

**Poetry as Epistemological Inquiry:  
Reading Bernstein Reading Cavell Reading Wittgenstein**

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**Für meine Eltern**

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## 0 Introduction

Philosophy ought really to be written only as a form of poetry. (Philosophie dürfte man eigentlich nur dichten.)

Ludwig Wittgenstein (*Culture and Value*)

Well, most men have bound their eyes with one or another handkerchief, and attached themselves to some one of these communities of opinion. This conformity makes them not false in a few particulars, authors of a few lies, but false in all particulars. Their every truth is not quite truth. Their two is not the real two, their four not the real four; so that every word they say chagrins us and we know not where to begin to set them right.

Ralph Waldo Emerson ("Self-Reliance")

In his 1986 essay "Writing and Method," the poet Charles Bernstein claims that "forms of art [...] investigate the terms of human experience and their implications." And concludes that "poetry and philosophy share *the project of investigating the possibilities (nature) and structures of phenomena*" (*Content's Dream* 220). He thereby clearly defines the alignment and concern of his work. His affinity with philosophy, in particular with the work of Ludwig Wittgenstein and Stanley Cavell, however, does not make him into a philosopher nor does it mean to obliterate the distinction between philosophy and poetry. But it gives expression to the mutual attraction of poetry and philosophy. Bernstein describes the relation like this: "the natural condition of philosophy is to aspire to ("reunification" with) literature and that of literature to aspire to the power of philosophy to speak to and of our lives" (168). It thus comes to no surprise that the philosophers to which Bernstein is in particular indebted, Wittgenstein and Cavell, also hold a threshold position between philosophy and literature. While still holding to their status of philosophy, for Bernstein, they aspire to literature: Wittgenstein in claiming that "philosophy ought really to be written only as a form of poetry" and Cavell in, as Bernstein has it, "making the case for immersion inside moods,

fears, hopes--not to make philosophy literature but to call philosophy back to its sources of judgment" (*Content's Dream* 168). In this dissertation I want to claim that literature is the only adequate medium for such an epistemological inquiry. Only the realm of aesthetics in which the production of a work of art takes place is able to provide an access to the sources of judgment. Chapter I elucidates this peculiar relation between epistemology and aesthetics and by extension epistemology and literature.

The epistemological project of poetry, however, also has a political dimension, which can be justified in Cavell's comparison of Wittgenstein's "possibilities of phenomena" (*Philosophical Investigations* 90) or differently put "our agreement in judgments" (242) with Rousseau's concept of "consent" (to the membership in a society) which he develops in *The Social Contract*. It prepares the ground for my second claim that poetry as epistemological inquiry fulfills more than a philosophical function but is motivated by a political need. The need of the politically mature citizen to know what he or she has consented to. Cavell's discovery of the similarity and comparability of Wittgenstein's concept of "agreement in judgments" and Rousseau's concept of "consent," thus gives a political dimension to epistemology which often goes unnoticed, furthermore it illustrates the inseparability of ethics and aesthetics<sup>1</sup>, which has also been claimed by Wittgenstein in his dictum from the *Tractatus* that "ethics and aesthetics are one" (6.421).

Another aspect of epistemology which falls squarely into the realm of literature and philosophy is skepticism. According to Cavell both disciplines are drawn toward, perhaps struggling with the "truths and wrongs of skepticism." He, for instance, reads the work of Shakespeare as an incessant reflection on skepticism<sup>2</sup>. One of the truths of skepticism, Cavell draws our attention to, is the human being's "metaphysical finitude" which I relate to

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<sup>1</sup> For a similar view of the inseparability of ethics and aesthetics see the Language poet Joan Retallack. In her essay "The Poethical Wager," Retallack coins the term "poethics."

<sup>2</sup> For instance in *The Claim of Reason. Wittgenstein, Skepticism, Morality, and Tragedy*. and *Disowning Knowledge. In Six Plays of Shakespeare*.

Bernstein's poetics of "negative capability," a term he borrows from Keats who describes it as the quality to "remain content with half-knowledge,"<sup>3</sup> to "accept the limits of knowledge" (*Content's Dream* 328). In this way negative capability has a therapeutic function and serves as a constant corrective against metaphysical delusions and confusions.

An explanation of the philosophical background informing Bernstein's work is given in chapters I.1, II.1 and III.1. It supplies an aid for approaching his poetry by introducing and recreating the spirit in which his work is written. Such knowledge of the political and philosophical breeding-ground is essential for an adequate understanding of the work. In the second part of chapters I, II and III, Bernstein's poetics will be brought in relation to the epistemological background introduced in the first parts. This approach provides a view of Bernstein's poetics which to the present moment has not yet been given. The dissertation at hand takes seriously Bernstein's claim that "poetry and philosophy share *the project of investigating the possibilities of phenomena.*" It takes this claim as a point of departure and investigates its meaning in all its implications, acknowledging its political, philosophical and aesthetic interrelations. As a consequence, such an analysis necessarily has to be multidimensional. Or differently put, only an interdisciplinary approach is able to fully realize the political and philosophical relevance of Bernstein's poetry and to do justice to it.

As the reception of Bernstein has shown, the interpretation of Bernstein's poems is not an easy task. Perloff describes the issue as follows:

most critiques of Bernstein's work, as of Language poetry in general, have raised the issue of the work's nonreferentiality. Thus Eliot Weinberger dismisses Language Poetry as "an endless succession of depthless images and empty sounds, each canceling the previous one;" it is made up of words set free of any possible meanings, sentences that ignore or contradict what has just been said, words whose effect is not meant to go beyond the second in which they are uttered, words without history" (*Radical Artifice* 172).

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<sup>3</sup> Letter from Keats to his brothers George and Thomas (Dec. 21st, 1817).

In this passage Weinberger alludes to one of the main slogans associated with Language Poetry: "the death of the referent." Many critics like Weinberger happily take this slogan as an opportunity to categorize Language poetry as just another instance of postmodern "senseless play" and "anything goes". As Bernstein is not only associated with the Language group but is one of its most well-known proponents, I will give a brief introduction to L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E poetry in general. The literary phenomenon known as L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E poetry or L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E writing, originated in the early 70s as a counter movement to main-stream poetry, a "mode of resistance to institutional or critical demands for fixed aesthetic value and direction" as Linda Reinfeld has it in her *Language Poetry*. Apart from its critical attitude towards all traditional forms of writing, there are no common convictions shared by all Language poets, no central pamphlets or manifestoes. The group of poets can rather be described as an open congregation with the magazine L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E serving as their discussion forum. Many of those early contributions were republished by Bernstein and Bruce Andrews in the first anthology dedicated to self-reflexive writing: the *L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E Book*. Other subsequent anthologies are for instance: Ron Silliman's *In the American Tree*, Douglas Messerli's "Language" *Poetries: An Anthology (1987)* and *From the Other Side of the Century: A New American Poetry 1960-1990* or more recently Paul Hoover's *Postmodern American Poetry: A Norton Anthology*. That the group of language poets is a rather heterogeneous congregation also becomes apparent in the wide range and diversity of their theoretical (Derrida, Lacan, Foucault), philosophical (Wittgenstein, Austin, Searle, Cavell), linguistic (de Saussure), political (Marx) and poetic (Stein, Ashbery, Objectivist poets, Russian Formalists) interests. If one insisted on determining one common interest, it would be the overall preoccupation and fascination with the constitutive function of language for knowledge<sup>4</sup>.

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<sup>4</sup> For more information on Language poetry see: Michel Delville's *The American Prose Poem. Poetic Form and the Boundaries of Genre*: "the collective premises underlying the development of the movement (which have so far given birth to a polymorphous body of texts published in numerous specialized magazines, small presses, talk series, and other collective projects explicitly or implicitly associated with the "Language" label) bring out a number of broadly shared aesthetic, theoretical, and ultimately political concerns signaling their breakaway from the mainstream of contemporary American poetry. These broadly shared concerns include a critique of

The focus on language and thus on form in contrast to content is apparent in the work of Bernstein and other Language poets. It leads many critics to the conclusion that formal experiments are the only thing that matters for this mode of writing. Even a sympathetic reader of Bernstein such as Hank Lazer for instance, is hesitant about making sense of Bernstein's poems. In his essay on Bernstein's *Dark City* Lazer asks: "I wonder if it is possible or even desirable to discuss Bernstein's poetry in terms of content?" (*Opposing Poetries* 124) and continues by suggesting that "a thematic or content-based approach may falsify his poetry, which is quite insistently based on difference" (124). He then concedes, however, that "Nevertheless, acknowledging the liabilities of a thematic approach, it does seem worthwhile to ask, especially after twenty books, What are Bernstein's recurring concerns?" (125) and goes on to elaborate on some of the themes in *Dark City*<sup>5</sup>. All in all, though, Lazer remains reserved towards reading a Bernstein poem in terms of form as well as *content*: "The words and sounds refuse the more habitual or mainstream poetic task of carrying meaning" (141).

However, just as Wittgenstein, Bernstein does not want to jettison meaning altogether, only the misleading idea of meaning as "essence" or "transcendental signified." Indeed, it is not possible to get rid of meaning or cohesion. Even by tearing or ripping words and sentences apart one cannot destroy the meaningfulness of language, as Bernstein has it in his motto to "Semblance:"

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referentiality, a rejection of the norms of the plainspoken "voice" lyric, and a conviction that theory is central to and even inseparable from the writing of poetry. Lastly, Language poetry also proposes new compositional methods that invite the reader to participate in the creation of meaning and are meant to hold out the prospect of new social and political possibilities for poetry." (186) Delville also confers to George Hartley's *Textual Politics and the Language Poets* as "an extensive discussion of poetry as a mode of class struggle, and to Michael Greer's essay "Language Poetry in America 1971-1991" as a "brief introduction to language-oriented poetry in America." (262). Additional books on Language writing are: Linda Reinfeld's *Language Poetry: Writing as Rescue* (1992) (Reinfeld mentions the importance of Wittgenstein's philosophy for Bernstein but focuses on Derrida as major philosophical influence); Geoff Ward's *Language Poetry and the American Avant-garde* (1993), and Bob Perelman's *The Marginalization of Poetry: Language Writing and Literary History* (1996).

<sup>5</sup> "The first poem in his 1994 collection *Dark City*, 'The Lives of the Toll Takers' establishes a consideration of the state of poetry today as one such recurring concern for Bernstein" (*Opposing Poetries* 128-29).

It's as if each of these things has a life of its own. You can stretch them, deform them and even break them apart, and they still have an inner cohesion that keeps them together (*Content's Dream* 34).

Rather than destroying meaning, poetry attempts to explore, disrupt, intensify the meaningfulness of language not in order to overcome it but to return to it. Bernstein's diagnosis here resembles that of Thoreau. Like the American Transcendentalist, Bernstein insists that we are estranged from our words which results in a "faithlessness to our language [and] all our shared commitments" (Cavell, *Senses of Walden* 66). Or in Emerson's words: "we are not wrong in a few particulars, authors of a few lies" but "every word they say chagrins us" (*The Portable Emerson*, "Self Reliance" 144). Instead of obliterating meaning Bernstein is looking for possibilities of returning to its multiplicity. Accordingly, he writes: "Not 'death' of the referent - rather a recharged use of the multivalent referential vectors that any word has, how words in combination tone and modify the associations made for each of them" (*Content's Dream* 34). Far from being interested in rejecting meaning, Bernstein tries to make the "structures of meaning more tangible" thereby furthering the epistemological project of making "experience palpable not by simply pointing to it but by (re)creating its conditions" (35). In contrast to an idea of reference as "a one-on-one relation to an object" he suggests a multiplicity of referential vectors which "roams over the range of associations suggested by the word" (35). Rather than just transporting sounds void of meaning, Bernstein abandons the dualism of form and content: "Tune attunement in understanding-- the meaning sounds. It's impossible to separate prosody from the structure (the form and content seen as an interlocking figure) of a given poem" (37).

To neglect the concern for meaning, for ways of producing, imagining, and finding "utopian content" and not to acknowledge Bernstein's critical activity of reflecting on mechanisms of meaning generation or meaning control ("thought control" 60, *Controlling Interests*) makes

one overlook the political dimension of his poetry. As Perloff aptly observes in *The Dance of the Intellect*, Bernstein's poetry is "not nonsense talk" (231) not "that easy postmodernism of the 'anything goes' variety". In an essay on postmodernism for the *Socialist Review* Bernstein takes position against such a reading of (or refusal to read) his poetry and stresses its political importance:

*We can act:* We are not trapped in the postmodern condition if we are willing to differentiate between works of art that suggest new ways of conceiving of our present world and those that seek rather to debunk any possibilities for meaning. To do this, one has to be able to distinguish between, on the one hand, a fragmentation that attempts to valorize the concept of free-floating signifier unbounded to social significance ... and on the other, a fragmentation that reflects a conception of meaning as prevented by conventional narration and so uses disjunction as method of tapping into other possibilities available within language. (quoted by Perloff in *Radical Artifice* 14)

Bernstein's poetry is clearly an example for a work of art that looks for new possibilities of meaning which is not "trapped in the postmodern condition" if postmodern condition means the waning of affect and the reduction of art to mere surfaces as Jameson describes it in his *Postmodernism or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*. Thus, Bernstein's work is not postmodern, if this means that it is without social relevance. On the contrary, it can only be truly understood if its social and political concern is taken seriously. In its disjunctive, associative and citational mode, however, it certainly can be looked at as a work of Postmodernism. Perloff describes this textual quality of much of the Language poets' work as "radical artifice":

Artifice, in this sense is less a matter of ingenuity and manner, of elaboration and elegant subterfuge, than of the recognition that a poem or painting or performance text is a *made thing* - contrived, constructed, chosen - and that its reading is also a construction on the part of the audience. At its best, such a construction empowers the audience by altering its perceptions of how things happen. (*Radical Artifice* 27-28, emphasis in the original)

Because of its artificiality and its disjunctive, collage-like quality, a Bernstein poem is not easy to read. A similar difficulty of understanding, is put forward by Tom Beckett in his

interview with Bernstein in *Content's Dream*: "one frequent criticism of many of the contributors to L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E in general and you specifically is that the theoretical essays you write, say, are considered to be more "alive" than your poems" (401). Bernstein's answer goes as follows: "the people who actually can read and respond to my poetry aren't going to think that" (401) "I would think the person who makes this point doesn't know *where* to find the poetry" (402). Indeed, the problem in reading a Bernstein poem is to know *how* to read it or *where* to find it. This assigns an active role to the reader. As Perloff has it "Reading is also a construction on the part of the audience" (*Radical Artifice* 27). Therefore, it requires ways of making sense we are not used to, and triggers the imagination of worlds we are not accustomed to.

Although the composition of the poem in its artificial quality does not encourage or compel the reader to keep on reading, there are numerous remarks to be found which seem to have the function of cheering or encouraging the reader, even giving instructions for reading: "Delight. Finding the light in. 'Not to see by but to look at' in multiple, serial array" (*My Way* 215). Bernstein's poetry "reverses the dynamic of the 'difficult' text excluding the reader by shifting the burden of exclusion outward:"<sup>6</sup>

For the words are shut out at your own risk. Inarticulate true meaning.--It is not the 'marginal' anti-articulate text that is doing the excluding but the one who closes eyes, refuses to listen (*My Way* 101).

The reading that Bernstein's poetry suggests or requires is a reading that keeps on "listening" even though the language of the poem might appear inarticulate, obscure and meaningless, a reading that is obedient<sup>7</sup> to the dynamics of the text in a way as it is suggested by Emerson in "Self-Reliance:" "Who has more obedience than I masters me" (153). This strange kind of "mastery," however destabilizes the concept of mastery which is based on violence

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<sup>6</sup> This is a comment Bernstein makes about Susan Howe's work in his essay "Passed by Examination" but which holds equally true for his own work.

<sup>7</sup> The German word for "obedient" is "gehorsam" which has the same root as "Gehör" meaning "hearing."

and not on obedience. In his deviant use of the term "mastery," Emerson finds a new meaning of mastery. The mastery asked for is non-violent thereby reactivating the receptive side of human character, such a recovery of "reception" can also be related to Cavell's epistemological category of "acknowledgment" in contrast to "knowledge" which will be discussed in chapter III: "Skepticism." Bernstein's work is meant to exemplify how poetry can function as epistemological inquiry in ways which extend the possibilities of philosophy. For Cavell this potential of poetry expresses itself in philosophy's aspiring towards literature. Accordingly he ends *The Claim of Reason* with the question: "Can philosophy become literature and still know itself?" (496).

The fact that Bernstein's poems do not draw the reader's attention towards them, but rather leave the decision to continue to the reader, revives the possibility for a deliberateness of reading, consciously choosing to go on, instead of being captivated by the text. At every point of the poem this decision must be actively made. This is part of the program.

Bernstein, thus, uses the means of postmodern art but for different ends: not to create a world void of meaning containing nothing but simulacra and simulacra of simulacra but in order to overcome the indifference towards the social and political importance of language. Instead of abandoning meaning, he makes higher demands on meaning which of course results in making great demands on the reader.

As the title of my thesis suggests, Bernstein's essay: "The Objects of Meaning: Reading Cavell Reading Wittgenstein" (*Content's Dream* 165-183) plays an important role in my analysis, it serves as a portal to his work. It helps finding a way to enter the work, because it acknowledges "the overlap between philosophic and poetic practice in [Bernstein's] writing and thinking" (*Content's Dream* 401). It also makes manifest the direct influence of Wittgenstein and Cavell. In an interview on L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E poetry, he explicitly presents his own work as an ongoing preoccupation with the two philosophers and relates it

to the L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E poet's general fascination with language: "Another category of shared interest would be language philosophy; for me, the late writings of Ludwig Wittgenstein, in particular, with the related work of the American philosopher Stanley Cavell" (*My Way* 66).

Bernstein's essay on Cavell and Wittgenstein focuses on four issues which figure prominently in his poetics: the relation between philosophy and literature, the political dimension of literature, the epistemological problem of skepticism and a theory of reading. All of these are major concerns in the works of Cavell and Wittgenstein. As already mentioned, the first three chapters of the thesis discuss and elaborate on the first three areas of poetic and philosophical overlap. Each one gives an account of Bernstein's poetics by first supplying the philosophical context and then focusing on an aspect of Bernstein's poetics which develops from this breeding ground. It is one of my central claims, however, that Bernstein's poetry and poetry as epistemological inquiry in general is able to extend the works of philosophers such as Wittgenstein and Cavell in ways not predictable by the two philosophers' oeuvres. This is in particular apparent in chapter IV "Reading *Dark City*," which illustrates the ways in which poetry surmounts the possibilities of philosophy and turns out to be *the* adequate medium for an epistemological inquiry.

While the structure of my dissertation suggests an approach to the poetry via philosophy and poetics, it is also possible to directly go to the reading of *Dark City* and return, as the need arises, to the relevant explanations. However, in order to do justice to the complexity of interconnection between poetic and philosophical thought in Bernstein's work, I would recommend a complete reading of chapters I to III. It also makes plain how much Bernstein's poetry is informed by Cavell's and Wittgenstein's methods and subject matters, how much it aspires to philosophy while its insistence on the centrality of composition roots it in poetry.

Still it can be said that my reading of *Dark City* (1994) builds the "dark imploding" center of the work. *Dark City* is so representative for Bernstein's poetry, because it brings together philosophy, politics and poetry. The dark city of words or city of dark words functions as a model and way to the just society. It stands in the tradition of Plato's *Republic* while reclaiming the place of poetry in society or the role of poetic thinking for the human being as such. While there will be a brief and general introduction to *Dark City*, there will be no complete account of the volume. Instead, I deliberately limit myself to an exemplary close-reading of a connected section from the first poem of the collection "The Lives of the Toll Takers" and the final section of the last poem, the title poem, of *Dark City*. In this way it becomes possible to witness the process of meaning generation within the poem, getting to terms with the methods of composition displayed in *Dark City*. In many respects such a reading is also meant to show that the semantic richness of the poem does not only consist in answers to the question "What does it mean?" but also in answers to the question "How does it work?"<sup>8</sup> an approach which agrees with Wittgenstein's conception of meaning as use. Such a reading is able to draw one's attention to the implicit knowledge of one's language and one's world, the silent "agreement in judgments" and "consent" to the membership of a society.

The concluding chapter "Redemptive Reading" harvests the fruits of this reading, for it takes reading itself as its subject. Bernstein's theory of reading, developed in this chapter, is not only based on poetic reflection but also on the actual experience of reading/writing. The kind of reading suggested and provoked by *Dark City* is related to Cavell's idea of revitalizing language through a "recounting of criteria," a way of epistemological inquiry he also refers to as "redemptive reading." This kind of reading always presupposes a reading

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<sup>8</sup> Similar questions which point away from the representative function of language and focus on use are posed by Mike Kelleher in his essay "Charles Bernstein in the 20th Century, A Brief Review of Poetic Values:" "What does the poem produce? How does the poem produce it? And does the poem make the most efficient and profitable use of available resources?"

of oneself, a conversation with oneself that not only initiates the discovery of a new world but also a discovery of a new self. Bernstein's work can be looked at as an epistemological inquiry that draws attention to one's implicit knowledge of oneself and the world by making it visible in the medium of poetry. In this way he is able to teach a way of regarding/reading the world and the self that restores it with life and meaning.

# I Literature and Philosophy

## I.1 Philosophy's Aspiring to Literature

The claim that poetry can be regarded as a kind of epistemological investigation relates literature and philosophy in ways which demand further clarification. Wittgenstein's and Cavell's views on aesthetics will help to shed some light on the issue.

In *Lectures on Aesthetics*, a number of lectures delivered at Cambridge in the 1930s, Wittgenstein ponders on the relationship between aesthetics and philosophy and claims that in many respects the philosopher can be compared to the art critic. Such a comparison not only furthers our understanding of the nature of aesthetics but also helps to explain Wittgenstein's philosophical program and method. I am reading Wittgenstein's remarks on aesthetics as an elaboration of his claim that philosophy really only ought to be written as a form of poetry. The basis for such a claim is Wittgenstein's discovery of the "queer resemblance between a philosophical investigation and an aesthetic one." The main subject of the *Lectures on Aesthetics* are so called "aesthetic puzzles". By aesthetic puzzle, Wittgenstein refers to situations in which one is impressed or startled by a work of art without being able to say why. For instance: "Why do these bars give me such a peculiar impression?" (*Lectures and Conversations*, 20) However, the explanation one longs for, when asking such a question, is not, as Wittgenstein argues, a scientific or psychological one, but an aesthetic one.

In order to elucidate the "queer resemblance between a philosophical investigation and an aesthetic one," Wittgenstein puts philosophy and aesthetics in opposition to science and claims that neither philosophical nor aesthetic problems get solved by scientific explanations.

There is a fundamental difference between scientific explanations on the one hand and aesthetic explanations on the other; they do not operate on the same level. According to Wittgenstein, a scientific explanation has the form of a hypothesis which still has to be proven by experiments. It is accepted as correct, if the hypostatized mechanism is confirmed by experience. Scientific explanations, thus, have to be verified empirically. They try to elucidate hidden mechanisms and general laws and ultimately aim at prediction, calculation and control. In the case of Wittgenstein's example of aesthetic puzzlements a scientific explanation tries, for instance, to explain the impression of the bars by a stimulation of neurons in the brain. This sort of explanation, however, is not satisfying. Although it is not wrong, it does not really solve the feeling of puzzlement. The person puzzled needs a different kind of explanation: not a cause but a reason. "The sort of explanation one is looking for when one is puzzled by an aesthetic impression is not a causal explanation, not one corroborated by experience or by statistics as to how people react." (21) Wittgenstein, thus claims that, in contrast to science, in the realm of aesthetics one seeks not empirical explanations, a physical or psychological cause, but the reason for a particular reaction to art. The distinction between reasons and causes is fundamental for an understanding of Wittgenstein's separation of aesthetics from science. Whereas a cause is an explanation one cannot know prior to the investigation, namely, a hypothesis which might turn out to be true if it is empirically tested, a reason is something one is able to know without additional experiments. One might either be convinced of it or reminded of it. Accordingly, Wittgenstein compares a reason to a motive. In court, for instance, one is supposed to know the motives of one's deeds, but not the scientific laws which govern one's body and mind. A reason for aesthetic puzzlement is, thus, something one ought to be able to know without additional research. "The problems are solved, not by giving new information, but by arranging what we have always known." (Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations* 109) In aesthetics, therefore, we are confronted with a different criterion of correctness than in science. The concept of aesthetic correctness plays a fundamental role in

Wittgenstein's comparison of the nature of a philosophical and an aesthetic investigation. It will also turn out to be at the center of Cavell's reflections on literature and philosophy. Whereas in science the criterion for the correctness of a cause is that it agrees with experience, in aesthetics the criterion for a correct explanation for aesthetic puzzlement is that oneself agrees with the explanation. There is nothing to rely upon but one's own aesthetic sense, namely, the subject's capacity for judgment. Wittgenstein mentions Freud as an example for this new understanding of correctness:

Cf. Freud: Wit and the Unconscious. Freud wrote about jokes. You might call the explanation Freud gives a causal explanation. 'If it is not causal, how do you know it's correct?' You say: 'Yes, that's right.' Freud transforms the joke into a different form which is recognized by us as an expression of the chain of ideas which led us from one end to another of a joke. An entirely new account of a correct explanation. Not one agreeing with experience, but one accepted. You have to give the explanation that is accepted. This is the whole point of the explanation. (*Lectures and Conversations* 17)

Although Freud claims to be giving scientific explanations, Wittgenstein is of the opinion that instead of causes he supplies reasons. Freud's misconception of his own work is due to the fact that he takes mechanics as paradigm for his work. In Wittgenstein's view, however, mechanics can do justice neither to the complexities of Freud's investigations nor to those of the human soul. The simplification of which Wittgenstein accuses Freud is that he is inclined to explain the complexity of the phenomena of the soul by a few general laws. In this context Wittgenstein draws attention to the temptation, which is particularly typical of science, to say of a psychological phenomenon that "it is really something else." In Wittgenstein's view Freud might tell his patient that her, for instance, 'beautiful' dream is really an obscene dream. In contrast Wittgenstein considers the motto: "everything is what it is and nothing else" to be a much wiser and less misleading approach to aesthetic as well as psychological phenomena. Although Wittgenstein criticizes Freud in this respect, he maintains that Freud's work is much more akin to the work of an art critic than to the work of a scientist. Not Freud, but the anthropologist Frazer is criticized by Wittgenstein for

stubbornly proceeding according to the ideal of science without acknowledging the specific and complex nature of his object of investigation:

What a narrow spiritual life on Frazer's part! As a result: how impossible it was for him to conceive of a life different from that of the England of his time! Frazer cannot imagine a priest who is not basically a present-day English parson with the same stupidity and dullness. ("Remarks on Frazer's *Golden Bough*" 125)

As aesthetic puzzles are not solved by experiments and statistics they are not a branch of empirical psychology. Wittgenstein elaborates on this distinction between aesthetics and empirical psychology:

People often say that aesthetics is a branch of psychology. The idea is that once we are more advanced, everything--all the mysteries of Art--will be understood by psychological experiments. Exceedingly stupid as the idea is, this is roughly it. Aesthetic questions have nothing to do with psychological experiments, but are answered in an entirely different way. (*Lectures and Conversations* 17)

The way aesthetic questions are answered is by giving comparisons: "As far as one can see the puzzlement I am talking about can be cured only by certain kinds of comparison, e.g. by an arrangement of certain musical figures, comparing their effect on us." (20) In the same way one could compare the effect of one particular word or combination of words in a sentence with another word in the same position. Aesthetic explanation requires *analogical* thinking, while in contrast scientific explanation requires *logical* thinking. Another kind of comparison the art critic might supply, is the comparison of a musical composition with a work of art of the same epoch. Wittgenstein, for instance, compares the work of Brahms and Keller. In each case the aesthetic explanation is supposed to further the understanding of the work of art, to turn it into something which matters to us. In the same way, Klopstock's poetry suddenly starts to mean something, for Wittgenstein, when the right aesthetic explanation is provided. The correct answer in this case is an instruction about the metre of the poem. Wittgenstein describes the change of his perception of the Klopstock odes as follows:

I had an experience with the 18th century poet Klopstock. I found that the way to read him was to stress his metre abnormally. [...] When I read his poems in this new way, I said: 'Ah-ha, now I know why he did this.' What had happened? I had read this kind of stuff and had been moderately bored, but when I read it in this particular way, intensely, I smiled, said: 'This is *grand*,' etc. (*Lectures and Conversations* 4)

A satisfying explanation does not change the ode but the reader's reaction to it.

Furthermore the sudden understanding does not manifest itself in an inner process (psychological or physical) which needs to be made visible by measuring, for instance, the activity of neurons, but is open to view in the reader's obvious satisfaction or in his manner of reading the poem. The way Wittgenstein describes the sudden understanding of a poem reminds one of his discussion of aspect perception in the second part of *Philosophical Investigations*. In the context of 'seeing aspects' he introduces the figure of the duck-rabbit which he takes from the realm of Gestalt-psychology. A person exposed to the figure sees it as a duck or as a rabbit. But it is also possible to switch between the different aspects of the figure. Wittgenstein distinguishes between continuous aspect perception and the sudden change of an aspect. In the case of continuous aspect perception only one aspect of the duck-rabbit is permanently seen. Whereas, if a change of aspect occurs, the perception of the figure changes without the figure itself changing. Just as in the example of the Klopstock poem, it is the beholder's reaction to the figure which changes, not the figure itself. Such a change of aspect can be provoked by providing a particular context. If the figure of the duck-rabbit is for instance surrounded by rabbits one is likely to see it as a rabbit rather than as a duck. Or if one reminds a 20th century reader of 18th century reading habits, the particular way of using metre, namely, of what Wittgenstein calls the "cultured taste" of that period, one provides a context which helps one to understand the poem. To imagine a different context for a particular perception leads to a differing interpretation of the perception. For instance a smiling face can appear benevolent or wicked depending on the context:

I see a picture which represents a smiling face. What do I do if I take the smile now as a kind one, now as a malicious? Don't I often imagine it with a spatial and temporal context which is one either of kindness or malice? Thus I might supply the picture with the fancy that the smiler was smiling down on a child at play, or again on the suffering of an enemy. (*Philosophical Investigations* 539)

Such instances of supplying a context is what Wittgenstein means by "peculiar kinds of comparison." How much Wittgenstein's views on aesthetics agree with his views on philosophy becomes apparent in paragraph 109 of *Philosophical Investigations*. The philosopher and the art critic share the same method:

It was true to say that our considerations could not be scientific ones. It was not of any possible interest to us to find out empirically 'that, contrary to our preconceived ideas, it is possible to think such-and-such'--whatever that may mean. (The conception of thought as a gaseous medium.) And we may not advance any kind of theory. There must not be anything hypothetical in our considerations. We must do away with all *explanation*, and description alone must take its place. And this description gets its light, that is to say its purpose, from the philosophical problems. These are, of course, not empirical problems; they are solved, rather, by looking into the workings of our language, and that in such way as to make us recognize those workings: in despite of an urge to misunderstand them. The problems are solved, not by giving new information, but by arranging what we have always known. (109)

Wittgenstein's investigation, thus, is not an *empirical* one but one that tries to understand the workings of language. As such, it could be characterized as a *conceptual*, or as Wittgenstein himself coined it: a "grammatical investigation" (90).

In addition to giving "particular kinds of comparison" in order to understand a work of art, one has to "describe ways of living" (*Lectures and Conversations* 11). This is tantamount to describing the "workings of our language;" for, as Wittgenstein claims, "to imagine a language is to imagine a form of life." As a form of life might change over the centuries, a cultured taste is dependent on the particular ways of judging art at a particular time.

In philosophy as well as in aesthetics the role of the subject is essential. In both realms the investigation is dependent on the single individual. In contrast to the psychological experiment for which it is characteristic that it has "to be made on a number of subjects" (*Lectures and Conversations* 21) the aesthetic or philosophical investigation relies on the judgment of one single subject. Wittgenstein, in this respect, grants an authority to subjectivity which is suppressed in science:

Working in philosophy--like work in architecture in many respects--is really more a working on oneself. On one's own interpretation. On one's way of seeing things. (And what one expects of them). (*Culture and Value*, 16)

In his remarks on aesthetic puzzlement Wittgenstein talks about a "longing," a "need for" an answer which cannot be "satisfied" by a scientific explanation. This shows that his investigations also have an emotional relevance. Wittgenstein's philosophy operates on a level beyond the dualism of rationality and emotion. Accordingly, he writes in the "Remarks on Frazer's *Golden Bough*:"

Every explanation is after all an hypothesis.  
But an hypothetical explanation will be of little help to someone, say, who is upset because of love.--It will not calm him. (123)

Wittgenstein turns philosophy around its own genuine need, the need to come home again, to bring our words back from their metaphysical to their everyday use. A philosophical problem, accordingly, has the form: I don't know my way about. In the German original Wittgenstein writes: "Ich kenne mich nicht aus." For Cavell this is a hint at how much a philosophical confusion is connected with the loss of self-knowledge. Although the translation of "Ich kenne mich nicht aus" with "I don't know myself", is not correct, because "sich auskennen" is not the same as "sich kennen", it agrees with the general line of thought of Wittgenstein's philosophy and is supported by the above quoted view of philosophy as "a working on oneself."

In his essay "Declining Decline," Cavell relates Wittgenstein's characterization of an aesthetic explanation to a kind of thinking which the late Heidegger refers to as 'true thinking'. It has been said about Wittgenstein's aesthetic investigation that it does not want to control or predict anything; that it contains nothing hypothetical and, that it is dependent on agreement. Therefore, it does not claim to be objective, but instead allows for subjectivity. In short: "It leaves everything as it is." This claim of Wittgenstein about philosophy has often been misunderstood as conservative, understood in the right way, however, it helps to develop an attitude towards the object of investigation which does justice to it, and which sidesteps the violence of the scientific method or of an approach to philosophy which strives for an ideal of science.

For Cavell, Wittgenstein's remark about "philosophy leaving everything as it is" presents itself as "distinctly radical," because "leaving the world as it is to itself, as it were - may require the most forbearing act of thinking" (*This New Yet Unapproachable America* 45). In respect to this mode of thinking suggested by Wittgenstein, Cavell draws a parallel to Heidegger:

I am of course proposing here a connection between Wittgenstein's idea of a philosophy's leaving everything as it is and Heidegger's idea of thinking as "letting-lie-before-us." (46)

Like Heidegger, Wittgenstein wants to teach a new attitude towards the world, a new way of looking at things. The philosopher and the art critic say: "Look at things like this!" (C&V, 61e) Accordingly, Wittgenstein says in his *Lectures and Conversations on Aesthetics*:

What I am doing is also persuasion. If someone says: "There is no difference", and I say: "There is a difference" I am persuading, I am saying "I don't want you to look at it like that" (III.35).

By suggesting a different way of looking at things, Wittgenstein is "making propaganda" (III.37) for a different way of thinking. "How much we are doing is changing the style of thinking and how much I'm doing is persuading people to change their style of thinking" (III.40).

In *What Is Called Thinking?*, Heidegger, like Wittgenstein, wants to change our style of thinking. According to Cavell, it is "a work based on the poignancy or dialectic, of thinking about our having not yet learned true thinking." (*The Senses of Walden* 132) Like Wittgenstein's aesthetic thinking, Heidegger's 'true thinking' is non-violent and most forbearing, it is "the receiving or letting be of something, as opposed to the positing or putting together of something." (132) The latter corresponds to a mode of thinking which "is pictured most systematically in Kant's ideas of representation and synthesis" (132). Knowledge, as defined by Kant, is always active, it is "a matter of synthesizing experience, that is appearances, which alone are receptive, passive." (*This New Yet Unapproachable America* 80) In such an understanding the idea of "intellectual intuition" is a contradiction in terms. It is, however, just this receptive mode which is favored by Heidegger as 'true thinking,' whereas for Kant intuition is not intellectual but only sensual. By introducing the sharp distinction between understanding and intuition, and by giving priority to the realm of the rational, Kant suggests a view of human knowledge which opposes the intellectual tradition of thinking which acknowledges the role of intuition in human thinking. Spinoza, for instance, considers intuition (*scientia intuitiva*) the fundamental source of human knowledge. And Fichte's and Schelling's criticism of Kant in their defense of 'intellectual intuition' had a crucial influence on Romanticism.

But also the American Transcendentalist Ralph Waldo Emerson, who Cavell considers to be the founder of American philosophy, denounces Kant's rejection of 'intellectual intuition' as misleading by stating in "Experience": "All I know is reception." According to Cavell,

Emerson in this way "rais[es] again the question of the possibility of such intuition," (*This New Yet Unapproachable America* 80) a position which is comparable to Heidegger's call in *What Is Called Thinking?* "for a fateful step back from 'representative thinking'." (Cavell, *This New Yet Unapproachable America* 80) The tendency of representative thinking to impose conditions on phenomena, in order, to grasp them, in order, to get a hold on them, rather than listening to or receiving them in their specificity and particularity, is reflected by Emerson in a key passage from "Experience:"

I take this evanescence and lubricity of all objects, which lets them slip through our fingers then when we clutch hardest, to be the most unhandsome part of our condition (296).

In "Finding as Founding", Cavell comments on this passage:

What is unhandsome is I think not that objects for us, to which we seek attachment, are as it were in themselves evanescent and lubricious; the unhandsome is rather what happens when we seek to deny the stand-offishness of objects by clutching at them; which is to say, when we conceive thinking, say the application of concepts in judgments, as grasping something, say synthesizing (*This New Yet Unapproachable America* 86).

There is, however, an alternative to the unhandsome aspect of our human condition, namely the handsome condition. In Cavell's view, it is "clutching's opposite" which is the "most handsome part of our condition." (86) The concept of handsomeness is related to attractiveness, "attraction being another tremendous Emersonian term or master-tone." (86) The importance of attraction, in Cavell's opinion, is also expressed in Heidegger's term for the opposite of grasping the world which he refers to as an attitude of "being drawn to things." (87) Commenting on the astonishing parallels between the work of Emerson and Heidegger, Cavell writes:

Such affinities between apparently distant thinkers - call them congruencies of intellectual landscape - are always surprising, however familiar, since they betoken

that a moment of what you might have felt as ineffable innerness turns out to be as shareable as bread. (87)

The idea of reaching human common ground in the most private expressions of thinking, also plays an important role in Cavell's comparison of aesthetics and ordinary language philosophy.

In accordance with Wittgenstein, Cavell claims that there are resemblances between aesthetics and philosophy and in particular between aesthetics and ordinary language philosophy. In his essay "Aesthetic Problems of Modern Philosophy" he elaborates on the issues already prepared in Wittgenstein's *Lectures and Conversations on Aesthetics*. Cavell refines Wittgenstein's idea that philosophical and aesthetic explanations depend on the agreement of the person to whom they are given. As mentioned before, Wittgenstein, and Cavell in his tradition, focuses on a kind of correctness which is not liable to empirical proof but to the capacity of judgment of the individual subject. Philosophical and aesthetic discourse, therefore, rely on subjectivity and cannot be done justice to under scientific criteria of objectivity. Cavell's central claim is that both philosophical and aesthetic discourse draw on the speaker's capacity for judgment and for expressing this judgment. It relies on a linguistic competence which for Cavell is ultimately a form of self-knowledge.

As scientific discourse puts a special emphasis on rationality, Cavell starts his investigation of the nature of aesthetic judgment and debate by having a closer look at the quality of rationality in the realm of aesthetics. At first sight "the lack of agreement over aesthetic judgments" seems to suggest a "lack of rationality" (Mulhall, *Philosophy's Recounting of the Ordinary* 23). This lack of agreement, however, is not a lack of agreement in patterns and procedures but a lack of agreement in conclusions. The agreed procedures in aesthetics are not designed to produce agreed conclusions as in the case of science or logic. But that does not mean that aesthetic debate is irrational. Irrationality is the complete abandonment of

agreement and commitment to patterns or procedures of speaking and acting. As long as a speaker agrees in patterns and procedures he or she is considered to participate in rational discourse, even without the necessary agreement in conclusions. To postulate a necessary agreement in conclusions for any kind of discourse is as misleading as the idea that every kind of explanation must comply with the model of science and explain a hidden mechanism. Ultimately, it amounts to a reduction of the possibilities of knowledge.

The idea of a hidden mechanism or even a super-mechanism is expressed in the idea of a formula which already contains all its possible continuations. Such a guaranteed agreement in conclusions, however, is only one possible type of rationality. It is an understanding of rationality as it is, for instance, described by the philosopher Laplace who introduces the idea of a world formula with the help of which one would be able to foresee the entire development of world history. Such a view of rationality which aims at prediction, calculation and control is criticized by Wittgenstein and Cavell. The latter suggests that "logic or rationality might be more fruitfully thought of as a matter of agreement in *patterns* rather than in *conclusions*." (Mulhall 26) This distinction between patterns and conclusions alludes to Wittgenstein's distinction between *judgments* and *opinions* in paragraph 241-42 in *Philosophical Investigations*:

"So you are saying that human agreement decides what is true and what is false?"--It is what human beings *say* that is true and false; and they agree in the *language* they use. That is not agreement in opinions but in form of life.  
If language is to be a means of communication there must be agreement not only in definitions but also (queer as this may sound) in judgments. This seems to abolish logic, but does not do so.--It is one thing to describe methods of measurement, and another to obtain and state results of measurement. But what we call "measuring" is partly determined by a certain constancy in results of measurement.

An agreement in patterns and procedures which is to say an agreement in "form of life" is a necessary precondition for rationality. An agreement in conclusions however is only one special case of rationality and does not apply to rationality in general. It manifests a

fixation on "measuring", the introduction of a super-hard measure for certain purposes. As seen before, such a fixation characterizes the method of science. For science is a discipline which works empirically and therefore is interested in a strict "constancy in results of measurement". Science, if understood, for instance, in the way Popper<sup>9</sup> defines it, has an interest in fixing the method of measurement not in questioning or investigating it. It strives towards objectivity and suppresses subjective deviations from the standard. Nevertheless, Wittgenstein concedes that an exact definition of concepts for certain purposes is a pertinent method in science.

In aesthetics, on the contrary, agreement is arguable and if it is achieved it is due to subjectivity and intersubjectivity. Subjectivity, according to Cavell, is, thus, one of the characteristics of aesthetic judgment and debate.

If we say that the hope of agreement motivates our engaging in these various patterns of support, then we must also say, what I have taken Kant to have seen, that even were agreement in fact to emerge, our judgments, so far as aesthetic, would remain as essentially subjective, in this sense, as they ever were. Otherwise art and the criticisms of art would not have their special importance not elicit their own forms of distrust and of gratitude. The problem of the critic, as of the artist, is not to discount his subjectivity but to include it; not to overcome it in agreement but to master it in exemplary ways. (*Must We Mean What We Say?* 94)

Whereas in science disagreement with the methods within a paradigm is always a sign of one's incompetence, in aesthetics disagreement is a competent way of judging. The critic only has to be able to "put the world of his aesthetic responses to words. [T]o bring others to see what we see, we must be capable of identifying what it is what we see" (Mulhall 28). This presupposes a willingness to "rely upon a capacity of self-knowledge and a capacity to give expression of this self-knowledge," (28) in order, to persuade others of one's subjective way of looking at the object of art and to invite them to share the world of one's aesthetic responses.

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<sup>9</sup> In *Knowledge and Human Interests* Habermas develops his critical theory as an alternative to a kind of science that follows Popper's definition.

According to Cavell, this personal responsibility to speak for others in an exemplary way is also a central characteristic of ordinary language philosophy. Aesthetic judgment as well as the method of ordinary language philosophy relies on a competence to express, as Cavell has it, "what we say when", for instance, to know how and when to use a particular word. Although, such linguistic competence might seem to be objective, Cavell prefers to call it subjective as it is not separable from the person employing it, and because it is based on a "capacity to exercise right judgment from case to case in a manner that cannot be captured by or reduced to routines." (Mulhall 5) Therefore, aesthetic discourse, as well as, ordinary language philosophy, relies on a form of self-knowledge. Linguistic and aesthetic competence, as seen by Cavell, is ultimately based on the speaker's self-reliance. A speaker who is asked about what we say when, or who teaches the use of language to a child, offers her own use as a paradigm or a model. This is what Cavell means by "speaking in an exemplary way." To give testimony of one's capacity of speech is a way of speaking which occurs in the first person plural form, in speaking representatively one claims to be speaking for oneself and others. "[I]n this region of self-knowledge, to know one's mind is to know other minds--which does not make such knowledge both subjective and objective, but rather both personal and interpersonal." (Mulhall 10)

It is the commitment to shared forms of life which makes statements about 'what we say when' possible. To be wrong about what I (we) do might be a result of the refusal of this commitment and in Cavell's view it "is liable, where it is not comic, to be tragic." (Cavell, *The Claim of Reason* 14) Cavell's remarks about agreement in patterns, expressed in one's ability to state 'what we say when,' show that such an agreement in patterns is something which has to be established before any empirical investigation can take place. For in order to be able to discern if, say, the liquid in a bottle is water, one has to know what counts as water and that is a matter of "knowing how and when to say of something put before us that it is

water." (Mulhall 18) In Wittgenstein's terminology to know 'what we say when' is the capacity of "measurement". It is the precondition for "obtaining results of measurement." (Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations* 242) Ordinary language philosophy and aesthetics thus differ from science because the knowledge they draw upon is not a "knowledge of matters of fact, but the knowledge of what would count as various 'matters of fact'. Is this empirical knowledge? Is it *a priori*? It is knowledge of what Wittgenstein means by grammar--the knowledge Kant calls transcendental." (*Must We Mean What We Say?* 64)

Both ordinary language philosophy and aesthetics, thus engage in an investigation of the possibilities of phenomena, which is to say in an epistemological or more precisely in a grammatical investigation.

In the context of his investigation of the nature of an aesthetic judgment Cavell compares Kant's and Hume's views on the issue. For Hume aesthetic judgment is nothing more than an agreement or 'reconciliation' of taste. The impression of its necessity derives from agreement and not from universal validity. In contrast to Hume, Kant describes aesthetic judgment as 'universal agreement,' the 'harmony in sentiment' or 'a common sense of mankind.' However, although aesthetic judgment claims to universality it "is not 'theoretical,' not 'logical,' not 'objective,' but one 'whose determining ground can be no other than subjective.'" (88) In particular, judgments about what we find beautiful demand general validity. Kant refers to them as the 'taste of reflection' in contrast to the 'taste of sense' according to which we decide what we find pleasant. Cavell and Wittgenstein, thus find themselves in the tradition of Kant in claiming that aesthetic judgments are at the same time subjective and general, or private and public. In the realm of aesthetics as well as in the realm of philosophy, to speak for oneself is tantamount to speaking for others. The power of aesthetic judgments resides in their being simultaneously subjective and intersubjective.

This remarkable fact about the realm of aesthetics allows the critic and the artist "to explore the depth of connection between [one's] inner life and that of others." (Mulhall 29) It provides a way of establishing community in a fuller expression of individuality. The possible experience of rebuff, and, thereby, of the limitation of community, is the only price one has to pay for the opportunity of community without having to give up subjectivity. There is another aspect to this community which connects aesthetic and political discourse. Mulhall elaborates on this issue of a community without forced agreement:

The fact that such a community of response and thought is not guaranteed shows something about the sort of community it is--one in which membership is freely willed, elicited rather than compelled from each individual. (Mulhall 29)

The kind of philosophy, or the kind of thinking, that both Cavell and Wittgenstein strive for, is, thus, one of a "non-coercive and tentative nature." (Mulhall 32)

The next chapter switches perspective regarding the matter not from the point of view of a philosopher but from that of a poet. It investigates to what extent an alternative mode of thinking, as depicted by Cavell, the late Wittgenstein and the late Heidegger, can be realized and achieved in poetry? Is poetry capable of giving rise to the handsome aspect of our human condition? Is it able to "let [a kind of] truth happen" which is not the truth of science or logic?

## I.2 Literature's Aspiring to Philosophy

Regarding the relation between literature and philosophy, the poet Charles Bernstein describes his attitude as follows:

My idea of a wedding [of philosophy and literature] may seem one-sided: I see it from the point of view of poetry. From this bias, poetry is the trump; that is to say, in my philosophy, poetry has the power to absorb these other forms of writing, but these other forms [literary criticism, poetics, philosophy] do not have that power over poetry.  
So when I think of the relation of poetry to philosophy, I'm always thinking of the poeticizing of philosophy, or making the poetic thinking that is involved in philosophy more explicit. (*A Poetics* 159)

The poetic thinking involved in Wittgenstein's and Cavell's philosophy is characterized by a trust in aesthetic judgment rather than scientific argument. Or as Wittgenstein has it: "Philosophy really only ought to be written as poetic composition." In this reliance on aesthetic judgment -which for Cavell is tantamount to Emerson's idea of "self-reliance"- philosophy and literature intersect.

Much like the two philosophers, Bernstein distinguishes between aesthetic and scientific discourse. He develops a defense of poetry which agrees with and elaborates on Wittgenstein's and Cavell's views on aesthetics. Furthermore he relates them to Habermas's remarks on "scientism" which he summarizes as follows:

Jürgen Habermas, in *Knowledge and Human Interest*, usefully contrasts two forms of knowledge--the dialogic or hermeneutic and the monologic or scientific. He differentiates the two modes by their interest component, pointing to prediction and control as the knowledge-constitutive interest of the scientific mode. (*Content's Dream* 173)

This view of Habermas agrees with Wittgenstein's and Cavell's characterizations of science as a discipline which in its coercive impetus enforces an agreement in conclusions rather

than being based on freely willed agreement. All three philosophers identify control and power as the knowledge-constitutive interest of the scientific mode, whereas it is a clear characteristic of aesthetic thinking that it is non-coercive. Furthermore, Habermas' characterization of the non-scientific mode as dialogic, corresponds with Wittgenstein's compositional method of putting two voices in conversation. The *Investigations* are written as a dialogue, as a "text answerable to itself." Wittgenstein thereby pursues a compositional practice which, according to Bernstein, draws attention to its method. (Cf. *Content's Dream* 227)

As Bernstein is biased towards the non-coercive aesthetic mode, he criticizes the dominating character of scientific discourse and argues for alternative modes of knowledge-acquisition.

In a collaborative work on art and technology he writes:

the association of 'scientific method' with knowledge is reductive, and represents a dominance of 'the ideology of science' over and against other knowledge-producing investigations, which are generally agglomerated together as 'aesthetic'. (*Art and Technology* 7)

In Bernstein's view "the neglect of other ways of making knowledge is socially unproductive"

(6). Like Cavell, he seeks answers to the question "to what degree does art propose methods of acquiring knowledge that are alternative to scientific methods?" (7) Cavell, for instance, dedicates an essential part of his work to investigating "how literature, film, and painting address epistemological issues in a unique way." (7)

It is characteristic for art, as understood by Bernstein, that it reflects its own method, a critical attitude that is less frequent in science which often hides the fact that it operates according to a particular paradigm and instead claims its neutrality. Unlike science, the aesthetic mode of thinking for which Bernstein argues takes nothing for granted, be it "subject matter, syntax, grammar or vocabulary." (*My Way* 163) Similar to Cavell and Wittgenstein, he disseminates a mode of thinking which is suppressed in Western "technorationality" (*Art and Technology* 9) According to Bernstein, the misunderstanding of Western

science is that it takes one particular kind of rationality --which Cavell describes as guaranteed agreement in conclusions-- as the model for rationality as such and thereby becomes blind to other modes of knowledge acquisition which do not rely on guaranteed agreement. On the background of Cavell's and Wittgenstein's theoretical considerations, Bernstein realizes his poetic extension of the concept of rationality as well as the concept of knowledge. He uses the term *rationality* in opposition to *reason*, in order to stress the distinction between scientific rationality and the concept of extended rationality, the former being just one of the various possible expressions of reason. As scientific rationality, in Bernstein's view, seldom reflects the methods or the paradigm of its investigation, the blindness of scientific discourse to "the meaning of its forms is a denial of reason in the name of rationality." (*My Way* 12)

There is of course a branch of philosophy which does not deny the meaning of form but on the contrary dedicates all its efforts to the exploration of the forms and conditions of knowledge. In its tradition of critique, epistemology provides an important background for an understanding of the work of Bernstein.

In philosophy since Kant, form and style are inseparable from content. What is said is determined by how it is said. Before Kant philosophy has been regarded as akin to science in its aim of providing knowledge of reality. Since Kant's 'Copernican Revolution' however, this self-understanding of philosophy has been challenged. According to Kant philosophy ought not so much investigate objects but our mode of knowing objects. Philosophy, thus, focuses on the preconditions of our knowing and experiencing the objects of the world. Wittgenstein modifies this Kantian conception in claiming that thoughts are intrinsically linked to their linguistic expression, which leads to his claim that "Grammar tells what kind of object anything is". Kant's 'reflective turn' therefore has been transformed by Wittgenstein into a 'linguistic turn'. Wittgenstein's new philosophy is concerned with achieving clarity

about our "form of representation", instead of describing or explaining reality. The form of representation characterizes our method of describing the world, it determines what counts as a description of reality. Hence, Wittgenstein's philosophy, focuses on method. For Cavell, it is still pertinent in contemporary philosophy to pay attention to methodological questions.

What I have written, and I suppose the way I have written, grows from a sense that philosophy is in one of its periodic crises of method, heightened by a worry I am sure is not mine alone, that method dictates to content; that, for example, an intellectual commitment to analytical philosophy trains concern away from the wider, traditional problem of human culture which may have brought one to philosophy in the first place. (Cavell, *Must We Mean What We Say?* 74)

For Bernstein as well as for Cavell, there is "no neutral form of philosophical or critical argument" (Bernstein, *My Way* 12), and, according to Bernstein, the poetic is willing and able to acknowledge this fact: "[p]oetry continues to make active *methodological* interventions into critical and philosophical discourse." (12)

This is seldom the case in science. Because of the axiomatization and fixation of its methods, which becomes necessary in order to guarantee agreement in conclusions and thereby prediction and control, it is not possible for scientific rationality to be flexible in its methods of measurement or to switch between alternate methods. On the contrary, very often it directs attention away from the methods of measurement and instead focuses on the things measured. The hiding of method and the resulting impression of neutrality and objectivity is achieved through violence. For Bernstein, the violent mode of scientific discourse turns thinking into "'dead ideas'; suggesting a rule of always-already formulated concepts, habits of agreement running roughshod over newly formulating vistas" (*Content's Dream* 364). This process of axiomatization has been described by Deleuze and Guattari as the erection of the theater of representation in the place of production<sup>10</sup>. Scientific discourse,

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<sup>10</sup> Deleuze, Gilles and Félix Guattari: *Anti-Oedipus. Capitalism and Schizophrenia*.

thus, freezes or kills the vitality of the world, coming up with a "picture of something figured out" (*My Way* 117)

Aesthetic or poetic thinking, by contrast, is "an investigation of figuration" (117), it is not based on a fixed agreement in conclusions. In the poetic realm it is not desirable to predict where one is going to arrive at. On the contrary, poetry wants to break with scanning over the same always already formulated routes. It "insists on running its own course" (Bernstein, *A Poetics* 1). Therefore, the poet has to follow his or her intuition. For Bernstein, who writes in the tradition of Emerson and Schelling, "[i]ntuition is a crucial term to describe a working practice of poetry [...] it suggests an arena of judgment based on hunches, guesses, quick assessments" (*My Way* 69). Accordingly, he declares that he "love[s] the fact of intuition not being defensible, at least on rational grounds, even if perfectly reasonable; and also that you can learn to use your intuition" (69). In the pursuit of learning to use one's intuition it might happen that one trips, strays of the straight and narrow path or loses one's balance. In an interview Bernstein says about himself:

I've never been much for balance, but there's a clear advantage to staying on your feet or not falling off the bed. I was a slow learner (which I suppose may be why I like to teach): I found it difficult to reproduce socially prized models of balance, symmetry, and grace; no doubt I grew to resent these things, more often conventions than the immutable principles they purported to be. It seemed to me I kept my balance in some mighty awkward ways: it may be my aesthetic now, but it was largely given to me by disadvantage. Disadvantage, that is, puts you in mind of your particular vantage and that enables some sort of eco-balance: balance within a complex, multilevel system--where posture, say, or grammar, is not the only factor. Within a poem, the more active questions of eco-balance are ones of proportion and judgment. I think what may make my work seem difficult is that I am always testing my judgments, throwing them off balance so that I can see where they land: and this testing, this interrogation, of judgment and senses of proportion constitute the aesthetic process for me. (26)

'Intellectual intuition' or aesthetic thinking does not exert authoritativeness or dominion. It is more akin to Emerson's "power of passiveness" (*This New Yet Unapproachable America* 114). It is a strength which grows out of a weakness, an advantage developed from a

disadvantage. In the aesthetic realm, as experienced by Bernstein, the missing harness of rules and regularities makes it difficult to go on. Concepts are not always already formulated, but have to be constructed. The poet "enters into the engendering". For Bernstein "poetry is like a swoon" (*Islets/Irritations* 47), he compares this dizzying situation to

a remark made by Wittgenstein to his sister Hermine: "You remind me of somebody who is looking out through a closed window and cannot explain to himself the strange movements of a passerby. He cannot tell what sort of storm is raging out there or that this person might only be managing with difficulty to stay on his feet." When the reader is sealed off from the world of the poem, it may well seem strange and demanding; it is only when you get a sense for this world, and not just the words, that the poem can begin to make sense (*My Way* 26-7).

Here it is most apparent that Wittgenstein and Bernstein inhabit the same realm which is only accessible through poetic thinking and within which one has nothing to rely on but one's own aesthetic judgment which turns out to be Cavell's and Emerson's self-reliance.

Bernstein elaborates on the idea of such an aesthetic realm:

If I am making an argument for the aesthetic, I hope it will be apparent that I use "aesthetic" not to suggest an ideal of beauty but rather to invoke a contested arena of judgment, perception, and value where artworks and essays operate not as adjudicators of fixed principles but as probes for meaning, prods for thought. To investigate the conditions that make value possible is not to abandon value to historical contingency but rather to insist that values be argued for, demonstrated, and enacted [...] I do hold out for a realm of value that is determined by judgments made without recourse to rationalizable justification and claim that this realm of aesthetic judgment is the basis for reason. (11)

Bernstein here seems to echo Wittgenstein's remark in *On Certainty* 475: "Language did not emerge from some kind of ratiotination." He describes the effort to walk without relying on the fixed structures of rationality as "unmastering language." (*A Poetics* 146) In the course of this unmastering the poet might temporarily lose control over his linguistic skills resulting in a stammer or a stutter. For linguistic responses are not triggered automatically anymore by a discourse of power, but the poet becomes conscious of his ways of using language and

thereby his ways of constituting meaning. His or her staggering and groping movement through language

necessarily involve[s] error. Error in the sense of wandering errantly, but also error in the sense of mistake, misperception, incorrectness, contradiction. Error as projection (expression of desire unmediated by rationalized explanation): as slips, slides [...] (153)

There is also a humorous aspect to the concept of error. Bernstein describes this transformation of error into humor in the following way: "I am interested, insofar as possible, to try to put into talks like this, essays, certain kinds of pratfalls, the equivalent to slipping on a banana, or throwing a pie in my own face. So that error is made explicit as part of the process" (153-4). This intertwining of humor and error is reminiscent of Emerson's remarks on conditions handsome and unhandsome. The handsome condition of knowing is one of indirection, one which does not attempt to grasp nature and to draw it nearer with violence like on an operating table:

Nature does not like to be observed [...] and likes that we should be her fools and playmates [which thus will make for fooling and playing with language, so make for intellectual comedy] (quoted by Cavell in *This New Yet Unapproachable America* 110) (Emerson, "Experience" 269).

In its playful and "provisional quality" such a poetics of 'intellectual comedy' resists the "institutionalization of interpretation." (*A Poetics* 157) "Poetics is all about changing the current poetic course. Putting on a dress, not strapping yourself into a uniform." (157) Still, such a poetics requires a certain kind of optimism which Bernstein describes as "a social optimism expressed by worldly partiality rather than intellectual disinterestedness." (158) This attitude of disinterestedness is typical of the scientific mode, which evokes the impression of being "outside the world, neither affecting it nor affected by it, taking stock"

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as Cavell has it in *The Claim of Reason* (204)<sup>11</sup> To dive into one's worldly partiality, to become aware of the mutual interpenetration of world and self, at first seems frightening. Without the certainties of control and prediction of the scientific mode, Bernstein asks, "what ground do we have for going on, for taking positions, for speaking with assurance and conviction?" (*A Poetics* 161) He replies to himself:

Optimism is my Emersonian answer, at least today, as my mood allows (or else, more blackly disposed, I fall silent): a willingness to try, to speak up for, to propose, to make claims; enthusiasm versus the cautiousness and passivity of never advancing what is not already known; judgment versus instrumental analysis; reason not ratio. (160)

Concerning this "willingness to try", this willingness to become active, Emerson writes in "The American Scholar": "Inaction is cowardice, but there can be no scholar without the heroic mind. The preamble of thought, the transition through which it passes from the unconscious to the conscious, is action." (59) For Emerson, the precondition for action is "self-trust" (62). Only the scholar who trusts his own judgments is able "to cheer, to raise, and to guide men." (62) This optimism is also apparent in Thoreau's motto for *Walden*: "I do not propose to write an ode to dejection, but to brag as lustily as chanticleer in the morning, standing on his roost, if only to wake my neighbors up" (106).

Still, in spite of this willingness to try and to cheer, the scholar's as well as the poet's self-reliance, involves many inconveniences and troubles:

Long he must stammer in his speech; [...] he must accept--how often--poverty and solitude. For the ease and pleasure of treading the old road, accepting the fashions, the education, the religion of society, he takes the cross of making his own, and of course, the self-accusation, the faint heart, the frequent uncertainty and loss of time, which are the nettles and tangling vines in the way of the self-relying and self-directed; (Emerson, "The American Scholar" 63)

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<sup>11</sup> Quoted by Bernstein in *Content's Dream* p. 168.

Bernstein and Emerson compare this learning to trust one's intuitions to learning to swim. Emerson's picture of "a boy standing before water not realizing that he can swim," (*A Poetics* 161) is very useful for Bernstein "in responding to questions about how people can understand poetry that hasn't already been written, that they've not learned about previously" (161). A reader who cannot see the "new conventions" displayed in the poem, cannot "judge what [he or she] like[s] from what [she doesn't]" (161). "Such a reader is like the boy in Emerson's essay, who can't imagine that the water will buoy him up. But when you jump in, you discover that you can swim, if you don't sink in a panic of disbelief." (161)

In contrast to the scientific mode, aesthetics, ordinary language philosophy, and poetry rely on subjectivity. As I have argued in the previous chapter, the capacity to bring others to see what I see, presupposes a willingness to rely upon a capacity of self-knowledge.

Accordingly Bernstein's Emerson encourages his young scholar to trust his own "private thoughts [...] because they will speak the most publicly. Trust the associations that make sense to you, even if they appear out of tune or inarticulate or inconsistent: allow them to speak. 'Self-reliance is the aversion of conformity'" (161).

In Bernstein's poetry, as well as, in Cavell's and Wittgenstein's philosophy, a fuller expression of one's individuality is tantamount to an exploration of our human common ground. It, thus, provides the possibility of community. Emerson describes this startling and seemingly contradictory effect of self-reliance as follows:

the instinct is sure, that prompts him to tell his brother what he thinks. He then learns that in going down into the secrets of his own mind he has descended into the secrets of all minds. (64)

This is an entirely new way<sup>12</sup> to think of community, starting not from the group but from the individual. Bernstein sees in "language the place of our commonness." (*Content's Dream*

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<sup>12</sup> Or an old, but repressed way, of which one has to be reminded.

29/30) "The essential aspect of writing centered on its language is its possibilities for relationship, viz., it is the body of 'us'-ness, in which we are, the ground of our commonness." (31) "The move from purely descriptive, outward directive writing" which corresponds with the "intellectual disinterestedness" of the scientific mode, "toward writing centered on its wordness, its physicality, its haecceity (thisness) is, in its impulse, an investigation of human self-sameness, of the place of our connection, in the world, in the word, in ourselves;" (32) hence an acknowledgment of our worldly partiality.

The last section of Bernstein's poem *Dark City* expresses this connection in and through language:

"The words  
 come out of  
 her heart  
 & into the  
 language"  
 & the language  
 is in the heart  
 of that girl  
 who is in the heart  
 of you. (146)<sup>13</sup>

Bernstein suggests to look at "'privacy' as a central aspect of writing." (*Content's Dream* 77)

In the essay "Thought's Measure" he states: "That writing is in some senses the exploration and revelation of that which is private seems the heart of the desire to write poetry." (78)

The exploration of one's own private feelings has a long tradition in poetry. The poet withdraws into the solitude of his or her own private thought. But what he then finds is not something which is true only for himself and essentially incommunicable, on the contrary "the more deeply personal a writer's revelation, the more the writing itself comes to be taken as evidence of a shared truth, not unique to the writer at all." (78) Bernstein compares this peculiarity of poetic privacy with the exploration of one's private feelings in psychoanalysis:

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<sup>13</sup> Cf.: The Gospel According to St. John, I,1-5: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made. In him was life; and the

It is almost like the myth of psychoanalysis: our most private fantasies and dreams hold the key by which our behaviors become 'publicly' comprehensible. (78)

But not only poetry and psychoanalysis are instances of withdrawing into the self and finding the public; Bernstein accordingly defines poetry as "a private act in a public place," (77) but in philosophy as well he makes out a tradition of private investigations which can be subsumed under the names of meditation, contemplation and confession. As its exponents he names Descartes, Augustin, Rousseau, and Montaigne. All of those thinkers pursue a kind of thinking which Bernstein describes as the free-associative mode and which escapes the control and manipulation of the scientific mode by an appeal to privacy. It might thus be described as an approach to Heidegger's 'true thinking.'

Bernstein defines the private as that "which is true to oneself and for oneself on one's own terms." (77) Its power for writing is its "address of intimacy ('truthfulness' rather than 'truth' to use Wittgenstein's distinction)". As the concept of truth has been usurped by logic and science and therefore has to follow "formal requirements of clarity and exposition" (78), only an appeal to truthfulness, the repressed aspect of truth provides the "freedom to speak as one will and not as one should".

The criteria for the truth of the confession that I thought such-and-such are not the criteria for a true description of a process. And the importance of the true confession does not reside in its being a correct and certain report of a process. It resides rather in the special consequences which can be drawn from a confession whose truth is guaranteed by the special criteria of truthfulness.

(Assuming that dreams can yield important information about the dreamer, what yielded the information would be truthful accounts of dreams. The question whether the dreamer's memory deceives him when he reports the dream after waking cannot arise, unless indeed we introduce a complete new criterion for the report's 'agreeing' with a dream, a criterion which gives us a concept of 'truth' as distinct from 'truthfulness' here (Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations II* 222-23) (quoted by Bernstein in *Content's Dream* 80).

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life was the light of men. And the light shineth in darkness; and the darkness comprehended it not."

Bernstein sees in this description of 'truthfulness' an attempt of wresting thinking from the deforming grip of science. Wittgenstein's distinction between truth and truthfulness corresponds to his earlier distinction between aesthetic and scientific correctness. Aesthetic correctness as well as truthfulness escapes the violence of scientific objectivity and gives recognition to the individual human being's power of judgment.

The following points are aspects of a tradition of thinking which, for Bernstein, form an alternative to discursive and propositional thinking. Thinking, that favors intuition rather than rationality, is a private experience. It is more akin to a process rather than a fixed representation, therefore the 'content' and the 'experience of reading' collapse onto each other. In this way the medium of thinking is made visible, validating Wittgenstein's claim that writing and thinking are inseparable. Language does not accompany but constitute thinking. Wittgenstein accordingly writes in *Philosophical Investigations* 329: ""When I think in language, there aren't 'meanings' going through my mind in addition to the verbal expressions: the language is itself the vehicle of thought."

In its free-associative mode, thinking is able to map "the fullness of thought and its movement" (*Content's Dream* 70) thereby avoiding a habitual ordering of attentions. In 'thinking as a genre' the method of representation is not assumed but intended, thus, the individual human being who is thinking is responsible for the meanings created by his or her particular language use. Writing as thinking "becomes conscious of itself as world/object generating making palpable the processes of the mind and heart 'our' participation in the constitution of nature and meaning."

Summing up it can be said, that writing as thinking is an active, autonomous and self sufficient process in which the writer takes responsibility for the work and thereby commits herself to truthfulness.

In his essay "Thought's Measure" Bernstein collapses the apparently irreconcilable modes of 'free-associative' or 'natural' writing as thinking and 'artifactual' or 'constructive' writing, and argues that in spite of their obvious difference they still pursue a mutual aim.

Constructive writing focuses on the structures, forms and shapes of writing. For instance it draws the reader's attention to syntax by deviating from regular grammatical rules. Its method is to show how ordering and sequence assert values, how form limits/conditions what you can say in it. Thus, it draws attention to the form of representation, claiming that "all writing exists in form, shape, as mode, in a style in genres." This limitation of human thinking to the conditions of thinking, for Bernstein, is also expressed in the work of the projectivist poet Charles Olson and the objectivist poet Louis Zukofsky. In "Thought's Measure" he quotes a characteristic line from the work of each poet:

"Limits  
are what any of us  
are inside  
of" [Olson].

"That order that of itself can speak to all" [Zukofsky] (*Content's Dream* 71).

Another important instance of the constructive mode, for Bernstein, can be observed in the work of the early modernist Russian writers Viktor Shklovsky and Velimir Khlebnikov. In his "zaum" poetry, Khlebnikov transcends the standards of meaning production thereby reaching hitherto unacknowledged ranges of meaning.

The Russian Formalist Shklovsky is known for his concept of "making strange", the "alienation effect". "The technique of art is to make objects 'unfamiliar,' to make forms difficult." ("Art as Technique" 12) Its aim is to awaken the reader from his or her automatic perception of the world. "[A]rt exists that one may recover the sensation of life [,] to make one feel things, to make the stone stony." (12)

Bernstein argues that "we are seduced [...] into accepting a natural 'speech'-derived syntax or 'logic'-derived discursiveness" (*Content's Dream* 74-5). This seemingly naturalness of language and thought, however, turns out to be made. The semblance of the 'natural' is due to familiarity. The technical device of estrangement, though, exposes the 'natural' as 'constructed.' What otherwise goes unnoticed because of its familiarity now becomes visible. This idea of our blindness towards the familiar also plays a crucial role in Wittgenstein's *Investigations*.

The aspects of things that are most important for us are hidden because of their simplicity and familiarity. (One is unable to notice something--because it is always before one's eyes.) The real foundations of his enquiry do not strike a man at all. Unless that fact has at some time struck him.--And this means: we fail to be struck by what, once seen, is most striking and most powerful. (*Philosophical Investigations* 129)

In constructive writing, thus, "certain radicalities or extremes of compositional strategy that tend to increase the artifactual, non-naturalistic sense in the poem" (*Content's Dream* 73) are used to make visible the structure or parameter, or the method by which a work is generated. Both constructive writing and thinking as a genre, therefore, draw attention to the measure of thought which is the method of representation, our linguistic conventions, our language.

In contrast to science, thus, poetry as epistemological inquiry is aware of its method of representation of the conditions of knowledge, "the measure which is language" (Bernstein) or in Wittgenstein's terminology to "the form of account we give, the way we look at things." (*Philosophical Investigations* 122) This finally leads Bernstein to his claim that "poetry and philosophy share the project of investigating the possibilities (nature) and structures of phenomena." (*Content's Dream* 219) A project which Wittgenstein declares programmatic for his *Investigations*:

We feel as if we had to penetrate phenomena: our investigation, however, is directed not towards phenomena, but, as one might say, towards the 'possibilities' of phenomena. We remind ourselves, that is to say, of the *kind of statement* that we make about phenomena. [...] Our investigation is therefore a grammatical one. (90)

Like Bernstein, Wittgenstein, thus, focuses on the specifically human ways of apprehending the world and making sense of it. This focus on the "kind of statement" on the way of proceeding is an investigation of method. For Wittgenstein "[t]here is not a philosophical method, though there are indeed methods, like different therapies" (133). A discipline which focuses on methods has to consider the style of writing it practices to the same degree as its subject matter. As it is for Bernstein "all writing is a demonstration of method" all epistemological inquiry be it poetic or philosophical has to reflect and take responsibility for its own method. Wittgenstein, as mentioned before, acknowledges this commitment to method, for example in the dialogic mode of conversing voices in the *Investigations*. But other philosophers aspiring to literature also consider methodological issues in their work. For Bernstein,

[i]t is this understanding of philosophy that lead Heidegger in his later work to reject philosophy and instead call for instruction in 'true thinking' (in *What Is Called Thinking*), or has lead Stanley Cavell, recently writing on Emerson, to talk of the relation of mood to philosophic inquiry. (*Content's Dream* 220)

Cavell's "literariness" consists in "his immersion inside moods, fears, hopes," in his "embeddedness in the forms and textures of life." It is not a literariness for its own sake with the aim of turning philosophy into literature, but literariness as method, namely *the* pertinent method to "call philosophy back to its sources of judgment." (CD 168)

Thoreau in *Walden* shares this view of philosophy as an activity with a particular interest in method. In the chapter "Economy" he writes:

The philosopher is in advance of his age even in the outward form of his life. He is not fed, sheltered, clothed, warmed, like his contemporaries. How can a man be a philosopher and not maintain his vital heat by better methods than other men? (116)

Like Cavell and Wittgenstein, Thoreau stresses the "centrality of method" (Bernstein, *Content's Dream* 220) for philosophy. For Bernstein, it is just this acknowledgment of or even passion for method in which philosophy and literature intersect. In an interview he describes such epistemological projects as works of "composition-centered philosophy" (401).

The context out of which Bernstein's work grows is on the one hand a tradition of philosophical thinking which aspires to literature and which can be related to the late Wittgenstein's and the late Heidegger's exercises in 'true thinking'. On the other hand, it grows from a tradition of literature which can be subsumed under the name of "composition as explanation." Bernstein regards this "Composition as Explanation" mode, which was the one that "very much struck [him] for a long time, that Stein was the great exponent of, and Creeley in his essays, Williams in his imaginative prose" (450) as a reaction against and an alternative to "straight expository writing." (450) Unlike expository writing, composition as explanation does not explain in a scientific way; rather, the composition shows something which cannot be said independently of the composition. Bernstein therefore also refers to poetry as "the show-me business." For Gertrude Stein in "Composition as Explanation" method turns out to be central:

Each period of living differs from any other period of living not in the way life is but in the way life is conducted and that authentically speaking is composition. (517)  
 The only thing that is different from one time to another is what is seen and what is seen depends upon how everybody is doing everything.  
 Everything is the same except composition and as the composition is different and always going to be different everything is not the same. (520)

In accordance with Wittgenstein, Stein stresses the necessity of describing a whole environment in order to understand the composition of a particular period, in order to understand what is seen. Thus, to come to terms with the particular way people are

judging or interpreting the world at a particular time, Stein suggests describing "the way life is conducted at that time," or as Wittgenstein has it: "you have to describe ways of living" (Lectures and Conversations I 35). In the *Investigations* he refers to these ways of living as "forms of life." The ways of understanding the world and art are bound up with our ways of using language. Wittgenstein elaborates on this interrelationship of language and aesthetic judgment:

The words we call expressions of aesthetic judgment play a very complicated role, in what we call a culture of a period. To describe their use or to describe what you mean by a cultured taste, you have to describe a culture. What we now call a cultured taste perhaps didn't exist in the Middle Ages. An entirely different game is played in different ages. (*Lectures and Conversations I 25*)

The human composition of the world or the ways of world making change within the history of human kind. Composition and world view are displayed and investigated in art. It is art's potential to explore the linguistic as well as cultural conditions of phenomena. For "What belongs to a language game is a whole culture." (I 26) Such an investigation ultimately amounts to an investigation of our human condition.

It is this interest in the human condition which is tantamount to an interest or a passion for composition and method. This intertwining of epistemological and aesthetic issues provokes Bernstein in his reading of Cavell to describe the relation between philosophy and literature as follows:

the natural condition of philosophy is to aspire to ('reunification' with) literature and that of literature to aspire to the power of philosophy to speak to and of our lives (*Content's Dream 168*).

## II Politics

### II.1 The Social Contract

Both philosophy and literature rely on a mode of thinking which has been characterized as "aesthetic thinking." It is a mode which is non-violent in that it does not insist upon compelling agreement, but instead focuses on method. It strives for self-knowledge. Nevertheless, in any and all of its aspects the mode of thinking favored by literature and philosophy contains a political dimension: The willingness to speak for others when speaking for oneself characterizes both the realm of philosophy and the realm of art. In either, the speaker or writer takes responsibility for his or her utterances. In this respect, philosophy and art have an ethical dimension, or as Wittgenstein puts it in the *Tractatus*: "Ethics and Aesthetics are One" (6.421).

Cavell acknowledges this intertwining of ethics and aesthetics in a passage from *The Claim of Reason* in which he stresses the fundamentality of agreement in judgment for human thought. He characterizes this judgment as judgment of value:

both statements of fact and judgments of value ultimately rest upon the same capacities of human nature; that, so to speak, only a creature that can judge of value can state a fact. (14-15)

Judgment of value is, thus, *the* fundamental human capacity, and underlies all human utterances, regardless if made in the realm of aesthetics, ethics or science. It expresses a commitment to shared forms of life.

The relationship suggested by this assertion, the nature of the particular commitment of the individual to the group and the inverse, immediately yields a number of questions requiring clarification: How is this commitment, which constitutes the possibility for human

communication, established? What authorizes Wittgenstein to formulate his philosophical claims in the first person plural form? "What gives me the right to speak for the group of which I am a member?" (*The Claim of Reason* 18) Cavell is startled by the fact that "so much of what Wittgenstein shows to be true of his consciousness is true of ours (of mine)" (20). The issue can be elucidated by bringing together Wittgenstein's remarks on "agreement in judgment" in the context of Rousseau's idea of the "social contract."

The essential message of the idea of a social contract is that political institutions require justification, that they are absolutely without sanctity, that power over us is held on trust from us, that institutions have no authority other than the authority we lend them, that we are their architects, that they are therefore artifacts (*The Senses of Walden* 82).

Conceiving of institutions in the broadest sense, I want to argue that the ultimate institution to which we lend our authority, is language (*Philosophical Investigations* 199, 337, 380, 540). Language, like society, can be regarded as an institution which is "founded on convention" (355). It is thus possible to draw a parallel between the institution of language and a political institution; both rely on a shared form of life. In this way epistemological, grammatical, and political questions are not clearly separable anymore.

"The claim to community" in philosophical and aesthetic discourse, as much as in political discourse, is thus a "search for the basis upon which it can [be] or has been established" (*The Claim of Reason* 20). It is an attempt to understand the startling agreement between the individual's and the group's consciousness, an agreement which points to Locke's and Rousseau's idea of a social contract. As Cavell argues, however, this explanation is not meant as a historical explanation, but could rather be looked at as an "explanatory myth." Cavell comments on the idea of a social contract:

it is an old, if unestablished feeling, that the mutual meaningfulness of the words of a language must rest upon some kind of connection of compact among its users; and that the classical locus of philosophical investigations of this idea of a compact lies in

the discussion of the social contract supposed to have established the political community. (*The Claim of Reason* 22)

Hume attacks and ridicules the idea of such a social contract: "In vain are we asked in what records this charter of our liberties is registered. It was not written on parchment nor yet on leaves or barks of trees." (22) In describing grammar as the "account books of language" (*Philosophical Grammar* 44) Wittgenstein seems to directly comment on Hume's objection towards the social contract. He seems to suggest that the social contract expresses a grammatical agreement; the consent Rousseau talks about has to be thought of as agreement in judgments. In this way the strange fact that we agree to something we are not aware of ever having given our consent to starts to become comprehensible.

Cavell describes Rousseau as a "grammarian of society," (*The Claim of Reason* 23) who wants to come to terms with the question: "How can I have consented to the formation of government, since I am not aware that I was ever asked for it or ever gave it?" But this question concerning a human being's knowledge can be transformed into a question concerning a human being's responsibility: "How can I have recognized this government as mine since I am not aware that I am responsible for it?" (24) The project of exploring the extent of one's commitment to a society is not just of epistemological but also of moral interest in that every human being is responsible for the society of which he or she is a member. But only an epistemological inquiry can give insight into the content of one's agreement and can help to understand why it is that we agree without being conscious of it. Political education, as Cavell argues, therefore, has to be philosophical as well as political:

it is philosophical because its method is an examination of myself by an attack upon my assumptions; it is political because the terms of this self-examination are the terms which reveal me as a member of a polis; it is education not because I learn new information but because I learn that the finding and forming of my knowledge of myself requires the finding and forming of my knowledge of that membership. (25)

Politics, like philosophy and aesthetics, does not stand in need of additional information but rather requires perspective of those things it knows without necessarily being aware of knowing them. "The epistemological problem of society is not to discover new facts" (25) but "to discover my position with respect to these facts - how I know with whom I am in community, and to whom and what I am in fact obedient" (25). The idea of finding one's position reminds us of Wittgenstein's axiom that a philosophical problem takes the form 'I don't know my way about' or in Cavell's free translation 'I don't know myself'. The theory of the social contract, thus, does not provide new knowledge, but a new form of knowledge, Cavell describes it as "a way to use the self as access to the self's society." (26) The knowledge according to which one acts without being aware of it, (which could also be described as 'knowing how' in contrast to 'knowing that'), somehow seems to be repressed. The unconscious character of agreement is also expressed in Wittgenstein's sentence: "I follow the rule blindly" (*Philosophical Investigations* 219). According to Cavell, the unveiling of a new mode of knowledge is at the same time

the discovery of a new mode of ignorance. Marx and Freud will call this ignorance unconsciousness, the former of our social present, the latter of our private pasts; but these will prove not to be so different. (Both speak of this ignorance as a result of repression) (*The Claim of Reason* 26)

Wittgenstein describes the discrepancy between conscious and unconscious knowledge, emphasizing the enormous gulf of ignorance comprised by the latter and the possibility that the two realms might never touch in his *Remarks on the Foundations of Mathematics*:

It is possible for one to live, to think, in the fancy that things are thus and so, without *believing* it; that is to say, when one is asked, then one knows, but if one does not have to answer the question one does not know, but acts and thinks according to another opinion. (Ansicht) (II-12)

For Wittgenstein, therefore, it is conceivable that one never gets in touch with one's true beliefs, the beliefs according to which one acts and thinks, but always remains a stranger to them, thereby also remaining estranged from one's self.

Regardless, however, of whether we are aware of our beliefs or not, "granting (or withholding) of consent" in Rousseau's terminology (or "agreement in judgments" in Wittgenstein's terminology) is "the precondition, the condition, of speaking for oneself" (*The Claim of Reason* 27). Indeed it is the condition of speaking at all. As Wittgenstein has shown in the so-called 'private language argument,' the idea of a private language is illusory; every kind of human articulation is essentially public and is in this way a political act. "I could not apply any rules to a *private* transition [...] Here the words would hang in the air; for the institution of their use is lacking" (*Philosophical Investigations* 380). Accordingly, Cavell holds the view that "The alternative to speaking for yourself politically is not: speaking for yourself privately [...] but having nothing to say" (*The Claim of Reason* 27). It is not just constitutive for the human being to possess language; implied in the human being's capacity for speech is a capacity for moral and political speech. In order, for Cavell, to be human "I am to have my own voice in it, I must be speaking for others and allow others to speak for me. The alternative to speaking for myself representatively (for someone else's consent) is not: speaking for myself privately. The alternative is having nothing to say, being voiceless, not even mute" (28).

Before focusing on the consequences of this voicelessness, of the ignorance of one's consent to an institution, for the human being's humanness, I want to further elucidate the nature of this consent which goes deeper than any "current idea of convention could seem" (31) to go. According to Cavell, "we cannot have agreed beforehand to all that would be necessary" (31). It is "altogether important that Wittgenstein says that we agree (in form of life) and

that there is agreement in (judgments)" (31). The key passage, already cited, from *Philosophical Investigations* is now to be regarded from a political point of view:

If language is to be a means of communication there must be agreement [Übereinstimmung] not only in definitions but also (queer as this may sound) in judgments. (242) It is what human beings say that is true and false and they agree in the language they use. (241)

Cavell comments on this particular kind of agreement or consent, Wittgenstein draws our attention to:

The idea of agreement here is not that of coming to or arriving at an agreement on a given occasion, but of being in agreement throughout, being in harmony, like pitches or tones, or clocks, or weighing scales, or columns of figures. That a group of human beings *stimmen* in their language *überein* says, so to speak, that they are mutually attuned top to bottom (*The Claim of Reason* 32).

Cavell, thus, draws attention to the meaning of the German word "übereinstimmen" which is more pertinently translated as agreeing in than agreeing to. Taking up Cavell's image of the weighing scales, it could be compared to adjustment or calibration. This "mutual attunement" is the "bedrock" of human understanding, on which "our spade turns" (*Philosophical Investigations* 217). "For nothing is deeper than the fact, or the extent, of agreement itself" (*The Claim of Reason* 32). Now, if we look at Wittgenstein's agreement as a form of political consent, how is it possible to disagree, to express one's dissent?

The precondition for dissent is to become aware of what one has agreed on. For Cavell, it seems that Wittgenstein in the *Investigations* voices "our secrets, secrets we did not know were known, or did not know we shared" (20). The *Investigations* is in this way an "examination that exposes one's convictions, one's sense of what must and what cannot be the case; so it requires a breaking up of one's sense of necessity, to discover truer necessities" (21). This attempt to follow one's true need ("our examination must be turned around [...]

but about the fixed point of our real need" *Philosophical Investigations* 108) is situated, by Cavell, in a tradition of political philosophy.

[A]n idea of true need in opposition to false need seems to me no less in the *Investigations* than in those philosophical texts that more famously and elaborately contain early considerations of artificial necessities, such as the *Republic* and *The Social Contract* and *Walden* (*This New Yet Unapproachable America* 43-4).

Cavell draws attention to the political potential of Wittgenstein's philosophy. It is, however, difficult to imagine what this true need consists in and how it can be satisfied. (In the chapter on literature and philosophy, the aesthetic explanation had been the one which satisfied one's need or, differently put, redirects our attention to our needs.) It seems helpful to approach this question by looking at Wittgenstein's treatment of misleading views and philosophical confusions. Such a misleading view is, for instance, the idea that conventions are God-given or *a priori*, instead of being a product of our own hands. (Heidegger's thinking as handicraft) It shows an almost pathological estrangement from oneself for which Wittgenstein offers a number of therapies. Because of this therapeutic character of his philosophy, he also compares it to psychoanalysis.

In his reading of Emerson's Moral Perfectionism, Cavell puts forth a similar therapeutic claim. He argues that Moral Perfectionism expresses the need to be "true to oneself and to the humanity in oneself" (*Conditions Handsome and Unhandsome* 1). According to Cavell, Emerson, like Wittgenstein, pictures the soul as on a journey (upward and onward) that begins by finding oneself lost to the world" (1). In addition to Plato's *Republic*, Cavell names, among others<sup>14</sup>, Heidegger's *Being and Time* and Shaw's *Pygmalion* as sharing this

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<sup>14</sup> The complete list reads as follows: "Plato's *Republic*, Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*, the Gospel according to St. Matthew, Augustine's *Confessions*, Shakespeare's *Hamlet* and *Coriolanus* and *The Tempest*, Pascal's *Pensées*, Kant's *Foundations of the Metaphysics of Morals*, Friedrich Schlegel's *Athenaeum Fragments* and "On Incomprehensibility," Kleist's *The Marquise of O-----*, Mill's *On Liberty* and *On the Subjection of Women*, Ibsen's *Hedda Gabler* and *A Doll's House*, Matthew Arnold's *Culture and Anarchy* and "Dover Beach," Emerson's "The American Scholar" and "Self-Reliance" and "Experience," Nietzsche's third *Untimely Meditation* entitled *Schopenhauer as Educator*, Marx's *Introduction to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right*, Thoreau's *Walden*, the critical writings of Oscar Wilde, certainly including his review of a book about

view of the human being as being on a journey to its real self. In all those works Cavell detects the need for a transformation of one self and of one's society from a state of ignorance and alienation to a state of self-knowledge. Such a need is also expressed in contemporary American literature.

In "Wittgenstein and Modern Writing," R.M. Berry suggests that "despite the immense influence of French philosophy on contemporary criticism, it seems arguable that the greatest philosophical influence on contemporary poetry and fiction, at least in America, has been Ludwig Wittgenstein" (*American Book Review* 3). Berry is not the first to point to Wittgenstein's relevance for American literature. Charles Bernstein and Guy Davenport draw attention to methodological agreements in the works of Stein and Wittgenstein. Furthermore, Gerry Hagberg, Marjorie Perloff, and Linda Reinfeld investigate Wittgenstein's affinity with literature. In *Wittgenstein's Ladder. Poetic Language and the Strangeness of the Ordinary*, Perloff discusses a number of artists working "under the sign of Wittgenstein" (xiii). The metaphor of the ladder, for Perloff "contains in embryo" three aspects of a "distinctly Wittgensteinian poetics" (xiv). I will only mention the first two, as they express an affinity with Emersonian Moral Perfectionism. The first aspect, is its "dailyness: for Dante's purgatorial staircase, for Yeats's 'ancient winding stair,' Wittgenstein substitutes a mere ladder [...] Second: the movement 'up' the ladder can never be more than what Gertrude Stein called 'Beginning again and again'--a climbing 'through,' 'on,' and 'over'" (xiv).

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Confucius, Freud's *The Interpretation of Dreams*, *Civilization and Its Discontents*, and "Delusions and Dreams in Jensen's *Gradiva*," Shaw's *Pygmalion*, W. C. Williams's *Selected Essays*, John Dewey's *Experience and Nature*, Heidegger's *Being and Time*, and "On the Origin of the Work of Art," and *What Is Called Thinking?*, Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations*, Beckett's *Endgame*, and (the film) *The Philadelphia Story*. Others might have been mentioned here, most of which appear in related writings of mine: Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, Dante's *Divine Comedy*, Montaigne's *Essays*, Spinoza's *Ethics*, Milton's *Paradise Lost*, Molière's *Misanthrope*, *The Unborn: The Life and Teaching of Zen Master Bankei*, Schiller's *On the Aesthetic Education of Man*, Rousseau's *The Reveries of a Solitary Walker*, Goethe's *Faust* and *Wilhelm Meister*, Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*, Wordsworth's *Prelude*, Coleridge's *Biographia Literaria*, Kierkegaard's *Repetition* and *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, Whitman's *Leaves of Grass*, Melville's *Pierre*, Dickens's *Hard Times* and *Great Expectations*, Pater's *The Renaissance*, Dostoevsky's *The Idiot*, Twain's *Huckleberry Finn*, William James's *Varieties of Religious Experience*, Henry James's "The Beast in the Jungle," Veblen's *Theory of the Leisure Class*, D.H. Lawrence's *Women in Love*, and (the film) *Now Voyager*" (*Conditions Handsome and Unhandsome* 5).

Stein, therefore, can be included in Cavell's list of moral perfectionists who understand the human as being on a way up and onwards but not capable of achieving perfectibility. In addition to Stein, Perloff discusses Marinetti, Beckett, Thomas Bernhard and Ingeborg Bachmann, John Cage, Joseph Kosuth and a number of L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E poets. Berry also names Stein in his list of American writers under the influence of Wittgenstein. Moreover, he addresses the works of W. C. Williams, Guy Davenport, Ron Silliman and Rosemarie Waldrop, as well as, Paul Auster and David Markson. According to Berry, Auster is the most Wittgensteinian of these writers, because he shares Wittgenstein's diagnosis of the human being as living in a state of self-estrangement. Berry convincingly describes this condition:

Its principal manifestation is that we inhabit what's nearest--e.g., our native language, culture, body, thoughts, landscape, pains--as though we were aliens. We get entangled in our own rules, must be reminded of what we know, lose our way, bump our heads, stray into pointless subtleties, suffer invisible confinements, fall captive to our own pictures, labor under bogus requirements, etc. (6)

The account pictures our ignorance of our own deeds, of the agreement and consent according to which we live. We are unaware of our commitment to conventions, which is to say, that we obey them blindly. Our conformity turns our lives into that "blind-man's buff" of which Emerson speaks in "Self-Reliance." Berry continues by giving an overview of literary and philosophical reflections on alienation, most of the sources are taken from Cavell:

[...] earlier accounts of similar predicaments seem familiar enough. The Russian formalist Viktor Shklovsky calls it "automatization," a process by which "life fades into nothingness," an idea Shklovsky got from (among others) Tolstoy, whose ruling class Russians seemed continuously forgetful of what every peasant knew. Wordsworth called it "savage torpor"; Thoreau called it "quiet desperation." Nietzsche compared it to cows munching in a field, Heidegger to an anonymous "they." Probably its greatest expositor was Kierkegaard. (6)

In *A Cycle of Ethico-Religious Essays* Kierkegaard writes: "Most men live in relation to their own self as if they were constantly out, never at home [...] Spiritually and religiously understood, perdition consists in journeying into a foreign land, in being 'out.'" For Cavell, who quotes this passage in *This New Yet Unapproachable America* "perdition [...] is a way of saying: lost" (39). This loss or exile from oneself, thus, seems to be a permanent threat to the human whose dehumanization is pictured as a metamorphosis into "bugs" or "spawn" or even things, like "automatons," without a soul.

This "unhandsome condition," to use Emerson's expression, is also characterized as voicelessness. The human being who has lost his voice has ceased to speak politically and thereby has ceased to speak at all. He or she is caught in a state of Emersonian 'conformity': "What goes on inside us now is merely obedience to the law and voices of others" (*Conditions Handsome and Unhandsome* 45). Our own voice has ceased to exist which is tantamount to our own end of existence, or at least the end of being conscious of it. Cavell points out, that "[i]n Descartes, self-consciousness, in the form of thinking that I think, must prove my existence, human existence" (47). For Emerson then it seems that "we dare not (as if we are ashamed to) say 'I think,' 'I am,' as if barred from the saying of the cogito ergo sum, his implication is that we do not exist (as human), we as if haunt the world" (47). Emerson relates this "haunting" to "being ashamed". The cause for our being ashamed is our exaggerated conformity. As Cavell has it: "our conformity exhibits the fear of others' opinions, which Emerson puts as a fear of others' eyes, which claps us in a jail of shame." (47) The effect of dictation and conformity on human consciousness is impressively described in John Stuart Mill's *On Liberty*:

In our times, from the highest class of society down to the lowest, every one lives as under the eye of a hostile and dreaded censorship. [They] do not ask themselves what do I prefer? [...] or, what would allow the best and highest in me to have fair play, and enable it to grow and thrive? They ask themselves, [...] what is usually done by persons of my station and pecuniary circumstances? [...] I do not mean that they choose what is customary, in preference to what suits their own inclination. It does

not occur to them to have any inclination, except for what is customary [...] conformity is the first thing thought of; they like in crowds; they exercise choices only among things commonly done: peculiarity of taste, eccentricity of conduct, are shunned equally with crimes: until by dint of not following their own nature, they have no nature to follow: their human capacities are withered and starved: they become incapable of any strong wishes or native pleasures, and are generally without either opinions or feelings of home growth, or properly their own. Now is this, or is it not, the desirable condition of human nature (61-2) (quoted by Cavell in *Conditions Handsome and Unhandsome* 62-3)?

Cavell reads the concluding question as moral perfectionism's "cry for freedom": "Do you [...] under any circumstances, desire this censored condition of mankind" (*Conditions Handsome and Unhandsome* 63)? For the conforming human being, however, it is almost impossible to know its desires and needs. "It does not occur to them to have any desire." They seem to have forgotten that they have a choice or a right to their own decisions and judgments. As a consequence they have no feeling of responsibility whatsoever. Cavell's diagnosis of this state of voicelessness and dispossession goes as follows: "we do not give ourselves the moral law because we are already ashamed [...] as if we lack the right to be right. Again, it is not that we are ashamed of our immorality; we are exactly incapable of being ashamed of that; in that sense we are shameless" (48). It is exactly this failure to take personal responsibility for our lives which dehumanizes us and turns us into "bugs" or "automatons." "Our moralized shame is debarring us from the conditions of the moral life [...] from responding to our lives rather than bearing them dumbly or justifying them automatically" (48).

For Emerson, as for Kant, the state of debarment and embarrassment cannot be considered human because it lacks the quality of freedom which is constitutive for humanity. Freedom as understood by Kant, Rousseau, and Emerson is autonomy. Cavell elaborates on the philosophical idea of freedom:

Understanding Emersonian Perfectionism as an interpretation of Rousseau's and Kant's idea of freedom and autonomy means understanding it as questioning what or

who the self is that commands and obeys itself and what an obedience consists in that is inseparable from mastery. (30-1)

According to Rousseau, the individual who decides to become a member of society gives up its original freedom in order to obtain a second order freedom which is autonomy. The social contract in this way promises to hold the solution to the difficulty of society per se:

How to find a form of association which will defend the person and goods of each member with the collective force of all, and under which each individual, while uniting himself with the others, obeys no one but himself, and remains as free as before. (*The Social Contract* 60)

This ideal of society, however, remains utopia. In a society as described by Mill "we are not expressed in the laws we give ourselves, [...] the public does not exist, [...] the social will is partial (conspiratorial)" (*Conditions Handsome and Unhandsome* 31). For Rousseau, the quality of our imprisonment is only understandable if one keeps in mind that the human being is ontologically free. "Man was born free, and he is everywhere in chains" (*The Social Contract* 49). Our imprisonment, thus, consists in forgetting our right to autonomy and in not exercising it. As forced agreement is a contradiction in terms, existing societies with all their relative disadvantages "could not exist except with each individual's choosing not to exercise freedom for all (to make the will general)" (*The Senses of Walden* 87). In Cavell's view, "[t]he social contract is nowhere in existence, because we do not will it" (84).

For a person who fails to understand that the society he lives in is his own society for which he necessarily takes responsibility, his deeds are of no consequence, they do not matter. In *What Is Called Thinking?* Heidegger writes: "Most thought-provoking in our thought-provoking time is that we are still not thinking" (6). Cavell interprets this sentence as dissatisfaction with human indifference: "we are still not really provoked, [...] nothing serious matters to us, or nothing seriously, [...] our thoughts are unscrupulous, private" (*Conditions Handsome and Unhandsome* 37). According to Heidegger's view our life is

characterized by disinterestedness, lack of involvement and boredom. To start thinking would mean to regain an interest in one's life. Heidegger, like Wittgenstein attempts to explain this condition of remaining uninvolved and disinterested. He finds an answer in the attempt to speak outside language games, a "desire to make my desire inconsequential" which Cavell compares to Freud's death instinct. "The Investigation closes, roughly, with an investigation of interpretation (seeing as) in which the possibility is envisioned that we lose our attachment to, our desire in, our words, which again means losing a dimension of one's attachment to the human form of life, the life form of talkers" (*This New Yet Unapproachable America* 61). As an example for such an indifference to words, Wittgenstein imagines a tribe in which the words are shuffled daily in some systematic fashion. For the members of this tribe, however, it does not matter, and they show no attachment to their words.

Wittgenstein also describes them as 'soul-blind.' Moreover, such people are not able to appreciate poetry. They are not able to "experience the meaning of a word" (*Philosophical Investigations II XI 214e*). In their detachment from their words they eerily resemble machines. In order to get out of this dehumanized state, Wittgenstein asks us to stop and return. Like Heidegger he wants to interrupt our alienated way of thinking and initiate a new way of thinking. "Wittgenstein's picture of thinking is [according to Cavell] one of moving from being lost to oneself to finding one's way, a circumstance of spiritual disorder, a defeat not to be solved but to be undone" (*Conditions Handsome and Unhandsome* 21). In characterizing the problem as a spiritual struggle, Wittgenstein agrees with Kierkegaard who describes loss as perdition and spiritual darkness, which is in need of redemption in form of a turn (metanoia). Cavell compares this scene of loss to the eighth chapter of *Walden*, entitled "The Village": "Not till we are lost [or turned around], in other words not till we have lost the world, do we begin to find ourselves, and realize where we are and the infinite extent of our relations" (*This New Yet Unapproachable America* 36).

For Wittgenstein and Emerson, the incentive to turn and change is a feeling of moral disgust, a feeling of dissatisfaction with the present state of one's self. Wittgenstein "makes propaganda for a different style of thinking" because he is "honestly disgusted with" (*Lectures and Conversations* III 37) the present state. For Cavell, dissatisfaction with thinking can be discerned in "Western philosophy since the Enlightenment, a feeling of discontent vaguely and often impatiently associated [...] with an idea of Romanticism" (*Conditions Handsome and Unhandsome* 33). It is remarkable, however, that while sharing this dissatisfaction, Emerson is not opposed to the Enlightenment. On the contrary he claims: "I ask not for the great, the remote, the romantic [...] I embrace the common, I sit at the feet of the familiar, the low" (34). Emerson's embrace of the common is comparable to Wittgenstein's and Austin's fascination with ordinary language. "What we do is to bring words back from their metaphysical to their everyday use" (*Investigations* 116). To bring them back to the human form of life which is their original home is tantamount to a reinvestment. In a similar way, Emerson's view of thinking draws attention to "an attitude toward or investment in words [...] an attitude allegorical of an investment in our lives" (*Conditions Handsome and Unhandsome* 34). Emersonian thinking is a process which consists of transfiguration and conversion. Both are essential elements of Emersonian Moral Perfectionism which for Cavell can be described by two themes:

- (1) A hatred of moralism, of "conformity"
- (2) An expression of disgust with or disdain for the present state of things so complete as to require not merely reform, but a call for a transformation of things, and before all a transformation of the self (46).

The oppositional aspect of Emersonian thinking or conversion, is aversion. In his aversion Emerson is close to Heidegger who claims that thinking "is from the start tuned in a negative key" (*What Is Called Thinking?* 29) (quoted in *Conditions Handsome and Unhandsome* 36). To overcome the voicelessness of our alienated state, which is still in need of true thinking, the human being has to voice the call of freedom, to return to speaking politically.

"For Emerson [...] this requires a constitution of the public and at the same time an institution of the private, a new obligation to think for ourselves, to make ourselves intelligible, in every word. What goes on inside us now is merely obedience to the law and voices of others" (45). Emersonian aversion is a refusal of obedience, an attitude which can be compared to Thoreau's "civil-disobedience." In his aversion Emerson is countering conformity and dictation. The precondition of aversion is self-reliance, a return to one's true need, "let our needs recognize what they need. This is a reasonable sense of intelligence - not the sense of applying it but that of receiving it. The incentive of the world I think is [...] the world. Reason does not need to make anything happen" (20). "Aversive thinking", as Cavell refers to it, in his essay by the same name, therefore is a cessation of the mode of thinking which has been described as the unhandsome part of our condition, the human temptation to grasp and clutch objects. Emerson calls for an interruption of this condition, thus enabling us to receive the world. This would bring about the handsome part of our condition. It is tantamount to a return to reality for which we are craving. Berry describes this return to live as follows:

To recall us to our lives, Wittgenstein believed that his writing has to work on two levels. It must bring to consciousness the repressions and denials that prevent us from recognizing what's immediately before us ("We want to understand something that is already in plain view"), and it must do this within a context, where the significance of what's seen will be felt. (6)

This aim of feeling the significance is expressed by Cavell's view of responsibility as responsiveness. Self-knowledge can be brought about by responding to our lives and by acknowledgment rather than knowledge, if knowledge is prediction and control.

As an aid to reaching the denied or repressed self, Emerson develops the concept of the "unattained self." This unattained but attainable self is the true need to which the soul aspires. Emerson's self-reliance entails the reliance of the attained on the unattained/attainable self. Unless one manages this reliance one is "left in precisely the

negation of the position he calls for, left in conformity" (*Conditions Handsome and Unhandsome* 12). This suggestion of a return from self-denial, can be compared to coming home to oneself (13). In cheering up his reader to have the "courage to be what you are" Emerson prefigures Nietzsche who promises in the subtitle to *Ecce Homo* to teach us "how one becomes what one is" (16).

In *A Theory of Justice*, John Rawls criticizes Nietzsche's (and by extension Emerson's) perfectionism for being undemocratic and elitist. Cavell disagrees with this view of perfectionism. On the contrary, he finds "Emerson's version of perfectionism to be essential to the criticism of society from within" (3). Nietzsche's and Emerson's call for genius does not contain anything elitist, but genius is "already universally distributed" (49). Genius is "the capacity for self-criticism, the capacity to consecrate the attained to the unattained self, on the basis of the axiom that each [human being] is a moral person" (49). The perfectionist movement, its aspiring to the next self, is expressed in Nietzsche's call in *Schopenhauer as Educator*: "I see above me something higher and more human than I am; let everyone help me to attain it, as I will help everyone who knows and suffers as I do" (162) (quoted in *Conditions Handsome and Unhandsome* 51). For Cavell, this higher self "is my own, unsettlingly unattained" (51). To attain this self is of the highest moral urgency, it is not to be postponed: "It is today that you are to take the self on; today that you are to awaken" (56). This urgency is justified because in our present state of conformity we are incessantly wronging ourselves. "It makes [most men] not false in a few particulars, authors of a few lies, but false in all particulars [...] every word they say chagrins us" ("Self-Reliance" 144) (quoted in *Conditions Handsome and Unhandsome* 28). We have to bethink ourselves in order to stop this perpetuated state of injustice, "as if thinking is remembering something" (56).

Emerson's writing is meant to draw our attention to our rejected self. It builds a path to justice and in its cheering "keeps alive the democratic hope" (56). In this way, Emerson is a

representative, a delegate for humanity: "I will stand here for humanity' as if he is waiting for us to catch up or catch on" (58). He waits for us as a friend. This need for a friend on the way to the unattained self lies in our partiality. We are separated and looking for our other. Cavell, in this respect, stresses the "high role assigned in moral perfectionism to friendship and recalls Aristotle's speaking of a friend as 'another myself'" (59). The human partiality, which, according to Rousseau, is due to our not exercising the general will, for Emerson, is a "sign and incentive of my siding with the next or further self, which means siding against my attained perfection (or conformity), sidings which require the recognition of an other--the acknowledgment of a relationship--in which the sign is manifest" (31).

According to Cavell, the theme of befriending is particularly stressed in the originating instance of perfectionism: Plato's *Republic*. It there can be observed in a "mode of conversation between (older and younger) friends, one of whom is intellectually authoritative because his life is somehow exemplary or representative of a life the other(s) are attracted to" (6). Again, it is attraction, the handsome part of our condition, or Heidegger's feeling of "being drawn" which triggers a change. In its attraction to the life of the older friend, the "self recognizes itself as enchained, fixated, and feels itself removed from reality, whereupon the self finds that it can turn (convert, revolutionize itself) and a process of education is undertaken" (6-7). In Plato, as well as in both Emerson and Wittgenstein, this education is associated with an "upbuilding." Wittgenstein compares philosophy with architecture, as it consists in "working on oneself" (*Culture and Value* 16). For Emerson "men and women are to be upbuilded" (*This New Yet Unapproachable America* 9) from what are at the present state nothing more than "materials strewn." In his perfectionism, he wants to "attract the human [...] to the work of becoming human" (10). "[E]ach self is drawn on a journey of ascent to a further state of the self [...] it is a transformation of the self which finds expression in the imagination of a transformation of society" (*Conditions Handsome and Unhandsome* 6-7). The "upbringing" and transformation

of the self is, thus, thought to bring about the just society or the just city, envisioned in Plato's "city of words."

According to Cavell, a certain kind of writing, for instance, a poet's or a philosopher's writing, can be a medium for this befriending: "Each philosopher, each bard, each actor has only done for me, as by a delegate, what one day I can do for myself" (54). The kind of writing Cavell specifically has in mind is literature, because literature fulfills the requirement of achieving "an expression public enough to show its disdain for, its refusal to participate fully in, the shameful state of current society" (7), or as Bernstein has it, "poetry is a private act in a public place." In this way it is able to show society its shame; while, at the same time pronouncing "a promise of expression that can attract the good stranger to enter the precincts of its city of words." (7) Thus Gertrude Stein claimed to be writing for herself *and* strangers.

In Cavell's view, Plato demanded that poetry be banned from the just city, because he wanted philosophy to take on the role of poetry. Plato's philosophy competes with poetry, because it wants to claim for itself "the privilege of the work poetry does in making things happen to the soul" (7). In reminding us of our agreements, our attachment to words, literature is able to resuscitate the soul from its torpor.

The preoccupation in contemporary American literature with leading the human self back from its alienation and into a state of renewal, a return to life as Berry has it, is not only a Wittgensteinian but also an essentially American project. America is founded on the hope for a new human being in a new political community in a new world. For Emerson and Thoreau, however, this claim for renewal remains empty, if not cynical, in comparison to the actual life of American citizens of whom, according to Thoreau, "the majority are leading lives of quiet desperation" (*Walden* 111). Such lives seem to be a parody of America's high founding promises. The new America is still unrealized, it is "this new yet unapproachable

America," of which Emerson writes in "Experience." The following passage from Cavell's *The Senses of Walden* shows the discrepancy between the American promise and its actual reality:

Everyone is saying, and anyone can hear, that this is the new world; that we are the new men; that the earth is to be born again; that the past is to be cast off like a skin; that we must learn from children to see again; that every day is the first day of the world; that America is Eden. So how can a word get through whose burden is that we do not understand a word of all this? Or rather, that the way in which we understand it is insane, and we are trying again to buy and bully our way into heaven; that we have failed; that the present is a task and a discovery, not a period of America's privileged history; that we are not free, not whole and not new, and we know this and are on a downward path of despair because of it; and that for the child to grow he requires family and familiarity, but that for a grownup to grow he requires strangeness and transformation, i.e. birth (59-60)?

Images such as transformation, molting, dawning, birth, and awakening play a fundamental role in *Walden*. They are used to elucidate the progress towards a new state of the self. Thoreau's call for a new state, for transformation and birth reminds one of America's call for a new state which has never been realized. On the contrary, all hope for it seems to have been smothered leaving only despair. Like Emerson, Thoreau connects the question of a new society with the question of a new self. Emerson's next or unattained self, is roughly comparable to Thoreau's double. Thoreau pictures the self as consisting of two elements the indweller and the spectator. The latter is describes by him as a part of him and not part of him, because it is "sharing no experience [only] taking note of it" (*Walden* 205). It pictures the self's relationship to itself. According to Thoreau, each self has a double which is its impartial and detached observer. Because of its detachment, the spectator is able to obtain a view of the self's present state. Thoreau describes the self in its present state as the unconscious indweller and workman. It is not able to observe itself. If the two elements of the mind are unified the self is able to change and grow. Unity however does not consist in a fusion, but in "perpetual nextness." For Thoreau, integrity, is, therefore, an activity of neighboring or as Emerson has it: befriending. Doubleness or nextness is not to be overcome, but persists. For Emerson, as well as for Thoreau, there is no final state of the

self to be reached. Rather, every state is final and might be desirable for the self. The self might get attached to it and thereby inhibited in its further growth. In this way Emersonian perfectionism has nothing to do with perfectibility. The ability to neighbor oneself is a precondition for neighboring the world. Therefore, the proclamation of a new state or a landfall is not enough to found a nation. Every citizen has to find the repressed but potential new state in his or her own self, in order for a nation to be peopled.

The recovery of the repressed next self, also contains the recovery of our attachments to words. Thoreau's Americans do not understand a word because in their despair they gave up responsibility for their language. "Our faithlessness to our language repeats our faithlessness to all our shared commitments" (*The Senses of Walden* 66). According to Cavell, writing is Thoreau's way of overcoming this faithlessness to our form of life which is language:

Writing--heroic writing, the writing of a nation's scripture--must assume the conditions of language as such; re-experience, as it were, the fact that there is such a thing as language at all and assume responsibility for it--find a way to acknowledge it--until the nation is capable of serious speech again. Writing must assume responsibility, in particular, for three of the features of the language it lives upon: (1) that every mark of a language means something in the language, one thing rather than another; that a language is totally, systematically meaningful; (2) that words and their orderings are meant by human beings, that they contain (or conceal) their beliefs, express (or deny) their convictions; and (3) that the saying of something when and as it is said is as significant as the meaning and ordering of the words said. (33-4)

For Cavell, *Walden* seems to supply a kind of information which is necessary for the Americans, in order that they can respond to the new America's appeal:

[...] an appeal to the people will go unheard as long as they do not know who they are, and labor under a mistake, and cannot locate where they live and what they live for. Nothing less than *Walden* could carry that load of information. (85)

The attitude towards words which is displayed in *Walden* returns the despairing and disoriented reader to his commitment to a community of language, triggering an awareness

which resuscitates the reader's repressed self-consciousness. What is repressed, can also be described as the capacity for self-criticism which for Emerson is nothing else than genius. The impartial spectator therefore stands for the passive rather than active side of human character. It is the human being's capacity for reflection. The writer helps to draw the reader's attention to the double by "enacting a provisional, external version of the double" (Mulhall). In Emerson's or Plato's terminology, he takes on the role of the older friend. The reader, or the younger friend, however, has to remain detached in order not to succumb to idolatry. The friend or Exemplar is nothing more than a help for the reader to reach a potential which is essentially his or her own.

In his reading of Emerson's "Experience," Cavell focuses on two issues which are related to our inability to reach the next self and, accordingly, our inability to approach a new America. Cavell draws attention to Emerson's sentence "I cannot get it nearer" which appears in the context of mourning the death of his son. For Cavell, the inability to get it nearer leaves a direction open and opens up the possibility of indirection. Indirection is part of Emerson's idea of our handsome condition. I cannot grasp it, draw it towards me, but *it* can approach me, and attract me. America in this way cannot be approached, its becoming depends on the revival of our handsome condition. It can only come about if we bethink ourselves, take responsibility for our agreement and alignment with others, and become aware of our nextness to our self and the nextness to others: "I cannot approach it alone; the eventual human community is between us, or nowhere" (*This New Yet Unapproachable America* 108). Cavell also understands Columbus's discovery of America as a process of indirection, looking for the East and finding the West.

In addition to indirection he ponders the concept of succession, another term transfigured by Emerson. Succession is related to the idea of indirection. Our concept of succession is influenced by the idea of a series which is calculable and predictable by formula. It

corresponds to philosophy's old claim to provide foundations. In his discussion of succession, Cavell challenges this claim and suggests that to turn away from it might lead us onto another step of perfectionism's ladder: "on another step we may feel this idea of (lack of) foundation to be impertinent, an old thought for an old world" (109). Instead of looking for foundations we find ourselves engaged in a series of which we do not know the extremes. Emerson, reinventing the nature of the quest, replaces founding with finding. Such a view also conforms to a conception of the self's activity of integrity which is not determined, but is instead continuously deciding anew how to go on. Succession in this new sense is like a series without beginning or end, even without direction. It makes it conceivable to find the journey's end at each step of the road, an idea which for Emerson expresses a definition of wisdom. It foreshadows Wittgenstein's ideal for philosophy: to be able to end one's investigation wherever one finds oneself. As this kind of succession is spontaneous and therefore cannot be predicted, it predicates receptivity. Indirection "is precisely the direction of reception, of being approached, the attractive, handsome part of our condition" (109). Such a new mode of thinking would allow us to experience an America which is "already there (always already)" (91) and which is in this sense unapproachable.

[I]ts presence to us is unapproachable, both because there is nowhere else to go find it, we have to turn toward it, reverse ourselves; and because we do not know if our presence to it is peopling it. 'Repeopling the woods' is a way Thoreau names his task as a writer" (92-3).

In this way, literature (aspiring to philosophy) and philosophy (aspiring to literature) become a shared manner of thinking that promises to make us human again, to "lead us from, or break us of, our shameful condition;" (*Conditions Handsome and Unhandsome* 62) a new mode of thinking that has a fundamental political function and "presents itself as a (an untaken) way" (62). Cavell comments on this new way of thinking: "I assume what will

become 'philosophy itself' may not be distinguishable from literature - that is to say, from what literature will become" (62).

## II. 2 The Politics of Poetic Form

As for Cavell, for the L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E poets the investigation of language and its knowledge constitutive function has an essentially political dimension. In his *My Way* whose title alludes to "the urgency to think for oneself, to make oneself intelligible, in every word," (*Conditions Handsome and Unhandsome* 45) Bernstein comments on the intertwining of aesthetics and politics:

If I speak of a "politics of poetry", it is to address the politics of poetic form not the efficacy of poetic content. Poetry can interrogate how language constitutes, rather than simply reflects, social meaning and values. (4)

The political potential of poetry is a recurring theme in Bernstein's work. In the introduction to *The Politics of Poetic Form*, a collection of essays which Bernstein edited, he describes the contributions as a continuation of a dialogue on politics and poetry begun in the magazine L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E and places the project in an even larger context of poetry and public policy:

In these essays, the poets assembled extend Shelley's dictum that poets are the unacknowledged legislators of the world and George Oppen's revision: that poets are the legislators of the unacknowledged world. (vii)

In this passage we find two important aspects of poetry's political function. First, the idea of the poet as unacknowledged legislators seems to suggest that the society he or she speaks for is a society which is freely willed and in which membership is "elicited rather than compelled from each individual." (Mulhall 29) Poetry is free of coercive force or as Bernstein has it, the poet is an "epistemologist without portfolio." Second, poetry tries to enact worlds which are attainable but which at the present state are still not realized or acknowledged, "unknown but not unknowable."

Poetry as epistemological inquiry, is a pertinent arena for the exploration of "basic questions about political thought and action" (vii), because it acknowledges the fact that "style and form are as ideological as content and interpretation." The critical potential of poetry, its ability to "critique itself" (*Content's Dream* 370) predestines it for the investigation of public policy. Poetic thinking, in Bernstein's sense, is pervaded by a passion for method. This passion is needed for political education which is, on the one hand, epistemological in its questioning of assumptions and, on the other hand, political in relating the knowledge of oneself to the knowledge of one's membership in a society.

The repression of such knowledge or the fostering of ignorance by an ideological system entails a spiritual numbness, a state of consciousness which is described by Emerson as 'silent melancholia' and by Thoreau as 'quiet desperation.' Bernstein who has inherited the philosophy of Emerson and Thoreau, is equally aware of the alienating and numbing effects of conformity. In *Three or Four Things I Know About Him*, he depicts the consequences of rigidified conventions on human consciousness. The piece mimics the rhythm of spontaneous talk, with blank spaces suggesting pauses in speech. It is a reflection on human action and interaction in a public situation, such as, the work place. Both forms of expression of human life, however, are completely withered:

	its like living death	going to work	
every day	sort of like being in a tomb		to sit
in your office (13)			

The bracketing or censoring of one's own thoughts in the work situation seems to take away the responsibility for one's deeds. It puts people into a state of consciousness in which they assume the attitude:

	that somehow they could do whatever it is	
they had to do	during the day	they could be
managers	they could be bosses	they could order

people around            let the women answer the phones  
                                  and criticize me for typing            they could basically  
 serve this large corporation            to the best of their ability  
 to serve it            and to further its particular interests  
                                  this was actually a nonprofit corporation  
 and then sort of go out at lunch or            on the side  
                                  and on a personal level say to you            that really  
                                  who they were at the job            the way they  
 behaved at the job            what they did all day  
                                  was not them            that the real them            the  
 real person            was            somebody different            who  
 went home at night and had liberal values            was  
 critical of what the company was doing            what the  
 job was making them do            that they really weren't  
 what they did at the job            they were somebody else (16-7)

The demands of capitalist society thus seem to provoke a form of self-alienation which gives the impression that the self is excluded from public action and restricted to the realm of private thought. What one does at the job in this way appears to be nothing more than a role one plays which has nothing to do with one's real person. Such an attitude towards one's public life encourages a "tremendously distorted notion" (17) of the self in suggesting that what a person really is is "this private thing that doesn't really do anything [,] this sort of neutral gear" (17). It leads to the delusion that one's public actions are inconsequential and that the only thing that counts is the private self which cannot be touched by society. The former aspect deprives the human being of a sense of responsibility and the latter renders this state desirable. Moreover, it prevents an understanding of the self in which knowledge of the self is intimately related to the knowledge of one's membership of a society. The idea of the private self as the real self makes it impossible to see "that you are what you do / that insofar as the self is anything its how it acts in a social situation" (17). In this way, the image of the 'neutral gear self' as the real self is "a picture which holds us captive," as Wittgenstein has it, and which blocks us from a pertinent understanding of the self. Bernstein's image of the 'neutral gear self' is reminiscent of Wittgenstein's remark about philosophical confusions which "arise when language is like an engine idling, not when it is doing work" (*Philosophical Investigations* 132). This is to say, "an inner process" of the self "requires outward criteria." The search for the self as an inner object which is separable from

public manifestations is usually misleading. Wittgenstein accordingly recommends:

"Always get rid of the idea of the private object in this way; assume that it constantly changes, but that you do not notice the change because your memory constantly deceives you" (*Investigations* II XI 207e). In a similar way, he compares the idea of a private self to a beetle in a box:

Suppose everyone had a box with something in it: we call it a 'beetle'. No one can look into anyone else's box. The thing in the box has no place in the language-game at all; not even as a something; for the box might even be empty.--No, one can 'divide through' by the thing in the box; it cancels out, whatever it is (293).

When we speak of the self, we do not refer to a mysterious thing in the box. Rather, one could ask "what else is a person [,] anyway [,] / but a signifier of responsibility for a series of actions." As the private self does not act at all, but remains in neutral gear, one is led to the frightening conclusion that the self does not exist. If we invest everything in the thing in the box we might end up with a "tremendous vacancy of person" which also entails a "lack of connection" between people:

because if people dont really think they are being  
 them all day long in their suits and shaved faces  
 and their very reduced mild language and  
 their reduced middle of the road opinions which  
 they feel is the safest way then theres no way to  
 get a connection with anybody everything is just so  
 neutralized that you can work in a place for years  
 and years and really feel no no clicking with  
 anybody else no contact with anybody there  
 you can go out to lunch at the same time as  
 if with ghosts (*Content's Dream* 18)

Here one is reminded of Emerson's comparison of the Americans with ghosts who are afraid to say "I am" or to show their existence to others but instead "clap themselves in a jail of shame." For Bernstein, as for Emerson, it is the poet's duty to trigger awareness of our distorted condition, to draw our attention to the discrepancy between our beliefs and our

actions. In this respect Bernstein agrees with Wittgenstein's view that the human being's true beliefs show themselves in his or her actions, including speech acts:

there is no escape from what  
 you do                   and even if you feel you dont mean what you  
 do           dont mean what you say                   dont mean the way  
 you dress                   dont mean the kind of business letter  
 language you use                   dont mean the division of labor  
 you go along with                   or that you institute  
                   dont mean the kind of attitudes you have competitively  
 toward your coworkers                   dismissingly to the  
 secretaries                   that one does mean these things whether  
 one wants to or not                   that they can be taken to be  
 intentional                   to be you                   are you                   who  
 you are                   and they can be read as being you (18)

The behavior described in this passage recalls Wittgenstein's agreement in judgments which is an agreement in form of life and thus displays our consent to society. To "go along with" it without meaning it, is not a withdrawal from consent but mere ignorance.

*Three or Four Things I Know About Him* exposes the social grammar according to which we act. It has a political function because it draws the reader's attention to the content of his or her consent. It works against self-alienation in demonstrating that what one is, is inseparable from what one does. This conforms to Wittgenstein's view that the human soul is not to be found in some hidden inner realm, but rather that the human body and its actions are the field of expression of the soul. These can be read as expressing the soul: "they can be read as being you." That we don't mean what we do or say at work does not make these expressions inconsequential, but shows that the formations of capitalism have taken "over our form of life (see *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* and *Dawn of the Dead* for two recent views at this)" (59).

Cavell's question: 'Must we mean what we say?,' which gives the title to one of his books, is not just a philosophical but also an ethical and political question. It recalls his claim that

someone who refuses to speak politically and, thus, refuses to mean what he says, does not speak privately, but is not speaking at all, is voiceless. *Three or Four Things I Know About Him* can be read as a reflection on the self and the self's voice which also draws attention to misleading assumptions about the self. In an interview with Tom Beckett, Bernstein expresses his interest in the notion of the self: "What a person is is certainly a theme throughout my work" (409). He is, however, cautious not to be trapped in any received notions of person, voice, and self. His attempts to find a voice are not to be understood in an autobiographical sense: "I'm not interested in myself--in recounting facts and observations about that." (394) What is at stake are the conditions of selfhood:

how the self gets formulated as an article of socialization seems to me insufficiently explored. So I'm interested in the situation - the ontology - of the person in the world and what constitutes that. How the self in circumstance is inseparable from it, that is, not an independent actor. (394)

What makes up a person is dependent on the historical and social circumstances and the self's relation to these circumstances.

As *Three or Four Things I Know About Him* shows, an exaggerated demand of conformity can cause people to give up their public self and retreat into a sort of inner sanctuary in which the self loses its capacity to express itself and withers, unable to know even three or four things about itself. Rather than looking for the self in an autobiographical investigation which is prone to be as misleading as it is uncritical of received or romantic notions of self and voice, Bernstein approaches the self, and self-knowledge through an epistemological investigation:

The question that always interested me was how could language be made more conscious of itself, a question of the making audible of knowledge otherwise unreflected or unconscious. This making audible being the music of the poem. (409)

In many contexts in which Bernstein talks about finding the measure or the limit, it seems as if his use of the term "measure" corresponds with Cavell's use of the term "voice." Bernstein wants to draw attention to "voice" in the sense of "mutual voicing" which is a metaphor for human agreement. His investigation is an investigation of our human common ground.

In *Three or Four Things I Know About Him* the knowledge of our commonness is completely suppressed. In spite of working together for years, the people at the job have no connection to each other. They are as alienated from their co-workers, as they are alienated from themselves. A human being whose individuality is suppressed, appears to be in trance, the standards and formations of language according to which it thinks and lives take over its form of life.

[A]s by posthypnotic suggestion we find ourselves in the grip of--living out--feeling--the attitudes programmed into us by the phrases, &c, and their sequencing, that are continually repeated to us--language control=thought control=reality control. (60)

This diagnosis recalls J.S. Mill's description of the devastating consequences of conformity on human consciousness and shows that the fixation of conventions and habitual patterns, their erection into an absolute, remains a standing threat to humanity:

by constant reinforcement we are no longer aware that decisions are being made, our base level is then an already preconditioned world view which this deformed language "repeats to us inexorably" but not necessarily (60).

For Bernstein, as for Mill, we live as if under "a hostile and dreaded censorship" (*On Liberty* 61). Which is to say, we do not ask ourselves "what do I prefer?" (61) we do not make conscious decisions but "are no longer aware that decisions are being made" (*Content's Dream* 60). Bernstein explores this dream-like state of consciousness in the first piece of his poetry volume *Controlling Interests*:

A poem like "Matters of Policy" is exactly about this process, how conventions and language itself induce trances under which we glide as if in automatic pilot. And how we live in this spellbound way (*Content's Dream* 391).

The human being in the state of conformity and automatization loses contact with his individual needs and gives up idiosyncrasies of speech and action. Action, that is, turns into behavior.

For Bernstein the spreading loss of autonomy is furthered by such technical developments as the word processor. Spelling and grammar searches are "eroding both conscious and unconscious participation by users in determining language forms" (356). Such developments go along with a tendency toward simplification which can be observed in capitalist society in general. Especially for the media, which make up a large part of public discourse, every message has to be simple and easily digestible. For Bernstein this is a kind of domestication of culture which directly (and ironically) contradicts Emerson's call for the domestication of culture in "Experience." For Emerson, as well as Wittgenstein, domestication is tantamount to a return to the human form of life, to the coming home from an estranged use of language: "'What we do is to bring our words back'--to make our experiences visible, or again: to see the conditions of experience" (59). In contrast,

The current plethora of word processor ideology is the latest attempt to domesticate writing--not in order to inhabit it but to trivialize it. The word processor has about as much chance of instructing us about the nature of writing as the threshing machine had to instruct us about the nature of the soil. The analogy is specific: for the relation of soil to vegetation is comparable to the relation of writing to human consciousness. (355)

This suggests that the standardization enforced by 'word processor ideology' separates language from human consciousness, that is, separates the product of production from the source of production, the vegetation from the soil. Mill uses a similar image depicting the separation of vegetation from soil, by speaking of "opinions or feelings of home growth" (62) which are missing in the conforming human being. Language and the public it produces,

originally is a product of human hands. In the grip of standardization, it is taken out of the hands of human beings and put into the service of ideology. As a result, we forget the "bodily rootedness of language."

[L]anguage is a living necessity making place and time in the only world in which any of us lives for any lifetime. We are confronted by language as much as confront with it; its shapes arise from the way we handle that which occurs. (*Content's Dream* 335)

If the vitality of language is lost or falls into oblivion, it is necessary to recall the idea of the social contract and the role poetry can play in political education.

Bernstein is aware of the seeming irrelevance of poetry for society in our times but nevertheless insists on its importance:

Don't get me wrong: I know it's almost a joke to speak of poetry and national affairs. Yet in *The Social Contract* Rousseau writes that since our conventions are provisional, the public may choose to reconvene in order to withdraw authority from those conventions that no longer serve our purposes. Poetry is one of the few areas where this right of reconvening is exercised. (*A Poetics* 225)

As the prior investigation has shown, the appeal to the social contract is a way of distinguishing true and false necessities: what has to be taken as given and what can be changed if it turns out to produce injustice. Moreover, such an appeal provokes reflection about the nature of convention and authority. Above all, in such an investigation, it is important to be able to differentiate:

I do not think that all conventions are pernicious or that all authority is corrupt. But I do think it is essential to trace how some uses of convention and authority can hide the fact that both are historical constructions rather than sovereign principles. [...] For convention and authority can, and ought, serve at the will of the polis and not by the divine right of kings or the economic might of Capital. (222-223)

Bernstein argues that the usurpation of language by the capitalist system has led to a reduction of the possibilities of language. The formerly living language now consists of stale formulas which incessantly repeat the same preconditioned ideas. Being "emptied of specific, socially refractory content" it can now "be easily and widely disseminated; but this is a dissemination without seed" (224). Bernstein's comparison of language in the state of exhaustion with refined food is reminiscent of Wittgenstein's idea that a lot of philosophical diseases are caused by a one-sided diet. He regards the ideological programming in capitalist society as a similar form of one-sided diet, which has detrimental effects on the human spirit and turns people into conditioned animals. Communication, then:

[I]s not communicative action but communication behavior: one speaks less to particular individuals than to those aspects of their consciousness that have been programmed to receive the already digested scenes or commentaries provided. (224)

Bernstein sees the restriction of linguistic possibilities as an "arteriosclerosis of language." Moreover, he uses Wittgenstein's image of language as a city (Cf. *Philosophical Investigations* 18), and compares the standardization of language with a restriction of the infrastructure of a city to "only the straight rows." Such a reduction of language has clear implications for experience:

Any limits put on language proscribe the limits of what will be experienced, and, as Wittgenstein remarks, the world can easily be reduced to only the straight rows of the avenues of the industrial district, with no place for the crooked winding streets of the old city. (*Content's Dream* 59)

Certainly, the old city of language can be suffocated and stifled, but not fully destroyed. As Bernstein has it in "Matters of Policy," it breaks through the cracks of the cement, like a repressed desire: "the new lights & new gaiety masking the utterly out-of-mind presence of the ancient city's darker history" (*Controlling Interests* 7). In Bernstein's view, the dark or the obscure, that which cannot be comprehended at first sight, tends to be rejected in the name of clarity.

We censure the unknown because it has not always/already been understood, and we call this communication, clarity, expression, content. But only when the taboos against incomprehensibility are transgressed does it become apparent that there is an excess of meaning in the cracks we have spent our days sanding down and sealing over. (*A Poetics* 183)

Bernstein opts for a different kind of clarity, a clarity akin to that that Wittgenstein proposes in his notion of 'perspicuous representation.' It is a method of philosophizing which is non-violent, because it 'leaves everything as it is.' Accordingly, it is skeptical towards generalizing tendencies and tries to do justice to the complexity of phenomena. Instead of generalizing it tries to differentiate. Wittgenstein, accordingly, considered taking a sentence from *King Lear* (another work of perfectionism) as a motto for the *Investigations*: "I want to teach you differences." His method, which aspires to literature, for Bernstein can be brought to fruition in poetry.

that might be [the] poem's dream; that we be content to allow for difference ("content as stubble at the eventide"), to accept that we cannot always or immediately understand what other people say and that those gaps speak as resonantly as--more resonantly than--any message extracted. (192)

Poetic thinking interrupts the violence of technorationality which aims at control, prediction and certainty of knowledge: "poetry can be the *censer* of these spirits from the unknown, untried, unconsidered - really just unacknowledged - that now, as if they always had, bloom in vividness" (183). It

challenge[s] such self-censoring (& censoring) mechanisms: that is, articulate[s] that which is repressed not only by the individual psyche but also by the *socius* (collectively), a censoring that is encoded into the grammar of all our signification systems (182-3).

For Bernstein, all writing is composition, which is to say the poetic cannot be reduced to literature, "but not all writing acknowledges its conditionality" (*Content's Dreams* 398).

Poetic thinking, by contrast, refuses to make compositional and prosodic questions

secondary to 'content'" (401). In this way poetic thinking is able to critique dominant language practices, which is a precondition for understanding "how and why technologies are harnessed for social control" (357). Only if such a critical insight is achieved "can it begin to be possible to change these uses and put the technologies in the service of positive social transformations" (357).

A reading of Rousseau's 'consent' as 'agreement in judgments,' elucidates how our consent informs our judgments and attitudes toward the world at a deeper level than we might have thought. Poetry turns out to be able to fulfill the political work of exposing the extent of our consent to our society. This is possible, because it directly engages the realm of the aesthetic and, in this way, "creat[es] the focus that generates" (396). Such a focus on composition is related to what Bernstein refers to as a sensibility for the contemporary.

... in its counterconventional investigations, poetry engages public language at its roots, in that it tests the limits of conventionality while forging alternate conventions. Moreover, the contained scale of such poetic engagements allows for a more comprehensive understanding of the formation of public space: of polis. (*A Poetics* 219)

Although, poetic thinking is counterconventional and initially entails a form of dissent, its withdrawal of consent does not consist in what Bernstein calls "far-outness." It does not remain in a "gesturalizing of nonconformity or anticonventionality" demonstrated by a "formal rejection of literary conventions or a theatrical rejection of bourgeois lifestyles" (*Content's Dream* 395). On the contrary, "a positively constituting poetry [...] is not essentially reactive but generative" (395). It does not withdraw from society by rejecting all of its conventions. It rather draws deeper into the process of conventionalizing. According to Bernstein, "dominant conventions are hardly the only conventions with authority, and refusing the authority of particular conventions does not, in any sense, put one outside conventionality" (*A Poetics* 219). In the same way, "[Stein] wasn't being *antigrammatical* she was discovering what the grammars of our language are by making them." (*Content's Dream*

396) The counterconventional investigation that poetry can achieve is, therefore, not to be described as "far-outness" but as "far-inness."

In his or her dissent the poet shows an awareness of her right of autonomy which is a constitutive feature of the human. This act of resistance recalls Rousseau's opening line in *The Social Contract*: "Man was born free, and he is everywhere in chains" (49). Alluding to this phrase, Bernstein writes about his poetry: "Verse is born free but everywhere in chains. It has been my project to rattle the chains. That's one way to approach my prosody, or perhaps not prosody but prosody-making arguments." (*My Way* 11) In his reformulation of Rousseau's opening line, Bernstein acknowledges the human condition, the fact that we are living beings whose form of life is language. He does not attempt to break or blow up the chains of language, but accepts them as true necessity, a necessity, however, which is a "living necessity" (*Content's Dream* 335) not one to be entombed. Accordingly, "we are limited to language but not by it." The "rattling of the chains" is an attempt to make the language, our condition, audible.

The project of "rattling the chains" draws attention to the fact that all language and all writing occurs in modes, but that there is no natural mode. Bernstein elaborates on this issue in his piece of composition centered philosophy "Stray Straws and Straw Men." It is part of the collection *Content's Dream*. The piece is made up of eighteen numbered paragraphs, and gives an account of his poetics in a non-expository way. The 'stray straws' from the title seem to allude to Emerson's 'materials strewn' from which the human is to be recreated, ". . . but what the devil is the human" (43)? It seems as if we don't know that from the start, and the danger to be trapped in received stereotypes is always there. According to Bernstein, the poet is entitled to be the "technician of the human" (43). The word technician points to the fact that all modes of writing are artificial and that art is technique. In this way, only the poet as technician, who is aware of the conditionality of

language, and, who does not assume a natural mode, might avoid ending up with just another 'straw man' instead of the human. Wittgenstein describes a similar failed attempt at characterizing the human. Its outcome is not a living being but a lifeless piece of wood. However, as we have said, the human being under the censorship of conformity is in a state of living death already. The poem offers a way out of this deformed state of the actual self into the state of the eventual self, or as Emerson has it, into the next state of the self.

Bernstein, accordingly, writes about the poem:

A sign of the particularity of a piece of writing is that it contains itself, has established its own place, situates itself next to us. It reveals the conditions of its occurrence at the same time as it is experienced. So I don't feel a part of it as much as facing it (*Content's Dream* 43).

The poem, in this way, displays the state of the self while enabling the reader to perceive the conditions of its experience of it; which is to say, it puts the reader in the position of Thoreau's detached spectator. The spectator, that is, the double, is able to observe the production of the workman. In the ninth paragraph, Bernstein quotes Thoreau's description of besideness in *Walden*:

"Next to us the grandest laws are continually being executed. Next to us is not the workman whom we have hired, with whom we love so well to talk, but the Workman whose work we are" (*Walden* 204) (43).

Thus, in reading or writing poetry, it is possible to reach Thoreau's state of besideness, of ecstasy, which is a state of standing next to one self in a sane way. Cavell elaborates on the idea of besideness in a passage which is quoted by Bernstein in *Content's Dream*:

To suggest that one may stand there, stay there in a sane sense, is to suggest that the [being beside oneself] of which ecstasy speaks is my experience of my existence, my knowledge 'of myself as a human entity' . . . (175)

A similar thought is expressed in the text "A Particular Thing" which reads like a footnote to "Stray Straws and Straw Men," a footnote placed behind the expression: "the particularity of a piece of writing." It serves as further explanation of the particular potential of the poem to let the self experience itself by becoming aware of its conditions:

So a poem as discrete field of meaning, trying not to echo externally explicated grammars but rather to discover (come upon) the limits that make up meaning, which is the human; that is, the grammar that is shared, lived within (*Content's Dream* 52).

Poetry would then offer a chance to return to one's humanness. It would offer a way of experiencing our form of life, in exposing our "particular constellation of beliefs, values, memories, expectations; a culture; a way of seeing, mythography; language" (43). The poem allows to observe oneself in one's absorption in a world view. It allows one to regard one's self from the outside, a world, of which at the same time one is fully inside: "for what is beside us is also ourselves. At the same time in & beside" (43). Becoming aware of one's present state, is the first step on the road to the next self.

The poem, however, is not only a path to the *human* in its eventual state but at the same time, a depiction of the eventual state of *society*. In fact, the individual and his or her society are inextricably intertwined. A "particular piece of writing [...] establishes its own place" (43), and in this way contributes to the constitution of public space, the construction of *polis*. The fact, that, Bernstein titled his 2000 collection of poems *Republics of Reality*, accounts for the idea that poems can be looked at as participating in the effort to create that "virtual republic that we aspire to, all the more, knowing it unattainable," (*My Way* 310) as Bernstein has it in an essay with the telling title "Warning-Poetry Area: Publics under Construction."

Poetry's epistemological inquiry, therefore, has a clear political function. Bernstein disagrees with Eagleton who argues that "literature has ceased to have much practical function at all"

(*Content's Dream* 378). On the contrary, "[o]ne practical function of literature, though not a deliteraturized writing, is the continual formation of utopian content, either as story, in Fredric Jameson's sense, or as textuality" (378). This is also the way to understand the title *Content's Dream*. The dream of content is the aspiration to the eventual, or utopian, content which could be the next state of the self and society. Accordingly, Bernstein suggests to

reinterpret Pound's remark that poets are the antennae of the race to mean ideas embodied as poetry construct a new polis in the site of the old: no longer postponed, enacted. Then poetry's pealing would be a toll from that "other" world calling for its truth to be established in *this* one. (379)

The toll reminds one of the measure which is found in poetry and which makes the music of the poem. It reminds the self-alienated human of its true need, of the possibility for growth and change, which is possible with help of the double. The double can give the orientation the workman is lacking. Poetry, in this way, has the power to appeal to the element of the self which is the spectator, the capacity for self-criticism, that is, genius. It "provid[es] a necessary corrective" (379).

The other world from which poetry's pealing (or appealing) is a toll, or of which it tells might already be there, waiting for us to acknowledge it.

A task of poetry is to make audible (tangible but not necessarily graspable) those dimensions of the real that cannot be heard as much as to imagine new reals that have never before existed. Perhaps this amounts to the same thing. (*A Poetics* 184)

That poetry is not interested in making the unapproachable graspable, accounts for its non-violent mode of thinking, or as Emerson has it, its handsome condition. In fact, the New America is not approachable but can only be received. We can be approached by it. For this to happen, it requires a new mode of knowing, that is, listening. Poetry listens to the world nobody listens to. This is a meaning of Jack Spicer's observation: "Nobody listens to poetry."

For Bernstein, however, it does not matter how many people are listening to the pealing of poetry:

Poets don't have to be read, any more than trees have to be sat under, to transform poisonous societal emissions into something that can be breathed. As a poet you affect the public sphere with each reader, with the fact of the poem, and by exercising your prerogative to choose what collective forms you will legitimate. The political power of poetry is not measured in numbers; it instructs us to count differently (226).

This defense of poetry elucidates that it does not need a mass of people to change the course of society; a single individual can make a difference. Bernstein stresses the role of the individual, "in resisting the 'collective imperative,' in Roland Barthes's phrase, of gregariousness" (180). He reclaims the ideal of the social contract, according to which the society has to protect the autonomy of each of its members. Thoreau in *Civil Disobedience* also expresses this conviction. For him, "to be strictly just, [the authority of government] must have the sanction and consent of the governed. It can have no pure right over my person and property but what I concede to it." Thoreau stresses the importance of "a true respect for the individual" (103). In this way he returns an authority to the individual which is at risk of being forgotten in a democracy with majority rule. Ethics and aesthetics are realms in which the authority of the single human being is acknowledged. For Wittgenstein, the individual has the final say in aesthetic judgment. The loss of faith in the individual is expressed by Bernstein's phrase: "ethics and aesthetics are incredibly out there." The role of the individual, however, is of the greatest importance, or as Thoreau puts it: "any man more right than his neighbor constitutes a majority of one already" (92). His *Civil Disobedience* is filled with a trust in the power of the 'honest man,' a confidence, or form of Emersonian optimism, which also pervades the work of Bernstein:

I know this well, that if one thousand, if one hundred, if ten men whom I could name, --if ten *honest* men only, --ay, if *one* HONEST man, in this State of Massachusetts, *ceasing to hold slaves*, were actually to withdraw from this copartnership, and be locked

up in the country jail, therefor, it would be the abolition of slavery in America. For it matters not how small the beginning may seem to be: what is once well done is done forever. (Thoreau 93)

Thoreau, and Bernstein in the tradition of Thoreau, encourage us to leave our state of lethargy, which seems to be caused by an exaggerated belief in the right of majority. They try to alter the attitude which holds us in a state of inertia. Such a change of attitude (change of aspect) can be accomplished by showing that our view of the world is due to a confused understanding of the meaning of 'majority.' Bernstein, for instance, suggests the view that a majority is nothing more than a minority with an armed force, and recommends to read all writing "but especially official or dominant forms of writing, as in part 'minority' discourse in order to partialize those cultural and stylistic elements that are hegemonic" (*A Poetics* 227). Such a manner of looking at different forms of discourse allows to give all modes of writing equal authority. In this way it becomes comprehensible that what makes action impossible for us, is not a necessity but is rather the result of an ideological construction which supports a concept of majority that gives it an "authoritativeness" that leads to a suppression of individual interests. The treatment of our deluded conception of 'majority,' is comparable to Wittgenstein's treatment of a philosophical confusion in which he wants to show the fly the way out of the flybottle. Thus, the problem we are dealing with is not a factual one but a conceptual one. As such, it cannot be solved by arguments but requires a "leap of faith" (183). Bernstein comments on the powerful effect of this leap of faith:

I'm always amazed at just how much any action can accomplish--doing what you've been told, or told yourself, can't be done. Acting in the face of disinterest or rejection and at the risk of incomprehensibility. Speaking out rather than censuring yourself out of the conviction that no one, or not enough people, are listening, or the occasion's not right. (182)

Still the idealism expressed by Bernstein, Wittgenstein and Thoreau, remains contestable.

As it requires faith, it cannot be justified, and in the eye of the unconvinced spectator, the

struggle for faith in justice might look like a futile, even tragi-comical undertaking. "In Matters of Policy" Bernstein reflects on this possibility:

"If the  
great things of religion are rightly understood,  
they will affect the heart." Still, what an absurd  
figure a poor weak man makes who in  
a thunder storm goes against the flashes of  
lightning with sword in hand. "No vision of  
loveliness could have touched me as deeply  
as this sad sight." (*Controlling Interests* 3)

The first sentence alludes to Cavell's characterization of poetry, its power to make things happen to the soul; the context of religion stresses the spiritual potential of poetry. However, for a person not ready to get involved, the whole endeavor might look absurd. Furthermore, the picture of a man in a thunderstorm is reminiscent of Bernstein's interpretation of Wittgenstein's remark to his sister Hermine. For a person not willing to consider the possibilities offered in poetry, or someone not realizing that he or she can swim, the whole undertaking makes no sense. Such a hesitant reader remains behind the window and the movements of the passerby seem to him strange and unbalanced.

Poetry, however, never gives up on its project to engage the reader in participation. As Bernstein argues in "Blood on the Cutting Room Floor," the poem functions as a structural allegory for the relation of the individual part to the whole. As in an ideal society, it fully acknowledges the specificity of each part or member: the parts are more than the sum of the whole. As mentioned before, the power of the individual to resist the "collective imperative" is fully acknowledged in poetry and cannot be "collectivized without losing its most powerful effect" (*A Poetics* 180). Poetic thinking acknowledges the self's responsibility for its actions, it exerts its "authority to challenge dominant societal values, including conventional manners of communication." Ultimately, the poem "is a model for the individual political participation of each citizen" (219). Bernstein proposes:

a dialectical material writing, decentered and democratic, not vested in the authority of a rhetoric dictated by Capital but part of a "collective struggle", as Jameson puts it, "to wrest Freedom from the realm of necessity". (CD 380)

The poetry called for by Bernstein is a realization of Emersonian Perfectionism, taking the self and society on a journey, and, all along the way, serving as a necessary corrective. "It is aversion of conformity in the pursuit of new forms" (*A Poetics* 1). "Poets can operate as agents of resistance, poems can be sites of social struggle" (177). The effects of such poetic thinking spread through all aspects of human existence and initiate a new way of looking at and responding to the world:

These political dimensions to poetry (and more generally art, and more generally to a way of regarding--reading--the world, which can be acted out at every level from personal relationships to conduct at the Job) seem to be worth bringing to the fore. They involve more a movement to change the nature of reading values, and not only reading values applied to poetry. (*Content's Dream* 386)

The potential of poetry to change the state of society by changing our attitude or style of thinking, for Bernstein, is connected to a theory of reading. The redemptive function of reading will be addressed in chapter V.

## III Skepticism

### III.1 The Truths and Wrongs of Skepticism

The issue of skepticism is connected and intertwined with the subjects of the two previous chapters, with the relation of philosophy and literature, and with politics. The forms of self-alienation described above, which express themselves in a loss of vitality, numbness, despair, and melancholia, can also be related to skepticism. None of those states of consciousness are easy to overcome because a picture of which we cannot easily rid ourselves supports them. It is the picture of a dualism between the inner realm of the soul, mind and feelings and the outer realm of the world and others. This inner/outer disparity triggers a number of misleading ideas about human knowledge which are difficult to conquer because "a picture held us captive. And we could not get outside it, for it lay in our language and language seemed to repeat it to us inexorably" (*Philosophical Investigations* 115).

The image of the inner/outer realm, evokes the notion that the world is separated from one's self. It seems to exist before one's self as a bubble of which one is not a part. This picture of the world is encouraged and fueled by the interest component of control and manipulation. The world turns into an object of manipulation. As a consequence one seems to be sealed off from the world of which one is wholly inside of or as Heidegger has it, which one is indwelling. The split between inner and outer also results in a split between the private and the public, which seem to be two separate and independent realms. The idea of the private inner realm which is hidden and a public outer realm underlies three closely related corollaries. The first is the behaviorist view that we infer inner processes only from outer behavior. The second is the belief that only one's own private feelings are knowable, while the feelings of others remain forever hidden from us. Finally, there is the idea that there are

outer criteria which accompany inner processes. Wittgenstein rejects all three hypotheses as they are based on the inner/outer picture. Instead he argues for the inseparability of inner and outer (cf. *Content's Dream* 165-183). Public behavior does not refer to an inner process of the self, but expresses the self. Wittgenstein accordingly writes that the statement "I am in pain" does not refer to pain but expresses pain, it substitutes pain behavior. The human body is the field of expression of the human soul, or as Wittgenstein has it: "The human body is the best picture of the human soul." In the same way he argues for an inseparability of form and content and thought and language. Thought is not accompanying language but language is the vehicle of thought.

For Wittgenstein the inner/outer picture is also the source for the distorted notion that the meaning of the word is the object the word refers to. This leads to a reification of meaning which separates meaning from its use, its production. Deleuze and Guattari describe the effect of the inner/outer picture as the erection of the theater of representation in the place of production.

The skeptic's feeling that we are sealed off from the world and others, that the other's body blocks the view to his or her soul, is a picture, precisely the inner/outer picture, which competes with a more appropriate attitude towards the other. Skepticism, thus, culminates in the claim that we do not know with certainty of the existence of the external world and other minds within it.

Cavell reads Wittgenstein's *Investigations* as a struggle with skepticism but not an attempt to refute it. In his response to the threat of skepticism Wittgenstein develops the notion of the criterion. It is in many respects comparable to the ordinary use of the term criterion. A Wittgensteinian criterion, however does not merely evaluate the degree to which a known object fulfills a standard but it constitutes what counts as an instance of a particular object.

"Grammar tells what kind of object anything is" (*Philosophical Investigations* 373). Criteria in this way have a constitutive function. In learning the criteria for the use of a word, one has to learn "how its concept fits into a web of other concepts," one has to know its "grammatical post" (Mulhall 80). Criteria supply the basis for determining value:

The focus upon judgment takes human knowledge to be the human capacity for applying the concepts of a language to the things of a world, for characterizing (categorizing) the world when and as it is humanly done, and hence construes the limits of human knowledge as coinciding with the limits of its concepts (in some historical period). The philosophical task will be [...] to show what in a given period we cannot fail to know, or ways we cannot fail to know in. (*The Claim of Reason* 17)

Furthermore, criteria are always ours, which is to say, that every language user is able to give criteria for the use of a particular word or in the terminology of ordinary language philosophy: every speaker is able to say "what we say when." There is, that is, no separate authority or higher instance which establishes criteria. Criteria draw on a background of mutual agreement.

Pain is a recurring psychological concept in Wittgenstein's *Investigations*. A criterion for pain is, for instance, groaning. The example of groaning shows that criteria are to a certain extent context dependent but also context independent. It is context dependent in the sense that it does not count as pain behavior under all circumstances, somebody could be groaning to call his hamsters or clear his throat. However, as soon as it is seen as pain behavior, it counts as a criterion for pain in all circumstances. In this sense, criteria are used to identify a given behavior as pain behavior but not to guarantee the existence or presence of pain. In this sense they enable us to understand that it is pain that somebody is feigning. They are used to identify the meaning of a particular behavior, they tell us when a concept can be applied, how we are able to express or feign pain and to understand that the meaning of a particular kind of behavior is pain. For Cavell:

Criteria are 'criteria of something's being so', not in the sense that they tell us of a thing's existence, but of something like its identity, not of its *being* so, but of its being so. Criteria do not determine the certainty of statements, but the application of the concepts employed in statements. (45)

As a consequence, they cannot be taken to refute skepticism. They rather confirm the skeptical conclusion that we cannot know with certainty of the existence of the world and others within it. But this is not a failure of knowledge. It only shows that it is inappropriate to speak of knowledge at this basic level of human understanding and communication. We cannot get beyond the level of mutual agreement in our criteria. 'Our spade turns.' In speaking of knowing something with certainty we already presuppose the whole background of mutual agreement in the context of which such a statement only makes sense. The background itself cannot be further justified, it is "only human nothing more than natural to us" (47). The rational claim of certainty is not at the basis of human understanding, or as Wittgenstein has it in *On Certainty*: "Language did not emerge from some kind of ratiocination" (475). At the level of mutual agreement it makes more sense to speak of acknowledgment than of knowledge.

The discussion of criteria is not meant to say that we are not able to judge, if someone is feigning pain or really suffering, that we are not able to judge the difference between a real bird and a stuffed bird. But it is to say that *criteria* cannot fulfill this task. They do not apply themselves, but the individual is responsible for their application. For Cavell, therefore, "all this makes it seem that the philosophical problem of knowledge is something I impose on these matters; that I am the philosophical problem. I am. It is in me that the circuit of communication is cut; I am the stone on which the wheel breaks" (*The Claim of Reason* 82). The skeptic is dissatisfied with criteria, because they do not function independently of the human application of them. In asking criteria to do what they cannot do, he "repudiates our criteria" (Mulhall 85). In this repudiation, Cavell sees a denial of the human. The skeptic's wish to overcome the human also presents itself in his tendency to

speak outside language games, which is to say, without the commitments of speech acts. The skeptic has the half-right intuition that it cannot be one single human being that gives meaning to an utterance. This is true insofar as language is a social institution. But he goes wrong in feeling that the individual's contribution is irrelevant. The view that the meanings of words are independent of the speaker, for the skeptic, gets supported by the fact that it is possible to speak outside language games, outside social contexts and social commitments. For Wittgenstein such an escape from the commitments of speech is an instance of "language going on holiday" (*Philosophical Investigations* 38). An example for such decontextualized language use is the statement "I know that this is a table" without a particular reason for not being able to know this. Wittgenstein also describes a situation in which two philosophers are standing in the garden and looking at a tree, saying: "This is a tree." The philosopher wants to get in contact with that which establishes the connection between the realm of language or thought and the world. For Descartes this connection can only be established by God. "In Cartesian epistemology God assures the general matching of the world with human ideas of it" (*In Quest of the Ordinary* 11). The skeptic in this way wants to be able to perceive the world in the way he imagines God to perceive the world:

In philosophizing we come to be dissatisfied with answers which depend *our* meaning something by an expression, as though what *we* meant by it were more or less arbitrary. (As we sometimes feel about our more obviously moral commitments that they are more or less arbitrary, and that if they are to have *real* or full power they must be rooted in, or 'based upon', a reality deeper than the fact of morality itself.) It is as though we try to get the world to provide answers in a way which is independent of our responsibility for *claiming* something to be so [...]; and we fix the world so that it can do this. [...] And we take what we have fixed or constructed to be *discoveries* about the world, and take this fixation to reveal the human condition rather than our escape or denial of this condition through the rejection of the human conditions of knowledge and action and the substitution of fantasy (*The Claim of Reason* 215-6).

It seems for the skeptic that if our meaning is not rooted in some deeper justifiable meaning, independent of the human being meaning it, it is futile. The same holds true for morality, if morality is not justified by a higher instance it is purely human and in this way appears to the skeptic as without authority. The skeptical view consists of two elements. First: it

entails the realization that human life is not justifiable by anything outside the human. This is the truth of skepticism, acknowledging the metaphysical finitude of human knowledge. But in the second step the skeptic rejects this finitude and strives toward something beyond the human, for this purpose he has to purify the world of the human or in another terminology, to "sublimate" (*Philosophical Investigations* 94) it, which results in a fixation and freezing of the world which he then takes to be the real condition of the world. This second step is the wrong of skepticism. Wittgenstein describes the cost of our continuous temptation to knowledge at a level where the concept of knowledge is not applicable, as "madness, loss, forgoing of identity and selfhood" (Cavell, *The Claim of Reason* 242). The rejection of one's humanness results in self-estrangement, a kind of torpor, or numbness. This confusion is in particular noticeable in an inappropriate knowledge claim about psychological concepts such as the statement: I know he is in pain. Such a statement estranges the speaker from the human being suffering, because it creates an unnatural distance and keeps the speaker from reacting to the other's pain.

A person who speaks outside language games, displays a distanced, dehumanized attitude towards his fellow human being. He is caught in a state of inertia. He is not able to respond to the other's suffering. This failure to respond is a failure not of knowledge but of acknowledgment. Acknowledgment is the capacity to apply psychological concepts to other human beings, this requires imagination, which Cavell refers to as 'emphatic projection': the ability to identify with a fellow human being and to regard it as a kin with one self. Acknowledgment is not a mere intellectual registering, but it requires a reaction, the other's behavior "imposes a call on me" (Mulhall 110). Again, it is the individual which is decisive in the application of criteria: "What is disappointing about criteria? There is something they do not do; it can seem the essential. I have to know what they are for; I have to accept them, use them" (*The Claim of Reason* 83). In the domain of psychological concept, to accept criteria is not mere knowledge but acknowledgment: "part of knowing

that another is in pain is knowing that the other's pain demands a response from me" (Mulhall 110). In "Knowledge and Acknowledgment," Cavell elaborates on the difference between a 'failure of knowledge' and 'a failure of acknowledgment'.

A 'failure to know' might just mean a piece of ignorance, an absence of something, a blank. A 'failure to acknowledge' is the presence of something, a confusion, an indifference, a callousness, an exhaustion, a coldness. Spiritual emptiness is not a blank (*Must We Mean What We Say?* 263-264).

For Cavell the willingness or failure to acknowledge is also at stake in *Othello*.

"Shakespeare's plays interpret and reinterpret the skeptical problematic" (*Disowning Knowledge* 3). In this way both philosophy and literature struggle with skepticism in their investigation of the human condition. It, however, seems that Shakespeare is at the center of the skeptical problem at a time where in philosophy the issue is not yet fully developed. In *Disowning Knowledge* Cavell writes accordingly:

My intuition is that the advent of skepticism as manifested in Descartes *Meditations* is already in full existence in Shakespeare, from the time of the great tragedies in the first years of the seventeenth century, in the generation preceding that of Descartes (3).

For Cavell, Shakespeare's tragedies show that skepticism's doubt is not a cognitive or intellectual but a spiritual problem. It is "motivated not by a (misguided) intellectual scrupulousness but by a (displaced) denial, by a self-consuming disappointment that seeks world-consuming revenge" (6). The skeptic is disappointed about the fact that all he can know is grounded in and dependent on human agreement. He is disappointed with the limitation of knowledge in the metaphysical finitude of knowledge. In his disappointment he denies this finitude and tries to overcome the human, tries to speak outside language games.

According to Cavell's interpretation, Othello is also caught in a denial of human finitude, he refuses to accept his humanness and thereby blocks his human capacity of

acknowledgment. As a result, he avoids to acknowledge Desdemona as a fellow human being. This attitude of avoidance distorts Othello's perception in such a way, that he sees Desdemona as a beautiful but lifeless statue:

Whiter skin of hers than snow  
And smooth, as monumental alabaster (V. ii. 4-5)

His rejection of the kind of knowledge a human being can have of another human being, his refusal of acknowledgment and demand for ocular proof does not only turn Desdemona, but also his own heart, into stone. But it enables him to deny and repress what he knows, namely that he is a human being of flesh and blood and that Desdemona exists as a separate being of flesh and blood. He cannot accept that Desdemona is "separate from him, other. This is precisely the possibility that tortures him. The content of his torture is the premonition of the existence of another, hence of his own, his own, as dependent, as partial" (*Disowning Knowledge* 138). It is a view of himself and others which seems irreconcilable with his view of himself as 'a perfect soul.' His love for Desdemona gave him an insight into the human condition, into human separateness and partiality, he is not willing to accept. Therefore "the idea of Desdemona as an adulterous whore is more convenient to him than the idea of her as chaste" (133).

The image of Desdemona as a statue also denies that "he has scarred her or shed her blood," (134) either by taking her virginity or by killing her. The image seems to make his actions inconsequential, it takes away his responsibility for his emotional callousness towards Desdemona. If a person is looked at as a statue it cannot be harmed, a statue does not have feelings. Cavell in this context quotes Wittgenstein, reflecting on the possibility of applying criteria of psychological concepts to inanimate things: "Could one imagine a stone's having consciousness? And if anyone can do so - why should that not merely prove that such image-mongery is of no interest to us" (*Philosophical Investigations* 390)? Seeing

Desdemona as a statue is an effect of Othello's denial of acknowledgment and at the same time it prevents him from feelings of guilt for this failure. It is a grammatical remark that one can only feel guilt towards a creature which is possessed of consciousness.

Desdemona's transformation into a statue is also connected to Othello's "attempt to convert the human condition, the condition of humanity, into an intellectual riddle." (*Disowning Knowledge* 138) He is willing to face neither his own condition of humanity nor Desdemona's humanity, and therefore uses the problem of knowledge as a cover. For Cavell this is a typical skeptical temptation: "To interpret a metaphysical finitude as an intellectual lack" (138).

Tragedy [however] is the place we are not allowed to escape the consequences, or price, of this cover: that the failure to acknowledge a best case of the other is a denial of the other, presaging the death of the other, and the death of our capacity to acknowledge as such, the turning of our hearts to stone, or their bursting (138).

As Othello has converted his discomfort about human partiality into a problem of rationality, it is only logical for him to ask for ocular proof. Giving proof, however, is exactly what human criteria are not meant for, as Cavell has it at the end of "Othello and the Stake of the Other:"

So they are there, on their bridal and death sheets. A statue, a stone, is something whose existence is fundamentally open to the ocular proof. A human being is not. The two bodies lying together form an emblem of this fact, the truth of skepticism. What this man lacked was not certainty. He knew everything, but he could not yield to what he knew, be commanded by it. He found out too much for his mind, not too little. (142)

What Othello knew but could not yield to was his separateness from Desdemona and vice versa: "Their difference from one another - the one everything the other is not - form an emblem of human separation, which can be accepted and granted, or not" (142). It is in this sense that Othello knows more than he can stomach, he knows about the truth of skepticism

and turns away from it. This turning away also entails a turning away from human life from what Wittgenstein refers to as our form of life. The question is: what could bring Othello and Desdemona back to life? For Cavell, poetry seems to have this redemptive potential. Even more so, if one regards the world of the skeptic as a world which has lost its poetry. He therefore suggests that Blake might have "what he calls songs to win them back with" (142).

For Cavell, the avoidance of the truth of skepticism and the resulting aspiration to a realm of sublimity and away from the rough ground of ordinary life is also at stake in Coleridge's *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*. He sees an "internal connection between skepticism and romanticism" and suggests that "skepticism is what romantic writers are locked in struggle against, writers from Coleridge and Wordsworth to Emerson and Thoreau and Poe" (*In Quest of the Ordinary* 8). Cavell, in particular, stresses the romantic struggle "for some ground of animism, which may take the form of animation" (8). In this context he names E.T.A Hoffman's automatons, Coleridge's "figure of life-in-death," and Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*.

In Wittgenstein's *Investigations*, the striving towards sublimity is described as the yearning for an ideal language and correspondingly an ideal world. The dissatisfaction with human fallibility and the conditionality of human life results in a striving towards ideal conditions. This yearning of the skeptic to overcome human imperfection is summarized in a fairy-tale-like story at the end of the *Terry Eagleton Script for The Derek Jarman Wittgenstein Film*. In the film Keynes tells the story to Wittgenstein on his death bed:

There was once a young man who dreamed of reducing the world to pure logic. And because he was a very clever young man, he actually managed to do it. And when he had finished, he stood back and admired his handiwork. It was beautiful: a world purged of imperfection and indeterminacy, like countless acres of gleaming ice stretching silently to the horizon (55).

The wish of the young Wittgenstein, as it is imagined by Eagleton, to 'reduce the world to pure logic' is reminiscent of Othello's wish to turn the problem of human imperfection into an intellectual problem. It also entails the reduction of language from a living necessity to a calculus. The result of this wish is a beautiful but lifeless world of ice. Such a view of the world is almost identical with Othello's view of Desdemona as having "whiter skin than snow and [being] smooth, as monumental alabaster" (V. ii. 4-5). It expresses Othello's yearning for perfection. Like the skin of the ideal Desdemona, the surface of the ideal world is of an impeccable purity: "The ice was smooth and level and stainless" (*Terry Eagleton Script* 55). But when the young man in Keynes's story tries to explore the world he has created he finds that he cannot walk on it: "He took one step forward, and fell flat on his back. You see he had forgotten about *friction*" (55). So according to Keynes's story, the young Wittgenstein had to realize that the perfect world is not inhabitable. One cannot live within it. "We want to walk: so we need *friction*. Back to the rough ground" (*Philosophical Investigations* 107)! Nevertheless the beauty and purity of the ideal is always tempting. The only way for the Wittgenstein of the *Investigations* to overcome this temptation is to bethink oneself of one's true need. "The *preconceived idea* of crystalline purity can only be removed by turning our whole examination round. (One might say: the axis of reference of our examination must be rotated, but around the fixed point of our real need)" (108).

The agreement of Othello's way of looking at Desdemona and the skeptic's way of looking at the world, supports Cavell's claim that Othello is comparable to the external world skeptic. In both cases skepticism is emotionally motivated:

there is between human existence and the existence of the world a standing possibility of death-dealing passion, of a yearning at once unappeasable and unsatisfiable, as for an impossible exclusiveness or completeness (*Disowning Knowledge* 6).

Cavell describes this possibility also as the "possibility to fall in love with the world" (6). The picture of 'falling in love' strongly describes the emotional motivation of skepticism. The love which drives the skeptic, however, is love in its unhandsome, its 'death-dealing' condition. In the "grip" and "stranglehold" (6) of death-dealing passion, the desire for possessive intimacy, the object of love dies and turns to stone. For Cavell, "Othello's violence studies the human use of knowledge under the consequence of skepticism" (*In Quest of the Ordinary* 9). He relates the violence in human knowing to "Heidegger's perception that philosophy has from the beginning [and] with increasing velocity in the age of technology, conceived knowledge under the aegis of dominion, of the concept of a concept as a matter, say, of grasping a thing" (9). This violent mode of thinking has been related to Emerson's description of our 'unhandsome condition' which he sees in the temptation of clutching objects instead of receiving the world. Cavell takes Emerson to allude to Kant's idea of knowing as actively synthesizing objects which excludes the possibility of knowledge as reception, of "intelligible intuition" (QO 9), the handsome part of our condition.

The threat of violence and spiritual numbness in the rejection of human finitude and imperfection is a standing threat in philosophy. In its temptation to turn the world into an icy landscape it can be compared to the *Ancient Mariner's* Journey to the Polar Sea. Cavell suggests a reading of Coleridge's *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*:

which takes the poem as an enactment, in its drift to a frozen sea below what the poet calls 'the line,' of skepticism's casual step to the path of intellectual numbness, and then of the voyage back to (or toward) life, pictured as the domestic (*This New Yet Unapproachable America* 57).

For Cavell, the *Rime of the Ancient Mariner* is an exemplification of the *Critique of Pure Reason*; or in a more general view, romanticism can be regarded as a "monitoring of Kant's settlement with skepticism" (*In Quest of the Ordinary* 31). Kant settles the problem of

skepticism in assuring that "what we understand as knowledge is *of the world*" (31). This assurance, however, has to be paid for with "the ceding of any claim to know the thing in itself" (31). In Cavell's view such a solution of skepticism is essentially unsatisfying. Accordingly, he comments Kant's achievement with the remark: "Thanks for nothing" (31).

More satisfying, however, is Kant's focus on limitation. Cavell observes "an ambivalence in Kant's central idea of limitation[:] we simultaneously crave its comfort and escape from its comfort" (QO 32). On the one hand Kant limits knowledge in order to allow for faith, on the other hand the limiting of knowledge is a means of protecting it from skepticism. Kant's drawing of a line between the knowable and the unknowable seems to produce the craving for the realm on the other side of the line, which seems to be one's better existence. This yearning, however, only comes into existence by the drawing of the line, and makes one turn away from the ordinary worlds one shares with others, as if losing one's interest in them. Cavell understands Wordsworth's claim to arouse men from a 'torpor' which he announces in the preface to *Lyrical Ballads*, as an attempt to resuscitate our interest in our ordinary world. In his settlement of skepticism Kant triggers a kind of spiritual disease, a withdrawal of one's interest in our common world. It causes a new form of skepticism which can be described as melancholia. "Its cure will require a revolution of the spirit, the conversion of the world" (32). Texts which promise such a cure, are Wordsworth's *Lyrical Ballads*, Wittgenstein's *Investigations*, Coleridge's *Ancient Mariner* and Emerson's essay "Fate."

Cavell interprets Emerson's "Fate" as providing a way of overcoming Kant's two worlds "by diagnosing them, or resolving them as perspectives, as a function of what Emerson calls 'polarity'" (36). Emerson's sense of polarity is reminiscent of Wittgenstein's attention to the dualism of the inner/outer picture and its deconstruction in the run of the *Investigations*. He unmask the world of the inner and the outer as pictures which are in our language and which, therefore, are limitation we have established ourselves.

The opposition of Fate and Freedom is a similar form of dualism which is contained in our language. Emerson accordingly suggest that "Fate is not a foreign bondage;" only a person alienated from his language and form of life perceives it like that; "human life is not invaded, either by chance or by necessities not of its own making" (36). The pervasive background of agreements establishes a scaffolding in which the possibilities of human experience are in a sense predetermined. Only certain attitudes towards the world are possible, our attention is schooled in such a way that particular interests and expectations are cultivated while others are suppressed. However, as a speaker is not necessarily aware of the background of agreements he shares with others, he might perceive the necessities of his life as forced upon him by a foreign power, as something which has to remain secret to him. Emerson writes accordingly: "The secret of the world is the tie between person and event . . . He thinks his fate alien, because the copula is hidden." For Cavell this hidden copula is comparable to what Freud calls our suppressed 'private past' and Marx our suppressed 'social present.' Furthermore, he relates it to Wittgenstein's "remark from the *Investigations*: 'It is in language that an expectation and its fulfillment make contact' [PI 445]" (*In Quest of the Ordinary* 36). Again what seems like an alien law turns out to be a structure of the language of which we are a part of. Cavell, therefore, stresses the importance of philosophy "in tracing out the source of our sense of our lives as alien to us, for only then is there a *problem* of Fate. This looks vaguely like the project to trace out the source of our sense of the world as independent of us, for only then is skepticism a problem" (37).

The issue of skepticism is intertwined with the issue of limitation; depending on how we understand it, it either helps us to get to terms with 'the mysteries of human condition' or drives us to the 'cold Country' of an ideal world. In the *Critique of Pure Reason*, human knowledge is limited to *a priori* conditions: 'Concepts of objects in general thus underlie all

empirical knowledge as its *a priori* conditions' (A93; B126). According to Cavell, Emerson takes the investigation even further in asking for the "conditions in human thinking underlying the concept of condition" (*In Quest of the Ordinary* 37). Similar to Wittgenstein, Cavell proposes a more differentiated and complex form of epistemological investigation. An investigation which is not limited to twelve categories but which investigates every word of the language.

Where Kant speaks of rules or laws brought to knowledge of the world by Reason, a philosopher like Wittgenstein speaks of bringing to light our criteria, our agreements (sometimes they will seem conspiracies). [...] what Wittgenstein means by grammar in his grammatical investigations--as revealed by our system of ordinary language--is an inheritor of what Kant means by Transcendental Logic (38).

Cavell understands Wittgenstein to allude to Kant's concept of possibility in his programmatic paragraph 90 from the *Investigations*. Kant describes his idea of possibility as follows: "The term 'transcendental' [...] signifies [only] such knowledge as concerns the *a priori* possibility of knowledge, or its *a priori* employment" (A56, B80-81). Wittgenstein, however, uses the word in its plural form, while still marking it as a quote:

We feel as if we had to penetrate phenomena: our investigation, however, is directed not towards phenomena, but, as one might say, towards the '*possibilities*' of phenomena. We remind ourselves, that is to say, of the *kind of statement* that we make about phenomena. [...] Our investigation is therefore a grammatical one (90).

To remind ourselves of the ways we use words, helps one to become aware of one's possibilities, that is, of the judgments we are agreeing in. Such a grammatical investigation can provide a cure for the self-estrangement which has been described as torpor, despair and melancholy.

For Emerson the conditions controlling our condition are 'the old knots of fate, freedom, and foreknowledge'. Philosophy has to "unravel our knots of agreement (or conspiracy)" (*In Quest of the Ordinary* 38) in order to provide an understanding of the relation between the concepts of condition and limitation. It can be used to expose our prejudiced view of Fate,

a view which represses its other, that is, freedom. What we call Fate is often looked at as a book, a book of laws, an account book of language, a text we enact with our lives. The impression that with our lives we "enact old scripts" (38) is supported, for Emerson, by the science of statistics. Statistics furthers our "sense of subjection to dictation, as if to read tables concerning tendencies of those like me in circumstances like mine" (38). This description is strongly reminiscent of Mill's description of the censorship of conformity (cf. Wittgenstein's comment on statistics). But, as Emerson argues, if we are to accept Fate, "we are not less compelled to affirm liberty, the significance of the individual, the grandeur of duty, the power of character."

In order to elucidate the meaning of Fate which appears to us as 'irresistible dictation,' Cavell shows that both words dictation and condition have to do with language. With 'dictation' one associates 'talking,' 'commanding,' and 'prescribing.' Condition means talking together. So while the semblance of an alien force is prevailing in 'dictation,' the concept of 'condition' presents itself as an affair of the public, reminding one of the sense in which criteria are always 'ours' and not to be justified by an authority separate from us. Cavell concludes: "Then it sounds as though the irresistible dictation that constitutes Fate, that sets conditions on our knowledge and our conduct, is our language, every word we utter" (39). There is a reciprocal relation between fate and freedom, we might be a victim of the text of fate in the sense that we are determined by fate, but it can also be the other way around, which is to say, that "our language contains our character, that we brand the world" (39). Another truth of skepticism and of human finitude is thus that language is our fate.

It means hence, not exactly prediction, but diction, is what puts us in bonds, that with each word we utter we emit stipulations, agreements we do not know and do not want to know we have entered, agreements we were always in, that were in effect before our participation in them (40).

If language is our fate and makes us victims of laws we have proclaimed ourselves, then, a truly ideological epistemology must be a grammatical investigation or better still an investigation which directly engages the conventions of language in a way only literature can do it.

Emerson's phrase that 'Intellect annuls Fate. So far as man thinks, he is free,' recalls the similarity between the thinking Emerson claims for and poetic thinking, or Heidegger's true thinking. All of those modes of thinking entail an abandonment of thinking, a stopping and turning. The thinking suggested here, for Cavell, also includes the 'annulling' or "upending of antitheses" the overcoming of polarities which alienate the human being from itself. In this way it is reminiscent of Hegel's "Aufhebung."

In *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*, the human tendency to think in opposites is also at issue. The poem exemplifies the polarity in human thinking that it is caused by the Kantian distinction between the world of human knowledge and the world of things in themselves. Like Schelling's concept of intellectual intuition, the poem criticizes and tries to overcome this limitation. Furthermore the overcoming of alienated thinking requires the recovery of the ordinary and of one's voice in ordinary language.

For Cavell, the loss experienced in skepticism and the recovery from it is expressed by Coleridge in the following lines:

How a Ship having passed the line was driven by Storms to the cold Country towards the South Pole; . . . and of the strange things that befell; and in what manner the Ancient Mariner came back to his own Country. (*In Quest of the Ordinary* 46)

The poem maps an intellectual movement which according to Kant is impossible. For Cavell, it therefore exposes the Kantian limitation of knowledge, as a kind of Fate which is man-made, which is not due to an *a priori* limitation but due to repression. The hardness of the logical must of Kant's transcendental logic is overcome by Wittgenstein. He shows that

grammar, or the conditionality of language, is a living necessity and open to change, thereby substituting the Kantian *a priori* by a quasi *a priori* which is social and historical.

Limitations and polarities are structures or pictures which are in our language. The possibility to get entangled or limited by them is always there. In this way the tracing of the workings of our language as well as of our sense of alienation remain a perpetual challenge for the individual human being. Wittgenstein accordingly describes philosophy as a spiritual struggle: "a battle against the bewitchment of our intelligence by means of language" (*Philosophical Investigations* 109). In a similar way, Cavell sees in Emerson's "Fate" the incessant call for a remaking of the world in such a way "that I could want it," (*In Quest of the Ordinary* 36) and could be at home in it, a "continuous rebuke to the way we live, compared to which, or in reaction to which, a settled despair of the world, or cynicism, is luxurious" (36).

### III.2 The Poetics of Negative Capability

As the previous investigation has shown, there is a truth to skepticism but also a danger to it. On the one hand, its true or healthy dimension consists in the insight that there is no knowledge independent of the human way of apprehension and its embeddedness in language, and that in order to understand our Fate we have to understand our commitment to shared forms of life. The detrimental effect of skepticism, on the other hand, is the desire to overcome the human limitation of knowledge in search for absolute knowledge, with the effect of reducing the multiplicity of the phenomena of the world. The means through which this idealized world is thought to be accomplished is generalization and objectification.

What I want to call the poetics, or the philosophy, of negative capability is a mode of thinking which is cautious about any kind of generalizing or universalist tendencies. Instead, it supports a particularistic approach to language and the world. This particularistic approach, for instance, manifests itself in Wittgenstein's negation of any kind of theory. The poet and philosopher John Koethe acknowledges Wittgenstein's negative capability in talking not of Wittgenstein's *theory* of language, but instead of his "*constructive vision*" (Koethe, *The Continuity of Wittgenstein's Thought* 49). While the importance of construction for the work of Bernstein has been discussed in the two previous chapters, it is a topic of this chapter to relate the concept of *vision* to the poetics of negative capability. Furthermore I will compare the poetics of negative capability to the poetic strategy of disrupting absorption, which is elucidated in Bernstein's essay "Artifice of Absorption," which leads to a discussion of negative capability in the context of Deleuze's and Guattari's notion of schizophrenia and Cavell's reading of Thoreau's besidness.

Like Cavell, Bernstein does not reject or affirm skepticism as such but differentiates between the truths and wrongs of skepticism. One of the morals of skepticism is that human knowledge is not absolute but limited to the conditions of knowledge. A poetics which acknowledges this limitation and even embraces it as our common condition can be referred to as a poetics of "negative capability." Bernstein takes this term from Charles Olson, who derives it from Keats:

Olson's project--*push*--was to find an alternative to the discourse of a single, rationalized voice acting with predetermined knowledge--trappings, in his view, of the "Western Box". For this reason he was attracted to Keats's concept of "negative capability", which he interpreted as acting decisively in the face of uncertainty. (*Content's Dream* 325)

For Bernstein, however, this interpretation of "negative capability" is "insufficiently radical:" "Negative capability suggests not only the need to 'know for oneself' but also to not know, to accept the limits of knowledge and action" (328).

The realization of the limitation of knowledge promotes a mode of thinking which can also be described as questioning. Wittgenstein and Heidegger, among others, devote themselves to the exploration of such a way of thinking which "is tuned in a negative key," as Heidegger terms it. From the perspective of a philosophy which is caught up in scientism, it seems to be utterly unproductive, even destructive, and therefore, unwelcome. Wittgenstein is aware of this possible objection towards his way of doing philosophy. One may be driven to ask: "Where does our investigation get its importance from, since it seems only to destroy everything interesting, that is, all that is great and important?" Wittgenstein's retort is that: "what we are destroying is nothing but houses of cards and we are clearing up the ground of language on which they stand" (*Philosophical Investigations* 118). Thinking as negative capability, in this way, distinguishes between true and false necessities. It is critical thinking which exposes false beliefs.

In this way, it is reminiscent of what Bernstein describes as sophistry. Pound, who, in Bernstein's view strives towards absolute values beyond human limitation, accordingly, despises sophistry: "What Greek logomachy had in common with the Hebrew poison was debate, dialectic, sophistry, the critical activity that destroys faith" (*My Way* 155). Bernstein takes this description of sophistry as characterizing his own poetics and "insist[s] on debating what they/we cannot understand" (115). The poetics of negative capability, thus, support as way of thinking that takes nothing for granted, and rejects received notions of, for instance, 'rationality,' 'voice,' 'self,' or 'identity.' It is a negative or critical activity which exposes the limitations which these notions have suffered. The capability of this critical activity is to revive those concepts from their exhaustion and reduction through restrictive language use. This accompanies a new understanding of the term 'concept' as well. According to Wittgenstein, analytic philosophy is caught up in a picture of a concept as strictly limited district, as Frege describes it. In order to lead philosophy out of this confusion, Wittgenstein develops the notion of family resemblances and blurred borders (cf. Piombino, *Boundary of Blur*).

Hence, negative capability is able to disrupt a "fixation of the gaze" which has been encouraged by a conception of concepts as districts with fixed borders. Such a fixation can lead to a reduction in the possibilities of thought and language, and to a loss of vitality. The *negative* element in a poetics of negative capability expresses its attitude of aversion, which places it in the tradition of Emerson and Thoreau. The term *capability* stresses its productive potential, albeit not productive in a utilitarian sense. It is a poetics which is "committed less to opposition than composition - a com(op)posing that values inquiry above representation, resistance over adjudication." Bernstein, insists on a "stubborn aversion to the conventions of expression, even for the sake of the aversion" (*My Way* 104). The neologism com(op)position expresses the peculiar project of approaching a positive end

by negative means, a movement which bears a resemblance to Emerson's method of indirection. In both cases one may end up finding aspects of human life which are unknown but not unknowable. According to Cavell, this movement of indirection is the only way to find the New America.

Aversion to received notions of, for instance, America and the self, initiates the perfectionist journey to the self or America in its eventual state. A precondition for this journey, however, is the disruption of the endless repetition of always already constituted concepts: "[M]y insistence in doing it my way, even in the face of, even because of, being ostensibly wrong, can also be understood as a resurgence of willfulness, obstinacy, stubbornness, dissidence--themselves marks of a newly forming individuality" (69).

The fixation which skepticism tries to resist in its form of negative capability is also at work in what Bernstein refers to as "the poetics of sight." For Bernstein the poetics of sight display one of the mistakes of skepticism, its dissatisfaction with the conditionality of human knowledge and its drive towards an ideal of certainty, prediction and control. In this it can be compared to the yearning for an ideal language, which is to say, an immediate form of communication. The poetics of sight regards sight as a "passive mechanisms of reception," (CD 135) which postulates an "isolated visual image in a single space" (*Content's Dream* 136). According to Bernstein, it is caught up in a "static idealization of the experience of looking" (137). This static idealization of looking corresponds with the idealization of thinking as thinking in fixed concepts. Like objects of thought, the objects of sight are subject to an overfocussing which is at odds with Wittgenstein's idea of blurred borders of concepts. The poetics of sight, like the yearning for an ideal language, strives for knowledge without interference, for a perception "clear of uncertainty." Bernstein quotes passages from the works of Wallace Stevens, Louis Zukofsky and William Carlos Williams

which display an affinity with the poetics of sight. The need for fixation and certainty is expressed in Stevens's poem "An Ordinary Evening in New Haven:"

We keep coming back and coming back  
To the real: to the hotel instead of the hymns  
That fall upon it out of the wind. We seek

The poem of pure reality, untouched  
By trope or deviation, straight to the word  
Straight to the transfixing object, to the object

At the exactest point at which it is itself  
Transfixing by being purely what it is,  
A view of New Haven, say, through a certain eye,

The eye made clear of uncertainty, with the sight  
Of simple seeing, without reflection. We seek  
Nothing beyond reality . . . (138)

Although, claiming to acknowledge the ordinary, the poem in each word aspires towards its sublimation: It speaks of pure untouched reality, of transfixing the object, and of a world of exactitude which is free of uncertainty. All these images make one think of the early Wittgenstein's frozen landscape which has been created out of the wish for an ideal language and a correspondingly ideal world.

It is important to note that Bernstein uses the word sight not in its ordinary but in a more restricted sense, in order to draw attention to an idealization of perception which results in a fixation of vision: "By 'sight' I mean something more limited than that word might otherwise permit; I am referring to the object-focused, extratemporal, singled perspective that is in actuality, a static idealization of the experience of looking" (137). In this context he also stresses the interrelation of art and perception: "Images shape the perception of the visual world; we see in terms of pictures because we look for what we have seen." For Bernstein, this idea is also expressed in Wilde's claim: "Reality is art's only pupil" in "The Decay of Lying" (132). The reality craved for in Stevens's poem is thus an illusion. There is no immediate or simple seeing of reality, reality is always mediated through the syntax of our

verbal as well as visual language. A similar temptation to catch and arrest reality is expressed in Williams's poem "The Lily" of which Bernstein quotes the following passage:

The branching head of tiger-lilies  
 through the window  
 . . . It's raining--  
 water caught  
 among the curled-back petals  
 Caught and held.

Bernstein's "reading of "The Lily" is that the *poem* catches and holds the flower like the flower catches and holds the water." (138) The desire to grasp and fix the world in order to know it, is a standing threat to the human being and can be related to what Emerson's calls the unhandsome part of our condition. It is also at issue in Stein's *The Making of Americans* where Stein describes a boy catching a butterfly and putting it in an album. Representation, that is, turns out to have a deadening effect on the object represented. The theater of representation and the poetics of sight "determine, fix, hold and stamp down" (*Content's Dream* 440) the living object, thereby killing it like the boy killing the butterfly. For this reason Bernstein is skeptical of characterization, of naming, of defining. An attitude which can also be observed in many of his poems, for instance in "Standing Target" from *Controlling Interests* (1980) or in "An Affirmation" from *With Strings* (2001). In an essay on Stein he points out that, in *The Making of Americans*, Stein refuses to use nouns. Instead she heavily relies on pronouns, verbs and deictic expressions, thereby, producing a text which is highly context-sensitive and which is resistant to fixations of identity. "Stein celebrates her suspension of identity, this holding off naming to see what otherwise emerges. Her writing becomes a state of willing, of willed, unknowingness" (*My Way* 144). In this respect Stein's poetics can also be described as a poetics of negative capability.

The detrimental effect of characterization, of the call for "discipline of the eye, clarity [not to lose] sight of the target" (*Content's Dream* 139) as Robert Duncan has it, is reflected in Bernstein's poem "Standing Target" from *Controlling Interests*.

#### STANDING TARGET

Deserted all sudden a all  
 Or gloves of notion, seriously  
 Foil sightings, polite society  
 Verge at just about characterized (39)

The expression "gloves of notion" in the second line of the poem suggests the coarseness of the "juridical gaze" (*My Way* 225). A person who has been "characterized" has been dismissed or slighted, has been denied his or her own full rights, and has been instead limited and grasped with "gloves of notion".

This image seems to stand in opposition to Heidegger's image of receiving hands. Unlike other mammals the human being does not use his or her hands as claws for grasping and clutching things but is able to use them in much more differentiated and delicate ways. As Heidegger has it:

the hand's essence can never be determined, or explained, by its being an organ which can grasp. [...] The hand is infinitely different from all grasping organs--paws, claws, or fangs--different by an abyss of essence. [...] the craft of the hand is richer than we commonly imagine. The hand does not only grasp and catch, or push and pull. The hand reaches and extends, receives and welcomes--and not just things: the hand extends itself, and receives its own welcome in the hands of others (*What Is Called Thinking?* 16).

The particularity of the human hand, for Heidegger, is a model for the mode of thinking he aspires to. Accordingly, he speaks of thinking as "handicraft." Thinking which is more than grasping and clutching with "gloves of notion" may be poetic thinking. In its quality of

receiving and welcoming, thinking bears a family resemblance with thanking. As shown by Heidegger, both words share the same root. The hand's quality of receiving and being received in the hands of others also provokes Paul Celan's comparison of the poem with a handshake:

Handwerk--das ist Sache der Hände. Und diese Hände wiederum gehören nur *einem* Menschen, d.h. einem einmaligen und sterblichen Seelenwesen, das mit seiner Stimme und seiner Stummheit einen Weg sucht.  
Nur wahre Hände schreiben wahre Gedichte. Ich sehe keinen prinzipiellen Unterschied zwischen Händedruck und Gedicht. (Letter to Hans Bender, *Gesammelte Werke III* 177)

For Heidegger, a handshake symbolizes unification: "Two hands fold into one, a gesture meant to carry man into the great oneness" (16); but it also reminds us of our partiality.

This knowledge of partiality is precisely what Othello wants to disown and which causes him to ask for ocular proof. His hands are not open to receive and welcome. In his clutching hands Desdemona turns into a statue. For Bernstein, Othello's skepticism is related to the skepticism of a poetics of sight: "Othello's tragedy is the demand he makes for 'ocular proof'" (*Content's Dream* 147). His problem is not a problem of knowledge or certainty, but it is situated on a deeper level of human interrelation. It is a failure of acknowledgment:

Othello's problem is not a failure to see but, as Cavell argues, a failure to acknowledge the conditions of sight, that is trust and love [...] He is doomed by virtue of demanding an objectified sight when love could be enough (147-8).

The poetics of sight share with Othello a failure of acknowledgment which has as its consequence a kind of "indifference," "callousness," "an exhaustion, a coldness" (*Must We Mean What We Say* 264) (cf. Bernstein, "The Hand Gets Scald But the Heart Grows Colder," *Controlling Interests* 33-36). It is a spiritual numbness and emptiness, which for Cavell seems to be curable only through poetry. For poetry has the power to make things happen

to the soul. This is why, as we have seen in the last chapter, Cavell suggests Blake's poems or songs as a means for returning Othello and Desdemona back to life.

Blake is also the remedy recommended by Bernstein against the violence and fixation of the poetics of sight. In "Words and Pictures" Bernstein compares Zukofsky's sight with Blake's vision. Vision is to be understood as not merely involving the eyes but as an "engagement of all the senses, and of thought beyond the readily visible, the statically apparent" (*Content's Dream* 139). In this sense poetic vision is a synaesthetic experience: "Vision is eyes hearing, hands smelling" (142). If one considers the poet a prophet or a seer, his or her seeing is as much listening as seeing. The poet listens to his or her voice in order to find what Bernstein calls the measure; a measure, however, which is not taken for granted or always already constituted by habitual patterns of perception. Bernstein takes the following quote from Wilde as a motto for "Words and Pictures". Wilde there stresses the synaesthetic capabilities of the poet:

I have sometimes thought that the story of Homer's blindness might be an artistic myth, created in critical days, and serving to remind us . . . that the great poet is always a seer, seeing less with the eyes of the body than . . . with the eyes of the soul. . . . When Milton became blind he began to compose as everyone should compose, with the voice purely . . . that mighty, many-stopped organ. (Wilde quoted by Bernstein in *Content's Dream* 114)

Bernstein relates Wilde's "seeing with the eyes of the soul" to Richard Foreman's remarks on the "erotics of thought" (140). Foreman stresses the sensual dimension of thought and in this way abandons the strict separation between rationality and intuition. The poetics of vision, thereby, support an extended concept of knowledge which can be realized, in particular, through poetic thinking. This ultimately leads to a resuscitation of repressed structures and potentialities within language. In this sense as well, the poet is Oppen's "legislator of the unacknowledged world." For Foreman,

the Utopia--there, before our eyes--is unseen by most people. . . . To catch it, to make it hold still you have to kill it . . . so I have to talk about OTHER things. . . . Real perception is resistance to perception. . . . THINKING treated as sensing, as the sixth sense. . . . See the (object) dissolve into a kind of web-of-association awareness. (140)

Foreman also stresses the danger of killing the thing one wants to represent. One is again reminded of Emerson's method of indirection. Like Emerson, Foreman argues that Utopia is unapproachable, in the sense that we cannot actively approach it but must allow ourselves to be approached by it. Therefore, "real perception is resistance to perception" resistance to a kind of characterization of the world which does violence to it. A poetics of vision resists a brutal grasping of the world. Instead it claims: "All I know is reception." Reception or intuition leaves the object in the context which is its home. Foreman describes this context as "a kind of web-of-association" of which we become aware if we allow for "thinking as sensing." Unlike the reifying kind of thought modeled according to the ideal of clear sight, vision, or "thinking as sensing" acknowledges the contextuality of meaning, in that "it cannot be isolated from context, from structure, and from duration" (141). Wittgenstein, who stresses the importance of the context for meaning throughout his work uses the picture of the film and the cinema lamp in order to elucidate the embeddedness of meaning in context and duration.

I always think of it as like the cinema. You see before you the picture on the screen, but behind you is the operator, and he has a roll here on this side from which he is winding and another on that side into which he is winding. The present is the picture which is before the light, but the future is still on this roll to pass, and the past is on that roll. It's gone through already. Now imagine that there's only the present. There is no future roll, and no past roll. And now further imagine what language could be in such a situation. One could just gape. This! (Bouwsma 13)

Such a picture of language or the self as an isolated frame is misleading insofar as it neglects or holds back the whole surrounding context of language and the human being within it. To understand a word presupposes the understanding of a full-blown language.

Descartes's view of the self in the *cogito*, is thus an arrestation and isolation of the sort which is typical for a poetics of sight.

In "A Case Study," Bernstein compares Blake's "poetics of vision" with Zukofsky's "poetics of sight." As one might expect, an objectivist poetics is likely to strive towards objectification. Accordingly it favors "the clear physical eye against the erring brain" (Zukofsky, *Prepositions* 167), and "praises 'objectified' and 'solidified' perception" (*Content's Dream* 146). Zukofsky stresses the power of the eye and its capability to yield immediate knowledge, ocular proof, of the existence of the world. He considers the eye superior to the "shortcomings of mind" (*Bottom: On Shakespeare* 263). The ideal of knowledge, for Zukofsky, is "an objectification at perfect rest" (*Prepositions* 12-13). In this respect, he is comparable to Othello, whose death dealing passion is described, by Cavell, as a form of jealousy. Zukofsky's quest for ocular proof is also emotionally motivated. His *Bottom: On Shakespeare* is "filled with a nostalgia for a primal world of instant, unmediated perception, severing eyes from erring mind and memory" (*Content's Dream* 149).

The separation of thought and sight and the rejection of the former leads to "a concept of purified sight," which, for Bernstein,

is like a partial version of Freud's model of the perception-consciousness apparatus in 'A Note on the Mystic Writing Pad' [...] The pad is a device made of a slab of dark brown resin overlaid with a thin transparent sheet of celluloid. Marks made by a pointed stylus become visible because the depressions in the celluloid are pressed into the resin slab. The marks are erased by pulling up the oversheet (149).

For Bernstein, it seems as if in Zukofsky's poetics only the immediate marks are recognized as true perception, while the marks in the wax slab are ignored for being unreliable. Freud, however, draws attention to those marks underneath the celluloid: "a permanent trace of what was written is retained upon the wax slab itself and is legible in certain lights" (150). In this way Freud compares the wax slab to the unconscious. Like Stein, Bernstein is in

particular attracted towards illegible handwriting. "It is wonderful how a handwriting which is illegible can be read, oh yes it can."

In his poetics of sight, Zukofsky frequently quotes from the *Tractatus*. Wittgenstein's early philosophy displays a static view of the world which agrees with the poetics Zukofsky develops in *Bottom*. "He seems [however] unaware of Wittgenstein's total overthrow of this sort of atemporal anti-epistemology in his later writings" (*Content's Dream* 150). Zukofsky's equation of the 'I' with the 'eye' also corresponds with Wittgenstein's remarks on the "non-psychological I." Bernstein, relates Zukofsky's equation to "Wittgenstein's famous equation of positivism and solipsism" in the *Tractatus* (151):

5.64: Here we see that solipsism strictly carried out coincides with pure realism. The I in solipsism shrinks to an extensionless point and there remains the reality co-ordinated with it (*Bottom* 52).

In his quest for certainty, Descartes doubts everything, except that he is thinking. As a consequence the self shrinks to the extensionless point of the *cogito*. As in Wittgenstein's example of the cinema, Descartes reduces reality to a single atemporal frame before his eyes, while the whole surrounding which gives life to it is effaced.

Zukofsky's equation of the I with the eye is a result of his privileging of sight over words. For Bernstein, however, "words significantly show that ears everywhere inform eyes always "I"s, in the plural, us" (*Content's Dream* 151). Such a conception might return the I from its state of extensionlessness to a state in which the alignment with others is felt. Such feeling of connectedness is furthered in a form of life which relies less on seeing than on hearing.

Apparently, not all cultures share our bias for the visual among the senses. David Guss reports, in conversation, that in the heavily shaded world of the upper Orinoco (Venezuela), all life forms are oriented more toward sound than light. He suggests that while the horizontal space of sight distances in its objectification, the shaded world of sound permits an intimacy of interconnectedness (127).

Bernstein recovers a world of shadows which can build an alternative to a world of brightness that separates and distances. The opacity of shade which is eradicated by the latter is supported and acknowledged by a poetics of vision. It encourages an understanding of knowledge which includes more than clear and distinct sight. Such an extended view of knowledge is also expressed in the following lines from Stevens which Bernstein quotes in "Words and Pictures": "It is not the premise that reality / Is a solid. It may be a shade that traverses / A dust, a force that traverses a shade" (153). Here one might be surprised at Bernstein's first quoting Stevens as a poet who is attracted to sight and then as a poet who acknowledges shade. It is, however, typical for his way of reading other poets that he is able to accept contradictory impulses in the work of one author. This might be looked at as another version of negative capability which avoids closure.

The notion of shade as a part of the poetics of vision, thus, works as a remedy against reifying tendencies in human perception. These tendencies are more often than not motivated by the interest component of certainty, prediction and control, all of which belong to the dynamics of power. The negative capability of a poetics of vision consists in its avoidance of authoritativeness. In this sense negative capability bears a family resemblance to Bernstein's terms of "theory without authoritativeness," "unappointed philosophy" and "epistemology without portfolio" (*A Poetics* 159).

As the poetics of sight relies on Newton's optics, it can be said to be criticized by Blake's visionary poetics. Bernstein, who in his work favors a poetics of vision and reflection over a poetics of sight and insight, points out that "Blake's visionary physics is an all-out attack on 'sight,' conceived as Newtonian optics of rationalized, continuous space filled with uniformly measurable permanent objects" (*Content's Dream* 143). Like Blake, Bernstein demands "to clear the doors of perception of sight, of Newtonian optics" (CD 144). These are "modes of perception Blake finds reductive of the possibilities of human experience"

(CD 144). His skepticism towards Newtonian optics and accordingly his negative capability is, in particular, investigated in Donald Ault's *Visionary Physics: Blake's Response to Newton*, from which Bernstein quotes the following passage:

The complexity of Blake's poetry to us arises out of his attempt to correct our confused perception which is constantly lured towards the forms of perception synthesized in Newton's system. Mainly [Newton's] technique tries to rescue spatialized permanence from the flux of time (145).

Rather than accepting such an idealized version of the world with an inherent bias on objecthood that is motivated by a yearning for stability, Blake acknowledges a more pertinent mode of perception, thinking, or consciousness which is expressed in his concept of the vortex. Blake's vortex is comparable to Bernstein's "turbulent thought" (*My Way* 42) and to Thoreau's "doubleness." As Harold Bloom comments in the Erdman edition of *The Poetry and Prose of William Blake*, the vortex is

the eddy or whirlpool of eternal consciousness, whose center is the object eternal consciousness intends. Since the center and circumference are not separate in eternal vision, the perceiver is at once at the apex of his or her vision, and yet able to regard it from a distance (146)

Blake's vortex is cautious of any kind of solidifying, objectifying, and generalizing perception: "one law for the Lion and the Ox is Oppression" (Erdman, *The Poetry and Prose of William Blake* 43), or as Wittgenstein has it: "If a lion could talk we would not be able to understand it." Which is to say, each phenomenon has to be acknowledged on its own terms as the particular thing it is.

Objectification and generalization, for Bernstein, are the privileged techniques of the American academy which, therefore, turns out to be "reductivist in its ideologies." Because of its artificial limitation of knowledge, it "has been one of the major adversaries of thought

and reason. Ratio-nality, as Blake points out, is the suppression of the mind" (*Content's Dream* 155):

the straitjacket of received forms, or the intellectualization of neat literary irony or elusive high tone or coy historical reference or discursive mannerism represents not the hallmarks of thought but its effacement. Blake, for instance, never considered his attack on Newton to be an attack on "intellectual things" (156).

Rather it is an attack on the reduction of intelligence through the strict separation of thought and emotion and the expulsion of the latter from academic discourse. Such a separation is a confusion and makes one forget that according to Blake "a Tear is an Intellectual Thing" (48). The inseparability of thought and emotion is in particular at issue in Bernstein's text "The Only Utopia Is in a Now". Throughout his work, he tries to overcome the "antirationalist' manifestation [which] takes 'thought' as 'prohibiting emotion'" (*Content's Dream* 157). The emotional numbness of "anti-intellectual intellectualism" causes not only reification but also has its organic effects: it puts the human being into a state of sclerosis. Bernstein prefers the word "sclerotic" to the term "reified", because it "is a biological metaphor, referring to an organic process, reify is more conceptual--to make into a thing." Like reifying it also means hardening but hardening as for instance in "arteriosclerosis" (*A Poetics* 168):

With sclerosis you are still alive, just stiff, swollen, pained. The human is evoked by that--are the joints moving? What did the Tin Man want?--not to be rust-proof aluminum (a better machine) but to have a heart (168).

So, sclerosis roughly corresponds with Cavell's "failure of acknowledgment" which results in a spiritual and emotional numbness. Both Cavell and Bernstein, draw attention to a disease of the soul and the heart for which poetry is expected to provide the cure. The stiffness which results from the false desire of skepticism to overcome human imperfectibility and which develops through the striving towards idealization and generalization can only be overcome by the care for the particular. As Bernstein has it: "Stiffness may run roughshod

over the malleability of flesh, but the real sadness is not to have the heart to care" (168). In "The Objects of Meaning: Reading Cavell Reading Wittgenstein," he acknowledges Cavell's attempt to resuscitate the soul from its repression in analytic philosophy and further illustrates the skeptic's spiritual and emotional plight by taking a quote from *The Wizard of Oz* as a motto for this essay: "Now I know I have a heart because it's broken" (L. Frank Baum quoted in *Content's Dream* 165). Disowning the knowledge of one's soul or the soul of others brings to mind Wittgenstein's term of "soul-blindness."

Apart from the dualism of thought and emotion, a poetics of negative capability also annuls the body-mind dualism: "philosophy cannot be literature as long as our minds do not sit comfortably in our bodies" (168). Furthermore, it does not accept "the gap between nature and culture, fact and convention, fate and freedom" (172). Ultimately, it breaks with the "endless repetition of either/or" (160).

The poetics of negative capability do not "refute skepticism but the transcendental illusion." The truth of skepticism is that meaning can only be found inside conventions, inside Wittgensteinian use, or Deleuze's and Guattari's desiring production (cf. 173). While a "ceding of skepticism" (174) is necessary in order for society to take place, there is according to the social contract always the possibility of an abrogation of the ceding of skepticism. Such an abrogation can in particular be accomplished by a poetics of negative capability, or as I have argued in chapter II, poetry is able to exercise the right to reconvene. There are two possible consequences of the abrogation of the ceding of skepticism. 1: Abrogation can lead to a revolution, with an initial destruction of fixed structures together with a deterritorialization of rigidified borders and a subsequent reterritorialization and reconvening, which might bring about the just society. 2: It might result in self-banishment and force the individual who withdraws his or her consent to live apart from society and

ordinary life. The former has been referred to before as far-inness, whereas the latter has been referred to as far-outness.

In the following I want to relate the abrogation of the ceding of skepticism, which is one of the main potentials of a poetics of negative capability, to Bernstein's poetological notions of absorption and antiabsorption. Furthermore the discussion of disruption and redirection of absorption will be compared to Wittgenstein's concepts of seeing and changing aspects. In "Artifice of Absorption," Bernstein observes that, associated with absorption is the intensification of attention, which has a mesmerizing, hypnotic effect. An absorptive text is spellbinding. It induces the reader to identify with the experiences depicted in it. In its enthralling quality it provokes belief, conviction and silence. In a related essay on film, "Frames of Reference," Bernstein defines absorption as the "unwilling suspension of disbelief".

Antiabsorption or impermeability, on the other hand, suggests artifice, boredom, distraction and digression. Because of its fractured, fragmented and anticonventional style, an antiabsorptive text, or in Perloff's terminology the "radical artifice," interrupts identification and uncritical attention. It's ironic, programmatic and didactic tone repels the reader's immersion in the text and provokes skepticism, doubt and resistance.

In his poetry, Bernstein is, in particular, interested in using "antiabsorptive techniques (non-transparent or nonnaturalizing elements) (artifice) for absorptive ends." Accordingly he explains:

In my poems, I  
frequently use opaque & non absorbable  
elements, digression &  
interruptions, as part of a technological arsenal to create a more powerful  
("souped up")  
absorption than possible with traditional

& blander, absorptive techniques.

Although Bernstein favors antiabsorptive techniques in his writing, he does not want to get rid of "content or meaning" but "to speak of a radically impervious text / is to speak oxymoronically--absorbency & repellency / are relative, contextual / & interpenetrating / terms" (*A Poetics* 65).

One of the examples of antiabsorptive techniques used for absorptive ends that Bernstein touches upon is Brecht's method of Unfamiliarization (*Verfremdung*). Unlike the dramatic theater which is grounded in empathy, compassion, and identification with the fate of the characters Brecht's epic theater is based on alienation. Alienation takes away the natural, the obvious, the familiar aspect of a thing or action by representing it in a peculiar, striking and remarkable fashion. In this way estrangement triggers amazement and curiosity in the spectator. He or she is enabled to escape the suggestive spell of the scene. Instead of being caught up empathetically with the character on stage the spectator is able to say: It does not have to be like this, it could be different and thus wakes up "from the spell of accepted reality," becomes active and tries to imagine how it could be instead, how the situation could be changed for better. Negative capability, in this sense, is the capacity to disrupt and investigate what seems to be our Fate but in reality is the product of our own hands. The effort of disrupting and stopping, is a crucial element of Bernstein's poetics. In "An Interview with Tom Beckett" he says that the doubting and stopping which makes up negative capability "is all important: ('STOP! in the name of love, before you break my heart!' with the all important credo as addendum, 'Think it over!')" (*Content's Dream* 391). This tongue in cheek call to "stop in the name of love" sounds at the same time banal and pertinent. Pertinent, because the sclerosis which is to be overcome can only be healed through "the syntax of love" (Bernstein, *The Sophist*: "The Only Utopia Is in a Now" 35). However, as emotion is scorned in authoritative discourse, one risks to be smiled at condescendingly. A position Bernstein even provokes in using worn out lyrics to express his

poetics. The insertion of mass media language into so-called high culture provokes a break in style which has a similar effect of disruption.

In particular in his longer poems Bernstein tries to "create something analogous to what Brecht means by *epic* [...] to break out from the propulsion/projection" (*Content's Dream* 391):

the questioning, the stopping, built into the structure of the poem, seems to me crucial to seeing the constituting nature of language, which is the reading value I've been suggesting, and that indeed this stopping/framing allows for the music of the poem to be heard, the music being the sound come into meaning rather than a play with already existing meanings by way of meter (391).

Brecht is concerned about maintaining the entertainment value of the theater while stressing its didactic potential. Russian Formalism shows, indeed, that alienation has not only a didactic but also an aesthetic value. Estrangement heightens the intensity of aesthetic sensation: "it makes the stone stony" (Shklovsky, "Art as Technique").

The concept of the unfamiliar and accordingly of familiarity also plays a crucial role in Wittgenstein's late philosophy. It connects aesthetic considerations about alienation with the epistemological issue of seeing aspects. For Wittgenstein a thing is familiar ("wohlbekannt") if one does not change the aspect of the thing seen, but instead grasps one aspect straight away and settles in this aspect ("daß ich den Aspekt des Gesehenen nicht wechsele, sondern sogleich einen Aspekt ergreife und festhalte mich in einem Aspekt niederlasse und bleibe.") Unfamiliarization or antiabsorption, thus, disrupts the automatic mechanism of the grasping of an aspect and gives the opportunity for an alternate perspective.

Like Wittgenstein, Bernstein reflects on 'seeing' as a metaphor for knowledge. Both use the image of 'blindness' to refer to a restriction of the possibilities of conceiving and meaning, as

it happens for instance in the poetics of sight. Expressions such as "ambliopia", the title of a long poem in *The Sophist* or *Islets/Irritation* the title of a volume published in 1983 illustrate the danger of limiting vision, that is, knowledge. Ambliopia is a medical term for the "dimming of vision" without an organic defect: "it is" as Bernstein writes "something like hysterical, imaginary, but there remains the material organic possibility for ambi-opia, multilevel seeing" (*A Poetics* 184). A similar syndrome is displayed in the case of frame-fixation which Bernstein defines as follows:

Frame fixation bears a family resemblance to aspect blindness, as ascribed by Wittgenstein in part 2 of *Philosophical Investigations*, where the single figure that can be interpreted as a duck or a rabbit is discussed. Different contexts may suggest the appropriateness of particular interpretive systems, some of which may then seem determining. That is, once viewed through a particular frame, it becomes difficult to recognize alternate readings. A gaze freezes into a stare; only one aspect of an ambiguous figure is visible. The projection overwhelms the text without exhausting the work (*My Way* 90).

The duck-rabbit, which Wittgenstein uses as his chief example for seeing aspects, is a figure taken from Gestaltpsychology. What renders the duck-rabbit so important is that one can see it as a duck or as a rabbit without the picture itself changing at all. In opposition to Köhler, Wittgenstein denies that the person experiencing the change of aspect has two inner pictures, two Gestalten, in his or her mind which explain the two different ways of seeing. Instead he claims that the beholder's attitude or reaction to the visual object changes. Wittgenstein's discussion of the duck-rabbit, just as his discussion of criteria, redirects attention on the individual. It is the individual who applies criteria, who reacts to another human being and acknowledges or fails to acknowledge it. It is *oneself* who responds in acknowledging, just as the change is in *me* in the case of changing aspects. Every single human being is responsible for his or her reaction, reacts by him- or herself. Furthermore our response depends on the surrounding we associate while looking at the picture, an association which is based on our conceptual framework. In everyday life situations, objects are presented in a familiar context and words occur in well-known language games.

Unless there is an pun or a slip of the tongue, the word, or object always rests in the same aspect. In Bernstein's view, it is the potential of art and, in particular, of literature, to create ambiguous figures and situations which then expose the contingency of our way of conceiving. Or in Brecht's diction, it provides an opportunity to become aware of the fact that the conditions and circumstances of human life are not unchangeable but historical and can be altered by the human being.

Nevertheless, it's a difficult task to break the hypnotic spell of frame-fixation. In Bernstein's view: "Something powerfully absorptive is needed to pull / us out of the shit, the ideology in which we slip-- / mind altering as the LSD ad used to put it." For Wittgenstein, ideology is like a pair of glasses one cannot take off. Everything we look at is shaped by those glasses, we do not see things but see things as something. Thus, all apprehension and all knowledge of the world is "seeing as." That one follows an arrow from its end to its tip and not the other way around is an instance of "seeing as." We use an arrow in this way without choosing and it seems only natural to us. To rest in a familiar aspect and to grasp an object with certainty is to act in agreement with the system of beliefs of the social group one is a member of.

Negative capability is able to question such received beliefs. It is the critical activity that destroys faith. Wittgenstein refers to the system of beliefs as a world-view or in the "Remarks on Frazer's *Golden Bough*" as "an entire mythology which is stored within our language" (133). Knowledge, understood as, seeing as, therefore is not part of perception in the sense that it depends on the empirical, but it is a function of grammar. It belongs to our "scaffolding of thought." For Bernstein the idea of absorption and antiabsorption and its poetic aim of changing aspects has to do with the "dilemma of belief: what is lost if one reveals the grounds of belief & what is lost if one conceals them". (*A Poetics* 71) In his

writing he wants to achieve a hyperattentiveness through the "disruption of a single plane of belief or attention" (83).

In agreement with Rousseau in *The Social Contract*, Bernstein claims that "our conventions are provisional, and that we may choose to reconvene in order to withdraw authority from those conventions that no longer serve our purposes" (225). In this sense, it is the strength of poetry to "change our tunes" and to let "new rhythms dawn". In "The Klupzy Girl" from *Islets/Irritations* Bernstein writes: "Poetry is like a swoon, with this difference: / it brings you to your senses" (47). This is to say that although there is an initial blurring involved, the poem might then provoke a change of focus, which leads to the perception of aspects "that were hitherto [...] not apprehendable" as Piombino has it in his essay "Currents of Attention in the Poetic Process" and from which Bernstein quotes in *Artifice of Absorption*. Piombino argues that "the poet must find some way of directing the gaze of consciousness onto literally inconceivably complex linkages between various models of experience." This exercise in attention leads to an oscillation or a blurring which may "cause a shift in magnitude of attentional focus ... the poetic state of consciousness makes possible an expansion of the absorbability of experiential data by the attentional mind." Wittgenstein describes such a redirection of attention in a similar way: "It is as if one had altered the adjustment of a microscope. One did not see before what is now in focus" (*Philosophical Investigations* 645). Thus, poetry has the potential to direct attention on previously unnoticed aspects of the world. Those *quasi* hidden aspects can be referred to as the "disattend track", a term Bernstein takes from Erving Goffman's book *Frame Analysis*. Goffman there uses the term "disattend" to refer to the withdrawal of all attention and awareness" (202). For Bernstein:

The process of locating disattend tracks, and bringing them to the center of attention, can be understood as not only a primary pedagogical aim but also a central project of much modernist and contemporary art (*My Way* 94).

An antiabsorptive poem thus shows unfamiliar perspectives of an object, it enables the reader to "see the same thing from multiple points of view or different angles." (a principle of Cubism as well) Bernstein compares this shifting of perspectives to the "radar or sonar scanning of a three-dimensional object" (7). The paragraphs or lines of such a poetic text are related in a "manner of transition" (205) which reminds of Wittgenstein's "family resemblances."

In *Philosophical Investigations* Wittgenstein argues that the meanings of the word "play" are incommensurable. There is not one characteristic which they all share but they are connected through transitory relations. As an ordering principle in poetry, Bernstein describes this kind of relation as "non-developmental seriality[:] [M]odules share thematic interconnections with subject clusters connected by family resemblances, commonly involving a permutation of tangentially related motifs, with shifts among themes varying from slight to abrupt" (My Way 206/207).

An example for non-developmental seriality connected by family resemblances is the poem "Of Time and the Line" from *Rough Trades*. As Perloff illustrates in her essay: "After Free Verse: The New Linear Poetries," the line has been subject to much reflection. For most theorists it is the unit of free verse. "Olson celebrates the line as the embodiment of breath, the signifier of the heart." In contrast, many of the Language poets perceive the line "as a boundary, a confining border, a form of packaging." In this context it is interesting to see that the concept of the "line" as it is presented in "Of Time and the Line" has no fixed borders. On the contrary, Bernstein draws on the different meanings and aspects of the word "line". The reader experiences shifts in meaning from the "space between the lines" and the "weaving together of lines" to Hennie Yougman's isolated "one-liner". The one-liner fulfills Bernstein's idea of radical parataxis where the segments of the text are not in

hypotactical relationship. The transition to the next line of the poem: "My father pushed a line of ladies' dresses ..." is indeed strictly paratactic, there is no logical connection in the sense as one would expect it in expository writing. Between the "line of ladies' dresses" and the "hemline" there is a semantic connection. Whereas we experience a thematic jump from the "hemline" to "Maoist lines" on which the subsequent "line of malarkey" throws a rather dubious light, provoking a belated shift of meaning. The discredit radiating from the "line of malarkey" prepares the "decline of the iambic line, since it is no longer so clear who I am." The pun on "iambic" and "I am" alludes to the question of identity and the idea of an inner realm of the "I" or the "self" and an outer realm of the "you" or the "other." However, the extension of what one is "lining in" or "lining out" is not always fixed. Nevertheless, the constitutive function of "delineation" is stressed: "Adam didn't so much name as delineate," which ascribes a more active function to language and stresses the role of the imagination. Like Wittgenstein's mathematician, Bernstein's Adam is more of an inventor than an explorer. Or put into a socio-historical statement: "The lines of an imaginary are inscribed on the social flesh by the knife point of history". Here the role of time comes in and the word "line" gets the connotation of a "mark". Bernstein also seems to allude to Barthes conviction that the cinema mirrors a society's world view. For Barthes the cinema is the imaginary of our time, which is to say, the cinema most impressively displays the ideology of a particular period. Furthermore the image of the knife suggests the violence of the inscription of ideology and stresses the organic nature of language, refusing to look at it as an ahistorical system, which is independent of its speakers.

While the short discussion of "Of Time and the Line" offers only a first glimpse at the poem it already makes apparent that Bernstein goes beyond Wittgenstein's concept of family-resemblances. He stretches this concept in suggesting a connection between "line" and "hemline" and clearly goes beyond it at the end of the poem ("Or, as / they say in math, it takes two lines to make / an angle but only one line to make / a Margarita" *Rough Trades*

43), where he jumps from "line" to "lime," in this way, not only acknowledging semantic relations but also relations of sound. There is however, no strict distinction between sound and meaning, as Bernstein argues in his discussion of Walter Benjamin's "Doctrine of the Similar" in "Living Tissue / Dead Ideas" (*Content's Dream* 365-8). For Bernstein, as for Benjamin, "sound, like the graphemic, is a principal tool of communicative (and noncommunicative!) activity and, as such, invests the social field with an horizon of meanings" (367). In this respect, the poetic is able to extend the realm of epistemological inquiry in a way which goes beyond the possibilities of philosophical discourse. Poetry's potential of semantic exploration through formal experimentation provides an incentive for philosophy to aspire to literature.

The semantic shifts, the changes of aspect of the word "line" displayed in the poem, provoke what Bernstein calls "context sensitivity" (*My Way* 44). Context sensitivity is the opposite of "frame-fixation" and makes one aware of the malleability of language. In this sense Bernstein defines the poetic as the practice of moving from frame to frame, as the art of transition. Like Wittgenstein who wants to "teach us differences", (as the motto to the *Investigations* taken from Shakespeare's *Lear* tells us), Bernstein wants to draw attention to the multiplicity of possible meanings of a word. Both Wittgenstein and Bernstein attempt to teach a *new way of seeing*. For the latter poetic innovation consists in "new ways of conceiving of our present world" (*A Poetics* 93). Bernstein's poems in this sense must be read as proto-phenomena. "It is a mistake" as Wittgenstein writes in *Philosophical Investigations* 654/655, "to look for an explanation where we ought to look at what happens as a 'proto-phenomenon.' That is, where we ought to have said: this language game is played. [...] The question is [one of] noting a language-game." As I have argued extensively in chapter I, Wittgenstein's language games and Bernstein's poems do not "emerge from some kind of ratiocination" (*On Certainty* 475) but rely on aesthetic judgment. Although Bernstein's poems seem strange and disorienting at first "rhythms [might] dawn [eventually] among

dense-packed words" (*A Poetics* 85). Or as Wittgenstein describes it: "I could say to my pupil: 'You will think differently once you've gone through these exercises'" (Item 115).

Such a dawning of aspects is also described in "The Taste Is What Counts" from *Poetic Justice*:

Next to us all this twirls in spin rapt as reverie as much as sight, sound, sign. Repelled or riveted, the consciousness of seeing clumped with signs fills out or insists on absence. The change is in me: the very same sand of my childhood still confronts me. The signs constructed by the borders projected by a language hover in actuality around the crisses and crosses obediently answering to my expectations (*Republics of Reality* 186).

"Next to us all this twirls in spin," here we are reminded that our relation to the world is not one of knowing but of besideness. We live within the world, not outside of it, disaffected by it. The "twirling" and "spinning" recalls Blake's "vortex" as well as Poe's "maelstrom." Both images correct the misunderstanding of metaphysics which pictures the subject as "absent viewer" or "voyeur" (*Content's Dream* 91). This supposedly isolated position of the subject is perfectly realized in film, which in Bernstein's view, is an exemplification of Western metaphysics. Both are caught up in the inner outer picture and even fuel this split or dualism:

The essence of cinematic voyeurism involves the power derived from looking at an other situation that is self-contained and unaffected by me, and toward which I am invisible, irrelevant. In simplest terms, I watch, unseen, the performance of everyday life (92).

Images such as "vortex," "eddy," or "maelstrom," draw attention to the human condition of insidiness. This insidiness, can be experienced in a state of consciousness which Thoreau refers to as "doubleness." The "double," or the aspect of the self which is called the "spectator," is able to observe the element of the self which is called the "workman." It is this

realization and experience of besideness which is expressed in the first line of the passage at hand: "Next to us all this twirls in spin." The line continues: "rapt as reverie as much as / sight, sound, sign." This second part of the sentence recalls Bernstein's poetics of absorption and antiabsorption. It seems to suggest two kinds of rapture. Rapture is one of the terms included in Bernstein's list of words used in the context of absorption. "Rapt as reverie" (cf. *Walden*: "rapt in a revery" 188) in particular stresses immersion, whereas "rapt as sight" suggests an absorption which excludes the beholder. These two kinds of absorption are roughly comparable to Barthes's two kinds of enjoyment which he terms "pleasure" and "jouissance" (bliss). Through its disruption and deviation, the "writerly text" astonishes and provokes rapture and ecstasy. For Bernstein, this effect of bliss is also due to the fact that a writerly text has to be received rather than synthesizes. In the process of such a reading every letter is tasted and indulged. Like Barthes, Bernstein stresses the erotics of reading and connects it to the aesthetics of the body. In fact, his poem "The Taste Is What Counts" encourages the tasting of letters or sounds, by the frequent use of alliteration such as "sight, sound, sign" or "rapt, reverie, repelled or riveted." As mentioned before, the taste that counts in poetry, counts differently. Just as in Stein's poetics, it does justice to every single word (a structural allegory for the just society): "one at a time, oh one at a time is something oh yes definitely something" (*The Geographical History of America* 151). In this respect it opposes unconscious absorption. It is not easily digestible as the always already prefigured messages in, for instance, the mass media: "Every syllable stings. & that's the / hardest thing to stomach on a low-noise / diet, if you sink your teeth into / the / thought that all that sound gotta be / digested" (*Dark City* 64).

Bernstein, however, is not opposed to absorption as such. On the contrary his poetry tries to achieve absorption, but a kind of absorption which includes the subject instead of turning it into an absent viewer. He wants "to create a more powerful / "souped up" / absorption than possible with traditional / & blander, absorptive techniques" (*A Poetics* 65). Just as in

Barthes, this more powerful absorption relies on a willingness to try on new paradigms and to open oneself to a new way of reading. This new mode of reading can be compared to the following situation described by Stein: "You read with glasses and somebody is cutting your hair and so you cannot keep the glasses on and you use your glasses as a magnifying glass" (*The Geographical History of America* 151). Increased absorption might also be realized by a switching between absorption and antiabsorption: "Repelled or riveted, the consciousness of seeing clumped with signs fills out or insists on absence." In fact, as Bernstein argues, it is not possible to escape from absorption, the only thing that a poetics of negative capability can achieve is a redirection of absorption, which triggers awareness of one's own absorption within the world and enables one to focus on the "disattend track." The alternatives of "filling out" or "insisting on absence" seem to allude to the two positions of the subject: its experience of indwelling a world of meaning and its feeling split off from the world, which is characterized by absence. As the preceding investigation has shown, each individual is responsible for his or her relation to the world. Only in his or her acknowledgment of shared forms of life does the world fill out with meaning or remains empty. Therefore: "The change is in me." We also find this sentence in Cavell's *Claim of Reason*, in the context of his discussion of aspect-blindness. In order to be able to escape the fixation of a poetics of sight, in order to overcome ambliopia and to enter multi-level seeing, one has to change one's attitude towards an object, one's interpretation. The world, or the duck-rabbit figure, remain the same: "the very same sand of my childhood still confronts me." While the education of the child consists to a large part of training, the education of an adult strives towards becoming aware of one's schooled perception, of one's condition of knowing as seeing as. This awareness, which is also a concern of political education, is reached in the experience of the changing or dawning of an aspect. It is one of the truths of skepticism that our world view is determined and constituted by language, limited to it, but not by it: "The signs constructed by the borders projected by a language hover in actuality around the crisses and crosses obediently answering to my expectations." The last part expresses that

we only see what we know, what our perception has been schooled to see: "expectations stymie hunger for / exception" (*Dark City* 49). The imagination, however, is able to invent or receive new ways of ordering the world. It is able to find its own measure and, in this way, to suggest new ways of reading the world. Such new modes of reading are meant to be more appropriate and less violent.

Stylistic innovations, thus, are no mere alternate aesthetic conventions but have to be recognized as "alternate social formations." For Bernstein "[the] aesthetic and the political make an inseparable poetics" (*A Poetics* 227). Again, the "continual formation of utopian content" is one main function of literature. The imagination of alternate ways of conceiving of the world helps to escape the "logorrheic lock jaw" of frame-fixation, even if it is only "trope-ically" (75):

The utopian ecstatic  
is not a refusal of history  
but an envisionment of the indwelling  
potentialities of history  
that must be envisioned--audibly embodied--  
in order to occur.

The poetics of negative capability can also be related to Deleuze and Guattari's notion of schizophrenia. For Bernstein, skepticism's refusal of the ceding of skepticism is a form of insanity. "It is with this insanity, the other side of reason, that Guattari and Deleuze wish us to be in touch so that we do not misunderstand the bases of our social contracts" (*Content's Dream* 174). Bernstein comments on the form of insanity they refer to as schizophrenia:

For them, the schizophrenic is a process in which bands of intensity flow through one like waves of energy, sheer impulses, the self as it were collapsing into the world, at one with it. These flows "disinvest the social field" by decoding, deterritorializing, deconventionalizing. The "subject itself is not at the center, which is occupied by the machine [by desiring production], but on the periphery, with no fixed identity, forever

decentered, *defined by the states through which it passes*" [*Anti-Oedipus*, p. 20] (quoted in *Content's Dream* 174-5).

In Bernstein's view, Deleuze's and Guattari's schizophrenia can be compared to "Cavell's account of 'being next to' in Thoreau." Schizophrenia seems to be another instance of "doubleness." For Cavell (*The Senses of Walden* 103-6) 'doubleness,' means "that we are in the world unselfconsciously as pure production and flow--existence--and that at the same time we front ourselves as spectators of our existence" (*Content's Dream* 175). This description, indeed, reminds one of Deleuze's and Guattari's account of schizophrenia. Cavell, in particular, stresses the possibility of self-knowledge in the condition of besideness:

To suggest that one may stand there, stay there, in a sane sense, is to suggest that the [being beside oneself] of which ecstasy speaks is my experience of my existence, my knowledge of myself as a human entity' [...] This condition--the condition of 'having' a self, and knowing it--is an instance of the general relation the writer perceives as 'being next to' (*The Senses of Walden* 104).

In this way the relation to the world is not one of knowing but one of being next to. The condition of besideness has been understood as another truth of skepticism. There is, however, also the danger of standing beside oneself in an insane sense. In Deleuze's and Guattari's terminology, this condition is referred to as paranoia, in Emerson it would be our unhandsome condition. The detrimental side of madness is also

at the center of Cavell's devastating portrait of Charles Stevenson's positivist moral theory. Stevenson argues to the effect that all moral views are mere attitudes and persuasion, that no valid basis exists for choosing among them, thereby, Cavell points out, overthrowing morality fully as much as those (he cites Marx and Nietzsche and Freud) who have found our moral codes wanting as a way of regulating our lives (*Content's Dream* 178-9).

The positive moral theory discussed in *The Claim of Reason* is an example of another one of the wrongs of skepticism, the dissatisfaction with our moral values because they are only human. This realization, however does not need to lead to the rejection of all responsibility

for human moral values, on the contrary it stresses our responsibility for them. Cavell as well as Deleuze and Guattari accordingly distinguish two forms of madness:

the one is the quest to free the human as fully as possible to itself, the other the 'denial of the human', or anyway human society or morality, in the avoidance of 'metaphysical finitude'. (Deleuze and Guattari call the latter paranoia--being beside oneself in an insane way--and distinguish it from the schizophrenic process--they are not talking about 'clinical entities'--seeing paranoia as an experience of distance and separation, of being next to your experiences but not being able to feel them happening, occurring) (179-80).

According to Bernstein, Deleuze and Guattari seem to be more political in their work than Cavell and Wittgenstein, because they "locate value totally within the deconventionalizing and deterritorializing flows of desiring production" (180). Thereby they do not realize the importance of reterritorialization. Conventions can only exist within forms of life in which they are embedded. Cavell and Wittgenstein, therefore, "locate value totally within the context of use and production in the language/socius" (180). For both, values can only come about if they are territorialized, this is also an aspect of what Bernstein has called far-inness. Poetry is not interested in jumping out of the socius but in revolutionizing it by criticizing it from within.

For Bernstein, paranoia is one of the wrongs of skepticism, it provokes a state of consciousness in which one feels separated from the world. He understands the work of Derrida as a continuation of the dark side of skepticism. While he acknowledges that there is a kinship between Derrida and Wittgenstein, in that, both reject the transcendental signified as an illusion and, thereby, criticize traditional metaphysics. He holds the view that Derrida's philosophy is a form of skepticism which goes beyond the truth of metaphysical finitude. For Derrida it is not enough to say that there is no absolute meaning and no absolute presence but he continues to doubt where according to Wittgenstein it makes no sense either to doubt or to affirm one's knowledge:

What Derrida ends up transforming to houses of cards--shimmering traces of life insubstantial as elusive--Wittgenstein locates as *meaning*, with the full range of intention, responsibility, coherence, and possibility of revolt against or madness without. In Wittgenstein's accounting one is not left sealed off from the world with only 'markings' to 'decipher' but rather *located* in a world with meanings to *respond to* (181).

Derrida leaves no room for the responsibility that each human being has for the state of his or her society. For Bernstein, this responsibility is central: "each person must take responsibility for--the failure to make ourselves present to each other, to respond or act when the occasion demands" (182).

## IV Reading *Dark City*

I come to guard the city *in that* somewhere I am uttered.

*Cantares Mexicanas*, tr. John Bierhorst

But suppose the noting of "our city" is a standing gesture toward the reader, or overhearer, to enter into the discussion, to determine his or her own position with respect to what is said--assenting, puzzled, bullied, granting for the sake of argument, and so on. Then the city has, in each such case of reading, one more member than the members depicted in a Platonic (or Wittgensteinian, or Emersonian) dialogue.

Stanley Cavell (*Conditions Handsome and Unhandsome* 8)

The knowledge gained in the course of the previous investigation, concerning Bernstein's poetics and his method of composition, in this chapter will be used to benefit an adequate reception of his poetry, and in particular a reading of selected passages from *Dark City*. I suggest to look at *Dark City* as an instance of what Perloff calls "radical artifice" and Bernstein "artifice of absorption." Both, Perloff's and Bernstein's idea of "artifice," prevents an immediate habitual grasping of the meaning of the work of art. It disrupts automatized ways of perception and requires an active process of reading. In this way, the reading of a constructive piece of writing "is also a construction on the part of the audience. At its best, such a construction empowers the audience by altering its perception of how things happen" (*Radical Artifice* 28). The perception of how things happen is tantamount to an experience of our "form of life" our familiar ways of talking about and acting in the world. It is made possible through the estrangement of the everyday, thereby exposing the "strangeness of the ordinary" (Perloff, *Wittgenstein's Ladder*). In this way the poem as artifice gives an opportunity to witness our "particular constellations of beliefs, values, memories, expectations; a culture; a way of seeing, mythography; language" (*Content's Dream* 43). In

what is to follow I will present a reading of *Dark City* that looks at it as textual space which is emblematic for the textual space that is our form of life, our "city of words,"

Wittgenstein's ancient city of language. It is a dark city, because it consists of the level of human life and consciousness which is suppressed or forgotten. If one were to compare it to Freud's "mystic writing-pad,"<sup>15</sup> it would be the "dark brown resin" (431) slab. Marks on this level of the writing pad are only discernible in a special light, the light of poetry or a way of thinking that has been described as aesthetic thinking.

*Dark City* resists a poetics of sight which favors the bright light of logic and scientific exactitude, in its obscurity and opacity it interrupts the detrimental impulse of our unhandsome condition which immediately grasps and clutches objects. Instead, it helps the reader to receive the world, by supplying a counter-education that schools our poetic senses.

The poetic sense that epistemological poetry attempts to foster appears to be an essential part of our humaneness. As such its restoration has a revitalizing effect on the reader. The poem speaks to our soul and in this turns out to be an important means for ethical and political education.

*Dark City* can be looked at as a philosophical and a political poem:

it is philosophical because its method is an examination of myself by an attack upon my assumptions; it is political because the terms of this self-examination are the terms which reveal me as a member of a polis; it is education not because I learn new information but because I learn that the finding and forming of my knowledge of myself requires the finding and forming of my knowledge of that membership (*The Claim of Reason* 25).

In order for a reader of *Dark City* to become aware of his or her membership of a polis, she has to bethink herself of her ways of using language, the "matters of policy" that govern language and thus our social contracts. Each reader has to follow the dark and hidden paths which make up our dark and ancient city in order to come to terms with our

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<sup>15</sup> Cf. Freud, Sigmund. "A Note Upon the 'Mystic Writing-Pad.'" *Volume 11: On Metapsychology*.

agreements in judgments with our implicit knowledge that governs our most basic beliefs and convictions. As this requires a movement of thought along the intertwining lines of family resemblances, it has to follow a free-associative mode that performs the "art of transition" and in this way creates and exposes links between concepts. It is precisely such an associative mode that is needed for a kind of reading that approaches our handsome condition that is reception and thereby extending the concept of knowledge. In the process of understanding the poem, the reader is encouraged to create a web of associations:

"starting with the word and finding the world within it." The associations developed in this way, however, are not arbitrary but follow the paths of our common language as well as the textual surrounding. The context-sensitivity which is demanded from the reader is the opposite of frame-fixation. It allows for a switching between contexts a switching between the meanings of words. This switching enables the reader to experience the meaning of a word or combination of words. For Wittgenstein this ability to experience the meaning of a word is a quality that distinguishes the human being from a language using machine. The machine cannot experience the semantic nuances, the different connotations of say two synonyms. Wittgenstein describes this lack of aesthetic sense as aspect-blindness or soul-blindness. Finally a reading based on context-sensitivity gives account of Bernstein's comparison of poetry with a swoon, a "swoon," however, that "brings us to our senses," returns our aesthetic sense that has been almost lost in a society whose dominant forms of discourse leave not much room for analogical thinking, in a society that expelled poetry from its republic. In the process of reading *Dark City*, each reader has to find the repressed but potential new republic in his or her own self, in order for a nation to be peopled. "Then the city has, in each such case of reading, one more member than the members depicted in a Platonic (or Wittgensteinian, or Emersonian) dialogue" (*Conditions Handsome and Unhandsome* 8). A reading of *Dark City* which does justice to the spirit in which it is written requires a method of reading that embodies the "dialogic or hermeneutic rather than the monologic or scientific" in Habermas' terminology.

The chapter is not divided into subdivisions as this would disturb the process of going back and forth within the textual space of the poem and in this way would contradict its method of composition.

As the ideal of Emersonian reception in contrast to Kantian synthesis of knowledge is a recurring theme in Bernstein's poetry and poetics, it comes to no surprise that the first poem in *Dark City*, "The Lives of the Toll Takers" starts with an image of failed reception.

There appears to be a receiver off the hook. Not that  
you care.

The phone is off the hook, it cannot ring and one wonders for whom it is meant to toll. The possible retort to such a question is formulated in the poem "Surface Reflectance" from *The Sophist*. We there read: "So do not ask for whom the phone rings - not likely for you. I think it's time we were all put to sleep." (167) The sarcastic undercurrent of this utterance expresses a mood of resignation the dark flipside of the poet's Emersonian optimism, his or her ability to "cheer, to raise, and to guide men." The passage also alludes to John Donne's *Devotions upon Emergent Occasions* (1624):

No man is an Iland, intire of it selfe; every man is a peece of the Continent, a part of the maine; if a Clod be washed away by the Sea, Europe is the lesse, as well as if a Promontorie were, as well as if a Mannor of thy friends or of thine own were; any mans death diminishes me, because I am involved in Mankinde; and therefore never send to know for whom the bell tolls; It tolls for thee (*The Complete Poetry and Collected Prose* 441).

This view of the human condition as it is seen by Donne, is aware of the connectedness and interdependence between human beings which ties in with Bernstein's idea of interconnectedness through language and agreement in judgments. As I have argued in my reading of Cavell and Wittgenstein, most people are not aware of their having given consent to their membership to a society. They do not feel responsible for the state of society they

are a part of and do not realize that they have a say in its constitution. As a consequence they "lead lives of quiet desperation," (*Walden* 111) they are more dead than alive and might as well, as the line from "Surface Reflectance" suggests, "be put to sleep". The image of the phone ringing or not even ringing symbolizes the human being's loss of his or her capacity of listening to or of receiving the world and the other in the sense of Emerson's "intellectual intuition". "There appears to be a receiver off the hook. Not that / you care." The second sentence expresses the numbness and indifference towards this loss in all its sadness. The person not caring is in a state of spiritual darkness and does not even care about his or her not caring. (cf. sclerosis) Moreover, this indifference keeps the addressee from reacting and lets him or her remain irresponsive and irresponsible. In the context of the poem and in particular in the context of an opening line of the first poem of a collection, the receiver most obviously addressed is the reader, the "you" called for by the writer. However, the potential receiver can also be the writer reading and responding to the text he or she has written. Such an interpretation supports the idea that the knowledge obtained in the epistemological quest of poetry is always a form of self-knowledge.

The relation between the I and the you is exemplary for the possibility of conversation as such. So far however, the call remains unanswered which is expressed by the following lines:

Beside the gloves resides a hat and two  
pinky rings, for which no  
finger was ever found. (*Dark City* 9)

The desired exchange, expressed in a sentence which could have been taken from a fairy tale, has not yet come about. The image suggests a marriage, an alliance or agreement, but something like a mock-agreement<sup>16</sup> because it is waiting to be performed through an exchange of "pinky rings". There are numerous instances in Bernstein's poetry in which a

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<sup>16</sup> Cf.: Cavell's discussion of "Comedies of Remarriage."

"you" or a potential reader is addressed, for instance in the following passage, also taken from "Surface Reflectance":

There are many  
 things to say, much that can be truly said, but  
 little that needs saying. Acts  
 of meaning preempted as an absence  
 for want of repetition - the needing  
 is saying, the saying is meaning. Any you,  
 my friend, back away, & hear only dim  
 peals to dead throngs. I hear  
 them too, & you. Speak  
 to me so I may hear, speak  
 that I may speak. There are only  
 plain words, panes of our separation  
 and sameness in saying. Tell  
 me of another country and of  
 your blankest journeys, tell  
 of the colors you cannot contain (*The Sophist* 167).

The first sentence differentiates between that which can be truly said and that which needs to be said. For instance between sentences of science, which can be empirically proven and then turn out to be wrong or right and sentences in the realm of ethics and aesthetics which do not fulfill the criterion of truth but of truthfulness. Utterances of the latter kind draw our attention to our needs. "Our investigation is turned around our real need" as Wittgenstein has it and in this way they might be able to overcome the absence of meaning which is due to a "want of repetition". An act of meaning which is justified not by rationalized truth but by the speaker's satisfaction with it, speaks and means, that is, is recharged with meaning because of the speaker's taking responsibility for it and intending it. "Any you" the lyrical I goes on addressing the reader, telling him or her to "back away" (antiabsorption) in order to hear what are "only dim peals to dead throngs" with dead ears and dead tongues. Again we come across the imagery of "pealing," or "tolling." According to Bernstein: "poetry's pealing" is "a toll from that 'other' world calling for its truth to be established in *this one*" (*Content's Dream* 379). The poem, thus, asks one to direct one's attention to that what is repressed, minor and dim. In order for the repressed need to be

articulated, the poem or the I speaking through the poem addressing "any you" depends on a response from the reader. "I hear / them too, & you"? the lyrical I asks, encouraging the other to "speak / to me so I may hear, speak / that I may speak." Such an appeal brings to mind Cavell's remarks on *This New yet Unapproachable America*, of which he says that "I cannot approach it alone; the eventual human community is between us, or nowhere" (108). The poem in this way strives toward a communion with the reader. It seems to be an act of "befriending" or "neighboring:" "Any you, my friend". The recovery of the repressed self which is tantamount to a discovery of our repressed need can only be reached with the help of an other (self). In this way, writing as an act of "befriending" "attracts the good stranger to enter the precincts of its city of words" (7) as Cavell has it in *Conditions Handsome and Unhandsome*. The demand: "Tell me of another country" seems to allude to "this new yet unapproachable America." It encourages one to speak of things of which it does not seem to be possible to speak of like "blankest journeys" and "colors you cannot contain." In this passage of the poem, thus, the text enacts a mood of optimism and cheering. However, only a few lines later the voice breaks into a tone of resignation and sarcasm; offering the earlier quoted proposal that we might just as well "all be put to sleep" for the pealing is not likely to be addressed to us.

This whole context of utopian content and discontent is triggered in the opening line of "The Lives of the Toll Takers": "There appears to be a receiver off the hook. Not that / you care" (*Dark City* 9). Thus, from the beginning we find ourselves in the middle of an epistemological quest.

The poem continues with a mock explanation of Derrida's concept of "différance."

#### Difference or

*différance*: it's  
the distinction between hauling junk and  
removing rubbish, while

I, needless not to say, take  
 out the garbage  
 (pragmatism)

. (9)

At first, one is surprised, almost embarrassed by such a banalization of the "high" notion of "différance." Then one wonders where are the parallels. The "a" which distinguishes "difference" and "différance" is not audible. It can only be perceived in written language. The difference between "difference" and "différance" as well as between "hauling junk" and "removing rubbish" might easily escape one's attention. Although the distinction of the former seems to be ridiculed and profanized, in particular, because it is at least spatially related to the word "stupefying," semantic differences and nuances play an important role in the poem and the "a" in "différance" reappears as "ghost phoneme" on page 12 (*My Way* 106). The lyrical I, however, suggests a third option, thereby stopping reflecting on the distinction and becoming active: "while / I, needless not to say, take / out the garbage / (pragmatism)" (9). The transition from theoretical reflection to practical action is also performed on the level of grammar, that is the grammatical form changes from gerund ("hauling junk," "removing rubbish") to first person present active ("I [...] take out the garbage"). The grammatical transition from "neutral gear" or gerund to active describes a Wittgensteinian movement from "language being in neutral gear" to language having returned to "work" or to the "rough ground," the rough ground being every day life with all its impurities like junk and rubbish which has to be taken out. In this way it is a form of pragmatism.

Following this pragmatic or everyday line of thought, one gets the impression that the lyrical I of the poem, throws a glance at the chest of drawers with the phone, the "hat and gloves" and "pinky rings" on top, and then leaves the apartment and goes for a stroll through the city, on the way out taking the garbage to the garbage disposal. There are a number of

formulations which suggest a walk through the city or are related to movement through space in general:

"all the way to" (10), "to barely make it into" (10), "straight-forward" (12), "approach" (14), "slip and slide" (15), "guide," "where is my place?" "directory" (15), "just around the corner," "angles," "tangles," "direction," "give way" (16), "tire tracks," "on the way without stipulating the destination," "the better to get there (somewhere, other)," "few advances," "are you close to" (17), "that may lead us [...] into" (20), "you blast out / onto the street" (21), "environment," "you can't stand still" (22), "sharp edges," "shady groves," "mosaic walkways," "dance" (23), "all the way to," "a people rooted in the land they sow," "straightforward" (24), "navigate through the rocky waters," "there was nobody home and no / time when they were expected," "what time will the train arrive?" (25), "environment," "besides" (28).

If language is regarded as a city, the poem could be regarded as a walk through the city of words with all its new and old streets, footpaths and thoroughways. On a stroll through the city one might stop at a restaurant and have breakfast, thinking to oneself "I figured they do good eggs here." And depending on the quality of the meal, this would be an utterance of satisfaction or dissatisfaction. Furthermore the remark is a piece of a typical American language game alluding to the enormous variety of preparations of eggs that are usually offered in an American restaurant: sunny-side up, scrambled, soft-boiled, hard-boiled, poached etc.

The poem continues with the apparently unrelated remark:

Funny \$: making a killing on  
junk bonds and living to peddle the tale  
(victimless rime)

It is not directly apparent how the transition from "good eggs" to "Funny \$" is motivated. Perhaps through an external stimulus, something written in the newspaper. At first sight it makes one think of a newspaper headline, which is commented by its reader with the expression in brackets: "(victimless rime)". The rime "funny money" is a euphemism which covers what its paraphrase reveals "making a killing on / junk bonds and living to peddle

the tale," suggesting that this kind of financial transaction involves violence or differently put, that it takes its toll. Another meaning of the word toll is evoked in this section. Somebody has to pay the toll for the profit which has been made. On the other hand it could just refer to somebody who made a lot of money on the stock exchange and got famous because of it. (Borsky) The expression "funny money" which not only refers to a huge amount of money but also makes one think of "funny business" or "funny tricks," hence, triggers a number of associations. There is something funny going on here, it makes one suspicious.

The following sentence provides a further paraphrase for "funny \$":

(Laughing all the way to the Swiss bank where I put my money  
in gold bars  
[the prison house of language]  
.)

The Swiss bank is known for its numbered accounts which make it impossible to trace financial transactions. The line, thus, makes one think of an investor who got his money from dubious sources or uses it for criminal purposes. A numbered account facilitates the transfer of bribe money or the evasion of taxes. Furthermore the Swiss bank is associated with looted Nazi gold. This subject will be investigated at a later point of the poem in the context of a similar sentence which makes the connection more apparent. At this stage the sentence "Laughing all the way to the Swiss bank where I put my money / in gold bars" stresses basically two issues: the attempt to cover up a financial transaction and the disruption of the flow of money through its fixation in gold bars. As this reification is immediately commented by the expression "[the prison house of language]" (Fredric Jameson) one becomes aware of a relation between money and language. Both, the flow of language and the flow of money are arrested in those images. And even the type-setting contributes to the overall impression of fixation. The words "[the prison house of

language]" are put in square brackets, or bars, in this way playing with the idea of the inseparability of form and content. The typographical composition also underlines the ambiguity of the word bar: bars of gold or prison bars. Furthermore, the numbered accounts allude to our alienation from our linguistic transactions.

Now that a link between language and money is established, it seems possible also to read the first explanation of "funny money" as a remark on language: "making a killing on junk bonds and living to peddle the tale (victimless rime)." We here come upon the first instance of the compositional device of backward movement. The poem in this way promotes "anaphor and cataphor (forward and backward pointing in the text) over exophor (outward pointing) (*A Poetics* 145). "Tale" and "rime" are both forms of using language but also the expression "junk bonds" characterizes a particular way of language use, perhaps the reduction of language to "stale formula." However, it could also refer to Bernstein's way of composition that uses discarded and worn-out pieces of language which might be comparable to "junk," and reorders them to tell a new tale. In such a second reading of the passage, the aspect of it is changed. The words are taken out of the context of the language of the market, their meaning is transfigured, their regular use subverted.

This backward pointing can even be continued all the way to the first page of the poem and the passage about "taking out the garbage". Reading also these lines as a remark on language allows for an interpretation of "taking out the garbage" as meaning distributing the forgotten and dead phrases and ideas which make up the collective unconscious of society, the "compost heap of consciousness" which needs to be told. Such telling would lessen the amount of ideas having fallen victim to oblivion or repression. The expression "(victimless rime)" then, could be a comment on this way of composition. It also evokes the expression "victimless crime" alluding to the "crime" of poetry "to write in otherwise unsanctioned ways" (*Dark City* 74) as Bernstein has it in "The View from Nowhere." The

criminalization of deviation also recalls J.S. Mill's observation that "peculiarity of taste, eccentricity of conduct, are shunned equally with crimes" (*On Liberty* 61).

In respect to the method of composition, the expression "junk" can be looked at as a wormhole that connects apparently unconnected galaxies of meaning. It establishes a link to the passage on "rubbish, junk, and garbage" which was used to differentiate between "difference" and "différance." The following sentence also distinguishes between similar sounding words:

Simplicity is not  
the  
same as simplistic.

Whereas the latter has a negative connotation, the former stresses the aspect of purity or guilelessness, perhaps innocence, forming an opposite to the corruption hinted at by the expression "funny \$." According to Bernstein in a capitalist society language is domesticated not in order to make things "simple" but "simplistic" and in this way to destroy the possibility of complex thinking: "simplicity is not / the / same as simplistic." By contrast, the differentiation between simplicity and simplistic is the first step back to a more pertinent and less violent use of language.

Another example for the abuse of language is its reduction to logical operations. The obscenity of such a reduction is expressed in the following lines:

sullen  
supposition, salacious conjecture, slurpy deduction. (10)

The adjectives characterizing those logical operations suggest a state of perversion and corruption. Language presents itself in a dreadful distance from what it could be, a "syntax



Bernstein plays with and destabilizes this "bias toward reifying objectness" (126) by developing a number of variations of this initial phrase:

[a tincture gives birth to a gravely verve]  
[a mixture is worth a thousand one-line serves]

As the first variation clearly addresses poetry, it is put in relation to the "1965 Ted Berrigan poem" which might also "give birth to a gravely verve." The description of the poem as a "short stabs" poem reminds one of Wittgenstein's statement that the words of a poem can pierce you. Such a view of poetry stresses Wittgenstein's conviction that although a text uses the "language of information it does not have to be used in the language game of giving information". The example of the poem thus seems to suggest other possibilities of language besides representation. It also accounts for a way of reading that acknowledges the use of each word and in this way is capable of recognizing the complexity of meaning a poem is able to unfold:

A poet's words can pierce us. And that is of course *causally* connected with the use that they have in our life. And it is also connected with the way in which, conformably to this use, we let our thoughts roam up and down in the familiar surroundings of the words (Wittgenstein quoted by Bernstein in *My Way* 220).

This "roaming up and down," I want to argue, is essential for an adequate reading of Bernstein's poetry. Furthermore, the expression short stabs might be a description of the rhythm as well as the effect of the poem which might be baffling to the reader, provoking a feeling of being bowled over. The word "verve" furthers this impression and reminds one of an attitude towards writing/reading which could be described as enthusiasm.

The second variation, this time "picture" is replaced by "mixture," occurs in the context of the work of Barbara Kruger<sup>17</sup>:

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<sup>17</sup> Barbara Krüger is famous for her one-liners which represent verbal stereotypes and truisms. Her work can be compared to that of Jenny Holzer whose work Bernstein discusses in one of his essays. While he is fascinated by the way of presentation of Holzer's one-liners, he is disappointed by the limitation in poetic possibilities and suggests a collaboration with poets.



The phrase "nei / ther / speaking the unspeakable nor saying / the / unsayable" seems to have the function of a disclaimer. The poem does not pretend to be so grand as to be able to say the unsayable, its intention is more humble, it just wants to "slur the unslurrable." "Slurring" allows for a number of associations. It describes a way of speaking or writing that is obscure or unreadable. Furthermore, it can refer to a way of speaking that is "clumsy" as in the enunciation of a drunk. But also "to slur over" which means to get past an unpleasant topic quickly or to conceal. As mentioned before, Bernstein as well as Stein are fascinated by a handwriting which is illegible and still can be read. This is an apt characterization of a lot of Bernstein's poetry. It seems to be a way out of the aporia of language described by Adorno. The unslurrable which nevertheless is slurred or expressed in an obscure manner could be seen as a reminder of the crimes against humanity that cannot be forgotten but persist within the unconscious like a trauma.

The term "slurring" also evokes "blurring," it seems to refer to a way of writing that "dedefines" which is to say "deconstructs" and "deterritorializes" fixed structures and concepts within language, and in this way alludes to the terms used by Derrida and Deleuze and Guattari. Unlike the French poststructuralists, though, Bernstein in his poetics also stresses the importance of "reconstriciting." In this respect he is closer to Cavell and Wittgenstein who claim that meaning is only possible within the context of language games. (cf. "The Objects of Meaning") The dissatisfaction with the poststructuralist idea of a utopia of language free of all restrictions is expressed in the line: (libidinal / flow just another word for loose / st / ools)." The idea of a libidinal flow or a presymbolic realm, for Bernstein, is nothing more than a romantic fallacy a disease which has to be cured like Wittgenstein's grammatical confusions. There is no presymbolic or unconditioned life to be regained but our conditionality (our metaphysical finitude) is essential for our being human. "Limits / are what any of us / are inside of [Olson]."

As I have pointed out before, the typesetting plays an important role in Bernstein's poetry, enhancing the semantic possibilities of the poem. Accordingly, the "slurring" is not only referred to but also performed through the typesetting and linebreak. The words "nei / ther," "dedef / ining," "rec / onstricting," and "st / ools" are torn apart or "slurred" which leads to the emergence of new meanings through the cracks. For instance, the syllable "ther" evokes the word "there," "dedef" split from "dedefining" makes one think of "de-deaf-ining" which is to say regaining one's ability to hear or differently put: regaining one's aesthetic sense. Such a differentiation or heightening of perception alludes back to the possibility of perceiving the inaudible "a" in *différance*, an association which is easily made, as Derridian deconstruction is already paraphrased by the word "dedefining." Furthermore, the breaking up of "rec / onstricting" into "rec" and "onstricting" triggers such various meanings as "reckon," "rec" short for "recommended," and "record," whereas "onstricting" means something like an "ongoing strictness." Finally, "loose st / ools" interrupted in this way, encourages a sounding of the words as "lose tools". The low culture term "loose stools" now changes into a high culture term which could have been taken from a philosophical context thereby shifting from surface to depth. To reject one's language in order to return to a "pre-verbal chora" of libidinal flow in Kristeva's terminology, is tantamount to losing one's tools. "As if the first human 'babbling' were not already language, always social, a toll as well as a tool!" (*My Way* 298) To reject language would mean to reject "our connectivity through the alphabet, through aurality, through the symbolic" (298).

However, although rules and regularities cannot be done away with it is possible to break or to deviate from regular language use, to "wreck" "onstricting" at every moment. Resistance to "strict" conformity or straight-forward affirmations is one aspect of the poetics of negative capability. It is a way of malfunctioning, of "slurring" or "stammering" that leads to a semantic richness unattainable by more effective techniques. The following passage is full of images for such shortcomings that turn out to be generative:

Li  
ke  
a dull blade with a greasy handle (a  
docent page with an  
unfathomable ramble). Poetry's  
like a spoon, with three or four  
exemptions: in effect only  
off-peak, void (*Dark City* 11-12)

A "dull blade with a greasy handle" cannot be used efficiently, an "unfathomable ramble" is something which does not fulfill the standards of science or the academy and is therefore inadequate. Furthermore, the comparison of poetry with a spoon brings to mind a measuring spoon, perhaps Eliot's coffee spoon, but it also evokes the association of "spoonerism," a slip of the tongue. The expression "a spoon, with three or four / exemptions" makes one think of a spoon with holes which would be as useful as a "dull blade with a greasy handle." However, the term "exemption" hints at the trump of poetry, at the possibility to be "exempt from paying the taxes" everybody else has to pay. In addition it evokes Bernstein's mock definition of poetry at the beginning of the "Klupzy Girl": "Poetry is like a swoon, with this difference: / it brings you to your senses" (*Islets/Irritations* 47).

A further, equally strange characterization of poetry is that it is "in effect only / off-peak, void." In everyday use "peak hours" are the rush-hours of the day, when the corridors of the subways are clogged with people going to work. Off peak, on the contrary, suggests a time or place less frequented, and less utilized, a place for idling. Poetry in this way could be looked at as a kind of idling, as "language going on holiday," as Wittgenstein has it in *Philosophical Investigations* 38. In "Idleness as the Political Value of Poetry" (*Content's Dream* 82-85), the fourth section of Bernstein's essay "Thought's Measure," he focuses on idleness as a "primary desire in poetry" that characterizes a "writing that is just for itself, not used for some other thing" (82). The idleness of poetry makes it "noninstrumental." Bernstein

relates this "idling of language" in poetry to "stubbornness," a stubbornness of being "at one's own pace, my own measure, and not doing *anything*, just doing (cf. the lilies in the field, etc.)" (83). In favoring idleness, thus, Bernstein wants to suggest a different kind of reading value from the one demanded in a kind of representation that is "valued only as a means toward a goal of a process. Values only for what a thing produces, its product" (83). In contrast to a writing caught up in commodity fetishism following the logic of "salacious conjecture," he argues for "writing as stupor, writing as out-to-lunch. Writing as vacation:" "when language goes on holiday." For Bernstein, "[w]riting as idled thinking (not just the means to a displaced end, becomes world revelation)" (84). The same holds true for "reading" as "idled thinking," a way of reading that is demonstrated in my own interpretation of *Dark City* in this chapter.

The nonutilitarian wandering of the mind that Bernstein compares to idling is also demonstrated in the following passage from "The Lives of the Toll Takers:"

To refuse

the

affirmation

of

(a)

statement

(sentiment)

is

not

to

be

so

straight-forward

bent-over

with

irony

as

to

be

unable

to

assert

anything

but

to  
 find  
                   such  
   statement  
 already  
                   undermined  
 by the resistance  
   it  
   pretends  
   to  
   overpower  
 by  
   its  
 idealism  
                   masked as  
   realism. (12-14)

The type-setting of the sentence illustrates the avoidance of the straight-forward statement. Furthermore, the logical construction of the sentence is not straight-forward either but displays a number of twists and turns. Although, there is no difficulty on the level of surface grammar or syntax, a quick automatic grasping of meaning is prevented by this kind of construction. Instead the reader is encouraged to enter this long and labyrinthic sentence without being able to know in advance where it will take him or her. "There's no crime like presentiment." Again, Bernstein at the same time exemplifies and states his poetics, a poetics that refuses "affirmation" or "fixture". The type-setting of this meandering sentence for instance generates a counter-image to the straight line jammed in square brackets. Not irony prevents the speaker from uttering a "straight-forward statement (sentiment)" but his feeling that such a statement is already an idealization, nothing natural but something made. The particular characteristic of an affirmation is that it pretends to overcome its idealism but in the end only hides it behind the mask of realism. In this way, an affirmation is far from being straightforward. It is equally mediated as any other utterance but through its high standardization and agreement in habitual patterns of speaking it provokes the illusion of the natural and the immediate. Besides, the exaggerated intricacy of the sentence, also has its comic effect which is heightened by the

confused exclamation "What?" meaning "I don't understand a word of this 'unfathomable ramble.'"

On the next page (15) the reflection on language and money and ultimately poetic economy is taken up again. It starts out with another variation of the phrase "A picture is worth more than a thousand words:"

(A picture is worth 44.95 but no price can be put on words.)

The original saying is completely subverted, the expression "is worth" is taken literally and as a consequence a concrete value "44.95" is determined. However, as the currency is not indicated, the information is useless. Nevertheless, it is possible to put a price tag on a picture, a treatment which is considered impossible in respect to language, at least in the literal sense of the word. The reflection on language and money brings to mind Bernstein's essay "The Dollar Value of Poetry" in which he argues as follows: "So writing might be exemplary--an instance broken off from and hence not in the service of this economic and cultural--social--force called capitalism" (*Content's Dream* 57). In contrast to the restricted economy of capitalism which brings about a restricted psychic economy, the general economy of poetry is "in effect only off-peak," it is "the fact of its own activity," (57) "in itself and for itself" (57). Accordingly, no exact price or meaning can be put on words, but the aspect of a word or a combination of words can change, as has been demonstrated before. Words in poetry, thus, have no fixed \$ value, in this sense they could also be described as funny \$.

As Bernstein states in his poetics and shows in his poetry, the aesthetic realm of language is not as easy to control as other kinds of discourse. This lubricity is also thematized and exemplified in the next passage:

She can slip and she can slid, she's every  
parent's j  
oy & j  
i  
b  
e  
(guide)  
. (15)

Again, form and content are inseparable, the slipping and sliding reflected on is realized in the sliding letters on the page. But the letters do not only slip and slide regarding their position on the page they also slip in the sense of a slip of the tongue, for instead of using the fixed idiom: "she's her parent's joy and pride" Bernstein writes "she's every parent's joy and jibe," substituting the high notion of "pride" with the low notion of "jibe." Here we come across a word that does what it means, namely poking fun, in this case, at a well established saying. The passage thus stresses poetry's affinity with comedy. For "she" one could also read "poetry" for "parent's" "writer's."

Bernstein's concept of error is important in this context. It constitutes a link between wandering "the unfathomable ramble" and "slipping and sliding." As discussed in chapter I.2, writing involves error: "Error in the sense of wandering errantly, but also error in the sense of mistake, misperception, incorrectness, contradiction. Error as projection (expression of desire unmediated by rationalized explanation): as slips and slides" (*Poetics* 153). In the latter aspect of error we find the kinship with comedy and slapstick: "certain kinds of pratfalls, the equivalent to slipping on a banana, or throwing a pie in my own face. So that error is made explicit as part of the process" (153-4). In the realm of aesthetics there is nothing to hold on but intuition, the fixed structures of rationalized thought are destabilized by poetry's playing and fooling with language ("she can slip and she can slide"). As a consequence one's aesthetic sense is one's only "(guide)," turning thinking into sensing, the "sixth sense." Being an "expression of desire unmediated by

rationalized explanation" error is akin to dream. "In dreams begin a lot of bad poetry" reads the opening line of the next paragraph of "The Lives of the Toll Takers." "Bad" of course depending on the position of the speaker. It could be meant as a warning, a scornful remark, a compliment etc. In any way it triggers a reflection on the quality of poetry and on the way a poet sees himself. Thus, the issue of identity is brought up:

In dreams begin a lot of bad  
poetry.

*Then where is my place?*

Fatal Error F27: Disk directory full.

The things I  
write are  
not about me  
though they  
*become me (15).*

The passage reflects on notions of the self and the loss of self(-knowledge). The question: "Then where is my place?" recalls Wittgenstein's definition of a philosophical problem. "A philosophical problem has the form: I don't know my way about" which has been interpreted by Cavell as "I don't know myself" (Ich kenne mich nicht aus). A grammatical confusion, thus, seems to be related to a loss of self-knowledge. The computer message: "Fatal Error F 27" also hints at a mistake or a confusion. Furthermore, it indicates an unauthorized or forbidden operation: "access is [...] blocked to an experience (experiencing) whose horizon is not totally a product of the coercive delimiting of the full range of language," as Bernstein has it in "The Dollar Value of Poetry." The error message in this way would be a warning or a censoring. However, as poetry is exempt from the "economic and cultural--social--force called capitalism," it is able to receive an "experience (released in the reading) which is noncommoditized, that is where the value is not dollar value (and hence transferable and instrumental) but rather, what is from the point of view of the market, no value." "No price can be put on words." From the point of view of the market, thus, poetry is not only "bad" but a "negativity, inaudible, invisible" (*Content's Dream* 58). From a different position, however, it might not be inaudible.

The "peeling" of poetry can only be released in the reading and therefore depends on the reader's responsiveness. Is the "receiver off the hook" or is he/she/it receiving? "[T]he experience released in the reading" is crucial as well as "untranslatable." The latter, however, does not make the reading inconsequential but even more necessary. "Untranslatable" and "unparaphrasable" here stresses "that nongeneralizable residue that is specific to each particular experience" (58). Its being "nongeneralizable" means that a particular human being has to go through it by himself or herself. And that the change a poem makes is a change "in me." The receptive reader/writer opens up him- or herself to change. In this way reading/writing can be described as "working on oneself. On one's own interpretation. On one's way of seeing things. (And what one expects of them)" as Wittgenstein has it. One could say: "The things I [read] are not about me though they become me." In this way reading can be related to what Thoreau refers to as "upbuilding." The poem "attract[s] the human [...] to the work of becoming human" (Cavell, *This New Yet Unapproachable America* 10). The word "becoming" here suggests a process of transformation, transformation being for Thoreau that which is required for the adult to grow. And indeed the poem continues with an image of growth:

You look so becoming, she said, attending the flower pots.  
 I'm a very becoming  
 ing guy  
 (tell it to  
 )  
 . That is, better  
 to  
 become than  
 (gestalt f[r]iction) {traction?}  
 {flirtation?}  
 to  
 be: actuality  
 tuality  
 is just around  
 the corner (just a spark  
 in the dark); self-actualization a glance in

a tank of concave [concatenating] mirrors. (*Dark City* 15/16)

In the context of gardening becoming is used in the sense of "growing," "thriving," in the next sentence it means "good-mannered," "charming," and the opposition between "become" and to "be" stresses the aspect of process in the meaning of the word becoming. "Attending the flower pots" seems to be a counter image to the "receiver being off the hook." "Attending" suggests a number of related meanings ranging from "to be present" to "paying attention" to "waiting upon somebody". In the context in which it appears in the poem "attend" means to "care for," "to bring up," "to tend," "to foster." The woman "tending the flowers" seems to have "planting hands." Hands which do not grasp and fix but tend and foster. This handsome condition expressed in the image of "attending the flowers" is the condition of true thinking, of poetry. Poetry, in this way, is always in a state of becoming, of growth, of transition, as if on a journey. In "A Statement on Poetics" from *Rough Trades* Bernstein writes accordingly: "A poem should not be but become," (29) it is an aspiration to the eventual: "ac / tuality is just around / the corner" (*Dark City* 16). That it is just around the corner seems to suggest that it is there all the time like "this new yet unapproachable America;" only when we realize our continuous missing of it, only when we realize the darkness of the "dark age," "the darkness of this time" (Preface to *Philosophical Investigations*), do we get the idea to switch on the light, an endeavor which can be accomplished by poetry, a poem being "(just a spark / in the dark)" (16). The process of becoming, growth or transformation which might bring about "this new yet unapproachable America" appears again in the form of a dialogue: "you look so bec / oming," (15) supporting Cavell's conviction that we cannot approach it alone (cf. *This New Yet Unapproachable America* 108).

That actualization is necessary in order to reach a potential which is still unrealized also reminds one of Bernstein's piece "The Only Utopias Is in a Now" from *The Sophist*, which stresses the need for actualization already in the title. Throughout his work, he suggests looking at "identity as an acting out rather than as an inner state; externally animated, not

innately fixed." (*My Way* 141) In this, meaning in its extended sense is also an affair of the people: "Hands, hearts, not values made us" (189). Literature as an affair of the people does not start out with a fixed set of values but finds reading values in the process of composition. Like in a democracy, in which each member has a say in its constitution, in a poem each word is attended to and given equal weight.

I have no conception of what I have to say which I then want to put into writing, but [...] the writing itself shows me what I have to say, and it's always news to me ... It's not the horse pulling the cart of writing but the writing that's pulling me; and I find out who or what I am, or what I have to say by reading it. So really here the cart is pulling the horse (*Content's Dream* 405).

A similar experience of the production of thought during the process of thinking is depicted in the following passage:

Not  
 angles, just  
 tangles. From which  
 a direction emerges, p  
 urges. (*Dark City* 16)

This passage, reminiscent of Bernstein's description of the process of composition, evokes the impression of an initial confusion, an erring or wandering about and an eventual finding of one's way. It describes the starting position of moral perfectionism that perceives the soul as "on a journey (upward and onward) that begins by finding oneself lost to the world" (Cavell, *Conditions Handsome and Unhandsome* 1). It also refers back to the passage on self-loss: "Then where is my place?" (*Dark City* 15). As the title *Dark City* suggests, we are living in a state of spiritual darkness from which we can only be released through poetic thinking: "Wittgenstein's picture of thinking is one of moving from being lost to one self to finding one's way, a circumstance of spiritual disorder" (*Conditions Handsome and Unhandsome* 21). Or as Cavell has it in *This New Yet Unapproachable America*: "Not till we are lost [or turned around], in other words, not till we have lost the world, do we begin to find ourselves, and realize where we are and the infinite extent of our relations" (*Walden* "The Village," quoted in

*This New Yet Unapproachable America* 36). Not the "angles" and straight lines of mathematics help one to find one's way but the "tangles" and confusions initiate the journey of the soul. The "direction" that "emerges" at the same time "purges" and "urges." "Purging" suggesting something like purification and reformation, whereas "urging" underlines the moral urgency of turning: "It is today that you are to take the self on; today that you are to awaken" (*Conditions Handsome and Unhandsome* 56). The poem continues:

On the  
way without stipulating  
the destination,  
the better  
to get there (somewhere,  
*other*  
). (17)

The "other" or "next" world which the poem hopes to find, is a recurring theme in Bernstein's poetics. In "Living Tissue/Dead Ideas" he writes about "that 'other' world calling for its truth to be established in *this one*" (*Content's Dream* 379). And in "The Dollar Value of Poetry" he characterizes writing as "an appeal to an *other* world" (57) of which we can only sometimes have a "glimpse" (57) and which might be discernible between "crack[s]" (57) or as "a spark / in the dark" (*Dark City* 16).

Furthermore, the phrase: "On the way without stipulating the destination" characterizes Bernstein's serial composition: "a series of which we do not know the extremes." It is a writing which does not look for the source, for the one formula to explain it all, but one that "reinvents the nature of the quest" by replacing "founding" with "finding" (*This New Yet Unapproachable America* 116). Such a reinvention locates new

tasks for thought and for writing [...] tasks such as the transfiguration of founding as finding, of grounding as lasting; the conversion of American success and Kantian succession into a passive practice, the power of mourning; the composition of a testament, so a bequeathing, specifically of a promise; the stepwise overcoming of

skepticism, say of the immeasurable distance from the world, by the process of nearing as indirection, so an instruction in mortality, finitude; an establishing of founding without a founder, a ground on which the power of mastery is common, is mastery of the common, the everyday (116-117).

It is a mode of composition which continuously decides anew how to go on. Such mode of seriality can also be related to Perloff's "Poetics of Indeterminacy." This mode of finding one's way in writing is also described by Bernstein as a manner of "figuring it out / or letting it come of itself / ways of / (never known prior, always coming out / in the com(*op*)posing, / it going on)" (*Content's Dream* 51).

Serial composition also works as a remedy against frame lock, a state of being stuck in one frame of reference or tone or mood in which the subject has no critical distance but is controlled by "slurpy deduction and salacious conjecture" (10). Bernstein compares this state of consciousness to Wittgenstein's concept of "aspect-blindness. In his remarks on Gestalt-psychology in the context of his discussion of aspect seeing, Wittgenstein criticizes Köhler's idea of predetermined gestalten ("gestalt fiction") (*Dark City* 16) instead he argues that the experience of a change of aspects depends on a change of interpretation not on the switching between already existing gestalten stored in some mysterious mental realm. In this way the idea of a gestalt is a fiction.

I don't want to enfold the variety of language I use into the category of voice, any more than I would want some autobiographical gestalt to be imagined as the cohering principle among diverse elements of a single poem or among poems (*Content's Dream* 407).

The idea of "gestalt fiction" is disturbed by the inserted "(r)" which turns "fiction" into "friction." Returning thought back to its rough ground, away from the metaphysical construction of a cohering autobiographical gestalt. The journey of the self and its society is

thus not one out of this world, but deeper into this world, allowing oneself to be drawn toward it or to be attracted by it. This attraction is alluded to by the word "flirtation" (16).

Still the journey is strenuous: "Heavy tolls, few advances:" (*Dark City* 16) The mentioning of tolls seems to evoke a political event in recent American history, namely the Reagan-Bush era. The names of Bill Casey and Oliver North (and a few pages later Max Gomez) bring to mind and reveal political details which had been "misplaced" and kept "deep undercover:"

The brain of Bill Casey preserved in a glass jar deep undercover in Brunei.

[...]

A depository of suppositories

[...]

but

I misp

laced

it somewhere

in the

back burner

of what

is laugh

ingly

called m

y

mind

(my

crim

e). A

mind is a terrible thing to steal:

*intellectual property is also*

*theft.*

Ollie North, pound of chalk--but who is writing,

what is writing? Nor

all your regret change one word of it; yet so long as the blood  
flows in your veins there is ink  
left in the bottle. FAKE A  
WHISTLE TO WRITE (*spiritus sancti*) (19-20)

The covered up issue alluded to in this passage is Iran-Contra. In *George Bush: The Unauthorized Biography* Webster G. Tarpley gives an overview of the Iran-Contra affair. He lists five principal points of the scandal:

- 1) the secret arming of the Khomeini regime in Iran by the U.S. government, during an official U.S.-decreed arms embargo against Iran, while the U.S. publicly denounced the recipients of its secret deliveries as terrorists and kidnappers--a policy initiated under the Jimmy Carter presidency and accelerated by the Reagan-Bush administration;
- 2) the Reagan-Bush administration's secret arming of its "Contras" for war against the Sandinista regime in Nicaragua, while such aid was explicitly prohibited under U.S. law;
- 3) the use of communist and terrorist enemies--often armed directly by the Anglo-Americans--to justify a police state and covert, oligarchical rule at home;
- 4) paying for and protecting the gun-running projects with drug-smuggling, embezzlement, theft by diversion from authorized U.S. programs, and the "silencing" of both opponents and knowledgeable participants in the schemes; and
- 5) the continual, routine perjury and deception of the public by government officials pretending to have no knowledge of these activities; and the routine acquiescence in that deception by Congressman too frightened to oppose it (Chapter -XVIII-).

Bill Casey a close ally of George Bush is entangled in the affair from the beginning. His involvement starts with the organization of the election campaign for Reagan. Although he was never convicted, there have been allegations that he disturbed Carter's hostage negotiations in order to secure Reagan's election victory in the fall of 1980. Just one day after Reagan's inauguration the hostages were released from the embassy in Teheran. However, Reagan's election victory was only the beginning of Casey's career that ended with the position of CIA director. When the scandal broke in late 1986 and early 1987, an

important year in "The Lives of the Toll Takers" as it is mentioned twice<sup>18</sup>, it is too late for Casey to talk about his role in the affair. Due to a surgery on a brain tumor he loses his power of speech, resigns on February 9, 1987 and soon dies. The brain or memory of Bill Casey, therefore cannot be taken into account for an investigation of the affair: "it lies preserved deep under-/cover in Brunei." The reference to Brunei might allude to a \$ 10 million donation by the Sultan of Brunei, a former business partner of George Bush, for the Contras to continue the anti-Sandinista war (Chapter -XVIII-).

In addition to Casey, Marine Lieutenant Colonel Oliver North plays an important role in the affair: "Ollie North, pound of chalk--but who is writing / what is writing?" (*Dark City* 19) Oliver North worked together with Felix Rodriguez alias Max Gomez ("*Hello / my name is Max Gomez.*" 26). They were responsible for transporting weapons to Nicaragua to support the Contras. In the course of the affair the US sold weapons to Iran or exchanged them (3,000 American TOW missiles, cf. Tarpley) for hostages held by Iran. The transactions to support the Contra-rebels in Nicaragua also involved the smuggling of drugs from Central America into the United States. The incident that drew public attention to the scandal was a plane crash on October 5, 1986 of a U.S. plane that started from Miami carrying arms and ammunition for the Contras. On October 11, 1986 "*The Washington Post* ran two headlines side-by-side: 'Captured American Flyer to be Tried in Nicaragua' and 'Bush is linked to Head of Contra Aid Network'" (Tarpley -XVIII-). However, thanks to "Richard Chaney, the senior Republican member of the House Select Committee to Investigate Covert Arms Transactions with Iran, [who] helped steer the joint committees to an impotent result[,] George Bush was totally exonerated[.] [W]hen president, [he] rewarded Dick Chaney by appointing him U.S. Secretary of Defense" (Tarpley --XVIII-). While those are the most important facts behind the three names Bill Casey, Ollie North and Max Gomez, I now want to focus on the way they are presented and why.

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<sup>18</sup> Cf.: "Barbara Kruger is enshrined in the window / of the Whitney's 1987 Biennial" (11) and "(language held hostage: year one thousand nine hundred eighty seven)" (24).

The imagery that Bernstein uses in his allusions to Iran-Contra is striking and gives a further dimension to the issue. Examples for unusual images or phrasings are: "the brain of Bill Casey is preserved [...] deep under-/cover," "a depository of suppositories," "I misplaced it in [...] my mind," "Ollie North pound of chalk" "as long as there is ink left in the bottle" "FAKE A WHISTLE TO WRITE." All of those wordings are concerned with preservation, memory and writing and so recall Freud's "Note on the 'Mystic Writing-Pad,'" a text in which he starts his reflection by thinking about two different possibilities of externalizing one's memory and thereby obtaining a "materialized portion of [one's] mnemonic apparatus": writing on a sheet of paper with a pen or writing on a slate with a piece of chalk. Both methods of preservation have their advantages and disadvantages. In writing on paper "the receptive capacity of the writing-surface is soon exhausted" (429). In the case of the slate, by contrast, one has "a receptive surface which retains its receptive capacity for an unlimited time and the notes upon which can be destroyed as soon as they cease to interest me" (429-30). The price for this advantage, however, is that a permanent trace cannot be preserved. In a next step Freud argues that it is precisely the peculiar quality of the human "mental apparatus" that "it has an unlimited receptive capacity for new perceptions and nevertheless lays down permanent - even though not unalterable - memory-traces of them" (430). Having come upon the mystic writing-pad, Freud is convinced that this apparatus can be used to explain the workings of the mind. The pad consists of a slab of dark brown resin or wax, a transparent piece of celluloid, and a thin translucent waxed paper. In order to write upon it no pencil or chalk is needed:

It is a return to the ancient method of writing on tablets of clay or wax: a pointed stilus [chisel] scratches the surface, the depressions upon which constitute the 'writing.' In the case of the Mystic Pad this scratching is not effected directly, but through the medium of the covering-sheet. At the points which the stilus touches, it presses the lower surface of the waxed paper on to the wax slab, and the grooves are visible as dark writing upon the otherwise whitish-gray surface of the celluloid (431).

Freud goes on to compare the wax slab with the unconscious which preserves the permanent trace of memory and insists that this trace is "legible in suitable lights" (432).

Returning to Iran-Contra and connecting it with the issue of writing, memory and the unconscious we come to understand that although Bill Casey is dead and wasn't even able to witness when he was still alive "his brain is preserved in a glass jar deep under-/cover." Accounts of the affair, although difficult to find are nevertheless, not effaced but stored within a safe place, like the preservation of memory traces inside the wax slab of the unconscious. Or differently put, they can be found within the collective unconscious of the American people. That is to say, although the evidence concerning the affair has been "misplaced" or "stolen," it cannot be undone but remains "preserved" within American history. And "so long as the blood / flows in your veins there is ink left in the bottle" (19/29) to remind of it by writing about it. Therefore one of the tasks of poetry consists in giving testimony of the hidden or withheld stories of America. Although, those stories might be "deep undercover in Brunei" they are "unslurrable" and it is poetry's duty to "slur the unslurrable." Writing in this way turns out to be a kind of reading: "No 'mere' readers only / writers who read, actors who interact" (20). In the pursuit of poetic justice the writing of poetry is the reading of the illegible and repressed history of the American people.

The repression of "records of injustice" also entails a denial of the victims' sufferings. The reflection on the possibility of writing after Auschwitz comes to mind again. Bernstein summarizes his position in respect to a poetry after Auschwitz as follows:

In contrast to--or is it an extension of?--Adorno's famous remarks about the impossibility of (lyric?) poetry after Auschwitz, I would say poetry is a necessary way to register the unrepresentable loss of the Second War (*A Poetics* 217).

On a more general level, thus, the task of poetry could be described as memorial. Poetry must bear in mind, preserve and render visible what is in danger of being forgotten or what is withheld. It must commemorate and remember the stories which remain unacknowledged and it must remind its reader of his consent to a society which may support violence and injustice. In this effort of recollection poetry attempts to save the reader from his detachment from his society and his language.

The next section of the poem plays on a number of variations of the by now explained phrase "take a chisel to write," which also alludes to a line from a Beatles song again stressing the difficult and strenuous work of writing.

FAKE A  
WHISTLE TO WRITE (*spiritus sancti*). No "mere" readers only  
writers who read, actors who inter-  
act. Every day fades way, nor  
all your piety  
or greed bring back one hour: *take a swivel to  
strike.* (20)

Unlike in the case of the expression "a picture is worth a thousand words," in the case at hand the original is not stated in the poem. However, in both cases the idiom played on is related to writing. "FAKE A WHISTLE TO WRITE" is a strange advice for writing. The notion of faking, however, is a recurring theme in Bernstein's work: "Poetry fakes nothing actually. *Poetry fakes nothing happening*" (*My Way* 191) alluding to Emerson's "reason makes nothing happen." It is related to forging and to the trickster.

Unable to operate from entrenched positions of power, [poetry] becomes a trickster or schtick artist who turns situations around by taking advantage of opportunities, using comedy to subvert occasions, employing the know-how and make-do of "cross-cuts, fragments, cracks and lucky hits" (*A Poetics* 163).

The element of "faking" in FAKE A WHISTLE TO WRITE, thus, relates Bernstein's poetics of tactics to what Deleuze and Guattari describe as "minor literature," a term they borrow from Kafka (cf. *Kafka. Toward a Minor Literature*). The use of the word "whistle" in this phrase is equally unusual. "Whistle" means to "make a clear musical sound, a series of such sounds, or a high pitched, warbling sound by the forcible expulsion of the breath through a small opening formed by contracting the lips, or through the teeth, with the aid of the tongue" as *Webster's Encyclopedic Dictionary of the English Language* explains. The whistle can also be the device used for whistling. Unlike the "chisel," the "whistle" - as a sound produced by a living creature - cannot imprint or emboss anything, it is nothing beyond this sound and its existence is ephemeral. Furthermore its presence is dependent on the breath of a particular human being and the ear of another human being. In this acknowledgment of the bodily rootedness it is related to the preceding line comparing the "ink" for writing to the "blood in one's veins." Writing as whistling stresses the physical production of sound, its relation to the human body. Furthermore as an image for writing it draws attention to the semantic dimension of sound which is often shunned onto the disattend track. Another instance in literature where whistling is related to art and writing and produces a kind of "minor art" is Kafka's story "Josefine, die Sangerin oder das Volk der Mause." The story reflects on the particular quality of the whistling/singing of the mouse Josephine, who sells her ordinary, even less than ordinary whistling as art. It also displays an interesting kinship to *Dark City* as the role of the people is so important. With the title "Josephine, the Singer or the People of the Mice" Kafka stresses the equal importance of the singer and the people, thinking of a scale in which both terms: "Josephine" and "the People" (artist and society), connected through the linking word "or," have equal weight. Like in the Kafka story the whistling in "FAKE A WHISTLE TO WRITE" has an air of charlatanism. One wonders what can be the value of this art. "Dieses Nichts an Stimme, dieses Nichts an Leistung" (*Samtliche Erzahlungen* 178) as Josephine's singing is described is reminiscent of the value of poetry: "a negativity, invisible, inaudible." And yet: "Hier in den durftigen Pausen zwischen

den Kämpfen träumt das Volk, es ist, als lösten sich dem Einzelnen die Glieder, als dürfte sich der Ruhelose einmal nach seiner Lust im großen warmen Bett des Volkes dehnen und strecken" (180).

In both, the Kafka story and Bernstein's phrase, the spiritual condition of the human being is at stake. The above quotation from "Josephine" as well as Bernstein's "*(spiritus sancti)*" alludes to some kind of salvation through art. And in both cases art is the affair of the people; the just society or the New America cannot be brought about by a single human being: "I cannot approach it alone; the eventual human community is between us, or nowhere" (Cavell, *This New Yet Unapproachable America* 108). "No 'mere' readers only writers who read, actors who interact," "speak / to me so I may hear, speak / that I may speak" (Bernstein, *The Sophist* 167). Reading described in this way is an exchange an act of communion in which both parties, reader and writer have equal importance. The elevation of the reader to the status of the writer reminds one of Thoreau's notion of "reading in a high sense" (183) in *Walden*: "The works of the great poets have never been read by mankind, for only great poets can read them" (182). A real reader, that is, has to become a writer, has to construct the work in the process of reading. For Thoreau and Bernstein in his tradition, "reading in a high sense" is as desirable as it is difficult, for it is much more complex than the "easy reading" we are accustomed to as Thoreau writes:

Most men have learned to read to serve a paltry convenience, as they have learned to cipher in order to keep accounts and not to be cheated in trade; but of reading as a noble intellectual exercise they know little or nothing; yet this only is reading, in a high sense, not that which lulls us as a luxury and suffers the nobler faculties to sleep the while, but what we have to stand on tiptoe to read and devote our most alert and wakeful hours to (183).

If one relates "The Lives of the Toll Takers" to the "Reading" chapter in *Walden*, one comes across a further meaning of the line "FAKE A WHISTLE TO WRITE (*spiritus sancti*)."

Thoreau elaborates on the relation of breath and the written word: "A written word [...] is

something at once more intimate with us and more universal than any other work of art. It is the work of art nearest to life itself. It may [...] not only be read but actually breathed from all human lips;--not to be represented on canvas or in marble only, but be carved out of the breath of life itself" (181). In addition to the spiritual dimension of reading which is stressed through the imagery of breath, the passages from *Walden* and "Josephine the singer" also point to the idea that reading/writing in its most private moments is most public, most intimate and most universal. An insight which not only informs the work of Bernstein but also gives it the ground to go on. In "Sunsickness" the matter is expressed in a similar way this time in a variation of a quote from Emerson:

For what  
you may learn is that by going  
down into the secrets of your  
own crimes you descend  
into the secrets of all  
mimes (minds). Anyway:  
some *other* (*Dark City* 38).

The secrets and crimes of all minds which at the same time are the most private are at stake in *Dark City*. The poem helps to get in contact with those secrets by exposing that what seems to be so ordinary, because it is always before our eyes. The following line can be read as another reminder of the urgency of the endeavor. "Every day fades way," the "whistle" now could be read as a sign of warning or a reminder that the loss of the self resulting in a state of spiritual darkness is not to be undone by "piety or greed." In this respect the tolling of a bell, and if there is nothing else at hand "take a swivel to strike," again expresses the moral urgency of writing and reading. Furthermore, the phrase "every day fades way" recalls Thoreau's comment on the detrimental effect of people's indifference toward their lives: "As if you could kill time without injuring eternity" (*Walden* 111). In Bernstein as in Kafka, however, such considerations and reflections on spiritual salvation, are never unbroken or of an unconscious pathos but corroded by humor and in constant danger to turn into slapstick.

The next passage also stresses this switching between the heroic and the comic. It puts "The Lives of the Toll Takers" in line with other works of Moral Perfectionism:

(The near-heroic obstinacy of his refusal [inability?] to despair.)  
 & who  
 can say  
 whether dejection or elation will  
 ensure the care for, care  
 in  
 the world that may lead us  
 weightless, into a new world or  
 sink us, like lead  
 baboons,  
 deeper into this o  
 ne? (20)

"(The near-heroic obstinacy of his refusal [inability?] to despair.)" recalls the following passage from "Matters of Policy:"

"If the great things of religion are rightly understood, they will affect the heart." Still, what an absurd figure a poor weak man makes who in a thunder storm goes against the flashes of lightning with sword in hand. "No vision of loveliness could have touched me as deeply as this sad sight." (*Controlling Interests* 3)

In this and the former passage the most important exponents of moral perfectionism are gathered together, ranging from Wittgenstein (the man in the thunderstorm), to Emerson (his refusal to despair expressed in cheering), to Thoreau (not writing an ode to dejection), and perhaps even including Cervantes (his Don Quixote fighting with sword in hand against evils nobody else can see). Acknowledging this new context, the "whistle" from the passage above could be related to Thoreau's motto for *Walden*, in which he compares his writing to the whistling of a particular bird: "I do not propose to write an ode to dejection, but to brag as lustily as chanticleer in the morning, standing on his roost, if only to wake my neighbors up" (106). Again we come upon the whistling as a signal to call our attention,

this time in the form of a wake up call. It can be read as the optimistic flipside of the sarcastic or despairing comment quoted at the beginning: "So do not ask for whom the phone rings - not likely for you. I think it's time we were all put to sleep." (*The Sophist* 167)

Perhaps this is the voice of the disillusioned moral perfectionist:

Largesse  
with no release became, after  
not too long, atrophied, incendiary,  
stupefying. (*Dark City* 9)

Within the multitude of voices, moods and tones in the work of Bernstein there is a constant dialogue between the sarcastic voice of resignation and the cheering voice of the moral perfectionist. However, it remains undecidable which voice in the end will win, the voice of despair and torpor or the voice of the chanticleer. Thoreau puts it in a similar way:

"whether we should live like baboons or like men, is a little uncertain." "& who / can say / whether dejection or elation will / ensure the care for, care / in the world that may lead us weightless, into a new world or / sink us like lead / baboons, deeper into this o / ne?" This wording also suggests that the journey "into a new world" might be tantamount to a "sinking deeper into this one," an "embrace of the common" which makes us "explore and sit at the feet of the familiar, the low" ("The American Scholar" 69). Bernstein's skeptic does not attempt to overcome the human but accepts his or her metaphysical finitude or as Emerson has it in "Experience": "We may climb into the thin and cold realm of pure geometry and lifeless science, or sink into that of sensation" ("Experience" 276-77). Bernstein certainly opts for the latter.

Still, the mood of uncertainty and doubt expressed in the phrase "who can say" is carried over to the next paragraph in the form of "what if":

What if  
success scares you so much that at the point of some

modest acceptance, midway through  
                   life's burning, you blast out  
 onto the street, six-shooters smoking, still a rebel.  
                   For what? (21)

The stubborn aversion in the tradition of Thoreau now seems to be outdated and becomes ridiculous, the willfulness which lead to the formation of a new kind of identity loses balance through "some modest acceptance" and turns the poet into a caricature of himself, expressed by the comic-strip like exaggerated image of the "rebel" "blasting out onto the street, six-shooters smoking."

As if reacting to this experience of imbalance, the poem completely changes its tone and enters a discourse of power, the discourse of business language:

Of course new ventures always require risk, but by carefully  
 analyzing the situation, we became smart risk  
 takers. (21)

This sentence could be read in the memoirs of a team of successful investors or businessmen. Asked about the secrets of their trade they refer to the importance of analyzing the market. The passage also refers back to the second page of the poem and the reflection on "funny \$:" "making a killing on junk bonds and living to peddle the tale." Again, it is possible to read a passage dressed in the lingo of business talk as a remark about language and poetry. The secret of the poet's trade also lies in carefully analyzing the situation. However, as a "smart risk taker" he can hardly be describes as a "rebel" anymore, this crisis in the way the poet sees him- or herself triggers the following reflection on "softness" versus "rigidity."

                  Fear of  
 softness characterized as rounded edges, indecisiveness, need to  
                   please  
 versus the humorless rigidity of the "phallic"  
                   edge, ready

to stand erect, take  
sides (false dichotomy, all dichotomies) (21)

The passage represents the stereotyped distinction between male and female behavior and thought: "rounded edges," and "need to please" are usually seen as female attributes whereas "humorless rigidity," "'phallic' edge," and "stand erect" are qualities attributed to males. To the list of sexually charged images of the male one could add the "smoking six-shooter" as an image of virility at the border of caricature. In "Words and Pictures" Bernstein comments on thinking in its feminine aspect of character: "Reflection may also be associated with insecurity, uncertainty, and frailty--'negative capability.' Discomfort with vulnerability and mutability is a commonly "male"-identified value" (*Content's Dream* 156). The "dichotomy" between female "ingratiation" and male "authoritativeness" however is already destabilized in the way the poem switches between a discourse of power and a discourse without authoritativeness. For instance, the passage on "smart risk taking" and "carefully analyzing the situation" is written in the language of power but talks about poetics which for Bernstein can be described as "philosophy without authoritativeness". The dichotomy between "softness" and "rigidity," "female and male" "humor and humorlessness" which is protected by the dominant discourse in order to sustain its dominance is subverted in the poem: "(false dichotomies, all dichotomies)". The same holds true for the dichotomy between intellect and emotion:

An affirmation that dissolves into the fabric of  
unaccounted  
desires, undertows of an imaginary that cannot be willed away but  
neither need be mindlessly  
obeyed. What's that? (21-2)

The fixation of the straight-forward "affirmation dissolves into the fabric of unaccounted desires." The opposition between rationality and desire is abandoned. Instead they weave into one fabric the fabric of writing, of poetic thinking of thinking as sensing, as Foreman has it: "THINKING treated as sensing, as the sixth sense ... see the (object) dissolve into a kind

of web-of-association awareness" (*Content's Dream* 140). The loosening of reification and rigidity can also be related to a cure of one's spiritual numbness which has been described by Cavell as a "failure of acknowledgment." In poetry the unacknowledged or the "unaccounted desire" is given justice to. The poem, thus, accounts for the "neglected," the "disregarded"--"the socially obscure, the forgotten and repressed, the overlooked...Hiding in plain sight you may never be found: if sight is not to "see by but to look at", not to use but behold." (*My Way* 221) The idea of "hiding in plain sight" is also expressed in the next passage from another poem from *Dark City*.

*I left  
you there but you  
have never found  
me though I hide  
in visibility and  
wade higglety pigglety among  
archways or ski lifts (115).*

The "undertows of the imaginary" referred to in the previous passage from "The Lives of the Toll Takers," however, are not to be "mindlessly obeyed" (22) as if now to privilege the other side of the dichotomy. On the contrary, mind and emotion do not exclude each other. The poem interrupts the "endless repetition of either or" for "a tear is an intellectual thing" as Bernstein has it in "The Only Utopia Is in a Now" (*The Sophist* 34-36). This text from *The Sophist* which can be described as a hybrid being situated at the threshold between poetry and poetics, reflects on the misunderstandings concerning the notion of "emotion" if apprehended in opposition to intellect. A woman who is described like an apparition in a dream or a character from a fairy tale, explains the confusions concerning 'emotion' and 'thinking':

On this block [...] what is called 'thinking' is absolutely forbidden in the name of what is called 'emotion.' You are only supposed to write and say what everyone else knows, and to write and say it in the way everyone else has already heard it. In fact, they issue a manual, *Acceptable Words and Word Combinations* and everyone talks and writes only in permutations derived from this book. It's no use arguing, since anyone who

disagrees is called anti-emotional and, regardless of their gender, is also called 'male'. This is what makes everything so topsy-turvy. You see, emotion doesn't express itself only in words we already know. But people here who talk about emotion don't really want to experience it, they only want simulations of it in patterns of words they've already heard. In other words, they only want to hear what they already know, and they call this repetition, which is after all somewhat comforting, 'emotion'. But if you speak or write with the syntax of the heart, saying in words what otherwise cannot be expressed, you're told you're against communication and too intellectual. They make an adversary of the mind, forgetting that a tear is an intellectual thing, as Blake said. In fact, the people here are so ideologically pro-emotion they make it into an abstract concept that is more theoretical than the intellectuality they renounce. (34-36)

This passage summarizes Bernstein's poetics in the language of myth or fairy-tale, voiced by a mysterious woman who does not shrink back from becoming so vulnerable as to "speak her heart" (35). Although her story could be easily ridiculed and rejected as trivial matter, it provokes the impression of incredible wisdom which we have the chance to receive, a voice "soft" and "clear," "as if it was a friend's whisper in your ear" (36). (another instance of befriending) Her secret, that "emotion doesn't express itself only in words we already know" ties in with the idea of "unaccounted desires" which nevertheless "need not be mindlessly obeyed". As she goes on explaining: "It is not our minds that are our enemy. The mind can in no way be understood except as compressed emotion, as a body" (36). Thinking in this way is perceived as sensing or intellectual intuition: "The mind is a purely sexual entity, and play with language outside the rote routines prescribed, is live play--a communion in what we share." In fact this description recalls Stein's poetics and one could imagine the apparition with the "singing voice" to be the ghost of Gertrude Stein.

Another statement of poetics but again fashioned in the more privileged discourse of business talk follows the reflection on the inseparability of mind and desire.

Our new  
service orientation  
mea  
nt  
not only changing the way we wrote poems but also diversifying  
into new poetry services. Poetic  
opportunities

however, do not fall into your lap, at least not very often. You've got to seek them out, and when you find them you've got to have the knowhow to take advantage of them (*Dark City* 22).

This statement on poetics is disconcerting as it is composed in the language of advertising. In particular in regard to what has been said so far about "the dollar value of poetry," that is about poetry's noncommercial value, it seems absurd, repulsive and perverted to market poetry in the way a commodity or a service is marketed. "Poetry thickens discussion, refuses reductive formulations. It sings of values not measurable as commercial sums" (*My Way* 240). However, whereas the form of presentation seems inadequate, the content agrees with Bernstein's poetics. In this way, the textual dynamics perform something like a masquerade, the poem turns into a fashion show of different styles, modes and discourses. Bernstein's obsession with clothing and fashion and its relation to his reflection on language and power has been investigated by Susan M. Schultz's in her essay "Of Time and Charles Bernstein's Lines: A Poetics of Fashion Statements". She there argues that "What the poet can do, and what Bernstein has done throughout his nearly 30 year career, is to critique fashions of writing that attempt to conceal their status as fashion." In order to draw attention to the fashions of writing Bernstein suggests a "self-interpreting, proactive literature [that] provides instruction in how to read the everpresent social texts of the culture" (*Content's Dream* 370). His fascination with modes and fashions of writing can also be related to his reflections on de Certeau's concept of "la perruque;" the following question is to be read in context with the preceding statement on poetics in business lingo: "How is it possible for an act of linguistic defiance bordering on revolt to appear in a cultural space that would suppress any explicit expression of political opposition?" (de Certeau 25) The answer to this question is given in de Certeau's *The Practice of Everyday Life*, in a section titled "a diversionary practice:"

La perruque is the worker's own work disguised as the work of his employer. [B.'s work in business writing] It differs from pilfering in that nothing of material value is stolen. It differs from absenteeism in that the worker is officially on the job ... the worker who indulges in la perruque actually diverts time (not goods, since he uses only scraps) ... for work that is free, creative, and precisely not directed toward profit ... to deal with everyday tactics in this way would be to practice an "ordinary art", to find oneself in the common situation, and to make a kind of perruque of writing itself. (28)

Bernstein's statement on poetics in the discourse of business, could be looked at as an instance of "the worker's own work disguised as the work of his employer" (28). His inappropriate or nonutilitarian use of dominant discourse becomes more apparent in the next paragraph:

Poets deserve compensation  
for such services.  
For readers unwilling to pay the price  
we need to refuse to provide such  
service as alliteration,  
    internal rhymes,  
    exogamic structure, and  
    unusual vocabulary (23).

What catches one's eye, is that the passage at hand as well as its surrounding is interlarded with words taken from the realm of economics: "fees," "expenses" (22), "for nothing," "cost savings," "minimizing wasted time (condensare)," "reducing," "compensation," "to pay the price," "provide such service," and "microtolls" (23). If one follows this train of thought one might consider the possibility that poetry indeed has something to do with economy, but a different kind of economy than the restricted economy of Capital. In *Walden* Thoreau also dedicates himself to questions of economy, suggesting a kind of economy which differs from political economy: "Even the *poor* student studies and is taught only *political* economy, while that economy of living which is synonymous with philosophy is not even sincerely professed in our colleges" (*Walden* 143-4). Economy, accounting and recounting are all methods of working on one's soul. The economy that Bernstein and Thoreau want to draw

our attention to is an ethical or a spiritual economy, which becomes apparent in the switching of, for instance, the words "compensation" and "toll" between the realms of business and ethics or religion. It is our spiritual economy which is out of balance and which is in need of redemption. What seems to be required to take us out of our moral depth is a reinvestment in words, a change of attitude towards our language: "an attitude allegorical of an investment in our lives" (*Conditions Handsome and Unhandsome* 34). A reinvestment in our words is also required in order to make sense of the next two lines:

Sharp edges which become shady groves,  
mosaic walkways, emphatic asymptotes (asthmatic microtolls).

"Sharp edges" is an image of exactness which corresponds with the "humorless rigidity of the 'phallic' edge, ready to stand erect." Furthermore it belongs to a way of thinking which appertains to the "poetics of sight" in which clear and permanent objects can be discerned and captured. However this exactness of sight which is also associated with clarity and light is now said to turn into "shady groves," an image more akin to a poetics of vision, in which borders are blurred and which connects rather than separates. The following images could be described as ways of composition: "mosaic walkways" are ways made of many fragments or diverse elements, recalling Bernstein's collage style, an "incorporation of dead ideas (call them prior texts) into a work [that] is not simply collage [...] but the spiritual domain of poetry" (*Content's Dream* 363). In this way, poetry as epistemological inquiry is a poetry of commemoration. In addition, "mosaic" means pertaining to the Muses and in this way alludes to art, "mosaic walkways" being the walkways of art. Mosaic, however could also refer to the writings, laws, and principles attributed to Moses, in this way it would perhaps allude to the Pentateuch, and its interpretations collected in the Talmud could be looked at as "mosaic walkways" in this way already announcing the "pilpul" of the next paragraph. Furthermore mosaicism is a condition in which an organism or part of an organism is composed of two or more genetically distinct tissues. This use of mosaic has a

family resemblance with Bernstein's poetological principle of "dysraphism". In "Blood on the Cutting Room Floor" he defines it as follows: "Medically, [dysraphism] would mean a congenital misseaming of embryonic parts--raph means seam, a rhapsodist being one who stitches parts together, that is a reciter of epic poetry" (359) (cf. *The Sophist* 44). "Emphatic asymptotes" could characterize a way of thinking that unifies logical and analogical thinking, the "emphatic" being the decided or definite element as in "It stands like a great, stone dagger, emphatic against the sky": the "phallic edge, ready to stand erect" (*Dark City* 21) whereas the term "asymptotes" suggests an approach which is never complete, a way of procedure typical for analogical thinking. And finally the (asthmatic microtolls) suggest insufficiency. An asthmatic is not able to walk as fast as a healthy person. It is also an image which evokes the body, but the body in its deficiency and finitude. In this way "asthmatic microtolls" could be another paraphrase for "negative capability," the metaphor of the toll again suggesting a connection to poetry, however a poetry which proceeds in small steps or microtolls, a poetry which makes an art out of a negativity. "Asthmatic microtolls" also recall the "method of microanalysis" of which Bernstein writes in "Reznikoff's Nearness." It is a method which demands from the reader to pry the "words open, listening for the tones and overtones--a way of reading that intensifies the conflict between 'the clear and plain' and 'the necessary,' between the accessible and the ineffable." Microanalysis entails a "weighing and measuring of words for their undertones as well as their piths" (*My Way* 219).

The density of associations produced by those two lines, slows down the reader, it interrupts the smoothness of reading of the preceding passage composed in the highly standardized language of business. The speeding up, slowing down and stopping of the reading process can be looked at as a semantic dimension of the poem which needs to be acknowledged in order to understand its complex semantic dynamics. The poem, in this way, realizes an extension of the concept of meaning that cannot be achieved in expository

writing. Furthermore, in their effect of slowing down the process of reading, the two lines are a good preparation or tuning for the next rather complex passage:

The hidden language of the Jews: self-reproach, laden with ambivalence, not this or this either, seeing five sides to every issue, the old *pilpul* song and dance, obfuscation clowning as ingratiating, whose only motivation is never offend, criticize only with a discountable barb: Genocide is made of words like these, Pound laughing (with Nietzsche's gay laughter) all the way to the canon's bank spewing forth about the concrete value of gold, the "plain sense of the word", a people rooted in the land they sow, and cashing in on such verbal usury (language held hostage: year one thousand nine hundred eighty seven). (23-24)

In an interview with Tom Beckett Bernstein comments on this passage:

The passage you ask about refers to Sander Gilman's *Jewish Self-Hatred*, which it diagnoses as a state in which a person internalizes the racist stereotype that their true language is not the one they speak but an imaginary "hidden language of the Jews". Gilman's study centers on the delusion that the Jews can never be "native" or even competent speakers of their own language; for the anti-Semite rejects the possibility that Jews can assimilate into the language, and culture, that they can make it as their own. That echoes with Pound's idea of Jewish rootlessness but also gives social dimension to my preoccupation with the radical morphogenerativeness of language and its related instability and ambiguity, its unsettling and polydictory logics, which constitute, rather than impede, our mutual grounding in language as a grounding in each other that forms the basis not of nations or ethnicities or races but of polis. (*A Poetics* 188/189)

The "racist stereotype" internalized is furthermore described as "dark, magical, dangerous, private" (*Jewish Self-Hatred* 16) it is also put in relation to the *pilpul* that Pound referred to as the "Hebrew poison" and which he compared to sophism. In *Jewish Self Hatred* Gilman gives a definition of *pilpul*:

the *pilpul shel hevel*, an argument based on analogy and approximation and not on the syllogism, the basis of classical logic. The *pilpul* is the quintessentially Jewish mode of argument. It is the basis for all Talmudic discourse. Suspending time and space, it confronts the opinions of all authority, seeking the moment of resolution hidden within seemingly contradictory positions. (90)

The pilpul in its dialogic and hermeneutic method of exegesis, thus, performs a mode of thinking which is akin to Wittgenstein's and Bernstein's aesthetic thinking. It also describes the way of thinking that is necessary to understand poetry. In order to bring to life a poetic text like the two lines above ("Sharp edges which become shady groves, / mosaic walkways, emphatic asymptotes (asthmatic microtolls)") (23) one is in a need of way of thinking which transcends a way of thinking that focuses on propositional content, such an expansion also leads to a more complex notion of meaning, meaning as "resonance" rather than the fixed picture, the "concrete value of gold" argued for by Pound. The experience of a way of reading which is "laden with / ambivalence, not this or this either, seeing five sides to every issue, the old *pilpul* song and dance" (23). In the essay "Poetry and/or the Sacred," Bernstein relates the pilpul to a mode of writing which does not aspire to the heights of pure logic but which is "laden with ambivalence," sunk into the sensual. The sacred is not "something to rise up to but something in which to descend, the gravity Simone Weil talks about that is a condition of grace." Moral perfectionism as negative capability is a way of stopping decline by declining it, as Cavell has it in his essay "Declining Decline:" "looking philosophically as it were beneath our feet rather than over our heads" (*This New Yet Unapproachable America* 34). Poetry as negative capability, for Bernstein, is "grounded horizontally in the social and not vertically in the ethers." Thus, the Jewish rootlessness Pound talks about is a general human condition "a grounding in each other that forms the basis not of nations or ethnicities or races but of polis." What Pound looks at as an insufficiency, Bernstein perceives as the "radical morphogenerativeness of language" with all its "instability" and "ambiguity." The phrase "a people rooted in the land they sow, and cashing in on such verbal usury" could be read as a reproach by Pound directed to the Jews, in particular as "usury" is one of the main prejudices against Jews. Nevertheless, it could also be read as an apt description of the human condition in general and its "grounding in each other." Humanity grows from what it sows, in this way it can be looked at as a self-supporting or autopoietic "system" or rather "environment," (*Dark City* 28) as the last

sentence of "The Lives of the Toll Takers" suggests. The fruit that grows from sowing is reaped, a process which could also be described as "cashing in." In this way "verbal usury" could refer to the tilling of the field of language. In German usury means "Wucher" a word derived from the Old High German word "wuohar" meaning "fruit, output, profit."

Thoreau's beanfield comes to mind about which he writes: "a new growth is rising all around, preparing another aspect for new infant eyes" (*Walden* 220): "the dawning of an aspect." The relation between field work and composition becomes in particular apparent in Thoreau's idea of working in a field "only for the sake of tropes and expression, to serve a parable-maker one day" (224).

The last phrase of the paragraph "(language held hostage: year one / thousand nine hundred eighty seven)" which I related earlier to the Iran-Contra scandal: to Oliver North and the "arms-for-hostages deal" that William Casey knew all about but couldn't communicate anymore due to his brain tumor, also constitutes a link to another Bernstein text, his essay about Susan Howe: "Passed by Examination:"

The "savage" that we have conquered in the name of civilization is ourselves. "We all wear moccasins." (Heliopathy) The captivity narrative is the story of our own language held hostage, divided against itself; except when we sometimes return to it: in dreams, in the inarticulate sounds - the hiss - of "history", in poems such as these that bloom in the dark, sick from the blinding light of the sun ("heliopathy" a kind of sunsickness).

Here it is useful to keep in mind that the "field work" in *Walden* was meant to establish "a connecting link between wild and cultivated fields" (221) an attempt to "salvage the savage," ("Heliopathy") the savage being our own denied past. Howe's "We all wear moccasins" brings to mind the repressed Native American and triggers a reading of the "Lives of the Toll Takers" as "The Lives of the Toltecs" telling the American people about their history by acknowledging that which is repressed, captivated, and conquered. It tells the story of America as a history grounded in violence. "The captivity narrative is the story

of our own language held hostage." The expression "the Toll Takers" in this way constantly switches between two meanings, on the one hand it refers to the conquerors, the repressors or the toll takers, that is, the European settlers believing in their Manifest Destiny, their God-given right of expansion regardless of its costs and on the other hand it reminds of the conquered Native Americans, who are the US Americans' lost or repressed history. The Toltec culture corresponds to ideas "whose origin is past," to, as Bernstein has it, ideas dead "in the way a culture may be lost, its people vanish without records or monuments or memories. Ideas then, not so much dead as submerged, melted, transubstantiated, absorbed; everywhere informing but no where fully explicable" (*Content's Dream* 361). Poetry resounds those ideas "in the inarticulate sounds--the hiss--of history" (the ancient city). Bernstein compares our history of dead ideas to a "compost heap in which present language and writing grows." In this way "a people rooted in the land they sow" would refer to our rootedness in the "historical unconscious" of dead ideas. A "consciousness resounding with an inexhaustible repository of ideas, as a cave to be mined" (316) but of which we have to be reminded. This need for reminders recalls what Cavell refers to as a particular kind of "ignorance" and that he relates to what Marx calls our repressed "social present" and Freud our repressed "private past." It also recalls Wittgenstein's definition of philosophy as "an assembly of reminders" (*Philosophical Investigations* 127). For Cavell, this repressed knowledge is our ignorance of our agreements. We have forgotten to what we have consented. We do not feel responsible for our society any more. *Dark City* reminds of what we have consented to, bringing to mind again what has been "preserved deep under-/cover." So the turn or return that Bernstein in the tradition of Cavell wants to elicit through poetry and via the process of reading is not a return to some home but a return to our "senses of responsibility:"

The Greeks had an idea of *nostos*, which is not quite what we now think of as nostalgia. *Nostos* means returning to the point of origin: not the same thing as home. [N]ostos suggests the political and ethical responsibility of the human being in

orienting herself or himself. You can't go home again, but you can stay tuned to your senses of responsibility (Interview with Tim Wood, *artsDFW*).

The call for a return to our "senses of responsibility" and to our "language held hostage," the need to "salvage the savage" must be related to the rest of the passage. For a more comprehensive understanding of the complexity of its meaning a close-reading is required, that is, a reading that obediently follows the dynamics of the text and pays respect to each single word.

The paragraph starts with the expression: "The hidden language of the Jews" which is the sub-title of Gilman's book, but also the title of this paragraph. The colon indicates that what is to follow is an explanation or elaboration of the title phrase. The stereotype of the "hidden language of the Jews" contains the idea of self-reproach which evokes the title of Gilman's book: *Jewish Self-Hatred*. Gilman argues to the extent that some of the assimilated Jews in Europe have so internalized the racist stereotype that they themselves start fighting their so-called "corrupt" Jewish quality of thought and language. They identify with the aggressor and try to eradicate this corrupt hidden language which seems not to be compatible with the requirements of logic and clarity, but instead appears as a kind of "obfuscation." The hidden language of the Jews is thus blamed for muddling, perplexing, darkening and confusing thought. Furthermore it is lacking the seriousness and respectability a straightforward statement requires. This conception of the Jewish language or of "mauscheln" leads to the conviction that for a Jew it is not possible to speak the truth, a prejudice so wide-spread that in court Jews had to take an oath before they were allowed to testify (cf. *Jewish Self Hatred*). In the passage at hand the idea of the inability of the Jews to make a straightforward statement is expressed in the lines following the cue word "obfuscation:" "clowning as ingratiation, whose only motivation is never offend, criticize only with a discountable barb." The Jewish way of thinking is valued insufficient. Expression such as "clowning," "need to please" and "rounded edges" describe it as

feminized, void of the "rigidity of the 'phallic' edge. The image of the feminized Jew is for instance formulated by Weininger. For Gilman this is an instance of self-criticism turning into self-hatred. The historical effect of this racist stereotyping in search of identity is the Holocaust: "Genocide is made of words like these." Again, the phrases following the colon are like notes taken down, cue words, requiring or leaving room for further thought. In this respect they are elliptical. It is the reader's responsibility to make the associations required ("speak to me so I may speak"), to render a phrase like the following meaningful: "Pound laughing (with Nietzsche's gay laughter) all the way to the canon's bank spewing forth about the concrete value of gold, 'the plain sense of the word.'" The first relation which can be drawn is to compare this line to a similar line at the beginning of the poem: "(laughing all the way to the swiss bank where I put my money in gold bars [the prison house of language].)" Again the poem requires a backward and forward movement during the process of reading. As I have pointed out before, the fixation of money in gold bars is compared to the fixation of language, its imprisonment through reification, which is connected to a poetics of sight that favors clarity and the distinct permanent object above the more horizontally rooted connectedness of a poetics of vision with fluent transitions and blurred borders. The fixation of flux is symbolized in the "gold bar" which also hints at the prison bar. In the new context the "captivity narrative of our language" (*My Way* 103) is related to anti-semitism and the Holocaust as well as to Pound's anti-semitism and his role in literary history: "the canon's bank."

"Pound laughing (with Nietzsche's<sup>19</sup> gay laughter) all the way to the canon's bank spewing forth about the concrete value of gold, the 'plain sense of the word'" (*Dark City* 23) is a

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<sup>19</sup> The spelling error "Nietzche" alludes to Pound's compositional practice of including mistakes into his poems. ("The Pound Error" is [Christine] Froula's term for Pound's inclusions of printer's errors, misattributions, mistranslations, and the like into the text of *The Cantos* so that the "history" that the poem includes is also a history of its groping compositional process. Froula means for "error" to also suggest errantly, or wandering.)" (*My Way* 160) Cf. Froula, Christine. "The Pound Error: The Limits of Authority in the Modern Epic" is chapter 3 of *To Write Paradise: Style and Authority in Pound's Cantos*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1984.

characterization of Pound's poetics and his effect on literary history and on the canon. In "Pounding Fascism" Bernstein describes Pound's work and influence as follows:

Pound's fascism, far from hindering the canonization of his poetry by American literary culture, has been a major factor in its acceptance. Stripped of its obnoxious overtness, Pound's fascism becomes the stern but fatherly voice of authority, measuring by the Pound standard the absolute worth of the cultural production of all the societies of earth, the ultimate Core Curriculum (*A Poetics* 121).

The canon's bank which echoes the canton's bank but also the violence of the cannon<sup>20</sup> refers to Pound's authority regarding the cultural "Curriculum," as well as to "the canonization of his poetry by American literary culture" (121). The allusion to the Swiss bank with its hidden numbered accounts might hint at his veiled fascism "stripped of its obnoxious overtness" while the rest of the phrase ("spewing forth about the concrete value of gold, 'the plain sense of the word'") directly refers to Pound's poetics, a poetics that insists on clarity, order and control. In "Pound and the Poetry of Today" Bernstein gives an overview of this poetics and stresses Pound's "insistence, variously, on 'the plain sense of the word,' on the 'direct treatment of the 'thing'" and on the unswerving pivot whose Imagist distillation was made possible by eliminating any word that did not directly 'contribute to the presentation.'" As Bernstein points out, "Pound vilified fragmentation and abstraction as debasing the 'gold standard' of language" (*A Poetics* 161), or put in the words of "The Lives of the Toll Takers," as debasing the "concrete value of gold" (*Dark City* 24). Bernstein, however, also draws attention to the contradiction between Pound's poetics and his poetry which is not controllable in the way his poetics require:

yet his major and considerable contribution to the poetry of our language is exactly his rococo overlayings, indirection, elusiveness. His fast-moving contrasts of attitudes and atmospheres collapse the theater of Ideational Representation into a textually historicist, unfinishable process of composition by field--a field of many voices without the fulcrum point of any final arbitration, *listening not judging*: a disintegration into the incommensurability of parts that marks its entrance into the space of contemporary composition (*A Poetics* 161).

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<sup>20</sup> Cf. Marjorie Perloff's essay: "'Can(n)on to the Right of Us, Can(n)on to the Left of Us: A Plea for Difference," in *Poetic License: Essays on Modernist and Postmodernist Lyric*, pp. 7-30.

Thus there is a tension between Pound's poetics of the "plain word" and his actual poetry in its indeterminacy, verbiage, ambiguity and equivocation, all qualities Pound attributes to the Jews in his radio-speeches.

The fact that "The Cantos is in many ways radically (radially) at odds with the tenets of his fascist ideals" exposes Pound's ignorance regarding his own work. He refused "to recognize in it the process he vilified as usury and Jewishness" (122). For Pound "Jews are the purveyors of fragmentation and therefore the dissolution of fixed hierarchical cultural values" (122). In regard to literature, he "contrasts the phallogocentric/logocentric unswerving pivot with the castrated and nomadic Jew" (122). In his view and terminology, the authority of the author is his "extraliterary point of 'special knowledge' that creates a phallic order over the female chaos of conflicting ideological material," (122) an "indefiniteness" (124) which Pound in his paranoia and megalomania ultimately attributed to the Jew who he saw as "falsification incarnate" (122).

According to Bernstein those are

grotesque views for someone whose work is filled with indeterminacy, fragmentation, abstraction, obscurity, verbiage, equivocation, ambiguity, allegory; who has made the highest art of removing ideologies from their origins and creating for them a nomadic economy whose roots are neither in the land nor in property but rather in the abstraction of aestheticization and the irresolution of the jarring harmonies of incommensurable sounds (124).

Bernstein thus argues that the kind of economy that Pound vehemently reproaches as Jewishness and usury is in actuality the verbal economy of his own work. In this way Pound could be looked at as a self-hating intellectual, who represses just that quality of thinking which is the most powerful and creative in his own work.

As the issue of economy features prominently in "The Lives of the Toll Takers" it seems pertinent to have a closer look at Bernstein's view of the idea of economy in Pound's work:

the real economy of *The Cantos* is the one Pound constantly struggles to repress and to lay bare: the economy of reader and writer and book; the economy of language not as Logos but as exchange (124).

The economics that characterize Pounds literary work contradict with "the crude economism of his fascism" (124) and with "his small-minded, penurious political accounting system" (124-5), instead they can be described as "the utopian chaos of a negative dialectic" (124), another aspect of negative capability. For Bernstein, the "nomadic economy" that operates in "The Cantos" even if repressed by Pound plays an important role for contemporary poetry. It gives "comfort to utopian fantasies of a self-conscious, multivocal, polyvalent, intensely sonorous poetry" (*My Way* 160). Such a poetics of "nomadic economy" also informs Bernstein's poetry and can be experienced in reading "The Lives of the Toll Takers." For an understanding of the compositional dynamics of this poem it is also helpful to acknowledge the distinction between "montage" and "collage" he develops in the context of his discussion of Pound. Montage "involves the use of contrasting images in the service of one unifying theme" while collage "juxtaposes different elements without recourse to an overall unifying idea" (160). The latter is typical for a work of nomadic economy in which every "grain or strain or swatch has its own claim to truth [...] as part of the democracy of words and cultures and histories, all impossible to exhaust or rank" (162). In this way a poem composed according to the verbal dynamics of nomadic economy can be a model for the just city, establishing "a new polis in the place of the old." Bernstein's poetic economy not only contradicts but also corrodes the economics of Capital, in this way the passage is composed in the language of business but talks about the economy of poetry: it subverts and destabilizes the ideology usually stabilized by this kind of discourse. This is due to Bernstein's applying of economic categories to a subject matter which is usually incompatible with business lingo. It can be looked at as a reinscription, a new way of

applying language which wrests freedom from the realm of sclerotized thoroughways and false necessities. To a "real" businessman the use of business language is inappropriate and out of tune. For charging fees for poetic services like "alliteration," "exogamic structure," etc. seems silly or mad. As mentioned before, this way of misuse of the discourse of economics is reminiscent of Thoreau's use of economic terms in *Walden*. His "accounting" and "doing business" goes against the grain of the established use of these expressions. It is a form of "misalignment" of being "out of sync" as Bernstein has it. In its political dimension it could be described as "civil-disobedience" and "aversion".

"Verbal usury" in this way does not pertain to capitalist economics but to the utopian economics of communism. Accordingly, Pound saw "Jews as usurers and in league with the Commies" (*A Poetics* 122). For like communism a nomadic economy wants to overcome the estrangement of the producer from the produced which is the result of reification. A poetry of nomadic economy is capable of returning the reader to his or her agreements in judgment, it draws one's attention to the disattend track, to that which is denied, to our "private past," our "social present". As such it encourages a response to the poem. The reader is called on ("any you") to become responsive (to the dim peals of poetry), to take responsibility for the poem's meaning and in this way to overcome his or her spiritual numbness which is the result of a failure of acknowledgment. As I have pointed out before, the failure of acknowledgment is brought about or furthered by a poetics of sight that looks for distinct and permanent objects. Thus, it now becomes apparent how the issues of money and economics, of the "poetics of sight," of "Jewish self-hatred," of imprisonment and the repressed are interlinked, that is, interrelated in a complex way. The coherence between those different issues, therefore, is not a coherence of montage but of collage: "a coherence of the displaced--disseminated and desecrated--making a home where it is to be found, where it occurs" (122): "Not / angles, just / tangles. From which a direction emerges, p / urges" (*Dark City* 16).

Like the poststructuralists, Bernstein acknowledges "the displaced, the disseminated and desecrated," but unlike for instance Derrida he stresses the importance of reterritorialization, of "founding as finding" an emphasis which, as I have argued earlier, shows his affinity with Wittgenstein and Cavell: "never only dedef / ining always rec / onstricting (libidinal / flow just another word for loose / st / ools.)" (11). His kinship with Wittgenstein also comes to a fore in a thinking in transitions, in which the issues pondered on are not unified by one central idea but connected through family-resemblances.

The opposition of this aesthetic mode of thinking to the scientific mode might have triggered the composition of the paragraph five lines after the reflections on Pound.

*These are the sounds of science (whoosh, blat, flipahineyhoo), brought to you by DuPont, a broadly diversified company dedicated to exploitation through science and industry (24).*

One could imagine this message to be broadcast before a TV show, however instead of "exploitation" it would probably say "innovation" or another more positively connotated word. In the place of the name of the TV show we read the expression "the sounds of science." As if for demonstration, it is actually followed by a number of sounds: "whoosh, blat, flipahineyhoo" which might have been taken from a cartoon, for example the Loony Tunes. However, the combination of the phrase "the sounds of science" with the onomatopoeic expressions "whoosh, blat, flipahineyhoo" does not fit and seems to be out of place. Rather than talking about "the sounds of science," it would make more sense to refer to those sounds as the sounds of, say; "science fiction." Furthermore, the expression the sounds of science evokes the song line "the sounds of silence" by Simon and Garfunkel.

The overall tone of the message is sarcastic as it speaks of "dedication to exploitation." This tone differs strongly from the tone of the preceding paragraph which appears to transport an attitude of pathos:

There is no plain sense of the word,  
 nothing is straightforward,  
 description a lie behind a lie:  
 but truths can still be told. (24)

The "truths [that] can still be told" might be tantamount to "the sounds of silence," in this way standing for a tradition of poetry that is groping for ways of expressing the ineffable, "slurring / the unslurrable." (10) Such efforts of finding one's language and in this way extending the possibilities of meaning also implies a constant switching between styles, tones and modes, for instance between sarcasm and pathos as it has just been demonstrated. Here we come upon a textual dynamics which is reminiscent of Bernstein's description of Pound's poetry and which turns out to be an apt characterization of the textual dynamics of "The Lives of the Toll Takers.":

His fast moving contrasts of attitude and atmosphere collapse the theater of Ideational Representation into a textually historicist, unfinishable process of composition by field--a field of many voices without the fulcrum point of any final arbitration, listening not judging: a disintegration into the incommensurability of parts that marks its entrance into the space of contemporary composition (*My Way* 161).

The next "swatch" inserted into this collage without unifying or reducing tendencies is a transformation of Bob Dylan's "Knocking on Heaven's Door":

Take this harrow off  
 my chest, I don't feel it anymore  
 it's getting stark, too stark  
 to see, feel I'm barking at Hell's spores (24).

The question which immediately poses itself is: What new meanings do those changes provoke? ("stark" instead of "dark," "barking" instead of "knocking," and "Hell's spores"

instead of "Heaven's Door.") I just want to focus on the substitution of "dark" by "stark" which constitutes a link to the next poem of *Dark City*, "Sunsickness."

The issue of light and shade is a recurring theme in Bernstein's poetics: "Blinded by avenues," "it's getting stark, too stark / to see," etc. It can be related to Bernstein's discussion of a "poetics of sight" versus a "poetics of vision," to his remarks on opacity and misalignment as well as to the need of acknowledging what is repressed. What makes reception impossible is not darkness but too much light. It is exactly the bright light of pure logic that makes all other kinds of seeing that is knowledge impossible. Bernstein wants to do justice to the latter, the neglected ways of knowledge, including the opaque layers of the mystic writing-pad. He himself describes his recurring interests as follows: "my themes, to call them that, have pretty consistently been awkwardness, loss, and misrecognition" (*My Way* 14). In his essay on Howe "Passed by Examination," he suggests that writing

can engender a hyperactive awareness of the page's opacity and impenetrability: stopped up short by an isolated syllable or by the space between syllables, then jolted by a line that becomes a crack into long-sealed chambers deep below the surface.

Writing, therefore, acknowledges what has been lost or sealed over: "the new / lights & new gaiety masking the utterly out-of-mind / presence of the ancient city's darker history."

(*Controlling Interests* 7) This line from "Matters of Policy" is the germ out of which *Dark City* grows. A continued attempt to do justice to that which has been denied:

We disappear--benight, blacken--what appears to us unknown, unmarked, unclaimed; that is unpossessed by us: calling it savage, inarticulate, mad, eccentric, odd, ineffable, dark, empty. So that our own history is one more concretely of evasions than charting. (*My Way* 102)

*Dark City* keeps a chart of American history, it is an acknowledgment of the obscure and opaque, an insistence that the illegible can be read, that the "unslurrable" must be "slurred." In this it imagines a way out "of the long, dark night of our captivity in history," (102) a

"road out of the dark ages" through an unconcealment of loss, which is constantly sealed over by the fixed structures of habitual patterns of perception:

& our grammar repeats just these erasures & concealments, wiping out the wildness of language in the name of law, rationality, homogeneity, territory, (102).

The light of rationalized knowledge, in its unifying and generalizing brightness is a "blinding / light" (*Dark City* 108): "It's getting stark too stark to see". This light is not capable of receiving "the shadow world" even though it exists and will, as "How I Painted Certain of My Pictures" insists, "intervene before the last lost moment" (*Dark City* 61). In particular the poem "Sunsickness" reflects on the blinding force of the light of ratio-nality: (--Michael writes of sun, but all I can think of is sunsickness, too much in the sun never a daughter" (*Dark City* 33).

The pun on "sun" and "son" and the quest for the "daughter," expresses the need for the so-called "feminine side of human character" (Mulhall 240) which is analogical, ambiguous, non-violent, that is, receptive. The call for the daughter also establishes a connection to what Cavell refers to as the "Unknown Woman." The "social function of the unknown woman is to deliver an impersonal rebuke about the present state of the self in the name of an unknown but not unknowable future state of the self" (258). For Cavell the political function of the "unknown woman" consists in her being "emblematic of a crucially important dimension of moral evaluation in a modern liberal democratic society, as a defender of idiosyncrasy against the fixation of conformity" (259). Accordingly, Bernstein is "inclined to dwell on (in) forms of damage, maladjustment, dislocation" (*My Way* 31). For as the truth of skepticism teaches: it is our idiosyncrasy our separateness that connects us: "that we have our misalignments more in common than our adjustment to the socially correct norm." The opaque texture of Bernstein's poetry in this way acknowledges the "stigma that is our common ground, our point of adjacency with one another, our "us"ness" (31). "There are

only / plain words, panes of our separation / and sameness in saying" (*The Sophist* 167). Hence, "whatever communication we can manage must be in terms of our opacities and particularities, our resistances and impermeabilities--call it our mutual translucency to each other" (*My Way* 32). If those darkness and opacities are not being acknowledged the world is "getting stark too stark to see" and we feel we are "barking at Hell's spores" (*Dark City* 24).

Bernstein's theme of darkness has many facets. In addition to darkness as opacity: "mutual translucency", there are other meanings of darkness. For instance the image of "darkness" is used in a number of contexts to draw one's attention to a state of "spiritual darkness," a darkness which also contains the possibility for change: "Not till we are lost [or turned around], in other words not till we have lost the world, do we begin to find ourselves, and realize where we are and the infinite extent of our relations" (*This New Yet Unapproachable America* 36). In this respect Bernstein's poetry has an affinity to Reznikoff's poetics. In "Reznikoff's Nearness" he writes: "Darkness and light; or dusk, when dark and light can no longer be separated--Suddenly we noticed that we were in darkness; so we went into the house and lit the lamp." The realization of loss in this way generates the need to overcome one's state of darkness, a darkness that is related to numbness.

To speak out against the Dark is to make Light: this is the Poetic alchemy, call it economy, that Reznikoff enacts over and again: to recover the lost, make sound in the presence of silence, behold the Light-- (*My Way* 225)

The experience of loss and darkness is also expressed in "Sunsickness:" "As if God's light still shone on we who have shaded our eyes" (*Dark City* 34). However in spite of despair, poetry tries to recover the loss, a loss which is concealed in the history of America. To acknowledge a history of violence means to articulate "the sounds of s[ilence]," (*Dark City* 24) to write a poetry of testimony:

*Testimony*: to found America means to find it--which means to acknowledge its roots in violence, to tell the lost stories because unless you find what is lost you can found nothing.

Against the indifference of the juridical gaze (paradigm of detachment), founding means giving witness to what is denied at the expense of the possibility of America. [...]

*Testimony* as memorial: an act of grief/grieving, of mourning. The cost of life, the cost of lives lost, is poetic/psychic economy, of which this is an account/accounting. "No one to witness and adjust"--'cept *here* (*My Way* 225).

Examples for the lost stories<sup>21</sup> and the concealed violence of American history that need to be mourned are, for instance, the genocide of the Native Americans, slavery, the execution of the Rosenbergs and other supposed communists during the McCarthy era, the Iran-Contra scandal as well as other related crimes or injustices committed in the name of "freedom" in particular during the Reagan-Bush era: "In Reagan's / vocabulary, freedom's / just another word for 'watch out!'" (*Dark City* 14). On a more general level, however, Bernstein's poetry acknowledges the lost or forgotten stories of humanity as such. Writing as "*testimony*" in this way overcomes the detachment from our words and deeds, "gives witness to what is denied." It makes one aware of the fact that one's membership to a society implies an agreement with the actions of this society. Taking responsibility for the lost stories of one's society and in this way finding them initiates the possibility for grief and the eventual founding of "this new yet unapproachable America."

The need for grief and mourning that turns out to be at the center of a poetry of testimony introduces a new dimension to the idea of economy: "poetic/psychic economy." "*The Lives of the Toll Takers*" is full of words alluding to "psychic economy:" "toll," "comeuppance," "compensation," "release" (9), "unaccounted desires," "expenses" (22), "price" (15), "depository" (18), "exploitation" (24), "nothing gratis"(25), "reward" (26), etc. To become receptive to psychic economy can put into operation an act of mourning:

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<sup>21</sup> In *Testimony* Reznikoff bases his account on law reports of several states. He recounts the forgotten and found stories of victims of crimes within the United States.

mourning/grief as part of the celebration of the New Year (Yom Kippur), as prerequisite for new world/new word. "America" not so much a "place" but an attitude toward language (*My Way* 225).

Like Reznikoff and Thoreau in *Walden*, Bernstein is aware of the transitory quality of mourning, "mourning" as psychic economy which enables a new beginning, a "new world/word" and new morning. Words are the "means of our mourning and of our morning but also of our mooring" (17) (a people rooted in the land they sow). Like Reznikoff's poetry, Bernstein's poetry "is a poetry of the found, a disposition apparent in the found details of the everyday that people his poems" (220-221). *Dark City* also gives testimony, telling the history and present of America through found pieces including overheard conversations, fragments from the radio<sup>22</sup> or TV, advertising clips, scraps from the newspaper, songs, jingles, nursery rhymes, idioms etc. In this it can be compared to "Reznikoff's testament to the foundering of America and to the possibility of its founding in fondling, call it care in, the everyday (221)." "& who / can say / whether dejection or elation / will ensure the care for, care / in / the world that may lead us / weightless, into a new world or / sink us, like lead / baboons, / deeper into this o / ne?" (*Dark City* 20). What saves us from the blinding brightness of rationalized thought and at the same time leads us out of spiritual darkness and numbness is the care in the particular. This care for and in the particular could be called the composition principle of *Dark City*, imagining the "New America as an attitude towards language." "Witness as care / in-volved / as care-taken, caretaker, care in the language, for the world. Language is caretaker of the world (*My Way* 217)" The emblem for such caretaking is the loving relationship between two human beings, not Othello's death-dealing passion for knowledge, but a kind of love that acknowledges. "Nearness as attitude of address: not isolated, deanimated "images" of distantiated ocular evidence. The *intimacy* of address, the fondling/comment/intrusion into the "material" is a nearing toward a dwelling, making an habitation (215).

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<sup>22</sup> For instance, a quote from Jack Benny's radio show in "Dark City:" "JELLO AGAIN THIS IS JACK BENNY FOR / JELLO PUDDING AND PIE FILLING" (141).

Reflections on the possibility of a "loving relationship between fellow human beings" of a "language of care," of an "intimacy of address" are recurring themes in Bernstein's poetry and poetics. In "Three or Four Things I Know About Him" (*Content's Dream*) this reflection is triggered by the Dylan song: "Shelter from the Storm." The meditation is situated in a discussion of the use and abuse of the concept of "love" for the social dynamics of power. Phrases referring to "love" are tainted by the controlling interest of power or worn out through repetition: "there is no depth here, no unique sensibility: everyone says them" (24). The text displays a tension, a dialectic between a despairing voice, rejecting the possibility for a resurgence of "love," and the cheering voice that holds against it, turning the argument by throwing in phrases like: "And yet?", "But still" (24). This voice is reminiscent of the singing voice of the woman in "The Only Utopia Is in a Now," perhaps Cavell's "Unknown Woman:" "Love is so simple, to quote a phrase, you've known it all the time I'm learning it these days" (24). But the voice of desperation is still doubtful: "So simple and yet so seeming sentimental to say, as if sentimentality were the curse that prevented us from knowing how simple love is in our repulsion to its being demanded by our families/country/society at the price of self-abnegation."

One kind of discourse that is in particular liable to the controlling interests of power is the discourse of politics. Most obviously in political speeches, the words serve the purpose of manipulation and control. I want to demonstrate this on the basis of Reagan's speech in July 1980 in which he accepts his party's nomination for president at the Republican National Convention in Detroit. In this speech Reagan refers to the Mayflower Compact of 1620 "the voluntary binding of free people to live under the law" and calls upon a renewal of this compact. After mentioning Lincoln's renewal of the compact he poses the question: "Isn't it once again time to renew our compact of freedom, to pledge to each other all that is best in our lives, all that gives meaning to them - for the sake of this, our beloved and

blessed land?" Here we come upon the annexation of a society's language and its most valuable virtues and concepts for the sake of obtaining and securing power. Such abuse is an instance of corrupting language. The ethical dimension of Cavell's question "must we mean what we say?" at this point becomes most evident. In order to overcome this distortion the words have to be "taken out of the service of the [ideological] system" in which "Sentiment cements the well-settled arrangement" (*Dark City* 42). "The Lives of the Toll Takers" reflects on this corruption of language: "In Reagan's vocabulary freedom's just another word for 'watch out.'" The line warns us not to take his words at face value, or to use Emerson's phrasing, they are "not quite true;" as a consequence his vocabulary is "not false in a few particulars [...] but false in all particulars." Although Reagan refers to the social contract and the possibility of taking responsibility for one's society, of having a say in it, he does not mean it. For the public does not take part in political decisions. It is not even informed but systematically deceived, thereby corrupting Rousseau's idea of the social contract and the possibility of autonomy. Keeping this in mind the use of the word "freedom" is totally out of place. It shows the extent of perversion of a language that is in service of an ideological system. People conforming to this system are not able any more to speak truthfully: "Their two is not the real two, their four not the real four; so that every word they say chagrins us and we know not where to begin to set them right" ("Self-Reliance" 144).

Poetry is a form of resistance to this invasion of language. In order to wake up from conformity and sentimentality, a state of mind in which words like "freedom," "love," and "caring" are used in an automatized and worn-out fashion, being nothing more than stale formula used to maintain the status-quo, one has bethink oneself, to recover the commitment to one's words. Again our words have to be returned, we have to recall our criteria for using them, recover our "true need." "Three or Four Things I Know About Him" suggests that our criteria for the use of the word "love" can be recovered by a "native sense"

that "was lost that love is so simple, to quote a phrase, that we are each for each other shelter from the storm, if we are not afraid to come in, or take another into where we are" (*Content's Dream* 24). I want to suggest that the process of reading *Dark City* can be looked at as an instance of "com[ing] in[to]," entering that city of words "or taking another into where we are" an instance of caring for and paying attention to the uses of our words that manifests itself as an attitude towards language. In this way each reader of *Dark City* has the chance to enter a utopian space, namely the new America. The textuality of *Dark City* encourages reading in its "handsome condition" a kind of reading that does not grasp already constituted meanings but allows oneself to be attracted by the complex and multi-level dynamics of the text. This attraction towards words can also be described as a falling in love with the world.

I now want to proceed to the last poem of *Dark City*, the title poem of the volume in which a similar appeal to love and care is expressed. The third of six numbered sections is titled "Endless Destination," referring to the movement of Emersonian perfectionism and on the level of composition to seriality. It is written in an elegiac tone and in this respect sticks out from the rest of the poem:

If I should die  
 cut out my throat  
 and burn it on the pyre  
 of their indifference.  
 It means no more to me  
 than that, to take  
 your hand in my  
 hand and turn our backs  
 from the wreck  
 not of our lives  
 but where we have been given  
 to live them. I would not  
 walk alone here, where the  
 dark surrounds, where your face  
 radiates beyond my swollen  
 misgivings and clarifies the mist  
 of my belonging. Stay near  
 that I may hold you lightly

else the fear inside tear  
 away what measures I have  
 held against the night.

Love's no more than that  
 a straw against the wind  
 that blows us to the ground  
 without submission. Come  
 love, come, take this  
 shadow I call me: cast  
 it against stone, lest the gloom  
 become us. Come cast me  
 down 'gainst shore, where  
 sand enfolds us.

The first sentence: "If I should die<sup>23</sup> / cut out my throat / and burn it on the pyre / of their indifference" imagines the death of the speaking subject. It recalls McKay's "If We Must Die" and the claim that the Black people's death will not be for nothing but that "even the monsters we defy / shall be constrained to honor us through dead!" In a similar way the death of the lyrical I in "Endless Destination" is meant to have an effect. The speaker asks for his throat, that is, the place of the production of sounds, not just articulated meanings, to be burned on the "pyre of their indifference" enabling a kind of communion. In this way it can be regarded as a testament/testimony against "their indifference:" "Against the indifference of the juridical gaze (paradigm of detachment), founding means giving witness to what is denied" (*My Way* 225). The idea of communion and exchange is picked up again in the next sentence: "It means no more to me / than that, to take / your hand in my / hand and turn our backs / from the wreck / not of our lives / but where we have been given / to live them." Following the logical construction of the sentence, one can conclude that the burning of the lyrical I's throat on the "pyre of their indifference, means just as much as "to take / your hand in my / hand," another worn out expression, perhaps from the lyrics of a popular song. But yet, it reminds one of the handshake Celan compares the poem to, and of the handsome condition of receiving instead of clasping hands. It could also be understood as a referral back to the first paragraph of the first poem "The Lives of the Toll

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<sup>23</sup> Cf. Rupert Brooke: "The Soldier:" "If I should die think only this of me ..."

Takers" where we hear about a "pinky ring for which no finger was ever found." As so often in Bernstein's poems, a "you" is spoken to: "Speak to me so I may hear, speak that I may hear" (*The Sophist* 167). In a handshake, the "I" and the "you" join, they fold into each other. This might allude to a relationship between lovers or to the relation between the subject and the world. In any case a relation of nextness is brought about reminding us of the truth of skepticism that the relation to the world is not one of knowing but one of being next to. The intimacy of holding hands now seems to enable the "great pair" to turn their "backs from the wreck / not of our lives but where we have been given to live them." The formulation is ambiguous, it seems to mean that they turn their backs to the wreck, that is, withdraw from it, which is the usual way of putting it, or taken literally "to turn one's back from something" means to "face something" to return to it. The second reading would take the turning as a kind of return to the ordinary with all its imperfections, a return to "where we have been given to live our lives." Thus, in a "community of two" they enter the Dark, the "ancient city's darker history." "I would not / walk alone here, where the / dark surrounds, where your face / radiates beyond my swollen / misgivings and clarifies the mist / of my belonging." The other's "radiating face" builds a counter image to the "surrounding dark" helping the I to find his way and his "belonging". In this respect she can be looked at as his guide which brings to mind the following passage from "The Lives of the Toll Takers": "She can slip and she can slide she is everybody's joy and jibe (guide)." As I have argued in discussing "The Lives of the Toll Takers," "she" could stand for poetry, which is to say that the "you" spoken to in the line at hand could also be poetry. Hence, what guides the speaker is his aesthetic sense, his trust in his judgment or reliance on the next self. The "swollen misgivings" on the other hand evoke Bernstein's idea of sclerosis, a state of the self in which "one is still alive just stiff and swollen" in a state of spiritual numbness, soul-blindness, ambliopia: "a dimming of vision without physical cause". Against this state of darkness poetry promises relief: "To speak out against the Dark is to make Light: this is the Poetic alchemy, call it economy: to recover the lost, make sound in the presence of silence,

behold the Light--" (*My Way* 225) The recovery of the lost cannot be brought about deliberately but must be found through a movement of indirection. Recovery as reception entails nearness and intimacy: "Stay near / that I may hold you lightly / else the fear inside tear / away what measures I have held against the night." For measures here, one can read "means or method" but also "metre." Both meanings, however, are related in Bernstein's poetics. For "metre," or "measure," the "measure of thought," "paradigm," and "method" are connected through family-resemblances. Furthermore, the expression "that I may hold you lightly" recalls Emerson's "handsome condition."

The next stanza of the *Endless Destination* section starts with an even more ambivalent and complex sentence: "Love's no more than that / [echoing 'It means no more to me than that'] a straw against the wind / that blows us to the ground / without submission." The references in this four line sentence are not clear. From a grammatical point of view the statement "love is no more than a straw against the wind that blows us to the ground" can either mean that love blows us to the ground or that the wind blows us to the ground. Furthermore it is not clear whether the blowing agent blows without submission or if the straw blown is without submission. The next line however suggests that love is the force that blows us to the ground, for the lyrical I calls for love and begs it to be "cast against stone." In the context of the second sentence, the first sentence could be provisionally paraphrased as follows: Love is like a strong force that blows the human being in its weakness to the ground. The image also evokes the difference between "humble and humility" which stresses the grandeur of being humble of "leaving everything as it is" and not forcing an external order onto it. It is a welcoming of chaos and in this way could be related to the fifth section: *The Plight of the Bumblebee*, which also stresses, loss ("she was a rudder / without anchor"), disorientation ("in a chaos of expectation") and negative capability (a comb without teeth, a / brush without / bristles"). The term "shadow" in "take this / shadow I call me" evokes a number of associations: the weakness and mortality

of the human being, his or her life in the Platonic cave, and Bernstein's use of the concept of "shadow" in his poetics:

Shadows--an underworld of imagination in which the muted differentiation of figure and ground is source (stuff)--beyond uncertainty and its attendant fear--["beyond my swollen misgivings"] for freedom from the contortion of language to conjure discrete objects (*Content's Dream* 159).

Furthermore, the "casting of the shadow against stone" as well as the image of the "straw blown against the ground" suggests scripture or writing. Commenting on Apollinaire's poem "Shadow", Bernstein remarks: "the inscription of language is the negation of light: the world of objects is mediated by our inscriptions, that by means of shade differentiation rescues that world from the blinding whiteness--the memorylessness--of light" (159).

Without the possibility of shade through writing, the world would get "stark too stark to see."

Another theme of the second stanza is the quality of love in the sense of "care taking and involvement." The care *in* the world contains a "sinking deeper into this world," a descent.

"Entering into the world as a descent, not (Idealized) ascent, to borrow Simone Weil's terms" (*My Way* 214). To sink deeper into this world means to let oneself be attracted by the world, to fall in love with the world in a sane way, not in order to grasp it, but to receive it, "to hold it lightly": Nearness as attitude of address: not isolated, deanimated "images" of distantiated ocular evidence. The intimacy of address, the fondling/comment/intrusion into the "material" is a nearing toward a dwelling, making an habitation" (215). "Come cast me / down 'gainst shore, where / sand enfolds us." The utopia of making a landfall of founding a nation and entering "this new yet unapproachable America" is contained in this image, but also death and rebirth seem to be at stake. The enfolding sand reminds one of a grave and in this way refers back to the first line of the poem "If I should die." "[F]inding as founding means finding as foundering (to fall to the ground, to come to grief)" (214).

Mo(u)rning in this way can be described as "the path (back) to the world, a reinvestment of interest in its discovery" (*This New Yet Unapproachable America*) "that turns a waste land into holy ground."

I want to argue that *Dark City* is a text open to transformation, a text that is made up of "waste," a "waste land" of discarded pieces of language that through a reinvestment of interest on part of the reader is turned "into holy ground." As an assembly of reminders *Dark City* draws one's attention to the dark, the opaque and obscure, that which is neglected or repressed, in Freud's terminology to the "dark brown resin slab" which is our collective unconscious and our private past. In its work of recollection, poetry is testament, testimony, mourning and morning. It overcomes self-estrangement by returning us to our city of words, to the commitments we share by being a member of the *polis*.

*Dark City* draws the reader's attention to "'our' participation in the constitution of nature and meaning" to "our account books of language" which are in "plain sight" but due to our "looking by" hidden like numbered accounts. In this, *Dark City* is

a standing gesture toward the reader, or overhearer, to enter into the discussion, to determine his or her position with respect to what is said--assenting, puzzled, bullied, granting for the sake of argument, and so on. Then the city has, in each such case of reading, one more member than the members depicted in a Platonic (or Wittgensteinian, or Emersonian) dialogue (*Conditions Handsome and Unhandsome* 8).

## V Conclusion: Redemptive Reading

It is wonderful how a handwriting which is illegible can be read, oh yes it can.

Gertrude Stein

In every work of genius we recognize our own rejected thoughts; they come back to us with a certain alienated majesty.

Ralph Waldo Emerson

In the chapter on skepticism it has been suggested that poetry is able to heal the skeptic from his spiritual numbness and return him to life. The reading which *Dark City* requires, provokes, and allows for, gives a glimpse of the possibility of such a return or revival of the human being, of his or her language and ultimately of the world. It is a way of reading that is willing to pay respect to each and every word and in this way to become receptive to the environments of words, to the fields of their everyday use, as well as the semantic interconnections between words and on a more complex level the interconnections between themes. It is a reading that acknowledges the three features of language, as they have been developed by Cavell in *The Senses of Walden*:

(1) that every mark of a language means something in the language, one thing rather than another; that a language is totally, systematically meaningful; (2) that words and their orderings are meant by human beings, that they contain (or conceal) their beliefs, express (or deny) their convictions; and (3) that the saying of something when and as it is said is as significant as the meaning and ordering of the words said (34).

Such a reading amounts to a grammatical and epistemological investigation. It "means knowing how the criteria for the relevant word interweave with the criteria for a range of interrelated words" (Mulhall 161). *Dark City* in this way supplies us with reminders: "reminding ourselves of (certain aspects of) our shared criteria" for a particular word and "its distinctive place in our form of live" (Mulhall 161).

It is a reminder of the fact that our agreement in criteria is ultimately a matter of sharing certain routes of feeling, reaction and response--that must be accepted as our form of life (Mulhall 161).

It is a particular strength of poetry to allow our receptive side of character to become active: "in poetry you start with the word and find the world in it." The idea of becoming actively passive needs some further clarification, it is related to what Thoreau calls the spectator, the spectator is our passive or receptive side. A reading of *Dark City* in a receptive way, thus, means "accepting the independence of what attracts [us], not imposing [one's] interests and needs upon it but rather allowing it to elicit the responses it requires and requests from [us] in its own way and according to its own nature" (158). Such a way of reading that is actively passive offers an alternative to the skeptic's attitude of death-dealing passion. It is a new way of "conceptualizing a loving relationship between human beings" (158). The relationship depicted in "Endless Destination," thus, can be looked at as a model for "reading," reading that strives not for knowledge but opens up to acknowledgment. Such "receptive reading" "combines acknowledging the world with acknowledging one's own existence within it" (166) it does "not so much confirm our existence as create it" (168). In the tradition of Descartes, human beings must achieve and maintain their existence in thinking/reading. This achievement of existence, however cannot be taken for granted but must be actively brought about in that the human being takes responsibility for his way of speaking and reading the world. This responsibility is tantamount to a willingness to "say what we say when," a willingness that characterizes the method of ordinary language philosophy and in this way establishes a link between Wittgenstein's, Emerson's, Thoreau's, Cavell's, and Bernstein's way of thinking. Bernstein's conviction in the redemptive power of the ordinary for instance can be found in the following passage from *Dark City*:

As if the  
ordinary  
were just there answering

our call but we  
 won't sound it  
 out, or find the work  
 too demanding (de-  
 meaning), too extra  
 ordinary. There  
 are sleighbells I know but never  
 mine. Yet nothing I've lost nothing  
 yet to  
 find.  
 If that makes you sad  
 then I'm sad too, even though we've  
 never met or meet just now (*Dark City* 62-3).

This passage from "How I Painted Certain of My Pictures" describes a state of existence in which the human being is still leading a ghost like existence, is disowning his or her language not being able to or not willing to "say what we say when." The possibility for awakening however is always around the corner "just a spark in the dark":

In effect, by declaring what we say when we allow the things of the world to attract us once more, and so might succeed in turning away from our fixated lives of boredom and disappointment--lives in which we haunt the world, in which we exist as not fully present to a world that is not fully present to us (Mulhall 171).

The "sleighbells that I know but never mine," are our words our disowned tolls or "ghost phonemes" that the toll takers, that is the poets, return to us. In the following passage, Bernstein comments on this estrangement from our words which poetry has the power to overcome:

What poetry belabors is more important than what poetry says, for "saying is not a game" and the names that we speak are no more our names than the words that enter our ears and flow through our veins, on loan from the past, interest due at the dawn of each day, though not to the Collector who claims to represent us in the court of public discourse but to the Collector we become when we start to collect what belongs to us by right of our care in and for the world (*A Poetics* 8).

The care in and for the word and the world restores our interest in our lives. It turns us into "Toll Takers" of our forgotten and neglected tolls, that is our "dead ideas." It leads us out of a state of indifference out of a state of disowning knowledge in which the words are not

our own. In its quality of returning our attention to our dead ideas, poetry is comparable to "mining:" "sleighbells I know but never mine."

For Bernstein poets are the miners of dead ideas, of ideas which have been reified or forgotten which are deposited in the compost heap of our unconscious.

Imagine consciousness resounding with an inexhaustible repository of ideas, as a cave to be mined. And consider poetry as that mining, so the incorporation of dead ideas (call them prior texts) into a work is not simply collage or a familiar, almost comforting, defamiliarization technique, but the spiritual domain of poetry, its subject (subjectness) percolating through (*Content's Dream* 363).

Poetry, therefore, has the power to speak to the soul: "By allowing words to draw us through their complexities of sense [...], we allow them to make or recover connections and associations of meaning in ourselves--we are brought to recognize our (linguistic) soul" (Mulhall 177).

A precondition for "mining" and for the words becoming "mine" again, however, is the realization that we have lost our connection with our words: "Yet nothing I've lost, nothing yet to find." This also implies the ability to allow for grief in respect to this loss: "If this makes you sad I am sad too, although we never met or meet just now."

Redemption is a recovery from loss which presupposes an awareness of one's state of being lost:

We are orphaned, have lost our parents in the sense of our foundations, our bearing in the world; until, that is, a detail jolts the memory, when we feel, as in the fragments in our pocket, what we have held back out of denial (*A Poetics* 216).

The denial of loss "marks the refusal to mourn: to understand what we have lost and its absolute irreparability" (AP 216). The realization of loss which is caused by a detail is the

psychological or spiritual precondition for turning. He we come across the redemptive power of the detail in the process of composition. Only through an awareness of loss do we recognize our need to retrace our steps to return to the world, our human form of life. This can be accomplished by recalling the criteria which constitute our form of life:

The practice of recovery or reanimation that Wittgenstein offers [and Bernstein puts into action] is that of reminding us of the criteria which govern our words, the means by which and the terms in which that things of the world count for us, matter to us; and in reminding us of this, in getting us to acknowledge this, he gives us the opportunity of reviving our interest in the world, of reinvesting it with our care and concern and so reviving our interest in our lives.

Cavell refers to this reminding as "recounting criteria;" recounting in the sense of recalling our mutual ways of using language as well as becoming aware of the ways in which the world matters to us and counts for us. Recounting criteria, therefore brings to awareness our attitude toward the world: "It means recalling what counts, reminding ourselves that the world attracts us and how it does so in each particular case" (Mulhall 163).

The poetic practice of recounting criteria accepts the limits of the human life form, it accepts our metaphysical finitude, but it does not have to accept the "present form of life, that particular inflection of our capacities, reactions, interests and needs" (165). For Bernstein, therefore "recounting criteria" can be a form of "transfiguration" or "reconfiguration." Like Cavell, he looks at "humanity as a form of life, or a level of life, standing in need of transfiguration--some radical change, but as it were from inside" (*This New Yet Unapproachable America* 44). Such an attempt at transfiguration can appear at the same time "as radically innovative (in action or in feeling) or radically conservative." Bernstein describes the poetic task of reconfiguration as follows:

Poetry can bring to awareness questions of authority and conventionality, not to overthrow them, as in a certain reading of destructive intent, but to reconfigure: a necessary defiguration as prerequisite for refiguration, for the regeneration of the ability to figure--count--think figuratively, tropically. (*A Poetics* 228)

Accordingly, Bernstein writes in the opening poem of *Rough Trades*, "The Kiwi Bird in the Kiwi Tree:" "I want no paradise only to be / drenched in the downpour of words, fecund / with tropicality" (11). A "grammatical investigation of the [terms of our present life] can accordingly have a revolutionary, life-restoring and/or life-enhancing potential" (Mulhall 165). Recounting can also be looked at as a way of repeating or reiterating because it recalls that which we already know, furthermore it is a "mode of repetition which [...] competes with or contests the mode of repetition" (166) that amounts to "frozenness" and "fixation". This is exactly what Bernstein manages with his collage technique, overcoming the repetition of quoting by quoting. Examples for quoted quotes are nursery rhymes ("There was an old lady who lived in a / zoo" 11), (altered) lines from songs ("freedom's just another word," 14 "She wore blue velvet," 17 "[t]ake a [chisel] to write," 20 "the sounds of s[i][l]ence," 24 "Take this harrow off / my chest, I don't feel it anymore [...]" 24), advertisements ("*brought to / you by DuPont, a broadly diversified company [...]*" 24), business talk, quotes from the work of Sander Gilman (23), Ron Silliman (24), Gertrude Stein (26) and Ezra Pound (23-24), expressions that just sound like quotes and fixed idioms such as "making a killing" or "a picture is worth more than thousands words." The repetitive mode is enhanced in that those fixed idioms also have fixation as their subject matter. In his method of quoting or requoting Bernstein investigates mythological structures within our language, structures that hold us captive. Or as Wittgenstein has it: "A picture [a fixture] held us captive. And we could not get outside it, for it lay in our language and language seemed to repeat it to us inexorably" (*Philosophical Investigations* 115). This way of mythological investigation is comparable to Cavell's method of allowing myths "to teach him by allowing the precise weight of its words to unfold their significance and thereby reveal possible paths of illumination and distortion which criss-cross the grammatical area with which he is concerned" (Mulhall 174-5). We need "new mysteries because we have already mystified ourselves; it requires theology because we are theologized" (*The Senses of Walden* 93).

In "The Lives of the Toll Takers" Bernstein unfolds the significance of idioms by writing extensions and transformations of them, creating contexts, and listing consequences of them, thus revealing grammatical relations between various semantic fields that often go unnoticed but nevertheless influence our way of looking at the word. Poetry in this way triggers a reading of the myths of our language. The insight that repetition can only be healed by repetition is related to Wittgenstein's "insight that the ordinary has, and alone has, the power to move the ordinary, to leave the human habit habitable, the same transfigured. The practice of the ordinary may be thought of as the overcoming of iteration or replication or imitation by repetition, of counting by recounting, of calling by recalling. It is the familiar invaded by another familiar" (*The New Yet Unapproachable America* 46-7). The following passage from *Dark City* exemplifies one kind of overcoming repetition by repetition:

Love is like love, a baby  
 like a baby, meaning like  
 memory, light like light.  
 A journey's a detour  
 and a pocket a charm  
 in which deceits are borne.  
 A cloud is a cloud and  
 a story like a story,  
 song is a song, fury  
 like fury (145).

This mode of recounting, however, which is written in a solemn mood almost resembling a prayer, only stands for one among the many different ways that Bernstein pursues in his attempt of healing repetition by repetition, counting by recounting. The next passage, for instance, reflects on recounting and "healing" repetition in a way that displays a totally different attitude or different mood in comparison to the passage above. The solemnity is substituted by some kind of coarse humor:

A depository of suppositories  
 (give it me where it counts:  
     one and  
     two and

one  
two  
thr

eee)

I had  
it but  
I misp  
laced  
it somewhere  
in the  
back burner  
of what  
is laug  
hingly  
called m  
y  
mind  
crim  
(my  
e).

A suppository is a kind of medication, a means for healing, that releases its medication over a longer span of time, furthermore, due to its way of administering, it is immediately placed in an environment where it can unfold its power of healing. It finds its target without delay. This recalls Bernstein's comparison of a poem with a "heat seeking missile," that blindly finds its target. In the passage at hand the suppository's finding of the target is also demonstrated typographically, that is, the movement of administering is displayed in the arrow-like formation of the letters "e" in combination with the bracket that produces the typographical structure: eee) Its position in relation to the rest of the lines gives the impression of having crossed a border and having entered another realm. The sound "eee" alludes to a possible response of the person receiving the suppository. The poem in this way opens up a kind of double-talk, constantly switching between high ideas of the power of poetry and the kind of low humor that pokes fun at and draws one's attention to those aspects of being human which are usually ignored in talking about high human ideas. While allowing for both ways of reading "suppository" (in its literal as well as metaphorical sense) the poem also stresses the bodily rootedness of language, hinting at the materiality of language and the need to receive this materiality if one is willing to recount one's criteria. "I

had it but I misplaced it" also refers to the loss of connection with the criteria that govern one's thoughts and feelings while "depository" and "suppository" recall the image of the "compost heap" which has to be mined. The switching between high poetic ideas and down to earth bodily functions has a comic effect. The web of association triggered by this passage brings together the themes of "mining consciousness" "recounting criteria" "the body and its bodily functions" "digestion" "a remedy and its administering" etc. In this way it activates our ability to receive the semantic interrelations and effects of our words and allows the poem, as Wittgenstein has it, to pierce us (pun intended): "A poem should not mean but impale / not be but bemoan, / boomerang /buck(le) / bubble" (*Dark City* 141).

Throughout his work, Bernstein reflects and writes about reading. He claims to be "teaching reading workshops" and suggests "new reading values." A recurring theme in respect to reading is the relation between reader and writer which has been reflected on at the beginning of my reading of *Dark City*. The initial focus was on the opening line of "The Lives of the Toll Takers:" "There seems to be a receiver off the hook. Not that you care." As I have argued, the city or new polis which is to be established in the place of the old, the "republic of reality" the poem imagines, is in need of a community of at least two: the writer "writing" and the reader receiving the "work," which on another level is interchangeable. For Bernstein, the reception of a text turns "writing" into "work." He describes this becoming of the "work" as follows:

I am alone on the beach & the tide is racing toward me until the spot I had picked out for its distance from the shoreline has become completely submerged. My pad, pencil, & book float helplessly on the water's surface before being pulled, precipitously, toward the horizon, having met their destination (*A Poetics* 186).

The completion of a work, depicted in this way, thus, coincides with the reading of the work by an other human being. Reading in this way means to "enter into it, trace its figures, ride its trails along tracks that are called lines" (*A Poetics* 186). For Bernstein, "the other defines

the work, completes the process and makes it definite." In this way he stresses the role of the reader in a similar way as it is stressed by Cavell for whom "[r]eading is a variation of writing," (*In Quest of the Ordinary* 18) recalling the following line from "The Lives of the Toll Takers:" "No 'mere' readers only / writers who read, actors who inter- / act" (20). Writing, therefore, is "something which finds its fulfillment in being read, when it attracts or discovers a reader who can acknowledge (and thereby preserve and re-create) the animation of words which the writing enacts" (Mulhall 178). Writer and reader enter into a conversation. For the writer the response of the reader is indispensable. "[I]t is precisely," Bernstein goes on explaining,

what I have contained but cannot identify that the other, being other, makes palpable, lets figure, & (hopefully) flower. It is only an other that, in the final instance, constitutes the work, makes it more than a text (test), resurrects it from the purgatory of its production, which is to say its production of self-sameness (*A Poetics* 186).

The reader's and the writer's mutual dependence on each other is also reflected on in Cavell's remarks on "redemptive reading:"

if the life of language is relatively independent of the life of any one of its users, then the writer's reader will be able to recover from the text reaches of meaning of which the text's author was unconscious, and the reader's writer will draw out reaches from her reader's consciousness of which the latter was initially unaware or in which she was uninterested (Mulhall 180-81).

Thus, in entering into a kind of exchange, reader and writer get the chance of overcoming their self-sameness, of getting into contact with the unknown. "A meaning only reveals its depth once it has encountered and come into contact with another, foreign meaning" (*A Poetics* 187). For Bernstein, therefore, reader and writer "engage in a kind of dialogue, which surmounts the closedness and one-sidedness of the particular meanings, these cultures" (187). Rather than speaking of "the reader (or writer) as originator of the meaning of the text", he suggests to "conceive of the relation of the writer and reader (which gives birth to the poem) as dialogue" (187). Poetry in this way allows for conversation and "[t]o have a

conversation is not to stare mutely, or to utter minimally directive words & be consumed by the other--but to allow room for response while responding in turn" (*A Poetics* 187). The resurgence of the capability of response and acknowledgment is an important potential of poetry, it also plays a crucial role in Bernstein's poetics. Talking about the motives of his grammatical investigations in poetry he suggests "a syntax of motives [t]he motive being to provoke response and evoke company. To acknowledge. To recognize. Though surely to recognize is also to misrecognize" (164), to understand and to misunderstand. Bernstein elaborates on the idea of recognition:

You see someone's face coming out of the fog and you are propelled to make out who it is--maybe they're looking for you--and you shout out some words of recognition. Recognition and acknowledgment are much more important motivations for me than any sort of theoretical or explanatory paradigms (165).

This explanation of recognition recalls the following passage of "Endless Destination" a passage which, as I want to suggest, can be read as a conceptualization of the relation between reader and writer:

I would not  
walk alone here, where the  
dark surrounds, where your face  
radiates beyond my swollen  
misgivings and clarifies the mist  
of my belonging (*Dark City* 144).

The "radiating face" and the "face coming out of the fog" seem to be related. The recognition and acknowledgment of the other provides a way out of spiritual numbness. It returns the skeptic to the world. The standing threat of skepticism is also alluded to in the expression "swollen misgivings," it constitutes the flip side of the poet's "critical plowing in the meadows of [his] enthusiasm" (*A Poetics* 158) ("malted meadows and hazelnut innuendoes" *Dark City* 141):

Here's the dark side, the ghost that haunts my optimism and turns it into a pale rider on the plains of compromise and misgivings. What started as playful considerations of possibility becomes, after the fact, and edifice of molten lead; the nimble clay dries into a stone figure removed from the process that gave birth to it (*A Poetics* 162).

The depicted reader-writer-relationship promises redemption from the "swollen misgivings" that turn the world into stone. However, as the above quote, suggests recovery from sclerosis or reification is not guaranteed once and for all but "reading/writing in a high sense" requires a continuous returning of the words to our form of life. Art or poetic thinking, in this way, entails a "perpetually new beginning" it also means that "anything is possible that there is an inexhaustible amount for artists to do" (173). Indeed, in Bernstein's work one can find an inexhaustible amount of "belaboring language." In this respect his writing is indebted to that of Thoreau.

"Our capacities have never been measured," Thoreau writes in *Walden*, "nor are we to judge of what [one] can do by any precedents, so little has been tried ... It matters not what the clock says or the attitudes or labors of men. Morning is when I am awake and there is a dawn in me." *So little has been tried* (173).

The dawning that writing promises, can be compared to Wittgenstein's idea of a change of aspect. Poetry is capable of changing people's ways of looking at the world a change of aspect which is brought about by a change in their attitude towards language. As mentioned before, the new America is an attitude towards language. A way of attending to language that lets "new rhythms dawn." But this change of aspect which Bernstein also describes as "the transgression of the already known in an exchange with the incomprehensible, the marginal, the outside" that which has been shunned onto the disattend track, "requires something like a leap of faith--not arguments--to bridge this particular gap" (AP 183). The poet in this way could be described, as it is done in "How I Painted Certain of My Pictures," as "the man / on the barge selling / you the bridge between this thought / & / this" (*Dark City* 66).

Poetry which consists of "words more salutary than the morning," thus provokes "a *conversion into a conversation*. This is the pleasure that verse promises--and why one reader speaks of hearing cascades from the worlds within this one, while another sees only inert black marks on a blank page" (*A Poetics* 183). The redemptive reading that poetry can bring about is nothing coercive but a community of freely willed membership, a model for democracy. This is also the reason why a Bernstein poem is not absorptive in the sense in which a novel is absorptive. The reader is required to keep up his or her interest in the process of reading, to respond, remain responsive and responsible for the words he or she is reading. Cavell describes this kind of reader as "listening, persisting reader" (*This New Yet Unapproachable America* 101) and relates this way of reading to Emerson's formula "Who has more obedience than I masters me" (153). In this phrase he senses a whole theory of reading, such "mastery as listening [...] would so to speak give birth to, experience" (*This New Yet Unapproachable America* 101). Mastery as listening and obeying can be compared to Bernstein's "theory without authoritativeness." The receptive attitude which it requires, is also illustrated in another passage from Emerson's "Self-Reliance:"

We lie in the lap of immense intelligence, which makes us receivers of its truth and organs of its activity. When we discern justice, when we discern truth, we do nothing of ourselves, but allow a passage to its beams (150).

For Cavell, this "intelligence" is language. Redemptive reading in this way is brought about by "allowing a passage to its beams." "Poetry fakes nothing happen" but receives by way of indirection, just as Columbus found the West by looking for the East, a way of negative capability "never knew what west is / best is" (*Dark City* 52) "I got / no eyes / all ears" (53). Reading would then be a way of hearing that makes us hear the "aurality" of the world/earth as language, in whose lap we lie and to whose reality and materiality we need to be reconnected:

the fate of the earth--

like if the world doesn't care who will?  
 [...]
   
That we have to inhabit the world to know where  
 the earth might be, is. Then where was  
 it (was it?) lost (*Dark City* 64-5).

In order to bring about the New America we have to inhabit it, we have "to people the woods." The finding of the world might also return us to the earth. Bernstein wonders accordingly:

Could it be that language is as much a part of the earth as of the world? And that this is what is censored? That the tools we use to construct our worlds belong to the earth and so continuously (re)inscribe our material and spiritual communion with it?

The earth in this way would refer to the bodily rootedness of language, the organs which are still functioning in the case of "Ambliopia:" "The body-with-only organs may still be intact (there's still some time but the planet and those on it are in danger); then this dimming of vision (what I've called sight) is something like hysterical, imaginary, but there remains the material organic possibility of ambi-opia, multilevel seeing, which is to say, vision repossessed" (*A Poetics* 184). The illness which not only darkens our world but also threatens the earth must be treated as an illness of the soul. Again it is poetry in its power to speak to the soul that promises redemption through attraction and care. It envisions a relation "between a human being and the world--a vision of falling in love with the world" (Mulhall 159). This vision also entails what Cavell refers to as "an appropriateness of my response" (*The Claim of Reason* 441). Poetry's care in and for the particular does justice to each object in the world:

But why shouldn't one say that there is a required appropriateness with respect to each breed of thing (object or being), something appropriate for bread, something else for stones, something for large stones that block one's path and something for small smooth stones that can be slung or shied; something for grass, for flowers, for orchards, for forests, for each fish of the sea and each fowl of the air; something for each human contrivance and for each human condition; and if you like, on up? For each link in the Great Chain of Being there is an appropriate hook of response. I said that one's experience of others puts a seam in experience. Why not consider that

experience is endlessly, continuously seamed? Every thing, and every experience of every thing, is what it is (*The Claim of Reason* 441-42).

The poetic vision of ambi-opia is particularistic, "it leaves everything as it is," and keeps returning us to the rough ground by reminding us of our criteria. Poetry in this way can be looked at as a "communication of feeling" but feeling that "comes *indirectly* as a result of the *selection of objects* and the 'music' that composes the object" (*My Way* 211).

This insistence on listening recalls the persistence which Cavell demands from the true reader. The persistence required for "redemptive reading" may also be compared to the need to stay awake: "We must learn to reawaken and keep ourselves awake, not by mechanical aids, but by an infinite expectation of the dawn" (*Walden* 172), we must constantly be "on the alert" (199). Such an aspired state of wakefulness would turn reading into a kind of revelation, as Thoreau suggests in "Reading:" "There are probably words addressed to our condition exactly, which, if we could really hear and understand, would be more salutary than the morning or the spring to our lives, and possibly put a new aspect on the face of things for us" (185).

Poetry as epistemological investigation, as "addressed to our condition" thus, is able to read the human by allowing oneself to be read by language: "the limits that make up meaning, which is the human; that is the grammar that is shared lived within" (*Content's Dream* 52). It has been one of the truths of skepticism that knowing is a relation of "besideness." "Reading in a high sense" fosters this state of "being beside oneself in a sane sense." As a consequence the "virtually Kantian picture of the studier and the thing studied" breaks down.

Serial composition, one paragraph adjacent to the next, one topic followed by another, one perspective permuted with another, refuses the idea that the studied and the studier are separable. Next to us is not the work that we study, which we love so well to explain, but the work we are. I unclasp myself in addressing the poem, and the

poem returns to show me my bearings, my comportment, and the way to read the next poem or painting, person or situation (*My Way* 99).

Nextness, thus furthers the capacity for self-reflection. The disruption of absorption that Bernstein's poems provoke through a rapid shifting between styles and modes, trains one's ability of interpretation and reflection of interpretation: "For a self-interpreting, proactive literature provides instructions in how to read the ever-present social texts of the culture" (*Content's Dream* 370). In its critical potential literature has a political function, a function which cannot be replaced by anything else: "something like literature is necessary to learn how to read/regard in a literary manner" (374). The critical distance achieved by this kind of self-interpreting literature can be compared to what "Brecht meant by *epic* to break out from the propulsion/projection." The "questioning" and "stopping" which is "built into the structure of the poem," for Bernstein is "crucial to seeing the constituting nature of language, which is the reading value I've been suggesting" (391). Questioning and stopping disrupts our "faithlessness toward language and all our shared commitments." "No stop exists / except what we manufacture / the need for" (*The Sophist* 113). It initiates a reinvestment in our words and our lives that extends the realm of poetry. Ultimately, "it encourages a way of regarding--reading--the world, which can be acted out at every level from personal relationships to conduct at the Job" (*Content's Dream* 386).

This reading/regarding is the non-violent thinking discussed in the first chapter, the thinking that Heidegger is looking for, to which he senses that we have not yet been provoked and which, according to Wittgenstein, is to be reached by turning our investigation around our true need. To be provoked has the same quality as to awake: "Morning is when I am awake and there is a dawn in me. Moral reform is the effort to throw off sleep" (*Walden* 172) to throw off spiritual darkness in a "leap of faith." The failure to believe in the possibility of awakening, by contrast, leaves the human being in his or her state of inertia: "That man who does not believe that each day contains an earlier, more sacred, and auroral hour than he

has yet profaned, has despaired of life, and is pursuing a descending and darkening way" (*Walden* 171). Such desperation is commented throughout *Dark City* by a number of sarcastic comments, such as "Slump not lest slip, slumber, swagger into / indelicacy, delirious indolence" (50), "the brotherhood of sleeping cars" (56), "I guess we all just want to go home to bed" (67), "anything / that can be forgot / will be forgotten" (115), "surely as the morning / falls, whether or not we get up. / Or else--- / wake me for meals" (127). The counterimage to these instances of sleeping, is dreaming (*Content's Dream*) "in dreams begin a lot of bad poetry" as well as the image of "troubled sleep:"

No, I'm not sarcastic, just unsettled, like  
 images of the Indians trouble my sleep, like  
 we settled altogether too much too fast &  
 have to throw out our backs retracing our  
 steps

There is a madness to their method: Take no  
 prisoners, pensioners

For to dissect is to delight in the  
 sentient; all else is so much hocus  
 pocus, ring-a-leveos of repression and  
 triplebind, culpable blindness to what  
 is before our touch. Read to redress,  
 disguise as promise--not to submit (*Dark City* 126).

The reason for the speaker's troubled sleep is the repressed history of "the 'savage' that we have conquered" and that now "breaks through the cracks." As mentioned before, however, the "savage" does not merely allude to the "savage" in the sense of the "conquered Native American" but also to the "savage who is ourselves," the repressed part of our character which I have related to Cavell's concept of the "unknown woman." Again the "unknown" functions as a rebuke to our lives, reminding us of "the unmarked, unclaimed; that [which] is unpossessed by us: calling it savage, inarticulate, mad, eccentric, odd, ineffable, dark, empty." Unlike in the line "Yet nothing I've lost nothing yet to find," in "Reveal Codes" the loss comes to the speaker's consciousness. It provokes him to "retrace his steps" and to look for "a way out of the long, dark night of our captivity in history[.] For the conquerors of

North America, an inhabited wilderness was a desert--an empty space--to be filled." In their ignorance they did not recognize "the ancient city's darker history". For Bernstein, "this is the method of "our" madness: we destroy without acknowledging the actuality of that which we obliterate." Or as he puts it in the poem: "There is a madness to their method: Take no / prisoners, pensioners." This formulation recalls the passage in "The Lives of the Toll Takers" on "fixation" and "the prison house of language." Both poems, "Reveal Codes" and "The Lives of the Toll Takers," thus, tell the "captivity narrative of language." And both poems are dedicated to redemptive reading: "'Complicity battling redemption:' either we own up to--take responsibility for--examine--our grammars as much as our histories--or we remain guilty for them." One of the compositional methods praised for their redemptive power in "Reveal Codes" is "dysrhythmism:" "for to dissect is to delight in the sentient," that is, the poem turns "dead ideas" into "living tissue," "brings us to our senses." This capacity of poetry, for the speaker, is the only true alchemy, "all else is so much hocus pocus, ring-a-levos of repression and triplebind." Only poetry is able to overcome "(aspect-)blindness." Its reading rescues. The recommendation "Read to redress," could thus be read as Bernstein's poetic credo as well as it could serve as a motto for this thesis.

I want to end this thesis by summarizing and refocussing on the relation between redemptive reading and economy. As the examination of *Dark City* has shown the economy Bernstein aspires to and which is connected with his idea of redemptive reading is a spiritual or moral economy, in his discussion of Pound's poetics he also refers to it as nomadic or "general economy." Bataille's idea of "general economy" in contrast to "restricted economy" gives prominence to the sensuality of language. In this way: "Learning to read & write / is not a mechanical operation / but a social, & in Bataille's sense / erotic experience" (*A Poetics* 73).

Another model for the revision of economy is supplied by Thoreau. In *Walden* the "beans" are not grown in order to be eaten but "in order to get their message." This business of "growing beans" which is carefully accounted for is akin to Bernstein's description of poetry whose political value he determines as idling. As in the example of "growing beans," the tilling of the field of language in poetry is not for the sake of an instrumental value but "in effect only off-peak" and still it is the most strenuous kind of work. In both Bernstein and Thoreau, the accounting is the crucial part of the project. Getting the beans' message is a kind of reading and in the same way the reading of a poem requires strenuous work: we must laboriously seek the meaning of every word and line; conjecturing a larger sense" (*The Senses of Walden* 27-28). This holds in particular true for a reading of *Dark City* in which the words seem to be accidental, as if placed without intention. As a consequence the reader is asked to seek the meaning, and thereby to resuscitate the text from its seeming meaninglessness and opaqueness. In this way the reader becomes a writer of the text.

But also the writer has to become a reader. He cannot invent words but has to give an account of the full blown language into which he was born. In order to approach redemption by indirection he has to give accounts of loss. In *Dark City* we find a number of such accounts, one of them is the following picture strangely switching between perdition and redemption: "Balloon slips / from hand and floats into sky, like / the soul of Jesus meeting his father" (45). *Dark City* can be read as an "accounting ... a document, with each word a warning and a teaching" (testimony, testament) In this preoccupation with accounting, counting and recounting, *Dark City* shows an intense affinity with *Walden*. The lists of numbers in *Walden* are parodies of America's method of evaluation.

Acknowledging this kinship between the works of Bernstein and Thoreau, the following passage from Cavell's *The Senses of Walden* can be read as an apt description of the textuality of *Dark City*:

The place you will come to may be black (XVIII, 2), something you would disown; but if you have found yourself there, that is so far home; you will either domesticate that, naturalize yourself there, or you will recover nothing. (54)

The reader's ability or inability to recover the words from the opaqueness of *Dark City's* textuality depends on his or her willingness and capability for a reinvestment in the words of our language: "One earns one's life in spending it; only so does one save it" (45). In this way, both, *Dark City* and *Walden* share the same motive: they "invite us to take an interest in our lives, and teach us how" (67). In their epistemological investigations they "show how we count phenomena, what counts for us" (66). They draw attention to our conditions and try to expose the "seeming fate commonly called necessity" as a product of our own making: "hands, hearts not values made us" (*My Way* 189). The effect that such a writing can have on the reader is

a sense that the mystery is of our own making, that it would require no more expenditure of spirit and body to let ourselves be free than it is costing us to keep ourselves pinioned and imprisoned within "opinion, and prejudice, and tradition, and delusion, and appearance" (*The Senses of Walden* 79).

In this respect *Walden* and *Dark City* can be looked at as "tracts of political education for membership in the polis" (85). The understanding which can come from such tracts is the insight that we are the makers of our own fate. "The state of our society and the state of our minds are stamped upon one another" (89). *Dark City* and *Walden* in their recounting of economic terms, thus serve to "let light into this structure of terms, to show that our facts and ideas are uneconomical, that they do not meet but avoid true need, that they are as unjust and impoverishing within each soul as they are throughout the soul's society" (89-90). But not only in *Dark City*, Bernstein draws our attention to the intertwining of economic and spiritual concepts. In "Ambliopia," a poem from the collection *The Sophist*, one of the pieces of found material that Bernstein seams into his work is a text he "lifted from the back of a credit card bill, and set in lines" (*My Way* 26). In an interview with Manuel Brito he

comments on this swatch of everyday life which gives insight into the mythological structures of contemporary society: "I loved the strains of Puritan sermon that run through this passage [...] One of the many "fine print" language types that are constantly at the periphery of consciousness, but which we rarely focus on" (26). The passage reads like this:

INFORMATION ABOUT THE RATE ON PURCHASE  
AND THE BALANCE  
BY WHICH EACH IS JUDGED. The  
Balance of every Purchase is an average  
Daily Balance. Each daily Purchase  
is added in the Life Cycle for, as  
applicable, Purchase incurred before  
the Conversion Date and Purchase incurred  
on or after the Conversion Date. Each  
day is begun with the opening Balance  
for the Life Cycle for whatever Purchase  
and all new Purchase and other  
debts are added (including any posted  
that day), subtracting all Payment and other  
Credits posted to the Principal since the start  
of the Life Cycle (including any posted  
that day). The Daily Balance for Purchase  
incurred on or after the Conversion Date  
is as follows: each day is  
begun with the opening Balance for the  
Life Cycle for Purchase and all New Purchase  
and other debts posted to the Principal  
since the start of the Life Cycle (including  
any posted that day), subtracting as before  
(including any posted that day). However  
there is no Balance for  
Purchase incurred either before or on  
or after the Conversion Date in any  
Life Cycle in which there is no  
Previous Balance for Purchase, or in which all  
Payments and other Credits applied to Purchase  
for the Life Cycle at least equal the  
Previous Balance for all Purchase for the  
Life Cycle. (*The Sophist* 119-20)

Indeed, it is striking how this text talks about being judged by the balance of one's credit card in a way that brings to mind the meaning of "giving account" in the spiritual sense of the word as in the following passage from Romans 14:10-12 quoted by Cavell in *The Senses of Walden*: "We shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ ... every tongue shall

confess to God. So then, every one shall give account of himself to God" (30). Instead of "confessing to God" we "give account to the Principal." In the Brito interview Bernstein wonders if "things like our credit card contracts provide an allegory for a spiritual or religious contract we've entered into--as if in a consume-on-credit society, we are indeed each judged by the balance of (and on) our purchases, and where our purchase is much more than a dinner or a couch, but a 'purchase' in the figurative sense of that word, a position of advantage in the world, for which we may not be prepared to pay the bill, unaware of the hidden charges" (*My Way* 26). A text such as this credit card contract, shows the extent to which contemporary society is caught up in theology and myth, a captivity in pictures and false necessities which can only be overcome through an invention of alternative myths and a bethinking of our true needs.

As the previous investigation has shown, spiritual economy is the kind of economy which is at stake and which can be brought about in poetry. An economy that is non-restrictive and not impoverishing but gives way to justice, poetic justice. In his pursuit of "poetic justice" an expression which also gives the title to one of his poetry collections, Bernstein keeps reflecting on "balance," recounting its criteria and transforming it: "I've never been much for balance ... I kept my balance in some mighty awkward ways: it may be my aesthetic now, but it was largely given to me by disadvantage. Disadvantage, that is, puts you in mind of your particular vantage and that enables some sort of eco-balance" (27). The balance of poetic economy, thus, puts one in a position of besideneess, makes one aware of one's vantage: "To realize where we are and what we are living for, the conditions of our present, the angle at which we stand to the world" (*The Senses of Walden* 61).

In *Dark City* Bernstein continues the experiment that Thoreau has called the "discovery of the present:" "The Only Utopia Is in a Now." His epistemological inquiry is not that of the skeptic caught up in paranoia for whom meaning is nothing but "shimmering traces of life

insubstantial as elusive" but an inquiry inherited from Wittgenstein and continued in poetry that seeks and finds "meaning, with the full range of intention, responsibility, coherence, and possibility for revolt or madness without" (*Content's Dream* 181). In Bernstein's "accounting, one is not left sealed off from the world with only 'markings' to 'decipher' but rather *located* in a world with meanings to *respond to*" (181). A reader's response to Bernstein's poetry, his or her acknowledgment, might bring about an experience of redemptive reading as it is described in the following passage from *The Senses of Walden*:

Perhaps it will happen by a line of words so matured and experienced that you will see the sun glimmer on both its surfaces, as if it were a scimitar, and feel its sweet edge dividing you through the heart. Christ is to come with a sword, and in Revelation the sword is words (17).

This recalls Wittgenstein's remark that the words of a poem can pierce you, but also Kafka's claim about the relevance of reading showing his awareness of the relation between mourning and morning:

Wir brauchen Bücher, die auf uns wirken wie ein Unglück, das uns sehr schmerzt, wie der Tod eines, den wir lieber hatten als uns, wie wenn wir in die Wälder verstoßen würden, von allen Menschen weg, ein Buch muss die Axt sein für das gefrorene Meer in uns.

Kafka's understanding of the redemptive function of literature displays a closeness to Thoreau's remarks on solitude in the woods and the sweet edge of words, to Wittgenstein's piercing words, to Coleridge's ice sea and to Blake's and Bernstein's critique of a poetics of sight, their attempt of healing sclerosis through the care in and for the world: "No / cordon ever warms the soul, but / a simple costless gesture may. Yet / the act is not made but found, not / yet discovered--nothing hides" (*The Sophist* 115).

"Such affinities between apparently distant thinkers" show "that a moment of what you might have felt as ineffable innerness turns out to be as shareable as bread" (*This New Yet*

*Unapproachable America* 87). It is in this context that Bernstein's poetry has to be read and can be understood in its relevance.

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