

The Poetics Seminar

4: The Daydreamer (Notes: December 12, 2017)

I want to start by reflecting on some recent writings by Franco Berardi. In his book, *The Uprising: On Poetry and Finance*, Berardi proposes that it is through poetic language that we may counter the current dominance of “financialization” and “deregulated predatory capitalism” – the ways in which neoliberal economies shape our bodies, our lives, and our communities; and further, produces an “abstract” relation to them.

“Abstraction has detached the epidermis of language from the flesh of the linguistic body.”

Berardi searches for ways to reinstate a relation to the sensuality of language, to its place in the body, and more, within the “social body”; in this way, he understands the task of poetry to disentangle social life from the dominance of technocratic competition, of what he calls “mathematical exactitude”, social exhaustion, and debt.

Poetry can achieve this because, he suggests, it is the excess of language; a force of sound, of voice, of rhythm. It is beyond the functionality of a financial machine. Finally, poetry may reactivate the “emotional body” in support of new “social solidarity”: a caring for each other.

The poetic is therefore put forward as a type of weapon, as well as a path toward the depths of a collective body.

Today, we will follow this proposal into the idea of daydreaming; we might ask: what does daydreaming produce, and is it possible to daydream within the framework of our socially mediatized world? Where is the daydreamer today?

I’m interested in the figure of the Daydreamer, and the conditions and experience of reverie: this momentary drifting off. Daydreams should be contrasted with Night dreams, which bring us deep into the unconscious; instead, during daydreams we keep our eyes open.

Gaston Bachelard, in his book *Poetics of Reverie*, gives us a wonderful account of daydreaming; Bachelard highlights “the path of reverie” as a “downhill path” where consciousness relaxes and wanders and becomes clouded; it is an instant of “inattention”. From this state of a “diminished consciousness”, the poetic image operates, to draw consciousness outward and toward an “expanded” dimension – a “cosmos”.

Importantly, for Bachelard, reverie forms the basis for the poetic imagination – it is the emergence of the imaginary, and the possibility of seeing the world differently: it is daydreams that lead us toward poetry he says, where writing works to capture the “oneiric” or phantasmic event. He says: “The reverie promises to be written.”

We might apply this to creative work in general: reverie educates us on how to dream during the day; to pull from the banal and the ordinary an extraordinary event, movement, or construct; to find along this downhill path the possibility of a future.

*Bachelard says: “The poetic image, in its newness, opens a future to language.”
“The poetic imagination attempts to have a future; it wants to take root, to figure itself in the world, as a type of unreal reality; in other words, we search for ways to live out the daydream as a type of reality.” (Bachelard)

The poetics of reverie is the condition where the imagination and reality are bound together; if we recall, we keep our eyes open when we daydream, so there exists a double perception: on the one hand, we still perceive what is in front of us: the table, for instance, people around us; at the same time, we are fixated on something else, something that hovers in our thoughts; reverie is a type of pause, and in that gap we glimpse the possibility of these two things coming into relation, existing side by side, or one on top of the other: the real and the imaginary. Reverie puts them into a form of composition.

This composition, this intertwining of the real and the imaginary, he calls the making of a “cosmos”: the cosmos is essentially a creativity found within daydreaming, one that produces its own world; reverie is never only the reality in front, but again, it connects this to a larger and greater framework or imagination; this he terms “the cosmos”.

*As he says: “Poetic reveries situate us in a world and not in society.”

To define this cosmos, this creativity, Bachelard leads us to two other aspects, that of childhood and love.

Bachelard emphasizes how reverie is always connected to memories of childhood, returning us to a state of imagination that is essentially grounded in the first impressions we experience of the world – our first dreaming; childhood for Bachelard acts as a type of origin of the imagination, a “primary scene” where we first begin to dream and to play, to fantasize.

*we can think about this in relation to objects; Bachelard spends a great deal of time reflecting on “the poetic object”: how we dream upon objects; how we let our attention drift over the materialities of the world; in that drifting, objects take on other qualities: they become partners in daydreaming.

*maybe we can think about this through our childhood relation to objects: objects are always potential partners in play-acting: they are alive with force and potentiality.

He refers to this as a “poeticization” of consciousness, which we also experience through love.

He writes: “Love is never finished expressing itself, and it expresses itself better the more poetically it is dreamed.”

Here, we should remember the profound connection between love and poetry; the essential poetic position is one driven by love, by a falling in love – in many ways the poet is a figure that celebrates love, in all its passions as well as pain, from its presence to its absence. Love is also a downhill path; a falling.

*love and childhood are based on real experiences, while unsettling this reality by relating it to something more: through an emotional and sensual drama and passion.

I’m curious to consider this relation, between poetics and love.

Luce Irigaray, in her book *The Way of Love*, leads us into an extremely thoughtful consideration of what it means to relate one to another; and how to foster a more ethical and more loving involvement with others. Irigaray is concerned to overcome the discriminations and the lack of care often passing between two; instead, she sees in the act of speaking and listening, for example, the possibility of a different kind of sharing, of knowing and being known.

She says: “It is not possible to learn once and for all how to speak – at each moment the creative work of inventing a speaking is imposed.”

In this shift, from speech as an existing code that one adopts to something that is created in the very moment of encountering each other – speech becomes something that must be made and remade each time, as something that co-emerges and that requires a sensitivity for this coming together, as two.

*She calls this “the sharing of speech”.

“These words do not yet exist, and they could never exist in a definitive way. It is in a new listening to oneself and to the other that they will be discovered, pronounced.”
(Irigaray, *The Way of Love*)

Returning to Bachelard, it is love that draws us into language, into a speaking as we fall, as if everything is new, as if something must be said to capture this opening up between two; as he states, “The poetic image, in its newness, opens a future to language.”

Here, I’m interested to propose that poetics is a condition of discovering language each time one speaks; it is the presence of a childhood, because it is as if we encounter something for the first time; which requires the imagination in order to speak of it.

We might emphasize poetics as the basis for a deeply ethical, sensitive and nurturing position, especially for giving to others.

*Poetics as a basis for a loving attitude; for the production of a subjectivity capable of deep generosity, of a profound ethics.

What happens then, in this condition of poetics? Of speaking always new, and of being sensitive to all living things – the presence of others? The objects around us? Does not poetics see life in all that surrounds, and that allows one to enter into a deeply creative relation to living in the world? To remake things according to the lessons of daydreaming, which stand or draw upon the essential forms and experiences of love and childhood, falling and playing.

New Materialism

There are two directions we can move toward in order to think further about poetics and love, speaking and caring. The first, being a consideration of what is termed “new materialism”.

In her book, *Vibrant Matter*, Jane Bennett argues for a deeper understanding of what constitutes “bodies of force.” Shifting from an overarching anthropocentric worldview, she argues for life as “a restless activeness” – a “vitality” that is brought into single

bodies, while equally expanding those bodies into a dynamic relationality. In other words, life is envisioned as a capacity to intermingle, one to another. This vibrant model unsettles the human body as a dominating figure, and instead, places it within a field of life-forces from which alliances, conflicts, intermingling, and contaminations are continually at play, from body to body, species to species, thing to thing.

Accordingly, Bennett highlights agency as “distributive and confederate” and that performs through “matter-energy assemblages.” As she states, “In this strange, *vital* materialism, there is no point of pure stillness, no indivisible atom that is not aquiver with virtual force.” Instead, everything bristles with potential.

Bennett charts out an understanding of human agency as being bound to “nonhuman manifestations” that extend from material properties to more “energetic” and “cosmological” forces. This ultimately leads to a notion of “enchanted materialism” from which Bennett creates extremely suggestive links.

She writes: “An enchanted materialism embraces the possibility that differential degrees of agency reside in the intentional self, the inherited temperament of a self, a play-drive, molecules at far-from-equilibrium states, nonhuman animals, social movements, political states, architectural forms, families and other corporate bodies, sound fields.”

*Agency is interwoven into an assemblage of materials and forces which, Bennett suggests, requires that one “listen” – to perceive the nuanced and ever-changing relations in which we are embedded.

We might understand this assemblage of bodies and things, materials and energies, as a condition that weakens us: we become open and porous to things around us; things enter into our thoughts, our feelings, to stir our emotions, to put us into contact.

I understand this as a poetic expression, for poetics is always weakening our borders; as Bachelard says, it puts us on the downhill path, making us lose ourselves and our attention; we drift and we daydream, and in this, we become weak – we become open to the presence of others: things, energies, movements.

Precarity

The second direction we should consider, in terms of poetics being the basis for relations, is outlined by Judith Butler and her focus on “precarity”.

*Butler is concerned to reinstate a sense of moral responsibility, especially in light of global war and violence. In doing so, she raises a number of compelling questions, for instance: what makes one human life more grievable than others? How might the ways in which certain bodies are deemed “less than human” be challenged, to remind of a greater shared humanity and responsibility?

She poses the condition of precariousness as that which pervades human life, underscoring vulnerability, interdependency, and mutual care as essential factors for sustaining life in general; and how particular conditions of precarity are often imposed onto certain bodies.

“The apprehension of the precarity of others – their exposure to violence, their socially induced transience and dispensability – is, by implication, an apprehension of the

precarity of any and all living beings, implying a principle of equal vulnerability that governs all living beings.” (Butler, *Precarious Life*)

If one is able to recognize the inherent precariousness of one’s own life, and if one may then recognize the degree to which one’s life is dependent upon others, might this shift the conditions that make possible extreme practices of abuse, intolerance, violence, and war?

*Precarity and vulnerability are also conditions for responsiveness, for the “formulation of affect” and from which new recognitions and responsibilities may emerge.

“Our obligations are precisely to the conditions that make life possible, not to ‘life itself,’ or rather, our obligations emerge from the insight that there can be no sustained life without those sustaining conditions, and that those conditions are both our political responsibility and the matter of our most vexed ethical decisions.” (Butler, *Precarious Life*)

Extending this farther, can we appreciate our weaknesses and our vulnerabilities as what might produce a type of strength, what we can call “weak-strength”?

Finally then, we are led to consider daydreams as a fundamental means for poetic experience and creation – the “cosmos” that Bachelard speaks of; where imagination and reality are bound together and from which we are inspired to speak as if for the first time.

*Poetics, like love, is an event through which we emerge with a deep sense of our own vulnerability, our own weakness, and the precariousness of others; and from which we must draw upon our emotional resources to care for others. I want to pose poetics, then, as not only a question of language and speech, but additionally, as the basis from which we develop as emotional beings: a subject position from which to create a world of generosity and responsibility.

Works to consider:

Erdem Gündüz /

“The Standing Man” (2013)

House of Natural Fiber

“Intelligent Bacteria” (2010) / fermentation process (methanol)

Alice Chauchat /

“Love Piece” (2007)

“Togetherring, a group solo” (2015)

Womanhouse /

Miriam Shapiro, Judy Chicago

Sandy Orgel, Linen Closet

Robin Weltsch, The Kitchen

Vicki Hodgets, eggs and breasts

Wanda Westcoast, curtains

Faith Wilding, Waiting

Robert Filliou /

“The Principles of Poetic Economy”

Palle Nielsen / unauthorized adventure playgrounds in Copenhagen

“The Model, A Model for A Qualitative Society” (1968); Moderna Museet

*built with children and anti-Vietnam activists; relation to Swedish children’s education programs;

Mladen Stilinovic /

“In praise of laziness”

Jonas Mekas /

“As I was moving ahead, occasionally I saw brief glimpses of beauty” /