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Animistic Poetics: William Carlos Williams' *Paterson* and *Animistic Ecology*

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Animistic Poetics: William Carlos Williams' *Paterson* and *Animistic Ecology*

Part 1

"a complete little universe": An Introduction

In many respects, William Carlos Williams' *Paterson* can be read as a vast account of intimate interactions between a speaker (or many speakers), a community, and their shared living, observing setting. Expanding from this observation, I will argue that *Paterson*, at its most foundational or microcosmic level, contends with the intimate relationship created between individuals and their setting, through experience, in the creation of meaning from internalized realities. By internalized realities, I specifically mean the world of color, sound, taste, touch, and smell that we internally create and occupy cognitively, rather than the world of light, airwaves, chemicals, energy and matter that we physically occupy. The individual mind's interplay with the external and material universe in the construction of meaning from these internalized realities is essential to Williams' characterization of the imagination in *Spring and All* and foundational to *Paterson*'s episodic construction of a living and observing city—interaction by interaction and word by word. The sum of these interactions is what I'll be calling an *animistic ecology*, which I'll define more thoroughly shortly, that symbolically produces a kind of collective reality from the epistemological entangling of innumerable internalized realities. At its most macrocosmic level, *Paterson* offers an example of this kind of an *animistic ecology* through the living and observing city of Paterson, which unifies the interconnected consciousnesses of all those who live within it under its own singular identity. In this way, the city of Paterson lives through the people who occupy it, observe it, and make meaning and reality from it. Just as the speaker, or the many speakers, come from the living Paterson's mind as dreams, according to the logic of *Paterson*, so too does the thinking, living and observing qualities of the setting come from the

many minds that occupy the city—the speaker's specifically. Through the construction of an *animistic ecology*, *Paterson* entirely deconstructs the dichotomous nature of the self and the world's relationship. In every passing moment, the material universe and the perceiving-self participate in a co-creative kind of interaction; the material universe guides the perceiving mind in the construction of an internalized reality—a reality through which we develop an understanding of, and create meaning from, the material universe—that is in an approximate accord, an "approximate co-extension" (*Spring and All*, 27), with the universe's form. Moreover, as a book-length poem, *Paterson* embraces the form of poetry in a manner that reveals how—like the fleeting unity of the reader and poem—our selfhood, thought, and the meaning that we inherent or create are inseparable from the sensory reality, and thereby the material universe that informs its creation, that simultaneously acts as the backdrop and the subject of consciousness.

Importantly, poetry functions in a way that resonates with this framing of our relationship to the world. In essence, the poem guides the mind of its reader in the construction of an imagined internalized reality (a poetic space), from meaning, much in the same way that the material universe guides the creation of meaning from the immediate moment. Therefore, the poem acts as a kind of model for how the mind and the world collide in the mind's creation of a reality from the senses and meaning from this sensory reality. In a 1957 interview with Mike Wallace (*Paterson*, 304), Williams stated that "a poem is a complete little universe" (221). Williams included parts of this interview, the aforementioned statement as well, in *Paterson*—his largest poetic universe. What this claim means for the nature of his poetics, his characterization of reality, and, potentially, our shared material universe is essential to *Paterson*'s creation of an *animistic ecology*, and *Spring and All*'s connection to *Paterson* through its characterization of the imagination's role in this reality-constructing and meaning-producing

process. At first glance, we might think that Williams' characterization of the poem as a universe is uncharacteristically grand. At the very least, we are left to wonder how syntactically deconstructed and aesthetically conscious language can possibly be akin to the unimaginably complex and large universe it occupies. My analysis of *Spring and All* will bridge this gap by elucidating how the poem emerges from the imagination of the reader in the discursive act of reading, and how the world, as we know it, similarly emerges in the mind of the perceiver in the act of perceiving. Like the universe in its co-construction of our internalized realities, the poem guides the reader's imagination, creating an experience of sound and color, as they come into contact with the language on the page. From there, because the poem becomes a microscopic model for our interactions with the universe, we can start to recognize how Williams is characterizing our relationship to the universe with the same kind of intimate and discursive nature.

The poem as an object, ink on paper, is akin to the universe, the reader is akin to every perceiving individual, and the sounds, images, and meanings that emerge in the mind of the reader are akin to the internalized realities and language that emerge in the mind as sensory perception and thought. Thus, the poem also reveals how, for humanity, this interaction between the mind and the material universe is interwoven with language and meaning. Specifically, by breaking the universe into intelligible parts and naming them, language creates, adds to, and pulls from a cultural knowledge base, a collective memory, that allows for the describing of the material universe as we experience it and for the imagining of experiences that were created by others through the organizing of language (and thus the conjuring and reorganizing of this collective memory/knowledge base). Thus, when cognitive realities are constructed through the creative interplay of the mind and the material universe, the creative capacities of the mind, with

the help of the imagination, are in a relative harmony with its subject—whether that subject is the material universe experienced in time or language experienced in time. Therefore, the collective of signs that is language and the collective of interconnected, internalized realities that is Paterson have potential similarities.

Ultimately, where *Spring and All* offers a kind of microcosmic and phenomenological rendering of the imagination's place in the universe and the mind's co-construction of reality, *Paterson* takes this framework and deeply complicates it by widening its scope and creating a vast *animistic ecology* of these reality constructing interactions. This ecology is unified under the singular persona of the living and observing city, Paterson, and it reveals a few important things: 1) we participate in the material world as observable bodies, and thus we, like Paterson, are simultaneously perceiving individuals and part of the material universe/setting; 2) our consciousness is one among a collective of partially unique and partially uniform consciousnesses that all participate in the construction of internalized realities; and 3) both the universe and the perceiving individual are intertwined in a mutually defining, coextensive relationship and synchrony that deconstructs the dichotomous nature of self and world.

Animistic ecology is a term that has its origin in anthropological study, but that I am recontextualizing and redefining to offer a new means of making sense of what poetry (Williams' in particular) suggests about the relationship created between human consciousness and the material world in experience. In anthropology, the use of the phrase *animistic ecology* would likely refer to the way in which the vast number communities whose religious ontologies have and/or continue to fall under the categorization of animism understand and interact with the ecologies that they participate in. For example, Montes, Tshering, Phuntsho, and Fletcher's exploration of "*truth* environmentality" ("Cosmological Subjectivities," 355) in relation to the

"*Shokuna* herders" of Bhutan suggest that their animistic ontology shapes how they understand their relationship to the landscape: "As herders learn to shape their own behaviour, the core appeal is to the existence of a particular cosmology in terms of which certain actions are demanded. A network of relations is thus narrated and used to understand the relationship between humans and their surroundings." (362). Thus, in an anthropological sense, *animistic ecology* might be said to specifically refer to how animism shapes people's understanding of their relationship to ecology, or the nonhuman landscape, and to contextualize each of these particular cultural relationships to the environment within a broader scope of similar relationships and understandings of humanity's relationship to the environment.

However, while the literary use of *animistic ecology* that I am proposing here doesn't contradict the anthropological use of this phrase (both link humanity and locality), my use does make a different and specific claim about the relationship created between the self and the world in experience and in the creation of meaning. Thus, it is important to note that my hope is not to appropriate nonwestern ontological understanding simply for the sake of commenting upon western philosophy and poetics. Instead, I intend to use animism's potential for complicating the notion of personhood and deconstructing the Cartesian split between subject and object in a manner that I hope is relatively empowering and believe deconstructs western, colonialist, and Eurocentric renderings of humanity and the world's relationship rather than instantiates them. I also hope to, at least implicitly, assert the philosophical importance and nuance of animistic thought without exoticizing it, and I don't believe that Williams' exoticizes animism either.

In the literary and epistemological sense that I am proposing, an *animistic ecology* is a complete system of co-constructive relationships between a vast number of consciousnesses and their shared material universe where thought and selfhood are inseparable from the world, via

experience, and meaning and sensory experience are themselves revealed to be the shared project and medium of the discourse between consciousness and the material universe. In this way, *animistic ecology* acts as a means of articulating how the interconnected nature of sensory experience and the creation of meaning breaks down the distinctions between self and world—both of which, in experience, compose one another, and are interconnected in the creation of meaning. Therefore, literary *animistic ecology* specifically tries to make sense of the way in which personhood is produced from the material world in experience, and how, in thought, the creation of linguistic meaning projects personhood onto the material world that surrounds us.

Thus, at the foundation of literary *animistic ecology* is the idea that the self and the places we occupy participate in a liminal and discursive relationship, and are thus false dichotomies, in the creation of subjective realities. Therefore, the production of experience and meaning, despite being foundational to the separation our sense of selfhood often implies, interconnect the self and the material world. In *Paterson*, this unification happens to such a degree that those who occupy the city are revealed to essentially be the sensory world they perceive, and the world they know is revealed to essentially reflect their own personhood. In this way, the *animistic ecology* that I am identifying within *Paterson* suggests that the ontological production of experience and the epistemological production of meaning act as a complete blurring and meaningful entangling of the self and world—life and nonlife, the human and nonhuman, *etc.*—through the creation of a living and observing setting that interconnects everyone and everything that occupies it.

Moreover, *Paterson* and *animistic ecology* offer a unique opportunity for articulating how phenomenology and ecocriticism intersect in their articulations of the self's relationship to the world. This capacity for interconnecting phenomenology and ecocriticism is what makes *animistic ecology* particularly useful in relation to the contemporary critical scholarship

surrounding *Paterson* and Williams' other works. In light of *animistic ecology*, scholars like Bernhard Radloff and Emily Lambeth-Climaco, who contend with how Williams' work characterizes the intimate and phenomenological relationship between the self, language, and the immediate world, can expand the scope of their arguments and ideas to contend with how Williams is characterizing our consciousness' creation of a complex ecological world from the limits of individual perception. Moreover, the work of scholars like Joel Nickels, Lee Rozelle, Carlos Acosta-Ponce, and Alba Newmann, who contend with the "multitude" (Nickels 47) that is Paterson in incredibly unique ways, can be expanded in light of *animistic ecology* to consider how the intimate relationship between the speaker and the material world that is inherent to Williams' work becomes foundational to the expansive and ecological nature of Paterson.

What makes *animistic ecology* a useful, if not necessary, intervention within the critical scholarship surrounding Williams and *Paterson* is the way in which it fundamentally deconstructs the kind of estrangement we associate with "otherness" without throwing out difference. For example, while Nickels offers a uniquely materialist and Marxist rendering of *Paterson* wherein Williams' imbuing of the city with animism acts as a kind of "*self-valorization* of the multitude" that redefines its value in relation to its capacity for the "reproduction of the multitude's own capacities" (50) rather than its monetary production (50), *animistic ecology* can deepen Nickels' already nuanced claims by revealing the way in which this redefining of economic value reshapes, or at least influences, individual consciousness. Moreover, Acosta-Ponce's analysis of the tension between the urban and natural in *Paterson*, which reveals the way in which Williams is advocating for a "close association with nature" (87), can be taken a step further to reveal how human consciousness is entirely dependent upon the material universe and

to, thereby, reveal another means by which Williams is attempting to foster a sense of closeness with nature.

In the following section of this thesis, I analyze Williams' characterization, in *Spring and All,* of the imagination's participation/interplay with the construction of internalized realities. I also consider how Williams' poetics, as laid out in *Spring and All*, define the relationship between the world and the self as intimately interwoven and co-constructive. In the third section of this thesis, I look at how this intimate and co-constructive relationship between the mind and material universe, in immediate experience, is exemplified in *Paterson* by the speaker's (or many speakers') interactions with his setting. Laying the groundwork for the following section, I analyze the poetics and content of *Paterson* to establish how the process laid out in *Spring and All* produces an *animistic ecology* when it is practiced in the expansive manner that it is in *Paterson*. Thus, this section also reveals how the speaker becomes a kind of model for the way in which *animistic ecology* works at the individual level, his thoughts and desires interacting coextensively with Paterson, the living city, and it therefore sets the groundwork for the expansive scope inherent to *Paterson*, which is revealed by the speaker's understanding of others' similar relationship to their shared, living setting. It also takes seriously the idea that poetic space is inseparable from literal space. In the fourth and final section of this thesis, I begin to expand the scope of my analysis to contend with the larger, perhaps more abstract, conceptual consequences of *animistic ecology* as a philosophical model for our relationship to the world, which requires a shift from the direct analysis of *Paterson* to a more direct analysis of *animistic ecology* as a concept. In this final section, I also further contend with how *animistic ecology* and the reading of *Paterson* this thesis offers is related to, and has potential within, the current critical conversation attending to *Paterson* and Williams' work in general.

In light of *Spring and All*'s characterization of the imagination and its essential role in the creation of meaning, Williams' living, dreaming, and thinking setting in *Paterson* imbues the relationship between consciousness and the material world with a kind of intimacy and liminality that, if taken seriously as an epistemological and ontological model, makes the borders between us, the sensory world we cognitively occupy, and the material universe we physically occupy elusive if not indistinguishable. Through his use of an animist construction of the environment, Williams subtly reveals how consciousness is inseparable from the material universe in its production of a sensory reality and meaning, and he reminds us of the way in which the sensory realities we cognitively occupy are inseparable from us. However, *animistic ecology* is also an idea or framework that has the potential to offer a new methodology for reading poetry and prose outside of Williams' work, despite the fact that Williams' work is what has inspired its conception. As a tool for analyzing other literature, *animistic ecology* has the potential to reveal how the discursive creation of meaning from experience complicates and produces selfhood relationally, and *animistic ecology* can potentially offer a means of articulating how this interconnection of personhood and the world, via experience and meaning, also interconnects people into epistemologically co-constructive relationships.

Part 2

"exactly what every eye must do with life": *Spring and All* and Williams' Poetics of the Imagination

Spring and All is a unique text that is intimately concerned with the imagination and how it interacts with the local, external universe in our mind's construction of internalized realities—the worlds of color, sound, taste, touch, and smell that each of us cognitively occupy—from immediate experience. Specifically, I am offering a reading of *Spring and All* that characterizes the imagination as the faculty of consciousness that is capable of employing the mind's ability to produce sensory experience with intention—in the creation of a mental image, for example—and to explain how, through this process, the imagination interweaves meaning, experience, and the material universe. Thus, I am exploring the ways in which Williams suggests that the imagination brings the mind's faculties for constructing internalized realities to life, in the conscious mind, and puts it to work in the immediate moment—either creating meaning from experience or creating an internal experience to express meaning. In this way, the imagination does not only produce mental images, but also thought, which brings temporal experience, language, and the meaning language contains into contact. Admittedly a bold claim, if thought describes the way in which consciousness is capable of internally producing an auditory, linguistic experience to reflexively articulate meaning, and if the imagination describes the part of the conscious mind that is capable of producing sensory experiences with intent, then, logically, thought could only be made possible through the imagination. In essence, according to the reading I am offering of *Spring and All*, the imagination mediates between "consciousness as the place of meanings" (Merleau-Ponty 27) and "consciousness as the flux of lived experiences," to use Merleau-Ponty's useful phrasing in his "The Relations of the Soul and the Body and the

Problem of Perpetual Consciousness." Moreover, Williams suggests that the imagination's bridging of the "place of meanings" and the "flux of lived experience" is essential to the production of truth in the present moment. Therefore, using Dylan Trigg's definition of phenomenology, Williams' characterization of the imagination serves a phenomenological purpose: "phenomenology understands knowledge as being constituted by subjective experience" (Trigg 39). Ultimately, Williams' rendering of the imagination importantly reveals how human consciousness imbues the world we experience with meaning, and how the world, conversely, inspires the creation and interweaving of meaning that, if in accord with the world's form, creates truth. While the mind processes and produces sensory experience automatically, it is in the imagination's interweaving of the external universe (as experienced internally) and meaning, in the immediate moment, that produces truth. Thus, by revealing the way in which meaning and the internalized realities we cognitively construct are interwoven in the imagination, Williams' characterization of the imagination replaces the traditionally binary understanding of the self and world with a liminal one. Simply put, human consciousness is revealed to be entirely dependent on the material world it perceives and makes meaning of.

To support this reading of *Spring and All* and the imagination, I first analyze Williams' prose, which articulates his understanding of the imagination, its ontological and epistemological nature, and its place in art and poetry. Then, I analyze "Spring and All," the titular poem of this text, which puts into practice Williams' claims about poetry's connection to the imagination. "Spring and All" will also exemplify the kind of poetics that Williams, for the most part, maintains throughout *Paterson*, and, therefore, the analysis of poetics here should, to some extent, resemble the analysis in the following section of this thesis.

Early in this text, Williams dedicates *Spring and All* to the imagination in a way that usefully articulates how it brings life and meaning into a kind of creative contact:

> And if when I pompously announce that I am addressed — To the imagination — you believe that I thus divorce myself from life and so defeat my own end, I reply : To refine, to clarify, to intensify that eternal moment in which we alone live there is but a single force — the imagination. This is its book. (3)

Here, in a remarkably compressed manner, Williams subtly encapsulates the interconnected qualities of the imagination that he later, throughout *Spring and All*, expounds upon and refines. The first of these ideas is that the imagination is not in opposition to life and the material universe, but it is instead necessarily in contact with the material universe it deconstructs in the interweaving of meaning and experience. Thus, while the imagination may be capable of play with the material world as perceived and capable of conjuring "nonrealities," a term Williams would likely dislike, the perceived material world is always the imagination's medium and subject. The second, expanding on the first, is that the imagination takes the mind's sensory construction of present experience and turns it into what might be called a sensory reality. It is the part of us that brings meaning and the mind's creation of a sensory world into contact in immediate experience—that "eternal moment in which we live alone"—and, thus, it brings us and the material universe, through its play with sensory experience, into a kind of reality and knowledge producing contact. The third, which proceeds to expound on the second, situates the imagination as a necessary mediator for the kinds of epistemological discovery that make it possible for humanity to make meaning of the external universe—"To refine, to clarify, to intensify." Thus, while the second quality directly situates the imagination ontologically, the third directly situates the imagination epistemologically. However, it is important to note that, for

Williams, the creation of "reality" blurs the line between ontology and epistemology; in essence, the creation of reality and knowledge happen simultaneously and are thereby inextricable. Lastly, drawing again from the phrasing "that eternal moment in which we live alone," Williams recognizes how each mind constructs its own internalized reality, with the aid of their imagination, from its particular experience of the present moment. Each person's sense of reality is entirely defined by the intimate and particular relationship they have with the world in experience.

Unfortunately, because these ideas are so deeply interwoven in Williams' prose, there is not a clean way to break them apart and analyze them individually. However, the first notion, that the imagination is not in opposition to life but is instead in a constant kind of interplay with the external universe, acts as a foundational intersecting point for all of the other identified qualities of imagination, and, thus, it is a good place to start. Furthermore, it is through the imagination's connection to reality (and thereby truth) that Williams attempts to justify the imagination's significance, and that Williams puts his claims into poetic practice.

Williams clarifies how this interaction between the mind, the imagination, and the external universe works best when he suggests in *Spring and All* that "the inevitable flux of the seeing eye toward measuring itself by the world it inhabits can only result in himself crushing humiliation unless the individual raise to approximate co-extension with the universe. This is possible by aid of the imagination" (27). In essence, Williams claims that the individual mind can only make truth of its relationship to the material world in the immediate moment through a kind of deeply attentive experience of it, wherein the mind reaches a kind of synchrony, or "co-extension," with the movements of the world as subjectively experienced in time through the assistance of the imagination. Thus, Williams suggests that the creation of truth is intimately

connected to, or even emergent from, the contact made between the mind and the material universe through the epistemological work of the imagination, which he suggests when writing "only thru the imagination is the advance of intelligence possible" (28). Williams' usage of "advance" is particularly important here—it is through the imagination that knowledge acts, so to speak, in the world and that new knowledge can be made or old knowledge renewed. Thus, while meaning (contained in language) and the external universe exist before an individual brings them together in immediate experience, truth can only emerge when meaning and the external universe, as experienced through the senses, are brought into coextension. In the act of bringing meaning into contact, awareness, and play with the mind's faculties for constructing internalized sensory realities, the imagination acts as a mediator that makes it possible for the mind to creatively produce truth from and in our immediate experience of the world. In this way, truth is always in a state of temporal renewal.

To make further sense of this, Merleau-Ponty's first definition of consciousness as "the place of meanings" is remarkably tellingly. This characterization of consciousness as a "place" (being imbued with the qualities that "place" might denote) and meaning as the thing that composes or occupies that place is, when paired with Williams' rendering of the imagination, suggestive of how the creation or emergence of meaning in the immediate moment is both always contending with experience and experienced*,* in time, in the same way that the material world is—as sensory data (thought being our primary example). The notion that meaning can occupy a space, or perhaps even construct a space, is particularly useful in respect to Williams. Moreover, the experiential nature of meaning's emergence in time, as sensory data (as thought, language, mental imagery, memories, *etc.*), is suggestive of the way in which meaning potentially shares a similar nature to the material universe, and the material universe a similar

nature to meaning—for example, both simultaneously exist beyond individual consciousnesses, being experienced by humanity universally (which is not to suggest in the same way, but by all), yet emerge and live in consciousness as sensory experience. It is also important to note, as Williams suggests when claiming that a person must "raise" themselves to approximate coextension, that we should not associate the experience of meaning, or any experience for that matter, with the sense of passivity that experience may traditionally connote. Instead, the notion that meaning is experienced should reveal how the inner place of meanings we contain occupies the seemingly external sensory reality that our minds construct and that we experience from the subjective point of view; or rather, it should reveal the way in which Merleau-Ponty's two definitions of consciousness are in a perpetual state of transposition. In essence, "the place of meanings" is the very ever-shifting place that we cognitively occupy through "the flux of lived experience." Interestingly, in accord with the kind of parallelism that this spatial rendering of consciousness imbues meaning and the material world with, the interconnecting of meaning and experience elucidates the way in which sensory experience shares a similarly symbolic (semiotic), or representational, nature with language—sensory experience symbolizes, so to speak, an otherwise inaccessible external and material universe, while language symbolizes otherwise inexpressible meaning. In this way, meaning and the material universe both symbolically inhabit our internalized, sensory realities in relatively similar ways. Moreover, it is through the imagination, interweaving semiotic and/or abstract meaning with experience, that sensory experience's symbolic capacities are expanded to include semantic and/or abstract meaning. In this way, sensory experience can simultaneously symbolize the material world it is responding to and be imbued, through the imagination, with semantic and abstract meaning in the creation of knowledge from experience. Thus, in experience, semiotic/abstract meaning and

the material world don't replace each other, but coinhabit experience together, so to speak. For example, meaning and experience are inextricably linked to such a degree that the sight of a thing can conjure the thought (the language) associated with it and *vice versa*, if aided by the imagination. Interestingly, as will be discussed momentarily, art becomes a quite literal imbuing of the external world with meaning through the creation of meaningful objects, which in turn reveal and clarify the way in which meaning emerges from consciousness's discursive interplay with the material world we experience internally.

Specifically, art offers a means of engaging the imagination to actualize the interweaving of the external world and meaning, through interpreting experience, on a smaller, more intimate, and more clearly creative or interpretive level. Poetry, in particular, becomes the imagination's play with the mind's creation of internalized realities put into an externalizing practice; it is the externalizing of an internal reality through language. Specifically, the poem's purpose is to capture an instance where the writer's imagination came into a creative, coextensive interplay with the material world in language, and to then turn it into a material object that isn't unique from the material universe, but sits within it and participates in the creation of internalized realities just as the rest of the material universe does when it comes into contact with consciousness: "Poetry has to do with the crystallization of the imagination — the perfections of new forms as additions to nature" (*Spring and All* 78). The poem occupies the same field of existence that we do, as a material object that inspires meaning, and the poem is made "real" or "actual," so to speak, through the collision between its material existence and the imagination of its reader: "life becomes actual only when it is identified with ourselves. When we name it, life exists" (41). In this way, the poem becomes a model for how the external world becomes "real," so to speak, when we internalize it as meaning—"When we name it." This is not to suggest that

the universe does not exist independently of consciousness, it certainly does, but it instead redefines "reality" as that which emerges from the contact between the world and meaning in experience—therefore, reality is neither entirely ours nor the universe's.

Rather than imitating the world as they see it, writers manipulate the mediums used by the mind to construct internalized realities—color and sound, in particular—to create new objects that will act upon the viewer's imagination in intentioned and meaningful ways. Williams suggests this idea in a passage of *Spring and All* where he clarifies the relationship between the "writer of imagination" (49) and the natural world: "Nature is the hint to composition not because it is familiar to us…but because it possesses the quality of independent existence, of reality which we feel in ourselves. It is not opposed to art but apposed to it" (50). Writers give their audience an opportunity to engage with a new object, like any other object, and to then create meaning from it in the same way that they would nature, which can then—through the imagination's mediation and interweaving of meaning and experience—shape the kinds of understanding they creatively imbue their sensory worlds with. Thus, the poem is not any less real than the material universe: "He holds no mirror up to nature but with his imagination rivals nature's composition with his own" (51). It becomes a part of the material universe as an object, and, thereby, a kind of truth can be revealed by the artist in their creation of a thing to be experienced—"transfused with the same forces which transfuse the earth" (50)—and internalized as sensory reality. Thus, the poem—and art generally—serves the function of creating realities that are not opposed to the external, material universe, but are instead "apposed" (50) to it. Art exists within, and the meaning art creates reflects upon, the material universe and the processes that make sensory experience possible.

Shifting to the imagination's dissolving of the borders between the self and the world, Williams expounds upon this idea when he characterizes the creating of art and the collision between the imagination and the material universe, in attentive experience, as an act of sympathetic interconnection: "In the composition, the artist does exactly what every eye must do with life, fix the particular with the universality of his own personality — Taught by the largeness of his imagination to feel every form which he sees moving within himself, he must prove the truth of this by expression" (27). In essence, because we automatically construct internalized realities from the world and because the imagination interweaves this internalized reality with meaning, the sensory world we experience is one where the border between the perceiver and perceived is blurrier than we may instinctually assume. The internalized reality we cognitively occupy is a world wherein meaning and experience emerge together, and collide to produce thought and truth, when our senses, the meaning we produce as thought, and the material world achieve a kind of "approximate co-extension" (27). Thus, Williams' redefining of the imagination imbues our relationship to the world with a kind of co-constructive intimacy: "only through the agency of this force [the imagination] can a man feel himself moved largely with sympathetic pulses at work" (27). Ultimately, this kind of sympathetic interweaving of the self, as the container and partial composer of both meaning and sensory reality, and the material world, through the medium of sensory experience inspired by the material world's form and movements, is essential to what Williams achieves in his poetry. The speaker and the world are inextricably bound to such a degree that the only remnants of the speaker's presence are often the words on the page.

Perhaps exhibited most intensely in *Spring and All*, Williams' poetry often only gives its reader an experience, as expressed through language, and it rarely drifts from concrete imagery,

which allows it to almost entirely dissolve the speaker's presence—we almost never confront direct metaphors or symbolism. In this way, Williams enacts the kind of dissolving of self and world that his rendering of the imagination attempts to reveal or achieve. Simultaneously, our only access to the speaker is through his experience, and our only access to the experience is through the speaker's language. Also, examining how Williams' poetry works reflexively, we experience the language as sight and sound, and, in the act of interpreting or picturing the imagery through the imagination, we unify our thought and sight with the meaning contained by the poem, or, to borrow Gaston Bachelard's phrasing, "the poem possesses us entirely" (*The Poetics of Space* 7). In essence, where the speaker's (the poet's) imagination created language—and thus meaning—from an experience, we are left to create an experience from his language. I gesture toward Bachelard's *The Poetics of Space* because Williams and Bachelard both address poetry and the poetic image's faculty for bringing the self and world into a kind of epistemological, and imaginatively ontological (constructing a kind of internal "reality" through the creation of fleeting mental images from language), discourse: "the act of creative consciousness must be systematically associated with the most fleeting product of that consciousness, the poetic image. At the level of the poetic image, the duality of subject and object is iridescent, shimmering, unceasingly active in its inversions" (4). Thus, poetry reveals how the world reverberates, to borrow Bachelard's phrasing, in us (as exhibited in the poem's speaker), and it enacts this kind of reverberation in us when we read; however, for Williams the poem has the potential to not only unceasingly invert subject and object, but to make them singular (or nearly so). The result is the creation of an epistemological process where, first, the mind and the material universe come into contact and produce sensory experience; then sensory experience comes into contact with consciousness "as the place of meanings" (Merleau-Ponty,

27) through the aid of the imagination; and, lastly, the interweaving of meaning (language) and experience, if done attentively and in "coextension" with the material universe, becomes truth, which indicates a kind of imbuing the of the material world, and collective knowledge if communicated, with meaning that may or may not be fleeting. At the very least, according to Williams, this is the process that make truth from our immediate experience of the world—and it is thus a phenomenological rendering of the imagination's mediating authority.

To make sense of how Williams puts this understanding of the imagination into poetic practice, the titular poem "Spring and All" offers a useful opportunity to do so. Interestingly, while "Spring and All" exemplifies the disappearance of the speaker articulated previously, this poem also gives us subtle glimpses into the kind of work that the speaker's consciousness, through the imagination, is putting into describing the world that surrounds the speaker. Thus, this poem obscures the speaker's presence in a way that makes the it feel entirely experiential to the reader, but it also contends with the consciousness of the speaker to enough of a degree that how he is inspired by his surroundings, and how he is imbuing this setting with meaning, is also revealed—meaning that he feels within himself and the world simultaneously:

> All along the road the reddish
> purplish, forked, upstanding twiggy
> stuff of bushes and small trees
> with dead, brown leaves under them
> leafless vines —
>
> Lifeless in appearance, sluggish
> dazed spring approaches —
>
> They enter the new world naked,
> cold, uncertain of all
> save that they enter. All about them
> the cold familiar wind —
>
> Now the grasses, tomorrow
> the stiff curl of wildcarrot leaf

> One by one objects are defined —
> It quickens : clarity, outline of leaf (pg.12, ll. 9-23)

In the first stanza quoted here, the speaker describes plant life growing on the side of the road using a great deal of adjectives, colors in particular, and in doing so he is exemplifying the kind of attentive experience Williams advocates for when claiming that the individual mind must a achieve a kind of "co-extension" (27) with the material world to understand it as it exists in the present moment. Interestingly, the adjectives "reddish," "purplish," and "twiggy," among unspecific nouns like "stuff," express a kind of uncertainty in the speaker that, by the end of the stanza, leads into clearer details and images—as if the imagery is coming into focus as the stanza progresses. The final images of the stanza, "brown leaves under them / leafless vines," do not connote the same kind of diffidence. Thus, in this stanza, Williams' speaker is engaging in a kind of tentative process of converting experience into language where the associative (the connotative) detail and meaning (like color and texture) that are immediately observable define our understanding of the objects being perceived, rather than their names (the denotative). In this way, the speaker's use of language guides our imagination in the production of mental imagery and produces an experience that is far more reflective of the speaker's specific experience than it would be if, using specific denotative meaning, the speaker named the surrounding environment and left the rest to our imaginations. We become engaged in the same tentative epistemological process as the speaker, despite the relationship between cause and effect being reversed. The speaker produces language from an experience, and we produce an experience from his language.

However, in the following couplet and quatrain, the speaker subtly shifts from the recreation of his experience to a more clearly imaginative engagement with his surroundings.

The speaker uses the adjectives and verbs associated with consciousness/sentience to first describe spring abstractly, and to then describe the new plant life emerging in early spring. In the first couplet, "Lifeless in appearance, sluggish / dazed spring approaches" (ll. 14-15), Williams personifies spring with the adjectives "sluggish" and "dazed," which are typically used to describe someone waking from sleep, and in doing so he brings personhood, his particular understanding of what constitutes it, and spring into a kind of reflexive discourse. In this way, this couplet identifies a shift in the speaker's consciousness from describing the surrounding environment to identifying with it. In the following stanza, where the language is perhaps most clearly charged with the emotion of the speaker, the speaker crafts his language in a way that can be universally applied to all living things at the beginning of their life: "They enter the new world naked, / cold, uncertain of all / save that they enter" (ll. 16-18). Thus, momentarily, the subject is only ascertainable through its context. Otherwise, who "they" specifically describes is entirely ambiguous, and, thus, the meaning and feeling the speaker identifies in his surroundings acts as though it is universal, and it blurs the distinction between subject and object. The speaker has achieved a kind of "co-extension" with his setting, and thereby the meaning identified in the world is also identified with the speaker, and, in the act of reading, in us.

Moreover, because of the way in which language is experienced linearly, the reflexive quality of the meaning in this stanza carries over to the stanzas that follow it. In this way, "All about them / the cold familiar wind" (ll. 18-19) and the following couplet, "Now the grasses, tomorrow / the stiff curl of wildcarrot leaf" (ll. 20-21) take on a metaphoric quality without explicitly being metaphors. Suddenly, the experiential nature of this poem takes on a reflexive quality, and asks us to identify, just as the speaker starts to, with our experience (and thereby making meaning of it) rather than experience passively. Interestingly, the last couplet quoted

here, “One by one objects are defined — / It quickens : clarity, outline of leaf” (ll. 22-23), quickly returns the reader’s attention to the speaker’s consciousness, and its role in identifying and defining the world we perceive through the senses. Williams’s speaker suddenly brings us back to the foundational project of experiencing and naming the world in the creation of reality—which, again, blurs the line between epistemological creation (knowledge construction) and ontological creation (reality construction). In doing so, Williams poetically exemplifies the kind of epistemological process expressed earlier where we attentively experience, meaning emerges from that attention in the imagination, and then we return back to experience. Thus, experience and meaning emerge in consciousness discursively.

In summation, *Spring and All* offers a unique rendering of the imagination as the part of consciousness that interweaves meaning and experience. Importantly, this rending of the imagination produces a poetics wherein the self and world are unified in a meaning producing discourse. In doing so, this characterization of the imagination reveals how meaning and our sensory realities are inextricably woven, and how, through this interweaving, we can create truth despite our mediated access to the world. In order to do so, Williams suggest that we must be attentive in our experience of the world, and that we must participate in making meaning of it by bringing the imagination into a kind of creative synchrony with, or simply coextension with, the material universe as we experience it. Thus, *Spring and All* offers a rendering of consciousness and the imagination that makes it possible to reveal the ways in which our imbuing of the world with meaning, meaning in accord with the world’s presence in our minds, interconnects us and the world.

Part 3

"Eternally asleep, / his dreams walk about the city": *Paterson* and the Poetics of *Animistic Ecology*

Book One of *Paterson* acts, in many respects, as the foundation from which the four other books build, and it is thus where the relationship between the speaker and setting—the foundation of *animistic ecology*—is first, and perhaps most clearly, exemplified and articulated in this text. In accord with Williams' statements in the "Author's Note" to *Paterson*, Book One establishes "the elemental character of the place" (xiv). It is where the setting is first imbued with its animism (its life and consciousness), where the speaker first comes into the mutually defining, co-constructing contact with his setting, through the imagination, outlined in *Spring and All*, and, thus, where Williams first deconstructs the traditionally dichotomous nature of self and world. Specifically, the unifying epistemological discourse between the setting and the speaker, as outlined in my reading of *Spring and All*, is first suggested in the preface of Book One, and it is repeatedly revealed and actualized throughout this text when the movements of the speaker's thoughts and/or desires are reflected in his setting—when the speaker and the setting coextensively interact with each other and others. It also important to note that *Paterson* contends with a very specific geographical space of Paterson, New Jersey. Thus, Williams is directly connecting the creation of a poetic space with the interpretation or experience of literal space. Therefore, not only is sensory reality abstractly the medium and subject of the poetic imagination, but, in the case of *Paterson*, it is also quite literally its subject. In this way, Williams' *Paterson* blurs the line between imaginary, poetic space and literal, cognitive or sensory space (emerging in response to material space) to a degree that *Spring and All* fails to accomplish.

The vast majority of analysis in this section of my thesis, regarding how Williams' poetics are at the foundation of *animistic ecology*, is dedicated to Book One. However, while Book Two, Three, Four, and Five of *Paterson* continue much of the same stylistics, they differ from Book One in that the shifts in the speaker, or the speaker's consciousness, become slightly more drastic and expansive in focus—thereby, intensifying and broadening our sense of this epistemological process' complexity and consequence. Therefore, throughout the rest of these books, the living setting speaks to, or is imbued with, meaning in ways that are increasingly more varied and pluralistic than Book One. In this way, they progressively reveal how each individual consciousness's epistemological discourse with their setting produces meaning that is uniquely bound to their intimate relationship with that setting—to their subjective experience of the setting. Moreover, because it is produced from the imagination's—to the best of its ability—attentive, and thereby coextensive, epistemological interplay with the material universe in the immediate moment, this meaning is simultaneously new, or temporally renewed, by the individual and in accord with the natural world's form as experienced.

Therefore, while Book One establishes the foundation of my argument—establishing the kind of liminality between the self and the world, in our consciousness's production of meaning from experience, that is foundational to *Paterson*'s creation of an *animistic ecology*—the following books deepen our understanding of Paterson's scope and the consequences that this rendering of meaning production has. Notably, Book Two of *Paterson*, expanding on the intimacy between the self, the world, and thereby others established in Book One, produces a kind of Whitmanesque model for collective intimacy that is founded in epistemology; Book Three of *Paterson*, much like *Spring and All*, advocates for a kind of cognitive shift wherein, rather than depending on the knowledge created by those of the past, we actively attend to the

world that surrounds us in the production of new meaning and truth; Book Four of *Paterson* partakes in a relatively radical stylistic shift when Paterson, in the first part of Book Four, becomes an individual who is interacted with, by varying characters, spoken to, and speaks; lastly, Book Five of *Paterson* conceptually returns to Book One's interconnecting of the self (the poet) and the setting (Paterson) as a singular identity, but with a speaker/poet and city who have grown older, more disillusioned, and have become relatively bitter, but are still searching for intimacy.

Starting with the preface of Book One, it is here where Williams first, and most directly, characterizes the city and the man—the self and the setting—as interwoven and codependent:

> rolling up out of chaos,
> a nine months' wonder, the city
> the man, an identity—it can't be
> otherwise—an
> interpenetration both ways. (4)

In this passage, Williams offers a series of seemingly discordant appositives that syntactically unify otherwise typically unrelated nouns as the singular subject of the fragmented sentence: "nine months' wonder," "the city / the man," and "an identity" are unified in this way. Moreover, because "the city" and "the man" are only separated by a line break, rather than a comma (which would signify the beginning of a new appositive), both "city" and "man" simultaneously act as the subject of the noun phrase. Williams' use of the line break here intensifies the degree to which "the city" and "the man" are interconnected in a way that, if broken into two appositives, would not necessarily have the same effect. The final appositive before the dash, "an identity," importantly brings the meaning of the phrase and the effect of this passage's syntax into a kind of complementary accord. The "nine months' wonder," "the city," and "the man" are all unified as the subject, by the syntax, and unified as "an identity" by the final appositive. Moreover,

Williams imbues this unification of the setting and those within it—"the city / the man"—with a kind of exigence through the embedded clause "it can't be otherwise." In doing so, Williams' speaker universalizes this construction of the self and the setting's relationship; he articulates it as foundational to the human experience.

Moreover, with the final phrase "an interpenetration both ways," Williams' speaker clarifies the nature of this relationship as one of liminality, discourse, and interconnection rather than complete unity, which the appositives may have otherwise suggested. Interestingly, because of this, Williams' use of the appositive takes on a metaphoric effect; the meaning of each of the noun phrases, "the city" and "the man" in particular, are interlinked in nearly the same way that they would be if composed as direct metaphors (ex. the city is the man, the man is the city). Thus, like metaphors, the appositives interconnect the nouns through the creation of coextensive, meaning producing relationships between them. In essence, that which is true of one noun becomes true of the others, and *vice versa*. Importantly, however, the nouns that are interconnected by a metaphor (and the appositives here), despite revealing connotative similarities, remain relatively distinct. They are brought into a meaning producing discourse, and thus they remain partially unique but interconnected. Furthermore, Williams' choice to use the appositive achieves a couple noticeable things that a metaphor wouldn't and that, for the most part, remain consistent in Williams' style throughout *Paterson*: 1) the appositives decrease the number of syllables (by excluding the verb "is") and thereby increase the speed and intensity of the lines; 2) the appositives equalize the relationship between the nouns of the sentence/fragment by participating in a kind of renaming, rather than acting upon (there are not any direct objects being affected by the subject through the verb "is"), and, thus, the appositive is capable of

interconnecting identities in a way that intensifies the kind of co-construction and liminality that is inherent to the metaphor, but can also be obscured by its syntactical structure.

Where an explicit metaphor would modify the meaning of the subject by connecting it to a direct object, which essentially imbues the subject with meaning in the same way that an adjective would, the appositive is capable of interconnecting nouns in such a way that explicitly puts the nouns into a relationship where they equally and mutually modify each other. Thus, the appositive enacts the kind of co-constructive, epistemological interweaving of identities that is essential to the meaning of this passage, and to the foundation of *Paterson*'s construction of an *animistic ecology*. Through this kind of complicated layering of noun phrases, Williams enacts the kind of "rolling up" and "interpenetration" that gives the fragmented sentence its meaning, and, thereby, the appositives intensify the kind of interconnection and liminality that Williams imbues humanity, meaning, our internalized realities, and the material universe with. An interconnection and liminality between the individual and their setting that is only made possible by the imagination's capacity to interweave each of our internalized, sensory realities with meaning in the immediate experience of the present moment.

Establishing the setting's animism and how it relates to the kind of interweaving of identity and experience, in the creation of meaning, that is foundational to *animistic ecology*, Williams directly personifies the city, Paterson, and characterizes those who live within it as its living dreams in the first passage of Book One:

> Paterson lies in the valley under Passaic Falls
> its spent waters forming the outline of his back. He
> lies on his right side, head near the thunder
> of the waters filling his dreams! Eternally asleep,
> his dreams walk about the city where he persists
> incognito. Butterflies settle on his stone ear. (6)

In this passage, Williams' speaker imbues Paterson with a kind personhood—giving the setting its presence as a character. The speaker does this by describing Paterson using anatomical features ("the outline of his back" and "stone ear"), and by suggesting that Paterson can dream. This personification unifies the setting under a singular identity, and it imbues the inanimate landscape with a kind of life and consciousness. Moreover, by characterizing the citizens of Paterson as the city's dreams, Williams' speaker interweaves human consciousness with the subconscious of their shared living city. In this way, the citizens of Paterson are cognitively unified under the singular persona of their living city. However, the citizens of Paterson also have a unique kind of agency because, as dreams, they occupy the setting's mind but are outside of the setting's control—the setting simply observes.

Thus, Williams simultaneously characterizes the speaker and the citizens of Paterson as individuals, being subjective experiencers, and as parts of a singular collective—as the dreams of a singular personified setting. While the citizens of Paterson perceive their setting and each other, Paterson perceives its varying parts, and the natural world surrounding it, through the eyes, so to speak, of its living dreams/citizens. Concisely put, Williams' speaker suggests that Paterson's citizens are the city of Paterson subjectively perceiving and making meaning of itself. While the characterization of humanity as the dreams of its setting remains, for the most part, isolated to Book One, it establishes the kind of liminal, interconnective relationship between the speaker and the setting—Paterson and those who perceive it—that is essential to *Paterson*'s structure throughout all five books. This rendering of subjective experience as one of our setting's many dreams is also useful for conceptualizing how the imagination's interweaving of material reality and meaning, through the mediation of the unconscious mind's construction of internalized sensory reality, can produce a collective *animistic ecology* where varying subjective

experiences are epistemologically interwoven to produce a dynamic and meaningful setting that lives, symbolically, through humanity. However, for the sake of clarity, I examine this idea more thoroughly in the following section after establishing some of the nuances inherent to Williams' interconnecting of the speaker and Paterson here.

We as readers, and thereby as imaginers, experience Williams' living setting through the language of the speaker. The speaker, being a dream of Paterson's, is a creation of Paterson, and, yet, Paterson's identity, being personified and thus imbued with personhood by the speaker, is also, to some extent, a construction of the speaker's mind in the form of language. Moreover, as *Spring and All* elucidates, through our imaginative interaction with the language that makes up *Paterson*, we also participate in a kind of internalized construction of Paterson—the speaker's living setting—wherein meaning and sensory experience (as thought and mental images) are unified in the act of reading. When paired with the claim that people are the dreams of their city, the speaker's elusive presence as a mediator also exemplifies how the kind of liminal, co-constructive relationship he and Paterson participate in has an epistemological, meaning and knowledge producing, center. In both cases, as the mediator of his living setting's experience (as one of its dreams) and as the mediator of our linguistic experience, Williams' speaker is always at the center of interweaving experience and meaning. Importantly, however, the speaker sees themselves as one of many similar dreams and mediators among whom he simultaneously feels a remove and a kind of kinship; their thoughts and the meaning they produce are their own, yet they participate in the same kind of epistemological, liminal relationship with their shared setting that he does. Thus, while the speaker is at the center of our understanding of Paterson (likely varying speakers, at varying points in *Paterson*, with unclear shifts between), they are aware—and make us aware—that they are not alone in their epistemological co-construction of Paterson.

This plurality is first recognized by the speaker in a scene that usefully encapsulates the simultaneously liminal relationship each individual has with their setting and the distance one feels from others when they realize that each of the liminal, co-constructive relationships others participate in are mostly inaccessible:

> Inside the bus one sees
> his thoughts sitting and standing. His
> thoughts alight and scatter—
>
> Who are these people (how complex
> the mathematic) among whom I see myself
> in the regularly ordered plateglass of
> his thoughts, glimmering before shoes and bicycles? (9)

Starting with the first few lines, Williams' metonymic use of "thoughts," as opposed to "people" at the beginning of the following stanza, briefly dissolves their corporeality, which thereby establishes a tension between the cognitive and material (being paired with the verbs "sitting," "standing," "alight," and "scatter," which denote physical action), and isolates the speaker who has no direct access to others' thoughts or experience yet knows that they are thinking and experiencing.

Moreover, by contrast, the final image of the speaker's reflection among the images of others, on the bus window, "glimmering before shoes and bicycles" shifts our focus from the inaccessibility of others' cognition to the speaker's cognitive internalizing of himself and others as light and color. This image elucidates a simultaneous sense of belonging, having the speaker recognize themselves among a collective of others, and othering wherein his perception of their material being (and his own material being) is revealed to be the product of his mind's automatic internalizing of the world as light and color. The verb "glimmering," in particular, draws our attention to the way in which those on the bus, as well as the world around them ("shoes and bicycles"), exist to the speaker as light—just as they exist as light on the bus window. However,

as suggested by the lines before it, they also exist abstractly as producers, mediators, and communicators of thought, in response to their particular experience of material reality, and thus they exist as the epistemological centers of their own experience, which reveals the way in which the speaker similarly exists as light to them. In this way, the speaker is not only akin to those who occupy the bus, as perceivers of the world, but also akin to the "shoes and bicycles" that he sees himself and the others among in the bus window's reflection. Like shoes and bicycles, we occupy material reality, are unknowable except through the mediation of sensory experience (which can then be abstracted via language, memory, *etc.*), and we occupy the minds of others both as light, sound, touch, and smell and as meaning captured in language. We are simultaneously the subjects of our perception and the objects of others' perception.

Furthermore, by evoking the cognitive process wherein consciousness, through the work of the imagination, identifies reflected light as "people," "shoes," and "bicycles," Williams' speaker subtly draws our attention to the way in which thought and meaning emerge in response to, and in the ever-present backdrop of (so to speak), immediate sensory experience. Thus, in many respects, Williams' speaker is contending with the simultaneity of two seemingly paradoxical ideas in this passage: 1) to borrow Merleau-Ponty's phrasing, "Truth does not 'inhabit' merely the 'inner man,' or rather, there is no inner man; man is in the world, and it is in the world that he knows himself" ("What is Phenomenology?" 58); and 2) we cognitively occupy an internalized sensory space, emerging from our mind's contact with material reality, and that thought is an internalized expression of meaning accessible only to the thinker because it emerges from their imagination's creation of, and meaningful interplay with, auditory experience in response to the material world. We have no exclusively inner being because our minds operate in a kind of perpetual response to the material world we perceive and physically occupy, yet the

world, as we perceive it, is also internally produced by our minds automatically. Moreover, through the imagination, we can produce experiences—thoughts and mental images—that are experienced only by us and are epistemologically, rather than biologically, in response to the material world as perceived, but those experiences necessarily reflect and pull from how we perceive the material world and, thus, the degree to which they can truly be understood as "ours" is elusive.

As exemplified in *Paterson*, Williams' interweaving of meaning and experience in the creation of thought produces moments within this text where the desires and thoughts of the speaker are reflected in their living setting, thereby shaping our understanding of Paterson, and where the living setting's form, as experienced by the speaker, inspires the meaning the speaker makes of it. One particularly useful and recurrent example is when the speaker shares, and Paterson reflects, a desire for a unity between the masculine and feminine, sometimes momentary and other times lasting, throughout this text. Interestingly, in moments like these, the degree to which Paterson's personhood is a projection of the speaker's, and the speaker's personhood (selfhood, thoughts, desires, *etc.*) a response to Paterson, is left meaningfully ambiguous. However, entertaining both simultaneous, these two movements—the speaker's projection of identity onto the setting, and the settings' nature/identity directing the thoughts of the speaker—importantly exemplify the kind of meaning producing coextension that Williams advocates for in his *Spring and All* and that is foundational to *animistic ecology*. In these moments, the speaker achieves a kind of coextension with his environment where thought, thereby meaning, and experience complement, rather than distract from, one another: where, as Williams phrases it, "events [dance] two / and two with language" (*Paterson*, 23). For example, in the following scene, the speaker's tentative pursuit of sexual and intellectual union with a

woman is expressed through his description of, and a wish to be submerged within, the setting that surrounds them both:

> his thoughts, the stream
> and we, we two, isolated in the stream,
> we also: three alike—
>
> we sit and talk
> I wish to be with you abed, we two
> as if the bed were the bed of a stream
> —I have much to say to you
>
> We sit and talk,
> quietly, with long lapses of silence
> and I am aware of the stream
> that has no language, coursing
> beneath the quiet heaven of
> your eyes (23)

In this scene, the speaker's struggle to find the language needed to express his desire is reflected in the stream, which is symbolically unified with thought yet lacks the language needed for expression. In the first stanza identified here, Williams takes up a metaphoric use of appositives that is similar to those identified within the preface to Book One, and, in doing so, he ties together "his thoughts," "the stream," and "we" into the kind of co-constructive, coextensive meaning producing relationship inherent to metaphors. However, while the stream, the speaker, and the woman are all identified with Paterson's thoughts, the three remain unique. Thus, there is a kind of tension in this passage, similar to the tension identified in the scene on the bus, where the speaker, those around him (the woman), and the material world (the stream) are simultaneously identified as similar in nature (occupying a shared material reality) yet distinct from one another (occupying subjective, cognitive/sensory realities that are externally inaccessible). They are three, but they are "three alike."

The subtle metaphoric interconnecting of his thought and the stream, complemented by the coextensive movements of the speaker's thought in response to the woman and the stream that occupy his consciousness, allows the speaker to subtly articulate the way in which both he and the woman are quietly submerged, so to speak, in their own consciousness and thought. Consequently, the speaker's wish to be physically/sexually unified with the woman in the second stanza—"to be with [her] abed"—also symbolically expresses a desire to be intellectually unified with her. This is particularly evident when the speaker likens the bed he imagines they'd occupy to the bed of a stream (assumably inspired by the stream they physically occupy). To be unified, rather than isolated, in the bed of a stream, and thus submerged in the streams' waters, symbolically becomes akin to being unified in thought (occupying the same thought/stream together). The simultaneity of these two kinds of interconnection (physical and intellectual) is further elucidated by the following line and the following stanza, which reestablish the kind of tension identified in the first stanza by drawing our attention to linguistic communication—the primary medium of thought and one of the few means by which we can bring the thoughts of others into an approximate coextension with our own—and the stream's lack thereof. In the lapses of silence, the stream is recognized as languageless, and consequently, so is the speaker's desire to be unified with the woman sexually and in thought, which is symbolically linked to the stream. Moreover, the final image, "the quiet heaven of / your eyes" (23), similarly illustrates a kind of cognitive remove from the woman. While the speaker physically and cognitively occupies the stream (his thought emerging, in part, from his attention to the stream), the woman seems to cognitively occupy a distinct and desirable space ("a heaven" from the speaker's perspective) that the speaker has no access to. In this way, Williams's speaker is again contending with the degree to which our internalized realities are inaccessible to others, and, in

doing so, he likens physical unity and unity of thought (partially possible through linguistic communication) with others to the imagination's coextension with the material universe, through subjective experience, in the creation of meaning.

However, Williams' speaker is struggling to achieve this kind of coextension with the woman, and, perhaps consequently, he establishes a subtle hierarchy between the woman's consciousness and his own. The stream courses beneath the "heaven of / [her] eyes," and thus, the speaker's consciousness, occupying and being reflected in the stream, is below hers. Williams, in the use of "heaven," is also subtly playing with the connotative divide between the earthly (corporeality, desire, instinct, *etc.*) and the divine (spirituality, thought, self-control, *etc.*). Ultimately, this scene and moments like it exemplify the nuanced nature of meaning creation as the discourse between otherwise disconnected consciousnesses and the material universe they share (and participate in) through the mediation and interweaving of language and sensory experience. Thus, while the borders between self and world can shift and seemingly fade, at least momentarily, the divide between one consciousness and another is only bridgeable through the interweaving of meaning and experience (speech in particular)—through our imbuing of the world, as each of us subjectively experiences it, with meaning, and the communication of that meaning to others within the world.

Book Two of *Paterson* is uniquely apt for bridging this intimate, coextensive movement of the speaker's thoughts and his living setting's form, as they subjectively experience it, with the broader scope of *animistic ecology*, which I'll analyze in the following section of this thesis. While Book Two contends with the same kind of coextension between the speaker's mind and the setting's form in Book One, it is also far more sprawling than Book One. Specifically, where Book One contends with the speaker's struggle to reconcile the disconnects between his and

other peoples' consciousnesses, in Book Two the speaker's thoughts emerge in response to a greater number of people and to a larger span of the city, which is suggestive of how the imagination's interweaving of meaning and experience also has expansive and broader cultural consequences. For example, in Part One of Book Two, the speaker observes a variety of individuals picnicking in the park in a way that often takes on a sexualizing gaze: "she finds what peace there is, reclines, / before his approach, stroked / by their clambering feet—for pleasure" (54); "the leg raised, verisimilitude / even to the coarse contours of the leg, the / bovine touch! The leer, the cave of it, / the female of it facing the male" (58). The sexual desire that implicitly motivates the speaker's gaze, in these moments, shapes our and his understanding of Paterson and those who occupy him as thoughts/dreams, which exemplifies how meaning gets projected onto, and thereby shapes, our understanding of the world in our experience of the immediate moment. Thus, while this co-constructive relationship between the material world and self's deeply intimate nature, when articulated in relation to two people who are mutually constructing meaning from, and thereby internally defining the identities of, one another, is foundational to Book One, Book Two intensifies the degree to which this epistemological intimacy is in fact indicative of a larger collective system of epistemologically interconnected individuals. The intimacy present between the speaker and the woman in the river, described in Book One, is again articulated in Book Two, but in relation to an entire collective of people. Thus, Book Two takes the intimacy articulated in Book One and produces a collective model of epistemological intimacy that is, in many respects, akin to a Whitmanesque "social ontology" (Cull 762) that "[understands] being in terms of being-with others" and is foundational to Whitman's "radically democratic poetics and politics." Interestingly, while Ryan Cull's characterization of Whitman's "social ontology" is one that "sets aside the epistemological urge

to know others in favor of seeking to be with them," the model that I am proposing Williams offers in *Paterson* characterizes the epistemological processes of coming to know others as akin to, rather than opposed to, being with them. Thus, where intimacy, for Whitman, is achieved through a kind of purely ontological presence with others, bracketing the "epistemological urge" to assign meaning, for Williams, intimacy is instead achieved through a kind of epistemological interconnecting of the self and others. In Williams' collective model for intimacy, epistemological knowing is a means by which our minds achieve a kind of coextension with other's presence in the material universe, and thus it is a means by which we become close to others.

Moreover, in Part Two of Book Two, the speaker directs our attention to a sermon given by preacher named Klaus, recounting it, and thereby disappears behind the preacher's persona: "and so / one day I heard a voice… / And the voice said, / Klaus, what's the matter with you? You're not / happy" (69). In doing so, we partially and momentarily experience Paterson through the voice of a different individual, with different ideological inclinations, who creates different kinds of meaning from Paterson, in his experience, than the speaker does. Interestingly, however, our experience of Klaus's voice is prefaced by the speaker's sense that religion offers the congregation a means of distancing themselves from the world that surrounds them—"those poor souls had nothing else in the word, save that church, between them and the eternal stony, ungrateful and unpromising dirt they lived by" (62)—and it is also followed by the speaker's deification of the material world: "You are the eternal bride / and father" (75). Therefore, the speaker's claims seep into our reading of Klaus's voice, and Klaus's appeals to divinity briefly shape the speaker's reading of Paterson after the sermon. Williams gives his readers the speech of another individual that is unique from the speaker, revealing how each person's perception of

their setting is simultaneously their own and shaped by the systems of meaning they contain (linguistic, cultural, religious, political, *etc.*), yet we experience Klaus's speech through the voice and framing of the speaker, which reveals the way in which our imagination's interweaving of meaning and experience imbues others with meaning that is unique to our subjective experience of them. Not only do we come to know ourselves in the world, but we come to know others and the word itself through our internalizing of the world and others as sensory experience and meaning. By offering a collective epistemological model for intimacy and interweaving the voices of others, Book Two elucidates how this epistemological framework becomes incredibly complex and ecological in nature when we expand our scope, from an individual's intimate attention to the material world or another individual in detail, to an individual's expansive and abstract projection of meaning onto the world as a collective of innumerable, interconnected parts and people that they experience internally, as sense perception, yet know exists externally and indifferently, for the most part, to one's consciousness.

Book Three of *Paterson* advocates for a kind of epistemological attention to the world that allows us to produce meaning that is uniquely our own, or unique to our experience of the world. This is particularly the case when Williams' speaker, in the second part of Book Three, is observing/recalling a fire that took place in Paterson—"Beautiful thing / —the whole city doomed! And / the flames towering" (116)—burn down the local library. Specifically, the burning of the library becomes symbolically linked with a kind of cognitive shift, or a fresh start, where the viewer suddenly becomes enamored with the world and/or the destructive beauty that surrounds them. Those watching the fire are subsumed by awe, and, consequently, they are momentarily attending to the world with the "sympathetic pulses" (*Spring and All* 27) of their

own imaginations, and they bring thought and the world they perceive into a kind of meaningful coextension:

> The person submerged
> in wonder, the fire become the person .
>
> But the pathetic library (that contained,
> perhaps, not one volume of distinction)
> must go down also —
>
> BECAUSE IT IS SILENT. IT
> IS SILENT BY DEFECT OF VIRTUE IN THAT IT
> CONTAINS NOTHING OF YOU (123)

The first couplet, in particular, is incredibly direct about this coextension—through the person's wonder, and thereby attention, the fire momentarily "become[s]" them. The person cognitively attends to the fire that has inspired their wonder to such a degree that their physical disconnection from the fire is rendered meaningless. Moreover, the library, throughout this section, symbolically embodies the authority of past knowledge—"books / that is, men in hell, / their reign over the living ended" (116)—and thus the burning of the library means the destruction of that authority, which is also associated with beauty and awe in the first couplet here (being connected to the beauty of the fire) and throughout this section of Book Three: "beauty is / a defiance of authority" (119). Interestingly, however, Williams' characterization of beauty as a defiance of authority also associates the kind of cognitive attention beauty demands with the defying of authority. If it is through this kind of attention that meaning is interwoven with experience to create new truth, then it stands to reason that epistemological attention defies the authority of old thinking. This idea is also suggested in the last tercet quoted here where the speaker justifies the burning of the library on the grounds that it either contains nothing of our being because those texts were written by others—it is dead people's being that the library contains—or because, as the use of "SILENT" suggests, the discourse inherent to the act of

reading is no longer taken up by those who occupy Paterson—the books no longer speak because they no longer have an audience who identifies with them. Either way, not only is past knowledge's authority defied, but it is also delegitimized and replaced by flames that have been metaphorically linked to the viewers of the fire in the first couplet. In this way, the burning of the library symbolically becomes the replacement of old consciousnesses, captured in books, with new consciousnesses, identified with the fire. Thus, resonating with Williams claims about the imagination's "destroy[ing] and recreat[ing] everything afresh in the likeness of that which it was" (9) in *Spring and All*, the speaker imbues the kind of epistemological model *Spring and All* and *Paterson* embody with a sense of urgency or exigence in Book Three of *Paterson*.

Book Four of *Paterson*, specifically the first part of Book Four, interestingly characterizes Paterson as an individual who is engaged with by others, is spoken to, and speaks like any individual could. In this way, Book Four momentarily collapses the divide between self and world completely, which also collapses the divide between the abstract and concrete and disrupts the relationship that has been established between them throughout. Rather than acting as a setting that is imbued with personhood and consciousness by the speaker and the others who occupy it, Paterson suddenly becomes a conscious person that symbolically represents the setting they are simultaneously occupying and identified with. Implicitly, they are also suddenly given a body that can act as any other would. Specifically, Paterson becomes a character for the sake of achieving the kind of sexual intimacy both he and the speaker desired throughout Book One and Book Two—where it is symbolically interwoven with the kind of cognitive intimacy inherent to the process where we, the world, and others become interdependent in the production of meaning from immediate experience:

Phyllis & Paterson

How long can you stay?

> Six thirty . I've got
> to meet the boy friend
>
> Take off your clothes
>
> No. I'm good at saying that.
>
> She stood
> quietly to be undressed (154)

The kind of cognitive unity between the self and world that sexual intimacy began to symbolically represent throughout Book One and Book Two is achieved, for Paterson, at the same point in the text where sexual unity is also implicitly achieved. Thus, this section of Part Four is interestingly suggestive of what Emily Lambeth-Climaco claims when writing, "Williams persists in hypothesizing the equivalence—even the functional sameness—of the abstract and the concrete" (50) in "'This Rhetoric Is Real': William Carlos Williams's Recalibration of Language and Things." Physical unity and the unity of selfhood and material reality are simultaneous, because they are coextensively linked, and therefore this kind of coextensive interaction between the mind and the world does not only reveal how the self and world, as experienced, participate in liminal relationship, but similarly reveals how the abstract and concrete also participate a liminal relationship when we make meaning of immediate experience.

Lastly, Book Five of *Paterson* returns, in many respects, to Book One's interweaving of the speaker's cognition with his setting. However, In Book Five the speaker and Paterson have aged and are now contending with the inevitability of death—"we shall not get to the bottom / death is a hole / in which we are all buried" (209-210)—which only, according to the speaker, the imagination can escape through the creation of art: "at the bottom of the cavern / of death, the imagination / escapes intact" (210). Williams articulates this idea most playfully, and perhaps

most ambiguously, in the final lines of Book Five where he metaphorically uses the notion of dance to simultaneously contend with the nature of knowing, or epistemology, and with how art—responding and adding to the material universe, interweaving concept and action, and remaining beyond one's death to unify one's imagination (expressed in movements, language, color, sound, *etc.*) with the imaginations of others—eternalizes (relatively speaking) one's imagination:

> We know nothing and can know nothing
>   but
> the dance, to dance a measure
> contrapuntally,
>   Satyrically, the tragic foot. (236)

The dance acts as a visual metaphor where two counterpoints, as the word "contrapuntally" emphasizes, achieve a kind of discursive unity in the production of a singular performance or piece of art that both outlasts and lives through, so to speak, the particular dancer that performs it. In the first line, the dance is articulated in relation to knowing and can thus potentially be read as a metaphor alluding to a kind of epistemological model for the discursive creation of meaning where two counterpoints come together. For example, we might associate the music we dance to with the material universe we perceive and the resulting dance/art itself with the meaning that is created. If we were to read the dance, containing all that we know, in this way, then this metaphor also reveals the way in which we are ever responsive to, and guided by, the world that we experience. Moreover, the dance is simultaneously temporal, responding to each musical measure in time, and eternal, existing as an art that can be performed at any moment in time if there are dancers to do so. The same can be said of meaning, which emerges in response to the world we perceive but can be eternalized, to some extent, by language that can be performed (read) as long as the language is not forgotten. Thus, continuing with this train of thought, the

production of meaning becomes akin to the externalizing of one's imagination or thought as culture, which then continues to live, so to speak, through collective, discursive engagement throughout time. Regardless of how one specifically reads the dance as a model for knowing, the very final lines of this passage contain an interesting kind of tension that imbues the nature of living and knowing with a potential paradoxical, but nevertheless empowering, nature. We dance a tragic foot, but do so "satyrically," and, thus, the manner in which we dance is, in some respects, a kind of triumph over the music and the tragic dance itself. The dancer asserts a kind of interpretive authority that is in direct opposition to all other authorities that define the foot as tragic, including the music and the creators of the dance itself.

Ultimately, *Paterson* uses poetics to complement its establishing of a complex co-constructive relationship between the speaker and the setting where both collide in the creation of meaning and truth from the immediate moment, where thought and thereby the self emerges within and in response to the sensory realities each of us cognitively occupies, and where each individual bridges the gap between the material universe and their internalized sensory reality through the creation of meaning and truth in the immediate moment. Book One first establishes this relationship between the speaker, the living setting, and the citizens of Paterson who simultaneously act as parts of and live within Paterson (like the speaker), and the following Books broaden this scope to reveal how meaning that is internally created from the intimate coextension of individual minds and the setting they share shapes the way in which we abstractly understand the world as a macrocosm—exceeding immediate experience yet ever shaped by it in this interweaving of meaning and sensory reality—and thereby elucidate the kinds of complex consequences this understanding of epistemology can have on our understanding of the world. Moreover, in addition to using *Spring and All*'s characterization of the imagination to blur the

line between "poetic space" and literal space, *Paterson* also blurs this line by taking a specific geographical space as its subject. In this way, our creation of a "poetic space" in the reading of *Paterson* becomes an imaginative recreation or interpretation of Paterson, New Jersey, from the perspective and language of the speaker, which, in itself, deconstructs the borders between meaning, the imagination, and literal space.

<u>Part 4</u>

"The province of the poem is the world": The Philosophical, Macrocosmic Nature of *Animistic Ecology* and its Potential Within Williams' Scholarship

Thus far, *Spring and All*'s characterization of the imagination and *Paterson*'s coextensive, co-constructive rendering of the speaker and his environment have elucidated Williams' understanding of how human consciousness participates in a liminal relationship with the world it occupies in the immediate moment; first, through the internalizing of the material universe (we share and are part of) as a world of colors, auditory tones, textures, tastes, and smells; and second, in the interweaving of this sensory reality with meaning and truth, through the imagination, in the immediate moment when the mind is brought into "approximate co-extension" (*Spring and All* 27) with the material universe it is experiencing in time. Importantly, these two processes—the automatic, ontological reality-producing process and the epistemological process of interweaving meaning and experience in the production of thought, lasting knowledge, and/or temporal truth—happen in the conscious mind simultaneously, which, as articulated in relation to *Spring and All*'s rendering of the imagination earlier, interweaves consciousness "as the place of meanings" and consciousness "as the flux of lived experiences" ("The Relations of the Soul and the Body" 27). The sensory reality we experience is both the subject and backdrop of the meaning we create. Thus, as Merleau-Ponty phrases it, just as "there is no inner man; man is in the world, and it is in the world that he knows himself" ("What is Phenomenology?" 58), there is also no external sensory world—no objective world of color, sound, taste, touch, and smell—but an otherwise inaccessible material one. Therefore, the world that we know through experience is neither entirely our own nor entirely the universe's, but the shared project of both—quite literally in *Paterson.* The speaker and Paterson are co-constructing

their shared reality; the speaker, as one of Paterson's dreams, is one of the many mediators of Paterson's experience, and Paterson, being perceived by the speaker, is the subject from which the speaker cognitively produces a sensory reality (the automatic production of his experience) and meaning in the form of language, which we, in turn, create an experience and meaning from in the act of reading.

However, we have yet to fully contend with the scope of Paterson as a vast ecology of similar meaning and reality producing interactions that, in part, imbue the setting with personhood and, in part, produce persons through the production of meaning from the setting internalized as sensory experience. Nor have we contended with *animistic ecology*'s potential within the contemporary critical scholarship that addresses Williams' work. In short, we have yet to truly contend with the macroscopic nature of *animistic ecology*—both philosophically and within the critical conversation it participates in.

Importantly, Williams' creation of an *animistic ecology* completely deconstructs the notion of alterity (or otherness) when analyzed from this expansive perspective. If consciousness is always participating in a co-constructive relationship with the material universe it occupies and participates in, then it stands to reason that no part of the universe that we experience can truly be disconnected from us—experience itself is a familiarizing process. In this way, *animistic ecology* can be conceptualized as an epistemological redefining of Timothy Morton's "mesh" (*The Ecological Thought* 28) for the sake of analyzing how *Paterson*'s rendering of the ontological (reality producing) and epistemological (knowledge/meaning producing) processes inherent to the creation and interpretation of immediate experience are interconnective and thereby disrupt dualistic understandings of self and world, which happens through *Paterson*'s uniquely expansive engagement with Williams' articulation of the imagination in *Spring and All*:

> All life forms are the mesh, and so are all dead ones, as are their habitats, which are also made up of living and nonliving beings. We know even more now about how life forms have shaped Earth (think of oil, of oxygen—the first climate change cataclysm). We drive around using crushed dinosaur parts. Iron is mostly a by-product of bacterial metabolism. So is oxygen. Mountains can be made of shells and fossilized bacteria…Beings such as bees and flowers evolve together; all living beings evolve according to their environments. (*The Ecological Thought* 29)

Morton's "mesh" is useful in the reading of *Paterson* because the titular setting and character of this text is himself a mesh of interdependent and interconnected parts, both materially and cognitively, with no stable or singular center. In the same way that, "each point of the mesh is both the center and edge of a system of points, so there is no absolute center or edge" (29), the people and places that make up Paterson are simultaneously the center (as perceivers) and the edge (as objects of other people's perception), so to speak, of the epistemological process that puts Paterson and the people who occupy it in a co-constructive, liminal relationship. Thus, in many respects, *animistic ecology* takes the model offered by Morton and abstracts it to articulate how meaning and the world, as we experience it, are interwoven by the imagination.

Moreover, Morton's "mesh" and my use of *animistic ecology* similarly deconstruct the concept of "nature" by revealing the way in which it is a human construction that problematically imbues the world we experience with alterity. Specifically, the manner in which the "mesh" universalizes biological and ecological interconnection reveals the way in which the notion of "independence" is ultimately fallacious. Thus, our cultural sense of our and nature's independence from one another contradicts biological and ecological facts, and our thinking

must change to account for these ecological and biological facts: “Thinking interdependence means dissolving the barrier between ‘over here’ and ‘over there,’ and more fundamentally, the metaphysical illusion of rigid, narrow boundaries between inside and outside” (Morton 39). Morton’s “mesh” takes on a significantly similar nature to *animistic ecology*, in this moment, despite having biological interconnectedness at its foundation instead of poetics and/or subjective experience. As suggested earlier in this thesis, *animistic ecology* is also deeply concerned with deconstructing the “boundaries between inside and outside,” and, in this way, it also deconstructs the kind of division between humanity and the environments we perceive, which does not entirely strip the material universe of its alterity but does strip the worlds each of us perceive, in particular, of its independence. For example, as Lee Rozelle points out in “Ecocritical City: Modernist Reactions to Urban Environments in *Miss Lonelyhearts* and *Paterson*,” Williams brings the natural and urban world into a kind of contact that, at least partially, dissolves their “otherness” in *Paterson*: “Central to Paterson is the idea that body, place, and city interrelate directly—the molecular, the ecological, and the urban” (110). Interestingly, this dissolving of otherness is rendered in relation to their shared materiality for Rozelle. In this way, Rozelle is immediately concerned with how the material universe is itself characterized as interdependent in *Paterson*.

Thus, it is important to note that, in contrast to Morton or Rozelle, *animistic ecology* does not necessarily concern itself with the ecologically interconnective nature of the material universe independent of human consciousness. Where *animistic ecology* takes the interconnected nature of consciousness, meaning, and the material universe as its foundation, Morton and Rozelle start with the material universe’s interconnection as their foundation, and Morton, in particular, builds a model for consciousness from there that is remarkably similar to Williams’

(as defined in this thesis). *Animistic ecology* and Morton's "mesh" both contend with the ecological nature of consciousnesses' interconnection with the material world, they both deconstruct the conceptualization of "nature" as independent or disconnected from humanity, and they both work to relatively dissolve the borders between the "inside" (meaning, abstractions, selfhood, *etc.*) and the "outside" ("nature," sensory reality, the material universe, *etc.*).

However, perhaps in contradiction to Morton's conceptualizing of the "mesh," *animistic ecology* and *Paterson* are deeply concerned with locality, and thus it is necessary to account for how Paterson emerges in the mind of the speaker, and all those who occupy Paterson, in a way that, while decentralizing the self, takes subjective experience as its foundation. As is also true of Morton's "mesh," Paterson can only be conceptualized as a complete whole through abstraction. Neither Paterson nor the mesh can be experienced, in all their detail, at once, and thus both of these complete systems can only be experienced incompletely. However, Morton asks us to move through and past the limits of this subjectivity: "the ecological thought must extend our sense of location to include 'anywheres.' 'Anywhere' corrodes our sense of 'here.' Other times and other places are part of this 'here.' The more we study it, the more holes we find" (55). Paterson is a particular space, imbued with personhood and animism through ontological and epistemological cognitive processes in a particular way, and thus locality is intimately important to this text in way that it is not for Morton's. This is perhaps where *animistic ecology* and Morton's "mesh," as a model for conceptualizing ecology, most radically diverge.

Alba Newmann's "rhizomic" model for *Paterson* in her "*Paterson*: Poem as Rhizome," borrowing from Deleuze and Guattari's *One Thousand Plateaus*, is uniquely situated for connecting the abstract complete system that is Paterson to the speaker's, and the vast number of

others who occupy and similarly make meaning of Paterson, subjective and incomplete experience of the setting. While Newmann is particularly concerned with how *Paterson* interweaves poetry and prose to create a kind of organic and shifting map, so to speak, of the living city it contains, the rhizomic model is useful for articulating how the interweaving of setting and meaning among an unnumbered collective of consciousnesses can produce a complete system of interconnected but otherwise incomplete parts (humanity, nonhuman life, and nonlife interconnected under the singular persona of Paterson). Newmann defines the rhizomic model when writing, "using Deleuze's and Guattari's own terminology…the rhizome [is] 'a multiplicity,' which 'seeks to move away from the binary subject/object structure of Western thought' producing, instead, a form of 'polytonality.' A multiplicity is neither one thing nor another—it is the network of relationships between things" (63). Similarly, Paterson is a network of relationships, and thereby a multiplicity, that is imbued with animism by its varying parts. If connected to Morton's "mesh," this rhizomic model offers a useful means of conceptualizing how Paterson is simultaneously a complete system, with no stable or singular center or edge, and eternally dynamic, being recreated in time by each individual perceiving Paterson and interweaving their experience with meaning in the production of thought and/or truth. Moreover, not only is *Paterson* rhizomic because it interconnects varying forms (prosaic and verse), but it is also rhizomic, according to the previously articulated definition, because it interweaves episodic encounters between a speaker and the varying parts of his vast setting that produces a complex ecosystem, imbued with animism, that is simultaneously singular, unified as a singular persona/consciousness, and a multiplicity.

Therefore, foundational to *animistic ecology* is an attempt to contend with the degree to which we necessarily abstract the material universe from its varying parts, which we can only

experience within the limits and horizons of our senses, and to, therefore, reconcile the seeming tension between abstraction and experience. It is important to remember, however, that the speaker or varying speakers of *Paterson* are not in pursuit of abstract understandings regarding the entirety of the material universe (contrasting Morton) but are instead concerned with the setting they specifically occupy and that occupies them as sensory experience. Thus, when using the term "abstraction," I am particularly concerned with how we conceptually contend with varying settings as unified wholes despite our inability to perceive it as such.

In accord with Williams' articulation of the imagination in *Spring and All*, the speaker's production of an abstract, unified Paterson from his episodic engagement with its varying parts is not in opposition to the material reality they perceive incompletely, but is instead emerging from it and "apposed" to it, to borrow Williams' language in *Spring and All*. Interestingly, because the abstraction of larger spaces, like Paterson, interweaves the immediate sphere of experience with other known, spatially relational, yet currently unexperienced places, we implicitly interweave or unify immediate experience with our memories of varying spatially related places in the production of these abstractions. Therefore, we have to contend with the degree to which spatial memories are responding to, yet different from, reality. Essential to my rendering of Williams' poetics and *animistic ecology* is the idea that representation does not replace reality, but that reality, as we know it, is representational in nature—the imagination being the mediator of this representation: "life becomes actual only when it is identified with ourselves. When we name it, life exists" (*Spring and All* 41). Our memories of varying places are similarly representational because they are likewise inseparable from experience.

Through the imagination, our memory recreates past experiences, against the backdrop of immediate experience, in response to meaning that emerges in the present moment, which is

what Dylan Trigg suggests, in his *The Memory of Place*, when claiming that, "it will suffice to concern ourselves with memory as an affective retrieval of an episodic experience…it embodies the meaningful retrieval of an experience" (51). In particular, Trigg's adjectives "affective" and "meaningful" are telling. Not only is memory a retrieval of a past experience—a subjectively situated representation of the material world at a particular moment in time—but it is also meaningfully responding to immediate experience. Therefore, memory is always responding to and constructed from reality despite being conjured up, intentionally or otherwise, in the imagination, which interweaves those two otherwise temporally disconnected experiences in a manner that produces meaning. The divide between the memory of a place and its current reality is only discernable through the reexperiencing of that place, which inevitably changes, even if only slightly, as time passes. In this way, the places that "*live in us*" (Trigg 33) are altered each time we reexperience them—our memories of places become revised in the present moment by our physical, experiencing presence in that space. Thus, spatial memory does not only respond to reality in the production of meaning, it is also revised and/or recreated, in relation to a new moment in time, when we reexperience the places that memory otherwise stands-in for.

Thus, the settings that we physically occupy, but that expand beyond the scope of immediate experience in all directions, are always partially a construction of our imaginations for the sake of understanding how we are spatially situated in a world or setting that we know exists beyond the horizons of our experience. The world that we know can only be pieced together from our subjective experiences of its varying parts at varying times, which means that the memory of all those varying parts is implicitly conjured, or at the very least referred to, by the imagination when we conceptualize expansive spaces. In this way, "worldhood" (Trigg 52) is itself an abstraction because we can only account for expansive spaces through the imagining,

generally using memory, of that which exists beyond the horizons of our immediate experience. Moreover, because it is through experience that we can piece together abstractions like Paterson, the city, "worldhood" is always constructed subjectively—in relation to where we currently stand, what we currently see, to where we have ever stood, and to what we have ever seen. Trigg usefully contends with this when he suggests that "worldhood, be it remembered or perceived, forms an experiential context, adopted through a network of familiar, dimensional, and constantly unfolding appearances, all of which attest to a broader region" (58). Returning to *Paterson*, the living and dreaming city therein is the kind of "broader region" to which the memories and immediate perception of the speaker attest. Sister Bernetta Quinn, an early scholar of Williams' *Paterson*, contends with a similar idea in her assessment of Williams' use of dreams: "Dream offered [Williams] an associational technique by which persons and places transcend daylight barriers" (525). We might similarly suggest that spatial memories transcend immediate "daylight barriers" for the purpose of conceptualizing large spaces like Paterson in their totality. In fact, we could potentially take this analysis a step further and suggest that each of the episodic encounters that make up *Paterson* acts as spatial memories that, when interwoven together, constitute Paterson's totality. Regardless of this extra step, Paterson is an abstraction that emerges in the mind of the speaker, and therefore the reader, from his episodic experience of its varying parts in the concrete. Thus, in the same way that Paterson, as an *animistic ecology*, places the self and the world in a co-constructive meaning producing relationship, so too are the "abstract" and "concrete," the setting as a unified whole and the varying parts we perceive, and memory and reality implicitly placed in co-constructive meaning producing relationships.

Thus, not only does Williams describe a vast ecology of perceiving consciousnesses that simultaneously interweave meaning and sensory experience, but he also describes an ecology of

individual experiences that are interconnected, by the speaker, when Paterson is conceptualized as a unified whole, experiencing itself through the varying consciousnesses that occupy it. In this way, Paterson is simultaneously ecological at the collective and individual level. Also, the world that expands beyond immediate experience, much like the world that our mind's construct as sensory experience, is at least partially a construction of our minds. Thus, the primary difference in how we experience the parts of the material world that we currently occupy and those that we know exist beyond the horizons of our immediate experience is that this latter space is not currently being co-constructed but recalled, which has a great deal of consequences (which Trigg contends with). However, by constructing large spaces through the use of memory, we construct our understanding of the world from the subjective point of view. Thus, the world as we know it is always reflective of, or always affirming, our personhood because we always experience the world as if we are at its center, yet we know that we are not and are aware of the presence and inaccessibility of other consciousnesses. In this way, *animistic ecology* redefines "personhood" as that which emerges from our contact with the world, and thus it deconstructs "personhood" as a foil to "worldhood" without entirely dissolving the difference between each. The borders between "personhood" and "worldhood" are dissolved, but both still stand side by side. Ultimately, despite its accuracy, this difference is essential for making meaning of the world—we break the universe into unique parts, using the medium of language, but we also necessarily and implicitly interconnect these parts, knowing or otherwise, in our experience and in the creation of meaning to describe the world.

Moving on to what potential *animistic ecology* has in discussion with the scholarship surrounding Williams' work, *animistic ecology* is especially useful within the context of scholarship that contends with three primary ideas: 1) Williams poetics embrace locality and the

ordinary in a manner that complements phenomenology; 2) Williams' works take on the ecocritical aim of decentering the human perspective (decentering the consciousnesses of the subject by placing it in a co-constructive relationship with the world); and 3) the tension between "nature" and "non-nature" in Williams' work is suggestive of a claim about our rendering of "nature" as other.

Starting with what *animistic ecology* offers to Williams' phenomenological interest in locality and the ordinary, *animistic ecology* takes the perpetual presence of, and our intimate relationship with, the local as its foundation. In essence, we could reframe nearly everything that has been said thus far with the claim that we can only know the world as a whole, relatively, through our experience and memory of the local. These varying locales are then interwoven, by the individual, in the production of large spaces like Paterson, and they come into contact with other consciousnesses who occupy the same locales, physically, yet similarly experience those locales as a sensory reality that is unique to their own subjective perspective and cognitive/experiential faculties. For example, the scope and consequence of Bernard Radloff's "poetics of the local" (140), as defined in "Name and Site: A Heideggerian Approach to the Local in the Poetry of William Carlos Williams," become subtly expanded by *animistic ecology* (not to suggest that they are not already radical and expansive). In addition to contending with the poetic creation of an imagined locale—where experience and meaning emerge together when "The poem speaks by letting the things themselves speak…by staying with the things through a simple naming which calls the things into presence" (144)—that interweaves the past, present, and future through language, *animistic ecology* directs our focus to the way in which this locale is ultimately contextual (just like all other locales). Thus, in light of *animistic ecology*, not only does Radloff's "poetics of the local" reveal the way in which with language "bears the interplay

of past and future" (141), but also how language bears the interplay between "here" and "there," or the varying contextually interconnected, yet incompletely experienced (in the immediate moment), spaces that produce worldhood.

Moreover, because that which is considered ordinary is that which occupies our perception most often, the ordinary plays a significant role in this construction of worldhood from the local. This is complemented by the fact that the epistemological attention that Williams' advocates for leads us to recognize the particularity, or even beauty, of the ordinary; or rather, this epistemological attention revels that ordinariness falsely imbues the immediate world with a kind of stasis that is ultimately contradictory to the nature of reality within time, and that, therefore, nothing is truly ordinary. Everything we experience has a particular, contextual, and temporal nature; as Radloff suggests, "the poem of the local implies the liberation of the thing to its natural uniqueness" (143). Thus, *animistic ecology* doesn't only attempt to imbue our internalized realities with life through its characterization of the imagination and consciousness (our life in particular), but it also imbues our internalized realities with a kind of dynamism that deconstructs ordinariness as an intrinsic quality and suggests that it stems from a lack of attention to the world and immediate experience's particularity.

In "Diderot and the Phenomenology of the Ordinary," Jack Undank briefly mentions this idea in relation to Williams's "Between Walls" when suggesting that "the ordinary, in fact, no longer exists in [Williams'] poem because he, the poet, has seized, processed through the poem, its «radiant gist», heightened the scene into a metaphorical vision without, by the way, introducing…a single rhetorical metaphor" (147). Thus, following Undank's logic, the poem reveals how ordinary objects, like the shattered green bottle in "Between Walls," are capable of producing or inspiring meaning much in the same way as the extraordinary. Admittedly

paradoxical, we might suggest that the ordinary is in fact extraordinary. However, this paradox reveals the manner in which both of these labels ultimately fail to describe the intrinsic nature of things and that ordinariness and extraordinariness ultimately emerge in relation to the amount of attention certain objects or scenes are given and/or command from us.

While we have already partially covered this in relation of Morton, *animistic ecology* is also potentially useful for making sense of how Williams "decenters" individual consciousness by placing it in a co-constructive relationship with the worlds we experience, and by displacing individual consciousnesses within a vast ecology of similar meaning and reality constructing consciousnesses. Notably, Iris Ralph contends with the "decentering" of human consciousness through art, in "Ecocriticism and the Modern Artist's Notice of Nature," using the former idea of illustrating how consciousness is entirely reliant upon the world it perceives, and thus does not "command" it, so to speak, but responds to it in a creative fashion. Ralph suggests this when writing, in reference to Peter Halter, that "Williams understood human language as a peer to natural language or a companion design to natural design rather than as something superior to or able to traduce nature. It must assert its independence but in a way that does not commit the offense of dismissing or replacing nature" (122). The phrasing "language as a peer to natural language" is particularly telling in this regard. As suggested in the *Spring and All* section of this thesis and identified again in relation to Morton, Williams is dedicated to the project of dissolving the borders between and interconnecting consciousness and the material world, the abstract and concrete, and that which we deem particularly human or natural, which otherwise problematically disconnects humanity from the world that surrounds them.

Thus, *animistic ecology*'s "decentering" of human consciousness is also, in many respects, deconstructing the divide between "nature" and "non-nature," which was also covered

earlier in relation to Morton's "mesh." However, because of this deconstruction, *animistic ecology* has the potential to be useful to scholarship that contends with the divide and tension between the natural and human (or industrial) in Williams' work—*Paterson* in particular. For example, Acosta-Ponce, in "The Role of the Environment and Nature, and Their Decay in the Face of Industrialization in William Carlos Williams' *Paterson*," suggests this when writing, "the corruption of the landscape and the destruction of beauty in *Paterson* are the direct result of the realization Hamilton's industrialist vision…Williams believes that…the individual needs to go back into a close association with nature in order to find true peace and live a full life" (87). *Animistic ecology* is, in many respects, a means of articulating how Williams is using poetry to reveal our cognitive and epistemological dependence on the world we perceive, which should then foster the sense of closeness to the natural world that Acosta-Ponce suggests *Paterson* promotes between humanity and nature. Moreover, this moment subtly reveals the kind of pragmatic potential *animistic ecology* has in light of ecocriticism and the last few century's ecological destruction. It offers a means of specifically conceptualizing why a "close association with nature" leads to a "full life." *Animistic ecology*'s interweaving of consciousness and the material universe reveals the way in which human consciousness is indebted to the natural world that inspired and continues to inspire the creation of meaning and art.

In light of *animistic ecology*, Williams' *Paterson* contends both with our intimate co-constructive relationship to the world—in the creation and use of meaning in response to experience through language—and the ecologically, yet variably and thereby messily, interconnected nature of these relationships that have the same material universe and the same mediums, relatively speaking, at their foundation. In this way, *Paterson* and *animistic ecology* are simultaneously intimate and expansive in their scope, and they both contend with making

sense of the simultaneous universality and particularity of experience, which is the medium through which the imagination (according to Williams's characterization of it in *Spring and All*) responsively produces new, and recontextualizes old, meaning and truth in the creation of language. Thus, *Paterson* and *animistic ecology* meaningfully bridge the divide between "poetic spaces," spaces that we imaginatively produce and experience, so to speak, in response to poetry, and geographic place. As Williams suggests with the claim, "The province of the poem is the world" (100), poetry—and thereby the imagination—contends with the reality our minds produces as sensory experience from the material universe we occupy, and thus neither the poem nor the imagination is ever truly disconnected or unique from this reality—in many respects the imagination becomes the connective tissue between meaning, the self, experience, and the material world that the imagination can, in the creation of art, add to. Therefore, *animistic ecology* makes sense of the connective tissue between the microcosmic phenomenological rendering of the speaker's intimate, co-constructive, and personifying relationship with his setting and the ecological nature of the collective of consciousnesses that is Paterson.

Thinking expansively, *animistic ecology* also has a unique kind of potential outside of Williams scholarship as the foundation of a new framework for engaging with any number of diverse texts. Specifically, *animistic ecology* could potentially serve as the foundation of a new literary and theoretical school that offers a methodology for articulating how the discursive nature of meaning and experience construction ultimately deconstruct binary understandings of the self and the world's relationship—revealing the way in which human consciousness is inseparable from the world that is simultaneously its subject, backdrop, and medium. *Animistic ecology* also offers a means of articulating, at least abstractly, how the incredibly vast ecologies of epistemological interconnections that languages contain are deeply connected to our

subjective understanding of the material universe. Most importantly, this frame of thinking redefines the creation of experience and knowledge as the medium and project of a familiarizing discourse between us and the world we occupy, and it thereby deconstructs the notion that knowledge somehow transcends the universe it attempts to describe. In this way, the creation of meaning is suggestive of a kind of intimacy between human consciousness and the otherwise inaccessible universe, rather than alienation. In the creation of knowledge, we achieve a kind of closeness with the world that not only reveals our epistemological dependence upon it, but that also breaks down, at least partially, the distinctions between the abstract self, experience, and the world.

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