

"Objectivists" 1927-1934: A critical history of the work and association of Louis Zukofsky, William Carlos Williams, Charles Reznikoff, Carl Rakosi, Ezra Pound, and George Oppen

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fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of
Philosophy

By
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Preface

“Objectivists’ 1927-1934” is a critical history of the work and association of Louis Zukofsky, William Carlos Williams, Charles Reznikoff, Carl Rakosi, Ezra Pound, and George Oppen during the years of their closest collaboration. Its historical aspect establishes the “Objectivists” as a literary group by presenting evidence of their mutual support and common purposes; its critical aspect defines “Objectivism” as their poetic consensus adapted from Pound and Williams for the political and literary necessities of the late twenties and early thirties.

My chronological organization and documentary method make this work different from the usual academic dissertation. I have carefully documented the history of the group with many facts and primary texts for three reasons. First, competing traditions in poetry and the effects and changes of time have obscured our knowledge and understanding, resulting in confusion about the existence of the group and what they stood for. Second, the work of the several writers involved in the movement has never before been assembled and correlated. And, third, the movement must be understood as the accumulated products of individuals slowly developing common principles and purposes in response to changing conditions. Since theory underlies practice, my critical definitions, judgments, and generalizations follow the history with repetition, variation, development, and resolution.

“Objectivism” promoted the health of language as a prerequisite for the health of human beings and therefore for the health of their societies and cultures. It fostered a metaphysical association of existence, expression, and experience by restoring emotions, words, and ideas to the particulars of the shared world.

Zukofsky defined the fundamental criteria of “Objectivism.” Sincerity is the presentation in writing of “particulars,” the presentation of words and phrases that register with exactitude details whose specificity and concreteness make them unquestionably true, thereby objectifying the writer’s personal sincerity or, as Oppen said, his “curiosity” or “joy”—“that emotion which causes to see.” In the sincerity of his writing, the writer relies on his personality and personal experiences, relations, concerns, preferences, principles, and poetic influences and confluences, but presents his object in terms whose significance is not merely personal. History is the sincerity of a life and its locale, the presentation of particulars focused to give a sense of the energy and ethical consciousness of a human being. In history the writer represents his political stance against conditions which hinder happiness and creativity. Objectification is the achievement of the necessary form by which the details of sincerity and history cohere in what Pound called the Image, so that the architectonics makes the poem not just a thing about a world of things but a thing in the world of things.

The introduction counters common misconceptions about the “Objectivists” and describes my strategy, limitations, and method. “Foundations,” sections 1-7, covers the history from the first issue of

Pound's The Exile in 1927 through 1929, introducing the "Objectivists" in their order of meeting and giving a sense of their beginning consensus by delineating the poetic and political problems with which they were concerned and explicating their relevant work to date to show their answers to those problems. "Synthesis," sections 8-12, covers the history of their mutual interest and support to October 1930 and interprets Zukofsky's essays on Reznikoff and American poetry of the twenties, which provided the first syntheses of "Objectivist" criteria. "Presentation," sections 13-20, describes the editing and the critical and creative contents of the "Objectivists" issue of Poetry, February 1931, the means by which the "Objectivists" were first publicized as a group. "Renascence," sections 21-23, analyzes critical reactions to their issue of Poetry and Zukofsky's efforts to clarify "Objectivist" principles, and chronicles the establishment and achievement of the group's two publishing ventures. Finally, "Contexts," section 24, establishes the group's political and literary contexts, justifying my claim that the "Objectivists" are a significant link in the modernist tradition in poetry.

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A subtitle to any thesis on contemporary reputations might well be: How truth fares among us today.

— William Carlos Williams, "A Note on the Recent Work of James Joyce," Selected Essays

In this struggle for details we were guided by a desire to reveal concretely as possible the very process of the revolution. In particular it was impossible not to try to make the most of the opportunity to paint history from the life.

— Leon Trotsky, The History of the Russian Revolution

199 "So then an egoist can never embrace a party
200 Or take up with a party?
201 Oh, yes, only he cannot let himself
202 Be embraced or taken up by the party."

— Louis Zukofsky, "Poem beginning 'The'" attributed to Max Stirner

I think these days when there is so little to believe in—when the old loyalties—God, country, and the hope of Heaven—aren't very real, we are more dependent than we should be on our friends.

— William Carlos Williams, January: A Novelette

Among the heaps of brick and plaster lies
a girder, still itself among the rubbish.

— Charles Reznikoff, Jerusalem the Golden

Friends are not made; they are recognized.

— Carl Rakosi, Ex Cranium, Night

To have gathered from the air a live tradition
or from a fine old eye the unconquered flame
This is not vanity.
Here error is all in the not done,
all in the diffidence that faltered . . .

— Ezra Pound, "Canto LXXXI"

DRAWING

Not by growth
But the
Paper, turned, contains

This entire volume

— George Oppen, Discrete Series

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Introduction

I came to the work of the "Objectivist" writers, as a writer myself, because of my admiration for them and through the admiration of the generation of writers preceding them and of the generation following them. Were they the missing links in the tradition descending from the early modernists to the writers of the generation preceding my own, the Black Mountain, the Beat, and the San Francisco Renaissance poets?

I found Robert Creeley's claim that

the poetry of the Twenties and Thirties, or that which was dominant at that time, publicly—let's say the poetry of Ransom and Tate and Bishop and that which then came from the younger men such as Jarrell—this poetry, in effect, tended to block off, not to smother but to cover, the actual tradition operating in the poetry of say Zukofsky and Reznikoff and George Oppen, but I feel that the continuity is there, suffers no break, keeps going.¹

Creeley's claim was supported by evidence of the patronage of Zukofsky by the difficult but acknowledged master, Ezra Pound. Instead of being dismayed that Creeley's assertion passed over certain influential poets, I was made eager to learn more about the neglected ones.

Through the influence of my teachers and friends, I discovered the Norton edition of Louis Zukofsky's work, All: The Collected Short Poems, 1923-1964, and then George Oppen's Of Being Numerous, which had won a Pulitzer Prize, and Carl Rakosi's Amulet, both published by New Directions. I enjoyed their work, and found that it was of use in my own writing.

I gradually formed a rough picture: in the early years of the Great Depression, Pound and Williams advised and supported a group of young American avant-garde writers who briefly called themselves "Objectivists," and who early disbanded, leaving, however, an influence on later writers disproportionate to their meager publications and popularity. The "Objectivists" issue of Poetry, edited by Zukofsky,² seemed to have begun a movement which found further expression in works published by two presses: To Publishers in France in 1932, publishing Pound, Williams, and An "Objectivists" Anthology, edited by Zukofsky, and the Objectivist Press in New York City in 1934, publishing Oppen, Reznikoff, and Williams.

My initial overview was not entirely right.

It is true that the movement was disintegrated by the Depression and overshadowed by the success of the more academic tradition descending from Eliot. George Oppen wrote:

T. S. Eliot's immense reputation was already established by the end of the twenties: Pound's somewhat later. It is within the present decade that Williams has achieved a

comparable position. It was Eliot's influence, far more than Pound's, and Eliot's influence by way of Auden which formed the tone of the so-called Academic poets who dominated the field during the forties and early fifties, and whom the Beats assailed. . . . But it is to Williams that the young poets of this school acknowledge the greatest debt . . . ³

But it is not true that the "Objectivists" issue of Poetry started the movement, that at its core was a group with a clear, published policy, that Pound and Williams merely advised them, and that they were all Americans. The rather unstable group was formed by 1929, Pound and Williams learned from as well as taught the others, and, as Donald Davie has insisted, the group should not be limited to a "chauvinistically American context."⁴ Basil Bunting was British, Emanuel Carnevali was Italian, Tibor Serly was Hungarian, and René Taupin was French. The disintegration of their group efforts is shown by the fact that, as early as 1933, Zukofsky disclaimed leadership and even the existence of the movement:

Mr. Zukofsky has used the word objectivist but never Objectivism in connection with the work of certain poets. He disclaims leadership of any movement putatively literary or objectionist. The Writing of Guillaume Apollinaire is intended to dispel such dispensations.⁵

"The Writing of Guillaume Apollinaire" was published in two parts by The Westminster Magazine. The above paragraph appeared with the second installment. The first appeared with the statement: "MR ZUKOFSKY is the leader of Objectivism in America; his work has appeared in the better American and European magazines."⁶

Pound, who most wanted to spur another reform movement in his art, predicted this trouble. From the beginning, Zukofsky showed signs of being a man who would not be pushed into notoriety. Pound had originally suggested to Harriet Monroe, the editor of Poetry, that Zukofsky and Donald McKenzie together edit the issue which became the "Objectivists" issue.⁷ When he got the news that she had asked Zukofsky alone to do it he wrote:

Did I or did I not suggest tempering Zukofsky with McKenzie? Zuk to provide the good sense and McKenzie the conviction of the value of the new group. I dunno what can be done now to make up for that bit of motive power. I may have said "or" instead of "and."

Anyhow I shall urge Zuk to take the March or May in order to have time to get the most dynamite into it.----

...
Waal, waal, my deah Harriet, I sho iz glad you let these young scrubs have the show to their selves, an ah does hope they dust out your office. My only fear is that Mr. Zukofsky will be just too Goddam prewdent.⁸

The prudent Zukofsky never withdrew his disclaimer. In fact, he could be rude to anyone who suggested he had once affiliated with others known as "Objectivists."⁹ Interviewed by L. S. Dembo on 16 May 1968, he confirmed:

In the first place, objectivism . . . I never used the word; I used the word "objectivist," and the only reason for using it was Harriet Monroe's insistence when I edited the "Objectivist" number of Poetry. Pound was after her; he thought the old rag, as he called it, was senile, and so on. He had had his fights with her; he couldn't get across

the people he wanted, and in one of his vituperative letters he told old Harriet the magazine would come to nothing, that there was this youngster who was one of the best critics in America ...well, I'm reminiscing. In any case, Harriet was fond of Pound and after all she was enterprising. Well, she told me, "You must have a movement." I said, "No, some of us are writing to say things simply so that they will affect us as new again." "Well, give it a name." Well, there were pre-Raphaelitism, and dadaism, and expressionism, and futurism—I don't like any of those isms. I mean, as soon as you do that, you start becoming a balloon instead of a person. And it swells and a lot of mad people go chasing it.¹⁰

One must be careful to discriminate between the "ism" and the "ist." Zukofsky claimed that he's not responsible for the former and that the latter was required of him. Neither of these abstractions should detract from the actual work of the writers involved. Nor, however, should the fact that the "ist" was required of him be reason to discredit its validity. Zukofsky admitted that "some of us" had the same intention in writing, but, like Williams, he knew that naming it would bring attention more to the name than to the work, to the abstraction instead of the concrete particulars.

A statement by Williams, written in 1928 about French painting, is supportive. The universal is in the work, not in the theory behind it:

The painters have paid too much attention to the ism and not enough to the painting. I'm for the painting where it is, in America or elsewhere, but I'm not for morons—vigor, worth, fervor—wherever it is and don't be seduced by it save for the pleasure and impregnating point of it—which isn't an ism—or of the moment.¹¹

After all, Zukofsky's fears were confirmed by the events. "Objectivists" ballooned into "Objectivism" and people have gone around chasing it, although sometimes not without reason. If they have been mad, there has been some method in their madness, although doubtless less method than there would have been if Zukofsky had not abandoned his creation so early. As it was, it seemed to me as I stumbled upon them that the picture was obscured with irregularities for which the errors of forty intervening years of neglect could not entirely account.

Oppen and Rakosi, who after about twenty-five years of silence had resumed their careers as poets, were, along with Charles Reznikoff, willingly called "Objectivists," but Zukofsky and Williams and other associated writers such as Kenneth Rexroth, who had kept working through the thirties, forties, and fifties, were not. Was "Objectivism" merely a literary sensation, a temporary and noteworthy collaboration of writers, or was it a viable poetic, an ongoing esthetic program; was it merely a historically focused phase in the careers of individuals or a mode of writing available to groups or careers extending beyond the particular conditions which originally generated it?

There is also a question about the precise membership of the group. Were all forty-five writers associated with "Objectivist" publications "Objectivists?" There were thirty-two writers published in the "Objectivists" issue of Poetry and in An "Objectivists" Anthology, but only eight were included in both. In addition, Zukofsky listed nine writers who could not be published for lack of space and three writers who practiced the principles stated in his "Program: 'Objectivists' 1931."¹²

This problem is magnified not only because Zukofsky's criteria for the group was obscurely written, but also because the term had prior use in other circles. In "'Recencies' in Poetry," his preface to the anthology dated August 1931, written to clear up the confusions of hasty readers of the issue, Zukofsky explained: "The quotes around 'objectivists' distinguish between its particular meaning in the Program of Feb. Poetry, and the philosophical etiquette associated with objectivist."¹³ Whether by "philosophical etiquette" Zukofsky was thinking of A. N. Whitehead's "objectivism," of Leon Trotsky's "historic objectivism," of the uses of the term in the many forms of leftist literature, of its parallel concepts in art and photography, or of the common sense which gave all these uses consistency, these and other senses were available to lead the careless reader astray or to justify his aversion to these arrogant young reformers.

Moreover, during the years of neglect, many lost sight of or faith in Zukofsky's warnings. With the revival of the idea that they had been a group, Zukofsky's term gained meanings extended far beyond describing the historically limited group. Critics have argued intelligently—variously and contradictorily—that "Objectivism" is a movement in poetry which began with a generation of writers under the influence of Ezra Pound and extended to later generations, and that "Objectivism" is a given epistemological stance which can be located in the oeuvres of different writers without reference to time, place, or literary influence, and that

"Objectivism" is an esthetic or a poetic program which is restricted to only a few writers and is described by their life works. "Objectivism" might also be confused with the philosophy of Ayn Rand, which is distinct not only historically (Rand's career as a novelist began in 1936, as a philosopher in 1961) but also in intent and focus. Rand's work supports anti-collectivism, capitalism, and rationality in the service of self-interest. "Objectivism" supports language, creativity, and the full range of human perceptual abilities in the service of the common good. Rand's theory of rights reduces to conditions for creativity. Rand puts art in the service of her ethics; the "Objectivists" put ethics in the service of their art.¹⁴

When discussing the movement in poetry begun by Ezra Pound in the teens, it is useful to distinguish among Imagisme, Imagism, and imagism. Imagisme refers to the poetics invented and practiced by Pound and associated with the work and the writers in Des Imagistes and with the Vorticist movement; Imagism and imagism refer to the popularization of Imagisme by Amy Lowell and hundreds of other writers, which Pound termed Amygism or Impressionism, the former more specifically applying to the six poets of the three anthologies of 1915, 1916, and 1917 titled Some Imagist Poets. Similarly, it is useful to distinguish among "Objectivism," Objectivism, and objectivism. "Objectivism" is associated with the work in the "Objectivists" issue of Poetry, and in An "Objectivists" Anthology; Objectivism with the complete works of the same and related writers; and objectivism with any work which sufficiently embodies or reflects the same principles. These distinctions are confused in this dissertation only where writers whom I quote do not find them necessary.

These extensions, all including Zukofsky's work, were all disclaimed by Zukofsky. Many readers will view the confusion and discount at once both the "ism" and the "ist." However, a painstaking, empirical study of the details of the case will do more than refute those who would claim that

"Objectivism" is groundless; it will give precise definition to any ground discoverable. My strategy has been to begin with the fundamental, to see whether I can induce a poetic from the influences, the persons, and the times which gave the work of these writers birth and character. Such a procedure is in accord with their principles: the universal is found in particulars, not in generalities. If a common esthetic or poetic exists, it will be found within the years of their closest association. Such is the rationale behind this dissertation.

I have limited myself to the actions of six principal characters to reduce the stage to manageable dimensions. This limitation was not meant to exclude any writer from being considered a member of this group in any sense. The six were initially chosen on the basis of later reputations for having been involved in the group, and I found that the meaning of their affiliation was confirmed by the history as it unfolded.

Louis Zukofsky was their chief public relations man, their collaborator, editor, advisor, secretary, and friend. William Carlos Williams was an older compatriot in their common struggle, their friend and advisor, and was published by both their presses. Pound was their major influence, both personally and literally, the person most responsible for the existence of whatever group activity there was. George Oppen learned his craft in the company of Zukofsky and Reznikoff; he founded, with Mary Oppen, To Publishers; and he was involved in and published by The Objectivist Press. Charles Reznikoff's work was the occasion for an initial definition of principles by Zukofsky, and he was involved in and published by The Objectivist Press. Carl Rakosi corresponded with Zukofsky and was well-represented in The Exile, the issue, and the anthology.

Kenneth Rexroth and Robert McAlmon were in similar positions but, unlike Rakosi, did not later claim to be "Objectivists." Basil Bunting is an exception. Although he hasn't claimed to be an "Objectivist," he acknowledges that among the living Pound and Zukofsky taught him much.¹⁵ Bunting met Zukofsky and his friends when he lived in New York City in 1930, and he lived near Pound in Rapallo from 1931 to 1935,¹⁶ where he entertained Zukofsky in his visit to Europe in 1933.

I have limited my study to the events and works of the years between the fall of 1927, when they began to meet each other, and the summer of 1934, by which time they had abandoned their cooperative ventures. The Oppens joined the Communist Party in 1935, deferring their careers in poetry and art. Although George Oppen continued to think of himself as a poet, his second book was not begun until 1958. Carl Rakosi had become a social worker in 1924, and from as early as 1930 had been losing the struggle to write. He didn't publish his first book until 1941, and it was his last effort until he began Amulet in 1965. Although Reznikoff and Zukofsky never stopped writing, Reznikoff was resigned to obscurity from the beginning of his career, so that his involvement in the group required the persuasion of his friends; and Zukofsky was already dissatisfied with the principles set forth in the Poetry issue by the end of 1931.¹⁷ In 1932, he had stopped submitting unsolicited manuscripts, bitter about lack of support.

My method is for the most part descriptive, documentary, and my organization is fundamentally chronological, although for convenience and clarity at certain points I bring together elements which were

more strung out in time. I insert biographical and theoretical discussions at appropriate places in the chronological sequence. I also occasionally refer forward from the present to future events, publications, principles, and issues which help tie the facts together. In the empirical spirit of the investigation I present and analyze many texts: their correspondence, poetry, fiction, and essays, many of them unpublished; and I induce from these texts the similarities and the differences among them and between them and their masters, which gradually and cumulatively define and limit what can be concluded about the "Objectivists" and "Objectivism."

Since this is a history as well as a criticism of the "Objectivists," I present throughout biographic and bibliographic information which, rather than clarifying or developing my critical argument, supports in different ways the existence of the group and its relation to the times. Critics may misunderstand or discount the "Objectivists" only to the extent that they are ignorant of the facts. Documentary is not only in order but necessary because relevant manuscripts have never been published and relevant publications are no longer widely available.

Unfortunately, the record is incomplete and imbalanced. Only a small portion of a writer's life ever gets written down, and in the writing it can lose its original character. We also have to rely on the foresight and the fortunes of the writers, their families, and the recipients of their letters to preserve this material. Rakosi's early manuscripts and his letters to Zukofsky, for example, have been lost. So have most of Oppen's early manuscripts. Partially because Oppen and Reznikoff were living in New York City with Zukofsky, there is no significant correspondence between them. For the point of view of Rakosi, Reznikoff, and Oppen, we have to rely mainly on their hindsight recollections, which can never recapture the past with its original resolution and comprehensiveness.

Consequently, the story is recorded disproportionately from Zukofsky's point of view. He was not only the principal letter-writer of the core group, but their editor and their critic. His communications with Pound in Italy, Williams in Rutherford, and Rakosi in Wisconsin and elsewhere comprise our most detailed record of their association, and his essays our most involved record of their poetics. It is, therefore, especially unfortunate that Zukofsky became so embittered about their cooperative enterprise. His disclaimer has carried great, perhaps disproportionate weight because he did most of the work. Moreover, Zukofsky's original critical formulations were, like Pound's "A Few Don'ts by an Imagiste" in 1913,¹⁸ meant not to be dogma but exploratory approximations which, again like Pound's pronouncements, came to mean slightly different things to each member of the group. In my examination, therefore, I have had to keep in mind that for several reasons Zukofsky deserves the first but not necessarily the last word on the meaning of "Objectivism."

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Section 1 - History 1927-1928

I. Exile

Ezra Pound's short-lived little magazine, The Exile, was the first instrument that brought together a group of writers who were eventually called the "Objectivists." It was their first public meeting place and it expresses many of the principles, especially about the importance of group activity, that Pound continued to impress upon them.

Exile 1 (Spring 1927) contained an editorial which linked literary with public affairs:

As to an editorial program:

The republic, the res publica means, or ought to mean "the public convenience". when it does not, it is an evil, to be ameliorated or emended out of, or into decent, existence.

Further, Pound claimed that if the

capitalist imperialist state . . . will not bear comparison with the feudal order; with the small city states both republican and despotic; either as to its "social justice" or as to its permanent products, art, science, literature, the onus of proof goes against it.¹

The editorials in Exile 3 (Spring 1928) elaborated not only on the crimes of government against the arts—unemployment, censorship, customs, and the passport system—but on the role of the arts and the responsibility of artists in reforming civilization:

Quite simply: I want a new civilization. We have the basis for a new poetry, and for a new music. The government of our country is hopelessly low-brow, there are certain crass stupidities in administration that it is up to the literate members of the public to eradicate.

A new art requires a new civilization, without which it cannot flourish; artists must therefore reform the stupidities of the old.

Pound did not identify "the basis" for the new art. He wrote only: "(Parenthesis: No, dearie, when I say: the basis for a new poetry, I don't mean the vers libre movement as it was in the year 1912.)"² He had in mind, however, the set of discoveries which he had made or recognized during and after his Vorticist period (c. 1914-1916), for which I use in this work Pound's term, in its French form, Imagisme. Imagisme, whose principles are presented in Pound's critical works, is the basis upon which he created the Cantos and edited The Exile. Further, he implicitly identified examples of this "new poetry" based on Imagisme, by including in The Exile work by Louis Zukofsky, William Carlos Williams, Robert McAlmon, Carl Rakosi, and himself, writers who Zukofsky later identified as writing in accordance with "Objectivist" principles.³

These poets, Pound must have thought, had to make exceptions to the traditional isolation of artists from public affairs, since the new suffers the worst under an old regime. Pound complained about artists who do not try to alter the conditions that interfere with their work:

The ivory tower is too often made of paper-maché. Our intellectuals are lacking in savagery, and public affairs have arrived at a state of annoyingness where they interfere with proper conduct of life and the fine arts. Everybody not engaged in actual contribution to art and science ought to turn to and turn out the scoundrels and imbeciles.⁴

Pound wanted the Exile to be a form for the free exchange of good writing and enlightened ideas. His advertisement in the June 1927 issue of Poetry contains the most concise statement of his expectations:

I do not want mss. that any other editor will print. I want mss. which, in a moment of abandon I might say, "other editors are too stupid to print"; or at least mss. that could not appear elsewhere without inordinate complications and delays. . . .

Apart from this, I also want a place where I can speak freely concerning superstitions and idols of the American people which, as Molochs and other superstitious fetiches, are deeply revered by many, and are for that all the more hideous. In the main these arise from two roots, or perhaps it is only one root:

First: The loss, in the United States, of all distinction between public and private affairs; leading to the tumid bureaucracy, the plethora of idiotic "laws," etc., and the character of the bureaucrats.

Second: The tendency inherent in most occidental religions and moral systems, to mess into other people's business before arriving at any harmonization or order in one's own.

There is possibly a third division: the lack in America of any tendency anywhere or in anything; or thinking of anything in relation to any fundamental principle whatsoever; the acceptance of ideas based on forgotten origins, etc., etc. . . .

Writings showing complete neglect of all the advice offered by The Exile's editor in Poetry ten or fifteen years ago, and also obvious imitations of either the editor's or Mr. Eliot's verse, need not be submitted.⁵

In The Exile, Pound placed the work of "Objectivists" or "Objectivist"-associates—Louis Zukofsky, William Carlos Williams, Howard Weeks, Herman Spector, Carl Rakosi, Robert McAlmon, and Ernest Hemingway—in the company of work by other writers whom Pound admired—W. B. Yeats, John Rodker, Samuel Putnam, Benjamin Peret, Payson Loomis, Mark Klorin, Guy Hickock, Joe Gould, Clifford Gessler, R. C. Dunning, John Cournos, Morley Callaghan, Stella Breen and Richard Aldington—surrounded by Pound's opinions on the related needs and necessities of poets, poetics, and politics. The Exile established the "Objectivists" in the tradition in poetry for which Pound was the principal spokesman. "Data," Pound's final editorial in Exile 4, details "the periodicals in which the struggle took place," with names and dates, beginning with the English Review edited by Ford Madox Hueffer (Ford) in 1908 and ending with the Exile, including "Zukofsky and various writers already listed in the contents of the magazine."⁶

II. Groups

Pound's letter to Zukofsky of 25 February 1928 suggested that a group be formed to make use of the Exile.⁷ This was the beginning of an obsession that influenced Zukofsky to consider his friends and

admired elders as potential members of a group to gather around Williams and as contributors to a series of publication schemes that Zukofsky would edit, influenced Harriet Monroe to surrender to Zukofsky the February 1931 issue of Poetry, influenced Zukofsky and George and Mary Oppen to establish To Publishers in France in 1931, and influenced Zukofsky, Williams, Reznikoff, and the Oppens to establish the Objectivist Press in New York in 1933.

On 14 March 1928, Zukofsky wrote Pound that if by such a to the Exile then he had already group Pound meant new contributors asked several, including Whittaker Chambers, Henry Zolinsky, and S. Theodore Hecht—three writers who were published in the Poetry issue—to send Pound their best material.⁸

Pound advised Zukofsky on 31 July 1928 that if he should discontinue The Exile not to try to edit it by himself—as Pound thought Williams’ letters suggested he might—but suggested instead a cooperative, adding that Williams should invite six to ten prospective contributors to dinner to get things going:

What might, and prob. ought to be done, is to form some sort of local council, the Mercure de France had board meeting of all contributors before each issue.

You need, I mean IF you want to run this sort of review, you need a group of people who will meet once a month or once in six weeks.

Tell Bill to invite a select six or ten to dinner, to start with.⁹

Pound elaborated on this idea in a seven-page letter on 12 August 1928, beginning:

As my suggestion you see Bill Wms. seems to have done no harm, but rather to have afforded some pleasure and consolation to both, I further suggest that you make an effort toward restarting some sort of life in N.Y.; sfar as I know there has been none in this sense since old Steiglitz organized (mainly foreign group) to start art.

I suggest you form some sort of gang to INSIST on interesting stuff (books) 1. being pubd. promptly, and distributed properly. 2. simultaneous attacks in as many papers as poss. on abuses definitely damaging la vie intellectuelle.

Pound suggested meeting at a “cheap restaurant . . . as we have done at various times in London,” and asked for Zukofsky’s “opinion on the availability” of Herman Spector, John Price and his friend Wadsworth, Pauline Leader, Joe Gould, Joseph Vogel, Lola Ridge, Mark van Doren or Frieda Kirchwey of the Nation, Mike Gould, Marianne Moore, and June Heap. Howard Weeks, he said, “is a live wire.” He speculated on the “magnetism” needed to attract such writers, and thought that Williams should be able to “get ’em together once,” but said that Zukofsky and Williams (whom he described as a “magnificent patriarchal elm”) could not do it on their own; they needed to have a “more active mechanism.” Pound offered to “subsidize the first meal or two, or some of the fiscally weaker members now and again,” and urged the need for “a NEW grouping,” avoiding “people tainted with the murkn equivalent” of the National Review Francais, “older elements” who were compromised “either toward mediocrity or popularity,” and “the mugs, the y,m,c,a, types, the gorddam seerryous neo-Lippmans” Furthermore, he warned, “keep free of THEATERS . . . As also the gorddam marital ammosphere of N.Y. Poesy Society !!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!! Dont be a society. Dont have officers and by laws.” Finally, Pound wrote:

Idea literature to be dissociated from idea Fifth Ave., idea profit, idea communism. (none of these being any more evil than plain, mountain, river, but are all different concepts, to be kept in relation and not to impinge. What group shd. mean is: convenience of literature, i.e. faculty for printing and distributing without too damnd much bother, secondly, as accessory, fight-against impingements on vie litteraire.¹⁰

Zukofsky responded that everything depended on Williams, whose opinions could not be discovered until he returned from his vacation, but that he would write Vogel, Price, Gould, and the others. Although, as he had suggested, Williams said that he would have a group, he probably would not. Zukofsky's own feelings were that more than five would be too many and that one would be enough. He would like Cummings and Moore, but both would be reluctant. He felt that he could act as the group's representative for the young writers, at least those who he knew, and he mentioned Whittaker Chambers, T. S. Hecht, and Henry Zolinsky.¹¹ This difference of opinion existed between Pound and Zukofsky. Zukofsky wanted the company of older, more established writers, and Pound insisted that the establishment of the younger generation should have priority. Later, although Zukofsky pleaded, Pound refused to be included in the "Objectivists" issue of Poetry, except in the program.

Pound wrote on 31 August 1928 that unless there were enough life to create such a group, he wouldn't care to continue the Exile. He could not see working any longer in isolation for the furthering of no apparent interest.¹² Zukofsky responded on 5 September and 19 September to describe the uncertainty and the difficulty of organizing any group. He reported that collective schemes plainly bore Williams, and that he had received no response from Price, Gould, and Spector.¹³ Pound did not agree that "one is enough" but on 6 September wrote that Zukofsky's limit of five real lives was fairly good. He advised Zukofsky to start small; "make it a cenacle." "The more lofty figures" would drop in later. He said he had written Moore "on the general subject of cenacles" and expected "in due time" "a guarded and circuitous answer."¹⁴

Pound wrote again on 21 October to urge Zukofsky, "cenacle or now [sic] cenacle," to take Gould to dinner with Pound's five dollar check, but to conceal Pound's hand. Insisting he could not himself put more effort into The Exile, Pound complained about the laziness of Williams, especially since he "has profited from former cenacles"; as for Marianne Moore, she thought the business required the backing of a millionaire. Despite these discouragements, however, Pound called for action and warned against succumbing to a sense of futility: "As to influence, we none of us start with having it. The aggregate or sum of . . . etc . . . the assemblage of small prods. etc. is not to be despised. The beak of mosquito more perilous than claws of tom cat."¹⁵

Williams had little time, with his two professions, for cooperative schemes, and Zukofsky preferred to fraternize with great men. Although Williams and Zukofsky needed convincing, Pound had the force to convince them. He considered a "group" to be a beneficial tool. In 1909 he had attended the meetings of T. E. Hulme's unnamed group at The Eiffel Tower, a restaurant in Soho, London, in company with Joseph Campbell, Florence Farr, Desmond Fitzgerald, F. S. Flint, Edward Storer, and Frances Tancred,¹⁶ of whom only Pound and Flint became known in the movement. Pound not only attended but he

gleaned from Hulme several of the tenets upon which he based his own movements. He formed the core of his own little group of Imagistes in 1912 with H. D. and Richard Aldington, who agreed on the three proscriptions to help publicize themselves before they had enough material for a full book. Pound wrote:

Upon many points of taste and of predilection we differed, but agreeing upon these three positions we thought we had as much a right to a group name, at least as much right, as a number of French "schools" proclaimed by Mr. Flint in the August number of Harold Monro's magazine for 1911.¹⁷

Pound published their manifesto with an introduction by Flint in the March 1913 issue of Poetry, and then took eleven poems by Aldington, seven by H. D., and seven by himself and added five by Flint, two by Ford Madox Hueffer (Ford), and one each by Skipwith Cannell, John Cournos, James Joyce, Amy Lowell, Williams, and Allen Upward to comprise his anthology, Des Imagistes, published in 1914. But by then Amy Lowell had appeared on the scene and diluted Pound's authority by the force of her personality and her money.¹⁸ When she offered a more democratic means of publication, a series of anthologies, to Aldington, H.D., John Gould Fletcher, Flint, and D. H. Lawrence, Pound abandoned them to whatever they could understand of his theories. Apparently his "Doctrine of the Image" remained mysterious. By 1914, he joined another movement, Vorticism, and reformulated his theories into more dynamic metaphors to insure them against ineffective popularizations.

In his memoir of Gaudier-Brzeska, who was killed in the Great War, Pound wrote of the fact that Gaudier-Brzeska, Wyndham Lewis, Edward Wadsworth, Mr. Etchells, and himself chose to call themselves "Vorticists": "The name does not imply any series of subordinations, it means simply that we were in agreement concerning certain fundamentals of art."¹⁹ The group did not imply loss of individual identities, nor that anyone in the group was forced to imitate another:

One cannot ask Mr. Synge's admirers to like Mr. Yeats, one does not seek to bring the admirers of Gaudier-Brzeska to the feet of either Mr. Lewis or myself, but when I see in the Press statements to the effect that Gaudier was not a vorticist, or that I am not a vorticist, I am compelled to think that the writers of such statements must have read into the term "vorticism" some meaning which is not warranted by our meanings and our definitions. At no time was it intended that either Mr. Lewis, or Gaudier or myself or Mr. Wadsworth or Mr. Etchells should crawl into each other's skins or that we would in any way surrender our various identities, or that the workings of certain fundamental principles of the arts should force any one of us to turn his own particular art into a flat imitation of the external features of the particular art of any other member of our group.²⁰

The lesson is that agreement on fundamental principles need not (and did not) imply surrender of individual character or practice. Zukofsky's statement that he was never a member of the group of "Objectivists"—in the light of such fundamentals—could only be credited to misunderstanding and personal differences. If we regard the grounds upon which they agreed (even if they had only ten percent agreement), we are justified, according to Pound, in regarding the Objectivists as a group.

Acting on the advice of Pound's letter of 12 August 1928, Zukofsky wrote to Joseph Vogel, who replied to Pound. On 21 November Pound wrote to Vogel his thoughts on "the science of GROUPS," and

asked him to pass his words on to Zukofsky. First, he wrote, "at the start you must find the 10% of matters that you agree on and the 10% plus value in each other's work." Secondly, you should not expect a group to remain constant: "Take our groups in London. The group of 1909 had disappeared without the world being much the wiser. Perhaps a first group can only prepare the way for a group that will break through. The one or two determined characters will pass through 1st to 2nd or third groups." Thirdly, "No use starting to crit. each other at start. Anyhow it requires more crit. faculty to discover the hidden 10% positive, than to fuss about 90% obvious imperfection. You talk about style, and mistrusting lit. socs. etc. Nacherly. Mistrust people who fuss about paint and finish before they consider girders and structure." Fourthly, "You 'all' presumably want some sort of intelligent life not dependent on cash, and salesmanship. . . . Point of group is precisely to have somewhere to go when you don't want to be bothered about salesmanship. (Paradox?? No.)" And, finally, "When you get five men who trust each other you are a long way to a start. If your stuff won't hold the interest of the four or of someone in the four, it may not be ready to print."²¹

Pound's reasoning did not satisfy Vogel. On 23 January 1929, a more antagonized Pound wrote:

Dear Vogel: Yr. painfully evangelical epistle recd. if you are looking for people who agree with you!!!! How the hell many points of agreement do you suppose there were between Joyce, W. Lewis, Eliot and yrs. truly in 1917; or between Gaudier and Lewis in 1913; or between me and Yeats, etc.?

Pound recommended that if Vogel respected decent writing, writing which expressed a man's ideas, then he ought to exchange his with others who have "ideas of any kind (not borrowed clichés) that irritate you enough to make you think or take out your own ideas and look at 'em."²²

A group, as Pound conceived it, meant a few people who decide to work together against their common enemies. In America, economic considerations made it almost impossible for a writer to live by his writing, and so a group must also see that its members get published. Pound believed that the arts and the state, poetics and politics, were distinct but interrelated. Practical contingencies dictate the functions of a group: publicity, publication, "pleasure and consolation," "gathering information," "enlightenment, and stimulus to action." "What a group shd. mean is: convenience of literature, i.e., faculty for printing and distributing without too damned much bother, secondly, as accessory, fight against impingements on vie litteraire."²³

The "Objectivists" were a group in Pound's sense. They learned from, advised, edited, and published each other. And, although it takes more careful attention to perceive, both the grounds of their fundamental agreement and the particulars of their differences provide positive and negative delimitation to the concept of "Objectivism."

III. Publication Schemes

Zukofsky detailed a scheme to publish limited, signed editions by subscription for Pound on 22 October 1928. The series might begin with Pound's How to Read, or his Cantos, or Williams' collected

poetry, but would include work of young men. The only drawback was that he had no money to invest in it. However, once such a thing were established, he claimed, a group would form itself around it; the problem was that there was nothing to involve them. But his letter also noted that he had found new poetic ability in the twenty-year-old George Oppen.²⁴ That conjunction of poets would precipitate the group that Zukofsky came to designate "Objectivists."

Pound then wrote two letters condemning the American publishing industry and approving Zukofsky's book-of-the-quarter scheme. He suggested on 2 November the publication of Williams' collected poems, Gould's History, something by Pound himself, possibly his Cavalcanti, the poems of Zukofsky, Rodker's Adolphe, the tales of McAlmon, Marianne Moore's collected poems, and the work of two strangers, Cockburn and Stokes. The next day, he added E. E. Cummings and enclosed a manifesto on the need for such a club, calling for the repeal of censorship, Article 211 of the U.S. Criminal code. Also: "It would be a great step along if one could start the sale of unbound stuff in the U.S. allee samee la France. pay the author higher % royalty, and charge the buyer less."²⁵

Zukofsky reported on 19 November that although Williams said the scheme sounded good, he would not commit himself to it, and that he would likely remain uncommitted in spite of Zukofsky's persuasions. The same night, Zukofsky's follow-up mentioned that he had been scheming with Gorham B. Munsun and Vogel about publishing. He listed three younger talents: Hansell Bough, R. Ellsworth Larsen, and John Riordan who edited Salient at the New School of Social Research, and forwarded Munsun's request for a manifesto from Pound to be read at a New School dinner on 8 December.²⁶

Pound sent the following on 26 November 1928:

Dear Z:

There is no time to elaborate a program if it is to reach you by Dec. 8.
HWOEVER [sic], main points for any group of "young writers, especially in America."

1.

Neither crap nor flatter each other. Look for the ten percent of possible good in each other's work.

2. Decide or dig out the two or three points on which you agree and fight those issues against the outer darkness [sic].

3. Ivory Tower attitude is ambiguous and misunderstood. It is O.K. if it means attending to your own job, first last and always. One decent poem is more aggressive than any amount a talk round and about the matter.

BUT, aloofness on part of yr. elders went too far, they got superior, couldn't touch contemporary issues.

It is probably not your job to mess into politics, but when the unspeakable filth, bureaucracy, half-men anthropoids etc, who boss the general show trespass on your ground, when they pass legislation definitely interfering with your job, then you shd. fight [sic] like tiger cats, every day and all day, until these infamies are removed.

Among these assaults and infamies are

1.

ART. 211 of the Penal Code.

(Borrow, INSTIGATIONS from BILL, and read it to the blighters) p. 247

THAT represents the unspeakable shit which your fathers have permitted to govern the country. The blue-arsed baboons who passed that are the RULERS of your bleeding and withering country.

2. The same shits, in the later crop have tied up the frontiers with passport system, you can no longer as you cd. have done before 1914, wander about in peace free from interference of ronds de cair.

3. You can't have your intellectual communications circulated at reasonable rate, because of a copyright law, ninety years behind those of all civilized countries.

4. Your frontiers are watched by a set of lice who interfere with the import of books and works of art. Including, mine, Hokusai's and Brancusi's.

YOU HAVEN'T THE LEAST IDEA OF THE POWER YOU ACTUALLY POSSESS; I.E. IF YOU WILL ACT TOGETHER, or of the power actually used by your semblables, the intelligenzia in other literate countries.²⁷

Points 1 and 2 of this manifesto summarize Pound's advice to Zukofsky about the meaning and use of groups: first, that cooperation need not require any more than ten percent agreement, and, second, that a group can work effectively on that ground of agreement against their common enemies. Point 3 elaborates the issue which was haunting Pound more and more, the relation of literature to the state. Here he begs a distinction between politics and the politics of literature. Writers have an obligation to change the atrocities of the latter, which include the present systems of censorship, passports, copyrights, and customs.

In spite of Williams' reluctance, however unfortunately, the uncorrected difficulties against which Pound complained were in league with the Depression to eventually persuade him of the necessity for cooperative publishing. The work Zukofsky suggested for his subscription scheme, i.e., Pound's How to Read and Williams' A Novelette and Other Prose, were published by TO Publishers in 1932 in France to take advantage, as Pound suggested, of the printing of paper-bound books, and to circumvent their difficulties with customs and bookstores, Williams' collected poems were published in hardbound by the Objectivist Press (in which Williams played a greater hand) in 1934 in New York with books by Oppen and Reznikoff.

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Section 2 - Carl Rakosi

I. Biography

In 1923, his junior year at the University of Wisconsin, Carl Rakosi wrote a letter to Miss Purnell, the editor of Palms:

I was born in Berlin, Germany, 1903. Lived in Southern Hungary, Illinois, Indiana, Wisconsin. Had short jobs in factories, stores, farms, telephone and electric companies, etc. Studied at the University of Chicago (1920-21), a puppy without company. Studied at the University of Wisconsin (1921-?) where even my few friends held me for an immoral, obscure boob. Associate editor of the Wisconsin Literary Magazine for one month!¹

The biography on the back leaf of Ex Cranium, Night elaborates:

From 1903 to 1910 he lived with his grandparents in Baja, Hungary, his parents having been divorced. In 1910 he and an older brother, Lester, came to live with his father, Leopold Rakosi, and his stepmother, Rose Kulka. Leopold Rakosi was a watchmaker and had a jewelry store, first in Gary, Indiana, and then, until his death, in Kenosha, Wisconsin.²

In addition to being a Hungarian from Budapest, Leopold was Jewish and his an avid Socialist. Carl Rakosi speculated on the importance of father to him:

What my father used to tell me about Hungarian painters and literature and the whole life-style in Budapest must have influenced my selection of images, color, tone—it's possible. . . . My whole moral stance is exactly my father's. And my interest in society—all my father's. He was an avid socialist all his life. A very idealistic socialist. When he was in Germany, he met the two great leaders of the time, Karl Leibknecht and Rosa Luxemburg, magical names in the history of socialism. But he—I remember he was telling me about hearing them speak. His whole face would light up. The world was never the same for him after this experience.³

Rakosi began as a Freshman at the University of Chicago, but since he was very lonely in Chicago he transferred in his sophomore year to the University of Wisconsin at Madison. There he earned a B.A. in English and an M.A. in educational psychology. Kenneth Fearing was his roommate; he also met Horace Gregory and became a dear friend of Margery Latimer.⁴

Life wasn't easy for this moody and unconventional young man. His letter to Miss Purnell continued:

I am sure sex chose me for destruction; that my tropsemitic-savoir will defeat itself in the way a poetic technique, too conscious of its facture, defeats itself. Since 1920, I have tried to fend off oblivion, and the domination of trifles and quasi-poets by a life of exact ritual. Nothing can convince me that my passive attention will not sometime surprise depth and novelty; nothing but a feeling of non-existence, a humour of calculation. Yet, can these defining words frame anything but the words,

The richness and humorous quality of Rakosi's diction is indicative of Carl Rakosi?⁵
his artistic distance. His poetic integrity is located by a precise facture, by exact ritual, even in a description of his own psyche, since for Rakosi, as for the other "Objectivists," poetic and psychic technique were synonymous.

Rakosi's comparison of the self-defeat of savior and poetic techniques, however, reveals a difference from Zukofsky which Rakosi shares with Oppen and Reznikoff. From the beginning, Zukofsky was unique in being able to combine theory and creation. When I asked Rakosi about his theories in the early thirties, he responded:

You note that in your effort to reconstruct the theory that preceded the Obj. issue of POETRY you lack my theoretical speculations. Well, I must have had some but I couldn't tell you what they were. What I can tell you is that I avoided theory then. I had the feeling that I didn't need it to write and that, in fact, it might harm my work by turning my attention away from creative impulse and making me self-conscious and expository . . . i.e., making me talk about work rather than doing it.⁶

This doesn't mean that he wrote without intention, without precision, but only that his controls were not consciously expressed. Most poets learn rules only to forget them; one can't work as a master until, with the rules internalized, one can devote one's full attention to the game. George Oppen told me that in high school he tried to devise a scale which arranged even vowel-consonantal pairs by their position in the mouth. His awareness of the contiguities of consonants became second nature, a matter not of formulae but of ear: "So I worked with consonants etcetera but mathematical formulae or any kind of formulae I have quite a resistance to even thinking about."⁷

II. Poems, 1927

Rakosi was little-known in 1927; he had only a few poems published in the Nation, Palms, and Two Worlds Quarterly. He moved from Milwaukee to Boston and then to Houston after he submitted his work to Pound, and did not hear of his acceptance and publication until Zukofsky wrote him in November 1930 to ask for submission for the "Objectivists" issue of Poetry. (see [Section 14](#)).

His poems in Exile 2 (Autumn 1927), like "Poem beginning 'The,'" are parodic, but whereas the basis for parody in Zukofsky is literary, in Rakosi it is modern advertising, and whereas Zukofsky's object is personal, Rakosi's is social.⁸ The objects of his sarcasm are the values and conventions of society: in "Characters" the accepted male and female roles, his bravado and her mysteriousness, in "Wanted" the means by which one must rise to popularity, in "Superproduction" the sentimentalisms of the popular romantic movie, and in "Revue" the lack of a means on the stage of the world for the individual to comprehend anything but the urges of his own psyche.⁹

"Characters" seems obscure because of its syntactic abbreviation and verbal indirection, but these features can be one's reward for puzzling the poem out. The almost telegraphic abbreviations, for example: "in grandstand," and "bares biceps," make up for the indirection of much of the diction by their directness, and the poem's strangely mixed, heavily alliterated diction gives the poem a peculiarly humorous quality.

The poem does not draw a simple picture or story; it presents two characters as male and female reflections of personal magnetism. The first, the male, is a stock-market wizard and a baseball hero:

One of our brassy beefeaters
 in grandstand on the continent
 bares biceps to the gaping millions,
 sinks shaft in market, pockets wheat
 holds cornucopia of cash.
 Cheers heard before his private front
 as he lands place with notables.
 We call this tribute in a nutshell,
 a miracle of entertainment.

His ostentatious, ritual display of physical and economic power is symbolically linked to his sex: bares biceps, sinks shaft, and so on through to the climax. The second character, the female, is a romantic virgin:

Speaking of beaus sartorial,
 perplexed young girl hands laugh to love-wise.
 I am a lovely, irresistible girl
 of seventeen, with wonderous witching orbs.
 Why do I blaze in my intangibles
 like any mandolin romantic,
 you, stable as the sterling?

Her subtle, mysterious charm contrasts with the overt showiness of the male. She is perplexed; her power is a covert magic which neither she nor those she impresses can resist. Rakosi ridicules these roles by the manner in which he exaggerates them. The "millions" are "gaping"; his "entertainment" is a "miracle." Her "orbs" are "wonderous" and "witching"; and she blazes in her "intangibles."

"Wanted" is a preposterous advertisement for writers:

WANTED

Expert experiences black on white
 by men who are all white from the midriff
 to the arches through the lowest joints.

Their required whiteness seems an ironic indication of their acceptability to the American public, a superficial innocence.

We train you in accepted imagery,
 the sights of love, and other popular sports,
 and keep your eyes peeled for the gems of gab.

So far, this seems to reveal the young Rakosi's scorn for the popular, accepted poet, but the next two lines suggest that he's also talking about himself, as a Jewish poet whose "larynx" is "without gentile deformations."

Diction or fact, it's all one to the larynx,
 that is, one without gentile deformations.

Rakosi realized that he was sometimes fascinated with sound to the detriment of meaning. In 1968, Rakosi explained:

Well, at first I was very much seduced by the elegance of language, the imaginative associations of words; I was involved in a language world—a little like the world of Wallace Stevens, who was an idol of mine during a certain period. But at the same time, another part of me did not get away from social reality. You'll find in the Youthful Mockeries section of Amulet a lot of scorn for what was going on in the social world.¹⁰

The poem represents Rakosi's discovery that the manner of expression may conflict with the matter of fact, and that the latter is preferable. Although Rakosi retains some of Stevens' techniques, his epistemology is different. The "Objectivist" concern for the veracity of their subject is a characteristic by which they clearly differ from Stevens' romantic-poetic world of the imagination.

Not only is the poem an ironic self-portrait of Rakosi's desires as a poet; it is also a criticism of the society that encourages and rewards those desires. Rakosi ridicules "their behavior, their values, and their way of talking."¹¹ The poet is expected to gain popular acceptance by cribbing the superficial and clichéd standard style; he must be a proud, urbane, and merciless hustler, a man who is conceited from his ability to harm others, one whose strong intentions are merely to master mockery:

The applicant is to be oriented,
a hustler from his collarbutton up,
upright and sly, a snotshooter who spares
no words or pleasant whispers of address.
Report to us at once with sample pomp
and testimonies of urbanity.

Also a man to master mockery,
a spotlihter with strong intentions.

It is likely that the poem appealed to Pound because Pound also suffered from frustration of the same desires, and because both retaliated with scorn for society's norms. Also, Rakosi's style embodies principles shared by Pound. The alliterative form of lines in all four poems is reminiscent of the Old English metric of Pound's "Seafarer" and Canto I. Rakosi's abbreviated style and jammed accents, perhaps influenced by Gerard Manely Hopkins' "sprung rhythm," are consonant with Pound's desire to condense perception into isolated and emphasized words.

"Superproduction" is another instance of self-conscious reporting: a sentimental story of romance and tragedy is reduced to twenty-four short lines. The poetic intention no doubt stems from the Imagiste principle of condensation. Here, however, Rakosi goes beyond Imagisme not only in presenting narrative but in incorporating the reporter's angry and disrespectful point of view:

St. Louis songbirds in Atlanta.
Just a minute. This is romance.
Enter Nancy picking daisies.
Plughole sounds on the verandah.
All under the bedsheets rise.
The eyes thaw open and detect.

Rakosi, as does Zukofsky, recognizes the disintegration of the standard "poetic" forms. "Romance" doesn't allow geographical references, and reduces Nancy to stereotypical actions:

With the change in weather,
 exposed and cooped in cold,
 Nancy solicits your attention.
 Nancy lies finished and deceived,
 a sight to make your eyes fail
 in the heated rooms, poisoned
 by Rudolf's talcum manner.
 Now love is slain and the well-groomed
 lover is wanted in seven states.
 Again perfidy clicks like a billiard ball
 and bounds from unexpected cushions.
 Nancy's beloved body travels
 the long way in a silent box,
 unscented, unattended
 by rhythmical, gloved gentlemen.

The end of the poem rudely offers the absurd panacea of religious salvation:

Voices demand a happy ending.
 Let her find more comfortable quarters,
 then, through any heated savior.

Rakosi's purpose is not merely to ridicule Christianity for its lack of charity. The speaker himself is a "heated savior," a man who would have been willing to take this tragic whore off the streets. His anger at her fate makes her story, like her coffin, uncomfortable for us, too direct, too real.

With economy of means, the poem rivals what Hollywood's "superproductions" achieved with orchestras, choruses, dance groups, and star actors and actresses. Moreover, Rakosi does what Hollywood has never been able to do—he arouses us both against the accepted and admired perfidy of the pleasures of the Rudolf Valentines of the theater, and against the audiences that identify with Rudolf so much as to insist on a happy ending.

"Revue" is a review of revues, and, like Rakosi's other poems in Exile 2, it is critical of its object, which he expands to wordly significance:

They say in dreams they have a peetweet's view
 of happy matters, but around them
 and ahead stand fixtures of morality.
 They scan these properties for some design
 with a macabre elegant complexion,
 but merely turn the screws of introspection;
 turn and pick a ragtime on the strings,
 and drink a soda to a better day,
 when to a maiden's heart, the ace of wits,
 calligrapher and creeping microskeptical,
 equipped like tourists with a wordly light,
 will sing the blues of a gregarian.

Hi Ho the Merri-o. Fashion decrees
shaved jawbones for established gents,
and sees them stripped to animal devotions,
swim in oceanic notions.

Leviathan and bulk of melancholy,
shine with us in miserable motions.

"They" are at once theatrical producers and the leaders of society. Both claim that the intention of their efforts is to bring our happiness, but their "peetweet's view" has the comprehension not a birds-eye but of a bird's brain, a nitwit. They are' Incapable only of entertainment but of providing anything other than "fixtu of morality" which like stage properties must be fabricated, hois and lowered to create the illusion of presentability. They try t effect a complex design "but merely turn the screws of introspect In their inability to see beyond the urges of their own psyches, project their neuroses to torture everyone else into doubting the selves. They deny their responsibility with the pretentiousness a bit performer.

The "Objectivist" ethic is against this kind of pretense; relies like Elizabethan drama on the bare stage and like Confuciu on the priority of putting one's own affairs in order. It does n decree behavior, but helps one to establish equipoise by attentio what with surety exists. Rakosi's criticisms of the social theater imply the virtues of his poetry. It gives no false view of happy matters." Its honesty of character and verity of subject challenges the deceptive decrees that reduce women to objects of the hunt and men to animal devotions.

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Section 3 - Louis Zukofsky

I. Biography

Louis Zukofsky's preface to his [Autobiography](#), is of characteristic brevity:

I too have been charged with obscurity, tho it's a case of listeners wanting to know too much about me, more than the words say. —[Little](#)

As a poet I have always felt that the work says all there needs to be said of one's life.¹

The first sentence is from his roman à clef, [Little: For Careenagers](#), and is spoken by Dala, Zukofsky's persona.² His widow, Celia Zukofsky, has said that all of Zukofsky's work is autobiographical, especially [Little](#), although she also said that he would have denied it.³ His point might have been that his work has objectives that go far beyond the representation of his life. The true subject of [Little](#) is not Louis Zukofsky; it is his son, Paul.

In [Autobiography](#), Zukofsky gives us five brief paragraphs of the bare facts interspersed among twenty-two musical settings composed according to his suggestions by Celia⁴ to eighteen of his poems, which present the meaning of his life.

The songs, whose lyrics, Celia Zukofsky's other work, are always idiosyncratic and elliptically extrasyntactic, are sometimes frivolous ("General Martinet Gem Coughed A-hem, and A-hem, and A-hem" in F Minor, 4/4 time, for four voices),⁵ sometimes elegant ("Little wrists, Is your content My sight or hold, Or your small air That lights and trysts?" in F Minor, 3/4 time, for tenor and piano),⁶ and sometimes simple ("Isn't this a lovely field in winter. Lovely field. Lovely field" —complete, a round, four bars in C Minor, 4/4 time).⁷ They seem therefore a marriage of dissimilar qualities: the ranging tone of the lyrics with their peculiar informality, coupled with the formality of the music.

Zukofsky:

But the bare facts are: I was born in Manhattan, January 23, 1904, the year Henry James returned to the American scene to look at the Lower East Side. The contingency appeals to me as a forecast of the first-generation American infusion into twentieth-century literature. At one time or another I have lived in all of the boroughs of New York City—for over thirty years on Brooklyn Heights not far from the house on Cranberry Street where Whitman's *Leaves of Grass* was first printed.⁸

Zukofsky mentioned the city by which he claimed connection with James and Whitman; he did not mention that he was born of Jewish parents, except obliquely by including himself among the first

generation Americans who infused twentieth-century literature. His father, Rabbi Pinchos, figures in "A"-12:

When I sit down to eat, my father drouses.
 This is a "fall to" bench-trestle
 It leans to the table.
 My guest Henry (masculine)
 What a face has the great American novelist
 It says: Fie! Nancy, finance.
 I have just met him on Rutgers Street, New York
 Henry James, Jr.,
 Opposite what stood out in my youth
 As a frightening
 Copy of a Norman church in red brick
 Half a square block, if I recall,
 Faced with a prospect of fire escapes—
 Practically where I was born.⁹

Here Louis, at the table with his drowsing father, reads James' *The American Scene*, wherein Henry visits a place near where in that very year Zukofsky claims he was born.¹⁰ In writing this passage Zukofsky was following Pound's suggestion: "Still, if one is seeking a Spiritual Fatherland, if one feels the exposure of what he would not have scrupled to call, two clauses later, such a windshield, 'The American Scene' greatly provides it."¹¹ The American scene is more real to Zukofsky than his European fatherland. The contingency of James's presence in it proves a kind of continuity that transcends his sleeping blood-connection to the Old World.

In a letter written to Carl Rakosi in 1931, Zukofsky gave more than the bare facts about his life. The intimacy of his family who spoke Yiddish to one another, was weakened by marriage, death, and cultural difference. Louis was much younger and the only one born in America. The others were born in Russia—his father, Pinchos, about 1860, his mother, Chana, about 1862, his oldest sister in 1888, his sister, Fanny, in 1890, and his brother, Morris, in 1892. They came to America in 1903. His eldest sister died about the age of 25, leaving Louis a nephew; Fanny and Morris were both married and had two sons and a daughter. His mother had died on 23 January 1929, Louis' birthday. They had spoken little to each other. Although this belied a deep mutual understanding, it did them little good. His father—who most religiously followed the philosophy of Spinoza—was resigned to poverty. The family could not sympathize with Louis' commitment to literature and writing, which was not a part of their lives.¹²

Even so, Louis' family influenced his career. First, his father's devotion to Spinoza is reflected by the constant presence of Spinoza in his own work, for example, in "Prop. LXI" and the second half of "A"-9.¹³ Secondly, as he admitted to Rakosi, just as his father's pride in his unpretentious nature glorified his own abilities, although Louis could not play or read a note, he said he would like to learn about music, to drive a car, to operate machines, or after the revolution to take advantage of his undeveloped talent as a teacher.¹⁴ And, thirdly, Louis received from them a rich Yiddish culture.

In his Autobiography, Louis wrote:

My first exposure to letters at the age of four was thru the Yiddish theaters, most memorably the Thalia on the Bowery. By the age of nine I had seen a good deal of Shakespeare, Ibsen, Strindberg and Tolstoy performed—all in Yiddish. Even Longfellow's *Hiawatha* was to begin with read by me in Yiddish, as was Aeschylus' *Prometheus Bound*. My first exposure to English was, to be exact, P.S. 7 on Chrystie and Hester Streets. By eleven I was writing poetry in English, as yet not "American English," tho I found Keats rather difficult as compared with Shelley's "Men of England" and Burns' "Scots, wha hae."¹⁵

Yiddish theater was then a strong international, cosmopolitan force. Kenneth Rexroth wrote:

After 1900 Jewish influence became increasingly strong and has endured, decreasing again, until the present time. From about 1910 to 1925 New York was one of the major capitals of Yiddish culture, a strong competitor with Warsaw or Frankfurt. Plays by the leading European playwrights were performed in the Yiddish Theater. A majority of the leading Yiddish writers came to America to visit, many of them to stay. Yiddish magazines and newspapers discussed the literature and drama, philosophy, and political theories of Europe for a general audience, when such issues were known only to a handful of intellectual English-speaking Americans. The influence was reciprocal. The American Populist writers were translated into Yiddish, or read in English by Yiddish writers. The poet Yehoash was a disciple of Ezra Pound. The influence of Yiddish writing itself on American literature in English was practically nil. In that direction the influence was largely personal or seminal and postponed for a generation, until the children of Yiddish speakers began to write in English. . . . Since this extraordinarily active Yiddish culture was isolated both by language and prejudice, it is without doubt the most underestimated factor in the American intellectual synthesis.¹⁶

To the Yiddish, Zukofsky's work owes not only an early literary and philosophical education of cosmopolitan, international, and classical scope, but, in part, a Jewishness whose effect is ubiquitous and subtle. Also, it owes much of its subject-matter and its humor. His writings, especially "Poem beginning 'The,'" "A", and Little, contain routines, parodies, and puns reminiscent of the Yiddish theatrical tradition.

He met Celia Thaew in 1933 and they married in 1939. It is to her talent and Louis' promptings that we owe the music. One child, Paul, born in 1943, was taught at home and became a virtuoso violinist, making his debut in Carnegie Hall at the age of thirteen. Although Louis never learned to play an instrument or read a note,¹⁷ few if any modern writers are more concerned with the musical basis of poetry and require of their readers as much musical intelligence as does Louis Zukofsky.

II. Poem beginning 'The'

Zukofsky, a child of Yiddish speakers who wrote in English, like Yehoash, a disciple of Ezra Pound, translated Yehoash into English and put him into a macaronic structure with Bach, Bede, Beerbohm, Beethoven, The Bible, Chaucer, Cummings, Dante, Norman Douglas, Elijah, Eliot, John Erskine, Heine, Herrick, Horace, Aldous Huxley, Henry James, Joyce, Lawrence, Christopher Marlow, George Moore, Marianne Moore, Mussolini, Pater, Poe, Pound, Robinson, Shakespeare, Sophocles, Spengler, Max Stirner, Villon, Franz Werfel, Virginia Woolf, and others in his "Poem beginning 'The,'" which appeared in Pound's Exile 3.

This role-call is taken from the notes which precede the poem, in which each item is followed by the number of each line in the poem which refers to the item. This list suggests the parodic nature of the poem. The fact that in a poem of 330 numbered lines there are over 79 allusions to at least 52 different persons and things is indicative of Zukofsky's intention. His playfulness is especially shown by the three items for which he gave other than the normal literary references:

Obvious—Where the Reference is Obvious, *** Power of the Past, Present, and Future
 —Where the reference is to the word Sun, *** Symbol of our Relatively Most Permanent
 Self, Origin and Destiny—Wherever the reference is to the word Mother.¹⁸

Although the motifs of Sun and Mother help unify the poem, their use is partly pretentious. There are at least twenty-one lines which either refer to or contain the word "Mother." For some of them this noted designation is facetious. Similarly, to insist that the lines

313 O my son Sun, my son, my son Sun!
 would God
 314 I had died for thee, O Sun, my son, my
 son!

refer to "Power of the Past, Present, and Future" is to stretch a point to comic dimensions. The lines are taken from the words of King David in 2 Samuel 18:33, but with the word "Sun" substituted for "Absalom" they have an insincere effect.

As one begins the poem, the device one first notices is the overlaying of voices, and confounding of allusions. Here are the first five lines:

1 The
 2 Voice of Jesus I. Rush singing
 3 in the wilderness
 4 A boy's best friend is his mother,
 5 It's your mother all the time.

The first line, "The," begins the poem as the title promises. Lines 2 and 3 are adapted from Matthew 3:3, in which Jesus associates Isaiah's prophesy with John the Baptist: "For this is he who was spoken of by the prophet Isaiah when he said, 'The voice of one crying in the wilderness.'" In Zukofsky's poem, "one" is replaced by the character "Jesus I. Rush," who is singing, not crying. "I" is Mr. Rush's middle initial. His last name, "Rush," reminds me of Moses, who is associated with the bulrushes, or, to stretch it a little, with the burning bush of Exodus 3 and 9. Mr. Rush is thus an amalgam of Moses, John, Jesus, and "I," which could represent Zukofsky or the reader, singing. This lamination of persons onto the archetypal figure is typical of Zukofsky. If "Rush" is also a verb, then this multi-person is said to rush into the wilderness singing, as appropriate poetic action for a poem in a magazine titled Exile. I think of the burning bush because the next line, although absurdly in the language of a "Popular Non-Sacred Song," echoes the fifth commandment. Or better, since we are given the voice of Jesus, they echo Mark 7:10, in which Mark records the voice of Jesus quoting Moses quoting God's commandment.

The first five lines already both confirm and confute the title of this first movement, from Chaucer's "Parliament of Fowls": "And out of olde bokes, in good feith."¹⁹ Like Chaucer's narrator's dream, Zukofsky's poem is from old books, but of questionable faithfulness. The old books provide for Chaucer's narrator only the seed for a dream which he will search in vain to find in a book, unless he has a self-reflection to consider his own.

The first movement, of 60 lines, surveys the state of Western literature, beginning with the voice of Jesus in the Bible and ending with the voices of rabbis living on Cathedral Parkway in New York City. In lines 1 through 13, Christ is linked to Odysseus, to Aldous Huxley's Tyrrhenian, and to Joyce in Paris by the epic themes of banishment and the power of women. These, in turn, merge with the theme of the loss of paradise. In a series of ten questions, Zukofsky ponders the state of modern literature. Norman Douglas' South Wind, Pound's Mauberley, D. H. Lawrence's Lovat, Joyce's Stephen Daedalus, Marianne Moore's Observations, and George Moore's Kerith, compared rhetorically to Eliot's waste land.

- 25 Are dust in the waste land of a raven-
winged evening.
26 And why if the waste land has been explored
traveled over, circumscribed,
27 Are there only wrathless skeletons exhumed
new planted in its sacred wood,
28 Why—heir, long dead,—Odysseus, wandering of ten years
29 Out-journeyed only by our Stephen, bibbing
of a day,
30 O why is that to Hecuba as Hecuba to he!

Most of the poem's references and allusions are remade to fit Zukofsky's purposes. Line 30 echoes Hamlet's lines obliquely referring to his mother: "What's Hecuba to him, or he to Hecuba, that he should weep for her?"²⁰ Here Hamlet queries the mock passion of one of the players and ridicules his own lack of action. The implication is that Zukofsky's poem is an attempt to achieve more than the Eliotic "wrathless skeletons" whose monopoly over American literature the poem challenges. It is meant to be a work for which one will look in vain in "olde bokes."

Zukofsky felt that The Waste Land, unlike the Cantos, was flawed by structural redundancy. In "American Poetry 1920-1930," he wrote that the meaning of the whole Cantos cannot be discovered in its part: "One cannot pick from them a solitary poetic idea or a dozen variations of it, as out of Eliot's Waste Land, and say this is the substance out of which this single atmosphere emanates." And his footnote to this discussed his own reply to Eliot:

Zukofsky's Poem Beginning "The" (1926) written as a reply to people concerned with the end of the world, the dedication and attendant numbers intended as a kind of hors d'oeuvre not as an aid to digestion, is obviously more of a thought sequence than The Waste Land is from movement to movement. The images in The; are incidental and its intention is hardly an atmosphere. The result is certainly not an improvement on The Waste Land but something different—something perhaps nearer to an intellectual control (one doubts its value), to statement than pointilism. For the rest, since there is probably no relationship one should distinguish differences—i.e., Z. perhaps uses

stress and consonance too much, with too little relief of the lighter vowel qualities characteristic of the French hexameter which Eliot adapted for English use.²¹

Lines 31 through 44, interweaving lines which refer to the French language and a popular song with New York colloquialisms and E. E. Cummings' coinages, represent the material that Zukofsky has to work with in trying to "make it new." Lines 45 through 53 (these parts are separated by strophe breaks) represent Zukofsky's ironic release from the absurdly melodramatic: the college cheer, Christopher Marlow's Edward II, Poe's beating heart, and Virginia Woolf's Dalloway, awakening! In the last section of the movement, Zukofsky dares to challenge his Jewish roots, which he has to transcend to live by his art.

The "SECOND MOVEMENT," whose title, "International Episode," is credited to Henry James, is "the aftermath / 62 when Peter Out and I discuss the theater." In the first part; lines 61 through 75, they discuss Dante, Franz Werfel's German "Jew goat-song" (a literal translation of "tragedy"), the Greek tragedians, and the funereal power of Mussolini. Death and the dream-life of the stage are linked; his metaphor is from Macbeth V, v. 24-26:

Life is but a walking shadow, a poor player
That struts and frets his hour upon the stage
And then is heard no more . . .

The themes of shadow-life, dream, and death prepare us for the next two parts, lines 76 through 92 and lines 93 through 103, an elegy to "Lion-heart, frate mio." Lines 104 through 113 are transition from this lament to a translation of a poem by Yehoash, which continues through line 129. Yehoash's poem, about a Bedouin resurrected to leap on his steed and embrace the desert night, is a response to the question "109 What, in revenge, can dead flesh and bone make capital?" The answer is poetry, for here one can resurrect the dead. The lines:

114 With the blue night shadows on the sand
115 May his kingdom return to him

could be understood to mean: "With his walking shadow on the page, may his life return to him." There is an excellent discussion by Harold Schimmel of Zukofsky's use of Yehoash. Schimmel compares this part with a similar passage in "A"-4:

In both cases Zukofsky choses to exhibit Yehoash first by a piece of exotica (a Bedouin lyric in "Poem," Samuri in "A"-6), some folk motifs, and a hymn to the sun. The strangeness of introducing foreign materials via Yiddish is apparent and allowed under the banner of "Song's kinship." Still, "Shimannu-San, my-clear star" as an illustration of "the courses we tide from" is not without some irony.²²

These two phrases are from "A"-4, but they match the theme of the international nature of literary roots in both poems. The Yiddish theater in Zukofsky's youth was a strong international force. Schimmel continues:

With the two exceptions of the Yiddish of Yehoash and the Yiddish of Jewish Folk Song most of Zukofsky's references are slapstick or parody. The only sequential lines of any significance truly quoted are those from the Yiddish. . . . Zukofsky's contribution . . . to the succeeding stanza is mainly in way of padding to keep Yehoash's meter. Translation follows syllable for syllable.

But now the scene shifts quickly. As Schimmel notes, "Transitions are often absent or absent-present in the mode of vaudeville."²³ The "lion-heart" elegy and the Bedouin translation become like two theater productions discussed and discarded by Zukofsky and Peter Out:

130 I've changed my mind, Zukofsky
131 How about some other show—

From here, the movement continues in an absurdly comic manner. Lines 132 through 135 list works by E. A. Robinson, Spengler, D. H. Lawrence, and others as if they were plays on Broadway. In a ribald, punning playfulness, the following titles are suggested by the name of Zukofsky's sidekick, Peter Out:

144 "Tear the Codpiece Off, A Musical
Comedy,"
145 Likewise, "Panting for Pants,"
146 "The Dream That Knows No Waking."

This is not simply impertinent. The last line refers to the themes in the first part of the movement, and the list of literary plays mirrors the survey in the first movement.

The tone of this part and that of the first part contrasts with the tone of the elegy and the translation which they frame. Zukofsky's statement seems to be that true art, art which makes the dead live, must exist in the context of the cheap, superficial, and witty showmanship that for a popular audience recreates the cosmic into the comic.

The "THIRD MOVEMENT: In Cat Minor" is only 15 lines long, 146 through 161. The metaphor of the title reminds us of the musical structure of the entire poem, divided into "movements" in which each numbered line is like a bar of music. The relation between poetry and music will concern these poets for their entire careers. Here, "Cat Minor" is Zukofsky's linguistic substitute for a minor chord. (It is also a new constellation, a complement to Canis Major.) The repeated phrases in the first lines of each of the five, three-lined stanzas, rhymed X, A, A, make this movement the most lyrical of the poem. Its combined themes of the complaint and the carpe diem (the last line, "161 — And r-r-run--the Sun!," alludes to the end of Marvel's "To His Coy Mistress") seem delightfully playful from the mouths of a chorus of cats.

In the "FOURTH MOVEMENT: More 'Renaissance,'" lines 162 through 185, Zukofsky continues his search for a rebirth of his art, for something other than Eliotic skeletons. The title refers to Pater's work, and there is irony in the fact that "More" implies that such renewals have become a frequent, old-fashioned occurrence:

162 Is it the sun you're looking for,
163 Drop in at Askforaclassic, Inc.,
164 Get yourself another century,
165 A little frost before sundown.
166 It's the times don'chewknow,
167 And if you're a Jewish boy, then be your
Plato's Philo.

Line 163 is attributed, in the notes, to "Modern Advertizing," line 165 to Pater, line 166 to "The King's English," and line 167 to "Myself." Line 165 is a parody of Coleridge's "Frost Before Midnight." Zukofsky's attitude toward the classics is made very clear by the following parody of a poem by Poe, "To Helen," lines 168 through 182. Its first stanza follows:

168 Engprof, thy lectures were to me
 169 Like those roast flitches of red boar
 170 That, smelling, one is like to see
 171 Through windows where the steam's galore
 172 Like our own "Cellar Door."

This mimics Poe's stanza:

Helen, thy beauty is to me
 Like those Nicean barks of yore,
 That gently, o're a perfumed sea,
 The weary, way-worn wanderer bore
 To his own native shore.²⁴

The romantic mediterranean air of the original is entirely corrupted: not Helen or beauty, but Engprof and lectures; not unreal ships on an unreal sea but red meat on a New York City street. Zukofsky's deformations have a point to them. The time of "poetic" subjects and diction is past. The poet is free to indulge in what is closest to him, even if it's as mundane as a lecture or as crass as a local deli.

Hugh Kenner wrote: "'Say it,' wrote Williams, 'no ideas but in things.' And say it, no 'poetry' but in poems. Wallace Stevens was the Last Romantic, the last poet of a long era that believed in 'poetry,' something special to be intuited before the words had been found, something of which one's intuition guided the precious words."²⁵ Kenner then credited Pound and Williams for "a new species of composition: the American Poem." Although this species is relatively new, accepting for the first time as object the "crass and quotidian," it is not strictly American, not when among its originators are T. E. Hulme and Ford Madox Ford, and among its continuers Basil Bunting. Nevertheless, Kenner's concept of the poetic as something which inheres in the poem is exactly the "Objectivist" understanding.

Wallace Stevens, writing a preface for the Objectivist Press edition of Williams' Collected Poems 1921-1931, was compelled to characterize Williams' verse as "anti-poetic." In spite of the fact that for Stevens to admire Williams at all Williams had to be considered a romantic poet, he was "rarely romantic in the accepted sense." Williams becomes in Stevens' mind a man whose sentimental spirit requires the cure of its opposite, the "anti-poetic." The anti-poetic is attributed to Williams' root in realism, in imagism: "The implied image, as in YOUNG SYCAMORE, the serpent that leaps up in one's imagination at his prompting, is an addition to imagism, a phase of realism which Williams has always found congenial." This anti-poetic realism concerns the "exceptional view of the public dump and the advertising signs of Snider's Catsup, Ivory Soap and Chevrolet cars" from the poet's ivory tower.²⁶

Williams' concern for the objects of realism: the secular, the corporal, the temporal, the local, is something he shares with Zukofsky and the other "Objectivists"; the figures on the billboards advertising

lyrically beautiful notwithstanding the absurd and unconventional bestiality of its subject. Together, they represent the mother's sentimental ideal and they subtly contrast with Zukofsky's perspective of "gastanks, ruts, cemetery-tenements." This part begins by asking the wild geese "Where lies the passage" to paradise, presumably the paradise whose loss is noted in the first movement. "17 But why are our finest always dead?" is echoed by: "210 Where has our sun gone forth?" In this Eden, ducks float "On a cobalt stream," "A barefoot shepherd boy" tends "jaded sheep," and "An old horse strewn with yellow leaves" rests "By the edge of a meadow." Horses continued to fascinate Zukofsky. Here the horse in the Yehoash translation is the occasion for an invocation to the Lord for the protection of "224 Horses that pass through inappreciable woodland. . . . 230 Reared in your sun." This theme echoes the grace and freedom of the steed in the Bedouin translation, lines 116 through 126; the horse, like Pegasus, is a metaphor for poetry.

The movement ends with a message characteristically put in another's voice, creating a potential for irony, three lines from Heine and one by Zukofsky, line 268, inserted:

266 I, Senora, am the Son of the Respected
 Rabbi,
 267 Israel of Sargossa,
 268 Not that the Rabbis give a damn,
 269 Keine Kadish wird man sagen.

Zukofsky is also the son of a respected Rabbi, but line 268 gives away his hand: he is bitter towards the group of which he is a part. Although, through Heine, he says he will say a little Kaddish, his Kaddish is already said; he ironically participates in a ritual of his people to celebrate his distance from them.

The last, the "HALF-DOZENTH MOVEMENT: Finale, and After," wraps up the themes of the previous movements as would a musical postlude in a fugal structure, and leaves us with a promise of things to come. Lines 270 through 280 translate the Jewish folk song "Raisins and Almonds," as sung by the son to his mother. In turn, lines 281 through 285 are sung by the mother to her son. In the first part, lines 270 through 296, we see again the cradle of a mother's overprotection (lines 270, 282), the cat of the third movement (line 280), the racial fairness, "Even in their dirt," of the Angles (line 291), and Zukofsky's gastank perspective (line 294).

In the second part of this movement, lines 297 through 308, Zukofsky contemplates an affair with the attractive "Helen Gentile." This echoes Homer's and Poe's Helens and the theme of the power of women. But she's impossible for the young Jew:

303 Angry against things' iron I ring
 304 Recalcitrant prod and kick.

The next part is attributed to J. S. Bach and "Myself" (line 309) and Beethoven's Ninth Symphony (310-312). As if in reaction to Helen Gentile, Zukofsky embraces Life and God by its magic. Next, lines 313 and 314 parody King David's lament for Absalom. The theme is the value of life, symbolized, as previously in the poem, by the sun. Finally, in the last two parts, lines 315 through 326 and

lines 327 through 330, sun, son, and mother come together to sing a song 3-19 they all can sing, their "Sun-song" of eternal love, endless strength, and future fruitfulness:

327 How wide our arms are,
 328 How strong,
 329 A Myriad years we have been,
 330 Myriad upon myriad shall be.

On the basis of this poem, Pound knew Zukofsky was a poet who was "making it new," who was not merely repeating, as were most writers of the time, the over-used innovations of previous writers, but who had progressed beyond what most had not yet understood. Pound therefore began a correspondence with Zukofsky which carried him to the end of his life. He also recommended to his good friend Williams that he take on this younger man as a friend and fellow poet, and insisted to Harriet Monroe of Poetry and to Lincoln Kirsten of Hound and Horn and to Nancy Cunard of the Hours Press and to Samuel Putnam of the New Review and to T. S. Eliot of Criterion that they publish Zukofsky. With only limited success in establishing Zukofsky's reputation as a writer and a critic, Pound nevertheless persuaded Zukofsky to become the center of an informal group of working writers who tried to establish their reputation for being, they believed, the developers of the modernist tradition, the originators of lasting poetic accomplishment, and the forerunners of a new wave of poetic energy.

III. Mass-consciousness

Our first record of Zukofsky's correspondence with Pound is 18 August 1927, when Pound wrote Zukofsky about Zukofsky's submissions to Exile, and 6 September 1927, when Zukofsky sent Pound corrections for "Poem beginning 'The'" and asked if Pound would indicate which of five volumes of unpublished Zukofsky should be destroyed.²⁸ This correspondence began a friendship which lasted the rest of their lives. Pound's generosity in helping establish the careers of those he admired is well-documented. In this case, he went even further than getting Zukofsky published; he began to advise Zukofsky on matters relating to his future career as a writer. In turn, Zukofsky not only read proofs and edited work of Pound's friend Williams for Exile, but kept Pound in touch with developments in America.²⁹

In his letter to Zukofsky of 5 March 1928, Pound accepted, for Exile 4, "the prose, both the Cummings and the Preface," by which he referred to "Mr. Cummings and the Delectable Mountains" and "A Preface."³⁰ This preface had originally been written for a series of eighteen poems (including "Constellation: In Memory of V. I. Ulianov"—Lenin). In it Zukofsky reconciled the correspondence of each poem to its epigraph from Bunyan's allegory, Pilgrim's Progress. He felt his poems were "indicative" of "a singular sociological myth as great in its way, and as binding on peoples, as the solar myths of the ancients in their times." The idea came from Georges Sorel, who postulated the socialist "march towards deliverance" as such a myth. According to Sorel, the revolutionary pessimist accepts deliverance by violence because he is bound by two conditions: the "feeling of social determinism" and the "conviction of our natural weakness." Zukofsky wrote:

—it becomes clear why the quotations accompanying my 18 poems, indicative of such a singular sociological myth as mentioned above, are from Pilgrim's Progress.

Because, Bunyan, who had a conception of Deliverance by the right way, straight and narrow, was, if similitudes are employed, a Revolutionary pessimist with a metaphysics such as George [sic] Sorel wrote of in his Reflections on Violence . . .

The passage which follows in Sorel's French tells us, in translation, that pessimism "is a philosophy of conduct rather than a theory of the world; it considers the march towards deliverance as narrowly conditioned. . . The pessimist regards social conditions as forming a system bound together by an iron law which cannot be evaded, so that the system is given, as it were, in one block, and cannot disappear except in a catastrophe which involves the whole." Deliverance by violence is both determined and made necessary by social conditions. Zukofsky continued:

In these 18 poems, then, the pessimistic philosophy of proletarian violence, the only contemporary Deliverance to minds thinking in terms of destiny and necessity.

Zukofsky felt that poets in his age must do more than, as Eliot wrote, "be difficult." "If they are to outlive their experience— a refined sensibility for appreciating love, war, death, El Greco, Krazy Kat, Negro Spirituals and relativity,—and mean anything to the future," they must "subordinate the cries and twists of our present generation to the creation" of the new myth.³¹

Pound noted a discrepancy between the sensibility stated in this preface and the technique implicit in Zukofsky's poems (except for "Constellation"). He wrote:

Preface appears to me NOT pref. to poems enclosed but to poems as yet unwritten. You postulate a new sensibility or a new state of mind, but the verse still boggles along with the cadence and diction of 1890: obviously is botch.
(all except the Lennin [sic], which I am ready to print, if you care to detach from the rest; though even that (saved by contents and drive) is not wholly in language of post-1917).

Zukofsky's cadence and diction was archaic; his technique was not proof of his "new sensibility." Pound felt that the antidote for this "mediaeval habit" was "mass-consciousness":

C. S. Wood has been writing intelligent stuff on massconsciousness. One cant fall back merely into mediaeval habit of allegorical utterance: Everyman speaking, and speaking old fashioned pre-unanimiste english [sic].

Cadence of this stuff is its weakest component. Not by any means up to the level of Poem begining THE.

Jah, art iss long.
Gertie and Jimmie both hunting for new langwitch, but hunting, I think, in wrong ash-pile.

The writer's ethic, his technique, and the times must all be in harmony. The fragmentation of the age did not assure the validity of writing for everyone. Modern masses are not "detached individs. capable of sympathy," so the writer must write not allegorically but, as perhaps Pound would say, directly. This necessitates cadence and diction which precisely affect the object—not literary precedent but the English language itself. The problem was to craft a language that could relate the poet and the public. Pound continued:

Re language: poets since Adam's uncle Joe, have been trying to speak "for humanity," for NOT merely themselves but for "everyone" :::: considered probably AS a series of detached individs. capable of sym-pathy or of looking out from same critical point as author.

Suggest you look up ALL Jules Romains Unanimiste stuff (vide my Instigations, in pub. lib. if not obtainable elsewhere) :: that was an attempt, J. R. found something but not enough. That was 1911 and 12.

Not sure one can write TO the future. IF a man can manage to write IN the present it is about the apogee of human potential.³²

In Instigations, Pound devotes fourteen pages to Jules Romains' work, including a section on Unanimisme which is largely Romains' "Reflexions."³³ Unanimisme is a theory about the importance of groups which requires, instead of the Newtonian analytic consciousness of humanity as a collection of individuals, an Einsteinian synthetic consciousness of a field in which groups of humanity without definite limits (like time and space, or like the emotions, for example, of love and friendship) merge with one another. In this field, as Romains observed of beings in space, "everything overcrosses, coincides, cohabits."³⁴ Although Pound retained his "full suspicion of agglomerates,"³⁵ he recognized the potential poetic validity of Romains' "organic consciousness." As Romains wrote:

we must know the groups that englobe us, not by observation from without, but by an organic consciousness. And it is by no means sure that the rhythms will make their nodes in us, if we be not the centres of groups. We have but to become such.

The men who henceforth can draw the souls of groups to converge within themselves, will give forth the coming dream, and will gather, to boot, certain intuitions of human habit.³⁶

Zukofsky, urged by Pound to form a group to foster the literary life in America and given the editorship of Poetry for February 1931, named such a group "Objectivists." In his "Program: 'Objectivists' 1931," Zukofsky defined "An Objective" in poetry as "Desire for what is objectively perfect, inextricably the direction of historic and contemporary particulars."³⁷ This definition combined, as Pound advised, the ethic, the technique, and the times. The basis of the "Objectivist" poem, like the basis of Romains' groups, is a convergence, and that convergence requires a political awareness, an "Organic consciousness" of "historic and contemporary" conditions. Although Romains found something, he did not find enough. Zukofsky's poetics contain two criteria of value not in Remains' Unanimisme. For the first, "sincerity," the poet must limit his "organic consciousness" to something more precise than "rhythms" which "make their nodes in us." He must attend to "particulars" and the direction he extrapolates from them must be "inextricable." For the second, "objectification," the poet must realize the convergence of nothing so vague as the "souls of groups" for "the coming dream," whose interpretation may depend on totalitarian arbitration. He must achieve "what is objectively perfect," whose determination depends not on any individual's intentions but on matters of poetic craft.

Zukofsky agreed with Pound's suspicion of agglomerates, and would have been happier if "Objectivism" could have been limited by the kind of precision of which only poems are capable, but yet his new poetics is based on consciousness of his present age, leaving behind the archaisms of his juvenalia.

Zukofsky responded to Pound on 20 March 1928 to both agree and disagree. Considering Pound's criticism, Zukofsky realized that it was not the language of the eighteen poems that was archaic; it was the sensitivity that created the language. This sensibility was archaic because it was tied by nature to Spinoza's natura naturana, which results in a Jewish humility unresponsive of the revolutionary philosophy described in "A Preface." Zukofsky was tied yet to imperialism; all he could do (misquoting Pound's "If a man can manage to write in the present") was to "unite" the present. Unlike Bunyan's Christian, Zukofsky could not entirely escape the masses' "slough of despond." But, even so, he realized a mass-consciousness more genuine than Romaine's idealization of groups.³⁸

"Natura naturans," nature as creator, is a key phrase for Zukofsky. He took his definition of "An Objective" (for "Program: 'Objectivists' 1931") from "A"-6, where, first, he opposed naturans with naturata: "Natura naturans—/Nature as Creator,/Natura Naturata —/Nature as created," and, second, he paired it with "An Objective":

An objective—rays of the object brought to a focus,
An objective—naturans—desire for what is objectively perfect,
Inextricably the direction of historic and
contemporary particulars.³⁹

The fact that "objective" is syntactically equivalent to naturans and not naturata signifies that the mind should be active and not passive and that the "Objectivist" poem should deal with conception, not merely perception. In Gaudier-Brzeska: A Memoir, Pound wrote:

There are two opposed ways of thinking of a man: firstly, you may think of him as that toward which perception moves, as the toy of circumstance, as the plastic substance receiving impressions; secondly, you may think of him as directing a certain fluid force against circumstance, as conceiving instead of merely reflecting and observing."⁴⁰

This distinction helped Pound distinguish Vorticism ("which is, roughly speaking, expressionism, neo-cubism, and imagism gathered together") from futurism (which "is descended from impressionism").⁴¹ Zukofsky insisted on the consequences of Pound's distinction. As a necessary antidote to the dilutions of Imagisme in the twenties, "Objectivism" undercut mere phanopeia with logopoeic structures. As Williams put it, "The mind rather than the unsupported eye entered the picture."⁴²

In Ethics, Spinoza wrote that emotion may either be an ACTION (active) or a PASSION (passive), and that the goal of a wise man is the virtue of living according to reason, that is, of acting according to his own nature rather than suffering the nature of other things.⁴³ At the same time, however, the result of this effort at responsibility is "humility" because one must become aware of the extent that our emotions are passive, that our natures are created instead of creating. Such humility, then, is Jewish not because Spinoza was Jewish but because, as Carl Rakosi wrote, "the historical way of looking at sin" is that one should take responsibility for the sins of others as if they were one's own:

In this view every member of the "congregation of Israel" . . . that is, all Jews . . . has to acknowledge not only his own sins but also the sins of others as if they were his own, and carry the responsibility for them and beg to be forgiven for them and promise to

reform, a thing not only illogical but unjust, though historically understandable, for the covenant which God made with the ancient Israelites was not with the individual but with the people as a whole.⁴⁴

Zukofsky must have been aware that the Jew is in greater danger than the gentile of suffering the fates of others. His "feeling for mass-consciousness" was bivalent. He was sufficiently conscious of the mass, but he was unwilling to embrace it in its "slough of despond." This, as he wrote, "does not work for victory." Neither does it work for totalitarian victory. Instead, with the intentions of Unanimism converted into the more precise terms of poetic craft, it made for a reliance on formal necessity, an insistence on poetic structure, and a regard for the poem as an object.

Nevertheless, Zukofsky's sympathies were for the oppressed rather than the oppressors. When he identified with the masses in "Preface—1927," they were "natural forces to come," "being of the same quality as running waters," which were due to displace "the economic appointers" of his generation. Like them, Zukofsky was obliged to "live with the whip of my being. . . . To escape it would mean I hide not only myself but betray others." They would sting "the appointers" only as they burned, being damned.

Zukofsky's disdain for the wealthy was not lessened by his life-long poverty. In "Critique of Antheil," he despised the audience whom Antheil tormented with what must have provided "the basis" for the "new music" that Pound heralded. Their wealth did not redeem (as poverty would excuse) their ignorant inability to appreciate "your timespace, your musical machines in fourth-dimensional blues." After Antheil's "Mockery of the vortex sucking them, leaving them more and more the drenched wet rags they are," Zukofsky noted that "from where I sit / I can look down into the expensive pit / And spit."⁴⁵

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Section 4 - William Carlos Williams

I. Zukofsky and Williams

The extent of the friendship and mutual influence of Zukofsky and Williams is not sufficiently known. Williams' autobiography records that the two were "good friends" but not that they read and criticized each other's work with interest and a sense of common purpose from the day they met until Williams died. Critics fail to acknowledge the importance of Zukofsky and "Objectivism" to Williams and his work because they do not know the facts. Webster Schott, for example, fails to credit Zukofsky for editing The Descent of Winter for Pound's Exile and A Novelette and Other Prose for the Oppens' To Publishers.¹

Pound's letter of 5 March 1928 suggested that Zukofsky meet William Carlos Williams: "Re/ private life: Do go down an' stir up ole Bill Willyums, 9 Ridge Rd. Rutherford (W. C. Williams M.D.) and tell him I tole you. He is still the best human value on my murkin. visiting list." It also enlisted Zukofsky's service as editor: "I shd. be inclined to print anything of Bill Wm's that you picked out. Editing ought really to be done by the young (?? what/ d-- age are you) not by the senile or even by the mature. -eh- save for the purpose of commerce."² Pound was 42; Williams, 44; Zukofsky, 23. Zukofsky responded to this on 20 March 1928 by noting that he had written Williams and Cummings and that, meaningfully, his previous letter to Pound, which crossed Pound's in the mail, had expressed interest in meeting Williams.³

Williams replied to Zukofsky on 23 March, beginning: "My dear Zukofsky: By 'human values' I suppose Ezrie means that in his opinion I can't write. Dammit, who can write, isolated as we all find ourselves and robbed of the natural friendly stimuli on which we rest, at least, in our lesser moments?" Apparently mistaking Zukofsky's role as editor, Williams wrote: "So you are responsible for Exile now. Is that so?" Since Zukofsky came "with an introduction from my old friend," Williams invited him to Rutherford "for a country meal and a talk."⁴

Zukofsky wrote that he could visit Saturday, but Williams countered on 28 March that he would "not be home this Saturday evening" but that he could meet Zukofsky "in the city" after "being interviewed ---- at five o'clock by some stranger."⁵ The two met, then, on 1 April 1928. Williams remembered in his autobiography that "one day I met Louis Zukofsky in the city after I had been sketched for a caricature by a person named Hoffman. Louis and I became good friends."⁶ This friendship brought Zukofsky to Rutherford in April, and repeatedly thereafter, affording, as Pound observed, "some pleasure and consolation" to them both.⁷

The facts of William Carlos Williams' life are well-known. He was born 17 September 1883.

Although, as Mike Weaver wrote, "He was half English, one-quarter Basque, and one-quarter Jewish,"⁸ he is known for his insistence on the value of the American language and locale. Like Zukofsky, Reznikoff, and Rakosi, his American values were not inherited; they were earned.

Williams met his life-long friend Ezra Pound while he was in medical school and Pound was in graduate school studying romance languages. Pound involved him in the free verse movement. His job as a general practitioner with specialties in pediatrics and obstetrics left him little time for his main passion, his writing. In 1928 he was feeling the lack of recognition that should normally come to a writer of his merit in middle age. He felt isolated. Attention from other writers more than flattered him; it provided the "natural friendly stimuli on which we rest, at least, in our lesser moments."

Of the years following his return from Europe in 1924, he remembered:

These were the lush Republican years when money flourished like skunk cabbages in the swamps in April. . . .

Damn it, the phone ringing again. . . . That was Mr. Taylor who said excitedly, You never wrote a poem in your life, Doc. What you write is prose, like Shakespeare.

when Doc. K. was selling week-ends at two hundred dollars a shot, complete: liquor, keep and a woman guaranteed; and when stupidity had no measure.⁹

Mr. Taylor's stupidity makes his criticism into praise. Coolidge prosperity did not improve the intelligence or integrity of Williams' contemporaries. "Five minutes, ten minutes, can always be found." In these years, Williams banged off his work between patients. "Then would come the trial. The poem would be submitted to some random editor, or otherwise meet its fate in the world. I would observe that fate and so come to judge the intelligence of my contemporaries."¹⁰

Zukofsky swiftly became Williams' special editor and critic, extending the care taken between Williams' creation and submission. His first visits left Williams with suggestions for cutting deadwood from his first novel, A Voyage to Paganry, which was in progress and would be published in September 1928.¹¹ Williams wrote to Zukofsky on 17 May 1928: "What you had to say about the novel did me much good. I felt that you had hit on some very raw spots. Oh well, I can't quite bring myself to throw the thing away though I wanted to do so after you had left."¹² And, on 25 June 1928, after working on it, Williams added that "the book looks about as presentable as I can make it. I cut out a lot about the Rhine! which should give you a special pleasure."¹³

Williams' novel was based on his trip to Europe with his wife in 1924. When in Vienna, as he described it in Chapter XXVI, titled "Bach," he attended a performance of Bach's St. Matthew's Passion. Soon after their first meeting, Zukofsky invited Williams to attend with him a performance of the Passion at Carnegie Hall. Williams could not make it. His letter of regret on 2 April 1928 attested to the importance of this new friendship:

This has been a pleasure, the reading of your poem. You make me want to carry out deferred designs. Don't take my theories too seriously. They are not for you--or for you, of course, or anybody.

I'd give my shirt to hear the Mattheus "Passion" this week, but I doubt if it can be done. If I do get there in spite of everything, I'll cast an eye around for you.

But your work's the thing. It encourages me in my designs. Makes me anxious to get at my notes and the things (thank God) which I did not tell the gentlemen. Thanks for the supper. As soon as work lightens a bit for me here in the suburbs, I want you to come out. I congratulate Pound on his luck in finding you. You are another nail in the -- coffin. Damn fools.¹⁴

It is likely that Williams and Zukofsky had read together "Poem beginning 'The,'" Zukofsky explaining its allusions and structure and Williams, as he suggested, extemporizing poetic theory. Already Williams had found Zukofsky to be a compatriot and perhaps a disciple in his struggle against the "damn fools" who did not accept the value of his work.

Zukofsky went to the Passion alone; "A"-1 is his reaction to the performance:

The Passion According to Matthew,
Composed seventeen twenty-nine,
Rendered at Carnegie Hall,
Nineteen twenty-eight,
Thursday evening, the fifth of April.¹⁵

"As a matter of fact," Celia Zukofsky remembered, "the poem 'A' started out as a letter to William Carlos Williams."¹⁶ The Passion became one of the themes for this work, whose 24 movements took Zukofsky the next 46 years to complete:

"A"
of a life
—and a time

Bach is a theme all thru the poem, the music first heard in 1928 affecting the recurrences or changes as may be of the story or history.¹⁷

Zukofsky referred in "A"-1 to A Voyage to Paganry directly and indirectly. The lines "I heard him agonizing, / I saw him inside" are unchanged from their occurrence at the end of "Bach" chapter, where they form the thought of Williams' protagonist, Evans, after the performance in Vienna, and refer to Bach empathizing with Christ.¹⁸ Further, Zukofsky's vision of Bach hurrying to church, "Ah, there's the Kapellmeister / in a terrible hurry — / Johann Sebastian, twenty-two / children!" reflects Williams': "Funny old figure he must have been going across the street after having generated another child in the night."¹⁹

Williams' letter to Zukofsky on Easter expresses his feeling of direct relation between himself and Zukofsky:

I did not wish to be twenty years younger and surely I did not wish to be twenty years older. I was happy to find a link between myself and another wave of it. Sometimes one thinks the thing has died down. I believe that somehow you have benefited by my work. Not that you have even seen it fully but it proves to me (God Damn this machine) that the thing moves by a direct relationship between men from generation to generation.

And that no matter how we may be ignored, maligned, left unnoticed, yet by doing straight-forward work we do somehow reach the right people.

Williams' feeling is confirmed by a consideration of the importance of the two other topics in his letter in the history of their work and association. First, Williams expressed curiosity and regret, having missed the performance of the Matthew's "Passion." Such interest had already inspired the beginning of Zukofsky's life's work, "A". Secondly, Williams claimed:

There must be an American magazine. As I have gotten older, I am less volatile over projects such as this (a magazine) less willing to say much but more determined to make a go of it finally—after I am 70 perhaps—. Perhaps it will crystalize soon.^{[20](#)}

Williams and Zukofsky continued in the years that followed to be interested in publishing the "straightforward work" which others ignored.

Williams was temporarily rescued from the need to begin a new magazine by a request from Pound that he help with the Exile. Williams responded on 16 April 1928:

Dear Ezra: Your present letter rescued me from an oozy hell. Your offer is generous. I hereby give up any thought of a new magazine. Within two weeks I'll let you know what kind of material—what kind of impetus it is that has been stirring in me. If you feel impelled to give me a whole number of Exile when you have the material in hand, well and good. But I'll be content with as much space as comes my way.

But it is a delight to me to feel a possible bond of workmanship being exercised between us today. Damn it, why don't--why didn't I seek you sooner? Exile is a good venture; let me from now on really throw my energy into it—not for my name or for myself in any way, but just to do it. I'll do it. For a year at least I'll shower you with anything I can rustle up or squeeze out. I want to. I need to. I have felt sometimes of late that I am sinking forever.

This is just to accept your offer. More later. I heartily support your judgment of Zukofsky's excellence (in the one poem at least) and he seems worth while personally.^{[21](#)}

Williams again referring to Zukofsky's "Poem beginning 'The,'" in Exile 3, perhaps one of the reasons he considered Exile "a good venture."

II. The Descent of Winter

Zukofsky took Ezra Pound's suggestion to edit The Descent of Winter by William Carlos Williams for Exile 4.^{[22](#)}

Williams began the sequence "on board the S. S. Pennland in the fall of 1927 . . . having left his wife in Europe to care for their two sons who were attending school in Switzerland for a year,"^{[23](#)} and he continued and finished it living with his mother in Rutherford.

Zukofsky sent his edited version of the manuscript to Pound on 28 May 1928, noting that the Sundays he had spent with Williams in Rutherford had been more than reassuring.^{[24](#)} The first two months of their friendship had established lasting trust and understanding between them, a secure basis for future collaboration. Pound received the manuscript and wrote Williams to make further suggestions. Williams

replied on 25 June 1928, and noted: "I'm really delighted that you like Zukofsky's batch of choosings. You'd be amused to see the stuff he didn't take. Yet he did a fine job, believe me—" ²⁵ On 1 July 1928 Pound wrote Zukofsky: "/// Re/ the Bill Wms. I have merely deleted 4 lines. Any further emendations HE chooses to make, might be added to mss. (or deleted from same) before it goes to press) . . . Bill seems please[d] with the way you have edited his mss." ²⁶

The Descent of Winter, one of the first results of collaboration between "Objectivists," is important not only to the relationship between Williams and Zukofsky, but to the history of the "Objectivist" movement. Editing Williams' work for Pound must have taught Zukofsky or confirmed in him the poetic values which Pound and Williams had developed from their innovations in the second decade of the 20th century.

The Descent of Winter remains in the journal format in which Williams wrote it; each piece is dated, beginning "9/27" (27 September 1927) and ending "12/18" (18 December 1927). These dates, as Webster Schott notes, "literally document Williams' title. Winter was coming." ²⁷ Williams had just turned 45 and felt the descent personally; however, in his work, corresponding to the archetype of Kora in Hell which was rooted in his psyche, he found Persephone's blessings in the imagination's revitalizing of physical perception, in the spontaneous creations of his mind, and in his old mother's memories of her childhood in Mayaguez. These blessings countered his disgust with the death he felt of art and culture. The central concern of his attempted revitalization was writing itself. His restoration of the problems of art and culture to the writer's poetic discipline proved to be characteristic of "Objectivism." Williams attacked the death of his art by experimenting with form and content, and by directly attacking the problems before him either metaphorically (9/30 "There are no perfect waves— / Your writings are a sea / . . .") or critically (11/1 "Introduction / in almost all verse you read, mine or anybody's else, . . .").

The work opens with two poems, "9/27" and "9/29," both of which present objects at that time new to poetry. "9/27" (printed in quotation marks and italics) expresses a man's elation at discovering the underwear he had long taken for granted. "9/29" focuses on the oval celluloid disc in Williams' sleeping cabin which identified the "No. 2" berth. The form of each poem is uniquely adapted to its feeling, and the feeling is a direct response to the object:

My bed is narrow
in a small room
at sea ²⁸

"9/30" begins Williams' direct confrontation with the problems of writing. His language like the sea is imperfect—broken, restless, monotonous, and uninhabitable. But perhaps in it is "a coral island slowly / slowly forming and waiting / for birds to drop the seeds." ²⁹

Subsequent entries are seeds, some of which fall on fertile ground. "10/23" begins a long section of free-form prose which reveals Williams' refusal to take the marksman's properly rigid stance but also shows his ability sometimes to hit the mark. He begins by declaring: "I will make a big, serious portrait of

my time," which is only partly ironic. It will be like the Aztec calendar which survives its cheap Mexican imitation. As in the opening of Spring and All, Williams felt that poetic excellence repels idiots but suffers because of its nakedness:

. . . the art of writing is to do work so excellent that by its excellence it repels all idiots but idiots are like leaves and excellence of any sort is a tree when the leaves fall the tree is naked and the wind thrashes it till it howls it cannot get a book published it can only get poems into certain magazines that are suppressed . . . [30](#)

Williams howled when his work lost its leaves as winter descended. He felt his poems in the world were like seeds drowning in gasoline.

Yet inherent in their construction is "the great law": that care for quality, for integrity of materials, is love:

. . . and all I say brings to mind the rock shingles of Cherbourg, on the new houses they have put cheap tile which overlaps but the old roofs had flat stone sides steep but of stones fitted together and that is love there is no portrait without that [that] has not turned to prose love is my hero who does not live, a man, but speaks of it everyday. [31](#)

Love is the attention which creates objects that will not date or decay. It is an active and creative assertion of the value of the part of the whole, of the order which frees not only the creator's energy but can free the energy of others and of the world. Zukofsky's natura naturans (nature creating rather than created) is such "love, whose proof in writing is "sincerity" (Section 8). Williams' concept of love is further elaborated in January: A Novelette (Section 10). Here, he continued:

But there is a great law over him which—is as it is. The wind blowing, the mud spots on the polished surface, the face reflected in the glass which as you advance the features disappear leaving only the hat and as you draw back . . . [32](#)

Attention to the effects of "the great law" revealed to Williams the relevance of the birth of Dolores Marie Pischak in Fairfield, September 1927, which he celebrated in "10/28." Her birth killed the decency and order that obstruct creation and writing. She was a seed dropped to germinate on a coral island; she was Williams' "hero," and so her portrait is the portrait of his time:

born, September 15, 1927, 2nd child, wt. 6 lbs. 2 ozs. The hero is Dolores Marie Pischak, the place Fairfield, in my own state, my own country, its largest city, my own time. This is her portrait: O future worlds, this is her portrait —order be God damned. Fairfield is the place where the October marigolds go over into the empty lot with dead grass like Polish children's hair and the nauseous, the stupefying monotony of decency is dead, unkindled even by art or anything—dead: by God because Fairfield is alive, coming strong. [33](#)

Williams abolished in his creation the order in her birth love abolished. Poetic liberation established for the "Objectivist" a political liberation. Williams became free from the loveless and pleasureless monotony of the suburbs:

Oh, blessed love where are you there, pleasure given out, order triumphant, one house like another, grass cut to pay lovelessly. Bored we turn to cars to take us to "the

country" to "nature" to breathe her good air. Jesus Christ. To nature. It's about time, for most of us.³⁴

Nature is disorderly. To order is to drive out pleasure and health: "A cat licking herself solves most of the problems of infection. We wash too much and finally it kills us."³⁵ Writing must reveal the vivid "truth of the object"³⁶ without attempting to order it, to clean it up; it must experience the poverty and dirtiness of nature without comparing it to something else:

and the late, high growing red rose
it is their time
of a small garden

poetry should strive for nothing else, this vividness alone, per se, for itself. The realization of this has its own internal fire that is "like" nothing. Therefore the bastardy of the simile. That thing, the vividness which is poetry by itself, makes the poem. There is no need to explain or compare. Make it and it is a poem. This is modern, not the saga. There are no sagas"*only trees now, animals, engines: There's that."³⁷

The thing itself reveals the whole of which it is a part, synecdochic. The universal is in the particular, the idea in the thing. This became the ultimate justification of "Objectivist" sincerity—their emphasis on concrete and specific particulars, their distrust of abstraction and generality. In The Descent of Winter, "Russia is every country," and in "A Morning Imagination of Russia," a man frees himself of everything (sleep, cities, walls, rooms, elevators, files, fashion, shaving) that comes between himself and the earth and sky.³⁸

Williams' love is a development of Keats's negative capability. Both react against the rationality that interferes with creativity. "O for a Life of Sensations rather than of Thoughts!" Just as Keats felt the setting sun always set him to rights "—or if a Sparrow come before my Window I take part in its existence [sic] and pick about the Gravel,"³⁹ so Williams praised Shakespeare's "mean ability to fuse himself with everyone which nobodies have . . . that is what made him the great dramatist."⁴⁰

"11/13 SHAKESPEARE" continues this argument, and here, where Williams described the "unemployable world" of Shakespeare's mind outlasting those destroyed by their artificiality, it is clear that Shakespeare's virtue applies as well to Williams. The "scaffolding of the academic, which is a 'lie' in that it is inessential to the purpose as to the design," and the "defense of the economists and modern rationalists of literature" are done away with by "intelligence . . . subjected to the instinctive whole," by the poet who "lives because he sinks back . . . into the mass."⁴¹

The only human value of anything, writing included, is intense vision of the facts, add to that by saying the truth and action upon them—clear into the machine of absurdity to a core that is covered.

God—Sure if it makes sense. "God" is poetic for the unobtainable. Sense is hard to get but it can be got. Certainly that destroys "God," it destroys everything that interferes with simple clarity of apprehension.⁴²

To sense the plain core of the facts and the natural "stores of the mind"⁴³ is difficult but not impossible. This core is not therefore transcendental but immanent. Creation from this "simple clarity" is freer from the perverse, inane, oppressive, cheap, and "fragmentary stupidity of modern life."⁴⁴

"Genius" is realizing this intense clarity: "It is to see the track, to smell it out, to know it inevitable—sense sticking out all round feeling, feeling, seeing—hearing touching."⁴⁵ Genius is the corollary to "the great law" of love. Great art is the product of this genius. The dramatist must identify "situations of the soul (Lear, Harpagon, Oedipus Rex, Electra)" so closely with life "that they become people," and he must identify so closely with these people that the drama comes to life. "But to labor over the 'construction' over the 'technique' is to defeat, to tie up the drama itself. One cannot live after a prearranged pattern, it is all simply dead."⁴⁶ The theater is dead unless the actor does more than mimic the script, and unless the script does more than mimic the life. To be scrupulously realistic, to copy the prearranged pattern, kills the life. "The painfully scrupulous verisimilitude which honesty affects drill, discipline defeats its own ends in—"⁴⁷ Creation depends on the subject as well as the object; life depends on author as well as nature.

Shakespeare's ability to "live," like Williams' ability to "love," was to escape the rational inhibitions and inane imperfections of language and of the world for the full realization, in the mind and in the senses, of the vivid truth of the object. The Descent of Winter therefore established the "Objectivist" solution of political and personal problems as a poetic concerned with registering "clarity of apprehension" in terms of facts objectified by a structure within which both the human psyche and the shared world participate.

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Section 5 - Williams and Zukofsky

Williams wrote Zukofsky on 2 April 1928 and praised Zukofsky’s “Poem beginning ‘The’”:

Yes, yes. You have the rare gift. As with everything else there are plans—the tripping rhythm—but not always the tripping rhythm—just sometimes. It spoils the adagio effect. It is noticeable that the lines have such an excellent internal necessity that they must be read slowly. It is thoughtful poetry, but actual word stuff, not thoughts for thoughts. It escapes me in its analysis (thank God) and strikes against me a thing (thank God). There are not so many things in the world as we commonly imagine.

Plenty of debris, plenty of smudges.¹

The meaning of Williams’ term “thing” depends on an assumption of central importance to Imagiste and “Objectivist” poetics—that there exist “things” in the world which may be translated intact not only as one’s direct experience of them but as poetic expressions of those experiences, so that the readers of those poetic expressions may experience the original “things.”

I. Definitions

The assumption in Williams’ letter underlies apparent ambiguities in Imagiste and “Objectivist” poetics and may be explained by showing how classes of “objective” existence, experience, and expression are strongly related, by showing that a triplet of ontological, epistemic, and linguistic objects—items within the objective classes of existence, experience, and expression—may have identical significance.

First, the relations among states must be clear. On the one hand, experiences and expression have ontological aspects—the body and the words as words consisting of matter occupying time and space in the world—and assume within these aspects what I term “extensive” forms. On the other hand, expression and existence have epistemic aspects—the meanings and effects of their extensive forms, that is, perceptions and conceptions—and assume within these aspects what I term “intensive” forms. Since the relation between extensive and intensive form is the relation between ontological cause and epistemic effect, certain existences and expressions may be strongly related by virtue of certain intermediary experiences. A corollary of Williams’ assumption, then, is that we have the ability to experience the identical significance of certain triplets of things within each state.

Usually, the objective is said to include objects of action or feeling (or, simply, events outside the mind) as distinct from the subjective, which is said to include the will or knowledge of the agent or subject (events within the mind). This distinction, however, being quantitative rather than qualitative, is not very useful for a poetic theory, which must differentiate the quality of events which are both inside and outside the mind. Furthermore, the usual distinction often leads to two misconceptions: first, that the subjective and objective (mind and body) are mutually exclusive, that the distinction is qualitative, that events inside or outside the mind should be preferred.

First, mind is not an opposite of body or world. As William James writes, "Sensations are cognitive."² Some experiences, such as the anger that sees red or the fear that breaks out in a cold sweat, are more objective than their objects, the presumed affront or the imaginary threat. Mind inheres in body as securely as forms and actions inhere in their material objects. In Imagiste and "Objectivist" poetics, ideas and emotions are forms which inhere in the body as in the world, body and world being equally real as existence.

According to these poetics, artistic ideas and emotions—gestalts—are not empathic; they are not subjective states imaginatively projected into objects. Carroll C. Pratt wrote that art succeeds by the presentation of the artist rather than the projection of the art lover. Pratt also confirmed the translatable nature of the gestalt when he wrote of Kohler's attack on empathy:

An auditory rhythm is auditory, and that's that; but the same rhythm—a Gestalt—may also be visual or tactual, and the graceful lilt, let us say of a waltz rhythm—a tertiary quality—will be present in all three modalities. Gestalten and their tertiary qualities reveal innumerable iconic relations and resemblances across modalities. Therein lies the great power of art, for the moods and feelings of mankind are capable of iconic presentation in visual and auditory patterns—a mode obviously far more direct and effective than symbolic representation—and when done by the great geniuses of art they become the world's treasures of painting, music, sculpture, ballet, and architecture.³

Tactual gestalts may be translated into visual or auditory gestalts. The "Objectivists" believed that such gestalts actually inhere in existence and expression as they inhere in experience, and, unlike the method of the symbolists, wished to present these gestalts "directly."

We should not wish, in any poetics or aesthetics, to dissociate the subjective from the objective. Instead, we should show how the relations between them may be affirmed and used to help us feel what we know and know what we feel. Secondly, therefore, the necessary qualitative distinction is not between existence and experience, but between kinds of things in existence, experience, and expression. The "Objectivists" not only assumed distinctions in each state but assumed relations between the states on the basis of those distinctions. Let us therefore define the collection of "things" in each state which bear this strong relation as "objective" and the collection of "things" in each state which do not bear this strong relation as "subjective," and let us give an idea of what the "Objectivists" believed characterized each collection.

The usefulness of the following definitions will be evident when one realizes that the Image of Williams' "thing" is an ontologically, epistemically, and linguistically objective form. It is, in other words, neither ideal nor abstract; it inheres in the particular and its experience is experience of the particular; it is immanent rather than transcendent.

An "Objectivist" would say that a thing is ontologically objective if it has a specific and concrete existence which coheres as a gestalt, such as an apple, a certain melody, or a word as a word. Such things, we say, have formal organic integrity; they constitute a functional unit with properties not derivable from their parts in summation. They are what Wolfgang Kohler describes as "'segregated' or 'detached' wholes"

as distinct from the fields in which they occur.⁴ A thing is ontologically subjective if it has a specific and concrete existence but is so fleeting, random, disordered, faint, or incomplete that its parts do not cohere in one's experience as a gestalt. Williams called these "debris" and "smudges" in his letter of 2 April. The distinction between ontological objectivity and subjectivity is not fixed but is dependent upon one's point of view, wisdom of experience, and attention or concentration. Both, however, are real.

An experience is epistemically objective if it is a direct experience of the real, such as one's physiological responses to eating an apple, hearing a specific tone or rhythm, saying a word, or being confused by some debris or smudge. There are obviously two classes of epistemic objectivity—experiences which cohere as gestalts and experiences which do not. An experience is epistemically subjective if it is an indirect experience of the real. A specific collection of apples and oranges, or melodies, or a set of sentences using a word are ontologically objective or subjective, but fruit, music, and the meanings of words are epistemically subjective.

The distinction between direct and indirect experience is derived from William James's two types of experience: "knowledge of acquaintance" and "knowledge about." "Knowledge of acquaintance" is directly dependent upon the materials of sensation and perception, on what Whitehead terms "naive sense experience"; it is individual experience of what seems external to consciousness and it cannot be communicated discursively. To call this kind of experience an "object" or "thing," in James's psychology, is a judgement of its intensity relative to "knowledge about," which is dependent upon thought, memory, or imagination. "Knowledge about" is the mental product of one or more, not necessarily one's own, direct experiences, seems internal to consciousness, and can be communicated discursively.⁵ Since the "Objectivists" followed James in believing that immediate emotional responses are physiological, epistemic objectivity is for them a subset of the ontological; direct experience is real. The epistemically subjective, however, is not real.

An expression may be linguistically objective in two ways, textually and formally, which are what Zukofsky means by "sincerity" and "objectification." If an expression is textually objective or has sincerity, it expresses either epistemically objective or subjective experiences in terms which literally signify ontologically objective things in appropriate forms consisting of melopoeia (rhythm, cadence), phanopoeia (image), and logopoeia (idea). Textual objectivity must account for both the ontological and epistemic aspects of language—its form defined by its words as words and its form defined by its meanings. The terms in appropriate forms of textual objectivity present what Zukofsky called "particulars," the relevant elements of objective existence. "Impossible to communicate," Zukofsky wrote, "anything but particulars—historic and contemporary—things, human beings as things their instrumentalities of capillaries and veins binding up and bound up with events and contingencies. The revolutionary word if it must revolve cannot escape having a reference."⁶ In other words, the textually objective is dependent on the contexts and processes of ontological and epistemic objectivity; words are not isolated figments of human ego; they are parts of the real, bound up with "events and contingencies" as much as is human physiology and psychology. The first Imagiste proscription, "Direct treatment of the 'thing,' whether

subjective or objective,"⁷ advocates textual objectivity, for which Pound's term (a half century before Pratt) is "presentation."

If an expression is textually subjective, it is composed in terms which signify epistemically subjective experience or in forms which are inappropriate to the thing expressed. It is impossible to express with any clarity ontologically objective things in textual subjectivity; it is not impossible to express epistemically subjective experiences clearly in textual objectivity. "The serious artist," wrote Pound, "is scientific in that he presents the image of his desire, of his hate, of his indifference as precisely that, as precisely the image of his own desire, hate or indifference."⁸ The cultivation of objectivity and the delineation of subjectivity are not in mutual opposition.

Finally, if an expression is formally objective or has objectification it is textually objective and has formal integrity, an intensive form capable of being realized by the reader as a gestalt; if an expression is formally subjective its intensive form does not cohere as a gestalt. Formal objectivity is composed of textual objectivity but transcends it as the whole transcends its parts. Textual subjectivity cannot achieve formal integrity.

Formal objectivity is the defining criterion of both "Objectivism" and Imagisme before it, as it is, as Pound and the "Objectivists" would say, of all great literature. The Image and Zukofsky's "poem as object" are both formally objective. "An 'Image' is that which presents an intellectual and emotional complex." This complex is what I have described as a gestalt.

Pound did not limit the Image to linguistic form. "That which presents" may be linguistic, strictly ontological, or something presented by expression or existence, that is epistemic. "Energy, or emotion, expresses itself in form. . . . When an energy or emotion 'present an image,' this may find adequate expression in words."⁹ "In the writing of poems," Pound claimed, "the author must use his image because he sees it or feels it, not because he thinks he can use it to back up some creed or some system of ethics or economics."¹⁰ Oppen made the same claim when he wrote that "the image is encountered not found," not, that is, invented; "it is an account of the poet's perception, of the act of perception; it is a test of sincerity, a test of conviction, the rare poetic quality of truthfulness."¹¹ The epistemically objective is an undisguisable, truthful register of the real. "An image, in our sense, is real because we know it directly," and "it is our affair to render the image as we have perceived or conceived it," wrote Pound.¹²

Pound discussed the translatability between languages of his three "kinds of poetry," melopoeia, logopoeia, and phanopoeia, in How to Read. Melopoeia, the charging of words "with some musical property," and logopoeia, the charging of words with the properties of usage and aesthetics, are not or not easily translatable, but phanopoeia, "a casting of images on the visual imagination," can be translated intact.¹³

The translatable nature of the Image was explicated in Pound's Vorticist criticism: "The image is not an idea. It is radiant node or cluster; it is what I can, and must perforce, call a VORTEX, from which,

and through which, and into which, ideas are stantly rushing."¹⁴ The vortex is the form in which the thing presents itself to the "vivid consciousness"; it is the thing conveyed by an arrangement of shapes, planes, colors, musical notes, or words.¹⁵ The Image is not content; it is form, and must on this basis be distinguished from the visual image. Pound believed th the form of a certain apple, for example, may be experienced and expressed without loss of integrity, even though as an apple it composed of water, fructose, and so forth, as experience it is c posed of physiological and mental impressions, and as expression may be composed of plaster of Paris, oil paints, the notes of a flute, or words of the English language.

But even in the articles upon which the Imagist movement predicated, Flint's "Imagisme" and Pound's "A Few Don'ts by an Imagiste" published in Poetry in March 1913, Pound tried to describe the discipline, direct presentation, which presents the Image. The possibility of direct presentation is the single assumption upon which the three Imagiste prescriptions are based. Its practice is "direct treatment" (the first prescription), which is enhanced by condensation (the second—"To use absolutely no word that does not contribute to the presentation") and carried by absolute rhythm (the third—"As regarding rhythm: to compose in sequence of the musical phrase . . ."). Direct presentation provides, in William James's term, knowledge of acquaintance. It therefore depends on linguistic objectivity—specific and concrete terms which present the material of naive sense experience, and relies on the poet's ability to find the absolute forms of melopoeia, phanopoeia, and logopoeia to reproduce exactly the intended emotion, thing, and idea. Its object and effect is the Image. It is neither projection nor representation. It produces in intensive form the particulars of sincerity and history within the poem to cohere as the "poem as object."

II. Imagism

The perception of a formal whole, upon which Williams' "thing," Pound's Image, and their ontological, epistemic, and linguistic identity depends, is the very backbone of Imagist and "Objectivist" poetics. In the beginning of Imagisme, on 29 November 1912, Pound wrote Williams:

Your perception of the "unit" is the most gratifying. That of course is the artistic triumph. To produce the whole which ceases to exist if one of the component parts be removed or permitted.

=or rather the "whole that has no parts."¹⁶

The perception of the whole distinguishes Pound's Imagisme and, later, "Objectivism," from the free-verse movement. The dilutors of Imagisme rarely achieved more formal significance than phanopoeia, and the images which constitutes their phanopoeia rarely formed Images. Their cadences were rarely more than speech rhythms with a decorative purpose. In Pound's point of view, they wrote impressionistically rather than Imagistically because they failed to require in their work the conciseness necessary to achieve formal objectivity. They did not realize that their poems as a whole must give not only image but melody and logic a coherence by which the poem can survive as a thing in the world of things.

Most particularly, according to Pound, the free-versists erred in not satisfying the second Imagiste proscription:

This school [Imagisme, 1912] has since been "joined" or "followed" by numerous people who, whatever their merits, do not show any signs of agreeing with the second specification. Indeed *vers libre* has become as prolix and as verbose as any of the flaccid varieties that preceded it. It has brought faults of its own. The actual language and phrasing is often as bad as that of our elders without even the excuse that the words are shoved in to fill a metric pattern or to complete the noise of a rhyme-sound. Whether or not the phrases followed by the followers are musical must be left to the reader's decision. At times I can find a marked metre in "*vers libres*," as stale and hackneyed as any pseudo-Swinburnian, at times the writers seem to follow no musical structure whatever.¹⁷

To complete his derision, Pound elsewhere called such free-versists "Amygists," after Amy Lowell who had usurped his editorial control of the movement. Apparently Pound had not explained his principles to his colleagues¹⁸ and had been able to represent some of the contributors to *Des Imagistes* as Imagists only by judiciously selecting and editing their work. After Pound's anthology in 1914, Lowell afforded a series of three anthologies from 1915 to 1917 titled *Some Imagist Poets*, each time publishing work by four writers whom Pound had included (Richard Aldington, H.D., F. S. Flint, and Amy Lowell herself) and two others (John Gould Fletcher and D. H. Lawrence).

The failure of the followers (who were not of course limited to Lowell's anthologies) to satisfy the second specification is symptomatic of their root lack of understanding of Imagiste form. One must have a sense of the formal limits of the Image before one knows whether a word contributes to its presentation; they did not have this sense. Their images and cadences were too often mere mimesis—pictures and speech rhythms. Restriction to phanopoeia and the language of the tribe could not alone produce the essential.

Nevertheless, Amygism and Imagisme (misunderstood) created a sensation in English poetry. They freed writers from the falsities of the imitation of great poets either distant or dead, clearing their airs of affectation and archaism.

Williams recalled the situation in his autobiography:

The Objectivist theory was this: We had "Imagism" (*Amygism*, as Pound had called it), which ran quickly out. That, though it had been useful in ridding the field of verbiage, had no formal necessity implicit in it. It had already dribbled off into so called "free verse" which, as we saw, was a misnomer. There is no such thing as free verse! Verse is measure of some sort. "Free verse" was without measure and needed none for its projected objectification. Thus the poem had run down and become formally non extant.

Williams did not make the distinction between Imagisme, which Pound established and whose principles are embodied in his critical writings, and Amygism. Imagisme had been Pound's cure for the "diluted Tennysonism"¹⁹ of the teens. But by the twenties Imagisme had itself become diluted into a poison which retained its liberties without its responsibilities. "Objectivism" was an "antidote" to this poison in that it redeveloped those responsibilities. Williams continues:

But, we argued, the poem, like every other form of art, is an object, an object that in itself formally presents its case and its meaning by the very form it assumes. Therefore, being an object, it should be so treated and controlled—but not as in the

past. For past objects have about them past necessities—like the sonnet—which have conditioned them and from which, as a form itself, they cannot be freed.

The poem being an object (like a symphony or cubist painting) it must be the purpose of the poet to make his words a new form: to invent, that is, an object consonant with his day. This is what we wished to imply by Objectivism, an antidote, in a sense, to the bare image haphazardly presented in loose verse.²⁰

Strictly speaking, all things, all writings, have form. The form of free verse, however, was conceived without necessary function. Its "measure," which Williams thought should be conditioned by the present necessities of the poet, his place, and his time, was nonexistent; it had "no formal necessity implicit in it"; it did not present in its integrity a form to be, like any other object, experienced as a gestalt.

The "Objectivists" therefore returned to the modernist inventions and studied how not to imitate but to develop and adapt them to the needs of their own time, place, and personalities. Since Pound and Williams had also developed relevant concepts, Zukofsky recognized them as not only mentors but members of the group. Pound had been able to free his Image from stasis in Vorticism and to create extended Images in his Cantos because he knew that images and cadences were merely pigments to be used to create significant form. Williams, too, as Zukofsky noted, extended "the monolinear image . . . to include 'a greater accessibility to experience.'"²¹ The "Objectivists" sought to replace the simple phanopoeia of the twenties by significant form into which the ear and the mind could enter as well as the eye.

Zukofsky admitted that he wrote "Poem beginning 'The'" in a logopoeaic mode in reaction to Eliot's grandiose, imagistic motifs in The Waste Land.²² I believe it is also true that he wrote it in reaction to the Amygists' too-simple reliance on phanopoeia. Zukofsky's intuition that significant form could be achieved with logopoeia was confirmed and perhaps even made conscious by Williams' statement that "Poem beginning 'The'" was "thoughtful poetry, but actual word stuff, not thoughts for thoughts." By direct presentation (textual objectivity, sincerity), Zukofsky had presented thoughts in words that evoked knowledge of acquaintance rather than knowledge about.

Although Williams could acknowledge Zukofsky's success on the level of direct experience, he did not at first understand how Zukofsky succeeded, since he did not fully understand the implications of Pound's "intellectual and emotional complex." He knew, however, why, when Zukofsky failed, he failed. On 5 July 1928 Williams wrote of Zukofsky's juvenalia:

Poems are richer in thought as image. Your early poems even when the thought has enough force or freshness have not been objectivized in new or fresh observations. But if it is the music even that is not inventive enough to make up for images which give an overwhelming effect of triteness—as it has been said. The language is stilted "poetic" except in the piece I marked.

Eyes have always stood first in the poet's equipment. If you are mostly ear—a newer rhythm must come in more strongly than has been the case so far.

Yet I am willing to grant—to listen.²³

This letter indicates the difference in poetics that concerned Williams and Zukofsky at this time, at first during personal meetings, to which Williams seems to refer: "as it has been said." Williams was too much a poet of phanopoeia to accept Zukofsky's tendency toward logopoeia easily. According to Williams, ideas

must be expressed as visual images, since "eyes have always stood first in the poet's equipment." The phrase "thought as image" indicates what one has in a poem when fresh or forceful thought has been "objectivized in new or fresh observations."

Zukofsky would have agreed that thought should be "objectivized in new or fresh observations," but not that such observations must be visual. He realized that the necessary objectivization should achieve not merely phanopoeia but significant form, and he thought that abstract diction could be carried by the music of the poem.

III. Constellation

Williams' concept of the poem as a thing reoccurs in his letter to Zukofsky of 18 July 1928, which praises Zukofsky's poem "Memory of V. I. Ulianov" (originally titled "Constellation: In Memory of V. I. Ulianov.")²⁴ Williams wrote:

Dear Louis: Certainly the "Lenin" outdistances anything in the earlier book of poems as the effect of a "thing" surpasses all thought about it. It is the second poem of yours that I like, the first being the long one. In some ways this poem is your best work (that I have seen). It has the surging rhythm that in itself embodies all that is necessary to say, but it carries the words nevertheless and the theme helplessly with it. The word "continual" at the end is fine.

It is this, the thing that this poem is, that makes you what you are today—I hope you're satisfied! No doubt it is the underlying theme to me of whatever feeling we have for each other. It seems to me surely the contrabass for everything else we may do. If there is not that under our feet (though I realize that you are speaking of a star), then we cannot go on elaborating our stuff.²⁵

Williams' admiration for Zukofsky's poem is evidence of more than the merit of the poem; it is evidence of their poetic agreement. The fully successful "Objectivist" poem has an "effect of a thing" created by a prosodic structure which embodies or organizes a semantic structure.

A "thing" may be felt before it is understood. Zukofsky achieves this effect, as do Williams and Pound, by creating an equation of correspondences, in rhythms and symbols, to form the Image. "Objectivism," like Imagisme, relies on a faith in entities, and in a language for them of rhythm and symbol, neither symbolical nor allegorical, whose meanings have not been described in dictionaries.²⁶ Thinking in this language, a poet is aware of the expressiveness of each formal aspect of poetic technique. The successful poem seems like a "thing," like a piece of sculpture composed of planes defining masses in relation.²⁷ Thus Williams recognized in Zukofsky's poem "the surging rhythm that in itself embodies all that is necessary to say." And when he writes that "it is the underlying theme to me of whatever feeling we have for each other" he refers to their shared sense of the poem as a "thing."

Williams' letter continues, registering now their differences:

Sometimes though I don't like your language. It probably is me and not you who should be blamed for this. You are wrestling with the antagonist under newer rules. But I can't see "all live processes," "orbit-trembling," "our consciousness," "the sources of being"—what the hell? I'm not finding fault. I'm just trying to nail what troubles me. It

may be that I am too literal in my search for objective clarities of image. It may be that you are completely right in forcing abstract conceptions into the sound pattern. I dunno. Anyhow, there you are.

I will say that in this case the abstract, philosophic-jargonist language is not an obstruction. It may be that when the force of the conception is sufficiently strong it can carry this sort of thing. If the force were weaker the whole poem would fall apart. Good, perhaps. Perhaps by my picayune, imagistic mannerisms I hold together what should by all means fall apart. . . .

Yours,
BILL

Later: . . . virtue exists like a small flower on a loose piece of earth above a precipice. And isn't it a fine day.²⁸

Williams reveals in this letter the same habit of conception that he reveals in his letter of 5 July above. He had not understood before Zukofsky's tutelage that phanopoeia was the only means of producing the "whole that has no parts."

In his afterward to "A" 1-12, Williams admitted:

One lack with imagism, as a definition of effort, is that it is not definite enough. It is true enough, God knows, to the immediate object it represents but what is that related to the poet's personal and emotional and intellectual meanings?

Realizing that he "was baffled" by Zukofsky, Williams found two "disturbing" elements. One was "his relation to music. . . . It was never a simple song as it was, for instance, in my case." Another was "the concentration and the breaks in the language . . . I didn't realize how close my attention to detail had to be to follow the really very simple language. . . . After all a poem is a matter of words, the meaning of words." Williams continued:

The meaning. I was seeking, perhaps, a picture (as an imagist poet) to relate my poem to; the intellectual meaning of the word, the pure meaning, was lost, we'll say, on me Intent on the portrayal of the visual image in a poem my perception has been thrown frequently out of gear [by Zukofsky's work]. I was looking for the wrong things. The poems whatever else they are are grammatical units intent on making a meaning unrelated to a mere pictorial image.²⁹

In the two poems, at least, and increasingly thereafter, Zukofsky moved beyond "objective clarities of image." He had moved toward objective clarities of conception. For Williams, conceptions were hopelessly abstract; he could not "see," for example, "our consciousness." But for Zukofsky, concrete diction could describe not only sensed but perceived particulars of whatever nature: "objects, states, acts, interrelations, thoughts about them."³⁰ Such particulars were, to him, objective, which meant, to him, that the terms which presented them were used in their literal denotative senses. His conceptual diction exactly corresponds to the details of the real, the details which present the intellectual and emotional complex. These details are particular because they correspond absolutely to elements of the original or generative experience and because that correspondence guarantees them, in the poem, specific effects.

Zukofsky's understanding of an objective conception which makes a poem is like the "abstraction" of Kandinsky. It may have intrinsic form without being pictorial representation. Zukofsky

termed the record of particulars "sincerity" and the realization of the intrinsic form of the poem "objectification." The conception of Image is far different from the "picayune, imagistic mannerisms" to which Williams confessed. "Objectivism" frees the poet to use effects of wider scope than the simply sensual or visual. "Objectivist" poems, Zukofsky wrote, "do not form mere pretty bits (American poetry, circa 1913)."³¹

"Memory of V. I. Ulianov" presents the complex of Zukofsky's responses to seeing a star through the leaves of an elm. The star is and will be, literally, "immemorial," extending beyond the reach of memory, although the term evokes no visual image. "White" and "orbit-trembling" give the star's visual qualities. Although the star's orbit is movement occurring beyond the moment of Zukofsky's immediate perception of it, the compound "orbit-trembling" signifies that the star is trembling in its orbit, a visually precise position realized in Zukofsky's moment of immediate conception. "Proportionately vast" by itself would be vague, but in context refers to the star's distance in space, as Zukofsky conceived it, relative to the perceptible dimensions of the elm. "Live processes" would also by itself be abstract, but here it is particularized as that of the star, its conversion of mass to energy radiated into space, which seems continual to us who are, like the elm leaves, in its light.

Thus the first fifteen lines address the star, describing it. The first verb is in line sixteen and the first sentence ends with line twenty-three. When we feel like a star, alone and secure, the poem tells us, we speak to it. Our fate, which we share with the star, is to be of an everlasting process.

My analysis of the poem so far disregards the title. The name of Lenin brings in a realm of political connotations. In "A Retrospect" Pound wrote:

I believe that the proper and perfect symbol is the natural object, that if a man use 'symbols' he must so use them that their symbolic function does not obtrude; so that a sense, and the poetic quality of the passage, is not lost to those who do not understand the symbol as such, to whom, for instance, a hawk is a hawk.³²

In Zukofsky's poem the star is a star—and a symbol. It is, contrary to Lowell's "silver hail-stones," what I have called, after Pound, a natural symbol. Its literal, denotative significance is neither lost nor obtrudes to foil the feeling of the whole. Similarly, "live processes" denotes stellar fusion and connotes any live process which gives off energy to stimulate life, such as the class struggle, one star of which is Vladimir Ilyich (Ulyanov) Lenin, whose light is his leadership and writings. The elm, perhaps, is Russia, and we, the proletarian masses, are moths who beat their wings in the night attracted by a light sometimes eclipsed.

This analogical reading of the poem's symbols is in accord with its relation to the revolutionary pessimism of Bunyan and Sorel. The poem's original epigraph underscores not only some of its terms but also its tone: "—Wherefore being come out of the River, they saluted them saying, We are ministering Spirits, sent forth to minister for those that be heirs of salvation. —PILGRIM'S PROGRESS."³³

Zukofsky's admiration here was not of nation, government, or party, but of an ideology consistent not only with being communist but also with being American and Jewish. Zukofsky identified

with the masses, who, in their escape from suppression ("in strange hegira"), appeal to Lenin to be their leader ("we speak to you"). The balance of individual and communal alliances ("Singles we are, the others still may be with us/And we for others"), and of conscious and unconscious actions ("we do not sink with every wave" and yet "Rush as of river courses./Change within change of forces") finds as their center allegiance to and identification with the dictatorial Lenin ("And we in turn/Share now your fate"). It took a nation of individuals to work the revolution ("we in turn"); now they share its leader's fate, and see it cannot have been otherwise ("Irrevocable you, too,/O star, we speaking to you"). Lenin appropriately expresses, against other perhaps larger forces, the strivings of the masses, just as the star expresses, against the elm leaves in the night, Lenin. Leader, people, and nation are parts of the continual process realized momentarily in star and elm to present an intellectual and emotional complex in an instant of time.

IV. Kandinsky

Williams' description in his autobiography of the Amygists' work as having "no formal necessity implicit in it" and his description of lines of Zukofsky's "Poem beginning 'The'" as having "such an excellent internal necessity that they must be read slowly" both refer to Wassily Kandinsky's concept of "Inner Necessity."

Williams' affinity with Kandinsky stemmed from Kandinsky's adoption by the Vorticists. In "Vortex," under "ANCESTRY," in Blast, Pound wrote: "Picasso, Kandinski, father and mother, classicism and romanticism of the movement."³⁴ In his memoir of Gaudier-Brzeska, Pound wrote that "the image is the poet's pigment; with that in mind you can go ahead and apply Kandinsky, you can transpose his chapter on the language of form and colour and apply it to the writing of verse."³⁵ Pound illustrated his affinity with Kandinsky's principles by describing the genesis of his famous poem "In a Station of the Metro." It is a "one image poem" composed of the Vorticist "primary pigment," the original form of impressions produced in Pound's consciousness by his experience in the metro station at La Concorde in Paris of seeing a sequence of beautiful faces.

In one of the passages from Chapter IV, "The Language of Form and Color" of Ueber das Geistige in der Kunst (Concerning the Spiritual in Art) which Edward Wadsworth translated for Blast in 1914, Kandinsky defines "Inner Necessity" in terms of the distinction between extensive and intensive form:

Form in the narrower sense is, however, nothing more than the boundaries between one surface and another. This is its external meaning. But since everything external implicitly conceals an interior (which comes to light forcibly or feebly), so also every form has an inner content.

FORM IS THEN THE UTTERANCES OF ITS INNER CONTENT. This is its inner meaning. One must think here of the simile of the piano, but apply "form" instead of "colour." The artist is the hand, which, through this or that key (=form) makes the human soul vibrate appropriately. It is clear then that the harmony of form must be based only on the appropriate striking of the human soul.

This we termed the Principle of Inner Necessity.

The two aspects of form just mentioned are at the same time its two aims. And on account of this the external limitation is thoroughly appropriate only when it best expresses the inner meaning of the form.³⁶

The extensive aspect of form, Kandinsky's "form in the narrower sense," is the set of tautological relations among the elements of the medium, such as the angles and lines in a plane composing a rectangle. Form in the wider sense, however, has referential relations and experiential effects, and so we may think of a rectangle as a box and feel a certain way about it according to its scale and proportions. This aspect of form is intensive; it is the set of relations between extensive form and the complex messages and effects of its elements. In poetry, extensive form may be conceived and measured regardless of content, such as the iambic pentameters, the sonnet, and an amateur's "free verse" (which is not to say that a particular sonnet or work in free verse is not also intensive). Intensive form is organic and relative to person, place, and time. It must be experienced; it cannot be merely measured.

Kandinsky's Principle of Inner Necessity is the stipulation that the elements of the medium (whether musical notes, painting pigments, or words) should be controlled to affect the human soul according to the intentions of the artist. This principle produces what we may call significant form, form which coheres so that it may be experienced as a gestalt, a "thing."

In a passage not given in Wadsworth's review in Blast, Kandinsky wrote of the necessity sometimes to use an abstract object to reproduce the necessary inner vibration:

Once more the metaphor of the piano applies: for "color" or "form" substitute "object." Every object (whether a natural form or man-made) has its own life and therefore its own potency. . . . Nature, that is to say, the ever changing surroundings of men, sets in vibration the strings of the piano (the soul) by manipulation of the keys (various objects with their specific potentialities).³⁷

This passage, with the passage above ("the harmony of form must be based on the appropriate striking of the human soul"), could be behind Williams' statement that Zukofsky's poem "strikes against me a thing." A poem seems a thing only if one believes as Kandinsky believed that even man-made objects have their specific spiritual potencies, that all form has intensive significance. Zukofsky's "abstract" diction, being abstract in the same sense as are Kandinsky's objects, that is, man-made, have therefore, as forms, objective significance.

In the practice of writing poetry, the discipline of Inner Necessity is direct presentation. Since words can never be divorced from their referential significance and since the epistemic values of the objective are more clear and vivid than of the subjective, Inner Necessity requires that the expression be formally objective, that is, that it both be textually objective and cohere to strike the reader as a gestalt, a "thing."

Mike Weaver writes, "In the prologue to Kora in Hell Williams makes a brief reference to Kandinsky's famous little treatise On the Spiritual in Art, paraphrasing the three fundamental principles every artist would accept if he expected to create a work possessed of the 'inner necessity.'"³⁸ This is Williams' paraphrase:

Every artist has to express himself.
 Every artist has to express his epoch.
 Every artist has to express the pure and eternal qualities

of the art of all men.³⁹

In Wadsworth's translation, these "three mystical necessities" are followed by the statement that "it is necessary to penetrate with one's mental vision only the first two elements in order to see this third element exposed."⁴⁰ Although I think Kandinsky means that the first two aspects obscure one's understanding of the third, which is the only ultimately important aspect, I also think that Weaver correctly describes Williams' understanding of Kandinsky's intentions when he writes that "from these principles Kandinsky developed a fourth; that the first two elements only needed to be practiced for the third to follow of itself."⁴¹ The formally objective, composed in the relative terms of the artist and his epoch, according to the "Objectivists," presents the Image, which conveys the qualities of all men and all epochs.

V. Whitehead

If Williams' concept of "thing" was first influenced by his understanding of Kandinsky's Principle of Inner Necessity, it was secondly influenced by his understanding of Alfred North Whitehead. On the boat back from Europe in 1927, Williams inscribed in his copy of Whitehead's Science and the Modern World this inscription: "Finished reading it at sea, Sept. 26, 1927—A milestone surely in my career, should I have the force and imagination to go on with my work."⁴²

In his book, Whitehead describes his objectivist position:

This creed is that the actual elements perceived by our senses are in themselves the elements of a common world; and that this world is a complex of things, including indeed our acts of cognition, but transcending them. According to this point of view the things experienced are to be distinguished from our knowledge of them. So far as there is dependence, the things pave the way for the cognition, rather than vice versa. But the point is that the actual things experienced enter into a common world which transcends knowledge, though it includes knowledge. The intermediate subjectivists would hold that the things experienced only indirectly enter into the common world by reason of their dependence on the subject who is cognising. The objectivist holds that the things experienced and the cognisant subject enter into the common world on equal terms.⁴³

Williams was, in Whitehead's sense, an objectivist. The philosophy, however, must be distinguished from the art. The objectivist philosopher believes in what I call epistemic objectivity; the "Objectivist" writer, although he is also an objectivist in philosophy, believes in linguistic objectivity. The philosophy rests on the assumption of a human ability of direct experience; the art rests on the ability of poetic discipline to represent all experience. A writer can precisely present his feelings, even though his feelings may not be precise.

The equal realness of things experienced and cognizant subject suggests—if the elements of the poem are precisely, absolutely derived from the thing experienced—the equal realness of the experience of the poem and the experience of the thing. Whitehead wrote that "in the use of language there is a double symbolic reference:—from things to words on the part of the speaker, and from words back to things on the part of the listener." Of the word "trees," he wrote:

Both the word itself and trees themselves enter into our experience on equal terms; and it would be just as sensible, viewing the question abstractedly, for trees to symbolize the word 'tree' as for the word to symbolize the trees.⁴⁴

The "Objectivists" believed not simply that trees and "trees" are equally real, however; they believed that the thing experienced and words presenting the thing experienced could evoke in the consciousness of the reader the same primary form. The words composing the Image do not simply refer to experience; they are experience.

The objectivist's belief that the things experienced are not dependent on our knowledge of them affirms naive sense experience. Whitehead gave this affirmation as a reason for basing his own philosophy on the objectivist position:

I hold that the ultimate appeal is to naive sense experience and that is why I lay such stress on the evidence of poetry. My point is, that in our sense-experience we know away from and beyond our own personality; whereas the subjectivist holds that in such experience we merely know about our own personality.⁴⁵

Whitehead thus at once affirmed Williams' predilections and validated Williams' art.

John Riordan gave Whitehead's book to Williams in December 1925⁴⁶ to help explain to Williams what he called "Precision Poetry." Williams was prepared for the theories of Riordan and Whitehead by the implications of Pound's poetics. Pound assumed that poetic elements like cadence and diction could, if composed with "exactitude," present to the consciousness of the reader as directly as would the thing experienced the essential form of the experience.⁴⁷ Poetic structure can affect directly the reader's physiological and emotional consciousness. Riordan wrote Williams:

The difficulties in writing a poem are as immense as those of writing a philosophy, and when anyone begins to know anything about what we call "emotions" and "nerve adjustments" it will be found that the structure of your poems (written intuitively) is as rigid as any mathematical solution.⁴⁸

Riordan's "Precisionism" was a theory to achieve in art the precision that mechanistic science achieved by eliminating the human observer with "invariable measuring instruments" and eliminating the variations of chance with abstraction. Riordan thought poetry could achieve this precision by reestablishing the variables. "He referred to A. N. Whitehead's analysis of perception," which is a generalization of Einstein's Special Theory of Relativity, "identifying three relationships in the act of perception: the observer, position in space, and point in time." Riordan's point was that each relationship—the observer's, the spatial, and the temporal—had to have as important a role in influencing the artist's act of perception as they had in life according to Einstein and Whitehead. To reestablish the observer, "the writer had to become his own reader, a functioning perceiver observing himself in action." The observer could not remain "simply an inattentive recipient of the writer's conveyed intentions"; he had to become a participant in the experience, which had to be objectivized as any other experience.⁴⁹

According to Einstein's theory of relativity, space and time are not fixed; they vary depending on the conditions under which they are observed. Similarly, according to Whitehead's theory of organic mechanism, as Mike Weaver writes, "the general laws of mechanistic science were modified according to the organic situation in which they were objectivized." Weaver claims these concepts were useful to Williams in creating his "variable foot." Since the duration of time depends in "the relative speed of the moving body," Williams allowed the length of the foot to depend on the relative speed of "the projected voice of the poet."⁵⁰

The idea of the variable foot is much misunderstood,⁵¹ even though it takes no more liberty than is allowed the Old English alliterative foot and the sprung rhythm of Hopkins, and no more rigor than is required by the Imagiste principle of composing "in sequence of the musical phrase, not in sequence of a metronome." The desired event "in the accepted prosody," wrote Williams in 1948, "is similar to what must have been the early feelings of Einstein toward the laws of Isaac Newton in physics. Thus from being fixed, our prosodic values should rightly be seen as only relatively true. Einstein had the speed of light as a constant—his only constant—What have we? Perhaps our concept of musical time."⁵² To satisfy Williams' parameters, the variable foot might be a phrase or unit of the line containing one major stressed syllable (which is determined by the rhythm of common speech) and any number of unstressed or minor stressed syllables. The practice would be to vary the length of the foot by varying the number of syllables according to the effects intended to be registered by the pace of the voice, the flow of the verse.

Williams had relied since the beginning of Imagisme on concrete details to present the forms of the subjective—of states of feeling and abstract relations. The abstract statement lacks precision. But Whitehead's statement, "So far as there is dependence, the things pave the way for the cognition, rather than vice versa," may have suggested to Williams the formulation of his dictum, "No ideas but in things." Whitehead's affirmation of naive sense experience would at least have justified Williams' belief that presentation of things is more clear and vivid than of ideas.⁵³

Whitehead's philosophy did more than justify and clarify Williams' poetic practice; it fed his distrust of the civilization that did not recognize him for his art. Whitehead's organic mechanism advocated an antidote to scientific materialism and to the devastating effects of modern industrial capitalism. Whitehead discussed not only the relativity of space, time, and matter, but also the relativity of body, mind, and world. Together, he claimed, Einstein and William James represented the modern challenge to Descartes.⁵⁴ Consciousness, said James, is not an entity; it is a function. This brought about the end of the Cartesian bifurcation of mind and body, just as Einstein's theory that matter is energy brought about the end of space, time, and matter as absolute quantities.

In the last chapter of Science and the Modern World, "Requisites for Social Progress," Whitehead discussed the bad effects of educational abstraction and professional specialization, and advocated a renewed emphasis on concrete experience and aesthetic appreciation not only of the human but of the whole field of an activity's interrelations:

What we want to do is to draw out habits of aesthetic appreciation. According to the metaphysical doctrine which I have been developing, to do so is to increase the depth of individuality. . . . We must foster the creative initiative toward the maintenance of objective values. You will not obtain the apprehension without the initiative, or the initiative without the apprehension. As soon as you get towards the concrete, you cannot exclude action. Sensitiveness without impulse spells decadence, and impulse without sensitiveness spells brutality. I am using the word "sensitiveness" in its most general signification, so as to include apprehension of what lies beyond oneself; that is to say, sensitiveness to all the facts in the case. Thus "art" in the general sense which I require is any selection by which concrete facts are so arranged as to elicit attention to particular values which are realizable by them.⁵⁵

Williams' poem "Paterson" is a work in Whitehead's general sense of art. Paterson the man, a personification of the river and the city, is a "philosopher" whose ideas are in concrete things, the particulars of the river and city, as if they were a work of his art. The first strophe is:

Before the grass is out the people are out
and bare twigs still whip the wind—
when there is nothing, in the pause between
snow and grass in the parks and at the street ends
—Say it, no ideas but in things—
nothing but the blank faces of the houses
and cylindrical trees
bent, forked by preconception and accident
split, furrowed, creased, mottled, stained
secret—into the body of the light—
These are the ideas, savage and tender
somewhat of the music, et cetera
of Paterson, that great philosopher—

This poem, like many of Williams' "Objectivist" poems, is not restricted simply to a selection of concrete facts; it contains explicit statements regarding objective values . . . and aesthetic discipline:

Defeated in achieving the solution they
fall back among cheap pictures, furniture
filled silk, cardboard shoes, bad dentistry
windows that will not open, poisonous gin
scurvy, toothache—
. . . .
But never, in despair and anxiety
forget to drive wit in, in till it
discover that his thoughts are decorous and simple
and never forget that though his thoughts are decorous
and simple, the despair and anxiety
the grace and detail of
a dynamo—⁵⁶

This is a directive toward action, action according to values realizable by the facts of Paterson.

VI. A Thing

Williams' understanding of Zukofsky's reestablishment of poetic essentials, of Pound's Imagisme, of Kandinsky's Principle of Inner Necessity, and of Whitehead's objectivist position were all behind his statement that Zukofsky's "Poem beginning 'The'" struck against him a thing.

Williams' "thing" is a natural or man-made object whose potency clearly affects the human soul, allowing it to exist with clarity in the world. Williams' statement, like Kandinsky's treatise, equates the ontological form and the linguistic form. As such, it is a judgement of the affectiveness and clarity of Zukofsky's poem.

We may see this achievement as the conclusion of a transitive relation whose first premise is Zukofsky's success with Pound's direct presentation, with equating the linguistic object and the epistemic object ($l=e$)—that is, with creating a poem which is an experience— and whose second premise is the belief that the epistemic object is equivalent to the ontological object ($e=o$)—that is, that the experience reproduces the experienced. In formula:

If $l=e$ and $e=o$, then $l=o$.

This formula means, in other words, that if the poem reproduces experience and experience reproduces the experienced, then the poem may be experienced as a thing in the world. Or, to reverse the relation, the fact that the poem strikes against Williams a thing both complements Zukofsky on his technique and presumes a philosophical belief in the validity of direct experience—that, as Whitehead put it, "the actual elements perceived by our senses are in themselves the elements of a common world." I believe that Williams received this second premise from Whitehead and that Zukofsky received it from Williams. I believe that Whitehead was the agent in their becoming conscious of their fundamental philosophical positions.

The fact that a poet may recognize the form inhering in experience that inheres in the experienced and create an expression in which that form inheres rests on a basic assumption of Imagiste and "Objectivist" poetics: namely, that there exist forms which may be identically inherent in particular sets of ontological, epistemic, and linguistic objects, and so may be translated among them in direct experience and by poetic technique. The Image and the Vortex are exactly such forms; the "poem as object" and Williams' "thing" present such forms. Williams' statement that Zukofsky's poem struck against him a thing, therefore, informed Zukofsky's concept of objectification, which he first defined almost two years later, around January 1930. Objectification is the presentation of the "thing" in terms of the objects of sincerity and history, that is, in textual objectivity; it is the process which reduces the poem to terms whose form reproduces the "objectively perfect, inextricably the direction of historic and contemporary particulars,"⁵⁷ that is, to formal objectivity. The "poem as object" was thus a synthesis and development of concepts inherent in the modernist poetic tradition.

Section 6 - George and Mary Oppen

I. Biography

George August Oppen was born in New Rochelle, New York, on 24 April 1908. When he was four, his mother died, and when he was nine or ten his father (also named George) married Seville. The next year the family, with George, an older sister, Libby, and a younger sister, June, moved to San Francisco. Their father owned theaters, belonged to the Bohemian Club, and moved in the best society. The Oppens were accustomed to fine clothes, expensive restaurants, many servants (including, as cook, the young Josephine Araldo), frequent and formal dinner parties, bridge, talk of the stock market, and business. Oppen's first break from home was entering the Agricultural College at Corvallis, Oregon, in the fall of 1926.

Mary Colby was born on 28 November 1908 in Kalispell, Montana, where her father was the postmaster. She had three older brothers, Wendell, Paul, and Noel. Kalispell was at the time in the remote country. In 1918, the Colbys moved to Seattle, where her father invested in an import firm. When Mary was twelve, they moved to Grants Pass, Oregon, a town of miners, lumberjacks, and farmers, where the Colbys ran a general store. When Mary was fifteen, her father died of cancer; she wanted to escape Grants Pass but was held back by her age and the family's dwindling finances. After a brief time at the University of Oregon at Eugene, she went, in the fall of 1926, to the Agricultural College at Corvallis.

Mary's childhood background, different from George's in class, locale, and familial and financial security, gave her a perspective on possibilities for finding their American roots that proved vital to George's sense of poetry. George and Mary met in Jack Lyon's poetry class during their first quarter. They were introduced to the work of Carl Sandburg, Sherwood Anderson, E. E. Cummings, Edna St. Vincent Millay, Vachel Lindsay, Ezra Pound, and to Conrad Aiken's Modern American Poetry, which included Emily Dickinson, Amy Lowell, Robert Frost, Wallace Stevens, William Carlos Williams, H. D., and T. S. Eliot. Two months later, Mary was evicted and George Suspended for an overnight rendezvous, and neither returned.

For a time, Mary returned to Grants Pass to work in her family's store, and George to San Francisco to work in one of his father's theaters; but in July Mary joined George in San Francisco. George attended a prep school in Oakland, and Mary Heald's business school. In the fall of 1927, to escape George's parents, they hitchhiked to Dallas, where they were married. Mary wrote in her autobiography:

We were in search of an esthetic within which to live, and we were looking for it in our own American roots, in our own country. We had learned at college that poetry was being written in our own times, and that in order for us to write it was not necessary for us to ground ourselves in the academic; the ground we needed was the roads we were travelling. As we were new, so we had new roots, and we knew little of our own country. Hitchhiking became more than a flight from a powerful family—our discoveries

themselves became an esthetic and a disclosure. The people we met, as various and as accidentally met as thumbing a ride could make them, became the clue to our finding roots; we gained confidence that this country was ours in a sense which we hadn't known under our parents' roofs. The sense was not only a patriotic but also a personal one, for as people generally accepted us, we felt comfortable and at home in our country. I have never felt so at home in any other land.¹

When the Oppen family met Mary, they decided against forcing an annulment and instead schemed to woo Mary with luxury and wealth to trap George into his father's business and their way of life, which neither George nor Mary were willing to accept.

In 1928, therefore, they hitchhiked across the country to Detroit, bought a small boat, and sailed on the Erie Canal to New York City. Mary wrote:

We had not felt in San Francisco that we knew the people who were writing and thinking and searching for what was new, and we went to New York searching for those people, for a circle of peers. We had the conviction that the works of artists and writers had to be new, or there was no point to the effort. We were undoubtedly lucky, for we found almost at once, and seemingly without impediment, friends who had these concerns too, and who understood us and accepted us as friends.²

One day, on their way to a party, they discovered the Gotham Book Mart, where they saw more books of poetry than they had ever found in one place before. George stood there and read through the Exile 3. The first poem in the magazine was Lous Zukofsky's "Poem beginning 'The.'" At the party they met friends of Zukofsky, Mary and Russel Wright, through whom they met Zukofsky himself. Soon they met other young people interested in the arts, including Zukofsky's friend Tibor Serly. Zukofsky also introduced them to Charles Reznikoff's work, and then to Reznikoff himself, whom they visited frequently.

With the discovery of George Oppen, Zukofsky had found a group of literary friends who would work with him to satisfy Pound's invectives for literary activism and achievement.

II. Discrete Series

On 6 March 1930, Louis Zukofsky wrote to Ezra Pound, announcing that he might have for Pound thirty-two pages of poems by George Oppen, whose occasional imprecisions and stylistic peculiarities were excused by his unique purpose and ability.³ These pages were a manuscript of Oppen's first book, Discrete Series, which was published by the Objectivist Press in 1934, with a preface which had been volunteered by Pound.

Principles

The last poem in Oppen's most recent book, Primitive, describes writing Discrete Series:

. . . and writing
 thru the night (a young man,
 Brooklyn, 1929) I named the book
 series empirical

series all force
 in events the myriad
 lights have entered
 us it is a music more powerful
 than music⁴

As Oppen here describes the process, the poems of Discrete Series were the results of the myriad lights in events entering his consciousness. The effect is musical because the process recognizes and taps the music inherent in the heart of things and of language itself.

Pound, describing his poem "In a Station of the Metro," wrote: "In a poem of this sort one is trying to record the precise instant when a thing outward and objective transforms itself, or darts into a thing inward and subjective."⁵ A poem of this sort is an act of what I will here call "inspiration," an inward movement of an objective thing such as myriad lights or faces in a crowd. "Objectivist" and Imagiste poems both rely on inspiration. In contrast, Symboliste poems are acts of what I call "projection," the outward movement of a subjective thing. Symbolism remakes the world in the image of the poet's prior psychic state, but Imagisme and "Objectivism" are based upon the recognition that our psychic states are remade by the world with each fresh perception.

Pound's Imagisme and Oppen's "Objectivism" differ regarding the usual nature of the "thing," the Image. Pound allowed the Image to be either "subjective or objective."⁶ In "Affirmations . . . IV. As for Imagisme" in 1915, Pound wrote that a "subjective" Image emerges from the mind unlike its possible original "external causes, but that an "objective" Image emerges from the mind "like the external original," purged of only its inessential qualities.⁷ In the composition of Discrete Series, Oppen believed exclusively in the virtues of original external causes; that is, his Image was usually objective, and his world, full of form.

A further distinction between Imagisme and Symbolisme also tells something about "Objectivism." Even the Imagiste's subjective Image is not an act of projection. It is not misrepresented as the world. Subjective experience is not justified by claiming priority over objective things. Instead, the Imagistes emphasized the dynamic and emotive properties of the poem's structure.

The first principle behind the composition of a poem such as "In a Station of the Metro" is the belief that each element of one's art can have a precise intellectual and emotional effect on the reader. The complex of such effects, as Pound defined the term, is the Image.⁸ An Image in this technical sense is not, as many poets and readers, beginning with Amy Lowell, have mistakenly thought, a visual impression of something objective. It exists in the poem as the poet's representation of an ur-Image: his impression of the object if the Image is objective, or his impression itself if the Image is subjective.

The second principle of the composition of such a poem is that, to have the effect of the thing the poet wishes to express, the elements used in the poem must be derived from or exactly correspond to the

ur-Image of that thing. Pound's concept of an "absolute" (discussed in Section 8.IV) embodies both these principles.

These principles survived the twenties in the work and mentorship of Pound and Williams, descending directly, and also indirectly through Zukofsky, to Oppen. In his interview with L. S. Dembo, when asked about the attitude which he claimed characterized the writers in An "Objectivists" Anthology, Oppen stressed the debt the "Objectivists" owed to the imagists:

Let me see what we thought and whether I can generalize about it. I'll just put it in personal terms. What I felt I was doing was beginning from imagism as a position of honesty. The first question at that time in poetry was simply the question of honesty, of sincerity. . . . The . . . point for me, and I think for Louis, too, was the attempt to construct a meaning, to construct a method of thought from the imagist technique of poetry—from the imagist intensity of vision. If no one were going to challenge me, I would say, "a test of truth." If I had to back it up I'd say anyway, "a test of sincerity"—that there is a moment, an actual time, when you believe something to be true, and you construct a meaning from these moments of conviction.⁹

Oppen's point was based on the "Doctrine of the Image"¹⁰ as a serious epistemological discipline, avoiding the Amyglist idea of the image as the passively transmitted visual impression. One can see the germ of Oppen's "moments of conviction" in Pound's original definition of the "Image":

An "Image" is that which presents an intellectual and emotional complex in an instant of time. I use the term "complex" rather in the technical sense employed by the newer psychologists, such as Hart, though we might not agree absolutely in our application.

It is the presentation of such a "complex" instantaneously which gives that sense of sudden liberation; that sense of freedom from time limits and space limits; that sense of sudden growth, which we experience in the presence of the greatest works of art.¹¹

A moment of conviction is the experience of the objective Image, an experience strictly faithful to empirical fact. The presentation of the Image, its realization in form, gives a sense of revelation—"thereby," wrote Williams, "causing a direct liberation of the intelligence." This formal realization is the discipline of Discrete Series. In his interview, Oppen continued:

My book, of course, was called Discrete Series. That's a phrase in mathematics. A pure mathematical series would be one in which each term is derived from the preceding term by a rule. A discrete series is a series of terms each of which is empirically derived, each of which is empirically true. And this is the reason for the fragmentary character of those poems. I was attempting to construct a meaning by empirical statements, by imagist statements.¹²

"Imagist," for Oppen, meant "empirical." An "imagist statement" is absolute, a statement which precisely corresponds with the empirical observation. This discipline avoids through its reliance on the substantive the falseness to which abstract levels of language becomes subject. Oppen said that "if we are talking about the nature of reality, then we are not really talking about our comment about it; we are talking about the apprehension of some thing, whether it is or not, whether one can make a thing of it or not."¹³ Oppen's test of reality is whether he can make of it a "thing," whether he can make of it a poem which achieves form.

The objects for Oppen's empirical series derived from his experience of New York City in 1929. Mary Oppen, in her autobiography, wrote:

We didn't yet know the subway system, and we got off at stations at random just to see what was above ground. Once we stuck our heads out into a cemetery, another time we were on clay fields with standing pools of water, and once we were among gigantic identical apartment buildings in the Bronx, block after block.¹⁴

When I suggested to the Oppens that this was a prototype for Discrete Series, George said, "That's Rezy," and Mary added, "That's Charles Reznikoff. He comes up and he sees the streetlight or he comes up and sees the moon."¹⁵ Oppen learned the value of empirical observation partly from Reznikoff. The work of both realizes moments of revelation of (in Oppen's words) "the things which one cannot not see."¹⁶

In his interview with L. S. Dembo, however, Oppen also stressed a point with the Amygists had never understood:

But I learned from Louis, as against the romanticism or even the quaintness of the imagist position, the necessity for forming the poem properly, for achieving form. That's what "objectivist" really means. There's been a tremendous misunderstanding about that. People assume it means the psychologically objective in attitude. It actually means the objectification of the poem, the making an object of the poem.¹⁷

Although Oppen might not have realized it, this point is also based on Pound's Imagisme—on the three Imagiste propositions, which proscribe "direct treatment," concise presentation, and composition by cadence.¹⁸ Pound wrote, "By 'direct treatment,' one simply means that having got the Image one refrains from hanging it with festoons."¹⁹ Only by an idea of the formally objective does one know what to avoid. The Imagiste manifesto required that all the elements of poetry, not only diction and rhythm, correspond absolutely to the thing the author wishes to express, which was for Oppen an objective thing. If these correspondences are established, one has, in Zukofsky's term, "sincerity." Moreover, if correspondences are established to all essential qualities of the object, one achieves "objectification" to create the "poem as object."

Williams spoke of the poem as object in his autobiography. There "Objectivism" was "an antidote, in a sense, to the bare image haphazardly presented in loose verse."²⁰ He also spoke of the poem in terms of a machine. His best-known application of this metaphor is to his own work, in the introduction to The Wedge in 1944,²¹ but he had previously applied it to the work of George Oppen, in his review of Discrete Series in 1934.²² Here Williams suggested that Oppen's book is "of importance to the highest degree" because "necessary corrections of or emendations to human conduct" originate "in the poems, causing thereby a direct liberation of the intelligence." He continued:

But this importance cannot be in what the poem says, since in that case the fact that it is a poem would be a redundancy. The importance lies in what the poem is. Its existence as a poem is of first importance, a technical matter, as with all facts, compelling the recognition of a mechanical structure. A poem which does not arouse respect for the technical requirements of its own mechanics may have anything you

please painted all over it or on it in the way of meaning but it will for all that be as empty as a man made of wax or straw.

It is the acceptable fact of a poem as a mechanism that is the proof of its meaning and this is as technical a matter as in the case of any other machine. Without the poem being a workable mechanism in its own right, a mechanism which arises from, while at the same time it constitutes the meaning of, the poem as a whole, it will remain ineffective. And what it says regarding the use or worth of that particular piece of "propaganda" which it is detailing will never be convincing.²³

In his interview with Dembo, Oppen expressed, less metaphorically, his own sense of the meaning of form:

Yes. Well, I do believe in a form in which there is a sense of the whole line, not just its ending. Then there's the sense of the relation between lines, the relation in their length; there is a sense of the relation of the speed, of the alterations and momentum of the poem, the feeling when it's done that this has been rounded. I think that probably a lot of the worst of modern poetry, and it would be true of some quite good poetry, such as Creeley's, uses the line-ending simply as the ending of the line, a kind of syncopation or punctuation. It's a kind of formlessness that lacks any sense of line measure.

The meaning of a poem is in the cadences and the shape of the lines and the pulse of the thought which is given by those lines. The meaning of many lines will be changed —one's understanding of the lines will be altered— if one changes the line-ending. It's not just the line-ending as punctuation but as separating the connections of the progression of thought in such a way that understanding of the line would be changed if one altered the line division.²⁴

According to metrical prosody, one simply looks at the poem to see if it has form: one counts syllables and charts accents and rhymes. But one cannot simply look at an "Objectivist" poem to see if it has form. "Objectivist" form is the realization of a gestalt; the "thing" by which all the elements of the poem—semantic, syntactic, phonemic, and phonetic—cohere.

The Problem

Each poem of Discrete Series makes an objective Image of a direct observation by the young George Oppen of New York—except for the first poem, which, instead, prepares us for these observations by addressing the problems of seeing what is really in the world:

The knowledge, not of sorrow, you were
saying, but of boredom
Is—aside from reading speaking
smoking— —
Of what, Maude Blessingbourne it was,
wished to know when, having risen,
"approached the window as if to see
what was really going on";
And saw rain falling, in the distance
more slowly,
The road clear from her past the window-
glass— —
Of the world, weather-swept, with which
one shares the century.²⁵

Maude Blessingbourne is a character in Henry James's "The Story In It."²⁶ She is a sweet young widow who is staying at Mrs. Dyott's country home. After a visit by Mrs. Dyott's secret lover, Colonel Voyt, during which Maude and the Colonel argue about whether women in the French romances in which Maude vicariously lives need be immoral, Mrs. Dyott learns that although Maude is passionately in love, she prefers that the man not know it. Maude's indulgent withdrawal into the pleasures of her subjective romance protects her from the danger which her pessimistic fears would involve her in, if she were to "live." She fears a real relationship would be a threat to her "honesty," that is, her virtue; however, her "honesty" is less at stake than her fantasy. By not honestly admitting it, she protects it from the rest of reality. At any rate, her pleasure in being the mistress of her own passion compensates for her unhappiness and boredom. Her withdrawal, her abstinence from expressing her passion, is symbolized by her gesture of approaching the window to look at the storm, knowing beforehand what she would see. The weather, if not a projection of her psychic state, is at least consonant with her inner, though not her outer, nature. It is not something that has entered her and changed her in the way the impressions of New York City changed the young George Oppen in 1929.

This poem serves as Oppen's preface to Discrete Series. As such, it is different, in several ways, from the thirty poems which follow it. To begin with, we are given, in addition to the speaker and his listener, addressed as "you," a persona, Maude Blessingbourne, with whom the mood of boredom is identified. Moreover, she is mentioned by the author to illustrate a philosophical concept previously expressed by his listener: "you were / saying," he says. This distances that mood and that concept from the speaker. Secondly, the poem directly states this concept—that is, that the knowledge of the mood of boredom is the knowledge of the world. To state the concept is to break the discipline which is maintained in the thirty subsequent poems, which present, without comment, the Image encountered in concrete experience. Each of the other poems in the series is precisely not the objective correlative of a subjective thought or state of feeling, but the objective itself, presented to show its significance. Thirdly, and as a consequence, in this poem, which quotes and even parodies the prose of Henry James, the rhythms are more extended and less broken, the syntax more convoluted and less elliptical, than in the poems which follow.

The irony of the quotation adds to the distance created by James's language, by Maude's mood, and by the ascription of the philosophical concept in the poem—i.e., "the knowledge of boredom" —to an unidentified interlocuter, the "you" of line one. The poem's total emotional effect is one of curiosity, an effect appropriate to the manner in which the "you" to whom the poem is addressed makes distinctions: "Not of sorrow, you were / saying, but of boredom." The alliteration and the repetition of the musical phrase: / x / x, reinforces a deliberateness not associated with Maude's fond vagueness.

Oppen spoke of this poem in his interview with Dembo. He said that "The word 'boredom' is a little surprising there"; also that it is "rather strange."²⁷ I suggest that it seemed strange to Oppen because it represented the fulfillment of Maude's not Oppen's desire to know. The degree to which her social class removes her from the rabble is also the degree to which she is removed from her own basic needs. It can be assumed safely that Oppen understood this problem, for it is the reason he left his financially successful

and socially prominent family in San Francisco to hitchhike with Mary across the country and to find in New York poets who insisted on "contact." Mary Oppen wrote in her autobiography:

We were searching for a way to avoid the trap that our class background held for us if we relented in our attempts to escape from them. We understood from our experiences while hitchhiking that in the United States we were not required to remain in the class into which we were born. We wanted to see a great deal of the world, and the education of which we talked for ourselves was to leave our class and learn our life by throwing ourselves into it.

And speaking of George's father's reaction to their commitment, she wrote:

I know now that we must have seemed to him vulnerable and too young to be out in a world of which he knew nothing. I think now that he was afraid for us. But we had found people out in the larger world to be open and friendly to us wherever we had been; his life did not hold for us this wealth of people of all classes that we wanted to know. I think we felt the world was ours, and that it was not his to give to us.²⁸

Maude Blessingbourne had been contented to love from a distance, but Oppen felt more a part of "the world, weather-swept, with which / one shares the century," the world he threw himself into.

Speaking of the spirit which he feels offsets "a kind of pessimism" in his later poems, Oppen has said that he enjoyed life "very, very much," and he has defined his feeling about life

by the word "curious" or, as at the end of "A Narrative," "joy," joy in the fact that one confronts a thing so large, that one is part of it. The sense of awe, I suppose, is all I manage to talk about. I had written that "virtue of the mind is that emotion which causes to see," and I think that perhaps that is the best statement of it.

Yes, it is an emotion. The mind is capable not only of thinking but has an emotional root that forces it to look, to think, to see.²⁹

Maude's gesture, made "as if to see / what really was going on," is ironic and pathetic. Oppen's presentation of her boredom is proof of the ability for which Zukofsky praised Oppen. The poem, though expressing knowledge of the world, is not boring. The poet has chosen not withdrawal but involvement, not subjectivity but objectivity, not pessimism but curiosity; and the consequence of this is not boredom but joy.

The Unreal

In his brief preface to Discrete Series, Pound complained:

. . . the cry for originality is often set up by men who have never stopped to consider how much. I mean how great a variant from a known modality is needed by the new writer if his expression is to be coterminous with his content.

Oppen succeeded in that reformation in 1929 by providing an "adequate variation from a known mode of writing" — from, that is, the mode of Dr. Williams.³⁰

The similarity between the work of Oppen and Williams is clear. In his Novelette, Williams wrote that his poems are neither symbolic nor evocative of images; they are "pure design" having "only the

effect of themselves."³¹ The second poem in Discrete Series is such a pure design:

1
 White. From the
 Under arm of T.
 The red globe.
 Up
 Down. Round
 Shiny fixed
 Alternatives
 From the quiet
 Stone floor . . .³²

Even though, for the present-day reader, this poem has an appreciable purity as design, it can remain obscure because it neither names nor creates a visual image of its object. This obscurity has increased with time, because the object from which the poem arose, once common, is now esoteric. On the newer elevator portals in Manhattan in the late twenties was a decorative device shaped like a "T" and under its "arms" were two shiny round globes, one white and one red, which lit to signal the direction of the passage of the elevator, up or down. The poem gains for the present reader with this knowledge total clarity.

Although unfamiliarity with essential factual details increases with time, there is another kind of seeming obscurity more daunting to readers in the thirties, who were not as accustomed as are present-day readers to poetry which enacts the process of perception. Pound tried to counter this obscurity in his preface:

Bad criticism emerges chiefly from reviewers so busy telling what they haven't found in a poem (or whatever) that they have omitted to notice what is.

The charge of obscurity has been raised at regular or irregular intervals since the stone age, though there is no living man who is not surprised in first learning that KEATS was considered "obscure." It takes a very elaborate reconstruction of England in Keats' time to erect even a shaky hypothesis regarding the probable fixations and ossifications of the then hired bureaucracy of Albermarle St., London West.³³

This obscurity arises from the reader's "fixations and ossifications," his outdated, inappropriate expectations about the poem. Few readers in the thirties, even though they would have recognized the device on the elevator, were prepared to appreciate a poem without "poetic" ornaments or rhetorical devices, without symbol, metaphor, or simile, without impressions of simple emotional suggestiveness, without traditional themes or subject-matter, and without abstract fundamentals like Truth or Beauty. They did not know how to "read" a poem which strives to be a verbal equivalent of a perception brought into being by the changing lights of elevator signals in a skyscraper.

In An "Objectivists" Anthology, Zukofsky put this poem in the section devoted to the "epic,"³⁴ which was his term for poetry which recognizes the poetic value of the facts around us, contemporary or historical particulars, be they things or events. Zukofsky wrote to Carl Rakosi that Oppen would be

represented in the anthology by a short poem presenting the modern skyscraper—the sense of being inside it.³⁵ For Zukofsky, the poem does not simply record the elevator portal. The poem is synecdochic; the part represents the whole. If concrete experience is a test of more conceptual observations, then we are justified in seeing the poem as a part of more inclusive wholes. Indeed, the poem's title in the anthology is "1930s,"³⁶ and it states a frame of mind which during the years of the Great Depression was fascinated with devices by which one could swiftly rise—or just as swiftly fall.

The third poem is an observation about how "big-Business," with a capital "B," removes itself from public view:

2
 Thus
 Hides the
 Parts—the prudery
 Of Frigidaire, of
 Soda-jerking— —
 Thus
 Above the
 Plane of lunch, of wives
 Removes itself
 (As soda-jerking from
 the private act
 Of
 Cracking eggs);
 big-Business³⁷

The objects of this poem are more recognizable than the object of the previous poem. The previous poem seemed mildly ironic because it used Pound's "direct treatment" (avoiding ornament, stripping the verse to its functionally essential parts) to present a device which was to a large degree ornamental. Here Oppen presents an observation of the same kind with, however, a more critical intent. He reflects on the location of a public soda-fountain on the first floor of a large office building. The businessmen above are removed from the "Plane of lunch, of wives," just as the working parts of Frigidaire's refrigerators are hidden within aerodynamically designed curves of white enamel, and as a common act like cracking eggs is made by the soda-jerk to appear to be an act of magic. Big-Business in its tower is removed from the plane of private experience just as the products of big-Business induce a withdrawal which protects us from that kind of experience. What is "really going on" is that we are removed from the actual by the mystiques of architecture, design, and showmanship whose intent is to hypnotize us into paying for what we could either do without or, like cracking eggs, do for ourselves. This poem, as others in the series, directly presents an aspect of reality antithetical to the honesty and sincerity of direct and objective experience. The "Objectivist" presentation contributes critically to the continuing investigation of the book into the question of what is real.

For Oppen, the real exists on three interdependent levels: the formal, the epistemological, and the social. Accordingly, the poem must rest on three interdependent disciplines: meaning must be resolved into matters of form; thought must be expressed in terms of lower levels of abstraction; and the object must be in accord with a kind of populism which Oppen feels he shares with the poets in his tradition. Oppen summarized his populist principles as follows:

The early moderns among painters of the United States found themselves promptly identified as the Ash Can school, and it happens that Lindsay, Sandburg, Kreymborg, Williams—the poets of the little magazine Others which came off a hand press in a garage somewhere in New Jersey about 1918—were almost a populist movement. Though it is hard to register now, the subjects of Sandburg's poems, the stock-yards and the railroad sidings, gave them their impact. Of the major poets it is only William Carlos Williams, with his insistence on "the American idiom," on the image derived from day to day experience, on form as "nothing more than an extension of content," who shows a derivation from populism. But it is the fidelity, the clarity, including the visual clarity and their freedom from the art subject which is the distinction also of Pound and Eliot and the force behind their creation of a new form and a new prosody; the "speech rhythms" of Pound, the "prose quality" of Eliot.³⁸

Populism is a belief in the rights, wisdom, or virtues of the common people. For Oppen, this belief connects his own work with the work of Pound and Eliot, of the Others group, of the Chicago literary renaissance, and, later, of "the San Francisco School, the poets called Beat."³⁹ The term "populism" labels Williams' social, epistemological, and formal virtues: "his insistence on 'the American idiom,' on the image derived from day to day experience, on form as 'nothing more than an extension of content.'" Similarly, he approves Pound's and Eliot's "fidelity" and "clarity," "their freedom from the art subject," and "their creation of a new form and a new prosody," again, reflecting the same three mutually dependent aspects of poetic meaning: the social, the epistemological, and the formal.

This is not to say that Oppen's poetic is identical to that of any other poet in his tradition. For one thing, Oppen did not share Williams' self-conscious need, as a first-generation American, to embrace and reflect the American character. Williams' belief that the language of the poem should be the language of speech is a restriction by which Oppen does not abide. Oppen believes that the language of the poem should be the language of thought, that is, of experience. Although the sounds and rhythms of the poem are part of the structure that gives the meaning, Oppen's test is never whether one would actually say the poem. When asked whether he agreed with Williams about the great importance of overthrowing the iambic pentameter, he replied,

I don't subscribe to any of the theories that poetry should simply reproduce common speech, and so on. My reason for using a colloquial vocabulary is really a different one. It may be touched by populism as Williams' is, but in general I don't agree with his ideas on the subject.⁴⁰

In short, Oppen's poetic is, just as Pound wrote in the preface to Discrete Series, "the adequate variation from a known mode of writing," and is certainly not identical to Williams' or any other writer's. Pound wrote: "I salute a serious craftsman, a sensibility which is not every man's sensibility and which has not been got out of any other man's books."⁴¹

Oppen does not dwell exclusively on the unreality of urban experience; he also dwells on its realness. He presents not only things which detach one from direct experience, but also things which attract us to it. Here, for example, is the sixteenth poem, one of the book's love poems:

She lies, hip high,
 On a flat bed
 While the after-
 Sun passes.
 Plant, I breathe— —
 O Clearly,
 Eyes legs arms hands fingers,
 Simple legs in silk.⁴⁷

The meaning is in the scene itself, which is presented as clearly and sincerely as it is apprehended by the speaker. The single nonliteral word is "Plant," metaphorical shorthand for something like "Quiet as a plant," or, from an early manuscript of the book, "As in a closed room a plant / In darkness growing. Nightcloud."⁴⁸ But the plant's qualities need not be explicitly stated; they are implicit in the word itself. We have here only the essentials. "Afternoon" has been reduced to "after-." The terms in "Eyes legs arms hands fingers" are not separated by commas, for they are organically parts of one body.

In his review of Discrete Series, Williams wrote:

An imaginable new social order would require a skeleton of severe discipline for its realization and maintenance. Thus by a sharp restriction to essentials, the seriousness of a new order is brought to realization. Poetry might turn this condition to its own ends. Only by being an object sharply defined and without redundancy will its form project whatever meaning is required of it. It could well be, at the same time, first and last a poem facing as it must the dialectical necessities of its day. Oppen had carried this social necessity, as far as poetry may be concerned in it, over to an extreme.⁴⁹

The form of the poem expresses the epistemological and social realizations which were the conditions of its creation.

The awareness of form that registers "the sense of the whole line, not just its ending," and "the sense of the relation between lines," also registers the sense of the page and the relation between pages. That this series is discrete does not mean that its terms are unrelated; it means that they are as related as are their counterparts in the real world. The twenty-ninth poem illustrates this sense of form:

DRAWING
 Not by growth
 But the
 Paper, turned, contains
 This entire volume⁵⁰

In Collected Poems, Discrete Series has lost the sense of being a volume of discrete but related parts. It is like a poem whose lines are written out as prose with only longer spaces between the lines. The deleterious effects of the cramped design are more serious than the occasional confusion about where one

(existing in it)— —
Her p1easure's
Looser;
'O—'

'Tomorrow?' —

Successive
Happenings
(the telephone)⁵⁶

One recognizes in the last three lines a description of (and a model for) a discrete series. The series is like successive calls on a telephone, events which might have no relation to each other except that their medium is the same and that their audience holds the same receiver. Yet the series of Discrete Series is unlike successive calls on a telephone because it consists of events ordered by Oppen's art into objects in and of themselves.

George Oppen stopped writing after Discrete Series was published by the Objectivist Press in March 1934. In 1958, when he began writing again, the world had only begun to understand, by confirming the importance of his immediate predecessors, the significance of his work. Discrete Series still stands as a testimony to the value of the objective Image and the power of language to register not the fiction but the fact. Oppen cleaved the clean—the essential, the concrete—from the unclean. In doing so, he adapted with integrity, as all writers must, old words to our new world in a new way.

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[7. Charles Reznikoff](#)

Section 7 - Charles Reznikoff

I. Biography

Charles Reznikoff was born in Brooklyn in 1894, the son, like Zukofsky, of Jewish immigrants. He had wanted to be a writer since high school, and so in 1910 and 1911 he attended the University of Missouri School of Journalism. He decided not to study there when he found that the school was "mostly interested in news" and did not share his interest in good writing. "And then one day passing N. Y. U. Law School I remembered that Heine had studied law and Goethe had studied law, so that seemed to be fine."¹ He did exceptionally well, even though he wanted to quit and devote his energy to writing. He was admitted to the bar in 1916 and at his father's urging began a practice, which the war gave him a convenient excuse to drop. The war was over, however, before he could serve.² After this he worked for his father as a salesman of hats, a job that gave him room and time to continue writing. He never returned to the practice of law, but in 1928 he started working for the American Law Book Company revising legal definitions for Corpus Juris.

Reznikoff's pattern of avoiding commitment to anything that did not serve his art was vital to his growth as a writer—a necessity in a time when society was insensitive to the needs and the lessons of writers. This pattern, however, must be compared with the importance to Reznikoff of the life around him. Matters pertaining to the sale and manufacture of hats and to the legal problems of the poor occur in his work. His experience living and working in the poorest neighborhoods of the city gave him an understanding of the pleasures and the sufferings of common people, and his training as a lawyer served his discipline as a poet in relating his experience and understanding. George Oppen said that "Charles felt later that the training of law book definitions, which requires great exactitude and great compression of language . . . was an enormous benefit to him."³ Reznikoff's work for the American Law Book Company also brought him the legal records from which he drew for the composition of Testimony (1934) and his later volumes of similar material.

Reznikoff was 18 and in law school in 1913 when Pound published "A Few Don'ts by an Imagiste" in Poetry. When asked whether in those years he were reading or involved with the Imagists, Reznikoff stated that he thought "the first two Cantos" of Pound "have a magnificence, and his translations especially. But all the people I know who were interested in writing were also very much moved by his prose articles in Poetry." These critical articles "very much influenced" Reznikoff, who "found them just right—just the facts stated as a witness would state them in a courtroom trial." Pound confirmed the viability of Reznikoff's application to his writing of the limitations of court testimony. "Testimony" is an avoidance of conclusion and inference, an emphasis on the facts:

Say a person is suing for injuries, and the defense is that he was negligent in crossing the street. The witness isn't allowed to go on the stand and say, "Yes, he was very

careless" or "He was very careful." He's got to say just what he did in order that the jury or the judge may determine whether he was careful or careless.

Yet Reznikoff was not limited in the effects of his writing to the tense formality of the courtroom. His work was always motivated by a passion which he strove to produce for his readers: "You start with something that moves you and you state it as simply and as directly as possible, without saying you're moved, but in such a way that the reader will also be moved by it. This is the way I try to write."⁴

In "Early History of a Writer," Reznikoff remembered how, during his study of the law, Imagisme influenced his writing:

I had been bothered by a secret weariness
with meter and regular stanzas
grown a little stale. The smooth lines and rhymes
seem to me affected, a false stress on words and syllables—
fake flowers
in the streets in which I walked.
And yet I found prose
without the burst of song and sudden dancing—
without the intensity which I wanted.
The brand-new verse some Americans were beginning to write—
after the French "free verse," perhaps,
or the irregular rhythms of Walt Whitman,
the English translations of the Hebrew Bible
and, earlier yet, the rough verse of the Anglo-Saxons—
seemed to me, when I first read it,
right:
not cut to patterns, however cleverly,
not poured into ready molds,
but words and phrases flowing as the thought;
to be read just as common speech
but for stopping at the turn of each line—
and this like the rest in music or a turn in the dance.
(I found it no criticism that to read such verse as prose
was to have a kind of prose,
for that was not to read it as it was written.)
And with the even artificial beat of the old meters,
I gave up the artifice of rhyme:
not only because I had the authority of Milton
and the usage of the Elizabethans in their plays;
I liked a Doric music better.⁵

The Doric order of classical architecture, unlike the Corinthian, was characterized by simplicity of form.

On 27 October 1917 he submitted a collection of poems to Harriet Monroe, who selected two, titled "Futility" and "The Dead," but did not publish them.

Now Poetry (Chicago) had a great reputation, and Harriet Monroe, who was the editor selected my things. But a year went by and they weren't printed—and I had sent her, among other things, something that I thought the best of them, and that she rejected. So, since I was expecting to get into the Army—I'm talking now of 1918—I thought I'd just privately print what I had that I liked, and I did. I got out a book called Rhythms.⁶

Reznikoff withdrew his poems from Poetry on 4 May 1918, and Rhythms was printed in Brooklyn by the De Vinne Press by July 1918.⁷ This little pamphlet contained, in twenty-four pages sewn into a red paper cover, a group of twenty-three poems.

It was such a relief to get it out of my way, to feel that I didn't have to rely on anybody — even someone as good as Harriet Monroe — that I did it again the second year. . . . I liked that privately printed way. I managed to get it off my chest and start on something else.⁸

Reznikoff had Rhythms II printed at his own expense by June 1919 at the same press and some were stitched into the same cover with Rhythms. It contained twenty-three poems in twenty-three pages. The next year, Samuel Roth at the New York Poetry Book Shop published Reznikoff's Poems in an edition of 250. This book contained forty-eight pages divided into three groups, the first two comprised of the poems of the first two books, revised and reordered, recording Reznikoff's increasing poetic acumen, and the third comprised of thirty-nine new poems. In this publication the poems were not printed one to a page as in the first two, and were separated by large initial capital letters.

In 1921, Reznikoff, again at his own expense, published Uriel Accosta: A Play and A Fourth Group of Verse, in which were fifty-one new poems. In 1922, he published Chatterton, The Black Death, and Meriwether Lewis: Three Plays, and in 1923, Coral and Captive Israel, two more plays. Reznikoff recalled:

But privately printing became rather expensive because I had more work to print, so I decided that the easiest thing to do would be to buy a printing press and do my own printing. I went to a school where they teach people how to set type, and I bought a press that you worked by a treadle, and set it up in the basement of my father's house.⁹

In 1927, Reznikoff "set the type by hand and did the presswork" (thus read his colophons) for 375 copies of Five Groups of Verse, which was a revision of the four groups already published plus a fifth group of twenty poems, and 400 copies of Nine Plays, including in addition to those already printed Abram in Egypt, Rashi, and Genesis. And in 1929 Reznikoff printed another, the first and only in what was to have been an annual series, By the Waters of Manhattan: An Annual, which consisted of memoirs adapted from his mother's Yiddish, a long, somewhat autobiographical story of Joel Stein's success with a Greenwich Village bookshop, and "Editing and Glosses," a group of dramatic interpretations and condensations of portions of the Old Testament in verse.

To the fact that Reznikoff labored patiently in the production of these nine books should be added the fact that they sold poorly or not at all; Reznikoff gave away most of them. Zukofsky and the Oppens were among the very few who appreciated Reznikoff's work in his own time. George and Mary expressed their debt to Reznikoff during an interview in 1976. George said:

But Rezy — I really think we learned almost everything from Reznikoff. Certainly we learned to understand that city. We called on Reznikoff — I'm not sure that it was by his suggestion — we called on him regularly once a week.

George was inspired by the complex of Reznikoff's neglect, his commitment to poetry, and his law experience:

Charles felt that all the poetry benefitted by his law experience. And Charles chose that. He knew he faced a long neglect and he knew that he had to earn a living. And he set himself—I believe I'm following almost his words—to find the work which he could do and would infringe least on his poetry or conflict least with his poetry. There's a wonderful poem of his—all these things we learned from him—how to work, too, we learned. There's a poem of his which describes his revelation of the task of work and the way to do it, watching a secretary where he sat somewhere waiting for a job interview . . . he saw the young woman beginning it with a huge heap of papers to transcribe them on the typewriter, and saw that she didn't look at the heap of what was left—she just started. And Charles was just starting.

These were the foundations of the political relation of one "Objectivist" to his place and its populace.

Oppen continued:

As for Charles' politics, he wouldn't have discussed it with us much. But Charles' sense—of course you hear the populist base there—but the sense of himself as a small Jewish man in the city, walking, a very small man, this modest not really modest man, his head absolutely full of history, of centuries upon centuries of history, an eye where there wouldn't have been an eye, an eye to see with . . . 10

Reznikoff bore unselfish and sympathetic witness to the city in which his intelligence and care, his historical perspective and keen awareness, seemed, perhaps, to matter little.

II. Five Groups of Verse

Five Groups of Verse, the collected edition of Reznikoff's verse to 1927, stood as the record of Reznikoff's growth and achievement when the "Objectivists" were considering what could be done about the conditions which Pound had argued were damaging to vie littéraire. It was the primary subject of Zukofsky's essay providing critical definition of the group ([see Section 8](#)). For this edition, Reznikoff had revised and reordered the four groups from Rhythms, Rhythms II, Poems, and Uriel Accosta and A Fourth Group of Verse and added a fifth group of new poems. 11

First Group

Reznikoff's first group of verse, revised from Rhythms of 1918 and the first group in Poems of 1920, consists of nineteen poems composed in irregularly metered, usually rhymed verse. The first poem reads:

The stars are hidden,
The lights are out;
The tall black houses
Are ranked about.

I beat my fists
On the stout doors,
No answering steps
Come down the floors.

I have walked until
I am faint and numb;
From one dark street
To another I come.

The comforting
Winds are still.

This is a chaos
Through which I stumble,
Till I reach the void
And down I tumble.

The stars will then
Be out forever;
The fists unclenched,
The feet walk never,

And all I say
Blown by the wind
Away.¹²

If the effect of the rhyme and meter is awkward, it is appropriately so. The persona's desperate struggle for recognition could not be expressed with grace. All we can ask of any liberty is that it be meaningful, and so too of any constraint. The syllable-count and the end-rhymes are like the doors of the houses of the blocks on which our hero beats his fists. Only the pivotal strophe is free of the pattern: "The comforting / winds are still."

Reznikoff's concern with maintaining a diction which relates to things of universal significance did not at this point in his career (1918) concentrate entirely on things of indisputable existence. The common virtue of stars, lights, houses, fists, doors, steps, floors, and street is lost on the comic generality of chaos, stumble, void, tumble. Revision subsequent to 1918 omitted only a minor redundancy: in 1918 the final strophe began "The wandering body / Break into dust." And yet the poem's bleak sentiment, expressing the bitterness of a man for whom humility is necessary but not easy, is characteristic of Reznikoff. Never sure of salvation, nor of literary immortality, only the wind which blew his work away was comforting.

Not every poem in the first group is spoiled by comic generalities and rhymes. Reznikoff could find desolations appropriate also to free verse, for example:

The shopgirls leave their work
Quietly.

Machines are still, tables and chairs
Darken.

The silent rounds of mice and roaches begin.¹³

Even a consolation:

When you sang moving your body proudly

Before me wondering who you were
Suddenly I remembered, Messalina.^{[14](#)}

But of course this consolation is deceptive. Messalina, the third wife of the emperor Claudius, used her influence over Claudius to gratify her lust and avarice. The encyclopedia says that "by procuring in A.D. 42 the unjust death of Appius Silanus, who had slighted her advances, she greatly contributed to the mutual suspicion between Claudius and the senate and to what may almost be called a reign of terror." She was eventually executed, age 26, in A.D. 48, for bigamy.^{[15](#)}

Poems eleven, thirteen, and fourteen refer explicitly to World War I, and the fact that nearly every poem deals in some way with death may be attributed in good part to the depression of wartime. Yet, as in the Messalina poem, in most of these poems, the depression is quiet enough to impart an undertone of wit. The poems have a wry twist that one might expect if the only sign of life were bleakness. There is something redeeming about "the silent rounds of mice and roaches"; they are of an order beyond the shopgirls' drudgery and the machinery of contemporary life. And there is certain grace and nobility in Reznikoff's Messalina; she is of an order beyond man's casual perception. Desperation, drudgery, depression, weariness, and death brought suddenly to light may have a vividness like great beauty to open one's eyes.

Reznikoff's irony is improved by his revisions subsequent to 1918. The superb deadpan of the second line in the following poem:

On Brooklyn Bridge I saw a man drop dead.
It meant no more than if he were a sparrow.

Above us rose Manhattan;
Below, the river spread to meet sea and sky.^{[16](#)}

was originally over-weighted by tragic commentary:

The tragedies men move in are mostly played
Behind stone walls, shut doors, and curtained windows.
The hero of the fifth act, Death, frequents
Dark chambers, rooms with blinds drawn: for he knows
That he is terrible, but only sad
Along the highway underneath the sky.
On Brooklyn Bridge I saw a man drop dead.
It meant no more than if he were a sparrow:
For tower on tower behind the bridge arose
The buildings on Manhattan, tall white towers
Agleam with lights; below, the wide blue bay
Stretched out to meet the high blue sky and the first
white star.^{[17](#)}

Gone is the heavily symbolic interpretive drama of Death with that capital "D." Gone, too, is "tower on tower behind the bridge arose / The buildings * * * tall white towers / Agleam with lights." This was too redundant, too rhetorical. Reznikoff became more confident that his virtues lie in understatement or

meiosis, in the tacit understanding of facts. The proper noun "Manhattan" is enough to complement the insignificance of one dead man. And one dead man is enough to evoke the pathos and the pitifulness of death. In poem fourteen, "killed" was originally "spilled." The fact is simpler and more vivid than the poetic euphemism.¹⁸ In places Reznikoff omitted redundancies: "A fleet of ships at anchor" becomes "a fleet at anchor," and "The rain is over, the wet pavement shines / With sunlight" became "The rain is over, the wet pavement shines."¹⁹ In the 10th poem, he omitted superfluous modifiers: "A great wind" becomes a "a wind," and "the thickly frosted panes" became, simply, "the frosted panes"; "Only the sun, again, like the lidless eye of God" became "Only, a lidless eye, the sun again"; with God, he discarded data which was not of the immediate experience: "Tomorrow long clouds shutting out the day / And maybe snow or thick rain dropping heavily."²⁰

Yet Reznikoff was not too specific. So the second poem, originally beginning with the line "In this room once belonging to me," began in 1920 and thereafter with the second line:

The dead are walking silently.
 I sank them six feet underground,
 the dead are walking and no sound.
 I raise on each a brown hill,
 the dead are walking slow and sti11.²¹

The rhythm and the repetition of the vision of the walking dead is enough without further rhyme to convey the circularity of this depression. Along the same line, Reznikoff made the poem not more general but more generic, less dependent on the proper circumstances of its creation, when he came to revise this poem of 1918:

ON ONE WHOM THE GERMANS SHOT

How shall we mourn for you who are spilled and wasted,
 Gaudier-Brzeska,
 Sure that you would not die with your work unended,
 As if the iron scythe in the grass stops for a flower?²²

Reznikoff omitted the title in 1920 and the second line in 1927. Thus the poem can stand independent of the reader's sentiment toward the particular person Gaudier-Brzeska and the particular manner of his death, and independent of the associations dependent on Ezra Pound's 1916 memoir of Gaudier-Brzeska. If the poem works, it should apply to everyone killed with their work unended. As Zukofsky wrote, "the fact that it was originally an epitaph for Gaudier Brzeska may compel the attention of a few, but adds nothing to the poem as object."²³

If the poem depends entirely on knowledge of its proper allusions, then it is a failure. Only the irony of the Messalina poem is lost by not knowing who she is, but in the following prose-poem, omitted after 1918, one is lost entirely without knowing at least what Vashti is to Queen Esther:

Queen Esther said to herself What is there to fear? We move in our orbits like the stars.

But in the night looking at the black fields and river she could not help thinking of Vashti's white cheeks hollowed like shells.²⁴

The reference is of course the book of Esther in the Bible, but Zukofsky singled this out as his example of the "symboliste semi-allegorical gleam" which Reznikoff "deliberately avoided."²⁵ The poem depends almost entirely on knowing that Vashti was queen before Esther and deposed for a minor disobedience of the king, and that Esther saved her people the Jews by disobeying the king in a greater matter. For Zukofsky, these allusions render the poem obscure enough to approach the symboliste realm in which all meaning is private, of which one glimpses, as Pound explained in Gaudier-Brzeska, only metonymic symbols.²⁶ Pound set the "Objectivist" standard for the use of symbols when he wrote that the proper symbol is a natural object which makes sense to those who do not understand it as a symbol.²⁷ For those who do not know the Bible, Vashti is only someone whose "white cheeks" are "hollowed like shells."

Second Group

Reznikoff's second group of verse, revised from Rhythms II of 1919 and the second group in Poems of 1920, consists of twenty-two poems in free verse. It is free of the first group's impersistent rhyme and omnipresent mention of death.

There are a few poems of lonely desolation. The first poem is a complaint about a cold wind; in the third the protagonist knocks at a door from which his friends have, without telling him, moved; the eleventh describes the grave's reward for a woman who "worked patiently" for her children; and the fifteenth, title and one line, presents the signs of an epidemic:

EPIDEMIC

Streamers of crepe idling before doors.²⁸

But there are also poems of a quiet joy in things. In the fourth poem, although the moon might at first be hidden, she shows herself warm and open: "Surely I saw her, / broad-bosomed and golden, / coming toward us."²⁹ And Reznikoff was consoled in the eighth poem by remembering "women at windows in still streets, / or women reading, a glow on resting hands"; in the nineteenth by the arrival in the hall of a woman "sudden as a rainbow"; and in the twenty-second by a clear night sky and "Far off / a white horse / in the green gloom / of the meadow."³⁰ The evocative qualities of these natural objects do not detract from their matter-of-factness. The wind, the door, the grave, and the streamers of crepe, as well as the moon, the glow on resting hands, the hall, and the white horse have in them emotional valences which suggest their circumstances as surely as if Reznikoff had detailed in each poem all the impressions at the moment of his mind and all his senses. One does not doubt that these objects were encountered by Reznikoff in his life. Things are "images," which as Oppen said are accounts of the poet's perception and tests of sincerity.³¹ The existence and Reznikoff's experience of these objects are indisputable. Moreover, each in some essential aspect was vivid enough to have had its moment carried by Reznikoff from his private experience into the public experience of the poem.

When asked where his poems came from, Reznikoff spoke of having been first moved by an experience. Here he was asked about how the city is manifest in his work:

Well, since I was born in a city, in a great city and grew up in it, most of the emotional impressions I get are from things I've seen in the city. They may or may not be beautiful, they may on the contrary be ugly, but these are impressions, just as I think is true of all the great natural poets. Generally they came from a country background, and naturally they were moved by the things they had seen. Except, to my surprise, Wordsworth has a magnificent sonnet on walking on Westminster, on the bridge there. But he's moved by the setting because he's so surprised by the beauty. But generally I write about things that move me, and they're generally about the city.³²

A moving experience is what Oppen calls a "moment of conviction" it is a moment in which you can not deny the existence of an object, having been moved by it.³³

A feature new to Reznikoff's second group was his third-person descriptions of living people whom he had observed from the streets of the city. For example, the fifth poem:

IN THE GHETTO

The winter afternoon darkens.
The shoemaker bends close to the shoe,
His hammer raps faster.

An old woman waits,
Rubbing the cold from her hands.³⁴

In addition, the seventh and ninth poems present a "Scrubwoman" and "The Idiot," whose pathetic idiosyncracies are given without comment. These people are not in the service of any authorial mood. Reznikoff has simply put them down as he saw them, as, in a sense, they were.

The most extensive act of revision of the 1919 group condensed the first of two of the following poems in 1920 into the third and in 1927 the fourth:

1

She moved effortless,
A swan on a still lake
Hardly beating the water with golden feet.

Straight brow and nose,
Curved lips and chin.

Sorrow before her
Was gone like noise from a street,
Snow falling.

2

I remember her all in white
In a house under great trees,
Shaded and still in summer;

A white curtain turning in her Open window
And a swan dipping a white neck in the trees' shadow.

3

Like a curtain turning in an open window.

Like a swan effortless
On a lake shaded and still in summer,
Dipping a white neck in the trees' shadow,
Hardly beating the water with golden feet.

Sorrow before her
Was gone like noise from a street,
Snow falling.

4

A white curtain turning in an open window.

A swan, dipping a white neck in the trees' shadow,
Hardly beating the water with golden feet.

Sorrow before her
Was gone like noise from a street,
Snow falling.³⁵

The images present the poignant beauty that Reznikoff identified with a certain woman. The first poem presents the woman by swan and snow; the second presents the woman by swan and curtain. Reznikoff realized these things together form a complex of coherent associations, and that with their juxtaposition nothing further needed to be said. Accordingly, in 1920, he wove together these four elements from thirteen lines into one poem of eight lines, omitting from the first poem two lines describing her face and from the second two lines remembering her in a house under great trees. These lines present elements which are either inessential or already suggested by what remains. Reznikoff did not need, for example, to say she is dressed in white, since only white things realize her beauty. Further, in 1927, he realized that he did not have to describe the shaded and still lake, since that was already suggested by a swan in the trees' shadow beating the water.

Also in 1927 Reznikoff buried two of the poem's three similes. He realized that it was unnecessary to tie together with that particular poetic device elements which he encountered already together, elements which in their natural juxtapositions of mind and nature moved him to strong feeling. As Zukofsky wrote, 'Like's have often been seen together, or have been strongly felt together.'³⁶ Similes suggest artifice, and the realization of these similarities required no artifice.

Third Group

Reznikoff's third group of verse, revised from the third and final group in Poems of 1920, consists of thirty poems, and is distinguished from the previous groups by evidences of a growing narrative ability.

We still see a few of Reznikoff's elegant descriptions, which, like Japanese brushwork, reveal subtle beauties of form in two strokes:

The twigs tinge the winter sky

Brown.^{[37](#)}

And we still see short poems which capture more than the moment, suggesting as much about New York City of 1920 as might volumes of psychological, sociological, and economic treatises:

The pedlar who goes from shop to shop,
Has seated himself on the stairs in the dim hallway,
And the basket of apples upon his knees, breathes the odour.^{[38](#)}

But here and there we see longer lines and rhythms embracing more extended actions:

Suddenly we noticed that we were in darkness;
So we went into the house and lit the lamp.

The talk fell apart and bit by bit slid into a lake.
At last we rose and bidding each other good night
went to our rooms.

In and about the house darkness lay, a black fog;
And each on his bed spoke to himself alone, making
no sound.^{[39](#)}

Among these short narratives are two poems, "Nightmares" 1 and 2, which Reznikoff omitted from the 1927 collection, probably because they were too symboliste: their narrative intent originated in the psyche, so that the existence of the terrifying old man, the lame beggar, the girl of twelve, and the laughing man is not indisputable.^{[40](#)}

Chief among the short narratives in the third group of verse are four poems which in 1920 were grouped under a common title: "Four of Us," presumably, four Jews who lived in the ghettos of New York City at the time. The first of these, the tenth in this group, is an account of the life and death of a man who came to America from a Russian town in which he was the chief clerk in a big store. He came to America in order that his older children "might study and the boys be free from army service, but now they had to work to support him, his wife and his younger children, because his own business was a failure:

Forty years in a store where business was done
leisurely over glasses of tea,
And now to walk the streets and meet men hasty and
abrupt,
Between tenements and their barrels heaped with ashes
and garbage.

Left in the house alone, "the first warm day of spring," and feeling forgotten and useless:

He pulled down the window-blind and laid himself
near the stove.
He folded his coat under his head, over the floor's
hardness.
The pour of gas sickened him, he was half-minded to pull
the rubber tube out of his mouth;
But he felt dizzy, too weak to move.^{[41](#)}

Reznikoff's testimony is always enriched by a sense of its tragedy, even if at first it only deepens the irony of the fact that a man's death means "no more than if he were a sparrow." Reznikoff never tells you what to feel; he never comments. If his poem works, then you feel as he felt, seeing what he saw. The great difference between the accounts of suicides in these groups is the result of a narrative technique that is able to suggest more than what might at that moment reach the senses of observer. Reznikoff is now able to control, as if they were concrete and present facts, the regretful and bitter imagination of past and offstage circumstances; he is able to weave them without flaw into his presentation of window-blind, stove, coat, floor, gas, and rubber tube, without unnecessary facts, without redundancy, without interpretation.

In the 1920 version of the poem described above, the man, realizing it is the first warm day of spring by the oblongs of sunlight on the wooden floor, opens a window.

But this sunlight showed where his shoes' leather had
cracked and gaped,
His faded trousers, the bottoms frayed with walking,
Showed his clothes like a symbol of himself.⁴²

Reznikoff revised this passage for the 1927 collection to present the details more directly:

The sunlight fell on his shoes, cracked and gaping,
his faded trousers, the bottoms frayed.⁴³

He does not need to say the sunlight showed these things. Suffice to say the sunlight fell on them. And he does not need to explain that the outer circumstances of this man reflected the inner like symbols.

Fourth Group

Reznikoff's fourth group of verse, revised from Uriel Accosta: A Play and A Fourth Group of Verse of 1921, consists of forty-eight poems.

The presence of Reznikoff's first verse drama in the original volume with this group suggests a comparison between Reznikoff's narrative poems and his dramatic verse. Their similarity rests more on the nature of Reznikoff's verse than on his narrative techniques. For example, from "Uriel Accosta":

HIS BROTHER. When England exiled the Jews, the
captain of their ship
Stole all they had, and left them on a sand-bar in the
Channel;
They stood on tipoe and stuck their noses up for air,
But still the tide came up, and so they drowned.
If your friend should serve us so?⁴⁴

And from the fourth group:

After dinner, Sunday afternoon, we boys would walk slowly
To the lots between the streets and the marshes;

And seated under the pale blue sky would watch the
 ball game—
 In a noisy, joyous crowd, lemonade men out in the fringe
 tinkling their bells beside their yellow carts.
 As we walked back, the city stretched its rows of houses
 across the lots—
 Light after light, as the lamplighter went his way and
 women lit the gas in kitchens to make supper.⁴⁵

In both these passages we find long lines comprising slow rhythms carefully interrupted by syntactic pauses. At the end of each line one is likely to rest while getting breath for the next, whether it ends the sentence or not. Reznikoff's rhythms inhere in the thoughts they express. "After dinner, Sunday afternoons, we boys would walk slowly"—the slowness of their walk is paced by the speaker's memory of that slowness. "They stood tiptoe and stuck their noses up for air," pausing for breath, "But still the tide came up," giving the reader time to acknowledge this new element, the tide, "and so they drowned." The sentence ends with the line to emphasize the final word. Then follows the point of the story—one sentence on a single line.

The diction in both play and poem is not "poetic," neither archaic nor in any other way obscure or unusual. There is nothing to interfere with the immediate apprehension of the object, and the object is not superficial. After the publication of By the Waters of Manhattan: Selected Verse in 1962, when Reznikoff began to give public readings, George Oppen was one of those who advised Reznikoff to tone down his delivery.⁴⁶ He had been making the gestures and verbal postures of a nineteenth-century rhetorician. But even afterwards, his stress and intonation were spirited and emphatic, as if he were arguing the poem as a case before a jury. To hear this opens one's ears to the potential energy, to the depth of feeling and the deftness of movement lying near the calm surface of his verse.

Most of the forty-eight poems in this group extend the idea of "Four of Us" to present the lives of those whom Reznikoff best knew and understood. In 1921, twenty-seven of them were grouped under a common title, "Jews."⁴⁷ The tones of these vignettes is unique for the individual presented in each: in the twentieth, the touching satisfaction of a boy's private freedom set against his public persecution; in the twenty-first, the deep seriousness of Grandfather's misery caused by anti-semitical incidents, and in the twenty-second, the wry sympathy with a boy's retreat from sickness and family misfortune by identifying with a tree. And these lives are not all moved by the mystery of misfortune. In the twenty-sixth, we experience the quiet joy of sensual pleasure; in the forty-seventh, the comic and coarse energy of the shoemaker's wife; and in the forty-eighth the invigorating reassurance of shoes newly cobbled and blacked. Most of this group, however, deals with the misfortune typical of the people in New York City's Jewish ghettos. Here is a stepmother's misguided discouragement of a young girl's desire to better herself; here is the tragic failure of a man to live up to the expectations of his father and friends; here is the sad loneliness of a bumbling, sick, ugly, and inarticulate blacksmith; and there is Reznikoff's own experience as a young lawyer with the petty squabbles of the people. The range and depth of Reznikoff's attention and understanding evince a man whose craftsmanship is a truly admirable as his human sympathy. Zukofsky wrote:

Yet the lives of Reznikoff's people slowly occur in the sincerity of the craft with which he has chosen to subdue them. One returns in the end not to the aging girl at the window, nor to "her aunt and the man," but to the sincerity which has seen, considered, and weighed the tone these things have when rendered in only necessary words.⁴⁸

For this reason his people live in one's memory far beyond what the sparsity of his verse might lead you to expect.

Fifth Group

Reznikoff's fifth group of verse, completing Five Groups of Verse of 1927, consists of twenty poems including two short dramatic pieces and one Biblical monologue. This group lacks the wit of the previous groups, and sometimes the careful craftsmanship. For example, the thirteenth poem:

BUILDING BOOM

The avenue of willows leads nowhere:
it begins at the blank wall of a new apartment house
and ends in the middle of a lot for sale.
Papers and cans are thrown about the trees.
The disorder does not touch the flowing branches;
but the trees have become small among the new houses,
and will be cut down;
their beauty cannot save them.⁴⁹

The commenting last line here is uncharacteristic of Reznikoff's best work. That the disorder does not touch them is enough indication of "their beauty," and that they will be cut down is enough indication that it "cannot save them." It would have been better to have omitted the title and the words "lead nowhere: / it," "are thrown," and "The disorder," which only interpret the facts presented.

Two fine poems of the group are about Reznikoff's study of the Hebrew:

How difficult for me is Hebrew:
Even the Hebrew for mother, for bread, for sun
Is foreign. How far have I been exiled, Zion.

*

I have learnt the Hebrew blessing before eating bread;
Is there no blessing before reading Hebrew?⁵⁰

In both, the wit underlines the pathos, which aptly reflects the pain of exile and the desire for reunion. The final poem in the group is a monologue in the character of Samuel, who was the first Jewish prophet after Moses and who had incredible influence over Israel. Samuel expresses his unswerving strength against change and chance. These sentiments no doubt were a consolation to Reznikoff, who in 1927 was 33 years old and at least 35 years from recognition as a poet:

Whatever unfriendly stars and comets do,
whatever stormy heavens are unfurled,
my spirit be like fire in this, too,
that all the straws and rubbish of the world

only feed its flame.

The seasons change.

That is change enough.

Chance planted me beside a stream of water;

content, I serve the land,

whoever lives here and whoever passes.⁵¹

Reznikoff's stand against neglect, his relation to the place and its populace to which he bore honest and compassionate witness, his sensitivity to moments of tragedy and beauty, and his concern for his younger colleagues. The principles implicit in his work, in his omission of interpretation, redundancy, and rhetoric, and in his restoration of meaning to natural objects of common significance, objects whose actual existence had moved Reznikoff to strong feeling, are the definitive principles of "Objectivism."

[6. George and Mary Oppen](#)

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[8. Sincerity and Objectification](#)

Section 8 - Sincerity and Objectification

The autograph manuscript of Louis Zukofsky’s essay “Charles Reznikoff: Sincerity and Objectification” is dated 4 February 1930.¹ It was never printed in its entirety. In the fall of 1920, Zukofsky shortened it in manuscript from 27 to 15 pages (and made a few minor changes according to Pound’s suggestions) so that it could fit into the crowded “Objectivists” issue of Poetry, February 1931, where, titled “Sincerity and Objectification: with Special Reference to the Work of Charles Reznikoff,” it became the chief public manifesto for the group.² The Poetry version contains about half as many examples from Reznikoff’s work as the original and omits sections of the original which deal with Reznikoff’s neglect, which define more fully the term “sincerity,” and which discuss his Nine Plays and miscellaneous prose works. The version in Prepositions, among Zukofsky’s collected critical essays, is even more dramatically abbreviated.³ Under two pages, it renders Zukofsky’s definitions entirely abstracted from poetic practice by omitting all examples of and references to the work of Reznikoff and others. These omissions have helped divorce “Objectivism” from the “Objectivists” and have left Zukofsky’s concepts underdetermined and therefore too easily misunderstood. In order to fully understand “Objectivism,” one must restore the original subjects and contexts of Zukofsky’s ideas. I have therefore relied on the original manuscript whenever it was appropriate to relate Zukofsky’s definitions to the poetry they were meant to define and to the tradition they were meant to develop.

I. Sincerity

Reznikoff’s virtue depends on the relation of two sincerities, which we might term personal sincerity and poetic sincerity. The first is the quality of a man who stands beside his word, and whose word, accordingly, is a consequence of his personal integrity. The second, which is a major concern in Zukofsky’s essay, is both a chief criterion separating “Objectivist” work from the general and popular practices in verse at that time and delineating the conditions of words which satisfy that criterion: poetic sincerity presents with clarity or exactitude the details of a real experience in words which are a consequence of the integrity of existence.

Although both Pound and Zukofsky claimed that personal sincerity is unnecessary so long as the poet achieves poetic sincerity,⁴ the rarity of the latter suggests that it is at least helpful if the poet’s personal sincerity be invested in achieving poetic sincerity, if, that is, the poet’s personal integrity is involved in and committed to the integrity of the experience he presents in his work. His concern must be with the technique of presenting work that is an object of experience, of objectifying, as Pound wrote, “the thing that is true and stays true that keeps fresh for the new reader.”⁵ Such a concern comes naturally to Whitehead’s objectivist, who believes in the independent validity of the real and in his ability to realize it. Poetic sincerity can not be counterfeited, just as one can not literally live in a fantasy. As Zukofsky said,

one lives in the world with things as they are no matter what one thinks about them, and the poem enters this world as one’s sensations and thoughts enter it. Either the details of the real are in the writing or they are not.

Zukofsky speculated that Reznikoff’s difficulty with finding a publisher and the lack of public interest in his work were due to Reznikoff’s delight in the experience of his senses and his capacity to accept, without support, responsibility for his own writing.⁶ Reznikoff was sustained in his life and in his art by his joy in experience and his peace with the world. His personal sincerity required him to project—no matter what publisher or public valued—the honest impression, the perception rooted in evidence of his senses.

Zukofsky wrote:

Sincerity among authors differs with the range of their sensations and apperceptions, but what is negative to sincerity remains negative to all who are sincere. So much that is vicious, as writing, is omitted from all of them, and of these there are probably no more than can be counted on the fingers of both hands in a generation. Reznikoff is included among these.⁷

Poetic sincerity differs with poets’ abilities to realize (as well as to objectify) the real and the uncounterfeitable. The unreal and the counterfeitable, the “vicious,” must be omitted. Zukofsky called this “the process of active literary omission” and wrote that it may be discussed in terms of “two criteria: sincerity and objectification.”⁸

Zukofsky compared the original editions of Reznikoff’s five groups of verse with the revised and collected edition of 1927 to discover the poetic considerations behind the omissions that Reznikoff made or did not make. First, he noted that Reznikoff kept a poem from 1918 which anticipated T. S. Eliot’s The Waste Land and “Hollow Men,” “not for any care the author may have had for the particular dejection expressed, for since that state he has been concerned with other matters, but for the element of method then already apparent in the clarity of image and word-tone.”⁹ Furthermore, Reznikoff omitted one poem for its “symboliste semi-allegorical gleam” and another for its “surrealism.”¹⁰ These poems ran counter to the desire to project the mind’s peace in the eyes’ sights, the ears’ hearing, and the fingers’ touch; they conveyed either perceptual distortions or no perceptions at all.

When technique achieves clarity, it expresses the poet’s conviction in his experience. Zukofsky wrote that poetic sincerity is the representation of experience and the assertion of existence. An “Objectivist” believes that words are not only referential, but that they are also objects of experience in and of themselves. Words refer to details, and they are details. Since we must be referred continually to details which our attention misses because we are barraged by so many details, we desire writing whose words are a warehouse of truth—in counterdistinction to writing which tries vainly to represent the past or the future, ignoring the present which in its particularity is universally relevant. An “Objectivist,” therefore, omits what is abstracted by its distance from direct experience, which is a matter not merely of personal desire, but of poetic craft. Intentions must be invested in actual words and word-forms. Egotism and ignorance can

not excuse its absence, and imitation of current literary modes can not replace it. With this poetic sincerity as his criterion, Zukofsky claimed that most "successful" work of the day seemed only barely competent: hastily superficial and commercially modish in its treatment of idea and locale.¹¹

Those whom Zukofsky admired were unique in having attended to what Pound wrote in 1917:

Technique.—I believe in technique as the test of a man's sincerity; in law when it is ascertainable; in the trampling down of every convention that impedes or obscures the determination of the law, or the precise rendering of the impulse.¹²

Zukofsky, however, in order to describe the work of the "Objectivists," added to Pound's early formulations the requirement that the impulse must have its origin in the real, and emphasized that the real includes not only things as they exist but things as one experiences them. This produced poems which were capable of more than the mere phanopoeia that was characteristic of the dilutors of Imagisme of the twenties. It produced poems which were real as existence and as experience.

According to Zukofsky, poetic sincerity is the product of perceptions, of conceptions which are integral with things experienced, and of poetic technique. It is composed of "the detail, not mirage, of seeing, of thinking with the things as they exist, and of directing them along a line of melody." One is aware of "shapes" which are "concomitants" of both things experienced and "word combinations" but are in themselves only "precursors of . . . completed sound or structure, melody or form."¹³ In other words, sincerity "records action and existence and incites the mind to further suggestion," but does not in itself "attain rested totality."¹⁴

Zukofsky noted that each word in Reznikoff's verse adds to the presentation of particulars: each noun retains its integrity, each adjective is either "simple" and "sensory" or a metaphor "presented with conciseness in a word." "One is brought back to the entirety of the single word which is in itself a relation, an implied metaphor, an arrangement and a harmony."¹⁵

Simile and metaphor should not be ornamental; they should be "confirmation of the objects or acts which the writer is setting down," of similarities "strongly felt together."¹⁶ Zukofsky affirmed the physical accuracy of Reznikoff's line, "Old men, wrinkled as knuckles, on the stoops," for example, by saying that the word "wrinkled" describes the old men's knuckles as well as their faces, contrasted with the geometric linearity of the stoop's steps.¹⁷

Zukofsky noted that Reznikoff's particulars suggest the wholes of which they are parts: "The verbal qualities of Reznikoff's shorter poems do not form mere pretty bits (American poetry, circa 1913) but suggest . . . entire aspects of thought: economics, beliefs, literary analytics, etc."¹⁸ Reznikoff's poems, like the oriental lyric, are unions of succinct expression and implied thoughts. His plays, like the Noh, are controlled by the speeches of their characters, which are accurate to and suggestive of their times and places. His narrative verse does not imitate ancient narrative, but presents his observations of New York City and is decidedly Reznikoff's and therefore "sincerely" modern. His prose, like that of Joyce's

Dubliners, presents the common matters of living in their true significance. He relies on the original effects of present situations to bring freshness to his rendition of them; his commentary is implicit in his expression of sights, sounds, and actions; his writing is not discursive.¹⁹ Reznikoff’s writing was not only new and stayed new, but it anticipated, like Romains’ Unanimisme, a convergence—an inextricable “direction of historic and contemporary particulars”²⁰; his descriptions of the details of different people’s struggle for livelihood among shops and factories, Zukofsky claimed, anticipated the concerns of the revolutionaries of the late twenties. But Reznikoff also had the conviction to learn poetic sincerity—the technique of rendering his sympathies in words.²¹

II. Objectification

The art of poetry is more than choice and treatment of content, and so the “Objectivist” must consider more than the criterion of poetic sincerity. If he did not, his work might degenerate into propaganda for the implications of locale or ideology. The necessary further consideration is objectification, the criterion by which one evaluates the success of a piece of writing as a whole. Although the sincerity of a poem’s parts is a prerequisite, objectification primarily depends on the interrelations of its parts. Objectification is “the arrangement, into one apprehended unit, of minor units of sincerity—in other words, the resolving of words and their ideation into structure.” Whereas the details of sincerity suggest the wholes of which they are parts, objectification is itself a whole, and gives a sense of “rested totality,” “the apprehension satisfied completely as to the appearance of the art form as an object.” It is “writing (audibility in two-dimensional print) which is an object or affects the mind as such.”²²

For the “Objectivist,” the distinction between “an object” and a thing in writing which “affects the mind as such” is trivial. He does not seek to make a real red wheelbarrow; he seeks to make a thing that will affect the mind as a wheelbarrow or any other object. His unspoken assumption is that real objects and verbal objects are the same in the psychology of awareness. Therefore, Zukofsky dismissed epistemological distinctions between “real” and “ideal.” In his interview with L. S. Dembo, he said: “I don’t care how you think about things, whether you think they are there outside of you, even if you disappear, or if they exist only because you think of them. In either case you live with things as they exist.”²³ In his essay on Reznikoff, he wrote: “It is assumed that epistemological problems do not affect existence, that a personal structure of relations might be a definite object, or *vice versa*.”²⁴ The “poem as object” is predicated on the possibility of this formal equivalence. In this way, objectification is dependent upon sincerity. As Zukofsky wrote, “more objectification cannot be expected from writing than from its subject matter.”²⁵

III. Applications

Zukofsky applied his two criteria to three examples from the poems of Reznikoff. The first of these satisfies the criterion of sincerity:

I. Aphrodite Urania

The ceaseless weaving of the uneven water.²⁶

Zukofsky noted that each word of this one-line poem is referential, translating the patterned energy of its object. Together, they give a visual image but do not achieve objectification:

The first example illustrates sincerity, not objectification, each word possessing remarkable energy as an image of water as action. The title carries connotative and associative meaning in itself and in relation to the line; yet the line and the title together, tho interdependent, have not been arranged as a unit in the condition or relation of an object. Instead, the mind is attracted to the veracity of the particular craft, the validity of writing apprehending the most energetic constituents of possible objectification.²⁷

The poem is not objectified because it attracts the mind first not to a sense of its self-completion but to its relation to myth and actuality. The relations it suggests have not been internalized.

The next two examples by Reznikoff satisfy, however, the more difficult criterion:

II. Hellenist

As I, barbarian, at last, although slowly, could read Greek,
At "blue-eyed Athena"
I greeted her picture that had long been on the wall:
The head slightly bent forward under the heavy helmet,
As if to listen; the beautiful lips slightly scornful.

III.

How shall we mourn you who are killed and wasted,
Sure that you would not die with your work unended—
As if the iron scythe in the grass stops for a flower.²⁸

To explain why these are examples of objectification, Zukofsky detailed matters of poetic structure—rhythm, length of word, accent, and line—not of content. The fact that the second example "translates the Hellenic" is incidental, and that the third alludes to Gaudier-Brzeska "adds nothing to the poem as object":

The second and third examples are objectification. In the second, the purposeful crudity of the first line as against the quantitative (not necessarily classic) hexameter measures of the others, the use of words of two syllables (greeted, picture, slightly, etc.) with suitable variations of words of four and three (barbarian, beautiful); the majority of the words accented on the first syllable, all resolve into a structure (which incidentally translates the Hellenic) to which the mind does not wish to add; nor does it, any more than when it contemplates a definite object by itself. The mind may conceivably prefer one object to another—the energy of the heat which is Aten to the benignness of the light which is Athena. But this is a matter of preference rather than the invalidation of the object not preferred.

The second example is so much an object that the title, Hellenist, is a mere tag not even necessary for designation. The third example needs no title and has none. The fact that it was originally an epitaph for Gaudier Brzeska may compel the attention of a few, but adds nothing to the poem as object. Objectification in this poem is attained in the balance of the first two lines; the third line adds the grace of ornament in a simile, as might the design painted around a simple bowl.²⁹

"At any time," Zukofsky continued, "objectification in writing is rare. The poems or the prose structures of a generation are few." These high-toned pronouncements were characteristic of Zukofsky.

Even in the work of Reznikoff, "the degree of objectification . . . is small." On the other hand, Zukofsky conceded that "it is questionable . . . whether the state of rest achieved by objectification is more pertinent to the mind than presentation in detail." Perhaps sincerity is more important than creating "poems." Reznikoff, after all, never claimed to achieve objectification, and out of deference to the ideal "called his writings in cadence, not poems, but verse."³⁰ Similarly, Zukofsky later admitted that in the "Objectivists" issue of Poetry, there was little objectification, but suggested that there was much sincerity.³¹

Zukofsky judged the rest of contemporary poetry with equal rigor. His list of the standards of contemporary "Objectivist" writings begins with Pound: "The poems of Ezra Pound alone possess objectification to a most constant degree; his objects are musical shapes." Objectification in the work of other contemporary writers is much less frequent. "Objectification is to be found," however, in Williams' Spring and All "in Poems VIII, X, XVIII, XXIII, XXVI," five out of the twenty-seven poems in the book. In comparison, only two poems by Marianne Moore and one poem by T. S. Eliot achieve objectification, although Moore and Eliot often achieve sincerity: "It is interesting that the work of Marianne Moore is largely a portrait of the author's character intent upon the presentation which is sincerity, rather than the revealed rest of objectification" which is found in "An Octopus" and "Like a Bulrush." And "in the work of T. S. Eliot it is often the single quatrain (or whatever the unit of composition may be) which possesses objectification; together, his quatrains are a series rather than the entirety of a poem." Objectification occurs more frequently in the more erratic poetry of E. E. Cummings—that is, in "Him Song III, Amores VII, Unrealities V in Tulips and Chimneys" and "at least a half-dozen poems in Is 5," and Zukofsky explained the nature of Cummings' success as "an equilibrium between the extremely connotative speech of an energy of five senses which are vitally young, and an aptness of purposeful print, and musical rhetoric weaving this energy into an interlacing (sometimes, unfortunately, astray)." Since objectification depends on the sincerity originally inherent in the poet's subject-matter, poetic success may be a register of cultural health: "To what extent objectification bearing the trade-mark of the Americas may be expected out of a geography and humanity constantly shifting, is indicated with ironic evenness in Robert McAlmon's North America, Continent of Conjecture (1929)." In this sequence of poems, claimed Zukofsky, "mock historicalness . . . joins isolate attenuations . . . and offers not merely North America's but the race's Unfinished Poem."³²

IV. Correlations

Pound's influence on the "Objectivists" explains the prominence of Pound's work among Zukofsky's models of poetic excellence and underlies the poetic agreement among the "Objectivists" including Williams, Moore, Eliot, Cummings, and McAlmon. These writers are in a common tradition which sprang from Pound's Imagiste manifesto. Zukofsky's poetic sincerity, accordingly, is a restatement and clarification of the first Imagiste prescription, direct presentation. Presentation, although to my knowledge Pound never explicitly defined it, is the inclusion in writing of only those elements which absolutely correspond with essential qualities of the object. Presentation provides knowledge of acquaintance and may be directly experienced.³³ Pound used the phrase "the economy of words" to

describe the second Imagiste proscription: “To use absolutely no word that does not contribute to the presentation.”³⁴ Similarly, Zukofsky defined sincerity as writing which does not indulge in ideas without “presentation” or “tangible rendition,”³⁵ and wrote that “the economy of presentation in this [Reznikoff’s] writing is a reassertion of faith that the combined letters—the words—are absolute symbols for objects, states, acts, interrelations, thoughts about them.”³⁶

The analogy to music of the term “absolute” is clear in Pound’s “Treatise on Harmony.”³⁷ Pound adapted the term from a concept in music theory: absolute pitch, the ability to sing or name a note asked for or heard. An absolute is the exact poetic form or element required to reproduce the object. Rhythm, metaphor, and symbol may all be absolute. Pound wrote, “I believe in an ‘absolute rhythm,’ a rhythm, that is, in poetry which corresponds exactly to the shade of emotion to be expressed,”³⁸ and, he wrote, “I believe that every emotion and every phase of emotion has some toneless phrase, some rhythm-phrase to express it.”³⁹ We can also see, more systematically, that Pound distinguished absolute melopoeia from absolute logopoeia: “I believe in an ultimate and absolute rhythm as I believe in an absolute symbol or metaphor. The perception of the intellect is given in the word, that of the emotions in the cadence.”⁴⁰ He also mentioned absolute phanopoeia: “one believes that emotion is an organizer of form, not merely of visible forms and colours, but also of audible forms. This basis of music is so familiar that it would seem to need no support. . . . The rhythm form is false unless it belongs to the particular creative emotion or energy which it purports to represent.”⁴¹ The ability to find these exact forms and to judge the exact perception given by a certain form is necessary to implement Pound’s direct presentation and Zukofsky’s poetic sincerity. Their existence is part of the “Objectivist” faith.

Responding to L. S. Dembo, George Oppen described the “faith” in his lines “The small nouns / Crying faith / In this in which the wild deer / Startle, and stare out”:

Q. What exactly is the faith: Is it in the world as world or is it in man’s ability to know the world?

A. Well, that the nouns do refer to something; that it’s there, that it’s true, the whole implication of these nouns; that appearances represent reality, whether or not they misrepresented it: that this in which the thing takes place, this thing is here, and that these things do take place. On the other hand, one is left with the deer, staring out of the thing, at the thing, not knowing what will come next.⁴²

The “Objectivist” faith is in the potential of words to present the world to man, in the absolute relations between expression, existence, and experience. If a poem has sincerity, its details imply the whole of which they are parts—“appearances represent reality”—the poem is an understatement, a kind of paradigm or synecdoche. One must look from the words to the reality they symbolize, just as, Zukofsky suggested, in a poem by Reznikoff whose words “render the equivalent of the sounds” of birds, a traveller “Whom a bird’s notes surprise” looks for the bird in the trees.⁴³

Sincerity and objectification govern distinct stages of poetic technique. Zukofsky might have discovered this distinction in [Spring and All](#), where Williams wrote that “prose has to do with the fact of an emotion; poetry has to do with the dynamization of emotion into a separate form.” “Prose” is “statement of facts,” and its form is “the accuracy of its subject-matter”; “poetry” is “new form dealt with as a reality in itself” and its form is “related to the movement of the imagination revealed in word.”⁴⁴

Zukofsky might also have discovered his distinction in Pound’s essay “Affirmations . . . IV. As for Imagisme,” where Pound wrote that the ability to find the absolute could be a direct response to existence and experience. As he put it, “energy creates pattern. . . . emotional force gives the image. . . . Intense emotion causes pattern to arise in the mind—if the mind is strong enough.” “Pattern,” like sincerity, refers to the poem’s parts, for he continued: “Perhaps I should say, not pattern, but pattern-units, or units of design.” Zukofsky might have chosen his phrase “minor units of sincerity” with Pound’s terms in mind. Furthermore, Zukofsky might have chosen his phrase “word combinations” with Pound’s “arrangement of forms” in mind. Zukofsky wrote that in sincerity “shapes appear concomitants of word combinations.” These are poems or parts of poems which do not attain rested totality—but each word of which retains its integrity. Pound wrote: “The difference between the pattern-unit and the picture is one of complexity. The pattern-unit is so simple that one can bear having it repeated several or many times. when it becomes so complex that repetition would be useless, then it is a picture, an ‘arrangement of forms.’”

Pound’s “arrangement” is not yet the final poetic achievement. Objectification translates a third unit created by emotion, the Image:

Not only does emotion create the “pattern-unit” and the “arrangement of forms,” it creates also the Image. The Image can be of two sorts. It can arise within the mind. It is then “subjective.” External causes play upon the mind, perhaps; if so, they are drawn into the mind, transmitted, and emerge in an Image unlike themselves. Secondly, the Image can be objective. Emotion seizing up some external scene of action carries it intact to the mind; and that vortex purges it of all save the essential or dominant or dramatic qualities, and it emerges like the external original.

In either case the Image is more than an idea. It is a vortex or cluster of fused ideas and is endowed with energy.⁴⁵

Pound thus gave Zukofsky three units of poetic composition—the pattern-unit, the arrangement of forms, and the Image. Although perhaps Zukofsky’s theories can not be fully understood without Pound’s, Zukofsky had the genius to organize Pound’s random prescriptions and beliefs under two criteria, relate them to one another according to the requirements of a unified poetic process, and emphasize certain aspects of the process to correct the deficiencies of the “accepted” verse of the time.

Section 9 - History 1929-1930

I. Blues

Pound's letter to Vogel on 23 January 1929 stated his hopes that the projected magazine Blues would take the place of the Exile:

If it is any use, I shd. be inclined not to make an effort to bring out another Xile until one has seen whether Blues can do the job. . . .

I don't see that there is room or need for two mags doing experimental stuff . . . at present moment. If Blues can bring out a wad of Joe Gould it seems to me it wd. about cover the ground.

. . .
I personally don't want to write any prose for the next year or two or three. If you get Bill Wms., McAlmon, Joe Gould and the authors you've got, there ought to be enough solid core to carry the thing.¹

Blues published neither Gould nor McAlmon; however, its editors, Charles Henri Ford and Parker Tyler, were, as Kenneth Rexroth wrote, open to young and radical members of the avant garde: "The number of people Ford and Tyler discovered or published when they were still practically unknown is astonishing. They discovered Erskine Caldwell, Edouard Roditi, and me in one issue."² Blues published fourteen poems by Zukofsky and work by several writers whom Zukofsky selected to be in the "Objectivists" issue of Poetry: Williams, Tyler, Herman Spector, Harry Roskolenkier, Rexroth, Pound, Norman Macleod, Richard Johns, Horace Gregory, and Ford.³ The magazine ran through nine issues, from February 1929 to the fall of 1930. The second issue came out with prefaces by "contributing editors" Pound and Williams.

When Ford asked Pound for a literary program for the new magazine, Pound responded with essentially the same advice that he had been offering Zukofsky:

Dear C. H. F.: Every generation or group must write its own literary program. The way to do it is by circular letter to your ten chief allies. Find out the two or three points you agree on (if any) and issue them as program. If you merely want to endorse something in my original Imagist manifesto or the accompanying "Don'ts" or in my How to Read that has just appeared in the N. Y. Herald "Books," simply say so. Or list the revered and unrevered authors you approve or disapprove of.

(Pound's three grounds for association: (1) two or three points of agreement, (2) endorsement of prior manifestos, and (3) common influences, positive and negative, would justify the "Objectivists" as a group.) In spite of his apparent reluctance, Pound enclosed a brief program for Ford which repeated invectives from the Exile against the inutility of government, customs, and the copyright laws. His letter to Ford continued:

Re my "Program" enclosed: A man's opinions are his own affair. When writing a poem he shd. think only of doing a good job. But a magazine is a public matter. It is there as mediator between the writer and the public. A magazine shd. think of the

welfare of literature as a whole and of conditions in which it is possible to produce it. I shd. like you to print my "Program." Note it is civic NOT political. Not a question of messing into politics but of the writers or intelligentsia raising hell all day and every day about abuses that interfere with their existence AS WRITERS and that represent an oppression of literature by the stinking sons-of-bitches who rot the country.

As to magazine policy: Most "young" magazines play ostrich. They neither recognize the outer world nor do they keep an eye on contemporary affairs of strictly literary nature.⁴

Williams wrote Zukofsky on 4 December 1928 that as a contributing editor he wanted to publish in Blues Zukofsky's "poem beginning 'A.'"⁵ Williams' title for the poem is perhaps not a misnomer; the first movements of "A" at least were intended, wrote Zukofsky, to make good the promise at the end of "Poem beginning 'The.'"⁶

Zukofsky's sense of "The" as reaction against The Waste Land was another point of agreement with Williams. Although Williams had expressed some of his objections to Eliot's work in Spring and All (1923), Zukofsky might not have been aware of Williams' argument until after they met in 1928, whereas Zukofsky wrote "'The'" in 1926. But the influence of The Waste Land was so pervasive that every poet had to deal with it. Williams remembered:

Then out of the blue The Dial brought out The Waste Land and all our hilarity ended. It wiped out our world as if an atom bomb had been dropped upon it and our brave sallies into the unknown were turned to dust.

To me especially it struck like a sardonic bullet. I felt at once that it set me back twenty years, and I'm sure it did. Critically Eliot returned us to the classroom just at the moment when I felt that we were on the point of an escape to matters much closer to the essence of a new art form itself—rooted in the locality which should give it fruit.⁷

Kenneth Rexroth corroborated: "Within a couple of years the influence of The Waste Land had become enormous, but only on the English-speaking literary bohemia. Soon little Waste Lands were sprouting everywhere."⁸

Williams and Zukofsky were on the losing side of the controversy. And their position worsened as the disillusionment of the twenties moved into the Depression of the thirties, and those who favored Eliot's academicism found support in the universities.

Williams did not get "A" into Blues; he had entertained the possibility of continuing the Exile to publish the poem, but the publisher, Covici, was not willing to sponsor another issue. Williams wrote Zukofsky: "My proposal was to pay for one more Exile, or rather to be responsible for any deficit – in order to have your new thing in it, etc. But if Covici is off the whole thing so am I."⁹

II. Private Presses

On 28 January 1929, Zukofsky asked Pound for submissions for a projected magazine based in Philadelphia and to be called the States Quarterly. He wrote that four people would choose what to print: himself, Kay (the printer), Tibor Serly (a Hungarian musician and composer and student of Kodaly), and a man who wanted to remain anonymous (although Pound had once responded favorably to his manuscript

submitted under a pseudonym).¹⁰ The printer was the "Kay" in "A"- 2, 5, and 6. Serly also remained a friend, and no doubt fed Zukofsky's growing interest in music. The fourth apparently died in anonymity as he wished. The magazine was never published, so that Zukofsky was stuck with the manuscripts that he had edited for it through the spring.

Since Zukofsky lacked the financial backing to publish these manuscripts himself, he proposed a possible partnership with Williams, but in his letter to Pound in 18 September 1929 he reported Williams' response: "Printing anything ourselves seems a mad idea to me just now. I may quicken to it later however. We'll see. Yes, it may be the only way."¹¹ Zukofsky also offered to distribute the Exile, hoping that Pound would continue it. If Pound could get Williams to share the expenses, he wrote, he would commit the labor. At this point, Zukofsky was without a job and had no prospects of getting published by the Dial, Hound and Horn, Transition, or Criterion, but Blues had accepted something and he wondered whether it would appear.¹² He offered to send Pound manuscripts left over from the States including Williams' January: A Novelette and his long poem "The Flower," selected work by Reznikoff, poems by Oppen and Jesse Loewenthal, a short story by T. S. Hecht, and music by Serly.¹³ All these writers except Serly were published in the "Objectivists" issue of Poetry.

When on 22 November 1929 Zukofsky sent Pound three books published by Reznikoff himself — Nine Plays (1927), Five Groups of Verse (1927), and By the Waters of Manhattan: An Annual (1929)— he listed the work he selected by Reznikoff for the defunct States: the play "Coral" and thirteen poems including the unpublished "Idyll." Zukofsky also recommended that Pound read "Editing and Glosses" and the plays "Meriwether Lewis" and "Rashi." Finally, he gave Reznikoff's age (35), claimed that his work was more than intelligent, and commented that Reznikoff had a hand in writing his mother's autobiography in the annual.¹⁴ The work in these three books and Zukofsky's study of them formed the basis of Zukofsky's essays on Reznikoff, which he began for the Menorah Journal by 19 December 1929.¹⁵

Pound wrote Williams on 2 December 1929 that he was interested in buying a little printing press, if Williams could send him the particulars:

And now to speak of something conskrucktive: Since my progenitors cum over here, I don't see any god damn American magazines cos nobody sends 'em. And I shd. like to see the advertisement of one of those latest smallest lightest printing presses again. The kind advertised fer bizniz houses: "Do your own printing."

. . .
Damn it, I oughn't to bother with the thing at all; but the rest of the world is so lousy lazy that I may as well look into the matter. . . . Couldn't cost too much as wd. certainly be idle most of the time; and no chance of "merchanting" the products in any conceivable case. . . .

Drawback mainly the feeling that if I buy the damn thing there will for eight years be nothing to print on it.¹⁶

By 9 December 1929, Pound had read enough of the books writand printed by Reznikoff that Zukofsky had sent him to comment:

The Reznikoff prose very good as far as I've got at breakfast. BUTT if the blighter has a press and can set type why the hell is it up to me to find a printer fer all the etc.....

////

Capital idea that next wave of literature is Jewish (obviously) Bloom cast shadow before prophetic Jim. etc.

also lack of prose in German due to all idiomatic energy being drawn off into Yiddish.

(not concerned with the "truth" of these suggestions but only with the dynamic.)¹⁷

Zukofsky wrote on 19 December 1929 to discuss Reznikoff. He confirmed that Reznikoff owned a printing press, but complained that it was not stored in New York City. The address printed on his title pages, 5 West Fourth Street, was that of a relative and a matter of business. Anyway, Reznikoff was too busy—committed to revise legal definitions for the rest of his life and occupied with his own writing and with his daily study of the Bible, Homer, and Dante—to waste money on unfortunate writers like Zukofsky. Reznikoff could not even sell his own books. Nevertheless, he once mentioned the possibility of moving his press back and working part-time so that he could use it as a diversion; he also mentioned doing other writers' booklets, if he had the money. He would prefer to take the risk himself—such was his nature.¹⁸

Zukofsky also mentioned that in the article on the work of Charles Reznikoff which he was writing he quoted Pound's capital idea above. This brought the following response on New Year's Eve:

I DONT think the publik shd. be taken so far into one's confidence. After all it is a dangerous animal to be guided, and can only be guided by the toe of the boot applied with vigour. You may use footnote saying that

Mr. P. has expressed a suspicion that

1. whether the next wave of lit. will be Jewish
2. whether lack of prose in Choimun is due to drawing off the idiomatic energy into yiddish.

You say that these speculations rose from reading Rez.

That's much better than a cliché about my saying he was "good" & elicits much more interest.¹⁹

These points were included in a footnote, showing Pound to be one of the three exceptions to a "literary market' not interested in sincerity as craft."²⁰

Reznikoff's press interested Pound as much as his work. Pound's letter of New Year's Eve continued, recommending that Zukofsky and his group use it to publish a series of contemporary authors:

Stuff must be done IN SERIES with enough authors to do a bit of runnin rahnd.

There's you; Bill, Bob while he stays in Manhattan, a couple of culchuld yng. damsels recently come into N. Y. from the provinces. (Vogel if he gets forgiven).²¹

Pound further recommended printing and not binding the books, in imitation of the French brochures, at a time there were no paper-backs printed in America. The price of binding a book in hardcover seemed to Pound an unnecessary burden on the writers. This factor eventually influenced the Oppens to establish To Publishers in France.

Pound wrote on 10 January 1930:

Have read Reznikof's [sic] verse. Good; but he shd. have got into the gang; i;e; sent it to me in 1918 instead of now. perhaps it was printed in Poetry or somewhere at the time he wrote it ???? and only needed his own printing for the book ?? very difficult to do anything about it so late in the history of the world.²²

And Zukofsky, on 12 January 1930, wrote that he was to meet Reznikoff within hours, and would attempt to discuss business. Maybe everyone could combine resources and rent a place for Reznikoff to work. Reznikoff, he commented, was exactly like Williams, only Jewish: if Pound could imagine that. Also, Zukofsky was continuing work on his essay on Reznikoff, except that he was temporarily stymied trying to define two terms—sincerity and objectification.²³ These letters are evidence, over a year before the "Objectivists" issue of Poetry, of an incipient group, with predecessors, a purpose and a poetics. We observe mention of their affinity with Pound's "gang" of 1918; we see Williams and Reznikoff compared by Zukofsky to Pound; we see that they realized the necessity of cooperative self-publication, and we observe mention of "sincerity and objectification"—the core of the "Objectivists" poetics, then being formulated in Zukofsky's essay on Reznikoff ([see Section 8](#)).

However, the times were difficult. Williams wrote Zukofsky on 14 January 1930 that he thought that Pound's proposal to establish a private printing venture was not quite feasible; Williams had money but no time. Instead, he asked Zukofsky if he would recommend putting an advertisement in the New York World for some old printer.²⁴ At the end of January 1930, Zukofsky wrote Pound of possible arrangements and, more to the point, of the drawbacks of using Reznikoff's press.²⁵ With this note the idea was dropped altogether.

III. Critical Management

Pound once wrote to Zukofsky: "My Dear Ni Hon Jin/ . . . Considering myself something as yr. ring manager in this question of the fly-weight belt contest. You have a nice tidy little gloire de cenacle; & it wd. [be] a shame to waste it."²⁶ In addition to taking on Reznikoff and the rest of Zukofsky's "cenacle" on Zukofsky's account, Pound acted as Zukofsky's literary agent for a series of critical works. Zukofsky sent Pound his long essay "Henry Adams: A Criticism in Autobiography," which he had begun as his masters thesis in 1924 at Columbia and had revised and extended with a review of A Voyage to Pagan, "Beginning Again with William Carlos Williams."²⁷ Perhaps encouraged by the publication of two poems by Zukofsky in the Criterion of April 1929,²⁸ Pound replied 31 October 1929 that he was sending it to T. S. Eliot by the next post, and commented: "With this display of capacity; seems to me you have a chance to live by pen. IF you can connect with Times Lit. Sup. I don't know what there is in America that wd. support you. Get the Guggenheim thing of course if poss."²⁹

Nothing was heard from Eliot about "Henry Adams." Zukofsky had already applied for a Guggenheim, requesting recommendations from both Pound and Williams. Pound had replied on 20 September 1929, and Williams sent Zukofsky on 14 November a copy of his letter of recommendation which read, in part, "that he is endowed with a rare insight into the conditions, difficult for many to realize,

surrounding modern writing."³⁰ There followed only a long silence, until 10 March 1930 when Zukofsky wrote Pound of his rejection.³¹ After receiving the editorship of an issue of Poetry, he renewed his application, with as little success, in spite of Harriet Monroe's recommendation:

I strongly endorse this candidate even though I am not yet exactly intimate with his work. He is a member, perhaps the leader, of a "new group" of poets who are doing very interesting, more or less experimental work in poetry and in aesthetic criticism. He seems to me, judging from certain recent essays, to be searching profoundly the fundamental principles of poetic art, and I think it is important to the progress of modern literature that young minds of his calibre should be given a chance to work out their ideas and publish the results.³²

Zukofsky also sent Pound his article on the Cantos. In September 1929 he sent emendations to it.³³ In November Pound asked whether Mark Van Doren, Zukofsky's old professor at Columbia, could get it published in America.³⁴ In December Zukofsky asked Pound if he could get Eliot to publish it in the Criterion, and Pound sent it by 6 May 1930 when he acknowledged receiving René Taupin's French translation of it.³⁵ This was published in Paris as "Ezra Pound: Ses Cantos" in Echanges, 1, 3 (1930).³⁶ Zukofsky knew of Eliot's offer to read the English version in January 1930, and was told of its partial acceptance in June.³⁷ "The Cantos of Ezra Pound (One section of an long Essay)" was published in the Criterion in April 1931 under the spelling "Zukovsky."³⁸ Meanwhile, Pound arranged to have Emanuel Carnevali, then convalescing from encephalitis in Italy, translate it from Taupin's French into Italian. This version was serialized in L'Indice, 10 April, 25 April, and 10 May 1931.³⁹

Although the Exile was not continued, and although the States Quarterly was never published, these ventures encouraged Zukofsky to begin gathering a group of writers who satisfied the criteria he was developing in his critical articles on Henry Adams, A Voyage to Pagan, the Cantos, and Reznikoff's work.

Zukofsky's criteria were also partly based on Pound's critical work. Back on 12 February 1929, Pound responded to Zukofsky's request for submissions to the States by withholding judgement and manuscripts; however, he wrote:

There is plenty of stuff in my printed work that hasn't yet been digested by the am. pub. . . . Faintly to discern that in How to Read PLUS my previously printed stuff there is the BASIS of a new critical system. Not mere impressionism or Eliotic or other academicism etc.⁴⁰

Pound referred to his ideogramic method of criticism, which he summarized in 1938 in Guide to Kulchur (dedicated to two "Objectivists," Zukofsky and Basil Bunting)—Chapter 5: "ZWECK or the AIM":

I mean to say the purpose of the writing is to reveal the subject. The ideogramic method consists of presenting one facet and then another until at some point one gets off the dead and desensitized surface of the reader's mind, onto a part that will register.

The "new" angle being new to the reader who cannot always be the same reader. The newness of the angle being relative and the writer's aim, at least this writer's aim being revelation, a just revelation irrespective of newness or oldness.

To put it another way: it does not matter a two-penny damn whether you load up your memory with the chronological sequence of what has happened, or the names of

protagonists, or authors of books, or generals and leading political spouters, so long as you understand the process now going on, or the process biological, social, economic now going on, enveloping you as an individual, in a social order, and quite unlikely to be very "new" in themselves however fresh or stale to the participant.⁴¹

Guide to Kulchur summarizes the "BASIS" of Pound's ideogrammic method of criticism that Zukofsky had previously studied in Pavannes and Divisions (1918), Instigations (1920), and How to Read (1929). I have suggested that Zukofsky defined "An Objective" after Romain's Unanimisme, which Pound urged him to study (Section 1); Pound's method, too, was influenced by Romain's. Zukofsky's "historical and contemporary particulars" and Pound's "facets" are both the perceptual and conceptual details of what is "now going on," and particulars of the present which are relevant to the past and to the future.⁴² Both Pound and Zukofsky had a sense of the coalescence of this data into a revelation which is "aimed at." Whether "the process biological, social, economic" or "a thing or things as well as an event or chain of events," the objective of neither was the simple sensual image of the free verse movement. Both realized that revelation and revolution are analogous—each must be related to the new that stays new. But where for Pound the process was critical—the revelation of the process from a new angle, for Zukofsky the process was creative—the "objectification" of the poem, the complete resolution of the process into new structure appearing as an object in itself. Also, Zukofsky's object required more precision than Pound's barrage of facts. In 1933, Zukofsky wrote in reply to an unfavorable review of An "Objectivists" Anthology that the revolutionary objective will not materialize unless it is aware of the grounds upon which it either acts or reacts, and that each piece in the anthology provides explicit or implicit awareness of these grounds. It does so because it is a revelation of human truth and perception.⁴³

Zukofsky's criteria were also refined during his continued editing of Williams' writing. While Pound was managing Zukofsky's work, Zukofsky was managing Williams'. In October 1929 Williams wrote to thank Zukofsky for the return of Williams' "Stein thing" with Zukofsky's "pencilings," and again in November to note that they were "of great assistance."⁴⁴ "The Work of Gertrude Stein" was first published in Pagany in Winter 1930, and Zukofsky eventually included it in A Novelette and Other Prose, published by the Oppens in 1932.⁴⁵ Williams enclosed in the October letter his poem "The Flower," which he asked Zukofsky to submit for him to a "Philadelphia venture." It was published in U. S. A., 1 (Spring 1930), 31, and later included by Zukofsky in Williams' Collected Poems 1921-1931.⁴⁶

Meanwhile, on January 1929 Williams wrote Zukofsky that he had composed a novelette:

While tearing around tending the sick I've composed a Novelette in praise of my wife whom I have gotten to know again because of being thrown violently into her arms and she mine by the recent epidemic – though not by the illness of either of us, quite the contrary.⁴⁷

Williams soon sent January: A Novelette to Zukofsky with this note:

Here she is. I'd like to see her in print. I had put her away so carefully it took me two days to find her.

And will you be so genteel as to scribble me down (on the script) the changes you so generously have suggested. I'm for 'em—i.e. the changes. Then send the thing to

me to be recopied – I'll cross my heart I'll return it pronto.^{[48](#)}

By 4 March 1929, Williams (as well as rushing through with his mother their translation of Philippe Soupault's Last Nights in Paris, due at the printer by 15 April) was revising it.^{[49](#)} Zukofsky wanted to put it in the States before that scheme failed; he also offered to send it to Pound if he wished to continue the Exile, describing it as a novelette of fifty pages in the style of Kora in Hell and The Great American Novel, well-written and centered on a common theme—concerning Williams, his wife, his work during the influenza epidemic, and his writing—the “novel.”^{[50](#)}

At this point in their history, the “Objectivists” were securely established as a literary group with healthy working relationships. Their efforts to promote their work and ideals were evident in the plans of Pound and Williams as contributing editors to Blues, in the plans of Zukofsky for the States Quarterly, in their opinions of Reznikoff's work, in their consideration of using a private press, possibly Reznikoff's, to print work in which they believed, in their mutual services as literary agents, and in the similarities of the principles of their critical and creative works.

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[8. Sincerity and Objectification](#)

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[10. January: A Novelette](#)

Section 10 - January: A Novelette

In a letter of 10 January 1930, Pound wrote Zukofsky that Nancy Cunard's Hours Press would publish XXX Cantos, and suggested that she might also publish the Zukofsky manuscripts which he had sent her, and possibly also Williams' short works edited by Zukofsky.¹ A few days later, Pound wrote Williams:

Dear WillYam: Zuk tells me that Reznikof has a printin press. In any kuntry but Murka this wd. solve a lot of problems.

Nancy has agreed to print Zuk's "The." Also wants something of yours, as I indicated when writing to Z. so'z to save a week's time.²

Williams then wrote Zukofsky that Cunard's press was a better scheme for Pound "than the-hand-press-in-New York route," and suggested the publication of his novelette and a "Collect Definitive" of his own poetry.³ His next letter further instructed Zukofsky: "Let's get both the poem" ["the Primavera thing"] "and the novelette ready and send them both to Pound."⁴ "The Primavera thing" is a sequence of new poems which he and Zukofsky were editing.⁵

Cunard published XXX Cantos but not "Primavera" nor "Poem beginning 'The,'" nor Williams' collected poems, and not his novelette. The efforts of Williams and Zukofsky, however, were not entirely wasted: Williams' short works were published with his novelette by the Oppens To Publishers in 1931 and "Primavera" with his collected poems by the Objectivist Press in 1934.

On 9 February 1930 Pound asked Zukofsky to send him E. E. Cummings' books to help Van Hecke (as he wrote Cummings on 17 February) with "an American number of Varietes." He also enclosed a check, told Zukofsky to take a friend out to dinner, and noted that Rene Taupin's book just published in Paris had a good chapter on Williams.⁶ Zukofsky responded on 6 March 1930, enclosing for Pound two stories by Reznikoff with many miscellaneous publications and photos of the Lower East Side. He wrote that Reznikoff appreciated their efforts but was not eager to be published.⁷ Van Hecke, unfortunately, did not fulfill Pound's hopes; none of this material was published.⁸

Pound also wanted something by Williams, who responded on 13 March:

I've been up since 5.30 certifying the death of a man's wife (he cried) and now finishing the correction of the Novelette.

The latter will go forward to you by the next mail. It is the prime provocation for this letter.

Naturally Nancy will not want to print two books by me this year. And the poems should come first if she prints either. But the Novelette is very close to my heart—and no one will handle it here. You see what I mean.

The Novelette contains something I have been trying for half my life, yet—well, that's about enough of that. I hope you like the thing and that you will be able to find something in it suitable for Variétés.

What can I do? The answer is: Write.

Oh, Jolas will be using the first four chapters of the Novelette in transition. I'd suggest that you take the chapter called "Conversation as Design"—if I remember it correctly—it's in a drawer behind my back and I can't bother to turn around.

Hope Dorothy has some fun out of the thing. Floss and the ubiquitous Zuke are the only ones in this section of understanding who have fallen for it. And no two people could approach the things from a more divergent angle.⁹

In "Conversation as Design," Williams complained, as to his wife, Flossy:

Conversation of which there is none in novels and the news.

Oh, yes, there is.

Oh, no, there is not. It is something else. To be conversation, it must have only the effect of itself, not on him to whom it has a special meaning but as a dog or a store window.

For this we must be alone.¹⁰

"Conversation as design" must have only the effect of itself. On 25 July 1928 Williams had described Zukofsky's work as having "the effect of a 'thing.'" In both phrases we see the value of realizing the work as—Williams wrote—a "pure design":

But conversation in a novel can be pure design.

Yes, if it doesn't have to tell a story. That would be difficult; a novel that is pure design—like the paintings of Juan Gris.¹¹

The term equivalent to "design" for writing is "form." William emphasized, as did the other "Objectivists" the form which a work can stand by itself, a "thing" capable of surviving being read without subjective investment, meaning no more than the meaning its form gives it.

Williams disclosed to his readers in Chapter "VII. Fierce Singleness" the revelation that came to him only when pressed by several immediate concerns: "In a flash it comes and is gone. Words on a par with trees." This "humane matter," a marriage of word and thing, was the key to Williams' marriage with Flossy and the key to his writing: "Imagine then why I have—why it has been impossible for me to think of not being married. Because in that is the key. The old terminology intervenes. In every poem that I have written is one thing. So in you. In you is everything, in you is a piece of paper."¹² Whether Williams' writings were about "a train passing" or "the dark trees against the night sky and the row of the city's lights beyond and under them," it would always be "a love statement."¹³

The realization that words are on a par with "a dog or a store window," that "trees" are on a par with trees, is the key to the faith of the "Objectivists." With this key, they could realize a "light" or "fierce singleness" to "sweep through the confusions of the world as the thought of the new world swept Europe," and create writing which by being actually itself would cure the need for "trips to the poles, trips of discovery, suicides and the inability to see clearly."¹⁴ The marriage of word and thing would create writing

which would have both "the effect of itself" and the meaning of its object, since these would be in a sense identical. "It is simple. There is no symbolism, no evocation of an image."¹⁵

This key, the basis of a metaphysical association of sensibility, gives the freedom and creativity that breed clarity. It frees things from the "categories . . . reinforced by tradition," by which "every common thing has been nailed down, stripped of freedom of action and taken away from use."¹⁶ To counter the fear that this revelation would mean an end to "general ideas and the content of literature," Williams affirmed the concept that includes all conceptions, the reality that can be presented but not represented, the things that can be known by acquaintance but not discussion: "Hello Sweetness. These are the inexpressible gestures of love. Secretive. Undiscovered. Here lies the difficulty of talk. Everything has a tail of difficulties that swamps the mind before the expression."¹⁷ To refute the claim of philosophers to the absolute, Williams answered

that philosophy has no more to do with the absolute, that it is no more inclusive of other categories of the intelligence than the concept of a tree or a stone—which includes truly a conception of the whole, by necessity, as does any thing or category by virtue of its nature as a part, but without any pretense towards absoluteness.¹⁸

Williams and the other "Objectivists" rely on our natural mental ability to regard a thing for what it means in context. Whereas a generality has no context or is at least relatively divorced from the specific contexts of the things it comprises, the concrete is always a conceptual part of a whole. The universal—in a word, meaning is not in the general but in the particular. Moreover, in the particular, unlike in the absolute, meaning is not restricted by pretending that things and ideas are not inextricably married.

In January 1929, when writing the novelette, Williams published an article in which he wrote: "One has to learn what the meaning of the local is, for universal purposes. The local is the only thing that is universal."¹⁹ One need only attend to the universal in the local. In the novelette he wrote:

. . . the harm is not in the study of plants, it is in the forgetfulness of large relations to which minute observation of Nature has occasionally led those who are addicted to it.

As in this so every detail of the day—the lights of the city—in the distance that seem to close in together at the end of the dark street as the car swiftly advances: in themselves equal in detail the existence of affection—the fact of love and so, deciphered, intensely seen become in themselves praise and a song.²⁰

It is not insignificant that "the ubiquitous Zuke" fell for the novelette. Zukofsky's poetics seem like elaborations of ideas conceived in this work. Corresponding to Williams' concept of "the effect of a thing" is Zukofsky's "poem as object"; corresponding to Williams' "local" are Zukofsky's "particulars"; and corresponding to Williams' marriage of word and thing is Zukofsky's sincerity—both writers link the world to the poem in an absolute relation which achieves form.

Section 11 - History 1930

I. Publications

Pound wrote on 14 February 1930 to ask Zukofsky to send him manuscripts of criticism: "What has Reznikoff lying about?" Also "Bob McAlmon" and "Bill." Pound hinted of a fee if Zukofsky would translate "Paideuma" by Frobenius, and asked if there were any works including Yiddish which needed to be "traduced or summarized in english." All this was to be a basis for a new movement:

am thinking of starting a intellexshul movement in amurika, above questions apply to prose (critical, root=ideas if any, and at a stretch to fixshun that can be considered (very briefly) as having some relation to the Devil upment of writing.¹

At the same time, Pound was plying Lincoln Kirstein with letters to try to divert Hound and Horn from its Harvard limitations to become the medium for this new movement.² Kirstein, however, complied to only Pound's letter and not his spirit, and so Pound's proposal was put in abeyance until 1931.³

Feeling the effects of the depression, Zukofsky asked Pound on 10 March if the Frobenius translation was to be his unemployment compensation. Nine days later, he sent Pound a piece by Gould, but he was now concerned more with his own writing than with Pound's movement. In addition to poems published in Blues and Pagany, Zukofsky's long essay on Henry Adams was accepted by Lincoln Kirstein.⁴ It was serialized from April-June 1930 to Winter 1931.⁵ Also at this time Zukofsky was negotiating with Eliot for the publication of his essay on the Cantos (see [Section 9](#)).

Williams congratulated Zukofsky on the Hound and Horn acceptance,⁶ and after its first installment wrote that the piece was "delightful"; however, Williams was more concerned with the last Imagist Anthology. Published 10 May 1930, it included an incomplete version of "Della Primavera [sic] Transportata [sic] al Morale," and five other poems, but its typographical errors took away Williams' pleasure in it. Page 229 listed books by Williams: "Tempera [sic], 1913 / Kora in Hell, 1920 / Four Grapes [sic], 1921 / In the American Grave [sic], 1925." As Williams observed, '—and Spring / is yeomen in! &%\$jesus\$1/4* What a cocksucking mistake THAT is!"⁷

Williams had given a fuller response to Zukofsky's thesis on Henry Adams on 12 July 1928 after he had read it in manuscript:

I finished the "Henry Adams" yesterday before breakfast. It interested me greatly both as an introduction to the life of an American of extra-ordinary significance to my way of thinking – which is not putting it half firmly enough – and as the work of another American . . . I enjoyed your work. All through the reading I came upon lines of real distinction . . . To me your thesis shows a worthwhile subtlty of style indicative of a mind of fine grain and selective power of thought which is unusual . . . You seemed to

hold the damned subject up from the table as a whole with clean hands. That's the gist of your power to me. I don't feel any shit – smell, would be better. You have power that is real, penetrant and (so far) flexible enough not to crack irritably the way the thing usually does in the people I have to do with most often.⁸

Williams admired Zukofsky's thesis not merely out of friendship. It, like his In the American Grain, was the result of a need to establish roots in America by a first generation American and shows in doing so "a grain and selective power of thought which is unusual."

Zukofsky wanted to follow his study of Adams with one of Thomas Jefferson. Pound found value in the idea if it was to be "a POPULAR book on Jefferson's fight for freedom of the press."⁹ Such a study would promote the "Objectivists" struggle against the inertia of the publishing industry. In spirit Zukofsky began planning a trip to California before settling that fall in Wisconsin for the winter to be a graduate assistant on a small stipend at the University of Wisconsin at Madison. There Zukofsky was to capitalize on his Jefferson interest by presenting it as his graduate project. Quickly disenchanted with the labor of being a poet, critic, and teacher, however, little came of it except a poem, "Madison, Wis., remembering the bloom of Monticello (1931)."¹⁰

Zukofsky's letter to Pound of 27 May 1930 mentioned the completion of "American Poetry 1920-1930" (see [Section 14](#)), and that he had received from A. and C. Boni a contract to translate from the German Albert Einstein: A Biographical Portrait by Anton Reiser, Einstein's nephew.¹¹ This is the kind of hack-work that appealed to Zukofsky. Although Reiser idolized his uncle and his skill as a biographer was limited, much of the book was devoted to explaining Einstein's theories. Zukofsky must have rushed the translation because he needed the money; after it was finished, he asked that he not be credited as translator.¹²

Some of the data from this work, however, surfaced in "A", beginning in "A"-6 whose composition took from early summer up to 19 August 1930.¹³

Asked Albert who introduced relativity—
 "And what is the formula for success?"
 "X=work, y=p1ay, Z=keep your mouth shut."
 "And what about Johann Sebastian? The same formula."¹⁴

Zukofsky's translation of his source for this in the biography reads:

The school of German music from Bach to Beethoven and Mozart best manifests for Einstein the essence of music. . . . On one occasion when asked to answer a questionnaire about Bach he said briefly, "In reference to Bach's life and work: listen, play, love, revere, and—keep your mouth shut!"¹⁵

Although Zukofsky's version is not scholarly accurate, it is more revealing than Reiser's. Zukofsky cast Einstein's quip into a formula and must have applied it to his own as he applied it to Einstein's success. Zukofsky shared with Einstein interests in music (Bach) and mathematics (to whose terms he reduced many of his descriptions of the poetic process). The theoretical discipline characteristic of music and

mathematics was for Zukofsky a necessary balance to the inaccuracy of the art against which he struggled. The "Objectivists" were among the first to adapt to their art the advances of modern physics, particularly field theory and the theory of relativity.

Charles Reznikoff was also working for Boni. His novel, By the Waters of Manhattan, was published in Charles Boni's Paper Books series in June 1930, with an introduction by Louis Untermeyer and a cover by Amy Drevenstedt featuring people on a New York tenement street below the Brooklyn Bridge in the background. The novel is in two parts, both revised from By the Waters of Manhattan: An Annual which Reznikoff had published in 1929 with a third part—"Editing and Glosses."¹⁶ This revision changed the first person autobiography of his mother, Sarah Yetta, into the third person, and the story of Joel Stein into the story of Ezekiel, Sarah Yetta's son. "Ezekiel" was Reznikoff's Hebrew name.¹⁷ Ezekiel, like the young Charles, was not content with work that deprived him of the peace of mind necessary for his interest in literature. Unlike Reznikoff, however, Ezekiel avoided a job in the factories and a distraught home life by opening a modest bookstore, success with which, as with the women he met there, was only close enough to jade him to his real desires.

Untermeyer's short introduction to the novel began:

It is a long time since I have read a story so obviously sincere—so tellingly simple. The simplicity, from the first paragraph to the last, is not an incidental virtue or a trick of technique; it is essential. It bears no relation to the over-cultivated monosyllables which have come as a reaction to our over-cultivated (and belated) Eighteen Nineties. Here is nothing falsely naïf in story or in style.

Reznikoff's essential simplicity was the result of direct treatment, the method by which Pound countered the errors of the decadents. He avoided all "literary" ornament and affectation; he presented the life, which is more meaningful than any authorial interpretation, any faddish or falsely sensational fabrication.

Untermeyer continued:

There is, in fact, no "style." The style is in the story —quiet, always serious, and cumulatively impressive. It builds up in little blocks of incident until events attain a dignity far beyond the statement.¹⁸

The same virtue is apparent in the works of Reznikoff (Section 8) and Williams (Section 10). Details of sincerity suggest the wholes of which they are parts.

II. Travels

Having sent Pound his future address, a set of Adams letters, and mention of meeting Basil Bunting,¹⁹ Zukofsky traveled at the end of July 1930 by train from New York to California, where he stayed with Roger Kaigh in Berkeley until mid-September, when he traveled to Madison. Zukofsky took notes en route to write "Train-Signal" and, with the volume of the economist Thorstein Veblen that Kaigh loaned him, "Immature Pebbles."²⁰ "Immature Pebbles" begins with an epigraph from Veblen that challenges one to banish "Imponderables" by "a course of unsettling habit." The poem is an account of an observation of the change in seasons which brings "the expected to the accustomed / in this

place"—"young men and women / bathing in a lake." Zukofsky's course was to move on "before one's an accessory to these ways." "In our day," it ends, "impatience / handles such matters of photography / more pertinently from a train window." Zukofsky's travels this summer, which brought him for the first time far from the city of his birth, rendered his perceptions more free from "axioms of settling habits."

In "A"-6 we find a more complete record of his journey:

N. Y., and then desolation.
The steel works of Gary.
Stopped by Lake Michigan, Chicago,
And left a note he was going to Berkeley.

Desolation. Brush. Foothills of the Rockies.
Green sea roof: desert shack in Nevada—
120 degrees in the shade—
Far away in the heat the monument of a city.

That was Salt Lake City behind him. To speak of unsettling habits, he continued:

Was, divorced from himself,
Advised in the night-life of Reno.

He was advised a number of things, everything from the relation between road and the prohibition to a song that reflected a word of Bach's Passion:

Outside the voice of one word in a chorus
falling
 "Asunder!"
 A sole, a sole
 A soldier boy was he

 Two pis two pis
 Two pistols on his knee
So everyday's a love day to a sailor
And who's the boy who would not see the wurrl,
Wand'r a sailor (example he of paler
Than haller 'gainst his bunting flag unfurled.

These things which on the trip Zukofsky was advised by the acquaintances of his circumstances are the details which illumine for him America:

Achieved:
A country of musty, inherited grants
And aged Indians,
Indians employed to establish
Proof of the grants to the white men,
"Not 150, that can't be your age?"
 asked cautiously the Indian's counsel,
"No... No...! That wrohng! ltheast 200!"

Achieved:
San Francisco's hills and fogs;
In one of its newspapers—

"Some of our best and largest dowagers
almost do the split";
Sing Fat Co.—merchants.

This was America—the land of the free to be free to complain, swindle, shock, and amuse.

After a few passages like this are located in historical time, Zukofsky's whole poem seems renewed in fact, and the reader is more willing to puzzle out the meaning that can survive time and the poet's ruthless omissions. For example, Zukofsky's preferred brand of cigarette was apparently in short supply in the land of Sing Fat Co. He wrote: "Achieved: / Three thousand miles over rails, / And adequate distribution of "Camels"—meaning that California was three thousand miles from adequate distribution."²¹

In Berkeley, plans were made to publish a book of criticism by Zukofsky and Kaigh: Four Essays and Paper.²² The four essays were Zukofsky's on Henry Adams, the Cantos, Charles Reznikoff, and American poetry 1920-1930. "Paper" is Kaigh's criticism of those such as logicians and philosophers who depend on "static or categorical meanings" credible only on paper:

'Yes' and 'No' are categorically distinct upon paper, but either may mean anything from emphatic 'Yes' to emphatic 'No' when spoken. For the context, gesture, intonation and pronunciation give words a stamp of meaning which a written form will lack.

Zukofsky quoted this in "American Poetry 1920-1930" to argue not against those who wish to ignore the infinite but against those who indulge in it, against poets "who, as some one has said of Matthew Arnold, have put on singing robes to lose themselves in the universal."²³

While in Berkeley Zukofsky briefly visited the Oppens in Belvedere, received an offer from Echanges (which was publishing the French version of his essay on Pound's Cantos) to be American correspondent, and, by 19 August 1930, finished "A"-6 and 7.²⁴

In Madison by 17 September 1930, Zukofsky set about being a graduate teaching assistant, and temporarily abandoned his efforts to have the poets in whom he believed published. But then he received an offer from Harriet Monroe to guest-edit an issue of Poetry.

This history not only reveals the foundations upon which the "Objectivist" poetic structure was built and suggests the uses it served, but also confirms the relations between foundation and structure. The "Objectivist" wrote of things which they had experienced to satisfy needs which they personally felt.

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Section 12 - American Poetry 1920-1930

Zukofsky finished his essay "American Poetry 1920-1930: A Sequel to M. Taupin's Book, 1910-1920" on 2 June 1930,¹ and would have used it, instead of "Charles Reznikoff: Sincerity and Objectification," for the program of the "Objectivists" issue of Poetry if it had not been accepted by another magazine.² It appeared in the Symposium: A Critical Review, January 1931, to which Zukofsky referred the readers of Poetry:

To avoid repetition: the visiting editor of this issue of POETRY has indicated his interest in American poetry of the last decade in an article published in the latest quarterly number of The Symposium.³

In this article, Zukofsky did more than indicate his favorite writers of the previous decade; he indicated the principles by which he selected work for the "Objectivists" issue and anthology.

I. The Canon

Zukofsky disputed with René Taupin as to the nature and direction of literary modernism. In L'Influence du Symbolisme Français sur la Poésie Américaine (del 1910 à 1920), Taupin was concerned with "an 'evolution' of poetry" discernible in the differences between generations, in which "Eliot should be considered as forming the transition between pure imagism and the new symbolism which is more complex; between a first generation which sought sincerity of expression and of rhythm, and a generation of poets taking from the world of their conscience forms and sounds to combine them according to the laws of harmony and sensibility and to express the movements of their brain' (p. 287)";⁴ Zukofsky was concerned with a more sustained "progress" evident in the individual developments of significant modernists, for which James Joyce's development of the lyric of Chamber Music into the epic of Finnegans Wake should be considered the model. Zukofsky countered Taupin by noting that "the first generation" of literary modernists "developed, after 1920 or shortly before, as did Joyce, literary mechanisms for expressing the movements of individual brains,"⁵ and by showing that the followers of Eliot are much less advanced than Eliot himself. Zukofsky felt that the significant movement of literary modernism was not of generations but of individuals and that it was not a movement toward a symbolist presentation of private worlds but a movement toward an Imagiste presentation of the shared world. The individuals whom Zukofsky admired—"Pound, Williams, Eliot, Marianne Moore"—extended "the monolinear image" to "include 'a greater accessibility to experience.'"⁶

Wishing to present a direct view of the object, Zukofsky's "Objectivists" differed from their contemporaries who wrote either free or formal verse. They differed, first, by freeing themselves from pretentious imitation of the great French, English, and even American poetic models. Zukofsky referred to Taupin's claim that "American do not need to blush if it is 'la poésie,'" and responded that "Reznikoff's

poetry, singularly, does not speak French; but neither does it speak immemorial English in so many light-stress syllables of regular verse, or speak prettified octopus-Whitman."⁷ Similarly, Zukofsky attributed HD's failure in her "later work" to achieve "a greater accessibility to experience" to her "Anglicized dilution of metric and speech value" and noted that the "new work" by Wallace Stevens "is marked by an attenuated 'accessibility to experience' characteristic of the latest Eliot . . . perhaps because, like Eliot, he has purposefully led his rather submerged intellectual excellences (as contrasted with Pound's rebelliousness and awareness of changing forces) to a versification clambering the stiles of English influence."⁸ Furthermore, "the work of the new formalists—Allen Tate, [John] Crowe Ransom, Malcolm Cowley— seems also to droop from the stem of English influence; perhaps via Eliot. In any case, their linear and stanzaic impalings [sic: impalements] do not even possess Eliot's spark of craftsman's accomplishment," and the work of Hart Crane, whose "technical regularities" associate him with the formalists, is spoilt by being "Elizabethian drive", being "iambic in the grand manner. Such imitation helps an indefinite language and prolongs verbal indecision past the useful necessity of meaning."⁹

The "Objectivists" differed from their contemporaries, secondly, by using their freedom to fill Pound's proscription for "direct treatment of the 'thing,'" to present, as Zukofsky put it, the "poetic emotion" in "constructions mentally alive, precise, and ramified and sub-ramified as to meaning." In contrast, Zukofsky noted, the "steadiness" of the new formalists "is that of truncated emotions." Their work, saved neither by "poetic emotion" nor "metaphysical construction," is "'intellectual' rhetoric" from which "blurred tangibilities hang disjointed."¹⁰

The work of the "Objectivists" achieved a "metaphysical" unity of message and medium—emotion, idea, and construction—by exact correspondence to the effects of the object. "In Donne," wrote Zukofsky, "the idea was also his feeling-tone and was also a particular metaphysical concept of his time—emotion propelling the crowding on of metaphysical things." Similarly, "Williams' feeling-tone, as Donne's, groups an order of tangible objects."¹¹ The poem presents the vortex which the experience of the object set in motion.

In the work of Hart Crane and Elinor Wylie, however, idea conflicts with feeling-tone, and feeling-tone conflicts with the object. Accordingly, Zukofsky criticized Crane's use of synesthesia and inaccurate diction, and associated Crane with Elinor Wylie, whose work "errs on the side of mysticism" by "repeated shifting from one feeling-tone (one kind of ecstasy) to another." The root evil in both is the vagueness of inaccuracy and inconsistency. Although Crane has "energy," Zukofsky explained, it is "an energy too often pseudo-musical and amorphous in its conflation of sense values." He follows, in Pound's words, "the Wagnerian ideal" of exciting and confusing the audience by "smacking as many of his senses as possible." In addition, "his single words are hardly ever alone, they are rarely absolute symbols for the things they represent." They lack exactitude, the accurate correspondence of word to thing. His poems are too seldom "of the senses," that is, they seldom present the object in terms of the senses which apprehend it. "The result is an aura—a doubtful, subtle exhalation—a haze."¹² The work of Crane and Wylie is, rather than metaphysical, "mystical."

The effects of imitation of the iambic are limited or arbitrary; the effects of allegory are indirect. A poem dependent on such effects cannot be vital. Zukofsky admired Herrick's "Divination" for its "contemporariness"—which he revised as "exactness." The poem must present the truth that stays true. The work of Robert Frost, on the contrary, "is just too cutely pastoral, too cutely rampant to be alive, to be true." Zukofsky believed that "it is in the nature of things that poets should want to live; and ethically living cannot be a Wordsworthian dilution." Frost's "thought as well as his versifying involved in the allegorical dies at the hearth."¹³

Implicit in Zukofsky's criticism of Frost is an equation of "ethically living" with writing vitally. "I believe in technique as a test of a man's sincerity," wrote Pound.¹⁴ Zukofsky went further: "Ultimately, poetry is a question of natures, of constitutions, of mental colorings." The fact that Pound was capable of "the distinction of an ethical commonplace by Spinoza," wrote Zukofsky, allowed Pound in the opening of "Canto XXX" to present "the composite of internal rhyme, repetition of word, repetition of line with one word altered, delayed and rapidly extended cadence, and tendency toward wrenching of accent."¹⁵

"In contrast, it cannot be said that the 'idea'" in Pound's lines, wrote Zukofsky, "is the substance of Robinson Jeffers' works, for his melodrama has vitiated all idea as expression. . . . Compared with Jeffers, the sad, honest work of Archibald MacLeish (much, too much, overburdened with Eliot) is at least an obvious attempt at meaning."¹⁶ The poem and the vitality of its meaning is killed by anything, such as Jeffers' melodrama, that can not correspond with subtlety and integrity to the object.

An "Objectivist" does not deprive the immediate of its direct significance. The "aesthetics" of Williams' "material," wrote Zukofsky, "is a living one, a continual beginning, a vision amid pressure," a vision of the "values in the living broken down for others by sentimentalism." Therefore, Williams' "exclusion of sentimentalisms, extraneous comparisons, similes, overweening autobiographies of the heart, of all which permits factitious 'reflection about,' of sequence, of all but the full sight of the immediate."¹⁷

Zukofsky's criteria excluded most accepted verse of his day. His "bibliography of poetry after 1920," he wrote, "is brief: Pound's Cantos; Eliot's The Waste Land; Marianne Moore's Observations, Williams' Spring and All, Primavera . . . Cummings' Is 5; references to earlier volumes by Cummings, Stevens' Harmonium, McAlmon, Reznikoff, Exile 3 and 4."¹⁸

II. The Criteria

The difference between the "Objectivists" and their contemporaries is inherent in Zukofsky's distinction between metaphysical and mystical poetry. Metaphysical poetry presents the rigorous emotional coherence of an apprehended thing; mystical poetry presents only a sensational haze. In making this distinction, Zukofsky attended to the principle that for T. S. Eliot distinguished the Victorian poets from the original metaphysical poets. "It is the difference," wrote Eliot, "between the intellectual poet and the reflective poet. Tennyson and Browning are poets, and they think; but they do not feel their thought as immediately as the odor of a rose. A thought to Donne was an experience; it modified his sensibility." To

account for this difference, Eliot postulated a "dissociation of sensibility" which began in the seventeenth century and from which the British "have never recovered," although certain French writers, Eliot asserted, have the "essential quality of transmuting ideas into sensations, of transforming an observation into a state of mind."¹⁹

"Objectivism" attempts to reassociate the sensibility by integrating sensations, words, and ideas according to the relations among objective classes of existence, expression, and experience. Zukofsky took this for granted when he wrote: "Naturally in a poem image, cadence, and idea are inseparable."²⁰ Ontological references and epistemological effects must be inseparable properties of the linguistic structure of the poem.

Zukofsky's correlation of image, cadence, and idea elaborated Pound's statement that "a new cadence means a new idea."²¹ The inseparableness of idea and cadence is contingent upon a belief implicit in Pound's statements that "emotion is an organiser of form" and "emotional force gives the image," which Zukofsky further elaborated by asserting that the image is at the basis of poetic form."²² An "Objectivist" believes in the objectivity of emotion. He believes that the form of a direct experience (sensation) is the form of the thing experienced, whether the thing is in the world (image) or in the poem (cadence). This means that the form that inheres in the thing the poet wishes to present may be presented and experienced in the structure of the poem.

This fundamental belief in the translatability of form is implicit in Zukofsky's admiration of poems which succeed in satisfying his criteria of sincerity and objectification. He believed that sincerity—the careful presentation of particulars, providing "knowledge of acquaintance," is antithetical to "factitious 'reflection about,'" and that its corollary, "accessibility to experience," is attenuated by imitation of the English iambic, intellectual rhetoric, synesthesia, melodrama, sentimentalism, and forced or arbitrary "poetic" devices such as symbols, allegory, and simile.²³

Accordingly, Zukofsky admired the "inclusiveness" of McAlmon and the "incisiveness" of Moore and Pound:

Robert McAlmon in Unfinished Poem has recalled in its inclusiveness of the American mock-historical, geographical scene, the scope of Marianne Moore's An Octopus, retained an isolate individualism similar to hers while communalizing quotation, hardly ever reached her incisiveness—the definite hardness of perhaps Whitman when he writes of a stallion "Head high in the forehead, wide between the ears"—and added the indigenous cynicism of American song blues. Ezra Pound's conversation of American personae in the Cantos is much better than the conversation of similar personae in McAlmon's Portrait of a Generation (1926) and Unfinished Poem (1929).²⁴

Although McAlmon's inclusiveness of the American scene, speech, and character are admirable, it would be preferable if his observations were also presented with the incisiveness of Moore and Pound. The "Objectivist" presents the real, but he also stylizes or "communalizes" it by isolating or condensing it to, as Pound wrote, its "essential or dominant or dramatic qualities."²⁵

The qualities of "Objectivist" diction are also inclusiveness (variety) and incisiveness (specificity). Diction is used for a broad range of effects, from Williams' clear statement to Cummings' "straightforward" and parodic American and "Elizabethian virtues," to Pound's colloquial diction and polyglottal dialects:

Whatever one's preferences, the diction of these poets remains their fully varied material, which includes quotations from sources apparently useful to a kind of communistic interest in preserving poetry wherever it is found.²⁶

Variety of diction may rest on a variety of sources. In his essay on Reznikoff, Zukofsky wrote that "Reznikoff has not found it derogatory to his production to infuse his care for significant detail and precision into the excellent verbalisms of others," and noted that the use of quotations in Moore, Pound, Williams was "for the communal good."²⁷ For these writers, "care for significant detail and precision," that is, sincerity, is more important than originality. The facts may often inhere in the words of others.

Diction is not used to impress or mystify; it must have specificity: "The only diction which is dead today is that of poets who, as some one has said of Matthew Arnold, have put on singing robes to lose themselves in the universal."²⁸ Zukofsky quotes from "Paper," an essay written by his friend Roger Kaigh, to criticize those who indulge in categorical imperatives such as the iambic to the detriment of meaning. The corrective for their lack of specificity, their inability to choose and delimit among the infinite shades of available connotations, is the practice "employed by Pound, Eliot, Williams, M. Moore and Cummings." These poets "clarify and render the meaning of the spoken word specific" by control of the poetic equivalents of, as Kaigh wrote, speech's "context, gesture, intonation and pronunciation," that is, by careful selection of diction for precise connotation and by "emphasizing cadence by arrangement of line and typography." "The things these poets deal with," added Zukofsky, "are of their world and time, but they are 'modern' only because their words are energies which make for meaning."²⁹

A concept related to specificity which contributes to a poem's sincerity is Pound's concept of an "absolute." (See [Section 8](#).) If the melopoeia, phanopoeia, and logopoeia of a poem are in sufficient and necessary relations to the essential particulars of the experience, then its rhythms, metaphors, and symbols will be absolute—they will be expressive, "interpretive" rather than ornamental. This concept associates the expression with the experience and the thing experienced. In contrast with Hart Crane's words, which Zukofsky wrote are "rarely absolute symbols for the things they represent, e.g., 'The incunabula of the divine grotesque,'"³⁰ are Pound's words "which are absolute symbols for things and textures," for example, "The sand that night like a seal's back / Glossy beneath the lanthorns."³¹

Absolute terms render facts with clarity, and so Zukofsky admired the work of Moore:

Marianne Moore has allowed the "neatness of finish" of her "octopus of ice" to clarify ubiquitously the texture of at least a hundred images with a capacity for fact.³²

Clarity is exactitude in presentation of fact. The "Objectivists," in their regard for facts, their natures and their orders, wrote a "nominalistic" poetry, a poetry whose validity is secured by its revelation of the real,

its synthesis of concrete and specific detail.³³ Zukofsky presented nominalism as an "Objectivist" standard by including his translation of René Taupin's review of André Salmon in the program of the "Objectivists" issue of Poetry. ([Section 17](#)).

"Cummings," Zukofsky continued, "is less nominalistic," but he is not less specific; he is "more sensuously evocative, sometimes fanciful . . . but continually interested in something like capillaries, 'everything which we really are and never quite live,' the sources where images begin."³⁴ Words, like Remains' groups (see [Section 1](#)), are limitless; they are not separate and distinct from the world. Zukofsky's phrase "something like capillaries" refers to Pound's statement that words

are like the roots of plants: they are organic, they interpenetrate and tangle with life, you cannot detach them as pieces of an anatomical figure. The dissection of capillary and vein is at a certain stage no longer possible.³⁵

Cummings' words "interpenetrate and tangle" with life that he attempts to present.

Another concept related to sincerity is "history"—"history defined as the facts about us, their chronological enlivening for the present set down as art, and, so, good for the next age and the next," which Zukofsky admired in the work of Williams. Williams, according to Zukofsky, "is of rare importance in the last decade (1920-1930), for whatever he has written the direction of it has been poetry—and, in a special sense, history." In this special sense, history is a poetic record of the present focussed to give a sense of the energy and ethical consciousness of a human being: "History, or the attractions of living recorded—the words a shining transcript." The transcription of history is sincerity, "in which something was seen, a quantity heard, an emotion apprehended," but history is sincerity whose "direction" is the writer's political stance against conditions which hinder happiness and creativity. History represents the writer's "social awareness": "the singular creature living in society and expressing in spite of the numb terror around him the awareness which after a while cannot help be but general." As an example of history, Zukofsky gave Williams' poem "To Elsie," which begins "The pure products of America go crazy." This poem succeeds "through its realization of points of aesthetic, living values," its realization of the facts of the "social determinism of American suburbs in the first thirty years of the twentieth century."³⁶

Zukofsky recognized in the work he admired certain structural features that emphasize relations among word, sensation, and thing. After he noted that Reznikoff's "equilibrium" between accentual and syllabic meters "give an image," he continued:

The principle of varying the stress of a regular meter and counting the same number of syllables to the line is thus transferred from "traditional" to cadenced verse. Williams began this procedure in Spring and All . . . there seems to have been a decided awareness of the printed as well as the quantitative, looseness of vers libre.³⁷

In fact, Williams later declared: "There is no such thing as free verse! Verse is measure of some sort. 'Free verse' was without measure and needed none for its projected objectifications."³⁸ An "Objectivist" needs measure—provided it is flexible enough to render the nuances of his object—to realize his objectifications, and is therefore concerned about stress, syllable, cadence, quantity, lineation, and their effects.

Balancing accent against syllable, syllable against word, or word against line could not only bring the reader's attention to the intended melody but could also create melodies to render a variety of specific nuances. The essentially predetermined nature and overemphasis on extensive form of regular meters make them less able to render both the full range of experiences which the "Objectivists" value and the precise movement appropriate to each experience. Furthermore, their expectability may dull the attention of the reader to intended effects. Zukofsky wrote that Pound's passage on "Pity" itself in "Canto XXX" "is effective because the cadence of the word 'pity' is never perfectly expected. The versification is not a matter of each syllable finding its usual place in an iambic pentameter, as in Frost's 'One bird begins to close a faded eye.'" Frost's "main drawback" is his "submission to" or his "continued tinkering with accent."³⁹

An "Objectivist" wished to achieve with words and their arrangement on the page the controlled effects that music may achieve with notation of rhythm and tone, that is, as Zukofsky put it, melody.

There is, of course, melody in the passage on Pity. Melody, with Frost, is by now almost a dead issue. There was melody in the Frost of A Boy's Will, a melody often on par with R. C. Dunning. There will be when the Cantos are finished the complete music of the Cantos, and it will include successfully those conversational overtones which Frost seems to have labored over for about 20 years, only to falsify them with Simple Simon naiveté.⁴⁰

The effects of poetic melody in an "Objectivist" poem render and enhance rather than falsify the forms experienced in the object. Melody must be organic with the thing experienced.

The "Objectivists" based their measure on quantity, the relative durations of the sounds of words. Quantity's intensive nature, the fact that it cannot be as easily systematized as stress, the fact that it must always be heard rather than merely known and counted, make the poem less subject to predetermination and overemphasis of surface than regular meters. Quantity is flexible enough to register the precise forms and rhythms of objects consonant with new worlds and time. "Pound's contribution," wrote Zukofsky, "is quantity, and the dealers in stock and trade sonnets and iambs have never taken up his challenge. They have also dissipated the sonnet as a form; it is time someone resurrected it."⁴¹

The "Objectivists" took up Pound's challenge. Zukofsky admired Cummings for "partly" resurrecting the sonnet form—when he is "not palpably Shakespearean." Imitation of the past cannot be organic with the present. Although Cummings is occasionally Poundian or Eliotic, "for the most part . . . he has been himself, the cadence approximating the actuality." Similarly, Zukofsky observed, "Eliot has always been more interesting in his effects with quantity than in his effects with accent" and Moore achieves a music varying from "quantitative couplets" (in which "she does not, like Robert Frost, seem to say 'Look, I am writing couplets'") to complex stanzas and extended structures which rival the work of John Donne.⁴²

Finally, arrangement of line and typography may not only clarify and specify diction; it may also emphasize melody. An "Objectivist" gives his verse an audible order which he emphasizes with a visual

order to intensify the reader's direct apprehension of the object. Zukofsky observed that Williams, "since 1923, printed his poems differently—used print as a guide to the voice and the eye. His line sense is not only a music heard, but seen, printed as bars, printed (or cut as it were) for the author [the reading]—the sentimentalisms which might possibly have encroached brushed off like flies as at those clear times when the dynamic feeling of a person is not disturbed."⁴³ Williams' audible and visual line-sense provides the reader the dynamic clarity of Williams' object, the sense of the thing in its undisturbed integrity.

Zukofsky traced this correlation of the visual with the semantic aspects of words back to Fenollosa, "back to the feeling for image in handwriting and type—vidê Pound's translation of Fenollosa, The Chinese Written Character."⁴⁴ Chinese notation, according to Fenollosa, is "based upon a vivid shorthand picture of the operations of nature."⁴⁵ In it, supposedly, the relation between symbol and thing symbolized is direct; the "printed arrangement" emphasizes the expressive arrangement of each unit of sincerity.

The fundamental "Objectivist" belief in the translatability of form is also implicit in Zukofsky's admiration of poems which have achieved objectification. In his essay on Reznikoff, Zukofsky explained that whereas sincerity "incites the mind to further suggestion," objectification brings to it a sense of "rested totality" or "complete appreciation."⁴⁶ The ultimate literary means of associating the sensibility is constructing a poem upon a "metaphysical" unity of word, sensation, and thing which not only presents particulars of sincerity but organizes those particulars into a coherent whole to strike the reader as a gestalt.

Accordingly, Zukofsky admired the capacity shown in Reznikoff's work not only for presentation and clarification of facts but for "the composite of objectified fact which makes a poem" and for "becalmed accuracy of concrete idea in cadence."⁴⁷ Zukofsky's phrase "concrete idea in cadence" associates the thing (the concrete), the experience of the thing (idea), and the expression of the thing (cadence). Furthermore, his concern for sincerity is reflected in his word "accuracy" and for objectification in "becalmed." Zukofsky gave as an example of "becalmed accuracy of concrete idea in cadence" Reznikoff's one-line poem "After Rain": "The motor cars in the shining rain move in semicircles of spray, semicircles of spray."⁴⁸ In this poem the repeated pattern of "semicircles of spray" accurately gives the experience of observing the recurring passing of the cars through the water, each phrase depicting onomatopoeically the sound of a car splashing. The reader is also satisfied by the image of the spray in the sunlight, which moves like sunlight in rays, but from a different center. The one line says all that need be said about the object.

Another poem by Reznikoff, "The English in Virginia April 1607," describes the facts, apparent to Captain John Smith upon landing, of trees and meadows, vines and flowers, berries, birds, deer, fresh water, and savages, each item concisely detailed in a separate strophe of varied line-lengths. Zukofsky commented: "Reznikoff attains here a poised balance of picture in the resultant equilibrium of a conflict between stress and counting syllables so that they give an image—precision and concision."⁴⁹ Objectification is achieved as a "poised balance" of references (with "precision") in appropriate forms

(with "concision"). This verse both reproduces the emotional patterns of the object and binds those patterns into unity.

Objectification produces the "poem as object," the poem with the properties of a thing in the world. "In the last ten years, Zukofsky wrote, "Pound has not concerned himself merely with isolation of the image—a cross-breeding between single words which are absolute symbols for things and textures . . . but with the poetic locus produced by the passage from one image to another. His Cantos are, in this sense, one extended image."⁵⁰ Each part of the Cantos is dependent upon the whole, and cannot itself represent the meaning of the whole: "A synopsis may no more be given of them than of a box, a leaf, a chair, a picture: they are an image of this world, 'an intellectual and emotional complex in an instant of time.'"⁵¹

Although the critical genius responsible for the synthesis of "Objectivist" poetics described in the foregoing pages was Zukofsky's, the creative genius Zukofsky described was not merely his own. The terms "sincerity," "accessibility," "history," "variety," "specificity," "melody," and "objectification" were synthesized from the principles and practices also of Williams, Reznikoff, Rakosi, Pound, and Oppen, writers who shared with Zukofsky a common purpose.

[11. History 1930](#)

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[13. Plans for the *Poetry* Issue](#)

Before leavin' home yesterday I recd. 2 essays by Zukofsky. You really ought to get his Reznikof. = He is one of the very few people making any advance in criticism. =he ought to appear regularly in "Poetry"

The crit. in the Reznikof. is of value, apart from what one may think of the subject.

Hang it all. — you printed my "Don'ts" & Ford's essay on Poetry in 1913. etc. & they set a date. You ought not to let the magazine drift into being a mere passive spectator of undefined & undefinable events.

A prominent americ. homme de lettres came to me last winter saying you had alienated every active poet in the U.S. — one ought not be left undefended against such remarks.

There is new bilin [talent?] now at work. Zuk. has a definite critical gift that ought to be used.

D. McKenzie (of Morada) has def. conviction re a new line of writers that he believes in = after all it is 16 years since 1914. & 18 since 1912 = It is time that our sons & bastards began to show a life of their own, erected on our ruins & munniments.

Zuk's address is 1110 Miller Ave. Berkeley, Cal.

If you will recall the past years.

you can remember that I have never before stated there was a new group, or new line, or new critic. I have told you (rightly) from time to time that there was a new or old isolated writer.

You cd. get back into the ring. if you wd. print a number containing only people McKenzie believes in & that Zukofsky is ready to treat with serious criticism.

Must make one no. of Poet. different from another if you want to preserve life as distinct from mere continuity.

Ever

Ezra

And then two final notes: "McKenzie is in Munich. but Macleod is still. at Albuquerque N. Mex." and "C'mon you aint ossified yet."⁵ Pound had never been proved wrong in his estimation of literary talent. His letter therefore prompted Monroe to invite Zukofsky to edit an issue to show the work of his new group.

Zukofsky's letters to Harriet Monroe of 12, 14, and 20 October and his letter to Pound of 13 October express gratitude for the opportunity they offered him but reservations about their expectation that he would use this opportunity to publicize a "new group." He felt he did not have a new group to publicize, only new work and new names—good work by known and unknown writers. Specifically, he hoped to get work by Pound and E. E. Cummings, and he had work by Williams. Cummings' work is instructive of the "Objectivist" intent to emphasize "cadence," as Zukofsky wrote in "American Poetry 1920-1930," "by arrangement of line and typography." Cummings, Zukofsky told Monroe, succeeded in presenting with typography not merely the effects of the printed work, but also the effects of the spoken word.⁶ Williams' poem "The Botticellian Trees," he told Monroe, proved that Williams' work had developed since Al Que Quiere (1917) and Sour Grapes (1921), although the critics had not recognized this, perhaps since Williams had not been able to publish the best of it.

Zukofsky also named specific new writers, including Charles Reznikoff, although Reznikoff was not new to Monroe, since she had accepted his work in 1917 (see [Section 7](#)). Zukofsky was sorry that Reznikoff's excellent poem "The English in Virginia: April 1607" would not be available, since he had sent it to Richard Johns who accepted it for the fall issue of Pagany. Zukofsky also named Jerry Reisman, Carl Rakosi, George Oppen, Payson Loomis, and, Zukofsky's student at Madison, Betty Zane Grey. Zukofsky thought Miss Grey wrote with greater clarity than her father, Zane Grey, although in his next letter to

Monroe he withdrew her as a serious possibility, feeling that her talent had not yet matured. As for including his own work, Zukofsky wished something could be selected by Monroe, but suggested to her the seventh movement of "A", which he described as a set of seven sonnets, a new development, he felt, in the craft of writing sonnets, but also together a rondeau or fugue set inside "A" as a whole, which was also a fugue. Zukofsky asked Monroe whether she would recommend him for a Guggenheim, and added that "A" treated the matter of the project he proposed to the Foundation, a contemporary version—if possible—of Dante's De Vulgaria Eloquentia.⁷

Although Zukofsky did not feel he could present a new group, he wrote to Pound that perhaps Pound might know of one, and offered to include any manuscripts that Pound would send by British or American writers including Basil Bunting and, if his work were available, the author of The Ecliptic, to Williams.⁸ Zukofsky also asked Pound for the addresses of Rakosi and Loomis, and (unsure of the spelling) for information about "Edmund Coveloski," whom he had learned Pound had endorsed. Finally, Zukofsky welcomed Pound's critical comments for publication and asked for a "Canto," which, he felt, would be "new."⁹

Since Zukofsky felt that energized language is rare, and wished that his issue would consist of it entirely, he would not be limited to the recent, the formerly unknown, or the young. He would include six or more writers, he told Monroe, who had not been able to publish their finest work, but these would include Williams, who was neither young nor unknown. The work of Williams and Pound was new only in the sense of being durable. "In depicting the motions of the 'human heart,'" Pound wrote, "the durability of the writing depends on the exactitude. It is the thing that is true and stays true that keeps fresh for the new reader."¹⁰ Zukofsky wished his group would be new in this sense only.

Zukofsky's letters to Monroe and Pound also reveal his speculations about possible editorial content. He was reluctant, he told Monroe, to write an editorial, and asked Monroe whether she would write one, or whether she thought "American Poetry 1920-1930" would do, since it treated his editorial principles. In his next letter to her, however, he wrote that the editors of Symposium had accepted it. Writing to Pound, Zukofsky also considered whether his review of XXX Cantos would do; however, he had submitted it to Hound and Horn. In any event, his essay on Reznikoff also treated his editorial principles, and would suffice, he felt, after it was shortened by converting its first paragraph to a bibliographical note, reducing its number of examples, and omitting its discussion of Reznikoff's prose. He felt its discussion of Reznikoff's plays should be retained, although condensed, and asked if Monroe agreed. Finally Zukofsky warned that he would like to continue Pound's tradition of introducing a French poet new to the U.S. by including his translation of René Taupin's article on Andre Salmon.¹¹

Zukofsky's initial speculations about the contents of the issue he would edit proved to be largely true. The issue in fact includes Williams' "The Botticellian Trees," work by Reznikoff, Rakosi, Oppen, his own "A"-7, his essay on Reznikoff, and his translation of Taupin. Work by Jerry Reisman was excluded for lack of space, and Pound ruled out Payson Loomis, whom he claimed was "too tired & sophisticated."¹²

Perhaps Zukofsky thought that the work of his friend Reisman was not sufficiently "Objectivist," and agreed with Pound that the work of Loomis was not sufficiently new. But Zukofsky did not agree with Pound that the work of Pound and Cummings was not sufficiently "Objectivist" and new, although he could not persuade them to contribute their work. Pound, however, contributed critical comments on Carnevali, forwarded manuscripts by Basil Bunting, Carnevali, Hemingway and Rakosi (with his address), and flooded Zukofsky with a river of editorial advice. Pound's work, critical ideas, and admired writers were perfectly acceptable to Zukofsky. Zukofsky accepted but also excluded for lack of space a statement from Pound, in place of a "Canto," to have been printed in large letters, centered on the page, to the effect that Pound protested certain impediments to literary life in America.¹³ Such a protest, characteristic of Pound's editorials in the issues of his Exile in 1927 and 1928, expressed the original reason for the existence of the group Pound had been urging Zukofsky to form.

In spite of Zukofsky's doubt that he could use his issue of Poetry to present a new group, the writers he admired cohered as a group according to the principles which he had already realized in the essays which he now considered as editorials for his issue. He now had reason to accept Pound's offer of 26 September to edit his manuscripts. He asked Pound on 16 October to edit his work both on XXX Cantos and on Reznikoff, adding that he thought the distinction between sincerity and objectification should be retained for its editorial importance. As for his suggested co-editor, he asked whether Donal McKenzie was Pound, an unknown, or non-existent.¹⁴

Pound received Zukofsky's letter of 14 October 1930 and one from Monroe. On 24 October 1930 he thanked Monroe with cheers and exclamation marks, and, since "you rashly ask for further hint," offered Monroe his counsel:

Did I or did I not suggest tempering Zukofsky with McKenzie? Zuk to provide the good sense and McKenzie the conviction of the value of the new group. I dunno what can be done now to make up for that bit of motive power. I may have said "or" instead of "and."

Although Pound said "and" in his letter of 26 September, he gave Monroe Zukofsky's but not McKenzie's address, and so led Monroe only to Zukofsky. Pound wrote, "I sho iz glad you let these young scrubs have the show to their selves, an ah does hope they dust out your office," but feared "that Mr. Zukofsky will be just too Goddam prew dent." Since Zukofsky lacked conviction as to the existence of the "new group," Pound felt exhortation would be needed: "I shall urge Zuk to take the March or May in order to have time to get the most dynamite into it."¹⁵ This effort, however, failed. Zukofsky would not take the time to do what would have been plainly out of character. Even though he agreed with Pound on all the issues, he would not campaign for them in Pound's manner.

On the same day, Pound began a series of long letters to Zukofsky. His first expressed his excitement that Monroe had put Zukofsky "at the wheel for the Spring cruise" but advised Zukofsky to share that wheel with the more forcible McKenzie:

At any rate since it was a letter from donal mckenzie that smoked me up into writin Harriet the letter that awoke in her nobl booZUMM [sic] the fire of enthusiasm that led

her to let you aboard [,] I wd. [sic] appreciate it if you wd. invite mckenzie to do one of the prose articles for the number and state his convictions as forcibly as possible. . . . after which I see no reason why you shdnt. add an editorial note saying why you disagree.

Poetry has never had enUFF disagreement INSIDE [its] own wall.

mckenzie might provide the conviction and enthusiasm (which you somewhat lack) and leave you to promote the good sense

I can not GODDDDDAMMMMIT find mckenzie's LIST of just men but I am asking him to send it to you.

Although Pound, in this letter, gave Zukofsky McKenzie's address in Munich and by the 28th of October sent McKenzie a note to forward his list to Zukofsky, I have found no evidence that McKenzie wrote Zukofsky, or that Zukofsky wrote McKenzie. McKenzie does not appear in the issue, but Zukofsky did list him as having been omitted due to lack of space.

Pound realized that the public would find greater interest in a position taken both with conviction and by someone new. Although he wished to help Zukofsky, he also wished to keep from public view his influence on Zukofsky:

need hardly say that I am ready to be of anny [sic] assistance I can. I do NOT think it wd. be well to insert my point of view. I shd. like you to consider mckenzie's point of view and your own.

IF there is anyone whom you want to include and cant [sic] get directly, I might be of use in raking them in, but I dont [sic] want to nominate any one

For the rest, it is up to you to tell me. I can NOT be expected to know wot [sic] the young are doin'

///

I see NO reason for you or for me to tell anyone that I have had an indirect participation in the whatshallwe nego=well=ci=moreor1ess=ation.

Pound felt that his ties to the older generation would muddle what he wanted to be, as he wrote on the 24th, "a fairly homogenous [sic] number; emphasis on the progress made since 1912; concentrated drive; not attempt to show the extreme diversity; though it cd. be mentioned in yr. crit."

Pound's influence, nevertheless, was strong and clear. It consisted of not only editorial advice but poetic principles which dated from 1912 and his Imagiste anthology of 1914:

I don't know that I mentioned my statement to R. A. or praps it was to W.C.W. that I shd. have considered tying up with that lot of survivors game a species of betrayal of your generation. (or some less rhetorical term, probably a list mentioning you and McA.).¹⁶

The Imagist Anthology, published 10 May 1930 and mentioned by Williams above, included work by Aldington, John Cournos, H. D., John Gould Fletcher, F. S. Flint, Ford Madox Ford, James Joyce, D. H. Lawrence, and Williams and was introduced by Ford and by Glenn Hughes. Hughes was writing a critical study of the Imagists centrally concerned with what Pound called the Amygists. The anthology represented

a partial reunion of writers involved in the free verse movement ten to fifteen years earlier. Hughes wrote in his study:

My point . . . is that the imagist banner is here flaunted not as a challenge but as a symbol, and that the imagists are here mustered not for a charge but for parade. Even if two or three of the marchers seem to limp slightly, the parade is nevertheless a success, for there is sufficient fame attached to the names of these veterans to lend the occasion an air of triumph.¹⁷

Pound wanted Zukofsky to make a new charge instead of merely limping in review. Pound felt that to have contributed to the issue would have been a betrayal of the generation of writers including Zukofsky who could fight the war.

Pound advised Zukofsky to set his group in context by including a historic section consisting of "8 or 12 pages with the classics of the intervening period. (I have in mind Hemingway's 'They all made peace' and the Neothomist poem (with the title correctly spelled)."¹⁸ Hemingway's "Neothomist Poem" (with its title misspelled) was in Exile 1. "They All Made Peace—What is Peace?" was first published in the Little Review in the spring of 1923, probably through the influence of the review's foreign editor, Pound. It is a parody of the Lausanne Peace Conference in 1922 written in the style of Gertrude Stein.¹⁹ A "distillation of an event," wrote Hemingway's editor, Nicholas Gerogiannis, it was reprinted in Zukofsky's "Program: 'Objectivists' 1931" as an example of epos, the inextricable "direction of historic and contemporary particulars." Zukofsky's reprinting of the poem, introduced with the statement that it "is as good now as it was in The Little Review in 1922" (misprint for 1923),²⁰ defied Pound's advice: "Carnevali can prob. do as well as he ever has done. Cummings and Hem. ??? hist. sec. only."²¹ Pound felt that Hemingway, Cummings, Williams, and himself should be relegated to a historic section, that no one over 40 should be in the new group. Zukofsky felt, on the contrary, that great work never became dated.

Pound also advised Zukofsky to provide the appearance of conviction and enthusiasm:

The Imagiste movement was made with four or 5 poems of Hilda's, three or four of Richard's and one ole Bill Water Closet Wm's. plus y.v.t. or if you like manipulated by y.v.t. whereto were added about the same amt. of stuff that wdn't. damage (i.e. one hoped it wdnt. damage the effek).²²

Whereas the Amygist anthologies published each author's selections without editing, the work in Des Imagistes, as Layeh Bock has shown, was chosen and elicited and even edited by Pound according to strict principles.²³ Pound advised Zukofsky to do the same:

The other expert advice is: Invite the men you believe in. IF they don't send stuff up to level of their best KEEP AT 'eM. Be takkful. Say you want to show what they can do, havent they something less open to attack. After all the position is xposed, challenges the record etc.

IF the number is convincingly better than the usual numbers of Poetry there is a chance (happens to be damn good chance) of rescuing the magazine from the slough of Zabel, Dillon and co. and making it what it was in 1912/13, the forum in which the Zeitideen WERE presented and discussed.

Much better to conduiser la dance in a well established and subsidized mag. than in a new indigent 6 leaf peryodiuncle likely to last for three numbers.

The prob. differs from mine in Des Imagistes. There, it was to make a very exiguous quantity go as far as possibl [sic]

You on the other foot have got to disentangle a far more multitudinous etc. etc.

plenty of chaps meaning what they say (with no lit. capc.)

they are your basis. you've got so to choose 'em as to hide their defects.

By getting the ten good lines the barstuds have writ, you compose more or less one hole man out of the lot, or one author.

Keep at 'em till you get stuff that is good enough. Fight with 'em the day after; that don't matter.

If they don't send in something good; relegate 'em to the historic section in small print. ten or a dozen poems wd. cover that.

The fact that it will be hard for you to satisfy yourself among yr. con'empraries is all to the good.

Pound sent a second letter on 25 October 1930, which added:

Get good stuff from people not perhaps good enough in themselves; but who can get through 8 lines or a page without giving themselves away;

AND

a little really solid.

3 or 4 men can do the needful.²⁴

Pound's idea was to talk Monroe into doing a whole series of special numbers, first, Zukofsky's, which was to be the "murkn number," then an English number edited by Basil Bunting, and then a French number edited by René Taupin. Perhaps for this reason Pound advised Zukofsky: "Don't lean on europe. Certainly NOT a translation of an essay on Salmon."²⁵ And later: "am for omitting foreigners from your number. That number shd. establish the new American line up."²⁶ Since Monroe didn't consent to this plan, we are fortunate that Zukofsky had the independence to include among his "Objectivists" the British Bunting, and French Taupin, and the Italian Carnevali.

On 28 October 1930, Pound elaborated the purpose of his proposed historic section:

State of things to be disinfected//scence [sic] covered by dilutions of me; Bill and Possum Eliot:: also praps of Ed. Estlin [Cummings]/

plus mess caused by reaction against these dilutes. I mean the Tennysonian sonnet etc. now being done, and NOT so well done as in 1898 or when they were all trying to do it as well as Miss Edith Thomas//

then the whole

ngr [sic] and "sensitilité" of the bleatin nashun wuz concentrated on that cambric tea effort.

Since 1912 it has been divided.

Your li'l have fer the KALON KAI AGATHON [beautiful and the good] has got to make a clean up, as was done by the Don'ts and Des Imagiste. (the anthology; or its justifiable parts) as distinct from the Amygists.²⁷

Although Pound repeatedly professed his desire to remain backstage of the Objectivist performance, on the 27th he noted:

Am also cogitating a note on criticism which you cd. have IF necessary, but it wd. du [sic] in some other issue of Poesy just about as well. Depending on whether you found yourself pushed for space, or embarearsed to fill the issue without using bunf.²⁸

This "note" appears to be the article titled "The Situation" which Pound sent to Monore with this comment:

The enc. is not for Zuk's number, which shd. be devoted to the new group. I have sent him merely a page on Carnevali designed to boost E. C's stock. I think he can now be taken on his merits as distinct from his misfortunes.²⁹

The page on Carnevali which Pound mentioned to Monroe would be incorporated by Zukofsky into "Program: 'Objectivists' 1931." "The Situation," published in Poetry (May 1931), presented Pound's theory of the cycle of literary achievement: (1) dead tradition, (2) reform of technique, (3) pedantic attention to new technique, and (4) the new dead tradition. This cycle supposedly takes about 15 years to complete, since Pound suggests that "Objectivism" picks up again from where Imagisme left off:

It has taken us almost all the intervening years to get back to where we were in 1914, and possibly to get started forward.

The one newish phenomenon, toward the end of 1930, would seem to be a clear and definite declaration against provincialism both regional and urban.³⁰

Zukofsky answered Pound, on 6 November 1930, in forty-three points and a postscript. Many of these points deal with McKenzie and editorial possibilities. Personally, Zukofsky was not interested in writing editorials nor arguing with McKenzie; he would rather be writing poetry. He agreed to ask for an editorial from McKenzie, but he would not promise to accept it for the issue. To Pound's information that "several of mckenzie's men were repd. in Pagany for Winter 1930,"³¹ Zukofsky responded that he had read the work in Pagany, New Masses, and Morada and found it to have little merit. He felt the issue's liveliness should depend on the poetry, not on the editorials.

Lively poetry, he felt, might be obtained from Basil Bunting (or other British writers of merit, in spite of Pound's plan to reserve them for a British number which Bunting would edit), Whittaker Chambers, E. E. Cummings (if he could be persuaded), S. T. Hecht, Robert McAlmon, Henry Rolan (pseudonym), George Oppen, Carl Rakosi (if he could be found), Jerry Reisman, Charles Reznikoff, Williams (whose "The Botticellian Trees" proved his youth liveliness), and himself. It could not be obtained, he felt, from back issues of Poetry and he expressed disapproval or doubt of Emanuel Carnevali, Richard Johns, and Norman Macleod. He did not wish to repeat Hemingway's "They All Made Peace: What is Peace?"

Pound advised Zukofsky to express a group dynamic by highlighting newness and energy: "I can't see that you need be catholic or inclusive; detach whatever seems to be the DRIVE or driving force or expression of same."³² Zukofsky's "preudent" reply is familiar. He would not present a new group, since the only advance since Des Imagistes had been a number of successful poems (judged according to Pound's critical works) written by individuals. He would not work for a homogeneous issue, but he would pare it to the core, which would consist of six to eight "new" (little-known) writers and four to six "old" writers (represented by only "new" work)—Williams, Pound, McAlmon, and Cummings, but not Eliot unless Pound could certify that his latest work had improved. From Pound's point of view, Zukofsky undercut the appearance of newness by including the work, however new itself, of older poets. Although such inclusiveness gave him a better selection of poetic excellence, it would not sufficiently inspire the masses, who required more than the pared core to turn them from their tired ways onto the "Objectivist" path. A "group" with "DRIVE" might prod them, but Zukofsky preferred to entice them. To the more bullying Pound, Zukofsky showed a lack of "conviction."

Pound also suggested that page proportions should correspond with relative importance of contributors. Three main poets should have six pages each, three secondary should have six pages total, and six tertiary poets should have six pages total. These pages should then be followed by a historical survey of the classics of the period since Des Imagistes and the same number of pages of editorial criticism.³³ Zukofsky agreed to this scheme, and the issue presents large selections by Rakosi, McAlmon, and Zukofsky only. Williams, Reznikoff, Oppen, Rexroth, and Bunting take second place, and the rest are limited to one poem or one page.

As for editorials, Zukofsky argued that his essay on Reznikoff must be included since Reznikoff might not be able to equal the poems Zukofsky had submitted for him to Pagany and included in the essay, since the essay makes general allusions to poetic history and presented Zukofsky's critical position, since Zukofsky did not want to repeat what he had said in "American Poetry 1920-1930," and since Monroe had approved of it. Zukofsky urged Pound to edit it, and he detailed what he thought could go or stay. If Pound would omit Zukofsky's professorial prolixities and halve its length, he claimed, they both would have an essay to be proud of.

Zukofsky rejected Pound's advice not to lean on Europe. Taupin's review of André Salmon, he claimed, would reinforce nominalism, which he considered to be his own position.

Zukofsky also rejected Pound's proposal for having a historic section in small print. Monroe prohibited small print and Zukofsky worried about copyrights. Besides, if he were to go by his statements in "American Poetry 1920-1930," he would need to include work by Cummings, Eliot, McAlmon, Moore, Pound, Stevens, and Williams, whom he felt could not be relegated to past history.

Although Pound and Williams had appeared in Des Imagistes, Zukofsky felt that they had advanced considerably since then. If he were to represent what was happening in 1930, he felt he would have to include them. Pound's generation was not obsolete if its recent work were as vital as Pound's three cantos in Hound and Horn. Zukofsky urged Pound to contribute to the issue; Pound should appear as a

contributor not as a father since he did what Norman Macleod only intended to do. Neither a poet's age nor the passage of time determines poetic quality. Given such quality, Zukofsky thought his "movement" would be as valid as that of the first Imagistes. He ventured in his postscript that he was zealous whenever there was anything worthy of zeal.³⁴

The existence of the "new group" had become less problematic. Initially, it might seem no more than Pound's fiction to help persuade Monroe—tactfully denied by Zukofsky when he claimed that he did not have a "new group" but he did have "new work" and "new names." However, when one sees that the work of Zukofsky's contributors coheres along lines of certain principles and that Zukofsky knew and admired many of them, then one might well believe that Pound was correct and that Zukofsky was too prudent. Zukofsky not only had a "new group," he eventually even seemed to accept its value. His statement that his "movement" would be as valid as that of the first Imagistes, for instance, seems to assert more than pride in reaction to Pound's exhortation—"The thing is to get out something as good as Des Imagistes." And his letter to Monroe of 18 November 1930, which claims that he would probably have more of a group than he thought, seems more than another fiction to pacify Monroe.³⁵

These letters began to establish not only the form of the "Objectivists" issue, but the form of the group itself. The final product diverges very little from the possibilities Zukofsky suggested to Monroe and Pound. The reason for this convergence have to do with the foundations and syntheses already established. Although this act began when the essays by Zukofsky on Reznikoff and American poetry of the twenties (with the catalyst of McKenzie's letter to Pound) prompted Pound to recommend Zukofsky to Monroe, the stage had already been set by the relationship between Pound and Zukofsky, their agreement on principles and issues, and efforts begun to accomplish the goals that Pound had urged in the Exile be accomplished.

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[14. Editing the Poetry Issue](#)

Section 14 - Editing the *Poetry* Issue

I. Stray Manuscripts

Zukofsky edited the "Objectivists" issue of *Poetry* in November and December 1930, beginning with "all the stray mss/" that Pound could find, including work by Carl Rakosi, Howard Weeks, Ernest Hemingway's "They All Made Peace—What is Peace?" and Emanuel Carnevali's translations of Rimbaud (which Pound thought "ought to go in").¹

Writing to Pound on 9 November 1930, Zukofsky relied on the critical principles he expressed in "American Poetry 1920-1930" and on Pound's distinction between voices to comment on the qualities of Carnevali (his smooth voice), McAlmon and Hemingway (their rough voices), Eliot (his fiddling with the iambic in *The Waste Land*—not without success—and his natural incorporation of the Latin), and Bunting (his masterful attention to verbal quantity). Furthermore, his letter shows that he had begun the work of editing the issue with the kind of aggressiveness recommended by Pound; he noted that he had slaved over McAlmon's "Fortuno Carraccioli" omitting lines, and, parenthically, that the poem satirized the Italian immigrant—apparently modelled on Carnevali.² On 15 November he added that he had been receiving manuscripts but, after working like a dog to discover the little good in them, had had to return them to court the writer's favor.³ Zukofsky not only detailed revisions, he negotiated with the writers for their acceptance. Their correspondence is a record of Zukofsky's personal and critical perceptiveness.

Some contributors required much work to qualify as "Objectivists." Zukofsky wrote Pound on 12 December that he could save Harry Roskolenkier only by filtering through many manuscripts and combining lines from different poems.⁴ During a brief trip to New York, Zukofsky left a note for comrade Roskolenkier on the back of a State Bank of Wisconsin check which said that he was including in *Poetry* "Salvation Army" but without its first strophes and with the final line from "Photograph of Time." It also noted that he had given the rest of the manuscripts to Johns of *Pogany*, which, if published, would be paid for.⁵ Yet Zukofsky's struggle with Roskolenkier was not over. On 1 December, he returned further manuscripts complaining that after editing there were not enough lines left to publish.⁶ And on 4 December he asked Roskolenkier not to send any more manuscripts that needed editing, and not even to send finished work after 12 December. And he added humorously that the Workers Party should hire him to teach a poetry writing workshop, because if a few workers could learn how to communicate to the masses, the revolutionary aim might be improved.⁷

When the issue was finished, Zukofsky sent Pound his "Program: 'Objectivists' 1931," commented on each of the contributors, and noted that he had learned that his generation were mostly children in need of a mother.⁸

Pound consistently refused to allow Zukofsky to publish him as an "Objectivist"; however, he permitted it to be known that he was invited. Moreover, "if Harriet will let you git away with it," Pound requested, "Two pages to face each other, blank on left and note on right; preferably 'centered'; breaking habitual format so possibly dear to 'Arriet's 'eart." The left-hand page was to have born the legend "SPACE RESERVED FOR E.P." in "Large type poss'bly sans serif," and the right-hand page an editorial by Pound to chastize the United States for "impediments to literary life."⁹

Pound's pages, along with work by lesser "Objectivists," were left out due to lack of space. Zukofsky sent the issue to Monroe on 15 December 1930, noting that if, as he thought, there were a few extra pages of poetry, he could advise omissions, and that Monroe if she wished could save the work by Johns, Mangan, Gregory, Champions, and others for later issues.¹⁰ Zukofsky's telegram of 22 December 1930 and his letter of 31 December 1930 gave Monroe permission to accept Horace Gregory's "A Tombstone with Cherubim," Richard Johns' "The Sphinx: for WCW, Henry Zolinsky's "Horatio," Jesse Loewenthal's "Match", and Martha Champion's "Poem" for subsequent issues of Poetry. Only Gregory's poem, published in the March issue, was so accepted; the rest were left in the February issue. Zukofsky's end notes for the issue apologizes that Gregory's poem would "appear in a later issue" and that "the limitations of page-space" prevented "presenting contributions by Helene Magaret, Herman Spector, John W. Gessner [an error for "Gassner," the drama critic], William Lubov, B. J. Israel, Chrystie Streeter, Sherry Mangan, Donal McKenzie, and Jerry Reisman." Furthermore,

the editor also regrets the omission of a blank page representing Ezra Pound's contribution to this issue—a page reserved for him as an indication of his belief that a country tolerating outrages like article 211 of the U.S. Penal Code, publishers' "overhead," and other impediments to literary life, "does not deserve to have any literature whatsoever." Mr. Pound gave over to younger poets the space offered to him.¹¹

Space was also made by dividing Zukofsky's translation of René Taupin's essay on André Salmon between this and the March issue.

Another telegram from Zukofsky on 22 December 1930 instructed Monroe to cut from "Program: 'Objectivists' 1931" certain lines dealing with university administration and students.¹² These comments, no longer available and perhaps deleted after Zukofsky more carefully considered the reactions of the professors at Madison, might have been inspired by Pound's complaints to Zukofsky on 8 November 1930 about the American University system. Instead, the "Objectivists" bitterness against academics incapable of appreciating significant innovation survives in a poem Zukofsky quoted in full for Pound on 16 December 1930 and 5 January 1931:

University: Old-Time

Dis in napa now trailing the sterilized.

Joyce Hopkins¹³

The poem and the identity of "Joyce Hopkins" stimulated occasional notes, queries, and explanations between Pound and Zukofsky through January 1932.

"Joyce Hopkins" was a pseudonym. The poem is from a letter from Roger Kaigh to Zukofsky. Kaigh wrote that his wife, D. (Dorothy) was in Napa (California) training those whom the state had sterilized (to get them pensions). Zukofsky combined initial and verb, put the city in lower case, and titled it, implying allegorical and anagogical meanings to tease the academics. It was meant to describe Zukofsky in the university as Dis, the god of the underworld, chasing sterilized invalids; it also meant, said Zukofsky, that they might be saved by evil.¹⁴ But the academics at Wisconsin could not interpret it, and even Pound thought Zukofsky "could have expressed the same subject matter in a more simple and lucid manner without losing one jot of the meaning."¹⁵

"University: Old-Time" was a small part of the real challenge to the status quo that the "Objectivists" represented. Zukofsky, an underling within the English department at Madison, felt discomfort in expressing his vanguard position. In spite of Pound's commendation in the English Journal and in spite of the impressiveness of Monroe's gift of the editorship of Poetry, Zukofsky's relations worsened with the Department which it could be said he did not by this time highly regard. In March 1931 he wrote Pound that the professors could not comprehend his issue of Poetry and his essay in Symposium and therefore imagined he was corrupting their students.¹⁶

The relationship between Pound and Zukofsky was surprisingly close. Although they were very different in character, they shared common beliefs about poetry and its role in the world.

II. Rakosi

Zukofsky had asked Pound for the latest address of Carl Rakosi on 13 October 1930 ([Section 13](#)). Pound responded, 24 October 1930: "I am glad you asked about Rakosi. The chap was feelin blue as sombohillbo in his last letter, I wudn't be sprised if he'd shot himseIf."¹⁷ Zukofsky thereupon wrote a letter to Rakosi, inviting him to submit work for the issue of Poetry. This letter reached Rakosi in Houston, where he was teaching English in a high school. Rakosi replied sending a collection of manuscripts.¹⁸ Zukofsky was so excited by these that he wrote Pound on 17 November that Pound had been right again—the work received from Rakosi was better than everything else by him. He also wrote that Rakosi claimed that he had quit writing in 1925. Zukofsky did not know what Rakosi was doing, but gave Pound his address in Houston and his legal name, Callman Rawley, and supposed that Pound knew that Rakosi once studied at the University of Wisconsin.¹⁹ (Rakosi had in fact changed his name legally to Callman Rawley, but of course Carl Rakosi was his "real" name and the name by which he published his poetry.)

Zukofsky's delight with Rakosi's work published in Exile 2 and 4 and with the leftovers he received from Pound attested to a fundamental ground of poetic agreement. In addition, both Zukofsky and Rakosi suffered the position of alienated writer, as Williams wrote of Shakespeare, "unable to employ himself in his world."²⁰ Rakosi wrote of Zukofsky:

He had just come on as a teaching assistant in the English Department at the University of Wisconsin and had discovered immediately that this was the wrong medium for him, the wrong place, the wrong responsibilities, the wrong people, and began almost at once to send out feelers on possible jobs back in N.Y. . . .

I was in somewhat the same situation. I was beginning my second year as an English teacher in a Houston high school and was crushed by the teaching load and the disciplinary problems, and sick from alienation from it all. We had the same desperate psychic problem, therefore, and consequently instant rapport.²¹

Their poetic and personal rapport meant that their correspondence immediately exceeded the necessary business of editor and contributor and extended beyond the deadline for the "Objectivists" issue. Zukofsky was editing Rakosi's work in January just as he had in November and December. They had become friends — coworkers and confidants, partners in a common effort.

Until this time, Rakosi was unaware that he had been published by Pound in Exile. Rakosi speculated that Pound may have thought he had informed him and when he received no response feared, as Zukofsky reported, that Rakosi had killed himself.²² Zukofsky's letter to Rakosi of 17 November 1930 opened with some confusion as to how Rakosi (or Rawley) should be addressed, but then begged to claim that Rakosi's work was better than any American work that Zukofsky had read in years. Zukofsky asked with incredulity whether it were true that Rakosi had quit writing. Since he guessed that Rakosi did not know his work was published in the Exile, he reviewed the facts. Zukofsky had read Rakosi's four poems ("Characters," "Wanted," "Superproduction," and "Revue") in Exile 2 (Autumn 1927), edited by Pound whom he described as the sole prophet of the new dispensation. In spite of the influence of Eliot and Cummings in Rakosi's work, Zukofsky determined that it had a core of sincerity. Furthermore, Zukofsky identified the six poems of Rakosi's "Extracts from a Private Life" which appeared in Exile 4 (Autumn 1928), mentioned three poems by Rakosi which he highly admired, and said that, based on these, he had included Rakosi among the significant few in "American Poetry 1920-1930," which was in the upcoming issue of Symposium. Next, Zukofsky intended to include in Poetry five to seven pages by Rakosi among thirty-two pages of the most significant work written in the previous decade. Zukofsky foresaw difficulty finding more than six writers of Rakosi's quality, although he said he would like twelve. He was considering Rakosi's "Washington Lincoln in the Tropics," "The Founding of New Hampshire," "Fluteplayers from Finmarken," "Chanson Sans Paroles," "Unswerving Marine," "Dolce Padre and Ephebus," "Orpean Lost," and "Panels for a Victrola," and perhaps also "News," "Death Song," and others whose indirect and ornamental leanings marked them as different from Rakosi's best work. If Rakosi allowed him, Zukofsky would submit anything he did not use to Hound and Horn, Pagany, Morada, or, if his issue did not alienate Monroe, later issues of Poetry.²³ Zukofsky asked Rakosi's opinion of a few revisions by which Zukofsky clarified and objectified Rakosi's manuscripts. Among these, Rakosi's "green theme" (in "Washington Lincoln in the Tropics") broke Pound's rule in "A Few Don'ts" against synesthesia, and his "drums of evil / pursue the canny atomic stars" (in "Orpean Lost") mixed an abstraction with the concrete.²⁴ Rakosi's revisions heeded Zukofsky's suggestions. Zukofsky indicated that Williams, Pound (hopefully), McAlmon, S. T. Hecht, Oppen, and himself would also appear in what he called Rakosi's issue, repeated his question about Rakosi's alleged abstinence from writing, asked Rakosi's

preference of pen-name, said Rakosi's check would come in the mail with the magazine, inquired about Rakosi's private life, and finally, requested a brief note of bibliography.²⁵

Zukofsky's letter of 24 November gave more suggestions for revision of "Washington Lincoln in the Tropics," suggested omitting three lines from "News" which showed Eliot's influence, and responded to three concerns that Rakosi had expressed. First, in response to Rakosi's protest against Zukofsky's assertion of his genius, Zukofsky wrote that one's special abilities should no more be doubted than one's ability to eat, walk, or sleep; it should be a fact one recognizes, no matter what anyone else says. Second, in response to Rakosi's concern about repaying Zukofsky for his great interest in Rakosi's work, Zukofsky claimed (humorously astonished to consider that Rakosi had been so poorly treated as to believe a return necessary) that Rakosi could do nothing to repay him—except to tell him sometime about Rakosi's life experiences, and to give him the poems he had not yet seen, including the poems in Little Review, Nation, American Caravan, Two World's Quarterly, New Masses, Broom, Palms, Echo, Liberator, and so on. And, third, in response to Rakosi's statement that he could not write to Pound because Pound was too much of a hero to him, Zukofsky claimed that Pound would be more pleased by a letter than by being a hero and that it was useless to idolize the man when one could work with him.²⁶

Zukofsky's next letter, 3 December 1930, said he liked "Out of the Egg" except where the lines, in discord with the rest of the poem, assume the iambic cadences of Eliot. Yet, even there, Zukofsky admired Rakosi's distinctive diction.²⁷ In fact, however, the iambic was probably directly from Wallace Stevens, who had a strong influence on Rakosi at this time. Zukofsky's consideration of Stevens, wrote Rakosi, "was always luke-warm and reluctant."²⁸

From the beginning of his correspondence with Rakosi, Zukofsky attempted to tease and flatter Rakosi into writing more poems. Rakosi later wrote, when he re-read Zukofsky's letter of 17 November 1930:

I was astonished and could hardly believe that I had begun to shrink back, or been forced back, from writing as long ago as 1930. My memory had set the date at 1939 or 1940, which was, in fact, when all writing stopped (until 1965), but my memory, apparently, had deleted a whole decade in which I was struggling to make a living and to write at the same time, and was losing.²⁹

Zukofsky's letter of 3 December continued by urging Rakosi to write again.³⁰ Under this persuasion, Rakosi wrote a poem and sent it to Zukofsky who subsequently sent it to Pound, on 9 December, with great exclamations.³¹

On 7 December 1930, in addition to noting strengths in and suggesting revisions of the poem which he suggested be titled "Before You," Zukofsky described his "Program: 'Objectivists' 1931" as a "standard" around which the writers in the issue could rally, and mentioned that he might send it to Rakosi for his approval, but on 16 December 1930 wrote that he had no extra copy of it.³²

Zukofsky's admiration of and relationship with Rakosi established Rakosi as an "Objectivist" as surely as had Pound's discovery of Rakosi in The Exile. Yet in Zukofsky's aggressive editing process, Rakosi's work was brought even more in line with "Objectivist" principles. Rakosi was now established as a partner in the efforts of writers with whom he could share more than space in a magazine issue.

III. A Standard

Louis Zukofsky has insisted that "the only reason" for using the term "objectivist" was "Harriet Monroe's insistence when I edited the 'Objectivist' number of Poetry. Pound was after her," and so: "Well, she told me, 'You must have a movement.' I said, 'No, some of us are writing to say things simply so that they will affect us as new again.' 'Well, give it a name.'"³³ But Monroe's insistence was the reason for using a term, not the term.

Zukofsky wrote to Pound on 9 November 1930 to complain that the group should not be circumscribed by the personalities of either McKenzie or himself. He thought it better to name them by their number, time, locale, or common trait, and gave seven possibilities, asking for Pound's suggestions, but then stated that one of these, namely "Objectivists," if it could be divorced from its philosophical connotations, should serve, since it would describe poems which were themselves things or objects.³⁴

Once the term had helped give the work a sense of coherence, he wrote Monroe that his issue definitely would present more of a "group" than he had predicted, since even though his contributors—so far McAlmon, Rakosi, Hecht, Oppen, Williams, and himself—had never met as a group for discussion, their work cohered as a whole.³⁵

"Program: 'Objectivists' 1931," a miscellany of editorial statements, was written about 7 December 1930, when Zukofsky confided to Rakosi that it should rouse the stupid and sterile masses and give the writers in the issue something to rally around.³⁶ Zukofsky's low opinion of the reading public was by this time compounded by his alienation as a teaching assistant at Madison. Pound's and Monroe's insistence that he conduct and lead a popular movement was almost unpalatable.

Two days later, his letter to Pound mentioned that he was including a little trash concerning "Objectivists" (with quotation marks to distinguish the term from its meanings in philosophy), which would possibly stimulate criticisms of the work in the issue.³⁷ This was his concession to Pound's advice of 25 October 1930 to invite attack, since "it will implicate you into a reply in later issues; which is all to the good."³⁸ Unfortunately, the reason for the quotation marks was not given in the issue. This oversight was made up in a letter by Zukofsky to Stanley Burnshaw published in the April issue of Poetry and in Zukofsky's preface to An "Objectivists" Anthology, but these were too late and too little noticed. From the first the term swelled like a balloon, as Zukofsky complained, "and a lot of mad people" went "chasing it."³⁹

The section headed "COMMENT" at the back of Poetry: A Magazine of Verse, 37, 5 (February 1931) includes, first, "Program: 'Objectivists' 1931," a brief description of objectives, mention of the contributors, and a poem by Hemingway, second, "Sincerity and Objectification: With Special Reference to the Work of Charles Reznikoff," a shortened version of his essay on Reznikoff, third, "Symposium," a critical dialogue between Zukofsky and the two editors of Blues, and, fourth, an essay by René Taupin translated by Zukofsky, "Three Poems by André Salmon, I," the second half of which appeared in the subsequent issue, Poetry (March 1931). In a note to Monroe, 22 December 1930, advising what could be omitted, Zukofsky warned that "Program," "Sincerity and Objectification," "Symposium," and "Three Poems" were all necessary; together they comprised one manifesto.⁴⁰

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[13. Plans for the *Poetry* Issue](#)

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[15. Program: "Objectivists" 1931](#)

An Objective: (Optics) — The lens bringing the rays from an object to a focus. (Military use) — that which is aimed at. (Use extended to poetry) — Desire for what is objectively perfect, inextricably the direction of historic and contemporary particulars.

It is understood that historic and contemporary particulars may mean a thing or things as well as an event or a chain of events: i.e., an Egyptian pulled-glass bottle in the shape of a fish or oak leaves, as well as the performance of Bach's Matthew Passion in Leipzig, or the Russian revolution and the rise of metallurgical plants in Siberia.⁵

The "Objectivist" brings the rays of particulars into focus, aiming at a new or renewed object. Zukofsky's example of "a thing" is the title to and object of a poem by Marianne Moore: "An Egyptian Pulled Glass Bottle in the Shape of a Fish," and his example of "things," "oak leaves," is a phrase from Williams' January: A Novelette.⁶ His example of an event presumably specifies the original performance in Leipzig of Bach's Passion (see "A"-1), and recalls its performances in Vienna attended by Williams and in New York City attended by Zukofsky.⁷ His example of "a chain of events" is from "A"-6 as above and also reflects Pound's statement in Exile 1: "Both Fascio and the Russian revolution are interesting phenomena; beyond which there is the historic perspective."⁸ Zukofsky's examples, therefore, reflect the roots of "Objectivism" in Moore, Williams, Bach, Pound, Zukofsky's "A", and Zukofsky's sense of history.

Zukofsky made these roots more explicit by listing, as he listed in "American Poetry 1920-1930," the works of Pound, Williams, Moore, Eliot, Cummings, Stevens, McAlmon, and Reznikoff which Zukofsky thought show individual developments from Imagisme to stand above the "dilutors" of free verse and imitators of the English iambic. Zukofsky felt that these works modeled "Objectivist" principles: "These poets seem to the present editor to have written in accordance with the principles heading this note. So do the contributors to this number."⁹ The principles to which he referred are objectification ("desire for the objectively perfect") and sincerity or history (composed of "historic and contemporary particulars"), the minimum requirements of "Objectivism."

Zukofsky further defined these principles by an example and by the association with Pound which his example implies. If Ernest Hemingway's "They All Made Peace—What is Peace?" is not "objectively perfect," it is at least predicated on vital particulars. The poem brings into focus the politics and politicians of the conference in Lausanne that climaxed the war between Turkey and Greece.¹⁰ Furthermore, Hemingway's poem affirms the "good writing" from which "Objectivism" was developed. In "Small Magazines," Pound wrote:

The active interest in prose centered in the opposed methods of Hemingway and McAlmon. Hemingway to all extents and purposes accepting the principles of good writing that had been contained in the earliest imagist document, and applying the stricture against superfluous words to his prose, polishing, repolishing, and eliminating, as can be seen in the clean hard paragraphs of the first brief In Our Time, in They All Made Peace, in The Torrents of Spring, and in the best pages of his later novels.¹¹

Both "They All Made Peace—What is Peace?" and McAlmon's poem in the "Objectivists" issue of Poetry, "Fortuno Carraccioli: A Satire," are attempts to deal satirically (a logopoetic device) with

absurdities of human society—the diplomat’s hypocrisy, the sensitive man’s desperate isolation. McAlmon’s method, however, was “taking a fresh canvas, a fresh wad of typing paper, and beginning a new story whenever he has failed in a first one.” If Hemingway developed the second Imagiste proscription, condensation, McAlmon developed the first, direct treatment. Although “McAlmon remains (A.D. 1930) the one very important American writer whom no American publisher will touch with a ten-foot pole,” Pound continued,

there is a greater variety of character and of situation, a greater fidelity to the scene and the life before him, than in other American writers. There is less of the received idea. There is a greater readiness to tackle hitherto untackled material. There is no effort to exploit the already exploited literary situations. There is already a more extended panorama of contemporary life than in other writers. . . . The freshness of McAlmon’s writing is due to his unperturbed gaze.¹²

The breadth and fidelity of McAlmon’s dispassioned view of the American scene gave his work the freshness that Hemingway achieved by careful pruning. Both Hemingway and McAlmon model “Objectivist” “good writing.”

The exclusiveness represented by the fact that “no American publisher will touch” McAlmon is reflected again in the evaluation by Pound of Emanuel Carnevali by which Zukofsky chose to justify the presence of Carnevali’s translations of Rimbaud in the issue. Carnevali’s work, Pound wrote, “has shown temperament, ‘fire,’ a refusal to be controlled, an intensity of feeling without which no poet is ever satisfactory, though this fury,” in spite of the judgment of Michaud at the Sorbonne “that Carnevali was one of the two poets in America whose work attained an international standard,” “is not in itself a complete poetic equipment.”¹³

Zukofsky echoed Pound’s sentiments about the exclusiveness of “Objectivist” criteria in two paragraphs which Monroe, in her editorial for the March 1931 issue of Poetry, attributed to “the arrogance of youth.” Zukofsky wrote:

Implied stricture of names generally cherished as famous, but not mentioned in this editor’s American Poetry 1920-1930 or included among the contributors to this issue, is prompted by the historical method of the Chinese sage who wrote, “Then for nine reigns there was no literary production.”¹⁴

This Chinese sagacity came to Zukofsky through Pound, who responded to Zukofsky’s point of 6 November 1930 against the idea of having a historic section: “My idea of historic section was NOT to record vile names of the incompetent. My model historian is the chink whose name I forget. sic ‘Then for nine reigns there was no literary production.’”¹⁵ Zukofsky felt that the “Objectivists” were the only writers who produced from 1920 to 1930 anything of literary value:

None at all; because there was neither consciousness of the “objectively perfect” nor an interest in clear or vital “particulars.” Nothing—neither a new object nor the stripping of an old to the light—was “aimed at.”¹⁶

Literary value is predicated on "consciousness of the 'objectively perfect' (objectification), on "interest in clear or vital 'particulars'" (sincerity), and on aiming at a new or renewed object (history).

Zukofsky followed Pound's lead in crediting the little poetry magazine "for helping to keep up an interest" in "the materials of poetry":

Mr. Pound has treated this subject in detail in an article in The English Journal (Chicago) for November, 1930. The small magazines are to be praised for standing on their own against the business of the publishing racket, the "pseudo-kulchuh" of certain national liberal weeklies published in New York, and the guidance of the American University.¹⁷

Zukofsky also recognized the role of self-publication and of Pound's criticism in the survival of work within the "Objectivist" sense of literary value:

Pound, Williams, McAlmon, Cummings, Reznikoff, etc., have had to publish a good deal of their work in privately printed editions. In every case the work was worth publishing, a statement not applicable to 95% or more of the usual publishers' lists. At least one American publisher could save his face, and add honor and intelligence to publishing, by reprinting Ezra Pound's critical works—Spirit of Romance, Pavannes and Divisions, Instigations, How to Read, etc.—all of the utmost importance to any discussion of the materials of poetry.¹⁸

Against the materials of poetry are the materials of avarice and ambition. Pound wrote:

The significance of the small magazine has, obviously, nothing to do with format. The significance of any work of art or literature is a root significance that goes down into its original motivation. When this motivation is merely a desire for money or publicity, or when this motivation is in great part such a desire for money directly or for publicity as a means indirectly of getting money, there occurs a pervasive monotony in the product corresponding to the underlying monotony in the motivation.¹⁹

Unfortunately, commercial publications suffer from a monotony of the product "selected rigorously on the basis of how much expensive advertising they would carry." Their "overhead" creates a need to minimize the risk of experiment, of ideas which have not already been accepted by the public. This monotony leaves a "vacuum"²⁰ which the "Objectivists" tried to fill.

The "Objectivists" antagonism against the economic and political conditions of the twenties and thirties was made necessary by their poetic exclusiveness and experimentation. Yet their antagonism and the "philosophical etiquette" associated with the term "Objectivists" (which Zukofsky tried to avoid by setting the term in quotation marks)²¹ led some to think the definitive motives of the "Objectivists" were political. After all, objectivism (without quotation marks) was in the air of the times. The Oppens, for example, read Leon Trotsky's The History of the Russian Revolution in 1932.²² In his preface, dated 14 November 1930, Trotsky defined "the only possible historic objectivism" as "a scientific conscientiousness, which for its sympathies and antipathies—open and undisguised—seeks support in an honest study of the facts, a determination of their real connections, an exposure of the casual laws of their movement," and claimed: "Events can neither be regarded as a series of adventures, nor strung on the thread of some preconceived moral. They must obey their own laws. The discovery of these laws is the author's task."²³

Philosophical emphasis on the priority or equality of objective reality (as opposed to subjective experience) served the political necessities of the times. Robert von Hallberg refers to Georg Lukacs and A. N. Whitehead and suggests that their common objectivism was a response to "the political and economic pressures that made the Marxist position attractive in the early thirties." Von Hallberg also shows that Whitehead's objectivist philosophy has deep similarities with Oppen's populism and Zukofsky's mass-consciousness.^{[24](#)}

The political dimension of Zukofsky's "objective" is evident in his use of the Russian revolution as an example of a particular. Other "Objectivists" translated this awareness into action. Whittaker Chambers and Harry Roskolenkier were Communist Party members. George and Mary Oppen joined the Party in 1935 to organize neighborhoods against forcible evictions. Carl Rakosi had socialist leanings and made his career as a social worker. Many self-respecting artists of the time were on the left, and felt that only the left embodied the ideals of personal and social responsibility upon which good art is based. Zukofsky, however, was always primarily engaged with poetry and its techniques and disliked epistemology, philosophy, and politics. He realized that poetry of the left descended to propaganda when it lacked technical discipline.

One could take for granted philosophical and political foundations; one could not take for granted the main concern of the "Objectivists"—ability to write well. In his editorial for Exile 1, Pound wrote:

As to our "joining revolutions" etc. It is unlikely. The artist is concerned with producing something that will be enjoyable even after a successful revolution. So far as we know even the most violent bolchvik has never abolished electric light globes merely because they were invented under another regime, and by a man intent rather on his own job than on particular propaganda.^{[25](#)}

The job of the "Objectivists" was to invent objects that like light bulbs give light, objects whose value is permanent.

Zukofsky ended the "Program" by "parodying" what he had quoted in "A"-6, as if the issuance of the "Objectivists" were the beginning of a revolution: "Finally, parodying a great writer (V. I. Ulianov—The State and Revolution) editing this number has been too pleasant and too useful to permit further discourse about it."^{[26](#)} Lenin was not a greater writer because he was a popular writer, but because he wrote about what he had lived through. The "Objectivists" issue is also a record of things its contributors lived through.

"Objectivism" was not a fiction, not a mere ploy for publicity. The "Program" describes already established "Objectivist" roots and principles, and expresses the struggle of the "Objectivists" against the literary situation of the time.

Section 16 - Symposium with Tyler and Ford

"Symposium" is an exchange of poems and poetic theory between Zukofsky and the two editors of Blues, Parker Tyler and Charles Henri Ford. Zukofsky mentioned to Pound on 9 December 1930 that he was including it with "Program: 'Objectivists' 1931" in the "Objectivists" issue, and described it briefly.¹ In addition to including their two poems ("Hymn" by Tyler and "Left Instantly Designs" by Ford),² their explanation ("Note on Hymn and Left Instantly Designs"), Zukofsky's response ("Note by the Editor"), and their "In rebuttal," Zukofsky appended a note directing their attention to a sonnet by Samuel Putnam, text included: "The Horses of Her Hair: for Riva." All this in spite of Monroe's prohibition is in small print, and the prose is in a style so elliptical as almost to prohibit understanding. One unfamiliar with Zukofsky's critical career would learn little from this symposium.

As Tyler and Ford's critical note implies, the two poems are examples of the two methods of creating the poem, "respectively: the symbolic and the mythic." Tyler's poem is a result of the symbolic method:

HYMN

for one proud moment
is the lid rolled back and fran-
tically the birth of springs releases
hood of the humble hour, in which
growth of the sensual face
creeps from the creamy white stalk
like wrinkles of a spring wound
in a faultless conformity up to
the head

no where, when men decide
lust is a moment for shock will this
momentless jack-in-the-box fail
of its head and its speech
or the wordless twinge of its
wire-filled arm, for
one curved moment is

the ruff supreme: the
nose provoked: the
mouth articulate with
rhetoric, and is the strained
mechanical form ousted for
the eased air and softer earth, suffusing
all the grave childwristed brain—

so, till the thing shall rust of
using too many times the fatal

button, dust or the remote will
 will not detain
 laugh of the opened lid, the stained
 cheeks or the crested cap from
 being shock of the moment:
 faultlessly the well-known
 secret fast on the click

In this method,

the images depend upon a fixed symbolic scheme, dictated by intuitive judgment, and receptive of a contrapuntal motive (organic not technical) relating to the involved type of human experience composed of its own images.³

The poem's "fixed symbolic scheme" is the metaphor of a camera's action. Its "contrapuntal motive" is the association with nature—the camera's "springs" like spring itself give birth to a photograph like a flower. This scheme relates to "the involved type of human experience," the spontaneous shock of lust, laughter, or poetic creation, whose product is "composed of its own images"—the poem or the photograph. In this sense the poem is self-reflexive. It is written about writing; its final click finishes the poem. These correspondences are "organic not technical," that is, intuitively not rationally contrived, so that the poem is an experience, an object, not a problem whose meaning is in something beyond itself.

Ford's poem is a result of the mythic method:

LEFT INSTANTLY DESIGNS

describe the circles
 first; terror
 will stay and
 the moon displace

 them and control
 the rain;—
 then walk away
 in the rain's disgrace;

 the blood's obedience
 will follows
 instantly designs
 left in the sky's hollow;

 once fearful often
 each ear then
 accepts its
 rightful coffin;

 if the dream
 cries, let
 the moon mother
 it, encircled

 with goodbyes
 mist
 cannot

smother;
 explain your circles
 to the sun
 and, but for the dark,
 run.

In this method,

the images depend upon a given type of human experience, in which a concept operates through their inevitable behavior toward a dogmatic or scriptural conclusion; they are built upon actual experience and out of them intensity throw up metaphors such as might pertinently occur in actual experience: circles, coffin, mother.⁴

Here the images depend on "a given type of human experience," which, unlike "the involved type," is given to man not created by him, naturata not naturans. In the terms of Jung, whom Ford might have read, Ford referred to archetypes thrown up by the collective unconscious and approximated by actual experience—primordial images and patterns of instinctual behavior which strike meaningful correspondences with the type of experience that originally generated them in the archetypal layer of the unconscious. These archetypes operate "through inevitable behavior toward a dogmatic or scriptural conclusion."

This analysis does not indicate in "Left Instantly Designs" the kind of "fixed scheme" which is as easily realized as in Tyler's poem; however, like Tyler's, Ford's poem appears to have a self-reflexive aspect. It describes and traces to their sources its own "designs," the archetypal "images" to which Ford referred. Beginning "describe the circles / first," the poem circumscribes the "terror," limiting it so that it "will stay." This originally literal description is then replaced by the image of the moon, whose beauty, as Rilke wrote of Angels, is nothing but the degree of terror that we can bear. Bearing it, then, the moon controls the rain and the describer of the first circles can "walk away / in the rain's disgrace." The third stanza obeys the archetypal design, and the fourth restates this obedience: the fearful ears accept their "rightful coffin." The fact that what began as a necessary self-control is now a deathly trap does not need to be explicitly stated in the poem; it is inherent in its images. "Rightful coffin" stifles the dream, but the moon mothers it, encircling it with goodbyes that mist cannot smother. One should never surrender one's freedom to run.

My analysis of the poem can only be too explicit. If the poem works, then the meanings I have identified in it are imparted to the reader without his being conscious of their means; those meanings are independent of his realization of its similarity to any other thing. The reader simply feels the poem as he would feel any other object.

Tyler and Ford recognized this experiential independence of the poem in their note. The poem is neither representation nor imitation:

The poem is a gratuitous and arbitrary organism designed to contravene the hypothesis of continuous experience through time and space. It must consciously eliminate the assumption of a continuous or historical type of experience by the projection of a system of correlated images having an inevitable dramatic pause. The images of these

poems are not representative because neither a duplication nor yet an embellishment of actual experience is desired; all that is desired is an experience which is not subject to the continuous or historical premise; the poem is an object.⁵

The "continuous or historical" hypothesis, assumption, or premise pertains to experience (after Aristotle) without a beginning, middle, and end. The middle of a poem, as Tyler and Ford put it, is "a system of correlated images" and the end effects "an inevitable dramatic pause." In a limited sense, a poem has this beginning, middle, and end, and so contravenes reality's sensible continuum; however, in a broader sense, the division between the existence of the poem and existence generally is arbitrary. It is just as one's experience of, say, an apple. One comes into a room, sees it on the table, picks it up, examines it, puts it down, and leaves. Its existence is prior and posterior to one's experience of it; its existence, in itself, is neither begun nor ended with one's direct encounter with it. In one's experience of it, one sees it has a skin, a pulp, and a core; in this sense it also contravenes the continuous and historical hypothesis. The difference between poem and apple is only in their mediums and their creators, not in existence or experience.

In his reply, Zukofsky differed with Tyler and Ford on the "gratuitous and arbitrary" qualities of the poem: "'Gratuitous' depending upon the poet's nature, but never 'arbitrary' if the poem is an object."⁶ In its creation, varying with each creator, the poem may be gratuitous, but in its medium it can never be arbitrary. Its objectification depends on a complex of absolute effects. Zukofsky continued: "No objection to the second sentence if 'eliminate . . . a continuous or historical type of experience' does not refer to the poem itself—Pound's Cantos discard the Aristotelian unities but are a continuous experience in themselves."⁷ Zukofsky took exception to the limited sense of the existence and one's experience of a thing understood by Tyler and Ford. They did not think of the poem as "a continuous or historical type of experience" in itself. The Cantos contravene the continuous or historical type of experience which the Aristotelian unities were an attempt to preserve in art. Nevertheless, they are a continuous experience in themselves. They have an integrity, like any Image, independent of the integrity of any other things: "No image is representation, or at any rate concerned with esthetic dialectic devoted to evaluations of the 'extent of imitation' and other problems of this kind which bothered Baumgarten. The poem is an object."⁸ It is an object independent of the scaffolding of references to the world outside the poem and upon which the poem was built.

One may work like Swift's Laputans by building from the roof down, but a roof is still a thing existing outside of the poem. Whether in the mind or per se is perhaps not a problem for poets to worry over. In any case, the mind's thought and a poem are two different objects—or states—exciting in common jargon such metaphors as "fluidity," etc.⁹

The fact that a poem's complex of absolute symbols may reproduce the effect of a thing outside the poem does not mitigate the poem's separate existence. Zukofsky felt that the question of the absolute ontological existence of things does not affect the distinctions between things. The difference between "the mind's thought and a poem" is common sense and could be described in terms of their relative "fluidity" or by many other metaphors. Zukofsky continued:

The analyses of the poems are very adequate—exception to “involved type of human experience composed of its own images” has already been taken.

The essential difference, for poetry, seems to be between two types of symbolism: the word as symbol for the object, and-hallucination. Objectivity and even merit may be claimed for the last. But Hymn and Left Instantly Designs are printed here for their objectivity of cadence and for their frequently marked powers in the use of the word as symbol for the object, rather than for their attainments as hallucination.¹⁰

Zukofsky accepted Tyler and Ford's analyses of their poems, excepting what he mistakenly confused with the “continuous or historical type of experience,” but he rejected their distinction between symbolic and mythic methods. He proposed a different distinction which puts Tyler and Ford's poems in the same class. In less personal terminology, they are “Objectivist” rather than Symboliste poems. A Symboliste poem does not have sincerity; its words are symbols not for the object, but for the mind's seeming.

Zukofsky rejected their distinction between symbolic and mythic methods perhaps because he was not comfortable with the extent to which the mythic is dependent upon the archetypal, the “given type of human experience.” The key to Zukofsky's creative act is natura naturans, nature as creator, not naturata, as created. Zukofsky has less acceptance than Tyler and Ford of the difference between the poet's creation and natural creation. Tyler and Ford's “In rebuttal” picks up on this point: “‘Gratuitous and arbitrary’ in any case because the poet and natural dispensation are clear apart; otherwise ‘hallucination’. The Cantos qualify.”¹¹ One assumes this means they agreed with Zukofsky that the Cantos are a poem, but, retaining their definition of the poem, they still call the Cantos “gratuitous and arbitrary.” If a poet pretends his creation is equivalent to God's, he is hallucinating.

Ending the “Symposium,” Zukofsky appended a note and a poem:

N.B. Mr. Tyler and Mr. Ford will probably be interested in this sonnet by Samuel Putnam:

THE HORSES OF HER HAIR

for Riva

The horses of her hair rear in a wild
billowwinnowing of nightcrest to a wake
of brighter caution werewell where I slake
drearfoundering of daydark in a mild
propost to rapture's log starfeet uppiled
foamhigh to wavebreak waterhoofbeatquake
rein back! pull pack shake off flakerain of snake
Poseidonpeaks rein pack! O Diomed! defiled.

And there was Phaethon and the whoring Helen
and Icarus et cet sunwax shun parallax
she sat at Illium's gate and carved her melon
Paris loved her hair better than ax
better befuddled than battlebent he said
they took him from the stirrups did they? dead.¹²

This poem seems to be Zukofsky's answer to the unresolved question as to the status of the mythic method. It suggests a third type of symbolism, the epic, in which Ford's archetypes might reside without Zukofsky's

Symboliste "hallucination." The images in the epic method depend on created objects with historical or factual reference and archetypal significance. Their meaning, as in Williams' formula, are in the thing, and yet the thing, like the objects of Putnam's coinages, may be the results of the power of artistic perception to redefine possibilities out of chaos.

This symposium proves that Zukofsky's "Objectivism" was neither extraordinarily unique among the literary vanguard nor a simple makeshift or superficial position. Zukofsky could accept as "Objectivist" work by Tyler and Ford while rejecting only the fine points of their poetic theories. Zukofsky's points deal with intricate and refined matters of poetics—the epistemology of the poem as object, the role of symbolism, the importance of archetypes, the differences between poetic intention and achievement, and the relation between poetry and nature.

[15. Program: "Objectivists" 1931](#)

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[17. René Taupin's André Salmon](#)

Section 17 - René Taupin's André Salmon

André Salmon was important to the "Objectivists" because he, "like his friend Guillaume Apollinaire," was among "the generation which devolved from Symbolism."¹ The methods which they "devolved" were similar to that of the "Objectivists."

Symbolism discarded, André Salmon now wrote poetry which was neither dreamy nor sentimental, but a matter of neat and simple notation. He did not even employ the artifice of the current metaphor, and yet he did secure the validity of its detail and ornament. "Nominalistic poetry."²

Among the arguments that Zukofsky gave Pound for including this translation of René Taupin's review of André Salmon was the assertion that it would reinforce what he considered to be his own position — nominalism.³ Although the "Objectivists" were not nominalists in the extreme sense of denying the existence of universals or of believing that all relations of word to thing are arbitrary, they were nominalists in the sense of distrusting vague phrases, general and abstract words, and discursive analyses and commentaries. Like Salmon, they wanted a poetry which presents the thing rather than qualifies or talks about it. Taupin wrote: "The metaphor of Baudelaire, or even the metaphor of Mallarmé, was primarily qualitative; it expressed what consistently poor adjectives could not express."⁴ However, Taupin, on the one hand, felt that metaphor and image were essentially artifice. He asked: "Would the image no longer do?" and answered: "The real would."⁵ He asked: "And language?" and answered: "Not metaphors, but the most immediate projections of the real which does not stop being real, even taking on, under this handling, plastic, decorative and emotive value."⁶ The "Objectivists" believed, on the other hand, in the Emerson-Fenollosa-Pound tradition, that certain metaphors and images were of the essence of the real. At the roots of all language are metaphors which substantiate original perceptions which can be revitalized in poetry as thought, melody, and image. Nevertheless, the metaphor of the "Objectivists" was not the metaphor of Baudelaire and Mallarmé. It was interpretive rather than qualitative. Qualitative metaphor modifies but does not create perception of the fact. It is a subjective comment about a thing, "hallucination," not perception.

Like Salmon, the "Objectivists" wanted a poetry the validity of which was secured by revelation of the real. Taupin wrote: "Nominalistic poetry is the synthesis of real detail, similar to the art of the primitives; and not of abstract or decomposed detail, like the impressionists."⁷ The difference between real and abstract or decomposed detail, like the difference between objective and subjective Images as Pound defined them (see [Section 8](#)), is whether the detail emerges from the mind of the poet like or unlike his original generative experience. Details become abstract or decomposed as their accessibility to experience becomes attenuated by preconceived requirements and subjective distortions and associations.

Taupin argued for “the most direct contact,” approaching the purity of mathematical formula, the expressiveness of “scientific statement,” or newspaper reportage. “The newspaper,” he claimed, “is not so insipid as one might think when the news runs together and bears a definite imprint; it is only when the news inclines to be ‘literary’ that it loses its force of perfect notation. . . . The event therefore should be left to its integrality, to its maximum of the wonderful . . . The fact as it forms, that is not as it is cooked by the imperfect or predatory or sentimental poet.”⁸

Regard for the event was characteristic of both Salmon and the “Objectivist.” Taupin wrote that “epic poetry is neither recitative nor narrative”; it is neither moralistic nor depends “on decorative qualities for its framework.” Epic poetry depends on “the poetic value of the event.” The epic poet does not feel the need for “making his heroes greater than their action.”

But this poetry is based on choice, on the imagination which apparently does not create but discovers, and gives the accomplished fact its maximum of the real: the esthetic of the reporter and the cinematographer—Eisenstein looking for the perfect Russian peasant woman and finding her after examining a thousand imperfect ones.⁹

Salmon, like the “Objectivists,” consciously chose the details that best represent the wholes of which they are parts, the particulars which best evoke the experiences which involve them. The particulars of sincerity, therefore, can not be invented out of nothing. “The image,” Oppen wrote, “is encountered.”¹⁰

The Nominalist poet allows details, by themselves, without analytic underpinning, to evoke the event. “The composition of the poem,” wrote Taupin, “is neither descriptive nor narrative”; its contents are not classified or schematized. Speaking of Salmon’s Prikaz, in which Salmon discovered “the value of the Russian revolution,”¹¹ Taupin wrote:

It is obvious that the objects in this poem do not hold together in an association of ideas, but in their proper force of attraction.’ There is an art more than composition—even the composition of the impressionists; there is the attraction of the magnet, and the electric shock, the reality runs into reality by these brusque transformations of shock: the esthetic of Eisenstein.¹²

If drawing a constellation, a nominalist would present the stars as dots by themselves in their proper arrangement, leaving out the lines we imagine between them and the mythological figures we associate with them, knowing the reader would imagine the lines and figures for himself. This compositional method is the same as Pound’s ideogramic method—the presentation of synecdochic details or examples whose juxtaposition participates in certain lines of force—the magnet’s rose pattern in the iron filings. It does not depend on either Symboliste or rationalistic “association of ideas.” If the idea or sentiment is valid, it will appear as a gestalt of the assembled details.

This “restitution” of ideas to an assembly of facts is “the essential distinction of the epic”:

Prikaz is this generation’s unique, intelligent attempt to give to the epic its rightful qualities, to find again the essential distinction of the epic, which is neither love nor hate but the restitution of these sentiments to a chain of facts which exist and the

existence of which confers upon them the marvelous (le merveilleux—cf. Chateaubriand, le merveilleux chrétien) indispensable to all poetry.¹³

Zukofsky echoed this concept of epic restitution in his "Program": an "Objective" is "the direction of historic and contemporary particulars . . . a thing or things as well as an event or chain of events."¹⁴ Zukofsky also made Taupin's statement the epigraph to the "epic" section of An "Objectivists" Anthology and claimed in his preface that "poets should ultimately attempt" the epic restitution which Taupin accurately described.¹⁵

[16. Symposium with Tyler and Ford](#)

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[18. "A"](#)

Section 18 - "A"

I have discussed various aspects of "A" in previous sections: the inception of "A" with Zukofsky's interest in and attendance of the performance of Bach's St. Matthew's Passion on 5 April 1928, Williams' role in stimulating that interest and Williams' admiration of the beginning movements of "A", and the relation of "A" to "Poem beginning 'The'" and to The Waste Land in [Sections 4 and 9](#); the evidence in "A" of Zukofsky's translation of the Albert Einstein biography and of his trip to California in [Section 11](#); the concepts of naturans, naturata, and "An Objective" in "A"-6 as they relate to other "Objectivist" writings in [Sections 3, 15](#), and passim; the fact that the first seven movements of "A" were completed by 19 August 1930 in [Section 11](#), and Zukofsky's brief descriptions of "A"-7 in his letters to Harriet Monroe of 12 and 14 October 1930 in [Section 13](#). I have yet, however, to discuss the relation of "A" to Pound's translation of and commentary on Cavalcanti's "Donna mi Prega" in the July 1928 issue of the Dial (the topic of this part), and to present the correspondence between Pound and Zukofsky after Zukofsky sent "A" 1-7 to Pound in November 1930 (the topic of the next part).

I. Donna Mi Prega

In "American Poetry 1920-1930," Zukofsky wrote that Robert Frost, by "continued tinkering with accent," could not achieve the "melody" and the "conversational overtones" which Pound achieved in the Cantos by attention to quantity: "Pound's contribution is quantity, and the dealers in stock and trade sonnets and iambs have never taken up his challenge. They have also dissipated the sonnet as a form; it is time someone resurrected it."¹ Since this survey of American poetry was not finished until 2 June 1930,² this challenge might be seen as an elegant condensation of some comments Pound made on the sonnet published in "Donna Mi Prega by Guido Cavalcanti with Traduction and Commentary by Ezra Pound: Followed by Notes and a Consideration of the Sonnet," in the Dial of July 1928.

In this "Consideration," Pound claimed the sonnet was a stunted form:

The sonnet was not a great poetic invention. The sonnet occurred automatically when some chap got stuck in the effort to make a canzone. His "genius" consisted in the recognition of the fact that he had come to the end of his subject-matter.

Historically the sonnet, the "little tune," had already in Guido's day, become a danger to composition. . . . It marks the beginning of the divorce of words and music.

NOTE: All this is not so unconnected with our own time as might seem. Those writers to whom vers libre was a mere "runnin' dahn th' road" videlicet escape, and who were impelled thereto by no inner need of, or curiosity concerning, the quantitative element in metric; having come to the end of that lurch, lurch back not into experiment with the Canzone or any other unexplored form, but into the stock and trade sonnet.³

The ideas in this final note were in part repeated for Zukofsky in Pound's letter to him of 28 October 1930, which recommended that Zukofsky edit for the Poetry issue a historic section to disinfect the "state of things . . . covered by dilutions of" Pound, Williams, Eliot, and perhaps Cummings, "plus mess caused by reaction against these dilutes. I mean the Tennysonian sonnet etc. now being done."⁴ Those who reacted against the escape versifiers were equally incapable of the virtue that was originally intended to justify the new liberty. Even worse, in returning to accentual metrics and standard forms, they lacked not only the musical contribution of quantity but also denied themselves the freedom in which they might experimentally discover it themselves.

Pound's publication in the July issue of the Dial was important to Zukofsky beyond its useful ideas regarding the sonnet and the reactionist writers of sonnets. In it Pound made clear a distinction which Zukofsky found useful in his essay on Reznikoff (Section 8) and in his translation of Taupin's essay on Salmon (Section 17). Reznikoff's metaphor and simile, like Salmon's "non-metaphorical image," is not ornamental; "it is a confirmation of similarities strongly felt together" in the object. It is not, as Taupin put it, "qualitative," it is "interpretive." Pound wrote:

I spoke to him [T. E. Hulme] one day of the difference between Guido's precise interpretive metaphor, and the Petrarchan fustian and ornament, pointing out that Guido thought in accurate terms; that the phrases correspond to definite sensations undergone; in fact, very much like what I had said in my earlier preface to the Sonnets and Ballate.⁵

In this preface, dated 15 November 1910, Pound wrote that Cavalcanti was "more keen in his understanding, more precise in his expression" than any "psychologist of the emotions," for "we have in him no rhetoric, but always a true description" of the sensation. Further, Pound wrote of "absolute" symbol, metaphor, and rhythm: "The perception of the intellect is given in the word, that of the emotions in the cadence." And "It is the poet's business that this correspondence be exact, i.e., that it be the emotion which surrounds the thought expressed."⁶ An "absolute" is "interpretive" in the same sense that a good translation is interpretive: it neither creates a new thing altogether nor simply transforms the literal accidents of the original.⁷ Finally, Pound wrote in "A Retrospect":

As to Twentieth century poetry . . . It will be as much like granite as it can be, its force will lie in its truth, its interpretive power (of course, poetic force does always rest there); I mean it will not try to seem forcible by rhetorical din, and luxurious riot. We will have fewer painted adjectives impeding the shock and stroke of it. At least for myself, I want it so, austere, direct, free from emotional slither.⁸

Pound's essay in the Dial did more than assert the essential importance of the Imagiste principle of exactitude; it concretely proved its viability. The fact that it could be embodied in a form as complex as Cavalcanti's "Donna Mi Prega" was an inspiration to Zukofsky.

In the commentary on the poem, Pound mentioned "Bach's opinions on the fugue" and compared the fugue to the canzone: "The canzone was to poets of this period what the fugue was to musicians in Bach's time. It is a highly specialized form, having its own self-imposed limits."⁹ Zukofsky quoted this

Appropriately for the sixth movement, there are six each of years, jobs, and themes. Although perhaps not the six main themes of the movement, six themes of this passage might be identified as (1) onomatopoeia ("Zoo-kaw-kaw" or Zukofsky, and "tiaras, tantrum, tiaras" or Kay's attempt at a Latin declension), examples of the "clear music," so-named in the opening of "A"-2, at its most obvious: the melody in which the thought moves, (2) conversational mimicry ("someone opens his mouth and you copy," and so forth), demonstrations of what a quantitative metric is capable of, (3) the type of the creative artist struggling against an indifferent society (in Kay's comparison of Zukofsky and Bach), (4) Bach's St. Matthew's Passion ("Ye daughters!" the double chorus's opening invocation, here applying to Bach's students), (5) reflexive poetics ("Polyphony" and "Six jobs, six themes at once and fughatta, and all music—"), and (6) the false undervaluation of the labor of being a poet ("out of a job" is a thing of disgrace, yet "job" does not include, as would the Marxist labor theory of value, the "six jobs" of composing this intricately-themed contrapuntal "music").

Lastly, in the third instance, Zukofsky repeated his own challenge. In essence, this represents his own realization, inspired by Pound's publication in the Dial, that his long poem ought to have an overall structural rationalization:

Can
The design
Of the fugue
Be transferred
To poetry?

At eventide, cool hour of rest

Who rests?

That is Venus come up!

And I,

How shall I—

Her soles new as the sunned black of her grave turf,

With all this material?

To what distinction,

Horses, she saw?

My—

Seventh Movement: "There are different techniques"¹⁷

Zukofsky's question modulates through elements of cultural, cosmic, and mundane histories to the more pertinent question as to how he should apply the fugal form to what next concerns him, someone's perception of horses. His answer is twofold. First, it is "My— / Seventh Movement, whose subject is the perception of saw-horses, and, second, in the subtitle to the movement, it is the fact that there are different techniques.

These three instances of the concept of fugue in "A"-6, and especially these final questions and answers, applying specifically to the seventh movement, are instances of Zukofsky's theme of reflexive

poetics. The poem itself, breaking new poetic ground, educates its own readers in how to best read it, effectively and concretely demonstrating the principles on which it is based.

In his notes on the canzone, Pound had recourse to Dante's comments on the canzone in, as Pound spelled it, De Vulgari Eloquio, "the eloquence of the vernacular," the mother tongue. Here Pound referred to his own work as an advance on Dante's: "My own brief study of Arnaut Daniel may throw a further light on earlier phases of the canzone in the 'lingua materna.'" ¹⁸ In his study, Pound claimed En Arnaut "tried to make almost a new language, or at least to enlarge the Langue d'Oc, and make new things possible." ¹⁹ In fact, Pound's study, like his translation of and commentary on "Donna Mi Prega," throws light, not only on Daniel's and Dante's mother tongue but also, as does any advance in poetry, on Pound's own. Zukofsky fully understood this, for when he wrote to Monroe on 12 October 1930 he described "A" incidentally, as a contemporary version of Dante's De Vulgaria Eloquentia. ²⁰ Furthermore, in "Recencies in Poetry," Zukofsky wrote that "A"-7 "attempted to resolve the writer's criticism of poetry into the movement of the poem." ²¹ It would itself present the "Objectivists" critical principles.

One such principle for Zukofsky was an expanded concept of the musical values of poetry, so that there could be "different techniques." Only by this expansion can "the fugue / Be transferred / To poetry." Pound discussed this in the Dial:

The reader will not arrive at a just appreciation of the canzone unless he be aware that there are three kinds of melopoeia, that is to say: poems are made to speak, to chant, and to sing. This canzone, Guido's poetry in general, and the poems of mediaeval Provence and Tuscany in general, were all made to be sung. Relative estimates of value inside these periods must take count of the cantabile values. ²²

For this statement, Pound drew upon what he had written for the New Age in March 1918 as a music critic under the pseudonym William Atheling. Matters of substance from these reviews were collected and published in Chicago by Pascal Covici in 1927 as Antheil and the Treatise on Harmony with Supplementary Notes. That Zukofsky studied this text is indisputable. He quoted "Atheling" in "A"-1:

Atheling—"There are different techniques,
Men write to be read, or spoken,
Or declaimed, or rhapsodized,
And quite differently to be sung." ²³

"A", therefore, increasingly depended on the certain blending of words or syllables to give a musical equivalent of actual experience, the appropriate technique for a work which like the canzone was meant as a marriage of words and music. Pound conceived his translation of "Donna Mi Prega" and Zukofsky conceived "A" as a step toward healing the divorce of words and music. Quantitative metrics and experiment with the canzone/fugue (forms invented more-or-less prior to the divorce) are means by which they felt they accomplished this. Accentual metrics and standard forms ("the stock and trade sonnet and iamb") were, as the melodic and conversational falsities of as good a poet as Robert Frost testified, too rigid to register the subtlety shifting emotional values of actual speech, actual experience.

"A"-7, begun in 1928 after Zukofsky read the Dial for July 1928 and finished finally by 19 August 1930,²⁴ was the "different technique" by which the breach in music and words could be healed. Accordingly, he wrote Pound on 8 September 1930 that it was the resurrection of the sonnet that he had requested.²⁵ "A"-7 was the first thing of his own he considered including in his issue of Poetry. (see Section 13). Zukofsky's feeling for the musical integrity of "A"-7 was eventually confirmed by his friend Tibor Serly, the musician and composer. On 7 December 1931 Zukofsky wrote Pound that Serly had secretly taken the trouble to analyse the rhythms of the poem into musical notation and had discovered that it had a complex and ideal rhythmic structure.²⁶

II. "A" 1-7

Pound received the last of "A" 1-7 by 27 November 1930 when he replied:

recd. one development of fugue or fuagal etc. produced by Ludwig von Zuk und Sohn, on not always digested meat of his forebears but with a ditional and final contortion or fugal (quasi) termination in form of canzone (miscalled 7 sonnets) but still a canzone a la sestina but with 14 lines to the strophe.

Crit. wd. be

(A.) eliminate top dressing inherited. . . .

Wd. be (B.) the purely rational and commentarian expositions a bit perffessorial in parts.

. . .

. . . ought to end with a "to be continued"

At least I don't think it ought to go on after your seven wollups. NOT unless you are making it a life work. Which; if I remember rightly; was not yr/ orig. intent.

"A" a work not in but showing progress.

You have not wasted the year or however long it has been.

I strongly suggest that YOU send me a crit. of it before I say anything more about it.²⁷

Pound's characterization of "A"-7 as "a canzone a la sestina" was his recognition of the fact of its relation to his study of Arnaut Daniel and his translation of and commentary on "Donna Mi Prega." It is his acknowledgment that "A"-7 throws a further light on the capability of the mother tongue (against the darkness of non-qualitative dilutors and reactionaries), and it expresses his admiration of the formal intricacy of "A"-7. The sestina is the most complicated of the verse forms initiated by Pound's admired troubadours, and is alleged to have been invented by Arnaut Daniel himself.

Pound perhaps surmised that "A" would not be a life's work from Zukofsky's statement nearly two years before that he had envisioned only twenty-four movements.²⁸ If seven movements could be completed in two years, twenty-four ought to take only seven.

Zukofsky responded in full to Pound's request for a criticism on "A" on 12 December 1930.²⁹ He began by declaring that "A" was as far as he could presently see a life's work; he could only write two movements each year and had to finish a heroic twenty-four. With this note, one sees that the number of

movements in "A" principally derived from the poem's epic constitution and the fact that Homer's Iliad and Odyssey each have twenty-four books. In this, Zukofsky was building upon the Joycean model;³⁰ however, unlike Ulysses, he wished to reflect not the Homeric themes but the Homeric structure. There may have been other justifications for the number. Zukofsky was an avid numerologist. It could reflect the twenty-four hours in the day, for example, or the alphabet (like Williams' alphabet of the trees in "The Botticellian Trees") from "A", the poem as a whole, to Z, Zukofsky as its author, representing the universal potential of the language.

Replying to Pound's description that "A" 1-7 were developed "on not always digested meat of his forebears," Zukofsky claimed that "A" was initially conceived not on the model of the Cantos but in conscious reaction to The Waste Land. Specifically, Zukofsky wrote that when he began "A"-1 and -2, he had read only the Cantos in Instigations, Lustra, and Poems 1918-1921, not "Canto II" and not the Paris edition of "Cantos 1-16." Although he read A Draft of the Cantos 17-27 (London: John Rodker, 1928) after finishing "A"-2, "A" was already begun to fulfill the intention of "Poem beginning 'The,'" in which he had tried (and as a whole failed), while shunning Eliot's prosody and polish (and failing to achieve his clarity), to prove that the land was not only unwasted but could produce new life. Zukofsky took issue with Eliot's grandiose synchronic motifs by composing "The" in a discursive diachronic mode, but as a whole the poem did not transcend parody. "A" was intended to do so.

On the other hand, the fact that Zukofsky did not initially conceive "A" on the model of the Cantos does not mitigate the fact of Pound's great influence. The high incidence of hyphenated terms and the coincidence of the word "hyaline" in "A"-2 as in "Canto II" show an influence not structural but textural.³¹ Also, many of the principles important to Zukofsky and relevant to "A" were, if not learned from Pound, at least confirmed by him. For example, Zukofsky claimed almost complete adherence to the principles in Pound's "A Few Don'ts."³²

His letter of 12 December continues by describing how he returned to a synchronic mode for "A", but sought to unify the poem by his original use of Bach's St. Matthew's Passion. In this, he was working immediately from line 309 of "Poem beginning 'The,'" "Our God immortal such Life as is our God," which was the first line of each of the four strophes of a poem Zukofsky wrote in 1925, "For a Thing by Bach," then published in Pagany of October-December 1930. This poem is repetitive and symmetrical, but its regularity is a matter not of accent or syllables but of tone and timing. It appears to have been designed, as its title suggests, as a lyric for a piece of music. Its diction is as abstract as the diction that Zukofsky later wielded in poems such as "Memory of V. I. Ulianov" but without any of its later power: "apportion us thy rest," "vaunt not against us," "thy vault of strength," "Hope nor force wasted," "if like to errant stars we flutter," and ending "(as to the immortelle / Form, color, long after the gathering, is given). Our wish: / Give measureless your urge that is our strength still increate-"³³ It is in theme an almost messianic, devotional glorification, foreshadowing Zukofsky's later fascination with the theme of the Passion, and in intention a marriage of word and music, but in technique and structure nothing like "A".

Zukofsky went on to remind Pound that when he began "A", he had read Cantos only as distinct poems with different subjects; he did not imagine Pound's purpose for the Cantos as a whole. If he had read "Cantos XIV, XV, XVI," and others with American themes, he would not have begun "A"; however, since he was unable at the time to write brief lyrics (excepting only "Two Dedications" in 1929), he could only persist. Zukofsky realized that he duplicated Pound's efforts, but felt it was an accident of his youth and his inability to afford the necessary books. Yet he thought that he could rescue the poem by focusing on the particulars of his experience—his personality, place, and time—his unique emotions directing the prosody and his peculiar technical gift twisting the language to set his work apart from the work of any of his predecessors.

Nevertheless, he acknowledged the immediate inspiration of Pound's statements in the July 1928 issue of the Dial for his subsequent movements. Specifically, "A"-7 was, in Pound's words, an "effort to make a canzone" and not get stuck automatically with the sonnet because "he had come to the end of his subject-matter." Zukofsky said that he meant "A"-7 to reinforce his criticism in "A"-1 of the writers of sonnets whose repetitions and obfuscations pretended lineage from the classics just as the inane and superficial patronizers of the arts after the performance of the Passion falsely identified themselves with the cultural elite. Moreover, "A"-7 also took up Pound's criticism of "those writers to whom vers libre was a mere . . . escape," who "having come to the end of that lurch, lurch back not into experiment with the Canzone or any other unexplored form, but into the stock and trade sonnet."³⁴ Zukofsky felt that in his experimental canzone he avoided coming to the end of his subject-matter, and avoided writing a mere sequence of sonnets, because he was inspired not by mere ideas but by the play of themes which he kept spinning together in the air, attentive to the appearance of their shifting configurations. This process was the same, Zukofsky claimed, for the poem as a whole. The themes originally configured in the first two movements were variously reconfigured in the other movements, each time appearing in a new context of particulars and from a new vantage.

The first twelve movements, Zukofsky indicated, would carry on this play of themes registered in varying historic and contemporary particulars and the second twelve would begin "An" and experiment with translating into the English language the possibilities that Pound suggested in the Dial for the canzone. In fact, only "A"-8 and -10 register the kind of particulars registered in "A" 1-6. Perhaps Zukofsky's interpretation of and relation to the contemporary situation after 1940 did not justify continuing that scheme. By then, he had effectively isolated himself within his marriage, and after Paul was born in 1943 this isolation intensified. "A"-9, a double canzone," "A"-11, a love devotional "for Celia and Paul," and "A"-12, an autobiographical poetical treatise (136 pages in the collected edition), are more introspective. Although "A" 14-19, perhaps 20 and 21, and 22-24 begin with "An" (or those two letters), they are not in any structural sense canzoni, but it may be said that in part at least they reproduce in English a virtue of the canzone, its marriage of music and word.

Next in this letter of 12 December 1930, Zukofsky tried to identify the passages of possible weakness in the poem, requested of Pound whether specific weaknesses he could see could be strengthened by any method he knew, and asked Pound not to spare his work if it were imitating the Cantos. In

comparison to other poems appearing with it in his Poetry issue, Zukofsky wrote that "A"-7 was less decorative but more a departure from the English standard than Williams' "The Botticellian Trees," and it was less incisive of direct experience than Rakosi's "Fluteplayers from Finmarken" (where Rakosi was not imitating the fashion). In his opinion, it was not, however, as Pound called it, a "contortion," although he was unsure of Pound's meaning. In other words, Zukofsky felt that "A"-7 was more accessible than Williams' poem but less than Rakosi's. Accessibility is a matter of poetics, which creates the "language" of a poem. Zukofsky's concern is not trivial. He so much wrenches English diction and syntax in his attempt to make something distinctive, or, like En Arnaut, "make new things possible" in his language, that he challenges the comprehension of the native speaker.

Zukofsky was worried, as he confessed to Pound (betraying his admiration of Pound's ability to retain spoken and conversational values while, as he put it in "American Poetry 1920-1930," "communizing quotation"), that "A" was inaccessible unless it were seriously chanted or intoned, even in passages that were originally speech or discursive commentary. In this it differed from the Cantos, since his poem had to be approached not as speech but, concluding his discussion of "A" on a positive note, as melodic design.³⁵ Perhaps on this note Zukofsky realized that he need not be worried. The fact that his poetics requires a special approach to effectively realize its complex intentions, both isolates and redeems "A". "There are," after all, "different techniques."³⁶ Meaningful uniqueness might create difficulty of understanding but also rewards one's effort to master it; the difficulty of "A" gave the work its being.

Pound responded on 25 December 1930:

Re / yrs / re / "A"

I concurrrrr. I see no reason fer yr/ being discouraged. No pale regrets. And printing "7" in yr/ issue has my O.K.

The whole thing is an advance. The Whistlerian dictum that a picture ought to be finished at every stroke of the brush, comes from Japan and has to be taken cum grano. (Danger of a thing that stops at the end of every chapter and yet DONT stop.

Also, thinking of Zukofsky's statement that his only conscious design to unify "A" was based on the line from "The" and the Passion, Pound added: "You can't unconsciously multitudinously incarnadine the sea."³⁷ Pound implied that the original on which "A" depended is so obvious and so unique that its dependence could not have been accidental. At any rate, Pound advised Zukofsky to go on with "A".

Pound and Zukofsky continued to discuss "A" through the thirties. Aside from notes on practical matters regarding, in 1931 and 1932, the inclusion of "A" 1-7 in An "Objectivists" Anthology and, in 1933, the inclusion of "A" 5-7 in Pound's Active Anthology, they were concerned with mainly two questions: (1) its length (the question of whether it would sustain a life's work), and (2) its dependence and departure from Pound's advances (its relation to the Cantos).

Pound wrote:

. . . I pussnly dont believe "A" is geared for a life work. I think if you cut if off about the length of "Homage to S.P.", you wd. hold something.

Not because I objekk to peepul writing epicts;
//

Me, I am ritin another opry. More musical.³⁸

Pound's unargued opinion did not move Zukofsky,³⁹ and so Pound later added: "re/'A' not a question of weight but of AGE. of course you may be precoc=ior than I am, but still / my calklashun wd. be you cd/ finish a pome of reezonable length now to now=ish and do a longer one when you grow up."⁴⁰ But in this important matter Zukofsky was not to be mastered. "A" was not finished until 1974: in the collected edition, over 750 pages later.

On 22 December 1931, Pound had repeated that he was against "A" as a poem of some length.

Wot you posterlate is an abstracter kind of poesy than my generation went in for.
Waller TOOT.

If the alternative is McLeishing fer KRRists sake go on and do fugues and double cannons and letter puzzles and sequences of pure consonants with no god damn trace of god damn licherCGoor in 'em AT ALL.⁴¹

Pound also referred to the poem's "incomprehensible sections," to which Zukofsky replied that the poem could not be abstruse since he followed Pound's principles in "A Few Don'ts" as if they were his own, and that he doubted that Pound's phrase "abstracter kind of poesy" described "A" 1-7 because beyond its melodic design it invariably conveyed or intended to convey a meaning.⁴²

Yet the poem's specific syntax, Zukofsky's twisting of English, make reading the poem difficult in spite of its adherence to the Imagiste principles. Partly, this is the result of what is not there to be governed by "A Few Don'ts"—the poem's ellipses, which Rakosi claimed saved the poem from banality. Partly, also, this difficulty is the result of Zukofsky's rigorous efforts to increase the structural burden of his verse. He wrote Pound that the Cantos took more advantage of cinematic montage (being less of narrative) than "A" 1-7 but that "A" was more like a fugue than the Cantos because the Cantos was polyphonic whereas "A" was duophonic, and because the many voices in the Cantos were angels whereas the two voices in "A" were derived from one human being and were differentiated by theme.⁴³ Zukofsky's cinematic distinction is clear and might have been based on Taupin's review in Poetry where he associated Salmon's method of composition with the work of Eisenstein (Section 17), but Zukofsky's distinction between angelic polyphony and human bi-vocalism is both unclear and original. Since "A" 1-7 seems to be as polyphonous as the Cantos (as far, that is, as polyphony can be approximated by the necessarily linear arrangement of the poem), Zukofsky's distinction and the structural burden carried by the fugal nature of "A" 1-7 can not be clear until we have learned exactly what he meant by his divided human voice.

There does not appear to be any hint of an explanation until "A"-5 where, having there begun with the fugue as a compositional principle, Zukofsky must have realized the necessity for at least two voices to establish a fundamental thematic counterpoint. One might suppose that Zukofsky's two voices are music and thought:

Here are the roots of Zukofsky's identification of the poet with "natural dispensation," with which Tyler and Ford disagreed in the "Symposium" of the Poetry issue ([Section 16](#)). "Nature as creator" is immediately apposed to "He who creates"; "Nature as created" to "these inertial systems." Naturans, being "a mode of" naturata, as yang is a mode of yin, the two wrap around each other, like the circulation of the light that creates the Golden Flower of the Tao,⁴⁸ to create "the flower—leaf around leaf wrapped around / the center leaf," which image links Zukofsky's two voices to the everlasting flower metaphor for the music of the Passion in the previous movements of "A". In "A"-2:

Johann Sebastian . . . old . . .
 Listen . . .
 Listen, Kay . . . the music is in the flower,
 Leaf around leaf wrapped around the center leaf,
 Profuse but clear the outer leaf breaking on space;
 Bountiful the flower, there is space to the central heart⁴⁹

The first thematic voice records "these inertial systems"—what is given by his environment for him to speak, such as the Passion and the lines attributed in "A"-1 to "those who had been at the concert and in "A"-2 to Kay. The Images of this voice might also be regarded in Pound's distinction as "objective," and the Images of the second voice be regarded as "subjective" (see [Section 8](#)). The two voices are then registers of received and original themes.

A reexamination of the passage above reaffirms this hypothesis: "the words Matthew weeps" is in the first voice, naturata; "Or say, words have knees" is in the second, naturans. From the beginning of "A"-5, Zukofsky's "conversation" with Kay is resolved into these two voices:

Kay: Flowers over the heart,
 Offal (I'm kiddin' sure)
 Offal-and-What, the imagination,
 In case of emergency follow the
 next lunatic.

This registers something received, with a bit of folk wisdom from Kay as "Anybody, but a particular Anybody"⁵⁰; however, Zukofsky's response, his rationalizing, comic juxtapositioning, and mimicry, is purely original:

The reason we're not further along (But this is a swell sun,
 brother comrade,
 Ask Faust aquaplaning, Go-ethe, his spiritual (whew)!
 MacFadden,
 (Hu!) he-er vent Hel-ee-na squat from our Sidewalks,
 (Ritornelle)⁵¹

Bernard MacFadden was the publisher of a love-confession magazine, True Story, which between 1919 and 1926 established "a record of rapid growth probably unparalleled in magazine publishing."⁵² Zukofsky's

The naturata voice insists there are no airs, and, above this passage, that their stomachs are logs and their legs are wood, but the naturans voice disbelieves they are "logs" ("Are logs?!") For him the horses have stomachs and legs.

Though these voices are not always clearly differentiated in "A"-7, the tension between them creates a dynamic movement which revolves each voice around the other to form the whole a in wonderful way. The words and their music are full of comic and spirited effects.

Such is Zukofsky's thematic bi-vocalism. We now must admit the truth of his distinction between his and Pound's methods. The Cantos is surely not resolved in terms so clear and effective. Zukofsky's work has an added structural burden: the resolution of all his themes into these two voices. He reduces a complex thematic and angelic polyphony (as in the Cantos) into a simpler thematic and human duophony.

Pound similarly claimed that all the themes of the Cantos were to be resolved into three thematic groups. He wrote his father on 11 April 1927:

Afraid the whole damn poem is rather obscure, especially in fragments. Have I ever given you outline of main scheme ::: or whatever it is?

1. Rather like, or unlike subject and response and counter subject in fugue.

A.A. Live man goes down into world of Dead

C.B. The "repeat in history"

B.C. The "magic moment" or moment of metamorphosis, bust thru from quotidien into "divine or permanent world." Gods, etc.⁵⁶

W. B. Yeats reported in 1928 similarly:

Now at last he explains that it will, when the hundredth canto is finished, display a structure like that of a Bach Fugue. There will be no plot, no chronical of events, no logic of discourse, but the themes, the Descent into Hades from Homer, a Metamorphosis from Ovid, and, mixed with these, mediaeval or modern historical characters. . . . He has shown me upon the wall a photograph of a Cosimo Tura decoration in three compartments; in the upper the Triumph of Love and the Triumph of Chastity, in the middle Zodiacal signs, and in the lower certain events in Cosimo Tura's day. The Descent and the Metamorphosis—A B C D and J K L M—his fixed elements, took the place of the Zodiac, the archetypal persons—X Y Z—that of the Triumphs, and certain modern events—his letters that do not recur—that of those events in Cosimo Tura's day.⁵⁷

It appears that Pound applied his ideas as published in the Dial in July 1928 to his own work a year before Zukofsky began "A". One can see the Cantos on these grounds, like Zukofsky's flower of "leaf around leaf," as a vortex of "ply over ply."⁵⁸ Of mythical, historical, and personal archetypes all in fugal counterpoints. However, one must acknowledge that Pound did not succeed with the application of the fugal structure as well as Zukofsky. Not only was Pound's plan of writing 100 Cantos and then going back to revise their "drafts" later abandoned, but his thematic scheme is more superficially imposed on the text. Zukofsky's scheme is texturally and dramatically self-evident and resolved.

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Section 19 - The Poetry

The "Objectivists" issue of Poetry: A Magazine of Verse, "FEBRUARY 1931 / Edited by Louis Zukofsky,"¹ features the work of twenty-seven writers, including Arthur Rimbaud as translated by Emanuel Carnevali, Ernest Hemingway in Zukofsky's "Program: 'Objectivists' 1931," André Salmon as presented in review by René Taupin, Taupin himself, and the authors of the three poems in the "Symposium"—Parker Tyler, Charles Henri Ford, and Samuel Putnam.² I have divided the twenty writers whose work is in the body of the issue into two groups. The first group includes those whose greater representation in this issue (by number of pages and poems) and whose representation in Zukofsky's subsequent anthology identify them as core "Objectivists." These are, in their order in the issue, Rakosi, Zukofsky, McAlmon, Reznikoff, Rexroth, Oppen, Bunting, and Williams. The second group, the peripheral "Objectivists," were limited in this issue to one page or one poem and were not represented in An "Objectivists" Anthology. These are Howard Weeks, "Joyce Hopkins," Norman Macleod, S. Theodore Hecht, Harry Roskolenkier, Whittaker Chambers, Henry Zolinsky, Jesse Loewenthal, Emanuel Carnevali, John Wheelwright, Richard Johns, and Martha Champion. I discuss Horace Gregory, also a peripheral "Objectivist," in [Section 20.11](#). I have discussed "A"-8 by Zukofsky in [Section 18](#), "Joyce Hopkins" in [Section 14](#), and the third and first poems of Discrete Series (such is their order here) titled "1930's: I and II" by George Oppen in [Section 6](#). A poetic movement must ultimately depend not on theories but on poems. The following pages, therefore, detail how the poems yet undiscussed are or are not successful in "Objectivist" terms.

I. The Core

Rakosi

Four poems by Carl Rakosi under the collective title "Before You" begin the issue. They seem to be the work of an insecure and introverted man who is capable of great clarity and self-comprehension, for in these poems, Rakosi presented himself as a fool to parody his human weaknesses and the practices of "quasi-poets" which do not overcome such weaknesses. By the finest "Objectivist" technique, he not only overcame them himself but he achieved poems which stand as objects of "depth and novelty."³ Healthy psychic and poetic techniques are synonymous for the "Objectivist." Rakosi's poems are ingenious, playful, and comic; they also deal with serious issues of sex, psychology, history, and theology.

The first parodies the external and internal extremes of poetic and personal abandon. Its title, "Orphean Lost" refers to Orpheus the poet, whose songs tamed animate and inanimate—the beasts, the birds, and even the rivers, stones, and trees. The protagonist is like the decadent Orpheus of Ovid, who, after he failed to rescue Eurydice his bride from Hades, "refused to sleep with women"—whether in fear or in faithfulness—but "taught the men of Thrace the art / Of making love to boys."⁴

The oakboughs of the cottagers
 descend, my lover,
 with the bestial evening.
 The shadows of their swelled trunks
 crush the frugal herb.
 The heights lag
 and perish in a blue vacuum.

And I, my lover,
 skirt the cottages,
 the eternal hearths and gloom,
 to animate the ideal
 with internal passion.⁵

The protagonist is the poet lost in the "bestial evening"; it and the oakboughs "descend." The trees are animated (by the poet's music?) to satiate their sexual potential; trunks are swelled like penises and seem to rise to "heights" which "perish" in consuming climax with the sky. In the second strophe we see that this Orphean, like the original, is separated from his lover. He "skirts" the animated corporeality that surrounds him and, instead, animates the immaterial ideal.

The scene and the protagonist parody extremes of poetry and the psyche: the corporeal and the ideal. The corporeal is "bestial and "swelled"—gross and pretentious. Its "shadows" (inexactitude) "crush the frugal herb" (poetic economy) and it perishes in a formless "vacuum." The ideal, in skirting the corporeal, internalizes passion. But the healthy psyche and the true poet can be found in neither extreme: this Orphean is lost. The effect of either sensations without meaning or intentions without contact is the mystical haze that Zukofsky identified with poets whose "feeling-tone" and idea are in conflict or whose "accessibility to experience" is "attenuated."⁶

A characteristic of "Objectivism" is the unity of meaning and technique. Rakosi's rhythm-form and diction emphasize and specify the points of his parody. With seven dactyls and two spondees, the poem is not iambic; quantity is more important than stress. When one reads the poem aloud, the words "descend," "swelled," "crush," and "gloom" tend to assume extended quantities (each syllable is given more time than the words around it) to suggest the macabre. As for diction, "skirt" sets the ideal balance of aversion and attraction, and "herb" is the perfect natural symbol for frugality, "vacuum" for formlessness, and "hearths" for basic human corporeal needs.

"Fluteplayers from Finmarken" is not a record of an actual encounter with Swedish fluteplayers. Like Rakosi's other poems here, it is an example of what Pound called the subjective Image,⁷ and demonstrates the writer's ability to create a poetic object where nothing equivalent already existed; it is a case of naturans instead of naturata.⁸ Rakosi recollected:

I can only make a guess at "Fluteplayers." This will give you some idea then as to how the other poems originated. I think it has to do first of all with the fascination I've always felt towards the extreme north, the barrenness and so on of the extreme north. I must have started with that as a tone. And then the extreme north has in my mind a certain beauty, and, since it's such a simple landscape, I would associate that beauty with the sound of a flute.

See that's a single tone or note—the simplest of all instruments, its sound, like a fine line drawing. So that then you people it with two flute players meeting there.⁹

The poem was constructed, Rakosi added, “out of my original, formless inchoate feeling about the north,” but the formlessness of the generative feeling does not prohibit the clarity of the final poem. Rakosi had to construct his own clarity, his own Image, by conscious selection and creation of consonant details and corresponding poetic structures—cadence, assonance, consonance. If the poem presents an Image, it does so with the formal devices that all poems use. The specific effects of these devices are not dependent on their objective referents; the “Objectivist” poem is an object. Thus in his letter of 17 November 1930, Zukofsky claimed that the poem’s clarity was notable.

Here is its first strophe:

How keen the nights were,
Svensen.
Not a star out,
not a beat of emotion
in the humming snowhull.
(Now and then an awful swandive).

The extreme north presents the image of extreme clarity. In fact, it is so clear that no familiar support of star or emotion prevents the imminent, nightmarish self-revelation of the protagonist. Both “awful swandive” and the intrusion of the deadening soft vowels “u” and “i” and the liquid and nasal consonants “l,” “m,” and “n” into the clear, confident tone established by the hard vowels “ē,” and “ī,” (IPA vowel sounds [i] and [aI]) and hard consonants “k” and “t” presage the revelation described in the second strophe:

It seemed ordained then that
my feet slip on the seal bones
and my head come down suddenly
over a simple rock-cistvaen,
grief-stricken and archwise.
Thereon were stamped
the figures of the noble women
I had followed with my closed eyes
out to the central blubber
of the waters.

The fall presaged by “swandive” and the movement of the sounds of the first strophe is here extended to a physical fall which in turn symbolizes a metamorphical fall, the protagonist’s failure with “the noble women / I had followed.” In the imagined hell¹⁰ of this revelation, their figures are stamped with a dreamlike or Dantesque logic on the rock-cistvaen, and lead the protagonist out to nowhere. Appropriately, the comic imaging of his failure with women may also describe the methods of quasi-poets. The “central blubber / of the waters” could be the mystical object of blind desire, of personal intentions unsubstantiated with poetic sincerity.

The fall of the protagonist returns him to the stillness and barrenness of the extreme north in the third strophe:

The poem consists of reflections on the passage of civilization. Its theme, similar to "Orphean Lost," is our failure to transcend corporeality. Its first strophe follows:

Before you is Corinth—
 once a pedestal for wrestlers
 in classical shorts.
 What method in their manner!
 Shall we say the gods
 with lights behind us
 have broken wind
 in a changing system?
 Yesterday behind the olive boughs
 they too were lucid.
 Send us again, O gods,
 peppers and poppyseed,
 porphyry and white cocks.

These first thirteen lines satirically represent nostalgia for the Hellenic age, whose truth can not be regained, either by tourists or by poets. Zukofsky disapproved of the neo-classicism of H. D., for example, and claimed that another Rakosi manuscript suffered because its content seemed too dependent on a personalized set of myths, so that its language seemed like H. D.'s spurious and incoherent bacchanalia, instead of quickly conveying the precise fact at its inception. Pound, said Zukofsky, succeeded in making his allusions seem precise even when one did not know what they alluded to.¹⁵

The attempt to reproduce a gone age with allusions to things whose meaning has been lost results in work which is vague or merely personal. In "Before You," the references are objective and quickly conveyed—except in as much as they parody items whose meanings, since they were dependent upon an unsustainable, transcendent ideal, have been lost. "Peppers and poppyseed, / porphyry and white cocks are physically specific but significantly meaningless.

All that remains of Corinth is pedestals or foundations. The word "pedestal" puns on the fact that Corinth gave its name to the most elaborate order of Greek architecture, distinguished by a particular style of column and capital. It, like the wrestlers, had good form: "What method in their manner!" But these words allude to a famous line in Shakespeare; Polonius observed of Hamlet, "Though this be madness, yet there is method in't" (Hamlet, II, ii, 208). The poet imagines the pedestal for the display of wrestlers ridiculously garbed in "classical shorts." The manner of the Greek gods would also seem mad, and so the poet asks if we shall say "with lights behind us"—in the shadow of the truth? with lucidity?—whether the gods "have broken wind / in a changing system." Have they made their mark or built their sheltering monument against the flux of time? But the question answers itself; the pun reduces the godly to the corporeal—the flux they might have broken to flatulence. The gods are no longer lucid as they once were "behind the olive boughs."

So much for the gods of the old world. Of those of the new, the poem continues:

After a thousand years
 Saint Casper said: Behold

the apple blossoms of the new world,
 the early grapes,
 the young man's cartograph
 on which appears an arrow
 pointed north to heaven.
 There the gentle still idealize,
 the heart is lighter.
 And the good Cross is attended.

But we pass obscurely
 from post to sleep,
 opening the constructions
 of the virtuous and loghouse
 Puritans of Massachusetts.
 They planted radishes
 and hailed the Savior
 spreading His alarming
 feathers over the pickets.

Saint Casper's view was optimistic; the young man's "cartograph" could not still be so directed. Neither Greek nor Christian idealism can free us from our corporeal nature. We yet "pass obscurely"; our Puritan devotions to the Savior and to radishes are equally absurd; "His alarming / feathers"—protective wings or threatening snowflakes—do not enlighten us.

After another thousand years, we have abandoned Greek and Christian idealism for our individual perceptions of the "physical and resolute" facts of life:

A country house in April
 after a thousand years.
 Poor headpiece,
 you are unhappy.
 Buy yourself some alcohol for winter
 and a squirrel rifle for Sunday morning.
 You too will juggle
 rabbits, eggs, bananas—
 physical and resolute.

Tumblers in the nebula,
 is not every man
 his own host?¹⁶

If every man is the keeper of his own spirit, then he is free to explore any possible cure for his unhappiness, no matter how unideal. For winter, there is some alcohol; instead of Sunday service, there is a squirrel hunt. The "Objectivist" recognizes the pragmatic nature of these alternatives no matter how pathetic. Although alcohol does not bring spring and squirrel meat does not provide community of spirit, "rabbits, eggs, bananas," at least, are "physical and resolute." Man may waver, but can rely on items of objective and precise reference. Their meanings will not be lost.

McAlmon

Zukofsky mentioned Robert McAlmon's poem, "Fortuno Carraccioli: A Satire" (the Italian is the name of the protagonist), to Pound on 9 November 1930 as McAlmon's satire of the Italian immigrant—Carraccioli was apparently modeled on Carnevali.¹⁷

A long poem (108 lines), it represents with sincerity, in the detail of his thoughts and acts, the character and observation of a man who suffers and is misunderstood. He wants "to get things straight on people" ("Last night, sweating in my pyjamas, / with kitchen slop and sweat smells oppressing me, / I hated people, but I want now to call across / and tell that women, 'I don't hate you. / Let's understand. It's what we both put up with"). He walks the poor streets of Chicago because he is not thought of there as "a poor wop." Feeling unloved, he notes that not only "hurt romantics" dislike their lives. His self-knowledge tells him of others what they do not know themselves: "I wandered on State Street where men and women hunt. / Maybe they hunt sex, but I think they are only lonely."¹⁸ The effect is poignantly sad and funny. The poem ends with a twenty-two line lyrical reverie of his childhood in Firenze, his sense of joy and beauty contrasted with his loneliness and his sensitivity to the sufferings of others.

After the publication of the issue, Zukofsky wrote to the associate editor of Poetry, Morton Dauwen Zabel, that McAlmon apparently attempted to present the character of the protagonist in his own idiom—which resolved his idealism and frustration, his sensitivity and distress—and in the process shed light on the times in which he lives.¹⁹ The details of sincerity in "Objectivist" poems suggest the wholes of which they are parts. Like Rakosi, McAlmon resolved the complex psyche of his character into synecdochic details — idioms, actions, observations—but, unlike Rakosi, McAlmon's Image is objective. McAlmon's poem suggests an objective context, the streets of Chicago and a childhood in Firenze. Nevertheless, the poems of both authors give a sense of "rested totality," embodying the whole that is understood in the little that need be said.

Reznikoff

Charles Reznikoff's "A Group of Verse" contains six new poems which were later included in Jerusalem the Golden published in 1934 by the Objectivist Press.²⁰ Like McAlmon's, Reznikoff's context is objective; unlike McAlmon's, Reznikoff's is personal:

A GROUP OF VERSE

I

All day the pavement has been black
With rain, but in our warm brightly-lit
Room, praise God,
I kept saying to myself,
And saying not a word,
Amen, you answered.

II

From my window I could not see the moon,
And yet it was shining:
The yard among the houses—
Snow upon it—

An oblong in the darkness.

III

Among the heaps of brick and plaster lies
A girder, itself among the rubbish.

IV

Rooted among roofs, their smoke among the clouds,
Factory chimneys—our cedars of Lebanon.

IV

What are you doing in our street among the automobiles,
Horse?
How are your cousins, the centaur and the unicorn?

VI

Of our visitors—I do not know which I dislike most:
The silent beetles or these noisy flies.²¹

These poems cohere not by their objects' disjunction, but by their common esthetic and poetic qualities. Like Discrete Series, the group owes its "fragmentary nature" to their sincerity, to each poem's separate empirical derivation from a world of diverse particulars (see Section 6). Each fact expresses part of an event which in a particular way moved the poet to present it. The emotions that moved Reznikoff were as humanly simple as the understood communion and devotion of the first poem here, or the joys in the perceptions of the moon's omnipresence, of a girder's integrity, of factory chimneys' ironic similarity to "cedars of Lebanon," of the heterogeneity of the horse and the city street, or, in the last, of the humorous resignation of his inability to choose between two irritants.

Their forms follow with little elaboration the direct statement of the situations, or, indeed, their understatement, for where the sincerity of Rakosi and McAlmon works by synecdoche, the sincerity of Reznikoff works by meiosis. Reznikoff's lines vary greatly in length, in intonation, in rhythm: "Room, praise, God, / I kept saying to myself, / . . . / Horse? / How are your cousins, the centaur and the unicorn? / . . . / Of our silent visitors—I do not know which I dislike most," but only by juxtaposing them in this manner does their variation become a concern. The careful craftsmanship of each poem is deliberately effaced by phonetic, phonemic, syntactic, and semantic harmonies for the sake of each object.

Rexroth

Kenneth Rexroth wrote of his poem "Last Page of a Manuscript" to Harriet Monroe on 6 January 1931: "That Mr. Zukofsky saw fit to print this fragment is not altogether fortunate. I am not willfully obscure. The long poem of which this is the end has a quite clearly developed argument."²² The poem is, indeed, the end of a long poem by Rexroth, which appears complete in An "Objectivists" Anthology, where it is titled "Prolegomena to a Theodicy."²³

"Last Page of a Manuscript" reads:

Light
Light

The silver in the firmament
 The stirring horde
 The rocking wave
 The name breaks in the sky
 Why stand we
 Why go we nought
 They broken seek the cleaving balance
 The young men gone
 Lux lucis
 The revolving company
 The water flowing from the right side
 Et fons luminis
 The ciborium of the abyss
 The bread of light
 The chalice of the byss
 The wine of flaming light
 The wheeling multitude
 The rocking cry
 The reverberant scalar song lifts up
 The metric finger aeon by aeon
 And the cloud of memory descends
 The regant fruitful vine
 The exploding rock
 The exploding mountain cry
 Tris agios
 The sapphire snow
*Hryca hryca nazaza*²⁴

Since the syntax of this liturgical summary is clear and simple and its vocabulary and allusions (except for "byss" and "*Hryca hryca nazaza*") would be familiar to any Catholic or student of theology, it is difficult to explain Monroe's sense of its obscurity except by exaggerating the dependence of the part upon the whole. It is the result of an intense effort by Rexroth to communicate by both the liturgical nature of its rhythms and the full meaning of each symbol, allusion, and metaphor. Rexroth carefully explained to Monroe the significance of some of its terms:

The term is byss, your printer made no mistake. The term is late Neo-Platonic, and is used for the plenum, roughly, Being as contrasted with Not-Being. It emerges in western culture with John Scotus Ereugina. Pico uses it. Also Jacob Boehme, who makes much of it. I believe it is found in Blake, but I seldom read Blake's more ambitious work. And in Yeats somewhere. "Why stonde we / Why goe we nought?" is from Robert Manning of Brunne, the Tale of the Colbek Dancers, of which tale it forms a sort of chorus. Lux Lucis et Fons Luminis, from a hymn of St. Ambrose. Tris agios of course is "Sanctus Sanctus, Sanctus" The idea of the exploding rock and exploding mountain came to me while reading an early english Apocalypse of Peter, where the word petrus is played on in this way, a highly successful rhetorical device, to convey something of the intensity of Peter's vision. *Hryca hryca nazaza* is from a Goliardic love song, a mediaeval student's equivalent of "hip, hip, hooray."²⁵

On 12 January Rexroth added:

The poem of which you are printing an extract has as subject the governance of God in the world, I have tried to surround that subject with perspectives accessible to the world I find my contemporary, but I assure you it was not written irreverently.²⁶

Although Rexroth wrote for readers of greater erudition than Rakosi, McAlmon, or Reznikoff (see [Section 20.IV](#)), his attempt to surround his subject with accessible perspectives is in align with the "Objectivist" "accessibility to experience."

Perhaps Zukofsky was less interested in this poem for its "developed argument" than for its qualities of the words as sound. Coincidentally, its music is reminiscent of the devotional quality of the music of "A"-2. Zukofsky's isolation of the last page of the manuscript put the responsibility for meaning not on the poem as a referential structure but on the poem as a direct experience. If Williams is right, its meaning rests on the workings of its practical mechanism.²⁷ Pound wrote in his introduction to Cavalcanti:

When we know more of overtones we will see that the tempo of every masterpiece is absolute, and is exactly set by some further law of rhythmic accord. Whence it should be possible to show that any given rhythm implies about it a complete musical form—fugue, sonata, I cannot say what form, but a form, perfect, complete. Ergo, the rhythm set in a line of poetry connotes its symphony, which, had we a little more skill, we could score for orchestra. Sequitur, or rather inest: the rhythm of any poetic line corresponds to emotion. It is the poet's business that this correspondence be exact, i.e. that it be the emotion which surrounds the thought expressed.²⁸

Rexroth's lines have such "Objectivist" exactitude. The emotional tenor of the last page implies the theme of the whole. Since the "governance of God in the world" can be located, synecdochic, in Rexroth's "contemporary" world, it must also be located in this poem, and, particularly, in its last page; God is omnipresent.

It is fortunate, since few readers would know the literal meaning of the last line, that it is not necessary to know it. Its incomprehensibility, given the reader's faith that it must mean something, makes a meaningful statement about "the governance of God in the world."

Bunting

More obviously than Rexroth, Basil Bunting intends, in "The Word," the self-referential quality which Zukofsky achieved in Rexroth's contribution only by isolation of the part, and yet, like Rexroth's, Bunting's meaning of technique emphasizes his meaning of reference. The poem begins:

Nothing
 substance utters or time
 stills or restrains
 joins the design and the

 supple measure deftly
 as thought's intricate polyphonic
 score dovetails with the tread
 sensuous things
 keep in our consciousness.

This masterful first period flows over between lines and strophes, arresting the mind but not impeding the heart. The hard consonants and the explicit timing achieved by quantity, lineation, and syntactic delays create the persuasive force absent in, for instance, Chamber's poem in this issue. Bunting's cadences seem

to be the inevitably perfect shapes of his thoughts, so that paraphrase seems to be a corruption and not, as for Roskolenkier's poem, a clarification.

In paraphrase, ambiguities arise which in the reading do not interfere with the immediacy and meaningfulness of the verses themselves. Does Bunting's sentence mean that the poet's words (which "substance utters") can not match his intentions (his "design" and "measure") as well as his thoughts match his experience (the "tread" of "sensuous things . . . in our consciousness")? Or does it mean that the world (which "substance utters" and "time stills or restrains") can not equal the harmonies of the word (which is unrestrained or stilled by time)?

In any event, the reader feels, through the conviction of Bunting's words, that the capability of the word is extolled, which the rest of the poem confirms by celebrating the craft of cutting form from the formless, to order, to measure, and to mime Creation in its seasons including the life and death of man:

Celebrate man's craft
and the word spoken in shapeless night, the
sharp tool paring away
waste and the forms
cut out of mystery!

When the tight string's note
passes ear's reach, or red rays or violet
fade, strong over unseen
forces the word
ranks and enumerates. . . .

Mimes the clouds condensed
and the hewn hills and the bristling forests,
steadfast corn in its season
and the seasons
in their due array,

life of man's own body
and death. . . .

As "life" has been exemplified by the life of Bunting's verse, death is now described as the death of poetic technique:

The sound thins into melody,
discourse narrowing, craft
failing, design
petering out;

ears heavy to breeze of speech and
thud of the ictus.

This is a pure statement of the primary importance of "Objectivist" experimental poetic technique. Life in every sense is fostered by expansion of the possibilities of the word. In this poem, Zukofsky claimed (see [Section 20.VI](#)), the "thud of the ictus" is replaced by the liquidity of quantity.

Following the statement above, which might be considered abstract if it were not describing also itself, is a concrete example:

Appendix: Iron

Molten pool, incandescent spilth of
 deep cauldrons—and brighter nothing is—
 cast and cold, your blazes extinct and
 no turmoil nor peril left you,
 rusty ingot, bleak paralyzed blob!²⁹

Here "Objectivist" onomatopoetic precisions of diction and rhythm require, among its other poetic elements (for example, "spilth" and "blob") two inversions ("brighter nothing is" and "peril left you") and the dashes and exclamation mark describe the life and death of the metal, like the life and death of man, like spring and winter, and like the life-breath of the verse of the "Objectivists" and the cerement of the verse of poetic dilutors and reactionaries.

Williams

Zukofsky saved, for the last poem in the body of the issue, William Carlos Williams' "The Botticellian Trees." His high opinion of the poem is shown in the comments he made to Monroe and Pound ([Section 13](#)). He also commented on it in his letter to Rakosi of 6 February 1931 after Rakosi wrote to say he had gotten a kick out of the "Objectivists" issue but had found among the poems very little objectification.³⁰ Zukofsky declared that he identified the poem with Williams' best work, and that Williams' wonderful coordination of alphabet and trees is interpretive rather than qualitative—it directly presents both alphabet and trees objectified as a thing with an ideal structure: Williams' theme is stated in the first four lines, receives two expansions, one before and one after his row of dots, and is concluded in the final sentence.³¹ Not only is here a conceit optimumply deserved by the poet's materials, but it is in a poem so conscious of its own integral mechanism that reading it one learns of the spirit in which all such legitimate and meaningful equations derive:

THE BOTTICELLIAN TREES

The alphabet of
 the trees
 is fading in the
 song of the leaves
 the crossing
 bars of the thin
 letters that spelled
 winter
 and the cold
 have been illumined
 with
 pointed green

by the rain and sun
 the strict simple

 principles of
 straight branches

 are being modified
 by pinched out

 ifs of color, devout
 conditions

 the smiles of love

 until the stript
 sentences

 move as a woman's
 limbs under the cloth

 and praise from secrecy
 with hot ardor

 love's ascendancy
 in summer—

 in summer the song
 sings itself

 above the muffled words—[32](#)

The alphabet and the trees are miraculously coordinated, not only by “trees” referring to trees and spelled t-r-e-e-s, but by the fact that the trees have the same meaning as the poem, that since words compose poems and facts compose trees, as Emerson wrote, the “words are signs of natural facts,” and “the use of the outer creation” is “to give us language for the beings and changes of the inward creation.”³³ This interrelation proceeded from Williams having seen the two to the level of their common inward spirit. And so their languages state their theme in common: “The alphabet of / the trees // is fading in the / song of the leaves.” As the green leaves pinch out, the message that spelled winter in the crossed branches fades and is modified to read not of the cold but of “devout conditions / the smiles of love.”

The trees and the poem have the same meaning and they also have the same discipline, the same principles of growth and vitality. By this poem, as Williams wrote of Pound, Williams has “put us on the track of a released intelligence, a released spirit, a body that can function with what might be health.”³⁴ To put it bluntly, a poem without a straight sense to support its parts is like a tree in full leaf without branches to support them. The poem and the tree both must be like a woman moving under cloth to arouse the passion of the inward creation. The second expansion of the theme states that “the stript sentences” must move under their muffling words (like the summer leaves obscuring “the strict simple / principles of / straight branches”) “as a woman's / limbs under cloth,” so that they will sing of “love's ascendancy.”

Only by such a perception, the act of what Oppen meant by “a moment of conviction,” a synchronistic link to the Tao accompanied by joy, can one make of one's experience a “thing,” a poem as

object. Having done so, the poem, in what it is, is revolutionary, for as such it strikes, as Williams claimed Pound and Stein strike, "at the basis of thought, at the mechanism with which we make our adjustments to things and to each other. This is the significance of the term culture and an indication of literature's relation thereto."³⁵

II. The Periphery

The poems of the peripheral "Objectivists" are not as uniformly well-written as the poems of the core "Objectivists." Some seem to have been included for padding, for contrast, or for personal favor; others, however, are well-written and reveal something about "Objectivism."

Howard Week's poem, "What Furred Creature," is a question in ten lines which answers itself. The furred creature that "delicately lifting shy-pointed ears, / his trembling whiskers / touched by the ribbons of wet wind," / who "will eye brightly / through a screen of new leaves / and see winter / dead again / in a coil of old snow / under a log" is, at least, described in the poem. Although the poem contains little of significance, it is self-contained, and its significance is resolved into particulars (for example, "winter" is resolved into "a coil of old snow"), and so it is more than padding for the issue. It is pleasant matter for experience. A note on Weeks appears at the end of the issue:

Howard Weeks (died June 10th, 1928) appeared in Exile 3, edited by Ezra Pound. Pound writes in the article, Small Magazines (English Journal, Nov., 1930): "I printed very little of Weeks because he seemed to me a man of great promise; one felt that his work was bound to be ever so much better in the course of the next few months. The next few months were denied him."³⁶

Norman Macleod's residence in Albuquerque, New Mexico (to which the notes testify), suggests that his understanding of the Pueblo Indians is from first-hand observation. His "Song for the Turquoise People" represents the "sky" as "a kiva" in which the men discuss the incidents which are shrinking the "horizon" of their people. Although this conceit is first expressed with precise focus ("Sky a kiva of the turquoise people / to circle rusty earth where smoke drifts / underground"), the subsequent difficulties provoke confusion ("thoughts of men / and ritual of marriage-beds / not too discriminate [sic] / to be recalled, turned over / inconsiderately, perhaps, to make a trend / to place the philosophical tail / in memory. / Time, when the sky / covers too many incidents, / horizon gone / like a trail of tribal migration / marked by birds into the south / with a song in the eyes").³⁷ The difficulties of these lines are perhaps attributable to inaccurate syntax and diction. Unless "too" should be "to," the verb "discriminate" seems to be used in the adjectival sense of "discreet" or "discerned"; "tale" might make more sense than "tail"; the two sentences lack verbs. Nevertheless, Zukofsky may have understood the poem or thought he did and could have included it in the issue not for contrast but because, like Williams' poem in the issue, it is governed by a conceit which reflects the identify of its parts in form and spirit, and because it focuses events in time into the concrete details of a moment.

S. Theodore Hecht's "Table for Christmas" describes a female figure setting a table for Christmas with a little tree, bread, and four bottles with pink ribbons. The simplicity of her movements and of the

arrangement, unfortunately, is not presented by a simplicity of poetic mechanism; its parts are descriptive and redundant. Its first eight lines, for example, "Carefully along / The runners on the floor / She walked: / Reminded one / Not a little / Of a church aisle, / A figure going up / To an altar," might be condensed to "She walked / As to an altar / Along runners." Furthermore, the terms of Hecht's title do not bear the repetition that Hecht gives them. "The little Christmas tree" in the poem need only read "The little tree"; "And in each corner of the table / Four in all" could read, simply, "And in each corner."³⁸ Perhaps Hecht's friendship influenced Zukofsky to accept this poem as an example of sincerity. If it has virtue, it lies in direct statement. Although Hecht described and repeated the facts, he did not generalize or abstract them.

Following the poems by Hecht and Oppen is Harry Roskolenkier's "Supper in an Alms-house," in which the persona reports that on the city streets the exhaust of the autos of "the comfortable" "leave poison for my nose," and that among "constant scenes" and everyone's effort to maintain appearances, "a man collapses." Finding himself desperate, he says: "I shall bow to him in religion / for a bowl of string-bean soup," and forget the Lord "as the soup finds its worship." The final line, "And the cannons do not aim at the sky," was taken by Zukofsky from another poem (see [Section 14](#)). By it, Zukofsky expressed more capably than Roskolenkier the radical intention implied in the speaker's lack of direction. The poem implies an indictment against a government whose "cannons" are set for self-destruction, a society which discourages the proper ethical resolution of its problems. Although the whole seems weak and confused, at least its parts have sincerity. Roskolenkier wrote: "Even an aged man will change his shirt and boil his cuffs / his collar starched, his suspenders lifted to the neck," when he could have said "Everyone maintains appearances."³⁹

In Whittaker Chambers' "October 21st, 1926," the speaker, before his "brother" on a railroad siding, observes the momentum of the clouds and freighters and preaches resignation to inevitable death, as is clear in the first of the poem's five stanzas:

The moving masses of the clouds, and the standing
Freighters on the siding in the sun, alike induce in us
That despair which we, brother, know there is no withstanding.⁴⁰

Chambers' analogies are located in the scene and are methodically brought to bear in developing his theme. The second and third strophes expand the statement of the first, the fourth argues that flowers must gather their roots in darkness, and the final two preach resignation.

What Chambers gains by alliteration, he loses by the high tone of the diction, by (as the poem unfolds) feminine rhymes on -ing, -asses, and -ation, and by a repetitiveness and lack of rhythmic driving force. Nevertheless, this poem, more obviously than other "Objectivist" poems, was meant not merely to give knowledge but to make something happen; it is in this sense an object of experience. This date marks the third or second day after the expulsion of Leon Trotsky and Grigori Zinoviev from the Politbureau following Joseph Stalin's victory over leftist opposition, the first day after the death of the socialist Eugene Debbs, and, more significantly for Chambers, a month and a half after the death of his brother, Richard Godfrey, who was also memorialized by Zukofsky in "A"-3.⁴¹

Henry Zolinsky's "Horatio," in contrast to Chambers' poem, is a hymn expressing the speaker's joy in life; however, except for two lines ("Into the gold upon puddles and mudflats" and "Taut fingers combing the wind"), there is little in the poem to cause joy. Its rhythmic ineptitude ("The squatting stones, and / Streams to flow") is unrelieved by slant-rhyme (roll / flow) and falsely ambiguous chiasmus ("Joy bringing so little, / But so little bringing joy"). The phrases by which the speaker perhaps intended to produce levity ("A burden of ding-dong-bell" and "This golden-day-part of me") give it a childish tone. Its epigram is misquoted from Hamlet: "Are you there, Horatio? / A piece of him."⁴²

Jesse Loewenthal's "Match" gives another conceit. Since a paraphrase could only be more wordy, I quote it in full:

I will not rub your green head,
 Match of black waxed paper,
 Where it says: strike here.
 Others have been torn from
 Their stems before,
 I see,
 By soot-covered headstones,
 Where the R. R. passes the cemetery.⁴³

This is a similarity (or "match") between things "strongly felt together," an interpretive metaphor.⁴⁴ But the poem's meaning is not limited to the perception of similarity; its conceit also suggests an agent to tear off and strike the matches. By association, that agent is the railroad, representative of the megalithic industrial powers which drive the common man to his grave. Loewenthal's sincerity resolves this abstraction into its concrete terms—matches and headstones, and produces a very good "Objectivist" poem.

Following Loewenthal's poem are Emanuel Carnevali's translations: "From Arthur Rimbaud: Wakes—III, To One Reason." Perhaps Zukofsky made the best of what he received from Pound in a show of support for his fellow writer, since Carnevali was suffering from encephalitis and scapolin, but these poems are not excellent translations. Unless Carnevali began with a corrupted text, it appears that he obscured the sense of the originals by mistranslation of simple words including pronouns ("rut" for coque: hull; "wood" [only questionable] for taillis: copse; "of his" for toi: of yours, and "I" for on: they), by using non-English word order ("sing to you those children"), and by omitting quotation marks and an entire line and phrase.

Nevertheless, Rimbaud is worth having in spite of such distractions, and the translations have some virtue as objects. The quick succession of metaphors in "Wakes—III" causes the reader to refocus on the essentials of the poem. "Objectivist" poetics requires neither simplicity nor propagandistic message, only the unity of exact emotion focused as the direction of clear and vital particulars.

"One is brought back," wrote Zukofsky of Reznikoff's "metaphor . . . presented with conciseness in a word," "to the entirety of the single word which is in itself a relation, an implied metaphor, an arrangement and a harmony" (Section 8).⁴⁵ In Carnevali's translation, the structure of "Wakes—III" is based on the multiple meanings of the title word. Firstly, it refers to the watch held over the body of a dead

person prior to burial. It is in this sense that "the lamps and carpets," the "tapestry," and the heaving "breast of Amélie" are found in the poem. Secondly, it refers to the track left by a moving ship in the water. Thus "The lamps and the carpets of the wake make the noise of waves / in the night, along the rut and around the steerage." This is not a case of the synesthesia of sight and hearing. The line precisely indicates a relation between the two senses of the word. Although this is an extreme example, "Objectivist" poetics is not without verbal play. The next line substantiates the conceit: "The sea of the wake, such as the breast of Amélie." Amélie's sighs, in the wake of the death of the loved one, heave like the sea in the wake of the ship. The two senses are indisputably related. Passings create disturbances.

Lastly, the third sense of the word refers to the state of being awake. If the first two senses could not awaken the reader to the structural possibilities of the single word, then the third might do so, for it presents the flight of turtledoves in a wall cloaked by an artistic illusion, a tapestry representing a green copse. "The tapestry, just at medium height, the wood of laces dyed / in emerald, where the turtle-doves of the wake throw themselves."⁴⁶ The poet awakens the doves in the tapestry and throws them into the imaged Eden, just as the attendants at the wake in their passion might imagine the dead (the spirit is frequently symbolized in literature and art as a bird) to have been thrown into heaven, which is also, perhaps, an illusion. Although the reader upon which the awakening of art depends is like the attendant of the wake, waiting for the miracle, the reader has more chance, like Pygmalion, of being satisfied. Confronted with the death of poetry in the twenties ("thud of the ictus"), no lover of poetry should remain unmoved. This "Objectivist" poem is an emerald copse woven with words to be so imagined.

The second translation, "To One Reason," in spite of its obscurity as translation, is interpretable as a prophesy supporting "the arrogance of youth." The first line, "A hitting of your fingers on the drum shoots out all the sounds and begins the new harmony,"⁴⁷ could refer to the possible success of the "Objectivist" poetic revolution. Once the poetry public becomes conscious of "objectively perfect" and becomes interested in clear or vital particulars, they should agree with Zukofsky that "there was no literary production" in the previous decade, and the new harmony should begin.

John Wheelwright's "Slow Curtain" presents yet another conceit: the terms in which the relationship of two lovers may be considered as a stage production. The poem's cadences are liquid, quick, and effortlessly read. Moreover, the poem has, in proper proportions, humor ("It is an amateur performance"), perspicuity ("The actors are their own audience. / As actors, they are artists; / but as audience, they are critics"), and pathos ("The lovers face one another. / Neither moves a muscle. // There is no applause").⁴⁸ The sincerity of this poem in my opinion falls short of achieving objectification only because it is too abstract; it is a schematic representation of any relationship rather than a presentation of a particular relationship.

Zukofsky felt obligated to include in his issue a poem by Richard Johns, who had published Zukofsky and his friends in *Pagany* ([Section 15](#), Zukofsky's point 11 of 6 November 1930). Here, "The Sphinx: for W C W" describes Williams on a day off at the beach building and destroying a sphinx of sand as his "wife and boy watch; laugh, / sleepy." This falls short of sincerity. Perhaps Zukofsky included it only

to avoid alienating Johns. To its credit, the lightness of its lines present the gaiety of the "brain forgetting, / letting go," but this emotion seems inconsistent with the object Williams builds there, the sphinx. The function of the sphinx in the poem is antithetical to the life-threatening riddle; that it connotes it represents, simply, the worries of his life which, "playing hookey / from pills and potions," he destroys in effigy: "building a body / he may destroy / with down-patting feet // happily / daily." These lines demonstrate the superficiality of the poem's conception. A man's problems are not solved "happily / daily" by "playing hookey."⁴⁹

Martha Champion's "Poem" might be read as a comment on Johns'. There are places we will not go, however inviting they are, because they lull us, like the lotus, to sleep:

There are places we will not go:
 Where yellow birds fly—
 And the high hum of their voices
 Is like the whirl of sewing-machines.
 Or ancient
 Moss grows, and the ground is soft,
 And yellow-throated lizards with purple backs,
 Kneel in the grass.
 And what the air does is simple: it makes us sleep.⁵⁰

Champion's craftsmanship is not flawed as was Johns' by redundancy and trifle. Her lines' weight and timing are precisely graphed by their arrangement in three margins. Her alliterations and assonances are eminently musical ("we will not go," "where yellow," "grows," "ground," "yellow-throated," "grass"), and their music is of the emotion most appropriate to the discretion she takes, ironically, in describing where she will not go.

Although these poems may not be monuments of poetic genius and public attention, they are examples of different poetic techniques employed in a common effort (with different degrees of success) to communicate things (whether subjective or objective) of actual and human significance in terms of particulars composed in appropriate forms coalescing into wholes which strike the reader with the intensity of the real.

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Section 20 - Critical Reactions

I. Harriet Monroe

Harriet Monroe's editorial in the March 1931 issue of Poetry, "The Arrogance of Youth," defended the poets of the teens against the "Objectivists." She thought that the former achieved in their youth much to be preserved and respected, and the latter were, where not incomprehensible, banal or arbitrary. Referring to the passage in "Program: 'Objectivists' 1931" where Zukofsky discussed his "stricture of names generally cherished as famous,"¹ Monroe observed:

There we have it. With one grand annihilating gesture this young exponent of a "new movement" sweeps off the earth the proud procession of poets whom, in our blindness and ignorance, we had fondly dedicated to immortality. I turned to his Symposium article for comfort, but in vain; if any of these were mentioned there, it was deprecatingly, to enforce a contrast with the elect. Robinson, Lindsay, Frost, Masters, Sandburg, Jeffers, Miss Millay, Amy Lowell, Elinor Wylie, the once-revolutionary imagists—these and the other unfortunates born too soon are lost forever in that age of darkness when there was "no literary production—none at all"—like those nine blank reigns recorded by the Chinese sage. And why? Not because their work lacked beauty of rhythm or phrasing or imagery, richness of emotional or intellectual quality, essential truth of motive, close regard for the difficult exactitudes of poetic art—not for lack of all these or any one of them are these poets of the last two decades consigned to outer darkness, but because they possessed "neither consciousness of the objectively perfect nor an interest in clear or vital particulars." In short, because these poets do not fit into a theoretic scheme spun out of brain fabric by a group of empirical young rule-makers, they are simply not poets at all, and the waste-basket is their proper destiny.²

Monroe not only loved the work of these "non-poets," she detested the work Zukofsky claimed as models of perfection. She offered the case to "our readers" but left them no doubt as to their decision.

Monroe's difficulty, and the difficulty of most of her readers at that time, was with realizing the practical sense of Zukofsky's "theoretic scheme." His definitions of the new poetic virtues were too abstruse to express their newness, let alone the appropriateness of their newness. Monroe wrote: "Mr. Zukofsky rightly stresses sincerity, but he rarefies this solid solid virtue, common enough among artists, with gaseous definitions to be breathed only by the elect."³ Although she had read Zukofsky's essay on Reznikoff, Monroe still thought that "sincerity" was "the same old process of the poet's mind which the world heard of long ago." She missed entirely the fact that Zukofsky applied the term not to the poet but to the poem. She sensed Zukofsky's theoretical nervousness, but she did not locate it; she did not realize its cause or its meaning. She was right in valuing both "essential truth of motive" and "close regard for the difficult exactitudes of poetic art," but not in believing that her admired poets had achieved both. The virtue of integrity can only be embodied in the common sincerities of the poet and the poem. Neither intended genuineness (personal sincerity) nor technical exactitude (poetic sincerity) can stand on their own. The sincerity of the mind and soul of the poet regards the effective conception of the poetic truth; the sincerity

of the sense and music of the poem regards the effective communication of the first sincerity in its regards. Pound's principle, "The perception of the intellect is given in the word, that of the emotions in the cadence," correlates personal and poetic sincerities to achieve the virtue of poetic integrity.

The "Objectivists" were reacting against a generation of poets whose integrity was asserted but not substantiated by their work, whose sincerity regarded only, as Monroe wrote, a virtue "among artists," a process "of the poet's mind." They did not know the meaning and use of current technical innovations. That knowledge had been left with its inventors—Stein, Joyce, Pound, Williams—and with the exceptional few—Cummings, McAlmon, Moore, Stevens. That knowledge was passed on mostly by Pound and Williams only after they had lost the general respect, by surpassing the general comprehension, of their own generation, and it was passed on only to a few—including Basil Bunting, George Oppen, Charles Reznikoff, Carl Rakosi, Louis Zukofsky. Meanwhile, the verse of Monroe's "once revolutionary imagists" either was structured without responsibility to an integrity of emotional response to the generative experience or object, to "what one encountered, what one saw, the reality of the world," as Oppen put it ([Section 6](#)), or was free without means to establish a technical integrity to correspond with, to communicate, an integrity of perception. The weakness of their work, its lack of exact correlation of emotion and technique, had reached a critical stage in the twenties, and by the Depression, with too few exceptions, it was either quaint or frivolous, rigid or effusive, obdurate or indulgent. Failing to achieve an integrity of both poet and poem, they failed to communicate an integrity of either, and so, in a bad time, gave poetry a bad name. "Objectivism" was the necessary corrective. The virtue of sincerity must be conceived in the integrity of the poet, but it can not be communicated without the integrity of the poem. "Consciousness of the 'objectively perfect'" and "interest in clear or vital 'particulars'" were intended to satisfy this latter requirement.

"The first question at that time in poetry was simply the question of honesty, of sincerity," said George Oppen. Romanticism and imagism had failed to achieve integrity by failing to substantiate emotion in technique—by not "forming a poem properly," by not "achieving form." "That's what," Oppen claimed, "'objectivist' really means. . . . People assume it means the psychologically objective in attitude. It actually means the objectification of the poem, the making an object of the poem."⁴

"Objectivism" took for granted the necessity for personal sincerity and focused on poetic sincerity. Williams wrote that without technical integrity a poem may be intended to mean anything, "but it will for all that be as empty as a man made of wax or straw." Further: "Only by being an object sharply defined and without redundancy will its form project whatever meaning is required of it. It could well be, at the same time, first and last a poem facing as it must the dialectic necessities of its day."⁵ "Objectification" is not, as Monroe mistook it, "our old friend imagination, somewhat circumscribed and specialized."⁶ The practical sense of Zukofsky's theoretic scheme was to give a new measure of integrity, a discipline by which a poet could validate in the particulars of language the sincerity that existed in his good intentions, and, if he had enough skill, achieve the poem as object, an outer integrity to convey his inner integrity.

The "Objectivist" corrective suffered the fault of all correctives. Zukofsky insisted on the nervous extreme, the poem as a passionless, mechanical thing, in reaction against those whose shapes were justified only by an intuition of the forms of things unknown," by "the same old process" of "our old friend imagination" which, by habitual repetition, had lost its meaning.

The "Objectivists" thought that the work of Monroe's immortal imagists had lost its original freshness, its generative integrity. Lines like Edwin Arlington Robinson's "A flying word from here and there / Had sown the name at which we sneered," Vachel Lindsay's "It is portentous, and a thing of state / That here at midnight in our little town," Robert Frost's "My long two-pointed ladder's sticking through a tree / Toward heaven still," or "My Sorrow, when she's here with me, / Thinks these dark days of autumn rain / Are beautiful as days can be," Edgar Lee Masters' "I do not like my garden, but I love / The trees I planted and the flowers thereof," Carl Sandburg's "What was the name you called me?— / And why did you go so soon?," Edna St. Vincent Millay's "Love has gone, and left me and the days are all alike. / Eat I must, and sleep I will—and would that night were here," Amy Lowell's "The white mares of the moon rush along the sky / Beating their golden hoofs upon the glass heavens," and Elinor Wylie's "Say not of Beauty she is good, / Or aught but beautiful" no longer struck, if they ever did, "at the basis of thought, at the mechanism with which we make our adjustments to things and to each other."⁷

On 16 January 1931, before the "Objectivists" issue was released, Zukofsky replied to a letter from Morton Zabel, who had implied that Zukofsky's issue was already being criticized. Zukofsky wondered who these tactfully anonymous critics were.⁸ By March, of course, he knew that Monroe was chief among them. Poetry had become a grudging host; its editors seemed to have little understanding or sympathy for their guests. But even Zukofsky, who had been urged to stir up controversy, was unprepared for the controversy that ensued. The correspondence sections of subsequent issues of Poetry represented the confusions of critics trying to clarify principles and rectify the "Objectivists."

II. Horace Gregory

The correspondence section of the April issue of Poetry began:

Contradictory comments have reached us in regard to the February number and Mr. Zukofsky's editorship: from that of the Princeton student who congratulates us upon achieving an interesting issue at last, and wonders if, after that climax, we will go back to our old benighted ways—to the protest of the Long Island editor who mailed back his copy first-class, with a letter demanding the price of it:

My money
 is what i want
 you heard me . . . money

You got it
 and i got poetry
 which, metaphysically speaking, is
 nothing but horsehair and metal discs in a Bach fugue . . .
 my money, my god, my money!

and so forth—a page of it, which gave all the editors a merry moment.⁹

The "Objectivists" were not without a serious defender, although he came from within their own group, and his approbation was mixed with disapprobation, at least to the degree that he did not understand, with some reason, Zukofsky's intentions. The correspondence section of the April issue continued:

But certain letters we have received are more serious. Horace Gregory, having read the number twice and dreamed about it, congratulates everybody concerned, and continues:

I believe the issue is a landmark, an important event in the writing of American poetry. It is, however, a Left Bank issue with offices on lower Fifth Avenue, New York, where the Menorah Journal appears whenever it can raise enough money to ship copy to the printer. There is a curious strain of Jewish nationalism, disguised as a Greek chorus, reciting its refrain throughout the poems. As a middle-westerner of pioneer American stock, with a touch of Edgar Lee Masters in my make-up, I feel a bit lonely, particularly in New York.¹⁰

Of this criticism, Zukofsky wrote to Monroe on 11 February 1931 that Gregory was charitable, at times too charitable (for instance, perhaps the issue was not a "landmark"), and at times too hasty in conclusion. For instance, Zukofsky proffered evidence showing that the "strain of Jewish nationalism" was inessential to the "Objectivists." Specifically, Zukofsky had only twice visited the offices of the Menorah Journal, they had rejected his article on Reznikoff claiming it was not in their customary line, and if Gregory was to read "A"-4 and 5 he would discover that Zukofsky was not biased toward the Jews.¹¹

Gregory continued:

At the risk of being a dogmatist, I'd like to express a full opinion of the Objectivists. Mr. Zukofsky has done valuable work indeed by making an effort to combine the little poetry movements of the last ten years under one banner. This issue of poetry clears the air and will be the starting-point of a new movement. So far, so good. My quarrel with his program is that it doesn't go far enough and that we are left gasping for fresh air.

If Gregory had read "American Poetry 1920-1930," he might have thought Zukofsky went too far, but on the basis of what had been included in the February issue he felt the "Objectivists" were too limited.

This limitation I think has several reasons for being: I D' (1) Mr. Zukofsky has placed Charles Reznikoff, a man of minor abilities, at the top of his scale and then proceeded downward. he has failed to show how his movement has a relationship to such men as Hart Crane, Yvor Winters, Malcolm Cowley, Allen Tate, Kenneth Fearing, and even—this is a long jump, but an important one—Robinson Jeffers. (2) If his movement means anything at all (and as I see it, it does) it must embrace at some point the work of every original poet in American today. Mr. Zukofsky should make some effort to show how such an original artist as Hart Crane either falls outside or may be included within his range of definitions. Although I believe that such men as Yvor Winters and Allen Tate have shot their bolts, their early work showed some of the same tendency that we find in this issue of POETRY. (3) Isn't Mr. Zukofsky's preoccupation with technique driving him into the same dilemmas that have cut short the activities of Yvor Winters and Allen Tate? With his program he has had an opportunity to drag poetry out of the library (where the revolt of 1912-1916 died), and into the streets, in much the same fashion that Antheil drove music out of the concert halls.¹²

moving. Mr. Zukofsky's Objectivists will die for lack of oxygen if they ignore the panorama of strictly American life, including the class struggle. Like the Humanists, they will be forced backward into the library, and their material for poetry will merely feed upon past performances. In this retreat they will forget the power of the specific images out of which some of the greatest poetry of all times is written. Their effort should be to carry on the non-"literary" elements in their work to survival, something for which Ezra Pound and Carlos Williams will be remembered; and here I might well include such men as Sandburg and Bodenheim.¹⁵

In his letter to Monroe, Zukofsky argued that if Gregory thought the "Objectivists" "ignored the panorama of strictly American life" then he overlooked the salient intention of their program and the implicit character of nearly all their poems, particularly "A"-7.¹⁶ Indeed, Gregory's "A Tombstone with Cherubim" is neither propagandistic nor, any more than one can expect of any short poem, evokes "the panorama of strictly American life."

Gregory was not, as his opening comment shows, against the movement. He only wished to explain that he thought it did not go far enough.

I would say that Mr. Zukofsky's definition of objectification and sincerity would open the way for new subject matter (American life in the detail which we recognize as characteristic, and the rejection of much of what we call "poetic" diction). With this plank in his platform, he would be able to utilize whatever equipment he has to offer.

As to the individual contributors to this issue, I believe that Carl Rakosi and Whittaker Chambers show most promise. Such men as McAlmon I believe to be dead as Tate and Winters, but in his own fashion. However, it is hardly fair to isolate the work of individuals here—the issue is planned as a mass movement, rather than for the selection of striking individual pieces. On the whole I find myself more in agreement with Mr. Zukofsky than with any other group that has come into the limelight. My only regret is that the tendency to speculate exhaustively about the technic of writing leads more often than not to the creation of introverted and minor poetry.¹⁷

Gregory's concluding sentence shows his awareness of his own sympathy for the whole whose part received Zukofsky's too exclusive attention. The other Objec"Objectivists"tivists used "Objectivist" techniques to present details characteristic of American life.

III. Stanley Burnshaw

The editors of Poetry, next printed in full a letter to Louis Zukofsky from Stanley Burnshaw, followed by Zukofsky's full reply. Burnshaw was a poet as well as a critic. His poetry first appeared in the March issue of Poetry. The note on him in that issue claims for him a translation of André Spire and magazine publications of verse and prose in French and English in addition to work printed on his own hand press. A graduate of the University of Pittsburgh in 1925, and later employed in a steel mill, "He is now in the advertising business."¹⁸

His letter began:

Dear Sir: As spokesman for the "Objectivists" you will doubtless be willing to answer several questions which rereadings of the current issue of POETRY have failed to explain: 1) How is Objectivism related to past poetry? Is it a new ramification (such as Dadaism, Jemenfoutism, Surrealism, for instance), or can it be traced to certain

verse existing in past centuries (as in the case of so-called "metaphysical" verse, for example)?¹⁹

Zukofsky gave two answers to this first question, the first serving also for Burnshaw's questions 3, 4, and 5. He declared:

1) Poetry is "past" or "news" only to historians of literature and to certain lay readers; to poets (craftsmen in the art of poetry) and to competent critics, poetry. Interpretation differs between individuals and sometimes there are schools of poetry; i.e., there is agreement among individuals. But linguistic usage and the context of related words naturally influence an etiquette of interpretation (common to individuals, and, it has been said, "for an age" — though all kinds of people live in an "age").²⁰

This does not directly answer Burnshaw's question (whether "Objectivism" represents a break with or a development of certain past verse), but says that, although there are "schools" of agreement, "poetry" is an absolute whose interpretation depends on the individual, except in as much as the age, through changing usages, influences "an etiquette of interpretation."

Zukofsky's second answer collects and supports three statements by Zukofsky on the subject:

1) Vide, Sincerity and Objectification (in February POETRY): ". . . anticipated a conviction that surrealism in 1928 was not essentially novel." (P. 273.) "The process of active literary omission" is implied in "past poetry" but "at any time has been rare." "New writers had better be given a chance to find their own forebears." (American Poetry, The Symposium, p. 60). Mr. Rexroth reads Dante, Chapman, Racine, Kynaston, Davies of Hereford, Du Bartas; Mr. Williams, Shakespeare. The writer has read Bach's and Picander's text of St. Matthew Passion.

Reznikoff decided to omit surrealistic verse from Five Groups of Verse (1929); the discretion evident in his process of omission is characteristic of but not exclusive to the "Objectivists," but each "Objectivist" must judge the value of symbolism for himself, choosing his own literary models. Even though the "Objectivists" might be in relative agreement, here Zukofsky did not say so. In "Recencies' in Poetry," however, he suggested that although the "Objectivists" did not agree in common to establish a movement, they might form, by their individual attentions to "the craft of poetry," a common revolution:

The interest of the issue was in the few recent lines of poetry which could be found, and in the craft of poetry, NOT in a movement. The contributors did not get up one morning all over the land and say "objectivists" between tooth-brushes. Somewhere the so-called program of the number implied that a "poet" who is not conscious of Lenin's statement that it is better to have lived thru a revolution than to write about it is not worth his salt. This may seem pigheaded — but the interest of poets is after all in particulars.²²

To Burnshaw's second question:

2) Is the poetic of Objectivism imputed to inherencies of the language (as was René Ghil's system, for example), or is it created and invented into a new system (as was Jean de Baïf's vers mesuré, or Spire's vers libre)?²³

Zukofsky replied, first, curtly: "2) The poets in the February issue of POETRY have written obviously in English,"²⁴ and then, as a corollary, obscurely:

2) "Inherencies in the language" (French presumably) of René Ghil were created or invented by Spire? or not used by Jean de Baïf? Of course, there are different prosodies: counting syllables, accent, quantity. Mr. Basil Bunting, in The Word, is interested in the adaptation of classical quantitative measures to English, as was Jean de Baïf in their adaptation to French. Ezra Pound's How to Read, explaining the poetic charging or energizing of language, is again offered for publication to some enterprising book-concern, as against "the codifications of rhetoric books."²⁵

The poetic of the "Objectivists" is neither "imputed to inherencies in the language" nor "created and invented into" a specific prosody. It is "imputed to inherencies" which transcend languages (French or English) and to which all prosodies (systems of meter) are subservient. A poetic is a set of epistemological and ethical assumptions and criteria which different prosodies might follow and satisfy. The "Objectivists" do not share a prosody; they share the principle that prosody must serve the object of the poem.²⁶ Bunting would have been interested in quantity because it could form patterns which more subtly present the precise forms of the object than stress could. Although the "Objectivists" share a language, "Objectivism" is not a "codification"; it depends on shared human perceptual abilities to charge or energize their language. In How to Read, Pound wrote that a poet's work is fresh, durable, and useful "in proportion as his work is exact, i.e., true to human consciousness and to the nature of man."²⁷ The "Objectivist" poetic is the obligation to present with exactitude the immanent qualities of the human condition and the reality of the world in which we find ourselves.

Burnshaw:

3) Is Objectivist poetry a programmed movement (such as the Imagists instituted), or is it a rationalization undertaken by writers of similar subjective predilections and tendencies (as was the case with the neo-classic movement which centered about Moréas)? Is there a copy of the program of the Objectivist group available?²⁸

Zukofsky felt his first answer, regarding individual interpretation and agreement among individuals, answered this as well, but he added:

3) To those interested in programmed movements "Objectivist" poetry will be a "programmed movement." The editor was not a pivot, the contributors did not rationalize about him together; out of appreciation for their sincerity of craft and occasional objectification he wrote the program of the February issue of POETRY, which is contained in the several definitions of An Objective and the use of this term extended to poetry.²⁹

The "Objectivists," as Zukofsky asserted from the first, was not a "new group"; it was a new choosing. Pound wrote to Monroe of the issue:

The point is that although most of the contents was average, the mode of presentation was good editing. The zoning of different states of mind, so that one can see what they are, is good editing.³⁰

The "Objectivists" issue was more a reflection of Zukofsky than Burnshaw imagined. The contributors did not use him as a "pivot." Rather, he used their work to present what he considered best in poetry of his time. Burnshaw had already seen the only "copy of the program of the Objectivist group available."

The above issues concern the extrinsic nature of "Objectivism." Burnshaw's fourth matter concerns its more intrinsic qualities:

4) These questions pertain to generalities and are not so difficult for my intelligence to solve, as are the questions arising from the distinguishable characteristics of Objectivist poetry itself. I believe I understand that two characteristics are particularly typical of Objectivist poetry: sincerity and objectification. I believe I understand what you mean by sincerity. It is "inevitability of verbal expression" is it not? . . . and as such it is true of all estimable poetry.³¹

Zukofsky agreed, but, for him, "poetry" is an absolute term, not a value term: "estimable" is redundant; work not worthy of esteem is simply not poetry.

Burnshaw continued:

But as for objectification, I can see two possible meanings deducible from your exposition in POETRY: (1) an application of James' stream-of-consciousness hypothesis employed in some manner different from that of Gertrude Stein; or (2) the quality of satisfying-wholeness which makes a poem an entity, which accords it "rested totality" in your phraseology. This first possible meaning is proved wrong, however, by the presence of W. C. Williams and Reznikoff as Objectivist poets. And the second possible meaning is invalidated by the fact that all estimable poetry is marked by a satisfying-wholeness. And in this case, your two criteria would be true of all estimable poetry, and would merely indicate that the Objectivists are only offering new interpretations of a purely subjective nature to matters of inevitability-of-verbal-expression (sincerity) and satisfying-wholeness (objectification). Obviously this conclusion which I find myself with, is an absurdity; and I am left with only one other possibility deducible from your exposition. If I have read it correctly: namely, that by objectification is meant the fact that a poem contains a new and absolute individuality which acts as a self-contained, created object in itself.³³

Zukofsky's response is brief to the point of opacity, although part of the problem is the result of the printer's errors with punctuation:

"Objectification"—yes, "self-contained" interpretations and therefore objective (contextual) not "subjective" in nature: (1), also "satisfying-wholeness;" (2), statement; (1) esthetic, statement; (2) psychological. Again, "true of all poems." "Absurdity:" cf., note 3 above in answer to question 3.³⁴

Objectification is not a matter of a subjective interpretation, an estimation of poetic value; it is the achievement of the poem as object. Whereas Burnshaw uses "self-contained" to describe the poem, Zukofsky uses it to describe its interpretation. In this light, it appears, so long as the interpretation is "objective (contextual) not 'subjective' in nature," it does not matter whether the interpretation is psychological or esthetic; i.e., whether it regards the poem's means (1) of reflecting a stream of consciousness or (2) of achieving a "satisfying-wholeness." In other words, according to Zukofsky, Burnshaw's three possibilities are not exclusive. Although Zukofsky balked at the adjective "subjective," the "Objectivists" were giving their personal (hence subjective) interpretations of criteria applicable to all great poetry. Burnshaw invalidated his first possibility because he wrongly assumed that "Objectivism" was a programmed movement which requires a uniformity of prosody. The "Objectivist" program dictates a poetic—that the consciousness presented in the poem is of particulars, "things as they exist," and that those

particulars be directed toward a unified effect. An "Objectivist" may avoid the unreal and achieve the presentation of an object in a sonnet or in a series of seven of them, even if its words have movement such as is typical of Stein.

Burnshaw's fourth point continues, speaking of the possibility that objectification means that the poem contains an individuality which acts as a self-contained object:

Now this, of course, would be true of all fine poems (exclusive of fragmentary compositions), unless you attribute to the words constituting a poem, some new identities apart from their normal meanings: unless you attribute to the words absolute meanings in themselves and look upon them not as names for things and acts, which they have been chiefly used for in the literature of the past. If this is your use of words in Objectivist poetry, where do the words derive their new meanings from, and what are these new meanings?³⁵

Since Burnshaw thought that what is true of "Objectivist" poetry can not be true of all fine poetry, he needed a means of objectification which does not depend on sincerity, on words as "names for things and acts," the means of other fine poetry. He needed to define some kind of self-referential, "absolute" meanings for words. The "Objectivists," however, believed that words have both referential and self-referential meanings, and that objectification is the product of both. In his answer, Zukofsky referred to three statements in the program of the issue which testify to the "Objectivist" reliance on referential meaning and suggested that the "new and absolute individuality" of the poem that Burnshaw sought was the self-referential possibility of "words as movement" such as is typical of Stein:

"Words . . . as names, things and acts:" the writer asks his critic to read two other items included (evidently with a purpose) in the February issue of POETRY—René Taupin's discussion of Salmon's Nominalistic Poetry, and the editor's note to Symposium, by Messrs. Tyler and Ford; cf., also p. 273—"writing . . . the detail, not mirage, of seeing, of thinking with the things as they exist." However, for the possible meaning of words as movement, see Wm. Carlos Williams, The Work of Gertrude Stein, Pagan, Winter, 1930.³⁶

In his essay on Stein, Williams declared that "the essence of all knowledge" is movement. Movement is a process of renewing perception, of refreshing interest. "The goal is to keep a beleaguered line of understanding which has movement from breaking down and becoming a hole into which we sink decoratively to rest." It is to be found in Bach, where it is "not suborned by a freight of purposed design," and it is to be found as clearly in Stein. It "must not be confused with what we attach to it," but it is not invalidated by those attachments. Since the artist must "be democratic, local (in the sense of being attached with integrity to actual experience)," and since "observation about us engenders the very opposite of what we seek: triviality, crassness and intellectual bankruptcy," the artist "must for subtlety ascend to a plane of almost abstract design to keep alive. To writing, then, as an art in itself. Yet what actually impinges on the senses must be rendered as it appears, by use of which, only, and under which, untouched, the significance has to be disclosed."³⁷ The ultimate responsibility of the poet to "things as they exist" is reaffirmed, not vitiated, by movement, by its design, by its integrity as an object.

Burnshaw's final point:

5) I cannot understand what peculiar characteristics are responsible for grouping the various poems you have grouped as Objectivist poems. Many of these pieces are quite traditional, it seems to me; notably Champion's, Lowenthal's, Weeks', Hecht's. These poems might very well have been printed in almost any poetry magazine which functioned sometime or another during the past twelve years. I can well imagine a generous just critic remarking about Oppen's, Macleod's, and Chambers' contributions the presence of a technical inability to achieve lucidity with reasonably workable material. I cannot imagine anyone failing to see that Reznikoff's poems reveal a hokku influence which has typified the product of so many contemporary poets, as well as a pleasant ability to produce striking figures of a purely traditional nature. And as for Williams' poem, it is surely a very simple clear poem beneath its frail cloak of unorthodoxy, carrying a lucidly exposed idea through charming, traditional, understandable imagery and reflections. In the face of all these facts, why call these poems Objectivist?³⁸

And Zukofsky:

5) Obvious now that "many of the pieces may be quite traditional"—i.e., in the sincere tradition of "writing the detail, not mirage of seeing." The contributions to sincerity of Champion, Loewenthal, Weeks, Hecht, Macleod, Chambers, "might well have been printed elsewhere," but haven't been because general interest is in deceptive emulations of "past" poems and not in expressions of particulars, or "self-contained" structures of these expressions. The writer believes Oppen's contributions qualify as to objectification by nature of their rhythmic and logical structures, and that Reznikoff's Group qualifies as a collective sequence. Williams is not "unorthodox," his objectification of wit as ordered and resolved movement is not unlike that of the "traditional" metaphor of "bare ruined choirs where late the sweet birds sang"—i.e., "objectivist" as indicated in the italics heading the February editor's Program. The quotes around "objectivist" distinguish between its particular meaning in the Program and the philosophical etiquette associated with objectivist.³⁹

According to Zukofsky, his "new group" was not only not a group but it was also not new. It was, however, superior to the work accepted as poetry by the publishers at the time. Zukofsky's new meaning for the term "objectivist" distinguishes it not from the English language but from philosophies. This was the first time that he explained in public the meaning of his quotation marks. It was not the last time he needed to.

IV. Kenneth Rexroth

The editors next presented a passage from Kenneth Rexroth's letter to Monroe of 12 January 1931. In this letter, Rexroth explained his elite and erudite "aims and methods as a poet": "There have often been men, creative in the arts, who have chosen to sacrifice numerical advantages of appreciation for intensity of effect in an audience of less imposing dimensions." Rexroth felt that his sacrifice of popularity for intensity was necessary because of the plurality of existence and the diversity of individuals, and because he did not wish to write for an audience which did not understand his experience or share his ability to experience:

Ultimately one's audience is an extension of oneself; it is quite impossible to sit down, envisage a class of people, and say, I shall write for these people, without degenerating into journalism. If our own experience and potentialities for experience cannot be woven, warp for woof, into the texture of that class of ideal experiences of an articulate person which we call a poem, that poem is irrelevant for us.⁴⁰

Rexroth believed that his readers should cultivate an availability to both George Herbert and Herbert of Cherbury, to Meleager, Catullus, Abelard, Cynewulf, Dante, and Du Bellay in spite of whether these writers might have less to say than, respectively, Menander, Juvenal, Alanus, Beowulf, Tasso, and Du Bartus.⁴¹ Allusions to any of them might be necessary to represent in the poem "that class of ideal experiences of an articulate person." As he wrote to Monroe, "I spent two months learning a rather ugly language that I might read a poet whom I then found to be unsatisfactory, Camoens, surely you do not begrudge me a dictionary, or even an encyclopedia."

Since nothing could guarantee the usual reader's knowledge or understanding of esoteric content, Rexroth rejected membership in Zukofsky's group and doubted the value of publication in Monroe's magazine. Questioned by the present writer, Rexroth wrote that he rejected membership in any group on principle and admitted a lack of common understanding between himself and Zukofsky concerning his work.⁴² Questioned by Harriet Monroe, Rexroth admonished her for her narrow concept of poetic value. Although she had an obligation to limit the work she published, she should not believe her limitations delimited "the field of possible subject and treatment for poetry." Considering such limitations, Rexroth wrote: "I do not know where those others of Mr. Zukofsky's number expect to find their audience, as for myself I ask only to be left to my own devices."⁴³

The "Objectivists," however, would have agreed with Rexroth's arguments, except for his reliance on obscure knowledge. His elitism would have been no obstacle; the "Objectivists" were similarly convinced of the rarity of the good. Rexroth wrote, "If we do not quarrel with machinery, reject Dante because we are agnostics, or Lucretius because we are Christians, the art of the world offers us a small group of products" whose meaning "approaches inexhaustibility."⁴⁴ And both Rexroth and Taupin (in "Three Poems by Andre Salmon" translated by Zukofsky) proposed the statements of Christ as examples of "inexhaustibility." Rexroth wrote, "The remarks of Christ possess this quality preeminently. History has found in them a fecundity of possible value comparable only to that of nature herself."⁴⁵

Rexroth's poetic principles, moreover, are almost identical to "Objectivist" principles. His distinction between "experience and potentialities for experience" reflects Zukofsky's distinction between sincerity and objectification. The poem must synthesize experiences (sincerity) so that their "potentialities" approach "inexhaustibility (so that further suggestion approaches objectification).

If a work of art uses only what experiences we have brought to it, previously coördinated, it leaves us exactly where we were, we might have employed the time more profitably at chess. It is the potentialities for experience that count. These potentialities are of course already funded in the previously acquired deposit of coördinated experience, but they are as yet unused for any really integral synthesis. It is the function of a valuable work of art to assume those potentialities into coördinated societies of richer meaning than would have been discovered in the chances of the occasional world, and to leave, as any achievement of coördination must leave, a realm of richer potentiality for new synthesis. When the relevance of the material is sufficiently independent of temporal contingencies the poem, or picture, or whatever, approaches inexhaustibility.⁴⁶

Furthermore, Rexroth employed, as in "Last Page of a Manuscript," meanings of "words as movement" to reaffirm meanings of words as content as Williams advised in his essay on Stein, and his description of the art product "in which this quality of inexhaustibility is at a maximum" as "machines for the enrichment of life as endurable as radium clocks" is like Williams' description in his review of Oppen's Discrete Series of a poem as a mechanism.⁴⁷

V. Ezra Pound

The editors of Poetry closed the correspondence section of the April issue with an implicit statement of their regret for having sponsored a thing so controversial:

The above extracts from recent correspondence may suffice to give our readers a hint of the contradictory comments on the February issue. We will close the symposium with a postcard message from Ezra Pound:

Send me four more copies—this is a number I can show to my Friends. If you can do another eleven as lively you will put the mag. on its feet.

Alas, we fear that would put it on its uppers!⁴⁸

In Pound's "Our Contemporaries and Others" in the New Review for Spring 1931, the influence of Zukofsky's formulations is evident:

Thought

Thought, dogblast you, thought is made up of particulars, and when these particulars cease to be vividly presented to the consciousness in the general statement, thought ceases and blah begins.⁴⁹

In addition, a section of this essay directly concerns Monroe's editorial in the March issue of Poetry:

Pathos

"Perhaps it does." said Senator Edwards.

"Poetry" for March is mainly interesting for Miss Monroe's lament over Zukofsky. We "salute" the sporting spirit which enabled Miss Monroe to hand over the Feb. number to the opposition. It is something that a middle aged review in Chicago shd. produce—by whatever means—a single issue that shd. compel at least one hardy Briton to admit that nothing as good cd. be concocted with contemporary British material, same hardy Briton having been full of objections to murkn poesy before the said Feb. issue.

Mr. Zukofsky's number seems to have caused local distress.

Miss Monroe sought comfort in "Symposium" and found it not. She then essayed irony by giving a list of the great transpontines neglected by the rising generation. The list is as follows: Robinson, Lindsay; Frost, Masters, Jeffers, Miss Millay, Amy (not McPherson), Elinor Wylie.

Apart from Miss Lowell's faking, pretense, minor Barnumism, we can seriously affirm that this lot of writers maintained (vis à vis European production) that inferiority in American writing that was so successfully established by Whittier, Emerson and the Concord school in general.

The discrepancy between the two standards was probably increased during the garbagesque era in which N. Y. was dominated by Howells, Underbrush Johnson, Gilder, Van Dyke etc. in opposition to H. James.

An optimist might content that Robinson and Frost reestablished a proportion analogous let us say to the relative status of Whittier and Gautier. Miss Monroe's generation never quite understood why one shd. make comparisons so painful to local vanity.⁵⁰

Pound repeated some of these sentiments in his letter to Monroe of 27 March 1931. There he claimed that "there has been a development in American verse during 20 years; and the messy Britons have not kept up with it." We may exempt, of course, Bunting, who was likely Pound's "hardy Briton" above. Mentioning to Monroe his "brief note on Feb. Poetry for Putnam's New Rev.," Pound wrote that "An editor is not there to represent him- or herself save as a PART of the period," and that Monroe should respect diversity: "Different facets shd. be presented with as much separation as possible, so as to show what they are, not merely partly boiled legumes in the soup."⁵¹ This was Pound's argument for her devoting "another eleven" issues of Poetry to separate groups. (As Pound wrote to Zukofsky at the beginning, "Poetry has never had enUFF disagreement INSIDE" its own walls.)⁵² Pound continued:

Only a small part of any epoch or decade survives. Service of Feb. number perhaps not so much re what is to survive of present infants as in strong indication of what will not survive from former mediocrity and faintly-above-medioc. A pruning of the tree.

There always is "mightily little" being done.

And further:

P.S. Yet again: say the Feb. number doesn't "record a triumph" for that group. GET some other damn group and see what it can do. What about the neo-Elinor-Wyllites? Have they got any further than the neo-Vance-Cheneyites of 1904?

Zone the barstuds.

Or the neo-hogbutchererbigrifties?

They all gone Rootabaga?⁵³

These kinds of remarks, of course, were not acceptable for publication in the correspondence section of Poetry. Yet they represented valid opinions about the value of the "Objectivists" issue.

VI. Basil Bunting

"'London or Troy?' 'Adest,'" in the June 1931 Poetry (Zukofsky's review of Basil Bunting's Redimiculum Matellarum) further asserts and clarifies the aims of the "Objectivists" according to Zukofsky. The fact that the book was privately printed helps confirm Zukofsky's assertion in "Program: 'Objectivists' 1931" that the usual publishers do not publish work worth publishing (Section 15).⁵⁴ Zukofsky's title, composed of phrases from Bunting's work,⁵⁵ embodies the main themes of his review, that the synchronicity of places and times in Bunting's poetry emphasizes the qualities they share as pattern (a music of diction and quantity), and that sincerity (evidence of the poem's basis in experience) and the objectification (the poem as its own experience) are not contradictory.

Since vers libre, as Pound pointed out, was related to a renewal of interest in classical quantitative meters,⁵⁶ it is natural that Bunting depended on not only the sense of melody but also the particular tones of classical poetry. Zukofsky wrote: "Bunting's poetic care is measure. He is aware that

quantity has naturally to do with the tones of words. His diction, as a result, tends to a classical selection, even when his themes are modern . . .”⁵⁷

Asserting, with familiar elitism, that all other work is simply not poetry, Zukofsky evaluated Bunting’s work with “Objectivist” criteria:

But Mr. Bunting would not be among the isolate instances of Englishmen concerned with poetry in this time, were his content only the product of a classical ear directing a polished manner. All his poems, and especially the Villon, are grounded in an experience, though the accompanying tones of the words are their own experience.⁵⁸

The experience detailed in sincerity need only be actual, not personal; the metaphor in the poem “has become the objective equivalent” of Bunting’s “personal irony.”⁵⁹ “Villon” is an experience of Bunting’s experience of Villon’s experience. It is a dramatic monologue in which Bunting presented Villon’s life in the terms of his own potentialities for experience to create a marriage of time and character. Bunting expressed his attitude toward Villon’s suffering in prisons by indicting anthropometrics, a system of criminal identification. Alphonse Bertillon’s system, superseded by fingerprinting, was not in use until four centuries after Villon. From Bunting’s poem:

Distinguishing marks if any? (O anthropometrics!)
 Now the thumb-prints for filing.
 Color of hair? of eyes? of hands? O Bertillon!
 How many golden prints on the smudgy page?
 Homer? Adest.
 Dante? Adest.⁶⁰

“Villon” represents Bunting’s ethical consciousness; it is, in Zukofsky’s sense, history. Zukofsky wrote that Bunting’s “indictment of Bertillon in this poem is violence that an intelligent man confronted with historical fact has had to express, even if the name has joined the decorative scheme of his poem.”⁶¹ The phrase “O Bertillon!” is both a musical element and a detail of things as they exist. Bunting’s poems are both “grounded in experience” and give through the movement of their words “their own experience.” Sincerity and objectification are compatible. Zukofsky’s review of Bunting, then, was an attempt to clarify and exemplify “Objectivist” standards.

VII. Walter Lowenfels

The editors of Poetry continued to receive letters about Zukofsky’s issue. The correspondence section of the August issue is devoted to two such. Although both were sent first to Zukofsky for comment, his comments were published with neither. Of the first, “Note on the Anonymous Object,” by Walter Lowenfels, Zukofsky wrote simply that he approved and agreed.⁶² Lowenfels, “an American poet in Paris,” argued the necessity of the worldly-referential aspect of “Objectivism,” which counter-balances (more clearly and completely than Zukofsky did in his response to Burnshaw and his review of Bunting) the self-referential tendency of Zukofsky’s program.

Lowenfels began by describing the failure of what I have called the symbolist poem: "The highly personal 'romantic' poem that creates highly personal objects is not a thing in itself. It is the result of a reaction of the poet away from the world of common stuff." In contrast, it is understood, the "Objectivist" poem ("a thing in itself") is neither "highly personal" nor "a reaction of the poet away from the world of common stuff." Yet Lowenfels believed that objectification cannot be achieved except by personal, non-objective forces. The poet must react with "the world of common stuff": "If we are to achieve objectification it is necessary to begin with the sources from which the non-objective poem springs. You cannot legislate objectivity; it has to arise out of human experience and attitudes about the world. It is from his contact with the world through himself that the poet creates a poem with a sense of the world in it, his sense."⁶³ Similarly, in "American Poetry 1920-1930," Zukofsky praised Cummings for his interest in "the sources where images begin" and for having "been himself, the cadence approximating the actuality."⁶⁴

Sincerity and objectification are not only compatible; they achieve together a balance in words that are simultaneously referential and self-referential. Lowenfels wrote: "The objective poem keeps the new world the poet creates related to the world of common stuff. The poem makes new objects out of old ones, but they will not be objects for readers at all unless that fine balance is maintained between the 'before unapprehended relations' the poet sees and what we have seen before. Otherwise, the poem's strangeness is too much for us."⁶⁵ Rexroth's concept of the poem as an "integral synthesis" of "potentialities for experience . . . funded in the previously acquired deposit of coordinated experience" and Zukofsky's concept of the poem as a fugal interplay between naturans and naturata, received and original apprehensions (see [Section 19](#)), incorporate the same balance. The poem cannot be an object unless it is both related to the real and real itself.

The Symbolist creates poems which ignore the referential meanings of words and, therefore, fail to achieve this balance. Lowenfels claimed: "Instead of making words fly out of emotions, the non-objective poet makes word games by beginning with the word texture itself. That is, he uses words as objects instead of emotions about processes and objects."⁶⁶ The "Objectivist" poetic process is of inspiration and presentation rather than projection (see [Section 5](#) and [Section 6](#)). Emotions may reflect the object and organize appropriate forms to be presented in the poem, as Pound wrote: "One believes that emotion is an organizer of forms. . . . The rhythm form is false unless it belongs to the particular creative emotion or energy which it purports to represent."⁶⁷ The "Objectivist" uses words, Zukofsky asserted, as "absolute symbols for objects, states, acts, interrelations, thoughts about them."⁶⁸

Lowenfels argued that creativity depends on a balance between the poet and the world, and that the isolation of the poet by society tends to make him a Symbolist: "The world drives the poet into himself, and in order to create at all he creates too much out of himself alone. The ego predominates, against the world and its objects Balanced creation comes out of a balance between the one and the many. If you want objective and affirmative poems you must recreate a situation that will allow them. Otherwise, creation itself will stop. Affirmation by negation cannot be continued forever."⁶⁹

Since, as Zukofsky wrote, "He who creates / Is a mode of these inertial systems,"⁷⁰ the poet's creative force may help create situations in which people do not need to negate their experience. "To become an active force to integrate the world," Lowenfels wrote, "the poet must stress creation itself rather than his individual ego. . . . Poems give us a sense of the world; if they are integrated and affirmative then we and our sense of the world will be. Poems may act for us as the Holy Church did in the Middle Ages. And you may get poems that have the common objective reality of Gothic cathedrals."⁷¹ Although Lowenfels' notion of the role of the Church and the character of the cathedral (perhaps from Ruskin)⁷² is idealistic, Lowenfels was not naive about the inertia of the world. The principle of stressing poetic creation instead of the poet's ego, he wrote, "implies, perhaps, anonymous art; there is, in fact, such a movement now under way. However, the practical difficulties of omitting signature are enormous, and what has a better chance to succeed is a more active union of poets than we have at present. Technical differences may be sunk to stress creation itself as a central unifying force out of which technical 'movements' can evolve."⁷³

The "Objectivists," who believed with Lowenfels that poetry is "the mould of language as of feeling,"⁷⁴ shared both Lowenfels' diagnosis of the world's disease and his proscription for its cure. From 1930 to 1933, the "Objectivists" made two serious attempts to form an active union of poets, in which they advocated not a common prosody but a common poetic, the epistemological and ethical conditions which make creativity possible.

VIII. T. H. Ferrill

The editors of Poetry understood their "recent strictures on the overproduction of sonnets" to have brought "from a western poet" the second letter published in the August issue. Thomas Hornsby Ferrill's letter, however, deals only indirectly with sonnets; its real object of ridicule is poetic theorizing. Ferrill claimed he would lobby against the writing of sonnets if Poetry would lobby for a nineteenth amendment prohibiting esthetic rationalization!" But "even this," he felt,

would be ineffective, because the Aristotles, Longinuses, Ezras, Amys, and even Zukofskys would all begin bootlegging their precise logic, based on factual observation, into the magazines.

I think they accomplish some good to the extent that they destroy sooner weak poets who would be destroyed by something else anyway; and what they write is usually interesting, sometimes thrilling literature of a sort, an art in itself. But they feel, and I think most careless readers feel, that what they say about poetry has some organic relation to poetry itself, which it certainly has not. Being in a generous mood this morning I will give you as much as a dime if you can point to a single period of human history wherein esthetic rationalization has not been symptomatic of anything but decadence.⁷⁵

This provoked from Zukofsky a vituperative reply, unfit for publication in Poetry, which he sent to Monroe on 27 July 1931 and which he confessed to Zabel on 3 August was a pasquinade and an impermissible but importunate outbreak from his customary taciturnity.⁷⁶ Ferrill, unable to digest "esthetic rationalization," like a cow who, unable to eat, sickens and dies, Zukofsky claimed, would never write poetry. Esthetic

rationalization has always been in “organic relation to poetry itself.” The excellent poetry of Aristotle, Longinus, Pound, and even Dante was written not despite but because of “their precise logic, based on factual observation.”⁷⁷

Ferrill continued to preoccupy Zukofsky. The nature of the “organic relation” between criticism and poetry, and the importance in both of “precise logic, based on factual observation,” were to be explicitly detailed in Zukofsky’s next attempt to clarify the confusions resulting from the February issue of Poetry—his lecture, “‘Recencies’ in Poetry.”

The critical statements about the “Objectivists” issue published in Poetry are not so much “contradictory” as they are, each in their own way, limited. Critics too often fail to leap to understand new work in the light of new concepts, and to understand the other in the light of the other’s perspective. But they all—Monroe in her adoration of the writers of the twenties, Gregory in his middle-western, pioneer-stock populism, Burnshaw in his excessively analytic Francophilia, Rexroth in his erudite elitism, Pound in his rude and exaggerated aggrandizement of the good, Bunting in his ethical consciousness and poetic craftsmanship, Lowenfels in his feelings against the “highly personal ‘romantic’ poem,” Ferrill in his bias against “esthetic rationalization,” and Zukofsky in his curt, frequently unintelligible, and defensive stubbornness—they all lack the perspective which I have attempted to provide by interpreting and comparing to clarify agreements and disagreements. Fundamentals are often not explicitly stated. We should not worry about the confusion. Zukofsky’s principles were not clearly stated, and the significance of an idea may be directly proportional to the controversy it generated.

[19. The Poetry](#)

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[21. “Recencies” in Poetry](#)

Section 21 - "Recencies" in Poetry

"'Recencies' in Poetry," the preface to [An "Objectivists" Anthology](#), was Zukofsky's final statement as a spokesman for "Objectivist" principles. It was first given as a lecture at the Gotham Book Mart in New York City on 19 August 1931, as he mentioned to Zabel, commenting that he had hoped it would once and for all clarify "Objectivism," but the reactions of his audience more than disappointed him.¹

The essay, seemingly unrevised from Zukofsky's notes for oral delivery (witness its redundant verbalizations of quotation marks), is sometimes confusing because of Zukofsky's peculiar usages and his concise but complex and elliptical syntax. As Zukofsky later said of his early criticism as a whole, "there are certain infelicities of style in the original."²

Zukofsky might have chosen his title, "'Recencies' in Poetry," in response to Stanley Burnshaw, who wished to know how "Objectivism" was "related to past poetry" ([Section 20.III](#)). Zukofsky answered that "Objectivist" work, like past poetry, was "poetry," but that interpretation of that absolute depends on the individual and the age, and that he could only speak for himself, not for the other contributors. Here, he wrote that "poetry" is contemporaneous: "The subject of this: 'Recencies' in Poetry. Quotes around 'recencies' because only good poetry — good an unnecessary adjective — is contemporary or classical."³

I. Critical Qualifications

Zukofsky began his lecture by apologizing, in his fashion, for the confusion that made necessary two clarifications of his position in the "Objectivists" issue of [Poetry](#). His apology is preceded by a denial of apologies, qualified by a "perhaps," and followed by a disparagement of the critics who made it necessary. His first clarification, repeated from his reply to Burnshaw, was intended to address the confusion between linguistic and epistemic objectivity: "The quotes around 'objectivists' distinguish between its particular meaning in the Program of Feb. Poetry, and the philosophical etiquette associated with objectivist." The term "Objectivists" refers to the understanding of the poem as an object, not to any limitation to the ontologically objective. The "thing" they represent may be either subjective or objective. They neither denied the efficacy of the subject nor believed in art for art's sake. Their "poem as object" is both conceptive and emotive and in it is inherent a transitive relation to objective reality.

Zukofsky's second clarification was intended to address the error that Ferrill made in stating that poetic criticism bears no "organic relation to poetry itself": "The several definitions of an Objective and the use of this term extended to poetry — as slightly reworded in the Feb. issue — are from the sixth movement of the editor's partly published poem "A" dated the early summer of 1930, almost a year before the

'Objectivists' number."⁴ Quoting the lines in "A"-6 to which he referred (see [Section 15](#)), Zukofsky explained:

Assuming the intention of these lines to be poetry, the implications notwithstanding the hurried convictions of certain hasty readers that analysis has no "organic relation" (quotes) to poetry, seem to be that as a critic the editor of Feb. Poetry began as a poet, and that as a poet he had implicitly to be a critic. Wm. Carlos Williams had said before him, in Spring and All,—"I believe it possible, even essential, that when poetry fails it does not become prose but bad poetry."

A poet finds the continuously present analysis of his work preferable to criticism so-called.⁵

Different purposes, not different forms, distinguished poetry and "criticism so-called." The poet's ongoing self-critical and self-analytical awareness of his work is more useful than the work of critics. Poetic criticism either shares with poetry a common source—as Zukofsky put it, "a poetically charged mentality"—or it is a brand of "circumlocution requisite to ponderous journals and designated by Mr. Pound as [backsidebeforeness](#)."⁶

Zukofsky then took two examples of "'critical' backsidebeforeness" to show the ways in which it differs from "Objectivist" principles. Both examples are criticisms of Samuel Johnson. The first, by T. S. Eliot, was found, he wrote,

in a recent preface to a volume containing Johnson's [London](#) and [The Vanity of Human Wishes](#): 'Those who demand of poetry a day dream, or a metamorphosis of their feeble desires or lusts, or what they will believe to be the "intensity" of passion, will not find much in Johnson. He is like Pope and Dryden, Crabbe and Lander, a poet for those who want poetry and not something else, some stay for their own vanity. I sometimes think that our own time with its elaborate equipment of science and psychological analysis, is even less fitted than the Victorian age to appreciate poetry as poetry.'⁷

Zukofsky wrote that Eliot made two mistakes: "First, Mr. Eliot makes the graceless error of writing down to those who consciously want something else from poetry—not poetry—as some stay for their own vanity."⁸ In other words, whoever refuses to condescend, to those who rightly see in poetry the poet's sense of the world, must read poetry only to boost their own egos, to regard themselves as an elite. For an "Objectivist," there is no such thing as poetry which does not have "something else" in it; a poem's particulars are of a shared world. This brings us to Eliot's second mistake. The "Objectivist" poem uses and relates facts:

Secondly, he [Eliot] seems to "sometimes" think that minds elaborately equipped with specific information, like science[,] always must confuse it with other specific information, like poetry. That may be the case with unfortunates. The point, however, would be not to proffer solemnity or whiningly confusions to the confused, but to indicate by energetic mental behavior how certain information may be useful to other information, and when the divisions which signalize them are necessary.⁹

Relations are not confusion except to the confused; they do not inevitably obscure necessary distinctions. "Science and psychological analysis" is useful to interpretation of poetry whenever the poetry is related to the matters of science and psychology.

The author of Zukofsky's second example of critical backsidebeforeness, who is not named, comments on another passage by Johnson. Its poetic precision, lucidity, and purity, the critics claimed, are the result of a "maturity" which is no more than isolation from "ceaseless social change" and "too much speculation." Johnson was not "lost in the mutability of sensation"; he had his mind "made up." "Such a poet will have taste" — not "sensation."¹⁰

Zukofsky discounted all these assumptions. First, the passage by Johnson to which the critic referred "does not seem precise and lucid, i.e. profoundly entire . . . in anything but its versification."¹¹ In contrast with Johnson's generalized language, the "Objectivist" deals with particulars; only particulars guarantee clarity; only by exactitude is a poem made a thing "profoundly entire."

Secondly,

. . . Johnson must, in spite of or because of his maturity have been aware of the ceaseless social change around him or at some time, for where else could the armful sweep of perorated obsequy have come from? — "And bids afflicted worth retire to peace" — (Worth: cultural involved with economic standing? afflicted implying at least an impress if not an oppressor and obviously an oppressed?)¹²

No matter what his poetic principles, a mature poet can not be unaware, as Oppen phrased it, "of the world, weather-swept, with which / one shares the century."

Thirdly, one need not deny "the mutability of sensation" altogether in order to avoid being lost in it. As Lowenfels asserted, the Objectivist poet seeks a balance between original and received apprehensions, or, as Zukofsky might have put it, a counterpoint of naturans and naturata (see [Section 18](#) and [section 20.VII](#)).

Fourthly, "taste" is not preconception. One learns from experience; the "taste" of an "Objectivist" resides in his handling of the precise particulars of experience, not in having his mind made up beforehand.

Fifthly,

it will not do to say "that part of Johnson which is not poetry is nothing," one cannot speak of a part of a poem any more than a part of a flow. — "Words, writes Mr. Pound, do not function in this manner. They are like the roots of plants: they are organic, they interpenetrate and tangle with life, you cannot detach them as pieces of an anatomical figure. This dissection of capillaries and vein is at a certain stage no longer possible."¹³

As if in reply to Horace Gregory, each of Zukofsky's excep' tions to critical backsidebeforeness implicitly assumes the importance of the worldly referential qualities of the poem. Very little has been said about "the technic of writing." Instead, Zukofsky has concentrated on the epistemological and ethical assumptions of the "Objectivists."

II. Poem as Object

Next, the essay explicitly presents the principles by which such sensations are raised "to honesty and intelligence" and to a "precision of style."¹⁴ Poetry is a job and a poem is a piece of work, just like any other job and any other piece of work. The poet, therefore, "has an economic bias. He has been doing a job. It will perhaps as soon as not be his salvation."¹⁵ Thus Zukofsky pitched his concept of the poem as object against a society which dismissed poetry as subjective and ephemeral, and therefore impractical. As in his "A"-9, poetry is considered in the light of Marx's theory—a product given value by the labor of making it.¹⁶ Such value is the poet's reason for being; the poem is socially redeeming.

Zukofsky introduced the characteristics of the poem with such value by analogy: "A desk as an object."¹⁷ A desk depends for both its construction and its realization, its meaning, on things outside itself, on its relation to human life.

For even a desk has something to do with capillaries and veins the dissection of which at a certain stage is no longer possible—The desk then as a piece of work, the parts, the process of making it—"We cannot," says the critic of Mr. Eliot's criticism of Johnson, "have a classical attitude in perfection without a classical society."¹⁸

With such an attitude, the desk is also "classical"; it adheres to and is representative of the values of the society for which it was made. A poem, like a desk, is also an object whose context explicitly relates to a world outside it:

A poem. Also the materials which are outside (?) the veins and capillaries—The context—The context necessarily dealing with a world outside of it—The desire for what is objectively perfect, inextricably the direction of historic and contemporary particulars—A desire to place everything—everything aptly, perfectly, belonging within, one with, a context.

A poem. The context based on a world—Idle metaphor—a lime base—a fibre—not merely a charged vacuum tube—an aerie of personation—The desire for inclusiveness—The desire for an inclusive object.

A poem. This object in process—The poem as a job—A Classic.¹⁹

This theory substantiates the definition of "An Objective" given in "A"-6 and the February program. As "what is objectively perfect, inextricably the direction of historic and contemporary particulars," the poem is synecdochic with its worldly context; it is an "object in process"; it perfectly belongs in the whole of which it is a part. As such, it is inclusive and extensive: the world has meaning in it, and is given meaning by it. Zukofsky:

The mind may construct its world—this is hardly philosophy—if the mind does construct its world there is always that world immanent or imminently outside which at least as a term has become an entity. Linguistic usage has somewhat preserved these acts which were poems in other times and have transferred structures now.²⁰

This extensiveness, dependent on exactitude, is what "is true and stays true that keeps fresh for the new reader," as Pound put it.²¹ Zukofsky called a thing with these characteristics a "Classic," and he gave an example: "Homer's The Wet Waves not our The Wet Waves but enough association in the three words to make it mean a context capable of extension from its time into the present."²²

In addition to being an object with a context "with communicative reference," the poem is a "'musical' shape." In "Sincerity and Objectification," Zukofsky wrote that writing is the detail of directing "things as they exist . . . along a line of melody."²³ Here he elaborated: "A poem: a context associated with 'musical' shape, musical with quotation marks since it is not of notes as music, but of words more variable than variables, and used outside as well as within the context with communicative reference."²⁴ Poetry's musical shapes are the shapes which, in "Sincerity and Objectification," appear concomitants of word combinations." Words, for an "Objectivist," are both referential and self-referential.

Finally, the things which are included and extended as a musical object are the elements of human experience—particulars:

Impossible to communicate anything but particulars—historic and contemporary—things, human beings as things their instrumentalities of capillaries and veins binding up and bound up with events and contingencies. The revolutionary word if it must revolve cannot escape having a reference.²⁵

If the pattern of the generative experience is transferred in the integrity of its particulars into the words of the poem, one raises sensations "to honesty and intelligence" and to a "precision of style." The revolutionary value of the poet's job is not in transcending the world of sensation, the world of "ceaseless social change," but in expressing with precision the movement inherent in that world. Zukofsky wrote: "Poems are only acts upon particulars, outside of them. Only thru such activity do they become particulars themselves—i.e. poems."²⁶ Only by such a process does the poet's work, according to Zukofsky, become poetry ("good an unnecessary adjective"). Such work is both referential and self-referential; its universals inhere in particulars; and it is the product of both "exclusion" and "invention."

III. Exclusion and Invention

Exclusion is the poetic discipline by which particulars are perfected from existence for experience. Zukofsky wrote:

The history of EXCLUSION in poetry as recorded by an American, and in a sense for the first time in poetic criticism, since much research would have to be accomplished before its concise poetical and critical parallel can be found,—is brief. Three statements of Ezra Pound as now recorded in A Retrospect, Pavannes and Divisions, and dated 1912—²⁷

Here Zukofsky quoted Pound's three Imagiste principles, regarding direct treatment, economy of words, and the musical phrase, according to which, having got the Image, as Pound wrote, one "refrains from hanging it with festoons."²⁸

Given the principles of exclusion, a poet is able to differentiate between work that is "final . . . this highest thing, this saying the thing once for all and perfectly" and work which is mere "experiment."²⁹ To which, Zukofsky added,

(Not much more than Mr. Pound's sort of experiment which will be of use to a poet in his later work, or to his successors was claimed for the sincerity of poets in the "Objectivists" number of poetry—sincerity defined in the critical section of that issue. A careful reading should show this.)³⁰

In the program of the issue, Zukofsky described the "process of active literary omission" and "the acceptance of two criteria: sincerity and objectification."³¹ Sincerity is the presentation of the particulars of an Image, as opposed to "festoons." It ensures at least experimental value. But objectification is the achievement of work that is final, upon which could only be based lesser, imitative work.

Invention regards the positive aspects of poetic accomplishment, not what one avoids but what one uses to present the Image. Zukofsky: "The history of the principles of poetic invention as recorded by an American is also brief—Mr. Ezra Pound—In the Vortex —"Instigations" dated 1920—"³² And here Zukofsky quoted Pound's division of poetry into "three sorts": (1) melopoeia, (2) imagism (phanopoeia), and (3) logopoeia, or, simply, music, image, and thought. In How to Read, Pound defined the three modes and added: "All writing is built up of these three elements plus 'architectonics' or 'the form of the whole.'"³³ Pound's melopoeia, phanopoeia, and logopoeia are three ways of achieving Zukofsky's sincerity. Zukofsky, who read How to Read in January 1931,³⁴ was in a position to relate Pound's "three principles of poetic invention" to his concept of objectification. If melopoeia, phanopoeia, and logopoeia are the lumber, then the poem as object is the finished desk:

Adding to Mr. Pound's statement, one can speak of an attained emotion fusing these three principles of poetic invention. There is no use in a surplus of distinctions. Obviously there can be only that emotion which in its movement, in its verbal existence, sensuously and intelligently manifests poetry—i.e. speaking of poetry—The desk, not the lumber.³⁵

One may achieve this fusion only if all the elements in the poem have a unity in a single emotion.³⁶ Pound did not speak of objectification, but he did speak of the Image and the organizational force of emotion. In a passage from "A Retrospect," for example, Pound stated that a rhythm should be "a part of the emotion of the 'thing.'" And in "The Serious Artist," he wrote that "the words and their sense must be such as fit the emotion. Or, from the other side, ideas, or fragments of ideas, the emotion and concomitant emotions of this 'Intellectual and Emotional Complex' . . . must be in harmony, they must form an organism, they must be an oak spring from an acorn."³⁷

Zukofsky realized that emotion, Image, and the poem as object are related:

Mr. Pound again—Emotion is the organizer of poetic form. The image is at the basis of poetic form. Elsewhere, Pound had defined the image as that which presents as intellectual and emotional complex in an instant of time. One can go further, try to dissect capillaries or intelligent nerves—and speak of the image felt as duration or perhaps of the image as the existence of the shape and movement of the poetic object.³⁸

Zukofsky thereby united "attained emotion," Pound's Image, and his "musical" shapes. All three are aspects of the same "thing"—the pattern which the experience impresses and whose essence is the emotion.

It inheres in the experience of the world and, if the poet is capable of transferring it, in the experience of the poem. The poet is capable of transferring it only if he is able to locate the precise devices. If Pound's "sorts" of poetry are not translated into poetic components, there can be no invention.

Zukofsky again emphasized the tradition which he shared with Pound and Williams:³⁹

It is known now as it was known previous to 1913 when certain American writers perpetuated a great many errors and to a great extent sabotaged poetry—Mr. Pound was the only exception—that the poet's image is not dissociable from the movement or the cadenced shape of the poem.

A new cadence is a new idea—again Pound.

An idea—not a concept. An idea—its value including its meaning. The desk i.e. as object including its value—The object unrelated to palpable or predatory intent—Also the meaning, or what should be the meaning of science in modern civilization as pointed out in Thornstein. Veblen's masterly essay.⁴⁰

Zukofsky did not state Veblen's thesis, but one may assume it is that science is simply a tool available for either use or misuse. The object itself, like the desk, is "unrelated to palpable or predatory intent." The predatory misuse of writing would be persuasion, propaganda. As Pound wrote, "art never asks anybody to do anything, or to think anything, or to be anything. It exists as the trees exist, you can admire it, you can sit in the shade, you can pick bananas, you can cut firewood, you can do as you jolly well please."⁴¹ Zukofsky made this distinction to defend his art against the simplistic accusation from the left of being against the proletariat if he is not with it. Zukofsky surrendered his argument to Pound's "Mauberley" as follows:

The protagonist of Pound's poem—

He made no immediate application
Of this to relation of the state
To the individual—

No predatory manifestation—Yet a manifestation making the mind more temperate because the poem exists and has perhaps recorded both state and individual—

By all means a literature of the proletariat—which will be only literature after all—if there are writers.⁴²

"Writers," one understands, are not propagandizers; however, Mauberley failed to make both the application and the distinction. Zukofsky is guilty neither of Mauberley's decadence nor of others' polarized predatoriness. Literary invention is a record of "both the state and individual." The value of the "idea" in "making the mind more temperate" is its use in recording the fact, not in arguing the faction. This is as if to say that the value of a desk is to keep one's writing paraphernalia in order, to keep a surface cleared for writing, or that the value of science is to organize our knowledge of material reality. The mind is similarly organized for use by literature.

The remaining components of poetic invention—diction, melody, and typography—must similarly serve not the ego of the poet but the meaning of the poetic object. Invention establishes the value of innovation in producing the "thing" for the health of man, for impartial use. Zukofsky quoted Williams:

“The only human value of anything, writing included,’ says Wm. Carlos Williams, ‘is the intense vision of the facts, add to that by saying the truth and action upon them—clear into the machine of absurdity into a core that is covered.’—”⁴³ As Oppen said, “The important thing is that if we are talking about the nature of reality, then we are not really talking about our comment about it”; we are talking about the facts and their consequences, including their emotional consequences. It is as important to locate in the real the observer and the means of observation as the thing observed. Pound wrote: “The serious artist is scientific in that he presents the image of his desire, of his hate, of his indifference as precisely that, as precisely the image of his own desire, hate or indifference.”⁴⁴ Similarly, Zukofsky criticized “the work of poets who see with their ears, hear with their eyes, move with their noses and speak and breathe with their feet,” and realized that even synesthesia might be presented as precisely synesthesia: “And yet lunatics are sometimes profitably observed: the core that is covered, the valuable sceptic knows, may in itself be the intense vision of a fact.”⁴⁵ Scientific precision requires sincerity in writing, without which it would not matter how sincere were one’s intentions: “Intention must, however, be distinguished from accomplishment which resolves the complexity of detail into a single object. Emphasize detail 130 times over—or there will be no poetic object.”⁴⁶

Zukofsky next answered Burnshaw that, no, objectification is not “an application of the James’ stream-of-consciousness hypothesis.”⁴⁷ Zukofsky agreed with Pound’s statement in “Small Magazines” that the “stream of consciousness in Ulysses” is as much a product of “composition” and “condensation” “as a plot of Racine’s,” and that “the relative value of presentations of such imagined streams will depend as writing in the past has depended, on the richness of content and on the author’s skill in arranging it.”⁴⁸ Objectification does not depend on this or any “formula” of presentation. There is a distinction between the processes of consciousness and literature. Zukofsky did not prohibit the literary presentation of consciousness; he simply regarded that as one kind of intention. It is not objectification; it is simply a thing which might on occasion be objectified. No psychological hypothesis can substitute for artistic craftsmanship.

Zukofsky considered three levels of craftsmanship, or “carpentry.” In the first, “certain joints show the carpentry not to advantage,” and in the second the joints “are a fine evidence,” showing but at least to advantage; however, in the third, “necessary craftsmanship is hid in the object.” The third level of craftsmanship is Zukofsky’s aim, even for his criticism:

Against obvious transitions, Pound, Williams, Rakosi, Bunting, Miss Moore, oppose condensation. The transitions cut are implicit in the work, 3 or 4 things occur at a time making the difference between Aristotelian expansive unities and the concentrated locus which is the mind acting creatively upon the facts.⁴⁹

In the “Symposium” with Tyler and Ford in the February issue ([Section 16](#)), Zukofsky claimed that “Pound’s Cantos discard the Aristotelian unities but are a continuous experience in themselves.”⁵⁰ As in Bunting’s work, particulars of different actions, times, and places are meaningfully juxtaposed, yet the differences between such particulars are no more destroyed than are the differences between an apple and

an orange by being placed together on a table. Moreover, juxtaposing different fruits on the table can say something about their shared and distinctive qualities and about the characteristics of the orchards in which they grow more concentratedly than walking from orchard to orchard. An "Objectivist" poem presents such "complexity of detail" and aims at resolving it into a meaningful experience.

Zukofsky:

In contemporary poetry 3 types of complexity are discernible. 1—the swift concatenation of multiple references usually lyrical in movement—almost any poem by Donne, for example. 2—the conceit—Shakespeare's "when to the sessions," his working out of love as bookkeeping, or Donne's Valediction, his "two twin compasses"—3—the complexity of the epic—Byron's Don Juan, or most of it.⁵¹

He gives further examples: (1) his "Madison, Wis., Remembering the bloom of Monticello (1931)," (2) Williams' "The Botticellian Trees," and his "Prop. XLI," and (3) Eliot's The Waste Land, McAlmon's Portrait of a Generation and North America, his "Poem beginning 'The'" and "A", and Pound's Cantos.

Of the epic, Zukofsky wrote:

M. Taupin's accurate statement regarding Salmon's Prikaz was included in the Feb. issue of Poetry as indicative of what poets should ultimately attempt. "—give to the epic its rightful qualities, to find again the essential distinction of the epic, which is neither love nor hate but the restitution of these sentiments to a chain of facts which exist, and the existence of which confers upon them the marveleous indispensable to all poetry."⁵²

The differences between epic, conceit, and lyric poems are only of their degrees of complexity of detail. All three types must be inclusive and extensive, the product of poetic omission and invention, and restitute emotions to an order of facts. This order is the shape "of the poetic object and its simple entirety." In this sense, it resolves "complexity of detail" into a unity; i.e., "The Cantos meaning is The Cantos: in spite of all the complexities they deal with."⁵³

The ideal is from Walter Pater:

If music be the ideal of all art whatever, precisely because in music it is impossible to distinguish the form from the substance or matter, the subject from the expression, then, literature, by finding its specific excellence in the absolute correspondence of the term to its import, will be but fulfilling the condition of all artistic quality in things everywhere, of all good art.⁵⁴

Zukofsky added to this the requirement that the intention be disinterested:

I.e. order and the facts as order. The order of the Cantos as the order of all poetry is to approach a state of music wherein the ideas present themselves sensuously and intelligently and are of no predatory intention. A hard job, as poets have found reconciling contrasting principles or facts. In poetry the poet is continually encountering the facts which in the making seem to want to disurb the music and yet the music or the movement cannot exist without the facts, without its facts. The base matter, to speak hurriedly, which must receive the signet of the form.⁵⁵

The poet, aware of the sensuous and intelligent qualities of words, strives to act with words upon particulars in such an order that his act becomes a particular of such an order.

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Section 22 - History 1931-1934

I. An "Objectivists" Anthology

Zukofsky wished to improve upon his Poetry issue. Pound performed a small editorial function for Samuel Putnam's New Review in Paris. And so Zukofsky wrote on 25 April 1931 to ask Pound to convince Putnam to publish an anthology of "Objectivists" which he would edit—and also, to improve Zukofsky's reputation, a book of his poetry.¹

Putnam would not have been antagonistic to the idea. Zukofsky had included his sonnet in the "Symposium" of the "Objectivists" issue, and Putnam had already accepted for publication in the spring issue of the New Review Zukofsky's "'A', Third and Fourth Movements," and "Imagism," Zukofsky's review of René Taupin's L'Influence du Symbolisme Français sur le Poésie American (de 1910 à 1920).² This issue also included a poem by Donal McKenzie, criticism by Pound, and a long editorial by Putnam, "Black Arrow."

"Black Arrow" set forth Zukofsky's issue of Poetry as one of a few publications marking 1931 as a "turningpoint" [sic] from the age which began in 1914 with the death of Cubism to a new age in which is chosen "the Magic of the Object," a "White Magic" which "consists in drawing aside the veil of Reality, in revealing what the Greeks called the sacra of life . . . in conferring a sacramental significance upon the object, which is more satanic than any Word, revolutionized or not, could ever be." Putnam described to Zukofsky as "the best, the most important critic that I am able to think of in America," but he did not really understand that the denotation of Zukofsky's "Objective" was primarily in the writing, not in the world. Putnam wrote: "The thing, in any case, is the thing. And this is the meaning of that new contenutismo, or stress upon content as opposed to the overstress on form of the past decade, which we hear being called for all over Europe."³ Although the "Objectivists" felt they were reacting against a formlessness which prohibited effective communication of serious content, their "thing" was not just content; it was also form.

The second mention of Zukofsky's anthology comes in his letter to Pound of 26 August 1931, where he demanded that Pound contribute a Canto. To make his anthology seem a more proper home for a Canto, he said he had gained from the experience of his Poetry issue: the anthology would be more conclusive and its poems would not lack objectification. Since he would exclude published work, eight writers in the issue might not qualify for the anthology. Finally, he offered Pound a veto on all submissions, beginning with work, if he could please obtain it, by Bunting and Carnevali.⁴ Pound, however, did not give him a Canto. Zukofsky included instead two parodic and bawdy song lyrics by Pound, the chorus of the first being "Mit der yittischer Charleston Pband," and the second titled "Words for Rondel in Double Canon (Maestoto e triste)."⁵

By 18 September 1931, Zukofsky had set the deadline for the anthology: 15 October 1931. He also perhaps had received from Putnam some sort of promise of compensation, with the idea that the anthology would be printed as an issue of New Review, but he complained to Pound because Putnam had neither confirmed his offer to publish the anthology nor paid Zukofsky for his expenses, time, and effort.⁶

Zukofsky had already been working with Rakosi. He had been responsible for the publication of work by Rakosi in two previous issues of Pagany. The spring issue contained "Three Poems: Revue; Death Song; Dolce Padre and Ephebus," and the summer issue "The Founding of New Hampshire."⁷ In addition, two more groups of three poems were to be printed in the fall and winter issues,⁸ and a group of seven numbered poems titled "A Journey Away" was printed in the October-December issue of Hound and Horn.⁹ Zukofsky included in An "Objectivists" Anthology this later group, rearranged and expanded by two poems, and "Parades."¹⁰ (On 15 September 1931, he returned "Parades" for Rakosi's approval, relined.¹¹ It appeared in the anthology in the form Zukofsky suggested.)

By 26 September 1931, Zukofsky had begun to despair. He wrote to Rakosi that he was in distress, worrying that he would not find six alive writers, that contemporary poetry was dead, and that his anthology would be its own memorial service. Since this was to be an anthology of "Objectivists" and not Rakosi's collected poems, Zukofsky wished to memorialize one coherent and unified presentation of Rakosi's achievement rather than his range or diversity. Zukofsky then copied all nine poems of the proposed group, beginning with the note that their unity should be recognized by a common title, like "Chanson sans Paroles" (song without words), which was Rakosi's title for the first poem in the group—and ending with the note that the poems be merely numbered. The group's unity, he suggested, was that of a travel journal, a description of the times. As such, it was "epic" and would be included in the epic part of the anthology, rather than in the lyric part or (unless Rakosi disagreed entirely with Zukofsky's plan) the collaboration part.¹²

The group, titled "A Journey Away," was, as Zukofsky wished, included in the epic part, and "Parades" was included in the lyric part. The distinction between epic and lyric was made by Zukofsky in "'Recencies' in Poetry," which served as a preface to the anthology (Section 21). Zukofsky described the whole anthology for Rakosi on 7 October 1931, and commented that Rakosi was the preeminent writer of the epic in the anthology, and that the epic was distinguished by its subject, not its size.¹³

Zukofsky sent to Pound the dedication on 12 October 1931, and the anthology was finished 21 October 1931,¹⁴ but as late as December Zukofsky still had no commitment from Putnam. Williams wrote to Pound on 8 December 1931 that Zukofsky "has just completed (during the past month) an anthology which Putnam has. Now I don't know Putnam well, but I've written to him and had no answer after having been led to believe that he might answer very substantially, etc., etc."¹⁵ On 17 December 1931, Zukofsky wrote Pound that Putnam offered to publish "A" and that he liked the anthology, but nothing had been done by Christmas, and on 11 February 1931 Zukofsky received Putnam's rejection, whereupon, as he wrote to

Pound on 15 March 1931, Zukofsky decided that he would no longer submit work unsolicited or without pay, especially for editors like Putnam. Zukofsky chastized himself for sacrificing his money, time, and energy.¹⁶

II. To Publishers

Meanwhile, on 22 January 1931, when the "Objectivists" issue of Poetry was at the press, Pound reviewed the "super book club" idea, sending Zukofsky a list of names of those who might be counted on, including Dahlberg, Ford, Joseph Freeman, Gregory, Johns, Kirstein, Macleod, Mangan, MacLeish, Price "(who impd. Xile . . .)," Rakosi, Reznikoff, Tyler, Wheelright, and Zabel, with this note: "add list of men willing to WORK."¹⁷

Zukofsky responded on 5 February 1931 to say he was not a salesman; however, he commented on Pound's list and added Rexroth. At this time Zukofsky was occupied with being both a poet and a graduate assistant at Madison, teaching and writing a thesis on Jefferson.

Pound replied on 18 February 1931:

I suggest you stick mainly to Jeff. and yr/ pome; but for conversational purposes you cd. stress need of MACHINERY for printing and distributing 6 vols. McAlmon; Bill's ineditis; and my Prolegomena (collected prose to up last year).

I mean that cd. be a nucleus. When the mCHinery is constituted it wd. find plenty more to work on.

I suggest stuff be cheaply but clearly printed in europe and sold unbound (broché) at lowest possible price. Idea of small but quick return, small and q. to authors and 6% to pubshr. or financier. Overhead negligible.

At any rate; start keeping a list of those with either
or
time
money
energy
ingenuity
acquaintance with either or possible purchasers or people
with DAS KAPITAL¹⁸

Zukofsky discussed this matter with Rexroth (who had just moved from Chicago to California), Oppen, and possibly Rakosi. By the end of August 1931, he had enough of Rakosi's work for a book. On 24 August he wrote Zabel that R M R, a new paperback press in Los Angeles with which Rexroth was associated, might publish Rakosi.¹⁹ Zukofsky also understood that R M R was interested in publishing Pound, particularly How to Read.²⁰ but nothing became of this possibility.²¹

Fortunately there was another possibility in the works. The notes at the end of the February Poetry said that George Oppen was living in Belvedere, California.²² He and Mary had moved there in the fall of 1930.²³ But before Zukofsky left New York in July, as Mary Oppen wrote in her autobiography:

Louis, George, and I agreed on a plan for publishing books: Louis would be the editor, arranging and getting the books for publication, while George and I would go to France in a year to set up a household and find a printer. We would see the books through the printing and ship them back to Louis, who would market them. The plan was to print paperback books, reasonable enough in price that students and others could buy them. At that time no paperback books existed. We could pay for the cost of the enterprise, and Louis would be paid \$100 a month. Louis chose the name To Publishers – “to” in the sense of “to whom it may concern,” as on a bill of lading, or as in usage before a verb to indicate the infinitive, “to publish.”²⁴

The Oppens spent the year in California “writing and assimilating our New York experience and getting together the money for the To publishing venture,” and they left “on a small French freighter from San Francisco, destination Le Havre, a thirty-day trip,” around the middle of April 1931.²⁵ From Le Havre, the Oppens journeyed slowly across France and settled outside Le Beausset, in Var. That fall, they were ready to begin arrangements with the printer in Toulon to publish what Zukofsky would send them.

Zukofsky wrote Pound on 15 October 1931 and described their arrangements and plans. Zukofsky proposed printing a volume of miscellaneous prose by Williams and then Pound’s critical prose in a sequence of volumes, which would be sold cheaply in paperback. He claimed Oppen would pay \$100 for each book plus possibly royalties.²⁶ The plan differed from Pound’s recommendations only in its exclusive dependence on the Oppens as publishers and financiers and on Zukofsky as editor and distributor.

On 27 November 1931, Pound wrote Zukofsky that Oppen had agreed to publish Prolegomena I, the first volume of Pound’s collected prose. He suggested also publishing Bunting’s translation of Tozzi’s “Tre Croce,” and concluded:

At any rate the O/Z appears mos; sa” zisfakory” or mos’ likely pub:ng propstn since the Egoist of blessed memory.²⁷

On 7 December 1931, Zukofsky was already speculating on the publication of Pound’s complete works,²⁸ and on 10 December he forwarded to Pound Oppen’s royalty arrangements, plans to publish all of Prolegomena in folio after the series was completed, and a list of their planned publications.²⁹ Zukofsky also wrote a letter on To Publishers stationary to Zabel on 29 December 1931 describing their arrangements and outlining the sequence of volumes he wished to publish. After Williams’ A Novelette and Other Prose and Pound’s Prolegomena I might come Bunting’s “Tre Croce,” a book by Zukofsky, and Reznikoff’s Testimony (then titled My Country ‘Tis of Thee). After these, Prolegomena II and books by Rakosi, Rexroth, and others. Zukofsky wished to publish at least six volumes each year.³⁰

Meanwhile, Zukofsky finished editing Williams’ A Novelette and Other Prose by the middle of November 1931.³¹ Williams received letters from Oppen concerning the publication of the book, for Williams wrote to Zukofsky:

I like immensely the tone (it isn’t exactly that) of the Oppen’s letters. A man like that can be trusted to do anything he decides on as necessary. you’re lucky to have him to work with.³²

Also, showing that Zukofsky's "group" had begun to share poetic principles, Williams later added:

I want that Oppen phrase (in his letter) about sincerity being not in the writer but in the writing. I hope you haven't destroyed it. Send it to me please. I want to make use of it no matter how for the present.³³

Pound's letter of 23 December 1931 to Oppen and, in carbon, to Zukofsky, approved of Oppen's folio design, with the print in two columns. He added:

Oh/ Yes/ my items/

1.
How to Read, with first part of Spirit of Romance (revised)
early medieval studies.
2.
Spirit of Romance, part 2, revised
studies of later middle ages.
3. Limbs of Osiris³⁴

Work began in France with Williams' volume. Mary Oppen wrote:

We made frequent trips to Toulon to the printer. The books were printed in English, but they were typeset by non-English-speaking French printers. We read proof after proof, each time finding more mistakes. . . .

When we shipped the books of To Publishers from France to Louis in New York, he found that he could only get the books by paying a duty. Customs declared them to be magazines, not books, but a loophole existed—if we wrapped them in bundles of twenty-five or less they could come in duty-free. This entailed numerous trips by us and by Louis to the Post Office. Louis hated to carry bundles, and he lived in a rented room, where storing the books was another problem. Charles Reznikoff stored them in his sister's house, in the basement where he had his press, until his sister sold the house.³⁵

When Pound received A Novelette and Other Prose, he disliked its appearance and wrote Zukofsky in apprehension of his own forthcoming volume: "That is what a god damn printer will do to the neophyte."³⁶ Moreover, their difficulties with customs and distribution had escalated its price. Mary Oppen wrote:

Financially we had taken on too big a burden; we could not support ourselves, Louis, and the printing and publishing of the books unless at least a small amount of money came back to us. And no money came back to us. The book-sellers called the paperbacks "magazines" and would not give them shelf room. When we returned to New York from Paris in 1933, George went from store to store leaving books on consignment, but the return was negligible.³⁷

In December 1931, Williams had written to Richard Johns: "Oppen is bringing out a book of mine in France somewhere : the novelette and assorted prose bits * about 100 pages. To sell cheap : 35¢ !"³⁸ Zukofsky's estimate of 50¢ in October 1931 was more realistic, but after publication its price was raised to 75¢.³⁹ When Prolegomena I was published in June 1932 it was priced at \$1.00.⁴⁰

On 15 March 1932, Zukofsky, thinking of having To publish An "Objectivists" Anthology, asked Pound to exert his influence.⁴¹ The Oppens agreed.⁴² Even though Bruce Humphries of Boston had taken over their distribution, by July the Oppens' financial burden had become excessive. Pound wrote to Zukofsky: "With O's capital attacked (as he has prob. writ. you) the question of cooperation ??? etc. Also grave question of how it affects yr/ salary."⁴³ Zukofsky wrote on 8 August 1932, disappointed and apologetic, that Oppen could neither continue To Publishers nor his salary.⁴⁴ Oppen had paid him \$100 each month from November 1931, but after this it was reduced to \$50 and ended altogether in October.⁴⁵

The Oppens published the anthology in August 1932, this time, perhaps because they had already left Var, using a printer in Dijon, and Pound reviewed it in the Chicago Tribune (Paris) on 2 September 1932.⁴⁶ In September, Bruce Humphries raised the price of To volumes to \$1.25, but in vain: the Oppens still received no money from sales. Besides, as Mary wrote: "we had read Pound's ABC of Economics and discussed it between ourselves. . . . Perhaps Pound could not think clearly about economics; at any rate, we could not agree to publish the book."⁴⁷

III. The Objectivist Press

As To Publishers was failing, Zukofsky decided to begin another venture. This one would not rely exclusively on the efforts of him and the Oppens. On 12 November 1932, he asked Pound to read and respond to the two letters he had sent to Basil Bunting regarding the establishment of a union for writers.⁴⁸ Bunting was living at the time in Rapallo across the harbor from Pound.⁴⁹

In the spring of 1933, the Oppens had returned from France,⁵⁰ and Zukofsky had outlined plans for the union. As he wrote to Pound on 17 April 1933, it was to be called Writers Extant, or W.E., Publishers; its board was to consist of Serly, Taupin, and himself, and its members to include Reznikoff and Williams, and possibly Rexroth, Moore, and McAlmon, Mina Loy, Wallace Stevens, and others. He wrote also that Oppen had labored mightily for him, had performed beyond the call of duty; he could not and should not be permitted to do more, though he would likely participate in W.E., Publishers.⁵¹

Pound responded with a promise of investing \$25 in the venture, and with a public-relations statement titled: "IS AMERICA LOSING HER CHANCE?" The purpose of this document was to call for cooperation and organization to publish contemporary books.⁵² Williams responded on 28 April with: "What the hell can I say about Writers Extant? I don't see how it can be done. I think your prospectus is too complex."⁵³ And, on 6 May 1933, with:

You have made a start & the motion is not lost. We are all searching for the phraseology. Part of the next step, and it may take some time to develop it, come what may, is for you to see the men involved, personally. It will not be until after that that a program can be put down on paper. When you have done this (supposing for the moment that you are the permanent secretary indicated in your project) and after you have seen certain theoretical scripts, including my White Mule. Then we can band together, publish one book, the best we can find, and then, with some solid ground

under our feet and a snarl in our voices we can begin. LAST will come what is written down as a contract – after we have had some experience.⁵⁴

Finally, Williams simplified Zukofsky's prospectus. Zukofsky sent Pound Williams' version on 11 May 1933.⁵⁵ It read:

THE WRITERS PUBLISHERS, Inc.

1. Membership in the group is limited to those writers who have in actual possession an available and complete book manuscript of high quality which is unacceptable to the usual publisher.
2. Manuscripts to be published by the group are to be selected (with advice) by a Director who shall be elected by a majority of the group members for the term of one year.
3. The business end of the group activities will be under the direction of a paid Secretary-Treasurer, under bond, who shall occupy the office indefinitely—or until removed by a two thirds vote of the existing membership at any time.
4. Initial funds are to be contributed by the charter members as may be agreed upon, to be added to later as the business of the group may prove profitable.
5. The first membership will be made up of a selected, voluntary group who by a majority vote, after the first requisite is satisfied, will add to their numbers from time to time.
6. Resignation from the group may take place at the discretion of the member by which he is absolved from further financial responsibility at the same time relinquishing any claim he has had upon the group's resources.
7. Dissolution of the group as an organization will be conditional upon an equal distribution among the members of all funds and other rights enjoyed by the group under its incorporation.
8. Further additions to these rules will be made from time to time.⁵⁶

Nevertheless, Williams remained skeptical of the success of the scheme in writing Zukofsky on 24 May 1933: "I've tormented my soul long enough over our Writer-Publisher proposal: I think it's no go and we should give it up."⁵⁷

Nothing was done about it anyway until the end of the summer. Zukofsky wished to visit Pound in Rapallo. Mary Oppen wrote:

Louis had not been to Europe; he had only corresponded with Pound, and I think it was Tibor Serly who spoke to us of the importance of Louis' going to visit Pound. The problem was that Louis had no money; the trip required that Louis' friends help to pay his way. Somehow this was done, and several of us made contributions; Williams, Serly, George and I bore the expenses of travelling, and Pound and Bunting provided housing and meals once Louis was in Rapallo.⁵⁸

The possibility had been considered as early as November 1930.⁵⁹ Now, Zukofsky was in Paris on 12 July 1933.⁶⁰ Charles Norman wrote:

Zukofsky went abroad in June, 1933. He was met at Cherbourg by René Taupin. In Paris he stayed at the Hotel Périgord, near the Bibliothèque Nationale, where Pound himself had often stayed. He called on the sculptor Brancusi and the painters Léger and Masson—at Pound's suggestion. From Paris he went to Budapest to join Tibor

Serly. A reporter for Pesti Napló interviewed him in a coffeehouse on the Danube waterfront. The photograph that appears with the interview shows a long, narrow, earnest face, brown eyes peering intently from behind horn-rimmed glasses, thick, dark brown hair parted on the left side. He was twenty-eight years old. The interviewer noted that he spoke "in a quiet almost whispering tone." Basil Bunting, in a red jacket, met him in Genoe to escort him to Rapallo. They arrived in time for lunch, which they had with Pound and his wife at the Albergo Rapallo. Pound, Zukofsky said, was very paternal.⁶¹

Norman quoted from Serly's translation of the Pesti Napló interview, 'Louis Zukofsky: American Vanguard Poet,' including:

"Is there a definite group in America who acknowledge Pound and have definite characteristics?"

"Yes and no. They have broken with the known, customary, successful, banal forms. Each of the group tries in his own way to find means of expression and this very independence holds the group together. Among the most important are William Carlos Williams, René Taupin, Basil Bunting and Carl Rakosi, who will probably interest you seeing he is a Hungarian. I might also mention Charles Reznikoff, Kenneth Rexroth and Forrest Anderson."

"Much as we regret it, we have not yet had the opportunity of making the acquaintance of any of them."

"I can relieve you of some of the regret by saying that few in America know of them."⁶²

Zukofsky was back in New York in September. A meeting was arranged for 24 September 1933 at the Oppens' apartment on Columbia Heights, Brooklyn. In attendance were Zukofsky, Williams, Reznikoff, and George and Mary Oppen.⁶³ Williams' synopsis follows:

Synopsis of suggestions discussed and general agreements arrived at at meeting Sept. 24th. Writers-Publishers to be incorporated:

1. 1. A possible list of subscribers to 1 book of poems to be circularized and approached by whatever means possible. The book to sell at \$2. and to be the most saleable we can find.
2. 2. This book to be published on the basis of whatever advance subscriptions are obtained.
3. 3. The proceeds, if any, from this sale to be divided, 60% to the author, 40% to the group which 40% is to be used to publish book #2 and to pay the Executive Secretary who will be the sole officer of the group.
4. 4. On this basis books are to be continued to be printed and sold as often and for as long a time as practicable.

Notes: When the first book is advertised it will be put forward as one of a series of four which will all be published and offered, separately, for subscription during the first year.

The original suggestion of E.P. to be rewritten to conform to this plan.

As a feature of the plan distinguished (?) modernists of the day will write introductory pages to these books - their names (with consent) to be given out when the first notices appear : such names as Marion Moore, T.S.Eliot, Wallace Stevens, etc etc. This in effect will be a sponsoring Committee without putting too much of a burden on names.

Harriet Monroe and Poetry to be approached from the first with intent to get as much backing from that source as being the official (?) poetry organization in U.S.

Mr. Zukofsky to be named to Executive Secretary etc. etc. with power to keep records, see individuals, arrange for publishing, correct proofs ? ? ? select format, wrote [sic] letters, devise lists, compose advertising matter, push sales, etc. etc—God help him!⁶⁴

Details, including the title of the organization (5 October 1933, Williams suggested "Cooperative Publishers"),⁶⁵ were worked out, and on 23 October Zukofsky wrote Pound to describe their final compromise. The Objectivist Press would publish Williams' collected poems for two dollars and Reznikoff's Jerusalem the Golden and Testimony for one dollar each. Subscriptions were requested. The press planned to publish Zukofsky's 55 Poems and possibly books by Bunting and Rakosi the first year. Zukofsky noted that Reznikoff was paying for his own, \$147 for the poetry and \$227 for the prose, 200 copies each, that they were using the Harmsworth edition of How to Read as a model for format, and that they had chosen as name The Objectivist Press because of its previous publicity, in order to increase sales. Finally, he asked for Pound's approval to be named as advisor.⁶⁶

Reznikoff was responsible for a short statement about the press. Oppen remembered:

When we sat down to write a statement on the book covers, Charles Reznikoff, who had legal training, produced at the right moment his statement: "The Objectivist Press is an organization of poets who are printing their own work and that of others they think ought to be printed." It was a little beyond the fact because there were differences of opinion on what should be included.⁶⁷

Special financial arrangements were made for Williams' book, Collected Poems 1920-1930. Williams put up \$250, of which \$150 was refunded by the group's investors, apparently including Serly, Oppen, Rakosi, Taupin, and Reznikoff, and of which the remaining \$100 was taken as a percentage of the gross.⁶⁸ Afterwards, each author (Reznikoff and Oppen) simply paid for his own.

A preface for Williams' book was secured from Wallace Stevens (see [Section 3](#)), and, as Williams remembered, "Louis did most of the work of making the collection."⁶⁹ Williams was proofing the galleys by 6 December 1933 and 500 copies were printed 20 January 1934 by J. J. Little and Ives Company in New York in hardcover. Its dust jacket carried, on the front, comments by Moore, Pound, and Taupin about Williams, on the front flap a "Biographic Note," and on the back Reznikoff's statement, a list of writers "to be published": Basil Bunting, George Oppen, Carl Rakosi, Charles Reznikoff, René Taupin, Louis Zukofsky, Tibor Serly and others," the address of the press, and "Advisory Board: Ezra Pound, William Carlos Williams, Louis Zukofsky, Sec'y."⁷⁰ Although Williams remembered that "it didn't sell at all,"⁷¹ Reznikoff remembered that it "was reviewed on the second page of The New Times Book Review and the edition of five hundred copies almost sold out."⁷² This would have brought the press a small profit.

Passages of Testimony had been previously published in An "Objectivists" Anthology and in Williams' magazine, Contact, in each case introduced by Reznikoff's brief forward:

I glanced through several hundred volumes of old cases—not a great many as law reports go—and found almost all that follows. I am indebted to the reporters and judges not only for the facts but for phrases and sentences.⁷³

This statement appeared in Testimony as a Note” after the title page with the last sentence omitted, with a verse from St. Paul’s Ephesians IV, 31:

“Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamour, and railing, be put away from you, with all malice!”

“The Matter of the Document,” Kenneth Burke’s introduction, was secured by Williams. It begins by comparing two complementary movements in modern art. The first is “a progressive development of fiction towards the ‘case history,’” by which the cases are synthesized to demonstrate preconceived theses, and are “deceptive, not in their general tenor, but simply in their ‘purity,’ their ‘efficiency.’” The second, which we are to understand describes Testimony, is the “movement of ‘the case history’ towards fiction.” “In the end,” as he wrote of both, “any simplification of a human life is a fiction, and any case history is a simplification.” Burke did not share the “Objectivist” perspective; he believed that Reznikoff’s “case histories” are not more “true” than “manufactured or refurbished cases.” If they are more valuable, that is due only to Reznikoff’s skill as a writer, “his sensitiveness of appraisal, his deftness and accuracy in narrative.”

Burke quoted from a statement by Reznikoff on the book, which emphasizes the importance for Reznikoff of the local qualities of particulars he presents:

“A few years ago,” he has explained, “I was working for a publisher of law books, reading cases from every state and every year (since this country became a nation). Once in a while I could see in the facts of a case details of the time and place, and it seemed to me that out of such material the century and a half during which the United States has been a nation could be written up, not from the standpoint of an individual, as in diaries, not merely from the angle of the unusual, as in newspapers, but from every standpoint—as many standpoints as were provided by the witnesses themselves.” He felt that such material could encompass “the life of a people, in mines and on ships, all the activities that the law itself covers, which is pretty nearly everything.”

But Burke discounted the standpoint of the particulars for the standpoint of the whole, the local for the universal:

Whatever individual standpoints they may represent, be they plaintiff or defendant, interested or disinterested witness, slave or slave-owner, brutal sea-captain or recorder of his brutality, these bearers of testimony represent in the large the “law court point of view.” In this respect Mr. Reznikoff’s work embodies in miniature the problem of the “whole truth” as it arises in a civilization marked by many pronounced differences in occupational pattern. There arise the “doctor’s point of view,” the “accountant’s point of view,” the “salesman’s point of view,” the “minister’s point of view,” the “mechanic’s point of view,” and so on. Much of Mr. Reznikoff’s “testimony” is clearly local to his profession; but the vein of sympathy that underlies his work is not similarly local. It is to this quality perhaps, and not to the documentary aspect of his work, that we must look for its measure of ultimate “truth,” that is, its usefulness to living.⁷⁴

Since Reznikoff did not mention the universal meaning inherent in the work, Burke concluded that he must have taken it for granted, more interested in matters of craft. But Burke is off-base in discounting the function of the particulars: the reader is made curious, confounded, and amazed by the incidents presented — especially since they are true not simply in significance (due to Reznikoff's skill as a craftsman) but in fact.

After Collected Poems 1921-1931 and Testimony, the Objectivist Press was responsible for two more books by Reznikoff, Jerusalem the Golden and In Memoriam: 1933, and Oppen's Discrete Series (Section 6). After the end of May, however, the episode was over. On 23 May 1934, Zukofsky told Pound that he had left the Objectivist Press for good.⁷⁵

It had become obvious that in the Depression publishing excellent work "unacceptable to the usual publisher" would not pay for the work that had to be put into it. An exhausted and depressed Zukofsky wrote to Pound on 12 April 1934 that he was in the hospital, having been working for the Objectivist Press without pay for one to three hours a day.⁷⁶

Williams, on 1 June 1934, recommended to him a free doctor in New York:

Oppen says you didn't give him the second copy of my criticism of his book which I sent you for him. . . .

How are you anyway? Oppen says not so good. . . . Stop screwing and eat more food. Why in the hell do you want to die young, maybe your book will be published sooner than you think. Come on, live awhile longer.⁷⁷

Furthermore, Zukofsky's relationship with Pound was slipping. On 6 February 1934, Pound had written Zukofsky to describe Williams' Collected Series, which he apparently didn't know had been edited by Zukofsky:

The worst of Wms/ iz in these collected poems/ (and a good deal of the best omitted) HOW ever they contain some I hadn't seen / two of which are good enough to give me a steamroller answer to the London Banderlog . . . He has puttt in, I shd. think ALL the mos' grdm sentimental diabetes he ever had.⁷⁸

By the end of January 1935, the correspondence between Pound and Zukofsky had become bitter and accusatory, dwelling on disagreements over political and economic issues. Zukofsky's letter of 11 May 1935 claimed that he realized Pound's intentions were good but since he had a mind and a life of his own he also realized that Pound was entirely mistaken. Since he had read Marx himself, he could not understand how Pound could claim to have read Marx and yet believe that labor is not a commodity. Since the oppressors yet oppressed, labor was still a commodity. Although Pound might have changed his politics since writing How to Read, Zukofsky could not; he could accept neither Social Credit nor President Roosevelt, since both wished to preserve capitalism. Zukofsky made a distinction between Pound's poetry and Pound's economics. As for Zukofsky's own career, he had sacrificed his time for To Publishers and the Objectivist Press, and had written to 152 quasi-poets while editing the "Objectivists" issue of Poetry and An "Objectivists" Anthology, but although he recognized that their good results were valuable he would

make no more such sacrifices. Moreover, he had cut off ties with so-called friends, since they reminded him of the bitter experience.⁷⁹

On "Yooltide" 1935, Zukofsky, enclosing for Pound the first four pages of "A"-8, wrote that he believed all the "Objectivists" of 1931 were involved in or associated with the Communist Party, including himself, although unofficially, since he was working unpaid as a secretary and editor for the New Masses.⁸⁰ Mary Oppen wrote:

An appeal was made to intellectuals by the seventh World Congress of the Communist Parties in 1935 to join in a united front to defeat fascism and war. We responded to that call, and in the winter of 1935 we decided to work with the Communist Party, not as artist or writer because we did not find honesty or sincerity in the so-called arts of the left. (I could make an exception for Bertolt Brecht and for some Soviet movies.) We said to each other, "Let's work with the unemployed and leave our other interest in the arts for a later time." Few in the Party or in the Workers Alliance knew anything of our past, and in a short time we were no longer thinking of Paris or of To Publishers, of poetry or of painting. We also left it to our friends and families to keep in touch with us if they chose. We felt that our political decision was not one in which we wished to involve them.⁸¹

Reznikoff kept the legal title to the press. In 1936, he published under its impress his own Separate Way, and in 1948 surrendered it to Celia Zukofsky who published Zukofsky's A Test of Poetry, which Zukofsky had finished in 1940.⁸²

Meanwhile, James Laughlin, III, founded New Directions Publishing and took up the publication of Pound and Williams, beginning with Williams' novel White Mule in 1937. In his New Directions anthologies, he published Zukofsky's "'Mantis'" with "'Mantis, An Interpretation" in 1936, and "A"-8 in 1938. In 1941, in his pamphlet poets series, he published Rakosi's Selected Poems.

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Section 23 - The Shared World

This history has been recorded in great detail to establish the fact that Zukofsky, Williams, Reznikoff, Rakosi, Pound, and Oppen had a long, complex, creative, and meaningful association. Such a history disproves the allegations initiated by Zukofsky after this period that the "Objectivists" were a group in name only, a matter of editorial convenience or public relations, and that they had no theoretical common ground. Any set of writers who edited, published, and reviewed each others' work as often as the "Objectivists" must be considered a literary group. The critical aspect of this history, therefore, has attempted to define by induction the consensus of their association, that is, the principles of "Objectivism."

I. The Political Context

A primary context for their consensus, a ground so common that in their time it was assumed without comment and in our time it is too often ignored, was economic. A particular problem for writers in a free society, especially for writers who are bent on doing something new, and especially in times of economic uncertainty, is being on the economic fringe. They find it difficult to make a living with their art. In Exile 3, Pound wrote: "What largely ails the 'arts' is unemployment."¹ The appearance of prosperity for others under Coolidge alienated such people—especially when high unemployment prohibited alternative work:

While stock prices had been climbing, business activity had been undeniably subsiding. There had been such a marked recession during the latter part of 1927 that by February, 1928, the director of the Charity Society in New York reported that unemployment was more serious than at any time since immediately after the war.²

In this situation, since the public bought fewer books and the publishing industry took fewer risks, writers' work and others' opinions of it suffered. Writers of the time had to respond to the fact that as economic difficulties became more serious literary difficulties seemed less serious. They could respond by scorning public acceptance, creating art without relevance, or by serving the proletariat, creating relevance without art, but the "Objectivists" wanted both relevance and art. They therefore enhanced the realness of both referential and self-referential literary form (sincerity and objectification) and asserted the beneficial effects of that realness. They created writing to counter the forces of isolation, abstraction, and dehumanization.

In these efforts they were guided by the polemics of Ezra Pound. In Exile 2 Pound claimed a connection as well as a distinction between society and literature, as between the public and the private:

The drear horror of American life can be traced to two damnable roots, or perhaps it is only one root: 1. The loss of all distinction between public and private affairs. 2. The tendency to mess into other peoples' affairs before establishing order in one's own affairs, and in one's thought. To which one might perhaps add the lack in America of any habit of connecting any act or thought to any main principle whatsoever; the

ineffable rudderlessness of that people. The principle of good is enunciated by Confucius; it consists in establishing order within oneself. This order or harmony spreads by a sort of contagion without specific effort.³

Pound's analysis put the artist in a fortunate position. Since the arts establish private order, they are of vital importance to the health of society. The epigraph of the *Exile* is "Res publica," which Pound translated as "the public convenience," referring to the fact government should be for the convenience of the people.⁴ A government which interfered with the arts was not for the convenience of the people; it created chaos by ignoring the root source of all order. The artist has reason to be bitter when his position is unacknowledged; the artist-exile strikes back at the situation in which "public affairs have arrived at a state of annoyingness where they interfere with the proper conduct of life and the fine arts."⁵

The idea that order is established best through art is a constant concern throughout Pound's writings. Zukofsky wrote of him:

For a quarter of a century he has been engaged in 'the expression of an idea of beauty (or order)' and his results are one aspect of a further personal comprehension.

out of key with his time
He strove to resuscitate the dead art
Of poetry; to maintain 'the sublime'
In the old sense.

—intent upon 'language not petrifying on his hands, preparing for new advances along the lines of true metaphor, that is, interpretive metaphor, or image, as opposed to the ornamental.' 'Artists are the antennae of the race,' words to him are principals of a line of action, a store, a purpose, a retaining of speech and manner, a constant reinterpreting of process becoming in himself one continuous process, essentially simplification.

He has treated the arts as a science so that their morality and immorality become a matter of accuracy and inaccuracy.⁶

The meaning of words was to the pragmatic Pound the basis of truth in the process of his experience: "principals of a line of action, a store" of the facts of experience, "a purpose of life, and a retention "of speech and manner"; they enact the proper relation between a man and the world. Words were, that is, the principals of principles.

William James wrote, "The truth of an idea is not a stagnant property inherent in it. Truth happens to an idea. It becomes true, is made true by events. Its verity is in fact an event, a process, the process namely of its verifying itself, its verification." "The pragmatic method," he wrote, "is to try to interpret each notion by tracing its respective practical consequences."⁷ The "Objectivist method, similarly, is to try to present each notion in terms of actual consequences, things actually perceived. Restoring truth to the accuracies of this discipline is, as Zukofsky said, a "simplification." "So much depends / upon // a red wheel / barrow," wrote Williams; a picture is worth a thousand words.

Williams was more explicit than Pound about the "contagion" by which artistic order spreads. He claimed Pound and Stein used language to reconstitute thinking and therefore being:

But he is striking, as Stein is, at the basis of thought, at the mechanism with which we make our adjustments to things and to each other. This is the significance of the term culture and an indication of literature's relation thereto.

Pound, in his studious efforts to put us on the track of a released intelligence, a released spirit, a body that can function with what might be health—has dug down into the history of the *mens sana in corpore sano* throughout the ages.⁸

In a letter to Pound on 15 March 1933, Williams expressed the same idea about his own poetry and the bitterness he felt from the lack of its recognition:

What shall you say about me? That I have a volume of verse which I have been in the process of making for the past ten years, that it is the best collection of verse in America today and that I can't find a publisher—while, at the same time, every Sunday literary supplement has pages of book titles representing the poetry of my contemporaries. And when I say I have sought a publisher I mean just that, for I had the best agent in New York fairly comb the city for me last year. I'll try again this spring.

This must mean something. No doubt it means that my conception of poetry is not that of my contemporaries, either in the academics or out. This should be a distinction. It means that I believe poetry to be the mould of language as of feeling in any world and that its importance as a mechanism for correct thinking makes it too difficult for ordinary use, not that my own work is anywhere near what it shd. be, & that it is my constant effort to make it.⁹

Pound and Williams did not merely challenge that poetry should be responsible for the health of man; they detailed how it could be kept responsible. *How to Read* was printed in the *New York Herald Tribune Books* in 1929 and in England in 1931, and Zukofsky thought it important enough for the Oppens to reprint again in 1932.¹⁰ In it, Pound claimed that literature has “a function in the state. . . . And this function is not the coercing or emotionally persuading . . . people into the acceptance” of opinions. Instead, “it has to do with the clarity and vigor of ‘any and every’ thought and opinion. It has to do with maintaining the very cleanliness of the tools, the health of the very matter of thought itself.” Pound wrote that when “the application of word to thing goes rotten, i.e. becomes slushy and inexact, or excessive or bloated, the whole machinery of social and of individual thought and order goes to pot.” Poetry can be kept responsible by working for the technical condition of clarity, exactitude. Pound seems not to have observed always the distinction between expressing opinion with exactitude and propagandistic bullying; nevertheless, he is right—poetry differs from propaganda not by avoiding opinion but by being primarily concerned with the inner rather than the outer orders of man, with substance rather than with accidents. Pound continued:

Misquoting Confucius, one might say: It does not matter whether the author desire the good of the race or acts merely from personal vanity. The thing is mechanical in action. In proportion as his work is exact, i.e., true to human consciousness and to the nature of man, as it is exact in formulation of desire, so is it durable and so is it ‘useful’; I mean it maintains the precision and clarity of thought, not merely for the benefit of a few dilettantes and ‘lovers of literature,’ but maintains the health of thought outside literary circles and in non-literary existence, in general individual and communal life.

Or ‘*dans ce genre on n’émue que par la clarté.*’ One ‘moves’ the reader only by clarity. In depicting the motions of the ‘human heart’ the durability of the writing depends on the exactitude. It is the thing that is true and stays true that keeps fresh for the new reader.¹¹

With exactitude, the precise expression of the order that stays true, the “Objectivists” both established their responsibility to historical conditions and defended their work from the simplistic demand that it serve

revolutionary proletarian opinions.

Williams' "tactus eruditus," or, as Kenneth Burke put it, his "doctrine of contact," is a direct corollary of exactitude, and his statement "No ideas but in things" indicates its necessary discipline.¹² In Williams' work we see that the order that stays true can not be of loose abstractions; it must be of the concrete things of experience, whether objects in the world or "motions of the 'human heart.'" Williams' poem is superior to the student interpretation of it which follows because Williams presented the idea in terms of things of experience:

So much depends upon
The ovum and the sperm (chicken)
Man's ingenuity (wheel)
His labor (barrow)
And the elements (rain).¹³

In fact, that's not it at all. The meaning of a thing can not be understood in terms of what it might symbolize; it is itself, and it can only, with clarity, be itself. The concrete has more meaning, more depends upon it, than upon any abstraction.

George Oppen recalled: "What I felt I was doing was beginning from imagism as a position of honesty. The first question at that time in poetry was simply the question of honesty, of sincerity."¹⁴ Oppen took Pound's principle further even than Williams' discipline. The image became a test of personal sincerity. In "The Mind's Own Place," Oppen explained:

It is possible to find a metaphor for anything, an analogue: but the image is encountered, not found; it is an account of the poet's perception, of the act of perception; it is a test of sincerity, a test of conviction, the rare poetic qualities of truthfulness. They [modernist poets] meant to replace by the data of experience the accepted poetry of their time, a display by the poets of right thinking and right sentiment, a dreary waste of lies. That data was and is the core of what "modernism" restored to poetry, the sense of the poet's self among things. So much depends upon the red wheelbarrow. The distinction between a poem that shows confidence in itself and in its materials, and on the other hand a performance, a speech by the poet is the distinction between poetry and histrionics. It is a part of the function of poetry to serve as a test of truth. It is possible to say anything in abstract prose, but a great many things one believes or would like to believe or thinks he believes will not substantiate themselves in the concrete materials of the poem.¹⁵

Thoughts and sentiments are ethically "right" if they are related with exactitude to "the data of experience." This ethical quality, "the sense of the poet's self among things" entailing his responsibility to them, goes back to Pound's "distinction between public and private affairs," to the distinction between propaganda and literature, or as Oppen wrote histrionics and poetry. The "Objectivist" poem was not a performance; it presented the thing that can not be feigned or counterfeited. William James wrote, "True ideas are those that we can assimilate, validate, corroborate, and verify. False ideas are those that we cannot."¹⁶

"Presentation" was the word that Pound used, although not consistently, for the discipline of exactitude. It requires that every formal element of the poem be in absolute correspondence to the

particulars of the object. Presentation insures vividness—the vitality of language restored by “interpretive metaphor, or image”; it excludes what Pound called ornament. Considering verbal redundancy, this discipline produces economy or condensation. Considering meter, it produces absolute rhythm, which depends on cadence or the musical phrase to reproduce the feeling of the object. Considering the idea (propaganda or histrionics), it produced understatement, a method of allowing the absolute terms of concrete experience to speak for themselves. Zukofsky’s “sincerity,” “preoccupation with the accuracy of detail in writing,”¹⁷ is a redefinition of this central principle. The poem must accurately express particulars, the concrete materials of experience.

The materials to which words could with exactitude be applied was expressed differently by each of the “Objectivists.” Oppen spoke of the image and also of the “substantive, the little words or the necessary content of our lives:

I’m really concerned with the substantive, with the subject of the sentence, with what we are talking about, and not rushing over the subject-matter in order to make a comment about it. It is still a principle with me, of more than poetry, to notice, to state, to lay down the substantive for its own sake. . . .

A statement can be made in which the subject plays a very little part, except for argumentation; one hangs a predicate on it that is one’s comment about it. This is an approximate quotation from Hegel, who added (I like the quote very much): “Disagreement marks where the subject-matter ends. It is what the subject-matter is not.” The important thing is that if we are talking about the nature of reality, then we are not really talking about our comment about it; we are talking about the apprehension of some thing, whether it is or not, whether one can make a thing of it or not. Of Being Numerous asks the question whether or not we can deal with humanity as something which actually does exist.

I realize the possibility of attacking many of the things I’m saying and I say them as a sort of act of faith. The little words that I like so much, like “tree,” “hill,” and so on, are I suppose just as much a taxonomy as the more elaborate words; they’re categories, classes, concepts, things we invent for ourselves. Nevertheless, there are certain ones without which we really are unable to exist, including the concept of humanity.¹⁸

The substantive is, as Pound wrote, “true and stays true.” Disagreement marks where it ends.

Carl Rakosi spoke of a “counter-devil” which evades subject-matter:

There’s the strongest kind of pull in a poet against subject-matter—in fact, against writing a poem at all. No psychologist understood this as well as Otto Rank. He called this force the counter-will. This force is always around when the urge to write is felt, and is a match for it, and often more than a match. The fine hand of this counter-devil is evident, of course, in a writer’s procrastination, but also operates behind the scenes in other more subtle and devious ways whenever one is evading subject-matter, by being rhetorical or elliptical, for example. On the surface this looks innocent, as if it were just a literary matter, but if the writer himself thinks so, it just means that his protective purpose has been achieved and he has been conned by his counter-devil. In the process, he may make something as good, or even better, but the fact remains that he did not retain the integrity of his original impulse, he had to appease or deceive his counter-will with a substitute. . . .

Abstraction, of course, is the most common deadly offender. When you write about something as though it were a principle or a concept or a generalization, you have in that moment evaded it, its specificity, its earthly life.¹⁹

And Charles Reznikoff spoke of a limitation to “testimony”:

I see something and it moves me and I put it down as I see it. In the treatment of it, I abstain from comment. . . . "By the term 'objectivist' I suppose a writer may be meant who does not write directly about his feelings but about what he sees and hears; who is restricted almost to the testimony of a witness in a court of law; and who expresses his feelings indirectly by the selection of his subject-matter and, if he writes in verse, by its music." Now suppose in a court of law, you are testifying in a negligence case. You cannot get up on the stand and say, "The man was negligent." That's a conclusion of fact. What you'd be compelled to say is how the man acted. Did he stop before he crossed the street? Did he look? The judges of whether he is negligent or not are the jury in that case and the judges of what you say as a poet are the readers. That is, there is an analogy between testimony in the courts and the testimony of a poet.²⁰

The statements by Pound, Williams, Oppen, Rakosi, and Reznikoff above are assertions of the importance and reality of their art in defense against a social and economic order. The "Objectivists" redefined poetry to strike at the basis that constitutes society.

In 1928 when Pound was urging Zukofsky to form a group to fight against certain obstructions to literary life, Zukofsky complained that it would be difficult to find members among his worthy contemporaries because Jew and non-Jew alike were predisposed against his own concerns for one of two reasons—it would not support them financially, or it would not usher in the revolution.²¹ These two predispositions characterized the social polarization of the ensuing depression. The collapse of the capitalist economy in November 1929 shocked the frightened "conservatives" (as I shall call them) into holding the more tenaciously onto whatever claims they had to the success of the system, and shocked the alienated "radicals" into struggling the more tenaciously for the overthrow of the system. Meanwhile, the "Objectivists" were caught in the middle. While joining in the leftist struggle to institute a more equitable economic order, they had to support themselves and market their works within the capitalist system.

Unfortunately, no matter how important their efforts were in the history of the development of poetry, no matter how artistically successful, they were a practical failure. The poets had great difficulty in getting publishers or public. On the literary level, too, they fell between extremes. The conservative establishment ignored them because they seemed undisciplined and unintellectual, because they did not write in the accepted forms; the radicals scorned them because as decadent bourgeois they let an obsession with formal matters distract them from the oppression of the proletariat, and because they would not dedicate their writing to propagandizing the Party Line.

Faced with this dilemma, the "Objectivists" tried for a while to work as an independent group to realize their poetic cure for man's disorders. They felt that the relation between literature and the state was as Pound described in How to Read. However, after the collapse of To Publishers and the Objectivist Press they disbanded and took up different resolutions according to their separate inclinations.

Pound was the first to change, being influenced before the others by the Economic Crisis, which hit Europe before the United States, and perhaps influenced more than the others by the end of To Publishers, having hoped it would print his complete Prolegomena and possibly his complete works. By 1933, Pound's admiration of Benito Mussolini (begun in 1926)²² had ripened into advocacy. After Zukofsky visited Pound in Rapallo in the summer of 1933, Zukofsky increasingly withdrew from practical

involvement with politics as his poetical father threw himself more and more vehemently into it. Although Rakosi and Oppen refused to withdraw, they both quit writing. Both felt after 1934 that in the extremity of the crisis something needed to be done which their poetry could not accomplish, and so direct action had to supplant poetry. Williams, with his practice as a doctor, also worked to help alleviate the increasing human suffering, although he stopped neither writing nor believing that writing could maintain the cleanliness of the tool of thought for the whole of society. Perhaps only Williams and Reznikoff were largely unaffected by the Depression and the failure of their group efforts, but then Reznikoff had been resigned to failure and rejection from the beginning of his career.

In 1933 Pound reviewed for Poetry a new magazine which attempted to show awareness of the problems of the day, Cambridge Left. Pound warned that its contributors, among whom was the young W. H. Auden, should not only aim at the "LARGER" subjects but should also follow Dante in rendering them with "precise and specific statements" and "concrete exact presentations." Moving on to his own unawareness and awareness of larger problems, he wrote that he did not "regret having ignored social problems during the first ten years of my writing." They were not important before 1910. Marx was a "great historian," but "he did not affect his own time very greatly." However, the times and the importance of social problems in it had changed:

On the very base of his own material determinism, Marx, alive in the 1930's, would be the first to recognize that an enormous change in the material basis of life demands an equal change in the intellectual recognition. Labor was probably the true basis of value in 1840, but the cultural heritage, that is labor plus the whole mass of mechanical inventions, is the basis of value in 1930 (change from the machine age to the power age).

I am not dragging social discussion into this periodical. I am considering a writer's problem, as concretely thrust under my eye by walking example.

The program of Cambridge Left, which Pound quoted, began:

The motives for writing, of those who are writing for this paper, have changed, along with their motives for doing anything. It is not so much an intellectual choice, as the forcible intrusion of social issues. Those who are left in their politics have to face certain problems as writers of prose and verse.²³

Kenneth Rexroth wrote that after 1929 "it was a lean season for American poetry. Hundreds of young intellectuals who started out as writers were consumed and cast aside by the Communist Party. Most of them became political activists and gave up writing. The strong-willed ones obeyed the Party Line and dutifully wrote Proletarian literature and Socialist Realism. The stultifying effects of bureaucratic control are more than conclusively shown by the fact that all this passionate activity and commitment produced, in poetry, almost nothing of enduring value."²⁴

The "Objectivists," however, in spite of the pressure of the times to be socially responsible in the narrowest sense, and in spite of lack of support for their work, did not join the radicals appearing in publications like the New Masses, the Partisan Review, or the Daily Worker; they still believed in the political, social, and moral inviolability of their art, in writing which attempted to realize something more basically human than ideology.

In 1933, Williams was asked to accept the editorship of [Blast: A Magazine of Proletarian Fiction](#). He responded by saying he would not work for them but they could use his name if the magazine would be “devoted to writing (first and last),” not to party ideology. He wrote:

A dilemma has been broached when the artist has been conscripted and forced to subordinate his training and skill to party necessity for a purpose. . . . in order to serve the cause of the proletariat he must not under any circumstances debase his art to any purpose. . . . Bad writing never helped anybody.^{[25](#)}

Good writing, like all true art, as Williams claimed in 1936, is the creation and maintenance of “the great tradition which we have today so largely forgotten,” namely, “the dignity and importance of man in the universe and his actual responsibility here”; art is a world which “we most need for our enlightenment,” a refuge from “the unreal if not the misshapen and the grotesque” creation in which we live and which is verified daily in the newspapers. Art offers an “asylum, a working place for the reestablishment of order,” a “battleground where difference of emotional and intellectual opinion may be engaged to the enhancement of the soul, . . . a battleground where men contend to enlarge their vision and to refresh and engage their minds and emotion.” Accordingly, Williams asserted that “America, having the wealth, should find better ways of giving the arts sustenance. . . . A means must be found to publish”—and to distribute—“books of better quality, of less general appeal than the ordinary, on some other than a purely commercial basis.” He complained that America’s endowments, not only for publishing, but for criticism, sculpture, and architecture were hopelessly inadequate.^{[26](#)}

Unlike Williams, as early as 1924, Rakosi began to feel a conflict between writing and social work. Before he stopped writing, he tried his hand as a messboy on a merchant ship (1925), a boy counselor at the Jewish Board of Guardians in New York City (1925), a student of psychology at the University of Wisconsin (1925-1926), an industrial psychologist in Milwaukee (1926-1927), a family counselor at the Massachusetts Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children in Boston (1927-1928), an English instructor and graduate student and then a student of law at the University of Texas (1928-1929), a high-school teacher and part-time group worker with Mexicans at Rusk Settlement House in Houston (1929-1931), a summer student in premedical sciences at the University of Texas at Austin and the Texas Medical School in Galveston (1931-1932), a social worker at Services to the Aged in Cook County Department of Public Welfare in Chicago and a student at the University of Chicago Graduate School of Social Service Administration (1932-1933), a Director of Social Services in the new Federal Transient Bureau in New Orleans and a faculty member at the Graduate School of Social Work at Tulane University (1933-1935), and a worker at the Jewish Family Service in New York (1935-1940).^{[27](#)} In this period Rakosi was not only trying to accommodate both writing and social work, he was satisfying his passionate desire for new experience; he had wanted to see different parts of the country and to meet different kinds of people.^{[28](#)}

Rakosi’s father was a strong socialist, having been inspired by Karl Liebknecht and Rosa Luxemburg (see [Section 2](#)). His roommate at the University of Wisconsin was Kenneth Fearing,^{[29](#)} whom Rexroth claimed was one of the two best poets (the other being Horace Gregory) anticipating “the proletarian poetry of the Red Thirties.”^{[30](#)} It is not surprising that the back cover of [Amulet](#) states that

Rakosi stopped writing when "he had become disillusioned with the state of our society and felt there was no place in it for a poet." In his interview with Dembo, Rakosi explained:

During the thirties I was working in New York—this was during the very depth of the Depression—and any young person with any integrity or intelligence had to become associated with some left-wing organization. You just couldn't live with yourself if you didn't. So I got caught up very strongly in the whole Marxian business. I took very literally the basic Marxian ideas about literature having to be an instrument for social change, for expressing the needs and desires of large masses of people. And believing that, I couldn't write poetry, because the poetry that I could write could not achieve these ends.³¹

Rakosi married Leah Jaffe in 1939; they had a daughter in 1940 and a son in 1944. After giving up poetry by 1941, Rakosi did not begin writing again until 1965 and began writing full-time when he retired from his practice as a private psychotherapist and from his position as Executive Director of Jewish Family and Children's Service in Minneapolis in 1968.³²

George Oppen also chose acting over writing after the collapse of the Objectivist Press. We and Mary Oppen decided to postpone their life in poetry and the arts when they joined the Communist Party to oppose fascism in 1935. In New York City they "created organizations of the unemployed" through the Workers Alliance, arranging demonstrations and sit-ins, working in neighborhoods to keep people from eviction and starvation, and obtaining "emergency food and rent orders" from the relief bureau. In Utica they organized a party of leftists and radicals, and encouraged dairymen to cooperate with the Farmers' Union milk strike.³³ George Oppen remembered the deep commitment of those years:

It was a matter of going from house to house, apartment to apartment; I think we knew every house in Bedford-Stuyvesant and North Brooklyn and all the people in them. We wanted to gather crowds of people on the simple principle that the law would to be changed where it interfered with relief and that settlement laws would have to be unenforceable when they involved somebody's starvation. And we were interested in rioting, as a matter of fact—rioting under political discipline. Disorder, disorder—to make it impossible to allow people to starve. It also involved the hunger march on Washington as well as local undertakings.³⁴

Mary Oppen recorded the advice of her teacher Pop Mindel to a young Negro artist: "It's the wrong time for you to be an artist—you have set your foot on the path to help your people, and you can help them more in politics than you can with your art."³⁵ In spite of the "Objectivist" belief in the power of art to realize and disseminate the order of the essentially human and real universe, Oppen, like Raskoi, was forced painfully to conclude that this time his art could not relieve the many whose suffering and oppression required immediate relief. In Oppen's own words:

I think it was fifteen million families that were faced with the threat of immediate starvation. It wasn't a business one simply read about in the newspaper. You stepped out your door and found men who had nothing to eat. I'm not moralizing now—and I've been through this before—but for some people it was simply impossible not to do something. I've written an essay that appeared in *Kulchur* 10 in which I explained that I didn't believe in political poetry or poetry as being politically efficacious. I don't even believe in the honesty of a man saying, "Well, I'm a poet and I will make my contribution to the cause by writing poems about it." I don't believe that's any more honest than to make wooden nutmegs because you happen to be a woodworker. If you

decide to do something politically, you do something that has political efficacy. And if you decide to write poetry, then you write poetry, not something that you hope, or deceive yourself into believing, can save people who are suffering. That was the dilemma of the thirties.³⁶

After 1937, the Oppens had a daughter, and George was trained in a government school as a machinist. He worked in a factory in Detroit and he served and was wounded in World War II in France, returning to the States at the end of November 1945. The Oppens moved to California in March 1946, where George worked as a carpenter and a cabinetmaker. From there, fearing persecution as one-time Communists, they moved to Mexico City in 1950, where they lived until 1958, the year in which George resumed writing.³⁷

The decisions of Rakosi and Oppen to involve themselves entirely with practical solutions to the dilemma of the thirties put as definite an end to the "Objectivists" as Zukofsky's withdrawal from literary salesmanship. They resumed writing with the deeper understandings of human necessity and artistic purpose that their experiences in politics and social work, working in agencies and factories, fighting in war and having families had offered them, but also with changed attitudes towards poetry.

For Zukofsky, too, the thirties posed a dilemma. His employment was marginal and uncongenial. After his salary from the Oppens for *To Publishers* ended in August 1932, he was unemployed until 1934, when he began a broken series of relief jobs up to April 1942. After November 1942, he worked irregularly as a substitute teacher in high school, edited technical instruction books, and did stints of teaching at Colgate University (summer 1947), Queens College (evenings 1947-1948), and San Francisco State College (summer 1958). He also taught at Polytechnic Institute of Brooklyn from February 1947 to August 1966, when he retired to write full-time.³⁸ Meanwhile, he married Celia Thaw in 1939, and they had a son, Paul, in 1943.

In the early years of the Depression, as Celia Zukofsky remembered, any thinking person came to see Communism as the only moral alternative—and in fact a viable one, since the march on Washington showed the United States very close to revolution.³⁹ However, as Celia also remembered, Zukofsky "did not become an activist politically; he did not join groups; he didn't get into marches or parades." Even as a child, Zukofsky had always been a spectator, never a participant.⁴⁰

Zukofsky's radicalism was strictly literary. His defense against non-literary systems of value, whether the capitalist monetary system (exchange-value) or the revolutionist ethical system (use-value), was Marx's labor theory of value: that the value of a thing is based on the labor required in its production.⁴¹ In this scheme, the labor in poetic composition would be equivalent to labor in any other endeavor. The beginning of "A"-8 marshalls arguments from Marx to establish Zukofsky's belief, as he wrote in "'Recencies' in Poetry," in "poetry defined as a job, a piece of work."⁴² Marx sought the establishment, wrote Zukofsky, of a "labor process" in which "the opposition between brain and manual work," as between the oppressor and the oppressed, "will have disappeared." Accordingly, Zukofsky noted

that Marx worked "like a horse" writing Das Kapital.⁴³ This was Zukofsky's defense against both business and revolutionary interests.

Morris U. Schappes, a radical critic, criticized An "Objectivists" Anthology for the lack of the coherence, organization, and direction which he thought were promised by Zukofsky's "objective: inextricably the direction of historic and contemporary particulars." Countering Zukofsky's statement that it is "impossible to communicate anything but particulars," Schappes claimed that "there is no artistic communication of particulars only." The "Objectivists" objective, he believed, was a socially regressive nihilism which denied "intelligence, conscious action, and art." He explained:

At a certain stage in the decay of a class, its artists turn against it in furious vanity. Control by the middle class, its idolization of Business-Profit, make the poet of little importance. He vents his pique by refusing to write for it, and withdraws into rootless esotericism. Scorned, he scorns. But his very method of rebelling against domination by Finance is conditioned by his former roots in the bourgeoisie. In protesting, he nevertheless accepts its premises; instead of questioning its economics, its politics, its morals, its values, he denies that there are values. In practice, Objectivism is such a nominalistic denial of art, of value. Because he has been reduced, in his social status, to Nothing, he thinks All is Nothing. The intelligent alternative, however, is completely to stride beyond these premises of the bourgeoisie: that is, to ally oneself with the revolutionary proletariat. Only there will the deracinated bourgeois poet find the rock from which criticism can be made, and on which are built values that are other than those sanctioned by a decadent middle class.⁴⁴

To this challenge to the radical commitment of the "Objectivists," Zukofsky quoted Lenin: "As for the failure 'to ally oneself with the revolutionary proletariat': 'This party rejected Marxism, stubbornly refused to understand (it would be more correct to say that it could not understand) the necessity of a strictly objective estimate of all the class forces and their interrelation in every political action.' (Lenin—Left: Communism, An Infantile Disorder)." Zukofsky implied that this "objective estimate" is not only an essential aspect of Marxism, but also "the concern of the editorial presentation and the poetry of An "Objectivists" Anthology, whether the presentation be statement, image, contrast (satire), or assertion." Schappes did not share Zukofsky's belief that the "objective estimate" of particulars was an affirmation rather than a denial of values, and that it is up to the reader to make relations among particular values at the root of all economic, political, and moral actions. Zukofsky believed such relations were implicit in the particulars presented in the anthology and criticized Schappes for approving only of "poets' who 'express' their 'service' to the revolutionary proletariat in the worst public-school honored manner of Milton—to repeat, 'thou honored flood.'"⁴⁵

Although here Zukofsky, swayed by the bias of the times, pictured himself as revolutionary, he was equally truly bourgeois; he directly neither questioned nor served either bourgeois or proletarian economics, politics, or morals. Instead, he restored essentially human values like "love and hate to a chain of poetic fact," that is, to "order and the facts as order" which approaches "a state of music wherein the ideas present themselves sensuously and intelligently and are of no predatory intention."⁴⁶ Schappes reduced the absence of "predatory intention" to nihilism, but Zukofsky argued instead that this absence makes possible the clarity in which universals may be perceived in the things in which they inhere.

In spite of commitment to aesthetic integrity, Zukofsky was indeed swayed by revolutionary interests during the thirties. Evidence of these interests may be found in 55 Poems (1923-1935). In addition to Poem IX, "Memory of V. I. Ulianov" (see [Section 5](#)), Poem 7, "During the Passaic Strike of 1926," contains the line "For Justice they are shrewdly killing the proletarian" with obvious irony; and Poem 29, one of "Two Dedications" (1929), speaks of the peasants and workers in Comrade Diego Rivera's murals and foresees the revolutionary state: "Holidays— / There'll be many— / . . . Sunday; the / Miner's lantern unlit, / Coal beneath the sun." In addition, Song 23, "The Immediate Aim" (1934), suggests the political implications of sincerity ("Other than propaganda"): the workers should "take time off / this March morning" so that they "might make bare" their eyes to the precisions of spring, since "your value which enslaves you / in advance / has made your eye-pupils limited— // inanity / to prate / the injustice of it." Instead of arguing injustices, they should take a walk by the river, that is, they should "walk out / against / the // social / and political / order of / things." Further, Song 27 (1933) in "3/4 time" quotes Das Kapital on social relations and money to suit the drunken pleasure of Zukofsky's friend's birthday without money; Song 29, "N.Y." (1933) mentioned "the nth reversion, 're' Marx"; and "Further than'—" (1935) explores the possibilities of Zukofsky's bathroom after "a shower / expectant that today or tomorrow must / bring the new economic atomization."⁴⁷ From these poems one sees that although Zukofsky had radical interests he preferred to express them in terms of local and rather eccentric particulars. His "immediate aim" was to focus human issues rather than strictly economic, political, or moral issues.

In 1934 Zukofsky had an experience by which he felt he could deal with his belief that "the growing oppression of the poor" was "the situation most pertinent to us—, / . . . the most pertinent subject of our day." In the subway he came upon a praying mantis, which seemed to him to be begging for help but which then flew at his chest. Sympathy and fear conflicting within him, Zukofsky experienced again the bivalence that defined his "mass-consciousness" in 1928 (see [Section 1](#)); he recognized his own poverty and his fear of poverty, his Jewish humility and need for belonging, and his American independence and need for upward mobility. He wrote: "The mantis, then, / Is a small incident of one's physical vision / Which is the poor's helplessness / The poor's separateness / Bringing self-disgust." In the facts of this experience, then, he perceived both the real and the symbolic, whose potential he wished to translate into poetry. But the "Objectivist" compromise had definitely failed; Zukofsky could not reconcile his revolutionary perceptions with "Objectivist" form and so had to write two poems (or one poem with two distinct parts), "Mantis" and "Mantis, An Interpretation," the first in the form of a sestina and the second in free verse.

Andrienne Rich described "Mantis" and "Mantis, An Interpretation," in her review of Found Objects in 1964. "Whatever the faults of the 'interpretation' as poetry," she wrote, "it is an interesting study of one deliberately, consciously avant-garde poet's pain and concern with the possible limitations of two traditions—the Anglo-European mainstream containing Dante, Chaucer, Shakespeare, the Bible, the great formal structures—and the regenerative American breakthrough of the early part of this century, with its demands for a more spontaneous measure, for a closer look at things, for an independent movement belonging to the American inflection and the American consciousness." Finally, however, Rich wished that Zukofsky had accomplished "what is clearly the task of all today who, like him, want the best of both

worlds—the work of fusion, not in separate sections of one poem, or in separate poems, but in individual lines and whole poems.”⁴⁸ Despite Zukofsky’s contention that the sestina form was required by his experience rather than the other way around the sestina form proved incapable of fulfilling his complex intentions. “—Our world will not stand it,” he wrote, “the implications of a too regular form.” The interpretation was necessary to counter those implications.

Was political directive intended in Zukofsky’s presentation of political directive? Was “Objectivist” aesthetics political, and effective politically? Was a kind of “propaganda” concomitant with regard for the thing itself, for presenting the thing’s “sensuality” in the poem? In 1936, when these poems were first published, Zukofsky might have answered “yes.” He hoped, for instance, that his “original shock” would persist in the coda of “Mantis” (“Fly, mantis, on the poor, arise like leaves / The armies of the poor, strength: stone on stone / And build the new world in your eyes, Save it!”)—“So that the invoked collective” (“the poor’s strength”) “Does not subdue the senses’ awareness” (“the mantis”), and that this “awareness” would arouse action against the forces of war:

The original emotion remaining,
like the collective,
Unprompted, real, as propaganda.

The voice exhorting, trusting what one hears
Will exhort others, is the imposed sensuality of an age
When both propaganda and sensuality are necessary against—
“—we have been left with nothing
just a few little unimportant ships
and barges” (British Admiralty even in 1920)⁴⁹

After 1936, however, Zukofsky would probably have answered “no.” His next book Anew (1935-1944), contains no such evidence of radical interests.

In “A” too, Zukofsky’s ambivalence presents problems which the critic finds in the work of neither Williams (who tried to remain outside of politics) nor Pound (who became increasingly immured in politics). “A”-8, written in 1935-1937, shows favor towards the Communism of the Soviet Union and quotes Lenin and Marx at length. Or was Zukofsky simply presenting them as the significant particulars of the age? In any case, by “A”-12 (1950-1951) he confessed that he was mistaken: “13 years or so back when / I tried hard for the fact, . . . the ‘fact’ / is not so hard-set as a paradigm.”⁵⁰ If Stalin did not discredit himself and Communism everywhere with his purges of 1936-1938, he did so with his pact with fascist Germany in August 1939. Between the first and final publications of “A”-8, Zukofsky omitted many of the most direct representations of leftist political utterance. For instance, the lines “The poor / Betrayed and sold. // Workers, no thought of a system exists / Completely abstracted from action” are revised to omit the words “Workers” and “of a system.” Similarly, between the lines “Two legs stand— / Pace them” (alluding to “A”-7) and “Railways and highways have tied / Blood of farmland and town,” Zukofsky omitted the lines:

In revolution are the same!

Workers and farmers unite
 You have nothing to lose
 But your chains
 The world is to win
 This is May Day! May!
 Your armies are veining the earth!

After the line "With wit or steel?" which reflects Zukofsky's dilemma whether to take up the pen or the sword, Zukofsky omitted:

These claim to have conquered Marxism
 For eighty years in the hearts of the workers—
 And the proof that they won't:
 The Union of Soviet Socialist Republics,
 Shock worker of Marxist Workers thruout the world.⁵¹

The omission of these lines leaves the question open.

At a time in which every self-respecting young intellectual had to take the political situation into account and decide where he would stand, Zukofsky designed "A" as a medium for radical opinions; he took up the pen to "record / Politics. / Record / Labor."⁵² Yet he always succeeded in transcending propaganda, in maintaining the poem's inviolability as art. Robert Duncan wrote of the Cantos and "A": "Whatever a poem meant in its truth of particulars it was not a political directive. The truth of a poem was the truth of what was felt in the course of the poem, not the truth of a proposition in whatever political or religious persuasion outside the poem."⁵³

Reznikoff, of all the "Objectivists," seems the most aloof from social and political concerns. His life was not spectacular. His publisher's biography reads: "In 1928, he went to work writing law for the firm publishing Corpus Juris, an encyclopedia of law for lawyers. Later, he worked in Hollywood for about three years for a friend who was then a producer for Paramount Pictures. After that, he made his living by freelance writing, research, translating, and editing." Reznikoff's stint in Hollywood is recorded in his novel The Manner Music and in "Autobiography: Hollywood,"⁵⁴ but was in no way distinguished. His career as a freelancer consists principally of his work published by the Jewish Publication Society of America: The Lionhearted: A Story About the Jews in Medieval England, the historical novel (1944); The Jews of Charleston: A History of an American Jewish Community, written with Uriah Z. Engelman (1950); translations of My Three Years in the United States by I. J. Benjamin (1956), and Stories and Fantasies from the Jewish Past by Emil Bernhard Cohn (1961); and a two-volume edition of Louis Marshall, Champion of Liberty: Selected Papers and Addresses, with an introduction by Oscar Handlin (1957).

Reznikoff was not, however, unconcerned with society and politics. Jerusalem the Golden, published in 1934 by the Objectivist Press, ends with "Karl Marx," a brief sermonic presentation of a Marxian utopia in apocalyptic terms. A Separate Way, published in 1936 by the Objectivist Press, includes "The Socialists of Vienna," a representation of revolutionary spirit "indebted to Ezra Ehrenbourg's Civil

War in Austria (New Masses, July 3, 1934).” This piece contains the lines “Arise, arise, you workers! / Revolution!” and ends:

Karl Marx Hof, Engels Hof,
Liebknecht Hof, Matteotti Hof—

. . .

names peeling out a holiday among the ticking of clocks!—
speak your winged words, cannon;

. . .

cry out, you fascists,
Athens must perish!
Long live Sparta!⁵⁵

Reznikoff did not treat historical and political concerns in terms of theory or ideology; he treated them in terms of their observable human effects, and usually in terms of an individual Jewish sufferer. He never stated his own feelings or opinions about particulars. Even so, there is no question where his sympathies lay when he discussed the “One man” who “escapes from the ghetto of Warsaw / where thousands have been killed,” when he described the feelings that erupted after “A husky red-faced young fellow / pushed his way through the crowded subway train / selling Father Coughlin’s Social Justice,” when he overheard “people with calm intelligent facts / in snug restaurants and rooms / talking against” the Jewish refugees from Nazi Germany, and when he remembered the coin his ailing grandfather had given him, with “the monstrous eagle of czarist Russia, / with two open beaks, / from which my father and mother and so many others had fled.”⁵⁶

Reznikoff’s Holocaust (1975), “based on a United States government publication, Trials of the Criminals before the Nuernberg Military Tribunal and the records of the Eichmann trial in Jerusalem,”⁵⁷ is a supreme achievement of ironic understatement, presenting horrible incidents from the approving eyes of the Nazi’s more than from the suffering eyes of the Jews. For instance, under “Entertainment” we read: “The commander of a camp, among his amusements, as in other camps / had a large dog / and at the cry of ‘Jude,’ that is, ‘Jew,’ / the dog would attack the man and tear off pieces of flesh.” And in a footnote on the last page: “But, despite the burden on every S.S. man or German police officer during these actions to drive out the Jews from Warsaw — where they had once numbered a quarter of a million — the spirit of the S.S. men and the police officers, it was noted by one of their superiors, was ‘extraordinarily good and praiseworthy from the first day to the very last.’”⁵⁸ Yet these outrageously understated observations are calculated to evoke an intense moral and political conviction against such outrages. Geoffrey O’Brien wrote that “Reznikoff’s book may help restore some sense of genocide as an actual experience rather than as an abstract concept; of real death, without recourse, without intellectual prettification, a few inches away from someone’s eyes. . . . It isn’t history, it’s poetry; and poetry, really, is not a form of fiction.”⁵⁹

Whether together before or separately after the failure of the Objectivist Press, the “Objectivists” dealt with challenges from both political extremes against the relevance and enduring value of their work. No one writes in a vacuum. Sincerity in enduring art may be both distinct from propaganda and related to the matters of propaganda. We should not let the passage of time make background matters and energies

seem unimportant to art in which time and place is immanent. Implicit in each "Objectivist" poem are certain and precise relations between the word, man, and the world.

II. The Literary Context

Whereas sincerity related "Objectivism" to the political necessities of the day, objectification related it to the literary necessities. When the political world was polarized into radicals and conservatives, the literary world was polarized into freeversists and formalists, the first lacking artistic discipline and the second lacking worldly relevance. Pound therefore complained in 1918 that free verse "has become as prolix and verbose as any of the flaccid varieties that preceded it,"⁶⁰ and Zukofsky explained in 1931 that the work of the twenties lacked any realization of "clear or vital 'particulars'" and of the "'objectively perfect,'" and that no object was "'aimed at.'"⁶¹

Carl Rakosi has written that "perfection realized outside the mind and feelings in the art-object known as a poem was very much and always the aim of the four of us whom you're studying, but not, of course, restricted to the Objectivists." In fact, Rakosi felt that "the special quality of the Objectivists lay not in desire but in the realization of the desire, the degree of realization, the solidity of it. To get at the particularity of that, you should read the poems appearing in Poetry at the time and during the decade preceding and compare these to what we were writing (I recommend doing this also as an empirical way of getting at what I, at least, was aspiring for in clarity)." ⁶² Theoretically, Rakosi aspired to "clarity" in the sense that Pound used it in How to Read: writing has clarity when its "application of word to thing" is exact.⁶³

The "kindest appreciation" Rakosi could give of Solon Barber's Cross-Country in his review of it in Poetry in 1933, for example, was that it contained "a good deal of sentimental symbolism." Rakosi explained:

Since this energy is not organic in the language or in the construction but is derived from an entirely different tradition, it seems faked. As far as the poem is concerned, the metropolitan bar with its jazz, the folk-lorish tough ranchero, and the awe of the poet in the open spaces are all one and the same thing: they draw on material for which the author can find only a flaccid, contourless imagery unnecessarily romantic, lacking in the incision to keep its sentiment fresh. An energy is implied in the material which is not fulfilled in the language.⁶⁴

Rakosi required, as did the other "Objectivists," the "incision" of language and structure that shows respect for the poem's material, for the detail and form of the poet's initial impulse.

Rakosi's review in 1933 for Symposium of Williams' Collected Poems 1921-1931 (then yet unpublished and titled Script) shows that Williams succeeded where Barber failed: "Williams' persistence and concentration on his object in the face of all kinds of contemporary rhetoric are a distinct service." Williams avoided, Rakosi claimed, the "objectionable" distortions of glamorous French models used according to "a set of badly fitting" English "critical standards" which obscure "the prose qualities of the language." Williams could not "say it better in prose."⁶⁵ The prose standard, via Pound, is from Ford

Madox Ford. Pound wrote that Ford “believes in an exact rendering of things. He would strip words of all ‘association’ for the sake of getting a precise meaning.”⁶⁶ Here, claiming Hardy rather than Ford as his prose model, Rakosi claimed that Williams’ writing “expresses a solidarity of atmosphere which, if it were voluminous, would be comparable to Hardy—not an atmosphere, naturally, of ego-seduction by hidden musical forms, floating, but of those arrangements that express a consistence and a simplification, a character.” Even in *Al Que Quiere*, this character is “modestly expressed in perception and declaration. His notations fill the book with integrity and an explicitness that gives the feeling of the male open eye between moments of slightly drab declaration.”⁶⁷

The “Objectivists” response to the general poetic malaise was to return to the modernist inventors who had made it possible—Joyce, Stein, Pound, and Williams—and to the few who had some sense of inner necessity—Moore, McAlmon, Cummings, and even some of Eliot and Stevens. Since Pound and Williams had developed and adapted the underlying assumptions of the “Objectivists,” Zukofsky correctly recognized them as not only mentors but as members of the group. The “Objectivists” studied not how to imitate Pound and Williams but how to develop and adapt to their own time, place, and personalities the concepts which Pound and Williams confirmed in their own inclinations. In his review of Williams, Rakosi claimed that the objectionable distortions which he found absent in Williams were in Pound “never great . . . absorbed early by a great energy in critical evaluation and poetic exactness; in Eliot they were utilized by an exact measure of sentiment, in Cummings by a caper, in Stevens by a pattern. They have been stimulating but their influence had been too much against lucidity.”⁶⁸ Pound, Eliot, Cummings, and Stevens’ successes were dangers for the unwary, but the “Objectivists” were wary. Although they differed among themselves according to their different interests and personalities, they all concentrated on the real rather than the “poetic” and discovered in the context of the modern age the objects upon which they founded their own poetic experiments.

The contemporary formalists, on the contrary, had reacted not only to the idea of free verse but to the idea of modernism itself. About the Southern Fugitives—notably John Crowe Ransom, Allen Tate, and Robert Penn Warren—Rexroth wrote:

From the early Twenties, based on Vanderbilt University, a deliberate, highly self-conscious, tightly organized, reactionary movement was underway. This was The Fugitives group, named after their magazine, *The Fugitive*. The title was chosen to indicate that they were fugitives from every aspect of modernity, philosophical, social, literary, political. They were militant defenders of the Myth of the Old South, long since debunked by Mark Twain as a pipe dream resulting from falling asleep over the novels of Sir Walter Scott. They read T. S. Eliot’s *Criterion* and Maurras’ *L’Action Française* and tried to put their principles into practice amongst the corn and cotton. They allied themselves with the briefly notorious “Humanist Movement” and came to call themselves Southern Agrarians. . . . Their literary principles were equally reactionary.⁶⁹

In writing “American Poetry 1920-1930,” Zukofsky recognized the formalists as the only group to pose a real threat to the “Objectivists” (see [Section 12](#)). He gave only a parenthetical to H.D., a single clause to Carl Sandburg, and a half-paragraph to Robinson Jeffers and Archibald MacLeish—but he devoted over four pages to the formalists, beginning with a discussion of the dangerous tendencies of the

recent work of Eliot and Stevens. Zukofsky claimed that the work of these poets—Allen Tate, John Crowe Ransom, Hart Crane, and even Elinor Wylie—suffered from “an attenuated ‘accessibility to experience’” because of their enslavement “to a versification clambering the stiles of English influence.” Robert Frost, too, suffered from a spiritual and ethical death of iambic seduction.⁷⁰

The intensity of Zukofsky’s criticism must be balanced against the reality of the economic and poetic threat which the formalists brought against unemployed writers of Leftist persuasions like the “Objectivists.” From the viewpoint of the enemy, Rexroth wrote:

As the economic crisis deepened, American society became as highly polarized as German or French, and almost all writers to greater or degree moved to the Left. There had to be some writers around the Right pole, but America, where everybody is liberal and progressive, was very short of Right writers. The Southern Agrarians were only too happy to meet the need, to fill the vacuum in the American Geist. They already occupied certain strategic positions and they were as highly organized as the Left. It is hard to realize today when “everybody teaches” that they were the only group in America entirely based upon the universities. All of them already were academicians. They had in the days of “Humanist controversy” staked out a number of influential book-reviewing claims. (It should be explained that “Humanism” was a drive on the part of conservative and academic critics under the leadership of Irving Babbitt, teacher of French at Harvard and disciple of Maurras, to capture book-reviewing jobs from the followers of H. L. Mencken and the Midwesterners.) From then on they drove steadily toward a takeover of contemporary writing, editing, publishing, and teaching. They did not succeed, but they were unaware of it.⁷¹

Whatever Reznikoff’s distortion and oversimplification, the Southerners’ positions in the universities and their control of strategic positions in literary journalism ensured their positions of influence through the Depression, Wartime, and Cold War that broke apart the “Objectivists” (and engendered in Zukofsky a life-time distrust of academicians). They succeeded well enough in opposing the principles at the root of “Objectivism” that many academic critics still lack the appropriate expectations and understanding to approach and appreciate “Objectivist” work.

Ransom, the oldest member of the group, may be taken as representative. To the “Objectivists” concern for the new, for objects in a language appropriate to the modern age. Richard Ellmann and Robert O’Clair claimed that Ransom “like Spenser in The Faerie Queen . . . could be said to have ‘writ no language,’ since he cultivates archaisms, mock-pedanticisms, unaccustomed usages. . . . The pull of the past has been powerful, being the past of language, the past of literature, and the past of southern [sic] society.” To the “Objectivist” sincerity, Ransom posed artifice, ignoring the fact that formality may more easily conceal malice than honesty, and falsely assuming that intensive form is capable of less exactitude than extensive form. To illustrate, as Ellman and O’Clair observe, “Ransom is avowedly a formalist, and he defends formalism because he sees in it a check on bluntness, on brutality. Without formalism, he insists, poets simply rape or murder their subjects as, without courtship, lovers lose the possibility of discovering what is distinctive in each other. Most modern poetry seems to him to err in its exclusive aim of being sincere and spontaneous. . . . Yet only as an art can it survive, and Ransom accordingly endorses technique which is ‘vain and affected . . . like the technique of fine manners, or of ritual.’”

The art of the "Objectivists"—their sincerity, their clarity—respects the integrity of the object, neither rapping it, nor deceptively flattering it, nor, as Ellmann and O'clair further note of Ransom's strategy, "using obscurity to avoid sententiousness."⁷² The "Objectivist" naturally avoids sententiousness by being sincere; the "insincere poet," as Rakosi has written, is one "who settles for facile generalizations instead of going through the labor of working out the particulars ('attention to details'); who writes out of ego need, not poetic impulse; who professes to have feelings which the poem shows he doesn't have; who does not write out of his own experience; who uses words deceptively to give the appearance of substance; I could go on. The interesting thing to note is that sincerity in all this, in the sense of honesty and truth, exists as a product of the poet's relation to his medium and that the test of it lies, therefore, in the writing, not anywhere else."⁷³

Not surprisingly, "Objectivist" publications received little notice in the "better" periodicals. There were no reviews in The Southern Review or The Sewanee Review; however, William Rose Benet's review of Discrete Series in the Saturday Review of Literature may be typical of the conservative response. Benet claimed that although "Mr. Oppen's offering exhibits that extreme parsimony of words that is taken today to imply infinite ntofundity," he did not "believe it implies anything of the kind. Most of Mr. Oppen's observations fail to impress me. His writing is like listening to a man with an impediment in his speech."⁷⁴ Yvor Winters also criticized the "Objectivists" for lack of intelligence. In his review in Hound and Horn, Winters stated that An "Objectivists" Anthology "is of clinical rather than of literary interest." Since it was "next to impossible" for Winters "to disentangle more than a few intelligible remarks" from Zukofsky's preface, he presented two sentences "selected at random" whose context, he claimed, "throws no light on them." Furthermore, he decided that "Objectivist" poems were formally deficient and credited this to a lack of intellectual organization.⁷⁵ Unable to recognize the organizational force of emotion, Winters would not have understood Pound's definition of the Image as an intellectual and emotional complex.

Politically radical critics, on the other side of the coin, criticized the "Objectivists" for lack of emotion. An anonymous reviewer of Discrete Series in the Nation noticed that Oppen differed from Williams but claimed that "His work . . . has the fault which is characteristic of this whole school of poets. The images are not fused with the emotion. They merely objectify it."⁷⁶ In Dynamo: A Journal of Revolutionary Poetry, Charles Henry Newman claimed that Williams' Collected Poems 1921-1931 suffered from the "deficiencies of Objectivism, its philosophy and method." extreme reversal of "the romantic poet in defeat." "Out of specific images," he wrote, "concepts can be built. William Carlos Williams, with few exceptions, refrains from doing so. . . . In avoiding sentimentality, he reacts to an extreme, identifies sentimentality with emotion, and avoids becoming emotional. The emotion is deliberately stifled." This deficiency, according to Newman, meant that the "Objectivists" lacks creativity, direction, comprehensiveness, and purpose. "In remaining an Objectivist, pre-occupied with the external," he concluded, Williams "remains the dispassionate one, the nonpartisan, without direction; he does not create with feeling; he is unable to probe profoundly into the conflicting social scene as he excludes a point of reference and maintains no true scale of values to weigh his opinions. It is impossible to-day to maintain much longer the attitude of the detached one. To-day, the poet, and Williams in particular, in order to

broaden his outlook, make firmer his grip on reality, and widen his sensibility, must transform himself from the detached recorder of isolated events into the man who participates in the creation of new values and of a new world, into the poet who is proud to give voice to this new experience."

Herman Spector's review of Reznikoff's Jerusalem the Golden and Testimony, which follows Newman's review under the same title, is even more clear about the danger of the "Objectivist" politically detached outlook. Although Reznikoff is "sensitive and gifted," his failure, which is the "failure of the Objectivist school of poets to which he still belongs," lies in "the limited world-view of a 'detached' bystander: that is, of a person whose flashes of perception for the immediate esthetics of the contemporary scene are not co-ordinated in any way with a dialectical comprehension of the life-process." Reznikoff is

one who is incompletely rebellious, who is apologetic and distraught at the spectacle of the breakdown of his class, who hesitates to view clearly the future. Reznikoff still smacks his lips over crumbs of the petty-bourgeois feast. That only crumbs remain is testified by the fragmentary character, as well as form, of his writings. . . . The fatal defect of the Objectivist theory is that it identifies life with Capitalism, and so assumes that the world is merely a wasteland. The logical consequence is a fruitless negativism. . . . Profound world events cannot leave a poet of his integrity and sanguine temperament cynical or indifferent. He must soon realize that history permits him the alternative: either to succumb to the paralysis of reaction, or else to take that great step forward which is the way of revolution. Impartiality is a myth which defeatists take with them into oblivion. The creative man makes a conscious choice.⁷⁷

The creative man, according to the radical critic, obeys the Party Line.

When Williams called for a new criticism in 1919, saying that "the mark of a great poet is the extent to which he is aware of his time and NOT, unless I be a fool, the weight of loveliness in his meters," he was not thinking of the doctrines of Marxist revolutionaries against Capitalist decadence. He was through with the thoughtless singing" of "a peasant's feelings for lovely ladies," but for him "the NEW, the everlasting NEW, the everlasting defiance" was something American and something human independent of both business and revolutionary interests.⁷⁸

Conservative and radical critics alike were unprepared to appreciate the "Objectivists" compromise between discipline and innovation. The "Objectivist" objective to reconstitute thinking was not simple enough to placate the Marxists, who looked for proletarian propaganda. And the "Objectivist" technical discipline was too experimental for the conservatives, who looked for forms they could test on their fingers. The difference between the radicals and the "Objectivists" is the difference between assertion and truth, between opinion and perception, between "coercing . . . people into the acceptance of any one set of opinions" and maintaining "the clarity and vigor of 'any and every' thought and opinion."⁷⁹ The difference between the conservatives and the "Objectivists" is the difference between extensive and intensive form, between form which may be preconceived and measured regardless of content and form which is organic, experienced as a Gestalt, and exists as a necessary and relative intention of content.

The "Objectivists" ends and means were neither simple enough to be dictated nor established enough to be expected. This and their relative silence from the middle of the Depression through World

War II meant that their talent received little recognition in their own time and is only beginning to receive belated recognition now.

III. Principles

The "Objectivists" presented much of value for their own time and for ours. In adapting modernism to the political and economic situation, they were concerned both about the state of the world and about the state of literature. They were, in Whitehead's sense, objectivists; the shared world was meaningfully real to them. As Zukofsky's "Marxism," Rakosi's "socialism," Oppen's "populism," and Reznikoff's "Judaicism" express their sense of social responsibility, so their poetics was an attempt to be socially responsible. Moreover, their very concern for formal necessity was socially responsible. Pound's verbal, melodic, and imagistic clarity and exactitude could keep thought, the human function upon which all personal and social order is predicated, fit for use; by presentation, absolute correspondence of word to thing, the poem could cohere as Image. Williams' doctrine of contact located the idea in the thing and the thing in the local; Oppen's substantive, Rakosi's subject-matter, and Reznikoff's testimony made the poem a presentation of the real rather than of ornament, rhetoric, abstraction, comment, opinion, symbolism, solipsism, sentimentalism, mysticism, or vagueness of any sort. Zukofsky, their chief theorizer, reforged all of these concepts into new terms—sincerity, history, and objectification, which combine the ethic, the times, and the technique. By the principles upon which rest the Image and the poem as object, namely, the formal equivalence of ontological, epistemic, and linguistic objectivity, the sensibility may be re-associated, and the poem may be truly responsible to and for the shared world.

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