of the limbs" and "staples of the China trade." I offer a brief read of Pound's piece in my epilogue.

We are not, however, given a narrative trajectory to follow. The bombing of Hanoi occupies the same page as “the fruity warmth of zinfandel” and the “desert ironwood where waxwings / perched in spring drunk on pyracantha” (8) Here, as elsewhere in his oeuvre, the names of things are important: waxwing, pyracantha, bêche-de-mer. Hass practices listing, the enumeration of these names, most notably in the beautiful stand-alone line: “Clams, abalones, cockles, chitons, crabs” (10). The names of places figure prominently, too:

Olema
Tamalpais Mariposa
Mendocino Sausalito San Rafael
Emigrant Gap
Donner Pass (9)

And here the poet alerts us to the incursions of a dominating mapping impulse, as he tells us,

Of all the laws
that bind us to the past
The names of things are
stubbornest (9)

The poem is also concerned with vision, and the ways in which seeing and naming are connected to owning, binding, and claiming. References to eyes and vision occur repeatedly within the poem. The most significant of which is “the eye owns what is familiar” (9). A map, in the traditional sense, may “own” what it depicts—as may a poem (this is the ratified possession to which Miller refers). But ownership is not the goal of the anti-authoritarian poet—so the poet must defamiliarize the landscape, as well as the form of the poem, in order to relinquish power over it, and our reading of it.

Rather than accepting the conventional definition of reading as passive reception, the paratactic poem calls upon us to participate actively in making meaning from the text.⁶ We can, at this point, productively call upon Michel de Certeau, who argues that

[The reader] invents in texts something different from what they “intended.” He detaches them from their (lost or accessory) origin. He combines their fragments and creates something un-known in the space organized by their capacity for allowing an indefinite plurality of meanings. (169)

This analysis comes from Certeau’s larger project, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, which discusses the ways in which humans negotiate the seemingly nonnegotiable systems that circumscribe their lives—textual, economic, spatial, etc.—and the uses to which they put the materials of language, fabrication, and consumption, contrary to the pressures of the “normative frameworks” that govern the use of such materials (frameworks not unlike the authorities, ideologies, and facts that Williams and Burke resist). For Certeau, the “multiform, resistant, tricky and stubborn procedures that elude discipline without being outside the field in which it is exercised” (i.e., “tactics,” negotiations, inhabitations, “ruses”) constitute “the practice of everyday life;” so, in describing reading, he can assert that “. . . to read is to wander through an imposed system (that of the text, analogous to the constructed order of a city or of a supermarket)” (96, 169).⁷

For the reader, contact exists precisely in those moments of associative connection-making and discovery that Burke describes as zig-zag flashes of lightning, or, in Certeau’s terms, in the reader/consumer’s tactics or “wit,” which “juxtapose diverse

⁶ Please see my discussion of the shared authority between author and reader, calling upon Burke and Williams, in my epilogue.

⁷ Elizabeth Bishop’s uses of ambiguity, for instance, might be considered in this light.

elements in order suddenly to produce a flash shedding a different light on the language of a place and to strike a hearer” (Certeau 37-38). According to Certeau, such operations occur out of “[c]ross-cuts, fragments, cracks and lucky hits in the framework of a system” (ibid). He places special emphasis on the importance of analogical thinking and expression:

. . . analogy is the foundation of all these procedures, which are transgressions of the symbolic order and the limits it sets. They are camouflaged transgressions, inserted metaphors and, precisely in that measure, they become acceptable, taken as legitimate since they respect the distinctions established by language even as they undermine them.
(54)

Metaphor and analogy, and as I argue here, listing allow for a negotiation of authority, an opening up or venture into the structures of the literal and the “whole.” Burke describes his associations in terms a breaking of the law, or a violation of health. Certeau might very well recognize “law” or “wellness” as expressions of a total or whole authority.

He suggests another means of explaining the production of such “deviant readings,” those that enact contact and generate the unknown out of a known system of language, by using Wittgenstein’s description of the philosopher’s work:

When we do philosophy [that is, when we are working in the place which is the only “philosophical” one, the prose of the world] we are like savages, primitive people, who hear the expressions of civilized men, put a false interpretation on them and then draw the queerest conclusions from it. (Certeau 12, quoting *Philosophical Investigations* 194, 79)

Wittgenstein recognizes the philosopher’s process of formulating interpretations as both deviant and fruitful. Rather than offering a legal or medical explanation of the ability to see connections between seemingly disparate materials, his description can be understood spatially: zig-zag flashes produced via a displaced perspective. Because they

escape the confines of convention, the misunderstandings of the outsider can produce insight.

The presence of the Yahi Indian, Ishi, at the end of Hass's poem suggests a similar phenomenon:

Ishi
in San Francisco, 1911:
it was not the sea he wondered at
that inland man who saw
the salmon
die to spawn and fed his dwindling people
from their rage to breed
it was the thousands of white bodies
on the beach
"Hansi saltu . . ." so many
ghosts (10)

The modern world of San Francisco is defamiliarized by his understanding of the sunbathers as ghosts upon the beach. The sense is that, as an outsider, Ishi has some uncanny insight. Wittgenstein's "savages," and even Hass's poetic evocation of Ishi, are not entirely unproblematic, as they verge upon an exoticizing attribution of some "native" insight (even if the insight is a productive misunderstanding). According to Certeau however, this position can be achieved even by insiders, who are in "the position of being a foreigner *at home*" (Certeau 12). Elizabeth Bishop, with her perpetual outsider's view, offers numerous examples.

In this model, to realize unexpected paths of association and analogy requires another movement, displacement, what we might call (as Certeau does) "drift." In keeping with Certeau's description of the text's "capacity for allowing an indefinite plurality of meanings," in *Attitudes Toward History*, Burke explains that "since the work

of art is a synthesis, summing up a myriad of social and personal factors at once, an analysis of it necessarily radiates in all directions at once . . .”(Certeau 169, ATH 197-200). The potential lines of relation within literature, as in the outside world, are legion. It is the critic/reader’s task to develop “his own pattern of selectivity” among these myriad radiating lines (ATH 197-200). This does not, however, mean that such paths must be rigid, rule-bound, orthogonal progressions. On the contrary, some of the most productive lines are formed of “subtle ‘combinations’” that “navigate” among roles, “play[ing] with the possibilities offered by traditions,” without applying those principles or rules: “[readers choose] among them to make up the repertory of their operations”—the resulting lines shift and drift (Certeau 54, quoting Bordieu *La Sense Pratique* 54-75). (We might understand Emily Dickinson’s admonition in similar terms—that we “tell the truth” but not directly, by circuitous means.)

Despite the casual sound of “drifting,” there is a certain urgency to discovering new, revelatory lines among the myriad options—an urgency felt by philosophers, theorists, artists, and readers. As Williams himself says in *Paterson*: “. . . unless there is / a new mind there cannot be a new / line, the old will go on / repeating itself with recurring / deadliness . . .” (50). Ultimately, however it is not simply a matter of supplanting one line with another, one flash of associations for another—it is a matter of revealing intersections. This way of reading works against an isolated authority. Discussing this, Certeau makes use of the work of Michel Serres to explain the importance of multiplicity: “Theory favors a pluralist epistemology composed of a ‘multiplicity of points of view . . .’ It is an art of ‘circulating along paths or fibers,’ an art

of transportation and intersection; for theory progress is an ‘interlacing’” (199, citing Serres, *Hermès II, L’Interférence* 12-13). Again, we find movement paired with contact, and an emphasis on interdependencies—displaced and interlacing perspectives. Here, the map becomes significant once again—that document of myriad lines “radiating in all directions,” intersecting, interlacing paths, lines of transport, circulation, the system through which the reader or traveler drifts.

Maps That Tell It Slant

Despite the misgivings of critics of cartography, I believe that, in the *use* of maps (be they official or esoteric), experience can trump legibility, that the world is not made text by the map; if anything, the text is made real in the exploration it instigates (where an immersed, “authentic” experiences outweighs the detached, objective authority). Confronted with the map, the casual user does not say, “Oh the oppressive order of the city, the dominating horizontals and verticals”; instead they begin, almost immediately, to relate themselves to what they see—looking for points of contact of their own, for their own zig-zag flashes.⁸

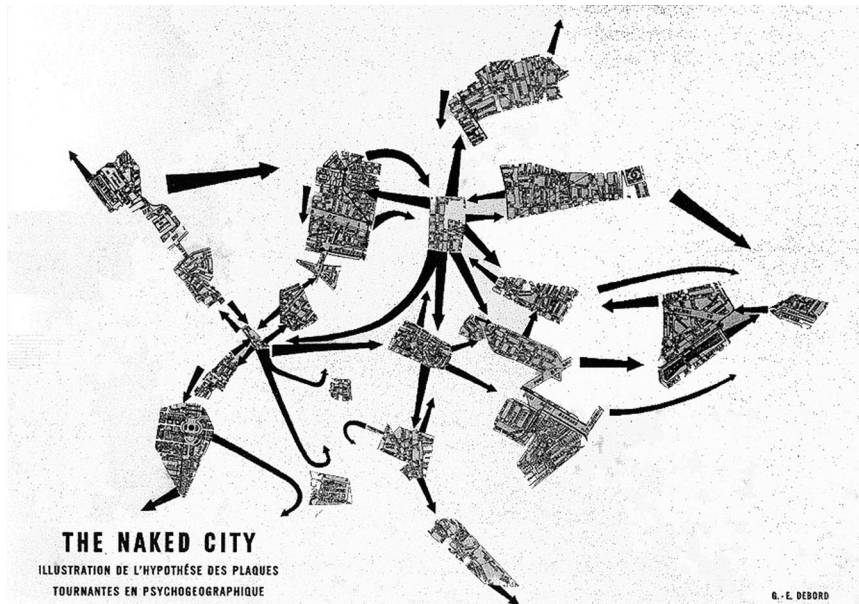
Map makers themselves are also not limited to expressing singular, detached, objective perspectives. With the city as text, there are as many cartographic interventions possible to the wanderer as there are for the reader of the written text. The work of a number of twentieth-century map makers sought to evoke these movements, both

⁸ The tour or itinerary, in contrast, offers this freedom only to its own originator. Regardless of how innovative, how idiosyncratic their line may be, because it maps a single path, for all others, it is far more proscriptive than the map—it is a single flash, rather than a field of lightning rods.

physical and mental, in their work. Among these are the Situationists, who coined the term “psychogeography.” They were a group of self-identified interventionists, authors, urban planners, and artists, working primarily in Paris in the 1950’s, and the city was their text. Wishing to “release the ordinary citizen into a world of experiment, anarchy, and play” the Situationists practiced “the drift” (Sadler 69). Espousing a subversive, anti-functional agenda, they articulated “an urban navigational system that operated independently of Paris’s dominant patterns of circulation,” and did so, vividly, through mapping (88).

Unlike cartographic detractors, the Situationists were not disillusioned with mapping; instead, they wanted to force a shift in the imperatives and structures that conventional maps expressed (Sadler 82). Through a collaboration of physical and conceptual exploration and cartographic intervention (cutting, collaging, and redrawing maps, images, and photographs), they produced maps that documented “sums of possibilities,” “massive number[s] of permutations for drift,” as well as the states of consciousness and emotions experienced while on the drift (87, 89, 84). Below is an image of one of their most famous maps, “The Naked City.” Guy de Bord takes credit for this piece, and indeed he was one of the central figures of the Situationist movement, but the map itself reflects a collective, experiential understanding of the city of Paris.

Setting aside the traditional Plan de Paris, the Situationists would wander the city, responding to the call of certain neighborhoods or certain streets. They then returned to the map, dissected and reassembled it—so that more adequately reflected their experience of the proximities and distances within the city—its hubs and perimeters.



Such acts of mapping are powerful because they resist the crystallization of traditional forms of representation and comprehension of the worlds they depict; and unlike the singular itinerary or tour, they reflect multiple experiences of the city. They are packed with information but can never claim objectivity, can never give us the “big picture,” because they are imbedded, as a river is, within the material they map, always moving, carrying us with them:

Rather than float above the city as some sort of omnipotent instantaneous, disembodied, all-possessing eye, situationist cartography admitted that its overview of the city was reconstructed in the imagination, piecing together an experience of space that was actually terrestrial, fragmented, subjective, temporal, and cultural (Sadler 82)

The Situationists speak to the power of cutting, fragmenting, and redrawing connections in map making, so that the maps we create more closely represent our experiences. This approach to map making echoes those twentieth-century poets who resisted the potential univocality of their medium by decentering, fragmenting, and obscuring the source of the

utterance, even writing from non-human points of focalization. Concern about the effects of a too-distanced perspective led to an emphasis on immersion, and the vicissitudes of subjectivity, in both media—representing experiences from within, rather from any objective distance.

Conclusion

Recognizing the situated condition of knowledge means acknowledging that how we see and understand the world, and how we represent it, are affected by our individual and collective cultural positions in the world. Within cultural studies, scholars such as Donna Harroway and Timothy Mitchell have used similar concepts to frame their investigations into culturally-specific models of knowledge and education. Simon Ryan, examining the underlying attitudes toward land expressed in European explorers' maps and journals, discusses both physical and epistemological situatedness. In *The Cartographic Eye*, he explains “both ideational and physical space must be seen as in part socially produced: the individual’s notion of space is determined by his or her socialisation” (4).

To reveal these often implicit, or unrecognized, socially-constructed “positions” is important work—work that challenges the claims to authority and objectivity often made by cultures engaged in domination and conversion, such as the cultures of imperial Europe and America or those of Enlightenment empiricism undergirding Western science. Attending to the works of those who intervene into, alter or abolish the traditional hegemonic positions from which knowledge of the world is made and told

draws us into compelling and often controversial territories, which is why, I believe, in recent years we have seen a growing interest in practitioners such as Walter Benjamin and Deleuze and Guattari, as well as in indigenous epistemologies.

In the chapter that follows I examine, at length, the ways in which Deleuze's and Guattari's rhizomic map, and Williams's poetic map of Paterson resist a hierarchizing crystallization, offering instead perspectives of immersion and opportunities for contact between the mind and the world.

And for Williams, the sun rose and set on New Jersey. *Paterson* could not exist as some vague semblance of city; it must be made of the city of Paterson itself. It must, as a speaker in Book III says, be made “of this, make it of *this*, this / this, this, this, this .” (141).

Williams was born and raised in Rutherford, New Jersey, neighboring Paterson; he resided there, practicing medicine, throughout his adult life. His awareness of geography, and his place in it, may have been accentuated by the diverse geographies from which his family originated: his father was English, but had spent most of his youth on the islands of St. Thomas and Santo Domingo, in the West Indies. Williams’s mother was from Puerto Rico—of French, Jewish, and Basque ancestry—but had spent formative years in Paris before settling in the U.S. with Williams’s father (Mariani 5, 6, 15). Very early on, Williams made a connection between an awareness of place, an interest in travel and movement, and textuality. When asked about his introduction to literature, he recalled his infatuation, as a teenager, with a line from Robert Louis Stevenson’s “travel book” *The Inland Voyage (I Wanted 1)*. And in his own early writings, we encounter poems describing his travels in Italy, his interest in the Pastoral, and the figure of the Wanderer. As time passed, he became increasingly committed to documenting the textures, histories, and occupants of his own native places.

Although the first volume of *Paterson* was not published until 1946, as early as 1926 Williams was thinking about the poetic ramifications of the city. In that year, he wrote a poem called “Paterson,” elements of which would eventually appear in his longer work. When Book I of *Paterson* was published, Williams explained in the Preface that he

had chosen to write about Paterson because of his “intimate” knowledge of the city (xiii). He later elaborated, in a series of interviews, that the scale of the city (neither as large as New York, nor as small as Rutherford), the richness of its history, and the presence of the Passaic River and Falls influenced his choice of site as well (*I Wanted* 72-73).

At a time when many American writers were leaving the United States for Europe, Williams urged a return to American roots and a recognition of vernacular value. In the manifesto written for the first issue of the “little magazine” *Contact* (1921), Williams explained:

For native work in verse, fiction, criticism or whatever is written we mean to maintain a place, insisting on that which we have not found insisted upon before, the essential contact between words and the locality that breeds them, in this case America. (*Contact* 1)

Even years later, the city of Paterson was an effective vehicle for this argument, since it functioned for Williams as a microcosmic United States, in its history and the diversity of lives and spaces it contained (Conarroe 51). As Williams began the research necessary for the composition of his poem, he was excited by the wealth of detail he encountered: “I . . . fell in love with my city . . . all the facts I could ask for, details exploited by no one” (*I Wanted* 73). His description is enthusiastically appropriative, echoing his commentary on the composition of *In the American Grain* (1925).⁹ Both formalist and post-structuralist critics have made note of the appropriative strain within Williams’s writings about place. His excitement at having discovered the “unexploited” terrain of

⁹ Williams wrote, in a letter to Horace Gregory, that the impetus behind writing *In the American Grain* was to possess “the locality which by birthright had become my own.” (*Selected Letters* 185-188).

Paterson clearly puts him in the role of exploiter; however, as an act of claiming, it may also be designed to offset the acts of abandonment Williams witnessed among his peers—allowing him to write, in Joel Conarroe’s words, a celebratory “anti-exile poem” (21).

Consistent throughout Williams’s writing career is his commitment to revealing the commensurate relationship between language and the world around him—through the invention of a new line, a new measure, a new poetics. Kinereth Meyer speaks about Williams’s concurrent efforts to possess land and language as a performance of “the struggle in American literature between aesthetics and an ideology of power,” and finds neither act of possession wholly feasible; he describes *Paterson* as “a poem that struggles with its own discourse” (Meyer 155-156). “Aesthetics” is not, I would argue, an adequate term to describe Williams’s prosodic concerns, though I agree that *Paterson* is a site of internal struggle. I would suggest that the poet was more optimistic about the potentials of language than Meyer, while remaining explicitly aware of the problematics of mastery.

Williams shared with his friend, philosopher Kenneth Burke, a concern with the accretions of commonly held beliefs, to which they gave various names—“facts,” “knowledge,” “the symbols of authority”—that deny the contact between words, ideas, and things because they are proscriptive, rather than responsive to and engaged with the world itself. The reified compartmentalization that results from these “ideologies” is representative of the “divorce” that Williams found all around him, what Bremen describes as “a separation, a dissonance that leads to the most chilling acts . . .” (37). Antithetical to “contact,” such rigid orders, or systems of separation and hierarchy (the

“order, perfect and controlled / on which empires, alas, are built”), are dangerous (*Paterson* 178). They prevent interaction and enactment, that is, the productive synergies of words and things. They allow for an over-reliance on the traditions and authority of the past. And they inhibit empathy and imagination, two fundamental ways in which the poet can make contact with the world.

Because “contact” is so central to Williams’s writing, we must look for explanatory models that will help us better understand its functioning, particularly within Williams’s life-work, *Paterson*. Such models cannot rely solely on a jingoistic explanation of Williams’s interest in writing the American scene. As Burke points out, for Williams, “the implications of ‘contact’ were quite different and went much deeper [than a simple cult of ‘Amurricanism’]” (*Language* 283). Instead, Burke describes contact in terms of a productive physicality, one that enacts rather than duplicates (283).

In fact, both men were concerned with the translation of physical and conceptual worlds into language—as an enactment, rather than a mirroring of those worlds. Williams knew that the things of the world escape the names we place on them; he felt that poetry could not be an Adamic process of re-naming, and thereby capturing, the things of the world (cf *Paterson* 22, 29). Instead, both he and Burke describe a revelatory or transcendental “naming” process that brings words and things into contact with one another. As Brian Bremen discusses in *William Carlos Williams and the Diagnostics of Culture*, this poetic naming represented a condensation of the experiential and the imagined, which is and must always be more than a mimetic process: it must, for Burke, be a “symbolic action,” for Williams, a freeing of language and its structures that

facilitates discovery on the part of author and reader.

When Williams says he must insist on “the essential contact between words and the locality that breeds them,” he is not simply talking about the integration of colloquial idioms into his poetry; he is, I would argue, pointing to a poetics in which language and place are expressed homologically—in which the poem enacts as well as interacts with the textures, structures, and movements enacted by the city itself. Early on in his study of Williams’s use of language and landscape, Joel Conarroe describes *Paterson* as an “exhaustive attempt to find a language capable of giving adequate expression to the America he knew intimately” (4). What if we were to invert this statement, and say that Williams’s poem represents an exhaustive attempt to find the structures of an American place capable of giving adequate expression to an American poetics? Although this distinction may seem minor, there is evidence, within *Paterson* and Williams’s subsequent works, that what he learned from the landscapes of Paterson, he carried with him prosodically afterward: that the structures of the place produced the “new measured” structures of Williams’s poetics. The most straightforward example of this is the “descent” that “beckons” in Book II. The slope that descends from the hilltop park to the city and the river below gives structural meaning to Williams’s “triadic step-down” lines or “staggered tercets”:

The descent beckons
 as the ascent beckoned
 Memory is a kind
of accomplishment
 a sort of renewal
 even
an initiation, since the spaces it opens are new
places

inhabited by hordes
heretofore unrealized.
of new kinds—
since their movements
are towards new objectives (78)¹⁰

It is likely that the movement of falling water inspires Williams's falling lines, as well. But this form goes on to serve him well, episodically throughout *Paterson*, and even later in his poem "Of Asphodel, That Greeny Flower" (1955)—allowing the prosodic discovery facilitated by landscape to carry on its poetic work outside of the environment that produced it (*Collected Poems*).

When we discuss the implications of place in Williams's writing, and in *Paterson* in particular, we must keep in mind the multiple capacities in which place operates: it has literal significance—it is Paterson, NJ, in its concrete particulars, that Williams wants to reveal; it has various symbolic, cultural significances—the city of Paterson functions as a synecdoche for America at large, the river figured in the poem represents the course of a life, etc. And perhaps most importantly, we must recognize the fundamental structural significance of the city to the poem—in *Paterson*, Williams is able to uncover, and in turn construct, a physical model of the transformative poetics he had throughout his life been struggling to articulate and perform.

¹⁰ The passage is also evocative of the operation of Australian aboriginal songlines as described by Bruce Chatwin, in which "the melodic contour of the song describes the nature of the land over which the song passes"; only here, it is the contour of the lines on the page and Williams's distinctive use of enjambment that emerge from the nature of the land over which the poem passes (108).

II. MAPPING *PATERSON*

Paterson-as-text does more than document the city visually or topographically. It maps a series of correspondences between the complexities of the place (its physical, historical, and personal materials) and the complexities of its poetic composition—allowing both city and poem to be “new measured.” I use the term “map” advisedly here, both for its association with the delineation of physical spaces, but also because of the tensions inherent in maps as devices of control and invitations to exploration.

Maps occupy an intriguing middle ground between the meticulous observations and calculations of a scientific method—a will to understand by the revelation of order—and the less methodical, but equally powerful projections of imagination, invention, and desire. Whether drawn from the material or conceptual world, cartography reveals ways in which knowledge is structured and communicated. Its products may be tools for recognizing and navigating within the physical world. They may lay claim to territories. But we can also understand mapping as a method of challenging assumptions and revealing connections or unexpected proximities, between ideas, perceptions, systems of representation, and things in the world.

Maps can and do make bold claims to authority. Their capacity to establish a dominant perspective, and to enforce that perspective on the world they document has often made them tools of empire. Recent work on cartography, however, draws attention to alternative, anti-hierarchical potentials of the map. This is what architect and theorist James Corner describes in “The Agency of Mapping: Speculation, Critique, and Invention,” where he addresses the “more optimistic revisions of mapping practices,”

rather than the “authoritarian, simplistic . . . and coercive acts of mapping” so often discussed (*Mappings* 213). Corner’s work is indebted to the writings of French theorists Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, who were among the first to articulate a theory of mapping as an anti-hierarchical, anti-mastering practice. The opening up of methodologies to address alternative mapping practices, ones that describe structures of interconnection, immersion, wandering, and escape, rather than possession, linearity or hierarchy, is essential to my analysis of *Paterson* and the ways in which Williams’s concept of contact operates within the poem.

In his commitment to the revelation and relevance of an American scene, William Carlos Williams does put *Paterson* on the map. The question is, what kind of map is it? In 1987, Kenneth Burke wrote to Brian Bremen, that perhaps *Paterson* could be read as “a Baedeker”: “its very title would suggest the totality of his art-as-contact, informing the reader, as tourist, of what is going on in *Paterson* as both a place and a poem.” In its capacity to open unfamiliar territory to the reader, to invite “travel” through *Paterson/Paterson*, the guidebook represents the book-length poem well. It expresses the work’s literal and conceptual engagement with movement and the experience of the city. At the same time, invoking the Baedeker calls upon specific cultural and historical positions with regards to the landscape—ones that claim objectivity and dominion—and cannot be fully reconciled with Williams’s poetic project. This essay considers *Paterson*’s mapping practices, as Burke suggests, as an introduction or guide, but also as an *enactment* of terrain that is far more dynamic and problematic than a traditional guidebook’s representation; Williams’s poem emphasizes the monstrous as well as the

scenic, derelict landscapes as well as canonized ones, the quirks, fragments and intimacies of individual perception that are drawn from local knowledge.

III. POEM AS GUIDEBOOK

As a model for understanding *Paterson*, Burke's analogy is both promising and problematic. His emphasis on the work's title is suggestive of his concept of "entitlement": that transcendental naming process that creates a "summarizing vessel," into which experiential data is condensed, offering an analogical representation of the many, complex characters which must be connected to constitute the concept or thing being named (*Grammar* 516).¹¹

In discussing the activity of his "zig-zag flashes," Burke explains that they follow and create sets of relationships among particulars and their more general forms, creating equations or clusters, which are summed up in "key" terms. Those keys, in turn, form constellations for concepts, and more broadly, knowledge. Burke notes the added complexity that comes from expressing these relationships through language, when words carry valences (or zig-zag flashes) of their own; these he describes as "the resources of the terms" (letters 125). But he seeks nonetheless for a transcendent naming that will integrate their complexities, to name the "formal principles which these zigzags are embodying," and to place the particulars within these forms (124). Burke describes such key terms as "summarizing vessels." Rather than static receptacles for their

¹¹ For a further discussion of Burke's summarizing vessel, see Bremen, *WCW and the Diagnostics of Culture* 32.

constitutive parts, Burke's vessels offer a means of passage, a vehicle of movement in their own right, among ideas, language, things.

For Burke, the book named after the place, the book that contains the place, can be read as a "summarizing vessel" for Williams's greater project of "art-as-contact." The choice of the "guidebook" as vessel resonates with Burke's dual focus on language (or "symbolicity") and action: it is language ("book") and call to action ("guide"). Williams *was* consciously engaged with the rhetoric of place—the stuff of which guidebooks are made—a focus that contributes significantly to the relevance of Burke's conceit, as well. While Burke is celebrating the totality of art-as-contact, however, his comparison evokes another totality—one that overwrites the complexities and contradictions of a place in service to a readily followed formula, designed to deliver readers from point A to point B, both in terms of their location and their understanding of the place.

The guidebook is a tool of orientation. Whether it presents a linear, descriptive narrative, or a series of compartmentalized data (introduction, history, culture, where to stay, where to eat), its ability to *enact* the terrain it describes is debatable. In *Spring and All*, Williams expresses his disdain for the "traditionalists of plagiarism" (calling on a phrase from Poe's critique of Longfellow): those who adhere to convention, rather than emphasizing imagination, innovation or insight. How easily might the guidebook become one of the "prose paintings" or "copies" that Williams critiques: an exercise in "plagiarism" rather than discovery? We should consider Burke's summarizing vessel more closely, but in doing so, we must ask whether the guidebook is not representative of one of the "older forms" that the poet urges us to destroy, so that the imagination may be

free from its ideology of “facts.”

The Baedeker company began publishing guidebooks in Germany during the first third of the 19th century. As travel became increasingly popular among members of the middle classes, the Baedeker quickly rose to prominence, and by 1856 it was a standard accoutrement of the traveler in Europe, and even the Middle East (Hinrichsen 8, 14). Initially available in German and then French, the publication of English editions began in 1861, and from that time forward, as Burke’s reference suggests, the guidebooks became so ubiquitous that a mention of “a Baedeker” became shorthand for any guide (Eggert 207).

Characteristically, these books contained (as the now more common Fodor’s or Frommer’s do) information about popular scenic, cultural, and historical sites, as well as accommodations, food, and travel logistics. In Burke’s words:

A town in Italy, say, is famous for its Cathedral, or the number of paintings by one famous artist. The Baedeker informs tourists of these facts. Also it adds notable details about its history over the centuries, possible trips to surrounding areas, inns, restaurants, figures who had been notable citizens, picturesque sights, such as cascades or outlooks, etc.¹²

A Baedeker could cover an entire nation, a region, or a single city. Its goal was to facilitate travelers’ interactions with the spaces through which they moved.

Like a guidebook, Williams’s poem aims to introduce the reader/visitor to a specific space—the city of Paterson, New Jersey. The text tells the reader/visitor where to look, focuses our gaze and attention, and reflects information that the author feels will enrich our experience, including details designed to titillate interest and inform. Although

the site Williams has chosen to guide us through is not a typical tourist destination, like the “city in Italy” to which Burke refers, Paterson has its own scenic highlights, its own claims to historic significance (if not fame). It is not accidental, after all, that Burke mentions “cascades” in his description of the Baedeker: the Passaic Falls are first and foremost among Paterson’s scenic offerings. Many episodes in the poem, particularly in Book I, focus on the “thunderous” Falls—the “catastrophe of their descent”—their appearance, sound, and magnitude, their history and future (8).

The park, too, with its view of the town and river valley, is another of the highlights which garners attention in the poem, and serves as the setting for a walking tour. Itineraries for such tours are a common feature of many travel books (Baedeker’s included), and *Paterson*’s Section I of Book II, “Sunday in the Park,” is particularly evocative of this convention. The section follows the ascent of a pedestrian, climbing through a local park to a cliff and its “picturesque summit,” then doubling back again. The summit affords a view of the surrounding landscape and prominent features of the local terrain, both built and natural. Along the way, the poem makes note of local flora—sand-pine, cedar, sumac; it describes the activity of hikers, picnickers, and lovers; and marks the milestones of the climb.

This ascent (which “beckoned” in the passage quoted earlier) links the poem to a tradition predating the formal guidebook: the aestheticizing language of late eighteenth-through mid-nineteenth-century travel accounts, particularly those written in the English Romantic tradition. Often, as Robin Jarvis notes, this tradition was paired with the

¹² Letter to Brian Bremen.

literature of pedestrianism. Compare, for instance, *Paterson's*:

At last he comes to the idlers' favorite
haunts, the picturesque summit, where
the blue-stone (rust-red where exposed)
has been faulted at various levels
(ferns rife among the stones)
into rough terraces and partly closed in
dens of sweet grass, the ground gently sloping (56)

with a passage from a 1793 edition of *Descriptive Sketches*:

Now as we lower trace the river's course,
The prospect opens, we have left behind
The lofty rocks and overhanging crags,
And nothing now doth greet the ravish'd sight
But graceful slopes and richly planted meads,
And the smooth surface of the distant sea. (quoted in Jarvis 84)

Williams's own description is arguably more lyrical than Miss M. Bowen's (the author of "The Walk," quoted above), but both participate in the "picturesque": "a mixture of masculine ruggedness and unrepressed elemental forces"—the rough and exhilarating faulted stones and crags—and "feminine depths, pleasing variety, and partial concealments"—gentle and soothing dens of sweet grass and graceful slopes (Jarvis 60).

In part, Williams achieves a romanticized affect in the poem by incorporating textual material from actual nineteenth- and early twentieth-century accounts. In addition to vignettes taken from John Barber's and Henry Howe's *Historical Collections of the State of New Jersey* (1844), the passages adapted largely verbatim from Charles P.

Longwell's *A Little Story of Old Paterson as Told by an Old Man* (1901) work similarly.

We find an example of this in the lines

Branching trees and ample gardens gave
the village streets a delightful charm and
the narrow old-fashioned brick walls added

a dignity to the shading trees. (*Paterson* 194)

into which the poet has placed line breaks, but has done little else to alter the text. Even in the altered passages he acquired from outside sources, the florid vocabulary and sensationalist descriptive techniques found often remain, as is the case with the tale of the Rev. and Mrs. Cumming, taken from John Barber's and Henry Howe's *Historical Collections of the State of New Jersey* (1844):

On Monday morning, [the Rev. Cumming] went with his beloved companion to show her the falls of the Passaic, and the surrounding beautiful, wild and romantic scenery . . . Having ascended the flight of stairs (the Hundred Steps) Mr. and Mrs. Cumming walked over the solid ledge to the vicinity of the cataract, charmed with the wonderful prospect, and making various remarks upon the stupendous works of nature around them. (14)

The process of incorporating outside sources or testimony is not entirely out of keeping with the guidebook tradition. Today, the Baedeker guides incorporate text from past (and usually famous) visitors. So, for instance, in a contemporary Baedeker's *Portugal* we get Lord Byron, in 1809, describing the village of Cintra as

perhaps in every respect the most delightful in Europe; it contains beauties of every description, natural and artificial. Palaces and gardens rising in the midst of rocks, cataracts, and precipices; convents on stupendous heights—a distant view of the sea and the Tagus. (78)

And later, quoting from its own edition of 1908: “. . . [Lisbon] in spite of the absence of a mountain background or distinguished buildings, possesses a beauty of its own in the picturesque disposition of its terraces, its view of the wide expanses of the Tagus, and the luxuriant vegetation of its public gardens and parks” (79).

As Burke points out in his letter, both guidebook and poem include historical anecdotes in order to add color and depth to the scene. As early as page nine, Williams

begins to incorporate vignettes from Paterson's past—scenes of life, primarily from the nineteenth century, but some reaching back to the colonial period. Many of these take place in the immediate vicinity of the Falls. A number of the historical passages indicate Paterson's history of tourism, prior to the writing of this "guide" to the city. They also begin to situate Paterson within the context of the broader scheme of American history: "General" George Washington "rested" in the area; Hamilton was inspired by the Falls and the economic potential he recognized in them (10, 12, 70). The history of the Native American populations of the region, and their encounters with European colonists, also play a significant part in the poem, as do later references to escaped slaves and Hessian deserters who took up residence in New Jersey.

Williams's poem argues that *here* is a place in which men of merit (Washington, Hamilton, Chief Pogatticut) found value: the historical episodes emphasize the cultural relevance of the site and the persistence of its value over time. These depictions also focus on the remarkable in Paterson. *Here* is a site of extraordinary abundance (long an American trope), as seen in the discovery of pearls in local mussels or the catching of enormous fish (9, 11, 34). Here, too, is a site of drama and heroism: the daring deeds of locals, the major events that shaped the city's past and present. Like the core samples brought up by the digging of the artesian well in Book III, Williams's materials are excavated from local sources (139).

In *A Tourist's New England: Travel Fiction 1820-1920*, Dona Brown observes, "Tourism is actually one of the oldest industries in New England—as old as the industrial revolution" (4). Many early visitors came to the region, not to witness its lovely scenery

but because they wanted to examine first-hand the economic, industrial, and social developments underway in the still-young nation. Williams appears similarly interested in those elements of the city's and the nation's development—its experimental and productive nature. According to Brown, factories were a common stop along a New England tourist's path. The subsequent craze for landscape consumption shifted the focus away from the man-made and onto the natural environment; still Paterson's industrial history might have played an important role in its early presence as a tourist destination (4-5). And certainly, it plays an important role in the poem. It was not as a scenic attraction but as a location for future industry that Hamilton was drawn to the Passaic Falls. The silk mills were, for a time, the region's source of fame and monetary well being, and they figure repeatedly in the poem. While industrial presence may no longer be a feature praised in many guidebooks, it was a source of power and value for Paterson, and, importantly, for the industrializing nation the city represents.

Williams understands the mechanisms at work within the guidebook genre, how sites are invested with value by the author's descriptive and rhetorical choices; and he is able to use some of these conventions to position Paterson similarly—even in commemorating the less familiar, less picturesque elements of the city.¹³ At the same time, however, he recognizes the reification of place that the guidebook genre enforces, with its over-reliance on traditional, middle-class values and aesthetics, its structure,

¹³ In doing so, he lays the groundwork for other artists interested in bringing New Jersey to light, “in all the sordidness of its abused beauty and energy”(Deutsch 101). Most notable among these is Robert Smithson, the conceptual and earthworks artist, who was a patient of Williams's as a child, and who would later write “A Tour of the Monuments of Passaic, New Jersey” (1967). Cf. *Robert Smithson: The Collected Writings*. Jack Flam, ed. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996:68-74.

based on “exact hierarch[ies] of importance” and its “severely factual flavour” (Eggert 210); and this makes guidebook’s conventions ready targets for his more iconoclastic tendencies.

Accordingly, Williams repeatedly manipulates these conventions, complicating them and disrupting them. Descriptions of scenery that begin in a typical, travel-guide tone, take a decidedly sexual turn, like the observation tower which “stands up / prominently / from its pubic grove,” or the juxtaposition on a single page of the image of “the deep-set valley . . . almost hid / by dense foliage” with the “labia that rive” in childbirth (53, 192). In creating landscapes that carry sexual charge, Williams may be commenting upon the conversion of place into a site of desire and conquest, where the traveler becomes paramour. And, as an obstetrician by trade, he is in a position to help “birth” this place into the public’s awareness. Of course, he would not be the first to conflate land and body. If anything, he is taking a trend already present in the language of travel narrative and accentuating it, at the same time disrupting the guidebook’s rhetorical claims to a helpful objectivity.

Within the first ten pages of the poem, we realize that Williams is not solely invested in aestheticizing Paterson’s surroundings, or connecting those landscapes with desire. The Passaic River begins, the poem tells us, in “oozy fields / abandoned to grey beds of dead grass, / black sumac, withered weed-stalks, / mud and thickets cluttered with dead leaves” (7). And as the poem progresses, the poet includes anecdotes from the city’s present and past that cast a pall over the local scene. In one case, just before a description of children sprinkling flowers in front of Lafayette’s feet, a local news report describes

how a baby girl was murdered by her father and buried under a rock, wrapped in a paper bag (194-195).

Revelations of violence are an intrinsic element of the fabric Williams is creating, as are images of “monstrosity”—the torture of Indian prisoners, the murder of children, the exhumation of a hydro-encephalitic man, “Peter the Dwarf,” whose skull has been buried in a separate coffin from his body. This is no strategy for putting visitors at ease with their surroundings. Nor is it one designed to put the “best face forward” for Paterson and its historical residents. It offers a stark contrast to the techniques of the Baedeker, which according to Paul Eggert, “pre-digested” experiences for travelers, according to a previously established aesthetic, and confirmed “existing ways of understanding the foreign” (213, 212). As early as 1908 (when E. M. Forster’s *A Room with a View*, which comments on the guide, was first published), the Baedeker had gained the reputation of being staid, stodgy, the crutch of the timid or incurious traveler, none of which resonates with the portrait of place Williams is constructing, nor the kind of traveler he wants to entice.

In general, guidebooks are not written by locals or for locals, but rather by “expert” travelers who come, assess, and depart—who maintain a distance between themselves and the spaces through which they pass. Their standards of judging and the depth to which they are able to penetrate the local scene are determined by their status as outsiders and authorities. The fragments which constitute *Paterson*’s epigraph point to a number of recurring concerns within the book. One of these is a reference to “a local pride” and another is “a reply to Greek and Latin with the bare hands” (2). “Local pride”

have both the knowledge of and pride in these places, even (or especially) when the heart of what is to be seen is unexpected.

Walking, as it is figured in the poem, shares much with the discussion of urban pedestrianism offered by Michel de Certeau in *The Practice of Everyday Life* (1984). In his chapter “Walking in the City,” Certeau contrasts the walker’s experience with the aerial view afforded from the top of a sky scraper (tellingly, the no-longer-extant World Trade Center Tower). For the latter,

elevation transfigures [the individual] into a voyeur. It puts him at a distance. It transforms the bewitching world by which one was “possessed” into a text that lies before one’s eyes. It allows one to read it, to be a solar Eye, looking down like a god. (92)

In contrast, those immersed in the city, the “ordinary practitioners of the city” live

“down below,” below the thresholds at which visibility begins. They walk—an elementary form of this experience of the city; they are walkers, Wandersmänner, whose bodies follow the thicks and thins of an urban “text” they write without being able to read it. . . . (93)

Certeau makes explicit a connection between movement and representation—the city-as-text is brought into being by the movement of the walker, but it is not “finished,” not totalized; the walker cannot even see the whole of the larger text in which her or his passage participates: “The networks of these moving, intersecting writings compose a manifold story that has neither author nor spectator, shaped out of fragments of trajectories and alterations of spaces . . .” (93).

Certeau’s examination of walking in the city is part of a larger exploration of the ways in which humans negotiate the seemingly nonnegotiable systems that circumscribe their lives—textual, economic, spatial—and the uses to which they put the materials of

language, movement, fabrication, and consumption, contrary to the pressures of the “normative frameworks” that govern them, frameworks not unlike the authorities and traditions that Williams resists (96). The “wanderings” of Williams and Ginsberg express an aversion to canonical assertions of value, to the normative frameworks that establish the values of places or experiences. That the two poets favor a local, “hands on” approach is another iteration of “contact,” as well as a possible response on Williams’s part to Eliot, Pound, and the expatriate community in general. The “bare hands” with which Williams replies in the epigraph to Greek and Latin (those emblems of canonicity and Euro-centrism) are suggestive of a fisticuffs—showing Greek and Latin a thing or two “with the gloves off”—but the bare hands offer, at the same time, an implication of intimacy unachieved by the icons of authority. Bare hands can actually touch the world. Williams, as a doctor, who, in Burke’s words, possessed the “knowing touch”—the ability to “read” and understand his patients and the world through touch—was certainly aware of the power of this form of intimate contact.

There is much, then, that distinguishes the mapping practiced in *Paterson* from that suggested by Burke’s analogy. While the Baedeker comparison attends to the text-as-place, it cannot represent Williams’s efforts to get out from under the thumb of traditional authorities—to “make it new.” Nor can the Baedeker comparison account for the richness of Williams’s city/poem/poet, its intertextuality and layering, its arrivals and departures, both structural and thematic. The subversion of conventions, the rejection of “classical” values and aesthetics, and the transvaluation of the seemingly mundane, or even monstrous, into the celebrated, create a text that is as much a tool of disorientation as it is

one of orientation—because in disorientation there is the potential for discovery.

Paterson is not only an invitation or guide, it is a mapping that shifts, flows, and falls, that breaks off and starts again, that “somersaults” as Williams says at the poem’s end, and escapes.

IV. POEM AS RHIZOME

Because of the complexity of the cartography expressed by *Paterson*, it is useful to amplify Burke’s conceit with another articulation of the productive potentials of mapping, emerging from the work of philosopher Gilles Deleuze and psychologist Félix Guattari. Roughly fifty years after Williams published the first volume of *Contact*, Deleuze and Guattari wrote their own manifesto in praise of contact: *A Thousand Plateaus* (1987), the second volume of their larger project *Schizophrenia and Capitalism*. Both men belonged to that generation of French thinkers and activists who, having experienced the events of May 1968, were deeply committed to revealing the mechanisms that establish and maintain authority, and to exploring how individuals can challenge the constructs and categorizations of the world “as we know it,” in search of new visions and insights.

In discussing systems of representation, Deleuze and Guattari make a distinction between representations that mirror (what Williams’s might call “plagiarisms”) and those that are productive interventions into or with the materials they seek to represent. Elaborating upon this distinction, they propose a contrast between “tracing” and “mapping.” In pursuit of clarity, tracings “organize, stabilize, [and] neutralize . . .

multiplicities” (13). Unlike the map, the tracing “describe[s] a de facto state,” and “maintain[s] balance in intersubjective relations” (such as hierarchies, or fixed perspectives) (12). The map, on the other hand, “unfolds potential;” it reveals a dense and complex fabric, or “assemblage,” that “ceaselessly establishes connections between semiotic chains, organizations of power, and circumstances relative to the arts, sciences, and social struggles” (7). Deleuze and Guattari use the figure of the “rhizome” to express the operation of this map. The rhizome itself is a subterranean, branching system of reproduction for plants such as the iris or ginger—but for Deleuze and Guattari, it is another way of describing an anti-hierarchical organization of knowledge that recognizes the fertile intersections and engagements between seemingly disparate ideas and things.

They contrast the acentred system of communication and proliferation found in the rhizome with the “root/radical” or arboreal system of the “tree,” in which knowledge is organized around and branches out of a central “trunk.” In the arboreal system, the trunk is understood as the origin, the source of authenticity or authority. Its branches are mere iterations or representations of its own content; they grow out of the trunk, and are completely dependent upon it. They have no vitality of their own, and are isolated from productive contact with other branches. Traditional theories of perception and representation (such as the Platonic) reflect this arboreal model—where “reality” or “truth” is the trunk, and perception, experience, and representation (at even further removes) are weaker echoes of the core.

A number of critics have discussed anti-Platonism in the works of Williams, as

well as in those of Deleuze and Guattari.¹⁴ There are two principle aspects to this opposition worth noting here. One is Williams's emphasis on the significance and substance of the real in the world, and our ability to access it. This is the "quality of independent existence, of reality which we feel ourselves" that Williams attributes to nature (*Collected Poems I* 207-08). Similarly, in his survey of Deleuze's philosophy, John Marks discusses Deleuze's attention to the haecceity or "this-ness" of the things of the world, identifying it with a "life" within things, within the "real" (reminiscent, once again, of the mandate in Book III of *Paterson* to "make it of this, this / this, this, this, this .") (Marks 38). Second, as Brian Bremen notes, Platonic thought demotes our representations of the world to "an imperfect imitation of thought, which is an imperfect imitation of that ideal essence within or behind reality"—another articulation of the arboreal model Deleuze and Guattari criticize (Bremen 20). Neither they nor Williams accept this "imperfect" echo as the only role of thought or representation. For them there are always at least two types of representations—ones which echo or mirror (i.e., "plagiarisms" like the branches of the tree), and ones which engage with, which produce, such as the poem (a "machine" of words, designed to produce) and the rhizome.

Marks, using Deleuze's and Guattari's own terminology, describes the rhizome as "a multiplicity," which "seeks to move away form the binary subject/object structure of Western thought" producing, instead, a form of "polytonality" (45, 25). A multiplicity is neither one things nor another—it is the network of relationships between things. As an

¹⁴ John Marks, for instance, explains, "Deleuze actively seeks out an alternative tradition from which he can draw support against the line which runs through Plato, Hegel, and Heidegger." (16)

example Marks points to Deleuze's writings on Spinoza, finding there a

“deconstructive” method . . . best considered as a project of free indirect discourse. . . . Deleuze seeks to work with other thinkers and artists so that his own voice and the voice of the author [about whom he is writing] become indistinct. In this way, he institutes a zone of indiscernibility between himself and the authors with whom he works. (25)

This practice is, again, a rejection of the “arboreal” structure, in which the subject (in this case, Spinoza's writings) would be the trunk, and the historian's or critic's writings mere branches off of this trunk, branches that can never develop the productive synergy they can when the boundaries between subject and object are dissolved. The concept of multiplicity and the ways in which it functions resonate with the “mutuality” of identity that Bremen emphasizes in his reading of Williams's poetry, in terms of its revelation of interdependences and a resistance against traditional systems of power and privilege.

In their writings, Williams, Deleuze, and Guattari resist the authoritarian or “scientific” privileging of a single perspective, a single voice—the self over the other, or the other over the self—the enforced “clarity” which interrupts contact. The blurring of distinctions between the voice of the author and subject describes both the fusing of Paterson as man, poem, and city, and Williams's incorporation and manipulation of passages by other writers throughout his poem. Among the most prominent of these are the “Cress” letters, written by Marcia Nardi, as well as correspondence from Dahlberg, Pound, and Ginsberg. It is the practice of multiplicity that leads us to the productive, if sometimes uncomfortable, questions of “who is speaking?” and “for whom?” within their writings.

In this regard, the Cress letters may be the most problematic aspect of *Paterson*. Because of the extent to which they are used in Williams's poem—the long passages, much longer than the other interpolated texts—and because of their raw vulnerability, the letters can evoke a sense of misuse, of both a co-optation of voice and an unfair divulgence. Interestingly enough, Deleuze and Guattari offer a possible response to similar concerns in their discussion of the “concept,” in *What Is Philosophy?* According to them, each “concept” is made up of multiple elements, which do not lose their own identities and are not entirely subsumed or co-opted by their incorporation into the larger concept. Instead, they create “a ‘fragmentary whole’ . . . made up of components which remain distinct, whilst allowing something to pass between them” (*What Is* 16, 20, quoted in Marks 42). That the rhizome, the multiplicity, and the concept operate similarly is not coincidental, since each, in its way, expresses Deleuze's and Guattari's belief in a productive and revolutionary contact between ideas and ideas, ideas and things; a contact that amounts to more than the sum of its parts, without diminishing the individual elements from which the “whole” is manifested.

Of course, the Cress letters are not the texts exactly as they were written to Williams; but as elements of the rhizome, they maintain a distinct voice of their own, while participating in the collective, intersecting voice of the poem. The purpose of incorporating and layering all of the many texts, personal as well as public, is to create resonances—that something which “pass[es] between”—to reveal something not yet witnessed or understood about the individual voices and about *Paterson*/*Paterson* as a whole, to take

. . . a mass of detail
to interrelate on a new ground, difficultly;
an assonance, a homologue

triple piled

pulling the disparate together to clarify
and compress (19)

Clearly, the rhizomic map is quite different from the typical atlas or guidebook map with which we are familiar—an object that traces the contours of the terrain it describes and regularly situates the viewer in a position of privilege, looking down from above the fray. Instead, this map “fosters connections between fields . . . is open and connectable in all of its dimensions; it is detachable, reversible, susceptible to constant modification” (12). It is an interactive exploration of an indeterminate number of points of contact: “made of variously formed matters, and very different dates and speeds” (Deleuze and Guattari 3). This description suggests a preliminary, but interesting correlation between “mapping,” as these theorists understand it, and the composition of *Paterson*, built as it is of variously formed matters (prosaic, prosodic, historic, public, personal) and very different dates and speeds. Further, “what distinguishes the map from the tracing” they tell us, is that it, like Williams’s poetic project, “is entirely oriented toward an experimentation in contact with the real” (*Thousand* 12).

Williams’s articulation of the differences between prose and poetry parallels the distinction between the tracing and the map. According to Bremen, for Williams, prose and poetry “reflect two different ‘methods of projection’ two ‘ways of thinking,’ whereby the world is either ‘copied’ according to some previously existing set of conventions, or alternately, ‘made anew,’ in Williams’s terms, by a new way of seeing” (16-17, citing *Collected Poems I* 178-82, 204-210). The journalistic tendencies of prose

lend themselves to representational tracing, a “plagiarism” of nature; but poetry, according to Williams, exists to create something new—an addition to nature. Within *Paterson*, the incorporation of prose *into* the poetry allows the prosaic textual material to participate in Williams’s more powerful and inventive poetic mapping.

The tracing, with its regime of “facts” correlates with the Baedeker’s agenda of delivering, in a pocket-size document, all the “relevant” information about a destination, “according to the axes of significance and subjectification belonging to it” (*Thousand* 13). While the guidebook is, no doubt, more complex than a photograph (the example of a “tracing” that Deleuze and Guattari use), it creates artificially still surfaces and descriptive units that have closure by hierarchizing and omitting information in service to a linear trajectory. In contrast, *Paterson-as-map* accesses not only surfaces, things seen from a distance, but depths and experiences, as well, crosscurrents and reversals. Its “perspective” is one of immersion—seen from the midst of the flow—the flow of images, time, water. This is one of the reasons the river is such a fundamental figure in the poem. Immersion in the river’s waters offers an antidote to the conceptual “divorce” that worried Williams. Even the potential divorce (death, separation, etc.) brought about by the action of falling, which occurs repeatedly within the poem, may be mitigated by the possibility of falling as water does or falling into water: “Only the thought of the stream comforts him, / its terrifying plunge, inviting marriage [. . .]” (82). Even when the effect of falling is death, as is the case with the student in Book IV, immersion still produces metamorphosis—a becoming of something that was not (164-165).

The river proves a central vehicle for “contact,” as rivulets and ripples join the

larger flow, carrying “rumors of separate worlds” to one another (25). And both its movement and the movement of the poem more broadly are evocative of Deleuze and Guattari’s concept of the “line of flight,” which “evolves by subterranean steps and flows, along river valleys or train tracks . . .” (12, 7).¹⁵ The plateaus to which the title of their work refers are the segments of a map—discrete in so far as they contain a certain “consistency” of their own (which should not be confused with homogeneity—think, instead, of the consistency of a force field made up of waves or particles, or a field of grass composed of many leaves). The definition of plateaus, or “planes of consistency,” is necessary for the mapping to describe something other than a system of inscrutable flux or disassociated points. There is a body of content here, and order, but it is not a rigid order. It is always flexible and active; and each plateau is connected to others by experimental connections, places of escape: these are the lines of flight. A rhizomic map may be dense or spare, depending on the number of lines of flight it creates, but, like the river in flood, there is always much that escapes from one plateau and infiltrates the next.

Early on in Paterson, Williams links the movement of water with the movement of thoughts through the mind:

Jostled as are the waters approaching
the brink, his thoughts
interlace, repel and cut under,
rise rock-thwarted and turn aside
but forever strain forward—or strike
an eddy and whirl, marked by a
leaf or curdy spume, seeming

¹⁵ This quote comes from a discussion of the operation of language more generally, but because Deleuze and Guattari are describing language in terms of the rhizome/map, I do not believe this elision misrepresents their thinking.

to forget . (7-8)

The linkage between liquidity and thought is relevant to the operation of lines of flight, in that, it is the mind with its fluid capacity to imagine that allows us, as cognitive beings, to recognize contact, even when the physical evidence says otherwise:

It is the imagination
which cannot be fathomed.
It is through this hole we escape . . . (210)

Institutions, of culture or education, teach us to accept “absolute” scales, such as those of rationality or propriety, to fix distances, and to recognize certain categories at the expense of other potential contacts. The flexibility of the mind, however, moving by liquid, subterranean paths can elude these strictures, allowing for invention and revelation:

Without invention nothing is well spaced
unless the mind change, unless
the stars are new measured, according
to their relative positions, the
line will not change, the necessity
will not matriculate: unless there is
a new mind there cannot be a new
line, the old will go on
repeating itself with recurring
deadlines [. . .] (50)

Invention is the purview of language for Deleuze, as well (Colebrook 4). And, as this passage from Book II suggests, the movement it produces is vital—it resists the authority of “the old line”—it re-delineates, poetically as well as physically, this time in terms of “relative” positions—positions that relate to one another and are not isolate nor absolute.

Language, too, becomes a fluid figure in the poem—flowing, falling, crashing down: “The language cascades into / the invisible, beyond and above: the falls / of which

it is the visible part” (145). As the episodes focusing on the force of the Falls and effects of the flood suggest, water is not easily contained, it has a power to resist stagnation, to resist the “designs” placed on it (unlike the sun which rises, ignorant, within the same “slot” each day) (4). In Book I, a speaker cautions against the “writing of stale poems,” products of “Minds like beds always made up / (more stony than a shore)” (4-5). Such a bed is the course of the river too narrowly defined, a course in which the mind of the poet and the river itself are unwilling to remain:

unwilling to lie in its bed
and sleep, and sleep, sleep
in its dark bed. (97)

The slipping and blending suggested by the movement of water is also expressed prosodically, in the slippage of sounds and the metamorphoses of words across lines. So, for instance, we have the movement of “ribbon” into “robin,” on page 18, with the r sound continuing into “Erudite” and then “Erasmus.” Or, on the following page, the flow of “white” into “swallows,” “flowered,” “shallow,” and “water” (19). Working within the materiality of the language, Williams recognizes assonance and consonance as forms of contact, ways in which words touch and inform each other, to trigger unexpected associations or harmonies for the reader.

Images, too, shift and slip. In Book III, Section III, a chain of dog-related events links an unspecified present with a Native American past and, further, with a mythical Greek past: a dog is killed for biting a passerby; a dog is killed to accompany the death of a chief; a dog’s body is carried by the river down to Acheron. Through these moments, the city of Paterson participates in a pattern that connects the mundane events of its

rhythms, ideas, and things into “contact.” Some touch by location on the page, others by the repetition of sounds, lines, or images lifted from one source and set down in another. In some cases, like the grasshopper episode, the linkages seem to follow a particular stream of consciousness, perhaps the consciousness of Paterson-as-man. Others happen without obvious human focalization.

Structurally, the poem’s interpolations and polyvocality highlight the significance of mingling and heterogeneity, resisting divorce; but this appears figuratively as well, in the “masticated” mud that is dredged up after the flood, in the congeries of flowers in the Cloister’s tapestries. It is evoked in scenes of trespass, metamorphosis, miscegenation. The Ringwood episode in Book I tells of a community of runaways—dispossessed Tuscarora Indians, women, both black and white, who have escaped enslavement, and deserting Hessian soldiers, all of whom have taken to the woods, to create a “bold association” (12-13). This episode is just one of a number of testaments to the productive potential of heterogeneity, coupled with the movement of escape. And this escape is fundamental to understanding the usefulness of the rhizomic map as a descriptive, but not totalizing model for Williams’s model of contact.

The power of the poet, to invent and to make discoveries, is not always a matter of linking two things or ideas together, of marrying or summing; it is equally important to “estrangle” to disrupt expectation and association, to look at dissonance as well as resonance, for

Dissonance
(if you are interested)

leads to discovery (175)¹⁶

There are benefits to shaking things up, to “turning the inside out” (140). In *Paterson*, incidents of disruption, particularly the fire, but also the tornado and images of inundation and draining, lead to discovery and reveal fertile potentials. The tornado and the fire impact rigid institutions of society—the Church is turned on its foundation, the Library, “sanctuary to our fears” with its “smell of stagnation and death,” is purged by flame (98, 101). Fire does more than empty that which it touches, it transforms and releases: “The beauty of fire-blasted sand / that was glass, that was a bottle: unbottled” (118). Williams recognizes the kinship between fire and poetry when he defines the act of writing as “a fire and not only of the blood” (113). Like writing, fire is rhizomic in its potential to leap from page to page, “from house to house, building to building,” releasing that which it connects through the association and destruction of conflagration (119). The atomic fire that can “smash the world wide” is at work in the poem and in the city of Paterson: “a city in itself, that complex / atom, always breaking down” (170, 177).

At the poem’s opening, the poet lays out this project:

To make a start,
out of particulars
and make them general, rolling
up the sum, by defective means— (3)

Initially, the “defective means” seem a statement of failure—but there is a degree to which the inability to make a total sum is not a failure, but a necessary condition—it preserves a means of escape. Even the poet must, at times, acknowledge that things

¹⁶ I would like to note, briefly, the movement of the “i” “n” and “d” sounds as they move through the three lines: Williams’s beautiful use of assonance and consonance in a passage that discusses dissonance.

escape from the names that have been placed on them:

a flower within a flower whose history
(within the mind) crouching
among the ferny rocks, laughs at the names
by which they think to trap it. Escapes! (22)

Both connection and disruption can be described in terms of escape. And escape is fundamental to understanding the rhizome as a descriptive, but not totalizing model for contact. *Paterson*, as mapping act, is a text that is never finished, never total; it, like the rhizome, is “perpetually in construction or collapsing,” “perpetually prolonging itself, breaking off and starting up again” (*Thousand* 20). Book V extends what was initially defined as a four book work; and at his death, Williams was working on yet another extension and expansion of the poem. The poem testifies to those processes of building up and tearing down witnessed both in the production of the text and of the American city it enacts. Even within the pieces that are “complete,” we see the rejection of a terminal form in the poem’s anti-teleological fragmentation and ultimate doubling back, suggested by the image of the snake with its tail in its mouth, and the man’s emergence from the sea at the poem’s end (229-230).

Had Burke left us with a more fully developed explanation of his vision of *Paterson-as-guidebook*, he might have focused, ultimately, on the ways in which Williams “moves in on” or infiltrates and subverts the dominating structures of the guidebook, allowing it to engage differently with the world it represents—a position in keeping with much of his other writings on Williams’s work, and certainly in keeping with Williams’s own working and reworking of prosodic form and tradition. For although Williams was well known for his insistence on liberating poetry from old, outmoded, and

copied forms, when it came to discussing his poetic maneuvers, he framed his relationship to tradition as a more subtle one; he did not suggest a total break from, but a reinvention of tradition. We find a version of this reworking in his negotiations of the guidebook genre, its rhetoric and hobby horses—breaking them down and building them up again, toward new ends.

Burke is correct in emphasizing that Williams is trying to show his readers something about the nature of Paterson, its significance—to “show us around.” But Williams does much more, immersing us in it, its complexity, contradictions, and fecundity. As readers, we encounter in *Paterson* not only a document of place, but an explosion of it, a thickening of our understanding of what such a place could mean that corresponds with the thickening of the identity of city and man and poem—“triple piled,” in Williams’s terms. Deleuze’s and Guattari’s understanding of mapping helps us to discuss such a city/man/poem, as Williams knew and expressed it, allowing for an openness, a flux that is critical to understanding *Paterson* not only as a representation, but as a place of rivers, a process, a defiance of authority, and as “an experimentation in contact with the real.”

Chapter 3: The Coast is Never Clear: Elizabeth Bishop and the Question of a Cartographic Poetics

I: INTRODUCTION

Elizabeth Bishop was born in Worcester, Massachusetts, in 1911, but spent formative years in Nova Scotia, with her mother's family. Her childhood was, in many ways, a difficult and lonely one—her father died in her infancy, and her mother was institutionalized when Bishop was very young. Feeling that she would be better brought up in Massachusetts, her paternal family removed her from the care of her Canadian grandparents, and Bishop suffered the separation. Once back in the U.S., she was enrolled in boarding school, though she spent a significant amount of time convalescing, as a result of asthma and acute allergies. In high school, Bishop began writing poetry, and her work appeared in school publications. For college, she attended Vassar, where she became a friend and acolyte of the poet Marianne Moore. Even after Bishop had matured as a poet, she remained fast friends with Moore, as she did with the poet Robert Lowell. It was Lowell who helped to secure for her the position of Consultant in Poetry to the Library of Congress (now called the Poet Laureate) in 1949.

Bishop received an inheritance from her father's estate, which facilitated her travels in Europe after college and the purchase of a home in Key West in 1938. Her earliest collection of poems, *North and South* (1946), reflects on her experiences in these environs. Bishop struggled with periodic bouts of depression, and after her term in Washington D.C., she agreed to embark on a circumnavigation of the continent of South America, as a possible means of combating one of these. As chance would have it, she

suffered from a violent allergic reaction to a cashew fruit in Brazil, and remained there while the rest of her party continued on. While recuperating, Bishop met Lota de Macedo Soares, a Brazilian architect, designer, and intellectual. The two women developed an intense relationship that would last until Macedo Soares's death some fifteen years later, during which time Bishop remained in Brazil. It was not until late in life that she returned to New England. She died in Cambridge, Massachusetts in 1979.

Bishop's oeuvre is modest in size. She published only five books during her lifetime. Two more were published after her death, one of which is *The Complete Poems* (1979). Their small number may be attributed, in large part, to her meticulously slow process of composition—nine years passed between the publication of *North and South* and her second collection, *A Cold Spring* (1955). Her poem "The Moose," famously, was in revision for over a decade. In other areas of her writing life, Bishop was far more prolific: she wrote prose pieces—both stories and essays—and a huge number of letters, as many as 300 a year for most of her adult life. This material record, along with her journals, has proven invaluable to scholars seeking to understand her attitudes toward, and processes of, writing poetry.

Despite having been recognized as a poet of national merit early in her career, Bishop's critical reception developed slowly. It was not until the 1980's that critics (often female scholars) began to dedicate significant attention to her work. The first book-length study of Bishop was published by Anne Stevenson in 1966, and incorporated information from Stevenson's correspondence with Bishop. Regardless of their critical leanings, few critics have questioned Bishop's competence as a poet. Her writing is, for

the most part, restrained—restrained and dense—with brief eruptions of exuberance, or, at times, acute pain. Her relationship to form, generally speaking, is one in which facility makes form nearly invisible. She is a very solid poet, and as such, I understand critics' desires to enlist Bishop as a representative woman, a representative lesbian, a representative modern, or anti modern; but these fixed categorizations are only possible through deliberate avoidance of the uncertainties and ambiguities Bishop preserves within her work. She was herself both modest (some have referred to her as diffident) and apolitical. Although cosmopolitan in her interests and experiences, she retained throughout her life a self-effacing attitude easily associated with the austerity of her early Northern Baptist upbringing. This degree of reserve is offset by her enthusiasm for the discovery of new places, new sensations, and her sensitive eye and ready ability to describe what she sees.

As her travels and the titles of her collections suggest—*North and South*, *Geography III*, *Questions of Travel*—Bishop had a lifelong fascination with geography and with maps. In her prose piece, “Primer Class,” Bishop reflects on her early childhood anticipation of geography lessons:

Only the third and fourth grades studied geography. On their side of the room, over the blackboard, were two rolled-up maps, like window shades. They were cloth, very limp with a shiny surface, and in pale colors—tan, pink, yellow, and green—surrounded by the blue that was the ocean. The light coming in from their windows, falling on the glazed crackly surface, made it hard for me to see them properly from where I sat. . . . I was so taken with the pull-down maps that I wanted to snap them up, and pull them down again, and touch all the countries and provinces with my own hands. (*Collected Prose* 10)

The impulse to “touch all the countries with [her] own hands” seems to have informed Bishop’s physical as well as textual peregrinations (though the countries themselves often proved no less elusive than their mapped counterparts). The consequent work calls out to be read cartographically; and many critics have responded to this call. The first poem in her first book is “The Map.” Describing a viewer’s imaginative encounter with a map (presumably of the Northern hemisphere, based on the nations she mentions), Bishop tells us, “We can stroke these lovely bays, / under a glass as if they were expected to blossom, / or as if to provide a clean cage for invisible fish.” The gesture is then repeated by the peninsulas on the map itself, which take water between “thumb and finger / like women feeling for the smoothness of yard goods” (*Complete* 3)

As the personification of geographic forms suggests, Bishop’s poem reads even these mapped coastlines as active, and she draws our attention to the uncertain relationships between land and water as they meet. Although the first line of the poem asserts that land lies in water, the remainder of the first stanza challenges this claim—making it unclear whether the shading at the edges of the coasts are shadows, cast by the land on the water, or shallows. The speaker then questions whether it isn’t the land that is lifting up the water, rather than reclining into it:

does the land lean down to lift the sea from under,
drawing it unperturbed around itself?
Along the fine tan sandy shelf
is the land tugging at the sea from under? (3)

The inclusion of such unanswered questions is a characteristic means of introducing ambiguity into Bishop’s poetry, unsettling her reader and her own claims to authority. It is a device she used throughout her career, perhaps most famously in her

poem “Questions of Travel,” in which she expresses her ambivalence about the traveler’s reasons for always “rush[ing] / to see the sun the other way around” (93).

Most of the book-length studies of Bishop’s work dedicate at least one chapter to the figure of the map as it appears in her writings, or to the cartographic qualities of her oeuvre. And, like much literary scholarship using the language of maps, few of these pieces delve deeply into what mapping means—the ways of thinking, and of organizing knowledge, via representation, that cartographic projects represent.

For example, in “Days and Distances: The Cartographic Imagination of Elizabeth Bishop,” now found in *Elizabeth Bishop Modern Critical Views*, Jan B. Gordon’s early comment that Bishop’s poems “appear as epistemological exercises” seems promising, but Gordon’s explanation of how this activity links to the “cartographic imagination” of her title is muddled at best (10). Beginning with a discussion of Bishop’s short story “In Prison,” Gordon focuses on the loss of a sense of the historical within Bishop’s work. For the prisoner, whose activity is limited to reading and commenting upon a text, “In the environment where every intersection is a corner, there is virtually no lineage . . . Since time has virtually disappeared, there is no meaning, save in the shade or the nuance—the projection of the inadequacy of taste to make circumscription a synonym for appropriation” (11). Describing the activity of the prisoner as appropriating the little world to which he still has access (albeit inadequately) through the exercise of taste and criticism, Gordon then goes on to say, “the predominant metaphor for this activity is map-making—a sort of charting of poetic voyages which is in part, at least, autobiographical” (11). There is a fundamental problem with this analysis. How can the

image of the voyage, or the autobiography, both linear propositions, be used to describe activities taking place in a space in which there is no access to linearity, lineage, or history? Charting terrain and charting voyages are two different mapping operations—and though they might be linked, Gordon does not make clear how these operations relate to one another, or, more importantly, how they do not contradict one another in the context of her reading.

In actuality, her explanation of the prisoner's critical activities holds interesting potential for a discussion of mappings that are non-linear or anti hierarchical. If, as she describes, the prisoner's "critical exercise is virtually indistinguishable from the book which serves as its object, and questions of priority and succession pale beneath the metaphysics of the layer" then the prisoner's activities align closely with the mapping practices I have already discuss in my chapter on William Carlos Williams's *Paterson* and the theory of mapping proposed by Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, as well as the reading practices explored by Michel de Certeau (Gordon 11). But Gordon's attention falls elsewhere; she does not consider this "flattening out" to carry beneficial, anti-hierarchical potentials, but instead links it to a pejorative "two-dimensionality" of Bishop's craft—criticizing her works for lacking a distinct teleology, offering "no possibility of a therapeutic progression" (15).

Gordon correctly identifies a deliberate "loss of privilege" in Bishop's perspectives, but rather than considering the distinction between this loss of privilege and traditional cartographic perspectives, she finds fault with this representational maneuver by saying that it allows for a lack of responsibility on the part of the poet (curious, in

that, perspectives that make claims to the privilege of objectivity are among the most notorious for avoiding responsibility for their representations) (15-16). Her essay emphasizes the ways in which she feels the landscapes in Bishop's poetry represent a "coalesced" rather than "personal" perspective, and appear "reproduced rather than experienced" (16). And though she does not make this explicit claim, it becomes clear that, to her, what it means to have a cartographic imagination is to imagine and represent the world as "all surfaces" (16).

When it comes to Bishop's cartographies, this is a serious mistake. While I agree with Gordon's claims that "Bishop seems fascinated with geographical extremities . . . [as] the structures of her world" and that cartographic concerns with "scale and perspective become primary considerations" within her works, Gordon's overarching line of analysis, with its emphasis on the superficiality of Bishop's writings leads, ultimately, to what I consider to be a significant misreading of Bishop's poem, "The Map," and of Bishop's poetic project more broadly (12, 13).

Regarding "The Map," Gordon claims that Bishop "has taken an object known primarily for its utility in getting us from one place to another and restored it to an existence purged of history" (13). But, as I discuss below, Bishop's map is *not* purged of history (no map can be); nor is it ever clear that the kind of map she examines in the poem is designed to guide us from one place to another. While Bishop does place emphasis on boundaries, surfaces, and coasts, her poems are not evacuated or "neutral spaces," nor are they composed entirely of surfaces—but of tensions between surfaces, projections, movements, and interiors (13). If we "lose rather than gain our way" in

Bishop's poetry, as Gordon suggests, this is due to her careful manipulation of our own expectations about surfaces and boundaries (13).

A notable exception to the less-than-careful treatment of cartographic concerns in Bishop's work is the epilogue to Bonnie Costello's study, *Elizabeth Bishop: Questions of Mastery* (1991). Costello begins this brief chapter by offering a concise definition of what a map does: "It orders the observable world into an intelligible visual scheme that reflects a political structure as well as a geological one" (234). While this is not the only possible definition of a map, it is a clear one, engaging with the ways in which knowledge of the world is ordered toward specific ends. According to Costello, maps have both "illusionistic as well as diagrammatic properties," which is what allows Bishop to find in them "not [only] the determinate shapes of the diagram, free of perspective, but the indeterminate signs of a fiction, made out of desire and subject to the play of a beholder's interpretive glance" (235). Costello is explicit in recognizing that Bishop interrogates cartographic forms of representation just as she does all representations: questioning "the promise of visual mastery by reminding us of the historical dimension in which maps . . . exist" (234). In "The Map," by making an analogy between map and poem, Bishop "loosen[s] relations of dominance to allow a flow of direction and interpretation and to reject the imperial stance" (235).

The tension and collaboration between what Costello terms the diagrammatic and illusionistic properties of maps in Bishop's works is helpful in understanding the

parallels between mapping and poetry more broadly.¹⁷ Gleaning what we can from Costello, as well as others, I would like to go further in investigating Bishop as a cartographic poet, considering the conditions and modes of inquiry leading to map-making that might be understood as complements to her writing; asking also, what the bounds of the comparison between her writing and the making of maps are. Such an inquiry involves the practice of a more full-fledged interdisciplinarity. But its usefulness carries us beyond strictly literal concerns with geography or territory. It is significant to Bishop scholarship (and to the study of twentieth-century poetry at large), because it allows us to approach her explicit concern with poetry's ability to represent, not only the finished artifacts of human understanding—thoughts—but modes of thinking in action, or movements of mind.¹⁸ Bishop draws our attention to this capacity when she praises Gerard Manley Hopkins for his works' ability to convey "not a thought, but a mind thinking" and for his attempts to "dramatize the mind in action rather than in repose" (Brown 298).

Mapping, too, has been productively used to reveal movements of mind, as the non-linear linkages between ideas made tangible, in cognitive or mental mapping. Rather than fully synthesized and integrated representations, depictions of thought in action, whether poetic or cartographic, emphasize movement. They can have a disorienting,

¹⁷ See, for instance, my discussion of William Least Heat-Moon's "deep map" of Kansas in relation to Robert Hass's writings.

¹⁸ This is not Bishop's concern, alone. See, Chapter 1. Also, Robert von Hallberg's discussion of Robert Creeley in *American Poetry and Culture 1945- 1980*: ". . . like Williams, Creeley intends his poems to display 'all the complexity of a way of thinking' (CP16) . . . both [Creeley and Ashbery] write poems whose difficulties derive mainly from the effort to render accurately, though often inelegantly, the ways a mediating mind actually moves through confusions, distractions, and banalities. (48, 54).

sometimes dizzying quality, as they record non-linear shifts through multiple focal points. (Cinema has been similarly identified with this capacity.) Poetic structure makes this possible textually—the breaking of lines and the juxtaposition of images within a brief space enacts in the mind of the reader the process of moving through and between the ideas that the poem documents.¹⁹ We can see this at work in the smallest of poems—say, “In the Station of the Metro”—and in the most elaborate—as in Williams’s *Paterson*, or at a somewhat smaller scale, Robert Hass’s poem “Maps.” Of significance to the discussion of all three poets’ works are the ways in which methodologically (that is, structurally and through the use of analogy, in particular) their writings deliberately “loosen relations of dominance” (pre-established orders or certainties) “to allow a flow of direction and interpretation,” describing movements of mind.

Elsewhere, I examine the work of analogy and listing as a means of evoking the mind in action. Here, I am interested in two principal, and interrelated, means by which the poem represents movements of mind. The first is through a recurring involvement with processes of re-vision: both textual revision as well as an ongoing reconsideration of what is seen and how. The second is an eschewal of certainty—an insistence on the flux that precedes and may even overwhelm the certain (hence the rejection of the imperial stance to which Costello refers).

While transparency of description—that is, the clarity of objects, ideas or feelings—may have been a traditional source of authority in poetry both before and

¹⁹ Stream of consciousness narrative has been attributed this power as well, but the structure of the poem on the page (its juxtapositions, fragments, and enjambments) adds a dimension that block prose (and, I would argue, the prose poem) cannot.

during Bishop's time, her works propose a shifting of the basis of this authority: one that does not abandon claims to verisimilitude, but refocuses representation onto the processes preceding the declaration of facts of thought or emotion—on the processes of thinking or understanding. This shift underwrites a heuristic claim: that by being in motion, not yet coalesced, the carefully documented processes of perception and thought may reveal or produce unexpected insights. And, of course, heuristic claims are the natural territory of maps—built out of discovery and designed to promote it.

Considering the emphasis I am placing on the connections between poetry and movements of mind, it is worth noting that poetry is still often deemed of primarily aesthetic or “cultural” (as in, high art) rather than epistemological or political significance. The apparent reluctance, even within literary studies, and certainly within the teaching of poetry, to examine systems of thought at work in the structures of poetry, (and, consequently, what the interdependences between poetics and the rhetorical agendas of poems might be) is a bit surprising, especially when both contemporary identity-based analyses and so-called post-modern (or post-structural) readings are very concerned with the linkages between modes of thought, modes of representation, and consequent modes of action. Bakhtin's assertion of poetry's monologic, totalizing voice, while an example of a way of reading poetry not divorced from its political implications, does little to help us understand the work done by poems designed to challenge the singular or certain perspective; nor does it help us understand what the real bearings of such poems might be on the way we as readers see and read the world through the poem.

Ironically, while I will argue here for the political and epistemological ramifications of poetic choice, one benefit of considering Bishop's writings cartographically is to challenge her periodic recruitment by critics into bounded political or stylistic camps. The skillful and often deliberately evasive negotiations of boundaries in her writing invite us to examine more closely her liminal status as poet between romantic, modern and postmodern modes.

II: CARTOGRAPHIC WAYS OF SEEING

Typically (and historically), maps have been thought of as transparent and objective documents—depicting structures of the world as they exist, rather than the social and political structures informing the mapmaker's sense of the world. This “objectivity” is what allows us to trust them, to make legal and navigational choices by them. (As I discuss in Chapter 1, the assumption of the objectivity and “innocence” of the map, as well as the discourses of travel and imperial expansion often associated with mapping, has now been soundly challenged.) While poetry, particularly in its association with the intimacies of human emotion, has rarely been explicitly described as objective, in Bishop's formative years as a young poet, this was precisely one of the aims undertaken by the poets of the “Objectivist” movement: to allow the particulars of the world to speak, as if through the transparent medium of the poem.

Bishop's influences were certainly not limited to the Objectivists. At various times she expressed admiration for Eliot, Stevens, Wordsworth, Herbert, and Hopkins, as well as the Surrealist painters, and her work is more often analyzed in terms of the

influences of these voices (and visions) than with those of Williams, Zukofsky, or the other Objectivists. Her mentor, Marianne Moore, however, was well known for her emphasis on clarity of vision. And throughout her own career, Bishop, expressed a concern with different ways of seeing. As a result of this, and her careful attention to detail and nuance found in the visual world, Bishop became known for having a “famous ‘eye’” (Page “Stops” 22). The wide-spread association of Bishop’s work with visual acuity—its being a poetry of “all eye,” as one reviewer states—points to the connection between visual clarity and the poet’s authority. Some have further attributed this authoritative accuracy to Bishop’s own apparent distance from the things of the world she describes, evoking two of cartography’s primary sources of authority: visual accuracy and an objective remove.

At the same time, as Costello points out regarding “The Map,” the effects of many of Bishop’s poems are to challenge “the promise of visual mastery” and to “reject the imperial stance” (*Questions* 234-235). Critics and fellow poets agree that her writing is characterized by “an emerging skepticism toward all mastering discourses of vision and voice” (Page “Stops” 14). As an unbeliever in “absolutes” she describes her perceptions of “a world she cannot control”, using “a vision that multiplies or shifts perspectives” (Donoghue 251; Boland 73; Costello, *Questions* 15).

If, as J. Hillis Miller argues, in *The Poets of Reality* (1965), twentieth-century American poetry sought to abandon the “project of dominion” associated with nineteenth-century thought, science, and Imperialism, “abandoning the will to power over things,” then claims to objective authority are particularly problematic for poets like

Bishop, who must actively seek alternative means of expression, alternative bases for realism or relevance (8). This chapter is dedicated to exploring the role of vision and perspective in establishing authority, and the maneuverings of an anti-mastery poet whose descriptive commitments and interest in the forms of the world remain strong.

Current historians of cartography and scholars in related fields are now offering arguments about the origins of cartographic ways of seeing and their effects. They examine the intersections of maps with art, politics, religion, and, of course, science. In many cases, these studies identify the roots of the visual authority vested in plane and scale maps with the mandates of empiricism and empire. According to Simon Ryan, the space constructed by empire is

universal, Euclidean and Cartesian, a measurable mathematical web constructed and maintained by positivism . . . Constructing a monolithic space . . . [which] allows imperialism to hierarchise the use of space to its own advantage (4).

He goes on to explain that the rendering of space according to the rules of empiricism and the interests of empire, as the “construction of a universal space” allows

a homogeneous mapping practice to be applied to all parts of the world: maps become an imperial technology used to facilitate and celebrate the further advances of explorers, and display worldwide imperial possessions. . . (5)

Paul Carter describes this process as “the delineation of new territory . . . over which a grid of exclusive authority [could] be laid” (Mappings 136).

Much of the mapping activity that interests Carter and Ryan takes place in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, and is closely associated with contemporaneous scientific movements. With the advent of empiricism, vision and

knowledge were firmly linked. Seeing as a way of Knowing charged the eye with tremendous power. It also placed the viewer, the owner of said eye, in an odd position—there was a rush to “discover,” to claim to have seen most clearly or for the first time (ignoring the world as it had been seen for generations by the native inhabitants of places); at the same time there was the pressure to authorize the discovery not only through primacy but through objectivity, or the detachment of what was seen from the subjectivity of a single viewer.²⁰ Recourse to systems of measurement and classification helped to accomplish this. Exploration, Ryan argues, like mapping, “is primarily a visual activity, aimed at determining through mensuration the dimensions of the outside via an act that simultaneously determines the self as objective observer” (5). In *Imperial Eyes*, Mary Louise Pratt offers a number of striking readings of the ways in which imperial viewers—from the late eighteenth century to the present—negotiate the power of their vision, and the claims to knowledge they make when they take on the role of “monarchs of all they survey.” It is from these origins, and the persistence of imperial systems of perspective and measure, that maps developed a reputation for being the devices of “classification, order, control, and purification” (Cosgrove *Mappings* 4).

All of which should make us hesitant to leap at the opportunity to describe Elizabeth Bishop as a cartographic poet. However, (and with Bishop, there seems invariably to be a “however”) it is still worthwhile to investigate Bishop’s ways of seeing: how they may or may not coincide with the traditions of cartography, and in what

²⁰ For a discussion of the ways in which these same impulses played out in the mapping of non-terrestrial terrain, see Maria Lane’s study of the contemporaneous mapping of Mars (forthcoming).

ways they reflect epistemological continuities over the course of time, from the advent of imperial mapping to the twentieth-century negotiations of its impulses. As we will see, even within the conventions of mapping itself, things become interesting in places where the traditional sources of cartographic authority are fundamentally challenged (and, indeed, it is the work of many sensitive scholars of cartography to reveal the ways in which all acts of mapping are fundamentally challenged, if not by the terrain itself then by contact with other systems of seeing and knowing).

III THE COAST IS NEVER CLEAR

In his essay, “Dark with Excess of Bright: Mapping the Coastlines of Knowledge” Paul Carter reflects on the essential indeterminacy of certain geographic features and the human drive to document and stabilize these forms. Carter focuses his piece on the concept of the coastline—its privileged status as destination, unifying structure, safe haven and hazard—and the ways this concept manifests in Enlightenment mapping. He considers the “bounding” capacity of coastal maps as an essentially imperial operation, associating it both with the drive to possess unfamiliar places and British imperial attempts to structure knowledge as an uninterrupted “logical” line—“an image of reasoning”:

A coast was a generalization, an abstraction: but as the medium connecting isolated objects to one other (sic), it was a condition of knowledge, an analogue of the associative reasoning essential to the orderly progress of reason (*Mappings* 125).

Using early European forays to the coasts of Australia and Alaska as examples, Carter examines the technical challenges of documenting a line that is always in flux—

where land and water join—and the various solutions early cartographers proposed for addressing the instability of the coastline. These included both surveys from sea and from land. Each approach, however, ultimately required that certain sections of the map be “sketched by eye”—documenting contours of the land, not by instrument or measurement, but by sight. The mapmaker would then endeavor to “eliminate any signs of the line’s human source” in order to maintain the map’s claim to objective authority (126). The process of sketching by eye, then erasing the signs of individual agency confirms the power of “raw” (unmeasured) sight in the collection of data for early maps,²¹ as well as the urge to articulate the coastline as “whole,” even if that meant relying on individual vision. (Carter mentions, too, that the “arabesques” of bays that were drawn without the aid of measurement may have expressed an aesthetic assumption about the correspondence of “the manual excursions of the cartographer and the mundane voyage of the explorer” (126).)

Seeing was not only intrinsically linked to the project of documenting the coast as unbroken line, but also to understanding the coast as revelatory structure. As Carter explains, one of the many reasons coasts appealed to eighteenth-century European explorers and mapmakers was their belief that the coast was “a space of revelation,” “a pre-emptive clearing” laying bare the biological or geological contents of the often difficult-to-access interior (132).²² The coast was even thought of as granting insight into

²¹ A process confirmed by Luciana de Lima Martins in her account of the mapping of Rio de Janeiro and the important role that sailors’ sketchbooks played in documenting the entry to the bay (*Mappings* 148-168).

²² He makes a connection between this diorama-like reading of the coast and the contemporaneous European involvement with cabinets of curiosities, which display the wealth of unknown interiors (of the ocean, foreign lands, etc.) (*Mappings* 132).

the interior workings or “occult forces” of time. Successful explorers, such as eighteenth-century mineralogist James Hutton, were lauded for “an accurate eye for perceiving the characters of natural objects’ and ‘in equal perfection the power of interpreting their signification,” and the coast was the zone in which they practiced these skills (134). According to John Playfair, Hutton’s memorialist (and his contemporary), it was the power of Hutton’s *vision* that allowed him to decipher in the rock formations at the coast “those ancient hieroglyphics which record the revolutions of the globe,” to look into “the abyss of time” (134). Pratt recalls that other eighteenth- and nineteenth-century explorers, too, commented on the insight they were granted into the vertiginous depths of time, based on the geologic surfaces of the land.

Because coastal sightings were expected to offer insight, in those cases in which the coast was obscured, by marshland for instance, or navigable entry to the interior was not found, explorers and mapmakers expressed bitter disappointment. They would even go so far as to give punitive names to these places, such as “Useless Bay,” because, Carter says, they understood the coast’s “utility, its promise, [as] in direct proportion to the conformity of its expression to their own expectations” (138).

Elizabeth Bishop’s writings express a similar preoccupation with coastlines—as sites of arrival and expectation, the edges of potential meaning or discovery. Having lived in coastal zones throughout her life, she published as many as sixteen poems documenting the shores of Nova Scotia, Florida, Europe, and Brazil. (Given the modest size of her published oeuvre, the number is considerable.) The work of the eighteenth-century mapmakers offers an interesting analog to Bishop’s own coastal approaches—in

so far as they both respond to and represent the expectations of the cartographer/poet approaching land from the sea with a hope for some “insight” into new territory. That the speakers in Bishop’s coastal poems, often self-identified as travelers and foreigners, share heuristic impulses with the travelers and conquerors of previous centuries is suggestive of her participation in the ongoing modes of inquiry which have accompanied Western “modernity” in its broadest sense—connecting Renaissance empiricism with exploration and conquest, Romantic attitudes toward nature and sight, and the eventual agendas and “accuracies” of travelers’ tour guides. Ultimately, as I will argue, Bishop chooses very different representational strategies than her cartographic predecessors in response to the difficulties and ambiguities of the coast—ones that allows her to participate both in the commitments of Modernism, and in the disruptions of expectations more characteristic of post-modern perspectives.

To begin with, however, Bishop’s poem “Brazil, January 1, 1502” makes clear the continuum she perceived between European colonialism and twentieth-century tourism. In 1951 Bishop arrived in Brazil, the first stop in her planned tour of South America. This poem is the second in a collection documenting her experiences in that country. It opens, “Januaries, Nature greets our eyes / exactly as it must have greeted theirs” (Collected Poems 91). As the piece unfolds, we learn that “they,” whose way of seeing matches the recently-arrived tourists’, are the militant Portuguese conquerors of the sixteenth century, armed with religion, desire, the tools of violence, and an antiquated way of seeing, through which they filter their experiences of their new surroundings. The correlation between past and present views is made especially strong by Bishop’s use of

“exactly” and the uncharacteristic “must,” which contrast sharply with the uncertainty her diction often cultivates.

Not only do the first two lines of the poem suggest the translation of the natural world into an emblem (capital N Nature), and an emblem of welcome, but that the viewers receive its welcome visually. A poem about ways of seeing and understanding the unfamiliar, “Brazil, January 1, 1502” reveals both the creative potentials and the palpable dangers of constructing correspondences: the associations travelers (whether tourists or conquerors) bring with them, laminating an old way of seeing and understanding onto a new environment. This is what allows the unfamiliar landscape to “correspond, nevertheless” for the Portuguese “to an old dream of wealth and luxury” in the poem’s final stanza, ultimately facilitating their exploitative relationship with the land and its inhabitants. Much of the poem’s power, however, comes from Bishop’s own ability to construct a correspondence between the conquerors way of seeing and the tourists’. Mary Louise Pratt discussion of this “imperial” way of seeing, as it occurs in Victorian exploration accounts, is useful for understanding the representative strategies at work in Bishop’s poem, which suggest the great consistency of this vision over time.

Even before the poem begins, in its epigraph from *Landscape into Art*, we are alerted to an interpretive lens through which Europeans have often processed their contacts with the natural world. Bishop calls on two phrases from Sir Kenneth Clark’s canonical history of western art, “embroidered nature” and “tapestried landscape,” to evoke the synthesis of visual detail into a metaphor of fabric, of art. Clark stands in, like the Portuguese and the mid-twentieth century tourist, for the Euro-centric ways of seeing,

of translating nature into art, whether embroidered tapestry or densely detailed painting, “fresh as if just finished and taken off the frame,” as Bishop says at the first stanza’s end.

In her discussion of nineteenth-century European exploration accounts (particularly of Africa and South America), Pratt describes three characteristic strategies for investing what is seen with value, to affirm the value of the explorer’s achievements (204). The first of these is, as Bishop’s poem suggests, framing the sight/site as a work of art, aestheticizing the landscape to create a “verbal painting” (201). In the first stanza of Bishop’s poem, color is critical to her artful construction of Nature. In fifteen lines, we encounter ten colors, including “blue, blue-green and olive,” “silver-gray,” “two yellows,” “rust red and greenish white” (CP 91). Entering the second stanza, it does not seem as if the scene has been “taken off the frame” after all—the density of description and color continues. Here we encounter color, “blue-white,” “pale-green,” and the enigmatic “hell-green,” as well as pattern—“web[bed],” “feathery,” “pure-colored,” “spotted,” “splattered,” and “overlapping”—evocative of painting (91).

It is not until the third and final stanza that we emerge from description of the setting to discuss the incursion of the Europeans, “small and hard like nails,” into the landscape. As it turns out, however, Bishop’s description is laced with the incursions of European ways of seeing, inserted (some small and hard, like nails) into the descriptive fabric. When Pratt describes Euro-centric ways of seeing and describing unfamiliar terrain, the second attribute she points to is a density of meaning achieved through “extremely rich . . . material and semantic substance. . . especially through a huge number of adjectival modifiers” (204). Bishop’s colors are clearly these, and the density

of the jungle scene is everywhere emphasized: foliage fills in “every square inch,” there is no air, only more leaves (*Complete* 91). Variety of size is also a focus. Leaves are big, little, and giant; flowers are also giant and “solid but airy”; palms are “swarthy, squat, but delicate”; vines are “oblique and neat”; the Christians are tiny and hard; and the “massy rocks” are “worked with lichens / gray moonbursts” (91-92).

Pratt is particularly interested in the density of meaning produced by the inclusion of “material referents” that “tie the landscape explicitly to the explorer’s home culture” (204). So, for instance, in Bishop’s poem we find a *satin* underleaf, a pale-green broken *wheel*, a red hot *wire*. There are also “sooty dragons” described as “Sin” and the reference to hell. Bishop’s inclusion of an English transliteration of a Portuguese plant name—“one leaf yes and one leaf no”—adds another layer of European translation onto the landscape. And, of course, at the poem’s end, the Christians are *nails* tearing their way through the “hanging fabric” of the jungle.

As the speaker’s self-identification with the Portuguese suggests, Bishop is aware of her own participation in these traditions. She self-consciously describes the birds in the scene as “big symbolic birds” which remain silent, and she creates a tableau of temptation in the garden, portrayed by five lizards, or “sooty dragons,” eyeing a small female lizard with “her wicked tail straight up and over, / red as a red-hot wire.” “Brazil” presents two connected, colonizing visions of nature—as virgin, in the first half of the poem, and dangerous tease (if not whore) in the second. The piece is, ultimately, a critique of the violence done in the name of an outmoded, Euro-centric way of seeing, “already out of style when they [the Portuguese] left home,” by those who cannot

understand the place on its own terms, but only as a seductive echo of the their own desires and fears, personal and cultural (92). Here, “discovery” is not fresh. It is the reapplication of previous, often erroneous, and even usurious systems of knowledge onto new places. So, although the Christians are diminished by the scale of Brazil, the damage they are capable of is not. The poem’s final stanza expresses this threat:

Directly after Mass, humming perhaps
L’Homme armé or some such tune,
they ripped their way into the hanging fabric,
each out to catch an Indian for himself— (92)

Which brings us to the third of Pratt’s criteria for establishing the explorer’s achievement: “the relationship of mastery predicated between seer and seen” (204). Picturing terrain as an artistic composition is a part of this mastery: the idea that the place is “made” by fact of its European documentation (204). “[A]t particular points in Europe’s expansionist trajectory,” Pratt tells us, “travel and exploration writing [has] *produced* ‘the rest of the world’ for European readerships” (5). It is here that she associates textual and cartographic representations:

a name on a map, a report to the Royal Geographic Society, the Foreign Office, the London Mission Society, a diary, a lecture, a travel book. Here is language charged with making the world in the most singlehanded way, and with high stakes. (204)

Bonnie Costello goes further to connect the mentality associated with the translation of nature into art and the mapping mentality described by Pratt, Ryan and Carter, which flattens, universalizes and imposes order. Discussing “Brazil, January 1, 1502” she reflects, “Reading nature as tapestry, we assume several things . . . that it is two-dimensional, vertical, and static . . . More than presumption, this reflects the structure of

the mind. We apprehend ‘nature’ as ‘landscape,’ as something intelligibly ordered” (Questions 144).

In art as well as mapping and “verbal painting,” to use Pratt’s term, the vantage point from which the view is “taken” plays a part in mastering what is seen.²³ This becomes clear in a number of Bishop’s poems—in views from balconies, from airplanes, from the elevated decks of ships as they pull into the harbor. In this poem, however, visually-predicated mastery is less clear. In fact, the language of visual mastery is not allowed the final word in the poem, because a critical part of the “seen” cannot be seen. While each conquistador is “out to catch an Indian for himself,” “those maddening little women” keep “calling, / calling to each other (or had the birds waked up?) / and retreating always retreating, behind” the jungle’s hanging fabric (92).

These Indian women are multiply fugitive. Not only do they evade view by retreating further into the jungle, they speak only to each other, not to the invaders. Perhaps these are “contestatory expressions from the site of imperial intervention” like those that Pratt investigates in her book (2). Perhaps the voices are not even those of humans, but the calls of the silent, symbolic birds, now awoken. Bishop’s odd syntax in these last lines challenges the verbal mastery of the scene as well. Most notably, the questioning aside “(or had the birds waked up?)” refuses resolution—ending a line with a question, a parenthesis, and a dangling preposition (so unlike Bishop, a rigorous grammarian) leaves things “up” in the air (while, of course, we have already learned that

²³ Within the language of these texts, mastery is also expressed in visions of “constructive” change to the landscape, fantasies of how the place will be once Europeans have put it to proper use (Pratt 61, 131).

there is no air here, only more leaves). By the time we arrive at the poem's last line, it is momentarily difficult to understand what it is the voices are retreating behind, the distance between the pronoun "it" and its referent stretching like the distance between where "we" stand, with the Christians five lines earlier, and the retreating voices.

It is worth noting here that the invisibility of the Indians is a double-edged sword: they elude the violence threatened by being "caught" or being seen; but at the same time, their absorption into the jungle and its sounds erases them *and* conflates them with nature—a long-standing, and deliberately dismissive European tactic for representing Native Americans. (One that was applied, as Pratt describes, to Spanish Americans as well: "Within the Euromyth, the Spanish American is accorded scarcely any other existence [than the ground on which Europeans sow their words], and certainly no voice: only Nature speaks" (141).) What may make a recuperative reading of this passage possible, as I will argue later, is that their voices are the voices of birds, and the voices of birds in Bishop's poetry are associated with knowledge, vitality, and with the poet's own voice.²⁴

As a poet and an American, aware of her own position of privilege in the post-World War II world, Bishop's critique of the conqueror/tourist's gaze likely reflects a number of preoccupations of her cultural moment. Although at mid-century travel was a frequent subject of American poetry, according to Robert von Hallberg, there was, within certain poetic circles, an air of disapproval toward travel poetry because of "the

²⁴ See also the association of the Indian Princess and the alligator in "Florida" (from *North and South* (1946)), with its "five distinct calls" / "friendliness, love, mating, war, and a warning—" (CP 33).

superficiality of the tourist's perspective" (63). The frequency with which Bishop describes moments of arrival, when the visitor's perspective is at its most superficial, openly acknowledges this problem—the traveler's necessary lack of insight. This very condition, however, proves fruitful in poems like "Brazil January 1, 1502," where what is being "discovered" is not Brazil itself, but a way of seeing Brazil, or seeing the foreign more generally. Von Hallberg also argues that the travel poetry produced after the war actively participated in America's cultural claim to "global hegemony" (72). This would prove problematic for poets like Bishop, who became painfully aware of "being the unacknowledged representatives of national culture, or vulgarity, wealth, and power, and implicated in the expansion of empire" (85). While a number of her contemporaries took up the task of demonstrating to the world how well-husbanded culture (and particularly European culture) would be in American hands, "[b]y fountain, statue, palazzo and piazza . . . demonstrating their ability to write intelligently, tastefully about the outward signs of the cultural heritage America was taking over after the war," Bishop was one of the few whose poetry seemed to express "a sense of imperial doom" (von Hallberg 72, 83). She was able to sidestep the mastering implications of American travel poetry with regards to Europe, for the most part, by avoiding the genre of poems recuperating continental monuments through the "fresh" eyes of America. She focused her gaze on South America and Canada instead.

Bishop also utilized a shift in scope or scale to avoid the grandiose or totalizing vision—dwelling instead on the details. As she does in "Brazil," she is often preoccupied with the visual textures of the natural world. But this does not get her completely out of

the woods, so to speak. As Pratt explains, writers of exploration literature include those who, like Bishop, would like to exempt themselves from the contexts of colonial aggression; but they cannot fully escape complicity. Among these “anti-conquest” voices were the naturalists who had come to the colonies to document their wealth of flora and fauna:

In the literature of the imperial frontier, the conspicuous innocence of the naturalist . . . acquires meaning in relation to an assumed guilt of conquest, a guilt the naturalist figure eternally tries to escape, and eternally invokes, if only to distance himself from it once again. Even though the travelers were witnessing the daily realities of the contact zone,²⁵ even though the institutions of expansionism made their travels possible, the *discourse* of travel that natural history produces, and is produced by, turns on a great longing: for a way of taking possession without subjugation or violence. (Pratt 57)

Elsewhere she explains, “as it understands itself . . . the ‘conversion’ of raw nature into the *systema naturae* is a strangely abstract, unheroic gesture, with very little at stake”

(33). Interestingly enough, at one point, Bonnie Costello describes Bishop as “an unheroic observer” (150). I cannot refute Costello’s claim, and it is supported elsewhere, by descriptions like Paul Tankard’s, of a “modesty” about Bishop’s poetry:

Her discourse does not exhibit a desire on her part to ‘totalize,’ to write the ‘supreme fiction,’ to see the text as prior to the world, or to make every poem a myth. It is sufficient for her if every poem maps out a few relationships between particular things in the real world (Tankard 74)

Still, it is worth noting the implications of those moments in which Bishop (like Hass or Williams) takes on the role of natural historian.

²⁵ Pratt defines “contact zones” as “social spaces where disparate cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other, often in highly asymmetrical relations of domination and subordination,” often within the context of colonialism (4).

Pratt does recognize one group as able to offer a critique from within the traditions of exploration writing—she calls these the “hyphenated white men” (Euro-Americans, usually)—as well as a group of explorer-women who create “a monarchic female voice that asserts its own kind of mastery even as it denies domination and parodies power” (208, 213). Bishop might readily be identified with either of these groups. As Canadian-American (and a long-time resident of Brazil), she, like the hyphenated white men, was an individual “whose national and civic identifications were multiple and often conflicted” and who had “lived out in deep personal and social histories the raw realities of Euroexpansionism [American expansionism, in Bishop’s case], white supremacy, class domination, and heterosexism” (209). Like the women Pratt describes, Bishop was also an anti-mastery master (or mistress), undermining established systems of authority while establishing her own.

The question of authority and its bases brings us back to the issue of seeing as a mode of authority. Bishop is often associated with visual authority. Randall Jarrell wrote of her work: “It is as if all her poems have written underneath ‘I have seen it’” (“The Poet and His Public” 235). Like the early coastal cartographer, she is well versed in “sketching by eye.” She does not, however, share the Enlightenment cartographer’s investment in the appearance of total continuity and objectivity, nor their desire to “eliminate any signs of the line’s human source.”

Though a “painterly poet”—aware of the rules of composition and visual communication (she was, herself, an amateur painter)—Bishop prefers the fragmentary quality of glimpses over a synthesized or centralized way of seeing. She is more

comfortable with the idea of “looks over vision” (Costello, *Questions* 3). This preference is expressed in her admiration for her contemporary painters—the cubists and surrealists—who were among the first to challenge the authority of a central, static perspective. As Costello explains, historically, central perspective had become

one of the great forms of mastery in Western art . . . in which nature appeared rationally aligned with art and art could claim, through the isometric design of space to express the unity of nature. The invisible basis of that unity was the static position of a single, impersonal beholder. (14)

According to Costello, by the time Bishop began writing, “the modernist challenge to such illusions of mastery” had been well established, and her work reflected this (14).

I would argue that Bishop demonstrates a heightened, even post-modern awareness of the problematics of mastery. Whether this is the result of her status as a second-generation modernist, steeped in the teachings of her immediate poetic predecessors, but also in an awareness of the ultimate failure of the modernist project (as Page argues), or whether her ambivalence toward mastery comes out of more personal biographical sources (a childhood in which self-mastery was emphasized in the face of a total lack of control over her own familial circumstances, an early religious upbringing that emphasized the ineffectual nature of human attempts at mastery, etc.) is still a matter for debate.

Her travel, and particularly her coastal poems are marked by their insistence on ambiguity and uncertainty, and on the subjectivity (or subjectivities) of the poet who shapes them. It may seem counterintuitive to describe a poet so well known for the intense clarity and detail of her descriptions as being committed to ambiguity, to uncertainty—but as Anne Stevenson says in “The Geographical Mirror,” ambivalence

haunts even [her] clearest descriptive passages” (32); Costello notes the movement “from mastery to perplexity” in the epigraph from *First Lessons in Geography* that opens Bishop’s collection *Geography III* (116); and Barbara Page finds that, in revising her poems, Bishop regularly replaced assertions with possibilities or questions, “mov[ing] from greater to lesser security . . . until the poem achieves a hairline balance between affirmation and denial” (“Stops” 15). This hairline balance makes a curious figure for the coast itself, where, as Bishop describes in “The Sandpiper”: “The world is a mist. Then the world is / minute and vast and clear” (131).²⁶

This does not mean, however, that there is no struggle for insight in her coastal poems, no attempt to see through the mist, to get to that vast and clear world. In a number of Bishop’s poems, her speakers express that impulse articulated by Playfair and his contemporaries—to read the coastline as hieroglyphic of the interior—but find themselves blocked by coasts that refuse to divulge their own meaning or bestow meaning on the visitor’s arrival. This apparent refusal to grant entry is likely the source of misreadings such as Gordon’s, which remain solely on the surface; though, on careful examination, we find that the action of the poem, and what the coast divulges has more depth.

“Arrival at Santos,” offers an important example. This piece, the first poem in Bishop’s collection *Questions of Travel* (1965) depicts a traveler’s (presumably Bishop’s) arrival in Brazil, and her disappointment at realizing that the coast cannot

²⁶ Bishop identified herself explicitly with the sandpiper when accepting the Nuestadt Prize.

deliver on her desire for complete, immediate comprehension of “a different world.” The poem opens:

Here is a coast; here is a harbor;
here after a meager diet of horizon, is some scenery:
impractically shaped and—who knows?—self-pitying mountains,
sad and harsh beneath their frivolous greenery,

with a little church on top of one. And warehouses,
some of them painted a feeble pink, or blue,
and some tall uncertain palms, Oh tourist,
is this how this country is going to answer you

and your immodest demands for a different world,
and a better life, and complete comprehension
of both at last and immediately,
after eighteen days of suspension? (CP 89)

In part, the poem comments on the vitality of the imagination, and the way reality may pale, or appear “feeble,” in comparison. The speaker is even aware that her expectations may have been unreasonable, her demands “immodest.” A change of setting is supposed to have transformative power, to reinvent the visitor’s life—too tall an order, apparently, for ports that “seldom care what impression they make” because, ultimately, they “[do] not matter.” These points of entry “waste” and “slip” away; they do not stick, like the postcard stamps in the poem, a slippage the speaker attributes to the inferiority of the glue and the heat.

As the “tender” approaches, the speaker describes it as “a strange and ancient craft, flying a strange and brilliant rag”:

So that’s the flag. I never saw it before.
I somehow never thought of their *being* a flag,

but of course there was, all along. And coins, I presume,
and paper money; they remain to be seen. (89)

The speaker's surprise and perhaps even disappointment at finding, not a blank slate, but a nation, with a flag, and its own currency is evocative of the "deculturation" enacted in Africa by Europeans, as Pratt describes it, erasing or negating local cultures, overwriting them with the expectation of emptiness, lack of culture (52). Costello builds on this by pointing to a number of poems in which

confrontations between landlord and servant classes ("Faustina," "Twelfth Morning or What You Will") or between dominant and subjected cultures ("Arrival at Santos," "Brazil, January 1, 1502") [take place] in which the observer is affronted by the discovery of an alternative culture or will where she had assumed a primitive blank slate on which to impose her own will or imagination. (251)

Coasts may be necessary points of arrival; but, this poem suggests, their primary effect (like that of the heat and "inferiority" of strange places) seems to be to evoke impatience in the visitor.²⁷ And how do impatient travelers respond?: "We leave Santos at once; / we are driving to the interior."

"Arrival at Santos" requires us, however, to make a distinction between the attitudes and actions expressed by the speaker within the poem and the attentions of the poem itself. Although the speaker finds little to interest her at the coast, the poem is entirely dependent upon the coast for all its information—at least seventeen lines of the poem offer descriptions. In contrast, the poem does not, as the travelers do, "drive to the interior," as it ends with that line.

Carter speaks of the difficulty Europeans had in disembarking onto unfamiliar coasts, and we find a comic iteration of these difficulties in the boat hook that snags Miss

Breen's skirt as she descends from the ship; and perhaps, less comically, in the poem's halting before achieving the interior. While a mid-twentieth-century arrival in Brazil might not carry with it the dangers associated with eighteenth-century exploration, the coast in the poem still represents a space of anxiety, anticipation, and miscomprehension, or as Carter puts it, of "epistemological confusion" challenging the viewer's assumptions, what she knows (145).

The poem "Cape Breton," from *A Cold Spring* (1955), also lends itself to this discussion, since at its outset, the coast appears to hide the true nature of the places it bounds, as only a surface or façade:

The wild road clambers along the brink of the coast.

[. . .]

The road appears to have been abandoned.

Whatever the landscape had of meaning appears to have been abandoned, unless the road is holding it back, in the interior,

where we cannot see,

where deep lakes are reputed to be [. . .] (*Complete* 67)

We can trace the road (in the way our fingers can trace over the glass covering the map in "The Map"), but the surface holds back the meaning and reputed depth of the interior.

The world of this poem seems to be viewed from above and slightly out to sea—allowing the speaker to describe the mist that hangs over the water as well as the valleys and gorges, the steeples of churches "dropped into the matted hills / like lost quartz arrowheads," and a small bus passing along the road on an otherwise deserted Sunday. Perhaps this sense of perspective is also influenced by the reference in the opening stanza

²⁷ cf Pratt's discussion of contemporary authors' descriptions of the discomforts of airports, hotels, and travel in the third world in general, 216-221.

to the airplanes flying close over the coast and the islands, sometimes driving the sheep pastured there to stampede over the cliffs in fear.

As in “The Sandpiper,” in this poem, the view with which we are presented is mitigated by the intervention of the mist: “The silken water . . . weaving and weaving / disappearing under the mist equally in all directions.” The mist is punctuated periodically, but at the poem’s end, it gives us no greater ground for certainty, as it continues “follow[ing] the white mutations of its dream.” Where Bishop does see through the mist to the coast in “Cape Breton,” her speaker still finds the scene difficult to interpret. She describes the “disused trails and mountains of rock / and miles of burnt forests standing in gray scratches / like the admirable scriptures made on stones by stones”—but fails to read meaning in these scratches or scriptures, telling us instead that “these regions now have little to say for themselves.”

Bishop, like Hutton, has an “accurate eye for perceiving the characters of objects” that constitute a region; her memorialists, too, claim she is “granted insight through careful attention to the world” (Costello 150). She is, however, far more circumspect in her interpretations of what she sees. The aphasiac landscape in the poem reflects her reluctance to claim a visual authority over the terrain by telling us explicitly what the coast and the interior it encloses mean. As it turns out, these regions have more to say for themselves than the tone of the poem or that line in particular suggest—but like the admirable scripture of stones on stones, it remains in a language untranslated.

The line immediately following the claim that these regions have little to say counters: “except in thousands of light song-sparrow songs floating upward / freely,

dispassionately, through the mist.” The sheer number of the songs suggests an emphatic act of communication, if not in a language with which we are familiar. It is worth noting, too, that the description of the song floating “freely, dispassionately” connects this poem to the poem that precedes it: “At the Fishhouses,” in which *knowledge* is described as: “clear, moving, utterly free,” swinging “indifferently above the stones,” “flowing and flown.” While “At the Fishhouses” considers the difficulty of touching and comprehending knowledge in the figure of the waters of the North Atlantic, “Cape Breton” may do the same through birdsong.

This language, or the nature of this communication, is not insignificant when we consider how birdsongs figure in others of Bishop’s poems. In “Brazil, January 1, 1502,” birdsong is the misunderstood voice of the interior, illusive, sought after, directed not at the visitor but at others of its kind. The poet does not force these “calls” to divulge their meaning—whether voice or song. In “North Haven,” however, birdsong is explicitly connected to poetic voice and invention. Written in memoriam for her long-time friend and fellow poet, Robert Lowell, this poem delicately incorporates a discussion of change as integral to the creative act with reflections on the transitory nature of life itself. In contrast to the steadiness of geography and the regular progression of the seasons—“The islands haven’t shifted since last summer, / even if I like to pretend they have”—she calls up the song of the White-throated Sparrow, which goes on changing, and the poet’s strivings for a similar sort of change, through revision. It is not radical, not the transformation of one thing into something completely other, unrecognizable, but a rearranging, and revising: “Nature repeats herself, or almost does: repeat, repeat, repeat;

revise, revise, revise.” It is access to this change, this invention and reinvention, to which Lowell is now denied:

. . . And now—you’ve left
for good. You can’t derange or re-arrange,
your poems again. (But the Sparrows can their song.)
The words won’t change again. Sad friend, you cannot change. (*Complete* 189)

The subtle affiliation of the voice of the poet and of the birds in Cape Breton, as the voice of “these regions,” far from telling us nothing, tell us about the intrinsic operations of nature and place, about the power of the poet to derange and rearrange meaning, and about the nature of knowledge itself.

IV “TO ONE SIDE OF THE MAP”

Despite her commitments to ambiguity, and her questions about the motivations of colonizers and travelers in general, Bishop’s speakers still seems to empathize with the challenges of mapping coasts, the coastal surveyor’s *position*, that is, with those who remain at or slightly off the shore. (Her work almost suggests there is no other position feasible.) In examining this coastal position, we learn about the ways in which Bishop recuperates sight and perspective, even in poems that do not dwell on the shore, to convey the necessary uncertainties of awareness and experience.

Speaking of the challenges specific to coastal cartographers, Carter explains,

While the surveyor reconnoitering a new territory could fix the consecutive points of his march by taking the bearing of prominent objects to either side of his course, the surveyor at sea was [isolated from the source of his data], always to one side of the map he was creating (130).

Bishop, for her part, has been described as a “poet of the periphery.” The description comes, initially, from a letter she wrote to Anne Stevenson emphasizing the significance of peripheral vision in capturing moments of empathy (Stevenson *Elizabeth* 66, quoted in Anderson and Shapcott *Elizabeth* 10). It is equally pertinent, however, because of the intense air of isolation that pervades much of Bishop’s work, and her biography. She seems always to be standing at the edges, watching intently, always “to one side of the map she is creating.”

Poems like “Arrival at Santos” or “Cape Breton” offer obvious examples of this coastal positioning, but the move occurs less obviously elsewhere—both figuratively and structurally. In “Over 2,000 Illustrations and a Complete Concordance,” the sudden inclusion of coastal imagery provides a segue between halves of a poem, so that the coast occupies a liminal position within the poem itself. One of Bishop’s densest poems, this piece contrasts canonical and experienced moments of contact with the foreign. According to Robert von Hallberg, the book to which the poem’s title refers is a nineteenth-century “Book of the World” (von Hallberg 82). Costello, however, indicates that the inspiration for the poem came from a family bible (*Questions* 136). Whichever the case, the first half of the poem examines the book’s illustrations of the holy land, in which “Arabs, plotting probably, / against our Christian Empire” point to “the Tomb, the Pit, the Sepulcher. / The branches of the date-palms look like files” and “The cobbled courtyard, where the Well is dry, is like a diagram . . .” (*Complete* 57). These illustrations are “Granted a page alone or a page made up / of several scenes arranged in catty-cornered rectangles / or circles set on stippled gray . . .” (57). In the second half of

the poem, Bishop strings together fragments of her own travel experiences in Nova Scotia, where “the touching bleat of goats reached to the ship,” in Mexico where “a dead man lay in a blue arcade,” or in Morocco, where the “little pockmarked prostitutes” “flung themselves / naked and giggling against our knees . . .” (58).

Between these two halves runs a curious passage. After the scenes set on stippled gray, we learn that images illuminate the text as well, “caught in the toils of an initial letter.” “When dwelt upon” the speaker tells us, all these images

. . . resolve themselves
The eye drops weighted, through the lines
the burin made, the lines that move apart
like ripples above sand, dispersing storms, God’s spreading fingerprint
and painfully, finally, that ignite
in watery prismatic white-and-blue. (58)

There is much to discuss in these few lines. First and foremost is the transformation of the desert world of the engravings (the lines the burin made), with its dry wells and date palms, into the ripples of water above sand. While the abstracted water figured here might call up images of oasis, rather than coast, Bishop’s diction in this passage links it with other coastal poems—particularly Key West poems—such as “The Bight,” which immediately follows “2,000 Illustrations” in *A Cold Spring* (1955). The Heraclitean (as Costello calls it) conflation of water and fire that occurs in “Over 2,000 Illustrations,” where ripples ignite, echoes the waters of the bight, “the color of the gas flame turned as low as possible,” as well as the fiery water of “At the Fishhouses.” The image of the dispersing storm, too, seems linked to “Little Exercise” (in *North and South*), in which the reader is asked to imagine a storm dissipating along the Florida coast.

This passage from “Over 2,000 Illustrations” carries weight, too, for its translation of looking into reading: the lines of the engraving become lines of text, and by association, the lines of the poem; these open up, allowing us to read between them the mark (the fingerprint) and force of the creator. Such self-referentiality takes us far from the cartographic impulse to “eliminate any sign of the line’s maker.” The difficulty of the reciprocal opening up of text and image is figured in the painful ignition of the lines (to which the “that” in this passage refers) and in the idea of image “caught” in the “toil” of text. The long stanza that follows continues the coastal motif and the sense of effort or tension, as it opens with the speaker’s entry into the “Narrows” of Saint Johns. We find ourselves in literal coastal zones again, this time off the shores of Canada.

The placement of the coastal imagery in this poem points to a larger structural pattern in Bishop’s work—the significance she places on shifts or transitions. As Paul Tankard says, “Coasts are essentially places of transition; people go to coasts to facilitate departures” (70). His comment suggests the elegant turn of a physical point of arrival into the source of a thematic departure (since Bishop’s coastal episodes are more often arrivals, than leave-takings). Here, coasts and map making, or being to one side of the map, coincide in their capacity to shift the speaker and viewer into a peripheral position: to grant a different perspective, at times, revelation.

Perhaps the most famous of Bishop’s poems in which she equates being at the periphery with revelation or discovery is “In the Waiting Room.” This is the first poem in her collection *Geography III* (1976). Set during Bishop’s childhood, in the final year of World War I, the poem documents her experience of waiting on her Aunt Consuelo,

while the older woman has dental work done. In the dentist's waiting room, shy of the adults around her, Bishop immerses herself in a copy of *National Geographic*. She catalogues the images she finds there—a volcano, European explorers in pith helmets, a supposed victim of cannibalism, women and babies whose heads and necks have been wound round with string or wire, bare breasted women. The accumulation of these “unlikely” images from the outside world creates a mounting tension within the poem, figured by the volcano, the child's inability to stop reading, and the fact that she finds the breasts of the women in the pictures “horrifying.” Nothing happens however, until she examines the *cover* and the yellow *margins* of the magazine, then:

Suddenly, from inside,
came an oh! of pain
—Aunt Consuelo's voice—
not very loud or long. (*Complete* 160)

It is curious that the inspection of the edges or bounds of the world the child has just been immersed in precedes, but seems to precipitate the exclamation of pain. In fact, for the first two lines of this stanza, it is not clear what “inside” is meant—we've just been looking at the outside of the magazine, does the cry come from within its pages? We are already in the waiting room, what further, unseen inside is now expressing itself? Of course, the third line lays these questions to rest: it is the voice of Aunt Consuelo; and the speaker tells us, it is not surprising she has cried out, for “even then I knew she was / a foolish, timid woman.”

The process of discovery that has been set in motion does not cease, however, for now the child begins her experience of identification:

What took me

completely by surprise
was that it was *me*:
my voice, in my mouth.
Without thinking at all
I was my foolish aunt,
I—we—were falling, falling,
our eyes glued to the cover
of the *National Geographic*,
February, 1918. (160)

In the subsequent stanza she elaborates on this sensation—

I said to myself: three days
and you'll be seven years old.
I was saying it to stop the sensation of falling off
the round, turning world
into cold, blue-black space. (160)

Here is the most extreme potential for being at the edge of the terrain her poetry describes—falling off the earth altogether. Without this sensation, however, there is no impulse to glue oneself to surface of the *National Geographic*, to attach oneself to those it contains and all those around, to discover:

you are one of them
Why should you be one, too?
I scarcely dared to look
to see what it was I was.
I gave a sidelong glance
—I couldn't look any higher—
at shadowy gray knees,
trousers and skirts and boots
and different pairs of hands
lying under the lamps.
I knew that nothing stranger
had ever happened, that nothing
stranger could ever happen.

Why should I be my aunt,
or me, or anyone?
What similarities—
boots, hands, the family voice

I felt in my throat, or even
the *National Geographic*
and those awful hanging breasts—
held us all together
or made us all just one? (161)

Even in confirming her sense of belonging, the glance she gives is indirect, sidelong. The longer she contemplates her relation to all these other humans the farther “in” she travels (a no less threatening sensation than falling off): in the “too bright,” “too hot” waiting room, she feels the room “sliding / beneath a big black wave, / another, and another” (161). “Then,” she tells us as the poem concludes,

I was back in it.
The War was on. Outside,
in Worcester, Massachusetts
were night and slush, and cold,
and it was still the fifth
of February, 1918. (161)

The layering in this poem is significant—the child is in the waiting room, in the winter, in Worcester Massachusetts, in the world as the War is on. She is both far from the worlds depicted in the *National Geographic*, and at the same time, recognizes herself there—in the unexpected images of the bare breasted women, and in the cry of pain she hears her Aunt Consuelo utter (whose name means consolation, comfort). The unexpected contrast and simultaneity of finding herself an individual, a child, a human, and a woman, produces the intense moment of slippage, of shifting so far to the periphery that she feels herself to be falling off the world all together, then sinking back into the space that has opened up, and finally back into the world as she has known it.

Bishop does not have to fall entirely off the earth (that ancient fear of early European navigators) to gain fresh sight of it. Her discoveries are facilitated by smaller

motions toward marginality as well. In her earliest published poems, dreams often accomplish this shift in perspective: in “Love Lies Sleeping,” “Sleeping on the Ceiling,” “Sleeping Standing Up,” and the later poem, “Sunday, 4 A.M.,” for instance. Not only do these pieces depict the physical shift associated with sleeping—“As we lie down to sleep the world turns half away, through ninety dark degrees”—but dream logic gives access to surreal perspectives, radical shifts in scale (“Sleeping Standing Up” 30). These poems speculate on what it would mean to go “beyond the frame,” as Bishop says in “Sunday, 4 A.M.” In “Sleeping on the Ceiling,” the sleeper moves to the margins of the room (the ceiling, the walls), and then must “go under the wallpaper / to meet the insect gladiator” (29). Shrunken to the size of a termite, she regards the photographs on the walls as animals, the wallpaper as “mighty foliage” and rustling flowers (29). Elsewhere, Bishop uses personification to effect similarly radical shifts in scale, as in her poems *Giant Toad*, *Strayed Crab*, and *Giant Snail* (grouped under the heading “Rainy Season; Subtropics” in *The Complete Poems*, 1969), where she speaks from the perspective of each creature, or in “12 O’Clock News,” in which the surface of her desk is converted into a fascinating topography of typewriter “escarpments” and manuscript “landscapes,” where cigarette butts are the contorted bodies of fallen soldiers (*Complete* 175).

In the dream poems, transformation seems to come not only from a shift in scale, but from the juxtaposition of angles of perception (hence the world “inverted and distorted” in “Love Lies Sleeping”). A revelatory, refractory sensation is produced by the simultaneity of these angles of perception. As Costello discusses at length, such

refractions and “active displacements in perspective” are the subject of a number of Bishop’s poems dwelling on the surfaces of mirrors or bodies of water.

In his discussion of Bishop’s use of geographic imagery, Paul Tankard observes “If Elizabeth Bishop can’t always be shifting, she can as a poet shift her gaze” (Tankard 70). The way in which her “vision multiplies or shifts perspectives” is one of the principle subjects of Costello’s book *Elizabeth Bishop: Questions of Mastery* (15). “Love Lies Sleeping” offers an important example of this shifted gaze. It opens with an image of “switching all the tracks” that connect the stars in the night sky to connect the streets, as light comes to the city in earliest morning. From this initial switch, the world is cast in particular, delicate detail—as if seen through the sensitive eyes of the hangover victim, who pleads in the poem, “Hang-over moons, wane, wane!” (16). “From the window,” the speaker tells us, “I see // an immense city, carefully revealed.” The city reaches languidly up toward the sky, like “the little chemical ‘garden’ in a jar,” which grows from “fused beads of iron and copper crystals.” Looking down upon the streets, she records the motions of the street sweepers, laundry being taken off of lines. There are, however, sounds of “Danger” here, in the “Boom” of the exploding ball, causing those who recognize it as a sound of danger, or death, to turn over in their sleep. For those waking up, the day’s prospects include “dragging in the streets their unique loves,” being scourged with roses, and, in the evening, dining on the hearts of others. Altogether it is an unsettling vision. Not as unsettled as the perspective offered in the poem’s final two stanza’s however:

for always to one, or several, morning comes,
whose head has fallen over the edge of his bed,

whose face is turned
so that the image of

the city grows down into his open eyes
inverted and distorted. No. I mean
distorted and revealed,
if he sees it at all. (17)

Again, falling “over the edge” precipitates an altered vision—one that is both distorted and revelatory. Bishop speculated in an interview that the man on the bed may, in fact, be dead, (which would account for the poem’s final line). The tone of loss and the altered vision suggested by the poem do not require this ultimate loss of sight, however, for us to recognize in it a discussion of alienated insight, brought about by shifts in perspective.

As Costello points out, there are a number of devices that keep Bishop’s perspectives shifted, adjusting. In addition to the reflections of mirrors, memory allows the speaker to “get to the side” of the world she is describing. Bishop’s late, great poem *Santarém* opens with this awareness, and the characteristic cast of doubt: “Of course I may be remembering it all wrong / after, after—how many years?” Her work includes other formal or stylistic expressions of this position as well. For example, we find “asides” in several poems, most famously in “One Art,” in which the speaker tells herself, within the poem, what she must do:

—Even losing you (the joking voice, a gesture
I love) I shan’t have lied. It’s evident
the art of losing’s not too hard to master
though it may look like (*Write it!*) like disaster. (178)

VI. MOVEMENTS OF MIND

A number of critics, including Barbara Page and Eavan Boland, have addressed the ways in which these shifts in position and perspective occur at the syntactic level in Bishop's poetry, or are "signaled by elements of technique" (Page "Stops" 12). Boland describes these as the poet's "slides," "skids and recoveries" (quoted in Page "Stops" 13). Page points out Bishop's "pauses and ellipses," "exclamations marking eruptions of feeling into consciousness and new discoveries, often arrived at through a shift in perspective," and "digressions, or . . . 'dreamy divagations'" She links these with a discussion of Bishop's "way of knowing" (Page "Stops" 12-13). For Page, these mannerisms signal movements of mind. Bonnie Costello, too, connects movement of mind and shifts in vision within her concept of "excursive sight," which she describes as, "the condition of consciousness in which travel predominates" (*Questions* 162). As the mind is always in motion, she argues, travel becomes a metaphor for cognitive action within Bishop's poetry.

One of the benefits of physical travel, Costello claims, is that it can "be a means to free ourselves from a parochial view of the world, to heighten sensation and invention" (128). This certainly can be true; but, as Bishop indicates in "Brazil, January 1, 1502," it is also possible to bring our "parochial view of the world" with us, wherever we go. The invitation to invention that Costello mentions is more interesting. In fact, I think, Bishop's work suggests two types of movement of mind: one that is represented by "sliding off"—skittering, peripheral, unresolved—and one that is "sinking in," characterized by invention or imagination in the face of the unknown.

The coastal poem “The Sandpiper,” describes a shorebird who lives “alongside” a roaring he takes for granted. His sense of the world both dwindles and is magnified by the his intense inspection of the sand:

. . . watching his toes.

Watching, rather, the space of sand between them,
where (no detail too small) the Atlantic drains
rapidly backwards and downwards. As he runs,
he stares at the dragging grains.

The world is a mist. And then the world is
minute and vast and clear. The tide
is higher or lower. He couldn’t tell you which.
His beak is focussed [sic]; he is preoccupied,²⁸

looking for something, something, something.
Poor bird, he is obsessed!
The millions of grains are black, white, tan, and gray,
mixed with quartz grains, rose and amethyst. (132)

As Bishop’s qualification in the second line tells us, the sandpiper’s way of looking is not *at* something (his toes), but to the side of them, at the spaces in between, the gaps, which are themselves both “minute and vast.” The poem’s diction is reminiscent of a letter Bishop sent to Anne Stevenson in 1964 in which she expressed admiration for Darwin—picturing him, “eyes fixed on facts and minute details . . . sinking or sliding giddily in to the unknown” (*Elizabeth* 66). Trying to fill in the “gaps” of the world (or our understanding of it) through visual attention to the particulars of the world produces the same two sensations here that are figured in “In the Waiting Room”: sliding off or sinking in.

Carter sees these same two actions at work in the practice of coastal mapping. Although cartographers had the “thin” ambition of “drawing a continuous, dimensionless line,” the gaps in coastal knowledge and accessibility made this impossible—unless the coastal surveyor could “slide off” what clues he had, to extrapolate, to draw lines that connect (128). He describes this practice in terms of “*ingenium*”: the “faculty that connects disparate and diverse things” or “the ability to see relationships and grasp their significance” (285, 128-129). Clearly, this is a description of movement of mind. But “sinking in” may be understood as a movement of mind as well, this time in terms of imagination, comprehension, or inhabitation. What the map would have us believe is a line, a figure of only two dimensions, can become deep with significances, rich with detail. This is especially true for those who move through the spaces described by the map, who are actively involved in its uncertainties. This is why, for instance, Paul Carter suggests that delineation in Eskimo maps represents a different project than it does in European cartography:

The Eskimo line represents a passage, a rate of progress, even a seasonal calendar, and is fat, palpable and regional; the cartographer’s line signifies the conquest of environmental memories, the translation of path-finding and performative renewals of place into the blank of a territory metaphysically brought into being by a bounding line that does not belong to it, and being nowhere, cannot be refuted. (128)

It also underlies the distinction Carter makes, within the Western mapping tradition, between the mapmaker’s and the surveyor’s perspective: “whatever the thin ambitions of

²⁸ In all likelihood “focussed” is a typo, though I have not been able to verify this. If it is not, it must then be a sibilant reference to the hissing of the sea through the sand, and a parallelism with “obsessed.”

the cartographer might be, the coast remained *fat* from the point of view of the coastal surveyor and hydrographer” (131).

In Bishop’s case, this imaginative inhabitation or thickening of the coastline can take the form of poems. In “The End of March” for instance, uncertainty pervades a walk along a still-wintery beach—the walkers never reaching their goal of a house set on the dunes; the speaker comments “Many things about this place are dubious.” And yet, Bishop dedicates twenty eight lines to describing a fantasy life within that unreachable house. What seems to be a boundary—the length of the beach, the unreachable house—is in fact an invitation to imagined entry, to invention. “Arrival at Santos” clearly works in a similar manner—though the speaker may tell us that the port is faded, feeble, slipping away—the poem is rich and engaging, inviting entry not only into the physical spaces it documents, but into the very questions of perspective and miscomprehension that accompany travel.

Which returns us to “The Map.” When Jan Gordon says all that she that she sees in Bishop’s cartographic poem are “surfaces,” she does not give credit to the insights that come when entry is denied, and we must slip and slide along making interpretative gestures of our own. Nor does she recognize the depths that open up in Bishop’s line, that allow us (as well as the speaker) to “sink in” to the map. It is significant, I think, that in the account of her earliest encounters with maps, Bishop describes them as “hard to see” and, implicitly, out of reach. For her, the map’s colors are like the faded and easily misunderstood colors of the port, the tan and pink and golden and green of her childhood classroom maps—colors softened by heat, time, crackled glaze and angle of perception—

they are unstable, subject to change, oiled, slipping away, blanketed in mists. They are difficult to see, or grasp, but easy to immerse oneself in imaginatively.

Chapter 4: Artifacts of Passage: Robert Hass’s “Songs to Survive the Summer”

What language could allay our thirsts,
what winds lift us, what floods bear us
past defeats
but song but deathless song ?
Williams, *Paterson*, 108

“A song,” he said, “was both map and direction
finder. Providing you knew the song, you could
always find your way across country.”
-Bruce Chatwin, *The Songlines*, 13

I INTRODUCTION:

In addition to talking about the ways in which poems and maps describe specific terrains, we have, thus far, looked at maps and poems in terms of their abilities to bring seemingly disparate materials together—to form conceptual maps. We have also looked at cartographic ways of seeing the world, and poetic means of complicating these ways of seeing. This chapter deals with questions of form.

Form in the context of this project means a number of things. It means, in the most traditional sense, the form of the poem on the page—its stanzaic and prosodic structures. It means, too, the shapes documented by poem or map—the images constructed through these media. It may also mean the names we give to these shapes or images, or to our experiences, as a way of giving them order, structure. In his essay on poetic form, Robert Hass refers to Pound’s description of rhythm as “a form carved in time” (*Twentieth* 126). Over the course of this chapter, I return repeatedly to the idea of the form carved in time, though I loose it from its strictly metrical or rhythmic context, to

consider the multiform ways in which a poem shapes time—how it forms experience into poetic material, as well as the ways in which it constructs an utterance in time.

In general, when we consider mapping, we think of making forms out of forms. This is largely true of the works I have discussed thus far—whether they are coastal maps made out of coastal forms or poems made out of cities, etc. Now, however, we must consider a different kind of map—one in which movement (a form of time) is recorded—that is, the map as a document of passage.

Passage is an important term for this chapter, as it is able to name both movement and form. A quick glance at the origins of the word and its many uses is suggestive: from its earliest Anglo Norman and Old French forms, a *passage* was a “place where there is a way through, as in a mountain pass (c1100)” (OED). It carries, also, the connotations of “the action of passing (c1165), part of a text (c1176), ferry-toll (c1176), crossing, ford, ferry, expedition overseas (first half of the 13th cent.), path, way (1295 or earlier in Anglo-Norman), word, speech (a1504) . . . means of transport over water (freq. 1086-1499 in British sources), [and a] crossing, expedition overseas (freq. 1160-c1450 in British sources)” (OED).

In this chapter, I examine the passages made by Robert Hass’s long poem “Songs to Survive the Summer.” This piece appeared at the end of his second collection *Praise*, in 1979. The poem’s composition is unusual—twenty-one pages of short-lined tercets, clustered into seventeen groups of varying lengths, each set off from the next by a mark, for instance:

•

But I have seen it twice.
In the Palo Alto marsh
sea birds rose in early light

and took me with them.
Another time, dreaming,
river birds lifted me,

swans, small angelic terns,
and an old woman in a shawl
dying by a dying lake

whose life raised men
from the dead
in another country.

•

Thick nights, and nothing
lets us rest. In the heat
of mid-July our lust

is nothing. We swell
and thicken. Slippery,
purgatorial, our sexes

will not give us up.
Exhausted after hours
and not undone,

we crave cold marrow
from the tiny bones
that moonlight scatters

on our skin. Always
morning arrives,
the stunned days,

faceless, droning
in the juice of rotten quince,
the flies, the heat. (56-58)

I refer to each of these groupings as a “movement.” The poem’s form bears the greatest resemblance to Hass’s earlier piece “Maps,” which is also assembled of seventeen pieces, and includes similarly broad reaching images and materials. In his discussion of “Maps,” Terrence Doody describes each of its segments as a “short poem” in its own right, even those which are only one line long (48). The same might be said for “Songs to Survive the Summer”—particularly because one of its sections appeared alone in Hass’s earlier collection, *Field Guide* as the poem “For Chekov”. Although each section may be considered as its own poem, I call them movements, because I want to emphasize their participation in the whole, to link them musically with the songs of the poem’s title, and because (unlike “canto,” for instance) “movement” makes clear the poem’s association with physical passages. I have chosen to focus on this piece not only because it represents a point of transition in Hass’s oeuvre, from his earlier formal tendencies to the longer more “discursive” forms of his later works, but because the poem helps us to ask, In what forms can we signify passage?

“Songs to Survive the Summer” has as its apparent impetus the unexpected death of a neighbor—who dies on a steamy summer morning, and whose death coincides with a sense of a dissolving, dissipating world:

These are the dog days,
unvaried
except by accident

mist rising from soaked lawns
gone world, everything
rises and dissolves in air

[. . .]

The mother of the neighbor
child was thirty-one,
died, at Sunday breakfast,

of a swelling in the throat.
[. . .]

. . . My daughter
was her friend
and now she cannot sleep

for nighttime sirens,
sure that every wail
is someone dead. (*Praise* 48, 51-52)

Opening with the ominous “dog days” (an unwholesome time in late summer, governed by the pernicious “Dog-star”) “unvaried / except by accident,” the poem is founded on a sense of endangerment, on the threats of an uncertain world. The speaker in the poem expresses a desire to offer something to his child—some means of guidance, some aid in making it through this world, this life. Like many maps, the poem responds to uncertainty. It seeks to serve as a tool of navigation or guidance and to give order to flux. The “gone world” of the poem’s opening is its cartographic invitation. At one level of narrative arc, the poem asks, how can we “sing” our way across the summer, how can we get from the “stunned” days of summer “faceless, droning / in the juice of rotten quince, / the flies, the heat” to “a clement shore in early fall,” where “[w]e feast most delicately” and “all are saved” (58, 64). Implicitly, it asks, how do we get through childhood, how can we get through adulthood; how can we, as the title of the poem suggests, “survive”?

Relatively little has been written about Robert Hass’s poetry, beyond reviews accompanying the publication of his four books, and the articles and interviews documenting his time as U. S. Poet Laureate (1995-1997). Although “Songs to Survive

the Summer” is his longest work to date, it has usually elicited little more than passing comment, the exception being Bo Gustavsson’s essay “The Discursive Muse.” What makes the poem provocative is the tense negotiation within its pages between the impulse to use poetry as a “stay” or stop—as a means of controlling or giving order to time—and the poet’s desire to foster movement within the poem, to form a path, a continuum, a passage. This tension is expressed in the interplay between image and form and in the struggle between transparency or passivity and situated agency.

In his collection of essays, *Twentieth-Century Pleasures*, Hass tells readers that the form of a poem is “the shape of its understanding,” emphasizing form’s constitutive nature when he says, “the presence of that shaping constitutes the presence of poetry” (58). Later, he attributes poetic form to the poem’s rhythmic qualities, or “music.” He shares with Williams this sense that rhythm determines the “music of poetry” and, ultimately, its form, explaining, “the music of the poem as it develops imposes its own restrictions. That is how it comes to form”; or, as Williams says, “The rhythmic unit decide[s] the form of my poetry” (*Twentieth* 65, *I Wanted* 15).

Both poets speak of the revolutionary potentials of new and innovative rhythms. Hass asserts that “Rhythm is always the place where the organic rises to abolish the mechanical and where energy announces the abolition of tradition,” and later that “New rhythms are new perceptions” (*Twentieth* 108). The ability to perceive differently and to express this perception or understanding through rhythmic form may be why, both in his poem, “Songs to Survive the Summer,” and in *Twentieth Century Pleasures*, Hass equates the activity of the poet’s mind to music: Wallace Stevens is described within the

poem as walking to work while listening to the “pure exclusive music in his mind”; in a later essay, Hass describes Herrick’s relationship to metrical rhythms as “a private music in the mind” (*Praise* 50-51, *Twentieth* 68).

While rhythm gives form to time, particularly in poems as they are spoken or read (“if we keep in mind the *tune* which the lines . . . make in our ears we are ready to proceed,” said Williams), when we come to a discussion of the “music” of poetic rhythm generally, I feel the uneasiness of the neophyte reader (Williams *Selected Letters* 326 - 327). As students grapple with the reality that there may be multiple interpretations of a poem, but some better than others, I grapple with the possibility that, if we explain form strictly via its relationship to poetic “music,” differing ways of hearing a poem’s rhythmic music will prevent us from grasping the poem’s “understanding,” that is, its reasons for being. I am particularly leery of this possibility for mis-hearing when I think of the ways in which Hass describes the poet’s relationship to his music—as “private,” “pure” and “exclusive.”

I know both Williams and Hass to be capable of striking rhythmic lines. Hass’s pentameter line “Clams, abalones, cockles, chitons, crabs” in “Maps,” for instance, reminds me of Pope’s Ajax striving with the stone (*Field Guide* 7). I appreciate, too, Hass’s attempts to specify the components of poetic music as both “stress, which governs the line, and the rhythm of phrases, which governs the building of the larger structure” (Reminick 26). Still, I distrust an unexamined recourse to “musicality” as an explanation for form, in part, because it seems a maneuver by which the poet attempts to divest himself of agency. Note the use of passive voice in both Hass’s and Williams’s

comments. How does the poem “come to form”? Not by the poet’s hand—the poem develops its own restrictions, the rhythmic unit makes the decisions.

Within the metrical tradition, we might say that the poem develops its own restrictions. Since the advent of free verse, however, each poem’s form must be the result of individual and complex formal choices. I don’t doubt that for the well-practiced poet, one steeped in the textures and rhythms of words, as both Hass and Williams are, the rhythm of the poem may seem to emerge organically. That being said, I do not think poetic “music” is what brings “Songs to Survive the Summer” (despite its title) to its form—not unless we can explain “musicality” as the intersection of complex ordering operations which include rhythm and stanzaic structure, reference to poetic traditions (both Eastern and Western) and, importantly, imagistic concerns, by which I mean making use of forms that are reflective of the poem’s material and conceptual content.

This reading emphasizes that the poem is an artifact—how its structures are shaped by the poet’s intent. The questions it poses—How do we make it through? and How can poetry and the knowledge it conveys help us to recuperate loss, dissolution?—are answered by the multiform ways in which people give shape to their experiences, leave their mark on the materials given to them, and form their fears into something other—“stories, / songs, loquat seeds // curiously shaped.”

II. DISSOLVING WORLDS AND POETIC “STAYS”

Making forms out of time is not a simple notion, and it is one with which twentieth-century visual artists grappled, alongside their poet counterparts. Pollock’s

“action painting,” for instance, is one investigation into making the shapes of time and action visible. The abstract expressionism of Pollock and his peers has as an advantage (at least from the perspective of this project) the utter opacity (that is, presence) of its own agency.²⁹ For poets like Hass, however, its level of abstraction presents a potential problem: when in pursuit of conceptual or kinetic terrains, forms lose their reference to the seen world, they become (to use Williams’s term) “divorced” from the world as we perceive it. Hass is, after, all a perceptual poet—one committed to our sensory experiences of the world, praised for his work’s “acuity of observation” and “vivid imagery” (Marshall 126). His insistence on the importance of the material particulars of this world, and his eschewal of Language poetry can be read as a rejection of the possible textual equivalents of abstract expressionism.

Interestingly enough, beginning roughly in the 1970s, American and Canadian visual and conceptual artists turned to map art as another means of representing the action of time. According to contemporary artist and critic Lucy Lippard, the installations and objects created by artists like Marlene Creates, Peter Dykhuis, Roger Welch endeavor to bring the many layers of time, and subjective experience of a place, into a simultaneous representation, to offer a “composite map” or “as full an impression as possible of the lived texture of the local landscape” (81).

While the sense of a dissolving world expressed in the opening lines of “Songs to Survive the Summer” may be descriptive of the modern as well as the post-modern

²⁹ A curious outcome of which is that, to the casual observer, the results may seem to lack all guiding agency.

conditions, Hass, like his artist contemporaries, is clearly working within the environmental and political climate of the late twentieth century. Although the North American landscape had been rapidly changing for at least two decades, by the time of the poem's publication in 1979, a sense of world endangerment was burgeoning, reflective not only of Vietnam era/cold-war brinkmanship but a growing awareness of the extents of environmental degradation, and the losses of wild and rural spaces to urbanization and suburbanization.

The rapidity of this change and a desire to document the worlds being lost were both motivations for the artist/map makers, who sought to convey a sense of continuity in the midst of disruption. Their work takes on a number of the concerns expressed in Hass's poetry—including questions of nativity, shifting perceptions of place over time, and the histories of the places we occupy—with a particular attention, in many cases, to the connections forged between “first peoples” or Native American's and the landscapes they inhabited. These works are, Lippard says, forms of “deep mapping”—a term borrowed from William Least Heat-Moon's book *PrairyErth*—“extended quest[s] for the whole revealed by [compilations of] all the parts” (77). To capture “all the parts” requires an attention to the particulars of place that is often associated with Robert Hass.

Since receiving the Yale Younger Poets award in 1973, for his first book, *Field Guide*, Hass has been praised for the delicately rendered, quotidian details of his poems, or his “Zen-clear way of noting detail” (Shillinger 1). A ready example comes from Hass's poem “Song” in which he describes his return home to an empty house, where

On the oak table
fillets of sole

stewing in the juice of tangerines,
slices of green pepper
on a bone-white dish.³⁰ (*Field Guide* 21)

Like Williams, Hass is a “native”—residing for most of his life within a single region; he is known for his articulations of a “poetry of place” (Davidson 206). Much of his work refers to the northern Californian landscapes of his childhood and maturity, drawing from the details of local flora and fauna, regional history, culture, and industry (particularly the participation of California’s military-industrial complex in the Vietnam war). The first section of *Field Guide*, for instance, comprising sixteen poems, is called “Coasts.” References to Williams’s work appear often in Hass criticism, if not as an influence, than as a resonance. (Stevens, Milosz, and Wordsworth are more often described as influences.) The emphasis on native places is just one of a number of shared philosophical positions or attitudes toward the efficacies of poetry in the two poets’ works.

Echoing Williams’s concern with the conditions of “divorce” and “marriage,” a poem like Hass’s “Santa Barbara Road,” for instance, voices the poet’s concern with his distance from the world and all that inhabits it: “I felt like a stranger to my life / and it scared me . . .” (*Human* 51). The speaker seeks a remedy for this estrangement by digging in his garden, “trying to marry myself and my hands to that place” (51). That an antidote for distance or divorce is offered by an immersion in place—digging in and

³⁰ Hass’s attention to the image has been attributed, at least in part, to his affinity for Pound’s works. Certainly we can sense that affinity here, in the echo between “on a bone-white dish” and Pound’s “on a wet black bough,” from “In the Station of the Metro.”

marrying—is not surprising. We can recognize that impulse, that investment in the local terrain from Williams’s *Paterson*.

Unlike *Paterson*, however, and unlike the works of many of the map artists whom Lippard discusses, Hass’s longest poem, “Songs to Survive the Summer,” is not anchored in a single landscape. It ranges from the Palo Alto Marshes to the Arctic, from Russia to Hartford Connecticut, to Japan. Like “Maps,” its contents are eclectic, including a miniaturized rendition of a Chekov short story, recollections of a childhood spent in California, “under the loquat tree,” a narrative of the discovery of the Seller Blue Jay, and a detailed recipe for French onion soup.

Rather than being a document of place, as I have already suggested, the poem can be understood as a document of passage. Like those maps which hope to capturing disappearing or contested terrains, it addresses the fear of death, of loss, and of formlessness. The narrative of the neighbor’s death, the child’s reaction to it, and the speaker’s attempts to comfort her, is punctuated and enriched by Hass’s ruminations on human efforts to order a disorienting, entropic world: a “gone world” that “unties like a shoelace,” one in which “everything / rises and dissolves in air” (48). The piece offers encouragement, such as the poet has to offer—that life continues, that beauty continues, even in the wake of inexplicable loss. At the same time, it documents the passage of the summer and the process of grieving.

Hass’s attention to loss in “Songs to Survive the Summer” reflects an abiding concern within his writings (and, he would claim, within poetry more broadly), perhaps most famously expressed in his poem “Meditation at Lagunitas,” which begins

All the new thinking is about loss.
In this it resembles all the old thinking.³¹
The idea, for example, that each particular erases
the luminous clarity of a general idea. That the clown-
faced woodpecker probing the dead sculpted trunk
of that black birch is, by his presence,
some tragic falling off from a first world
of undivided light. Or the other notion that
because there is in this world no one thing
to which the bramble of blackberry corresponds,
a word is elegy to what it signifies. (*Praise 4*)

The poem explores the senses of loss attending Platonic thought as well as the
Structuralist, post-Structuralist, and Lacanian insistence on the distance between
language and the things of the world.

When the world begins to dissolve in “Meditation at Lagunitas”—“talking this
way, everything dissolves: *justice / pine, hair, woman, you, and I*”—it is the memory of
the physical and psychological realities of a former lover that reconvenes the world:

. . . There was a woman
I made love to and I remembered how, holding
her small shoulders in my hands sometimes,
I felt a violent wonder at her presence,
like a thirst for salt, for my childhood river
with its island willows, silly music from the pleasure boat,
muddy places where we caught the little orange-silver fish
called *pumpkinseed*. . . (*Praise 4*)

As this poem suggests, one means of combating loss and dissolution in Hass’s writing is
the recourse to concrete particulars—to the “small shoulders,” “island willows” and
“little orange-silver fish”—grasping the world through its names and images.

³¹ An earlier draft read “All the new poetry is about loss. / In this it resembles all the old poetry.”

Because the particulars of the world are threatened, there is an urgency to the processes of knowing and naming what is seen: “clown-faced woodpecker,” “*pumpkinseed*.” When asked about the emphasis on natural history in his writing—the careful indication of plants and flowers by name—Hass reflected on his desire to use a knowledge of natural history as a means of staying the rapid changes occurring in California during his lifetime:

When I started doing botany and natural history in college, part of it consisted of learning the names of things I already knew, sensually, as familiars of childhood, and there was a kind of power I felt from learning the names. . . It wasn't merely a matter of having a label for something, because in order to name it, you had to know it in its uniqueness. And . . . everything was changing so fast. The whole post-war explosion in America was going on, and my study was a way of holding on, a way of making things that I valued stay put. By getting to know one species of grass from another, one species of bird from another, and by knowing the names, they could stay put. I thought. (Reminick, “Conversation” 18).³²

In the foreword to *Field Guide*, Stanley Kunitz (who had selected Hass as the Yale Younger Poet) comments on the capacity of Hass's poetry to function as a “stay,” describing it as

permeated with the awareness of his creature self, his affinity with the animal and vegetable kingdoms, with the whole chain of being . . . Natural universe and moral universe coincide for him, centered in a nexus of personal affections, his stay against what he describes as ‘the wilderness of history and political violence’”(Hass, *Field Guide* xii).

The idea of the poetic “stay” is not unique to Hass's work. Robert Frost, in the preface to his *Complete Poems* (1949), defined the poem as a whole as “a momentary stay against

³²This statement is reminiscent of Williams's description of his research on Paterson from *I Wanted to Write a Poem*, 72-73.

confusion.” And for his part, Hass reflected in an interview, “[F]or me, the way to anchor and clarify is with a poem . . .” (Shillinger 1).

The maps which “anchor and clarify,” which stabilize best are the clearest images. Whether describing natural or domestic worlds, in Hass’s writings, a large part of the poem’s ability to function as a stop or “stay” is linked to the image. But the image is also a difficult proposition; like the “objective” map, the image can disassociate itself from time, and from the circumstances of its own creation. While this may grant temporary relief from the “wilderness of history and political violence,” taken to its extreme, it represents another form of divorce from the world.

III. IMAGE

Hass, like his contemporaries, grapples with what Robert Pinsky describes in *The Situation of Poetry*, as a “dissatisfaction with the abstract, discursive and conventional nature of words as a medium for the particulars of experience” (12). But for Hass, image is more than words. It is associated with a moment of attention or “consciousness;” it is the documentation and *making* of a moment of awareness (Twentieth 74, 285; Cavalieri 43). When speaking of Chekov’s image—“mineral bottles with preserved cherries in them”—he explains, “what we see clearly is not perhaps the heart of reality toward which the image leaps, but the quiet attention that is the form of the impulse to leap” (273). In an interview following his selection as U.S. Poet Laureate, he argued that this capacity for attention is particularly salient in the works of the classical Japanese poets:

There’s a tremendous tendency, especially in our hurried-up society, to abstract, to not see, not notice . . . I was attracted to Japanese poetry

because it was the poetry of ordinary attention. And it was hugely arresting . . . (Shillinger 1)

His scholarly and poetic interest in haiku—the traditional Japanese form that captures an image and evokes a season through its concise, seventeen-syllable structure, further emphasizes the importance of the image. Having published *The Essential Haiku: Versions of Basho, Buson, and Issa* in 1994, he often uses examples from these poet's works to demonstrate principles within his critical writings. Resonant with the strengths of his own work, he praises haiku for its “freshness and precision” as well as its “quickness and condensation” (*Twentieth* 283).

Many of Hass's own images are arresting: the gazelle in “Spring Drawing 2” that watches as jackals eat its entrails, the gift of a bowl filled with dead bees, covered with rose petals in “A Story About the Body,” or the statement in “Songs to Survive the Summer,” both image and idea: “When it is bad, Vanya, / I go into the night / and the night eats me” (*Human Wishes* 14, 32, *Praise* 55). But the “arrest of the image” is not only a mark of its emotive, sensual, or aesthetic impact. Like the “stay,” the “arrest” is the effect of the image upon time, that is, the image's ability to freeze or leap outside of time. Hass identifies this impulse “‘to leap out of time’ or to record those moments in which we seem to” with the image in modernist poetry, and with Pound's work, in particular (*Twentieth* 80).

The power of the image is not that the image is “about” anything. The image is not metaphor. It is the particularity, the “smallness of detail” that gives poetic images their power, because, Hass tells us, these details serve as metonymic glimpses of our world:

Metonymy rather than metaphor is the characteristic of the image, because all our seeing is metonymic. *Parts of a World*, Wallace Stevens called a book of poems. The world is glimpses, moment by moment, in our experience of it. (*Twentieth* 290)

This is, in a sense, a version of the coastal proposition that Paul Carter describes, when the early explorers understood what was seen at the coast, those coastal “glimpses,” as indicative of the contents of the interior—but possible with an egalitarian, rather than mastering aim. Hass cites Buson, haiku master, as an exemplar of this attentive, metonymic way of seeing and constructing images:

I find that there is something steady and nourishing about the art of Buson, about his apparent interest in everything that passed before his eyes . . . he acted as if he believed that any part of the world, completely seen, was the world . . . (307)

Such glimpses or fragments are the materials from which a dissolving world might be reassembled.

In “Songs to Survive the Summer” this metonymic capacity to know the world through a single image is represented in the story of Wilhelm Steller. Steller, an eighteenth-century naturalist, joined Vitus Bering’s second voyage along the coast of Siberia, in search of an eastern passage to North America. The poem’s fourteenth movement offers a fictionalized account of the expedition, focusing on a moment of crisis: lost off the coast of Alaska (“Panic, / the maps were useless”), “Bering sick, / the crew half mad with scurvy,” Steller insists that if the crew would allow him to land on a nearby island, he could collect the herbs necessary to make “a healing broth”: “He said, there are herbs / that can cure you, // I can save you all” (*Praise* 62).

The crew will not allow him go ashore. They despise him, because “He didn’t /
give a damn about them /and they knew it.” He is a “mean impatient man // born low
enough / to hate the lower class” who, for two years had

connived to join
the expedition and put
his name to all the beasts

and flowers of the north. (61-62)

Eventually, however, Bering listens to Steller, and the crew relents. While on the island,
Steller sees a “blue black-crested / bird, shrilling in a pine. . . . unlike/ any European
bird” and recognizes in its image where they must be:

His mind flipped to
Berlin, the library, a glimpse
he’d had at Audubon

a blue-gray crested bird
exactly like the one
that squawked at him, a

Carolina jay . . .
. . . he knew
then where they were,

America, we’re saved. (63)

The jay is the metonymic sign of a continent—Steller’s knowledge maps place-onto-bird.
By recognizing the image of the jay, and naming it, he can name the place in which, up
until that moment he was lost:

Stellar’s jay, by which
I found Alaska.
He wrote it in his book. (64)

And yet, Hass's work suggests that the image is somehow insufficient, in its isolation and finitude. Although recognizing the jay allows Steller to know where he is, it does not help him to communicate this knowledge to others, or to guide their journey further:

No one believed him or,
sick for home, he didn't care

what wilderness
it was. They set sail
west. Bering died.
[. . .]
Saved no one. (64)

Here we encounter one of the fundamental tensions at work within Hass's poetics: the draw toward the image—its freshness, quickness, and precision, its ability to reflect the whole through the part—and the drawing away from the image for its isolation, the ways in which it holds itself aloof from the discourse, or interchange of the living world.

IV. FORM

The question is, how to get from finite images or glimpses of the world to some sense of coherence, some greater form. If, as Hass claims, the form of the poem is the shape of its understanding, then like the urgency of naming the images of the world, there is an urgency to poetic "shaping," in the face of dissolving worlds. Issues of form, for Hass, as for many poets of the twentieth century, reflect a movement away from the spent authority of traditional meters, but also the need for forms that respond to the circumstances and experiences of twentieth-century life. Speaking of Wordsworth's "Prelude" as an early influence, Hass turns our attention to a passage that ends with "And

loth to coalesce.” The phrase resonates with Hass because it “seems to speak particularly to the twentieth century, to our experience of fragmentation, of making form against all odds. . . . We have been obsessed with the difficulty of form, of any coherent sense of being . . .” (61). Certainly, the notion that “free-verse” poetry abandoned principles of structure or form is wrong. More than ever, early-to mid-twentieth century poets are concerned with “order,” as Stevens puts it, as both the power and burden of the poet.

After introducing the fact of the death, and the “gone world” in the poem’s first movement, Hass turns, in the third and fourth, to a rumination on the significance of form. He begins,

The squalor of mind
is formlessness,
informis,

the Romans said of ugliness,
it has no form,
a man’s misery, bleached skies (50)

When the Steller episode occurs, much later in the poem, Steller is described as “form’s hero,” perhaps because, by identifying the form of the bird as American, he also brings the inchoate world in which he is lost back into form. But there is another “form’s hero” in the poem, introduced in this earlier movement. After considering the term *informis*, the speaker says,

I thought
this morning of Wallace Stevens

walking equably to work
and of a morning two Julys ago
on Chestnut Ridge, wandering

down the hill when one

rusty elm leaf, earth-
skin peeling, wafted

by me on the wind.
My body groaned toward fall
[. . .]
Death is the mother of beauty. (50-51)

This line, “Death is the mother of beauty,” comes, of course, from Stevens’ poem, “Sunday Morning” (*Collected Poems* 68). Not only is it significant to Hass’s poem because the neighbor’s death occurs on a Sunday morning, nor because the reminiscence about Stevens occur on a path where “one / rusty elm leave . . . wafted by”—reminding us of death “strew[ing] the leaves / Of sure obliteration on our paths” in Stevens’ poem. It is significant because, by naming death as the mother of beauty, Stevens offers an antidote to loss, to formlessness. The negotiation of death by formulating it as mother, not of the child next door, but of beauty, gives fear a form, and addresses the Roman aesthetic (and possibly moralistic) claim that that which is without form is ugliness itself: misery, dissolved worlds, bleached skies. This is why, in the movement that follows, the speaker asks,

Should I whisper in [my daughter’s] ear,
death is the mother
of beauty? . . .

. . . It’s all in
shapeliness, give your
fears a shape? (52)

Stevens,

that clean-shaven man
smelling of lotion,
lint-free, walking toward his work, a
pure exclusive music in his mind (51)

in every way opposes “the squalor of mind” which is formlessness. His poem, “The Idea of Order at Key West” ruminates on the poet/maker’s “rage for order”—for singing into ordered being the world through which the poet moves. The path he walks “toward work,” may be read as the path walked by Hass’s twentieth-century poetic predecessors, toward a sense of order and finding form.

In his essay on prosody, “Listening and Making,” Hass makes reference to a lecture by another of his poetic predecessors, Williams. In “The Poem as a Field of Action,” Williams told his audience that Imagism had disappeared because it was not structural: “You can put it down as a general rule that when a poet, in the broadest sense, begins to devote himself to the *subject matter* of his poems . . . he has come to the end of his poetic means” (Twentieth 131). Updating Williams’s claim, Hass says of late-twentieth century poetry: “Almost all the talk about poetry in the past few years has focused on issues of image and diction. There was a liveliness in the idea of hauling deep and surreal imagery into American poetry, but the deep image is not more structural than imagism: there was hardly any sense of what the rhythmic ground might be” (132).

This description of contemporary poetry highlights several issues: first the question of the sufficiency of the image in modern and contemporary poetry; second the question of a structural necessity for a lasting poetics; and then, the notion of “the rhythmic ground,” presumably a relative of structure. Altogether, these factors suggest the need, as Hass sees it, for a poetic change—something that will bring questions of structure back into contact with the image. His reading of the Swedish poet Tranströmer’s long poem, *Baltics* seems to concur:

[The] perilousness of our individual lives is what makes the insight of the isolated lyric poem untenable. It creates the need in the wandering fragments or islands of *Baltics* to somehow transform image into discourse, into a form of time, as the terse notations of the poet's grandfather had turned the isolated towns his ship visited into a rudimentary culture . . . It makes the form of the poem its deepest and most urgent subject. (*Twentieth* 84)

As many critics attest, the issue of the insufficiency of the image was a concern of a number of late twentieth-century poets. And many, poets and critics alike, have argued that a “discursive” rather than imagistic poetry meets the need to “somehow transform image into discourse.” Hass is himself often identified among these discursive poets. The difficulty with the term “discursive poetry,” however, is that it readily lends itself to two, fairly different interpretations. One proposes a poetry akin to talking or to “discourse,” that passes from premises to conclusions as a form of argument: exploring “the discursive resources of statement and argumentation” (Gustavsson 193). This understanding of discursiveness emphasizes reason as the source of meaning rather than emotion. The other calls upon the more archaic origins of “discursive,” as in “running hither and thither; passing from one locality to another irregularly.” The benefit of the first of these interpretations is its suggestion of conversation, of communication and engagement in the world. The benefit of the second is its ability to represent movements of mind (or thinking)—but with far less emphasis on the “rationality” of thought. The two are not necessarily exclusive of one another; Robert Pinsky incorporates the casual or wandering aspect with the speaking and communicating one when he describes the discursive mode as “the poet talking, predicating, moving directly through a subject as systematically and unaffectedly as he would walk from one place to another” (133).

When it comes to reading poems as discursive, however, critics have tended to privilege either their “talking” nature, or the more stochastic movements of mind, represented in quick cuts and juxtapositions, etc. To complicate matters further, one of the principle proponents of discursive poetry, and Hass’s contemporary, Stanley Plumly defined it in terms of the poet’s mastery of tone (21).

According to Terrence Doody, after *Praise*, Hass’s writing demonstrates a movement away from the sufficiency of the image as a formal unit and toward an increased reliance on “the discursive *form* of the sentence” (47). In contrast to the image, the sentence allows for an opening up of the voice, or voices. Doody continues, “This new form not only extends the poetic line, it creates from these lines blocks or zones that are not quite stanzas but are more than merely syntactical units . . . The sentence is more capacious than the image, with room for greater drama, higher rhetoric, and ideas the image cannot support” (47).

While the form of the sentence may answer the demand for a suitable structure in Hass’s later poetry, it does not explain the form of “Songs to Survive the Summer,” built as it is out of enjambments and short fragments. This poem requires us to attend to that aspect of discursiveness which is wandering, moving about. Without sacrificing the vibrancy and focus of the image, or the haiku-form with its “virtues of brevity,” the question that arises in this poem, as it does in Tranströmer’s piece is, how can the poet make, from the compilation of fragments and glimpses, some structural or rhythmic ground? What is the structure by which a form emerges out of images?

William Least Heat-Moon asks a similar question, in *PrairyErth*, about the construction of his “deep map” of Kansas. Having spent several years compiling data on the region, Least Heat-Moon searches for a structural ground that will hold the many images of the prairie land together, allowing them to form some unexpected yet meaningful relationship to one another:

For thirty months, maybe more, I’ve come and gone from here and have stories to tell, but . . . I had not discovered the way to tell them. My searches and researches, like my days, grew more randomly than otherwise, and every form I tried contorted them, and each time I began to press things into cohesion, I edged not so much toward fiction as toward distortion, when what I wanted was accuracy; even when I got a detail down accurately, I couldn’t hook it to the next without concocting theories. It was connections that deviled me. I was hunting a fact or image and not a thesis to hold my details together, and so I arrived at this question: should I just gather up items like creek pebbles into a bag and let them tumble into their own pattern? Did I really want the reality of randomness? Answer: only if it would yield a landscape with figures, one that would unroll like a Chinese scroll painting, or a bison-skin drawing where both beginnings and ends of an event are at once present in the conflated time of the American Indian. The least I hoped for was a topographic map of words that would open inch by inch to show its long miles. (14-15)

Neither the poet nor the author want full randomness, but would prefer for figures to emerge, meaningful connections. In the case of *PrairyErth*, Least Heat-Moon finds his structure in the mapped divisions of the Jeffersonian grid—abstract, even arbitrary forms laid over the shapes of Kansas, forms to which the land has been shaped, and which the land has resisted: “a grid such as an archaeologist lays over the ground he will excavate . . .” (15)

In the case of “Songs to Survive the Summer,” Hass’s “grid”—the poem’s structural and rhythmic ground—emerges out of the three-line stanza.³³ Speaking of poetic form in *Twentieth Century Pleasures*, Hass says, “The metrical line proposes a relationship to order. So does a three- or four-line stanza. Imagine, it says, a movement through pattern” (127). Because the three-line stanzaic structure is maintained throughout this poem, we are pressed through the movement of its pattern; it serves the purpose, among other things, of reminding us of the made, the ordered nature of this poetic act. But its regularity throws into relief other types of movement within the poem—movement through images and alternate structures, between passages.

Among these alternate structures is the grouping of the tercets into those apparently organic clusters, each set off from the others by a mark—some with as few as four stanzas, the longest with seventeen. Though the content of each movement varies widely, the movements themselves are not random in their progression. Seventeen in total, they mark an undulating pattern of expansions and contractions in length, culminating in the fourteenth, then contracting toward the end, in what seems to be the poem’s the denouement. We can describe this dual structure, in which both the strictly regimented tercet and the wandering movements play a part, as an archipelago, expressing both the stays or stops and the passages in between.

³³ Each poem may have its own “grid,” its own structuring device. In Hass’s poem, “Human Wishes,” for instance, the figure of a “cloud chamber” appears: “I stayed home to write, or rather stayed home and stared at a blank piece of paper, waiting for her to come back, thinking tongue-in-groove, tongue-in-groove, as if language were a kind of moral cloud chamber through which the world passed and from which is emerged charged with desire.” Doody comments, “A cloud chamber, like an x-ray machine or spectograph, reveals the position and nature of unseen particles . . .” (48).

V. ARCHIPELAGO POEMS

Following the neighbor's death in the poem, the speaker describes his daughter's and his own desire to hide from reality in books. She goes to "Prairie farms" and "tales of spindly orphan /girls who find / the golden key . . ." He turns to "Chekhov's / tenderness to see / what it can save" (*Praise* 52-53). Eventually, though, the speaker expresses his uneasiness with books. The sense of possibility that they offer the child is no longer one he can share. Instead, he returns to his own experience, expressed through his own writing.

The three movements at the poem's center dwell on the efficacies of literary form. They are linked together by images of birds, but more significantly, by a concern with writing: what it can and cannot accomplish, what it amounts to—whether a book or a poem is more or less than text and world. Hass says in the 8th movement,

The love of books
is for children
who glimpse in them

a life to come, but
I have come
to that life and

feel uneasy
with the love of books.
This is my life,

time islanded
in poems of dwindled time.
There is no other world. (56)

Here, at last, we have the form that poetry carves in time—the form of an island. To take the form of an "island" suggests a turning into solid earth, concrete and finite. The island

is a discrete unit, a discrete entity, surrounded on all sides by water. Its limitations make its content more manageable. Perhaps like the haiku mentioned in the seventh canto, and the three line stanza, it has “the virtues of brevity.” It is poetry’s ability to condense or structure, in this case to “island” life experience that suggests an antidote to the dissolution of life and the loss experienced by father and child.

Let us say that the discrete observations—images or “pure moments”—function like islands. And the brief tercets function similarly at a structural level. Then, let us say that the isolation of the discrete island is unsatisfying, untenable. The island, like the image, carries with it the potential for extreme isolation, division, a constricting finitude. These traits run counter to the poem’s central theme—the search for continuity in the face of loss—as well as its potential for discourse. And, after all, this is not a single movement or a single song, not a single island. The poem must find a way to connect them, to make the passages as palpable as the stops or stays. In doing this, it forms a series, an archipelago.

I had not yet read Hass’s piece on Trastromer when I first began thinking of “Songs to Survive the Summer” as an archipelago; how curious it was to discover that Hass offered the same structural analysis for Trastromer’s poem: “*Baltics* . . . is an anthology of Trastromer poems, an archipelago;” “it introduces us to a labyrinth of islands and water which seems to be absolutely the terrain of modern poetry;” “it creates the need in the wandering fragments or islands . . . to somehow transform image into discourse, into a form of time, (81, 80, 84). The archipelago is a useful analogy for Hass’s poem because it allows both for the self-containment of the individual movement

and the continuity of the poem as a whole. Although submerged from view, a foundational connection holds each movement in relationship with the others, much as an underlying range of mountains connects islands that appear from the surface of the water to be independent: all of the cantos emerge from similar materials—the persistent tercet, the speaker’s memories and sensations, and the poem’s overarching thematic concerns.

The archipelago is suggestive of movement as well. Our reading of the poem—understanding and formulating relationships between its segments—is an act of navigation between islands. Typographically, an interesting conversion occurs: the passages of the text—which occupy both a greater space on the page and in time—constitute the islands, while the space of our interpretive movement is occupied by the tiny mark or dot. “Archipelago” originally described the Aegean sea and meant literally “chief sea or gulf.” Considering the word’s origin, we see that in the archipelago there is no negative space—it necessarily comprises islands and the waters in between. Our interpretation of the poem, too, means there is no negative space, an understanding Williams has already affirmed when he told Burke that reading of the poem is as constitutive of the poem as the lines on the page themselves are.

Finally, archipelagos are themselves a record of the passage of the earth, measured on a geologic time scale. A chains of islands, like Hawaii, for instance, records the passage of the earth’s tectonic plates over a “hotspot” below the earth’s crust. If we think of the earth surface as a fabric being drawn through a sewing machine, the hotspot is the needle. Each of the islands is one thrust of this needle. As the surface of the earth shifts, the next stitch is made—another articulation of the form made out of time. For the

poem, this figure of the chain of islands further evokes the stepping stones that carry the father and daughter across the gulf of the summer, to arrive eventually at a clement shore.

VI. ARTIFACTS OF PASSAGE

Although I have used the figure of the deep map to discuss the search for discursive forms—that is, forms that bring together disparate materials, allowing us to wander through their contents—Least Heat-Moon’s model does not fully describe Hass’s mapping practice in “Songs to Survive the Summer.” I have already claimed that Steller’s identification of the bird converts the bird into an “artifact of passage.” It is out of such artifacts that Hass’s map of islands is formed. Least Heat-Moon makes use of the “arbitrary” form of the county map to structure his materials. Hass’s forms are not arbitrary. The “artificiality” of Hass’s map is important to my articulation of the ways in which the marks we leave on the spaces we pass through can constitute a mapping practice, that is, how we construct an image of a place and our movement through it out of artifacts. This understanding is also important for the agency it places in the poet’s hands.

Near the poem’s beginning, we encounter the speaker as a child,

at high noon

in the outfield clover
guzzling Orange Crush
time endless, examining

a wooden coin I’d carried
all through summer

without knowing it. (49)

The coin is a gift from his grandfather: “carved from live oak, / Indian side and buffalo side.” It is accompanied by a puzzle—a proverb and a joke: “Don’t // take any wooden nickels, / kid,” he said, and “gave me one / under the loquat tree” (*Praise* 49). The grandfather’s eyes are

lustered with a mirth
so deep and rich he never
laughed, as if it were a cosmic

secret that we shared.
I never understood; it married
in my mind with summer. (50)

In the poem’s final movement, the coin appears again, as does this enigmatic luster. Now the speaker addresses his own child:

That is what I have
to give you, child, stories,
songs, loquat seeds,

curiously shaped; they
are the frailest stay against
our fears. . . .

[. . .]
. . . It is every
thing touched casually,
lovers, the images

of saviors, books, the coin
I carried in my pocket
till it shone, it is

all things lustered
by the steady thoughtlessness
of human use.

Although the speaker tells us that he carried the coin throughout the summer without knowing it, and that the process of becoming lustered happens casually, thoughtlessly, the poem itself cannot substantiate this casualness. Contrary to his description, the “stays” we create are not that frail. Perhaps, when the motif is death (or even time more broadly), it is difficult to claim agency, to do anything but acquiesce. While the passivity suggested by the acquiescence at the end of the poem is reminiscent of Williams’s and Hass’s descriptions of how the poem “comes to form,” the forming of life experiences, of memories, and of language into lines, albeit “lines of dwindled time,” denies this passivity.

A close reading of the complex patterns running through “Songs to Survive the Summer” indicates the poet’s active agency. There is an unmistakable pattern of threes throughout—both structural and imagistic. Hass draws explicit attention to his three-line stanza, evoking its kindred form, the Japanese haiku (55).³⁴ He mentions, too, that the protagonist of the Chekov story, the subject of the sixth movement, is “three years mad,” and later, that we have traded the whine of the ambulance for the patient rhythm of the “village bell,” which tolled for the dead “in threes” (53, 61). While on his walk, the speaker watches a heron lift from a pond “three hundred yards below;” the mother whose death is the impetus for the poem dies at thirty-one; the recipe for onion soup calls

³⁴ I cannot help but wonder if the fact that both “Maps” and “Songs to Survive the Summer” are composed of seventeen pieces (and that the longest of these pieces is, in “Songs” seventeen stanzas long) is some reference to the haiku’s composition of seventeen syllables. The repetition of seventeen does not seem arbitrary. Either seventeen must for Hass be some rhythmically satisfying length, or perhaps these poems could be read as “macro-haikus” in which each segment constitutes a single “syllable.”

for a three-quart pan, the soup to be simmered thirty minutes. At the poem's conclusion, Hass says he can offer his child three things: "stories, songs, loquat seeds."

Even a cursory analysis of the poem's structure and thematic preoccupations points to certain "hotspots" within the text, places where established patterns are altered, where something shifts or culminates. Because of the preponderance of figures of three, the rare appearance of twos is striking and occurs only within two crucial moments in the poem: in the fourteenth movement, with its description of Steller's two years of conniving to join Bering--and in the transition between the eighth movement, in which "time is islanded / in poems of dwindled time" into the movement that follows:

This is my life,

time islanded
in poems of dwindled time.
There is no other world.

•

But I have seen it twice.
In the Palo Alto marsh
sea birds rose in early light

and took me with them.
Another time, dreaming,
river birds lifted me,

swans, small angelic terns . . . (56).

In the eighth, Hass collapses the world of writing and the world of experience into one, explaining that his life *is* lines of poetry: "there is no other world." Then, as movement nine opens, he says, "But I have seen it twice." Spanning the gap between movements, the referent for "it" becomes ambiguous—it could be read as describing the following

scene with sea birds rising from a marsh. I think, however, that the line refers to that “one world” of the previous movement, and is a rephrasing of a comment associated with classical Chinese poet Tu Fu, to which Hass refers in *Twentieth Century Pleasures*. To explain the power of images within poetry, Tu Fu’s colleague told him: “It is like being alive twice” (*Twentieth* 275).

In Hass’s poem, then, we have both the Williams-esque assertion that text and world are one, “the province of the poem is the world” because “there is no other world,” and the recognition that through text we can see and live twice. While death may ultimately be inescapable, the text leaves a trail, of time islanded, to which we can return, to live those lines again.

According to Michel de Certeau, proverbs (and other discourses), like tools,

are *marked by uses*; they offer to analysis *the imprints of acts* or of processes of enunciation; they signify the *operations* whose object they have been . . . [and] more generally they thus indicate a social historicity in which systems of representations or processes of fabrication no longer appear only as normative frameworks but also as *tools manipulated by users*. (*The Practice of Everyday Life* 21)

I have thought of this passage often in considering the “cosmic secret” of the Grandfather’s proverb/joke. I think that “making a form out of time” and the “imprints of acts or of processes of enunciation” in this poem may be similar acts—both signifying passage: Steller’s passage to Alaska where he enunciates a creature and a continent, the passage of time marked by the coin’s luster, the passage of inscrutable wisdom from parent, or grand parent to child. These marks constitute the “the curious shaping” that the poet evokes in negotiating and remaking the world through poetry.

VII CONCLUSION: SONGLINES

According to cultural geographer Yi-Fu Tuan, the attempt to understand, or stabilize, the self by giving it topographical shape (and vice versa) has mythic analogues in a variety of cultures (Topophilia 142-144, 156). Often, the topographic expression of the self results in a mapping of the body in topographic terms. In Hass's poem, however, we find the self, as defined in temporally rather than corporally, taking on a topographical shape.

In closing, I would like to briefly consider the Aboriginal Australian practice of the songline. When I began my reading of "Songs to Survive the Summer," I had just read Bruce Chatwin's *The Songlines*, and was thinking about these Aboriginal Australian maps. Songlines are an inherited system of mythical mnemonics that link features of the landscape with explanations of their creation. These narratives trace the contours of the Australian continent, accounting for each topographical feature and its origin during the "Dreamtime," before human existence, when the "Ancestors" sang the world into being. The songline is a powerful navigational tool as well as mythopoetic medium, which extends beyond the borders of a given community and past lingual barriers. Its continuity, and its communicative strength, even for those who have not seen the landscape it depicts, results from the fact that the songline's melody describes the landscape it documents. As Chatwin describes, "the melodic contour of the song describes the nature of the land over which the song passes" (108).

Tone, rhythm, and the duration of notes all play a part in conveying this sense of the terrain. Interestingly, the sense is not a visual one, but one as experienced through the

feet of the walker (and the Ancestor, whose walk is being traced). So, for instance, “If Lizard man [one of the Ancestors] were . . . skipping up and down the McDonnell escarpments, you’d have a series of arpeggios and glissandos” (108). Certain combinations of notes, certain phrases, become recognizable patterns that describe types of land. When an experienced listener hears a passage of song that he has not heard before, the sequence of phrases signifying crossing a river or climbing an escarpment would eventually orient the listener to the location of the song; this is how “a musical phrase [becomes] a map reference” (108).

As the word “songline” suggests, the form that traces the land is musical—again, based upon tone, rhythm and duration of notes. Although some scholars of English prosody have argued that the constructs of formal poetry are essentially analogous with those of music, finding clear parallels between meter and landscape may not always be feasible. I have already indicated a possible correlation between portions of Paterson and the landscape it describes, expressed through rhythm and the appearance of the lines on the page; however, greater attention has been given to interpreting the effects of formal constructs on the experience of reading. So, for instance, poems that are written with a repetition of anapests (stressed “ta ta tum, ta ta tum”), as in Byron’s poem “The Destruction Of Sennacherib”: “And the foam of his gasping lay white on the turf, / And cold as the spray of the rock-beating surf,” may be described as having an “anapestic gallop.” The sensation of movement (in this case galloping) characterizes the rhythm of the form. This is not entirely unlike the rhythmic footsteps of the aboriginal Ancestors, which the singer of the songline re-experiences; however, poetic rhythms, such as the

anapestic gallop, do not tell us about the terrain through which the rider or reader might pass.

The literal correlation of rhythm and terrain in the songline puts a spin on the search for “rhythmic ground;” but “Songs to Survive the Summer,” as I have already pointed out, does not document a specific terrain rhythmically. And yet, in their capacity to act as tools of guidance, to facilitate passage across great distances and unfamiliar territories, I felt that the poem and the songline were somehow akin.

The songline, too, gives form to time—it structures cosmic and geological timeframes into narrative and rhythmic ones. It is, in this sense, both an artifact of physical and temporal passage. And, although it does not conform to western cartographic traditions, it is understood by many as a form of mapping. Each feature of the landscape, each site that is named—“Rainbow Snake,” “Dingo Puppies,” “Lizard Man,” the “Babies,” is an artifact of the Ancestor’s passage (or “Steller’s jay,” “by which he knew America,” perhaps?). These are the milestones of the Walkabout journey, as well as monuments to the continent’s creation. The songline spares no detail in accounting for the particulars of place and of passage—there is “hardly a rock or creek in the country that could not or had not been sung” (13). And, in the context of Chatwin’s book, the preservation of these artifacts of passage is linked directly to a desire to save a world from dissolution, disappearance.

His knowledge of the songlines, as explained by book, comes from a Russian-Australian man named Arkady Volchok . Arkady is committed to helping the Aboriginal communities preserve the sacred sites of their landscape from the encroachments of

development, and in particular, from a proposed train route. In order to translate their song maps into paper maps that will be heeded by engineers and politicians, he travels with various Aboriginal leaders, “his old men” through the outback. They explain to him the significance of the features of the landscape, and he records these places as sacred sites.

Although the singing of the songline acknowledges that the world was created long before, by powers greater than humans’, there is a fundamental sense of agency expressed through the medium:

By singing the world into existence . . . the Ancestors had been poets in the original sense of *poesis* meaning ‘creation.’ . . . The man who went ‘Walkabout’ was making a ritual journey. He trod in the footprints of his Ancestor. He sang the Ancestor’s stanzas without changing a word or note—and so recreated the Creation. (14)

At one point in his explanation of how the songlines operate, Arkady says:

“Sometimes, I’ll be driving my ‘old men’ through the desert, and we’ll come to a ridge of sandhills, and suddenly they’ll all start signing. ‘What are you mob singing?’ I’ll ask, and they’ll say, ‘Singing up the country, boss. Makes the country come up quicker.’” (14)

Of course, we can understand their signing as a means of making the time pass more quickly; but that is not what is meant here—they are, by voice and song, calling the landscape into being. This is why I link the Aboriginal practice with Hass’s: to think about the ways in which, through our knowledge, and our representations we can “call up” or “sing up” places—even when those places are “lost” in time. What map has more agency than the one that calls the terrain into being as we pass through it? Understood this way, Hass’s poem does not allow the world to dissipate, but “sings up” all the stages of the journey to that clement shore in fall.

Epilogue: Reading Maps, Reading Poems

Have you reckoned a thousand acres much?
Have you worked so hard to get at the meaning of poems?
-Whitman, *Leaves of Grass*

I THE EXIGENCIES FOR INTERDISCIPLINARITY

As I mentioned at my project's outset, I am invested in the benefits that can be wholehearted efforts at cross-disciplinary work—and as I conclude, I would like to reflect once more on this theme, and in particular, on the importance of interdisciplinarity for empowering students as readers of poetry.

In the Winter 2004 ADE Bulletin, Reed Way Dasenbrock comments on the failure of many scholars of literature (and particularly those in English departments) to engage fully in interdisciplinary projects. A Professor of English and Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences at University of New Mexico, Dasenbrock says,

We talk a great deal about interdisciplinarity in literary studies today, genuinely believing that we are more interdisciplinary than ever. If asked for evidence of this trend, we would surely point to the importance for literary theory of many thinkers whose disciplinary identity is not literary criticism. . . . By and large those outside of literary studies would not agree. . . . For literary studies, interdisciplinarity is above all a matter of what one studies and what one writes about; for others it is a matter of how one works and whom one works with. . . . [B]y the standards of the other disciplines to which we think we are connected we don't seem interdisciplinary at all.

To offset the “marginal status in the contemporary academy” of literary studies, Dasenbrock argues, literary scholars need to demonstrate their ability to work effectively with and *within* different scholarly traditions, rather than, as Willard McCarty says in his synopsis of Dasenbrock's piece,

poaching . . . materials from other disciplines for purposes defined by the discipline of the poacher, with no attempt whatever—nor (which is much worse) awareness of the need—to understand how people in other disciplines understand and work with these materials.

Dasenbrock is concerned not only with the poaching of materials from other fields, but the ability of scholars in literary studies to practice different ways of thinking about them. He speaks from the position of a dean—concerned with the pragmatics and politics of departmental support in a university-wide context—but his urging for more interdisciplinary endeavors merits attention with regards to its benefits to scholarship, as well.

Dasenbrock's position is, I suspect, more conservative than my own—he seems particularly concerned with the post-modern hobby horses of contemporary literary scholarship and how these may alienate colleagues in economics, psychology, philosophy, and other fields. While I agree with him that it is not surprising that scientists (even female scientists) might respond negatively to a critique of masculine-centric scientific systems of ordering knowledge (an example he gives of anti-interdisciplinary scholarship on the part of those in literary studies), I do not believe this type of encounter should be avoided in the interest of putting all parties at ease. A distinct benefit of attempting to work with and within another discipline, as well as one's own, is to challenge preconceptions on both sides about discipline-specific ways of thinking. Acknowledging that different fields of study prioritize and perpetuate different systems for organizing knowledge brings us closer to being able to place multiple disciplines in dialogue with one another—with the potential to make new discoveries, and to learn

about both fields. The teaching of poetry is one field that stands to benefit from such approaches.

II PEDAGOGICAL APPLICATIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

In discussing poetry with students who have had little or poor exposure to the medium, I often encounter an initial resistance, based upon their feeling that poetry is encrypted, deliberately encoded to prevent their entry. There is, I think, a kernel of truth in their describing poetry this way; poetry may be an encoded text—but not, I believe, one designed to keep the reader at bay. Instead, a useful comparison can be made between the coding practiced in cartography and in poetry.

In his *ABC of Reading*, Ezra Pound described poetry as “the most concentrated form of verbal expression.” In many cases, poems, like maps, take large quantities of highly complex experiential data and condense these into two-dimensional analogs. The process of condensation, or concentration, to use Pound’s term, shifts the burden of communication away from the literal or prosaic, onto the structural and relational (via juxtaposition, analogy, metaphor, rhyme, sight rhyme, etc.). In the classroom, I compare this process to the way in which hypertext functions on the internet: because information must be compressed, an idea, or a figure, lines up behind another image, phrase, or bit of code that is used to represent it; the full meaning is hidden from view, until we access it. In hypertext, we gain access to this additional information by “clicking” on the highlighted word or image which “links” us to the material we seek; in reading poems or maps, information becomes available to us through the process of interpretation.

Interpretation, however, does not offer the one-to-one correlation of the hypertext link to its subsequent page, which is why the poetic “code” can be both a highly efficient and an unpredictable means of communicating.

Reading maps, particularly those most familiar topographic or street maps, we readily understand the formal and structural translations at work: the figure of the mountain is not the mountain itself, but that does not prevent us from being able to visualize the actual (or imaginary) terrain described by the map. Not all maps, however are expressed through a vocabulary of familiar visual cues, and these, like poems, require an eye for forms, for patterns, repetitions, proximities and deviations, to begin to access the information they contain.

Few would question the necessity of condensation when it comes to cartography: in most cases, the map’s utility is based on its size. The portability of a map is certainly important to its “relevance,” but many significant effects of mapping, beyond the most obviously utilitarian, result from the condensation of the features the map describes. Because maps of terrain shrink the domains they depict, they offer alternative perspectives on the relationships between physical attributes of the world. The same principle is at work in conceptual or cognitive mappings that reveal relationships, proximities between ideas or things, that have not previously been acknowledged.

While Emily Dickinson speaks of poetry’s ability to practice the first of these forms of shrinkage—allowing us to carry a sunset in our pocket, it is poetry’s ability to reveal unexpected proximities, (or distances)—conceptual, etymological, visual, aural—that is most significant to our conversation about poetic condensation as a cartographic

practice. In the relatively small space of the page, the juxtaposition of words, lines, and images creates a field of associations. This field is the space of the poem's operations, mapped in multiple dimensions. Pound's famous poem, "In the Station of the Metro" offers one rich and concise example:

The apparition of these faces in the crowd;

Petals on a wet, black bough.

First, as readers, we are asked to acknowledge the visual parity of faces and petals, relying on the impressionistic visual resonance of shape and tone—ignoring scale and features. Also, as the title participates in the poem, we understand the dark tunnel as the bough on which the petals are arranged. So, already Pound has mapped human face to flower petal (a connection likely made by poets of earlier ages); and he has mapped subway tunnels to tree branches—an association that pulls nature and technology, the arboreal and the subterranean into contact. Further, if we know of Pound's interest in Asian poetry and art, we may find in the poem a connection between subway commuters and Japanese shoji screens, or enameled boxes, or with the subjects of Chinese poetry, in which plum blossoms often play a significant part.

III USING MAPS TO TEACH POEMS

If students respond to poems as though they were inoculations—they've had them before and they don't like them—one means of disarming them, I have found, is to start the class with maps, and not poems.

At the beginning of the semester, I bring in a wide array of maps—contemporary and ancient, Western and Eastern, terrestrial and extra-terrestrial. In those cases where a map may be familiar to students, I obscure give-away details, usually prominent names. I do include a few maps that are likely to cover familiar terrain, however (in the case of my students—a map of downtown Dallas, for instance), but try to defamiliarize these as well, by cropping, erasing street names, etc.

Having distributed the maps, I then ask, “What are you looking at? Their initial responses vary: some leap to interpretation and say—“I am looking at a river,” and I ask them about this; several are likely to say “a map” (usually those who have been given the most familiar types—not the medieval “T-O” maps, or the Arabic maps which, to a contemporary Western viewer invert the hemispheres). Then I ask them, “How do you know it is a map?”

This prompts a conversation about the translation of the physical world into one represented by cartographic conventions, and about our own map literacy, or “map-acy.” My general assessment is that most students come to the classroom with a broad, but usually fairly shallow familiarity with maps. This does not prevent them from jumping in as interpreters. I go on to ask them a series of questions about their map: what terrain does it describe? how do they know this? We talk about the words and forms on the page that give them clues, and the maps that stump them—remaining opaque.

I then transition to talking about poems. The same basic skills, I argue, that help them to “get oriented” with a map of terrain they may never have seen before can help them to orient themselves in the equally unfamiliar terrain of the poem. Asking them

about their own process of reading the poems, we are able to identify a number of significant reading strategies, emphasizing eye for patterns, repetitions, abstract forms that echo their physical correlates. (It is fairly easy to convince students that repetition suggests prominence, or importance, for instance, as readers, and as speakers, this makes sense to them.)

Having examined ways in which pictorial representations can be used to describe topographies, we then shift to thinking about how words can do this same work. I ask them, in groups, to pick several adjectives to describe the terrain represented by their map. Moving to a greater level of abstraction (or nuance), I then ask them to pick a variety of words that *sound like* the terrain represented in the map—which allows us to approach topics like onomatopoeia.

Finally, I give them a copy of “Corson’s Inlet,” by A. R. Ammons. And I begin the process again, asking them what they are looking at; how they know what it is they have in front of them; what clues they see, immediately, that help them to get oriented; and last, but certainly not least, what techniques does the poet use (descriptive and structural) to convey to his reader a sense of the terrain he surveys.

The benefits of teaching map reading alongside the reading of poems are several. First, the level of attention necessary for effectively reading maps, particularly of unfamiliar terrains, is, in many regards, an act of close reading. While formalist and new critical approaches to reading have taken a pounding in recent years—the practice of close reading *as a beginning point* is still of value to inexperienced readers (for all readers, I would say).

Understanding maps as artifacts, as rhetorical objects embedded in culture, does not allow our analysis of them to stop with a reading of their details or declarations. So, too, with poems. Once we have concentrated on what is on the page, we then must turn to talking about what is not on the page, and why: what circumstances, cultural or otherwise, may have contributed to the production of this utterance.

My goal in using maps to introduce the study of poetry is three-fold: to challenge students' assumptions about what belongs in a poetry classroom, and what they know about poetry; to teach close reading skills; and to begin a conversation about our abilities to read what is not on the page, and to consider the cultural production and implications of representations. My intention is not to replace one taxonomy with another—rather it is to encourage an openness to poems, and certain reading practices, which many of us embrace without thinking about them in our interactions with maps. This is particularly important for students who sense themselves to be disqualified readers of poetry (at an even further remove from the text than the unqualified reader).

The importance of active reading—of sensing ourselves as agents in the reading of poems—is heartily confirmed by an ongoing conversation that Williams had with Kenneth Burke about the relationship between the work of the poet and the work of the reader, critic, and philosopher, with which I will close.

IV “A FIELD WHERE POETRY AND PHILOSOPHY WILL MERGE,” READERS AS AGENTS

Williams and Burke engaged in a dialogue, spanning decades, that commented upon the significance of connection making to both their philosophies and poetics, and,

ultimately to the connections between poetry and philosophy itself. This is particularly clear in the letters written between 1947 and 1951.

Initially, Williams complains to Burke about the “meddling” of philosophers in poetry, a problem he associates with their search for meaning. On January 31, 1947, he writes:

All (I hope) I have ever said about phil. is that I sense its interfering hand in the difficult art of getting said in verse that which can be said only by the closest attention to the exigencies of verse, the inventions which philosophy tends to prune away in its attempts to find “meaning” There just ain’t no sense to that. (108)

And later that week,

I don’t give a damn what the philosophers say about my meaning, my “beautiful” or otherwise body of thought. I want to think as well as I can but that isn’t the point: the point is HOW am I to embody that thought in the technical matrix of the poem, how NEW to embody ANY thought in the INVENTION of the poetical body alive! (117)

Williams asks that the poem, the artifact of words, be allowed to come first, without interference from the philosopher, whose function “comes after the poetic deed”: “For if the poet allows himself to fall into that trap (of listening too early to the philosopher) he will inevitably be of little use to the very philosopher himself as a field of investigation after he, as a poet, has completed his maneuvers” (127). His comment suggests an anxiety of influence, but also the proximity of the role of philosopher and critic in his mind, as in Burke’s, who occupied both positions.

Burke proffers a number of responses. He points to poets, such as Wallace Stevens, whom he feels have built their poetics out of specific philosophical aesthetics, and who cannot, then, “yipe ‘Hand’s off!’ the moment one wants to discuss [their

statements] as a philosophy of poetry”—poets for whom philosophy’s presence is not an unwanted intrusion into their practice, but an integral aspect of their writing (112).

He also takes issue with the distinction Williams is drawing with regards to his own work: “. . . though my approach to the poet’s expression may not be quite what the poet would have it be, the divergence is not flatly that btw. ‘poetry’ and ‘philosophy’” (112). Instead, Burke defines his interest in poetry as “linguistic,” explaining “such an interest does not attempt to find ‘meaning’ in the restricted sense of the terms. It begins with the poem as act rather than as a proposition . . .” (113) Those familiar with Burke’s writings will recognize this emphasis on language as action. To the disavowal of meaning or ideas as a central concern of poetry, Burke responds that poetry, as a language act, “can handle ideas as easily as pie if it wants to” (112).

It is likely that both men were bluffing—that Williams was more interested in the meanings of his writings than he would let on, and that Burke was more invested in his role as philosopher than his comments suggest. What is certain, however, is that both men were concerned with the mechanics of meaning—that is, how meaning is constructed, put into action through language. And both shared a desire to escape the confines placed on them by the traditions of their disciplines. In Williams words, “Each of us by skill in technique wishes to gain himself freedom in his field” and, at the same time, “to find some basis for avoiding the tyranny of the symbolic without sacrificing the fullness of imagery” (115, 122).

Gradually, in their letters, Williams and Burke began to discuss their roles and approaches as complementary aspects of a single, larger project—offering a fascinating

model of interdisciplinarity. At the end of February, 1947, Williams maintains a separate-but-equal model for the workings of poetry and philosophy: “My whole contention, so far, is that we keep separate in order to be of as much use to each other as possible—to penetrate separately into the jungle, each by his own modes, calling back and forth as we can in order to keep in touch for better uniting of our forces” (127-128). This unification of forces becomes increasingly central to the conversation over the next few years. Williams suggests that if he and Burke are to agree, they will have to “step up” their argument to a higher field, “a field where poetry and philosophy will merge” (114).

Early in 1951 Williams read an article, by Blackmur, which made clear to him the contemporary “mind-destroying incoherence” of parts of a “presumptive whole”—the whole of criticism, scholarship, and rhetoric: “[Blackmur] at least let it be known that SOME sort of relationship is desirable—a thing no one seems to remember in our day” (152). That there should be a balanced and intimate relationship between these different methods of inquiry and representation might be “elementary” to Burke, Williams concedes, but “to [Williams] it needed saying in a broadly comprehensive manner, like the names Europe, Asia, Africa on the map” (152).

Locating criticism, scholarship, and rhetoric “on the same map” opens up the discussion of the connection between criticism and poetry, philosophy and poetry once more. Williams analyzes Burke’s methods, and explains that Burke’s criticism (in this case, of Roethke) is an articulate entity, something new and independent from the poetry itself— “In that way and in a sense you don’t say anything about Roethke’s poems”—but

one that seeks a “comprehensive purpose into which [the poems] will fit as an integer” (154). A collaborative, productive union is formed between the poetry and the criticism, in pursuit of this “comprehensive purpose.” Williams is very animated about the relationship: “In other words, the CONJUNCTION of the poems WITH what you are doing is the future (the present). It behooves us to stick together against regression: against, against—isn’t it a shame we have to say “against” and not “To!” (154). He then suggests that another body of poetry (Zukofsky’s) offers the “opposite and complementary” facet of Burke’s writing; together they would form a “completion”: “the whole which makes us necessary to each other; the full ‘act’” (154).

That the “full act” comes not from the art alone, nor from its analysis, but from the conjunction of the two is remarkable. Williams acknowledges that, in part, this union is possible for him and Burke because they are like-minded, sharing a “kind of thought” with each other, and others, like Zukofsky (155). According to Williams, philosophers like Burke show poets how to think, but the poets must “supply the material to think with”—the technical, material structure that allows the thought to be fully expressed. And a respectful desire to work together in this way is inherent to their effective collaboration. He praises Burke by saying,

After all you ARE able to differentiate such things [i.e., the interest in structure and the interest in meanings] and are willing, generous, toward their study. You WANT to join with another to elucidate such interests. Most don’t even know what you are talking about but get stalled on primary considerations or bile or lost in the phase, never standing back to see how one phase meets another to complete the “thing” which is beyond any one capability. (155)

The implications of this way of thinking are significant—Williams is acknowledging the poem as a system designed for use, subject to interaction with its users (readers, critics, philosophers), to the discoveries and re-inventions that they make from of it. Of course, all texts presume a reader or user, but not all authors understand the actions of that reader as integral to the poetic act in full.

V CONCLUSION

If the poem is the poet's "reading" of the world and of poetic dictums—their negotiations of the structures that be—then the student's reading is another level in this successive process of reading: one that does not escape the confines of discipline, as Certeau describes, but maneuvers within them, to produce something new. The reader, as interpreter or pedestrian (in Certeau's terms), must enter the spaces constructed by the poem, as the poet him or herself has entered into the structures of the world and the poetic traditions from which their work emerges.

When Williams claims that "Language is not a vague province," he not only emphasizes the significance of the American places from which his language emerges, he also points to those very structures of poetry within and around which he must work. When we negotiate the province of language in our own readings of poems, we create, in turn, maps of our own. In this regard, rather than linking maps to totalized terrains, we are able to link them to exploration, to the records of passages, and invitations to new ones.

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