

Contemporary British Poetry and The Objectivists.

Submitted by Alison Jane Stone, to the University of Exeter as a thesis for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in English, April 2017.

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Abstract

This thesis examines a neglected transatlantic link between three post-war British poets – Charles Tomlinson, Gael Turnbull and Andrew Crozier – and a group of Depression-era modernists: the Objectivists. This study seeks to answer why it was the Objectivists specifically, rather than other modernists, that were selected by these three British poets as important exemplars. This is achieved through a combination of close readings – both of the Americans’ and Britons’ poetry and prose – and references to previously unpublished correspondence and manuscripts. The analysis proceeds via a consideration of how the Objectivists’ principles presented a challenge to dominant constructs of ‘authority’ and ‘value’ in post-war Britain, and the poetic is figured in this sense as a way-of-being as much as a discernible formal mode. The research concentrates on key Objectivist ideas (“Perception,” “Conviction,” “Objectification”), revealing the deep ethical concerns underpinning this collaboration, as well as hitherto unacknowledged political resonances in the context of its application to British poetries. Discussions of language-use build on recent critical perspectives that have made a case for the ‘re-forming’ potential of certain modernist poetries, particularly arguments about ‘paratactic’ versus ‘fragmentary’ modernisms, and as such the three British poets’ interest in the Objectivists is interpreted as a response to a need for restitution following the trauma of World War II. Ultimately, it is argued that this interaction (which this thesis figures in explicitly transatlantic terms) was a challenge to the emphasis placed on collective and normative viewpoints in much post-war British poetry, many of which were located in an organic conception of ‘nation.’ This study claims that the Objectivists’ example posited a contrasting poetic, foregrounding

individual agency and capacity for thought as the only viable means for the poet to re-connect with and make meaningful statements about society and the world.

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Abbreviations

<i>CPAC</i>	Collected Poems Andrew Crozier (<i>All Where Each Is</i>)
<i>CPCT</i>	Collected Poems Charles Tomlinson
<i>CPGO</i>	New Collected Poems George Oppen
<i>CPGT</i>	Collected Poems Gael Turnbull (<i>There Are Words</i>)
<i>CPRk</i>	Collected Poems Carl Rakosi
<i>CPI/II Rz</i>	Collected Poems Vol 1/ 2 Charles Reznikoff
<i>CPI/II WCW</i>	Collected Poems Vol 1/ 2 William Carlos Williams
<i>SPLZ</i>	Selected Poems Louis Zukofsky
<i>CSPLZ</i>	Collected Short Poems Louis Zukofsky (<i>All</i>)

Archival Abbreviations

CAM	University of Cambridge Special Collections
HRC	Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center (Austin TX)
NLS	National Library of Scotland (Edinburgh)
MLS	Manuscript Letter Signed
TLS	Typed Letter Signed
MS	Manuscript
TS	Typescript
N.d	Non-dated
Anon.	Anonymous Author

Note: Archival materials are referenced in the same manner as they are found in collections e.g. with 'account numbers' Acc. Xxx. For materials from the HRC, the date and type of material is referenced, followed by the name of the collection in which the letter/ manuscript appears, then the box and folder number e.g. 24th May 1966, TLS to Charles Tomlinson. Kenner 50.1. HRC; this denotes Hugh Kenner's collection, box 50, folder 1.

Original spellings have been preserved, including variations between English and American English. Owing to the informal nature of much of the correspondence, only misspellings which are most likely to be unintentional have been marked “[sic].”

Postmarks have been sought in order to accurately date letters. As English and American date formats vary, where no post mark has been available for verification the format has been followed according to the nationality of the author (e.g. a letter from Zukofsky would be assumed to be dated month/ day/ year, rather than day/ month/ year).

Introduction

Contemporary poetry is prone to categorisation. Boundaries may be drawn on the bases of nationality, literary antecedents, philosophical influences or a whole range of other linguistic and conceptual preferences; whatever the category, there exists an overarching tendency to compartmentalise poets and their poetry. This has certainly been the case with contemporary poetry in Britain following the Second World War, where, as Randall Stevenson notes, “it was divided more complicatedly than contemporary fiction or drama into movements and counter-movements, each attempting through poetic practice and critical discussion to establish what the true priorities of poetry should be” (166). The role that anthologies have played in establishing these divisions is well-recognised. A. Alvarez, Blake Morrison, Anthony Thwaite and Ian Sinclair are a few individuals on a roster of names that have contributed anthologies and essays assuming positions, or making claims for certain ways of ‘best’ writing poetry. Though recent scholarship has occupied a more flexible reading of the divisions interweaving British poetry (something I shall not ignore),¹ the fact remains that more than forty years after Eric Mottram gained editorship of the Poetry Society and nearly sixty years after the first of Robert Conquest’s *New Lines* anthologies appeared, critics, readers, publishers and poets still debate the various dichotomies and groupings of poetry in Britain. This is the background against which this study is situated.

At first glance then, the so-called ‘Objectivist’ poets would appear to fit such a delineating tendency perfectly. The adjectival name for the group points towards a

¹ Zachary Leader’s 2009 edited collection of essays, *The Movement Reconsidered*, is an example of a study which has sought to read poetry from this period in a different light.

poetic propensity to describe an approach in a name, and their suffix places them within a modernist continuum of “ists” and “isms” that includes Imagism, Futurism and Vorticism. The modernist credentials of this group are, in fact, impeccable: its first appearance was in the February 1931 issue of Harriet Monroe’s *Poetry* magazine, guest edited by Louis Zukofsky at Ezra Pound’s recommendation and including Zukofsky’s essay “Program: ‘Objectivists’ 1931,” which was to become a manifesto-of-sorts for the group (which was not cohesive – a matter I shall return to shortly). The Objectivists did publish the obligatory anthology too, *An Objectivists Anthology* in 1932, and there was a short-lived “Objectivist Press,” notably publisher of William Carlos Williams’ *Collected Poems* in 1934. Considering that this group was unmistakably ‘American’ (an identification that Williams is of course well-known for), associated with an avant-garde modernism, and their work not widely available nor recognised in Britain at the time, it initially appears both unlikely and fascinating that the Objectivists should make such an impact on a select group of poets writing after the Second World War on the other side of the Atlantic. This connection becomes all the more intriguing when considering that the British poets of this thesis were initially separated from their elder American contemporaries by, at minimum, a twenty year gap after the publication of *An Objectivists Anthology*, making the relationship both transatlantic and somewhat intergenerational (Tomlinson’s *Relations and Contraries* was published in 1951 and Turnbull’s first collection in 1954, although the post-war return to writing of George Oppen and Carl Rakosi, as well as the latter work of Williams and Zukofsky, situates the American poets as elder contemporaries of the Britons I shall discuss).² Indeed, the interest of British

² See Ron Silliman’s “Third Phase Objectivism” for an account of the post-war revival of interest in the Objectivists’ work.

poets in this group not only traversed geographic and generational boundaries, but also occurred within the context of the oftentimes antagonistic divisions, movements and groupings of the British poetry scene, meaning that the initiation and cultivation of these relationships required a good deal of effort on the part of the British poets of this thesis – a matter which is testimony to the degree of their admiration.

With this in mind, this study will set out to examine contemporary British poetry in relation to Objectivist poetics, both how this intellectual exchange imbued the work of the British poets I shall discuss with new formulations and techniques for writing poetry, and also how it highlighted the poetic practice of an ethically-conscious approach towards the world and the possibilities of language. That these friendships and influences occurred and meant a great deal personally on both sides is not in dispute; numerous, revealing archival sources to which I shall refer attest to the existence of this link. Accordingly then, this thesis shall attempt to get to the bottom of the *nature* of these poetic relationships and ask, as its central overarching research question, why it was the Objectivists, over other modernists, that held an appeal to the British poets of this study. Central to my analysis will be the thesis that Objectivist principles urged a heightened awareness of and resistance to collective standpoints which were seen to posit experience as generalised and vague, and assumed to speak for everybody; I argue that Objectivist-influenced poets worried that such collectivisms represented a compromise of individuality – or, more specifically, agency. In order to fully unpick this proposition, I shall examine both the British and American poets' work through the lens of two further, closely-related research questions: how did Objectivist poetics necessitate an interrogation of both authority and value (terms I shall define shortly), constructs that it viewed as important guardians of collective and hierarchical world views? Additionally, at a time

when the poets of my thesis bemoaned the “provincialism” of British poetry,³ this thesis requires a consideration of what this unlikely transatlantic collaboration reveals about the attitudes of my poets towards national identity in poetry. This matter is rather expansive, particularly because the idea of “a nation’s literature” or “national literature” gained renewed prominence after the Second World War.⁴ My intervention here shall be to consider how far a British interaction with the Objectivists offered a premise for a contestation of “nation” as a “viable category for discrete study” (Manning and Taylor 2), presenting a challenge both to nation’s homogenising authority and its position, at the time, as an uninterrogated determinant of ‘value.’ In this way, Pascale Casanova has proposed an irrevocable link between literature and the state, where “through language, the one serves to establish and reinforce the other” (66), claiming furthermore that the process of canon formation is fundamentally linked with nationality: “[Literature’s] history is one of incessant struggle and competition over the very nature of literature itself – an endless succession of literary manifestos, movements, assaults, and revolutions... literary capital is national” (66, 67). Like the ‘anthology wars’ of twentieth century British poetry then, and the anthology from which the Objectivists themselves sprung, this thesis is an account of a deliberate and conscious creative coming-together, one that the poets on both sides of the Atlantic believed capable of restoring a vital relationship between poet, language and society – a connection that was thought, for various reasons at the time, to be remiss. Via my research

³ This is a term that will reoccur with frequency in this study. Though a few British poets held a similar view, Charles Tomlinson and Donald Davie are particularly fond of this phrase. It pops up with relative frequency in letters: see Tomlinson’s letters to Hugh Kenner (Kenner 49.5. HRC) and Davie’s letters to Tomlinson (Tomlinson 17-18. HRC).

⁴ Randall Stevenson (3-5) and Susan Manning and Andrew Taylor (“Introduction”), are examples of critics who have similarly observed a renewed interest in the “stabilising” effects of nation as an analytical premise following the Second World War.

questions, I shall seek to demonstrate the importance of the Objectivists' work as a "world-building" (a phrase of Ben Hickman's which I shall explain shortly) and reconstituting poetry, one capable of restoring meaningfulness and self-efficacy in a turbulent world.

While my research questions themselves are relatively straightforward, what their investigation reveals is that the bases on which these Anglo-American relationships were formed is subtly nuanced and multiplicitous, and is more than simply an absorption of certain formal techniques. With this in mind, my thesis foregrounds the notion of "influence" and how far it can be confidently determined. Influence has been defined as something which is documented, or can be measured via citations, references, or other such "empirical," quantifiable means (Manning and Taylor 6-8). Indeed, a substantial part of the analyses and interpretations that I shall propose are informed by original archival work: during the writing of this thesis I travelled to the National Library of Scotland to visit Gael Turnbull's archive (containing letters and drafts from Williams, Zukofsky, Basil Bunting, Denise Levertov, and many others), the University of Cambridge to view materials relating to Andrew Crozier (Cambridge is in the process of acquiring his, and other contemporary "Cambridge poets" archives), and spent substantial time in the Harry Ransom Center in Austin, Texas, studying the archives of Charles Tomlinson, Louis Zukofsky and American critic Hugh Kenner. Via these archives I have also come into contact with correspondence and other materials from a number of other poets and critics, among them Donald Davie, Cid Corman, and Roy Fisher. In many ways, the archival work that has enriched this study has been, in itself, a reflection of my research questions; just as financial means dictate the movement between and depositing of materials in certain archives, one might also ask how it is that the level

of value attributed to certain poets' work determines where their materials end up. In the case of Tomlinson, whose extensive archive was acquired by the Ransom Center in 1993, we might ask how it is that the work of this important poet, who for all his travels remained "essentially English in voice and vision" (Young 67), came to be situated in Austin, Texas. This is surely a statement about the constant process of value-determination and canonisation, a matter which is brought into sharper relief with a poet's passing.⁵

Approaching the archive then with a will to uncovering influence as something "measurable" is certainly applicable when tracing the existence of these friendships themselves – Tomlinson and Oppen, for example, corresponded and met over a twenty year period – and it is also evident in some of the poems too; a later chapter for instance contains a genetic reading of a Tomlinson poem via a draft sent to Louis Zukofsky. However, the question of influence considered in this measurable way has only limited applicability considered in light of my stated research questions, and can only develop my argument so far. In spite of the use of archival materials in this thesis, it is my conviction that the precise nature of a British-Objectivist connection can only truly be grasped by combining such sources with close readings of the poems themselves. Accordingly, my approach is concerned with unravelling latent positions and poetic convictions arising from a sustained engagement with the poetics – both British and American – rather than taking archival materials as my predominant, authoritative account. To explain the rationale behind this approach: it is, for instance, evident in letters and manuscripts from Tomlinson, Turnbull and Crozier that each was concerned about "provincialism," the praise of poems which

⁵ At a celebratory event held for Tomlinson at the University of Bristol in September 2016 (attended by myself), the poet's relative lack of recognition in his lifetime was a reoccurring topic of conversation.

promoted a homogenous sense of Englishness, but it is unclear in letters how this preoccupation accounts for an interest in the Objectivists specifically. Similarly, each of the three poets places emphasis on the need for clear and precise writing, yet the ethical implications of this interest considered in light of the Objectivists' work are also not clear from letters alone. Most importantly, there is hardly any political discussion between the poets, save for a brief conversation between Williams and Turnbull about canon formation; archival materials consulted during my research often contain mutual criticism, or recommendations for reading, but no real conversation on current affairs or political inclinations. Considering the prevalent position which politically-informed perspectives have occupied in readings of the Objectivists' work, such discussion is rather conspicuous by its absence from the archive. However, I wish to make a case throughout this thesis that this political inflection was a great 'unsaid' of the relationship between the Objectivists and my three British poets, a matter that shall be elucidated and come to light via my research questions.

In stating that the poetry itself shall form the bedrock of this thesis, it is necessary to outline how these readings might proceed. Like many modernisms, Objectivism gives the impression of theoretical density, or appears to invite examination from a number of different twentieth-century theoretical standpoints. Certainly, phenomenology, structuralism and critical realism are three perspectives that could reasonably be applied here, and would surely yield relevant readings. Yet, for the purpose of my research questions, there is little to affirm the profitability of pursuing such angles when thinking about the transatlantic ties between these two groups of poets. In fact, there are personal accounts on both sides (British and Objectivist) expressing a distaste for theoretical formulations, which are cast aside in

favour of a stated preference for “clarity” and “simplicity.” Though I shall occasionally use some elements of critical theory when a particular theoretical viewpoint enlightens a certain aspect of the poetry, I believe it would be misguided to consistently pursue one such reading.

Before stating my reasons for selecting Tomlinson, Turnbull and Crozier as the British focuses of this thesis, it is important to note that the Objectivists – whom Donald Allen’s influential 1960 anthology of poetry referred to as the “younger generation” (xi) of American modernists – have enjoyed a relatively recent upsurge in critical interest. The National Poetry Foundation’s *George Oppen* collection of essays and interviews as part of their *Man/ Woman and Poet* series (1981) brought together critical work on Oppen for the first time, but it was twenty years later that an upsurge of interest in Oppen really began: 2002 saw the publication of Oppen’s *New Collected Poems* with a lengthy introduction by editor Michael Davidson, which was followed four years later by the first monograph on the poet, by Lyn Graham Barzilai (*George Oppen: A Critical Study*). However, it is Peter Nicholl’s *George Oppen and the Fate of Modernism* (2007), combining archival sources with close reading, that made the most impactful case for a rediscovery of Oppen’s work, claiming the American’s poetry as both a formally and politically radical alternative to the modernism of Eliot and Pound. More recently, British critic Richard Swigg has done much to bring Oppen into the minds of readers on this side of the Atlantic with his online publication of Tomlinson’s and Oppen’s complete letters in *Jacket* (“Addressing One’s Peers”). Swigg’s 2016 study, *George Oppen: The Words in Action*, brings together all of his essays on the American poet which have previously appeared elsewhere. A similar upward curve of interest can be observed in relation to Louis Zukofsky, for whom Mark Scroggins has been a key source of publications,

most notably the poet's collected prose, *Prepositions* (2001), and the biography *The Poem of a Life* (2007). Ruth Jennison's more recent monograph, *The Zukofsky Era* (2012), looks in detail at the American's work through a political lens, and has done much to reveal deeply embedded social concerns via close readings of his poems, as well as via perspectives such as Zukofsky's documented interest in handicrafts. British critic Ben Hickman's 2015 *Crisis and The US Avant-Garde* also contains a chapter on Zukofsky, situating him as an important precursor of later twentieth century politicised poetics. Aside from these major studies – and there are many other, essay-length contemplations of the Objectivists' work available in journals such as *Contemporary Literature* and *American Literature* dating from (roughly) the 1990s onwards – key names in the critical appreciation of the Objectivists include American academics who have done much to rediscover other neglected modernists. Marjorie Perloff, Rachel Blau DuPlessis, Charles Altieri, Peter Quartermain and Burton Hatlen are all therefore prominent and reoccurring critics in this thesis.

In spite of a growing body of work on the Objectivists as individuals, there remain only two studies which are dedicated to considering their work as a group. Michael Heller's *Conviction's Net of Branches* (1985) was the first monograph devoted to Objectivist poetics; the readings presented in its pages, with one chapter addressing each poet, remain highly insightful, and certainly illuminate some of my analyses to come. Over a decade later *The Objectivist Nexus* (1999), a collection of essays edited by Rachel Blau DuPlessis and Peter Quartermain, brought together responses to this poetic from both American and British critics. *The Objectivist Nexus* contains significant examinations of the Objectivists' contribution to modernism more broadly, and is much more concerned than Heller's study with

tracing their influence on later twentieth century poets and movements. For example, in one essay Burton Hatlen views Objectivism as a pivotal poetic, “the chief link between the great American modernists, especially Pound, Williams, Stein, Moore and Stevens, and our principal poetic avant-gardes of the post-war years from the Black Mountain school to the Language poets” (54). In the book’s final essay, a retrospective on Objectivist legacies, Charles Altieri mirrors Hatlen’s comments, making a claim for observable influences on later Concrete and *L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E* poetries (301- 317). The most important matter to observe about these two books in the context of my study, however, is that neither – in spite of the latter’s concern with influence and inheritance – make reference to an observable effect outside the geographic boundaries of America. Indeed, as I shall discuss in my final chapter, the fact that Objectivism has often been considered as a pointedly *American* modernist poetic has likely hindered its acknowledgement as an influence on post-war “neo-modernist” or “late-modernist” (terms that seem to have been used interchangeably to refer to post-war formally innovative) poetry in Britain. In this sense, I believe the introduction to Michael Heller’s book to be particularly intriguing. It contains a short, but revealing post-script: “[I have] not included a discussion of the English poet Basil Bunting, who is often linked with these poets, since my subject here is American poetry. It can be argued that Bunting, as well as some other Objectivist-influenced poets in England, represents another line of development worthy of study by some English critic” (xii). Heller’s book therefore acknowledges the existence of a transatlantic inheritance; but, as Heller’s main criterion for inclusion and omission is nationality, the matter is not pursued further.

This lack of critical connection between the Objectivists specifically and post-war British poetries is a matter repeated on this side of the Atlantic. To date, the

study that comes closest to elucidating this link is Richard Swigg's 1994 monograph *Charles Tomlinson and the Objective Tradition*. In it, Swigg reads Tomlinson's poetry as emanating from the wide-ranging influences of William Wordsworth, Walt Whitman and visual artists such as Ruskin and Cezanne. Close attention is paid to an American modernist influence; sustained readings of what Tomlinson has developed from the poetry of William Carlos Williams and Marianne Moore form a large part of the study. Crucially, however, the "objective tradition" outlined is never *Objectivist*. This is surprising given that the author makes several references to Tomlinson's memoir, *Some Americans* (republished as *American Essays* by Carcanet in 2001), which contains first-hand accounts of the poet's meetings with both Louis Zukofsky and George Oppen in America in 1963. Swigg's intention at the time was to examine the "empirical" character of Tomlinson's work; while writing the book he was not familiar with the connection to the Objectivists, and the title "Objective" tradition was thrust upon him by his publisher.⁶ Still, the features of Tomlinson's work that Richard Swigg highlights in his monograph – such as a "move towards a literature of encounter" (27) – are undoubtedly sympathetic with an Objectivist poetic. Swigg is now widely known as Tomlinson's foremost critic and has recently, as per his aforementioned 2016 book on Oppen, turned his critical attentions to Tomlinson's American friend.

Certainly, of the three British poets of this thesis, Tomlinson is the most well-known and has received the most critical attention. Once more, however, this (relative) attention has failed to seriously investigate a link with the Objectivists. Monographs on Tomlinson's work by Brian John (1989) and Michael Kirkham (1999) contain barely any consideration of an American connection, and essays and

⁶ This was a question I put to Swigg himself in January 2015 in a personal conversation.

reviews which conversely have acknowledged the ‘Americanised’ element of Tomlinson’s poetic – such as Alan Young’s short “Rooted Horizon: Charles Tomlinson and American Modernism” – have not explored the link with the Objectivists specifically. This is of crucial importance, because a central claim of this thesis, which shall be reiterated time and again, is that an admiration of Objectivism constituted a discerning and purposeful alignment with a particular set of poetic approaches and values, an affinity with one kind of modernism over others. The two most relevant studies in this case then are Magid and Witemeyer’s curation of material on the connection between Tomlinson and William Carlos Williams, *A Transatlantic Connection* (1999), and an essay by Edward Hirsch appearing in Hatlen’s *George Oppen: Man and Poet* (1981), titled “The Visual Imperative in the Poetry of George Oppen and Charles Tomlinson.” Hirsch’s essay is rare in that it reads between the poems themselves, finding both poets’ work to stem from a similar visual ethos.⁷

Although Tomlinson is the most well-known of my three British poets, the critical attention he has received pales in comparison to many of his contemporaries. Andrew Crozier has, for instance, declared there to be an impenetrable Larkin-Hughes-Heaney triad present in post-war discussions of poetry in the British Isles (“Thrills” 19-26), from which the three poets of my study were excluded. In this respect, the critical interest afforded to Gael Turnbull and Andrew Crozier is also unjustifiably small, and even less than Tomlinson’s. It is only posthumously that much of these two poets’ work is even to be found in print, owing to the recent work of dedicated individuals – notably Ian Brinton (editor of all three available Carcanet

⁷ The other critical work to do this is again from Swigg, appearing in *George Oppen: The Words in Action*. See especially 113-115.

editions of Crozier's work [2012, 2013, 2015]) and Hamish Whyte (Turnbull's *More Words* of 2012). Neither poet has a critical monograph dedicated to his poetry, and what brief appreciations there are to be found are largely scattered as reviews in little magazines (such as Kenneth Cox's short appraisal of Turnbull in *Scripsi* [1984]) or in online publications, or blogs.⁸ Interestingly, Alex Latter has recently published a study of Crozier's *English Intelligencer* magazine (*Late Modernism and The English Intelligencer* [2015]), identifying a strong link with American "restitutive" modernisms. Though an important historicizing account of the poetic activity to be traced within *The Intelligencer's* pages, the book is far more focused on J. H. Prynne and Veronica Forrest-Thompson than it is on Crozier, containing only a brief reading of his *High Zero* and few references to the Objectivists. Consequently, this thesis presents some of the most sustained readings of both Turnbull's and Crozier's work and, in the case of some poems, the first ever.

If we are to broaden out the criteria for assessing the current available literature away from only work on Tomlinson, Turnbull and Crozier, it becomes apparent that there is a growing body of writing on this side of the Atlantic – some of it very recent – from critics that have identified an American, modernist influence on some of the more avant-garde orientated poets of the mid-twentieth century. For instance, Neil Corcoran's *English Poetry Since 1940* (1993) labels a number of Britons, including Roy Fisher, "neo-modernists"; Randall Stevenson's contribution to *The Oxford Literary History: The Last of England?* (2004) positions Tomlinson as the modernist antithesis to the Movement poetic of Larkin; Robert Sheppard's *The Poetry of Saying* (2005) is an important contextualising account of post-war avant-

⁸ See Brinton's useful Crozier bibliography at the back of the *Crozier Reader* (261-265). In fact, many of the critical appraisals of these two very different poets' work are to be found in similar online repositories; most notably *Jacket* and *Blackbox Manifold*.

garde poetries in which Turnbull and Crozier are mentioned; *The Oxford Handbook of Contemporary British and Irish Poetry* (ed. Peter Robinson [2013]) featured more than one essay on modernist legacies and transatlantic readings, including a (rare) chapter on Andrew Crozier; and most recently, Abigail Lang and David Nowell Smith's 2015 edited collection *Modernist Legacies: Trends and Faultlines in British Poetry Today*, contains a number of acknowledgements of American influences on today's British avant-garde. These surveys do all represent critical viewpoints somewhat more skewed towards the alternative or avant-garde elements within contemporary British poetry, but once again there is no sustained discussion of Objectivism bar passing references, and certainly no fine-grained consideration of its influence. I reiterate once more that this is important, because in surveys claiming to offer broad-brush perspectives, Objectivism is not differentiated from other modernisms; again, I claim in this thesis that Objectivism constituted a particular type of modernism whose outlook and practice appealed to the poets of this thesis over and above other possibilities.

In conclusion therefore, my original contribution to knowledge is quite clear: there has never before been a fulsome study linking the Objectivists with post-war poetry in Britain. In the case of Turnbull and Crozier too, critical analyses of their work are so few that this study also offers a number of entirely original readings. Additionally, this thesis contains a substantial amount of archival material, almost all of which is previously unpublished, and in the case of some of these correspondences – notably Williams' letters to Turnbull and Tomlinson – comparisons and connections have been formed between materials found in British archives and those housed abroad in America. This thesis then builds on the recent work of Jennison, Hickman and Latter, who have all identified a reconstructive

element in twentieth-century avant-garde poetics and claimed its distinction from so-called fragmentary modernisms; but these critics do not, however, consider these readings in light of possible transatlantic connections (it is Lattin that comes closest to this), and therefore not in a context of the “provincialism” of British post-war poetry. In fleshing-out a direct and unjustly neglected relationship between the Objectivists and three contemporary British poets then, this thesis contributes to our understanding of the breadth of British poetry’s engagement with modernism, as well as the range of artistic possibilities available to the British poet to make sense of a post-war world which was monumentally changed. For the Objectivists too, this thesis illuminates a wider and unacknowledged audience for their work, and extends their influence beyond the geographic boundaries of their own country where their importance is not in doubt. Therefore, this thesis has much to say about the internationalisation of literature post-world-war, the processes and contingencies of value-formation, and the importance of “productive, individual friendships” (Tuma 115), even across great distances. My use here of the word “internationalisation” rather than “globalisation,” is important: in this thesis I shall figure this transatlantic collaboration as a deliberate, and discerning intersection of discrete ideas – hence the distinction between “inter” and the more homogenising “global.”⁹ As shall become clear in the course of my chapters, the idea of discrimination and deliberateness is of fundamental importance to the ideas the Objectivist poetic propagates.

⁹ This is an idea borrowed from Paul Giles’ “Transnationalism and Classic American Literature” (47). Giles’ observation that national conflicts are “lived out experientially” is also relevant to Objectivist ideas, which I shall show value direct experience over theorisation.

Having highlighted my research questions and the current lack of literature relating to a British connection with the Objectivists, it is now necessary to outline my rationale for selecting the three British poets whose work forms the basis of my argument, as well as to then define how Objectivism, as a poetic, shall be understood in the course of this thesis. Contemplating the nature of this link with the Objectivists, we must surely turn first to Basil Bunting, and again to Michael Heller's identification of Bunting as the sole British poet to be included in the special issue of *Poetry* and also the *Objectivists Anthology*, and as such, somewhat of an anomaly. A friend of Louis Zukofsky and Ezra Pound (corresponding with both extensively), Bunting's presence would seem to evidence an indisputable link between the two countries; but his figure, like the group itself, is somewhat problematic. Letters at the Harry Ransom Center exchanged with Zukofsky show the Briton's vociferous aversion to the label "Objectivist," and Bunting has written similarly to his younger contemporary and friend, Scottish poet Gael Turnbull: "As to [Zukofsky's] manifesto, I hate manifestos, never made one in my life and nearly quarrelled with Louis over the one he stuck in his Objectivist Anthology. I am not an 'ist'" (N.d. [likely 1965] TLS. Acc13430/13429. NLS). In *The Objectivist Nexus*, John Seed's chapter "Irrelevant Objects" (126–43) does position Bunting as part of an Objectivist concern, but the essay is mainly contextual with a focus on Bunting's literary network in the U.S., rather than a consideration of any "Objectivist" poetic techniques. In spite of his Britishness – and *Briggflatts* is, of course, famously evocative of Northumbria – I will not offer a sustained reading of Bunting here: it seems a misnomer to place a poet who protested so vociferously *against* being associated with Objectivism, as a central figure in a thesis which considers the influence of this poetic. Certainly references to Bunting will be made; this thesis acknowledges his place as a central

conduit for the dissemination of American modernist ideas in Britain, and he did (though he would perhaps say otherwise) uphold many Objectivist principles in his work, such as the overt endeavour towards clarity in both image and expression. Bunting's extensive correspondence with Scottish poet Gael Turnbull, archived at the National Library of Scotland in Edinburgh, is also a rich source of contemporary criticism and context about modernist-influenced poetry in Britain in the early to mid-twentieth century.

In placing Bunting – the only British entrant in the *Objectivists Anthology* – to one side, it would seem that the influence of this idiom on British poetry has been relegated to something which is second-hand, or diluted in nature. In fact, this relationship between the two countries, as I have already iterated, is nothing if not direct. The three British poets who have been selected as the focuses for this study – Charles Tomlinson, Gael Turnbull and Andrew Crozier – have been chosen because they have a number of factors in common: all are contemporaries, known to each other (but not necessarily friends) and writing in an almost identical period (with Crozier slightly the younger); each too has been identified as having modernist traits and has openly declared the influence of modernism on their work at some point in their careers. Most importantly however, all three have corresponded with and/ or met at least one of the American poets originally featured in the *Objectivists Anthology*. Both Tomlinson and Turnbull wrote to and met face-to-face with both William Carlos Williams and Louis Zukofsky;¹⁰ Tomlinson also developed a particularly warm friendship with George Oppen, during which the American and his wife Mary visited Tomlinson's home just outside Bristol; Crozier, whose links with

¹⁰ For accounts of these meetings from the British poets themselves, see Tomlinson's *American Essays* and Turnbull's *More Words*.

American poetics are similarly multiple, was the catalyst behind Carl Rakosi's return to poetry writing in 1967. As an undergraduate at Cambridge too, Crozier also wrote to Zukofsky in 1964, asking to print sections from "A" for the student magazine *Granta*.¹¹ So, for all these poets, links with the American Objectivists – and thus with the Objectivist 'mode' of writing – are very immediate. One only need consider Bunting's response to Turnbull when the younger poet first sent him some work to critique: "I suppose Dr Williams has seen your poems. I think both Pound and Zukofsky would like to see them too" (5th June 1957, TLS. Acc13430/13429. NLS). Letters such as this confirm not only a direct connection to the American avant-garde of the Objectivists, but also an intellectual lineage from the preceding, older generation of poets that included Imagist originator, Ezra Pound.¹²

There are undoubtedly many other British poets contemporary to my selected trio who can make a strong claim to be included in this thesis: those (like Turnbull) who gathered around Bunting and were involved in the Morden Tower readings, particularly Tom Pickard, would not be out of place here. Nor would Roy Fisher, another close friend of Turnbull's and introduced to Zukofsky's and Williams' work via him. Tom Raworth too is an extremely likely candidate; his own poetry displays a strong modernist affinity and his publishing work in the 1960s, notably *Outburst* Magazine and Goliard Press, presented work by the likes of Ed Dorn and Charles Olson to British readers. One could also make a highly credible case for Crozier's

¹¹ For accounts of Crozier's time in America with Charles Olson and other American poets, as well as for a copy of the original letter sent to Carl Rakosi and notes on their friendship thereafter, see Ian Brinton's *An Andrew Crozier Reader*. Letters exchanged between Crozier and Zukofsky number only four, exchanged between January and March 1964 (Zukofsky 21.7. HRC).

¹² For detailed discussions on Objectivism's development from Imagism, see the first chapter in Heller's *Conviction's Net*, "Louis Zukofsky's Objectivist Poetics: Reflections and Extensions" (16-21) and Andrew Crozier's essay "Zukofsky's List" in *The Objectivist Nexus* (275- 285). Altieri's *The Art of Twentieth Century American Poetry* also contains a considered account of how Pound and Williams formulated new, "realist" idioms within modernist poetry, a concept seminal for the Objectivists (11-51).

fellow 'Cambridge poet,' J. H. Prynne. Though all of these poets are unmistakably influenced by modernism (Fisher has privately called himself a modernist¹³) and American poetry, the link with the Objectivists specifically is not as quantifiably direct. In Tomlinson, Turnbull and Crozier, there is an undoubtable inheritance and exchange of ideas traceable through letters and criticism, on occasions leading to characteristics in their work that can be confidently attributed to friendships with the Objectivists. With Pickard for instance, a protégé of Bunting, his work displays many Objectivist-like tendencies, but his artistic lineage is firmly with the Northumbrian (protesting Objectivist) poet more than it is with any of the Americans. Fisher too, though some of his early work has been likened to that of Williams, has never made it imperative to explore an Objectivist poetic,¹⁴ and it is difficult to trace Raworth's poetic to the Objectivists specifically rather than the Black Mountain poets (though, of course, the two are very much related). So, while I acknowledge an important, wider American modernist influence in contemporary British poetry of this period, the aim here is to keep the link with Objectivism as convincing and traceable as possible.

A final figure with perhaps the strongest potential for inclusion here, is Denise Levertov. Born in North London, she moved to America aged twenty-four and became an American citizen in 1955. A close friend of William Carlos Williams, her poetry, prose and interviews are all demonstrative of Objectivist influences and serve as explicators in many senses of the Objectivist 'worldview.' However, her case is

¹³ In a letter to Turnbull regarding OUP's interest in publishing a "Collected" Roy Fisher, Fisher writes: "The reason why... is, I think, that they'd like a token 'modernist' – ageing, but not as old as Basil" (22nd January 1980, TLS. Acc12554/1. NLS).

¹⁴ Donald Davie is among others who have interpreted links between Fisher's *City* (1961) and Williams' *Paterson*; see the chapter "Roy Fisher: An Appreciation" in *Thomas Hardy and British Poetry*. This was somewhat to the dismay of Fisher: "I really must read this *Paterson* which everyone says I mimic" (TLS to Turnbull, 19th March 1962. Acc12554/1. NLS).

somewhat similar to Bunting's in that her interviews and also correspondence, particularly with Gael Turnbull, show that although she occupied a somewhat indeterminate nationality, she ultimately thought of herself as an American, *not* a British poet; it would therefore, like Bunting, be unfair to include her in an analysis of what she declared herself not to be. In spite of this, her work will be examined and returned to on a number of occasions in this thesis, in spite of the fact she is not part of my central trio of poets.

Given this thesis's concern with post-war poetic exchanges, it is important to note that containing this study within the boundaries of a specific temporality is somewhat tricky. Though key dates spring to mind, such as Tomlinson's visit to America and meetings with Oppen and Zukofsky in 1963 (see *American Essays*) or Andrew Crozier's receipt of a first letter from Carl Rakosi (see *Andrew Crozier Reader* 188-189), it cannot be said – especially since I am not making a case for a “British Objectivism” here (as I shall shortly explain) – that British interest and influence in Objectivist poetics started in one year and ended in another. Indeed, all three of the poets that are the focus of this study demonstrated an Objectivist vein in much of their work, throughout their writing lives. It can be said that this study broadly looks at poetic outputs from the late 1950s through to the late 1980s, where Tomlinson, Turnbull and Crozier were most frequently corresponding with the Objectivists, or engaging with their work poetically or critically; therefore, the best approximation is a start of 1958, when Turnbull and Williams first exchanged letters, and an end of 1987, when Carcanet published Crozier's *A Various Art*.

Defining some of the context in which this transatlantic literary exchange took place is even more important. Though we cannot say that British universities and the British poetry establishment in the late 1950s and 1960s were unanimously hostile

towards American and modernist poetry, contemporary accounts do testify that for Tomlinson, Turnbull and Crozier, satisfying their interest in this type of poetry involved a considerable amount of effort on their part. In the first instance, works by American modernist authors were almost impossible to come by, as such foreign collections were not published in Britain. Tomlinson's collection of essays and memoirs, *American Essays* (a re-print of *Some Americans*), attests to this difficulty; his first encounter with Ezra Pound's work, for example, was by chance in a second hand book shop. The poet also recalls, on commencing his studies at Cambridge in 1945, the indifference of the academy to most modernist writers: "Not a word [of Pound]. For all Cambridge knew, Pound might never have existed."¹⁵ Tomlinson clearly felt his position of difference keenly, and his American-influenced poetry initially struggled to gain recognition in his native country. This was so much the case that an American publisher, Obolensky in New York, accepted his 1958 collection *Seeing Is Believing* as a publisher had been unsuccessfully sought in Britain for some time. Recalling such circumstances, the poet was vociferous about the exclusion he felt: "The 1950s were an unpropitious time to write the kind of verse that interested me and England an unpropitious place in which to publish it. An heir of Pound, Moore, Crane and Stevens must inevitably appear an odd fish in English waters" (*American Essays* 124). Indeed, it is possible that this context may account to some extent for the lack of research into Objectivist poetics in Britain: research materials are sparse, scattered in short-lived little magazines and other publications.

For Tomlinson, as for others, Gael Turnbull was an invaluable source of poetic fodder from the United States. The Scottish poet, a doctor like William Carlos

¹⁵ 13. Though of course, it is very possible that this was as much due to Pound's political activities during the war as it was a general preference for Eliot's work.

Williams, frequently travelled between the UK, US and Canada as part of his work, bringing back collections of poetry that were not available in Britain and lending them to his poet friends. His collection of correspondence and manuscripts held in Edinburgh, many pertaining to the internationally-minded little magazine *Migrant* that he founded and edited which ran for just over a year (July 1959 – September 1960), provides fascinating insights into the divisions and preconceptions that existed in Britain between contemporaries, and also between British and American poets – even those keen to promote literary relations between the two countries. Denise Levertov for example, one of the poets David Herd has identified as part of a post-war “generation of great [American] independent poet-readers” (“Pleasure at Home” 49) and a friend of William Carlos Williams among others, was very outspoken about a perceived divide in many of her letters to Turnbull:

My opinion of contemporary British poetry is low. I don't see very much of it as I can't afford to buy a lot of little magazines, but what I do see seems to me retrogressive... I don't know where the hell Cid [Corman] thinks he's going to find British writers [for an issue of *Origin*] when there aren't any... Certainly, Britain could benefit from more contact with what's going on here – there's a crass and obstinate ignorance [in the UK] – but I guess you know that (N.d. [likely early 1950s] MLS. Acc13430/7 NLS).

While the three British poets of this study have not gone as far as to claim there was a “crass and obstinate ignorance” in the poetry of their country at the time, all have overtly identified themselves with an ‘alternative’ sentiment, or stated their belief that poetry of their kind, as they perceived it to be counter to some kind of Movement orthodoxy, was relegated from ‘mainstream’ outlets, appearing instead in little magazines with limited circulation and often out of print.¹⁶ Tomlinson has been one

¹⁶ Charles Tomlinson's 1957 anti-Movement essay “The Middlebrow Muse”, names some such outlets; prime examples include large publishing houses and long-established magazines such as *The Times Literary Supplement* and *The Listener*. Tomlinson has also complained in letters that large

of the most outspoken critics of Movement poetry, both the poetic itself and its tendency to be favoured by the traditional influencers of British public taste. He is most direct in “The Middlebrow Muse,” a 1957 review of Conquest’s *New Lines* anthology in which he calls Movement poetry “watered down,” among other failings. Gael Turnbull too, while not assuming as pointedly an anti-Movement position as Tomlinson, has complained about the reception of modernist-influenced poets in Britain. For instance, he wrote to Hugh Kenner about Basil Bunting’s magnum opus: “... it is BRIGGFLATTS that exists... suddenly Bunting seems to have made it possible to live [in England] again. Even stand up and walk around” (24th May 1966, TLS. Kenner 50.1. HRC). And Andrew Crozier, a voracious theorizer of poetry and the cliques surrounding it, wrote the influential essay “Thrills and Frills: Poetry as Figures of Empirical Lyricism.” In it, he charts the various interventions for and against Movement poetry (including Tomlinson’s work), seeing the Movement not as “the internecine feuding of small, conspiratorial groups of poets, let alone the successful dominance of one group” (28- 29), but still finding the poetic itself ultimately “remote and diminished” (24), an assessment mirroring that made in Tomlinson’s “Middlebrow Muse.” The essay, which finishes with a complimentary reading of Tomlinson’s “Geneva Restored,” reads like a call to arms for poets to “let language become so identified with [their material]” and for their art to be “informed by respect for the presence and character of things... [without] the poet’s intervention” (47). Crozier’s later essay, “Resting on Laurels” (*An Andrew Crozier Reader* 247-249), once more unpacks the tendency of the poetic establishment in Britain to canonise poetry in the Movement vein, poetry that is authenticated through

publishers – particularly university presses – sought to dismiss proposals from those who would wish to study his poetry, or make a claim for his prominent place within an English canon alongside the likes of Ted Hughes (see especially 13th May and 25th August, both MLS. Kenner 49.5. HRC).

the presence of an “originating self” (248). Indeed, again and again Crozier’s criticism ruminates on the processes and conventions by which a particular poetry is initiated into a British canon, or gains widespread popularity and praise. Crozier’s essays are important contemporary commentaries on poetry, culture and nationality, and will be returned to throughout this thesis.

Of course, when one starts speaking of “mainstream” and “avant-garde,” or “popular” and “alternative,” one immediately enters difficult territory. Movement and Objectivist poetries are not always diametrically opposed, but are for the most part very different in both concept and execution; labels must be used for the purposes of distinguishing one poetic from another. Robert Conquest, like many other editors of poetry anthologies, stated in the introduction to the second *New Lines* that “[the first] was not produced *a priori* on the grounds that a change of taste was needed, let alone to launch a ‘Movement’” (xiii), something he reiterates in a much later retrospective of the anthology’s formation (“*New Lines, Movements and Modernisms*”). Such reluctance to make claims for polemical groupings, while at the same time cultivating ‘definite’ standpoints through certain ways of writing, is a somewhat contradictory matter that shall crop up again in this thesis, but given that such tricky conditions exist, any critic must tread carefully when it comes to using grouping adjectives such as “mainstream” or “avant-garde.” Regarding the dichotomy that such terminology suggests – in this case an apparent Movement versus modernism or Objectivism – the aims of this thesis are not to praise one poetic in order to denigrate the other. I believe that such an approach would be reductive and, as it shall become clear, opposed to the ‘world view’ that the Objectivists themselves advocated via their work. However, as shown by the way Tomlinson, Turnbull and Crozier each ruminated over these constructs, the three *did*

view themselves as outside a perceived mainstream of British poetry, and as such this narrative of ‘outsiderness’ must be taken into any consideration of their work in an Anglo-American context. This is certainly an important backdrop in terms of these poets’ relationship with the Objectivists, particularly William Carlos Williams, who shared with the Britons a similar feeling of exclusion; indeed, it is a significant subject of his correspondence with Turnbull and Tomlinson. Whatever the constructs – “avant-garde”; “neo-modernist”; “late modernist”; “alternative” – what is without doubt is that a debt to American and modernist poetry was figured to be an uncommon influence in British poetry at the time.

It is now necessary to consider what, in this thesis, shall be taken to constitute the ‘Objectivist poetic’ or to write in the ‘Objectivist mode.’ This is problematic because, as I have already noted, the Objectivist poets did not form a cohesive group, hence the aforementioned sensitivity towards the subtly variant terms “Objectivist” and “Objectivism.” It has been well documented that the impetus to name the poets gathered together in a special issue of *Poetry* magazine in 1931, and indeed the anthology of the following year, came from *Poetry*’s editor, Harriet Monroe. In a retrospective interview with L .S. Dembo, Zukofsky recalled “I used the word ‘Objectivist’, and the only reason for using it was Harriet Monroe’s insistence... she told me, ‘You must have a movement’” (203). Dembo’s interviews with the four poets (Zukofsky, Oppen, Reznikoff and Rakosi), appearing in the journal *Contemporary Literature* in 1969, have crucially informed critics’ understanding of this poetic. While the poets are not adamantly anti-Objectivist like Basil Bunting, each does refute the existence of a movement where all members agreed on means and methods, and each gives a slightly different answer when asked to recall what

they believed Objectivist poetry to be at the time of its inception in the early 1930s. These historical circumstances, combined with the overall conceptual difficulty of both Zukofsky's poetry and prose (though Zukofsky himself would certainly refute this judgement¹⁷), have led to varied attempts at defining Objectivism. The most astute of these have emphasised that Objectivism has "situated meanings, not an absolute one" (DuPlessis and Quartermain 7), recognising the fact that Objectivist poetry may involve a wide range of subjects, methods, and does not have an "absolute" set of criteria that a poem must meet. This reading mirrors that of Michael Heller, who views Zukofsky's work as "a response to life's variousness" (31) and has emphasised how "open and inclusive" the poetry of the Objectivist is (34). Though Objectivism has been interpreted differently by each of the "original" American poets of 1931, this thesis will return time and again to Zukofsky's critical writings, gathered together by Charles Bernstein and Mark Scroggins in *Prepositions*. Chief among these is "Program: 'Objectivists' 1931" and "Sincerity and Objectification"; *A Test of Poetry*, while not strongly associated with Objectivism, provides valuable insights into the 'dos' and 'don'ts' of writing in the Objectivist mode, much in the same way as Ezra Pound's often-quoted essay, "A Retrospect" (1913). While these essays of course do not constitute a comprehensive and indisputable Objectivist model, they do present the core principles of approaching poetry in this way. I shall thus read the prose in the way inadvertently suggested by Carl Rakosi, recalling Zukofsky's theorizing: "Louis tried to define Objectivist but he couldn't quite do it. He was much better at saying what it was not" (*Collected Prose* 107).

¹⁷ For Zukofsky, simplicity was a compliment. He positioned clarity and directness as two key aspects of Objectivism, and believed his own poetry to be straightforward: "They say my poetry is difficult. I don't know – I try to be as simple as possible" (Dembo 206). This aim for clarity has a decidedly ethical impetus connected with the value of language, as I shall show in forthcoming chapters.

It is eminently clear then that defining the Objectivist poetic, or at least providing a reasonable outline of the parameters in which it operates, has the potential to become a thesis in itself. The very flexibility that Michael Heller praises means that many pages would need to be devoted in order to do Zukofsky, Oppen, Reznikoff and Rakosi's work justice. Since my subject is *British* poetry's inheritance from Objectivism – and indeed this is my unique angle – I shall not attempt to add my own definition to those that already exist, but rather focus my attention on its influence on this side of the Atlantic. To this effect, the short definition in the joint introduction to *The Objectivist Nexus* is one of the most coherent, and broadly summarises the reading I intend to take: “The term ‘Objectivist’ has come to mean a non-symbolist, post-imagist poetics, characterized by a historical, realist, antimythological worldview, one in which ‘the detail, not the mirage’ calls attention to the materiality of both the world and the word” (3). DuPlessis and Quartermain's definition highlights the fact that although Objectivist poetics are certainly flexible – hence the word “nexus” – there *are* some common characteristics and principles that can be identified. The two which are absolutely pivotal, and underwrite all Objectivist poetry, are: a sense of words as material objects which must be used with utmost care, befitting their status as things inherently capable of conveying meaning; secondly (and equally importantly), an experientially-attuned, detail-orientated approach to the ‘real’ world. In this sense language should aim for simplicity and clarity of expression combined with an overall care in composition where “a process of words acting on particulars” is evident at all times.¹⁸ Writing in the Objectivist

¹⁸ Rakosi 107. It should also be acknowledged that William Carlos Williams repeatedly asserted that free verse in poetry did not exist, given that all poems, whatever their form, are consciously constructed (see Williams' *Selected Essays* but particularly “The Poem as a Field of Action” [280-292]). This is near-identical to Crozier's attack on readings of free verse as haphazard and lacking formal rigour in *Free Verse as Formal Restraint*. Form in the Objectivist-influenced poem shall be tackled in the chapters “Conviction” and “Objectification”.

mode also seeks to avoid the overly allegorical or metaphorical, instead situating itself in the here-and-now and being concerned with immediate material objects, facts, or one fleeting but 'felt' moment of cognition. Williams has summarised: "true value is that peculiarity which gives an object a character by itself. The associational or sentimental value is the false" ("Prologue to *Kora in Hell*" 11). In this way, Objectivist poetry resists the urge to extrapolate a moment of poetic apprehension or cognition in order to make all-encompassing subjective statements about the nature of life or death. DuPlessis and Quartermain's definition, in its use of the word "worldview," furthers my suggestion that Objectivism denotes not only a way of writing, but a way of seeing and interacting with the world. Accordingly, there exists a kind of Objectivist vocabulary when it comes to discussing the nature of this worldly interaction; the attention of the Objectivist poet for instance, who sustains an "intensity of perception" (*CP II WCW* 54) and employs his or her eye to bring "the rays of an object to a focus" (Zukofsky, *Prepositions* 189) are revisited themes. Related to this perception is what George Oppen has called "the question of honesty, or sincerity" (Dembo 160); concomitant with a resistance to conceptual or emotional extrapolation, is the conviction that poets have an ethical responsibility to present things and events in as realistic and accurate manner as possible (something Oppen has referred to as "authenticity"). Many of these concepts were posited by Zukofsky in the essay "Sincerity and Objectification" and Oppen has given them a more explicitly moral dimension, but they are present in some degree or manifestation in the work of all the Objectivist poets and those influenced by them.

What is evident in the characteristics just described – and only fleetingly, at this point – is that although there are certainly identifiable Objectivist traits, they are multifaceted, complex, and sometimes contradictory. In this thesis, I shall treat them

as such: they shall be revisited time and again throughout the course of this study and, since they cannot really be adequately ‘described,’ I shall endeavour rather to *show* them through examples and close readings, often shifting between British and American examples. The very flexibility and mutability of these traits actually demonstrates a core undertaking of the Objectivist idiom: a resistance to finite, all-encompassing positions which allow the formation of antagonistic dichotomies – a matter which requires a very good deal of unpacking. In spite of such complexities and flexibilities however, it is important to be as definite as possible and acknowledge these traits’ existence, so that Objectivist poetics (with a capitalised ‘O’) can be distinguished from a generalised mood of being ‘objective’ in poetry. Indeed some of the British poets in this thesis have been noted to be ‘objective’ or even “objectivist” without any reference to a lineage from the American poets featured in the 1932 anthology. Edward Larrissy for example, has called Andrew Crozier an “objectivist” poet with apparent flippancy (*Reading Twentieth-Century Poetry* 116), and C. D. Blanton has likewise claimed that Crozier’s magazine, *The English Intelligencer*, fostered “a new objectivism,” with no clarifying reference to the modernist group (150). This is a key distinction, as Objectivist poetry does not specifically set out to be ‘objective,’ and even more so does not evidence a simplistic objective/subjective division. It is, most certainly, resistant to emotive extrapolation – or, more specifically, the poet’s emotion or egoic activities becoming the subject matter of the poem. But to be as simple as possible at this stage, the “intensity of perception” required of the poet, whether their attention be focused on a rose, a table, or an autumnal evening, means that the figure of the poet themselves often appears absent; a shift in focus therein occurs from words that ‘describe’ an experience or a feeling, to a response engendered in the objectified verbal texture of

the poem itself – an approach that relies on a conception of each word as a material object. Indeed, the Objectivist-influenced poet would surely argue that personal responses and interactions are more effectively rendered via such objectified ‘showing,’ rather than circumlocutory ‘describing.’ The best way to properly explain this figuration is, once more, to consult examples of its practice – as I shall do on multiple occasions in this study – but it is important to note that there is a real difference between casually-stated claims for ‘objective’ poetries and the capitalised “Objectivist” that is my subject. George Oppen overtly corrected this misconception when interviewed by Dembo: “There’s been tremendous misunderstanding [about Objectivism]. People assume it means the psychologically objective in attitude. It actually means the objectification of the poem, the making an object of the poem” (160). To summarise then, the Objectivist ‘rules’ of writing are a flexible matrix, but they *are* present, and it is in this way that Objectivism demonstrates its “conviction” (another common term that shall be returned to).

At this point, somewhat in the spirit of Bunting’s protestations, it needs to be clarified that when this thesis refers to “Objectiv*ism*,” it is out of grammatical necessity. Louis Zukofsky himself, in a retrospective interview with L. S. Dembo, claimed that he thought the term too closely connoted a grouping: “I don’t like those *isms*. I mean, as soon as you do that, you start becoming a balloon instead of a person, and a lot of people go chasing it” (“Louis Zukofsky” 203), and similarly, “the objectivist, then, is one person, not a group” (205). Carl Rakosi, another entrant in the *Objectivists Anthology*, has seconded Zukofsky’s view by stating that “there were Objectivists but no Objectivism, in the sense of a type of poetry” (*Collected Prose* 105). Therefore, I use this phrase in this study with the recognition that it is most likely not the one the Objectivists themselves would have supported.

Since my focus here is Objectivism's influence on British post-war poetries, it is fascinating to contrast the ways in which certain elements of the Objectivist poetic manifest themselves variously in the work of Tomlinson, Turnbull and Crozier. Though we might say broadly that all three concurred with Objectivist values of paying close attention, a belief in the value of language, and also a formal scrupulousness – the manifestations of which can be seen to varying degrees to take on ethical resonances – the Objectivist influence is certainly not uniform across their work. For example, Scottish poet Gael Turnbull's work is difficult to place because it treads the lines between Objectivist and allegorical modes of writing, and employs techniques of both. His poetry also utilises a very wide range of subject matter, spanning the sensuous, abstract, mythical, or social-realist within the same collection – he may appear to be markedly Objectivist in one poem, and totally the opposite in another. Charles Tomlinson's Objectivist influence, particularly in his early poetry, borrows some formal elements, such as a consideration for the use of different line forms and "the eye['s] response to lineation to manipulate emphases" (Larrissy 113), but his primary inheritance is *not* formal.¹⁹ Tomlinson's work instead concurs with a certain ethic of perception, and an engagement with a prescriptive ethical vocabulary which denotes a craftsmanlike approach to writing and a mutual, unhierarchical relationship between poet and world. For Andrew Crozier on the other hand, the influence is more identifiable in the form of his poems: his poetry displays a deep attention to language and the juxtaposition of individual, 'discrete' (another Objectivist word) words, as well as to line arrangements and repetitions. His

¹⁹ It cannot be ignored that in spite of the friendship and mutual respect between Tomlinson and George Oppen, their work on-the-page is nothing alike. It is also important to note, as evidenced by Tomlinson's papers at the HRC and monographs on his work by Swigg and Kirkham, that many of these ideas were gained in the first instance from other sources, and Objectivism provided an enlivening confirmation and supplementation.

compositions often display strong visual characteristics in order to highlight occasions of both similarity and contrast, connection and disconnection, leading Leo Mellor to read “The Veil Poem” for instance as “a form [much influenced by Oppen], where the very act of reading catalyses the disparate elements” (63).

Certainly then, it would be foolish to attempt to make a claim for a new, hitherto unrecognised group of “British Objectivists.” In the first instance the influence of Objectivism on each is too various to do so, and secondly, there was no sense of shared impetus or collaboration towards a rediscovery of this neglected modernist poetic. By way of demonstration of this disconnect, Turnbull wrote to Crozier in 1966, criticising the work he saw in *The English Intelligencer* as mere mimicry of American modes (*More Words* 163-164). Similarly, in late 1963 to early 1964 Crozier and Tomlinson were vying for the same sections of Zukofsky’s “A” to be reprinted in *Granta* and *Agenda* respectively (see Zukofsky 21.7 and 28.3. HRC). Though all three poets were known to each other, and certainly Tomlinson felt indebted to Turnbull for introducing him to a great deal of the American poetry he came to love, there was no coordination of purpose present; perhaps even, in the case of Turnbull and Crozier (who shared many contacts in America), a hint of animosity existed. In fact this very lack of coordination, each poet engaging with Objectivism in a distinctly personal manner, can be seen to reflect an apparently wider phenomenon identified in avant-garde British poetries which shall be the subject of discussion at the very end of this thesis. *Without* then making a claim for a yet another ‘group,’ this thesis seeks to flesh out a neglected transatlantic literary exchange that took place during the late 1950s through to the late 1980s.

Having written about what Objectivism *is* and given a brief account of the circumstances of its inception, as well as the context in which the British poets of this thesis worked to engage with such a poetic, it is now necessary both to outline in more detail the constructs around which an examination of “The Objectivists and Contemporary British Poetry” will be organised, and also to highlight which particular features of this poetic are key to assessing its influence on British poetry. Via these aspects, I shall develop a proposition that this form of modernism was chosen due to its perpetual, distinctly ethical resistance to ‘collective’ world-views, and also for its hitherto unrecognised compatibility, in comparison to other modernisms, with some aspects of British poetry. In the first instance, as I have stated, this study considers to what extent writing within the Objectivist idiom constitutes a particular and significant reconfiguration of constructs of ‘authority’ and ‘value.’ These two terms are closely linked, and their meaning here shall be taken close to their colloquial meanings, with some specific inflections.

In order to begin to unpick these terms, we can turn to Andrew Crozier’s influential essay “Thrills and Frills: Poetry as Figures of Empirical Lyricism,” a piece that neatly summarises the characteristics of Movement poetry in Britain that Objectivist-influenced poets sought to oppose. Crozier uses this very word, ‘authority,’ in his analysis: “we detect in the poet’s authority a relentless determination of poetic discourse and foreclosure of its intended audience” (24). ‘Determination’ and ‘foreclosure’ are carefully chosen terms, encapsulating what Crozier sees as the closed mind-set of Movement poetry, whereby “appropriate responses” from the reader are also consequently “narrow[ed]” (45). Here, Crozier is talking about authority in a twofold manner: firstly, that the poet themselves occupies an authoritative, or what others have called “epistemologically secure” worldview

(Tuma 195), from which they may make observations or pass judgements which are assumed to be unequivocally true, or widely accepted. Secondly (following on from this), that the poet is even able to proclaim such authority reveals a belief that the world itself, and experience, can indeed be fully 'known' and neatly encapsulated once-and-for-all in summative poetic statements which contain a degree of universality. One might turn to lines such as those in Larkin's "Mr Bleaney" – "... how we live measures our own nature" (102) – or in "Ambulances" ("dulls to distance all we are" [133]), where the "we", "our" and "are" serve as sufficiently vague designations that they may apply equally to just the poet and a single reader, or to all of humankind; however they are examined, the impression is of uniformity and assent. Such a poetic approach as this in turn makes assumptions about the nature of truth and what it is to 'know' – which are very important Objectivist considerations – as well as the role of poetry itself: is poetry intended to summarise, to re-confirm relationships and experiences in the world which are already universally known, and generally accepted? In highlighting and criticising manifestations of authority in poetry therefore, Objectivist-influenced British poets hoped to make a case for a more contingent and flexible poetic, able to reflect a largesse of experience and thought.

At this point it should be noted that the Objectivists do not always make clear whether within the notion of 'authority' there are specific, singular 'authorities.' Certainly in Crozier, Tomlinson, and particularly Williams, there is a sense of the restrictive power of certain named authorities; historic institutions such as universities, with the ability to accept and exclude certain works from the canon, are for instance identified: "[literary] succession is not simply chronological but is concerned with authority and status" (Crozier, "Thrills" 22). This shall be discussed

specifically in the next chapter, but for now it is more important in the wider context of the argument to come to propose that Objectivist-influenced poets opposed the idea of poetry as a manifestation of, or vehicle for authority, more than they consistently opposed particular institutions. In his monograph on William Carlos Williams for instance, Ian Copestake has frequently used the word dogma, “a principle or set of principles laid down by an authority as incontrovertibly true” (*OED*). The Objectivists then were concerned with authority because collective ways of thinking and acting – the “incontrovertible” of the dictionary definition – arise from it. I have already stated that a British interest in the Objectivists was fuelled by an eagerness to resist certain collective viewpoints evident in mainstream British poetry, and later in this thesis I shall consider collectives once more in light of how Objectivism helped British poets negotiate ideas relating to nationality. But again, Objectivists are often not so concerned with precisely what these collectives *are* – that is, specific political or social groupings, etc. – but worry instead that their existence denotes a passive acceptance of certain truths, rather than an assertion of one’s agency based on individual, experience-informed judgements. An examination of the nature of British interest in Objectivism therefore gets at the heart of what Objectivist-influenced poetry endeavours to be: an embodiment of individual agency.

Before moving on to consider why this might be vital and how a poet might go about this, it is important to acknowledge the place that the ‘individual’ occupies within a context of a British interest in American literature. In the first instance, the notion of individuality alone is not sufficient to distinguish the Objectivists from other American poetries, considering a core part of my argument here is that British interest in this group was a pointed choice of one modernism over another. Individuality is of course a well-known and established trope in both American

literature and culture, memorably addressed by foundational thinker Ralph Waldo Emerson in essays such as “Self-Reliance” (Emerson urges readers to “believe your own thought, to believe what is true for you in your private heart” [121]) and, as Stephanie M. Wallis has observed, written into the nation’s very constitution (3-7). But whilst individuality constantly informs the work of the Objectivists, it is the way in which this generates into something more productive – agency – that I shall show in this thesis is important to British poets wishing to pursue this poetic. While individuality is primarily a status, agency is something more active and productive, and its cultivation is a distinguishing feature of the Objectivist poetic. This subtle difference between the two prevents a number of binary oppositions from forming in this thesis; for instance, post-war critics have often defined British literatures as inherently social, and American literatures as individualistic and asocial – something I shall show in my last chapter is far too narrow a conception in the case of this transatlantic exchange. Most importantly however, agency is a significant nuance to what might otherwise have been an uncomplicated and divisive binary between individuality and collectives. In this way, it is vital to acknowledge that Objectivism is a poetics of interconnection and relationships, rather than opposition; through their poetry, the Objectivists seek to negotiate a position in which one may indeed be an individual, yet still be concerned with and connected to society at large. Therefore, for the Objectivist-influenced poet, agency is a necessity because it is the enabler whereby the authority which leads to passive collectives can be questioned.

This thesis therefore repeatedly contemplates how it is that the Objectivists’ approach seeks to distance itself from the foreclosure and limitations of collectives, instead foregrounding individual agency as a primary, regenerative force. Proper to its belief in the poem as-an-object, Objectivists turn to the poem itself – that is, the

notion of the poem as something which is scrupulously *made* – as evidence of the poet’s agency. In the Objectivists’ and British poets’ work, this directive towards scrupulous making commonly manifests itself in ideas of ‘craftsmanship,’ a prominent word in the vocabulary of both groups of poets. This is a topic large enough to occupy a whole other thesis and at minimum a chapter here, but because it is so foundational to the Objectivist way of thinking about how poems work, I have instead woven this idea into the fabric of the thesis as a whole, running between the chapters as a constant and crucial defining principle.

Craftsmanship and poetry-as-craft tie in substantively with ideas of individuated labour processes. In Objectivist poetry there are numerous references to craftsmanlike occupations such as carpentry, sculpture and watchmaking, in which the resulting object has been lovingly handmade and cannot be replicated. Examples include Zukofsky’s likening of poetic construction to cabinet-making in “An Objective”: “certain joints show the carpentry not to advantage, certain joints are fine evidence... [the first type] is always present in a great deal of unnecessary writing” (17). There are also multiple likenesses drawn between poetry and sculpture, for instance of the poem as “a sculpture not yet proceeded with” (Zukofsky, “An Objective” 13).²⁰ In an early poem of Basil Bunting’s too, poetry is analogous with tessellating a mosaic.²¹ Connections with a number of other skilled trades are also highlighted, such as in Williams’ “Fine Work in Pitch and Copper” (*WCW CPI* 405).

This frequent depiction of poetry as craft, and of craftsmanship as a significant undertaking, did not go unnoticed by the British poets of this study: Tomlinson has said that Oppen’s “best things, like the products of men, wear the appearance of

²⁰ Bunting’s mason in *Briggflatts*, who “lays his rule/ at a letter’s edge”, is another memorable (though not strictly Objectivist) example. Mary Oppen has also used a sculptural analogy in an interview (“Poetry and Politics” 38).

²¹ See Donald Davie’s analysis of Bunting’s “Ode 36” from *Loquitur* in *Under Briggflatts* (38-40).

having their parts ‘End-for-end, butted to each other / Dovetailed, tenoned, doweled” (“Introduction” to *Poems of George Oppen* 10); not dissimilarly, Crozier has called Rakosi’s mind “thematically diverse, to be encountered in an account of building carpentry, in reference to exact machine processes, and to scientific measurements,” and that we can trace something of the “craftsmanship” in his poetic to “hours... spent watching his father, a skilled watchmaker, at work in his shop” (“Carl Rakosi” 157). Thinking therefore about the act of making a poem out of materials as a ‘craftsman’ does, is very much present in the work of Tomlinson, Turnbull and Crozier. For instance, Turnbull refers to “making” in *Residues* – “each stress, a footfall – syllable, a note – / men, making it...” (*CPGT* 230) – and Joel F. Wilcox has observed how “there is usually something special about stone in Tomlinson’s poems as symbolic of what is epistemologically graspable in a whole of flux... ([so that] the constant gives us a point of stability from which to see the unstable)” (50). Indeed, Turnbull’s 1969 poem “For Charles Tomlinson” points to just such an interest in stone, coupled with a craftsman-like discrimination of materials:

to delineate
 what is perceived
 with glance intransigent
 as a mason’s chisel
 struck with mallet force

yet deft enough
 to match each shift
 in a familiar landscape ever
 redefined by sudden
 inflections of the light

to cleave, from a wall
 of sedimentary words,
 a quarried speech

(*CPGT* 188)

The “deft” touch which Turnbull admires in Tomlinson’s work is the product of the ability “to delineate.” Indeed, this first line sets up the driving impetus of this short piece, in which the poet practices an unwavering exactitude to bring about their artistic vision and yet also exercises sensitivity towards a world which may be suddenly “redefined.” Delineation and precision – words which may be substituted for the Objectivist terms ‘conviction’ and ‘craftsmanship’ – are vital tenets of agency.

In order to further illuminate this connection between a heightened awareness of making and agency, it is fruitful to think about the poem in the same terms as Hannah Arendt, a twentieth century philosopher who has written extensively on work and labour. In *The Human Condition*, Arendt urges that all works of art should show themselves to be the product of “the human capacity for thought” (168). In the context of this thesis therefore, the poem is something hard-won, meticulously ruminated on, and an embodiment of the poet’s ability to weigh up various alternatives and make informed choices between them (such as a particular line break, the effect of one preposition over another, or a connection between sounds). This making is therefore, as I shall show, often less about the materials themselves than the way in which these materials are employed as components of an overall composition. In much the same way then that a simple opposition between collectives and the individual cannot be argued, the way an Objectivist poem works is more nuanced; it is constantly at pains to emphasise interconnections, affinities, disconnections and contrasts, and is profoundly a poetics of *relation*.

Before going on to give an example of how these ideas of relation and interconnection, making and agency come into play in an Objectivist poem, I wish to briefly consider the second of the two constructs around which my research questions centre: value. A good deal of the thinking around this subject has already

been covered in my outline of authority; the two are indelibly linked, as authoritative social norms or viewpoints are seen to propagate and reinforce constructs of value or to set the standards against which value is assessed. Again, this is the central topic of Crozier's "Thrills and Frills,"²² in which Crozier contemplates the standards used to deem which poetry is 'worthy' of reading and academic study or not. For Objectivist-influenced poets, an adherence to authoritative norms and ideas about value represented a narrowing of literature's potential, and meant that the same 'type' of poetries were being read in universities and made accessible, and thus the same kind of worldviews being replicated. To interrogate figurations of value, questioning the basis on which such 'absolutisms' (another reoccurring Objectivist word) rested, was an important Objectivist mission. Aside from these broad-ranging ideas about authority and value however, we can also see, on a smaller scale, how a reconfiguration of value is another vital prerequisite for the affirmation of agency. Objectivists shift value from the 'big picture' of a poem's structure, or the story it might tell, to the make-up of its smallest components and how those components work together in "harmony or dissonance" (Zukofsky, "An Objective" 14). This is something that is mirrored by the way in which the Objectivists became concerned with everyday, quotidian things and happenings, rather than with historical, ceremonial, or 'significant' occasions – focuses which would signal the poem as an undertaking capable of encompassing the experiences and emotions of a collective. Structurally, the shifting of value to "the smaller units" of the poem (Crozier, *Reader* 140) is one that emphasises once more the poem as a consciously-made thing where connections and relations come to light. Additionally, value placed in small

²² "[We should attend to] implicit strategies... which strip from the notion of a canon of excellence any suggestion that the criteria involved might not be universal" (21).

things and occurrences which are experienced directly by the individual, is a way of wresting back individual agency from group approval, of providing the space whereby an individual's ability to think and act may come to the fore. This placement of value on the quotidian is epitomised by William Carlos Williams' well-quoted phrase, "no occasion too small." Overall therefore, my configuration of value in this thesis is that it is not something absolute or finitely quantifiable, not something which can be universally applied, but instead, in the manner theorised by Barbara Hernstein-Smith in her monograph of the same name, "radically contingent."

In order to bring to light how Objectivism is a poetics of relation, contingency and interconnection, it is fruitful to look at an example from George Oppen, a poet who is endlessly aware of such interactions. Something particularly evident in Oppen's poetry is the continuous thinking around the way that individual agency works not in isolation from, but in relation to collectives and society. Oppen contemplates how one may at once preserve their individuality and assert their agency, yet still be very much a part of society. This distinctly Objectivist conundrum is evident in the titles of his collections: *Discrete Series*, in which 'discrete' denotes a self-contained entity yet 'series' proposes that these things exist in some logical, progressive relation to each other; *Of Being Numerous*, where the crowding of 'numerous' is tempered by the slightly removed 'of being,' and 'being' itself is active, present tense and a continuous experience. In the forty sections of *Of Being Numerous*, this tension between the self and society is conveyed particularly potently:

6

We are pressed, pressed on each other,
 We will be told at once
 Of anything that happens

And the discovery of fact bursts
 In a paroxysm of emotion
 Now as always. Crusoe

We say was
 'Rescued.'
 So we have chosen.

7

Obsessed, bewildered

By the shipwreck
 Of the singular

We have chosen the meaning
 Of being numerous.

(CPGO 166)

Oppen's writing is constantly at pains to emphasise the transformative potential of connectives – the “dove tails” of Tomlinson's carpentry analogy or the “joints” of Zukofky's cabinet-making; this gives the impression that the poem is continually unfurling, that meanings may be suddenly altered, or that new perspectives may come to light in an instant. For example, taken in isolation “We will be told at once” implies awaiting a specific piece of important information, yet “Of anything that happens” is vague and indiscriminate, resisting the disclosure the preceding line had apparently promised. “The discovery of fact” works in a similar way, the singular “fact” rather than “fact[s]” seeming to suggest an absolute – yet its lack of qualifying details (such as a following “about” or “of”) render it as something universal, but simultaneously unqualifiable. Indeed, Marjorie Perloff has noted the lack of concrete nouns in the whole of *Of Being Numerous* as key to the poem's movement between distinct and indistinct (“The Shipwreck of The Singular”). It is in this way that the poem repeatedly fluctuates between the ‘singular’ and the ‘numerous’, confounding expectations of both, asserting the separateness of both, yet revealing that ultimately neither can function in isolation from the other.

The interrelation of singular ‘being’ and ‘numerous[ness]’ come to light further in section 9, where Oppen’s Robinson Crusoe analogy – the “shipwreck / Of the singular” – is repeated:

9

‘Whether, as the intensity of seeing increases, one’s distance
from Them, the people, does not also increase’
I know, of course I know, I can enter no other place

Yet I am one of those who from nothing but man’s way of
thought and one of his dialects and what has happened
to me
Have made poetry

To dream of that beach
For the sake of an instant in the eyes,

The absolute singular

The unearthly bonds
Of the singular

Which is the bright light of shipwreck (CPGO 167)

Here, Oppen affirms the poet’s work as a deeply personal conglomeration of life experiences, many of which are distinctly social, such as “dialect” and “man’s way of / thought.” However, the break at “what has happened”, leaving “to me” typographically isolated and prominent, shows once more that amidst the “unimaginable pantheon” (CPGO 163), the flowing “populace” (CPGO 164) and the mass “language... of New York” (CPGO 164), it is the individual who remains the vessel of discernible experience. Oppen’s “what has happened / to me / Have made poetry” is not, then, the self-reliant individual genius of Emerson (121), but something more nuanced whereby the “singular” and the “numerous” are discrete, yet must both come into play in order that people may be able to “chose... the meaning of being numerous” (note Oppen’s repetition of “chosen” in sections 6 and 7

as an affirmation of agency). *Of Being Numerous* then demonstrates a characteristic dialectic of the Objectivist mode from small to large, singular to universal, and back again. This ethos is part of the flexibility of Objectivism that critics have identified, which I shall refer to in the readings to come.

The interactions in George Oppen's poems, where the singular must always be "bond[ed]" (CPGO 167), often seem to render the poem a vital energy of its own whereby meanings can be made and unmade. A large part of Oppen's appeal to Tomlinson, Crozier and Turnbull then was more than purely formal; his approach emphasised an individual's agency, yet at the same time was clear about the possibility of a productive dialogue with society at large. Typical for the Objectivist poet who is so concerned with craft and labour, such a dialogue is hard-won and arduous,²³ yet the tantalising prospect of its achievement signals Objectivism's reconstructive potential. Having outlined and briefly demonstrated how the Objectivist mode enabled a questioning of authority and value, as well as an articulation of various connections and interrelations, I wish to highlight too how these features work together to mark Objectivism as a poetic concerned with reconstitution. This was of profound importance to the Britons who were attracted to Objectivism, as their discovery of these American poets came at a time when they were negotiating a complex post-war poetic terrain, replete with competing missives and in which the reconstituting potential of nation, figured in rather absolute terms, was a particularly pressing issue. In spite, then, of figuring Objectivism as a challenge to authority and value, I shall posit it also as a poetic concerned with reconstruction rather than deconstruction, and essentially progressive in outlook –

²³ See Oppen's use of a phrase of Heidegger's, "the arduous path of appearance," at the beginning of *This In Which* (CPGO 92).

something critics Ruth Jennison and Ben Hickman have also done recently (though not in any relation to British poetry). Assessing the way this is achieved is in itself a difficult task, as many Objectivist characteristics throw up apparently antagonistic dichotomies, namely: specificity and detail as contra to generalisations; experiential and direct, personal experience instead of allusiveness or myth; process and contingency versus absolutisms or encapsulations; words as material, discretely-arranged objects rather than parts in a pre-determined system. However, I shall continually make a case in the chapters to come that for the Objectivist poet, the potential for reconstitution ensues directly from the affirmation of individual agency and thought. The Objectivist poem is figured as a wresting back of the ability to influence the world around us from vicarious, authoritative collectives and into the hands of the thinking, feeling individual, who is capable of making complex judgements according to how they have 'come to know' (a phrase of George Oppen's) the world.

All of these Objectivist approaches, so co-dependent and inseparable, have been assumed or concurred with to varying degrees in the work of Tomlinson, Turnbull and Crozier, who are, in spite of a shared nationality and interest in modernist literature, three very different poets. It should be apparent that these features which I have briefly described all carry a sense that the writing of a poem is an ethical undertaking, a matter which is reflected in the remarkably consistent and apparently moralising vocabulary of the Objectivists which shall infiltrate my readings; words such as 'sincerity,' 'authenticity,' 'clarity' and 'conviction.' For the Objectivists themselves, a sense of ethical considerations being integral to their poems was a strong guiding force, and has usually informed critical analyses of their work. Early in their careers, Oppen and Zukofsky identified as Marxists, and Oppen

was famously forced into exile owing to his “un-American” political views.²⁴ Similarly, Williams’ work has been read as a resistance to certain forms of unquestioned, societal authority.²⁵ What is much more difficult in this study however, is deciding how far the political viewpoints which inform Objectivist poetry factored in the appeal these poets held for Tomlinson, Turnbull and Crozier; as I have already mentioned, such discussion is conspicuously absent from correspondence, and so must be approached with caution. I have no intention therefore of pressing political readings on these British poets who, as I have said, were not organised in any way and did not often discuss such matters openly. Indeed, Tomlinson has expressed a dislike of overtly “political” or didactic poetry (“Words and Water” 22-23, 35-37). I believe it would be both incorrect and misguided to propose wholly political figurations of my British poets’ work,²⁶ as any such inflections are latent rather than manifest, implied and intrinsic rather than overt and directive.

It should furthermore be noted that in line with Objectivism’s concern for the poem as a constructed object, any political views are not expressed as directives but rather embodied in the construction of the poem itself. I shall claim then, that the individualisms and “self-knowledge” (a phrase of Ruth Jennison’s that can, in fact, be well-applied here [31]) cultivated via Objectivist-inspired practice, divulged a non-hierarchical, cosmopolitan and democratic interaction with the world, something which becomes more evident if we consider Tomlinson, Turnbull and Crozier set

²⁴ Oppen’s long poetic hiatus, more owing to his worries about poetry’s apparent ineffectualness to do social good than his pursuit by the FBI, has been much commented on. For more detail, see Eliot Weinberger’s “Preface” and Michael Davison’s “Introduction” to the *New Collected Poems* (xiii-xl), as well as George and Mary Oppen’s 1980 “Poetry and Politics” interview with Burton Hatlen and Tom Mandel.

²⁵ Ian Copestake’s *The Ethics of William Carlos Williams* (2010) provides just such a sustained reading.

²⁶ As, for example, Jennison does of Zukofsky, considering his work as opposition to capitalist practices of accumulation, and his poems as engagements with Leninist policies (56-68). There is certainly no evidence to support a similar reading of the three British poets of this thesis.

against the commonly-acknowledged, nationalistic ‘Movement orthodoxy’ of post-war Britain. Such latent views – most evident in Andrew Crozier’s prose – can not be mapped unproblematically and profitably onto any defined political standpoint (such as the Marxist ones which more readily [though again, not perfectly] suit the Objectivists themselves). To attempt to ‘fit’ the British poets of this thesis into the framework of any defined political stance would do their poetry a disservice. Finally, it is important to acknowledge that, as a thesis about poetics, this study shall not make attempts to assume direct and uncontested links between latent political views imbedded in the art of my writers and ‘real world’ politics and policies. In this sense, I refer to the sentiment of Ben Hickman’s recent (2015) study on *Crisis and the US Avant-Garde*: “the particular energies of poetry are impoverished by pressing them into a direct assault on the economic base of capitalism they are ill-equipped to make” (2). While this may seem contradictory, it is reflective of the fact that Objectivism (which Hickman is not discussing specifically, though he does dedicate a chapter to Zukofsky) is a flexible poetic, without set rules and instructions in spite of its nexus of shared ideas. To posit identifiable political instructions would be surely to assume “the political efficacy of poetry as an already existing fact” (Hickman 2), the kind of uncontested assumption that the Objectivists would not endorse; indeed, political implications are latent and continuous because they must be arduously thought-out, and it is precisely this thinking-through – even if the poem seems to be completely unrelated to political or social observations – which characterises the activity of the Objectivist-influenced poem. Objectivism therefore does not and cannot solve the tensions and injustices it observes in the world once-and-for-all: its role instead is to urge us to recognise and interrogate the means by which questionable manifestations of authority and value are secured. This is what lies

behind a figuration, repeated throughout this thesis and vital for the transatlantic relationship at the heart of this thesis, of the Objectivist poetic as a “way of being” rather than a set of determined formal practices.

In order to bring these exchanges to light, chapters in this thesis are arranged so that the argument culminates in a consideration of the implications of this transatlantic relationship for thinking about British post-war poetry with regards to nation and society. The first, “Not Pound and Eliot, but Pound and Williams,” takes its title from Andrew Crozier’s editor’s introduction to the 1987 anthology, *A Various Art*, and shall examine the highly influential role of the work of William Carlos Williams on the three British poets of this thesis. As Crozier’s allegiance-declaring statement suggests, this chapter shall introduce the central idea of British engagement with the Objectivists as a conscious and discriminating selection of a particular type of modernist poetic over another. As such, I shall suggest that Eliot’s allegorical, ‘impersonal’ and ‘collective’ modernism held little appeal for both British and American poets of the Objectivist mode, and that Eliot represented a scholastic modernism removed from the (by contrast) quotidian concerns of the Objectivists. In many ways this is a chapter of two parts: the first examines Crozier’s dichotomy – and of course Williams’ well-documented derision of Eliot – within processes of canonization. Such processes refer to determinants of value, matters which, as is made clear in letters to Turnbull in particular, Williams believes to be authoritative and exclusive. These discussions of canonisation and value, which will be taken up again in my final chapter, are considered also in light of their relation to arguments on ‘standards’ and so-called ‘symbolic capital’ examined by John Guillory and Barbara Hernstein-Smith. The second part of this chapter then is concerned with

close readings rather than theoretical contextualisations, and reveals Williams to be an invaluable exemplar for British Objectivist-influenced poets in the way his work demonstrated new ways of thinking about language and poetic form. In some cases, the formal inheritances of my British poets from Williams – demonstrated most indisputably by Tomlinson’s experiments with the “triadic” or “three-ply” line – are very direct, and can be traced via attention to specific elements in the work of both. This chapter lays the foundations for many of the following chapters in that it demonstrates the value of a focus on small occurrences, and introduces formal practices that reveal much about the Objectivist way of thinking.

The next chapter on Objectivist “perception” takes up a Williamsite conceptualisation – an “intensity of perception” – and considers both how this is achieved and why the notion of sustained attention might be so important. This shall be undertaken via close readings of a number of Tomlinson poems and Crozier’s longer sequence, *The Veil Poem*, and Turnbull’s *Residues*. This chapter importantly qualifies the sense of Objectivism as a certain “being in the world,” and also considers the resonance of the poem formulated both as “an object consonant with its day” and the product of “a context based on the world,” directives which emphasise the poem as temporal, contingent and constantly evolving. This chapter shall also set the scene for following discussions on individual agency in that it shall consider the ethical implications of such acute attention – something which Objectivism says must be constantly honed – and also plants a supposition to be returned to in the final chapter (in relation to empiricism), that truth is itself contingent and should be pursued on an individual basis. In this way, I shall begin to show that the poets of this thesis question any facile assumptions of a universal truth that can

be objectively (later empirically) verified, and that these poets are aware of how such assumptions can be used to secure collective viewpoints.

The next two chapters on “Conviction” and “Objectification” build on the preceding ones by looking specifically at how Objectivists use language, and both address, in variant ways, the conception of the poem “as object.” Central to these ideas is a reiteration of a British involvement with Objectivism as a statement of preference for one type of modernism over another; this is clarified to be an alignment with parataxis, rather than fragmentation. I shall claim that such a distinction was important because it proposed Objectivist-influenced poetry as “world-building” and restitutive, rather than disorientating and, potentially, nostalgic. The drive to be constructive rather than deconstructive is an idiom reflected in my British poets’ demonstration that words are to be revered and are capable of accurately conveying meaning, a conviction shared with the Objectivists which once more carries an ethical implication. Furthermore, in order for parataxis to come into being, I shall demonstrate how each word is, in itself, considered a discrete particular. In this way, I shall demonstrate the Objectivist conception of each word possessing its own materiality, and then use this idea to conduct genetic readings of some Tomlinson and Turnbull poems which have certainly, as can be verified from archival materials, been influenced by one of the Objectivists. Ultimately, these two, closely related chapters shall perpetuate a sense of the very constructing of the poem as an important embodiment of agency, and confirmation of an individual’s ability to make meticulously contemplated, and complex choices.

My final chapter, “Transatlantikers” (the title taken from a letter from Tomlinson to Hugh Kenner), situates all these ideas within ways of thinking about nation, a concern that re-emerged prominently following the Second World War. It

shall first situate Objectivism and the three British poets of this study within the antagonistic debate in the 1970s about “The Two Poetries,” outlining beliefs that each country’s poetic was fundamentally different from the other’s, and largely opposed at that. British poet-critic Donald Davie shall be a significant figure in this chapter, as his essays (and often sharply delineated opinions about the poetry he does and does not praise) have significantly informed the landscape of post-war Anglo-American poetry. This chapter shall seek to unravel why, in a time of “provincialism” and hostility to foreign poetries, Objectivism – generally considered by critics to be a distinctly *American* modernism – was chosen by Tomlinson, Turnbull and Crozier as worthy recipient of their creative attentions. In order to conduct such an assessment, I shall map Objectivist approaches hitherto discussed onto an important aspect of British culture that a number of critics including Davie have identified: empiricism. In this way, my thesis aims to make an intervention into both studies of British ‘neo-modernism’ post war and also into discussions of poetic nationality, venturing that the Objectivist poetic was a way to interrogate and dismantle unquestioned alignments of nation with quality, and similarly unquestioned collectivisms in general. Naturally, discussions such as these are exceedingly complex and fractious, and lead us to question the meanings behind terms such as ‘nation’ and ‘avant-garde,’ matters which British collaborations with the Objectivists only bring into further relief.

In conclusion then, this thesis endeavours to read Objectivism with awareness of its multiplicities, and situates the agency it declares as an important and unrecognised counter to the “impersonally collective tones” (Crozier, “Introduction” 50) of much mainstream contemporary British poetry of the 1950s-1980s. It is my

conviction that the lack of existing scholarship on this unlikely transatlantic link constitutes a significant omission from the narrative of post-war British poetry, an influence which I shall show helped to shape and reconfigure British poetries' relationship to language, agency, and society. Ultimately, the Objectivists' conundrum – how to assert one's individuality through poetry, yet to claim that poetry was still “a productive force within the larger society” (Davidson xl) – was one that Tomlinson, Turnbull and Crozier found to be equally applicable to them. Such a difficulty seems to underpin the misguided way that ‘objective’ and ‘objectivist’ have been used interchangeably. Indeed, Tomlinson's poetry, often lacking first person pronouns, has been criticised as “austere” or “lacking in human warmth” (Davie, Foreword 1), with critics reading his attention to individual sensory interaction and thought processes as incompatible with a concern for society at large. It is contestations such as these which mark a British engagement with Objectivism as highly relevant to our world today, and underscore the manner in which it has informed current, so-called ‘innovative’ poetries (as such, the legacy of this transatlantic collaboration shall be traced in my conclusion). To neglect Objectivism's impact therefore is to deprive understandings of contemporary British poetry of an important dimension pertaining both to modernist legacies and international collaborations. This remarkably-timed coincidence between a post-war neo-modernist resurgence in Britain and what Ron Silliman has called the “renaissance phase” of Objectivism,²⁷ is one that, I argue, significantly enriched the poetic output of this country from the late 1950s.

²⁷ See again “Third Phase Objectivism.” Silliman's description is certainly corroborated from a British perspective by Andrew Crozier, who states “the inescapable and belated novelty of much foundational modernism for people growing up in the 1950s and 60s” as a key inspiration (*Crozier Reader* 137).

Chapter 1: “Not Pound and Eliot but Pound and Williams”

In 1987, Manchester-based poetry press Carcanet published *A Various Art*, an anthology of contemporary poetry edited by Andrew Crozier and Tim Longville. The anthology, featuring work from a number of Crozier’s contemporaries including Jeremy Prynne, Veronica Forrest-Thompson and Anthony Barnett (prominently, but not exclusively, those from Crozier’s circle of friends at Cambridge), has been recognised by critics as an important snapshot of “objective” or “anti-metaphorical” writing, fostered by an admiration for modernist and American poetry.²⁸ Indeed, Edward Larrissy has gone as far as to claim the selection reflects “areas of [poetic] exploration that have characterised Anglo-American modernism since its inception” (64). Precisely what might constitute “Anglo-American” – in terms of both influence and technique – is a significant discussion in itself. For simplicity’s sake we can assume here that Larrissy means British poetry which is informed by and indebted to American poetry. Whatever the precise nature of such a term however, it is probable that Crozier may have been wary of it, for Crozier’s introduction, written with minimal input from his co-editor,²⁹ is in many ways a commentary on the polemicizing tendency of anthologies: “We have not attempted to provide a polemic apology or manifesto because no claim is advanced here for the existence of anything amounting to a school” (51). As I have already noted, this is also the case with

²⁸ See for example Andrew Duncan’s “Such That Commonly Each” in *Jacket 20* for reflections on the epoch the anthology emerged from, and Edward Larrissy’s “Poets of *A Various Art*” in which he claims the work of Prynne, Forrest-Thompson and Crozier “speak[s] to their condition more fully than any Metaphor Man can do” (78).

²⁹ Letters exchanged between the pair show that Longville was content to take a step back from the introduction. Incidentally, before the anthology was accepted by Carcanet, it was intended for an American publisher, James Laughlin’s *New Directions*. Laughlin was keen on the content of the anthology but did not feel that it would sell well: “I hardly think we would be able to manage it, unless there were a subsidy from the British Council or some other such organisation. We have had extremely bad luck on the sales of foreign poetry anthologies the last few times we have tried them” (3rd November 1981, TLS to Andrew Crozier. MS Add 9985 Box 1. CAM).

British Objectivist-influenced poetry, which did not form a cohesive group. In considering the similarities between the entrants, however, Crozier does relent on two aspects: the poets of *A Various Art* share the endeavour towards “a poetry employed towards the complex and multiple experience in language of all of us” and also “an interest in a particular aspect of post-war American poetry, and the tradition that lay behind it – not that of Pound and Eliot but that of Pound and Williams” (50-52). A discussion of the latter of these criteria is the subject of this chapter, rather than the contents of the anthology itself (in which Tomlinson and Turnbull did not appear).³⁰

The importance of Williams’ work is a vital and imperative starting point for any consideration of an exchange between the Objectivist and British poets. Indeed, the American’s poetry was responsible for initially garnering the attention of Turnbull and Tomlinson, and sparking their continued interest in modernist writing from across the Atlantic. Williams was also, given his avowed Americanism and lack of British readership, an unusual choice of poetic model. This Williams connection has not previously been given the critical attention it deserves, with Crozier’s introduction being vaguely called “a coded reference to Olson and the Black Mountain poets,” and a reflection of some generalised “shift away from the tradition of ‘Pound and Eliot’ toward that of ‘Pound and Williams’” – the second of these statements being, from the perspective of this chapter’s research, near-impossible to substantiate.³¹

³⁰ Turnbull was actually suggested for inclusion in the anthology by Crozier’s co-editor, Tim Longville (TLS to Crozier, 2nd October 1981. MS Add. 9985 Box 1. CAM). Reasons for his rejection are not clear, but it is possible the two men may have had a disagreement following the letter (aforementioned in my introduction) Turnbull sent to *The English Intelligencer* in 1966, accusing the magazine of merely “parod[ying]” the American style of Olson. See Turnbull’s *More Words* 163-164.

³¹ Larrissy, *Ibid* 64. While there is no denying the importance of the Black Mountain poets for my British poets, particularly Crozier (for an account of Charles Olson’s influence on Crozier’s work, see *An Andrew Crozier Reader* ed. Ian Brinton 16-18), I do not read this affiliation as a facile “nod” towards Williams’ influence on an American avant-garde. Nor it is possible to simply say this was part of an overall movement towards Williams and away from Eliot; contemporary accounts insist such was not the case in Britain, as I shall discuss.

Crozier's statement contains not a hint of circumlocution: a binary is posited when he juxtaposes Williams and Eliot in this way. In doing so, Crozier declares an affinity with a particular *type* of modernism that is anti-academic and non-canonical; a modernism which simultaneously both avant-garde and more accessible (though this word is obviously laden with complexities) for a reader with an average level of education; a poetry which is not answerable to or reverential towards certain historic institutions but instead formed on a bedrock of individual and immediate experience. It is also important to note that for British poets to express an interest in such an avowedly American modernist marked a questioning of what might constitute a nation's poetry, and a consideration of whether it was even necessary for poetry to exhibit a national character, or be 'of' a nation at all. Certainly, Williams' formal techniques make up a significant part of this appeal and shall be discussed towards the end of this chapter, but for the first part I want to consider the wider significances – significances which form the bedrock of much Objectivist thinking – implicated in such a bold declaration of "Williams, *not* Eliot."

The canon and consensus

To engage with the dichotomy of Williams-not-Eliot is to examine two constructs mentioned in the introduction: 'authority' and 'value.' Of course, Williams' rivalry with Eliot has been well-documented in the past and continues to be so;³² correspondence housed at the Harry Ransom Center sent by Williams to Zukofsky is replete with complaints about Eliot, whose work Williams viewed as obsequious

³² John Xiros Cooper's recent essay "T.S. Eliot and American Poetry" examines these contemporaries in many of the same terms as concern this chapter – notably canonisation and national identity.

towards a European literary tradition, whereas he himself, by contrast, sought to foster a specifically “American idiom.” It also seems fair to say that, to this day, Eliot remains more widely read and studied than Williams. By way of example, a quick keyword search of the British Library’s main catalogue for works both by and about these poets, yields over two thousand two hundred results for T. S. Eliot, versus only a little over six hundred for William Carlos Williams. Contemporary accounts insist this was even more the case when the British poets of this thesis were themselves at university: “For all Cambridge knew, Pound might never have existed... it was Eliot among the modernists, Eliot you read” (Tomlinson, *American Essays* 13).

Immediately apparent here is the question of literary value – or, to put it simply, which poets are read widely or deemed worthy of reading, and which are not. Pierre Bourdieu has famously referred to this idea as “capital,” and in this vein I want to use the work of two critics working in the area of literary value-formation and canonisation – John Guillory and Barbara Hernstein Smith – to theorise the differences between Eliot and Williams.

In his monograph *Cultural Capital: The Problem of Literary Canon Formation*, John Guillory has unpicked Bourdieu’s concept, noting two crucial constituents which affirm one’s possession of cultural capital: “*linguistic capital* – [a] socially credentialed and therefore valued speech, otherwise known as “Standard English” [and] *symbolic capital*, a kind of knowledge-capital whose possession can be displayed upon request and which thereby entitles its possessor to the cultural and material rewards of the well-educated person” (ix original emphases). As Guillory’s comments are particularly interesting and applicable to the case of Williams versus Eliot, I shall take each in turn. Firstly, it is clear that the second of these criteria, “symbolic capital,” is intrinsically tied to education – more specifically, the taste-

forming and quality-denoting powers of the university.³³ This label has a number of key constituents which require unravelling. In the first instance, Guillory claims that it is not so much the “ideological content” of literary works themselves that determines their canonical status, but rather the way they function within “the context of institutional presentation, or more simply, in the way in which they are taught.” In these terms, the inclusion of a writer’s work into a syllabus is a ringing endorsement of its value or quality (ix).

Williams’ lack of attention from the academies was in stark contrast to Eliot’s, and nothing if not a snub in his eyes; it was affirmation that these historic institutions did not take his quest for a specifically American idiom seriously, and that they would rather fall back on the “normative” (a word used by Hernstein Smith, which I shall return to shortly) authority of a European canon which Eliot referenced so readily in his work. As such, Williams’ letters to Louis Zukofsky are full of vitriolic commentary on these two figures: “Eliot is still our enemy and ALL the universities without exception” (8th April 1946, TLS. Zukofsky 29.11. HRC). While without a doubt it was Williams’ work itself which attracted the attention and admiration of Tomlinson, Turnbull and Crozier, it is likely that the American’s feeling of outsidersness would have struck a chord with the British poets of this thesis. This is a common factor I alluded to in this study’s introduction, both in Tomlinson’s complaints to Kenner about his lack of recognition in Britain, and Crozier’s crystallisation of an impenetrable “Larkin-Hughes-Heaney canon” in his “Thrills and Frills” essay (45), much of which is taken up with theorising about what, precisely, this orthodoxy *is* and the nature of its endurance in contemporary British poetry. Certainly, a sense of

³³ Whether “quality” should be a deciding factor in canonisation, what might constitute quality, and differences between “literature” and mere hobby-type or frivolous reading has also been discussed by Barbara Hernstein Smith (30-53). Guillory draws on Hernstein Smith’s study a number of times.

exclusion is prominent in the sentiment of all of these poets, coupled with the notion that ‘innovative’ or ‘boundary-pushing’ poetry and the academic authority of the universities were largely incompatible.³⁴ This last point is demonstrated by Williams’ joy in receiving letters from Turnbull and Tomlinson, where he delights that the two are “young,” declaring that the pair (note the American’s oppositional language) “represent a live interest in poetry in England in spite of the academies” (22nd January 1958, TLS to Turnbull. Acc.12552. NLS).

Williams’ conviction that universities were hostile to poetry which did not adhere to the “normative” standards which they had set, and strove instead to maintain the status quo of a European canon, necessitates another look at this particular word. It is used with frequency by Barbara Hernstein Smith in *Contingencies of Value*, where she has posited that in order for a work of art to become canonised, it must adhere to normative standards which are put in place and enforced by dominant communities: “institutions of evaluative authority will be called upon repeatedly to devise arguments and procedures that validate the community’s established tastes and preferences...justifying the exercise of their own normative authority” (40). In short, for something to become “the norm” – in a canonical sense – some kind of consensus is required. In the introduction I noted contemporary poetry’s predisposition towards categorising poets into different groups; indeed, the anthology itself is one means of claiming consensus of opinion, or declaring that “X” poet deserves critical attention over and above “Y” (again, Hernstein Smith examines anthologies as promoters of “value criteria” [46- 47]). Both

³⁴ This is indeed a recurrent thought of many of the Objectivists, as well as British poet Basil Bunting: “academic persons never seem to me more than academic poets” (5th March 1967, MLS to Turnbull. Acc 13429. NLS). It is safe to say that Tomlinson and Crozier, although to a certain extent suspicious, did not have as fractious a relationship with the universities as Williams did. Both attended Cambridge, and took up lectureships at Bristol (Tomlinson) and Essex, Keele and Sussex (Crozier). Turnbull, like Williams himself, retained his career as a doctor.

Crozier and Zukofsky, in their reluctance to declare definite positions for those included in *A Various Art* and the *Objectivists Anthology*, made attempts to recoil from the exercise of such authority (though of course, both were inevitably making cases for what they thought to be 'good' poetry). It is however something more readily evident in Eliot's journal *The Criterion* (1922-1939), where the title designates shared standards; work included within its pages is assumed to have met certain "criteria" and can therefore be deemed valuable, or worthy of our reading time. Likewise, both *New Lines* anthologies utilise judgemental vocabularies which assume a consensus of opinion based on some pre-established and (crucially) supposedly logical approach to poetry writing; words such as "rational" and "comprehensible" are two examples, and at one point Conquest goes as far as to claim "[I have the] knowledge that my views are, in general, those held by most poets and most people interested in poetry" (*New Lines* 2 xiv). Such a claim for authority and consensus could not be more explicit, and Conquest's particular appeal to the rational senses epitomises an almost scare-mongering tone that Hernstein Smith identifies as characteristic of normative authority: "institutions of evaluative authority will be called upon... to ward off barbarism and the constant apparition of an imminent collapse of standards" (40). Hernstein Smith and Guillory both, in their studies, repeatedly make connections between authoritative, taste-forming institutions and the conception that these institutions, through their authority, are a protector and stabiliser of the very pillars of civilised society.

Reactions to notions of community and consensus are, as I have stated in the introduction, intrinsic to Objectivist principles and British poetry's interaction with them. Tomlinson, Turnbull and Crozier, like Williams, harboured suspicions towards those that might proffer to speak for some universally-accepted standard of taste or

quality. Crozier and Tomlinson in particular have, on multiple occasions, expressed disdain at the way a 'mainstream' of British poetry – notably poetry of the Movement – seeks to foster consensus. Tomlinson's Movement critique, "The Middlebrow Muse," makes just such an observation. In his view, the Movement poet represents "the moderate" (208) and "the average man" (209), who "make[s] friends with the reader by assuring him how decent you and he are and how these chaps like Eliot lay it on a bit thick" (212). Readers might be inclined to ask who this "average man" is be assumed to be, and in this way Tomlinson's short essay worries that a propensity towards a middlebrow, catch-all type of poetry nullifies any imaginative impetus and vitality to be had, rendering poetry "merely dull" (215). Likewise, Tomlinson cautions against Conquest's claims to speak for a "poetry-reading public" who find modernist writing "debilitating" (*New Lines* 2 xii).

Indubitably, this idea that a "poetry-reading public" or an "average man" exists implies the formation of consensus. In his essay on Eliot and Williams, "Canonical Strategies and the Question of Authority," Peter Quartermain observes that Eliot's collection of essays, *The Sacred Wood*, is "prescriptive" in its language use, employing personal pronouns such as "we" and "our" to "encourage complicity on part of the reader" (16). Such pronouns may be read as a key way for the poet, in Tomlinson's words, to "make friends with the reader [and] assure him," implicating them into an apparently pre-established judgement-making group. Andrew Crozier has also honed in on a similar use of pronouns, identifying that many British poets of the 1950s utilised language that was "always to be grounded in the presence of a legitimating voice – and that voice, took on an impersonally collective tone" ("Thrills and Frills" 50). It is important to note that Eliot's "legitimating" voice and those of a number of Movement poets do significantly differ; Eliot's is that of the academic-

authoritative critic, proposing collective notions of quality, whereas the tone of Philip Larkin is just as demonstrative of a collective experience as of a collective “standard.”³⁵ The final line from Larkin’s well-known poem “Ambulances” is a case-in-point: “dulls to distance all we are” (*Collected Poems* 133). Immediately, one might be led to question whether “we all are” the same thing at all, and therefore likely to be affected by the realisation of our mortality in the same way. By the combination of these three simple words, Larkin has simultaneously made a claim to have tapped into a collective experience, but he has also left the sense of “what we [ultimately] are” sufficiently vague and unstated that it might apply to any one of us. Eliot and Larkin are of course extremely different poets, but their uses of “we” and “our” pronouns display a palpable desire to foster a consensus, or group identity. In this way, Quartermain has drawn attention to the important role of “shared knowledge” within a group or community, proposing such “legitimizing strategies” as “the salient feature of canonical writing [which claims] kinship to an established and recognizable group” (“Canonical” 20-22).

Quartermain’s emphasis on “shared knowledge” leads on succinctly to the last facet of Guillory’s “symbolic capital,” and the one which is perhaps the most obvious: one’s level of education and the ability to demonstrate it “on request.” Class is also clearly implicated here, by way of one’s ability to access quality education (something apparent when Guillory mentions “material rewards.” I shall discuss this in a moment when considering “linguistic capital”). This is a straightforward criterion by which to differentiate Eliot and Williams: Eliot’s work so obviously demonstrates and necessitates a high level of education in order to be understood, whereas

³⁵ Blake Morrison has defined the Movement as “stand[ing] for certain characteristics in English writing”, as well as proposing it encompasses certain ideologies (9, 1-9).

Williams' does not. Williams was aware of this, suggesting in his letters quoted above that Eliot's apparent security as a canonical figure was due to his position as a favourite in university establishments and academic circles. Accordingly, he also wrote to Turnbull in 1958: "I know English students schooled in your great universities are not interested in me but much to their surprise the reason for their neglect of me is plain" (12th July, TLS. Acc.12552. NLS). Eliot's intertextuality in particular has been read as a means of perpetuating a scholarly type of writing that, in invoking a number of canonical texts, is explicitly interacting with and in turn making claims to a place within that tradition (Quartermain, "Canonical" 17). Intertextuality is one of a number of rhetorical strategies that Eliot's poetry executes in order to "self-secure" (again, Quartermain's word) its place in the canon, since it assumes a position of authority on the basis of its demonstrable knowledge; indeed, the footnotes and references to Dante and Donne in *The Waste Land* are out-of-bounds for many readers, simply because they require "special qualifications" (Quartermain, "Canonical" 17) – in other words, an extensive literary knowledge – to be deciphered. Guillory has proposed this difficulty in similar terms, in relation to the New Critics: "In discovering that literature was intrinsically difficult, these students [of the New Critics] also discovered at the same moment why it needed to be studied *in the university*" (172, original emphases). This is one more way of validating the "evaluative authority" of certain historic institutions; that is, difficulty seems to perpetuate difficulty, and exclude those who do not seek to write 'difficult' or learned poetry, from this elite symbolic-capital-possessing group.

Questions of difficulty and simplicity are not, in the context of this thesis, easy to define. While Eliot's allusive, academic writing may be deemed difficult, so may Williams' sparse, typographically disjunctive verse (free verse, at that). Indeed, the

Objectivists as a whole are certainly not thought of as ‘easy’ poets; for example Williams himself, although a friend and supporter of Louis Zukofsky’s, often professed not to understand his compatriot’s verse.³⁶ Though tricky to define, perhaps this difference in ‘types’ of difficulty can be best understood as an Objectivist difficulty in syntax and structure, versus an Eliotic scholarly difficulty, requiring substantial deciphering. Andrew Crozier’s *High Zero*, with its intricate paratactical alterations, or the temporal changes and repetitions which characterise Gael Turnbull’s mysterious *Residues: Down the Sluice of Time*, can be seen as indicative of the Objectivist-type difficulty.

In a consideration of types and degrees of difficulty, it appears that an interest in the Objectivist mode placed British poets in a curious, somewhat conflictual position when it came to finding audiences for their work. Occupying as it did a somewhat indeterminate position away from both the academic and the “middlebrow” (Tomlinson’s word), Anglo-American modernist-inspired poetry such as Tomlinson’s, Turnbull’s and Crozier’s struggled to find an audience; it did not “[lay] claim to a privileged social, artistic, and philosophic status” (Quartermain, “Canonical” 23) as Eliot’s poetry did, but at the same time its pervading linguistic complexity barred it from a contemporary British canon that favoured regular, or in Conquest’s explicitly judgemental terms, “rational” metrical forms (*New Lines* xv). This is perhaps where Williams’ influence can be seen the most, as the American’s poetic approach seemed to present itself as a viable alternative to both the “allusive”, “indirect” poetry of Eliot on the one hand, and the homogenising, “heavy iambic swat” (Tomlinson, “The Middlebrow” 213) of the Movement on the other. For instance,

³⁶ For example: “I did enjoy [“Paris”] greatly without understanding every detail” (3rd April 1941, TLS. Zukofsky 29.9. HRC). There is a similar sentiment also in a letter dated 5th March 1958: “Rather than to fall in with the usual dead poetic patterns you prefer to be utterly intelligible. In THAT you succeed admirably” (TLS. Zukofsky 30.2. HRC).

Williams' was a rare voice of disapproval upon *The Waste Land's* (1922) publication, writing in his autobiography that its reverence towards a European canon was part of what made it "the great catastrophe to our letters," and that "[it was] Eliot's genius which gave the poem back to the academics" (145): "Literary allusions... were unknown to us. Few had the necessary reading. We were looked at askance by scholars and those who turned to scholarship for their norm" (148). It is what Williams suggests as the antidote to this scholarliness that really chimes with the intentions of Tomlinson, Turnbull and Crozier: "the *immediate* image" (148, my emphasis). This immediacy, or attention to the world close-at-hand, may seem too simple to even warrant serious investigation; however, it is a cornerstone of Objectivist thinking and carries with it important ethical repercussions to be unravelled throughout the course of this study. That British poets located an elder poet with similar convictions to their own – albeit on the other side of the Atlantic – meant a great deal, and seemed to justify their methods in the face of a disinterested British poetic mainstream. Undoubtedly, it meant a great deal to Williams too, who wrote to Turnbull in 1958: "You [and Tomlinson] are dissatisfied with the state of English prosody and dare look into the world of events for its further development. That is what has induced you to welcome me to your fellowship" (12th July, TLS. Acc.12552. Box 29. NLS).

Before I go on in the next section of this chapter to examine these ideas of immediacy and attention to a "world of events," and how they are rendered in Williams' poetry itself, I want to look for a moment at the second constituent of capital that Guillory identifies – "linguistic capital" – since this too is a matter of difference between Eliot and Williams. Discussions of education ("symbolic capital") and the academic content of poetry segue inevitably into thinking about "[a] socially

credentialed and therefore valued speech,” and this occupies a somewhat fraught position in Anglo-American poetic relations, as both sides have at various points claimed that the other is incapable of “hearing” their poetry.³⁷ For Williams this is important, as his poetic quest belligerently pursues the “American foot,” a voice that will truly represent the American mode of experience. In a 1937 letter to Zukofsky, containing a typescript draft of an entry to be included with a selection of his poems in the forthcoming *Oxford Anthology of American Poetry*, Williams outlines his feelings on the importance of an authentically-American speech:

The American writer, insofar as he is a child of the Anglo Saxon tradition, uses a language which stems largely from Elizabethan England, but which has been modified by time and the accidents of place to acquire a character differing greatly from that of present day English. For the appreciation of American poetry it is necessary that the English reader accept this language difference from the beginning. Its effects are discernible in many ways. Pace is one of the most important of its manifestations. This is particularly significant in versification since it is the direct forerunner of poetic form. It is by paying attention to the character of the spoken language that form is detected in its beginnings and later refined for exact use. By listening to the language of his locality the poet begins to learn his craft. It is his function to lift, by use of the imagination and the language he hears, the material condition and appearances of his environment to the sphere of intelligence where they will have new currency (17th March 1937 TS. Zukofsky 29.9. HRC).

In this context, Williams’ exclusion from the academies was proof that he lacked sufficient “linguistic capital” because he was not interested in pursuing an English voice. Williams’ mention of a difference in “pace” between American and English was explored in his so-called “triadic,” or “three-ply” line, a technique that fascinated Charles Tomlinson (further examples and discussion are provided in the next section). Tomlinson himself has demonstrated an interest in ‘non-standard’ dialect and vernacular speech in poems such as “Class,” a piece which draws on the

³⁷ For one account of how the two modes of speech can be read to differ, see Hugh Kenner’s article “William Carlos Williams’s Rhythm of Ideas”, *The New York Times Book Review*. September 18th 1983. 15, 33-34. Print.

inflections of Tomlinson's native Stoke-on-Trent: "Those midland a's / once cost me a job: / diction defeated my best efforts – / I was secretary at the time / to the author of *The Craft of Fiction*. / That title was full of class. / You only had to open your mouth on it / to show where you were born / and where you belonged" (CPCT 248-249). Tomlinson's experimentations with the three-ply line only furthered the opinions of many in taste-forming institutions within British poetry, such as *The Times Literary Supplement*, that Tomlinson sounded more American than British. It is no wonder then that from the beginning of their correspondence in 1957, Williams received Tomlinson's attention with excitement, writing gleefully in a review of *Seeing is Believing* which cheered Tomlinson greatly (it originally appeared in *Spectrum* magazine in 1958): "The English will not or at least do not accept one of their best younger poets, Charles Tomlinson, because he writes with many characteristics of an American... That is not cricket to an Englishman, to imitate the Yankees" ("Seeing is Believing" 47).

Tomlinson would have likely disliked Williams' use of the word "imitate," but surely agreed with the American's attack on the critical establishment's need for normative forms of speech.³⁸ In British critic Tom Leonard's 1976 essay on Williams, "The Locust Tree in Flower, and why it had difficulty flowering in Britain," Leonard proposed the notion of non-standard speech as the primary reason for Williams' neglect in this country, formulating it in much the same terms as Guillory's linguistic capital. Leonard claims that "standard grammar" and, by way of association "standard pronunciation," is a commodity that may be bought. He writes:

³⁸ There is certainly a case to be made here that Movement poets frequently did not employ Guillory's "socially credentialed and valued speech". For instance, Larkin and Amis have famously used coarse diction and swear words in their verse. It seems here that the British requirement focuses not necessarily on speech/ writing being 'high-brow', but instead on it being orderly and 'rational'. This will be returned to in the final chapter of this study.

Putting it another way, if a piece of writing can't be read aloud in a "correct" Received Pronunciation voice, then there must be something wrong with it. It's not valid. And this might not merely apply to the grammar of the writing, but the semantic content as well: since the standard pronunciation, having to be bought, is the property of the propertied classes, then only such content as these classes do not find disagreeable, can be "correct". Enter the inevitable assertion that the language of these economically superior classes is aesthetically superior – then in the interests of "Beauty" and "Truth", the regional and the working class languages, whatever else they're capable of, certainly aren't capable, the shoddy little things, of great Art (106).

In short, a poetic that so stringently proclaimed itself American, had little chance of gaining traction in a British poetry establishment already hostile to non-English poetries, as well as to "non-standard" writing and pronunciation. Furthermore, a poetry that was not writing towards some kind of dénouement or metaphorical allusion to be deciphered, that declared itself instead to be nothing more than the material condition of words on a page – an object – resisted the processes by which poetry was commonly being taught in schools and universities.³⁹ It is no wonder then that the tone of a letter Williams sent to Turnbull in 1958 contained more than a hint of facetiousness: "Out of Oxford/ Cambridge must come our saviour (since Mr Eliot has so long since abandoned us) who will acquaint the world with our modern orthodoxy" (12th July 1958, TLS. Acc.12552. Box 29. NLS). Williams' use of the word "orthodoxy" here is both comic and poignant, implying that literature is prone to simply substituting one authoritative institution for another.

Leonard's "The Locust Tree" essay makes little attempt to veil the pointedly socialist direction of its argument. His conclusions are in much the same sentiment

³⁹ Clearly, this requires unpacking, which shall be done in the final chapter. For now, I shall simply state that the principle of "the poem as object" fundamentally shifts attention away from a process whereby a poem is read and deciphered as an allusion to something else (death, love, etc etc). Accordingly, Guillory has noted the importance of "institutional presentation, or more simply, the way in which [texts] are taught" as a key facet in the fostering of ideological notions (ix). See also Guillory 168-172.

as those of Barbara Hernstein Smith, who declares with equal boldness: “since those with cultural power tend to be members of socially, economically and politically established classes (or to serve them or identify their own interests with theirs), the texts that survive will tend to be those that appear to reflect and reinforce establishment ideologies” (51). Neither Hernstein Smith nor Leonard could be more explicit: symbolic capital and thereafter canonisation is achieved by complicity with the established authorities that set, by means of their access to wealth (Hernstein Smith is clear about this too when she defines value as the product of a “specifically economic system” [30]), certain ideological standards. It is hard to determine to what degree Williams was fixated on the monetary prerequisites of authority (his biography and poems alike reveal multiple direct encounters with others’ poverty, especially in his work as a paediatrician) and it is perhaps best to read his work as an ethical resistance to the very existence of institutions that would seek to assume the superiority of their viewpoints over others. Indeed, this has been highlighted by John Xiros Cooper as the fundamental differentiator between Williams and Eliot: “After 1927 [Eliot] began to elaborate a socio-cultural vision based on the need for the individual to submit to authority. Not just any authority, of course, but a submission to deeply historical institutions such as, for example, an apostatic church, an ancient monarchy, and a traditional Tory conservatism” (252). That Xiros Cooper identifies Eliot’s “legitimate authorities” (252) as “deeply historical” furthers Williams’ conviction that such an approach was outmoded, and incapable of representing the experience of an America which was rapidly “emerging [as] a cultural centre” (246). This resistance to legitimising authorities is also the guiding argument of Ian Copestake’s 2010 monograph, *The Ethics of William Carlos Williams* (it should be noted here that Copestake employs Arendt’s phrase “capacity for thought”):

[Williams was concerned with] the pervasive influence of social and cultural forms of mediation, such as the authority of one's church or social mores. When laws or dogma are obeyed they constitute a barrier to the experience of reality because reliance upon them transfers autonomy from the self to an authority outside the self. For Williams the questioning of inherited forms of truth was a means of affirming one's autonomy, one's capacity for thought, and it needed to be encouraged at all levels (4).

Williams' message is clear: true "intrinsic value" – if we may say confidently that such a thing may ever exist (see Hernstein Smith 30- 34) – is to be sought not in homogenising power structures, but in individual efficacy and experience.

I stated near the beginning of this discussion that Tomlinson, Turnbull and Crozier became interested in William Carlos Williams for his methods, his poetry itself. But, in a statement so blatantly oppositional as Crozier's "not Eliot, but Williams," it becomes obvious that the British poets of this study were also attuned to the socio-economic factors underlining Williams' principles. Turnbull, for one, has written of Eliot that "I could make little contact with most of his poems and even less with the values and opinions" ("The Rest is Dross" 69). It was not then simply that Williams was American, or that he was modernist and invented a number of new approaches in the use of free verse; Williams' approach emphasised the inseparability of poetics and individual responsibility, making suggestions as to where the poet should place their 'faith' (a favourite Objectivist word). With Williams paving the way for a discovery of the Objectivist poets, these were complex ideas that my trio of British poets sought to wrestle with, as they reconsidered poetry's role and relevance in a world changed profoundly following the Second World War. In such a discussion of value and authority, perhaps the summative word is best left to another Objectivist, Carl Rakosi, who writes in typically succinct fashion: "The practice of ranking poets as major and minor, the bastard offspring of grading

students, freezes the poet in his tracks and makes him a nobody if he is less than great. This situation tempts him unduly into lofty postures, the breeding ground of rhetoric and abstraction, and intimidates his most precious asset, his individuality” (*Collected Prose* 42).

“Williamsite” Methods

The first section of this chapter went some way towards elucidating the mindset of William Carlos Williams’ poetic, based primarily on what his work is *not*. This part shall now focus on the poetry itself, positioning Williams’ approach as one which laid the foundations for a British engagement with Objectivism. This being the case, it is still useful to begin with another brief quote from Xiros Cooper: “Williams was deeply suspicious of Eliot’s influence not only because he had turned his back on the idea of American literature but also because he had turned his back on America as a source of concrete experience in time and place” (247). By engaging with the mythic, imaginary or allegorical, Eliot was making an implicit value-judgement about the suitability of quotidian, everyday experience as valuable source matter for serious poetry. Williams sought to right this perceived wrong by placing poetic faith instead in “concrete experience” and the materials of the poem as vital components, capable of accurately conveying that experience.

The suggestion that poetry can be accessed by an individual’s attention to subtle details and complexities, and indeed an attentive empathy to the world at-large, seems at first too simple to warrant critical examination; but it is this straightforward idea that stuck in the minds of Tomlinson, Turnbull and Crozier upon first encountering the American poet. As such, I wish to begin with a brief

consideration of Williams' most well-known and anthologised poem, "The Red Wheelbarrow":

so much depends
upon

a red wheel
barrow

glazed with rain
water

beside the white
chickens

(*CPIWCW* 224)

In his 1967 Phi Beta Kappa lecture, "The Poem as Initiation," Charles Tomlinson has read "The Red Wheelbarrow" as reflective of Williams' care for the quotidian and an everyday reality, where each object, however small, can be a legitimate means for celebration: "[The poem] dwells on the event, to force us into a consciousness of the meaningfulness of that event. Like ritual, the poem is pointed outwards from its own contemplative pausing, to life at large. There is no occasion too small for the poet's celebration – Williams' red wheelbarrow, or Wordsworth's 'naked table.'⁴⁰ Tomlinson's friend and onetime mentor Donald Davie (in spite of a general dislike of the American's work) has also picked up on the fact that "freedom of the individual" ("Larkin's Politics" 134) is a defining factor in this and other Williams poems, since the poet employs such a sparse method with no assurance towards definite or intended modes of interpretation.⁴¹ Tomlinson has explained the appeal of this brief

⁴⁰ "The Poem as Initiation". 1967. TS. Tomlinson 4.3. HRC. 2. Note here too the use of the word "meaningfulness" and not "meaning"; Tomlinson is alluding to a continuum of meaning, rather than a meaning which is singular and absolute. This distinction, hinted at in the introduction, is an important Objectivist notion.

⁴¹ Davie's assessment of Williams's poem shall be returned to proper in the last "Transatlantikers" chapter of this thesis, since it contains a number of important political resonances that require more fulsome attention.

and elusive poem in his introduction to the 1976 Penguin edition of Williams' poems, which he also selected and edited:

What depends on the red wheelbarrow for Williams is the fact that its presence can be rendered over into words, that the perception can be slowed down and meditated on by regulating, line by line, the gradual appearance of these words. The imagination 'accurately accompanies' the wheelbarrow, or whatever facets of reality attract Williams, by not permitting too ready an emotional fusion with them... When the dance with facts suffices, syntax, the forms of grammar, puns, the ambiguous pull between words unpunctuated or divided by line endings, these all contribute to – accompany – the richness of reality one can never completely fuse with but which affords a resistance whereby the I can know itself (17).

For Tomlinson, "The Red Wheelbarrow's" self-referential and self-justifying construction is one of its key strengths. The reader is assured that "so much depends" by the writing itself, wherein the taut verbal control and lineation is sufficient proof of the value of this object as a catalyst for poetic meditation, and the perceptive diligence of the poet reveals itself line-by-line.

Both Tomlinson's and Davie's comments, in spite of their differing views on the merit of Williams' poetry, adhere to a particular modernist approach that Charles Altieri, in his monograph *The Art of Twentieth Century American Poetry*, has dubbed "the new realism." Altieri specifically attributes this new realism to the poetic examples of Pound and Williams, just as Crozier does in *A Various Art*. Altieri writes: "[Pound's approach] requires shifting from what can be known through the image to what has to be experienced in terms of the poem's presentation of constructive energies. How the work is constructed becomes inseparable from how it can communicate" (27); the very activity of cognition is reflected within the lineation, punctuation and cadence of the poem itself. Examining the views of Tomlinson, Davie and Altieri therefore, two vital facets of Williams' approach can be determined:

the first is a dedication to “a richness of reality one can never completely fuse with” – that is, a resistance to a version of reality which functions purely as correlative for the ego⁴² – and the second is surmised by Altieri’s term “new realism,” in which experience and writing are one and the same. These two characteristics have been the source of significant fascination and inspiration for Tomlinson, Turnbull and Crozier, as indeed they have also been for poets on the other side of the Atlantic, such as Denise Levertov, Cid Corman and Robert Creeley among others.

First, I shall examine Williams’ dedication to a reality which is autonomous to a poetic ego that would seek to subsume it. As already mentioned, this perspective is bound up in the conviction that simple objects are suitably worthy protagonists of poems, rather than mere symbols. Certainly, some of Williams’ most often-repeated dictums reflect this stance: “no ideas but in things” (“Paterson”, *CPI* 263); “True value is that peculiarity which gives an object a character in itself” (*CPII WCW* 11). This attention to quotidian fact was interpreted by Gael Turnbull as symptomatic of the American’s deep appreciation of the physical world: “And so, Williams’ ‘object poems’ may seem a small thing to do: and of course, in a way, they are a small thing to do... Yet we are mistaken if we flick the pages past them, as being too obvious to deserve attention. It was not beneath Williams’ dignity to write them... That things exist in their physical presence is not an understanding that anyone can afford to view with contempt” (*More Words* 84).

A recognition that things *exist* is key to an Objectivist ‘integrity’ (another important word in the Objectivist’s vocabulary), both towards the object itself and the

⁴² Oppositions with Eliot’s “objective correlative” theory are inevitable here (see “Hamlet and his Problems” 95-103). Eliot’s notion is opposed to Objectivist ideas because even the word “correlative” implies some kind of attenuation, or a transference of the poet’s emotions between/ onto external things. This shall be returned to in later chapters on “Conviction” and “Objectification.”

way this object is approached poetically. To illustrate the nature of this integrity, it is worth momentarily considering an approach which is the complete opposite: the way in which objects or settings are frequently utilised in confessional poetry. Though not a strict contemporary of Williams, Sylvia Plath's "Poppies In October," for example, demonstrates how objects or observations – in this case, a field of poppies – can be used as a trigger for subjective reflection. The last stanza of this short poem reads: "O my God, what am I / That these late mouths should cry open / In a forest of frost, in a dawn of cornflowers." Doubtless in the Objectivist's view, this would represent an "emotional fusion" to be discouraged, because the poem has, by the last stanza, become focused on narrating Plath's feelings rather than the character of the poppies themselves. Furthermore, by describing the poppies as "late mouths" that "cry open," Plath's personification has compromised an attention to the poppies' "character in [themselves]." An Objectivist acknowledgement that things and objects exist entirely separate from the poet's conception and are not altered by the poet's gaze, carries with it an important ethical imperative.

To the greatest degree of any of the British poets of this study, Tomlinson's poetry is replete with dictates about the necessary separateness of object and ego. The poem "Object in a Setting" for example, reflective of Tomlinson's lifelong work as a painter as well as a poet, contains the explicit lines "To wish it a more human image / Is to mistake its purpose" (*CPCT* 23). This is a stance that Tomlinson cultivated before he was fully aware of Williams' work,⁴³ but he no doubt felt vindicated by the similarity of the American's viewpoint. Williams too, it seems, felt a

⁴³ For example, in the manuscript for an unpublished collection of essays, "Poetry and Human Relationships" (c.1948- 1950), Tomlinson warns against "the retreat into the narcissistic universe of the self, [and] the self-conscious cultivation of 'personality'" (MS. Tomlinson 4.6. HRC. 1.). Much of Tomlinson's ethic in this respect is derived from painters; John Ruskin and Cezanne are chief among these. See Swigg's *The Objective Tradition* for a detailed account of these influences.

certain solidarity towards Tomlinson, and praised the younger poet's *Seeing Is Believing*: "Thomlinson's [sic] new book is a beauty... I have seen nothing like it out of England in my life... For the first time an English writer can be read by an American with full approval and admiration, the new world writer can look up to his more cultured brother with complete trust in him" (12th July 1958, TLS. Kenner 50.2. HRC). Tomlinson has cited his poem "Hawks" from 1972's *Written on Water* as an example of the crucial resistance to "emotional fusion" that he also identifies in Williams:

Hawks hovering, calling to each other
 Across the air, seem swung
 Too high on the risen wind
 For the earth-clung contact of our world:
 And yet we share with them that sense
 The season is bringing in, of all
 The lengthening light is promising to exact
 From the obduracy of March. The pair,
 After their kind are lovers and their cries
 Such as lovers alone exchange, and we
 Though we cannot tell what it is they say,
 Caught up into their calling, are in their sway,
 And ride where we cannot climb the steep
 And altering air, breathing the sweetness
 Of our own excess, till we are kinned
 By space we never thought to enter
 On capable wings to such reaches of desire. (CPCT 215)

In the manuscript for another lecture (published in *Essays By Divers Hands*),

Tomlinson explains the imperative behind the poem:

The poem begins by taking an instance of something – the hawks – very different from us, and it tried to map the way that we and the hawks are in fact related across all our differences. Yet this feeling of difference is never dropped in the poem in a feeling of simple fusion, or symbolic identification with the birds. We neither feel at one with the birds... nor are they required to stand for something inside us. They remain hawks, calling to each other, not humans (CT 4.5, labelled "C: On Hawks". N.d. MS, HRC).

This sense of relation-but-difference chimes with a number of Objectivist concerns in which the poet maintains an attuned and intuitive relation to the physical world, yet respects its autonomy. Of the original American Objectivists, it is perhaps George Oppen that has most rigorously interacted with this concept, almost certainly relating his contemplations to Tomlinson during one of the pair's meetings.⁴⁴

I have already noted that a certain ethic relating to the poet's interaction with the world is a feature of writing in the Objectivist idiom. Williams' poetry also demonstrates that this ethic goes beyond a relation which is purely visual; it is also a way of *perceiving* and *thinking*. Indeed "perception," as it shall be utilised in this study, is distinguished from 'see' and denotes a more comprehensive engagement of the senses, complimenting Zukofsky's encouragement of the Objectivist poet towards "thinking with the things as they exist, and directing them along a line of melody" ("Sincerity" 194). "Thinking" emphasises a state of mind where the senses are wholly attuned to the physical world, something that is well observed in Williams' poems, "Thursday" being an early example:

I have had my dream – like others –
 and it has come to nothing, so that
 I remain now carelessly
 with feet planted on the ground
 and look up at the sky –
 feeling my clothes about me,
 the weight of my body in my shoes,
 the rim of my hat, air passing in and out
 at my nose – and decide to dream no more.

(CPI WCW 157)

⁴⁴ Here one thinks especially of Heidegger's work and Jacques Maritain's *Creative Intuition in Art and Poetry*, both of which were important to the American. For an account of Oppen's interest these two philosophers, see Peter Nicholl's *George Oppen and the Fate of Modernism*. Though, like Tomlinson, Oppen's aversion to symbolism was evident early in his career (see the poems of *Discrete Series*), it is worth noting Nicholl's claim that Oppen's work became more philosophical *after* his exile in Mexico and return to poetry writing in the early 1960s, post-dating the "Objectivist" group by some years (*George Oppen* 57).

In his short essay “Williams in a World of Objects,” Allen Ginsberg has likened the idiom of this poem to the Buddhist practice of mindfulness meditation, calling the poet a “saint of perception” and highlighting Williams’ concern with “being willing to relate to what is actually here without trying to change the universe or alter it from the one which we can see, smell, taste, touch, hear and think about” (36-38). In this respect, Ginsberg’s appreciation of Williams’ relation-but-difference to the world is very close to Tomlinson’s.

Gael Turnbull has also absorbed the Williamsite concept of sensory immersion into his own work. In its reflection of the poet’s sensate relation to the physical world, the Scottish poet’s “A Breath of Autumn” bears certain similarities to “Thursday”:

A quaver of light.
 Trees sift the dusk.
 Far sounds curl
 in the ear, falling.
 Days ago were
 and are not now.
 The earth moves on
 around the sun

This moment slides
 away but a roughness
 abrades the air –
 a singed aroma:
 gone as a stone
 into a pond,
 the ripples only
 expanding, coiling.

(CPGT 116)

Turnbull was outspoken in his admiration for Williams, and it is reasonable to assume that this poem, from the 1963 collection *A Trampoline*, was influenced by his 1958 and 1959 correspondence with the American. It may however also have been

influenced by the work of Denise Levertov, with whom Turnbull also conversed.

Another Williams follower, her 1961 collection *Jacob's Ladder* contains a somewhat similar poem, "Air of November":

In the autumn brilliance
feathers tingle at fingertips.

The tingling brilliance
burns under cover of gray air and

brown lazily
unfalling leaves,

it eats into stillness zestfully
with sound of plucked strings,

steel and brass strings of the zither,
copper and silver wire

played with a gold ring,
a plucking of crinkled afternoons and

evenings of energy, thorns under the pot.
In the autumn brilliance

a drawing apart of curtains
a fall of veils

a flying open of doors, convergence
of magic objects into
feathered hands and crested heads, a prospect
of winter verve, a buildup to abundance.

(*Collected Poems* 147-148)

Whatever the catalyst for Turnbull's poem, both engage with a world which is experienced through more-than-visual means. Turnbull focuses on aural and textural elements of the encounter, where the "singed aroma" in the air and "far sounds" are apprehended, giving the impression of an autumn which is lived as much as it is seen. Crucial to "A Breath of Autumn's" effectiveness is the poet's attention to what things *do*, rather than simply their appearance, which is reflected in a proliferation of

verbs: “quaver,” with its musical connotations, instantly injects movement into a light beam descending from the trees’ canopy, and the trees themselves are busy “sifting” the light. In spite of the poet’s sensory involvement, nature proceeds disinterestedly, retaining its autonomy as “The earth moves on / around the sun.” The poem ends with a brief, sensory metaphor, a stone dropped into a pond, to emphasise the momentariness of what has been perceived.

Levertov’s poem displays a similar perceptiveness, yet the “air” of November is further evoked by the poem’s attention to sonic textures, with reoccurring “l” and “ll” sounds, or “ance” and “ence” word-endings emphasising an apparent softness in the air itself,⁴⁵ alongside onomatopoeic words such as “tingling.” Indeed, the idea of the sounds of words as concomitant with the innate character of the object or scene is a frequent Objectivist technique, particularly for Levertov, Zukofsky and Reznikoff; it is one means of highlighting the physical nature of the poem itself, or making an “object” of the poem. Regarding these autumnal poems however, both Turnbull and Levertov, utilising different techniques, highlight that in Objectivist poetics, perception of an object or scene is more than merely ‘seeing’ it.

In Louis Zukofsky’s *A Test of Poetry*, which reads somewhat like a manual for poetry-writing (complete with examples of ‘good’ and ‘bad’ poetry set side by side), the Objectivist poet singles out Williams’ “The Red Wheelbarrow” for praise, noting how the “*more than visual* significance of the simple rural objects observed is only too evident in the short, thoughtful cadences of this poem” (101 my emphasis). Williams repaid the compliment to his friend in strikingly similar fashion in a short essay appearing in the 1964 special issue of *Agenda* magazine, dedicated to Louis

⁴⁵ If one were to use musical terminology, as is the tendency of Zukofsky, one could say the soft consonant and elongated vowel sounds evoke a “legato” feel, in accordance with the temperate nature of the scene.

Zukosfky and edited by Charles Tomlinson: “when [Zukofsky] thought of a rose, he didn’t think of the physical limits of the flower but more of what the rose meant to the mind.”⁴⁶ Concurrent with the Objectivist focus on a “more than visual” reality, Williams was vocal about his distrust of images as ornaments, warning against a descriptive poetry which simply copies nature. He wrote in *Spring and All*: “the only realism in art is of the imagination. It is only thus that the work escapes plagiarism after nature and becomes a creation.”⁴⁷ Williams’ *Spring and All* predates Zukofsky’s *A Test of Poetry*, but the sentiment between the two poets is complementary; objects are not only seen, but also thought about and meditated on.

This awareness of the potential for poems to become mimicry of, rather than interaction with the world, is demonstrated in “The Rose is Obsolete,” also appearing in *Spring and All* (the first six “stanzas” are quoted here):

The rose is obsolete
 but each petal ends in
 an edge, the double facet
 cementing the grooved
 columns of air – The edge
 cuts without cutting
 meets – nothing – renews
 itself in metal or porcelain –

whither? It ends –

But if it ends
 the start is begun
 so that to engage roses
 becomes a geometry –

Sharper, neater, more cutting
 figured in majolica –
 the broken plate

⁴⁶ 2. In writing the piece, Williams recalled his first reading of Zukofsky’s work and considered Objectivism’s place as natural successor to Imagism.

⁴⁷ *CPI WCV* 198. Here, Williams invokes French post-Impressionist poet Cezanne. In this sense, Williams’ interest in visual art and musings about the relation of artist and object mirror those of Tomlinson, who, as I have said, was also fascinated by Cezanne.

glazed with a rose

Somewhere the sense
makes copper roses
steel roses –

the rose carried the weight of love
but love is at an end – of roses

(*CPI WCW* 195)

The first line points inevitably to the rose's heritage as a common symbol of romantic love. Like "so much depends," "the rose is obsolete" sets up a refusal to accept the rose as a symbol, a refusal which is then enacted in the rest of the poem. The piece is an exercise in "what the rose [means] to the mind," as Williams' meditations skip between the "concrete", physical edges of its petals to the precision and discipline, likened to geometry, required to properly "engage" the flower's character. Note here too the use of the word "engage" as symptomatic of the active and involved cognition of the poet, as opposed to a word that would have more passive, detached connotations, such as "observe." Mid-line caesurae and line breaks suggest hesitation and care in getting the detail right, suggesting that the poet must deconstruct the flower and consider each of its separate elements in turn. The "intensity of perception" is such that it is not only the petals which are considered, but the *edges* of those petals, and how they interact with the negative space surrounding them; it is, in this sense, very painterly. With typical Objectivist "clarity" (another reoccurring word), Williams condenses the character of those edges to a single, one syllable verb, to "cut"; the petals are so fine as to "cut without cutting."

Contemplations of the rose's form occupying a different, manmade material such as steel, copper, or porcelain, are evidence of "the largeness of [the poet's] imagination to feel every form which he sees moving within himself" (*CPI WCW* 193). The process of contemplating roses in this way is suggestive of a poetic sensibility that

admires the rose from all angles and in all materials, and posits the rose's intricate form as an art-object in its own right.⁴⁸ Such an approach is congruent with the numerous readings of Williams that populate Carl Rakosi's daybooks: "the reality is already art... all the poet had to do was recognize it" (34). Crucially however, the imagination never deviates from the rose itself, and by the end of the poem the flower retains its inherent physical qualities, its relation to the world which is more than merely symbolic, a "fragility... / unbruised / [which] penetrates space."

Another flower poem, Andrew Crozier's "The Daffodil on My Table," would seem to pay homage to this Williamsite care for detail in the ordinary object. Unlike the Wordsworthian daffodil, this one is transposed instead into a simple domestic setting. Crozier's poem is much shorter, but he shows the same attention and reverence towards his daffodil as Williams does his rose:

Streaks of yellow show through
 the unfolding green spears
 three buds about to open among
 a cluster of pointed leaves
 . more as the first
 unfolded, blossomed, and died,
 new buds pushed through
 the waxen leaves, yellow
 emerging from green, unfolding
 blossoming, dying, it went on
 blossoming for six weeks
 in February and March 1963.

(CPAC 30)

Though the two poems are quite different in execution, Crozier's displays a similar concern for the "more than visual" in the way the poem focuses on the activity of the flower, rather than its appearance. The very first word, "streaks", contains a degree

⁴⁸ Charles Altieri has given a reading of this poem as "Williams' most ambitious foray into constructivist modernism," where poems emphasise "how formal features make [the object] appear as a distinctive force in the world" (*The Art* 47-50).

of lexical ambiguity which is often a feature of Crozier's work: in this context it functions as a noun, but the word also has the potential to be used as a verb. The effect of this word is to launch the reader into an action which is already taking place, of the shock of brightness appearing from the buds, and to simultaneously suggest the very fibre of the daffodil's petals, "streaked" rather than opaque yellow (evidence again of the crucial Objectivist "detail"). Crozier's use of repetition, rendered primarily through just five words – "blossoming", "unfolding", "dying", "green" and "yellow" – evokes the perpetual blooming of the flower itself as the poem repeats and renews, just as the daffodil does. Crozier also disrupts syntactical conventions in pursuit of this flowery-likeness, displaying a Williams-like attention to line constructions which is evidenced in the unusual juncture of the fourth line's full stop at the beginning of the fifth. Black Mountain poet Cid Corman, a contemporary of Crozier's and friend to Williams and Zukofsky, has attributed this grammatical trait specifically to Williams: "the particular (idiosyncratic) use of the non-syntactical period (.) in the middle of the second line is an innovation of Dr Williams (though it has parallels in Oppen, Pound, Olson etc.) and functions as a dramatic pause, throwing a stronger accentuation on [the succeeding line]" (72). The specific "lines" Corman is referring to come from Williams' "The Yellow Flower" – a late poem, part of 1954's *The Desert Music*. It is possible that the "yellow-ness" of Crozier's daffodil and its unusual full stop is a homage to this poem, though it is not possible to say for certain. In both poems the full stops invoke unexpected pauses, but the effect is slightly different between the two; in Williams', it is a conceptual shift, a moment when the poet becomes aware of a new perspective for encountering the yellow flower, as "crooked":

What shall I say, because talk I must?
That I have found a cure

for the sick?
 I have found no cure
 for the sick .
 but this crooked flower
 which only to look upon
 all men
 are cured. This
 is that flower
 for which all men
 sing secretly their hymns
 of praise. This
 is that sacred
 flower!

(CPII WCW 257)

There is also the sense in “Yellow Flower” that the stop indicates a certain hesitancy, the intellectual wrangling of a poet who “must” talk but is not entirely sure how to proceed. Combined with the frequency of rhetorical questioning and repetition throughout, we can intuit a poem indicative of the pendulous back-and-forths, the annunciations, pauses and reconfigurations of mental processing itself. “Yellow Flower” manifests the speaker’s very interaction with his subject, as he attempts to better understand the flower and “free [himself] / and speak of it” accurately (259). In Crozier’s “Daffodil” however, the effect of the full stop at (by way of contrast) the *beginning* of the fifth line, prolongs the action of the preceding line and forms a connection with the next. In this poem, the full stop can also be seen to mark a momentary pause which is akin to an intake of breath before the repetition begins again, mimicking the start of another flowering.

Crozier’s “Daffodil” goes some way towards a manifestation of “making an object of the poem,” since the poem’s composition reflects the lifecycle of the Daffodil itself. Another of Crozier’s earlier efforts, the idiosyncratic “Curtain,” can also be read in a similar light:

The curtain hung. It was looked at. It was

hung. It was stood back from
 to be looked at. It stood out from
 a black background. The stars were there
 in the distance. Of space. It was
 deep. On its surface the curtain
 floated. Motionless. No air current
 disturbed its folds. As it floated
 away.

(CPAC 71)

There are a number of things happening in this short poem that could well be a product of engagement with Williams' poetic. For one, "Curtain" highlights the potential of line endings to disrupt conventional expectations of the sentence; its lines are not arranged according to any syllabic or metrical logic, nor according to any kind of narrative meaning. Each sentence, despite being only a few words long, functions as a stand-alone utterance in that it can be read independently of surrounding lines and still make lexical sense. The singularity of each sentence is in turn emphasised by the use of full stops rather than commas or any other inter-line indication of breath pauses, giving the stops a far more finite sense. Certainly, one is compelled to consider under what pretence Crozier decided to break lines at such unusual junctures: it is clear that if lines had instead been finished with full stops, line endings corresponding to the sense of complete sentences, the poem would read rather more like a bulleted list; by contrast, continuing sentences over to the succeeding line in turn continues their meaning, and consequently keeps the reader's eyes moving from one line to the next. By elongating attention between two lines rather than one, Crozier displays an awareness of an active, rather than passive reading of the poem, wherein bodily movement is inseparable from how something may be perceived. In this sense the poem's approach is redolent of Maurice Merleau-Ponty's assertion in "The Eye and The Mind" that "vision is attached to movement. We see only what we look at. What would vision be without

eye movement?" (294). The overall effect – lines halting, continuing, folding back on themselves with repetition – is complicit with the undulations of the curtain's fabric itself: because the reader's eye must move between and across lines just as the poet's eye surveys the curtain, the impression is of an object perceived anew, just as Williams declares, at the end of his introduction to *Spring And All*, "THE WORLD IS NEW" (*CPI WCW* 182).

In the space of only nine lines, "Curtain" has raised a number of questions relating to lineation. As can be expected, it is a key formal concern of Crozier's poems, and is raised in a 2006 interview regarding his later collection, *High Zero*: "very important to understanding something about my poetry is the attention I pay to lines as units of composition, and relations between one line, and the preceding line, and the next" (*Crozier Reader* 139). Crozier's words nearly match those of American critic Alan Stephens, in a 1963 review of Williams' *Pictures from Breughel and Other Poems*:

I believe that the identity of Dr Williams' line has no metrical basis, but that nonetheless the line has a definable identity. The general principle is this: a line is a line because *relative to neighbouring lines*, it contains that which makes it in its own right a unit of the attention; and it is precisely as various in its way as are the shadings of accent that play about the abstract norm of the metrical foot, for it too has a norm against which it almost constantly varies, allowing for feats of focusing on values that would be otherwise indistinguishable. The norm is the ordinary unit of the attention in language – the formal architecture of the sentence (361).

Though it is not certain whether or not Crozier gained this term directly from Stephens' review, it is clear that the Williamsite sense of the line concerned Crozier's work as much as it did Tomlinson's, who quotes from the Stephens review in his

drafts from an interview with Robert Creeley.⁴⁹ The specific intricacies of approaching “the line as a unit” require more fulsome analysis later, but for now it will suffice to say that this formulation draws attention to the poem as an object consisting of a number of uniquely chosen and arranged components – a thing which is ‘made.’ Williams also drew British poets’ attention to how lineation could be utilised to evoke pauses, to reflect speech rhythms, and to visually or sonically highlight certain words. Tomlinson has summarised his own appreciation of the approach of Williams and the Black Mountain poets: “Unlike most of my English contemporaries, I owe much to American poetry. The Americans have given a good deal of attention over the past forty years to getting the full semantic richness out of their words by dint of matching them abruptly against surrounding silences, by running them with measured swiftness through typographic space” (“Charles Tomlinson Writes”. N.d. TS. Tomlinson 2.6. HRC). Such a “typographic” appreciation is echoed by Crozier, who goes as far as to state “I’ve increasingly come to think [that] poetry is something that is read, rather than heard” (*Crozier Reader* 141).

Williams’ “Good Night”, another example of the Objectivist attention to quotidian fact, is one such poem that engages with the visual arrangement of lines (I quote the first two stanzas):

In brilliant gas light
 I turn the kitchen spigot
 and watch the water plash
 into the clean white sink.
 On the grooved drain-board
 to one side is
 a glass filled with parsley –
 crisped green.

Waiting
 for the water to freshen –

⁴⁹ “Charles Tomlinson writes”, N.d. TS. Tomlinson 2.6. HRC.

I glance at the spotless floor – :
 a pair of rubber sandals
 lie side by side
 under the wall-table
 all is in order for the night.

(*CPI WCW 85*)

The simple domesticity of this poem is further demonstration of the innate value Williams attributes to his objects: “My whole life has been spent (so far) in seeking to place a value upon experience and the objects of experience that would satisfy my sense of inclusiveness without redundancy” (*CPI WCW 202*). In an essay on Williams’ “visualization” of poetry, Marjorie Perloff has noted of this poem that “it is lineation rather than the pattern of stresses that guides the reader’s eye so that objects stand out, one by one, as in a series of film shots” (“To Give Design” 176). Denise Levertov however has refuted Perloff’s reading, asserting that “[Perloff’s] claims that Williams scored lines for the eye, not the ear... I know, from my own conversations with him and his approval of my way of reading his own work back to him (at his request), was not the case.”⁵⁰ Even if, as Levertov says, “lines for the eye” were of secondary concern, we can see how the arrangement of “Good Night” utilises each line to reveal an additional detail, with particular words such as “parsley – / crisped green” standing out to our eyes “like film shots.” Williams also uses line length to foreground certain words; “light,” “spigot,” “parsley” and “sandals” are all positioned at the end of lines where the eye will momentarily pause. Highlighting nouns in this manner not only emphasises the prevalence of objects in the scene, but points to a simple Objectivist pleasure in naming things, a concept which is related to the very ‘conviction’ involved in language use (and “conviction” is indeed a favourite word of Williams’).⁵¹

⁵⁰ “On Williams’ Triadic Line” 25. The essay as a whole is a neat synopsis of the contrasting readings and interpretations given by critics and poets alike of Williams’ line use and rhythmic intentions.

⁵¹ Again, these are subjects for later chapters on language use – “Conviction” and “Objectification.”

The contrasting views of Perloff and Levertov can in fact be conflated in the way that Williams' poems also often suggest a connection between lineation and sound; specifically, the American has proposed lineation as a means of reflecting speech rhythms. To this effect, Hugh Kenner has noted that "[Williams'] favourite tension... [is] between the look of the poem and the sound of it. It's by the eye that we discern the division into lines, and by ear that we follow the enveloping cadence" ("William Carlos" 34). This idea of language in poetry as speech is a complicated one, and has drawn various readings. Denise Levertov has insisted that line length in the poems corresponds to moments in time, with line breaks indicating a breath or pause ("On Williams' Triadic Line"), an approach that would place Williams' ethos very close to that proposed by Charles Olson in his influential "Projective Verse" essay, where line breaks indicate pauses for breath. For Williams, like a number of his contemporaries (particularly Zukofsky and Olson), much of language's worth is derived from its function as *utterance* – hence his obsession with developing a poetic foot that would reflect not just the experience but the particular character, intonation and inflection of an American, rather than English speech.

A Williamsite sense of language as both contemplation and speech captured the imagination of Charles Tomlinson, who was particularly taken with Williams' "triadic", or "three ply" line, and utilised it on a number of occasions in his own work: "it was the three ply poems that appealed to me most, perhaps because they afforded the possibility of a more meditative movement... [I] needed a form that would progress at a speed resembling that of thought" (*American Essays* 24). It is such a feature of Tomlinson's early poetry that Richard Swigg and Paul Mariani have

both written detailed accounts of the Briton's use of it.⁵² "Ode to Arnold Schoenberg", from 1963's *A Peopled Landscape*, is perhaps the poem where Tomlinson makes the most pronounced use of Williams' three-ply form, noting in an unpublished typescript that the piece was intended to reflect "[the] rubato of daily speech, to be kept in flowing movement and, like a melody, to be felt out against... accompanying silences" ("Charles Tomlinson Writes" looseleaf TS N.d. Tomlinson 2.6. HRC):

At its margin
 the river's double willow
 that the wind
 variously
 disrupts, effaces
 and then restores
 in shivering planes:
 it is
 calm morning.
 The twelve notes
 (from the single root
 (the double tree)
 and their reflection:
 let there be
 unity – this,
 however the winds rout
 or the wave disperses
 remains, as
 in the liberation of the dissonance
 beauty would seem discredited
 and yet is not... (CPCT 103)

Rubato, in the musical sense, is a disregard for strict tempo in favour of expression reflected in changes of pace, and in this way Tomlinson uses the breaks between lines to elongate or isolate particular phrases, giving the sense of a perception which is almost enacted – or spoken – in the very process of reading the poem. Read aloud, a momentary pause concordant with typical speech patterns can be discerned

⁵² See the chapter "Thus Men Make a Mountain" in *Charles Tomlinson and the Objective Tradition* (33-77) and Mariani's "Tomlinson's Use of The Williams Triad" in *William Carlos Williams and Charles Tomlinson: A Transatlantic Connection*, ed. Magid and Witemeyer (109-118).

between the very first two lines, “at its margin / the river’s double willow”. A line break also instigates a pause around “it is / calm morning”, emphasising the conviction and care-in-naming that surrounds the affirmative “it is”, which is visually isolated.

Tomlinson has put Williams’ three ply line to use most strikingly in the pivotal, central three lines, a homage to Schoenberg’s musical twelve-tone method (starting at “The twelve notes” and ending at “unity – this”): each of these two ‘triadic stanzas’ of three lines contains a total of twelve syllables, the first isolating the monosyllabic nouns “notes”, “root” and “tree”, and the musicality of the second triad of lines linking to these through rhyme – “tree”, “be”, “unity”. Even the last word in this section, “this”, enveloped as is it by another pause, enacts an engagement of the poet with the material world, as if he were quite literally pointing to the scene before him and encouraging the reader to also see what he sees. Clearly, for Tomlinson, the possibilities of Williams’ formal invention included the rendering of speech, contemplation itself, and the isolation of certain musical qualities in the line. At the time of composition, Tomlinson viewed the piece as a new departure in terms of line-use, and wrote to Hugh Kenner: “I have been working in Williams three drop cadences of late and believe something new is emerging – an Ode to Schoenberg for instance – next Vol will be Hearing is Concurring” (21st September N.d. [1963 or before], MLS. Kenner 49.5. HRC).

In spite of his enthusiasm for Williams’ poetic, Tomlinson was less willing to accept the transatlantic divide seemingly imposed by the older poet’s insistence on *American* speech, *American* lineation and *American* poetic feet. Williams’ preoccupation with nationality has often been echoed by his contemporaries, with Levertov even stating in a 1971 interview that “the English reader doesn’t know how to read American poetry anyway, because the whole pace of American speech is

very different" (*Conversations* 41). Tomlinson, whilst keen on Williams' three ply form, wrote to the American protesting this divide:

Why do you make [the American idiom and the variable foot] so completely identical? Aren't you merely creating a restriction here? As far as I can see the variable foot and your three ply measure work just as well in Englishman's English as in American. Isn't the foot really based on a convenient way of breathing as much as anything else (vide Olson's 'Projective Verse') and don't we English break our breaths and take our breaths in very much the same manner as you Americans?... If you tie your discovery to 'American' I feel you're limiting it unduly (August 29th 1960 MLS. In Magid and Witemeyer).

Owing to Williams' poor health, Tomlinson never received the explanation he craved, but this did not dampen his appreciation of what he saw as "the value of the single note" in poetic composition that this mode of writing posited ("Charles Tomlinson Writes" looseleaf TS, N.d. Tomlinson 2.6, HRC). Thinking back for a moment to Tom Leonard's essay on Williams, the British poet-critic also figures the material qualities of Williams' language and speech as an essential tenet of his Americanness.

Quoting from Williams' autobiography, in which the poet stresses the importance of "com[ing] over into the tactile qualities, the words themselves beyond the mere thought expressed" (*Autobiography* 380), Leonard postulates that "his inclination to see and treat language as an object in itself might have been motivated by the thought that this was a necessary initial process prior to the consolidation of a specifically American poetic mode" (107).

In spite of Williams' infatuation with rendering an American idiom in poetry, for the three British poets of this thesis his example transcended boundaries of nationality: it was one of an experientially-attuned approach to the physical word, and a respect for the autonomy of that world; a sense of the innate value of material objects, and indeed of words as valuable material objects in their own right; and a

number of poetic techniques that played to the eye and the ear in equal measure, where composition was based on experience and expression rather than formalised rhythmic or metrical regularities. Receiving letters from Turnbull and Tomlinson, it appears that Williams harboured hopes for a poetic revolution of-sorts in Britain, along the lines of his own convictions: “Your welcome letter does me good but at the same time it puts the fear of God in me. For the responsibility of the conception of the new measure in England must be hung, I fear, around my neck. Maybe I exaggerate but let others prove otherwise” (22nd January 1958, TLS to Gael Turnbull. Acc.12552. Box 29. NLS). Williams’ influence on British poetry of the time may not have spread as far as he hoped, failing as it did to displace the contemporary Larkin-Hughes-Heaney canon. Nevertheless, his poetic was absolutely crucial in laying the foundations for Tomlinson’s, Turnbull’s and Crozier’s engagement with the Objectivist poetic, and as such, the American’s figure reoccurs throughout this thesis. Therefore, this chapter has given a broad overview of the Objectivist mode and a number of its key concerns, as well as how these concerns challenge prevailing notions of ‘authority’ (particularly in relation to the canon), and re-situate ‘value’ on the small, the everyday, and a simplicity of poetic expression. The next chapter will move on to focus on perception specifically. Indeed, an acute attention to the everyday world may be a feature seen in a great deal of poetry-in-general, but for the Objectivists such attention assumes a pointedly ethical impetus, having much to do with the notion of agency which I have begun to investigate here. It is the foundation for a ‘way-of-being’ in the world that ties the poet to the concerns of society more fundamentally than any didactic or political commentary ever could.

Chapter 2: Perception

The phrases are apt
 The scene is not unusual
 The joy is in the attention

("A Hill," *CPGT* 122)

The previous chapter, using William Carlos Williams' work as catalyst, touched on the Objectivist sense of an acute attention to the surrounding world and to everyday things. This chapter shall further unpick this aspect, figuring it not just as an attention, but also crucially as an interaction. In order to refer to this interaction, I shall use the term "perception," after Williams' phrase "intensity of perception," from the 1944 introduction to *The Wedge*: "it isn't what [the poet] says that counts as a work of art, it's what he makes, with such intensity of perception that it lives with an intrinsic movement of its own to verify its authenticity" (*CPII WCW* 54). "Perception" is a word that British expatriate Denise Levertov has also used to describe her own poetic process: "In the composition of a poem, thinking and feeling are really working together, as a kind of single thing... we don't want to call the movement of that process thinking-feeling, it's too clumsy... so let's call it perception, as perhaps a not totally accurate, but usable term" (*Conversations* 43). The comments of both Williams and Levertov point once more to the interconnectedness of the Objectivist poetic, in that "perceiving" is inseparable from "making," "thinking" is inseparable from "feeling," and so on. The impression we quickly gain is of an amalgamation of sense experience, cognitive processing, and conscious reasoning. I therefore use the word "perception" in this chapter as a term of the best possible fit, but with an understanding that it can never be wholly accurate.

Levertov's use of hyphenated words to denote the interrelated nature of her poetry writing is, interestingly, not unique. In a long letter to Charles Tomlinson in 1963, Louis Zukofsky offered substantial criticism and analysis of the younger poet's *A Peopled Landscape*, going through the minutiae of Tomlinson's verse with typical meticulousness and picking out individual words and phrases that struck as particularly impactful. The American praised the accomplishment of a "thinking-seeing resonance," and the importance of a "singing-seeing-thinking" quality in the poetry (19th October 1963, MLS. Tomlinson 28.3. HRC). These terms indeed denote the flexibility of Objectivism. Michael Heller for instance, writing of Louis Zukofsky, notes the inclusivity of the American's poetic: "[Zukofsky's] poetics [seem to be] a code of honour, a way of being in the world, and only in the most general sense a matter of stylistics" (*Conviction's Net* 18). Likewise, in his essay "A Poetics of Marginality and Resistance," Burton Hatlen has noted: "by remaining faithful to what Zukofsky called the 'historic and contemporary particulars' of their experience, [the Objectivists aimed to] shatter the grand ideological abstractions of the dominant culture, and thus open up a new way of being-in-the-world" (38). This use of such hyphenated terms to suggest immediacy and interrelation can be read as alluding to a broader context of twentieth-century thinking about the nature of one's "being", and his or her relation to the world in both the physical sense (as a physical entity related to other physical entities), and in a social context. Most obvious here is Martin Heidegger's conception of "being-in-the-world", a state of "Dasein" as put forth in *Being and Time*, but there is also "being-in-the-world" as proposed by Maurice Merleau-Ponty in his *Phenomenology of Perception*.⁵³ George Oppen especially has

⁵³ See "Part III", 429-504. Merleau Ponty quotes parts of Heidegger's *Being and Time* on several occasions in this chapter.

made no secret of the value of Heidegger's work to his own,⁵⁴ and papers at the Harry Ransom Center in Texas reveal also Charles Tomlinson's familiarity with Merleau-Ponty's *Phenomenology*, as well as with *The Primacy of Perception* and the essay "The Eye and the Mind" (though it is difficult to date this interest in relation to Tomlinson's discovery of the Objectivists).⁵⁵

In the context of these potential philosophical inheritances therefore, it is imperative to inspect specific vocabulary associated with perception, in order to unpick what perception entails for the Objectivist. As is typical for these modernist poets, the particular inflections or ambiguities of certain words bear much importance, and a good deal of the words can be seen to share pointedly similar usages to those employed by Heidegger. In this sense, it can be gleaned that the formation of a certain vocabulary – many of the words containing ethical dimensions – implies in itself a way of re-framing one's relation to the world, just as it did for the German philosopher.⁵⁶ In the first instance, the word "perception" itself is one such example, containing a few subtle variants: the OED defines it as either as the "becoming-aware-of" through the senses, the way in which something is regarded or understood, or the possession of an intuitive understanding or insight – each of which suggests a process of personal discovery, a *becoming* aware of something or a gaining of understanding. This is close to George Oppen's words in a 1980 interview when asked why he had stopped writing poetry for thirty years: "And when

⁵⁴ For a fuller account of this influence, see "George Oppen interviewed by Charles Tomlinson" in Swigg (ed) *Speaking with George Oppen* 57-61 and also Peter Nicholl's *George Oppen and the Fate of Modernism*, particularly 70- 93.

⁵⁵ References to both works appear in non-dated notes for the 1979 lecture, "The Poet as Painter", as well as references to Husserl (N.d MS, Tomlinson 4.5. HRC).

⁵⁶ We are drawn back to the fact once more that for the Objectivist poet, the way you perceive the world and the language you choose to write about that perception, are inseparable. See for instance Williams' *The Wedge*, that the artist should "make clear the complexity of his perceptions in the medium given to him" (CP II 54) and Heidegger's assertion that "naming brings beings to word and appearance" (73). Naming is a subject for the next chapter.

[World War II] occurred we knew we didn't know what the world was and we knew we had to find out, so it was a poetic exploration at the same time as an act of conscience, of feeling that one was worth something or other... you realised you didn't know enough to continue writing poetry, that you had to know more about the world" ("Poetry and Politics" 25). Oppen's use of "know" is much like Heidegger's, where "to know is to have seen, in the widest sense of seeing, which means to apprehend what is present, as such" (59). This 'coming to know' is a continuous and deeply personal formulation, and it is also a sensory exploration; when Oppen talks of knowing it is in a similar way to familiarising oneself with a sculpture or other object, whereby an interested party may run their hands across the thing's contours in order to fully apprehend its shape. This is notably similar to Zukofsky's comments about knowing and exactitude in an interview with L. S. Dembo: "no one knows 'exactly'. How can [one] know 'exactly'? I think we might as well be honest about that" (207). William Carlos Williams' derision in *Spring and All* of "acquisitive understanding" as contra to the "value of experience" (*CPI WCW* 202) demonstrates a similar thought; his pointed use of the adjective "acquisitive" also posits such an understanding as a possession, another form of symbolic capital that may be gained or accessed by some, and not by others.

Two more key Objectivist words relating to perception are 'authenticity' and, by association, 'truth.' In a basic sense, these words denote that the poet has a responsibility to convey perception with as much accuracy as possible, and that to be merely subjective would be to present some manner of falsity to the reader. Williams' aforementioned statement that an "intensity of perception... verifies the authenticity" of what the poet "makes," establishes a perception-authenticity-making triad, declaring that the poet who perceives attentively enough will be sufficiently

able to grasp the true nature of things, and also to communicate with clarity and honesty. A number of Heideggerian ideas can be correlated with Williams' words here, such as the equation of 'authenticity' with an emotional reaction to things perceived acutely: "the thingly element in the work [of art] is like the substructure into and upon which the other, authentic element is built" (Heidegger 20). Also, Heidegger refutes the concept of truth as something "timeless and atemporal" (38), instead claiming it to be constantly evolving, contingent and dependent. This impossibility for truth to be figured in a singular or authoritative manner, but instead as something successive and constantly in process, is very much compatible with an Objectivist understanding of truth (Oppen is the term's biggest user). The activity implied in this process, also has much to do with perception itself.

This brief and largely insufficient consideration of a small part of Objectivist vocabulary may seem digressive, but it does highlight the fact that Objectivist poetics invite a significant degree of difficulty because they can be seen to interact with so many twentieth century theoretical and philosophical approaches. While I shall not (as stated in my introduction) conduct an entirely Heideggerian or phenomenological reading, some aspects from these works do help to illuminate the central characteristics of Objectivist perception, something it is now necessary to summarise as far as possible. The first and most important characteristic to note is that for the Objectivist, the contingency and activity of perception is twinned with an awareness of it as subject to continual, conscious review: nothing is taken for granted nor assumed, and perception is never 'casual.' Many of the statements commonly associated with Objectivist perception, such as Zukofsky's well-quoted "bringing the rays from an object into focus. That which is aimed at" ("An Objective" 12) connote discrimination, an active rather than passive process of apprehension where the

poet's evaluative (as distinct from 'judging') faculties play a central role. This is much the same as Oppen's sense of "knowing," which also reveals a second, concomitant characteristic of perception: that it is always relative, and temporal – that is, perception is of-its-time. When Oppen speaks in the previously quoted interview of not "knowing" the world sufficiently after the war, he figures the conflict as such a disruption of experience that he felt at once defamiliarised and compelled to begin this process of 'coming to know' all over again. Perception is thus posited not just as something active and participatory, but something which must constantly evolve in order to maintain the poem's relevance towards a contemporary situation. Indeed, this sense of activity and interaction has been highlighted as a key differentiator between Objectivism and its predecessor, Imagism: "Imagism was absolutely founded on a subject-object dualism..." (Nicholls, *George Oppen* 70). William Carlos Williams has also observed a "lack" with Imagism, in that "it is true enough, God knows, to the immediate object it represents, but what is that related to the poet's personal and intellectual meanings?" ("Louis Zukofsky" 1).

One might ask why this formulation matters so much within the Objectivist schema, or why Oppen felt the need to state that to be an Objectivist was not merely to be "psychologically objective" ("George Oppen" 160). Perception is not "objective" (or founded on a "subject-object dualism") because – in spite of the distrust of poetry of the ego – it does not emotionally retreat from the world but instead engages with it. Such conscious and fulsome engagement of the intellect but also of the emotions is important to remember because, for the Objectivist, when relationships start to become casual – for instance between metrical formulae and 'good' poetry or between nationality and 'good' poetry; between one's own and the group's experience; between the self and society – this is when the individual ceases to think

for his or herself. Encouraging individual thought lies at the heart of the Objectivist doctrine, and that the Objectivist mode of perception testifies to the capacity for such thought is what, I shall argue, resonated so strongly with Tomlinson, Turnbull and Crozier.

“A context based on the world”

It does not require a great deal of searching in order to locate instructions in Objectivist literature regarding the poem as something in-context, temporal and interconnected with other “things.” Zukofsky has written in “An Objective” that it is “*impossible* to communicate anything but particulars – historic and contemporary things” (16) and also in “Recencies”: “A poem. A context based on a world” (207). William Carlos Williams has similarly figured the poem as “an object consonant with [its] day” (*Autobiography* 264).

There are a number of different approaches both the Objectivists and British poets employ in order to emphasise this interrelation and contextuality. One is an insistence that the poem is more than just an imitation of what it addresses. This may be seen to be a particularly painterly concern, and one that Charles Tomlinson – a visual artist as well as poet – is keenly aware of in his work, noting in a manuscript fragment that “to a large extent, the problems of poets are the problems of painters” (N.d. MS. Tomlinson 4.5 HRC). Indeed, mere imitation in art has been taken as a lack of imaginative engagement by John Ruskin – an important figure for Tomlinson – who has addressed this issue in *Modern Painters*: “[If I were to say that] the best picture was that which most closely imitated nature, I should assume that art could only please by imitating nature... there is some art whose end is to create and

not to imitate” (23). Paul Cézanne is also admired as an important artist in this respect, with Tomlinson’s phrase “ethic of perception” inspired by the painter,⁵⁷ and the French Post-Impressionist has been similarly heralded by William Carlos Williams in *Spring and All*: “Cézanne – The only realism in art is of the imagination. It is only thus that the work escapes plagiarism after nature and becomes a creation” (*CPI WCW* 198). Cézanne is the subject too of much interest for Heidegger, who likewise is convinced of the importance of art being not merely imitative.⁵⁸ This concern is very much present in Charles Tomlinson’s poem “Cézanne at Aix”:

And the mountain: each day
 Immobile like fruit. Unlike, also
 – Because irreducible, because
 Neither a component of the delicious
 And therefore questionable,
 Nor distracted (as the sitter)
 By his own pose and, therefore,
 Doubly to be questioned: it is not
 Posed. It is. Untaught
 Unalterable, a stone bridgehead
 To that which is tangible
 Because unfelt before. There
 In its weathered weight
 Its silence silences, a presence
 Which does not present itself.

(*CPCT* 37)

This poem forms part of Tomlinson’s early collection, *Seeing Is Believing* (1958, reprinted 1960), but Edward Hirsch’s essay “Out There is The World” has claimed a number of similarities between the approach evident in this poem and in the work of George Oppen, whom Tomlinson did not meet until 1963. Hirsch writes: “this is

⁵⁷ See further Kirkham 1-70 and also John 52- 53.

⁵⁸ For a fuller account see “Cezanne and Heidegger: Truth in Painting” in *The Retrieval of the Beautiful* by Galen A. Johnson, 64- 70. In “The Origin of the Work of Art” Heidegger also writes that “[the work is] the reproduction of the thing’s general essence” (37), making a distinction between reproduction/ imitation and a personal reaction – though his subject here is Van Gogh’s *A Pair of Shoes*, rather than Cezanne.

Tomlinson's version of Objectivist sincerity: to destroy received 'myths' by truthfulness to one's own perception of particulars" (176). While the "sincerity" here is certainly Tomlinson's, we might well identify what the British poet claims to admire in his American friend's work: a "remarkable consistency of vision" (Letter to Oppen, April 28th 1963: Swigg, "Addressing").

Unpicking "Cézanne at Aix" we may begin to gauge Tomlinson's awareness of the temptations of descriptive, imitative renderings, and see that the key to the activity of the poem is a refusal of such temptations. This is not just an image of a mountain, and accordingly, the poem begins with a somewhat curious first two lines: "And the mountain: each day / Immobile like fruit." The allusion to the "posed" composition of Cézanne's still life arrangements is clear – a painterly simile echoed a few lines later with references to portraiture – but Tomlinson's use of "And" as the very first word of the poem posits the mountain as something whose presence is suddenly apprehended, almost stumbled upon. This immediate use of "And" further situates the mountain as an object in-relation-to others; it may well be "immobile" in the literal sense of its irreducible, weighty permanence, just as an individual fruit may be immobile in a composition, yet it is far from static in the poet's mind. Further evidence may be gleaned from the numerous uses of connective and comparative words – "unlike"; "also"; "nor"; "to that" – indeed the poem at one point veers towards lexical clumsiness in its searching-out of the mountain's form: "to that which is tangible / Because unfelt before". The highly alliterative concluding three lines represent a sonic endeavour to get to the bottom of the mountain's resonance, as if the poet is physically embodying their imaginative fluctuations by sounding out relations. Here Tomlinson is deliberate in pointing out, through the etymological closeness of "presence" and "present," that the mountain will not "reveal" itself to the

observer without significant perceptive effort; a state of being in-relation-to the mountain cannot be reached via passive observation or a straightforward reproduction of the mountain's image.

Tomlinson's poem makes a convincing appeal that the purely imitative may not be 'authentic,' because such a mode would produce something static, atemporal, not sufficiently interrelated to other things and events, and therefore not reflective of the "intensity of perception" of the poet. In this sense, "Cézanne at Aix" posits another important characteristic of Objectivist perception when it appears to reach a culmination midway through, in the prepositional statement "it is." The poet's refusal to provide a disclosing adjective or noun here epitomises perception as-process: all the mountain encompasses may not be set down in one finite, summative word, and as such the tiny but vital "is" shows itself to be the subject of continuous and contingent reflection. This tantalising lack of lexical *dénouement* furthermore reflects an Objectivist dedication to making "a context based on the world," because it acknowledges that certain things or characteristics *cannot* be fully perceived, with just as much attention as what *can* be. Thus, the process of 'coming to know' involves also appreciating that the poet's perceptive position is not epistemologically secure, and not 'authoritative' because the poet does not claim to have a greater or privileged understanding of their surroundings than others.

Often for Tomlinson, this sense of perceived or not perceived, seen or unseen, manifests itself in a typically painterly way, such as the vanishing points and sense of visual limits in "The Fox Gallery," a poem inspired by a trip to Holwell Farm in Gloucester with American poet Ed Dorn, in which the two men observed a fox daily from a window on the top floor: "[follow] the fox's way / the whole length of the meadow / parallel with the restraining line / of wall and pane" (*CPCT* 185). It is also

an approach seen in “Nature Poem,” with its contrasts between light and dark, seen and unseen:

This August heat, this momentary breeze,
 First filtering through, and then prolonged in it,
 Until you feel the two as one, this sound
 Of water that is sound of leaves, they all
 In stirrings and comminglings so recall
 The ways a poem flows, they ask to be
 Written into permanence – not stilled
 But given pulse and voice. So many shades,
 So many filled recesses, stones unseen
 And daylight darkneses beneath the trees,
 No single reading renders up complete
 Their shifting text – a poem, too, in this,
 They bring the mind half way to its defeat,
 Eluding and exceeding the place it guesses,
 Among these overlappings, half-lights, depths,
 The currents of this air, these hiddenesses.

(CPCT 295)

Here, the processes of perception and of writing a poem are inseparable, and a finite “meaning” once more eludes the poet’s grasp, where “no single reading renders up complete / Their shifting text.” The verbs “exceeding” and “overlapping” make clear and the poet’s inability to accurately contain all the sensory data that confronts them, and oxymoronic phrases such as “filled recesses” and “stones unseen” (one wonders how something can be both “unseen” and allocated a definitive noun) emphasise the poem as a distinctly creative process, where a cognitive feeling-through is required just as much as an objective documentation of the facts. Everything here is interrelated and interdependent, reflective of the uncovering which is necessary because “world is never an object that stands before us and can be seen” (Heidegger 44). Certainly, Zukofsky’s “seeing-thinking-feeling” might be applied appropriately to this poem. Tomlinson’s concurrence with ideas of poetry as a temporal and flexible undertaking may be seen in the lines where the poem “[asks

to be] written into permanence – / not stilled / But given pulse and voice.” Here Tomlinson makes clear that “permanence” does not automatically mean static or unchangeable, but rather denotes durability, or lasting-resonance. According to Objectivist modes of perception which figure truth as a series of relative happenings, Tomlinson claims that the poem needs to be to be adaptable and changeable according to one’s surroundings, indeed an object ‘in context’ if it is to maintain its “permanency” – that is, if it is to continue to be relevant.

Tomlinson’s notions of the seen and unseen and his figuring of what gives a work of art permanence, draws into question the facile assumption that reality and truth are the same thing. There is a subtle and delicate balancing-out of interactions here: the poet is expected to be faithful to a world of objective facts and respect objects’ ‘otherness,’ yet ultimately value is placed instead on the “mutually supportive transaction between poet and world, one that damages neither partner” (Larrissy, *Reading* 122). Oppen and Zukofsky have both affirmed their dedication to a definition of reality as “of the physical world as independent of the mind or spirit” (R. Williams 258), which can be objectively observed: “[I am a] realist in the sense that something exists outside the poem” (Oppen, “George Oppen” 161); “I come into a room and I see a table. Obviously I can’t make it eat grass” (Zukofsky, “Louis Zukofsky” 204). Nevertheless, as previously stated, dedication to an “independent physical world” is not enough to delineate an ‘authenticity’ of perception. This seems to be what William Carlos Williams is hinting at when he invokes imagination as an equally important component of value as careful observation alone: “life is valuable – when completed by the imagination” (*CPI WCW* 194). Challenging unequivocal links between objective reality and formulations of truth is something which requires far more untangling, and has significant resonances for British poets’ relation to

empiricism. The point that I wish to make for now in highlighting this departure is simply that, for an Objectivist-influenced poet, an attention to details in-the-world is *not enough* to convince of the poet's intensity of perception. Rather, this can be figured by the kind of mantra that Tomlinson surmises perfectly in his aptly-titled poem "Aesthetic," an early piece that predates his interaction with the Objectivists: "Reality is to be sought, not in concrete, / But in space made articulate" (*CPCT* 3).

Andrew Crozier's 1974 sequence of nine poems, *The Veil Poem*, may be seen to embody just such a figuring of "space made articulate." In this case, the space is architectural, the work being inspired by the receipt of ten postcards from friend Jeffrey Morsman in 1971, containing images of a mosque in Oran. Crozier's selection of the noun "Veil" bears certain similarities to Tomlinson's preoccupation with the seen and unseen, and one wonders whether Crozier may have had in mind Williams' thingly-titled "Metric Figure" in which the veil reveals as much as it conceals: "Veils of clarity / have succeeded / veils of color / that wove / as the sea..." (*CPI WCW* 51-52). Williams' use of "wove" here is an interesting one, since weaving is also an analogy for perception also used by Tomlinson in his poem "Mushrooms": "a resemblance, too, / Is real and all its lights and links stay true / To the weft of seeing" (*CPCT* 294). Tomlinson's pinpointing of "weft" – as distinct from its counterpoint, "warp" – suggests once more that clear "seeing" is only one element of sensory engagement, a scaffolding of-sorts that forms the basis for a more complete perception.

Whether these fabric-like allusions shared between poets are coincidental or not,⁵⁹ they do suggest once more that perception is an interrelated process, consisting of the bringing together of many separate elements. Crozier's perception, just like Tomlinson's, is active and ever-evolving:

In the dark there is a fretwork
 that reveals a lightness beside it, gradually
 a tree stands out from the hedge and
 the rest of the garden, the sky lightens
 and bleeds off at the edges, quite sharp
 but not definite, the blueness has the frequency
 of space and there is nothing else but whatever
 has brought this tree here, quite taut
 but flowing smoothly through its changes
 I know it again and again and see how
 set in one place as it is and small and
 fragile I cannot dominate it, in the dark
 or with my eyelids closed it will score
 my face. Along a bright corridor the way
 turns or is transected and is lost
 in shadow, framed by a black latticed screen
 its light foreshortened, lacking
 depth. There is no radiant source within
 these walls, they hold the sunlight to
 define their intricate arching.

(CPAC 114)

Sudden shifts in perspective here characterise an active eye which “sees” (CPGO 70, original emphasis) in the exploratory sense. Indeed, if we consider Merleau-Ponty's inseparability of “vision” and “eye movement” (“The Eye” 294), this sense of a bodily involvement and of the poet physically moving between different spaces, becomes more convincing; this connection is further emphasised by the optical language: “foreshortened,” “lacking depth,” and in a later section “focal plane” and

⁵⁹ Objectivist poetry and prose is replete with references to craft – specifically, skilled making which is undertaken by hand. Tessellating, watch-making, and particularly sculpture and carpentry are analogies used to appropriate the process of making a poem. To discuss this topic fully would warrant another thesis, but this is something examined by Hatlen in “Art and/As Labour” and in Jennison's *Zukofsky Era* (particularly 56-68).

“horizon.” Such activity however is not infallible, with the noun “fretwork” situating observable phenomena within a bounded visual framework, segmenting images into visible and invisible, regardless of the poet’s desire to pay as much attention to details as possible. Indeed, if further confirmation were needed that the poet does not claim to see all, or that they acknowledge their perceptive limits with as much ‘sincerity’ as what they *do* see, it comes in the line “I cannot dominate it.” Here, in spite of seeing the “tree,” the poet declares that their presence or perspective does not supersede the object; Crozier resists the temptation to project his own egoic figurations on to the tree, leaving it simply to be “[quite] small and/ fragile.” It is important to note that the observer, in turn, is not unaffected by his perceptive encounter with the tree: “in the dark / or with my eyelids closed it will score / my face.” Crozier may be referring to a shadow cast by the tree, or equally to a bright afterimage temporarily imprinted on the retina. It may also be a pattern cast on to the observer’s face by light coming through the “black latticed screen” (probably a Mashrabiya or Jali). The senses are so attuned here that the opaque quality of things and how they affect and interact with other factors, such as sources of light, is the subject of just as much attention as their visual appearance. In such concern for detail as this, there is a basic ethical statement to be gleaned too – that the active poet, with sufficient “intensity of perception,” does not stand aloof and apart from what it is they perceive, but is inherently involved.

The similarity of Crozier’s perceptive impetus to that of the Objectivists’ (that is not to say that it is *precisely* the same, of course) is particularly revealed in the Oppen-esque use of the verb “know”: “I know it again and again and see how.” The repetition of “again” points doubtlessly to the fact that the tree and its surroundings cannot be “known” in a singular sense, but is subject to a continuous, re-evaluative

process. Further evidence of ongoing attempts to “make space articulate” is seen in Crozier’s use of lineation, often placing situating prepositions such as “that,” “the,” “and,” “but,” “has,” and “these” on the left hand margin, typographically emphasising that all the nouns of the poem are very much ‘in context’ with others. In this emphasis on connections, the reader gains the sense of the poet weighing up the possibilities both for perception and for poetry, and concluding that the two impulses are inseparable. Just as the mosque is a structure built by human hands, to piece together in a poem all the perceptions catalysed by this space is in itself an act of creation. This is much the same conclusion that Robin Purves comes to in his short essay on “The Veil Poem,” which similarly highlights the likely influences of Oppen and Heidegger: “[Crozier] encourages meditation on the process of looking and of thinking and of writing... The veil of words inscribed over the form of the building realises the dream of “The Veil Poem” as it unites linguistic and physical realities in a consummate feat of artistic production” (“What Veils”).

That seeing and writing are one-and-the-same and both an act of creation – emphasised by Purves’ use of the word “production” – is a conviction held strongly by the Objectivists. As such, Michael Heller has referred once more to the sense of truth as constantly unfurling: “truth is a possible and tentative occurrence – an activity of the poet’s making within the creative act of the poem. The poem does not so much show forth truth as it shows forth the ‘conviction’ (and hence the sincerity) of the moment, a moment which is time-bound and provisional” (*Conviction’s Net* 6). Accordingly, George Oppen writes in part of *Of Being Numerous*: “Occurrence, a part / Of an infinite series” (*CPGO* 163). That occurrence is constantly happening and subject to continual evaluation, is epitomised in what Oppen calls the “shock of recognition”:

Modern American poetry begins with the determination to find the image, the thing encountered, the thing seen each day whose meaning has become the meaning and the color of our lives... It is the arbitrary fact, and not any quality of wisdom literature, which creates the impact of the poets. The “shock of recognition”, when it is anything, is that... It is possible to find a metaphor for anything, an analogue: but the image is encountered, not found; it is an account of the poet’s perception, the act of perception; it is a test of sincerity, a test of conviction, the rare poetic quality of truthfulness” (“A Mind’s Own Place” 30-31).

The “shock of recognition” might be taken as the ultimate affirmation that the poem is a temporal creation, in that it does not follow predesignated imaginative orderings. Here too the verb “to recognise” also implies a process rather than a singular act, whereby seeing and the bringing-to-resonance which occurs in the mind cannot be untangled. Oppen’s use of “encountered” rather than “found” issues a directive against finite perceptive approaches, whereby a poet is able to exercise significant control over external stimuli (or indeed, to value-rank in terms of what is, and is not suitable material for poetry, a meaning hinted at by Oppen’s choice phrase “wisdom literature”). New sensory data may suddenly enter the poet’s perception, and as such the poet needs to affirm themselves as sufficiently in-the-world that they cannot help but be affected by it. This is shown potently in a poem from *Discrete Series*, commonly known as “Closed Car”:

Closed car – closed in glass –
 At the curb,
 Unapplied and empty:
 A thing among others
 Over which clouds pass and the
 alteration of lightning,
 An overstatement
 Hardly an exterior.
 Moving in traffic
 This thing is less strange –
 Tho the face, still within it,
 Between glasses – place, over which
 time passes – a false light.

(CPGO 13)

Much like the piecemeal unfurling of particulars in Crozier's *Veil Poem* series, we gain the impression of a gradual sequence of disclosure; the car is at first simply "closed," and then closed more specifically just a moment later owing to the addition of the defining "in glass," the use of hyphens typographically embodying this enclosure too. The car does have a latent political resonance for Oppen,⁶⁰ but here it is figured simply as "a thing among others," accruing meaning as a consequence of its relation to those others; it becomes "less strange" when considered in the context of its use-value,⁶¹ as "moving in traffic." The gradually-revealing energy of this poem might be appropriately characterised by the Heideggerian epigraph to Oppen's 1965 collection, *This in Which*: "[the] arduous path of appearance" (CPGO 92). In this poem then, detail occurs cumulatively and "arduously." Confirmation that the poet's perceptions, however gradual, are subject to change, is confirmed by the indented "alteration of lightning," with the shock of recognition coming near the end of the poem in the arresting discovery that the car contains "a face." According to the momentary nature of this recognition, we do not get any further descriptive detail; it is just "a face," and as such the poet withholds a more fulsome disclosure that might pre-empt a definitive or judgemental evaluation that would make the poem only 'about' the face in the car, rather than the process of its perception.

Though the term "shock of recognition" is Oppen's, he is not the only Objectivist to point to the necessary momentariness of perceptions. In Carl Rakosi's "City (1925)" – a poem that Tomlinson's archive at the Harry Ransom Center shows

⁶⁰ See Harold Schimmel, "(On) *Discrete Series*" in *George Oppen: Man and Poet*, particularly 306-307.

⁶¹ Again this is a distinctly Heideggerian conception of Oppen's. In "The Origin of a Work of Art" Heidegger distinguishes between "lifeless beings of nature and objects of use" (21), and also talks about "equipment" as a distinct category of "things" (15- 78).

was intended for inclusion in the British poet's anthology *Seven Significant American Poets*, which was never published – there are a number of these “shocks.” There is the photographic allusion of “the way a night shot/ discovers a beast drinking,” (*CPRk* 277),⁶² the verb “discover” here being particularly notable, and also the first person “I saw the city / changed” (277), where an indent visually emphasises this perceptive rupture. The third section of Louis Zukofsky's *29 Poems* also evokes a shock of recognition whereby the final noun, the “recognition” itself, is deferred to the very end of the poem following some disorientating (in the use of the word “Bacchae”) sensory impressions: “Bacchae / among electric lights / will swarm the crowds / streamers of the lighted / skyscrapers” (*LZSP* 12). Charles Reznikoff's technique is also similar to Zukofsky's in a short lyric from *Jerusalem the Golden*:

This smoky winter morning –
do not despise the green jewel shining among the twigs
because it is a traffic light. (*CPI Rz* 116)

For the Objectivist, a shock of recognition is important affirmation of the nature of seeing and writing as conjoined creative acts; the poet must continually renew their relation to the world and thereby continually assert their poem as a “new” object, which maintains its relevance to the contemporary situation. Williams writes accordingly that “the arts have a *complex* relation to society. The poet isn't a fixed phenomenon, no more his work” (*CPII WCW* 53, original emphasis); he also emphasises, using the analogy of seasonal renewal that spring entails, “THE WORLD IS NEW” (*CPI WCW* 182).

⁶² Crozier's interest in photography should also be noted, as per his review of exhibitions of the work of Alfred Stieglitz and Sadakichi Hartmann; see “American Photography” in *Thrills and Frills*, 138-143. Monique Claire Vescia has also linked the Objectivist perceptive mode and photography in her 2006 book *Depression Glass: Documentary Photography and the Medium of the Camera Eye in Charles Reznikoff, George Oppen, and William Carlos Williams*.

In a quest for ‘newness,’ not necessarily in the Poundian sense of “make it new” but in a sense of new *relations*, Charles Tomlinson has been quick to criticise poets suspected of propagating outmoded, or inherited responses. In his Movement critique “The Middlebrow Muse,” he worried specifically about the reduction of poetry to be merely “second hand responses” (215), and later clarified (in a response appearing in the “Critical Forum” section of the following issue) that he wanted “[a renewal in British poetry] by poets whose sensory organisation is alive, who are aware at their fingertips of the universe around them” (460). The Objectivist capacity to experience a shock of recognition is of course testimony to this awareness, but in Tomlinson’s emphasis on avoiding the “second-hand” there lies another latent ethical statement: for something to be second-hand it has passed through the mediation of an experience or viewpoint which is not the poet’s own. Tomlinson is referring in his article to the impression of detachment and aloofness that he sees in Movement poetry, but to extrapolate further his words also elucidate a link between immediacy and temporality, and the conviction that an individual does not need to seek affirmation or approval for their experiences from some other source. What such an external source could be, is of course entirely open for debate; but once more, the imperative for individual rather than collective thought is revealed. The poet needs not refer to anything outside his or her own authority to confirm the value of their experience, and as such Purves has made a similar observation regarding Crozier’s *Veil Poem*: “the surety of the truth of [the poet’s] own knowledge is found in that knowledge itself, that is, it foregoes the requirement to find a separate and unaligned guarantee for what he has observed of the observable earth.”

I will return to this notion of external validation, but first I want to look in more detail at the attention required towards “historic and contemporary particulars.”

Maintaining a concern for particulars is a key means of avoiding what Carl Rakosi has claimed to be a serious corruption: “Abstraction [is] the most deadly offender. When you write about something as though it were a principle or a concept or a generalization, you have in that moment evaded its specificity, its earthly life” (“Carl Rakosi” 187) (the other “corruption,” as paraphrased by L. S. Dembo in this same interview, is “an excessively rational apprehension of the subject” [187]). Rakosi’s thinking posits specificity as a prerequisite of contact with and relevance to the real world – but as always, that specificity must be tested and tried against other contingent factors. Michael Heller has identified this impetus as a defining characteristic of the Objectivist poetic:

What is meant to convince about Objectivist poetry is its sense of having been created within, as Zukofsky states, ‘a context based on the world.’ Thus, the division of Poundian and Objectivist poetics strikes me as hinging on this difference: that in Objectivist poetry, there is a profound sense of ‘one’s time,’ that the retort from which one forges any line of verse must first pass through the furnace of personality and history (*Conviction’s Net* 5).

Heller’s notion of passing “through” a furnace, the poem presumably being remoulded and affected on its reappearance, is another craftsman-like analogy. Here the verb “test” also comes to mind, as in Zukofsky’s didactic *A Test of Poetry*, and also an act whereby the correct materials must be selected for a given task and tested for certain qualities (strength, pliability, etc).

Gael Turnbull’s mysterious and elusive *Residues: Down The Sluice of Time* engages with just such this notion of the importance of particulars, “testing” them against each other and passing them through a “furnace of personality” and particularly “history” – hence the poem’s title. Often, Turnbull’s poem testifies to the mental activity of its creator via dramatic shifts in perspective, expanding and contracting viewpoints, and by moving rapidly between the tiny and particular (or

personal) to the universal. *Residues* also contains a number of “shock[s] of recognition” to attest to this activity, such as in the simple and momentary “a face / passed by on the street – / so near, / scarcely a breath away” (CPGT 231). Certainly, *Residues* energetically enacts a toing-and-froing between various arbitrary occurrences, quotidian details, semi-formed memories, anecdotes, or elliptical statements. The poem’s refusal to settle on any one occurrence or theme, weighing things instead against each other with an intensity of perception which frequently seems haphazard, is evidenced early on:

glitter of what’s far off,
flash of the unseen
casting back the light

pulse of the stars – and the dark
consumes our sight – in a shuttered room,
a candle flickers – and her eyes ignite

to rekindle
at source
the first fire –
need, need
against need,
the need fire –
to consume
with a need,
to blaze forth –
to ignite
the last void,
to flare silent

and a girl walks away down the street – her
hair hangs in a braid down her back – as
she walks, she moves, that braid moves,
my heart moves – desire moving, shaking
the heart

(CPGT 222)

In the space of three short irregular stanzas, the poem has moved from a sense of something that exists distantly (“glitter of what’s far off”) to the very specific and immediate (the girl with the braid). Indeed, the title of Turnbull’s poem points to

changeability: “residues” – an existence that cannot quite be grasped, or only in part; “sluice” – a sudden and continual outpouring; and “throng” – a dense, crowded, buzzing activity. This changeability is further emphasised in the way that Turnbull employs a variant form in each stanza the whole way through the poem, constantly altering the typographical layout.

Turnbull’s means of ‘testing’ the particulars against each other is often embodied in his linguistic experiments, a feature which has led Kenneth Cox to note

[his] distinctive characteristic is the extreme flexibility of his conceptions. The earliest of the poems printed already display a taste for the equivocal. Many of the later ones make ordinary things look gradually or suddenly different. Turnbull turns his conceptions around, using for the purpose the simplest verbal means available. A principal source of the pleasure his poetry gives is thus not superficial verbal ease but facility of conceptual transformation (95).

I would take this a step further and say that in *Residues* “superficial verbal ease” and “conceptual transformation” are inseparable, hearkening back once more to an Objectivist sense of conjoined creative activities (seeing-thinking-feeling-writing). These connective and transformative energies may take the form of repetition, as in this section where one noun catalyses the next:

and I dreamt I stood before a tree
 that tree was rooted in the earth
 that earth was firm beneath my feet
 my feet still hidden by the dark
 a darkness lit by many stars
 stars that were mingled with the leaves
 leaves that were restless as they sang
 that sang the changes of the wind
 a wind that came for ever from the sky

(CPGT 233)

or they may be presented in the rapid-fire assonance of the following:

gaps in the haze, in the dawn
light glimpsed, one sight

hearing the wind
through stones – alone –
under the eaves – seeking
from nowhere – going, no
not home – needing reprieve –
where is? – who knows? – with snow
greaved – grieving to the bone

(CPGT 239)

Stanzas such as these reveal Turnbull's intent focus on the material qualities of language via the sonic inflections of particular words, a characteristic he shares with Zukofsky. Homophones are something of a curio to the Scottish poet, and here the archaic noun "greave" – a piece of armour worn on the shin, thus enacting a conceptual connection with the following "bone" – is counterpoised against the common and emotive verb "grieve," itself likely generated by a gritty and apparently capricious anecdote from a preceding stanza: "old Charlie Oliver... riddled with cancer" (CPGT 223).

In this way, Turnbull is constantly enacting connections between disparate parts, many of which at first do not seem obvious or likely; but if these verbal somersaults and imagistic cacophonies may seem merely playful, when considered in a framework of Objectivist perception, they gain an ethical cogency. For example, conceptual "transformation," a flexible expanding and contracting of perceptions that may frequently be seen in Oppen (particularly in *Discrete Series*), can also be seen in Turnbull. Consider for example Oppen's tiny quatrain, in which an extreme conceptual zooming in rapidly places the expansive ocean in relation to human domesticity: "The edge of the ocean, / The shore: here / Somebody's lawn, / By the water" (CPGO 18). This is also seen in the first poem from *Discrete Series*:

The knowledge not of sorrow, you were
 saying, but of boredom
 Is – aside from reading speaking
 smoking –
 Of what, Maude Blessingbourne it was,
 wished to know when, having risen,
 “approached the window as if to see
 what was really going on”;
 And saw rain falling, in the distance
 more slowly,
 The road clear from her past the window-
 glass –
 Of the world, weather-swept, with which
 one shares the century.

(CPGO 5)

The sense of “boredom” again has much in common with Heidegger,⁶³ and the perceptive movement here is from small to large. “Maude Blessingbourne” reads quietly and then, upon moving to the window, gains a sense of her position in relation to the wider outside world, even a sense of a relation to history in the final lines “with which / one shares the century.” This is surely an example of what DuPlessis has termed “a poetry of affiliation” (“Objectivist Poetics” 143), in which the recognition of apparently unimportant or quotidian things and occurrences – in Oppen’s case, boredom – implicitly confirm our relation to the wider world. Turnbull’s affiliations frequently manifest themselves as a preoccupation with small details, such as in the tiny frantic bodies of insects:

with a turmoil of insects on the window
 pane, seeking the light and warmth –
 each alive, each separate, each with
 its desire –
 and behind them: the night

(CPGT 231)

This particular passage appears to share the notion of the Objectivist “shock,” the night suddenly framing the smallness of the insects and revealing their position

⁶³ See Vescia 80.

within larger happenings. It is a kind of hyperbolic contextualisation, in which a sudden and unexpected juxtaposition creates a new meaning for the arbitrarily-observed thing.

Turnbull's most striking and memorable "conceptual transformation" in *Residues* is once more enacted via the image of an insect – this time, a bluebottle:

The Sondercommando were the
prisoners condemned to work in the
crematorium. They could only be relied
upon to work for a few weeks. The first
job of each new member of the Sondercommando
was the incineration of his predecessor

the first job? the chief end?
and the brilliance of colour
on the belly of a bluebottle –
what possible purpose?

(CPGT 237)

The first stanza is like a paragraph from a disinterested history book; the language is matter-of-fact, almost documentary-like, and the lineation displays a creative and perceptual inertia which is in stark contrast to much of the rest of the poem. The bluebottle is introduced in the succeeding stanza apparently at random, and it is only after a moment's contemplation that the resonance of the animal becomes recognised. Turnbull uses the "simple verbal means" he often favours (Cox 95) of rhetorical questions to frame the two lines in which the bluebottle appears. This posits the insect's presence as a central contradiction: its iridescent body is the subject of visual wonder, an injection of colour into an otherwise utterly depressing scene – a change emphasised by the alliteration accompanying its appearance – but at the same time the creature itself is drawn to rotting matter. It is via the bluebottle therefore, that we are irrevocably drawn back to the horror of the Sondercommandos' task, stated with such nonchalance in the previous stanza: it is

in the insect's presence that such human brutality comes to be recognized. Turnbull's final rhetorical question here, "what possible purpose?" is simultaneously diffused and extended by the insect; it can be read dually as "what purpose" for imbuing such a morbid animal with such beauty, or as "what purpose" for the mass killing. Of course, the bluebottle cannot and does not provide answers to two unanswerable questions – it can only function as one instance of a 'particular' through which the emotive truth of the Holocaust begins to emerge. To answer a question such as "what possible purpose" would be to revert to a finite and encompassing knowledge, where of course it remains that the enormity of the Holocaust will always be incomprehensible. Turnbull's question then is perpetually deferred, left to echo endlessly in an empty "void" which attests to the twinned impossibilities of both finishing and forgetting.⁶⁴

Turnbull's bluebottle is most certainly a "particular" that has, to re-state Heller, "passed through the furnace of time" and re-emerged the other side with a potent resonance which is distinctly of its time. It is an example of "sincerity" in Zukofsky's sense – that is, an attention to detail ("Louis Zukofsky" 209); its tiny and fleeting presence indicates that truths can only be addressed partially, contingently, and temporarily, and so the poet must always look to close, immediate (and often innocuous) things in order to ground the "authenticity" of their ever-evolving experience. To put this in the simplest terms possible, an Objectivist-influenced poet maintains a conviction that small parts *do* relate to the wider world, and that in this way so does the individual relate to a greater whole – specifically, society. Charles Tomlinson's body of work clearly displays the belief that abstraction in poetry is a

⁶⁴ The word "void" is Rachel Blau DuPlessis's, used in the essay "Objectivist Poetics and Political Vision". The necessity of leaving some things un-disclosed, or un-clarified, or more specifically of the importance of silence, is an Objectivist prerogative discussed in the next chapter.

retreat from social concerns and a neglect of the virtue of sincerity, but throughout his career, the British poet struggled to convey to critics his certitude that nothing can be fully experienced in isolation or removed from its context.⁶⁵ In this way, Brian John has defended Tomlinson, pointing out that his work “shares with Larkin the same concern for the character of English social life” (94), and that the lack of first person pronouns in his work is actually key to forming relationships: “Such detachment serves both a phenomenological and a social purpose... it bears also upon that acknowledgement of the otherness of things, whether people or world, which is central to civility and true relationship” (95). John’s reading undoubtedly rings true of Tomlinson’s own comments about his work, although the use of the word “detachment” is problematic in relation to my arguments, and “civility” is perhaps out of place, owing to its suggestion of a socially-decorous, emotionally-withheld relation. “Civility” also has much in common with “gentility,” a contentious word in the context of post-war British poetries.⁶⁶

Tomlinson has repeatedly expressed frustrations, particularly to Hugh Kenner, that his poetry has been read as distant from social and human concerns:

“You say that my particular idiom doesn’t cope with Larkin’s world of factories and waste. When my parents were ill and dying, I made many journeys to the industrial midlands and in The Way In (1974) I deliberately set out to take on Larkin’s territory in the first ten or fifteen poems of that book. I had to, after the insult to my birthplace, Stoke, in Larkin’s ‘Mr Bleaney’ (his sister came from there, you’ll recall)” (13th June 1987, MLS. Kenner 49.5. HRC).

Similarly, the very title of the 1963 collection *A Peopled Landscape* can be seen as an immediate rejoinder to any critic who would label Tomlinson only as an aloof

⁶⁵ For a summary, see Kirkham 1-21.

⁶⁶ I am thinking here particularly of A. Alvarez’s *The New Poetry*, which is a subject for my final chapter.

nature poet. Donald Davie, Tomlinson's former mentor at Cambridge and (for the most part) supporter, has noted and praised an innate, twinned human and ethical concern in George Oppen's poetry: "[Oppen] does not need to protest, rant or ironize. The social criticism is as completely merged with the objects he presents as any other element of experience or response" ("Notes on George Oppen's *Seascape*" 415). But Davie did not always recognise the same conviction in his countryman, writing of Tomlinson in the poem "To a Brother in the Mystery", "Never care so much / For leaves or people, but you care for stone / A little more" (*Collected Poems* 108). Tomlinson however has been quick to point out that a poet that apparently *claims* to be socially-involved – that is, who utilises a good deal of public settings or events in their poetry, or frequently writes about human interactions – may be just as detached from society as someone who does not use first person pronouns:

[An] Englishman's awareness of his history is still a dense one. Or is it? The protagonist of Philip Larkin's poem, "Church Going," apparently knows nothing about the church he's visiting and the architectural terms and the history of the place are null as far as he's concerned. In "The Whitsun Weddings" Larkin sees people marooned in an essentially suburban culture and so not much different from anybody else with no sense of history... There is a point in Larkin's turning to interpret an essentially suburban world, yet one feels at times that he allows himself to be mentally stupefied by the premises of that world: "I work all day and get half-drunk at night." – the protagonist of that more recent poem seems to suggest a final passive acceptance of the shrunken possibilities, of an impoverished present.⁶⁷

In the disinterested and ahistorical manner that Tomlinson identifies in Larkin,

Objectivist principles regarding perception would seem to apply: insufficient attention

⁶⁷ "A Sense of the Past and Some Recent English Poetry" MS draft for lecture c.1982. Tomlinson 3.3. HRC. 4. Contains MS note: "Eventually much-changed because of the Kenneth Allot lecture of Uni of ? 1982." The changed version of this MS was published by Liverpool University Press in 1982 as "The Sense of the Past: Three Twentieth-Century Poets."

to specifics, and insufficient evidence that the poem has properly weighed up “historic and contemporary particulars.” Tomlinson demonstrates that a poet may be physically situated *in* society, but actually completely detached in an intellectual and emotional sense, and in this way he cautions against facile appropriations between setting or imagery and the idea that on this basis a poet is “social” or “asocial.” Oppen’s lines from “World, World – ” might well summarise this conviction: “Those who will not look / Tho they feel on their skins / Are not pierced; / One cannot count them / Tho they are present” (CPGO 159). Once more, connections between perceiving and being are established, with the qualification that physically being present and being in-the-world are not one and the same thing.

Tomlinson’s thinking is concomitant with numerous sureties in Objectivist writing that attention to specifics is the only authentic way to affirm one’s connection to a wider world, and social concerns. George Oppen’s memorable first stanza from the beginning of *Of Being Numerous* attests to this: “There are things / We live among ‘and to see them / Is to know ourselves” (CPGO 163).⁶⁸ Peter Nicholls has taken these (borrowed) lines to mean that “an understanding of others is the crucial condition for any self-knowledge” (87). Oppen also utilises a quote from French philosopher Jacques Maritain’s *Creative Intuition in Art and Poetry* – a book that was important to Oppen and one he would have surely introduced Tomlinson to (if he was not already aware of it) – as an epigraph to *The Materials*: “we awake in the same moment to ourselves and to things” (CPGO 38). That the poet and their poetry are constantly defined in relation to other things – not the isolated, invulnerable and introspective stance of the ego alone – contains a significant ethical bearing, one

⁶⁸ Peter Nicholls has identified the source of this phrase in quotation marks as Robert Brumbough’s *Plato for the Modern Age*. See *George Oppen* 87.

that can be seen as crystallised in a little-analysed inheritance in Tomlinson's poetry from the philosophy of Simone Weil: "For me, my poetry is encouraging an act of attention which rises above the merely natural man and Simone Weil's words in her marvellous essay on education have long signalled my own feelings about what I am doing: 'Every time we pay attention, we destroy some of the evil within' (13th June 1987, MLS to Hugh Kenner. Kenner 49.5. HRC). Weil is also a source of interest for Oppen, whose opening poem of *Seascape: Needle's Eye* is titled "From a Phrase of Simone Weil's and Some Words of Hegel's" (CPGO 211).⁶⁹ Tomlinson's pointed use of "merely natural" here can be seen as embodying the Objectivist idiom as-a-whole: no part of the creative process can be passive, blasé, assumed or unthinking – or, of course, "second hand". Though it is not certain which essay the British poet is referring to (he does not give a title), his comments closely relate to Weil's "Attention and Will," in which the "possibility" of applying full attention is proposed as the primary aim of teaching:

The poet produces the beautiful by fixing his attention on something real. It is the same with the act of love. To know that this man who is hungry and thirsty really exists as much as I do – that is enough, the rest follows itself.

The authentic and pure values – truth, beauty and goodness – in the activity of a human being are the result of one and the same act, a certain application of the full attention to the object (234).

That acute attention (an "intensity of perception" by any other name) is the primary prerequisite of social empathy, and importantly that it is not passive but an act of "will," significantly chimes with Objectivist idioms. One may think of Zukofsky's apprehension of an absurdly out of place praying mantis on the New York subway, who may be trampled on by "the poor" ("Mantis", *CSPLZ* 73-74), or Williams' frail

⁶⁹ See further Jeremy Hooker's essay, "Seeing the World: The Poetry of George Oppen."

“poor old woman / munching a plum on / the street” (*CPI WCW* 383). The point here is an exceedingly simple one: paying proper attention to and thinking hard about the relations between things is essential in order to recognise social injustices.

Furthermore, it almost goes without saying that injustices must first be acknowledged in order to come up with possible means for addressing them. In this way, the Objectivist mode of perception constantly refigures the attentive poet as “a thing among others,” searching and exploring the space they occupy, in order to attempt to recognise not just physical but moral relations between themselves, others, and the world. That it is only via relation and contextualisation that the individual may gain relevance and cogency, is a matter so at the core of the perceptive act that the likes of Tomlinson have not seen the need to state it overtly; this has been possibly to the detriment of being labelled an “aesthete,” “psychologically objective,” or a socially disinterested poet.

Before moving on to the next chapter, where “will” becomes even more important when examining the constructive energies evident in the form of the poem, it is necessary to consider briefly once more the subject of the ego in Objectivist poetry. If we think of Weil’s figuring of attention, and Zukofsky’s idea too of the “poet’s eye” as a discriminating and “focusing lens,” it should be quite clear that the exercising of proper “intensity of perception” precludes any figuration of the poet’s ego. Though I hesitate to use words like ‘natural’ (as Tomlinson did a moment previously), there is the sense that an absence of exceedingly subjective or egoic formulations will be an inevitable consequence of properly attuned perception. A moment’s thought will show that the implied opposite of this, that an attentive eye might look out into the world and see only matters that concern or relate to its own ego, is of course self-absorbed and morally reprehensible for the Objectivist.

Unsurprisingly, a number of twentieth century artists and theorists have meditated on the ramifications of such a focus on ego, not least Jacques Maritain in his discussion of the sublime in poetry. Maritain deems such art “defective in aesthetic value” because it is “distant” from perception, and seeks only to “overcome” and subsume stimuli found in the physical world for its own purposes (6). Maritain therefore marks this as a hierarchical relationship and a conflict, one in which the poet proposes the greater value of their own subjective mental state. Furthermore, an approach that stirs up “vague and indeterminate heroic possibilities” (6) suggests abstraction, where the poet stops looking outwards to the world and perception ceases to be a process but instead becomes staid within the confines of the ego. It is safe to say that for Tomlinson too, so keen to emphasise the mutual and mutable nature of the relationship between poets and things, egocentric formulations involve the assertion of power, dominance or possession: “I only have to look out of that window in the morning to see that nature isn’t mine” (“Charles Tomlinson at Brook Cottage” 78). Again, this is borne out by the vocabulary of “Swimming Chenango Lake,” where the swimmer “grants the grasp” and water is “a possession to be relinquished / Willingly at each stroke” (*CPCT* 155). Objectivist perception therefore is always at pains to promote a careful, attentive, and crucially non-hierarchical relationship between the poet and the world, and by implication not to endorse certain hierarchies present within society. This last point, of course, requires far more explanation throughout the course of this study.

I stated earlier that the Objectivist notion of perception pursues a continual and contingent ‘truth’ with a lower case ‘t’, and that this truth is not reliant on justification from any authority other than the poet’s own. While this is an assertion of the validity of individual experience and individual thought, it also has the potential to

make the poet into a kind of perceptive autocrat – aloof, unfeeling and invulnerable. This is perhaps one reason that Objectivist literature is frequented with references to the poet's "integrity" and "responsibility," pointedly ethical words that confirm a duty *to* or *for* something other than the poet's self alone. While it is true that the Objectivist may need look to no other experience than their own for validation, this purposive rejection of the ego coupled with an emphasis that being in the world occurs in context, shifts final, judgment-forming power away from the poet. Certainly, the processes and modifications involved in "sensing with things as they exist" (Zukofsky, "Louis Zukofsky" 209) are too fluid to permit definitive or summative positions. Thus the Objectivist's mind and eye alike are inquisitive and independent, but the poet's position is never epistemologically privileged: the writing of the poem is always "The act of being, the act of being / More than oneself" (*GOCP* 159).

This chapter has established how Objectivist perception is founded on the importance of attention to detail and non-hierarchical relationships between things, self and world. In the framework of my research questions, the Objectivist perceptive mode shifts value onto the individual 'will' to attention, and away from any extrapolative and authoritative temptations to mould a world which is physical and resistant into a reflection of the poet's ego. This acute attention is also a means of recognising injustices, and therefore meditating on the authoritative social structures which bring them into being. A dedication to the temporality of the poem too, or of keeping the poem 'current' in its relation to the world, is an approach which also seeks to guard against the influence of any external, legitimising authorities, placing value on an individual's responsibility to see and respond to a world which is relevant to them at any given time, rather than to defer to inherited modes for its contemplation. The next chapter will explore how these convictions are embodied in

the making of the poem. Just as with perception, the central Objectivist precept of making “an object” of the poem is a means of avoiding abstraction, and proving the poet’s rigorous and independent thought in relation to the world. Like perception, form is confirmation of mental activity, something which, in the words of a section from Crozier’s *The Veil Poem*, “leave[s] no single point at rest” (CPAC 117). Once more, the manner in which the British poets of this thesis responded to the formal techniques of the Objectivists – and their responses are certainly not uniform – undertakes a significant ethical and political bearing which can be related back to their dissatisfaction with certain elements of poetry in their own country.

Chapter 3: Conviction

the poem is

conviction forceful
as light

(“Beautiful As The Sea,” CPGO 301)

In his interview with L. S. Dembo in *Contemporary Literature*, Louis Zukofsky defined both sincerity and objectification, as per his so-called Objectivist manifesto: “Sincerity is the care for the detail... Objectification is the structure. I like to think of it as rest, but you can call it movement” (209). This chapter and the next therefore address the central Objectivist notion of the poem “as object” – or, to put it another way, the Objectivist attitude towards both the value and deployment of language in the structure of poetry. Typically, this is very complex and apparently contradictory, but like the “perception” of the previous chapter, some unifying principles can be identified within this poetic “nexus,” in spite of the very different styles of each poet. Indeed, in his essay “A Poetics of Marginality and Resistance” mentioned in the previous chapter, Burton Hatlen considers what it was that the Objectivist poets “[had] in common,” and identifies foremost their approach to language as a fundamental, unifying principle: “what distinguishes these poets is their determination to find or invent a poetic language that will... shatter the grand ideological abstractions of the dominant culture” (38). Such a statement once again realigns objectification with perception; it is further evidence of the conglomerated convictions that underline the Objectivist poetic – that perceiving and writing are inseparable acts, and furthermore that in doing so the poet is inherently related to society. In the Objectivist approach to language then, broadly similar rules apply as they do to

perception: abstraction is to be avoided at all times; attention to particulars is collocated in an attention to the minutiae of language; the poet has a responsibility not just to perceive accurately, but to write or say accurately; the poet has a 'faith' that words *do* have some important, however imperfect, ability to disclose things and events. Of course, the case is much more complex than this, as I shall show, and as such the beginning of this chapter forms an overall introduction to the ideas to be explored here and in the next section on "Objectification."

Parataxis or Fragmentation?

In order to think more carefully and usefully about the Objectivist approach (if it can be spoken about in the singular sense) and to situate it in relation to a broader context of other modernist poetics, I am going to dedicate this first section to bringing certain ideas to light. This section will therefore be concerned with outlining some substantial questions and concepts, which will require demonstration by reference to the poems themselves in the second section of this chapter.

In this way, I want to use Ruth Jennison's formulation from the beginning of her 2012 monograph *The Zukofsky Era* as a jumping off point. In it, she proposes a dichotomy between "fragmentation" – a favoured technique of many "first generation" modernists including Eliot and Joyce – and "parataxis." Jennison defines parataxis as "the formal development of a radical agency, wherein discrete particulars are placed side by side" (3), calling it "the signature strategy of Objectivism" (3). Jennison's definition has much in common with Zukofsky's emphasis on "the quality of things being together without violence to their individual intact natures" in "An Objective" (13), an essay in which he also bemoans the "degradation of the

individual word in a culture which seems hardly to know that each word is in itself an arrangement" (13). We can say then that parataxis is the poetic act of placing 'discrete' words, each considered 'wholes' in their own right, side by side in order to emphasise the nature of the relations between them. This is distinct from syntax alone in that syntax is "a set of rules and principles in language" whereby a writer or speaker can create "well-formed sentences" (*OED*). The authority suggested by "rules and principles" and the value implication of "well-formed" sentences, underlines syntax as a far more restrictive undertaking than parataxis, and one whose practice can be taken to denote "socially credentialed" (Guillory xi) communicative modes. In contrast, *the Princeton Encyclopaedia of Poetry and Poetics* specifies that "in a paratactic style, the logical relationships among elements are not specified but are left to be inferred by the reader" (650). The idea that parataxis is free from grammatical hierarchies shall be shown to be an important one for the Objectivists in terms of language's ability to render individual thought, but this also presents a potential difficulty for my analysis: in a chapter which sets up a difference between parataxis and fragmentation in modernist poetries, how far are the two comparable? The definitions above suggest that parataxis is often grammatically identifiable, whereas fragmentation, it seems, is more to be perceived as an 'effect' rather than an objectively determinable 'technique.' This is a subtle distinction, and one that cannot really be satisfactorily resolved; so in accordance with Objectivism's conjoined seeing-thinking-writing, I want to think about this binary in terms of the variant worldview that each offers, and also in terms of contrasts in how poetry might be thought to address or represent those views. Once more, this can only be shown through examples. In claiming a difference between the Objectivists and some other modernists therefore, this chapter outlines another

reason for British poets' selection of the Objectivists specifically over other possible exemplars.

Firstly, it is necessary to think about what fragmentation is conceived to be. It is of course inevitable that T. S. Eliot's famous line from the end of *The Waste Land* instantly springs to mind: "these fragments I have shored against my ruins" (430). Equally, W. B. Yeats' famous words from "The Second Coming" – "things fall apart; the centre cannot hold" (211) – might be taken as another example, indicative of "ruin," "anarchy" (211) and a loss of cohesion. Indeed, fragmentation seems generally to be interpreted as some kind of spiralling, often uncontrollable dissolution of both the self and the self's relation to the world, accompanied by a questioning of the representative capability of language to communicate this dissolution. Indeed, John Xiros Cooper has considered fragmentation as a defining trope of modernist poetry, where "not only does society need to be shored up by the self, but the 'I' does as well" (248). In spite of the term's frequent usage by critics however, its meaning is somewhat slippery and it is not always used exclusively in relation to modernist poetry. For example, John Beer has spoken of "fragmentary and divided thinking" and "self-contradictions" in Romantic poetry (232). Anthony L. Johnson shares such a focus on self, similarly defining fragmentation as "gaps or portions missing from a *Gestalt*" (399), subsequently claiming that much of the disorientation a reader experiences in reading a text such as *The Waste Land* or *Ulysses* comes about from the inability to grasp "centres of consciousness" due to frequent "unannounced shifts in linguistic or actorial register" (403). Anthony Mellors, taking the British poet J. H. Prynne as his more contemporary example, also refers to an "uncompromising textuality in which the personal voice or lyric ego of the poet ceases to be an organising principle and gets dispersed in the melee of mutually

exclusive utterances which now make up the poem” (167). Mellors furthermore observes that “Prynne never quite gives up the claim to an authorial presence which might unify the fragmented text,” but that “such a presence becomes increasingly contingent, haunting the poem as a call to unity that fails to materialise” (167). What all these excerpts have in common is that they do indeed figure fragmentation as a dissolution or breaking apart of a unified self (A. Johnson’s “Gestalt”) – a self which it is tantalisingly suggested *may* be recovered, but is conspicuous by its absence or indeterminacy. In this way, both fragmentation and parataxis can be understood as embodying senses of discontinuity. Where the two significantly differ, however, is that in a paratactical approach, words and accompanying ideas are not figured as “fragments” of some previously identifiable whole (whether that be an authorial figure/voice or some kind of discernible narrative) but are instead already considered complete wholes in their own right. This has important consequences for notions of reconstitution, a factor other critics have picked up on and one I shall turn to shortly. Parataxis places these smaller, supposedly self-contained wholes (words) side by side in order to create new relations, and in this way it also rejects any possible notion of words themselves as ‘belonging’ to the poet, or of having stemmed directly from his or her psyche. Indeed, the Objectivist poet is at pains to constantly emphasise language as something communal, shared by and connecting us all, and something we may all access equally.

Already, it should be evident from these first, tentative distinctions that fragmentation and parataxis can be figured as indicative of certain ideological differences. Accordingly, Jennison writes of the Objectivist dedication to “avoiding the specious speculations regarding the imprint of a subject supposedly fragmented by modern life upon the text,” and furthermore that “[the] account of modernist

fragmentation enjoys institutional hegemony” (2). That this is patently similar to Peter Quartermain’s assessment in “Canonical Strategies and the Question of Authority” mentioned in my first chapter (and also with other arguments therewith) cannot be ignored; however, it is Jennison’s argument concerning precisely why modernist fragmentation is preferred by the academies that is most interesting:

Such hegemony persists, in part, because fragmentation supplies students with a useful metaphor with analysis of modernist form in which fragments melancholically register the unstoppable proliferation of immigrant languages in the metropole and the sharding of the world produced by anticolonial existence... Fragmentation, it turns out, is less a formal descriptor than it is a narrative about the ways in which a lamenting liberalism invokes an essentially conservative ontology. In this genealogy, modernist texts signal a regretful fall from the place prior to imperialist and class conflict (2-3).

Jennison’s claims that students are accustomed to thinking about poetry in metaphors has much to say in the first instance about the way such material is commonly assumed to be taught (thinking back again to my first chapter). Crucially, in positing fragmentation specifically as a metaphor, Jennison by implication suggests that the fragmentary trope inherently looks to some ‘other,’ or supplementary means in order to properly define itself: it is not ‘the actual thing’ or the response accessed as directly as possible, but rather a projection or manifestation of it. Once more, we might refer to Eliot’s “objective correlative”,⁷⁰ while it will not be beneficial here to conduct a detailed analysis of Eliot’s theory, a crucial distinction can be identified between absences and presences, or between presenting “correlatives” for a thing, and presenting the thing itself. It is worth mentioning too that the employment of metaphor is often viewed with suspicion by the objectivist poet, on the premise that its use requires a transfer of meaning from

⁷⁰ See “Hamlet and His Problems” in *The Sacred Wood* 95-103.

one word to another.⁷¹ Summarising differences between fragmentation and parataxis therefore, there appears to be a distinction between writing which defers or deflects meaning while indicating subtly that it *can* be obtained, thereby inviting academic analysis or readerly attention “towards retrievals of sense” (A. Johnson 340), and alternatively writing which defies the notion of extra-textual meaning, pointing instead to the very materiality of the relations between words on the page as substantial meaning-in-itself. This certainly ties in very much with Objectivist perception, as the poem need not refer to anything external to its own form – not even metaphor – to “verify its authenticity.” Such a distinction reveals much too about Objectivism’s attitude towards the value and utility of words. ‘Conviction’ is another common component of the Objectivist’s vocabulary, a word which implies that the poet should always be sure they are using the ‘right’ word and the ‘right’ structure, because nothing else will do. Such claims to conviction would of course not be possible if words or the poem functioned simply as corollaries to something else altogether; or, even, if the self was so fragmented that it would be incapable of proposing anything with any surety. These contrasts between present and absent, there and deferred, form the basis of ideas about the Objectivist poem as object: it is always present, constantly referring to its own materiality, and gives the impression of intactness.

Ruth Jennison’s observations regarding a fragmentary versus paratactic modernism are not unique, and correlate with a number of recent studies that have also concerned themselves with this distinction as part of a wider discussion about different ‘types’ of modernism. Michael Davidson for instance, has alluded to a split

⁷¹ For more on metaphoric transfer, see Johnson’s *Philosophical Perspectives on Metaphor* 6-12. Simile is not viewed with the same suspicion, since it involves the *comparison* rather than transfer of signifieds. For some examples of Objectivist and British grumblings about metaphor, see Zukofsky, *A Test* 58 and “Sincerity” 197; Rakosi, *Collected Prose* 30; Crozier, “Thrills” 45.

between fragmentation and parataxis in his introduction to Oppen's *New Collected Poems*, figuring the uptake of the latter (though he does not use the particular word "parataxis") specifically as a response to Depression era experiences: "The experience of the 1930s convinced [George Oppen] that the aesthetic strategies of his modernist predecessors were no longer adequate to deal with the social trauma of increasing modernization" (xx). This is largely the same route that Ben Hickman follows in his 2015 *Crisis and the US Avant-Garde*, which contains a substantial reading of Louis Zukofsky's work as a similar product of such experiences (16- 42). Hickman notes too that American avant-garde poets held very little in common with "the obliterative methods used by European modernism" (7), thereby making a transatlantic distinction, and – like Jennison's proposal that fragmentation indicates "an essentially conservative ontology" – furthermore that "[Eliotic modernism] show[s] up the degradation of modern society by comparing it unfavourably with the achievements of the past" (31). In this way, Alex Latter's survey of Crozier's *English Intelligencer* magazine similarly notes a trend throughout the publication's issues away from "fragmentary" tropes and towards "reconfiguring rather than disfiguring modernism[s]" (2), where attention is "no longer focused on the restitution of a mythic whole... [but] simply to remain attentive to its own processes" (194). Clearly, all these critical viewpoints share a concern with the variant possibilities that either fragmentation or parataxis present for the reconstitution of certain wholes, or the reforming of a meaningful relationship between self and world which has become severed. It is apparent in the accounts of all (as well as a number of others⁷²) that what *type* of reformation might ultimately take place is absolutely crucial. At the risk

⁷² See also a discussion of Eliot's "discourse of insularity" in Jed Esty's *A Sinking Island*, 110. Sara R. Greaves has similarly read Eliot's 1940 poem "East Coker" as a "[l]ament for] a long-lost English organic community" ("Transcultural Hybridity and Modernist Legacies" 160).

of over-simplifying or generalising such questions, the choice between the two different approaches seems to be essentially divided into either a) Fragmentation: a return to some previous, lamentably lost whole, or b) Parataxis: the making of an entirely new set of contexts. One may be perceived as somewhat backward-looking, while the other seeks to move forwards.

Such critical responses show that Jennison is not alone in figuring these differences as an expression of some political conviction. Jennison's key word in her formulation of this dichotomy would seem to be "agency" (3), and it is one that constitutes the pivotal modernist question for Xiros Cooper too: "the problem [for modernism] lay in how one might reconstruct individual agency from the disjointures of modernity and yet not fall into an imprisoning egoism" (Xiros Cooper 252). Of course, Jennison's reading of fragmentation is a little negative; certainly authors can have a "positive appraisal of fragmentariness" (A. Johnson 399), and absence does not in-itself necessarily signal negativity: "[fragmentation] does not mean that poetry achieves an inverse or negative status in terms of something 'lost' to itself as the negative experience of a transcendent, 'full' meaning" (Mellors 170). But Jennison's (and others') considerations question what variant opportunities fragmentation and parataxis might present for the execution of individual agency. Given fragmentation's gesture towards apparently absent things, and its proposition that there was, once, something whole where the fragments now reside, one is left wondering what palpable, graspable material there is left with which one may attempt to re-build some semblance of meaningful relations.⁷³ Fragmentation explicitly gives the impression that the initial fragmenting occurred as a result of circumstances distinctly

⁷³ However I do accept that, as per Mellor's assertion, there may be conversely be much meaning in meaningless. What I simply hope to suggest here is that there is a difference between subversion and indirection, or claiming that nihilism conversely does create meaning, and a contrasting poetics which is more direct and opaque.

outside the poet's control. Read in this way, fragmentation might be interpreted as a position of relative helplessness: how may one put back together shards of a previously formed whole in the unrelenting persistence of what caused them to fragment in the first place? Fragmentation does not, nor does it even attempt to, offer answers (and herein one should say lies its meaning), but it is for this reason that in this study the distinction is best understood as it has already been posited – as fragmentation versus parataxis – rather than a variation of “negatives,” as Hickman has suggested.⁷⁴

While harbouring a degree of modernist scepticism towards language and also forgoing finite ‘answers,’ the Objectivists therefore suggest through their paratactical technique that things ultimately *can*, however arduous and wreathed in complexities, be put back together. This is achieved by piecemeal means – scrupulously, interrogatively, and ultimately imperfectly – but the pointedly *new* formulation which occurs as a result is an embodiment of a hard-won individual “agency.” Objectivism can therefore be conceived as a socially-responsible poetic in that it constantly reasserts the ties between language and society, and as such cannot “take-apart-and-abandon”, for want of a better phrase. Objectivism views the inevitable and rapid social change of the twentieth century⁷⁵ as a process to be continuously adapted to and not necessarily feared, hence repeated aforementioned instructions to consider the poem “in context”. It is the Objectivist’s responsibility to ensure that the object that is the poem is new and vital, rather than a conservative

⁷⁴ Hickman refers to the fragmentary/ paratactical distinction as “negative” and “affirmative” negation: “What we need now is an account of negation that can be affirmative and world-building” (6). Though I believe his conception is the same as Jennison’s, I am not keen on his terminology since claiming two ‘types’ of (both) negation somewhat blurs their differences.

⁷⁵ Like other aforementioned critics, both Jennison and Hatlen also figure Objectivism as an explicit product of and response to early-twentieth century developments, particularly the Great Depression and technological innovations such as broadcast media. This is an ongoing theme throughout *The Zukofsky Era*; see esp. Hatlen, “A Poetics” 46- 49.

re-formulation of pre-established authoritative norms. This emphasis on *new* relations is affirmed not just in the perceptive approach as per the previous chapter, but in the paratactical technique itself which places objects and things we all recognise – and indeed the signs that signify these things – in new arrangements to suggest newly thought-out orders. Furthermore, in order for things to be effectively rearranged, they must evidence properties which permit them to be suitable building-blocks, or ‘objects’ in their own right – the small-scale wholes rather than fragments. This, it seems, is where the Objectivist ‘conviction’ that words do have an important denotive use stems from, and this is the point from where this chapter shall begin proper.

That parataxis is the “signature strategy” of Objectivism is not a difficult argument to make; one instantly thinks of George Oppen’s *Discrete Series* for example. However, since this thesis’s primary concern is with the effects of Objectivism’s ideas on British poets, we must look for corroborations on this side of the Atlantic. The question then becomes: did the British poets of this study identify similarly with a dichotomy between fragmentation and parataxis? A first, clear signal comes from Charles Tomlinson, speaking in an interview of “the sheer weight of [T.S. Eliot’s] introversion and then the mysticism and worship of an absent ideal” as being “utterly foreign” to his own poetic “habit” (“Charles Tomlinson at Sixty” 226). Tomlinson’s words, especially his identification of an “absent ideal,” suggest that he felt these contrasts between absences and presences, directness and indirection, keenly. It is necessary at this point to think back to my first chapter’s examination of the “Pound and Williams” allegiance of Crozier’s *A Various Art*, and my proposal that in doing so Crozier declared an affinity with a particular type of modernism. Let us consider in this context that the (documented) hostility towards modernism of many

elements of the British poetic mainstream may have been founded on a dislike of certain, particular modernist characteristics. In this way, Robert Conquest is clear in the *New Lines* anthologies about the methods he does not care for: “men capable of moving work were encouraged to regard their task simply as one of making an arrangement of images of sex and violence tapped straight from the unconscious” (xiv); “we [should] see [a] refusal to abandon a rational structure and comprehensible language” (xv); that Pound was the product only of “an absurdly inflated search for novelty” (*New Lines 2* xvii). Conquest also deplores the “not uncommon insistence that British poets have a duty to be influenced by American poetry” (xxiv), specifying such an influence as “a particular type of American poetry long notorious for obliquity of grammar, vocabulary, structure and sense” (xxiv). Of course, these are subjective judgements and it is unlikely that Conquest would have cared much for Objectivist techniques either, but these remarks do display some consistency. It appears that, in referencing the subconscious and a loss of “sense” in particular, Conquest likely has a fragmentary type of modernism in mind.

In this way, Anthony Easthope has provided a relevant summation of the basis for such hostility towards modernist poetry. He proposes that “English national culture” – referring specifically to Conquest’s introductions – is founded on a belief that “the real exists unproblematically out there”: “Modernism endangers this scenario at each point. For modernism, the real is in question, any means for representing the real has its own materiality, and the subject – far from given – is in process” (“Donald Davie” 28). At this point in my study I wish simply to posit that what the British mainstream thought of as “modernist” was almost certainly fragmentary in nature. Thinking once more of the break-up of the self as the primary indicator of the fragmentary mode, it becomes clear that this particular modernist

approach does indeed concern itself with such deconstructions of language or psychoanalytic dispersals of the psyche which would pose a challenge to the poem as a rational, decorous embodiment of an uncomplicated relation to reality. As I have already discussed, the circulation and reading of modernist texts was so limited in Britain in the mid-twentieth century that it would not have occurred to many readers that different modernist approaches, and different attitudes towards form, content and language, may have existed. Comparisons such as these are key to beginning to unravel why Tomlinson, Turnbull and Crozier were drawn to the Objectivists: for the Objectivists “the real” is neither a finite nor static entity, but neither is it totally dispersed, and language crucially does retain some important representative capability alongside its materiality.

I propose therefore that Objectivism provided a model by which British neo-modernist poets could make a clear and definitive break with the remoteness, disinterestedness and formal conventionality that they identified in many of their contemporaries, while still avoiding subjectivity or egoism and maintaining the ‘restraint’ (this is, as I shall show, a key word) that marked their poetry as deeply connected with a real world of objectively-observable social facts. Making a case for Objectivism in this way as being distinct from fragmentary modernisms, also puts my British poets in a curious intermediary position between a deep connection with, but also distance from their literary national identity; both Tomlinson and Turnbull have simultaneously expressed an identification with what can be called ‘Britishness,’ while at the same time rejecting much of what was often thought to constitute its representation in poetry. The effects of this transatlantic relationship on notions of nationality and national literary identity are questions reserved for my final chapter, but I wish to plant this idea now, in the context of differentiating between

fragmentation and parataxis, in order that the forthcoming discussion on precisely *how* the poem becomes an object shall eventually bear further fruit.

Having outlined some of the broader implications of objectification it is necessary to tend to the looming question: how does the poem become, and verify that it is, an object? In order to get to the bottom of this question and its relevance to the British poets of this study, it is first necessary to look at the approach towards the things that form the building blocks of this object: words. In this chapter I shall use a two-pronged approach to get to grips with the Objectivist approach to words and form. Firstly, I shall examine attitudes towards the ability of words to accurately represent things and be “definite” (or the notion that signified and signifier are not irrevocably separated and words therefore *can* convey what the poet intends); secondly, I shall look at the Objectivists’ claims that words do have their own materiality, and the implication of this thought for figuring a paratactical/ fragmentary split.

Conviction and the “definite” word

In light of discussions so far, this chapter’s epigraph from George Oppen – “the poem / is conviction” – can be counterpoised with Yeats’ “the best lack all conviction” (*Collected Poems* 211). For the Objectivist, “conviction” is born from the belief that words maintain a representative capability. As such, Objectivist writing is full of statements declaring words’ utility. In “An Objective,” Louis Zukofsky wrote: “the economy of presentation in writing is a reassertion of faith that the combined letters – the words – are absolute symbols for objects, states, interrelations, thoughts about them. If not, why use words – new or old?” (14). In the didactic *A Test of*

Poetry, Zukofsky has also instructed that “good poetry is the barest – most essentially complete – form of representing a subject; good poetry does not linger to embroider words around a subject... good poetry is definite information on the subject dealt with, on the movement of the lines of verse and on the emotion of verbal construction” (89). These sentiments are echoed in “The Mind’s Own Place,” where Oppen writes of the imperativeness of “the poem show[ing] confidence in itself and its materials” (31), and furthermore that “verse, which had become the rhetoric of exaggeration, of inflation, was to the modernists a skill of accuracy, of precision, a test of truth” (30). The impression of precision we gain here is a dual one, founded both on the capability of words to convey information precisely, and of the overall structure of the poem as an embodiment of a favourite Objectivist word: “clarity.”

The British poets of this thesis shared such a dedication to clarity, evident in Gael Turnbull’s second *Residues* sequence (*Thronging the Heart*) where the poem is presented as “a form of utterance, an expression / an abrupt clarity” (CPGT 242). Likewise, in the running-together and near punctuationless stanzas of Crozier’s “i.m. Rolf Dieter Brinkmann,” there lies a bipartite conceptualisation of words both as intact objects and as things that “condense” (I quote the final two and a half stanzas):

on a summer branch which dips
toward the water to be reflected
in words that condense like the image

of each leaf shifting over the others
while unreflected light flickers through
in a web of shining brevity
that glows all night long
as air moves and water rises

within those immense columns
echoing: all language is truth
though a bed of dry leaves when evaporation
ceases and our words turn and fall

flickering with our life upon the earth

(CPAC 182)

Crozier is interested in subtle lexical alterations as a way of rendering the fluidity of subjective responses to the perception of the pond: the doubling-back effect of “reflected” and “unreflected” emphasises the activity and changeability of such perceptions, akin to the surface of the pond itself, and the inversion of “air moves and water rises” – a switching of the noun-verb pairings one would expect here – adds to the overall sense of movement. Crozier’s poem thus achieves the impression of a significant degree of changeability through a relatively limited vocabulary.⁷⁶ The poem can be read as displaying certain discrete, identifiable things and instances (“ducks/ducklings,” “leaves,” “water,” “light”), which are often repeated but in variant combinations and contexts; enacting these conceptual changes would not be possible if individual words were not deemed to have some manner of representative utility which is reasonably consistent. In this way, the poem appears to enact a weighing-up of the very concept of precision and how it comes about. Here, “brevity” is the word that Crozier uses to underscore precision.

The most striking phrase of “i.m. Rolf Dieter Brinkmann” is “all language is truth.” Blankly asserted and left to hang in the air without a qualifying or a priori statement, the phrase seems disembodied, acontextual and belligerent all at once (we can also read this statement as an Oppen-esque examination of what constitutes truth). In this way, we might think of Zukofsky’s figuring of words as “absolute symbols” as similarly disembodied, as well as (surely) unrealistic. For in

⁷⁶ A quick count-up of the six stanzas reveals triple the number of nouns and double the number of verbs to adjectives. There is one clear simile in the poem: “words that condense like the image/ of each leaf”. The final three lines appear to be teetering on the edge of becoming a simile, but the use of “though” in the left hand margin makes their sense too ambiguous. I would also venture that the lexis here is quite straightforward; there are no obscure, “specialist” nor particularly learned words.

spite of Zukofsky's conviction, he is not so specific in "An Objective" to qualify *precisely* how words work; he does not instruct, for instance, "words correspond directly and unproblematically to things we wish to speak about." In practice, the case for using language is not as simple as Zukofsky claims, but what is clear is that precision and clarity forms a crucial part of how words should be employed in a poem. Crozier's sense of words "condens[ing]" is therefore extremely apt; in remembering a conversation with George Oppen, Carl Rakosi has written: "When George Oppen first read my poem "In Thy Sleep/ Little Sorrows Sit and Weep", it seemed to him that if it had ended on the line, 'the crow slept,' it would have been 'absolutely immovable.' By that he meant so solid that it couldn't be reduced any further" (*Collected Prose* 22). For the Objectivists, a word or phrase which is "absolutely immovable" will not gain anything further from being added to, be it with adjectives, metaphors or otherwise; to do so would be merely decorative, and to get away from a sense of essentiality that contributes to the meaningfulness of the poem. I believe the pursuit of such "immovability" has much in common with Zukofsky's figuration of the poem as "rested totality" or as in a state of "perfect rest" in "An Objective" (13): the poem is not a static entity – always it must be a product of and exist within a given context – but the poem, conceived of as an object, rests on a bedrock of lexical conviction.

This Objectivist dedication to clarity was most certainly shared by Basil Bunting, the only British poet to have appeared in the *Objectivists Anthology*. Just as Zukofsky stressed that "the economy of presentation in writing is a reassertion of faith [in words]" ("An Objective" 14), and Williams has thought of the poem as "pruned to perfect economy" (*CPII WCW* 54), Bunting has stressed the importance of "getting the words right, and therefore few" (21st September 1968, MLS to

Turnbull. Acc 13430/13429. NLS). As an important confidante and critic of his younger contemporary Gael Turnbull, Bunting frequently issued missives on the importance of being clear and direct. One particular description, in which the Northumbrian poet utilises a darts analogy, especially stands out:

It's good, seeing what gets written by others, to find nothing pretentious or portentous, no putting on airs [in your poetry]... Yet there is something muffled about it all, as if you moved out with an intention of candour and then drew back with an impulse of reserve or distrust... Approximations may be all the facts allow; yet one bull is more convincing than a whole series of inners. Sometimes indeed you seem to aim for the inner rather than the bull. Some current cant seems to encourage that, but look at all the ammunition some people waste shooting rings around the target (21st September 1968, MLS to Turnbull. Acc 13430/13429. NLS).

Bunting's concern with "definite" words and "economy" is as pertinent as his American friends'. There can be no doubt here that his consideration is also, to an extent, ethical, encouraging the poet to be forthright rather than "reserved", and that the opposite of this implies "distrust." Bunting is close to conceiving the act of selecting the "right" word as akin to truth-telling, which is precisely what Tomlinson identifies about Oppen's work in the unpublished typescript for *Seven Significant American Poets*: "with George Oppen we are brought back to the irreducible fact that poetry tells the truth" (Tomlinson 12.6. HRC. 11). That words – "ammunition" in Bunting's letter – can be "wasted," is further testimony to their precise nature. Furthermore, Bunting's contrast between "the bull" (bullseye) and "inners" would apparently also chime with some feedback given to Turnbull by Denise Levertov: "there is some essence in each that would have been a poem, but you have let yourself go on and on describing – never quite presenting" (21st March 1960, MLS. Acc 13430/7. NLS). Such a distinction between "presenting" and "describing"

concur with Bunting's worry that "approximations" are not sufficiently convincing. Furthermore, this distinction implies that there is indeed a means of hitting "the bull" – that it is possible to present the thing itself with as much sincerity as possible (to the poet's best ability), rather than to circumlocute the thing via related information about it. Once more, though it is not given precisely how, we gain the impression that "right" words used in the "right" way, can evoke meaningful relations to things and events.

Before moving on to consider why it might be so important that poetry "convince," it is necessary to look further into how one arrives at the "definite" word, rather than an insufficient approximation. Objectivist poetry frequently displays a particular interest in nouns, and the act of naming takes on a special resonance, as Carl Rakosi has asserted: "[precise] is a far cry from what the symbolists meant when they said 'to name is to destroy. To suggest is to create.' I was very much moved by that when I first read it. But my own belief is to name and to name and to name and to name in such a way that you had rhythm" (*Objectivists and After*). In principle, there can be no more definite word than a noun, and this is something that Charles Tomlinson ponders in his early poem "Distinctions," where simply "Blue is blue" and "there is no question of aberrations / Into pinks, golds or mauves" (*CPCT* 21). A colour, of course, has no synonyms, only slight variations, and this would seem to reflect Tomlinson's concern for an art borne out of precision and not "evocation": "Art exists at a remove. / Evocation, at two" (*CPCT* 21). Such an attention to definite words has also drawn the praise of Andrew Crozier, who in "Thrills and Frills" presents Tomlinson's poem "Geneva Restored"⁷⁷ as an exemplar of a poetic which is "highly literal, informed by respect for the presence and character

⁷⁷ See *CPCT* 36.

of things” (47). Crozier’s praise for his contemporary’s work stems from what he sees as an avoidance of “figures” and “tropes,” and use instead of the “definite article,” the “proper name” (47). This name – “La Salève” – is an affirmation of the poet’s active and contemplative relation to the world: “Not only is the poem’s point of intersection with the world realised in detail, and in terms of particular, local qualities, the place is also remembered to possess a history, to be charged with it indeed as associations, with Protestantism, with Ruskin, which feed into the present” (47). Crozier’s praise of “particulars” here, and for Tomlinson’s recognition of La Salève as a product of history, aligns with aforementioned Objectivist attentions to “historic and contemporary particulars.” In this way, Crozier posits that a sufficiently definite noun is in-itself a product of intersecting histories and presents, via its etymological transformations down the ages.

Naming also has much relation to many principles of perception discussed in the previous chapter. Sounding or writing the name of a thing is connected with the Objectivist “shock of recognition.” There is a notion here that naming and recognising are synonymous or occur in tandem, and that the act of naming is a means of bringing a discrete particular forth into the perceptive gaze, or coming-to-“know” (in Oppen’s sense of the word) the subject. Furthermore, that discrete subjects have discrete nouns attributed to them, is further evidence of their discrete-ness.

Tomlinson has linked the act of naming with a founding sense of recognition in his poem “Adam,” which immediately follows “Eden” in *The Way of a World*:

Adam, on such a morning, named the beasts:
 It was before the sin. It is again.
 An openwork world of lights and ledges
 Stretches to the eyes’ lip its cup:
 Flower-maned beasts, beasts of the cloud,
 Beasts of the unseen, green beasts

Crowd forward to be named. Beasts of the qualities
 Claim them: sinuous, pungent, swift:
 We tell them over, surround them
 In a world of sounds, and they are heard
 Not drowned in them; we lay a hand
 Along the snakeshead, take up
 The nameless muzzle, to assign its vocable
 And meaning. Are we the lords or limits
 Of this teeming hoarde? We bring
 To a kind of birth all we can name
 And, named, it echoes in us our being.
 Adam, on such a morning, knew
 The perpetuity of Eden, drew from the words
 Of that long naming, his sense of continuance
 And of its source – beyond the curse of the bitten apple –
 Murmuring in wordless words: 'When you deny
 The virtue of this place, then you
 Will blame the wind or the wide air,
 Whatever cannot be mastered with a name,
 Moulder and unmaker, madman, Adam.'

(CPCT 160)

In a letter to Hugh Kenner in which he discusses an underappreciated religious aspect to many of his poems, Tomlinson writes of this poem: "I want to imagine the freshness and wholeness that Adam might be supposed to have known in Eden and to restore the sense of it to people's minds.... This may well seem like Romantic folly... but it's not Emersonian afflatus" (13th June 1987, MLS. Kenner 49.5. HRC). "Adam" recalls a time when all creatures were subsumed within one homogeneous category – "beasts" – or otherwise referred to via indistinct pronouns such as "them" and "they." In this way, the poem claims that naming is a means of recognising differences, a making of distinct 'wholes.' Tomlinson avoids the "afflatus" he rejects in his letter via the purposefully awkward phonic texture of his poem; the world, and the words to name it, are so new that the very act of speaking is stunted and difficult. The juxtaposition of elongated and abbreviated spondees, such as in "eyes' lip its cup," and the overall inconsistency of syllabic patterns in spite of many strongly-stressed words, alludes to an imagined pre-linguistic age. "Murmuring" is a

particularly interesting word, its onomatopoeic mirroring sounds embodying the “long naming” itself; it is an example of poetry as a “physiological” undertaking – an important principle of Zukofsky’s as I shall discuss – where words and bodily involvement meet. Tomlinson finally emphasises that the bases of such naming-distinctions may be founded on the subtlest of phonemic inflections when he draws attention to the closeness of “madman” and “Adam” in the final line. This rendering of *The Fall* further serves to indicate the very fine and often blurred line that separates binaries in the world: blessed or fallen, good or bad, right or wrong.

While Emerson’s concepts may not have appealed to Tomlinson, the American’s declaration of “the poet [as] the sayer, the namer” (“The Poet” 185) would likely have rung more true. Indeed, themes of Eden and Adam occur in a number of poems between the British poets and Objectivists,⁷⁸ and in this way perhaps Adam, as the first namer, can be conceived of also as the first poet. Naming a concept that appears too in Oppen’s highly personal “Myth of the Blaze” from the collection of the same name, recalling the poet’s ordeal trapped in a foxhole surrounded by artillery fire during the Second World War. Typically of Oppen, the poem contemplates the curiously indeterminate ground that nouns occupy between something properly representative with a ‘true’ connection of sign and signified, or something borne out of necessity where the connection is purely arbitrary. I quote part of the middle section:

into the eyes
of the Tyger blaze

⁷⁸ See for instance Crozier’s Eden-like “A Small Orchard” in the *Reader* 55, where a number of nouns – “apples,” “eyes,” “world,” “trees,” “leaves” – repeat throughout in different patterns and syntactic contexts. Also Zukofsky’s “Glad They Were There” (*SSPLZ* 102) has been read as enacting a spiralling and rotating motion, synonymous with *The Fall* (see Dembo “Louis Zukofsky: Objectivist Poetics” 84-85).

of changes ... 'named

the animals' name

and name the vigorous dusty strong

animals gather

under the joists the boards older

than they giving

them darkness the gifted

dark tho names the names the 'little'

adventurous

words a mountain the cliff

a wave are taxonomy I believe

in the world

because it is

impossible....

(CPGO 248)

Like Tomlinson's "Adam," this is a primordial type of naming. The two poems may be seen to share a ruminative preoccupation with names as either consented to, or on the other hand designated; this is the difference between "claimed" and "assigned" in Tomlinson's poem, and the more ambiguous "gifted" or "given" in Oppen's. In this way both worry that naming, while eminently necessary to achieve precision, represents a potential for things (animals in this case) to be limited merely to labels, and whether such a labelling would denote an exorbitant use of power (Tomlinson's "Are we the lords or limits / Of this teeming hoard?"). Indeed, the Objectivist idiom invites a constant thinking-through of the implications of language use, and as such the tension between finding the "definite" word/ noun and an acknowledgement of its imperfection is a frequently realised challenge. For Oppen, these ideas come to a

head in the final lines of the quoted segment where the poet states that definite articles – “a mountain,” “the cliff,” “a wave” – are taxonomy. Lyn Graham Barzilai has taken this instance as indication of the limited nature of nouns:

“There is a contrast here between the gift of darkness and the gift of names... the former is boundless, whereas the latter sets limits by its naming... the mountain and the cliff – these are basic, rock-hard words. Yet the idea of names is “impossible”; names of words, especially the “little” words, cannot be used for any purpose of reference (for example, classification), but only as integral units that refer to themselves” (134).

While Barzilai’s reading is astute, I want to carry it forward by way of concentrating on the break incurred between “taxonomy I believe / In the world.” Oppen is a masterful user of line breaks, and his syntactical disruption here designates the “it,” devoid of a clear referent, a great deal of lexical ambiguity which Barzilai does not consider: the sense may be understood variously as either the poet believes names are merely taxonomy, or instead that it is the world the poet believes in, precisely *because* of its impossibility. Read in this way, these lines are transformed from a somewhat melancholic evaluation of the limited capabilities of language, to a declaration of the value of language, in spite of such acknowledged limitations. That Oppen can be read as still ‘believing in the world’ in the face of such difficulties, suggests that one must maintain a faith in words and their ability to be definite (as far as is possible) and therein designate some genuinely felt experience from the world that surrounds us. To recall again Crozier’s words – language is far from perfect, but it is our “point of intersection with the world.”

“Myth of the Blaze” is not the only one of George Oppen’s poems to address language in this way: a deeply interrogative and speculative, yet (I would argue) notably hopeful figuring of words, is a primary impetus in Oppen’s work. Accordingly,

a poem such as “Debt” addresses writing – like other “skills” and the things that arise from them – as corresponding to various scales of imperfection: “The manufactured part – / New! / And imperfect. Not as perfect / As the die they made / Which was imperfect” (*CPGO* 60). Oppen rejects the notion of perfection because it would suggest finish, end, stasis, and is in this sense an abstraction. Furthermore, if something is “perfect,” there is the impression that it does not warrant or is immune from further debate; one might also imagine Oppen questioning who would possess the authority to designate this status, according to their entirely contingent impression of value. In Objectivist thinking then, it is possible to deploy words with substantial precision, but words are not absolutes. As such, ‘belief’ and ‘faith’ are common words in Oppen’s poems, as in the much-quoted line from “Psalm” where the “wild deer” of the forest and “small nouns” are equally elusive but nevertheless real: “The small nouns / Crying faith” (*CPGO* 99). Figurations such as these are a means of realigning poetry with the act of truth-telling: if language was unproblematically and directly representational at all times, or furthermore if things and events were experienced homogeneously by all, surely the poet would not need to tell the truth since we would all ‘come to know’ in the same way. Precisely because a seamless and organic relation between words and what they refer to does not exist, the poet has to work harder to get to a sense of “definiteness.” Poetry-writing is therefore figured as an endeavour, an undertaking, or as work. Once more, Rakosi has summarised such links between economy, precision, definiteness and the poet’s care: “If Objectivism means anything psychologically, it means tremendous self-discipline and hard work, because to get to a language that’s as simple and fundamental as [Oppen’s “Psalm”]... means you have to sift through it very, very carefully” (*Objectivists and After* 10).

In order to make a link between language-use and truth-telling in poetry and why this should be so important, I want to consider why, if even the most definite of words are acknowledged to be imperfect or always come-up-short to some degree, language should continue to be so highly valued by the Objectivists. Looking to Zukofsky's comments in his interview with L. S. Dembo, it becomes clear that the blankly-asserted "words as absolute symbols" of the essay "An Objective," is not as intransigent as it first appears. In thinking of words, Zukofsky explains: "I come into a room and I see a table. Obviously, I can't make it eat grass. I have delimited this thing, in a sense. I call it a table and I want to keep the word for its denotive sense – as solid as possible. The only way it will define itself further will be in a context" (204). This might be taken as a shorthand for the paratactical method; the table becomes more sharply defined via its relation, as a discrete and specific word, to others. Objectivist concern with context then, can be seen to span both perceptive engagements – as per the "historic and contemporary particulars" of the previous chapter – and also the manner in which discrete nouns acquire further meaning as constituents of a poem. "Sense" is important for Zukofsky, hence why his table won't eat grass, and reveals a key constituent of value in language: words are vital because, in spite of their acknowledged imperfections, they are still capable of conveying sense to others. This may seem too patently obvious to warrant substantive thought, but for the Objectivists it is both a key driving force and conflict in their work.

The proclaimed ability of words to convey sense has a twofold ramification. In the first instance, by keeping words "as solid as possible" and able to "delineate" things, Zukofsky expresses a conviction that sense should be readily available in a

poem, and as such a search for it need not be the primary impetus of the reader's activity. I have already implied that this differs from the fragmentary modernist method, which has been read as directing the reader towards "retrievals of sense" (A. Johnson 340) because words, or more specifically combinations of words, may not be deployed in a way that denotes their use as unproblematic significations. Zukofsky suggests numerous times in *A Test of Poetry* that attention should be focused instead on "the emotion of verbal construction" (89) and (in an analysis of Williams' "The Red Wheelbarrow") the "comprehension which includes surface and what is under it" (101). It is the objectified verbal texture of the poem then that is an embodiment of meaning and emotion, and should be the focus of any reading; the reader who searches the poem for a central metaphor or paradigm that might indicate some "sense" separate to the objectified form of the poem, will search in vain. That there is meaning in what may be best referred to as the 'verbal texture' of the poem, is something that Donald Davie and Charles Tomlinson have demonstrated an awareness of. In a letter to Tomlinson, Davie wrote of Pound (whom he admired greatly):

The true form; meditation – the associative transitions not in fact free at all, but rigorously controlled. And the relationships established! – so economically, across such intervals! Pound's objective is not expressive. You are not inside his head, though he pretends you are for the sake of an overriding convention; you are out in world of historical events, named artefacts, real people. The medium not demolished, undermined or dissipated as by Joyce. Joyce's words like plasticine, Pound's hard with an edge. Joyce's words give under the thumb, squash outwards like a smear; Pound's press up sharp, irreducible, gather light against them, focus. The keywords – periplum, diafana, usura etc. – don't take on more meaning as they go through the poem; they concentrate the meaning they have, narrow it if anything." ("Whitsun Monday" 1956, MLS. Tomlinson 17.24. HRC).

Just as Zukofsky wants to keep words “as solid as possible,” Davie points to a textural differential: words may be hard or soft, or resist or squash under pressure, according to the clarity of their sense as related to their degree of “condensation.” Like “the poet’s eye as a focusing lens,” Davie sees Pound’s lexis too as a focal point, a “gather[ing]” together versus the “dissipation” of Joyce. “Economy,” “rigorous control,” “historical events” and “real people” further affirm the degree of precision and restraint that Davie sees in Pound’s language. Charles Tomlinson has used strikingly similar terms in referring to what he saw as the “weaker” elements of his contemporary Dylan Thomas’s work, when he says Thomas is prone to “playing with words as if they were plasticine” (“Some Presences” 214). Tomlinson’s particular propensity to conceive of words as “hard,” often stone-like, indicates his ideas about the durability of language and of crafting a poem as an object which will stand the test of time.⁷⁹ Both British poets worry then that if not deployed with adequate care, words may become indefinite, “smear” in Davie’s words or, to use a painterly analogy, bleed together. Here we can perhaps uncover an alternative textural figuration of the fragmentary narrative: not language or the self as broken-apart pieces of a once complete whole, but instead as blurred together in an indistinct and irretrievable melee. Clearly, such smearing would indeed involve the “violence to [words’] individual natures” that Zukofsky directs against, and make a re-formation of matter after such smearing nigh impossible.

Objectivism thus provides clear directives about the necessity of form arising from definite words. For the poem to be a definable object, its constituents need to be solid enough to give it shape; words which are too malleable raise questions

⁷⁹ Joel F. Wilcox has interrogated the “stony” qualities of Tomlinson’s poetry in his essay “Tomlinson and the British Tradition.”

about the poet's conviction and the poem's durability as a poetic object. Aside from making-an-object of the poem, worrying that words might become diluted informs the second consequence of Zukofky's missive that words are able to adequately convey sense: using insufficiently definite, or "smeared" words, is a denigration of the poet's responsibility since language is communal. Again, this is incredibly obvious, but it is a key informant of the Objectivists' valuation of words – the poet can never be aloof from societal concerns, since using language enacts a connection to and involvement with other human beings. This is certainly a principle that the British poets shared, Tomlinson for example elaborating further that Dylan Thomas' use of words presented "a threat to what I should call a civil language" (qtd. in Schmidt 35). Tomlinson's particular use of the adjective "civil" here (though I have expressed some misgivings about this word previously) points to words conceived of as distinctly social matter. In this reading, "violence" (to use Zukofsky's term) to words is violence to our ability to communicate, as language is permanently and inexorably "so dense in the usages of community" that it can never be "merely private or passive or just concerned with 'stilled' moments" (Tomlinson, "Words and Water" 35). Gael Turnbull's awareness of this responsibility is close to Tomlinson's, and the Scottish poet has written of a reverence towards words which is founded on the knowledge that "in writing [a poem]... when we speak of something, we affect it... The very language we use is not 'mine' but only 'ours'" (CPGT 480). Turnbull has reflected his interest in the social, communal and historical aspects of language in poems he translated from Old Icelandic and Old Norse,⁸⁰ but his attitude might best

⁸⁰ I am thinking here of the sequences *Bjarni* (CPGT 51-65) and *Scarcely I Speak* (CPGT 265-271). Turnbull sent *Bjarni* to William Carlos Williams, who was full of praise: "It went through layers of shoddy to as firm a bedrock as I have ever known. I may be a pagan and I think I am but such writing (the Icelandic of it) does make me realize that what virtue I have in me comes from a deeper base that [sic] I usually acknowledge. Poetry itself comes from the same base" (5th March 1968, TLS. Acc 12552 Box 29. NLS).

be summarised in an elliptical stanza from *Residues*: “intense clarity... to design outside need and custom / is to write in a language no one can speak... / and nothing that is only one man deep / can last...” (CPGT 229).

I would argue that thinking of words as communal currency capable of communicating to others effectively, re-situates the poem not as a search for “sense” but as an ongoing attempt at truth, the ever-evolving and contextual truth of the previous chapter. Let us consider in this light another Zukofsky didacticism from *A Test of Poetry*: “if, in any line of poetry, one line can be replaced by another and it makes ‘no difference,’ that line is bad” (58). Zukofsky’s words may seem highly self-evident and applicable to nearly all poetry that is written, but for the Objectivists, such a degree of specificity once more has an important ethical implication: what you say, you should sincerely mean – hence the linking of ‘precision’ and ‘conviction.’ Of course, this is even more important when ‘faith’ is required, owing to words’ representative imperfection. Tomlinson, not commonly thought of as a poet with political concerns, has succinctly expressed the imperative of keeping language “as solid as possible” at the end of his 1981 interview with Alan Ross:

What people understand by “political poetry” usually means urging liberal sentiments that your audience agrees with anyway – knowing in advance what it is your poem has to say and then joining your auditors in a bath of self-righteous indignation... But the measure of [my] poems oughtn’t to be whether they’re committed to political reality (though they are), but whether I’ve preserved the language there in which such things can be written of – whether my duty to language has been maintained and I’ve succeeded in reconciling public and private concerns (“Words and Water” 37).

Words are the material and means by which political matters are discussed, and it is therefore crucial to preserve their ‘integrity.’ Verbal “clutter” (a word Zukofsky also

uses⁸¹), or a smearing or diluting of words, causes us to call into question whether the poet really means what they say, whether they really know what they mean, or even to what ends meaning might be being obscured. Vagueness therefore, can actually be figured as moral aberration when considered in the context of language as a communal medium. Indeed, assessing lexis in this way we can begin to see the wider significance of the ethical vocabulary that accompanies Objectivist poetry and prose, words which include “integrity,” “sincerity” and “conviction”; these become not only principles for poetry, but also for the way one endeavours to interact with others. The Objectivist imperative might be well understood then as a dual “seeing-clearly” (perception) and “saying-clearly,” where each is inseparable. I would argue therefore that statements such as Burton Hatlen’s, where “the Objectivists shared a sense that language is always inadequate, insofar as it can never lay hold on the absolute, but that it is nevertheless the only means we have to articulate our common humanity” (“A Poetics” 53) are inaccurate. While it is correct that the Objectivists recognised the imperfection of words, the defeatism implied by such statements does not ring true; words are still well capable of both conveying meaning and constituting suitable material for the poem, and their lack of absoluteness does not render them useless: the poet must maintain faith that this is not the case.

Hannah Arendt appears to share the Objectivist mindset towards the “narrowing of sense” that Davie described in his letter to Tomlinson about Pound’s work. In a discussion of poetry and other art works as “reification” in *The Human Condition*, she writes: “the durability of a poem is produced through condensation, so that it is as though language spoken in utmost density and concentration were poetic in itself” (169). Arendt’s comments about poetry are occasionally contentious in the

⁸¹ See “Louis Zukofsky” interview with L.S. Dembo 209.

context of this thesis,⁸² and it would not be profitable to engage in a discussion regarding the qualities of ‘poetic’ diction here. But her concept of condensation and concentration – the exercise of the latter concomitant with Objectivist perception – gestures towards a link between lexis and the feted word of this chapter’s introduction: agency. In such figurations of lexical selection as a process of “condensation” or “sifting through” various discrete and whole possibilities, constructing a poem is posited boldly as an act of choice; as such, the carefully-wrought poem is a direct result of the aforementioned “capacity for thought” (Arendt 168). The Objectivists however, want to make sure that this thought is an individual one, a product of personal experience, emotion, and being-in-the-world, and not one which merely adheres to existing social structures. Herein lies the key tension that Objectivist poets continually grapple with: how to be both a part of society, yet not to be passively subsumed within it? This is one of the primary contentions that Marjorie Perloff has identified in George Oppen’s work in her essay on *Of Being Numerous*, “The Shipwreck of the Singular,” and it is also the subject of reoccurring analyses in Michael Davidson’s introduction to Oppen’s *New Collected Poems*: “How is it possible, [*Of Being Numerous*] asks, to be both unique and yet live as a social being?” (xxxi). Unavoidably, language is a social and communal material which is not the poet’s alone, and as such it is capable of becoming discourse – that is, becoming a vehicle for certain structures with which its user (the poet) may not necessarily agree. The poet has a duty therefore to be continually aware of the propensity for language to fall into such patterns, and to try to avoid these.

⁸² It seems likely the Objectivists would have disagreed with Arendt’s very literal separation of painting, sculpture and architecture from music and poetry, saying that the latter pair are “the least materialistic” of the arts and that “the workmanship” required for their practice is not as great (169).

In the next chapter then I shall examine such a concept more closely, carrying through my observations about “the definite word” and how this becomes utilised in the making-an-object of the poem. I shall posit that the more a poem becomes ‘objectified’ and shows itself not to be another re-presentation of existing language structures, the less it falls back on authoritative norms and therefore the greater the degree of agency becomes evident. Put simply, the poem becomes less like discourse the more it becomes like an object. For British poets, getting away from the scaffolding of discourse – which could variously take the form of metaphor, fixed metrical forms such as iambic pentameter, or even commonly used images – was a crucial means of escaping a certain post-war national nostalgia. It is in this way that the poem is figured as a continual negotiation between competing claims to individual agency and social investment.

Chapter 4: Objectification

to cleave, from a wall
of sedimentary words,
a quarried speech

("For Charles Tomlinson," *CPGT* 188)

At the beginning of the previous chapter I drew attention to a perceived split between fragmentation and parataxis in modernist poetry, with the latter concerned with forming distinctly new wholes reflecting an assertion of individual agency. By now it should be clear that the Objectivist poem can only become a "definite" object if it is made up of definite constituents – words – which in itself presents the poet's care and responsibility towards truth-telling and preserving the value of language as a communicative medium. This chapter shall now consider, through close readings, precisely how the poem shows itself to be an object, and specifically what *kind* of object that might be. Tomlinson's, Turnbull's and Crozier's responses to this question are very different. For instance, Tomlinson is acutely interested in the notion of 'craftsmanship' or conceiving of making the poem in the same way as a carpenter makes a piece of furniture. His technique is not as formally radical as Turnbull's or Crozier's, and he appears less concerned with the objectified verbal texture of his poems than he is with presenting them as a meditative interplay of perceptive energies. Crozier, on the other hand, has constructed his sequence *High Zero* via mathematical patterns of line arrangements and repetitions, and Turnbull has utilised the arbitrarily derived nouns of *Twenty Words Twenty Days* as solid 'objectified' bases around which to construct the connective nuances of language.

As ever, the question of how far theory might be applied to making-an-object-of the poem, looms large. Certainly, the Objectivists themselves began writing in a

time when theorists such as Saussure, Derrida and Barthes had yet to make an impact on critical practices, but this was to change. As Peter Middleton has observed, “[1977] was probably the last time that it would be possible to suggest that British intellectuals and poets were not aware of the implications of treating language as an object” (“Warring Clans” 18). In the attribution of a specific date to these interventions in critical thinking (arrived at via reference to publications of influential works), we might reasonably posit British poetry’s engagement with Objectivism as a forerunner to the current concerns of what Middleton tentatively calls “the UK avant-garde poetry scene” (19), currently occupied with “the possibility of making meaningful statements... [and] questioning what sort of object – objective, objection, objectivity – language has become” (36). Considered in such a chronological context, Tomlinson, Turnbull and Crozier present some challenges when it comes to the application of theory: while Tomlinson’s and Turnbull’s letters exchanged with William Carlos Williams date from the late 1950s, and their poems that I shall analyse here were published (as part of a collection and individually) in 1969 and 1966 respectively, Crozier’s *High Zero* is almost exactly contemporaneous with Middleton’s date; it was first published in 1978 by Street Editions. One must therefore question the degree of theory’s relevance to the forthcoming readings. While I would argue that some of Saussure’s principles are a useful paradigm for understanding particular aspects of the Objectivist poetic (and indeed I shall briefly refer to Saussure in the discussion of Tomlinson and Zukofsky’s collaborative effort on “Gull”), to present the poems explicitly in terms of how they map onto or diverge from theoretical approaches would most likely be misguided.

Before beginning my readings it is necessary to contemplate for a brief moment why the poem conceived of as an object might be considered a valuable

deployment of valuable material (words). I mentioned a number of tensions in the Objectivist approach to language in my previous chapter, most of which are readily acknowledged to be ultimately irreconcilable; chief among these is the sense that language is imperfectly representational, and not ours alone but a communal material. The way to negotiate these conflicting parameters in the Objectivist way of thinking is, according to Zukofsky, not necessarily in the meaning (or 'signifieds') of the words themselves, but in the emotion of "verbal construction" (*A Test* 89).

Attention is therefore shifted from the 'meaning' of what the words 'signify,' or from a largely narrative interpretation, to one which is concerned with the process of putting together these distinct wholes (parataxis) into an objectified verbal texture. Such making is the ultimate signal of the poet's care and discerning, individuated thought. It is here that ideals of 'craftsmanship' abound: the sculptor's task is analogous with the poet's, in that his or her material may be largely predetermined (though it is still vital to select the most "definite" word possible) much like a lump of stone or a solid block of wood; but it is what the sculptor *does* with that material, the chiselling or carving away that their hands enact, that ultimately matters.

The Poem as Object

The first step in making a poem an object is to start with the smallest component: individual words which need to have a convincing solidity to them, so that each word is "in itself an arrangement" (Zukofsky, "An Objective" 13). To reiterate, such object-ness is a product of the endeavour for "condensation," keeping words distinct and discrete, and ultimately of the moral obligation towards clarity. Zukofsky has further emphasised the solidity of words by envisaging a response to

each as “physiological,” as tangible as touch, or, as his amendments to the forthcoming poem show, one which enlists the reader’s oral movements as part of a hyperawareness of the bodily involvement that reading poetry entails. Zukofsky has explained: “the word is so much of a physiological thing that its articulation, against that of other words, will make an ‘object’” (“Louis Zukofsky” 205). This particular preoccupation with sound is a residing feature in many of his poems,⁸³ and an aspect that Charles Tomlinson picked up on and admired when first coming across the American’s work: “It is, as I say, the quality of joyfulness that marks it for one, joy communicating itself through the rhythms, the puns, the titles themselves. There is not a sombre note in the whole: it is all love and lightness” (8th July N.d [likely 1963], MLS. Zukofsky 28.3. HRC). Such a sensitivity to the minute inflections of sounds, including various homonyms,⁸⁴ can be read in this physiological context as dually reflecting the joyfulness that Tomlinson describes, but also as evidence of a deep personal and emotive investment: “[Zukofsky thought that] not anything people do, even lovemaking, is more physical than speech... if one obligation to language was breath, another was to the road you scan with your eyes” (Kenner, “Louis Zukofsky” 11). In this way, the Objectivist is “objective” in their aversion to judgement-forming statements or personae, and likewise to projections of the ego, but certainly not objective in their level of personal investment in the crafting of the poem. Once more, this was not lost on Tomlinson, who wrote in his unpublished manuscript *Seven Significant American Poets* (possibly finding a similarity with criticisms that his own poetry had received), that “Zukofsky’s emphasis on objectification, far from implying coldness or deracination, carries with it a genuinely moral commitment: the poet’s

⁸³ One might relate this to Saussure’s exploration of the “physiological” nature of language in *Course in General Linguistics* 11-15.

⁸⁴ For a more detailed account of such formal imperatives, see Schleb, “Louis Zukofsky: The Exaction of Song.”

major aim, he tells us, is ‘not to show himself but that order that of himself [sic] can speak to all men’” (TS, 11. Tomlinson 12.6. HRC).

Tomlinson’s astute comments seem to relate to what Michael Davidson has referred to as the Objectivist need to engender a language “free from instrumental uses” (xx); Zukofsky’s physiological words are one way of emphasising verbal texture over a transcendent (beyond the materiality of the words on the page) meaning which may become “instrumental.”⁸⁵ This has potential implications for both the durability and temporality of the poem, or its ability to be “an object consonant with its day.” Such potentialities are raised in Tomlinson’s short poem “Gull,” which can be viewed very much as a collaboration between the British and American poets. Below left I have presented the version of the poem that Tomlinson sent to Zukofsky in February 1964 (1st February 1964, MS. Zukofsky 28.3 HRC), at the same time he was in the process of persuading William Cookson to run a special ‘Zukofsky issue’ of British magazine *Agenda* (which would eventually be published with Tomlinson as guest editor in December of the same year). Below right is the final version as it appeared in 1969’s *The Way of a World* (CPCT 188) dedicated to Louis and Celia, thus enabling us to trace the changes that Zukofsky proposed:

Flung
far down
as it rises, the
black smile
of the gull’s
shadow
masking its underside
takes
the heart

Flung
far down
 as the
gull rises,
the black
smile of
 its shadow
masking its
underside

⁸⁵ I understand Davidson’s use of this word to mean language consistently deployed towards didactic and often authority-securing ends, placing it in a similar realm to discourse. Basil Bunting has also noted the lack of instrumentality in Zukofsky’s work, describing it in much the same terms: “So much [of “A”] seems brooding on words for their own sake, not as instruments” (3rd February 1951, TLS to Zukofsky. 21.6, HRC).

into the height with it
to hover
above the ocean's
plain-of-mountains'
continuity of
moving quartz.

takes
the heart
into the height
to hover
above the ocean's
plain-of-mountains'
moving quartz.

The short-syllabled staccato cadence and alliteration of Tomlinson's first version evidences a real attempt to get to grips with the bold sonic textures that epitomise many Zukofsky poems. Though these changes are subtle, they provide insight into the care Zukofsky exercised in the 'arrangement' of a poem. At once obvious and striking is how Zukofsky has maintained Tomlinson's choice of words, but swapped round and rearranged them in such a way that the action of the poem and relations between words unfold differently. In a letter to Zukofsky, Tomlinson summarised such an approach as "[a] beautiful attention to the smallest components of the line" (27th December 1964, MLS. Zukofsky 28.3. HRC). A first significant difference here is Zukofsky's placing of the definite noun, "gull," earlier in the poem, so that the subject of the piece is indisputably the bird's shadow rather than its metaphor, "black smile," which the first version points to. The 'economy' of Zukofsky's approach can also be seen in the removal of the penultimate line, "continuity of," presumably on the basis of its superfluosness: the reader already has a clear image of the sea's fluid surface as consisting of perpetual mountain peaks, and "continuity of" adds little to this readily-formed image. Zukofsky's omission allows the link between "mountains" and "moving quartz" to be more direct, and attributes the adjective "moving" more resonance; the metaphor has become, "like all good writing, presented with conciseness in a word" ("Sincerity" 197). It is also worth noting that prior to its removal, "continuity" was a five-syllable word in the arrangement of mostly two-syllable words. Zukofsky's revisions then appear to be aiming towards a more

direct and pared down version, whereby any attenuation in the relationships between things is removed. For example, Zukofsky's connections flow, with the aid of line breaks, from "the black / smile of / its shadow" to "takes / the heart / into the height," with "takes" serving as the catalysing verb where two clear nouns follow sequentially and in both cases alliteration emphasises these ties. By comparing these two versions then – both using Tomlinson's word choice – we can detect Zukofsky's endeavours to make the poem "an arrangement, harmony or dissonance" ("An Objective" 14).

During the period between June 1963 and December 1969, Tomlinson and Zukofsky corresponded frequently, with the former writing a number of poems engaged with the latter's style. As per Hugh Kenner's previous comment, Zukofsky's poetry concerns itself dually with both sound and the visual appearance of the poem (ear and eye), but in "Arroyo Seco," Tomlinson turns his attention more towards the second of these concerns, where typography becomes an integral part of the making-an-object of the poem. Interestingly, once more the version of "Arroyo Seco" that Tomlinson sent Zukofsky in July 1963 is significantly different from the version first published in *Poetry* in April/May 1965 (127), and later republished in *American Scenes and Other Poems* in 1966. There is little in Tomlinson's or Zukofsky's archives to suggest that the American had a role in modifying this poem too, but I present below the version that Tomlinson sent Zukofsky in 1963 (July 1963, MS. Zukofsky 28.3. HRC), which can be compared with the version appearing in the British poet's *Collected Poems* (126):

A piano, so
long untuned

it sounded

and they
were gaudy:

SILVIANO

like a guitar

was playing
Fur Elise:

the church
was locked:

graves on
which the only

flowers were
the wild ones

except
for the everlasting

plastic
wreathes and roses

the bleached
dust making

them gaudier
than they were

we loved him
LUCERO

and equal
eloquence in

the quotidian
twisted and

cut across
two pages

in the statutory
book:

THY		LIFE
WILL		BE
DO		NE

Much like his fascination with the Williams triad, Tomlinson was clearly drawn to the sparse typographical arrangements of Zukofksy's poems. In "Arroyo Seco" the poem becomes the "statutory book" it refers to, with its words literally "cut across two pages," and the area of blank space in the middle of the two columns also gestures towards the dry river or gully of the poem's title. As it was changed before publication, it appears that Tomlinson thought the layout to be not entirely successful; besides the visual appearance of the words, the arrangement does little to catalyse or highlight the variant relationships between different words and lines. This draft poem does however demonstrate how the concept of the poem-as-object had entered the British poet's consciousness around the time of his discovery of the Objectivists.

For an arguably more interesting – and more Zukofskian – ‘column poem,’ we can look to a small, handwritten booklet in blue fountain pen that Gael Turnbull sent to the American poet a little over two years after Tomlinson sent his “Arroyo Seco,” entitled “Seven from Stifford’s Bridge” (October 1965, MS. 8 pages. Zukofsky 42.4. HRC). The booklet is one of a number that Turnbull sent to Zukofsky between January and October 1965; part of the sequence went on to form “Six Country Pieces” in *Scantlings* (CPGT 197-198). I have selected part of the middle section from Turnbull’s manuscript:⁸⁶

how	
lovely	a boat
slowly	rocking
a wave	gently
stirring	a leaf
softly	turning
a breeze	easily
safely	a shadow
bearing	a wing
beckoning	
clear	
it’s raining	
again	
out there	
fresh rain	
from the air	
fresh air	
air freshened	
by the rain	
it rains	
refreshment	
and again	
the rain	

⁸⁶ It is important to note that as the sequence of poems are written in hand, the lineation and arrangement is naturally more imprecise than it would have been were the poems completed on a typewriter. Even in MS form however, Turnbull does display great fastidiousness towards typography, which is what I have reproduced as faithfully as possible in word-processed format here.

This could equally be interpreted as a Williamsite interest in “lines for the eye,” but of the three British poets of this thesis, Turnbull has the most in common with Louis Zukofsky. The Scottish poet’s work frequently evidences an attention to the material quality of words – their sonic or visual patterns as opposed to their ability to ‘signify’ – which has much in common with that of his American friend.⁸⁷ In contrast to Tomlinson’s attempt at this form, Turnbull displays a preoccupation with the very act of reading as a catalyst for meaning; the two columns of the first section may be read either vertically or in horizontal pairs, effectively producing two different poems from the same set of signifiers. That fact that this is possible, and that the poem does not then become nonsensical, is proof of Turnbull’s care in arrangement: a sense may be found in the relations between variant pairs of words which is firmly grounded in objective reality – for example, a leaf may indeed “turn,” but it may also be “stirred” – and the poem proceeds in a sequence of adjectives and verbs, interspersed with a sufficient amount of nouns that the reader can be certain the poem is referring to and grounded in tangible things, rather than random effusions. In this way, it should be noted too that there are no possible juxtapositions of two nouns, thereby some semblance of ‘normal’ syntactic relations is maintained. Only three words – the first “how” (a demonstrative adverb, a signal of attention and specificity) and the last two “beckoning / clear” – are typographically isolated and therefore read as foregone conclusions. Lastly, but crucially, if there were still doubt that this first “column” section can be read either horizontally or vertically, Turnbull employs assonance and alliteration to invoke links between words, such as “a breeze” and “easily,” or “bearing” and “a wing.” This preoccupation with phonic links is carried forward to the

⁸⁷ See further David Miller’s essay on Turnbull, “The Heart of Saying,” where Turnbull’s poetry is “nearer, in his most important poems, to Zukofsky than he is to most other American poets in the sixties and seventies” (186).

next section, in which the typography changes significantly, possibly to visually represent the slant falling of heavy rain, but a similarity between sounds still pervades (“there,” “air,” “rain,” “again”). Turnbull has used extremely limited verbal means here, centring the stanza around only three nouns, “rain,” “air” and “fresh,” and small variations thereof. The first line posits a definite statement – “it’s raining” – an (in Oppen’s words) “irreducible” observation which is returned to throughout the stanza, with a small additional contextualisation added each time: “out there” situates the speaker indoors; “from the air” points to the origin of the rain as vital information; “air freshened / by the rain” posits the relationship between the two nouns as one of mutuality, or furthermore of an uncertainty as to whether “fresh air” or “rain / from the air” came first. This second section is another example of both perception and writing as a process and accumulation. Turnbull’s lineation means that the act of reading here recreates this cumulative impetus, and his determination to use the same words, just in different combinations, very much points to an understanding of individual words as discrete wholes which are “[defined further] in a context” (Zukofsky, “Louis Zukofsky” 204).

Turnbull’s poems sent to Zukofsky demonstrate a comparatively greater interest in the material qualities of words than in their ability to “denote” (Zukofsky’s word [204]) or signify things. In this sense, he appears to subscribe to the Saussurian notion, elucidated by Anthony Easthope in *Poetry as Discourse*, that language is not “transparent” and that signifiers, separated from their signifieds, do possess a materiality of their own.⁸⁸ Easthope’s understanding of the material nature of signifiers places the act of reading as the key component in bringing about meaning, a concept to which Zukofsky’s and Turnbull’s strong-sounding and visually-

⁸⁸ 12. See further Saussure 8-17 and Chandler “Modality and Representation” (Web).

striking poems would attest: “Signifieds, whether as meanings ‘on the page’ or as ideology, are simply not to be found lying around apart from their signifiers. Signifiers, on the other hand, are to be found all over the place, but they have to be put to work in a process of reading in order to bring a signified into existence” (Easthope, *Poetry* 22). Easthope furthermore points to an even smaller component than the word – phonemes – (12; Saussure 38-64), tiny inflections of sound that attest to the material distinction between even very similar-sounding and similar-spelt words. Again, this is something that we can identify in a good deal of Turnbull’s more formally radical work, and in the playful assonance and syllabic deconstruction of many Zukofsky poems such as those from *29 Songs*: “There’s naw–thing / lak po–ee try... / Dere’s na–thing / lak pea- nut-brittle” (“It’s a gay li – ife,” *SPLZ* 15); “Crickets’ / thickets / light, / delight:” (“16,” *SPLZ* 16). It is in the putting-into-practice of this belief in a materiality of signifiers that Zukofsky is, for example, able to produce a poem which, during the process of reading, creates the very impression of a downward spiralling synonymous with the fall in Dante’s *Paradiso* (see *CSPLZ* 113), while only deploying a word to ‘signify’ the action of falling once. The materiality of this particular poem becomes evident in the patterns of stresses, arranged to emphasise stronger stresses towards the middle of lines, combined with (mostly) falling line endings:

Glad they were there
 Falling away
 Flying not to
 Lose sight of it
 Not going far
 In angles out
 Of ovals of
 Dances filled up
 The field the green
 With light above

With the one hand
In the other.

(CSPLZ 102)

Zukofsky's poem finds a corollary in Gael Turnbull's "Excavation," a poem which curiously sits adjacent to the entirely metaphorical "A Poem is a Pearl" (CPGT 41), in 1954's *Trio*. Such a juxtaposition of two totally different poems within this one collection is evidence of the "uneven oeuvre" that Turnbull's early poetry has been seen to occupy.⁸⁹ Like Zukofsky's "falling" poem, in "Excavation" Turnbull deploys lineation combined with (mostly) decreasing syllabic patterns in order to produce this funnelling or burrowing effect. Unlike the American's poem, signifiers more frequently refer to the "pit" which is the poem's subject (I have quoted the first three, demonstrative stanzas):

They are digging up the street
Where I used to walk
Going for the milk

They have put up a sign
Warning me to stop
Lest I fall into a pit

The familiar surface
Of geometric concrete
Has given up its secret

(CPGT 40)

Given the recent critical discussions on the nature of parataxis in modernism that I acknowledged in my previous chapter, it is now necessary to consider how these theoretical unpickings correspond to a supposed greater potential for parataxis (over fragmentation) to offer some reconstitution of meaningful relations between self

⁸⁹ This is David Miller's observation in his essay "The Heart of Saying" (183). It is also something that Turnbull himself later acknowledged (in 1992): "I am aware of a lack of consistency over the course of time in regard to my own ideas about the construction of poems" (CPGT 479).

and society. Again, Easthope has offered a relevant definition, which he arrives at via Saussure: “[Discourse] is a term which specifies the way that sentences form a consecutive order, take part in a whole which is homogenous as well as heterogeneous. And just as sentences join together in discourse to make an individual text, so texts themselves join others in a larger discourse” (*Poetry* 8). In this reading, discourse formation is always the result of a particular *placing together* of various components, rather than inherent in the components themselves (though we can sometimes identify patterns in the usage of particular words or vocabulary to secure certain standpoints). By drawing attention to the minutiae of *how* distinct elements form part of a larger whole, parataxis can be seen to enact an awareness that these processes are indeed taking place and, furthermore, suggests that with such awareness comes the ability to opt out or posit alternative arrangements. In this interpretation, there is no need for the individual components – words – to be undermined, since they are the important bases for potential, new ‘joinings.’ By foregrounding the poem as something which is consciously *made*, the product of a process both of the selection of ‘definite,’ discrete words but also in their meticulous arrangement, the poet is emphasising the difference of their poem-as-object from patterns of discourse. Subsequently, the poem as a scrupulously-made object is conceived of as a declaration of agency.

The figuration of the poem in this way requires further extrapolation, particularly in relation to British poetry. For now, it should also be noted that the poem-as-object also has repercussions for its perceived durability. Objectivist idioms declare that the materiality of the poem be understood to be such that each word is in itself “an arrangement” – each word, as a constituent of language, is the product of the usage of a community and should be understood as such. In poems such as

Zukofky's or Turnbull's above, the focus on the act of reading signifiers imbues the poem with a degree of consistency, in that its specific visual or sonic inflections will be always be enacted physiologically, regardless of a potential for accompanying signifiers to change over time according to their usages.⁹⁰ This however does not mean that an Objectivist-influenced poem is considered to be permanently 'fixed.' Rather, in figuring the poem as a tangible object consisting in turn of smaller, but equally tangible objects, it can be emphasised that the relations between these parts are kept fluid. Turnbull's column poem with its dual readings above is one such example, and we may also think alternatively of the lexically ambiguous line breaks employed by George Oppen and also by Andrew Crozier, which emphasise the potential for multiple, variant responses. Much like the crucial role of silence in the composition of a poem, there is a sense that typographical or conceptual empty spaces may lead to an increased awareness of the potential multiplicity of connectives: the interpretations that arise from this awareness will of course always be socially and historically contingent. Thus, we can think back to Tomlinson's tripartite seeing-thinking-writing directive in "Nature Poem," that a poem "flows" and is "written into permanence – not stilled / But given pulse and voice" (*CPCT* 295). In this context therefore, being "permanent" or "immovable" and being "still," are not one and the same thing.

In *Twenty Words: Twenty Days* (*CPGT* 133-52), Gael Turnbull engages with many of the issues surrounding lexis, the relationship between signifiers and signifieds, and of the various imperatives at work in the arrangement of a poem. In

⁹⁰ See Easthope *Poetry*: "signifieds are *not* fixed and cannot be so fixed. Any text, especially one such as a poem, is constantly read and re-read in different ways – by different people" (7).

an appendix at the back of his *Collected Poems*, Turnbull tells us that the poem is the result of a word game, whereby for twenty days in 1963 “[a] word was picked from a large dictionary by an entirely random method” (CPGT 482); these words appear momentarily throughout the poem in capitalised font. Immediately then, we are confronted with a highly unusual premise: a poem constructed from materials (words) which the poet did not choose themselves but encountered arbitrarily, seemingly scuppering the Objectivist directive towards both the “definite word” and to an extent also of the arrangement of the poem as indication of the poet’s discrimination. Therefore, it might reasonably be questioned to what degree a poem constructed under these circumstances still engenders individual agency.

Particularly latterly in his poetic career, Turnbull was equally fascinated by the way in which word combinations came into being – the processes that went into their selection and utilisation – as he was with the nature of words themselves. Laurie Duggan has written an insightful piece to this effect on Turnbull’s “aleatory, kinetic and other off-the-page practices,” highlighting the Scottish poet’s transportation of poems onto literal physical objects whereupon the process of choosing is highlighted, and the multiplicity of possible combinations is brought to the fore. Examples include *Portals*, a series of panels with both words and cut-out areas, so that the object may bring about different combinations according to the way it is folded, and the “Kalexatron,” a kind of poetic ‘wheel of fortune’ mounted on a bicycle axel, where turning the handle causes rotations whereby words may arbitrarily come into relation (see Duggan’s essay for images of both). With this in mind, the degree to which Turnbull clearly believed that the figuring of the poem as an object (often very literally, which could be touched and moved and played with) presented capabilities beyond the simple placement of words on a page, is something that does

not always come across in the printed versions of his poems. For example, “A Perception of Ferns” loses some of the impact of its “inverted searchings” (*CPGT* 439) as it appears in two-column format in the *Collected Poems*; it was at one time installed at the Glasgow Botanic Gardens as upside-down plaques round a pond, so that the poem could only be read through its reflections on the water’s surface. Likewise, the aforementioned “Hommage a Cythera” (*CPGT* 183) loses a degree of interaction when transposed onto the conventional page; the original is housed at the Harry Ransom Center, and shows Turnbull sent this tiny poem to Zukofsky on a single piece of paper, in a handheld fan-like format, whereupon in order to uncover each new line the reader is required to unfold the next section of the paper, emphasising reading itself as piecemeal process and discovery.

That Turnbull was so engrossed by these “kinetic” practices does not, however, undermine the effect of *Twenty Words, Twenty Days*, a poem which does still engage deeply with the act of choosing and has been cited as one of the poet’s “[three] most important works” (Miller 185). The poem questions how far, given the undeniably communal nature of language, the poet may be able to make an arrangement which is truly new. Turnbull has expressed these competing forces succinctly: “Where certain words, or in certain places, are “given”, then the final result is not entirely dependent on our choice, except for that initial design” (*CPGT* 480). This focus on an overarching sense of “design” encompasses what Charles Altieri has characterised as a shift in modernist poetic practices towards “compositional, rather than rhetorical energies” (*The Art* 6). However, for Turnbull, such “compositional energies” do not come entirely at the expense of what words themselves are capable of signifying, a balance which is played out in the course of

interest in “time” also finds an apt locus in the boomerang, an object which is able to a degree to quantify time in its leaving and returning motion. This temporal interest is also reflected in the contrasts between short lines of only a few words and longer, more descriptive, even unnecessarily digressive lines. Compare, for instance “a depth, a largesse –” with “an effect discovered by observation and refined by / error, not deduced from principles – .” Whereas the former is succinct, the latter engenders the circumlocution of a dictionary description (and indeed it may well be), seemingly crying-out for a singular, encompassing and solidifying adjective, most likely “empirical.” In tantalising markers such as these, the reader is compelled to consider the resources of their own vocabulary in an effort to “condense” the language, accordant with the expectations of singularity set up by the “one word” premise of Turnbull’s aleatory game. Alongside these overt temporal and lexical concerns however, Turnbull injects a significant amount of personal warmth; quotidian accounts of chores and walks on the seafront transpose the concept of time from something to be intellectualised and ruminated on, to something actually experienced, and felt – a culmination set up by the notably absent “empirical” of the previous lines. *Twenty Words Twenty Days* therefore shows that in poetry where the author’s ego is not the central, organising principle (this is what Altieri means when he refers to “rhetorical” energies), it need not mean that emotional or personal inflections are excluded. This is something that both George Oppen and William Carlos Williams would no doubt have agreed with.

Along with his interest in the typographic and sonic potentials of language, Turnbull is also intent on exploring the transformative significations that each word may carry. This is evident in the consideration of the boomerang both as a noun and as a verb – “in the air, a phenomenon and a byword” – where “phenomenon” refers

to an experiential understanding of the boomerang, and “byword” more ambiguously both to an act of naming and summarising. Accordingly, Turnbull is also interested in how far the principle of delimitation matters (much like Zukofsky in the previous chapter). Like a painter interested in minutely variant shades of one particular colour, he places the words “expended” and “used” side by side: “expended” is chosen because it specifically refers to something which is finite and will eventually be used up; that is, it is like the “certain hour,” “certain day” and “[certain] week” that form the backdrop of the poem, moments that will come to be exhausted in time. Indeed, there are many cases where reading *Twenty Words, Twenty Days* seems to warrant a quick check of the dictionary to make sure that a small, but ultimately crucial distinction exists. Other times however, distinctions may be less subtle, even repetitive, but just as important: “the sea very still, with long slow, very slow breakers.” “Very” in particular is a mundane and uninteresting word, utilised frequently and unthinkingly in everyday speech, but its repetition either side of the central “long slow” lends it a degree of importance whereby its two syllables actually enact the slowing down of the sea’s movement. In such a simple word therefore, Turnbull has found an adverb capable of both refining the sentiment of its neighbouring adjective (or, as in this case, emphasising), as well as rhythmically supporting the significance of the signified it coheres to. In this first section, perhaps the most significant small transformation comes with “coiling, / uncoiling, recoiling,” where distinctions are enacted via only two letter prefixes. Ultimately, the verb “coil” and variations thereof becomes a collocation for both the boomerang and the sea, teasing out an unusual and latent similarity between the characteristic movement of both without directly employing either simile or metaphor. By the end of the poem, it seems that “turning” will proceed in a similar generative fashion as “coiling”

("returning / turning"), with the "ing" ending of both words pointing towards some continuity between the two.⁹¹

Turnbull's intense focus in this sequence on the minute transformative possibilities of words, may be seen as similar to George Oppen's assertion in an interview that "that's where the mysteries are, the little words. 'The' and 'and' are the greatest mysteries of all" ("Poetry and Politics" 38). In this way, Rachel Blau DuPlessis has framed the possibilities of these "little words" in Oppen's poetry:

[Poetry is] never a tool to get something else accomplished; it accomplishes only itself. Yet [Oppen's] is not an aesthete's poetry, because through language it is announcing the world as ensemble. The syntax engenders that poetry of affiliation. By consistently placing the first words of a subsequent thought on the same line with the end of the last thought, a simultaneous hovering-over and forward-pulsing is created on the scale of the smallest unit. Further, a ratio or metonymic resonance is created between the words on any given line. And finally, there is no descriptive amplification of any unit of meaning ("Objectivist Poetics" 143).

Though Turnbull's use of line breaks is not as pronounced as Andrew Crozier's (which shall be discussed in a moment in a reading of *High Zero*⁹²), his typographical arrangements and frequent, mostly hyphenated caesuras, emphasise lines – each one often containing a new discovery or contemplation loosely related to the 'chosen' word – as contingent parts of a larger whole which do, somehow, "affiliate." This is surmised neatly by an analogy of poetry-making as like playing with Meccano: "and I, busy as with a Meccano set, a language of nuts, bolts / and tin struts, contriving phrases as one might improvise toys – / for / ingenuity, and as a pastime – / 'Turn

⁹¹ Repeating "ing" line endings is a common technique of Turnbull's, and can be seen in poems such as in the aforementioned "Six Country Pieces" (CPGT 197-198) and "A Perception of Ferns" (CPGT 439).

⁹² Crozier coincidentally uses DuPlessis's word "metonymic" in *High Zero*: "the luggage unpacked into draws / most of it brand new and unmarked / if you follow metonymy" (CPAC 231).

the handle. A string runs on a / pulley. A hook lifts a matchstick./ It works!” (CPGT 150). Turnbull’s obvious fascination with “little words” and even of little *parts* of little words, embodies precisely the attention on the relations between words that DuPlessis is referring to, and is something that occurs within the “smallest unit[s]” of language. This is an approach very much shared by Andrew Crozier. Speaking of his sequence *High Zero*, he has been as explicit:

It seems to me one of the most interesting things about poetic language is its conjunction of bringing together of [sic] larger or smaller units. Or bringing together of elements into smaller and larger units. Thus drawing attention away from the largest unit as the ultimate verification of what meaning may be, which I think is one of the things which a notion of full and complete utterance or a bit of a sentence or a bit of sententiousness or an intended communication falls short of, overlooks (*Reader* 140).

“Verification” and “full and complete utterance” are two key phrases here, both certainly relating to ideas put forward previously about the poem’s objectified form (if it is crafted with sufficient care) not requiring validation from external authorities. Of course too, attending to “the smallest unit” shifts attention away from the closure and epistemological certainty implied by “full and complete utterance,” towards instead a notion of the poem-as-process, and relates closely to Easthope’s comments about how modes of discourse come about. For Turnbull particularly, the very act of selecting words at random from a dictionary seems to defy “complete utterances,” re-positioning the poet as a ‘maker’ with the materials given to him. This is notably similar to William Carlos Williams’ conviction that “all an artist or a Sperry can do...[is] to make: make clear the complexity of his perceptions in the medium given to him by inheritance, chance, accident, or whatever it may be to work with according to his talents and the will that drives them” (*CPII WCW* 55). This alignment of the poet’s activity with ‘making’ rather than ‘telling’ (“full and complete utterance”) – or

Altieri's "composition" rather than "rhetoric" – clearly signals a move away from the sense of the poet occupying a privileged position: declaring "the world as ensemble" proposes to redress any authoritative delineations of finite and sealed-off viewpoints.

As far as the structure of *Twenty Words, Twenty Days* is concerned, the poem's form as a whole also defies notions of completion; there is no narrative or conceptual thread running throughout, no identifiable rationale to tie the variant sections together or to suggest links between one randomly selected word and others. Each of the twenty sections may occupy a whole page, or only three quarters of a page; each selected word may appear right in the middle, or at the beginning or end of the section – yet to glance at, all sections are quite typographically consistent. Also, the text surrounding the selected word of each section may be seen to variously both engage and disengage with the word; there are times when the preceding or following words relate very closely to the term's given (dictionary) meaning, but then other times only a few lines later when they tail off into apparently random anecdote, recollection or rhyme. In this way, the progression and rationale of Turnbull's poem is difficult to track and defies linearity – an overriding characteristic that has much in common with Crozier's *High Zero*, although the execution of the two is very different. In this way, *Twenty Words, Twenty Days* can be read as a meshing together of different constructive energies, some of which appear to be planned, some of which appear to be entirely arbitrary but included nonetheless. Some others, even, may emerge during the process of reading. Turnbull's aim here was clearly not a seamless formal cohesion, but the expression of the interplay of these energies: "The subtitle of the original publication was: 'A Sketchbook and a Morula.' The word *maieutic*, which occurred, expressed one of the things I had hoped to achieve" (CPGT 482). In the twelfth section, "maieutic" is "of or having to do

with a method of helping to bring out ideas latent / in the mind – / from the Greek, literally, ‘obstetric’ – / forceps needed / on occasion, the child willing to come, and willed, but yet unable – ” (CPGT 144):

“... a shame to

spoil by diluting... and if you don’t care for the flavour, why take it at
all?”

taking a glass together –

or perhaps looking at, reading the glass

to foretell the weather –

or through a glass, to approach detail –

or

just in the glass, a long look at oneself –

then faltering, with gaps,

reticences –

unable to speak, and listening –

to the pauses, their

conception, their gestation, their deliverance –

that nothing hinder –

that all come forth – (CPGT 144- 145)

The twin “bringing forth” and “birthing” potentials of this word are expressed in Turnbull’s use of an imagined, somewhat awkward dinner party conversation. Here, the pauses and “reticence” represented by caesuras and white spaces, are related to the intermittency of labour contractions. Similarly, ideas must be “conceived” and require time to “gestate.” Such language could be seen to relate to a letter that Turnbull sent American poet and frequent *Migrant* contributor Cid Corman in March 1959: “[Gael is] all chatter on poetic structure. He seems to feel the need of some kind of womblike form to hold him tight” (13th March, Corman TLS to Louis Zukofsky. Corman 22.1. HRC).⁹³ By Turnbull’s own admission, his ideas on poetic form were subject to frequent change – but perhaps, in the context of this thesis, the analogy of the poem as a womblike structure is not a bad one: each section can be read as a

⁹³ I have tried to locate the letter that Turnbull sent to Cid Corman on 24th February 1959 in a number of archives in the U.S. that contain Gael Turnbull’s correspondence, unfortunately without success.

generative space, whereupon the energies and relations affiliated with the embryonic 'selected word' may come into being; pinpointing the precise nature of these energies does not matter so much as Turnbull's insistence that the objectified structure of the poem *is* a suitable site for bringing such contestations into relief, and for acknowledging the contingent and interconnected nature of language. Such hyper-awareness of the constituents of language, and of course of their deployment in the making of an "objectified" poem, is an important resistance to passively subsumed ways of speaking and writing that are the securing mechanisms for certain world views. A belief that a poem is capable of encapsulating and communicating such a complex interplay of energies, is a central Objectivist idiom.

Andrew Crozier's *High Zero* (CPAC 213-243), a sequence of twenty-six poems published in 1978, directly addresses these notions of contingency, relation, and the poem as something which is scrupulously and consciously arranged. As testimony to these ideas, the front cover of the original Street Editions publication featured part of a monochrome painting of a Mediterranean quarry by Crozier's friend Ian Potts; Crozier was drawn to the image as it presented a "very high contrast of black and white," but also for the potential of "the rubble, stacks of marble waiting to be sold on to sculptors and other consumers" (*Reader* 137), to eventually become formed as objects. In accordance with such an interest in the shaping of materials and contrasts between light and dark – what might very well be an artisanal analogy for the paratactical approach – Crozier has produced a poem which does not seek to hide its nature as something which has been made; its processes are, in his words, "completely overt" (*Reader* 138). Indeed, when asked, Crozier has been very forthright about the mathematical organising principle behind *High Zero*:

It should be apparent that the number of poems and the number of lines per poem are the same. Although that doesn't then lead to understanding of the actual sequence of the writing, it should suggest that there is a relationship between the two. I very easily see that relationship as being like that of a grid on a square format, in which the number of divisions on each side is the same, not unlike a square on an Ordnance Survey map, for example (138).

Crozier's comments point to an understanding of free verse that is similar to that of William Carlos Williams' – namely, that 'good' free verse is not concurrent with arbitrariness and disorder, but rather requires a substantial amount of care and control.⁹⁴ Furthermore, Crozier's mathematical structure suggests that free verse may legitimately and provokingly employ regular organisational principles, but that they need not be the metrical ones of poetry which is not free verse (which, as I shall discuss later, have the potential to signal homogeneity). In Crozier's description of his poem, the analogy of an Ordnance Survey map is a striking one too, suggestive of something that is sufficiently materially realised that it may bear a relation to physical space. This image also emphasises that although the poem's 'twenty-four X twenty-four' symmetry and repetitions evoke a feeling of self-containment, of the poem operating within certain bounded limits, *High Zero* is still fundamentally conceived as "a thing among others": the square on a map defines and measures just one constituent space of a bigger whole, operating within a wider context against other squares which together bring a landscape into relief.

This simultaneous self-containment and gesturing towards a context greater than its own object-ness, is just one of a number of complex and thought-provoking

⁹⁴ This is the very thesis of Crozier's PhD research, recently published by Carcanet as *Free Verse as Formal Restraint*.

dichotomies that the objectified structure of *High Zero* engages with. A number of these key concerns are evident from the first arrangements in the sequence:

While the grass spoils underfoot
like glass, the sound sharp and clear,
frost persists in the air while the sun rises,
looking “as if it were a lamp of earthly flame.”

But at the surface, like a separate place
the picture of this is over-exposed. But
in shock, rare gases leave their stain to
burn its bright sign on everything.

It would flout its law: saturation by
the contents spread anecdotally (BAL).
Shored up together to breathe
you hear the brain stay tuned to you.

The evolution of the principle optic
content is an illusion. So much
like marble in sunlight. The grain
is true or stained with loss.

And for ever and a day runs on
at arm’s length, held with scents
too vivid to see: beneath
the reckless apex of that hope.

(CPAC 217)

Only this and the final section consist of less than Crozier’s stated twenty-four lines, serving to encapsulate the internal sequence to follow. It sets up a number of ideas and motifs to be revisited throughout the poem, including those of going outside early in the morning – indeed the notion of beginning or starting again – and references to visual stimuli, often accompanied by photographic terminology (“principle optic,” “over-exposed,” later joined in other sections by “saturated,” “blur[red],” “retina” and “cataracts”). On the other hand, the simile of the sun as “a

lamp of earthly flame,”⁹⁵ demarcated by quotation marks and an excerpt from Percy Shelley’s *Epipsychidion*, is unique to this part of the poem only. As such, even in the first few sections of *High Zero* a contrast between the reoccurring and the unique is evident; it is as if the reader is expected to memorise and recognise particular words and lines as they move through the poem. The second section continues this impetus:

A pleasure shared
 at both ends of a string
 hands oppose the work of teeth
 until both unclench their grip on
 condition all but nothing in the room
 any longer recalls the hypotenuse
 it sags and upon our feet again
 hover before the onset of “Ennui”.

 Like angels turning our backs
 to heed the call

of fallen comrades
 and fall on top of them.

Shored up together to breathe
 the fumes of evening
 gathered in an airless room
 its windows still warm to touch
 are tinged with pink
 reflections of faces like
 stray atoms in a chaos
 trying to better themselves
 and liquefying painfully. The gases
 rarefy towards the ceiling
 heated in the light
 that sets them off.

(CPAC 219)

In both this and the previous section the phrase “shored up together” reappears. This seems an unmistakable reference to Eliot, but rather than the Eliotic shored “against” – that is, with the intention of providing a protective barrier – Crozier’s

⁹⁵ A specific reason for Crozier using this particular quote (other than admiring it) is not clear. I also have been unable to find a referent for the acronym “BAL.”

“shored up” is more of a prop or support mechanism, an enabler for the subsequent act of “breath[ing].” Perhaps, in this way, the reoccurring elements of *High Zero* can be understood as “shoring together” the variant aspects of the poem, and of bringing them into form. In fact, everywhere one looks in the poem, there appear to be analogies for the defining (I shall call it) ‘movement’ of the poem, tantalising semi-gestures towards what may be going on. For example, *High Zero* seems continually fascinated both with matter, such as “atoms,” “gas[es],” “liquefaction,” “saturation” (which it seems can be applied equally to a camera lens or to a proliferation of matter), and the forces under which matter is influenced or even transformed into a different state: “Surface tension vs. gravity” (221); “unequal pressure” (227); “condensation” (221); “evaporation” (221); “precipitate” (221). This interest in scientific phenomena and transformative states can be read as analogous with a perpetual exploration of “the line as a unit” which, as Crozier has explained, is key to understanding his poetry:

The way a group of poems is set up as a formal object recurrently involves drawing attention to the significance of the line, to the line of verse as a unit, and to the line of verse as a unit which can perform different roles in different contexts... [this is] something which individual words are also required to perform (*Reader* 139).

The similarity of this standpoint to the Objectivist focus on arrangement cannot be denied. Crozier’s interest in the transformation of matter calls into question whether a relatively “autonomous” (*Reader* 139) line is essentially the *same* thing within a different context of other lines, or whether something about it is fundamentally changed. There is the sense in *High Zero* that, subjected to certain “pressures,” these lines-as-units may alter their resonance; although the signifiers remain the same, the potential for the material to be seen from new angles in different contexts

has increased, with a whole new range of interpretations opened up. Accordingly, *High Zero* is interspersed with suggestions of spatial measurements and of movements progressing along defined scales, such as the mention of a “hypotenuse” or “symmetry,” or “pleasure shared / at both ends of a string,” where it seems that the interpretation available at one “end” would be significantly different to that at the other.

In a brief but insightful reading of *High Zero*, Alex Latter has honed in on just such a sense of the poem operating both within defined boundaries, while also referring to other, multitudinous possibilities. Indeed, he notes the apparent contradiction between the sense that “the poem is organised by an underlying principle – [but denies] the possibility of the fixed reading that such a principle would seem to guarantee” (162). This dichotomy is central to the achievement of *High Zero*, and comes about predominantly via two means: the first is the substantial stanzaic variation that arises from the strict adherence to twenty-four lines – an overt, typographical feature that cannot be missed. Like a mathematician, Crozier posits each section of *High Zero* as one version of multitude of combinations that will yield the ‘magic number’ of twenty-four: one section may proceed in quatrains, another in tercets, another in linear form directly down the page, and another with indentations at apparently random points in the left-hand margin. In a way, his approach coheres significantly with Zukofsky’s and Turnbull’s substantial interest in signifiers. Additionally, *High Zero* questions the very notion that something can be ‘fixed’ at all, since even apparently rigid structures can reveal new dimensions when subjected to a contemplative interrogation. In Crozier’s reference to a grid-structure, we are reminded too that these sequences are all discrete components of a greater whole, just as individual squares sit side-by-side to form a grid. However, thinking in

very literal terms, these components' irregularity suggests that the poem as a whole operates within a contested and variable context, in which smooth transitions from one sequence to the next and an overall cohesion, are impossible; the "grid" formed would likely be an uneven one, capable of encapsulating or bringing very little into relief.

The second, equally overt gesture towards an elusive organisational rationale and very much linked with the first, is the aforementioned repetition of certain units – lines – throughout the sequence. The most memorable repetitions, such as "the advance of happiness," "day to day bonheur," "at the surface" and "while the grass spoils underfoot," reappear with apparent unpredictability rather than according to a recognisable pattern, thus resisting the tantalising calculability that lines such as "like an axiom / that's always so reliable / there's a cue to use it" (*CPAC* 237) suggest is up for grabs. Furthermore, piecemeal parts of these units – "happiness"; "underfoot"; "surface" – also appear intact and removed from the lines in which they have formerly been recognised, therefore inviting a contemplation of not just the nature of the units (lines), but also their constituent parts: what is it about these particular words and combinations of words that warrant this repetition? Although an organising principle remains out of reach, the existence of these repetitions draws attention to the poem-as-object in both a temporal and cognitive context, by which re-stated units and words are recognised via memory; the reader is simultaneously given the impression of progress, in the manner that one section of twenty-four lines is immediately followed by another (and also in the start and end points implied by the varying twenty and seven line arrangements of the first and last sections), but also a 'rebounding' movement whereby repetitions bring him or her back to a previously experienced space. It is in this sense that Latter has encapsulated the

movement of *High Zero* as “emphatically non-linear” (171). Therefore, the reader is brought to an awareness of the poem as an object in-relation-to the (temporal) world and which is not ‘fixed’ by time but – in the way the same combinations of words can be deployed in new contexts – has a degree of fluidity. In this sphere too, we might also read the act of recognising these repetitions as another form of “physiological” response, much like Zukofky’s or Turnbull’s heavily assonanced poems. Frequent references to “beginning” again – such as “let it begin again / hopeful as a glance of recognition / at the end of a line” (231) and “all of your ideas / begin life again / when you wake up / your faithful servants, already at work / in their accustomed places” (224) – would seem to move back and forth between ideas of habituated contemplation, or thoughts which inhabit set-patterns and structures, and the realisation that each repetition may, quite contrarily to being staid, in fact offer up opportunities for renewal.

In a poem which appears to both volunteer and withhold certain readings simultaneously, it is futile as well as misguided to make a single claim for what *High Zero* is ‘about’ in the transparent sense; in this way it has more in common than not with Turnbull’s *Twenty Words, Twenty Days*. It is however profitable to examine Crozier’s poem in light of Objectivist idioms regarding a gaining of knowledge which is contingent and cumulative, and furthermore to think about the multiple resonances that the objectified verbal texture of the poem bring into relief, just as the blocks of marble in Crozier’s poem may reveal new patternings and contrasts hitherto unnoticed: “so much / like marble in sunlight” (*CPAC* 217). This is of course also true of Turnbull’s sequence, which foregrounds the presence of the poet as maker. Indeed both poems provoke many questions, to which both seem largely disinclined to provide answers; that neither can be summarised or encapsulated once and for all

within a singular meaning hints that it is precisely this process of reading and contemplation that is, in fact, the primary locus of value. This is an interpretation that the ebbs and flows, accumulations and dispersals of the poems themselves would seem to gesture towards, something that Turnbull has highlighted: “the form of a poem must be of positive use – and it may be that it functions more in the making than in the result” (*CPGT* 480). Furthermore, the deployment of language and form in both poems is so non-normative, that we are drawn into a realisation of these poems as rather ‘non-natural’ things (in as far as a poem can ever be said to be ‘natural’), entities which have not arisen organically but are “end-for-end, butted to each other” (*CPGO* 71) into joinings which may not always be harmonious, so as to further prick the reader’s attention. It seems this is what Burton Hatlen is intimating when he asserts “the Objectivists, standing in the indeterminate territory between English and Yiddish, between a ‘Jewish’ and ‘American’ identity, discovered that there is no natural language: and with this discovery they passed beyond modernism into postmodernism” (“A Poetics” 49). Certainly, making such a clear delineation between modernism and postmodernism is always problematic, as is a definition of “natural language,” but Hatlen is correct to acknowledge the Objectivists’ exploration of how poetic arrangements could be used to emphasise the very made-ness of the poem. Jennifer Ashton comments to a similar effect when she observes that “[the] modernist interest in objects becomes the postmodernist interest in materiality” (29), a matter that might well situate the Objectivist poetic as “passing [both] beyond” and between modernism and postmodernism. As an approach and a way-of-being then, Objectivism is well capable of traversing various categories (as my conclusion shall summarise). The employment of parataxis draws attention to the constituent parts

within an arrangement in a way that fragmentation does not, enabling this postmodern preoccupation with “materiality” to come to light.

At the start of this chapter I promised to consider what ‘kind’ of object the Objectivist-influenced poem might be. Given my previous arguments here it should be clear that the non-natural make-up of these objectified poems – a vital characteristic brought into sharp relief by parataxis – is related to agency. But this can be pushed further than the lexical autonomy implied by statements such as the following, however true: “in the works of all of [the Objectivists], we have the sense that the poet is speaking in a language that he has *chosen*, with full awareness of the meaning of this choice” (Hatlen, “A Poetics” 46). It is interesting to note in this context that both Ruth Jennison and Ben Hickman use startlingly similar terms in their consideration of ‘avant-garde’ poetries, considerations which go beyond lexis alone: “By raising parataxis to the level of structural, signifying logic, [Zukofsky’s] “A” delivers a jolt to readers beguiled by the naturalness of their historical present” (Jennison 40); “twentieth century crisis management tends, then, to call upon agents to act or decide, jolting them out of the general despondency at supposedly capricious and natural economic processes” (Hickman 4). Hickman goes on to refer to the “affirmative, world-building” poetics of the “American avant-garde” as the suitable means by which to “construct new frameworks” (6). A “shock” or a “jolt”, then: these are the energising interventions needed to rouse individuals out of a cultural or political (or maybe, both) lethargy, one in which they may be passively subsumed into collective viewpoints. It should be noted that such a “jolt” is remarkably similar too to an Objectivist “shock of apprehension” outlined in my previous chapter on “Perception.” This is a conceptualisation then which has particular relevance for Tomlinson, Turnbull and Crozier, who in their poetic careers

strove against what they saw as normative ideas of an organic British society and unquestioned national character. Indeed, I shall show in the next chapter how the Objectivist belief that the construction of the poem was more than a framework on which utterances were hung, but instead a “structural, signifying logic” in its own right, provided a means for British poets to challenge the forms via which normative formulations often appeared. For these three poets, British poetry had not yet registered the momentous “jolts” of both the Second World War and expanding internationalisation. But to remain for the moment on the topic of objectification and the parataxis by which it is realised, there is the sense that the unusual conjunctions that parataxis enables, coupled with a hyper-sensitivity to the very nature of these connective relationships, would appear to be the perfect approach to establish the poem as a rare and atypical object, one capable of *registering* shocks. If we think in very literal and tactile terms back to Davie’s figuration in the last chapter of some admirable poetry as “hard with an edge... sharp, irreducible, gather[ing] light against [it]” and lesser-accomplished poetry as much softer, we gain the impression that a poem with an objectified verbal texture will be notably reactive, and show-up the marks that such “shocks” and “jolts” may inflict. Parataxis then, enables the poem to be made in such a way that it readily shows these impresses. This may sound overly simplistic, even pedantic, but in the context of the Objectivists’ obsession with making, this reading is a useful analogy. The very fact that Zukofsky and Turnbull (and Saussure [see 65-70]) envisage language as “physiological” in nature, demonstrates the degree to which Objectivist idioms believe that words can be tangible, embodied forms, and thus reactive to social and historical circumstances.

These Objectivist formulations – the irresolvable dichotomies they engage with between fixity and flux, plan and impulse, logic and arbitrariness – urge

individuals simply to be aware of the patterns in which staid, naturalised or hegemonic formulations come about. It is in this way that the experimental energies of Objectivist idioms, proceeding with full awareness that an ultimate, transcendental 'balance' between these competing impetuses will inevitably remain out of reach, are far more than an "absurdly inflated search for novelty" (Conquest, *New Lines* 2 xvii) by which such poetry would no doubt be disregarded by the British poetry establishment. Indeed, a poetry which is energised by the testing of variant parts against each other, which emphasises processes rather than results, represents a real concern for the mechanisms according to which society operates. In this sense, in *The Art of Twentieth Century Modernist Poetry*, Charles Altieri has made an apt summarising comment regarding the conviction behind these "compositional energies":

A spirit of experimentation matters in poetry because a healthy society has to worry not only about negotiating direct claims concerning social welfare but also about the best way of securing the instruments by which we think about welfare. That securing process may well involve cultivating individual abilities to make complex judgements that challenge communal values and try out alternative ways of modelling how agents might enact commitments to social welfare (110).

Of course, one must be wary not to directly and unproblematically transpose claims of what poetry might achieve onto real situations of social change. But that Altieri is convinced of poetry's ability to "cultivate individual abilities to make complex judgements" speaks volumes of the precedent-forming potential that poetry has, alongside its ability to map-on to nexuses of sustained thought about *how* normalised behaviour and viewpoints come about. This is a crucial part of Objectivist poets' belief in the value of language and poetry as a medium. Within this context, parataxis can be read as the Objectivist-influenced poet's formal embodiment of a

capacity to “make complex choices,” but, even more importantly, of the acute awareness that making such choices is very much necessary.

In examining the shift in value from meaning to making that the Objectivist poetic incurs, and the subsequent value of the poem as a way of “modelling” contemplations about society, I have begun to propose Objectivist idioms as a means for my British poets to challenge certain normalised and authoritative ideas of value that they did not endorse. My next chapter will fully expound these ‘normalising’ standards, and look at how, in the context of an Anglo-American influence traceable between the Objectivists and the British poets, ‘social-normality’ and Britishness were often figured as synonymous, and furthermore, that Britishness and ‘quality’ came to be thought of as irrevocably intertwined. For now, I want to bridge this chapter with the next via an early Gael Turnbull poem from 1957, “Now That April’s Here.” In it, Turnbull has parodied this apparently impenetrable Britishness-Quality dualism by using precisely the “heavy iambic swats” and normality-inscribing references (for example, Oxford and Cambridge, *The Times*, and brussels sprouts) that he and his modernist-inspired contemporaries detested. The poem, here in full, seems an apt preliminary for the forthcoming discussion:

It’s raining on the brussels sprouts.
The fire is smoking in the grate.
Macmillan says he has no doubts.
Will Oxford beat the Cambridge eight?

Some bright intervals tomorrow.
Sixpence on a football pool.
Seven percent if you want to borrow.
Charles is settling down at school.

Put the Great back in Great Britain.
Write a letter to *The Times*.
Lots of fun with Billy Butlin.
It’s a poem if it rhymes.

(CPGT 88)

Chapter 5: “Transatlantikers”

Nation and Empiricism

In a 1957 letter to Hugh Kenner, Charles Tomlinson referred to both himself and the letter’s recipient as “Transatlantikers” (9th July. Kenner 49.5. HRC). Playful as it may be, this term usefully encompasses the exasperation of the British poets of this thesis that during their careers, being British and being receptive to international influences were often deemed to be mutually exclusive. In this way, I shall begin this chapter by outlining some of the contemporary attitudes towards transatlantic and modernist collaboration in British poetry – particularly referring to opinions expressed by the poets themselves both privately and publicly – and also consider these opinions briefly in light of some of the publishing activities of the time. In the first instance, all of these considerations are certainly recurring themes in a number of letters exchanged between Tomlinson and Kenner. For example, Tomlinson attributes his difficulty in finding a publisher for *The Necklace* (a problem surmounted due to Kenner’s intervention) to publishing houses’ too-narrow attitude towards the constitution of English poetry: “It’s not just the TLS either [which is hostile] – The Necklace was lost under the wave of national provincialism. When the reading public (all 6 of it) go for the combined miseries of Amis and Wain or the decent self-depreciations of Phillip Larkin... well!... the situation in poetry to me seems so sad” (26th February 1956 MLS. Kenner 49.5. HRC). Tomlinson continued to hope that his attempts to introduce American poets would have a necessary impact on a British Poetry which he saw as being in a state of lethargy: “What is really frustrating about my obscurity is simply this: I’ve done something that needed doing in Tingalingaland,

something that ought to have smoothed the path towards Marianne M., W.C.W u.s.w. The rest is silence” (16th Dec 1957, MLS. Kenner 49.5. HRC). Tomlinson’s invented “Tingalingaland” seems to be both a mocking of the impenetrable and persistent provincialism he describes, petty and childish-sounding, and also likely a parody of the ‘ringing’ fixed metrical forms frequently utilised by his contemporaries, that he finds so uninspiring.

Such views were very much mirrored by Gael Turnbull, who had been responsible for introducing Tomlinson to William Carlos Williams in the first instance,⁹⁶ and perpetually evident in the pages of *Migrant*, a small and short-lived hub of transatlantic collaboration founded by Turnbull. Recalling the founding of his magazine, which drew contributions from American poet-critics including Charles Olson, Denise Levertov and Cid Corman among others, Turnbull emphasised “I was wanting to create a context that was not narrowly national” (*More Words* 25). Turnbull is very much a Scottish poet, but a number of his prose notes and letters confirm that he felt his stock equally tied up with the interests of “British,” and even “English” poetry too, and that he saw the Movement Poets and their provincial inclination as equally relevant to a poet born in Edinburgh as to one south of the border. Hence, when I shall refer to “England” or “English,” or even that reoccurring phrase “Little Englandism,” there is no need that Turnbull be excluded from this conversation. Indeed, in letters exchanged with fellow poet émigré Denise Levertov, the correspondents discussed the comparative conditions of the “two poetries” (the title of Marjorie Perloff’s influential 1977 edition of *Contemporary Literature*) and American poets’ generalisation that almost all British poetry was “retrogressive” and even “obstinate” (N.d “early ‘50s”, TLS to Turnbull. Acc 13430/7 NLS). As the

⁹⁶ See Turnbull’s *More Words* 20.

proprietor of a transatlantic magazine, Turnbull, in turn, noted “some feeling of tension bound up with this English/ American business” of which he felt at the centre.⁹⁷

Certainly, this “tension” is something embodied by the publishing history of many of these collaborations, in which the making of Anglo-American poetry is figured as an often peripheral activity. Many of these collaborations took place within the pages of so-called ‘little magazines’ such as *Migrant* itself or Cid Corman’s *Origin*, or were undertaken by smaller presses such as Cloud or Fulcrum – both publishers of Oppen’s work in Britain. Magazines in particular have often been held up as an antithesis to the modernist ambivalence of mainstream publishers; Keith Tuma for instance, posits the American magazine *Poetry*, from which the Objectivists sprung, as the loci of twentieth-century Anglo-American modernist collaboration (104-139). Richard Price has also surveyed British little magazines of 1914 – 2000, seeking more specifically to interrogate the assumption that “UK post-war interest in American poetry really [began] as late as the 1960s” (182), and that “the UK really [was] insular,” given the “presence of nearly one hundred poetry magazines with a significant translation mission” (182). Price wishes to guard against the common conceptions of little magazines as “necessarily non-commercial” and “traditionally associated with ideas of marginality” (178), but the evidence he gathers does more-often-than-not concur with a conception that “productive dialogue between British and American poets in [the twentieth] century has been the work of individual friendships” (Tuma 115); notable examples of such friendships in this case might be Bunting and Zukofsky, Dorn and Davie, Raworth and Prynne. It should be reiterated

⁹⁷ 22nd June 1965, MLS from Levertov to Turnbull. Acc 13430/7. NLS. Levertov is quoting Turnbull’s own words back to him from an earlier letter that the British poet must have sent.

however, that any marginality to be claimed here – something which goes hand-in-hand with notions of what constitutes avant-garde poetry – should be acknowledged as thrust upon these poets, rather than wished for. This is epitomised by Tomlinson’s frustration with London publishers Dent, who were concerned that *The Necklace* would not garner sufficient interest among a British readership: “Dent wrote last week, saying: ‘Although this book would undoubtedly receive good reviews, we have to allow ourselves to be guided by commercial considerations’” (9th July 1957 MLS to Hugh Kenner. Kenner 49.5. HRC). Similarly, letters at the University of Cambridge reveal that Crozier’s *A Various Art* anthology was originally intended for American publishers – James Laughlin’s *New Directions* – but was rejected along similar lines. Laughlin wrote to Crozier: “I hardly think we would be able to manage [*A Various Art*], unless there were a subsidy from the British Council or some other such organization. We have had extremely bad luck on the sales of foreign poetry anthologies the last few times that we have tried them” (3rd November, 1981, TLS. MS Add 9985 Box 1. CAM). The impasse of both Dent and *New Directions*, on opposite sides of the Atlantic (albeit more than twenty years apart), are individual instances that apparently confirm a wider commentary about the mutual suspicion that the two countries harboured of each other’s poetry – or, at the least, that readerships for each other’s poetry were thought to be small. Therefore, if we do indeed conceive of Anglo-American poetry at this time as the product of small scale interactions and individual friendships, this then posits the friendships formed between the Objectivists and the British poets of this thesis as all the more important sites of transatlantic exchange.

That Tomlinson, Turnbull and Crozier struggled to gain recognition for their work was compounded by the fact that at the time identifying strongly as British,

while simultaneously maintaining a lively interest in American poetry, was thought to be unusual and contradictory. Turnbull, for instance, recalled his “excitement” at returning to Britain from America in 1955 having been exposed to new poetic approaches, yet finding that the poetry scene was decidedly counter to his interests: “This was the era of the so-called Movement poets, with their emphasis on a return to more traditional forms. I could not feel at home in any country but this. At the same time, I could feel no identity with most of what was published and broadcast in the well-known places” (*More Words* 19). Tomlinson, also a frequent traveller to the States, received multiple letters from Kenner urging him to move and take up a lectureship there, in order that his work might finally be appreciated. While Tomlinson agreed that such a move might be necessary in order to gain the recognition that was not forthcoming from British critics, his responses to Kenner (mostly N.d., likely from 1958-early 1960s) reveal his deep sense of rootedness in England, which was further solidified after his move to Somerset:

You are right. This place is finished culturally – for the time being, at any rate. And yet... I have thought out my situation to the bottom and I don't feel in my bones or wherever that it is yet time for me to depart... I feel I must base myself here... largely for more fundamental reasons which it will require an entire poetic oeuvre to articulate and to justify (N.d, MLS. Kenner 49.5. HRC).

Tomlinson's decision was, incidentally, one that George and Mary Oppen, visitors to Charles and Brenda's home in Ozleworth, applauded.⁹⁸ Alongside Tomlinson's own comments, readings such as those by Michael Kirkham and Richard Swigg (*Passionate Intellect* and *The Objective Tradition*, respectively) have traced an

⁹⁸ See Swigg's Preface to *Addressing One's Peers*, in which he draws attention to Oppen's repetition in correspondence of Tomlinson's line “our language is our land” from “Return to Hinton” (CPCT 59-62): “Oppen was struck, in turn, from his distinctly American standpoint, by the native rootedness which he saw being defended in Tomlinson's distinctly English verse” (Swigg, “Preface” *Addressing*).

unmistakeably English influence in the poet's work in spite of his interest in American forms; Wordsworth, Coleridge and Ruskin are as important to Tomlinson as William Carlos Williams. Basil Bunting too, commonly thought of as the first "British modernist" poet, admitted in letters to Turnbull that his poetic owed as much to Wordsworth as it did to Pound: "[Wordsworth is] the only CONSTANT influence in my own verse" (1st March 1967, TLS. Acc 13429. NLS). In turn, Turnbull and Tomlinson both despaired that the achievement of *Briggflatts*, which they hailed as a text at once both innovative and modernist but still with the closest of ties to Bunting's distinctly Northumbrian locale, should be apparently so quickly forgotten by poetry commentators. Turnbull wrote to Kenner:

It is BRIGGFLATTS that exists. And makes it suddenly very possible to live in England. It is so English. And without any constriction in that. Which may seem of small concern, way off there in view of the Pacific. But, I'm rather fond of this island, and even England, however small, and suddenly Bunting seems to have made it possible to live here again. Even stand up and walk around (24th May 1966, MLS. Kenner 50.1. HRC);

Twenty years later, Tomlinson also wrote to Kenner in remarkably similar terms: "how is it the English have managed so effectively to forget what Basil Bunting achieved in Briggflatts?... the memory of BB has already slid into oblivion except for a small group of us" (31st May 1987, MLS. Kenner 49.5. HRC). Such feelings, expressed overtly by these two poets, further demonstrate that not only has Anglo-American poetic collaboration been figured as the exception rather than the norm by critics of post-war poetry, but that it was very much *felt* to be so, at the time these poets were writing. This is the product of apparently well-defined criteria about what was seen to constitute 'Englishness' or 'Britishness' or, more widely speaking, nationality. These criteria, in not dissimilar fashion from processes of canon

formation described in my first chapter, dictate who is included and excluded – or, as Tomlinson claims, “forgotten.” Therefore, addressing these constructs – what was believed to be the basis of British versus American poetry – and subsequently how the three poets central to this study were affected, becomes pertinent.

If mid-twentieth century modernist transatlantic collaboration is then to be thought of as an uncommon activity (as Tomlinson, Turnbull and Crozier’s first-hand accounts assert) and the product of “productive, individual friendships”, then the timing of these poets’ friendships with the Objectivists can be seen as crucial. In his study for *The Oxford English Literary History*, Randall Stevenson posits the period 1960-2000 (although this thesis can be said to broadly encompass 1955-1980 and some instances thereafter) as a time of an “increasingly globalised culture, [when] ‘nation’ as a category of literary or even political analysis weakened during the period, and seemed likely to continue to do so. Marking the last of a traditional England, the period... may also have seen the last of English literature as traditionally or nationally conceived, and the beginnings of new, broader categories of analysis” (6). The occasions for Turnbull and Tomlinson receiving their first letters from William Carlos Williams – 1958 and 1957 respectively – sets them firmly at the start of this period. Likewise, Crozier begun a correspondence with Carl Rakosi in 1965, while studying under Charles Olson at the University of Buffalo. Rakosi’s response to Crozier’s first letter, reprinted in the *Andrew Crozier Reader*, is similar to that of Williams to Crozier’s contemporaries: a hopeful optimism that such contact might spark both a revived interest in American modernist poetry, and also a communication with a younger generation of poets coming through in the UK: “That Crozier found my work so interesting meant that others of his generation might also. That knowledge rushed through me and propelled me into writing again” (190).

Indeed, Crozier presented an edition of Rakosi's *Poems 1923-1941* for publication as late as 1995.

Timing has of course often been figured as a crucial influence on the work of the Objectivists themselves, with a number of critics figuring their early work as a product of responses to Depression era experiences. Similarly, in the context of this thesis, a specifically post-WWII context and understandings of what constitutes 'nation' collude. As I have discussed, it is not making too large a claim to say that Turnbull's, Tomlinson's and Crozier's interests in the Objectivists sought to cross both generational and national boundaries simultaneously – or, more specifically, to assert that fascinating and admirable poetry was just that, irrespective of these limiting categories. I have already pointed towards Crozier's "Thrills and Frills" essay, but his "Introduction" to *A Various Art* is as equally forceful a critique of the "uncomplicated mutual alignment" (49) of nationality (or national culture) and quality, "as though the prestige of national origin constituted a claim to the world's attention" (49). For Crozier, this disposition is epitomised by the phrase "the best of British" (49). While Randall Stevenson (retrospectively) claims that post-war Britain was beginning to become more globalised, Crozier observes exactly the opposite as underway in British poetry, and in his "Introduction" set out to declare his own distance from such narrowing categories. Indeed, David Herd has honed in on Crozier's polemic, positing it as a rupture, "the moment [that] poetry that happened to be written in England publicly dislocated itself from the concerns of nation" ("Dislocating" 508). In doing so, Herd places Crozier's standpoint firmly within a context of twentieth-century socio-political thought: "What mattered for (Hannah) Arendt, as it mattered for Crozier, was that the category of nation should cease to be the default position, that thought and language should not settle so readily on

circumscribed geopolitical ground” (510). For Crozier, this perceived need to assert the “prestige of national origin” is something which firmly differentiated post-war literature from its pre-war antecedent, which had “no need of such clothes, and contained a less complacent style of polemic, as though some cultural positions still remained to be stormed” (Crozier, “Introduction” 49). It is clear then that the British poets of this thesis detected some kind of unthinking deferral to an authoritative nationality that arose specifically after the war, a nationality by which ‘standards’ and value were judged. This was something to which all three British poets felt distinctly opposed.

Comments such as these inevitably require some consideration of how ‘nation’ or ‘nationality’ has been theorized – a perpetually tricky subject not least owing to the subtle but important variations of this noun, such as “nationality,” “nationalist/ism,” “national feeling” etc. Raymond Williams has pointed out that the word “national” is nowadays most commonly understood to mean a “politically organized grouping” rather than a racial or territorial grouping (213-214). Of course, such an understanding is difficult because “organized” implies some kind of orderly and rational structure in which people participate. The *OED* defines nation as “a large aggregate of communities and individuals united by common factors such as common descent, language, culture, history, or occupation of the same territory, so as to form a distinct people.” It is clear that whatever the reading, nation is generally conceived of as formed around certain shared principles. However, critics and theorists have offered multiple accounts of what these principles might be, how they are construed, the ramifications of adhering to or opposing these principles and, in turn, what this might reflect about the nature of nation. For example, Hannah Arendt, as per Herd’s comments above, conceives of nation in terms of subordination and a

delimitation of responses which places her on similar ground to Crozier; the primary indicator here is her use of the word “demand”: “Whether a nation consists of equals or non-equals is of no great importance... for society always demands that its members act as though they were members of some enormous family which has only one opinion and one interest” (49). It is certainly not, however, as simple as to say that nationality is imposed on one group by another, more powerful group. In this way, Anthony Easthope’s study *Englishness and National Culture*, which similarly to *Poetry as Discourse* is greatly concerned with the role of signifiers and language systems in fostering collectives, has sought to interrogate what a number of proposed “common factors” might be, and also to examine “nation” and “nationalism” from both positive and negative viewpoints. Easthope variously examines ideas such as “nation as class dominance,” whether “collective identity” can reliably be said to exist, and “nation as real versus nation as spirit” (see 6-29). Crucially, as suggested by this last factor, Easthope examines whether nation is “real” or “imaginary.” The latter of these terms owes much to Benedict Anderson’s theorizing of nation as “imagined communities” – “[nation is] *imagined* because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion” (Anderson 6, original emphasis) – a viewpoint which is, Easthope points out, based on a standpoint which will be familiar to the English reader “because it is empiricist – thus imaginary supposed in [direct] opposition to personal knowledge, direct encounter and being within actual earshot of another person” (9).

At this point in my argument it should be reiterated that arriving at a consensus of what constitutes nation is exceptionally complex, and so any claim to the constituents of ‘national identity’ – particularly ‘a nation’s’ literature – will

necessarily require some sweeping generalisations and delineations. Just as I have mentioned at the start of this thesis, poetry's apparent propensity to categorise means that it is often very ready to make such generalisations, particularly regarding the characteristics of British versus American poetry. Furthermore, generalizations and categorisation can be seen to relate not only to what nation might *be*, but *how* it comes to be represented that way – as per Easthope's last binary opposition of "real versus imaginary."⁹⁹ Tomlinson's, Turnbull's and Crozier's most immediate concern was not nation per se (something that, in itself, they all felt strongly about), but rather how such an idea of what the British nation was, was shored up by certain poetic practices. In this way, their primary concern can be understood as relating predominantly to culture, as Crozier explicitly states in his "Introduction" to *A Various Art*, and Tomlinson does too when he writes to Kenner in an aforementioned letter that Britain is "finished culturally." As Crozier's prose makes particularly explicit, "culture" is closely connected to the rationale selecting certain texts and declaring them to be works worthy of admiration and canonical status. Again, this is far from straightforward: culture is, in itself, a highly contested term, and one which we could similarly interrogate as either "real" or "imaginary." Also, just as Arendt is at pains to emphasise that "thought" and "nation" are not one-and-the-same thing (a far easier distinction to make [49]), other critics have emphasised that "nation" and "culture" are not interchangeable, and it should not be assumed that one cannot occur without the other.¹⁰⁰ Given the lengthiness and complexity of these arguments, it is not my intention here to give a fulsome account of what culture 'is' – rather, I simply wish to

⁹⁹ Easthope ultimately rejects such a stark difference, pointing to a perceived failure on the part of Marxist criticism to dismiss nation as "ideology," and therefore say that "[it is] in some sense, just not real" (8).

¹⁰⁰ Again, see Easthope *Englishness* 42-50, where there is an account of methodologies that other critics have used to delineate between these two terms.

emphasise that British poets' relationship with the Objectivists occurred at a time when it seems that 'national culture' was particularly foregrounded and came into awareness as a site of contention.

It is common reading in this context that a renewed concern with a pointedly national culture in post-war Britain was in part due to the profound change in Britain's nation status following WWII, including a loss of empire and the emergence of America as a world superpower.¹⁰¹ However, this interest can also be attributed to other circumstances, such as those that Dennis Dworkin, an intellectual and cultural historian rather than literary critic, outlines in his monograph *Cultural Marxism in Post-war Britain*. In this account, Dworkin figures the new battleground of post-war Britain to be "culture" (3), occurring against a backdrop of a succession of Labour Party defeats in the 1950s, a changing class structure, and the beginnings of a New Left in Britain: "At the root of [Labour's defeats] was the post-war re-shaping of a working class consciousness and culture, a consequence of full employment, real increases in income, class mobility and spreading of mass culture" (57). Dworkin claims this change brought about a crisis in socialism, in that it was assumed the upward mobility of the lower classes – what Dworkin pointedly calls "the beginnings of Americanization" – would "usher in a socialist world" (57). Indeed, Prime Minister Harold Macmillan's famous phrase, "most of our people have never had it so good," was uttered in 1957 (anon. "1957: Britons"). Dworkin's comments might be read with interest regarding Blake Morrison's comprehensive chapter on "Class and Culture" in *The Movement* (55-98), including assertions that the Movement poets were "lower-middle-class and suburban" (John Holloway qtd. in Morrison 55), and that their rise

¹⁰¹ See Morrison 59-61; Stevenson 165-206; also Nicholas Jenkins's "The' Truth of Skies'" which assesses Larkin's "historical pessimism." It should be noted that such a "return" to nationalistic values is by no means unique to the Movement poets of post-war Britain: see Esty's account of Eliot's 1930's "concentrated claim for the distinctness of an Anglo-Christian culture" 163- 226.

to prominence had a “sociological importance” because “they were assigned an identity which presented them as the ‘coming’ class... and were felt to be representative of [post-war] shifts in power and social structure” (Morrison 57). These accounts figure culture directly as a product of social struggles, and remind that it cannot be sharply distinguished from other concerns, such as class. In this way, Blake Morrison has also interpreted an expression of the Movement’s lower-middle-class mobility in its very “philistinism,” epitomised by Kingsley Amis’ well-known phrase that “nobody wants any more poems... about foreign cities” (qtd. in Morrison 61) (to which, of course, Tomlinson wrote the poem “More Foreign Cities” [CPCT 31]). For Movement poets then, “abroad” equals “upper-middle-class pretentiousness” (Morrison 61). In other words, it is those of greater economic means who travel, a potentially troubling matter that has not gone unnoticed in scholarship on transatlantic literatures: “to what extent does [transnationalism] endorse a middle-class cosmopolitanism, enfranchised to traverse national borders?” (Manning and Taylor 3).

That a new, upwardly mobile class were contributing to culture in such an important and substantial way marked a change in British poetry that occurred post-war. However, the three British poets of this study distinctly disagreed with the values and assumptions that this contribution espoused, including the relentless pursuit of social and artistic “stability” (Morrison 211) which facilitated looking back in time both to fixed forms and an impersonal decorum reminiscent of the Georgian era, rather than attempts to invent new expressions. In this way, we might usefully think of both the Movement poets and my three poets’ interaction with Objectivism equally as attempts at post-war reconstruction: however, the Movement’s approach may be broadly categorised as an attempt to reconstitute the ‘common man’ or a

common, collective society with which most people agree and feel a part of, whereas Tomlinson, Turnbull and Crozier placed their faith, as well as their embrace of international influences, in the representative capabilities of objectified language itself. These differences might be furthermore characterised as, on one hand, a will towards a shared viewpoint, or towards an organic society predicated on ‘tradition,’ versus an engaged and empowered individualism for which I have so far (along the lines of other critics, as well as Dworkin [3]) used the word “agency.”

In order to speak profitably about these contentious differences in the remainder of the chapter, I want to hang these ideas on the central scaffolding of British “empiricism.” That this term has been a focal point for British culture has been variously noted, not least in the title of Crozier’s “Thrills and Frills: Poetry as Figures of Empirical Lyricism.” Empiricism, and manifestations of it, are also the central themes in both Easthope’s monograph *Englishness and National Culture*¹⁰² and his essay “Donald Davie and the Failure of Englishness,” a piece appearing in James Acheson and Romana Huk’s *Contemporary British Poetry* of 1996. Empiricism is also a latent idea within Eric Homberger’s 1977 study of transatlantic poetry *The Art of the Real*, the clue being the last word of the title. Easthope has therefore provided a useful definition of this word: “The tradition of English National Culture is empiricist. That is, it assumes an epistemological scenario in which the real is conceived to exist in itself as an object such that it can be known more or less directly by the unprejudiced observer” (“Donald Davie” 28). This is near identical to (Raymond) Williams’ definition of empiricism as “knowledge which is based on [direct] observation [and experience],” contra to knowledge arrived at via “conscious

¹⁰² Easthope completely neglects Crozier’s essay in his chapter devoted to poetry in *Englishness and National Culture* (177-199). Crozier’s critique would have greatly complemented his own observations. Tomlinson (very briefly [192]) and Tom Raworth (198-199) are the only figures of modernist dissent mentioned.

application of directing principles or ideas” (117). Like Easthope, Williams also notes a tendency for empiricism and “national adjectives” to be paired together when discussing English traditions (117). This link between empiricism and nation is important, because if “the real is English, and Englishness is the real” (Easthope, “Donald Davie” 31), therein lies a very effective means for garnering common, and collective positions. Poetry which is founded on a basis of rationality, common sense, and an attention to ordinary, immediate circumstances is remarkably easy to secure and likely to appeal to a broad audience, offering the opportunity to dismiss those who don’t take this empirical view as sentimental, pretentious or indulgent, or perhaps even obscurely hermetic (a position which would imply class privilege). I have already acknowledged that ‘nation’ requires the presence of “common factors”; empiricism therefore carries with it both a moralising dimension and the extremely straightforward idea that we all indeed experience the world right before our eyes, whether that be going to the park or the supermarket, quite irrespective of different imaginative responses (imagination is often posited as the antonym of empiricism). For instance, in spite of his deep rootedness in the English countryside, Tomlinson clearly believes that ‘nation’ as an objectively quantifiable category does not exist, employing the word “myth” in an early MS draft for the lecture “A Sense of the Past and Some Recent English Poetry.” In this draft, Tomlinson considers “the difficulties Englishmen, and often English poets, have in reconciling their actual history with their myth of themselves as a homogenous island people, uninvaded since the Normans in 1066” (Tomlinson 3.3. HRC). If we continue along these lines, much in the vein of Benedict Anderson’s “imagined communities,” the conception of nation in itself appears to be a large contradiction if considered in empirical terms: we cannot say for sure that nation “empirically” exists – that is, beyond a series of geographic

boundaries – but by dressing it in empirical clothes it might be more likely that the concept will gain the “imaginative” buy-in required to arrive at the common factors necessary for its construction. Such an oxymoronic figuration can, in itself, be seen as symptomatic of the fraught difficulties that surround theorizing nation with regards to a nation’s supposed culture; one can see why an “uncomplicated mutual alignment” of nation and culture was regarded by Crozier with such suspicion, and even further problematized given its subsequent association with poetic value (“quality,” in Crozier’s words).

True to difficulties such as these, it certainly cannot be declared that an Objectivist influence on British poetry, with its attention to the minute details of quotidian happenings and direct experience, abandoned empirical standpoints. Indeed, I shall propose that a significant part of the appeal of Objectivism for British poets was that it did not completely do-away-with empiricism, but provided a means to negotiate *between* the cracks of it, so to speak, as well as to question the apparently finite and atemporal positions of authority that such an empiricist mode enabled *without* reverting to a simplistic, “objective/ subjective” binary opposition. As posited in Crozier’s “Thrills” essay, the poets of this thesis believed that such empiricism had gone too far – that it was so effective in its self-justification that the further application of alternative imaginative orderings and the questioning of the latent political positions that such poetry presented was extremely difficult. Indeed, the manner in which intellectuals and academics sought-out new, international influences in the 1960s and 70s – a trend Dworkin identifies as being something which was simultaneous with a rise in the prevalence of literary theory and England gaining membership to the European Community in 1973 – can be interpreted as a search for an “alternative to what [intellectuals] saw as the stifling effects of the

English empirical idiom” (Dworkin 6-7). In order to bring into relief Objectivism’s potential for negotiation of empirical standpoints, the generalisations of the time surrounding the character of “English” and “American” poetry need to be interrogated.

“Aesthetes” or “Rhetoricians?”

In spite of the difficulties surrounding ‘nation’ and ‘culture,’ construing what was thought to constitute “the two poetries” of England and America is relatively easy, given that viewpoints across different sources are remarkably consistent. Such consistency in turn led to these generalised divisions becoming all the more prominent in poetic thinking, leading those such as Michael Hennessey, in a review of new critical works on both Tomlinson and Zukofsky, to note that “this unlikely conjunction of an English and American poet in the mid-1960s seems all the more remarkable given the literary gulf between the two countries at the time – the aggressive insularity of the British poetry establishment and the general disregard among American poets for the work of their English contemporaries” (“Louis Zukofsky” 333). To comments like these we can add that such conjunctions seemed even more unlikely because Objectivism – contra to “obliterative European modernisms” (Hickman 7) – has been read to be a markedly *American* modernism. Irrespective of references to American locales, history, or even Williams’ forthright declarations for an “American idiom,” critics have read American-ness as inscribed within the very worldview and formal approach of the Objectivists. For a workable definition of a specifically American modernist poetic, Keith Tuma has gone as far back as 1919, to the young Conrad Aitken’s *Skepticisms*:

Ezra Pound's attack on ornament in 'A Retrospect' and on decorative rather than heuristic uses of metaphor, Mina Loy's insistence that poetry respond to contemporary life, the rejection of clear divisions between poetry and prose, or poetic and nonpoetic materials, the abandonment of an idea of poetic form as requiring 'perfect finish' and the 'modulation of beauty' (qtd. in Tuma 112).

Given that the ideas Aitken posits have cropped up continuously in the course of this thesis, it is not surprising that for each of these 'features' we find an uncannily corresponding notion in Objectivist theories, namely: the instruction that writing be clear, direct and not merely decorative; Zukofsky's insistence on the attention to "historic and contemporary particulars," or Williams' plea for "an object consonant with its day"; Williams' directive towards the value of "unpoetic" things and instances in "no occasion too small"; the sense of a latent potentiality and energy in the objectified form of the poem, such as in Zukofsky's description of the poem as "a sculpture not yet proceeded with" ("An Objective" 13). In Romana Huk's "The View from the USA" the following judgement is made: "Delivering the 'natural voice' has rarely been a goal in British poetry – whether Davie's, Hills', Fisher's, Prynne's, or, say, Veronica Forrest-Thompson's – focused as it is on language as social artifice rather than 'natural' footprint" (585). Huk's statement is rather sweeping, her choice of poets diverse; surely it is extremely difficult to argue that Prynne's poetry takes "social artifice" as a key concern, and what might constitute a "natural voice" is not defined with sufficient specificity. However, Huk's key pairing of words here is "social artifice", a formulation (as I shall discuss in a moment) taken up by Donald Davie. Another, American counterpoint to the supposed social artifice of the English style is provided in Perloff's "The Two Poetries," where she references how Lawrence Kramer's essay appearing in the same issue of *Contemporary Literature*, shows that

“Americans capture the phenomenology of perception itself” (Perloff, “The Two” 274).

In Huk’s and Perloff’s comments in particular, there is a distinction being set up between “social artifice” versus “natural footprint,” or, more broadly speaking, between “restrained” or “sincere”, between “artifice/ artificial” and the authentic. These are very big, and again moralising distinctions to make, proposing subtly that there is something in the approach to writing which is very much rooted in the experience of being American or being English – perhaps something along the lines of the supposed British ‘stiff upper lip.’ However, delineations such as these were made not only by American critics. In fact, one of the most oppositional binary figurings of the two poetics comes from this side of the Atlantic, albeit not from an English poet. In his essay for (not without relevance) a 1988 collection for Donald Davie, Seamus Heaney presents a number of English and American qualities which are distinctly oppositional (see “Or Solitude’: A Reading”). These features have been summarised and formatted into a two-columned ‘shopping list’ of poetic qualities by Jonathan Allison, and have much in common with Huk’s and Perloff’s assessments:

<i>Englishness</i>	<i>Americanness</i>	
social	solitary	
intelligence/irony	transcendence	
control/severity	release	
constricted	immodest	
consistent	risk-taking	
discretion	unexpectedness	
native limits	beyond limits	(Allison 180)

Allison has noted that such binaries are characteristic of much of Heaney’s criticism (179), with the poet displaying an overt preference for one poetic over the other:

“[American poetry displays] qualities of a more ambitious imagination, and one more

capable of representing modernity” (180). On closer inspection however, not all of the American features are so obviously positive, and the English so obviously negative; “immodest,” for instance, could certainly be conceived negatively, just as “consistent” usually has positive connotations. Regardless, the main thing that needs to be noted about these binary oppositions is that they do not describe formal practices and in turn do not relate specifically to the practice of poetry. In this way, Heaney’s features have more in common with Perloff’s and Kramer’s proposals than they do with those of Conrad Aitken; for Heaney and the critics of “The Two Poetries”, being “English” or “American” is less to do with utilising identifiable techniques or the excision of particular formal practices – it is more deep-rooted and akin to a poetic sensibility, in much the way that critics have observed Objectivism is perhaps more a way of “being-in-the-world” than it is a consistently identifiable formal practice.

This was a view very much shared by Donald Davie, one of the most prominent critics of British post-war poetry, and a figure without whom it is surely impossible to attempt a discussion of post-war Anglo-American poetics. Davie was humorously described by Tomlinson as having “literary schizophrenia” (*American Essays* 128), owing to his involvement with the Movement but also his love of Pound and criticism of Movement poets’ provincialism. In spite of this curious dualism, many of his views about English versus American poetic characteristics are rather staid and inflexible. One of Davie’s most striking musings on the nature of transatlantic poetic collaborations comes in the form of his winter 1978 essay for *PN Review*, “English and American in Briggflatts.” In it, he observes apparent differences between English and American technique (for example, he views the latter’s use of lineation and disjunctive syntax as markedly different to the former’s, predicting that

“*technically*, surely, Anglo-American is what our poetry will be henceforth”), before asserting “at levels more profound than technique – to which however only technique gives us access – the English poet will remain as English as ever, the American as American” (17). For Davie then, the figuration of nation is something that runs much deeper than the comparatively transient feature of form. It is in this way that he considers whether via Bunting, the “English Objectivist” (a label I have not myself attributed the Northumbrian poet due to previously mentioned reasons), we may “[envisage] the possibility of a distinctly English version of this otherwise all-American movement” (18). Davie’s differentiation between these two mind-sets ultimately rests on English poets’ supposed configuration of poetry as “public institution,” and in this manner he is near-identical to the first binary on Heaney’s list, “social/ solitary” and to Perloff’s “social artifice.” Highlighting the lack of punctuation in Lorine Niedecker’s, Marianne Moore’s and Williams’ poems compared to Bunting’s, he writes:

This points to an acknowledgement by Bunting of the social and public institution that grammar is... It will be clear what these comments are tending to – to the suggestion that for the English poet the writing of poems is a public and social activity, as for his American peers it isn’t... I’m prepared to argue that this is, and should continue to be, a distinctive feature of English poetry of our time, as against American” (18).

Davie does not precisely define what he means by “social activity,” but it is clear that his conception of poetry as a social act is positive, quite unlike the underhandedness implied by Huk’s “artifice.”¹⁰³ I interpret Davie’s “social activity” as both a sense of writing for an audience, and writing a poetry which is concerned and invested in the workings of society. In this way, in more than one occasion in his critical writings,

¹⁰³ See again David Herd’s “Dislocating Country”, especially 500-507.

Davie uses two terms, both equally derogative, to describe poets and their practices with which he disapproves: “aesthetes” and “rhetoricians.” In the context of this thesis, such words can be seen as occupying opposing ends of a scale running from an experimental individualism with a total disregard for a reading public at one end, and a decorous, sedate, public address with very little creative vitality, at the other; these may equally be seen as extreme manifestations of generalised ‘Americanness’ and ‘Englishness’ in poetry. Indeed, Davie’s aesthete has much in common with what Stephanie M. Wallis has summarised as “elemental individualism,” in which a person is “concerned with himself to the complete exclusion of social interests or desires” (11). Wallis’s recent book, *Individualism in the United States*, has theorised how the American constitution has often been thought to preference and protect individual rather than group interests,¹⁰⁴ and in this way the potent individualism of an aesthete can be suggestively figured as American. This is likely to be what critics have thought to be particularly ‘American’ about Tomlinson’s work, interested as it is in the perceptive interaction or exchange between poet and world, rather than speaking ‘to’ an audience. This very same topic is indeed discussed in the typescript for an interview between Tomlinson and American poet Robert Creeley, in which Creeley emphasises a standpoint which might be generalised in this context as disinterested with poetry as social activity and therefore ‘American’: “I don’t have an audience, and this qualifies what I write. My poems... speak in a very single fashion. I don’t speak for a generality of people” (“The Tradition” N.d. TS. Tomlinson 2.6 HRC. 5). I raise this dichotomy because understanding the implications of these

¹⁰⁴ See Wallis 3-7, in which she maps out ways in which the constitution of the US, and indeed the way it is taught in schools, is commonly figured to protect the interests of the individual. Wallis also charts a number of the key texts (most of them not American) which have formed the highly contentious term “individualism”, from Hobbes to Rousseau (1-31).

supposedly opposing approaches has much to say about the appeal of Objectivism as a mid-way point between the two.

For Davie, being an “aesthete” and being a “rhetorician” have equally dire implications for both poetry and one’s assumed relation to society. His most striking critique of the aesthete’s supposed disregard for social happenings is to be found in a chapter of *Under Briggflatts*, “Larkin’s Politics and Tomlinson’s.” A revealing polemic, the passage is worth quoting at length; the matter of discussion is Williams’ “The Red Wheelbarrow,” a poem which is labelled “portentous”:

The momentousness of the sparsely arranged scene is blankly asserted, not proved. Or rather it *is* proved – by sleight of hand; for if the little scene is not momentous, how did it come to be framed, in all its sparsity, by so much white paper? The reverential hush is thus not only demanded, but enforced... Such poetry is invulnerable, existing as a self-sealed and self-justifying realm called ‘aesthetic’, from which no appeal is allowed, or can be made, to other realms like the ethical or the civic... The achievement of Williams, of his followers and admirers, has been to show that the most secure haven for such doctrines is on the contrary in an ideology that is aggressively egalitarian, and also secular. A moment’s thought shows that this must be true. For the belief that ‘there is no occasion too small’ is naturally at home in a society that makes no distinction between small occasions and big ones, a society that resists any ranking of certain human and civic occasions above certain others. Thus it is social democracy that cossets and protects the aesthete, as no other form of society does. Williams’s ‘It all depends’ asserts and takes for granted the absence of any agreed hierarchies, hence the freedom of any individual to establish and assert his own hierarchy, without fear of being challenged (64-65).

This passage shows why Davie “had never warmed much” to Williams (Tomlinson, “Some Presences” 231): Williams is read as the ultimate aesthete because his poem is figured to exist in its own sphere, as a self-justifying activity with no need of external referents to confirm or authorise the validity of its utterance. For Davie, this is both arrogant, and dismissive of social concerns. Here, we cannot help but be reminded of the Objectivist missive that a poem’s form, rendered with sufficient

“intensity of perception” and craftsman-like scrupulousness, need not garner any other endorsements as affirmation of its value; as I have noted, this is precisely what Tomlinson admires about this poem (“Introduction” to Williams’ *Selected Poems* 17). Davie’s reading is somewhat perplexing in that Williams’ “aggressive” social democracy is “enforced” by the structure of his poem; one asks how this can happen in such a society with “an absence of agreed hierarchies,” because for something to be “enforced” obviously requires coercion or submission of one party to another – an exercise of power which is surely the opposite of “egalitarian.” It appears that Davie sees the position behind Williams’ poem as ultimately despotic, in that the poet is so confident of the ‘rightness’ of their poetic approach that they have no intention of answering to an imagined reading public. The key word here, one which in spite of his internationalism reveals Davie’s conservative outlook, is “agreed” hierarchies. We might wonder in the context of this study what these hierarchies could be, how they came to be “agreed” and even whether “hierarchies” – the subversion of one group by another according to possession of status or authority – can ever really be “agreed” in the first place. The use of this word suggests it is age-old, deeply embedded hierarchies that Davie is likely referring to; his labelling of Williams as “secular” suggests that the Church may be one authority, and implicit within the word “hierarchy” itself, a claim could be made that Davie is referring to class. Additionally, that the sparse typographical arrangement of Williams’ poem precludes it from making any “appeal” to “the ethical or the civic” is a sweepingly dismissive and unproven statement. Davie does not even consider, for instance, that the object presented in Williams’ poem is an agricultural one, and might reasonably be labelled therefore as having a “civic” resonance. In this way it is interesting that what Davie praises so highly in George Oppen’s work, the manner in which “the social criticism

is... completely merged with the objects he presents" ("Notes on George Oppen's" 415), is patently disregarded in this reading of Williams. Ultimately, Davie worries about Williams' freedom to state whatever he wishes without being "challenged." It should be obvious that the privilege and invulnerability that Davie finds in "The Red Wheelbarrow" is not consistent with Objectivist intentions; both the Objectivists and the three British poets of this thesis would point out that Williams is making no claims either to speak for a 'generality' of people, or to be representing some form of collective experience.

Williams' attention towards immediate, unexceptional things and occurrences of which Davie disapproves has another important bearing for British poetry's relationship with Objectivism. Davie's suggestion that it might be a virtuous poetic quality to discriminate between events as "major" and "minor" – much in the way, it should be noted (as per Rakosi's comments in my first chapter), poets can be categorised as "major" and "minor" – is making a case for valuing some experiences and occurrences over others. This idea is not straightforward when it comes to considering how nationality is rendered in English poetry: Tomlinson has indeed referred in early letters to "a more ceremonial style in which it is possible to consider the remains of the English past and to weigh the present" (28th April 1956, MLS to Hugh Kenner. Kenner 49.5. HRC), and Brian John's 1989 monograph, *Charles Tomlinson: The World as Event*, takes precisely this interest as its *precis*. Davie too has pointed out that the apparent ordinariness of Tomlinson's "Swimming Chenango Lake" is belied when it is understood that the swimming is a ceremonial undertaking, part of a Native American seasonal ritual ("Larkin's Politics" 65). It is not easy to say with surety that English poetry is more preoccupied with ceremony or adopts a more ceremonial style as opposed to a comparatively introverted and individualistic

American verse, but such an attention to ‘momentous’ occasions rather than commonplace ones is another manifestation of Davie’s conviction that for the English poet, writing is a social activity. Addressing these questions from an Objectivist viewpoint may lead us to wonder what is at stake in a society that does indeed make “distinction[s] between small occasions and large ones.” In this respect, a passage from Walter Benjamin’s “Theses on the Philosophy of History” might equally occupy the sentiment of Williams’ “no occasion too small”: “A chronicler who recites events without distinguishing between major and minor ones acts in accordance with the following truth: nothing that has ever happened should be regarded as lost for history” (256). The extrapolations of this statement are twofold: first, it is not too big a conceptual leap to posit that a ranking of events eventually leads to a ranking of people, since it is people who both set events into motion and experience and record them. Secondly, this account conceptualises “History” – with a capital “H” – as consisting of only highlights, or of occurrences which can be forever encapsulated and chronicled. The possibility that some events “should” be lost for history, once more figures such accounts as authoritative, with inclusions and exclusions assumed to be “agreed” upon. Davie’s critique surely invites the question, much in the manner of his “agreed hierarchies,” as to *whom* it is that has the authority to rank events as important and unimportant, and subsequently claim consensus? Such a process of historical ranking could well be yet another “common” factor in a roster of others required to construct the “imagined communities” of nation. This has much in common too with the notion of “tradition,” formulated as conglomerated versions of ratified history.¹⁰⁵ Terms such as “tradition” point to conceptions of history as a series

¹⁰⁵ Tradition is yet another highly contentious term. See R. Williams 318-320, who points to a sense of this word as public, collective and authoritative when he notes “there is a very strong and often predominant sense of this [handing down] entailing respect and duty,” and also identifies tradition’s

of events which are linear and cohesive and, furthermore, whose “handing down” (R. Williams 319) is uncomplicated. In this respect, Objectivist emphases on temporality and appeals for an object “consonant with its day” present relatively more flexible standpoints; the Objectivists would argue that surely, for something to be distinctly ‘of its day’ it must acknowledge small happenings as equally as the supposedly momentous events. “No occasion too small” implies that history is validly interpreted and reinterpreted according to a variety of personal, relative viewpoints, and is always open to debate. Such a disregard for ranking occasions in the way that Davie suggests is markedly resistant to collective viewpoints that assume the members of society all concur with what are, and are not important events.

By way of contrast now I want to turn to a poem which is at the opposite end of the spectrum from the supposedly civic disregard of Williams’ “aesthete.” In this sense I have chosen a somewhat extreme, but nevertheless revealing example – Larkin’s well-known “MCMXIV” from *The Whitsun Weddings*. This is unmistakably a poem as “social activity” or, more specifically, social address. Its style is patently ceremonial, marking a major event:

Those long uneven lines
 Standing as patiently
 As if they were stretched outside
 The Oval, or Villa Park,
 The crowns of hats, the sun
 On moustached archaic faces
 Grinning as if it were all
 An August Bank Holiday lark;

And the shut shops, the bleached
 Established names on the sunblinds,
 The farthings and sovereigns,
 And dark-clothed children at play

link with “standards.” Morrison has also dealt extensively with the Movement’s relationship with tradition (see 192-237).

Called after kings and queens,
 The tin advertisements
 For cocoa and twist, and the pubs
 Wide open all day;

And the countryside not caring:
 The place-names all hazed over
 With flowering grasses, and fields
 Shadowing Domesday lines
 Under wheat's restless silence;
 The differently-dressed servants
 With tiny rooms in huge houses,
 The dust behind limousines;

Never such innocence,
 Never before or since,
 As changed itself to past
 Without a word – the men
 Leaving the gardens tidy,
 The thousands of marriages
 Lasting a while longer:
 Never such innocence again.

(Collected Poems 127)

Immediately Larkin's title, in Roman numerals, declares the formality and historical significance of the occasion, one which deserves to be "ranked above others." The arrangement of four, punctuated, typographically-even octets with the beginning of each line capitalised, also implies regularity and a "decorous shape" (Corcoran 83) befitting of rational, empirical observations and responses. This is, of course, a memorial poem, but even so its formality and distanced, sweeping remarks about categories of people mean that there is oddly little compassion to be found; notions of individual suffering and personal sacrifices are palpably absent, overridden instead by impersonal plurals. However, it is not necessarily the distance and impersonality here that has caused the most debate, but Larkin's presentation of an organic, pre-war English society, prior to its loss of "innocence." In this way, a poem like "MCMXIV" calls into question how far a "ceremonial style" – or even, more simply, poetry which knows itself to be a "social activity" – is predicated on the

assumption that the nature of the society it refers to is, once more, “agreed upon.” Analyses which have taken issue with this poem have tended to focus in this way on Larkin’s generalisations, all of which promote the idea of an English society which is stable, a “consensual, nonconflictual public space” (Tuma 194) with the sense of having arisen over centuries, in accordance with deep-seated “traditions”. Larkin presents pre-war England as a lost pastoral idyll of cricket greens and cultivated fields, a society and way of living that has the sense of having come about harmoniously; it is notably absent of the inevitable ruptures and “jolts” of experience that modernist poets like the Objectivists sought to register. In this way, such nonchalance towards individual differences, coupled with the poet’s assumption of the status of “representative man,” is what has irked Keith Tuma about Larkin’s oeuvre:

The multifariousness of life experience [is] reduced to the knowingness of common wisdom, the speaker standing apart from and above the processes he would describe in order to summarise their meaning and consequences... the poem’s address is such that the reader understands that it might pertain equally to all localities. If this is a public, “common” style, it also demands little of its reader and promises no information, content, or perspective that it does not take as already fully understood, given, agreed upon. The poet is representative man, distinguished only by the skill with which he expresses what is already known, and what is already known can be contained once and for all in polished, finished utterance. The poet’s perspective is epistemologically secure; his utterance has the summary function of the obituary (194-195).

Tuma is obviously no fan of Larkin’s, and his reading does neglect the subtlety of Larkin’s use of multiple personae (something which Davie, by contrast, does pick up on¹⁰⁶), a feature which surely adds too many layers of ambiguity for much of his work to be straightforwardly labelled “epistemologically secure.” Though matters are not

¹⁰⁶ See again “Larkin’s Politics and Tomlinson’s” 61-63.

as unequivocal as Tuma would suggest, his observations are far from unique. David Kennedy (whom Tuma quotes), has similarly written of Larkin's style: "that while individuals may have varying backgrounds, attitudes and aspirations, such differences can be smoothed into a common style and forgotten in a set of shared values" (qtd. in Tuma 193). In a reading largely focused on the class hierarchies present in "MCMXIV," Neil Corcoran has also noted that many of the poems in *The Whitsun Weddings* "propose an idea of organic English community (sometimes vanished or under threat) in which differences of class are subsumed into, or transmuted by, an ideal of incorporation or continuity" (92). In fact, arguments used to denigrate Larkin and a number of his Movement contemporaries are strikingly similar: presuming to speak for everyone; a voice which is at once both authoritative but aloof from what it describes; events and things presented with sufficient vagueness that they might be figured to apply to everyone.

It goes without saying that the Objectivists would fervently resist any assumption that communities can occur organically, or passively – that is, where the complicity of individuals is taken for granted. It is important to note that for the Movement poets, such non-conflictual "organic" constructs were most often predicated on bastions of authority which are deep-seated, and historical – the "agreed hierarchies" that Davie is surely referring to. In "MCMXIV," these are the monarchy (children "called after kings and queens"), the indifferent "countryside" pointing to a lost pastoral idyll, and the contrast between the servants in "tiny rooms" and the "huge houses" and "limousines" occupied by their masters; one must enquire how (as Tuma does [193]), this last image of inequality can be endorsed by the label "innocence." In a discussion of the Anglo-American, this last point brings us back with some inevitability to the perpetual binary between Williams and Eliot which was

explored in the first chapter of this thesis, a chasm which has been figured in explicitly national terms via Eliot's submission to "deeply historical institutions [such as] an ancient monarchy, and a traditional Tory conservatism" (Xiros Cooper 251). John Xiros Cooper argues that such a submission is, for Eliot, a form of restitution, and that it was incompatible with pointedly American poetics: "It was only through such general acceptance of legitimate authority that the process of re-integrating shattered psyches and worlds could begin... that this ran against the grain of a deeply individualistic American need hardly be emphasised" (251- 252). To this last phrase, we might add the crucial qualification that the Objectivist endorsement of 'American' individualism was not that of the disinterested aesthete, but instead of a thinking-seeing-feeling individual, constantly at pains to negotiate their relation to society without compromising their agency.

If then, as Davie claims, poetry is a "social activity" for the British poet in a way it is not for the individualistic American, it is clear that Tomlinson, Turnbull and Crozier did not recognise, nor sought to be a part of the society that was rendered in poems such as Larkin's. It is Crozier who is the most vocal on this matter, the supposedly anti-polemic introduction to *A Various Art* revealing his stance: "the poets who altered taste in the 1950s did so by means of a common rhetoric that foreclosed the possibilities of poetic language within its own devices... language was always to be grounded in the presence of a legitimating voice – and that voice took on an impersonally collective tone" (50). Statements such as this prove that such disapproval runs far deeper than "technique alone" (Davie's words) or the creation of 'good' or 'bad' poetry; for Crozier, the "legitimating" voice is a form of subversion, gathering together its listeners into complicit collectivity and a common worldview. Both Crozier and the Objectivists – as I have reiterated throughout this study – were

at pains to emphasise perception, lexis, and the form of the poem all as results of conscious, painstaking, individual choice. Crozier's concerns segue into Davie's other derogatory term, "rhetoricians," which interestingly Crozier deploys to apparently identical usage in "Thrills and Frills." Both poet-critics worry that "rhetoricians" perpetuate a mode of poetry and an accompanying practice of reading that "forecloses possibilities," delimiting potential responses to something which is almost automatic. Davie puts it thus: "Teachers in English classrooms have for decades now persuaded school-children and students to conceive of the reading of a poem as a matter of responding to nudges that the poet, on this showing debased into a rhetorician, is supposedly at every point administering to them" ("English and American" 18). A "rhetorician" then, is a poet who "cajoles and coax[es], at all events sedulously *attend[s]* to" their reader (18, original emphasis), almost as if laying a path or set clues for the reader to follow. Although they do not use the term "rhetoricians," a near-identical concern for poetry falling into a system of predetermined questions and responses has been discussed by other Objectivist-influenced poets, including Denise Levertov and Charles Tomlinson. In the same interview with Robert Creeley mentioned earlier, Tomlinson has remarked on the tendency to read poetry as a vehicle for conveying something other than that which appears on the page: "I think this is the kind of thing the English tend to do when they read Williams, when they read Pound, when they read you: they can't take what you're presenting – they must somehow try to dig down for something which they think ought to be there and they get frustrated when they find it isn't" ("The Tradition" N.d. TS. Tomlinson 2.6 HRC. 5). Denise Levertov has likewise bemoaned the tendency towards reading for a finite, encapsulating meaning: "[Many audiences] have been conditioned by analytical experiences with poems, in school, I suppose.

The lines that will most often cause a murmur of approval are lines that confirm in an almost epigrammatic way something which the audience already knows or feels” (*Conversations* 15). According to Levertov then, the problem of “rhetoricians” is not exclusive to British poetry.

Comments such as these can be read along the lines of reasons for exclusion, much like Williams’ disdain for “the academies”; the poets of this thesis felt that the method of reading poetry which was familiar to most, was incompatible with the way their work functioned. However, since the topic of this chapter is nation, the relevance of this figuring of “rhetoricians” must be considered in terms of how it contributed to the securing of a vision of British society with which Tomlinson, Turnbull and Crozier did not agree. Here, we can once more refer to Hannah Arendt’s comments on the nature of community: “society expects from each of its members a certain kind of behaviour, imposing innumerable and various rules, all of which tend to ‘normalize’ its members, to make them behave, to exclude spontaneous action or outstanding achievement” (40). Once more, Arendt’s analysis focuses on the perceived subordination that is enacted as a consequence of belonging to a group, but her “normalising” is not far from what Davie, Crozier and others seem to be pointing to: a “normalising” of writing and reading practices, the creation of a ‘standard’ – in the sense of both typified behaviours and quality – for interpreting poetry. Ultimately, that reading and writing can apparently be so directed in this way is of concern because, in Crozier’s words, it discourages “reading back” (“Thrills” 45). When the version of society and nation represented in poems is not one with which you agree – an “organic” society, a “suburban mental ratio” (Tomlinson, “The Middlebrow” 215), or even “servants in tiny rooms” – one hopes that it will be subject to interrogation. Andrew Crozier is the most direct and

politicised of the three British poets in this sense: he worries that if such versions of Englishness go unquestioned, it will preclude “new Imperial suitings” (“Introduction” 49). It should by now be clear that the Objectivist poetic promotes, from every angle, a rigorous interrogation and questioning of every word, and each combination of words, each line break or pause. The Objectivist-influenced poet sees both language and form as having the potential either to embody agency or delimit responses, since at all times “language doesn’t belong to the poet, but to all of us” (Hatlen, “Carl Rakosi” 140). If, as the term “rhetoricians” suggests, we try to direct writing and reading along pre-determined paths, an activity which becomes coupled with the “common sense” empiricism and generalisations of the Movement, the version of nation we may come up with will be “normalised” and the need thereof to question it will become less apparent.¹⁰⁷ As David Forgacs has surmised of Gramsci’s “common sense”: “Many elements in popular common sense contribute to people’s subordination by making situations of inequality or oppression appear to them as natural and unchangeable” (*A Gramsci Reader* 421). It is therefore crucial that such a “reading back” does not become discouraged.

Objectivism then, urges us to pay attention to both the happenings of the world and to the workings of language. While this directive may be claimed for so much poetry that is written, modernist or not, the juxtaposition of the Objectivist poetic against the generalised statements of much of mainstream British poetry at the time when Tomlinson, Turnbull and Crozier were writing, gives this American

¹⁰⁷ The idea that in order for a collective to form, certain behaviours need to become “the norm” (see also Arendt 41-43) and this may have political implications, is most certainly not exclusive to the Movement poets or their “provincialism.” Wallis for example, notes a very similar trend in the “individualism” of the United States, where the “normative” idea that each person is entirely responsible for their own individual destiny obscures an interrogation of why social and economic inequalities are so rife (6).

modernism a particular resonance. In a final consideration of why the British poets of this thesis were attracted to the Objectivists specifically, it is necessary then to return to the central securing mode of English “national culture”: empiricism. Indeed, in the very usage of this word there is an implied dichotomy, a coming-down on one side of the argument for real, directly-experiential happenings versus imaginative ones, or theoretical effusions. It can be stated with surety that the Objectivists, given their attention to the lived world and everyday occurrences, were most certainly not opposed to “empiricism” in principle (as opposed to theorising). The Objectivists were, for instance, disapproving of the Symbolists’ methods, and were at pains to “restore meaning to words – particularly in a time of official lies” (Weinberger xv). As I have shown however, there is a significant disconnect between the versions of the real presented by the Objectivists and the Movement poets: for the poets of the Movement, the real was innately concerned with the imaginative boundaries of national experience, and homogenised by the assumptions of common sense and rationality. This was a real the Objectivist-influenced British poets of my thesis did not recognise.

In order to set these comments into relief – many of which were first proposed in my chapter on “Conviction” – I wish to refer to yet another anthology, well-remembered as an influential text in post-war British poetry: *The New Poetry*. In this 1962 addition to the Penguin “New Poets” series, the editor, A. Alvarez, identifies and writes in the introduction of an affectation which he calls “the gentility principle.” It is explained thus: “[the assumption that] life is always more or less orderly, people always more or less polite, their emotions and habits more or less decent or more or less controllable” (25). Alvarez’s definition denotes a search for order, rationality and stability irrespective of the violence and mass death experienced during the War not

yet twenty years previously; it is the determination to show that “the life in England goes on much as it always has” (25). His choice of word to define this attitude is, undoubtedly, perplexing, given the lower-middle class status (he says the Movement poet is “poor... the image of the post-war Welfare State Englishman” [24]) and the often decidedly un-“genteel” diction of the Movement poets. Ultimately however, his point is that the unemotional, aloof and disinterested tone of the Movement was out of place in a permanently changed world, and should be replaced instead with poetry of “a new seriousness... the poet’s ability and willingness to face the full range of his experience with his full intelligence” (28). Looking at Alvarez’s dictum from an Objectivist perspective, not only is such a poetics of “gentility” perceptively barren, lacking attention to the world-at-large, but it fails to recognise “jolts” in experience. Alvarez’s bemoaned “gentility” therefore adds another layer to empiricism, because it assumes that reality is not only directly accessible, but is orderly and consistent in nature. Interestingly, Alvarez’s gentility principle does find a congruity with an earlier, American source, and a vital Objectivist precursor at that: Walt Whitman’s “Democratic Vistas,” in which the poet deploys the word “genteel” twice in near identical meaning to Alvarez. Whitman’s somewhat oblique essay claims that “pressure” is on poets to be “genteel and proper” – that is, “to prune, gather, trim [and] conform” (961); furthermore, that such a genteel approach cannot begin to contemplate “what is required to serve a half-starved and barbarous nation” (961). While it would be wrong to push the similarities between these two texts much further, there is a sense that “gentility” or “genteel” is a form both of naturalisation, a smoothing over of inconsistencies in experience, and a reluctance to acknowledge horrors and injustices. In other words, it is a denigration of the poet’s responsibility to refer to and reflect social crises.

Of the three British poets of this thesis, Tomlinson is the only one included in *The New Poetry*,¹⁰⁸ and made it clear in letters to Hugh Kenner that he did not approve of Alvarez's overall premise for the anthology, nor his selections.¹⁰⁹ However, that something needed to change to get away from this prevalent gentility would not have been disputed by the British poets of this thesis; aside from this though, the convictions of Alvarez and Objectivist-influenced poets are completely polarised. In place of gentility, Alvarez proposed that the poetry of "a new seriousness" would consist of either poems of personal, internal trauma, owing much to psychoanalysis (à la Sylvia Plath or John Berryman), or the mystic, violent undertakings of Ted Hughes. For my poets, Alvarez's proposal must have seemed like a straight-up swapping of objective for subjective, and a retreat into poetry showing itself to be 'about' the psyche of the poet rather than showing "an awareness of a continuum outside themselves" (Tomlinson, "The Middlebrow" 215). I have already explored the ethical implications surrounding the Objectivist aversion to such poetry of-the-ego, so it is not surprising that a turn to the kind of poetic Alvarez proposed as an alternative to "gentility" would have been unthinkable for Tomlinson, Turnbull and Crozier. Also, it is clear that poetry of personal and psychological trauma was very much at odds with the English empirical idiom, and would likely have been dismissed by opinion-forming publications such as the *TLS* as sentimental or irrational. Alvarez then, continuing along the polarising tendencies that surround conceptions of Anglo-American post-war poetries, proposed an alternative to the "gentility" he criticised which was absolutely opposite. Alvarez's anthology did not take into account the proliferation of empiricist ideas, and how this

¹⁰⁸ Crozier, the youngest of the three, founded the Ferry Press one year later and did not publish his first collection of his own poems until 1967.

¹⁰⁹ "I'm sorry to observe that... Alvarez seems to have mushroomed up into one of our critical forces almost overnight" (3rd May N.d, MLS. Kenner 49.5. HRC).

might limit the uptake of such so-called confessional poetries. Therefore, we might see British poetry's engagement with the Objectivists as a workable mid-way point between the detached gentility of the Movement poets, and the subjective personal trauma of confessional poets.

In this context, an Objectivist influence on British poetry breaks down these stark binaries, or at the very least proposes that they can, and should, be perceived as more fluid. In the first instance, Objectivism claims that the distinction between poetry as individual, private act and as "social activity" is both unrealistic and undesirable. The Objectivist poet views the cultivation of their own agency through the scrupulous seeing-thinking-writing of the poem as dually pursuing their ability to both negotiate their position as an individual, within and *in relation to* society, as well as their ability to make informed judgements about the people and "things" they observe in the world with their own eyes. No poetry, even that which is deeply contemplative, is hermetically sealed from social occurrences, as Oppen reminds us: "To exist; to be among things" (CPGO 294). The continual Objectivist directives towards relativity, contingency and process challenge the notion that truth is something which exists and is evident to all, as if it were objectively quantifiable and capable of being achieved and contained. I have shown that the Objectivists did believe that language had a vital role in representing truth, but the nature of that truth for these poets and those influenced by them is figured to be constantly evolving and relative, to be pursued rather than encapsulated. This rejection of a finite figuration of truth furthermore undermines any authoritative claim for the poet to make statements from an "epistemologically secure" standpoint, as well as to question the validity of making generalisations, since truth is always small-scale and cumulative, taken from observations which can be directly known. It should be clear then that Objectivist

poetry does not unequivocally reject empiricism, so far as it is defined as “direct access to the real”; rather, it reconfigures the attachment of empiricism to an unequivocal truth, wherein an uncomplicated mutual alignment (Crozier’s words) of the two requires no further debate. For an Objectivist, the “coming to know” the world that is the poet’s responsibility means personal and emotive observations will always temper the self-securing, rigidly unproblematic judgements of the empiricism. In this way, the example that Objectivist poetry provided to British poets presented an opportunity to negotiate between the bipartite divisions between objective and subjective, rational and sentimental, empirical and imaginative that Movement poetry set up. As Peter Nicholls has pertinently surmised, referring to Oppen’s insistence that “Objectivist” did not mean “the psychologically objective,” Objectivism “attempt[ed] to find the subjective in the objectified form of the poem” (*George Oppen* 39). Heller concurs, noting that the Objectivist poetic is supposed to be “an appeal [both] to the emotions and the intellect” (29). Thinking furthermore about the ‘agency’ this thesis proposes, we might reasonably conclude that the best decisions and opinions one can form are usually those which employ both of these facets – logical, informed thought, and empathy – equally.

If the fluidity and multifariousness proposed here seems too insubstantial, too inclusive and idealistic to be pinned down (and it is, certainly, a very idealistic way-of-being), it is important to remember the surety and solidity implied by Objectivist vocabulary such as “conviction,” “sincerity” and “integrity”; words such as these cannot, and do not, stem from a poetics pervaded by doubt. Therefore, Objectivism attracted Tomlinson, Turnbull and Crozier’s attention variously because of its radical formal methods and its worldliness, but also for the openness and inclusivity of outlook it proposed. For these three poets, it seemed post-war British poetry was

only too eager to secure a way of looking at the world which was enclosed in excessively rigid formulations of nation, 'quality,' and shared experiences. It is pertinent in this sense that all three of these poets, despite between them spending a great deal of time abroad and particularly in North America, ultimately did not relocate to the other side of the Atlantic. I claim therefore that Objectivism proposed an engagement with the real that was largely compatible with the empiricism at the centre of much British poetry (that is, an aforementioned real which "can be known more or less directly" [Easthope]), but that the Objectivist version of this real was understood as continuously unfolding, contingent, and concerned with the ever in-process relationships between people and things – figured as "discrete" in nature, rather than collective. In other words, by absorbing some aspects of Objectivist thinking into their work, Tomlinson, Turnbull and Crozier were able to formulate poetics, each distinctly their own, that went some way to reconciling the apparently opposing identities of British and Modernist: Objectivism's example helped them to be both British without being provincial, and modernist without being fragmentary or elliptical, positions which each poet opposed. Ultimately, the relationships with these (originally Depression-era) American poets that were sought out and meant a great deal both artistically and personally to Tomlinson, Turnbull and Crozier, ratified each British poet that the perception of quotidian minutiae, a scrupulous and 'restrained' attention to form,¹¹⁰ and the objectified evidence of sometimes enlivening, sometimes laborious mental exchanges with the world, were indeed positions worth defending. At points variously ignored or criticised in their own country, friendships

¹¹⁰ This is the premise of Crozier's *Free Verse as Formal Restraint*, in which Crozier, much like Williams, proposes a verse devoid of fixed metrical or syllabic patterns as conversely requiring more restraint and self-control, owing to an endless amount of possibilities (unlike the pre-formulated patterns of regular forms). Crozier's thesis is, it seems, another rejoinder to formally haphazard and apparently random modernist forms.

with this older generation of modernists in spite of their geographic distance, encouraged the three poets of this thesis that the ethical impetus behind their critique of the collective methods of much British poetry was, indeed, important to pursue. Against the passive or normalising suppositions that Tomlinson, Turnbull and Crozier found in much of their contemporaries' work then, agency and the importance of individual choice were written into every lexical decision, every syllabic beat, and every urge to deploy an "intensity of perception" in the Objectivist poem. Examining the discussions of this chapter in light of my research questions therefore, the Objectivist example enabled Tomlinson, Turnbull and Crozier to poetically pull apart the authoritative construct of nation, and the assumption that nation and value were synonymous. The individual agency cultivated by the Objectivist poetic was a means of resisting the collectives necessary to form nation in the first place, yet the Objectivist attention to the real was such that this approach needed not be diametrically opposed to the empiricism that characterised British poetry. Ultimately then, Objectivism's conviction in the value of individual agency rather than national collectives, signalled to the British poets of this study its potential as a re-forming, forwards looking poetry, appropriate to the challenge of writing poetry in a post-war world.

Conclusion: “Self-legislation” and the World

Throughout this thesis, I have sought to elucidate the nature of the close relationship between the Objectivist poets and Charles Tomlinson, Gael Turnbull and Andrew Crozier. Primarily, I have examined why it was the Objectivists specifically that came to have such an influence on their younger, British contemporaries. I have theorised this admiration as a conscious choice, over and above other modernisms and in marked opposition to a Movement poetic so influential in Britain in the 1950s and after. Via my research questions I have revealed the extent of this collaboration to be not only formal, but testimony to synergies between the ‘way-of-being’ or ‘worldview’ promulgated by the Objectivists, and that sought by the three British poets that were influenced by and indeed approached these Americans.

This study has pursued an argument which figures the Objectivist poetic as an effective means to challenge prevailing constructs of authority and value. I have shown that authority can be understood in two ways: firstly, the authority of the poet to make judgements and declare shared or ‘collective’ experiences, and secondly the authority exercised by certain institutions such as universities, publishing houses, or even (in the case of Williams particularly¹¹¹) ancient institutions like the church. In the Objectivist view, these authorities present ways of thinking about the world which are “inherited,” and thus are a threat to an individual’s capacity to both experience reality directly, without authoritative mediation, and to form their own judgements (Copestake 4). Therefore, the questioning of authority is a central tenet of the Objectivist assertion of agency, and is indelibly intertwined with notions of value.

¹¹¹ Ian Copestake’s monograph considers Williams’ ethics in light of Unitarianism. See particularly 15-31.

Each of my chapters has been concerned with the reconfiguration of authority and value, in light of an Objectivist influence. My first chapter addressed my research questions by contemplating Williams' stance against authoritative, value-forming institutions and his rendering of this in poetry. I showed Williams' exemplar to be particularly resonant with my British poets' struggles to gain recognition for their work in a post-war Britain which often disregarded both modernist and foreign poetries. Williams' "no ideas but in things," urging attention to quotidian minutiae, appealed as an effective mantra to counteract the vague generalisations and collectivisms Tomlinson, Turnbull and Crozier detected and criticised in many of their British contemporaries' work. Such an attention to small things, rather than momentous events, was also a means of sidestepping authoritative judgements about the value or ranking of certain occasions over others: hence the dictum "no occasion too small." My second chapter presented another way in which Objectivist reconfigurations of authority and value aided my British poets' refusal of collectives in favour of agency: urging acute attention to the 'real' happenings of the world. While 'attention' is something to be found in many poetics, the Objectivist notion of perception imbues this act with such great value that it may count as the primary locus of the poem; indeed, the Objectivist poem is presented as an embodiment of the ability to see clearly and truly 'pay attention.' For all three British poets, just as it did for the Objectivists, I have argued that this took on an ethical significance. Both sets of poets posited the act of paying attention as vital for the recognition of injustices, and furthermore as a foundational component of an individual's ability to form "complex judgements" (Altieri, *The Art* 110). My next two chapters were concerned with the second component in a 'clear-seeing, clear-saying' pairing (an impetus which I have shown Objectivism constantly seeks to cultivate). The

Objectivist approach to language was such that the British poets of this study saw it as capable of restoring words' ability to communicate meaning, and correspond to truths. Such an approach, placing emphasis on naming and specificity, restored the ability of words to "earn their keep" (Tomlinson, "Words and Water" 25) and thereby the individual to express what they mean coherently – a vital tenet of agency. That Objectivism also reinstated not just the communicative appropriacy of words but their materiality as objects, also shifted value from the search for an overarching meaning (in the singular) to the continual process of making; the Objectivist poem aims to be "an object consonant with its day," capable of reflecting the multiplicities and contingencies of contemporary life, its every weighed-and-measured facet evidencing the poet's ability to make meticulously considered choices. Such consonance and temporality appealed to the British poets of this study because it seemed to be in marked contrast to an apparently regressive, neo-Georgian and nationalist poetic which was conceptually finite and closed-off from the 'authentic' possibilities of experience.

My final chapter framed the investigation of my research questions specifically in terms of nationality, a context that has been latent throughout this study.

Tomlinson, Turnbull and Crozier, each in their different ways, critiqued both the antagonistic and dichotomising formulations of nationalism and its position as an uninterrogated, deep-seated and authoritative indicator of value. Charles Tomlinson emphasised the essential 'Englishness' of his work, yet at the same time maintained an openness and receptiveness that declared his poetry to be the product of assimilation, rather than oppositional choices between one nationality and another. Turnbull was similarly hopeful that the "excite[ment]" he had encountered across the Atlantic, the "energy of a whole world of poetry that no one [in Britain] knew about"

(*More Words* 18), would eventually infiltrate poetry which would still remain distinctively British – just as he saw in his friend Bunting’s *Briggflatts*. Crozier on the other hand, via his derision of the phrase “best of British” (“Introduction to *A Various Art*” 49), appeared more keen to completely cast out nationality as a viable category of analysis altogether. Certainly, nationality seems to be challenged at every turn by the core principles of Objectivism, not only in the poetic’s emphasis on individual agency over collectives but its embodiment of contingency, interrelation, process, and ‘nexuses.’ Indeed, nation itself is “constructed solely in relation to other states, and often in opposition to them” (Casanova 68), implying an antagonism and the presence of dichotomised absolutes. The practice of ‘inclusion’ or ‘exclusion’ that this implies, one which is based on deep-seated and authoritative constructs, is not one the Objectivists would have agreed with.

Ultimately then, this thesis may be understood as a consideration of the variant means available to British poets for re-building some semblance of cohesiveness and sense following the catastrophic events of the Second World War. The question facing post-war poets after this global trauma seemed to be: how might poetry make useful claims once more about a vital relationship with society? It appeared that for British poetry, so informed and influenced by a tradition of empiricism, attempts to once more locate ‘the real’ in a world which was fundamentally changed would be at the heart of poetic efforts. The Movement poets presented a version of the real located in a sense of a homogenous, organic Englishness and claims for shared experiences. For the British poets influenced by Objectivism on the other hand, agency and the individual’s capacity for experience-informed contemplation was the foundation of poetry’s restitutive potential. Therefore, via an interrogation of ‘authority’ and ‘value,’ I have shown Objectivism to

be a particularly appealing poetic to the three British poets of this study in a time of post-war national anxiety, and one which was – in its attention to real things, events and people – more suitable than first appeared for transposition into a British context. In this way, the poetic convictions of this late-modernist grouping transcended national boundaries, as well as many arguments surrounding “the two poetics”; we may even interpret the international perspective of Objectivism (as before, Williams is the anomaly here) as intrinsic to its very nexus-like characteristics. Manning and Taylor have argued that to travel is “to see the world from a series of dynamic, shifting viewpoints,” and to similarly understand that knowledge is “comparative and everything is perceived from at least two viewpoints” (281). Thinking then of the Atlantic-hopping activities of Tomlinson, Turnbull and Crozier and the resulting poems (many referring to foreign locations), there is certainly a claim to be made that such dynamism and openness to new ways-of-being marks this as a truly transatlantic collaboration, in mentality as well as in geographic terms.

At this point some summative consideration needs to be made regarding claims for this Objectivist-British convergence being ‘transatlantic.’ In my introduction I stated that I would use this term specifically, rather than ‘global’ or ‘globalised’; this is because the latter has the potential to be a catch-all term, denoting generalised modes of representation and a lack of discrimination: to this effect Paul Giles has noted how “the discourse of globalisation can become vague and hypothetical” (47). This obviously then presents a challenge for the Objectivist-influenced poet who seeks to be clear, ‘definite,’ and to engage with discrete particulars. While Objectivism seeks to avoid antagonisms it does, crucially, acknowledge difference; the use of similes (rather than metaphor) and paratactical methods demonstrate a

respect for distinction as much as sameness, and indeed this acknowledgement of otherness and the individual character of things is central to the case this poetic builds for individual agency. In this way, it is far better to think of *international* or *transatlantic*, as “transnationalism seeks various points of intersection” (47), pointing towards discrete, tangible, and (importantly) wholly intentional instances of convergence. As I have figured an Objectivist-British collaboration in terms of “productive, individual friendships” as well as a selection of one particular modernism over another, this relationship can be thought of in terms that emphasise particulars and individual choice rather than an expansion into a ‘global’ perspective which threatens to become a homogenous collective in itself. Following Giles’ train of thought once more, one could also say, in the way these poets met and corresponded, that these intersections were “lived out experientially” (47).

Engagements with ideas of the transatlantic apparently mirror the activity of Objectivism itself. The poetic seems constantly in motion, shifting between the particular and the universal, emphasising inclusivity and broadness, yet often demonstrates an extreme honing-in on specific and discrete things and relationships. In this way it can seem very contradictory, a matter that Michael Heller asserts when he writes how “one does not live *by* such poetry as the Objectivists write, but with and through it” (6, original emphasis). By way of example, Objectivism urges clarity and simplicity, yet the paratactical arrangements of its ‘definite’ words enact relations that have seemingly infinite possibilities, eliciting a whole range of conjectures (few of which, of course, are easily summarised); it also urges against ‘abstractions,’ yet on occasion the poem may become so objectified, so of-its-own-form that it apparently refers to little which can be seen, heard, or empirically verified by a reader; it also directs towards temporality and an in-process, contingent “coming to

know” the world, yet it often posits the poems that stem from this view as “discrete polished objects” – a term of Crozier’s (“Thrills” 26) which surely refers to Oppen’s *Discrete Series* – which are fully formed.

Objectivism then undoubtedly occupies a complex and multifaceted poetic terrain, and in exploring a link between it and the work of Tomlinson, Turnbull and Crozier, this thesis has made a significant contribution to existing knowledge of both American and British twentieth-century poetics. In the first instance, this thesis extends the understanding of the workings of Objectivism beyond the theoretical framings in which the Objectivist poets have most commonly been considered – namely, overtly political readings which consider their Marxism or materialism, or readings which aim to chart their engagement with prominent twentieth century philosophical perspectives such as phenomenology. I would argue that previous readings, although acknowledging Objectivism’s flexibility and focus on ‘way[s] of being,’ have not sufficiently attended to the subtly non-divisive nature of this poetic. While critics have claimed (as I have here) that Objectivism is a ‘working-through’ and a poetics of relation, there has not been sufficient consideration of the ways in which this non-divisiveness and resistance to oppositional ways of thinking has led to a socially-committed poetics which ultimately transcends epochs such as ‘avant-garde’ and ‘radical,’ and is transposable onto a number of contexts. I have shown that this outlook was a vital attractor for the three British poets examined here; while certainly Tomlinson, Turnbull and Crozier wished to distance themselves from the nationalistic, Movement orthodoxy of poetry in Britain (and were oftentimes vocal about this), none truly believed that direct and antagonistic opposition was the way forwards, and sought instead approaches that were more artistically and politically

nuanced. Therefore, the current critical discussions around both Objectivism and (much more so) around post-war British poetries have not considered how far such non-divisiveness might be a crucial and foundational factor for the building of more attentive, inclusive, and compassionate relations between individuals.

As well as giving this non-divisive idiom proper recognition, this thesis addresses a threefold gap in the understanding of both groups of poets: firstly, a proper acknowledgement of this relationship's existence and the reasons, which are more than formal, behind it; secondly, it extends the influence of the Objectivists beyond American poetry alone; lastly, my work asserts that current readings of post-war British modernist-inspired poetries have not been sufficiently discerning of the *types* of modernisms, or differing modernist approaches that British poets engaged with, and that current readings subsequently fail to adequately recognise a restitutive and realist strain in such so-called neo-modernist poetry. My interventions can therefore be seen as concomitant with the objectives of Objectivism itself: a greater awareness of subtle nuances and 'inbetween' connections rather than straightforward oppositions, and a call for greater attention to the different, 'discrete' manifestations of modernism, and how the individual choice of one over another constitutes a commitment to the practice of a compassionate way-of-being.

Methodologically, I have shown through a combination of close readings and archival sources that there are numerous materials expounding the importance of this non-conflictual relationship in both groups of poets' ways of thinking. In the case of the poets' archives explored here, many of these materials have never before been published by the poets themselves, nor by any other critic as part of a reading of either the Objectivists' or British poets' work. Via these combinations some surprisingly close connections have come to light: Oppen's and Tomlinson's shared

interest in the nature of Simone Weil's attentiveness; Turnbull and Williams' simultaneous hope for a renewal in British poetry which could cast off the straightjacket of traditional forms; the concurrent interest of all three British poets in 'craft' and making – something that so pertinently and profoundly found a correlative in the work of the Objectivists. No other critic therefore has formed connections between these unpublished materials in various archives, both here and in the U.S, nor paired these with a close reading between the American and British poets' work, reflecting on the ways such non-divisiveness may be equally crucial to the approaches of both.

It is also important to note too that this thesis expands on current knowledge of modernist legacies as it makes a case for renewed modes of reflection on individual agency. Perhaps in an examination of the relationship between American and British poetries, questions surrounding 'the individual' were bound to be at the fore; certainly, as I have shown, this was a primary locus of contemporary discussions regarding "the two poetries." Again, Objectivism offers a more nuanced approach, whereby the individual is at once both discrete yet socially informed, and the continual, evidential practice of agency is instead figured as the constituent of "the unearthly bonds" (CPGO 167) between individual and group "being[s]" (I am referring again to Oppen's *Of Being Numerous*). In a consideration to come shortly of the relevance of my thesis' findings to poetics today, this issue – the tensions between individuals and group formation – is shown to be of continuing prominence. Indeed, the specific area of twentieth century poetics this thesis addresses should appeal to scholars of post-war British poetry in all its manifestations, groupings and divisions, those who study the legacies and influences of modernism, and scholars of twentieth-century American poetries alike.

It is possibly owing to the exceeding flexibility of the Objectivist poetic that my research can be seen to form a dialogue and intervene with a number of different angles in the existing field of scholarship. The first of these would be an examination of this transatlantic relationship in terms of (as hinted earlier) an embodiment of travel itself, as well as relating to variant conceptualisations of space. There is, for instance, more than one letter from Tomlinson to Kenner discussing notions of American and English landscape during the British poet's travels through the US, where "white-steepled churches" in New England are described as "lovely but oddly abstract": "in England you are part of the natural setting – hedges, walls, fences, bridges, articulate... I don't understand how one enters the natural intimacies of this land as [I believe] Americans never walk anywhere" ("Boston" N.d, MLS. Kenner 49.5. HRC). Likewise, Oppen's interest in the ancient dry stone walls in Ozelworth also points to the relationship of space and landscape with time. Certainly, these spatial and temporal contemplations can be considered anew in light of the Objectivist idea of the poem, an embodied and crafted entity which measures time through line breaks and balances text with white space and silence. Furthermore, in its discussion of agency and collectives, this thesis has also highlighted the tension between regionalism and nationalism in modernist poetries. Just as the transatlantic looks for instances of intersection between nations, smaller spheres of region may also be considered in light of a transatlantic context. Bunting is likely the most famous example of this – a poet with international modernist connections yet avowedly Northumbrian in outlook and technique, as in the strong sonic textures of *Briggflatts*. Similarly, Charles Tomlinson has also pondered whether Williams' poetry of New Jersey makes the American "too much of a local poet" ("The Tradition of the New." TS. Tomlinson 2.6. HRC. 7). Indeed the model Tomlinson proposes to come

to terms with this localism – based on an un-named article by Hugh Kenner – posits an interlinking of smaller parts to a broader perspective, much like “the sections of a telescope opening” (7). It almost need not be stated that relating the regional to the national occupies a larger scope than a British-Objectivist connection, and is something with which even decidedly un-Objectivist poets may be involved – yet once more, in terms of a specific modernist connection between American and British poetries, this was an area unexamined before this thesis. In this way, thinking about the Objectivists and contemporary British poetry in these geographic terms could be seen to add a transatlantic modernist turn to recent studies such as Neil Alexander and David Cooper’s *Poetry and Geography* (2013), an account of space and place in post-war Britain.

Another significant (and significantly large) area of critical enquiry into which this thesis intervenes relates to Objectivism’s attention to the ‘real,’ and the manner in which this in particular concern, alongside approaches to language-use, situates this poetic at a curious juncture within theories and categorisations of modernism and postmodernism. The Objectivists have been referred to both as “younger generation” modernists in Donald Allen’s influential anthology (xi), and as having – in their approach to language – “passed beyond modernism into postmodernism” by Burton Hatlen (“A Poetics” 49). Jennifer Ashton has also identified Williams and Zukofsky as (in aforementioned terms not dissimilar to Altieri’s “new realism”) representative of “modernism’s old literalism” (119), and has made a case that the Objectivists bridge the gap between modernism and postmodernism: “[the] modernist interest in objects becomes the postmodernist interest in materiality” (29). On this side of the Atlantic too, Alex Latter has struggled with whether to call the poets of *The English Intelligencer* “neo-modernist” or “late modernist”, one implying

renewal, the other tardiness (2-6). However, via its attention to Objectivism's value on real things and everyday occurrences, this thesis has also made a case that this poetic can be considered in light of some 'post-postmodern' tendencies. To bring this intervention to light, we may turn to some of the ideas behind critical realism, the "would-be successor" to postmodernism (Caldwell). Providing a basic overview of critical realism's perceived difference from postmodernism, Garry Potter and José López have described the latter as "a type of writing that celebrated ambiguity," an acknowledgement of the unending complexity of the world, and of language: "any attempt to encapsulate [such complexity] would fail; thus much postmodern theory became content merely to reflect complexity, or become complexity itself" (5). In the way the Objectivists strove towards clarity and integrity, towards 'definite' words and quotidian things and events, we could say their poetic coheres in many ways with a critical realist approach: "realism *struggles* for clarity and simplicity... it is the ideas themselves which are complex, rather than merely their mode of expression" (5, original emphasis). This idea too of clarity as hard-won, is certainly applicable to Objectivist ideals of lexical scrupulousness and craftsmanship. In the way that I have made a claim in this thesis (as have other critics) that Objectivism was a re-forming rather than fragmenting poetic, and that British poets' post-war turn to it was a reflection of this, Objectivism can profitably be considered in light of critical realism's interest in the natures of reason, knowledge, relativism, and truth.¹¹²

By highlighting how Objectivism traverses between supposed markers of modernism, post modernism, and critical realism, this thesis therefore also places

¹¹² Particular areas for consideration here might be critical realism's rejection of poststructuralism and "a self-defeating relativist scepticism" (Potter and López 8-9), and its belief instead in "the production of knowledge [as] a social process [in which] language is deeply embedded" (9), and also truth as "relative," accumulative, and not absolute, but nevertheless there being discernible differences between truth, error and lies (9, 12). I believe all of these matters have been shown to be of concern in the Objectivists' work.

the British poets that are its focus within similar intersectional territory. This is a reading that neither Tomlinson, Turnbull nor Crozier have been credited with before, and is a further indicator of their unjust critical neglect. Indeed, I have made a strong claim that all three poets – just in the way that Objectivism moves between contrasts of fixity and flux – can be read as truly international writers, travelling extensively (especially in the case of Tomlinson, who also undertook a large amount of translation work) and absorbing multiple modes. This thesis has therefore drawn attention to the ways in which this unexamined collaboration reflects an attitude in post-war British poetry which is cross-boundary, cross-category, and more flexible than has perhaps previously been acknowledged. In particular, conversations regarding Objectivism's modernism or postmodernism add an additional layer of complexity to considerations of the variety of 'neo-modernisms' that were employed to counter Movement poetics in Britain. This thesis therefore expands current scholarly understanding of what constituted these 'alternative' or anti-Movement paradigms, claiming that there were further nuances and flexibilities that have not been given adequate attention.

Examining the ramifications of this research, it becomes clear that British poetry's relationship with Objectivism harbours so much possibility for a plethora of different readings. This is surely reflective of the poetic's flexibility and openness, and testimony to Rakosi's assertion that Objectivism was more adept at defining what it was not than what it was (*Collected Prose* 107). This is why this study has necessitated an interrogation of my research questions – that is, how British poets' interest in the Objectivists represented a reconsideration of the constructs of authority and value. It is via these questions that Objectivism reveals itself to be a powerful, and more importantly *viable*, model for transposition into a British poetic

context, in which a minority of poets were contending with a so-called ‘Movement orthodoxy.’ Objectivism’s adoption into the work of Tomlinson, Turnbull and Crozier was as varied as it was incomplete, each selecting certain aspects or inflections of the American poets’ work which best suited their own. But in the poetry and prose of all three, we can uncover a shared ‘way of being’ that was just as relevant for post-war Britain as it was for depression-era (and after) America.

In highlighting the various areas in which this thesis either makes an intervention or has contributed new knowledge, I have drawn attention to some rather temporal, or ‘siloed’ terms – modernist, postmodernist, post-postmodernist, critical realist and so on – and in doing so I have perhaps brought this study full circle from the very first sentence of the introduction: the idea that “contemporary poetry is prone to categorisation.” In thinking therefore of where my own research might proceed from here, it is inevitable to also ask where Objectivism went – or has gone – next. As the last surviving of my three British poets, the passing of Charles Tomlinson in summer 2015 during the writing of this thesis seemed to mark a pivotal moment in the examination of this relationship: did the Objectivists’ influence on British poetry end with Tomlinson? Seeking to answer this question seems once more to involve an evaluation of the “movements and counter-movements” (Stevenson 166) of post-war British poetry, but contra to these ideas of categorisation, and the delineated influences and shared purposes that words such as “movements” and “categories” suggest, Objectivism’s influence on British poetry cannot be traced linearly. This is not unexpected, given the aforementioned considerable differences in Tomlinson’s, Turnbull’s and Crozier’s work, and also given the fact that the three never ‘joined forces,’ nor made any claims to belong to a

group. In this way, it is crucial to recognise that poets who did not subscribe to the Movement model of poetry writing were themselves divided and subdivided many times over, largely due to the immense variety of little magazines published in post-war Britain (to which Turnbull's *Migrant* and Crozier's *English Intelligencer* contributed¹¹³). In these two poets alone we can discern certain labels or associations: Turnbull can be affiliated with the poets of the Morden Tower readings, while Crozier is often categorised as a 'Cambridge poet.'¹¹⁴ Seeking indisputable Objectivist inheritances therefore is a case of piecing together various possibilities, rather than following one link from beginning to end. What is indisputable however, is that the three poets of this study, particularly Turnbull and Tomlinson, played absolutely vital roles in the dissemination of American modernist ideas to a British audience.

Turnbull's *Migrant* and Migrant Press, as well as the rare pamphlets that he generously lent to his friends (of whom Tomlinson was one), brought American modernist and Black Mountain writing to a whole audience of British Movement discontents that may not have otherwise encountered such work. Roy Fisher has been one such beneficiary, commending the work of Olson, Creeley, Duncan, Levertov and Dorn – all poets that certainly owe something to the Objectivists – as evidencing “the claims of early twentieth-century modernism,” which Fisher thought had been “too hastily abandoned” by other poetries (qtd. in Sheppard 36). Through the combined efforts too of Turnbull and original entrant in the *Objectivists Anthology*, Basil Bunting, a clear case can be made for Tom Pickard as a beneficiary of Objectivist ideas. In 1964 Bunting wrote to Zukofsky that “Tom Pickard is reading

¹¹³ See Richard Price, “CAT Scanning the Little Magazine” and Robert Sheppard *The Poetry of Saying* 35-76.

¹¹⁴ This is often in opposition to London poets; see Sheppard 55-58 and Andrew Duncan, “Such that Commonly Each” in *Jacket* 20.

you voraciously, not once, but over and over” (23rd November 1964, TS. Zukofsky 21.6. HRC), and Pickard has been described by an interviewer as “one of the foremost British proponents of a modernist aesthetic gleaned from the American Pound-Objectivist-Black Mountain backbone of modern poetry in English” (“To Reach the Moon”). Another individual whose work Gael Turnbull championed was fellow Scottish poet Ian Hamilton Finlay. Thought of predominantly as a ‘concrete’ poet, their reams of correspondence in Turnbull’s archive in Edinburgh are testimony to the extent of their contact, and of Turnbull’s inevitable pollination of aspects of Objectivist ideas.

Speaking more broadly, Turnbull particularly can be seen as one of the earliest influencers in what would come to be known as the ‘British Poetry Revival.’ As a flurry of anti-Movement writing, publishing and performative activities generally thought to have taken place in 1960-1974/5, the Revival is pointed to by critics as a repudiation of Blake Morrison and Andrew Motion’s comment in a 1982 anthology that “very little... seemed to be happening” between 1960-1970;¹¹⁵ Robert Sheppard’s *The Poetry of Saying* (2005) is the most fulsome account of this period and its key figures. Though Charles Tomlinson is perhaps less commonly associated with The Revival than Turnbull and also Crozier (and gains just one mention from Sheppard), his activity in or just outside this period is important: Tomlinson expressed the intention to edit a selected Williams as early as 1958¹¹⁶ (though this eventually materialised as a critical edition in 1972 and a *Selected Poems* in 1976), and was also responsible for *Marianne Moore: A Collection of Critical Essays* (1969) and a guest-edited special *Agenda* edition on Zukofsky (1964). Also at this time, in

¹¹⁵ See Sheppard 35.

¹¹⁶ Tomlinson wrote to Kenner as early as 1958 that he was “toying with preparing a selected W.C.W for the Hinglish [sic] reader” (19th May 1961, MLS. Kenner 49.5. HRC).

1963, a young Crozier was attempting to gather material from Zukofsky, Dorn, Olson and Creeley for the student magazine *Granta*; Crozier would later put together a foolscap of British poets titled *SUM*, which included work from Tomlinson and Turnbull, in 1965 while at SUNY Buffalo. In 1961 too another British poet, Tom Raworth, had also written to Zukofsky asking for material for the very first issue of his magazine *Outburst* (18th February, TLS. Zukofsky 27.1 HRC). Raworth, frequently thought of as a modernist foil to the Movement,¹¹⁷ informed Zukofsky of his intention to present a selection of both British and American poets within the magazine's pages, including Ed Dorn, Gary Snyder, and Mike Horovitz, the last of whom would go on to edit the eponymous Revival anthology *Children of Albion* (1969).

While it is of course difficult to state that Objectivism specifically was a fundamental influence on the British Poetry Revival (especially rather than or more than the poetry of the Black Mountain school, a number of whose figureheads came to England to give readings during this time), it is indisputable that the infiltration of American, modernist-inspired poetries was a vital and catalysing tenet during this time, and indeed on what has variously been called 'avant-garde,' 'alternative' or 'underground' British poetries thereafter. Crozier accordingly highlighted the importance of an "inescapable and belated novelty of much of foundational modernism" (*Crozier Reader* 137) for poets a similar age to himself, and also to the personal impact of Donald Allen's anthology, *The New American Poetry* (1960), on his own writing: "the Americans suggested, through the very narrow representation of their work afforded to me in London and Cambridge at that time, that being a poet was in some way a full time, serious activity" (*Crozier Reader* 17). That Crozier uses the same word here, "serious," as the one Sheppard uses to describe The British

¹¹⁷ See Sheppard 171-193.

Poetry Revival (35), is not coincidental – nor is it coincidental that A. Alvarez’s 1962 intervention into contemporary British poetry called for a “new seriousness.” While Alvarez of course came to very different conclusions as to those involved with the Revival, there was a sense in both that American poetry could provide useful models for arriving at a seriousness¹¹⁸ and dedication to craft that British poetry was thought to lack.

Today, it is possible to trace something of the Objectivists’ poetic legacy in what has been termed ‘Linguistically Innovative’ poetics, a strand of contemporary poetics which retains a distinctly modernist, and transatlantic character. Just as both Burton Hatlen and Charles Altieri have noted Objectivism’s influence on the New York and Language schools of poets in America (“A Poetics” 54; “The Transformations” 301-302), Marjorie Perloff has in turn pointed to “the related current in England, usually labelled ‘linguistically innovative’ poetics (“Language Poetry”). In doing so, Perloff extends a connection between American and British post-war avant-gardes, suggesting that such an interest and indeed inheritance in Objectivist principles may run simultaneously on both sides of the Atlantic. Perloff’s summation of the “cardinal principle” of both Language and Linguistically Innovative poetics, “the dismissal of ‘voice’ as the fundamental principle of lyric poetry” (a matter which I have shown deeply engrossed Tomlinson, Turnbull and Crozier equally), could be straight from a Zukofsky prose piece, or one of Rakosi’s or Oppen’s daybooks, or from a Williams introduction to a collection of his own poems. Furthermore, that Perloff points to a post-war re-examination of “agency and identity” alongside this

¹¹⁸ Though this is rather a vague term, I take “seriousness” to denote something akin to a ‘connectedness’ with the world and with real events, and to poetry’s ability to make meaningful statements. Again, that poetry should be a ‘serious’ matter points to the poet’s responsibility.

dismissal of voice (“Language Poetry”), could also not be closer to Objectivist concerns.

The closeness of these coinciding American and British ‘innovative’ strands is demonstrated finally by the periodical of the same name, the *Journal of British and Irish Innovative Poetry*. Issuing its first number in 2009, the journal – which cites *Children of Albion* and *A Various Art* as illustrative of the kind of work it seeks to discuss – is edited by a board of both British and American scholars with impeccable Poetry Revival or Language credentials. Perloff herself is an editor, as is Charles Bernstein, Keith Tuma, Robert Sheppard, Peter Barry, Robert Hampson, Romana Huk and Anthony Mellors among others. Many of these names have appeared with relative regularity in the course of this thesis, affirming the continued interest in the example set by Objectivist poetics up to the present day. Therefore, while it is not possible to trace the Objectivists’ influence on British poetry in terms of unbroken and uninterrupted treads of influence – hence my statement at the start of this thesis that I would not make a claim for a hitherto unrecognised ‘British Objectivism’ – a look at present day avant-gardes still shows up the marks of its poetic legacy.

I now want to make a final contemplation, one that is perhaps inevitable at the end of a thesis: why should the example set by the Objectivists still concern us in today’s world? In my search for influences, similarities and convergences I have repeatedly claimed, as well as pointed to the claims made by others, that Objectivism was a way-of-being as much, if not more, than a defined set of formal principles. To this effect, Michael Heller’s aforementioned crucial distinction between living “with and through” Objectivist ideas rather than the collective and didactic “by,” is important in terms of the claim I shall make for this mode’s continued relevance

today. While I must re-state the intention of my introduction to not press poetry “into a direct assault” on political and social issues (Hickman 2), I would argue that living “through” the Objectivist idiom does offer applicable standpoints from which to negotiate one’s position in the world. Certainly, during the course of writing this thesis, a number of events occurred to make the world seem an increasingly polarised and antagonistic place.

If my study has made Objectivist idioms sound somewhat idealistic, it is because they are. As I have shown, this is a poetic modernism figured as reconstituting and “world-building” (Hickman 6), rather than fragmentary, allegorical or hermetic. To boil down the consistencies of the Objectivist poetic to its essence then is to define it as this: a clear and attentive seeing-saying-making that affirms one’s twinned compassion and capacity for thought. This is exceedingly simple, but as always, mapping such a simple directive onto the real world is far from straightforward. In the first instance, one might ask how a poetic can be inclusive, flexible and non-authoritative but still make ‘definite’ statements aligned with positive change? These questions appear to be continuously but latently engaged with by Tomlinson, Turnbull and Crozier: Tomlinson’s poetic of non-conflictual, mutual exchange between the poet and the physical world is most certainly not didactic and is woven within the “weft of seeing” (*CPCT* 294); the infinite combinations of Crozier’s cube-like *High Zero* and Turnbull’s back-and-forth, ever-varying *Residues* similarly do not tell but *show*, through their very writing, the inclusive and flexible reasoning advocated. Yet possible problems arise out of an interrogation of Objectivism’s central claim to individuality and agency, as contra to the generalisations and naturalised, collective positions it averts. This brings us once more to question, just as Oppen does, how one can “be numerous” – that is,

maintain one's own convictions and yet exist within and as a part of society. In writing in one of his day books that "individuality remains avant-garde" (46), Carl Rakosi has drawn attention to the common associations between individuality (or difference) and exclusion when it comes to thinking about poetry. In this way I have shown numerous times that the poets of this thesis did not cultivate, and did not wish for their outsider or "avant-garde" status. Letters from Bunting to Turnbull for instance are full of references to Bunting's financial problems and attempts to secure funding from the Arts Council, and Zukofsky and Williams worried equally and often publicly about a lack of recognition for their work. This points to the fact that avant-gardeness, whether wished for or (as in this case) not, makes gaining recognition for one's point of view and work extremely difficult, since being avant-garde is without the momentum that being part of a larger collective would offer. Yet in Objectivist thinking, to identify strongly as part of a collective – whether this is a particular political or social grouping or to view oneself as "of" a particular nationality – is to make a generalisation and 'smooth over' differences, since all groups ultimately consist of individuals. One can see how, in this line of reasoning, considerations of being individualistic and avant-garde might preclude someone from 'making a difference' or an impact which is felt on a large scale.

Comments such as these may sound a little vague, but this difficult relation of individuals to groups and mainstreams to avant-gardes, alongside the poetry that might express such negotiations, is one that substantially occupies twenty-first century poetical thought (as indeed it did during the British Poetry Revival). In Abigail Lang and David Nowell Smith's 2015 *Modernist Legacies: Trends and Faultlines in British Poetry Today*, a number of the collected essays grapple with such difficult questions, making claims, however tentatively, for a "UK avant-garde

poetry scene" (Middleton, "Warring" 19) able to directly trace its modernist lineage via British poets such as Bunting, W. S. Graham and David Jones ("Introduction" 2); indeed, the term "avant-garde" crops up numerous throughout. It is interesting to note too that the editors attribute a previous, "now defunct" (1) rejection of modernism, which has so obviously formed the backdrop of my study, in significant part to "[modernism's] perceived political excesses" (4). In spite of these considerations of the nature of avant-gardeness, no essay in the collection provides a succinct definition of what the singular phrase – to be avant-garde – is, as opposed to thinking about its praxis. For instance, the OED defines it only as an approach which is "new and experimental," yet this begs the question as to whether "newness" and variation of formal approaches is synonymous with exclusion, and therefore an inability to garner sufficient support to enact change – a divisive figuration that would posit any "mainstream" as distinctly authoritative and highly concerned with its own security, very much like the one Williams believed in (as in my first chapter, "Not Pound and Eliot"). Thus, the assertion of individual agency occupies an extremely contentious position with regards to political action. In the last essay of *Modernist Legacies*, 'Ill read ill said': Faultlines in Contemporary Poetics as Ideology", Drew Milne contemplates just such tensions within "the Romantic anti-capitalism of British poetry [which is] conjoined with individualisms that are highly sensitive to the perils of group formation" (236). Milne cautiously surmises "neo-modernist poetics" as "assemblage done with empathy" (228), and his reference in the essay's title to a prose piece by Samuel Beckett can be seen to pertinently represent the absolute antithesis of the Objectivist idiom. A case cannot confidently be made here that Tomlinson, Turnbull and Crozier were "anti-capitalist" – especially given Tomlinson's

reluctance to get involved in “political poetry”¹¹⁹ – and Milne is in fact not referencing the Objectivist idiom; indeed, his subject is British poetry, and as such his essay does not examine an American modernist influence. This is all the more remarkable given the so-called “guestimate” (228) of avant-garde British poetry he provides, a kind of checklist of ideas and their formal indicators which is worth quoting at length:

LOWER CASE PROSE... without a secured hierarchy of capitals... the line as paratactic component in a field of syntactical indeterminacy; its sign is THE INDETERMINACY OF LINE ENDINGS; [the] focus on the limits of intuition as non-conceptual, non-communicative but experiential expression... the resistance of poetry to theory in its spirit: its mark is grammatical resistance to conceptual abstraction and theoretical coherence: its sign is PARATAXIS UNBOUND... the poet is radical as a self-legislating, newly autonomous maker of grammatical artefacts that do not recognise the hegemony of the grammar imposed by the world of prose... grammar is a foreclosed system of world-disclosure (229-231).

The focus here on syntactical disruption via parataxis, akin to a resistance to discourse aforementioned in my chapter on “Objectification,” is obviously pertinent (and also recalls Milne’s time as editor of the magazine *Parataxis* [1992-1996]¹²⁰). This is equally so of line endings, and particularly the avoidance both of abstraction and a theoretical coherence which would render such a poetic easily summarised, and therefore “foreclosed” (and also it seems, in the vein of my first chapter, ‘academic’). Every one of these concepts and their formal indicators can be mapped closely onto the Objectivist idiom. Looking at this list – and there is striking consistency between the essays in *Modernist Legacies*, such as Middleton’s identification of “parataxis, isolated phrases and words” (“Warring Clans” 19) and

¹¹⁹ See his interview with Alan Ross, “Words and Water”, 35-37. Yet Donald Davie did find a latent politicism in Tomlinson (see “Larkin’s Politics and Tomlinson’s” 135-136), and it cannot be ignored that Tomlinson did write occasional poems such as the phonetically derived “Class” (*CPCT* 248) and also “The Rich” (*CPCT* 249).

¹²⁰ See Sheppard 150-152.

even more so the “[treatment of] language as an object” (18) – leads us once more to consider the degree to which Objectivist poetics might have infiltrated and contributed to what is thought of as today’s, British avant-garde. Much like Robert Sheppard does, it is Tom Raworth who is selected by Milne as the epitome of these modernist ideas (and once more, via Raworth, the importance of an American influence is confirmed).

To return to my previous question however regarding tensions between individualisms and collective action, Milne’s use of the word “self-legislating” can be read as particularly telling. Of course, “self-legislating” implies agency and personal freedom, with no need to refer to external authoritative structures in order to gain verification. However, within this word there is once more a hint of isolation; a phrase such as “co-legislating”, for example, contrastingly implies cooperation which is, crucially, consensual and mutual. Here, the apparent hyper-awareness of neo-modernist poetries, epitomised by Crozier’s statement in *A Various Art* that the anthology’s pages do not represent “anything amounting to a school” (51), sits uneasily with the cooperation required to enact political change. Again, Milne considers these

individualisms that are highly sensitive to the perils of group formation, whether [this is] represented through publishing networks, reading series, coteries or friendships... the question of alliances is analogous to the problems of organization in politicizing new social movements, but neo-modernist British poetry is a rather small *not so new* social movement that boasts (few) members and (many) splitters (236, original emphases).

This concluding statement ends Milne’s essay on a rather downbeat note; but taking into account an understanding of individualisms based on the Objectivist poetic, my position is that statements such as these can be considered either as

negative or positive in nature, according (possibly ironically) to the viewpoint of the individual. In the first instance, it should be noted that both Oppen and Zukofsky, both at points considering themselves Marxists (Oppen famously driven into exile due to investigation by the FBI), parted ways with such an organised politicisation relatively early in their careers and refused to write didactic verse from the very start. Of the three British poets of this study, Crozier was the most politically active, involved in the British anti-nuclear protest movement in the early 1960s¹²¹ – yet his work is also very much devoid of overt directives. All these poets would argue that overtly political or moralising poetry would not make for good art, but that equally art and politics are not mutually exclusive; as such, these viewpoints and way-of-being are implicit within the kind of object that the objectified poem is presented to be – a question which Peter Middleton tells us the contemporary neo-modernist British poet and critic must consider.¹²² Certainly, a fiercely defended individualism may present a barrier to the formation of new politicized social movements, but the Objectivists would surely argue that an interrogation of the generalisations and abstractions involved in many collectives, is equally important to setting up new ones.

To re-frame some of Crozier's words therefore, it is important that the individual be wary of that which "incorporates and stabilizes antagonisms" ("Thrills" 27), and to question its motivation for doing so. Indeed, during the course of writing this thesis, a number of monumental and highly antagonistic events occurred, ones which pitched one 'generalised,' collective view starkly against another; nation was largely the catalyst and focus for these events, leading to some exceedingly

¹²¹ See the *Crozier Reader* 8 and 17.

¹²² "Current poetry is in a state of uncertainty about the possibility of making meaningful statements, statements capable of promise and hope; it is a state of questioning what sort of object – objective, objection, objectivity – language has become" (Middleton, "Warring Clans" 36).

polarised views: the Scottish Referendum in 2014, Britain's vote to leave the European Union (so-called 'Brexit') in 2016, and Republican candidate Donald Trump's election also in 2016, can all be understood as expressions of anxiety about nation-status. Of course, events such as these will need to be examined retrospectively in order for their full significance to be gleaned, but at the core of all can be identified the "uncomplicated mutual alignment" of nation with positivity, dignity, and empowerment, framed and promulgated by phrases of distinctly collective but also non-specific sentiment, such as urges to "take our country back" or "make America great again." Against such sweeping statements, the Objectivist-influenced poet would urge the absolutely crucial practice of asking questions, of interrogating what is behind these terms and weighing their definiteness, solidity and conviction against one's own, direct experiences within the world and within society: this is surely the most important means we have to combat potentially dangerous abstractions and guard against poor choices, whatever one's political persuasion. Furthermore, in times of such conflict and divisiveness, when it often appears that a place must be assumed on one 'side' of a divide, those who do not wish to be so delineated may find themselves contemplating a sense of exclusion or lack of influence, which is surely is behind Milne's call to organise "new social movements." Objectivism cannot solve this problem, nor does it claim to; but what the poetic does express is that in what appears to be an increasingly mass society, consisting of "constructed totalities" (Crozier, "Introduction" 51), small-scale interventions are still valuable, and indeed are the source of empowerment. The person who lives 'through' Objectivist values, who engages in the attention and interrogation that raises themselves above "merely natural" (Weil's words), homogenous ways of

viewing the world and acts accordingly with small-scale, every day interventions of compassion, may still bring about meaningful change.

Perhaps then, this leads my argument inevitably to that ever-quoted line by W. H. Auden in his elegy for Yeats, that “poetry makes nothing happen” (142). Interpreted in the most literal sense, in terms of direct political action or social change, this may well be true (hence Oppen’s well-documented moral struggles with writing¹²³). However, in objectifying a self-legislating but socially-involved way-of-being in the form of the poem, making it an embodiment of the responsibility of each person to critically examine language-use and its role in group formation as well as to pay true attention to the happenings in the world, the Objectivists were making a clear statement about “poetry as a productive force within the larger society” (Davidson xl). In much the same way as the Objectivists, the three British poets that have been the subject of this thesis were concerned about what they saw as a passive adherence to constructs of collective identity and collective experience, which gave the impression of having evolved organically, thereby warding off interrogation. Both the nature of these often nationalistic constructs and the possibility of their belligerent existence, were matters challenged by Tomlinson, Turnbull and Crozier. This Objectivist-British collaboration proposed instead a non-divisive poetic, reinstating a faith that poetry could still make meaningful statements, even in a post-war world.

¹²³ “[Oppen’s] silence was political in that it represented the inability of art to provide an adequate image of human suffering. His return to writing was political by representing the inability of communal forms to account for individual agency” (Davidson xl).

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