

Ezra Pound's Modernist Poetry: from a Chaotic Subject/Object Relation to the Poetry of Impersonality.

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Abstract: This article demonstrates how Ezra Pound's modernist poetry explores the tension between the disjointed self, his permanent conflict with the poetic object, and the poet's quest for a new poetics of impersonality. This new poetics attempts to accommodate the critical modern object. While Pound portrays the complex dual realities of the subject's personal experiences and his failed attempts to totalize the poetic object, he critiques the artistic degeneration of romanticism and creates a sense of distance that gives birth to an objective poetic language, a precise form of expression that could easily reflect the disjointedness of modern life.

Key words: Subject, Object, Tension, Subjectivity, Impersonality, Objectivity

Résumé: A travers cet article, la poésie moderniste d'Ezra Pound explore les tensions entre le sujet décousu, son conflit permanent avec l'objet, et la quête d'une nouvelle poétique de l'impersonnalité. Cette nouvelle poétique s'accommoderait avec l'objet complexe des temps modernes. Alors que Pound dépeint cette dialectique des réalités complexes, caractéristique des expériences personnelles du sujet poétique, il s'oppose à la dégénérescence artistique du romantisme, créant ainsi une poétique de la distanciation, une nouvelle expression du langage poétique capable de s'adapter, objectivement, au chaos de la vie moderne.

Mots clés: Sujet, Objet, Tension, Subjectivité, Impersonnalité, Objectivité

Ezra Pound's Modernism, though distinctive and idiosyncratic, has the fundamental characteristics of all Modernism. It is mainly focused on what makes all the poets of Modernism similar in their expression and basic methods of writing: the rejection of the subject's authority and the attempt, though not possible, to totalize a critical object, which, taken as the object of experimentation, always escapes the subject's intelligence. In his *The Art of*

Twentieth-Century American Poetry: Modernism and After, Charles Altieri makes out this common feature of Modernism that characterizes Ezra Pound's poetry. As a common principle, the poets of modernism reject the sincerity of the speaking subject, a fundamental poetics about which Altieri argues in these words:

For a poetics based on an ideal of sincerity, I simply had to ignore the many ironic factors that might undercut the pose of self-mastery. And, more importantly for young poets resisting such sincerity, this stance could be seen as misplacing cultural authority because it made authority dependent on the display of character rather than on the display of what attention could see and language realize. Therefore the modernists treated expression as an ideal based not on the character of the writer but on the constructive activity, giving the object a distinctive play of forces that is impossible to summarize in any discursive practice. (Altieri 5)

In other words, Modernism rejects all forms of the personal merge of the poetic self with himself, and beyond, with his object. Sincerity is endowed with the possibility of totalization, with the function of cohering self with self. This literary attempt at personal sincerity is viewed as mere delusion in modernist poetry, a process that always ends up in the chaotic power of language, disrupting the poetic subjects in an infinitely tense conflict of objects that resist logic and consciousness. French philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre describes, in his seminal phenomenological work, *Being and Nothingness*, an elusive and tense totalization of the subject with the object. This is what he calls bad faith, a form of self-deception in which the sincere person willfully constitutes himself as what he is in order to avoid being it. [...]. In total, constant sincerity as a constant effort to adhere to oneself is, by nature, a constant effort to dissociate oneself from oneself. A person frees himself from himself by the very act by which he makes himself an object for himself. (Sartre 65)

Jean Paul Sartre belongs to the generation of the twentieth-century post-war writers. Like his fellows, he attempts to question the existence of the subject in the

modern world. Existentialism is an ontological quest for true identity by the subject. For Sartre, subjects in a critical relation with others deny their true selves under the mask of bad faith, and this inauthentic relationship with others undermines even the sincerity of the speaking subject (the meeting of the self with his own self), as it is compromised by this inherent bad faith. In other words, the other is the one that imposes himself on my *self* and influences my authenticity.

The post-world war philosopher Emmanuel Levinas sees this influence of the other over the self through what he conceptualizes as the self's failed attempt to totalization, sameness and possession, as the subjective quest for totality is countered by the alterity of the other.

The possibility of possessing, that is, of suspending the very alterity of what is only, at first, other, and other relative to me, is the way of the same. I am at home with myself in the world because it offers itself to or resists possession. (What is absolutely other does not only resist possession, but contests it, and accordingly can consecrate it).
(Levinas 38)

The Levinasian concept of sameness describes the subject's ontological being substantiated by his constant desire to bring the alterity of the other into the sphere of his categorical understanding and dominance. But the other resists and escapes this categorization of the same, of the subject, by his own alterity. This resistance of alterity to the subject's totality opens the way to infinity (ethics), since otherness appeals to and influences my consciousness, action, and discourse with the power of escapism and alterity, through the constant conflict of the self/other relations noticeable in action and language:

The function of language would amount to suppressing "the other," who breaks this coherence and is hence essentially irrational. A curious result: language would consist of suppressing the other and in making the other agree with the same! But in its expressive function language precisely maintains the other to whom it is addressed, whom it calls upon or invokes. To be sure, language does not consist in invoking him as a being represented and thought. But this is why language institutes a relation irreducible to the subject-object relation: the revelation of the other. (Ibid. 73)

The rationalizing aspect of language (meaning) is that organized and established by the desire for convention, by the desire of the subject who aspires to cognition, dominance and power over the other. But, at the same time, formal language appears as the possibility to approach the other through the prospect of its otherness, its alterity and strangeness (form). Language is thus the expression of the critical face-to-face within the limit of the materiality of being (subject) and the evanescence of the other (object), and it fails to capture the ontology of the object whenever "it detaches the object from something other than itself" (idem, 95). This phenomenological approach to language is what we will try to connect to the poetic language of modernism and beyond to the poetry of Ezra Pound. In her reflection on the nature of language in modernist poetry, McIntire writes accordingly:

[...] what are we without this full and empty opacity of the signifier, whose mystery simultaneously enchants and alienates us? It is through the very structure of our relation to words, that is, that we find language all at once estranging, desirable, and fundamentally poetic. [...] for Eliot, desire is always bound up in compulsion, and in wanting what lies beyond the sphere of transparent choice: it involves our need for recognition and reciprocity from that Other, who nevertheless will always remain an absolute alterity. (McIntire 47).

More succinctly, the language of modernism is that of an open-endedness of the subject's discourse, suspended between what Levinas describes as the materiality of being and the evanescence of the other. Modernist language tends to give itself to the subject while it suspends all this possibility of totality. It is the language of permanent conflict between the subject's attempt at the ontological mastery of the object and the impossibility of this prospect due to the elusiveness and otherness of the object. This critical relation of the modernist subject to language, as Ben-Merre explains, results in the problem of logic and coherence of modernism, since "a logical problem might relate to seemingly self-defeating binds in critical theory, causal particularities of narrative, and how we have come to understand modernism." (Ben-Merre xvii). For Ben-Merre, all these disjunctions within the speaking self reflect a paradoxical and metaleptic language of Modernism that points to something of time and space, what will establish the fundamentals of modernist critical theories. In light of these modernist theories of paradoxes and ambiguities of the subject/object relation, the critical subject/language relation is a problematic topic that also needs to be explored in Ezra Pound's poetry. Quoting R. P. Blackmur, Tony Tost argues that Pound's modernist language was condensed and telegraphic for two reasons:

Because he merely noted that something occurred (as opposed to attempting to capture and express the felt experience of an occurrence), and because he tended toward "deliberate disconnectedness, this art of a thing continually alluding to itself, continually breaking off short." (Tost 96)

The poetic language of modernism is that in which the "something" (the other) somewhat reveals itself to the subject, independently from his desire and

voluntary decision, while restraining itself from this revelation. This object of revelation is beyond the subject's consciousness and linguistic control, as it escapes the subject's attempted totalization and categorization. It is, as a matter of fact, "continually alluding to itself, continually breaking off." To capture the essence of this "something," as Levinas said, the modernist poet needs to engage a typical language that constitutes the intermission of the ontological materiality of being (sameness) and the transcendence of infinity (otherness). As modernism is essentially based on the method of fragmentation and disjunction, we will deal with a typical modernist language that depicts the subject's fragmented consciousness, his disjointed self and his incoherently juxtaposed visions of the poetic object. To make this paper operative, a look back into the Formalist analysis of this subject/object, and beyond speaker/language, relation to Ezra Pound's modernist poetry is deemed necessary to understand the incoherent complexities of the subject's relationships with the others in modernist poetry. The self/other conflict in modernist poetry is what Cleanth Brooks describes as the form of drama in "The Well-Wrought Urn":

The essential structure of a poem (as distinguished from the rational or logical structure of the "statement" which we abstract from it) resembles that of architecture or painting: [...] Or, to move still closer to poetry, the structure of a poem resembles that of a play [...] for the very nature of drama is that of something "acted out" something which arrives at its conclusion through conflict—something which builds conflict into its very being. (Brooks 1189).

As we attempt to give a Formalist account of how the conflict in Ezra Pound's poetry reflects the Modernist tendency to the self/other and speaker/language conflicts, we will not overlook the fact that this conflict of self with self, of self with object, and of self with language is a direct, though critical, way to assess the "something "acted out" there, the other that escapes the subject's control through conflict and posits the basis of a new challenge to approach the ethical ontology of being (reality), its elusiveness and otherness.

To make this paper effective, William Empson's theoretical concept of ambiguity and I. A. Richards' concept of tension will both help us come face-to-face with the critical aspects of Pound's poetic language and object that seem to escape the possibility of unity and disrupt the capacity of the subject, expressing his apprehension of the object, in order to respond to the ethical appeal of the poetics of depersonalization, objectification, and universality.

Sameness and Otherness

Ezra Pound's prosody obeys the modernist rules of variability and tension. For D'Angelo, there is constant conflict between traditional sameness (the self) that attempts, by 'the tensions between subjects and objects in modernist poetry', to categorize its object and the tense infinity of the other that imposes its rules upon the poetic self's perception (D'Angelo 2). In fact, it is an experimental language that abides, neither exclusively by the aesthetic principles of conventional rules (the same) nor by the ones inspired out of the personal motives (the self)—for an exact account of the complexity of the poetic object (the other). In the strained process of modernist versification, we can always observe as D'Angelo notices:

[...] a speaker attempting an impersonal object representation, but one who, in the process, reveals deeply personal aspects of his experience. It also presents a speaker who initially recognizes a whole object [...] but one who gradually reassesses his ability to know such "wholeness," instead pursuing knowledge by cataloging the object's parts. (*Ibid.* 2)

This modernist conflict between subject and object, between self and other through such a complex, but precisely concentrating language of experiments, is evident in Pound's poem "In a Station of the Metro":

The apparition of these faces in the crowd;

Petals on a wet, black bough.

Pound's subject approaches "the faces" of the others out of his tensile perception of natural objects. He breaks the normative romanticism of these verses and creates tension between sameness and otherness in order to approach the "faces" of others in the isolation of this natural setting. This impersonality is a tense self vs. other medium that confuses Harold Bloom, qualifying Pound's poetics as "impressions drawn either from others or from the self". (Bloom 8). This tension drifts the reader away. In "In a Station of the Metro," this intermediate impersonal quality of the poetic language actually makes these 'faces' unknown and anonymous to the poetic subject, leaving the reader perplexed. There is a sense of discontinuity in the tradition of the romantic categorization of nature. With the metaleptic approach to the presence of others within nature, the disconnectedness of the two verses makes the project of the traditional categorization of the 'faces' impossible. Pound obeys the modernist rupture of the harmonious subject-object relation to nature (a harmony that is essential to the romantic tradition of self-identification and saneness) in order to approach the other-based identification such as central to modernist poetry. In *Poetry and Modernity*, Octavio Paz writes accordingly:

The models of that tradition were the works of Greco-Roman antiquity. By denying them, modern art ruptured the continuity of the West. Thus the change was both self-denial and, simultaneously, a metamorphosis. An end of nature as ideal (Paz 68).

Formally speaking, this romantic metamorphosis within the subject's critical relation with nature is substantiated in "In a Station of the Metro" by two nominal phrases concentrated with nouns and adjectives. Nature transforms itself into a human presence, positioning itself between other-based affirmation (otherness) and self-negation (sameness). "As Pound, Eliot and H.D. are relying on metamorphic energies, they are also deeply committed to attempting to speak from a perspective other than from their own limited, broken, traumatized selves [...], to speak with an impersonal, universal way." (Shubert 4)

To approach this universal and impersonal voice, Pound avoids the use of verbs in order to skip any attempt at narrative totalization (sameness) and to focus instead on the Imagistic power of the anonymous "faces" (otherness). The sudden apparitional quality of anonymous others— through "the crowd"— violently contrasts with the romantic sameness of nature. For Robert Pinsky, modernist language is located between "idiom" which 'is the sameness of the language' and "idiosyncrasy," which 'is the "language" of "a particular person's *crasis* or constitution"' (otherness), avoiding capturing the object of the poem in a sort of linguistic convention (Pinsky 106.) Modernist poetry counters the mechanical assessment of the other in a form of need and necessity. The other only imposes itself on the subject through constantly dramatic metamorphosis, vanishment and concealment. These are the techniques of modernist impersonality: "the unavoidability of change, that render possible early poetic dramatisations of the Modernist process without a subject" (Moulin 8). For Pryor, this sudden appeal of the others to the poetic self, in Pound's 'In a Station of the Metro', results from

the tension of poetic opposition to linguistic sameness (categorization), as it imposes its presence through metamorphosis, concealment within natural elements, and then through the anti-normative raid resulting from syntactic tensions so as to approach the complex image of the underworld captured within an instant of metamorphosis and surprise:

In modernism, poetry opposes a necessary other at every level [...] It opposes mechanical reproduction: ‘A prose kinema, not [...] the “sculpture” of rhyme,’ writes Ezra Pound in 1920 [...]. Given this situation, poetry vanishes in a cloudy abstraction or crumbles into that contingent set of verbal devices, cultural expectations, and aesthetic values. (Pryor 5).

In this process of subject/object opposition, Pound’s poetic self himself is not in a static harmony with these poetic faces of others. Instead, the various, dissociated impressions and emotions imposed by this complex picture of these faces are thus reported directly, not by the attempted, harmonious categorization of a poised self, but by the disconnected syntax of the verses of the anonymous. With this modernist tension, Pound’s subject is not always in direct contact with the object of the poem. His “poem, ‘In a Station of the Metro,’ excludes the use of first-person pronouns. And even when first-person pronouns appear, they are relatively uninvolved in the scene.” (Whitworth 164). Passive, the subject sees the other indirectly through the chaos he finds in nature, like through a hidden camera that snaps a picture of various aspects of anonymous objects with the diverse and conflictual impressions it gives. Complexity, tension and variability create the anonymity of others for the poetic self always attempting to bring others into his own categorization. According to Whitworth, the acts of the sudden apparition of

the crowd, the images of petals, the wet and then black bough are all snapped all of a sudden in the self's personifying imagination that cannot connect them all in a coherent totality with these "verbless noun phrases", but in a transient materiality and metamorphosis of the object:

The similarity of the faces in the crowd to the petals on the bough has often been noted; the poem as it exists already hints at a personification of the petals, as well as, conversely, implying that the faces are as delicate and transitory as the petals. (*ibid* 165).

Through the complex and delicate anonym of nature that describes the presence of "these faces," the language of this poem with no subject-verb agreement is full of fragmented nominal phrases that concentrate the image of others in a form of conflictual relationship with the impossibility of the subject's psychological totalization of the crowd.

Tension and the Language of Impossibility

Tension is a possibility within impossibility in Pound's Modernist language. Impossibility is instructed by the critical language of otherness, and not by the artificial conformity of sameness. This impossibility is perceptible in the language and the subject's tensile voices in Pound's poetry. We will first extract the rhythmic voice of tension out of Pound's modernist subjects in constant conflict with their objects. In order to counter a type of rhythm imposed by the biased and logocentric artificiality of the disrupted poetic self, the Modernist poet insists that the poet should instead write within the limits of tension between the metrical self-imposed categorization and the elusiveness of the other-imposed rhythms,

resulting in an impersonal, what Mathew Jenkins considers as the vaguely discernible voice that could approach the ambiguous modernist object in “the space of the Other”:

[...] “tension” is “the face-to-face relation” [...], becomes itself the site of language, its saying. The gap (in poem and in presence) opens the possibility of conversation [...]. This is the space of the other (and) the unsaid.

(Jenkins 55)

In other words, the other (or object of the modernist poem) is hidden from possibility within formal tension. To dig it up, the rhythmic voice of the poetic self should adapt— independently from the personal voice of the subject— to the critical exigencies of the poetic object. It is ethically urgent for the Modernist poet to counter the power of the subject’s personal categorization. This poetic individuality should not attempt to determine and conceptualize the rhythm of the poetic object, but should rather conform to the poetic object that imposes the musical patterning of the subject’s voice in a form of defiance and tension. Like most of the modernist poets, Pound decided to disrupt the subject’s conventional voice, breaking the unethical authority of the iambic meter in verses to give a natural, rhythmical and impersonal overtone to his poetic object. This metrical vs. rhythmical tension is substantiated by Anthony W. Stevens as he states that:

Pound's measure is still iambic and casts the feeling into a simple mould, but we get a sense from the passage of the words 'pulling against' this metre, creating a certain tension. (Stevens 77)

In fact, through the tension of his poem's metrical variations, its ambiguous tones and subtle prosodic features, the possibility of sense making seems to be open to the object-oriented rhythm. As we enter the poem entitled "The Return," the impossibility to meet with the object offers a possibility, despite the limitations of the personal, categorizing the voice of the poetic subject. Henceforth, the subject can approach in a tense rapport the insurmountable image of the disastrous and tragic aspect of the object, as a result of the tensions and atrocities of wars that characterize modernity. In the poem, metrical otherness imposes itself and breaks the subject's possibility of categorization and fixation:

See, they return; ah, see the tentative
 Movements, and the slow feet,
 The trouble in the pace and the uncertain
 Wavering!

See, they return, one, and by one,
 With fear, as half-awakened;
 As if the snow should hesitate
 And murmur in the wind,
 And half turn back;
 These were the 'Wing'd-with-Awe,'
 Inviolable
 Gods of the winged shoe!
 With them the silver hounds,
 Sniffing the trace of air!

("The Return," 1-8)

The poem, "The Return", evokes the hesitant possibility of coming, the return of the invisible, undefinable objects ("they" line 1). This undefinability of the objects

whose presence is only tentatively wavering for the subject to "see" creates tension in the subject's voice, making what he says impossible and uncertain.. Like any modernist poem that creates tension within its internal voice, this poem urgently breaks its own metrical sameness (self/subject) in a strained relation with rhythmical otherness (other/object) in order to give itself a possibility, to capture the variously indefinable and vulnerable aspects of this rhythmical otherness—the disruptive rhythm imposed by a face-to-face distancing from the subjective world to approach the vulnerable underworld. For Peter Brooker, Ezra Pound adopted from T. S. Eliot this impersonal poetics of distance based on tension between the subject (self) and the object (other):

His mission (like Eliot's) was to reclaim art's social function from the position of distance and superiority, which it guaranteed. Such were the tensions of the modernist poetics of impersonality. It is this virtually impossible position that contributes to the speaker's ambivalence. (Brooker 32).

This ambivalent poetic text by Ezra Pound, with its vague, tensile voice, as a result of the elusive rhythmical imprecision, echoes the chaotic situations that prevail within the vulnerabilities of modern individuals. With the pressure of the impersonal imperatives of otherness, the poetic subject needs to conform to the exigencies of the objectives and external vulnerabilities of others. Impersonal in tone, the poem carries a tense voice that is rendered more ethical than the one conveyed by any other form of normative discourse because of its varied, stressed musical beats which indicate the independence of language from the possibility of the self's categorization of meaning. This language is the language of impossibility and vulnerability, the language of otherness. It has various

counterweighing measures that try to create tension and thus approach every aspect of the conditions of the elusive other as objectively as possible. In fact, through tension, modernist subjects reject the possibility of personal and categorizing the voices of the poem and always attempt to solidify otherness within the plastic materials of the musically carved statue of impersonal values. Likewise, Pound uses these tools for the painterly musicality of impersonal and imprecise meanings. He finds it morally urgent to break the conventional, totalizing the musicality of poetry by varying stanza forms, the syllabic length and the metrical units of all the verses; thus, he can give an objective dimension to the strained, distant voice of the poem, resulting in “[...] the “decentering of the self” and “demise of the subject” that would only much later be considered an essential characteristic of Modernism.” (Moulin 5).

Through these metrically varied splotches of voices of a single, unidentified speaking subject, it is possible to capture and feel directly the complex, tense and horrible nature of the modern object—the dramatic aftermaths of contemporary wars on “the souls of blood” (line 14). Influenced by the Modernist project of objectively tense poetry, Pound does not favor the idea of a categorizing metrical musicality, but some varied rhythmical patterns in his verses instead with very few rhyming words, typical music, which suggests the dramatic images of social chaos with subjects’ impotent, neutral attitudes.

In Pound, iambs and dactyls tensely contrast in a form of ironic tension as much as trochees and spondees (or iambs and trochees) can as well and vice versa. This rhythmical conflict creates an impersonally indefinite, tense voice imposed

by the approach to the complex face-to-face with the object. As a consequence, the location of the object becomes elusive to a disrupted subject. “The [the self] would recognize or not recognize the object or person described.” (Pound. *ABC of Reading* 66). This posture makes the possibility very difficult to locate the exact personal traces of the critical self, resulting in a position where the reader is directly guided to the heart of instabilities and indeterminacies— as objectively as possible. For example, with no rhyme perceptible except the apocopated rhyming of “see” and “feet,” the poem focuses on the tense, ironical overtone of the dactylic, energetic vision of an unknown speaking subject whose perception visibly contrasts with the spondee of the nominal phrase “slow feet” which describes a constantly slow movement that results in a nonsense by the apartness of the dactylic stressed syllable “see” with no object. The isolated syllable already emphasizes the problematic acuteness of the perception of movement. Pound attempts to awaken his fascination for creating the presence of those absent, elusive “gods” from other civilizations. He tries to create possibilities for them, to categorize them, not in the sameness of traditional clichés, but in the harmony their disparateness creates. This causes the harmonious, disparate coexistence of the subject with divine otherness, just as Yihui Lui quotes Chinese Philosopher Tang Yijie in his *Ezra Pound’s Translation*: “Tang Yijie, Chinese Philosopher and Scholar, put forward a new way of seeking harmony, not sameness and the coexistence of civilizations” (qt in Lui. 7).

Perception plays a great role in the making of this possibility within impossibility. In the first line of "The Return", we can see this disharmonious

coexistence in the tense elements of the poem. For instance, the first verb of perception in the stressed dactylic position— “see” with no object— tensely contrasts with its own repetition in the unstressed dactylic position, which has this time an object, but a problematic object. The vision of the second verb “see” is rather associated with noises and has “uncertain” audible sounds like its object of perception instead. How is it possible to see the sound of “slow feet,” “the trouble in the pace” and “the uncertain wavering”? In the verse “See, they return, one, and by one,” we have the rhythmical pattern of trochee-iamb-trochee-iamb through which the movement of return is counterweighted by the paradoxical contrast between the trochaic stressed syllable of “one” and the other iambic stressed word “one.” Visually, like the rhythmical movement of the unbalanced form of the whole poem, the first “one,” as an unidentified active subject syntactically isolated by commas, is rapidly replaced by the second “one” as a passive object rendering, in turn, the first one inactive in movement. Perceptibly, the movement and wavering forms of the objects (or presences) in the poems are rendered by metonymic representations. As pointed out by Jenkins, “[...] a metonymy, rather than a metaphor, reveals an obligation to that otherness by not equating it and replacing it with another figure” (Jenkins 50). Naturally mimicking the social object, the musicality of the poem is as “uncertain” and “wavering” as the “tentative movement” of the poetic others being described, the musical voice of the poem as ambiguous and hesitant as a “murmur in the wind” of those coming back and the knowledge of the speaking subject as vague as a “half-awakened” speaker. To accentuate this vague sense of metrical variability, most of the verses

above are hypermetric, all of them tending toward the contrasting pattern of rising-falling measures, with accents varying generally from three to four with a sort of self-discipline in writing. Even the first verse, the longest with eleven musical beats, has a propensity toward this 3-4 beat pattern in its first three segments except the fourth, which has only 1 beat. From verses 1 to 5, the monosyllabic end-beats of verses 2 and 5 contrast sharply with the end-beats of unstressed extra syllables in verses 1, 3 and 4 showing respectively the paradox between the coming of the ghosts of wars and their hesitant movement. The vision of the speaker is consecutively uncertain to determine, with accuracy, the movement of the comers because “these were the swift to harry”, the bomb blast of jets making “pallid the leash-men.”

Syntactic Defiance as a Result of the Subject/ Object Conflict

This modernist defiance of the personal and egocentric values of the subject through his linguistic battle with the object of poetry is also perceptible in the conflicting aspects of the figurative, lexical, syntactical levels of the poetic language. Though modernist poets generally make use of literal and concrete lexicons to suggest the vulnerabilities of the object/object relation, the subject's conflict with the object over some figurative words and some morphological and syntactical structures makes the meaning impersonally evocative and subtle for the poetic subject to guess and, consequently, breaks the subject's attempt at the totalization of the love object. According to Kristeva, this subject/object

disruption through syntactic disorder is called “abjection”. “For Kristeva, the term ‘abjection’ refers to a state in which order is disrupted: the strict distinction between subject and object [...] begins to blur.” (Vice 504). Pound’s poetics of defiance based on the syntactic tension between the subject and the object resembles that of many modernist poets like Robert Frost, Marianne Moore, George Oppen, and William Carlos Williams. For D’Angelo, as she quotes many modernist poets, including William Carlos Williams,

[Modernist] experiments with line and syntax, which tend to fragment the object by reading it in pieces, also reveal the poet’s preoccupation with rendering a new creation. Williams advocates a mode of perception, via imagination, that strips pre-existing associations from the object, or aspects of “thingness,” in order to renew it. [...] Yet, tension exists over whether—and how—the poet can make the local object a universal thing, transferring within it some larger knowledge of human experience and understanding. (D’Angelo 29)

As we can see, any attempt by the modernist communion between the subject and the object to produce totalized, universal truths seems impossible through the syntactic tension that defies the subject’s imaginative power. Syntactically, parataxis and fragments subtly work against the full-fledged existence of a personal truth value from an alleged poetic subject. For example, in “The River-Merchant’s Wife,” a poem of 1915, Pound writes in a particularly modernist style that breaks the subject/object approach in the lyrical language of conventional love poetry in this contemporary era of commercial business:

At sixteen you departed,
You went into far Ku—to—yen, by the river of swirling
eddies,

And you have been gone five months.
The monkeys make sorrowful noise overhead.
You dragged your feet when you went out.
By the gate now, the moss is grown, the different
mosses,
Too deep to clear them away!
The leaves fall early this autumn, in wind.
The paired butterflies are already yellow with August
Over the grass in the West garden;
They hurt me. I grow older.

(*Cathay* 15-25)

Though the poem is about the silent, psychological sufferings of a female subject (the subject) and the materialistic misconduct of the one she loves and desires (the object), it objectively depicts in a tensely segmental way the different personalities belonging to this unknown, single subject who speaks. For Mathew Jenkins; “Love is nonjudgmental and sensual and opens the subject to the other via the body.” (Jenkins 145). This nonjudgmental love is substantiated through the cold, syntactic segmentation and the frozen voice of the disjointed speaking self, opening him to the defiance of the vulnerable and ineffable other.

In the poem, “The River-Merchant’s Wife”, the addressee is even unknown as well. The different stages of the speaking subject’s chaotic situations are substantiated by the syntactic constructions of the different adverbial clauses of time: “When my hair was still cut straight across my forehead,” “At fourteen,” “At fifteen,” and “At sixteen.” The speaker’s personality is disunited and dispersed at the different stages of her life experience with the love object. The

disjointed sentences are constructed in such a single, paratactic way that the subject can avoid any personal commentary between lines. Commentary is a form of totality. Pound's modernism is drawn from the method of incoherence disjunction so as to attain objectivity through the absence of totality, as Yihui Lui explains in his MA Thesis:

In Pound's eyes, [...] poetry is to transfer the concrete force, which especially denotes its particle syntax. This view is in coherence with his rejection of logic in preference for objectivity. (Lui 75)

In "The River-Merchant's Wife", this object-oriented poetry is visible through the disruption of the subject's voice and the disconnected syntax. Except for the complex sentence at line 19, which has a subordinate adverbial clause— "when you went out"— all the others are simple and compound sentences. Pound chooses to arrange his words in such a syntactically disjointed order so as to conceal his subject's emotions and reveal the profound infinity of the unattainable and insensible love of the object (beloved). For example, from line 15 to 17, we have a long, infinite compound sentence linked by the coordinating conjunction 'and' (v. 17) which focuses on the callous departure of the mercantile merchant lover (the subject). Each of the independent clauses of this section of the poem has a verb of movement in the past simple and present perfect, all of them related to the same adverbial phrase of time "At sixteen". The sudden change from the past simple to the present perfect shows how deeply the anxiously infinite sorrows of an irresistible resolution to go still wash over the subject, who chooses no words to translate his strained, unattainable love for the object. The sudden pause

at the predicate “departed” emphasizes the brusque departure and the infinite length of the sentence at line 16 and its alliterative echo in | 3: | and | e | in words like “swirling, yen, eddies” all associate the folly of such a journey with the never-ending rapturous desire to love objects, with yet no clear statement from the subject. In each simple sentence, the modernist subjects (participants of actions) have voices purely suspended in their grammatical relation with their objects. For Helen M. Dennis:

Pound, despite all the masks and voices he assumes, or symptomatically through them, is unable to sustain a stable sense of a unified wholeness. His relation to the symbolic order is also arguably unstable. (Dennis 280.)

Actually, there is no stabilization of the subject’s multiple positions and voices in Pound’s modernist poetry. The poet chooses not to personally reveal how cruel or doleful the conflictual quest for love objects is in modern times of bonanza capitalism. There is no personal judgment (or attempt at totality). Moreover, the subject is in a state of passive reaction in front of her object of love. At line 25, while she is in the accusative position “me”, she is in the nominative position in the second independent clause “I.” But, in the second clause, there is no real action, except for a predicative complement describing the physical degradation of the speaker waiting for the merchant lover (object). Again, from line 20 to 21, there is an unacceptable fragment. The ascriptive adjectival phrase “too deep ... away!” is a predicative complement whose elided verb grammatically agrees with the subjective noun phrase “the different mosses” and from which it is abnormally separated by a comma.

Ambiguous Lexicons and the Critical Subject/Object Relation

Because they wanted to translate the ambiguities of the factual, literal world of subject/object conflicts, modernist poets do not exclude figures of disparity, clashes and tension, which remain the most central to the operation of the figures of ineffable image (metaphor, simile, personification...) and the tropes of equivalence to capture this ineffability (metonymy and synecdoche). As Mathew Jenkins said, “ambiguity renders impossible the critical paraphrasing of the said of the poem [...] prevents that meaning from being reduced simply to a scientific treatise” (Jenkins 18.). In other words, ambiguity prevents the subject from categorizing the object into a logocentric convention of language.

In fact, our world is the world of anxieties and strains, which are signs of negativity, ambiguity and nihilism. The others (seen here as objects of the poem) are both vulnerable and ineffable to the speaking self. Thereupon, while mixing figurativeness and literalness, modernist artists like Ezra Pound try to depict the others exactly the way they appear and disappear in a critical relation to the speaking self. In his *ABC of Reading*, Ezra Pound elucidates that Dante’s poetic objectivity is the best. He explains that, for the subject to encounter his object, for speaking self to approach the object that lies beyond him in the objective world, he necessarily needs words that make “different noises”, with incongruous, ambiguous and far-fetched meanings:

You have to go almost exclusively to Dante's criticism to find a set of OBJECTIVE categories for words. Dante called the words 'battered' and

'shaggy' because of the different NOISES they make. Or *pexa et hirsuta*, combed and hairy. (Pound, Ezra. *ABC of Reading* 37).

In other words, these figures, like paradox, ambiguity, tension, irony, and allusion, are some of the Modernist figures used to erase the categorizing voice of the poetic self and clear the way to the others that are external to his totalizing voice, which belongs to the external, modern realities of inexpressible dimensions. Coming back to the last excerpt of “The Return,” for instance, Pound plays with paradox and tension among the concrete words and with the conflict between the literal world and the figurative one so as to suspend the speaking self in an infinite attempt at the totality of the object:

These were the ‘Wing’d-with-Awe’,
Inviolable.
Gods of the wingèd shoe!
With them the silver hounds,
sniffing the trace of air!
Haie! Haie!
These were the swift to harry;
These the keen-scented;
These were the souls of blood.

(Pound. 6-11)

As we can notice, the atmosphere of critical objects being described stands between the deceptively literal and figurative world. Ezra Pound’s modernist poetry is situated between the literal (what is called ‘prose’) and the figurative

(what he calls ‘poetry’), making the subject’s encounter with his object more and more ambiguous. The poet writes accordingly:

Both prose and poetry are but an extension of language. Man desires to communicate with his fellows. He desires an ever increasingly complicated communication. (Pound, Ezra. "The Serious Artist" 50)

This complicated communication between the subject and his object is caused by lexical ambiguity. Though literal, the words of “The Return” have metaphorical meanings with which they contrast the factual import through tension and paradox. The poetic subject as a whole is dominated by and overwhelmed with tension between present (presence) and past (absence), between decision (totality) and surprise (infinity), between the literal (totality) and the figurative (infinity). From verse 1 to 5, there is a firm resolution marked by metaphors that attempt to substantiate the infinity of the desire to return; from verse 6 to 11, we have the surprising images of those comers contrasting with the first, expected one. Thus, from the realistic impression of self-realization (reality), the subject suddenly comes to the ghostly (ineffable) world of blood. Moreover, in the last section of the poem above, the line between the literal and the metaphorical world is blurred through the expression of ambiguities, paradoxes and ironies. Despite the literal description of the poetic heroes, the latter have two contrasting appearances through the oxymoronic noun phrase “silver hounds” and the paradoxical displacement of the participial adverbial phrase “sniffing the trace of air.” The heroes seem to possess the presence of some typical dogs walking and capable of showing the way to the world of unattainable and undefinable others. However, the paradox of “winged shoe”—the image of walking contrasting with that of

flying— is reinforced by the noun “swift,” a typical quick bird, and the adjective “silver” referring to the metal, manufactured objects, gives the idea of a flying bird (or object) also, “sniffing the trace of air.” In Pound’s “The Serious Artist,” communicating with paradoxes, ambiguities and contradictions is quenched by the desire to see the poetic object (otherness) beyond our senses:

When you desire something not present to the eye or when you desire to communicate ideas, you must have recourse to speech. Gradually you wish to communicate something less bare and ambiguous than ideas. You wish to communicate an idea and its modifications, an idea and a crowd of its effects, atmospheres, contradictions. (“The Serious Artist : Emotion and Poesy.” 50-51)

The presence (and the absence) of the gods draws their substance from this ambiguity of the poetic language. The abstract forms of the “gods” are, in fact, materialized by these literally high concrete figures, while again they contrast with the degrading image of the “souls of blood,” a metonymic representation of the victims of scientific innovations such as the *metallic birds* dominating space. The poet’s orientation of the poem becomes more complex as regards the subtleties of the literally concrete words and images.

From Objectification to the Poetry of Impersonality

The Modernist quest for an experimental language that could objectively depict complex modernity and its intricate realities in the true and authentic form of crises will entail Ezra Pound’s engagement with the objective depiction of modern critical sensibilities. In fact, “Levinas [was] describing, in the decades after

World War II, an alterity that introduces an ethical failure in the process of objectification by the subject” (Jenkins 24.). In other words, modernists, like Pound, rejected the process of objectification by the subjective vision of the speaking self. Modernist objectification implies and imposes the poetic object on the subject instead. Similarly, Pound writes in “Hugh Selwyn Mauberley” that, at a certain moment:

For three years, out of the key with his time,
He strove to resuscitate the dead art
Of poetry; to maintain ‘the sublime’
In the old sense. Wrong from the start—

No, hardly, but seeing he had been born
In a half-savage country, out of date;

(Pound, “Hugh Selwyn Mauberley” 1-6)

In this piece of poem, for example, Pound shows how absurd and useless it is to come back to the practice of categorizing sameness by the subject— in these days when the poet is “out of key with his time.” The gloom, reflexive noun phrase “the dead art/Of poetry” is revived and rendered brighter both by the magical power and the last-ditch effort of an unknown subject who “strove to resuscitate the dead art” of the traditional sameness. This paradox (“strove to resuscitate”) already implies an ironical overtone because it shows how, in its very beginning, the poetic subject finds it difficult to resurrect into presence and the absence of the old, subjective art. The paradox of this situation is also echoed in the noun phrase ““the sublime”/In the old sense,” as we all know that the sublime refers to infinity,

to something that is so new and inestimable, so beautiful and impressive, that it affects the subject's attempt to totalize. Modern art should be independent from the subject's ideologies and sentiments. Pound makes it clear, as he compares modern art to dance. For him, poetry "is a dance, danced for the dance's sake, not a display. It is music that exists for the sake of being music, not for the sake of, as they say, producing an impression." ("Arnold Dolmetsch" 435).

This autonomy of modern art makes it constantly renewed, extensive and extreme in the eyes of the subject (infinity), not shabby and worn out "in the old sense" (totality). The direct remark about the categorizing normative poetry, anyway ("Wrong from the start"), reinforces this absurdity of temporal totality, of reviving the normative language of sameness. However, the sub-clausal negation "no" and the approximate negator "hardly" enable the subject to glance back at his previous statement about this poetic art through the phrase "Wrong from the start—". Correcting his view in some ways, the poetic subject justifies this practice of old poetic language through his being "born/In a half-savage country" (at the borderline between totality and infinity). Anyhow, the subject concludes, the poetic language of absolute totality is "out of date," since we are no more in the classic age of the "savage" subject whose life perfectly agrees with the permissive categorization of traditional clichés. Our modern society demands a medium, a language of strained sensibilities, different from the formulaic categorization of the former, a subjective one. Further, Pound writes that:

The age demanded an image
Of its accelerated grimace,

Something for the modern stage,
Not, at any rate, an Attic grace;

Not, not certainly, the obscure reveries
Of the inward gaze;
Better mendacities
Than the classics in paraphrase!

(Pound, "Hugh Selwyn Mauberley" 9-16)

For Pound, the modern age requires a new poetic language that speaks through the self's depersonalization— a subject that rejects the categorizing "classics of paraphrase" through "an image/Of its accelerated grimace" similar to the persona with a mask on "modern stage". In other words, the most efficient language is that which is capable of approaching the ontology of the object through the subject's various depersonalized and negated sensibilities— just like in a drama— in an instant of time. At a fully "accelerated" speed, the modern image of the poetic object is indeed pressing forward in its grimace-like undefinability and along with the subject's failed attempts to paraphrase the critical subject/object relation. Daniel Albright writes accordingly that Pound's subject always appears as "a shapeless self," a "slag heap of stuff," incapable of totalizing the poetic object and rationalizing it. As a result, this precautionary technique breaks off the poet's attempt at personalization to approach the poetry of "crystalizations" and objectivity:

This makes a noble affirmation of a shapeless self and codeless conduct [...] In 1920 Pound reviewed the list of personae in his poetry, and noted that, while Propertius, the Seafarer, and Mauberley "are all 'me' in one sense; my personality

is certainly a great slag heap of stuff which has to be excluded from each of th[ese] crystalizations" (Albright 64).

Consequently, a new, modern language is required to adapt the disrupted subject to these chaotic circumstances of the object's ineffability. The words "accelerated grimace" have a slight overtone of irony about the rapidly changing world and its objects of values constantly in crisis despite the progress in all sectors. "Grimace" associated with the notion of ugliness refers to all the social vices and wrongdoings. And the language of a theatrical image— independently from the subject himself— shows, but does not paraphrase for the sake of totalization, "an image" which, in turn, rejects all the biased sameness of "an Attic grace," of a poetry of ascendancy and glory that does not account for what Frost calls "a diminished thing", the ontology of being (the poetry of otherness).

Against Subjectivity: The Poetry of Science

To achieve this poetics of impersonality, the Modernist language should, like in Frost and Eliot, refuse any literary form of subjective totalization (the introspective and personal poetry), because subjective aesthetics is for Pound too much focused on "the obscure reveries/Of the inward gaze" (13-14), a language oriented toward the internal, dark world of the subject's consciousness from which no social truth can come out without categorizing the outward object, without paraphrasing under his own clichés the realistic values of our modern societies. Explaining Levinas's philosophy of language, Sean Hand points out that such poetry of nonjudgmental values demands the "forsakenness of the other" through the "arnachy" of language:

It is because in an approach, there is inscribed or written the trace of infinity, the trace of a departure, but the trace of what is inordinate does not enter into the present, and inverts the *arche* into anarchy, that there is the forsakenness to the other, obsession with him, responsibility and a self. (Hand 106)

Pound's poetry obeys this philosophy of language. Like his modernist fellows, Pound's poem, "Hugh Selwyn Mauberley", forsakes the poetic subject by insulating the subjective use of "paraphrase" from the modernist language. As Pound makes it himself clear, the subject makes use of the periphrastic language to attempt to interpret, elucidate, cohere with and conventionalize the poetic object, obscuring the essence of every dramatic aspect of a given social object under the traditional formulae. The subject needs theatrical language that could create the condition of a face-to-face with the object: "direct treatment meant "presentation," the thrusting of the reader into the middle of intellectual and emotional complexes without signposts or comforting explanations" (Mitchell 144). The modern poet should instead look for non-interpretative, theatrical art that attempts to offer the subject the possibility of meeting the poetic object with dramatic words: "One art [...] would almost touch upon theatricals, [...] That is where real drama begins, and where we leave what I have called, with odium, 'theatricals'" (Pound "Arnold Dolmetsch" 435).

To avoid periphrasis, what Pound demands that the modernist poet use then is a poetic language that should be automatic (involuntary) like science and far-fetched like plastic art, a particular linguistic medium that should approach modern critical facts as mechanically and objectively as possible, with no personal, coherent judgment and appreciation of the poetic subject:

The 'age demanded' chiefly a mould in plaster,
Made with no loss of time,
A prose kinema, not, not assuredly, alabaster
Or the 'sculpture' of rhyme.

This fragment has the impersonal keynote of the 19th-century Parnassian poetry¹ :
“the technique in Gautier's early work [...] is about as good as that of the best English verse in the 1890s. The English of that period added little to the sum of knowledge in poetic practice. To understand what was invented after 1830, I recommend Théophile Gautier's *Emaux et Camées*, Corbière, Rimbaud, Laforgue. To see how a man could write a single line or a brief paragraph of verse” (Pound. *ABC of Reading* 78). Pound compares Gautier's poetics with scientific technique and invention. He appreciates this type of poetry because it is impersonal. It avoids the perversion of the subject's personality and subjectivity. Science captures all the complex nature of an object, avoiding subjective interpretations.

In Pound's aforementioned excerpt, the subject insists that a typical poetic language should immediately be invented to capture the complexities of the object, like science, and carve its elusive, diverse characteristics to a standstill in proportion to the impersonal characteristics of modernity, “with no loss of time.”²
But that language breaks away with the ascendancy of strict versification, with

¹ Théophile Gautier was the founder of the Parnassian movement in 19th-century France. He recommended the poets of his generation to make use of 'art for art's sake' in order to avoid sensibility, personality and the social utility of art. Ezra Pound's "Hugh Selwyn Mauberley" is inspired from Gautier's poem, 'Art' (*Enamels and Cameos*). Both poems develop their aesthetic principles.

² In fact, for Pound, modern poetic art should act like science. Modernity that characterizes science saves time, since we live in a complex, fast-running world of technologies and machines.

“the sculpture” of perfect rhyme, because it must be automatic and involuntary, like modern machines to reproduce, with no subject’s implication, the complex pictures of the modern object. As he quotes Ezra Pound, Lui Yihui reminds us on his famous sentences about modernist poetic art:

According to Pound [...], ‘image is that which presents an intellectual and emotional complex in an instant of time’. To be more specific, “it is the presentation of such a complex instantaneously which gives the sense of sudden liberation from time limits and space limits.” (Lui 74)

Like Eliot, whose quest for impersonal poetic language is an absolute necessity, Pound clearly opens the way to a new epistemological and psychological revision of both the strictly realistic and the strictly subjective poetry of the romantic past. A psychological refusal of the tradition of introspective poetry is due to its confessional mode of social truth. An epistemological refusal of the old realist poetry is explained by the strict absence of the subject’s emotions considered capable of darkening the path to social truths. For modernist poets, the impersonal language of poetry is that which captures social realities along with all its complex; elusive and diverse emotions, with the subject’s objective distance, like an impartial observer (or camera) that describes all the details of a social object with its diverse impressions and feelings as exactly as they appear in their ontological reality.

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