

EZRA POUND AND THE HERITAGE IN IDEOGRAM

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1) Ekonomi

1) Economy

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3) Usury

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4) Ideogram

5) Modernizm

5) Modernism

## ABSTRACT

This study focuses on the markedly regulatory intentions at the centre of Ezra Pound's engagements with economics, poetics, aesthetics, history and education; it tries to exhibit the inherence of an overarching thematic and direction in these concerns which gains intelligibility in relation to the various uses of the term "economy." This way, not only economics but also notions like attention, perception, will, the cliché and even the human body come under the purview of categories like excess, spending, conservation and intensity, while the ordering of and access to literary tradition is confronted with dissolution. It is also shown how Pound's legitimations and prescriptive discourse rely on many strategies and tropes familiar from the history of rhetoric like "sensus communis" and catachresis.

## ÖZET

Bu çalışma, Ezra Pound'un iktisat, poetika, estetik, tarih ve eğitim alanlarındaki uğraşlarının merkezindeki açıkça "düzenlemeci" saikleri konu ediniyor ve bu ilgilerin hepsine yayılan kapsayıcı bir tema ve yönelişin varlığının, en iyi "ekonomi" kelimesinin çeşitli anlamlarıyla açıklık kazanabileceğini sergilemeye çalışıyor. Böylece, edebi geleneğe erişim ve bu geleneğe getirilecek düzen bozulma ihtimaliyle karşılaşırken; yalnızca iktisat değil, dikkat, algı, irade, klişe gibi kavramlar ve insan bedeni de harcama, sakınım ve yoğunluk kategorilerinin kapsamı içinde değerlendiriliyor. Aynı zamanda, Pound'un kural koyucu söylemi ve haklılaştırmalarının, nasıl "hitabet" disiplinin tarihinden tanıdık birçok strateji ve figüre başvurduğu da gösteriliyor.

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## Table of Contents

Abbreviations.....	v
INTRODUCTION.....	1
CHAPTER 1: Early Aesthetics.....	9
A) Representation.....	9
B) Ideogram.....	22
C) Intransitivity.....	29
CHAPTER 2: Organisation.....	36
A) Luminous Detail.....	36
B) Analytical Geometry.....	48
C) Gears.....	51
D) The Red Thread.....	55
E) Noigandres.....	65
CHAPTER 3: Economics.....	71
A) Hell Cantos.....	71
B) Usura in Context.....	86
C) Heritage.....	91
D) Metaphor and Subject Rhyme.....	99
CHAPTER 4: Citations.....	117
A) Passivity and Catachresis.....	117
B) Quis Erudiet Without Documenta.....	131
C) Dissolving View.....	146
CONCLUSION.....	160
WORKS CITED.....	165

## ABBREVIATIONS

*ABC of Reading:* **ABC**

*Ezra Pound Speaking:* **EPS**

*Gaudier-Brzeska: A Memoir:* **GB**

*Guide to Kulchur:* **GK**

*Literary Essays of Ezra Pound:* **LE**

*Pound/Joyce: The Letters of Ezra Pound to James Joyce:* **P/J**

*Selected Prose 1909-1965:* **SP**

*The Spirit of Romance:* **SR**

Conforming to the New Directions Edition of *The Cantos*, Canto numbers are indicated with Roman numerals, followed by the page number (for example: XX/125).

## INTRODUCTION

In this study the reader will encounter the word “economy” in many different guises and applications. This is first because it is a term that haunts the vast corpus of Ezra Pound’s writings, including his conceptualisations of subjects that may not necessarily imply the term at first glance. For the reason that Pound’s economics is usually a semiology, I tried to extend “economy” back to periods and subjects not immediately linked to the main instance of “economics” proper, and sought economy where it is not usually expected to appear in so dominating a fashion, in his early poetics for example. A vital reason for an insistence on using a critical term in a way Pound is not using it is the danger of making only a doubling commentary to a work that is defined by self-commentary, as in his unique employment of time Pound’s work gives many instances of revisiting of old themes, making provisional definitions only to alter them later, associating and dissociating with no end. On the other hand, in dealing with Pound’s writing in a strictly chronological focus, or through examination of a single period, there is always a risk of missing the play of self-reference that is one of the most characteristic aspects of his art. In studying Pound there is always a pre-history and post-history to reckon with, and both with uncertain, “penumbral” extensions. It will be seen that a main function of what is called the “ideogrammic method” is bringing forth and using this possibility of temporal stretch, bend and fold.

Of course, a preference for an unfamiliar “economy” has another reason which may basically be caution. It was his cryptic style which deferred Pound’s

reception for many years, and this style delayed any really comprehensive assessment of his political aims, and given the state of criticism around 40's or 50's, its commentators were largely constrained to the observation of textual strategies, selectively leaving out parts of the vast referential field *The Cantos* were drawing from. So, when the field of reference had begun to clear around the 80's, politically attuned critics started rightly to be wary of adhering to Pound's own terms, as they were fully aware of what political subtexts lay behind specific passages of the book. In the following, my orientation to a more theoretical approach is in part due to this, and I am drawing extensively from works written around this period, especially those that engage with his economics and poetry from the same wholistic point of view.

In order to support a framework supplied by "economy," it has been necessary to resort to a range of sources outside the field of Pound scholarship. Among these, studies by Jean-François Lyotard, Marie-José Mondzain, Jacques Derrida and Pierre Joris have been most helpful in locating and naming the different economies in Pound's work. The references to their works also show the fertility of an "economic" thought for cultural interests. De Certeau, Agamben, and indirectly Bataille—as a shadow presence—will be the other if more marginal examples of my engagement with an economically inflected theory. As all of these works open different perspectives on economy that are never amiss in application to Pound's diverse concerns, it may be necessary to indicate along the way what separate contours they lend to this discussion.

The first chapter examines Pound's early poetics/aesthetics, yet foreshadows the later chapters in order to extract those aspects which may have bearing on Pound's later works. The art movements that Pound was promoting are the main

regions under examination. Imagism which has become synonymous with a certain technique of superimposition is discussed from the standpoint of perceptual assumptions that underlie it. This is the first instance a conflict is introduced between a precise, identificatory discourse and its superfluous other. Vorticism on the other hand, brings up the question of an intensity that is essential for creating form. Thus economy is first a communicative and perceptual ideal, and next a question of management of power, both having a problematic relation with excess and disintegration. When the ideogram enters the discussion, it implies the rhetorical displacements with which Pound transforms poetic image into reference and allusion, to use Peter Nicholls's terms. The destabilizing effect this may have on a discourse of correspondence is called "general economy," which concept Pierre Joris borrows from Bataille through Derrida and uses in his discussion of Paul Celan.

The subject of self-referentiality is also introduced in the first chapter. This aspect is important to prepare the ground for the later discussions of self-commentary, "usury," and "dissolving view." As Savinel also notes, *The Cantos* are distinctively marked by a principle of non-exclusion, also expressed by Pound: "that the modern world / Needs such a rag-bag to stuff all its thoughts in." On the other hand, this is not without stringent criteria of selection, thus exclusion, which brings the book to the order of a self-referential system which differentiates, includes and discharges. Thus another sense for economy is systemic closure and the various transactions with the outside this implies. In the second chapter, in dealing with Pound's attempt to create a model of organisation for cultural materials, this "systemic" aspect will be brought to fore, and not improperly, as Pound's main interests directly overlap with a "complexity reduction" (Luhmann) which is a defining aspect of the systems-theory "economy" I am borrowing from Jean-

François Lyotard. As *The Cantos* are primarily known with their inclusion of documentary materials and long stretches of citations, this chapter is essential for my evaluation of Pound's poetic strategies. The chapter also contains initial discussions of Pound's politics of synthesis and an anticipation of the problem of the implicit "curriculum" and commonplaces behind/of Pound's writings.

The third chapter finally broaches the subject of economics. Before reaching "usury," it deals with the "Hell Cantos" where a discursive excess is satirically treated in scatological terms. Although representing them as satire, I am making qualifications for the genre of "Hell Cantos"; but what is more important is the way Pound equalizes a certain discourse and monstrosity, which enables a juxtaposition of "Hell Cantos" with the intentions of Pound's imagist-vorticist aesthetics, and simultaneously, his attempts at an organicist organization. Here I am also interpolating Mondzain's survey of iconophile economy which is directed toward finding a semantic unity in all the different instances of the use of the term "economy" in the early history of Christianity. Her argument that what is divided into "plan, design, administration, providence, responsibility, duties, compromise, lie, or guile" in translations of "oikonomia," is actually a single polysemous concept encourages me to search for such a principle of unity in many seemingly different facets of Pound's work such as the image, "design" in nature, economics, distributive justice, rhetoric of the ideogrammic short hand, and education with the help of digests etc. For example, Mondzain's assertion about the patristic tradition that "the concept of the economy is an organicist, functionalist one that simultaneously concerns the flesh of the body, the flesh of speech, and the flesh of the image" (Mondzain 15) closely echoes Pound's strategies in the "Hell Cantos," and also some *Rock Drill* passages.

In this chapter Pound's economics are examined with a view to their discursive implications, in order to bring out what his two main economic influences—Social Credit, and Silvio Gesell's stamp scrip—hold for a theory of poetry. One of these influences, Social Credit economics, also supplies my title in the concept of "cultural heritage." While I am critical of some implications of the concept, the title also refers to the avatars and resurfacing of ideogrammic method in the present. Ideogrammic use of the past in disjunctive associations, while historically problematic for being prone to a fatalism, is still one of the aspects that makes it fascinating. There is no question that I believe the ideogrammic discourse as used by Pound to be the discovery of a remarkable medium in the context of modernism, whose effects, transformations and reproductions are not limited to literature, or history as "past." Ideogrammic thinking, especially in its non-linear form that exploits differences, has a way of disseminating itself that must not be divorced from the present perceptual system we inhabit through the state of media in our time, hence Marshall McLuhan's interest in Pound.

Usury is in the center of my discussion of Pound's poetics, and as it presupposes a use of time for acquisition of interest, I fully subscribe to Richard Sieburth's view that usury can be a principle of composition, for Pound himself allows such a coupling of money and speech as parts of the same system of signification. In this scheme, usury becomes equivalent with the structure of delay that shapes Pound's discourse, and his iterative accumulation of the fragments with a view to their final reckoning. As usury inevitably problematizes the closure Pound seeks for his *Cantos*, the form and structure of the poem is also discussed here with references to the work of Pound scholars Stoicheff and Kenner, arguing for the presence of a principle of expenditure in *The Cantos*, no matter what model of

integration one may choose to impose on it.

The fourth and final chapter firstly takes up citation and the problem of commonplaces along with with the emphasis on historical recurrence. In the first section I am mainly dealing with Pound's poetics of citation in an axis of passivity vs. agency, and examining the figures of accumulation and masterful "timing" Pound requires for his metaphors, thus, the engagement with the temporal dimension opened up in the context of usura is continued. My discussion of Pound's citations as a collection of implicit "commonplaces," and their relation to the modernist crisis of expression is departing from Jean Paulhan's work *Flowers of Tarbes*, who specifically discusses De Gourmont—a central influence for Pound—and concludes with an appeal to a new literature that will deploy commonplaces and be "a rhetoric that dare not speak its name," and I take this as a quite prophetic announcement of what *The Cantos* would finally become in its increasing dependence on its own past, using and drawing from it as if from a fund. Catachresis becomes the sign of this mastery over the circumscribed field of Pound's attentions. Pound's catachreses are strange mixtures that combine the language of exploration and the pull of personal accumulation, passively quoting but also changing the contexts of the figures used. In this section I have greatly benefitted from the "economically" oriented discussion Patricia Parker makes in "Metaphor and Catachresis" in *The Ends of Rhetoric*. Her account of how catachresis is changed in the history of rhetoric from a figure that replenishes language in supplying for "lacks" to a more extravagant form that depends on mastery and improper displacement throws some light on Pound's ambiguous attitudes in disputing ornamental language while claiming for his image the status of a "word beyond formulated language."

In the second section, economy is present in the sense of administration and

conjointly education. Pound's late Canto sequence *Thrones* is the pivot of the analysis of how different interpretations of ideogram can contribute to different evaluations of Pound's work as a whole. Ideogram as a tool for dissociation and association itself emerges as divided between difference or what Peter Nicholls calls "remainder," and identification or recapitulation. Additionally, Pound's Chinese administrative ideal of locality, or "homestead" allows a seamless transition from commonplaces, because the desired regulation in the homestead requires a certain "sane" curriculum in education of scholars, functionaries, and common people, who "think in quotations." Quotations and cities can both be economically organized in similar forms, because economy names and works against a "make more work fallacy." Thus Pound himself gives a full, polysemous yet implicit significance to the term "oikos," including the senses of a field to be administrated, and educational regulation. The persecutory implications and biopolitical suggestions present in these Cantos should be thought in correlation with Pound's insistence on sanity in language and fundamental definitions. As homestead is a representative instance where Pound's politics gets overly repressive and authoritarian, the Radio Rome broadcasts is touched upon to historicize *Thrones*. About the sort of statement I quoted from the broadcasts, nothing would be better than directing the reader to Robert Casillo's thoroughly researched book on Pound's antisemitism, fascism, and their forms and sources. In the current study, "totalitarian synthesis" and "biological incorporation" are the proxies of such extremely agitating and agitated manifestations of persecution on Pound's part.

Finally, the third section engages the other late sequence *Section: Rock Drill* in order to discuss a Canto that is rich with suggestions of a return of the topic of organisation. In the Canto, figures of anatomical design, will, and economic justice

are brought together and explicitly related to “Speech as a medium, the problem of order,” thus reaching a variant of the sense Mondzain gives to economy. This section also allows a reprise of the matter of perception and “Hell Cantos” through Pound’s relation with Henry James and “dissolving view”.

## CHAPTER 1: EARLY AESTHETICS

### A) Representation

The feature of the image that is of supreme importance to the subject at hand is differentiation. For Pound artistic form and conceptual and verbal differentiation are analogous, so are the abilities to produce the same. In that sense Pound's early statements on the artists and his own art have purposes which are in mutual agreement insofar as the analogy is kept as analogy. This is because he was also aware that it is not entirely possible and just to define or make a critique of one art with the terms borrowed from the vocabulary of another.<sup>1</sup> In defending this he wrote that "there is perhaps, one art, but any given subject belongs to the artist, who must know that subject most intimately before he can express it through his own particular medium" (Selected Prose, 35). This is characteristic in that, Pound feels authorised to make statements about art in general as well as about his own only on the basis of the craftsman's prerogative, having demonstrated some kind of mastery

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1 In a major work of Pound criticism *Ezra Pound: Poet as sculptor*, Donald Davie points to the ambiguity in the defense of separation of terms for arts, saying that, while Pound was inveighing against defining an art in terms of another, he was one of the foremost representatives in the 20<sup>th</sup> century of the same practice traced back to Walter Pater, frequently transposing terms and carrying out a cross-fertilization of different fields and crafts. On this subject see also Daniel Albright's *Quantum Poetics* where he exposes the same inclination in Pound with special focus on his music theory.

to practice the right to speech.

In the book *Gaudier Brzeska: A Memoir*, intended to eulogize the war casualty artist Gaudier Brzeska, Pound makes some illuminating statements regarding both his own and his fellow artists' practices. The points he makes bear repeating in this context to understand what Imagism was, and against what it defined itself. Firstly in this book of composite articles, Pound emphasizes the importance of arrangement of material as opposed to imitation. So, by implication a poetic image is foremost an arrangement of material. Representational imagery is eschewed in favor of an almost denaturalized sense of form.<sup>2</sup> The artist cuts out and shapes a form; for this he selects from a manifold, by making distinctions, and finally playing things against each other. Pound writes, "They [most people] have no sense of form. I mean the form of things, as distinct from the composition of a picture or of a statue" (*Gaudier Brzeska* 146). In poetry, this arrangement is expressed by the image. What makes the image effective is its definiteness and precision in arranging these discrete perceptions. Pound expresses the distinctive trait of his image thus: "Still the artist, working in words only, may cast on the reader's mind a more vivid image of either the armour or the pine by mentioning them together or by using some device of simile or metaphor, that is a legitimate procedure of his art, for he works not with planes or with colors but with the names of objects and properties. It is his business so to use, so to arrange these names as to cast a more definite image than the layman can cast" (*Gaudier Brzeska* 121).<sup>3</sup> This

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2 For a comparison of Pound with Kantian aesthetics and theories of abstract art such as

Worringer's, see Christine Froula, "Abstract Form, Modern War, Vorticist Elegy," in *Ezra Pound and Referentiality*, ed. Hélène Aji, 125.

3 Compare with a similar invocation of arrangement in *Guide to Kulchur*, which Pound approvingly quotes from a letter written to him by the VOU group in Japan: "What we must do first for

description of course fits perfectly well a defining instance of modernism, which is his “In A Station of Metro.” This feature of the image prompts some critics to see Pound’s procedure as a precursor of the interactionist theory of metaphor: “Superposition presents two literal things (‘ideas’) rather than one figurative and the other literal, and Pound’s image is not these images presented, but the presentation of their interaction” (Lewis 277).

Precision is fundamental for Pound’s poetics and the indispensable complement for “making it new,” because there is an assumption that everyday perception and art-appreciation is riddled with a lazy obscurity which is mainly an inability to perceive distinctions. On this point his historical sense and his sense of form are determined by the same reactions. Just as in scholarship he defended luminous details that would bypass a lot of work and “sort the wheat from the chaff,” to use a favorite metaphor, he approached perception habits as forming a “slop” and perpetuating indiscrimination. As Jean Michel Rabaté indicates, this links him with the Russian formalist pleas for defamiliarisation, if only from a perceptual point of view. More importantly, it is useful to look at his stance toward the immediate predecessor group impressionism to understand how the two analogous attitudes toward literary history and contemporary perception habits converge at some point. In retrospect of Vorticist period and Gaudier, Pound writes:

[Gaudier’s vortex] is also the proclamation of a new birth out of the guttering and subsiding rubbish of 19<sup>th</sup> century stuffiness. A

volitionist act stretching into future. ‘The fall of impressionism,’ the

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imagery is (in this order) collection, arrangement and combination. Thus we get the first line: a shell, a typewriter and grapes in which we have an aesthetic feeling. But there is not in it any further development. We add the next line and then another aesthetic feeling is born. Thus all the lines are combined and a stanza is finished” (*Guide to Kulchur* 138).

‘Untergang’ you can’t call it sunset, but the moon-set or the slopset of a period that had included the whole three or four preceding centuries, in which expensiveness had usurped the place of design...What we call social necessity is nothing but the temporary inconvenience caused us by the heaped up imbecilities of other men, by the habits of a dull and lazy agglomerate of our fellows, which sodden mass it is up to the artist to alter, to carve into a fitting shape, as he hacks off unwanted corners of marble. (*Gaudier Brzeska* 144)

The language of the will, which is here a projection of Pound’s relatively later concerns to imagist aesthetics, has parallels in Pound’s early reflections on emotions, and how emotions create patterns in art. The topic of emotion as energy or intensity can be more appropriately located as a Vorticist concern, the other modernist art movement that immediately followed *Imagisme*, and which Pound was leading with Wyndham Lewis: “Intense emotion causes pattern to arise in the mind—if the mind is strong enough. Perhaps I should say, not pattern, but pattern-units, or units of design” (*Selected Prose* 344). Here Pound significantly introduces the theme of control, as if there can be an energy overcharge, or a scarcity which shows itself in either a blur or a lack of form. This will be very important in his “Hell Cantos” as well as the *The Section: Rock Drill*. The preoccupation with design also bears witness to Pound’s consciousness of the impersonal demands of any technique and art, and yet applied to poetry, emotion is the main inciter of form. So as opposed to a common early 20<sup>th</sup> century notion that intense emotion should essentially be unreceptive of form, other than chance outbursts—as Marinetti would believe<sup>4</sup>—

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4 In the manifesto “Destruction of Syntax/Imagination without Strings/ Words-in-Freedom,”

Marinetti writes, “The rush of steam-emotion will burst the sentence’s steampipe, the valves of

Pound makes a counterintuitive move to indicate that emotion gives form. Of course, counterintuitive only against his immediate context, as Nietzsche is a probable forerunner of Pound in this stance.<sup>5</sup> Design here also means the maximum efficiency one can obtain from one's materials, shaping objects in order to change or improve the common ways of dealing with the world. The period Pound wrote the above statement about will, was also one that saw an increased engagement on his part with the Social Credit theories of C.H. Douglas, hence good design will also be something of economic value, insofar as it adds to the common fund of techniques, or what Douglas calls a "heritage."

The rant against impressionism is important in some additional sense. In the first Blast issue, one of the the the targets of the interjection "Blast!" in the diatribe collaboratively written by Pound and Wyndham Lewis is the (English) fog, which is a favorite, even stock subject of the artists whose sensibilities Pound and his friends were set on offending. If in literature this was symbolists with the language of suggestion and blandness, in painting this was of course impressionists. Apparently impressionists were for Pound one of the many representatives of vagueness and a fogged perception. On the other hand, impressionist artists's invocation of vagueness was not because it was impossible for them to see clearly, and show clearly.

According to historian Jonathan Crary, the period was also one that witnessed an increasing scholarly and scientific labour on the subject of attention and he makes a

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punctuation, and the adjectival clamp. Fistfuls of essential words in no conventional order. Sole preoccupation of the narrator, to render every vibration of his being."

5 Jonathan Crary finds a similar insistence on the dependence of formal equilibrium and serenity on precisely "force" or intensity in Nietzsche's *Will to Power*: "The highest feeling of power is concentrated in the classical type. Logical and geometrical simplification is a consequence of enhancement of strength" (qtd. in Crary 175).

case that the impressionist moment in art was in coincidence with and reaching more or less the same conclusions with these scientific studies, even if no direct influence is postulated. When he assesses the conclusions of these studies he writes:

What became clear, though often evaded, in works of many different kinds on attention was what a volatile concept it was, and how incompatible with any model of a sustained aesthetic gaze. Attention always contained within itself the condition of its own disintegration, it was haunted by the possibility of its own excess-which we all know so well whenever we try to look at or listen to any one thing for too long. (Crary 47)<sup>6</sup>

So it is in this climate where issues of perception gained an importance in art especially with regard to their volatility, that Pound was putting “clean demarcations,” tensional structures that could as it were hold the attention for long periods of time, and all the negative rules to the foreground of his poetic technique, performing in a dramatic way the evasion Crary writes about. Confirming the importance of this preoccupation, even later while writing the pedagogical *ABC of Reading*, perception was still important for Pound: “The best musician I know admitted that his sense of precise audition was *intermittent*. But he put it in the form ‘*moi aussi*’, after I had made my own confession. When you get to the serious consideration of any art, our faculties or memories or perceptions are too ‘spotty’ to permit anything save mutual curiosity” (*ABC of Reading* 85). It is the resistance and advances against this kind of dissolution, or “regression” of perception that, among

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6 Crary’s striking hypothesis is that distraction and the negativity of which it is a form is a product of the same labour of perception, a side effect of it. When applied to Pound this is a very suggestive argument.

many other struggles and lessons in technical formation—like his highly developed acoustic sense— that moves Hugh Kenner to praise Pound as stamping an era. The motivation and factual effect of the artist’s formation is watching for the epiphanic intermittence, and making his own medium as likely to register “full eidos” or the rare formal manifestation, as possible. It is no coincidence that a variant of this concern surfaces in one of the earlier Cantos too, as another pathos-laden statement of intermittence, this time wishfully: “The fire? Always, and the vision always, / Ear dull, perhaps, with the vision, flitting and fading at will” (Canto V/17).

So Pound had to ensure a style that guaranteed clean demarcations and also contributed to new ways of seeing. Clarity is an ideal that is upheld against the possibilities of disintegration inherent in attention. More importantly intermittent glimpses of beauty had to be recorded. Being aware and constantly in mind of this regression is one of the justifications of Pound’s methods of montage, ellipsis and his valuing of a dynamic as well as precise representation. Regression, but also his assumptions about knowledge in general. If “real knowledge goes into natural man in tidbits,” (*GK* 99) this calls for an appropriate communication by the poet who wishes for and idealises a swift transmission in pursuit of fragmentary knowledge as well as intermittent beauty. Along with the emphasis on emotion, this puts the author, before all else, in the position of a receiver, and this is one reason why Pound’s statements about perception fall into an unexpectedly quasi-phenomenological register. Yet Pound was always qualifying these intimations of passivity with an assumed posture of usually masculine robustness: “ [The good artist] can within limits, not only record but create. At least he can move as a force; he can produce ‘order giving vibrations’; by which one may mean merely, he can departmentalise such part of the life-force as flows through him” (*Selected Prose*

346).

It is not sufficient for a crafted image to appear from among a mass of imprecise matter; as indicated above, the image was charged with the duty to alter habitual perceptions. Indeed Daniel Tiffany implies that the non-representational character of the image as arrangement or making finds its extreme logical conclusion in Pound's fascism. He quotes from *Gaudier Brzeska: A Memoir* in support of this: "The statements of analytics are lords over fact. They are thrones and dominations that rule over form and recurrence. And in like manner are great works of art lords over fact" (*GB* 92). Aligning this with Pound's definition of his preferred type of artist, who, beyond receiving impressions passively, "directs a fluid force against circumstance," he argues that "the domination of Images over things and facts actually constitutes a fabrication of things and facts—a poetics of revolutionary ideology, which eventually finds a cause in fascism" (Tiffany 36). Without assenting to this tenuous link, it is necessary to examine Pound's statements that may imply a non-representational dimension and its opposite in more detail.

If fabrication is the culmination of arrangement, in Pound's early poetics it is actually overshadowed by the adequacy of objects as the "primary pigment" of the poetic medium, thus giving rise to an indeterminacy; and how the two may coexist with each other is a major problem of Pound's early aesthetics. The problem is solved by Pound critics like Bacigalupo, Tiffany and Perloff in favor of the non-representational character of the Image, even if through the vehemence of his disavowals of "symbolism," Pound repeatedly gives the impression that non-superfluous duplication that is light on rhetoric and the other resources of language would be closer to his intentions. However even Pound's polemic with the other "Imagist," Amy Lowell, or the poet whom he perceived as arrogating Imagism, was

directed towards destabilising the image, in order to imbue it with movement, which is achieved through Pound's consequent understanding of the Chinese ideogram. So the economy that gathers and directs the facts may actually be constitutive of its facts or reference, which allows the witty formulation of Hugh Kenner, who suggests that not a poem about a cat, but a cat about a poem is usually a better approximation of the spirit of Pound's poetics. Yet on the other hand, as Kenner also recognizes, it wouldn't be true to claim that this element of adequation didn't in the long run find new avatars, becoming activated during Pound's exacerbations in different periods. "Usury Cantos" and Pound's economic ideas are maybe the most important examples of this; and the "Don't" of the Imagist manifesto surfaces in the guise of the Confucian "And then stop" in the *Pisan Cantos*, where in a certain irony Pound is conjuring a whole nether-world out of his memories. In the form of a transposition of the documentary object, this element is more visible in the late Cantos, for example the *Thrones* section skillfully examined by Peter Nicholls, where something very similar to the aforementioned "statements of analytics," and laconically referential proper names take the upper hand.

The motive of the negative statements in the "Don'ts for Imagists" is combatting what Pound calls "poesie farci comme," or poetic statements with fanciful similes, which are abusive and dysfunctional offshoots of symbolism for him. In maybe his most anthologized statement he writes: "Don't use such an expression as 'dim lands of *peace*.' It dulls the image. It mixes an abstraction with the concrete. It comes from the writer's not realizing that the natural object is always the *adequate* symbol" (*Literary Essays* 5). Here the impression is of a realistically mimetic image that doesn't make concessions to rhetoric in the pejorative sense. It seems to be the reverse of Barthes' reality effect which diagnoses in the "realist"

novel an employment of objects that subordinates them to the texture of discourse. However that this isn't quite so is made clear by another statement of Pound's: "The point of imagisme is that it doesn't use images as ornaments, the image is itself the speech. The image is the word beyond formulated language" (*Gaudier Brzeska* 88). The Image is verbal at the same time, it is a specific state of language use; it proves that the limits of sayable at any point is not definitive, that there is a beyond of "formulated language," which connotes a sedimentation that is the negation of the features of the image: precision, evocativeness and novelty. If William Carlos Williams' rationalization of his poetic practice was "no ideas but in things," Pound's must be "no things and no images but in words." So basically, to stay faithful to this statement, what adequation Pound must have in his poetry, must be inherent in poetry, an inner adequation which isn't to things of the external world, but a general purposiveness of the poetic artifact. Strictly speaking, Pound is not always using adequation—he uses the word adequacy above—in the sense of being adequate *to* something.

There is almost a tautological economy in defending the approximation of the natural object in the poetic utterance. Tautology indeed occurs when Pound says that "symbolic usage should not obtrude...so that a sense or the poetic quality of the passage, is not lost to those who do not understand the symbol as such, to whom, for example, a hawk is a hawk" (*LE* 9). Tautology is the point zero of signification, where symbolic overdetermination is checked in favor of a "smooth" extension and openness of the meaning to all, here already matching at least two senses of "economy" indicated by Marie-José Mondzain: a consideration for the addressees and efficiency. However in keeping with the above statement that the image is the word, here the degree of proximity inherent in tautology is working counter to the

alleged function of using the natural object as the adequate symbol. The natural object rather partakes of the artificiality of the “image” matched to it. Tiffany writes: “If tautology dictates that the image is identical to its object, then the object must exhibit the inherent ambiguity of the Image, and thus always points beyond itself to its superfluous other” (Tiffany 28).

A concomitant step in this procedure of mediation is the use of and alleged adequation to affects, and the same relation to the natural objects is posited in relation to affects. Possibility of failure, in not embodying the exact affect in the words is what drives the parallel statements in the Vorticist piece “The Serious Artist.” Importantly, one of the earliest of Pound’s characteristic analogies with scientific method appears in grounding the adequation to affects:

The results of each observation must be precise and no single observation must in itself be taken as determining a general law, although, after experiment, certain observations may be held as typical or normal. The serious artist is scientific in that he presents the image of his desire, of his hate, of his indifference as precisely that, as precisely the image of his own desire, hate or indifference. The more precise his record, the more lasting and unassailable his work of art.

*(LE 47)*

Here the binding tautology includes emotions instead of objects and this makes the topography of the exact word like a phantom triangle with language taking imprints from both emotions and objects, creating an equivalence between them, only with the provision that there is no “natural” emotion as well as no natural objects. Like Gaudier Brzeska regarding sculptural form, Pound’s emotions are wired to forms, in addition to being constitutive of them, as in the above Vorticist statement. Brzeska

wrote: "I SHALL DERIVE MY EMOTIONS SOLELY FROM THE ARRANGEMENT OF SURFACES, I shall present my emotions BY THE ARRANGEMENT OF MY SURFACES, THE PLANES AND LINES BY WHICH THEY ARE DEFINED" (*Gaudier Brzeska* 28).

The use of alleged natural object as primary pigment is for the sake of the relations it can be put in the poem, and this by itself points toward an intention beyond mimetic. Marjorie Perloff argues in the same direction. Paraphrasing Haroldo De Campos in an article she wrote on the poetics of Pound, she succinctly makes the case that the ideogram, here understood as "the ultimate image," "functions not to represent things in the external world but relationally within the text itself, to move from one poetic unit to another" (Perloff 223). This way the thing in Pound's poetry takes on strictly mediational-relational qualities, determined above all by its being placed and replaced in all the different juxtapositions and constellations that make the ideograms or images.

On the other hand due to the trait of novelty inherent in the image, Pound's poetics must point to a beyond of mere tautology. Going beyond formulated language is in order that there can be fresh (dis)associations actually referring to something. While Perloff imputes a nominalism to Pound which he never admitted, the purpose of linguistic novelty should be thought in collaboration with a new objectivity which finally works at the expense of direct presentation which Pound commended, and this distended objectivity is constituted by the technique in structuring and arrangement. After reminding that in poetry there is a "beauty of the means" in addition to the beauty of the thing, Pound writes:

I mean by that that one must call a spade a spade in form so exactly adjusted, in a metric so seductive, that the statement will not bore the

auditor...There are few fallacies more common than the opinion that poetry should mimic the daily speech. Works of art attract by a resembling unlikeness. Colloquial poetry is to the real art as the barber's wax dummy is to sculpture. In every art I can think of we are dammed and clogged by the mimetic. (*Selected Prose* 41-42)

Pound's quasi-phenomenological take on composition is apparent here, as Merleau Ponty would later refer to art's "coherent deformation" of everyday experience. Confirming the emphasis on seductive metrics and arrangement that deform simple identity, Ian Bell shows that Pound himself took issue with a tautological economy: "The error of making a statue *of* Night or *of* Charity lies in tautology. The idea has already found its way into language. The function of the artist is precisely the formulation of what has not found its way into language, i.e. any language verbal, plastic or musical" (qtd. in Bell 292). According to Bell this idea of a new thing actually implies a non-social aesthetic,<sup>7</sup> because it is a creation that doesn't acknowledge a shared world that could accommodate other perceptions and viewpoints, but the fact that Pound's justification of this resembling unlikeness appeals to the stimulation of his audience complicates this. It is usually right to take Pound on his words about his sense of an orientation with regard to possible addressees, as a series of assumptions about "epistemology" and his own reception as a reader underlie his statements.

It should also be noted that, from the standpoint of a poetic economy, the image that will rejuvenate perception or experience in its coherent deformation, or

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7 Christine Savinel names this the "disobliging" quality of Pound's work and specifically his poetic persona, after Laurence Sterne's depiction of the 19<sup>th</sup> century vehicle of transportation "disobligeante" in the *Sentimental Journey*. Bob Perelman also refers to "a solipsistic space" with reference to Pisan Cantos.

attain vividness through juxtaposition, is less resistant to slippages than the insistence on adequacy taken alone. Here I am referring to the ideas of restrictive or general economies which Derrida explored in relation to Bataille. Taking up Pierre Joris' discussion of Paul Celan, a general economy would be one in which "the poem opens up from the restricted economy of a containable and constrainable structure" to an organisation "where 'meaning,' 'reference' etc. begins to leak, to 'bleed' into an unconstrainable chain" ("Translation at the Mountain of Death"). Adequacy of natural objects is submitted to an action that moves them on the surface of discourse, and when Pound refers to "a moving image," this is bound up with the ideogrammic line a given notion is made to travel. Along with Pound's other definition of the Image that makes it an efficient transmitter of an "intellectual or emotional complex," the overt emphasis on non-identity looks forward to Pound's life long defense and application of the Chinese ideogram as a medium for poetry and thought.

## **B) Ideogram**

Finally we can attend to the "preconceptual" underpinnings of Pound's understanding of the ideogram. How transformative or faithful was Pound's appropriation of Ernest Fenollosa's essay "Chinese Written Character as a Medium for Poetry" has decisive importance in this context, as Fenollosa's essay on the ideogram can be read as a defense of an imagination that works in "complexes." When Pound was given the task of editing Fenollosa's posthumous papers, the ideogrammic method "must have struck Pound as an other-worldly confirmation of things he had been saying for years," (Saussy 10) some of which we have already

discussed. As Saussy also points out, the aspect of Fenollosa's essay that proved to be the most enduring for Pound was Fenollosa's emphasis on the concrete particulars which the Chinese characters retain even in referring to more abstract qualities. Imagining Western predicative logic as a pyramid, and criticizing "the copula," Fenollosa wrote:

At the base of the pyramid lie things but stunned as it were. They can never know themselves for things until they pass up and down the layers of the pyramids. The way of passing up and down the pyramid may be exemplified as follows: We take a concept of lower attenuation, such as "cherry"; we see that it is contained under one higher, such as "redness." Then we are permitted to say in sentence form, "Cherry is contained under redness," or for short "(the) cherry is red." If on the other hand, we do not find our chosen subject under a given predicate we use the black copula and say, for example, "(The) cherry is not liquid." (*Instigations* 381)

Ideograms, on the other hand, do not abstract from the redness of a particular red, and "attenuate" it to the point where it is contained under the concept. Rather, they descend to the level of every particular red, or any other manifold they are intended to signify, thus Pound's paraphrase:

Chinese ideogram is still the picture of a thing, of a thing in a particular position, or of a combination of things. It means the thing or the action or situation, or the quality germane to the several things it pictures... [A "Chinaman"] He is to define red. How can he do it in a picture that isn't painted in red paint? He puts (or his ancestor put) together the abbreviated pictures of rose, cherry, iron rust,

flamingo...The Chinese word or ideogram for red is based on something everybody KNOWS. (*ABC of Reading* 22)

While Pound didn't discuss extensively Fenollosa's criticism of predicative logic, his language in *The Cantos* was definitely supportive of a rehabilitation of a functional understanding of parts of speech—reducing all to the status of a verb—which was Fenollosa's alternative to the copula, and only implied in the passage above. In the most obvious example, *The Cantos* have a tendency to drop the subjects, leaving only verbs, thus emphasizing action, as in the opening of the first Canto: "And then went to the ship." More importantly, Fenollosa's interpretation of ideograms as having verisimilitude, showing "fundamental relations" found in nature as well as thought was a rallying point for Pound's "How to Write," and the composition of the *Cantos*. In this way a mode of thought becomes a manner of speaking, the manner of writing in ideogrammic connection becomes the mode of thought, and what's in thought mimics nature. Here though, we have to bring out the implications of this resistance to the "sacrifice of phenomena" that the given mode of signification inherent in the predicative logic dictates. Lev Vygotski, writing on language acquisition, observes a moment of organisation preceding concepts, which he calls a "complex," and he makes an analogy between this type of organisation and "family names": "In a complex, *the bonds between its components are concrete and factual rather than abstract and logical*, just as we do not classify a person as belonging to the Petrov family because of any logical relation between him and other bearers of the name. The question is settled for us by facts" (Vygotski 113, emphasis mine). It must be considered that, figuratively speaking, while the family of "red" may be the goal in a given poetic fragment of the *Cantos*, it may also serve to start the discourse on the different family organisations, like the collection of

birds that may resemble flamingoes, or the list of materials that corrode and turn partially into dust, while Pound's associations are also given to swirling like dust. Anticipating, an example of this taxonomy of intersecting intellectual complexes is given in *Pisan Cantos*. In Canto 80, a quotation on the irreparability of death remembered from Turgenev, calls up Pound's other favorite quote from the novelist, this time on a problem of communication, and both are part of two intertwined lines in progress. In the same Canto Pound also writes:

the problem after any revolution is what to do with  
your gunmen

as old Bilyum found out in Oireland

in the Senate, Bedad! Or before then

Your gunmen thread on moi drreams

O woman shapely as a swan,

Your gunmen tread on my dreams

Whoi didn't he (Pedraic Colum)

keep writing poetry at that voltage (LXXX / 516)

As a few pages later Pound takes up the thread of the theme of good poetry, and the tradition necessary for this, this splicing becomes more than a simple digression, but a good example of a "chain complex" where real gunmen—here those of Mussolini—serve as a reminder of a beautiful couplet. As Rabaté points out, at these kinds of junctures, Pound makes of his voices, here changing between his natural tone and an imitation of Yeats's manner of speaking, the signal of the articulation of these kinds of sprawling, associative connections, till a given thread achieves a certain saturation in its function. Saturation, on the other hand, usually remains an ideal.

In order to see beyond the sense of vocation Fenollosa and Pound manifest in opposition to the prevailing linguistic and implicitly philosophical assumptions of their time, a comparison with a *fiction* can be stimulating, especially if that fiction partly derives from the endeavours of Pound and Fenollosa. Appropriating the model of historical understanding which Walter Benjamin produced in his essay “Task of The Translator,” if the notion of life is best understood as history, Fenollosa’s essay found an afterlife other than Pound’s work, and one which reaches edifyingly extreme conclusions. This story by Jorge Luis Borges, “Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius,” is interesting in that Borges offers two imaginary languages that intersect with the visions of language Pound was interested in, and which he found in Fenollosa’s paper.<sup>8</sup> One of them is a language of verbs and has its equivalent in Fenollosa’s Chinese ideogram of relations and actions that Pound promoted, but the other is more relevant for a possible comparison with the Poundian “objectivity” that may be implied by what he also called “the new noun”: “He [the great artist] has so vigorously or so persistently, so clearly, or in such sudden and violent light dissociated some concept in some particular tone, shade and set of implications that his expression becomes a new noun” (*Visual Arts* 164). Here Pound uses the new noun at the same time as a signature that marks the style of particular authors, technique in short. However, taken literally, it may apply to the effects of ideogrammic chains, the use of which diversified on the course of the writing of the *Cantos*.

Linguistics of Tlön, Borges’ imaginary civilization, contains names for ideal

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8 In the story, Borges uncoincidentally gives the name “Ezra Buckley” to a character. The only place I have encountered this connection pointed out is the website entitled: “Guia de Lectura de *Ficciones*, de Jorge Luis Borges.”

objects which don't necessarily exist, to the point that any minimum sensory conjunction can yield "a new noun":

There are things composed of two terms, one visual and the other auditory: the color of the rising sun and the distant caw of a bird.

There are things composed of many: the sun and water against the swimmer's breast, the vague shimmering pink one sees when one's eyes are closed, the sensation of being swept along by a river and also by Morpheus. These objects of the second degree may be combined with others; the process, using certain abbreviations, is virtually infinite. There are famous poems composed of a single enormous word; this word is a "poetic object" created by the poet. The fact that no one believes in the reality expressed by these nouns means, paradoxically, that there is no limit to their number.

Granted that Borges' intentions border on parody, the passage is illustrative in that objects of the "second degree" are also what we have with Pound, even so far as including a similar technique of abbreviation or ellipsis in the *Cantos*. This is also apparent in his interest in other languages like those examined by ethnographer Lucien Levy Bruhl, where the generalizations that are made are different than in a western language, so much so that the language comes across as a collection of unlimited singularities resistant to generalization: "Bruhl found some languages full of detail / Words that half mimic action; but / generalization is beyond them, a white dog is not, let us say, a dog like a black dog" (XXXVIII/ 189).<sup>9</sup> Yet, as Pound's use of the ideogram for allusion and historical reference in the *Cantos* relies on

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9 Again, Borges's Chinese encyclopedia in "Analytical language of John Wilkins" can be a good illustration of the extreme conclusion of the interest in these "languages full of detail."

“recurrence” and the generalizing capacity of his language, it frequently endangers the singularity of events for a panoramic view of history.

Although Pound’s work doesn’t exactly contain a playful linguistics of endless new coinings as Borges’ *Tlön*, and cherry, iron dust and flamingo unite in the common redness, the particles that make up a specific ideogram always tend to stick out from and distend the configuration, and this finally moves the discourse towards a non-representational dimension. This prompts Daniel Tiffany to refer to a “baroque syncretism,” (Tiffany 60) in a typical instance of pointing out a “return of the repressed” in Pound. In a poetics of such avowed concreteness, an image-come-metamorphosis is also almost necessary, to command a wider range of difference, beyond the sameness of tautology. Frequently Pound’s open-ended, provisional associations simply put too much strain on the structure and contribute to the cryptic effect of his poetry.

Not all critics are unanimous on this point. Donald Davie for example, makes a distinction that is relevant here. Discussing “In a Station of the Metro,” he writes that for Pound it is as a rule the outward that transforms itself to inward, in contrast to Eliot’s “objective correlative,” which makes the outward a pretext for the inward. He shows Pound finding a support for vorticist aesthetic in Aquinas’ saying “names are consequences of things”. In Symbolism, however, “things are the consequences of names” as in Eliot’s phrase “penny world” (Davie 57). However no sooner he asserts this than he supports it with a criterion of pure craft and poetic mastery, or *poiesis*: The poem’s “compactness.” It is also important that Pound himself allowed for a subjective image, albeit in an ambiguous way: “It [the Image] can arise in the mind. It is then subjective. External causes play upon the mind, perhaps; if so they are drawn into the mind, fused, transmitted and emerge in the

Image unlike themselves” (*Selected Prose* 374). This leaves a door open for a use of words that defines symbolism, which Davie sharply separates from Pound’s poetics. One could argue that this separation between Poundian image and symbolist nominalism that Davie emphasizes is not necessarily a result of empirical objectivity but the retrospective effect of the clear demarcations—and later the cut line of the *Cantos*— which in the end only allows Davie to refer to “compactness and mastery.” At least the undecidability that Pound introduces between the two operations must be recognized.

Another instance of a tension between the economic adequacy of objects and “secondary” objectivity takes place in one of Pound’s earliest critical writings, *The Spirit of Romance*. There, Pound makes a distinction between epithets of “primary” and “secondary apparition.” Primary apparition epithets are “those which describe what is actually presented to the sense or vision” like Dante’s “shadowy wood,” thus a precursor of the later “realist” emphasis. Pound calls secondary apparitions “emotional,” and writes that they are “suggestive as in Yeats’ line ‘Under a bitter black wind that blows from the left hand.’” Then he associates the secondary apparition with “swift forms of comparison” like the ones found in Dante’s uses of “where the sun is silent” and “dead air” (*Spirit of Romance* 159). This instance is important in that it exhibits the supplementary status the non-mimetic dimension held in Pound’s earlier critical statements, while never signaling a complete exclusion of it. In the same book Pound similarly makes references to images as “exteriorization of sensibility,” and a thing becoming “a function of the intellect.”

### **C) Intransitivity**

In a text that is marked by relational chain complexes and internal adequation to the point of solipsism, the purpose of imagistic clarity itself has to undergo a transformation. Correspondence and indeterminacy between the inner and outer coexist in a supplementary logic. In this context, translations, where Pound has to manage a pre-given textual reference rather than a perceptual manifold, and has to deal with intralinguistic criteria, can supply a different perspective; and translation can be a test for the hypothesis of supplementarity of what we generally notice to be “secondary.” Pound offered translation as a training for poets: “Translation is likewise good training, if you find that your original material ‘wobbles’ when you try to rewrite it. The meaning of the poem to be translated can not ‘wobble’” (*LE* 7). This statement on original material is yet another instance of the “poetic fact” which Pound claims to “pre-exist” the poem. On the other hand, as we have already seen, unsteadiness or “intermittence” is a feature of perception, and Kenner wrote that perception and language or technique were “coterminous” in Pound (*Poetry of Ezra Pound* 133). How can the meaning not wobble in translation as it wobbles in composing? The sole answer may be that it is hitched to the “presence” of the original and this departing from an original presence is the model of composition or the finality Pound is offering. However in application, the composition is not done with till it is done with, and “preexisting” becomes a projection from the position of the presence of a material poetic artifact like *The Cantos*. This idea of presence can be extended to the unyielding instance of the untranslatable foreign words and phrases which make frequent appearance in Pound’s poetry. This conjunction is important, because in untranslatables we find a “meaning” not distinct from materiality. In *Cantos*, usually some terms or whole sequences function as opaque fragments defying comprehension. Davie writes that the Cavalcanti poem “Donna

mi Prega” functions in this way as a “hard nugget of foreign matter,” and one could add the Greek onomatopoeia, most famously “polyphloispuos,” or names like “Molü,”<sup>10</sup> as examples of this effect, which is the effect of unyielding—“unwobbling”—presence of opaque poetic particles.

The seemingly external criterion of adequation that is expressed with the prop of objects and metaphors of physical steadiness is a major difference Pound’s poetics offer to the kind of modern poetry understood as locked in a universe of discourse and negative in the sense of negating the world. Gerald Bruns who expounds this tradition in *Modern Poetry and the Idea of Language*, shows that since Mallarmé modern poetry manifests a language that is largely intransitive, not reaching to refer to something outside but exposing its recursiveness in “a discourse which disrupts or reverses the act of signification” (Bruns 201). Another critic, Peter Szondi, in his rigorous hermeneutic approach to the same tendency in Mallarmé and its influences, characterizes this as a situation where the “subject of literature” is no longer “external” to literature (Szondi 42). In a brief passage Bruns also singles out Ezra Pound as the exception to the diagnosis mentioned above, saying that “for Ezra Pound language remains a way of getting things into a poem, even to the extent of transforming the poem into an encyclopedia on the model of the ancient epic”

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10 Anne Carson, a contemporary poet and scholar whose work is resonant with Pound’s approach to history and translation, conceptualises a silence proper to untranslatableability through Homer’s word “molü,” which is the name of the food of gods. According to Carson, this word works as a radical alterity hence silence in the discourse of the epic. It is not humanly verifiable but presumed to belong to another world. Carson seems to imply a unique potentiality of poetic discourse with this. This focus on the untranslatable and silence is refreshing in that it helps to defamiliarise the use of these kinds of words for the readers who inevitably learn to translate these on the spot, no longer attending to their foreignness. For Molü in the *Cantos* see Canto XLVII.

(Bruns 195). However, here Bruns is very likely taking Pound on his reputation of an unconditional defender of the “correspondence” paradigm. Considering the relational status of the thing, even so far as to approximate a secondary object in the manner of Borges’ *Tlön*, Pound’s things are far from a straightforward contrast to the intransitive tradition of modern poetry Bruns writes about.<sup>11</sup> Not only that, but the carefully crafted element of sound, as well as the layout both clearly indicate a materiality beyond mere reference. Massimo Bacigalupo, who is sensitive enough to this dimension, gives a keen description of Pound’s poetry:

As a matter of fact, in his nonmetaphoric universe, signs are contiguous to phenomena—not placed between these and man as instruments of knowledge. Thus it is not possible to determine the presumptive object of Pound’s mimesis as a concrete entity, and his "realism" (like that of others) often appears to be but a roll call of prejudices concerning things... The real is barred instead from the *Cantos*, not because it is ‘vile’ as Mallarmé would have said, but because the page is the sole actuality, Pound’s world is all told in his lines, it is all present, explicit, equally lit—though no doubt it will revert to *absence* as soon as we set the book aside. In other words Pound’s poetry is primarily matter: not thought and not even description or, worse, instruction. His words, rather than conveying a content, attach themselves to memory in the manner of musical phrases, handsome or trivial as the case may be. (Bacigalupo 182)

Even though it may not be possible to extend this description to the whole of

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11 Christine Froula, concluding her archival study on *The Cantos* affirms that ideogrammic juxtaposition was “the true subject” of the *Cantos* (Qtd. in Liebrechts 145).

*Cantos*, some of which is really intended in epic ambition to serve as instruction, and on the overall a major statement on how everything—including poetry— is not what it should be, and how it can be so, this is a very effective jolt to the the mimetic bias associated with Pound. Moreover, in referring to the contiguity of signs and phenomena, a central theme for late *Cantos*, Bacigalupo is introducing a consequence—primacy of language and internal adequacy—to the “coextension of perception and language,” which Kenner could not have intended in his early work. This means that Pound’s poetry embodies a drift toward intransitivity but is differing from the main line of the tradition Bruns writes about; and this is largely through the mode and material qualities of his poetry, including the ideogrammic method itself, which is what allows the inclusion of the documentary and testimonial, in the way they are known to be included in the *Cantos*.

On the other hand Pound’s dreamy Venetian scenes can here serve to illustrate his fabled craft of sound with a “handsome” rather than trivial example:

Dye-pots in the torch-light,  
The flash of wave under prows,  
And the silver beaks rising and crossing.

Stone trees, white and rose-white in the darkness,  
Cypress there by the towers,  
Drift under hulls in the night.

“In the gloom the gold

Gathers the light about it.” (XVII / 78)

The alternations between wide and round vowels, and generally between “shaggy and soft” sounds—which Pound defends in *The Spirit of Romance* after the example of Dante’s *De Vulgari Eloquentia*—are here used to masterful effect, in a way familiar

to Pound's readers. Indeed Pound always admits that his "melopoetic"<sup>12</sup> art owes a lot to Dante and Troubadours, supporting a claim to have learned from the best craftsmen.

As a result, Pound's poetry contains a dimension that is more than only semantic condensation, and which can be understood as a presence.<sup>13</sup> Presence is here understood in alignment with intransitivity, as the effects obtained through non-signifying elements, layout and especially sound, and as Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht argues, it has a kinship with the temporality of "epiphany" (Gumbrecht 95). Presence also does justice to the assumptions about perceptual and linguistic discrimination being on an equal footing. Of course, counterintuitively, Pound does seem to make statements that favor the meaning over "presence" with all its sound and non-signifying qualities. For example, he writes to a translator of his: "Don't bother about the WORDS, translate the MEANING" (qtd. in *Pound Era* 151). For Kenner, this priority given to meaning is possible through the argument that a poem is a patterning of energy and not its language (*Pound Era* 145-63). When checked against Pound's translation practice of finding homophonic equivalents that frustrated philologists and caused them to attribute ignorance, it is possible that sound may be for Pound something that goes into the "meaning," at least so far as to "enhance" and modify it. This is also borne out by Pound's emphasis on an "absolute rythm" that would be the exact expression of an emotion. Zhaoming Qian supplies proof that, later in his career Pound also started to look for sound

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<sup>12</sup> Charging of words with meaning by sound (*ABC of Reading* 37).

<sup>13</sup> This distinction made between meaning and presence can be found in *The Production of Presence* by Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht, who claims a special relevance for it in poetry. For presence in Pound see Christine Savinel's article in *Ezra Pound and Referentiality*, ed. Hélène Aji.

symbolism in Chinese (Qian xxi). However, sound symbolism which approximates a meaning in sound can never contain all uses of sound, and under it lies a whole imperative of pleasure to create and hear the highly organized sound patterns.

So the charging of the words includes more than just semiological or hermeneutic meanings, which makes for an assimilation of meaning to presence. This also unfolds the dictum “DICHTEN=CONDENSARE” (*ABC of Reading* 92) in a way that supplements it with all the effects proper to presence and avoids encircling it within “polysemy.” For the reason that polysemy connotes a lack to be filled, invites the circle of interpretation and temporal synthesis as a filler, and Pound on the contrary is frequently trying to achieve a fullness and sufficiency that also has temporal corollaries in the reception of his work. Savinel who writes about this temporality says that, “Pound’s present sounds like an extended one, a present ‘with’ some past and future inflections—something like a present-for-ever.” In a way that is also bearing on Pound’s Vorticist period, Savinel also locates the aims of Pound’s quest for technique in this temporality: “Catching hold of a form, the seizing of a form in the present, with so much energy that the present expand backward and forward, as if it had existed before, and were to ‘hold’ in the future (Savinel 217).<sup>14</sup>

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14 This formal element has however not only aesthetic ramifications but also political counterparts.

Savinel also discusses the fascist salute “PRESENTE” in her discussion of presentation in Pound, and in a different context, Robert Casillo points out the distortions in the historical sense of *Cantos* which amount to the vision of a mythic and fatalistic ever present already criticized by Adorno and Horkheimer in their *Dialectic of Enlightenment*.

## CHAPTER 2: ORGANISATION

### A) Luminous Detail

A consideration of Pound's conceptualisations of access to history and the documents of the past is of paramount importance before going into the *Cantos* themselves. The attempts made over and over again to simultaneously create and account for a model of engagement with documents span his whole career and is not a negligible part of his world and system of values. A post-decadent concern with historical discrimination or a lack of it, and the sense of a possibility of living in an age of mere criticism in the aftermath of the exhaustion of poetic art are very present. He inherits the questions of "decadent" era like the excess in the accumulation of past documents and how to link to them, and an association made between scholarliness and lack of life, a variant of which is also found in Nietzsche's *Untimely Meditations*. In an understanding of art which frequently resorts to metaphors such as "the nutrition of impulse," the hardest intolerance is shown to works and also readings that do not show signs of life and energy. This biological association will be very important to Pound in later years. Pound's attempts at giving an order to access to tradition also resorts to a Linnaean taxonomy of sorts in his pedagogical *ABC of Reading* and comes to include more complicating attitudes in *Guide to Kulchur*. While his engagements manifest a consciousness of history that is acute and a conception of cultural memory that is in continuous transfiguration, they also nevertheless show a remarkable consistency over the years.

Pound also regards scholarly technique of luminous detail and poetic technique as in alignment and co-dependence, so much so that some Cantos like the later *Section: Rock Drill* make the questions of arrangement, concentration, access and fidelity in relation to documents their central subject matter while also manifesting that concern in their disjunctive forms. Finally, Pound's identification with Confucius as the ethical man owes a lot to the fact that Confucius also arranged and transmitted a tradition in danger of oblivion, by reducing the ancient Chinese Odes to a manageable, quotable and applicable size.

As numerous scholars indicated, one of the first statements of what came later to be the stereotypically modernist one on the historical relation between predecessors and descendants as simultaneity was made by Pound in 1910, even before Eliot's more famous and yet Pound inspired argument in "Tradition and Individual Talent" on the sense of the presentness of the past. In a passage that germinally contains many of his later positions, Pound wrote: "All ages are contemporaneous. It is B.C., let us say in Morocco. The Middle Ages are in Russia. The future stirs already in the minds of the few. This is especially true of literature, where the real time is independent of the apparent, and where many dead men are our grandchildren's contemporaries, while many of our contemporaries have been already gathered into Abraham's bosom, or some fitting receptacle" (SR 8). Not having reached yet the detailed classifications of an *ABC*, in this context he mainly makes a distinction between dated works which may only have "archaeological" import like *The Romance of the Rose* and those that may still have contemporary relevance. One also gets the sense of a challenge made to the literary and philological establishment of the time in reconfiguring priorities and rearranging excellences. As an example, Pound's favorite poem *Cid* is opposed to the

contemporary favorite *Chanson De Roland*, Pound saying “I may have profaned Roland,” and he in general has a consciousness of having violated “canons of modern prose” which are set by the philology of the time.

The method of scholarship which is more determining in his support of Fenollosa’s version of the ideogram, and which is defended in one form or other throughout his career is first given a near systematic form in 1912, through the article series, “I Gather the Limbs Of Osiris.” Here passing beyond the distinction of archaeological interest and actual relevance, he engages with the problem of method in a relatively more concrete way and the axis becomes the coexistence of an excess of information and the lack of means for the efficient use of the same. Pound’s answer to this initially Decadent problematic is what he calls “the method of luminous detail,” which he positions as “a method most vigorously hostile to the prevailing mode of today—that is the method of multitudinous detail, and to the method of yesterday, the method of sentiment and generalization.” He observes that “the latter is too inexact and the former too cumbersome to be of much use to the normal man wishing to live mentally active” (*SP* 21). Having hints of a vitalistic sociology of scholarly discipline, his sense of the draining aspects of having to manage abundant data can be likened to the desensitization of the over-stimulated city dweller Georg Simmel discusses.

More often than not it is as productive to examine Pound’s anathemas as his advocacies, and while the multitudinous detail seems relatively harmless as an evocation of dullness here, it is a vice fit for his later *Hell Cantos*, as the scholars there will very likely be those who use them in profusion; and non-differentiated abundance will be a signal characteristic against which he will frequently put to use his sanitary metaphors. Here though, he limits the analogies to the relation between

mud and the jewels which can be found in it. This also gives to understand that luminous detail assumes the anteriority of the mud of drudgery through multitudinous detail, and along with a heuristic speed, its importance lies in a consideration of the non-specialist public, in relation to which “there are certain forms of civility, consideration, and efficiency to be considered” (*SP* 22). In this context we can also compare with this the dependence of his “Image” on a certain repressed anterior perceptual diffusion, which Daniel Tiffany discusses in the context of the sublimated abjections in Pound’s early poetics.

Finally, Pound offers a criterion of judgement to determine what is a luminous detail and what is not: “Any fact is, in a sense, ‘significant.’ Any fact may be ‘symptomatic,’ but certain facts give one a sudden insight into circumjacent conditions, into their causes, their effects, into sequence, and law” (*SP* 22). So the multitudinous detail is what cannot give an insight into causality, sequence or law, and also what doesn’t constitute such a center out of which whole complexes can be built as in the later emphasis on “totalitarian” or the “paideuma.” In this sense, the luminous detail as “a charged node” is also a version of both the vortex and the Image in its speed, as Pound writes that the image is “that which presents an intellectual and emotional complex in an instant of time...It is the presentation of such a ‘complex’ instantaneously which gives that sense of sudden liberation; that sense of freedom from time limits and space limits; that sense of sudden growth, which we experience in the presence of the greatest works of art” (*LE* 4). This shows how intimately linked Pound’s poetics and his chosen method of scholarship are. The liberation and elation that the Image provides, also applies to the luminous detail: the fact that merits being a luminous detail “feeds us with energy” in contrast to those that are not, which “draw energy from us” (*SP* 30). However, perhaps just

this psychological attribute —or physiological? Pound famously has a consideration for preserving eyesight—which Pound affirms as a loosely stated principle of conservation casts a doubt on a proposal which aspires to scientific precision in referring to a “law.” When the question is not aesthetic appreciation but judgment of what is luminous—which Pound treats similarly up to a point— a discovery of the truth of that detail must be measured with the power of that body which makes the judgment about it. From the beginning Pound brings the question of body right into a cultural problematic and this move later takes the form of “a biological logic.” Moreover, as Casillo implies, in practice the Poundian heuristics are liable to shed the specifications of sequence and causality: “The direct and instantaneous perception which Pound admires may be merely an untested first impression, saturated with projective elements, as in *Hell Cantos*” (Casillo 166).

As indicated above, the function of the luminous can best be understood by what it will prevent and help organise. Here it is a heterogenous complexity that doesn't allow a hierarchical organization, and that makes a wholesale retrieval impossible; it isn't activated by the perception of the essentials and in a state of material diffusion and *discontinuity* only potentially receptive of this activation. In helping a speedy and synaptic articulation of this heterogeneity, the luminous detail will be integrative and economic(al). So Pound's use of metaphors from science and technology in the article are illustrative of this search for organisation and regulation as guided by a technique that is mainly economic: “These facts are hard to find. They are swift and easy of transmission. They govern knowledge as a switchboard governs an electric circuit” (*SP* 23). In another context, the article “Psychology and Troubadours,” he applies this metaphor of the switchboard to the organisation of the body itself, so one may ask whether Pound's attempt here consists of a slippage of

this figure of the switchboard-body toward history and the scholarly matter, in which case the “Hell Cantos” can furnish a good example, but before going that far the title needs pointing out: Pound makes no overt comment on his title, as if gathering limbs is the self-evident and aptest metaphor for the thing he is discussing. In order to reveal another perspective into this, it is appropriate to underline the question of system that is implicit in Pound’s ideas of cultural memory. Jean-François Lyotard, in an article that makes the connection between economy and the Leibnizian monad that is so important to Pound’s ideas on language, writes that “economy is the nomos, that is, the regulation of the circulation of forces and information or messages...it is a question of regulation, that is to say, of the ability to preserve, conserve, store, and use the past, past events, the effects that past events have had on the system or the apparatus, and to use this information in order to adjust for efficiency, optimal performance” (Lyotard 99).<sup>15</sup> As it will be seen in the context of *Kulchur* Lyotard’s association of Kantian determinant judgment with economy, in its difference from the reflective judgment as what escapes the economy can offer terms that supplement Pound’s own with regard to the question of access and scholarly labour.<sup>16</sup>

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15 In the article called “Oikos,” while engaging with Niklas Luhmann’s systems-theory, Lyotard examines the question of the social as a technocratic regulation and suggests that the descriptions of reality on the basis of electronics, information technology and cybernetics are outgrowths of a general physics the model of which can be found Leibniz’s monadology: a philosophy of substance whose determining characteristic is the matter-form distinction rather than inside-outside. I tend to think the complex relations Pound’s text forms with its forebears and his authorial relation with his *Cantos* itself as relations which tend away from the inside outside distinction toward matter-form. In a scheme of tradition that prioritizes organicist continuity, *The Cantos* make themselves an enhancement or discharge of certain qualities inherent in the system, while positioning themselves as part of that tradition.

16 Odd as it may seem to make Kant’s philosophic system bear on Pound, who apparently operates in different

Tarrying with the question of this system a moment longer the focus becomes that of the art work that is “donative.” Pound writes:

Interesting works are of two sorts, the symptomatic and the donative; thus a sestina of Pico Della Mirandola, concerned for the most part with Jove and Phoebus, shows us a Provençal form stuffed with revived classicism. Camoen’ “Os Lusíadas” has a similar value. In them we find a reflection of tendencies and modes of a time. They mirror obvious and apparent thought movements. They are what one might have expected in such and such a year and place. They register. But the donative author seems to draw down into the art something which was not in the art of his predecessors. If he also draw from the air about him, he draws latent forces, or things present but unnoticed, or things perhaps taken for granted but never examined. Non e mai tarde per tentar l’ignoto [It is never too late to try the unknown]. His forebears may have led up to him; he is never a disconnected phenomenon, but he does take some step further. He discovers, or better, “he discriminates.” (*SP* 25)

Here the distinction made is also important, for it also gives to understand what Pound would like his work to be like. His example for the discrimination that results in donation is troubadour Arnaut Daniel, “who perceived that the beauty to be gotten from a similarity of line terminations depends not upon their multiplicity, but upon their action the one upon other; not upon frequency, but upon the manner of

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modes, his complicated treatments of particulars and their possible organisation have a lot in common with the issue of two judgments in Kant: “When the universal is given, and the particular subsumed under it by the faculty of judgement, then the judgement is determinative; when only the particular is given and the universal has to be sought by the faculty of judgement, then its judgement is reflective” (Caygill 269).

sequence and combination.” At the conclusion of the article he also offers Daniel’s work as the luminous detail: “Having analysed or even read an analysis of Arnaut, any other Provençal canzon is clearer to one.” However in the rare instance of conclusion he finally clears up by separating what is a luminous detail from what is donative: For Pound, François Villon isn’t such a luminous detail for his contemporary set up while he is definitely a donative artist. Before passing to the main component of the donation which is discrimination, it is necessary to unfold the sense of the symptomatic further.

Firstly, the symptomatic is very likely what Pound elsewhere disparagingly describes as a case where some artists’s “ambience confer existence on them” (*LE* 24). The discrete works are seen as the instruments of a self-reproducing cultural background that could well do without them. Differing from this, what Pound calls “drawing from the air” coincides with a sensitivity which is later expressed in the slogan “artists are the antennae of race,” and marks the place of novelty that can configure the system, as it were. This is like a perception tilted toward the subliminal, and that’s why this statement is made in a chapter on perception in the *ABC*. Incidentally, this figure of ideas in the air is also one reason why Pound set so great store by conversations and correspondences, and *The Cantos* manifest this importance in the majority of their quotations. Pound here shows a prescient and acute sense of historical horizon and he tends to find the sources of a possible reconfiguration, and the possibility of “trying the unknown” mainly in noticing what is hiding in plain sight.<sup>17</sup> In only a seemingly obvious way recognizing the new is

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17 This is also the place of a historical unconscious, as Pound’s later references to Aristotle in *Guide to Kulchur* make clear:

Your historical notes shd. tell you that the Nicomachean treatise (or notes for lectures on ethical nomenclature?) was composed during a decadence, the greeks had already collapsed. Conscious or

dependent on knowing what would be dictated by one's context, as also seen in a discussion about precision made in "Psychology and Troubadours":

The accurate artist seems to leave not only his greater self, but beside it, upon the films of his art, some living print of the circumvolving man...of the things about which he felt it never worth his while to bother other people by speaking, the things he forgot for some major interest; of these and of another class of things, things his audience would have taken for granted; or thirdly, of things about which he had, for some reason or other, a reticence (*Spirit of Romance* 88).

Tellingly for an artist who later came to be known for elisions, here in a strange way the accuracy pertains to what is not said, as if it is possible to not say something accurately, and as a corollary there must be a way of reading what is not written, accurately, "in the crannies perceptible only to the craftsman" (*SR* 88). This is a good early example of what Sieburth calls "the reversibility of the oppositions within which his thinking seems to move and which center around the issue of production," insofar as Pound makes a claim for the donation only insofar as there is a reading to be done by somebody well-equipped to recognize this tacit context which it is Pound's whole point to make more complex in positing the contemporaneity of the many dead men with our grandchildren.

The decisive part that goes into donation is expressed with the emphasis on discriminations, which very likely derives from Rémy De Gourmont. De Gourmont's essay "Dissociation of Ideas" exerted a major influence on Eliot too.

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unconscious subversivism?[...] I am not attacking the conscious part of Aristotle, but the unconscious, the "everyone says," or "everyone admits," which wd. be inconceivable in the *Ta Hio*, in *The Steadfast Mean*, or in the *Analects* (*GK* 315, 331).

This essay is important for several reasons. First of all it offers dissociation as a sign of intelligence. It is a method for transvaluation, and in this function it also links up in a negative way with the cliché and the commonplace. For De Gourmont, who offhandedly makes the “level” of civilization dependent on the dissociations achieved, commonplaces are associations that are hard to break, and when they are broken it is with the benefit that their components can be freed for use in different combinations resulting, for example, in a transvaluation of the abstract idea of justice in its discrimination from punishment, of love in its dissociation from sexual pleasure as made in Christianity, or of sexuality as dissociated from procreation, as a more modern phenomenon. Inspired by a rhetoric of science, he interprets commonplaces on the model of chemical compounds, formed by concrete elements or “facts” and abstract elements which are ideas. In a perceptive passage discussing the essay, Kenneth Burke writes that “looking more closely at his essay, we see that its great emphasis upon division really serves to sharpen our understanding of identification. Indeed, if we were allowed but one text to illustrate how identification operates in language, we would select this essay, which is almost sadistically concerned with the breaking of identifications” (Burke 151). Burke also points out that in the course of his dissociations De Gourmont lays the foundation of his argument on an *association* made between divorce and the ideal intellectual activity (Burke 151). In the sense Burke gives then, the elementary opening examples from the essay are as important for the given identifications and superimpositions as for disjunctions:

There are no ideas so remote, no images so ill-assorted, that an easy habit of association cannot bring them together, at least, momentarily. Victor Hugo, seeing a cable wrapped with rags at the point where it crossed a sharp ridge, saw, at the same time, the knees of tragic

actresses padded to break the dramatic falls in the fifth act.[...] It should occasion no surprise were this bend of a cable to be called its “knee.” In any event, the two images remain ever ready to be divorced, divorce being the permanent rule in the world of ideas, which is the world of free love. This fact sometimes scandalizes simple folk. Whoever first dared to say the “mouth” or the “jaw” of a cannon, according to which of those terms is the older, was, without doubt, accused either of preciousness or of coarseness. (De Gourmont 4-5)

The formal similarity of Hugo’s epiphany with the archetypal instance of Pound “in a station of metro” is obvious. It wouldn’t be an extravagant claim that these catachreses whose parts are intended to be discrete particulars prefigure both the image and the ideogram, and Pound already asserted that dissociation is also the motor of donation and the reconfiguration of a given tradition in the arrival of “the new.” Later, when Pound invokes the scholastic terminologies as examples of an exactitude that is lacking in modern times, or better, in the context of discriminations he finds to extend knowledge in Confucianism as in the *The Great Digest*, he will also be re-working De Gourmont’s essay.

In order to observe the luminous detail in practice, it is instructive to examine some characteristic examples in Pound’s critical writings. Frequently, instead of dealing with large historical contexts, and foregrounding exemplary individuals or works, the method implicitly works in relation to single works. In an essay that mainly seeks recognition for the merits of Gourmont, Pound invokes a statement of Coleridge that he first used in *The Spirit of Romance*: “Coleridge who says that the test of a great poet is not to be found in individual passages, but in mysterious

pervasive essence ‘everywhere present and nowhere a distinct excitement’” (*SP* 384). This statement alone does not of course indicate the presence of the luminous detail; there must be a condensation too, rather than a figure of merely unlocateable excellence. This time to better convey De Gourmont’s style Pound resorts to another example:

As Turgenev builds up a whole novel to enforce two or three Russian proverbs; to make you know that he, the author, has understood some very simple phrase in all its profundity; as in the “*Nichée de Gentilhommes*” he has put first, “The heart of another is a dark forest,” and then in the middle of the book, man, his hero, opposed to the old trees of his dismantled garden, and then finally old Maria Timofevna’s “Nothing but death is irrevocable,” so, in a very different manner Remy De Gourmont has embedded his philosophy in a luxurious mist of the senses. (*SP* 384)

In a very different context that is the translation he has made of *Women of Trachis* of Sophocles, Pound makes a similar claim which rests more on authority than any specific argument. Regarding the line “SPLENDOUR, IT ALL COHERES” which he also uses in the late Cantos, Pound writes: “This is the key phrase, for which the play exists, as in the *Elektra*: “Need we add cowardice to all the rest of these ills?” Or the ‘T’as inventé la justice’ in Cocteau’s *Antigone*.” (*Poems and Translations* 1108). It all coheres for the sake of a judgement of coherence.

With Pound’s terminology these phrases are not merely details, but they can only be luminous details, and it is as if they belong temporally before the actual work, its cause of existence. Adapting a phrase of Paul De Man’s, we could call it the epistemology of synecdoche, a fragmentary openness cultivated only to achieve

a closing down. Based on this it is recognisable that the diffusion of the “pervasive essence” and the luminous detail are not mutually exclusive, but depend on one another, or more exactly, luminous detail retroactively conjures the background as a pervasive essence, making it possible that a whole complex of circumjacent details can be, as it were, caught up by single phrases. The way Pound composes *The Cantos* also strives to obtain similar effects insofar as it is a literalization of a favorite statement of his: “Poetry is made of gists and piths.” Here Pound rediscovers and is ambivalently reversing the most prominent element of the Decadent style expressed by Paul Bourget, which equates decadent style to a disintegration that breaks the discourse to a point where first sentences, then words stand out independently of the main subject. Pound writes: “Decadent art, I think all decadent art without exception is art in which the detail receives or demands too much attention against the main subject” (*Machine Art* 109). In contrast, his search is for a happy arrangement of a multitude of these central nodes rather than details in an even larger binding context which has reach over vast historical panoramas. Pound also differs from Bourget in charging his fragments with communal intensions, as parts of a “tale of the tribe.”

## **B) Analytical Geometry**

There is one notion in Pound’s early work from the Vorticist period, that without being explicitly linked to access to history or scholarly study by Pound, has far reaching implications for his poetics; and insofar as his poetics makes a simultaneous assumption of organisation of data, it is necessary to discuss it in this context. This notion is also as far one can get from evoking a bodily organisation as

possible, but in a paradoxical way, while making a claim over all spatial organisation. Writing that “vorticism is an intensive art” and that some expressions are more intense than others, he resorts to an analogy from math with which he illustrates the different intensities in question. This is the example of different kinds of mathematical formulations as compared to art. Pound writes that neither arithmetic nor algebra create form in the way analytical geometry does, in which “space is conceived as separated by two or three axes (depending on whether one is treating form in one or more planes). One refers points to these axes by a series of co-ordinates. Given the idiom one is able *actually to create*. Thus we learn that the equation  $(x - a)^2 + (y - b)^2 = r^2$  governs the circle. It is not a particular circle, it is any circle and all circles. It is nothing that is not a circle...The difference between art and analytical geometry is the difference of subject matter only” (*GB* 91). Beneath the distinctively modernist claim to a semi-scientific precision or smoothness, here is a very simple idea that traverses Pound’s work as a whole, both as a principle of composition and as a method of scholarship. The “nothing that is not a circle” of the formula, as the paradigm of utmost precision—also calling up the hardly disguised tautology, “a circle is a circle”—and intensity, is a way of indirect creation, an instigation toward the *emergence* of forms and a variant of Pound’s later figure of the “periplum.” Emergence is here in the sense given to it in discussions of scientific reductionism, as the irreducibility of the final configuration to the action of individual parts; applied to poetry, as invited to do by Fenollosa<sup>18</sup>, a detour taken in

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18 Fenollosa writes:

Relations are more real and more important than the things which they relate. The forces which produce the branch-angles of an oak lay potent in the acorn. Similar lines of resistance, half curbing the out-pressing vitalities, govern the branching of rivers and of nations. Thus a nerve, a wire, a roadway, and a clearing-house are only varying channels

individual parts only to reach the supposed gist of discourse which is different than, yet brought into being by the particulars. It is also what constructs the transition from particle to particle in what Sieburth calls “the synecdochal economy” of Pound’s writing as a containable, less indeterminate species of metaphor. For Pound Dante’s offering four distinct methods of interpretation for his *Commedia*, as allegorical, anagogical, ethical and literal also can be matched with the different mathematical intensities, thus the coordinate for circle becoming a coordinate for a union with the divine which instruction is the part of the anagogical among the four approaches (SR 116-17). Later in his *Section: Rock Drill* Pound will affirm this personal take on anagogical as a principle behind organisation of that specific sequence.

Much later than the vorticist formulation, Pound gives a less terminology-laden catchword: “Points define a periphery,” complementing “nodal” intensity that closes a circle with the figure of an emergent line and movement. A periphery or periplus can link Neoplatonic light philosophy with Confucius, or can trace a line of secret tradition from Mariolatry to secular Troubadour love cult. This is the figure that formalist expositions of Pound’s method as Hugh Kenner’s thrive in exhibiting, and it basically works with ambivalent (dis)associations, accumulating by small differences, yet hoping not to surrender the final integration:

Throughout his long labor on the *Cantos*, the side of his mind that kept diversifying the poem was balanced by a tacit side that should unify it in due time. Preparing, keeping active, refining what should

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which communication forces for itself. This is more than analogy, it is identity of structure. Nature furnishes her own clues (*Instigations* 377).

one day be the unifying force, was a contrapuntal activity, surfacing from time to time in interests the diversity of which bewildered readers. About 1914 he was thinking of his long poem with De Gourmont's "dissociation des idées" and Fenollosa's clustered particulars in mind. In 1917 he was occupied with Arnaut. In the early 1920's the theme was music; in the late 1920's, Cavalcanti; in the early 1930's, credit, an invisible *virtu*; after the mid 1930's, the dozen or so ideograms by which, he was convinced, Confucian wisdom was shaped. Each led to the next, and all, he postulated, would one day enter his final orchestration. (*Pound Era* 453)

### C) Gears

A later work called "How to Write" that significantly treats the problem of literary history alongside the ideogrammic method, and which is a generously condensed treatment of so many different issues is another proof of how vital the question of organisation is for him, as a student:

The student's dilemma is that of extent versus intensity. In 1907 I achieved the distinction of being the only student flunked in Josiah Penniman's course in the history of literary criticism. [...] I resigned from other literary courses because it seemed to me that the quantity of material one was expected or told to read was so infinitely in excess of the quantity one could in the given time possibly read with any thought or real understanding. Obviously one can not read everything. If one does not read enough, one's sense of general

literary geography may suffer. It is better, however, to understand the one book in front of one than to have a superficial knowledge that it belongs in such and such a place. One might be fairly safe with a very few books if one kept oneself aware that they were not the whole of art and letters. (*Machine Art* 102)

So the article “How to Write” vitally implies a question of what and how to read, and Pound’s sympathies typically lie in an intensive and economic restriction on materials in order to maximise the import of the case at hand.

Pound’s answer to this dilemma of provincialism against superficiality lies in an emphasis on the ability to make the work previously engaged a departure for new creations. This, as will be seen more thoroughly in the context of *Kulchur*, makes a higher form of knowing for him: “In art the Kundiger, the knower is not the man who can analyze a work after it has been done; but the man who can go on from that work and do something different (different however slightly and with respect to whatsoever component he may happen to alter)” (*Machine art* 102). Like “criticism by translation,” by which he refers to his influential translations, creation by interpretation—or vice versa—becomes another hybrid category Pound uses to explain his writing. In some ways a very prescient insight into the embeddedness of the act of reading in a larger practical context demanding further moves, as in a Wittgensteinian language game, this also opens up the perspective where works can be distinguished according to what can be done with them, thus requiring different criteria of judgement in an approximation of a functionalist theory of genre.

The discourse of functions takes over in the *ABC* and these are expressed with the different items of an engineer’s or scientist’s toolbox. For example Pound writes that “the authors and books I recommend in this introduction to the study of

letters are to be considered AS measuring rods and voltmeters...they are most emphatically, NOT all the books worth reading,” here obviously recalling the electric-switch of his earlier article. This language also surfaces in “Hugh Selwyn Mauberley,” significantly in the part concerning Pound’s figure of the decadent aesthete, Mauberley: “Unable in the supervening blankness / To sift TO AGATHON from the chaff / Until he found his sieve... / Ultimately his seismograph” (*New Selected Poems* 120). So Pound intends the voltmeters, among other things, as a remedy for purposeless drifting aestheticism that is set apart from practice, and concurrently the isolation of learning. As will be remembered, Pound also thinks that artists are the antennae of the race, and Pound adds to this the terms “barometers and wind gauges” as figures for artistic sensitivity and exact perception, resulting in an almost inhuman vision of implements responding to other implements in a general circuitry.

Finally, a sort of genre specificity is developed in a kindred fashion, and under the heading “Dissociate,” Pound discriminates two main classes of books from each other:

A Books a man reads to develop his capacities: in order to know more and perceive more, and more quickly, than he did before he read them.

and

B Books that are intended and that serve as REPOSE, dope, opiates mental beds.

You don't sleep on a hammer or lawn mower, you don't drive nails with a mattress (*ABC* 88).

In the first category there is again condensed two different points transposed from

Pound's earlier work: the emphasis on swiftness, which Pound almost always thinks in association with Aristotelian theory of metaphor, and perception altering abilities of art, that is literally, art incorporated. The incongruity of trying to drive nails with a mattress is a very vivid analogy and works both to illustrate the primacy of technique/practical engagement, and the necessity of fitting criteria to the case at hand, rather than being bound by unconditional interpretational or critical rules.

However the dominance of the functionalist view also calls into question the seemingly inactive part of the cultural material in one's access. Here the destructive strain in Pound's ideas of organisation becomes more marked: "Contemporary book-keeping uses a 'loose-leaf' system to keep the active part of a business separate from its archives. That doesn't mean that accounts of new customers are kept apart from accounts of old customers, but that the business still in being is not loaded up with accounts of business that no longer functions" (*ABC* 75). Then Pound implies that the survival of what matters will depend on condensation and disposal of the diagnosed inactive part: "A Japanese emperor whose name I have forgotten and whose name you needn't remember, found that there were TOO MANY NOH PLAYS, he picked out 450 and the Noh stage LASTED from 1400 or whenever till the day the American navy intruded, and that didn't stop it" (*ABC* 92). Pound's Confucius is of course another example for this tendency as having edited and saved the traditional Odes from complete dispersion and oblivion, a mirror for Pound as he sees himself in later Cantos. The war though, gives him an occasion to check the possible excesses of this conviction, and in a way characteristic of later Cantos, we notice that for Pound it is meet that there be something—whether form or content—rather than nothing, when nothing seems an actual possibility. In the following he addresses Torquato Dazzi, a friend from fascist Italy:

You making a pair with Marinetti

You wanting the past too much, he the future

Too much eagerness shoots past the mark

He wanted to clear away too much

and now we see more destruction than he wanted. (LXXII / 433)

Of course, what is significant is that these positions in the “pair” are reversible, and Dazzi and Marinetti are doubles: destruction can imply conservation, just as preservation can mean the loss of discriminations in excess, but the point is that one can go too far in destroying for preservation or unconditionally revering every fragment.

#### **D) The Red Thread That Runs Through it All: *Kulchur***

Christine Savinel rightly argues that the above quote from *The Cantos* “seems to point out Pound’s preference for the poetic present,” but more immediately and inclusively, what is in question is history and how a historical consciousness should work, and the natural preference given to present in this context. Pound’s prose work from 1938, which he called *Guide to Kulchur*, in large part addresses this problem of method, and it is there that we find the most programmatic clue to this preference: “We do NOT know the past in chronological sequence. It may be convenient to lay it out anesthetized on the table with dates pasted on here and there, but what we know we know by ripples and spirals eddying out from us and from our own time” (*GK* 60). As also touched upon above, this is another of those manifestations of the acute sense of historical horizon. The selection which he will complete in his personal “kulchur” is preceded by an

unconscious one which he admits, “a temporal index” in the now, as Walter Benjamin would call it, or “the law of what can be said” as in the Foucauldian archive.<sup>19</sup> Of course this is not crediting Pound with any later theoretical offshoots of a problem that has been studied in diverse areas such as philosophy and history of science, or Marxism, but mentioned only to mark the implications, expectations and surprises that can accrue to it from the point we are in. One final and maybe even more appropriate comparison would be Aby Warburg, a similarly innovative art historian whose methods, as Giorgio Agamben has showed, owed similarly a lot to the medium of resurgent images and a study of myths. Agamben writes that for Warburg, the symbol and image “are the crystallization of an energetic charge and an emotional experience that survive as an inheritance transmitted from social memory and that like electricity condensed in a Leyden jar, become effective only through contact with the ‘selective will of a particular period’” (*Potentialities* 94, emphasis mine). So there is an acknowledgment of a pre-given grid or an assumption of transmitted cultural topoi which condition us and put a limit to personal ownership.

However, more central to the book is that there is in present a material that needs ordering, manipulation or “sorting out,” which need seems to be dictated, much in the way luminous detail was, by primarily social intentions, of serving as a “guide” to, and transmission of values of different orders. As the text repeats many times, this ideal is approached from a Confucian basis and can be compared with the way in which Pound’s first Confucian translation, *The Great Digest*, makes the order in the empire dependent on “completion of knowledge [that] is rooted in

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19 The problem of a Poundian archive has already been studied in a dissertation: “‘A’ is for ‘archive’: A Case Study in the American Long Poem” by Thomas John Nelson.

sorting things out into organic categories” (*Poems and Translations* 619). So this time the dissociations that make up Pound’s “New Learning” are intended as overtly responsible part of a mission not solely aesthetic, but in a way Pound idiosyncratically calls “totalitarian,” the purpose of which Michael Driscoll defines as “serving a revised historical description that relies on inductive examples of interanimating economic and political programs and their coextensive practices of the arts” (Driscoll 141). In a way that justifies the epithet “rock drill” which Wyndham Lewis had given him, Pound returns over and over again to the question of organisation and knowledge, even if the book takes up a very wide array of subjects, and as Driscoll notes “what might be said to hold the volume together is Pound’s methodology itself and the presuppositions that inform his associative patterns of thought” (Driscoll 140). The Confucian image of an axe cutting an axe handle from the *Unwobbling Pivot*—if its political import can be bracketed for a moment— rather beautifully illustrates this methodological occupation: “The model is not far off.” Whatever the subject, the model for engagement is not far off. In a sense, this gives the sanction to the parallelities and variations pursued in the following discussion.

In the opening section of the book Pound submits a digest of the Confucian *Analects*. This digest, as a part of *Guide to Kulchur*, dates from a period at which Pound hasn’t undertaken a translation of the whole *Analects* yet, and is obviously prepared as an urgent introduction to the new learning he proposes. Two passages from the classic and his interpretations of them are especially important:

Said the Philosopher: You think that I have learned a great deal, and kept the whole of it in my memory? Sse replied with respect: Of course. Isn’t that so? It is not so. I have reduced it all to one principle.  
(GK 15)

You have heard the six words, and the six becloudings? There is the love of being benevolent, without the love of learning, the beclouding here leads to foolish simplicity. The love of knowing without love of learning, whereof the beclouding brings *dissipation of mind*. Of being sincere without the love of learning, here the beclouding causes disregard of the consequence. Of straightforwardness without the love of learning, whereof the the beclouding leadeth to rudeness. Of boldness without the love of learning, whereof the beclouding brings insubordination. The love of firmness without the love of learning, whereof the beclouding conduces to extravagant conduct. (GK 20, emphasis mine)

Pound's commentary to these runs thus: "In the 'ONE PRINCIPLE' text we have four common signs: one, by, passing through, emerging [...] The second sign is said to be the reverse of fixed, or stopped, in the third sign we have the string passing through the holes in the coins, in the fourth we have *the earth, the stem and the leaf* [...] The dominant element in the sign for learning in the love of learning chapter is a mortar. That is, the knowledge must be ground into fine powder" (GK 21, emphasis mine).

These passages are linked. Firstly, it is necessary to note that in the chapter they are juxtaposed with the emphasis on the "cheng ming" ideogram, which offers correct denominations and exact terminology as the foundation of order and right action in law, business, rites, or exchange in every sense of the term. Regarding Kung's one principle as opposed to book learning-surely it is not a baroque memory. It is what makes the retention of a manifold effortless, practical and ready for going into action, otherwise it would be equal to pedantry or a memory of "multitudinous"

details. This however raises the question whether the “one principle” lacks adaptivity, whether in attempting an appropriative subsumption of the new, it may miss the new as new. That this is not Pound’s intention is evident in his persistent opposition to generalisations: “The concrete knowledge precedes the generalization; and the generalization only absorbs a very small part of the real knowledge, one thread out of the tangle” (*Machine Art* 107). So the question is also how not to lose individual threads. This dilemma is a central problem of the text Pound deals with, as the *Analects* also include a passage addressing it: “If a man keep alive what is old and recognize novelty he can eventually teach” (*Analects* 2. 11). The key is the final Chinese character in the ONE PRINCIPLE text which Pound reads as an emergence or shooting of a leaf. This is the image of germination that Pound uses in so many different forms as “seeds of motion,” “gestalt seed,” “phyllotaxis in leaf grain,” and finally in one of the earliest instances, as the “germinal consciousness” of the artist. Considering how it is applied to organisation of knowledge, this is a variation on the ideogrammic method and indicates that particulars that are arranged under this Confucian principle serve a germinal emergence, which has a flexibility that can accomodate and take feedback from the contingency of the particulars, and incomplete without these manifestations. If it finally chisels them to fit the model and can not do but accomodate them strung together, this is not without the model’s own transformation and destabilization.<sup>20</sup> How much difference the model can tolerate, or how much it relapses to a machine of identification as Kenneth Burke shows with regard to Gourmont’s dissociations, is the measure of its economic

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20 Perhaps one of the most striking intersections that have been sought by various critics between Pound and W. Benjamin appears in this context. In the famous “Epistemo-Critical Prologue” to his *Origin of German Tragic Drama* Benjamin also uses the notion of biological emergence he takes from Goethe as a methodological constituent of his study.

restrictions, totalising bent and peculiar retentivity. Here Pound may have come dangerously close to the abstractions he elsewhere condemns, and the projection Casillo implies to inform the luminous detail appears as a likely totalising agent in this context too.

This is one of the cruxes of the politics of the problem of organisation in knowledge. In the course of the book Pound remembers a personal dialogue with Mussolini himself, and the question he addresses to Pound: “Why do you want to put your ideas in order?” Pound intends this question as evidence of a keen awareness on Mussolini’s part of the vitality of the problem that occupied him so long. However as uttered by Mussolini this may not be in the sense that Pound wants it to be, the comment may indeed have been made in favor of an unrestrained supposed intellectual energy against the possibility of a stifling order. As Bacigalupo cuttingly remarks: “Mussolini’s punchline, ‘Why do you want to put your ideas in order?’, is but the product of a mechanical irrationalism reminiscent of the ugly nonsense that he and his fellows (like the Rossoni mentioned in the *Cantos*) were wont to utter in the parliament, as upon the one occasion on which Antonio Gramsci spoke there” (Bacigalupo 247). However this creates a double bind where the sole alternatives are prizing an intellectual energy signaled by disorder itself and the brand of order Pound creates with the exegesis of “One principle,” which has a tendency toward appropriative homogeneity. So this limitation of the repertoire should be kept in mind.

The second citation from the *Analects* gives us the love of learning without which the love of knowledge is a dissipation of mind. Along with Pound’s later translation “waste incorrelation” which replaces the “dissipation,” this amounts to a picture of a mind occupied too much with individual cases in expense of a final

synthesis or the string image of the other lesson. In his exegesis Pound interpolates an overarching figure: the mortar or the knowledge ground to fine powder, rallied against the same sprawling incorrelation. Here the love of learning by itself is significant, because in *Kulchur*, Pound will paradoxically oppose his totalising designs to a dilettante's engagement with knowledge. It is necessary to note the action of a mortar, which is for de-composing wholes to ever smaller particles. Despite the homely associations, there is still a transforming action, if not violence. In this it is possible to read a variant of Pound's support of the biologist Louis Agassiz's teaching methods insofar as knowledge in both cases assumes a dependence on decomposition. This is the example where Agassiz teaches a student to look at a dead fish and produce essays of observation in various phases through a rather protracted duration: "At the head of three weeks, the fish was in an advanced state of decomposition, but the student knew something about it" (*ABC* 18). Eventually, Agassiz is in every way the prototype that unites the two ideograms here, as he wrote: "Facts are stupid things, until brought into connection with some general law (qtd. in Bell 118). In his methodology for biology, Agassiz probably also prefigures the idiom Pound creates for *Analects*: "To study a vast number of Species without tracing the principles that combine them under more comprehensive groups is only to *burden the mind with disconnected facts*, and more may be learned by a faithful and careful comparison of a few Species than by a more cursory examination of a greater number" (qtd. in Bell 125, emphasis mine).

The mortar ideogram discloses Pound's understanding of culture and the oblivion inherent in this conception, which is devised at the same time as a gain through incorporation. What stays after a bout of reading as fine powder has a privilege and "the rest is dross." Ideas in the air or digests are signs of an attempt of

forging a tradition inhering in its transmission in the form of “titbits,” suited to pass on “what resists the erosion of time” and also what has been thus sedimented. In a famously subversive statement Pound writes: “Knowledge is NOT culture. The domain of culture begins when one has forgotten-what-book” (*GK* 134). This provides a link between culture understood in this sense and the inrooted ideas of a period, or “paideuma,” because these inrooted ideas are similarly not to be attributed to anyone or any book in particular. It could be argued that Pound’s writing on the process of understanding simultaneously continues his concern with the “unknown” —as in “Non e mai tardi per tentar” — insofar as what is gained as culture after the forgetting of attributions of ownership may simultaneously betoken the presuppositions of a culture before any particular book, as Marjorie Perloff suggests in comparing “paideuma” to Foucault’s “episteme.” In this morphological conception, culture is diffused in ways of seeing, building, every conceivable technique, even reaching to customs like inscribing columns with their maker’s names, the lack of which in modern times is seen as a symptom of decline.

In contrast to the collection of negative figures such as undigested books, “facts, notions that you can look up in a phone book or library,” and “dead catalogues”—which are what a reading uninformed about the anterior referentiality of Pound’s text will frequently find in *Cantos*— there is an element of positivity in Pound’s understanding of culture, embodied in figures of technique, speed, energy and finally instinct. Emending the earlier statement about the culture “after books” Pound writes: “Culture is not due to forgetfulness. Culture starts when you can do the thing without strain. The violinist agonizing over the tone, has not arrived. The violinist lost in the melodic line or rather concentrated effortlessly on the reproduction of it has arrived” (*GK* 209). A variant may be an instance of a

literalization of “the love of learning” theme: “Properly, we shd. read for power. Man reading shd. be man intensely alive. The book shd. be a ball of light in one’s hand” (*GK* 55). That this is literally love is hinted in a splicing from the *Cantos*, where Pound quotes Guido Cavalcanti amid the quotations cut-up from the writings of John Adams: manhater (*IRA must be*) aroused ere the mind be / at its best (*LXIII* / 353). The image of a book as a dematerialized ball of light recapitulates both of Pound’s two opening exegeses. In addition to this, in a way that looks back to the conservation theory of the Osiris article, a particular locus of failure in this context is criticism or what he elsewhere calls “prose,” which doesn’t help this final intensification that can finally dematerialize the book: “The supreme evil committable by a critic is to turn men away from the bright and living” (*GK* 161). As we have seen, the criticism that doesn’t incorporate the book, “analysing” after the work is done, has a very inferior value. This language of light and living belong to a particularly charged concern and provides a passage to his concept of instinct.

Earlier in the “How to Write” essay we find the mention of instinct. There referring to Gourmont’s *Natural Philosophy of Love* which he translated in the twenties, Pound writes: “In Gourmont’s exposition the instinct is not supposed to intellect. Intellect is a sort of imperfect forerunner. After the intellect has worked on a thing long enough the knowledge becomes faculty. There is one immediate perception or capacity to act instead of a mass of ratiocination” (*Machine Art* 107). As in the previous example of the violinist, a faculty is formed, but this time as an inalienable second nature of the critic-artist, and here it applies as well to the way of dealing with documents. Pound would like to find his way in his “culture” as an animal would in his *umwelt* or form of life, “without strain” as a definition of genius Pound makes in his book *Jefferson and/or Mussolini* may suggest: “The flying ant

or wasp or whatever it was that I saw cut up a spider at Excideuil may have been acting by instinct, but it was not acting by reason of the stupidity of instinct...When a human being has an analogous completeness of knowledge, or intelligence carried into a third or fourth dimension, capable of dealing with NEW circumstances, we call it genius” (qtd. in Bacigalupo 91). Pound’s use of this definition in application to Mussolini gives simultaneously a naturalisation of culture and an aesthetization of politics and other apparent interrelations between the four, if we take them as at least provisional departure points. Offering a comparison with Thomas Carlyle’s “anti-self consciousness theory,” Robert Casillo draws some conclusions, extreme or not, that are enough to make this kind of cultural instinct oriented towards action suspect:

In order to evade the obstructing worm of consciousness and introspection, and to harness instinctual forces for socially productive ends, the self must forget itself: only in self forgetfulness can it fulfill itself in activity or work [...] It is entirely possible to confuse the unself-conscious vitality of free instinctive activity with the self-forgetfulness that accompanies such repressive acts of automatism as the gosestep. (Casillo 119)

If Casillo himself didn’t produce a psychoanalytical interpretation of Pound’s fear of the crowd, this would of course be more convincing, however it is still valid to assert that the self-forgetting of genius may lend itself to an absence of reflection *tout court*, or that cherishing a faculty acquisition because it is irreversible itself is a projection of mastery that is too sure of itself to allow any element of doubt and heterogeneity, even if the heterogeneity is that of which it cannot do.

## D) Noigandres / Enoi gandres

However this is not the only arrival of Pound's discussions. A search for a balance and other possibilities of engagement with culture inherent in the book must also be considered here. Pound addresses this issue of the mean mainly in a national context, while implying a reflection on his condition of exile: "Between America where 'they' know nothing and continually discover the moon, and Germany 'where they know everything and make no distinction between anything and anything else' one might aspire to 中 [ Chinese character for 'the mean']" (GK 201). Here we could remember Pound's disguised pride in being "flunked" in a literary history class in an American university. His distinction, although verging on hyperbole, is supported by the historical fact that American universities at the time had been trying to import the German system of higher education, which was already established and was at the forefront of research in humanities and disciplines like "Romance languages," as vividly exemplified by a novel like *Middlemarch*, or Pound's own preoccupations.

Pound's second exegesis on the love of learning has here too a lot to tell us. After referring to his scholarly pursuits helped by Italian librarians and archivists who "are an augment to the pleasure of study," Pound writes: "Naturally there is nothing duller than the results of such digging, UNLESS the searcher have some concept to work to. Not the document but the significance of the document [...]. Some kind of line to hang one's facts on is better than no line at all" (GK 221). As previously, Pound pits this notion of a guiding concept for the research against confrontation with a claustrophobia inducing abundance of documents that is in excess of any possible reflection (GK 221). Although Pound is also using the "the

significance of the document” to exclude and control the element of chance encounters and discoveries, he isn’t referring to his “line to hang his facts on” as a totalising fabric, but is taking it as provisional, indeed as mainly a reclamation of “the pleasure of study.” This is not fully compatible with the Kantian determinate judgement where the general, or the economic “one principle” is already instituted and ready to subsume what comes next, or for that matter, the telescopic symptomatology of “the totalitarian.”

As Massimo Bacigalupo shows, the answer of the totalitarian was the “closure” of another possibility, a more attentive and non-economic attunement to the individual case, which attunement *The Guide to Kulchur* and *The Cantos* itself hold in uneasy balance with the binding methodologies of the “one principle” and biological incorporation. In a critical passage Pound refers to his generation that was changed in profound ways by the war:

In any case they bred a generation of experimenters, my generation, which was unable to work out a code for action. We believed and disbelieved ‘everything,’ or to put it another way we believed in the individual case. The best of us accepted every conceivable ‘dogma’ as a truth for *a* situation, as the truth for a particular crux, crisis or temperament. And a few serious survivors of war grew into tolerance of the ‘new synthesis,’ saw finally a need for a ‘general average’ in law. (*GK* 291)

Just seeing that this new synthesis isn’t a necessary outcome of the previous attunement to the belief in the individual case—which entails an itinerancy similar to the Kantian reflective judgment—but a reactive and oddly self-corrective divergence, goes some way in inviting a rehabilitation of the strain of thought

typified here, which won't necessarily reflect on the work done under the standard of synthesis, as it is the synthesis that underlies Pound's most problematic statements in his broadcasts and *The Cantos*.

In a way that has perhaps a more direct bearing on Kung's one principle, Pound juxtaposes two different attitudes to cultural materials and emphasises a "general curiosity":

Yet from Montaigne or Rabelais you would, I believe, acquire curiosity by contagion, and in a more mellow form than from the 18<sup>th</sup> century collectors of heteroclite items laid out all of 'em from the same point of view, all dealt by an identical process, whereas Montaigne and Rabelais are handling them with a more general curiosity. You do NOT know all about any substance merely by testing it with litmus paper. (*GK* 208)

A few lines down he describes his progress in the book similarly as "dealing with a heteroclite set of impressions," and this allows one to ask whether Pound has been the connoisseur with his litmus paper or the generally curious, the two choices being gradations—one in "more mellow form" than the other—rather than oppositions. As the litmus example will attest, Pound has to be the generally curious and not worse for admitting it. Indeed a transvaluation of his graver words like those extrapolated from Confucius against this terminology, and even a reversal may be in order. Bacigalupo indicates that this curiosity may store an alternative, as Pound suggests in a particularly disconnected reflection, that the basis of the restoration of a common culture after the destruction of war could be found "in the overcoming of personal jealousies possible only in the high light of belief or the oblivion of pure curiosity" (*GK* 294). Finally, at the end of the same passage where he invokes "a

heteroclitite set of impressions,” Pound offers what he designates as a non-appropriative model, and displaces the element of heteroclitity to another context: “In traveling one marks certain maxima, and tries not to appropriate everything. The charm of nine ‘sights’ out of ten is in sense of discovery, a moderate temporary ownership, that ought to be left to the next man” (*GK* 208).

The submergence of this strain in Pound’s later writings is one of the reasons why the end Pound has written for the *Cantos*, insofar as it tries to conjure what Robert Casillo calls a “specious harmony,” has been contested, in that it is designed to exclude chance encounters, indeed any contact with otherness in a forced closure. As the book moves further in the direction of being the tale of the tribe, relying on ritual, rootedness, customs, the element of “travel” and discovery gets to be obscured, or if still present, chained to be the instrument of the final homecoming. Critics like Peter Nicholls and Robert Casillo indeed make a distinction between Pound’s early exilic cosmopolitanism and his later search for roots and the “homestead.” Nicholls refers to *Cantos* as “a poem which, in contravention of its original formal aims, came increasingly to epitomise a fantasy of groundedness and home” and questions “the promise of an ending by which the ‘ruined’ and fragmentary remains of history might recompose themselves in a figure of homecoming powerful enough to contain the centrifugal tendencies of a poem that now seemed to its author perilously ‘nomadic’” (“Modernising Modernism: from Pound to Oppen”). Robert Casillo, who comes exactly to the same conclusions, closes his book on Pound with a discussion on delight in spite of Pound’s later railings against a “schismatic” dilettantism. He reminds that Pound himself had once taken “diletto” literally and reinstated the importance of “dilettantism.” Pound had written: “Let me restore the foppish term dilettante, the synonym for folly, to its

place near the word *diletto*. The dilettante has no axe to grind for himself. If he be artist as well, he will be none the less eager to preserve the best precedent work” (*LE* 55). Casillo writes, “as Pound suggests, the word *diletto*, meaning delight, and the related word *dilettante*, have pejorative meaning only when, as in the modern world, mechanization and systematization have transformed culture into a joyless activity and a specialized form of experience [...] Though they celebrate a repressive politics, *The Cantos* never lose sight of joy, pleasure, and leisure as the true goal of culture” (Casillo 334). Casillo illustrates this “goal” with a passage from the *Cantos* which is the famous Noigandres passage in which Pound tells of his visit to a Romance professor in Freiburg to ask the meaning of an obscure word in Arnaut Daniel. Pound learns from Emil Lévi that noigandres is actually “d’enoï ganres,” and means “banishes sadness.” This tale perfectly harmonises the different strands of curiosity, obscurity that resists any facilely subsumptive tendency of the “one principle,” crossing of real boundaries, materiality of poetry, travel and love of learning:

And I went to old Levy, and it was by then 6 30

In the evening, and he trailed half way across Freiburg

before dinner, to see the two strips of copy,

Arnaut’s, settant’uno R superiore (Ambrosiana)

Not that I could sing him the music

And he said Now is there anything I can tell you?”

And I sald I dunno, Sir, or

“Yes, Doctor, what do they mean by *noigandres*?”

And he Said Noigandres NOIgandres!

“You know for seex mon’s of my life

“Effery night when I go to bett, I say to myself

“NOlgandres, eh, *noigandres*,  
“Now what the DEFFIL can that mean”  
Wind over the olive trees, ranunculae ordered,  
By the clear edge of the rocks  
The water runs, and the wind scented with pine  
And with hay-fields under sun-swath  
Agostino, Jacopo and Boccata  
You would be happy for the smell of that place  
And never tired of being there, either alone  
Or accompanied  
Sound as of the nightingale too far off to be heard... (XX / 90)

## CHAPTER 3: ECONOMICS

### A) Hell Cantos

In the “Serious Artist” Pound writes: “I believe that poetry is the more highly energized [...] And ‘good writing’ is perfect control. And it is quite easy to control a thing that has in it no energy-provided that it be not heavy and that you do not wish to make it move” (*LE* 49). Pound’s beloved —and Nietzschean— image of a Centaur for poetry also emphasizes the same. Some of Pound’s most felicitous images are formed after this figure of an energy that is harnessed and controlled, which implies a unique combination of passivity and activity. It is no coincidence that an iconic image from the *Cantos* —“rose in the steel dust”—makes an early appearance here in the same article, in application to the process of artistic creation: “A force rather like water when it spurts up through very bright sand and sets it in swift motion” (*LE* 49). This is a recursive structure that is a helpful waymark in treating some figures in Pound’s work: Some images of mastery and directed energy are also about expression itself. Formulated first in a discussion of poetic technique, they come to stand for an ideal more than technical while still harking back to that origin.

In a chapter of his *Poetry of Ezra Pound* called “Mud and Light,” Hugh Kenner wrote: “we should beware of stamping all the items in the *Cantos* either O.K. or N.G. But the cut-vs.-muddled remains one of the major skeletal lines to be grasped, and it has done no harm to isolate it” (Kenner 248). From the perspective of

the above performative conjunction which associates exact definition and energy with serenity, mastery, divine intelligence, and formal equilibrium, the pole of the muddled in Pound contrarily evokes undifferentiation, waste, slowness and uncanny shifts while exhibiting this in the images and words of the given characters, in short the texture of the poem itself. This means that, up to a point, “the stamping as O.K. and N.G.” has already been done by Pound himself, through his system of beliefs and values. In his examination of *The Four Quartets*, Anthony Moody summarises a crucial aspect of that specific work that also applies to Pound: “The drop in intensity and interest marks the relative meaninglessness, from the point of view of the questing spirit, of the material being dealt with. The style is a form of discrimination — properly understood, style *is* discrimination” (Moody 146). Vocal differentiation is a reflection of this fit sought between subject and style, and as Jean Michel Rabaté also shows, there are plenty of instances where Pound himself states as much, here in a quotation from the Confucian Odes: “Urbanity in externals, Virtu in Internals / some in a high style for the rites / some in humble, / for Emperors, for the people / all things are here brought to precisions” (LIX / 324). In a parallelism that is also Dantescan, voices define states of mind which may place someone in either hell or in paradise.

However there is another crucial question, which is whether representation can take on the properties of its reference, and specifically, whether in “Hell Cantos” Pound has been succesful in giving the due to his insight that “you can be wholly precise in representing a vagueness” (LE 44). In his treatment of similarly hellish passages in *The Four Quartets*, Moody acquits Eliot of this feedback: “It is not the writing which is inferior, but the order of understanding which it is just there representing” (Moody 147). Pound critics on the other hand, have had a harder time

extending this recognition to “Hell Cantos.” In their respective studies, Ian Bell and Daniel Albright imply a self-defeating quality in these Cantos, given Pound’s avowed ideals in poetry.

A tangle of relationships is found in the origin of the values and the perception of facts the Hell Cantos and the later social thought were based on. Here it is important to note that even Pound’s career in economic writing which was a main preoccupation throughout his later career had an origin not divorced from art, and the ideal of a freedom to work a given medium to its full capacity. In an anecdotal passage he says: “Autobiography if you like. Slovinisky looked at me in 1912: ‘Boundt, haff you gno bolidigal basshuntz?’ Whatever economic passions I now have, began *ab initio* from having crimes against living art thrust under my perceptions” (*Visual Arts* 261). What makes this significant and not to be taken for granted is Pound’s manner of positing this relation between art and economics. He usually locates an immediate *causality* between the two, and economics and culture are defined and brought to the same level with each other from the perspective of a central operative: “States of mind.” In a quite “demonic” fashion, some states of mind are responsible for both economic injustice and untruth, which finally contribute to unhappiness. In another context, a discussion of Aristotle in his *Guide to Kulchur*, Pound finds it necessary to point out the “thaumaturgic inheritance” in “eudaimonia,” and as Bacigalupo shows, the social evil and unhappiness caused by bad economy is a stumbling block which has to be dealt with before writing a “paradise” in a form it calls for (Bacigalupo 96). No wonder, the persistence of this concern supplied the title of Casillo’s pathbreaking study of Pound’s fascism: “Fear father of cruelty, are we to write a *genealogy of the demons*” (CXIV/811).

More to the point, the idea that economic system as a sign of civilization was

in an organic relationship with art foreshadowed Pound's later emphasis on the "totalitarian." Influenced by German anthropologist Leo Frobenius's "Paideuma," which he defined as "the inrooted ideas of any period," this highly formalist notion—Frobenius himself called his enterprise "Kulturmorphologie"—actually contains in itself the possibility of an encounter with otherness, in giving one to understand the limits and the totality of one's culture as if from the outside.<sup>21</sup> In *Kulchur*, after an anecdote about Frobenius, Pound actually makes a remark to this effect in referring to Robert Burns's poem "To a Louse": "The specimen present having been a familiar object of cognizance for two decades, I naturally noticed nothing. The foreign eye is half way house to Burns' wish for a mirror showing oneself what others see easily" (*GK* 218). However, in Pound, this possibility is overshadowed by an essentialist and paranoid bias at the same time: "When a given hormone defects, it will defect throughout the whole system. Hence the yarn that Frobenius looked at two African pots and, observing their shapes and proportions, said if you will go to a certain place and there digge, you will find traces of a civilization with such and such characteristics" (*GK* 60). Especially in his Radio Rome broadcasts, nothing escapes the deductive power of this discourse of the symptom.

The medical language is characteristic of Pound. Adapting Casillo on Pound's later strategies of scapegoating, found mainly in the broadcasts, one can say that "Pound's resort to mud-shit-blur-disease metaphors is proportionate to his need for definition" (Casillo 210). The greatest wrong is eroding essential distinctions,

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21 For this reason Marjorie Perloff passingly likens Frobenius's Paideuma to Foucault's episteme.

For a twist on the Foucauldian concept that specifically concerns the relation of Western thought to China see François Jullien, *Propensity of Things*. Jullien argues for the possibility of a "heterotopic" and holistic view that will come from the "outside."

and erasing boundaries, and thus a major determinant of Pound's hell of abjection is Dante's idea of justice as "counterpass," or as punishment mirroring the crime. This also touches on the issue of objectivity. "Hell Cantos" have been described as using a technique of satire (Makin), and as a genre satire doesn't require an identification on the poet's part with those satirized, on the contrary, allowing for "indirect aggression," it enables the objectification of the satirized. Some features of these Cantos correspond exactly to these features, so much so that the following could also have been written with these Cantos in mind: Here too "the scene is disorderly and crowded, producing the effect of 'disorderly profusion'" (Test 17). In a more striking and almost improbable coincidence, these Cantos also provide a "picture of a dense and grotesque world of decaying matter moving without form in response only to physical forces and denying the humane ideal which once molded a crowd into a society and the collection of buildings into a city," which is the characterization of satire made by Alvin Kernan (qtd. in Test 17). Indeed as war in one sense may be a "destruction of restaurants" (CX /800) hell may be an absence of buildings of *cut stone*. Casillo's emphasis on Pound's need for boundary stones is nowhere more appropriate than in relation to these Cantos, because a boundary stone is shortly a metaphor for form and design itself.

However, in spite of being so exact a depiction of satire in these features, Hell Cantos also complicate the genre, and contrary to Test's observation that satires typically end in "irresolution," here in a Dantescan scheme we have the final epiphany and the resolution of the escape, and the Hell Cantos' own isolative positioning between two figures of an anticipated paradise: Confucius and Dionysus. More importantly, these Cantos must be thought in the context of Pound's larger "economic" concerns, and personal motivations. This is all the more important if

accounting for all the elements of these Cantos from the standpoint of genre may miss some crucial implications that are borne out by Pound's other writings. On the other hand, the case for the uniqueness of these Cantos, and the statement of their divergence from the genre would better not be made in a spirit of moral resentment, which Test shows to be a characteristic response to satire. As it will be seen, the historical semantic economy of the term "economy" itself, in its inclusiveness, will partly provide the necessary wide purchase.

In order to qualify the identification as satire, first of all, there is a point in these Cantos where objectification becomes mingled with fear, and the possibility of an expropriation of the persona's body indicates that the "focalizer" is threatened by his environment. The association of this narratological operative with vision is particularly relevant. As Albright suggests, a defining characteristic of hell is the absence of the "Image" as Pound formulated it.

Secondly, T.S. Eliot's criticism of these Cantos in his own Anti-Semitic book, *After Strange Gods* must be considered. In a statement that is by now a commonplace of Pound criticism, and an invariable visiting point in every discussion of the Hell Cantos, Eliot wrote:

If you do not distinguish between individual responsibility and circumstances in Hell, between essential Evil and social accidents, then the Heaven (if any) implied will be equally trivial and accidental. Mr. Pound's Hell, for all its horrors, is a perfectly comfortable one for the modern mind to contemplate, and disturbing to no one's complacency: it is a Hell for the other people, the people we read about in the newspapers. (*After Strange Gods* 43)

Pound's depiction of the damned as lacking any personal characteristics, thus

prompting Eliot to criticize the setting apart of “type” from real social responsibility, is actually accounted for by the unique form of counterpass against the greatest wrong: indistinction. However, Eliot’s observation about hell being for other people discerns an underlying and more sinister logic that will be verified by later Cantos. Hell is not only a way of projecting Pound’s own violence to the outside. It is where any distinction between self and other collapses. Thus as Casillo writes, “Pound’s evasion and self-recognition requires not scientific objectivity but the ability to distance and fix the hated and feared object by visual means, to present it not in its actual resemblance to himself but as entirely other and entirely loathsome” (Casillo 165). For this reason Pound cannot afford to place a whirlwind of lovers in his hell, because love as “intellectual instigation” is assigned to his intellectual paradise, and his hell is also an intellectual hell: a break-down of “economic” organization that could be achieved with luminous details, an absence of the evocative new object the image constitutes, and absence of design itself, which is a sign of concentrated intellectual-emotional energy.

In these Cantos, firstly there is the matter in the archaic sense found in Neoplatonism. Against form associated with intelligence, a formless matter which is also a principle of passivity:

Melting like dry wax,  
decayed candles, the bums sinking lower,  
faces submerged under the hams  
And in the ooze under them  
reversed, foot-palm to foot-palm,  
hand-palm to hand-palm, the agents provocateurs [...]  
The soil a decrepitude, the ooze full of morsels,

Lost contours, erosions (XIV/62)

Liebregts who made an interpretation of *Cantos* through the lens of Neoplatonism, writes that in this philosophy “matter in itself is measureless and formless,” and “a bare receptacle of forms” (Liebregts 140). Matter is unbounded, undefined; it is the base counterpart of the Neoplatonic One in its resistance to forms of understanding. Reading the *Cantos*, one also sees that this principle of formlessness is easily associated with the feminine, later even personified as “Madame HYLE,” announcing the arrival of luxury in another instance of economic abuse. Here, in its passivity it also connotes the opposite of the active faculty of making (dis)associations, slowness and waste, prefiguring the later warning of Canto 46, “you who think you will get through hell in a hurry.” Pound always prized mental swiftness and energy, and this emphasis on swift perception was also a criterion for evaluation of other people for him. Charles Olson once wrote: “It is his measure—speed—for all work, and men. His mind bursts from the lags he sees around him” (*Olson*). Time-lag as well as “sero sero”—too late too late—are recurrent phrases in the *Cantos*, and many of Pound’s critical statements also take this as their axis. The luminous detail, ideogrammic short hand, and the Aristotelian emphasis on pattern recognition are all imbued with the same interest in their speed. In a passage of his “How to Write,” he offers an interpretation of “mens sana in corpore sano” that can shed light on some images from hell: “The higher the physical development, the more complicated the Gestalt (space); the higher the mens, the longer the durée” (*Machine Art* 108). This is an uncharacteristic reference to Bergson, however, when he refers to Bach and his supposed swiftness in conception, he betrays the identical concern: “The relativity in highest-mens is that Bach might be conceived as conceiving a whole fugue in an instant; probably no composer ever did; but these

foreshortenings or instantaneous conceptions and knowings of Gestalt that in expression needs extension in time are the indicated highest mens” (*Machine Art* 108).

As for energy in design, in a revealing note for the Cantos, Pound gives the equations:

form: sign of vitality

cohesion = symptom of vitality... (qtd. in Liebrechts 158)

This is important, because it means that in addition to showing as content the undifferentiated matter, Hell Cantos may demand a less taut, entropically “dissolving” form that can evoke the undifferentiation in the states of minds of the damned, permitted that the metaphor—that of vitality—is shifted from its biological provenance. As energy gives design, Pound will have to show the “soup” itself. Pound was familiar with the terminology of entropy: ideas can be “squashable” as opposed to solid monads and clusters, and he has a period tag in history of philosophy: “post-Baconian soup” by which he means the loss of distinctions and an overemphasis on epistemology.

The most prominent sound quality of these Cantos may be the “s” sound, finding accentuated repetition in the seven pages of the sequence, in individual words such as, “scission,” “scab,” “stench,” “souse,” “slough,” “pisswallow,” and alliterations: “stiff starched, but soiled, collars / circumscribing his legs” (XIV/61). It is as if the air is slowly being sucked out in the process of reading itself. This choice of sound quality in agreement with subject matter excludes the highly controlled euphonic variations achieved in passages of paradise and epiphanies.

Formlessness is given in an intersensorial fashion rather recalling the Judgment Day sermon James Joyce used in *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*,

which offers a vision of total sensorial punishment. Here, noise in the “clatter of presses” and “the air without refuge of silence” evokes a sonorous formlessness while “beneath one nothing that might not move” is tactile. Finally identities are also subject to shifts. Corresponding to “mobile earth,” there is the stage direction “PERSONNEL CHANGES,” rather an uncanny and uncontrolled form of metamorphosis. All these changes manifest the threat of spoiling contours, incursions from the outside, to resist which, the living visitor in hell has to “close the pores in his feet” (XVI / 66). This way Pound imagines a punishment which consists in the loss of identity and thus ascribability of the crime itself. Later in referring to his Cantos as a “whodunit” he would admit his search for the culprit.

If it is remembered that for Pound distinct forms and clear perception were linked to clarity in language and almost analogous, it is not surprising that language also finds here its utmost degradation, through its equation with excrement:

pets-de-loup, sitting on piles of stone books,  
obscuring the texts through philology,  
                  hiding them under their persons,  
the air without refuge of silence,  
                  the drift of lice, teething,  
and above it the mouthing of orators,  
                  the arse belching of preachers. (XIV/63)

In addition to charges of direct perversion and deceit like the ones about “those who had lied for hire; / the perverts, the perverters of language, / the perverts, who have set money lust / Before the pleasures of the senses,” others target, regardless of content, oratorical contexts, where one might assume the use of rhetorical language. The association Pound makes between deceitful word of rhetoric and excrement has

precedents. Dominique Laporte departs from a similar association of ornamental language and filth that he shows to have been made in Renaissance France, just when the enforcement of vernacular against the use of Latin began. In the historical coincidence of two edicts, one for the cleansing of language and the other for the hygiene of the streets of Paris, he finds a symbolic significance which is not amiss when applied to Pound:

Strictly speaking, the cleansing of language is less a political act than an economic one. Language is liberated from excess, from a corrupting mass that cannot be said to amount simply to the opposite of the beautiful. What the master excises is ornament: the calligraphy that enlightens the eye; the things in language that go beyond articulation; that which encumbers its flow and makes it unwieldy; that which fattens language without enriching it. All that derives from the primacy of the line and the gaze. (Laporte 23)

This insight that explicates verbal superfluity as an economic problem is also confirmed in Pound's main culprit in his epic, usury. What characterises Pound's Hell is above all a prodigal and uncontrollable growth invading both time and space, and which makes for a very fertile content for his paratactic catalogues: "infinite pus flakes, scabs of a lasting pox / skin flakes, repetitions, erosions." Not only that, but as it must be familiar by now, Pound also thought of a certain way of scholarship as linked with production of waste, defective in treating what really mattered. This was of course the claustrophobia inducing accumulation in the method of "multitudinous details."

From another perspective, the approximation of utterance in scatology constitutes not an isolated moment in modernism. Regarding the above passage

about orators, Ian Bell wrote: “This soiling of voice, and hence of the capacity of voice for proper utterance, ‘precise verbal definitions’ was, of course the major crisis of language for modernism: the diffused materiality of the one resulted in the insubstantiality of the other” (Bell 64). Here, Bell has Joyce in mind. Significantly, in his letters to Joyce, Pound distanced himself from Joyce’s *Ulysses*, writing that “he was more phallic” and “less interested in excrement” (*P / J* 144). Forrest Read who edited Pound’s letters to Joyce, writes on this distinction that “phallic” and “excremental” appeared to Pound to be an essential difference between poetry and prose: “Poetry asserts positive emotional values and works toward emotional synthesis. Prose arises from an instinct of negation, proceeds by intellectual analysis, and presents something one wants to eliminate” (*P / J* 146). Pound seems to suggest that prose and poetry are economic alternatives, poetry offering a condensation and recuperation without loss, while prose has a tendency to what Pound would later call “clutter.” Of course Pound would make an exception about Stendhal, Flaubert and Ford all of whom he adopted as allies in his quest for precision. Henry James, who is the subject of the above distinction, is more problematic, as it will be seen later.

Another related component of this Hell is monstrosity, as another instance of disorder:

Bush hanging for beard,  
    Addressing crowds through their arse-holes,  
Addressing the multitudes in the ooze,  
        newts, water-slugs, water-maggots,  
And with them.....r,  
        a scrupulously clean table-napkin  
Tucked under his penis,

and.....m,

Who disliked colloquial language (XIV / 61)

In the quote the displacement of vocality from mouth to anus both imply the equation of the non-exact or deceitful word with excrement, and monstrosity. Here Pound's own attitudes and devices largely overlap with those of the historical iconophiles. Marie José Mondzain, who elaborates the uses of the term "economy" in the iconoclasm debates of early Christianity, extracts a wide array of meanings behind the term, which the early church fathers borrowed from St. Paul. Apparently iconophiles also used this attack on the body as a discursive and outright rhetorical strategy. Indeed rhetoric is never contained by a theory of tropes, and Pound's rhetorical strategies and sense of circumstance demand our recognition. Iconophile "economy" too, encompassed both the discourse and the body, and they too were looking for placing "eternity's concern" (Robert Browning) into temporal order with the medium of the image. Mondzain's comment on the charge of monstrosity made by the iconophile discourse against iconoclasts bears quoting: "The proof of the adversary's malice is drawn from his very body because it resembles—or we should rather say, it is in the image of— his own rejection of the image" (Mondzain 13). It wouldn't be wrong to say that Pound's scholars are in the image of their rejection of the heuristic "luminous" detail, thus hiding books "under their persons" or the thickness of their bodies. Although Mondzain is discussing the use of religious icons, her study also shows, how in iconophile strategies also the "medical discourse and theological discourse respond to each other and share among each other both the good and bad" and indeed "everything that concerns the devil is revealed under the sign of rejection, not of appearance. Excrement, the fetus, vomit, eructations are so many irruptions of diabolic invisibility" (Mondzain 43).

Finally, the monstrosity of the damned brings up the question of the presence or the absence of the image with regard to these Cantos. Daniel Albright writes that a metamorphosis is an “image stretched in time,” however “a monster represents a spastic half-metamorphosis” (Albright 146). He concludes from this that “hell is the final resting-place of failed images,” almost equating Pound’s expulsions and repressive scatology with a poetic-imagistic failure. Indeed in these Cantos both the quality of the sound patterns and phanopoeia defined as “the casting of the images on the visual imagination” are different from the typical cases of the image. Replacing the parasitic breeding and self-replication of the same, the unity in difference characteristic of image only appears in the end of the sequence. More generally, hell imposes its own perceptual regimen of indistinction and superfluous growth to the detriment of the “control” the image presupposes.

Pound’s writings exhibit an understanding of poetic form as achieved by force of desire, which, even his self definition as “phallic” amply demonstrates. Formlessness on the other hand is very close to the “misdirection of will,” or the absence of it, and in that case images are without desire. The in-forming element, introduced at the end of these Cantos is nothing other than mirror of the shield which has the image of Medusa on it, thus recapitulating the controlling function of the themes of perception-visibility and objectivity; obviously, it is also Pound’s own shield against his conjurations of abjection. Mirrors for Pound must be a principle of sifting, a preservation and rescue of the essential from a “diffuse materiality,” just like the other devices used in the *Cantos* to refer to permanence, such as “in the mind indestructible” of the Pisan sequence or Van Buren’s “mirror of memory,” and of course the “forméd trace” of “Donna mi Prega” all of which point to the resilience of the well-loved or the essential—both indexical remainders— against oblivion. In

a *negentropic* and phallogocentric reversal this talismanic artifact held by Pound's guide Plotinus takes on the function of solidifying a thin strip of mud and leading to light:

Prayed we to the Medusa,  
petrifying the soil by the shield,  
Holding it downward  
he hardened the track  
Inch before us by inch,  
the matter resisting (XV/66)

On a general level it wouldn't be wrong to attribute the scatology and monstrosities of these Cantos to internal necessities and to point out that these are balanced by a structuring of a more major kind, that of the juxtaposition of the Cantos themselves, rather than image-particles in them. As noted by various scholars, Hell Cantos are placed after the serene Canto XIII on Confucius and just before the Dionysian opening of Canto XVII. However there are also psychologically extreme and compromising elements such as the "fear of contagion" Casillo mentions in his study of these Cantos. Pound also resorts to the rhetorical strategy of drawing evidence from his targets' bodies, thus putting rigid boundaries between the truth of his style and others's. As the distinction given above which Pound makes between poetry and prose suggests, here we may have an emotional synthesis, but it is a synthesis and projection of intensely unpleasant emotions that London must have evoked in Pound, the response to which foreshadows his treatment of "Usura."

## B) Usura in Context

In a consistently “economic” author single words may store much, and as employed by Pound, usury is no simple word. It will be shown that it touches upon the most central issues of his poetics. As Jean Paulhan writes:

We are always talking about a writer’s characteristic ‘language,’ the terms he is fond of, the expressions he invests—and which invest him—with a particular meaning: about his key words...That’s all very well. However anyone who makes the effort of shifting suddenly from the outside to the inside, and going from the state of being a reader to that of being an author, will no doubt feel that —far from being clever and useful words, these are on the contrary the truth, or the *central* thought expressed or served by more common ideas and words.

(Paulhan 43)

Usury is such a word in its “overdetermination,” and one of the examples Paulhan gives, the word “swarm” habitually used by French writer Charles Maurras, also has a direct connection with Pound, who according to Robert Casillo shows an affinity with the ideas of the former.

As related in the context of *Hell Cantos*, Pound’s interest in economics grew out of a reflection on his own situation as an artist. So from the start, his investment in economic subjects was intimately bound up with his own estate, and allowed him to react to economic problems as issues implicating everything he cared for. If economics was a tool for exploring the causes of his experiences, he was going to master it. This search presupposed making the crucial discrimination of what

belonged to economy as a cause and what was outside of its determinations. Pound comments on the new synthesis war has precipitated for him: “There was, in this perhaps no positive gain save that, again, a few saw a dissociation of personal crises and cruces, that exist above or outside economic pressure, and those which arise directly from it, or are so encumbered by, and entangled in, the root problems of money, that any pretended ethical or philosophical dealing with them is sheer bunk UNTIL they be disentangled” (*GK* 52).

In the second chapter we have already seen what might be at stake in a new synthesis. Excepting the “above or outside” which might signify Pound’s concern with transcendent preoccupations, economics would prove as central enough to claim corrective functions regarding biases associated with aestheticism, psychology and psychoanalysis. Bacigalupo points out the inevitable association with Marx: “While pursuing his ‘excessive idea of literature,’ he has stumbled upon Marxist ground: ‘Lot of damn rot and ‘psychology,’ people fussing with in’nards which are merely the result of economic pressure” (qtd. in Bacigalupo 230).

*The Cantos* give the definition of usury as “a charge for the use of purchasing power, levied without regard to production.” Usury in this sense implies the unlawful hoarding of money, in a way that obstructs “circulation.” In a diagnostic search for root causes and historical precedents, Pound would chase the avatars of this formula through a good part of the *Cantos* and his prose works. This quality once prompted Pound to claim that it made the early *Cantos* “a sort of detective story,” and him the “prosecutor” (qtd. in Makin 107). Even before the central “Usura *Cantos*” there is the Canto about the bank war, which focuses on the conflict over the prerogatives of credit/issue in the early history of U.S. In a way that exhibits his citational poetics, Pound reserves a major place for the words of his ideological

champions who were opposing possible abuses on the part of private banks:

“No where so well deposited as in the pants of the people,

Wealth ain’t,” said President Jackson.

They give the union five years...

Bank did not produce uniform currency..

they wd. import grain rather than grow it...

Bank of England failed to prevent uses of credit... (XXXVII /182)

From the real committee of Bank’s directors

the government’s directors have been excluded.

Bank president controlling government’s funds

to the betrayal of the nation...

government funds obstructing government... (XXXVII / 184)

The reference to Bank of England is connected with what Pound thought to be an even earlier encouragement of usury. As Peter Makin shows, Pound was using sources written in a climate that was affected by the Wall Street Crash of 1929 and the depression. On the Bank of England his source was such a book by Christopher Hollis, who supplies a paradigmatic instance for Pound’s detective story in the founder Paterson’s words: “The Bank hath benefit of interest on all the moneys which it creates out of nothing.” Here, money being created out of nothing is like the tax levied without regard to production. Emphasizing Pound’s adoption of Social Credit economics, Makin writes, “Pound had come to believe that the reason for starvation, gross inequality of wealth, and resultant conflict was a permanent undeclared tax on most economic activity” (Makin 107).

Andrew Parker indicates an important source for usury as Pound uses it in Aristotle’s *Politics*. Aristotle makes an essential difference between money as

neutral measure and its interest bearing form. Parker summarizes it thus:

In Chapters 8 and 9, Book I of the Politics, Aristotle differentiates between two antithetical forms of exchange: “economics” as such (oikonomike), described as “natural,” “original” and “proper”; and “wealth-getting” (chrematistike), defined as “artificial,” “secondary” and “improper” (1257a). In the former system, money functions solely as a mediating agent employed in order to facilitate the exchange of two heterogeneous commodities; its importance to the transaction hence is limited explicitly to its ability to serve as an adequate representation of commodity values. In the latter, however money is both the origin and end of a transaction mediated not by some (ideally transparent) measure of value but by the commodity itself; the “danger” posed by chrematistics thus would be its tendency to fetishize money as a commodity in its own right—a process that, once begun, is without “fixed boundary” since it is not restrained in any referential way to the world of tangible goods and needs: “all getters of wealth increase their hoard of coin without limit.” (1257b) (Parker 105)

Usury is the culmination of chrematistics, and its capacity to increase money not through exchange but interest leads Aristotle to compare it with incest, because here too the offspring of trade remains “qualitatively identical to its parent.” Aristotle writes: “Usury is most reasonably hated, because it makes a gain out of money itself, and not from the natural object of it. For money was intended to be used in exchange, but not to increase at interest. And this term “interest” (tokos, lit. “offspring”), which means the birth of money from money, is applied to the breeding

of money because the offspring resembles the parent. Wherefore of all forms of getting wealth this is the most unnatural (1258b)” (Qtd. in Parker). This definition of usury as unnatural has a frequent occurrence in *Cantos*, as the Canon Law phrase “CONTRA NATURAM,” in addition to the play on the word “tokos.”

In contrast to the symptoms, causes and reincarnations of usury, Pound also had a list of beneficent models. Among these, historical examples of money being lent by states instead of banks were primary, and characteristically both species of economy call their reciprocal opposites in Pound’s discourse:

and as to the distributive function

1766 ante Christum

it is recorded, and the state *can* lend money

as proved at Salamis

and for notes on monopoly

Thales; and credit, Siena;

both for the trust and the mistrust,

“the earth belongs to the living”

interest on all it creates out of nothing

the bugging bank has; pure iniquity (LXXVII / 488)

In a condensed way Pound gathers three instances of good economy in this ideogram. The line with the date refers to an example from Chinese history. Another of these concerns a naval battle—Salamis—between Greece and Persia, which Greece won thanks to the money lent by state that had in turn been invested in shipbuilding. Terrell points out the basis of this notion in the “Social Credit” economics: “Pound uses the incident to illustrate a major thesis of Social Credit, that the extension of credit, should be the prerogative not of private banks but the state”

(Terrell 369). The reference to Siena that this late Canto makes rests on an earlier previous engagement. This is about the Monte Dei Paschi Bank, a similar example of state lending money. The most significant aspect of this historical example is that it is based on the abundance of nature rather than creating currency “out of nothing.” Pound carried out research in the Siena archives for the writing of the related Siena Cantos, and aside from his peculiar target idiom, documents were transposed with little alteration into his poem:

That the Mount of Pity (or Hock Shop)  
municipal of Siena has lent only on pledges  
that is on stuff actually hocked...wd be we believe useful  
and beneficent that there be place to lend licitly  
MONEY to receive licitly money  
at moderate and legitimate interest (XLII / 209)

As Hugh Kenner discovers, Pound actually leaves out of his poem the best explanation he gives of the procedures of this bank: “The lesson is the very basis of solid banking. The CREDIT rests in *ultimate* on the ABUNDANCE OF NATURE, on the growing grass that can nourish the living sheep” (qtd. in *Pound Era* 428).

### **C) Heritage**

Usury is defined through the work of such slow repetitions: money created out of nothing, excessive taxes, governments incurring debts for the credit which banks issue, and opposing this, collective or personal initiatives like Alexander paying his soldiers’ debts, all traced through a vast cross cultural and historical field. Under all the previous examples, the stylistic presence of ideogram should be noted.

Usury is constituted by the ideogram in Pound's discourse, and the ideogram contains a disjunctive as well as reconstructive/recapitulating aspect. In the following, the implications of this complementarity will be explored with respect to the way Pound overdetermines usury, and the work of critics who consider Pound's poetic language in relation to "usura" will supply the main references.

Although the observation of Peter Makin that Usura Cantos are not "on a hellish plane," but "more concerned with presenting the valued things that usury kills" is right (Makin 197), the sheer accumulation of damages inflicted amounts to a mythological tableau of decline that is very open-ended and indefinite. This unrestrained multiplicity of associations still allows for intersections with the evils of the Hell Cantos. The central Cantos XLV and LI are themselves paratactic catalogues of lost excellences that enumerate with repetitions, harms of very different orders done by usury. Usury makes the arts suffer: "hath no man a painted paradise on his church wall." It impairs the quality of nutrition: "with usura, sin against nature, / is thy bread ever more of stale rags / is thy bread dry as paper." Usury blurs definitions as in "with usura the line grows thick / with usura is no clear demarcation," thus implying the absence of design and craft. It even impedes procreation and love: "Usura slayeth the child in the womb / It stayeth the young man's courting / It hath brought palsey to bed, lyeth between the young bride and her bridegroom" (XLV / 229-30). It is finally a malady of the soul: "in their soul was usura and in their hearts cowardice / in their minds was stink and corruption / Two sores ran together" (L / 248). All this is also supported by Pound's organicist assumptions of course.

Pound finally takes up the historical association of usury with Jews and in this helped by the "synecdochal economy" (Sieburth) of his writing. The method of

accretion inherent in ideograms implies that attributes of one unit will “travel” towards others which are “brought to focus” around the same center of signification. So usury frequently will come to signify Jewish machinations. Andrew Parker, arguing in the same direction, writes that “despite both his and his defenders’ many disclaimers to the contrary, it must be recognized that Pound consistently identified the usurer with the Jew—a gesture which assigns to the latter the same ‘unlimited powers’ and influence which he typically associates with the former” (Parker 111). This means that these two subjects are similarly invested by Pound, and Robert Casillo’s following observation has plural applications: “Besides being an obviously historical issue, and apart from its social and cultural sources, Pound’s anti-Semitism is no less a problem of signification, language” (Casillo 18). This is not only because Pound uses language to attack Jews, but because Jews, through their links with usury, will occasion a frustration of a certain language or model, failure of precision/design, and finally an outbreak of contradiction in the middle of Pound’s own work. We don’t see Pound driven to such extremes in forming his syncretic metaphysical tradition.

Usury owes the privilege of this status as “radiant node or cluster” in the first place to Pound’s particular motives in dealing with economics. As discussed by Peter Nicholls, David Murray, and Casillo, Pound usually neglects production in its economic sense and historical character for a more restricted focus on distribution and money itself. When it comes to economic production as determined by specific historical conditions and “relations of production,” he applies one determining pattern, and that pattern is in conformity with his original and artistically inflected drift in taking up economic subjects. This is the notion of “cultural heritage” which was elaborated by C.H. Douglas, the Social Credit theorist who exerted a major

influence on Pound. Pound prized Douglas's work highly and admitted an influence akin to conversion in an article he wrote on the topic: "Those of us who saw the Major's point in the first weeks of his first declarations find it rather difficult to unsee it, or to put ourselves in the role of non-perceivers" (SP 417). In the same article Pound gives definitions of two related concepts from Douglas's work: "*Increment of association*: Advantage men get from working together instead of each on his own[...] *Cultural heritage*: Increment of association with all past inventiveness, thus, crops from improved seed; American wheat after Carleton's researches; a few men hoisting a locomotive with machinery" (SP 413). In a way that shows the concept to carry over to the period of broadcasts, he also refers to it in his Rome Radio speeches: "Man with passion for justice, or even a sense of justice, or an uneasiness about the existence of justice, starts rootin' round, starts trying to delimit the claims of the three orders of WORK: 1) work today, 2) work yesterday by the folk who are still livin', 3) work by the departed. And ONLY on that basis can you have sane law and society" (EPS #53).

Hugh Kenner who takes up Douglas's views in distinction from those of Marx, focuses on a central difference. He quotes Marx on "masses of congealed labor time" making up value, and writes that, for Douglas "the value of a product is not labor time." According to Cary Wolfe, Pound's own study of Aristotle's discussion of economics reaches the conclusion that "it is not the amount and type of labor that go into a thing that determine its relative worth but rather the usefulness of the thing itself, regardless of how it is produced" (Wolfe 157). However that this doesn't mean an indifference as to the means of production is better shown in another aspect of Douglas's theory. Douglas's "cultural heritage" finds its function in the implications of this distinction of emphasis, —labor versus usefulness—

because as Kenner repeats, for Douglas a great deal of value is accounted for by the accumulated practices of generations of workers, craftsmen and scientists. Hence Pound's reference to improved seeds and locomotives. This allows Kenner to specifically appeal to "design" in order to discuss these accumulations:

Imagine one man tending a machine that prints circuits: is the value of the printed circuit his labor-time? The value of the printed circuit is design value: the design of the circuit, the design of the machine. Men turn out resistors and capacitors and transistors: these would be utterly worthless curiosities did not designs exist for television sets and computers and amplifiers. Or a Boeing 747 carries twice the load of a 707, but the crew works no harder. What has multiplied the value of their work is design done once and for all. Douglas called it the cultural heritage. It includes many esoterica: the results obtained by mathematicians long dead, the formulae of anonymous metallurgists, even, we may hazard, Brancusi's sense of form, which in a time of motorized box kites anticipated the aluminum cylinders we fly in today. [...]

To build Stonehenge took 1.5 million man-days. Its builders' cultural inheritance included knowledge of tree-felling and of raft-poling, and of the use of deer horns ("picks") and the shoulder bones of oxen ("shovels") to dig into chalk. Their increment of association permitted 80 men to move a five-ton stone perhaps a mile a day; one man in a lifetime could not have budged it. If we could duplicate Stonehenge rather easily now, it is because we have inherited so much. (*Pound Era* 311-12)

First of all, in coining the term “design value,” Kenner implies that the diachronic accumulation of formulae, or the process of development behind a design is worth economic consideration at least as much as “exchange value.” Indeed the aim of Kenner’s exposition of Social Credit seems to make room for the beneficent “design” that is intrinsically valuable and refashion other possible categories in this light. This is important because it enables a symptomatic reading of the blind spots of Pound’s economics. As Sieburth writes: “To the extent that exchange-value, according to Marx, is precisely that which exceeds use-value (and hence is represented by “superfluous” gold), it belongs to that problematic category of excess which Pound’s economics seek to repress” (Sieburth 156).

Additionally, in a way that points to the exact source of the *Usura Cantos* in Social Credit economics, the articles not backed by “design” in Kenner’s sense are shown to be burdensome rubble, only effective in circulation, and also a drain on the purchasing power of society: “Encountering a clog in houses, the economy diversifies into back scratchers, golf carts, scented dogbones, and so long as it can generate new demands it can postpone the Damoclean stasis. But creating newer and ever newer sets of insurmountable costs, drawing on more and ever more bank credit (some day to be called), ‘misdirected effort which appears in cost forms a continuous and increasing diluent to the purchasing value of effort in general’”(Pound *Era* 312). This is also probably what Pound means by highlighting the figure of will or “directio voluntatis” as of economic importance, anticipating his Italian fascist “voluntarism.”

Generally, what strikes one in this conception of heritage is the downplaying of any possible rupture in the rather monolithic “inheritance” or heritage, both temporally and socially. Kenner takes for granted the problem of who is inheriting

the advantages of the “tools and processes” in using the integrative “we”; and at least in this context he doesn’t discuss the related problem of transmissibility of the tradition or “heritage.” The kind of barbarism Benjamin mentioned in writing “there is no document of *culture* that is not at the same time a document of barbarism” doesn’t enter these more optimistic considerations. Interestingly, Benjamin’s “Theses on the Philosophy of History” which contains that statement, was written in 1940, the year Pound began writing his radio speeches.

Finally, Kenner brings up Pound’s legitimation of art as a “nutrition of impulse.” Design is the counterpart in art of the healthy food which usury corrupts, thus Kenner uncritically subscribes to Pound’s language of health/illness. Similarly, both Pound and Kenner are generally removed from a romantic conception of artist, yet they are not really removed from a romanticizing conception of the artist as mathematician/technician, or more generally of “immaterial” labour. Indeed the word “spirit” is in the offing when Kenner implicitly returns to Pound’s early comparison with analytical geometry: “The cultural inheritance—tools and processes—can be represented by sheets of specifications. It is sweatless and, Buckminster Fuller would add, weightless. It is made up of formae mentis, as much so as the Paradiso or Gaudier’s Dancer....Douglas was never more prescient than in divining (though he was thinking mainly of tools) that sheer mind, sheer intellection of self-interfering patterns, was the guarantor of all values”(Pound Era 312). While not necessarily assenting to Daniel Tiffany’s conclusion that this orientation to “fabrication” should necessarily lead to fascism, it is possible to find a source of Pound’s non-egalitarian politics in this position of the artist as representative of “sheer intellection.” Frequently Pound argues for a pure mathematics of poetic forms. As Tim Redman observes, Pound must have found a supporting motive for

his “cryptaesthetics” in the culture of usury which he suspected: “So long as laws are made with mediocre sense, at least writer should stick to his art as hermetically as an inventing chemist sticks to his lab” (qtd. in Redman 89). Laws, that is to say, which fail to combat usury.

Moreover, the way Pound deals with historical matter is selecting and exalting moments that serve as paradigms for later “recurrences.” In this sense, Pound is prevented by his own mode of scholarship in forging a genuine historical category, because the reliance on repetition—no matter how luminous the detail may be—itself erases differences and amounts to a mythical sense of history. An attack on the present banking system can be placed amid the natural harmonies of the “Seven Lakes Canto,” thus matching and levelling the relevance of the two units: “State by creating riches shd. thereby get into debt?/ This is infamy; This is Geryon. / This canal goes still to TenShi / though the old king built it for pleasure” (XLIX / 245). The juxtaposition of “Bank war” and Chinese landscape is quite typical, because any idyll is prone to call up usury and usury is the obstacle before Pound on the quest for paradise. David Murray rightly links this with the theme of linguistic adequation, and writes of this general style of historical construction thus: “combined with his long-standing concern for rectification of language and clear definition it produces Pound’s insistence that clear and simple definitions have been made in the past and need only be rescued. Their relevance has not changed because the basic issues are unchanging” (Murray 54). This may have yet another economic justification in Pound. It is possible to find in Douglas’s formulations the intention of conservation that informed Pound’s early statements on attention and scholarship. For Douglas, invented tools and processes save time and free the unit of price he calls “time-energy,” while they themselves are brought into being by the investment

measured in that unit. In a section of *Guide to Kulchur* Pound refers to the “make more work fallacy” and quotes from Confucius: “The inhabitants of Lou wished to put up a new public granary. Min-tseu-kian said: Isn’t the old one still good enough? Is there any need of a new one which will cost much sweat to the people? ...Comment: the old granary was still suited to its purpose. Kung is against superfluous labour that does not serve a purpose” (*GK* 17). In a sense, for Pound poetic fact really preexists, more in the ready-mades of other texts than in the external world, and *Cantos*’s citational poetics finds a justification in this argument about the “make more work fallacy.”

#### **D) Metaphor and Subject Rhyme**

“The problem of production” being solved, distribution being thus isolated, and money abstracted in its sign function, usury in Pound appears as a linkage between linguistic untruth and economic injustice, or better, it is the same idea without any division, manifested first under the aspect of linguistic untruth or artistic decline and then the other of economic injustice. Pound writes: “The verbal manifestation on any bank cheque is very much like that on any other. Your cheque, if good, means ultimately delivery of something you want. An abstract or general statement [like money] is GOOD if it be ultimately found to correspond with the facts” (*ABC* 25). This, going both ways, not only makes out of a general statement something like a cheque, but also out of a cheque or any other monetary sign something like a “general statement.” Hence usura represents a case of non-adequacy or superfluity in the fashion Imagism and the ideogram was designed to counteract: “In the absence of any ‘natural’ congruency between sign and referent,

money will be created ex nihilo with nothing 'real' to back it from the order of commodity values—a process that inevitably results in usury” (Parker 107).

When money is treated as “representation” bound by its basis in the abundance of nature, this looks back to Pound’s exhortations of immediacy in the use of language as the expression of a desire to close the gap between “word and object, poem and the real” (Sieburth 150). As indicated in the first chapter, materiality of language is a vexed issue in Pound. Richard Sieburth writes: “Words, like money, merely serve to carry or convey or ‘get across’ antecedent facts or meanings or values” (Sieburth 167). In an ambiguous way, this is again borne out by statements such as “money and language exist by being current. The acceptance of coin as of value; of words as having meaning, are the essence of currency and speech” (qtd. in Sieburth 167). Pound also uses the same typical word in application to money, which he uses to refer to sincerity, and particularly, to the situation of poetry in the face of its wavering reference: “Money is the pivot. It is the middle term” and “a money ticket under a corrupt system *wobbles*” (qtd. in Murray 56, emphasis mine). This pretty much establishes the functional unity of two kinds of sign in Pound, and it is now necessary to take up the specific case of usury as metaphor.

In a Canto that is an “addendum” to the *Usura cantos*, Pound inserts a denunciation of metaphor in correlation with usury. After maybe his most violent censures regarding usury come the lines:

“A pity that poets used symbol and metaphor  
and no man learned anything from them  
for their speaking in figures” (Addendum/ 819)

If usury is a figure for indefiniteness as in “with usura the line grows thick, with usura

no clear demarcation,” this fits Pound’s earlier concerns with ornamental language. First of all there is the ornamental metaphor that blunts distinctions in the act of placing something under the standard of another, as the old rhetorical definition of metaphor goes. As indicated above, Pound always opposed this, mostly by taking the side of transparent “absolute metaphor” or “interpretive metaphors.” After writing that the Renaissance declined with “rhetoric and rhetorical thinking,” Pound argues that “whatever force in our own decade and vortex is likewise in a search for a certain precision; in a refusal to define things in terms of something else; ‘in the primary pigment’” (*GB* 117). Remembering the associations he makes between ornamental language and excrement, it is also no surprise that these are also being applied to usury. David Murray notes that “The ‘usurer’s dunghill,’ ‘the putrid gold standard are standard terms in Pound, and his well-known association of usury with sodomy, as being equally unnatural, ‘contra naturam,’ in Canon Law corresponds to this division of anal and genital” (Murray 60). Usury is akin to an excess material as in the case of *Hell Cantos*, it is this through the impropriety of some metaphors; and yet this impropriety is actually a lack at the same time, a lack of the differentiation Pound always thinks of as the trace of a phallic marker which the series “stone, chisel, needle, young man’s courting” in the *Usura Cantos* suggests.

However if a certain correspondence and directly denotational structure is sought in opposing the “*poesie farci comme*,” this is offset by Pound’s own paratactic arrangements where certain similarities are given implicitly, and obey the dictates of a chain construction which is similar to what Pierre Joris refers to as “a general economy.” It should be noted that mere adequacy is not enough to describe the function of the ideogrammic style. Kenner himself recognizes that the ideogram produces metaphors: “The Chinese ideograph, like the metaphor, deals in

exceedingly condensed juxtapositions” (*Poetry of Ezra Pound* 89). So it appears that, for Pound, the vindicating aspect contains condensation itself as in the case of luminous detail, and this is the idea behind Pound’s emphasis on the “swiftness” mentioned by Aristotle, or again his peculiar rendering of “mens sana” as a sort of a telescoping mental velocity.

In addition, as shown in the first chapter, many statements Pound makes about poetics rely on openness, movement, exploration and a generative quality that point beyond the closure that the classical theories of metaphor dictate. One of these is given in a discussion of haikus:

The hokku is the Jap’s test. If le style c’est l’homme, the writer’s  
blood test is his swift contraposition of objects. Most hokkus are  
bilateral.

The foot-steps of the cat upon

The snow:

Plum blossoms.

May seem to the careless peruser to be only bilateral, two visual  
images; but they are so placed as to contain wide space and a stretch  
of colour between them. The third element is there, its dimension  
from the fruit to the shadow in the foot-prints. No moral but a mood  
caught in its pincers.

The waves rise

And the waves fall but you

(this is a hero’s monument in Nippon)

are like the moonlight: always there.

Another dimension. From dead thesis, metaphor is distinct. Any thesis

is dead in itself. Life comes in metaphor and metaphor starts

TOWARD ideogram. (*SP* 423)

The third element Pound mentions, is one of the rare instances he acknowledges the remainders his ideograms create. Indeed, despite the surplus of the third element, there is a color of loss in the haiku he chooses to illustrate the life that comes in ideogram. It is apparently an inscription: “This is a hero’s monument in Nippon,” the hero dead and buried. The third element is present thanks to its absence. We can expect similar absent presences in Pound’s subject rhymes, and ideograms.

Pound’s most “metaphors” are formed by *displacing* some short ready-made phrases to different contexts, thus making short-hand composites from a selected stock of phrases. For example, in a kind of coupling that is commonly used, Pound brings to bear on politics the effects of love expounded by Guido Cavalcanti. Quoting from Lacharme’s Latin translation of the Chinese Odes he inserts a line from Cavalcanti’s “Donna mi Prega”:

Ut animum nostrum purget, Confucius ait, dirigatque  
ad lumen rationis

*perpetuale effecto*<sup>22</sup>(LIX /324)

What happens to the adjacent lines of the Cavalcanti poem, whether the “perpetuale effecto” implies transposition of the whole import of “Donna Mi Prega,” or just this individual line, assumes a heuristic dexterity on reader’s part. As the juxtaposition already constitutes a grid of interpretation, the luminous detail can only function ambiguously. Pound’s fondness for additively determining some subjects is the main

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22 Terrell’s gloss: “To purge our minds Confucius says, / and guide [them] to the light of reason”.

“Perpetuale effecto” on the other hand, is used in association with “love in action” or “intelligence in process” (Terrell 251).

factor here, which makes “light” a polymorphous element that obtains different effects in different dimensions, here those of politics and love, and all this is done without lapsing into *obviously* stating something in terms of something else, yet the use of cut-up phrases in juxtaposition inevitably infuses each context with the other. Indeed, thanks to the art of quotation and displacement that Pound mastered, relations always multiply, thus reaching an almost combinatorial language that takes as its field of play not necessarily single Cantos but the whole book.

Returning to usury, if usury is all the things Pound says it is, and metaphor is usurious, and he used a brand of metaphor, what to make of this reversal? This was a deconstructible par excellence and no wonder Derrida has been the major reference for scholars who paid any attention to this theme. Concerning the above lines Casillo says that it posits the possibility of a “transparent and non-metaphorical language” and requires that “in order to grasp what usury is one must speak an appropriately denotative language” (Casillo 221). However in practice, as in most cases where Pound’s theoretical aims and practices are in contest with each other, this doesn’t happen. On the contrary, and especially in the *Cantos*, there are both major structural and more local devices and instabilities that make for a greater opaqueness and intransitivity.

Referring to usury’s essential relation with metaphor Derrida wrote: “This characteristic—the concept of usure—belongs not to a narrow historico-theoretical configuration, but more surely to the concept of metaphor itself, and to the long metaphysical sequence that it determines or that determines it” (*Margins* 216). Also including in his discussion, “usure” in its sense of effacement in French, he wrote: “One may decipher the double import of usure: erasure by rubbing, exhaustion, crumbling away, certainly; but also the supplementary capital, the exchange which,

far from losing original investment, would fructify its initial wealth, would increase its return in the interest, linguistic surplus value, the two histories of the meaning of the word remaining undistinguishable” (*Margins* 210). Effacement and surplus is complexly and inextricably present in Pound’s work. Usury, while associated with the wearing out of distinctions, is itself defined through the work of metaphor inherent in the ideogrammic accretion. Casillo says “the concept of usury is already constituted, contaminated, and overdetermined by metaphor” (Casillo 221). Here metaphor is recast as something which implies a gain in perception of relations, thus surplus, and a loss in the singularities of each case, usure in Derrida’s French. On the surface, singularities like Cavalcanti cue and the quote from odes are measured and defined with the relations they can form, but the status of remainders is more indeterminate.

Derrida departs from Anatole France’s discussion of “ruined” metaphors displayed as concepts in the discourse of metaphysics, and their possibility of restitution to consciousness in their original *concreteness*; the paralellity of this with the concerns of “Chinese Written Character” essay is also obvious, most saliently concerning adequation as the rootedness of language in natural processes. Derrida writes: “To read within a concept the hidden history of a metaphor is to privilege diachrony at the expense of system, and is also to invest in the symbolist conception of language that we have pointed out in passing: no matter how deeply buried, the link of the signifier to the signified has had both to be and to remain a link of natural necessity, of analogical participation, of resemblance” (*Margins* 215). Participation and resemblance may remind “adequacy” of the natural object, cases where Pound defends the ideogram for its verisimilar collection of concrete particulars, and in general any defense of identity at the expense of his insights about a quality of

“movement.” Privileging of diachrony, on the other hand, is only applicable with some ambivalence, in that the *Cantos*’s history of stipulative usages is the most immediate consideration here, and these stipulative usages are driven by an insistence on establishing precise definitions, that will found the book as system. It is true that overdetermination achieved in repetitions also endanger these solid definitions, because temporally, Pound’s prospective drift is as strong as the diachrony of an etymological sort. Fenollosa’s mention of “feeling back along the ancient lines of advance” prompts Pound to place an insistent caveat in the capacity of the editor of Fenollosa’s text: “The poet in dealing with his own time, must also see to it that language doesn’t petrify on his hands. He must prepare for *new advances* along the lines of true metaphor that is interpretative metaphor, or image, as diametrically opposed to untrue, or ornamental metaphor” (*Instigations* 378, emphasis mine).

As noted above usury is also marked by an unnaturalness, caused by the self engendering property of money. In a more comprehensive way usury may even come to represent the general “semiological disorder” that is the result of the gap “between symbol and object, between abstract money and embodied wealth” (Sieburth 158). Given Pound wants his money tickets and linguistic signs to be motivated instead of floating in a dimension of their own in a self referential way, and considers them in analogous ways, his interest in a type of money experiment is relevant from the perspective of materiality of signs and rhetoric. His search for solutions to the problem of usury allowed Pound to discover a local contemporary economic experiment made in Wörgl, an Austrian town, which adopted a type of currency that “loses value every month it lies idle or unspent, and after one hundred months becomes utterly worthless” (Sieburth 153). This experiment that increased

the general circulation of money allegedly worked until it was suppressed by central authorities. Pound found this event as interesting as to mention it in *Cantos*, and this case also confirmed his suspicions of a conspiracy of “Usurocracy.” Clearly he found in “stamp scrip” a closer connection to nature’s processes, because it “shares the properties of natural objects (perishability, velocity, cyclicity, and so on) and therefore functions as a symbol truly adequate to (or, etymologically, ‘equal to’) what it represents” (Sieburth 154). However as Andrew Parker argues, despite the fact that this money cannot be hoarded or created out of nothing, or made the subject of extraneous taxes, it still embodies a figurality in the rhetorical sense. From a strictly semiological point of view, instead of economic feasibility, it shares the “usurious increment” with the normal money, with the reason that “there is nothing ‘real’ or ‘natural’ to back that additional 12% exacted on every dollar per year—nothing, that is, except for the arbitrary power of the State which must under-write the production of this inevitable ‘difference’” (Parker 117). This makes the case of the scrip another example of the need for pure denotation remedied with a secret or displaced figurality.

Transposition of scrip into rhetoric makes for a rather marginal example for poetics, yet it is illustrative of how pervasive a concern with signifiatory immediacy Pound has, and how self-refuting that concern can get. However there is a more direct effect of usurious metaphoricity and mediation traversing the *Cantos* from the beginning to the end and maybe even foreclosing an ending, and that is largely due to what is rather innocently called “subject rhymes.” Hugh Kenner helpfully articulates this structuring device that holds not only individual *Cantos* but series of *Cantos* together in multiple relations with each other. Yet Kenner, as one of the scholars who has been let into the secrets of *Cantos* by Pound himself, and in

part still working for a widespread recognition of Pound's greatness, privileges the aspects that achieve a closure at the expense of open-endedness and excess; to give an example from his exposition of the relation of two series in subject rhyme with each other, here is how subject rhymes can work:

Pound's heuristic device is always the subject-rhyme. To elucidate the Italian New Birth of circa 1500, he compares it with the American of circa 1770. Specifically, Jefferson and his successors building a nation are rhymed with Malatesta building the Tempio, and a careful structural parallel enforces this rhyme. Four Malatesta Cantos, 8-11, had been followed by a sharply contrasting pair: Baldy Bacon (12), Kung (13). In *Eleven New Cantos*, four American Cantos (31-34) are followed by a similar sharp contrast: Mitteleuropa (35), Cavalcanti (36). And as when Jefferson first appeared (21) his letter about a musical gardener was linked by an Italian phrase to Sigismundo's letter about a painter (8), so now the Malatesta family motto, *Tempus loquendi, tempus tacendi*, stands at the head of Canto 31 to rhyme a bundle of Jefferson-Adams letters with Malatesta's post-bag, and by extension a four-canto sequence of documents with the four-canto sequence of Malatestan actualities. Like the Tempio, the nation is being built by minds scrupulous over detail: "screw more effective if placed below surface of water"; "type-founding to which antimony is essential"; "for our model, the Maison Quarree of Nismes." Coming after this, the Cavalcanti Canzone (36) is a model of focused intellection and passion, as its counterpart the *cento* from Kung (13) is a model of practical good sense. *One might have expected them to*

*be interchanged, the Canzone d'Amore to comment on the loves of Sigismundo and rebuke the tale of perversion narrated to bankers, the Kung to comment on the Founding Fathers' statecraft and rebuke the Mitteleuropian civic slither. But by transposing them Pound twists these themes together: love, statecraft, order, precision of thought, laconic wisdom, fertility, sound money. Any of these may represent the whole cluster. (Pound Era 424, emphasis mine)*

Apart from exposing very clearly the ideogrammic method, this illustrates how much movement and force these clusters can hold when whole Cantos are put in relation with each other by a survey broad enough. Here in a fidelity to the insights of his early apprenticeship with Pound, Kenner gives a variant of the fourfold model of metaphor as analogy, which Kenner and Marshall McLuhan were defending around the late 40's, after the example of Pound's ideograms. Indeed in a way that shows Pound's influence on him, McLuhan wrote Pound in a letter thus: "The American mind is not even close to being amenable to the ideogram principle as yet. The reason is simply this. America is 100% 18th century. The 18th century chucked out the principle of metaphor and analogy-the basic fact that as A is to B so C is to D. AB: CD. It can see AB relations. But all relations in four terms are still verboten. This amounts to a deep occultation of all human thought for the U.S.A." (qtd. in Barton).

However, from the standpoint of the literary work, the temporality of subject rhyme marks the *Cantos* with all the peculiarities of the work of art as "process." If some Cantos look forward to other Cantos through rhyming, no matter how far they are placed from them, and later Cantos work as if in retrospection of the older ones, as already announced by them, yet changing them through their own contexts in an

interpenetration, this allows for an enrichment of meaning—and a rather free and overproductive reading procedure—, but not without creating mediations over long arcs, and introducing a lability into rhymed units, always awaiting for their completions in further rhymes, and new defamiliarizing contexts.<sup>23</sup> Through the subject rhyme, the “work time” appears in its full significance. This is why Peter Szondi’s conceptualization of “werkzeit” is a most felicitous characterization of time in *the Cantos*: “Where the passage of time is not merely an object for the work (narrated time) or a means of expression external to its intention (time of narration), where instead the idea of the work really only comes into its own through its projection outwards, its stepping forth into the realm of temporal diversity, in such cases the work should be interpreted only as a process, whereby each passage must be explicated with a view to its positional value” (Szondi 90).

Despite the rule of a common substance or “reason” that should underlie the two sides of a metaphor or “four” of the ideogram, not all Cantos are as closely knit as the ones Hugh Kenner refers to, and Pound’s rhymes share the temporality of the fate of Homeric hero Elpenor, and remind the tag Pound gives him in the *Pisan Cantos*: “with a name to come.” More often than not, the repetitions that a given figure travels amounts to a picture of indeterminacy that is unlikely to be dispelled.

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<sup>23</sup> This is also the temporality of what Derrida called an “iterability” working inside Pound’s poem: “By virtue of its essential iterability, a written syntagma can always be detached from the chain in which it is inserted or given without causing it to lose all possibility of functioning, if not all possibility of ‘communicating,’ precisely. One can perhaps come to recognize other possibilities in it by inscribing it or grafting it onto other chains. No context can entirely close it. Nor any code, the code here being both the possibility and impossibility of writing, of its essential iterability” (*Limited Inc* 9). The implications of Derrida’s “iterability” for a literature of commonplaces is discussed by Michael Syrotinski, in his preface to Paulhan’s *Tarbes*.

Figure of the generally negative swamp once positively defined as “confusion, basis of renewals”; the vacillation between approving of merchants for their knowledge of human nature –“pollon d’anthropon iden”— and the condemnation of their monopolistic hoarding; Circe and the general attitude to the feminine are some of the similarly ambiguous examples. Yet what makes for an unevenly connected series, or allows one to speak of conceptual lability or slippage may in fact make very good music at the same time. As Adorno said in a discussion of parataxis in Hölderlin’s poetry, “great music is a conceptual synthesis” (Adorno 134). It is known that Pound justified his procedure in an analogy with “subject and response and counter subject in fugue” (*Selected Letters* 210).

As touching on large scale, epic structures, or “major form” in poetry, this also brings into question the problem of closure that faced Pound. In his book *The Hall of Mirrors*, Peter Stoicheff examines the problem of finding an ending for the *Cantos* that would tie the different ends of the poem. For him the *Cantos* is “a poem that has anticipated paradise yet disputed closure, acknowledged the significance of endings yet constantly deferred them” (Stoicheff 31). Stoicheff also refers to this property of disputing closure as “usurious excess” (Stoicheff 30). Usurious excess, beyond the context of Stoicheff’s discussion, functions on more minor scales too. We have also seen Hugh Kenner to be more inclined to grant that in the *Cantos*, the search for coherence achieved a balance with more “centrifugal tendencies,” so as to write that, “preparing, keeping active, refining what should one day be the unifying force, was a contrapuntal activity, surfacing from time to time in interests the diversity of which bewildered readers” (*Pound Era* 453). Yet Kenner, probably not entirely satisfied with his remark on the “unifying force,” has gone on to forge another model for the *Cantos* that also ultimately relies on music, and forgoes his

insistence on coherence.

In the essay titled “Self-Similarity, Fractals, Cantos,” Kenner gives a new twist to the Poundian topic of organisation with the help of Benoit Mandelbrot’s work on fractal geometry. Kenner borrows his central cue from Mandelbrot’s work on “scaling” structures which are “configurations that, viewed from varying distances, seem imitations (not duplicates) of themselves.”<sup>24</sup> Kenner chooses some basic examples: “(1) the coastline of Britain, comparably irregular whether we examine a full mapping, a 500-mile sample, or the wavering line we can trace around an inlet’s pebbles; (2) the jagged mountain whose any detail is jagged likewise; (3) the spiralling eddy which (Michelangelo knew) is made of the similar subspirals we miscall ‘turbulence’” (“Fractals” 721). As a textual example, frame narratives where heroes and narrators undergo similar processes in different levels can also be an illustration; pictorially, the paintings of the “cabinet of curiosities” variety can also fit the description, if they also contain themselves as one of the exhibits. For Kenner, Mandelbrot’s term “self-similarity” is a more sweeping term than the more local, literature-specific “subject rhyme,” yet also extending to that local application: “It resembles sung poetry’s oldest device, a tune recurring, carried by different words” (“Fractals” 721). Thus Confucius saving the odes, Pound gathering “from the air a live tradition” as in the *Pisan Cantos*, John Adams with his law references dematerializing into balls of light in the *Adams Cantos*, and “Erigena

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<sup>24</sup> Kenner also regards scaling as a complex arrangement loaded with surplus rewards: “Mandelbrot’s categories do group artists plausibly [...] Agostino di Duccio, Van Gogh, Pollock: scaling, with rewards for distance, other rewards for closeness.” Thus for Kenner, Pound’s work identified with scaling also fits into the list of art works with diverse rewards for diverse scales. This also means that for Kenner, the amount of attention demanded is liable to increase from the point of view of perception as an economy.

with Greek tags in his verses” are instances of self-similarity in the *Cantos*.

From this Kenner goes on to construe Pound’s work itself as a “scaling” structure and locates the similarity of Pound’s approach to this notion in music. Kenner writes: “When Pound talked emphatically about music, he was saying how he meant his *Cantos* to hang together. For as events in time pass below the threshold of audibility they become not clusters of vibration but discrete objects of attention. First pitches, then related notes, then phrases, then structural members: then the whole work. The difference is one of scale, as we stay alert for the self-similar” (“Fractals” 726). In a move that is interesting from a structural point of view, and which also bears on the topic of organisation, Kenner actually decides to relinquish his previous insistence on coherence. The model of scaling, instanced in Pound’s theory of harmony is opposed to coherence as sought by “lit crit”: “It [lit crit] likes plans, overviews; it likes diagrams later ‘filled out,’ paint-by-numbers. Subordinating details to some Big Picture, it identifies ‘form’ with a schema, and cries havoc when a schema seems not producible” (“Fractals” 723). In antithesis, “self-similarity in general confers the liberty to stop without incompleteness. *The Cantos* and *Paterson* stopped when their composers lost the will to go on. They aren’t ‘unfinished,’ nor is the fractal composition of mountains, islands, clouds” (“Fractals” 729). Thus, Kenner in one of his latest discussions of major form in *Cantos*, circuitously recovers the Transcendentalist theory of correspondences,<sup>25</sup> updating it with the lustre of fractal geometry: “Small units, when they have integrity, imply whole.” In addition to producing a model that problematically tends toward homogeneity, he also seems to ignore the fidelity, albeit loose, to a

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25 Bell writes: “For Emerson, ‘nature is always self-similar’, constituted by its ‘grand rhymes or returns’, which focus the strategy of idealist discourse where nothing is recognized as having a beginning or, by extension, an end” (Bell 130).

Dantescan scheme that requires the late *Thrones* sequence to be an approximation of paradise. After all Pound's most decisive statements on a paradise take place at the end of *The Cantos*.

Here maybe a certain technical perfection is the main point of Kenner's argument, however Kenner is still consistent in not granting a possible destabilisation, and not recognising another—other than closure, other than deduction of the whole from the small units—discursive economy that consists of “excess, expenditure, and intertextual dispersion” (Sieburth 171). At least, usury as subject must be a dissonant chord in the *Cantos*.<sup>26</sup> As Sieburth writes, usury proper is “profiting from the ‘time-lag’ separating loan from repayment” (Sieburth 150). Departing from this Sieburth asks an essential question: “If usury profits from the price of time, does this not in a certain sense mirror the very temporality of a poem like *The Cantos*, written on credit and including its own history within itself by an ongoing structure of deferral and delay?” (Sieburth 171). This opens up a perspective which helps to see usury not merely as a theme or object of Pound's preoccupations, but a part of his method itself. Pound may actually have given a better characterization of usury than he was aware, in exposing it in his own management of temporality, with repetitions which are frequently disjunctive as well as re-constructive.

As Sieburth notes, *The Cantos* function as their own commentary in endless overlayings and transfers of connotations. Maurice Blanchot pointed out a similar

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<sup>26</sup> Masterly harmonic progression is the savant demarcation of frequencies[...]When I consider the disagreeable noises I have heard in factories it seems to me that they are disagreeable for one sole reason, namely they are not organized. *Some screech continues too long; some repeat is irregular in an unpleasant manner.* (*Machine Art* 73, emphasis mine).

mechanism of “redoubling” in the ancient epic form, in the context of a discussion about commentary in general:

When commentators have not yet imposed their reign (as, for example, at the time of the epic), this work of redoubling is accomplished within the work itself and we have the rhapsodic mode of composition; that perpetual repetition from episode to episode, an interminable amplification of the same unfolding in place, which makes each rhapsode neither a faithful reproducer nor an immobile rehearser but the one who carries the repetition forward and, by means of repetition, fills in or widens the gaps, opens and closes the fissures by new peripeteia, and finally, by dint of filling the poem out, distends it to the point of volatilization. (Blanchot 390)

Although based on the assumption that there are multiple rhapsodes taking up their predecessors’s works, this isn’t denied by the intermittent and rare presence of Pound in his poem and the later figure Sagetrieb—oral tradition— exemplified by the line “it is not a work of fiction / nor yet of one man” (XCIX / 728). Epic redoubling as used by Blanchot may be a better term than “self-similarity” to designate the effects of usury as theme and form.

An example of this distension and volatility that applies specifically to usura, and how it made the subject of contradictory predications is found in Robert Casillo. Casillo underlines the fact that Pound attributes to usury both unnaturalness and a certain type of naturalness at the same time. He refers to the article “A Visiting Card” from the period that saw the peak of Pound’s economic activity, and in which Pound makes the association of usury with swamp, in the same way he does through the repetition of a motif from Canto 16 in Canto 51: the presence of the eels which is

associated with the monster Geryon, “twin with usura.” Casillo writes: “The swamp’s beclouding is meant to represent the result of usury, for which Cheng Ming [rectification of names] is the antidote. But since usury is by definition *contra naturam* and against Nature’s increase, one would not expect it to be compared with the luxuriant growth of the swamp” (Casillo 220).

As an explanation of this phenomenon one could of course offer the special intensity of Pound’s investment in the subject, affirming one thing and then another contradictory thing on a spiral of flight, memory being reserved for things that leave a sharply delimited “forméd trace” in the mind. Undercutting the language of cold diagnostics, usury is an object of fascination, figuring Pound’s own poetic time lags. This would also allow us to question whether the control that Pound required as the mark of good writing in “The Serious Artist” essay has been achieved in usura, or whether it conceptually failed here. As in the case of Hell Cantos, usura finally introduces a partial osmosis between representation and the object of representation, becoming “the name Pound gives to indistinction itself,” (Casillo 221) because it is just the thing that would be fixed with a rectification of names, yet in its presence what obtains is indistinction caused by contradictory predications, offering an instance of performative coincidence where style happens to conform to the subject.

## CHAPTER 4: CITATIONS

In keeping with the previous chapters that trace some tensions, incommensurabilities and disavowals within Pound's work, this oppositional structure can be staged in yet another dimension. This time the problem is Pound's concern with "donation" and novelty in the context of his poem which relies so much on repetition with variations. This will also help put in relief what some Pound critics call "the homecoming," the restrictive closure of the epic, because no matter how syncretic and additive Pound's tradition may be, his prescribing of it as a solid ground and remedy for all is problematic. This attitude is represented mainly in his late canto sequences *Rock Drill* and *Thrones*. The approach to stylistic novelty can be observed in Pound's definitions of the ideogram and an ideogrammic mind. Against the background knowledge of the later closure of the prescribed tradition, it will be possible to engage with the ideogram and the ways it is informed by a politics.

### A) Passivity and Catachresis

But the salt-commissioner took it down to the people  
who, in Baller's view, speak in quotations,  
think in quotations... (XCVIII / 710)

He said: Transmitting not composing, standing by the word and loving the antient.[...] I might get by in old P'ang's class. (*Poems and Translations* 684)

As we have already noted, this is about what Pound calls the “make more work fallacy.” This is also necessitated by the mythical approach to history, which hierarchically organizes the “permanent, recurrent and the ephemeral.” Pound’s emphasis on the recurrent is well known. This is another aspect that Hugh Kenner samples to demonstrate the self-similar quality of the Cantos. Pound also justified this with the method of the ideogram: “The ideogrammic mind assumes that what has been, is and will be” (*Poems and Translations* 625). The ideogram becomes a fatal fold, taking the side of transformation of the contingent to the necessary. From a linguistic perspective this can be identified with cliché and archetype. McLuhan himself argued for the transposition of the connotations of cliché to non-linguistic contexts, hence Pound’s non-linguistic context of historical recurrence falls into place beside his concerns to revolutionize the poetic language with ideogram itself, which in its turn contains a structure of repetition from unit to unit, event to event.

However in a symptomatic fashion, after the example of his precursor Gourmont, Pound’s critical statements and justifications of his own language relied on an attack on clichés, mainly picking on cliché’s predictable associations with what McLuhan calls “dull habituation” or lack of reflection, thus a passivity. So, the possibility of cliché is not in the least a trivial problematic. Pound wrote: “A real thought (Leibnitzian monad of thought; ever active, incapable of being compressed out of existence, etc) as distinct from a mere cliché or imperfect verbal manifestation consists of *a pattern or group of related images*; and this relation can be either in

nature before the thought, or it can be the arbitrary relation thrust on the images by the man thinking” (*Machine Art* 103, emphasis mine). For Pound the ideogrammic method first expounded by Fenollosa and which he defended as a medium for poetry and scholarship now becomes the image of thought itself and it is strongly linked with metaphoricity. As Pound knew, another image for clichés was formulated by Gourmont: “shells of thought,” because they are “the thoughts that have been already thought out by others.” So as opposed to the supposed passivity that pertains to circulation of clichés as shells of thought, in being “thrust” or imposed by the man thinking, ideogrammic associations still have a claim to being active. Yet Jean Michel Rabaté and after him Daniel Tiffany both supported that Pound’s “ideogrammic procedure of ‘heaping up’ the components of thought” assume “the profound passivity of the subject as he writes, which allows him to be the recipient of quotations and other discourses” (Rabaté 9). In the psychoanalytically paradoxical logic Tiffany usually engages in, Pound’s passivity is underlined with the fear he manifests of it. In a stimulating discussion of Pound’s attitudes to technology, Tiffany quotes a statement from his letters railing against the effects of the most fashionable type of mass medium in his time, the radio: “God damn destructive and dispersive devil of an invention. But got to be faced...Anybody who *can* survive may strengthen inner life, but mass of apes and worms will be still further rejuiced to passivity. Hell a state of passivity? Or limbo?” (qtd. in Tiffany 242). Of course in a fateful act that would change the course of the rest of his life, Pound himself made broadcasts, and Tiffany brings out the implications of this in his discussion, rightly stressing the élitist assumptions behind this vision of pastoral discourse where majority of listeners can only be “cattle.” So for Tiffany it is foremost politically urgent to argue that Pound was disavowing his passivity.

On the other hand it is not a coincidence that Pound's dispersed statements on communication in the *Cantos* refer to an elusive quality of receptivity:

the imprint of the intaglio depends

in part on what is pressed under it

the mould must hold what is poured into it

in

discourse

what matters is

to get it across e poi basta [and then nothing else]... (LXXIX/506)

Here the metaphor of material suitability and etching amounts to a theory of communication where the condition of addressees and circumstantial flexibility of the addressor are as important as the message itself, and the efficiency of discourse is qualified by this. This is an instance where Pound again moves in implicitly rhetorical terrain, despite his restricted use of the term "rhetoric" as a theory of tropes.<sup>27</sup> While it is possible to assimilate this to the discourse of elitist assumptions behind Pound's work, it nevertheless also deserves to be read as an admission of the position of addressee he occupies by citing his materials. That's also why the luminous detail was supported with an argument focusing on a crisis of

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27 Mondzain writes: "Rhetoric is the use of persuasive speech, the driving force of which is not cynicism or doubt as to the existence of truth, but the taking into account of the listener and of the very possibility of communication on the moving ground of everyday reality. It is an adaptive, specifically focused tekhné, as every true tekhné is" (Mondzain 12). A statement in *Guide to Kulchur* is also related to this issue: "Having attained a clear terminology whereof no part can be mistaken for any other, the student might consider another point raised by Frobenius when interviewed by Dr Monotti. 'It is not what a man says, but the part of it which his auditor considers important, that measures the quantity of his communication'" (GK 59).

transmission, where Pound posed himself before all else as an exasperated reader of multitudinous details, inquiring into a possibility of idealistic transmission of “gists and piths.”

If the fractures created by this tension between passivity and activity are to be traced more fully, the way Pound manages his quotations, and how much fidelity or subversion he practices in relation to them becomes of central importance. Usury let us exhibit the temporality of subject rhyme, and showed a certain extravagance in the management of this temporality, similar to the structure of a delay sustained by “originality” itself. Relatedly, yet distinct from this, it is also possible to find an extravagance in the syntagmatic cluster of the ideogram in patterning images, references and allusions. Indeed Pound’s aversion to clichés is the surest sign that he will make a subversive use of his materials. If Pound didn’t associate the cliché with a dispossession and passivity, Rabaté’s assertion would be unequivocally right and there wouldn’t be any need to trace the forms this subversion of materials may have taken.

The rhetorical figure of catachresis provides a good angle to approach Pound’s relation to his sources. Pound used the term “katechrestical vigours,” or “katechrestical rhetoric” in application to Elizabethan literature, and almost always in sense of an improper substitution and flashy extravagance. Thus, Tiffany gives Pound’s homophonic translations as examples of this abuse: Pound translates the Old English “sumeres weard” —meaning “guardian of summer”— as “summerward”; and “eorpan rices” —meaning “kingdom of the earth”— as “earthen riches” (Tiffany 210).<sup>28</sup> Obviously, semantic fidelity in translation is not a priority

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<sup>28</sup> Tiffany also suggests that catachresis’ sense of abuse would allow an association with “figural properties of exchange value” (Tiffany 214).

for Pound in practice. Tiffany superimposes this onto the ambiguity between “hostility and affection” found in fetishism, for as Freud reckons, fetishes are not only adored, but destroyed, corresponding to an “acknowledgement of castration.” Tiffany writes: “The idea that affection and hostility, reverence and abuse, subservience and domination can be contained in a single perspective is essential in explaining the contradictions in Pound’s achievement as a translator” (Tiffany 213). In parallel with this then, we could show a similar doubling of fidelity and subversion in Pound’s reiterative poetics.

Catachresis meets at least two related requirements in addressing his relation to his sources: one is a perspective into novelty and going beyond “formulated language” in the ideogram; another is doing justice to a notion of experience as a “fund,” or Pound’s sense of the usefulness of slow accumulation of facts, tropes and ideas for his poem. Without the memory system this fund provides, the *Cantos* couldn’t be written. He wrote to a functionary in the Disciplinary Training Center reviewing his Pisan Cantos: “Citations from Homer or Sophokles or Confucius are brief, and serve to remind the ready reader that we were not born yesterday.” In his later work Pound frequently recycles a principle found in Aristotelian ethics, and modifies it so that it means that “philosophy isn’t for the young,” for they do not have “a sufficient phalanx of particulars” at their disposal, “their katholou [generalities] can’t be derived from their hekasta [particulars]” (LXXIV/462).<sup>29</sup> Yet in the continuation of passage, he aptly adds the necessary complement to this essentially quantitative requirement: “lord of his work and master of utterance / who turneth his word in its season and shapes it” (LXXIV/462).

Consistent with his positions in other contexts, he singles out an economic

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29 Cf. 723 in *Poems and Translations*.

moment in philosophy. Hence the relevance of an issue of mastery and cultural capital, in the form of a non-representable deep structure anchored in the subjectivity of the poet:

Every language has absorbed itself and made common metaphors that were at their origin probably just as startling and fancy as the wildest tropes of our contemporary eccentrics. The good writer takes them when they are 'right,' when they are hard enough for his purpose, and tough so that they will not crumble. The great style is without preoccupations and bothers concerning detail. Its unity is in the thought underlying and in the modality of that thought prepared by the thinker's past life. 'C'est l'homme,' etc. (*Machine Art* 109)

That Pound is aware of the impression of abuse his juxtapositions may be making is apparent in his reference to startling and fancy tropes. This was also the departure of Gourmont's essay on the "Dissociation of Ideas" which went on from there to forge new commonplaces: "Whoever first dared to say the 'mouth' or the 'jaw' of a cannon, according to which of those terms is the older, was, without doubt, accused either of preciousness or of coarseness" (Gourmont 5). As a guarantee against the possible accusation that he is practicing exactly what he is decrying, Pound appeals to an elusive mastery and an integrative "thought underlying." This also reminds the work of luminous detail, which was charged with the duty to find the law of homogeneity under an apparent dispersal of facts. Of course a direct corollary of this is the question of how this conviction would affect the actual language of his writings, and whether this is a factor to economize the investment in this actual language. It is very likely that the excesses of ideogrammic condensation finds a motive in these appeals to the past life and the pervasive essence of a thought. This

projection of a space before the work, whether in the form of a previous engagement, or as an unexpressed present association, is an instance of what Giorgio Agamben calls the “eclipse of the work,” implying a “reification” of the artist or the process of creation itself (*Stanzas* 54).<sup>30</sup> Omission itself can become the sign of mastery, and as Pound writes elsewhere: “there is no substitute for a life time” (XCVIII/711). Pound has to think of himself in the nexus of a *continuous* productivity, not limited to his actual poem, because art as productivity is what he opposes to “usura,” and ideogrammic thinking is foremost a means of production of new configurations.

A particularly suggestive example of this assertion of elusive mastery in making both the most efficient and most evocative association at the same time is given in his *Guide to Kulchur*. After discussing in successive and seemingly disconnected sections the sculptor Gaudier Brzeska; the musical concept of the

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30 Agamben bases his discussion on an essay of Gottfried Benn who apparently refers to Pound:

Gottfried Benn rightly observes, in his essay on the ‘Problem of Lyricism’ (1951), that all modern poets, from Poe to Mallarmé to Valéry and Pound, appear to bring to the process of creation the same interest they bring to the work itself [...] The origin of this phenomenon is probably to be found in the theories of Schlegel and Solger on so-called Romantic irony, which was founded precisely on the assumption of the superiority of the artist (that is on the creative process) with respect to the work and which led to a kind of constant negative reference between expression and the unexpressed, comparable to a mental reserve (*Stanzas* 54-55).

Pound’s references to Brancusi and his artisanal perfectionism are the most relevant examples for this tendency: “And Brancusi repeating: je peux commencer / une chose tous les jours, mais / fiiniiiiir” [I can start something everyday, but finish!] (LXXXVI/580). “Brancusi has said, Non, les choses ne sont pas difficile à faire, mais nous, de nous mettre en état de les faire” [No, things are not hard to make, but it is to put ourselves in a state to make them] (*Visual Arts* 164).

“great bass”; Leibniz and Scotus Erigena, Pound writes: “These disjunct paragraphs belong together. Gaudier, Great Bass, Leibniz, Erigena, are parts of one ideogram, they are not merely separate subjects” (*GK* 75). Yet, going over the assembled particles of this composite makes a puzzling impression, because Pound doesn’t state the rationale. Firstly, Pound implies that Gaudier Brzeska exemplified for him a knowledge that comes from “doing” and practice, here too in opposition to bookish learning and compartmentalization of knowledge:

In contrasting Gaudier’s real knowledge (vide Aristotle’s fivefold division later) with the mentality of bureaucracy and of beanery [applied to academic institutions], note the current practices of latter and causes for.

1. Desire to get and retain job.

2. That many scholars write under a terror. They are forced to maintain a pretence of omniscience. This leads to restricting their field of reference. In a developed philological system they have to know “ALL” about their subject. Which leads to segregation of minute portions of that subject for profounder investigation. With corollary that any man who knows where the oil well is, is considered superficial. (*GK* 70)

The great bass, on the other hand, is that figure of temporality in the centre of Pound’s contribution to harmonics. This is also a figure that Kenner rightly makes much of, in extending it as a likely organising principle for the *Cantos* in his “Fractals” essay. In this context Pound defines it thus: “Certain sounds we accept as ‘pitch,’ we say that a certain note is do, re, mi, or B flat in the treble scale, meaning that it has a certain frequency of vibration. Down below the lowest note synthesized

by the ear and 'heard' there are slower vibrations. The ratio between these frequencies and those written to be executed by instruments is OBVIOUS in mathematics. The whole question of tempo, and of a main base in all musical structure resides in use of these frequencies" (*GK 73*).<sup>31</sup>

Finally, the placement of Leibniz and Erigena is more self-explanatory for this ideogram. The inclusion of each rests on their respective independence of orthodoxies: "Take it that Leibniz was the last serious character to worry about the reconciliation of churches. He and Bossuet ran onto the snag of "authority," shd. one accept Church authority when it was against one's own conscience?[...]

Scotus Erigena held that: Authority comes from right reason. I suppose he thought himself a good catholic" (*GK 75*).

However, coming full circle to Pound's definition of the "real thought" as an ideogram, the discussion of Leibniz is also on the ground of his "unsquashable monad," with all the typical associations of solidity/activity. Ardizzone rightly observes that monad appealed to Pound as "a prefiguration of the nature of matter as discovered in scientist's laboratory" (*Machine Art 50*). Yet, this means that this ideogram is still self-referentially correlated with a defense of ideogram as a

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31 Murray Schaffer, who edited *Ezra Pound and Music*, makes an illuminating comment on the great bass, and supports it with a statement of Pound's:

Great Bass links the elements into an indivisible whole. In this sense the final word on the subject is not to be found in *Kulchur* at all but in a casual piece entitled "Musicians; God Help 'Em,": "a composition has a main form and articulations, that is a root, a main structure, and details. To remember ONE fact and not a hundred separate notes...." It is the realization of one main fact that causes Heracles in Pound's translation of Sophokles Trachiniae to cry out: SPLENDOR, IT ALL COHERES. Pound prints it large: it is the pivot on which everything balances. Great Bass reasserts Pound's idealistic faith, in spite of the imperfections of material or craftsman." (Schaffer 480)

medium of thought, because elsewhere Pound justifies the act of the ideogram by comparing it to Louis Agassiz's collection of biological specimens. Revising the associations then, Gaudier as the artist of "masses in relation" manifests a universal knowing acquired in practice, without any loss in the extent of knowledge in parochialism; Leibniz is placed as the philosopher of substance whose intelligent/purposive monads also hold a vision of grand macrocosmic interaction; and Erigena as the representative of the priority of reason, which fits only if reason is understood etymologically as "ratio." Great bass, on the other hand, stands out as the index of another meta-reference, the invocation of order in the center of this ideogram. Schaffer's reference to the line in *Trachiniae* forcefully demonstrates this. Great bass can only fit if it charges the other particles with a connotation of grand coherence they may not be able to carry. Moreover, this is not the only import of the composite. From another perspective, the ideogram is also about dissent exemplified in all three human components and what they represent, and the case of Gaudier is the paradigm or meta-reference, in that this ideogram happens to join harmonics, history of philosophy, artistic avant-garde, and tangentially history of science, in a defiance of the claims of regional expertise. Eventually, it is catachrestical, because the particles are united at the expense of a resultant strain, and the relationships, although very pregnant, are plainly "imposed." In general, this ideogram overflows the confines of any particular "one principle" other than that of ideogrammic overdetermination.

Finally individual phrases Pound displaces in the course of his epic also rely on productive stipulations which have little to do with fidelity to his sources. Taking a recurrent tag in the *Cantos*, the phrase "libidinis experts" is conspicuously used with antithetical meanings. The first instance Pound uses the tag is his China Cantos,

and there Pound quotes his source Alexander Lacharme's Latin translation of Confucian Odes with no alterations in meaning:

CHI KING ostendit incitatque. Vir autem rectus  
et libidinis expers ita domine servat  
with faith never tricky, obsequatur parentis  
nunquam deflectat  
all order comes into such norm<sup>32</sup> (LIX / 324)

Much later when he writes the *Rock Drill*, the phrase is transformed by the adjacent details:

Thus Undine came to the rock,  
by Circeo  
and the stone eyes again looking seaward  
[...]  
& Helen of Tyre  
by Pithagoras  
by Ocellus  
(pilot-fish, et libidinis expers, of Tyre... (XCI/630)

This passage is particularly disjunctive in a way characteristic of Pound's *Rock Drill* where it is found. Carol Terrell helpfully unpacks the significance of the figure of Helen of Tyre:

Pound lists her [...] with "priestesses in the temple of Venus" and other female religious celebrants to support his thesis that sexuality and love are manifestations of the divine power in all nature including

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32 Terrell's gloss: "the *Shih Ching* shows and exhorts. But the just man / and the *one free from lust* so serve their masters [...] obeys his parents / never turns aside" (Terrell 251).

man, and that sexual congress, if so considered by the devotee, is a religious act. Such a belief contributed to the “mediterranean sanity” which he found in Provence: “I believe that a light from Eleusis persisted throughout the middle ages and set beauty in the song of Provence and Italy” [...] Sex acts in the Eleusinian rites of initiation and celebration were conceived as acts of worship. Thus Pound says of “chivalric love” (which was by no means ascetic or platonic) that it “was, as I understand it, an art, that is to say, a religion” [...] So Helen of Tyre takes her place among the servants of Aphrodite as a celebrant of the sanctity of love, a far better thing than the condition wrought by the usurers, who “brought whores for Eleusis.” (Terrell 548)

This makes in its turn the reference to stone eyes more intelligible, because stone eyes looking seaward are those of a statue of Venus in Terracina. So, as Bacigalupo writes, “the tag ‘et libidinis expers’ Pound seems to take to mean precisely the opposite of what it does mean—i.e. Helen is not exempt but ‘expert of all libido’” (Bacigalupo 283). Pound couples these figures with representatives of a mystical order of thinking, which are linked with Pound’s preoccupations with “light philosophy”—Ocellus tag is “to build light”— he mainly finds in Neoplatonism and Guido Cavalcanti. For Pound, these also must “belong together.”

Based on the procedure typified here, Pound’s epic definitely gives instances of thinking in quotations, but these quotations are usually made within a margin of transfiguration, if not error. This can also be expressed with reference to the self-referential dynamics of the *Cantos*, making the sources the input of this text that subordinates these to various alterations in the aspect of its tendency toward systemic closure. This margin is also what imbues Pound’s manipulation of his

sources with an agency which cannot entirely shirk responsibility, especially with regard to texts with particularly authoritarian agendas and in connection with Pound's previous engagements. That Pound is in the search for commonplaces in his epic is apparent in his frequently used couplings between light of reason, will, love, precision/perception and many other recurrent and interpassing motifs. In this sense, the language of tags which is designed to make immediate evocations of this assembly of commonplaces makes a cornerstone of this "tale of the tribe," because being as lapidary as proverbs and with similar communal connotations, they also make easily "iterable" resting posts from which new associations can be charted to form new clusters. Through this temporality and the unique mixture of mutability and equilibrium or said and the sayable it implies, the tags also provide an answer to the modernist struggle of expression most explicit in the words of Eliot in *Four Quartets*:

Trying to use words, and every attempt  
Is a wholly new start, and a different kind of failure  
Because one has only learnt to get the better of words  
For the thing one no longer has to say, or the way in which  
One is no longer disposed to say it. And so each venture  
Is a new beginning, a raid on the inarticulate  
With shabby equipment always deteriorating  
In the general mess of imprecision of feeling,  
Undisciplined squads of emotion. ("East Coker")

## B) Quis Erudiet Without Documenta?

The previous example from *Rock Drill* is also illustrative of how the remainders of Pound's actual discourse constitute an alternative and more copious one in the texts of Pound's commentaries. This brings vividly to life what Pound had written in the Osiris article, about accurate artist leaving traces "of things about which he had, for some reason or other, a reticence." With these omissions in the late *Cantos*, the "disobliging" quality Savinel writes about appears in an acute form. Through the errant quotations which incessantly supply missing contents to each other, the reader is usually forced to take the detour of the many voices and intertexts to reach a modicum of certainty about the text. Of course now that there are many books aiding to make this work easier, and that themselves oblige their readers, a central aspect of this obscure art becomes overshadowed. This can be summed up as a problem of "curriculum," or commonplaces in the mode of their prescription. Just as there is a drive to make new identifications in De Gourmont's "dissociation," Pound's commonplaces tend to compact themselves into the codes of a "curriculum," which is a term more immediately linked with an authoritarian concern. It will also be remembered that Pound's engagement with Leo Frobenius was also motivated by intentions of forming a "new learning."

How one critic approaches the ideogram usually by itself determines the subsequent interpretation of Pound's poetry. Thus Peter Nicholls who finds the ideogram to contain a principle of movement—as displacement—from the beginning, highlights instances where Pound's discourse starts to rely on the copula to represent the authoritarian and identificatory discourse of the "homestead":

His "ideogrammic method" had originally seemed to offer resistance

to an identificatory mode of thinking that would subsume objects to concepts, expressing instead a kind of remainder always in excess of the process of adequation (in defining the word “red,” for example, the ideogram containing “rose,” “cherry,” “iron rust” and “flamingo” instigates multiple displacements away from any simple identification of subject and predicate). By way of contrast, expressions such as “2 doits to a boodle” leave no remainder and produce a moment of reified identity in which being – the “is” of equivalence – can express itself only as quantity. (“Modernising Modernism”)

Nicholls also writes elsewhere that, in this kind of discourse, “Pound must be seeking a kind of simplicity that will result from correspondence and identity rather than from difference,” reminding us the early poetics of the Image. In this discussion of the ideogram which is a part of an article that contrasts Pound’s early cosmopolitanism with the later language of taking roots, Nicholls seems ready to concede that the ideogram possesses a redeeming aspect, from a perspective that attends to style and politics together. On the other hand, he presents the copula and the associated constructions as a discourse mirroring the political agenda behind the late Cantos, in excluding difference and the experience of the foreign. This is understandable, because the copula’s presence is usually a reliable marker of Pound’s highly conservative, nostalgic projections of local settlement and tradition in the context of the *Thrones* sequence. For example, with a page between, Pound gives the following statements:

keep mind on the root;

Ability as grain in the wheat-ear

Establish the homestead

[...]

Gt. is gt.. Little is little;

With friends one is one

2 is 2 ( XCIX / 713-14)

Nicholls also observes how the dominance of the discourse of identification as in Canto XCIX practically coincides with the disappearance of Pound's signature melopoetic technique from these sequences. Among other examples, he illustrates this with a comparison with the "Noigandres" passage we have already discussed ("2 Doigts to a Booodle" 55). So, borrowing the term "remainder" from Adorno's "negative dialectics," Nicholls tends to use the term as what moves the discourse away from the closures of simple identity, stressing the political sense. However, it is still debatable whether Pound's anti-Semitism wasn't the result of such an ideogrammic displacement from usury to Jews. Nicholls's answer to this may well be that the displacement from usury to Jews does not contain a difference in his sense, but a use of ideogrammic thinking that finds only similarities, coincidences.

Ian Bell however, has a different conception of the ideogram, and this conception has far reaching implications for his assessment of Pound's poetics. The fact that Bell historicizes Pound's ideogram through comparisons with Agassiz's non-evolutionary biology of recapitulation, and further the Transcendentalist theory of correspondences which posits a cosmos of self-similarities, causes him to attribute some of the identificatory bias, and exclusion of difference to the ideogram itself. As Bell convincingly shows, Emerson's interests in "the ultimate fusion of material and immaterial, of word and object" also pervaded Fenollosa's "Chinese Written Character as a Medium for Poetry": "Nature furnishes her own clues. Had the world not been full of homologies, sympathies and identities, thought would

have been starved and language chained to the obvious” (*Instigations* 377).

Although manifesting a more limited concern with the acoustic aspect of Pound’s poetry, Bell is also sensitive to the features that may embody an “eclipse of the work,” in Agamben’s sense. The following is a keen insight into what may be at stake in an omission of crucial details from the poem, thus creating the space of a different kind of remainder, of a commentary that can only dutifully unpack the significance of fragments:

The adjustments of metaphor are designed to predicate symmetry; the continuity that metaphor proposes relies on a something behind itself, as it were some mysterious and invisible force of coherence...Now the Whitmanian catalogue and the Fenollosan ideogram rely exactly on such force as a salvation from chaos, and Pound’s sufficient phalanx of particulars has meaning only through a presumed anterior matrix of ideas or community of interest by which its reductive, economical suggestions, its discrete items of “luminous detail” may be restored to plenitude, fleshed out again. In this sense catalogue ideogram and the sufficient phalanx share the epistemology of metaphor; they stand in place of their full range of meaning, and their act of reduction, the economical cipher of their range, removes its fullness from us and makes its reconstruction possible only according to the rules of their reduction itself, their own terms of restriction. (Bell 132)

Bell here anticipates his own problematization of a closure achieved precisely through fragmentation, and if what he calls the “anterior matrix of ideas” is also a remainder, this is not a remainder in the sense Nicholls understands it, but more like a remainder to save the appearance of idealistic coherence. Bell seems to single out

the aspect of Pound's text that seems to make gratuitous reconstructive demands rather than the manner in which it frequently risks any integrative "one principle" in favor of a suggestive indeterminacy. Yet more positively, he doesn't take for granted the usual narratives of coming to terms with Pound, and politicizing the "disobligingness," takes issue with that process itself which is sketchable as a progress from an initial puzzlement through growing familiarity until finally everything is recuperated in a transparency oblivious of the initial difficulties. A variant of this can be found in the work of Massimo Bacigalupo:

In sum, the Cantos demand a previous acquaintanceship with their iconography, that is to say a reader equipped with enough curiosity and time to identify the subjects treated, largely by reference to Pound's further works, and to the criticism and memoirs that have accrued to the corpus. (Bacigalupo 51)

[...]

In fact the difficulties of RD [*Rock Drill*], as always in Pound but unlike most modern poetry, are only on the surface- indeed his writing is often so nakedly transparent that too hard a look will evaporate the poetry: we must never allow ourselves to overlook the concision and quiet humor of this text, which has the quality of a subtle poliphony (Bacigalupo 260)

Although the second statement is correct insofar as Pound's fragments obey principles expressed in his critical discussions of the ideogram, we have begun to see that Bell's whole criticism rests on a questioning of the politically indifferent assertion of accessibility made by this statement. This is also a significant underestimation of the *Cantos*'s resources of obscure allusion, making a projection

from a position of knowledge into a predication about the text itself. The difficulty this obscurity creates is particularly visible in early critical treatments of Pound's poetry, largely because of the unavailability of the pointers with regard to isolated statements. An example would be Kenner, and his taking an allusion to the Nazi statesman Rudolf Hess simply as an example of multilingual dexterity. Yet Kenner nevertheless made his work an indispensable reference for dealing with Pound's oeuvre. Transparency also dangerously calls up associations with the doubling of authorial intention. To say the least, here Bacigalupo is being probably falsely modest, as his work on *Rock Drill* is seen by another critic of the late Cantos as "probably the most perceptive" reading of this sequence.

Finally the concern for the curriculum or the new commonplaces can be exhibited with Pound's own text. This is apparent in the context of some later Cantos with Chinese subject matter. As already indicated, Pound's text never leaves off dealing with the past in a certain anachronicity, insistently conceiving it as part of its own present: "Y TSONG his son brought a jazz age HI-TSONG" (LV/ 292)<sup>33</sup>. While this can animate myths, it also eventually smuggles some myth into history. A source Pound uses in the late Cantos is an exemplary instance of ancient "curricula" treated as an injunction to form and find one's own in the present of Pound's writing. In a way characteristic of Pound's sources, *The Sacred Edict* is a text that underwent major historical adjustments and translations, first written by the Chinese Emperor

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33 Michael André Bernstein remarks that the same specific technique of historical construction is applied with regard to Chinese materials, earlier and later. Although focusing on the China Cantos proper, his insight has a broader application: "The Histoire Générale [the source for the China Cantos] already contains a complete 'tale of the tribe,' which Pound was able to integrate into his own, larger narrative, both as a correction to the bias of other histories and as an instigation to his contemporary audience, the 'tribe' for whose edification all the historical material in *The Cantos* exists (Bernstein 55).

Kang-Hsi in the 17<sup>th</sup> century and subsequently altered and rewritten in the vernacular for broader influence. Just like Pound's other sources, it is distinctive in the intention of regulating a "closed society" organized around hierarchy, tradition, crafts and agriculture. It treats subjects that are Pound's specialities: rites, education of scholars, relation with foreign creeds, and a moral economy; so it is not surprising that it also gives the motif of the "homestead." Robert Casillo indicates that Pound's use of the *Edict* resembles his scapegoating strategies in relation to Jews and "usurers," in major part allowed by his source material's treatment of sects like Buddhists and Taoists as against Confucian orthodoxy<sup>34</sup>. Casillo writes: "This resemblance again suggests how much Pound's vision of social unity and hierarchy depends on the demonization of outgroups" (Casillo 262). It is important to bear in mind this "persecutory" aspect before discussing Pound's endorsements. Not surprisingly, one of the most remarkable instances of the strategy of vocal differentiation in Pound's poem is also observable here, complete with Chinese inflections:

Tinkle, tinkle, two tongues? No.

But down on the word with exactness,

against gnashing of teeth (upper incisors)

chih, chih!

wo chih<sup>3</sup> chih<sup>3</sup>

wo<sup>4</sup> wo ch'o ch'o, paltry yatter

wo<sup>4-5</sup> wo<sup>4-5</sup> ch'o<sup>4-5</sup> ch'o<sup>4-5</sup>

paltry yatter (XCIX/722)

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<sup>34</sup> In the China Cantos Pound's culprits are Taoists and Buddhists, taking over the role from the usurers of the previous cantos.

This is probably an imaginative departure from a passage in the *Edict*, which mentions “the barbarous lingo of Buddha’s country,” in its translator’s words (Baller 83). It is a shrill but amusing addition to the other examples of “doing voices” in the *Cantos*.

In the sequence, the mention of classics and curriculum is prepared by a central figure of the late cantos: “Thought is built out of Sagetrieb, / Our debt here is to Baller/and to volgar’eloquio” (XCVII/ 710). Sagetrieb is a coinage of Pound, and as David Gordon says, Pound gave its definition as “passing on the tradition” (qtd. in Terrell 479). Its connotations are mainly archaic, presupposing a transmission that is more like a training in crafts, possible in a society based on formalities and customs. There is also an indication that Pound related it to the “increment of association,” thereby overtly linking it to “cultural heritage”: “Sagetrieb, or the / oral tradition. / ‘Ten men’, said Ubaldo, ‘who will charge a nest of machine / guns / for one who will put his name on chit.’” (LXXXIX / 617). Returning to the dispossessions of cliché, thought is for some people the patterns of quotations which are forged with the traditional increment of association, and the quotations that the *Sacred Edict* supplies are correlated with “nutrition of impulse.” Indeed, Sagetrieb wisdom and food are parts of the same distributive justice in this imperial government: “Food is the root. / Feed the people” (XCIX / 715). Thus sanity in cultural pursuit becomes one of the first commands of the Emperor: “Esteem sanity in curricula. You cannot leave out the classics/ Prey on the people because they have no solid principles” (XCIX / 716).

Most immediately bearing on the problem of curriculum is the ideogram named “cheng king” taken from the *Edict*. Pound uses the figure a few times on the course of the *Thrones*. It is typically polysemous. In the first instance he splices it

with ideograms for ritual reverence:

“Parents naturally hope their sons will be gentlemen.”

[cheng king ideogram]

The text is somewhat exigent, perhaps you will consider the  
meaning of

[cheng king] (XCVIII/ 711)

This is one of the few ideograms that is used with this kind of emphasis, maybe matched in this by the “Make it new” ideogram and allusions to light philosophy in the general framework of the *Cantos*. Terrell notes that literally it is made up from radicals with connotations of “uprightness” (cheng) and “classics” or a “constant” (king). Of course, in the framework of *Cantos* it is intimately linked with the fundamental “cheng ming,” or the ideogram for correct denominations. Here it is an uprightness in the sense of gentlemanliness, but not in the familiar one of Victorian morality; rather it has a biopolitical significance, which Pound withholds from his readers to elaborate on it later. Granted, there may be a solid philosophical basis in Chinese thought that makes “feeding life”<sup>35</sup> a unitary department not presupposing a division into body and soul as in Western thought, and even justifying Pound’s metaphors of nutrition; yet it is still necessary to see the refraction, or the “ripple” that makes it such an urgent concern for a twentieth century American poet who made over the air very unsavoury comments on eugenics.<sup>36</sup> The passage in Pound’s

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35 Again, François Jullien makes a nuanced case for a reconsideration of the concept of life from the point of view of Chinese philosophy. Not strangely, his discussion of the vital paradigm in Chinese thought has an economic undercurrent: “Prior to the problem of values, which are always to one degree or another external, is the issue of the care and management of the self, the principle of which, we now know, is principally *economic*” (*Vital Nourishment* 22).

36 Pound had written:

source runs thus: “The philosopher Tseng of the Confucian school, said: ‘Parents naturally hope their sons will be gentlemen. If they suffer their bodies to commit disorderly acts, are harum-scarum in deportment this is to treat the bodies transmitted by the parents with contumely, and is undutiful’” (Baller 6). In Pound’s text this is not entirely a rehabilitation of a corporeity that may have been culturally wronged, but an instance of the biopolitical injunction “to make live,” because this time the enunciation of the poet emulates and ultimately contains that of the emperor.<sup>37</sup>

Another instance of the use of “cheng king” in the *Edict* as well as the *Cantos*, is related to an understanding of duty of scholarship, and intellectuals in general. Here again Pound is choosing a passage in accordance with his ongoing tendencies. Pound’s poem gives:

That the books you read shall be

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As to the Hitler program, it was (what we ALL knew, and did nothing about, namely) that the breedin’ of human beings deserves MORE care and attention than the breedin’ of horses and wiffetts, or even the breedin’ of sheep, goat, and the larger livestock. That is point ONE of the NAZI program. Breed GOOD, and preserve the race. Breed thorough, that is for thoroughbreds, conserve the BEST of the race. Conserve the best elements. That means EUGENICS: as opposed to race suicide. And it did not and does NOT please the Talmudic Jews who want to kill off ALL the other races whom they can not subjugate; and drive down what he thinks ( is doin’, his USF[sic.] to his race or nation consists in seeing the OBJECT and writin’ down what he sees, and not falsifying his record (*EPS* #39).

<sup>37</sup> Cf. the later lines “‘This clean out and that’s all.’ / Said Chu, the accomplished/ re Tao talk/ ‘e basta’” where the “this” of the passage refers to the body (XCIX/720). Related to this are other passages which join in an urge to preserve the body and life:

Each year in the Elder Spring, that is the first month of it,

The herald shall invite your compliance

There are six rites for the festival

and that all should converge!

And not to lose life for bad temper. (XCVIII/713)

cheng

king

ut supra [as above]

And your pals fit to read'em. (XCVIII/712)

Apart from the idiom, this corresponds to his source's "study some classical works [cheng king]; cultivate intercourse with a few respectable companions" (Baller 65). Translator's comment is clear on the dual application of "cheng king" in relation to both books and people: "Cheng-king as applied to books, means those which are regarded as orthodox by the Confucian school; as applied to persons=respectable, well-behaved, moral, etc" (Baller 65). Hence if we consider cheng king as Pound asks us to do, we have to see that this ideogram is appealing to Pound first because of its stress on the value of a cultural elite, best exemplified by a quote from Machiavelli he is especially fond of: "Men live through the existence of the few; the rest are sheep" (qtd. in Tiffany 244). In Pound's work one of the few appearances of this quote in its entirety—as an epigram to *Gaudier Brzeska*— is together with another one that is immediately related to the context of this discussion, a passage from the Confucian *Unwobbling Pivot*: "From the moment that he (the Prince) has gathered about him all the savants and artists his riches will be sufficiently put to use" (qtd. in Terrell 62). In its other application cheng king points to the necessity of a selection of the right curriculum that will meet the necessity of forming individuals as compliant with the decrees of some political magistracy that supposedly embodies reason itself ("authority comes from right reason"). This results in an exchange between doctrinal orthodoxy and moral decorum, which may make us ask why Pound elsewhere takes the side of dissenters like Erigena and questioners of orthodoxy like Leibniz. For the *Thrones* sequence at least, this may not be

contradictory, for there are strong suggestions that Pound dreams of being instrumental in achieving and becoming finally embedded in a new order and *consensus* that he conceives in such a nostalgic fashion.

Finally the vocabulary of technological regulation<sup>38</sup> Pound employed to argue for the luminous detail returns to enliven this rule of curriculum:

Study the ancient King Sages

as compass and T-square

To have masters in village schools

To teach 'em classics not hog-wash. (XCIX / 724)

Looking back to Hell cantos, the administration of the homestead, and the training of functionaries to serve it will require banishment of other discourses, or the “blacking out of the eroders,” persecution in short. The integrity and regulation of the homestead can only then reach out to encounter outside societies, or systems, only after successfully enclosing, and organizing itself as an incorporation: “One village in order, / one valley will reach the four seas” (XCIX / 729). However, even then, it is likely that the sole model of engagement with the outside may be creating it in the image of the initial “homestead,” practically scripting it from inside the already established, healthy locality. It must be pointed out that this too obeys a certain “economic” view of relation with the outside.

The appearance of cheng king near the end of the poem is a revealing moment

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38 Otherwise than this passing retrospect, technology is absent from the discourse of the homestead, confirming the attributions of “reactionary modernism” as an ambivalent, makeshift attempt to reconcile “values as vitalism, the soil, personal creativity, inwardness and organic community”(Casillo 370) with the upheavels caused by technology. As indicated in other discussions of Pound, the Chinese material in the Cantos has an “auratic” undercurrent most visible in the Canto XLIX or the “Seven Lakes” Canto.

for a discussion of the implied curriculum of the *Cantos* themselves. It is undeniable that ideogrammic condensation frequently causes a dilemma between a source hunting orientated toward reconstruction of the “full discourse,” and a reading that chooses to reconcile itself to the loss and erasure Pound’s text delivers on other texts in hardening its own catachrestical lyric texture. In this connection it is useful to return to Bell’s discussions. In the conclusion of his book, Bell takes up an article of Kenner which makes important claims on the problem of curriculum. In his trusted practice of appropriation of mathematics, Kenner brings to bear on the *Cantos* the notion of a “closed field...which contains a set of elements, and a set of laws for dealing with these elements,” hence in a certain justifiable distance from the “inescapable structure of intuitions about the familiar world” (qtd. in Bell 231).

Applying this to the *Cantos*, Kenner writes:

What happens in the *Cantos*, in short, is the deliberate imposition of the closed field on material virtually infinite...this closed field, since it implies that what is left out the author has examined and determined not to put in, offers to sharpen our attention rather than mock at our poverty of resource....One way or another, when it is focused by art, the closed field becomes that point of concentration which in proportion as it grows smaller concentrates more intensely the radiant energies of all that we feel and know. (qtd. in Bell 236)

Obviously, the closed field doesn’t mean a parochialism, and Pound’s insight into practical engagement for the sake of new creations goes some way in resolving that question. However Bell is concerned about selection itself, and unlike Kenner he questions the political intentions of the implied curricula:

We have to be suspicious about this assumption of authorial

purposiveness, and even if we subscribe to it, we need to recognize again the mysteriousness of the authorial choice and its privacy on the page. Kenner's reading of curriculum as selection and concentration provides one of the clearest statements we have on the nature of authoritarian rhetoric, curricular concentration is inevitably a seeking after power, the power derived from a selective process designed to refine language for the purposes of manipulation and which always imposes foreclosures exactly in the guise of possibilities. (Bell 236)

[...]

A poetics that advertises possibilities for correspondence through a language structure of dissociation in fact obliges the reader to reiterate the shadow language of its own programme, confined as he is by the shadow of its original promise. (Bell 245)

This is a cogent argument about the implications of the injunction of "sane curricula" made in the late cantos. "The foreclosures disguised as possibilities" is also that aspect of Pound's writing which aspires to making definitions that bind, and giving a basis to order and coherence through this means, in other words, a problem of terminology and systemic closure. It is not a coincidence that the scholars who set out to question Pound's politics characteristically begin by emphasising the need to use a discourse and terminology that is not Pound's own (Casillo and Parker), or point out that some of Pound's definitions are stipulative and not to be taken at face value (Rabaté). In accordance with this, the strategy of self-commentary also becomes suspect, because it may have a function of expropriating other discourses through marking its territory in so definite a fashion, using the closure, however precarious, as a "pretext" to avoid the scrutiny of another

language. On the other hand, the fact that Bell's discussion doesn't fully take into account the disjunctive and non-linear possibilities in Pound's ideogram, and tends to extend his argument to the whole of the *Cantos* may need some adjustment. It is right that in omission of details Pound is actually creating a host of "good neighbours"<sup>39</sup>, which are only locatable with the index of the selected fragments. It happens very often, as with Bacigalupo, that a critic directs the reader of *Cantos* to some indispensable contextual element which Pound chooses to leave out. By itself this doesn't amount to an authoritarian practice, only an imposition of erasure in the guise of condensation, to rephrase Bell.

Bell positions himself as critical of the habit among Pound scholars "of miming Pound's organicist idealism by making the elements of the *Cantos* 'rhyme' together" (Bell 243). While he rightly argues against the submission in "repeating repeats which in themselves seal the world by their own repetitions," his discussion must be complemented with the aspect of *Cantos* that manifest an iterability that upsets Pound's designs from the inside. We may remember that usury and the time lag "disputes closure." In this context the work of poets and artists who made the *Cantos* a departure for their own markedly different creations may signal other possibilities. For example, Jackson MacLow, a pioneer in using chance procedures in poetry, and who also has written "through" the *Cantos* in this way, actually credits Pound with "the whole process of juxtaposing disparate elements within the space (in all senses) of a poem," (MacLow) although he uses this process in ways that

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39 As Giorgio Agamben writes, the "good neighbour" is the principle of archival organisation and the method of scholarly reference followed by Aby Warburg in using his legendary library. To simplify, according to this principle, the historian looks for the clues to a certain fact not only in books immediately related to the subject, but in those that are organized to be *adjacent* to them. It can be fruitfully compared with the luminous detail's claims on circumjacent facts.

could hardly be approved by Pound. So as opposed to the group of critics who reconstruct the whole that Pound doesn't give in the actual discourse of his poem, and thus repeat the repeats, there are writers who augment "serendipity," showing that it is possible to dismantle the already dismantled, and both examples find justification in different aspects of Pound's poetics.

### C) Dissolving View

Bell's discussion is motivated in part by what he sees as a lack of any "syntactical leeway" in the juxtapositional strategy of Pound's writing, and interestingly Pound shows that he is aware of this problem in the sequence where his writing is at its most disconnected, due to increasing use of self-commentary through tags. Canto LXXXVII from the *Rock Drill* sequence opens with a remembrance of Mussolini and the question he addressed to Pound in 1932: "Why do you want to put your ideas in order?" (LXXXVII / 589). We can remember the implications of this question: Apart from his answer at the time that he wanted order in his ideas "for his poem," the whole discussion in *Guide to Kulchur* is directed toward the related question of how to achieve this order. Significantly, on the course of *Rock Drill* Pound will use this question in a subject rhyme, this time emphasizing the communal intentions of organisation:

"compagnevole animale" [King Khaty hieroglyph]

or "Perché" said the Boss

"vuol mettere le sue idee in ordine?"

"Pel mio poema." (XCIII/644)

Thus, it is not surprising that the rest of the Canto is punctuated with figures that

disclose the field of communication from an “economic” perspective.

Although the Canto mainly engages with economic policy and thus continues the usury theme through references to prerogative of issue, money as “an instrument of policy,” and monopoly, it also links this concern with a consideration of “will” or “directio voluntatis,” in a residual trace of Pound’s commitment to Italian fascist voluntarism. As order is almost synonymous with making definitions and rectification of names, medieval philosopher Richard of St. Victor’s definitions for mental processes serve Pound to provide the ideal of contemplation as a contrast to “beclouding” of economic facts:

Want, Χρεια

“Common practice! Sd/ Ari re business;

“Cogitatio, meditatio, contemplatio.”

Wrote Richardus, and Dante read him.

Centrum Circuli.

Remove the mythologies before they establish clean values.

(LXXXVII / 590)

The word from Aristotle’s *Nicomachean Ethics*—“Χρεια”—poses a particularly thorny problem for Pound and his readers. As Rabaté shows, Pound gradually moved from a preference for “use” to “demand” as the probable equivalent for the word (Rabaté 229). As the “common practice” refers to a discussion of monopoly in Aristotle, here Χρεια is probably intended as a vindication of distributive justice, similar to “feed the people.” However, the most important part of this passage is the trust Pound places in contemplation to combat economic wrongs. As Terrell points out, Pound’s interest in Richard St. Victor goes back to the time of *Kulchur*; and it is there that Pound gives Richard’s definitions for modes of thought: “There are three

modes of thought, cogitation, meditation and contemplation. In the first the mind flits aimlessly about the object, in the second it circles about it in a methodical manner, in the third it is unified with the object” (*GK 77*). In this definition of contemplation we may find a lofty variant of the tautological discourse of identification. The fact that it is opposed to the dispersion in “aimless” flitting brings it closer to the perceptual economies of the early years and the subject of will itself. The emphasis is on the fullness of manifestation not allowing any leakage or lapse of attention. Actually, this passage can be read through the lens of the early passage, “The fire? Always, and the vision always, / Ear dull, perhaps, with the vision, flitting and fading at will.” Hopefully, perception, contemplation and creation of clear forms will challenge the dissipations / muddlings of usury.

After this appeal to the ideal of identificatory contemplation Pound repeats the tag of monopoly in association with “directio”:

Seeking the common (as Ari says)

practice

for squeeze.

[Chih 4- ideogram for aim or will]

directio voluntatis (LXXXVII /592)

Terrell rightly points out the corrective role with which Pound charges the “directio” figure: “The science of economics will not get very far until it grants the existence of will as a component; i.e. will toward order, will toward ‘justice’ or fairness, desire for civilization, amenities included. The intensity of that will is definitely a component in any solution” (qtd. in Terrell 494). Thus, will as a form of intensity signals yet another preoccupation familiar from a relatively earlier period of Pound’s work. Will and intensity serve economic justice as well as form. This association goes as far back as to Fenollosa’s “Chinese Character” essay. In the essay Pound

annotates an enthusiastic passage that deals with a language of action, and to Fenollosa's phrase "will is the foundation of speech," Pound answers by making a note of the figures of "rectitudo" and "direction of the will" in Dante (*Instigations* 384). It is also relevant that Pound's resort to analytical geometry also aspired to a willful shaping of circumstance through "fabrication." The generalisation of order and economy is quite clear in this passage. Directed will is intrinsically an investment insured against loss, not the useless expenditure in misdirection of will; in the domain of economics, it restrains the effects of usurious practices; finally as an agent of order and control it applies to composition. The element of will or a willful manipulation also has the function of foreclosing chance in the context of these cantos. Obviously, chance has a connotation of chaos which Pound cannot easily bring himself to embrace. Earlier in the sequence Pound writes "not serendipity / but to spread / te [enactment of virtue/ techne /customs and rites] through the people," (LXXXV/568) and he links these two antithetical fragments about chance and will with a sentence-rhyme.

Following this, Pound interpolates a theme of corporeal order in association with a figure that signals "intelligent design." Here body itself is the place of a "design in the process" (XCV/ 665) and order. Contrasting the monstrosities of the Hell Cantos, here Pound explicitly relates anatomical order with a figure of a purposiveness which has metaphysical as well as obviously discursive implications:

As the water bug casts a flower on stone

nel botro [in the pool]

One interaction. Te ["Te" ideogram] interaction. A shadow?

[...]

Und tey vere dhere, shentlemenn,

mit tearsz hrolling tdown dhere vaces  
“Gentlemann, shin bones!!”  
ecstasy at a mathematical congress, ottocento.  
The bone is in fact constructed,  
according to trigonometrical whichwhat. Shinbones!  
Which illustrated Speech as a medium,  
the problem of order. (LXXXVII/594)

Although Pound also writes that “in nature are signatures/ needing no verbal tradition” here design in nature is itself described as “Speech” with the telling initial capital. The idiosyncratic transcription of the mathematician’s speech is not intended to mock him, but an alteration of a more endearing type to convey pronunciation, a version of which he uses in the “Noigandres” passage for Lévy’s similarly enthusiastic discovery. “The natural order of living organisms” (Mondzain 16) as in iconophile economy, and man among them, is treated as portion of a grander order, which presents itself as a Speech. As Terrell notes, the image of the water bug casting a shadow rhymes with Pound’s grand figure of the “rose in the steel dust” created by the effect of a magnet on iron filings. This image also is not far from Pound’s reflections on the artistic process and intensity: “A force rather like water when it spurts up through very bright sand and sets it in swift motion.” More immediately, the bones rhyme with the figure of gestalt seed and emergence, thus bringing Pound’s discourse back to the emerging leaf of “one principle” and the question uttered by Mussolini. Just as the process that brings out leaves is coded in the seed, a bone with design according to “trigonometrical whichwhat” is a synecdoche of body, as earlier in the *Pisan Cantos* Pound had referred to the mythology of the bone called “luz”: “or the bone luz / as the grain seed and the

biceps” (LXXX/ 532).<sup>40</sup> Pound’s idealistic faith in order and coherence is here infused with an eschatology, giving his own fragmentary procedure an apocalyptic undertone. It is not a coincidence that this Canto also contains the original line from Sophocles, “SPLENDOUR IT ALL COHERES.”

In the end, this Canto reaches a problematization of its own “manner of speaking” through Henry James’s remarks on “dissolving view.” In distinction from the previous figures of will, intensity, order and germinal design, dissolving view is significantly marked with implications of excess, expenditure and the incursion of the addressee instance on the writing itself. Through this passage we come to see how a negative model or style of discourse tenaciously accompanies Pound’s synthetic aspirations for the ideogram, and this model betrays a faultline in the ideogrammic manner of composition itself:

Henry’s remarks on “dissolving view”

Should be registered.

Chiefs’ names on a monument,

Seepage,

the élan, the block,

dissolution

[the character for a “hitching post”]

Or as Henry again: “we have in a manner of speaking,

arrived.

Got to, I think he says “got to, all got to.”

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40 Terrell’s gloss for “luz”: “According to rabbinical teaching, the ‘os coccygis’ is the only bone in the human body which resists decomposition after death, the bone has the shape of a hazelnut. [...] The idea that if you could find and destroy the bone Luz, you could condemn a person to perpetual hell, was the reason Amalric (74: 104), or in Pound’s mind, Erigena, was dug up out of sepulture” (Terrell 433).

The ubicity, ascertaining.

Was De Molay making loans without interest?

[...]

Justice, directio voluntatis

or contemplatio as Richardus defined it in Benjamin Major.

(LXXXVII/595- 96)

The appearance of Henry James in juxtaposition with “contemplation” is anything but arbitrary. First of all James’s prose is a lasting interest which serves Pound to make the distinction between prose and poetry. The discussion above about the *Hell Cantos* strived to underline this point. In his article on Henry James, Pound writes: “Most good prose arises, perhaps, from an instinct of negation; is the detailed, convincing analysis of something detestable; of something which one wants to eliminate. Poetry is the assertion of something positive, i.e. of desire, and endures for a longer period” (*LE* 324). Pound attaches this passage as a footnote to his criticism of the elusive play on “atmospheres” and “personal tones” that dominate James’s work. So far there is no complication, it seems as if Pound is pursuing a familiar line, and James primarily represents for him a thematic version of an orientation to an “endless series of indefinite middles,” or a soft and “squashable” terminology: “slight inclinations to adultery, slight disinclinations to marry, to refrain from marrying, etc, etc....” (*LE* 324).

The phrase “dissolving view” however, resists such an easy explanation. Terrell rightly takes the view that it is not the themes of James in question, but his style. He even locates another instance where Pound makes the same reference in a letter to Wyndham Lewis: “(re)member that touching passage in H.J.’s (a)bout the dissolving view?” (Qtd. in Terrell 498). In the letter, this question is a non-sequitur,

and Pound doesn't explain which passage. However, Terrell offers a plausible interpretation:

In this context the idea seems to be that a body of coherent thought reaches dissolution by slow attrition or seepage because it is not hitched solidly to "the one principle," as expressed by the ideogram. Sse's response in the *Analects* is, "I have reduced it all to one principle" (GK 15). Just as Mencius preserved the name of Confucius, from whom coherent thought came, so should we preserve such principles by monuments to the founding fathers, such as John Adams—a spirit and a solid block to build on, or become hitched to. (Terrell 498)

In the absence of the exact source of the phrase, Terrell rightly appeals to the context which contains all the usual suspects: the question, the seed, the bone, intensity, contemplation and even the totalitarian synthesis of paideuma: "Wherever" / Said Frobenius we find these drawings, we / find water at not more than 6 feet, / And the headless clay lions leave place for the head" (LXXXVII/594). For Terrell, dissolving view neatly acquires the connotation of prosaic negation or the "waste incorrelation" of the passage in the *Analects*. Therefore, this Canto appears to play out in smaller scale all the conflicts between heteroclity vs. appropriation, mortar vs. dead catalogues etc. found in *Kulchur*. The Chinese character which Pound designates as "a hitching post" becomes a block, or a gesture to check the almost tangible expenditures inherent in a dissolving view which is understood as seepage.<sup>41</sup>

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41 Sieburth refers to Pound's "Postface" to Gourmont's *Natural Philosophy of Love* in order to estimate "the precise relation of cumulation to expenditure in Imagism." The passage he chooses is also important for this discussion: "The liquid solution (of sperm and/or thought) must be kept

Hitching post is essential because seepage begins literally to appear in the lines consisting of single words carrying an association of expenditure. These lines stage a transformation where speech becomes a seepage. The word-choice is not unaccountable. The interruption achieved by the figural element of the “chih” character stops the discourse where it begins to leak.

Yet, Terrell’s commentary doesn’t offer a suggestion as to what is there to be so “touching” about the dissolving view. There are clues: we must recognize that what Pound desires to exclude is usually already inside the system, as, in Lacan’s words, he is always “finding a cause in what doesn’t work” (qtd. in Dolar 10). It is very likely that the structure of disavowal repeatedly stressed by Pound critics like Casillo and Tiffany is at work here. Pound’s most fervent censures usually center around something related to what already shapes his discourse intimately, as in *usura*. Although I find Bacigalupo’s remark that the *Rock Drill* conceals “an arid mental condition” a little too bold, Pound’s years-long condition as a politically convicted inmate in St. Elizabeth’s Hospital must have had a certain toll on his discourse, and aims of *control*. In *Pisan Cantos*, Pound was never shy of commenting on his situation, imperceptibly switching to a collection of analogous statements signifying a confessional tone of self pity, despair, fatigue, weakness and a longing for repose:

Her bed-posts are of sapphire

for this stone giveth sleep (LXXVI/479)

(and the mortal fatigue of action postponed) (LXXX/513)

---

at right consistency; one would say the due proportion of liquid to viscous particles, a good circulation; the actual quality of the sieve or separator, counting perhaps most of all; the balance of ejector and retentive media” (qtd. in Sieburth 148).

Je suis au bout de mes forces/

[...]

Les larmes que j'ai créés m'inondent

Tard, très tard je t'ai connue, la Tristesse,

I have been hard as youth sixty years (LXXX/532-33)

in the drenched tent there is quiet

sered eyes are at rest (LXXXIII/549)

However, there is only one reference to fatigue in *Rock Drill*: “Awareness restful& fake is fatiguing” (LXXXV/578). Why is fake fatiguing? How does Pound know that fake is fatiguing? The seepage, dissolution and the accumulated figures of synthesis rallied against them, marks a discourse which chooses not to admit its own precarious state and drift toward silence. Donald Hall, who made a very important interview with Pound after he had written *Thrones* and *Rock Drill*, interestingly compares Pound to Henry James: “There were enormous pauses in the middle of his sentences, times when he lost his thread; he would begin to answer, then qualify it, then qualify the qualification, as though he were composing a Henry James sentence. Often he could not find his way back out again and he would be overcome with despair” (Stitt). This must be “the ubicity, ascertaining.”

In the interview Hall refers to, Pound himself had brought up the question of James:

I'll tell you a thing that I think is an American form, and that is the Jamesian parenthesis. You realize that the person you are talking to hasn't got the different steps, and you go back over them. In fact the Jamesian parenthesis has immensely increased now. That I think is something that is definitely American. The struggle that one has when

one meets another man who has had a lot of experience to find the point where the two experiences touch, so that he really knows what you are talking about. (Hall)

As Pound writes elsewhere, “opacity is not an American quality” (qtd. in Stark 73) and he intends to cultivate just this non-American, partly European, partly Chinese syncretic opacity. As Stark reminds, the term opacity “is a physical one, it describes a quality or condition of not transmitting light; a lack of transparency or translucency; inability to be seen through (OED)” (Stark 74). The solidity and *substantial* form evoked in “and the waves rising but formed, holding their form/ No light reaching through them” (XXIII / 109) is exactly what will suffer from an excessive orientation to the addressee instance. Here there is no easy resolution between Pound’s setting store by the quality of what is “pressed under the intaglio,” or “being a social animal” and his search for a solid, material, foreign quality; or as Rabaté writes, pursuing simultaneously a “paratactic idiom” and “the speech of a whole people” (Rabaté 28).

The dissolving view is important for another reason, and this is James’s own favouring of dissolution of attention which has implications from the standpoint of organisation. Although we have to suspend judgement in the lack of any evidence that Pound was aware of the following passage, it is fully packed with elements that overlap particularly with the terminology of *Section: Rock Drill*, and generally with Pound’s discussions of the ideogrammic method. It also helps to convey how a word with obviously positive associations for James can translate to Pound’s proxy for an idiom of power. In the passage which is a part of a critical essay on Sainte-Beuve, James makes a comparison which deserves being quoted in some extent:

Taine pays in his preface a handsome tribute to the great service

rendered by Sainte-Beuve to the new criticism. Now Sainte-Beuve is, to our sense the better apostle of the two. In purpose the least doctrinal of critics, it was by his very horror of dogmas, moulds, and formulas, that he so effectively contributed to the science of literary interpretation. *The truly devout patience with which he kept his final conclusion in abeyance until after an exhaustive survey of the facts, after perpetual returns and ever-deferred farewells to them, is his living testimony to the importance of the facts.* Just as he could never reconcile himself to saying his last word on book or author, so *he never pretended to have devised a method which should be a key to truth. The truth for M. Taine lies stored up, as one may say, in great lumps and blocks, to be released and detached by a few lively hammer-blows; while for Sainte-Beuve it was a diffused and imponderable essence, as vague as the carbon in the air which nourishes vegetation, and, like it, to be disengaged by patient chemistry. His only method was fairly to dissolve his attention in a sea of circumstance surrounding the object of his study, and we cannot but think his frank provisional empiricism more truly scientific than M. Taine's premature philosophy.* In fact M. Taine plays fast and loose with his theory, and is mainly successful in so far as he is inconsequent to it. *There is a constant hiatus between his formula and his application of it.* (James 326-27, emphases mine)

In Sainte Beuve's insistence on "exhaustive survey of the facts" and "ever deferred farewells," James is able to give a prescient characterisation of Fenollosa's ideogram coupled with Pound's "time lags"; however he does this in a form that

would make indistinguishable dissolution and the ideogram. In using the term “imponderable essence,” James also anticipates the interrelation and the mutual dependence that Pound would establish between a luminous detail and a “pervasive essence.” Yet even more vitally, the contrastive pole James finds in Taine’s doctrinal approach is defined in terms immediately pertinent to the repetitive and disjunctive discourse Pound uses in designing this sequence as a “rock drill,” which can break through a conglomerate of facts with “a few lively hammer blows.” The *Rock Drill* passage itself contains a reference to “block.” Casillo’s criticism that “the direct and instantaneous perception which Pound admires may be merely an untested first impression, saturated with projective elements,” may be read as a revisiting of James’s observations on Taine.

If we take dissolving view as a precursor of that aspect of ideogram which doesn’t attenuate facts and phenomena but retain them, what appears to be lacking is the aspect of organicist coherence Pound sought in the “totalitarian.” As a result, the Canto which apocalyptically stakes on greatest fragmentation as the writing of greatest coherence discloses the insight that what Pound would like to exclude in his progress towards homecoming may also be the innermost possibility of the ideogram as a medium for thought, which implies configurations that can afford to dissolve, leak and seep rather than a faith in the power of totalitarian syntheses. Indeed, in the end it all boils down to a question of power. As repeatedly proved, Pound would not be so reserved about a substantial, forceful flow or “good circulation” that is form-giving, as in his “rose in the steel dust.” The reawakening of interest in Pound in the late 60’s was made possible thanks to a voice that is not blind to fragility, and the precariousness of its own attempt “to write paradise.” The final sequence of the *Cantos*, “Drafts and Fragments,” moved the book from the

impersonal-authoritarian register of *Rock Drill* and *Thrones* toward a more personal tone with singular lyrical beauty maybe only matched by his *Pisan Cantos*.

## CONCLUSION: Writing the Crack-up

Complex ideas arise only gradually, as the power of holding them together arises.

Ernest Fenollosa (*Instigations* 385)

The test of a first-rate intelligence is the ability to hold two opposed ideas in the mind at the same time, and still retain the ability to function. Scott Fitzgerald (“The Crack up”)

Remarkably, we know that Pound is similarly prone to create a “hiatus” between his formulas and his applications, most visible in the way he steers direct adequacy in the direction of an even more intensive rhetoric and intransitivity than Symbolists. That’s why bringing out the bifurcations and “dissimulations” inherent in his procedures are usually as legitimate as dwelling on the order he tried to institute. Neither inherently totalitarian-authoritarian, nor exempt from turning into a paranoid persecutory discourse, neither always asocial nor always serving communal ties such as that between the author and the reader, the ideogrammic displacements both regulate and dissolve, use and misuse, and problematization of power in Pound’s discourse cannot but take this circumstantiality into consideration.

The modalities of “Neither/ nor” and “both” actually extend over a very broad area of his aims and interests. Some of the most acute assessments of *the Cantos*, such as Sieburth’s and Rabaté’s, always take into account the dissimulated dualities and the strain of irreconcilable oppositions in Pound’s work and give another significance to Charles Olson’s statement that Pound was the “tragic double of our day, a living demonstration of our duality” (qtd. in Sieburth 172). As Sieburth writes, “Pound’s doubleness does not so much involve the split between reactionary politics and revolutionary language to which Olson alludes, but rather entails a fundamental division within his language, a division (or *différance*) whose tensions the economy

of his poem could in the end no longer sustain” (Sieburth 172). Thus a “premature philosophy” alla Taine can be substituted for the initial provisionality and experimentalism of ideogrammic method and can begin to display itself as a method that is “key to truth,” while still courting some of its initial potentials. Yet before being transformed to a key to truth, ideogram was a thought experiment that could conjure a chrematistic music, and a tropology of Money. In a sense, a denial of integration and an affirmation of divisibility becomes the only assurance for a synoptic view, which assurance is sought because of the fundamental “expensiveness” of holding together two opposite ideas, or of sustaining the “hiatus” between formulas and applications.

It wouldn’t be difficult to chart these dissimulations from the beginning: when Pound writes “meaning,” one also has to think of materiality, hence his translations; likewise, “direct impressions” of the primary apparitions are capable of being turned into secondary apparitions in greater scales. More generally, Pound’s simultaneous appeals to opacity and limpidity result in a strange mixture, observable in his use of source materials and his way of grinding them for the sake of accomodation in the instance of his lyric utterance: “had one vision only, and if the stars be but unicorns/or took the stars for those antilopes” (CI/746). Pound characteristically leaves out the Neo-Platonic context of these beautifully suggestive lines, probably not so beautiful in context.

As Rabaté observes, the movement of reference and stasis of Chinese characters, or a whole dimension of presence in epiphanies also oppose each other in the discourse of Cantos. Yet, calling the agent of referential movement “ideogram” means one is looking for a similar stasis in that movement too. The hints of this kind of split, and dis-articulation between stasis and movement is visible as early as his

*Gaudier Brzeska*. In narrating how the portrait Brzeska was sculpting of him looked in various stages, Pound expresses a doubt whether the finished looks better than the unfinished:

The bust of me was most striking, perhaps, two weeks before it was finished. I do not mean to say that it was better, it was perhaps a kinesis, whereas it is now a stasis; but before the back was cut out, and before the middle lock was cut down, there was in the marble a titanic energy, it was like a great stubby catapult, the two masses bent for a blow. I do not mean that he was wrong to go on with it. Great art is perhaps a stasis. The unfinished stone caught the eye. Maybe it would have wearied it. (*GB* 49)

Related to this is Rabaté's discussion of how the intermittent epiphanies are actually a reversion of speed into immobility, and that immobility may actually be "a climax of speed" (Rabaté 45).

The same structure of split even applies to one of the most characteristic features of Pound's critical attitudes, the emphasis on differentiation: "The defect of monolinear sentence structure in so far as it concerns criticism, as distinct from art, is that the critic using the traditional forms is so often constrained or to appear to contradict someone who is only five points off the critic's truth and to ally or appear to ally himself with an undefined vulgus which is ninety or more points off the same 'truth'" (*Visual Arts* 166). So Pound isn't always going after the absolute singularity, in accordance with the luminous detail of scholarship he promoted. All the useless precision is relegated to criticism with its "monolinear" sentence structure; and art, especially his art with its polyphonic rhyming, is implicitly charged with the work of making the most significant differentiations and also linkages. Worthwhile

differentiations extend to those about what is worthwhile and so on, thus division itself is divided. How can one reconcile the above statement with the following if one doesn't allow for circumstantial application?: "Unless a term is left meaning one particular thing, and unless all attempt to unify different things, however small the difference, is clearly abandoned, all metaphysical thought degenerates into a soup. A soft terminology is merely an endless series of indefinite middles" (*LE* 185).

In the realm of history the *Cantos* telescope the present with some temporally and spatially removed archetypal context, even finally extolling necessity and fatalism, through a recurrent statement from Mussolini: "what has been, should have" (LXXXVII/592). Yet this kind of resignation is never the only arrival of *Cantos*'s engagement with history. Paul Morrison is very accurate in writing that *The Cantos* also "evinces a certain openness before the unpredictability of experience and history. (Pound's epic thus serves as an exemplary caution against the facile translation of aesthetic form into ideological content. *The Cantos* resists "totalization" in the aesthetic sense, yet its politics are no less 'totalitarian' for that)" (Morrison 166). If we take the form of anecdote as a form receptive of historical contingency, as Joel Fineman argues, *The Cantos* offers plenty, giving scope to feelings and attitudes that themselves would contravene Pound of broadcasts. Pound's survey of war as "a destruction of restaurants" in the *Pisan Cantos* depicts with little delay the destruction of places where good conversation usually took place, places of bonding, sociability and pleasurable cultural exchange. In the last sequence of his book, he sums this aspect of his concerns really well: "I am all for Verkehr [commerce] without tyranny" (CX/797). Again, in the context of *Pisan Cantos*, Pound shows himself capable of great compassion worthy of a Dickens:

"both eyes, (the loss of) and to find someone

who talked his own dialect. We  
talked of every boy and girl in the valley  
but when he came back from leave  
he was sad because he had been able to feel  
all the ribs of his cow....” (LXXVI/478)

Even his economics, although it went seriously wrong in the end, relapsing into shrill repetition of its dogmas, have some benign ramifications, moments of care and apprehension about an economic order that gives more than enough reason to be worried about. A line from the final sequence *Drafts & Fragments* again offers a pertinent assessment: “That love be the cause of hate / something is twisted” (CX/800).

While surveying all these, one shouldn’t forget that Pound was also the poet of metamorphoses, using the theme of transformation as a cue for paradisiacal passages. The reason metamorphosis was so fascinating for Pound may have been the undecidability it introduces between the two stages it separates and conjoins, thus indicating the possibility of holding together fundamental disarticulations, just as imagistic design was charged with an animating release of tensions. Maybe that’s why Pound believes only a demi-god could make his *Cantos* cohere:

But the beauty is not the madness  
Tho’ my errors and wrecks lie about me.  
And I am not a demigod,  
I cannot make it cohere. (CXVI/816)

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