

Radical Meeting Places, Poetry and the Public Domain

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The intertwining of poetry and space has been a subject of scholarly research and debate for many years, but its study has acquired new vigor with transformations in media and the advent of the Internet. Indeed, a shared concept of space cannot be taken for granted and its facets have been reconfigured to the degree that research initiatives, like that of the Contemporary Poetry in Public Space group¹, have become important reference points regarding its nature for researchers exploring the topic. Bearing in mind that, through perception, space and time are bound together, this group's recent discussion of poetry's temporal roots in rhythm and corporal gesture (Chamberlain 45-58) necessarily calls for a corresponding reflection on poetry's rootedness in space. It calls for a reflection understood in the etymological sense of running thoughts backward from the conceptual, through the perceptual, to approach the deep-rooted experience of poetic discourse, understood broadly as a celebration of language. Here *language*, the material of poetic celebrations, is not to be reduced to *langue*, that is, to a specific morphosyntactic system and its lexical repertoire (Saussure 13-35) that traditionally has been the focus of Linguistics. It is understood as *langage*, or as *energeia* in the sense put forward by

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¹ See <<http://dinolipoe.blogspot.ca/2012/03/poesia-y-espacio-publico-condiciones.html>>

² The estimated number of deaths attributed to drug-related violence continues to grow

Wilhelm Von Humbolt in his treatise *On Language* and later developed by Hans-Georg Gadamer in *Truth and Method* when, following Martin Heidegger, he speaks of language as a mode of being in the world that brings tradition and historical import into play (Humbolt 48-64; Gadamer 314-15 & 351-66). Poetic discourse, understood as a deep-rooted celebration of language as *energeia*, inevitably proves problematic for commanding attitudes and empirical reductions of literature. To speak of *radical* meeting places points not only to the nineteenth-century sense of political reform but also brings into play *radix* and an historical sense of perceptual deep-rootedness. This hermeneutic point of departure, then, is supplemented by a phenomenological perspective that focuses less on space as a conceptual construct than on place understood as an experienced situation. Place is where we open to the world through a conversation with an inhabited environment. This conversation “takes place” and takes shape in different ways, of course, but to the degree that it mediates our deep-rootedness in perception and the experience of space, it is intimately intertwined with language and cannot be divorced from those celebrations of language called poetry. In this study, the poetry reflected upon is that which tells both convenient and inconvenient stories in a public domain. However, this term also calls for reconsideration because, from a standpoint in hermeneutic phenomenology, *public domain* is understood less as an abstract geographic or jurisdictional designation than as a field of anonymity and communal authority that is expressed in language celebrations.

These phenomenological and hermeneutic considerations clarify the points of reference alluded to in the title and they point to a direction of inquiry recently taken by other scholars, like Ian Davidson, who explore “radical or revolutionary” poetry, in the political sense (*Radical Spaces* 1). Davidson’s *Ideas of Space in Contemporary Poetry* (2007) and *Radical Spaces of Poetry* (2010) offer an overview of current approaches to poetry and space that indicate a clear shift in focus away from Henri Lefebvre’s “spatial materialism” and toward an ontological foundation in the phenomenological experience of poetry understood in terms of Heidegger’s *Dasein* or *being-in-the-world* (58-61). Davidson situates “the body” at the crossroads between local, familiar places and the concept of the global. However, his attention is clearly on the latter, where he sees “politically radical poetry” most powerful (6). This focus on the global leaves the radical dimension mediating body and texts, as well as body and the local places where poetry is also powerfully at play, obscure. For Davidson, body and poem remain discrete entities because a “poem is not a body and a body is not a text” (*Ideas of Space* 57). His challenge, therefore, lies in demonstrating “how the materiality of the body, the space it contains and the space it produces and is produced by, link to the form and content of poetry” (57).

Davidson’s complex theoretical platform is valuable because it points to unexplored areas that may prove fruitful in understanding how poetry comes to

bear on meeting places and on what constitutes a primary meeting place, as well as how the powerfully convenient or inconvenient impact of poetry can see lives enriched or endangered at local as well as global levels. If we are to meet conceptual, material, and performative challenges, then the hermeneutic experience of poetry must also be brought into play. If the body is central to the material consideration of poetry and space, then the role of perception must also be brought into consideration. Perception here is not understood as an impingement of external data on the senses but as a process of opening through sensory awareness unto the world, including the world of poetry, in order to grasp and intermingle with it. Experience and perception offer an ontological point of departure from which to approach the radical meeting places where poetry, in writing and song, proves problematic for authority both legitimate and illegitimate and where poetry awakens readers and listeners to action in a public domain. An exploration of the structure and character of both experience and perception is therefore in order.

Following Hans-Georg Gadamer, experiences, at least those that preoccupy listeners and readers of poetry, can be understood as having the structure of a question and the character of different attitudes in a dialogue (310-25). Structured like a question, experiences have three levels. True experiences, like true questions (that is, not apparent, Socratic, false, distorted, or leading questions), proceed from “a radical negativity,” from inexperience, from a “not knowing,” and a knowing that one does not know (325). It is from this not-knowing root level that consciousness sets out to find a resolution and it does so by passing through a second level that is marked by uncertain indeterminacy (326-7). In the field of indeterminacy, the answer could lie here or there, be this or that, a “yes” or a “no” and, in its unfolding, an experience can develop in a disappointing, a gratifying, a disconcerting, or a satisfactory manner. Eventually, a question settles on an answer and an experience solidifies into a recognizable event (328). In both cases the development is *from a not-knowing root to knowing* an answer, from inexperience or innocence to experience. Poetry, as William Blake has so sublimely shown, embraces both.

Gadamer characterises the degree or fullness of a “real experience” in terms of three levels as well, only now his comparison is to different attitudes inherent in a dialogue between two people, that is, between an *I* and a *you* (321-5). The first and least dialogical or least experiential attitude presents an *I* who does not listen to the other person but dictates *to* the *you* in order to achieve control and a self-serving end. In this case, the other is not truly experienced as another person but only as an extension of one’s own desire. Greater dialogue with, and experience of, the other person is achieved by a second attitude in which the *I* hears words coming *from* the other but only listens for and only selects what the *I* wants to hear. This may be more experiential than the first attitude’s dictatorship but it is also self-centred and therefore not a full experience of the other or of the mediation between the two. A

true dialogue and a full experience is characterised by a third attitude in which the *I* does not seek to control the *you*, but strives to set self-interest aside in order to be fully open to what is transpiring and to truly listen to what is being said, that is, to the fullness of the language *between* the interlocutors. In this way, true experiences are rooted in “a fundamental negativity” because they run contrary to expectations; they “radically” negate dogmatic opinion (319), and they negate dictatorial control. They pass through a field of indeterminacy in which they are free and fully open to different possibilities. *To, from, between* are prepositions that characterize our experiences, but *pre-positions* also reflect attitudes and directions (or *senses* in the multifarious meanings inherent in *sentidos* in Spanish or *sens* in French) that configure space. Prepositions are, as former mathematician and now author, theorist, and comparative-literary historian, J. Edward Chamberlin once commented to me, the *radicals* of language. *Between* can be considered the *radical* of poetic experience. Prepositions, of course, are also the tools with which the human body in action configures its space, its environment, in order to give rise to a place. This hermeneutic understanding of poetic experience, then, is interwoven with the phenomenon we live in called *body*.

Maurice Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenology of perception speaks not of *the* body but of *my* body. He explains that I “grasp my body as a *spontaneity that teaches me what I could not know in any other way except through it*” (*Signs* 93). I know my body inside out. I come to the world through my body. Inevitably, I cannot speak of *the* body except through *my* body. For Merleau-Ponty, my body exists in the etymological sense of *ex-istance*, that is, poised toward the world in a manner he also describes using the term *ex-stase* (*Phenomenology* xii & 419). Perception is first and foremost an outflow of awareness toward the world rather than an impingement on the five senses of data from the world. This outflow of awareness begins at a primary level preceding the senses, a level that Merleau-Ponty calls *non-sense* and that he describes as a “negativity that is not nothing” (*The Visible* 151). This primary level of radical negativity, of non-sense (that gave the title to his book *Sense and Non-sense*), is also a level of “primary faith” interwoven with art, culture, tradition, and language (*Phenomenology* 321). Neither the *not-knowing* source of hermeneutic experience nor the *non-sense* birthplace of perception’s phenomenology lend themselves to a self-serving selection of what will or will not exist nor to an impingement of exterior data on the lived experience of our bodies. The phenomenology of perception rests neither on a subject dictating to the world nor on an object dictating from some discrete reality. Perception proceeds from this primary level to a second level of sensation where the senses do not lie in discrete alienation from each other but in synaesthetic communication. “Synaesthetic perception is the rule,” we are told, and before anything is finally perceived as a particular taste, for example, it is first taste-felt-smelled-seen-heard simultaneously, as my body sensually intertwines with its discovery (229). It is only after all of the senses have acknowledged an aspect of the world that one’s body

settles on a particular sense that gives the perception fullness as something specifically tasted, or felt, smelled, heard, or seen. Thus, separate sense perceptions constitute the final step in a process beginning in a radical negativity and passing through a second level of synaesthetic indeterminacy. Gadamer's notion of experience and Merleau-Ponty's sense of perception share common features, not the least of which is an eccentric movement from not-knowing to knowing. The direction poetic discourse often takes is similar to both experience and perception in that it inevitably involves *ex-expression* or, etymologically, pressing-outward through a lexical and morpho-syntactic field of infinite possibilities in order to communicate or come into community with places and people, particularly in the case of non-lyrical poetry.

Aesthetics, from *aísthaneesthai* "to perceive," is intertwined with perception and synaesthetic expression, and undoubtedly plays a vital role in bridging body and poetic discourse. Merleau-Ponty insists that my body not be compared "to a physical object, but rather to a work of art" (150). Furthermore, he affirms that works of art such as "a novel, poem, picture or musical work are individuals, that is, beings in which the expression is indistinguishable from the thing expressed, their meaning, accessible only through direct contact, being radiated with no change of their temporal and spatial situation" (151-2). The question regarding a material link between *the* body and a poem, understood as form and content, which preoccupies Davidson, becomes immaterial when *my* body and a poem intermingle:

It is my body which gives significance not only to the natural object, but also to cultural objects like words. If a word is shown to a subject for too short a time for him to be able to read it, the word "warm," for example, induces a kind of experience of warmth which surrounds him with something in the nature of a meaningful halo. The word "hard" produces a sort of stiffening of the back and the neck, and only in a secondary way does it project itself into the visual or auditory field and assume the appearance of a sign or a word. Before becoming the indication of a concept it is first of all an event which grips my body, and this grip circumscribes the area of significance to which it has reference ... The word is then indistinguishable from the attitude which it induces ... (235)

Perception moves from a non-sense through a meeting place of senses in order to intertwine with places and poems. Indeed, "sensations represent the elements from which the great poetry of our world (Umwelt) is made up" (321), and again, "the whole of nature is the setting of our own life, or our interlocutor in a sort of dialogue," and again, "every perception is a communication or a communion" (*Phenomenology* 320). Meeting places inevitably invoke two dimensions because we radically meet the world as well as meet in the world. Merleau-Ponty's final essay, "The Intertwining—The Chiasm," reaffirms *my body* as a chiasm, an intertwining of self and world (*The Visible* 130-55).

This interplay of words, worlds, poems, and bodies rests on radical non-sense and it is tempting to dismiss it as such when dealing with *real problems* like poetry, politics, and the public domain. To speak here of “real problems” is, of course, to play the devil’s advocate and to do so very much in the etymological sense. Because, as I have argued elsewhere, poetry in both oral and written form is a “problem” child (Chamberlain 50-1). It is a problem because it throws obstacles in the path of dogmatic opinion and the reduction of human experience to a set of convenient rules; at least convenient for a select few. Indeed, the word problem comes from pro-balem, to throw ahead of something. It stands at ninety degrees to the word devil (and its advocates), which comes from dia-balem, to throw across. Poetry in print and song is downright offensive, a stumbling block, a scandalous obstruction to dictatorial control, as Hazard Adams has so successfully argued in his study *The Offense of Poetry*. Adams argues that poetry’s value lies in its offensiveness, that the ultimate scandal and offense of poetry lies in an ethics that cannot be reduced to “a set of moral principles” and, what is more, that “poetry should be defended as offensive” (3). This is nothing less than radical, negative non-sense in the eyes of dictatorial powers and they have, at every turn, striven to eradicate the offensive problem. A few of the more notorious and recent ways in which these so-called sensible forces have moved to silence scandalous, poetic non-sense in Spanish America are as follows: Atahualpa Yupanqui, exile in 1931 and, under Juan Perón, detention, incarceration, and again exile in 1949; Federico García Lorca, 1936, executed by firing squad; Julio Cortázar, 1951, incarceration and exile; Víctor Jara, 1973, shot to death with 44 bullets no less; José Lezama Lima, 1971, alienation and self-imposed house arrest; Eduardo Galeano, 1973, imprisonment and exile; Reinaldo Arenas, 1974, imprisonment, torture, and exile; Salman Rushdie, 1989, sentenced to death and forced into hiding (ten years later, Rushdie and Carmen Boullosa co-found the Citlaltépetl House for Persecuted Writers in Mexico City); more recently, in 2006, three members of balladeer or *corridista* group “Explosión Norteña” are shot; the same year, singer Valentín Elizalde is shot more than sixty times with an AK-47 assault rifle, Javier Morales Gómez, a *corridista* member of “Los Implacables del Norte” is shot a month later; in 2007, Sergio Gómez of *narcocorrido* group “K-Paz de la Sierra” is executed; the same year, another thirteen *corridistas* are executed; and in January of 2013, twelve members of the group “Poderoso Kombo Kolombia” are executed and their bodies dumped into a well. With all of the profound respect that is due to these victims and their families for the great suffering endured, it must be admitted that violence has been directed not just against their poetic discourse but also against their bodies. The human body; the body of listener, reader, singer, or writer; my body is inextricably intertwined with poetic discourse and, where poetry is found offensive, body and discourse are alienated or destroyed. The old adage often taught to children, “Sticks and stones will break my bones but

names will never hurt me” is hardly true. Indeed, the history of libricide, from Itzcóatl’s Tenochtitlan to the 2013 book bonfires in Timbuktu, is another take on the same operation as has been the Partido Revolucionario Institucional’s (PRI) radio censorship of *corridos* celebrating the Lucio Cabañas insurgency of the 1970s, as well as the PRI and Partido de Acción Nacional’s (PAN) censorship of drug-trade ballads, or *narcocorridos*, throughout the 1990s and the last decade, and only lifted in early 2013. Books become effigies of authors and readers and they, in turn, effigies of poetry. The experience, the perception, and the discourse of poetry in the public domain are a problem, an offense, and author, text, and listeners or readers pay a no-nonsense price for engaging in it.

Nevertheless, Hazard Adams has called upon readers and listeners to defend poetry and poets in the public domain, and they have. At the murder of his son by drug gangs in 2011, poet Javier Sicilia protested in pain and anger, not only against the illegitimate, “hard” despotism of the drug lords, but also against what Paul Ricoeur has called “soft” despotism, that is, against the lords of Mexico’s “legitimate” institutional power (312). His protest was, in itself, no more noteworthy than the protest of any of the other sixty-thousand Mexican parents who have lost children and other loved ones to violence over the past decade². What was noteworthy, indeed remarkable, was that a terrified community responded fearlessly to the poet’s call, first with forty thousand readers and listeners marching in Cuernavaca, then twenty thousand listeners and readers in Mexico City, then protests in more than forty cities across the country, and, on May 5th, a day of national celebration, over two-hundred thousand marched again in Mexico City’s and the nation’s central square along with more protests in thirty-one other cities across the country and seventeen cities abroad (Padgett). This was only one voice, but not any voice. It was the voice of a poet and it was answered by meetings of a quarter of a million people, at a moment’s notice, around the world. Poet and poetry resonate in the public domain and there are few “sensible” authorities that would not like to harness the *energeia* of such non-sense.

Having looked at the intertwining of poetry and body through experience and the process of perception, what of the public domain? As mentioned above, a public domain is a space belonging to no one; an anonymity that gestures communal authority. The public domain is the place of ballads such as Mexico’s *corridos*, which know neither author nor specific audience. They are anonymous and belong to a community, not to any specific individual. They often appear in

² The estimated number of deaths attributed to drug-related violence continues to grow and is today considerably higher than sixty thousand. The conservative estimate provided here is based on a February 20, 2013 figure provided by Human Rights Watch covering the 2006 through 2012 period. It is quoted by CNN in a report consulted at the time of this article’s composition and reiterated in a report update of March 10, 2015 . See <http://www.cnn.com/2013/09/02/world/americas/mexico-drug-war-fast-facts/> .

songbook or on broadsheet accompanied by the letters “DP,” that is, under the copyright of *el Dominio Público*, the public domain. Indeed, their authenticity, their authority, their dominion lie in their radical anonymity. In having a no-name author, they belong to a “no-one” that is not an absence of humanity but its fullness. They belong to everyone precisely because they belong to no-one. This poetic authority takes form in other fields of interaction as well. Radical political movements, like that of the Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional (EZLN), anchor the authority of their leaders in a faceless anonymity guaranteed by a ski mask. Person and poetry meet in this unnamed public domain. Nor has Subcomandante Marcos shied away from the profoundly poetic, the radically poetic character of the community he obeys and the movement he serves. Carlos Fuentes is reported to have said “El subcomandante Marcos, me parece, ha leído más a Carlos Monsiváis que a Carlos Marx” (It seems to me that Subcomandante Marcos has read more of Carlos Monsiváis than of Karl Marx³) (Prieto). Recalling his childhood, Marcos explains that his way of perceiving the world has been inextricably entwined with celebrations of language: “We didn’t get to know the world through a newswire but through a novel, an essay, or a poem. And this made us very different. This was the looking glass that our parents gave us, as others might use the mass media as a looking glass or just an opaque glass so that no one can see what is going on” (Hayden 188). Speaking of the EZLN movement in an interview with Gabriel García Márquez, Marcos declares “you [pointing to García Márquez] are partly responsible for all this” and, again, there “is no better way to understand the tragedy and the comedy of the Mexican political system than Hamlet, Macbeth and Don Quixote. They are much better than any column of political analysis” (188-9). If Mexican writer Carlos Monsiváis has been formative in Marcos’s thinking, Monsiváis is also acutely aware of what this radically poetic movement is all about: “The oft-repeated phrase in Zapatista speeches: ‘The world is watching us,’ is in the end a sign of existence: ‘Someone sees us! We acquire bodily presence’” (126). Describing a Zapatista meeting in 2001, he explains, “These young people look and accept being looked at They know they *are perceived*, and the end of their invisibility makes them happy and reinforces their adherence to the EZLN”⁴ (124). The anonymous “Himno Zapatista” or Zapatista Anthem that calls Zapatistas to their meetings is an adaptation of the 1910 Revolutionary ballad, “Carabina 30-30,” D.P., that belongs to the public domain (“Himno Zapatista”).

This concern for the anonymous, public domain is not privy to the oral celebrations of what some might view as an exotic Spanish American movement. Turning to César Vallejo during his years in Paris we find what Michelle

³ Translation is mine.

⁴ Emphasis added.

Clayton describes as a “pivotal anxiety,” throughout his poetry, for “the relation between the poet and the man in the street” (199). Even before taking up Marxism, Vallejo pondered the dilemma of how a lyrical first-person could hope to speak of and for humanity at large. Working to erase the lyrical subject, his final notebooks, written throughout 1936-37, arrive at the conclusion that “Of course, it is more profound and poetic to say ‘I’—taken as a symbol for everyone”⁵ (Clayton 199). Thus, when Vallejo celebrates “hope,” he does so in a radically negative way, in a profoundly communal way, because he does not take up any particular identity, ideology, or doctrine. His poem in prose “Voy a hablar de la esperanza” speaks from below the uniqueness of discrete identification, from the primary sub-stance or under-standing of perception before it has solidified into any particular sense:

I Am Going to Speak of Hope

I do not suffer this pain as César Vallejo. I do not hurt now as an artist, as a man or even as a mere living being. I do not suffer this pain as a Catholic, as a Muslim, nor as an atheist. Today I simply suffer. Were my name not César Vallejo, I would suffer this same pain. Were I not an artist I would still suffer it. Were I not a man or even a living being, I would still suffer it. Were I not Catholic, atheist, Muslim, I would still suffer it. Today I suffer from deep down. Today I simply suffer.

I hurt today inexplicably. My pain is so deep it had no cause nor did it lack a cause. *What would its cause be? Where is that thing so important that it would cease to be its cause? Nothing caused it; nothing has stopped being its cause. Why has this pain been born, all by its own?* My pain comes from the north wind and from the south wind, as those neutral eggs that some strange birds hatch from the wind. Had my girlfriend died, my pain would be the same. Had they cut my head clean off my neck, my pain would be the same. Were life, in short, some other way, my pain would be the same. Today I suffer from higher up. Today I simply suffer.

I see the starving man's pain and see his hunger move so distant from my own suffering, that if I fasted to death, at least a blade of grass would sprout from my tomb. The same for the man in love. How begotten his blood compared to mine, without source or consumption!

Until now I believed everything in this universe was inevitably a father or a son. But the fact is that today my pain is neither a father nor a son. It does not have enough back to night-fall, as it has more than enough chest to dawn. Placed in a dark room it would shed no light, and placed in a bright one, it would cast no shadow. Today I suffer come what may. Today *I simply suffer*.⁶ (“I Am Going to Speak”)⁷

⁵ Translation is mine.

⁶ Emphasis added.

⁷ **Voy a hablar de la esperanza**

The poem's final words, "I simply suffer," run in the opposite direction to its first words, "I do not suffer" and the non-sense mediating the poem's title and its focus on suffering turns on its structural and semantic centre anchored both in a question and the radical negation of cause-effect rationality: "What would its cause be? Where is that thing so important that it would cease to be its cause? Nothing caused it; nothing has stopped being its cause. Why has this pain been born, all by its own?"

The anonymity, non-sense, and innocence at the root of these oral and written celebrations in the public domain are not particular to Spanish-speaking poets or radical movements either. Turning to the English-speaking Americas, a clear example of the same radical nature can be found in a recent root movement in which self and community coincide. Both the discourse and the bodily expression of this movement was poetically offensive in the manner outlined by Adams above. It claimed dominion over the Queen's English in a most dreadful way and sported an equally dreadful hairstyle. Jamaican Dread Talk and dreadlocks spoke out against down-pressure while calling on the down-trodden to get up, stand up for their rights. If, as Merleau-Ponty argues, perceived space is a consequence of direction (*Phenomenology* 219-67), then Dread Talk's up and down are not only ex-pressions pushing against re-pressure, they are prepositions configuring *Jab-man-can* inhabited space, and, as Velma Pollard explains, "down-pressure" also means "depression" (46). Recalling Merleau-

Yo no sufro este dolor como César Vallejo. Yo no me duelo ahora como artista, como hombre ni como simple ser vivo siquiera. Yo no sufro este dolor como católico, como mahometano ni como ateo. Hoy sufro solamente. Si no me llamase César Vallejo, también sufriría este mismo dolor. Si no fuese artista, también lo sufriría. Si no fuese hombre ni ser vivo siquiera, también lo sufriría. Si no fuese católico, ateo, ni mahometano, también lo sufriría. Hoy sufro desde más abajo. Hoy sufro solamente.

Me duelo ahora sin explicaciones. Mi dolor es tan hondo, que no tuvo ya causa ni carece de causa. *¿Qué sería su causa? ¿Dónde está aquello tan importante, que dejase de ser su causa? Nada es su causa; nada ha podido dejar de ser su causa. ¿A qué ha nacido este dolor, por sí mismo?* Mi dolor es del viento del norte y del viento del sur, como esos huevos neutros que algunas aves raras ponen del viento. Si hubiera muerto mi novia, mi dolor sería igual. Si la vida fuese, en fin, de otro modo, mi dolor sería igual. Hoy sufro desde más arriba. Hoy sufro solamente.

Miro el dolor del hambriento y veo que su hambre anda tan lejos de mi sufrimiento, que de quedarme ayuno hasta morir, saldría siempre de mi tumba una brizna de yerba al menos. Lo mismo el enamorado. ¡Qué sangre la suya más engendrada, para la mía sin fuente ni consumo!

Yo creía hasta ahora que todas las cosas del universo eran, inevitablemente, padres o hijos. Pero he aquí que mi dolor de hoy no es padre ni es hijo. Le falta espalda para anochecer, tanto como le sobra pecho para amanecer y si lo pusiesen en la estancia oscura, no daría luz y si lo pusiesen en una estancia luminosa, no echaría sombra. Hoy sufro suceda lo que suceda. *Hoy sufro* solamente. (Emphasis added) ("Voy a hablar")

Ponty, Paul Ricoeur tells us that the “experiences of the lived body” dwell in an inhabited space “prior to Euclidean or Cartesian space,” and this body,

here, is the landmark for any there, be it near or far, included or excluded, above or below, right or left, in front or behind, as well as those asymmetric dimensions that articulate a corporeal typology that is not without at least implicit ethical overtones, for example, height or the right side. To these corporeal dimensions are added some privileged postures—upright, lying down—weightiness—heavy, light—orientations to front or rear, the side, all determinations capable of opposed values: active man, standing upright, someone sick and also the lover lying down, joy that awakens and arises, sadness and melancholy that lower the spirits, and so on. (149)

Rex Nettleford puts it succinctly for the purposes of this reflection: “Rastafarians are inventing a language, using existing elements to be sure, but creating a means of communication that would faithfully reflect the specificities of their experience and perception of self, life, and the world” (Pollard 6-7).⁸ This profoundly poetic movement would help give rise to recent celebrations of Caribbean English such as Lorna Goodison’s deceptively ingenuous “The Road of the Dread,” or her deeply moving “After the Green Gown of My Mother Gone Down,” in which Bob Marley plays a key note. This radical movement, this root movement, meets in Bob Marley’s “Root-Rock-Reggae” and in the renowned “I n “I,” now singular, now plural, of the public domain. “I” n “I,” to quote Father Joseph Owens, “is expressly opposed to the servile ‘me’” (Pollard 16). According to Owens, this singular-plural, deictic shifter can become, in some Dread Talk sentences, “nonsense words” (Pollard 12), and in so becoming, fill with anonymity. “I” is no-one outside of expression. When invoking “Heidegger’s interweaving of the ontological and phenomenological” with regard to the radical spaces of poetry (Davidson, *Radical Spaces* 5), it is helpful to bear in mind that, for this philosopher, the poet stands between humanity and “the god-head” (Heidegger 222). Poetic discourse *takes place*, as Dread Talk affirms, in “Iration,” that word meaning (or mediating) creation, the divine, and humanity (“Iration”). If “dread” is a greeting as well as a name for a true Rasta man, as well as the adjective “terrible,” as well as dreadlocks crowning the body and synonymous with “natty,” a person with dreadlocks and also a Rastafari, then the radical place, the intertwining of body and discourse, the chiasm where *I n I* meet, becomes clear in works like Bob Marley’s “Roots.” Here, Marley and his chorus the “*I-Threes*” call upon the jurisdiction of a community to counteract downpression with verses such as “Roots natty roots/ dread Binghi dread / I and I are the roots”; “Some are branches / I and I are the roots”; “Got to survive / In

⁸ If *experience* proceeds etymologically from Latin *ex-* “out of” and *peritus* “experienced, tested,” one might say here: *ex-* “out of,” *peritus-* “being well versed in.”

this man maniac / downpression / Got to survive / in iration"; and "Nothing they can do / to separate 'I' n 'I' / from the love of our father / You see, blood is thicker than water" and the refrain "I and I are the roots" (Marley).

Again, the global reach of Dread Talk through Marley's songs speaks for the public reach and authority of deep-rooted poetic discourse. A final consideration will turn to a poet, also of global impact, as far from Bob Marley's oral celebrations of language as imaginable. The priority of "between" *vis-à-vis* "to" and "from" in Gadamer's structure of hermeneutic experience was a starting point for this study and it has been argued throughout that poetry is a meeting place not only for individuals but also an intertwining of self and world, self and other in anonymity under the domain of a community. Bearing in mind that the pronoun "I," so gracefully expressed by Marley, is a deictic shifter, that is, an empty place filled by whomever stands up in expression, Jorge Luis Borges's poem in prose, "Borges and I," can be seen as a radical meeting place centred, much like Vallejo's poem, in the not-knowing, the non-sense of language's anonymity belonging to the traditions of a community. "Borges and I" oscillates rhythmically between the prepositions "a" and "de," that is, between "to" and "of" or "from," and it comes to rest in a not-knowing that concurs with the poem's structural and semantic centre belonging to "nadie," to "no-one" in particular but to the common domain of language itself. It begins with the phrase "Al otro," to the other, and concludes with its opposite, "del otro." A careful reading oscillates back and forth like a pendulum between these two pre-positions, that is, between these two directions in order to come to rest in the final, innocent sentence: "I do not know which of the two writes this sentence."⁹ The not-knowing of this final sentence coincides with the radical negativity of the poem's central sentences: "It asks nothing of me to admit that the other has achieved certain valid pages; but those pages cannot save me perhaps because what is good belongs to no one, not even to the other, but to language or tradition."¹⁰

Borges y yo

Al otro, a Borges, es a quien le ocurren las cosas. Yo camino por Buenos Aires y me demoro, acaso ya mecánicamente, para mirar el arco de un zaguán y la puerta cancel; de Borges tengo noticias por el correo y veo su nombre en una terna de profesores o en un diccionario biográfico. Me gustan los relojes de arena, los mapas, la tipografía del siglo XVIII, las etimologías, el sabor del café y la prosa de Stevenson; el otro comparte esas preferencias, pero de un modo vanidoso que las convierte en atributos de un actor. Sería exagerado afirmar que nuestra relación es hostil; yo vivo, yo me dejo vivir, para que Borges pueda tramar su literatura y esa literatura me justifica. Nada me cuesta confesar que ha logrado ciertas páginas válidas, pero esas páginas no me pueden salvar,

⁹ Translation is mine.

¹⁰ Translation is mine.

quizá porque lo bueno ya no es de nadie, ni siquiera del otro, sino del lenguaje o la tradición. Por lo demás, yo estoy destinado a perderme, definitivamente, y sólo algún instante de mí podrá sobrevivir en el otro. Poco a poco voy cediéndole todo, aunque me consta su perversa costumbre de falsear y magnificar. Spinoza entendió que todas las cosas quieren perseverar en su ser; la piedra eternamente quiere ser piedra y el tigre, un tigre. Yo he de quedar en Borges, no en mí (si es que alguien soy), pero me reconozco menos en sus libros que en muchos otros o que en el laborioso rasgueo de una guitarra. Hace años yo traté de librarme de él y pasé de las mitologías del arrabal a los juegos con el tiempo y con lo infinito, pero esos juegos son de Borges ahora y tendré que idear otras cosas. Así mi vida es una fuga y todo lo pierdo y todo es del olvido, o *del otro*.

*No sé cuál de los dos escribe esta página.*¹¹ (“Borges y yo”)

The tempo of “Borges and I”’s pendular oscillation quickly carries the reader into it a chiasm of time and space, self and other, that *in-corporates* poetry. At the root of poetry lies a place where we meet others and ourselves in the anonymity of language that speaks from and listens to the authority of tradition and community. This is the radical meeting place of poetry and the public domain.

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¹¹ Emphasis added. I have not found an English translation that adequately reflects Borges’s masterful play on prepositional semantics or his play with syntactic structures. Better translations of “Borges y yo” are found in James E. Irby’s *Labyrinths*, available on line at <<http://www.amherstlecture.org/perry2007/Borges%20and%20I.pdf>>; in Ilan Stavans’s *The FSG Book of Twentieth-Century Latin American Poetry*, available on line at <<http://www.fsgworkinprogress.com/2011/05/borges-and-i/>>; and a third potential translation is available at <<http://www.sccs.swarthmore.edu/users/00/pwillen1/lit/borg&i.htm>>. However, these translations do not adequately disclose the text’s play between different senses or direction.

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