Kacper Bartczak

The Poetics of Plenitude in Peter Gizzi's Recent Poetry

Abstract: This article continues my earlier exploration of an aesthetic, poetic, and cognitive phenomenon that I am calling "the poetics of plenitude." Here, I trace this poetics in Peter Gizzi's more recent volumes, with special attention given to his 2015 collection *Archeophonics*. In my discussion, I show how the term "plenitude," which I distinguish against a number of other uses of this concept, evolves in Gizzi's poems toward an emergence of a subjectivity. Such emergence is triggered within the space of a poem working as a device that modulates a specifically understood excess of externality. The externality engaged by Gizzi's poetry is a kind of pragmatist composite that links the sense of the material presence of the world with the larger body of the earlier poetic descriptions of this presence. Since such amalgamation of matter with its existent poetic description entails contact with the poetic predecessors of the newly emerging poet, Gizzi's variety of the poetics of plenitude also shows a new understanding of what Harold Bloom conceptualized when he argued that poetry is a response to the "anxiety of influence."

Keywords: Peter Gizzi, anxiety of influence, pragmatist poetics, poetics of plenitude

The Pragmatist Roots of the Poetics of Plenitude

In her study of the historical and Puritan roots of American pragmatism, Joan Richardson starts her argument by sketching the peculiarity of the cognitive, emotional, linguistic, and aesthetic situation of the New England settlers. The combination of their intense religious training and the equally intense novelty of the American environments—their mixture of illusory familiarity and impinging strangeness—put the newcomers in an interpretational situation that changed the parameters of any former, pre-established formats of subject-object relations. Their devotional habit of looking for, establishing and interpreting networks of signs, when transferred to the material layers of the new continent, causes an acceleration of the interpretive situations which now absorb a newly apprehended totality of the human organism—a totality that presents the need of a wholesale rethinking of the former opposites of mind/body, inside/outside, reason/emotion, rational/aesthetic, worldly/otherworldly. They are "thrown into the paradoxical situation of being both inside and outside their language at once" (3), the language being both an instrument of passionate entry into the life of matter and an objective inquiry of it. "Thinking," argues Richardson, is now realized as "a life form, subject to the same processes of growth and change as all other life forms" (1). Thought lives in language which itself is revealed as a living organism whose mutability makes it congruent with other life forms.

In this new cognitive environment, the organism inquires into its environment but the activity has nothing of the passivities inherent in the Old World binaries. Now the inquiry is emotional, exhilarative, endowed with the qualities of the religious—the ecstasy of an organism that comes to recognize the limits and parameters of its very being—even as it is also rational, cognitive, or scientific. According to Richardson, the new model of inquiry "physically effected the revolution into 'the modern' instanced by the collapse of the subject-object distinction" (9).

On a different level, this means that language, when used in purposive modes vital for the survival of the human organism, is not only a representation of "the structure of nature in so far as it had come to be known at [any given historical] time," but also a "constituent of changing nature" (21), the fact that Richardson further comments on by turning to Stevens's assertion that language be "part of the res itself and not about it" (qtd. in Richardson 21). This modernist Stevensian creed reminds us that a new epistemological situation is also a kind of aesthetics, in the sense that the experience of the active inquiry-as-participation in the world—entailing as it does a merger of the cognitive and the sensory apparatuses—simply cannot fail to be an experience of aesthetic nature. The inquiry modes devised by the early Americans are "solutions that were in the purest sense 'aesthetic,' before the term... had become established as a category of experience" (3).

The above is a certain hypothesis related to the origins of a rather vast intellectual, aesthetic, and cultural formation that came to be known as the American pragmatism. But Richardson's efforts to characterize the backgrounds of this movement may also serve as an introduction to a specific poetics, an off-shoot of the pragmatist aesthetics. At some point of the evolution of this pragmatist formation, it has produced a poem formula that reveals a sort of self-awareness which goes beyond the meta-poetic level of any kind of irony. If we can imagine a poem that is not just a model of but an instance of such active world-making, nature-reconfiguring participation, a merger of a manifold of modes of experience, a materialization in language of the ecstatic emergence of human-organic self-awareness, as it recognizes its contour in the very act of reformulating the world it inhabits—we imagine a poem of the poetics of plenitude. From a historical, scholarly perspective, we begin to sense the transmissions that hold between such moments in Whitman, Dickinson, Stevens, and their contemporary heir—Peter Gizzi.

Varieties of Plenitude

Plenitude is a term plentiful in itself and there are various plenitudes. There is, for instance, the gnostic plenitude in which the term signifies an esoteric space that is a compendium of the emanations and features of the supreme divine being before the scattering of further emanations that would lead to the creation of man, a "fully explicated manifold of divine characteristics… forming a hierarchy, and together constituting the divine realm" (Jonas 181). There is also, on a note that may only

apparently be far removed from the gnostic regions, the Lacanian plenitude that comes variously to be characterized in the nearly esoteric writings of the French thinker as a kind of unity. False and imaginary as it is, expressing a longing for a fusion of subject with object, signifier with signified, the subject of demand/desire with its object, such unity would be an imagined "total incorporation or mastery of the object," and it would be an attempt at reconstituting oneness that is a "a fiction of plenitude" (Rose 18). Terry Eagleton depicts it as "a fullness, a whole and unblemished identity" (166) that the developing ego comes to posit as its idea of a unified bodily self—a sort of a fiction that will limit the false ego-cogito subjectivity rigidly in its sad adult life. The idea of plenitude is also constitutive of another evolving Lacanian term, that of the Real, which can be characterized as "an absolute fullness, a pure plenum devoid of the negativities of absences, antagonisms, gaps, lacks, splits" (Johnston). Importantly, and characteristically for the Lacanian discourse, in it the variously functioning notions of plenitude signify loss, blockage of way or falsity, the term receiving associations with "everything the subject loses through [its] entrance into language (a sense of perfect and ultimate meaning or plenitude, which is, of course, impossible)" (Felluga).

Finally, there is also a modernist plenitude of language brought to its state of independent, emancipated, simmering *poesis*, a fullness of its material presence preceding and underlying the signification processes. This is the kind of linguistic meanings that Charles Bernstein detects in the enhanced material feels of the endless surfaces of Gertrude Stein's text (143).

The Poetics of Plenitude

The poetics of plenitude uses the term in a way that is markedly different from all the meanings and usages of the term described above.[1] Most clearly, it differs from the Lacanian family of meanings, in which plenitude is something either lost or false. In contrast to this, the poems of plenitude are instances of the construction of fictions that become the only available realities of the organism, the only areas in which realities and subjectivities endowed with a degree of authenticity and life are available. In other words, in contrast to the entire Lacanian discourse, the poetics of plenitude links vivid and living authenticity with the process of the poetic participation in the available fictions of the world, its constitutive fictitiousness, in

1 My term "the poetics of plenitude" is part of a larger project that I have been developing in a series of articles. The term stems from a wider variety of sources, which I am unable to point to within the scope of this article. However, the formative idea derives from my studies of the work of metaphor in the poetry of Wallace Stevens ("Wallace Stevens's Pragmatist Poetics of Plenitude"), my comparative discussions of Stevens, Rea Armantrout and Peter Gizzi ("The Poetics of Plenitude and Its Crisis"), my defense of Richard Rorty's concenpt of irony ("Richard Rorty and the Ironic Plenitude of Literature"), and my discussion of the role of the poet's personal biography in the poetry of John Ashbery ("John Ashbery: The Poetics of Plenitude").

which it follows the idea contained in Stevens's rich notion of poetry being a supreme fiction. In contrast to the gnostic storage of meaning, in turn, the poets of plenitude transfer the religious energies onto grounds of active coexistence and participation in the mortal earthly career of the organism. Here, it is the material being of the poem, as it steers and kindles the life of matter, that becomes an instance of belief—a sort of commitment to the world that is the proper evolution of the religious frame of mind, and that the description of which is everything that is at stake in William James's early, proto-pragmatist manifesto "The Will to Believe."

Finally, my use of the term differentiates it also even from Bernstein's meaning (admittedly closest to mine), his late modernist flaunting of the experimental thrust of the poetic text that the contemporary American poets inherit from Stein. In my more pragmatist formulation, the experience of such a text immediately bespeaks presences that are affective, psychological, but also bodily and physiological. In other words, the poetics of plenitude aims to leave behind the dichotomies between the textual realm and the complex realm of transitive subjectivities revealed by the poem to be inherent in the specific concentration of the textual—the concentration we call the poem.

To give an example of a lineage of the American poetics of plenitude, I would point to the continuities that link Whitman, Stevens, and Peter Gizzi. I will focus on Gizzi here, trying to outline his earlier manifestations of the poetics of plenitude, but will also try to illustrate how Gizzi modifies, or perhaps sheds new interpretive light, on the plenitudes arrived at in the poems of his predecessors, notably Whitman and Stevens.

The Whitmanian Plenitude—The Riddle of the Song

Whitman stands as the originator of the poetics of plenitude. The intense mergers and migrations of cognitive, somatic, religious, and political energies that enliven his so called "texts" change the very nature of the text and make it a live element of the material surroundings. The "I" that speaks from such a region is the "I" of the entire poem—the poem as the newly entered plenary presence of Earthly organic consciousness. Importantly for my purpose of speaking of Gizzi's late versions of plenitude, the presence of this newly emergent awareness of the "I" becomes most conspicuous in the moments of reduction, the proto-Stevensian returns to the layers that are purely material in the sense of the scattering and removal of the human forms of life.

The intense poetic adherence to the apparently lifeless debris of life—such as, for instance, those that we see at the end of "As I Ebbed with the Ocean of Life"—causes a repositioning of the figurative and thus cognitive powers, which features as a change in the position of the voice on a different level, so that it acquires a new awareness of its presence in a far vaster sense of the environment. The shift in the awareness signals the emergence of a new self for which the vast environment

becomes an externality that must be engaged.

At first, in the fragment in question, it seems that the emergent self seeks and sees its utter identity with lifeless matter, "loose windrows, little corpses, / Froth, snowy white, and bubbles" (Whitman 396). This discovery is ample enough, already impinging on the normative idea of life/death separateness. Yet the process of emergence does not stop here, and it proceeds to projecting a consciousness of a presence that exceeds the mere commerce of the human "I" with the slime of the Earth, its evolutionary predecessor. In the final lines, this "I" changes into "we," a combination of "me and mine," and the change offers the vision of a vast "you," a mysterious being "up there walking or sitting" whose identity remains undisclosed. According to James Longenbach, this is the moment in which Whitman's *poesis* successfully opens up to the vision of the infinite, understood on Levinasian terms as the withdrawal of the claims of the self in reaction to the enunciation coming from the presence of the other. The opening, according to the critic, has everything to do with an emptying out of the poetic power, the poem consenting to lie low, as if spent, at the level "zero" of material and biological being: "by inhabiting his relation with the things below him so utterly, by refusing to look up, Whitman is gripped by the sense of something above him, something beyond him, something that looks at him as he looks at the images spread before him" (Longenbach 150). I agree with Longenbach when he identifies this as the moment of plenitude: "When this happens, and this happens in the movement of syntax, all the dead things of the world are suddenly alive in their relation to the mysterious other who countenances them" (150). But I want to correct this perspective by reminding that the entire moment is a construction of the poem—a specific positioning of the form of the poem, "the movement of syntax," as Longenbach notes himself.

The poetics of plenitude is a form of consciousness reminding us that the moments of plentiful participation are not to be separated from the body of the poem that arranges the moment; such moments happen in and through the poem and are integral with it as the achieved relocations in our cognitive sphere. That is why, when Longenbach claims earlier that for the opening to infinity the poem must stop singing, by abandoning its iambic flow, I would like to point out that the removal of a specific metrical foot is far from the exit of the song. On the contrary, the song persists and proceeds by other means, the poem itself always positing a new rhetorical, prosodic, aesthetic and material shape, the sole reality of the song. Longenbach's approach forces him to speak of yet another metaphysical shift of focus away from the poem—now merged with the being of the Earth—to the metaphysics of the infinite: "everything—even Whitman, speaker of the sentence—becomes a metaphor for something else," this "something else" becoming an "unpromising inhabitation of a relation through which the possibility of infinitude is spoken" (150). Thus, Longenbach reintroduces metaphysics through a reasoning that was meant to reassess it. Doing so, he forfeits the palpable present being of the poem, which is now thought to subside, recede, give up its achieved consciousness of itself for the sake of "infinitude."

Peter Gizzi's late continuations of Whitman, Dickinson, and Stevens are ample instances of the return of the poem-as-song, of reclaiming its immediate, recalcitrant interventions in the earthly environments that call to being new human subjectivities. Gizzi's poetic space proper is that of "the song." As his poems illustrate, the song does not vanish, not even in the most ascetic moments when the figurative power of the poetic process stalls; on the contrary, in such moments the emergent self that belongs to the poem as a whole obtains a new shape, given to it by the arranged, artificial restraint of *poesis*, a restraint that makes more apparent the contour of the poem. It is this delineated body that now does without the thought of any "infinitude," and is its own sufficient presence of a being fully cognizant and alive with its finitude, as it engages its external environments.

Peter Gizzi's Plenitude of Externality

Gizzi's way of characterizing such engagement has been to speak of poetry as dictation taking. Robin Blaser has called this strategy "the practice of outside" (271), and has discussed it in the context of Gizzi's fascination with Jack Spicer, a poet who practiced the radical gesture of opening the poem to aleatory interceptions of found languages long before the practice of Language poets made it more normative (271). It remains to be discussed, however, how Gizzi's poems differ from Spicer's in negotiating the evanescence of the poetic self. For Blaser, and for Spicer, the poet becomes a medium letting the otherness of language speak through, a gesture the tradition of which goes back to Blake via Yeats. In Gizzi's poems, on the other hand, the passage of transmission brings the medium to a state I have being characterizing above as the state of the emergent self.

In Gizzi's mode of conducting the exploration of externality, the Whitmanian and Emersonian Not-Me becomes a stringent mixture of the physical, the spiritual, the linguistic, and the conceptual. Richard Poirier speaks of Emerson's "superfluousness" as "an effort to refloat the world" (40), that is to make readers aware of the ample set of ways in which an intense description of the world changes the world. Stanley Cavell hints at the connection between the material vastness of the world and the descriptions of it further, when he mentions a "form of breathing... that opposes the breath in my body to the ideas that fill the common air" (171). This comment by Cavell relates to a passage in "Fate" where Emerson claims, somewhat cryptically, that "the air is full of men." The task of reading Gizzi is to begin to sense the literal meaning behind this apparently metaphorical splicing of the realm of ideas with the realm of physical stimuli. In Gizzi's formula of engaging the external, there is no difference between the poem's confronting the physical presence of the world and its confronting the presence of other, former poems. The physical contact with the world becomes a form of receiving the earlier poetic modes which made the *physis* of the world available to consciousness. As we shall see, this modifies Harold Bloom's notion of influence—another critical context that receives a rewriting in Gizzi.

Gizzi's term for an intense merger of the poem with an excessive field of external stimuli is "the song." In this Whitmanian formula, "the song" is any kind of poetic—which means rhetorical, artificial, linguistic, formal—space the poem creates as it enters the process of sensing the outside and thus reformulates the cognitive contact with it. Gizzi's poetry often relies on calling upon this state, signaling its awareness, and then registering its effects. One of these effects is the radical removal of the language/matter and language/self barriers, a conceptualization of linguistic intrusions into the deep levels of material world, both in the macro and micro scale. Cole Swensen sees this method as a continuous inquiry into "how things [are] put together" and "how they hold" (113-114), and she is right in claiming that the strategy abandons the epistemological model of representation. As Swensen notes further, Gizzi invites us to think beyond the "conceptual frames" (113-114) that keep the world and language separate. However, such removal of the inside-outside barrier also requires us to step beyond what the analytic philosopher Donald Davidson called the scheme-versus-content model of representation, which means giving up on the question of seeking kinds of "order" beyond language.

Gizzi has worked with the idea of the total permeability of matter getting suffused by linguistic awareness in many earlier volumes. In a poem called "Human Memory is Organic," contained in *The Outernationale* (2007), we witness an intense passage of the linguistic trail of the poem—its auditory presence, its voice—through layers of matter, a passage that melts the boundaries between the inorganic matter and consciousness:

> I, moving across a vast expanse of water
>
> though it is not water maybe salt
> or consciousness itself
>
> enacted as empathy. (*Outer* 27)

Later in the poem, such passages reveal their Whitmanian lineage, with traces of a kind of commerce between the "I" and the "you" ("Let us go together," 28), and Gizzi realizes the full scope of the Whitmanian lesson, as his penetrating conceptual thrust engages large material forces—"organic existence of gravity... / organic nature of history" (*Outer* 28). In the next volumes such openness of the physical layers to language is modified toward making these forces an integral part of the poem, an effect Gizzi achieves through a specific brand of minimalism.

Before we attend to the minimalistic version of this poetics, however, we need to examine its mode of full openness, the state of "song" proper. Gizzi's fullest recent realization of this state appears in the volume *Threshold Songs* (2011). Here, the consciousness of the poem as song is signaled early on, in the opening lyric "The Growing Edge." The poem announces its mode of being as participation in all kinds

of externality, here gathered metonymically as the electrical charge of the storm, an impending mass of not just of a physical mass ("air"), but of a hit-wave of poetic transmission, an imagined music:

> There is a spike
> in the air
> a distant thrum
> you call singing
> and how many nights
> this giganto, torn
> tuned (*Threshold* 1)

The act of openness and reception is the poem itself, the function of speech as response to the call of the always already poetic outside:

> I mean I talk
> to myself through you
> hectoring air
> you are out there
> ……
> for as long as
> I remember
> I talk to the air (1)

This "you" is a vast, Whitmanian, collective being: the "air" itself, the predecessors, the more personal significant other(s). The indeterminacy of such collectivity signals excess of which the poems now partake.

The next poem in the volume immediately comments on this kind of participation as a way of inhabiting a space of Emersonian-Bloomian influence, of the "air" vibrating with the presence of former transmissions and participations: "Everyone's listening to someone in the air" (*Threshold* 4). A little further in the volume, the idea of such exhilarative openness to the outside, in which material transmission is already and on many levels a poetic transmission, comes to its full realization in a lyric called "Eye of the Poem." The poem changes the human body into a technological device, perhaps an engine, but also an antenna that intercepts the ultimate synthesized transmission of the world across the full spectrum of its radiation: material and poetic. To be in the "Eye of the Poem" means to be fully open, thus vulnerable to the influx:

> I come to it at an edge
> morphed and hobbled,
> still morphing...

That may sound laughable
but we'll need strength.
…….
We'll need every bit
of solar wind, serious goggles. (*Threshold* 11)

This poem is self-referential in the sense that it is an attempt to thematize the shaping of the poem as a kind of participation in an external excess, such participation, however, that does not annul subjectivity, but leads to its re-shaping ("morphing") and, thus, the emergence of a new subjectivity. It begins by speaking of a center, or at least a cluster or residue, of poetic energy—"the eye of the poem"—as a sort of external space that needs to be approached, sensed, before it can be participated in. The opening is a sort of preparation for the moment of participation in an excess of external energy. The nature of this energy is not clearly defined, but—as it soon becomes more obvious—the excess itself is not to be taken separately from the stance of openness and receptivity to it. Here, early on, the excess is prefigured as a kind of impending "solar wind," against which complex defenses will be needed ("serious goggles"). The approach itself, mentioned in the first lines, is a tense activity that already begins to mold the subject. The tension stems from the double edged movement of approach-as-protection, this section of the poem preparing a stance of a fuller opening to excess and merging with it.

Even though such preparation signals pain, here the position is of full openness, acceptance, receptivity: "you wanted throttle, / you wanted full bore. / Stay open to adventure" (11). The "throttle" makes the poet's throat a reception device, erasing the difference between singing and receiving, while the mention of "full bore" further strengthens associations with combustive devices working at their full capacity. It is also here that we begin to appreciate the fact that the stance of receptivity, modulated by the poem, is part and parcel of the thematized external excess.

In the final section of the poem the idea of the poem as a reception device becomes even more pronounced. This device is referred to as the "giddy coil," possibly the mortal body whose sensations are the proper material of the poem, as the body is "animated" by the "pressure" of the outside. The interaction with this pressure is the further instance of the initial tension and the process of subject-"morphing": "I remake my life. / What pressure animating giddy coil" (12). Clearly, such moments have a personal dimension—the "morphing," changing, emerging entity evolving toward a "person"—but the point of this poetics is that "personality" will inevitably be a part of other process. Here, this other process is also the commencement of sensing the world, a birth, or perhaps a regeneration of the knowledge of the world. Gizzi has sensed for a long time that there is a cost to cognition-shaping states. In a poem called "Nocturne" he wrote: "To know is an extreme condition / like doubt, and will not rest" (*Outer* 43). It seems, in the context of Gizzi's more widely appreciated work, that such moments stand at the foundation of cognition processes responsible for the

shaping of the sense of the world. The poem as song is the experience of the birth of knowledge, an event generating intelligent sentience, a nexus of the psychological, the physiological, the somatic, and the cognitive. In this experience, the permeations of organic and inorganic become a version of the larger life of matter in processes that are inherently poetic. And it is with this realization that Gizzi's poetics is in full contact with the presence of the world—both textual and organic-bodily. Writing poetry beyond the scheme-versus-content distinction means being permanently in touch with the world,[2] but the poem as song is not a neutral realization of this post-Cartesian proposition formulated in an impassionate voice of an analytic philosopher. It becomes a state of intensity that not only signifies sentience but causes its rise to the level of pain—pain that is a hypothetical pointing to the presence of an unknown self-system in its emergence. Increasingly, in Gizzi's formula of the "song," the Whitmanian passage is accompanied by the Dickinsonian sense of the traumatic, the trauma stemming from the very intensity of the act.

This is visible in a piece called "Basement Song." While on one level the poem seems to be related to the level of personal memory—a relationship with the mother—on another it also comments on the very psychological mode of remembering as an amplified mode of reception to stimuli which enlivens the human organism to the point of pain and trauma. The poem ends on the following "confession": "Did I tell you it hurt / accepting air in a new body?" (*Threshold* 38). *Archeophonics*, Gizzi's latest volume, continues this non-Cartesian poetics, testing out moments when the world-disclosing descriptions stall and the full painful sentience of the process emerges. When such moments come, Gizzi becomes a Stevensian scholar of "the nothing," with this difference, however, that his reductions to "nothingness" reject Stevens's abstraction and reveal the poem as painfully personal.

An important earlier engagement with the Stevensian minimalism occurs in a poem titled "In Defense of Nothing." The poem is a description of a parking lot amidst whose sensual poverty we witness a sort of a modern-day "Snow Man" exercise:

> I guess these trailers lined up in the lot off the highway will do.
> I guess that crooked eucalyptus tree also.
> I guess this highway will have to do and the cars...
> The present is always coming up to us, surrounding us. (*Some Values* 53).

In Stevens, such reductions result in the increase of the poetic power itself.[3] Gizzi writes in the same vein: his ability to accept the scene's poverty indicates a sort of faith in the poem—to say that the intercepted aesthetic scarcity of the scene "will have to do" is to imply the poem's imaginative self-sufficiency. It is even in as

2 Davidson writes: "In giving up the dualism of scheme and world we reestablish unmediated touch with familiar objects" (198).

3 For Bloom, Stevens's reductions to the first idea beam back on the creative powers of the poem (*Climate* 173-174). A similar approach is offered by Joseph Riddel (184).

impoverished an environment as this one—the poem seems to declare—that I thrive and secure the survival of the imaginative movement. The poem may well be a way the psyche confronts a not very promising landscape, whose distinctive elements bespeak a vacuity of mental or cultural life, a modern day, post-industrial desert. But as it soon turns out, the poem's thrust lies not in a portrayal of the scene, but in the action of portrayal being a form of defense against it. In fact, the induced minimalism has a penetrating effect, the lines morphing into an X-Ray vision in which the present is confronted on its molecular level: "It's hard to imagine atoms, hard to imagine hydrogen & oxygen binding, it'll have to do" (53).

The last final line has an almost ironic tinge, then. The power of the vision mocks the minimalist settings, as it helps imagination come to terms with processes active on levels that are not accessible to the sensory apparatus.[4] As we shall see, this sort of tricky and elusive parking lot minimalism returns in *Archeophonics*, in a way, however, that reevaluates the sense of poetic power and its use: the force of the poem stays, but its power to evoke sentience calls forth selves that are more ambiguous, less assertive, more private, much concretely human in their distortions than Stevens's abstracted "mind."

Plenitude as Reconfiguration of "Influence"

Gizzi's plenitude in *Archeophonics* takes the form of accessing the panoplies of the natural world as traces of the earlier mental acts, the "air" of the surroundings as a storage of earlier strong moments of poetic reconfiguration. This uses the rhetorical gains we have seen worked out in *Threshold Songs*—their treatment of the physical masses as signifying the presence of a specific rendering of poetic influence. Even a more conspicuous element here, "air" in *Archeophonics* is a medium of transmission, archival space, a recording and storage device. Poetic speech as breathing is entering an "archive," as we are reminded in the opening lyric of the volume, but there is a constant sense here that it is not just the human mouth that utters the sounds, but the "air" itself, the medium entering the human organism and enlivening, or actually igniting it: "The archive in the mouth and the archive is on fire" (1). Natural presence is inseparable from the way it has been described by previous poetic speech acts. "All the stars are here," we read within a series called "A Winding Sheet for Summer," "that belonged to whatever was speaking" (62). As in the previous volumes, the brushes with matter are brushes with poetic predecessors. *Archeophonics* is an archeology of the layers of sound deposited in so-called nature.

This modifies Bloom's idea of influence away from an internal drama of one poet-person's psychology taking shape in opposition to a rhetorical-psychological

4 It would be interesting to pause at the chemical reaction evoked in the lines about atoms. If the binding of hydrogen and oxygen signifies water, than the poem's whole defensive action is metaphorized as a watering of a scene whose elements—such as the twisted eucalyptus trees—are plagued by aridity.

formation installed by the predecessor poet. In Gizzi, this Freudian text is subsumed under the Emersonian-pragmatist one in which the influence is received from the physical presence of the world, a materiality not to be distinguished from the earlier poetic achievement, since in this Nietzschean epistemology—shared by Bloom, and projected early on by Emerson—whatever access we have to the material world is always already negotiated by the work of the poetically condensed and accelerated imagination.

Gizzi accepts such epistemology and he welcomes the existence of an already formulated rhetorical-psychical space. He welcomes it as poetic environment proper, to be entered and participated in, just as a physical surrounding is entered and specifically "participated in" by an inquirer. Such modification to the notion of influence also changes the mode of poetic being: from the struggle with the predecessor to a kind of accelerated involvement in the network that connects the material and the psychical. Yet, the element of struggle does not vanish: now the struggle is not against the internalized image of a predecessor, but against the increased capacity of the poem to receive or intercept the stimuli of various kinds.

And just as in the Bloomian poetics of influence, it is the struggle that leads to individuation. A poem by Gizzi is a specific disturbance of externality through which an artifice of personhood emerges and is endowed with sentience, cognition, memory, historical consciousness. In a lyric called "The Winter Sun Says Fight," the personal moments are distorted by their openness to the external forces whose mere physical presence points to the text of the previous poet. Thus, the admonition to "fight," contained in the title, alludes to the Stevensian struggle with northern lights, in "The Auroras of Autumn," which embody the activity of a potent imagination, the imagination that precedes and thus limits the self emerging in the new poem[5]. Gizzi's poem confronts the context head on, openly, from line one, entering this defined terrain here evoked in "the winter sun [that] says fight," confirmed in line two: "the arctic blasts [that] say fight" (*Archeophonics* 31).

However, the expectation of a lofty romantic duel with the predecessor is soon dispelled in this poem. The following stanzas, maintained in economical, post-imagist stylistic, have a brittle sound to them, a lack of tension in which the theme of "influence" is admitted to be deflected or redirected. The result is strangely non-Bloomian, as if the dark imago of the poet-within-the-poet—the true protagonist of Bloom's narrative—were suddenly coming to its more human sense of the failure and collapse of the spaces constructed in earlier imaginative battles. If there is a fullness consulted in this poem, it belongs to the speaker's own past:

5 Bloom writes: "Since any First Idea is finally an idea of an idea, or a new troping of the sun, Stevens seeks to show that the auroras are nothing unless and until they are contained by being imagined in his mind. Thus they would be unnamed and their menace to the poet would be destroyed" (*Climate* 270-71).

Once I saw the city
of god reflected
……..
I
thought life complete,
tight, happiness. (*Archeophonics* 31)

In Gizzi, the poetic "anxiety" results from expecting that a mere presence of physical phenomena will hit soon with a wave of rhetorical radiation that puts the self in touch with itself, calling it into existence, at the price of being simultaneously scattered amid various ontological orders. Here, this hitting force is not so much expected, as remembered, as the emerging self experiences a returning, postponed, impact of its former remorseless passages. And the reckoning is woeful, revealing a private self in ruin. Whatever may have been rallied and integrated for the Bloomian poet-within-the poet has now turned out to be a dispersal for the private self:

where
do I actually live so far
outside my head deep
inside the chemical
wash of my genes (*Archeophonics* 32)

And yet, on the final rebound, paradoxically, it is even in such dispersal that the poem reaffirms the poetics of plenitude of the earlier volumes. The decentered self signifies the consciousness of the ontological permeability of the organic and inorganic—the close and tight correspondences between thought and chemistry, the life of the spirit and "chemical wash." In some sense then, the newly emergent self, broken as it is, speaks with a compelling degree of authenticity—it is an inhabitant of the poem of advancing and maturing plenitude.

Fluctuating between various ontological realms, the poems in *Archeophonics* also turn against this very kind of fluency. We notice how poems seek breaks in transmission and its de-acceleration. One such moment occurs early on, in a section of "Field Recordings," when a parking lot setting undergoes an unexpected freeze of connections:

A sun slashed parking lot
thinking a poem
stalled
in the broken
surround. (*Archeophonics* 9)

The stalling is part of the general slowing down dominating the section of this longer poem, and it is uncharacteristic. More usually in Gizzi's poetry, an exposure to light, especially the sun, helps the fluency of the poem, making it a more expansive construct. Here, interestingly, the sun's rays "slash" vision, thwarting the movement of composition.

The poem returns us to some earlier parking-lot compositions in Gizzi, such as the one we saw in "In Defense of Nothing." Here, too, the aesthetic tests the results of the Stevens-like reductions. The fragment belongs to a larger group of poems in *Archeophonics* that recalibrate the Stevensian nothingness as trope of poetic power to a nothingness that belongs to moments of existential distortion. Where the earlier poem achieved imaginative and conceptual perceptivity, allowing for a refreshing reimagining of the poverty-stricken locality, the newer poem inquires of the sort of personal costs incurred by this operation, by confronting and annulling the modernist abstraction that replaces a "mind" with a model of personhood. Here, the insistence is on the continuous poverty of the locality, the procession of images refusing any sort of synthesis. We view a broken series of a "dazed" child's "spilled bike / more debris / CVS in the distance" (10). In fact, the "sun slashed" stanza sits in the middle of the entire series, as if directing the conceptual coming to terms with the condition of the scattering.

Thus, we have to conclude that this "stalled" parking-lot minimalism performs a double function. On the one hand, it continues to exercise a poetic effect: it is itself the source of the "dazing" that exposes the surrounding chaos, a blind spot of the poem, the very fragment of a shiny piece of litter evoked by the section's title ("wrapper frag") that signifies the "return of the real," the Lacanian "real" of the scene, the shiny presence of the gaze itself, not subsumed under any imaginary/symbolic operation.[6] But such return of the real is only possible in the arranged environment of the poem, the presence and action of its formal layout. This presence—the inescapable constructedness of the poem—now becomes the constructedness of any "Real," the poem oscillating quite freely between the allegedly incommensurate and non-permeable realms of the symbolic and the real. On the other hand, though, this power does reach and reveal a personal trauma, the trauma that belongs to a self now coming to terms with its own authentic existential condition. This self is seen against the abstraction of the mind, the mind obtaining a specific affective mood, that of sadness. The poem points to its own presence—its "torn vowels":

> that sound out vowel
> or sadness like glitter
> sprinkled in a mind. (9)

The poem performs a modernist gesture of achieving formal self-awareness which allows it to construct its own negotiation of orders, blurring the boundary between the symbolic and the real. It becomes a "glitter / sprinkled in a mind"—a

6 Hal Foster has suggested that certain works of contemproary visual arts, notably the serial pictures of Warhol, enact a refusal to sublate the elements of visual rapture under the coherence of any symbolic order. A visual representation of this operation is the blinding of the subjective gaze by the shine of the object itself. The shining belongs to the act of the gaze itself: "it is as if this art wanted the gaze to shine, the object to stand, the real to exist" (Foster 140).

being as traumatized, as it is more concrete, endowing "a mind"—the Stevensian abstractness—with personality.

Throughout *Archeophonics*, there emerge traumatized selves that inhabit closed, private surroundings, and consult the poverty of their enclosure. Sometimes they find their reflections in the creaking woodwork of house interiors. We see them in jumbled local bits and pieces, where Stevens's modernist negativity of "the nothing that is" gives way to "erratic nothings," nothingness as error, misnaming, in which the self sees its "warping" and strangeness, as it finds itself "do all the talking" (49). Such selves are "dearrange[d] and uncompose[d]" (8). This warped and deranged self admits its loneliness and strangeness. Mediated through the poem's artifice, they belong both to vast and incoherent externalities, not organized into holes but simply engaged by the poem's formal/conceptual action, and much more intimate, local interiors. Floors of all kinds, wooden or geological, revolve in Gizzi's plenitudes, and so do the artificial, touched, emerging selves of these poems: "The fact I spin and it spins and everything is spinning close up" (26).

Gizzi's poetics of plenitude, far more than just a registering of excess, becomes a transformation of all sorts of excesses—textual, linguistic, cultural, mineral, and organic alike—into a fresh multidimensionality of a self, redeemed, as it comprehends its artifice and strangeness. Such transformations are effected by the persistence of the "song"—the Whitmanian space of the poem in which various binary oppositions are cancelled and borders between ontological orders are crossed. In Gizzi's recent poetry, the operations of the song are shown congruent with the increasing minimalism of diction, the minimalism that in fact signals an increase in the intensity of self-recognitions. Here, Stevens's "listener," who is "nothing himself," is given a voice and power to personalize his nothingness as significant distortion that he is now able to acknowledge. Although painful, the acceptance is an achievement—it gives us a truer, more authentic, Western self for today. When so revealed, there may be a community of such selves—others who will identify with the ironic self-limitation and courage of this poetry's voice, as it begins to reconcile with its human connections:

> I came from a different world.
> I will die in it.
> Someone saw it, I love them for seeing it.
> I love seeing it with them. (*Archeophonics* 66)\

[Note: a much altered version of this text is being published this year by Wesleyan University Press, in a volume entitled *In The Air: Essays on the Poetry of Peter Gizzi*, edited by Anthony Caleshu.]

Works Cited

Bartczak, Kacper. "John Ashbery: The Poetics of Plenitude and the Poet's Biography." *Polish Journal for American Studies* vol. 9 (2015): 51-74. Print.

———. "The Poetics of Plenitude and Its Crisis in Wallace Stevens, Rae Armantrout, and Peter Gizzi: A Pragmatist Perspective." *Exorcising Modernism*. Ed. Mikołaj Wiśniewski, Warszawa: SWPS Press, 2014. 254-96. Print.

———. "Richard Rorty and the Ironic Plenitude of Literature." *Contemporary Pragmatism* 12.1 (2015): 59-78. Print.

———. "Wallace Stevens's Pragmatist Poetics of Plenitude." *Practicing Pragmatist Aesthetics*. Ed. Wojciech Małecki. Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2014. 109-126. Print.

Bernstein, Charles. *A Poetics*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992. Print.

Blaser, Robin. "The Practice of Outside." *The Collected Books of Jack Spicer*. Ed. Robin Blaser. Santa Rosa: Black Sparrow Press, 1999. 271–326. Print.

Bloom, Harold. *The Poems of Our Climate*. Ithaka: Cornell University Press, 1977. Print.

Cavell, Stanley. *Philosophical Passages: Wittgenstein, Emerson, Austin, Derrida.* Oxford: Blackwell, 1995. Print.

Eagleton, Terry. *Literary Theory: An Introduction.* Minneapolis: University of Minneapolis Press, 1983. Print.

Davidson, Donald. "On the Very Idea of a Conceptual Scheme." *Inquiries into Truth and Interpretation.* Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984. 183–98. Print.

Felluga, Dino. "Modules on Lacan: On Psychosexual Development." *Introductory Guide to Critical Theory*. 31 Jan 2011. Web 5 June 2017. www.purdue.edu/guidetotheory/psychoanalysis/lacandevelop

Foster, Hal. *The Return of the Real: The Avant-Garde at the End of the Century*. Cambridge: MIT Press, 1996. Print.

Gizzi, Peter. *Archeophonics*. Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 2016. Print.

———. *The Outernationale*. Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 2007. Print.

———. *Some Values of Landscape and Weather*. Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 2003. Print.

———. *Threshold Songs*. Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 2011. Print.

Jacqueline Rose, Jacqueline. "The Imaginary." *Jacques Lacan: Critical Evaluations in Cultural Theory*. Ed. Slavoy Zizek, vol. 1. London, NY: Routledge, 2002. 7-32. Print.

James, William. "The Will to Believe." *Writings 1878-1899*. Ed. Gerald E. Myers. New York: Library of America, 457-479. Print.

Johnston, Adrian, "Jacques Lacan." *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Winter 2016 Edition). Ed. Edward N. Zalta. Web. 5 June 2017. www.plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2016

Jonas, Hans. *The Gnostic Religion: The Message Of The Alien God, And The Beginnings of Christianity.* Boston: Beacon Press, 2001. Print.

Longenbach, James. "Whitman and the Idea of Infinity." *Walt Whitman: Where the Future Becomes Present*. Ed. Michael Robertson and David Haven Blake. Iowa City: University Of Iowa Press, 2008. 144-150. Print.

Poirier, Richard. *Poetry and Pragmatism.* Cambridge, Ma: Harvard University Press, 1992. Print.

Riddel, Joseph. *The Clairvoyant Eye: The Poetry and Poetics of Wallace Stevens*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press. 1991. Print.

Swensen, Cole. "Peter Gizzi's City: The Political Quotidian." *American Poets in the 21st Century: The New Poetics*. Ed. Claudia Rankin and Lisa Sewell. Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2007. 111–12. Print.

Whitman, Walt. *Complete Poetry and Collected Prose*. Ed. Justin Kaplan. New York: Library of America, 1982. Print.