

On the Shore of Interpretation: The Theory and Reading of the Image in Imagism*

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All seeing is essentially perspective, and so
is all knowing.

(Nietzsche, *The Genealogy of Morals* 255)

[...] in-itself the image is matter: not some-
thing hidden behind the image, but on the
contrary the absolute identity of the image
and movement.

(Deleuze, *Cinema I: The Movement-Image* 58)

When contextualised in the history of Modernism, Imagism might seem to be little more than an ancillary concept. The various “-isms” that comprise “Modernism” are consistently implicated in a reconfiguration of images across different artistic modes and genres.¹ Within the context of Imagist poetics, however, visibility involves an inter-relationship between the pseudo-visual and related interpretative faculties. As M. H. Abrams notes, “[i]mages not only convey what things look like, but direct us, by their patterns of associated and involved feelings, in our reactions to what is being represented” (2513).

The qualification of *pseudo*-visual becomes necessary in this context as a result of the relationship between Imagism’s visual precepts and its prosody. Although an image ostensibly connotes visibility *ipso facto*, its application in poetics is twofold: the visual is mediated

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through language. As William Empson recognises (comically) in *The Structure of Complex Words*:

No doubt the seeing of the "image" need not be done by a picture, but you do not even possess the almond simile till you "see" (till you realise) that this eye is *shaped* like an almond; only in a parrot could the mere thought of an almond "intensify emotion." (3)

The intensification of emotion is, of course, a longstanding and much theorised area of poetics.² Yet the correlation between an intensification of *feeling* as intimately linked to the sensory immediacy of *seeing* is transformed in Imagistic practice, which places the emotional engagement of the reader outside its poetic efficacy. For example, William Carlos Williams's "Portrait of a Lady" exploits metaphor in its presentation of the lady of the title:

Your thighs are appletrees
whose blossoms touch the sky (90.1-2)

The choice of concrete metaphor over a more lexically extraneous vehicle such as simile, coupled with natural associations (the "blossoms" and "appletrees"), resonates with the Imagist emphasis on natural tropes and lexical compactness. However, this compaction is more than a formal feature of Imagism's particular stylistic mores. It relates to the ontological and semantic tensions in the ability of poetry to capture and present instantaneousness, as famously embodied in Archibald MacLeish's instruction that a poem "should not mean / But be" (135.23-24).

The ontological primacy of Williams's image hinges on its declarative character: "Your thighs *are* appletrees." The directness of this image makes no gesture towards emotional connotation or denotation, and its clarity, concordant with the Imagist theory of poetry, thus becomes the most salient feature of the lines. The aesthetic prescription for the need for clarity in the poetic line was promulgated most

vehemently by Pound in his 1918 essay, "A Retrospect," alongside more overt expressive prohibition:

Don't use such an expression as "dim lands of *peace*". It dulls the image. It mixes an abstraction with the concrete. It comes from the writer's not realizing that the natural object is always the *adequate* symbol.
Go in fear of abstractions. (5)

Pound's identification of the abstract and the concrete as poetically incompatible suggests that, if William Carlos Williams's poem had invoked a metonymic or adjectival association between the poetic subject's "thighs" and the "appletrees" then the effectiveness of the poem would be abrogated. Pound's aesthetic prescription makes some sense; in order to function as an effective image, the referent must be capable of being visualised clearly. However, the stress on clarity is an aesthetic strategy designed to move beyond the pleonastic Edwardian line in verse.

The reification of the "hard" image into the locus for the conceptual and stylistic distinctiveness of the Imagist poetic school could be seen as an overly determined concern with poetic effect, leaving little room for interpretative complexity. But does the Imagist conception of the image in the poem suppress the reader's interpretative faculties, beyond the rigid descriptive intentions proffered by the poem's maker? The clarity of the Imagist aesthetic is intimately associated with a desire to move beyond the alleged faults and inadequacies of previous poetic and artistic styles. This is perhaps most polemically put in T. E. Hulme's foundational "Romanticism and Classicism": "I want to maintain that after a hundred years of romanticism, we are in for a classical revival" (68). The association between classicism and clarity is thus predicated on a rejection of Romanticism, and this underlies Pound's assumption that abstraction is incompatible with the clarity of Imagism. However, for Wilhelm Worringer, an important influence on T. E. Hulme's poetic theorisation, the beauty of abstraction (*Abstraktion*) in Oriental culture is commensurate with "the life-denying, inorganic [...] the crystalline" (4), all of which are aesthetic

concerns of Imagism itself.³ Here, abstraction offers an antidote to the empathy (*Einfühlung*) that is figured as a necessary condition of the organic and natural. Furthermore, this empathy reflects a reconciled view of mankind within the world—in Worringer’s words, “a narrow view” (4).

In contrast, Hulme aims to situate the relationship between poet and the world in the poet’s visual acuity, while its expression in verse is the primary indicator of the poet’s communicative power. Indeed, the visual, as an aesthetic element, is symptomatic of the modern *par excellence* in poetry. His 1908 “Lecture on Modern Poetry” stipulates that:

[...] the poet is moved by a certain landscape, he selects from that certain images which, put into juxtaposition in separate lines, serve to suggest and evoke the state he feels. To this piling-up and juxtaposition of distinct images in different lines, one can find a fanciful analogy in music. A great revolution in music when, for the melody that is one-dimensional music, was substituted harmony which moves in two. Two visual images form what one may call a visual chord. (64)

Although Hulme might seem to formulate a disjunctive use of images “put into juxtaposition in separate lines,” an underlying union exists in his quasi-musical analogy of the “visual chord.” The image assumes a unifying function within Hulme’s modern poem, while also encompassing the representational aims of the poet. In identifying the “state” the poet “feels” as integral to poetic production, Hulme’s schema appears reminiscent of earlier formulations on the powers of the poet as a privileged seer, or one gifted with the ability to articulate perception.⁴

But it should also be noted that the modernity of the image in Hulmeian aesthetics is in the expression of the *visual* perception of the poet. His primary mode of articulation is through the image as distinct from the verbal prolixity or sublimity of earlier poetic traditions. As Hulme puts it in his poem “The Poet”:

Over a large table, smooth, he leaned in ecstasies,
In a dream.

He had been to the woods, and talked and walked with trees.
 Had left the world,
 And brought back round globes and stone images,
 Of gems, colours, hard and definite. (49.1-6)

The descriptive analogue of “hard” and “definite” gems with “colours,” alongside the later invocation of “stone images,” demonstrates visual and textural clarity as a significant part of Hulme’s aesthetic intentions. But certain Imagists were considerably more polemic in relation to the discursive means whereby the poet conveys perception. Indeed, Pound makes direct prescriptions regarding the image, representation and what is suitable therein: the poet is prompted to use the image in order to avoid reproducing what is seen. The image should not, in Pound’s view, be purely representational and should not correspond directly to its visual referent: “The image is the poet’s pigment [...]. He should depend, of course, on the creative, not upon the mimetic or representational” (Pound, *Gaudier-Brzeska* 86). The corollary of such an assertion would seem to be that the purely mimetic image is uncreative. But can a poetic image so consistently associated with visuality—as in Imagist theory—ever escape the mimetic?

The relationship between the image and mimesis highlights the problems emerging when any group of poets is subsumed under a generalising stylistic or conceptual aegis. Although the fissile nature of the Imagist movement is well-documented,⁵ an examination of its foundational aesthetic assumptions evinces disparate reactions to the nature of the image in poetic usage. Where Pound’s rhetoric prescribes the image in poetic practice as distinctly non-representational, Hulme’s insistence upon clear visuality as the stylistic apotheosis of the best new poetry means that the poetic is fundamentally and inescapably intertwined with the mimetic. For Hulme, however, the emphasis on the visual and the sensory in modern poetry is indicative of a movement in the nature of poetic tradition. Thus, in “Romanticism and Classicism,” Hulme writes that “Poetry that is not damp is not poetry at all” (75).

Hulme eschews Romantic concern with the transcendental in favour of “accurate description” (75). This enables him to interrogate the effectiveness of the best new poetry—Classicist verse—in the form of a question: “Did the poet have an *actually realised* visual object before him in which he delighted?” (81). His valorisation of “accurate description” suggests mimesis; moreover, Hulme situates the skill of the most accomplished poet in his ability “to make you continuously see a physical thing” (“Notes on Language and Style” 57). Such an endeavour suggests as much about the use of language in Imagist poetics as it does about the visual: how does the poet “make” the reader “see a visual thing”? Addressing this question, Hulme turns to language in “Notes on Language and Style,” remarking that:

Perhaps the nearest analogy is the hairy caterpillar. Taking each segment of his body as a word, the hair on that segment is the vision the poet sees behind it. It is difficult to do this, so the poet is forced to think up new analogies, and especially to construct a plaster model of a thing to express his emotion at the sight of the vision he sees, his wonder and ecstasy. If he employed the original word, the reader would only see it as a segment, with no hair, used for getting along. And without this clay, spatial image, he does not feel that he has expressed at all what he sees. (38)

Language is placed in conjunction with the poet’s vision and visual models that best express “what he sees.” Specifically, it is the clarification of the communicative powers of poetry *through* the image which Hulme values. His rhetoric continually reinforces a heightened relationship between the poet’s vision and the recreation of the visual in poetry. *Pari passu*, this analogical relationship implies that poetry is to be *viewed* rather than read. The continual stress on the poet’s “vision” coupled with the necessity of constructing a “plaster model” and the use of “clay” to conjure a “spatial image” suggests as much. Thus, the *tenor* of the image (its abstract meaning) and the *vehicle* of the image (the concrete picture) must coalesce. The desired visual clarity of Imagism would seem to efface any visual ambiguity, but the nature of a clarified/reified visual technique raises questions in terms of the essential differences between the visual and linguistic.

The ekphrastic simulacrum between poetry and the visual which Hulme vehemently expounds is long-standing (Horace's maxim "*ut pictura poesis*" [125], in its coupling of the painterly and the poetic, is one kind of example). Yet for many critics, the primacy of vision (whether in painting or other visual art forms) is not entirely consistent with the linguistic constitution of poetry. Writing and reading may indeed be visual in terms of the orthographic units placed in syntactic order and processed visually, by the eye. But the *interpretative* process involved in reading is different from the temporo-parietal immediacy in vision (although both factors might be related, separately, to intellection).⁶ As Michel Foucault avers in *The Order of Things*:

It is not that words are imperfect, or that, when confronted by the visible, they prove insuperably inadequate. Neither can be reduced to the other's terms: it is in vain that we say what we see. What we see never resides in what we attempt to show by the use of images, metaphors, similes. (10)

Foucault asserts the possibility of a methodological disparity between the visual and the linguistic, two entities long held to be analogous within Imagism (although his assertion pertaining to the futility of saying "what we see" is arguably rather overstated).⁷ For example, R. P. Blackmur inscribes a synonymy between the visual and the linguistic in his pejorative assessment of Imagism as "a mere lively heresy of the visual in the verbal" (374). Blackmur's quip, although intended to be derogatory, need not necessarily be seen as such; Pound himself asserts "the point of Imagisme is that it does not use images *as ornaments*. The image is itself the speech" ("A Retrospect" 4).

Yet in "A Retrospect," Pound posits the image as much more than a halfway point between the figurative and the locutionary. Rather, Pound suggests that images link multiple interpretative faculties:

An "Image" is that which presents an intellectual and emotional complex in an instant of time. [...] 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 work of art. (4)

The image corresponds to a pattern in its ability to shape temporal instantaneity, while also mediating the intellectual and the emotional. However, this also suggests an aesthetic intention on the part of the poet (who does the patterning). Pound's use of the collectivising pronoun in his description of the efficacy of the image, as what "*we* experience in the presence of the greatest work of art" (my italics), signals a determinism of both the artwork and its experience.

If historicised, Pound's concern with the experiential nature of the image seems overtly Bergsonian in nature. The validity of such a conflation between philosopher and poet is suggested not only by the similarities in each writer's understanding of the function of the image, but also by the well-documented fact that Henri Bergson's theories of evolution, temporality and spatiality were at the very forefront of intellectual debate at the time Pound's "A Retrospect" was published.⁸ In *The Bergsonian Heritage*, Thomas Hanna points out that *L'Evolution Créatrice* (published in English as *Creative Evolution* in 1911), was "one of the rarities of philosophical literature, a smash" (16).⁹

Despite Pound's hostility to Bergson's theories,¹⁰ an examination of his conception of the image alongside Bergson's points to parallels between their respective conceptions of the image in terms of its function as a focal point for temporal intuitions and consciousness. Bergson stresses that:

While no image can replace the intuition of duration, many diverse images, borrowed from very different orders of things, may be the convergence of their action and direct consciousness to the precise point where there is a certain intuition to be seized. (Bergson, *An Introduction to Metaphysics* 8)

The Bergsonian image—albeit not directly poetic—is implicated, like Pound's image, in a phenomenological process that structures the perceptive or intuitive faculties of the reader/subject in relation to space and time.¹¹

A reading of Pound's quintessential Imagist poem, "In a Station of the Metro," could be seen as a poetical enactment of Pound's image theory proffered in "A Retrospect". In the poem the reader is presented with:

The apparition of these faces in the crowd;
Petals on a wet, black bough. (*Poems* 53.1-2)

The poem's timeless instant, not dissimilar to Bergson's sense of *la durée*,¹² functions through a superimposition of one image onto another. The conceptual *raison d'être* behind such an aesthetic manoeuvre lies in the very nature of the relationship between Imagist theory and the way in which the poem might be read. The poem certainly follows Pound's stylistic injunctions in "A Retrospect"—particularly the use of "no superfluous word" and "direct treatment of the thing" (3), together with the lack of any personal pronoun, verbs, comparatives or conjunctions. Moreover, the static imagery of the final line usurps the spectral mass motion of the first. Thus, the lines exist in opposition to each other.

A certain kind of movement, however, is necessitated on going from indeterminacy to a concrete image. The Imagist precept of stasis highlighted by Hulme's insistence upon the mind "arrested" is negated through the very process of reading Pound's poem. Shifting between the first and second lines of the poem invites an active movement from perception to object. The static imagery thus becomes animated, and while Pound's Imagist theory might posit the image as exempt from the limits of temporality and spatiality, the poem must be read—and is done so within the temporal framework of the reader's instant. Consequently, it might seem that there is an asymmetry between the theory that informs the poem and the actual reception and experience of that poem. And yet "In a Station of the Metro" is self-referentially concerned with the movement between two different states *in* reading; might it be possible to avoid the bracing either/or of past/present as the basis for the poem?

This allegedly atemporal movement of Imagistic theory becomes more problematic within the context of contemporary accounts of temporality in reading. The liminality of “In a Station of the Metro” lies in the movement between the quasi-spectral “apparition of these faces” to the more concrete referent of “Petals on a wet, black bough.” But movement, as Jacques Derrida suggests, is problematic in textuality:

[W]e talk about “movement” in the very terms that movement makes possible. But we have been always already adrift in ontic metaphor; temporalization is the root of a metaphor that can only be originary. The word *time* itself, as it has been understood in the history of metaphysics, is a metaphor which *at the same time* both indicates and dissimulates the “movement” of the auto-affectation. All these concepts of metaphysics—in particular those of activity and passivity [...] *cover up* the strange “movement” of this difference. (26)

Derrida’s invocation of the Heideggerian “ontic metaphor”¹³ means that movement itself is the depiction of movement; movement efficaciously creates its own conditions to move *through* temporality, while never departing from an originary point. The temporal representation of movement inexorably inches forward, indicating its own progression, while simultaneously covering its tracks. By asserting the “originary” centrality of metaphoric temporality, Derrida can disseminate what he regards as besetting binaries that plague metaphysical thinking about time: those of activity and passivity.

“In a Station of the Metro” also contains a movement that pivots around a binary; namely the movement from the liminal (the apparitional) to what in Heideggerian parlance might be termed the ontic (objects in-the-world). But by resisting the desire to fix the image movement of the poem as *active* or *static*, as a precondition to the authorial foisting of one reading valence upon the reader, the poem can offer an alternative to the trap of Imagist temporality where readers passively reinforce the poem’s intended effect. Pound himself declared that the poem represents “the precise instant when a thing outward and objective transforms itself, or darts into a thing inward

and subjective" (*Gaudier-Brzeska* 89). His intention seems to be to enact a strange movement in the transformation of the objective into the subjective. But this movement from the objective to the subjective is in fact a trans-categorical movement which depends upon the unions which the image can effectuate, temporally and experientially. Both the internality of the reader and the onticity of the image conjoin in this movement; they are simultaneously conditioned by the sublation of each element through their interdependence. In reading the poem, both the reader (as a localisation of subjectivity) and the image (as a vehicle of intention) are interrelated and depend upon one another. Just as the Romantic symbol necessitates a union—whether it is the contingent and the absolute, or the temporal and the trans-temporal—Pound's poem works through a yoking together of different contingencies: the reader and the image.¹⁴ The image seems to invite a movement of the indeterminate into the experiential which grants the poem its duration. Of course, the image serves authorial intentionality, but this intention sits alongside the faculties of the poem's reader.

Assigning equal importance to the existence of authorial intention within the image *and* readerly inference avoids granting either a dominating role. While the critic John Gage acknowledges both authorial intention and readerly subjectivity as parameters for reading Imagism, he presents Imagist authorial intention—with its artifice of temporality and excessively static quality—as belying a more negative interpretative fixity; thus:

The temporal activity of reading may be manipulated in such a way as to give the reader the illusion of instantaneity. What we seek, then, are the ways in which structure may be used to give the reader the illusion of "no process." The Imagists chose structures which allowed them to convince the reader that the mind is "arrested with a picture" by manipulating the way in which the reader's experience "runs along to a conclusion." (Gage 107)

To borrow Derrida's terms, Gage alleges that Imagism attempts to "cover up" the manipulation of temporality and the reading process by subsuming the reader and driving him or her towards "conclusion."

Within the context of T. E. Hulme's poetic theory, however, poetry is valuable precisely because it lacks the supererogatory qualities of prose, which is presented as the true manipulator of consciousness towards conclusion:

The direct language is poetry, it is direct because it deals in images. The indirect language is prose, because it uses images that have died and become figures of speech. The difference between the two is, roughly, this: that while one arrests your mind all the time with a picture, the other allows the mind to run along with the least possible effort to a conclusion [...]. One might say that images are born in poetry. They are used in prose [...]. Now this process is very rapid, so that the poet must continually be creating new images, and his sincerity may be measured by the number of his images. ("A Lecture on Modern Poetry" 66).

In Hulme's terminology, the image "arrests," but such an idea merely reinforces the inanimate nature of the static active/passive binary in which Imagism has been implicated by Gage. Are there no other interpretative options? The Derridean complexities inherent when premature binaries are imposed on the movement within textuality suggest the necessity of adopting a more complex notion of movement in relation to Imagist aesthetics. In this way, Imagism appears to be a far more heterogeneous practice. Furthermore, it becomes a practice that fails to fit or coalesce with its own theoretical precepts.

By examining the poetics of the (supposedly) paradigmatic Imagist, Hilda Doolittle,¹⁵ slippages become apparent within the conception of Imagism as a practice and as a poetics with a vexatious relationship to movement and poetic reading. While the static quality expounded in Imagist theory might seem particularly applicable to an image-centred poem like H. D.'s "Sea Poppies", there is also movement. The poem presents:

Amber husk
 fluted with gold,
 fruit on the sand
 marked with a rich grain
 (21.1-4)

The fecund imagery in the opening stanza certainly seems static, but movement is suggested at the conclusion of the short poem as the reader is presented with a flower:

Beautiful, wide-spread,
 fire upon leaf, what meadow yields
 so fragrant a leaf
 as your bright leaf?
 (21.13-14, 16)

The rhetorical question draws the reader into an interrogative process, and the poem seems more of an exchange between speaker and reader. In a parallel to “In a Station of the Metro,” the reader needs to actively make the connection between the disparate images of the poem. *Contra* the passivity of reflecting upon an image, Philip Nicholas Furbank adduces the active nature of the phenomenality of the poetic image in the fact that:

You can never stand back and scrutinize a mental image, since you are fully occupied in creating it—it represents your consciousness in action. (13)

The imbricating action of consciousness is similarly invoked in Pound’s “L’Art, 1910,” where the lack of any syntactic contiguity implicates the reader in joining the antithetical images of the poem; indeed, the poem signals its own referentiality as a lexical and visual object by conflating scene-setting and scene-setter with the reader through juxtaposition:

Green arsenic smeared on an egg-white coth,
 Crushed strawberries! Come, let us feast our eyes.
 (*Shorter Poems* 118. 1-2)

The imperative to “feast our eyes” collapses the subject/object binary of the poem and prompts the reader into a simultaneity of the visual realm, and the stasis of the image is abrogated by the reader. Recognition of the active nature of the consciousness of the reader is not only

a counter to the stasis of the image but, in conjunction with a more complex notion of temporal movement, it also erodes the boundaries of the Imagistic “instant,” temporally entrapping the reader.

What I am trying to suggest is that, despite their temporal conflation in the inauguration of Imagism and an interlarding personal and professional trajectory, both Pound and H. D. exhibit a far more inter-subjective aesthetic within the reading mechanics of their poetry than Imagist theorisations of reading might permit. This is not to disallow aesthetic theorising within the context of Imagism’s self-situation, nor to delimit pertinent theorising of an Imagist aesthetic, but rather to urge a productive and generative tension between theory and practice, collectivisation and singularity. In H. D.’s “Sea Gods,” the reader is situated in the present as the speaker tells that:

They say there is no hope—
sand-drift-rocks-rubble of the sea—
the broken hulk of a ship,
hung with shreds of rope,
pallid under the cracked pitch.
(29.1-5)

The speaker’s declaration “They say there is no hope,” which functions as an animating voice, although it never employs the personal pronoun, suggests the futility of the enterprise the poem expounds. Such an atmosphere of hopelessness is heightened by the Imagistic description of a ship “broken” and “cracked.” However, the tonal movement from hopelessness to a certainty that “you will thunder along the cliff— / break-retreat-get fresh strength— / gather and pour weight upon the beach” (31.45-47) makes the absent sea gods present. The earlier absence of the “Sea Gods” is negated through prolepsis as expressed by the repetition of “you will” ... “you will.” In a mantra-like anaphora the speaker envisages that:

you will come,
you will answer our taut hearts,
you will break the lie of men’s thoughts,
and cherish and shelter us. (31.57-60)

“Sea Gods” employs numerous verbs—come/answer/break/cherish—in traversing from present to future; the movement in temporality is echoed in the proliferation of the various verbs. The poem is far more complex than prescriptive Imagist ideas of stasis can account for. It seems more apt to say that there exists a salient tension *between* movement and stasis within the poem.

The recurrence of such binaries in Imagism—animate/inanimate, active/passive, dynamic/static—is given a suggestive gloss by Daniel Tiffany in *Radio Corpse—Imagism and the Cryptaesthetic of Ezra Pound*. Tiffany situates the inanimate as a significant thematic preoccupation of Pound’s Imagism and links this with the posthumous. As a result Tiffany argues that Pound is engaged in “necrophilia of the image.” Tiffany continues:

Indeed, by constructing the Imagist movement as an empty crypt, Pound wrote into history the return of the phantom inhabiting that empty place. In this regard, there is a fundamental correspondence between the fictional character of the Imagist movement and the phantasmagorical properties of the mythic image [...]. Occasionally, the poet assumes the voice of a dead person, but more frequently he is visited or haunted, by the *images* of the dead, by ghosts. Thus Pound’s earliest conception of the Image not only emerges from the grave but presupposes a profound state of passivity. (53)

Tiffany’s ostensibly startling correlation of spectral imagery with a more deep-seated concern with the deadly seems less idiosyncratic when read alongside an inverse exposition of the nature of the image. As Remy de Gourmont writes in 1902:

Without the visual memory, without that reservoir of images from which the imagination draws new and infinite combinations, there is no style [...]. It alone permits us to transform [...] every second-hand metaphor, even every isolated word—in short to give life to death [...]. Language is full of clichés which originally were bold images, happy discoveries of metaphorical power [...]. A great step has been taken towards simplification [...]. But the progress is greater still when the world of signs does not appear before our eyes in any perceptible form, when the words confined in the brain pass, as if by some distributing apparatus, directly from their pigeonholes to the tip of the tongue or the pen, without any intervention of the consciousness. (115; my italics)

The delineation of consciousness as an intrusion upon the process of creating style might similarly be seen to de-animate the poet.¹⁶ Gourmont's revivification of metaphor through the visual memory points towards another discipline where the image and spatiality/temporality are prominent factors. Furthermore, this discipline offers interpretative possibilities which run contrary to such overdetermined readings of the image as static and the reader as passive that plague Imagism. Indeed, just as Tiffany invokes the discourse of radioactivity, surgery and psychoanalysis *inter alia* in his explication of the posthumous in Pound's Imagism, this art form offers a different account of the image.

Photography, like Imagist poetics, is directly concerned with capturing images in an apparently static state. In a thematic parallel to Daniel Tiffany's linkage of the Poundian image with death, photography has also been seen as a *memento mori*. As Roland Barthes famously puts it in *Camera Lucida*, the photograph is concerned with "the return of the dead" (9). Indeed, just as Gourmont envisages metaphor via the visual memory as breathing "life into death," Barthes conceives of the photographic image as traversing the boundary of death through an inter-subjective engagement with the temporal moment of the photograph. Such a temporal moment is present via the photographic referent, but in reality, past. Writing about a photograph of his dead mother, Barthes expounds his notion of how "it animates me and I animate it" (20). The viewer thus has a revivifying power that transcends the binaries of space and time, subject and object. The inter-subjective nature of the Imagist poem is thus more suited to a paradoxical notion of the temporal moment as simultaneously present and deferred. Moreover, accommodating readings of the Imagist poem as a temporally contingent aestheticized form that also works within an exponential development of readerly temporality ensures that both readers and critics avoid the reduction of Imagism to an aesthetic *Mémoires d'outre-tombe*.

Writing on the photograph, Geoffrey Batchen suggests that:

The photograph presumes to capture, as if in a vertical archaeological slice, a single, transient moment from a linear progressive movement made up of a numberless sequence of just such moments. Photography apparently figures itself as a progressive linear movement from past to future. The present during which we look at the photographic image is but a staging point, a hallucinatory hovering that imbricates both past and future. (93)

An example of an Imagist subverting “linear” movement is to be found in H. D.’s “Mid-day” where a myriad of heightened moments suggest the presence of an overwrought subjectivity: “a split leaf crackles on the paved floor,” “A slight wind shakes the sea-pods,” “the shrivelled seeds / are split on the path” (10.3, 5, 13-14). Each moment of the poem corresponds to the speaker’s emotional state, thus “I am startled,” “I am anguished—defeated” (10.2, 4). The poem interlards temporality, emotive inflection and image. However, the moments of action and the emotional typology of the speaker develop into something more negational as:

My thoughts tear me,
I dread their fever,
I am scattered in its whirl
I am scattered like
the hot shrivelled seeds. (10.8-12)

The temporal specificity of the poem as represented by the title “Mid-day” intimates a moment of temporal demarcation, but the more immediate present of the speaker’s utterance creates a more continuous present that transcends the boundaries of one emotive refraction, or, indeed, of one moment. The disparate moments of the lyric-confessional “I” become disjunctive, vacillating between positions and locations:

yet far beyond the spent seed-pods,
and the blackened stalks of mint,
the poplar is bright on the hill,
[...].
O poplar, you are great
among the hill stones,

while I perish on the path
among the crevices of the rocks. (10.18-20, 23-26)

H. D.'s realisation of an inter-subjective framework is based upon her speaker's compaction of a painful emotive state and the more transcendent potentiality of location. "Mid-day" shifts the boundaries of self and object in order to play the immanence of natural conjunction against more cruel individuation.

Such a technique is far from uncommon in H. D.'s Imagist writing. "Oread," like Barthes's notion of an inter-subjective realm between viewer and dead object, co-mingles the disparate realms that the poem expounds. Although the poem's title alludes to an individual nymph in Greek mythology, the determiner "*our* rocks" coupled with pronoun "*over us*" hints, mysteriously, at some collective (55.4-5; my italics). The sharp images, as concurrent with Imagist poetic theory of "direct treatment of the thing," involve no expository, comparative or figurative linkage between the realms of sea, tree and self; but the borders between these areas are erased, as exemplified by "pools of fir" (55.6). In "Oread" sea becomes "pines" and pines "splash [...] on our rocks" (55.2-4). The fusion of the seemingly incongruous elements of the poem—sea and tree—into an inter-subjective realm of perception evokes fusion and interconnectedness; there is no first person pronoun in "Oread." The inter-subjective moment of this Imagist poem defies the static aesthetic of Imagist prescription while losing none of its clarity. To re-introduce Worringer's terminology, "crystalline" might seem more apposite as a description of its quality.

Yet, that adjective connotes a de-activated state; the image is by no means static in H. D.'s early Imagist poetry. In "Sea Rose" the reader is presented with the "Rose" of the poem in a static focus:

Rose, harsh rose,
marred and with stint of petals,
meagre flower thin,
sparse of leaf, (5.1-4)

However, the stasis is undercut when:

You are flung on the sand,
 you are lifted
 in the crisp sand
 that drives in the wind. (5.10-13)

“Sea Rose” involves the reader in an analogous interrogative process to that of “Sea Poppies.” The concluding question of the poem animates the earlier descriptive stasis of the poem by implicating the object/image of the poem within the rhetorical question projected towards the reader, as the speaker asks:

Can the spice-rose
 drip such acrid fragrance
 hardened in a leaf? (5.14-15)

While such an ending might suggest an over-determined manipulation of the image by subsuming the reader within the framework of the poem, the interpretative dynamic is more accurately—and actively—described as one of *exchange*. Like the Barthesian photograph that defies causality, temporality, and subjectivity in an inter-subjective moment, H. D.’s “Sea Rose”—along with her aforementioned Imagist poems—defies the imposition of a unilinear or static framework.

Complicity with certain Imagist traits might be seen as an affront to interpretative autonomy, but ultimately this confines poetic individuality. By using the image as both a poetic and conceptual tool (which problematize the theoretical tenets of Imagism in various ways), H. D.’s poetics cast new interpretative light on her Imagist compatriots. By suggesting the usefulness of re-examining the function of the Imagist image against the grain of authorial or theoretical intentionality, and simultaneously applying interdisciplinary methods of interpretation, the reader can (to borrow an image from H. D.’s in “Sea Gods”) stand on the “shore” of interpretation, where poetic intentionality and reading practice interconnect. By recognising the relative ephemerality¹⁷ of Imagism as a “school,” and resisting the urge to inscribe a false correlation between voluminous Imagist theory and the more diverse Imagist

practices, the critic can avoid the perils of the Imagist “crypt.” Indeed, just as Imagism gives way to a Vorticist notion of the image as an “idea”—while not detracting from its historical importance—the proliferation of labels in Imagist theory gives way to a more diverse form of poetic practice, with multiple conceptual/interpretative possibilities. Finally, the images of Imagist poetry are as active as the interpretative energies of that poem’s reader.

Cologne

NOTES

¹For a discussion of visual arts in Modernism see Glen Macleod.

²A notable example can be found in William Wordsworth’s desire to elicit a “spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings” (498). Also see the first chapter of William K. Wimsatt’s influential *The Verbal Icon*.

³Hulme applies Worringer repeatedly in his essay “Modern Art and its Philosophy” (1914). For a contextualization of Hulme’s reading of Worringer, see Beasley (esp. 4-5). Worringer’s explication of the “life-denying,” “inorganic” and “crystalline” neatly aligns with Imagism’s aesthetic concerns regarding stasis, energetics and the adamantine in poetic texture, all of which will be traced in Hulme, Pound and H. D. throughout the course of this essay.

⁴In *The Defence of Poetry*, Shelley situates the role of the poet as an interpreter of both how things are and should be; thus, “Poets were called, in earlier epochs of the world, legislators or prophets [...] he beholds the present intensely as it is and discovers those laws according to which present things ought to be ordered” (5). The similarity is particularly ironic within the context of Hulme’s vehement attacks on Romanticism in his “Romanticism and Classicism.”

⁵See the volume *Imagist Poetry*, edited by Peter Jones (esp. 13), and William Pratt describing Pound’s coinage “The Amygists” in *The Imagist Poem* (30).

⁶For a cogent exploration of the visual-verbal analogy in contemporary aesthetic and cognitive theory, see Hans Lund, *Text as Picture*.

⁷Immediate sense and comprehension, which is privileged in the naturalisation of the meeting of the pictorial with sight, is also a valorisation of concision that underscores many disciplines, but not always in terms that exalt the immediacy of the pictorial. For example, the mathematical jest—an equation tells a thousand pictures.

⁸For a discussion of the importance of Bergson’s theories in relation to Modernism see Richard Lehan’s chapter “Bergson and the discourse of the Moderns” in *The Crisis in Modernism*. See also Mary Ann Gillies’s “Bergsonism: Time Out of

Mind" in *A Concise Companion to Modernism*, and her *Henri Bergson and British Modernism*.

⁹It must also be pointed out, however, that Bergson attracted vociferous criticism, as in the case of Wyndham Lewis's polemical attack in *Time and Western Man* (102).

¹⁰Hugh Kenner expounds such disagreement in *The Pound Era* (242).

¹¹Such a feature relates to Modernism's most famous—arguably quasi-Romantic—innovations in relation to aesthetic transcendence. Examples would include James Joyce's practice of the epiphany in *Ulysses*, Virginia Woolf's "moments of being" or the *souvenir involontaire* of Marcel in Proust's *Du côté de chez Swann*.

¹²In Bergsonian metaphysics, *la durée* is subjective, psychological, non-spatial time; cf. his *Creative Evolution* (23).

¹³Heidegger's fullest account of the ontic as "is-ness" is located in section I, "Exposition of the question of the meaning of Being," subsection H.11, part 4: "The ontological priority of the question of Being," in *Being and Time* (32).

¹⁴For an elegant exposition of the epistemological assumptions within the Romantic symbol across different national traditions of Romanticism, see Nicholas Halmi's *The Genealogy of the Romantic Symbol* (1-26).

¹⁵Hugh Kenner reports the—quasi-mythic—incident in *The Pound Era*, when "Pound, with a slashing pencil, made excisions from her [Hilda Doolittle's] 'Hermes of the Ways' and scrawled 'H. D. Imagiste' at the bottom of the page before sending it off to Harriet Monroe at *Poetry*" (171-74).

¹⁶Gourmont might be more correctly seen as an influence upon Imagism rather than as Imagist. See Pound's "Remy De Gourmont" in his *Literary Essays*.

¹⁷For a discussion of the historical importance of Imagism, see Stephen Spender *The Struggle of the Modern* (110), and T. S. Eliot's 1953 speech, "American Literature and American Language" in *To Criticize the Critic*.

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