

Where does Poetry Take Place? On Tensions in the Concept of a National Art^{* 1}

诗在何处发生？论一种民族艺术概念中的诸多张力

保罗·马吉 堪培拉大学

Paul Magee University of Canberra

✉ Paul.Magee@canberra.edu.au

Abstract: Why do we regularly resort to national labels and locations (“One of Ireland’s best contemporary poets,” “An American poet of the 1950s,” “Born in Spain in 1927, in the province of Cadíz”) when discussing the work of poets? The article takes the pervasive tendency to badge contemporary poetry in geopolitical terms as starting point for a discussion of the difficult and at times antithetical relation between that artform and national imagining. It focusses this discussion on an archive of 75 Anglophone poets’ responses to a suite of questions about national and other forms of affiliation. The interviews were collected by the author and his colleagues in the course of their work on the 2013–2015 Australian Research Council funded project *Understanding Creative Excellence: A Case-Study in Poetry*. The article contextualises passages from the interviews through recent sociological work on the way contemporary subjects are called upon to assume an identity as national (Brubaker 2009 and 2015; Casanova 2005; Malešević 2011). The searching nature of poetic utterance provides a touchstone throughout. Where does poetry take place?

Keywords: Poetry; nation; belonging; interpellation; idiosyncrasy

Notes on Author: Paul Magee is a poet and researcher in poetics and postcolonial studies at the University of Canberra. He is author of the ethnographic monograph *From Here to Tierra del Fuego* (University of Illinois Press 2000), a study of tourism and travel in the far South of South America, and two books of verse: *Cube Root of Book* (John Leonard Press 2006), and *Stone Postcard* (John Leonard Press 2014). His current work focuses on the relation between poetic composition and speaking.

* Submitted Date: Aug. 26, 2018; Accepted Date: Dec. 4, 2018.

¹ This research was supported by the Australian Research Council under Grant DP130100402 and conducted over the years 2013–2015. Professor Kevin Brophy, Professor Jen Webb and I were the three chief investigators and we performed all the interviews. Professor Michael A. R. Biggs contributed, as participant investigator, to the conceptual design of the project and the analysis of the results. My focus in this article is on the interviews I personally conducted. But I would like to take this opportunity to acknowledge the influence of discussions with my fellow investigators on these themes.

1. A tension

In 1995, Helen Vendler described poet Jorie Graham as “a young and mesmerizing American voice.”² Twenty years on, one finds Graham’s poetry discussed in both the *Oxford Handbook of Modern and Contemporary American Poetry* and *The Cambridge History of American Poetry*, which singles her out for mention in its introduction as well.³ Anthologisations over the intervening period are extensive and include selections in *The Oxford Book of American Poetry*; *The Penguin Anthology of Twentieth Century American Poetry* and *The Norton Anthology of American Literature: Volume E: Literature Since 1945*, all of which follow on from earlier anthologisations in volumes like *19 New American Poets of the Golden Gate*; *Vital Signs: Contemporary American Poetry from the University Presses* and *The Harper American Literature*.⁴ Graham’s prizes over her career are too numerous to list, but they include most recently the Academy of American Poets \$100,000 Wallace Stevens Award for 2017.⁵

All of which I think has been merited, though that is not my point in offering these citations. The reason I table them here is rather for the way they demonstrate our pervasive tendency to categorise contemporary poets like Graham in national terms. What I particularly want to note is the way such categorisation persists in spite of contrary currents within the poet’s own writing. To see what I mean, compare the more or less everyday ascriptions of Americanness in the critical references, the book titles and the award above to the following lines from Graham’s “A Feather for Voltaire.” The poem was first published in 1980 and reprinted in *The Dream of the Unified Field: Selected Poems 1974–1994* in 1995, the same year Vendler described Graham as a “mesmerising American voice.” The poem comes to a climactic point:

And so here I belong, trespassing, alone
in this nation of turns
not meant to be taken
I’ve taken.⁶

What can one say of “the nation” imagined in these ornate and dense lines? The “here I belong,” collocated with “trespassing,” evokes a sense of moral deserts, as in the phrase *you belong behind*

² Helen Vendler, *Soul Says: On Recent Poetry* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995), 243.

³ J. Rhamazani, “American Poetry, Prayer and the News,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Modern and Contemporary American Poetry*, ed. Cary Nelson (Oxford: Internet, 2012), DOI: 10.1093/oxfordhb/9780195398779.013.0017; L. Keller, “Green Reading: Modern and Contemporary American Poetry and Environmental Criticism,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Modern and Contemporary American Poetry*, DOI: 10.1093/oxfordhb/9780195398779.013.0023; Stephen Burt, “American Poetry at the End of the Millennium,” in *The Cambridge History of American Poetry*, ed. Alfred Bendixen and Stephen Burt (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 1149–54; Stephen Burt, and Alfred Bendixen, “Introduction,” in *The Cambridge History of American Poetry*, 7.

⁴ *Vital Signs: Contemporary American Poetry from the University Presses*, ed. Ronald Wallace (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1989); *19 New American Poets of the Golden Gate*, ed. Philip Dow (Orlando: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1983), 409–34; *The Harper American Literature, Volume 2*, ed. Donald McQuade (New York: Harper and Row, 1987), 2861–70; *The Oxford Book of American Poetry*, ed. David Lehman (New York: Oxford, 2006), 1074–79; *The Penguin Anthology of Twentieth Century American Poetry*, ed. Rita Dove (New York: Penguin, 2007), 468–69; *The Norton Anthology of American Literature: Volume E: Literature Since 1945*, ed. Jerome Klinkowitz and Patricia B. Wallace (New York: W. W. Norton and Co., 2007), 3116–26.

⁵ “The Academy of American Poets Announces the Recipients of the 2017 American Poets Prizes.” <https://www.poets.org/academy-american-poets/stanza/academy-american-poets-announces-recipients-2017-american-poets-prizes>. [April 18, 2018]

⁶ Jorie Graham, “A Feather for Voltaire,” in *The Dream of the Unified Field: Selected Poems 1974–1994* (Hopewell, Ecco Press, 1995), 17.

bars. But the “I belong” is linked to “this nation” in the following line, bringing a hint of the discourse of national character into play as well. One might find ideas of sovereign authority here too. After all, those turns *have been taken*. Perhaps we all inhabit such interdicted nations, places we alone belong for our trespasses, that may have something liberating and powerful about them for all that? The least one can say about the national belonging in these lines is that it refers to somewhere other than a country with its capital in Washington D. C.

I am trying to identify something about the way poetry so often releases our notions of social, and especially national, space. Another instance might be Rafael Alberti’s reference to those *Gentes de las esquinas / de pueblos y naciones que no están en la mapa...* —“People of the street corners / in villages and nations that are not on the map...”⁷ How many of them are there? Yet even as I point to Alberti’s lines, I note the slight struggle involved in writing of such a (to Anglophone readers) relatively unknown poet without using a phrase like “Spanish poet, Rafael Alberti”—or, even more satisfyingly, “Twentieth Century Spanish Poet, Rafael Alberti”—to contextualise him. So we call Jorie Graham “a contemporary American poet,” ignoring the aberrant belongings her own lines at times evoke. Why?

Common sense would suggest I am getting at the simple distinction between author and persona. That would help us to see ascriptions of national identity as simple matters of fact, and would come close to regarding the claims a poet makes in any given poem as inherently fictive as well. So even though passports only became widely used from the 1920s, and birth certificates were not standardised in the U.S.A. till the 1930s, we would take the sort of ascriptions they represent as the blunt truths of the matter, and conveniently push the contents of any given poem into the category of the imaginative and/or liminal in the process.⁸ But would such neat divisions really be adequate to where poetry takes place?

The following article is written on the premise that a rethinking of the adequacy of ascriptive labels like “American poet” and “Spanish poet” is important if we are to pay heed to the demands poems themselves make on us. But it is also important simply to keep our thinking on these issues up-to-date. It is over 40 years now since Benedict Anderson pointed to the irony in that word “naturalization,” which implies a social process for becoming *naturally* British, *naturally* French, *naturally* Thai. His broader point was that the modern nation is “conceived in language not in blood.”⁹ One’s nationality comes about through the play of symbols. Whereas the idea that Anderson might have so much in common with 240,000,000 other “fellow Americans... in their steady, anonymous, simultaneous activity” struck him as outrightly fictional; in *Imagined Communities*, he goes so far as to suggest that the European novel played a key role in fomenting that sense of a subject’s shared identity with myriad others across “homogenous, empty time.”¹⁰ Actually, the idea that one is national in this fashion is little more than 200 years old. Anderson’s now canonical work suggests that the connection between our bodies and the nationalities ascribed to them is fictional in its own right—an effective fiction in his reading, though later critics will

⁷ Rafael Alberti, “El ángel Avaro,” in *The Penguin Book of Spanish Verse*, ed. J. A. Cohen (Middlesex: Penguin, 1955), 409–10. My translation.

⁸ For a contemporaneous expression of outrage at the maintenance of the hitherto war-time only measure of passport and visa control into a time of peace, and the discrimination this licensed see Reuben, Fink “Visas, Immigration and Official Anti-Semitism,” in *This Immigrant Nation: Perspectives on an American Dilemma, Articles from The Nation 1868—The Present*, ed. Richard Lingeman (E-book: The Nation, 2014), n. p. On the standardisation of birth certificates in the U.S. case, see H. L. Brumberg, D. Dozor and S. G. Golombek, “History of the Birth Certificate: from Inception to the Future of Electronic Data,” *Journal of Perinatology* 32, no. 6 (2012): 407–11.

⁹ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, revised 2nd ed. (London; New York, Verso: 1991), 145.

¹⁰ Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 26; 25.

suggest that the effectiveness of such imaginings has only ever been partial, and requires constant ideological work. Surely we should take this now extensive literature on the fantastic nature of national ascription into account, in our attempts to grapple with the very challenges poets offer us, in their reference to those *pueblos y naciones que no están en la mapa*.

Where does poetry take place?

2. Programme

The article to follow shifts through a number of positions, in line with its object. It starts with an indication of surprise. The surprise relates to responses I garnered in the course of interviewing poets during the 2013–2015 Australian Research Council-funded project *Understanding Creative Excellence: A Case-Study in Poetry*. I interviewed 14 of the 75 Anglophone poets who participated in that study, which involved poets in Australia, Canada, Ireland, New Zealand, the U.K., Singapore, South Africa and the United States of America. Most of my own interviews were conducted in the United States. My surprise was due to the following. I had assumed that most of the poets we were talking to would agree with me: that whatever nation they belong to, it is not the one on their passports. Or that they have no nation at all. Actually, the poets I interviewed were far more inclined to accept national labels (e.g. “I am a Canadian poet”) than I had expected. I quote a number of those interview responses over the following section of my paper. That section ends with some rough sampling from the full 75 interviews, sampling which demonstrates a similar phenomenon across our archive: Anglophone poets were generally quite prepared to identify themselves in national terms (at least at interview).

I write “(at least at interview)” advisedly. For these are, in many ways, surface effects. The next section of the article sees me draw on further interview materials to show how the specific speech context of the international research interview is calibrated to interpellate poets into a national role. This leads me to a discussion of current work on “the chimera of national identity.”¹¹ Scholars like Siniša Malešević, whose phrase I have just cited, have departed from a dominant tradition of theorising the emergence of national attachment in the early 19th century, and its current global preponderance, in functionalist terms (typically, as either the continuance of older forms of religious imagining, and/or as a structural necessity of capitalist social organisation, which required the homogenisation of local cultures to facilitate labour and other markets).¹² They focus instead on the contingent and fragile being of national identification, the constant ideological work required to hold such inherently anonymous affiliations in place. Research interviews can play their part in that everyday task of convincing us that our bodies are indeed national—or at least getting us to speak as if they were.

But it is not that the poets I interviewed were simply responding to ideological pressures in nominating themselves nationally. National ascription obviously does some descriptive work for them as well. In the next section of the article, I analyse one of the interviews’ leitmotifs: the poets’ sense that they work with localised patterns of language, and often do so to express a local content and/or way of seeing. National labelling reveals itself to be a convenient shorthand here for what is better referred to as a kind of embodied arbitrariness, a feeling through, that works with whatever language and references happen to be available. From such a perspective, terms like “American

¹¹ Siniša Malešević, “The Chimera of National Identity,” *Nations and Nationalism* 17, no. 2 (2011): 272–90.

¹² Anderson provides the most celebrated example of the former (*Imagined Communities*); instances of the latter include Ernest Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1983) and James C. Scott, *Seeing like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition have Failed* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998), 1–83.

poet” or “Australian poet” betray a sense of relation that is at once more local and also more ultimately substitutable than any such “by-birth” ascriptions. I add that the poets’ work is more local than national ascriptions would suggest, but by the same token more potentially global, for it takes form in language, and as such can be translated with ease across geo-political borders and even, if rather more problematically, into other languages.

The “nationalism” of poets’ responses during our interviews finds some explanation in the above arguments. But no inquiry into the difficult and at times antithetical relation of contemporary poetry and nationality can ignore the institutional systems by which poets achieve publication, prestige and pay for their work. In the Anglophone world, these systems are, with rare exceptions, practised within, and in congruence to, the boundaries of the nation-state. Supporting institutions serve, far more than any international research interview, to interpellate poets as national, lending titles like *The Penguin Book of South African Verse* or *A New Anthology of Canadian Literature in English* much of whatever traction they have; but also ramifying the tension with which I began: that a poetry that suggests alternative and at times even contrary ways of conceptualising divisions of space or character is simultaneously labelled Australian, Canadian, Singaporean...¹³

A final section continues the article’s focus on institutions that call on us *to be* in a certain way, by suggesting that we might understand poetic language in similarly interpellative terms—as so many calls upon the reader to become a certain type of embodied subject. I use “certain” in that curious English sense of “definite, but unspecified.” For Jorie Graham is in a sense *naturalising* us, even as we read her, into that “nation of turns / not meant to be taken / I’ve taken.”

3. Responses to a Question

I turn to the interviews. Our topic was poetic judgement. The questions we asked the poets ranged widely within this broad remit, extending from inquiries about education and upbringing across to a close focus on the sort of thinking a poet engages in the moments of composing.¹⁴ But it was the following, somewhat invidious question, that brought issues of national affiliation into the conversation. I cite the question the way I put it to C. D. Wright, whom I interviewed in Petaluma, California, in July 2013:

Would you be happy to have any locating labels added to your description as poet? You might, for instance, be referred to as a postmodern poet, or a political poet, or for that matter as an American poet. Is there a label you feel you could come at?

Wright’s response was as follows:

I am an American poet. My English is American English. My ear is American. I do write of Mexico, but it is North America, same land mass, same ranges, planes and canyons of earth and blood. I feel fundamentally “in the American grain,” as Williams put it. This would be the label I would be comfortable with.

¹³ *The Penguin Book of South African Verse*, eds. Jack Cope and Uys Krige (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1968); *A New Anthology of Canadian Literature in English*, 2nd edition eds. Donna Bennett and Russell Brown (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002).

¹⁴ For an analysis of responses on the last of these topics, see further my article “We do not know exactly what we are going to say until we have said it”: interview data on how poems are made,” *New Writing: The International Journal for the Practice and Theory of Creative Writing* 13, no. 3 (2016). DOI: 10.1080/14790726.2016.1203955. For a more extensive analysis see my forthcoming monograph *Suddenness: On Poetry and Thinking* (forthcoming).

Here is how C. K. Williams responded, when I interviewed him later that month in Manhattan: “Well, of necessity I’d have to be a North American poet—poets are defined to a great degree by their language and culture.” Williams proceeded to comment that, even though he lived in France half of the year, when he wrote in France it was always as an American, and nearly always about America:

I have a number of poems that do take place in France, obviously—it’s a home to me in many ways—but I’m always an American poet writing in the American language no matter where I happen to be.

Nor were these sorts of responses confined to poets from the U.S.A. “I think it is unavoidable and very deep genetic,” Medbh McGuckian replied, when I asked her in Belfast in 2015 whether she thought something of her location in time and space spoke through her work. That is not to say that all the poets accepted some sort of national or regional ascription. Brook Emery was blunt on the matter (we spoke in Sydney in 2014): “I despise the whole idea of nationalism.” What surprised me, however, is how relatively few poets seem to have found such discourses as irksome as he.

Allow me to be somewhat quantitative here. A sample of responses to this question in 18 of our 75 interviews (these 18 comprised the most awarded poets of the 75, e.g. those with Pulitzers, T. S. Eliot Prizes, or their local equivalents)¹⁵ revealed 6 poets who found themselves disinclined to add a national or ethnic ascription to their label as poet. On the other hand, 8 poets in that same sample of 18 most awarded poets were prepared to nominate themselves in national terms; another 2 were happy to do so in ethnic and regional terms respectively, making 10 prepared to affiliate themselves in such terms. 10/18 may not seem a huge number. But it is the moment you consider the spatially and socially subversive nature of the writings many of these poets actually produce. I will add that 2 poets in the 18 repudiated the idea that it was in one’s power to call oneself a poet anyway. That was for others to decide. Theirs was more the sort of attitude—a kind of emptying of the socially-inscribed self—I would have expected poets to adopt on matters of identity. But only 2?

4. The Interviewer’s Role in Making the Nation Up

I do not need to cite poems on the topic of modern rationality to remind readers that numbers can be duplicitous. Consider another “fact” from the quantitative analysis referred to above. That “fact” is as follows: a full 4 of the 5 U.S.A. poets in our sample of 18 most awarded poets were prepared to nominate themselves nationally and/or regionally (whereas only 1 in 3 of the U.K. poets in the 18 were prepared to do so, and only 1 in 3 of the Australians). An obvious, and rather prejudiced, interpretation suggests itself at this point, to do with a purported excess of national pride in U.S. culture. I do not know of any way you can measure a population’s quantity of “national pride,” but that is not the only reason for avoiding such cheap readings at this point. A closer inspection of the interviews shows that many of the U.S. poets’ motivations for nominating themselves nationally were actually the opposite of what that prejudiced reading would suggest. Such an inspection demonstrates how easy it is for a simple interview question to push people into

¹⁵ There is, of course, no convincing way to equate such disparate measures of recognition, even when one’s focus is, as here, solely on poets’ objective status as “awarded.” My sampling was necessarily impressionistic. (The following section will suggest that actually, the problems with the sort of analysis I practice at this point run deeper than that, and would vitiate a more convincing quantification of the data as well.)

a corner from which it seems a national response is the only genuine option. So one becomes a “national,” in spite of whatever one’s work has to offer on the matter. In short, I am going to use this duplicitous “fact” to broach the issue of interpellation.¹⁶

Let us turn then from these crude quantitative measures, to focus on the actual words of the interviews I conducted with poets from the U.S.A. over 2013 and 2014. I will refer to Emery’s and McGuckian’s interviews in passing too. Here is how Maxine Chernoff responded, when I asked her in her office at San Francisco State whether she would be happy to label herself in “national or regional” terms:

I am always surprised when I am put in a regional framework. If someone emails me and says, “We are doing a book on Chicago poetry...,” I think, “Yeah. I lived there. Okay.” But it strikes me as very strange.

Again, this was rather closer to the attitude toward space-as-given I would have expected from the poets, and particularly from the author of the world-warping prose poems in *Evolution of the Bridge*.¹⁷ I proceeded to ask Chernoff whether she felt similarly estranged from having her work identified in national terms. Chernoff replied that as a simple matter of placement, she is an American: “I think if you write in English, and you live in this country, by default you are an American... it is where I am placed.” But she added that “I think... my poetry should have, and I hope does have, currency outside of that.” Her next comment got to the crux of the matter:

I also think that I am an American poet because I feel in some ways responsible for the issues that are facing everybody, having been caused in many ways by our country’s incursions everywhere, and for the corporate world we live in. I am an American. But I am not particularly happy about that being the fact.

I encountered a similar response in two other interviews with U.S. poets. I would add that when I raised these issues during a seminar I gave at the University of Michigan in 2014, a similar response arose from the floor: these poets feel obliged to say they are American because not to do so would be to deny their complicity in empire.

This is clearly a very different matter to the sort of flag-waving attitude the bald statistic I gave above might suggest. An ethical decision to assume political responsibility by naming oneself as American emerged explicitly in 3 of my 12 U.S.A interviews. It may well have contoured responses like Noelle Kocot’s as well: “I am American. I am a poet. It’s the truth of the matter. At the same time, I don’t really think of myself that way.” Whatever was driving Kocot in this instance, it seems clear that something in the nature of my question was obliging her to name herself nationally—not to do so would deny a truth—even though on another level it is not really true: she doesn’t actually think of herself that way.

The closer one looks at the transcripts, the more these sorts of double-binds become apparent. I note in hindsight, and with some dismay, that in a number of situations where poets responded to our “Is there any label you would be happy with?” question by labelling themselves in terms of

¹⁶ My reference here is, of course, to Louis Althusser’s idea that ideological mechanisms proceed by constantly offering us limited and interested categories in which to nominate and what is more recognise ourselves as subjects: ideology “hails or interpellates concrete individuals as concrete subjects” (Louis Althusser, “Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses [Notes Towards an Investigation],” in *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays*, trans. Ben Brewster [London: New Left Books], 115).

¹⁷ Maxine Chernoff, *Evolution of the Bridge: Selected Prose Poems* (Norfolk: Salt Publications, 2005).

craft-based affiliations (e.g. *I am a lyric poet / a postmodern poet / a philosophical poet*)¹⁸, I came back at them with a restatement of the question, now focused on the issue that most interested me in all this:

What about national or regional labels? Are you happy with that sort of thing? For instance, are you happy to be termed an American poet?

Chernoff's was one of these cases, Armantrout's another. In short, I am forced guiltily to acknowledge that I, as interviewer, induced my subjects to become more national than they otherwise were!

I am guilty here but I think it is important to add that such things are never just personal matters. Actually, it was the international framing of our research that was, in and of itself, geared to eliciting such national self-ascriptions. When is one more marked as national than overseas, or in encounters with foreign nationals on "home soil"? Nor is this just a matter for poets. Siniša Malešević remarks on a scholarly version of this phenomenon, in the course of his critique of studies of national identity that base themselves on the assumption that the phenomenon exists outside the agencies that invoke it. What we actually have, according to Malešević, are "organisationally generated macro-processes of ideologisation."¹⁹ That is his term for the constant work educational institutions, bureaucratic agencies and public media put into the task of making subjects think of themselves as having something in common with millions and millions of others within an administratively bounded space. Malešević's reference is to "organisationally generated macro-processes," but that should not confuse us into thinking someone is centrally in charge there, or that it is just a matter of large institutional actors. It is the work of private citizens as well, and even of foreign nationals:

When asked at any international meeting where you are from the expectation is that you will name a recognisable distinct geographic and political entity such as "Germany," "India," "Nigeria" or "Peru." If you were to say "I have no nation," your answer would not be taken as a serious response. Instead you would be seen as a joker, a naïve utopian or a nuisance. Alternately, you would be asked further questions to clarify your "real origin."²⁰

To put such observations in context, Malešević is one of a number of recent scholars who (to quote Mike Davis's useful *précis*) in the late 1990s "rejected the 'Sleeping Beauty' thesis that the nations federated by Communism were simply waiting for a wake-up kiss from Western democracy"²¹ to emerge into "extreme nationalism and civil war"²². What Malešević, Rogers Brubaker and others saw rather was the work of specific parties, generating instant "ancient" feelings through "intense fear-mongering in warlord controlled media."²³ Brubaker, for his part, has questioned just how deep national sentiment runs, when not elicited through

¹⁸ 5 of the 18 poets in the quantitative sample I referred to above offered an affiliation in such craft-based terms as their immediate response, which also surprised me given I was expecting them to repudiate labels altogether.

¹⁹ Malešević, "The Chimera of National Identity," 273.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Mike Davis, "Marx's Lost Theory: The Politics of Nationalism in 1848," *New Left Review* 93 (May-June 2015), 47.

²² Ibid., 46.

²³ Davis, "Marx's Lost Theory," fn15, 49.

assiduous work.²⁴ Like Malešević, Brubaker believes that we should “focus on nation as a category of practice”; in fact, we should “refrain from using the analytically dubious notion of ‘nations’ as substantial, enduring collectivities.” Rather the very phenomenon of “nationness” is a “contingent event, or happening.”²⁵ It takes work.

These theoretical shifts in focus might seem quite removed from the gentle spaces of our interviews, and in a way they are. On the other hand, it strikes me that some of the things to emerge from the interviews were consonant with Malešević, Brubaker and Davis’s stress that the nation’s link to bodies and places is procedurally constructed. I am not just referring to the unfortunate way I interpellated our interviewees into being nationals, revealing as that might be of the micro-mechanics of broader discursive operations. For when we turn to how the poets I interviewed elaborated on their relation to place a number of interesting threads emerged. Of these, the stress on the regional, or even more immediately local, and the experience of that locality as a phenomenon of language, were particularly striking. You might even say that these elaborations performed a similar hollowing out of national space to that which one finds in the authors I have just cited and also, in certain acute moments, in Anderson himself (recall his remarks on “naturalisation”). I turn to these responses now. It seems to me that the following interview comments demonstrate an attachment to place that is at once deep and at the same time quite strangely “technological,” i.e. able to be set in motion anywhere.

5. An American Ear

Here is our question again, as I posed it to Brook Emery, in Sydney:

If you were to identify yourself to a journalist or other stranger, would you be happy to identify yourself as any particular sort of poet? For instance, would you be happy to call yourself “a lyric poet”? Or “an Australian poet”? Perhaps, “a philosophical poet”?

Emery indicated a certain wariness even to identifying as a poet, on the grounds that he only felt like one when “actually writing poetry”; but that he would all the same feel “quite comfortable to say I am a lyric poet and a philosophical poet,” on the grounds that what most interests him as an artist is “thinking and language: how poetry thinks through language, the fact that it does not think without language.”

As with the American poets, I repeated my inquiry: “What about a national identifier: ‘An Australian poet’? Would that mean anything to you?” I have already quoted Emery’s response, how he despises “the whole idea of nationalism.” He proceeded, however, to qualify this in an interesting way:

That said, once when I was reading in India, Kevin Brophy asked me, “I wonder what the Indians make of this really Australian stuff?”

I realised that my work is about place. I live here. The patterns of my language are from here. The vernacular I use is Australian. I write about the sea a lot because that is the place I spend a lot of time at. If I lived in the middle of the Surrey Hills, I may well be writing about café

²⁴ Brubaker: “When state representatives or nationalists speak of ‘sacred’ ideals, ‘sacred’ territory, or ‘sacred’ causes, does this signal an intertwining of religion and nation (or state) ? Or can it be considered simply one of many metaphorical traces of originally religious language?” (Rogers Brubaker, *Grounds for Difference* [Harvard: Harvard University Press, 2015], 111).

²⁵ Brubaker, qtd. in Davis, “Marx’s Lost Theory,” 47.

society or something. I don't know.

This would seem, at first glance, another tale of the interpellative power of the foreign encounter, acting to make nationals of us. It is that. But to dwell on the quote is to see that Emery's references are not only to national identity. He is also and in fact primarily referring to patterns of language use and local habit, habits so localised as to lead him to wonder whether he might not write a different poetry if living in a different suburb of the very same city!

In like fashion, the responses from Wright and McGuckian quoted in the previous section evoke some of the organic metaphors familiar from nationalist discourse ("American ear," "planes and canyons of Earth and blood" and "in the American grain"; "deep genetic"), but when one looks closer, one realises quite other dimensions to them. In Wright's case, the reference is to a landscape that is international as much as national; further, her "ear" reference concerns not the organ itself, but rather an acquired way with language, albeit one that gets right back to what one acquires while still a child. Note how McGuckian's outrightly biological metaphor opens up too, when put in full context. "I think it is unavoidable and very deep genetic," McGuckian said, in response to my question as to whether her location in time and space spoke through her work, but then continued:

The disputed nature of this province means you cannot forget it it is coded into you it was a very early assimilation of prejudice and narrow boundaries [*sic*]. For instance we went to a celebration for Michael Longley being awarded the Freedom of Belfast city. No Catholic or woman on her own has been considered for this. One sportswoman. So it is written in blood on the constitution that we are outside our own country. And may always be. The verse as it were seethes against this like the ice under the Titanic.

The "deep genetic" turns out, in the run of McGuckian's metaphor, to have been early "coded" through biographical encounters with practices of exclusion. Even more striking is the way her reference to blood turns it into the very ink of a writing—a dictum "written in blood on the constitution." What is more, what that blood references is clearly a history of conflict much more than any idea of biological belonging. But there is sense of locatedness, for all that.

Reflecting on these quotations from Emery, Wright and McGuckian, I would have to say that while the interpellative effects of my questions seem to me now undeniable, particularly in the case of the U.S. poets, these three comments point to forms of local affiliation that exist regardless of such manipulations. The comments demonstrate their authors' awareness that socio-linguistic, behavioural and in McGuckian's case outrightly political, aspects of their local environments make a key contribution to their writing. I am going to suggest that a further reason a national or regional moniker seems more or less adequate to so many poets is for the way it can allude to at least some of these currents.

But I also think what they are saying in these moments is quite strange, in relation to the national identities we supposedly achieve from birth and grow to share with 24.13 million other Australians; or 36.71 million others in Canada; or a current 323.4 million people in the United States of America. To see that, consider again the curious sense of an arbitrariness in all these comments: Emery's sense that he might have written a different poetry some suburbs away, the way Wright's ear metaphor poises ambiguously between the physically given and the enculturated, the fact that McGuckian's "deep genetic" reveals itself as "coded" via lifetime experience. We might approximate what the poets are describing here by referring to it as a sort of *embodied arbitrariness*.

Versions of it recurred through the interviews. So Noelle Kocot mentioned that since moving

to New Jersey from Brooklyn she had been fascinated by local bugs and plant life. When asked whether these had become topic for poems, she replied,

Sometimes. But they usually just wend their way into poems. They just appear. For instance, I wrote one poem called “Aphids.” The poem’s called “Aphids,” and it has aphids in it, but it’s about something totally different to aphids.

There is nothing deeply New-Jerseyan about it. Local things “just wend their way into poems” because composition involves opening up to the things that are there.

My exchange with Rae Armantrout brought out some similar currents. Armantrout’s immediate response to the question of what sort of poet she is was “I am going to answer that, even though I do not tend to like labels as I find them limiting.” Her next comment was, “I am certainly not an epic poet.” Anyone who knows Armantrout’s drastically pared back work will realise how droll the comment is. She proceeded to talk about the elements of lyric, and of pastiche in her work: “I am somewhere in the vicinity of lyric, in a postmodern kind of way.” But she wanted “to be careful about” words like “pastiche” and “lyric” and “irony,” as indeed about all the labels we discussed. That admirable wariness continued through our next exchange.

PM What about national or regional labels? Are you happy with that sort of thing? For instance, are you happy to be termed an American poet?

RA Well, I guess I have to be an American poet. I think that my work is very American, in that it references a lot of contemporary American culture.

The thing is that American culture has been widely exported. So a lot of these references can be understood elsewhere.

PM Californian references, in particular.

RA Yes. It is the benefit of empire... But, you know, I am kind of a mockingbird, I pick up what is around me. Do you have mockingbirds in Australia?

PM I don’t know, but I know what they are.

RA I am a mimic. I pick up a lot of stuff, and it is the stuff around me. It could be stuff I read, or it could be stuff I hear in the media. Often it has to do with American politics and culture.

So I guess I would have to say I am an American poet. And I have mostly read American poets. They have been my influences. I do not say that with any particular pride. It is just a fact.

Armantrout’s mockingbird metaphor seems to me particularly revealing. It continues the thread of organic metaphor in poets’ references to place, as tracked above. At the same time, it emphasizes the possibility that the material for one’s poems might be different, in a different setting. That theme emerged explicitly in the discussion that followed. In response to my question as to whether she felt this mockingbird aspect of her compositional practice would continue, were she to live somewhere other than San Diego, Armantrout replied that she thought it would “eventually, if it was an English-speaking place.” Her Spanish, she added, was not fluent enough for it to happen in a Latino one (“to write poetry, you have to be deep into the language”). But she could see it occurring in England or in Australia. “If I lived in a different part of this country, that would affect my poetry too.”

In short, Armantrout was happy to say that her work serves as the site for what is “probably a Southern California sort of world.” But this was not the same as saying that place determined it. “I

would not say that it [place] is determinative. But definitely that it all seeps in.”

Another question in our interview schedule concerned what poets saw as their “key points of connection to the world.” This elicited some interesting responses too. Forrest Gander answered with a quote from George Oppen:

The self is no mystery, the mystery is
That there is something for us to stand on.
We want to be here.
The act of being, the act of being
More than oneself.²⁶

Gander added that he liked this notion of what we *stand on* “because it is both a physical and an ethical thing.” At which he added: “My background in geology trained me—as well as teaching me to read carefully—to look for the structures we stand on.” C. D. Wright’s response to this question about “key points of connection” also had to do with the ground:

Have always thought of myself as a kind of autochthon. A poet told me once that if you take root you will grow. However briefly I find myself in a strange place, I am intent on locating myself.

How are we to read these (again markedly organic) metaphors for the poets’ relation to the world?

On the one hand we might say, with Wittgenstein, that humans are, at the end of the day, elements in the natural environment themselves: “Commanding, questioning, recounting, chatting, are as much a part of our natural history as walking, eating, drinking, playing.”²⁷ Why not place the making of poetry under the rubric of natural history too? But the references to intentionality, and to a certain portability, in all of these metaphors, including these last two from Gander and Wright, seem to introduce another detail into the picture: something more like a subjective awareness that the space and time of one’s poetry can be really quite arbitrary. What’s missing is any sense of perfect fit there. In this respect, these comments sit better with the Wittgenstein who also wrote, “The subject does not belong to the world, but is a limit of the world.”²⁸

Compare, for a dramatic contrast with these images for national and otherwise geo-spatial affiliation, that manner of thinking which Rogers Brubaker has termed “groupism,” and repeatedly identified in discussions of nationhood both popular and academic. Groupism is

the tendency to treat various categories of people as if they were internally homogenous, externally bounded groups, even unitary collective actors with common purposes; and to take ethnic and racial groups and nation as basic constituents of social life, chief protagonists of social conflicts, and fundamental units of analysis.²⁹

What is striking in Brubaker’s coinage is the way it draws a link between “objective” scholarly

²⁶ George Oppen, “World, World—,” in *New Collected Poems*, ed. Michael Davidson (New York: New Directions, 2002), 159.

²⁷ Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, trans. G. E. M. Anscombe (Oxford: B. Blackwell, 1953), 12e (§ 25).

²⁸ Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, German Text with an English translation *en regard* by C. K. Ogden (London: Routledge, 1922), 151 (§ 5.632).

²⁹ Rogers Brubaker, “Ethnicity, Race and Nationalism,” *Annual Review of Sociology* 35 (2009): 28.

discourses, inasmuch as these treat groups as “internally homogenous, externally bounded,” and the sort of rhetorics increasingly practised by politicians in relation to issues of asylum, such as the infamous Australian electoral slogan “We decide who comes into this country, and the circumstances in which they come.”³⁰ My point is that none of the organic metaphors or national references I found in the interviews served to advance any such sense of the nation as a “unitary collective actor.” To the contrary, the poets’ metaphors seem calibrated to unsettle such homogenisations of public space, by posing the experiences of their belonging in such idiosyncratic terms. It could be, and probably is, totally different for the person next door.

Poetry introduces a gap. G. C. Waldrep put it well, when I interviewed him in rural Pennsylvania in 2013:

[W]hen you read a novel, the background is noise and the dailiness of existence. But for poetry, the background is either the unknowable or nothing. Just absence.

I do tend to read poems that way: the poetic voice hangs in a kind of space that is, for want of a better word, silence.

It seems to me that what one is pushed back on, when such silence arises, is the sense of being right here in the immediate moment, in this very body. Ultimately, I would attribute the organic dimension of the metaphors discussed above to the way poems push us back into the flesh. But however embodied these metaphors are, one cannot, I underline, avoid the sense of arbitrariness that pertains to all of them as well, as painterly depictions of a phenomenon that might well have been depicted otherwise. These poets are suggesting that the stuff of the local culture their poetry captures is the material of a code, the glittering things one collects, the terrain one comes habitually to invest familiar emotion in. In all these cases one gets the sense that this material could easily be otherwise in a different language, a different place. But also that no silence would be possible without some such given environment.

6. Institutional Environment

Flannery O’Connor said the concerns that you have are your concerns and they will be there for you when you write if you are writing truly, whatever that means to you. The concerns I have in terms of the natural world, in terms of the body, in terms of the church: all those things come in. But they’re not conscious. I don’t sit down to write “about” anything, ever.

I cite this comment of G. C. Waldrep’s as a further instance of the sorts of poetic grounds discussed immediately above. But I also include it to point to the fact that Waldrep has—he underlined this elsewhere in the interview—a deep readerly relation to O’Connor, a writer who is not only American but also, like Waldrep himself, from the South. We can discern here yet another way in which poetry takes on geographical contours. It is a matter of what poets and other literary figures one reads. That reading forms a community in its own right.

Recall too at this juncture Armantrout’s comment: “And I have mostly read American poets. They have been my influences.” Maxine Chernoff alluded to a similar phenomenon:

³⁰ See further Reece Jones, *Violent Borders, Refugees and the Right to Move* (London: Verso, 2016).

I think that I have mainly been in conversation with American experimental poets. When I go to England, even the more experimental poets seem very middle of the stream to me. And as much as I liked some of the poets I met, I did not think we had a lot to talk about, in terms of relationships between my work and their work. I think I definitely am an American poet in terms of my place in poetry. The poets I most appreciate and respect and enjoy reading are American poets.

I pressed Chernoff on the identification she seemed to be making between the geographical identity of the literature one reads and one's own identity:

It intrigues me to hear you talking about the ethnicity of your writing in terms of the ethnicity of your reading. From such a point of view, it seems possible that if you mainly read German poetry, you would mainly be writing German poems.

Chernoff confirmed this, and proceeded to discuss the Friedrich Hölderlin translation she and Paul Hoover published in 2008.³¹ Her work changed markedly as a result of that encounter, she said.

I hasten to add that Chernoff qualified her comment that “the poets I most appreciate and respect and enjoy reading are American poets” with reference to her pleasure in Neruda, Vallejo, Ponge, Michaux, Lispector and the English Romantics. Nor do I want to give the impression that U.S. poets solely read work published there. Forrest Gander, for instance, is clearly a voracious reader of international poetry. Others seem to read widely as well.

Perhaps the real question is whether poets read the works of co-nationals *differently* to work published in other national jurisdictions. I suspect they do read those books differently, for two reasons, the first of which I will now proceed to discuss. It will have to do with the predominantly national nature of the institutions providing Anglophone poets with grants, publication and prizes. Reading the work of one's fellow nationals is, I suspect, different by dint of that fact: these are the poets (when still alive, and perhaps even somewhat beyond that) to whom one is competitively bound.

I will draw on a critical exchange between Pascale Casanova and Christopher Prendergast to help me make the case, at the same time driving forward our argument about the mechanisms that interpellate poets as national. According to Casanova, literature took on national dimensions in the late 18th and early 19th century. It was during that time that nations came to be considered

separate, self-enclosed units, each irreducible to any other; from within their autarchic specificity, these entities produced literary objects whose “historical necessity” is inscribed within a national horizon.³²

For Casanova, such Herderian trends have blinded literary criticism to the ways in which a writer's negotiations have over that time been international as well. This is not the place to address her Bourdieusian model of a “world literary space” in which formerly colonised cultures work at “the accumulation of national literary resources required to enter the world space and compete inside it,” including for the Nobel Prize, an award that is constantly discussed in terms of its laureates' nationality.³³ But I do want to address what she means by “national literary resources.” Her

³¹ Friedrich Hölderlin, *Selected Poems of Friedrich Hölderlin*, trans. Maxine Chernoff and Paul Hoover (Oakland: Omnidawn, 2008).

³² Pascale Casanova, “Literature as a World,” *New Left Review* 31 (Jan–Feb. 2005): 78.

³³ Casanova, “Literature as a World,” 81. Patrick White is, for instance, regularly described as the only Australian to have won the prize for literature. He might just as well be described as the only explicitly gay person to have won the prize...

argument with Christopher Prendergast is illuminating in this regard. The latter takes exception to Casanova's insistence on treating (in his words) "every single literary / linguistic community from the sixteenth century onwards as if it were, actually or aspirationally, national in character."³⁴ Such an approach works tolerably well for the novel, Prendergast remarks; but "how might the national-competitive construct work with lyric poetry?"³⁵ "Pace Christopher Prendergast," Casanova responds, her reference to "national literary spaces" is not intended to suggest that either writers or nations vie with each other "for national (or nationalist) reasons, but instead for strictly literary stakes."³⁶ Those "literary stakes" involve the struggle to be regarded as best author, which might include for authoring a work as confounding of place and indeed history as G. C. Waldrep's *Archicembalo*, or Rae Armantrout's *Versed*.³⁷ Casanova's point is that such contests for prestige now occur in national arenas; to which she adds, as her work's own specific contribution, that those arenas are linked in to a world arena, one structurally skewed against certain nations. Which is to say, the "nationalness" or otherwise of the contents, inspiration behind, or even effects of, a literary work is totally irrelevant to her analysis. The work will still be American, or Singaporean, or Canadian, because that is the space in (and for) which its author competes.

I find Casanova's explicitly Bourdieusian claim that prestige is the "quintessential form power takes in the literary universe"³⁸ overinflated—or, if you like, reductionist. What I would like to take from her rejoinder to Prendergast, however, is the reminder that 19th century "belief that the frontiers of literary space coincided with national borders" has become more than belief in the centuries since: we find it instantiated in all sorts of practices.³⁹ Pertinent in this regard would be the fact that the institutions that facilitate poets' work are, in the main, administered according to policies determined by the governments and bureaucracies of nation-states, and are regularly funded by them as well. I have in mind the primary, secondary and tertiary education systems that educate poets and at times set their books, the various tiers of magazines and journals, the systems of arts grants and prizes. The fact that many of these do indeed have strongly agonistic elements is grist to Casanova's mill. Poets find themselves publishing in the same magazines, approaching the same publishing houses, vying for the same awards, and even being surveyed by the same critics as their co-nationals and this helps, much like our international research interviews, but even more pervasively, to make those poets national ones.

A simple anecdotal corroboration of the inherently national artistic community which such mechanisms generate would be the fact that almost everyone I interviewed asked me at some point, usually prior to the interview itself, who else I was talking to. Those conversations revealed a high degree of peer recognition, even in the cases of the lesser known poets, *within a given country*. But many names were not recognised when I told Australian poets whom I was interviewing in the U.S.A. ; and vice versa. Relatedly, one finds William Logan mentioned in two of my U.S. interviewees as a notoriously vehement, very good critic. Waldrep mentioned that although Logan, who writes for *The New Criterion*, had never reviewed him personally, "I read his reviews very closely, largely for what they can tell me about my own work." Again, none of our non-U.S.A. interviewees mentioned Logan. To say one is an American or an Australian poet is in some ways simply to acknowledge—it would be disingenuous not to—that one works within

³⁴ Christopher Prendergast, "Negotiating World Literature," *New Left Review* 8 (Mar–Apr. 2001): 111.

³⁵ Prendergast, "Negotiating World Literature," 121.

³⁶ Casanova, "Literature as a World," 79 fn12.

³⁷ G. C. Waldrep, *Archicembalo* (Vermont: Tupelo Press, 2009); Rae Armantrout, *Versed* (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 2010).

³⁸ Casanova, "Literature as a World," 83.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 78.

the institutions operative there. But nor should we downplay the power of institutional practices to generate beliefs in their own right. (“Pascal says more or less: ‘Kneel down, move your lips in prayer, and you will believe.’”)⁴⁰

Looked at from the institutional perspective, poetry emerges as a very nation-based enterprise indeed.

But then one reads the lines.

7. The Sui Generis

I demurred, in the writing immediately above, from Pascale Casanova’s claim that prestige is the “quintessential form power takes in the literary universe.” Nor do I find her reference to “the merciless war of literature,” a war that is all about upping one’s holdings on this score, all that compelling.⁴¹ But what other forms does power in poetry take, if not “the” struggle for prestige? I will finish on this point.

For Robert Hass it is “the power of poetry to illuminate and clarify, to speak out of its whole being.”⁴² I am referring to his essay on James Wright. Towards its end, Hass cites the following lines:

I wonder how many old men last winter
Hungry and frightened by namelessness prowled
The Mississippi shore
Lashed blind by the wind, dreaming
Of suicide in the river.
The police remove their cadavers by daybreak
And turn them in somewhere.
Where?
How does the city keep lists of its fathers
Who have no names?
By Nicollet Island I gaze down at the dark water
So beautifully slow.
And I wish my brothers good luck
And a warm grave.⁴³

The power in question is, of course, a linguistic one.

Here I turn to the fact that the U.S. poets who told me they were mainly informed by the American tradition were clearly not just referring to contemporary—and in Casanova’s terms, competing—voices. They mentioned many older names too: James Wright, Robert Creeley, George Oppen, Plath, Pound, Whitman, Dickinson... It seems to me that this must have been because—here we come to the second reason I suspect the poetry of one’s co-nationals is read differently—those co-nationals, whether past or present, are in many ways working the same veins of the language.

Consider the repeated references poets made to the version of English spoken in their parts. I quoted Emery saying, “my work is about place. I live here. The patterns of my language are from here. The vernacular I use is Australian.” The way “place” gets so swiftly defined as a matter of

⁴⁰ Althusser, “Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses,” 111.

⁴¹ Casanova, “Literature as a World,” 83.

⁴² Robert Hass, “James Wright,” in *Twentieth Century Pleasures: Prose on Poetry* (New York: Ecco Press, 1984), 42.

⁴³ Wright, excerpt from “The Minneapolis Poem,” qtd. in Hass, “James Wright,” 4–6.

language-use in Emery's comment continues to intrigue me. It is as if the vernacular *is* Emery's conception of where place actually occurs. Medbh McGuckian's reference to "the quest the restraint the oddity of English in Ireland the total remoteness of the language and yet it is all there is" has overtones of that too. The language is where she works. Her colleagues work there as well.

Let me put a sharp angle on this: writing poetry in a given language is just as much a matter of dealing with an institution, and its institutional practices, as submitting a manuscript to publishers is, or entering into prizes. After all, stringing words together into lines involves dealing with structures of expectations too, some of which (e.g. grammar, though it is actually a far less stable entity than many think)⁴⁴ appear compulsory. Yet however institutional in its contours, language has the benefit of being legible elsewhere. Whereas poetic institutions, as more typically understood—representative bodies, publishers, prizes—are in the main organized along national lines, and often closed to non-nationals as well.

It is only by acknowledging the institutionality of language itself that we can grasp its capacity to make legible the seemingly *sui generis* character poetry so often seems to bear. Consider the 2008 *New York Times* article in which Joel Brouwer stated that American poet C. D. Wright "belongs to a school of exactly one." The contrast of such notions with what Wright actually told me at interview ("I am an American poet") is stark. But contrast to that, in turn, the beautifully styled language in which Wright couched those very interview responses, even while generalising herself as Southern:

From my warren, people are talkers... They like to tell a story, much more the case than in the city. Storytelling is mother tongue, mother's milk of the American South. I always had the impulse. I just never knew how to tell a proper story. So I both deliberately subvert the story, and involuntarily subvert the story. When I tell Forrest my dreams, he walks out of the room. He complains that I "tell it in real time." Whereas if I just threaten to tell a story, I can "simulate" a page-turner, an immediacy to the writing, even though there is no bona fide story being expressed.

Wright's descriptions (up to and including her descriptions of how she describes things!) have power because they are both within and in excess of the ways we typically use language. That is really what we mean when labelling someone's poetry *sui generis*.

The sense that I was encountering someone outside the ordinary arose repeatedly during the interviews. It did when I talked to Samuel Wagan Watson in Canberra as well. Sam was telling me how inspiring he had found his stay on our campus:

SWW When I get home, the next writing workshop I do, I want to go to Bunnings, buy a stack of sandpaper and just throw it on the students: "Let's write poetry on sandpaper. How do we do it?"

PM On the sharp, or the smooth side?

SWW The sharp side.

That's working with place, working out how to do that.

It is a very strange idea. But it is also in language, and therefore available. The "nation," on the other hand, hovers between a term one interpellates other poets to affiliate themselves to, particularly in scholarship, the parameter within which a great deal of publishing and prizes

⁴⁴ See further Michael Hoey, *Lexical Priming: A New Theory of Words and Language* (London; New York: Routledge/AHRB, 2005).

operate, a short-hand name for a variety of much more local and even technological engagements, and an outright chimera.

What is clear all the same is that poetry requires context to emerge. The more one delves into the matter the harder it is to ignore that poetic composition is a form of institutional engagement, albeit one most centrally directed towards the institutionality of language itself. Of which place is an epiphenomenon. Poets work, as I put it above, both within and in excess of the ways we typically use language. So why do we keep calling them “*sui generis*”? Is it not rather that the effect of reading their work—from Wright’s *One Big Self* to Chernoff’s *Evolution of the Bridge*, from Wagan Watson’s *Smoke Encrypted Whispers* to Anderson’s *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism*—is to make us, ourselves feel pitched somewhere out of the space we think we inhabit? The work leaves us, for those tantalizing moments, feeling *sui generis*, and excited or afraid.

参考文献 Bibliography

Interviews cited in the text

- Armantrout, Rae. Interview with the author. November 11, 2014. San Diego.
 Chernoff, Maxine. Interview with the author. November 17, 2014. San Francisco.
 Emery, Brook. Interview with the author. October 25, 2014. Sydney.
 Gander, Forrest. Interview with the author. July 19, 2013. Petaluma.
 Hoover, Paul. Interview with the author. November 14, 2014. San Francisco.
 Kocot, Noelle. Interview with the author. July 13, 2013. Elizabeth.
 McGuckian, Medbh. Correspondent, email message to author. February 11th, 2015-April 14th, 2015.
 Waldrep, G. C. Interview with the author. July 9, 2013. Bucknell.
 Williams, C. K. Interview with the author. July 25, 2013. New York.
 Wright, C. D. Interview with the author. July 20, 2013. Petaluma.

Books and Articles

- Alberti, Rafael. “El ángel Avaro.” In *The Penguin Book of Spanish Verse*. Edited by J. A. Cohen. Middlesex: Penguin, 1955, 409–10.
 Althusser, Louis. “Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses (Notes towards an Investigation).” In *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays*. Translated by Ben Brewster. London: New Left Books, 1971, 121–76.
 Anderson, B. *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. Revised 2nd ed. London; New York: Verso, 1991.
 Armantrout, Rae. *Versed*. Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 2010.
 Bendixen, Alfred and Burt, Stephen. “Introduction.” In *The Cambridge History of American Poetry*. Edited by Alfred Bendixen and Stephen Burt. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014, 1–12.
 Bennet, Donn and Brown, Russell, eds. *A New Anthology of Canadian Literature in English*. 2nd ed. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002.
 Brubaker, Rogers. “Ethnicity, Race and Nationalism.” *Annual Review of Sociology* 35, no. 28 (2009): 21–42.
 ———. *Grounds for Difference*. Harvard: Harvard University Press, 2015.
 Brumberg, H. L., Dozor, D. & S. G. Golombek. “History of the Birth Certificate: from Inception to the Future of Electronic Data.” *Journal of Perinatology* 32, no. 6 (2012): 407–11.
 Burt, Stephen. “American Poetry at the End of the Millennium.” In *The Cambridge History of American Poetry*. Edited by Alfred Bendixen and Stephen Burt. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014, 1144–66.
 Casanova, Pascale. “Literature as a World.” *New Left Review* 31 (Jan-Feb. 2005): 71–90.
 Chernoff, Maxine. *Evolution of the Bridge: Selected Prose Poems*. Norfolk: Salt Publications, 2005.
 Cope, Jack and Krige, Uys, eds. *The Penguin Book of South African Verse*. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1968.
 Davis, Mike. “Marx’s Lost Theory: The Politics of Nationalism in 1848.” *New Left Review* 93 (May–June 2015): 45–66.
 Dove, Rita, ed. *The Penguin Anthology of Twentieth Century American Poetry*. New York: Penguin, 2007.
 Dow, Philip, ed. *19 New American Poets of the Golden Gate*. Orlando: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1983.
 Fink, Reuben. “Visas, Immigration and Official Anti-Semitism.” In *This Immigrant Nation: Perspectives on an American Dilemma, Articles from The Nation 1868—The Present*. Edited by Richard Lingeman. E-book: The Nation, 2014, n. p.

- Gellner, Ernest. *Nations and Nationalism*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1983.
- Graham, Jorie. "A Feather for Voltaire." In *The Dream of the Unified Field: Selected Poems, 1974-1994*. Hopewell: Ecco Press, 1995, 17.
- Hass, Robert. "James Wright." In *Twentieth Century Pleasures: Prose on Poetry*. New York: Ecco Press, 1984, 26-55.
- Hoey, Michael. *Lexical Priming: A New Theory of Words and Language*. London; New York: Routledge/AHRB, 2005.
- Hölderlin, Friedrich. *Selected Poems of Friedrich Hölderlin*. Translated by Maxine Chernoff and Paul Hoover. Oakland: Omnidawn, 2008.
- Jones, Reece. *Violent Borders, Refugees and the Right to Move*. London: Verso, 2016.
- Keller, Lynn. "Green Reading: Modern and Contemporary American Poetry and Environmental Criticism." In *The Oxford Handbook of Modern and Contemporary American Poetry*. Edited by Cary Nelson. Oxford: Internet, 2012, 602-23. DOI: 10.1093/oxfordhb/9780195398779.013.0023.
- Klinkowitz, Jerome and Wallace, Patricia B., eds. *The Norton Anthology of American Literature: Volume E: Literature Since 1945*. New York: W.W. Norton and Co., 2007.
- Lehman, David, ed. *The Oxford Book of American Poetry*. New York: Oxford, 2006.
- McQuade, Donald, ed. *The Harper American Literature, Volume 2*. New York: Harper and Row, 1987.
- Malešević, Siniša. "The Chimera of National Identity." *Nations and Nationalism* 17, no. 2 (2011): 272-90.
- Oppen, George. "World, World—." In *New Collected Poems*. Edited by Michael Davidson. New York: New Directions, 2002, 159.
- Prendergast, Christopher. "Negotiating World Literature." *New Left Review* 8 (Mar-Apr. 2001): 100-121.
- Rhamazani, Jahan. "American Poetry, Prayer and the News." In *The Oxford Handbook of Modern and Contemporary American Poetry*. Edited by Cary Nelson. Oxford: Internet, 2012, 461-86. DOI: 10.1093/oxfordhb/9780195398779.013.0017
- Scott, James C. *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed*. New Haven (CN): Yale University Press, 1998.
- "The Academy of American Poets Announces the Recipients of the 2017 American Poets Prizes." Accessed 18 April 2018. <https://www.poets.org/academy-american-poets/stanza/academy-american-poets-announces-recipients-2017-american-poets-prizes>.
- Vendler, Helen. *Soul Says: On Recent Poetry*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995.
- Waldrep, G. C. *Archicembalo*. Vermont: Tupelo Press, 2009.
- Wallace, Ronald, ed. *Vital Signs: Contemporary American Poetry from the University Presses*. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1989.
- Wittgenstein, Ludwig. *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*. German Text with an English translation *en regard* by C. K. Ogden. London: Routledge, 1922.
- Wittgenstein, Ludwig. *Philosophical Investigations*. Translated by G. E. M. Anscombe. Oxford: B. Blackwell, 1953.

摘要: 我们为何惯于诉诸民族标签与地理坐标(如“爱尔兰最佳当代诗人之一”“一位美国五十年代的诗人”“1927年生于西班牙卡迪斯”等)来讨论诗人之作品? 面对以地缘政治分析来把握当代诗歌的潮流, 本文以此为基础, 并以此为契机进一步探讨作为艺术形式存在的诗歌与民族想象之间难以调和、甚至是相互对立的关系。作者的讨论围绕75位以英语为母语的诗人对民族归属等问题所做出的回应展开。文中涉及的访谈均为本文作者及其同事以《解读伟大创作——以诗为例》为题, 于2013—2015年间在澳大利亚研究理事会的资助下共同采集完成。以此为基础, 本文还以当代主体对民族身份认同这一历史使命问题为着眼点, 将访谈中的部分选段作了情境化处理, 从而使整篇论文上升到前沿社会学研究所关注的层面(布鲁贝克、卡萨诺瓦和马莱舍维奇等学者均聚焦过这一问题)。正是诗歌语言本身的找寻性为本文研究提供了一枚试金石, 继而引发了作者“更从何处觅诗源?”的探问。

关键词: 诗歌; 归属感; 召唤; 特质

作者简介: 保罗·马吉, 诗人、诗学研究者、后殖民研究者, 现任职于堪培拉大学。他的著作包括一本涉及南美南端旅游研究的学术人种志《从此间到火地岛》(伊利诺伊大学出版社2000年出版)、诗集《书的立方根》(约翰·莱昂纳多出版社2006年出版)和《岩石明信片》(约翰·莱昂纳多出版社2014年出版)。近来, 他专注于口传诗学和诗歌创作机制的研究。