UNIVERSIDAD COMPLUTENSE DE MADRID
FACULTAD DE FILOLOGÍA

TESIS DOCTORAL

Political activism in North American performative poetry: from Walt Whitman to Allen Ginsberg

Activismo político a través de la poesía performativa en Estados Unidos: de Walt Whitman a Allen Ginsberg

MEMORIA PARA OPTAR AL GRADO DE DOCTOR

PRESENTADA POR

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Madrid

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A mi familia

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Resumen / Abstract

RESUMEN:

Activismo político a través de la poesía performativa en Estados Unidos: de Walt Whitman a Allen Ginsberg

Este estudio surge de la comúnmente señalada asociación de los poetas estadounidenses Walt Whitman y Allen Ginsberg, ambos defensores de una poesía oral como método de activismo político. Ante dos escenarios históricos de tensión nacional (Guerra Civil, Macartismo, Guerra de Vietnam), estos autores encontraron en su escritura una forma alternativa de lucha por la emancipación del ciudadano en democracia. Los dos cimientan sus ideas en una concepción romántica del lenguaje, definida desde la teoría literaria por Jacques Derrida como pneumológica y fonocentrista: es en el habla, en el lenguaje oral, donde reside el verdadero significado de lo dicho, la rigurosa expresión del individuo. Es pues en el género de la poesía donde encuentran ese código puro de comunicación, frente a la corrupta logocracia del Estado. Así, en el marco de una trayectoria política en la cual la nación se crea con un acto de habla (la Declaración de Independencia), Whitman y Ginsberg se proponen, desde el acto performativo, señalar e inaugurar al poeta estadounidense, encargado a su vez de señalar e inaugurar una nación y un estado alternativos.

No obstante, mientras que la hipótesis inicial era que (en comparación) las poéticas de los dos literatos se revelarían muy similares, a lo largo de esta disertación se demuestra que cada uno desarrolla la noción de performatividad de maneras diferentes. Si inicialmente ambos coinciden en la reivindicación del lenguaje oral y común como material poético, su entendimiento de la problemática en torno al lenguaje escrito y la presencia del autor (o "yo") difiere. A lo largo de las páginas de este estudio, la autora analiza todos los aspectos relacionados con este conflicto. El poeta romántico aparece finalmente no como una prístina expresión del yo, sino como resultado de un detallado trabajo lingüístico en el que la teoría de los Actos de Habla de J. L. Austin, así como diferentes ideas traídas de la obra de Jacques Derrida, arrojan luz sobre los mecanismos lingüísticos que permiten dicha articulación. Así pues, en la poesía de Whitman la presencia del escritor se forja en una marcada ausencia, apoyada en el discurso oral, pero también en el uso de deícticos que genera un espacio de encuentro incorpóreo en el propio libro que sostiene el lector. En los textos de Ginsberg, sin embargo, el proceso de escritura adquiere mayor notoriedad, dado que el largo verso que se

inspira en Whitman no sólo tiene que ver con el aspecto corporal (y oral) de la poesía, sino también con la dimensión mental que tanto preocupa al poeta Beat, y que le lleva a construir un mantra con su lengua nativa.

De esta manera, ambos desafían la concepción de literatura como pieza cerrada y estable, pero difieren en la temporalidad que el suceso literario genera: para Whitman se trata de una atemporalidad que pone en contacto a lectores y autor; para Ginsberg, el texto es una intervención histórica, un suceso. En este desafío la literatura se revela como la institución encargada de garantizar la libertad de pensamiento del ciudadano. Frente a un canon estricto de literatura como expresión escrita, como terreno de decoro y silencio, Whitman reivindica el carácter poético del lenguaje oral, con la pronunciación, léxico y características gramaticales propias del inglés americano. De la misma manera, su obra se desarrolla con las diferentes publicaciones y reescrituras, la actualización constante de sus poemarios. Algo similar ocurre con la obra de Ginsberg, que identifica en la literatura un terreno para el pensamiento alternativo, de la mano con sus lecturas públicas, las cuales desestabilizan sus poemas con diferentes versiones. Combinado con esto, sin embargo, esta tesis también demuestra que en su proyección detallada del "yo," de los poetas "Walt Whitman" y "Allen Ginsberg," sus obras *Leaves of Grass* y *Collected Poems* adquirieron al final de sus vidas una forma cerrada y definitiva, una herencia poética que se puede oír a pesar del silencio.

ABSTRACT

Political activism in North American performative poetry: from Walt Whitman to Allen Ginsberg

This dissertation has its first prompt in the common scholarly association between the two American poets Walt Whitman and Allen Ginsberg, who vindicated the oral character of poetry as an alternative path for political activism. The nationally tense historical moments they lived (Civil War, McCarthyism, Vietnam War) made them conceive their writing as a shortcut for the citizens' complete emancipation within democracy. Both founded their ideas in the romantic conception of language, defined in literary theory by Jacques Derrida as pneumological and phonocentrist: it is in oral language and speech where the pure form of communication, the true meaning of what is said, resides. In poetry, these two authors find the key to fight, through a speech-based poetics, an alternative against the corrupted logocracy of the State. Thus, within the framework of their own political career as Americans,

who came to exist with a speech act (the Declaration of Independence), Whitman and Ginsberg aim to point at and inaugurate from the performative act both the poet and the new and alternative nation.

Nevertheless, even though the starting hypothesis was that (when compared) their poetics would turn out quite similar, the results of this study show that they developed the notion of performativity in different ways. If they share the vindication of oral and common language as poetic material, later they differ in their understanding of the conflict that surrounds written language and the author's presence (or poetic self). Along the pages of this dissertation, the author analyzes the aspects that this conflict entails. The Romantic poet appears finally not as the authentic expression of the self, but rather as the result of a finely detailed work on language that is explained through J. L. Austin's Speech Acts Theory and Jacques Derrida's terminology on language and presence. Thus, the linguistic mechanism that allows these articulations of the poet shows the differences between them. In Whitman's texts, the writer's presence springs from its absence, enacted in oral language, but also in the use of deictics that produce a space of encounter in the same book that the reader has in his/her hands. In Ginsberg's texts, however, the writing process is taken further in its conceptualization: it involves Whitman's long lines in orality, but adds Ginsberg's obsession with the mental dimension of the creative realization in written form that he theorized on and that enabled him to "make mantra of American language."

In this way, both defy the conception of literature as a closed and stable piece of art, but at the same time differ in the time notion that the literary event generates: for Whitman, poetry involved a mythic time that joins together reader and poet; for Ginsberg, the text is a sort of historical intervention, an event. In this defiance, literature turns out to be an institution in charge of enabling the citizen's freedom of speech and thought. Against a strict canon of literature understood as a written expression, as the arena of décor and silence, Whitman vindicates the poetical character of oral language, along with the pronunciation, lexical and grammatical traits of American English. In the same way, his corpus takes this instability with the different versions and rewritings of his collected poems. Something similar happens in Ginsberg's poetry; he identifies in literature a place for alternative thinking, in combination with his public readings, a destabilizing element for his written work. To this, the conclusions of this dissertation add another idea: in spite of this deconstruction of literature, the works that have been inherited (both *Leaves of Grass* and *Collected Poems*) become a detailed projection

of the "self," of the poets "Walt Whitman" and "Allen Ginsberg" in a closed and definite form, a poetic heritance which can still be heard despite its silence.

Introduction

> What living and buried speech is always vibrating here, what howls restrain'd by decorum.
> (Walt Whitman, "Song of Myself")

This dissertation has its origins mainly in my own interest regarding how literature has been and is (for some writers) an essential element in political activism. From political poems to protest song, the US has given many texts where words are used to point out their reality, in order to criticize it and also defend other alternative political systems. Nonetheless, a great many questions appear about the nature (and effectivity) of these texts; we end up theorizing about the position of the poet in relation to his/her public, about the accessibility to culture, or the importance of the latter for the development of a healthy and democratic citizenship. Is the poet a model, a prophet to follow? Does s/he have moral or ethical duties with his/her own times? Is there a "duty" in poetry? This type of questions opens up a long way around the concept of art and literature, covering the social, political and cultural role of the poet, but also questioning these diverse categories (if they are not, after all, the same one). Denise Levertov, an American poet from the late 1950s and 60s, wrote that the poet is inevitably linked to her times, and that she must compromise with the society she lives in so that the world can improve through her writings. We are here then facing the famous debate of modern poetics: Is art useful? Does it have responsibility?

Walt Whitman, the American poet of Democracy par excellence, spent several years building and projecting a literary figure of a poet with his own name ("Walt Whitman, a Cosmos"); a poet who went out with other men, regardless of their class or race, loving them, and including all humanity in his range of lovers, his possible readers taking part as well. He planned to go on a tour through the US, reading his poems aloud, singing America, a concept he turned into something else than a country, and which would eventually involve all countries and nations in a huge global cluster. In all of his prefaces, he developed an extremely clear idea of what literature was and the role it had in the US, as a nation and a country. He wanted to register in his poems the life of a common man in his own particular context. During the Civil War, he committed himself to giving voice to those who could not write letters to their families, and he also captured with words and reported in his journals what was happening in the improvised hospitals of the army (in Washington D.C.). His conception of poetry, as well as his own poems, were an answer to the spiritual needs that he (along with Emerson) identified in his own society. Material development could not go

unbalanced by an improvement in the soul of the citizens, and he found in poetry a different way to get that intangible growth.

A century afterwards, Allen Ginsberg followed Whitman's steps. Inspired by the ascendance of American poets (many of them Romantics) that were left out of the literary programs at college, Ginsberg started to experiment with verse composition, imitating models such as William Carlos Williams or Ezra Pound, while also getting away from the impersonality canon that was dominant in New Criticism spheres. Out of the wild discussions in his youth with class and bar mates, Ginsberg quitted the idea of writing about any other thing except the self. Compelled by both the romantic and modernist paradigms, he then started a career with the publication of "Howl," a poem whose versification inevitably reminds us of Whitman's "Song of Myself." His style changed as he learnt non-western ideas about consciousness, and it was later (in the 1960s) when he felt the necessity to write about and for the United States. Even though he had already shown interest in politics and civil rights when he was young (as seen in his journals *The Book of Martyrdom and Artifice*, 2006), he found in poetry the ultimate road of pacifism that would inspire the hippie movement. He always rejected (as so did his friend and peer artist Bob Dylan) any type of partisan compromise, and he turned (as he had planned) into a sort of concord messiah and defender of consciousness, open to other non-binary (and therefore fluent) logics.

The poetics of both writers are thus based on a solid ground of conceptuality and romantic subjectivity, elements which are sometimes seen as opposed. The two of them wanted to take their poetry out of the paper and into the streets, adding listeners to their amount of readers, bringing the American accent into the air, opening the doors to a freer citizenship while they expressed themselves as individuals in particular contexts. Nonetheless, both also kept the conception of their work as open to change or improvisation, and defended the autonomy of each version. At the same time, there is in both a tendency to escape from the poem, leaving behind —as a mold of the absent— a personality which is present.

As we will see throughout this dissertation, Whitman's and Ginsberg's works find place within a context named by Washington Irving as "logocracy," and which described the power of word at a social and political level. After the Independence War, American letters aimed at defining the United States and the "American type," repeating an exercise that the philosopher Jacques Derrida would define as "fabulous retroactivity" ("Declarations" 10). As it happens in the Declaration of Independence, in the Revolutionary and Post-

Revolutionary literature inherited by Whitman and Ginsberg there is a constant dance between what J. L. Austin's called performative and constative force. It is not clear whether the nation comes into existence when named or whether, by naming it, it is just being pointed out (i.e. it already exists). This will lead us, in analogy, to performative poetics, destroying mimesis —traditional representation— and rather using inaugural presentation in the framework of the concept of event. According to Derrida, the event never fully happens (*Limited Inc.* 36-37), but these poems are seen as events because they are inaugural, rather than forms of representation; we find in them the incarnation of action, the being is written as it is writing itself. Terms such as undecidability, signature, date, iterability, dissemination and arche-writing (all coming from Derrida) inevitably take us to a poetics which transgresses limits of canon and genre, acquiring all types of form: photographic, religious, theatrical, ritualistic. The spectral figure of the poet is on the tangible page, in the intangible voice, in the body of the person writing or reciting, but also in the reader's body and mind, making up an alternative state of consciousness.

To date, there have been many studies published about Whitman and Ginsberg. C. Carroll Hollis' exhaustive analysis on Whitman's poems from Austin's theory of Speech Acts was one of the most relevant for the grounding of this dissertation. In addition to that, Michael Davidson's *The San Francisco Renaissance: Poetics and Community at Mid-Century* guided me towards the performative aspects in the poetry of Whitman and, especially, Ginsberg. Both scholars stress the oral element of their poems, helping us link the nineteenth- to the twentieth-century poet, and there is a clear line of reading from the notion of "performative utterance" and "performance". It is true that in both poets, especially in Whitman, we find Austin's traditional speech acts: promises, declarations, oaths. As Hollis shows, Austin's distinction between the constative and the performative utterance can be used to study Whitman's style. Nevertheless, it is now difficult to learn about Austin's theories without getting to know about the conflict that later took place between his student John Searle and Jacques Derrida. The French thinker carefully read Austin and pointed out the origin of his failed theories, a conflict that the linguist could not solve when alive. Austin had identified constative and performative utterances, and found it was impossible to distinguish them. Furthermore, in his explanations on performative acts, he left aside jokes, poetry, theater, as they were considered "corrupted" or "parasitic" cases of speech acts. It was there, in this exclusion, as Derrida would defend, that the linguist's analysis was weak. The French author thought that the corrupted or parasitic condition was not an exception, but a given characteristic of language. At the same time, Austin's student, John Searle, tried to offer

tentative explanations for the conflict, defending that it was in context and the speaker's attitude —and not with clear lines, but within a continuum— that his teacher's categories could be applied. Thus, this conflict between context and text, as well as the purity and corruption of the categories, would inform the defiance of form and content that we find in performance —sometimes related intrinsically to Modernist poetics—, and introduces the notion of performance not just applied to language, but also to artistic expression.

Given this framework, the aim of this dissertation is to explore how the political compromise in poetry was put into practice by Whitman and Ginsberg, as well as the performative form that their activism took. In a country and a national identity woven in words (and so, logocentric and logocratic), the political compromise with democracy and a free-thinking state needed of clear definitions of language and poetry, but also of the American poet. This last point brings performance to the self-projecting exercise these poets do in their publications, mixing the Romantic approach to writing with the postmodern notion of a fragmentary (performative) self, eventually left as cultural legacy in both *Leaves of Grass* and *Collected Poems (1947-1997).* The structure of this work has then five basic divisions. Chapter 1 presents the Romantic tradition that both poets inherited, with special focus on the figure of the poet as a social factor, as well as the conception of a "natural" language and "organic" poetry which brings the common style of people (and orality) to the field of poetry writing. This chapter will also deal with the public place that the two poets would defend for poetry, shaping then a political stand on literature and literariness. Their challenge of the poem understood as written, serious, decorous and stable will be seen in the light of avant-garde and performance studies, but also from Derrida's definition of literature as an institution. Moreover, taking into account that Whitman and Ginsberg were looking for the American poet, I also include in this chapter the role of writing and voice in the making of the American nation, from the political discourse of the Declaration of Independence to the cultural and literary search of their own character in a literature that was eminently oral.

Chapter 2 attempts to explain how Whitman and Ginsberg react to all the elements previously outlined. Their compromise takes form of cultural programs based on performance. This implies, firstly, their specific conceptions of language; in Whitman, influenced by the oratory tradition of the nineteenth century in politics and religion, as well as by the Transcendentalist thoughts on language dominant at that time; in Ginsberg's case, a notion of language shaped by the environment of repression and propaganda he lived in while the counterculture explored alternative forms of expression and thinking. Secondly,

performance would come in their own conception of poetry and the poet, sharing with Derrida the acknowledgement of literature as an institution, and a common yearning towards that which was far from the "literariness" of their period. This is continued in chapter 3, where the compromise with their times and their programs entail the presence of the American poet. Here Derrida's presence and absence —as well as the written/spoken deconstruction— inform the experiments of the two poets to appear and happen on the paper, as well as the results this has on their discursive style. Nonetheless, it is in chapter 4 where we finally see them as the American poets, and where we explore how they perform themselves in historical terms, almost as if leaving behind the trace, a personified legacy for the history of American literature in full books which collect both their poetry and their historical character and social role. A following chapter will serve as conclusion of the whole research, comparing both poetics in points of convergence and divergence.

One may ask, however, does it make sense to study Walt Whitman and Allen Ginsberg, in 2021, and with a performance framework? There may be many reasons to answer this question with a negative utterance. For instance, we could tackle the amount of authors (particularly female ones) who have not been studied yet —I am thinking here of the Beat women, who have been ignored by the critical and editorial world for decades.[1] It could be said that Whitman and Ginsberg should leave space for other undiscovered or less known authors, of the past or the present. Nonetheless, taking here a Derridean position, it could also be argued that the question posed above implies institutional convictions about the necessity or usefulness of a doctoral dissertation. This question appears in the frame of a society (and university) whose goals are always determined by utility. This study aims at covering an academic gap, since there are few essays devoted to the analysis of Whitman's and Ginsberg's poems from performance notions. However, it also comes out of my own experience as a researcher. My first academic dissertation was an end-of-degree paper about human nature and politics in William Golding's *Lord of the Flies*. The following year, enrolled in the MA on Literary Studies, I researched the influence of Jack London and Henry David Thoreau in the film *Into the Wild*, focusing on the tensions between individual and society, and its political implications. It was then, led by the North-American Transcendentalists, that I became interested in the figure of Whitman, who seemed to answer Emerson's vindication

[1] It has not been until 2015 that a translation to Spanish has been published, although in a reduced volume (Trans. Annalisa Marí Pegrum, Bartleby).

of an authentically American poet. Finally, the influence of Whitman on Ginsberg a century later made me decide to include this Beat poet in my range of study.

This doctoral dissertation is then the result of a chain of discoveries and curiosity about a specific time and space of literature (the US, between the nineteenth and the twentieth centuries) which has been widely explored, but which nevertheless still has interest and questions for present generations of researchers. Being here under a Romantic influence which will be left aside through the rest of this paper, I can't help mentioning that Walt Whitman, back in his time, did dream about the possibility of recording his voice (something he actually managed to do with his poem "America," part of which is still preserved in a wax disc). Nowadays, new technologies allow us to communicate in immediate tempos, in written or oral form, something which is blurring the models of writing according to the medium, exploring new ways of expression by using emoji, block capital letters, lack of punctuation, or videos. Some poets (particularly young ones, aiming at a young public as well) tend to present their poems in visual platforms, as social media posts or illustrated editions, normally attaching a CD with the voiced version of their compositions. There are still public readings, at universities and libraries, but also at cafés and squatted social centers. Somehow, vindications of a different poetry, a poetry out of the paper, or on the screens, to be heard in recitals or through earphones, is linked to these poets. Readers can still value Whitman and Ginsberg because their poems have the presence (and absence) of a specter today, as they had in their own time. We can still read and hear them at the same time. The task of a researcher is to exploit the lucidity once acquired with the help of the teacher; to shed light on that which is still dark for the eyes. Whitman's and Ginsberg's poetics, as well as performance theories, have already been analyzed and deeply explored, but this study may also show that there are dark corners to be lit up, unknown corridors to walk along so that in the future others can pass through and get to other places of knowledge, even when their setting goes back in time.

Chapter 1. **The Political Poet in the US**

Both Walt Whitman and Allen Ginsberg, separated by a century, are heir to American Romanticism. Coming from European authors (most of them English), the movement's original principles were adapted to the society and writing tradition of the New Land, with Emerson's Transcendentalism as one of the main branches. Whitman's and Ginsberg's Romantic traits would embrace and mix it with the popular approach to poetry they had, getting closer to the community and the tribe rituals which would also be part of the performative drive of Modernist poetry and conceptual art. Given the political charge of their writings, the Romanticism that we find in them went along with their national literature, and the written nature of the concepts of America and the American, what Washington Irving called logocracy. This chapter is then an exposition of all the connections between these concepts: the political charge of the Romantic poet in the US, and how it is accordingly linked to the different notions of performance.

1. Whitman and Ginsberg in the Romantic Tradition of the American Poet

1. 1. Whitman's Library: Poetry in the Nineteenth Century

When studying Walt Whitman's cultural context, it is necessary for us to take into account the influence of Romantic literature. It was Romantic poets writing in England that were most widely spread throughout the United States during the nineteenth century, so the notion of poetry and the conception of poet would come from figures such as William Wordsworth, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Percy Bysshe Shelley, and the philosopher Thomas Carlyle. At their reception in the United States, as we will see, these concepts were adapted to the sociopolitical ideas that were being developed, based on the foundational ideology and on the pre-Civil War tension Americans were going through at that time. Whitman would then project a writing not only marked by the poetry of the period, but also from the literary discourses that were being written and spoken in religious and political spheres; not all literature was to be read, and popular culture would further dissolve the lines that distinguished each genre.

1. 1. 1. The English Romantic Poet

Even though the American strand of Romantic literature and thought proved to be quite different from its British counterpart, it is necessary for us to visit the idea of the poet defended by Romantic authors writing in England, since they were the ones read by the

majority of the American public, and so meant an important source of strength for what would later be known as the Transcendentalist movement. Indeed, as Francis O. Matthiessen asserts in his famous book on what he calls "The American Renaissance," "there is no document more allied to Whitman's prefaces . . . than Wordsworth's preface to *Lyrical Ballads*." There are, as he briefly explains, correspondences in their theories about poetry, in spite of the fact that they have independent ideas in each of the points (613-14). In fact, Whitman would not only deviate from the Romantic literary trend, but also from his fellow poets of the Transcendentalist circles. However, as we will later see, the Romantic idea of the poet is an undeniable component among the foundations of his writings.

Romanticism took the relationship between man and nature as its point of departure, something which is clearly seen in *Lyrical Ballads*, but also in Coleridge's *Biographia Literaria* and his theory of "Organic Principle." Given the deep connection between man and universe, poetry was to illustrate the mind as it was "agitated" in the process of perceiving nature, going through "fluxes and refluxes" (Wordsworth 292). In other words, as Allen Ginsberg would defend a century later, what poetry accomplished was "the incarnation of thoughts" which emanated of the perception of reality (Matthiessen 31). Thus, with this conception of relationship between mankind and nature, Wordsworth and the Romantics embodied the shift from the seventeenth-century scientific view of the universe as a mechanism which man was alien to, towards an organic conception of the cosmos which man was part of (Matthiessen 614-15). The organic principles working within the universe are then the principles of our mind-working with the Logos as well, rather than something alien and apart from it. German Romanticism (with Kant's *Critiques*) had introduced in the Western world the idea that the universe was half created and half perceived (Thorslev 84).

Thus, for Romantic authors the poet was an explorer of intuition-based knowledge, and the common man, in contact with nature and far from the Enlightenment thinking of cities, was an important source of inspiration. The poet had a "more comprehensive soul," and "rejoices more than other men in the spirit of life that is in him," although that does not mean that his language will be superior. On the contrary, as Wordsworth points out, conventional poetic language will, "in liveliness and truth, fall short of that which is uttered by men in real life." There is then a rejection of the "mechanical adoption" of past conventions, and a vindication of the poet as "a man speaking to men," using the "colouring of imagination" to add pleasure to the experience of reading. Some ideas were subject to

debate, like the relationship between verse and prose[2], but they all agreed that language should rise from nature, as plants (Wordsworth 300, 366, 289).

All these ideas converged then in a common vindication of a new type of poet that would later be taken to the nationalist feelings in the US. The poet was a sort of prophet, a teacher shedding light on every aspect of the individual's emotional dimension. His duty was to take language back to its origins, then setting a more genuine relationship with the world. For Percy Bysshe Shelley they were "unacknowledged legislators of the world" (90). In a famous essay whose title echoed Philip Sidney's "The Defense of Poesy," Shelley traced a notion of poetry which involved the nature of language, the power of words in our minds, and how this should be handled by the poet, a figure who was more than a mere craftsman of the written word. Shelley believed that poets should renew the language to defend human condition from decadence: "[i]f no new poets should arise to create afresh the associations which have been thus disorganized, language will be dead to all the nobler purposes of human intercourse" (18). A provider of both wisdom and delight, appealing to instincts and intuition more than to reasoning, the Romantic poet had a clear social role that Thomas Carlyle traced in his poet as hero, somehow degraded and no longer divine. He used the notion of the *vates*, which he defines (following Goethe) as the prophet of good and the poet of beauty at the same time, and regreted its literary impoverishment (from divine, to prophet, to poet), a sign of the decadence of society as well (78). In fact, Carlyle's convictions about the cultural, democratic elite meant an incentive for Whitman's construction of his poetics. Nevertheless, maybe the most obvious inheritor of Carlyle's theories is Emerson, who "Americanized" his Carlyle readings of the 1830s and 1840s to such a degree that, as David Kuebrich says, it is difficult to know which of them is the dominant influence over Whitman (203).

1. 1. 2. The American Romantic Poet

The figure of the Romantic poet in America has no homogeneous and stable definition, but we could say that one of the most relevant branches of the Romantic vein in this New Land was the Transcendentalist movement. The Transcendentalists, to whom Whitman's name has been commonly associated, shared with the Romantic English poets the rebuff of the Enlightenment, which had reduced metaphysics to physics, the supernatural to the natural, and human limits to the limits imposed by reality (Gelpi, *American Poetry after Modernism* 1). Carlyle had translated to the English-speaking world the results of the eighteenth- and

[2] Coleridge states in his *Biographia Literaria* that prose and verse are interchangeable, while Wordsworth claimed that "the language of Prose may yet be well adapted to Poetry" (298).

nineteenth-century Deism, the high biblical scholarship and the restoration of Myth Studies, as well as German literature and philosophy. All these elements are said to have supplanted British rational Christianity, introducing a distrust of church-like institutions that would have consequences in the relationships of politics, society and religion. As Kuebrich explains, different religious creeds began to be seen as the varied manifestations of the same religion spirit, and the true belief in God was seen, together with love of virtue, as an essential component of German aesthetics on poetic beauty. Influenced by these ideas, Emerson identified the big problem of the US in its conventional practice of religion. Richard Rorty remarks this as the Transcendentalists' displacement of god in favor of a humanist individualism (14-32), but this does not mean they abandoned the idea of religion on a social level. In fact, as Maurice Y. Lin says, the Transcendentalists wanted to fight the lack of religious sentiment, to such an extent that critics as Perry Miller (*The Transcendentalists*, 1950) have claimed they were mostly a religious movement, marked by artistic forms of expression rather than obsolete doctrines (Lin 3-4, 6-7). Stephen Cushman regards the Transcendentalist poet as a "secular priest" (92), and although (later in that century) poetry would be thought to be opposed to science (Renker 137-38), Whitman himself talks about the "science of god" in his preface of 1872 (to "As a Strong Bird on Pinions Free"), merging therefore the lines which supposedly divided religion, poetry, and science (*Leaves of Grass and Other Writings* 650).

Emerson, however, took this religious vindication and added a national component, since as George Hochfield asserts (and is later followed by Lin 1), Transcendentalism was also "an attempt to complete in the world of thought what the American revolution had begun in the world of action" (xi). Indeed, what the Americans faced was a special circumstance which served as the stage for the development of a "native American character." Even though English lifestyle was generally imitated, there was an increasing questioning about what they received from Europe. Americans felt a growing urge to "start anew," to develop an independent culture, founding not so much a Renaissance, but a "first birth," a "unique challenge and opportunity" (Gelpi, *The Poet in America* xxxiii, 61). Thus, many of Emerson's essays address the American cultural (and so, religious and social) situation. Religious, academic, and political institutions should change their point of view. The church was devoted to the maintenance of a "meaningless theological structure" (Lin 11-12) and intellectuals felt that stagnant doctrines were no longer proper for the new space and time that the American society was living; hence, much work was left for the poet to enliven the souls of the people and become a new kind of priest.

As for the academic spheres, Emerson charged against them in "The American Scholar" (delivered in 1837), where he complained that

> instead of Man Thinking, we have the bookworm. Hence the book-learned class, who value books, as such; not as related to nature and the human constitution, but as making a sort of Third Estate with the world and the soul. Hence the restorers of readings, the emendators of bibliomaniacs of all degrees. (*Portable Emerson* 56)

Following Socrates' condemnation of reading and writing as a danger for our critical thinking capacities, and in total agreement with Thoreau's comments in *Walden*, he ranted that the scholar could "read God directly, the hour is too precious to be wasted in other men's transcripts of their readings" ("The American Scholar," *Portable Emerson* 57). Readers should be "inventor[s]" so that the page could become "luminous with manifold allusion" (58). To this idea he also added the European influence over American intellectuality. In his lecture on "The Young American" (1844) he regretted that the books read in the US (literary works, college text-books, "domestic reading," and magazines) were all European: "We are sent to a feudal school to learn democracy" (451).

His most famous essay, "Nature," summarizes all these ideas in the concept of the "half-man," the result of alienation in modern civilization. In church, in school, and in the town's square, humankind was losing half of the knowledge he could have: "He works on the world with his understanding alone. He lives in it and masters it by a penny-wisdom; . . . his mind is imbruted, and he is a selfish savage." Industrialization, the social and institutional ensemble which was called in that period "civilization," had meant precisely the opposite: man was no longer human, but a mere being governed by the economic system and its materialistic principles (*Portable Emerson* 47). As a result, he vindicated the importance of keeping the balance between matter and spirit, body and soul, since both were the same thing ("The Poet," *Portable Emerson* 248). In this analysis, the true poet comes by way of language. During the nineteenth century, most authors were convinced of the "unmediated nature of language" (S. J. Mack, *The Pragmatic* 4). Emerson subscribed this idea in "Nature," claiming the one-to-one relationship with material appearance, a "radical correspondence" governed "visible things" and "human thoughts," which made the spirit, "the currents of universal Being," totally apprehensible for men ("Nature," *Portable Emerson* 20-21). The poet's role was then to recover the primeval poetry underlying language. If, as he writes in "The Poet" (1844), "[l]anguage is fossil poetry," then the function of the poet was that of "Namer or Language-maker" in society (*Portable Emerson* 252).

To have those effects, poetry would include common language and topics, even "words and images excluded from polite conversation" (250), and despite the fact that he would later be quite traditional in form ("constrained," "restricted," and "exact" are Joann P. Krieg's words in his article, 394-95), he even accused Wordsworth of being too much of a poet (Matthiessen 159). Simple language and imagination, as the English Romantics said, helped acquire "very high sort of seeing" that came, rather than by study, "by the intellect being where and what it sees," that is, through forms ("The Poet," *Portable Emerson* 255). Emerson thought "[w]e know more from nature than we can at will communicate," but the poet, far from the corrupting force of cities, had the sensibility needed to keep in tune with nature and the intuitions it stirred ("Nature," *Portable Emerson* 23). Thus he called for "free and brave" poets that could act as liberating gods, embracing the common, their American reality, and walking "on [their] own feet" (*Portable Emerson* 69-71): "America is a poem in our eyes; its ample geography dazzles the imagination, and it will not wait long for meters," he says in "The Poet" (264).

Nonetheless, it would be unfair to reduce Romantic poetry of the US to the Transcendentalists. Albert Gelpi identifies other literary movements that may be seen as conservative and a response to what could be labeled as provincial writing because of their "Americanness." Among others, Washington Irving, Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, and Edgar Allan Poe would embody a poetics of artifact and order, but also of an international target. As Poe said, "the 'boisterous and arrogant . . . pride of a too speedily assumed literary freedom' devolves into the 'gross paradox of liking a stupid book the better, because, sure enough, its stupidity is American.'" Thus, for many contemporary and future authors (Irving, Copley, Cooper, James, Whistler, Eliot, Pound, Stevens, Tate, Winters, and Lowell), art should not be based on the principles of "a narrow nationalism" (*The Poet in America* xxxv).

We may precisely take Poe as the main opponent to the Transcendentalist poetics. Although he has been widely considered as a Romantic poet, his approach to writing left behind the inspirational component. As he explained in "The Philosophy of Composition," poets do take more steps in writing than the mere "ecstatic intuition." The poem was matured and carefully worked on result through tone, verse, intention, but the circumstance surrounding this intention, that is, the poet's own inspiration, was to be dismissed when analyzing the poem (743). As Gelpi explains, this was a way of "saving graces in the face of metaphysical uncertainty, the failure of human relations and the indifference of nature" (Gelpi, *The Poet in America* xxxvii-xxxviii, 142-43). Of course, the poem's effects were

emotional, it was supposed to "elevat[e] the soul," and beauty was the main tool to achieve that elevation. In poetry, this translated to the need of dealing with its music, i.e. meter, rhythm, and rhyme ("The Poetic Principle" 558, 561-2).

It is important here to notice that Poe's future influence would be in terms of form rather than in content. In this systematization of art, he was totally opposed to the Transcendentalists, and objected to Whitman when the latter commented about his "intense faculty for technical and abstract beauty," which made him "brilliant and dazzling, but with no heat" (*Specimen Days* 157-58). According to Matthiessen, it is this opposition between the Transcendentalist idea of the poet as genius and Poe's poet as a craftsman that marks the following generations of American poets. Poe, Matthiessen asserts, "was the first man in this country to declare that practice must not be separated from 'the theory that includes it'; and it was his strict if brittle insistence on the principles of art that helped free and so cleared the way in turn for the emergence of Pound and Eliot" (578-79). The same ideas are present in Gelpi's introduction to his anthology of *The Poet in America*. Poe's poetics would be echoed in the work of a line of formalist poets "aware of loss and limitation," ranging from T. S. Eliot to Stevens, from Ransom and Tate to Snodgrass. Instead of the Transcendentalist assumption and reconsideration of Romantic organic principle, they would "imitate the balanced and harmonious 'classicism' of Greece or the Middle Ages or the Renaissance" (xxxvii-xxxviii). Nonetheless, as this dissertation shows, future authors would take elements from both worlds, that of Romantic inspirations, and also that of the poet as a craftsman who carefully worked on every word on the page. Poe was also different from the Emersonian group in his political reading of culture. According to John D. Kerkering, the poet would not be a national badge of honor, and in fact it has been said that Poe's concerns were more aesthetic than political (199-200). However, his search of a poetic impersonality could also be seen as a search of "democratic objectivity," opposed to Whitman's "democratic subjectivity." If Poe wanted his works to be "universally appreciable," intelligible for everyone, as Patrick Redding argues, then it could not be said that political targets are completely outside his writing, even though the topic is not as explicitly about politics as in many of Whitman's texts (681-82).

1. 1. 3. American Printing and Oral Culture in the nineteenth Century

In the framework of logocracy (which I will later develop more extensively), but also in the cultural context that preceded and surrounded Whitman's career, we cannot forget to mention how the literary market of his time influenced his writings. In the nineteenth

century, the dominant belief regarding education was Rousseau's idea of "rational amusement," according to which "pleasures of entertainment could and should be made to serve intellectual and moral development" (Barney 235). Thus, cities began to have many places such as commercial museums, moving panoramas, circus, theaters, places of popular entertainment which were to fill the common people's free time. At the same time, the literary market started to change when authors acquired rights over their work. Of course, it did not mean they were given complete freedom in writing, and in fact their origins were quite imitative, being more as arrangers than as creators (Gelpi, *The Poet in America* 62). This also meant the beginning of the distinction between high and low poetry: authors started to have their own fame and reputation, to be paid according to the quality of their writings, defining therefore what good quality was; decorum in both form and content were to decide what was published and what was not.

Regarding public readings, poetry was usually reduced to small and exclusive recitations sometimes in intellectual saloon meetings. Nonetheless, oratory was the great art of the nineteenth century for most Americans (Hollis, *Language and Style* 5). James P. Warren says in his article on Whitman's style: "nineteenth-century America was alive with excellent speakers," particularly those who discussed politics (Daniel Webster, Henry Clay), religion (H. W. Beech, Elias Hicks), and academic topics (Emerson, Frederick Douglas, Bayard Taylor, and Wendell Phillips participated in "lyceum circuits") (381). Whitman would actually admire and write about Elias Hicks and Father Taylor, described as having "the same inner, apparently inexhaustible, fund of latent volcanic passion—the same tenderness, blended with a curious remorseless firmness" ("Father Taylor" 113).

Whitman was so interested in oratory articulations that he studied and wrote about events in which the voice was used; not only public lectures, but also plays, operas, and concerts. At the same time, he was also quite critical with those who used artificial eloquence on the platform, those who were not "earnest and honest" (*Notebooks* 2241). Despite the fact that each gesture and change of pitch would have been studied with detail, he transferred the supposedly unpolished and spontaneous character of oratory to his journalistic writings so that it had the appearance of being "uttered on the spur of the moment," like political speeches (*The Journalism* vol. 1 391). Hence, it was not only politics or religion, nor a concrete literary genre, that he was thinking about when considering oratory. As Emerson, he ended up thinking that charisma, a "luminous eloquence," was essential for literature (Hollis, *Language and Style* 7).

As religious and political events, public entertainment was thought for the enjoyment of crowds. Circus and commercial museums, as well as the moving panoramas, were only some of the social entertainments which provided "rational amusement." According to Brett Barney, Whitman was a common spectator in these events, but he was also keen on observing the attending people (239). They had not the "respectability" of lectures and representations developed at museums, but it posed an equal source of inspiration for the poet (248-49). Opera, which was flourishing during the 1840s and 1850s, was also one of the most influential cultural genres for Whitman, since it was a model of musically performed literature. As Donald B. Stauffer says, one needs no deeper research than a quick look at his poems' titles to notice that many of them are branded as "songs" and "chants." However, what is interesting in this case is the emotion, the atmosphere and the relationship between singer and audience originated in the operatic singing (484).

Edmund Whitley also acknowledges some public events that were related to politics and national feelings. He points, for example, to public gatherings to celebrate national holidays, where they read the Declaration aloud, but also speeches and revolts organized by some reformers fighting against slavery, in favor of women and men equality, and for labor rights (462-63). These public meetings were also influential in Whitman's writings, which included some of the rhetorical figures they used (Simonson 365). In fact, he even participated in Democrats' events, and there is record of his giving a speech in 1841 in New York City (Hollis, *Language and Style* 20).

Thus, it is in these platforms where Whitman began to plan his performative poetry, one which could be read alone, but also aloud, directed to a public which would be as aware of the poet as they were of the preacher or the politician. His work would combine the spiritual effects of a religious ritual, but it would also help the listener develop as a democratic citizen. He was to be the poet prophesizing about democracy in actual contact with his readership, and so, as Emerson had predicted, America's geography would "not wait long for meters."

1. 2. Ginsberg's Century: Romantic and Modernist Influences

The cultural context in which Allen Ginsberg started to write was certainly marked by the conservative ideology of the post-war and Cold War period. Ideology was said to be absent, and in American colleges all programs were designed to fulfill national aims without leaving space for any kind of question or doubt about method or content. In the case of the study of literature, institutional intervention was promoted from the government, which meant

that programs were to follow the critical principles of New Criticism, based on T. S. Eliot's poetics. However, ideas defended by other modernist authors began to have relevance in marginal circles of intellectuality. That is where Allen Ginsberg began his writing career.

1. 2. 1. The American Modernist Poet

The notion of poetry which was established as the "official one" when Allen Ginsberg started to write his own poems had its roots in Modernism, and in the case of American literature, there is no clear definition of what *American* Modernism was. As Christopher J. MacGowan explains, there is a mixture of forces from both England and America in figures such as Auden and Eliot, who "interchanged" their nationalities. Also, the fact that many American writers left the United States towards lands friendlier to unconventional literature, and where the avant-garde had its established circles, resulted in a quite varied literary material which shares time and place, but not common and delimited features. Lines are further blurred if we take into account that, disenchanted by the cultural situation in their countries, they embraced European (specially French) literatures and were thus influenced by non-American traditions (MacGowan 2, 12, 277).

Therefore, the definition of American Modernism was in the hands of publishers, critics, scholars, writers and institutions, and their lack of a center in the United States[3] would result in the mixture of American and British voices, traditional and untraditional ones, trying to find a canon which could not reach a clear national line without obstacles. In fact, there was a common urge among critics and intellectuals for the development of an American literature as there had been during the nineteenth century. However, this time reactions were multiple, since the notion of "Americanness" could be understood and practiced in many different ways. Some writers would try to look for an American language, sound, rhythm (William Carlos Williams); while others, as Amy Lowell, would defend that "[i]nstead of deliberately choosing a preconceived set of 'American' subjects, American poets, in simply expressing themselves, by virtue of their being American, [would] create American poetry" (Morrison 17-18). Thus, as MacGowan asserts, even in the case of Eliot's poetics, America was important: his "search for physical and spiritual roots" had background in the autobiographical genres of the seventeenth century in New England, and his concern with tradition could be seen as "a response to a cultural inheritance that emphasizes its differences from the past, a culture notorious for having a little sense of history, even of its own" (277).

[3] For instance, Pound was a collaborator of the little review *Poetry* while he was in Europe.

Just as the Beat writers in the second half of the twentieth century, many American modernists (especially those who left the US) were accused of being un-American. In their attempts to get a "truly vibrant indigenous culture," they ended up embracing different aspects of immigration and native culture, thus leaving behind a false and hollow image of what being American meant (Morrison 12-13). It was a search and at the same time projection of what each of them understood of their land and their nation. There was a clear interest in keeping a serious work on identity definition. Pound was mainly interested in non-American cultures and paid little attention to the US as a subject for writing, but he was present there through his participation in little magazines such as *Poetry* (run with Harriet Monroe), where he tried to promote American authors (MacGowan 227, 1-3). Something similar happens with T. S. Eliot, whose work was greatly influential, but with little focus on getting a national mark. As mentioned above, W. C. Williams did pay much attention to the US, especially regarding language. He was interested in the local, as it was a previous step towards universality. Out of his urge to use common American English we could trace a line from Whitman which would later get to Ginsberg through him: the American idiom had a different pace than the British one, so English meter would not work for an American poet (Williams, "An Essay on *Leaves of Grass*" 837). Ginsberg —a disciple to Williams— would always acknowledge this influence in his poetics: "[i]nstead of a straight square metronomic arithmetic beat," Ginsberg explains, Williams implemented "the infinitely more musical and varied rhythmic sequences of conversation as well as the tones" (Ginsberg, interview by Harvey R. Kubernik n. pag.). Gertrude Stein was also interested in exploring the English language spoken in the US (apart from her interest in the notion of language itself). Her stream-of-consciousness-based prose is full of vocal transcription of accents and slang that for Ginsberg would later become a kind of mantra (*Allen Verbatim* 32).

What was left of American authors labeled as Modernists was for Ginsberg and his peers an important source of theory about poetry. Pound had defended the poet as in charge of recovering the mythological relationship between the poet and language, of rectifying the language people used (Jackson 319). The artist was "the antennae of the race," its "barometer" (*A B C of Reading* 81-83). However, there was no dependence between artist and public as there was with Whitman ("To have great poets there must be great audiences, too"); the poet was not there to satisfy the "vulgo" (Redding 675). The elite, not the masses, should be the aim of art and literature. Williams, on the opposite side, had little presence in literary circles. Like Pound, in 1955 he was still in "a limbo of acknowledged dispute" in academic spheres (Hallberg 25), although he was sometimes more innovative than younger poets

(Breslin, *From Modern* 28-29). Thus, his position was marginal, but at the same time he became a role for younger authors, those of the counterculture. Kenneth Rexroth points out his "Anti-literature" attitude (81) in contrast to that of T. S. Eliot, who actually, as James Breslin says, was one of those authors whose development led to the institutionalization (and consolidation) of Modernism (*From Modern* 11-13). Eliot defended aesthetic criteria in writing, where the poet had the moral duty of making poems that would lead to "redemption through intellectual, spiritual and physical discipline" (MacGowan 19). Influenced by Arthur Symons' *The Symbolist Movement in Literature*, his method drew from the symbolist subjective processes to reach impersonality, and got to the conclusion that "[t]he progress of an artist is a continual self-sacrifice, a continual extinction of personality," which meant that interest should shift from poet to poetry, which was no longer "the expression of personality, but an escape from personality" (*The Sacred Wood* 47, 52-53).

The Romantic poet had little dominance then, at least in academic spheres. Along with impersonality came the debate on what the role of literature was: if poetry was not the expression of the self, what was now the purpose of all literary texts? To their elitist approach some added self-referential discourses, the aesthetic principle with little adaptation to popular taste and language. Some did not agree, as Louis Untermeyer, who referring to other writers (as Sterlin A. Brown and Langston Hughes), claimed that democratic literature should include a language which was closer to the vernacular and the language of the people (Redding, "Whitman Unbound: Democracy and Poetic Form, 1912-1931"). All sides, however, wanted to fight the cultural decadence of their times, either by getting to all types of people and understandings or by forcing the public to make intellectual effort. Hence, although there is no clear political thought in Modernism, the endorsement by scholars of some of their ideas (particularly Eliot's) left free way for a supposedly "objective" and "non-ideological" approach to literature during the following decades until mid-1950s: an institutional establishment of what poetry was and was not; the conservative and "well-defined" world in which Allen Ginsberg started to write.

1. 2. 2. Ginsberg's College: New Criticism and the End of Ideology

When Allen Ginsberg started college in 1943, English departments at the university level were mainly structured according to a strictly limited idea of what poetry was. A good poetical piece of work would have a structural base of ambiguity, paradox, "complex of attitudes," and the most important: irony (Brooks 1355). Literariness was clearly delimited by a number of marks protected by what Breslin calls a "new rear guard" of conservative values and

traditional verse. Furthermore, having no real strength to produce "new ambitious theoretical formulations," scholars and poets centered on "practical criticism and the cult of poetic craftsmanship, activities their proponents claimed were free of theoretical 'bias'" (*From Modern* 24). Thus, Robert Duncan describes this period as governed by "phantasms of convention" ("Ideas of the Meaning of Form" 197). Detailed work on balance and harmony was a dominant requirement, nothing else should be the aim of the poet. Hence, Richard Wilbur defended —confronting Williams in a conference— the artifice of the poem as a necessary element, since it was the only way to render the complexity of reality. Louise Bogan, another supporter of the New Criticism, pointed out that formal (traditional) poetry had its origins in human breathing rhythms (Breslin, *From Modern* 19-30). Thus, the eternity was found in the objectivity of the text, and as a result, the poem was not supposed to mean, but rather to *be*; writing poetry was not about communication, but about building tension through language (Lin 65-66).

Edgar Allan Poe, but especially T. S. Eliot, originated then the principles of the New Criticism. The need to establish an apolitical canon in the US turned the latter into a figure of reference to such an extent that he was awarded the Nobel Prize for literature in 1947. There was a revival of the 1920s spirit in his relevant role in English departments, but as Breslin says, this proved more fruitful for criticism than for poetry writing. English departments became important sections of university, and they tried to project an image of scientific research through established methods which were supposed to be universal, non-biased (15-18). In an article about the politics in the American university between 1945 and 1995, Thomas Bender claims that after World War II, university programs and research projects were not oriented towards real life, but rather structured according to their internal logic, as a kind of inner feedback with no way out (6-7). For critics and poets who had lived their early years during the 1930s and 1940s, it seemed that "[a]ll of the major poetic discoveries and innovations had been accomplished" and there was no way to be "more violent, more disorganized, more obscure" than poets had been before (Paul Carroll, *The Poem*; and Randall Jarrell, qtd. in Breslin, *From Modern* 3). Furthermore, they left out of their focus those poets who did not fit into their analytical methods, those following the poetics of presence (as Whitman), along with women (Emily Dickinson included), Black poets, working-class authors, and social minorities. Most English professors followed books such as *Understanding Poetry* and similar ones, explaining the approach of critics like Cleanth Brooks, Robert Penn Warren, and John Crowe Ransom (Leitch 1350). As Karl Shapiro wrote, these books were thought to be used in examination periods, rarely outside class (41); and in fact,

Ginsberg, being "victim" of these methods during his Columbia years, saw the professors of this period as characterized by a "complete incompetence to evaluate and recognize anything new," probably as a result of the conservative structure of classroom syllabi ("It's a Vast Trap!" 78).

Moreover, it was in this period that the notion of canon became central to institutional culture, a notion to justify authority of certain ideas and people against those which posed a threat to order, against the "alien" (Hallberg 119). Despite the McCarthyism of the Cold War, the post-war years were prosperous ones for the universities of the country, which evolved both with more quantity and better quality in their functioning (Bender 1). The academic institution was prepared to develop a canon of literature through the careful combination of professors, college English classrooms, and the textbook market which appeared then. Furthermore, this development in the institution was risen with the nationalist aim of recovering the American letters in an international dimension. The United States had acquired a leading role in international affairs and so there was a shift in the function and meaning of literature for the nation, which led to the development of a necessary "scientific authority and seeming political neutrality" in academic spheres controlled by the government (MacPhail 145-46). Professors, institutional leaders, were the ones in control of prestige, not only because of their position in class, but also because they were part of committees of awards and literary ranks; what was literature, what was good writing, was in the hands of certain people from high positions.

Nonetheless, as we will later see (chapter 2 and section 2.1), the power over the academy was just part of a bigger structure of power coming from the central government and which extended to other cultural and social institutions. The Cold War was the motor that put into working all the mechanisms of ideology. At university level, it was a way to turn society towards contemporary concerns in the United States, and the spirit of meritocracy (and so of hierarchy and competition) was the principle that ruled the dynamics within (Bender 4-7). This hierarchical structure in university institutions meant a distinction between scholars and intellectuals (the former being more objective and rational than the latter), between high and mid-low culture. This clear delimitation, moreover, led to a disengagement of most people from debate. As Breslin says, "[t]he twenties produced an aesthetic, the thirties a social dissidence; [but] the fifties produced an accommodation which dismissed critical perspectives as 'irresponsible.'" It was called the "end of ideology" after the title of Daniel Bell's book (1960), which meant there was no discussion, no questioning, but just the

conformity of people in a limbo of political neutrality (*From Modern* 51, 45-47). Thus, in literary scholarship, neutrality was established and, for instance, there was a separation of poetics and politics in the (rare) study of Whitman (S. J. Mack, *The Pragmatic* 168.). Breslin mentions an "illusion of mastery" in this ideological practice, and in fact, this fiction of order and control was tinged by a conviction of ancestral and moral authority. Accepting these imposed limits was a sign of wisdom in every aspect of life (*From Modern* 35, 28, 49). James A. Wechsler, in 1960, described this panorama as follows:

> They discovered that "conformity" did not necessarily mean dullness and unthinking conventionality, that, indeed, there was great beauty, profound significance in a man's struggle to achieve freedom *through* submission to conditions. . . . Very much aware of how complicated and difficult all problems were, very much alive to the dangers of ideologies and enthusiasms and passions, very much persuaded that *la verité rest dans le nuances*, they struck a perfect attitude of the civilized adult: poised, sober, judicious, prudent. (*Reflections of an Angry Middle-Aged Editor* 21-22)

Thus, applied to literature, particularly to poetry, formalism, tradition, was not a sign of repression, but of civilization: anything outside would be regarded as error, savagery, anarchical mobs, madness, bad manners (Duncan 197). The imposition of truth and of rules came to be seen as a method to understand chaos and overcome reality's confusion, much as Poe had tried to establish some order on cosmic anarchy (Duncan 209).

1. 2. 3. Oral Precedents and the Voice of the New Media Culture (1930s-1940s)

As Kenneth Rexroth states, "[b]etween the wars it seemed as though the Whitman tradition was slowly dying, but it endured underground in hundreds of little magazines, and after the Second War emerged again in poets like Allen Ginsberg and then again swept the world" (22). In a book devoted to the oral (performative) poetry developed in the United States from the nineteenth to the twenty-first century, Tyler Hoffman pinpoints two poets as the most influential ones: Vachel Lindsay and Langston Hughes. Both were, along with many others (Alfred Kreymborg, Carl Sandburg), left out of English programs and poetry anthologies during the first half of the century. Vachel Lindsay was one of the first poets that recovered the importance of spoken poetry, of body and voice, after Whitman. His notion of poetical presence was the antithesis of Eliot's impersonality and "intellectual rigors of 'form.'" Lindsay vindicated the reconciliation of the poet-populace relationship, which had been broken by print and had led to high vs. low culture distinctions (Hoffman, *American Poetry in Performance* 75, 77).

Langston Hughes was other important figure of the oral poetry circles. He was a Black poet who wanted to write poetry with the real language of real men and women, the communal speech spoken by African-American people (Redding 686-87). According to Hoffman, Whitman was one of the influences in Hughes, but there was also a "sermonic strain" of Black preachers whose utterances caught his attention and left a mark in his future performative mastery. Every detail was thought to give a powerful speech (order of the poems, tone, etc.) so as to get from the audience effects ranging from laugh to silence. Furthermore, for Hughes his poetry had a political aim: he wanted to forge a Black audience who could achieve awareness of their own identity not as subordinated to the White tradition and the Black prototype that White culture had extended. Interestingly, his poetry was composed even to be performed by other people, leaving behind the idea of a stable persona of the poet-performer. Thus, like Lindsay had done before, he included marginal directions on how the poem should be read (Hoffman, *American Poetry in Performance* 102-4, 106).

In general, the dominance of the New Criticism had led poetry to be reduced to the printed form. Of course, there were authors who picked up Whitman's emphasis on the voiced poem, as we have briefly seen, but they were outside the canon for a long time. For them, the fact that poetry was inscribed, "carved" in paper, and stable, was an idea quite interesting to play with in their performances and recitation events. However, there was a technological development to which they reacted with rejection: recording devices. Whitman had dreamt and hypothesized about the invention of a "machine with a voice" (*Whitman in Camden* vol. 4, 81) and Lindsay and Hughes witnessed the technological development of those first recorders called "phonographs." Nonetheless, this was a source of anxiety about the corruption of their work because of repetition, something which Hoffman pinpoints as a common trait among poet-performers (*American Poetry in Performance* 24-25).

The appearance of the radio had been a revolution for poetry in the sense that it became a space in which poets (and cultural figures in general) could get their word spread, and many, both from England and America, read poetry on the radio. Mass media might have reduced the significance of the literary, but it did increase the cultural value of those texts promoted by the elite (MacPhail 144-45). Nevertheless, they came to be seen just as occasional events, since poetry was conceived as written and only written material, not the communal experience it would turn into later. The same could be said about television. In fact, for the scholarly spheres of the society, television was rather a source of entertainment, while poetry, founded on canon and an apolitical moderation, was not entertainment, but an

academic subject. In fact, according to Marshall McLuhan, a sociocultural critic whose famous work *Understanding Media* (1964) wanted to explain how media constituted the message, television meant the decline of movies, of national magazines and even of comic books (4). It was a cool medium, a more participational technology compared with radio and printed press, particularly taking into account, as McLuhan did, the fact that it used more spoken than written word (a thing that, as he points out too, was a source of anxiety for literate people) (82). Indeed, it might not have been poetry's medium, although its importance on authors would make a huge difference in terms of content and form, for Ginsberg and other contemporary writers.

1. 2. 4. Reactions to New Criticism in Poetry (1945-1950)

After World War II, then, most of the literature written and read in the United States was controlled by the New Criticism scholars, critics and editors. Only those poets who followed the impersonal poetics of Eliot and formalist composition would be promoted by official institutions. It was "the end of ideology" and so the printed word was carefully examined so that anything disrupting would have no way to be published. Although with less problems than the Beats with censorship, the "Confessional poets" shocked readers with their contents. The "rawness" of the revelations opposed the "technically expert poems that filled magazines and journals of the 1950s." Furthermore, the contents were usually seen as shameful, dealing with sexuality, madness, suicidal thoughts, inviting to a reconsideration of what was to be private and public (Nelson 34-35). In terms of form, Objectivists authors took Pound and Williams' poetics and vindicated the materiality of language in contrast to its communicative uses. Thus, for poets such as Louis Zukofsky, sincerity was a principle, a sign of "preoccupation with the accuracy of detail in writing" (280). As a result, he rejected symbolism, abstractions, ornaments; the poem should be an "arrangement, into one apprehended unit, of minor units of sincerity," a "rested totality" with a "tangible objecthood in the reader's mind" (Zukofsky 274; Scroggins 18, 20). This meant a political position which would be brought to Charles Olson's Black Mountain College, where part of the counterculture originated; weakened by the lack of money, it became, as Rexroth explains, a "political battleground" which contrasted with the rest of the campuses and their "absence" of ideology (133).

This last group shared with the Beats (particularly with Jack Kerouac and Allen Ginsberg) their body-based writing. According to Olson's manifesto ("Projective Verse"), poetry needs to catch up with the laws and possibilities of breath and listening that the New

Criticism had been ignoring (147). Thus, breath, pauses, and suspensions would be accurately embodied by the text (produced, most of the times, in typewriter). In this way, as Ginsberg himself declared, "the breathing of the poet [would be] ideally reproduced by the breathing of the reader" (*Allen Verbatim* 161-62). As Stephen Cushman points out, this idea would be present in transcendentalist poetics, but this time regular meter would not be justified by physiological data; on the contrary, human presence would mean natural rather than imposed forms (88). Writing was almost a process of discovering: the poet might find iambic pentameter as a result, but it would only be justified if it came from "the belly and the lungs" as Ginsberg said in an interview ("The Art of Poetry No. 8" n. pag.).

In this "field composition," form was an extension of content. This meant the poem was not impersonal, although it left the ego of the writer's behind (Hoover xxxvi). Moreover, because it was subject-centered, poetry became a sort of scientific exploration. As Rexroth explains, these poets were questioning: if there is no stability and logical correlation in human experiences and thoughts, why should it be different in poetry? (82). This point was shared with the Beats, who vindicated spontaneous writing as an exploration of the subconscious mind. In fact, most of the poets of this period could be said to participate of several poetics and "movements" at the same time. Kerouac might have come to Olson's ideas naively, rather through Zen Buddhism than by being involved in literary circles of the Black Mountain College (Ginsberg and Ball 145). This "synchronism" can explain why Ginsberg does mention Kerouac's influence more than he mentions Olson. Kerouac presented these principles with a more spiritual and exotic map of ideas than Olson's intellectual backward looks to literary history. Ginsberg could be thought to be mid-way between this autodidactic and, on the other hand, the scholarly development of poetics. He was fascinated by Kerouac's character and his messianic, improvised, natural way of regarding poetry; but at the same time, like Olson, his writing would be strongly influenced by literary criticism and modernism, especially that which Williams and Pound had proposed before.

2. Performative Poetry as a Political Statement

2. 1. Identifying Literariness: When Linguistics Met Literature

2. 1. 1. Structural Linguistics

As Maurice Y. Lin has explained in his study of the Beat Generation, it was more than a coincidence that during the period of New Criticism dominance at university level there was also an extended consensus in the field of linguistics, where Structuralist ideas were on their highest level of academic acceptance (267). The scientific approach that the Structuralists

had adopted in their study of language was seen as a perfect tool for the "objective" literary criteria that the New Criticism wanted to promote. New Criticism, as well as many other schools (Prague School Linguistics, French Structuralist Poetics), had its theoretical father in the figure of Ferdinand de Saussure, who marked many areas of knowledge from his new conception of language. His terminology (signs, signifier, signified, langue, parole) helped scholars to understand reality in a dual way that would also get to literature studies. Roman Jakobson took these ideas further and in his catalogue of communicative functions, identified literature in the poetic category, later coining the term "literariness" as "that which makes a given work a work of literature" (qtd. in Hill 18-19).[4] If the poetic function was exploited through language, that meant that literary texts could be clearly identified by taking a linguistic approach. As Mary Louise Pratt explains, Jakobson's ideas entailed the existence of a "separate grammar of poetry," with its peculiar laws of rhythm and syntax (11-13).

Thus, according to Jonathan D. Culler, the literary utterance was described with "deviant or ungrammatical constructions," "patterned language" based on repetition of similar items more than other types of language. This meant for Jakobson that the procedure could be followed mechanically, as if linguistics provided "an algorithm for exhaustive and unbiased description of a text," and constituted a "discovery procedure for poetic patterns." As Culler also acknowledges, the analysis would not be based just on superficial recognition of patterns, but rather on semantic relationships contributing to the poem, either consciously posed by the author/reader or not (56-57, 66-68). In any case, though, his theory proposed that there was empirical support for the classification of a text as literature, being it seen as an "autonomous" organism (Pratt 16, 122).

These ideas were applied by US scholarship during the 1940s and 1950s, along with T. S. Eliot's poetic dominance. As we saw above, the critical approach that was adopted by the 50s academia was one of impersonality; meter and rhyme, balance and harmony, were the most important elements of a poem. The text was conceived as an artifact, and so the method adopted would be non-subjective and universal. As de Saussure and later Jakobson had done, New Critics distinguished literary forms from "more ordinary uses found in journalism, everyday speech, scientific writing and so on," linguistic material "where direct communication, not highly wrought aesthetic form, [was] most important" (Leitch 17-18). Thus, be it "poetic function," "literariness," or "verbal art," Structuralism, Russian

[4] Translation by Victor Erlich in *Russian Formalism: History-Doctrine* (172).

Formalism, and New Criticism maintained an objective and scientifically approachable notion of what literature was and where its limits were.

2. 1. 2. Speech Act Theory

Furthermore, as a response to Logical Positivism's purpose of purifying language, critics like Wittgenstein defended that it had no essence, and that it was actually a game in which speech acts were moves within a framework of rules. Rather than a language of perfect correspondence between referent and referred, there were phenomena sharing different types of relationships among them. This perception of language, however, needed a further systematization, and that was what J. L. Austin did in a series of lectures later edited and published as *How to Do Things with Words*. Defending the "ordinary language" that Logical Positivism left aside, Speech Act theorists claimed that language sometimes might not mean or refer, but might rather do, or perform actions. Austin explored the difference between constative and performative utterances, trying to find the "felicity conditions," specific circumstances, which surrounded these speech acts. In this process, he noticed there were three elements in all types of utterances — the locutionary force, the illocutionary force, and the perlocutionary force— and tried to establish a classification which, however, always was quite slippery. In the end, he concluded there was no "purity of performatives" and that all utterances were both constative and performative; only checking whether the emphasis was placed on locution or illocution, we would declare an utterance to be one or the other (*HTD* 146).

Despite all these complexities, however, Austin always took for granted that literary utterances were aside of the study of ordinary ones. One of his felicity conditions established the point of departure in serious talking ("I must not be joking, for example, nor writing a poem," *HTD* 9). Literature was then a form of "etiolation," or "parasitism," perfectly identifiable and not valid. As Stanley Cavell explains, this exclusion of literary utterances as non-serious was somehow invaded by negative connotations, just in the same way that for Logical Positivism emotive statements were inferior to cognitive scientific ones (80-1). Curiously enough, this parallel rejection of the non-serious and the non-scientific might point to the future emphasis New Criticism would place on the idea of poetry as a scientifically approachable artifact with its own laws, both for production and interpretation, making it a matter of universal knowledge rather than subjective, individual, and emotive reception.

Many critics have brought Speech Act Theory to the branch of literary studies. Richard Ohmann pointed out the conventions (felicity conditions) surrounding literature:

speech acts could be categorized as such depending on the context (and the reader's competence to identify them) rather than on the locutions ("Speech Acts" 15). For him, words in literature were not used to refer, but rather to make an exhibition of "quasi-speech-acts" ("Speech Acts" 17). Thus, Austin's "illocutionary theory" illuminates what he saw in literature, a change in the relationship between speaker and hearer, who became writer and reader, both involved in the literary convention ("Speech, Literature" 54-5). During the 1970s, many other authors reacted to these texts. Stanley Fish, from the Reader-Response approach to literature, claimed ordinary language was actually extraordinary, since it included "properties of literature" at its heart ("How Ordinary" 51). Thus, literature would no longer have a special status, but neither would it be degraded as a mere deviation: it was an open category where any utterance could be placed ("How Ordinary" 51-2). Samuel R. Levin, for his side, identified in literature a mark, a "poetic faith" in an implicit sentence which says "I imagine myself in and invite you to conceive a world in which…" (150-52). Years later, Teun A. Van Dijk defended literature lacked the "generally intended perlocutionary effect," and that it could be identified by the non-observance of conventional principles (47-50). Working on a similar topic ("Metaphoring as Speech Act"), Dorothy Mack argued metaphor shares the felicity criteria of speech acts, turning the act of saying into an act of generating "another 'reality'" (248-50). Mary Louise Pratt (*Toward a Speech Act Theory of Literary Discourse*, 1977) did also contribute to this approach to literature, but as the rest, she kept the definition of literature as defined (and delimited) by the context.

Only with Derrida (and his long conflict with John Searle) do we have a real challenge to the idea of literariness. While the linguistic departments rejoiced in the clear limits that literature had, and how it could objectively be explained and measured, Derrida noticed that behind the notion of literariness there were (political) decisions and assumptions accepted for their practical conveniences, as well as a biased conception of language itself. Thus, he criticized J. L. Austin's exclusion of non-ordinary language in his Speech Act Theory, and Searle answered back, starting a series of publications where Derrida exposed his notion of "undecidability." Although Derrida claimed that there was a positive step in Austin's approach to communication as not purely semiotic (not only oriented to truth/false value), he found several weaknesses in the Speech Act Theory. Austin's reliance on context, on a set of felicity conditions that tied language to speaker and listener, implied a "serious," and correct use of language, one with a clear and stable message against that which was corrupted in meaning, leading to misunderstandings. Derrida thought that Austin was unaware of the "graphematic" nature of the sign, and he pointed out that both oral and graphic language

had the same structural backbone, the arche-writing. Derrida's understanding of language was then a total shock for the traditional (millennia-long) conception of language, speaking and writing. From Plato (and Socrates) to the present linguists and philosophers, writing had been the "corrupted" version of the spoken and the thought, decontextualized and prone to misunderstandings. As a result, what had been seen as the absent of the writer was also an absence in the speaker, regardless of his presence while speaking. Derrida explained it in the following terms: language was iterable (subject to duplicity), and this made it possible to speak and write, at the same time that it placed absence as a structural element of the sign. As a consequence, this structural iterability entailed the "undecidability" of the sign. The sign, he said, could only be stabilized through decisions, hence "determin[ing] (semantic, ethical, political) poles," and involving relations of power over meaning (*Limited Inc.* 13-4, 14, 148).[5]

Thus, as Sandy Petrey explains, for Derrida language did not depend on an outer, exhaustively determinable context governed by conventionality (136). No exhaustive context could be identified, so literature could not be seen just as a context-related category dependent on the attitude or the author's intentions. If Austin had explained failures in speech acts as accidents (sometimes in the context, others in the inner thoughts of speakers), Derrida claimed that they were a "structural possibility" that should not be excluded. To have an effective theory going, it should acknowledge all cases: quotation, non-ordinary uses, written modalities of language, theater and jokes (*Limited Inc.* 15-7). Consequently, the undecidability which characterized the sign (pre-writing, arche-writing) turned into "the very force of emergence," "a positive possibility." In fact, all non-serious uses such as citation (of a poem or on a stage) are part of the same "general citationality—or rather, a general iterability" present in the sign and "without which there would not even be a 'successful' performative" (17). Given all this, for Derrida the definition of literature becomes the establishment of limits, coming from no natural traits or literariness, nor from a context understood as something external,[6] but rather from right and law. As he explains, "laws, constitutions, the declarations of the rights of man, grammar, or the penal code" are not the same as novels, but "they depend upon the same structural *power* that allows novelesque fictions or mendacious inventions and the like to take place" (*Limited Inc.* 133-4) (emphasis added). As we will see, his definition of literature is in itself a form of anti-institutional institution, just as performance tries to redefine art by making it.

[5] *Limited Inc.*, published in 1988 is a compilation of the "argument" with Searle; it includes "Signature Event Context," a summary of Searle's "Response," and Derrida's "Limited Inc. A B C..."

[6] For Derrida, it is impossible to be / speak out of context, as they are infinitely generated (*Limited Inc.* 12).

2. 2. The Politics of Performative Poetry

2. 2. 1. Performance's Ontology: The Event

It is not the aim of this dissertation to define performance in an exhaustive way, as that would involve endless considerations still in debate. Even the definition that any confident erudite could give of the concept would, I think, try to be very tentative, especially given the relatively recent appearance of what has been called "Performative Studies." Its ephemeral nature, and so the limitations of terminology coming from other areas, has made it very difficult for critics to study and analyze performative creations in the same way that other art forms allow to do (Goldberg 23, Nickas 10). As Roselee Goldberg explains, it did not emerge in the late 1960s. During all the history of Western art, performance has gone through "waves," being present in Bernini's Rome, but also in Henri Rousseau's "soirees" in his studio of Montmartre, sometimes as willingness to engage with a wider public, others because creation is seen more as a process than as a product. In its open nature, it has helped artists to break the limitations that canon and the dominant definition of art has usually imposed on them (Goldberg 22). Performance works which were previous to the twentieth century could be seen, actually, as "avant-avant-garde," a "release from the stagnation and complacency of set styles and attitudes" (23).

It might even be said that it is a form in constant search of its own form, with a clear questioning of the established truth on beauty, canon, aesthetics. It supposes, as we will later see with Derrida's approach to literature, shedding light on impositions that are taken for granted, that come from the institutionalized systems of art. Performance scholars have had long debates on how performance supposes a challenge not only for the academia, but also for the common economy and commercialization of culture. One side, with Peggy Phelan (*Unmarked: The Politics of Performance*, 1993), defends that performance poses a challenge for commodification: its disappearance, interaction, non-reproducibility-based forms make it impossible to have copies, to be accurately recorded; performance is a "privileged site of resistance to forces of regulation and control" (Auslander 128). The other side, nevertheless, finds tautological arguments in Phelan's theory. As Philip Auslander defends, mediatization (i.e. video, film) uses the same language of performance, and so there is no complete independence (45). He points out that disappearance (absence) is also fundamental to TV performances, as even recordings change from one type of archive to other; and that repetition can also be part of performance's ontology, leading to an equal commercialization.

Performance could be seen then as a rebel among artistic forms, especially considering the stable ontology that most of them have or aspire to. This is based on notions of the artwork, first, as something finished, as Austin's constative utterances: a piece of language, color, with a stable form, and usually a clear message or meaning. While tradition had understood the piece of work as the result of creation, performance draws the focus from the object to the process, the action. In fact, the action is what conforms the work. At the same time, and precisely in its connection with arts such as dance or theater, performance is a defiance to the idea of the original and the copy.

In this sense, Derrida might not have discussed performance straightforwardly, but his ideas on mimesis and copy, absence and presence, on language and literature, are in clear relation to Performance Studies and its debates on the nature of performance, on the possibilities (or impossibility) to exactly reproduce a performative event. However, to understand this relationship one needs to go deeper into his readings on Western philosophy. In his readings of Plato, he coined two terms which would eventually be related. In the *Timaeus* he found the *khôra*, a defiance of binary thought, "neither 'sensible' nor 'intelligible,' [it] belongs to a 'third genus'" (89). As John D. Caputo explains, his ideas on the *khôra* appear as an allegory of the second term: the *différance* (Derrida and Caputo 97). As the *khôra*, the *différance* poses a challenge to the binary notions of the original and the copy. Seen as a "non-concept," the word *différance* encloses both *difference* and *deferral* to explain the way writing works for Derrida. According to the French author,

> *Differance* is neither a *word* nor a *concept.* In it, however, we shall see the juncture—rather than the summation—of what has been most decisively inscribed in the thought of what is conveniently called our "epoch": the difference of forces in Nietzsche, Saussure's principle of semiological difference, differing as the possibility of [neurone] facilitation, impression and delayed effect in Freud, difference as the irreducibility of the trace of the other in Levinas, and the ontic-ontological difference in Heidegger. (*Speech and Phenomena* 130).

The understanding of différance requires then a whole change in our relationship with the truth, with language, and even the psyche. It is not the summation of Nietzsche's, Saussure's and Freud's ideas, but a juncture, a non-word, a non-concept. As we continue reading, we get to the conclusion that it could be defined as "the *strategic* note or connection —relatively or provisionally *privileged*—which indicates the closure of presence, together with the closure of the conceptual order and denomination, a closure that is effected in the functioning of traces." (*Speech and Phenomena* 131). We may use it practically, but it means making choices of privilege that should not be ignored. He continues:

> [Différance] *is not*, does not exist, and is not any sort of being-present (*on*) . . . [I]t has neither existence nor essence. It belongs to no category of being, present or absent . . . Not only is differance irreducible to every ontological or theological—onto-theological—reappropriation, but *it opens up the very space in which onto-theology—philosophy—produces its system and its history*. It thus encompasses and irrevocably surpasses onto-theology or philosophy. (*Speech and Phenomena* 134-35) (last emphasis added)

If every word, every presence, every sign, is marked by deferral and difference, the whole ontology of the Western world is shaken. The binary understandings of presence/absence, speaking/writing, ideas/things are not turned upside down, but recognized as categories made from that binary (falsely verified) paradigm which privileges one or the other, ignoring the "third genus," a third path of understanding.

These ontological wanderings were rooted to linguistic ones. The distinction of spoken and written language, with its traditional assumptions of presence and absence (and its consequential purity and corruption of the meaning) had started with Plato (and his Socrates) in the *Phaedrus*. In "Plato's Pharmacy," Derrida explains that presence and truth are intrinsically linked in Plato's work, and that the Greek author then condemns written language because it is marked (corrupted) by the absence of the speaker, and thus by the mere "repeating without knowing" (*Dissemination* 75). This repetition in writing corrupts the message with the absence of the original one. That is why in Derrida's *différance* a whole conceptual map is involved: iterability, mimesis, arche-writing. Regarding the first one, he points out:

> In order for my "written communication" to retain its function as writing, i.e., its readability, it must remain readable despite the absolute disappearance of any receiver, determined in general. My communication must be repeatable —iterable— in the absolute absence of the receiver or of any empirically determinable collectivity of receivers. (*Limited Inc.* 7)

This means, as I pointed out above, that iterability (repeatability) is not an accident. Every sign that is repeated appears not as an accident, a secondary echo of the original one. Rather, it is a structural element the enables the sign to be what it is. In this sense, while writing could be seen as the echo —the corrupted version (a copy) of the original thought or utterance— it is said by Derrida to have the same structure the spoken sign (thus his use of the term arche-writing to explain this). Even in spoken language —the original utterance— there is no full presence, and no exhaustively defined context. In fact, as Derek Attridge explains in his introduction to a fragment from Derrida's *Shibboleth*, the iterability (repeatability) becomes essential for singularity (371).

Any mark (written or spoken) works through iterability and its consequent effect, called by Derrida "dehiscence" (Derrida, *Limited Inc.* 72). This means a deconstruction of intention (and context) as a mark of any sign (written or spoken). All signs inscribe in and engender new contexts, they cannot then stand for self-present entities separated from the circumstance, nothing can be outside of or without context (Miller, *Speech Acts* 109, 129-30). Against the common thought that written language loses its context and is characterized by the absence of the writer, he defends that even in spoken language there is a break or departure (the dehiscence), and that it is not accidental, but rather the very structural nature of language, of any mark (*Limited Inc.* 72). As a result, questions of truth, representation and art according to Plato are also included in the discussion. The Greek author again works with a binary theory: art is just a copy of reality, a corrupted version thereof. But Derrida deconstructs this duality, and points out that the distinction between the real and the phantasmatic copy is not a clear one (Hobson 136). While Plato denounced that, even at highest levels, art cannot achieve (faithfully represent) nature, Derrida destabilizes the concepts and proposes a multiplicity of presentations rather than the authenticity of previous realities (149).

Based on all these ideas, Derrida breaks with the traditional notion of literature, originated in Plato's binary system. For the French author, literature is —if understood as limitable or clearly identifiable— a "historical institution" ("This Strange Institution" 37). Here we need to recover his attempt to define the *différance* (page 42), and to keep in mind that it is not a concept, that its definition is based on the word's framework within another ontological paradigm. There are two words which are emphasized: "the *strategic* note or connection —relatively or provisionally *privileged*—which indicates the closure of presence" (*Speech and Phenomena* 131). There is privilege —i.e. power— in taking (even provisionally) a truth-presence. Moreover, this privilege is also strategically placed. Something similar happens in his definition of literature as an institution, as something which is actually political. He points out: since there is no clear distinction between referent and referred, between the original and the copy (or Austin's ordinary and non-ordinary language), there is no purity and clear ontological limitations in literature, neither in the text itself nor in its context or the speaker's/writer's intention. Hence, the literary traits which are traditionally accepted are revealed as intrinsically impure; there is impurity within the heart of convention and law that rule Literature (the capital letter pointing to its institutional nature). That is why he considers that texts do not belong to a single genre, but that they rather participate in several of them (Derrida, "The Law of Genre" 225-30). As a result, any piece of language

can be read as literature because the possibility is intrinsic, and distinction comes from (non-exhaustive) "provisionally *privileged*" contexts. Iterability makes possible that the language present in literature may be found outside and vice versa, and so responsibility is evaporated as well (Miller, "Derrida and Literature" 60, 65). In words of Derrida:

> The literary event is perhaps more of an event (because less natural) than any other, but by the same token it becomes very "improbable," hard to verify. No *internal* criterion can guarantee the essential "literariness" of a text. There is no assured essence or existence of literature. If you proceed to analyze all the elements of a literary work, you will never come across literature itself, only some traits which it shares or borrows, which you can find elsewhere too, in other texts, be it a matter of the language, the meanings of the referents ("subjective" or "objective"). And even the convention which allows a community to come to an agreement about the literary status of this or that phenomenon remains precarious, unstable and always subject to revision. The "so little literature" was pointing in the direction of this convention, and so toward this fiction on the subject of an unfindable fiction inside a text, rather than toward a very small ideal library. But if it is not almost everything, it is anything but nothing—or if it is nothing, it's a nothing which *counts*, which in my view counts a lot. ("This Strange Institution" 73).

Let me repeat: "Even the convention which allows a community to come to an agreement about the literary status . . . remains precarious, unstable and always subject to revision." The categorization of a text as "literary" is not due to an inner characteristic, nor to a especial context ruled by stable conventions. Its ontology is not any more that of the truth-presence, that which characterized Austin's constatives (which could be true or false). Literature, rather than an essence, turns into an act, an event, a performance ("This Strange Institution" 44-45; Miller, "Derrida and Literature" 73). In this framework, the institutional nature of literature (with its "privileged" position within the binary system) involves democracy and freedom of speech (Miller, "Derrida and Literature" 63-64). To actively transgress this institution, it is in form (rather than content) where creative radicalism should be. Both in creative and critical writing, a radical deconstruction might "cut across discourses which are thematically 'reactionary' or 'conservative' and confer upon them a power of provocation, transgression or destabilization greater than that of so-called 'revolutionary' texts" ("This Strange Institution" 50-1). Literature is "a counter-institutional institution [that] can be both subversive and conservative," it is "a place at once institutional and wild" ("This Strange Institution" 58).

As a result, we can write down several points in which performance theory and Derrida's proposal relate to each other. First of all, the fact that performance has no easy and stable definition reminds us of Derrida's conception of literature as a category only defined in strategic and provisional terms. This has to do with performance's constant questioning

of the definition of art as something stable and limited by conventions. Performance is an open-ended form of expression which is inclined to break with canonical rules and academic definitions. As Derrida's notion of literature, performance could be said to stand "on the edge of everything, almost beyond everything, including itself" ("This Strange Institution" 47). In performance the mixture and undecidability of genre-belonging that Derrida proposes is put into practice not only in reception, but also in the creative process. The focus is not always in the resulting art-work, but on the making. Just as literature is shown as an event, performative arts share an ontology of the happening rather than that of the closed/finished piece of work. Furthermore, the fact that the existing vocabulary may be insufficient —as Goldberg outlines (23)— might also be a reason to relate it to Derrida's notice of the difficulty, and even impossibility, to define literature outside of its institutionalization. As the definition of literature, performance's liveliness is also a historically mutable concept.

Derrida's ideas can also inform the debate over performance and the concept of commodity. As we saw before, the disappearance of live performance is also a characteristic of mediatized performance. Both "modalities" can become a commodity even though they have not the same ontological features. Commodity in this sense might be parallel to the notion of iterability (and presence/absence) that Derrida introduces in his conception of mark. Just as iterability makes possible that the mark be used in many different ways and at different times —with the consequential undecidability—, commodification might occur not as an accident, but as radically essential aspect of, a possibility which is always in, performance (be it live or mediatized). Thus, absence (of authors and their intentional meaning) and repetition are possibilities, rather than the distinguishing (and accidental) signs of performance.

We could also read performance, both live and mediatized, as embodiments of Derrida's theory on the deconstruction of mimesis (the traditional hierarchy placing the original over the corrupted copy). In live performance there is no authentic or superior model to imitate, each performative event is unique, and what could have been seen as the "corrupted form" becomes the norm. Even in the case of mediatization, reproduction is different each time. The medium might change and, even using the same medium, it might work in a different time, opening a different context in an endless dynamics. As Kenneth Goldsmith asserts in *Uncreative Writing: Managing Language in the Digital Age*, even in the case of supposedly "stable and neutral environments" such as the digital stage, there is no purity: "We're thrown into a digital version of a Wittgensteinian loop" and all results are unique, not

copies of a *superior* idea (67). This ontology of fluidity rather than stable unity is also related to the notion of art more as an experience or an act than as essence. In performance this is also seen in its tendency towards the concept, the emphasized process over the product.

All these ideas affect how we understand the presence of the artist, sometimes seen as a replacement of the artwork and others as a co-partner in performance studies. However, the traditional (and binary) paradigm of the artist and the artwork seems to dwell in these two propositions. In its transgression of this pair, performance involves other elements (other people, as the public, the place, the objects surrounding the event) and focuses on the self of the author as a unstable and non-unified entity. Thus, the presence of the author (no longer understood as a stable and unified self) is never an actual (complete, exhausted) aspect, and it entails a different approach to the artwork. It is no longer an external, atemporal, piece of work. Rather, it is the "third genus," an exploration of the ontological nature of the creative process, including its reception. Not the objective understanding of the piece, not the meaning the artist places therein. In this sense, we have to take into account that even though Derrida does not write explicitly about politics, all his ideas do have political implications (Bennington 193). In fact, they might also be connected to the politics of interaction that we find in performance and that may also be associated to the way performance poses a political challenge to the institution of literature.

2. 2. 2. Politics of Interaction in Performance

The dynamics of performance has brought to discussion the kind of interaction taking place between artist and audience, which is different from the traditional one in written literature. Much has been stated about the pragmatic characteristics in the act of reading literature. Van Dijk, as we saw before, referred to a "literary communication" in which there were parallel features with spoken communication, and Mary-Louise Pratt did also point out the conventions on turns, permission, obligations and responsibilities on both spoken and written modalities. The reader has not always been a passive vessel dominated by the text, and performance might bring this fact to a more obvious position. If language can be seen as a tool to resist power relationships, performance encourages the revolution within the system of artist and viewer/reader/listener, even if it is in a false equality. It is true, following Judith Butler's use of Althusser's "interpellation" (*Excitable Speech* 24-5), that addressing the audience in performance gives it an entity that it might not have had before. Furthermore, even through language, the fact that both artist and audience are sharing a physical (or virtual) space, involves the bodies of participants too. The bodily co-presence of both actors and

spectators, as Erika Fischer-Lichte claims, turns performance into an ever-changing event structured by a feedback loop: actions affect the audience and the response of the audience may affect the following actions (39). One might argue that Performance cannot be an arena for resistance in the same way that language was according to Butler; there is always a barrier because it is the artist who establishes the limits of freedom in the artist-public interaction. As Annabelle Henkin Melzer comments on the first performative movements of the twentieth-century avant-garde, the stage is a dividing line from the audience, the performer has the power to set the audience's closeness (34). In that case, we could say, along with J. A. Pocock, that freedom of shared power is rather an illusion created by the artist her/himself. But if the focus is placed on later performance movements (such as those of the 1960s and 1970s), the conclusion would be different. Fischer-Lichte points out the increasing involvement of the public and of the public's bodies; performance is an event and it is considered as such, leaving behind the author's intentions and attempts to control the audience possibilities. Even the elements which are not controlled would be considered part of it (39, 162).

This change of roles between actors and spectators, between objects and subjects, has also been analyzed in art criticism, especially in connection to the academia. As Andrew Ford asserts in an essay on catharsis, everyone can respond, catharsis has democratic workings, even though the judgement of art has always been on the hands of some privileged people (122). In performance, where the spectatorial participation of theater becomes participation itself (Roach 45-6), there is a challenge of the old distance between public and artist. As Goldberg acknowledges, performance means a movement from the isolation of the studio to a direct relationship with the public, at the same time that the public can have a different access to the work. It has, according to this critic, a ritual element too (22). In fact, the performative process has also an intended effect on the performer. Melzer, for instance, points out that while the audience has a limited share of the intense involvement taking place in a performance, the performer suffers or enjoys a fevered exaltation and nervous collapse which should not be forgotten by critics (30). Thus, it is not only a matter of creating an experience for other people, but one in which both parts are (though from different places) involved; as Robert Nickas says, both parts actually go back together (7).

This challenge to traditional conceptions of art, artist, public/audience, artwork, etc., and other dichotomies such as art/life, presence/representation, is then put into action within the relationships of performance (Fischer-Lichte 12-13). Sometimes artists have

turned to performative modalities in order to "act out," as Mary Beth Edelson explains in an unpublished conversation, "what [they are] trying to say —mostly for clarity and to intensify the statement" (qtd. in Nickas 7). But this cathartic intention is also associated to the artist's willingness to shock the audience. Goldberg suggests that performance looks for wider audiences, but at the same time it is also an effective form to shake up the public's attitude towards art, life and culture (23). Confronting the audience is a way of confronting society in certain aspects and that explains why performance movements have usually risen in times of political turbulence, both in social and cultural terms (Nickas 7). As in the Futurist movement, part of performance effects (in which they triggered riots) is the destruction of the "the Solemn, the Sacred, the Serious and the Sublime in Art with a capital A" (Marinetti 189); what is more: it means shattering the dichotomy life vs. art that institutions had previously imposed (Fischer-Lichte 201-4).

2. 2. 3. Performance (&) Poetry

If performance is then an event which challenges institutions but also the relationship between artist and receptors, do public readings of poetry also have performative traits? Could they be seen also as events? How are the written and the spoken poem related? To begin with, the fact of reading a poem aloud in front of an audience might lead to a re-questioning of traditional views about literature and poetry. Through performance, poetry might become a physical reality with social and material significance beyond the printed book. Instead of being confined to the library or the studio, words would be more widely spread (Pfeiler 9). At the same time, taking into account the history of literature, performance poetry means the return to the times of the bard-shaman. As it happened during the 1960s and 1970s, this type of encounters leads to a reversal of the orality-to-literacy revolution, "a collective yearning for an earlier era when the poet was a bard, a figure endowed with the powers of a shaman and leader, an era where . . . poetry was a repository of history and knowledge for a community where written records did not exist" (Middleton 229). Thus, poetry would have a different role within society and specific forms of realization.

Nonetheless, performance poetry, or the poetry publicly read, is not always common in academic spheres. As Maria Damon suggests, from the "Right," critiques might be that public poetry is not really poetry; from the "Left," it would be said not to be public enough; and finally, from the point of view of avant-garde movements and advocators of language revolution, it would be regarded as not revolutionary enough (326-28). Some critics, as Charles Bernstein, however, consider this social and academic invisibility as a form of

resistance (23); and in fact, in the case of slam sessions, the public (and not a board) is thought to appreciate (and even give a mark to) performances (Somers-Willett 2). In this sense, its open-minded attitude leaves space for diversity and avoids hegemonic truths based on the written predominance over orality in our society (assumptions of a Kantian subject, etc.) (Middleton 221). As it happened with the turn-of-the-century theater, the text is no longer the authority taken as the purest version, and its actual verbalization turns it into an event rather than a work of art (Fischer-Lichte 35).

What is clear for most critics is that poetry readings and its varieties (slam poetry sessions, book presentations, etc.) bring up a social element that might not be so evident in the poetry we read silently and alone (Bernstein 22-23). As Martina Pfeiler asserts, the expressive articulation which is sometimes put into action in poetry readings shows that it is not reduced to an individual sphere, that it is actually a group experience (84). Nonetheless, there are also theorists who identify a social impulse even in the lyrical poetry that seems to be aimed at an individual reading. Robert Pinsky, for instance, points out that the unity proper of lyric poetry "involves the creation of something like—indeed, precisely *like*—a social presence" (18). Pfeiler does also think, similarly, that even in a "print-bred society" like ours, we are "socially determined." This critic cites Anthony Easthope and asserts that, even though there are different levels of engagement in individual, silent readings, and public poetry events, there is a "social fact" even in the former (Pfeiler 75-76).

In this sense, Pfeiler creates a sort of categorization tracing the progress of the poem from the page to the stage. She distinguishes the "pagers" (those poets that only write for the page) and the "page-stagers," who read their poems as a way to promote their poetry although this does not suppose an influence in their writing (77). She points out that there is difference between reading aloud and performing a poem: if the poet "stages the page" the text is affected during the writing process, so more and more oral style is present there (an idea she extracts from Charles Altieri) (79). The "stagers" (performing poets which, according to her, appear in the nineteenth century with transportation advancements) are then the ones that revive orality as a direct communication with a wide audience, and which include repetition and colloquial oral language in their writings (82).

Reactions towards this fact are multiple. Critics have commented the sudden success of public poetry readings pointing out the debasement for poems, which lose the attention

in favor of the poet.[7] But many authors have responded and defended different aspects that are gained (or regained) with public poetry. Robert Pinsky emphasizes the communal component which covers everything, and that should be present in poetry as well, while Dana Gioia and Billy Collins praise the fact that public events serve to "attract an audience from beyond the poetry world without compromising quality" (Groff n. pag.). Pfeiler pinpoints the multilayered dynamism these public readings get (83-4), as Susan B. Somers-Willett underlines the multisensory experience it turns into (17), multiplying and amplifying communication, as Peter Middleton explains (240). As this last critic asserts, sound serves to "extend the semantic range of poems" and adds "another level of conceptual complexity by creating complex networks of association via sound and iconicity" (242), part of the list of arguments that both Whitman and Ginsberg shared, as we will later see. All this, as Middleton exposes, means a challenge to the "descriptions offered by linguistics, philosophy, and literary theory for the production and reception of texts" (233). It involves the discussion of authenticity and meaning.

Public oral poetry shares with the "performance" concept the "volatile nature" and so the difficulties to recreate or analyze, despite the available documentation. That is what happens, as Middleton explains, with the different accounts of the poetry reading that the Beat writers gave in San Francisco at the Six Gallery: there are "reconstructive uncertainties" that nobody can solve (219). At the same time, "irregularities" or "instabilities" are common in performance poetry. Middleton contrasts the "well-regulated art of opera" with the "messy, incomplete, heterogeneous" nature of public poetry readings. However, as he continues, these "flaws" are part of the event (222). As a result, there might be a vindication of authenticity, emphasizing the importance of the "original text," and at the same time any performance would be seen as a sort of "corrupted version," not more important or better than the other. Along with this conflict, some critics would point out the need to perform the poem so that it is complete (Middleton 237-38, Pfeiler 85). Also, and in relation with this, it might also be said (as Middleton does) that readings can have a clarifying effect if we take the author's interpretation as the correct one (233-34).

However, this could also lead people to believe there is a correct (single) interpretation of the poem, and this idea clashes with the association that is usually made

[7] David Groff, for instance, argues that "[a] recited poem vanishes faster than a vapor trail" and regrets the fact that "[p]ublic readings also work better for the poetry of recognition than the poetry of discovery," driving the public away from books instead of widening the audience (n. pag.).

between performance and deconstructive conceptions of poetry. Pfeiler mentions Paul Mills in relation to this, saying that silent reading might lead to a wider freedom against the dominance of the performer in the interpretation of a poem (75-76). Nevertheless, the non-semiotic dimension that might be found in readings (Middleton 234), the materiality constitutive of poetry (Bernstein 18), might lead us to think that no two readings are exactly the same and that there is no "correct" version as more traditional scholars would defend (Quartermain 220-21). Performance poetry would be marked, as Peter Quartermain asserts, by a "polyvocality" which makes each reading different (and valid) without establishing an ideal one (222). Thus, following a Derridean path along with Bernstein (and Fischer-Lichte in her theatrical performance studies), the written text is nor previous nor primary, there is no original poem, but only variants constituting a plural existence with no metaphysical unity (Bernstein 9).

With authenticity and the approach to interpretations, the concept of authorship comes into play as well. Following Butler's ideas on identity and performativity, many critics have seen in performance poetry a performance of authorship itself, as well as of the poem. Middleton, for instance, points out that "[p]art of what the poem means is what it means as an event in which individual identity is set alongside the group identification of an audience" (248). Performance, as Somers-Willett maintains, leaves space for the performer to convey nuances about identity that are not conveyed by the page (18). At the same time, in this dynamic in which the audience is also performing a role, there is an underlying illusion that the words come directly from its original source, especially in slam poetry events where this authenticity is examined (Somers-Willett 32). That is why certain theorists have found tensions with Barthes' ideas on authorship: the author is (in performance) part of the performed poem (Somers-Willett 35). According to Fischer-Lichte, there is oscillation between presence and representation, between the body of the actor and the dramatic character (89). Nonetheless, Somers-Willett does also bring a sensible comment that might solve the conflict. Citing Elin Diamond, she suggests that, instead of seeing performance's expression of self as "original, unique, and reflective of a deeply true internal substance" — that is, instead of assuming that "there is an original or essential self"—, we should rather regard identity as "a social and cultural construction," as Judith Butler does, and then understand the "I" of poems as without a core identity, as a series of "enunciations of the 'I'" rather than an "external representation of an interior truth" (Somers-Willett 73). As we will later see, this approach to authorship would be in the equation for writing, both in Walt Whitman and Allen Ginsberg's projected poets.

2. 2. 4. Performative Drive and Modernist Poetry

As I said above, performance studies had their golden years during the 1970s, but performative art and literature did take place before. It has also been acknowledged that criticism of these performative works has been limited because of the very nature of performance, which cannot be fully grasped by descriptions, paintings or photographs, and that the study of performance is usually parallel to the study of other forms of art such as theater, cinema, and music (Goldberg 23). In fact, Erika Fischer-Lichte's proposal on performative aesthetics has its roots in the school of German theater from the early twentieth century, and she makes no distinction between drama and performance. Nevertheless, some of these ideas might also be useful when regarding the earliest movements of Modernism and their performative drive. Artists and writers came together during the first decades of the twentieth century breaking the boundaries of canonical genres. In the US, modernist poets "looked to the radical activity of the painters, sculptors, and photographers for direction" in the 1913 Armory Show (MacGowan 16), while cafés and theaters turned into places where artists could expose "objects which were simultaneously pictures, sculptures and poems" (Howarth 141). From the critique, however, these aspects have been long ignored. As Penny Farfan and Katherine E. Kelly explain in an issue of *The South Central Review* devoted to performance in Modernism, the fact that it was "one of its [Modernism's] key manifestations" has been overlooked due to the orthodox and canonical approach to the movement (1). New Criticism, they say, by focusing on "serious art" and on the "formal autonomy" and individual, "private," "close reading," has led to a biased conception of the movement that needs redefinition now (1-2).

While performance is said to be a radical challenge to the establishment of art and politics, a fight based on ideas and actions, the same could be said of Modernism. The "new 'isms'" of the early twentieth century tried to cross the divide between art and life through unconventionality. Going out of museums and institutions, they have been described as "guerrillas assaulting a corrupt art establishment" (Howarth 142), an aspect which it shares with performance's aim at shocking the audience. As Farfan and Kelley defend, there is a clash between the Modernist trend of "autonomy and single authorship" and the modernist alternatives that some authors brought to dramatic texts and theatrical performances (1). That is, key modernist principles are inapplicable to modernist performance: on stage, it was pretty impossible to defend an autonomous and purely independent existence of the work of art (Innes 131). In fact, against the conception of the poem as an artifact that would be defended by Classicists and New Critics of the 1950s academia, in modernist performance

the event would be an ongoing process of co-creation with the public (usually explicitly addressed in performance).

In this context, sound, along with painting and dancing, turned into the most important element for poet performers. Nancy Perloff, in her study of musical avant-garde, uses a chronological division that was presented by Steve McCaffery and B. P. Nichol in a compilation titled *Sound Poetry* (1978). There, they propose three phases of sound poetry: 1) paleotechnic, 2) experimental, and finally, 3) poetry which could use technological advances such as tape-recorders. In the experimental phase they identify the Modernist movements of the early twentieth century: Russian Avant-Garde, Italian Futurism, and German Dadaism, the three of them characterized by the rejection of a semantic use of language (N. Perloff 110). Since representation in painting and sculpture was broken, the same happened in language for these artists. Poetry was reduced to phonetics, isolating concrete phonics, playing with the cacophonies of the modern city and exploiting onomatopoeias (Pfeiler 87; M. Perloff and Dworkin 99). Hugo Ball, one of the exponents of Zurich Dadaism, influenced by Kandinsky, proposed the *zaum'*, a trans-rational language in which there was no reference, but just isolated sounds (McCaffery, "Cacophony" 123; N. Perloff 106). According to him, artists should "give up words to recover them from the corruption of journalism" and to "rediscover the evangelical concept of the 'word' (logos) as a magical complex image" (McCaffery, "Voice in Extremis" 164). Words were left behind, and so did the rest of linguistic structures that only legitimated bourgeois institutions ("religion, law, politics, the current culture industry") and their "grammar of war" (Pfeiler 87-88; McCaffery, "Cacophony" 121). In a journal entry, he declared: "I have invented a new genre of poems, 'Verse ohne Worte' [poems without words] or Lautgedichte [sound poems], in which the balance of the vowels is weighed and distributed solely according to the values of the beginning sequence" (70). A dehumanizing world was felt in the dehumanizing language of journalism and the press, so focusing on language sound meant not only departing from semantics, but from the "doxa of conventional meaning" (McCaffery, "Cacophony" 122-4). As Fischer-Lichte explains, the experience was more important than linguistic articulations of understanding, conforming a new way of meaning based on a state of consciousness (142).

Something very similar could be seen in Italian Futurism, whose first conference at the Teatro Rosetti in Trieste (1910) ended up in a riot after "abusing the audience for its bourgeois values" (Goldberg 24). Nonetheless, while their Russian counterparts had tended to the construction of neologisms, Italian Futurists aimed at sounds, syntax and punctuations

by way of speech and typography (ink-density, color, etc.), leading to a more conventional narration (when compared to other movements) despite their defense of *parole in libertà* (N. Perloff 106). Their poetry readings consisted on screaming at the audience, often asking for a response, and fusing it with circus performers and industrial machinery. In all these movements (especially in Dadaism), theatricality, "the relationship among text, voice, and body" was central and led to spaces which fused the stage and the gallery, the spectator and the audience (Erickson 65). Hence, these movements were originally related to shows in cafés, theaters, cabarets or even in the streets; places where writers, visual artists, actors, dance artists, musicians and singers could participate, "whether as artists or spectators, in some part of the wide array of performance events that inspired, challenged, and/or provoked their own work" (Farfan and Kelly 2). Thus, what would later be the Bauhaus and the Black Mountain Schools, had predecessors as the Café Simplicissimus (Munich), Stray Dog Café (Saint Petersburg), and the Cabaret Voltaire (Zurich) (Goldberg 23). As a challenge to the traditional and conservative academia, artists performed bizarre works dressed in odd ways, using puppets, reading simultaneously several poems, dancing and interacting with objects and with the audience.

Therefore, it could be said that in these earliest Modernist movements there is a tendency towards performance, and that their relationship is intrinsic (Farfan and Kelly 2). As we have seen, Modernism is not reduced to performative forms —as it could not be reduced to other associated features such as impersonality, fragmentation or imagism—, and in the US the development would be marked by diversity. From institutions and publishing houses, during the 1950s, Modernist poetry was understood as limited to the written word, and based on T. S. Eliot's poetics. However, earliest "–isms" were present in the poetics of more marginal writers such as Pound, Stein, and Williams. All of them felt the impact of the Armory Show of 1913 and were influenced by (if not participants in) the European performative *soirees*. American authors, says MacGowan, took over the avant-garde spheres of London before World War I, and their works later stretched across the Atlantic to find an audience in the pages of the little magazines that sprang up in Chicago and New York (1).

Pound, despite being a lover of Medieval and Renaissance literature, adopted several traits of the European avant-garde movements. He defended that art and poetry were not meant to satisfy the *vulgo*, the conformist masses that the earliest Modernists addressed (Redding 675). The ideogrammic character of his writing (Creeley 248) along with the economic approach to verse (Davidson 98) may be derived from Hugo Ball's obsession with

sound, and the artistic (intergeneric) mixtures that were developed in cabarets and little magazines of lettrism and unconventional typography. Furthermore, his poetics of vowels was a response to bourgeois values, an alternative way to fight against the art produced by capitalism (Ginsberg and Ball 170). Gertrude Stein did also share a challenging vision of art, based on improvisation, on creation as something in action and not premeditated. Her repetition and broken speech reminds also of the broken syntax used by Dadaists and Futurists, making up a sense of ongoing and time-bound writing, of writing as performance (Portelli 83, 94).

However, authors such as Williams, Vachel Lindsay and Langston Hughes built a different branch of Modernist writing. They shared the emphasis, as we saw above, on performance and public acts, but their conception of these events were inspired by Whitman's democratic readings, far from the elitist spheres in which the earliest Modernists moved, and closer to the American tradition of political and religious speeches. In the case of Williams, he did take part in alternative magazines such as *Poetry*, and was influenced by pictorial (European) Modernism, but his concerns were not so much on shocking the audience, but rather on playing with American English sounds. Thus, as we will see, in Allen Ginsberg's poetry several Modernisms are developed. He followed Whitman and Williams in their use of the American colloquial speech, but concepts from avant-garde authors such as Pound, Stein, and Artaud would be relevant in his poetics as well, combining personalist and conceptual ideas of what a poem is and performs.

3. The US as a Logocracy: The Poet's Stage

The US may be the clearest example of the power of language to change our reality, as it appeared with a declaration, a speech act which inaugurated the beginning of the US as an independent country. Many questions arise here, as whether the country somehow existed before the declaration so that it could declare itself independent, or rather whether the act was not preceded by an entity and it actually constituted the entity itself. However, to understand the nature of the declaration as a historical event, we will turn to the idea of logocracy and the textual composition of the US from its very beginnings.

Both Whitman's and Ginsberg's understanding of the US were preceded by centuries of tensions in the relationship between language and politics. During the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, language (both written and spoken) meant an arena where legitimacy was discussed, while in the twentieth century the debate involved ideological manipulation as well. Thus, before analyzing Whitman's and Ginsberg's response to their logocratic

contexts, our focus will now be placed upon the performative origins of the US and how, based on that, the national identity would be built through public discourse. First, we will have a look at the concept of logocracy and its development in the US, and then we will continue with a deconstructive discussion of the Declaration of Independence with the help of Derrida's article on this document. Finally, we will pitch into the figure of the American citizen that the institutional (Republican) logocracy would promote and how it would change with the Romantic movement.

3. 1. Logocracy and the Declaration of Independence

3. 1. 1. The Government of Words in the Revolutionary US

Christopher Looby, in *Voicing America: Language, Literary Form, and the Origins of the United States*, asserts that the US was "the first modern nation deliberately fabricated *de novo*, founded in a self-conscious performative act of new political creation"(3). Furthermore, he adds, there were other texts that contributed to what Washington Irving called the American "*logocracy*, or government of words" (148). Inspired by Martin Heidegger's quotation that "[i]t is in words and language that things first come into being and are," Looby explains that, just as many origin myths start with words or speech, a new political entity, like the US republic, could be "spoken into existence" (18). As Christopher Bigsby points out in a reflection on how Americans can be defined, the US nation may be seen as the result of mixing up myth and reality (2). In fact, the US and the entire American continent were lands which had been imagined by Europeans before they were actually occupied (Grant 10). Later, during colonial times, these myths and images were developed and materialized through reports, maps, travel accounts, and promotional literature which acted as propaganda of the New World (25, 33-34, 77). Along with these texts, charters, agreements and tracts were also granted by the crown of Great Britain, governmental documents which became crucial for every person living in the colonies (77); the US had, from the very beginning, a "literature" society whose foundations could be traced back to documents and scriptures such as the Mayflower Compact or the Declaration of Independence (Portelli 27-28).

Thus, print culture and bureaucracy could be considered the main axis of nationalism in the New World (Grant 77). That is why Benjamin Franklin, one of the signers of the Declaration, understood that "the power of Great Britain over its colonies was 'a tie constructed of words,'" and that "resistance to that power also necessarily took the form of linguistic performance" (Looby 67). Actually, as Looby states referring to Irving's words in *Salmagundi*, language was "the *only* social institution readily available to the young republic"

when traditional means of securing consent were absent. Order was then always threatened because of the power of language, and the use of voice (or quill) was no guaranty of peace (Looby 80-82). This nineteenth-century author does also refer to the verbosity in Congress as the cause of national division and confrontation: "Words are but breath–breath is but air, and air put in motion is nothing but wind," he says, "[t]his vast empire, therefore, may be compared to nothing more nor less than a mighty windmill" made up by orators and "chatterers" (154-55). Violence is then present in a language which is referred to as "*wordy battle*" and "*paper war*," military metaphors extensively used at that time (81).

This logocracy had its foundation in the ideas which circulated around academic and political spheres, both in written and spoken forms from colonial times. Furthermore, if we pay attention to the titles of some published works, one realizes many of them are self-conscious in their textuality, as it happens with the influential *Treatise on Civil Government* (1690) by Locke, the Boston minister Jonathan Mayhew's *A Discourse Concerning Unlimited Submission* (1750), or John Dickinson's *Letters from a Farmer in Pennsylvania* (1768) (Grant 95). Jefferson maintained that the Declaration was not a particular voice, but "an expression of the American mind," the compilation of "the harmonizing sentiments of the day, whether expressed in conversation, in letters, printed essays or in the elementary books of public right" ("To Henry Lee Esq." 343). Similarly, Franklin referred to a "genealogy of authority" based on "a train of verbal performances, a *textual* history" made up of "declarations, edicts, letters of instruction, and so forth" (Looby 75-76). Readings took place along with discussions and debates out of the Congress, in form of dinner party conversations and sermons given by elite societies (Grant 95). Nevertheless, what has been underlined as an essential part of this logocracy and colonial union is the national web of newspapers and postal service. In order to be a nation, a military victory should be accompanied by symbols as flags, a homogeneous use of language, and a national structure for newspapers and post office expansion, institutionalized in 1792 by the Post Office Act (Grant 95). Indeed, Alessandro Portelli has defended the thesis that the press was actually the hinge between revolution and Constitution (62). Posters, printed pamphlets, and oral public speeches that surrounded the press were intrinsically linked to the establishment of the new state. As a result, the Constitution would be a text into which a multiplicity of voices had been channeled (58-59).

This melting pot of letters, pamphlets, newspapers, sermons and debates brought with it a discussion on the authority of writing and the power of voice (Portelli 64). Books,

which had been relied on due to their stability and impersonality, started to be subject to interpretation and debate, while oratory forms in politics brought the conception of the US as a "nation of orators" (65). Words, as Irving had stated, constituted and at the same time threatened authority in the US; even when calling for military actions, words had to be used (Looby 230). In the case of the Constitution, Jacques de Ville claims that, in constitutional theory, the text consists of a "written document through which the people as sovereign and as the originating source of political power (*pouvoir constituent*) determine the way in which they will govern themselves." Authority then is said to reside in and come out of the people that the Constitution is involving. However, as this critic points out, most of the times the written nature of constitutions, declarations, and other legal documents, is taken for granted and not discussed in depth (3). In the case of the US, although Thomas Paine's *Common Sense* might be said to be one of the first texts towards its independence, the Declaration is, as a speech act, the document that actually broke the state bonds between Great Britain and its American colonies.

3. 1. 2. Legitimizing Words and Nations

If the US republic can be said to be spoken into existence, something similar could be claimed about the US nation and its people in relation to terms such as signature and legitimacy. Just as it had happened with Paine's *Common Sense*, which addressed the colonists as Americans, the Declaration brought not just a form to break with the empire, but a new identity too (Grant 104). In the declaration, the Founding Fathers go back and forth from "these Colonies" to "these States," making it clear that the transition will finally make their territories free and independent. The use of "We" does also point at the common rhetorical resource of community against "the Other," what is known in contrast to what is different. The fact that "these States" are used to denominate the newly (or on-the-way) independent territories leads us to think about our nature as linguistic beings (Butler, *Excitable Speech* 1-2). Our society, being made by words, is constituted then by individuals formed by words as well. As Judith Butler explains, there are two ways in the conception of the relationship between language and identity: while for Althusser speech precedes the being, for Austin it is the individual who precedes the speech. Either way, Butler says, there is power and vulnerability, exclusion and violence, in the use of names (*Excitable Speech* 30-31, 5). J. A. Pocock points at how (in language) power may not be controlled in terms of meaning, and how that factor can lead to a two- or a one-way ground of discussion (34-36). Language ambivalence, or rather multivalence, makes it difficult to have a purely master/slave arena

(36). The fact that, as this author does also highlight, there is a previous institutionalization of language, makes it a powerful weapon that, at the same time, is out of control (31). As a result, Austin's infelicities, be they in convention, procedure, or intention (*HTD* 14-18), are not an accident, but part of language's nature, as Derrida maintained (chapter 1, section 2.1.2).

To this same conclusion have arrived other critics from diverse fields. Portelli, for instance, keeps a similar opinion applied to the use of voice in American democracy and literature. With voice, people can destroy an order, but they can also erect another (59). Derrida plays here an important role, since he explains this lack of control and dissemination of meaning (power and intention) in terms of undecidability, iterability and signature theorization. Influenced by Edmund Husserl's ideas that "we can never mean what we say or say what we mean," Derrida proposed several terms (dehiscence, dissemination) and pointed out that intention existed in every speech act, but that it never acted straightforwardly, nor achieved what it intended; the goal, according to him, is never fully attained. It is thus that he differs from Austin, who built the concept of performative act around seriousness and "nonetiolation" (Miller, *Speech Acts* 92-93, 64). Derrida, on the contrary, embraces those "accidents" and the concept of absence and death as the condition of the sign; the possibility of death or absence is actually "inscribed within the structure of the mark" (de Ville 6). In fact, for this author, language involves an actual promise of death, an idea which he will extrapolate to (proper) names, dates, and signatures, and ultimately to every constitution (15-20). "A constitution, we can say," claims de Ville following Derrida, "promises more than what appears. A performative speech act inevitably belongs to the horizon of the masterable possible" (15-16), and in the case of proper names, they announce the subject's death (19-20). This, furthermore, jeopardizes the legal certainty that constitutional theory attributes to the written nature of constitutions, along with every other certainty about the effects of language, as we saw above (3-4). It has, so to speak, implications on the way we understand the origin of political representation.

This last topic is explored by Derrida in an essay titled "Declarations of Independence," which J. Hillis Miller has defined as the paradigm of Derrida's aporia of performance. The US Declaration of Independence performed a double act: at the same time that it pointed at the American people (and their political independence) it started their existence as such. Derrida is mostly interested in the nature of this double speech act and how it is related with political legitimacy (*Literature as Conduct* 9). Of course, this is also related

to his ideas on language, and in particular, how iterability enables both writing signatures and dates —signs which, in principle, are thought to be unique, unrepeatable. As de Ville explains, the topic had already been dealt with in *Of Grammatology*, where Derrida goes back to Rousseau's condemnation of writing and political representation, caused by their lack of purity. As he would repeatedly do, Derrida points out that the supposed lack of purity (the mark of death, of absence, Austin's etiolation) was not an accident. The iterability that was the root of language was also the root of any political representation (de Ville 9-10). Because of iterability (and undecidability), the lack of control over language —over meaning, and so the risk of failure— meant a lack of political power. Applied to the "Declaration," this leads us to two main questions: 1) Is the Declaration a constative or a performative act? and 2) Who does actually sign the Declaration of Independence? (Derrida, "Declarations" 8-9).

However, even Austin, who had developed the Speech Act Theory, admitted that there is a slippery distinction between constatives and performatives (*HTD* 130), and this would be a point in common with Derrida. It is impossible to discern whether the Declaration is referring to a nation state or rather instituting it, which leads us to the "mythic present," that is, a ground where the nation is "at once already constituted and yet to be," as Looby explains using Lynn Hunt's term (23). For Derrida "every concept is inhabited by its other," giving way to the undecidability which involves presence, absence and death (De Ville 2). In the Declaration (according to Derrida's article) this aporia is put into play in relation to its written nature; particularly, to the signatures and chain of legitimizing representatives that they entail. In fact, this opportunity to write "a critical problematic of 'speech acts'" is the perfect ground for Derrida to display a theory of "performative writing, of the signature, of the contract, of the proper name, of political and academic institutions" ("Declarations" 7). When he asks who signs the declaration, the question "spreads or propagates itself in a chain reaction through all the concepts affected by the same rumbling: act, performative, signature, the 'present' 'I' and 'we,' etc." (8). Thus, the question is not only about the subject of the signature, but what the signature is performing.

As a result, the answer to the second question involves an answer to the first one I posed above. In order to tackle them, Derrida presents the word "retroactivity." After acknowledging that Jefferson, author of the first draft of the Declaration, is the representative of the rest of the representatives (the Founding Fathers that did sign the final copy of the document), he points out that the signers (or representatives) do not sign either because "they sign for themselves but also 'for' others," "in the name of," and for the "good

people." That is why, Derrida says, "[o]ne cannot decide . . . whether independence is stated or produced by this utterance." There is undecidability between their stating their freedom or starting it ("Declarations" 9). Since the good people that the Declaration refers to do not exist "as an entity . . . *before* this declaration . . . [t]he signature invents the signer" in a "fabulous retroactivity." The right to sign is given to themselves (the signers) by the "delegation of signature" (10). However, this chain of signatures and signers goes on in Derrida's dialogue with the Declaration. Given the fact that God is also represented (it is signed by the name of God), and is also the judge of the rectitude of the Founding Fathers' intentions, the divinity would end up being "the ultimate signature," "the best proper name" (11-12). In a nutshell,

> He represents the "representatives" who are the representatives of the people in whose name they speak, the people themselves authorizing themselves and authorizing their representatives (in addition to the rectitude of their intentions) in the name of the laws of nature which inscribe themselves in the name of God, judge and creator. (12)

As Butler explains, Derrida sees power in language, but there is no clear originating will; rather, as it happens in the chain of representatives, the dynamics is derivative (*Excitable Speech* 51). Miller does also summarize it as a "perpetual round of deferral" by which signatures are implicitly countersigned until God's name finishes the thread, acting as the base of the revolution (*Speech Acts* 120-21). Thus, as this critic claims, defying Austin's felicitous conditions for a speech act, and legitimized by God, the representatives lay a ground that presupposes itself and follows a set of rules at the same time it creates them. It is, then, "radically inaugural," although infelicitous from Austin's perspective (125-26).

However, we should not forget that in these chains of representation (as it happens in written and spoken language), death or absence are what actually make them work as they do. As de Ville says in his interpretation of Derrida's lecture, "[a]lthough Jefferson and the other representatives . . . appear to be the representatives of the people, they are in the first place the 'representatives' of the death of the people, of dissemination, or of unconditional justice;" that is, the desire for presence (in language and in political representation) "is a consequence of the repression of this pre-origin; of the anguish of dispersion or dissemination" (11). In this sense, Derrida's terminology and ideas of différance and iterability are key concepts in his theory about the Declaration. Différance combines differentiation and deferral, and is exemplified in the delegated representation that we find in the Declaration: representation means displacement or deferral, since signature (and date) give a "false appearance of the present" (Miller, *Speech Acts in Literature* 123). As it happens

with the rest of speech acts, signatures work because they exist. It is precisely because of this that while Jefferson and the representatives sign the Declaration, it is "the good people" who are doing so through the "countersignature"; signatures, being already "inscribed within a structure of iterability" respond to and invoke an "originary" or general signature, and also to the signature of the other (de Ville 17).

To this, other critics have added ideas related to the way the Declaration legitimizes itself. According to Portelli, the fact that it has written form, and that it comes from a plural subject, works towards the legitimation of people's sovereignty. The "[h]egemony of printed word" during history has associated formal documents with universality, with "depersonalization of authority of invisible subject," and with community memory (60-61). Thus, after oral discussion, print used to bring simplicity, clarity, moderation, and thereby, universality, explaining the triumph of logocracy and stabilizing the uncertain world of Revolutionary times (62). Thus, as Miller explains, historical events have been taking place through language, creating their own ground in order to justify it (*Speech Acts in Literature* 112). Given all this, then, we could get to the conclusion that logocracy's power is based on iterability. Words' structural iterability enables them to sign and perform at the same time it works towards the speech act's impurity. In its written nature, however, the body and the voice are involved, leading some critics to analyze the Declaration as a text thought to be performed in a public space, to be, as music, played in front of the people. The next section will deal with that proposal.

3. 1. 3. The Declaration as Performance: Body and Voice in the Political Speech of the Revolution

The Declaration of Independence has the double projection of the word "performative." It could be considered a performative speech act, as we have seen, but given its oral characteristics some critics have approached this text as part of other genres closer to theater. Although written, the Declaration was surrounded by political oratory which might have turned the printed logocracy into a more varied government of words; one not just reduced to ink and paper, but brought to stages on which people were expressing themselves through their voices. As explained above, the logocracy of North America has mainly been associated to the hegemony of printed material from the very first moments of its colonization. Jay Fliegelman, citing Michael Warner, points at the way print culture became the main public sphere in which politics could be discussed, and the connotations that print culture had in terms of authorship (128). Moreover, as it has been said, the written nature of some official

texts (the Declaration, the Constitution) is legitimized not only by the signatures they may include, but by their written condition. Writing was associated to plural or invisible subjects, leading then to understanding these documents as universal, depersonalized texts which established impersonal sovereignty and placed the common or general interest ahead of personal ones (Portelli 60, 62).

Conversely, while printed material was perceived as fixed and visual in nature, as permanent and immutable, speech and voice were associated to vagary (Portelli 64), both in content and form. Fliegelman explains that the common belief was that orality had no order or form, acting also as a "ghost" that put into question "the historical, political and narrative authority of records and texts" (27-28). As an alternative to written form, spoken language became the source of infringement and subversion (28), but it also had connotations coming from civic and religious discourses. In this sense, we should not forget the Platonic tradition of phonocentrism that Romantics and Transcendentalists would follow. The voice was also the true presence. Thus, for example, the Great Awakening had understood speech as linked to God, developing ideas about immediacy and direct communication, "aimed at performance, and bound to time and context." Also, it was associated to the democratic legitimacy of the people, and actually showed "the unequal enjoyment of supposedly equal rights" in the "republican ideology of print": voice use was associated with blacks, women, and Native Americans, people out of the printing hegemony in politics (59-60, 63).

However, this social importance of the voiced utterance may not be despite, but in addition to the silence of print. It was seen as an amplifier for the grounds of political authority that the printed word had (Looby 3, 44). As Fliegelman explains, in public readings the discourse went from the document to event, and the voice was "experienced emotionally and responded to vocally." That is why musicality and the sonority of the human voice was so important for orators, who sought specific effects and responses, similarly to musicians (26, 14). Again, the emotion, the truth, and the voice, were connected in the public consciousness. The presence of the speaker, and the passionate experience it meant, has been opposed to "the abstract, alienated, rational polis of print culture" (Looby 5), while the latter was also seen as impersonal and thus, more reliable (Fliegelman 128). Nevertheless, both conceptions coexisted in Revolutionary and Post-Revolutionary times. In the middle of the hegemony of the print culture (logocracy), most intellectuals of that time, like Benjamin Franklin, kept a logocentric (phonocentric) conception of truth, and thought speech was more transparent and authentic because it kept the presence of the speaker, while writing

was a supplementary, corrupt and false translation of what was said (Looby 73). Orality meant a revolt from written authority; writing meant a revolt from orality's power (Portelli xiv, 6), but both were developed in socially high and low political events.

Moreover, writing was influenced by the way people talked, leading to mixed forms in both the page and the stage: cheap newspapers, public speeches, and the rising of vernacular language fed the tensions between the public and private, as well as the implications that writing and speaking might have in terms of passion (Portelli 57-58). In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, there were several attempts to establish linguistic rules in spelling and pronunciation (Daniel Webster's is the most famous), and something similar happened concerning the properties of speech that were lost when brought to the page. The aim was to "inscribe the gesturing body on the printed page and thus serve as print culture's compensation for the loss of an expressive oral mode, a compensation for the inadequacy of print culture to rise the challenge of demonstrating rather than merely representing the effective." Italics were used to compensate the absence of the physical speaker and (as they are used now) to solve the ambiguities this absence might cause, that is, "to bring the 'written discourses […] as near as possible to those spoken'" (Fliegelman 54-55, Looby 73). Wider publics might have also been important in this transition. Readers and listeners were not specialized, but common people who preferred a familiar and epistolary comic writer rather than the elevated orator, poet or historian. Better than the unnatural affectations of high rhetoric, the masses asked for Wordsworth's "man speaking to men," an element that was present through dialogues and monologues of novels (Fliegelman 59-60, Portelli 66). There was a mixture then of phonocentric and logocentric writing, which would make up also the Declaration of Independence.

The voice was very important in the Declaration. In fact, the word theatricality was repeatedly used by those who criticized and praised the document. The immediate reaction to the Declaration was based on its originality, but it did not come from its content. Rather, "its 'manner,' . . . its character as an address" made intellectuals interpret the text as words "that one could imagine hearing 'on the stage.'" As John Wilkes —"the longtime supporter of colonial rights"— held, the text was to be defended and praised "not on political grounds but on the grounds that it inaugurated a new theatrical era in political rhetoric, an era that correlated with a new political age" (Fliegelman 188). Something similar was defended by John Adams: US politics needed dramatic performance to achieve revolution, and Benjamin Rush, a friend of his, did actually say that the Declaration was a theatrical show with the same

effects of staged works (Looby 24-25). Thus, there is no surprise to find that some authors have recognized in the Declaration and in the first draft (written by Jefferson) signs of phonic consideration.

Fliegelman, whose book is titled *Declaring Independence: Jefferson, Natural Language & the Culture of Performance*, is the main defender (from the critique) holding that the Declaration was written with a theatrical, or at least an oratorical, mind. There he explains that, influenced by his musical knowledge, and by authors who associated music and public speaking, Jefferson was very careful in writing, and transmitted through bars the stress, pauses, and cadences that the Declaration should have in its spoken deliverance (10, 14). At that time, the important element of public speaking was that of natural language. Rhetoric was not based on elaborated explanations following classical patterns of oratorical speeches. Rather, the essence was in how transparent the language was, an idea that some authors brought to the national discourse. Wilkes, for instance, defended that the Declaration was effective precisely because of the "ill-written" nature some others criticized about it. Gentlemen, Wilkes says, describe negatively the document as "drawn up only with the view to *captivate the people*," but that is actually why it works so well with the American public: "The polished periods, the harmonious happy expressions, with all the grace, ease, and elegance of a beautiful diction . . . *captivate* the people of America. Manly, nervous sense, they relish, even in the most awkward and uncouth dress of language" (Fliegelman 89-90). This explains why the US is said to be a nation of orators, and why the Declaration includes semantic fields appealing to this tendency: the US was, before the document was signed, suffering from its "British brethren" who remained "deaf to the voice of justice & of consanguinity" (173).

Although, as Jefferson identified, the general public was more interested in comic writers than in elevated orators and poets (Fliegelman 26-27), critics point out a change in the way oratory was practiced and received by the common people. Portelli labels the period between the Independence and the Civil War as the golden age of oratory (65), and as mentioned in the previous section, it was the great art of the nineteenth century (Hollis, *Language and Style* 5), leading to a definition of orators as the "chief source of political information, inspiration, and entertainment" (Schlesinger qtd. in Portelli 65). As we said before, debates and sermons were important social events, both in cultural and political terms (Grant 95), and public speeches' functions were closer to the ritual than to the political, leaving, as Portelli explains, a "mark on the national imagination" (66). The change did also affect the way the orator approached his/her task, including conflictive elements as the self-

control and the passionate expression that the public asked for, the self-effacement and authority of impersonality proper of scientific (objective) discourse, and the authority that sincerity and self-assertion and self-revelation involved (Fliegelman 129, 190). Furthermore, the living voice had to speak for both the particular interest (perceived as sincerity) and also for the general auditor's feelings (64). There is no surprise then when the tension of spontaneity and impersonation, or theatrical vs. natural models of rhetoric, are identified (190).

Moving the audience emotionally was the essence of the new ways of communication that started to dominate oratory in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Sounds and words, music and text, were the axes to these innovative models, among whom we find Patrick Henry, an orator whose natural theatricality was explained by his lack of reading, that is, his mind was said to be "unmediated by the written word" (Fliegelman 190, 95). With this elocutionary revolution, there was a redefinition of rhetoric, oratory and language itself; the narrow stylistic and argumentative strategies used in the past were substituted by performative resources to influence the audience in terms of emotion (29-30). Words were not the point, but their deliverance, the way ideas were displayed rather than communicated. Elements such as tones, gestures, expressive countenances, the involvement of the body, gave emotional credibility and led to a "performative understanding of the selfhood," something that had, according to Fliegelman, a key role in American revolution, altering the "dynamics of persuasion and, by extension, the dynamics of political authority" (1-2). In relation to this, for instance, Robert A. Ferguson presents Thomas Paine's *Common Sense* as aimed at the mob and, consequently, written with the language of anger (459). The performative was then over the argumentative, maybe influenced by the Evangelical rhetoric of sensation that preachers had practiced since the Great Awakening. Moreover, several books on speech and melody were published in the eighteenth century, some of them read by Jefferson; and oratorical manuals were often quite similar to theatrical acting ones (Fliegelman 38, 58, 81). Emotions should be audible and visible to really persuade, while at the same time they were actually the sources of disorder, capable of moving the crowds' hearts (Portelli 65).

Thus, as Fliegelman asserts, "[b]y viewing the Declaration as a text meant to be read silently rather than to be heard as performance we have lost sign of crucial mid-eighteenth-century assumptions about speakers and personal expression, about rhetoric and the art of reading . . ., assumptions necessary to a full understanding of Revolutionary American

culture" (24). However, his analysis leaves behind the Derridean thesis on language. The Declaration was the result of both phonocentrism and logocracy, the conviction that spoken language was true, and that the written form was legitimate if appropriately (spoken-like) written. Presence was guaranteed in the spoken style, legitimacy was strengthened with the written signatures. This would influence the literature that the US nation would produce, along with a conceptualization of language. If the new oratory models sought to "replace artificial language with natural language and to make writing over in the image of speaking," many other aspects would be reconceptualized, including, as Fliegelman highlights, the revelation of a private self (24). This self would be presented as American, as part of a nation which spoke and acted differently from their European counterparts. The American self was then publicly performed, as their State had been achieved through a performative act. In literature, this would take different forms. The US, as a country, had been created out of a document, out of words. Its literature and culture, as we will see, would take the same path, a feature that Whitman himself would defend repeatedly, claiming that "[t]he Americans are going to be the most fluent and melodious voiced people in the world – and the most perfect users of words –words follow character–nativity, independence, individuality" (*An American Primer* 2).

Hence, with the same structures that allowed them to declare the Independence, the US citizens started also to build their own myths about their nation and their national identity. Out of written texts had risen a logocracy legitimized by the hegemony of paper and ink, but this was followed by a necessary development of oratorical movements. Popular culture was infused with voiced speeches, in written and spoken forms, leading to the reconceptualization of politics, language, and the private and public self. Of course, taking into account Derrida's ideas on representation and presence/absence, this self will not be understood here as a closed entity, but rather as an ever-changing being, an event which is articulated in speech and whose nature, as Derrida's mark, has death and disappearance as part of its essence. The American self would then be performed as the Declaration, through voice and body, through words and sounds. Political speeches would be about a (bodily) self in constant evolution and dialogue, and it is in this frame of thought that the cultural programs of Whitman and Ginsberg would take place.

3. 2. What, Then, Would the American Be? Literary Proposals for a New Identity

Given all this, how would literature extend the American logocracy? From their position of gentle and sophisticated writing, usually as part of official institutions, authors of Revolutionary and post-Revolutionary literature also contributed to the logocracy by establishing conventions of authorship, but also building an "American self" which was projected rather than recorded, something which would totally change with the Romantic paradigm. America had adopted and adapted the Enlightenment principles coming from Europe: the natural rights of man, including principles of justice, freedom, and equality, leading also to a limited power of monarchy (if any), a defense of the individual rights of expression, religious practice, and, in America, to the inherent right to self-determination (a logical foundation for the Declaration and pamphlets such as Paine's *Common Sense*). All these political and religious rights of the individual brought with them the concept of the self-made man, an idea which would later develop easily with liberalism and capitalism, and that needed of education and rights of property to act as guarantors.

Their sense of identity came progressively though, as colonies would tend to "loo[k] naturally to England rather than to its immediate neighbors" (Ferguson 358). In literature, British authors were dominant not only because of the sense of inferiority in US writers, but also due to its shared ground with oral culture and the unhelpful character of early American copyright laws (Gilmore 547-48). As a result, American literature from Revolutionary and post-Revolutionary times was actually quite close to texts that would have rather been classified as institutional and governmental documents. As Robert A. Ferguson points out, "Revolutionary Americans use[d] their faith in writing to stabilize the uncertain world in which they live[d]" (351), so any genre and format would serve that purpose. Their commitment to the written word could only lead to starting their community in "some act of writing," followed by "a perpetual crisis in definition, a steady search for the words that will complete identity in a new moment of agreement" (470-71). The purpose was then to describe, or rather prescribe, what America should be, and Revolutionary literature described it "as a land of new beginnings with high ideals and agrarian values," under inspiring titles such as Joel Barlow's *The Vision of Columbus* (1787), Philip Freneau and Hugh Henry Brackenridge's "The Rising Glory of America" (1775), Phillis Wheatley's "Liberty and Peace" (1785), or John Dickinson's *Letters from a Farmer in Pennsylvania* (1768) (Boswell and Rollyson xiii).

Thus, literature was conceived as intrinsically linked to the purposes of the community. Emerson's call to an independent literature was preceded by the Revolutionary culture, which placed poetry everywhere in the life of Americans. There was no such division between political and institutional writings (such as pamphlets and treaties) and more imaginary works, as the Romantics would establish. Instead, the varied nature of oral and written culture would make the receptions a rather collective experience, either when singing songs or ballads, or when listening to oratorical speeches. This would help "to forge a sense of nationhood by binding people together in the common expression of patriotic sentiments" (Gilmore 594). The literary voice of the Revolution and post-Revolutionary times, both in satirical pamphlets and patriotic songs, was aimed at unifying and representing (I would add at the same time, in a performative dynamics) "the composite American nation" (Robinson 25). In a nutshell, the main duty of literature in Revolutionary times was to serve society rather than the expression of the individual self. All genres encouraged virtue by showing the dangers of seduction, and actually "belles lettres were not sharply differentiated from overtly didactic forms like the oration and the sermon," being "the lines between practical and imaginative discourses . . . blurred" (Gilmore 548-49).

In this didacticism, they took also the English as models. Shakespeare and Milton, as well as the Augustans and Neoclassical writers, focused on public themes and correctness, and addressed "social and political issues with the goal of inculcating proper attitudes." American writers and public adopted this as a central point, although they found in satire the perfect genre for them due to its depersonalization, as it made the national legitimation easier (Gilmore 591). Epic poetry was also very common. It helped them show national pride to such an extent that that poems have been defined as "founding documents in meter and rhyme, belletristic analogues to the Declaration and the Constitution"; they even have been said to be regarded by Jefferson as complementary to the polity (595). Many texts were usually related to national fests and military homage, and along with that, their contents were commonly part of the public knowledge and were seen as common property. To legitimize a nation, they needed their Homeric texts, and so they got Timothy Dwight's "Columbia" (1783) and Joel Barlow's *The Columbiad* (1807), originally published as *The Vision of Columbus* (1787). Some were national heroes fighting for the community, but in later texts American authors projected an American type that applied to their reality, but also that legitimized and proved their ontological goal of self-definition. They were institutionally represented and that was to be followed in literary texts as well. Representation, as Amy Robinson explains, became the key factor for authors to legitimize their works. Their popular opinion of

literature was linked to "the idle European élite" and a new American type should be present if they wanted to make their works "relevant to the colonists' lifestyle" (19). Later on, with epistolary format, Americans were represented (projected) as farmers, like John Dickinson's and Hector St. John de Crèvecœur's protagonists. When De Crèvecœur asked in his *Letters from an American Farmer* (1782) "What, then, is the American, this new man?" he wanted to make the difference with Europe, and the difference came from the conceptual origins of the nation. Although having European roots, this new man, "leaving behind him all his ancient prejudices and manners, receives new ones from the new mode of life he has embraced, the new government he obeys, and the new rank he holds." The mixture of nationalities was presented as a positive feature adding to the difference, leading in fact to "a new race of men, whose labours and posterity will one day cause great changes in the world" (39). Although they might not be realistic, they were representative "in the sense that it represented how Americans liked to perceive 'reality.'" Disguised as a farmer, these authors were able to exploit the political connotations of the persona leaving outside other complexities (Robinson 36, 37-8).

If literature had a social (Republican) role, then American writers adopted a rather impersonal attitude to the publishing world. As Shield explains, the eighteenth-century Belle Lettres had an uneasy relationship with the printed culture (312). Although in a pose, most men of letters paid little attention to fame and money, trying to go along with their conservative politics and thus disowning their works: names did not appear in poetic anthologies, and many books were written in groups. Moreover, if the common welfare was over individual interests in economic and political terms, the same applied to their literary work, and any commercialization of culture would be looked askance (Gilmore 598). Shared authorship sometimes mixed writers and readers, since the latter also collaborated in the production through subscription, often getting more billing than the poets themselves (551, 594). Furthermore, they had no consideration of originality, and the Puritan tradition led to a rejection of fiction. Thus, most works were based on historical facts that were public knowledge, leaving no space for subjectivities or development of private imagination. Americans would have to wait until the nineteenth century to get a change of the concept of art as a "separate autonomous sphere" (Gilmore 545).

These traits emphasized the oral element in literature. Oral works were thought to be the voice of the community, and their didactic goal sometimes made them repetitive and formulaic so that they could be better memorized by speakers and grasped by the audiences.

Culture was then seen as collective wisdom with no copyright or individual inspirations (Gilmore 546). In the case of poetry, publications had less market appeal than novels because they were associated with ceremonial occasions and public events rather than with the individual turn they would take with Romanticism. It was precisely with the novel when the change of paradigm from Republican agrarian system to Liberalism took place. From the epic, the public, functional, and common literature, the model turned into the novel, a more subjective, individualistic and commodified writing. Of course, this came with the fall of Enlightenment: factuality, true accounts and empiricist focus, the scientific and revolutionary spirit would be questioned by more individualist and private viewpoints. It was not about a national historical event of common importance for a collective, but about the psychological struggles of individual characters expressing subjective ideas (Gilmore 544). The liberal ideology of the nineteenth century came hand in hand with the idea of "artworks as the unique production of an individual, . . . a work of personal inspiration and creation and also the author's property, a potentially valuable commodity to be disposed of (or not) in the marketplace"; imagination, which had previously been discarded, became an essential tool to express the private self, the unique personality of the writer (Gilmore 541-2, 555). After that, and until the 1980s, the academy has ignored early republic literature because of the dominance of the romantic paradigm and the deeply internalized concept of originality in art. Little by little, later generations of the nineteenth century started to repudiate the Belle Lettres of the Republic and the literary panorama was invaded by poets and novelists that were printed, that might or not follow the models coming from Europe, and that would call for American literature, an individual and representative author for the independent US (Shields 343). Thus came Whitman, as an answer to both Republican and Romantic canons, as we will see in the following chapter.

Chapter 2. **Poetic Performance of the Nation: Countercultural Projects by Walt Whitman and Allen Ginsberg**

Several complexities are posed in front of us then. The Romantic poet, who rose out of specific philosophical (metaphysical) assumptions on the self and its relation to nature and language, would also share traits of what is understood as performance. Language and the self conjoined in an essentialist notion of writing, but also opened up the doors to the inaugural character of speech acts and poetical events. Both Whitman's and Ginsberg's conception of poetry would no doubt be related to this, and would of course tackle how language and the self would not only mark writing, but also the political development of the American nation. In this chapter I will therefore explore the way the nineteenth- and the twentieth-century poets applied their linguistic and literary convictions to the building of (counter)cultural projects, elaborating on their convictions on (natural) language, literature as an institution, and their relationship with the voiced poem.

1. Whitman's Poetics within Logocracy

> Americanos! conquerors! marches humanitarian!
> Foremost! century marches! Libertad! masses!
> For you a programme of chants.
> (Whitman, "Starting from Paumanok")

As we have seen in the previous chapter, Whitman was heir to different traditions of literature. He was deeply rooted to the orators of the Revolution. His grandfather had been friends with Thomas Paine, he had listened to political orators, and worked as a writer in different newspapers. He was surrounded from the very beginning by the direct result of revolutionary literature. At the same time, he was heir to Romanticism too, especially that of Emerson. English authors had pointed out the interrelated dynamics between language and society, and Emerson had defined the poet as "namer" or "language maker" (*The Poet* 252-53). Thus, mentality change and independence of thought would be achieved through a poetry working within the logocracy dynamics.

These two sources would inform his poetics, but they would also converge with his studies on language, a trait that has been forgotten by scholars until C. Carroll Hollis and John Bernbrock vindicated his linguistic interest (Amyot 97). Also, Carla Billitteri points out

that, although his reading sources are difficult to trace, they include many authors and branches of knowledge, from comparative philology to history of language, German philology schools, along with elementary textbooks on orthography, English language grammars, and dictionaries (Webster's among them) (63). He has been said to be the co-author of William Swinton's *Rambles Among Words*, but critics have listed many other titles on the same topic by our poet: "America's Mightiest Inheritance" (1856), "Slang in America" (1885), "The Primer of Words," later edited by Horace Traubel as *An American Primer*, "Words" and "Other Notebooks, &c. on Words," transcribed by William White, and other prose writings arranged by Edward F. Grier (Billitteri 62-3). Some of them were intended for lectures, as "The Primer of Words," later turned into a book about the power of language over society. Moreover, as Hollis pinpoints, these writings (especially *An American Primer*) "provid[e] insights into the organization and shaping of *Leaves of Grass* without which Whitman as a conscious literary artist cannot be understood" ("Whitman and the American Idiom" 418). Indeed, it informs both the techniques, his explorations, and sometimes even the content of his poetic writing.

1. 1. Whitman's Philosophy of Language

Whitman's philosophy of language had its origins in the "Organic Principle" that Romanticism had frequently defended in poetic realms. In the eighteenth century, the American letters had been marked by the "discovery that words were detachable from their contemporary meanings," an idea which destabilized the power relationships in political discourse: Americans started to use words such as "legitimacy" and "liberty" in their own way (Robinson 33).[8] Conversely, in the Transcendentalist nineteenth-century letters, language was seen as rooted to nature, thus unmediated, establishing a correspondence between language and reality (Hoffman, "Language" 363-64; S. J. Mack, *The Pragmatic* 4). As in the Declaration, there was a mixture of both language conceptions: on the one hand, that which could be turned upside down to generate political change; on the other, the legitimacy coming from the "naturalness" of spoken language. Billitteri explains Whitman's language notion from the point of view of cratylism, an "archaic understanding of language as a natural phenomenon, of words as emanating from or belonging to things and so as univocal in their reference." As this critic asserts, cratylism is present in the Transcendentalist view of mind and matter —language and reality— as fundamentally connected (4). In a nutshell, they

[8] A summary can be found in John Locke's assertion that "we should have a great many fewer disputes in the world, if words were taken for what they are, the signs of our ideas only; and not for things themselves" in *An Essay Concerning Humane Understanding* (282)

believed in "a one-to-one correspondence between words and things, in an 'intrinsic' or 'necessary' meaning as distinct from the 'extrinsic' or 'arbitrary' meaning of the empiricists." Thus, nature was seen "as a language in which material things impart[ed] spiritual meanings" (Billitteri 43, 42). This, as we will later see, would converge in the nationalist component of his thought: a different land would generate a different language, and prove that the inherited one (the one coming from feudal Europe) no longer fit for the American people.

In this sense, the common thought, shared by the Transcendentalists, was that "material forms are the revelation of spiritual natures" and so our words "lend themselves plastic and willing to the formative laws of the word-forming faculties" in our imagination (Swinton 37). As Whitman would claim, words are spiritual, "eluding, fluid, beautiful, fleshless, realities," "the souls of the earth" (*American Primer* 1, 12). At the same time, he points out the material side of language: although subjective, the meaning of words "must tally with objective fact," they emerge from "concrete reality" (G. W. Allen, "Literary Technique" 434, Amyot 100). As he points out in the *Primer*,

> A perfect user of words uses things—they exude in power and beauty from him—miracles from his hand—miracles from his mouth—lilies, clouds, sunshine, woman, poured copiously—things, whirled like chain-shot rocks, defiance, compulsion, houses, iron, locomotives, the oak, the pine, the keen eye, the hairy breast, the Texas ranger, the Boston truckman, the woman that arouses a man, the man that arouses a woman. (14)

Matter and spirit make a perfect unity, being almost interchangeable terms and it is in the intellect (and in poetry) where this conjunction is articulated. In fact, as Matthiessen underlines, Whitman's position goes back and forth from materialism to idealism (unlike Emerson, who was more consistent), and so he understood language as part of our physical life at the same time that it was the expression of the spirit (520-21, 525-26). While for Emerson language is a translation of the language of nature, for Whitman language is the "immediate apprehension" of both corporality and spirituality, matter and spirit, together (Billitteri 55).

This convergence (and sometimes contradiction) enriched his ideas about the changing nature of language and how it was interrelated with sociocultural aspects and institutional nationalism. The change in the meaning of words and the development of slang had origin in "lawless germinal element[s]" that "prove[d] a certain perennial rankness" ("Slang in America" 149). Language was alive, and rather undistinguished from life or vitality of other types: language experiment was an experiment in living, which would inspire *Leaves of Grass* in the end (Amyot 99). At the same time, Whitman was aware of the dynamic

relationship that this living organism had with society, which would work similarly. In fact, while analyzing grammars and dictionaries, his studies went to the actual speakers, trying to "Talk to everybody, everywhere—try it on— keep it up—*real talk*—no airs—real questions—no one will be offended—or if any one is, that will teach the offendee just as any one else" (*Daybooks and Notebooks* vol. 3 675). The common speech of people was stronger than grammarians' decisions (Hollis, "American Idiom" 420).

Along with that, social convention did also take part in the changing nature of language. As Whitman asserts in his *Primer*, words are not original or arbitrary, but the result of "what has been or is in vogue," thus the result of common references, whatever their origins (8). Responding to this, Billitteri clarifies that language is a human construct in constant change yet "some elements of language . . . are proper and unyielding natural facts," which are exemplified by aboriginal words and American slang (28). In her reading of Whitman from Cratylism, this critic acknowledges that there is perseverance in the movement to "reconcile modern ideas about the evolution of language, signifying relations, and the polyvocality of meaning to older beliefs in a language of natural meanings whose complete and faithful adherence to the things names guarantees a state of unchangeable referentiality (4). Nonetheless, it might be a mistake to place this "naturality" of language just in aboriginal names and slang. Change came as a natural aspect of language in general. Whitman's study of etymology (as a kind of geology, archeology or biology) made him find civilization, the history of nature in all departments, the organic Universe, "comprehended in words, and their backgrounds" (Bernbrock 69-71; "Slang in America" 149). Furthermore, this approach was open-minded, and changes in meaning were naturalized and even promoted. Borrowings such as *ensemble*, *En Masse*, *Camerado*, *Libertad* were put into use along with terms such as *Yonnondio*, a Native American word whose meaning he tried to modify (Hollis, "American Idiom" 418; *Whitman in Camden* vol. 2, 269).

Change in meaning comes from necessities, and the same reason leads to linguistic evolution in many other aspects. New ideas ask for new words, that is why he defined words as bodies ("I put my arms around them – touch my lips to theirs") and declared himself "done with many of the words of the past hundred centuries" (*American Primer* 12). Old words might be useful, but language should evolve with history. Rather than the artificiality of dictionaries and other linguistic authorities, we should embrace the latent life in the users of words (16-17). Actually, Whitman had the idea of a "far more complete dictionary to be written, and the grammar boldly compelled to serve the real genius underneath our speech—

which is not what the schoolmen suppose, but wild, intractable, suggestive and free" (qtd. in Hollis, "American Idiom" 420).

Slang for Whitman was a very powerful source of inspiration and expressive words for writing, although it was negatively seen by the academy of his times. Defined as "an attempt of common humanity to escape from bald literalism, and express itself illimitably," slang was the true underlying motor of poetry. Its countercultural origins were "needs, ties, joys, affections, tastes, of long generations of humanity," it was made up by the masses, and so a perfect result of democracy ("Slang in America" 150-1; Amyot 98). Thus, along with that came the acceptance of obscene words defended by Emerson, a vindication of "illustrious, spoken in anew connection of thought. . . . The meaner the type by which a law is expressed, the more pungent it is, and the more lasting in the memories of men . . . Bare lists of words are found suggestive to an imaginative and excited mind" ("The Poet," *Portable Emerson* 250). Rather than style, expressiveness was the important point for Whitman's choice of words, so he "prefer[ed] the ugly to the beautiful words if the ugly word says more: ugly words you'll often find drive more immediately to their purpose" (*Whitman in Camden* vol. 4, 220). If we followed grammars and dictionaries, he explains, we would "deprive writing of its life" (qtd. in Hollis, "American Idiom" 409).

In relation to this, I agree with Billitteri when she points out that the conflict between natural and conventional forms of expressions had the analogy of spoken and written codes. While the first one was evolving —open—, the second one was stable —closed. Actually, the second was seen as an "unwelcome legacy of the past," reflecting "the colonial rule of England, Spain, and going further back, imperial Rome" (47). This goes in line with what Tenney Nathanson explains too: for Whitman, there was an association of written language with artifacts, while the utterance was connected to the organic nature of language (173). The Romantic stress on common language was translated in his poetics to a stress on the oral one, surrounded by a cultural context where orality was essential in politics and religion. Thus, for the poet, the spoken realm of language acquired connotations of linguistic (and cultural) evolution. In *An American Primer* he asserts that "*Books* themselves have their peculiar words — namely, those that are never used in living speech in the real world, but only used in the world of books — Nobody ever actually talks as books and plays talk" (6). In fact, not only does Whitman point out the difference between the characteristics of spoken and written language, he underlines that written language is an obstacle for communication in some poems such as "A Song for Occupations," where he talks about

"cold types," or "Song for the Open Road," where he finds ideas "untransmissible by print" (Hoffman, *American Poetry* 19). His literary ambition, after all, became the conjunction of both, he wanted "to convey more than the meanings of words themselves; somehow by manner, tone, feeling, and implication to write so that he could say 'The words of my book nothing, the drift of it everything'" (Allen, *Solitary Singer* 115).

Neither should we forget the invention of recording technologies during Whitman's life. Sound, one of his obsessions, could be recorded, which also worked along with the culture of celebrities and the issues of aura, presence and authenticity that it would bring. Thus, as Hoffman explains, these inventions would "farther shape his mythologies of the spoken word and their corresponding notions about America and Americanness" (*American Poetry* 12). Moreover, his conception of words as sounds reinforced his idea of words as physical things, and this led him to write about voice (or pronunciation) as "the stamina of language" (Hoffman, "Language" 373-74; *American Primer* 12). In this sense, the body and its physicality would be intrinsically related to speech (*American Primer* 10). The vocal organ and its physiology would turn into a topic of interest for him, as "he came to believe that some sort of supreme wisdom could be conveyed not through words but through the musical tones of the words in the *mouths* of inspired *speakers* or *singers*" (emphasis added) (Allen, *Solitary Singer* 115). Focused on the "phonetic significance" and "pith" of expressions and words such as "howdydo" or "mugwump" (*Whitman in Camden* vol. 2, 164), he would later turn these ideas into part of his poetics. Actually, it might lead him to use words that were not very common in literary texts, from zoological terminology to Native names of places ("Mannahatta"), or foreign words ("Libertad," "camerado"). He wanted to get the charm and beauty of sounds that were usually absent in written and conventional language which was seen as the "correct" one (*American Primer* 20). In fact, taking it farther, in "A Song of the Rolling Earth" he would dismiss "written language as mere squiggles, affirming that the only real language abides in the substance of the earth and in human corporeality" (Billitteri 60).

However, this would be taken back when he allowed that "[i]n the best poems re-appears the body, man's or woman's, well-shaped, natural, gay / Every part able, active, receptive" (*Leaves* 184). His goal changed and he aimed at what Tyler Hoffman has called "fiction of text's liveliness" (*American Poetry* 20), or (as seen above) Peggy Phelan's "stager" (82). Thus, he would rather exploit the loose distinction between written and spoken language. Along with mystic and Romantic ideas of inspiration, he used sound and action to

arouse feelings, and wrote a poetry which appealed to both the body and the soul; words were conceived as miracles from hand and mouth (Matthiessen 555-56). This last idea of the miracle might be related to his definition of language as magic. In *An American Primer*, he says that "[n]ames are magic — One word can pour such a flood through the soul" (18). Gay W. Allen explains that this is not an atavistic savage belief in the magic of words, but rather "mystic powers and relationships which they feebly signify." Along with this, Allen quotes Matthiessen and his realization that Whitman's obsession with naming comes from the conception of an experienced language: "a man cannot use words . . . unless he has experienced the facts that they express, unless he has grasped them with this senses" ("Literary Technique" 432, Matthiessen 518). There is no magic or miracle as such, but a huge emotional meaning on the way language works, from the past (in etymology) and in the present (from the materiality of the pronunciation). As he writes in *An American Primer*, "What a history is folded, folded inward and inward again, in the single word I" (4).

The future of the US would then be worded, according to Whitman, "with undissuadable words" to overcome the foreign heritage from Europe ("Prefatory letter" 645). The US was a logocracy, and the tool to build changes was the *logos*, the poet's basic tool. Whitman's obsession was democracy, language was the vehicle to solve the dilemma of unity and diversity that the democratic system supposed, as it is shown in "One's Self I sing" (Amyot 97): "One's-Self I sing, a simple separate person, / Yet utter the word Democratic, the word En-Masse . . . The Modern Man I sing" (*Leaves* 3). From the individual to the unity there is the utterance, and words that involve both. Billitteri's thesis is that throughout the history of the literature in the US, there is a repeated fight for the perfection of society through the perfection of language (xiii); in the case of Whitman, "poetry is a means to an end," and this end is the "renewal of society" (1). In these premises, poets acquired an essential social role as the guides in "how language *might* be used and *should* function" (2). However, rather than from divine inspiration, the poet's function comes from his "human understanding of the common good"; he is not to "confer names," but to "adjudicate between them" and "mark out for others the distinction between the proper and the improper." Thus, while seen from the positivist point of view, language is a sociohistorical phenomenon after all, the poet is "in the midst of language's ongoing history" and helps its development. If seen as a legislator, the poet's function is towards democracy, given that language is the commonest, and most accessible, reality that articulates society (Billitteri 31). He is working for communication and at the same time for the regeneration of society. That is why language, as a social phenomenon, is revised; and why the poet has such an important

role within society. What is more, as the next section explains, American English would define American democracy, so it should be the matter of poetry too.

1. 2. Nationalist Approach to Language

Of course, all these ideas about language as an organic element, a material and spiritual reality that intercedes in our world, would be applied to the nationalist views of the Transcendentalists and other letter movements that were blooming in Whitman's times. Language was a factor for political union, but it was also a national phenomenon. As Billitteri explains, American English was thought to help "consolidate the nation's cultural identity and assist in the furthering of its political mandate" (40). Thus, his poetry would emphasize the American sound of English, to make it part of the realm of poetry, but also to get a poetry fit for the land.

Even if we consider Swinton's *Rambles among Words* with no co-authoring by Whitman, he would have been exposed to thoughts on America and American language as the one that follows:

> Transported to the new and vaster arena of America, the English language comes under the conditions, outer and inner, that are shaping the American mind. It is qualified by all that makes American life—by the geographic and climatic conditions, by the ethnology of America, by her politics, sociology, manners, mentality. (Swinton 287)

Nation, mentality and language were interrelated; "the issues of Words represent issues in the national thought" (Swinton 291). In other texts, Whitman would defend ideas which were very close to this one. Apart from needing words to "embody the new political facts" (the Declaration of Independence, the Constitution, the concept of Union, States and Congress, the election processes, stumps, speeches, and addresses), English should evolve in order to cope with social changes such as equality between sexes, tolerance of different faiths, and developing areas of science and knowledge (*American Primer* 9). Americans needed words for different feelings (the ones that did not have a name yet, such as homosexuality), and words for non-delicate but realistic topics to express the American reality (15, 21-22). It became the "language of resistence," the dialect of common sense, adapted to the American "growth, faith, self-esteem, rudeness, justice, friendliness, amplitude, prudence, decision,

exactitude, courage." It was, basically, the medium to "express the inexpressible" (*Leaves*, "Preface 1855—*Leaves of Grass*" 635).[9]

In this sense, Whitman acknowledged the importance of English as a language whose spirit was fit for the US due to its possibilities. The strong and live nature of English made it easier to find alive words that "walk, look, step, with an air of command" rather than submission (*American Primer* 11). Actually, what he emphasizes is that English language "spurns law" and is open to contributions from many languages. That is why he writes that

> America owes immeasurable respect and love to the past, and to many ancestries, for many inheritances – but of all that America has received from the past, from the mothers and fathers of laws, arts, letters, &c., by far the greatest inheritance is the English Language – so long in growing – so fitted. (*American Primer* 30-1)

American English welcomed new words from science and technology (9), and so was able to regenerate itself in the new land. There were "new words, called for by new occasions," but "[f]ar plentier additions [would] be needed, and of course, [would] be supplied" (*American Primer* 5). As Hoffman explains in a chapter on Whitman and language, Whitman interpreted language history in a national way (their independence came from Germanic influence; their revolutionary ideas, from France), and he saw American English as an imperial language, lamenting its stale status in certain aspects, and so vindicating the poet's task as equalizer (he should make language accessible for everyone through new uses). In fact, the American idiom should rather acquire the state of "an authentic language in its own right, not simply a provincial form of British English." It would, moreover, keep "its own linguistic and natural resources" (Billitteri 27-28, 51). As he says in a poem included in *An American Primer*, American English is made of

> Words of Modern Leading Ideas,
> Words of Modern Inventions, Discoveries, engrossing Themes, Pursuits,
> Words of These States — the Year 1, Washington, the Primal Compact, the
> Second
> Compact (namely the Constitution) — trades, farms, wild lands, iron, steam,
> slavery, elections, California, and so forth. (26-27)

"[T]he common speech of the mass of the people" would involve words from the American social reality (23-25). The people of this young nation needed a "precise system of symbols to convey thought," so neologisms, colloquialisms, archaisms, idiomatic expressions were adapted and adopted to different practical demands (Amyot 100; Hollis, "American Idiom"

[9] These quoted words were present in "Poem of Many in One" (1856 version) but were deleted in 1860. At the same time, the poem was later inserted in "By Blue Ontario's Shore" (Amyot 97).

409). Nevertheless, the international character of part of the population was one of the key factors in the development of American English. Native words were added to those coming from other countries, giving the nation a fluid identity (*American Primer* 34). In fact, this open mind would actually lead to the concept of an America which is constantly (re)built, in process, in line with Whitman's assertion that "America is not finished, perhaps never will be" ("Prefatory Letter" 643).

The process of naming would be essential in this sense. Names would be "the substantial words of American democracy," composing "the organic compact of These States, a compact comprising 'Workmen' and 'Workwomen'", emphasizing these two words and those he would list in his poems (Billitteri 61-62). And of course, this naming would come out of the new needs of the land. Americans would reject the "etiquette of saloons" and rather use a renovated speech for their "meadows, farms, mountains, men" (*American Primer* 2). "*All lies folded in names*," says Whitman, and so America should root its names in its own ground (*American Primer* 33). Thus, language should not be a copy, and rather draw on its dialects and lawless condition better than on external academies ("Prefatory Letter" 640). As the poet argues in his conversations with Traubel,

> Why should we give up the native for borrowed names? Down in this country—right here, near us—there was a place called Longacoming: the name was fine, fine—the mere sound of it: yet they got it into their fat heads that the name was not satisfactory: they met, put the old name aside for a new name: changed Longacoming to Berlin: oh God! (*Whitman in Camden* vol. 3, 123)

Placenames are no indifferent matter, and for him aboriginal words fit better in length, breadth and depth than artificial ones (*American Primer* 17-18). Particularly, he points out the Western States as the "special areas of slang" both in conversation and names for localities, towns and rivers ("Slang in America" 154). In this sense, the frontier and the wilderness paradigm of the newfound land paved the way for names closer to untamed nature that was common there.

Oral expressions of language were maybe the most outstanding in terms of American linguistic features, and the ones that included slang, new words, native names. The printing press was rather controlled, as commented above, by European (British) manners. Thus, it was first in the spoken realm that Americans started to dissent from their British brethren. In *An American Primer*, Whitman pointed out that spelling and pronunciation would be diverse and differ from the European one (11), and he actually collected and studied it, trying to "work out for himself a somewhat naïve code for pronunciation of words, specially French

words, of which there are a great many in the *Words* book" (Hollis, "American Idiom" 411). More than from books, Whitman's inspiration came from walking and listening to voices of Americans in the open, which he related to physicality and body (420). His idea of American English was intrinsically connected to the American body and character. As quoted above, he thought in the future Americans would be "the most fluent and melodious voiced people in the world" (*American Primer* 2).

The spoken version of American English would nonetheless keep its beauty, despite being out of most books. As he explains in the *Primer*, the charm and beauty of their national language was not in the written and conventional sources of "correct" language, but in its sounds. Rather than in dictionaries and grammars, beauty was found in the pronunciation which actually reflected their "perfect flexible vocal organs" and their "harmonious soul" (6, 20). This would later influence American meter, as Williams comments, and as the Transcendentalists pointed out before Whitman: heartbeats, rather than artificial patterns, were the actual foundation for American pace in literature ("An Essay" 837), and it has led some critics to consider "common, everyday speech" as the root for American tradition, including the writings of Stephen Crane, S. Anderson, G. Stein, E. Hemingway, R. Carver, Whitman, and John Dos Passos (Portelli 160-1). During the Early National period, there had been many linguistic projects for independence, but in the nineteenth century the focus was different. It was not about making American dictionaries, but about the lawlessness of language and of race itself. Whitman's intention was to create a real dictionary or grammar of American English, but one whose rules could also be broken (*American Primer* 6). Bad words (those used by fighting men, gamblers, thieves, and prostitutes) would be included for their strength (7), and slang was a key concept in this sense. He defined it as "the lawless germinal element, below all words and sentences, and behind all poetry, . . . prov[ing] a certain perennial rankness and Protestantism in speech" ("Slang in America" 149). Slang's "daring and license" was part of a word-formation process; not from dictionary-makers, but from human needs, and the decisions were made by the masses, "people nearest the concrete" ("Slang in America" 150-51).

In Whitman's poetics, then, the use of talking from the streets was one of the main targets, vindicating the common and even vulgar words, which were "tangible and clean-lived, all having texture and beauty" (*American Primer* 3). He was inspired by the language of working classes and moved around different jobs and types, he tried to associate with them and make friends and acquaintances to get to know it better. As Gerald F. Amyot explains,

they were the first authority for everyday, ordinary language (99-100). Whitman's poetics would develop out of geographical and national material, but they would materialize in a peculiar use of language. As Emerson had written in *The Poet*, America is a poem and it could prove a very useful source of characters, topics and prosody. Something similar is said in the *Primer*: "American writers are to show far more freedom in the use of words. –Ten thousand native idiomatic words are growing, or are to-day already grown, out of which vast numbers could be used by American writers, with meaning and effect" (35). So far, his philosophy of language and the national approach he took to speech would guide him in the task of designing the *American* poetry. "One wants new words in writing about these plains, and all the inland American West," he wrote; "the terms *far*, *large*, *vast*, &c., are insufficient" (*Specimen Days* 148). His main principle was "Be simple and clear.—Be not occult" (*Uncollected* vol. 2 63). In fact, for him "the infant genius of American poetic expression" might be found "in some western idiom, or native Michigan, or Tennessee repartee, or stump-speech or allusion of the Manhattan, Boston, Philadelphia, or Baltimore mechanic" ("Democratic Vistas" 238). That is why in his studies of dictionaries he also included lists of slang, idioms, and etymology, centering on the real talk of people. If America was a bunch of blank pages, his aim was recording and reinventing the American English in poetry, leading to a democratic culture that would strengthen his nation.

1. 3. Poetry & the Poet's Definition within the US Logocracy

Taking into account his ideas on language and the nationalist approach that he kept, we could get to the conclusion that Whitman's poetics were actually a well-defined cultural program for the US. It was thought for the nation and the state, to balance the amount of logocratic institutions and material development, and rather encourage spiritual growth in each citizen. Emerson's *The Poet* and his vindication of an authentically American culture, plus Whitman's education in the revolutionary enlightenment and its belief in science and progress towards happiness, triggered the approach he adopted to writing (Erkkila 70). "Exact science and its practical movements are no checks on the greatest poet but always his encouragement and support," says Whitman in the 1855 preface to *Leaves of Grass*; "the idea of political liberty is indispensable" too (626-27). In different articles, prefaces, and book-length essays, Whitman argued that the US geography and nature needed its own literature. America, he says,

> is become already a huge world of peoples, rounded and orbic climates, idiocrasies, and geographies—forty-four Nations curiously and irresistible blent and aggregated in ONE NATION, with one imperial language, and one unitary set of social and legal standards over all—and (I predict) a yet to be National Literature. (In my mind this last, if it ever comes, is to prove grander and more

> important for the Commonwealth than its politics and material wealth and trade, vast and indispensable as those are.) ("Have We a National Literature?" 333)

In the 1855 preface to *Leaves of Grass* he claimed: "The United States themselves are essentially the greatest poem" (*Leaves* 616). US geography and nature, but also de the Democratic system (in contrast with the feudal Europe) demanded a different type of literature:

> Our fundamental want to-day in the United States, with closest, amplest reference to present conditions, and to the future, is of a class, and the clear idea of a class, of native authors, literatures, far different, far higher in grade than any yet known . . . permeating the whole mass of American mentality, taste, belief ("Democratic Vistas" 199-200)

Geography, literature and politics were intrinsically related in their path towards a total emancipation and national development.

As Allen exposes, "Whitman is nowhere more typically American than in his pragmatic belief that the old must be destroyed to make way for the new" (*Solitary Singer* 258). America needs its own intellectual and aesthetic masterpieces generated in the here and now of its land and institutions ("Democratic Vistas" 203). Even though he acknowledges the influence of Shakespeare and "old hereditaments, legends, poems, theologies," Whitman does defend that the American poet should "exploit our own day." It was not about destroying just the European aesthetics, but also the social connotations of nobility that would not rule in the Revolutionary state. That is why he asserts that "[t]he greatest feature in current poetry . . . is the almost total lack of first-class power, and simple, natural health, flourishing and produced at first hand, typifying our own era." From material development, Americans should advance towards a parallel literary growth. "[B]usiness, money-making, politics, agriculture, the development of mines, intercommunications" were to be the "inevitable precedents and providers for home-born, transcendent, democratic literature" ("Have we" 337).

As commented above, Whitman's times were those of national complaint for cultural scarcity of original and unique American literature. Thoreau, Emerson, Margaret Fuller, all of them had talked about the lack thereof. Its instrumental purpose (prayer, amusement, education, etc.) was evolving and getting to the Romantic paradigm, with different publics and conceptions of high and low literature. Whitman was opposed to this elitist conception of culture, and actually found it was usually associated to European models that hardly ever represented or expressed the reality of the American society (Olsen 309-10). According to

Robert L. Davis, Whitman considered culture as an ensemble of different texts which would be an intrinsic part of citizens and, therefore, a key element to take into account when trying to build a democracy. Rather than working with abstraction, everyday activities such as cooking, dressing, dreaming, exercising and reading would be expressed in national identity terms. Thus, any cultural program was to be absorbed by the "citizenship of the body," "into the deepest recesses of the self" (Davis 549). The problem was then if the culture that was being absorbed belonged to another time and place. If Americans took feudal Europe as a reference for cultural tradition, there would be no democratic culture and, as a result, no democratic citizens. For Whitman, America was making great progress in science, medicine, technology, journalism, and education further than other countries; the States had solid economic and political foundations, but there was a lack in literature writing ("Have We" 336), "as if we were somehow being endow'd with a vast and more and more thoroughly-appointed body, and then left with little or no soul" ("Democratic Vistas" 205).

Conventional beauty was associated to the past, Whitman criticized, that is why he vindicated the works of authors such as Longfellow, Whittier, and William Cullen Bryant, who exploited the atmosphere to create magnetism, rather than imitating beauty canons that belonged to other times and places ("Old Poets" 484). In the brief article titled "Have We a National Literature?" he tackled the "tremendous fearful subject" of American writing (if there was any such thing), which did not portray the American type and "lack[ed] quite altogether the modern," because it was "possessed in spirit with the past and feudal, dressed, maybe in late fashions" (337). Similarly, in *Democratic Vistas* he pointed out that the American literature was not literature at all, and demanded "races of orbic bards" to replace the sensational writers that only looked for cheap "stimulus," "incident" and "persiflage" (234). Betsy Erkkila, who has widely worked on the political dimension of Whitman's program, remarks that however theoretical, the political commentary on the people's lack of taste and conformity was articulated through organic metaphor, something he also applied to express his fear of political dismemberment. Moreover, as this critic asserts, the organic metaphor would also be organizing principle of *Leaves of Grass*, a book which he saw in the same developing process as the American democracy (Erkkila 132, "Walt Whitman to Edward Dowden, 18 January 1872" 155). This, as we will later see in chapter 4, is actually seen in the contents of each of the chapters that conform the only poetry book he published when alive.

1. 3. 1. American Readership

Readership was then an important element for Whitman. He wrote that if a moral microscope were placed upon humanity it would show a desert-like personality. However, he also believed that the literature of the New World was the tool that could change the situation ("Democratic Vistas" 205). The personal traits that he thought would characterize the American type ("Good-Nature, Decorum, and Intelligence . . . Surely these make the vertebral stock of superbest and noblest nations!") should also be present in the US national literature ("Have We" 334). From his early reflections on the topic of reading, he realized that it was creative activity. He underlined in an article from May 1845 in the *American Whig Review* that "[a]n author enriches us, not so much by giving us his ideas, as by unfolding in us the same powers that originated them," and he added on the margins that light reading could also fertilize the mind (qtd. in Allen, *Solitary Singer* 126). The famous epigram "To have great poets there must be great audiences, too" points at the belief in a reciprocal relationship between artist and public in a democracy (Hoffman, *American Poetry* 1), and so the reader became part of the poem. As Erkkila explains, in Whitman's "Song of Myself," for instance, the reader —not the hero— is the responsible agent, the one that is creating the self, the nation, and the world. In a universe governed by democratic principles, the text is not linear, but rather circular, and reader and writer are part of the same communal process of creation and regeneration (95). This, as we will later see, does also happen in other poems where the content addresses the moment of reading, the reader's context. A proper national literature for the US would train the reader to struggle with poems and keep this active role, enter into the creative dynamics and break the writer's authority and the traditional view of the reader as a vessel (Folsom 138). Furthermore, as Stephen Railton and other critics have suggested (and as we will see in the next chapter), the use of the pronoun "you" is a key element here, given its ambiguity: understood as a plural referent, the poet is addressing Americans as a whole; however, understood as an individual pronoun, it is asking the reader, personally, to be active (12).

The reading scenario became then an object of reflection and a source of inspiration for Whitman. He was aware of book market changes and printing technologies, and so wanted to keep a strict design of his books. He was obsessed with the idea of portability and small editions so that people would "take [him] along with them and read [him] in the open air" (*Whitman in Camden* vol. 2, 175). This last point, in fact, gives us an idea of what the poet's body and personality meant for this close relationship with his readers. Although he would later contradict himself in terms of copyright polices within this new culture of

production/consumption, Whitman was aiming at equality between poet and reader, and conceived the former as a promoter rather than an authority, leading to endless possibilities of interpretation (Hoffman, *American Poetry* 46-47; Olsen 308-09). Hence, instead of writing epic poems, he composed texts which would be closer to the performance, which would unite past and present, and save the gap between the hero and the reader; there was no narrative, but rather an encounter of different voices (Railton 9).

1. 3. 2. The American Poet

As I pointed out before, language theory and philosophy was one of the areas that Whitman worked on before and during the development of his corpus. His studies on language and the conclusions he got regarding American English would certainly inform the kind of work the poet was to develop in the US. This has led critics to think that there is a clear relationship between texts like *The American Primer* and "the organization and shaping of *Leaves of Grass*[,] without which Whitman as a conscious literary artist cannot be understood" (Hollis, "American Idiom" 418). Although his poetics may be seen in contrast to Poe's craftsmanship (Matthiessen 579), his career as a journalist led him to consider language as a very serious issue. In fact, in his turn from journalism and party politics to a poetry of democracy he introduced the idea of a "divine grammar" as a tool to fight against the national instability and the threatened union (Erkkila 49).

Along with the study of the American language, Whitman's poet was deeply connected to America, topographically and biologically. He was to be "a sort of demi-god formed in part from America's vision of herself in all her wished-for powers and moral perfection" (Allen, *Solitary Singer* 154). In the 1855 preface to *Leaves*, he claims that the poet "incarnates [America's] geography and natural life and rivers and lakes." The different states, the different animal and vegetable species (pine, cedar, hemlock, fish-hawk, indian-hen), and the land features (mountains, rivers, falls) are part of the American poet, who will therefore be more important than the president (618-19). In these dissertations, furthermore, the poet is marked by a masculine virility and potency mating with the maternal restatements of America and giving life to American culture and poetry. Readers would then have the responsibility, in active reading, of reproducing the poet's generative power (Olsen 310-11). Through this terminology, however, he meant to promote a poet who would realize the moto "pluribus unum" (in many, one), as the poet was also to be "a 'joiner' of states into the body of a holistic nation" which suffered tensions of sectionalism and slavery, and which was seen "in a perpetual state of becoming" (Hoffman, *American Poetry* 32). Nevertheless, the role of

the poet was not just reduced to the national level, he would also be the fuser of all democratic nations. Apart from poems such as "Passage to India" (*Leaves* 356) or "Song of the Exposition" (*Leaves* 165), he included global vindications in the prefaces for foreign editions, where he defended political and emotional affiliations between nations, and proposed the word *comradeship* to displace diplomacy (Hoffman, *American Poetry* 38-39).

As a mediator, then, the poet would find topics in nature, but not just in its beauty. He would have to deal with the link between reality and the soul, the matter and the spirit, acting as a "time-binder" and building an "eternal present." G. W. Allen has described this position as an equalitarianism in metaphysical terms: the unity of the kosmos is just the unity of time, nature, soul, and the body; that is why Whitman presents a cosmic poet (or "poet of the kosmos") that would harmonize diversity of forms and experience into one single discourse (*Solitary Singer* 154-55). He brings equality from the social to the cosmic dimension: he equalizes age and land, being his "the ultimate brain," and at the same time acknowledging the sacred and perfect condition of the illiterate person (*Leaves* 620). Nevertheless, the poet is the only one that knows he is complete, "[h]e is a seer . . . the others are as good as he, only he sees it and they do not" (*Leaves* 621). As he wrote in the margins of an article about modern poetry and poets of 1849, "[t]he poets are the divine mediums—through them come spirits and materials to all the people, men and women" (qtd. in Allen, *Solitary Singer* 132-133).

In his edition of *Leaves of Grass*, Michael Moon comments that Whitman ended up being the poet he had intended: the poet as maker, reformer, celebrator and lover ("Introduction" xxxi). However, all these aspects were not part of a supernatural condition. As Stephen J. Mack explains, it was rather due to his expropriation of religious language to symbolize nature (*The Pragmatic* 14). In fact, Whitman himself explained his unifying effect as coming out through the intellect ("Walt Whitman on his Art" 783). In "Democratic Vistas" he also described the "great literatus" that America needed in psychological and moral terms:

> A strong-fibred joyousness and faith . . . may well enter into the preparation of future noble American authorship. Part of the test of a great literatus shall be the absence in him of the idea of the covert . . . the grim estimates inherited from the Puritans, hell, natural depravity, and the like. The great literatus will be known . . . by his cheerful simplicity, his adherence to natural standards, his limitless faith in God, his reverence, and by the absence in him of doubt, ennui, burlesque, persiflage, or any strain'd and temporary fashion. (240)

However, if the poet was a mediator or interpreter, as Hoffman explains, he would also have to adopt different personalities and to enact multiple voices, those that had been "historically marginalized," identities that were unvoiced at that time and that could be realized through speech. "Through me many long dumb voices," said Whitman; "Through me forbidden voices" (*Leaves* 46). Thus, "[h]e speaks on behalf of the marginalized and disenfranchised, enacting thereby their full citizenship" and acting then as an example of the performative traits that several critics have identified in his work (Hoffman, *American Poetry* 40).

1. 3. 3. Out to the Streets/Stage

All these elements (American English, language, poetry, the poet's and the reader's definition) were to play a fundamental role in Whitman's idea of poetry as a public event. In the "Prefatory Letter to Emerson" (1856), Whitman stated that he aimed at writing poems and voicing them "face to face" with his audience so that they could get the "American rude tongue" (*Leaves* 638). With a cultural program based on the masses rather than on aristocratic hierarchies, he was interested in getting to everyone. What is more, he tries to disguise himself as a working man in an attempt to rise readership in that specific social class. Hence, he used their language and brought to his poetry influential traits from other forms of entertainment common among working classes. As M. Wynn Thomas says, however, he was ignored by workers of his time although he was concerned with their issues (65-67, 72-74).

More than a class set apart, poets were to be public, "bards of ensemble!" ("Prefatory Letter" 644). In this sense, Whitman understood poetry not as static or self-contained (as Poe and the New Criticism would do), but rather as an area of identity performance in which both poem and the poet were enacted (something Charles Bernstein would defend a century later) (Hoffman, *American Poetry* 18, 6-7). His main concern was not "aestheticism," and he was willing to disavow the name of poet if it was required, claiming: "If they call me no poet then no-poet it may be. I don't care what they call me – by one name or another name – it is all one – so that I produce the result – so that I get my word spoken and heard – maybe move men and women" (*Whitman in Camden* vol. 2, 150). The main thing was to get to the masses while performing himself as the poet figure he wanted to vindicate. The undefined nature of performance, as Nickas explains, is an advantage for artists (6), and Whitman was aware of that. Although he was breaking conventions (both in subject matter and form), it was a way to get a different relationship with the audience, and a different conception of the relationship between artwork and artist. Therefore, in Whitman's case, he used performance

to promote the type of poet and reader/citizen he thought America needed. Hoffman pinpoints he uses "a masculinity that takes the athletic and affective as indicators of nationality and patriotism." Influenced by different figures (Father Taylor, the Italian tenor Bettini, the orator Henry Ward Beecher) he figured out the voice he (as a poet) would like to articulate his poems in (*American Poetry* 29-30).

The promotion of better American types was also part of his program, and he started with the poet persona, based on his special personality and characterizing the democratic race that the system was not producing yet ("Walt Whitman on his art" 787). As written in a letter to William D. O'Connor (October 7th, 1882), whereas authors such as Ruskin were devoted to art through "making abstract works, poems, of some fine plot or subject, stirring, beautiful, very noble, completed within their own centre & radius," they were lacking flesh, as they had "nothing to do with the poet's personality." It was a mistake, he thought, to ignore that there were greater dramas than Shakespeare's "going on within [him]self & every human being," and that started to be his poetic aim ("Walt Whitman to William D. O'Connor" 242). In Whitman's creation of characters and personae we can find then the interaction of the individual with the surrounding situations. Actually, he described *Leaves of Grass* and later *Specimen Days* as an attempt to record a personality in a particular time and place (Balkun 38). Poetry became then "a living document of these years" and this, as some critics have commented, leads to further complexities in "the notion of a fixed, unitary selfhood" (Hoffman, *American Poetry* 30-31). As Mary M. A. Balkun has asserted, "he is the American writer who, perhaps more than any other, is the acknowledged adopter of personae, modifier of biographical information, and abettor in constructions such as the 'rough' and the 'good gray poet.'" He wrote his own reviews and promoted an image of himself according to his ideals in order to sell "at any given moment" (32-33).

Nonetheless, he was willing to use his image rather than a name to identify himself as the author of the book (although this changed over the years, as we will later see). He presented himself as the "perfect loafer" with a portrait which was part of the poem ("Song of Myself"), something that involved questioning the notions that people had at that time around the relationship between poet and poetry (Folsom 139). Later, however, this figure evolved, and during the Civil War (and his accounts in *Memoranda during the War*) his prophetic traits turned to those of a historian, becoming a fictive reporter-persona or chronicler. It was, as Erkkila exposes, an exercise of remembrance and reinvention, a work in which he

mythologized the soldiers and articulated a modern heroism marked by the anonymity and the American character as a feature for reconciliation (207).

In Whitman, then, there was a re-founding of the American personhood at the same time that there was a new image of the historical function that poets had (Grossman 880). As I will later argue, the poet was to be in constant change, or in constant embodiments of the unique identity of Walt Whitman (Hoffman, *American Poetry* 49). This self or identity conception follows Butler's idea of a "string of performances" with no "original, true, and authentic self" to point out (*Gender Trouble* 18). The identity of the poet, according to Hoffman, would be "contingent, approximate, always a copy of a copy," and this made it easy for him to adapt his figure to mass-production "through an open-endedness that," as the scholar claims, "both betrays the notion of the autotelic text and flows from his understanding of the performative nature of the selfhood" (*American Poetry* 32).

1. 4. Literary and Political Institutions in the Republic

Whitman's cultural program had the democratic logocracy as its framework. As it has been suggested above, poems were founding documents just as the Declaration and the Constitution. In this sense, as R. W. B. Lewis asserted in his famous work *The American Adam*, Whitman's approach to literature was that of building (performing), rather than representing, what he wanted to achieve. Whitman's poems, says Lewis, have "the air of being the first poems ever written, the first formulations in language of the nature of persons and things and of the relations between them" (44). From the pleasure of just seeing, the poet goes to the pleasure of naming or creating. In a nutshell, "Whitman articulated the dominant metaphysical illusion of his day and became the creator of his own world" (51). Thus, literature, along with the rest of the logocratic institutions, would be part of the framework that would constitute the American republic and its nation.

The notion of literature as an institution for democracy arose in the parallel development of the nation and its culture. Actually, Whitman considered the development of his work (the different editions of *Leaves of Grass*) intrinsically related to the development and progress of his country (Moon, "Introduction" xxvii). In his article on national literature he asserted that the greatness of a nation is found more in its books and its readership than in the laws and manners that rule them ("Have We" 333-34), and although without a clear statement, the notion of logocracy can be identified in the poet's literary ideas. In a letter to Edward Dowden, in 1872, he said

> I seek to make patent the appalling vacuum, in our times & here, of any school of great imaginative Literature & Art, fit for a Republican, Religious, & Healthy people—and to suggest & prophesy such a Literature as the only vital means of sustaining & perpetuating such a people. I would project at least the rough sketch of such a school of Literatures—an entirely new breed of authors, poets, American, comprehensive, Hegelian, Democratic, religious—& with an infinitely larger scope & method than any yet. (156)

While the literary development was also said to be a very slow process, the political unity of the country depended on its growth ("Have We" 333). Actually, it would be part of the third stage he identified in the development of the New World. After the "planning and putting on record the political foundation rights of immense masses of people," and later after the promotion of "material prosperity, wealth, produce . . . newspapers, a currency for money circulation, &c.," it was the time to promulgate "a native expression-spirit . . . to be evidenced by original authors and poets to come, by American personalities, . . . and by a sublime and serious Religious Democracy sternly taking command, dissolving the old" ("Democratic Vistas" 236). As Kenneth Burke implies, these ideas revealed a positive view, a plan for the future coming out of the present illnesses to be overcome (28). The US was absorbed in the material development, but the lack of spiritual compensation meant for Whitman the "inevitable precedents and providers for home-born, transcendent, democratic literature," although it was yet to be developed ("Have We" 337-38).

These ideas were articulated in religious terms, a trait that S. J. Mack has interpreted and vindicated as part of the poet's program of "civic religion." A concept that has been ignored by progressive and Left scholars and critics, this civic religion is positively associated with Whitman's patriotism and the American pragmatic tradition, and it is seen as the base for Whitman's proposal of democracy as something more than a political system. Rather, democracy (America being its main synonym) would be a socio-cultural process; hence literature's important role within it (*The Pragmatic* xvii-xviii). The spiritual advance, although articulated in religious terms, had the democratic citizenship as its main objective. For the poet, "good theology, good art, or good literature" shared their appeal "to emotions, pride, love, spirituality" in humankind, at the same time that they were associated to "the materiality and personality of a land" ("Democratic Vistas" 237). Poetry and imaginative literature were the medium of moral ideology, which would be more important, after all, than institutions and laws. The aim of this anti-feudal and independent-builder culture and literature was the promotion of citizens with self-sufficiency, self-governance and, the most important, civic religion, as a means to counterbalance the fragmenting and alienating effects of the extreme

individualism of the system (S. J. Mack, "A Theory of Organism" 147).[10] In this framework, then, writing was part of the national project of building America and the American identity as the culmination of modern humanity ("Preface to 1879 edition," *Leaves* 658). Particularly, poetry writing drew on what he called the "*divine* grammar." After his disillusionment with party politics, he was rather interested to "speak with the soul" (Erkkila 49-50; Whitman, *Daybooks and Notebooks* vol. 3 762). Rituals, more than declared politics, "leave their mark on the national imagination" (Portelli 66).

If democracy needed of a different literature to promote a "civic religion," Whitman thought it necessary to challenge the idea of high culture. Democracy would not get rid of inherited (old, Medieval) values with its classist frameworks. Culture had the power to perpetuate values long after the historical moment had passed, thus blocking the development of one's own identity (S. J. Mack, *The Pragmatic* 140). Thus, the institution of Literature and cultural canon as it came from Europe should be revised, along with the notions of literariness. He would do this with the inspiration of other foundational texts. His oratorical style meant a challenge of the canon. Due to his job as a journalist, and influenced by the republican texts, Whitman's understanding of language pointed to the lack of formal distinction between written and oral forms. This took him to use linguistic strategies such as syntactic parallelism, dynamic cataloguing, using the first person, synthesizing compound words, etc. (Warren, "Reconstructing" 82-85).

His project of a poetic tour of public readings added to the destabilization of the written (fix) form. The silent text would become a collective cultural event in which the artist would come back as the bard to the tribe, not replacing the object, but establishing himself as a kind of intermediary whose deliverance would actually mark the object of art. The appearance of the phonograph shook his poetics too; not so much because it was a recording of a voice and thus a permanent proof of its existence in the past, but rather because in his poetry he had aimed at recording (in written) a voiced form. These ideas might entail the closure of the voiced text, its stable trace on paper (or wax), but Whitman kept in his mind the variable, instable, fluid component of speech, and it covered also his writing. As the US, as any human being, texts were to change, in their different editions or their voiced forms.

[10] S. J. Mack has identified, however, a "deeper principle" of personalism. He was not promoting a standardized personality type congenial to the capitalist system where he lived. Rather, he wanted to work towards an "idiocrasy of universalism." This tackled directly the paradox of the individual autonomy and the relationship of the individual with the culture. In personalism, Mack observes, the individual follows some self-rules, but they are "ideologically informed by universalized culture." Thus, the individual and the collective were not hierarchically understood. A new self was being presented in which both sides (the one and the whole) were different aspects united in the same social self (*The Pragmatic* 145).

As Jason Stacy explains in his introduction to *Leaves*, improvisation and open-endedness would then challenge two convictions that were present in the sphere of letters at that time: the sense of the text as a self-contained artifact, not related to the author; and the understanding of identity as a performative organism made up of constant changes and lacking stability. As the nation itself through subsequent texts and amendments, the poems were "in a perpetual state of becoming," a characteristic that Hoffman has explained as "a metonym for Whitman's performance of self and nation" (Hoffman, *American Poetry* 36-37, 32).

All this goes in line with the instability proposed by Derrida in his thesis on "Literature" and "Literariness." Actually, Whitman embraced this "absolute unliterariness" as a mark for a better literature and a better democracy. As he explains,

> I have always been best pleased with what seems most to disregard literariness: the artistic, the formal, the traditional aesthetic, the savor of mere words, jingles, sound—I have always eschewed: language itself as language I have discounted—would have rejected it altogether but that it serves the purpose of vehicle, is a necessity—our mode of communication. But my aim has been, to so subordinate that, no one could know it existed—as in fine plate glass one sees the objects beyond and does not realize the glass between. My determination being to make the story of man, his physiological, emotional, spiritual, self, tell its own story, unhindered by artificial agencies. (*Whitman in Camden* vol. 6, 386)

Although not completely, this has certain elements in common with Derrida's approach: there is no literature essence, "no truth of literature" but the fine glass where you place it. Literature might be read in any type of language, as it is "our mode of communication" and we trace a communicative act in language (Attridge 7). In the end, literature is an institution, the "high culture" that some define and limit, "[a] space in which, in principle, anything and everything may be said," and delimiting what is considered as such becomes rather a political act (Attridge 24). Further, it might be understood, with the French philosopher, a "historical institution" coming from Europe, from England and its undemocratic system.

As a result, Whitman's position was sort of ambivalent. On the one hand he rejects the idea of literature as a political institution, as it may lead to the same corrupted state of "high culture". On the other hand, he vindicates the institutional role that literature eventually incarnates, especially because of its peculiar nature. For him, literature is a "non-subordinated soul," an element of disruption that enables the individual freedom and autonomy that the republic needs. By using speech acts, and relying on future readers, it is a more dialogical way of developing a democracy (Olsen 313). Hence, the national literature that Whitman predicts is "to prove grander and more important for the Commonwealth than

its politics and material wealth and trade, vast and indispensable as those are" ("Have We" 333). It is to lead the nation and later the rest of the world ("Democratic Vistas" 239). That is why, as Harold Aspiz has explained, Whitman "wished not so much to reform the state . . . as to remove the institutionalized restraints that thwart personal development" (116), and literature was the organism to do that:

> The priest departs, the divine literatus comes. Never was anything more wanted than, to-day, and here in the States, the poet of the modern is wanted, or the great literatus of the modern. At all times, perhaps, the central point in any nation . . . is its national literature, especially its archetypal poems. Above all previous lands, a great original literature is surely to become the justification and reliance, (in some respects the sole reliance,) of American democracy. ("Democratic Vistas" 200)

Thus, literature is not an organism promoted by political institutions; it is an institution in itself, a counterinstitutional institution, as Derrida says, a social, legal, and political process, a term whose definition is an "ethical, political act" (Attridge 24). Instead of reducing the institution to the canon imposed during the colonial period (i.e. Shakespeare, Homer), Whitman vindicates literature in the common language of Americans, with their own topics, a property present in whatever form a nation chooses to build itself.

Thus, in the same way that Derrida finds in literature an arena of "resistance to the philosophical tradition of conceptual thought" (Attridge 25), Whitman gets this institutional awareness and puts it to work against the institution (of "high culture") itself through redefining the role of the poet and a more democratic literature. Leslie Hill explains that Derrida does not renounce the truth, but rather presents a different relation leading to a reinscription in "powerful, larger, more stratified contexts"[11] (Hill 38-39; Derrida, *Limited Inc.* 146). Drawing a parallel line of thought, we could say Whitman's redefinition of literature is an attempt to deal with its lack of limits within the framework of a politically-aimed project. In this sense, with Whitman the blurring lines that Austin acknowledged in his own systematization of language affect the limit he placed in the exception of literature as well. Literature may be consciously institutionalized within the structure of democracy, and it should only work along with its civic values. Something similar will happen in the case of Allen Ginsberg, as we will see in the following part of this chapter.

[11] Hill modifies the translation and writes "more powerful, more inclusive, more stratified contexts" (39).

2. Ginsberg's Church of Poetry

> If anybody wants a statement of values—it is this, that I am ready to die for poetry & for the truth that inspires poetry—and will do so in any case—as all men, whether they like it or no—I believe in the American Church of Poetry.
>
> (Ginsberg, "When the Mode of the Music Changes the Walls of the City Shake")

To understand Ginsberg's belief in "the American Church of Poetry" we need to consider how the logocracy originated in the eighteenth century kept its dominance and reached the twentieth century. If in the previous chapter the Enlightenment gave way to the more individualist Romanticism, the ideological frameworks which characterized the twentieth century in the US turned much more complex and varied. The appearance of the radio and then the cinema and the television meant a modification of the logocracy that maps, letters, newspapers and institutional speech acts had established before. In this section I will deal with the progress from Whitman's logocratic poetics to Ginsberg's vow to "make Mantra of American language." We have to jump from the late nineteenth century to the late 1940s, when Ginsberg started to write and elaborate his own conception of poetry. Now my task is to review the change of mentality that the different media supposed for the understanding of language and its nature, how logocracy changed. In the first chapter, I drew a brief picture of the academic panorama that the Beats found when they started university. Stuck to a very strict so-called "apolitical" program, English departments (as well as the rest of the academic areas) were far from rising debate over the definition of what America should be. Rather on the contrary, they were all working for a homogeneous view in which no ideology was supposed to underlie. The role of universities was basically to act as a reinforcement of the monolith of ideas that the American society embodied, "at least," as Walter M. Cummins and George G. Gordon say, "on the surface," while ignoring the tensions that were underneath (31-32). Let us then explore what Ginsberg got to think regarding all this.

2. 1. From Revolutionary Logocracy to the Twentieth-Century TV Consciousness

The American (and Western) twentieth century has been widely analyzed from the point of view of media development. Words would be still present in magazines, newspapers, and the radio, but the appearance of television would change the ideological framework people moved in. In fact, it is precisely the word "ideological" that many authors theorized about,

from "the second Wittgenstein" who posed in his *Philosophical Investigations* that language is not a single game, but that we build our realities through the combination of endless language games, to authors as Baudrillard, who analyzed the nature of television and its influence over society. In the second half of the twentieth century, Americans had to learn how to build themselves, this time through television. Cinema had also its importance in this sense. Any screen displaying images in movement would become a perfect media to project models to follow. As I said before, McLuhan's thesis was that television brought along the decline of movies, national magazines and even comic books. Compared with other media, TV had indeed the greatest power over the perception and behavior of the viewers. Cummins and Gordon explain this in their book *Programming Our Lives: Television and American Identity*. After decades of hearing the radio, which worked with the words of radio speakers and the listener's imagination, the public had to learn how to watch a home screen. The engagement that it demanded was of a lower degree, and the focus became more fragmented than it used to be with the radio.

However, apart from its perceptional effects, television offered different contents than the radio. While the latter constituted its own world of characters based on entertainment programs, television left more space for news broadcasting, it relied more on the "real" world, either in terms of business, politics, social movements, or less serious matters such as the life of celebrities and soap operas. Furthermore, in contrast to movies, television became part of the Americans' life so much that it affected their consciousness "without awareness because of its omnipresence" (Cummins and Gordon 13). The viewer's relationship with reality was influenced in two ways. On the one hand, after the Korean War, which was reported through photographs displayed on television, the Vietnam War was fully transmitted through videos, changing the political positions of the population. On the other hand, during the first years of existence, television was an arena where the reality that Americans wanted was actually projected, becoming a "cohesive bond . . . a healer while providing a window to the events impacting American society" (Roman xi). The new devise also gathered the nuclear family to see the life of model families as those in *Father Knows Best, Leave It To Beaver*, and *Ozzie and Harriet*. The characters were always white, with two or three children, and lived in suburbia houses, so the result was the idealized picture "in which they wished to live," far away from the reality of "drugs, gang violence, or teenage pregnancy" (Cummins and Gordon 30-31). The farmer had cleared the way for the modern American type, the "Organization Man" coming out of the post-war panorama in the US, where the GI program helped a middle-class development, the phenomenon of the baby boom, and

new models of behavior (29, 195). Thus, Ginsberg wrote in "345 W. 15th St." about his failure to be a "workmanlike tender churl":

> I wished that I were working for $10,000 a year.
> I looked all right in business suits but my heart was weak with fear.
> I wished I owned an apartment uptown on the East Side,
> So that my gentle breeding nurtured, had not died. (*Collected Poems* 82)

Similarly, in "My Alba" (*CP* 97) he describes the alienation of that model of man: "obedient prompt / poorly paid . . . fainted in offices . . . deodorant battleships / serious business industry." In this context, the TV also contributed to the increase in material desires and, especially, the "expectation of immediate gratification" (Cummins and Gordon 195). Nonetheless, when critical movements started to have a voice on television, other expressions of Americanness started to be grown, as it would happen with the Beat writers.

Television did also have an impact on the language of the media. Cummins and Gordon point out the way the timings imposed by television limited the delivery of messages coming from politicians. Their speeches had to be accurate and synthesized in short sentences so that they could be cut for television. As a result, their discourses could not be complex and extended. As these authors argue, "TV has changed the nature of what we attend to from our candidates and in turn has changed what our candidates are willing to tell us" (Cummins and Gordon 75). Also, along with the decrease of the number of newspapers, there was an evolution towards the reliance on visual material over words, but the importance of the latter (written and spoken) could still be felt. In 1938, before the appearance of television, but already living with the radio, John Dos Passos wrote in *U.S.A.*

> U.S.A. is the slice of a continent. U.S.A. is a group of holding companies, some aggregations of trade unions, a set of laws bound in calf, a radio network, a chain of moving picture theatres . . . U.S.A. is a lot of men buried in their uniforms in Arlington Cemetery. U.S.A. is the letters at the end of an address when you are away from home. But mostly U.S.A. is the speech of the people. (vii)

There was awareness about the relationship between the state of affairs and the language that was used to describe, define and, ultimately, interpret it. Other authors theorized about this process as well. George Orwell, in his 1946 essay "Politics and the English Language," asserted that language and politico-economic decline were associated. The way we think, he argued, marked our language, and our language marked our thoughts back. For political regeneration, professional writers were needed, an idea which reminds us of Emerson's and Whitman's vindication of American letters to rise the American spirit. The same did William Carlos Williams think, claiming in a letter to Robert Creeley that "the government can never

be more than the government of the words" and that, consequently, "[b]ad art is . . . that which does not serve in the continual service of cleansing the language of all fixations upon dead, stinking dead, usages of the past" ("Williams to Creeley" 140).

Nonetheless, Orwell was also referring to the manipulation of discourse to create a parallel reality of euphemisms and misconceptions, something authors such as Louis Althusser, Jean Baudrillard and even Noam Chomsky would point out in the future with concepts as the "Ideological State Apparatus" and the "Manufacture of Consent." The cruelty of the realities to be transmitted on TV reduced political language to "euphemism, question-begging and sheer cloudy vagueness." Terms like *pacification*, *transfer of population*, *rectification of frontiers* and *elimination of unreliable elements* were coined to hide air raids, eviction and deportation, imprisonment and execution. "Such phraseology," says Orwell, "is needed if one wants to name things without calling up mental pictures of them" (261-62). This is applied to the context of the after-war period and the Red Scare described by Susan-Mary Grant. There was a change, he asserts, from a "wartime rhetoric of freedom" to "a new language of legislation" which was aimed at securing freedom. Nonetheless, this fear of extremism did actually turn into extremism itself from the media and other institutions (279-80), something that would be reflected on language (279-80).

Chomsky's term "manufacture of consent" was actually coined by a twentieth-century American journalist, Walter Lippmann. In an article with the same title, Chomsky analyzes the differences between democratic and totalitarian systems and the tools they use. While totalitarian systems use force to control what people do, democracy controls what people think through "the unstated framework for thinkable thought," helped by critics who tolerate the system and "play by the rules" (Chomsky 132). The manufacture of consent is then a system which deflects attention to other problems, deviating it from "the real source of great deal of violence and suffering in the world." Propaganda acts in democracies as violence in totalitarian systems, creating the sense of stability and freedom, or of indoctrination, depending on who the artificer is (124). Roland Barthes does also point to these "ideological systems" and refers to them as fictions (novels) "supported by a social jargon, a sociolect, with which it identifies":

> [W]e are all caught up in the truth of language, that is, in their regionality, drawn into the formidable rivalry which controls their proximity. For each jargon (each fiction) fights for hegemony; if power is on its side, it spreads everywhere in the general and daily occurrences of social life, it becomes *doxa*, nature*: this is the supposedly apolitical jargon of politicians, of agents of the State, of the media, of conversation*;

> but even out of power, even when power is against it, the rivalry is reborn, the jargons split and struggle among themselves. (emphasis added) (Barthes 28)

He also writes about "the logosphere," the world of language, "a vast and perpetual conflict of paranoias" that are dominated by ideology (29, 32). This sort of ideas which are very close to the concept of logocracy started to spread throughout the Western world during the second part of the twentieth century, but they also explained what had happened in the first one. The "ideological state apparatus" (Althusser's term) included the TV and had the *homo consumptus* as its goal. Derrida later introduced the term "artifactuality" to point to the artificial construction of the fact on TV: "We ought never forget the full import of this index: when a journalist or politician seems to be speaking to us, in our homes, while looking us straight in the eye, he (or she) is in the process of reading, on screen, at the dictation of a 'prompter,' a text composed somewhere else, at some other time, sometimes by others, or even by a whole network of anonymous authors" (*Echographies of Television* 4). Ginsberg seems to be aware of this last idea, although —as we will later see— he understood words in terms of black magic, of tribal or more (let us say) primitive sensibilities. Moreover, as Randall B. Woods explains, consuming and shopping as "a major recreational activity" kept some of the Puritan beliefs in material success as "a badge of divine favor," to have possessions was "not only fun but also positively moral" (127). Thus, commercials started to be the short spots that we see today, offering many different products in few minutes, transmitting the message "through implication rather than direct statement" (Cummins and Gordon 15). Families got together to see other (model) families, the population started to have the same cultural references from the limited number of channels, and for the first time politicians' speeches were seen and heard by masses of prospective voters, getting closer, as Cummins and Gordon write, to "the type of mind control depicted in *Animal Farm* or *1984*" (90).

Therefore, consciousness and language, as Ginsberg would claim, were united (if not the same), and affected the political development of the country. In his journals of the '50s and '60s, he wrote that "[l]aws hurt people, in U.S., like waking up to a vast police conspiracy to hypnotize and cow whole nations of individual souls under the ancient arbitrary will of a malevolent state" (163). After the World War II and during the Cold War, the US articulated the conflict in polarized terms. As President Harry S. Truman claimed in a "Special Message to Congress" on March 12, 1947, the population was convinced they would have to choose between American "free institutions, representative government, free elections, guarantees of individual liberty, freedom of speech and religion, and freedom from political oppression" and, on the other hand, the Soviet system of "terror and oppression, a controlled press and

radio, fixed elections, and the suppression of personal freedoms" (26). The term freedom would have different meanings, each time decided by the speaker in charge of the deliverance. The discourses on television would look for consensus and avoid class conflict, a tendency that would also lead to the notion of classlessness where the similarities between the working and middle class were emphasized, and their differences (which had hardly changed at all) were ignored (Hallberg 118). The misuse of words was then everywhere and involved all types of topics, beginning in the field of politics, to society, and even to poetry, as we saw in the previous chapter.

Hence, after taking over "the military guardianship of Europe," the challenge for the US was to "measure up culturally" as well (Hallberg 3). Universities and other cultural institutions were key factors in this sense. Actually, although they were not popularly trusted, intellectuals of the 1950s were, according to Robert von Hallberg, "more influential ideologically than any other group." As seen above, in the 1960s they started to have more and more presence in the government, the number of professors, students, colleges and faculties increased, and the university was labeled by Daniel Bell as "the primary institution of the new society" (Hallberg 119-20). Along with television, the academic world was part of the state apparatus to such an extent that intellectuals started to be in the government. The state and the institution of the university were working together so that no leaf of dissent could grow there, as exemplified by the creation of the American Assembly of Columbia University and the elaboration of the *Goals for Americans*, a policy document listing the national objectives for the 1960s following its "nonpartisan" nature (Hallberg 34). In the case of literature, standards and canons guaranteed the assent, which meant writers to be recognized and publicly praised should support the State policies in order to "preserve, by education, a hold on the past and a claim on the future" (27). As a result, the universities were felt by the Beats, and particularly by Ginsberg, as the house of paranoia and a source of "brainwashed bullshit" rather than *Culture* (his emphasis) (*Composed on the Tongue* 70-71, "It's a Vast Trap!" 78).

Television brought the image of the new American type, along with another model of household. It was not a farm anymore, but a big city flat, or a detached house in the suburbs. The self-made man had the material reward of a car, a fridge, a washing machine (for his wife), and enough money to spend the weekends at the mall. Every new habit was supplied by the products that were advertised on TV. The American was a self-made and self-bought individual with access to freedom of choices between a channel or the other, a

brand and another. Nonetheless, against this format of American identity, the Beats would make their own contribution of "Americanness" based on different aspects. In the case of Ginsberg, as we well see, his theories about language and consciousness would help him explain how to get away from the ideological apparatus of the state, related at the same time to the poetics he would develop.

2. 2. Ginsberg's Conception of Language and Consciousness

Ginsberg and his Beat peers were attacked by "university academic intellectuals" because they opened up "an area of another consciousness, a planetary ecological consciousness, in a sense." Consciousness within the academy was "narrowing down . . . and it was the initiation of the cold war theoretics for them, the beginning of that grand international paranoia" (Ginsberg, *Composed* 70-1). As we will see, this ideological state apparatus was labeled by Ginsberg as a source for mechanical consciousness. Inspired by authors such as Whitman, Blake and Cézanne, he developed in speeches and lessons his ideas about language (written and spoken) and its relation to the collective consciousness which could act politically in a different way from the one the traditional left had followed. Consciousness was not only a matter of language, but also about the physical state of the body, that is why drugs conformed a path towards transcendence too.

The influence coming from other cultures such as those of the Native Americans or Eastern forms of religion led Ginsberg to analyze the disposition of words on the page, the way they appeared in the mind, and their conflict when transcribed on the paper. As Walter Ong would do in later decades, he considered thoughtfully the tensions between linguistics and semantic forms. The invention (or discovery) of writing had supposed a change in the way we assume the information we receive, says Ong (78). Similarly, Ginsberg stated that the way the American population received information from the media made up a structure for the way they used their minds. These ideas would end up reflected on his conception of writing as the undistinguished mixture of form and content where syntax was "a function of the soul," a "nonlinear" accumulation of details given by a "rhapsodic voice" (Dennison 451-452). In his *Indian Journals*, Ginsberg continued with his questioning of the use of written and spoken language, as well as their relation to each other. Prompted by post-Einsteinian science and theory about the relationship between instruments and studied object, he concluded that "the structure of the brain-mind determines the interpretation of the 'outside' universe" (38). He enquired why the arrangement of the lines on the page should not change and adopt a rather organic form to express associations in a different way. "There's no reason why every

line must begin at the left hand margin. A silly habit, as if all the thoughts in the brain were lined up like a conscript army," he argued. On the contrary, space-jumps and broken syntax were perfect to express hesitancies and interruptions. Writers should experiment "[g]raphing the movement of the mind on the page," and avoiding unnatural patterns such as the iambic pentameter and conventional verse writing (40-41).

The problem with language, however, seemed to radiate from its abstraction. In his journals of the early 50s and 60s, he stated that language was worn out, and that his role was to "find, among other things, a new word for the universe, I'm tired of the old ones, they mean too many things from other times & people" (*Allen Verbatim* 29-30, *Early Fifties* 10). The mechanical consciousness was everywhere, but once identified, it could be deactivated. Reflecting on the public and private consciousness, Ginsberg and his peers realized they "were in the midst of a vast American hallucination, that a hallucinatory public consciousness was being constructed in the air waves and television and radio and newspapers, even in literature" (*Composed* 74). Exposed to the imposition of "mechanical consciousness of mankind," Americans were the prey of "money, time, machines, institutional education, & all the means of communication" (Bowering 371-72). Thus, evil language encouraged and helped to perpetuate the involvement of US in international conflicts (such as the Vietnam War) by distorting the image of the American army and its duty. As Ginsberg pointed out, the poorness in language quality limited the options of the poet, who is then doomed to use a "glut of clichés and adolescent vocabulary" to "express complex adult feelings and ideas" (P. Carroll, "I Lift" 298, 308). In this context of ideological control, the unconscious element is present, even in anti-capitalist systems. As he explains,

> All governments including the Cuban are still operating within the rules of identity forced on them by already outmoded modes of consciousness. I say outmoded since it has brought all Govts. to edge of world destruction. No govt., not even the most Marxian revolutionary & well-intended like Cuba presumably, is guiltless in the general world mess, no one can afford to be righteous any more. Righteous and right & wrong are still fakes of the old suicidal identity. ("Prose Contribution" 343)

Language perpetuated the corruption, regardless of the system, and the Beats aimed at creating an alternative to the language of the media, which was then filling the air "with pompous personages orating and not saying anything spontaneous or real from their own minds, they were only talking stereotypes" unconscious of their talk (*Composed*, 71). In this sense, censorship supposed a limit for consciousness as well as physical states of the individual ("Prose Contribution" 344, *Allen Verbatim* 126-27). These ideas about the

"[o]rganized system of manipulation" would be present in many of Ginsberg's poems, from *Kaddish* to "Wichita Vortex Sutra" (Mottram 262-63). He identified them in human nature, and so was suspicious even in the case of democratic systems. The solution was not to take sides, as there was a risk to "become like them, a limited identity" ("When the Mode" 335). In fact, the role of the poet, according to Ginsberg, was to restore "the prophetic function of language." As in "Wichita Vortex Sutra," the corruption of language is the origin of war; the "formulas for reality" appearing on the media distort the reality and "impose a false consciousness" that the poet can replace (Lin 152-53).

In order to demolish the homogeneous way of thinking, Ginsberg's proposal included a new relationship between the author and reader, one based on consciousness and vision. To do that, after some years of struggle, he realized he had to break formal logic presentation of ideas and opt for a "bare communication available in words direct from the soul," removing "the control center ways of communication" (Bowering 377). The conventional forms of communication, he found, were incompatible with the expression of what was going on in his mind (mystical illuminations and deep emotion). The only way to express this event was by "spontaneous irrational juxtaposition of sublimely related fact" ("When the Mode" 324-25). Therefore, influenced by Cézanne's painting technique of juxtaposition, which was also related to Fenollosa's ideograms and Pound's Imagist tenets, Ginsberg developed what Hart Crane had called "logic of metaphor" antedating the pure logic and basis of speech, consciousness and thought-extension (Crane 78, Davidson 78-79). It took him years to adapt Cézanne's "supernatural" method to poetry writing (Portugés, "Ginsberg's Cézanne 147), but he explained this process with the following words:

> [J]ust as Cezanne doesn't use perspective lines to create space, but it's a juxtaposition of one color against another color . . . so, I had the idea . . . that by unexplicable, unexplained nonperspective line, that is, juxtaposition of one *word* against another, a *gap* between the two words – like the space gap in the canvas – there'd be a gap between the two words which the mind would fill in with the sensation of existence. ("The Art of Poetry" n. pag.)

Working then with associational meanings rather than from logical significance, he had to sacrifice articulating parts of speech and leaving only bare nouns in intermixed catalogs which remind the reader of Whitman's writing. Also, in this mixture of nouns in juxtaposed dynamics, the Dadaist writings of Apollinaire and Cendrars had an influence, along with sound-based composition of percussive syllables (as in "kind king light of mind") and combination of multiple semantic fields ("teahead joyride neon") (Davidson 79). Ginsberg maintained that this kind of writing was a closer depiction of mind processes, based

more on images than in logically articulated ideas; it was a "catalyst to visionary states of being" ("The Craft Interview" n. pag.). In fact, as he expressed in his *Indian Journals*, "grammar / syntax / order" were just elements of convention which censored experiences that might be embarrassing, although real (Géfin 281-282). He referred to this process of writing as "basket-weaving," especially in his use during the composition of *The Fall of America*. In this collection of poems, the texts juxtapose perceptions coming from newspapers and radio reports with memories and observational details of immediate happenings during the journey he was going through. It worked, according to Laszlo Géfin, as "electrical discharges" so that the reader could get relations unseen or obscure before (283). These ideas went along with his belief in self-expression in spontaneous language and thus "unadulterated attention" (Portugés, "Ginsberg's Cézanne" 151), although rather than the romantic paradigm, he would justify his position with a scientific approach where stream of consciousness was even more logical than the "Newtonian thought" (*Composed* 55-56).

In relation to this, the concept of "word" became critical for Ginsberg. While he took into account Timothy Leary's thesis that humans would end up getting by without words, he was also aware of his position as a poet, as "wordsmith," and the risks for his identity of living in a wordless world (Morgan 336). On the one hand, mentioning Wittgenstein, he asserted that getting rid of words supposed being able to break with the "monotheistic memory-conception of one holy eternity" ("Prose Contribution" 341). On the other hand, he might lose himself along with words. In a letter to Howard Shulman, he explained this point in the following terms:

> For further awareness lay in dropping every fixed concept of self, identity, role, ideal, habit and pleasure. It meant dropping language itself, *words*, as medium of consciousness. It meant literally altering consciousness outside of what was already the fixed habit of language-inner-thought-monologue-abstraction-mental-image-symbol-mathematical-abstraction. It meant exercising unknown and unused areas of the physical brain. . . . I thought Poetry was doing all along! But the poetry I'd been practicing depended on living inside the structure of language, depended on words as the medium of consciousness & therefore the medium of conscious being. (qtd. in Miles 293).

When Burroughs told him to "go right ahead, into space, outside of Logos, outside of time, outside of concepts of Eternity & God & Faith & Love" for Ginsberg it meant losing all certainty and center of reference, "exercising unknown and unused areas of the physical brain." But it was in this conflict that the use of drugs and meditation saved the gap ("Prose Contribution 340-41). Just as he had noticed the inherited meanings of corrupted language,

surely he could use language's changing nature to get to different thinking patterns (*Allen Verbatim* 33)

He found the key to escape these limitations of mechanic consciousness in the ability to get absorbed in words rather than to pay attention to them; to observe language as Stein did, as a yogic exercise where it becomes "pure prayer meditation, removed, perhaps even from its associations" and getting then another modality of consciousness in language (*Allen Verbatim* 157-58). In other words, there was a possibility of redefining the use of words and turn them into "purely expressive, subjectively expressive, where the breath exhaled is a conscious articulation of feeling." By including the body, Ginsberg balanced the abstraction of word use and gave it the property of event, that is, of a mantra (*Allen Verbatim* 26-27). Therefore, it was not only about expanding the mind, but rather dealing with the overburdened consciousness and attempt to disentangle it by naming and making totem phrases, that is, making phrases with presences (Dennison 170-71). By applying such techniques, he aimed at "annihilat[ing] mass media power centers of control" and stepping into "unrecognizable areas of awareness" and of "BEING" ("Prose Contribution" 342).

In this mantra writing, naming was the main concern and it involved a different conception of the truth. With mantra, Ginsberg was "not attempting to carry any weight of 'reality' other than a pure subjective projection from the body" (*Allen Verbatim* 25). There was no truth anymore, but different points of view taken because of practical reasons (Ginsberg, interview by Gloria Brame n. pag.). At the same time, though, this mantric writing or speech was able to dismantle the corrupt language which sustained the war in Vietnam. "In brief," as Paul Carroll explains, "the mantra is one of true or beatific language; its job is to dissipate and annihilate the slaughter and moral barbarism created by false or evil language" by using correct, accurate and, ultimately, magical vocabulary instead. This involves also religious elements, since the mantra is, after all, God incarnate in a "true and beatific," memorable, language; it is made up of "strong, vivid, and lucid words" ("I Lift" 294-95, 299). Moreover, the use of mantra was also due to the physiological effects of its rhythms. The sensation coming from the vibration (coming, at the same time, from breathing) led to different ways of thinking, both in listener and reader, who responded mechanically and reproduced the same cadence of thought in the writer's (or speaker's) mind. What is more, as he explained,

> One function of a mantra is that the name of the god is identical with the god itself. You say Shiva or Krishna's name, Krishna is the sound of Krishna. It's Krishna in the dimension of sound—so if you pronounce his name, you, your

> body, is *being* Krishna; your breath is being Krishna, itself. . . .So [in "Wichita Vortex Sutra"] I wanted to—in the English language— make a series of syllables that would be identical with a historical event. I wanted the historical event to be the end of the war. (*Composed on the Tongue* 46-47)

In a nutshell, sound and thought made up an identical unit in both sides of the printed page or the stage (Hungerford 279). Ginsberg explains the conservative rejection of certain kinds of music precisely because of these effects. Jazz and rock 'n' roll were characterized by "hypnotic rhythms and body movements and strange vibrations" which "alter[ed] the consciousness of the kids and hypnotize[d] them," leading to behaviors which were "not like American 'reasonable' morals" (*Allen Verbatim* 34).

Moreover, mantra had a complex ontology. It was a totem, but a changing one. As he explained,

> [y]ou can't make a statement absolutely descriptive of an event even if the statement is identical with it. Even an Om is not eternal, in the sense that the Om changes with the Om-er, from minute to minute, so there's no hiding place even in mantra. There's no rest from continued creation or language. (*Allen Verbatim* 33)

This unstable ontology of mantra came associated with its effects, it was seen as a kind of action. Taking into account that, for him, protest was not enough to change the world, and that the role of the poet (as an activist) was to "make conscious what people already know unconsciously" (209); mantras (or the poems he wrote) were seen as spiritual speech acts after all. As Amy Hungerford maintains, for Ginsberg and his contemporaries, performative language had a socially coercive power, and this affected the New Criticism conviction that language did not mean anything, but rather *was* itself. Ginsberg and Austinian authors realized that language did not mean, but rather *did* something in a sort of supernatural event (Hungerford 290-91).

As a result, against the old ways of the traditional Left, he would propose political formulas which ranged from demonstrations to "dozens of imaginative, funny, and peaceful ways to avert violence," among which meditation sit-ins and mantra chanting were mentioned (Morgan 418). Hate discourse led to more hate, so "Americans ha[d] to stop calling policemen pigs and use a different mantra on these human souls in order to transform them into helpers of the gods rather than enemies of the gods" (*Composed* 89). Poetry would have a role, as we will see, among all these ideas, as it would help replace intellectual abstractions of corruption with purer forms of language use and thinking patterns (Lin 62). It was to be a form of meditation, as it involved working with words, "look[ing] *in* between

thought," exploring and observing mind processes (Portugés, *The Visionary* 104-5); at the same time, mantra conjoined the *being* and the *doing*.

Sex and the use of drugs would accompany these practices, as they helped achieve other states of the mind. Always keeping the intellectual goal in his mind, he listed the drugs he wanted to try and their effects in his diaries (*Martyrdom* 85), and emphasized its spiritual gain: "the lesson of drug," the "change of the physical body & brain, / change of brain consciousness . . . the cellular / switchboard making new combinations" (*Indian Journals* 52-53). He got to the conclusion that the State should compromise with this consciousness exploration, although he also thought that drugs were the margin and would rather help against the corporative brainwashing of the status quo (*Allen Verbatim* 118). He participated and celebrated the experiments that some universities and research institutions were carrying out with drugs (as those by Timothy Leary). In fact, he thought it should be accessible for everyone, not just for some privileged groups of people. Space exploration, according to him, was secondary to scientific exploration of consciousness, the brain and the nervous system ("Prose Contribution" 343). Nevertheless, he also maintained this should be not taken as a hedonist vindication, and declared years later that he was disappointed when they were used for partying (Morgan 98).

Acquiring other consciousness patterns implicated then working with words, analyzing the use of the mind and the relationship with the body (in the case of mantra and meditation), the observation of already settled convictions that came not from the individual's soul and pure human condition, but from the outside parameters of thinking and institutional (governmental) indoctrination of the population. The importance of words and (written and spoken) language in this process, as a reaction to the positivist and over-rational approach to language that was dominant at the beginning of the twentieth century, led Ginsberg to the intuitional processes that poetry could contribute with in the consciousness revolution he wanted to lead.

2.3. Poetry and Politics in Ginsberg's Cultural Program

If Ginsberg was to be confronted with the conflict of choosing between a poetry to be understood by everyone, with a clear revolutionary content, and, on the other hand, a poetry not logically understood, but with an unconventional form, he would directly go for the second one, although some aspects of the first position were also present in his poetry. From a very early age, the poet wanted to develop the ability to change the world and help the people. He was politically conscious at the age of eleven, when he got obsessed with the

Spanish Civil War. In 1941, being fifteen years old, he wrote in his diary about his school achievements (including participation in debating clubs and student publications), and his interests in journalism (he kept a collection of newspaper headlines). At that age he defined himself as "an atheist and a combination of Jeffersonian Democrat [and] Socialist Communist," clarifying that he did not "agree with communist foreign policy and dictatorship" (*Martyrdom* 14). When he was very young, he promised he would never "betray the ideal . . . to help the masse in misery" and so entered law school. However, he would do this as a "genteel type rather than 'one of the roughs.'" As he acknowledged later in his life, he did not know the people he wanted to lead, and this prompted him to change his lifestyle, go out with non-intellectuals and poor people in order to get to know the argot of jazz and New York slums; in a nutshell, he aimed at "varying [his] social experience" ("Prose Contribution" 335-36). Later on, after presenting the American reality through the image of Moloch in "Howl," his compromise with political action became more and more explicit, and in terms of content, his poetry became a clear denounce of the "wastes of mechanized world" (Ferlinghetti 44).

Starting with the Moloch monster of "Howl," Ginsberg's poems constituted a fierce comment on the Cold War US. However, he had already written some poems that were critical towards society before composing his most famous text. For instance, in his first journals, he wrote an "Epitaph for Roosevelt" (*Martyrdom* 409), and in "Patterson" he was already denouncing the diminishment of the individual soul in the American reality (*Collected Poems* 48). Later, compositions such as "America" (included in the first City Lights edition of *Howl and Other Poems*) also denounced the national materialism and political persecution quite straightforwardly. In the 1960s, especially in his *Indian Journals*, Ginsberg wrote texts (difficult to be strictly classified as verse or prose) which approached American politics from a religious viewpoint. Influenced by his spiritual experiences in the East, he composed several poems where he listed the weapons, mass media, and political (national and international) practices which were corrupting the foundational texts and prospective ideas of the United States.[12] When he was back in the continent, he wrote "Wichita Vortex Sutra" (*CP* 402), another explicitly political denounce of the American state and its work on the popular ideology through the mass media and misuse of language during the Vietnam War. This tendency to refer to the conflicts of his times continued until he died, as it will later be seen.

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[12] Some titles are "H*Y*M*N* T*O* U*S*" (16-17), "DURGA-KALI —— MODERN WEAPONS IN HER HANDS" (21-22), and *The Fights* (50), to be discussed in later chapters.

However, his relationship with politics and activism was never a common one. His aim was not to assert his own political principles to convince the skeptic, but rather to bring for the other (person) an expanded consciousness, to bring a state of being rather than to transmit an already-articulated thought (Hungerford 281). He acknowledged that his relationship with the traditional left was not a good one because he rejected their violent means of development (*Composed* 78). His ways may remind us of Thoreau, since like the nineteenth-century writer, he denied to pay taxes for military finance. The link between the two authors comes also along with their different articulation of social engagement. It was not a collective approach within the Establishment, and their commitment was to a new society that needed of new methods. This led Kenneth Rexroth to decry the Beat movement as disengaged, although Ferlinghetti, Snyder and Ginsberg himself emphasized the compatibility of engagement in a different format of organization. He was always associated with the Communist movement, but after he was expelled from Communist countries, and specially with the hippie phenomenon, politics for him were approached from a rather individualist position.

Taking into account both this and his understanding of language, his conception of poetry required "freedom, of Meter & technique in Poesy, to follow the shape of the mind, and laws (narcotic) to follow thru to wider consciousness, & love, to follow natural desire" ("Prose Contribution" 339). Poetry was "the one medium for the democratic individual to express himself because every other medium is blocked up with plastic or legally censored." Only poetry keeps sanity, clarity and lucidity, and can be free from the establishment control (Ginsberg, interview by Gloria Brame n. pag.). In the development of his own poetics, Ginsberg took into account both composition and deliverance or reading process of the text, involving the body and the physical reality that both author and reader inhabit. Influenced by Kerouac's spontaneous writing, he changed his initial style inherited from the academic canon and from his own, involving political activism. The connection between the writing process and mental consciousness would turn poetry into the arena where the population could get rid of the ideological control from the Establishment. In public deliverance, the ecstatic feelings of the performer would infect the listeners, while in reading the person would get to the same mind state through the disposition of the lines on the page. As a genre, poetry was thought to have a clear social role, going back to its initial collective and more primitive uses, and this was also seen in Ginsberg's conception of the poet as a Whitmanian bard. Poetry was needed in the US, and the US had Whitman as a model of such a cultural project. However, unlike in Whitman's times, the problem was not the lack of a national

poetry, of an American great epic, but rather the recovery of a true expression of the self, freed from the canonical conscriptions that were common in cultural institutions, particularly after World War II.

Very broadly speaking, we could say that Ginsberg's career is divided in three periods. The first one might be labeled as "Beat-reading," developed during the 1950s and including his famous compositions "Howl" and "Kaddish"; I have branded the second one as "mantra-chanting," and it might be said to characterize his writings from the 1960s and 1970s. Later on, he would combine these two methods with song and ballad writing, keeping then his original performative ways during the 1980s and 1990s. The first period was mainly based on the principles of William Carlos Williams, but it was preceded by more canonical writings. During his early years at college, Ginsberg tried to emulate the style of Renaissance sonneteers, and also the writings of the so-called English Metaphysical poets (such as John Donne). These models seemed for him perfect as the starting points to express his deep sufferings and the visions he had in relation to Blake and reading his poems (a well-commented passage of his life, both by him and by critics[13]). At that time, he had long conversations with his friends from Columbia, among whom Lucien Carr and William Burroughs were the protagonists in the transcriptions he wrote in his journals. Even at this early stage, unlike Carr, Ginsberg thought art should always be communicative (*Martyrdom* 39). For him, it had to serve some purpose for society, although he sometimes was close to Lucien's view of art as self-ultimate in his reflections: "The most individual, uninfluenced, unrepressed, uninhibited expression of art is true expression and the true art" (*Martyrdom* 80). Even so, in this self-expression, he did want the readers to understand his visions and illuminative experiences, and this was to be done following Blake's notion of prophecy as "a formula for revolution," not primarily political, but of consciousness, "a secret formula" which would express the "universal archetypal knowledge of something beyond my own life" and not reduced to the human experience (Portugés, *The Visionary* 66; *Allen Verbatim* 104).

Years later, already developing his mantra-chanting poetics, he would write about the need of changes in American poetry, required by the change in consciousness that had been brought by the spontaneity of jazz, drug use, Eastern meditation practices, as well as the new machinery and technology of information. The process of the mind, in contrast to old narrative forms, was the matter of poetry (*Indian Journals* 93-94). Thus, the previous conception of message was replaced by a recording of consciousness which was to be shared,

[13] Paul Portugés has devoted a whole volume to this topic: *The Visionary Poetics of Allen Ginsberg* (1978).

establishing then a diverse type of relationship between writer, reader, and text. Strictly speaking, however, his writing had not a political compromise, or at least that is what Ginsberg defended. On meeting Bob Dylan, both agreed that poetry should be the reflection of the mind, independent from politics (Morgan 382-83). Nonetheless, that does not mean that their works had no political value, or that their position on writing was not a political stance after all. The fact that the new poetics proposed by Ginsberg and his contemporaries involved performative aspects and called to a community sense which was missing from the American society meant a political demand, a denounce of the way culture was being spread by the Establishment (Davidson 23). In a way, the performative character that poetry acquired in certain circles of San Francisco during the 1950s implied the idea that poetry was a social force, that poems had the potential to transform reality. Thus, the people who went to poetic events (in jazz bars, cafés, and art galleries, eventually getting to the radio and the TV) acquired a sense of collectivity, the sense of being outside the dominant culture, thus developing alternative views and proposals of what being American meant.

Nonetheless, poetry was not just going to work with the magical language of Hindu or Buddhist mantra. If war was begun with English language, it should also be ended through it. The reality of war, coming from institutions and expressed in the mass media, was somehow based on language and the consciousness. Thus, the role of poetry was to "dismantle the language Consciousness conditioned to war" (*Composed* 48). This counter-mantra, as he claims in "Wichita Vortex Sutra," was to be made out of American language. He starts then a battle with the ideological state apparatus through the use of language in a purer way. Syllables are "identical with the historical event" and conform

> A force field of language which is so solid and absolute as a statement and a realization of an assertion by my will, conscious will power, that it will contradict—counteract and ultimately overwhelm the force field of language pronounced out of the State Department and out of Johnson's mouth. (*Composed* 46-47).

Poetry then should rectify the language, and conceive "poetic images so powerful that they can measure up to the horrible reality that the average person faces reading the morning newspaper" (Portugés, *The Visionary* 67-68). Through poetry, Ginsberg aims at precipitating other consciousness in his assertions battle, "because the whole War is WILL-FULL-NESS, and the War is a Poetry, in the sense that the War is the Happening, the Poem invented and imagined by . . . [the government]; so the *end* of the War is the *Happening*, the Poem" (*Composed* 47).

In this approach to poetry as a speech act involving the union of breathing (the body) and mind processes (the soul), the idea of composition is linked to the spontaneity of jazz and the poetics of both Kerouac and Charles Olson's "Projective Verse." This explains why the tape recorder became another poetic tool for Ginsberg. If, as Hayden Carruth comments, the conventional structures he followed while young had led way to the forms coming from within (spontaneous, more organic writing), in the 1960s external ones coming from without started to be present in his poetry again, not in traditional poetic forms, but in the patterns of the press and governmental discourses (322). By using the tape recorder to compose, Ginsberg was able to combine both sources of inspiration: his mind processes, directly vocalized, and the external elements irrupting in that stream of consciousness which he finds in the world. That is what we discover in "Wichita Vortex Sutra": Ginsberg recorded his thoughts on what he was actually perceiving at the same time, and then he transcribed it on paper in terms of units of breath and thought. Thus, as Brian Jackson explains, the poem presents a flux of mind between perception of external phenomena and interior reflection, as Pound had intended to do in the *Pisan Cantos*. The visual element inherited from Williams and the auditory phenomena were mixed with his authorial imagination (318). Nonetheless, he declared there was no great difference between using the tape recorder or the notebook: "At times a tape is more convenient, at times a notebook is more convenient. But I can shift back and forth" (*Composed* 59). In this sense, the musical origins of poetry make sense and unite again the poetry that we had been reading for centuries with the voice with which it began in ancient Greece and other shamanic civilizations. The twentieth-century poetry in the US, with Pound and Williams, but also with Dylan and Mick Jagger, was just a return of a different, more collective conception of poetry (*Composed* 59).

Davidson, in his performative analysis of the San Francisco Poetry panorama, does also point out the creation of a personalist style (19), and it is a point not to leave behind because a new poetry concept was linked to a new idea of the poet. Gregory Corso narrates the first reading of "Howl" by Ginsberg and describes him as "surprised at his own power, drunk on the platform, becoming increasingly sober as he read, driving forward with a strange ecstatic intensity, *delivering a spiritual confession* to an astounded audience—*ending in tears*" (emphasis added) (*Howl: Original Draft* 165). Far from the colder and formal readings given by university departments, Ginsberg spoke himself out and ended up in tears after giving information about himself and his generation. "[A]rms outstretched, eyes gleaming, swaying from one foot to the other with the rhythm of words," reading the poem became more of a performance of himself in ecstasy than a common recitation (Miles 193-94). It

was, furthermore, a presentation in front of people who also participated and reacted, so there was a sense of collectivity in the room. Beat performance meant a return to primitivist notions of the community (Davidson xi), poetry events were seen as rituals run by ancient tribes, the poet was the shaman or the spokesman who "would get up and say what was on everybody's mind" (*Allen Verbatim* 209). Influenced by Pound and Artaud, Ginsberg got convinced of the "bardic function" of the poets to counteract the "black magic" (language) of the state, the system, the media, and so recover the mythic and sacred time (Jackson 319). Thus, in some journal notes which would become later the poem "America," he would say of himself: "I Allen Ginsberg Bard out of the New Jersey take up the cudgel from Whitman" (*Journals: Early Fifties* 91). He thought of himself as prophet-poet, as Blake's vates, "who could . . . see below the surface of reality into the very essence of existence" (Portugés, *The Visionary* 65-66).

Indeed, one of the most important reviews of "Howl" (written by Richard Eberhart, a young scholar who endorsed the approach of New Criticism) described the poem as violent, Jewish and Biblical in style, a spiritual charge and criticism of "the nerves of suffering and spiritual struggle" of a generation which had force and energy not deprived of madness (*Howl: Original Draft* 155). Romantic elements such as the irrationality and the characterization of the poet as a sensitive guide for the rest of the people came from many different sources. His visions with William Blake led him to think about the psychic effect poetry could have and how that was a social tool, and Shelley's "legislator" for mankind confirmed the political agency of the poet. Whitman's idea of candor was also a base for his own projection of the American bard. As Lin explains, he kept a "Whitmanian hope for an Adamic community," to embody the "divine literatus" and write the poetry that the society of the US needed. Other non-Romantic authors were inspiring for him as well. In a letter to Lionel Trilling (one of his teachers in Columbia) he described Rimbaud "not as the *poet maudit*, the decadent, but the representative hero, the sociologically concerned, and in the highest manner politically minded poet" (*Martyrdom* 127). Also, some Modernist writers, as artistic trouble makers, became models for him.

Pound and Williams are constantly mentioned in his lectures about American poetry and on his own idea of writing, but other names such as Gertrude Stein and T. S. Eliot are somehow absent. In the case of the former, he pointed her name out when discussing the disappearance of subject matter in poetry, something he endorsed along with automatic writing techniques (*Indian Journals* 38-39, *Composed* 110), and he also commented on the

importance of observation of language that she developed in her poetics (*Allen Verbatim* 32, *Composed* 41); but T. S. Eliot was not among his Modernist models. This may be due to the incompatibility between the young poet's neoromantic approach to writing and the canonist tendencies in the older one. In fact, the former might be originated as a reaction to the New Criticism and their assent of T. S. Eliot's principles of impersonal writing, tradition, and self-contained art-works. Nonetheless, although the Romantic drive might be understood as a response to the lost personality in the New Criticism poetics, and despite the fact that he ended up thinking that "the ego . . . is the true cause of permanent art, not the drive to self-expression in permanent form" (*Martyrdom* 81), Ginsberg believed there was not a single, but a multiple identity after all (Hoffman, *American Poetry* 252-53).

Therefore, his poetry was always filled with autobiographical references that would help him project the American poet he wanted to be. As Davidson points out, the circle of writers of San Francisco, that is, the Beat writers, became professional in the task of creating fictions about themselves (5). In the case of Ginsberg, contradictory desires of being out of the public sight and of moving huge audiences converged in him. As his biographer Bill Morgan explains, "[h]e was determined to break down the distinction between public and private demeanor and display the same frankness and inspiration in public that was usually reserved for private encounters" (379). The intimate expression of the ego required that type of purity in his approach to art, and as other Beat peers —and as Emerson, Thoreau, and Whitman had done—, he saw his personal life in cultural terms (Davidson 30), that is why the performance of the poem brought along with it the performance of the poet. In fact, the point was not just narrating one's life in verse, but writing "the same way that you… are!" and avoiding the practice of just copying the models that have been read before ("The Art of Poetry No. 8" n. pag.) He also became a "media man" recording his experiences in the US of the Cold War, a "populist chronicler" (Davidson 83) who would end up as the guru for the hippie movement. He participated in marches and mobilizations as master of ceremonies, but included in his agenda attendance and response to magazines and newspapers, radios, and TV talks. Sometimes more as a rock star than as a poet, but vindicating the latter's importance for society, Ginsberg "made poetry readers out of nonliterary citizens and political activists out of other poets" (Davidson 30).

2. 4. Counterculture and the Institution of Literature

Convinced of his social role and the importance of poetry for the development of alternative ways of thinking, Ginsberg also thought about literature as a social institution that, however,

should serve to question the official ones. As mentioned above, Ginsberg was aware of the use of language and images made by the Establishment in order to control the population's mentality, and defended poetry as a way to overcome the brainwashing effects. Poetry was then to constitute the "tribal council" needed by the American society in order to know "what dances and songs should be said, sung and performed" (*Allen Verbatim* 209). What is more, a change in mentality was needed to acknowledge a different conception of reality, of the US, and of the American identity. Once the political foundation rights and the material wealth were secured, Whitman vindicated "a native expression-spirit" which Ginsberg would also look for. The "High Culture" poets and "academy bureaucrats" were not being honest and were actually "making a living out of the energy of poetry" (*Composed* 104). The civic religion he proposed then looked for a democratic society, but this democracy would not be achieved until a different state of consciousness worked in the Americans' minds.

Unlike Whitman, Ginsberg did not have the idea of the American society as the best one in the world, nor did he plan to develop a poetics with that goal. In Ginsberg's texts there is no such definition of the model citizen, but rather an opening of the already established concept to other formats of being American. Probably because of his anarchist tendencies, he did not feel the necessity to establish a delimited conception of what the US republic should be, but he focused on giving methods (use of drugs and mantra, mainly) to improve their condition. Although important, culture would not constitute the main articulator of society in Ginsberg's countercultural program. His idea was rather centered, as pointed out before, on a different mentality related to a new type of poetry, but without the intrinsic relationship which was the basis of Whitman's approach. Both would find in literature a disrupting element, because poetry, for Ginsberg, was closer to reality and so could express what the Establishment forbade and censored: the soul. Another conception of Americanness was only to be accepted if expressed through a purer and more natural language. Ginsberg would also believe in a "divine grammar" (his mantra chanting) and defended rituals over declared politics, given their power to influence the people without entering the institution. The divine literatus of Whitman would be in Ginsberg's figure, who thought the Beats had more power than many governmental organisms, and also like Whitman's, Ginsberg's conception of literature as an institution would have a Derridean vein as point of departure.

From the very beginning Beat writers felt and saw themselves as a community outside of the dominant culture. The places they occupied to celebrate their events were far from

the academic world, in order both to "encourage experimentation and reach nonacademic audiences" (Somers-Willett 52). Furthermore, especially in its origins, the publishing world was totally closed for them because of their diverging literary topics and disrupting forms. In a nutshell, they had to make up their own publishing houses and magazines, as the Modernists had done some decades before, and they also had to fight for a new conception of literature, literariness, and cultural recognition. That is why, although acknowledging the institutional functionality of literature, the Beats also worked in order to enter and deconstruct its principles. In this sense, the New Criticism supposed the biggest limitation for them. As pointed out above, the academy was controlled by the government, it was one of the fingers of the ideological state apparatus, and so there was a literary atmosphere of censorship where canon was dominant. Ginsberg saw this closure of form in poetry as a closure of form in the mind, and any type of subversion of the norm was left outside, as were Whitman or Williams in the case of English departments (for being non-serious and provincial) ("Document" 113, Miles 77-78). In this context, Ginsberg wrote in his diary, after publishing *Empty Mirror* and while trying to get *On the Road* a publishing house:

> It is so difficult to operate like this, not knowing what is good or bad except by other people's reactions—when the mass reaction of the world is immediately negative—not only commercially, but on the part of the University also. Who can we trust but ourselves? and we are crazy. (*Martyrdom* 363)

If Whitman, Williams, or Pound, were left aside, where was the Beats' place in the literary world of the US? ("Document" 113). Ginsberg did not know he was writing a poem when he composed "Howl," neither did he in the case of "Kaddish." Tradition was a limit that he did not know to tackle: "'Make it new', saith Pound, 'invention,' said W. C. Williams. That's the 'Tradition'–a complete fuck-up so you're on your own" ("How *Kaddish* Happened" 346). The New Criticism and their control over the definition of literariness supposed a constricting barrier for the Beats to understand their own writings, although it also became a mark of identity. Actually, Ginsberg ended up denouncing the bankruptcy of the Academy in the US, because of their lack of taste and their inability to appreciate the new ways of writing. With scorn, he described critics and journalists' work as "brainwashed bullshit" and accused them of just wanting "money and security and not ART" ("It's a Vast Trap" 78-79). Therefore, the random limits of their defining power were put into question and he pointed out their mistaken approach:

> Most criticism is semantically confused on this point –should & shouldn't & art is & isn't – trying to tell people to do something other than that which they

> basically & intelligently want to do, when they are experimenting with something new to them (and actually in this case to US literature). ("When the mode" 328)

It is here, in this recognition of the arbitrary nature of literature (or art) as an institution, that Ginsberg gets closer to the ideas Derrida would develop some years later. Literature, after all, was a sign of power, a political oppressive decision which established a truth, a clear definition and set of features, leaving aside other equally-valid possibilities. Thus, a text was literary if seen as such, which would also pave the way for a different understanding of works of literature. As Whitman had started to point out, poems could be unstable, unfixed; although written they could be changed each time they were read, as did the poet delivering them. Ginsberg adopted this position, and it meant a complete challenge of the New Criticism definition of poetry as a self-referring artifact.

Literature, then, had a social role and took the form of an institution, but the one coming from the academies was not fulfilling the tribal task of culture that Ginsberg was vindicating. In fact, through censorship it was denying legitimacy to feelings, ideas, and forms deviating from the norm, causing then the alienation that Ginsberg portrayed in "Howl." The best minds of his generation went to universities, but they were surrounded by the "scholars of war." Nevertheless, there was always a link between the Beats and the academy. Most of them had been university students, and were in contact with professors and had their critical support (Ferlinghetti mentioned a long list of names in the "Howl" trial). Ginsberg himself ended up participating in lectures, giving lessons as a professor, and setting up different literary organizations and academic organisms. During the 1950s they got sponsors for poetry readings, and throughout the 1960s he was called from many universities, among them Harvard, Howard, George Washington University (Washington DC), and Brooklyn College (Lin 55, Miles 259). The small community of New York and San Francisco poets started to be nationally known, sometimes with distorted reports and attacks to the writers rather than their poetry. Thus, Morgan explains, Ginsberg began to reflect deeper on the role of the media, and how other news of political issues would be distorted as well (290-91). When invited to academic institutions, they "often broke the unspoken rules . . . by inviting audience participation, employing instruments and music, and making the event more of a free-for-all than a solemn appreciation of the author" (Somers-Willett 52), they still kept the ritual and public sense they had started with.

However, he learnt how to make good use of his position. He got the membership of the American Academy and Institute of Arts and Letters, and tried to gain the loyalty of other members and get recognition for authors such as Burroughs (Morgan 550). Although

acknowledging that institutions were manipulating the term "literature" and "art," and despite his early rejection of a "social commitment" or conscious creation of the Beat circle, he certainly got to interact and be part of literary organizations. Indeed, in 1959 he wrote about himself as the founder of "the American Church of Poetry" in his journals (*Journals: Early Fifties* 101). For a "full-scale revolution," there was need to upset the values and imagination that were controlled by the wrong mentalities (Miles 228). Thus, he was founder of two poetry-related organizations. In 1964, after a law that made bars pay an expensive cabaret license, he created a new defense group of poetry, the Committee On Poetry (or COP), which, conceived as a church, coordinated readings and built a net of support to get permissions for public events, free, and working on a noncommercial basis (Morgan 386-87). He also founded in the 1970s "The Jack Kerouac School of Disembodied Poetics" in the Naropa Institute, the first Buddhist university in North America (484). We might therefore conclude that what Ginsberg did not share with institutions was their misuse of power to establish a pattern of thought, while (similarly to Whitman) he thought institutions could also work for a change in a society which needed of spiritual development. After all, the tribal council that he thought was needed could also be understood as another form of institution.

These institutions, nevertheless, should not interfere in literary creations. The point of having an institutional organization was the promotion of culture for a change, but culture was not in service of political ideas. At least, not strictly speaking or led by party interests. Actually, Ginsberg's concern when he became a famous public figure was the commodification of his poetry. He took the vow of poverty and decided not to get money from readings in order to prevent poems from becoming business or "subject to influence or pressure by the patron." If the organization was paying for the event, it might be censured or controlled, so Ginsberg opted for free readings and promised himself never to read the same poem more than six times so that they kept away from triteness (Morgan 301-02). Pound was a great influence in these convictions. As Ginsberg explained in a lecture about the Modernist poet, the idea of his change from the traditional prosody to the classical meter was based on political ideas. In order to get language freed from capitalist criteria in poetry, writing should be done in terms of syllables, each of them meaning something. Otherwise, Pound said, the line "grows" thick (*Allen Verbatim* 168-70).

Poetry was thought to be the counter-language facing the Establishment's hackneyed one, a counter-institution which, however, would be present in college, radio, and TV, but

also in the streets, waking people up from the slumbers of the "black magic." In the case of Ginsberg's poetics, the traditional poetic language was left aside and, as Whitman (and Williams) had done before, he started to write poetry out of the language present in non-poetic fields: the language of the street, the speech of young people talking themselves out, the discourse found on the radio, the television, the newspapers, both in representations of reality and the projections the Americans got from commercials. In this sense, language was being deconstructed, the differing and deferring nature was exposed, and so was the process going on in the term "literature," getting to the point that Burroughs pointed out in his discussions with the young Beats, when they were looking for a "New Vision," that art was whatever one wanted to call art. However, a further step was realizing (with Derrida) the origin of that "calling," the tensions between the acknowledged intentionality and the fact that it was not there precisely because it could. Consequently, the institution of poetry was there as long as one wanted to recognize it as an institution, but whose nature was actually that conscious recognition, and nothing else.

Chapter 3. Presence and Absence: The Poet on the Stage and the Page

Having given an account of the performative nature of American identity and how both Whitman and Ginsberg, in different centuries, built their cultural programs within a logocratic framework, our attention will now turn to ontological implications in their poetics. In the writings of Whitman and Ginsberg there is a constant tension between written and spoken language, precisely because their attempts to bring poetry to the public space. This implies a tension between presence and absence in the written text. As we have seen, written and spoken language were distinguished because of the presence or absence of the speaker (or writer). Traditionally, as Derrida points out, from Plato to Rousseau, getting also to figures like Benjamin Franklin, written language was seen as corrupted; the written message, far from the original speaker, became vague, inaccurate, prone to misinterpretation. On the contrary, there was no risk of misunderstanding when the speaker was present. In Whitman's and Ginsberg's poetry, then, the presence of the author takes place in writing (that is, in what was commonly marked by the absence of the author). Their texts were projections of the presence of the American poet, a persona that would dwell on the printed poem and the book. The way both authors involved the body in their writing (through oral style) brought the text to a middle point, one between their absence (because of written) and their presence (because of their oral style). Their projected (performed) poets' ontology was that of the specter: it was there (on the page, on the poem), but it was not. In this sense, Derrida's philosophy of language (and, consequently, his metaphysical remarks) will be involved. The phonocentric approach to writing that both poets keep reinforce their presence as poets while acknowledging their absence, precisely, in their writing.

However, this chapter proves that Whitman and Ginsberg differ in their performance of the poet. On the one hand, Whitman plays with the reading and writing (the communicative) context so his poems are sometimes contentless: pronouns and verbs of action dominate the texts, and they turn out of be about themselves. Whitman's poet happens when the poem is read. On the other hand, Ginsberg explores how formal lineation and stream of consciousness is what conforms the content of the poem; thus, his body and breathing (the basis of lineation) do also happen in the text. Moreover, both have an oral approach to writing, but form and content articulate their (projected) self in differing ways: Whitman's contextual contents make easier the analysis from J. L. Austin's Speech Act Theory. In the case of Ginsberg, context is rather historical, which turn the poems (with their

contextual nature) into historical speech acts which do not depend so much on the reading that we may do nowadays.

1. "Camerado, this is no book": Whitman's Written Voice

> Camerado, this is no book,
> Who touches this touches a man,
> (Is it night? are we here together alone?)
> It is I you hold and who holds you,
> I spring from the pages into your arms—decease calls me
> forth.
>
> O how your fingers drowse me,
> Your breath falls around me like dew, your pulse lulls the
> tympans of my ears.
> ("So Long!" *Leaves* 424)

The oral nature of Whitman's poetry has been addressed by scholars quite frequently. He himself (as seen above) had strong convictions on this aspect of his writing, although he hardly ever read his poetry in public, and finally did not manage to do the poetic tour that he repeatedly mentioned to friends and in his notes. Furthermore, this oral nature was related to the social and political power that he saw in literature. To this, he added a clear description of the poet, who was characterized by physical strength and oratorical skills. As a result, his writing explored the encounter between poet and readers, just as these two would get together in the public reading. The printed page became a stage where the presence of the author (in voice) would be equally marked by his absence (in the written nature of the poem). In other words, his absence would point to his presence, as a specter, and this would be articulated through the use of discourse elements.

Thus, I am going to explore how he turned his poetic self (almost as a character: Walt Whitman) into a ghostly voice for the reader. Both the written and the spoken converge on the printed poem, and so do the time of writing and that of reading. Time referents like past, present and future get sometimes blurred, just in the same way that his "I" gets fluid (involving multitudes, and also being a single individual). Thus, an analysis of the contextual language will also be done, concerning the use of specific verb forms, as well as pronouns and other deictics.

1. 1. The Being Written and Writing the Being

Regarding Whitman's work, the ideological charge and power of words will be seen not only in the form or in the clear indications that he gave about his poetry and its purpose. The

contents of his poems would also have to do with the topic of poetry-writing, poetry-reading and the presence (and absence) of both sides of the printed poem in the scenario of writing and reading. Actually, Bertolini points out the fact that most of his poetic contents are their contentless nature, something Whitman himself thought and responded to a critic, claiming "he had never 'addressed one single word in the whole course of his writings' to the intellect" (Allen, *Solitary Singer* 232-33). In an attempt to break down the barrier between words and the world, Whitman left behind the constative use of language and filled his works with words that built, rather than pointed to, the US he was living in and he wanted to inaugurate (Bertolini 1062-63). This goes in line with the idea of performative identity proposed by postmodernity. Our personality is not something previous, but an entity made on the go and which remains subject to changes and fluidity.

1. 1. 1. Walt Whitman, a Signature Binding Time

Thus, in the same way that the pronoun "We" of the Declaration could be seen as inaugurating rather than pointing to a pre-existing group of people, in poetry the voice of Walt Whitman the poet will have a performative structure. As Erkkila explains, Whitman carries out an assault to literary decorum when he nicknames himself thus establishing an uncommon familiarity in the literature of his time. "Walt Whitman . . . one of the roughs . . . no stander above men and women or apart from them" was how he presented himself for the first time in 1855, and he complemented this text with the reviews he published about his own work in the press (*Leaves* 680). Portraying a physically and psychologically strong model of the American man, Whitman did not give a literal representation of himself, but rather a projected image "of the poet as the representative American who emerges in the poems" (Erkkila 4-6). This emergence of the voice, furthermore, happens in a book whose main cover (in the first edition) did not feature any name and whose author was identified with a frontispiece to give an idea of his appearance. In fact, regarding this picture, in a letter to James R. Osgood & Company (the publishing house), he said that the steel engraving "required in the book . . . in fact is involved as part of the poem" ("Whitman to Osgood, 12 September 1881" 227). For him, it was ridiculous to give the name with the title of the book because "My name occurs inside the book—that is enough if not more than enough" (*Whitman in Camden,* vol. 2, 78).[14]

[14] Although the cover did not feature any name or title, readers should not forget that "Song of Myself," the main composition of the 1855 *Leaves*, was then titled "Poem of Walt Whitman, an American."

Indeed, as quoted above, the voice identified itself as "Walt Whitman," but the name *occurred* —his character called "Walt Whitman" happened— within the book because identity (along with language experiment) was the main point of the volume. In later prefaces to his 1876 edition of *Leaves of Grass* and *Two Rivulets*, he stated that his *Leaves* were meant "to be the Poem of Identity, (of *Yours*, whoever you are, now reading these lines)" (*Leaves* 656). Ed Folsom says on discussing this practice that "[t]he reader opens the book to confront an engraving of a daguerreotype of the poet's physical self and then turns to the poems to encounter a daguerreotype of his soul" (137), while Hollis points at his famous line ("who touches this touches a man") and calls it "the most successful metonymic trick in poetic history" (*Language and Style* 252). As Folsom explains, Whitman really wanted to give the "illusion of physical touch" and used new technologies to accomplish his goals, even though it sometimes bordered the artificial, as he used techniques to modify his portraits (149). Nevertheless, this critic also asserts that Whitman embraced these illusory images of himself because they were not meant to represent the "self that lived outside the pages," but rather acted as bricks for "the constructed self that lived only *in* the pages of his book" (152). Thus, although he gave his name, it was meant to build a rather "shifting presence" (Herrington 129).

To analyze this "presence" we must also study the articulation of time and place in Whitman's poetry. G. W. Allen, in his analysis of the literary techniques of Whitman, says that the ego is in constant motion, that it is not finite, a "migrating soul transcending time and space" ("Literary Technique" 383). In the 1855 preface he describes a good poet as someone able to "project himself centuries ahead and . . . live through them . . . hold on untired" (*Leaves* 634). That is why Eldrid Herrington asserts that anonymity fits well with this futurity. I would say, however, that he is more accurate by changing the term anonymity with "changeful identity," describing it as the "evolutionary adaptability to future conditions." Whitman's voice is then egotistical and emptied, opening the doors to other times and places for other identities to appear (133-35). In fact, Vincent J. Bertolini's thesis is that (for Whitman) words become a place of "physical encounter with the reader" in which the voice does not abandon, but rather leads to the "empowering of the reader" (1053), an idea that has been widely supported by Nathanson as well. This critic's approach, however, acknowledges the lack of a central point of reference. That is, the self is made physically present by a voice which is also absent, somehow "fantasmatic" and unsettling (9).

Time then is seen as the common place where both reader and the poet's voice can meet, and this comes from a specific conception thereof. There is a tendency in Whitman to use present tense, perhaps (as proposed by Hollis) because of the inaugurating character of his poems, where speech acts are very common (*Language and Style* 85-87). However, other interpretations have been given by the critics and have fed the idea of timelessness. As S. J. Mack says, the overuse of present forms might come from his democratic principles. The mythological suspension of time (and place) put readers and writer at the same level, to such an extent (this critic continues) that ontologically speaking, there is no privilege, no clear line to set who was there before (*The Pragmatic* 43, 51-53). Mack sees this as an "aesthetic time," although Keith Wilhite has claimed in his own reading that time does not disappear, that it is rather multiplied (multitemporal) (923-24). And in fact, though we could keep Mack's observation on ontological democracy (as I will later defend), in words of the poet in the 1855 preface, "[p]ast and present and future are not disjoined but joined. The greatest poet forms the consistence of what is to be from what has been and is" (*Leaves* 623). The "yet-to-be" condition of the Declaration takes place in his poet too.

Whitman's poet is a sort of time-binder, which means he is able to transcend the printed page. Critics have commented on the dissolution of "the barrier of print" (Dougherty 491) and the effects that this has. Hollis says that in Whitman's poems there is a transposition of the speaker to the printed page (*Language and Style* 49), and G. W. Allen points out that he tries to do this through the style (cadence, repetition, omission of commas, dates, etc.) (*The Solitary Singer* 155). The experience of reading is then an encounter with a physical other, as Whitman wrote:

> Indeed, the qualities which characterize "Leaves of Grass" are not the qualities of a fine book or poem or any work of art but *the qualities of a living and full-blooded man*, amativeness, pride, adhesiveness, curiosity, yearning for immortality, joyousness and sometimes uncertainty. *You do not read*, it is *someone that you see in action*, in war or on a ship, or climbing the mountains, or racing along and shouting aloud in pure exultation. (*Leaves* 785) (emphasis added)

M. Jimmie Killingsworth interprets this as a world created for "physical contact that, although empty itself of physical presence, strives to inspire (literally, to breathe) within the reader" (71). It is then necessary for us to address the topic of presence and absence in some more depth. The fluidity of identity goes along, as this critic says, with interpenetration of the internal and external, the container and the contained, the public and private, the poet's body and mind (70). This will affect the voice and the writer, but also the written and the

vocalized word. If Whitman's style transcribed his projected self into the paper, other questions arise concerning absence and presence, reading and hearing, contact and distance.

1. 1. 2. The Writer's and Readers' Presence

Tenney Nathanson has devoted a whole book to the study of these elements in Whitman's first two editions of *Leaves of Grass* (1855 and 1856). Acknowledging the difficulty to pin down a stable identity in individuals, and taking into account the studies of philology that Whitman carried out before and during his writing career, Nathanson uses Derrida's term "iterability" to explain Whitman's vindication of organic language, opposed to the artificial, empty one of culture. Iterability enables the poet's "production of ideal forms . . . positing repeatable entities, we generate a world we can control" and thus counteract that of the system (113). Drawing also on Austin's distinction between performative and constative utterances, Nathanson explains Whitman's distinction of presence and representation in language. While representative language (associated with writing) is powerless and "disastrously self-enclosed . . . circular," natural language (associated with voice) can "take hold of [the] world" (177). Performative and organic language can generate, restore to health, and counteract a fallen language whose "coercive power [is] wielded by the symbolic language of culture" (181-82). The poet is then the one able to liberate the readers from the violent, and I would add logocratic, force of culture, and this liberation is achieved through his voice. By speaking, language generates presences rather than representations, and Whitman asserts also that the speaker must be "endowed with superb vocal equipment . . . epitomized by the gargantuan pneumatic prowess of the poet of *Leaves of Grass*" (235). This point makes Whitman draw on the Socratic ideas Plato wrote in the *Phaedrus*. As Derrida explains in *Of Grammatology*, truth is for Socrates present in the *phoné*, the voice, while it is corrupted when written (10-11). Whitman's proposal, as we will see, takes this idea further by claiming another type of writing is possible.

Whitman stressed every physical aspect when referring to his poet, precisely to make sure presence (rather than mere flat representation) was what constituted any type of text willing to get to its audience or readership. Among many other texts and commentaries, in *Specimen Days* he underlined the importance of "presence, face, voice, dress, manner, and what may be call'd his atmosphere and magnetism" about Thomas Paine (97). In a clearer way, he described his war pieces saying it was "not chiefly literary . . . it is chiefly human—it is a presence" (*Whitman in Camden* vol. 2, 78). Nathanson explains this in terms of magic, understanding the poet as a shaman "activating a power anterior" to the culture's "symbolic

authority" (6-7). Whitman would then be going back to a phonocentrism (Derrida's term) to counteract the inherited and no-longer suitable language for the nineteenth-century US. The poet vindicates the voice in line with the traditional philosophical conception of language identified by Derrida. If the voice (the soul) is closer to the truth, Whitman's poetry becomes a language fighting back against the fallen (corrupted, written) language of the system. In other words, institutionalized culture, the acknowledged logocracy of printed paper, was seen as an oppression of the voice, being the latter a countercultural element prompt to rebellion. Voice is said to produce a "spatial transformation" that "cold types and cylinder and wet paper" cannot do in the 1855 edition of "A Song for Occupations" (*Leaves* 710) (Nathanson 169).

This leads us to the relationship between writing and presence, understanding presence as a synonym of life too. Writing is traditionally seen not only as the language of those who are absent in terms of space, but also the language of those who are dead. It allows the dead body to talk, and Whitman explores this aspect in his performative writing. Presence is usually associated with voice in Whitman's poetry, but voice is intrinsic to the body as we saw above. Sounds came from bodies rather than from written texts, after all, and these American bodies produced sounds fit for their own (new) reality. As Robert L. Davis explains, in Whitman's project the body was so important as to include explicit indications on how everyday habits ultimately conformed culture (549). As the poet declared in his 1856 letter to Emerson, conversely, poems (and speeches) "adhere to the body" (*Leaves* 638), aiming to "cast into literature not only his own grit and arrogance, but his own flesh and form" (*Leaves* 793). Body, breath, and voice were then intrinsic elements in his writing process. With his project of a reading tour, he wanted to get the "*irresistible attraction and robust living* treat of the vocalization of the lecture" that the written word lacked (Hoffman, *American Poetry* 27-28), but this gap was also worked through by taking other roads of writing. The descriptions he redacted about his own work were crowded with references to his voice, his manners in "preaching and teaching," and he wrote and distributed a review in which his poetry was said to "come forth . . . direct" and "as if spoken" (qtd. in Hollis, *Language and Style in "Leaves of Grass"* 2-3).

Nonetheless, contradictions are found all over his theory regarding his writing procedures. While he claimed (as indicated before) that he was interested in the sounds, he also said he was not after music, but rather after the content of words ("Whitman on His Art" 787). Anyway, in writing, he always tried his poems in their spoken form "to get a new

angle on them — I see things I could not see in any other way" (*Whitman in Camden* vol. 3, 375). In his own self-reviews, his poems were said to be thought for public and private performance, and to "simulate a live vocal presence" through different techniques ("Prefatory Letter," *Leaves* 644). One of them was turning the preface of the 1855 edition into poems, as an "almost uninterrupted procession" of "cadences" moved by "fluxional pulsation"; to add sonority, he used repetitions, additions ("and"), he omitted commas and used ellipses (....) to mark caesuras or suggest continuation (Allen, *Solitary Singer* 155). He would define this as "garrulous-like" because the conventions and necessities had changed. As he explained to Traubel, "now, when the poetic work in literature is more than nineteen-twentieths of it by print, the simply tonal aids are not so necessary, or, if necessary, have considerably shifted their character" (*Whitman in Camden* vol. 1, 163). In Pfeiler's categories, then, Whitman would be the "stager," not just a person reading the poem from a paper ("page-stager") (82, 77).

Other critics have referred to this status of "stager" as a poet able to produce or generate an "interplay of speech and poetic writing" (Killingsworth 69), a "fiction of text's liveliness," as we saw above with Hoffman (*American Poetry* 20), or a "rhetoric of embodied performativity in the text" (Bertolini 1048). Nevertheless, the concept of "stager" is defined by Pfeiler as s/he who composes her/his poetry with a vocal sense, and distinguished from the "on-stagers," who stress the physicality of the self in order to overcome the limitations of time and place. The written paper then has an important role, despite Whitman's constant condemnations thereof. In this sense, Nathanson's proposal may give a solution to this conflict in his analysis of referentiality and presence. As he explains, Whitman's use of deixis points to a body which is not there, reducing it "to the barely physical presence of his word" and generating a sort of timeless incarnation (111). This word is then the presence which is opposed to the referential language he associated to writing, leading us to an impasse: "the magic word that generates the poet's presence achieves its apparent transfiguring power by suppressing its dependence on the very linguistic mechanisms from whose alienating dominance the poet should liberate us" (171). Rhythmic, vocalic features are kept and involve in the writing/reading process the kinesthetic, bodily matrix of the speaker.

In this sense, Whitman's ontology of written poet is rooted to his binary and phonocentric view of language. While written and spoken language are unified in his attempts to record (in the written form of poems) the voice, his ideas on language kept being binary in theory. He distinguished an organic-spoken-natural language against the cultural-written-

corrupted; in Nathanson's words, he believed there was a huge difference "between the poet's liberating speech and the mass of social language whose oppressive effects his word is to undo" (Nathanson 231, 236). The poet's role was different then. That is why he does also make the distinction between good and natural writing coming from the heart and soul, and the other "artful… technique, exiled in the exteriority of the body" (Derrida, *Of Grammatology* 17).

His condemnations of writing are then balanced with celebrations of "good" writing, that which comprehends the body, as in his famous ending of the "So Long" poem: "Camerado, this is no book, / Who touches this touches a man, / . . . I spring from the pages into your arms . . . O how your fingers drowse me" (*Leaves* 424). By referring to the actual, physical scene of reading, Whitman's poem turns out to be the poet in written and tangible form. Written words prove they can be as physical as the spoken ones thanks to the reader. Thus, a poetry of the body brings the reader's own body. As Killingsworth asserts, s/he is not a mere spectator, but a "fellow performer, a bodily presence, . . . a lover" (69). "I pass so poorly with paper and types," Whitman says, "I must pass with the contact of bodies and souls" (*Leaves* 710). Thus, binary identities of internal/external, container/contained, public/private, body/mind, words/gestures interpenetrate (Killingsworth 70), and (although distinguished) they are far from being "ontologically separable" (S. J. Mack, *The Pragmatic* 23).

The contact between reader and poet is then in a poetics of "intimacy-at-distance" (Simonson 368). Following Nathanson, Bertolini points out that Whitman's poetry did not have anything to do with representational, narrative or political texts, and so the reader's role is not "mere reading" (1050-51). This critic discusses the displacement of the speaker, but also of all interpretive objects. Meaning, sense, completion, are disintegrated and at the same time unified in the mind of the reader (G. W. Allen, "Literary Technique" 385; Larson 474-75). In a more Derridean stance, there is a resistance to the systematic use of referents, and so, the reader is the one with "subjective agency" (Bertolini 1055). Actually, Bertolini's proposal goes further by involving the body: it is an embodied agency, the "[s]imultaneous enactment of both speakerly and readerly agency in the lyric utterance." In his own words: it is "[n]ot the poet speaking for the reader, but as or in the voice of the reader" (1064). Thus, perhaps the "shamanic" poet identified by Nathanson, described as superior in terms of language use, depends on the articulation of a reader's voice as well. It is the reader's role to set the "now," "here" and "personally to you" and complete the apostrophes posed by Whitman. In the poems, says Nathanson, the voice inaugurates moments both intimate and

universal, exerting "a peculiar, centripetal pressure on the individuals" reading it (5). The point is not, then, "getting the message to people now rather than later, but the eternal moment on which his imaginative vision depends" (169).

In fact, Whitman's focus on the individual was placed on the individual reader. His book was "the poem of *Individuality*—addressed more *distinctly to the single personality listening to it*" (*Leaves* 783). In his catalogues, he tried to particularize "subjects according to their race, ethnicity, profession, regional or national identity, social station, and otherwise," but being careful not to reduce them to "mere subject positions." His voice addresses (or tries to reach) "unique individuals" (Bertolini 1058). However, Ryan Cull does also identify addressing strategies to overcome the sense of alienation and thus blur the polarities between "I" and "you" in a celebration of ontological proximity (770). This blurry ontology was also linked to the democratic purpose that his poetry had. Individuality was a national concern, but in unity with the other, and his comradeship discourse was articulated through the intimacy that anonymity allowed, as Coviello points out (86-87). "It avails not, time nor place—distance avails not, / I am with you, you men and women of a generation, or ever so many generations hence," says Whitman in "Crossing Brooklyn Ferry" (*Leaves* 136). While he addresses "you," he acknowledges that this "you" is part of generations of men and women, a collectivity grown out of individuals. This last idea is the core of US motto *e pluribus unum* (many in one) which was used in the Continental Congress in 1782 to make the Great Seal (Simonson 360, 361). Everyone would and should be involved in individual ways within the whole citizenship, and so *Leaves of Grass* was structured with the "ideal . . . of a complete healthy, heroic, practical modern *Man*—emotional . . . in consonance with modern science, with American Democracy, . . . model of a Woman also." Whitman wanted "to typify a living Human Personality, immensely animal" ("Whitman to Edward Dowden, 18 Jan. 1872" 155). As he wrote in a letter to Harry Stafford, the purpose of his *Leaves* was to make the reader "*see himself*, and see that *he has got to work out his salvation himself*—has got to pull the oars & hold the plow, or swing the axe *himself*" (215).

1. 1. 3. The Container of Multitudes

This "formative" aim was acknowledged in several occasions. In letters to his friends, in prefaces, and essays, he asserted that the individual personality for the American land was one of his main purposes. In a self-review of *Leaves*, he pointed out that

> [h]is whole work, his life, manners, friendships, writings, all have among their leading purposes an evident purpose to stamp a new type of character, namely

> his own, and indelibly fix it and publish it, not for a model but an illustration, for the present and future of American letters, and American young men. (*Leaves* 794)

Though empty —as we will see— the poet's identity was not an imposition over the others'. Rather, such articulation of the self was an open door to include everyone in his poems and to name himself at the same time that he named the world, as R. W. B. Lewis defends (52). Following the 1855 preface to *Leaves of Grass*, geographic and natural life, peoples, tribes, institutions, workmen and workwomen, are to be expressed in his writing (*Leaves* 618-19). In "A Backward Glance to Travel'd Roads" (the introduction to the 1888 edition of *November Boughs*), he defined this work as the exploitation of a personality "in the midst of . . . the momentous spirit and facts of its immediate days, and of current America" (*Leaves* 473); however, at the same time, there was an effort to make it universal by approaching this exploitation through the idea of "the eternal Bodily Character of One's-Self." "[G]enius must realize," he continues, "that . . . there is something far more precious, namely, simple Identity, One's-self" ("Preface 1876," *Leaves* 655-56). Thus, it was not just about Walt Whitman the poet, but about an individual identity. That is why, answering Ruskin's ideas and critiques of his work, he said that spinal passions and joys were precisely the object of his writing, over fine plots and abstractions.

In this sense, it is shocking then to find declarations such as the following:

> "Leaves of Grass" indeed . . . has mainly been . . . an attempt, from first to last, to put *a Person*, a human being (myself, in the latter half of the Nineteenth Century in America,) freely, fully, and truly on record. I could not find any similar personal record in current literature that satisfied me. ("A Backward Glance," *Leaves* 484)

While he puts emphasis on the term Person —a human being, anyone— he is also inscribing himself there individually ("myself"). But it is precisely in this ambiguity where he can actually exploit the nature of the fluid self he believed in. Eldrid Herrington refers to this approach as an egotistical and emptied self, identifying and unidentifiable with others (138). Universality is achieved through its vaguer projection as material and immaterial, anonymous and bodily presence (133). Hence, we find him warning the reader about the nature of his texts: trying to understand him does not mean understanding his poetry, as we see poems such as "Whoever You Are Holding Me Now in Hand" or "Are You the New Person Drawn Toward Me?" (Bertolini 1049-50). There is no simple authorial work here, but a much more complex one which critics have considered a key element in his rhetorical use of the "I." Kerry Larson calls it a "protean I" (478-79), while for Altieri it is a "purely functional" referent inviting to a "self-reflexive activity of both author and readers" ("Spectacular" 36).

Bertolini comments on this speaker also as "a lyric self devoid of embodied, historically marked concreteness, to be understood as empty form to be filled with content by the reader" (1051-52).

S. J. Mack, in a pragmatic approach drawing on John Dewey's and Mead's ideas, analyzes the "I" as the subject in relation to the world, using the poem "A Child Went Forth" to justify his position. In this theoretical framework, the self is said to be empty, or rather subject to the uncertainty of boundaries separating it from the outside (*The Pragmatic* 26-27, 56). In this indeterminacy and connection with the other in equal terms we could find the grounds for a poetics in line with his democratic convictions and cultural project (477-78). A fluxional "I" paves the way for a pluralist vision of society and, taking it farther, as Ryan Cull does, recognize a social ontology of being individual with the others (761-62). It is then at this point where we recognize the multitudes he acknowledges in section 51 of "Song of Myself" (*Leaves* 77). His false multiple identities commented by Ezra Greenspan in *The Cambridge Companion to Walt Whitman* are actually a way to involve the readers in this social ontology. In fact, to the previous assertions about his work and the key role that individual identity plays there, he added as a core idea the concept of "ensemble," pointing out that it "is the word that epitomises the philosophy of Walt Whitman. Add the word *modernness*, & you begin to unlock Leaves of Grass" ("Whitman to O'Connor (for Moncure D. Conway)" 130). In reading Keats and his idea of the poet having no identity, Whitman wrote (as a reply on the margin) that "[t]he great poet absorbs the identity of others, and the exp[erience] of others, and they are definite in him or from him" (qtd. in G. W. Allen, *The Solitary Singer* 131). Apart from the catalogues, where Burke finds an "omnific principle" (26), Whitman's speaker wanted to represent a democratic race, the union of the individual and the mass, articulated, as we have seen, in a poetics where reference places the "I" and the "you," reader and writer, in a scenario of shared ontology of individuality.

1. 1. 4. The Absence

In Whitman we find then Derrida's conception of ~~is~~. While presence is usually seen in the logos, in any spoken utterance, Whitman shows Derrida's proposal: the presence that is associated with the spoken language is not unified, saturated, fully completed. It ~~is~~ because it does not point to the stable limited self of any individual speaking or acting. At the same time, a non-saturated being involves a non-saturated context and event. This is in connection with the idea of iterability and undecidability. As I explained above, iterability is an underlying structure in language which allows us to utter words and repeat them, either in written or

spoken form. Undecidability, then, is the impossibility to pin down the exact meaning (the original intentional meaning coming from the speaker) of the words. These two notions generate a speaking self which is non-saturated, whose presence is structurally marked by absence; thus, Derrida's use of the graph ~~being~~:

> The formal essence of the signified is *presence*, and the privilege of its proximity to the logos as *phoné* is the privilege of presence. This is the inevitable response as soon as one asks: 'what is the sign?,' that is to say, when one submits the sign to the question of essence, to the 'ti esti.' The 'formal essence' of the sign can only be determined in terms of presence. One cannot get around that response, except by challenging the very form of the question and beginning to think that the sign ~~is~~ that ill-named ~~thing~~, the only one, that escapes the instituting question of philosophy: 'what is . . .?' (*Of Grammatology* 18-19)

In Whitman's poetry, all signs (words, deictics) can be said to ~~be~~, their presence is marked by their absence, as in a ghostly ontology. He seems to explore —or his poems seem to express— the same kind of ontology. The presence of Whitman's poet (as his words) is not to be understood as fully there, but neither is he absent. As in the "fabulous retroactivity" of the Declaration of Independence, Whitman's voices and hearers, his projection of poet and of the American readers, are inaugural (performative) in non-closed events and contexts; thus their blurry ontology and the undecidability of their "outside referents." The multiplicity of "I" and "you," as well as the open form of contextual referents, are actually enabled by iterability and undecidability. At the same time, however, the link between truth, logos, phoné and soul that Derrida finds in the history of philosophy is what Whitman wants to achieve or emulate in his countercultural writing. In his writings, we find an alternative to ~~being~~, a different (actually postmodern) understanding of the self, but Whitman's language philosophy proves to be essentialist in his search of a "purer," more "natural" writing (although for other authors, his spoken-like writing would be seen as inappropriate for literature). When Derrida unveils logocentrism as phonocentrism, he also sheds light on Whitman's approach to the written language, where the soul and the true communication are intrinsically linked to voice (leading, at the same time, to the bodily presence). Nonetheless, this does not mean that the poem is then corrupted by the absence of the poet. For Whitman, it is precisely in the convergence of speaking and writing that the poet's ontology between the presence and the absence is articulated, and it is impossible to have one without the other. Just as there is no voice without writing (and no writing without voice), absence does not happen without presence, and presence does not happen without absence. Corruption does not come from absence (and thus from undecidability). It comes from a writing that forgets about the body and its voice, the spoken element that enables writing itself. Thus, following

Whitman's ideas, one can actually distinguish two types of uses of language and one of them is the correct (point at which he diverges from Derrida's deconstruction of binary notions).

The poem is then a presence with no clear ontological limits and far from the representative function of traditional writing. Through voice and body in written form, Whitman meets the reader in an aesthetic time of absence and presence (of ~~being~~) which is also a democratic place of equality between writer and reader, voice and listener. This organic and natural use of language is vindicated against the logocratic, artificial one corrupted through years of misuse and alienation. Thus, performative language is here a tool to resist the systematic use of referents in the constative utterances of the corrupted logocracy and, at the same time, an arena of contact between both sides of the printed page (i.e. the reader and the poet). And it is the presence inherent in absence (and the other way around) that conforms the base of this vindication.

Altieri's poetics of presence, which he identified in the second half of the twentieth century in the US ("From Symbolist" 626), does also apply to Whitman's texts, in line with Bernstein's understanding of poems as performative events with no unity or closure. But the disappearance of the poet is a dominant element in this poet's writing. If there is no such thing as a closure, neither in the meanings nor in the voice/presence, it is because of the "plural existence" of "multiple performances" that Bernstein identifies (9), but also because of the absence that marks the poems and thus prepares the scenario of the physical encounter with the reader, through voice and printed paper.

1. 2. Written Deeds: Performative Style in Whitman's Poems

Throughout his writings on language and literature, Whitman defined words as organisms which constituted actions (see previous chapter). Influenced by Emerson's definition as such ("The Poet" 244), his aim was to build a reality through his poetry, and this was reflected both in content and style. As Erkkila asserts, his power would take the "form of political action—as agency speech act, and social event" in an artistic period which emphasized the aesthetic and private over the public literature (91). Nonetheless, the American context described in chapter 1, made up of Republican enthusiasm, led Whitman to derive from the most canonical Romanticism and to embrace other stylistic alternatives. His aim was "wording the future with undissuadable words" ("Prefatory Letter" 645), that is, "[r]ather than singing an already world, he would sing America into being" (Erkkila 277). This inaugurating nature has been widely studied: James Dougherty compiles the different interpretations of the use of speech acts in Whitman's poetry (Romantic, urban, metapoetic,

poetics of presence): Hollis, as we will see, got to the conclusion that the illocutionary force of his speech acts let the poet achieve the "immediacy and power of face-to-face communication." Nathanson, years later, asserts that the performative voice is given in order to traverse space and time in a magical projection of presence, an idea also defended by Quentin Anderson (Dougherty 492).

C. Carroll Hollis's is the most famous study of Whitman's style from the point of view of Austin's speech act theory. There he lists assertives, directives, commissives, expressives and declaratives, and makes an exhaustive analysis of all of them, getting to the conclusion that Whitman's work has more illocutionary acts than any other American or English poet, especially up to the 1860 edition of his *Leaves* (74). Speech acts go in line with the prophetic voice he wanted to achieve, and came from the style he got from his years as a journalist (206-7). Hollis mentions the oratorical impulse in his style, the projection of a physical audience receiving the voiced message that, however, would turn more lyrical years later, when Whitman felt the failure of his prophetic intentions. Hence, elements such as cadence would be rather innovative in the field of poetry. Oral, rather than metrical, rhythm was to mark Whitman's prose and later turn it into the poetry that we now know. Oral patterns were expressed through the use of ellipsis (meaning pauses), rhetorical questions, repetition (in anaphora, epistrophe and symploce), working along with pronouns and deictics, as pointed out before. Speech acts played an important role in this oral style, especially in the involvement of the audience or readership: the questions, imperatives and invitations, the commitments and declarative chants, songs, and celebrations that populate *Leaves of Grass* work for a magnetic influence over readers while giving the sense of presence, eye contact, and immediate communication with a "you" which, Hollis says, was not very common in nineteenth-century literature.

This contact with the reader is also possible through colloquialisms, repeated syntactic formulas of insistence, supple syntactic framework, and varying line lengths (Warren, "Style" 382). Catalogs and jumps in the narrative voice (from omniscient and descriptive to subjective and testimonial, then to fragmentary and declarative, from interrogative to imperative, and so on) have been seen as one of the main traits of his style as well (Coviello 88-89). This feature has also been interpreted as a dialogic attempt (Olsen 313), as an endless speech act enabled by the iterability of the deictic (Nathanson 114), by the multiplicity of the possibilities of "you," which could be unborn readers (Olsen 316-17), the US as a nation, but also a group of lovers, a readership on their way towards national

comradeship (Erkkila 182-83), a gate to more individually characterized citizens (Bertolini 1058). Critics have also discussed the possibility of a real contact or closer relationship between reader and voice. Dougherty suggests that Whitman's tendency to use address is actually a demand of attention to efface distance (491-92), while Cull defends their similarity to political speeches of the period at the same time that he interprets them as strategies to overcome the sense of alienation as well as the blurring of the "You"/"I" ontological polarities (763-64, 770).

It is clear then that the speech act approach involves, necessarily, the oral character of Whitman's writing. Although "designed for reception by individuals in private space" (Simonson 867), many of Whitman's poems seem to be oral discourses for public spheres. Nonetheless, the circuit of communication may not be closed as in the conventional settings proposed by Austin. The writer is transcribing an oral text and addressing a readership which could be seen as plural or singular (even both at the same time). This may lead us to conclude, with Bertolini, that he is "courting unhappiness," that is, accepting the broken bounds while acknowledging them:

> Whitman knows full well that for *Leaves of Grass* to have any participatory rhetorical force, he will not be able to guarantee the successful closing of the circuit of communication, cannot ensure that the reader will "hit" his "hint" correctly, take it up in a particular way. He can only theorize the speech act on the production side of the rhetorical transaction and imagine the felicitous consequences of its reception. (1063)

If, as seen in the previous section, presence is not saturated, the risk of unhappiness in Whitman's speech acts is then general. The reader may misread what he means while the poet invites him/her to accept his lack of a stable point of reference or source of knowledge. In "Whoever You Are Holding Me Now in Hand," the poet says "I am not what you supposed, but far different . . . [and] these leaves and me you will not understand, / They will elude you at first and still more afterward, I will certainly elude you, / Even while you should think you had unquestionably caught me, behold! / Already you see I have escaped from you" (*Leaves* 99-100). At the same time, the voice does also confess his own lack of self-knowledge ("Why even I myself I often think know little or nothing of my real life") or knowledge of the world ("A child said *What is the grass?* fetching it to me with full hands; / How could I answer the child? I do not know what it is any more than he") (*Leaves* 9, 30). Whitman's contradictory messages all but point to the same uncertain and multiple ontology of both reader, poet, and meaning of the poem, but still he exploits conventional formulas.

There is no grammar criterion to point out speech acts, Austin concludes (61-62), but some of the features he outlines can be distinguished throughout Whitman's poems. The first person singular, along with the use of present simple, is followed by both direct and indirect speeches of act (a distinction made by Searle, though). This phantasmatic "I" (see the previous section) is, along with "You," the center of many poems, and even the anaphoric anchor of Whitman's long lines. The "endless announcements" mentioned in "Starting from Paumanok" (part 14) are announcements of who the lyrical voice is and what it does. There is a great exercise of self-definition in most of his poems. Sometimes through apposition, other times by using the present simple of the verb 'to be.' In this self-definition the voice situates himself on the other side of the page, becoming a presence which is absent, and emphasizing the moment of connection that the reading action constitutes. This singing of the self (as in "One's self I sing") that he aimed at was realized by projecting an American self in constant and autonomous construction. In "To a Historian," the "I" is the "habitant of the Alleghanies," that is, the oldest mountains in the US. As Michael Moon points out in a note to this line, "Whitman is allegorically identifying himself with the ancient geologic past of his land" (*Leaves* 5). In writing, he "seek[s] for [his] own use to trace out here [in the book]" (*Leaves* 9).

Part of this self-definition is done by giving his name. We find it in the signature of his first poem in the "Inscriptions," where he establishes the name of both body and soul ("Come, Said my Soul," *Leaves* 2). However, this role of signature is turned into something else in other poems. In "Song of Myself," it appears in the opening section 24, after having given other definitions. In fact, from the very beginning, we start getting to know the voice, "now thirty-seven years old," "the mate and the companion of people," "old and young," "the poet of the Body and . . . the poet of the Soul," "he attesting sympathy" (*Leaves* 45-47). But more than his name, his actions are the central part, as in "Salut au Monde!" (*Leaves* 117). In this poem, the name of Walt Whitman is filled with what he does: "What widens within you Walt Whitman?", "What do you hear Walt Whitman?", "What do you see Walt Whitman?". There are multiple self-descriptions using "I am" as well, all throughout his work. "I am a man who, sauntering along without fully stopping, turns a casual look upon you and then averts his face," "I am the credulous man of qualities, ages, races," "I am not an earth nor an adjunct of an earth, / I am the mate and companion of people, all just as

immortal and fathomless as myself" (*Leaves* 14, 18, 31).[15] It is in this way that he becomes the multitudes that he "contain[s]":

> I am the hounded slave, I wince at the bite of the dogs,
> …
> I am the mash'd fireman with breast-bone broken,
> …
> I am an old artillerist, I tell of my fort's bombardment,
> I am there again. (*Leaves* 58-59)

Also, he adds:

> I am a real Parisian,
> I am a habitan of Vienna, St. Petersburg, Berlin, Constantinople,
> I am of Adelaide, Sidney, Melbourne,
> I am of London, Manchester, Bristol, Edinburgh, Limerick,
> I am of Madrid, Cadiz, Barcelona, Oporto, Lyons, Brussels, Berne, Frankfort,
> Stuttgart, Turin, Florence,
> I belong in Moscow, Cracow, Warsaw, or northward in Christiania or Stockholm,
> or in Siberian Irkutsk, or in some street in Iceland,
> I descend upon all those cities, and rise from them again. (*Leaves* 122-23)

The self-definition is then an exercise where he blurs the limits of his self after all. Nevertheless, as I pointed out above, it is also accomplished by describing what the voice does in present simple. In "Starting from Paumanok," the poet gives an idea of what he says he does (constative illocutionary acts): "I project my hat," "I resume the overstaid fraction," "I troop forth replenished with supreme power"; "I see" (used 287 times), "I hear" (199 times), "I know" (83 times). Nonetheless, the present simple is mainly used in commissives and declaratives: "I say" (30 times), "I tell" (12), "I swear" (24 times), "I salute" (4 times), "I sing" (53), "I belief" (24), "I think" (38). It is also common to find them in conjunction with structures of "will/shall." Being the future so important for this prophet-poet, there are many instances of commissives of this type. "Starting from Paumanok" again has long lists of things that the voice will do ("I will make a song for these States that no one state may under any circumstances be subjected to another State, . . . I will acknowledge . . . I will sing . . . I will show . . . I will therefore let . . . I will lift . . . And I will show . . . And I will show . . ." *Leaves* 17).

[15] Other examples of this use: "I am he that walks with the tender and growing night, I call to the earth and sea half-held by the night," "I am not the poet of goodness only, I do not decline to be the poet of wickedness also," "I am a free companion, I bivouac by invading watchfires," "I am the teacher of athletes," "I am the chanter, I chant aloud over the pageant," "But I am not the sea nor the red sun, / I am not the wind with girlish laughter," "I am he who tauntingly compels men, women, nations," "I am for those that have never been master'd," "For I am the sworn poet of every dauntless rebel the world over," (*Leaves* 43, 44, 57, 73, 205, 240, 287, 297, 311).

Thus, the constative speech that we read may be shocking for us, since here the present simple is not used to point at a regular action or habit, but rather at a reality which might be taken as a general truth or, as Austin points out, a "historic" present, giving the poem a performative dimension (*HTD* 64). It is not "I see you every day," but a plain "I see you" that builds the connection with the reader/listener in an uncommon way. Nonetheless, other tenses are used in his poems too. "Me Imperturbe," for instance, combines present and past participle ("Me imperturbe, standing at ease in nature . . . Imbued as they"), while many others use the past simple to rise the present personality from past events, as at the beginning of "Starting from Paumanok," when he says "I conn'd old times, / I sat studying at the feet of the great masters, / Now if elegible O that the great masters might return and study me" (*Leaves* 11, 16). These sentences, furthermore, through the use of anaphora, involve everyone, every human being of the world, every nation and state. Thus, in "Salute au Monde!" he writes: "Within me latitude widens, longitude lengthens," and he hears and sees from "the workman singing and the farmer's wife singing" to "all the inhabitants of earth," saluting them (*Leaves* 117, 123). In this involvement, the use of vocatives (calls) plays an essential role. In this same poem, part 11 starts "You whoever you are" but ends up mentioning many different nationalities ("You Norwegian! Swede! . . . You benighted roamer of Amazonia! you Patagonian! you Feejee-man!"), from present and past civilizations (*Leaves* 124-25). Many of the poems have vocatives as titles. "For You O Democracy," "Salute au Monde!", "Pioneers! O Pioneers!", "Beat! Beat! Drums!", "Respondez!", "Up, Lurid Stars!" are some examples. Within them, calls to the reader are also very common, and this goes along with the use of questions pointed out by Hollis in his book.

But why should we see this set of structures as speech acts if, after all, there is no rigorous agreement over the nature of performative (in contrast to constative) speech acts? Is self-definition a performative act then? Our poet says what he does (hears and sees), but are his utterances pointing at a world (and poet) "outside" the text, a real person seeing and hearing? If we go back to the previous section, and consider the volatile (rather decentered) nature of Whitman's "I," we can start developing some ideas to answer this theoretical question. The lyrical voice of the poet (if there is only one) places and moves himself while asserting his existence; or rather, defines himself in movement. Whitman's aim is to sing the "Modern Man" (*Leaves* 3), to chant "personality" (*Leaves* 5), and also, as we saw above, "to define America, her athletic Democracy" (*Leaves*). This is to be done through a close relationship with whatever is beyond the paper, through the projected (and absent) presence we outlined in the previous section. Articulated through the use of deictics, and uncommon

use of verbs (of speech) and verb tenses, through vocatives and interjections, the poet transfixes the limit of the paper. The dualism of written and "real" (physical) world is abolished because the self-definition is not mimetic, but rather performative. In the poem "To Thee Old Cause" (*Leaves* 6) he claims that "[his] book and the war are one." Here war refers to the democratic fight in which his writings participate on equal terms. Thus, literature (or language) are not parallel to the world he lives in. It becomes a place of action and progress within the political processes of the US.

The nature of his speech is then inaugural, as that in the Declaration of Independence. The language used constitutes (in action) rather than changes reality. While for Austin words could do things (always excluding the case of jokes or poems), Whitman's proposal is of a literature that can be America and the American citizen itself in his actions. His emphasis on the contact between the reader and the voice points at the task his poetry is supposed to accomplish: the individual and the composite (that is, the American nation) drawn together, brought into existence (absent and present) through words. Imperatives, vocations, exclamation marks, the cadence of its punctuation, along with the verb tenses and deictics work towards a presence (of both voice and hearer) which ~~is~~, in the Derridean line. Whitman is self-defining within Derrida's framework of non-exhaustive ontological limits. He moves in a timeless but also non-systematic use of referents which are sung into being, inaugurated by words. If the poet can be multitudes, if it can meet different "You" in different times, it is due to this non-essential conception of presence. The lack of specific features, but at the same time, the use of those outlined by Austin, make us see a projection of what the non-exhaustive could have been if happiness was fully achievable. Whitman points at a vanishing scenario of non-encounter which meanwhile favors its eventuality. In an endless arena of repeated inauguration, poet and reader come into ~~being~~.

2. "I Hereby Declare the End of War": Ginsberg's Spoken / Written Acts

> Poets to come! Orators, singers, musicians to come!
> Not to-day is to justify me and answer what I am for,
> But you, a new brood, native, athletic, continental, greater than before known,
> Arouse! For you must justify me. (Whitman, "Poets to Come")

> "Who touches this book touches a man," said Whitman Usually people pompously accent the last word as if Whitman were calling himself virile. Quite the opposite,

> Whitman meant that he really had put himself out in his book as he never was able to do in the flesh. So whoever he got under the covers of the book was having a vicarious feel job with the good gray poet. (Ginsberg, *Martyrdom* 359)

As discussed in the previous chapter, Ginsberg's writing career is set in a period of time when poetry was supposed by the New Criticism to be treated as objectively as any other science. However, he noticed that a "romantic period" was starting with his generation despite the numerous attempts to imitate Eliot's "hard-up and classical" style. He noticed, indeed, the need to get "personal": "how could there be now anything but a reassertion of naked personal subjective truth—eternally real? Perhaps Whitman will be seen to have set the example and been bypassed for half a century" (*Howl: Original Draft* 156). Ginsberg seems to take Whitman's approach to poetry in the same way. Although there are different stages in his writing career, in all of them we can feel the tension found in Whitman's texts: the nature of the encounter between reader and writer seems to hang on the play within and without (through) the paper and the written voice.

In this section, my goal is to give account of the presence of the poet's voice in the text, the role of written sound, and the stylistic consequences of Ginsberg's performative approach to language. Thus, both J. L. Austin and Jacques Derrida will go along with us in this analysis of the countercultural poet.

2.1. The Mind in Written Form and Mantra Chanting

As it happened in Whitman's poems, Ginsberg's could be said to be "contentless," to be constituted by the absence of a represented reality or picture. Rather, he presents himself in an attempt to project (again, as Whitman did decades before) his idea of the prophet-poet in the US, as well as the mind's travels through different discourses. Michael Davidson follows here Charles Altieri's poetics of presence or immanence. The poem becomes a direct unmediated extension of the author where language does not represent, but rather constitutes a transparent form. The text turns into the incarnation of the writer through whom, as Emerson defended, a vital universe flows, leading him/her to avoid embellishment and opt for spontaneity and improvisation (Davidson 17-18). This, nevertheless, is not a very accurate account since, while Ginsberg did prefer presentation over representation, there was in his writing a carefully arranged work on the final product, as we will see. We find in his poems a mixture of the Romantic and Poststructuralist dimensions of postmodernism outlined by Davidson. It is easy to see in his poetics a rejection of the high modernist formalism and impersonality, but also an awareness of the interaction between poetry and

its context of "culture industry," along with the "dissolution of subject in forms of ideological reification" (31). Rather than keep the "persistent effort to confirm word's communicable referentiality to reality and truth" (Gelpi, *American Poetry* 14-15), Ginsberg's proposal will include a voice which, far from being independent from its context, will rather transfix the paper in its traditional literary role.

Bernard Duffey, analyzing the poetry of Williams, proposes a poetics of presence too, but in this case he understands writing as an act of presence, "as linguistically present action" originated in its "kinetic" nature. Thus, the poet is "more engaged in expressing literary action than in forging literary objects" (x). Ginsberg was also more interested in writing "literal renderings of actual material which, though less pretty than the rhymed poems I was writing, actually had more humor, more life . . . rather than recombining symbols that I had appropriated from Yeats or Blake or Marvell" (*Allen Verbatim* 142). The subject matter of the poem was not an interpretation of reality, but "the literal workings of the mind," as in the work of Gertrude Stein (Portugés, *The Visionary* 59). Also, despite taking an approach similar to Williams's, Ginsberg's poems are not just presentations of a reality, but introspective mirrors where abstractions of time, eternity and death could also take place (Breslin, *From Modern* 92-93). Thus, in general, scholars have found the Romantic trend to focus writing on the self, but presentation (in contrast to representation) and the presence of the self add a divergence in the traditional expression of the self in the Romantic paradigm of the writer.

2. 1. 1. The Ego in Writing

Critics have commented widely on the autobiographical component in Ginsberg's poetry (Breslin, "The Origins" 407-8), adding to his own articulation of presence. He himself, during his lessons at San Francisco State College, claimed that writing should be an exercise of getting naked, of expressing one's "secret lives in whatever form came out," one's "sympathies most intimate to myself and most awkward in the great world of family, formal education, business and current literature," an expression of uncensored candor (Morgan 216; Ginsberg, *Howl: Original Draft* xii; Ginsberg, "Document" 117). As a result, his poetry is crowded with private allusions and "assumptions of common reference" that make them difficult to understand out of their context (Ginsberg, *Howl: Original Draft* xii). Although we could compare Ginsberg's to Whitman's poetics, Ginsberg's self did not happen in his book in the same way that the nineteenth-century persona had done. Ginsberg's books happened and took part in the twentieth-century United States, they changed the mental panorama and

made people aware of the manipulation the media and the government did to justify the war. However, Ginsberg's projected self was articulated in the form of the poem, in its lines. He presents himself in "Lysergic Acid" (*CP* 239) with "I allen Ginsberg a separate consciousness," [sic] and also mentions his name most times humorously, as in "What's Dead," "I'm a prisoner of Allen Ginsberg," "They're all Phantoms of my Imagining," "After Lalon," and "Is About" (*CP* 697, 882, 888, 1019, 1089). Self-projection here is different from the one found in Whitman's poems. Of course, the fact that Ginsberg's poet was "getting naked" was aligned to these autobiographical concessions, but it is in his recording of the self that he achieved this effect. The spontaneous technique, along with a work on that same form, shows there is a formal concern in his projection of the self. Actually, while the distinction between real life and poetry is dissolved —"everything *is* poetry, to begin with, if you see it" (*Composed* 147-48)—, aesthetic principles made the difference after all. As he explains in his analysis of *Howl*, the Carl Solomon of the poem was seen as a "poetic metaphor," a stereotype rather than a real identity (*Howl: Original Draft* 111). This also happened in the rest of his writings, in letters and diaries. He wrote and dealt with his daily texts as if he was an editor taking "control of the public face of his private life." Hence, "his poems extend beyond the orthodoxy of published print" (Arthur 227). Letters and journals became the "found objects" that could be used in his poems.

Hence, there is also a sense of self-fiction in these texts, following Whitman's well-programmed projection of the poet's self. As Davidson says in his description of the Beat circles, they were creating images of writers for other writers to read (5). Just as Whitman had done, there was a huge work behind the images of the poet that Ginsberg wanted to project. The Romantic poet and his expression of the self were interpreted by Ginsberg as the expression of *a* self, an approach to writing which was influenced by many different sources of inspiration. Thus, "the Shaman with his beard" and the "longhaired Crank" of "Kansas City to St. Louis" (*CP* 421) will combine features to make up a Whitmanian poet. As a teenager, and later as a Columbia student, he worked on the definition of poet and self-expression, being communication a key concept for him. In one of his diary entries he emphasized the role of communication in art: "It is a wasteful for an artist to create uncommunicative art" (*Martyrdom* 38). In fact, he ended up using communication rather than the term *expression* (81), although regarding this topic, the use of *ego* turns into a more interesting aspect. In his terminology we find his defense of an impersonal position as we said before. It is the ego, that is, a side of the poet's psyche, who conforms the actual poet:

> The artist's pleasure is greatly, societal. He loves recognition. He communicates—his ego is the dynamo that moves the transmission belt of his art. Self expression is in actuality—brutal reality—the communication, not the mere expression, of self. Creation is reducible to communication. Art is by nature communicative. Ego the producer, experience and soul the raw material, art the commodity, the intellectual, the consumer. (*Martyrdom* 81)

That is why, years later, he claimed that writers found more interesting poetry in their journals, letters, and notes, than in the stuff they wrote as "poetry" (*Composed* 112-13). He was then defying the doctrines of New Criticism, Eliot's model of the modern artist as "hard-working, disciplined craftsman." He wanted to risk imperfection or failure in order to achieve "honesty and immediacy of feeling" (Breslin, "The Origins" 402).

2. 1. 2. The Presence

But is this, necessarily, the presence of the author? Of course, from the Romantic tradition he would bring the idea of the poet as a guide, a *vates*, a prophet, the center of collective rituals where the equation writer/reader was changed and which took place in venues that were only for politicians or rock musicians before (*Allen Verbatim* 209, Davidson 29-30). But in writing, the poet's presence took other forms. If we consider time conception, as we did with Whitman, critics have not found as much complexity as in other coetaneous authors (those traditionally catalogued as "postmodern"). However, J. Jesse Ramírez lingers in the nightmares that appear in "Howl," and so points to the out-of-joint character of time in "Kaddish." Drawing on Derrida's *Specters of Marx*, he identifies a "spectral experience of time," and consequently a "deconstruction of the self-contained *is* that opens up to its temporal Others: the *was* of the past injustice, and the *will be* of the redemptive future." Poetry, Ramírez concludes, becomes a disjointed temporal field perfect for opening up an "emancipatory vision" (50-51).

However, this disjointment is mainly realized through the topics and deictics, and in form it would rather be seen in his spontaneous methods, in his notion of poetry as something which happens, and that he would later connect not only with the Buddhist embracement of the "immediacy of his own reality" over craft, but also with the eternity he said he achieved in the juxtapositions inspired by Cézanne's "*petit sensations*" of perception (Portugés, *The Visionary* 55-6, "Ginsberg's Cézanne" 147-48). As he himself said, in his involvement of both breathing and thinking in writing, there was a "montage of time & space, surrealist juxtaposition of opposites, compression of images, mind gaps or dissociations, 'hydrogen jukeboxes'" (Ginsberg, *Howl: Original Draft* 175). In each of those gaps between surrealist arrangements, the poem outstripped "rational cognitive processes

taking place during perception and association," eventually leading to the jump from profane to sacred time (Jackson 312-16, 299). As in Whitman's poetics, time acquires in poetry a mythical or atemporal component where the deconstruction of the "self-contained *is*" happens.

This last notion adds to the reception of the text, in written and spoken form. If poetry was to act as a graphic of the mind, a process more than a message, readers and listeners would receive it as a "an emotional time bomb that would continue exploding in US consciousness" against the "repressive police bureaucracy," to "deflate tendencies toward authoritarian strong-arming" (Ginsberg, *Howl: Original Draft* xii). But apart from that, involving the body, the breath, and the mind in lines meant a reconceptualization of the poet's self, not so much as a mere dispatcher of lines, of interpretations of the world; s/he would rather be the line itself, a body and mind in motion, happening, being by doing —a presentation instead of a representation.

As seen above, mantra was also part of this equation. The connection between the body (breath, voice) and mind had already been in his first writings (those inspired by Williams' poetics, as well as other avant-garde writing experiments), but it was reinforced with his studies on consciousness within Eastern religions and meditation practices. Removed of associations, of referential use, language could become "pure prayer meditation," "pure sounds in a spacious physical universe" (*Allen Verbatim* 157-58). Since his travel to Nepal in the 1960s, Ginsberg had given these concepts another level of meaning, and he compared the sensation of mantra-chanting with drug experiments. This added to the "contentless" character of his poems, since changing a name (the sound of the name) of god conformed the god, and actually turned the chanter into the god itself. This would affect the choice of words in composition, going to the concrete thing-name rather than the abstract word (*Howl: Original Draft* 125), and it may explain poems such as "Hūm Bom" (*CP* 576, 1004), which through sound and black humor transforms the listener into "a person of peace" (Hungerford 278-79). Every syllable was intentional, it had magical powers against the logocratic background of the Establishment, and so they were also to conform, as seen before a "historical event" (*Composed* 47).

It seems, then, that Ginsberg's poems work as Whitman's: the poet —an identity— happens in the text physiologically, which is partly achieved through these spontaneity techniques. Writing poetry was a physiological act where the spirit was intrinsically present. The "Spirit" or "Spiritus," that is, the "anima," was the breath (Gelpi, *American Poetry* 101;

Ginsberg, *Composed* 108). Hence, the body was the foundation for the spontaneous (voiced) poetry, which at the same time would come from the articulated observation of the mind, as in meditation (Ginsberg, *Composed* 107-9). Writing poetry turned into a process of discovery: the poet happened in the poem because "[t]he only pattern of value or interest in poetry is the solitary, individual pattern peculiar to the poet's moment & the poem *discovered* in the mind & in the process of writing it out on the page, as notes, transcriptions–reproduced in the fittest accurate form, at the time of composition" (Ginsberg, "When the Mode" 325-26). Thus, through spontaneous writing he got the honesty that Kerouac vindicated in writing, the "immediate consciousness of the transcriber" (*Letters of A.G.* n. pag.), avoiding representative forms.

As he insisted later in his career, the result was "a poetry with a meaning which is identical with its form, with a rhythm identical with the arrangement of the words on the page, and the words on the page arranged identically with what you want to say and how you want to say it" (Ginsberg, *Allen Verbatim* 144-45). Each line became a "single breath unit," which meant that "physical and mental inspiration thought [was to be] contained in the elastic of a breath" (Ginsberg, "Notes Written on Finally Recording *Howl*" 81). This proposal was therefore a counteractive technique against the "mechanical reproduction of imagery for interpersonal communication" which had atrophied our bodies (Ginsberg, *Allen Verbatim* 27-28). The paper, the white space, became a field to defy the canon and convey the spontaneity of the poetry present in speech (*Composed* 54-55). The poet was then physiologically and psychologically present in the act of (writing and) reading. Poet and reader would get together in the "natural flow of the mind," "the inside-mind-thought rather than [in] the verbalized speech" (Ginsberg, *Howl: Original Draft* 153). There is, of course, and as we indicated before, a careful selection, a revision of the material which was presented, but it was precisely a job on the spontaneous nature that it enacted (M. Perloff, "A Lion" 203; Ginsberg, *Composed* 96).

2. 1. 3. Careful Spontaneity of the Mind

We find therefore in Ginsberg a constant tension between revision and "rawness" of verse. On the one hand, he was interested in Kerouac's spontaneous poetics, but he also kept traces of the craft he said he wanted to fight. He was looking for honesty but it was a carefully displayed (almost artificial) honesty, and this gave him his own position in the poetics of the 1950s. He was not just a follower of Kerouac, but rather an advocator who added supposedly opposed techniques to his writings. As he explained, even in automatic (spontaneous) writing, as that of Stein, there was actually an "automatic selection," a choice of what was

going to be included and what was not. There were many ideas going through the mind and the writer would choose those being written (*Composed* 110). To get vivid writing there must be selection:

> I'm not writing to write something, . . . I catch myself thinking; I suddenly notice something I have thought of when I wasn't thinking of writing, and then I write it down *if it is vivid enough*. And as far as *the choice* of what to write down or not, the slogan is vividness, is self selecting. (Ginsberg, interview by Harvey R. Kubernik n. pag.) (emphasis added)

This carefully arranged stream of consciousness included then written, spoken, and thought discourse alike, making no difference between them because all of it would work towards a specific state of the mind (*Composed* 50).

The result was a spontaneous but somehow mimetic display of the mind which would also get the reader/audience to the same state of consciousness, a projection of a self in a specific situation. There was an emulation of the mind in every speech pause found on the paper in form of lines. This would contrast with the "TV platform politics public style," characterized by unnatural rhythms. On the contrary, his poems were to have "a kind of natural speech rhythm that comes when you are speaking slowly, interestedly, to a friend" and this would be read as such in public: "When I get up and read those units I just make believe I'm trying to think of the next phrase. And then I come out with the next phrase. And so actually that leads the listener, or reader, in an oral interpretation," finally getting their minds "hovering" with the poet's. This theatrical element of playing the role of the poet in a specific way, however, did not lead to a binary thought of "ideal" or "original" poem and its copies. Ginsberg defended that in each reading, if the poet wanted to run on a line it would be as valid as cutting it up into small ones by using pauses (*Composed* 21). Through these elements he projected a body, a mind, a personality which happened in the poem, to such extent that he wrote (in a letter to Lionel Trilling) that each poem was an "extension from [him]self" (*Martyrdom* 255). It was then, not a matter of the themes that he discussed, but of the writing technique. He invited to write "the same way that you… are!". Traditionally, poets wrote following the models that they had read, but Ginsberg's proposal was to get poetry out of the quotidian life; doing otherwise was just a form of hypocrisy ("The Art of Poetry No. 8" 7). Moreover, if the poet happens in the poem it is also due (as in the case of Whitman) to a particular sense of the individual self and identity. In his own accounts about himself as a poet, in his attempts to project the precise public figure he wanted to be, he acknowledged "Howl" as a composition which rose out of self-expression rather than intentional poem-writing. However, at the same time, this "real" self turned out

to be his idealized self: “the Lamb in its glory . . . Compositional self-exploration turns out to be compositional self-idealization” says Breslin (*From Modern* 104).

In this idealization, in this construction or performance of the self in written form, the logos would have a huge importance. Breslin points out there is a background of death-wish and self-annihilation throughout all his career (*From Modern* 81), but his major fear was losing himself. At Burroughs’s suggestion to “go right ahead, into space, outside of Logos” he answered his identity was built on all those elements, so renouncing to them meant the effacement of his own self (“Prose Contribution” 340). He found the solution, however, in a deconstructed conception of the self, in the mantra tradition and meditation, where consciousness could rise while keeping some sort of references (Hungerford 275-76). The spectral experience of time he proposed, as Ramírez explains, led to the acknowledgement of the “temporal others” (“dead and unborn”) and hence, as seen before, of the “deconstruction of the self-contained *is*, that opens up to the temporal Others” (50). The self was not a unit, but a chain of selves which could never get stable, and whose limits were always in process of change. In the same way that he said of Dylan “I don’t think he’s got a self!” (Interview by Peter Barry Chowka n. pag.), there was no unified self of Allen Ginsberg. While he kept reading his compositions even years later, he also acknowledged (when asked to record “Howl”) that it had been written in a “limbo by somebody else, not me” (Ferlinghetti and Ginsberg 42).

Ginsberg’s approach to the self that was writing his poems is in constant conflict precisely because of the contradictions in his own discourse. While his poetry was written by different selves, they kept the same “Allen Ginsberg” as author, and this character was said to be the result of the honest (transcribed) presentation of a writing being with a body and a mind process. The specific situation of the writing scenario was however translatable to the reader or listener, to such extent that the physiological and psychological states would be shared by both sides of a page (transfixing it as a result). Ginsberg claimed he started to write “Howl” as a non-poetic exercise, as a summary of his life with no other (public) pretense precisely because of the autobiographical (and explicit) details it included (“Notes Written” 80). Opposed to Burroughs’s proposal of leaving the self behind (something that, as John Tytell explains, was in line with Eliot’s poetics), Ginsberg and Kerouac defended that the personality should be “the center and subject of their work” (Tytell, *Naked Angels* 15). In fact, this helped him justify Pound’s work despite his antisemitism. What was important was not Ezra Pound’s mind, but that it was a mind, that he had opened up in his poetry “*a model*

of mind process," "the nearest to a natural model . . . as Cézanne had worked *from* Nature, to reconstitute the optical field perceptions" (*Composed* 8-9). Thus, while Allen Ginsberg's name was there, the focus was on the poetics of transcribing a person, presenting his/her mind and, through line arrangement, involving physiological processes. As in Whitman's poems, then, there is a shared ontology with the reader to some extent. In his lectures, Ginsberg claimed there is one consciousness that we all share on the highest level, that we are all one self, actually, that we are all one self with one being, one consciousness (Ginsberg, *Allen Verbatim* 5). In this sense, as said above, his poetics of transcription were a key factor. In Whitman, the scene of reading was addressed in the poems, thus breaking the fence between one and other side. Here, however, this interstice is inhabited through the form, a point we will develop in the following section.

2. 2. Ginsberg's Declarations and Magic Language

Ginsberg's style is quite heterogeneous, especially if we take into account his first years of imitating the New Criticism poetics he was taught at university. In this section, I am going to focus then on those poems written after breaking away from canonical forms through Williamesque and Poundian (experimental) poetics, and going further to the years of "Howl" and later *The Fall of America*. As it happened in Whitman's corpus, there is a sense of inauguration in each of his texts, although the focus is rather placed on poetry as an event, as a happening. The Declaration had inaugurated the existence (that is, it had created) Americans and the US as an institution. Therefore, the text had legitimized itself by its own pronouncement. Ginsberg's countercultural aims were actually producing a new consciousness state that could constitute the American reality, proclaiming then the end of the Vietnam War and leading the US to a cathartic redemption. His poetics of transcribing the mind constituted the poem and so eliminated the subject matter, getting closer to avant-garde techniques coming from Stein (composition in void, broken syntax), Kerouac and Surrealism (associations), Burroughs (random juxtaposition), or Artaud (sound arrangement) (*Indian Journals* 38-39).

Thus, his poems can be seen as speech acts, given the effect that he wanted to get with them. The poet was the one who would overcome the cynicism and complacency of the misuse of language by government and press, and at the same time turn war into peace, destruction into renewal (Gelpi, *American Poetry* 108-9). Against the "hallucinatory public consciousness" poets could enhance the private consciousness, subjective, and so revolutionary, through an alternative language (*Composed* 74). However, despite this

performative nature, there are not as many studies regarding Ginsberg's speech acts as there are about Whitman's. Davidson acknowledges the adequacy of Austin's performatives in studying the Beats and the San Francisco Renaissance poets because of their "context-specific" nature that "removes it from a realm of linguistic universals and emphasizes the uniqueness of the speech act situation itself" (22). Similarly, Hungerford finds in the Beats a spiritual understanding of speech acts on the basis of language that is not just *being*, but *doing* in a supernatural way (290-91). Despite these attempts, we could say that, in general, there has not been a "Hollis" for Ginsberg in the academy, and aspects of felicity conditions, contexts and performance have been broadly commented but not in such a systematic and exhaustive way. It may be due to the fact that Ginsberg's texts seem to be much more diverse in terms of content and style, and thus also more difficult to scan in the same way that Whitman's were dissected and analyzed by Hollis. The twentieth-century poet was interested in poetic acts which included sit-ins where people would just sit down for hours and do nothing but meditate and chant mantras (Ginsberg, *Composed* 101), a textual object that is hard to classify just by taking Austin's theory of speech acts. Of course, there are explicit performative utterances, but they are combined with mantra chants, conversational metrics, juxtapositional composition —elements which would help Ginsberg build a diverse type of poetic event.

If Ginsberg uses speech acts, it is usually in a broader sense. The term performance exploits here its polysemic nature and transcends the strict definition from Speech Act Theory. As Davidson explains, when applied to poetry, Austin's term refers to a poetry "that effects a change in the reader beyond the mere reception of information – in short, that uses language to go beyond language" and "the literary application of the performative uses a heightened linguistic context, notation, or oral delivery to accomplish its ends" (21). Hungerford also adds a "spiritual" understanding of speech acts to point out the power of language over inner states, and poetry would also have this magic effect (290-91). Ginsberg himself explained that Williams' motto of "no ideas but in things" could be understood as a rejection of general philosophical concepts and a vindication of "particular *actions* that you can actually *perform* or *do*, tangible things that you can program" (emphasis added) (*Allen Verbatim* 211). He thought he was changing the American public opinion with his poetic activism, both in poetry readings and in his published texts. With the "Wichita" line of "make Mantra of American language now" he did not mean that Americans "should literally start chanting the lines for mantra purposes," but rather "make a series of syllables that would be identical with a historical event." Poetry was an event just as war (*Composed* 47). Ginsberg

seems to be aware of Derrida's theories on media and what he calls "artifactuality," the artificial projection of real (and live) events retransmitted on television. The poet's terms are, as seen above, drawn from mystical conceptions of reality: he talks about black magic and about shamans who know what dances to dance in order to save the tribe. At the same time, though, he believes that the truth shown in television is an event rather than a reflection of reality. The mantra, the "sacred formula" which invokes a divinity in the pronunciation itself adds to this event-based nature (P. Carroll, "I Lift" 293). In mantra there is no reference, no pointing out to a referred "thing," but an actual creation. Thus, writing, reading, thinking, are conceived as events which can counteract the artifactuality of TV war.

In Ginsberg's style, then, the analysis is not as category-based as that of Whitman that we saw above. In terms of pronouns, for instance, the interaction between the "I" and the "you" which could be established between the poet and the reader (or listener) is not as noticeable as it was in Whitman's poems. His lyrical voice does not try to reach an individual you on the other side of the page. The "yous" we find are not the readers, but characters in his narratives, impersonal ways of talking ("And one time / is all Time if you look / at it out of the grave" from "In Death Cannot Reach"), or addressees such as America ("Where O America are you" from "After Dead Souls") or other people (among whom we find Carl Solomon, Walt Whitman, or García Lorca). The first vocative to a reader/listener is found in "Howl": "who drove crosscountry seventytwo hours to find out if I had a vision or you had a vision or he had a vision to find out Eternity" (*CP* 137), and later on "to recreate the syntax and measure of poor human prose and stand before you speechless and intelligent and shaking with shame" (*CP* 138). There are also poems similar to those of Whitman, addressing possible readers of the future or other planets ("Poem Rocket": "I write you a poem long ago . . . Now at last I can speak to you beloved brothers of an unknown moon real Yous," *CP* 171), hypothetical ones (as in "Ignu," *CP* 211). In more political poetry, we find "yous" for the population, as well as vocatives.[16]

Nonetheless, the amount of speech acts connecting writer and reader are quite reduced. There is little reference to the body of the reader, and to the incarnation of the "I" on the paper and written words. He mentions himself several times, but he is aware of his writing in few occasions. He finishes "This Form of Life Needs Sex" with an informal "and

[16] Examples can be found in "Who Will Take Over the Universe" ("send your protest to Clint Murchinson") (*CP* 273), "September on Jessore Road" (*CP* 579), "News Bulletin" (*CP* 613), "You Don't Know It" (*CP* 943), and "Cosmopolitan Greetings" (*CP* 953). Vocatives appear in "Come All Ye Brave Boys" (*CP* 645), "Gospel Nobel Truths" (*CP* 649), "Rolling Thunder Stones" (*CP* 651), "To the Punks of Dawlish" (*CP* 729), "Fifth Internationale" (*CP* 957), and "Don't get angry with me" (*CP* 1104).

that's my situation, Folks—" (*CP* 294), and addresses a "dear *reader*" (my emphasis) in "Today" (*CP* 354). Another exception is "Objective Subject":

> It's true I write about myself
> Who else do I know so well?
> Where else gather blood red roses & kitchen garbage
> What else has my thick heart, hepatitis or hemorrhoids—
> Who else lived my seventy years, my old Naomi?
> and if by chance I scribe U.S. politics, Wisdom
> meditation, theories of art
> it's because I read a newspaper loved
> teachers skimmed books or visited a museum. (*CP* 1137)

As in a declaration of intentions, this poem addresses writing itself, a kind of justification for choosing himself as the object of writing. In his "Scatological Observations," he also warns "Young romantic readers" and suggests "skip this part of the book" (*CP* 1147). Most of the poems, though, lack this type of awareness. Writing may be mentioned or the main topic of the poem (as in "Improvisation in Beijing" *CP* 937), but there are few instances where the poet refers to the context of reading and writing per se.

Regarding performative speech acts, we find many more examples. In "Television Was a Baby Crawling Toward That Deathchamber," for instance, he claims

> I prophesy: the Pigs won't mind! I prophesy: Death will be old folks home!
> I prophesy: Chango will prophesy on national Broadcasting System,
> I prophesy, we will all prophesy to each other & I give thee happy tidings Robert
> Lowell and Jeanette MacDonald— (*CP* 280)

Later on his presence is made up of actions (in constative utterances): "I am masturbating in bed, . . . I am naked in New York, . . . I seize the tablets of the Law, . . . I saw him . . . I screamed" (*CP* 290-91). His speech is also important in "Plutonian Ode"

> I manifest your Baptismal Word after four billion years
> I guess your birthday in Earthling Night, I salute your dreadful presence lasting
>   majestic as the Gods
> . . .
> I celebrate a matter that renders Self oblivion
> . . .
> I yell thru Washington
> . . .
> I enter your secret places with my mind, I speak with your presence, I roar your
>   Lion Roar with mortal mouth
> . . .
> I chant your absolute Vanity
> . . .
> I dare your Reality, I challenge your very being! I publish your cause and effect!
> . . .

> My oratory advances on your vaunted Mystery! This breath dispels your braggart
>   fears! I sing your form at last
> . . .
> I call your name with hollow vowels, I psalm your Fate close by
> . . .
> to Spell your destiny, I set this verse prophetic . . . (*CP* 710-12)

In "Proclamation" (*CP* 971) he identifies himself as "the King of the Universe," and in "The Ballad of Skeletons" (*CP* 1091) he presents the clash of speech between different skeletons (Presidential, Speaker, Representative, Supreme Court, Military, etc.). If we include imperatives or directive utterances here, poems such as "Television Was a Baby" (*CP* 280), "Be Kind to Yourself" (*CP* 367), or "Going to the World of the Dead" (*CP* 875) should also be mentioned, although maybe more in relation to the oratorical character of his poems.

Thus, there may be no proximity between writer and reader on the paper, in the written nature of his poems, but it is there, as we saw above, to the extent that the disposition of lines on the paper was to serve as a transcription of the body and mind of the poet, and so the reader could get the same state of consciousness. He thought poetry should unite poet and readers in a catalytic moment by manipulating the thought-breath units that he worked with. The key factor was not the information given, but the emotions aroused (Portugés, *The Visionary* 81). The relationship between body, mind and talking is then important here. Poems such as "Wichita Vortex Sutra" have been seen as an embodiment of "an experience of contemporary American language" (P. Carroll, "I Lift" 294-95). Through Olson's Projective Verse, but especially from Kerouac's ideas, he stuck to the rule that you can "*talk as you think*. And talk as you talk, instead of talking as a literary person would be taught to talk if he went to Columbia." To substitute New Criticism writers, Kerouac and Ginsberg had African-American music (Charlie Parker, Gillespie, Monk) and avant-garde authors such as Proust, Céline, Thomas Wolfe, Saroyan (*Composed* 40-41). Theirs were the metrics that should be followed, mental streams, in breath-units, which were much fitter than the forced forms of traditional verse and, at the same time, allowed some space for the spontaneity that was so important for the honesty they wanted to get (*Howl: Original Draft* 153). In this oral or projective writing, then, he combined the catalogue, the anaphora, and traditional rhymes with the juxtaposition of elements in collage-like compositions. "[A] long Train of Associations" in a sonorous articulation that would catalyze in readers and listeners, in form of "[p]hysiological spasms" (Ginsberg, *Composed* 22-23, 36). The "syntactical condensation" and the mantric properties of a language coming from the body would then be the base for decisions such as that in "Portland Coliseum" (*CP* 373), where, as Ginsberg explains, he turned "hands waving *like* myriad snakes of thought" into "hands waving myriad / snakes

of thought," or "The million children *of* the thousand worlds" into "The million children / the thousand worlds" (*Composed* 25).

In "Adapted from Neruda 'Que despierte el leñador'" (*CP* 704) the poet asserts: "I didn't come here to solve anything. / I came here to sing / And for you to sing with me." His phonocentrism led him to develop the public readings that Whitman did not carry out despite his interest in them, and they were to fight the logocratic Establishment with words, with sounds. In this sense, he shares with Whitman his phonocentric convictions. Voice, furthermore, in its relationship with mantra, turned out to be the perfect counteract to change consciousness. All this helped Ginsberg to understand his poetry as something which happened, as an event that inaugurated new mentalities (and so, realities). Readers (or listeners) found a transcribed mind which could be heard, the paper was transfixed at the same time it kept its essential position in the process: the voice was written because it had a written nature. There was also a sense of presence and absence (understood in Derridean terms), although in a different way when compared with Whitman. While in Whitman's text the ambiguity between writing and speaking was articulated in the non-systematic use of referents, in the fuzzy ontological limits, in Ginsberg's it is based on the shared spaces of the mental processes inhabited by poet and readers, voice and ear. Both sides of the paper transfix it by generating a virtual scenario which could invade (or pervade) the "physical" one precisely because of the physical (physiological) dimension of this poetics. Although far from the exhaustive study of pronouns and verb tenses that Whitman gives himself to scholars, in Ginsberg's texts traits such as the oral style, the collage building and the line arrangement also show there was in him an idea of what he wanted to construct with his poetry.

Chapter 4. **American Life "Clusters" in *Leaves* and *Collected Poems*: A Countercultural Legacy for the US**

In their Romantic approach to writing, both Whitman and Ginsberg kept, as we have seen, an autobiographical component in their texts, although this would be informed by the logocratic and phonocentric frame of the US in the nineteenth century. Thus, to the social role that the Romantic poet had, they added the national component: the musicality of American English, as well as the power of their texts among the others that conformed the Republic. Furthermore, their understanding of language, poetry and the poet were put into practice through self-performance. Each in his own time, they were to be (to build in their texts) "the American poet."

This chapter will explain how their books *Leaves of Grass* (the 1892 edition) and *Collected Poems: 1947-1997* (2006) were thought to conform a poetic legacy for the US, and how this legacy was based on the persona of Whitman and Ginsberg, already famous and renowned when they approached death. These books are the result of their poetic programs, but also of their own self-projection for the future. As I have elaborated above, theirs were different forms of self-performance. In Whitman's poetry, the poet Walt Whitman is absent and present at the same time, and this ghostly ontology is used to generate a democratic relationship with readers from both his present and the future. The civic religion he wants to inaugurate takes form in the different clusters (as he called them), along with his reflections on his own work. Thus, in terms of topic, we find from the individual to his relationship with society and the new land, the sexual drive to create new citizens, but also the adhesiveness needed between them, the beginning and consequences of war, and later on his own role as a poet, the future of culture, his own legacy for the US. Whitman's approach might be shocking precisely because, even in this cluster-based division, he does not place the poems in chronological order. Rather, they appear in thematic order, in relationship with the rest of the poems even within the same cluster.

Ginsberg's book is different though. His presence and absence, as explained before, are developed through the stream of consciousness and his oral disposition of lines on the page. The book (*Collected Poems*) is thought to be something else: a compilation of everything that he wrote. In its arrangement, the different sections do not outline his life, but rather his career as a famous poet. Unlike Whitman's, Ginsberg's poems are placed in chronological order, just as they were written. However, the classification in different sections take into

account both the time they were written, the phase in his life, and the titles that his publications had.[17] More than political, after decades this collection of poems may be seen as a chronicle of the poet's life and times, a piece of countercultural language of the second half of the twentieth century.

Thus, if chapter 3 explains how the projection of the self —self-performance— appears in textual level, this chapter focuses on the published compilation of their texts. That is why the clusters and sections in *Leaves* and *Collected Poems* become a key factor in the articulation of the poet. The order that they take contribute to the making of a specific type of self. The voice, the body and the mind appear on lines, but also on the changing styles that we find in clusters and sections. Of course, this means that the public encounters and readings that the poets did when alive take a different form here. The text is now finished, closed, but at the same time —because of their orality— alive. In this chapter we will find then two poets in two books; two self-presentations of iconic writers who wanted to be a source of inspiration and change. To conform, eventually, the written voice whose echo could go through the printed page.

1. Whitman's *Leaves of Grass*: Who Reads This, Reads a Life

The chronological development of Whitman's poetry is intrinsically related to different events that took place in his times. We cannot ignore his first years as a poet after discovering his own voice. However, I dare not pay attention to the compositions he got published in the press. My aim is rather to read those which had place in his multiple editions of *Leaves of Grass*, as it was in this book that he arranged his countercultural program and legacy for the US in 1892. Some of the compositions of *Leaves*, as we saw above, were adapted from older notes in his personal archives, but the vast majority appeared after the first edition (1855). Whitman added different sections to his *Leaves* as years went by. The group of poems under the heading *Inscriptions* were included in the 1871 volume. After the original "Song of Myself," he enclosed *Children of Adam* (called then *Enfans d'Adam*) and *Calamus* in 1860, *Drum-Taps* in 1865, *Whispers of Heavenly Death* in 1871; *Birds of Passage*, *Sea-Drift*, *Memories of President Lincoln*, *Autumn Rivulets*, *From Noon to Starry Nigh*t, and *Songs of Parting* in 1881; the annexes *Sands at Seventy* in 1884, *Good-Bye my Fancy* in 1891, and *Old Age Echoes* in 1897. Nonetheless, his poems jumped from one cluster to another in the numerous editions of the same book. Some

[17] For instance, *Empty Mirror: Gates of Wrath* combines the title of two publications (*Empty Mirror*, 1961; and *Gates of Wrath*, 1972), but he mixes the poems from *Howl* with others under the title of *Howl, Before & After: San Francisco Bay Area (1955-1956).*

disappeared, some others were created and sub-divided. This dissertation, however, will study *Leaves* with the last arrangement that Whitman left between 1891 and 1892, including the annexes that were later added.

For the purpose of this section, I will follow the order established by Whitman. Due to the great number of poems and the impossibility to deal with all of them, I will focus on those where my own theories can be best explained, as well as those dealing with political content. As the reader will see, the order placed by Whitman followed a strict conception of the volume as a whole. First, he presents his intentions on writing "his leaves," while in the following clusters the focus will be on the figure of the poet, the need of new generations of citizens in America, and the type of love which was also needed to achieve his ideal republic. Nonetheless, the following clusters are less obviously connected to his cultural program: there are spare poems chanting the international advancement of the US, but also biographical commentaries of the poet. There is also a section devoted to the war (*Drum-Taps*) and its consequences (*Memories of President Lincoln*), but clusters like *Autumn Rivulets*, *Whispers of Heavenly Death* or *Sands at Seventy* are rather lyrical commentaries on his own transcendentalist ideas and his sense of lost youth and near death.

I have divided my study following Whitman's own division of his work. Some sections take the name of specific clusters, while others are devoted to just one poem. *Inscriptions* is followed by two of the most important texts of self-presentation: "Starting from Paumanok" and "Song of Myself." Then, I turn to *Children of Adam* and *Calamus*, which were followed by a series of songs written in 1856 and from which I have selected "Crossing Brooklyn Ferry," a perfect example of the spectral encounter between reader and writer. Afterwards, I devote a whole section to deal with three clusters: *Birds of Passage*, *Sea-Drift*, and *By the Roadside*. From them I will point out how some poems continue the line of self-projection and thus contribute to the perception of the book as a whole. Then, another section compiles the analysis of *Drum-Taps* and *Memories of President Lincoln*, although my focus is placed on those compositions where the poet keeps a mindful voice, without forgetting the role of literature (and, especially, his poems) in the Civil War and postwar period. Then, I continue with the poem "By Blue Ontario's Shore" and *Autumn Rivulets*, again with the aim of outlining how the role of the poet (the "I") is developed regarding his society and his own work. The last two sections of my analysis cover the final clusters of *Leaves* (*Whispers of Heavenly Death*, the poems "Thou Mother with Thy Equal Brood," "A Paumanok Picture,"

as well as *From Noon to Starry Night* and *Songs of Parting*). My analysis will also include poems from the annexes: *Sands at Seventy*, *Good-Bye My Fancy*, and *Old Age Echoes*.

As the reader may notice, and as I have stated above, there is a clear relationship between the poems gathered in this volume. Thus, my choice is not just based on the poetics and topics that I have outlined in previous passages. My reading emphasizes the organic nature of the *Leaves*, as if following the steps of the poet throughout his own work.

1. 1. Inscriptions *(1871)*

This cluster, as most of the ones that we are going to find, is made up of poems written at different times, but they are linked by a common topic. They deal with American Democracy ("To Foreign Lands"), with its future, "what is yet to be" ("To a Historian"), the underlying material and spiritual rules of world, but also the individual lives, each of them with its own charm and value. This last point is what appears in "One's-Self I Sing" (*Leaves* 3). As Michael Moon notes, it was first included in the 1867 edition of *LG*, and was part of the "Inscriptions" group of poems of the 1871 version. It is, however, a sharp declaration of his job as a poet. Here Whitman is singing and he poses the object of his song: One's-Self, the human physiology, Life, both male and female, "The Modern Man." Both Michael Moon and Gerald F. Amyot agree that in this text language is the vehicle to solve the dilemma of unity in the diversity that democracy proposes: the individual needs the En-Masse (Moon 3, Amyot 97). Betsy Erkkila relates this to the Jeffersonian convictions of public virtue, the perfect achievement of a group starting with the individual (94). Burke uses the word "omnific" to refer to the principle that would build Whitman's catalogues (36). Here, however, the technique is different. Instead of a list of people, characters, types that we will later find, the poet uses repetition of sounds, words, and sentences, each of them with its own purpose. Sounds are repeated at the beginning of each stanza:

> One's-Self I sing, a *s*im*p*le *s*e*p*arate *p*er*s*on,
> . . .
> O*f* *ph*ysiology *fr*om *t*op *t*o *t*oe I sing,
> . . .
> O*f* li*f*e imme*ns*e, in *p*a*ss*io*n*, *p*ulse, *p*ower,
> Cheer*f*ul, *f*or *f*reest action *f*orm'd . . .

The strength of plosives (sim*p*le, se*p*arate, *p*erson, *t*o*p* *t*o *t*oe, *p*assion, *p*ulse, *p*ower) is combined with softer sounds of fricatives (*s*imple, *s*eparate, per*s*on, *ph*y*s*iology, *fr*om, li*f*e,

cheer*f*ul, *f*reest); the former give rhythm, the beats related also to the use of pauses in oratory, while the latter sounds get the poem to the other side of the genre: the song.[18]

This poem turns then eminently oral and material. It becomes physiological not only because of the reference ("physiognomy," "life," "pulse"), but also because of the choice of words. Some of them are repeated or nearly repeated as well: "physiology" and "physiognomy," alone in the fourth line, "worthy" and "worthier." Also, the repetition of the phrase "I sing" in each line should be noticed. The poem starts with "One's-Self I sing," positioning the phrase at the very beginning of the stanza. In the following ones, however, it is placed at the end: "Of physiology from top to toe *I sing* . . . The Female equally with the Male *I sing* . . . The Modern Man *I sing*." This is emphasized by the fact that it is in the shorter lines where this phrase is included:

> One's-Self *I sing*, a simple separate person, [short]
> Yet utter the word Democratic, the word En-Masse. [long]
>
> Of physiology from top to toe *I sing*, [short]
> Not physiognomy alone nor brain alone is worthy for the Muse, I say the Form
> complete is worthier far, [long]
> The Female equally with the Male *I sing*. [short]
>
> Of Life immense in passion, pulse, and power, [short]
> Cheerful, for freest action form'd under the laws divine, [long]
> The Modern Man *I sing*. [short]

He establishes the main points in the short lines (the self, physiology, both male and female, life, the modern man) and gives details in the longer ones, as G. W. Allen identifies also in *Calamus*, *Drum-Taps* and old-age lyrics. A line advances a thought or image, followed by a line which amplifies or illustrates it ("Literary Technique" 400). In this case, most of these elaborated points are concessions, acknowledged exceptions: he sings the self, but this self involves the word En-Masse; he sings physiology, the bodies, but the whole of it, "the Form complete," including the mind; and it is life, pulse, what he sings, but he does not forget the divine and free character of vitality. He sings, but he "utters" (line 2) and "says" (line 4). There are some irregularities in this pattern though, which help him close the poem by uniting beginning and ending. While there is a pattern of three stanzas of two and three lines each —combining both short and long lines— in the last stanza there is no phrase closing the first short line with "I sing":

[18] In this sense, as it happens in Ginsberg's works too, popular culture is seen not only in the oral echoes of political and religious speeches (the influence of the Bible included), but also in the interest of both poets in popular music, sometimes the opera, but others the more traditional song.

> Of Life immense in passion, pulse, and power, [short]
> Cheerful, for freest action form'd under the laws divine, [long]
> The Modern Man *I sing*. [short]

In this way, Whitman limits the overuse of the effect and doubles it by holding it back until he gets to the shortest and most powerful of his lines: "The Modern Man I sing."

Erkkila identifies in this poem the solution to the national and political crisis regarding the American identity, the conciliation of individualism and equality, of nature and the city, of the body and the soul, the individual and the state (95). The same could be said about the written and spoken nature of this composition. This poem was placed a decade after the first publication of *Leaves of Grass*; however, in using it as the first composition of the book Whitman turns it into a conscious reflection on his own writing and, what is more, on his writing's purpose. As I said before, this poem could be regarded as a statement of intentions, but this is not only due to its position within the compilation of poems.

There are two other aspects which make this poem dance between the written and the spoken. The disposition of lines on the paper is one of them. Whitman uses commas, but also line arrangement. The division in stanzas does not respond to a traditional form. As it was said in the previous chapters, his use of verse is organic, form and content are intrinsically related, and each verse follows that principle. While the first stanza introduces the main (political) conflict —that of individual and democratic identity— the second is devoted to the form, the physiology of man and woman alike. The last one introduces the concept of life, a vitalist pulse which makes up the concept of the "Modern Man." The longer lines are also (as indicated above) development of the basic ideas posed in the shorter ones, but this pattern is also related to the reading, the bodily expression of the poem read aloud. While commas help the reader clarify the meaning in terms of syntax, the length of each line expresses the use of the voice, the utterance of the verses. "One's-Self I sing, a simple separate person." Here the comma leads to a syntactic clarification, it is the Self of a "simple separate person." Nevertheless, he starts another line to introduce a "Yet," a contradiction, as it happens in the second stanza:

> Of physiology from top to toe *I sing*,
> Not physiognomy alone nor brain alone is worthy for the Muse, I say the Form
> complete is worthier far,

He says he sings of physiology, but he also introduces a contrast: "Not physiognomy alone . . . I say the Form complete is worthier far." In this sense, not only does this sentence acquire oratorical strength because it is longer than the previous one; the effect also comes from the

phrase "I say," which reminds us of the conscious utterances we remarked in chapter 3. In this poem, he utters and says, apart from singing, which emphasizes the vocal character of the writing.

Thus, the reader finds a lyrical voice who insists on his own voice, on the fact that he is singing and will sing the rest of the poems collected in the present book. In a longer version of the poem (included in *Sands at Seventy* as "Small the Theme of My Chant"), he points to a physical encounter with future readers:

> My Days I sing, and the Lands—which interstice I knew of hapless War.
> (O friend, whoe'er you are, at last arriving hither to commence, I feel through every leaf the pressure of your hand, which I return.
> And thus upon our journey, footing the road, and more than once, and link'd together let us go.) (*Leaves* 442)

As he would repeatedly do in the rest of the book, the poet here refers to a physical reality, the hand of the reader and the book itself, through which he actually feels the hand. Vocality goes along the written word. The use of capital letters does also bring the reader to the written form and the paper: "One's-Self," "the word Democratic, the word En-Masse," "the Muse" and "the Form," "the Female equally with the Male," "Life," and "The Modern Man." Here we find the Romantic and Republican values we discussed in chapter 1. The individual, as we have seen, is where poetry starts for Whitman. He wanted to sing a personality, a unity (although multiple and varied). The Romantic "I" full of feelings and flesh, brought from English authors, adapted by Emerson to the American land, is here then a "Self" within the "Democratic," a "One" who can be male or female, equally free under "divine law" which may surprise us because of the lack of capitalization. Here the muse, form, and life are the capital concepts, not the laws of god.

We also identify the afore-mentioned civic religion which would build the American reality Whitman wanted to fight for. Modernity is also the guide of the self: the Modern person acquires such a description because of the democratic world s/he lives in. Far from the idealized Medieval times found in Romanticism, here the poet is inspired by the common identity of a new man in a new political system. One may ask here about the inaugural nature of this poem. In this text there is no canonical speech act or declaration, but we could relate the singing of these concepts to the naming. If, for Derrida, one comes to existence by being given a name (*Writing and Difference* 85-86), Whitman is vindicating through the song a type of expression outside of the political institutions of governments and parties. The word "En-Masse" is aligned with terms such as "Muse," "Life," or "Modern Man," not so common in

the world of politics. "Passion" and "pulse" are mixed with "power," bringing the body back to a sphere of logocracy. This may explain Lewis's idea that "[t]here is scarcely a poem of Whitman's before, say, 1867, which does not have the air of being the first poem ever written, the first formulation in language of the nature of persons and of things and of the relations between them; and the urgency of the language suggests that it was formulated in the very nick of time, to give the objects described their first substantial existence" (44). In relation to this point, we could also add that Whitman's proposal is that of "natural language," of the spoken (uttered, said, sung) word which includes the body and balances the overuse of abstract terms —something which is actually seen in the word-choice of this poem, where the self, the democracy, Life and the Muse is counterbalanced by the En-Masse, the physiognomy of men and women, the pulse in actions.

1. 2. "Starting from Paumanok" (1856)

The self is also the center of "Starting from Paumanok" and "Song of Myself." "Starting from Paumanok," originally titled "Proto-Leaf," was included in the 1860 edition of his *Leaves*, and as Michael Moon points out, it is also a "mythic and personal portrait of the poet" (*Leaves* 15). Part I is in fact a presentation of the poet going for a New World. There are only two first person (subject) pronouns here, in the first and the last line, making it circular.

> Starting from fish-shape Paumanok where I was born,
> Well-begotten, and rais'd by a perfect mother,
> . . .
> Solitary, singing in the West, I strike up for a New World. (*Leaves* 15)

The rest of the lines are made up of phrases based on present and past participles ("Starting," "Well-begotten," "Having studied . . . and heard," "singing"), as well as on adjectives and nouns which define him as a dweller and soldier who is (repeatedly) "aware of" natural elements: rivers, big and small animals, plants. He also situates himself in the West, a land associated at that time with the wild.[19]

In this first part he presents himself individually, but somehow there seems to be no name behind the "I," there is no expression of the self, just a profile, a general one "Well-begotten, and rais'd by a perfect mother" which could perfectly be the land he mentions (the city or the savanna), becoming the "soldier camp'd or carrying my knapsack and gun, or a miner in California, / Or rude in my home in Dakota's woods, . . . / Or withdrawn to muse and meditate in some deep recess." Maybe that explains why the "I" is barely used. To fill

[19] Apart from the numerous examples present in regional literature written in the nineteenth century, there is a brilliant elaboration of the topic in Thoreau's essay "Walking."

the gaps of information, however, the type raised in this "New World" is aware of, witness to, the character of all the surrounding elements that are mentioned: populous pavements, and crowds of people "passing rapt and happy" go along with "free giver" and mighty rivers, buffalos and bulls grazing, but also "hirsute and strong-breasted," amazing flowers, stars, rain, snow, singing and high-flying mocking birds, hawks and hermit thrushes. It is the strength and beauty of these national pictures that build up an "I" who "strike[s] up for a New World." Thus, the initial inscriptions open the door to a poem where there is an encounter with a self now defined as American.

There is in this poem, as in previous and following ones, a tendency to use long lines articulated through anaphora and parallelism:

> **Starting** from fish-shape Paumanok where I was born,
> **Well-begotten**, and **rais'd** by a perfect mother,
> **After roaming** many lands, lover of populous pavements,
> Dweller in Mannahatta my city, or on southern savannas,
> *Or* a soldier camp'd or **carrying** my knapsack and gun, or a miner
> in California,
> . . .
> *Or* **withdrawn** to muse and meditate in some deep recess,
> . . .
> *Aware of* the fresh free giver the flowing Missouri, aware of mighty
> Niagara,
> *Aware of* the buffalo herds grazing the plains, the hirsute and
> strong-breasted bull,
> *Of* earth, rocks, Fifth-month flowers experienced, stars, rain, snow,
> my amaze,
> **Having studied** the mocking-bird's tones and the flight of the
> mountain-hawk,
> And **heard** at dawn the unrivall'd one, the hermit thrush from the
> swamp-cedars,
> Solitary, **singing** in the West, I strike up for a New World. (*Leaves* 15)

Participles (in bold) start each line, while repeated particles (in italics) continue the train of images which, because of the resulting cadence, seem endless until it is closed by a conjugated sentence with subject, verb and complements (underlined).[20] Here we can read, then, the inauguration or projection of a personality, an American type who is by being written, who comes into being precisely in the lines, with no or little articulation, but with images which, however, are sonorous. The cadence of the lines is accompanied by the names and words he chooses, as Erkkila has pointed out (86). Here we see the Native American Paumanok, Mannahatta, Dakota, Missouri, Niagara,[21] but also words which are far from the Anglo-Saxon

[20] As I will later explain, the same technique of anaphora and repetition, as well as the same verb tense uses, will be seen in Ginsberg's compositions, especially those surrounding "Howl".

[21] As Erkkila explains, Paumanok and Mannahatta were the Native names for Long Island and New York (86).

origins of English and which point to the open nature and varied origins of the New World, like savannas (from the Taino) or California (from Spanish).

The following part of the poem continues the creation through naming, this time focused on the planet Earth, where first he gives a series of noun phrases related to democracy ("Victory, union, faith, identity, time") and that he presents as the result of the formation of the planet:

> This then is life,
> Here is what has come to the surface after so many throes and
> convulsions.

The referred precedes the referent: Victory, union, etc. is life, "what has come to the surface after so many throes and convulsions." These last words, related to childbirth (and, at the same time, to death) introduce the object of the following stanzas: soul and sun, the globe, the continents, but most important of all, the people. After naming the earth, the poet invites us to see it:

> *See* **revolving** the globe,
> The ancestor-continents away group'd together,
> The present and future continents north and south, with the isthmus between.
>
> *See*, vast trackless spaces,
> . . .
> They are now cover'd with the foremost people, arts, institutions, known.
>
> *See*, **projected** through time,
> For me an audience interminable.
> With firm and regular step they wend, they never stop,
> Successions of men, Americanos, a hundred millions,
> . . .
> With faces turn'd sideways or backward towards me to listen,
> With eyes retrospective towards me. (*Leaves* 15-16)

The anaphora (in italics) again includes parallel uses of participles (in bold), which add a sense of transcendence of both space ("the globe," "trackless spaces") and time ("through time"). It is not only something he names, but we can also see it through our own reading of the text: we are the audience, as long as we can hear his voice due to the cadences of the lines, but we can also see this "audience interminable" because we, as readers, are one of the generations. He puts much emphasis on the vocal part: it is an audience which turns back to listen, but there is also part of the eyes, "retrospective towards me." The "Americanos" is another striking word in this context, since he mentions "ancestor-continents away group'd together," maybe referring a bonding in terms of nationality rather than physical countries. The use of the word in Spanish may point (along with line 24 "The present and future

continents north and south, with the isthmus between") to the United States' South-American siblings, but also to a more general openness to other countries. As Walter Grünzweig asserts, Whitman's imperialism could be understood in global terms: he aspired to extend the US values in political terms, but through freedom and national plurality (162).

Hence, this poem starts with a profile composed by a series of images (natural ones), but it goes along with Democracy and the democratic audience as the main object. The terms we find in the first stanza are to compose the New World. Most of them are abstract:

> Victory, union, faith, identity, time,
> The indissoluble compacts, riches, mystery,
> Eternal progress, the kosmos, and the modern reports.

The first ones are simpler and more general: victory, union, faith, identity and time were the principles that Whitman thought should guide the US. Victory because of its success, union in terms of fraternity and national brotherhood, faith in the common and divine or transcendental purpose, and time referring to the newness of mentality. The second and third lines are more developed, referring to the compacts (agreements), riches and mystery of the new things to come, the progress, and modern reports. Political terms are mixed with more spiritual ones (faith, mystery), keeping the balance we pointed out above between material and spiritual development.

Nonetheless, in the third part he introduces the step he started in the first one. After creating the profile and the land and audience, the purpose is clearly set after a series of vocatives:

> Americanos! conquerors! marches humanitarian!
> Foremost! century marches! Libertad! masses!
> For you a programme of chants.
>
> Chants of the prairies,
> Chants of the long-running Mississippi, and down to the Mexican
> sea,
> Chants of Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, Iowa, Wisconsin and Minnesota,
> Chants going forth from the centre from Kansas, and thence equidistant,
> Shooting in pulses of fire ceaseless to vivify all. (*Leaves* 16)

The chants, for the Americanos, the masses, are of land and water, including all territories. In the fourth part this address turns to the nation rather than the citizens:

> Take my leaves America, take them South and take them North,
> Make welcome for them everywhere, for they are your own offspring,

Here the voice becomes more aware of the written nature of the text. The leaves are said to be the offspring of America, and its precedents should make room for these new poems. Similar to his prefaces, the poet here shows his political and cultural program, as he continues in the fifth part discussing "[d]ead poets, philosophs, priests" of "other shores." He acknowledges them but also asserts: "I stand in my place with my own day here." Time and place are different for him, so his purpose in writing is different as well.

In the following section he then establishes the principles of his new poetry: the spiritual character of the material, the Democratic values of freedom and unity, the recognition of all lands, and finally the "manly love" required to build the America he wants. This section is characterized by anaphoric, not very long, lines. The voice promises to make "the poems of materials . . . of my body and of mortality":

> *I will make* the poems of materials, for I think they are to be the most spiritual
> poems,
> And *I will make* the poems of my body and of mortality,
> . . .
> *I will make* a song for these States that no one State may under any
> circumstances be subjected to another State,
> . . .
> And *I will make* a song for the ears of the President, full of weapons with
> menacing points,
> . . .
> And a song make I of the One form'd out of all,
> The fang'd and glittering One whose head is over all,
> Resolute warlike One including and over all,
> (However high the head of any else that head is over all.) (*Leaves* 17-18)

The chants that were mentioned before are this time presented in the future, they are yet to be made while actually making them. There is a paradoxical inauguration of the poems which brings us to the discussion of the Declaration of Independence by Derrida. There is no representation, but a constant building or pointing out towards a reference which is created in the act of pointing out. There is a "a programme of chants," which I would add seem already there, while one can also find a sense of anxiety in his repetitive "I will make a song," as if it was needed, as if it did not exist in those very same words of stress. He continues his anaphora with the construction "I will," later with different verbs: acknowledge, trail, report, sing, show, lift, give, write. This need of change may be related to the variation he makes of "I will make," using rather "and a song make I."

He seems to be aware of the monotonous effect of the "and" overuse, and hence his application of other structures and verbs. They go from the speech-related ones

(acknowledge, trail and salute, "put in my poems," report) to more artistic and celebratory ones (sing, show, "let flame from me the burning fires that were threatening to consume me," "give . . . abandonment," "write the evangel-poem of comrades and of love"). Word and action are however developed in this written form which might be heard as an institutional vow as well. This tension is present throughout the rest of the poem. The chants are referred to several times. In section 10, "The following chants each for its kind I sing," sometimes appearing as "[w]arblings under the sun, usher'd as now . . . Strains musical flowing through ages." In section 11, there is a "throat . . . inflating itself and joyfully singing." This section also goes back to the promises with "I will":

> I exultant to be ready for them will *now shake out carols* stronger and haughtier
> than have ever yet been heard upon earth.
>
> *I will make the songs* of passion to give them their way,
> . . .
>
> *I will make the true poem* of riches,
> . . .
> *I will effuse* egotism and show it underlying all, *and I will be the bard of personality,*
> And *I will show* of male and female that either is but the equal of the other,
> . . .
> And *I will show* that there is no imperfection in the present, and can be none in
> the future,
> . . .
> And *I will thread a thread through my poems* that time and events are compact,
> . . .
>
> *I will not make poems* with reference to parts,
> But *I will make poems, songs, thoughts,* with reference to ensemble,
> And *I will not sing* with reference to a day, . . .
> And *I will not make a poem* nor the least part of a poem but has reference to the
> soul, (emphasis added) (*Leaves* 21)

Here again he combines repetition with slight variations in order to keep the attention of readers/audience, and explains the broad content of the poems he will sing: the personality, open sexuality, the perfection and miraculous nature of everything we observe, the unity and the presence of soul in material entities. Religion, which turns out to be the center of Democracy and love, the principle behind his spiritual convictions, is the articulator of his poems as well, as it is this principle the reason why he includes America in its details ("Land of coal and iron! . . . of wheat, beef, pork! . . . of the pastoral plains," of regions, rivers, seas and cities that he enumerates in section 14). Love and Democracy are then inseparable from this type of religion which has nothing to do with the Puritan doctrine.

The chants he wants to make, his "endless announcements!" are made up then, as at the very beginning of the poem, by the things he wants to sing, the things he will chant, the things he does. It seems, as Hollis suggests, that by saying what he does he makes up real actions ("Tallying" 64). To the examples of the first section we can add those of section 14:

> *Walking* New England, a friend, a traveler,
> *Splashing* my bare feet in the edge of the summer ripples on Paumanok's sands,
> *Crossing* the prairies, *dwelling* again in Chicago, *dwelling* in every town,
> . . .
> Yet *returning* eastward, yet in the Seaside State or in Maryland,
> Yet Kanadian cheerily *braving* the winter, the snow and ice welcome to me,
> . . .
> Yet *sailing* to other shores to annex the same, yet *welcoming* every new brother,
> Hereby *applying* these leaves to the new ones from the hour they unite with the
> old ones,
> *Coming* among the new ones myself to be their companion and equal, coming
> personally to you now,
> *Enjoining* you to acts, characters, spectacles, with me. (*Leaves* 23)

He does all kinds of actions and in many places, with many people, which gives the poem the cadence of, maybe not a chant, but of the kind of religious or scholarly speech that were popular in his times. In this fragment, anaphora is again an essential element which works with the long lines and gives it an oratorical effect. That may be why the body is a common reference throughout the poem, in the throat of the singing thrush, but also as part of his discourse on the soul ("Behold, the body includes and is the meaning, the main concern, and includes and is the soul").

Nonetheless, the vocal quality of the lines are never clearly established as exclusively spoken utterances. He is characterized by his "flowing mouth and indicative hand," and there is a bodily description as well: ("Bearded, sun-burnt, gray-neck'd forbidding, I have arrived"). He is "determin'd to tell you with courageous clear voice" the "New politics, new literatures and religions, new inventions and arts" as well, but his "leaves" are not fully absent (understood in physical terms). In section 3, he invites: "Take my leaves America" and in his account of actions of section 14, he claims "Hereby *applying these leaves* to the new ones from the hour they unite with the old ones." Later on, in section 18, the poems as such get to the forefront:

> See, *in my poems* immigrants continually coming and landing,
> . . .
> See, on the one side the Western Sea and . . . the Eastern Sea, how they
> advance and retreat *upon my poems* as upon their own shores,
> See, pastures and forests *in my poems*—see, animals wild and tame— . . .,

> See, *in my poems*, cities, solid, vast, inland, with paved streets, . . . , ceaseless
> vehicles, and commerce,

The poems become here something else, not spoken, or written; and towards the end there is a total mingling of both types: "Here the *loud echoes of my songs* there—*read* the hints come at last." It seems, then, that although the poet "descend[s] into the arena," there is some written recognition. The loud echoes are followed by a some hints that the poet invites to actually read. It is interesting, in this sense, to find that the connection between the "I" and "you" happens in the "to-be-read" section:

> O camerado close! O you and me at last, and
> O a word to clear one's path ahead endlessly!
> O something ecstatic and undemonstrable! O music wild!
> O now I triumph—and you shall also;
> O hand in hand—O wholesome pleasure—O one more desirer and lover!
> O to haste firm holding—to haste, haste on with me.

After referring to an "audience interminable" of Americanos of all types, after getting to the arena —an eminently public place— to make announcements about his future songs, the poet celebrates in this last section an intimacy which could be predicted by the last part of section 14 ("Coming among the new ones myself . . . coming personally to you now"). We could trace an increasing proximity to the reader or audience behind the multiple "yous" that are found in the poem. At first, the poet calls to the "Americanos! conquerors!", and he addresses the poets of old times, but despite his desire to promote the companionship necessary for a real Religious Democracy, it is only in section 8 where we find an individual approach. First, it is a "young man" who he refers to, later including a "camerado," "son," "daughter" of America, "[m]y comrade!" (*Leaves* 19). As if to get close he wants "you" to know him (and he actually discusses that consent)[22], there are two sections between one attempt and the other, and another lapse of two short sections (16 and 17) until we get to the encounter of the last part, which again is made "hand in hand," although supposedly to be read.

This close position takes us back to chapter 3, where I discussed the presence that Whitman gets through his written word. Time and again, the poet calls to the meeting of both sides of the printed page, the reader and the poet. He wants to transcend that limit in time and space, to get to future generations that, of course, will find him in his leaves. In section 2, there are

[22] "(I may have to be persuaded many times before I consent to give myself really to you, but what of that? / Must not Nature be persuaded many times?)" (*Leaves* 23).

Successions of men, Americanos, a hundred millions,
One generation playing its part and passing on,
Another generation playing its part and passing on in its turn,
With faces turn'd sideways or backward towards me to listen,
With eyes retrospective towards me. (*Leaves* 16) (emphasis added)

His cries "may rise from me yet, and soar above every thing," he wants to "cheerfully pass them [his songs] forward," and they may get to "those who belong here and those to come." In this sense, references of time and place add to the performed "presence." The poet becomes a performer precisely because of his vindication of "heres" and "nows" which will change with each reader. "Here" and "now" are carefully placed along with imperatives and vocatives. "Now" may refer to the newness of the States ("They are now cover'd with the foremost people, arts, institutions, known"), to the changes of world power ("Nations once powerful, now reduced, withdrawn, or desolate"), but most of the times, it refers to the proper advance of the poem and the actuality of the song when read. For instance, it is when the poet turns to the soul that he says "The satisfier, after due long-waiting now advancing," and the songs are "usher'd as now," "Strains musical flowing through ages, now reaching hither," "Warblings under the sun, usher'd as now, or at noon, or setting." The song is happening while reading:

Democracy! near at hand to you a throat is now inflating itself and joyfully
singing.
. . .
I exultant to be ready for them will now shake out carols stronger and
haughtier than have ever yet been heard upon earth. (*Leaves* 20-21)

He also comes "personally to you now" and at the end says "O now I triumph—and you shall also." The use of "here" is much more reduced, and somehow related to the new panorama:

I stand in my place with my own day here.
. . .
Here lands female and male,
Here the heir-ship and heiress-ship of the world, here the flame of materials,
Here spirituality the translatress, the openly-avow'd,
The ever-tending, the finalè of visible forms,

However, as this same extract continuous, there is a sense of common "literary" space, of writing and reading processes:

The satisfier, after due long-waiting *now advancing*,
Yet *here comes* my mistress the soul.

These last lines close section 5 (devoted to the acknowledgment of old literature and vindication of a new one) and introduce the topic of section 6, as if somehow welcoming another character to the stage. In addition to this, the repetitive imperatives and vocatives turn the reader into part of an audience of "Americanos," comrades, who are invited to see and hear his voice.

Given all these elements, we are then facing here an inaugural and performative poem in several terms. It takes, as in "One's-Self I Sing," the individual as the center of everything, but adding political convictions about the New World. He presents a lyrical voice, a bard, which embodies the figure he outlined in his prefaces. A rough man, acknowledging the importance of the past, but vindicating the future. The civic religion may be said to be the central line: democracy, love and religion (the soul) trigger the voice to sing America and its present and future generations. There are Romantic traits throughout all the poem: the bard proposed by Whitman comes out of a wild land, from the modern city and also "from the people in their own spirit." Natural elements (singing birds but also bigger buffalos "captured" in his lines) are present throughout all the poem, mixing up with echoes of public (urban) meetings, due in part to the contextual references he builds up. There is here also the same ambiguity we outlined in chapter 3: it is not clear whether this is a celebration or an inauguration of a poem: the lines constitute one, while at the same time they promise another one to come. In this sense, we could say the poem (as will do the rest of them) could be seen as an event, something that comes as the voice which is in fact written.

Apart from the political challenge that this "new poetry" might mean for the "literary Establishment," due to his unruly style and unconventional contents (including sex and "manly love"), there is in this composition also a performative goal with political implications. Therein lies a projection or vindication of a certain type of reading experience, where the poet is equal with the reader, thus practicing the principle of democracy that is so important in the poem. The voice emphasizes the contact between author and readers, as well as the American (because of the accent and the language) component. The long lines spread as the oral discourse of a preacher. The religious contents do also pose a challenge for the system, as it is aligned with democracy but also with a love which includes that between men. The New Land needs a new religion scaffolding the rest of its aspects: society, politics, culture. The format, based on long sonorous lines, may work for this, as it is no doubt influenced by the oral culture of sermons and political speeches, to the tradition of public national celebrations discussed in chapter 1. The individual focus (of the "I" and

"you") here is balanced with a collectivity of US inhabitants, women and men, all types of jobs, present and future, in this way keeping in line also with the Revolutionary discourse.

1. 3. "Song of Myself" (1855-1881)

"Song of Myself," so many times analyzed and close-read, may pose several challenges for a scholar, especially if we take into account that it is now impossible to cover all the bibliography related to it. I will try, nonetheless, to keep an inquisitive eye, supporting myself with part of this bibliography. Although it is placed after "Starting from Paumanok," this poem was actually written and published before. It had different titles in its numerous publications. As Michael Moon explains, it was titled "Poem of Walt Whitman, an American" in 1855, "Walt Whitman" from 1860 to 1881, and later "Song of Myself." Something similar happened to his famous line "Walt Whitman, a kosmos, of Manhattan the son." The same editor points out it changed from "Walt Whitman, an American, one of the roughs, a kosmos," to "Walt Whitman am I, of mighty Manhattan the son," and then "Walt Whitman am I, a Kosmos, of mighty Manhattan the son." The present title and line may give us some clues about the nature of this poem. It seems to give a constant attention to the individual, following the Romantic strain, in line with the two other poems we have read. The "I," as we saw in chapter 3, is a central character, the main protagonist of the poem. Also, his aim was to give a whole portrait of a person in the New World, something that, however, he wanted to specify. Instead of keeping the "American," he finally decided to keep his origins in Manhattan, considering that "mighty" was not necessary, maybe to give an idea of simplicity and equality with other regions. Nonetheless, in his different changes of both title and the mentioned line, we can notice that this poem was the result of Whitman's working on his own poetics and idea of the poet, something that is also reflected in the rest of the text.

The Romantic and Transcendentalist streak can be seen throughout the poem, especially regarding the content and discourse, the images and ideas that Whitman develops. He makes sure he describes himself as a poet:

> *I am the poet* of the Body and *I am the poet* of the Soul,
> The pleasures of heaven are with me and the pains of hell are with me,
> The first I graft and increase upon myself, the latter I translate into a new tongue.
> . . .
> *I am the poet* of the woman the same as the man,
> And I say it is as great to be a woman as to be a man,
> And I say there is nothing greater than the mother of men.
> . . .
> *I chant the chant* of dilation or pride, (*Leaves* 43)

As the poet vindicated by Emerson, he sings everything, both material and spiritual facts, the good and the evil ("I am not the poet of goodness only, I do not decline to be the poet of wickedness also"), chanting positive science, but also the civic religion he wanted for the States. In this description of the poet the idea of the kosmos turns out essential. The poet is related with the other, the outer world, but he encompasses a whole world within: "One world is aware and by far the largest to me, and that is myself" (*Leaves* 42). Nonetheless, this kosmos also comes from embracing nature, the out-doors life that Thoreau defended, and the people inhabiting the US, whatever their condition.

This is partly due to the pantheistic conception of the universe that he inherited from the Transcendentalist movement. The first lines already give an idea of what his ontological philosophy is based on. "[E]very atom belonging to me as good belongs to you," he says, and continues the discourse on our atomic nature: "My tongue, every atom of my blood, form'd from this soil, this air" (*Leaves* 26). The one and the many that would be the base for his political ideas had origin in the relationship of the "I" with everything outside, understanding this "I" as made up of the intrinsically joined pair of body and soul. These two dimensions of the individual identity are repeatedly placed as equals, and sometimes even as the same thing, posing then a challenge to the traditional position of soul over body. "Clear and sweet is my soul, and clear and sweet is all that is not my soul," he writes in section 3 of the poem, and in section 5:

> I believe in you my soul, the other I am must not abase itself to you,
> And you must not be abased to the other. (*Leaves* 29)

And later on, in section 48:

> I have said that the soul is not more than the body,
> And I have said that the body is not more than the soul, (*Leaves* 74)

Over and over again, the body is equal to the soul and, in this las extract, it leads to acknowledging that the self is equal to God:

> Why should I wish to see God better than this day?
> I see something of God each hour of the twenty-four, and each moment then,
> In the faces of men and women I see God, and in my own face in the glass,
> I find letters from God dropt in the street, and every one is sign'd by God's name,
> And I leave them where they are, for I know that wheresoe'er I go,
> Others will punctually come for ever and ever. (*Leaves* 75)

In acknowledging that divinity is everywhere, and that there is equal value between the self and God, Whitman was preaching here the civic religion that I already mentioned

above. There is here a fluctuant relationship between religion and democracy, being democracy a form of religion, and religion the form that democracy acquires. Involving both social equality and moral issues, the two areas become one for the poet. If everything is divine, everything should have the same value, and so it leads him to question common hierarchies associated with Western religions:

> Why should I pray? why should I venerate and be ceremonious?
>
> Having pried through the strata, analyzed to a hair, counsel'd with doctors and
> calculated close,
> I find no sweeter fat than sticks to my own bones.
>
> In all people I see myself, none more and not one a barley-corn less,
> And the good or bad I say of myself I say of them. (*Leaves* 42)

However, this is not a rejection of religion per se. In fact, in section 43 he embraces all religions:

> My faith is the greatest of faiths and the least of faiths,
> Enclosing worship ancient and modern and all between ancient and modern,
> Believing I shall come again upon the earth after five thousand years,
> Waiting responses from oracles, honoring the gods, saluting the sun,

He then lists all types of rituals and beliefs from different religions and their priests, including llamas and Brahmins, sacred literature as the Shastas and Vedas, the Koran,

> Walking the teokallis, spotted with gore from the stone and knife, beating the
> serpent-skin drum,
> Accepting the Gospels, accepting him that was crucified, knowing assuredly
> that he is divine,
> To the mass kneeling or the puritan's prayer rising, or sitting patiently in a pew,
> (*Leaves* 68)

Equality and tolerance are then applied in this song for democracy, but also understood in religious terms. Sex and bodily images are, however, included. The body and sex, whatever its form, are divine.

There are, moreover, some contradictions in his conception of the self and the relationship with the world. While there is equality and embracement, there are several passages where the self seems to be vulnerable and rather closed to the outside. In section 4, for instance, he identifies "[t]rippers and askers," society in parties and events from the news,

> The latest dates, discoveries, inventions, societies, authors old and new,
> . . .
> *These come* to me days and nights *and go from me again*,
> But they are not the Me myself. (*Leaves* 29)

The events, the context, influences here the individual, who is therefore in constant change ("These come . . . and go"), keeping intact the "Me myself," the individuality. In this sense, his vindication is that of individual identity, the distinction from the outside, and opening at the same time a door for diversity, in equal level. The kosmos that makes up the individual identity is in equal value with the otherness, the other universes:

> In all people I see myself, none more and not one a barley-corn less,
> And the good or bad I say of myself I say of them. (*Leaves* 42)

The self, furthermore, is constituted by everything which is experienced. That is why atmospheric descriptions (as that of section 2) are so important.[23] The poem then, because it is to incarnate a projected self (that of "Walt Whitman"), is largely composed of images and sounds as well, including the sense of touch, as we can see in sections 27 and 28:

> Is this then a touch? *quivering me to a new identity,*
> Flames and ether making a rush for my veins,
> Treacherous tip of me reaching and crowding to help them,
> My flesh and blood playing out lightning to strike what is hardly *different from*
> *myself,* (*Leaves* 50) (emphasis added)

In this tension between the outside and inside —the public and private— the poet becomes aware of the fluidity and emptiness of the "I" we saw in chapter 3. In fact, it seems here that there is a sense of vulnerability: "On all sides prurient provokers stiffening my limbs, / Straining the udder of my heart for its withheld drip, / Behaving licentious toward me, taking no denial . . . Unbuttoning my clothes" (50). The vulnerability comes from the other opening the doors, instead of an inner embracement of the outside. This becomes a point of crisis which, in the rest of the poem, does not seem so obvious, and that may even surprise the reader.

Sounds become also repetitive, not only because of the performative cadence of the poem, but because of the sounds which are mentioned and that the lyrical voice hears:

> I have heard what the talkers were talking, . . . (27)
> . . .
> I heard his motions crackling the twigs of the woodpile, (33)
> . . .
> Now I will do nothing but listen,
> To accrue what I hear into this song, to let sounds contribute toward it.
> I hear bravuras of birds, bustle of growing wheat, gossip of flames, clack of sticks
> cooking my meals,
> I hear the sound I love, the sound of the human voice,

[23] "I believe in the flesh and the appetites, / Seeing, hearing, feeling, are miracles, and each part and tag of me is a miracle." (*Leaves* 46)

> I hear all sounds running together, combined, fused or following,
> Sounds of the city and sounds out of the city, sounds of the day and night . . .
> (48-49)
> . . .
> I take part, I see and hear the whole,
> The cries, curses, roar, the plaudits for well-aim'd shots,
> The ambulanza slowly passing trailing its red drip, (*Leaves* 59)

Images will also conform the identity, as observing (witnessing) is one of the main actions that the poem does in its descriptions. It is precisely in this way, in these experiences with the world, that the individual "I" acknowledges the multitudes it contains, the potential for plurality and understanding the "other." He is surrounded, as said before, by "[t]rippers and askers" which influence him, but there is also in his lyrical voice a game of identity. All along the poem, he incarnates different people. In section 10 he is a frontier man, and then a sailor:

> Alone far in the wilds and mountains I hunt,
> Wandering amazed at my own lightness and glee,
> . . .
> Falling asleep on the gather'd leaves with my dog and gun by my side.
>
> The Yankee clipper is under her sky-sails, she cuts the sparkle and scud,
> My eyes settle the land, I bend at her prow or shout joyously from the deck.
>
> The boatmen and clam-diggers arose early and stopt for me,
> I tuck'd my trowser-ends in my boots and went and had a good time; (*Leaves* 33)

He makes sure that "not a person or object [is] missing, / Absorbing all to myself" (35). This is mainly seen in his catalogues, as that of section 15. There he gives an extensive list of American people, stereotypes of all the social classes, in scenes of daily life. It is not a working-class portrait, as it spans from the slave and the prostitute, to the president, regarding them and picturing them in the same way. There is no intervention of the "I," except for some clarifications between parenthesis, and towards the end we see the purpose of all of it:

> The city sleeps and the country sleeps,
> . . .
> And these *tend inward* to me, and I *tend outward* to them,
> And such as it is to be of these more or less I am, (*Leaves* 39) (emphasis added)

Thus, the principle of *e pluribus unum* that I mentioned above, is present in his inclusion of multitudes, something which he acknowledges, not only when he gives his voice ("Through me many long dumb voices"), or when he acquires the self of the protagonists in the stories he tells ("I am the man, I suffer'd, I was there . . . All these I feel or am . . . Agonies are one of my changes of garments," 58); but also, we can see it in one of the most famous lines of this poem:

> Do I contradict myself?
> Very well then I contradict myself,
> (I am large, *I contain multitudes*.) (*Leaves* 77) (emphasis added)

At the end of the poem (these appear in section 51), this point is just a clarification between parenthesis.

The fact, then, that the self (which individual but multiple) is made up of the other, the contact with the world outside, is also understood in terms of sounds. Not only on, as seen just above, what the poet listens to and hears. The essence, for him, is on sounds because they transmit more than traditional book-based knowledge. Rather than dealing with "linguists and contenders," the poet says, "Only the lull I like, the hum of your valvèd voice." Of course, this phonocentrism will be in relation to the body and its breath. Maybe the most interesting proof of this streak is in section 8, where he mentions "[t]he blab of the pave, . . . talk of promenaders, . . . [t]he hurrahs for popular favorites, . . . the sudden oaths, . . . so many echoes, / What groans, . . . What exclamations . . . What living and buried speech is always vibrating here, what howls restrain'd by decorum." All these construct the reality, and so his identity. In the same way, the poet's voice acquires a political charge in section 24, where he "speak the pass-word primeval, I give the sign of democracy":

> Through me many long *dumb voices*,
> *Voices* of the interminable generations of *prisoners* and *slaves*,
> *Voices* of the *diseas'd* and despairing and of *thieves* and *dwarfs*,
> *Voices* of cycles of preparation and accretion,
> And of the threads that connect the stars, and of wombs and of the father-stuff,
> *And of the rights of them the others are down upon*,
> Of the *deform'd*, *trivial*, *flat*, *foolish*, *despised*,
> Fog in the air, beetles rolling balls of dung.
> Through me *forbidden voices*,
> *Voices* of *sexes* and *lusts*, voices *veil'd* and I remove the veil,
> *Voices indecent* by me clarified and transfigur'd. (*Leaves* 46) (emphasis added)

Thus, although there are also traditional narratives included in the poem, the poet adopts the register of a preacher, using repetitive phrases proper of a sermon, also vocatives, exclamations, addresses and deictics, which keep the discourse close to a projected (performed) encounter with the reader/listener.

As pointed out in chapter 3, the encounter with the other side of the page (or stage) can be seen in the use of the pronoun "You." Because of their "empty" nature, the use of "you" was used to transcend time and place, wherever it was read or heard, "whoever you are," the poem could get to someone else, creating, furthermore, a sense of presence of the "I," which acts similarly. In this poem, vocatives and directives are very common, it actually

starts with one ("And what I assume you shall assume," 26). Questions are posed over and over again throughout the whole poem, and he calls for breaks:

> Enough! enough! enough!
> Somehow I have been stunn'd. Stand back!
> Give me a little time beyond my cuff'd head, slumbers, dreams, gaping,
> I discover myself on the verge of a usual mistake. (*Leaves* 63)

And for listeners ("Eleves, I salute you! come forward!" 63, "Behold, I do not give . . ." 64, "Come my children, / Come my boys and girls, my women . . ." 66, "Sit a while dear son" 73, "Listener up there!" 77). The performative streak can also be seen in the reference to a "now" which can point out to any reading or listening time. Although it may be frozen by the fact that we know the poet is "now thirty-seven years old" (and that may, and actually would surely change), time is always adaptable to any context. At the beginning of the poem (section 3), he insists on this "new time":

> There was never any more inception than there is now,
> Nor any more youth or age than there is now,
> And will never be any more perfection than there is now,
> Nor any more heaven or hell than there is now. (*Leaves* 27)

But also, it seems to bring the reader back to a shared encounter in time: "Come now I will not be tantalized, you conceive too much of articulation," "Now I will do nothing but listen" (48), "Now I tell what I knew in Texas in my early youth" (59). Sometimes, it is accompanied by an emphasis on shared space as well: "Now the performer launches his nerve, he has pass'd his prelude on the reeds within" (66), "Now on this spot I stand with my robust soul" (71), "We should surely bring up again where we now stand" (*Leaves* 72).

Along with that, references to bodily contact with readers/listeners do also appear several times. He sometimes establishes closed spaces, as in section 19,[24] but it is through deictics that he really gets the sense of a shared stage. People seem to crowd the lines, especially in section 42:

> A call in the midst of the crowd,
> My own voice, orotund sweeping and final.
> . . .
> *Folks are around me*, but they are no household of mine.
>
> Ever the hard *unsunk ground*,
> Ever the *eaters and drinkers*, . . .
> Ever myself and my neighbors, refreshing, wicked, real,
> . . .

[24] "This hour I tell things in confidence, / I might not tell everybody, but I will tell you." (*Leaves* 41)

> Ever the vexer's *hoot! hoot!* till we find where the sly one hides and bring him
> forth,[25]
> Ever love, ever the sobbing liquid of life,
> . . .
>
> Here and there with dimes on the eyes walking,
> To feed the greed of the belly the brains liberally spooning,
> *Tickets buying*, *taking*, *selling*, but in to the feast never once going,
> *Many* sweating, ploughing, thrashing, and then the chaff for payment receiving,
> *A few* idly owning, and they the wheat continually claiming.
>
> This is the city and I am one of the *citizens*, (*Leaves* 66-67) (emphasis added)

The movement of the crowd here, as well as the cadence and repetitions, gives an overwhelming effect, which is more explicitly seen in section 19. This part is a perfect example to explain how Whitman exploits his role of poet as performer. The deictics create (perform) an actual meeting, which could be interpreted as both the act of public encounter and also private reading. Everyone is "*hereby* invited" and involved in bodily terms:

> This is the press of a *bashful hand*, this the *float and odor of hair*,
> This *the touch of my lips* to yours, this the *murmur* of yearning,
> This the far-off depth and height reflecting my own *face,*
> This the *thoughtful merge* of myself, and the outlet again. (*Leaves* 41)
> (emphasis added)

Hand, hair, face and its impressions are created by the initial (and repeated) deixis, inaugurating a projected encounter which however could be linked to the action of reading: the press of the book in the hand, the odor that the reader may get from the leaves, the touch of the lips when the poem is read aloud, the reflection of the face on the text itself. The body, part of the identity because of the experiences (and knowledge) it brings to the individual, is also important because of the performative charge it adds. He calls everyone to listen, but also places "My left hand hooking you around the waist, / My right hand pointing to landscapes of continents and the public road" (*Leaves* 72).

Another element which helps the poet with performative dimension is the constant reference to the poem itself, in spoken and written form. From its very first lines ("I celebrate myself, and *sing* myself"), there are acknowledgements of the sung nature of the text. Rather than the action, we find songs: "the song of me rising from bed and meeting the sun," "Matchless with horse, rifle, song, supper, courtship" "a song or play on the banjo." What is more, we find references to "this song" several times. In section 13, he describes the broadness of the song, as we have seen:

[25] Here the italics are Whitman's.

> In me the caresser of life wherever moving, backward as well as forward sluing,
> To niches aside and junior bending, not a person or object missing,
> Absorbing all to myself and for this song. (*Leaves* 35)

In section 15, after his long catalogue of American types, he clarifies the relationship with him and his song:

> And these tend inward to me, and I tend outward to them,
> And such as it is to be of these more or less I am,
> And of these one and all I weave the song of myself. (*Leaves* 39)

Something similar happens in section 26, where he wants "[t]o accrue what I hear into this song, to let sounds contribute toward it" (48). In section 42, furthermore, he adds a written sense which is not completely absent, as I pointed out before. After referring to the performer ("Now the performer launches his nerve, he has pass'd his prelude on the reeds within"), he acknowledges:

> I know perfectly well my own egotism,
> Know my *omnivorous lines and must not write any less,*
> And would fetch you *whoever you are* flush with myself. (*Leaves* 67)
> (emphasis added)

Despite the fact that both the vocal qualities and the contents of the poem point to a spoken performance, to a social encounter with the other, who becomes a listener, this text does not leave behind the written pulse, which then mixes up with the spoken one:

> Not words of routine this song of mine,
> But abruptly to question, to leap beyond yet nearer bring;
> *This* printed and bound book—but the printer and the printing-office boy? (*Leaves* 67)

Although this same passage continues asking metaphysical questions ("The sky up there—yet here or next door, or across the way?"), it also includes calls for what is written and what is physically close. It is not "*the* book," but *this one* held in the hands of the reader, who is also called to notice "The well-taken photographs—but *your* wife or friend *close and solid in your arms*?" (67). The song, spoken, voiced, is described as "[*e*]*asily written* loose-finger'd chords" in the same section too.

However, we should not leave aside the fact that images were pretty important for Whitman, a trait that actually places him closer to modernity, and in this poem he makes it clear both in speech acts and in content. Although the voice was essential, he also included in this poem the "untranslatable" character of the atmosphere, which was to be rather caught in images. As a result, in section 25 the "voice goes after what my eyes cannot reach," and

claims that "Speech is the twin of my vision, it is unequal to measure itself, / It provokes me forever, it says sarcastically, / *Walt you contain enough, why don't you let it out then?*".[26] He gets to the conclusion that there is no way to "encompass me," that only the world (and its experiences) can be encompassed, that "[w]riting and talk do not prove me." Thus, as well as there were many instances where the listening and speaking process were important, in this poem images and sight acquire an equal value. After avoiding the "[t]rippers and askers," the "linguists and contenders" that we mentioned above, he sets his intention to "witness and wait" (29). Thus, in this poem we can find several passages where Whitman is "afoot with my vision," and gives long lists of images. Sections 11, 12 and 13 are good examples, since they present images, with minimum intervention of the "I" except to emphasize his act of observation ("I loiter enjoying his repartee and his shuffle and break-down," "I behold this picturesque giant and love him" 35-36). Maybe this is the reason why there are more verbs in past and present participle than in other forms, adding also a religious or preaching tone to the text. Moreover, the untranslatable character of atmosphere (which he mentions more than once[27]) is finally identified in himself: "I too am not a bit tamed, I too am untranslatable" (*Leaves* 77).

This poem then continues the lines of the previous ones, having the American identity as the key element. However, as foreseen, this identity is the result of a conflict between the individual and the collective, the "I" and the other, although articulated in the framework of democratic equality. This poem includes everyone and everything, as well as it calls to readers and listeners, playing also with the ambiguity of its written and spoken nature, and at the same time presenting (inaugurating) the self and the world of that self, that is, the US that he wanted to vindicate and build in his writings. The self, the starting point, is plural though: *e pluribus unum* seems to be radically essential too, that is why multitudes crowd the poem, both in its performative dimension and its images. The song of "myself" then perfectly achieves the type of poem Whitman was aiming for: the portrait of an individual self, in the new land and in a new system, while at the same time presenting, enacting, the American profile. As the *Letters from a Farmer in Pennsylvania*, this poem is a song of the American self which rather vindicates, as a model, a specific type of (plural) citizenship, while at the same

[26] Whitman's italics.

[27] "A morning-glory at my window satisfies me more than the metaphysics of books" (*Leaves* 47), "Logic and sermons never convince, / The damp of the night drives deeper into my soul" (51), "Not objecting to special revelations, considering a curl of smoke or hair on the back of my hand just as curious as any revelation" (66), "No shutter'd room or school can commune with me, / But roughs and little children better than they" (74), "I hear and behold God in every object, yet understand God not in the least, / Nor do I understand who there can be more wonderful than myself" (75).

time it combines this Revolutionary vein with the Romantic focus on the "I." It is then performative in form and content, inaugurating the civic religious American while consciously chanting in speech acts proper of a public meeting. With the same candor that Ginsberg would vindicate and use in his poetry, Whitman was presenting (and celebrating) his public, alternatively American, democratic "self."

1. 4. Children of Adam *(1855-1865)*

"Song of Myself" was followed in 1860 by *Enfans d'Adam*, later retitled *Children of Adam*. As we will see, after setting the purpose of his book ("One's-Self I Sing") and giving a profile of the poet ("Starting from Paumanok," "Song of Myself"), Whitman complemented his volume with a cluster devoted to the figure of Adam, bringing it to the American stage. However, as Erkkila points out referring to the "Prefatory Letter to Emerson," this volume was also a huge challenge for the sexual politics which were dominant at that time. Using the title in French, and so exploiting the associations with sexual freedom proper to France, Whitman wrote a series of poems which, although related to the innocence of Adam in paradise, had sex as its spine (176-77). Convinced of the necessity of a new literature which could re-conceptualize the understanding of sex, in relation to both women and men, regarding them as equals, he left behind the "deluded deferential love" of popular songs and fiction, and set as his goal the celebration of "the amativeness of Nature, the Motherhood of all" (*Leaves* 645).

These poems then combine sexual and more traditional politics. They were thought to chant the endless generations of citizens that should populate America. That is why he used the image of the Garden of Eden to define the continent, the New Land where innocence was dominant. As R. W. B. Lewis said in *The American Adam* (1955), Whitman's poems were a continuation of Thoreau's "rebirth ritual of *Walden*" (42). This trope was used in the first and last poems of the cluster ("To the Garden the World" and "As Adam Early in the Morning"), where he places a speaker, "[a]s Adam early in the morning, / Walking forth from the bower refresh'd with sleep" (*Leaves* 96). He wanted to present here the potential of the American women and men to create "Potent mates, daughters, sons, preluding" (78). In "I Sing the Body Electric" (*Leaves* 81), he included again a catalogue of people in daily action:

> The sprawl and fulness of babes*, the bosoms and heads* of women, the folds of their
> dress, their style as we pass in the street, *the contour of their shape* downwards,

> The *swimmer naked in the swimming-bath*, seen as he swims through the transparent green-shine, or lies with his face up and rolls silently to and fro in the heave of the water,
> The *bending forward and backward of rowers in row-boats*, the *horseman* in his saddle,
> Girls, mothers, house-keepers, *in all their performances*,
> The *group of laborers* seated at noon-time with their open dinner-kettles, and their wives waiting,
> The female *soothing a child*, the farmer's daughter in the garden or cow-yard,
> The young fellow *hoeing corn*, the sleigh-driver *driving his six horses* through the crowd,
> The *wrestle of wrestlers,* two apprentice-boys, quite grown, *lusty, good-natured*, native-born, out on the vacant lot at sun-down after work,
> . . .
> The *march* of firemen in their own costumes, the play of *masculine muscle* through clean-setting *trowsers and waist-straps*,
> . . .
> The natural, perfect, varied attitudes, *the bent head, the curv'd neck and the counting*;

He gives here a catalogue of athletic citizens, characterized by the movement of their bodies (in italics), and at the same time (specially women), by their potential for breeding and creating more generations. Men are strong, tough, hardworking, while women are presented as mothers, or daughters of farmers, somehow far from the force needed to build this new world, but necessary for their reproductive qualities. This poem also presents the common (old) farmer, the female body and the male body, as well as that of the slave. In each of these sections, Whitman puts special emphasis in their bodily description. The farmer, for instance, is described thus:

> The shape of his head, the pale yellow and white of his hair and beard, the immeasurable meaning of his black eyes, the richness and breadth of his manners,
> . . .
> He was six feet tall, he was over eighty years old, his sons were massive, clean, bearded, tan-faced, handsome, (*Leaves* 81-82)

While for this "common farmer" the importance lays in his manners and the rough appearance, for the female and male bodies he describes, it is the reproductive ability that becomes the center. In the "female form" he combines physical qualities with her virtues:

> Mad filaments, ungovernable shoots play out of it, the response likewise ungovernable,
> Hair, bosom, hips, bend of legs, negligent falling hands all diffused, mine too diffused, (*Leaves* 83)
> . . .
> The female contains all qualities and tempers them,
> She is in her place and moves with perfect balance,
> She is all things duly veil'd, she is both passive and active, (*Leaves* 84)

The male, however, "is all qualities, he is action and power," appetites, defiance, passions and pride, and there is no explicit physical description until he gets to the "slave

passage," where he performs an auction in which the different parts of the body are pointed out. The "seller" describes the head, the limbs, the eyes and spine, but also the blood and the heart and the reproductive possibilities:

> This is not only one man, this the father of those who shall be fathers in their
> turns,
> In him the start of populous states and rich republics,
> Of him countless immortal lives with countless embodiments and enjoyments.
> (*Leaves* 85)

Other poems of the cluster have reproduction and the creation of generations of Americans as central topic. "A Woman Waits for Me," for instance, includes a scene which could be read as a rape (I will later deal with that), and whose main goal is this generation of citizens, "sons and daughters fit for these States," "athletic girls, new artists, musicians, and singers" (*Leaves* 88-89). Furthermore, these citizens, male and female, are seen as equals. In "To the Garden," Adam follows Eve "just the same" (*Leaves* 78), and "I Sing the Body Electric" again stands out for its examples. In this poem, men and women are equal, but so are the marginal citizens:

> The man's body is sacred and the woman's body is sacred,
> No matter who it is, it is sacred—is it the meanest one in the laborers' gang?
> Is it one of the dull-faced immigrants just landed on the wharf?
> Each belongs here or anywhere just as much as the well-off, just as much as you,
> Each has his or her place in the procession. (*Leaves* 84)

Equality comes also in the slave's action passage (section 7). Here the slave is presented as a wonder and a hero, and the poet evidences the moral evil in refusing the recognition of slaves as humans. As Killingsworth says, this (along with the passages devoted to women) was defying a "repressive social system that made a routine of covert violence and sexual exploitation" (Killingsworth 74). Thus, these poems are political not only because of their celebration of American generations, but also because of their vindications of equality. "A Woman Waits for Me" could also be seen as an example of such purpose, although Erkkila has put it into question. It is true that this poem chants the figure of a different woman than the one present in more popular literature of the time. This text upholds the repressed sexual part of the woman ("Yet all were lacking if sex were lacking"), and defends that

> They are not one jot less than I am,
> They are tann'd in the face by shining suns and blowing winds,
> Their flesh has the old divine suppleness and strength,
> They know how to swim, row, ride, wrestle, shoot, run, strike, retreat, advance,
> resist, defend themselves,

They are ultimate in their own right—they are calm, clear, well-possess'd of
themselves. (*Leaves* 88)

By presenting women in the same way that he presents men in other poems, he was breaking the canons of the idea of feminine women. However, it is also true, as Erkkila points out, that in this poem, once the phallus appears, the male "takes control" and makes her work "in service of the race":

I draw you close to me, you women,
I cannot let you go, I would do you good,
. . .
I am stern, acrid, large, undissuadable, but I love you,
I do not hurt you any more than is necessary for you,
I pour the stuff to start sons and daughters fit for these States, I press with slow
rude muscle,
I brace myself effectually, I listen to no entreaties,
I dare not withdraw till I deposit what has so long accumulated within me.
(*Leaves* 88)

Suddenly, it is "I" who dominates the scene, which could be then read as a rape. The female who was so active before, becomes here a passive side in the creation of the strong nation, as there is no female sexual pleasure, and it seems it is done against her will. Thus, as this scholar claims, the poem goes from the "dynamic pairing of equals to a scene of domestic rape" (137-38).

Somehow, the explicit images play a political role here. As Whitman himself says in the aforementioned poem, "All the governments, judges, gods, follow'd persons of the earth, / These are contain'd in sex as parts of itself and justifications of itself" (*Leaves* 88). Acknowledging the importance of sex and the role it plays everywhere means he was also establishing new modes of civilization. As Erkkila asserts, these poems are not about love, but rather about the body "as a locus of democratic energies and sexuality as personal power and creative force," an element of disruption of "Victorian notions of closet and virginal motherhood" (177, 135-36). Steven Olsen-Smith agrees with this idea, and points out Whitman's conviction of a "pantheistic sexual demiurge" (519). "From Pent-Up Aching Rivers," first titled "Song of Procreation," is a good example of this point. Sex is here something to celebrate and sing:

From my own voice resonant—singing the phallus,
Singing the song of procreation,
Singing the need of superb children, and therein superb grown people,
Singing the muscular urge and the blending,
Singing the bedfellow's song, (O resistless yearning! . . .) (*Leaves* 79)

Sex here, as Erkkila also claims, is linked with the "amative flow of nature" (135-36). As we can see, poems are informed with "grossest Nature or among animals":

> Of the smell of apples and lemons—of the pairing of birds,
> Of the wet of woods—of the lapping of waves,
> Of the mad pushes of waves upon the land—I them chanting;
> The overture lightly sounding—the strain anticipating; (*Leaves* 79)

Emphasizing senses of smell, touch, and movements proper of water, he gives an explicit portrayal of sexual intercourse. Later on in the same poem, these images are placed along with "Two hawks in the air—two fishes swimming in the sea not more lawless than we." Pairs of animals out of the "decency conventions," but that bring innocence to the conception of sex. However, towards the end of the poem, body parts become the spinal line of discourse:

> From privacy, from frequent repinings alone,
> From plenty of persons near and yet the right person not near,
> From the soft sliding of hands over me and thrusting of fingers through my hair
> and beard,
> From the sustain'd kiss upon the mouth or bosom,
> From the close pressure that makes me or any man drunk, fainting with excess,
> . . .
> From the act-poems of eyes, hands, hips and bosoms,
> From the cling of the trembling arm,
> From the bending curve and the clinch, (*Leaves* 80)

As natural mating is divine in animals, so is sex among humans. Sex is also explicitly seen in "I Sing the Body Electric," where the female form is brought to images of flow, liquidness, and at the same time wild:

> *Ebb* stung by the *flow* and *flow* stung by the *ebb*, love-flesh *swelling* and deliciously
> aching,
> *Limitless limpid jets of love hot and enormous*, *quivering jelly* of love, white-blow and
> *delirious juice*,
> Bridegroom night of love working surely and softly into the prostrate dawn,
> *Undulating* into the willing and yielding day,
> Lost in *the cleave of the clasping and sweet-flesh'd* day. (*Leaves* 83) (emphasis added)

Similarly, sex between men is also portrayed in images of nature in "Spontaneous Me." In the intimate stage between parenthesis, the poet confesses "(Know once for all, avow'd on purpose, wherever are men like me, are our lusty lurking masculine poems,)". This is followed by scenes of nature which are alternated with those of sexual intercourse (in italics):

> The hairy wild-bee that murmurs and hankers up and down, that gripes the full-
> grown lady-flower, curves upon her with amorous firm legs, takes his will
> of her, and holds himself tremulous and tight till he is satisfied,

> The wet of woods through the early hours,
> *Two sleepers at night lying close together as they sleep, one with an arm slanting down across and below the waist of the other,*
> The smell of apples, aromas from crush'd sage-plant, mint, birch-bark,
> *The boy's longings, the glow and pressure as he confides to me what he was dreaming,*
> The dead leaf whirling its spiral whirl, and falling still and content to the ground,
> (*Leaves* 88)

The aromas, atmosphere and the night images are followed by a rejection of any type of repression, and a passage which describes masturbation. Desire is then part of this procreation process, and sexual freedom is also involved and required for the new Democracy, as it is seen in "One Hour to Madness and Joy." This poem combines terms from nature and madness: the liberating storm, "the mystic deliria" and "savage" aching, and the joy of being "absolv'd from previous ties and conventions, . . . To find a new unthought-of nonchalance with the best of Nature!". The escape, driving free and getting lost is part of a reckless trance for the "inebriate soul!" (*Leaves* 91).

Nonetheless, all this is articulated within the belief that the body and the soul are the same. In "I Sing the Body Electric," for instance, after giving a long list of parts of the body, including those of sexual connotation, he claims:

> O I say these are not the parts and poems of the body only, but of the soul,
> O I say now these are the soul! (*Leaves* 87)

The body, however, is not only the parts that it has. "[T]he expression of a well-made man appears not only in his face," it is in the movements, "in his limbs and joints," but also "in his walk, the carriage of his neck, the flex of his waist and knees, dress does not hide him . . . To see him pass conveys as much as the best poem" (*Leaves* 81). Similarly, in the last poem, "As Adam Early in the Morning," the body becomes important only in the voice and the touch, in the movement of the protagonist "Walking forth . . . refresh'd with sleep" (*Leaves* 96). Hence, the body that he focuses on in his description of the future generations of "Americanos" is also part of their soul, inextricably linked to the functioning of the Republic.

We are here facing then a cluster which is somehow far from the first poems that we have read so far. The center of most poems is the female and male reproduction, and the need of these bodies for the development of this New World. However, there is some little space for the projection of the "I" of Walt Whitman in the poems too. The "I" is most of the times a chanter, a poet, and he acknowledges his role, although with less emphasis than in the previous compositions. The lyrical voice of "To the Garden the World" is Adam, but

the rest of the poems have a singer, as in the case of "From Pent-up Aching Rivers." In the latter, the poet makes his aim explicit:

> From what *I am determin'd to* make illustrious, even if I stand sole among men,
> From *my own voice resonant—singing* the phallus,
> *Singing* the *song of procreation*,
> . . .
> *Singing* the bedfellow's song . . .
> . . .
> Of that, of them and what goes with them *my poems* informing,
> . . .
> Of the mad pushes of waves upon the land, I *them chanting*,
> (*Leaves* 79) (emphasis added)

He actually presents himself as the "chanter of Adamic songs, . . . Bathing myself, bathing my songs in Sex, / Offspring of my loins" ("Ages and Ages Returning at Intervals," *Leaves* 92). In "Native Moments," he projects himself as "your poet," someone who is "play[ing] a part no longer" and so breaking the barriers (maybe just as an illusion) between the private and the public expression. In this projection he also involves a "you" which might be the reader or the listener, someone he addresses many times as a lover. There is an invitation in the first poem of the cluster ("Curious here behold my resurrection after slumber"), but most of these callings are in closer terms, building a sense of intimacy which goes along the topic of the poems. In "From Pent-up Aching Rivers," for instance, the poet calls to "whoever you are," and tells him/her to

> (Hark close and still what I now *whisper* to you,
> I love you, O you entirely possess me,
> O that you and I escape from *the rest* and go utterly off, free and lawless
> . . .
> O you and I! What is it to us what *the rest* do or think?
> (*Leaves* 80) (emphasis added)

Here the crowds that we found in the previous poems are absent, and the poet insists on getting closer to "you," in private terms, although in the framework of a public text ("the rest"). As commented before, this turns sometimes into a violent invasion of bodies, as in "A woman Waits for Me." Addressing all women, he says:

> I draw you close to me, you women,
> I cannot let you go, I would do you good,
> I am for you and you are for me . . .
> It is I, you women, I make my way,
> . . .
> I do not hurt you any more than is necessary for you,
> . . .
> I brace myself effectually, I listen to no entreaties,
> . . .
> Through you I drain the pent-up rivers of myself (*Leaves* 88)

This passage, furthermore, combines the vocatives ("you women") with images of this corporal invasion ("I draw you close to me," "I brace myself effectually"). This address is softened in "One Hour to Madness and Joy," which keeps some features, but in a less violent way:

> O to be yielded to you whoever you are, and you to be yielded to me in defiance
>   of the world!
> . . .
> O to draw you to me, to plant on you for the first time the lips of a determin'd
>   man. (*Leaves* 91)

This poem centers on the freedom he yields to, not on procreation, and so leaves more space for pleasure. In "Native Moments," the "you" is also called to a close relationship with the "I," and without procreative purposes. In this case, the contents bring us to Baudelaire-like stages of drinkers and dancers, of decadent pleasures. Addressing a "you" who seems already known ("when you come upon me"), he acknowledges his sexual interests ("Give me now libidinous joys only, / Give me the drench of my passions, give me life coarse and rank"), and confesses that

> I am for those who believe in *loose delights*, I share the midnight orgies of *young*
>   *men*,
> I dance with *the dancers* and drink with *the drinkers*,
> The echoes ring with our *indecent* calls, I pick out some *low person for my dearest*
>   *friend*,
> He shall be *lawless*, *rude*, *illiterate*, I shall be one *condemn'd by others for deeds done*
> (*Leaves* 94) (emphasis added)

Thus, after defining his "dearest friend" type and offering himself ("I am for those who") he brings back the direct address to the reader:

> *O you shunn'd persons*, I at least do not shun you,
> *I come* forthwith in your midst, *I will be your poet*,
> I will *be more to you* than to any of the rest. (*Leaves* 94) (emphasis added)

This cluster, nevertheless, has much less deictics of time and place, and so it is more difficult to see the projected presence of the poet and his performative dimension in time. They are combined with speech acts of invitation and call. In "To the Garden the World" he says "Curious here *behold* my resurrections after slumber," and in "Native Moments" both present place and time are pointed out ("Ah you are here now! / Give me now libidinous joys only!"). Something similar happens in "From Pent-up Aching Rivers," where the lyrical voice tells the reader to "[h]ark close and still what I *now* whisper to you," and at the end of "A Woman Waits for Me":

> I shall expect them to interpenetrate with others, as I and you interpenetrate now,
> I shall count on the fruits of the gushing showers of them, as I count on the fruits of the gushing showers I give now,
> I shall look for loving crops from the birth, life, death, immortality, I plant so lovingly now. (*Leaves* 89)

The emphasis, however, is more clearly seen where the poet describes what he does, as in "I Sing the Body Electric," where he cries "O *I say* now these are the soul!", or in "A Woman Waits for me" ("Now I will dismiss myself from impassive women"). Questions do also appear to get the attention of the reader, being "I sing the Body Electric" the most relevant example. With questions which are not rhetorical, but directed to the reader, the poem invites him/her to revise his/her convictions ("Do you think they are not there because they are not express'd in parlors and lecture rooms?" "How do you know who shall come from the offspring of his offspring through the centuries?").

Hence, there is here a progressive retraction of the figure of the poet and his presence if we compare it with the first three works I analyzed above. However, that does not make it any less political. On the contrary, the central role that sexuality and the body have in this cluster turns it into a song of procreation and pleasure, a vindication of the importance and the essential role that sexuality plays for citizens, and how it should be given a different position in life, far from the constrained and veiled place it used to have in traditional literature. Once more, Whitman approaches politics and his ideals for an American Republic from a different side. After using the figure of the poet to project an alternative expression of the self and citizenship, here he poses an alternative concept of sex and procreation, and opens the doors of politics from a traditionally private sphere. As for its performative articulation, these poems start a journey to more traditional and less oratorical styles. Although he keeps the long format and combines it with shorter compositions (as those we found in the "Inscriptions" cluster), and despite the fact that he keeps using the long line, there is a reduction in oral prosody, being repetition much less common here.

1.5. Calamus *(1860-1871)*

Calamus is usually seen as the counterpart of *Children of Adam*. While the latter was centered on the relationship between men and women, sex, and procreation, the former has "adhesive" love between male comrades as the spinal topic. S. J. Mack explains that it was probably written while suffering a depression after a complicated (homosexual) love relationship and that he tried to memorialize and solve this conflict of self-loss in verse (*The Pragmatic* 77). Thus, he combined his ideas on comradeship with those of personal

attachment between men, giving the "unspeakable" trait of homosexuality a political taint in his term "adhesive love" (Erkkila 178-79, 181-82). That is why Erkkila defines this cluster as the "most radical sequence personally and politically"; he presented himself as the "poet of homosexual love and the bard of democracy," infusing democracy and erotic passion, and linking homoeroticism with democratic bound-breaking nature (183). Plus, as Michael Moon explains in his edition of *Leaves*, this "adhesive love" was a counterbalance for the "materialistic and vulgar American democracy," as well as an alternative from the traditional (censured) heterosexual love portrayed in literature at that time (97).

Nevertheless, although most of the poems that compose this cluster seem to be inspired by Whitman's idea of love, there is a constant acknowledgement of this fact, an awareness of the role that this love has in his writing. There are some exceptions, as "Of the Terrible Doubt of Appearances" (*Leaves* 103), where he gives some metaphysical ideas on perceptions ("colors, densities, forms") and the possibility of achieving a truth which turns out to be an "untold and untellable wisdom" acquired in silence with "he whom I love" by his side. The rest of the poems, nonetheless, refer to the act of writing and the role the poet wants to acquire in this scenario. As if commenting his previous writings and referring back to them to change his mind, in "City of Orgies" he lists what he admired and sang before:

> City whom that I have lived and sung in your midst will one day make you
> illustrious,
> Not the pageants of you, not your shifting tableaus, your spectacles, repay me,
> Not the interminable rows of your houses, nor the ships at the wharves,
> Nor the processions in the streets, nor the bright windows with goods in them,
> Nor to converse with learn'd persons, or bear my share in the soiree or feast;
> Not those, but as I pass O Manhattan, your frequent and swift flash of eyes
> offering me love,
> Offering response to my own—these repay me, Lovers, continual lovers, only
> repay me. (*Leaves* 107)

In this poem, Whitman seems to go back to his first compositions and style, but inverting the content with the final line, where he makes it clear that his attraction to the Modern city lies not in his inventions and events, but in the love that moves its people. It seems to be the volitional motor for the poet, as he expresses in "I Saw in Louisiana a Live-Oak Growing" ("Uttering joyous leaves all its life without a friend a lover near, / I know very well I could not," *Leaves* 108). It also seems to be much more important than the figure of the poet himself. This is the point of "Recorders Ages Hence," where he also starts playing with the idea of death and the transcendence of the poet in his leaves. Calling future researchers, he says

> Come, . . . I will tell you what to say of me
> Publish my name and hang up my picture as that of the tenderest lover,
> . . .
> Who was not proud of his songs, but of the measureless ocean of love within
> him, and freely pour'd it forth,
> . . .
> Who oft as he saunter'd the streets curv'd with his arm the shoulder of his friend,
> while the arm of his friend rested upon him also. (*Leaves* 104)

He is then a lover apart from a poet, and something similar happens in two other poems, "When I Heard at the Close of the Day" (*Leaves* 105) and "When I Peruse the Conquer'd Fame" (*Leaves* 110-11). While the poet relegates himself to a less important place, he keeps however referring to himself.

> When I heard at the close of the day how my name had been receiv'd with
> plaudits in the capitol, still it was not a happy night for me that follow'd,
> And else when I carous'd, or when my plans were accomplish'd still I was not
> happy,
> But the day when I rose at dawn from the bed of perfect health . . .
> And when I thought how my dear friend my lover was on his way coming, O
> then I was happy, (*Leaves* 105)
>
> . . .
>
> When I peruse the conquer'd fame of heroes and the victories of might generals,
> I do not envy the generals,
> Nor the President in his Presidency, nor the rich in his great house,
> But when I hear the brotherhood of lovers, how it was with them,
> . . .
> Then I am pensive—I hastily walk away fill'd with the bitterest envy.

He does not pay attention to the "plaudits in the capitol," but he writes verses about that fact, and similarly disregards the "conquer'd fame of heroes and the victories" without stopping the acknowledgement of their fame.

Critics have also found a nationalist impulse in these poems. According to Coviello, they show the paradox of antebellum literary nationalism based on passionate —not legal— bonds between strangers, between citizens. Nationality should be conformed because of sentimental links, not just those coming from the state or institutions (86-87). Erkkila, in the same line, points at the fear of dismemberment, of fracture, that would rather push the poet to vindicate love between men for the sake of the republic (180-81). The treatment of that feeling, however, is not always described in the same terms. In "The Prairie-Grass Dividing" he calls for a "copious and close companionship of men" which he describes also following his idea of the rough American we have already seen (*Leaves* 110); in "A Leaf for Hand in Hand" he defends the natural gesture of "friendly boatmen and mechanics" ("you roughs!")

of holding hands in the streets (*Leaves* 113), while in "To the East and to the West" this love is "a superb friendship, exaltè, previously unknown" (*Leaves* 114). There's a difference with a later poem. The three poems that I have just mentioned were written in 1860, while "The Base of All Metaphysics" was written in 1871, and here the poet seems to be much more explicit. In this poem, the lyrical voice is a professor addressing his students and stating that underneath all Western philosophies lies "the dear love of man for his comrade, the attraction of friend to friend, / Of the well-married husband and wife, of children and parents, / Of city for city and land for land" (*Leaves* 104). Although somehow lightened by the fact that this love links also "the well-married" heterosexual couple, he is using here the explicit word "love" to refer to the relationship between comrades that he did not dare to describe as such in the previous poems.[28]

Nonetheless, it seems to me that most of these songs are not about love or the national need of bonds between citizens, but rather about these poems themselves, about writing them and their future purpose. This can be seen even in small details, as in "A Leaf for Hand in Hand," where the leaf is the poem, or in "I Saw in Louisiana a Live-Oak Growing," where the parallel image with the tree comes along with the idea of leaves as poems, as the poet's work. Apart from that, explicit references to poetry writing are, for instance, in the poem "In Paths Untrodden." Erkkila says this is a "poetic 'coming out'" because of the scenery that the poet chooses: "paths untrodden," the "margins of pond-waters," avoiding "standards hitherto publish'd," "(for in this secluded spot I can respond as I would not dare elsewhere)" (*Leaves* 96-97). He "hovers" then, adds Erkkila, "between his private desire to confess secrets . . . and his public desire to celebrate comrades" (179). He is here "resolv'd to sing" and "proceed for all who are or have been young men, / To tell . . . / To celebrate the need of comrades." This, which is the first poem, is then a presentation of the poet and his intentions by using speech acts and references to this "now," emphasizing thus the inaugural character of the composition ("Afternoon this delicious Ninth-month in my forty-first year").

The following poem, "Scented Herbage of My Breast," uses the idea of leaves sprouting from the (dead) body of the poet, but keeping an explicit relationship with his writing ("Leaves from you I glean, I write, to be perused afterwards"). Leaves are here

[28] Here I am referring to poems that are about the term "love" (in general). As we will see, there are other compositions from 1860 (in this same cluster) which include other terms to point to this "manly love."

presented as "[p]erennial roots" that will blossom long after the poet is dead, so death becomes the central spine of the poem:

> O I think it is not for life I am chanting here my chant of lovers, I think it must
> be for death,
> For how calm, how solemn it grows to ascend to the atmosphere of lovers,
> Death or life I am then indifferent, my soul declines to prefer,
> . . .
> Indeed O death, I think now these leaves mean precisely the same as you mean,
> (*Leaves* 98)

This also leads to performative utterances where the poet states his aim and the purpose of his leaves. No longer will he follow the traditional styles, the "[e]mblematic and capricious blades," he says,

> I will *say* what I have to say by itself,
> I will *sound* myself and comrades only, I will never again *utter* a call only their call,
> I will raise with it *immortal reverberations* through the states,
> I will give an example to lovers to take permanent shape and will through the
> States,
> Through me *shall the words be said* to make death exhilarating, (98)

The written nature of his leaves are however blended with the oral quality, as I have remarked with my italics above. Like the scent and "faint odor," the quality of his leaves is also immaterial, but perceptible, giving it a projected present and absent nature.

Moreover, he keeps the images of songs and chants that were used in the poems preceding this cluster. This is seen in "For You O Democracy," where after making promises ("I will make the most splendid race . . . / I will make divine magnetic lands, . . . / I will plant companionship thick as trees . . . / I will make inseparable cities . . ." *Leaves* 100-1), the poet addresses all "these songs" for democracy. Similarly, "These I Singing in Spring" presents the "poet of comrades" "Collecting" a garden, picking up leaves, and then "dispensing, singing" them to a crowd that "gathers around me" (*Leaves* 101). "These songs" are also the final and central point of "Not Heaving from my Ribb'd Breast Only" (*Leaves* 102). In this text, the poet gives a list of speech acts to vindicate adhesiveness in his own compositions. He discards signs, oaths and promises, wishes, cries, laughter and defiance, echoes and words; his body parts too: "my ribb'd breast," "this beating and pounding at my temples and wrists," the "husky panting through clinch'd teeth," "the limbs and senses of my body." Thus, everything that he had sung in the previous poems (those in the "Inscriptions," "Starting from Paumanok," etc.) appears in this cluster as a secondary element ("*Not* heaving from my ribb'd breast *only*"). It is only then "a few carols vibrating through the air I leave."

References to the songs are joined by references to the poet as well. In fact, as S. J. Mack asserts, the "Calamus" cluster is not reduced to a psychological conflict of loss and pessimism, it could also be read as a projection, a creation of "fictionalized versions of the self" (*The Pragmatic* 85). There are warnings in several poems about the deceiving nature of the "I" behind them. Take as an example the poem "Are You the New Person Drawn toward Me?" which performs this warning in his second line:

> To begin with take warning, I am surely far different from what you suppose;
> Do you suppose you will find in me your ideal?
> Do you think it is so easy to have me become your lover?
> . . .
> Do you think I am trusty and faithful? (*Leaves* 105)

This is, as S. J. Mack also adds, the beginning of a new relationship with the reader, who has to be active and "uniquely suitable for him to identify with" (*The Pragmatic* 93). The poet in "Whoever You are Holding Me Now" is also a strong teaser for the reader. Starting the poem with a warning too, here Whitman plays with a projected self into the book and the contact between reader and poet. After calling for followers and a "candidate for my affections," Whitman defines the process of reading him: "[y]our novitiate would even then be long and exhausting." That is why he tells the reader to "let go your hand from my shoulders, / Put me down and depart on your way." However, that is just the beginning of the poem. He continues the composition for those who do want to follow him. Presenting a series of intimate scenery ("by stealth in some wood for trial, / Or back of a rock in the open air, (For in any roof'd room of a house I emerge not, nor in company)"), he then lets the reader get into contact with him:

> Here to put your lips upon mine I permit you,
> With the comrade's long-dwelling kiss or the new husband's kiss,
> . . .
> Or if you will, thrusting me beneath your clothing,
> Where I may feel the throbs of your heart or rest upon you hip,
> Carry me when you go forth over land or sea;
> For thus merely touching you is enough, is best,
> And thus touching you would I silently sleep and be carried eternally. (*Leaves* 100)

As Moon explains, he is identifying himself with the book. The man is suddenly, as we saw above, happening in the book, and so it is the reader who he can encounter from there. However, the following lines go back to the teasing tone of the beginning, as the poet might not be understood despite of that contact:

> But these leaves conning you con at peril,
> For these leaves and me you will not understand,

> They will elude you at first and still more afterward, I will certainly elude you,
> Even while you should think you had unquestionable caught me, behold!
> Already you see I have escaped from you. (*Leaves* 100)

What is more, there is something he dares not mention, and that seems essential for him. "For all is useless without that which you may guess at many times and not hit, that which I hinted at; / Therefore release me and depart on your way." While he invites to leave out the idea of finding him, of understanding his leaves, he also seems frustrated at the impossibility of readers to get the "hint." Leaving aside the question of what the hint is, its role turns out to be quite interesting in this projection of the self and in this conception of writing and reading. Readers might get a meaning, but the poet wants to make them aware that their reading might not get him, that they could fail at getting the meaning. This is also present in the aforementioned poem "Scented Herbage of My Breast," where the poet admits that not even he "know[s] what you [the leaves] mean there underneath yourselves" and at the same time "I permit you to tell in your own way of the heart that is under you" (*Leaves* 98). Similarly, the three-line poem "Here the Frailest Leaves of Me" plays with this tension: "Here I shade and hide my thoughts, I myself do not expose them, / And yet they expose me more than all my other poems." What we get after all is the physical contact and intimate scenarios, the aura of self-exposure which, nonetheless, does not guarantee the total knowledge of the other, and which this time happens in more individual terms, far from the crowds that we could find in the poems previously read in the volume.

All these points (the national purpose of the poem, as well as the auto-references to the poem and the poet) lead us to the articulation of presence that we outlined in chapter 3. Because of the intimacies that are generated, here the poet is not so much the public performer in front of a crowd. As we will see, the vocatives that we found in longer poems are not so common here; and if they appear, it is in a more individual approach. Of course, the use of "you" carries the tension of constantly shifting from "you" as the US and Democracy (as in "For You O Democracy"), but there is an emphasis on it as an exclusive group of homosexual lovers or readers, who cannot always understand him and get the meaning of his leaves (Hollis, *Language and Style* 120-21; Erkkila 182). Thus, as Erkkila claims, the terms *reader*, *Democracy*, and *America* interchange with personal lovers, terms which are further linked when taking into account that addresses are part of the democratic strategy: once you plant the intimate bond seed, you can start to create the "comradeship throughout the land" he aspired to (182-83).

One of the last poems I have mentioned, "Whoever You are Holding Me Now" might serve to introduce this point. This text, as we have seen, puts the poet and the book as the same entity, so it is while reading it that the presence of the poet is physically felt in the book. Deictics to "these leaves" are common throughout the whole cluster, and here it goes along with the call to "whoever you are," a rhetorical address he had been using a lot as we have seen. In a poem which develops the possibility of understanding the meaning of the text, the presence of the poet in its physical form, in the reality of "this book" which the reader might be holding in his hands, seems pertinent. It teases the reader to get what s/he actually has in her/his power, deciding also where to read it ("carry me with you . . ."). He permits to put our lips "here," and to put it against "your clothing," to feel the "throbs of your heart or rest upon your hip." The poet is not then a figure outside the text, but emerges from it, dwells on the leaves which the reader can physically touch. Hence, there appears a contact, an area of time and place where both coincide, no matter the time or the reader.

"Behold This Swarthy Face" (*Leaves* 108) gives also a kind of performative description. Although acting as a portrait of the poet himself, the poem invites to "Behold *this* swarthy face, *these* gray eyes." The use of deictics brings the attention to the poet, who is the deictic center, thus projecting him to the scene of reading. Although the reader cannot see the image itself, s/he is actually reading "this swarthy face, these gray eyes," so there is no going out of the text, no travel to the "outside world," but an encounter on the book. There are other instances where the poet acquires a different approach to the written nature of the text. As it happened in "Scented Herbage of My Breast," or in "Recorders Ages Hence," the last poem of this cluster (titled "Full of Life Now") addresses future readers, and again we can find in this composition the projection of the poet's presence. It is divided in two parts: in the first one, he gives a date, a time reference which is not changed, while in the second part he addresses the time of reading, whenever that may be. Nonetheless, the verb tenses and time deixis are combined in order to build this scene of encounter between both sides of the printed page and the poem:

> Full of life *now*, compact, visible,
> I, *forty years old the eighty-third year of the States*,
> To one a century hence or any number of centuries hence,
> To you yet unborn *these*, *seeking* you.
>
> When you read *these* I that was visible *am become* invisible,
> *Now* it is you, compact, visible, *realizing* my poems, *seeking* me,
> *Fancying* how happy you were if I could be with you and become your comrade;
> *Be it as if I were with you.* (Be not too certain but I am *now* with you.) (*Leaves* 116)
> (emphasis added)

The present-time deictics of the first stanza are then a past for the reader (in the second stanza). In italics, we have "now" and the date of the poem, but "now" is in the second part pointing at the reading moment, which means that the "lyrical I," the poet, has moved to the future time, now a present for the reader, as a phantasmatic presence which, furthermore, asserts between brackets "Be not too certain but I am now with you." The future, referred by "hence," "you yet unborn" and "when," however, do not go along with future tenses. Most of the clauses are in present and past participles. Hence, full sentences are only found in the first and last lines of the second stanza: "*I* that was visible *am become invisible*," "*I am* now with you." For the reader (who is "you" and is now "realizing my poems"), there might not be as many bodily contact as we found in other poems; rather, what s/he finds is a fluid perception of time, being then able to read the presence of the poet, who actually may be in her/his "now."

This is then a cluster which continues the line of poems around the self in relation to the Other that Erkkila outlines (291). The self and the world were the center of "Starting from Paumanok" and "Song of Myself" and, while *Children of Adam* was a chant to procreation and the importance of the body for the development of the US, *Calamus* vindicates the adhesive love, the comradeship which should also be part of the citizenship of athletes he wanted to arise with his songs. Here, however, there is a greater emphasis on the act of writing and reading, and as we have seen in the last poem that I have analyzed, a more complex play of presence and absence. The poems of this cluster then celebrate love, that between men, that between the poet and the readers, but they also stand out because of their auto-referential nature. These leaves seem to be about these leaves after all: about writing and reading and the arena of encounter that they entail. Thus, the presence of the poet and his poems is such because of the reader, who brings the otherness (a future —but present at the moment of reading— time). The orator-like figure that we found in previous poems disappears here, addressing an individual audience and, without disregarding speech and voice, keeping the performative involvement that the written voice entails.

1. 6. "Crossing Brooklyn Ferry" (1856)

The final distribution of poems in *Leaves of Grass* (1891-1892) makes the style of the poet advance and go back to his basics as we proceed from the first "Inscriptions" to the cluster of *Calamus*. Whitman presents himself as the poet, his ideas about sex and love, but as we have seen, in each of these compositions he introduces new figures and tones. While in "Starting from Paumanok" and "Song of Myself" his voice was eminently oral, the poems

that followed showed he was able to play with other styles, with shorter lines and poems. What I have decided to call the "in-between poems," however, combine a mixture of topics and styles. This series of "songs" are a celebration of America, as Moon claims about "Song of the Open Road," "Out old Feullage," "A Song of Joys," "Song of the Broad-Axe," and "Song for Occupations." Written in the 1850s, these poems expose his idea of what America should be: a land of prolific material development, along with a spiritual counterpart. American types and jobs are listed in images of both natural and urban areas, emphasizing the equal values between all types of individuals, as well as their contribution to the States. Unity between the different regions, which was a source of anxiety for Whitman, is also vindicated in most of these compositions. Some of them, as "Salut au Monde," "Song of the Rolling Earth," and "Song of the Exposition" give this "cluster" a balance for his nationalism, as they acknowledge the contribution of other countries to the general development of humanity. The tone in most of them is that of the public speaker, as it happened in "Song of Myself" and other 1850s poems: vocatives, exclamations, calls to "whoever you are," and auto-referential utterances of saying and singing, abound in these texts. Also, in "Song of the Answerer" and "Song of the Rolling Earth" he discusses the role of the poet in society, as an extension of the preface, from which the latter includes some fragments.

Nevertheless, two poems stand out because of their content and form. The "Song of the Red-Wood Tree," composed in 1873 is closer to the style he would later develop in following clusters, and its nationalist chant is then less a written oral speech than a narration. Also, and this will be the object of our analysis here, "Crossing Brooklyn Ferry" deviates because of its proposal in the relationship between poet and reader; acknowledging and exploiting its written nature. As I said above, "Crossing Brooklyn Ferry" is one of the poems that can be used to explain the addressing strategies and the blurred ontological lines that he sometimes employed to project his presence, although, as James Dougherty explains, there are several complementing readings. From the romantic tradition, we can read this poem as a meditation on a landscape, as well as a reflection on the urban life in the mid-nineteenth-century US. This scholar does also point at my own approach: this poem is about poetry itself, about the conservation and communication of personal experience in verse, about the struggle to get that scenario of encounter between reader and author across time (484). Like previous poems, this one is divided in nine sections which have the "lyrical I" in a ferry as the spinal stage. However, as I will propose, this stage is just the basis for articulating his own ideas on the future and his presence. The division may be due to the focus given through

one side ("I") or the other ("you"). Section 1 starts with different "yous" which turn into "others" in the following one, while the third and fourth sections, along with the seventh and eighth, tackle the contrast and tension between the now and then of both "you" and "I."

In terms of form, this composition follows the oral style proper of the first years. Lines are long, combining vocatives and exclamations, and so giving it the sense of cadence that characterizes Whitman and that charges the poems with political associations of oratory. In contrast, the very same poem is a challenge to time through its written nature, and that is why most critics have focused on this transcendence of time while keeping the space. In the poem, the ferry crossing the river is what unites present and future:

> Crowds of men and women attired in the usual costumes, how curious you are
> to me!
> On the ferry-boats the hundreds and hundreds that cross, returning home, are
> more curious to me than you suppose,
> And you that shall cross from shore to shore years hence are more to me, and
> more in my meditations, than you might suppose.
> . . .
> Others will enter the gates of the ferry and cross from shore to shore,
> . . .
> A hundred years hence, or ever so many hundred years hence, others will see
> them. (*Leaves* 135-36)

Time is then linked to fluidity and cyclical advance, especially if we take into account the ontological nature of the river and the back and forth movement of the ferry. As Erkkila explains, all the figures of fluidity are part of the "well-joined scheme" that Whitman saw in time. Repetition of words and images of return motion throughout the whole poem work towards a deviation from the lineal conception of time (142). Disintegration of the self may come from the constant "current rushing so swiftly and swimming with me far away," "the run of the flood-tide," "the pouring-in of the flood-tide, the falling-back to the sea of the ebb-tide" (*Leaves* 136). "I too had been struck from the float forever held in solution," he says in section 5.

The association of time and cyclical fluidity leads us to what Ryan Cull names a "social ontology": the center of the speaker is actually decentered, also decentering the epistemological authority. As a result, this poem needs the "other side," the participation and engagement of the reader to complete its circularity. Absence and presence are started in the scenes of writing and reading, with an "I" and "you" which are in constant movement and so shifting the referents (763-64). That is what we find at the very beginning of the poem:

> Flood-tide below me! I see you face to face!

> Clouds of the west—sun there half an hour high—I see you also face to face.
> Crowds of men and women attired in the usual costumes, how curious you are
> to me!
> On the ferry-boats the hundreds and hundreds that cross, returning home, are
> more curious to me than you suppose,
> And you that shall cross from shore to shore years hence are more to me, and
> more in my meditations, than you might suppose. (*Leaves* 135)

"You" here may refer to the river, but also to the other travelers or to the readers. In line 1, the "you" refers back to the "Flood-tide bellow me," and then to "Crowds of men and women," but also "you that shall cross . . . years hence." Although the first lines may point at the views of the "lyrical I," the ending of the section points at the main addressee: people in the future, and what is shared among them. This is something that he develops in the following section: "The others that are to follow me, the ties between me and them." We should remember here the importance of experience for the development of identity. "Sight, hearing" is what joins the poet and the future people, maybe listeners but also readers. To the sonority of lines and their cadence (anaphora abounds here as well), the poet uses in section 3 colors and light to paint the views and so connect himself with others, that might not be there, but that can see it from his presentation. The first stanza focuses on the "I" doing the same as "you," mixing up present and past tenses, but still keeping a lineal conception:

> *I am with you*, you men and women of a generation, or ever so many generations
> hence,
> *Just as you* feel when you look on the river and sky, so I felt,
> Just as any of you is one of a living crowd, I was one of a crowd,
> Just as you are refresh'd by the gladness of the river and the bright flow, I was
> refresh'd,
> Just as you stand and lean on the rail, yet hurry with the swift current, I stood yet
> was hurried,
> Just as you look on the numberless masts of ships and the thick-stemm'd pipes
> of steamboats, I look'd. (*Leaves* 136) (emphasis added)

As in the previous section of the poem, there is a kind of interaction with a "you" of future generations which Erkkila considers a step towards intimacy ("I am with you"). Redemption does not come from personal immortality, but through collectivity and participation in rituals of daily action (143-44). Furthermore, in the repeated phrase of "just as you," what we find is a "less and less subject-centered" discourse, and an advance towards an "ontological state of mutually being-with" (Cull 764-65). Something similar is asserted by S. J. Mack, who finds in this shared activities a common experience which transcends time (*The Pragmatic* 50).

However, in the second stanza of this section, "you" disappears and the "I" and his views become the center of a light-designed picture. Each stroke of "glistening yellow,"

"shimmering track of beams," "sunlit water" shows what the "I" "saw" and "look'd": the river, the sea-gulls, the sky and also the ships and buildings on the coast which (as the stanza advances) loose the verb, the tense, and become atemporal:

> I too many and many a time *cross'd* the river of old,
> *Watched* the Twelfth-month sea-gulls, saw them high in the air floating with motionless wings, oscillating their bodies,
> *Saw* how the glistening yellow lit up parts of their bodies and left the rest in strong shadow,
> . . .
> *Had my eyes dazzled* by the shimmering track of beams,
> *Look'd* at the fine centrifugal spokes of light round the shape of my head in the sunlit water,
> . . .
> *Saw* the white sails of schooners and sloops, saw the ships at anchor,
> . . .
> The white wake left by the passage, the quick tremulous whirl of the wheels,
> . . .
> The scallop-edged waves in the twilight, the ladled cups, the frolicsome crests and glistening,
> . . .
> On the river the shadowy group, the big steam-tug closely flank'd on each side by the barges, the hay-boat, the belated lighter,
> On the neighboring shore the fires from the foundry chimneys burning high and glaringly into the night,
> Casting their flicker of black contrasted with wild red and yellow light over the tops of houses, and down into the clefts of streets. (*Leaves* 136-37)
> (emphasis added)

The last ten lines (from "The white wake…") are dominated by past participles and a final present participle which, as mentioned above, act as a painting where the reader (and not only future generations of passengers) can experience the same as the poet. This atemporality is made clearer in the following section:

> These and all else were to me the same as they are to you,
> I loved well those cities, loved well the stately and rapid river,
> The men and women I saw were all near to me,
> Others the same—others who look back on me because I look'd forward to them,
> (The time will come, though I stop here to-day and to-night.) (*Leaves* 137)

The deictics "these and all else" link the past of the "I" ("were to me") and the present of the "you" ("they are to you"), while the looks also help for the encounter: "others who look back on me because I look'd forward to them." While they look in the present, the tense is directed to the past ("back"), and the look coming from the past is "forward" to the other. Moreover, there is a sense of future ("The time will come"), but present time ("to-day and to-night") is also a present place ("here"), exploiting the empty and contextual nature of

these words. As Keith Wilhite does, we can see here a suspension and convergence of spatial and temporal categories, involving then the writing and reading scenes (940).

Section 5 changes this articulation and introduces the union of "I" and "you." As James Dougherty asserts, there is a progressive change in addresses, from the future passengers to the future readers in the starting questions of the passage:

> What is it then between us?
> What is the count of the scores or hundreds of years between us?
> Whatever it is, it avails not—distance avails not, and place avails not,
> I too lived, Brooklyn of ample hills was mine (*Leaves* 137)

From the shared landmarks with the passengers (Brooklyn, Manhattan island), he draws towards common reference points as the sun, the water or the views of crowds that any city may give (Dougherty 489-90). Any identity, based on the body, and built from experiences ("I too liv'd," "I too walk'd," "I too felt") can be understood and embraced by the poet. Thus the beginning of section 6:

> It is not upon you alone the dark patches fall,
> The dark threw its patches down upon me also,
> . . .
> Nor is it you alone who know what it is to be evil,
> I am he who knew what it was to be evil,
> I too knitted the old knot of contrariety, (*Leaves* 138)

Cull asserts this is "one of the darkest passages in Whitman's work" (768), a list of experiences and past feelings. Thus, the identity of "I" and "reader," exposed both to these "dark patches," have the same matter, although towards the end the poet shows the power to modify the "role" we have to play in life ("as great as we like").

We can trace, then, a constant going back to the I-centered constructions which however impulse the poet towards the "you." If in section 5 he questioned the nature of that "between us," and then answered with the experiences conforming identity, in section 7 he turns back to the addressee, this time with what Cull identifies as "overt eroticism," a disturbing intrusion which might be explained (as Cull does) with Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's "paranoid reading" theory. Indeed, we cannot assure that the "you" is the reader, as Cull says, if we consider the last three questions:

> Who was to know what should come home to me?
> Who knows but I am enjoying this?
> Who knows, for all the distance, but I am as good as looking at you now, for all
> you cannot see me? (*Leaves* 138-39)

Thus, as this critic proposes, what would be happening in the poem is a voyeuristic practice where the reader is just an observer (Cull 771-72). However, the last line gets us closer to the reading scene, where the "I" is not anymore to be seen, but where it has the power to address (and therefore, see too) the future reader. Furthermore, after the past tenses of section 6, sections 7 and 8 bring the poet's speech to a present, making then the sense of presence more intense. In section 8, actually, the images of Manhattan, the tide and the people, are in the present, while the address to "you" evolves into a "we"

> Which fuses me into *you now*, and pours my meaning into *you*?
>
> *We* understand then do we not?
> What *I* promis'd without mentioning it, have *you* not accepted?
> What the study could not teach—what the preaching could not accomplish is
> accomplish'd, is it not? (*Leaves* 139) (emphasis added)

Thus, although Manhattan poses a specific place, the rest of the deictics can be filled with other information: now, you, we. As Wilhite explains, all this leads to a shared sensory apprehension, a moment of fusion where the reader is called to participation through the questions and the involvement in "we" (940-41), and which is rather emphasized by the use of liquid imagery. Thus, maybe Manhattan and its views are only important because of the "waves of flood-tide," the "oscillating" sea-gulls, the fusion and "pour[ing] my meaning into you" (*Leaves* 139).

These elements do also appear in the last section. It evolves to imperative constructions in long lines. Here Whitman combines matter and soul in fluid continuation of the previous section: study cannot teach the spiritual side of the river, clouds and ships. Thus his vocative, a chant to experience which comes from the brain, eyes, but without epistemological authority, as defended by Cull.

> Flow on, river! flow with the flood-tide, and ebb with the ebb-tide!
> Frolic on, crested and scallop-edg'd waves!
> . . .
> Throb, baffled and curious brain! throw out questions and answers!
> Suspend here and everywhere, eternal float of solution!
> Gaze, loving and thirsting eyes, in the house or street or public assembly!
>
> Sound out, voices of young men! loudly and musically call me by my nighest
> name!
> Live, old life! play the part that looks back on the actor or actress!
> . . .
> Appearances, now or henceforth, indicate what you are,
> You necessary film, continue to envelop the soul, (*Leaves* 139-40)

As the critic says, this last part is also a practice of sociability into the world, as it brings together the different points of the poem: the river, the young men calling him, his playing of a life part, the light on the heads and the film of the soul that was the scheme of section 2, the celebration of bodies in section 6, etc. (773). This implies a sociopolitical openness, as it may be seen in the "dumb, beautiful ministers" of the last stanza, although it is not clear whom (or what) it refers to.

> You have waited, you always wait, you dumb, beautiful ministers,
> We receive you with free sense at last, and are insatiate henceforward,
> Not you any more shall be able to foil us, or withhold yourselves from us,
> We use you, and do not cast you aside—we plant you permanently within us,
> We fathom you not—we love you—there is perfection in you also,
> You furnish your parts toward eternity,
> Great or small, you furnish your parts toward the soul. (*Leaves* 140)

This cryptic passage also makes use of a "we" which might be made up of speaker and reader. The "you" refers to the clouds, the reader ("you who peruse me"), the water, but also "appearances," the "necessary film," the cities, the "being." This loss of referents may be read as an invitation to loosen the control over the subtle meanings he tries to pour into us.

We are then reading a poem articulated from a projected absence, in whose projection the reader finds an invasive "lyrical I." The use of vocatives, as in previous compositions, places the reader not only in an oral scenario, but also in one where responses may be needed, where the speech becomes also an invocation of images and the experiences that conform the poet's identity. This is at the same time a different poem because there is no reference to the written nature, no mention to the "leaves" which are repeated over and over again in previous and following compositions. In the same line, there is no physical contact based on the book, but rather an "approach," the looks of one upon another. Distance of time and place "avails not" because of references to time, place and, above all, verb tenses and pronouns. "I," "you," and finally "we" involve the reader and work towards the ontological fusion we pointed out above. Thus, although less explicit than in other compositions, here Whitman articulates the encounter of reader and poet, exploiting a specific situation (his travels on the Brooklyn Ferry) and making it universal. The writer is both present and absent. He appears as the voice, the dweller in a series of vocatives and steps towards the reader, while these moves are enabled by his absence, at the same time structured in a blurry ontology and time/space conception. After the previous sections and poems, this one appears as a break of discourse which will change in the following clusters. Within the book, the poet is suddenly underlining both his absence, his ghostly being, and

the pervasive effect this may have in future readers. The American poet is able to leave behind the local and adapt to whatever time and place is needed. Not only does he get closer to the common people, he is also trying to turn the American into the universal, something which will be extended in the next cluster.

1. 7. Birds of Passage, Sea-Drift, *and* By the Roadside

From "Crossing Brooklyn Ferry" we jump to the cluster *Birds of Passage*, as Michael Moon says, a chant to cultural advance and West expansion, but also to history and identity (*Leaves* 189). This last point is what we find in the poem that I will analyze first. Written in 1856, "To You" was first titled "Poem of You, Whoever You Are" and it is this open and undecidable "you" that articulates the whole poem. As Moon explains, "it remains a striking instance of WW's [Whitman's] intimate address directly to the reader, somewhat in the manner of teacher to disciple. Here the teacher encourages one of the 'divine average' to discover and respect his own personal identity" (*Leaves* 195). Thus, it could be seen in contrast to the previous compositions, where Whitman's ideas on identity were mainly developed in the figure of his poet. This "Poem of You, Whoever You Are" is the "Song of Yourself," an invitation to the development of the reader and citizenship he wanted to generate with his cultural program. To start with, the open content of "whoever" is a political position. As we saw above, Whitman was one of the poets who merged popular and high culture, and who was rather against this last limitation. What is more, his aim was the average American, not the aristocratic and vain one. Thus, this poem seems an invitation to everyone and at the same an individual person, the one reading it.

There is then an exploitation of that plurality and singularity which are potential in the vocative and the pronoun, although in this case, as in "Crossing Brooklyn Ferry," this is not a scene where a public speaker is addressing an audience. Again, the use of the book and its physical reality make it easy for the poet to invade the reality of the "reader-You." This last point is seen in the first two stanzas:

> Whoever you are, I fear you are walking the walks of dreams,
> I fear these supposed realities are to melt from under your feet and hands
> Even now your features, joys, speech, house, trade, manners, troubles, follies,
>   costume, crimes, dissipate away from you,
> Your true soul and body appear before me,
> They stand forth out of affairs, out of commerce, shops, work, farms, clothes,
>   the house, buying, selling, eating, drinking, suffering, dying.
>
> Whoever you are, now *I place my hand upon you*, that you be my poem,
> *I whisper* with my lips close to your ear,
> I have loved many women and men, but I love none better than you.

(*Leaves* 195) (emphasis added)

While the first one dissipates the reality of the reader (his/her features, joys, house, trade), in the second the poet gives a physical certainty by projecting his body through the constative utterances of his approach (in italics). The first part divests the reader of his/her incidental dimension, getting him naked, since the "true soul and body appear before me." This sense of invasion is rather enlarged as the poem continues with the "lyrical I's" regrets about his delayed approach ("O I have been dilatory and dumb, / I should have made my way straight to you long ago, / I should have blabb'd nothing but you, I should have chanted nothing but you").

This projection is also found in the contrast between the past and present times, something which is articulated through non-participle verb tenses. Whitman places the contrast between his absence and presence in the distinction between now and before, which is emphasized in the fourth stanza through an anaphoric inversion:

> I will leave all and come and make the hymns of you,
> None has understood you, but I understand you,
> None has done justice to you, you have not done justice to yourself
> None but has found you imperfect, I only find no imperfection in you,
> None but would subordinate you, I only am he who will never consent to
> subordinate you,
> I only am he who places over you no master, owner, better, God, beyond what
> waits intrinsically in yourself. (*Leaves* 196)

It is then with the presence of the poet, and his actions that the value of the self is made evident. In this sense, Whitman's idea of himself as prophet comes into action, especially taking into account that it is the development of the individual citizen that he is looking for and the task that the poet has. Thus the first line, where the hymns are made for you, whoever you are, leading then to a proper understanding and justice, a recognition of perfection as any individual is perfect, and also to the development of independence and freedom ("no master . . . beyond what waits intrinsically in yourself"). Hence, while the poet he presented paid no attention to hierarchies the same is applied to the "you." The following stanza makes this recognition of the average even clearer. While in painting the "nimbus of gold-color'd light" is around the head of "the center-figure" (the saint), he shows his "average" objective in poetry: "But I paint myriads of heads, but paint no head without its nimbus of gold-color'd light, / From my hand from the brain of every man and woman it streams, effulgently flowing forever" (*Leaves* 196).

Painting however goes along with singing. While the saints get attention in pictorial compositions, in literature the "grandeurs and glories" traditionally sung about the hero go here to this "whoever" reader. Nevertheless, the deeds are not everything, and they can in fact "return in mockeries" which do not define the individual. Again, as in the first stanza, actions and attempts to build (or cover) the self do not stop the poet's sight:

> I pursue you where none else has pursued you,
> Silence, the desk, the flippant expression, the night, the accustom'd routine, if these conceal you from others or from yourself, they do not conceal you from me,
> The shaved face, the unsteady eye, the impure complexion, if these balk others they do not balk me,
> The pert apparel, the deform'd attitude, drunkenness, greed, premature death, all these I part aside. (*Leaves* 196)

The reader (or "you") contains endowments, virtues, pluck. There is potential for every type of values in the person, and this is equally acknowledged in everyone, at the same or even higher level than natural elements ("These furies, elements, storms, motions of Nature, throes of apparent dissolution, you are he or she who is master or mistress over them"). The last stanza, again with a constative utterance, frees the individual towards life, whatever its ways:

> The hopples fall from your ankles, you find an unfailing sufficiency,
> Old or young, male or female, rude, low, rejected by the rest, whatever you are promulges itself,
> Through birth, life, death, burial, the means are provided, nothing is scanted,
> Through angers, losses, ambition, ignorance, ennui, what you are picks its way.
> (*Leaves* 197)

This poem is then a vocative in itself, an invitation for the reader to acknowledge that s/he can be the protagonist of poems. Apart from another approximation to the reader, it turns out an exhortation to the individual of his and any time to develop what he so much valued: identity. This goes in line with the metaphysical discourses that he was writing in the 1850s, although its position in *Birds of Passage* seems to give the cluster a balance. This section has also "Songs of the Universal," a Hegelian song to scientific development where America is placed as "the scheme's culmination," an embracing land which however is to overcome "the grandeurs of the past" in other continents. This composition is followed by "Pioneers! O Pioneers!," written in 1865 and first included in *Drum-Taps* because of its form. A marching song that emphasizes the union of all citizens for the union of the US, it starts with a call to arms ("Follow well in order, get your weapons ready"), but it is actually a vocative for America as a whole: Western youths are invited to take the "task eternal" and leave the past behind. There are in this poem, as in the ones seen above, a series of images of America: the

mines and rivers, the "hunting trail" which is there to be exploited and inhabited by this "resistless restless race!" that he presents. Thus, although with a trochaic beat, here Whitman was actually outlining his perfect society of "Pioneers."

There are also political contents in "France," a poem which was first included in the 1871 group "Songs of Insurrection" and which is a commemoration of the Revolutionary Tribunal in 1794. In this case, lines get longer, there is no rhyme except (again) in the anaphora that he uses, giving it a sense of political speech which indeed could be given in front of an audience unless it was not a message to France:

> Hence I sign this salute over the sea,
> . . .
> And from to-day sad and cogent I maintain the bequeath'd cause, as for all lands,
> And I send these words to Paris with my love,
> And I guess some chansonniers there will understand them,
> For I guess there is latent music yet in France, floods of it (*Leaves* 198)

This last point seems to be present in all poems. In "Song of the Universal," the poet is not absent either. In fact, it starts with a vocative from the Muse to the poet, to "Sing me a song no poet has yet chanted, / Sing me the universal" (*Leaves* 189). In "Pioneers! O Pioneers!" it appears as well:

> Minstrels latent on the prairies!
> (Shrouded bards of other lands, you may rest, you have done your work,)
> Soon I hear you coming warbling, soon you rise and tramp amid us,
> Pioneers! O pioneers! (*Leaves* 194)

Thus, there is a kind of line uniting all these compositions. Also in "Myself and Mine" we find a committed voice ("I would bind in words retrospective some of your deeds and signs, / I would sing how an old man, tall, with white hair mounted the scaffold in Virginia, / . . . I would sing in my copious song your census returns of the states . . . / Songs thereof would I sing, to all that hitherward comes would I welcome give"), and the same happens in "With Antecedents." This last poem is a chant to the future of the US that will come, that is yet to be developed. In the first section it acknowledges the past: "With my fathers and mothers and the accumulations of past ages, With all which, had it not been, I would not now be here, as I am," but here he includes the global history and development. All countries, but also all religions and myths become part of the self's background and foundation.

This cluster ends up then (after celebrating national and international advancement, after calling to the self of the reader and establishing his own position in "Myself and Mine") with an official presentation of the US in atemporal terms. The past gives way to an

annulation of time in the contact between the "I" and "You": "We stand amid time beginningless and endless." It seems as if time has not yet started, as if he actually inaugurates it with the US:

> I respect Assyria, China, Teutonia, and the Hebrews,
> I adopt each theory, myth, god, and demi-god,
> I see that the old accounts, bibles, genealogies, are true, with exception,
> I assert that all past days were what they must have been,
> And that they could no-how have been better than they were,
> And that to-day is what it must be, and that America is,
> And that to-day and America could no-how be better than they are. (*Leaves* 202)

As it happens in "To You" above (*Leaves* 195), present times are what count. In the following section, again calling for the "common average," the poet asserts that the States conjoin the past and the present, but foresees a greater future:

> In the name of these States and in your and my name, the Past,
> And in the name of these States and in your and my name, the Present time.
>
> I know that the past was great and the future will be great,
> And I know that both curiously conjoint in the present time,
> (For the sake of him I typify, for the common average man's sake, your sake if
> you are he,)
> And that where I am or you are this present day, there is the centre of all days,
> all races,
> And there is the meaning to us of all that has ever come of races and days, or
> ever will come. (*Leaves* 202-3)

This last idea of "coming" reminds us of the "mythical time" of the yet-to-come that we pointed out in the previous chapters. There seems to be some kind of non-completion, of ever-coming into being of "these States." This may also be related to the composition of this whole cluster and its title. *Birds of Passage* may refer to these poems, especially if we take into account their position in the volume. They are compositions coming from previous clusters and which, tackling different aspects, still keep something in common: the advancement but also de cyclical trace of birds' migrations. He gives accounts of the past, but the final poem seems to point towards a mythical time, a non-lineal evolution where the "I" and "You" do also participate. Thus, although maybe not as obviously as in previous clusters, this one has its own meaning and conceptual foundation underneath.

The following cluster (*Sea-Drift*), however, has a clear line of selection. Again, it is made up of poems from different years, comprising from 1856 to 1880, but all of them are united by the image of the sea, sometimes as object of reflection, while others it becomes the scenery or main image. Michael Moon adds that it is the result of the poet's "impression, deep in childhood memory, of the sea and the beach, an influence that is at the heart of his

acceptance of the tragic in life" (206). Scholars point at his sexual and love disappointment as one of the inspirations to write these poems as well (S. J. Mack, *The Pragmatic* xix; Erkkila 171). After 1857 and what they identify as a period of depression, the images that the sea had incarnated in previous poems became the symbol of insecurity and alienation. This may explain the autobiographical tendency felt in most of the poems, where the identity of the "I" that we saw in "Song of Myself" and other early poems suddenly turns into a limited figure tormented by a life which is not fruitful and prolific, but rather merciless. "Out of the Cradle Endlessly Rocking" (*Leaves* 206) opens the cluster with "A reminiscence" of the poet's childhood, already marked by sights and sounds. The "mocking-bird's throat," "the mystic play of shadows twining and twisting," the "lilac-scent" seem to explain the present man's poetic streak, although in a pessimistic tone, as it ends with "the final word," which is precisely a death no longer seen in the light of transcendentalist ideas. Something similar occurs in "As I Ebb'd with the Ocean of Life" (*Leaves* 212), although in the latter the object of regret is the poet's own work. Among the rest of the poems which conform this section, this last poem retakes the auto-reference to writing seen in the poems above: "I musing late in the autumn day, gazing off southward, / Held by this electric self out of the pride of which I utter poems, / Was seiz'd by the spirit that trails in the lines underfoot" (*Leaves* 212). The poet sees his work as sea-drift ("Chuff, straw, splinters of wood, weeds, and the sea-gluten, / Scum, scales from shining rocks, leaves of salt-lettuce, left by the tide") and regrets his publications ("Oppress'd with myself that I have dared to open my mouth . . . Pointing in silence to these songs, and then to the sand beneath") (*Leaves* 213).

The rest of the poems ("Tears," "To the Man-of War-Bird," "Aboard at a Ship's Helm," etc.) appear as continuations, narratives and metaphors based on the sea, but in a more traditional style and in shorter extension. This last point is extended to *By the Roadside*. Although this section starts with "A Boston Ballad" (1854) and "Europe" (1850) (more than 30 lines long), as it continues to the end, the poems start reducing their length, sometimes getting to two-line compositions. As the previous groups of poems (*Birds of Passage* and *Sea-Drift*), this one mixes up writings from 1850 to 1881, and thus combines different styles and topics: knowledge and metaphysics, politics, and a series of poems around images witnessed by the poet and that may remind us of Williams's style. "A Farm Picture," for example, is a three-line poem where nothing happens, just a very concise presentation of the ideal republic Whitman wanted to build:

> Through the ample open door of the peaceful country barn,
> A sunlit pasture field with cattle and horses feeding,

> And haze and vista, and the far horizon fading away. (*Leaves* 230)

While the scenery seems the center of this poem, in "The Runner" it is the body that constitutes the image:

> On a flat road runs the well-train'd runner,
> He is lean and sinewy with muscular legs,
> He is thinly clothed, he leans forward as he runs,
> With lightly closed fists and arms partially rais'd. (*Leaves* 230-31)

Similarly, in "Beautiful Women" and "Mother and Babe" the body and movements emphasize the type of female and male citizen he was looking for.

In this cluster we also find a poem which could be compared with "To You" above:

> Lover divine and perfect Comrade,
> Waiting content, invisible yet, but certain,
> Be thou my God.
>
> Thou, thou, the Ideal Man,
> Fair, able, beautiful, content, and loving,
> Complete in body and dilate in spirit,
> Be thou my God. ("Gods," *Leaves* 226)

Here the approach is, nevertheless, a different one. The "thou" is a sign of the style change that C. Carroll Hollis points out, and he is more concise than in the afore-mentioned poem: he is a lover divine, content, complete. In fact, here Whitman presents him as the "perfect Comrade," a term which takes us back to the *Calamus* cluster, although this text was first published in "Passage to India." If he is divine he is also a fit citizen. However, this poem continues addressing Death, as a counterpart of the Life which in the comrade "has served its turn." At the end of the poem, the chant to the perfect self is turned into a chant of life and death, "Time and Space." Thus, although there may be different topics, we could say that the point of union between these diverse poems is the underlying truth and rule which affects everyone and everything, a sort of metaphysics or epistemological reflection which is seen more clearly in poems such as "Gliding o'er All" (*Leaves* 232) but which, however, seem to move as well the series of "Thoughts" on justice, equality, obedience and ownership. "Silence" sometimes appears as a better understanding of the "unaccountable" world he lives in ("When I Heard the Learn'd Astronomer," *Leaves* 227) and at the same time references to writing are missing from this group. That may be the reason why these poems are somehow by the roadside, juxtaposed with a volume which seems to be aware of its written and logocentric nature.

It is impossible for us not to mention as well two of the poems which stand out as more explicitly political. "To a President," one of the shortest (it has only four lines), was written in 1860, so its addressee, the president it refers to, is James Buchanan (Moon, *Leaves* 228). However, the poem does not contain any detail, so it could also be read as the list of values to guide the republic:

> All you are doing and saying is to America dangled mirages,
> You have not learn'd of Nature—of the politics of Nature you have not learn'd
> the great amplitude, rectitude, impartiality,
> You have not seen that only such as they are for these States,
> And that what is less than they must sooner or later lift off from these States.
> (*Leaves* 228)

As in the transcendentalist discourse of Emerson and Thoreau, here Nature is that which rules everything, and which politics cannot ignore. The landscape of the US, the "great amplitude" leads to values of "rectitude, impartiality." Thus, geography and politics should go hand in hand, their link should not be ignored. Nevertheless, after "To a President" (although with some poems in between), "To the States" does also tackle the politics of the republic. As the previous poem, it belonged to a cluster titled "Messenger Leaves" and was included in the 1860 edition of *Leaves of Grass*. As the title indicates, it was written between 1857 and 1859 ("To Identify the 16th, 17th, or 18th Presidentiad"), and so it was inspired by the administrations of Fillmore, Pierce and Buchanan, objects of the pamphlet "The Eighteenth Presidency!" too. Against the images of filth ("scum floating atop of the waters," "What a filthy Presidentiad") the States seem to be sleeping in a "deepening twilight" when the congressmen are seen as creatures of the night, "bats and night-dogs." This poem poses then a contrast when read besides the political chants where the future is the main object. Here, future times are just pointed out at the end, where "with muttering thunder and lambent shoots we all duly awake, / South, North, East, West, inland and seaboard, we will surely awake" (*Leaves* 234). Curiously enough, this is the last poem of the cluster, and so the final message we find before the following group of poems: that of the Civil War. As Erkkila also notices, its position seems strategical, as the next thing the reader finds is the drum-taps, the sign of the people who are awake (184-85).

1. 8. Drum-Taps*, and* Memories of President Lincoln

Drum-Taps was first published apart from *Leaves of Grass*, although as Moon claims, Whitman knew it belonged to the volume from its early stages (*Leaves* 234). He even said it was better than *LoG*, and it is also clear that it is more autonomous than the rest of the groups of poems. However, it proves to fit within the concept of the *Leaves*, as it is also a register of a self going

through the Civil War. As he told Traubel, it was "put together by fits and starts, on the field, in the hospitals, as I worked with the soldier boys" (*Whitman in Camden* vol. 2, 137). It was part of his interest to blend in the different social groups and types, and the war turned out a prolific scenario for his writing after all. As he told William O'Connor in a letter in January, 1865,

> I am perhaps mainly satisfied with Drum-Taps because it delivers my ambition of the task that has haunted me, namely to express in a poem (& in the way I like, which is not at all by directly stating it) the pending action of this *Time & Land we swim in*, with all their large conflicting fluctuations of despair & hope, the shiftings, masses, & the whirl & deafening din . . . with the unprecedented anguish of wounded & suffering, the beautiful young men, in wholesale death & agony. ("Whitman on His Art" 784)

In fact, this may be read along with his prose accounts included in *Specimen Days*, although he also stated there that "the real war will never get in the books," as he titled one of his diary entries (*Specimen Days* 80). As Moon adds, this cluster received poorly and unenthusiastic reviews, which saddened the poet. The style of these texts is rather varied. More traditional forms combine with higher use of language, especially the vocabulary, although we may also find Whitman's attempt to register the sounds and images in a raw way. His photographic techniques have drawn the attention of scholars and it moves the poet's voice from the public speaker to the intimate presenter of a reality which is far from the reader. In this sense, his years as a journalist may have played a defining role, at least in what Erkkila identifies as the fictive persona of a reporter which might be found both in his prose and poems, in form of telegraphic style and cinematic montage (207-8). However, as this critic also claims, there is control over his verse compositions, somehow getting to an anesthetization of the horrors of war, without, at the same time, creating epic models. Thus, the martial spirit with the first poems will be balanced by more realistic compositions where the writer ("I") is less present. In this variety, then, Genoways has found four types of poems according to their topic: the recruiting, the journalistic, the soldier, and the hospital poems.

The first ones (the recruiting) open the cluster, as "First O Songs for Prelude," "Eighteen Sixty-One," and the famous "Beat! Beat! Drums!". As this scholar says, they were written during the first months of the war, of course, with a public purpose, although the first two were not published until 1865, the same month the Civil War ended. They all have in common the emphasis on a city and country which are waking up by the coming of an invading sound (that of drums). As Edward Lybeer explains, there is a "martial enthusiasm" which requires a pace of "relentless exaltation" and a tone of "fierce interpellation" (26-27).

In "First O songs for a Prelude" (*Leaves* 234) this is seen in terms of noise. The beat of drums replaces the "soft opera-music," the "soldier parading" and "pageants," the "cry [is] everywhere," there are "wild cheers" and "mutter of preparation." The poet's role is once more to sing it, although there is some silence as well: "Loth is the mother to part, yet not a word does she speak to detain him," "Old matron of this proud, friendly, turbulent city, / Often in pensive or covertly frown'd amid all your children, / But now you smile with joy exulting old Mannahatta." The silence seems to come from women, while action and noise comes from men.

In the following poem, "Eighteen Sixty One," something similar happens, although this time in relation to the poet who is to sing the war:

> Arm'd year—year of the struggle,
> No dainty rhymes or sentimental love verses for you terrible year,
> Not you as some pale poetling seated at a desk lisping cadenzas piano,
> But as a strong man erect, clothed in blue clothes, advancing, carrying a rifle on
> your shoulder. (*Leaves* 237)

As in the previous poem, where mechanics were listed with lawyers, drivers, salesmen and judges, here the poet is also to take part in the war, and there is a change towards the masculine. Suddenly, the model of the Romantic or decadent poet (pale, sentimental) which was associated with the feminine, turns into a "strong man" with a sonorous and masculine voice which rings "across the continent." In fact, this masculinity is placed along with the violence of the war: "Heard your determin'd voice launch'd forth again and again / Year that suddenly sang by the mouths of the round-lipp'd cannon." Celebration does not come then in form of the "cadenzas piano," but from the workmen of all the country doing the war. This turns into an invading sound in "Beat! Beat! Drums!," whose rhythm is a kind of emulation of the actual march, mainly to the spondaic and anapestic emphasis (Moon 237). This transpires

> Through the windows—through doors—*burst* like a *ruthless force*,
> Into the *solemn* church, and scatter the congregation,
> Into the school where the scholar is *studying*;
> Leave not the bridegroom *quiet*—no happiness must he have now with his bride,
> Nor the *peaceful* farmer any peace, ploughing his field or gathering his grain,
> *So fierce you whirr and pound you drums—so shrill you bugles blow.*
> (*Leaves* 237) (emphasis added)

Against a background of peace in different common scenes (the church, the school, the field), the war comes as a storm and in the cities it overcomes "the rumble of wheels" and the work of people ("No bargainers' . . . no brokers or speculators"). With a series of

sonorous directives (partly due to the monosyllables of the refrain), the poet celebrates the sudden interruption of peace while emphasizing the urgent need of union. In this sense, the three poems include this idea. Union within social classes appear in the catalogue of "First O Songs":

> To the drum-taps prompt,
> The young men falling in and arming,
> The mechanics arming, (the trowel, the jack-plane, the black-smith's hammer,
>   tost aside with precipitation,)
> The lawyer leaving his office and arming, the judge leaving the court,
> The driver deserting his wagon in the street, jumping down, throwing the reins
>   abruptly down on the horses' backs,
> The salesman leaving the store, the boss, book-keeper, porter, all leaving;
> Squads gather everywhere by common consent and arm,
> The new recruits, even boys, the old men show them how to wear their
>   accoutrements, they buckle the straps carefully, (*Leaves* 235)

Here Whitman makes use of his catalogues of the 1850s. While in the previous stanza verbs are in the past they turn now, as usual in this technique, to the present participle and present simple, thus giving a general image rather than a narrative. In "Eighteen Sixty-One," union is between regions:

> As I heard you shouting loud, your sonorous voice ringing across the continent,
> Your masculine voice O year, as rising amid the great cities,
> Amid the men of Manhattan . . .
> Or with large steps crossing the prairies out of Illinois and Indiana,
> Rapidly crossing the West with springy gait and descending the Alleghanies,
> Or down from the great lakes or in Pennsylvania, or on deck along the Ohio
>   river,
> Or southward along the Tennessee or Cumberland rivers, or at Chattanooga on
>   the mountain top, (*Leaves* 237)

The three of them have an oral nature, not only due to their song references. The cadence of "First O Songs" may reside in its long lines and anaphora, the afore-mentioned catalogue and its interjectional vocatives ("First O songs for a prelude," "O superb! O Manhattan, my own, my peerless!" "War! And arm'd race . . . / War! be it weeks, months . . ."). "Eighteen Sixty-One" (*Leaves* 236) is shorter, but Whitman's characteristic long verse is also combined here with the constative intervention of the "I" ("I heard you shouting," "I saw you as one of the workmen," "Saw I your gait and saw I your sinewy limbs," "I repeat you, hurrying, crashing, sad, distracted year") and its repeated conjunctions ("Or with large steps, . . . Or down from the great lakes . . . Or southward along the Tennessee . . ."). On the contrary, "Beat! Beat Drums!" is much more traditional in its use of refrains, which however does not prevent its oral effects.

While Genoways's division of poems in those four categories I reported above (recruiting, journalistic, soldier, hospital poems) seem accurate and practical when tackling this cluster, the truth is that I would add another series of poems to his groups. "From Paumanok Starting I Fly Like a Bird" (*Leaves* 238) and "Song of the Banner at Daybreak" (*Leaves* 239) seem to emphasize the role of the poet in this type of historical moments. Let us remember here that Whitman's purpose was to counterbalance the historian, to sing the present and the future, what was yet to come and was happening in his US. In the first three poems, the role of the poet is to work, it seems, in this process of waking up that every city and land is undergoing, but there is a need for stronger and non-sentimental writing, somehow a disturbing voice that may act as drums and bugles. That is what happens in the aforementioned two poems. In "From Paumanok Starting I Fly Like a Bird," the poet has "to sing the idea of all," while at the same time there are songs for each of the regions and States he mentions:

> To Kanada till I absorb Kanada in myself, to Michigan then,
> To Wisconsin, Iowa, Minnesota, to sing their songs, (they are inimitable;)
> Then to Ohio and Indiana to sing theirs, to Missouri and Kansas and Arkansas
>   to sing theirs,
> To Tennessee and Kentucky, to the Carolinas and Georgia to sing theirs,
> To Texas and so along up toward California, to roam accepted everywhere;
> (*Leaves* 238)

The center of this poem is unity, all and each of them, "one and inseparable," and to sing to this unity "to the tap of the war-drum if need be." The image of the bird, which was present in poems of other clusters, keeps having an important parallelism to the poet, not only because of the chant but also because of his flying abilities. To see the states from the heights and consider the whole in one is also something present in "Song of the Banner at Daybreak," although this poem is quite different in terms of form. While the first one is short and somehow concise (it has just eleven lines), the latter is more experimental, as it presents a dialogue between personified attitudes to the war (a pennant and a banner, a father and a child, and a poet). So far, we had not found this type of composition in Whitman. Although there is something similar in "Out of the Cradle Endlessly Rocking" (*Sea-Drift* cluster), where the poet's voice alternates with that of the bird, here each intervention is titled with the name of the speaker. It is, as Erkkila claims, written with the principles of a more formal artistic structure (194-95), and it also appears much more traditional in its conception, as it finally turns out a semi-allegory of the ideological reasons for the war. While the father defends the need to continue the peace so as to keep the materialistic life and economic

profits, the child, under the influence of the banner, seems to prefer freedom as a higher value, thus justifying the carnage of war.

The figure of the poet may be the most interesting one, as this poem could be read, according to Sherry G. Southard, as a poem about language itself (34). The poet expresses his role and intention in the first section, because he is the first one to speak: "O a new song, a free song." As the first section of this poem, this composition starts with an actual reference to itself, although the main object is the meaning of the banner and pennant. In the first intervention of the poet, song and banner, voice and flapping, are correlated. Both song and banner are in the "open air," heard and seen by father and child. The abstract "book-words" are replaced by the poet in physical chords which he can twine, as sewing a banner. In fact, his song is seen in physical actions of the war:

> I'll put the bayonet's flashing point, I'll let bullets and slugs whizz,
> (As one carry a symbol and menace far into the future,
> Crying with trumpet voice, *Arouse and beware! Beware and arouse!*)
> I'll pour the verse with streams of blood, full of volition, full of joy,
> Then loosen, launch forth, to go and compete,
> With the banner and pennant a-flapping. (*Leaves* 239)

The poet is then to enact the war with his words, translating, as we will see, the message of the pennant. This meaningful object calls the "bard" to fly along, which is something the poet shows he can do in his second intervention: he knows the sun, the sea, the wind, the brooks and woods, and so he is also able to hear the banner and its meaning. After the small talk between child and father, the banner and pennant make the poet speak again and translate their "mere strips of cloth":

> I hear and see not strips of cloth alone,
> I hear the tramp of armies, I hear the challenging sentry,
> I hear the jubilant shouts of millions of men, I hear Liberty!
> I hear the drums beat and the trumpets blowing,
> I myself move abroad swift-rising flying then,
> I use the wings of the land-bird and use the wings of the sea-bird,
> and look down as from a height, (*Leaves* 241)

Hence, the banner and pennant's meaning can be heard by the poet, and so translated to the child, giving him a celebratory description of war where men are giving "jubilant shouts," where drums and trumpets are sounding. The key idea here is "Liberty!" which will be followed by its analogy: the multiple and shared identity of the States. Acknowledging the peace and advances in transportation and building, all the poet sees from his bird's view is "Identity formed out of the thirty-eight spacious and haughty States, (and many more to come,)", and over them "the lengthen'd pennant shaped like a sword," the need to go to the

war to get that freedom. The "terror and carnage" of the war are accepted, and actually merged with the rivers and crops, with the material power of the land, the "passions of demons, slaughter, premature death" are embraced by the banner for the sake of "The Continent, devoting the whole identity without reserving an atom." The poet, however, sings as the child feels attracted to it: "Insensate! insensate! (yet I at any rate chant you,) O banner." Again, as in the previous poems, there is a sense of waking up in this composition. Just in the first intervention of the poet, the trumpet is crying "*Arouse and beware! Beware and arouse!*". This call comes at daybreak as well, "[f]resh and rosy red the sun is mounting high," and the banner emerges and advances "out of the night," while the banner actually brings the stars with it. These waking images do also appear in other poems, such as "Rise O days from Your Fathomless Deeps" (*Leaves* 244).

These poems then were thought to wake up the people and praise the war for the ideals of union and freedom, embracing its violent and bloody side and rather despising economic development. Following them, the reader finds a series of poems which record the war from different points of views and different stages, although the dominant one, again, is the poet's and his acknowledged position of power and importance during the war. In "City of Ships" (*Leaves* 246) with vocatives, the poet "chant[s] and celebrate[s]" in peace and war, each one having its own time. However, in those poems where the speaker is another person, the poet suddenly appears to recognize his position there as well. That is what happens in the "Terminus" section of "The Centenarian's Story" (*Leaves* 247) where he interrupts the speech:

> Enough, the Centenarian's story ends,
> The two, the past and present, have interchanged,
> I myself as connecter, as chansonnier of a great future, am now speaking.
> . . .
> I must copy the story, and send it eastward and westward,
> I must preserve that look as it beam'd on you rivers of Brooklyn. (*Leaves* 251)

Something similar happens in "Come Up from the Fields Father" (*Leaves* 253), a long poem where the reader finds the other side of war. As Genoways explains, the martial spirit he celebrates at the beginning was balanced by his accounts of its consequences (213-14). Here the voice of the daughter is intertwined with the poet's in a common narrative form, but Whitman's "lyrical I" foresees the future and actually introduces a flash-forward move to present us images of a grieving mother.

These flashing images would rather be present in shorter poems (although not all short poems are image-based). Matthiessen has pointed out this style as an influence of the developing open-air painting, writing "living pictures" (599-600). Erkkila follows the same idea, pointing out his realistic techniques as an anticipation of the Modern war writing and Pound's and Williams' imagisms (213-14). Thus, it was not so much about recounting events, but rather playing with time and space perceptions to "create a sense of what army life *felt* like" (Genoways 526). Among those listed by critics, "Cavalry Crossing a Ford" (*Leaves* 252), "Bivouac on a Mountain Side" (*Leaves* 252), "By the Bivouac's Fitful Flame" (*Leaves* 253), and "A Sight in Camp in the Daybreak Gray and Dim" (*Leaves* 257) stand out because of the use of lights and colors. In the first one, almost from a bird sight, readers find:

> A line in long array where they wind betwixt green islands,
> They take a serpentine course, their arms flash in the sun—hark to the musical
> clank,
> Behold the silvery river, in it the splashing horses loitering stop to drink,
> Behold the brown-faced men, each group, each person a picture, the negligent
> rest on the saddles,
> Some emerge on the opposite bank, others are just entering the ford— while,
> Scarlet and blue and snowy white,
> The guidons flags flutter gayly in the wind. (*Leaves* 251-52)

Forms (line, long, serpentine), colors (green islands, brown-faced men, "Scarlet and blue and snowy white"), and light ("their arms flash in the sun," silvery river) combine with the slow-motion movements of the men and horses. In a short poem, Whitman brings the scene of a moving picture rather than a narrative. A similar image is given in "An Army Corps on the March" (*Leaves* 252), where the reader finds a "swarming" and "dense" group of soldiers, "[g]littering dimly, toiling under the sun—the dust-cover'd men." Two of these texts contrast because of their different focus. While "Bivouac on a Mountain Side" appears as a picture taken from a bird's eye view, "By the Bivouac's Fitful Flame" presents an "I"-recorder, one of the men. The former gives a general view of the land: "Below a fertile valley spread, with barns and the orchards of summer, / Behind the terraced sides of mountain, abrupt in places rising high"; the latter, on the contrary, is right there, so details are given as in a cinematic forefront:

> By the bivouac's fitful flame,
> A procession winding around me, solemn and sweet and slow—but first I note,
> The tents of the sleeping army, the field's and wood's dim outline,
> The darkness lit by spots of kindled fire, the silence, (*Leaves* 253)

This close recording is also given in "Look Down Fair Moon" (*Leaves* 269): there the light of the satellite is called to "[p]our softly down night's nimbus floods on faces ghastly, swollen,

purple" in bodies which are described as "dead on their backs with arms toss'd wide." Light and forms are then what articulate this short composition, with no explicit story line.

However, of the forty-three poems that we find in this cluster, fifteen make reference again to the poet and his work (leaves and songs). To those that we considered above as "recruiting poems," we should add this series of compositions scattered throughout the rest of the cluster. Erkkila claims that the "I" is less present or not present at all in *Drum-Taps*, but these fifteen poems show a first-person speaker who is actually a poet and, once more, refers to these poems consciously. In "A March in the Ranks Hard-Prest, and the Road Unknown" (*Leaves* 256), the speaker is at the beginning just an observer, someone who actually wants to capture everything he sees:

> 'Tis a large old church at the crossing roads, now an impromptu hospital,
> Entering but for a minute I see a sight beyond all the pictures and poems ever
> made,
> . . .
> Then before I depart I sweep my eyes o'er the scene fain to absorb it all,
> . . .
> These I resume as I chant, I see again the forms, I smell the odor, (*Leaves* 256-
> 57).

All the perceptions he has in that moment become material to be chanted. In fact, this is what Moon calls an "on-the-spot notation," as it comes from notebook records (*Leaves* 256; Erkkila 215-16).

Hence, as he also says in "Not the Pilot" (*Leaves* 258), the poet's charge is "to compose a march for these States, / For a battle-call, rousing to arms if need be, years, centuries hence." While the pilot and pathfinder are important in the war, the poet acquires also a position of chanter, not less important than the rest. The following poem, "Year that Trembled and Reel'd Beneath Me" (*Leaves* 259), does also give the same message, although this time showing some doubt:

> A thick gloom fell through the sunshine and darken'd me,
> Must I change my triumphant songs? said I to myself,
> Must I indeed learn to chant the cold dirges of the baffled?
> And sullen hymns of defeat? (*Leaves* 259)

Again we find the same ideas of the first poems: there is a change of the chant needed in times of war, although here the tension is between the triumphant songs and the cold and sullen dirges and hymns. Placed almost in the middle of the cluster (it is the twentieth), this poem reflects the internal debate of a poet who, at the very beginning, celebrated war and carnage, but who now, in the middle of sharp images (like those of "A Sight in Camp in the

Daybreak Gray and Dim") starts struggling with the difficulties of getting beauty, the "triumphant" tone, out of them. That is what happens in the following poem, which appears almost as an answer. "The Wound-Dresser" (*Leaves* 259) turns up as a future projection where the old poet tells children, but also "maidens and young men," about the war in what S. J. Mack calls "the future's present tense" (*The Pragmatic* 118). Using a narrative present simple, memories and dreams mingle, the "doors of time" open and a catalogue of constative utterances are presented images. The "I-speaker" is a "wound-dresser" who, however, is also healing for social memory (S. J. Mack, *The Pragmatic* 118). Moon asserts that it is a "faithful description of WW's [Whitman's] ministrations to the war-wounded in Washington hospitals" (*Leaves* 259). The point, however, is that this poem is also an acknowledgement of the afore-mentioned difficulties to celebrate a war. In a passage between brackets and which was actually an epigraph for the whole cluster in 1871 and 1876, the poet confesses:

> (Arous'd and angry, I'd thought to beat the alarum, and urge relentless war,
> But soon my fingers fail'd me, my face droop'd and I resign'd myself,
> To sit by the wounded and soothe them, or silently watch the dead;) (*Leaves* 259)

"These poems" are then presented as the result of that work, as he says in "Not Youth Pertains to Me" (*Leaves* 268). The poet registers, as a non-lineal historian, what happens during the war. Towards the end of the cluster, more and more poems of this type appear. "To a Certain Civilian" (*Leaves* 272), for instance, asks the reader a series of questions regarding the cluster as something finished, since they are in the past:

> Did you ask dulcet rhymes from me?
> Did you seek the civilian's peaceful and languishing rhymes?
> Did you find what I sang erewhile for you to follow?
> Why I was not singing erewhile for you to follow, to understand—nor am I now;
> . . .
> And go lull yourself with what you can understand, and with piano-tunes,
> For I lull nobody, and you will never understand me (*Leaves* 272)

From this poem on, there is a sense of departure, of a conscious ending of the cluster. In the same way that the first poems vindicated a new way of chanting the US (in war), the last ones start a reconsideration of the work done by writer and reader. "Lo, Victress on the Peaks" (*Leaves* 272) points out the dark side of this assignment:

> No poem proud, I chanting bring to thee, nor mastery's rapturous verse,
> But a cluster containing night's darkness and blood-dripping wounds,
> And psalms of the dead. (*Leaves* 272)

This is followed by "Spirit Whose Work is Done" (*Leaves* 273), which invites the war's spirit, once it is over, to remain in the poet's lips:

> Touch my mouth ere you depart, press my lips close,
> Leave me your pulses of rage—bequeath them to me—fill me with currents
> compulsive,
> Let them scorch and blister out of my chants when you are gone,
> Let them identify you to the future in these songs. (*Leaves* 273)

Rather than a source of inspiration, the war is to be there, in "these songs," to be identified in the future. Whitman seems here a kind of historian of the soul who, as seen in "Adieu to a Soldier" (*Leaves* 273), starts another work just when the war finishes:

> Adieu dear comrade,
> Your mission is fulfill'd—but I, more warlike,
> Myself and this contentious soul of mine,
> Still on our own campaigning bound,
> . . .
> Here marching, ever marching on, a war fight out—aye here,
> To fiercer, weightier battles give expression. (*Leaves* 274)

After the effort of the soldier, the poet's task is to continue expressing, which is another battle taking place "here," maybe referring to the actual poem, the moment of writing, or the leaves of the book.

However, the truth is that all the poems have a strategic position, including those which do not mention the poet or his writing role. Whitman included poems dealing with the values he introduced in the first poems. "Give Me the Splendid Silent Sun" (*Leaves* 262), found in the middle of the cluster, presents the republic Whitman wanted, both with a peaceful countryside and a stimulating city. This composition, as Moon says, has great rhythm and uses his catalogues and repetition (anaphora) to give it cadence. Somehow, in going back to images of peace, the tone turns also to the prophetic and celebrating one where the poet wants to absorb and include the US reality and idealized images. Something similar happens in "Over the Carnage Rose Prophetic a Voice" (*Leaves* 265), which actually belonged to *Calamus* and so contains a chant to adhesiveness as the healing solution after the conflict: "The dependence of Liberty shall be lovers, / The continuance of Equality shall be comrades." Among the images of pain and death, this is, as the title says, a "prophetic" utterance against "disheartenʼd" feelings. There is also space for elegiac compositions, as "Dirge for Two Veterans" (*Leaves* 264). This stanzaic poem presents the funeral of father and son, dead in war, and it gives the reader an image of mourning, of how adhesiveness may not cover everything after war. The psychological consequences of the war are present in "The Artilleryman's Vision" (*Leaves* 266) while the slavery conflict is addressed in "Ethiopia Saluting the Colors" (*Leaves* 267).

Towards the end, along with the aforementioned poems on the work itself, readers find a series of poems emphasizing the results of the war. As Moon explains, Whitman turned into the poet of reconciliation, a value which was necessary for the total unity he wanted for the US. Thus, his final poems emphasize the equality between both sides ("Reconciliation," *Leaves* 270), the overall importance of the US identity ("How Solemn as One by One," *Leaves* 270), the flag (and its political meaning of freedom) embracing both light and darkness, peace and war ("Delicate Cluster," *Leaves* 271). In "Turn O Libertad" (*Leaves* 274), freedom is something yet to come, as we said at the beginning. For Whitman, the Civil War was not just a victory, but a confirmation of freedom, and so an example for the rest of the world (Moon, *Leaves* 274). Then, as a vocative addressed to Freedom, this poem acknowledges the past history of the war but inaugurates the future, "greater than all the past," and "swiftly, surely preparing for you." Finally, "To the Leaven'd Soil They Trod" (*Leaves* 275) points out again American geography. Liberty values are enacted by its natural landscapes, both South and North, here united as "the general Western world" and attesting all his songs.

Drum-Taps turns out then, as the other clusters, into a unit of political significance within Whitman's program. If we consider the different clusters seen until now, we can trace a clear path to follow, from the individual to the highest values of the republic, but crossing the type of citizens required, the type of bonds between them, the concepts of history and evolution fitter for his purpose. In terms of style, the long compositions of the first poems and clusters disappear, along with the projection of an oral stage of encounter with an audience. This may explain why *Drum-Taps* is also placed after those clusters where writing and reading styles (and self-references) were dominant over oral traits. Sonority is not absent (especially if we take into account that some compositions are actual marching songs), and cadence is still achieved through the use of anaphora and rather long lines. However, it seems clear that there was a turn towards other expressive forms as Whitman's life continued, and as Hollis explains in his now-classic book on the poet's style. Maybe disappointed by his scarce success, Whitman decided to explore other writings while keeping in mind his idea of the poet as a social guide, included in this cluster as well. As a final remark, we could also point out the diminished presence of "you" in this cluster. While the "I" keeps his position as a recorder and interpreter of images, there is little space left for the intervention of the "You-reader." Vocatives are addressed at values (Liberty!) or cities, usually after an interjection. The poet acquires here a less invasive approach to the scene of reading as well, and what assaults the page is the series of photographs he takes.

He would keep this position in the following cluster, *Memories of President Lincoln*. There he arranged four poems of a more traditional style. The conventional character of images, symbols and form of these compositions have been widely commented on, especially in the case of "When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloom'd" (*Leaves* 276) and in "O Captain! My Captain!" (*Leaves* 284) (G. W. Allen, "Literary Technique" 424; Genoways 535; S. J. Mack, *The Pragmatic* 121). As in the previous poems, these were not only an acceptance and chant to the death of Lincoln, but also a vindication of the values that the president had defended during the war. In fact, his death is seen by Erkkila "as the culminating sacrifice" of the national conflict. Again, in these poems, unity is the key idea, and it is in the unity between body and soul, between man and land, where the real union of "these States" happens. A dark cloud covers the land in "When Lilacs," a unity which is also given in the collective mourning of land and cities:

> Coffin that passes through lanes and streets,
> Through day and night with the great cloud darkening the land,
> With the show of the States themselves as of crape-veil'd women standing,
> With processions long and winding and the flambeaus of the night, (*Leaves* 278)

The corpse of Lincoln being carried through the country is the same "dust" he presents in "This Dust Was Once the Man" (*Leaves* 285), claiming that in his being "Gentle, plain, just and resolute," he "saved the Union of these States." Thus, when the poet wonders how to mourn his death best, the answer is not only given in the thrush's warble, but also in images of an ideal republic: "Pictures of growing spring and farms and homes, With the Fourth-month eve at sundown, and the gray smoke lucid and bright . . . And the city at hand with dwellings so dense, and stacks of chimneys" (*Leaves* 279). The role of the poet, as before, has its importance in two of the poems. In "When Lilacs," his identification with the thrush reminds us of previous compositions. A passage of the poem actually translates his song to death, including performative utterances which make the song a dominant topic as well:

> *Dark mother always gliding near with soft feet,*
> *Have none chanted for thee a chant of fullest welcome?*
> *Then I chant it for thee, I glorify thee above all,*
> *I bring thee a song that when thou must indeed come, come unfalteringly.*
> . . .
> *From me to thee glad serenades,*
> *Dances for thee I propose saluting thee, adornments and feastings for thee,*
> *And the sights of the open landscape and the high-spread sky are fitting,*
> *And life and the fields, and the huge and thoughtful night.*
> . . .
> *Over the tree-tops I float thee a song,*
> *Over the rising and sinking waves, over the myriad fields and the prairies wide,*
> *Over the dense-pack'd cities all and the teeming wharves and ways,*

I float this carol with joy, with joy to thee O death. (*Leaves* 281-82)

Once more, the poet and his role are part of the content itself. The conflict of how to make the proper mourning and homage to the president becomes the homage itself. In "Hush'd Be the Camps To-Day" (*Leaves* 285), the poetic voice addresses the poet:

> But sing poet in our name,
> Sing of the love we bore him—because you, dweller in camps, know it truly.
> . . .
> As they invault the coffin there,
> Sing—as they close the doors of earth upon him—one verse,
> For the heavy hearts of soldiers. (*Leaves* 285)

The deictics which in other poems projected a scenery of writing and reading, a place of encounter, disappear here turning the poems into auto-referential compositions. Thus, although one of them has now a date ("Hush'd Be the Camps To-day" has "*(May 4, 1865)*" as subtitle), the rest of them could be seen as a-historical, partly due to the cyclical echoes of the spring time, always coming back, and partly due to the use of oscillating tenses, including (as Fenton and Rohy point out) a period of months in present tense (260). This is intensified by the use of anaphora, which also increases the cadence of "When Lilacs" and "O Captain!". Nevertheless, and although these were poems which he had to read a lot in front of people, we will have to proceed with the rest of the *Leaves* to find again the presence of reader and poet, and of that long-awaited meeting between them.

1. 9. "By Blue Ontario's Shore" and Autumn Rivulets

Autumn Rivulets may be the most chaotic (to study) of all of Whitman's clusters, drawing upon, as Moon explains, "no less than nine separate editions" written in 1850s, 1860s, 1870s and even the 1880s. This scholar points out there is no common theme or progression, but that there is a "prevailing mood of retrospective recall, of mature evaluation" of experience, combining a range of interests rather than focusing on a specific topic. That is why we can consider it under the light of the poems we find between *Drum-Taps* and the present cluster. One of them is "By Blue Ontario's Shore," composed in 1856, modified in each of the editions, and characterized by the fact that a third part of it was drawn from the 1855 preface to *Leaves*. Thus, it is in this poem where the barrier between prose and poetry starts to be "questionable" for scholars (Matthiessen 581), although the truth is that, in terms of style, it shares the same repetition, syntactic parallelisms, cataloguing and direct address of the 1850s. This "cumulative effect of the style, delivering the sense of a specific vivid voice" (Warren, "Style" 382), makes it even closer to the speech that the preface might have been in its time.

This is a text where the American poet vindicates the American poet to come, listing the qualities necessary to really write the poetry that the land needs.

This last point is important because of the inaugural quality the text has. The beginning is a narration where the poet reports the call of "a Phantom gigantic superb," a figure that Moon has read as the Muse: "*Chant me the poem,* it said, *that comes from the soul of America, chant me the carol of victory, / And strike up the marches of Libertad, marches more powerful yet, / And sing me before you go the song of the throes of Democracy*" (*Leaves* 286). Thus, the poet starts a response, where the position of the poet within the US republic is clearly defined, but where the answer itself responds to the requirements. The poet writing the definition of the American poet is the American poet himself: "A Nation announcing itself, / I myself make the only growth by which I can be appreciated, / I reject non, accept all, then reproduce all in my own forms" (*Leaves* 286). The poet is defined as the teacher inviting to open the way for new modes of American identity. In section 4, he presents himself:

> I am he who tauntingly compels men, women, nations,
> Crying, leap from your seats and contend for your lives!
>
> I am he who walks the States with a barb'd tongue, questioning everyone I meet,
> Who are you that wanted only to be told what you knew before?
> . . .
> (With pangs and cries as thine own O bearer of many children,
> These clamors wild to a race of pride I give.) (*Leaves* 287-88)

Later on, in sections 12 and 13, a list of questions is posed for the future poet, regarding points such as the knowledge of the "land, its idioms and men," its "physiology, phrenology, politics, geography, pride, freedom, friendship," its democratic system, "the good old cause." However, he himself gives the answer in the following passage, which also projects the physicality of the book and his body. After asking the future poet "Are your body, days, manners, superb? . . . How dare you place any thing before a man?" an answer is given: "Fall behind me States! . . . I have loved the earth, sun animals, I have despised riches . . . Hated tyrants . . . Read *these* leaves to myself in the open air . . . *This arm*, *this hand*, *this voice*, have nourish'd rais'd, restored . . . many a prostate form" (*Leaves* 295-96) (emphasis added).

Moreover, the figure of the poet, which is that of the teacher but also that of the priest, is placed in this poem at the same level than the government. In section 6 he defines the American democracy, in line with the land and its spirit. There he mentions the logocratic foundations in the Declaration of Independence, the Constitution, the independent and unified states, "swarming with blatherers," the Congress and its members, their speech and

amativeness, but also the relationship with "wild animals, hunters, trappers," the "mechanics and farmers," "the perfect equality of the female with the male, the fluid movement of the population," the "factories, mercantile life, labor-saving machinery, the Northeast, Northwest, Southwest." The Republic is not reduced just to the government, and it depends on the bards more than anything else: "I heard the voice arising demanding bards, / By them all native and grand, by them alone can these States be fused into the compact organism of a Nation." The threat of national dismemberment could be then fought by a citizenship guided by Shelley's "poet legislator" we mentioned in chapter 1:

> To hold men together by paper and seal or by compulsion is no account,
> That only holds men together which aggregates all in a living principle, as the
> hold of the limbs of the body or the fibres of plants.
>
> Of all races and eras these States with veins full of poetical stuff most need poets
> and are to have the greatest, and use them the greatest,
> Their Presidents shall not be their common referee so much as their poets shall.
> (*Leaves* 291)

The position of this poem within *Leaves* seems then a critical point in relation to this last passage. After the cluster of war, *Drum-Taps*, and of the fallen ideal of Lincoln's republic, this poem appears as a source of hope coming from poetry to strengthen the weak unity of the country and continue the task of spreading a different type of model for citizens. In this sense, some passages of the poem again emphasize the individualist thought of Whitman within the ideal of *e pluribus unum*. Section 15 introduces the "you" as the center of this concept:

> Underneath all, individuals,
> I swear nothing is good to me now that ignores individuals,
> The American compact is altogether with individuals,
> The only government is that which makes minute of individuals,
> The whole theory of the universe is directed unerringly to one single individual—
> namely to You. (*Leaves* 296)

Along with "Nativity" and the "Expression of love," the self is what can help articulate the republic, and what ultimately conforms it, as in section 17 the poet claims

> O I see flashing that this America is only you and me,
> Its power, weapons, testimony, are you and me,
> Its crimes, lies, thefts, defections, are you and me,
> Its Congress is you and me, the officers, capitols, armies, ships, are you and me,
> Its endless gestations of new States are you and me,
> The war, (that war so bloody and grim, the war I will henceforth forget), was you
> and me,
> Natural and artificial are you and me,
> Freedom, language, poems, employments, are you and me,
> Past, present, future, are you and me. (*Leaves* 297)

This is not only a recognition of the individual need for the society, but also, in its repetition, it turns out a moment of intimacy between reader and poet, or of communion between listeners and speaker (given the oral qualities of the text). The vindicated poet appears here as the main voice, addressing the present and future citizens of the US, thus incarnating the necessary bard. However, that does not mean that he must be alone. At the end of the poem, already in section 20, he calls again: "Bards for my own land only I invoke, . . . Bards of the great Idea! bards of the peaceful inventions! (for the war, the war is over!) / Yet bards of latent armies, . . . / Bards with songs as from burning coals or the lightning's fork'd stripes! / . . . You by my charm I invoke" (*Leaves* 299). "Reversals" (*Leaves* 299), the six-line poem that follows, is also a reiterative invitation to place in the center what is in the margins in order to get a different world or reality: "Let that which stood in front go behind, / Let that which was behind advance to the front" (299). There is, after all, a sense of renewal after the war, the hope of getting different poets and different publics.

In *Autumn Rivulets*, the reference to poetry and its purpose continues. Actually, some of its poems were also drawn from the 1855 preface, so it continues the line of argument of the previous poems. As pointed out above, there is no thematic unity in this cluster though. It deals with politics, the American identity, the evolution of civilizations towards democratic systems, but also the love between comrades, the moral equality between humans, the generational needs of the republic, and the relationship between the individual identity and the world outside. Many of them are also auto-referential in their poetic character. "As Consequent, *Etc.*" (*Leaves* 300) starts with an acknowledgement of its nature, but also of its own position within a bigger volume:

> As consequent from store of summer rains,
> Or wayward rivulets in autumn flowing,
> Or many a herb-lined brook's reticulations,
> Or subterranean sea-rills making for the sea,
> Songs of continued years I sing. (*Leaves* 300)

This poem, furthermore, is the first we find in the cluster, so the "songs of continued years" gives the reader the sense of a continuation of the volume itself, also in time. The "songs" keep appearing in "The Return of the Heroes" (*Leaves* 301), "To a Foil'd European Revolutionaire" (*Leaves* 311), "Warble for Lilac-Time" (*Leaves* 318), "I Was Looking a Long While" (*Leaves* 326), and "Wandering at Morn" (*Leaves* 336). In "The Return of the Heroes," a poem which deals with the coming back of soldiers from war at the same time that springs starts to bloom in the American fields, the poet reflects on his own singing task:

When late I sang sad was my voice,
Sad were the shows around me with deafening noises of hatred and smoke of
war;
In the midst of the conflict, the heroes, I stood,
Or pass'd with slow step through the wounded and dying.

But now I sing not war,
Nor the measur'd march of soldiers, nor the tents of camps,
Nor the regiments hastily coming up deploying in line of battle;
No more the sad, unnatural shows of war. (*Leaves* 303)

The object of his songs appear later on, and it is the "joy and power for boundless fertility" of the American fields, where the heroes are now working the land. His voice does also appear acknowledged in "To a Foil'd European Revolutionaire" (*Leaves* 311), which belonged to the "Songs of Insurrection" group of poems. Here he announces himself thus:

(Not songs of loyalty alone are these,
But songs of insurrection also,
For I am the sworn poet of everyday dauntless rebel the world over,
And he going with me leaves peace and routine behind him,
And stakes his life to be lost at any moment.) (*Leaves* 311)

Thus, once again, he is not only the poet of America, but the poet of freedom worldwide. However, he appears as a poet here of different topics; apart from politics, his task is there to sing to spring ("Warble for Lilac-Time," *Leaves* 318), to life's lights and shadows ("Wandering at Morn," *Leaves* 336). In this sense, the land becomes a poem, and it requires his verses. In "As Consequent, *Etc.*" (*Leaves* 300) again, we find his poetry responds as "[c]urrents for starting a continent new, / Overtures sent to the solid out of the liquid, / Fusion of ocean and land, tender and pensive waves" which are like lines of a poem. The sounds of the sea are actually the poems read in "[m]urmurs and echoes still call up, eternity's music faint and far . . . / Whisper'd reverberations, chords for the ear of the West joyously sounding" (*Leaves* 301). Ideas from the 1855 preface appear almost verbatim in "Songs of Prudence" (*Leaves* 314), but we can also find them in "To Him That Was Crucified," where he talks about the "men and women of races, ages to come" (*Leaves* 324), or in "Laws for Creations," where the main necessity of the republic is "strong artists and leaders, . . . fresh broods of teachers and perfect literats for America" (*Leaves* 325). Also, "I Was Looking a Long While" (*Leaves* 326) discusses the purpose of his poetry, the "Intentions" (actually, Moon says in the footnote to this poem that it "could well have been an 'Inscriptions' poem"). Although looking for in the past and history, it is finally found:

It is not in those paged fables in the libraries, (them I neither accept nor reject,)
It is no more in the legends than in all else,
It is in the present—it is this earth to-day,

> It is in Democracy—(the purport and aim of all the past,)
> It is the life of one man or one woman to-day—the average man of to-day,
> It is in languages, social customs, literatures, arts,
> It is in the broad show of artificial things, ships, machinery, politics, creeds,
> modern improvements, and the interchange of nations,
> All for the modern—all for the average man of to-day. (*Leaves* 326)

Following the line of the preface, and within the variety of topics again, we find in common the stress on this average American identity, the embracement of all workers in order to call for a real democracy. "The Return of the Heroes" (*Leaves* 301) celebrates the blooming fields, a "Fecund America" of "fruits and barns," "trees and grass," uniting South and North after the war with its different crops. The soldiers then turn into heroes of harvesting: "Toil on heroes! toil well! handle the weapons well!". We find this average man in both the countryside and the city, at the same level. In "Song of Prudence" (*Leaves* 314), for instance, he lists: "Who has been wise receives interest, / Savage, felon, President, judge, farmer, sailor, mechanic, literat, young, old, it is the same" (*Leaves* 317). In fact, in "Thought" ("of persons arrived at high positions") the artifice is despised as "false realities" which make some people live as "unwaked sonnambules walking the dusk" (*Leaves* 326). As in the British Romantic tradition, the common man keeps close to nature and the material reality of essentials, and free from "ceremonies" which do not mean anything. Democracy goes hand in hand then with the embracement of everyone not only in legal terms, but also morally speaking, as it happens in "To a Common Prostitute" (*Leaves* 325), or in "You Felons on Trial in Courts" ("I feel I am of them—I belong to those convicts and prostitutes myself").

The American identity is present here as a result of absorbing the American reality, but also making it. The best-known example might be "There Was a Child Went Forth" (*Leaves* 306), an autobiographical poem where nature, society, the family and spaces the child inhabits become part of him. With the catalogue technique, Whitman describes in detail the America he found: "the old drunkard staggering home . . . the schoolmistress . . . the friendly . . . and the quarrelsome boys, . . . His own parents, . . . Men and women crowding fast in the streets, . . . Vehicles, teams, the heavy-plank'd wharves, the huge crossing at ferries." Again, tenses help make these images open, atemporal, as most of them are articulated in present participle until the last lines close the narrative which was in the past, but which actually turns to the future ("These became part of that child who went forth every day, and who now goes, and will always go forth everyday").

These pictures appear also in "Outlines for a Tomb" (*Leaves* 319), an elegy for the anthropologist George Peabody, whose name however he shortened in the title, giving it a

more open meaning. Any tomb in the US would have "nor heroism thine, nor war, nor glory," but "tableaus, prophetic, bodiless scenes, / Spiritual projections" of different people at work, women giving birth and breastfeeding their children, the students going to school, the trio of grandmother, mother and daughter "[c]hating and sewing," "[a]ll, all the shows of laboring life" in city and countryside (*Leaves* 320). Some of these poems encourage, as others before, a certain psychological profile needed for the republic. "To a Pupil" (*Leaves* 328), "Unfolded Out of the Folds" (*Leaves* 329), and "Kosmos" (*Leaves* 330) are the best examples. While in the first one the poet acts as motivational speaker ("Rest not till you rivet and publish yourself of your own Personality"), the second one emphasizes the labor of women by giving birth to the future citizens ("Unfolded out of the folds of the woman man comes unfolded, and is always to come unfolded"). The last one, however, praises the individual's systematic harmony, describing the perfect identity as that "Who includes diversity and is Nature, / Who is the amplitude of the earth" (*Leaves* 330).

As it combines poems from different periods of time, this cluster means jumping from one type of Whitman to other, both in terms of content and form. There are several instances where his language suddenly turns elevated, while others he welcomes the American idiom by praising its sounds (as in "Vocalism," *Leaves* 322). The chant to the "Fecund America" in "The Return of the Heroes" (*Leaves* 301) uses his anaphora, but having "thou" as the anchor, drawing us back to other styles of writing. Something similar happens in "O Star of France" (*Leaves* 333), where the common images of shipping and stars as the destiny of the nation appear between examples of old forms of spelling: "In that amid thy many faults thou ever aimed*st* highly, / In that thou would*st* not really sell thyself however great the price, / . . . In that along among thy sisters thou, giantess, did*st* rend the ones that shames thee" (emphasis added). This elevated tone, however, goes in combination with scenes of writing and reading which bring both writer and reader back to the physical aspect of the paper, the voice, and its transcending qualities. In the very first poem we find, the poet addresses the reader and his/her reality: "In you whoe'er you are my book perusing, / In I myself, in all the world, these currents flowing, / All, all toward the mystic ocean tending" (*Leaves* 300). Among the transcendental references to the world, which will receive his fluid message, the reader can actually grab the same physical matter the poem refers to: "my book perusing" turns the paper into a window to "the other side," which is however liquid after all ("Or from the sea of Time, collecting vesting all, I bring, / A windrow-drift of weeds and shells").

A similar moment of physical encounter with the reader, of transcending the paper, is in a poem about his own image engraved in one of his books: "Out from behind This Mask" (*Leaves* 321). With this composition Whitman takes back the invading approach of previous poems. Acknowledging the engraved nature of himself in that illustration, he talks from the position within the book. Prepositions, along with deictics, give the reader the clues of the movements of the "engraved poet." The text starts with "Out from this bending rough-cut mask" and later on insists on the "Out from the convolutions of this globe." He introduces two images with them: the first one that of the face as a theatrical mask or stage, which may or may not show the drama *behind*:

> Out from behind this bending rough-cut mask,
> These lights and shades, this drama of the whole,
> This common curtain of the face contain'd in me for me, in you for you, in each
> for each,
> (Tragedies, sorrows, laughter, tears—O heaven!
> The passionate teeming plays this curtain hid!) (*Leaves* 321)

It is this "common curtain" which places a barrier between the observer and the covered person. The second image is that of the person as a world, a "subtler astronomic orb than sun or moon, . . . This condensation of the universe." The individual, the poet, contains a kosmos. Nevertheless, the reader's attention is brought back to the material: "this bending rough-cut mask, / These lights and shades, . . . / This heart's geography's map." "This" makes all the images matter in the picture itself, getting to its peak when he refers to "These burin'd eyes, flashing to you to pass to future time, / To launch and spin through space revolving sideling, from these to emanate, / To you whoe'er you are—a look" (*Leaves* 321-22). The engraved nature of the poet is a means to transcend time, but as we will see, in the second section of the poem place is dealt with. He travels "thoughts and years," but the engraved poet moves within the book to encounter the reader. Among "songs, ventures, speculations," he suddenly pops up as in a child's book: "Lingering a moment here and now, to you I opposite turn, . . . / Pausing, inclining, baring my head, you specially I greet, / To draw and clinch your soul for once inseparably with mine, / Then travel travel on." The "now" and "here" of the reader's act of reading his book (it is not a poem in this case) is consciously interrupted by his portrait, which transcends the time and the paper to greet "you specially."

Another poem which stands out because of the involvement of reader and writer on the same stage is "Who Learns My Lesson Complete?" (*Leaves* 331), a chant to the wonders of the world which cannot be expressed in books, schools, libraries and churches. "The great

laws take and effuse without argument . . . I cannot say to any person what I hear—I cannot say it to myself—it is very wonderful" (*Leaves* 331). These wonders, that of a "delicious globe moving so exactly in its orbit for ever and ever," and that of conception, birth and growth, appear along the encounter of "I" and "You":

> And that my soul embraces you this hour, and we affect each other without ever
> seeing each other, and never perhaps to see each other, is every bit as wonderful.
>
> And that I can think such thoughts as these is just as wonderful,
> And that I can remind you, and you think them and know them to be true, is just
> as wonderful. (*Leaves* 332)

Deictics pointing to "this hour" and "such thoughts as these" bring the reader to the poem, the thoughts that are there, thus incarnating the embracing soul, the union of "I" and "you" in the same thoughts.

While lacking a central topic of articulation, this cluster keeps then Whitman's main concerns, including that which is important for us: the outlining of the poet within the republic and its projection from a paper which is both acknowledged and transcended. Politics is involved then in his cultural program to encourage certain types of citizenship, while also in content, discussing liberty and its natural foundations as the key trigger for historical development, both globally and nationally. This is followed by six poems which also come from different clusters, and which appear as independent though. That is the case of "Proud Music of the Storm" (*Leaves* 339), a celebration of the opera, but also the daily sounds that one hears in life and that, like in "There Was a Child Went Forth," build identity. This concept is also present in "To Think of Time" (*Leaves* 364), a poem which could be compared to his first compositions because of the Emersonian ideas it develops on death, life and natural destiny. Nonetheless, along with this composition where the divine law is close to the nineteenth century pantheistic beliefs, the truth is that in this "non-cluster" Whitman's approach is more ambiguous in religious terms. "Passage to India" (*Leaves* 345), for instance, is a celebration of the union of different countries and states of the US through the Suez Canal and the railroad constructions. However, this materialistic progress has a spiritual side, seen in the poem with the characterization of the soul as a protagonist, a companion which is also travelling and which goes "to more than India." Erkkila claims this composition is organized by Hegel's "triplicate process" of thesis, antithesis and synthesis, and that it is structured around triadic combinations of past, present and future; time, space and death; Man, Nature and God; Ancient, Medieval and Modern, Asia, Europe and America; train, cable and

telegraph; and finally, explorer, inventor and poet (265). Indeed, in this process there is acceptance, acknowledgement, but also the openness for the future he defended in his preface of 1855, although it was written in 1871 and so its style deviates from the early publications. Vocatives are present, to vindicate this "Passage to India!", but there is no address to the reader. Although there is anaphora one more time, it uses archaic language ("Lo soul, the retrospect brought forward," "And who art thou sad shade?"). As the poem gets to the end, the passage to India becomes a travel of the soul which is, however, expressed in natural terms, being nature another source of the mysteries of god.

This last composition could be seen in the light of those written during the post-Revolutionary period to chant the glory of national heroes. It accepts the past, "the old, most populous, wealthiest of earth's lands" which appear in "[t]he flowing literature, tremendous epics, religions, castes." In fact, in the poem Columbus is a heroic visionary, an example of the "feverish children" in "restless explorations" that open the doors of the future, not only in geographical but also in spiritual terms. Once material development permits the overcoming of separation, it is the poet ("The true son of God") who will sing the songs of the universe and its spiritual side. Thus, the poet is also present in this "non-cluster," although this is the last stance where we find him. The rest of the poems have no reference to this figure and its role. "Prayer of Columbus" (*Leaves* 354) has been read as an autobiographical reflection where the poet asks for a divine sanction for his work (Moon 354), but it also stands out because it presents a different relation to god, a step towards more traditional forms of religion (Erkkila 283-84). "The Sleepers" (*Leaves* 356), another poem belonging to this group, does not make any reference to the poet or writing scene either. In fact, it stands out as one of Whitman's precedents of modern Surrealism. It keeps, nevertheless, some of his common features: the omnific principle ruling its catalogues (Burke 36) and the anxiety over the topic of union through American history.

Regarding its position within the 1892 *Leaves of Grass*, this group appears as a continuation of *Autumn Rivulets*, gathering themes, styles, but this time without a clear bound between them, either in content or style. The fact that they used to belong to other clusters leads us to think he wanted them to be independent, to stand on their own. The first one, "Proud Music of the Storm," because of the poet's life-long interest in the opera, and thus as an acknowledgement of this influence in his work. "Passage to India" because of its complex display of the poet's philosophy regarding the individual and the world, but also the historical development of the western civilizations. "Prayer to Columbus" seems, despite its

title, a reflection on his own work, parallel to that of the explorer. God here acquires a central position, as the main trigger of both the poet's and the explorer's feats, and thus making a balance with other religious beliefs we find in the rest of the volume. The poet may also have wanted "The Sleepers" to have its own independent ground because of its peculiar oneiric approach to the equality of individuals, not found in any other of his "omnific" poems.

"Transpositions" (*Leaves* 364), with its proposal of the decentering of figures of authority and marginal individuals reminds us of the short composition found after "By Blue Ontario's Shore," titled "Reversals." Both short poems came from another text finally excluded: "Respondez," a quite long poem characterized by its oral strength (its anaphoric structure, exclamatory tone and long-line cadenzas). Why the poet might have decided to exclude the poem and take some lines as short pieces of invitations to "de-centering" has not been explained by scholars. I think it could be due to his experimenting with other styles as years passed by. In the 1890s his idea of writing and his own work surely had changed. That may explain why the poem as a whole was not essential for him, and he rather preferred to keep the parts he thought important and distributed them in the volume. Both "bits" kept their independent place and brought politics to the mind of the reader when perhaps, after other poems, it was left in the background of the mind. As for "To Think of Time" (*Leaves* 364), the poet might have preferred it to be independent precisely because it was so at the very beginning, in the first edition, and because dealing with the topic of death from a universal point of view, he may have seen it as the perfect precedent of the following cluster: *Whispers of Heavenly Death.*

1.10. From Whispers of Heavenly Death *to the last cluster*

Whispers of Heavenly Death, as its title points out, has death as a central figure, although the approach is far from that articulated through presence and absence. In this case, death marks the content more than the style and discourse. Its poems continue the spiritual line of the preceding ones, this time with a constant tension between matter and spirit ("Night on the Prairies," "Thought," "As I Watch'd the Ploughman Ploughing"), and only some of them stand out because of their written-awareness and focus on speech. Death appears as sound, sometimes as whispers, or "murmur'd" words. In "Whispers of Heavenly Death" (*Leaves* 371), it is a "[l]abial gossip of night, sibilant chorals," in "Yet, Yet, Ye Downcast Hours" (*Leaves* 374) it appears as an "o'erweening, mocking voice . . . Despairing cries," and in "Chanting the Square Deific" (*Leaves* 371) the prophets and poets are placed along with Satan, who can "still utter words." The speaker of the poems refers to his own words as well:

"Nor time nor change shall ever change me or my words" ("Chanting the Square Deific") and "what I dream'd I will henceforth tell to every person and age" ("Of Him I Love Day and Night," *Leaves* 373). "These songs" are pointed out, not as repeatedly as in other clusters, but in a pair of them. In "Quicksand Years" (*Leaves* 376) he asserts that only the theme of the soul is subject for his songs, while in "Pensive and Faltering" (*Leaves* 381) he reflects:

> Pensive and faltering,
> The words *the Dead* I write,
> For living are the Dead,
> (Haply the only living, only real,
> And I the apparition, I the spectre.) (*Leaves* 381)

Here the act of writing is a transcendent act by which the points of reference are interchanged. The living are actually the apparition, the written form of *the Dead* is "the only living, only real," maybe due to its lasting form.

"Chanting the Square Deific," however, emerges as the only one where a physical encounter between writer and reader is generated. Although in "Of Him I Love Day and Night" there is a reference to the writing scene ("The houses full of life were equally full of death, (*this* house is *now*)") (emphasis added), it is in this chant of spiritual topic where writer and reader meet. The lack of contact through oral style (that which was dominant in his 1950s compositions) is balanced by the last stanza, where the body and speech of the poet arises from (or is registered in) the page and its written words:

> Santa Spirita, breather, life,
> Beyond the light, lighter than light,
> Beyond flames of hell, joyous, leaping easily above hell,
> . . .
> Ethereal, pervading all, (for without me what were all? what were God?)
> . . .
> Here the square finishing, the solid, I the most solid,
> Breathe my breath also through these songs. (*Leaves* 373)

The deictic of the last line pointing at "*these* songs" places there the breath of the poet, making it available for the reader to get it, and by reading, feel it as a physical reality. Without any reference to a reader-you (it is absent in this cluster), the poet is able to make himself felt at the scene of reception, whatever the time and place.

Following *Whispers of Death*, we find the last two independent poems of the volume (followed at the same time by five clusters[29]). The first poem, "Thou Mother with Thy Equal

[29] *From Noon to Starry Night*, *Songs of Parting*, *First Annex: Sands at Seventy*, *Second Annex: Good-Bye My Fancy*, and *Old Age Echoes*.

Brood" (*Leaves* 381), brings the attention back to one of the aims of Whitman's volume: the political foundation through poetry of an American free citizenship. This poem is presented as a formula of different values that are not new at this point of the *Leaves*: America is chanted from a position of acknowledgement and, at the same time, rejection of the past and other lands: the American soul, always looking towards the future and its re-generation, has its basis on equality between the difference, the involvement of the many in one sole identity, the body and soul and its connection with nature, the acceptance of death, the celebration of the scientific Modernity and its consequent new modes of morality. Once more, the new poet is vindicated: "(Thy soaring course thee formulating, not in thy two great wars, nor in the century's visible growth, / But far more in these leaves and chants, thy chants, great Mother!)". Although keeping its oral strength, here the vocatives are not to a you-reader or you-listener, but to an America which may seem distant and divine in its archaic address (thou, thee, thy). The solemnity, however, gives the text a sense of public speech or sermon, a glorification of the possibilities, both material and spiritual, of this new land. The poet himself points out the republic's natural and constant change:

> Thou wonder world yet undefined, unform'd, neither do I define thee,
> How can I pierce the impenetrable blank of the future?
> I feel thy ominous greatness evil as well as good,
> I watch thee advancing, absorbing the present, transcending the past,
> . . .
> But I do not undertake to define thee, hardly to comprehend thee,
> I but thee name, thee prophesy, as now,
> I merely thee ejaculate! (*Leaves* 384)

This last image, as Moon explains (along with Oscar Cargill), makes Whitman not only the prophet, but the "Priapus of the new continent" (*Leaves* 384). The tropes of maternity and birth are completed by the poet, the one able to actually engender the superb comrades. However, apart from those brief examples, there is no other passage in the text where the poet projects himself to the future, unless we take the whole poem as such, as a kind of declaration of independence in a poetic form. Certainly, the acknowledgement of the past and the contribution of other lands has its place in the composition; the values to conform a future nationality (with its own identity) are listed and presented as in a "formula," but also as a law of "Ensemble, Evolution, Freedom." As Kuebrich asserts, for Whitman the main necessity was that people acknowledged their "inner divinity and insisted upon their rights, create a society that allowed for humans to completely realize God's plan for their existence" (214). The law he presents is then superior, it is that of the soul, with the hope that future citizens would naturally follow what their own times and place demanded.

Hence, towards the end of the book (although with some clusters to follow yet) our poet turns in this poem to the soul, as he did with *Autumn Rivulets* and *Whispers of Heavenly Death*. This time, the political perspective takes the encouraging qualities we found in clusters such as *Calamus* and *Children of Adam*, but replacing the bodily dimension with a more spiritual one, linked with the destiny of its land in religious terms. "Thou Mother" contrasts hugely with its companion: "A Paumanok Picture" (*Leaves* 386), which was drawn from "Salut au Monde!" and thus given an autonomy that Moon attributes to aesthetic principles. The picture is made up of "Two boats with nets lying off the sea-beach, quite still," operating on a "thick school of moss-bonkers"; movement dominates but at the same time it presents a stable scene:

> Some of the fishermen lounge in their boats, others stand ankle-deep in the
>   water, pois'd on strong legs,
> The boats partly drawn up, the water slapping against them,
> Strew'd on the sand in heaps and windrows, well out from the water, the green-
>   back'd spotted mossbonkers. (*Leaves* 386-87).

A seven-line poem, it seems again a minimalist (almost imagist) composition of images focusing on the material side of the world, giving then a counterbalance for the previous poem.

This is however followed by another cluster, *From Noon to Starry Night*, whose poems come from different groupings and have no unifying principle except, as Moon points out, a certain "reflective or retrospective" tone which, however, would also characterize the rest of the volume. It may owe its title to the arrangement of its poems: it starts with an image of a "hot October noon" in "Thou Orb Aloft Full-Dazzling" (*Leaves* 387) and ends up with "Night, sleep, death and the stars" in "A Clear Midnight" (*Leaves* 408). These poems deal then with all sorts of topics and images: Modernity ("To a Locomotive in Winter," *Leaves* 395), national history ("From Far Dakota's Cañons," *Leaves* 404; "Old War-Dreams," *Leaves* 405), different political issues ("Spain," *Leaves* 403; "Thick-Sprinkled Bunting," *Leaves* 406), but there is little similarity with the first prophetic poems. Of course, there is sonority in some of them, especially with its vocatives and exclamations, as usual. But there is no projected scenario, nor listeners or readers.

Nonetheless, I would like to stand some poems out because of their auto-referential features. This cluster has instances of reflection on language itself, as it happens in "Mannahatta" (*Leaves* 397). There the poet wonders on the theme of naming:

> I was asking for something specific and perfect for my city,

Whereupon lo! upsprang the aboriginal name.

Now I see what there is in a name, a word, liquid, sane, unruly, musical, self-
    suficient,
I see that the word of my city is that word from old,
Because I see that word nested in nests of water-bays, superb, (*Leaves* 397)

The name itself here seems sufficient to crown the city because of its sonority. Words appear in several of the poems, conforming the aforementioned logocracy. Particularly, in "Thoughts" (*Leaves* 401), where fiats, askings, mumblings, screamings and dicta are balanced by "the intuitions of men and women, and of Self-esteem and Personality; / Of the true New World—of the Democracies resplendent en-mass." The discourse on words come along with discourse on the poet's task. In "Mediums" (*Leaves* 402) the poet prophesizes the coming of poets to report, illustrate, make. These poets are to be great orators as the poem itself constitutes a prophet-like speech:

They shall arise in the States,
They shall report Nature, laws, physiology, and happiness,
They shall illustrate democracy and the kosmos,
They shall be alimentive, amative, perceptive,
They shall be complete women and men, their pose brawny and supple, their
    drink water, their blood clean and clear,
They shall fully enjoy materialism and the sight of products, they shall enjoy the
    sight of the beef, lumber, bread-stuffs, of Chicago the great city,
They shall train themselves to go in public to become orators and oratresses,
Strong and sweet shall their tongues be, poems and materials of poems shall
    come from their lives, the shall be makers and finders,
Of them and of their works shall emerge divine conveyers, to convey gospels,
Characters, events, retrospections, shall be convey'd in gospels, trees, animals,
    waters, shall be convey'd.
Death, the future, the invisible faith, shall all be convey'd. (*Leaves* 402)

The repetition of the predictive structure "they shall" gives it a rhythmic point of departure for each line, where the purpose is political in its outlining of the future generations, the conveyers of divine gospels, whose character is intimately linked to their land ("trees, animals, waters"). In their reporting nature and its laws, they also illustrate Democracy, with its materialism and products. This link to the land is also in "Spirit That Form'd This Scene" (*Leaves* 407), one of the last three poems closing the cluster. The "savage spirit" that formed "this scene" (the one of Platte Cañon, Colorado, as the subtitle clarifies) is to rule also his lines. Thus, the poet wonders why his work is criticized as irrational and conventional:

Was't charged against my chants they had forgotten art?
To fuse within themselves its rules precise and delicatessen?
The lyrist's measur'd beat, the wrought-out temple's grace—column and polish'd
    arch forgot?
But thou that revelest here—spirit that form'd this scene,

They have remember'd thee. (*Leaves* 407).

In "As I Walk These Broad Majestic Days" (*Leaves* 407) however, the focus turns to the times rather than the geography. Once the war is over, the sounds surrounding the poet are "that eclat of the world, politics, produce, / The announcements of recognized things, science, / The approved growth of cities and the spread of inventions. /. . . And hear the indorsement of all, and do not object to it." To balance these "solid things," the poet announces them as well. The visions of poets are in this poem "the most solid announcements of any," and they must also acknowledge that "Science, ships, politics, cities, factories, are not nothing . . . They stand for realities" that might be considered "abstract" and therefore unreal: "Libertad and the divine average." The task of the poets here is then to make them solid, to take them from the world of abstractions and build them.

Nonetheless, among these poems about the poet and poetry, there is one where Whitman projects his presence onto the paper. "By Broad Potomac's Shore" (*Leaves* 404), written in 1872, may seem just a recollection, as Moon says, based on symbolism of the "blood-red roses" for friendship and the "perfume" for memory. But this poem is also about poetry itself. The beginning is quite clear: "By broad Potomac's shore, again old tongue, / (Still uttering, still ejaculating, canst never cease this babble?)". The images of painful recollection are consciously brought to his writing though:

Perfume *this book* of mine O blood-red roses!
Lave subtly with your waters *every line* Potomac!
Give me of you O spring, before I *close*, to put *between its pages*!
O forenoon purple of the hills, before *I close*, of you!
O deathless grass, of you! (*Leaves* 404) (emphasis added)

As it happened in "Out from behind This Mask" (*Autumn Rivulets*), the writing and reading scenes converge on the paper. This time the referents and references (in italics) are crowded with the images: the roses, the waters of Potomac, the views of the hills. It is not a pre-imagist presentation, but an acknowledged written nature which actually emphasizes the physicality of the scene: the book can be closed, and the images must be placed there before that happens.

This last strategy is widely used in the following cluster, *Songs of Parting*. It seems a counterpart to the initial *Inscriptions*. If the first grouping was a declaration of intentions, the compositions that we face now act as its title indicates: to say good bye. This would be complemented after the 1881 edition with two annexes, both also including this idea of departure, referring to the ending of the book, but also to the author's life. Hence, *Songs of*

Parting constituted the last cluster in his 1881 edition of *Leaves*, and a retrospective reflection thereon. That is what we find in his first poem, "As the Time Draws Night" (*Leaves* 409). While death approaches, the poet wonders if his work makes any difference and gets to the conclusion that it does: "O books, O chants! must all then amount to but this? / Must we barely arrive at this beginning of us?—and yet it is enough, O soul; / O soul, we have positively appear'd—that is enough" (*Leaves* 409). In contrast to the pessimist poems on his own writing that we found, for instance, in *Sea-Drift*, here the poet justifies his work in a positive embracement of death. A curious case is that of "As at Thy Portals Also Death" (*Leaves* 416), where the deceased is his mother, for whom the lines constitute a monument "before I go, amid these songs, / And set a tombstone here" (*Leaves* 416-17). The poet is approaching death, but also the end of the book, hence his decision to include a dedication to his mother before closing it. "As They Draw to a Close" makes a more explicit point in this sense:

> As they draw to a close,
> Of what underlies the precedent songs—of my aims in them,
> Of the seed I have sought to plant in them,
> Of joy, sweet joy, through many a year, in them,
> (For them, for them have I lived, in them my work is done,)
> Of many an aspiration fond, of many a dream and plan;
> Through Space and Time fused in a chant, and the flowing eternal identity,
> To Nature encompassing these, encompassing God—to the joyous, electric all,
> To the sense of Death, and accepting exulting in Death in its turn the same as
> life,
> The entrance of man to sing;
> To compact you, ye parted, diverse lives,
> To put rapport the mountains and rocks and streams,
> And the winds of the north, and the forests of oak and pine,
> With you O soul. (*Leaves* 420)

His "precedent songs" or planted leaves involve his joys and aspirations, but also his ideals on identity, on Nature and God, on Life and Death. This poem constitutes a summary given by the poet, but also a clarification of their aim: to plant these seeds for the future, transcending space and time, even death in its acceptance.

The same topic is dealt with in "My Legacy" (*Leaves* 417). There he compares the legacy of a business man and that of a poet. Money and goods are compared to his "certain remembrances of the war for you, and after you, / And little souvenirs of camps and soldiers, with my love, / I bind together and bequeath in this bundle of songs." Moon adds in a footnote a section from the first 1871-76 version which was later removed, and which is rather interesting for us. The second stanza looked then as follows:

> But I, my life surveying, closing,
> With nothing to show to devise from its idle years,
> Nor houses nor lands, not tokens of gems or gold for my friends,
> Only these Souvenirs of Democracy—In them—in all my songs—behind me leaving,
> To You, whoever you are, (bathing, leaving this leaf, especially with my breath—pressing on it a moment with my own hands;
> —Here! feel how the pulse beats in my wrists!—how my heart's blood is swelling, contracting!)
> I will You, in all, Myself, with promise to never desert you,
> To which I sign my name,
> Walt Whitman

The poem had a political charge before the final version of 1881, but also a passage of physical encounter or incarnation in the book. Addressing the reader ("whoever you are"), he becomes the book and leaves, and makes present his breath and hands, felt by the reader in the words and the physical reality of the volume. He calls, and thus projects in the reading scene his pulse and "heart's blood . . . swelling, contracting," and finally closes with a promise not to desert us through his signature. This last detail, as seen above in chapter 1, has to do with iterability and with the promise of death that, according to Derrida, the signature entails. The signature marks then the beginning of the author's death (as he says himself in the topic of the poem), but it also leads to ghosts, shadows, semi-presences or semi-absences that help him succeed in this physical encounter with the readers.

The same strategy articulates the last poem of the cluster, and that which has closed *Leaves* since the third edition in 1860. "So Long!" (*Leaves* 422) makes up a farewell composition also because of its performative discourse. In a final passage leading to the apotheosis, both reader and writer share the stage in bodily but also ghostly terms:

> Camerado, this is no book,
> Who touches this touches a man,
> (Is it night? are we here together alone?)
> It is I you hold and who holds you,
> I spring from the pages into your arms—decease calls me forth.
>
> O how your fingers drowse me,
> Your breath falls around me like dew, your pulse lulls the tympans of my ears,
> I feel immerged from head to foot;
> Delicious, enough. (*Leaves* 424)

The poet approaches the reader by turning himself into the book and "spring[ing] from the pages." However, both the first and the second person appear as subject and object alternately: "It is I you hold" ("I" is the object, "you" the subject"), "I spring from the pages into your arms" ("I" becomes the subject, "you" the object), "O how your fingers drowse me . . . I feel immerged from head to foot." Touching, approaching each other, the "I" and

"You" then have here active positions which are felt through the arms, the fingers of the reader, but also the tympans of the poet. As it continues, however, the encounter turns more intangible:

> Enough O deed impromptu and secret,
> Enough O gliding present—enough, O summ'd-up past.
>
> Dear friend whoever you are take this kiss,
> I give it especially to you, do not forget me,
> I feel like one who has done work for the day to retire awhile,
> I receive now again of my many translations, from my avataras ascending, while
> others doubtless await me,
> An unknown sphere more real than I dream'd, more direct, darts awakening rays
> about me, *So long!*
> Remember my words, I may again return,
> I love you, I depart from materials,
> I am as one disembodied, triumphant, dead. (*Leaves* 424)

This final kiss is the beginning of a travel to the "unknown *sphere*" with "awakening *rays*." The poet "depart[s] from materials, . . . disembodied." The journey to death may however be also seen as the end of the reading and writing scenario. It is the words that remain, while the material part of the book may be left behind, closed, although with the possibility of opening that door again. Many "translations" and "avataras" (Sanskrit for 'incarnation' or 'embodiment') are awaiting the lyrical voice, which can be brought back to life through the reader's breath and pulse: "So I pass, a little time vocal, visible, contrary, / Afterward a melodious echo, passionately bent for, (death making me really undying)."

There is a certain sense of disembodiment and thus of ghostly appearance. Decease calls the poet, and the images of breath, dew, the gliding present and ascending movement prepares the reader for a ghostly experience. The poet "may return again" although dead, a point which is also related to the "yet to come" ideal world he wants to project in his poetry. Despite being a farewell song, the ending and the previous passages of this poem open up the future, especially in national terms. The ending is just a beginning of "the other," unknown but optimistic. The same poem starts with an announcement to inaugurate his ideal republic: "To conclude, I announce what comes after me," he says, thus starting and finishing at the same time. The "fruition" of his writings of body and soul, life and death, is the citizen of "these States" and his/her values: liberty and equality, candor, a single identity within a Union of adhesiveness between men and women, old and young. However, all this is yet to come in his announcement, it comes into being in the very utterance he makes, which also gives (in its anaphoric appearance) a prophetic rhythm and tone to the composition. Other poems share this last feature. The poet prophesizes the material and political advances to

come in “Years of the Modern” (*Leaves* 410) and “Thoughts” (*Leaves* 413). The former has no performative utterances, but emphasizes through repetition the poet’s ability to foresee:

> Years of the modern! Years of the unperform’d!
> Your horizon rises . . .
> I see tremendous entrances and exits, new combinations, the solidarity of races,
> I see that force advancing with irresistible power on the world’s stage,
> . . .
> I see Freedom, completely arm’d and victorious and very haughty, . . .
> (*Leaves* 410)

Thus, this foreseeing entails future events, as he says, “tremendous entrances and exits.” That is the reason why the poem is full of movement forwards with clear political charges: “A stupendous trio [Freedom, Law and Peace] issuing forth against the idea of a castle; / What historic denouements are these we so rapidly approach?”. There are “men marching and countermarching,” “the People beginning their landmarks,” whispers of modernity “O lands, running ahead of you,” “No one knows what will happen next, such portents fill the days and nights.” Modernity is coming but the material development goes along with a ghostly and spiritual one:

> Years prophetical! the space ahead as I walk, as I vainly try to pierce it, is full of phantoms,
> Unborn deeds, things soon to be, project their shapes around me,
> This incredible rush and heat, this strange ecstatic fever of dreams O years!
> Your dreams O years, how they penetrate through me! (I know not whether I sleep or wake;)
> The perform’d America and Europe grow dim, retiring in shadow behind me,
> The unperform’d, more gigantic than ever, advance, advance upon me.
> (*Leaves* 411)

Phantoms and shapes, the “ecstatic fever of dreams” make of what is yet to come a phantasmatic presence, an absence which however is there, advancing. In “Thoughts,” the object of prophesy is on the verge of being. America, as it says, “illustrates birth” in its coming out of “convuls’d pains, as through parturitions.” Then models for the athletic citizens “arrive,” and then “lea[d] to other results.” The cities and their “Democratic masses” appear, in struggles that “keep on and on”: “society waits unform’d, and is for a while between things ended and things begun.” He wants to sing:

> How America is the continent of glories, and of the triumph of freedom and of the Democracies, and of the fruits of society, and of all that is begun,
> And how the States are complete in themselves—and how all triumphs and glories are complete in themselves, to lead onward,
> And how these of mine and of the States will in their turn be convuls’d, and serve other parturitions and transitions, (*Leaves* 413)

Life and death is presented also in terms of what is planted, as in the second section he introduces the image of the seed. Again, the future will continue the building of America in union: "Of the temporary use of materials for identity's sake, / Of the present, passing, departing—of the growth of completer men than any yet . . . Of mighty inland cities yet unsurvey'd and unsuspected" (*Leaves* 414). Again, Whitman's anaphoric writing brings the text to oral dimensions, as it also occurs in "Song at Sunset" (*Leaves* 414).

This last poem is celebratory in form, as its repetitive structures are paired with exclamations. The third, fourth and fifth stanzas are close to preaching texts:

> Illustrious every one!
> Illustrious what we name space—sphere of unnumber'd spirits;
> . . .
> Illustrious the passing light! Illustrious the pale reflection on the new moon in
> the western sky!
> Illustrious whatever I see, or hear, or touch, to the last.
>
> Good in all,
> In the satisfaction and aplomb of animals,
> . . .
> In the grandeur and exquisiteness of old age,
> In the superb vistas of Death.
>
> Wonderful to depart;
> Wonderful to be here!
> The heart, to jet the all-alike and innocent blood!
> To breathe the air, how delicious!
> . . .
> To be this incredible God I am;
> To have gone forth among other Gods—these men and women I love.
> (*Leaves* 415)

In his embracement of everyone and everything, of body and soul, this poem brings us back to his writings of the 1850s, although it was composed in 1860. In fact, its assertions are almost brought from those in "Song of Myself." See, for instance, "Wonderful how I celebrate you and myself!", or "O amazement of things—even the least particle!". His adoration also reaches that of modernity ("I praise with electric voice"), without any less religious charge.

These poems then combine the figure of the poet that the rest of the volume keeps, but this time his preaching skills come along with the invasive presence in phantasmatic terms. The encounter between reader and writer, sometimes almost erotic, entails two features: first, the poet recovers a close connection with the readers. It is not just that he becomes a popular preacher, but he also invades the scene of reading, getting in touch with

the person holding the book; second, the political aim of his poems does also get part of this relationship. The citizen (whoever reading this) has no lower level, no distance from the poet's personality, who is actually equal to him/her. Finally, we should not leave out of our attention the conceptual structure of the volume, and how this last cluster closes a whole poetic program for "these States." Getting so close to the reader, while at the same time recovering the oral style and his projection of a prophet-poet, give the volume a circular trace of awareness in the task. While *Inscriptions* (written between the 1860s and 1870s) pointed out the beginning of "these leaves," the final cluster (also written between those years) acts as a mindful reflection of its end. It, furthermore, confirms his idea of the book as a place of identity development, with the different points of page-transcendence, and acts as a suitable closure.

1. 11. Annexes after Leaves of Grass

To the original *Leaves*, however, Whitman added two annexes (*Sands at Seventy* and *Good-Bye My Fancy*), along with a group of poems titled *Old Age Echoes*. The former includes the poems he had published in *November Boughs* (1881), and later became an annex to *Leaves* in 1884 and finally in 1888, with its own page of contents. As Moon points out, in his aim to keep a life-based organization, Whitman decided to integrate these poems written during his seventies as the continuation of the *Leaves*. As short notes written to be read in silence, the compositions of this group move between an imagist-like painting of scenes and lyrical reflections on different topics: his own life, work and memories, the US and its history, transcendentalist views of the universe, death and knowledge. In terms of content, this annex does not mean a big change regarding his work in *Leaves*. The topic of language is still a source of inspiration as well, although at the same time the descriptions and calls to the American poet disappear from its pages. While he dwells on the nature of names (in "Mannahatta" [*Leaves* 425], for instance, he analyzes its meaning but praises its sound), and explores the scene of writing ("As I Sit Writing Here," *Leaves* 427; "Had I the Choice," *Leaves* 431), America seems to have received the poet he so much wanted. In "To Those Who've Fail'd" (*Leaves* 426), the focus is on unrecognized poets, but not the writers who were yet to come in *Leaves*. Along with "unnam'd soldiers" and "devoted engineers," he places all the "lofty song and picture without recognition." In contrast to the previous vindications of new ways of writing, here the poems focus on how his work may relate to what others have written in the past. In "To Get the Final Lilt of Songs" (*Leaves* 438) he wonders:

> To get the final lilt of songs,
> To penetrate the inmost lore of poets — to know the mighty ones,

> Job, Homer, Eschylus, Dante, Shakspere, Tennyson, Emerson;
> To diagnose the shifting-delicate tints of love and pride and doubt — to truly
> understand,
> To encompass these, the last keen faculty and entrance-price,
> Old age, and what it brings from all its past experiences. (*Leaves* 438)

Although the poem includes Emerson side by side with Western European figures, the reflection is on his own writing within that huge canon. Something similar happens in "As the Greek's Signal Flame," where he places himself in parallel to the Greek canon in his homage to Whittier's eightieth birthday ("As the Greek's signal flame, by antique records told, rose from the hill-top . . . So I aloft from Mannahatta's ship-fringed shore") (*Leaves* 448). Thus, the American poet, average-man, is among these poems regarded beside the classical Western paradigm he acknowledged but criticized before. The "[o]ld farmers, travelers, workmen" are not praised in themselves. Instead, as in "True Conquerors," they are seen as national heroes following the figure of the conqueror (*Leaves* 442).

As the last clusters of the *Leaves*, this one has also references to his work, although here the content is related to his life, in a confessional strain which it did not have before. The projected figure of the poet he wanted to enact ("Walt Whitman, a Kosmos") turns here into Walter Whitman, an American writer who is closer to the fireside poet than to the popular preacher or orator. His work is not a source of celebration, but rather of quiet recollection, as in "A Carol Closing Sixty-nine" (*Leaves* 426) or "Now Precedent Song's, Farewell" (*Leaves* 449). The former text groups the values of his writing: "God, Life, Nature, Freedom, Poetry; / Of you, my Land . . . States . . . mottled Flag I love" (*Leaves* 426), and the latter lists his titles "from elder years, mid-age, or youths" and traces them "[f]rom fibre heart of mine—from throat and tongue—(My life's hot pulsing blood / The personal urge and form for me—not merely paper, automatic type and ink,) / Each song of mine—each utterance in the past—having its long, long history" (*Leaves* 449). What was yet to come, even with future readers, has no place here except in "Thanks in Old Age" (*Leaves* 443) where he addresses "You distant, dim unknown—or young or old—countless, unspecified, readers belov'd." The rest of the poems show no reference to the future, even in those dealing with the US democracy (with the exception as well of "Washington's Monument, February, 1885," where he mentions the "teeming cities' streets . . . / Now, or to come, or past," *Leaves* 437).

Its position outside the *Leaves* group, as an annex rather than a cluster, may be due then to its different purpose. These poems were written with the same spirit, but out of the project he had wanted to keep from the beginning. While the whole volume is devoted to the record of an identity, an individual living in the nineteenth century in the US, this last

part becomes an appendix, an extension of the values which were already set in the closed *Leaves*. *Good-Bye My Fancy* (1891) does also compile compositions which were firstly part of periodical publications, but it keeps the topics of the 1881 volume of *Leaves*. Prefaced with a note where he acknowledges the possible common places and "parrot-like repetitions" that characterize his writing, this cluster deals with all sorts of themes. Its title refers to the "fancy," at that time understood as "creative imagination." However, death also becomes a big source of inspiration, along with the US and Europe relationships ("Bravo, Paris Exposition!" (*Leaves* 457), the US as the home of heroes ("Interpolation Sounds," *Leaves* 457; "Osceola," *Leaves* 462), and philosophical collections of cognitive and metaphysical nature. The "Soul" is a key idea here, both in the journey to death ("Sail Out for Good, Eidólon Yacht!," *Leaves* 453; "Lingering Last Drops," *Leaves* 453) and in his transcendentalist view of the cosmos ("My 71st Year," *Leaves* 454; "To the Sun-Set Breeze," *Leaves* 458; "Grand Is the Seen," *Leaves* 467). There is a constant tension between matter and soul, although as in his first poems, they are one.

Being a good-bye cluster, it has a mindful use of the figures of poetry, poet and his written work. Of the 31 poems, 12 deal with literature from different perspectives. Imagination seems to be decaying, as we see in the two compositions titled "Good-Bye My Fancy" (the second one including an exclamation mark). They are a melancholic separation or departure from creative work ("Long have we lived, joy'd, caress'd together; / Delightful!—now separation—Good-bye my Fancy"). Nonetheless, more than a departure, what we find in other poems is a continuation of the previous clusters, a constant re-considering of his work's themes and purpose. In "On, on the Same Ye Jocund Twain!" (*Leaves* 454) the object of writing is "my nation's crucial stage," "the general average horde," and finally ("now") the "old age." There is even a sense of future writings at the end:

> (My verses, written first for forenoon life, and for the summer's, autumn's
> spread,
> I pass to snow-white hairs the same, and give to pulses winter-cool'd the same;)
> As here in careless trill, I and my recitatives, with faith and love,
> Wafting to other work, to unknown songs, conditions,
> On, on, ye jocund twain! continue on the same! (*Leaves* 454)

In fact, although some of this group of poems deal with old literature and acknowledge its importance for the present and future ones (as in "Old Chants," *Leaves* 459), there is a general look towards the future, and towards the yet untold. In "Shakspere-Bacon's Cipher" (*Leaves* 456) the meaning of poetry and nature escapes words, and "[a] mystic cipher waits infolded" (*Leaves* 456-457). And even his own poems will "reach fruition" in the future, "[a]fter a long,

long course, hundreds of years, denials." The poet again appears as the "blender, uniter" linking Nature and the Soul, but the total accomplishment happens in the future ("Which he will never release until he reconciles the two / and wholly and joyously blends them") (*Leaves* 461). There is still a poetry to come, there is "[s]till something not yet told in poesy's voice or print—something lacking, / (Who knows? The best yet unexpress'd and lacking)" (*Leaves* 467). Thus, his good-bye to writing comes along with an open future for poetry, not closed with his death.

His *Old Age Echoes* constitutes an example of that continuous writing, although, as we see in Traubel's note at the beginning, Whitman wanted there to be an "unobliteratable division line." It should be seen as "supplementary," applying "not so much to things as to echoes of things" (*Leaves* 485). Thus, the topics from his *Leaves* have their place in this group as well. From the purpose of his writing in "To Soar in Freedom and in Fullness of Power" (*Leaves* 486) to transcendentalist philosophy of perception, the national and international destiny, and reflections on life and death. While in the annexes there was still a sense of closure, a mindful relationship to the *Leaves* bulk, this cluster acts differently, with what was left rather than with a common unity. Although the poet said he was not "unprepared" for this final writings to take their own form (and he even had a title), they act just as "echoes" of what was written before. Its style keeps Whitman's long lines, though not as long as they were in the long compositions of the 1850s and 1860s. Also short in length, these poems appear as notebook recollections, and in fact Moon accuses Traubel of transcribing prose writing in verse form ("To Soar in Freedom," *Leaves* 486). Consequently, little do they have of oratory strength, although some have exclamatory utterances and vocatives ("Then Shall Perceive," *Leaves* 486; "A Kiss to the Bride," *Leaves* 487; "A Thought of Columbus," *Leaves* 491), as well as his frequent anaphoric repetitions. After ten editions of *Leaves*, Whitman's decision of drawing that division between the volume and this group of poems may be, as proposed above, a practical one, not wanting to leave outside (although he actually did) the poems he considered worth of publishing, but still not in line with his first (political) project.

2. Ginsberg's *Collected Poems* and Life Chapters

We cannot deal with Ginsberg's work as we have done with Whitman's. First of all, the list of poems he wrote and public seems endless when compared to the nineteenth-century poet's. But apart from that, Ginsberg did not originally plan his poetry to have a unity, he did not want from the very beginning to record in a single book an individual living in a specific time in the US. His aim was rather Romantic: the expression of the self in different

outlets, the connection with the other, building an arena of development for the Beat generations, the outcasts, those living on the margins. And he would do this in different ways. The first one is taking a Romantic approach to writing, which was out of the literature class, the academy and book industry. Secondly, he took as models Modernist poets: Ezra Pound, William Carlos Williams, Gertrude Stein. This was also a challenge for the literature canon of that time, as we saw above (chapter 1). Third, his approach to writing became political in his conception, but at the same time, this happened in a non-ordinary party-based line. Rather, he drew from Eastern philosophies and religions a body-mindful and spiritual belief that he would apply to poetry writing and reading. The public event turned for him into a necessary practice for poetry to really change the mind of the people and get rid of the *status quo* and the Establishment's doctrines. Does this mean, then, that he was not a politically mindful poet? Of course, that is not the case. Some of Ginsberg's books were written with that specific purpose and regarding them as a whole, as *The Fall of America* or *Plutonian Ode*.

The rest followed other aims. While the volume I have read embeds everything he published as poetry (he also wrote poetry in his diaries, but not all of it was published in his books), its arrangement gives a biographical account, not the subsequent "conquests" in the publishing world after releasing *Howl & Other Poems*. As Marjorie Perloff asserts, the autobiographical strain that guides "Howl" does also structure the 1985 arrangement of his *Collected Poems* ("A Lion" 199). Thus, at the very beginning we find the texts he wrote between 1947-1952, although they did not get to the bookshops until 1961 (*Empty Mirror: Early Poems*)[30] and 1972 (*The Gates of Wrath*). After that, we find another group, *The Green Automobile*, gathering poems written between 1953 and 1954, just before *Howl* was published. Then, my compilation adds *Reality Sandwiches*, although it was not released until 1963, after *Kaddish and Other Poems* (1961) was already out. This is followed by the latter, and then *Planet News* (1968), *King of May* (not published as such until this compilation came out), and *The Fall of America* (1973), which includes the poems published in *Iron Horse* (1973). After that, *Mind Breaths* (1978) and *Plutonian Ode* (1981) just in the same order they came out, and finally *White Shroud: Poems 1980-1985* (published in 1986), *Cosmopolitan Greetings: Poems 1986-1992* (1994), and *Death & Fame: Poems 1993-1997* (2000). All in all, although he made sure to place them in order of writing, it may be difficult for the scholar to find the original context of some of his

[30] 1952 however is the date of Williams's attempt to publish it, including his own introduction.

poems, as several of them did not appear in the collections which give title to some of the sections, and rather appeared in this final account of his career.

Unlike in the section devoted to Whitman, my aim here is to analyze Ginsberg's poems with a chronological order, to see how his topics and style developed. In this case, it does not follow the unifying pattern that Whitman wanted to get in his *Leaves*, but we will see how his style evolved from William-like poems to those that were to be read in theaters, in what the author clarifies could be seen as a sort of "biography" (*CP* 5). In his preface to his *Collected Poems: 1947-1980* (the first part of *CP 1947-1997*), which is also a "reader's manual," the poet asserts there is a "poetic energy" in his work which is "cyclic, . . . with peaks of inspiration every few years." Also, on the "texture of texts," he points out that the spontaneous technique of "First thought, best thought" is the main and constant "motif and method of these compositions":

> Syntax punctuation Capitalization remain idiosyncratic, retaining the variable measure of nervous systematics. In many poems, semi-irregular indentation of verse conforms to divisions of original notation or spacings of first thought-speech mindfully recollected. "Mind is shapely, Art is shapely." (*CP* 6)

It is also interesting that he added notes so that "innocent-eyed youths" can understand his references, where he "took opportunity to verify ephemera in his poetry," having to "interpret recurrent reference images for peers and elders" (*CP* 6-7). While "things are symbols of themselves," there is a contextual aspect in many of his poems, as we will see.

2. 1. Empty Mirror, Gates of Wrath, The Green Automobile *(1947-1954)*

The first three sections of Ginsberg's *Collected Poems* gather the compositions he wrote between the late forties and the first half of the 1950s, just before his publication of *Howl*. Some of the poems keep traditional forms, while others are clear examples of Williams' influence, exercises where he rearranged prose journal entries into "small snippets" (*Allen Verbatim* 142-43). That is what marks his difference with the older poet: he made statements about the world rather than "*present* it concretely"; in these compositions, there are introspective and self-conscious explorations, as James Breslin points out *(From Modern* 92-93). Coming from journals, but also from the internal sufferings of a young Ginsberg, there is a sense of Romantic self-expression in these first compositions. Many of them are then narrative. The first one we find, "In Society," is a humorous rearrangement of a dream which, "though less pretty" contains "more life in them, more detail, more minute particulars, less ideas, more things—'icebox, cabinet, toasters, stove'—*presenting* material, rather than recombining symbols" (*Allen Verbatim* 140-41):

> I walked into the cocktail party
> room and found three or four queers
> talking together in queertalk.
> I tried to be friendly but heard
> myself talking to one in hiptalk.
> "I'm glad to see you," he said, and
> looked away. "Hmn," I mused. The room
> was small and had a double-decker
> bed in it, and cooking apparatus:
> icebox, cabinet, toasters, stove;
> the hosts seemed to live with room
> enough only for cooking and sleeping.
> My remark on this score was under–
> stood but not appreciated. I was
> offered refreshments, which I accepted.
> I ate a sandwich of pure meat; an
> enormous sandwich of human flesh,
> I noticed, while I was chewing on it,
> it also included a dirty asshole. (*CP* 11)

This contrasts with other poems where the pivotal element is the image. Here there are events, a first person narrating it, reporting the dialogues. Common, daily-life details appear not only in the objects he pointed out years after, but also in the conversational language ("hiptalk"). Slang (queer, double-decker, cooking apparatus), interjections ("hmn"), colloquial and scatological images ("it also included a dirty asshole"). There is, in relation to this last point, a mixture of realistic and plain presentation with surrealistic irreverence. In society everything seems to be nice, but the speaker is out of it ("My remark on this score was under-/stood but not appreciated"). He turns out a messianic figure who, however, insults the others because of their lack of sympathy ("I said, 'What!' / in outrage. 'Why you shit-faced fool!'"). Its conversational style, however, comes as we said before from the lineation. At the end of each line the mind (and speech) has a break to continue the discourse, as an alternative syntax of the mind which does not follow logical punctuation. It is then a syncopated account which makes the tone clearer.

The poem turns then into a written and spoken piece of language, as a score for the voice which brings the poet to the page when it is being read. In fact, the anecdotic character of the piece turns it into a monologue of a stand-up comedian, although there is a bitter social critique in the character it presents. Ginsberg's name is not important here, but the persona that he projects is articulated through the content and the colloquial form the contents take. At the same time, these first poems are also dark in tone and content, since death and metaphysical reflections are one of the main topics. "Tonite all is well" is a much shorter composition, but also equally conversational:

> Tonite all is well . . . What a
> terrible future. I am twenty-three,
> year of the iron birthday,
> gate of darkness. I am ill,
> I have become physically and
> spiritually impotent in my madness this month.
> I suddenly realized that my head
> is severed from my body;
> I realized it a few nights ago
> by myself,
> lying sleepless on the couch. (*CP* 40)

This dark monologue comes straight from his diaries of the 1940s:

> Tonite all is well. . . . What a terrible future. I am 23, the year of the iron birthday, the gate of darkness. I am ill. I have become spiritually and practically impotent in my madness this month. I suddenly realized that my head is severed from my body; I realized it a few nights ago, by myself, lying sleepless on the couch. (*Martyrdom* 316)

If we dwell, however, for a while, in its lines, we notice several aspects. He keeps the non-standard spelling of *tonight* in what he considers is a poem, a small form of transgression of what was seen as poetry at the time, but he turned the figures to their letter-based form: "twenty-three." Although the poem is not canonical, the poet works with words rather than numbers, and that might explain his decision to turn them into letters. Moreover, the division of lines may follow patterns of breathing and conversation, but the change of his age from "23" to "twenty-three" acts then as an anchor for the written. Although Ginsberg developed these ideas quite late in his career (*Allen Verbatim*, for instance, is a collection of lectures given in the late 60s and early 70s), the features were already there in his early writings. Each letter and each sound was meaningful for him, as we saw above, and density was important in this sense, which also explains the removal of the determiners ("~~the~~ year of the iron birthday, ~~the~~ gate of darkness"). The minimalist vein (from Pound) led him to get little by little to what would later be seen as Cézanne-like juxtapositions in "Howl." He would go without syntactical elements which did only work with traditionally written discourse. Coming from the mind, directly to the mouth, he wanted his speech to dismiss inauthentic (corrupted) language. His position is then phonocentric, considering the truth, the pure version of the self, was in the mind, out of the logocratic forms of the Establishment.

Nevertheless, this last point is a source of contradiction as well. As Jack Kerouac would point out, in his rearrangement of lines, in his modification of words, Ginsberg was working towards a certain product: not a straight transcription of the mind, but a pretended, mindfully worked presentation of a mind which was not his anymore (the "real blow"

Kerouac missed even in "Howl") (*Howl: Original Draft* 150). As the conflicts he wanted to emulate were also metaphysical and existential, he substituted "spiritually and practically" with "physically and / spiritually." Including body and soul, the young poet kept the source of inspiration in those questions for many other (more traditional) compositions. "Refrain" (*CP* 19) seems a good example for this point, as it tackles the anguish of "Tonite all is well" with stanzaic and rhyming forms:

> The air is dark, the night is sad,
> I lie sleepless and I groan.
> Nobody cares when a man goes mad:
> He is sorry, God is glad.
> Shadow changes into bone.
>
> Every shadow has a name;
> When I think of time I moan,
> I hear rumors of such fame.
> Not for pride, but only shame,
> Shadow changes into bone.
>
> When I blush I weep for joy,
> And laughter drops from me like stone:
> The aging laughter of the boy
> To see the ageless dead so coy.
> Shadow changes into bone. (*CP* 19)

The contrast is evident since the very first lines. While in the previous poem the first utterance was continued with the opposite idea ("Tonite all is well . . . What a / terrible future"), this one keeps the dark message: there is sadness, sleeplessness, groaning, shadows, and weeping. Instead of an ironic tone, the poet seems to keep a solemn approach to his pessimistic view, and the concrete elements of the head severed from the body is here turned into a metaphorical refrain: "Shadow changes into bone." This line appears in "The Voice of Rock" as well, and Paul Portugés clarifies its meaning with an unpublished interview to Ginsberg (July 1976). There, the writer claims "'Shadow changes into bone' was my symbolic language for meaning Thought, high intellectual thought, ambition, idealized desire, and that it can actually come true and you do get to see a vision of eternity which kills you. So shadow, mind, insight changes into three dimensional bone" (*The Visionary* 29). Thus, even though both poems are short and share topic (a pessimistic perception of the self's body and mind state), there is a clear change from one year to the other, from the Ginsberg trying to emulate metaphysical poets and that getting to a poetics of the spoken (conversational) verse.

Some poems, however, appear as a strange hybrid because of the beat-friendly content and the form. That is the case, for instance, of "345 W. 15th St.", a poem which

presents his life on the margins of society in a set of rhyming stanzas supported by a caesura. The protagonist is a first person whose life is a decadent picture brought to NY:

> I came home from the movies with nothing on my mind,
> Trudging up 8th Avenue to 15th almost blind,
> Waiting for a passenger   ship to go to sea.
> I live in a roominghouse attic near the Port Authority,
>
> An enormous City warehouse   slowly turning brown
> Across from which old brownstones'   fire escapes hang down
> On a street which should be Russia   outside the Golden gates
> Or back in the middle ages   not in United States. (*CP* 81)

He comes across different people of the "roominghouse" (a Puerto Rican, "the homosexual pair / That lived in different cubicles playing solitaire," "Ned, / A crooked old man like Father Time   who drank all night in bed") but still there are tensions and desires expressed. He thinks of "my home in the suburbs, my father who wanted me home," and wishes "that I were married to a sensual thoughtful girl. / I would have made a wedded   workmanlike tender churl." Although he idealizes this figure of the flaneur coming from movies, he also says:

> I wished that I were working   for $10,000 a year.
> I looked all right in business suits   but my heart was weak with fear.
> I wished I owned an apartment   uptown on the East Side,
> So that my gentle breeding   nurtured, had not died. (*CP* 81)

The self of "In Society" is here out of society again, as unfit for either the context he is in (the rooming house) and the model he should follow (the business man, the "workmanlike tender churl"). Some words remind us of Romantic poetry: "what faint words, what whispers," the "consummation," the "sweetening of the heart," while the images push us farther in time, to Modern writing profiles ("Walk home from the movies   lone long nights in bed, / Books, plays, music, spring afternoons in bars"). "A Crazy Spiritual" (*CP* 83) written two months later, seems to give a Beat-like story, also in traditional form, but this time with no rhyme. Telling the story of an angelic and mad youth, this poem seems to overcome the Romantic pessimism of the previous one. This is also a road story where the protagonist is subject of mockery for the authority, although later he finds an understanding judge. His madness for the authority turns him into a "fairy," while the judge is the only one who sees that he has no madness, but "artificial legs" and that acknowledges "the craziness / of the people / of America." Rather than regretting this profile position on the margins of society, this poem is a vindication of that section of the American society. There is, however, in this poem a series of ideas which are rather symbolic. The "black mongrel" named

Weakness, which he asks about to the Marshal ("I'm on my own / from the crazyhouse. / Has anybody / seen my Weakness?"), meanwhile the wooden leg reminds of the outcast, the pirate, but also the veteran of war. This last idea is rather emphasized with the old Judge who picks the boy, as he promises "to drive [him] / home through America" (85).

In spite of the fact that his journals have a big component of self-expression and ideas on the "I," many poems appear as images with no subject behind. Romanticism leaves some space for the Modernist. One of the most famous compositions of this group is a linguistic photography, an objective approach to his experiences. "The Bricklayer's Lunch Hour" (*CP* 12) has been widely studied as the paradigm of Ginsberg's first "good poems." Actually, he said it is "the earliest text I published which makes real sense" (qtd. in Miles 144). For him, the present time and land were key factors for writing (Breslin, *From Modern* 92). According to Schumacher, it was written in Denver while he was waiting for Neal to come to his apartment, and later, under the encouragement and influence of William Carlos Williams, the text took verse form. In words of the poet, it was "just sort of like looking out of the window—sketching … actually, I got it off Kerouac, the idea of making a verbal picture. Like making a little pencil sketch. … A little shiver of eternal space, that's what I was looking for. Simply by looking outside of the window and seeing what was there" (qtd. in Schumacher 81):

> Two bricklayers are setting the walls
> of a cellar in a new dug out patch
> of dirt behind an old house of wood
> with brown gables grown over with ivy
> on a shady street in Denver. It is noon
> and one of them wanders off. The young
> subordinate bricklayer sits idly for
> a few minutes after eating a sandwich
> and throwing away the paper bag. He
> has on dungarees and is bare above
> the waist; he has yellow hair and wears
> a smudged but still bright red cap
> on his head. He sits idly on top
> of the wall on a ladder that is leaned
> up between his spread thighs, his head
> bent down, gazing uninterestedly at
> the paper bag on the grass. He draws
> his hand across his breast, and then
> slowly rubs his knuckles across the
> side of his chin, and rocks to and fro
> on the wall. A small cat walks to him
> along the top of the wall. He picks
> it up, takes off his cap, and puts it
> over the kitten's body for a moment.
> Meanwhile it is darkening as if to rain

> and the wind on top of the trees in the
> street comes through almost harshly. (*CP* 12)

In contrast to the previous poems I have mentioned, this one has no first person singular, which gives it, as the poet said, a photographic presentation where language may not be as self-referential as it would later be. It seems to be plain description, with little narration though. "Two bricklayers are setting the walls" appears with a present continuous which is however followed by present simple in all the actions: "It is noon / and one of them wanders off." We see the other sitting idly, wearing dungarees, although the action is part of a script. He throws away the wrapping of his sandwich, strokes a cat, and at the end, again, the present continuous contextualizes the scene: "Meanwhile it is darkening as if to rain." Closed by the same verb tense that started the poem, the actions seem to be somehow encapsulated in different time evolutions. The bricklayers are setting the walls, but what we see is the lapse of time while it does not happen, and the focus is rather placed on the small details of the picture: the figure of the bricklayer, the red cap, his posture. There are not many actions here, but the poem dwells on each of the movements and visual details, stopping the speed of the images. Ginsberg explained this as a "little shiver of a moment in time preserved in the crystal cabinet of the mind. A little shiver of eternal space" (qtd. in Miles 144). Thus, this is just a moment, a short period of time which, however, takes an eternal presentation through this photographic display.

Thus, we may discern in his first compositions a sort of struggle, between the self and the objective writing, between the Romantic and transcendental aim of his work, and at the same time the power of plain language coming from journals. He would finally solve this tension with his more psychological approach to writing: the stream of consciousness combined both the Romantic expression of the self, the struggle of his soul/mind, and the plain display of images. This would come along with lineation, and some long-verse poems are found in this first group, as predecessors of "Howl." In "Hymn" (*CP* 44), for example, we find this strange mix of mystic elevation, raw language, juxtaposed images, and a hymn-like cadence (as the title anticipates):

> No hyacinthine imagination can express this clock of meat bleakly pining for its sweet immaterial paradise which I have celebrated in one gone dithyramb after another and have elevated to that highest place in the mind's angelical empyrean which shall in the course of hot centuries to come come to be known as the clock of light:
>
> the very summa and dove of the unshrouding of finality's joy whence cometh purely pearly streams of reves and honey-thoughts and all like dreamy

essences our hearts therefrom so filled with such incomparable and crownly creaminess one never knew whence it came,

whether from those foul regions of the soul the ancients named Malebolge or the Dank or the icicle-like crystal roads of cloudless sky called Icecube or Avenue where the angels late fourteen there convened hang on and raptly gaze on us singing down

The contrasting images ("hyacinthine imagination," "honey-thoughts," "liturgies of milk and sweet cream," "celestial fire escape") around the struggle of body and soul ("clock of meat," "immaterial paradise," "Diamond Seraph") articulate a mystical desperation which has oral display in the line arrangement, which goes back to Whitman, but also to Christopher Smart. "Paterson" (*CP* 48) does also stand out as a predecessor of "Howl," this time with a description of his hometown. While in "345 W. 15th St." (February 1952) he wanted to go back to his father's house and work as a businessman, writing in a rhyming and caesura-driven poem in stanzas, in this poem of November 1949, he expresses himself in these terms:

What do I want in these rooms papered with visions of money?
How much can I make by cutting my hair? If I put new heels on my shoes, bathe my body reeking of masturbation and sweat, layer upon layer of excrement
dried in employment bureaus, magazine hallways, statistical cubicles, factory stairways,
cloakrooms of the smiling gods of psychiatry; (*CP* 48)

Curiously enough, this poem was drawn from his journals of the 1930s and 40s, in the present form, which makes us think about the different approaches to writing that he may have had at that time. We should not forget that many of the poems were rearranged and included in the books already in the 1960s, when Ginsberg's limits of public and private life had been blurred by his fame. Although he may have worked a lot in this poem, its characteristic lineation remind us of "Howl," supposedly written as something else rather than poetry or prose, as a text in between different conventional literary genres. In this self-expression of an "I" which was alienated, who felt different from the rest of his society, line arrangement and stream of consciousness appear as fitter forms for his specific expressive needs. The Beat life he describes was then relegated to his private journals ("I would rather go mad, gone down the dark road to Mexico, heroin dripping in my veins, / eyes and ears full of marijuana"), somehow waiting for its release (*CP* 48).

There is no inauguration here of his poems, as it occurred in Whitman's *Leaves*. Maybe due to the fact that they were published later in life, these compositions appear as the early trials and experiments of the young Ginsberg, who would later clarify and comment on each of the varied poetics which are here in play. Nevertheless, there is already a sense of

inscription in writing, as in his visceral outpourings in his journals, which when read, may (as he explained) get the reader to the same state of consciousness. The encounter with the reader is far from that which would later mark his poetry. Words are here a toy for expressing his inner struggles, a path towards self-knowledge and self-understanding, but also to build in a less conscious way, less Romantic-like poetic works (like "The Bricklayer's Lunch Hour," but also the playful composition with Kerouac and Cassady, "Pull My Daisy").

As we go on with Ginsberg's groups of poems (and publications) we find *The Green Automobile*, collecting poems written between 1953 and 1954 which did not appear as an autonomous volume, but were rather included among others in *Reality Sandwiches* (1963). During these two years, Ginsberg travelled to the West, met the atmosphere of the San Francisco Renaissance poets, and took a trip to central America. It was also a period of development of Eastern practices and thoughts. Kerouac introduced him to Buddhism and meditation, which would be seen in his writing. Influenced by his mate's spontaneous writing, he was also observing his train of thought, which invited him to experiment with his poetry layouts. These compositions are quite longer when compared to those of the first group. Many of them are narrative, although this time they are closer to the stream of consciousness or mind-notation. However, there are still elements which he kept, like the use of regular stanzas. Although the rhyme did not disappear, there are several instances of experimenting with short stanzas. That is the case of the first poem, "The Green Automobile" (*CP* 91), and later on "Havana 1953" (*CP* 100). In the former, stanzas are made up of four lines which appear on the paper as follows:

> If I had a Green Automobile
>   I'd go find my old companion
>   in his house on the Western ocean.
>   Ha! Ha! Ha! Ha! Ha!
>
> I'd honk my horn at his manly gate,
>   inside his wife and three
>   children sprawl naked
>   on the living room floor.
>
> He'd come running out
>   to my car full of heroic beer
>   and jump screaming at the wheel
>   for he is the greater driver. (*CP* 91)

The effects might be understood if we consider another lineation:

> If I had a Green Automobile
> I'd go find my old companion
> in his house on the Western ocean.

Ha! Ha! Ha! Ha! Ha!

Although it could be read aloud (spoken, heard) in exactly the same way, here the reading (and writing) experience, the written nature of the poem, seems important. His spontaneous writing was linked to the mental connections, and so the use of blank spaces may point to that precise notation of the mind. Moreover, each syntactically full sentence takes place in each four-line stanza, although some of them are subordinations of the previous one. The first line of each stanza is the referent for the rest of it, so they become units of meaning which, although needing the whole, guide the reader in the same train of thought. In "Havana 1953," the arrangement is quite similar, although the stanzas are longer. This poem is made up of perceptions, sights and sounds of different places in Cuba. In Part I, the poet is at

> The night café—4 A.M.
>   Cuba Libre 20c:
>   white tiled squares,
> triangular neon lights,
>   long wooden bar on one side,
>   a great delicatessen booth
> on the other facing the street.
>   In the center
>   among the great city midnight drinkers,
> by Aldama Palace
>   on Gómez corner,
>   white men and women
> with standing drums,
>   mariachis, voices, guitars—
>   drumming on tables,
> . . . (*CP* 100)

In contrast to the previous poem, here the disposition does not seem to follow logical syntax. While the excerpts in "The Green Automobile" had the point of departure in the first line (with no indentation), here the stream of consciousness is closer to the unconscious, to non-logical thinking and perceptions occurring on the go. Observe, for instance, line 10, "by Aldama Palace," related (subordinated) to the previous line and yet placed on the left again. This irregularity is also seen in the number of lines per stanza. In "The Green Automobile" each stanza had the same number of lines, whereas in this poem their unity seems to be linked to the contents. In this sense, I think we should take into account that, although in the *Collected Poems* this composition is dated in 1954, it was probably arranged in this way for the publication of *Reality Sandwiches* in 1961. There is no sight of it in his journals of that time, so it could be either written at that time with this form or in prose, in another group or folder of notes later lost. Its similarities with the style he used already in the early 1960s, however, is somehow suspicious (check, for instance, the lineation of the first stanzas of "Aether"

[1960], "Who Will Take Over the Universe?" [1961] or "This Form of Life Needs Sex" [1961]).

Other poems in the same group have no regular pattern at all, following as well the stream-of-consciousness technique. "Siesta in Xbalba" (published also in the 1961 *Reality Sandwiches*) shows inconsistent use of indentation:

> Late sun opening the book,
>   blank page like light,
> invisible words unscrawled,
>   impossible syntax
> of apocalypse—
>   Uxmal: Noble Ruins
>
> . . .
>
>   eyes watching me:
> unease not of the jungle
>   the poor dear,
> can tire one—
>   all that mud
> and all those bugs …
>   ugh… .
>
> Dreaming back I saw
> an eternal Kodachrome
> souvenir of a gathering
> of souls at a party, (*CP* 105-6)

The first lines already give an idea of what is happening. Opening the book, there is an "impossible syntax" which requires "let the mind fall down." While the dream of his life back in the US appears in images which follow each other with no blank space, no lapse of thought, his ideas seem to have a slower pace (and less logical connections) in his account of his meditative practices in the wild, among old ruins and the sounds of the "selva." However, while images as that of the "souls at a party" are part of the rest of the poem, they are scattered as in his mind, which goes back and forth to his life in New York:

> As I leaned against a tree
>   inside the forest
> expiring of self-begotten love,
> I looked up at the stars absently,
>   as if looking for
> something else in the blue night
>   through the boughs,
> and for a moment saw myself
>   leaning against a tree …
>
> … back there the noise of a great party
>   in the apartments of New York,

half-created paintings on the walls, fame,
    cocksucking and tears,
money and arguments of great affairs,
    the culture of my generation … (*CP* 107)

His mind travels appear then not so much as the first (straightly indented) photograph he remembers, but as groups of images, sounds, perceptions he inscribes in this form, making a clear map of connections (of subordinated ideas) in his line arrangement. This is something he acknowledges in the second part:

Jump in time
    to the immediate future,
another poem:

    return to the old land
penniless and with
    a disconnected manuscript,
the recollection of a few
    sensations, beginning: (*CP* 114)

Thus, as it happened in many other poems, this recollections come from his journals (*Journals: Early Fifties* 30-31). In fact, he also wrote about it extensively in the same notebook, when he was already back in the US:

> A reordering of the stanzas needed be in the poem, some formal equality of stanzas, or alternation of stanza forms—
>
> An interior order in each stanza someway apparent—syllable, accent, or quantity, or general weight of lines intuitively felt—What measure within the stanza, in the line?
>
> Perhaps the concept of *line* is at basic root. Break up the line?
>
> into emotive or meaningful or musical complete images or abstractions or sensations—whole, each, however.
>
> Except for purposeful variations on the meaning.
>
> Re-form lines in terms of concepts or/and units of words conjuring up a sensation, (images) (*Journals: Early Fifties* 83)

This explains why in *Collected Poems*, each part of the poem has a different context. In the first one, Ginsberg clarified: "Finca Tacalapan de San Leandro, Palenque, Chiapas, Mexico 1954–San Francisco 1955," in the second one it says "Guanajuato–Los Angeles, 1954." Henceforth, even when he might say he followed a spontaneous technique, it was not incompatible with revision and minute working on each aspect of the poem so that it emulated, presented, "conjur[ed]" a sensation, a state of mind.

Thus, if writing/reading was important, punctuation, which was not so much exploited before, appears here as another aspect to experiment with. In this case, it may point

out to the flashes of the mind and jumps from one scene to another, but it is also used so as to express lapses of time and thought "blackouts," as when he introduces " . . . a dwarfed thatch roof" or ". . . the few actual / ecstatic conscious souls / certain to be found, familiars . . . returning after years." Along with these ellipses come the use of dash and capital letters. The former, as the ellipses, to reflect tone changes, but also jumps in his discourse. The latter appears just once, in the second part:

> another image descending
>   in white mist
> down the lunar highway
>   at dawn, above
> Lake Catemaco on the bus
>   —it woke me up—
> the far away likeness
>   of a heavenly file
> of female saints
>   stepping upward
> on miniature arches
>   of a gold stairway
> into the starry sky,
>   the thousands of little
> saintesses in blue hoods
>   looking out at me
> and beckoning:
>   SALVATION!
>   It's true,
> simple as in the image. (*CP* 114-15)

Acting as a road sign or notice, "SALVATION!" stands out from the rest of the stanza as what it is, a visual call which is incarnated by the views itself, but also as an emphasis in the tone we might read this with. The written nature of this poem marks then not only the mental but also the spoken quality it has. If Ginsberg's aim was to "write as you… are!", this presence would have to fight the absent nature of the written form. While the reader can feel and share the mental state with the author, this happens precisely because of the written and absent nature of his projection.

In general, most of his poems in this cluster have short lines. Only one of them stands out because of this, and it is "Love Poem on Theme by Whitman" (*CP* 123). Long lines may be explained here with the narrative and less mind-bound character of the discourse:

> I'll go into the bedroom silently and lie down between the bridegroom and the
>   bride,
> those bodies fallen from heaven stretched out waiting naked and restless,
> arms resting over their eyes in the darkness,
> bury my face in their shoulders and breasts, breathing their skin,
> and stroke and kiss neck and mouth and make back be open and known,

(*CP* 123)

Invoking Whitman's amativeness, he describes a sexual encounter as a plan ("I'll go into the bedroom silently") involving a bridegroom and a bride, whose parts of the bodies are mixed, not knowing whose they are. Each line gives an image, here with less syncopation than in previous poems, although syntactically speaking, these are not complex sentences. Rather (maybe following Whitman), present and past participle are the main articulators of the movements we read. In contrast to the other poems, this one appears as more bodily-based, and each image is the image of an action ("Arms resting . . . bury my face in their shoulders . . . stroke and kiss neck and mouth . . . legs raised"). We could say this explains the long lines, as a more fluid stream of actions which need objects after each verb, and which thus have no lapse of time or mind break. Setting a longer stream of consciousness would get the reader a similar mind state. In this case, because of the explicit content, Ginsberg might be looking for a different type of expression, one of absolute openness and trust, thus getting to this sort of diary entry-like composition.

His Beat-ness can also be seen in the poem we mentioned above. "The Green Automobile" is a long text articulated around a conditional sentence. "If I had a Green Automobile / I'd go find my old companion . . . / I'd honk my horn at his manly gate, . . . / He'd come running out, . . . / We'd pilgrimage to the highest mount" (*CP* 91). It is an idealization of the Beat life on the road, a projection from the office:

> in the Green Automobile
> which I have invented
> imagined and visioned
> on the roads of the world (*CP* 92)

Real places like Denver, however, are combined with invented and symbolic pictures, as the "miraculous college of the body." The Beat and the angelic that would appear in "Howl" are already here:

> How many Saturday nights will be
> made drunken by this legend?
> How will young Denver come to mourn
> her forgotten sexual angel?
>
> How many boys will strike the black piano
> in imitation of the excess of a native saint?
> Or girls fall wanton under his spectre in the high
> schools of melancholy night?
>
> . . .

Neal, we'll be real heroes now
in a war between our cocks and time:
let's be the angels of the world's desire
and take the world to bed with us before we die. (*CP* 93-94)

Both in "Love Poem on Theme by Whitman" and "The Green Automobile" the Beat (male) figure appears as a saint suffering from the outcast position, but also recovering and consoling himself in pleasures of the body. That is why, as critics have claimed, this set of poems is a final acceptance of his position as an outsider in a society which does not accept him, but which does not attract him either. "My Alba" and "Song" deal with his alienation ("stayed on the market, / youth of my twenties / fainted in offices / wept on typewriters") and depressive feelings ("The weight of the world / is love. / Under the burden / of solitude, / under the burden / of dissatisfaction"). Here, as Portugés asserts, he renounces to the American bourgeois values and makes an announcement of doom of destruction before "Howl" (*The Visionary* 45), although other poems introduce us to his circle of friends ("On Burroughs' Work" *CP* 122).

Thus, the first years of his career are rather heterogeneous in terms of writing. While the first cluster (*Empty Mirror: Gates of Wrath* [1947–1952]) gathers poems in which he was struggling with the canonical form, trying to deal with his inner conflicts, the second group (*The Green Automobile* [1953–1954]) fits there, just before "Howl" as a transition towards another type of writing: one where the stream of consciousness and the effects that can have on the reader, as well as and because of its sonority, seem to be more mindfully applied. This principle of the spontaneous writing, the Williams' images and breath-notation, would later explain all his poems, even those he adapted to verse from journal entries. Voice, mind and reading encounter were already important here, though he did not bring the voice to the social event until the famous poetry slam where he read "Howl." However, there is a clear difference between them, both in form and contents: the first group has death, time and transcendence as key topics; the second one opens up to other characters and discourses, still keeping some pessimism, but also including Beat models and attitudes which he shared with the rest of his peers and helped him understand his position in the American society as an alternative, still American, still valid.

2. 2. Howl*, Before & After: San Francisco Bay Poetry*

The year 1956 may be seen as the most decisive in the writing career of Allen Ginsberg, as it was the year when Lawrence Ferlinghetti got out his successful and controversial *Howl and Other Poems*. It contained, however, only seven of the poems which we see gathered in this

edition's group. Moreover, Ginsberg included, along with "Howl," "Footnote to Howl" and poems written at that time, compositions from years before, such as "An Asphodel," "Song," or "In back of the real" [sic] (seen above). The arrangement of the *Collected Poems: 1947-1997* presents for the reader the original seven poems plus other thirteen texts that were then co-texts (not published) of the "official" ones in *Howl*. The reader, however, should keep in mind that there are recordings of "Howl" which date 1954, thus opening the door to research on the selection of poems, and even on the writing process. Ginsberg, as the editor of his final *Collected Poems*, may have decided to keep "Howl" as a 1955 poem in order to keep loyal to the original publication, and thus to his own narration of himself as a poet. Of course, other reasons might be added: "Howl" may have so much more to do with "America" than with "The Green Automobile," not because of the content, but rather because of the visual form that it has. Although the principles of composition were the same, these poems are far from each other also because of their context: "Howl" was read aloud, and it marked Ginsberg's following compositions (including "America"). Therefore, "Howl" appears in this cluster as a necessary symbol, not only in relation to its mates, but also as the beginning of a new (public) image for Allen Ginsberg.

In this sense, my reading of the poem has been influenced by what the scholars have repeated in several ways and publications, but also by the inconsistencies in all the discourse that surround the poem. While it may be true that it responds to the features pointed out repeatedly by critics, Ginsberg's poem does also appear as a conceptual work where the writing process is as important as the text itself, partially due to the poet's own comments. As I will discuss in the following paragraphs, there is a certain myth in all those readings that the author tried to defend. In the same way that there is a lot of literature and Romanization of *On the Road's* first draft and how Kerouac wrote it in two weeks, "Howl" has gone through the same process of mythologized narration. As he tells in his own *Facsimile* commentary,

> I began typing, not with the idea of writing a formal poem, but stating my imaginative sympathies, whatever they were worth. As my loves were impractical and my thoughts relatively unworldly, I had nothing to gain, only the pleasure of enjoying on paper those sympathies most intimate to myself and most awkward in the great world of family, formal education, business and current literature. ("Author's Preface" to *Howl: Original Draft Facsimile* xii)

Earlier in time, in a letter to Williams while preparing his volume of *Howl and Other Poems*, he summarized what would later become a repeated explanation of his poetics:

> Look what I have done with the long line. . . . In some of these poems it seems to answer your demand for a relatively absolute line with a *fixed base*, whatever it

> is . . . all held together within the *elastic of the breath, though of varying lengths*. The key is in the jazz choruses to some extent; also to reliance on *spontaneity* & expressiveness which long line encourages; also to attention to *interior unchecked logical mental stream*. With a long line comes a return, (caused by) expressive human feeling, it's generally lacking in poetry now, which is inhuman. The release of emotion is one with the rhythmical buildup of long line. (*Howl: Original Draft* 150) (emphasis added)

The "fixed base" became a pivotal element which structured the evolution of the poem. In the first part, "who" became the point of departure of every line, which kept the beat and triggered the "long flight of the imagination" encapsulated in each of the lines (Miles 185-86). In the second part, "Moloch" became the repeated pivotal word to go back to. Taking back the comparison with Kerouac's account on writing *On the Road*, here Ginsberg explained in a similar way that, being "high on Peyote," he had seen "an image of the robot skullface of Moloch in the upper stories of a big hotel glaring into my window" and, some weeks later again, high as well, he "wandered down Powell Street muttering 'Moloch, Moloch' all night and wrote 'Howl II' nearly intact in cafeteria at foot of Drake Hotel, deep in the hellish vale," while "[t]he rhythmic paradigm of Part III was conceived and half written same day as the beginning of 'Howl,'" but he "went back later and tiled it out" ("Notes Written" 81-82). This fixed base does also remind us of Whitman's anaphora and catalogues. To keep balance with the long lines (and the cadence they marked), Whitman had used different particles ("the," "and") to create unity in the lists he wrote. Similarly, in Ginsberg's "Howl" "who" helps the reader keep an anchor in the discourse.

The second feature Ginsberg points out is the "elastic of the breath, though of varying lengths." The long lines were not new in his writing, as we have already seen. Previous compositions as "Paterson" had been built through this conception of the line, which was rooted both to the mind and the breathing rhythms of the poet. The emotional content of the poem determines the physiological character of the lines, in this poem seen as "breathing exercise forms" (Ginsberg, *Composed* 36) incarnating both the madness, alienation and ecstasy of his generation. Along with this lineation, exclamations and other punctuation work towards a specific state of the body. In fact, as Lin explains, in Part II the long line is broken into shorter units with exclamation marks, leading to an "effect of discharging quick volleys of fire from the power battery" and bringing "the reader to a high emotional pitch" (117-18). Compare the final lines of section I with the beginning of section II:

> the madman bum and angel beat in Time, unknown, yet putting down here what
> might be left to say in time come after death,

and rose reincarnate in the ghostly clothes of jazz in the goldhorn shadow of the band and blew the suffering of America's naked mind for love into an eli eli lamma lamma sabacthani saxophone cry that shivered the cities down to the last radio

with the absolute heart of the poem of life butchered out of their own bodies good to eat a thousand years.

II

What sphinx of cement and aluminum bashed open their skulls and ate up their brains and imagination?

Moloch! Solitude! Filth! Ugliness! Ashcans and unobtainable dollars! Children screaming under the stairways! Boys sobbing in armies! Old men weeping in the parks!

Moloch! Moloch! Nightmare of Moloch! Moloch the loveless! Mental Moloch! Moloch the heavy judger of men! (*CP* 138-39)

While the first part ends with a more complex (in terms of syntax) sentence, divided in breath units, the second part has a first line which introduces the syncopated exclamatory pattern that expresses, not the desperation of the previous, but a kind of exorcism of the "monster of mental consciousness that preys on the lamb" (Ginsberg, "Notes Written" 82).

The key, however, and the central part of his "writing myth" is the spontaneity of his mental stream, linked to jazz. The spontaneity of his own accounts relies on a total lack of control on the mind, having a special importance the juxtapositional combination of words and the absence of grammatical and syntactical full articulation of sentences. Thus, adjectives and nouns appear as somehow linked, but suggesting more than describing ("negro streets," "angry fix," "angelheaded hipsters," "ancient heavenly connection," "starry dynamo," "supernatural darkness," "unshaven rooms," "paint hotels," "shuddering cloud"). Something similar happens with the verbs and the objects ("contemplating jazz," "ate fire," "drank turpentine"), and relational combinations like "the windows of the skull" (not the skull of windows), "peyote solidities of halls" (instead of "halls of peyote solidities"). By testing the logical structures of the mind, here the poet proposes a different mental functioning, no doubt related to the emotional state he wants to transmit. Nonetheless, this is something he discussed a lot, and in his journals we find an explanation: he wanted "the essentials & bones": "Never try to write of relation themselves, just the images which are all that can be written down on the subject" (*Journals: Early Fifties* 95).

Although Portugés points out his use of catalogue was drawn from Christopher Smart's "Jubilate Agno" ("Rejoice in the Lamb") (*The Visionary* 85), many other critics, and

Ginsberg himself, have pointed out it also comes from Whitman's style. Bruce Hunsberger finds in the American poet the influence of Smart, but rather because of his personality: an outcast of society, both in mystic and psychological terms. The rest of them, as Lin (124-26) and Morgan (206), follow the point that both sources are equally important, since the two of them use the anaphora as the point of departure and return in his long lines. Ginsberg also included in his explanation Blake, Biblical rhetoric, Genet, Céline, and Kerouac ("The Art of Poetry 8" n. pag.). Thus, it is a form of expression not only in its form, but also in the democratic, open, inclusion in long lists of people, things, actions. In this last sense, the first part of "Howl" is full of anecdotes and biographical information. Although covered by an anonymous "who," as Lin asserts, the reader gets to know about the lives of the poet and his friends (116-17). He tells "the tale of the tribe" (Miles 186), thus confirming the clarification he makes in his introduction to *Collected Poems*: there is an ephemeral element in his poetry, which may need information to "interpret recurrent reference images for peers and elders" (*CP* 7).[31]

All these techniques resulted in a prophetic tone that he obviously aimed at, despite his accounts of the text as an intimate outpouring of feelings. As Breslin points out, there is a progression from the "madman bum" to the "angelheaded hipster" and finally to the "angel beat in Time" (*From Modern* 97-98). The juxtaposed images, along with the breathing patterns, are supposed to open the mind of the reader, thus reaching his/her state of consciousness and shake its structures. Although the saint of the poem is Carl Solomon, it is the poet who can liberate the mind of the people. Moreover, as Portugés points out, there is an emulation of the Old Testament as well, in catalogues, anaphora, detail-free-associations in search of a "prophetic versification" (*The Visionary* 83-84). Thus, not only because of its oratorical features, but also because of its prophetic character, "Howl" turns out to be a poem for the stage, for the physical performance along with its private reading.

Therefore, what the reader finds is an outburst of feeling, an exercise of totally honest self-expression of a young Allen Ginsberg drowned in an alienating America of straight, money-based, Puritan society which has no room for those in the margins. "I began typing, not with the idea of writing a formal poem, but stating my imaginative sympathies, whatever they were worth. . . . I had nothing to gain, only the pleasure of enjoying on paper those sympathies most intimate to myself and most awkward" (*Howl Facsimile* xii). But there was a lot work on the poem. As we have seen, it could not be just the source of inspiration: he

[31] Barry Miles has given a detailed account of each autobiographical anecdote in "Howl" (186).

wrote first section I and III, but section II was definitive to put them together as a whole poem. Honesty was part of the first writings, while drugs were used in the second (Miles 189), thus helping the process of transcribing what was in his mind. Interestingly as well, in the *Collected Poems*, "Howl" is preceded by "Blessed be the Muses," a short poem which could explain "Howl" as a sudden and unexpected gift for written expression. But we could say that Ginsberg actually missed "the real blow," as Kerouac would point out (Miles 188). His long lines, already used in previous poems, did not appear as a visionary resource for the poem. In fact, he wrote it after receiving a critique from Rexroth for being "too formal and too tight." Thus, he tried writing "something looser, more like prose" (Miles 183-84). His aim was to write something very intimate, "sum up [his] life," but the text became later a field to work on and achieve a different effect. His first lines were then quite different to what he later published:

> I saw the best minds of my generation
> generation destroyed by madness
> starving, ~~mystical~~ [hysterical], naked,
> ~~who dragged~~ [dragging] themselves thru the angry streets at
> dawn looking for a negro fix (*Howl Facsimile* 13)

Lines were closer to those of Williams: reading each of them as a breath unit, the effects in terms of orality would be altered. The poem was then further from the tradition of Whitman, but also from the Bible and the prophetic style of Smart, losing some of its expressive strength. Furthermore, and maybe that was the most important aspect for Ginsberg, it was not in line with Kerouac's writing. Although Ginsberg aimed at writing poetry, not prose as his friend, he wanted to bring his prose sonority to his own compositions; the sonority of the American language of the street, but also the rhythms of jazz. Thus, the same lines finally appeared as follows:

> I saw the best minds of my generation destroyed by madness, starving hysterical
> naked,
> dragging themselves through the negro streets at dawn looking for an angry fix,
> (*CP* 134)

As Barry Miles summarizes, there was a lot of detailed work: he labeled his lines thematically and changed words, he gave it some order leading to the climatic passage of Carl Solomon (187). He noted the margins with ideas on rhythm and content. In the second draft he notes "particulars" just before the list of anecdotes (*Howl Facsimile* 27); in the second draft of part II he points out the antiphonal character of the structure (60). Some words are replaced, and so do phrases and lines. There are five drafts of the first part, eighteen of the second, and five of the third. As for the "Footnote," Ginsberg himself explained that it was "an extra

variation of the form of Part II" ("Notes Written" 82). As in the other poem, "Footnote to Howl" was deeply revised not only in terms of rhythm, but also in combination of words, which follow a classification: from the body, to the writing scene, the cities of the world, and finally to the soul. The first line acts as an introductory mantra to a series of words which are mainly monosyllabic and carefully placed. Although his inclusive attitude may remind us of Whitman, it is clear that the choice of words follows sonorous principles, and as it gets to the end the use of punctuation and meter is less strict and at the same time less syntactic:

> Holy the sea holy the desert holy the railroad holy the locomotive holy the
> visions holy the hallucinations holy the miracles holy the eyeball holy the
> abyss!
> Holy forgiveness! mercy! charity! faith! Holy! Ours! bodies! suffering!
> magnanimity!
> Holy the supernatural extra brilliant intelligent kindness of the soul! (*CP* 142)

While comma punctuation is disregarded during the whole poem, only the exclamation marks from the beginning are recovered towards the end, giving the text a syncopated rhythm, especially if we take into account the illogical use of the words "Ours! Bodies!". However, all this appeared in revisions of the poem, not (only) as a result of a moment of illumination and inspiration.

"Howl," is then a text which might seem visceral and thoughtless, but there is work on it, and at the same time, an open view of its reading. Despite the fact that the poet may have written it with the aim of having a specific result, it is open to other ways of performance and other rhythms, as Ginsberg also stated that its line breaks depend on the humor you have "[i]n reading it" (*On the Tongue* 25). Thus, although the detail-work might point to a specific text, closed and stable, it is also true that in its orality it can be modified, being equally valid or legitimate (as asserted in chapter 2). If Ginsberg wanted to "sum up" his life, he was doing it through his language, promoting a self which is partly fictional (revised) and partly based on his own feelings, partially public and at the same time intimate, thus playing with concepts which were already in play in the eighteenth and nineteenth century. The honest speaker in front of the audience, more emotional than rhetorically brilliant, was a performed self which in this case vindicated an alternative Americanness. Given the constant reference to the country he was living in, the type of people he lived with, this poem is a "Howl," a sound-based expression of a different marginal self which was more emotional than the logic-dominated paradigm he inhabited.

But of course, not all poems in this section (and in the original publication) are desperate cries of solitude and alienation. I have identified three main lines of topic, which however could also be seen in "Howl": America as an identity, but also as subject of description and redefinition; the Beat spirit, their lifestyle and artistic proposal; and finally the soul, object of interest and concern for Ginsberg during all his life. Many of the poems appear as acts of signature, because of the proper names and the dating they give, as it happens in "Howl." That is the reason why this may be seen as a record of an identity, as Whitman's *Leaves* just a century before. The language is also that of "Howl": avoiding empty metaphors and rhetorical discourse, Ginsberg's style goes back to Whitman and Williams, to the common language as the matter of poetry, so slang and the telegraphic language of the mind help him with poems such as "Malest Cornifici Tuo Catullo" or "Dream Record: June 8, 1955." In the first one, his visions and Heaven-like images appear because of "a new young cat" (*CP* 131), in "Many Loves" the I-Allen and Neal Cassady "made shift to sack out in Harlem" (*CP* 164), in "Dream Record: June 8, 1955" Huncke is "in the can" (*CP* 132). The syntactical logic is replaced by mind logic, but sometimes close to oral conversation. In "Dream Record," he speaks with Joan Burroughs: "Bill on earth, he's in North Africa. / Oh, and Kerouac? Jack still jumps / with the same beat genius as before, / notebooks filled with Buddha" (*CP* 132).

Contextual elements, along with these techniques, appear also in the three topical centers I will outline. America is (as the Declaration) both pointed at and redefined (inaugurated), in a constant struggle of denouncing and love.[32] The second part of "Howl," for instance, gives a description of a hellish America, mostly through the use of images of building materials: the cement and aluminum, the stone and the machinery that makes prisons, jailhouses, smoking tombs made out of factories, skyscrapers, robot apartments and mad-houses. Moloch is the joint of these buildings over the mind:

> Moloch the incomprehensible prison! Moloch the crossbone soulless jail-house and Congress of sorrows! Moloch whose buildings are judgment! . . .
> . . .
> Moloch whose eyes are a thousand blind windows! Moloch whose skyscrapers stand in the long streets like endless Jehovahs! Moloch whose factories dream and croak in the fog! Moloch whose smokestacks and antennae crown the cities!

[32] I am here going back to chapter 1, section 3. The Declaration of Independence, as it has been explained, draws its force precisely from its dance between the performative and the constative, the fact that there is no clarity on the subject of American independence. Does the independent America exist before it is reported, or does it exist as a consequence of the declaration? Ginsberg's poems have this ambiguity too, although it is applied to the relationship he has with the US: denounce comes in his pointing out of cruelty and alienation; at the same time, there is an inauguration of a different angelical US, resulting from the national redemption.

> Moloch whose love is endless oil and stone! Moloch whose soul is electricity and banks! . . .
> . . .
> Moloch! Moloch! Robot apartments! invisible suburbs! skeleton treasuries! blind capitals! demonic industries! spectral nations! invincible mad houses! granite cocks! monstrous bombs! (*CP* 138-39)

The material nature of this definition of Moloch weighs on the soul: the "mind is pure machinery" and the monster "entered my soul early." The brain and the imagination, the mind, the soul, are spread throughout the poem until this spiritual side explodes:

> Visions! omens! hallucinations! miracles! ecstasies! gone down the American river!
> Dreams! adorations! illuminations! religions! the whole boatload of sensitive bullshit! (*CP* 140)

America has then a heavenly side, victim of Moloch. This other side is exploited in many other poems about America. We could consider "A Strange New Cottage in Berkeley" (*CP* 143) as the alternative of Americanness. Recovering the idea of the farm which was so common during the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century literature of the US, Ginsberg gives there a diary-like notation of work in a cottage:

> All afternoon cutting bramble blackberries off a tottering brown fence
> under a low branch with its rotten old apricots miscellaneous under the leaves,
> fixing the drip in the intricate gut machinery of a new toilet;
> found a good coffeepot in the vines by the porch, rolled a big tire out of the scarlet bushes, hid my marijuana;
> wet the flowers, playing the sunlit water each to each, returning for godly extra drops for the stringbeans and daisies;
> three times walked round the grass and sighed absently:
> my reward, when the garden fed me its plums from the form of a small tree in the corner,
> an angel thoughtful of my stomach, and my dry and lovelorn tongue. (*CP* 143)

This is, as the title says, "a strange new cottage" where the pastoral work of cutting blackberries and watering daisies also implies fixing the toilet and putting tires away. The farmer does keep a marijuana plant and has time to ramble "round the grass and sig[h] absently." Against a background of stone and cement in "Howl," this poem appears as an idyllic scenario where the angelic trees feed the cottager.

In line with that poem, where a traditional important symbol of the nation is re-taken and redefined, and just after it, we find "A Supermarket in California" (*CP* 144). Here the poet takes Whitman as the conceptual center of his poem. The prolific America listed by Whitman is then translated to the supermarket:

> What peaches and what penumbras! Whole families shopping at night! Aisles full of husbands! Wives in the avocados, babies in the tomatoes! —and you, García Lorca, what were you doing down by the watermelons?

Whitman's features appear in content, in the "enumerations," in the families, but also in the homoerotic "eyeing the grocery boys." The transcendental blends with the material delight: "Who killed the pork chops? What price bananas? Are you my Angel?" There is a pampered portrayal of "the brilliant stacks of cans" and refrigerators, an America to love but which, however, is asking the poet for a direction: "Where are we going, Walt Whitman? . . . Which way does your beard point tonight?" Nonetheless , the adventure is just a dream coming from the touch of the book ("(I touch your book and dream of our odyssey in the supermarket and feel absurd.)"), somehow trying to get from him the solution, the paved way towards "the lost America of love." Later, the scenario of the supermarket goes along the side streets and "blue automobiles in driveways," which somehow remind us of "Paterson," this time mixed with a sense of nostalgia transferred to the present. The poet suddenly finds Whitman at the supermarket as a sort of ghost or spirit still present among the "enumerations" of a mass-productive America, and yet a marginal dream. As Erkkila points out, both poets coincide that the US may be understood "not as a place on the map, but a place in the imagination that would live and die only with him [Whitman]" (189).

It is precisely with Whitman's focus that he writes "Afternoon Seattle" (*CP* 158), a poem which describes the neighborhood of Seattle's wharves, the people there, but also a list of things to be seen. While the first part is more narrative (it is the arrival of the I-Allen and Gary Snyder to the city, passing by the theater), the second part is a series of images in participle forms:

> A rowboat docked and chained floating in the tide by a wharf. Basho's frog. Someone left it there, it drifts.
>
> Sailor's curio shop hung with shells and skulls a whalebone mask, Indian seas. The cities rot from oldest parts. Little red mummy from Idaho Frank H. Little your big hat high cheekbones crosseyes and song.
>
> The cities rot from the center, the suburbs fall apart a slow apocalypse of rot the spectral trolleys fade
>
> the cities rot the fire escapes hang and rust the brick turns black dust falls uncollected garbage heaps the wall
>
> the birds invade with their cries the skid row alley creeps downtown the ancient jailhouse groans bums snore under the pavement a dark Turkish bath the cornice gapes at midnight
>
> Seattle!—department stores full of fur coats and camping equipment, mad noontime businessmen in gabardine coats talking on streetcorners to keep up the structure, I float past, birds cry,
>
> Salvation Army offers soup on rotting block, six thousand beggars groan at a meal of hopeful beans.

As the reader may have seen, though, there is no sense of nostalgia here, nor Whitman's level of celebration. In this sense, this text seems to be close to Williams as well: detailed images need no further metaphor or symbolic charge, they are just there, present in the poem.

Nonetheless, in his taking US as an object of writing, Ginsberg's most representative poem is "America," which was also included in the original publication of *Howl*. In "America," he addresses social and political issues, but it is done from a state of alienation which is clearly seen in the conversational style he uses:

> America I've given you all and now I'm nothing.
> America two dollars and twentyseven cents January 17, 1956.
> I can't stand my own mind.
> America when will we end the human war?
> Go fuck yourself with your atom bomb.
> I don't feel good don't bother me.
> I won't write my poem till I'm in my right mind. (*CP* 154)

Being conversational, and thus oral, rhythm is important, and it is reached through the use of repetition. Over and over again, the poet goes back to the initial "America" as a call but also as the trigger of each line. In terms of rhythm, we should also take into account that lines are shorter here, although they become longer as the poem continues towards its end. Slang is also combined with ungrammatical language of kids, which gives it humor:

> America you don't really want to go to war.
> America it's them bad Russians.
> Them Russians them Russians and them Chinamen. And them Russians.
> The Russia wants to eat us alive. The Russia's power mad. She wants to take our cars from out our garages.
> Her wants to grab Chicago. Her needs a Red Reader's Digest. Her wants our auto plants in Siberia. Him big bureaucracy running our fillingstations.
> (*CP* 155-56)

As Tyler Hoffman explains, in performance, this poem was humorous, the poet being a clown or a stand-up comedian (*American Poetry* 136-37). Although part of the effect is given on the individual reading, the text itself seems to offer a transcription of the pretended tone. The lineation and punctuation, if following his principle of unit-breaths in each line, would guide, and thus project the voice on the paper.

Voice is here then a key element, as it was already in previous poems. However, this poem is also interesting not because of "anti-American" message, but rather because of its "anti-Americanist" proposal (Hoffman, *American Poetry* 136-37). The lyrical voice is an alienated one ("I can't stand my own mind"), also in social terms ("America two dollars and

twentyseven cents January 17, 1956"), and as in the previous poems, the vindication is of a spiritual nature. On the one hand, America is a Moloch, a source of suffering:

> I'm sick of your insane demands.
> . . .
> Your machinery is too much for me.
> . . .
> America stop pushing I know what I'm doing.
> . . .
> It's always telling me about responsibility. Businessmen are serious. Movie producers are serious. Everybody's serious but me. (*CP* 154-55)

On the other, the lyrical I insists on the saintly character to be developed:

> America when will you be angelic?
> When will you take off your clothes?
> . . .
> When can I go into the supermarket and buy what I need with my good looks?
> America after all it is you and I who are perfect not the next world
> . . .
> You made me want to be a saint.
> . . .
> I won't say the Lord's Prayer
> I have mystical visions and cosmic vibrations.
> . . .
> America how can I write a holy litany in your silly mood? (*CP* 154-55)

This is an exercise of love towards his country, an articulation of a different form of patriotism where America is a potentially good kid corrupted by its Cold War policies. That is why there is a sort of idealization of Leftist movements within the US: Trotskyites, Wobblies, Sacco and Vanzetti, his own childhood in Communist meetings: "everybody was angelic and sentimental about the workers . . . Everybody must have been a spy." The paranoid anti-Communist frenzy of the 1950s US was then a source of mockery as well. At the end, his proposal is that of the opened mind, the overcoming of the media and institutional messages, and contributing to America in his own way:

> I'd better get right down to the job.
> It's true I don't want to join the Army or turn lathes in precision part factories,
> I'm nearsighted and psychopathic anyway.
> America I'm putting my queer shoulder to the wheel. (*CP* 156)

He is not fit for the worker's movement, "nearsighted and psychopathic" as he is. His place is that on the margins, it seems, as a queer who, however, wants to love the US.

The humorous and oral tone help him play with his identity to such an extent that he ends up interchanging it with America itself. At the end of the first stanza, the poet says:

It occurs to me that I am America.
I am talking to myself again.

Asia is rising against me.
I haven't got a chinaman's chance.
I'd better consider my national resources.
My national resources consist of two joints of marijuana millions of genitals an unpublishable private literature that jetplanes 1400 miles an hour and twentyfive-thousand mental institutions.
I say nothing about my prisons nor the millions of underprivileged who live in my flowerpots under the light of five hundred suns.
I have abolished the whorehouses of France, Tangiers is the next to go.
My ambition is to be President despite the fact that I'm a Catholic. (*CP* 155)

While in stanzas 1 and 3 America is addressed, in this stanza what we find is a mock personification of America, who is in conflict with Asia while his national resources are countercultural elements: marijuana, sexual explicitness, "unpublishable private literature," and at the same time "twentyfive-thousand mental institutions" to solve the problems that transgression could bring. After "abolishing" (condemning) the licentiousness of France (associated with the American vanguard writers who moved there during the 1920s), Tangiers (which Burroughs, Ginsberg, and other Beats visited) is next, he says; everything which is not in line with the expected anti-Communist paranoia is to be suspected, even being a Catholic (as his mother, a communist, was).

Therefore, rather than a description, what we find is an intimate address to a system which avoids any type of intimacy, which rejects marginal or divergent ways of being, including the "angelic," Beat(ific) ones. Thus, along with these approaches to America, Ginsberg wrote other poems about what he and his peers were doing. Poems such as "Fragment 1956" (*CP* 157), "Scribble" (*CP* 160), "Many Loves" (*CP* 164), or "Ready to Roll" (*CP* 167) did not appear in *Howl*, but they describe another form of being American at that time. In the first one, the approach seems to be Whitmanian: the poet consciously introduces the poem and its topic ("here comes my mistress the soul," "Starting from Paumanok").

Now to the come of the poem, let me be worthy
& sing holily the natural pathos of the human soul,
naked original skin beneath our dreams
& robes of thought, the perfect self identity (*CP* 157)

The human soul is the center of this poem, though it is seen in terms of body: "naked original skin . . . with lists and intellectual faces," with "contortions of the upper eyes, the whole body / breathing and sentient among flowers and buildings / open-eyed, self knowing, trembling with love." Nonetheless, that is the

> Soul that I have, that Jack has, Huncke has
> Bill has, Joan had, and has in me memory yet,
> bum has in rags, madman underneath black clothes.
> Soul identical each to each, as standing on
> the streetcorner ten years ago I looked at Jack
> and told him we were the same person—look
> in my eyes and speak to yourself, that makes me
> everybody's lover, Hal mine against his will,
> I had his soul in my own body already, . . . (*CP* 157)

This is an account with proper names then, not just a specific date and a series of places in New York and Chicago. As in "Howl," the soul, although shared, is object of illumination but also of suffering, of alienation:

> . . . Joe Army screaming
> in anguish in Dannemora 1945 jailhouse,
> breaking his own white knuckle against the bars
> his dumb sad cellmate beaten by the guards
> an iron floor below, Gregory weeping in Tombs,
> Joan eyes narrow-lidded under benzedrine
> harkening to the paranoia in the wall
> Huncke from Chicago dreaming in Arcades
> of hellish Pokerino blue skinned Times Square light,
> Bill King yelling pale faced in the subway window
> final minute gape-death struggling to return,
> morphy himself, archsuicide, expiring in blood
> on the Passaic, tragic & bewildered in
> last tears, attaining death that moment (*CP* 157)

If the soul is shared, madness is something which is also in all of them, they all suffer together, as the generation described in "Howl." Nonetheless, although there is some telegraphic language ("final minute gape-death struggling to return," "Soul identical to each other"), this poem diverges in form: against the backdrop of the long lines in "Howl," here the poet transcribes a calmer tone, he is supposed to "sing holily the natural pathos of the human soul." It is more a conversational rhythm than a biblical one. He experimented with indentations, however, in the following poem I have mentioned: "Scribble." There the arrangement of lines follows mental logic, rather than syntactical principles. With just three commas, the poem looks like this:

> Rexroth's face reflecting human
>   tired bliss
> White haired, wing browed
>   gas mustache,
>   flowers jet out of
>   his sad head,
> listening to Edith Piaf street song
>   as she walks the universe
>   with all life gone
>   and cities disappeared

only the God of Love
left smiling. (*CP* 160)

In terms of content, the approach has part of Williams' technique. Each line starting on the furthest left is just an image, or is related to the image of "Rexroth's face": he is "White haired" and is "listening to Edith Piaf street song." However, with each indentation, words get more abstract and less realistic: "tired bliss," "gas mustache, / flowers jet out of / his sad head." While it may seem an imagist poem at first, it acquires a surrealistic streak as well; the singer "walks the universe / with all life gone / and cities disappeared / only the God of Love / left smiling." Here again, the proper name places the poem in a specific context which is however vague in its title. The double meaning of "scribble," which can be a drawing or a note, thus applies to the form of the poem and the content. In its undecidability, the title opens the nature of the poem, which is both an image and a written text. "Rexroth" becomes in this case just a noun, not proper anymore, as it would happen with a carelessly drawn picture of his face, now auto-referential.

"Many Loves" and "Ready to Roll" go back to the autobiographical content, so they are also context-tied. The former is the narration of an explicit encounter with "Neal Cassady," preceded by Whitman's quotation: "Resolved to sing no songs henceforth but those of manly attachment." Although the explicit sexual language was not new in Ginsberg's writing, this poem is a detailed account in terms of this "manly attachment," the "adhesiveness" vindicated by Whitman is part of this relationship where tenderness is not absence:

> So gentle the man, so sweet the moment, so kind the thighs that nuzzled against
> me smooth-skinned powerful, warm by my lefts,
> That my body shudders and trembles with happiness, remembering—
> His hand opened up on my belly, his palms and fingers flat against my skin
> I fell to him, and turned, shifting, put my face on his arm resting,
> My chest against his, he held me to turn, and held me closer (*CP* 164-65).

This tenderness is expressed in the slow pace of the discourse, which is fully punctuated: colons, semi-colons, dashes, commas, all serving the structuring of the sentences. Thus, each line starts a new stream of images, a new idea, which guides the voice we hear in our mind (or that of the public reader, if that is the case). This Whitmanian encounter is not one of desperation, but a quiet illumination with a comrade who is "angel & greek & athlete & hero and brother and boy of my dreams." In fact, it is a series of images which "continu[e] in my imagination to this day a full decade." The final line, after giving his deepest confession, is an acknowledgement of this dreamy quality ("—And I lie here naked in the dark, dreaming").

"Many Loves" then is just the account of one love encounter which however would be quite shocking for his time. Recovering Whitman's homosexuality concept of "manly love," Ginsberg was then drawing on an American-charged symbol to form his own American identity. That of sexual and tender love between men, as comrades and lovers.

"Ready to Roll" is another poem with "Beat content." No doubt inspired by Kerouac's novels (especially *On the Road*) and Whitman's celebratory style, this composition dwells on the margins of society: the slums, drugs, the forbidden sex in dark streets, the unknown lovers. The tone is here more syncopated than in the previous one:

> To Mexico! To Mexico! Down the dovegray highway, past Atomic City police, past the fiery border to dream cantinas!
> Standing on the sunny metropolitan plateau, stranger prince on the street, dollars in my pocket, alone, free—genitals and thighs and buttocks under skin and leather.
> Music! Taxis! Marijuana in the slums! Ancient sexy parks! Continental boulevards in America! Modern downtown for a dollar! Dungarees in Les Ambassadeurs! And here's a hard brown cock for a quarter! (*CP* 167)

The exclamations emphasize the oral quality of the poem, although there is no vocative to a reader or listener, as it was common in Whitman. Ginsberg is rather interested in enumerating the images while also juxtaposing adjectives and nouns: the "dovegray" highway, the fiery border, the dream cantinas. At a certain point, he just gives words as in a catalogue: "Drunkenness! and the long night walks down brown streets, eyes, windows, buses, interior charnels behind the Cathedral, lost squares and hungry tacos, a calf's head cooked and picked apart for meat." Lines are broken when a lapse of time is needed though, which is something Whitman did not use: "purchasing nothing / but a broken aluminum coffeepot . . .", "fear and gaity of unknown lovers / coming around the empty streetcorner . . .". Ginsberg, however, might have emphasized Kerouac's influence not only in content, but in form. Both Kerouac and Whitman coincide in their tendency to lengthen their sentences, only their position on the page follow different principles. Kerouac focused on the mind and speech: honesty and spontaneity was the rule to follow; Whitman, on the other hand, conceived his lines in oratorical and visual terms, so we could say they finally converge in Ginsberg's writing and his obsession with its sonorous quality.

Finally, the spiritual concern that is found in "Howl" appears in different forms in other poems of that time. In fact, two of them were included in the original publication of 1956. As I said above, the prophetic character of "Howl" resides in the madness and alienation of its characters, who are closer to an illumination, but also in its form. The Blakean

figure of Moloch is a judging and merciless god which, as James A. W. Heffernan explains, incarnates "modern American civilization" feeding from the "sacrifice of human blood and human imagination" (257-58). Other poems, however, approach the spiritual or soul part of humans in a more positive way. "Fragment 1956" (*CP* 157) seen above, emphasized the shared character of the human soul, and that is the message we also find in "Sunflower Sutra," included in the original publication of *Howl*. As a "sutra," this poem is symbolic, narrative and religious. However, it contrasts with the context that Ginsberg uses: illumination is found against a backdrop of

> . . . Hells of the Eastern rivers, bridges clanking Joes Greasy Sandwiches, dead baby carriages, black treadless tires forgotten and unretreaded, the poem of the riverbank, condoms & pots, steel knives, nothing stainless, only the dank muck and the razor-sharp artifacts passing into the past—

Thus, among all this decadence and mud images, the almost-dead sunflower helps the lyrical I identify with it. Among the images of material waste, there is a golden nature that he expresses in a "sermon to my soul, and Jack's soul too, and anyone who'll listen,"

> —We're not our skin of grime, we're not our dread bleak dusty imageless locomotive, we're all golden sunflowers inside, blessed by our own seed & hairy naked accomplishment-bodies growing into mad black formal sunflowers in the sunset, spied on by our eyes under the shadow of the mad locomotive riverbank sunset Frisco hilly tincan evening sitdown vision. (*CP* 147)

The America he finds, that of the "Southern Pacific locomotive," "Joes Greasy Sandwiches," and old tires, is not to mark what the sunflower is. The contrast of artificial and natural elements brings us back to the Romantics and Whitman, although this time the decadent sunflower is accepted in its own decadence:

> Poor dead flower? when did you forget you were a flower? when did you look at your skin and decide you were an impotent dirty old locomotive? the ghost of a locomotive? the specter and shade of a once powerful mad American locomotive?
> You were never no locomotive, Sunflower, you were a sunflower!
> And you Locomotive, you are a locomotive, forget me not! (*CP* 147)

The beaten condition of the flower is the beaten condition of "the best minds of [his] generation," "angel-headed" and alienated flowers. In terms of form, this poem continues the long-line style, a conversational tone with short lapses of time to recover breath:

> And those blear thoughts of death and dusty loveless eyes and ends and withered roots below, in the home-pile of sand and sawdust, rubber dollar bills, skin of machinery, the guts and innards of the weeping coughing car, the empty lonely tincans with their rusty tongues alack, what more could I name, the

smoked ashes of some cock cigar, the cunts of wheelbarrows and the milky breasts of cars, wornout asses out of chairs & sphincters of dynamos—all these

Entangled in your mummied roots—and you there standing before me in the sunset, all your glory in your form! (*CP* 146-47).

After a long catalogue mainly articulated by commas and a short commentary ("what more could I name"), the poem recovers the strength to introduce the sunflower: "and you there." Thus, as before, each line is a breath unit, which he included in his own account of the creative process behind this poem. According to Miles, it was written in 20 minutes, under the inspiration of a real sunflower he had seen while walking with Phillip Whalen and Kerouac. As he said, he had felt "enthralled and really into it" (198). In this case, there is no other version to compare the first and the final draft before this poem went to the print, but it could have had many "interventions," especially considering the lexical complexity it shows. Ginsberg moves around "box house hills" and "gnarled steel roots of trees of machinery," phrases which remind us of those he only accomplished after detailed work in "Howl."

The soul is also the center of other poems. "Psalm III" (*CP* 163), for instance, may remind us of the "Sunflower Sutra," since it calls for illumination for everyone, including workmen in Skid Road in Seattle. In this poem, even the cockroach is holy, so straight and crooked flowers have the same value. It is also Whitmanian in formal terms:

To God: to illuminate all men. Beginning with Skid Road.
Let Occidental and Washington be transformed into a higher place, the plaza of eternity.
Illuminate the welders in shipyards with the brilliance of their torches.
Let the crane operator lift up his arm for joy.
Let elevators creak and speak, ascending and descending in awe.
Let the mercy of the flower's direction beckon in the eye.
Let the straight flower bespeak its purpose in straightness—to seek the light.
Let the crooked flower bespeak its purpose in crookedness—to seek the light.
Let the crookedness and straightness bespeak the light.
Let Puget Sound be a blast of light.
I feed on your Name like a cockroach on a crumb—this cockroach is holy.
(*CP* 163)

The repetitive anaphora of "let" brings rhythm and ceremonial tone to this so-titled "Psalm." Thus, as in Whitman, here the souls are democratically included in this "holy" state, covering the socially accepted and unaccepted. The spiritual also appears in two image-based poems: "Sather Gate Illumination" (*CP* 150) and "In the Baggage Room at Grey hound" (*CP* 161).

The first one dwells on images of the Berkeley Campus, where "new sentences spring forth out of the scene to describe spontaneous forms of time" (*CP* 151). Nonetheless, the center of the poem is the loveliness of the soul. The poet starts wondering

> Why have I denied myself?
> What other has rejected me?
> Now I believe you are lovely, my soul, soul of Allen, Allen—
> and you so beloved, so sweetened, so recalled to your true loveliness,
> your original nude breathing Allen
> will you ever deny another again? (*CP* 150)

This is followed by a short reply to Whitman and his call for self-love and manly love ("I forbid you not to touch me, man to man, True American"), and a series of images of different people: teachers, students, scholars. Each detail seems important ("I will denote one particularity of each!"), but his focus is rather sex-related. A girl's "red skirt swinging shows how she loves herself," "And even the ugliest will seek beauty—'What are you doing Friday night?'"

> Now cripple girl swings down walk with loping fuck gestures of her hips askew—
> let her roll her eyes in abandon & camp angelic through the campus bouncing
> her body about in joy—
> someone will dig that pelvic energy for sure. (*CP* 151)

It seems to follow the stream of thought combined with a visual focus, as images are detailed, as in a short scene where the lyrical I observes the people around him, finally getting to an illumination on self-love. As a way to close the poem as it was started, he says:

> My grief at Peter's not loving me was grief at not loving myself.
> Huge Karmas of broken minds in beautiful bodies unable to receive love because
> not knowing the self as lovely—
> Fathers and Teachers!
>
> Seeing in people the visible evidence of inner self thought by their treatment of me: who loves himself loves me who love myself. (*CP* 153)

Thus, although we may feel a change of topic after the second stanza, the whole poem is about observed and observing people. "Broken minds in beautiful bodies" may receive less love than the crippled girl, or "that poor dread boy / with two-day black hair / all over his dirty face." As in "Psalm III" (and "Footnote to Howl"), everybody is holy, but love is necessary to really see that condition. Thus, it mixes up Williams' plain use of images and lineation according to breath and, at the same time, a Romantic idea of sudden (transcendental) realization about the self.

"In the Baggage Room at Greyhound" images are also important, but this time the Whitmanian influence comes on the form: anaphora and catalogue dominate in part one:

> In the depths of the Greyhound Terminal
> sitting dumbly on a baggage truck looking at the sky waiting for the Los Angeles Express to depart
> worrying about eternity over the Post Office roof in the night-time red downtown heaven,
> staring through my eyeglasses I realized shuddering these thoughts were not eternity, nor the poverty of our lives, irritable baggage clerks,
> nor the millions of weeping relatives surrounding the buses waving goodbye,
> nor other millions of the poor rushing around from city to city to see their loved ones,
> nor an indian dead with fright talking to a huge cop by the Coke machine . . . (*CP* 161)

The poet starts the composition with also a conventional technique in Romanticism and Whitman. The reader finds the place and also the action in progress ("sitting dumbly . . . worrying . . . staring . . ."). Then the realization, the vision, the sudden illumination comes to the speaker: "I realized shuddering these thoughts were not eternity." While part I lists the sights he catches from his own position, part II brings the counter side: "Yet Spade reminded me of Angel, unloading a bus." As in a specific mythology, Angel appears with no determiner, unloading a bus and carrying "a huge ton horse" and "an iron shepherd's crook." The image makes him realize that the racks with different objects from different places and with different destinies (from Japan and Hawaii to Fort Brag, Nogales, Eureka, Sacramento, Stockton, Calistoga) are that which mark eternity:

> the racks were created to hang our possessions, to keep us together, *a temporary shift in space*,
> God's only way of building the rickety structure of Time, to hold the bags to send on the roads, to carry our luggage from place to place looking for a bus to ride us back home to Eternity where the heart was left and farewell tears began. (*CP* 162) (emphasis added)

Suddenly, an image-based poem becomes a transcendental commentary again: the racks are the structure of Time, Angel pushes them, and it is God who builds them. The eternity he could figure out in Part I, is explained here as our destiny, our home.

Taking into account these poems we can prove the convergence of so many different sources of inspiration for Ginsberg. His obsession with Blake's spiritual writing was complemented by Williams' tendency to materiality and visual writing; *Howl* and the rest of his compositions of the 1955-56 period might be seen as the result of his youth anxieties around death and his self and soul, while also acknowledging the context, the times and places he was inhabiting, and thus also embracing Whitman as a model for both content and

forms. After *The Green Automobile*, where we find a tentative understanding of his and his peers' position in society, this publication broke, as the title said, as a *Howl* whose sonorous properties would reassure Ginsberg's future compositions and development of his own poetics. It opened the doors of poetry, or rather, as McClure later wrote, it hurled "a human voice and body against the harsh wall of America and its supporting armies and navies; and academies and institutions and ownership systems and power-support bases" (*Howl: Facsimile* 168). The autobiographical, the constant references to contextual people and places, combine with the projection of his voice in the stylistic decisions that he makes. Orality combines with slang and colloquial language, with exclamations which are more proper of religious speeches, and with a kind of confessional approach to writing. These poems were starting a new conception of literature: one which was subject-based, emotional, political. And from this moment, he would use the name of Allen Ginsberg and his fame to develop the persona that would eventually become an American (countercultural) icon.

2.3. Reality Sandwiches: Europe! Europe! (1957-1959)

Reality Sandwiches was published in 1963 and included poems written between 1953 and 1960. It appeared, however, after *Kaddish and Other Poems*, so in this final autobiographic *Collected Poems* the organization mixes up compositions which were originally in different volumes. As we are following the chronological order, this section includes those poems written between 1957 and 1959, regardless of when they were published. *Howl* did not have a lot of success when compared to the literary giants of that time (Dylan Thomas, W. H. Auden); nonetheless, the fact that it was taken to court made it more famous, and Ginsberg received offers to record himself reading the poem.[33] It was also the time when the term Beat-nik was coined. The Cold War race between Russia and the US made "Sputnik" a common word, and it was mixed with Beat to refer then to the beatniks "humorously and insultingly to anyone who did not accept middle-class conformity" (Morgan 257-58). At the same time, though, they also became important in college levels, and everyone wanted to host them, almost as if they were Hollywood celebrities (Morgan 257-58, 282). This period of his life was also marked by his travels, not only back and forth, from New York to San Francisco, but also to Tangiers in 1957 (to visit Burroughs), to Italy, where he approached Auden for the first time, and Paris, where he wrote the first ten poems of this section.

[33] Which he replied to, as Morgan reports: "I don't want to plan on coming to U.S. just to make another fucking recording of that fucking poem (which I'm positive was written two years ago in limbo by somebody else, not me, maybe Carl S.)" (253).

Artistically speaking, during these two years he experimented with Burroughs' cut-ups, a form of collage with the "routines" typed and directly fallen to the floor. The final result had not connection or continuity, but somehow made up a suggestive and mind-blowing text. Consciousness and mind-travels became the center of his motivation in writing. Burroughs was interested in Freudian exploration, and so Ginsberg got obsessed with making the darkest parts of his mind (and imagination) the object of his writing. Dreams and common thoughts could be the subject matter of poetry, regardless of the reduced audience that this implied. From the self-expression of *Howl* he turned rather to a public self-exploration, as a sort of treatment. Accepting certain fears was a source of liberation from paranoia, he learnt from Burroughs, but the opening of the self was also an interesting experiment for him. These years he tried using laughing gas at the dentist, but also turned to Buddhist meditation. The illumination he was still trying to get was then in consciousness exploration, which was intrinsically linked to his political concerns. During these two years he became more interested in other political forms, as those in Cuba and Russia, and he also studied Whitman's *Democratic Vistas*, the "best statement I've seen anywhere on what [an] American poet should be and do" (qtd. in Morgan 251-52). He took Whitman's definition of poetry as a religious and civic expression of democracy, the salvation of the US from its extreme materialism. He became aware of the US international policies and its power in world politics. The fact that the US was supporting dictators was a sign of decay and he was convinced that the Western civilization would be dominated by other (better) paradigms (Morgan 265). Consciousness was and would be for him a key element in the disarticulation of the US power as we saw above (chapter 2).

Part of the poems in this group are then, as he wrote in *Reality Sandwiches*, "Scribbled secret notebooks, and wild / typewritten pages, for yr own joy." Partly because he included poems previous to *Howl*, this volume was certainly close to his improvised writing in diaries, but the truth is it could have also been applied to those in *Howl*, as we saw above. His writing kept close to the autobiographical exposure of psychological and mystical struggle. Poems such as "The Names" or "Ignu" were self-definitions as part of the Beat writers group. Like "Howl," "The Names" (*CP* 184) introduces a generation:

> Time comes spirit weakens and goes blank apartments shuffled through and
> forgotten
> The dead in their cenotaphs locomotive high schools & African cities small town
> motorcycle graves
> O America what saints given vision are shrouded in junk their elegy a nameless
> hoodlum elegance leaning against death's military garage. (*CP* 184)

It keeps the telegraphic language of the previous volume. Although some sentences are syntactically logical, the poet tries also going without some grammatical units, exploiting then the desperate tone and oral speed it adds to the text. After referring to Huncke, he introduces

> Brilliant bitter Morphy stalking Los Angeles after his ghost boy
> haunting basements in Denver with his Montmartre black beard
> Charming ladies' man for gigolo purpose I heard, great cat for Shakespearean sex
> first poet suicide I knew we sat on park benches I watched him despair his
>   forehead star
> my elder asked serious advice, gentle man! international queer pride humbled to
>   pre-death cigarette gun fright (*CP* 184)

The lack of punctuation also adheres to that "Howl," especially if we take into account that the protagonists are here "shrouded in junk." The poem titled "Ignu" did also refer to Ginsberg and his friends, but emphasized the angelical side and included other poets as models:

> On top of that if you know me I pronounce you an ignu
> Ignu knows nothing of the world
> a great ignoramus in factories though he may own or inspire them or even be
>   production manager
> Ignu has knowledge of the angel indeed ignu is angel in comical form
> W. C. Fields Harpo Marx ignus Whitman an ignu
> Rimbaud a natural ignu in his boy pants (*CP* 211)

Thus, Ginsberg went on with his own projection of a poet-self coming from the margins, vindicating literary figures which were out of the canon at that time. The American poet could be Williams and Burroughs as well as Eliot, in a network of letters which emphasizes the Beats as a community:

> Who's amazing you is ignu communicate with me
> by mail post telegraph phone street accusation or scratching at my window
> and send me a true sign I'll reply special delivery
> DEATH IS A LETTER THAT WAS NEVER SENT
> Knowledge born of stamps words coins pricks jails seasons sweet ambition
>   laughing gas
> history with a gold halo photographs of the sea painting a celestial din in the
>   bright window (*CP* 213)

This last fragment turns out an interesting approach to the reader, which was previously included in the concept of the spoken poem with an audience. Here, furthermore, the poet completes what he does at the beginning. "On top of that if you know me I pronounce you an ignu." Playing with his figure as a countercultural famous poet, he establishes with the reader the shared condition of ignu. This fragment, almost the end of the composition, reinforces that connection (there is no other address except those two instances). He is

creating then a marginal net of "ignus" throughout the world ("as lifetime friends romantic winks and giggles across continents") in his own poetry.

His autobiographical tendency was also combined with his interest in mind-travelling. An example of this is the poem "The Lion for Real" (*CP* 182), where surrealism and symbolism work together in a narrative of his internal struggles. The lion he finds in the living room seems a reminder of his death which is in an intimate and close place, as if residing within himself. The protagonist escapes and tries to ask for help, but as a "social disgrace" he just finds a social lack of understanding. The "Reichian analyst . . . kicked me out of therapy for smoking marijuana," his friend rejects him after he kisses him, his "novelist friend" replies with "spontaneous ignu high poetries." Hence, he accepts the lion, almost starves him to death, though when he goes out he promises to "be back again":

> Lion that eats Lion that eats my mind now for a decade knowing only your hunger
> Not the bliss of your satisfaction O roar of the Universe how am I chosen
> In this life I have heard your promise I am ready to die I have served
> Your starved and ancient Presence O Lord I wait in my room at your Mercy. (*CP* 183)

It may remind the reader of the Moloch in "Howl" ("What sphinx of cement and aluminum bashed open their skulls and ate up their brains and imagination?"). Here, however, the monster comes from the self itself, as an alienating force which does not eat the poet, but which acts a constant threat.

There is a tendency for self-expression, self-depiction, autobiographical writing, which might be understood as a Romantic streak but which does not depart from Modernist principles of writing. The "I" (his personality) is the subject-matter, but rather as a "self" which turns out an interesting psychological case, as well as a source of existential discussion. In addition, this self will however be read as the poet Allen Ginsberg, already known, at least for readers of countercultural literature. The poem could be said to be a public in-depth study. Memories and dreams kept their place in both *Kaddish* and *Reality Sandwiches* ("To Aunt Rose," "Back on Times Square, Dreaming of Times Square," "Battleship Newsreel"), but the novelty in this group (in these two years) was the experimental approach to drugs and writing. While the mental state of the poet was essential in his very first compositions, it was with these poems that he entered the world of abstraction and meditational writing. "Laughing Gas" (*CP* 197) acts as one of the best examples of this stream of consciousness. While the body did not lose importance, the linguistic matter of the mind turned poems into

a field of performance of the self. Reader and writer meet in the self's journey within the mind. Thus, content and form are the same, and it comes from the disposition of the words on the paper. The poem's dedication expresses this idea as well: "To Gary Snyder / The red tin begging cup you gave me, / I lost it but its contents are undisturbed": the cup is no longer the limits it gave, but rather its contents.

This poem is divided in five parts, though the narration is more cyclical than lineal. Once the poem starts, it records a travel of the mind from perceptions to abstractions (i.e. perceptions of the mind) which concern the universe and existence. Over and over again, we find the poet in "the same old universe":

> the sadness of birth
> and death, the sadness of
> changing from dream to dream,
> the constant farewell
> of forms . . .
> saying ungoodbye to what
> didn't exist (*CP* 197-98)

This process of relaxation, death, sleep and waking up "will repeat itself / Be Born! Be Born! / Back to the same old smiling / dentist—". Every now and then, the perception of the universe appears as cyclical:

> The whole universe a shaggy dog story!
> with a weird ending that begins again
>
> . . .
>
> It is not One, but Two
> not two but Infinite—
> the universe be born and die
> in endless series in the mind! (*CP* 199)

In the second part, he goes back to the dentist, "coming out / of a trance" and "the whole /process unfolds this /universe & logically / and symmetrically next / unbuilds it in exact / reverse till you arrive / back at the Nothing," "the whole / structure unfolds / itself inevitably and / folds back into / Nothing again . . ." (*CP* 200-1). Also, in part III: "BACK: Endless cycles of conflict happening in nothingness"; in part IV: "Back in the same old black hole / where Possibility closes the / last door" (*CP* 204); and in part V "I've come back to the same medicine / cabinet in the universe—Bong," "History will keep repeating / itself forever like the woman / in the image on the Dutch Cleanser box" (*CP* 206).

This travel is however a movement of "structures" which fold and unfold, but also a play of inside and outside, closing and opening. If "the universe is a void," it mutates with holes closing and opening. Existence and perceptions are rather like places: "It's the instant of going /into or coming out of / existence," "Stepping outside the universe," "split open existence," "coming out / of a trance," "that first frog / thought leaping out of / the void," or "the acrobat leaps / out into the void," while "it's only happening / in the closed universe of / illusion". There are also surfaces to cross, as selves in a mirror: "I wake up dazed . . . / it being the dream of someone in a dentist's," but this self-annihilation is mindfully perceived as follows:

> A way out of the mirror
>   was found by the image
> that realized its existence
>   was only . . .
> a stranger completely like myself
>
> A way out for ever! has not been found
> to enter the ground whence the images
>   rise, and repeat themselves (*CP* 206)

This unfolding and folding of structures is actually a transcendence of the logical thinking and state of the mind. This "self" goes through perceptions of different worlds, or different perceptions themselves. As he says in part I, "the chiliasm was an impersonal dream— / one of many being mere dreams." The fact the "mind-consciousness" is anesthetized marks his train of thought also in lineation:

> The many worlds that don't exist
> All which seem real
> All joke
> All lost cartoon
>
> At that moment the whole goofy-spooky of the Universe WHAT?! Joke Being slips into Nothing like the tail of a lizard disappearing into a crack in the Wall with the final receding eyehole ending Loony Tunes accompanied by Woody Woodpecker's hindoo maniac laughter in the skull. Nobody gets hurt. They all disappear. They were never there. Beginningless perfection. (*CP* 198)

Paused abstractions mix up with surrealistic collaged images. Between his complex speculations on life, death, existence and a void universe he slips images of both his world ("The Bloomfield police car / with its idiot red light / revolving on its head / balefully at Eternity") and the scene at the dentist:

> . . . . . . .with eye opening
> slowly to perceive
> that I be coming out

of a trance—
one look at the lipstick
it's a nurse
in a dentist's office (*CP* 200)

As he would do later on in other poems of the sixties, he introduces every interruption of attention, from "the crooked tooth-drills hanging like gallows" he goes to the capital-lettered "TRACKLESS TRANSIT CORPORATION / runs a bus thru Bloomfield." Both perceptions, thoughts and sounds, and the relationship between them in consciousness, constitute the poem.

These lines might pose a political stance in their form. The mind being transcribed opened a door to other forms of understanding the world. However, explicitly political comments appear especially in connection to the Cold War and the media at that time. The radio sounds "mechanical voices . . . singing Destination Moon," a song by Nat King Cole released in 1950, while the space race was intense, but the poet questions the aim: "humans, singing, singing—of the moon—for money?—except it's the imbecilic canned voice of eternity rocking & rolling in Space making invisible announcements—". He mentions Sherman Adams, Eisenhower's assistant involved in a White House scandal, as Ginsberg himself explains in the notes, "for accepting fur coat as gift" (*CP* 771). The president appears later on, in connection to the threat of atomic explosions and Gregory Corso's poem "BOMB" (highly criticized by some pacifist groups). "[W]ar is on the radio ahead / we are all going to the inevitable beauty of doom." There is no explicit critique to the situation, but rather an unconventional approach from consciousness: the radio brings songs and war news, poets write bombs, and imagination is what explodes, so it seems the conflict is a matter of thought-level struggle which the individual cannot trust as s/he used to do. "I want to return to normal," he says, "—but there is no changelessness / but in Nirvana." Constant change in the train of thought, and thus in world perceptions, is what is left.

Many other poems include political comments. "Europe! Europe!" is a lyrical reflection on love and loneliness, his experiences in London and Paris, but part of it presents a cannibalistic world. "Mind eats its flesh":

Bony China hungers brain
wash over power dam and
America hides mad meat
in refrigerator Britain
cooks Jerusalem too long
France eats oil and dead
salad arms & legs in Africa

loudmouth devours Arabia
negro and white warring
against the golden nuptial
Russia manufacture feeds
millions but no drunk can
dream Mayakovsky's suicide
rainbow over machinery
and backtalk to the sun (*CP* 180)

This excerpt is full of eating images: hungers, mad meat, salad arms and legs, the rich countries devouring, feeding on the poor ones. However, the rest of the poem has no other reference to international exploitation. "Death to Van Gogh's Ear!" (*CP* 175) is much more direct in its message. The poet takes a very clear position: "Poet is Priest," and poetry must be part of the revolution. Against a backdrop of an academy which defended the "apolitical" approach to literature, this poem turns out as a proposal where models are politically relevant: Lorca, Whitman, Mayakovsky, Hart Crane, Vachel Lindsay, Poe, Pound. It could be seen as Ginsberg's own version of Whitman's *Democratic Vistas*. Constituted by a single stanza, and based on long lines, this poem might also be considered an oral work because of these two features, but also because of its performative character in terms of discourse. The first part of the poem identifies the symptoms of corruption in the US:

POET is Priest
Money has reckoned the soul of America
Congress broken thru to the precipice of Eternity
the President built a War machine which will vomit and rear up Russia out of
Kansas
The American Century betrayed by a mad Senate which no longer sleeps with its
wife (*CP* 175)

Not only does he point out to a Whitmanian figure of the poet, but also identifies in money and governmental institutions the limits for a religious citizenship. Just as the Transcendentalists had denounced, the idea of the "American century" (coming from Henry Luce's publications in the 1940s) proved in the twentieth century that the US material richness should also translate in a spiritual or ideological improvement. Thus, Ginsberg cries against "the rotten eggs of America," both in its national and international policies. The world has lost its poets (Lorca, Mayakovsky, Hart Crane), and what is left is hunger, poverty, and the power of only some countries:

just as millions of tons of human wheat were burned in secret caverns under the
White House
while India starved and screamed and ate mad dogs full of rain
and mountains of eggs were reduced to white powder in the halls of Congress
on godfearing man will walk there again because of the stink of the rotten eggs
of America

> and the Indians of Chiapas continue to gnaw their vitaminless tortillas
> aborigines of Australia perhaps gibber in the eggless wilderness
> and I rarely have an egg for breakfast tho my work requires infinite eggs to come
> to birth in Eternity
> eggs should be eaten or given to their mothers
> and the grief of the countless chickens of America is expressed in the screaming
> of her comedians over the radio
> Detroit has built a million automobiles of rubber trees and phantoms
> but I walk, I walk, and the Orient walks with me, and all Africa walks
> and sooner or later North America will walk (*CP* 175)

These last lines introduce the prophetic character of the poem. While he denounces the injustices of the presence, the future opens in front of him. This is also seen in the vocabulary: the *soul* of America needs of *eternity*, hunger is explained with a metaphor of eggs, and this walking goes along with messianic images:

> and sooner or later North America will walk
> for as we have driven the Chinese Angel from our door he will drive us from the
> Golden Door of the future
> we have not cherished pity on Tanganyika
> Einstein alive was mocked for his heavenly politics
> Bertrand Russell driven from New York for getting laid
> immortal Chaplin driven from our shores with the rose in his teeth (*CP* 175)

Religious and political speech alternate here ("heavenly politics") to introduce his idea of poetry:

> Nobody publishes a word that is not the cowardly robot ravings of a depraved
> mentality
> The day of the publication of the true literature of the American body will be day
> of Revolution
> the revolution of the sexy lamb
> the only bloodless revolution that gives away corn (*CP* 175-76)

These future predictions cover politics and involve his poetic system. His position swings from anarchist ideas ("I doubt if anyone will ever fall anymore except governments / fortunately all the governments will fall") and a mindful prophetic announcement. If the good governments "don't yet exist" he immediately asserts: "But they have to begin existing they exist in my poems . . . Now is the time for prophecy without death as a consequence . . . History will make this poem prophetic and its awful silliness a hideous spiritual music." Against an apocalyptic backdrop of Cold War, he claims poetry is the only solution:

> Man cannot long endure the hunger of the cannibal abstract
> War is abstract
> the world will be destroyed
> but I will die only for poetry, that will save the world (*CP* 176)

Poetry is not then an abstract element. "*Now* is the time," and "History will make *this poem* prophetic." The poem is a concrete event irrupting in the logocratic Cold War, although this is followed by a contradictory passage:

> Vachel Lindsay Secretary of the Interior
> Poe Secretary of Imagination
> Pound Secty. Economics
> and Kra belongs to Kra, and Pukti to Pukti
> crossfertilization of Blok and Artaud
> Van Gogh's Ear on the currency
> no more propaganda for monsters
> and poets should stay out of politics or become monsters
> I have become monsterous with politics
> the Russian poet undoubtedly monsterous in his secret notebook
> Tibet should be left alone
> These are obvious prophecies
> America will be destroyed
> Russian poets will struggle with Russia (*CP* 177)

There are two "politics" in this poem then: the heavenly one of poets where, paradoxically, they should not be; and at the same time that which reduces the poet to a secrete notebook and turns him into a monster. From the margins, poets appear as prophets unheard by politics:

> Where was Theodore Roosevelt when he [Whitman] sent out ultimatums from his castle in Camden
> Where was the House of Representatives when Crane read aloud from his prophetic books
> What was Wall Street scheming when Lindsay announced the doom of Money
> Were they listening to my ravings in the locker rooms of Bickfords Employment Offices?
> Did they bend their ears to the moans of my soul when I struggled with market research statistics in the Forum at Rome? (*CP* 177)

The lack of question marks in some of these interrogative sentences emphasizes the oral character of the poem, thus keeping it in the verge of the genre with political (or religious) sermon. It turns to the second as the poem continues towards the end. At first, he answers these questions with strong answers, which stand out because of the vocabulary rather than its syntax ("No they were fighting in fiery offices, on carpets of heartfailure, screaming and bargaining with Destiny / fighting the Skeleton with sabers, muskets, buck teeth, indigestion, bombs of larceny, whoredom, rockets, pederasty"). The images of "carpets of heartfailure" and "fighting the Skeleton," which might remind us again of his Moloch passage of "Howl," is followed by a list of plain words with little articulation, ending up in a series of exclamations:

Money-chant of soapers—toothpaste apes in television sets—deodorizers on
hypnotic chairs—
petroleum mongers in Texas—jet plane streaks among the clouds—
sky writers liars in the face of Divinity—fanged butchers of hats and shoes, all
Owners! Owners! Owners! with obsession on property and vanishing
Selfhood!
and their long editorials on the fence of the screaming negro attacked by ants
crawled out of the front page!
Machinery of a mass electrical dream! A war-creating Whore of Babylon
bellowing over Capitols and Academies!
Money! Money! Money! shrieking mad celestial money of illusion! Money made
of nothing, starvation, suicide! Money of failure! Money of death!
Money against Eternity! and eternity's strong mills grind out vast paper of
Illusion! (*CP* 177-78)

It keeps the fight against abstraction on. Abstractness of television and the whole system of war, a "Machinery of a mass electrical dream" both dominating "Capitols and Academies," and aiming at the illusion of money rather than eternity. A new poet-priest must come to replace the "depraved mentality," the "sky writer liars in the face of Divinity."

In a more humorous way, he shifts his attention to the space race of the USSR and the US in "Poem Rocket," whose own title is an experiment with dots and stars forming a rocket which might as well be seen as a phallus, and beneath which there is a quotation by Gregory Corso: "Be a Star-screwer" (see fig. 1 on page 396). With that sort of pun, the poem is conceived then as a rocket willing to sexually conquer the stars. In this case, the addressed lover is the moon. The poet, "no longer a Romeo Sadface in drunken river Loony Pierre eyebrow," settles the poem as a chant of possibilities: "as God is possible as All is Possible so we'll reach another life." He then translates politics to the moon:

Moon politicians earth weeping and warring in eternity
tho not one star disturbed by screaming madmen from Hollywood
oil tycoons from Romania making secret deals with flabby green Plutonians—
slave camps on Saturn Cuban revolutions on Mars?
Old life and new side by side, will Catholic Church find Christ on Jupiter
Mohammed rave in Uranus will Buddha be acceptable on the stolid planets
or will we find Zoroastrian temples flowering on Neptune?
What monstrous new ecclesiastical design on the entire universe unfolds in the
dying Pope's brain?
Scientist alone is true poet he gives us the moon
he promises the stars he'll make us a new universe if it comes to that
O Einstein I should have sent you my flaming mss.
O Einstein I should have pilgrimaged to your white hair! (*CP* 171)

The corruption of the earth, its oppressive systems and political upheavals involve now Plutonians, "the new," in terms of religion and its institutions too. Science also takes another role in society: "scientist alone is true poet." As in "Death to Van Gogh's Ear!", Einstein is

here seen as another prophet: his "heavenly politics" are actually heavenly poetics able to "promise . . . a new universe if it comes to that."

This is followed by a highly significant passage. The poet addresses "fellow travelers" of the future from his present moment of writing: "I write you a poem in Amsterdam in the Cosmos / where Spinoza ground his magic lenses long ago." The articulation, however, twists the linear narrative: "I write you a poem long ago / already my feet are washed in death." "Long ago" is here combined with the present simple tense, also used to point out his death. He mixes up then the scene of writing and that of reading at the same time. This idea is emphasized by the reference of the written nature of the speech:

> Here I am naked without identity
> with no more body than the fine black tracery of pen mark on soft paper
> as star talks to star multiple beams of sunlight all the same myriad thought
> in one fold of the universe where Whitman was
> and Blake and Shelley saw Milton dwelling as in a starry temple
> brooding in his blindness seeing all—
> Now at last I can speak to you beloved brothers of an unknown moon (*CP* 171-
> 72)

The body of the poet is actually the "the black tracery of pen mark on soft paper," getting close here to Whitman's incarnation in his leaves and his book. "Here I am," he says, presenting himself as the written form that the reader can see and hear ("Now at last I can speak to you"). Nonetheless, there is something of a religious connotation in this passage. Whitman and Milton dwell in a "starry temple / brooding in his blindness seeing all—". These poets have the ability to see (and so do Blake and Shelley, who see Milton) and address readers in universal terms. However, the stanza continues:

> real Yous squatting in whatever form amidst Platonic Vapors of Eternity
> I am another Star.
> Will you eat my poems or read them
> or gaze with aluminum blind plates on sunless pages?
> do you dream or translate & accept data with indifferent droopings of antennae?
> do I make sense to your flowery green receptor eyesockets? do you have visions
> of God?
> Which way will the sunflower turn surrounded by millions of suns? (*CP* 172)

As another "Star" able to transmit, however, his message might not be read by the extraterrestrial receptors: their pages may be "sunless," they may even eat the poem. There may be another logic, or multiple ones, like the directions for the sunflowers.

The poem is declared then a rocket made out of "pure thought" in the last stanza. His "immortality" does not rely on the matter used to build rockets, but words, "amazing

chemical / more than my hair my sperm or the cells of my body / the speeding thought that flies upward with my desire as instantaneous as the universe and faster than light." This leads to a tension between the tangible and intangible: his poem, which was first seen as "black tracery of pen mark" is now a "thought," which can "land on whatever planet awaits it" though. It is both to be read and heard, its title emphasizes the written nature, the bodily materiality, while it comes directly from his mind. This "tension" would always be present there in terms of form, as we have seen, but this poem includes it in its content, somehow exploiting at the same time the humorous approach to the space race of those years. Another poem, "Funny Death" (208), does also explore the written and sonorous quality of mental processes. The display of letters is under the clear influence of Apollinaire, as the title can be read aloud and at the same time act as a visual sign:

```
FFFFF U       U NN     N
F      U      U N N    N
FFFFF U      U  N  N   N
F       U    U  N    N N NY  DEATH
F        U U    N     NN
F         UU    N      N
```

This poem may be seen as a cryptic exploration of his existential fears. Although most of it follows a logical articulation of the discourse, the display of lines on the paper goes along the experiment with words' disposition:

The music of the spheres—that ends in Silence
The Void is a grand piano
a million melodies
one after another
silence in between
rather an interruption
of the silence

Tho the music's beautiful
Bong Bong Bon———
gnob
gnob
gno——— (*CP* 208)

Taking the theory of *musica universalis*, he develops an image of "the Void" as a grand piano, exploiting the figurative dimension of the term. While originally it referred to the proportions and harmony between celestial spheres, "the music of the spheres" is taken here as a sound-based idea which places silence as a circular form which, as the "million melodies" finally

"[s]hrinks / and disappears / back into the piano." Sound (or music) is also visually represented, as seen above and with a circular disposition (as follows):

```
Bong Bong Bong
o            n
n            o
g            b
b            g
o            n
n            o
obgnobgnobgnob
```

(*CP* 208)

The reader may wonder about its relationship to the title: "Funny Death." Ginsberg is here playing with the visual and the sonorous qualities of writing at the same time. The poem might start (when read aloud) with "FFFFF U U NN N," and later read the circular form of the transcribed form of the sound "Bong." The "funny death" might refer to the death of these sounds, as well as the peculiar approach to writing and reading that the poem entails: death (disappearance into the grand piano-void) follows a different, non-lineal, pattern.

Thus, as we will also see in the following section (devoted to "Kaddish" and related poems), his poetry was turning both more explicitly political and at the same time more experimental, especially considering his ideas on the transcription of the self (body and mind) on the paper. The division between these two sections follows, as we saw above, a biographical and chronological principle, so the next part of my analysis will show little change regarding poetics. Rather, we might take from it the topics, the different expressions of his political ideas and the enactment of his performative approach to poetry. We may also remember the parallel reading of all these poems as part of two different publications, especially because of Ginsberg's progressive reconsideration of his own work, and as we saw above, his own account and perception of himself as the American poet. The years 1957-1959 were important for him not only because of his experiments with different drugs and his travels to other countries, but also because he started to get his own perspective out of the Beat generation. He was going to be the international poet of the US (culminating in *Planet News* and *The Fall of America*), and that would also make a difference within his writing. Allen Ginsberg, as a public figure, would write a poetry for the public space, even when that was considered to be in the public opinion or public consciousness.

2. 4. Kaddish *and Related Poems (1959-1960)*

Kaddish and Other Poems (1961) collected some of the poems commented above: "POEM Rocket," "Death to Van Gogh's Ear!", "Europe! Europe!", "The Lion for Real," "At Apollinaire's Grave," "To Aunt Rose," "Laughing Gas." The biographical details had the component of writing while he was drugged, which would go along with other poems present in this section: "Kaddish," "Mescaline," "Lysergic Acid," "Aether." Drugs, politics and his own story of madness (including his mother's) made of the second volume he published another statement about himself, as *Howl* had done before. As I pointed out in the previous section, there is no great difference in terms of writing techniques. If he wrote "To Aunt Rose" between 1957 and 1959, he wrote "Kaddish" just between 1959 and 1960. Poems on drugs and consciousness kept their dominance, while it is true that (explicitly) political poems are somehow replaced by those on his death reflections. He was, nonetheless, still interested in the US position in the world, in its support to dictators that marked the "decline of America" and confirmed Spengler's ideas. During 1958, he had started thinking, as Morgan explains, that "his old socialistic ideas were not pipe dreams, but might be the wave of the future," non-Western civilizations would overcome Western ones, and the "Oriental century" would come (262). In 1960 he went back to South America, this time visiting Chile. He was bored by college conferences, but found interesting the political diatribes that most literary discussions turned into. The link between literature and politics had started way earlier in his career, but these encounters helped him weave his own poetics far from the constant proselytizing of Nicanor Parra, while keeping the eye on how poetry could help people get out of the box.

In an interview in *Village Voice*, August 25th, 1959, he ranted on how "[r]ecent history is the record of a vast conspiracy to impose one level of mechanical consciousness on mankind and exterminate all manifestations of that unique part of human sentience in all men, which the individual shares with his Creator" (qtd. in Bowering 371-72). He could not and would not get rid of the religious or mystical nature of knowledge, of thinking and perception of reality. His experiences taking yage in 1960 supposed a reinforcement of those beliefs. They were scaring at the beginning, but helped him get to different stages of consciousness, learning that "the condition of life was suffering, too, a fundamental principle he would later rediscover through his Buddhist studies" (Morgan 316-17). It also helped him understand schizophrenia, and so got closer to his mother's universe. While previous poems (those of the first half of 1950s) had played with stream of consciousness and juxtaposed

images, the poems he wrote after 1957 stand out because of their relationship to drug experiments with writing.

"Kaddish," in this sense, is also covered by a myth on the creative process, exactly as it happened with his other big poem, "Howl." William's influence was still there, as Miles asserts: the older poet's minute observation of normal American speech could be transposed in the "abnormally excited speech, such as the wailing and crying over his mother's death and similar moments of extreme emotional stress" (283). To this, he added the heightened consciousness of drugs. It took him two years to complete the poem, and so combined different strategies. He started with what would later be Part IV, in Paris (1958), and then continued back home. These first writings were reported to Kerouac with a comment: "I write best when I weep, I wrote a lot of that weeping anyway and got idea for huge expandable form of such a poem, will finish later and make a big elegy, perhaps less repetitious in parts, but I gotta get a rhythm up to cry" (Ginsberg and Kerouac, *Letters* n. pag.). By then it was just an elegy, but it would turn into a chant which combined the stream of consciousness and the physical act of crying for the dead person. Breslin points out the second part was written in twenty straight hours of effort after a night of no sleep. The poet had been taking mescaline and speed listening to Ray Charles' records and chanting aloud passages from Shelley's "Adonais" and the Hebrew Kaddish. The poet, completed the story with a narrative:

> I walked out in early blue dawn on to 7th Avenue & across town to my Lower East Side apartment – New York before sunrise has its own celebrated hallucinatory unreality. In the country getting up with cows and birds hath Blakean charm, in the megalopolis the same nature's hour is a science-fiction hell vision, even if you're a milkman. Phantom factories, unpopulated streets out of Poe, familiar nightclubs bookstores groceries dead. ("How *Kaddish*" 345)

From 6 a.m. Saturday to 10 p.m. Sunday he wrote non-stop except to go to the bathroom, take morphine and liquid methadrine injected in vein. The account continues: Peter Orlovsky (his partner) brought boiled eggs and coffee, Dexadrine tablets to keep the creative energy,

> I began quite literally assembling recollection data taken from the last hours . . . till I'd reached a climax, covering fragmentary recollections of key scenes with my mother ending with a death-prayer imitating the rhythms of the Hebrew Kaddish. . . . [T]old the whole secret family-self tale[,] . . . it would seem odd to others, but . . . familiar – everybody has crazy cousins and aunts and brothers. So I started over again into narrative – "this is release of particulars"– and went back chronologically, sketching in broken paragraphs all the first recollections that rose in my heart . . .– embarrassing scenes . . . – Images that were central to my own existence such as the mass of scars on my mother's plump belly – all archetypes. ("How *Kaddish*" 345-346)

Thus, the narrative combines the "Howl"-like composition of longer or shorter lines according to the breath needed, as we will later see. However, Williams' technique of transcribing oral language went along more visual tools, as it had happened, for instance, in "Poem Rocket." In "I Beg You Come Back & Be Cheerful" (*CP* 243), where he gives images of a chaotic and dirty America and presents himself as dissident in his beard and "subversive salami," he uses the page to display his own message. After placing himself beside the window, "me spying on New York," the reader finds a staircase in written form:

What
if
the
worlds
were
a
series
of steps

What
if
the
steps
joined
back
at
the
Margin (*CP* 245)

The similarity between "worlds" and "words" makes here a pun with the step-like figure they build on the page, down and then back to "the / Margin." Thus, although the oral dimension of poetry was still important for him, he developed the experiments which were already present in compositions of the previous section (years 1957-1959). Another example is "To an Old Poet in Peru" (247): although traditionally narrative, this poem makes use of block capitals to emphasize what the surrounding "scraps of paper" say ("DIE GREATLY IN THY SOLITUDE") (*CP* 247-49); also, "Aether" includes a boxed notation with exclamation marks and a star:

★
! ! I JUST NODDED BECAUSE OF THE SECONDARY
NEGATION

(*CP* 251)

His drug-induced poems were not just a way to release the self from the logocratic forces of the Establishment; as he insisted, it was also a way to get closer to God, and that is the subject of "Mescaline" and "Lysergic Acid." As in Whitman, there is an emphasis on a

civic religion, a political activism which goes hand in hand with the recovering of the soul, this time in transgressive ways. "Mescaline" (*CP* 236) appears on the paper as an inner monologue on one's own death, the questions and answers (if any) the voice can give. Nevertheless, the center is "Rotting Ginsberg," a phrase which is repeated over and over again, interrupting the discourse ("are we ever free of—rotting ginsberg"; "erk, I'm stuck with this familiar rotting ginsberg"; "I *want I want* ridiculous *to know to know* WHAT rotting ginsberg"). The poem acts as a present moment record of the mind, between the improvised and stream of consciousness. The perceptions of the space add connotations in the first part

> my kitten mews, and looks into the closet
> Boito sings on the phonograph tonight his ancient song of angels
> Antinoüs bust in brown photograph still gazing down from my wall
> a light burst from God's delicate hand sends down a wooden dove to the calm
>   virgin
> Beato Angelico's universe
> the cat's gone mad and scraowls around the floor (*CP* 236)

A plain description of what he sees is however charged with symbols of spiritual aspect: the song of angels in the opera singer, the photograph of a classical proportioned sculpture, the picture of the Annunciation where the hand of god is depicted. The inner dialogue that follows addresses God in a conversational display of lines ("Then let it decay, thank God I know / thank who / thank who / Thank you, O lord, beyond my eye"), but also acknowledges the writing process. "[T]he rhythm of the typewriter" marks his repetitive patterns:

> can't stand boys even anymore
> can't stand
> can't stand
> . . .
> is that any use at all use use use
> death death death death death
> god god god god god god god the Lone Ranger
> the rhythm of the typewriter
>
> What can I do to Heaven by pounding on Typewriter
> I'm stuck change the record Gregory ah excellent he's doing just that (*CP* 237)

The poem is then, not only a reflection on his own conception of death, on God's mysteries, but also a writing experiment itself, with no other aim than recording the mental (and writing) connections he makes at that specific moment and place. It might be understood as an oral composition, since breathing may also be important in the disposition of lines, but its conception is linked to the paper and the typewriter in this case. The thoughts of the writer, in his body (his breathing, and here his typing), become molded in word choice and lineation.

Thus, the reception of the poem both visually, mentally and even vocally (when read aloud) is marked by the present absence of the self.

"Lysergic Acid" (*CP* 239) leaves out the explicit description of the writing scene, but was also written during a trip on acid. Ginsberg gives a contextualizing note to the poem: it was composed on his experiments at Mental Research Institute in Palo Alto, California. Professor Spiegelberg took different mandalas and ghost traps to the sessions, brought from a monastery in Sikkim. The text is full of hallucinations over the self in an endless universe which seems to be doomed by a multiple-eyed spider weaving an endless web. The self is just "in the last millionth infinite tentacle of the spiderweb, a worrier / lost, separated, a worm, a thought, a self." He describes himself:

> I allen Ginsberg [sic]
> I who want to be God
> I who want to hear the infinite minutest vibration of eternal harmony
> I who wait trembling my destruction by that aethereal music in the fire
> I who ate God and give him a name
> I who make mistakes on the eternal typewriter
> I who am Doomed (*CP* 239)

His union with God is rather a nightmare than an epiphany, which later on is seen in bodily terms:

> My face in the mirror, thin hair, blood congested in streaks down beneath my
> eyes, cocksucker, a decay, a talking lust
> a snaeap, a snarl, a tic of consciousness in infinity [sic]
> a creep in the eyes of all Universes
> trying to escape my Being, unable to pass on to the Eye
> I vomit, I am in a trance, my body is seized in convulsion, my stomach crawls,
> water from my mouth, I am here in Inferno
> dry bones of myriad lifeless mummies naked on the web, the Ghosts, I am a
> Ghost (*CP* 239)

The answer to his existentialist questions involves, as his conception of the universe, multiplicity and even endlessness of referents. "Must there always be an Answer? you reply," and he continues after four lines:

> a Yes there Is . . . a Yes I Am . . . a Yes You Are . . . a We
>
> A We
> and that must be an It, and a They, and a Thing with No Answer
> It creepeth, it waited, it is still, it is begun, it is the Horns of Battle it is Multiple
> Sclerosis (*CP* 240) (Ginsberg's ellipses)

The "We" is "It" and "They" and "Thing"; it requires a different way of thinking, that of multiplicity. The complexity leads to the image of the spider web, the "Ghost Trip," but also

"a crossframe on which a thousand threads of differing color / are strung, a spiritual tennis racket / in which when I look I see aethereal lightwaves radiate / bright energy passing round on the threads as for billions of years." This, which is "an image of the Universe in miniature," involves waves, "Word circles," larger images "outward circling thru bands of faroff Nebulae & vast Astrologies / contained, to be true to itself, in a Mandala." Thus, the perceptions during the drug experiment are registered but filtered through his mind, and so mixed with the hallucinations of the "billion-eyed monster, the Nameless, the Answerless, the Hidden-from-me, the endless Being / one creature that gives birth to itself" (*CP* 240-41).

This struggle of distressing images of a universe-monster which will devour the "separate consciousness" is, however, calmed towards the end of the poem. The poet accepts "I cannot follow," and then makes another image of the monster:

> it feels like Cryptozoids
> it creeps and undulates beneath the sea
> it is coming to take over the city
> it invades beneath every Consciousness
> it is delicate as the Universe
> it makes me vomit
> . . .
> it wants me
> it gives me good reason
> it gives me reason to exist
> it gives me endless answers
> a consciousness to be separate and a consciousness to see
> I am beckoned to be One or other, to say *I am both and be neither* (*CP* 241-42)
> (emphasis added)

This last idea opens his view, his way of thinking: "to say I am both and be neither" involves an ontology which is much more complex, or difficult to understand without his consciousness state. He writes "MANDALA" humming on his "electric type writer," and sees "the gay Creator," accepting that "One image in the end remains myriad-eyed in Eternity / This is the Work! This is the Knowledge! This is the End of man!". To the rational reader, this "Knowledge" may be difficult to reach, but a progressive line towards this other paradigm can be seen as the poem develops.

While in the first lines the multiple-eyed monster was a source of anxiety for the "separate consciousness," at the end of the poem this feature is applied to any image within the universe. The hallucinatory discourse keeps then a narrative form which makes us question the nature of the text: was it really written during this altered state of consciousness or just written emulating it in order to get the same effects for the reader? In other words: is it a representation or presentation of the brain? We might never know, but we saw above

Ginsberg's own answer, which makes his poetry a conceptual work after all. As Whitman, he is recording a self in a specific moment and place, a mental "struggle" or travel which shows his personal anguish (uncertainties about death, god, existence), but at the same time it offers the reader a non-conformist mental discourse. Whether he presents this mental discourse, thus creating it in the reader, or just reproduces something which was already outside of it, it can also take us back to the writing scene. His thinking and writing occur at the same time: "It is a multiple million eyed monster / it is hidden in all its elephants and selves / it hummeth in the electric typewriter" which appears at the end as "it types a fragmentary word which is / a fragmentary word, / MANDALA." The capital letters brings us back to the physicality of the paper.

This tension is also present in "Aether" (*CP* 250). As indicated just some pages above, this poem makes use of the paper as a visual and expressive tool, adding boxes, exclamations and symbols (see page 302). It might be seen also as oral because of the use of block capitals in performative utterances (*CP* 254-53, 258-59) and columned disposition of lines (*CP* 260-70). Leary claims this was written with cotton on one hand and the pen on the other (232). Ginsberg wanted to find God (Lin 107-10), and in this poem it seems this encounter comes without language. As in the previous one, he takes into account "Sabahadabadie-pluralistic universes" and "combination[s] of Being" which the sages get in their slow observation of life (especially sounds), and concedes that universe is made by its perception:

> The universe is an OLD mistake
> I've understood a million times before
> and always come back to the same
>   scissor brainwave—
> The
> Sooner or later all Consciousness will
>   be eliminated
>   because Consciousness is
>   a by-product of—
>   (Cotton & N_2O)

This passage also shows the whole functioning of the mind, which does not follow a totally coherent discourse. In the middle of the utterance, "the" appears to introduce another phrase which disappears and is rather replaced by "Sooner or later…". Thus, the poem records a mind struggle to "the unspeakable" that he mentions several times ("unspeakable," "unrecorded," "Un/intelligible," "the Vast mystery of our creation"); he tries to record what may be "unrecordable":

> . . . . I stood on the balcony
>   waiting for an explosion

of Total Consciousness of All—
being Ginsberg sniffing ether in Lima.
The same struggle of Mind, to reach the
Thing
that ends its process with an X
comprehending its befores and afters,
unexplainable to each, except in a prophetic
secret recollective hidden
half-hand unrecorded way.
As the old sages of Asia, or the white beards of Persia
scribbled on the margins of their scrolls
in delicate ink
. . .
None remember but all return to the same thought
before they die—what sad old
knowledge, we repeat again.
Only to be lost
in the sands of Paracas, or wrapped in a mystic shroud
of Poesy
and found by some kid in a thousand years
inspire what dreadful thoughts of his own? (*CP* 253)

The poet, unable to get this unspeakable knowledge of old sages, is "condemned to write statements." All throughout the poem, the reader finds him writing, speaking, looking for the word: "Ya, Crap, what Hymn to seek, & in / what tongue, if this's the most / I can requite from Consciousness?— / That I can skim? & put in words?"; "I'm scribbling nothings. / Page upon page of profoundest nothing." The consciousness and knowledge he wants to get escape his statements, so he tries to express it in alternative ways.

As I pointed out above, this poem stands out because of the display of words on the page. His invocation of the creator appears in block capitals, emphasizing both the act of writing but also the tone it would have in spoken form:

GREAT CREATOR

WHOSE NAME I NOW

PRONOUNCE:

GREAT CREATOR OF THE UNIVERS, IF [sic]

THY WISDOM ACCORD IT

AND IF THIS NOT BE TOO

MUCH TO ASK

MAY I PUBLISH YOUR NAME?

I ASK IN THE LIMA

NIGHT

FEARFULLY WAITING

ANSWER,

hearing the busses out on
the street hissing,
Knowing the Terror
of the World Afar (*CP* 255)

This fragment might be seen as a public announcement. It makes use of conventional speech acts: "I *now* pronounce," "May I publish your name?" (although no name is given). Later on, the display catches the eye in the lineation:

Will know in Death?
And before?
Will in
Another know.
And in another know.
And
in another know.
And
Stop conceiving worlds!
says Philip Whalen
(My Savior!) (oh what snobbery!) (*CP* 257)

Again, he tries to present the state of mind on the paper, or to emulate it. We saw above that for Ginsberg thought and speech go hand in hand (if they are not the same thing). Breathing might not be altered, but in his poetics it is intrinsically related to the state of mind.

He would use this principle to explain all his corpus, although in the case of "Kaddish," the religious aspect is involved as well. The kaddish is a Jewish memorial prayer marked thus by its sonority. Ginsberg would take that element for his mother's and mixed it with the symbolical parallelism of his mother's madness and death with the downfall of the 1930s Left culture (Portugés, *The Visionary* 64). This is not without importance, considering Ginsberg's own view of himself as an outcast, as well as the idealization of Carl Solomon's angelical madness in "Howl," but religion and spirituality are present in this poem rather because of its form. In this case, breathing patterns are not just marked by mental processes (he seems to be spontaneously outlining different scenes and stages in his mother's life), but also the sacred and liturgical character of the text. Each part (proem, narrative, hymmnn, lament, litany, fugue) takes a different emotional lineation; the proem and the narrative follow a long line which made critics say the poem was between prose and verse (Alvarez 92-3). The

"Hymmnn" (the title being clear in its vocal character) interrupts the narrative to chant God's blessedness, though with a Beat approach. God's greatness comes from his outcast position:

> In the world which He has created according to his will Blessed Praised
> Magnified Lauded Exalted the Name of the Holy One Blessed is He!
> In the house in Newark Blessed is He! In the madhouse Blessed is He! In the
> house of Death Blessed is He!
> Blessed be He in homosexuality! Blessed be He in Paranoia! Blessed be He in the
> city! Blessed be He in the Book! (*CP* 233)

Taking the exclamatory forms of celebrations, along with the repetition of "Blessed be…", this part seems closer to the spoken than to the thought word, and something similar happens in part IV, the litany:

> O mother
> what have I left out
> O mother
> what have I forgotten
> O mother
> farewell
> with a long black shoe
> farewell
> with Communist Party and a broken stocking
> farewell
> with six dark hairs on the wen of your breast
> farewell
> with your old dress and a long black beard around the vagina
> farewell
> with your sagging belly
> with your fear of Hitler
> with your mouth of bad short stories
> . . .
> with your eyes alone
> with your eyes
> with your eyes
> with your Death full of Flowers (*CP* 234-35)

This section is characterized, however, by a less emphatic tone. There is no exclamation, but rather a religious repetition (a litany), which evolves from shorter to longer lines, and then back to short ones. From the "sagging belly," the "fear of Hitler," and mouth, fingers and arms, he goes to the eyes, ending in an Ophelia-like image. Abortion, paranoia, electroshock surround this goddess or saint. Critics have also underlined part V because of its apotheosis orality. It combines onomatopoeia and invocations for the lord to embrace Naomi:

> Caw caw caw crows shriek in the white sun over grave stones in Long Island
> Lord Lord Lord Naomi underneath this grass my halflife and my own as hers
> caw caw my eye be buried in the same Ground where I stand in Angel
> Lord Lord great Eye that stares on All and moves in a black cloud
> caw caw strange cry of Beings flung up into sky over the waving trees
> Lord Lord O Grinder of giant Beyonds my voice in a boundless field in Sheol

> Caw caw the call of Time rent out of foot and wing an instant in the universe
> Lord Lord an echo in the sky the wind through ragged leaves the roar of memory
> caw caw all years my birth a dream caw caw New York the bus the broken shoe
>   the vast highschool caw caw all Visions of the Lord
> Lord Lord Lord caw caw caw Lord Lord Lord caw caw caw Lord (*CP* 235)

Thus, as the Romantic poets, these texts were written "under great emotional stress," "each line change like a sob" (Miles 234), increasingly, as we have seen, as the poem advances. Portugés does also find in the poem the mental aspect: the sobs are thought units which of course would be influenced by the substances under which they were written, and which were so because of the minute particulars they placed the focus on (*The Visionary* 80). Other non-religious poems carried the emotional aspect as well. Lin clarifies: not all his drug trips were illuminating, some visions turned into nightmares involving death, darkness, a void devouring him. That is what happens in "The Reply" (*CP* 265). This poem expresses his panic to death and the sense of losing the body and soul. "God answers with my doom! I am annulled / this poetry blanked from the fiery ledger." The universe is in this text a place invaded by a presence where the poet has to advance:

> a dead gong shivers thru all flesh and a vast Being enters my
>   brain from afar that lives forever
>   None but the Presence too mighty to record! the Presence
>   in Death, before whom I am helpless
>   makes me change from Allen to a skull
> Old One-Eye of dreams in which I do not wake but die—
>   hands pulled into the darkness by a frightful Hand
>   —the worm's blind wriggle, cut—the plough
>   is God himself
> What ball of monster darkness from before the universe come
>   back to visit me with blind command! (*CP* 265)

This presence "will come, the hour / will come," so the threat is there until the end, where there is "No refuge in Myself, which is on fire." This poem then keeps the lineation of the mind. Indentations record the subordinated relationship between line-thoughts, at the same time that each line break means a stop, a pause, an interruption of the fluidity of the mind.

The poems in *Kaddish and Other Poems* were therefore a continuation of *Howl and Other Poems*, and were not far from *Reality Sandwiches* in terms of poetics either. The topics, however, made the difference: *Kaddish* presented a Ginsberg travelling to Europe, close to the avant-garde, while keeping his attention on America's mad margins and starting to include in his intellectual interests the consciousness exploration through drugs. *Reality Sandwiches* appeared then as a prequel to his confessions in *Howl* and *Kaddish*, including his Beat origins (then, in 1963, vindicated and increasingly recognized), his relationship with his country in "Siesta in

Xbalba," his love relationship with Peter Orlovsky ("Malest Cornifici Tuo Catullo"), and his attempts to give pictures in written ("Sather Gate Illumination," "Afternoon Seattle"). Ginsberg, getting the fame of a rock 'n' roll celebrity, worked with special care on the image he was giving of himself as the American poet, and dived himself in the way the media built the American reality in the next publications we are going to tackle: *Planet News* (1968) and *The Fall of America* (1973).

2.5. Planet News: To Europe and Asia (1961-1963) *and* King of May: America to Europe (1963-1965)

Following the biographical division that Ginsberg did in his *Collected Poems*, his *Planet News* just comprises from 1961 to 1963. The original publication was different though: it compiled poetry written between 1961 and 1967 and included more poems than those in the present section. Published in 1968, it was a clearly political volume and addressed contemporary people and events, just in the same way he had previously done. At this time, his fame was complemented by the publication of Thomas Parkinson's *Casebook on the Beat* (1961) and he defined his movement and his own work as "the Church of Poetry" (*Journals: Early Fifties* 101). He kept reflecting on his role in diaries, as in the *Indian Journals* when he wrote "What / suggestion can I make, calmly, to solve the / 'World Problem.' Join Communist? . . . Government is big corporation, / I'm just poor poet me." His choice was rather out of the system after all ("No I would take / off my close & go naked on Television / with Kruschev" (192). The media control over people's minds started to get his attention. What was the role of literature in that stage of establishment dominance?

As pointed out above, in essays such as "Prose Contribution to Cuban Revolution" and "When the Mode of the Music Changes the Walls of the City Shakes" (published in 1961), he claimed poetry was the way to revolution; or rather, revolution should be literary if it was to make any real changes. This waking up of the people was no doubt spiritual. As Morgan claims,

> Allen viewed his job as poet as communicating with that "grand majority" and doing what he could to "dynamite the emotional rock bed of inertia and spiritual deadness" that hung over the country. He'd have to figure out a way to "enter people's souls and shake their emotions and wake their souls to the fact of God on earth." Only then would it be possible for the people to seize power over their own universes and end their dependence on external authority. "I hope America will still be there when we get back," he wrote in his journal as the ship sailed to Europe. (328)

His travel to the East was enormously important in this sense. He was surprised by the way people lived religion. He wrote in a letter to Kerouac that "[i]t's assumed that all Gods are unreal so one should respect all Gods as purely subjective forms of meditation to fix the mind on one image and still it down and be peaceful" ("Letter to Kerouac" n. pag.). Drugs, which had been his main path towards illumination and transcendence, started to be combined with inner contemplation of the mind in action, something he applied to poetry.

While from a very early age he had been obsessed with death, his visions with Blake and the promise he had made then, his approach to Hinduism and later Buddhism gave a turn to those ideas. He learnt he had to accept death, accept his own body rather than go beyond it:

> mainly getting over the fear of an absolute god outside of myself and coming to a slow realization that the divinity which was prophesied to me by Blake years ago was actually in myself rather than outside like a hidden god outside the universe … the change for me finally was a precipitation of my awareness back into my body from wandering in various alternative possible metaphysical universes experienced in visions or experienced under drugs. (Unpublished interview of 1976, qtd. in Portugés, *The Visionary* 94)

This can be seen in "Last Night in Calcutta" (*CP* 309). This poem focuses first on the room details, but time is also physical there: "The old clock Ticks, . . . Time sits solid." The observation of time and place implicit in meditation is here exploited in the scenery: the sounds he can hear, the things he can see ("whistles & dog barks, answered a block away / Pushkin sits on the bookshelf, Shakespeare's / complete works as well as Blake's unread"). In the middle of the poem, the body (also important in his meditation) recovers relevance:

> —Waking to stained fingers, bitter mouth
> and lung gripped by cigarette hunger,
> what to do with this big toe, this arm
> this eye in the starving skeleton-filled
> sore horse tramcar-heated Calcutta in
> Eternity—sweating and teeth rotted away— (*CP* 309)

The decayed body ("this" one which is emphasized here) points to no Eternity, matter crashes ideas:

> the great crash of buildings and planets
> breaks thru the walls of language and drowns
> me under its Ganges heaviness forever.
> No escape but thru Bangkok and New York death.
> Skin is sufficient to be skin, that's all
> it ever could be, tho screams of pain in the kidney
> make it sick of itself, a wavy dream
> dying to finish its all too famous misery (*CP* 309)

Death appears here as a material reality, linked to the body, and so related to the scream, the fear he gets over by accepting its eventuality. The poem closes the discourse saying

> —Leave immortality for another to suffer like a fool,
> not get stuck in the corner of the universe
> sticking morphine in the arm and eating meat. (*CP* 310)

Drugs and meat (sex? carnal desire?) cannot help the poet overcome death, because it cannot be overcome. Only fear can be fought through acceptance of the body and its eventual disappearance.

Other poems point out these new ideas for him. In "The Change" (written in Japan) (*CP* 335) he summons the mind to go back to the body and accept the physical sickness and possible death. Presenting himself in a performative way, he writes:

> Allen Ginsberg says this: I am
> a mass of sores and worms
> & baldness & belly & smell
> I am false Name the prey
> of Yamantaka Devourer of
> Strange dreams, the prey of
> radiation & Police Hells of Law
>
> I am that I am I am the
> man & the Adam of hair in
> my loins   This is my spirit and
> physical shape I inhabit (*CP* 335)

By using his own name, "Allen Ginsberg says this" —a sentence that might be obvious, that could be taken for granted if we understand literature as a performative act starting with "I imagine myself in and invite you to conceive a world in which…" (Levin 150)—, the poet is making his presence explicit: "Allen Ginsberg says this" invokes the poet in a presence which might be future (read in the future) and points to a "this" which rather continues his projection: "I am…". He is a "mass" of matter, a body which is being described, re-presented but also presented, inaugurated. The "prey / of Yamantaka Devourer of / Strange dreams," he is the victim of the deity of death in Vajrayana Buddhism, but also of "radiation & Police Hells of Law." He does not forget that the sense of alienation comes from the system too.

There was a clear progression then, from Blake and Cézanne to the Eastern mantra chanting and meditations. Consciousness was the center of it all, and poetry was its best expression and, at the same time, battle field. Thus, his poems enable a flow of consciousness which both inscribes and leads to a specific state of mind, achieved through drugs or religious practice. That was the free element in poetry: with no rigid patterns in the mind, poetry was

also to be limitless (Laszlo 280). In addition, his inherited techniques coming from American and European modernism fit in with these ideas: meditation was of course related to his detailed descriptions (photographs) following Williams; but also, the tendency to use telegraphic language drew on Pound's poetics of "direct presentation," thus the minimalist streak of Eastern religions. Some of these poems have a narrative line, but they also appear as thick texts where the references to different myths and religious figures force the reader to get into the poet's text-based world. Images of creatures, proper names, references to contemporary events as the Vietnam War, get together in a non-logical discourse which cannot be read with a logical mind. While there are instances of object and place descriptions ("Describe: The Rain on Dasaswamedh Ghat" *CP* 303), Ginsberg's writings could be interpreted as inner-monologues, supposedly to be occupied by the reader, but obviously delimited by his presence as Allen Ginsberg, a defined first person singular.

As in previous sections and publications, Ginsberg's approach to writing was also that of public intimacy: again, journal writings were the origin of the poems he would later publish in poetry collections. The poem "Journal Night Thoughts" (*CP* 275) is a case in point, although there is no trace of it in his other journals (*Journals: Early Fifties*, *Indian Journals*). The reader may wonder whether this is actually a diary entry or one which is already thought to be a public declaration. The poem is dated "NY January 1961" and has a parallel reading from "Sept. 28, 1964" where the poet outlines the contents of the original text (in two columns, then). In a continuous stanza with indented lines (showing subordination of thought, relationship between each idea), we go along the poet in a train of thought occurring at night, thus in connection with dreams and hallucinations which this time seem to come from a "mandala." The circle, the void, the hole, then marks the rest of the poem, which is also cyclical like a "serpent eating or / vomiting its tail / —the blank air a solid wall revolving / around my retina—" (*CP* 275). Readers also follow him in his memories of taking "Yage in Pucallpa," as he notes on the margin, or "Leary's Bedroom Harvard." His perceptions fit in the middle of a strongly cultural context as well:

> Riverside Drive, as in Breughel
>   a girl in red coat

—a footprint a lone
passerby
on sidewalk under apartment wall—
and a blimp from the war floating in air
over the edge of the city—
Wagner's last echoes, and Baudelaire
inscribing his oceanic page
of confessions
Ah love is so sweet in the Springtime
Omnia amor vincit
Eliot's voice clanging over the sky
on upper Broadway
"Only thru Time is Time conquered" (*CP* 276)

★

Unsteadily Walking in Manhattan Near Where Poe Wrote The Raven

Visual art, music, and literature surround his meditations. Out from his window on Riverside Drive, he observes the snow on "the Palisades / and a small white park etched / by bare thin branches / with black birds aflutter in the /frosty underbrush," and it probably reminds him from Brueghel's *Winter Landscape with Ice skaters and Bird trap* (1565). Poe, Baudelaire and Eliot appear linked, maybe because of the relationship between the first two authors (Baudelaire was a fan of Poe), and also because of their decadent model now applied to "upper Broadway." Scenes at the dentist are also mixed up with memories of his own writing ("*Kaddish Completed*") and sexual encounters ("I come in the ass of my beloved, I lie back / with my cock in the air to be kissed—"). As explained above, also, they come registered through indentations, drawing the mental relationship between each phrase.

Similarly, "This Form of Life Needs Sex" (*CP* 292) and "To P.O." (*CP* 301) cover intimate moments which are however made public. The first one contrasts the heterosexual expectations of society if one wants to "continue the race" and fight "oblivion," while narrating his first feelings of homosexual desire and its progressive increase with years. As the others, it may be taken as a transcription of the mind, but orally expressive, which is confirmed at the end of the poem, closed with "and that's my situation Folks—". "To P.O." is a public celebration of Peter Orlovsky's birthday while keeping the tension with intimacy in the initial letters. From the three last poems, only the second was published in *Planet News*, the other two probably added in this final (biographical) compilation that I am using for my study. The distribution here shows that only half of the poems which were to be published in *Planet News* were written between 1961 and 1963 (the period of time which Ginsberg included in the section with the same title). His travelling marked the contents of his compositions, and many are then his thoughts and experiences out of the US.

Nonetheless, with those devoted to his exploration of Europe and Asia, we find poems of political content and contemporary commentaries. They were not always a direct

denounce: his approach to poetry and political activism, as we said above, was not that of the conventional social writing. His aim was to tackle mental processes, and this could be done in different ways, taking into account the connection between the mind, speech, and the body he defended. "Who Will Take Over the Universe?" (*CP* 273) gives a perspective on the future and power within the context of the Cold War, in a US of paranoia, but also of increasing countercultural movements. Rather than changing mentality, this poem pulls out the nature of the national and international tensions within the US in the second half of the twentieth century. The poem starts with an image of "A bitter cold winter night / conspirators at café tables / discussing mystic jails." It actually seems the beginning of a tale which somehow reminds us of the early twentieth century, or even before, narratives of bohemian artists weaving the revolution. The "mystic jails" might be those of Blake, although they could be discussed by young people, the "conspirators" which for the McCarthy government wanted to destroy their America.

The following idea (in the same stanza) makes this "tale" even more confusing: "The Revolution in America / already begun not bombs but sit / down strikes on top submarines / on sidewalks nearby City Hall—". Thus, as the reader goes on through the indentations, the origins of the US are linked to that of pacific protests in the Cold War (submarines are involved). This revolution comes now from the margins: not the Declaration of Independence, but from the native Americans and the "enemies" of the US, Che Guevara and Fidel Castro. Drugs and sex are united with the alternative America:

> The Indians won their case with Judge McFate
> Peyote safe in Arizona—
> In my room the sick junky
> shivers on the 7th day
> Tearful, reborn to the Winter.
> Che Guevara has a big cock
> Castro's balls are pink— (*CP* 273)

American politics appear in terms of pop culture. "The Ghost of John F. Dulles hangs / over America like dirty linen," as a parody of Marx and Engel's "Gespenst" at the beginning of the Communist manifesto (ghost, soul, commonly translated as 'specter'). Rather than a solemn spirit, this ghost is that of popular representation, and it belongs to John F. Dulles, Eisenhower's Secretary of State between 1953 and 1959 who "escalated coldwar with China at 1954 Geneva Conference" where he refused "to shake hands or speak with Chinese foreign minister" and so initiated the "U.S.–China 'containment policy'" (Ginsberg's notes, *CP* 776). This ghost provokes "Unconscious Gas," and "hypnotize the Egyptian

intellectuals." Ginsberg also adds the iconic image of the pirate flag: "He grinds his teeth in horror & crosses his / thigh bones over his skull," thus giving it a comical and also disturbing effect, especially because of the sense of decay that it produces:

> Dust flows out of his asshole
> his hands are full of bacteria
> The worm is at his eye—
> He's declaring counterrevolutions in the Worm-world,
> my cat threw him up last
> Thursday. (273)

The anecdotic and the metaphorical denounce go hand in hand, thus making a non-conventional criticism of society. As previously he declares "Ignore the Government, / send your protest to [the billionaire] Clint Murchison," power is seen at the end of the poem as convulsed by death and insanity: "& Forrestal flew out his window like an Eagle." James V. Forrestal, the first US Secretary of Defense, anti-communist but also mad, had suicided in 1947 and Ginsberg brings him back among ghosts and corpses to give an alternative view point of his country. While the poem's title questions the power over the Universe, reminiscent of God, the last line of the poem asks "Who are the rulers of the earth?". "America's spending money to overthrow the Man," he says just before the closing question. Economic power dominates the position of the capital-lettered Man (be it the President, the Prime Minister, the Citizen).

"Television Was a Baby Crawling Toward That Deathchamber" (*CP* 280) initiates a practice which would later be seen in *The Fall of America*: taking the language of the media and subverting it with its context. This poem could be summarized as a big collage of comments on the US: national and international policies, media pop culture, the black magic he would later condemn and try to fight, the consciousness manipulation for the audience by the Establishment quartiers. Against the backdrop of a paranoid system of persecution and censorship, the poet becomes a prophet whose oral speech can be seen in long lines and the use of block capital letters and exclamations. This poem acts as the vibrations of thought, through the body and its public speech. Although it was already highly influenced by religious practices, it was actually composed on drugs (Miles 279), thus helping him in the fluidity of his mental stream. As Zweig asserts, this poem is not conceived with the idea of poetic form, but rather privileging its generation as an "experience (or enchantment) of 'too much'" (196-98). This "too much" was not new in Ginsberg's composition: it had also appeared in "Howl" and "Kaddish," although as he claimed in an interview, he removed the anaphoric use of "and" after all. Thus, although it keeps its oral strength, this poem does not share all

rhetorical figures, and gets closer to the mind (*Composed* 46). He also added that "since it is like a train of associations, . . . it is high speed toward the end" (*Composed* 21). Each line was a "one breath, if possible," thus leading to "a heavily labored breathing, like a gasp for breath after each comma" (*Composed* 22-23). The body was then present, and intrinsically rooted to the mind and vice versa.

As I pointed out before (chapter 3), in this poem there is an example of a speech act at the very beginning ("I prophesy: The Pigs won't mind! I prophesy: Death will be old folks home!"), but the whole poem could be considered so. At the very beginning, as in a TV show, he introduces an apocalyptic panorama:

> It is *here,* the long Awaited bleap-blast light that Speaks one red tongue like Politician, but happy its own govt.,
> either we blow ourselves up *now* and die, like the old tribe of man, arguing among neutrons, spit on India, fuck Tibet, stick up America, clobber Moscow, die Baltic, have your tuberculosis in Arabia, wink not in Enkidu's reverie—
> *it's a long Train of Associations* stopped for gas in the desert & looking for drink of old-time H_2O— (*CP* 280) (emphasis added)

Here and now, he points and presents to be seen the "long Awaited bleap-blast light" which is also "a long Train of Associations" looking for water. Then we find the prophet, as Jesus offering the liquid, "I prophesy, we will all prophesy to each other & give thee happy tidings Robert Lowell and Jeanette MacDonald." The repeated detail that he is prophesizing show his aim of creating an event rather than a representation. Furthermore, he takes the format of television or radio, and applies it to his own apocalyptic text with a parodic result:

> *The Family presents*, your Corpse *Hour—attended by* myriad flies—hyperactive *Commentators* freed at their most bestial—sneering literary— perhaps a captive & loan Square
> caught hiding behind a dummy-univac in the obscurest Morgues of Hearst — wherever—no more possible—
> Only remains, a photo of a riverswollen hand in black and white, arm covered by aged burlap to the wrist—
> skin peeling from the empty fingers—; yet discovered by a mad Negro high on tea & solitary enough himself to notice a Fate— (*CP* 280) (emphasis added)

Although introducing a death, the codes are those of television (in italics), creating again the sense of event, of something which is happening here and now, as the reader receives the poem. In this sense, the poem is a clear area of contact between author and reader not only because of the use of deictics and speech acts, but also because of the references to the reading and writing scene: "Who? but us all, a Me, a One, a Dying Being, *The presence, now, this desk*, hand running over the steps of imagination / over *the letter-ladders on machine*, vibrating

humm-herald Extend-hope own *unto Thee*, returning infinite-myriad at the Heart, that is only red blood" (282). These lines appear as an event of writing which the reader completes with his/her reading. The "vibrations of my thought in *this* poem" that he underlines turn real when read, as words may get to the mind but also include the body through breath.

But the linguistic experiment enacted and provoked by this poem involves other aspects of inscription. In the first half of the text, the prophetic voice writes: "same battle raging in *tsraved* cats and *gahgard* dogs for American ghostly bone—man and man, fairy against red, black on white on white, with teeth going to the dentist to escape in gas—" (*CP* 282). This repeated typing error appears in all versions of the poem, and leads us to different ideas on composition: first, it may emphasize the idea of the spontaneity, and so of the honest approach to writing. In the process of writing, there is no barrier or filter, thus this is not corrected in future printings. It also may be a way to exploit the sonority of letters, as pronouncing them has different result than their common form of "starved" and "haggard"; and also, it may be closer (considering then there is a clear origin) to the mind's processes. Language is then subject to lapses and ungrammatical structures which are thought to be more direct. That makes some words shorter (the "govt." of the first line) and both closer to oral and telegram-like language. Thus, he writes "he *must've saw thru* the Star Spangled Banner" and at the same time goes without commas, using the em dash to mark thought jumps, inner interruptions in his monologue, or closed ideas. Along with the em dash we find the semi-colon, some commas here and there, but most of the text is articulated by lineation. Emphasis is expressed through block capital letters, as towards the middle of the poem. The prophet invites us to turn the TV on:

> Turn the Teacher on!—Yes not conspire dollars under navy-town boardwalk, not spy vast Services of gunny Secrecy under drear eyeglass Dulles to ASSASSINATE!
> INVADE! STARVE OUT! SUPPLY INVISIBLE ARMS! GIVE MONEY TO ORGANIZE DEATH FOR CUBAN REVOLUTION! BLOCKADE WHAT FRAIL MACHINERY!
> MAKE EVIL PROPAGANDA OVER THE WORLD! ISOLATE THE FAITHFUL'S SOUL! TAKE ALL RICHES BACK! BE WORLDLY PRINCE AND POWER OVER THE UNBELIEVABLE! MY GOD!
> AMERICA WILL BE REFUSED ETERNITY BY HER OWN MAD SON THE BOMB! MEN WORKING IN ELECTRICITY BE U.S. SADISTS THEIR MAGIC PHANOPOEIAC THRU MASS MEDIA THE NASTIEST IN THIS FIRST HISTORY!
> EVIL SPELLS THRU THE DAILY NEWS! HORRIBLE MASOCHISMS THUNK UP BY THE AMERICAN MEDICAL ASSOCIATION! DEATH TO JUNKIES THRU THE TREASURY DEPARTMENT! TAXES ON YOUR HATE FOR THIS HERE WAR!

LEGIONS OF DECENCY BLACKMAIL THY CINEMAL FATE! CONSPIRACIES CONTROL ALL WHITE MAGICIANS! I CAN'T TELL YOU MY SECRET STORY ON TV! (*CP* 283-84)

The stridence of television is here combined with message of war and imperialism. National and international politics are here denounced because of their cruelty: invading, starving, bombing, but also torturing junkies and those out of the Establishment's control.

Thus, with the cut-ups proper of television's shorter discourse and collage-like practices of zapping, he tackles the mechanisms of power in the US of his times. Just after the previous excerpt, he mentions

> Chambers of Commerce misquote Bob Hope who is a grim sex revolutionist talking in hysterical code flat awful jokes
> Jimmy Durante's kept from screaming to death in the movies by a huge fat Cardinal, the Spell Man, Black Magician he won't let mad white Chaplin talk thru the State Megaphone! He takes evil pix with Swiss financial cunt!
> It's the American Medical Association poisoning the poets with their double-syndicate of heroin cut with money-dust,
> Military psychiatrists make deathly uniforms it's Tanganyikan nerve-skin in the submarinic navy they're prepared for eternal solitude, once they go down they turn to Reptiles
> Human dragons trained to fly the air with bomb-claws clutched to breast & wires entering their brains thru muffled ears—connected to what control tower—jacked to what secret Lab where the macrocosm-machine

Economy, religion's spells, state medicine, the army, described as "[h]uman dragons" controlled in their minds from a tower. The logocracy of "mature capitalists running the State Department and the Daily News Editorial hypnotizing millions of legional-eyed detectives to commit mass murder on the Invisible." He denounces Standard Oil, describing it as "a big fat fairy monopolizing all Being that has form'd it self to Oil" (*CP* 283). Television is then just a structure among others. To the censorship of writers ("vast Customs agencies searching books—who Advises what book where—who invented what's dirty?") he adds the hyper-connection:

> Six thousand movietheaters, 100,000,000 television sets, a billion radios, wires and wireless crisscrossing hemispheres, semaphore lights and morse, all telephones ringing at once connect every mind by its ears to one vast consciousness This Time Apocalypse—everybody waiting for one mind to break thru— (286)

Just as Dos Passos in *U.S.A.* (see quotation on page 98), America seems a big text connecting the minds, thus combining a logocracy and logocentrism that for Ginsberg set people to passivity. The imperialist and capitalist spirit of the US is arranged on the language of institutions and media, and later guaranteed by a materialist religion:

> MURDERED AND DRIVEN FROM THE EARTH BY US JEWISH GOYIM
> who spend fifty billion things a year—things things!—to make the things-machinery that's turned the worlds of human consciousness into a thing of War
> wherever and whoever is plugged in by real filaments or wireless or whatever magic wordy-synapse to the money-center of the mind
> whose Eye is hidden somewhere behind All mass media—what makes reporters fear their secret dreamy news—behind the Presidential mike & all its starry bunting, front for some mad BILLIONAIRES (*CP* 284-85)

Thus, the "money-center of the mind" arranges people's values and focus on things, the mass media, owned by billionaires, reinforce them. The text then combines denounce and a clear explanation of the power links sustaining the system. He is then what he says: a prophet, a messiah that however adds towards the end of the poem an inaugural tone:

> all day I walk in the wilderness over white carpets of City, we are redeeming ourself, I am born,
> the Messiah woke in the Universe, I announce the New Nation, in every mind, take power over the dead creation,
> I am naked in New York, a star breaks thru the blue skull of the sky out the window,
> I seize the tablets of the Law, the spectral Buddha and the spectral Christ turn to a stick of shit in the void, a fearful Idea,
> I take the crown of the Idea and place it on my head, and sit a King beside the reptile Devas of my Karma— (290)

The text excessiveness has origin in the prophet's ability to disentangle the logocracy of a corrupted system then to be replaced by his own "tablets of the Law," the register of his own mind while crossing the idea of the US and thus the consequent path he opens through language.

Another political poem which was composed between 1961 and 1963 and also published in *Planet News* is "Stotras to Kali Destroyer of Illusions," a text that has a clear relationship to that published in the *Indian Journals* and titled "DURGA-KALI — MODERN WEAPONS IN HER HANDS." Both poems connect the Statue of Liberty and the representation of the goddess Kali, destroyer but also creator, preserver, deity of time and change. This double aspect is then found in the statue of liberty and the idea of the US. Thus, once again, Ginsberg takes a popular element of the US and poses its otherness. In the case of the first poem, the tradition of anthems is displaced by the stotras, a type of ode which is composed to be sung rather than to be read aloud, and which combines prayer and description. Actually, it was first titled "H*Y*M*N* T*O* U*S*" in the *Indian Journals*, and was also longer, following the notes he had made of the "original" representation of Kali also included in the same volume (13-16). The final result leaves behind a text which could be seen as prose, and so too far from the stotras form. The long lines here conform, as in

his other poems, a text full of cadence which is emphasized by anaphoric vocatives to the goddess while describing her: republic female, "fortress America Guardian Blueprint," freedom, wife of China, mother. But this female figure is also described carrying (as Kali) the corpse of Edgar Allan Poe, of Roosevelt and George Washington, Thelonious Monk and Gertrude Stein, William Randolph Hearst (owner of an American newspaper) and the political activist Earl Browder; all the faces and objects that accompany the goddess gather here those of the US: Uncle Sam, a telephone in one of her ten hands, the mudra (hand gesture) of Foreign Aid, the skulls of the Rosenbergs, Indian Scalps in her waist, James Dean and the founding texts.[34]

As in the poem "America," the poet here gives two sides, the destroyer and alienating, but also that based on democratic principles:

> twelfth hand in the mudra of Foreign Aid and thirteenth palm closed in sign of Disarmament
> O Freedom with gaping mouth full of Cops whose throat is adorned with skulls of Rosenbergs
> whose breasts spurt Jazz into the robot faces of thy worshippers grant that recitation (*CP* 299)

Later on, the poet adds:

> Ah me why then shall I not prophesy glorious truths for Thee Ah me folks worship many other
> countries beside you they are brainwashed but I of my own uncontrollable lust for you
> lay my hands on your Independence enter your very Constitution my head absorbed in the lips of your
> Bill of Rights O Liberty whose bliss is union with each individual citizen intercourse (*CP* 300)

[34] All these proper names are important for American culture. Edgar Allan Poe is one of the most famous writers worldwide. In the case of Roosevelt, Ginsberg does not indicate whether he is mentioning Theodore Roosevelt (president of the US between 1901-1904), Franklin Delano Roosevelt (also president from 1933 to 1945) or Eleanor Roosevelt (activist, diplomat and writer, the latter's wife). However, because of the topic of the poem, I think that he is referring most probably to Franklin D. Roosevelt, for his so-called "neutral" position during the World War II and the postwar program known as the "New Deal." These were a series of measures intended to mitigate the economic crisis and prevent social upheaval. Ginsberg also mentions George Washington, the first president of the US (1789-1797); Thelonius Monk, a referent of American jazz for his improvisational style. Ginsberg mentions him in *Composed on the Tongue* when he develops his improvised poetics. Gertrude Stein is rarely seen as a model by Ginsberg, but she was an important modernist figure not just because of her writings, but also because of her role as a social link for artists and writers in the first half of the twentieth century. As for William Randolph Hearst, he was the owner of one of the biggest and most powerfull media companies of the US, Hearst Communications. His newspapers were characterized by their sensationalist contents, including the war between Spain and Cuba. After Hearst, Ginsberg mentions Earl Browder, the leader of the Communist Party USA, and the Rosenbergs, Ethel and Julius, accused of spying and killed in the electric chair. James Dean was a famous actor who died at the age of 24 and became an icon. Uncle Sam is a common representation of the personified US (country and government), used to recruit soldiers for World War I and World War II.

It is then the liberty, not the US itself, that saves it: "Democracy O Formless One take me beyond Images & reproductions spouse beyond disunion." Not only does this text identify the destroying character of the US, but it also calls for a change: "O mother with eyes of delightful movies enter at last into amorous play united with all Presidents of the US."

Another image is given in his diaries, where Kali as Statue of liberty combines in her arms the Theory of relativity, a rocket, a Raid Siren, an Electric Chair, "one Mandala of hot air, an invisible globe in the center of which is a microphone on a TV Screen," a policeman, the Empire State Building, the Holy books, but she also wears as her necklace the skull of Hitler, Mussolini, Roosevelt, Chamberlain, Naomi Ginsberg, Virginia Woolf and Poe among others.[35] All in all, these texts serve as perfect explanation of Ginsberg's interests during these three years. They could be seen as an expected development of the Moloch monster of his "Howl" to an open door to the Eastern imagery. The alienating system was still there, now analyzed from the point of view of the media and the censorship and oppression which was a continuation of the Cold War paranoia. These poems are also political in their own conception of writing. First, as a deviation from the common way of thinking through the use of drugs and meditation; and second, as a text which is not to represent, but to register and also create a specific mind state. Oral and mental speech converge here again, projecting the presence of the poet not in the book, as it used to happen in Whitman's poems, but in his voice and mind.

These poems are however followed by much more biographical compositions for which Ginsberg opens a section titled "King of May: America to Europe," gathering poems from 1963 to 1965. The poet centers here on his figure, not completely out of the political world, but far from a much more direct denounce. Between 1963 and 1965, Ginsberg went first to Cuba and then to Prague (then in Czechoslovakia), where he learnt that the same censorship to avant-garde and countercultural art and literature suffered in the US was also part of these two communists countries. He found that homosexuals in Cuba were also persecuted, and later he suffered the same type of censorship in Prague (an incident he narrates in "Kral Majales"). Most of the poems are based on memories and daily actions described in conversational style. That is what happens, for instance, in "Today" (*CP* 353). Using no date, but rather the empty referent of time in "today," he narrates different events happening during that period of time: a phone call, a bus ride and eating "Italian Sausages,

[35] Again, the Roosevelt mentioned is probably Franklin Delano Roosevelt. With Chamberlain, Ginsberg might be referring to Joshua Lawrence Chamberlain, a Union officer awarded the Medal of Honor for his role at the Battle of Gettysburg (during the American Civil War).

Coca-Cola, a chili-burger, Kool-Aid I drank— / All day I did things! I took a nap—didn't I dream about lampshade academies and ouch! I am dying?". In all these details, he finds excitement, and also a kind of illumination: "My fate and I became one today and today became today— / just like a mystic prophecy—I'll conquer my belly tomorrow / or not, I'll toy with Mr. Choice also for real—today I said 'Forever' thrice—". Furthermore, there seems to be an acknowledged sense of written nature, as he addresses the reader once ("a big surprise it was Me—Dear Reader, I seem strange to myself—"). At the end of the poem, he explicitly tackles writing his life out:

> I took a crap once this day—How extraordinary it all goes! recollected, a lifetime!
> Imagine writing autobiography what a wealth of Detail to enlist!
> I see the contents of future magazines—just a peek Today being hurried—
> Today is slowly ending—I will step back into it and disappear. (*CP* 355)

The act of writing and the resulting text (even this poem) can be an overwhelming list which however does also conform a sphere of presence and absence: "Today is slowly ending—I will *step back into it*," he says, going back to it, "and disappear" from the text we are actually reading (and with the day that is getting to an end). He focused then on writing his life, or rather writing the life of Allen Ginsberg, as in "The Moments Return" (*CP* 360). There he describes the sounds and views of Warsaw, which bring to his mind memories from the USA. He appears as a flaneur, a decadent body, and claims that "[t]he poem returns to the moment, my vow to record—my cold fingers—& must sit and wait for my own lone Presence—the first psalm—". While the images he presents of the city are fleeting (the detail of a "an iron trolley rolling insect antennae speaks blue overhead, hat man limping past rusty apartment walls"), he gets to the idea of presence, his "lone Presence" to be recorded.

The self becomes the explicit center in "Who Be Kind To" (*CP* 367), a poem where, as Lin asserts, he leaves behind the bitter attitude of "Television was a Baby Crawling toward that Deathchamber" and adopts a rather understanding and conciliating tone (147-49). He mentions "Your self," playing with the tension which it may create between the spoken and the written approach to the text. The self is "one and perishable," applied to everyone: the "neighbor who weeps / solid tears on the television sofa," "your disappearing mother / and gazing out the terrace window," "the politician weeping in the galleries / of Whitehall, Kremlin, White House / Louvre and Phoenix City." The poet defends: "Be kind to the universe of Self that / trembles and shudders and thrills / in XX Century . . . And be kind to the poor soul that cries in / a crack of the pavement because he has no body—". This peaceful attitude may also explain the lack of rage in "Kral Majales" (*CP* 361) maybe the

most political poem of the section. It is a text about the Communists and Capitalists' limits and his own experiences there, though no capital letters are used, not even an exclamation mark. Rather, the text appears as a religious pray given the use of the repeated phrase "And I am the King of May." The "and" starts the poem as in media res, and it is only interrupted at the end with a "Thus" which closes the poet's apology. While "the Capitalists proffer Napalm and money in green suitcases," the "detectives in green uniform" go for him in Havana, and then in Prague he is chased by "detectives in Czechoslovakian business suits" (as "Cardplayers out of Cézanne"), the youth movement supports him:

> And I am the King of May, which is the power of sexual youth,
> and I am the King of May, which is industry in eloquence and action in amour,
> and I am the King of May, which is long hair of Adam and the Beard of my own
>   body
> and I am the King of May, which is Kral Majales in the Czechoslovakian tongue,
> and I am the King of May, which is old Human poesy, and 100,000 people chose
>   my name,
> and I am the King of May, and in a few minutes I will land at London Airport,
> and I am the King of May, naturally, for I am of Slavic parentage and a Buddhist
>   Jew (*CP* 361-62)

Sex, the cult to the body, and poetry place him in a persecuted position which however does not seem to get back at the authorities. He prefers the calmed exposition of contradictions: communists "have nothing to offer but fat cheeks and eyeglasses and lying policemen," they seem nice and intellectual, but they ignore the heart ("and the Communists create heavy industry but the heart is also heavy"): "And *tho*' I am the King of May, the Marxists have beat me upon the street, kept me up all night in Police Station, followed me thru Springtime Prague, detained me in secret and deported me from our kingdom by airplane. / Thus I have written this poem on a jet seat in mid Heaven." This poem somehow explains his political position as a poet, especially if we take into account that he was accused of being a communist. Expelled from two communist states, he seats writing "mid Heaven," with no place in the capitalist world either. The last poem of this section is "Portland Coliseum" (*CP* 373) an account of the Beatles concert in Oregon in 1965. He was back in the US, and already working on what would be one of his most explicitly political volumes: *The Fall of America*.

2. 6. The Fall of America (1965-1971)

Compared with the previous sections, *The Fall of America (1965-1971)* is much longer. It compiles six years of production which are also subdivided in five parts: "Through the Vortex West Coast to East," "Zigzag Back Thru These States," "Elegies for Neal Cassady," "Ecologues of These States," "Bixby Canyon to Jessore Road," identifying different trips he did during these years, as well as the death of Neal Cassady. Throughout all of them, as we

will see, an ecological streak contrasts with the gray descriptions of the American landscape of factories, roads, and networks of both building and destruction. Most of them belong to *The Fall of America* and *Iron Horse* (1973), although four of them were published in 1968 in *Planet News*. Part of the difficulty here strikes from the lack of a clear origin of poems such as "Carmel Valley," "A Methedrine Vision in Hollywood," or "Chances 'R'"; curiously enough, those poems are not explicitly political, and rather continue an autobiographical line which is explained by the poet's fame at that time. In his projection of the poet as a sort of modern bard in the figure of the rock star, among these writings we find poems such as "First Party at Ken Kesey's with Hell's Angels" (*CP* 382), where he describes a party at the novelist's house, listening to "loudspeakers / hi-fi Rolling Stones Ray Charles Beatles" while "twenty youths / [are] dancing to the vibration thru the floor." In "Chances 'R'" (*CP* 401) the reader finds similar images, "A lie of painted boys snapping fingers / & shaking thin Italian trouserlegs . . . / bumping and dipping ritually." Allen Ginsberg placed himself among the youth movements, as in "Grant Park: August 18, 1968" (*CP* 515) or "Anti–Vietnam War Peace Mobilization" (*CP* 549), while at the same time he kept the confessional strain in compositions like "Growing Old Again" (*CP* 431) or "The Old Village Before I Die" (*CP* 433)

Nonetheless, most of the poems deal with the object of the title: a decadent US whose landscape and logocratic nature are traversed by the poet travelling by train, plane and bus, in terms of space but also of spoken, sung and written (neon) words. As the poet explains, these poems "naturally tie together; they're all done the same way, during the same time period, by the same mind, with the same preoccupations and obsessions, during the same war. So I mean no matter which way they went they'd all go out from the same brain place" (*Composed* 29). We find here a self traversing, but also pierced by, the American reality during a specific period of time, just as Whitman had planned. This self, however, and as seen above, is made up of a body and a consciousness where political change begins. In this sense, they could be seen as a conceptual poetic work. The poet planned to record his experiences so that they could have an enlightening result, writing two phrases each day, then add one to another "and when I'd get three or four that made an apposition I'd start a new paragraph. So it's maybe one paragraph a day for three weeks. Covering from the Canadian border down to San Francisco. That was *written* in pencil" (Ginsberg, *Composed* 31). The written part was accompanied however with the voice: he used a recorder, as I pointed out above, and then transcribed it following the "click" sounds for line patterns.

The result is a series of poems that develop ideas already present in his writings from *Howl*: long lines based on breath and also linked to mind discourse, this time giving a panoramic view of the US. His travels become a chain of words which seems almost unstoppable, and that takes the reader to a net of different discourses coming from the radio, the newspapers and radio programs, from literature and pop songs, and so inevitably rooted to that specific time and place setting, having the Vietnam War and the American national policies as the center of denounce. The trip through the US is a trip through the logocracy of war. The landscapes that he describes combine the bucolic and the industrial, both realistic and idealized. In "Beginning of a Poem of These States," he writes:

> Under the bluffs of Oroville, blue cloud September skies, entering U.S. border, red red apples bend their tree boughs propt with sticks—
> At Omak a fat girl in dungarees leads her big brown horse by asphalt highway.
> Thru lodgepole pine hills Coleville near Moses Mountain—a white horse standing back of a 2 ton truck moving forward between trees.
> At Nespelem, in the yellow sun, a marker for Chief Joseph's grave under rilled brown hills—white cross over highway.
> At Grand Coulee under leaden sky, giant red generators humm thru granite & concrete to materialize onions— (*CP* 377)

In "Hiway Poesy: L.A.–Albuquerque–Texas–Wichita," the landscape is described as follows:

> Two trailer trucks, Sunkist oranges / bright colored
> piled over the sides
> rolling on the road
> Gray hulk of Mt. Baldy under
> white misted skies
> Red Square signs unfold, Texaco Shell
> Harvey House tilted over the superhighway— (*CP* 390)

Here the idyllic US is invaded by the granite and capitalist spaces of production and generation of the nation, leading the poet to a struggle with it. The beauty one may find is corrupted by the meanings they have. That is what happens in "Iron Horse":

> Brilliant green lights
> in factory transom windows.
> Beautiful!
> as eyes close to sleep,
> beautiful as undersea sunshine
> or valleybottom fern.
> Why do I fear these lights?
> & smoking chimneys' Industry?
> Why see them less godly
> than forest treetrunks
> & sunset orange moons?
> Why these cranes less Edenly than Palmfronds?
> these highway neons unequal in beauty

to violet starfish anemone & kelp
in Point Lobos'
tidepools' transparency?

. . .

Because these electric structures rear tin machines
that will kill Bolivian marchers
or flagellate Vietnam adolescents' thighs—
Because my countrymen make this structure to make War
Because this smoke over Toledo's advertised in the Toledo Blade
as energy burning to destroy China. (460-61)

In a somehow anaphoric style which may remind us of Whitman, Ginsberg exposes the conflict of the land he sees. While colors are a source of beauty ("red red apples," the white horse, the "Sunkist oranges" and "undersea sunshine") there is a latent message of war and imperialism which eventually leads to ecological concerns, which are not limited to the section titled "Ecologues." In "Iron Horse," the air turns to dark colors in the following terms:

Sawdust burners
topped by black cloud—
sulphurous yellow
gas rising from red smokestacks
Power stations netted
with aluminum ladders and ceramic balls
rusty scrapheaps' cranes
stub chimneys puffing gray air
Coalbarges' old Holland dusk in a canal,
railroad tracks banded to the city
watertowers' high legs walking the horizon (*CP* 455)

This also continues in "Bayonne Turnpike to Tuscarora," where the beginning is all covered in gray:

Gray water tanks in gray mist,
gray robot
towers carrying wires thru Bayonne's
smog, silver
domes, green chinaworks steaming,
Christmas's leftover lights hanging
from a smokestack—
Monotone gray highway into the gray West—
Noon hour, the planet smoke-covered
Truck wheels roar forward
spinning past the garbagedump
Gas smell wafting thru Rahway overpass
oiltanks in frozen ponds, cranes' feederladders &
Electric generator trestles, Batteries open under heaven
Anger in the heart— (*CP* 476)

In fact, American nature is being destroyed in material terms, “everywhere digesting forests & excreting soft pyramids / of newsprint” (*CP* 468). Similarly, in “Chicago to Salt Lake by Air,” we read:

> Detroit’s lake from a mile above chemical muddy,
> streams of gray waste fogging the surface to the center,
> more than half the lake discolored metallic—
> Cancerous reproductions the house flats rows of bee boxes, DNA Molecular
> Patterns
> microscopic reticulations topt w/Television Antennae
> and the horizon edged with gray gas clouds from East to West unmoved by wind.
> (498)

However, he makes sure he shows the potential of US in terms of nature, especially considering the farms he mentions, particularly in the “Ecologues” section. In *Planet News*, “Wichita Vortex Sutra” let readers find pastoral images as those following:

> A black horse bends its head to the stubble
> beside the silver stream winding thru the woods
> by an antique red barn on the outskirts of Beatrice—
> Quietness, quietness
> over this countryside
> except for unmistakable signals on radio (*CP* 407)

The idyllic then is invaded by the war, something also present in “Ecologue,” a poem where he narrates life in a farm being interrupted by the news about the repressive actions of the government. While he describes the development of different animals, he also records “Leary sleeping in an iron cell, / John Sinclair a year jailed in Marquette / Each day’s paper more violent— / War outright shameless bombs / Indochina to Minneapolis” (*CP* 552). Eclogue and political protest go hand in hand, being the former a sort of alternative for the latter, a way to dismantle the machinery of war created in the American landscape.

Nonetheless, as I pointed out above, this physical travel through the US is also a travel through its language, something which is sometimes explicitly underlined and which will lead to the prophetic role the poet eventually adopts. Language invades the landscape in sight, but also through sounds, determining the writing method of recording and transcription. In “Continuation of a Long Poem of These States,” words come among the different lights the poet encounters at the beginning, getting out of “Downtown Frisco”: “Stage-lit streets” and stars are accompanied by “Bright Johnnie Walker neon / sign Christmastrees” and “3 bright green signals on forehead / Jeweled Bayshore passing the Coast Range” (*CP* 383); similarly, “These States: into L.A.” includes the “Black Sign Los Angeles 140 Miles” and “passing 28th Parallel” that the poet finds on his way. This is then

complemented by the language coming from the media. Mixing in a collage-like way everything he hears, these poems become a door to that specific period of time, and so turn Ginsberg into a kind of chronicler, a compiler of the late sixties' news. His vow is to "haunt these States / . . . eyes staring out plane window" but also "gazing bleakly out train windows, blue airfield / red TV network on evening plains, / decoding radar Provincial editorial paper message, / deciphering Iron Pipe laborers' curses as / clanging hammers they raise steamshovel claws / over Puerto Rican agony lawyers' screams in slums" (468). His work is on code, language, on "screaming ceilings of Soap Opera, / thick dead Lifes, slick Advertisements for Gubernatorial big guns / burping Napalm on palm rice tropic greenery." The images coming from the Vietnam War are accompanied by the discourses of the Establishment to justify every attack. Thus, in "Wichita Vortex Sutra" he gives an explicit account on how language is used by the government and the media:

> Put it this way on the radio
> Put it this way in television language
>   Use the words
>   language, language:
>   "A bad guess"
> Put it this way in headlines
>   Omaha World Herald—Rusk Says Toughness
>   Essential For Peace
> Put it this way
>   Lincoln Nebraska morning Star—
>   Vietnam War Brings Prosperity
> Put it this way
>   Declared McNamara speaking language
>   Asserted Maxwell Taylor
>   General, Consultant to White House
>   Viet Cong losses leveling up three five zero zero per month
>   Front page testimony February '66
>   Here in Nebraska same as Kansas same known in Saigon
>   in Peking, in Moscow, same known
>   by the youths of Liverpool three five zero zero
>   the latest quotation in the human meat market—
>   Father I cannot tell a lie! (*CP* 407)

The repeated phrase "put it this way" and the use of the word "language" underline the logocratic structure of what the people thought and thus reproduced. Language is here seen as a filler of silence, somehow a material reality which builds the world:

>   The war is language,
>   language abused
>   for Advertisement,
>   language used
>   like magic for power on the planet:
> Black Magic language,
>   formulas for reality—

. . .
Flashing pictures Senate Foreign Relations Committee room
Generals faces flashing on and off screen
mouthing language
State Secretary speaking nothing but language
McNamara declining to speak public language
The President talking language,
Senators reinterpreting language
General Taylor *Limited Objectives*
Owls from Pennsylvania
Clark's Face *Open Ended*
Dove's *Apocalypse* (*CP* 409-10)

Language seems to cover the reality through black magic, words do not designate or point, but inaugurate and contrast the images of "Napalm and black clouds emerging in newsprint." As in Denise Levertov's poems, the reality of war on the newspaper images and TV reports is rearticulated through the language of Black magic:

While this American nation argues war:
conflicting language, language
proliferating in airwaves
filling the farmhouse ear, filling
the City Manager's head in his oaken office
the professor's head in his bed at midnight
the pupil's head at the movies
blond haired, his heart throbbing with desire
for the girlish image bodied on the screen (*CP* 410)

The American logocracy seems to be then a kind of veil for the population, the base for a logocentric mentality whose referents are manipulated by the establishment. Thus, as he writes in "Iron Horse," "The whole populace fed by News / few dissenting on this train, I the lone beard who don't like / Vietnam War—" (*CP* 450), and "Cut Sound out of television you won't tell who's Victim / Cut Language off the Visual you'll never know / Who's Aggressor" (*CP* 462). As in Orwell's *1984*, the poet identifies "Newspaper Language" taught at "Grammarschool."

Spoken language dominates his trips through the radio. The perception of road signs goes hand in hand with those of the airwaves, gathering, furthermore, spoken news, advertisement and songs. As in a form of collage with "already mades," he juxtaposes all these sources. "Hiway Poesy: L.A.–Albuquerque–Texas–Wichita" mixes them all the way through:

Heading East to San Berdoo
as West did, Nathanael,
California Radio Lady's voice
Talking about Viet Cong—

Oh what a beautiful morning
Sung for us by Nelson Eddy

. . .

". . . several battalions of U.S. troops in a search and destroy operation in the Coastal plain near Bong Son, 300 mi. Northeast of Saigon. Thus far the fighting has been a series of small clashes. In a related action 25 miles to the South, Korean troops killed 35 Viet Cong near Coastal highway Number One."

"For he's oh so Good
and he's oh so fine
and he's oh so healthy
in his body and his mind"
The Kinks on car radio

In Riverside,
a 1920s song—
"It's the only words I know / that you'll
understand" (*CP* 390).

Nelson Eddy, the Kinks, the Beatles, but also war news interrupt and conform the poet's travel. The radio however, adds a sense of artificiality, as in "Bayonne Turnpike to Tuscarora," where similarly to "Hiway Poesy," the poet transcribes

artificial rock & roll, Beach Boys
& Sinatra's daughter overdubbed microphone
antennae'd car dashboard vibrating
False emotions broadcast thru the Land
Natural voices made synthetic,
phlegm obliterated
Smart ones work with electronics—
What are the popular songs on the Hiway?
"Home I'm Comin Home I am a Soldier—" (*CP* 476)

"These States: into L.A." is also full of speech: "said Mansfield" (a Democrat senator), "chorus whine Requiem," "says Pope His / Christmas Message," "Few minutes of live speech, little joy or thanksgiving," "the Preacher hollered in tongues," "Lodge spoke from Saigon," "He's broadcasting serious-voice,"

Cut-Up Sounds that fill Aether,
voices back of the brain—
The voice of Lodge, all well, Moral—
voice of a poor poverty worker, (*CP* 387)

It is this invasive discourse coming from the different media that sets the general state of consciousness in the population, as a form of mantra, or "black magic" which only perpetuates war and alienating policies. The poet then tries to uncover the mechanism,

"dismantle" the spell, and so inaugurate a different reality. His strategy however is not homogeneous. As we have seen, he points out the superficiality in the use of language by the media and the government, especially in relation to the Vietnam War. Nonetheless, the fact that it is written (actually *recorded* from voices coming from the poet and the radio) may lead the reader to question its inaugural nature. Can it be an inaugural fact if it is recorded, or rather transcribed? It seems necessary here to tackle the idea of transcription: getting the voice to the paper, decoding and re-coding the sounds and letters.

Ginsberg's approach to writing during the 60s and 70s keeps the principle of spontaneity that was already present in the 1950s poems. This is no doubt linked to his theories on lineation, stream of consciousness and breathing. The influence of the Charles Olson's projective verse, but specially Kerouac's "first thought, best thought" motto, appears here to show not only what the poet is in his mind and body, but also the political implications of that relationship between the inside and the outside. Actually, it may lead to analyze the lack of a clear limit there. He shows that traversing the US is traversing its texts, and that the individual is not an impermeable entity: speech gets inside, flows with his/her own thoughts, modifies and combines with them. That is why spontaneity is a key element in Ginsberg's lines. Each breath and thought unit appear in these poems as a transcription of its mental (and voiced) form. Indentations show a subsequent relationship, while the length has its origin in the breathing patterns of the poet. Taking all this into account, the concept of mantra (apart from Hindu instances that we find directly transcribed in many of the poems) comes into play. The logocentric (and logocratic) character of the American citizen may be turned to a more peaceful approach, an alternative form of political activism. That is why he wants to "make mantra of American language." The same language that proliferates on TV and radio must be consciously reformulated, and this is done as a historical intervention.

As we saw in chapter 3, this turns the poem into an event rather than a representation, especially if we take into account the multiple readings (and so versions) of these poems in public encounters. From the years of "Howl," Ginsberg wrote with his voice, and the paper became a non-ideal place, not closed or stable; rather, the opposite. Writing was language articulated more in sounds than in visual elements, though without doubt related. At the same time, they are inextricably linked to its context: the use of proper names, of brands and politicians, as it had happened before, turn these texts into performative speech acts. "Wichita Vortex Sutra" may be the most outstanding in the group of poems written while

travelling, as it is saturated with utterances of inauguration. There are vocatives ("O Man of America, be born!"), but also full canonical (Austinian) speech acts to counteract the black magic (language) of the Establishment:

> *I claim* my birthright!
> reborn forever as long as Man
> in Kansas or other universe—Joy
> reborn after the vast sadness of War Gods!
> . . .
> *I call* all Powers of imagination
> to my side in this auto to make Prophecy,
> all Lords
> of human kingdoms to come
> . . .
> ancient Seraphim of heavenly Desire, Devas, yogis
> & holymen *I chant to*—
> Come to my lone presence
> into this Vortex named Kansas,
> *I lift my voice aloud,*
> make Mantra of American language now,
> *I here declare* the end of the War!
> Ancient days' Illusion!—
> and *pronounce* words beginning my own millennium.
> (*CP* 414-15)(emphasis added)

This sense of performative speech acts is kept in compositions such as "Pentagon Exorcism" and "War Profit Litany." The former is a short composition aimed at the international policies of the government, recalling the 1750s-60s slogan of colonists: with no representation in the British Parliament, they would not pay the taxes. Ginsberg goes back to that motto ("No taxation without representation") and places it in his own times, discovering (as in an exorcism) the "'Brainwash!' Mind-fear! Governor's language!". Alienation comes in form of empty political practices where body and mind are not taken into account. Thus the first three lines: "Who represents my body in Pentagon? Who spends / my spirit's billions for war manufacture? Who / levies the majority to exult unwilling in Bomb / Roar?". As in an exorcism, language becomes the center, so he unveils the "Corporate *voices* jabber on electric networks building" but also fights back with his own vocatives:

> Go spend your bright billions for this suffering!
> Pentagon wake from planet-sleep! Apokatastasis!
> Spirit Spirit Dance Dance Spirit Spirit Dance!
> Transform Pentagon skeleton to maiden-temple O Phantom
> Guevara! Om Raksa Raksa Hum Hum Hum Phat Svaha!
> Anger Control your Self feared Chaos, suffocation
> body-death in Capitols caved with stone radar sentinels!
> Back! Back! Back! Central Mind-machine Pentagon reverse
> consciousness! Hallucination manifest! . . . (*CP* 491).

Here Ginsberg takes another path. From virtually crossing the US, he tackles a specific institution, trying to turn it to an alternative consciousness through mantra drawn from politics ("Phantom / Guevara!"), religion ("Om Raksa Raksa Hum") and plain English ("Back! Back! Back!"). He also uses the mantric effects of repetition in the latter poem, "War Profit Litany" (*CP* 494), going back to the anaphoric use of "and" followed by "here," thus intensifying the performative effect.

> These are the names of the companies that have made money from this war
> nineteenhundredsixtyeight Annodomini fourthousandeighty Hebraic
> These are the Corporations who have profited by merchandising skinburning
> phosphorous or shells fragmented to thousands of fleshpiercing needles
> and here listed money millions gained by each combine for manufacture
> and here are gains numbered, index'd swelling a decade, set in order,
> here named the Fathers in office in these industries, telephones directing finance,
> . . .
> and here are the names of their ambassadors to the Capital, representatives to
> legislature, those who sit drinking in hotel lobbies to persuade, (*CP* 494)

Repeating "here" brings the poem to almost any other context. In fact, in contrast to the previous compositions, this one has no proper names, and rather a reference to them so that they can apply whenever it is read, just with the exception of the year ("nineteenhundredsixtyeight Annodominy"). Thus, "the names of the companies," the "listed money millions," the "directors, makers of fates, and the names of the stockholders of these destined Aggregates" have no other detail, and as a result, the poet points out the net of power between government, billionaires, media owners.

The sonority of texts did not lose its importance then, and actually was brought farther in compositions such as "Hum Bom!" (*CP* 576) and "September on Jessore Road" (*CP* 579). "Hum Bom!" supposed a turn (back) to the bop prosody that was already in use in "Pull My Daisy" (1949). However, the aim was here to shed light over the lack of a mindful position in the politics of the Vietnam War. Questions such as "Whom Bomb'" "What do we do?" "Why bomb?" and "Who said bomb?" are followed by equally simple answers: "We bomb them!", "You bomb you!", "You bomb! Bomb them!" and "We don't want to bomb" as in a sort of childish discourse, where repetition helps the pupils learn by heart and then questioning "Why bomb?" and suddenly realize "We don't want to bomb." This was, in Ginsberg's words, the beginning of his musical compositions along with Blake, the final jump from his beat reading to mantra chanting, something which can be clearly seen in his "September on Jessore Road," a poem where Ginsberg goes back to rhyming and predictable discourse.

Millions of babies watching the skies
Bellies swollen, with big round eyes
On Jessore Road—long bamboo huts
Noplace to shit but sand channel ruts (*CP* 579)

Furthermore, the use of images of babies and children (daughters, girls, "[m]illions of families hopeless alone") bring remembrances of Blake's *Songs of Innocence and Experience*, this time brought to the refugees camps between Bangladesh and Calcutta, where East Pakistan people were starving in floods in the early 1970s. Against a backdrop of suffering and death, the poet keeps his regular metrics and asks

Where are the helicopters of U.S. AID?
Smuggling dope in Bangkok's green shade.
Where is America's Air Force of Light?
Bombing North Laos all day and all night?

Where are the President's Armies of Gold?
Billionaire Navies merciful Bold?
Bringing us medicine food and relief?
Napalming North Vietnam and causing more grief? (*CP* 581)

Again, we are in front of a text which is rooted to its context, a poem which might be seen as a historical object, or rather another historical *event* somehow weakening the "black magic" of the Establishment's statements. Ginsberg identifies the logocentric and logocratic nature of his country, he acknowledges its mechanisms and then tries to get into them in order to undermine them, thus presenting rather than representing, acting rather than reflecting. Although he might be seen as a mere (passive) chronicler, Ginsberg's poet is another active element within the logocratic machinery of war. Body and mind, voice and its transcription help him not only develop his idea of the American self, but to uncover the relationship between the US and the individual living there. Poetry, as an event articulated in body, breathing and thinking, becomes then the alternative for a peaceful and effective political activism, a conviction he would have for the rest of his life.

2. 7. Mind Breaths all Over the Place (1972-1977)

Mind Breaths, published in 1978, can be seen as a break from political writing in Ginsberg's career, although the purpose of meditation and observance of the logocentric workings of the mind was for him a political aspect. However, explicit politics is not totally absent, as we will see, and it includes his continued struggle with the idea of the poet he wanted to conform. The attitude can be seen in the two subdivisions he left: "Sad Dust Glories" and "Ego Confession" (from titles of two poems). The first one points at the sadness, the sense of death in dust, but also past fame (glories). In the second title, the confessional aspect in

relation with the term "ego" lets us see his Buddhist approach to the self. Thus, the sadness of getting old and losing the early fame, the prospective death and what can be left after it, mark the texts that we find here. This book appeared then as a sort of public diary of a poet getting to his fifties, contemplating the possibility of tradition and how his work could affect it, as well as his own position in the history of American poetry.

"What would you do if you lost it?" (*CP* 600) is a goodbye poem to the different people and things in his life, a preparation for death. A scarf, a "tattered copy of Blake, with chord notations, black books from City Lights, / Australian Aborigine song sticks, green temple incense, Tibetan precious-metal finger cymbals—". To the objects which leave traces in his life, he adds places ("Goodbye farmhouse, city apartment, garbage subways Empire State, Museum of Modern Art where I wandered thru puberty dazzled by Van Gogh's raw-brained star-systems pasted on blue thick skyey Suchness—") and people (Naomi, Louis, "my brothers who write poetry & play fiddle, my nephews who blow tuba & stroke bass viol, whistle flute or smile & sing in blue rhythm"). The poem actually turns to anaphoric repetition of "Goodbye" which finally leads to the mantra ("Om ah Hum A La La Ho Sophia, Soham Tara Ma, Om Phat Svaha Padmasambhava Marpa Mila sGam.po.pa Karmapa Trungpaye! Namastaki Brahma, Ave atque vale Eros, Jupiter, Zeus, Apollo, Surya, Indra . . . Harekrishna faretheewell forevermore!"). The last line closes the poem with a total acceptance of death and nothingness: "None left standing! No years left for eyes, no eyes for weeping, no mouth for singing, no song for the hearer, no more words for any mind" (*CP* 600-2). Disappearance of words (from mind) goes along the disappearance of the body functions, somehow related to the bodily union of soul and matter in the mantra. The poem closes his life just at the end, without keeping a sense of openness in the exclamations. However, the following poem ("Who" *CP* 603) contrasts in its directness and length. While the first one includes in a Whitmanian list all aspects he has to say goodbye to, the second poem is the poet's summary of his career:

> From Great Consciousness vision Harlem 1948 buildings standing in Eternity
> I realized entire Universe was manifestation of One Mind—
> My teacher was William Blake—my life work Poesy,
> Transmitting that spontaneous awareness to Mankind. (*CP* 603).

He seems close to Whitman's clusters about his own career and writings, such as *Songs of Parting*, or the annexes he wrote at the end of his life. Poetry is then his fate, but it is a poetry of a unified consciousness which requires a humanist compromise. That is what we

also find in "Ego Confession," where he approaches directly his fame and develops his different achievements:

> I want to be known as the most brilliant man in America
> Introduced to Gyalwa Karmapa heir of the Whispered Transmission Crazy Wisdom Practice Lineage
> as the secret young wise man who visited him and winked anonymously decade ago in Gangtok
> Prepared the way for Dharma in America without mentioning Dharma—scribbled laughter
> Who saw Blake and abandoned God
> To whom the Messianic Fink sent messages darkest hour sleeping on steel sheets "somewhere in the Federal Prison system" Weathermen got no Moscow Gold
> who went backstage to Cecil Taylor serious chat chord structure & Time in a nightclub (*CP* 631)

The poet seems to be good at sex, cooking and even political activism ("who called the Justice department & threatn'd to Blow the Whistle / Stopt Wars, turned back petrochemical Industries' Captains to grieve & groan in bed"). Doing "all for the sake of Poesy," the poet is here presented as filling a social role which is almost humorous, getting, as Hayden Carruth points out, to the point of mockery (321). "Mugging," on the other hand, presents an old poet, already wearing a "neat orlon shirt" who is attacked and confesses the uselessness of his own philosophy and religious principles:

> as I went down shouting Om Ah Hum to gangs of lovers on the stoop watching
> slowly appreciating, why this is a raid, these strangers mean strange business
> with what—my pockets, bald head, broken-healed-bone leg, my softshoes, my heart—
> . . .
> Have they knives? Om Ah Hum—Have they sharp metal wood to shove in eye ear ass? Om Ah Hum
> & slowly reclined on the pavement, struggling to keep my woolen bag of poetry address calendar & Leary-lawyer notes hung from my shoulder (*CP* 633-34)

He insists on using the mantra while at the same evidencing in conversational tone the lack of effect. The most commented poem of this collection, nevertheless, makes use of a different format. "Contest of Bards" is a narrative poem where a young poet meets an older poet and shows him the possible explorations of poetry yet to discover. It could be considered as autobiographical, as it was written after doing a retreat with a young 18-year-old poet. As Morgan explains, this young poet wanted to make him reconsider Poe as a poet as good as Blake, but it was also then that he got to understand Blake's texts (521-22). In a conversation, the young poet identifies the graven nature of some types of writing, what he calls a "mattress of Rock sheeted with Vocables." The young poet —that is, the poetry

needed— comes naked, as a hippy in an encounter with a hermit, and including a sexual intercourse, the text serves explaining Ginsberg's convictions:

> You stare at the ceiling half asleep, or sit on your pillow with heavy eyelid
> murmuring old bards Truths to your brain, repetitive
> imagining me, or some other red-buttocked stripling savior come
> to yr stone bed naked to renew your old body's intelligence
> and help you read again when blind now what you already memorized
> and forgot, peering like a boor illiterate in Shadows 30 years—
> Yes I have come but not for your feeble purpose, come of my own dreamed will
> To show you what you forgot dreamt, Immortal Text neglected
> . . .
> Your watery selfish infatuate eyes from my breast to my feet
> & read me aloud in Bardic Voice, that Voice of Rock you boast so well so many
> decades (*CP* 674-75)

Repetition of old forms ("already memorized / and forgot") which make him a "boor illiterate" are the stagnation of poetry, which can be revived: "Youths maddened by Afric jukeboxes."

Thus, although the title of the compilation may shed a light over the topic of meditation (without doubt, a clear influence on lineation of this and his future writings), it was rather Ginsberg's public appearance after *The Fall of America*, now as an older poet considering death, but also a projected "sage," the prophet of the tribe, this time more aware of what was happening in his life and how to serve the individual, not the citizen. The link between breathing and poetry kept being a radically important element in his poetics, but it also turned to music. As we saw in the previous section, he started to work on melodies already when writing *The Fall of America*, but it was with this publication and *Plutonian Ode* (1981) that music became a common feature in his books. That is why we find here a certain return to regular lineation and stanzaic forms ("Gospel Noble Truths," "Rolling Thunder Stones," and "For Creeley's Ear"), along with his other principles of breath- and thought-based writing. The poems also kept tackling the logocracy of the US, but now without the road which was the backbone of *The Fall of America*; and again, the narrative of this swim among words is mostly done in present tenses, although there are some exceptions. In "Junk Mail," for instance, he introduces his list of what is usually called "junk mail" (thus the use of quotation marks in the title):

> I received in mail   offer beautiful certificate National Conference Synagogue
> Youth
> invites subscriber   Monthly Review   Independent Socialist Mag
> Congressman Koch reports on collapse of our cities (*CP* 665)

As it continues, what the reader finds in the poem is a series of already-made phrases that record what the poet is subscribed to in social and political terms. Also, as the radio news and headlines he transcribed in *The Fall*, each of them is a mark of what the US (and the world) is going through. "Rehabilitation Vietnam Laos Northern Great plains Indians block land-destruction by energy seeking industries Contact between Israeli Jews & Arabs," also "Gay Peoples Union NYU faces bankruptcy   Dance Halloween," and "Racial motives lead to Innocent Marine's conviction in Georgia murder trial a thick envelope from Southern Poverty Law Center Julian Bond" (*CP* 665-66). From inner to outer politics, each of these phrases address the reader as it addresses the poet, thus involving him/her in the same discourse found by the Ginsberg protagonist in the poem, who signs "Opened Midnight, New York, September 4, 1976." The poem turns then into a historical object as well. Something similar happens in "News Bulletin" (*CP* 613), a compilation of the poet's reaction to the news he hears and reads. The first two stanzas keep a regular structure where the first two lines of news are followed by two lines of the I's reaction:

> "Criminal possession of a controlled substance—
>   Marijuana" came over the radio
> I got mad & sent Gov. Rockefeller a
>   crystal skull postcard
>
> Abbie Hoffman just got busted
>   million pounds of Cocaine
> I wrote the wrong essay & combed burrs
>   out of a Godly dog's hide (*CP* 613)

However, this changes as the poem continues. The response of the "I" appears then in the second line ("A lady asked text on Jewish Holocaust / I filed her letter and made sugar borscht") and then in the first line of the following stanza ("Tim Leary silent Folsom Jail'd I jacked / off with a plastic cock in my ass"), somehow increasing the speed of the discourse, which has a climax in the third stanza, with a telegraphic language which turns him to the "Universe wheels":

> Catastrophe everywhere today propane
>   shortage prophesied I answered my mail
> I stuck my head out the edge of
>   Universe wheels in starry wheels
> While Supreme Court struck down porn-
>   ography for the umpteenth time (*CP* 613)

The first two lines appear as an anxiety source, which continues in the following stanza:

> It'll begin all over dope raids
>   sex flick police assassinations

mass Television in Vietnam
Mugging on streets your favorite
policeman peddling junk (*CP* 613)

Against this, the protagonists responds with daily action: "I exercised my painful ankle smoked / a joint I came I wrote letters / scratched my head," "I made toast I fried mushrooms I ate raw corn . . . I resigned I sat and stared at / a flat gray cloud over the roof—". The reader almost finds the news bulletin of the poet's life, to such an extent the end points at the trial because of the translation of *Anarchist's Cookbook* and his own cooking action ("I held the cloth / thru which Peter poured boiling beet juice into an Aluminum pot" (*CP* 614).

In a different way, "These States: to Miami Presidential Convention" follows the format of *The Fall of America*, mixing up the stream of consciousness with mantric formulas to try to exorcise the US politics:

Soaring over Atlantic's lit-up electric
houses to the politics Warre
Ah! Shall be my mantra—America's gasp of Awe—
Ah as Fireworks ascend & light glitters
faery shimmering in treetop darkness
sky over Eastside Park July 4th—Ah
As the enlightened Aborigine sighs his
soul-journey with birds to New Guinea
Ah! the madman screamed
to himself in the silence of the Ward
Ah as car owner collapsed into
his ruined heap of metal on his own
Front Yard
Ah! the divorcee steps off her plane onto Mexico City Airport—
Ah! as I ride spitting petrol into the exquisite
Midnight Atmosphere
above cloud cities
toward another gateway of Police Boys (*CP* 590-91)

The formula continues all throughout the poem: "Ah! for miseries we caused, youthful screaming," "Ah! that we know ourselves better, / Ah! that America rise from / the dead matter / & transcend this body heavy asphalt usury." But in each of the utterances, he identifies the possibilities for a better future as well: "Ah! Great Self we come to know / Ah to All souls, Republican empty as / Democrat—Identity we Citizens / share this late century." The final breaths or mental unit actually call for it:

Ah! Normal voiced & Future President
Whoever Ye Are True Ah to Thee
Ah! to the Republic how it fare, Ah
sad flag, color transmuted

into all Three Worlds
    This prayer to All Souls in America
Citizens of Body Mind & Speech
                    Ah! Ah! Ah! (*CP* 594)

The oral aspect kept being a key factor for the conception, as in "Jaweh and Allah Battle" (*CP* 622), where images which cover both the Judeo-Christian and the Muslim God and images of contemporary history are presented as in a constant appeal to the public, in questions as well as in exclamations. In fact, this poem is written using even capital letters, most probably because of the public effect they might have. After developing the question "Jaweh Allah which unreal?", the poet answers

HITLER AND STALIN SENT ME HERE!
    WEIZMANN & BEN-GURION SENT ME HERE!
        NASSER AND SADAT SENT ME HERE!
ARAFAT SENT ME HERE! MESSIAH SENT ME HERE!
                    GOD SENT ME HERE!
    Buchenwald sent me here! Vietnam sent me here!

He becomes a kind of prophet which condemns all sides of the conflict because of their false justifications: "The Americans & Russians are sending bombing planes tanks . . . The capitalist Communist & Third World Peoples' / Republics Dictatorships Police States Socialisms & Democracies / are all sending Deadly Weapons to our aid!". Despite all conflicts, he identifies that "under Allah Christ Yaweh forever one God" and so cries in Hebrew, Sanskrit and Arabic: "SHALOM! SHANTIH! SHALAM!". While here the repetition is at the end of the line, in "Yes and It's Hopeless" (*CP* 604) Ginsberg turns to a Whitmanian anaphora, adding endless lists and going back to longer lines. His private life is combined with news of that time:

hundred million cars running out of gasoline
million coalstoves burning shale carbonmist over cities
Hopeless I'll never get laid again, O what a beautiful body that boy from Jersey
    City last night
Hopeless, locked in plaster-of-Paris leg cast, bones, skull heart, intestines, liver,
    eyes and tongue
All hopeless, the entire solar system running Thermodynamics' Second Law
down the whole galaxy, all universes brain illusion or solid electric hopeless
    emptiness
evacuating itself through quasar pressure Furnaces,
hopeless the 300,000 junkies in N.Y.
hopeless President waging war, "fighting for peace" sending State Secretary to
    Israel, the moon, China, Acapulco,
hopeless the Dutch boy standing with his finger in the dike, (*CP* 604)

Repetition is also used in the middle of the poem, where he focuses on "the energy crisis"

> . . . the protein crisis 1990, the Folklore Crisis, the Aboriginal Crisis, the Honkie Crisis, the old Nazi Crisis, the Arab Crisis, the Chrysophrase Crisis, Tungsten, the crisis in Panama, Brazil, Uruguay, Argentina, Chile, Peru, Bolivia, Venezuela, Santa Domingo, Haiti, Cuba, Florida, Alabama, Texas, New Jersey, New York, East 10th Street, the Crisis in San Juan Capistrano, the Oil-spill in Bolinas Bay, Santa Barbara's tar tide, the crisis of the Loch Ness Monster & the Dublin Bomb Crisis, (*CP* 604)

War, hunger, repression are listed here and then closed with the poet's name: "Oldsmobile sans batteries, dead corpse of Myron the neighbor Farmer the live corpse of Ginsberg the prophet / Hopeless" (*CP* 605). Anaphoric repetition is also the main feature of "Hadda Be Playing on the Jukebox" (*CP* 643), a poem which uses the image of the vocalist and composer Hadda Brooks to tackle the progression towards cruelty in American politics and media. The use of "Hadda be…" emphasizes the ignorance and simplicity of mind which actually feed the listed actions, from comedy TV programs to howls of pain coming from the CIA, the American mafia, the corrupted government:

> Hadda be flashing like the Daily Double
> Hadda be playing on Tee Vee
> Hadda be loudmouthed on the comedy Hour
> . . .
> Hadda be Central Intelligence The Family "Our Thing" the Agency Mafia Organized Crime FBI Dope Cops & Multinational Corporations
> one big set of Criminal gangs working together in Cahoots
> Hit Men murderers everywhere outraged, on the make
> Secret drunk Brutal Dirty Rich
> . . .
> Hadda be rich, hadda be powerful, hadda hire technology from Harvard
> Hadda murder in Indonesia 500,000
> Hadda murder in Indochina 2,000,000
> Hadda murder in Czechoslovakia
> Hadda murder in Chile
> Hadda murder in Russia
> Hadda murder in America (*CP* 644-45)

As a type of mantra, this text sheds light upon the corruption accepted as normal, and even as innocent, in the US, ignoring the fact that it can murder within and out of the country.

All in all, this compilation stands out between *The Fall of America* and *Plutonian Ode* perhaps because of the variety of topics it deals with, but also because of the different ways in which it is political. Logocracy appears in "ready-mades," but mantra (that is, "mind breaths") is put into action through American and Eastern formulas, accepting the "om mani padme hum," but also a simple "ah" closer to his native language. The anaphora that gave rhythm to his writings from a very early stage in his career here turns to the factual change, a kind of mantric performative speech act applied to his context. Many other poems (left out of my analysis) also show that Ginsberg was keeping a certain control over the image that he

was projecting. The prophet is getting old and acquiring a different role within the tribe, something which was emphasized if we take into account his public appearances. Thus, the poet he had wanted to incarnate when young was being achieved: a social actor with enough intelligence to open a new path of political activism. Let us then see how he continued this task in *Plutonian Ode*.

2. 8. Plutonian Ode (1977-1980)

Published in 1981, *Plutonian Ode* got out when people were already able to read Ginsberg's *Journals* from the early fifties and early sixties, but also *Composed on the Tongue*, a series of lessons transcribed and then edited where he explained the whole of his poetics. The late 1970s were just a prolongation of Ginsberg's fame, getting to the academic world but also to television. He participated in different mobilizations against the Nuclear War industry, he read his famous poem "Plutonian Ode" in the trial, and continued his own questioning on his methods (as Morgan says, he wondered "whether it was appropriate to use meditation for the purpose of a protest demonstration and speculated that it was probably a misuse of something originally intended to be independent of aggression") (531). As it had happened in *The Fall*, he tended to write these poems in specific sites and dates, thus with a specific use which was recorded. Those poems where events historically tied, so he kept the spirit of a chronicler in his writings. As a result, as Hoffman points out, he had to change names, locations and details such as statistics every time he read these texts in other situations, making use of the spontaneity he was so keen on (*American Poetry* 143).

There was no sense of closure then, and the publication went hand in hand with performances everywhere he went, including TV programs where he was interviewed and then wanted to read poems, usually accompanied with a band. In all these interventions, he made sure he explained the meditative approach underlying his compositions. In general, and as in previous compilations, *Plutonian Ode* had long and short poems, but it also stood out because it kept including the music he added to some of his poems while working on those by Blake. In this period of time, he worked with bands as The Clash, and brought his figure to punk stages, defending the real connection between poetry and what happened in rock 'n' roll music. Already in his fifties, Ginsberg became what he had always wanted to be, a mixture between a rock star and a prophet, something we find in this collection.

He kept the autobiographical streak as well, and wrote poems which tackled his feelings both on his death and the fame he had. "These were the musings of Buddhist student Allen Ginsberg," he says in the first poem of the collection ("What's Dead?" *CP* 697), turning

the text into a sort of legacy report with his own signature. "Celebrities & Nonentities set apart, absent from their paths shadows left behind, breathing no more—". There was no obsession yet, although the topic was as common as when he was younger. "Grim Skeleton" (*CP* 698) is a good example of the importance of breath in his contemplation of his death. It starts as a call to death: "Grim skeleton come back & put me out of Action / looking thru the rainy window at the Church wall." His years seem to be piled as sound:

> —woken dizzy from nicotine sleep—papers piled on my desk
> myself lost in manila files of yellow faded newspaper Clippings
> at last after twenty five years tapes wound thru my brain
> Library of my own deeds of music tongue & oratoric yell— (*CP* 698)

He wonders about his own legacy and what it may turn into:

> Now homunculus I made's out there in American streets
> talking with my voice, accounted ledgered opinionated
> Interviewed & Codified in Poems, books & manuscripts, whole library
> shelves stacked with ambitious egogood's thousand pages imaged
> forth smart selft over half a lifetime! . . . (*CP* 698)

However, part of the anxiety found in this poem comes precisely from the self being traversed by words, "tapes wound thru my brain," but also:

> I slumber cook my meat & write these verses captive of N.Y.C.
> What's my sickness, flu virus or Selfhood *infected* swollen sore
> Confronting the loath'd work of poetic flattery: Gurus, Rock stars
> Penthoused millionaires, White House alrightniks *crowding my brain*
> with *orders* & *formulae*, *insults* & *smalltalk*, threats & dollars
> Whose sucker am I, the media run by rich whitemen like myself, jew
> (*CP* 698-99) (emphasis added)

As he says, "I'm afraid / to write my thoughts down lest I libel Nelson Rockefeller, Fidel / Castro . . . faded ghosts of Power and Poesy / that people my brain with paranoia, my best friend shall be Nameless." His writing becomes so self-aware that the end of the poem closes with an auto-reference:

> Whose *public speech* is this I *write*? What stupid vast Complaint!
> For what impotent professor's *ears*, which Newsman's brainwave? What jazz
> king's devil blues?
> Is this Immortal history to *tell tales* of 20th Century to striplings
> naked *centuries hence*? To get laid by some brutal queen who'll
> beat my hairy buttocks punishment in a College Dorm? To show my ass
> to god? To grovel in magic tinsel & glitter on stinking powdered pillows?
> Agh! Who'll I read this to like a fool! Who'll applaud these lies (*CP* 699)
> (emphasis added)

He is writing the public speech for an unknown person, maybe destined for "striplings / naked centuries hence," thus getting a projected encounter as those we found in Whitman.

Future people will hear rather than read something which is however written. Fear of death does not come so much from disappearance as from the poet's voice without his body. The typewriter becomes, as he says, "a green skull by the window," a "hummunculus" talks with his voice spreading from selves and TV, turning the texts into "lies," "tales of 20th Century."

This bitter tone is kept in many of the poems which deal with his fame. "Ode to Failure" (*CP* 745) is an admission of his own failing although he places himself along with Whitman, Mayakovsky, Monet and Beethoven. "O Failure, I chant your terrifying name, accept me your 54 year old Prophet / epicking Eternal Flop! I join your Pantheon of mortal bards, & hasten this ode with high blood pressure." In fact, he addresses specific issues of his career:

> My tirades destroyed no Intellectual Unions of KGB & CIA in turtlenecks & underpants, their woolen suits & tweeds
> I never dissolved Plutonium or dismantled the nuclear Bomb before my skull lost hair
> I have not yet stopped the Armies of entire Mankind in their march toward World War III
> I never got to Heaven, Nirvana, X, Whatchamacallit, I never left Earth,
> I never learned to die. (*CP* 745)

While in "Grim Skeleton" he acknowledged the he had achieved the adolescence dream of appearing on television, the poet in this poem has almost nothing to celebrate. His features as a rock star, as a political activist, and as a spiritual guide are not fulfilled, so the sad tone is emphasized by the repeated "I never . . .", each shorter than the previous one to get rhythm.

He continues this topic in "After Whitman & Reznikoff" (*CP* 740). Comparing himself to these two American authors (both socially compromised), Ginsberg sets two parts: "What Relief" and "Lower East Side." In "What Relief" he tackles the impossibility of writing, and so getting free from the pressures of his duties:

> If my pen hand were snapped by a Broadway truck
> —What relief from writing letters to the *Nation*
> disputing tyrants, war gossip, FBI—
> My poems'll gather dust in Kansas libraries,
> adolescent farmboys opening book covers with ruddy hands. (*CP* 740)

Both his political writings and his poems would be much less famous, reduced to the margins (the "farmboy"). The second part, however, appears as an anecdote (in present tenses) where his fame is put into question:

> That round faced woman, she owns the street with her three big dogs,

> screeches at me, waddling with her shopping bag across Avenue B
> Grabbing my crotch, "Why don't you talk to me?"
> baring her teeth in a smile, voice loud like a taxi horn,
> "Big Jerk . . . you think you're famous?"—reminds me of my mother. (*CP* 740).

There is no image of a prophet here, but of a writer whose feelings about his own social role are confused. Something similar happens in "Brooklyn College brain" (*CP* 725), rooted to his substitution of John Ashbery as a teacher in 1978, at the title's college (Morgan 532). This poem contrasts his past and his present, the surprising turn from the counterculture to the life of a college teacher who, nevertheless, is not totally welcomed at the academia. The "dungarees & blue workshirt" is replaced by the "tweed jacket & yr father's tie on yr breast, / salmon-pink cotton shirt & Swedish bookbag." Also, changes affect the body: "you're half bald, palsied lip & lower eyelid / continually tearing." His fame may not be a positive thing though. The poet needs here a card to certify his identity (" . . . get your identity / card next week from the front office so you can / get to class without being humiliated dumped on the / sidewalk by the black guard at the Student Union door"). Changes, however, are also to better conveniences:

> Hello Professor Ginsberg have some coffee,
> have some students, have some office hours
> Tuesdays & Thursdays, have a couple subway tokens
> in advance, have a box in the English Department,
> have a look at Miss Sylvia Blitzer behind the typewriter
> Have some poems er maybe they're not so bad have a
> good time workshopping Bodhicitta in the Bird Room. (*CP* 725)

"Have" is repeated over and over again, contrasting with his youthful "sneaking sweetness into Brooklyn." The poet is a Professor showing two points: that the young Beat is now where he wanted, but with the poetry he wanted ("sweetness," "Bodhicitta"); that time has also tamed that aspect, somehow turning the prophet into a more passive character, "official" while also not always recognized.

Again in this compilation Ginsberg mixed up his own life's details (as we have seen, the development of his fame) while also dealing with the political panorama of the US. He kept believing in the use of mantra, and went further in his connection with rock 'n' roll, as I pointed out above. That is why among his political poems we can identify those following regular patterns and those which are more Whitmanian, without the common rhyming of songs but with a strong sense of rhythm and orality. The "Ballade of Poisons" (*CP* 700) and "Capitol Air" (*CP* 751) mean another step in the progressive approximation that Ginsberg had to music, especially in his work with Blake's poems (which he adapted to music). The

"Ballade," following most of the traditional features (three stanzas of nine lines followed by a refrain and finishing with an "envoi"), deals with the chemicals and polluting matter present in natural landscapes and food, and its consequences:

> With oil that streaks streets a magic color,
> With soot that falls on city vegetables
> With basement sulfurs & coal black odor
> With smog that purples suburbs' sunset hills
> With Junk that feebles black & white men's wills
> . . .
> May your soul make home, may your eyes weep tears. (*CP* 700)

All along the poem, he uses anaphora, with the exception of the refrain and what he titles as the "Envoi," and the result is a text which sounds as a religious prayer and reminds us of his "Kaddish" ("with your eyes alone / with your eyes / with your eyes / with your Death full of Flowers"). The anaphora keeps the rhythm and so intensifies the oral quality of the text. Rhyme is regular, although not completely. While in the first stanza we find *a b a c c d d e d e*, in the second the rhyme follows *a b a b b c c d e d*. There is some alteration then, even though there is a clear pattern of three lines rhyming, followed by two couplets, and again three lines with alternated rhyming. The solemnity of the format clashes with the contents. The poet points at the "Chemic additives that cause Cancer," the "microwave toaster television," the "CIA tainting World emotion." It is a list of "Poisons" which are not always substance, but also political issues. Thus, the "envoi" of the ballad follows the refrain, which is a vindication of the soul and emotional redemption of the government:

> *Envoi*
>
> President, 'spite cockroach devotion,
> Folk poisoned with radioactive lotion,
> 'Spite soulless bionic energy queers
> May your world move to healthy emotion,
> Make your soul at home, let your eyes weep tears. (CP 700)

The "cockroach devotion" and spread poison may not stop the president from waking up and changing the state of his soul. "Capitol Air" (*CP* 751) starts with a quite strict rhyme at the beginning, as well as a repeated phrase:

> I don't like the government where I live
> I don't like dictatorship of the Rich
> I don't like bureaucrats telling me what to eat
> I don't like Police dogs sniffing round my feet
>
> I don't like Communist Censorship of my books
> I don't like Marxist complaining about my looks
> I don't like Castro insulting members of my sex

Leftists insisting we got the mystic Fix (*CP* 751)

Rhyme keeps consistent throughout the whole song (it was adapted to music, see fig. 2 on page 396), with an *aabb* pattern. But as it continues, the anaphora is left behind, getting to just one line in stanza 9 (there are 24 of them):

I don't like the Crown's Official Secret Act
You can get away with murder in the Government that's a fact
Security cops teargassing radical kids
In Switzerland or Czechoslovakia God Forbids (*CP* 753)

His criticisms are aimed at his own country (stanza 1), but also the Communist states (stanza 2); the corruption of institutions, the repression of the police and the media, the imperialist policies of the US, and the flawed dynamics of the US elections. The polarized world and its Cold War appear as equally mistaken:

America and Russia want to bomb themselves Okay
Everybody dead on both sides   Everybody pray
All except the Generals in caves where they can hide
And fuck each other in the ass waiting for the next free ride

No hope Communism no hope Capitalism Yeah
Everybody's lying on both sides Nyeah nyeah nyeah
The bloody iron curtain of American Military Power
Is a mirror image of Russia's red Babel Tower (CP 754).

However, many of the political poems are more irregular than this in rhyme and meter. "Birdbrain!" (*CP* 746) is a very good example of how mantra appears not so much as part of a traditional (Blakean) form (as he found in punk tunes), but in the Whitmanian forms he had always exploited, long lines introduced by a repeated formula. There he identifies different aspects of the world in his times, repeating "Birdbrain" to underline the common aspects which both leftists and rightists shared:

Birdbrain runs the World!
Birdbrain is the ultimate product of Capitalism
Birdbrain chief bureaucrat of Russia, yawning
. . .
I am Birdbrain!
I rule Russia Yugoslavia England Poland Argentina United States El Salvador
Birdbrain multiplies in China!
Birdbrain inhabits Stalin's corpse inside the Kremlin wall
Birdbrain dictates petrochemical agriculture in Afric desert regions!
Birdbrain lowers North California's water table sucking it up for Orange County
Agribusiness Banks (*CP* 746)

All along the poem, he keeps the structure with little exceptions. Towards the last third of the text, however, he interrupts it to introduce the topic of poetry. After identifying this

"birdbrain" in Hitler and in corrupted governments of subtle imperialism over central and south America, he states:

> Birdbrain became got sick in Harvard Square form smoking Mexican grass
> Birdbrain arrived in Europe to Conquer cockroaches with Propaganda
> Birdbrain became a great International Poet and went around the world praising
> the Glories of Birdbrain
> I declare Birdbrain to be victor in the Poetry Contest
> He built the World Trade Center on New York Harbor waters without regard
> where the toilets emptied— (*CP* 747)

The author adopts and leaves the adjective alternately, so it seems to set no clear referent. It is applied to the American government, to the poet, to Einstein ("He invented the Theory of Relativity so Rockwell Corporation could make Neutron Bombs at Rocky Flats in Colorado"), so it is everywhere even in the final line, where he declares:

> Birdbrain realized he was Buddha by meditating
> Birdbrain's afraid he's going to blow up the planet so he wrote this poem to be
> immortal— (*CP* 747)

This poem goes in line with those I analyzed at the beginning of this section then, where the poet dwells on his own work and its effectivity, but it also appears as a comical definition of the power relationships of the world, where birdbrains are the leaders, but also where those bellow can also be so.

"Ruhr-Gebiet" (*CP* 734) also tackles politics; specifically, the situation in Ruhr-Gebiet, a West-Germany region (the poem was written in Heidelberg). This composition keeps as a repetitive mantra the phrases "too much" and "not enough," pointing out the industry, the production-based economy and the alienation of people and nature in the Capitalist side of Germany: industry, police oppression, forced obedience and "happy Nazis" characterize the place. It also takes some element from "Birdbrain" and "Ballade of Poisons": German philosophy mixes up with computers, slate roofs, smokestacks and sugar.

> Too much industry
> too much eats
> too much beer
> too much cigarettes
> . . .
> Too much metal
> Too much fat
> Too many jokes
> not enough meditation (*CP* 735)

The principles of the Western world (the Capitalist system) keep people in West-Germany in the same conditions they are in the US: asleep with television, sugar, and repressed if they are "crazy students" like the Beats back in the 1950s.

All these poems, either in repetition or in meter, constituted some kind of mantra to be heard, to be performed alive. However, the most famous one of this collection is "Plutonian Ode" (*CP* 710), a long poem which has no repetition but appears as a speech act of praise and naming for the element. Inspired by the ancient odes (Pindaric and Homeric), he presents Plutonium within the classical mythology map of gods and goddesses. He is the god of under-ground who raptures Persephone and thus creates the different seasons, but he is also "penned unmindful by Doctor Seaborg," his discoverer. Myth and science get mixed in this text, striking the element with words. To deactivate its power, the poet states with speech acts:

> I manifest your Baptismal Word after four billion years
> I guess your birthday in Earthling Night, *I salute your dreadful presence* lasting majestic as the Gods,
> . . .
> Father Whitman *I celebrate* a matter that renders Self oblivion!
> . . .
> *I begin your chant*, openmouthed exhaling into spacious sky over silent mills at Hanford, Savannah River, Rocky Flats, Pantex, Burlington, Alburquerque
> *I yell* thru Washington, South Carolina, Colorado, Texas, Iowa, New Mexico,
> Where nuclear reactors create a new Thing under the Sun, where Rockwell war-plants fabricate this death stuff trigger in nitrogen baths,
> . . .
> *I enter your secret places with my mind, I speak with your presence, I roar your Lion Roar with mortal mouth.*
> . . .
> Enter my body or not *I carol my spirit inside you*, Unapproachable Weight,
> O heavy Element awakened *I vocalize your consciousness* to six worlds
> *I chant your absolute Vanity . . .*
> I dare your Reality, I challenge your very being! *I publish your cause and effect!*
> *I turn the Wheel of Mind* on your three hundred tons! *Your name enters mankind's ears! I embody your ultimate powers!*
> *My oratory advances* on your vaunted Mystery! *This breath* dispels your braggart fears! *I sing your form at last*
> . . .
> *My voice resounds through robot glove boxes* & ingot cans and *echoes* in electric vaults inert of atmosphere,
> . . .
> *I call your name with hollow vowels*, *I psalm your Fate close by*, my breath near deathless ever at your side
> *to Spell your destiny, I set this verse prophetic on your mausoleum walls to seal you up Eternally with Diamond Truths!* O doomed Plutonium. (*CP* 710-12) (emphasis added)

The material reality of the element is tackled through the poet's insistence on his powers, through his total reliance on his power of agency through words, through this mental and

magic spell where he names rather than defines the element. This "Destroyer of lying Scientists! Devourer of covetous Generals, Incinerator of Armies & Melter of Wars!" is invoked as any other god, to be fought and defeated by the same vocal weapon. As pointed out above (chapter 3), this poem becomes an event, since it is auto-referential and inaugural: "Over your dreadful vibration *this measured harmony* floats audible*, these jubilant tones* are honey and milk and wine-sweet water . . . *these syllables are barely groats* . . . I set *this verse prophetic* on your mausoleum walls to seal you up Eternally with Diamond Truth!" (*CP* 712) (emphasis added). The second part sets "the Bard" as the protagonist and establishes the setting. He has powers to contemplate the history of power creation by humans, from "Mercury Vapor streetlamps" to "Satanic industries," but Ginsberg points at the text directly: "Around the world same time this text is set in Boulder, Colorado before front range of Rocky Mountains / twelve miles north of Rocky Flats Nuclear Facility in United States on North America, Western Hemisphere." Towards the end, the poem seems to open up for the future, through auto-references to text and an address to "Poets and Orators to come," although the time and place setting is rather closed here, combining common but also concrete referents (emphasized):

> *This ode to you* O Poets and Orators to come, you father Whitman as I join your side, you Congress and American people,
> *you present meditators*, spiritual friends & teachers, you O master of the Diamond Arts,
> *Take this wheel of syllables* in hand, *these vowels and consonants* to breath's end
> take *this inhalation* of black poison to your heart, breathe out this blessing from your breast on our creation
> forests cities oceans deserst *rocky flats* and mountains in the Ten Directions pacify with *this exhalation* (*CP* 713)

Mantra appears in this poem just at the end, in the form of "an Americanese approximation," a phonological translation from the Sanskrit to the American sounds of language (Ginsberg's own notes to the poem) (*CP* 805): "thus empower this Mind-guard spirit gone out, gone out, gone beyond, gone beyond me, Wake space, so Ah!" (*CP* 713). The rest has no repetition, but there is a constant summon of the element through questions and exclamations. Because it is an ode, there is a sense of celebration of the element, and it is achieved through the poet's own agency ("I manifest your Baptismal Word," "I celebrate a matter that renders Self oblivion!") as well as through the tone set in the long lines it is composed of and its exclamations.

Other political poems appear in the collection. "Nagasaki Days" (*CP* 707) has a diverting form, as it is made up of notes written during different days of protest against the

US race in chemical weapons. The first part, "A Pleasant Afternoon," narrates in past tenses the settling of "3 poets & 60 ears" in Aurora, "listening to Black spirituals, tapping their feet, appreciating words singing by in mountain winds." The second part tackles the "Peace Protest" in three very short stanzas which seem independent from one another. In contrast to the previous poem, this one does not act in the moment, but rather embodies a photography of the process, as in a Williamesque style he writes:

> Cumulus clouds float across blue sky
> over the white-walled Rockwell Corporation factory
> —am I going to stop that?
>
> *
>
> Rocky Mountains rising behind us
> Denver shining in morning light
> —Led away from the crowd by police and photographers
>
> *
>
> Middleaged Ginsberg & Ellsberg taken down the road
> to the gray-haired Sheriff's van—
> But what about Einstein? What about Einstein? Hey, Einstein Come back!
> (*CP* 707)

Thus, in presence of nature (the blue sky, the mountains) the lyrical voice (signing as Allen Ginsberg) is taken down by the police and then goes to trial. The poem includes another image while waiting for the Judge, part IV with "Everybody's Fantasy," an apocalyptic dream in the Lower East Side, but also the "Numbers in Red Notebook," the last part where he lists:

> 2,000,000 killed in Vietnam
> 13,000,000 refugees in Indochina 1972
> 200,000,000 years for the Galaxy to revolve on its core
> 24,000 the Babylonian Great Year
> 24,000 half life of plutonium
> 2,000 the most I ever got for a poetry reading
> 80,000 dolphins killed in the dragnet
> 4,000,000,000 years earth been born (*CP* 709)

Once again, he seems to be a chronicler, although another poem, "Verses Written for Student Antidraft Registration Rally 1980" (*CP* 738), takes an allegoric form where the Warrior is put in contrast with the Conquered, somehow describing the anti-draft resisting person and that obeying the call:

> The Warrior is afraid
> the warrior has a big trembling heart

> the warrior sees bright explosions over Utah, a giant bomber moves over
> Cheyenne Mountain at Colorado Springs
> . . .
> The warrior never goes to War
> War runs away from the warrior's mouth
> . . .
> The Conquered go to War, drafted into shadow armies, navy'd on shadow
> oceans, flying in shadow fire
> only helpless Draftees fight afraid, big meaty negroes trying not to die—
> The Warrior knows his own sad & tender heart, which is not the heart of most
> newspapers
> Which is not the heart of most Television—This kind of sadness doesn't sell
> popcorn (*CP* 738)

However, this poem —perhaps read in front of anti-draft students— might be seen as an event, an address to resistance, an ode to their braveness, more than a registration of something historical. In fact, it might be seen as the poet's intervention in the history of his own country. The same happens in "Homework" (*CP* 739) where he hypothesizes with a global cleansing of the world with the imagery of doing the laundry, tacking political corruption and environmental decadence ("I'd thrown in my United States, and pour on the Ivory Soap, scrub up Africa, . . . / I'd wash the Amazon river and clean the oily Carib & Gulf of Mexico").

Plutonian Ode, in this sense, is less heterogeneous than *The Fall of America*. Both had the clear aim of dealing with American issues, especially in relation to outer policies. Both had also their biographical part (many poems of love and sex are included in this collection as well). But there is a different approach to the logocracy of the US and the Western world. The power of voice is the root in the two of them, but while *The Fall* was an experience being recorded, with its performative answer with some agency given to the poet, the *Plutonian Ode* presents a less powerful poet, one who has doubts about his own agency, who tries to respond to his times, who protests, but also who experiments with music, with the poetry seen as a public event which might need adaptation in the different readings. As we have seen, then, there are no clear dividing lines, as every collection compiles poems which draw features from different poetics and different approaches to language and to the role of writing and speaking. And similarly, there would be little change in his later poetry, in that of *White Shroud* (1986), *Cosmopolitan Greetings* (1994) and *Death & Fame* (2000).

2. 9. White Shroud: Poems 1980-1985

White Shroud: Poems 1980-1985 was published in 1986, as a continuation of the *Collected Poems*, which included all the poems from 1947 to 1980 and was published in 1984. It turned Ginsberg into an already consolidated poet whose work was widely studied in university

levels. Many of the scholars that I have consulted for this dissertation started to work deeply on Ginsberg's corpus during the 1980s: William A. Henry III, Marjorie Perloff, Laszlo Géfin, Paul Portugés. Ginsberg was alive and getting his own writings studied by critics, although they focused on his early writings, especially the years of *Howl*, *Kaddish*, or *The Fall of America*. That explains the lack of criticism on this group of poems if compared with his previous publications. Nevertheless, as I mentioned above, there is little change in his approach to poetry, and it kept thus being both political and autobiographical, giving a continuation to his projection as the American (Whitmanian) poet. His biographer Bill Morgan points out that he felt during the 1980s a loss of confidence in his power to change reality with his writing, but the truth is that he kept a sense of responsibility and still got involved in different issues (Morgan 573, 555). By having a look at his poems, we also see this tension: many of them are devoted to his own life reflections, to his feelings about death and disease, but politics did not disappear from his index of texts and his poetical program. He wanted to write about the "World Karma" (*CP* 913) and reflected about his role in "Thoughts Sitting Breathing II":

> Be that as it may as blue empty Buddha floats through blue bodied sky,
> should I settle down & practice meditation, care for my nervous Self, do nothing,
> arrange paper manuscripts, die in Lower East Side peace instead of heart attack
> in Ethiopia,
> What way out of this Ego? Let it appear disappear, mental images
> Nothing but thoughts, how solve World Problems by worrying in my
> bedroom?—
> Still one clear word-mighty poem might reveal what Duncan named Grief in
> America
> that one hundred million folk malnourish the globe while Civic Powers inflate
> $200 billion War Machines this year—
> and who gets rich on that, don't all of us get poor heart?—but what do I know
> of Military Worlds? (*CP* 878-79)

This fragment is paradigmatic for the rest of the book. Ginsberg was in a constant struggle with the things that he could do to change what he considered was unfair, at the same time that he wondered whether he was being a good poet and a good example of the tribe's chief, now suffering from disease and fearing death.

Critics did also notice a change in his conception of himself. William A. Henry III noticed the break with the countercultural spirits not only in his looks (now he wore suit, and tie, and formal shoes) but also in his public readings: his "Howls" were not a cry of pain and anger, but rather a mock, a joke, a satiric interpretation of the past (369). He was also closer to the academia, as Morgan points out. He got to be member of the American Academy and Institute of Arts and Letters, which meant he was part of the institutions that

had ignored him and his peers, and so could pave the way for their recognition (550). The clown-like poet that M. Perloff vindicated ("A Lion" 210) appeared at the same time that Performance Studies started to bloom, with the publication of Gregory Battcock's and Robert Nickas's anthology, but also with the studies on the oral Whitman by C. Carroll Hollis, or Walter Ong's ideas on oral cultures. Ginsberg does not mention any of these sources in his own conception of his poetry, but there is no doubt that their coincidence in time show the cultural climate and thus the importance that his public readings had.

It is also true that the challenge to genres and life/fiction dualities which characterize performance were already present in Ginsberg's previous poetry, and his texts kept the autobiographical stream in poems about sex, love, but also about his own death ("What You Up To?" *CP* 870, "Sunday Prayer" *CP* 886, and "It's All So Brief" *CP* 899). Memories and fears fill poems such as "Black Shroud" (*CP* 911), "Prophecy" (*CP* 915), "Memory Cousins" (*CP* 916), "Maturity" (*CP* 872). His life kept being material for his writing, but this time he also included poems which elaborated the concept of self, in self-perception and self-projection. As a famous figure, Allen Ginsberg's persona turned into a source of inspiration, a character to be used and to be explored in texts which were already a form of self-expression, following Romantic codes of lyrical writing. The writer and the writer's figure are here polarized, although not completely distinguished. One seems to be alienated, disconnected from the other, but the reader does not know which one it is. "I Am Not" (*CP* 881), for instance, starts with a series of negative self-definitions which might be read as his own answer to social commentaries about him:

> I'm not a lesbian screaming in the basement strapped to a leather spiderweb
> I'm not a Rockefeller heart attacked in the paramour bed with pants off
> I'm not a radical Stalinist intellectual fairy
> not an anti-Semitic Rabbi with black hat white beard & dirty fingernails
> not the San Francisco jail cell poet beaten by minions of yellow police New Year's
> eve
> not Gregory Corso Orpheus Maudit of these States
> nor yet a schoolteacher with marvelous salary (*CP* 881)

He himself exaggerates the social image that he may have had at that time but clarifies he is not "a radical Stalinist intellectual fairy" and that he is not the same as his peer writers (like Gregory Corso). His political associations with Communism and the gay community are subject of caricature here ("I'm not a lesbian screaming in the basement strapped to a leather spiderweb"). However, the last two lines take another turn in the poem's discourse:

> I'm not anyone I know
> in fact I'm only here for 80 years (*CP* 881)

The conflict is different than we thought: the poet seemed to be clarifying who he is, but suddenly, it is the people who *he* knows that seems to be blurry for him. As his reference is the people that *he* (and not the public, not the readership) knows, he turns out to be the confused person about his own personality, and so the clarification may be for himself. Nevertheless, the last sentence brings us to the final point: the approach to death. "[I]n fact I'm *only* here for 80 years," eight decades seem such a short period of time that he does not know who he is.

This conflict is further developed in "I'm a Prisoner of Allen Ginsberg" (*CP* 882). Miles relates it to his tour throughout Europe and the stress of recording an album, having television appearances, at the same time that he was doing paperwork and letters (507-8). Fame supposed a lot of commitment and events to attend, which so acted as a downside for his love of public attention. He wonders:

> Who is this Slave Master makes
>   me answer letters in his name
> Write poetry year after year, keep up
>   appearances

Here the slave and the master are the same person who, however, has a proper name and appearances to keep up. We may ask, as readers, is Allen Ginsberg really the Allen Ginsberg known for his "Howl" who now gives interviews on television and then writes himself down on his books? Was all his previous, confessional, and autobiographical work really his self-expression? Which self is being expressed now? Deictics point out to an unclear "Allen Ginsberg":

> *This* egotist whose file cabinets
>   leave no room for more
>   pictures of *Me*?
> How escape *his* clutches, *his* public sound
>   bank accounts, Master Charge
>   interest
> Who's *this* politician hypnotized my life
>   with *his* favors
> . . .
> Why's *this guy* oblige *me* to sit
>   meditating,
> . . .
> makes *me* go down suck teenage boys
> *I declare* a new life, how can *I* pay all
>   *his* debts
> next month's rent *on his body,*
>   bald & panicky, with Pyronie's disease
> Cartilage stuff grown an inch inside
>   his cock root,

non-malignant. (*CP* 882)

While there is no explicit reference to the material reality of "this egotist," we find his "public sound" and body. On the contrary, the distinction is only made with "Me" and, later on, the "I." Thus, the protagonist is "Allen Ginsberg," placed as a third person singular, who forces the first person singular to act like and for him. The tension here is read by Miles as humor (507-8). "This guy" who has got health problems ("Cartilage stuff grown an inch inside / his cock root, / non-malignant") is nobody but himself somehow pretending to be other inside his body. This leads him to utter his independence, to vindicate it given the poor circumstances of his rent ("bald & panicky, with Pyronie's disease").

He also plays with his public figure in "They're All Phantoms of My Imagining" (*CP* 888). It is an autobiographical text departing from the idea of "I needed," to show the present result of his self and his corpus. It could be seen as some sort of justification for his existence, a narrative which is finished, since at the end of the poem we see his grave (meaning he is dead when writing the text). At the same time, it is a list of people: young lovers and friends, teachers of Buddhism, parents and brother, but also his experiences at college:

> I needed a young musician take off his pants sit down on the bed and sing me
> the blues
> I needed a teacher could nail me to the Unborn
> . . .
> I needed a brother was gentle, suffered to protect me from anger
> . . .
> Comrade farmer cook with me & study Banjo Dharma
> Needed Presidents mad so I could write the Nation sane
> I needed a father a poet would die
> . . .
> A college to be kicked out Columbia (*CP* 888)

But it was partly a fiction. As he says later on, "Invented all these companions, wept & prayed them into flesh / needed these Creatures to be Allen Ginsberg this my self / crying the world away mid oceans of suffering blood." He keeps the narrative in past tenses, but also reconceives the Allen Ginsberg self there: "these Creatures," who are not the people he lists, but the people living those experiences, conform a present self ("this myself"). He adds, however, "needed to be the liar of Existence in America." All these texts deepen then in what he was known for and as, questioning "Allen Ginsberg" and what it meant (if it meant one single thing at all).

Many of the other poems are biographical as well, but they do not center on his figure, rather on death and his bodily decadence ("Sunday Prayer," *CP* 886), his writing career

("It's All So Brief," *CP* 899), his travelling experiences ("One Morning I Took a Walk in China," *CP* 903). The fact that he was getting old became a source of inspiration for the poet that he wanted to project, not always close to the wise prophet of previous collections. In "It's All So Brief" he summarizes his feelings thus:

> I've got to give up
> Books, checks, letters
> File cabinets, apartment
> pillows, bodies and skin
> even the ache in my teeth. (*CP* 899)

Death means for him leaving behind both his fame, his work as a writer, and his body. "Reading Bai Juyi" (*CP* 905) has different sections dealing with the same conflict: his old age, his writing, and his public appearance. In section I, he writes:

> . . . I'm famous,
> my poems have done some men good
> and a few women ill, perhaps the good
> outweighs the bad, I'll never know
> Still I feel guilty I haven't done more;
> True I praised the dharma from nation to nation
> But my own practice has been amateur, seedy
> . . .
> I don't believe in an afterworld of god or even
> Another life separate from this incarnation
> Still I worry I'll be punished for my carelessness
> after I'm dead—my poems scattered and my name
> forgotten and my self reborn a foolish workman (*CP* 905)

While in some poems he teases "Allen Ginsberg" the famous poet as another person, here he accepts it, wondering at the same time about his social effects. This self-deprecating discourse continues in the following part:

> Still coughing, reclusive, I went back to bed
> With a headache, despite afternoon sun
> Streaming through the French windows
> Weakly, to write down these thoughts.
> Why've I wanted to appear heroic, why
> strain to accomplish what no mortal could—
> Heaven on earth, self perfection, household
> Security & the accomplishment of changing the World.
> A noble ambition, but that of a pathetic dreamer.
> Tomorrow if I recover from bronchitis
> I'll put on a serious face and go down to the Market. (*CP* 906)

As in "I'm a Prisoner of Allen Ginsberg," here (in section IV) the poet is expected to do certain things because of his fame:

> So I lifted my head from my pillow and Woke

to find I was a sick guest in a vast poor kingdom
A famous visitor honored with a heated room,
medicines, special foods and learned visitors
inquiring when I'd be well enough to lecture my hosts
on the musics and poetics of the wealthy
Nation I had come from half way round the world (*CP* 908)

At the same time, while he was questioning himself as writer in his own writings, this was also a time when he composed music, as he was also adapting some Blake's poems to record an album. More repeatedly than before, he connected music and poetry, as well as the mantric properties. Interestingly enough, most of these compositions were political, and so we find in "Industrial Waves" (*CP* 845) that he tackles the mechanisms of economic liberalism: the persecution of dissident thinking, racism, the war discourse and the media manipulation, the use of drugs by the government, the environmental and health problems of the population, and the radical role of the US and its outer politics in these issues. As "Capitol Air" (it actually shares the tune with it), this poem keeps a regular meter and rhyme (*aabb*), emphasized by the repetition of "Freedom from/to/for." In "Airplane Blues" (*CP* 859) the contents mix a scene of traveling with political issues of his time, using lineation to make clear where the caesura is:

I drove out to the airport
                    on a blue sunny day
Smog brown over Denver
                    Horizon dung gray
Look down on Missouri
                    vast river bend south
Dakota sky brilliant
                    Cigarette in my mouth
. . .
Mankind's great delusions
                    Scrape sky with rad rage
Build bombs out of Atoms
                    to blast out the words on this page
Majestical jailhouse
                    our joy's in the Cage
Hearts full of hatred
                    will outlast my old age (*CP* 859)

Although the poem has its own chords, there is a reference to "this page" which may confound both listeners or readers, acknowledging the written nature of the text, but at the same time making sure it is turned to sounds with the lineation. Something similar happens in "Do the Meditation Rock" (*CP* 863), where the caesura makes the poem be seen as in columns:

If you want to learn   how to meditate
I'll tell you now   'cause it's never too late

I'll tell you how — 'cause I can't wait
it's just that great — that it's never too late
If you are an old — fraud like me
or a lama who lives — in Eternity
The first thing your do — when you meditate
is keep your spine — your backbone straight
Sit yourself down — on a pillow on the ground
or sit in a chair — if the ground isn't there
Do the meditation
Learn a little Patience and Generosity (*CP* 863)

Lines are quite shorter when compared to previous publications, to such extent that "The Little Fish Devours the Big Fish" (*CP* 865) is written in columns because of the length for just two or three words per line.

Mantra, as we saw before, was a sound which supposed an event; rather, a sound-based event with religious and political implications. That is why apart from songs we find repeated phrases as he had done in his first "Howl." Repetition supposed not only a point of reference keeping rhythm, but also a material reality leading to change in mental patterns. As in Gertrude Stein's texts, "A Public Poetry" (*CP* 869) repeats the word "sissies" to such an extent that we may lose the meaning.

The fact is, the Russians are sissies
And Chinese big yellow sissies too
Americans by their nature sissies
Ran away to the New World & beat up Indians,
Now we're gonna let Peabody Coal take their Four Corners away!
So sissy we exploded Atom Bombs on Japs! (*CP* 869)

This "public poetry" is actually a public humorous denounce of contemporary politics and summarizing the conflict with an informal adjective. "Fighting Phantoms Fighting Phantoms" (*CP* 884) is another example of this mantric repetition, this time tackling the illusions that move life: Hollywood dreams, the fear of death, writing challenges. These "phantoms" are what trigger human acts:

Fighting phantoms we have car wrecks on Hollywood Freeway
Fighting phantoms th'Egyptians mummified Pharaohs & rich businessmen
Fighting phantoms a young Scotsman wore tennis shoes on the battleship deck
Fighting phantoms William S. Burroughs wrote umpteen novels
. . .
Fighting phantoms the ruling class blew up the military budget, 244 Billion dollars 1985—of the tax pie 63% if past military debt interest & pensions're added in
Fighting phantoms Ronald Reagan sent cocaine armadas to Central America
. . .
Fighting phantoms Truman dropped two Atom Bombs
Fighting phantoms Einstein invented the theory of relativity (*CP* 884)

From artistic and literary creation to bomb development, what the people is doing is "Fighting phantoms."

Repetition then is linked to mantra —an event— and so to the present moment. Here again we find a conflict for Ginsberg: his observation (and recording) of reality may not be the event the mantra is. In this compilation, there are notes on meditation, on his exploration of present sensations which are actually written. In "Porch Scribbles" (*CP* 843) he writes all he perceives in nature; in "Homage Vajracarya" (*CP* 8520) he praises the mindful approach to eating and drinking tea. However, there is little exploration of writing itself by writing. There are brief references to the writing scene. In "Old Love Story" (*CP* 856) he closes the text saying:

> Enough, I've stayed up all night with these boys
> . . .
> Now I'm tired and must set my pen down
> Reader, Hearer, this time Understand How kind it is for man to love a man,
> Old love and Present, future love the same
> Hear and Read what love is without shame
> I want people to understand! They can! They can! They can!
> So open your ears and hear the voice of the classical Band. (*CP* 857)

The encounter between writer and reader is also present in "White Shroud" (*CP* 889). After mixing up memories and dreams, again, he closes the poem thus:

> Then glad of life I woke
> in Boulder before dawn, my second story bedroom windows
> Bluff Street facing East over town rooftops, I returned
> from the Land of the Dead to living Poesy*, and wrote*
> *this tale of long lost joy*, to have seen my mother again!
> And when *the ink ran out of my pen*, and rosy violet
> illumined city treetop skies above the Flatiron Front Range,
> I went downstairs to the shady living room, where Peter Orlovsky
> sat with long hair lit by television glow to watch
> the sunrise weather news, I kissed him & *filled my pen and wept.* (*CP* 892)
> (emphasis added)

We are then, in this case as well, facing a compilation which mixes up the written and the voiced text, a written voice in all the vocatives that we find in "Empire Air" (*CP 893*), for instance ("Conquer yourself! Conquer your gluttony Ginsberg! Conquer lust for Conquest!"); a written voice which is placed not only in chords, but also in lineation, in the rhythms and rhymes that rule how we read them, and which actually call for a physical sound-based fulfillment. As a famous poet, Ginsberg wanted to play with the public image of "Allen Ginsberg," reflecting on his own writing, but also on his own performance of himself. The line between one and the other is not clear, as is not clear the distinction between fiction and

reality. Politically speaking, Ginsberg was interested in exploring the figure of the American poet he had been in previous decades, and he wanted to do it in a public act of writing and performing himself. As we will see, the same happens in *Cosmopolitan Greetings*.

2.10. Cosmopolitan Greetings: Poems 1986-1992

In 1994, when Ginsberg publishes *Cosmopolitan Greetings*, he was just prolonging a discourse on what the famous poet Allen Ginsberg was. There is little criticism on this volume, which contrasts with the fact that important publications were released when these poems were being written. In 1989, Lewis Hyde edited the book *On the Poetry of Allen Ginsberg*, compiling criticism from the early 1950s to the late 1980s. Also, Michael Schumacher's *Dharma Lion: A Critical Biography* turned Ginsberg into a classic whose life was starting to be studied in relation to his work. He was not dead yet, but literary critics begun the long-term task of closing his "public life." With *Cosmopolitan Greetings*, as it would happen with *Death & Fame*, he was contributing to that endeavor. He combined in his public image the rebel-like attitude of a rock star and the erudition of a scholar. He turned up at gigs, surrounded himself with rock singers (like Aerosmith's, with whom he wrote "Europe, Who Knows?" *CP* 959), but also went back to Brooklyn College in the fall of 1986 as Distinguished Professor in the English Department (Morgan 593). In each public event, the poet kept a role which sometimes was over the poem itself, as he said in *New York Quarterly* Spring 1991 (qtd. in Pfeiler 78). That may explain why this volume includes poems whose function was more social than creative. There is a translation ("Angelic Black Holes" *CP* 1025), a poem written for the back jacket copy of *Break the Mirror* by Nanao Sakaki, a Japanese poet (*CP* 969). Also, he printed a short comic story titled "Deadline Dragon Comix" (*CP* 1018) giving biographical and spiritual commentaries with little elaboration, probably improvised (see fig. 3 on page 397).

However, the figure of the poet was not the only thematic center of the book. Politics kept being very important for Ginsberg, especially if we take into account that in 1988 there was a rise of the "right-wing 'Moral Majority' led by the Heritage Foundation and politicians like Senators Jesse Helms and NEWT Gingrich," and by which "the government began a new crackdown on what they perceived as filth." Thus, they could ban poetry among other forms of expression, which Ginsberg of course condemned (Morgan 607). If marginal (indecent) poetry was persecuted, poetry had the duty to tackle injustice and social sleepiness, as it had done in the 1960s, and in Ginsberg's poetry this was materialized in highly contextual texts. The poet was reacting to the historical development of his country, and so there was a need to actualize them. The poem "Hum Bom!" (*CP* 1004) is a good example:

to the lines written in 1984 and published in *The Fall of America*, he adds new stanzas which deal with the conflict between USA and Iraq ("Saddam said he hadda bomb! / Bush said he better bomb!"). As in this poem, repetition was considered a mantra and so is part of many of the political texts of this volume, which would also include songs with their respective chords. Take, for instance, "You Don't Know It" (*CP* 943), where he lists the cruelties committed during the Cold War and after by authoritarian states. He repeats and plays with the construction "You know" and "You don't know" to defend that both sides were wrong:

> In Russia the tyrant cockroach mustache ate 20 million souls
> and you don't know it, you don't know it
> In Czechoslovakia the police ate the feet of a generation that can't walk
> and you don't know it, you don't know it
> In Poland police state double agent cancer grew large as Catholic
> Church Frankenstein the state itself a Gulag Ship
> and you don't know it, you don't know it (*CP* 943)

As the poem continues, the refrain changes, and so does the speed and rhythm, with less commas and longer lines. The text is then an oral denounce: it addresses a "you" who is probably hearing the rant, although the lineation ties it to the page as well. Any reader may notice in his/her own reading the tone of the poet. Something similar happens in "Research" (*CP* 1026):

> Research has shown that black people have inferiority complexes regarding white folks
> Research has shown that Jews are exclusively concerned with financial lasciviousness
> Research has shown Socialism to be a universal failure wherever practiced by secret police
> Research has shown that Earth was created 4004 B.C., a Divine Bang
> . . .
> Research has shown that Hollywood makes the best films ever, the sexually degenerate
> that the U.N. is Good □ Bad □ Indifferent □ for American interests Check One
> . . .
> Research has shown that Elitist Individualism Spiritual Corruption & Degenerate Art caused Dictatorships in Soviet Union China and Germany
> that possession of pornography by American Family Institute has resulted in 35% increase in sex crimes among institute librarians
> viewing murderous behavior on TV sitcoms resulted in 100% increased violent language behavior by intercontinental Heads of State
> To conclude research has shown that the material universe does not exist (1026-27)

Retaking the long and indented lines that characterize his mid-1950s writing, he mixes up information coming from different sources, demonstrating that "research" can show that homosexuality is both natural and unnatural ("Research has shown that sparrows, bees, lizards, chickens, pigs & cows exhibit signs of homosexual behavior when in prison," but

"Research has shown . . . Lesbianism crime against nature"), or that race does make a difference. Recalling the headlines of magazines and reviews or newspapers, Ginsberg sheds light on the fallacious beliefs that can arise just from the written sources we read. In this sense, repetition appears as a tool for social manipulation, just as the mantra can open a path towards alternative states of consciousness.

This belief was also underlying his songs, as it had done before. Although most of the songs we find in this volume do not have repetition, their metrics and rhyme were also an effective way of thinking in an alternative pattern. There is however a sense of humor in some of them, as in "Fifth Internationale" (*CP* 957), where he rewrites the former Soviet national anthem to point out the system's mental manipulation. From:

> Arise ye prisoners of starvation,
> Arise ye wretched of the earth,
> For justice thunders condemnation,
> A better world's in birth (*CP* 1052)

he composed:

> Arise ye prisoners of your mind-set
> Arise Neurotics of the Earth
> For Insight thunders Liberation
> A sacred world's in birth (*CP* 957)

Thus, he kept his disappointment with Leftist totalitarian systems while he still criticized the capitalist ones. The 1980s brought also the Palestine-Israel conflict to his compositions, as well as the environmental crisis that was ignored by politicians. In "Grandma Earth's Song" (*CP* 973) he added a drawing (see fig. 4 on page 397). He introduces, as in a narrative, the image of an old crone who is actually "Old Ma Earth," "with silk stockings wandering alone singing out loud on way to Civic Center":

> When dull roots write Laws
> Jerusalem to New York
> Poor Jews break Arab Jaws
> Blacks eat greasy pork
>
> What's the Planet News?
> Wall Street's poison pill
> Palestinians stone Jews
> Water runs downhill (*CP* 973)

Along with that, he devoted a poem to the disaster of Chernobyl ("Europe, Who Knows?" *CP* 959), and another one against smoking ("Put Down Your Cigarette Rag" *CP* 1029). His political denounce took also form of documentation, as in "Numbers in U.S. File Cabinet

(Death Waits to Be Executed)" (*CP* 982). There the poet lists different figures to quantify money devoted to war, victims of drug addiction and pollution, combined with his own details (the telephone number of his father, for instance). His obsession with the policies on drugs gave way to "CIA Dope Calypso" (*CP* 997), "N.S.A. Dope Calypso" (*CP* 1000) and "Just Say Yes Calypso" (*CP* 1002). These were, as Tyler Hoffman says, poems in progress, as they changed with the news (*American Poetry* 144). The first one was inspired by a piece of news in the *New York Times*, March 12, 1989. It combines then the rhymes and phrases taken from the newspaper:

> In nineteen hundred forty-nine
> China was won by Mao Tse-tung
> Chiang Kai-shek's army ran away
> They were waiting there in Thailand yesterday
>
> *Supported by the CIA*
> *Pushing junk down Thailand way*
>
> . . .
>
> The policeman's name was Mr. Phao
> He peddled dope grand scale and how
> Chief of border customs paid
> By Central Intelligence's U.S. A.I.D.
>
> *The whole operation Newspapers say*
> *Supported by the CIA* (*CP* 997)

In "N.S.A. Dope Calypso" (*CP* 1000) and "Just Say Yes Calypso" (*CP* 1002) the structure is similar: four lines with rhyme *aabb* are followed by a refrain which is gradually modified but which emphasizes the government's responsibility:

> *They discovered Noriega only yesterdays*
> *Nancy Reagan & the CIA*
>
> . . .
>
> *It was buried in the papers only yesterday*
> *When Bush was Drug Czar U.S.A.* (*CP* 1000)
>
> . . .
>
> *Though he used poison gas, Saddam was still our man*
> *But to aid the Contras, hadda also arm Iran*
>
> . . .
>
> *The Garden foul'd up, brimstone came down*
> *In the good old days we had plenty ozone* (CP 1002)

These texts are then highly contextual and difficult to understand without historical knowledge. Proper names and historical events crowd them and so tie them to the moment. That is what happens also in "Get It" (*CP* 1024), a list of injustices involving Rodney King (a black taxy-driver beaten by policemen), Amiri Baraka, Kennedy, Lee Harvey Oswald, Jack Ruby, Oliver North, or Charles H. Keating.[36]

This turned the poems not only into records but also events, as responses to what was happening, and so a form of activism, throwing light upon issues which might be left outside of the media. The concept of event is also central because of the performance of the self of "Allen Ginsberg" that he wanted to achieve with many texts included here. He deals with his fame, but also with the different expectations he has of himself in contrast to the needs of society. This conflict is set at the very beginning of the volume, in a poetic preface titled "Improvisation in Beijing" (*CP* 937), an explanation of his writing which is articulated with the poetics which are being explained:

> I write poetry because the English word Inspiration comes from Latin *Spiritus*, breath, I want to breathe freely.
> I write poetry because Walt Whitman gave world permission to speak with candor.
> I write poetry because Walt Whitman opened up poetry's verse-line for unobstructed breath.
> I write poetry because Ezra Pound saw an ivory tower, bet on one wrong horse, gave poets permission to write spoken vernacular idiom.
> I write poetry because Pound pointed young Western poets to look at Chinese writing word pictures.
> I write poetry because W. C. Williams living in Rutherford wrote New Jerseyesque "I kick yuh eye," asking, how measure that in iambic pentameter?
> I write poetry because my father was poet my mother from Russia spoke Communist, died in a mad house. (*CP* 937)

The long lines introduced by an anaphora that he uses here do actually come from the "unobstructed breath" of Walt Whitman, as well as the "word pictures" from the Eastern influences coming through Pound. Politics appears as one of the reasons to write as well ("I write poetry because writing sexual matters was censored in United States. / . . . because millionaires East and West ride Rolls-Royce limousines, poor people don't have enough money to fix their teeth. / . . . because my genes and chromosomes fall in love with young

[36] Apart from the racist assault on Rodney King, Ginsberg mentions Amiri Baraka, black writer associated to the Beat generation. He also refers to John F. Kennedy, president of the US, assassinated in 1963 while riding in a presidential motorcade in Dallas, Texas. Lee Harvey Oswald was accused of this murder, and he was shot by Jack Ruby while he was in in police custody. Oliver North was a National Security Council staff member during the Iran–Contra affair (a political scandal of the late 1980s). Keating was an American athlete, lawyer, banker, and activist best known for his role in the crisis of the "savings and loan" (also in the late 1980s).

men not young women," *CP* 938). As we get to know in the notes, this was a "[d]iscourse at Chinese Writers Association conference with American Academy of Arts and Letters on 'Sources of Inspiration,' Beijing, October 1984," and it was "improvised from notes, transcribed from tape, lightly edited" (*CP* 1051). The poem is then an event in a double sense: it acts as the preface to the book, but also constituted the speech he gave, with variations which are not seen as failed versions, but autonomous and valid in themselves. Breath, mind patterns, and politics are related here both in form and in content. A similar format is found in "Yiddishe Kopf" (*CP* 1013), where he explains why he is Jewish:

> I'm Jewish because love my family matzoh ball soup.
> I'm Jewish because my fathers mothers uncles grandmothers said "Jewish," all
> the way back to Vitebsk & Kaminetz-Podolska via Lvov.
> Jewish because reading Dostoyevsky at 13 I write poems at restaurant tables
> Lower East Side, perfect delicatessen intellectual
> Jewish because violent Zionists make my blood boil, Progressive indignation.
> Jewish because Buddhist, my anger's transparent hot air, I shrug my shoulders.
> Jewish because monotheist Jews Catholics Moslems're intolerable intolerant—
> (*CP* 1013)

The oral character of these lines emphasizes then the self-presentation that the poet is doing, although the deictics are replaced by the "Senior Citizen Jewish" he mentions. Thus, the poem is tied to "Allen Ginsberg the poet," only he can read the poem, conforming then an event, a fleeting presence which here, however, takes the written form of the book.

"Cosmopolitan Greetings" (*CP* 954) is also an event, since it was written as "a Response to Macedonian request for message to Struga Evenings of Poetry festival, on receiving 1986 Golden Laurel Wreath prize" (*CP* 1052). Although it is a greeting text, it is made out of a series of constative and directive utterances for public listeners, and again conforms a form of self-presentation, as it is signed as "Kraj Majales." Something similar occurs in "Supplication for the Rebirth of the Vidyadhara Chögyam Trungpa, Rinpoche" (*CP* 1009). Towards the end, he states:

> These slogans were writ on the second day of June 1991
> a sleepless night my brother's 70th birthday on Long Island
> my own sixty-fifth year in the human realm visiting his house
> by the Vajra Poet Allen Ginsberg supplicating protection of his
> Vajra Guru Chögyam Trungpa

Both the poem and the book become a signature of the "Vajra Poet Allen Ginsberg," an event which in this case is not the common public meeting. Although this is rare in Ginsberg, there is another encounter with the written format and future readers in "Now and Forever" (*CP* 1036), where he writes:

I'll settle for Immortality—
Not thru the body
    Not thru the eyes
        . . .
But thru words, thru the breath
        of long sentences
loves I have, heart beating
        still,
inspiration continuous, exhalation of
        cadenced affection
These immortal survive America,
            survive the fall of States
        Departure of my body,
            mouth dumb dust
This verse broadcasts desire,
            accomplishment of Desire
Now and forever boys can read
            girls dream, old men cry
Old women sigh
            youth still come (*CP* 1036)

"These immortal," "This verse," which point at the written word will contrast with his references to a "Senior Citizen" in "Lunchtime" (*CP* 1017) and Allen Ginsberg himself in "After Lalon" (*CP* 1019), and here is where his fame comes into play, since many of these texts point at the public figure, and continue the conflict he initiated already in his youth: Where are the limits between the writer and the written I, if any?

Ginsberg exploits that tension in several poems of this volume. Of course, his autobiographical tendencies were not new in the 1980s, but the fact that he was becoming the old poet of the Beat Generation still alive allowed him not only to include texts which would have been excluded otherwise, which served as historical recordings of who his figure was, but also to explore in his writings his own confessional tendencies as a celebrity. "I Went to the Movie of Life" (*CP* 962), for example, seems to record his acquaintances with rock stars, as well as his own role in history along with the Merry Pranksters and the 60s Diggers. A crew of cameras follow him as he looks for a young lover, but only finds "this crowd of wily wrinkled wanderers." He wonders "What was my role?"

I hardly knew these faded heroes, friendly strangers
 so long on the road, I'd been out teaching in Boulder, Manhattan,
 Budapest, London, Brooklyn so long, why follow me thru
these amazing Further bus party reunion corridors tonite?
 or is this movie, or real, if I turn to face the camera I'd break
 the scene, dissolve the plot illusion, or is't illusion
 art, or just my life? Were cameras ever there, the picture
 flowed so evenly before my eyes, how could a crew follow
 me invisible still and smoothly noiseless bus to bus
 from room to room along the caravan's painted labyrinth? (*CP* 964)

As a rock star on the road, he is surrounded by "friendly strangers," as an actor of his own life threatening to break the fourth wall, to turn the face to the camera and get awareness of what his own life is. In "Proclamation" (*CP* 971) and "Return of Kral Majales" (*CP* 984) he elaborates his own public personality. In the former, he is a prophet, "the King of the Universe," "the Messiah with a new dispensation," even "God himself / Not at all human. Don't associate me / w/that Crowd. / In any case you can believe every word / I say" (*CP* 971). His work may not be so clearly effective, but his position is that of a powerful tribal leader. In this sense, the former poem appears as a response to a 1990s law on "indecent language" on airwaves. Going back to his 1960s title, he defines himself as the "King of May with high blood pressure, diabetes, gout, Bell's palsy, kidneystones & calm eyeglasses," wearing "the foolish crown of no ignorance no wisdom anymore no fear no hope in capitalist striped tie & Communist dungarees" (*CP* 984). In "Salutations to Fernando Pessoa" (*CP* 976), this idealization of the self is taken to the extent of comparing and declaring himself better than the Portuguese poet:

> Every time I read Pessoa I think
> I'm better than he is I do the same thing
> more extravagantly—he's only from Portugal,
> I'm American greatest Country in the world
> right now End of XX Century tho Portugal
> had a big empire in the 15th century never mind
> now shrunk to a Corner of Iberian peninsula
> whereas New York take New York for instance
> tho Mexico City's bigger N.Y.'s richer think of Empire State
> Building not long ago world empire's biggest skyscraper— (*CP* 976)

The conversational tone ("New York take New York for instance") adds humor, as well as ambiguity, to this ode to himself as the American poet. He compares the number of books they have written, the places they have been to, the number of translations their works have had ("Anyway he never influenced me, never read Pessoa / before I wrote my celebrated *Howl* already translated into 24 languages"). The fact that he had several voices ("Alberto Cairo Alvaro de Campos Ricardo Reis Bernardo Soares & Alexander Search simultaneously") turns him into a "Confusing personae not so popular," in contrast to the multiple Walt Whitman, and —we suppose— Allen Ginsberg.

He also included criticisms to himself. The idea of scandal, which in "Elephant in the Meditation Hall" involves gurus and politicians, does also affect him: "Nobody does anything right! Gods, Popes, Mullahs, Communists, Poets Financiers! / My own life, scandal! lazy bum! secondhand royal scarlet ties & Yves St. Laurent Salvation Army blazers." All in all, he is a rock star who pretends to be simple, to be humble, at the same time that his ego is getting

bigger as he becomes older. This sense of pretending is mixed, however, with the fear of death. While Allen Ginsberg may appear as a stuck-up poet, he also shows his nightmares, approaching what his last book would tackle: *Death & Fame*. "May Days" (*CP* 979) appears as a narrative of his daily life, with a morning routine which includes dealing with public compromises: publications and photographs, while the thought of death is latent behind. As in the phrase of the title "Not Dead Yet" (*CP* 1012), and in "Autumn Leaves," he seems to be waiting, "happy not yet / to be a corpse" (*CP* 1046):

> Should I get up right now, crosslegged scribbling Journals
> with motor roar in street downstairs, stolen autos doctor'd at the curb
> or pull the covers over achy bones? How many years awake or sleepy
> How many mornings to be or not to be?
> How many morning Mays to come, birds chirp insistent on six-story roofs? (*CP* 980)

Allen Ginsberg was dying and so he wanted to make sure that was registered in his writings. Having his diaries already published, the figure of this poet needed also an ending in written form. Just as Whitman had intended to record (with oral style) a self living a specific time in the US, Ginsberg's plan was to give the Beat writer a poetic ending as well; something he would finally achieve in his last book.

2. 11. Death & Fame: Poems (1993-1997)

Death & Fame: Poems 1993-1997 came out as Ginsberg's only posthumous volume. It was published in 2000, three years after he died of cancer. This book is, however, a continuation of the previous volumes in terms of form and content: death, sex, and countercultural art as a response to politics fill its pages. Ginsberg, already in his eighties, was the society's tribe leader, the wise man, the old prophet, and this is reflected on the text in his constant self-exposition within the social spheres of poetry and art (also of rock and roll); he registered his acquaintance, rather than with big names of the academy or literary references, with Buddhist teachers and lessons, as well as his knowledge of contemporary history and present events at that time. By the second half of the 1990s, the Beat Generation was subject of retrospective conferences and studies; courses were given and dissertations and Ph.D. works were written regarding these authors who had been previously ignored. It solidified their legitimacy "as both a literary revolution and a fertile period for the visual arts" (Morgan 640). This situation combined with his increasing health problems. As Robert Creeley wrote in the foreword, *Death & Fame* compile his last writings when in hospital aware of his impending death, his last reflections and resolutions—his last mind" (*CP* 1061), and that is why many of them came from his journals (something Bob Rosenthal pointed out in the afterword, *CP* 1163).

He kept his obsession with "his self" as Allen Ginsberg, the famous poet. In "After the Party" (*CP* 1068) he describes the scene at the end of an encounter

> among professors' smiling beards,
> sneaker'd classicists, intelligent lady millionaire
> literary Patron fag hags
> earth mothers of Lambeth, Trocadero,
> Hyde Park, 5th Avenue
> blond haired journalists with bracelets, grand
> readers of Dostojevsky & Gogol—
> senior editor escorts from Trotskyite weeklies,
> lesbians sitting on glossy magazine covers (*CP* 1068).

He seems to be among people from London, Paris and New York, the cultural elite of his time which now accept him despite the fact that he is looking for a young lover, "a kid moving from / foyer to bathroom, thin body." Along with this poem, we find "City Lights City" (*CP* 1081), where he presents the year 2025 and describes the streets of San Francisco with the names of his peer writers. Musicians and "spiritual novelists" walk around the "Whalen Bridge," the "Phillip Lamantia Tower," the "Neal Cassady R.R. Station on Corso." Those who had been on the margins of literature had a central place in the future of American culture.

Still, he struggled to know and define himself as he had done before. "Multiple Identity Questionnaire" (*CP* 1103) poses questions on his identity in terms of religion, sex, politics and fame, with a conversational tone which gives the conflict some humor. He asks:

> I'm a jew? a nice Jewish boy?
> A flaky Buddhist, certainly
> Gay in fact pederast? I'm exaggerating?
> Not only queer and amateur S&M fan, someone should spank me for saying that
> Columbia Alumnus class of '48, Beat icon, students say.
> White, if jews are "white race"
> American by birth, passport, and residence
> Slavic heritage, mama from Vitebsk, father's forebears Grading in Kamenetz-Podolska near Lvov.
> I'm an intellectual! Anti-intellectual, anti-academic
> Distinguished Professor of English Brooklyn College,
> Manhattanite, Another middle class liberal,
> but lower class second generation immigrant,
> Upperclass, I own a condo loft, go to art gallery Buddhist Vernissage dinner parties with Niarchos, Rockefellers, and Luces
> Oh what a sissy, Professor Four-eyes, can't catch a baseball or drive a car—courageous Shambhala Graduate Warrior
> Addressed as "Maestro" . . .
> Still a student, chela, disciple, my guru Gelek Rinpoche (*CP* 1103)

Ginsberg is "Senior Citizen," "Mr. Sentient Being!" but at the end of the poem, after going back and forth in his affirmations, he describes himself as an "Absolutely empty neti neti

identity, Maya Nobodaddy, relative phantom nonentity." The conflict between being Jew or Jewish, gay, but also pederast, White, but son of immigrants, intellectual but also anti-academic, lower class, but also "Another middle class liberal" and an "Upperclass" frequenting sophisticated places, a "Maestro," but also a "Professor Four-eyes" and still a student. This may remind us of his "I Am Not" in *The White Shroud* (*CP* 881), still a comment on what he might be for the outside world, with different categories, and (as a result) empty, difficult to get a place within those frames despite having a proper name.

Nevertheless, the book has also a justification for his self-centered writings and there the idea is totally the opposite. We read in "Objective Subject" (*CP* 1137), a title which juxtaposes and at the same time relates the objective and the subjective as perfectly compatible:

> It's true I write about myself
> Who else do I know so well?
> Where else gather blood red roses & kitchen garbage
> What else has my thick heart, hepatitis or hemorrhoids—
> Who else lived my seventy years, my old Naomi?
> and if by chance I scribe U.S. politics, Wisdom
> meditation, theories of art
> it's because I read a newspaper loved
> teachers skimmed books or visited a museum (*CP* 1137)

He writes about himself and, according to him, only "by chance" he "scribe[s] U.S. politics," meditation and art theories, which is also due to his life: his readings, his teachers, his visits to the museum. Thus, diary entries and letters are included, as the letter titled "Happy New Year Robert & June" (*CP* 1117) or "Tuesday Morn" (*CP* 1074), where he gives a list of routines including scatological details. He tries then, from the public sphere, to get some intimacy with the reader, which gets to the highest point in "Scatological Observations" (*CP* 1147). There he warns "Young romantic readers / Skip this part of the book / If you want a glimpse of life / You're free to take a look" at him as "an incredible shit machine."

Most of these poems are conversational, so punctuation, indentation, and line breaking, as well as exclamation marks and spelling, keep the oral streak his poetry always had. In fact, as Bob Rosenthal says in the afterword, "[o]ften slight rhythmic corrections to poems would come in after Allen returned from giving poetry readings. Allen Ginsberg was one of very few poets who had the opportunity to refine the exact cadence of his lines through his frequent public readings." Rap music and hip hop culture started to be more popular, and so Ginsberg found there the continuation of the improvised jazz of the 1950s. He also writes about poetry slams in "Bop Sh'bam"

OO Bop Sh'bam
At the poetry slam
Scream & yell
At the poetry ball

Get in a rage
On the poetry stage
Make it rhyme
In double-time

Talk real fast
till your time's passed
Sound like a clown
& then sit down.

Listen to the next
'cause she listened to you
Tho all she says is
Peek-a-boo-boo. (*CP* 1158)

His poetry was also linked to breath in "Five A.M." (*CP* 1100). The text is a late night pondering on inspiration, where he denies its existence but acknowledges the clear connection between poetry and breathing:

Breath transmitted into words
                    Transmuted back to breath
          in one hundred two hundred years
nearly Immortal, Sappho's 26 centuries
of cadenced breathing—beyond time, clocks, empires, bodies, cars,
chariots, rocket ships skyscrapers, Nation empires
brass walls, polished marble, Inca Artwork
of the mind—but where's it come from?
Inspiration? The muses drawing breath for you? God?
Nah, don't believe it, you'll get entangled in Heaven or Hell— (*CP* 1100)

Poetry can transcend because of the "cadenced breathing" it incarnates, and so he kept this approach, although there is also an undeniable will to take it to the stage and be heard from the poet himself.

This may explain his autobiographical writings, but also the political ones. In this sense, many of the poems are highly contextual, they deal with current events, and so he appears as a chronicler and preacher of contemporary history. Poems such as "Peace in Bosnia-Herzegovina" (*CP* 1066) or "Thirty State Bummers" (*CP* 1151) continue his work as a commentator on events of his time. He combines the serious approach (as in the former text) with humoristic and childish effects of rhyme and basic language. In the later poem, we read about oppression in different states in a somehow naïve tone:

Take a pee pee take a Bum

Take your choice for number one

. . .

President Clinton President Dole
Number three you're in a hole

. . .

Richard Helms Angletone live
We were lucky to survive

Jesse Helms & dirty pix
Dance your fate with his party mix (1151)

CIA officials and political leaders are explicitly mentioned, along with Allende, Pinochet, D'Aubisson (the Rightist leader in El Salvador), the Conservative TV commentator Pat Robertson, Fujimori, or the NAFTA. Poems as these must be read with a history encyclopedia to be completely understood. The chronicle, of course, came along with the denounce, just as we can see in "Newt Gingrich Declares War on 'McGovernik Counterculture'" (*CP* 1082), a response to the Republican leader's rejection of countercultural expressions in fashion, music, drug consumption, meditation, ecology and poetry. His "Reverse the rain of Terror" (*CP* 1108) appears as kind of "howl": population seems to use drugs against "Death Penalty! Electric Chair! A roomsful of poison gas! Lethal injections! Mortal Hanging! Beheading the Idiot killer!". Different characters take shelter in drug consumption because of their difficult situations:

Puerto Rican kid needs a doctor, young black man needs his girlfriend's fix, white boy didn't know his habit was immortal!
The octogenarian schmecker's liver & kidneys failed, wants a deathbed shot of M
Half mad lady on the street had a fight with her daughter the whore!
The old boy lies on the sidewalk hands dirty red faced in his own saliva.
The delicate youth's in his halfway house a decade, thorazine eyes glazed over
His brother's Christmas card arrives at Binghampton State Hospital! (*CP* 1108)

Alienation is also denounced in "Sending Message" (1110):

They are sending a message to the youth of America
Smoking medical marijuana's all right
. . .
They're sending a message to American youth, African youth can starve to death we can't care
too much money, far over the Atlantic, our boys'll never die, politically unpopular, they'll become dependent, it won't fly
They're sending message by Bronco, Honda, 4 by 4, cinema MG, Land Rover & half million gas stations
. . .

> They're sending the message to Saturn, American Democracy works over the globe, spin that round your rings
> . . .
> They're sending youth a message look at TV football baseball hypnotic soccer basketball sports, sport! (*CP* 1110-11)

Repeating the starting phrase gives the poem a rhythm which no doubt would be used in public as a political speech. He wrote about disasters happening in India, Japan, Rwanda and Guatemala ("No! No! It's Not the End," *CP* 1112), and about non-idealized poverty ("Homeless Compleynt," *CP* 1116).

Some of his political poems were, however, thought as events. Rather than recording what was happening, they appear as happenings in themselves. He literally sent "New Democracy Wish List" (*CP* 1063) as a letter for President Clinton. It compiled a series of suggestions in long lines which might sound as a rant, each line tackling a different issue. Almost like a report, it is divided in "Retro Axioms" and "Lacks & Needs," dealing with the consequences of "Hyper-rationalization, hyper-industrialization & Hyper-technology," which "create chaos." Inner politics of the US still work as a big Moloch machine, placing "Muscle Power connected to appropriate hi-tech might rehabilitate Earth." Along with military and environmental problems, Ginsberg addresses the issue of AIDS and drug consumption, asking for education:

> Fund Ryan White Care Act, separate Church & State in Center for Disease Control, fund bleach kits, needle exchange & plainspoken AIDS education, build infrastructure of decentralized community based health care preventative medicine early intervention clinics for poverty class disease-prone high-risk teens women & men living with AIDS & TB inner city plagues.
> . . .
> Sexuality's loose not fixed. Legalize it.
> Decriminalize addictive drug problem, doctors can cure addiction or provide maintenance if no cure. Reduce mass-million exprense on narcotics-addicted political prisoners overcrowding courts & jails, Medicalize drug trade. (*CP* 1063-64)

The poem also asks for a different farming system and more transparent politics. As a famous poet, Ginsberg saw in his letter to the president an opportunity to give him some of his ideas. Another (less private-like) text is "The Ballad of Skeletons" (*CP* 1091), a review of the capitalist system and its ideas on religion and morality (including debates on abortion, race, sexuality) in the form of a repetitive and strongly rhythmic song which was actually set to music with Philip Glass in 1992 and CD-recorded (Hoffman, *American Poetry* 141). He also read it to the riff in the Albert Hall of London with Paul McCartney (interview by Harvey R. Kubernik n. pag.). The poem evidences the logocratic nature of politics, repeating who said

what in a macabre dialogue between skeletons: the Presidential, the Speaker, the Representative, the Supreme Court, the Military, the Upperclass skeleton, the Right Wing and the Gnostic, the Corporate, the Homophobe, the Macho skeleton and the NAFTA one. Thus he points at the main conflicts of his times, as a constant discourse fight rather than a humanitarian one. Similarly, the "World Bank Blues" (*CP* 1126) follows regular metrics and rhyme, but rather narrates the story of a worker of Capitalism. Although they may not be understood as pure events, it is to be taken into account that they were repeatedly performed and so modified according to the context.

The person chanting them was Allen Ginsberg, a poet-prophet getting close to his death, and so this book was also a sort of goodbye, a public declaration of his disappearance. As part of the title of the book, death is central and obviously related to his fame. Some poems show restlessness over the idea. For instance, "Bowel Song" (*CP* 1097) uses the second person to confront it, but includes his name at the end:

> You've been coughing for weeks
> still you don't sit on your cushion & visualize Bam
> . . .
> Listen, your days are numbered, why waste the essence of your clock
> How will you feel when you can't breathe?
> What'll you do the last six minutes?
> Where'll you go for the next 6 hours?
> . . .
> Wanna drift off & become a newspaper headline,
> what good favorable publicity in the bardo?
> Allen Ginsberg says, these words'll get you nowhere
> these jokes won't be funny when everyone leaves the seven exits (*CP* 1097).

The diminishing time and signs of disease follow along his own public figure: he addresses himself as "you," and also talks from his famous entity. The lack of knowledge makes him unable to answer what death is like, as in "Kerouac," where he argues "I can't answer, / reason I can't answer / I haven't been dead yet" (*CP* 1138). What he knew, however, was disease and getting old. "These knowing age" (*CP* 1070) contrasts the social expectation of having a lot of knowledge, and at the same time, the bodily decadence proper of his age:

> These knowing age
> fart
> These knowing age
> walk slowly
> these knowing age
> remind themselves of their grandmothers (*CP* 1070)

The scatological details, as we saw above, were part of his strategy to open up, but also a way to project how Allen Ginsberg had an organic and finite body. That is what we find in "Here

We Go 'Round the Mulberry Bush" (*CP* 1075) and "Excrement" (*CP* 1078): "My self the poet ageing on the stool / Polythymnia the Muse herself, lowered to this throne— / what a relief!". In "Hepatitis Body Itch . . . " (*CP* 1139) he listed his pains and sufferings, while in "Things I'll Not Do (Nostalgias)" (*CP* 1160) he recited the travels of the past which would never be repeated.

Humor would be essential in "Death & Fame" (*CP* 1130) too. In this poem, the writer jokes around the social event of his death. He writes:

> When I die
> I don't care what happens to my body
> throw ashes in the air, scatter 'em in East River
> bury an urn in Elizabeth New Jersey, B'nai Israel Cemetery
> But I want a big funeral
> St. Patrick's Cathedral, St. Mark's Church, the largest synagogue in Manhattan
> (*CP* 1130).

Family members, lovers, poets, musicians and artists, along with teachers, readers and journalists get together and comment about the poet's sexual knowledge, as well as his natural charm ("'I met him dozens of times he never remembered my name I loved him anyway, true artist' / 'Nervous breakdown after menopause, his poetry humor saved me from suicide hospitals'"). The meeting is "part of 'History,'" although he pretends not to know: "Everyone knew they were part of 'History' except the deceased / who never knew exactly what was happening even when I was alive" (*CP* 1132). Thus, the false modesty is clear here, in line with the rest of the poems. He was giving details of his disease and his decadence because he thought the death of Allen Ginsberg was to be a historical event, and so wrote it in his last published book.

Conclusion. Poet Meets Poet: Final Remarks

The relationship between Walt Whitman and Allen Ginsberg has already been pointed out by critics. The twentieth-century poet was inspired by Whitman's ideas and poetry, and he wanted to take his place (his "cudgel") in his own century. There are a hundred years separating the appearance of both "Song of Myself" and "Howl," two cries coming from the same country and taking the same visual (sonorous) form in uncommonly long lines. We may ask: to what extent is Ginsberg the response to Whitman's call for an American poet after Emerson's? Ginsberg seems to have taken his prefaces and *Democratic Vistas* as a guide for his projection of "Allen Ginsberg the Poet": he wanted his poetry to be public, to get to the common people, to break with old and stench literary canon, as well as promoting his manly love, the adhesiveness necessary to get a real democracy. This dissertation is an exploration of these two authors from the perspective of political activism and performance, and it has shown that in the figure of the poet that Whitman and Ginsberg tried to project we can find elements from self-expression, but also those of self-projection, a stand in the middle between the essentialist and the fluid conception of the self, intrinsically linked to the national role they had as literati.

As I pointed out in the introduction, the topic of this dissertation has a long history of research. The relationship between the Beat generation and the American tradition of authors as Emerson, Thoreau, and Whitman has been explored. Nonetheless, not all the studies I have read deal with them from the linguistic approach. They remark the political symbol that Whitman was for future generations, and the inspiration he was in terms of form (in the use of free verse), but there are few works devoted to the relationship between their political programs and their performative realization. C. Carroll Hollis opened the path to analyze Whitman's performative language with his studies on style, and decades later, Tyler Hoffman does point at the performative streak that can be found in American culture, from Whitman's line to contemporary hip-hop compositions. This dissertation then combines the analysis from Speech Acts of Hollis, the performative reading of Hoffman, and gives it the frame of logocracy, already pointed out, but not developed by the latter critic. As the reader can see through the outline of this work, my analysis takes as point of departure the figure of the poet, as it is defined by Romanticism, by these two poets, and how they articulate it in their writing, involving then aspects of presence and absence on the page, issues which were part of the poetical concern of both Whitman and Ginsberg.

My proposal is then a response to different analysis of these authors that were never put in comparison with each other in depth. Both have been read under the light of Romantic poetics, but there is a close connection between their position as Romantic (Neo-Romantic in the case of Ginsberg) and their conception of language within a nation which was created by language. Moreover, the approach from terms such as performative/performance, entails working on self-presentation, an aspect these poets were absolutely devoted to. In their enacting of the national poet, they took a specific position regarding reading, speaking, listening and writing, a position in which they differed. Roughly speaking, these two poets would share poetics, but if we apply the framework I propose, we can appreciate their activisms take different forms.

1. The Romantic Path

In this long tradition of comparison there has been some debate. Several critics have found huge differences and misunderstandings in the parallelism between these two poets, as is the case of Allen Grossman. He argues there is nothing of Whitman in Ginsberg because his style founded the celebration of a secular world, while in Ginsberg's text (I suppose he is referring just to "Howl" or "Kaddish") celebration is replaced by a "ruined mind" and an attempt to build a new reality. He also contrasts Whitman's national images of stability with Ginsberg's international focus (Grossman 106). However, one cannot help but remembering Whitman's constant vocatives to the rest of the world, to the East and Europe, at the same time that Ginsberg's sceneries in later texts on America make it clear that Grossman's point is not strong enough. What we may admit, though, is Marjorie Perloff's reading of Ginsberg's line as not completely Whitmanian, but also influenced by a mix of Williams' realism, high (English) tradition, Henry Crane, Apollinaire and Blaise Cendrar ("A Lion" 209). Of course, as I advanced above, there is in Ginsberg also the influence from the Bible, as well as his Yiddish origins.

Nonetheless, having Whitman as a model was something Ginsberg repeated over and over during his career, and there are many explicit references to the nineteenth-century poet. We find it in his titles, as in "Love Poem on Theme by Whitman" (*CP* 123), "After Whitman & Reznikoff" (*CP* 740), "I Love Old Whitman So" (*CP* 900), and "Whitmanic Poem" (*CP* 1140); also, in the text, as in "Siesta in Xbalba" (*CP* 105), for instance, where the dead god of America seems to be responded to with the image of the poet

—Returning
  armed with New Testament,

critic of horse and mule,
        tanned and bearded
satisfying Whitman, concerned
        with a few Traditions,
metrical, mystical, manly
… and certain characteristic flaws (*CP* 118)

Later on, in "A Supermarket in California" (*CP* 144) the young poet recalls and finds Whitman among images of meat and vegetables, no doubt praising Whitman's adhesiveness with the grocery boys lines. There the images the old poet gave of the street are comprised in the American supermarket; his enquiries over the eyes of the oxen ("What is that you express in your eyes? / It seems to me more than all the print I have read in my life" *Leaves* 35) appear here in Ginsberg's question "Who killed the pork chops?". America needs Whitman's guide to have a real destination. He is listed with Blake, Shelley, Lorca, poets who bore political connotations. "Franco has murdered Lorca the fairy son of Whitman," "Whitman warned against this 'fabled Damned of nations'" he says in "Death to Van Gogh's Ear" (*CP* 175). He appears among what Ginsberg calls "Ignus" (*CP* 211), and celebrates every part of his body, "Nor one single Whitmanic / toenail contemn" ("Why is God Love, Jack?" *CP* 343). Whitman's "barbaric yawp over the roofs of the world" (*Leaves* 77) sounds in Manhattan of "Bayonne Entering NYC" (*CP* 427), along with the "Whizz of bus-trucks shimmer." He is a source of inspiration, object of vocatives now and then, in "Thoughts on a Breath" ("Oh Walt Whitman salutations you knew the laborer, / the sexual intelligent horny handed / man who lived in Dirt" *CP* 638) and "Plutonian Ode" ("At last inquisitive Whitman a modern epic, detonative, Scientific theme . . . Father Whitman I celebrate a matter that renders Self oblivion! . . . This ode to you O Poets and Orators to come, you father Whitman as I join your side, you Congress and American people" *CP* 710, 713).

Thus, Whitman's poetry is a sublayer in Ginsberg's works. In his preface to *Cosmopolitan Greetings* collection, titled "Improvisation in Beijing" (*CP* 937) he explains his writing: "I write poetry because Walt Whitman gave world permission to speak with candor," and it is precisely about this candor that he spoke in an interview with Gloria Brame: "I'm simply trying to write according to the directions of Walt Whitman, who said he hoped the poets of the future would specialize in CANDOR. I'm trying to record my experiences candidly, and that right must be protected, because my experiences are more or less parallel with other people's" (n. pag.). Indeed, in his 1855 preface, Whitman points at the "freshness and candor of their [the common people's] physiognomy" (*Leaves* 617). "[T]he investigation of their [men and women, and the earth's] past and present and future shall be unintermitted and shall be done with perfect candor"; that is, "personal candor" —and not "tricks"— were

to define Whitman's poet (*Leaves* 626-27). This candor then emphasized the common as subject for writing, but also a trait to be desired for the American poet: only the common, he who was aware of the margins of society, and who accepted his own imperfections, was able to write the fittest poetry for the US. As a result, we find in both poets a tendency to write themselves, mixing the chronicle and the autobiography in what I have concluded is rather a performance of the American poet, first in the nineteenth and then the twentieth century US.

As we have seen in chapter 4, Whitman's *Leaves of Grass* took a topic-based division, but there is a clear life-related progression as well. *Inscriptions* introduces the self, the man that dwells on the pages and whose childhood can be read in "Starting from Paumanok." The following sections (*Children of Adam* and *Calamus*) develop the sexual drive needed in his times: that of procreation, as well as the adhesive, "manly" love. The rest of the sections, from *Birds of Passage* to *Memories of President Lincoln* explore the American self and land, going through the material improvement of technological expansion and the distressing images (photographs) of the Civil War. What is left of the volume, with *Autumn Rivulets*, *Whispers of Heavenly Death*, *From Noon to Starry Night*, and *Songs of Parting* are different expressions of old age condition and feelings towards death (something we could also say of the two annexes). From his childhood to the book that would be left after his death, the volume covers his entire life in the precise moment of the nineteenth century in the US.

Similarly, Ginsberg's *Collected Poems* took the form of an autobiography. He divided them in different periods of time, sometimes based on publications, and sometimes just on travels or phases he went through. Thus, the division does not follow that of a life as we found in Whitman (birth, reproduction, crisis, old age, death), but that of Allen Ginsberg as the famous poet he came to be. "Howl" goes along other poems written in the "San Francisco Bay Area," and *Reality Sandwiches* with those written in Europe. As annexes to the *Collected Poems* that he published in 1980, we also find *White Shroud*, *Cosmopolitan Greetings*, and the *Death & Fame* poems, somehow in line with Whitman's introduction to death and his disappearance, although here the protagonist is not a lyrical voice, but Allen Ginsberg, the poet who could also be seen as a "rock star." As he had literary legitimacy and renown, he rearranged, added and classified his poetry following a strictly chronological order, something Whitman had avoided. Therefore, although both volumes appear as two selves living two different centuries in the US, their projection was different: Whitman's seems to

be centered on the development of the nation; Ginsberg's, on the contrary, surrounds his own public figure.

Whitman's "candor" led them to write about the individual self, tying both poets to a Romanticism they would combine with other traits. As Ginsberg explained, he identified the "romantic period" coming and asked: "how could there be now anything but a reassertion of naked personal subjective truth—eternally real?" (*Howl: Original Draft* 156). Candor, honesty, should be the basis for writing, although as I have explained throughout this dissertation, the self was somehow projected, performed, and spontaneous only out of detailed working. In the case of Whitman, he was both exposed to the anonymous tradition of the Post-Revolutionary literature, at the same time that he attended public speeches of well-known orators, both streams trying to define what the American land and who the American citizen were. He broke into the literary market with a picture of himself that was rather uncommon for any poet in his times, and at the same time he kept America as his main subject of writing. If in political terms he was living periods of convulsion (the tensions leading to the Civil War, the movement from a farm-based society to the big cities characterized by their smokestacks), he also found in the marginal poet the figure to lead a social change against the corruption he was witnessing in institutions (including that of literature).

When we consider Ginsberg's times, some parallelisms can be found: at college he had found a total rejection of self-expression in poetry. The New Criticism had removed the attention from author and context, leaving just an orphaned text to be analyzed with the objectivity of a scientific approach. In the meantime, Ginsberg found in out-of-the-program poets a real inspiration for his interests and personal concerns. Thus, he was absorbing ideas from Blake, Whitman, Rimbaud, and later on from the Modernist voice of Williams, not very recognized at that time either. This was of course related to the sociopolitical context: the spirit of "unpolitical" thinking that flooded intellectual and artistic departments at college had an equally inflexible and homogeneous social model for all men and women of the nation. The "candor" that Whitman and Ginsberg defended was then an alternative way to define the US and its citizens, a different path for an equally patriotic conception of their duties as poets on the task of building, performing, inaugurating a diverse "Americanness." The "separate person" but also "the word En-Masse" celebrated by Whitman appears as the mechanic and the prostitute, the soldier and the nurse of the Civil War, and also the readers whom he tries to encounter from a book introduced by his picture and a long preface on

American literature and democracy. As the Transcendentalists', his text is a vindication of the wild, although his love for Mannahatta led him to include in his praises the backstreet and the tavern. Ginsberg's protagonists, poor and mad, beats and "ignus," did also set an alternative form of "Americanness," in attitude, language, and use of sex and drugs against a backdrop of imperialistic war. Whitman defines, among all his poems to "these States,"

> **America**
>
> Center of equal daughters, equal sons,
> All, all alike endear'd, grown, ungrown, young or old,
> Strong, ample, fair, enduring, capable, rich,
> Perennial with the Earth, with Freedom, Law and Love,
> A grand, sane, towering, seated Mother,
> Chair'd in the adamant of Time. (*Leaves* 429)

The model for a democratic system, America is a stable "seated Mother," composed of men and women in equality, characterized by a strong physicality which here is not compensated by spiritual traits, but rather with principles of "Freedom, Law and Love." Ginsberg does also point to the prolific America of Whitman, as seen above, in "A Supermarket in California," and later in exercises of love towards the land of both nature and war and industrialism (remember, for instance, the images in "Beginning of a Poem of These States," *CP* 377). Ginsberg showed a land and a type of American which was not idealized, but which, as the sunflower covered in dust, was beautiful and divine. Thus, in "America" (*CP* 154), he asks the country to be angelic and accept him ("Your machinery is too much for me. / You made me want to be a saint. / There must be some other way to settle this argument . . . America I'm putting my queer shoulder to the wheel").

This Romantic approach to writing and the conception of the self involved a vindication of natural language. As explained in chapter 2, both poets defended the inclusion of slang and common people's language in their poetry. This was with no doubt related to the exploration of American English sounds and vocabulary. Thus, what Michael Moon and Karen Karbiener note as slang in multiple poems: in "Faces" (*Leaves* 388) when he uses "Fores" meaning "the front, the snout, whatever" (as he told Traubel), or in "Song of Myself" when he refers to the "brutish kobo," a slang for the natives of Sumatra (*Leaves* 69). Native words, oral spelling, emphasize the American roots of the poems; while the European models used English spelling and vocabulary, Whitman tried to explore that of his own land, and that of the common man. His was a popular poetry, not that of high intellectual spheres, something which Ginsberg shares, not only in spelling ("Tonite all is well" *CP* 40) but also in vocabulary and grammar: "he must've saw" ("Television was a Baby," *CP* 285), "the can"

for 'jail' ("Dream Record: June 8, 1955" *CP* 132), "usta have" ("Hard Labor" *CP* 948). Ginsberg's sexual explicitness and scatology does also pour his poetry with words that would shock his readers. Thus, sexual practices, lower social classes and their vocabulary, were part of the poetry that these poets defended and that would challenge the definition of literature that their contexts gave.

Their honest, candor-based language included, of course, the oral and conversational style that both adopted, and this is seen in several aspects. First the use of long lines, although following different patterns, as I will later explain. These had no final rhyme, and appeared as sentences, but also noun or verbal phrases that extended through long enumerations, sometimes getting to full stanzas. Both "Song of Myself" (1855) and "Howl" (1955) had the cadence of Biblical texts, repeating "and," using anaphora as a point of departure, and combining both punctuation (mostly commas) and line-breaks to give the text the oral strength of sermons and political speeches. Vocatives, deictics and present-time referents made these texts also linked to the public performance; written to be spoken in front of an audience, they led to the performance of the self that popular culture had evolved into after the Revolution and later on in the nineteenth-century oratory tradition. Just as the Declaration of Independence had marks for its oral reading, many of these poets' compositions seem to involve a sound-based realization.

The explanation for this is, however, a point of divergence in the study of Whitman and Ginsberg. Both dreamt about taking tours around the US, meeting the people face to face, bringing their poems to the streets, as musicians and orators, but there were different poetics underlying their decisions for the use of the afore-mentioned strategies. In the nineteenth century, few poets had used long lines apart from William Cullen Bryant, and taking his looser lines made it easier to get to the American sounds of English. Traditional metrics had the connotation of fine, high art, coming from the European canon. Thus, Whitman's lines had no doubt a nationalist interpretation, emphasized with the vocabulary and spelling already outlined. However, and as it happened in Ginsberg's corpus, not all his poetry was based on this metrical principle. In fact, he did not keep his lines as long as those by Ginsberg. Rather, they seem to spring from his lists and repetitive discourse. Even in more traditional writings, as those after the Civil War, he keeps anaphora to articulate his poems:

> O powerful western fallen star!
> O shades of night—O moody, tearful night!
> O great star disappear'd—O the black murk that hides the star!

> O cruel hands that hold me powerless—O helpless soul of me!
> O harsh surrounding cloud that will not free my soul. (*Leaves* 277)

Also, in compositions which were more image-centered, as those included in *Drum-Taps*, we find this cadence of long lines just by the use of enumerations and repetitive structures, while it is the point of view and the projection of the poet that changes from one to the other. In his preface to 1855, he claims the organic origin of his lines: "[t]he rhyme and uniformity of perfect poems show the free growth of metrical laws and bud from them as unerringly and *loosely* as lilacs or roses on a bush, and take shapes as compact as the shapes of chestnuts and oranges" (*Leaves* 622) (emphasis added). Thus, as the wild and yet to discover and explore land of the US, the US line was to extend itself, defying any type of metrical and rhyme limit.

Ginsberg's principles, as seen also in chapter 2, are different. His line derives from theories which go back to Whitman, but also to Blake, Christopher Smart, as well as the Modernist ideas of Williams and Pound, which make it more complex. As a result, his work is less homogeneous than Whitman's, having poems which are very close to the haiku short lines and extension, as well as outbursts of words as "Howl" and the verbose *The Fall of America*. The orality and conversational tone of his writing was from the very beginning related to the inner processes of the writer, rather than to an encounter of the poet with a big audience (although there would be poems with that trait too). Ginsberg's times were those of television, radio and a media network which made some thinkers aware of the relationship between language and thought. While Whitman's vindication was that of natural language as related to the oral speech of common people, Ginsberg's ideas went further: natural language was that which originated from individuals who were liberated from the Establishment's discourse. The political implication was not just that of Whitman: the nation should be proud of their margins and popular culture, but also, there should be a change in their state of mind. This became the root for Ginsberg's poetics of the line (with the influence also of Kerouac's spontaneity). The body that in Whitman had sexual connotations turns also into the place where the line starts, body and mind converge in the breath, which is then transcribed on the paper. Thus, Ginsberg uses more indentation than Whitman, as his poems do also appear as streams of consciousness, each line a breath and thought unit.

Both then developed their own conception of natural language against that of the system's logocracy. In the case of Whitman, because of the long tradition that considered spoken language as destabilizing for the Establishment, mostly legitimized through the written laws. If the Declaration of Independence, although written, had a strong sense of orality, the nineteenth-century poet aimed at doing something similar with his *Leaves of Grass*.

A corrupted system could only regenerate through language and its conception regarding literature. The poet was a political component because of his role as regenerator of words, and therefore active in the performance (definition and inauguration) of the nation. The increasing belief in individualism could only be translated in a literature of the self, and so of his/her emotional (subjective) reality. A century later, the paradigm had evolved into something else: words built reality, but those in charge of ruling how words were used (in the media and in literature) were actually limiting what people thought. As a result, again oral, conversational, the honest language coming from the individual (drowned in feelings and emotions), was to fight and overcome the corrupted and cold language of the Establishment. In the case of political discourse, this was settled in the use of euphemism to talk about war, and in literature translated as the text-centered (and authorless, apolitical) reading of works. The answer of Ginsberg and the Beats was then that of mental exploration (use of drugs) and bringing literature to the margins, out of the Academia and the canon. Ginsberg could have written Whitman's call for a group of poets able to "permeat[e] the whole mass of American mentality, taste, belief, breathing into it a new breath of life, giving it decision, affecting politics far more than the popular superficial suffrage, with results inside and underneath the elections of Presidents or Congresses" ("Democratic Vistas" 200).

A natural language meant then for both a different way of threading America's logocracy, one which was much more healthy and democratic. The En-Mass word that Whitman chanted was made up of not less important individuals that would be the basis for the Romantic thought but also the capitalist system. Taking the American land and its differences with the rest of the world, as well as its historical tradition based on the Declaration of Independence, these two authors drew on the American sounds, its cadences and oratorical tradition to inform their poetics and give them a political dimension which cannot be left outside of their texts, in content and form. Although in different ways, these aspects would be materialized in their conception of the line and its relationship with the body of the poet, who was a public figure. However, as said above, their poetry was not homogeneous, and other aspects should be taken into account: their Modernist streak, as well as their differing realization of performance constitute the main point of conflict between them, as I will contend in the following section.

2. The Performative Turn

However, there is a constant doubt on who these poets are presenting as themselves. Was Whitman the man of the picture that he engraved in his book? Was Allen Ginsberg the

"angel-headed hipster" that wept in "Howl"? We saw above, in chapter 3, that there is a constant reference to the "I," to "Walt Whitman" and "Allen Ginsberg" in these texts. The use of deictics and proper nouns do not only refer (and inaugurate) readers and listeners in their vocatives, but physical realities of the body and the lines on the book. The Declaration's double performance is seen in the inaugural language of Whitman and the voiced writing of Ginsberg. Whitman springs from the pages, Ginsberg's body and breath is incarnated in the lines, but although this is done from the perspective of Romanticism and its belief in the expression of the inner self, these two poets are actually building the American poet from the outside, from the relationship with the other: Whitman in the encounter with the reader; Ginsberg, in his interventions on contemporary history. As I will explain in this section, behind the curtain of Romanticism, there is a detailed work on a spontaneous appearance of the poet. The conception and articulation of presence and absence that I discussed in chapter 3 comes into play here. Each in his different way, perform themselves (or an American poet, a Walt Whitman and an Allen Ginsberg) from and on the page.

It is here, in this reconceptualization of the self and language (and literature) to perform the American poet that they diverge. Whitman would exploit Austinian performative utterances; Ginsberg, would rather explore how his voice (his body, his presence, on lines) could change reality. Taking then the page, the line, the word, the voice and the body, these two poets aimed at creating their American literati by writing them. Texts became processes rather than closed pieces of art, and as a result none of the versions were seen as superior to the others. This, however, did not prevent them from trying to close their "final" (deathbed) editions in very specific ways. Whitman wanted it to be his 1892 *Leaves of Grass*, and Ginsberg revised his writings after reading them in public, trying somehow to get to a more accurate reflection or expression of the poem itself. One cannot help but considering these revisions as attempts to improve their writings, although we could also see them not so much as perfectionism towards the texts, but towards their future heritage as national dead poets, future projected presences of their American poets. Between the improvisation and the multiple versions, there was a detailed work both on the texts and on the myths they were leaving behind.

As we have seen, Whitman fights the corrupted logocracy in the US with a poetry of presence and absence because those concepts are intrinsically related with natural language. Apart from his tours throughout the US reading his poems aloud in front of the American citizenry, his encounter with the individual was through the text. His poems are full of

directives, vocatives, celebrations, but also of references to "now" and "here," "you" and "I," building up the contact between poet and reader. It was a complete break-up of tradition: his lyrical I appeared as a total honest and transparent self, dealing with all types of topics, the mud and the crown, the popular song and the high culture opera. As a result, both content and form made his writings to be seen as invasive and tasteless. Sometimes from a timeless scenario, Whitman approaches the reader:

> Closer yet I approach you,
> What thought you have of me now, I had as much of you—I laid in my stores in advance,
> I consider'd long and seriously of you before you were born. (*Leaves* 138)

By using the present and the past indifferently, the poet seems to be active everywhere and everytime, through the reciprocal action of considering and seeing. By describing himself in the physicality of the book and lines, he inaugurates the encounter:

> To You, whoever you are, (bathing, leavening this leaf especially with my breath—pressing on it a moment with my own hands;
> —Here! feel how the pulse beats in my wrists!— how my heart's-blood is swelling, contracting!) (*Leaves* 537)

And this is also related to the role he takes and that he asserts he takes: "When you read these I that was visible am become invisible," the poet talks from the past in present, referring and so creating the present reading scene; "when you read these" conjugate the present ("when") of the "you" and his "these," touching the reader and positioning himself as an atemporal voice. His presence is actually an absence, and the other way around. Thus, the natural language which is voice-based needs of the written form, a relationship which is established with no apparent conflict, as taking to poetry the idea of inauguration ("I too, following many and follow'd by many, inaugurate a religion, I descend into the arena," *Leaves* 18). Rather than representation, then, in Whitman's poetry we find a constant articulation of the self as the American poet — "I will make a song for these States" (*Leaves* 17).

Whitman's poems appear then as processes, as actions rather than objects of mimetic nature. Either he is saying, claiming, or promising ("I will"), he presents images of actions ("Twenty-eight young men bathe by the shore," *Leaves* 34), or the poem itself becomes an action of vocatives and addresses to the reader ("So long!" *Leaves* 422). Speech is the backbone because of the traditional (catalogue-fitting) speech acts that he uses, but also because, in more traditional and narrative poems, the voice and tale-telling component are still important. As I explained in chapter 3, the use of present and past perfect seems to dominate the text, but the past simple is integrated as well when the lyrical voice is a teller, a

self-aware narrator who minds the form of his narrative. The poems are seen as chantings and celebrations, thus events, happenings, involving presences and, consequently, natural language too. If the corruption of democracy came from logocracy, it was that of an non-native use of language, both in the press and the government. For a democracy to work, common language was needed, and so that of the spoken spheres, of face-to-face speech. Thus he combines the writing of his poem and his political activism in a double vindication: of the purity of spoken language and also that of the common American people, as well as its application to literature.

As Whitman, Ginsberg wanted to read his poems aloud, to take them out of the paper and put them in sound. As the nineteenth-century poet as well, he wanted to (and actually did) take tours around the US just reading his poems. In fact, it was in the context of a public reading that he started his career, a fact that would mark the way he considered himself as a poet, and the myth he built around his own writing. Of course, Ginsberg contemplated the action of writing under the light of the Modernist movements that had preceded him. The creative process was the center for so many authors that he admired: Apollinaire, Artaud, Pound and Williams. Rather than the canonical branch of Modernism opened by T. S. Eliot, he felt attracted to the poetics of Williams' presentation of American language, its connection with the spoken English of real life, the application of the "already-mades" to poetry. At the same time, he saw in Pound the meticulous work on language, words, syllables, in the spoken form. This turned his conception of poetry to the action more than the autonomous object of art. His neo-Romanticism was then combined with some Modernist components. To this, he added Kerouac's and Burroughs's influence. Kerouac's spontaneous (talkative) style was combined with Burroughs's psychological explorations in writing.

As a result, even though Ginsberg's writings were, especially at the beginning of his career, quite confessional, soon he took a slightly different approach. His irruption in the poetic scene with "Howl," and later its publication, censorship and trial, turned the text and his personality into a subject of literary discussion which he wanted to participate in. Thus, his writings kept being confessional, but the intimacy that we saw in Whitman was not present here. If any, it was articulated through the topics: scatological and sexual, his writings became the peephole to the queer America, and later on they also turned into an interpretative guide outside of the Establishment. There is no intimate approach to the reader, the American readership was a multitude of people, so Whitman's first images of the

arena might have served to develop his conception of poet and the projection of his own persona. Every poem was not only a process because of his aforementioned poetics, but also because the place they took in contemporary pop culture. In the late 1960s Ginsberg exploited his figure and put it to fight against political injustices, in and out of the US.

That is how his poems come to be seen as events. They were not just retellings, but things that happened in what he wanted to be his public image and life. He was obviously influenced by the Romantic conception of the self-expression in writing, but the "I" also would become an object of exploration and self-making. Just as he jokes in "I'm a Prisoner of Allen Ginsberg" (*CP* 882), the poet everyone knew acquired enough personal information to become a kind of jail. He had built a detailed character who was commenting contemporary history and vindicating a different way of thinking. Moreover, the poetics which ruled his lines according to thoughts and breath units turned the reading process into a change in the body and mind of the reader as well. Even when read, the poem's vibrations had the power to change the mind of the people. Using the concept of mantra, Ginsberg defended his poetry as a counter-spell for the reality built by the Establishment's logocracy and logocentrism. It was, in his own words, a "historical event" (*Composed* 46-47). Although spoken, his poems were written in such a form it could guide the voiced version, at the same time that it recorded the self of the poem, his state of mind and body rhythms of breathing. Later on, in the 1980s, he started writing songs that he performed live with other musicians and rock bands (his favorite after The Beatles: The Clash), found in rock music the mantra that he so much appreciated to get rid of the Establishment's mentality, and his texts became also fleeting happenings (in public demonstrations or TV shows).

Thus, from the common idea of the poet as a public speaker who can act as a social factor and benefit democracy, these two poets developed their ideas in different ways. The oral was in Whitman something to fight the corrupted language of written communication, as well as a vindication of American sounds against the canon of European literature. In Ginsberg, it was a way out of the mind state, intrinsically related with the breathing patterns of the person. On the page, Whitman aimed at inaugurating an arena of encounter between reader and poet; Ginsberg's use of page was rather related to the inscription of the bodily (kinetic) energy of the poet at the time of writing, as well as a path for the reader to acquire a different state of mind. Whitman's vocatives and deictics worked for both the public and intimate author; in the case of Ginsberg, the constant reference to contemporary historical events turn his texts into reactions, chronicles of his times, not an "atemporal" meeting of

the reader, who plunges him/herself into the mind troubles and travels of a person like Ginsberg in different historical moments of the US.

As a result, their poetics were a challenge for the conception of literariness in a way. In Whitman's time, poetry was a cultural product following mostly European models where decorous language was the material, and virtue-related ideas were the topic. His poetry defied the genteel tradition where the poems justified their literary nature in the elevated language and decorous presentation of Enlightenment values. The utilitarian approach to writing was not totally left aside, as he proposed a literature for the democracy and springing from the American lifestyle. However, as I commented above, his poetry acted as a kind of complement for the declaration, declaring, inaugurating itself a different writing, authorship, and reading concept. Rather than portraits, they are acts of observation and claiming, when they are not absorbed in their textual nature, involving both the writing and reading scenes. Ginsberg's texts, of course, share this trait: his were challenges to the New Criticism's definition of literature, through form, content, and creative process. His poems did not follow the idea of just being, they were performative because they were actions in themselves.

Their strong orality took the poem out of the paper and rose questions around literature as a written-based category. Although they were strongly interested on what Derrida would later call phonocentrism or pneumological language (they were obsessed with "purifying" the corrupted language of the Establishment), with this approach both Whitman and Ginsberg somehow challenged the duality of writing and speaking. Spoken language could actually be written, and their books were conceived following that idea. In the writing process, in fact, speaking (and thinking) was writing in itself. This involved a different definition of the text, not as closed and rooted to the page, but derivative, in process, subject to change and valid in all its versions (regardless of the original). The text (as Derrida says of the Declaration) points at and (thus) creates what is "outside," although there is no clear limitation between these two "places." As a result, as well, there is no literariness to be identified, no feature that could tag them as poetry. The use of oral form and slang directly taken from real life pieces of language (letters, oral speech of the streets) broke the limits between high culture and common speech. When the latter was subject of literary writing, literature was reconceptualized and, in the case of these two authors, it acquired a national component. Given all this, these two poets converge with Derrida in their conception of literature as an institution which should be revised. For Whitman, this revision should be done in the framework of democracy, considering the American features of the society, as

well as the values to be encouraged; for Ginsberg, it should take into account the mental power of language, and so exploit the emancipatory character of language. All in all, literature, inside the mechanisms of logocracy, was to regenerate and deactivate the numbing (and corrupting) effects it could have.

The political activism of these two authors turns then, at the end of this dissertation, not so similar as they may seem at first. They share a concept of poetry going back to the streets, the idea of the poet as an influential guide for society, the importance of the oral element in writing. However, my approach shows that they differ in the articulation of the self as the Romantic poet, using strategies which overcome the simple approach of the American citizenship through public readings. The creative process involves a reconsideration of the writing according to the political needs of their country. Against a backdrop of corrupted logocracy (in different levels of development, as they belong to different centuries), their proposal brings a phonocentric vindication for poetry, which also meant a challenge for the concept of literature and its role within the US democracy. The result: two poetics of self-performance, based on a fight to write the oral, and achieve alternative ways of thinking and conceiving the republic.

Broadly speaking, we could say the Whitman was more successful than his heir. Relying on the paper and the physicality of his book, readers surely get the touch of Whitman even close to two centuries later. Ginsberg's book, however, becomes rather a chronicle which readers have to approach with an Internet searcher so that they can find the multiple references to people, places and events. He might have been, as he thought, recording his breathing and mind patterns on the page, making mantra of American language and declaring the end of war, but the text now will change the mind state of the reader with some difficulty. It becomes, nevertheless, a priceless sign of what it meant to write from the margins, and later as the center of the already pop (but Beat) culture, at that time.

All the ideas that I have developed in this dissertation underline then the conceptual component of writing in both authors and how they are not so similar as they might seem at first. Both poets are seen as Romantic and Post-Modern. The poet becomes a fluid entity which is spilled as in self-expression. Whitman's oratorical tradition is combined with that of a self which is performed rather than essentialist. In the case of Ginsberg, his conception of language, mentality and a media-controlled world takes refuge in a kind of essentialism: the

breath and the thought processes of the writer and the reader. At the same time, this study reveals the importance of the public figure in the writer's own approach to his/her task. Fame turns into a trigger of the self-projection, even in its multiplicity.

This study does also throw light on the role of literature within the US understood as a logocracy, as well as the performative nature of the national identity of Americans. The un-essentialist, and in-process ontology of what being American means is clearly seen in these two authors. They are not un-American, rather on the contrary: they want to be an active agent in the production (performance) of the American. The US, as an eternal receiver of population, becomes an epitome of the self as built, almost an object of decision. The notion of Literature and American Literature is equally marked by this paradigm. Literature can be defined before it appears; that is, literature as a concept does not precede the literary text. It is then performed, inaugurated in the same way that the self is inaugurated in the act of self-definition. Under the light of this approach, Whitman is one of the opening voices of this Modern conception of literature and the poet, whose cudgel Ginsberg takes, but which can also be seen in many other disruptive authors such as Burroughs, who said art was "just a three letter word—that's all. It means whatever you want it to mean" (*Martyrdom* 38), and even the earlier artists of the Avant-garde movements, questioning the closure of the term by the academia. In this sense, US as a nation, American literature and the American self are revealed here as subjects of present time, challenging the past, the given definition. Thus, from Whitman to Ginsberg we find the alternative side of the nation.

Farther research could analyze these aspects in the figure of Bob Dylan, especially if we take into account his early association with the Beat generation and his recent release of an album which echoes Whitman's poetics and discourse (*Rough and Rowdy Ways*, 2020).[37] Also, a research could try to get what the selling of the copyright to Universal Music could suggest regarding authorship if compared to the legacy-reading I take out of *Leaves of Grass* and *Collected Poems*. Besides, future studies can bring my theory to analyze the poetry springing from the Internet, the development of poetry in different platforms and how they may mark forms. Videos, images on *Instagram*, haikus on *Twitter* now imply another performance of the self. The profile-based format of most social networks invite to the projection of the "I," thus intensifying the connection between the writer and the text, and also the open process of authorship which is offered on those online displays. From the concept of logocracy to that of presence and absence of the author, we could trace the progressive development of

[37] Songs as "I Contain Multitudes" or "False Prophet" are suggestive in the framework of Whitman's corpus.

traits that were already present in Whitman and that now take form in public readings (poetry slams) and online exposures of the self. If, as psychologists and sociologists claim, the Internet and its social networks have heightened the characteristics proper of the city — seeing without being seen, being seen without noticing, individualism and a social encounter with multitudes of unknown people—, something similar could be happening with the online (public) poet in the twenty-first century: present and absent, in a public and intimate encounter, self-pouring an identity while building an individual self.

Appendix

★

★ ★

POEM
Rocket

★★★★★★★★★★

"Be a Star-screwer!"—Gregory Corso

Fig. 1. Title to "POEM Rocket," *Collected Poems* (page 171).

Capitol Air

A D A

I don't like the govern-ment where I live!

D A

I don't like dic-ta-tor-ship of the Rich I

E A E

don't like bureaucrats telling me what to eat I

A E A

don't like po-lice dogs sniffing — 'round my feet

Copyright © 1982 by May King Poetry Music Inc., Allen Ginsberg

Fig. 2. Chords to "Capitol Air," *Collected Poems* (page 752).

Fig. 3. "Deadline Dragon Comix," *Collected Poems* (page 1018).

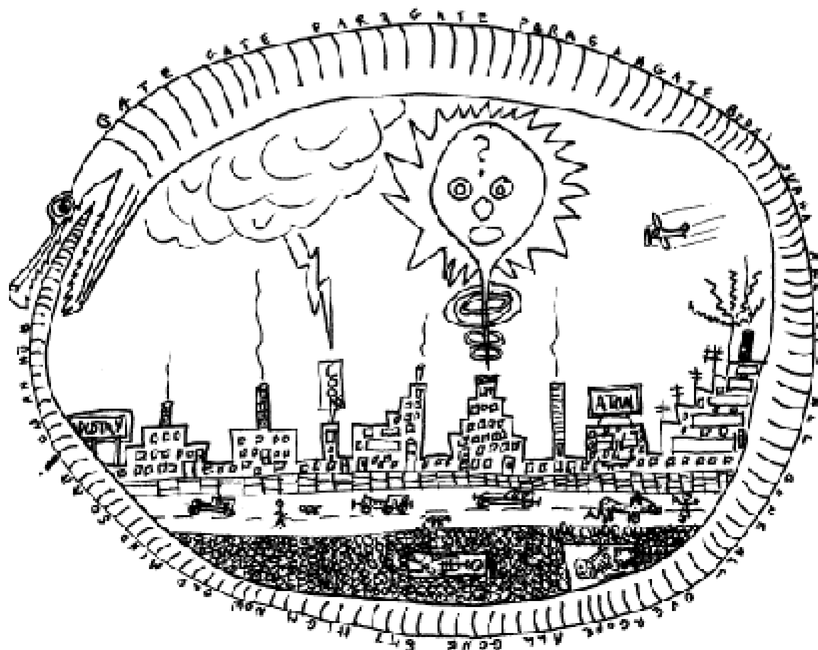

Fig. 4. Drawing included after "Granda Earth's Song," *Collected Poems* (page 975).

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