

CORPOREALITY, TEMPORALITY, BREATH:
A PHENOMENOLOGICAL APPROACH TO THE POETRY OF ROBERT CREELEY

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DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to Steve Wilson. Steve, without your guidance, support, and occasional kick in the butt, this thesis would not have been written.

Thank you – O’ Captain, my Captain.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

For months I had taken to staring blankly at Karl Schmidt-Rottluff's painting "Gap in the Dyke." The vivid blue, the golden patches, and the startling red swirled together in giant blobs of nothingness. I was mesmerized by the colors. Satisfied with my staring. I was drawn to it daily; something about it made me keep coming back. Then one day, with the book in my lap, I began to run my eyes over the rest of the page and found the title, truly saw the title for the first time. Truly took in the words. I focused intently back and forth between the painting and the title, the painting and the title. I realized that "Gap in the Dyke" was taking me somewhere. I wondered: How had a gap in the dyke become *this* "Gap in the Dyke," with its extraordinary colors, its lack of boundaries, its mesmerizing hold over its viewer? I imagined the scene itself. I imagined Schmidt-Rottluff standing there, taking in the summer day. There was simply nothing extraordinary about it. It was just two people, some trees, a gap, a dyke. And what I finally understood was the magnitude of Schmidt-Rottluff's gesture, the connection between painting and word, word and life. Through his willingness to see that tiny moment as worthy of art, what the artist had done was take something insignificant and open it up, revealing something more, something about life—something about his life, about my life. There was no worry about green for grass or blue for sky. There was no

worry about which gap or which dyke. The word *essence* began to ring in my ears. Finally, the word *essence* was alive with clarity. I recalled these words from Husserl in “Philosophy as Rigorous Science,” that everything,

depends on one’s seeing and making entirely one’s own the truth that just as immediately as one can hear a sound, so one can intuit an “essence”—the essence “sound,” the essence “appearance of thing,” the essence “apparition,” the essence “pictorial representation,” the essence “judgment” or “will,” etc.—and in the intuition one can make an essential judgment. (110-111)

For “Gap in the Dyke,” Schmidt-Rottluff had used his intuition to make an essential judgment. He had taken that gap and that dyke and relieved them from their surroundings, catapulting them into an other world, a world full of danger and interest, reds and blues, making it alive beyond its ordinary moment. Life was truly at work in this painting. Life at its most ordinary presented itself to Schmidt-Rottluff on that day, but the artist was open enough to meet it with perceptive, interested eyes, and, perhaps most importantly, he had become part of it through his vivid blue, golden patches, and startling red. He had allowed his consciousness room and, through the act of art, had found the essence of it all. That gap was suddenly *gap*. That dyke was suddenly *dyke*. Incredibly, they were also *more* – and so was that painting. I saw it. Essence in phenomenological terms is not about how an object can be reduced to its actuality. It is not about reduction at all, not a stripping away of layers to get at a core. Instead it is about all the actualities of a given object and then the relief of the object from those actualities. It is a passing beyond, a passing through. There is nothing *gap* or *dyke* about

this painting – and that is the point. The artist succeeded. I am somehow astonished that the painting exists at all. An amazing moment it must have been for Schmidt-Rottluff, imagine seeing this ordinary day, seeing a gap in the dyke, and getting *this* “Gap in the Dyke,” with its intense swirls of blue and red. So crazy. How wonderfully crazy. *Essence* as ideality through possibility was revealed to me in this moment. “Gap in the Dyke” was phenomenological. And from that moment on, for me, so was everything else.

It is of course no accident that Karl Schmidt-Rottluff and Edmund Husserl are connected by a country, a time, and thus a perspective. It just took me time to see it, to make the connection through a series of acts, corporeal and temporal, in order to make the world of phenomenology my own. Husserl’s world my own. It is a strange world, an extraordinary world, living amongst what was old made new again. As Husserl writes in *The Crisis*, I have become part of the “life-world,” living “wakingly” in it, an always interested student (142). Objects that once comprised the background of my life are now at the forefront, haunting my thoughts, my dreams, my everyday life. My fork is now one of the most amazing objects in the world. Sometimes it seems perfectly shaped to its purpose, and is beautiful to boot, with its stunning silver tines curved intently towards the roof of my mouth. It is rhythmic, melodious, part of my daily ritual of sustaining myself. But having surpassed mere usefulness, the fork, like Schmidt-Rottluff’s painting, now also messes with me. It too is somehow *strange*. The fork is frightening. It looks sinister, with its cold, steel edges. How could it be that I put this dangerous thing in my delicate mouth? And then it is silly. Goofy. It is a melded glob of silver and four pointy things. It seems overly constructed, too suited for the purpose of shoving burritos in my

face at 2 a.m. So now my fork is both useful and odd each time I use it because I see it as it is and as it is not. I understand its essence. How frightening it is. How silly. How strange. And this strangeness follows me. This fork and the other objects once outside of me, somehow beyond me, are now part of me; each object that comprises the world is an extension of me and this strange consciousness, full of wondrous, new things. So the consciousness I once thought was waiting for the world to show itself, has found that the world was waiting for me all along, to help make its meaning.

And it is of course consciousness that is the foundation of phenomenology. For Husserl, “the only thing we can be certain of is our own consciousness of the world” (Selden 101). But, as it served Schmidt-Rottluff in the act of creation, Husserl’s consciousness is purposeful, useful, active. As writes Judith Butler in the foreward of Maurice Natanson’s important work *The Erotic Bird Phenomenology in Literature*, Husserl’s “consciousness consists rather in a series of acts, repeated through time and temporalized in their very structure” (ix). Consciousness here is about action, not passive reception. It is built upon over and over through experience, through an openness to the experience of life and the world itself. Writes Butler:

The world is irreversibly there, populated with objects for consciousness, but it is only “there” in the manner of being meant or intended. To be “intended” within phenomenological terms is not to be the object of a conscious wish: it is to be constituted, built up, through a series of acts. The thereness of objectness is made plain to a consciousness that intends or constitutes those objects, but it would be wrong to assume that consciousness manufactures those objects. It performs a paradoxical

exercise, building up what is already there, at once layering what is disclosed, constituting the given. In this sense, the givenness of objects is made plain only for a consciousness that is structured as a corollary to the world itself. (ix-x)

Consider the connection I made between Schmidt-Rottluff's painting "Gap in the Dyke" and Edmund Husserl's term *essence*, for instance. Both the painting and the term were already *there*, both in the world and in my consciousness. But nothing especially wonderful was happening because both of these objects were there. Up until that one significant day, I had seen the painting as a mere object of loveliness, just a pretty painting to look at and enjoy. And the concept *essence* was a phenomenological principle I was aware of and didn't entirely understand. But when I looked between the painting's title and the painting itself, I suspended my notion of the painting as merely a pretty thing to look at—and my consciousness took action. As writes Butler,

The turn to the object is one that effectively sets the object into relief from its ordinary context, de-naturalizing the object, as it were, in order to gain access to its essential structure. Setting the object into relief, suspending one's everyday understanding of what the object is, becomes the route by which consciousness takes stock of itself as constituting the object at hand. What is constituted about the object only becomes clear on the condition of such a de-realization of its status, a suspension of the web of beliefs within which it is ordinarily held. (x-xi)

The painting now had an intentional relation and, rather than becoming "better" it simply becomes more *of itself*: it becomes *essence*. And the concept *essence* becomes

clear. But it took both this series of acts (looking back and forth between the painting and the title, realizing the simplicity of the title itself, recalling Husserl's notion of essence, denaturalizing the painting itself because of its new context), and a particular consciousness (my own), to make the connection that the painting was a perfect illustration of the principle of *essence*. Struggling for some time to make the notion of Husserl's essence clear, I had been searching the objects of my world for that clarity. One day, thanks in part to Schmidt-Rottluff's painting, I found it. And the connections continue. Consciousness in phenomenological terms is always *consciousness of something*. Life, for Husserl and for me, is thus pre-given; but meaning is all about making. "Meaning is the joint product of the world and the 'subject'" (Patocka 169). Meaning is an act of consciousness; it is only possible through active seeking, listening, and paying attention to the world itself, and all of the objects that comprise it.

Of course, few would argue that the artist is involved in this kind of active seeking, listening, paying attention, and making. Making meaning through the act of art seems obvious. Taking a blank canvas, as Schmidt-Rottluff did, and creating the painting "Gap in the Dyke" involved his paying attention to the world, allowing his consciousness to become open to the world, seeking a particular moment, and, eventually, recreating the essence of *gap* and *dyke* on canvas. However, there is another part of this making meaning that is essential to the world of phenomenology, and that is what happens *after* Schmidt-Rottluff has painted his painting. The process of making meaning does not end with the artist. Rather, the process continues indefinitely, at least it does when viewed through the lens of phenomenology. Reader response is more than a response – it is a transactional effort. Moreover, that effort continues among multiple texts, writers, and

readers. Thus, as one of the points along this continuum, I take my place in the writing of this thesis.

CHAPTER II

EARLY DEFINITIONS

In contrast with other material objects and processes, the body is a center of orientation, the point zero of an ordered sequence which we bear with us or, better, which we are

Jan Patocka, *An Introduction to Husserl's Phenomenology*

Listening to the rhythm of a poem entails grasping the principles that organize it

Charles O. Hartman
Free Verse: An Essay on Prosody

"The poet thinks with his poem" (as Williams says) far better describes what my experience as a writer (poet included) has been

Robert Creeley
What is Poetry: Conversations with the American Avant-Garde

All poetry is a bodily experience. What free verse does with its attention to the breath is remind poets and readers that poetry is experiencing that engages the mind through the body. If the body is the center of orientation, as deems phenomenologist Edmund Husserl, then all acts of creation come from this center. It cannot be forgotten that without breath human beings cannot exist. Breath, then, as the essential component of our existence, brings us continually back to the body as locus. Thus, a phenomenological prosody of poetry must take into account that we are beings with bodies.

It is to the body, then, that one must look to when discussing the poetry of Robert Creeley. While at Black Mountain, Robert Creeley found a group of thinkers that would take not only poetry but all art to new places. The Black Mountain poets disagreed about many things. But one thing they agreed upon, according to Martin Duberman in *Black Mountain: An Exploration in Community*, is that “the creative process could be taught: one could be taught to see and to use tools in such a way as to allow the clear articulation of what was seen” (47). Education in the Black Mountain community happened inside and outside the classroom. As writes Duberman, living and learning at Black Mountain “were intertwined” (25). The focus on life, on living, as creative stimulus led Olson, Creeley, Levertov, Albers and others to new ways of thinking not only about the creative process but thinking itself, that is consciousness. The poets in particular returned to the rhythms of the body as the foundation of verse. Charles Olson writes in *Human Universe and Other Essays* that, “Verse now, 1950, if it is to go ahead, if it is to be of *essential* use, must, I take it, catch up and put into itself certain laws and possibilities of the breath, of the breathing of the man who writes as well as of his listenings” (15). The idea of existing as a corporeal being and all that this entails, then, is where to begin a discussion about what Robert Creeley poetry does and is.

The act of making a poem and the act of reading it rely upon conventions that are innately human. One of these conventions is important above all others when it comes to Robert Creeley: rhythm. For Creeley, the poet must listen to the line. The line’s rhythms are what shape the poem. Rhythm and its complex network of interconnected parts are the focus of Charles O. Hartman’s monumental work *Free Verse: An Essay on Prosody*, a work that serves as a cornerstone of this thesis. Hartman defines prosody as “the poet’s

method of controlling the reader's temporal experience of the poem, especially his attention to that experience" (13). By deeming prosody a temporal experience, Hartman is implying two things. First, the poet can assume the reader has a willingness to engage in the specific experience of reading a poem. Second, because of this willingness, the poet can influence *how* the reader reads the poem. For Hartman, the poet controls the reader's experience largely through rhythm, which Hartman defines as "the temporal distribution of the elements of language" (14). While all language has rhythm, Hartman and I contend that the rhythm in poetry is a deliberate method of organizing. Readers pay more attention to the rhythm of poetry because they assume there is something deliberate about it; the rhythm contributes to the overall experience of a poem, namely our corporeal and temporal experience. This corporeal and temporal experience is the focus of Robert Hass' "Listening and Making." He states that poetry "calls the reader to a kind of attentive consciousness, a kind of consciousness which is instinctual rather than learned" (113). For both Hass and Hartman, rhythm gives free verse its form and is also the way the reader enters the poem. The reader is essential because form emerges because of the way the *reader reads* the poem. This rhythmic form calls upon the reader to take an active part in the poetic process. The innate listening skills of the reader bring this rhythmic form to recognition. The reader is involved corporeally through the physical reading of the poem, through listening, and through breath. She/he is also involved temporally because reading, and its components, represent an experience in time. Reading the poetry of Robert Creeley hinges upon active participation from the poet and the reader. Thus, the poetics of Robert Creeley is best expressed

phenomenologically, as phenomenology proposes that all meaning is made through corporeal and temporal experience.

Phenomenology is both science and philosophy, the foundation of which is consciousness. Husserl's phenomenology posits a consciousness that is bound but active. Writes James Dodd in *An Introduction to Husserl's Phenomenology*, "consciousness is something located, bound to a place and a reality that it cannot escape; it is something essentially *corporeal*" (xix). A free verse poem asks the reader to participate in a specific temporal experience through her/his body. If the poem is an experience, then that experience registers in time. Hartman, referring to Ezra Pound's definition, states, "the poetic fact is an occurrence, a moment in time" (131). A poem asks the reader to participate in a specific corporeal experience, and we experience time through our bodies. What the poem does, then, creates the meaning and overall emotion of the poem. Meaning is produced actively. It is "a joint product of the world and the subject" (169). This corporeal/temporal kind of poetics relies upon active participation from the poet and reader in the world of the poem. Hass, like Husserl, contends that we experience the world (both the material and the poetic) through our bodies. Through the use of our senses, human beings are innately rhythmical. Rhythm, how it is produced and what it does, is an essential component of a phenomenological prosody.

For the phenomenological foundation of my thesis I will rely upon the principles of Edmund Husserl, the father of modern phenomenology. First, Husserl's focus on intentionality as a unifying bond, as well as the nature of cognition as both a temporal and corporeal experience, are of particular importance when considering Hass' active participation and attentive consciousness. Second, I will consider the significant

exploration done on phenomenological literary theory by Judith Butler and Maurice Natanson in *The Erotic Bird Phenomenology in Literature*. These two critics contend that the reader/writer relationship is an extension of the active building up of meaning in the world, and this pertains to the reader/poet relationship outlined by Hartman and Hass. Natanson also contends that it is through imaginary variation that the essence of an object emerges. This concept directly applies to the poetics of Robert Creeley as it is my contention that one of Creeley's objectives is to take the reader through the thinking process itself. In so doing, his focus is not on, necessarily, one object or subject, but that object through various imaginary variations. The reader of a Creeley poem must participate in imaginary variation in order for the poem to work. Thus, as Hartman and Hass contend, Creeley sees the reading of a poem as an active, bodily experience. The poem as bodily experience is further illustrated by Louise Rosenblatt in *Literature as Exploration*, wherein she posits that the associations made by a reader between words and images largely accounts for what any respective work communicates to her/him. In another work, *The Reader, the Text, the Poem: The Transactional Theory of the Literary Work* (1969), Rosenblatt discusses transactional theory, which states that there is a relationship between the text and the reader, and that the meaning of a text results from a transaction between the text and the reader within a specific context. My goal in examining these theorists is to apply the phenomenological principles of corporeality and temporality, as well as the principles of rhythm developed by Hartman and Hass, to the poetry of Robert Creeley in an effort to express his poetics as phenomenological.

It would of course be remiss not to narrow the scope of the massive philosophical science that is phenomenology. To propose a phenomenological poetics for Robert

Creeley, I will rely upon Husserl's own definitions, along with my own interpretation of those definitions. It is important to understand the specific phenomenological lens through which this poetry will be examined. Husserl's phenomenology is specific, but has been interpreted widely and loosely. The phenomenological methodologies I will rely upon are those of Jan Patočka and James Dodd, Maurice Natanson, and Judith Butler. Their interpretations of Husserl are some of the most practical and concise. Each explains the complexities of Husserl's work through wondrous, though logical means, especially those key concepts that this project will use as a foundation. Each has made phenomenology accessible, and when one makes something accessible, one makes it applicable. For me, these writers have made phenomenology *useful*. A philosophy, if useful, can become a way of life.

Husserl calls phenomenology a rigorous science. It is a precise study of the world as a means to knowledge. And the key word here is "study." The world reveals itself to us, but without an active participation, an active attention, this knowledge will not only be unrealized, it will not be useful. Just as Hartman and Hass are interested in "attentive listening," Husserl is interested in attentive experiencing, attentive living. An inactive life in phenomenological terms is the equivalent of a science experiment wherein I gather the chemicals but fail to mix them—nothing will happen. There is, essentially, no experiment, no results. For Husserl, life is *active*, life itself is the horizon of knowledge. In Jan Patočka's *An Introduction to Husserl's Phenomenology*, editor James Dodd has this to say about the origin of the science itself:

Greek science—here, Husserl and Patočka are in agreement—is characterized by a different conception of the access to meaning: the

relation to the world is not one of mastery, but of letting be what is, letting what is show itself as itself. As Patocka notes, this is the motivation behind Husserl's adoption of the concept of "phenomenon": the task of "phenomenology" is to thematize the question of how access to the order of the world is possible, it does this not by asking what means are requisite in order to "reach" the "external" world, but by recognizing that the question of this access is more a question of how the world presents itself to *us* than how we "picture" it or "construct" it. (xiii)

What is problematic for Husserl in previous scientific systems such as Cartesianism is the apparent passivity of the subject. Phenomenology is not a passive science. True, the subject does not construct the world—he does not go that far—but the subject relies upon a pre-given world. Writes Husserl in *The Crisis* "The world is pregiven to us, the waking, always somehow practically interested subjects, not occasionally but always and necessarily as the universal field of the actual and possible praxis, as horizon. To live is always to live-in-certainty-of-the-world" (142). The world and the subject are in a unique relationship wherein neither is more important than the other. The subject assumes its world, but does not assume its meaning. Rather, the subject sets in motion the discovery, the knowledge, in this pre-given world. The subject must live in a state of constant, open awareness, which is the true beginning of the interrelated concepts of the phenomenological process. As states Dodd, "The conditions for the possibility of knowledge are found not in the object, but in the openness of the subject to the object, an openness that is always prior to the manifestation of the world" (xiii). This openness

comes before the phenomenon itself, and this open, active seeking is a product of consciousness.

The term consciousness, of course, is used widely and in countless different ways. What consciousness is not, in phenomenological terms, is a stream of thoughts or perceptions that have nothing to do with, no interrelatedness to, the world itself. Nor is it merely a state of inner or outer awareness. Consciousness here is not merely “I like to read books,” nor “I am aware of that book.” Nor is it merely “I am aware that Virginia Woolf wrote that book *To the Lighthouse*.” Nor is it even “I am aware that *To the Lighthouse* by Virginia Woolf is about a woman named Lily who desires to uncover the psychological dynamics of both herself and the Ramsay family through her much-struggled-over painting.” Instead, it is about all of those things together, all acting upon one another, all adding up, layering, making correlations and connections, with the other aspects, perceptions, and knowledges of my world. Consciousness, according to Husserl, is a series of acts. Above all else it is an “active forming and intending of the world” (Selden 103). Each association points to another, and another. Consciousness is constantly moving; and moving is all about the body. Dodd makes an important note about Husserl’s notion of consciousness:

That the body is the center, located in the world, of the very movement of consciousness itself, means that consciousness cannot be likened to an infinite streaming of a light which, emerging out of everywhere and nowhere, “reveals” the presence of entities in the world. Consciousness is something located, bound to a place and a reality that it cannot escape—it is something essentially *corporeal* (xix)

Consciousness relies upon the body moving through its world to acquire knowledge. Thus, though bound, it is not without movement, perception, retention, experience—all of these actions, however slight, require the body or parts thereof to *move*. When a reader reads a poem, for instance, the eyes, mouth, tongue, heart, and breath can all be understood as movements of the body. These physiological movements make the mind respond in such a way as to create emotion and thought. When one reads the line from Creeley's "Mazatlan: Sea," "Sleep—it washes / away," it is more than just the words that produce emotion. What produces emotion is also the way our eyes pause on the word sleep because of the dash. It is the way our lips linger over the word away as it ends the stanza with an airy vowel sound. Without the movement of our bodies, then, consciousness is not possible. Husserl takes this into account when he states that if our bodies are never stagnant, are constantly moving, this means *consciousness is always moving*. Furthermore, if consciousness is an action dependent upon our bodies, then it is not only always moving with our bodies, it is also always making new associations as our bodies encounter new experiences. Yet, what happens to "old" associations, "old" experiences, "old" acts of consciousness? Those are retained. Consciousness, in this sense, becomes not only a reaching forward but also a reaching backward. The subject must reach for retentions in order to form new associations. Husserl states in his first Lecture at Gottingen, "Isolated cognitions do not simply follow each other in the manner of mere succession. They enter into logical relations with each other, they follow from one another, they 'cohere' with one another, they support one another, thereby strengthening their logical power" (*The Idea of Phenomenology* 13). When reading a poem, then, the perceptions build as the lines build upon each other. Stanzas mark the

end of one thought and the beginning of another, yet each stanza is not isolated. Rather, each stanza builds upon the emotion and thought of every other stanza. A poem operates much like consciousness. Consciousness is also a reaching sideways, a reaching back around. Again from “Mazatlan: Sea,” when the reader reads the stanza, “Other way—dark / eyed, the face of a glow of some other / experience, deepens / in the air” the feeling of frightening possibility does not stop with the final line. The feeling carries into the next stanza, “AGH—MAN / thinks” (154). Consciousness is an always pointing and reaching activity. In short, it is *intentionality*.

Intentionality is that unifying bond thanks to which the experience of consciousness is not a rhapsody of impressions and other phenomena but rather a unitary meaningful process. This process brings together temporally disparate sequences; it induces relations of similarity and difference; it fuses, interpretatively, impressions into synthetic wholes, letting unity emerge in them; it intends, by verbal expression, units of meaning to which it can return as identical, under certain circumstances transposing meaning into an intuition which fulfills it or disappoints it — all of which presupposes a synthetic bond among individual acts, a bond constituted by the pointing, intentional activity. (Patocka 64)

So intentionality not only realizes correlations, it *presupposes* correlations. The credo of the phenomenologist is that all consciousness is *consciousness-of* something. As Maurice Natanson illustrates perfectly in *The Erotic Bird*, intentionality “refers to the activity of

consciousness” (21). We are active in the world. Thus if we are part of the world, we are part of its rhythms, not merely watching them go by. We are part of the world’s temporality. Our very reality is temporally located.

Of course, temporality does not merely relate to time itself. It is far more than an abstract concept. Time in phenomenological terms is not something merely registered as past, present, and future. Because temporality is something we experience, it is part of us. Temporal is what we *are*. Dodd explains that the horizon is not merely a “spatial” metaphor to locate ourselves against. It is a temporal locator as well. He continues:

These analyses demonstrate that to be open to a horizon, to the world, is not to be a being who stands before a horizon, peering off into the distance at silhouettes of whatever is standing “against” it. On the contrary, we do not just sit and wait for objects to unfold before us; we are, in the progression of our lives, “in” things, not just next to them. For the world is not a backdrop for the show of things, it is the horizon of ourselves as well, of our life as beings who are open to the order of the world. The synthesis, then, which lies at the very origin of meaningfulness of all that is, is not something we do, but a movement that we are, this means that the synthesis of an originary temporality, a primordial movement, lies at the very core of subjective comportment. (xviii)

Because consciousness is active, through the act of intentionality, and because intentionality presupposes, we can be said to move through the world purposefully.

Movement is thus what we *are*, not just something we do. For Husserl, everything comes down to experience, and “there is no reality which would not have temporal location or

locations” (Patočka 119). Our lived experiences make up our reality, and those lived experiences can take certain forms. Those forms comprise Husserl’s phenomenon.

The concept of “phenomenon” is a complicated one. Rather than merely calling the phenomenon any “fact” or “event” that is observable, Husserl defines three conceptions that make up *phenomenon*. Patočka explains these succinctly. The first concept of phenomenon is “the *entire lived experience of perceiving* with all of its components.” The second is the phenomenon “as *thing*, the *object* which appears in lived experience with all its qualities, moments, and relations: the table on which I write [...] the landscape I see through the window” (62). The third is the “‘representant,’ the component of my lived experience—for instance the *impression* of red, green, etc., —that serves as the pivot of my apprehension in its orientation to the object” (*Introduction* 62). Thus, Husserl’s notion of phenomenon leaves much room for the subject. Only one-third of this concept is the “thing” itself. The impression of the object on the subject in that moment, and the sum total of all impression moments of lived experience, are also essential. Moreover, the conceptions of the phenomenon are not just given in the world; rather they are the result of a process – the result of the process of intentionality, the activity of consciousness. If Husserl takes into account the idea that phenomenon is about *impression*, then this means it is transactional and transcendent. The three conceptions of the phenomenon are thus the result of a two-fold process of consciousness: the openness of the subject to the world, or intentionality, and the pre-givenness of the world, the world showing itself as itself. The poet must be open to the world in order to write a poem, and the reader must be open to both her/his world and the world of the poem in order to read the poem. In order to create the experience in the

world as an experience on the page. the poet must also allow the words to shape the poem. Words exist as objects and do particular things – different words, different poem. Thus the poet must allow the words to exist as themselves in order to allow the poem to come to form. Writing a poem, in the phenomenological sense, is not about a poet's manipulation of words or objects. Instead, writing a poem is about meeting the objects in the world, and this includes the words, as they are. The poet takes the reader through the process of essence, that is the subject must set the object, in this case the objects in the poem, into relief. This occurs through Husserl's process of reduction.

Essence, for Husserl, is not Platonic. That is the essence of an object is not found somehow in the core of the object. It is not a stripping away of layers to arrive at an essence. Writes Theodore De Boer on this matter in *The Development of Husserl's Thought*, Plato "regards ideas as *realities*, that is to say, as things that have the same mode of being as 'real' things in space and time. In opposition to this view, Husserl always emphasized the *ideal* mode of being of essences" (263). Husserl, in short, describes himself as an idealist. Continues De Boer, "The thing is temporal and the idea eternal" (264) It is through the imagination that ideas live on. Husserl states in his fifth lecture in Gottingen in 1907, "For a consideration of essence, perception and imagination are to be treated exactly alike, the same essence can equally be 'seen' in either, / or abstracted from either, and any interpolated suppositions about existence are irrelevant" (*The Idea of Phenomenology*, 53-54). Thus the imagination is simply another reality for Husserl. Concerning poetry, then, it is only through imaginary variation that an essence may be intuited. Imaginary variation is a process that concerns both the poet and the reader. Butler writes in Natanson's *Bird*, that the phenomenologist "seeks to know" the

object not as “a list of its features or the variety of its forms, but what persists as an ideal unity in the course of imaginary variations, something which is called its ‘essence’” (xi). A poet concerned with phenomenology will take an object and not merely focus on the one form it can take but through the *forms* it can take. The goal is to influence the reader to see the “thing” in a new way, relieve the “thing” from its ordinary existence. Again in “Mazatlan: Sea,” Creeley writes, “They all walk by / on the beach, / large, or little, / crippled, on the face / of the earth” (158). The principle object that appears in the first line is “They.” In this line “they” are simply walking by. However, in the second line Creeley places “they” on the beach. In the third he describes them as “large, or little.” In the fourth, quite unexpectedly, they are suddenly “crippled.” The reader is startled by the word and seeing the object in this new way. The final association is “on the face / of the earth.” In the last lines of the stanza the reader learns that what is really being contemplated is not a simple walk on the beach but the existence of all people as their representants walk on “the face of the earth.” Each line, then, represents one step in the imaginary variation. Creeley’s use of imaginary variation has taken a simple “they” and made the reader see “they” in a very different, profound way, connecting a walk on the beach with existence itself. Thus the goal is not simply to layer emotion, but to take the object to places it might never be without the writing of the poem. As writes Natanson, “In the realm of essence, possibility is king” (60). It is thus through the exploration of the possibilities of objects, words, and experiences that lead the poet through the writing of the poem. The poem, then, is organized not so much by the poet but through the process of the poet listening and responding to experience.

One aspect the poet must listen to for a poem to come to form is rhythm. Charles O. Hartman focuses on rhythm as the organizational method for free verse in his book *Free Verse An Essay on Prosody*. Hartman writes, "A poem is the language of an act of attention" (12). This "attention" requires both writer and reader to share an approach. Each must come to the poem with the same willingness to pay attention, a more scrutinizing and active attention than when approaching prose. Several other assumptions can be made. First, calling the poem an "act of *attention*" implies that writing and reading a poem are temporal experiences. The experience of writing and reading a poem is temporal, as is the experience found within the poem, rendered into language. Also, by calling a poem "the language of an *act*," Hartman is proposing that the poem is a languaging of experience. This is, of course, Ezra Pound's notion of the poetic fact, which is an occurrence, a moment in time. Hartman writes, "The dynamic relations among things constitute the Image, and the 'poetic fact' is above all a process, objects *acting* on one another" (13?). The poetic fact pre-exists, is *pre-existing*. Thus, it too is temporal. The poem begins before the poem is rendered into language and continues after. It is an experience that *joins all the people and objects involved at one point along a time continuum*. First, there is the poem waiting to be rendered into language. Second, there is the poet writing the poem. Third, there is the reader reading the poem. Fourth, there are the experiences that the reader is led toward during *and after* she/he has read the poem. Each part of the poetic process is an acting, a transferring of energy. The text, as the manifestation of the energy of the poetic fact, serves as the focal point of attention for the writer and reader. Thus, "the poem serves as the matrix for both their acts of attention" (12). Phenomenologically, an act of attention necessarily involves

the body because, as Husserl states, “All things are oriented to the body,” the body is always in relation to other things, also, all acts are experienced through the body (144). When Hartman states that prosody is “the poet’s method of controlling the reader’s temporal experience of the poem, especially his attention to that experience,” he means that the poet can influence how the reader *reads* the poem – the poet influences the poetic experience (13). Phenomenology posits that all experiences are experienced through the body, and this means the poet influences the poetic experience by influencing the body. Moreover, the poetic experience does not end when the reader is done reading the poem – the body takes the poetic experience with her/him into other experiences. As experience is corporeal, it is also temporal. Thus the poet is responsible for recreating the temporal experience on the page. Hartman posits that it is rhythm that accomplishes this recreation. Hartman defines rhythm in this manner: “Rhythm, in poetry, is the temporal distribution of the elements of language” (14). While all language has rhythm, the rhythm in poetry is a deliberate method of organizing. As readers, we pay more attention to the rhythm in poetry because we assume there is something deliberate about it; rhythm will somehow contribute to the overall feeling or meaning of a poem. It is this “system of rhythmic organization,” as Hartman contends, that controls both the poet’s construction of the poem and the reader’s reading of it (14). It is meter that establishes this regularity. However, it is the rhythm opposed to the regular meter that acts against that regularity. This is Hartman’s counterpoint. As Hartman contends, two lines that seem to mirror each other may vary a great deal rhythmically. In the following couplet from “The Traveller” Creeley writes, “Upon his shoulders / he places boulders, / upon his eye / the high wide sky” (5-8). The first two lines contain five syllables, and the stressed

and unstressed syllables fall in the same pattern in both lines. Yet while lines seven and eight each have four syllables, line eight ends with a stress on each of the final three words. A different scansion will take away from the intention of the poet, and will change the meaning of the poem. It is rhythm not meter that accounts for these differences. Thus, according to Hartman, while rhythm is the “what,” the element of organization, counterpoint is the “how,” or the mode of organization.

It is Hartman’s contention that “multiple rhythmic patterns – not all of them metrical and perhaps none – can coexist within a given passage of verse” (25). Sometimes the rhythmic patterns reinforce each other and other times they conflict with each other. Hartman defines the tension created by multiple rhythmic patterns in free verse that stand in conflict of one another as “counterpoint” (25). Robert Creeley’s “Boat” will illustrate this concept. This short poem of four couplets is similar rhythmically through the first two couplets: “Rock me, boat. / Open, open. / Hold me, / little cupped hand” (1-4). In the first lines of both couplets there are monosyllabic words, each of which receives a stress. In the second lines of each (lines 2 and 4) there is the addition of two syllable words: open and little. Though line one ends with a period and line three ends with a comma, the effect is similar, each punctuation mark enforces a pause. However, both couplets end with a period in the second line, establishing closure. The third couplet is noticeably different, however, both rhythmically and visually. The couplet begins, “Let me come in,”(5). This line of four syllables does not close the couplet, as in couplets one and two, but rather opens couplet three. Also, line six contains only two syllables, without any punctuation at the end of the line: “come on” (6). Couplet three thus begins differently than the previous two couplets and does not

have their same sense of closure. This couplet is more a continuing stanza, moving into the final couplet: “board you, sail / off, *sail off*. ” (7-8) This final couplet begins with the same rhythm as the first couplet: “Rock me, boat.” With the established rhythmic and visual pattern established in the first two couplets, the third couplet startles the reader Creeley keeps the lines visually similar by using a couplet, but because the couplet begins with a different rhythmical pattern than the previous couplets, and is visually different with the omission of the period in the second line, the reader feels two effects taking place at once. Thus, there is continuity, and there is variance. Visually, the reader knows something has changed. Upon reading, the content matches the effect. The rhythm is disrupted using counterpoint. Of course there are many ways to establish counterpoint, and various ways of looking at counterpoint in general. But it is the establishment of rhythm that brings the reader into that act of attention. As Robert Hass contends, the act of attention is biological, and if it is biological, it is phenomenological.

In his essay “Listening and Making,” Robert Hass speaks to Hartman’s notion of rhythm as an integral part of the prosody of free verse. He writes, “It is listening that I am interested in – in writers and readers – and the kind of making that can come from live, attentive listening” (Hass 109). This is comparable to Hartman’s notion of reading and writing a poem as an act of attention. Hass argues that, “rhythm is at least partly a psychological matter;” and thus, speaking phenomenologically, if it involves the mind, remember, it must involve the body, because the brain is embodied (106). Rhythm, for Hass, has three phases. The first he deems “attentive consciousness” (113). He writes, “We attend to a rhythm almost instinctively, listen to it for a while, and, if we decide it has no special significance for us, we can let it go; or put it away, not hearing it again

unless it alters, signaling to us [.] that something in the environment is changed” (113)

Poetry inspires this same “attentive consciousness,” as it calls on the reader to look for patterns through rhythm. Phase two is “recurrence and variation,” wherein “Repetition makes us feel secure and variation makes us feel free” (115) For instance, Robert Creeley uses repetition and variation in “For Somebody’s Marriage”: “All night in a thoughtful / mood, she / resigned herself to a / conclusion—heretofore / rejected ..” Lines one through five comprise one full sentence and move smoothly with long phrases in between punctuation Yet as the second sentence begins there is a noticeable change in rhythm: “She woke lonely, / she had slept well” (5-8). The use of two phrases in succession that sound similar, each of which contains four syllables with a similar stress pattern, creates a different cadence than the first sentence; the line is inward-driven and much faster. As the line continues, Creeley slows down the pace visually and rhythmically by using the word “yet” (8). The word lingers alone in the margin visually and, because it is monosyllabic, the rhythm is immediately disrupted The inward-driven pace is stopped by this single word The reader knows both visually and rhythmically that there is a change This, of course, leads to the third phase of rhythm that is closure. Closure comes because the reader is familiar with the form and then listens for that form to change. Hass contends that, “what gives the passage the articulation of form is the pattern of pauses and stresses” (121). He believes, as do I, that the poem must “find its way” through variation in rhythm to this sense of closure The first stanzas of Creeley’s “Kitchen,” for instance, contain a single sentence comprised of four lines The first lines are also similar in content and rhythm: “The light in the morning” and “In the silence now” (1,5) The first contains six syllables and the second five, but the final stanza is

comprised of only three lines, the first of which contains seven syllables disbursed between only two words: “PerPETually SWEEping / this ROOM, I WANT it / to BE like it WAS” (9-11) The first line ends on an unstressed syllable that pushes into the next line, as does the unstressed syllable in the second line. The combination of enjambment and unstressed syllables makes it feel like the poem should continue, but the final syllable is stressed. It is an obvious contrast to the two previous lines that end on unstressed syllables. Ending on a stressed syllable brings emphasis to the word “was.” Thus the last line feels like a final statement. The reader experiences a sense of closure because the line, with five monosyllabic words, is noticeably different. Indeed, rearrangement of the lines would change the stress pattern of the poem, the rhythm, and the overall meaning. A poem that ends, “Perpetually sweeping / this room, I want it / to be like it was” is very different from one which ends, “I want it / to be like it was / perpetually sweeping / this room.” As Hass observes, “A poet in a poem is searching for the one thing to be said, or the many things to be said one way. As soon as we start talking about alternative possibilities of form, we find ourselves talking about alternative contents” (126). Hass agrees with Hartman that lines are not broken arbitrarily and that the rhythm of a free verse poem is what gives it its form. Though they use different terms, they both point to rhythm and lineation as essential means of organizing the experience of the poem, both of which, phenomenologically speaking, are experienced corporeally and temporally.

This kind of agreement is what helps establish a phenomenological prosody for examining the poetics of Robert Creeley. For Hartman, Hass and me, both reader and poet share important phenomenological characteristics that influence their poetic experience.

CHAPTER III

CONTINUUM: CREELEY'S PHENOMENOLOGICAL POETICS

If, as Creeley repeatedly insists, his writing rejects the kind of ordering which demands traditional thematic and formal interpretations, his critics must find ways of placing the work by tracing the modes of thinking he depends upon and extends

Charles Altieri, in "Placing Creeley's Recent Work
A Poetics of Conjecture"

Let me put it baldly The two halves are
the HEAD, by way of the EAR, to the SYLLABLE
the HEART, by way of the BREATH, to the LINE

Charles Olson "Projective Verse"

There is no reality which would not have a temporal location or locations

Jan Patocka, *Introduction to Husserl's Phenomenology*

In "Massachusetts" Robert Creeley writes, "You place yourself in / such relation, you hear / everything that's said" (4-6) Creeley's poetry is about many things, but one thing all of his poems share is a concern with being in relation to something – an object, a place, a person. Thus to explore the poetics of Robert Creeley, consider the poet and the poem as being in a particular kind of *relationship*, each an object in an object-filled world. Now add the reader to the relationship. Since the poem is experienced through our bodies and because our bodies are never in stasis, the poem is also never in stasis. The creative act is not so much a singular act as an interrelated *acting* The poem

becomes, quite literally, an experiencing, and all that experiencing entails. Creeley takes into account the movement of a corporeal and temporal artist through a corporeal and temporal world, a world wherein the artist is simply an object acting continuously in relation to other objects. As writes Charles Olson in *Human Universe and Other Essays*, “the writer, though he is in control (or art is nothing) is, still, no more than—but just as much as—another ‘thing,’ and as such, is in, inside or out” (78). The poet, the poem, the reader, are all related points along a phenomenological continuum. The poem, then, can be said to be the manifestation of the energy created when these points meet. It is the poet’s job to recreate experience and sustain the energy through each line of the poem that began with her/his meeting the other important parts of the poetic process.

The Approach

To examine Robert Creeley’s body of work is a daunting and mesmerizing task. What unites the collections, however, is a *getting at something* that energizes the work. Creeley startles with his form. What is at first neat and tidy is suddenly pushed to the edge of the page, or back around on itself—a constant unfolding, a giant Möbius strip of words. There are poems in one collection comprised of short stanzas amidst others comprised of couplets. There are poems that rhyme line by line amidst those that seem an outright protest against any type of uniformity. This apparent lack of consistent form, I contend, is actually a realization of form. The words themselves are what Creeley relies upon for form. Thus, no poem will be like any other because the words used determine the context. Creeley is neither master nor slave to words. He is, rather, in collusion with them, establishing a unique, fruitful, and always surprising partnership.

In addition, while Creeley is in relationship with words, he is also in relationship with other poets. Among those who inspire Creeley's form is William Carlos Williams. As notes Paul Mariani in "Fire of a Very Real Order: Creeley and Williams," when Creeley wrote a letter to Williams on the subject of form, Williams responded that "Bad art is [...] that which does not serve in the continual service of cleansing the language of all fixations upon dead, stinking dead, usages of the past" (Williams, as quoted in Mariani 176). Creeley's attention to the words themselves shows that this idea served as continued inspiration. Mariani comments that the poetics "focused on a language rinsed as much as possible of its literary associations, an anti-Symbolist stance, the words sharp, distinctive, denotative, their energies supplied by their specific context and space" (176). Even so, Williams, like Mariani, called Creeley "unformed" (180). This is not the case. Form is not so much made as form *happens* in a Creeley poem. In an interview with Daniel Cane in *What is Poetry: Conversations with the American Avant-Garde*, Creeley states that, "poetry is also a structure of words, or better put, a construction of words. And whatever one may have meant the construction to mean or say, the experience of others will also be a large factor in the stabilization of such meaning" (60). Creeley inspires the reader to see objects in new ways because he uses words in new ways to create the frame of experience. Creeley makes each of us take a second look at the apple on the table, at the shadow on the wall, at the sign along the road, because of the context within which he places each; ordinary objects become extraordinary. The poems thus work on the page and *in the mind* of the reader. Active participation on the part of poet and reader is necessary. In order for the poems to point in new directions, the reader must use imagination. Moreover, Creeley's words construct a frame. Within that frame, he allows

room for both his own imagination and the reader's. This framework certainly implies a certain point of view, as any frame supplies a context through which one looks, or reads. Thus, it can be said that, at least to a certain extent, Creeley's view becomes the reader's view. However, within the frame is often a rather open canvas, allowing for the extension of Creeley's views when met with the reader's views. Each collection, therefore, somehow points to every other, is an extension of consciousness, both Creeley's and the reader's, rather than a separate entity, standing alone. The world is truly at work, and Creeley is open enough to see it, meet it, join in its dance.

This dance that often receives the most scrutiny. Critics of Creeley's work as far back as the 1970s have contended that his poetry is, as Charles Altieri posits, "A Poetics of Conjecture" (1978). Creeley himself stated that, "I like those [poems] best, in a way where you posit a problem and see how much energy you can generate for it to survive as a question [...] Conjecture is a great word. Olson really dug it" and "I'm interested primarily in questions of thinking" (As quoted in Altieri 518). Creeley's thinking, like Husserl's, relies upon an irreality: a reality that is dependent upon both the world and the subject, and one wherein consciousness is the means of exploration. Altieri is correct when he explains that, "When the goal is no longer to make single structures for experience, it becomes possible to shift one's emphasis from what the mind can do to what is available in the mind in a given occasion" (525). Creeley's poems, as poems of conjecture, are often thought too subjective, especially when the poems are seen within a context. Robert von Hallberg writes in "Robert Creeley and the Pleasures of System," for instance, "Creeley's poems generally seem timeless in a simple sense: when they refer to a context, it is often so personal as to be beyond reach" (371). Thus, for von Hallberg,

the context, when given, is usually too personal, too subjective. Yet for myself, the context is the mixture of the highly personal and the abstract. In other words, Creeley uses a kind of subjectivity that is both useful and deliberate. When Creeley points to specific details of his own thoughts or experiences, he brings himself into relationship with the reader's consciousness. Moreover, when Creeley omits specific details that point to specific experiences, the emphasis becomes not a specific experience but *experience*. It is the combination, at times subjective, at times abstract, that creates a compelling and intricate consciousness on the page. Altieri, who makes similar claims, is off the mark when he states that, "Creeley may by nature be condemned to joining a company of writers so distrustful of illusion they deprive their work of the fully developed dramatic situations necessary for complete involvement" (519). Creeley is distrustful of illusion, but not of imagination. In fact, it is imagination that he seems to trust above all else. His perception is linked to it. Those "fully developed dramatic situations," as Altieri puts it, will not often allow the reader to experience the poem as if it is her/his own, relating the poem to her/his experience (s). The poem is an experience in itself. Creeley goes to great lengths to make sure each poem is not merely about the experience of the writer alone, placing him among those poets who trust that the reader should and will involve her/his imagination: Pound, Olson, Williams. To fully develop a dramatic situation is to point to one specific experience. However, Creeley's poetry allows the words to play, the words point to other words, and the words to point to other experiences. Indeed, Creeley is notorious for writing poems about personal experiences but leaving out specific references. In this way, the subject of the poem is the poem itself, the experience of the words, the experience of thinking about the words and letting

them exist as they are. It is the relationship between the world, the poet, the poem, and the *words themselves* that charges Creeley's work.

Of course, a poetics about relationships is nothing new—think Projective Verse. Projective verse is both an approach and a method. The approach is inspired by Charles Olson's notion of history. For Olson, the word "history" is problematic. He writes in "The Special View of History" that history expresses what man does, not what man is. Olson states:

The condition of man is a continuum we hereby declare to be called as it has always been meant, history. It means "knowing": Hister. Find out what it's about. Can one offer a determinative more exact to that which any one of us is impelled to do without any choice in the matter? That is, otherwise one is forced to talk about "life." But it has never been a satisfactory word because it means what nature offers, not what man DOES. One can indeed live. But curiosity? It is only satisfied by the creation of the history of one's self. What makes us to want to, a Lady asked me. It is what I mean by no choice. History is to want to. It is the built-in (28)

The focus on the metaphysical Being is particularly problematic for Olson because existence does not take into account the corporeal and temporal structure of human beings. As writes William V. Spanos in "Charles Olson and Negative Capability: A Phenomenological Interpretation" (1980), history represents "the interpretive process understood as the ontological priority of temporality over Being: the process of opening out into depth of dis-covering: aletheia, as Heidegger puts it, the on-going

phenomenological bringing out of hiddenness that the metaphysical habit over-looks, forgets, alienates” (71). For Olson, if the state of Being takes precedence over being, then human beings are taken out of the world. Our existence, in other words, is more important than existing. Olson, with his Projective Verse, brought the focus back to living in a corporeal and temporal world within corporeal and temporal structures. Projective Verse was what was necessary for poetry to move forward, and to keep on moving as man moves.

It was with projective verse, then, that poetry began to pay attention to more than the breath of human beings, but to all mind and body movements. In his essay “Projective Verse,” Charles Olson stresses the distinction between non-projective verse and projective verse, the first being what was done up until 1950, the latter what poetry must do after. For Olson, the next step in free verse is projective verse, which he describes as open verse, created through the “possibilities of the breath” (16). Such poetry involves not only a particular form but also a particular “stance toward reality,” which involves, as states Spanos, the “deconstructing of the metaphysical tradition” in order to “retrieve for the present a phenomenological understanding of language as the act of its occasion, as a process of discovering” (15, 41). This stance, with human beings again focused on being rather than Being, Olson proposed, would change the way things looked on the page and “lead to new poetics and to new concepts”—a new form not so much made as achieved (16). It relied on new things such as the breath, perception and consciousness for its realizations, and thus led to a poetics based on relationships. Olson proposes that what is started by Pound and Williams continues and expands through poets such as his friend Robert Creeley. In “Introduction to Robert Creeley” in *Human*

Universe, commenting on Creeley's prose, Olson contends that Creeley achieves his perspective because of his stance. He writes:

I take it that these stories are of the second way, of the writer putting himself all the way in—taking that risk, putting his head on the block, and by so doing giving you your risk, your commitment by the seriousness of his—constituting himself the going reality and, by the depth and sureness of his speculating, making it pay, making you-me believe, that we are here in the presence of a man putting his hands directly and responsibly to experience which is also our own. (128)

For Olson, Creeley's openness and willingness is what sustains the work. He continues that "It is his presence that matters, for it rids us of artifice as such (as the whole of the story), instead only uses it to keep the going going, to make the reach of what is happening clear. For his presence is the energy" (128). Creeley brings energy to the page because of his openness to experience, his willingness to see experience itself as something other than how it has been seen and rendered in the past. This openness is Husserl's intentionality: Husserl proposes, remember, that "The conditions for the possibility of knowledge are found not in the object, but in the openness of the subject to the object, an openness that is always prior to the manifestation of the world" (xiii). Creeley thus has a certain "access to the order of the world" in that he is an active participant with the world, and also with the words and readers he needs for his poetry to reach its form (xiii). The realization of form for a poet like Creeley, Olson contends, is only possible through projective verse. Altieri posits of Creeley that, "His is a poetics of conjecture rather than closure, a poetics I see as one whose aim is not so

much to interpret experience as to extend it by making a situation simply the focus for overlapping reflexive structures, ‘one again / from another one’” (518). Projective verse is phenomenological and thus is Creeley’s poetics, as Creeley’s poetics considers the poet both subject and object. The poem, the words that comprise the poem, and the reader also all function as subjects and objects. As with the objects in the world, each object is a unique and essential component of making meaning in Creeley’s poetic world and beyond. Projective verse, then, is both a type of poetry and a particular approach.

Olson stresses three important characteristics in his definition of projective verse. The first characteristic is energy. Though the poem is certainly a physical, tangible, object, it is *beyond* inanimate because of what the poem *is* and *does*. Because the world is experience, and the poet is trying to convey experience, then the poem itself carries with it the energy taken by the poet from the experience to make the experience tangible on the page. Olson writes that first there is “the *kinetics* of the thing. A poem is energy transferred from where the poet got it (he will have some several causations), by way of the poem itself to, all the way over to, the reader. Okay. Then the poem itself must, at all points, be a high energy-construct and, at all points, an energy-discharge” (16). If the purpose of the poet is to convey an experience in the world, then the poet must take into account a world that is an ever-changing, always moving object. It is thus accurate to discuss the “world of the poem” as though the poem is an individual entity. However, the world of the poem is also no less than, and is an extension of, the world itself. Each world, in phenomenological terms, is an extension of consciousness. As writes Husserl, “For to be aware of life as the horizon of knowledge means to recognize as one’s own precisely the general movement of revealing the order of the world” (xi). The poet’s

purpose is to reveal the order of the world. In this manner, Creeley's poems become not only about Creeley's world, but about the world itself. This apparent lack of exclusive subjectivity is what Creeley relies upon for the poems to work, without the reader, the poem is nothing. Creeley discusses this notion with Daniel Kane in *What is Poetry*. Creeley states that "The Mirror" is about the genocide in Rwanda, though the poem makes no specific reference to the event. Creeley states, "In retrospect, I don't think referring specifically to Rwanda would make the poem say more, so to speak—the context is finally a daily one for any of us" (58). Even some of his poems that appear to be completely personal are open on the page. A poem such as "Bresson's Movies" is less about the movies themselves than about what the movies have revealed to Creeley. He writes,

Yet another film / of Bresson's has the / aging Lancelot with his /
awkward armor standing / in a woods, of small trees/ dazed, bleeding,
both he / and his horse are, / trying to get back to / the castle, itself of / no
great size. It / moved me, that / life was after all / like that. / You are / in
love. You stand / in the woods, with / a horse, bleeding (280)

Poems such as these are created with what Husserl deems transcendental subjectivity, a way of perceiving that goes beyond the reality of the thing (in this case, a movie) to its meaning as an experience. He writes, "the meaningfulness of experience can be reduced to a pure, transcendental subjectivity; that the meaning of all that is, even of the horizon in which anything that is manifests itself, can be grasped solely from the standpoint of subjectivity" (xii). If the perceiver, in this case Creeley, is open to the experience, then that experience will manifest both as a particular experience in the consciousness of the

perceiver and as an experience that reveals something about the world itself. Again, the purpose of the poet is to reveal the order of the world.

Olson's second characteristic of projective verse is borrowed from Creeley:

"...the principle, the law which presides conspicuously over such composition, and, when obeyed, is the reason why a projective poem can come into being. It is this: FORM IS NEVER MORE THAN AN EXTENSION OF CONTENT" (16). Since the poem consists of words, the words themselves provide a kind of spacial, mental, and aural structure. The poem, as an extension of the poet's consciousness, is always an object that is present in consciousness prior to the writing of the poem. The poem itself is a context, then, an object among objects in and of the world. Any context, states Dodd, the editor of *Husserl's Phenomenology*, "is nothing over and above the thing, but intrinsic to it, to have something to do with something, to handle it or understand it, is to always be at the same time moving in the horizon of its significance" (xiv). The objects of the world are always held in relation to other objects; in this way, our consciousness is a context. Thus the poem as object, and those objects in the poem, are held in relation. If, as Olson contends, the content of the poem is what gives the poem its form, then the form is realized only because the content reflects objects in relationship. The words in a poem work in relation to each other. Moreover, the words, holding the energy of experience, are carried by the poet to the page. Moreover, the words also contain energy; the English language operates in reference to temporal structures. Verb tenses, for instance, indicate time and space. With "The Rescue," Creeley creates a poem that has corporeal and temporal structure by using particular words. He writes, "A house is burning in the sand. / A man and horse are burning. / The wind is burning. / They are running to arrive" (13-

16). The repetition of the word “burning” creates a relationship between objects that would not ordinarily be present. Certainly the house, man and horse can physically burn; this is not a leap. Yet it is the use of repetition that allows for “The wind is burning”

(16). Also, it is the repetition of the “ing” verbs in the final stanza that moves the poem.

The verbs place these objects in time and space; and because the poem ends with “ing” verbs, it is as if the poem continues beyond the words themselves, beyond the page.

Form happens on the page, therefore, because of the words themselves, and it is the reader who reads the words, bringing the words an aural, moving presence. The poem achieves structure as the poet uses words and allows the words to direct the poem. Also, the reader brings breath and consciousness to the page. This all requires, as Olson would note, energy. The energy transferred in the relationships between poet, words, and reader is responsible for shaping the poem.

This shaping Olson deems the process of the poem, and he explains that the third premise of projective verse is, “the *process* of the thing, how the principle can be made so to shape the energies that the form is accomplished. And I think it can be boiled down to one statement (first pounded into my head by Edward Dahlberg): ONE PERCEPTION MUST IMMEDIATELY AND DIRECTLY LEAD TO A FURTHER PERCEPTION”

(16-17) In this manner, the words in the poem point to other words, the relationships created move the reader through the poem. A poem works because the form sustains energy. Olson’s notion is that, because the poem is a kind of consciousness, the poem must always be moving as consciousness is always moving. Or, as Husserl explains, “An experience is a reference to a further experience” (163). Consciousness operates by continually pointing, connecting previous experiences to new ones. In “Supper,” Creeley

writes, “Time’s more than / twilight mother at / the kitchen table over / meal the boiled potatoes / Theresa’s cooked with meat” (303). The title “Supper” unifies the single experience, but Creeley demonstrates that the one experience is full of many perceptions. Creeley further emphasizes the necessity of perception as a leading force by not using punctuation. Each perception runs into the next so quickly it is difficult to discern one perception from another. The energy of perception is what moves the reader through the poem. Creeley remarkably sustains this kind of energy in a much longer poem, “There Is.” Again, the poem is a single sentence but not a single perception. He writes,

There is / as we go we / see there / is a hairy / hole there is / a darkness ex-
 / panded by / there is a / sense of some / imminence imman- / ence there is
 / a subject placed / by the verb a / conjunction coord- / inate lines / a graph
 of indeterminate / feelings there is / sorry for itself / lonely generally /
 unhappy in its / circumstances (98)

Again, Creeley uses repetition, this time the phrase “There is,” to move the poem forward. The verb “is,” like the previous “ing,” connects disparate perceptions, bringing each into relationship with the next. Creeley also divides words between lines; there is no single perception that manifests entirely in one line. In this manner, the perceptions are even more rushed and also interrelated. Because it comprises one sentence, the experience is singular, but there are many perceptions that comprise this single experience.

Thus, what is paramount in Robert Creeley’s poetics is his approach to life and to the page. Consciousness is the beginning and the perpetual vehicle through which the poems move. Writes Olson, “It is human phenomenology which is reinherited, allowed

in, once plot is kissed out. For the moment you get a man back in, among things, the full motion and play comes back (not parts extricated for show or representation) but the total bearing, each moment of the going—as it is, for any of us, each moment, anywhere”

(128). The poem does not begin with Creeley; rather, the poem, as pre-existing, is moving through him and beyond him. The reader is a vital part of this experience, but not the end of that experience. As previously noted, Creeley considers poetry a construction of words. Thus, his poetics is about new worlds, new realities, as the world of the poem is encountered by the reader. Creeley further states in *What is Poetry*, “I’d agree with Williams that ‘A new world is only a new mind,’ that what one calls ‘imagination’ is the means by which we experience ‘reality,’ any reality” (59). Husserl too believes that it is in imagination where true perception, and thus meaning, lies. For him, the order of the world will only be revealed to one who lives as a kind of perpetual child, looking with the openness and willingness to see things as they are and as they could be.

The Line

As experience is rendered on the page, it is the line that gets, as Olson states in his essay “Projective Verse,” “the attention, the control, that it is right here, in the line, that the shaping takes place, each moment of the going” (19). However, this control, as stated previously, is not a kind of tyrannical control on the part of the poet. Rather, Olson means the line is where it all happens: the breath, the rhythm, the form. Though neither Hartman nor Hass contend as such, I contend that much of what Hartman and Hass have to say on the line lead one back to Olson’s projective verse: that is, the line pulls the

reader into a kind of attentive consciousness, and the poet uses the line as a way to organize rhythm and breath. For Olson, this kind of attention is rendered by the poet through her/his own listening. The line is thus comprised of units, the syllables. The poet begins by listening, and Olson's credo, "the HEAD, by way of the EAR, to the SYLLABLE / the HEART, by way of the BREATH, to the LINE," holds true in phenomenological terms (19). All human beings, including the poet, hear syllable by syllable not word by word, and this is an important distinction. It is not merely the words themselves, therefore, that comprise the form but the syllables within the words. A word is made up of individual units of sound. The sounds of the words make a poem line by line because, for Olson, these units of sound are first in the mind of the poet. He writes, "I am dogmatic, that the head shows in the syllable. The dance of the intellect is there, among them, prose or verse" (19). The syllable is the smallest unit that shows the mind working. Therefore, contends Olson, the syllable is showing what the mind *does* (19). A projective verse poem establishes a balance between the various actions of the mind. Writes Olson, "I take it that PROJECTIVE VERSE teaches, is, the lesson, that that verse will only do in which a poet manages to register both the acquisitions of his ear *and* the pressures of his breath" (17). The poet must concern her/himself with listening and speaking, only through this balance will the poem carry sufficient energy to sustain itself. If the poet is particularly concerned with sound, as is Creeley, the sounds are what lead and organize the verse. Creeley states in *What is Poetry*, "I loved the weave of such feeling in the securing and locating sounds and rhythms. Eliot and Longfellow, all the same! I guess that if I needed to choose one precept that most served my senses of poetry over the years, it would be Pound's injunction: 'Listen to the sound that it makes!'" (64).

Eleanor Berry speaks of this in her intelligent work “The Free Verse Spectrum” (1997). She writes, “It is the relation to phonological phrasing, rather than to syntax, that determines whether or not we feel a line as enjambed, fragmented, or both, and, if so, how strongly” (886). For Hartman and Hass, the line is a series of sounds that produce rhythm, and the rhythm produced by the sounds is what projects the line forward, pushes it back, etc. Creeley, since he depends upon listening, knows the line shapes through the listening act. In phenomenological terms, listening is an active, temporal and corporeal experience. As would note Husserl, one listening experience for the poet (and the reader, of course) necessarily leads to the next listening experience.

The line is also where the poet meets the reader. Creeley’s lines range in length and breath, but the variation is less an experiment in the line and more the realization of the line. That is, as previously stated, Creeley allows the words to shape the context and the reader to shape the experience. Louise M. Rosenblatt articulates this notion in *The Reader, The Text, The Poem* when she contends that, “the text is the stimulus that focuses the reader’s attention so that the elements of past experience—concepts linked with verbal symbols—are activated” (11). This, of course, reminds one of Hartman and Hass, but it also adds another element—the idea that verbal symbols, the words and the syllables that comprise the words, are connected to experiences. Sound itself constitutes an experience. As sounds gather they necessarily refer to other sounds. Words sound like other words, since the English language is made up of a particular, engrained set of phonemes. As the poems are formed through listening, Creeley’s poems pay particular attention to syllabication. In a poem such as “Eight,” for instance, Creeley writes, “Oct- / ag- / on- / al” (30-33). It can be argued that the syllables are divided appropriately, and

this alone, given Creeley's poetics, accounts for the line breaks. However, this does not take into account the particular sounds made by each of these syllables. The sounds are startling, even funny, once the word is divided, because one does not usually put such exaggerated stress on each syllable of any given word. The sounds produced in this final stanza of "Eight" also have a particular feel. The syllables are guttural, become savage-like utterances, in a poem about the order that numbers lend to the world. The sounds are thus juxtaposed with the content and other lines in the poem. The syllables, then, carry the weight of both sound and breath and, as the syllables compile, the emerging context. Eleanor Berry makes a similar observation about Creeley's "Walking," when she states that, "The poem's tidy appearance makes it seem more like something made than something said, as if Creeley were, in Ammons's phrase, 'speaking things / not words'" (893). The poem looks like a made object, yes, but given Creeley's attention to sound, his poetics is aural, and thus his poems are meant to be read aloud, to be spoken. The fragmented lines, "In my head I am / walking but I am not / in my head," also comprise fragmented sounds. In this way, the poem, and all Creeley poems, are objects of sound. Lineation, for Creeley, is accomplished through the listening act. The sounds themselves are, of course, made with the breath, and this returns to the body as locus of orientation.

Breathing during the reading of any poem draws the reader's attention to her/his body. However, during the reading of a Creeley poem, this experience becomes particularly intense because of his focus on the minutiae of the syllable. While reading most poems, the reader will notice physiological changes such as a change in heart rate or breath as the lines unfold and different contexts are created by the diction and content. This is certainly true of a Creeley poem, but the reader may also experience a

physiological or mental change with each syllable rather than with each line or stanza.

The cadence of a Creeley poem puts the reader in touch with each syllable and each breath that comes with it; it is the physical reading of the poem, in addition to the content, that inspires these physiological changes in the reader. While all poems rely upon words to inspire changes in the reader's physiological and mental state, Creeley's poems pay particular attention to the syllabic formation of sounds, and thus because the syllables may be divided in unusual ways, or may point in unusual directions, the reader becomes aware of her/his body with each syllable. Breath in a Creeley poem, then, provides not only the cadence but also the physiological response in the reader. Each breath involves bodily exertion. In short, the influence of the breath allows Creeley to inspire and create energy. When the reader reads in "Mazatlan: Sea," "The sea flat out, / the light far out," the lines are more fluid than "the / blobs of dark clouds / seem closer" (1-5). Lines that are not enjambed, like those in lines 1-2, feel smoother, more flowing to the reader than lines that are enjambed, like those in 3-5. Lines 3-5 are more staggered, fragmented. Moreover, each line takes a different amount of and different kind of energy to read. The comma in line one creates a natural pause, and thus a place for the second breath. The line, though an incomplete sentence, feels complete because of the pause. The pause makes the line feel finished, and line two therefore feels like a separate thought, not a continuation. However, in lines 3-5, because of their fragmentation, the reader takes breaths in awkward places, after "the" and "clouds," both of which are in the middle of the sentence. Lines 1-2 are read comfortably while lines 3-5 create discomfort. Because the breath is different, the emotion is different. Thus, if one thinks of the line as an energy transaction, as Olson contends, then it is through the breath that the poet controls

how much and how little energy is expended, and this energy creates emotion. Creeley not only influences the bodily experience of the overall poem, but the body's direct, immediate experience. When Creeley writes an entire poem comprised of one sentence without punctuation, as in "Shadow" for instance, he is telling the reader not only how to read the poem but how to feel during the reading of the poem. Creeley uses breath as more than just physiological activity. Rather, breath is emotion.

In his preface to *Robert Creeley Selected Poems*, Creeley writes, "It was also Ezra Pound who first impressed me with his emphasis, 'Only emotion endures'" (xix). It is lineation that allows the poet to inspire an emotional response. Different line breaks inspire different emotion. Moreover, in a Creeley poem, different syllabication means an entirely different line which, in turn, equals different emotion. Creeley builds his lines syllable by syllable, and the reader, too, feels this physiological and emotional layering. It is not just the content the reader feels, but the effort it took to break apart words and put them back together again. When one reads Creeley's work throughout the fourteen collections that comprise *Selected Poems*, it is clear that the process is what unites the collections. In the same fashion he gathers syllables, Creeley gathers particular poems together for *Selected Poems*, and, in this way, again helps to make their meaning. In *Selected Poems*, Creeley shows that the collections both stand alone as singular entities, but also function together. The collections, in short, are united by a common phenomenological poetics. Phenomenological elements are found throughout the collections, including intentionality, a focus on corporeality and temporality, imaginary variation, and essence. These elements are especially evident in *For Love, A Day Book, Mirrors* and *It*

Uniting the Collections

Subjects, for Creeley, are neither made nor found. Rather, subjects emerge through the process of writing a poem. To appreciate Creeley's body of work, one must distance her/himself from traditional notion of subject, for traditional subjects are not what unite these collections, nor will the emergence of a so-called subjects give rise to reader satisfaction. Instead, it is the process through which the poems emerge that brings disparate thoughts into relationship with one another. In short, to find a common thread throughout Creeley's work, look to the page itself to find how the thoughts arise, how the emotion persists, and how the poem unfolds.

In *For Love*, for instance, the reader must read the entire poem for the emotion to reveal itself. These are not poems of overstatement, or obvious emotion about the situation. While the poems are often dedicated to specific people, such as "Le Fou," written for Charles Olson, Creeley's emotion is not immediately obvious. However, abstract, seemingly cold observations about lines and breaths and beats become emotional, intimate, when Creeley writes, "I mean, graces come slowly, / it is that way" (32). It is not only using the poetic process but thinking about the poetic process that brings Creeley to this revelation about poetry, and about his friend. In "The Rescue," the emotion also unfolds late in the poem. What seems pure observation, "the man sits in a timelessness," becomes suddenly passionate when Creeley adds in the final stanza, "A man and horse are burning" (78). The emotional urgency in the final lines depends upon the slow moving, and seemingly unrelated, observations in the previous lines. Moreover, both "Le Fou" and "The Rescue" have lines that move both inward and outward. There is an internal tug as the lines move toward and away from each other, much like the real

struggle for and with emotions. Though the poems look quite different on the page, similar things occur in terms of emotion, use of punctuation or lack thereof, and phenomenological elements. In both “Le Fou” and “The Rescue,” it is essence that is being explored. Creeley explores the essence of Charles Olson’s technique in one and the essence of time in the other.

Similar explorations take place in *A Day Book*. The poem “Do you think ..,” or “the apple poem” as I’ve come to call it, was the impetus for this thesis. In “Do you think...” Creeley uses Husserl’s imaginary variation to illustrate how the thinking process unfolds. Creeley’s contemplation on the page leads him to propose startling questions about the essence of apples and love and even breath itself. However, “Do you think...” is not just about questions. The poem also considers the act of questioning itself, and how questioning leads to more questions, and thus more questioning. In this poem, Creeley exhibits some uncertainty, the open-ended asking of the world to show itself, as recommends Husserl’s phenomenology. There are many stresses on airy vowel sounds to mirror this positive feeling, and often it is the stress pattern itself that Creeley uses to establish both rhythm and meaning in the poem; but the poem does not wait for answers. The poem is not limp or weak, despite its questions. Instead, the lines push forward, backward, into the page and off the page. There is an internal energy of the mind at work, propelling line after line to its fruition. Moreover, as in *For Love*, also created is the energy of emotion. Though this poem explores the thinking process, it is not merely cerebral. With the use of longer and longer lines, Creeley considers the emotional chaos that emerges when one deals with unsatisfying and unfruitful thoughts. Though the

images, apples on tables, lovers in and out of love, seem to be unrelated, Creeley trusts the images, and the relationship between them, because of the thinking process, and of the poetic process, from which the associations result. The brain leaps and Creeley follows, both in content and form. By the final stanza, the reader has taken a journey with Creeley, that sheds light on the reader's own struggle with the thinking process. As with *For Love*, the poems in *A Day Book* take time to reveal their true intentions, and overall shape.

This exploration of the cognitive process continues in *Mirrors* and *It*. In "Shadow," Creeley again contemplates the essence of the object, this time "shadow." By giving shadow consciousness, Creeley illustrates the similarities between the shadow and the artist. Shadows, for Creeley, go far beyond mere imitation. In this poem, Creeley also uses no internal punctuation, showing both the fluidity and fragmentation of thought. Similar use of punctuation occurs in "The Edge," from *It*. "The Edge," my favorite of Creeley's poems, is written with a meticulous attention to sound and how sounds, down to the syllable, affect emotion. He also varies sentence structure and punctuation so as to be familiar to the reader, and yet strange. In "The Edge," Creeley shows how cognitive processes take people in interesting directions, and how those directions are always purposeful. In all of these collections, Husserl's theories emerge. Husserl encouraged the phenomenologist to act as a perpetual beginner, always looking, again and again, with open, child-like eyes. Throughout this collection, Creeley encourages the reader to look again and again at what we thought we knew. It is Creeley's process that will grab the reader and take the reader off the page, into her/his reality. As Creeley states in the preface to *Selected Poems*, the words he uses "have no owner to finally determine them"

(xxi). Thus Creeley expects the reader to help make their meaning. As I gather poems together in this thesis, I become a necessary part of Creeley's poetic process.

It is largely Creeley's poetic process, therefore, that unites these collections. His poetic process requires thinking by using the entire body, which is precisely what Husserl encouraged people to do in order to see the world reveal itself. Creeley, as Husserl would recommend, uses the entire body to perceive. It seems his missing eye did not so much diminish his ability to see, but rather made him perceive differently, using his entire body. Unlike most people, Creeley emphasizes that to write poetry, one must really "pay attention to things" in their entirety: the way things look, the way things sound, the way things feel, taste, etc. (*Tales Out of School* 8). Also important is how sensing and experiencing leads to emotional response. Writes Paul Diel in "Literal Activity," Creeley's unique method of shaping reveals that, "The lines were also things, but they weren't predetermined. No amount of counting, be it syllables, words, stresses, feet, shaped these things. The lines were felt shapes and the line ends, instead of ending a count, created the substance of emotion. Felt shape. Substance of emotion" (337). Lines, for Creeley, are created using emotion rather than meter. What Creeley implies, then, is that acts such as listening, for instance, do not just involve one's ears. Listening, along with the other senses, is a bodily, connected experience, rather than an isolated one. He contends in an interview with John Sinclair and Robin Eichele in *Tales Out of School* that from 1946 to 1950 he was,

frankly doing almost nothing else but sitting around listening to records, which my first wife would be pleased to testify to. I listened to records. I was fascinated by them; well, first of all, not at all easily, I was fascinated

with what these people did with *time* Not to impose this kind of intellectual term upon it, as I'd question that; but I want to emphasize this was where I was hearing 'things said' in terms of rhythmic and sound possibilities. (6)

For Creeley, then, the act of listening is not just about hearing the words and what the words mean. The act is about listening to what words can do, to their possibilities.

Exploring the possibilities of words is essential to Creeley's poetic process. Possibilities are never immediately obvious but, rather, take time to reveal themselves. Creeley's poetic process throughout his body of work involves not only paying attention, but revealing what one has learned through that patient attention. Moreover, the connection Creeley makes between words and temporality indicates that he believes the listening act involves the musician and the listener within her/his own reality. It is the responsibility of the poet, then, to use words in such a way that will make the reader feel, and not only because of their meaning. Writes Diehl, "Creeley made visible for my ear what on the page my eye had seen through – the ends of lines and what that *means* to a poem" (337). Ends of lines in a Creeley poem do not, then, represent the ends of thoughts. Instead, line breaks can be thought of as exploring the possibility of words, and how words are used by their speakers/writers. Through this exploration, Creeley learns that, "it's possible to say something, you really have access to your feelings and can really use them as a demonstration of your own reality" (6). Each listening act, because it is active and not passive, involves the body. Moreover, any listening that occurs only occurs because someone is reading the poem. In this way, the reader becomes an essential component of the poetic process. Each poem throughout these collections needs a reader to bring an

intellectual, physiological and emotional consciousness to the page. As writes William Sylvester in “Robert Creeley’s Poetics: I Know that I Hear You,” “Somebody has to listen to the words for the pattern to exist. Motion and sound can be objective (thrown before) only with respect to some body, a reader of poetry” (198). Therefore, there is never only one body involved in a Creeley poem. It is obvious that the poet uses his own body to create, but Creeley also relies upon the reader to use her/his body throughout the poem. Only through the reader’s body can the energy of the poem be transferred, as posits Olson. It is this energy transfer that results in an emotional response on the part of the reader. Moreover, it is the reader, finally, who is responsible for bringing Creeley’s poetic process to light.

There are at least two bodies directly involved in each of Creeley’s poems, especially those poems I will explore in this thesis. The poem “Do you think...” is the first poem I explore in detail, as this poem began my exploration of Creeley’s phenomenological poetics. When reading the poem, I noted that both Creeley’s body and the reader’s body were essential. The questions in the poem are a product of Creeley’s brain, thus they are a concern of Creeley himself, at least to some extent, but the questions are posed to the reader, and the reader is an active participant. Moreover, the questions in the poem are not abstract, rhetorical questions. They involve Creeley’s and the reader’s material world—one both are physically involved in. Thus the poem is a test of corporeal and temporal limits, and even of cognition itself. Cognition is a process, and it is process that Creeley is concerned with. Creeley’s poetic process reveals the nature of other processes, many of which are at the core of Husserl’s phenomenology, including imagination, consciousness, intentionality, and so on. The origins of this examination

begin, in my opinion, with the modern poets, with Wallace Stevens as perhaps its finest example.

In both *The Continuity of American Poetry* (1961) by Roy Harvey Pearce and *The Later Poetry of Wallace Stevens Phenomenological Parallels with Husserl and Heidegger* (1976) by Thomas J. Hines, the writers contend that Stevens' real subject is how the mind works. Writes Pearce, "As he insisted again and again, Stevens' essential subject was the life of the imagination (sometimes he said "mind")—thus for him, the life of man" (378-79). The poem for Stevens is, therefore, only the beginning, the initial point of contact between the poet and reader. However, "the poem, the creative act, must be made continually to point beyond itself to the problems of belief which its existence raises" (380). Going a step further, Hines writes that, for Stevens, "Poetry cannot depend purely on the imagination without reality [...] nor can the poem represent reality without the imagination" (70). He continues that "the subject of poetry is not man or reality, but the process of the imagination itself" (76). Both writers posit that Stevens, and the other moderns, became fascinated with the poetic (creative) process and how this process could reveal essences. The same can be said of Creeley's poetry. Like Stevens, Creeley involves the reader in the act of interpretation, but also in the act of creating itself. Throughout Creeley's poems, especially "Do You Think...", without the reader there simply is no poem. Thus, Creeley extends the exploration begun by Stevens. Stevens' process is lush, full, step by step, while Creeley expects a bit more from the reader—trust me and move with me, is what Creeley seems to be saying. He, of course, also seems to be saying to the reader, "Trust yourself." While I do not think that Creeley had Husserl in mind necessarily, nor phenomenology, I do contend that his concerns are similar to

Stevens and, therefore, to Husserl's. Unlike critics such as Charles Altieri, who claim that Creeley has a profound distrust of the world, for me, Creeley trusts the world, as does Husserl, implicitly. That is, Creeley sees the world as it is: beautiful, strange, frightening, fascinating. He notes in many interviews that growing up during the war years influenced his writing, as it did the writing of his contemporaries such as Ginsberg. Yet while he states that "these were very confused years," he also notes that "it was a time when one wanted desperately an intensive and absolutely full *experience* of whatever it was you were engaged with" (*Tales out of School* 2-4). To not merely experience but to experience completely was the goal. There is emphasis then on being in the moment and learning to pay attention to things with all one's senses. Creeley pursues a keen observation of the world that lasts throughout his career. It is this scrutinizing attention to the things involved during experience that allows Creeley such focus on the page. Rather than portraying him as distrustful, it may be more useful to understand Creeley as always wanting to experience, to explore, to pay attention to things. The exploration of the poetic process is intimately connected to who Creeley is as a person, and his own experiences.

Creeley's phenomenological poetics, then, involves both a particular stance toward reality as well as toward the world of the poem, and a particular method for making that experience literal on the page. Both the poet and the reader must be actively involved in the poem, using the body to transmit experience. Moreover, kinetics, form, and process are all active for Olson, and thus for Creeley. This focus will bring the poet and the reader back to being rather than Being. When Creeley employs these methods, therefore, the poem is an energy transmission. Syllabication and lineation affect breath,

and breath, in turn, affects the body in such a way as to transmit the energy and emotion of the poem. As states Creeley, “Breath anyhow is one means to solution, I think it is the *only* means. How does the breath ‘say’ it. And getting that—then how best indicate what that tells us, on the page” (As quoted in Diehl 340) The poem says what it says, does what it does and is what it is, because of the breath As Diehl states, “And that inherent way for Creeley, as it is for Olson and Levertov and so many others, that common link between man-as-organism and man-as-writing, between emotion and emotion-literal is ‘breath’” (340). It is breath that brings us back to our bodies and reminds us of our common experience in the world. Creeley, therefore, can rely on the relationship human beings have with their bodies, and with the objects in the world, in his creative process. The poem, ultimately, is an experience and is about experiencing: being instead of Being As writes Husserl in *Experience and Judgment*, “Every experience has its own horizon” (32) That is, every experience is both a single, immediate experience and a reference to other, infinite experiences, those contained in memory and those possible in the future. If the poet’s purpose is to reveal the order of the world, then the poet must locate the world in relation to our bodies, our mode of experiencing. What unites Creeley’s work is not only the exploration of the poetic process but the poet’s relation to that process, and to the others involved in the process. It is through the poetic process that Creeley brings the poet into relationship with his reader and, therefore, the world.

CHAPTER IV

THE APPLE POEM: “DO YOU THINK...”

The first time I picked up Robert Creeley’s “Do you think...” I thought to myself: This guy’s got a lot of nerve if he thinks I’m going to be fascinated by a poem about eating an apple. Impressed with my impeccable literary taste, I put the poem down after the second stanza – but, like Schmidt-Rotluff’s painting, I just couldn’t stop thinking about this poem. Mostly, I couldn’t stop thinking: “That poem *must* be about more than eating an apple!” I desperately wanted to understand how Creeley could come to the realization that eating an apple was worthy of poetry. I went back right to the second stanza: “Do you think that if / there’s an apple on the table / and somebody eats it, it / won’t be there anymore” (l 4-7). I still didn’t get it. Of course the apple isn’t there anymore. Somebody ate it. I read the stanza again. And again. After about a dozen reads, I found myself focused on the line: “it / won’t be there anymore” (l 7) Won’t be there anymore. Won’t be where anymore? On the table? Surely Creeley meant more than on the table. In the world? In life? Ah. Something stirred. No, the apple is not there anymore – but is it anywhere in the world? In reality? Does it exist? Does an apple exist, have existence? Could an apple be part of an intentional, phenomenological existence? Two weeks later I had the idea for my thesis. Eating an apple is

phenomenological. Moreover, the subject of the poem had emerged to the reader, namely me, through a series of acts – similar acts as those Creeley must have taken to write the poem in the first place “Do you think ..” has a process, one that the reader must follow, in order to fully appreciate the poem The poem is not about apples, or love, or breathing. Rather, it is “about” all of those things and none of those things The poem, by helping the reader think about thinking, lets the reader into Creeley’s poetic process

Creeley would remark, of course, that he did not set out to write a poem about an apple – although that is what I thought he did upon an initial reading In an interview, Linda Wager asks Creeley, “Did you—do you—ever consciously choose your subjects?” Creeley answers, “Never that I’ve been aware of” (*Tales Out of School* 45). Typical Creeley. Complicated and yet, somehow, right to the point. What is essential, for Creeley, is not the subject, but the process Only through the process of writing a poem can the subject, if one wants to call it that, be revealed. Like Husserl, who posits that consciousness is intentional and that the order of the world is revealed to us through active and attentive consciousness, Creeley’s subjects are revealed to him as he writes, and to the reader as she/he reads. “Do you think ..” did not start out as a poem about an apple, however, when the apple came to Creeley’s mind, the object pointed him in a new direction. Through the apple, Creeley is able to make startling associations. A poem *about* an apple is unremarkable – but a poem wherein the poet considers an apple’s possibilities as an entity that exists much like human beings exist: Ah, that’s interesting Go with it, Creeley. I’ll follow.

First some notes on the form of “Do you think ..”. This poem is perhaps one of the best examples of how content gives a poem form, as contends Olson with his

Projective Verse If form relies upon what the poet thinks about and where those thoughts and emotions go, then the poem's form is not only a reflection of the poet's consciousness, it is an extension of it "Do you think..." functions as an extension of thought itself, not just Creeley's thoughts. The poem, as an extension of consciousness, is immediately an extension of another consciousness, as all consciousnesses are connected. Therefore, Creeley's consciousness is connected to the reader's consciousness. Moreover, because the poem asks the reader to participate, only through the act of reading can the poem's form be wholly realized. Form, for Creeley, is not only the appearance of the poem on the page. Rather, form is about movement. Form is realized only as the reader moves her/his eyes, and body, through the poem. Even before the initial reading, the reader's eyes are drawn to the long lines jutting out in stanza three and the block-like appearance of stanza four. The variation in line lengths suggests the poem is not uniform. Rather, the form suggests an unravelling. The opening stanza is short and concise, and this echoes the content of a rather direct thought, but as the line lengths grow, so do the stanza lengths. There is a building momentum – a momentum mirrored by the increasingly complex thoughts that arise in stanzas two through four. It seems neither Creeley's brain nor the poem itself could contain these complex thoughts. Both thought and breath in the poem are pushed to their respective limits. As the number of lines in the stanzas and the respective line lengths increase, punctuation appears and then decreases. By the third and fourth stanza, reading this poem is exhausting, and that is precisely the point. As the thoughts become more complex and difficult to process, this is echoed in the form that appears. As posits Husserl, all thoughts lead to other thoughts. Thinking happens through association. Thus, without focus, thoughts can

unravel, move in strange directions. and build momentum. This momentum, of course, also affects the reader physiologically. The thoughts are experienced in a particular way because of Creeley's variations in sentence structure and use of punctuation (or lack thereof). In this way, Creeley makes the reader keenly aware that the reading of the poem, and the thinking process, is only possible through the body. The form, then, cannot be fully realized by looking at the poem on the page. Rather, it must be read by a reader. It is the reader's corporeality that is essential for the experiencing of "Do you think..."

This experiencing through the body is apparent right from the beginning, with the poem's title. Creeley immediately calls attention to the poem as an act, and all acts involve the body of someone. The words "Do" and "think" show that this poem will involve a specific action—thinking. They also reveal that Creeley is interested in the *reader's* thinking, not only his own. The reader will be called upon throughout the poem to think as Creeley is thinking and move as Creeley is moving. Thus, as evidenced by Creeley's meticulous attention to breath through cadence and rhythm, the reader is aware of her/his body *as she/he reads*. As writes Patocka, on Husserl's theory of the body, "In contrast with other material objects and processes, the body is a center of orientation, the point zero of an ordered sequence which we bear with us or, better, which we are" (144). By bringing the reader into the poem through breath, Creeley is able to control the reader's bodily experience of the poem. Because the reader is aware of the body in one way, through breath, it also becomes easier for Creeley to make the reader aware of the body in another way—through the mind. As I will illustrate, without the reader's imagination, the poem will not work. Thus the poem's rhythm is directly connected to

the content Without attention to rhythm, the content is impossible. A poem with different line breaks and different objects would result in different content. The poem will not only contemplate the act of thinking but will call upon the reader to actively *think* throughout the poem. When Creeley writes, “Do you think that if...” as the first line of each stanza, it is both a direct address and a call to move for the reader. The reader is asked to think and move as Creeley thinks and moves. As Husserl posits, all acts involve movement, and thus they are temporal. Creeley also uses familiar objects (and remember that in phenomenological terms, *object* refers to material objects and abstract concepts) and sets them into relief. The apple, for instance, is not only “apple,” the material object, but also *apple*---a mysterious object that means more than the material because of the context within which Creeley places it. This is more than mere representation, not symbol. Instead, the apple is a kind of point upon which to focus to help Creeley illustrate the process of cognition; and in this manner the lines reveal how these processes require the kind of imagining that Husserl suggests in order to intuit essence.

“Do you think...” reveals that, for Creeley, like Husserl, experiencing is not possible without a body. Reading a poem is both a corporeal and temporal experience. To experience the poem fully, a reader must actively use her/his body because the poem is all about cadence and breath, which in turn affect emotion and thought. Moreover, this is a poem revealed bit by bit in rapid succession. Each stanza comprises a single thought, revealed one movement at a time; yet each part of the movement is not delivered in linear fashion. Rather, the words are grouped in ways that test the reader’s understanding of how the English language works. Creeley’s delivery takes into account, then, the

particular way our brains process language. Writes Steven Pinker in *The Language Instinct. How the Mind Creates Language*,

Though sentences are strings of words, our mental algorithms for grammar do not pick out words by their linear positions, such as “first word,” “second word,” and so on. Rather, the algorithms group words into phrases, and phrases into even bigger phrases, and give each one a mental label, like “subject noun phrase” or “verb phrase.” (41)

Words are not processed individually, but instead operate within phrases. With this knowledge, Creeley is able to rely upon and then vary typical syntactical structures in order to produce a physiological and emotional (as well as intellectual) response in the reader. Creeley trusts these processes when he writes, and thus trusts the reader's processes as well. This control of the reader's temporal experience of the poem is a kind of manipulation, but it is not a tyrannical control. It will not work without the reader's active participation. If I refuse to breathe at Creeley's comma and only that comma, the exhausting effect of the last four lines is lost on me. If I refuse to let Creeley associate the notion of apple with the notion of existence (which I will touch on further in a moment), I will not make new associations as a reader. Thus, while it might seem as though the reader takes no part in the experience, other than experiencing the *reading* of the poem, this is not the case. As previously stated, temporality is an experience, and we experience through our bodies. Thus, the temporal and corporeal experience of this poem involves both Creeley and the reader. “Do you think...” shows that Creeley's poetic process is similar to Husserl's intentionality, since experiencing the poem involves

active participation on the part of both Creeley and the reader, rather than passive acceptance of information. The information, if you will, in “Do you think...” is largely delivered through the imaginary variations and through the objects therein.

These objects involved in “Do you think ..” such as the apple, are placed into a particular context; the objects are placed within particular stanzas and within particular lines of the poem. This particular context reveals something about the objects involved, the relationships between the objects, the world in which the objects reside, and the new associations made because of the particular context. It is a complex network, revealing new things line by line. Yet this revealing is not passive. The reader does not merely encounter the objects. Rather, she/he comes into association with them. Husserl, remember, proposes that intentionality is an action. The individual actively shapes and intends her/his world (including the world of a poem), rather than sitting back and accepting objects, concepts, relationships, blankly. For instance, I was not actively looking for the concept “eating an apple” to be phenomenological. Yet I made the connection because I had retained information about phenomenological concepts and, in a particular moment, “eating an apple” became associated with phenomenology. Through successive readings, trying to make sense of the poem, my mind made a new association. “Eating an apple” became different through its association with phenomenological concepts such as intentionality and essence. The new association defamiliarized the familiar. Intentionality, then, involves pointing. It is a kind of purposeful directioning. Rather than changing the objects involved, new associations that happen over time garner new possibilities. As writes Butler in her forward to Natanson’s *Bird*.

Husserl made clear that it was only through an imaginary experimentation that the essence of the object might be known. Such an experiment of imaginary variation not only takes time, enumerating the variety of perspectives by which an object might be constituted and known, but it also lays out the temporality of the object itself, the sedimentation of its features, the specific time of its unfolding. The object known through imaginary variation is never the same as the actual object, and yet that actual object is revealed as a possible permutation or adumbration of the object in the course of its imaginary travels. Thus, the point of such a phenomenological thought-experiment is not to fix the actuality of the object, but to render its actuality into a possibility: to show the contingency of *this* appearance within the temporal horizon of the object as a unity of its own possibilities. (xii)

As Creeley points the reader to this particular appearance, the reader also adds her/his own associations, emotions, and context to the objects. Reading, then, is transactional and thus temporal in nature. So intentionality is not only about the objects involved and not just about the respective consciousness(es). Also imperative in the notion of intentionality is the *moment*. I had read “Do you think..” over and over but had not seen what I perceived in that one moment. The act of my reading the poem was temporal; and after reading it again and again, the process became a series of temporal acts, each act relating to a specific time. It was only through the series of readings did I come to understand what I was looking for. Therefore, it follows, in phenomenological terms, that both writing and reading are *purposeful*. Both are active and seeking, and not merely

passive and receptive. Thus, Creeley's poetic process involves intentionality on the part of the poet and the reader. Creeley points the reader to *this* appearance, but without the reader's active participation, new associations cannot be made, nothing is revealed, and no transaction, as Rosenblatt posits, can take place. The poem will only move if it is effectively transferred to the reader. As contends Olson, each perception must lead immediately to another perception. The lines, then, are responsible for moving the reader through the poem. Therefore, the process of imaginary variation involves a series of objects revealed to the reader line by line. In the act of reading, the reader gathers the objects, and the feelings or perceptions the objects inspire, and takes this impression into each successive stanza. Imaginary variation is cumulative and, moreover, involves both the writer and reader. Through this process, the writer can bring the reader as close as possible to his process of writing the poem, and the impressions, thoughts, and feelings that the poet felt during the experience. Above all else, imaginary variation is a process that involves movement – the movement of the poet, the reader, and the objects of the poem.

One way Creeley achieves the movement of intentionality is through repetition. The first stanza offers a phrase, "Do you think that if," that is repeated as the first line of each stanza. Thus, each first line of the successive stanzas engages the reader with a direct address, "you," as well as asks the reader to think about something specific. The line "Do you think that if," points the reader toward a series of objects *within a context*. As writes Erazim Kohak in *An Introduction to Husserl's Phenomenology*, "Things are never meaningful in themselves, only with others; they point to a context [. . .]. As such this context is nothing over and above the thing, but intrinsic to it; to have

something to do with something” (xiv). In this case, the context is the rest of the stanza within which the object appears, *as well as* the rest of the poem. Had Creeley wanted the reader to think about only the apple in stanza two, for instance, he would have made the second stanza of the poem serve as its ending; yet he continues, placing other objects in front of the reader. Each object functions within the context of the stanza and in conjunction with the other successive objects and their contexts. Each stanza, therefore, is a series of steps. The first and second lines ask the reader to think about a relatively simple idea, *doing*. However, this simple idea is varied with the addition of the word “want.” In this regard, *doing* is set in a complex context—*doing* is the action inspired by *want*. When Creeley writes, “Do you think that if / you once do what you want” (1-2), the “what” is determined by the reader—each reader necessarily wants different things. The word “want” is thus purposefully left hanging as the last word in the line to make the reader pause. But the line is not necessarily experienced as enjambment. The phrase “do what you want” functions on its own, and this could easily be the end of a single phrase. Remember, as Pinker contends in *The Language Instinct*, language works in chunks. If this chunk is finished, then the mind experiences it as such. But what Creeley anticipates is that the reader will also experience the absence of any punctuation. Therefore, the blank space at the end functions as both internal (in the mind) and external (on the page) space. Creeley shows his reliance upon the reader with this involvement. The reader must experience the phrase simultaneously as successfully chunked and not successfully chunked. Thus the “chunk of mentalese,” as Pinker calls it, operates separately and in conjunction with the next chunk of mentalese. The reader must first use her/his imagination to add the “want” at the end of this line, then experience the line as finished,

and finally notice the lack of punctuation to push into the next line. All of this is reliant upon how our language works in the mind of the reader. Through this succession, Creeley is able to rely upon conventional syntax and also vary it, all of which relies upon participation from the reader. Therefore, it is the repetition of a familiar phrase that moves the reader through the poem in a particular way. The phrase reminds the reader of the initial thoughts of the poem, and connects those thoughts, and objects, with those that follow. The repetition, rather than halting the reader, moves the reader both backward and forward – to the initial phrase and to those that follow. Repetition, then, creates a feeling of familiarity and expectation, and this expectation will move the reader forward. The repetition works for Creeley in other ways, as well.

The repetition of the first line is also a direct request from Creeley for the reader to be open to the content that follows – each time he uses the phrase. Husserl posits, remember, that the subject must be open to her/his world (including the world of the poem) in order for new associations to happen. Intentionality requires openness. Each repetition of the first line in “Do you think...” shows Creeley exhibiting intentionality through the poetic process and that Creeley needs the reader to also exhibit intentionality. The phrase gets the reader involved in the process of the poem by asking her/him to participate along with Creeley as he writes and thinks. It is also a plea for openness, the kind of openness Husserl believes the subject must always exhibit in order for the world to be revealed. The word “you” is a direct address. Without the reader, then, the poem is not possible. The word “if” asks for that openness so Creeley can place an object in front of the reader’s consciousness. Only if the reader is open to the object can Creeley then set the object into relief through the process of reduction. In addition, because the line

ends on the monosyllabic “if,” the word can be read as stressed or unstressed. If the word “if” were placed in the middle of the line, the word would usually be read in one way, as unstressed. Placed at the end of the line, however, there is importance on the word. The word “if” is the beginning of a question, and thus is experienced by the reader with the typical uplift that a question receives. This uplift helps to establish the tone of the poem. Since the word “if” feels open, breathy, because of the placement of the lips and the expelling of the breath required to make the “f” sound, the word helps Creeley establish the intellectual and emotional openness necessary for the reading of the poem. Because this is the first line of the poem, the word “if” helps set the tone of the poem as questioning, and questions need active participants to help provide answers.

Therefore, the line is also a call for the reader to participate in the temporal world of the poem. The poem exhibits Husserl’s intentionality. The reader is asked not only to think, but to think *of something*, and to be open to the object’s possibilities. Second, the phrase acts as both a question, “Do you think,” and a suggestion, “that if” (l 1). The reader is first called to engage her/his mind with the word “think” and then to think about something specific—the intended object. Imagine “this” and then think about “this” in this particular way. Isolating the first phrase, that is separating the act of imagination from the object (which is revealed in the second and/or successive lines), shows Creeley is focusing on both the act, the act of consciousness, and the object itself. Each has emphasis because each has earned its own line (or lines).

Moreover, the phrase also allows Creeley to imitate the phenomenological processes (consciousness, intentionality, reduction) as the objects throughout the poem unfold and become more complex. Once Creeley has the reader’s attentive

consciousness, he is able to put more objects in front of her/him and ask the reader to think of the object in a particular way. Creeley actively engages the reader in the act of consciousness (intentionality) Creeley is both questioning and establishing with just this first line.

Finally, as previously mentioned, the line establishes not only the way Creeley is thinking through these thoughts, but also implying that all people think in a particular way. The questioning, the repetition, and the eventual pushing outward in the last two stanzas, mirror the cognitive process. In addition, there is noticeable space at the end of the line because this is only the first part of a question. At this point, the reader only knows this is a question, but she/he does not know what the question will be. The space at the end of the line is read as silence. But silence should not be thought of as absence. As writes Sylvester on Creeley's "The Rhythm," "The silence is not the emptiness between beats; the impulse from silence creates the rhythm" (204). In other words, this natural pause created by Creeley's diction (if) and the space at the end of the line will be experienced in the same way over and over as the line is repeated. Creeley experienced the silence during the thinking and writing of the poem; thus, the reader will experience the same silence at the same point in the poem. The repeated line and its breathy silence at the end of the line, therefore, establishes the tone and rhythm for the poem. Moreover, Creeley is setting apart this one chunk of mentalese by leaving it alone on one line. He is not stating that everyone begins her/his thoughts in this manner. Instead, he is implying that everyone thinks in this way: that is, with pauses, and phrase by phrase. Sylvester comes to a similar conclusion when he writes that Creeley

does not say, he does not imply that any feeling, any perception is universally true for all people (“Zealots are sincere”). He does not say “Feelings are paramount” or, “My feelings create the world.” He wants to get away from the notion that thinking is the world, but the world and thinking together provide the relationships that are themselves the motions of impartiality, relationships that are the ways everybody thinks. (199)

For Sylvester and myself, Creeley is less concerned with establishing certain thoughts as establishing how thinking works. Thinking brings human beings into relationship with their world, whether it is the physical world or the world of the poem.

Therefore, a great deal rests on this first line. Most importantly, the first line supplies the approach to the poem – the approach Creeley took to write it, and the approach Creeley encourages the reader to take. The reader must approach the reading of the poem similarly to how Creeley approached the writing of it, otherwise the process of the poem will be lost on the reader. The first line asks for openness on the part of the reader because it is with this emotion that Creeley wrote the poem. The repetition of the first line, “Do you think that if...” illustrates that Creeley needs the reader to be open and active throughout the entire poem. The line, then, acts as a jumping off point for each stanza, with a reminder to the reader about how to approach the content of the stanza. By using his own phenomenological process as the foundation of the poem, the reader is immediately involved in the process. As contends Patocka, “Intentionality is that unifying bond thanks to which the experience of consciousness is not a rhapsody of impressions and other phenomena but rather a unitary meaningful process” (64). It is the experience of consciousness that Creeley must recreate on the page in order for him to

bring the reader into the particular experience within the poem. Thus, without the reader, form is not realized, and this shows that Creeley is not only reliant upon his own consciousness when writing a poem, but the reader's as well. Repetition establishes the relationship between Creeley and the reader, and also brings the reader into contact with Creeley's world, as well as her/his own world. It is only through using a familiar repetition, one that provides both stability and expectation, that Creeley is able to move the reader through the poem and reveal his poetic process.

Another way Creeley achieves the movement of intentionality is through his use of punctuation. Punctuation helps Creeley move the reader through the imaginary variations in, at least as closely as possible, the same way he experienced the thoughts. While words are enough to engage the reader emotionally and intellectually, and are partially responsible for the cadence of the reader, it is the combined use of diction and punctuation that allows Creeley to bring particular words into association and move the reader in a particular way through the poem. Remember that the reader of English experiences phrasal units when she/he reads. We do not understand word by word, but instead look for meaningful chunks of language. If these chunks are grouped together without using appropriate punctuation, the reader will experience the line differently than if they are grouped together in the typical way. This extraordinary experience of language will, thus, have a physiological and emotional effect in the reader. Varying the punctuation not only moves the reader through the poem, the variation influences the reader physiologically, and thus emotionally and intellectually. It is only through the use of punctuation that the lines will be experienced in the reader much the same way that Creeley experienced them as he thought, and wrote. If Creeley is able to affect the reader

through his syntax, this will bring new associations in the mind of the reader. Moreover, the meanings of words will necessarily come into question as Creeley changes the structure of his language. Words are objects in phenomenological terms. Thus to use a word differently, or to make a new association between words, is using Husserl's imaginary variation. These imaginary variations created through diction and punctuation will also help move the reader through the poem.

Imaginary variation, remember, is the process through which an object is taken in order to intuit its essence. "Do you think..." is a series of imaginary variations, the first of which comprises the first stanza. In this stanza, Creeley suggests that the object of "want" for the reader, whatever the "what" is in the second line, be thought of differently. By calling the meaning of this particular "want" into question, Creeley is able to question "want" itself. In order to do this, Creeley must take the word through imaginary variation step by step, moving the reader through the stanza in a particular way. First, he uses the word "want" in a conventional context: "Do you think that if / you once do what you want." The words up until this point are used as they would be used ordinarily. There is nothing special in diction or punctuation to vary the meaning of the word, or experience of the reader, yet. But in order for imaginary variation to work, Creeley must call attention to the word "want" so the reader will focus on it while also moving into the next line. Thus, Creeley leaves the word "want" as the last word in the line. The pause created by the line break causes the reader to pause and focus on "want." But the lack of punctuation at the end of line two also enjambes the line, and this pushes line two into line three. Moreover, every word in the stanza is monosyllabic, including "want." The monosyllabic words help Creeley control the cadence and breath of the reader. The

stress pattern created by the stressed and unstressed syllables— “Do you THINK that if / you once DO what you WANT”— also moves the line forward as the stresses cluster at the end of the line. Because the words “think,” “do,” and “want” receive the stresses, the reader experiences these as the most important words in these lines. Line two, then, builds in intensity and is experienced by the reader as an acceleration. The reader moves through the line with building intensity and no apparent stops. However, in the third line the emotion changes because the rhythm, and thus the momentum, is disrupted. This is Creeley’s counterpoint, and where the next step in the imaginary variation occurs: “to DO you will WANT NOT to DO it” (13). Each stress in the line feels like a tug rather than an uplift. While in the second line the cluster of stresses moved the reader forward, the stresses in line three jam into one another on “want not” and, immediately after, “do.” The stresses placed so close together creates tension rather than momentum. The stresses in line two fall on the words “do” and “want,” words that feel positive. Both words also connote action. But the stressed syllables in the third line fall on the words “do,” “want,” “*not*” and “do.” The words “do” and “want” build the same momentum as in line two because this is repetition, but the stressed “not” disrupts the rhythm. The word “not” is unexpected, so the word creates a sudden jolt in the reader. Creeley first compelled the reader to think of wanting the “what,” and then to think of *not wanting* the “what.” As there are conventions of language, when the poet works against those conventions, the reader experiences any disruption as nagging or unpleasant. This unpleasant effect may also mirror how Creeley felt when he experienced the initial thought.

The disruption is further compounded by the unconventional use of language, first through punctuation. The reader is expecting a question mark to end the thought. The

question mark is the expected form of punctuation after a thought that begins with the interrogative “if.” What a question mark does is comply with the reader’s expectations of the experience of language. Instead, Creeley ends the question with a period. This unusual use of punctuation not only conveys Creeley’s experience of the line (as he may not have experienced the familiar uplift at the end of his thought), but also disrupts the reader’s rhythm, which is upsetting physiologically, intellectually and emotionally. Without the expected question mark, the reader wonders if the previous information was, after all, even meant as a question. Thus, the entire thought is without resolution.

Because the reader expects to encounter a question mark at the end of the phrase, and to experience the familiar uplift at the end of any question, there is, instead, a resounding thud at the end of the line when the reader experiences a period. The reader, therefore, feels tension created by a question/non-question, and the effect is nagging. The common use of language means there are expectations in how that language will be used.

Unexpected punctuation reflects Creeley’s experience of the line, but also effects the reader’s experience of the line, as well. Changes in common punctuation usage, therefore, do not have simple effects. The reader experiences this unconventional usage not only in this one stanza, but throughout the poem. Thus after the period’s first unconventional use, the reader’s awareness of punctuation usage is heightened. The reader will be looking for other places of unconventional usage, with similar effects.

Moreover, unconventional diction helps Creeley further emphasize the lack of resolution. The word “want” is first presented in the usual context. “Want” in line two is familiar to the reader, and has been used in a typical way. However, the meaning of *want* in line two is immediately varied with the phrase *not want* in line three. The act itself is a

rather simple thing to ask of the reader – think of want, and then think of not wanting. Yet because “want” is brought into association with “not wanting,” the notion of “want” is questioned. It is as if Creeley is asking the reader to ponder: Is there inherent in the notion of wanting, not wanting? Through imaginary variation, Creeley sets the concept of “want” into relief. Remember that to intuit an essence, according to Husserl, one must not only be open to the object but also “suspend one’s everyday understanding of what the object is” (Butler x). Thinking of *wanting* in connection with *not wanting* makes *wanting* itself different. The context within which the object was originally placed has now been varied, and thus the meaning of “want” has also changed. As with the change in typical punctuation usage, the reader will also be more aware of atypical diction usage, as well. While on the surface the poem seems simple and straightforward, by the end of the first stanza, the reader is feeling the frustration of Creeley’s thinking, as well as her/his own. Though the stanza can be read comfortably in one breath, the rhythm Creeley creates through diction and punctuation is both odd and provocative. The oddly constructed “want not to do it” gives the reader pause in terms of breath and imagination, and this first imaginary variation sets the tone for the imaginary variations that follow.

The first stanza, therefore, not only introduces the reader to the poetic process Creeley will use throughout the poem, but to the process of intentionality. The stanza begins Creeley’s series of imaginary variations, each of which will rely upon the previous imaginary variations, and the pattern they create for the rest of the poem. The object in each imaginary variation will not only have a smaller context within its own stanza, therefore, but a much larger one, as well, that includes: the entire poem, Creeley’s consciousness, and the reader’s consciousness. These contexts closely resemble

Creeley's own initial thought patterns, since only by going through the same experience will the reader be able to intuit the object's essence. Moreover, Creeley uses diction and punctuation to move the reader through each stanza the same way he moved through his poetic process, a poetic process that is similar to Husserl's intentionality. Since Creeley repeats the initial line at the beginning of each stanza, the reader becomes familiar with the line and what will follow the line – namely, the introduction of an object followed by its variation. The first line introduces the reader, then, to both the content of the poem, and the way the poem will move throughout. It is only through repetition that Creeley can create variation. Both imaginary variation and intentionality rely upon the expectation created by familiarity and the surprise created by variation; thus Creeley uses both so the reader will be similarly effected. Throughout the poem, Creeley will rely upon pattern and variation, created by punctuation, diction, and breath, in order to move the reader through the series of imaginary variations that comprise the poem.

As Creeley moves into the second stanza, a pattern has already begun. The reader encounters the phrase “Do you think ..” in the title and in line one of the first stanza. When the reader encounters the phrase for a third time, as the first line of stanza two, she/he not only understands the importance of the line, but also experiences it as a familiar foundation for the entire poem. It is expected that the line will be repeated again and again. Moreover, the repetition signals to the reader that an object and its variation will, undoubtedly occur, since this is what happened in the first stanza. Through repetition, therefore, Creeley engages the reader – the reader is anticipating the phrase, the introduction of an object, and the object's imaginary variation. Thus, this anticipation

creates a feeling of suspense that will move the reader through the stanzas with a similar attention and focus as that of Creeley

The second principal object that Creeley encounters in the writing of “Do you think...” is “apple.” Yes, the apple finally returns. As “apple,” like “want,” is a common object, often used and recalled with similar meaning, the object can easily be conjured in the mind of the reader. An apple is also small, thus the object can be easily moved literally and figuratively in the imagination. “Apple” can be imagined in a variety of places and situations that, say, “house” cannot. Like “want” in the first stanza, “apple” is first placed before the reader in the simplest of terms when Creeley writes, “Do you think that if / there’s an apple on the table” (l 4-5). Creeley, quite directly, implores the reader to imagine an apple upon a table. The stress pattern—“Do you THINK that if / there’s an AP ple on the TA ble”—reveals that “think” and the first syllables of “apple” and “table” repeat in roughly the same places as in the first stanza with “do” and “want,” despite the additional unstressed syllables. Thus, the first two lines of the second stanza are experienced by the reader in a similar way as the first two lines of the first stanza. The stresses focus the reader on the open sound of the vowel “a,” and thus the reader experiences “apple” as the most important word in the stanza, much like “want” in the first. This focus on a particular object is the first step in the imaginary variation. Though the reader certainly does not know that imaginary variation is going on (unless one is reading phenomenologically as am I), she/he is looking for the subject of any given sentence. Once the reader encounters “apple,” much as Creeley did, “apple” becomes the reader’s focus.

Moreover, once Creeley establishes this focus, the reader also knows that the focus will be varied, as this is what happened in the first stanza. Poems, as they rely upon the conventions of language, are about expectation. The reader reads the first stanza as a series of utterances because each word is monosyllabic. This same pattern recurs in the first line of the second stanza, obviously, because the line is an exact repetition. But unlike in the first stanza, wherein the rhythm is consistent throughout, the rhythm in stanza two changes. The second line in stanza two is the first line in the poem wherein Creeley uses polysyllabic words.

In the second stanza, then, the introduction of polysyllabic words is startling as it breaks the pattern established in stanza one – and this pattern variation is mirrored in the content. As writes Robert van Hallberg in “Robert Creeley and the Pleasures of System” regarding Creeley’s “The Whip,” “The polysyllables, ‘testament,’ ‘monotony,’ ‘perpetuity,’ glare out of the page as though they might amongst so many ‘low’ words, require footnotes to the dictionary” (377). Similarly, with the introduction of “apple” and “table,” though the words are common, the reader cannot help but feel the poem has become suddenly more complex, both syntactically and emotionally. Thus stanza three branches out in a new direction and is experienced differently by the reader because of the polysyllabic words. Polysyllabic words will, of course, stand out and receive emphasis from the reader, especially if they come after a series of monosyllabic words. The reader first notices the difference on the page, therefore, and then through the reading and listening acts.

The imaginary variation in the second stanza begins, therefore, by bringing attention to the principal object “apple” through both diction and syntax. Because

“apple” is the first polysyllabic word in the poem, the word receives both stress within the poem and stress in the mind of the reader. As the object is thus established, the reader will anticipate some sort of variation to follow. This variation occurs in line six when Creeley writes, “and SOMEbody EATS it, it.” This line helps Creeley accomplish several things in terms of Husserl’s imaginary variation. First, “somebody” is added to the context and within that context, particular action is added. The “somebody” is doing something particular—ingesting the apple. Secondly, the apple is removed from the original context. Creeley urges the reader to participate when he asks her/him to place the apple on the table. The reader experiences the line as active and feels in control. But then the object is removed by someone else, the somebody who eats it. When the apple is eaten, especially by someone else, the rhythm and tone change. The possibility of doing something else with the apple, something perhaps more positive, is removed when the apple is eaten. The rhythm in the line, then, echoes the sentiment of both Creeley and the reader. Remember that, initially, Creeley experienced this line in his consciousness during the writing. He, too, had the apple taken from him as it was eaten by someone outside of his control. The stress on “SOMEbody” creates a somber feeling in the reader as the “ome” resonates. When the reader encounters the word “EATS,” the initial stress on the long “e” is overshadowed by the more intense “s.” It is the ending of the word that lingers and becomes part of the next word, “it.” Also, there is a comma after the first “it” in the line, and this is the first comma in the poem. As with the addition of polysyllabic words, the comma surprises the reader. The punctuation causes the reader to pause and makes the phrase into a complex, rather than simple, sentence. The comma is also a place for the reader to take a breath, which indicates that a second breath is needed to

finish the line. While the first stanza could be read by the reader comfortably in one breath, the second stanza requires that a second breath be taken. Therefore, the corporeal and temporal experience of the line, and thus the second stanza, is different than the first stanza. Remember, "The prosody of a poem is the poet's method of controlling the reader's temporal experience of the poem, especially his attention to that experience" (Hartman 13). Creeley is controlling the reader's attention to the experience of the poem with such changes in diction, punctuation, and line length. As Creeley's thinking became more complex during the writing of the poem, then, this is echoed on the page. This attention to his writing process, and recreating that process for the reader, shows that Creeley is concerned not only with the meaning of the poem, but how that meaning is achieved. Meaning can only be a result of form. The line "there is an apple on the table and somebody eats it" is different than "Do you think that if / there's an apple on the table / and somebody eats it, it," but not only because of the difference in content. The "do you think that if" in the poem is a direct address to the reader's imagination, and the address shows that the poem is beyond reality; the entire poem takes place within the imagination of the reader. In addition, the line breaks create pauses, places for the reader to breathe and use her/his imagination along with Creeley. Remember that, as Diehl posits, a different way of breathing is a different way of thinking. Thus, as the questions become more complicated, the language used to express them and the manner in which they are expressed also becomes more intense and more complicated. The reader must not only experience the words Creeley uses. The reader must also experience the way in which Creeley experienced the words during the writing of the poem, and this is achieved through diction, punctuation, line length and breath. Imaginary variation, then, is not just

about the end result. Much like the writing of a poem, imaginary variation is about the entire process. The process continues not only until the essence of the object is revealed, but after. This continuation is evidenced in “Do you think...” with Creeley’s final line of stanza two.

In this final line, Creeley writes, “won’t be there anymore,” which is experienced by the reader as both a concluding remark, and as a question (l 7). As I mentioned in the opening of this chapter, the line, at first, feels simple and conclusive – the apple is no longer there. However, as I only realized after repeated readings of the stanza, there is also a question inherent in the context; and this presents a much more complex and intriguing situation. Just what has Creeley concluded and, moreover, what exactly is he asking? To answer this, we should further examine the experience of the reader. As with the previous stanza, the reader experiences tension between the final stressed syllable, “anyMORE,” and the absence of a question mark. The “won’t be there anymore” refers back to the “it” of the previous line (l 7-8). Thus the “there” points in two directions – back toward the table, the apple’s original “there” – and forward toward the “there” within the reader – that is, the “there” of the reader’s imagination. Because “there” is connected with the mind through the imagination, Creeley connects the apple to the larger context of being, as he did with *want* in the first stanza. The word “There” functions as both a tangible picture in the reader’s consciousness and as an abstract concept. Does the apple *exist* if it is no longer in the mind? Because Creeley is bringing into question the notion of human want in the first stanza, it is not too much of a leap to assume Creeley is concerned with the notion of existence in these lines; and he is using “apple” to first make the context relatively simple in order to change it, and in

order to bring disparate objects into relation with one another. One can assume that the reader probably never previously thought of “apple” as connected with “existence,” that is beyond the religious context of Genesis in the Christian Bible. But even in the context of the Bible, “apple” becomes mere metaphor for original sin. In “Do you think..” apple is discussed not only as tangible “apple” but also as an entity. Entity is beyond metaphor, as metaphor is representation. By putting the small, common object “apple” within the context of all existence, that is reality, Creeley is able to set the apple into relief. Writes Natanson in *Bird*, “It is not the ‘object-thing’ which is intended—that may be thought of—but the *meant* ‘thing,’ the ‘object’ as meant in the acts of seeing, perceiving, recalling, imagining, and so on” (27). Apple begins in this poem, then, as mere object; but when connected with the notion of existence, *apple* is beyond mere physical object. *Apple* is now somehow different, is meant differently.

Apple now functions in two ways in irreality. First, the apple itself is thought of as having a singular existence. It is no longer mere fruit. Rather, it is its own entity that can be “there.” It can exist or not exist—again, it is safe to assume the reader has not thought of an apple as having an “existence” before the reading of Creeley’s poem. This represents the shift of the individual ego to the transcendental ego, the second stage of reduction. Creeley encourages the reader to think of the apple as unto itself, if you will, with its own existence removed from its relationship to the individual ego. Second, because of the new association made between “apple” and existence through the use of the word “there,” the existence of the apple points to human existence. All existence is related. Moreover, in traditional Western thought, human beings are located in reality only because we can find ourselves through our bodies, we are “here” or “there” in

relation to other real objects in the world. If the “apple” now has a here and there, then the apple also exists in the same way that human beings exist, using its “body” to find itself. Through imaginary variation, Creeley is able to make strange connections; and, as Husserl notes, connections always lead to other connections, experiences to further experiences. The apple necessarily leads the reader to ponder her/his notion of existence because Creeley has called her/his attention to “apple” in this particular way.

Moreover, if the existence of the apple is different, and all existence is related, then is all existence different? By bringing such objects into disparate, unexpected relationships, Creeley encourages the reader to move from Husserl’s individual ego (my existence) to the transcendental ego (existence itself). Since the lines thus far read as questions, yet the punctuation at the end of each stanza is a period, the reader is left not with one specific question – is the apple still there? – but with as many thoughts as this particular notion will give rise to. When Creeley ends one line and begins another, the line break does not merely mark a new imaginary variation. Rather, the line breaks mark an individual pattern or thought and expression. The line breaks can be understood, as Hallberg notes in “Pleasures of System,” as a “system of utterance” (375). Hallberg writes of Creeley’s “Le Fou,”

The style here is grammatical in that it advances by reference to antecedent phrases and clauses. Both Olson and Creeley make their poems move with constant reference to the rules governing English usage; their styles are systemic in the sense that by underlining the grammatical grid behind the clauses and by favoring the small systemic, non-specific words – such as prepositions, conjunctions, pronouns – these poets declare

at nearly every turn that poems are generated as much by the systemic properties of language as by individual temperaments. (375)

Therefore, typical communication is governed by typical language patterns, but also by the individual's own means of expression. "Do you think. ." can be read as both systemic and as subject to Creeley's specific utterances. Thoughts are aural in consciousness, as well as on the page in a poem, especially as the reader reads the poem aloud. The grammatical and mechanical structures in "Do you think. ." must be specific to Creeley's usage, otherwise the imaginary variations will be different. However, Creeley must also balance the control of the language with a certain amount of openness, since he wants the reader to experience with him *and* without him. Again, Creeley urges the reader to participate with, but not completely rely upon, him. The reader is a partner, in a sense, and must contribute rather than be led completely. Diction, syntax, and punctuation work both within traditional language structures and against these structures. For instance, the absence of punctuation where the reader expects it then stands in conflict with the expectation of typical punctuation usage. In "Do you think. ." when the reader comes across a comma or a period the punctuation is experienced intensely because there is so little punctuation throughout the poem. The punctuation is used in both ordinary and unordinary ways and, moreover, in ordinary and unordinary places. Thus, Creeley relies upon standard use of punctuation in the English language, and the reader's expectations of language, to affect the reader physiologically, emotionally and mentally. Closing with a question mark implies that Creeley wants the reader to think merely about the apple, that one specific question. Closing with a period implies that this is the end of a thought, a kind of mental utterance. But no thought occurs or is referenced in isolation, as posits

Husserl Consciousness is constantly bringing experiences into association with other experiences. And because the poem mirrors the process of consciousness, the reader is able to identify a pattern in the poem. The first line will probably repeat, an object will be introduced, and then the object will be varied in context. Thus the reader's anticipation of recurrence and variation moves the reader into the next stanza. This pattern, like all rhythmical patterns, as posits Hass, creates energy on the page and within the reader. It is this pattern and variation that creates a heightened sense of awareness in the reader. They are expected in form, but unexpected in content. The reader will then, necessarily, be sensitive to both repetition and variation, and this will help the reader move through the imaginary variations.

In the third stanza, Creeley begins his third imaginary variation by again using different methods of repetition and variation. First, he establishes and then varies line lengths and, second, he uses particular diction and punctuation. Through imaginary variation, Creeley encourages the reader to see "love" in a new way. The two people in the poem are not in love or out of love, happy or sad. Instead, he proposes that the two people may still be "otherwise happy" in a relationship wherein love fluctuates, one being more in love than the other at different times. This imaginary variation also marks a new addition in form. Simply put, more happens *after* the comma than in the previous two stanzas. The breath of the reader is tested because of the increasing number of lines and line lengths, and the apparent lack of a place to take a breath. While the first line of the poem repeats, the successive lines extend toward the margin. Because of the repetition, the reader is urged to breathe in a particular way: as she/he breathed during the first line of the two previous stanzas. But this time the rhythm is immediately disrupted in the

second line of the stanza. Thus, the reader is asked to breathe differently earlier in the stanza. As previously noted, there is no internal punctuation besides the comma at the end of the second line. Thus far, the reader is urged to breathe at the commas in the stanzas. The first stanza is read in a single breath because there is no obvious pause to take a breath. In the second stanza Creeley compels the reader to breathe at the comma after "it," since this is the first time in the poem the next line begins at the end of a previous line. In other words, there is a line within a line. Following this expectation, the reader is anticipating a comma in the third stanza that will also be experienced as a place to breathe. But the only comma comes at the end of the second line after "another." The reader is compelled to take a breath at this comma, but is then also looking for another comma whereby to take another breath. Yet a second comma never comes. Thus it can be understood that Creeley intends the last three lines of the stanza to be read in a single breath, influencing the reader's temporal experience of the stanza. But the lines are also meant to imitate the act of thinking. In other words, Creeley challenges the reader's mind as well. As is often the case, as the thoughts become increasingly complex or strange in the imagination, the lines build both in pace and form.

The method of establishing an initial object and then taking it through a series of imaginary variations, therefore, has already been established in the previous two stanzas. The reader will be looking for both this previously established pattern, then, and also new information. The imaginary variation in the third stanza begins similarly to the previous imaginary variations – that is, the title is repeated, followed by the presentation of a simple object: "Do you think that if / two people are in love with one another" (l 8-9). In this stanza, as in stanzas one and two, Creeley first presents the object, "love" in its most

common usage. Two people are in love. The line is quite straightforward and is revealed in a single line; moreover, the line conjures a predictable picture in the imagination, like “there’s an apple on the table.” The “love” first presented is the standard version of love. Then he begins to vary the object with the next lines, “one or the other has got to be / less in love than the other at” (l 10-11). As with stanza two, the variation comes in the third line of the stanza, and thus the variation begins to unfold gradually, step by step. Also, this line extends farther than any in the poem thus far, and has a stress pattern with emphasis on the word “love,” marking the stanza’s object – “two PEOple are in LOVE with one anOther” (l 9). The word “love” is the only monosyllabic word in the line that receives a stress, and thus the word stays in the mind of the reader, much the same way he drew attention to the word “apple” by placing it as the first polysyllabic word in the poem.

Moreover, much like the previous stanza, the lines up until the comma can be read comfortably in one breath. The comfort of reading a line of typical length is mirrored in the content – there is no tension in a line that can be read comfortably. However, with the addition of the line “less in love than the other,” the typical notion of love is undercut. Thus, as the imaginary variation begins to vary the principal object in the stanza, this is also where the rhythm of the poem changes. The reader is anticipating a change in rhythm at this point because this is where the rhythm changes in the previous stanza. That is, the apple is eaten at about this same place in the previous stanza. In stanza three, the lovers will experience a similar tension, revealed in two lines instead of one, perhaps because of the more complicated situation: “ONE or the Other has GOT to be / LESS in LOVE than the Other at” (l 10-11). Noticeably, the tone is similar to the tone at this

point in the previous stanza. The emphasis is on the monosyllabic words “one,” “got,” “less,” and “love,” and the reader experiences these words as searching and desperate. Since the object is varied, not only does Creeley experience the tone shift, so do the two lovers in the poem, as well as the reader. As Creeley searches, so do the objects and the reader; this happens simultaneously because of Creeley’s diction and syntax. While this is an “otherwise happy relationship,” as states Creeley in the final line of the stanza, as with the apple, this experience of “love” is complicated

This complication in form and content is further emphasized by Creeley’s use of punctuation – it is largely through punctuation that Creeley will influence the reader’s breathing as the stanza progresses. The comma at the end of line 9 indicates an obvious place to take a breath, but there are still three more lines in the stanza, without any internal punctuation. The first two lines of the stanza can be read comfortably in one breath, as with the first two stanzas. The second two lines of the stanza can also be read comfortably because of the breath taken at the comma at the end of line two. But by that last long line, with the three polysyllabic words – otherwise, happy, relationship – the reader’s breath is challenged. Creeley obviously struggled to think the thought, and thus the reader must struggle to read it, as well as think about it. The line itself imitates this struggle, as it extends hopelessly and irregularly towards the right margin. The line is the longest and loneliest on the page. As the breath of the reader struggles to sustain itself, so does the line. As writes Hallberg, “The particular significations of a system are seldom his focus; relations are more binding than referential significance” (371). The reader experiences a comma in a particular way when reading English, and thus has a relationship of sorts with it. A comma marks a place to pause, and take a breath. The

reader anticipates, searches for, a comma in any complex sentence. Creeley, relying on this relationship, realizes that using a comma at some point between lines 10-12 would not only affect the breath of the reader, it would also mark the closing of a phrasal unit. But Creeley does not want these lines to be experienced by the reader only singularly. He needs the reader to also experience them collectively. The reader experiences the frustration created by the lack of a comma only because she/he is expecting there to be a comma. Thus, in the third stanza, Creeley is again influencing the reader's temporal experience of the poem with different types of counterpoint (specifically rhythm and meaning), with punctuation (or lack thereof), and with the numbers of lines and line lengths. It is through these devices that Creeley is able to make the "emotion literal" on the page. Writes Diehl,

Whether the poet wants to translate emotion into emotional-literal (the linguistic relationships which evoke emotion) or wants an emotion-literal to evolve out of the linguistic choices he makes or discovers, the "quality of the emotion" lies in the kinship of the essential form of poem and feeling, in the ability of the poet to create emotion for the reader, "literally." (340)

Without these specific syntactical decisions, Creeley may be successful in getting the reader to *think* about one person being less in love with the other at some point in a relationship, but he would not have been successful in getting the reader to *feel* his frustration at the thought, and the frustration of the two lovers. It is only by creating this frustration that Creeley can influence the reader to imagine "love" as being something entirely different than supposed.

Thus, through the process of imaginary variation, Creeley both brings the reader into the poem and into her/his own imagination. Like “want” and “apple,” there are no two specific lovers Creeley makes reference to. The two people are not named. Thus the reader is encouraged to come up with her/his own imaginary scenario – who the lovers are in relation to the reader, what the lovers look like, and so on. The lines depend upon the reader making a mental picture of two people in love and *then* adding the complications that Creeley suggests. Once the reader’s imagination is challenged to see these two particular people in love, and then in love in a different way, the notion of *love* comes into question because of the context supplied by the reader. That is, the majority of readers will have experienced love in some way. The reader will, necessarily, feel an emotional connection to the word “love.” This emotional connection is what triggers the reader’s memory. Memories are stored with an emotional tag. When an emotion is triggered, this leads the reader to connect immediate mental pictures (like those conjured in the immediate reading of the poem), with past mental pictures, and to make new associations. It is thus only through imagination that intuiting an essence is possible in a poem. Writes Husserl in Lecture V,

For a consideration of essence, perception and imagination are to be treated exactly alike; the same essence can equally well be “seen” in either, / or abstracted from either, and any interpolated suppositions about existence are irrelevant. That the perceived tone together with its intensity, pitch, etc., *exists* in a certain sense, that the imagined tone, to put it bluntly, the fictitious tone, *does not exist*, that the former is obviously present in a genuine sense, the latter not, that in the case of memory the

tone is posited as having existed rather than existing now and is only presented at this moment – all this belongs to another investigation. (54)

Creeley is able to rely upon imagination as true, lived experience because imagination triggers the same emotional responses as “real” experiences. For Husserl, there is no difference because the body does not distinguish between the two types of experience. These two types of experience are both necessary to set an object into relief. This setting an object into relief – that is, to relieve it from its usual limitations – is only possible through imagination because our real experience with any object is limited by the laws of reality. But in the world of the poem, because it relies upon the imaginations of the poet and the reader, words such as “want,” “apple,” and “love” can be seen as they exist beyond reality. Imaginary variations point in unusual directions. Creeley, for instance, is encouraging the reader to move off the page when he uses the word “relationship.” Because the word refers to no one in particular, the reader cannot help but hold it in reference to her/himself, and thus in reference to not only all the past experiences the reader has had with love, but all future experiences as well. The word “relationship” also carries with it the energy created by the previous, fast-moving lines, as this line extends into the margin. The only thing that brings the reader back to the page is the fact that the poem is not yet finished. The first repeated line, “Do you think that if...” appears again, and thus the reader knows the process of imaginary variation will begin again. By now, there is a distinct pattern created by this line, and the reader anticipates its return. As states Hass in “Listening and Making,” it is not just the experience of repetition that propels a poem forward. It is also the anticipation of repetition that propels the poem

forward and influences the reader. Thus here is the first line again, asking another question as Creeley moves into the final stanza.

In the final stanza, Creeley continues with imaginary variations, this time quite purposefully drawing attention to both literal and metaphorical “breath.” If it were ever in doubt, it is made expressly clear in this stanza of “Do you think...” that Creeley considers his own corporeality and the corporeality of the reader essential when writing a poem. In this stanza, Creeley pushes the reader to her/his limits in terms of breath and content, making an interesting connection between the “breath” of a poem and the “breath” of existence as he asks the reader to read through the final complicated and expansive stanza in just two breaths. In this way, Creeley establishes a connection between what is on the page and how the reader reads it. Only through breath is one’s corporeality most intimately felt. If one is asked to breathe at particular places in a poem – that is, if the poet urges the reader to breathe because of particular diction, punctuation, and line breaks – it is impossible not to notice that breathing is taking place in one’s body. These syntactical structures call attention to our bodies through breath in ways that are not ordinarily felt outside the world of a poem. Breath is one of the ways we locate our bodies, feel as though we are “here,” as breath is both corporeal and temporal. Breath is also essential in the reading of a poem, as breath is one of the ways the reader locates her/himself in the poem. Writes Olson in *Projective Verse*,

It is the advantage of the typewriter that, due to its rigidity and its space precisions, it can, for a poet, indicate exactly the breath, the pauses, the suspensions even of syllables, the juxtapositions even of parts of phrases, which he intends. For the first time the poet has the stave and the bar a

musician has had For the first time he can, without the convention of
 rime and meter, record the listening he has done to his own speech and by
 that one act indicate how he would want any reader, silently or otherwise,
 to voice his work (22)

Creeley influences the reader the same way a composer influences a musician. Mere notes in a composition cannot tell the musician *how* the music should be played. How to play the music depends upon the instrument used, the beats in a measure, and so on. Punctuation, for Creeley, helps determine cadence and breath. It is not just language, therefore, that shapes a poem – but language usage and all this entails How Creeley uses the language helps the reader determine how she/he should read the poem. The punctuation functions as a kind of signal to the reader, telling her/him to pause, move faster, or stop. In this final stanza, then, it is how Creeley uses punctuation that most readily affects the reader, both physiologically and emotionally.

It is Creeley's transmission of emotion through the spatial relations of language that most fascinates Paul Diehl. He writes, "By attending closely to pulse or breath or to some other activity, we attend closely to emotion" (340). In the English language, a comma indicates a pause in the sentence, and at that pause the reader typically takes a breath In the final stanza of "Do you think..." there are four and a half lines after the single mark of internal punctuation, a comma, in the line "you once take a breath" (l 14). In the second stanza there is only one line after the comma, and in the third stanza there are only three lines. In each stanza, therefore, Creeley is expanding the number of lines after each comma. Because the reader has experienced the previous stanzas as increasingly difficult to read in a single breath, the reader is anticipating a challenging

final stanza, both in terms of breath and content. Creeley's object in the stanza, *breath*, is again singular and deliberately common, as with "want," "apple," and "love."

Yet while the other three stanzas unfold rather gradually, in the fourth stanza Creeley adds an imaginary variation immediately, within the second line, "Do you think that if / you once take a breath, you're by" (l 13-14). Within this line the poem begins its most complex moments in form, rhythm, temporality, and content. In many ways the fourth stanza is in direct contrast to the previous stanza. The fourth resembles a solid block, with the lines concentrated in the middle and nearly even in the right margin. The lines clearly build onto one another, rather than moving off alone into the margin as they do in stanza three. Also, as previously mentioned, while line 14, the second line in the stanza, contains a comma like line 9, this time the comma does not end the line. Instead, the comma comes precariously close to the middle of the line. As the stanzas have also been increasing in terms of length, this means more lines will have to be read after the comma than in stanza three. The comma also marks the monosyllabic word that receives the only stress in the line – "breath." Creeley writes, "you once take BREATH, you're by" (l 14). The notion of breath is the very heart of this poem, and Creeley draws the reader's attention to it so purposefully in this final stanza it is impossible to miss. The comma places emphasis on the word as well. Therefore, the reader is urged to take a breath on the comma *at the word* "breath." It is a fascinating combination of synchronous events. In this moment the reader's temporal and corporeal experience are influenced by Creeley's form, punctuation, and content. This also means that the rush of variations begin at the end of line 14, the second line in the stanza, instead of in the fourth line as in the previous stanza. This creates an even greater intensity between breath and

content The need to take a breath without a place to do so in the text will affect the reader both physiologically and emotionally.

The next five lines are indeed difficult to say all in one breath, and this is precisely Creeley's point. Again, as posits Olson, form and content are intimately connected. As Creeley has been questioning existence in its various forms throughout the poem, it seems logical that he would not only question "breath" in the phrasing of the poem, but also make the effects of "breath" literal in the reader. Creeley is challenging the reader's intellect as well as physicality. Without additional punctuation or natural place to pause, it is clear that Creeley intends lines 13 to 18 to be read in one breath. Moreover, Creeley has been deliberately using commas to indicate pauses in both content and breath within the other three stanzas. The lack of a comma in these final lines, therefore, is obviously intentional, as are its effects. Creeley writes, "that comMITted to TAKing the NEXT one / and SO on unTIL the VERy PROcess of / BREATHing's an ENDlessly exPANDing NEED / ALmost of its OWN neCESSity forEVER" (l 13-18)

Again, the cluster of stresses at the end of each of these lines creates a manic pace, moving the reader forward with growing intensity. For the first time in the poem, monosyllabic words that receive stresses are intermingled with polysyllabic words that receive stresses either on the first or middle syllables: "BREATHing's an ENDlessly exPANDing NEED" (l 17). The intensity created by the words themselves is complicated by the apparent lack of a moment to take an additional, and much-needed, breath. What results is one final intense question that could expand indefinitely if not for Creeley's use of a period. The final question is both complicated and frustrating, mirroring the cognitive processes of the brain and challenging the limits of breath. As the

reader feels the frustration of not being able to take a breath, this frustration is further emphasized in the content. The variations keep coming, yet the reader is unable to breathe, or stop, until the period.

Moreover, the complications are not revealed line by line. Nor is there merely one complication in each line. Rather, Creeley overlaps the complications, the imaginary variations, within the lines themselves. The first variation begins in line fourteen but carries over into the fifteenth: “you’re by / that committed to taking the next one” (l 14-15). The final three lines of the stanza come in a flurry, each variation connected to the previous variation. The lines function as a kind of fast-moving, ever-expanding thought. Also, a precise attention is paid to the activity of thinking, rather than thought, *per se*. As writes Altieri in “Placing Creeley’s Work: A Poetics of Conjecture,” Creeley will often prioritize “thinking over thought” (514). That is, this thought could be articulated in a much more concise and precise way. But the expansion allows the reader to think along with Creeley, and move through the thought as he has, with both the same pace and frustration. The reader and Creeley experience thinking together, rather than emphasizing Creeley’s overall, final “thought” on the subject. This, of course, is directly related to what Creeley states about breath – form mirrors content. Creeley must not only call attention to “breath” with his diction and content, but also call attention to “breath” through the reader’s body to establish a connection between metaphorical breath and literal breath. To accomplish this, the variation continues to expand into successive lines wherein the second and third variations are: “and so on until the very process of / breathing’s an endlessly expanding need” (l 16-17). Notice that the beginning of the third variation comes in the same line as the end of the second variation since the line is

enjambed. Creeley is asking the reader to keep pace with both his mind and his words, although the task is increasingly difficult.

The third and final variation is found in the last line of the poem: “almost of its own necessity forever” (118). What Creeley has accomplished is taking the object, *breath*, from a singular, simple notion and connecting it to not only the existence of the reader but also to the existence of *breath itself*. In the first variation, the reader is asked to imagine *breath* as connected to her/his existence. *Breath* at this point is still thought of as controlled by the reader, breath is connected to her/his life—“you’re by / that committed to taking the next one” (14-15). In order to live, one must be committed to breathing, taking breath after breath. But in the second variation, *breath* is to be imagined as a process directly related to human *need*. In this way, *breath* is different from mere function, the reader taking breath after breath. Instead, *breath* is in control of the reader. The reader needs it, is dependent upon it. In the third and final variation, *breath* is changed still further. Creeley posits here that *breath* may be separate from the body of the reader when he writes, “almost of its own necessity” (179). Breath, like “want” and “apple,” is its own beyond the body of the reader. This is certainly a new way to imagine breath. It is beyond personification. Rather, the objects have been set into relief beyond the mind of the reader, and thus beyond themselves. In this manner, the imagination moves from the poem outward, off the page. This movement is similar to what Pearce posits about Stevens. Pearce writes, “the poem, the creative act, must be made continually to point beyond itself to the problems of belief which its existence raises” (380).

Thus, the reader of a Creeley poem must participate in the poem, use her/his intentionality, to not only make the poem work but also in order for new associations to form beyond the page. This acute attention to temporal notions, rhythm and breath, and the attention to the corporeal body, allows Creeley to move the reader through the poem and then move the reader from the poem to life. And it is off the page where Creeley points the reader at the end of this stanza. The lilting “if” from the first line of the poem will not return. The reader is exhausted and breathless. She/he was just taken through an intense mental, emotional and physical experience. Because of the nature of breath, because breath itself involves cognition and physicality, Creeley can be said to be influencing both the reader’s temporal and corporeal experience of the poem. Time is an experience, and the reader experiences the entire poem through the body. Inevitably, it is the control of breath that makes the poem’s emotion tangible on the page and transfer to the reader. Diehl writes that it is “Creeley’s use of line ends and stanza breaks to introduce new pauses into the flow of language, his use of these spatial relations that creates a sense of breath from our expectations of syntax, that creates on the page something to be felt” (342). Creeley’s lines, then, are not arbitrary. Nor do they conform to meter. Rather, the lines are broken in places that will move the reader, physiologically, emotionally, and intellectually. Continues Diehl, “It is then the nature of *that* breath, of that complexity of referential meaning, syntactic relation, and silence that helps create ‘literal’ experience, that helps ‘say it’” (342). Creeley does not merely use words. He is in collusion with them.

It is these relationships that Creeley enlists, such as his relationship with words, that makes his poems always fruitful for exploration. In “Do you think...” and most of

Creeley's poems, especially those I consider in this thesis, the reader is expected to pay attention throughout the poem, the same attention Creeley pays during the poetic process. The reader must move with Creeley, breathe with him, go along with the variations in imagination and syntax, or the poem will not work. Moreover, the reader must also contribute her/his own consciousness. Creeley trusts the reader because of what he and the reader share. By using his own corporeality and the corporeality of the reader, Creeley is able to make emotion and thought not only literal on the page, but transfer to the reader. It is the relationship between the poet and the reader that is crucial. As states Creeley in an interview with Linda Wagner in *Tales out of School*,

Yes. People are the most important things in the world for me. I don't at all mean that in a humanistic sense. I am a person. And how my world is, is intimately related with how all other worlds of persons can be. So that they are the most insistent and most demanding and most complex presence offered to me. I am never, never apart from that as a concern in working (47).

Thus, for Creeley, the world of the poet and world of the reader come to the page, and poet and reader experience the world of the poem together. It is through their shared corporeality that the poem happens. As writes Husserl,

To say that every grasping of an individual object, and every subsequent activity of cognition, takes place against the background of the world indicates something more than the dependence of this activity on the domain of what is pregiven in passive certainty. A cognitive function bearing on individual objects of experience is never carried out as if these

objects were pregiven at first as from a still completely undetermined substrate. For us the world is always a world in which cognition in the most diverse ways has already done its work. Thus it is not open to doubt that there is no experience, in the simple and primary sense of an experience of things, which, grasping a thing for the first time and bringing cognition to bear on it, does not already “know” more about the thing than is in this cognition alone. Every act of experience [...] has eo ipso, necessarily, a knowledge and a potential knowledge [Mitwissen] having reference to precisely this thing, namely, to something of it which has not yet come into view. (32)

Thus, Creeley does not invent language or invent new objects for the reader to ponder. Rather, Creeley relies upon his previous experience of the world, and the previous experience of the reader, to write a poem. The reader already understands how the English language works, for instance, and the reader brings that experience to the page. Thus the subtle, and sometimes not so subtle, ways in which Creeley experiments with syntax promote an emotional and physiological response in the reader. The imaginary variations only work if Creeley uses familiar objects – want, apple, love – so the reader will undoubtedly have already experienced these objects in their most familiar contexts. Creeley’s variations (syntactical, physiological, and imaginary) rely upon Husserl’s notion of a world desiring to be revealed by someone patient and open enough to observe its fascinating potential.

CHAPTER V

HOW THE BREATH SAYS IT: LANGUAGE MOVEMENT IN “THE EDGE”

As with “Do you think...”, “The Edge” is about movement. That is, it is about thinking and languaging experience. In this poem, Creeley creates a particular kind of moving between syllables and words, words and phrases, phrases and thoughts. Writes William Sylvester in “I Know I Hear You” on Creeley’s notion of movement,

When poets wish to make language “move” or wish to present “actual speech,” they usually imply some social, educational, or regional level. The sense of “Polish mothers” in William Carlos Williams or “the Berkeley scene” in Lew Welch evokes flashes of dramatic, quasi-personae. The early poem “Stomping with Catullus” has such overtones, but generally speaking, Creeley has been astonishingly successful in writing “the way people speak” and yet at the same time without implying a class of some sort. He has done this partly because he puts the “custom of usage” into a rhythm of process, and thus gets the words from the top of the page to the bottom. (204)

The speaking in many poems sets the poem in either time or place, and this means that the speech does not necessarily reflect or engage all readers. Creeley’s aim, therefore, is

not to recreate a more accurate speech, but rather to engage the reader by making accessible his own speech and language patterns on the page. This attention does not engage the reader because it is accurate, but because it is authentic, moves in interesting but familiar ways. Creeley is capable of great leaps in thinking and speaking because he relies on the fact that the reader comes to the page having experienced language and how language works. In its usage, in its phrasal units, there is a rhythm. The rhythm created, from the syllable to the word to the phrase, is what propels the reader forward, even through starts and stops, because the reader understands that this is how the English language works. Because we do not use language as perfectly on an ordinary basis, that is through speaking, as it is used when writing academic essays or other prose, the reader has experienced its patterns and variances. While other poets sometimes force language into form, for Creeley, it is language that gives the poem its form. Thus the reader moves with Creeley, in short, because Creeley lets language do what it does.

Creeley also again uses imaginary variation in order to make the poem move. In “Do you think...,” Creeley relies upon the reader to read the poem, and in this reading, the poem realizes its form. The reader is often responsible for supplying both the specific object, the specific “want” for instance, and the result of the variation. However, in “The Edge,” Creeley uses imaginary variation to intuit a specific essence. To come to the given object, that is the object in its truly given, eidetic form, one must take into account all its possibilities rather than discarding these possibilities as irrelevant. In our realizing each of an object’s possibilities, the object *as it is* is revealed to the subject (“Lecture I,” “Lecture II”). In “The Edge,” Creeley is writing about the thinking process and what thinking reveals about human existence. The objects in the poem, such as edge, end,

hope, face, intersection, thought, world, and so on, seem to be unrelated. But as the final stanzas approach, the connections seem more clear. Creeley, by taking the reader through his thinking process, demonstrates that thinking is not linear. The objects come into relation with each other, are connected, simply because the thinking process has gathered them together. Taking into account that both he and the reader are corporeal and temporal beings, Creeley attempts to guide the reader through the experience of thinking about thinking by bringing into relation seemingly disparate objects, and, eventually, showing how the objects lead to a revelation about existence

Thus, similar attention is paid to temporal and corporeal structures as in “Do you think...,” but in “The Edge” there is more meticulous attention paid to sound. Although sound is important in all of Creeley’s poems, this poem is the first I will explore wherein Creeley pays special attention to sound that influences the reader’s bodily experience of the poem. This poem is meant to be read with precision, and it is impossible not to note that while reading “The Edge” thinking takes place *in a body*. The rhythms of the sounds, and the sounds themselves, establish a connection between all of the bodies involved in the creating and reading of the poem. The sounds, because they affect each line so profoundly, also show Creeley’s attention to the poem as a temporal experience. Some sounds linger; some sounds end with a punch. The breath is established and then varied, and thus the *experience of the sounds* becomes an intimate part of the experience of the whole poem. The poem becomes both a corporeal and a temporal experience. Without the body, the poem cannot happen. That is, Creeley involves the reader bodily so as to engage the reader mentally. Moreover, Creeley needs the reader to bring her/his experiences to the page in order to make the experience of “The Edge” both personal and

individual. Writes Husserl on the notion of association, “Our judgments relate to this world. We make (sometimes singular, sometimes universal) judgments about things, their relations, their changes and about the laws of their variations. We find an expression for what immediate experience presents” (“Lecture I” 13). Creeley connects the mind with the body through the past and present experiences of the poet and reader. Clearly, thinking is a process that involves the body in space and time.

As in many of his poems, then, thinking in “The Edge” happens through the body as it makes sounds. Meticulous attention is paid to the syllables and how the reader articulates those syllables when reading. Moreover, because the reader is actively involved through speaking and listening to the sounds, the reader is acutely aware of how her/his mind is moving through the poem. Changes in sound will register in the reader as changes in thinking. As writes William Sylvester in “Robert Creeley’s Poetics: I Know that I Hear You,” on “Le Fou,” “One does not passively hear, bathes in sound. One responds actively, and so the second approximation is this: I am aware that I am hearing you. An awareness that the mind has changed its place can happen suddenly, or at least according to a time that is different from acoustical time” (195). When Creeley moves from a series of fragments in “The Edge” to complete sentences, the first noticeable difference for the reader is the way that these two distinct patterns of speech (fragment, full sentence) sound when read. The fragment “Feeling thought, heart, head / generalities, all abstract— / no place for me or mine,” is experienced piece by piece by the reader (l 16-18). The reader is looking instinctively for a subject and a logical ending to the thought, and when she/he does not find these conventions, the reader feels Creeley’s frustration. The line is experienced very differently than the full sentence,

“The snow from a high sky, / grey, floats down to me softly” (l 23-24). This full sentence has the conventional order of subject, verb, object. Thus, the frustration is replaced by a sense of relief. The juxtaposition of sound and feeling within the reader, then, provokes both a physiological response and a mental one. As Creeley takes the reader from sound to sound, he also moves quickly from object to object.

The objects Creeley chooses are deliberately vague, or in the very least lacking the specificity found in many of his other poems, so the reader must use her/his imagination to fill in content. Moreover, Creeley shows in “The Edge” how the line functions to push the reader to her/his physical and mental limits. What is created in “The Edge” is a context, a frame, within which the reader may use the imagination—but only within those bounds. While in “Do you think...” Creeley was specific about each object in his imaginary variations, in “The Edge” there is not the same specificity. Creeley does not focus on one object as it goes through specific imaginary variations. Instead, the reader feels and sees bits and pieces of objects—“Long over whatever edge,” and “coming home, an intersection, crossing of one and many” (l13-14). In “The Edge,” Creeley uses the comma and the dash as the primary means of punctuation, and this punctuation serves to enclose certain phrases, but also to push them, as does the diction. There is a flurry of images in this poem, unfocused examinations, full of frustration. That is, of course, until the final two stanzas. The real subject, again, is the *process* of thinking. But sound is also the poem’s subject. This poem, like “Do you think...,” is clearly imitating the process of the mind as it experiences racing thoughts and images. It is the piecing together of a puzzle, but it is also about how pieces of sound can project forward, make our mouths move, make us feel in direct connection with how our bodies

move to articulate sounds. Emotion is active for Creeley. Diehl writes in “Literal Activity” that in a Creeley poem, “emotion names not a mental state which results in a set of physiological activities but rather the set of physiological activities itself” (340). Thus, the goal of the poem may not be to create a particular emotion in the reader so much as to make the reader respond emotionally, and this emotionality is directly related to the set of physiological activities. Creeley also again connects existence with the process of thinking, this time imitating the process through a series of nine stanzas, each with an equal number of lines. The use of commas and dashes throughout serves to illustrate the interrelatedness of the objects in the poem. Punctuation, then, is not used to control the language but instead to show how words are tangible objects. Creeley successfully creates the temporal experience of the reader *along the way*, through both the body in terms of breath/rhythm and imagination. By eliciting the reader to use her/his imagination as the primary means of perception, Creeley can influence the reader physiologically, intellectually, and emotionally.

It is this notion of perception through imagination and experience that is particular to Husserl and used throughout Creeley’s work, especially in “The Edge.” While Descartes privileges perception – that is, the literal seeing act – over perception through imagination, Husserl makes no such judgment. Writes Husserl in “Lecture II,” “I have here put on the same level ‘seeing’ [act of] reflective perception and [the ‘seeing’ act of reflective] imagination” (24). Thus, for Husserl, any “seeing,” whether perception or imagination, is equal. Both are seeing acts and both are experiences. The imaginary experience is no more important than the perceptual experience. Creeley has similar confidence in imagination throughout his work. While all poets must rely on the

imagination of the reader, Creeley gives his reader more leeway (and therefore more responsibility) than most poets. Creeley does not simply take the reader of “The Edge” through a series of particular objects that must be imagined. Rather, Creeley is deliberately vague in his choices of objects, so the reader can actively participate to give those objects more specificity in the poem by using her/his imagination and experience. In the first line Creeley writes, “Long over whatever edge” (l 1). “The Edge,” similarly to “Do you think...,” begins with a single object, yet while the object is simple and provided by Creeley, he is deliberately vague in its description. He does not write, for instance, “imagine the edge of President Lincoln’s nose on Mt. Rushmore.” Rather, Creeley desires that the reader provide individual specifics by using her/his own imagination and experience. The phrase “whatever edge” is nondescript. The specifics, then, are not as important as the process of imagination. It is thus the common experience of imagination that unites poet with reader, not the common experience of a specific edge. Moreover, Creeley must give enough specifics to help the reader imagine “edge” in her/his mind, but not so many specifics that the experience becomes Creeley’s alone. Thus “whatever edge” is just enough information but not too much, as would be “the edge of President Lincoln’s nose on Mt. Rushmore.” The poem becomes less about giving the reader a specific experience as simply taking the reader through the process of experience through imagination. The thinking process, therefore, is not so much built upon as pointed in different directions depending upon the reader’s imagination. It is language usage, and all this entails, that helps Creeley recreate on the page – and in the mind of the reader – the process of imaginary variation.

Moreover, while there are similarities between “Do You Think...” and “The

Edge,” there are differences in the succession and delivery of thoughts. While the language of “Do you think...” operated within each stanza as a kind of unfolding, in “The Edge” the thoughts are started and stopped, joined with other thoughts, pointed in strange directions because of the particular way that Creeley uses language and its conventions. Each imaginary variation is contained within either commas or dashes through the first seven stanzas, and it is the effect of the specific punctuation that helps Creeley influence the reader. Returning to Husserl’s “Lecture II” on cognition, we find

as soon as we begin to reflect on the correlation between cognition and reality (and eventually also on the ideal meanings on the one hand and, on the other, on the object of cognition) there arise difficulties, absurdities, inconsistent yet seemingly well-founded theories which drive one to the admission that the possibility of cognition as far as its reaching the object is concerned is an enigma. (25)

Thus, while cognition relies upon imagination, it is difficult to reconcile cognition with reality. Thoughts are rarely linear because there is the constant interference of reality. Imagination provides endless possibilities, but reality has limitations. For Husserl, imagination is a necessary component of cognition, but experience of reality is as well. This struggle explains why our thoughts may race, connect without seeming connection. Through the stress patterns and use of punctuation (in particular commas and dashes), Creeley is able to create the push-pull effect of racing thoughts: “Long Over whatEVER EDGE, / BACKward a FALSE DIStance, / HERE and NOW, SENTiment—“ (l 1-3). In the first line, the stressed syllables are full of force because of Creeley’s diction and stressed syllables. A concentration of stresses toward the end of the line pushes the line

toward the margin. The line builds with force, but it is a force not so much of energy but of breath. The “dg” sound created by the word “edge” at the end of the first line is created with parted lips; the breath is allowed to escape, and the “dg” sound resonates, vibrates. The word serves to push the sound into physical space (the margin) as well as both corporeal and temporal space. This first line sets up a unique rhythm, and thus breath pattern, for the end words of each stanza through stanza six. The force continues into the second line as the line begins with a two-syllable word with a stress on the first syllable, followed by the stress on the monosyllabic “false” (1 2). However, at the end of the line, the word “distance,” with a stress on the first syllable, ends with a breathy “s” sound, propelling the line forward with breath expelled through the teeth. The sound of the word has the effect of pushing outward, external from the body. Both the sound and the thought trail off; however, as with most breathy sounds, the sound of the “s” also connotes possibility. The breath makes the sound linger, and thus the effect is not immediately lost to the reader. Writes Diehl on Creeley’s use of breath,

How *does* the breath say it? And what is “it”? First, breathing is one of the physiological activities involved with emotion and one of the few we can at times control consciously. In moments of panic or fear, when breathing is erratic, shallow, quick, the decision to slow down and deepen and regularize the breath helps control (or in another sense, alter) the emotion. Second, the breaths we take while speaking are not arbitrarily spaced but are determined by the structure of language itself. (341)

In the case of the “s,” then, the breath it takes to make the sound of “s” creates a pause. Any pause in the line creates a pause in the mind of the reader. The effect of the sound

also affects the reader's body. Creeley is able to affect the reader physically and therefore emotionally by using a single unit of sound. The "s" registers both corporeally and temporally.

Moreover, the dashes in the stanza function similarly to Emily Dickinson's usage. What appears to act as a period actually serves to enclose the fragmented phrases. As the reader moves into the third line with its stresses on the monosyllabic words "here" and "now," the stress pattern continues but the emotion is altered because the line ends with a dash, so there is no feeling of closure. While the "s" in "distance" is experienced as possibility and openness, the force of "here" and "now" interrupts the breath. On these words the breath is punched, short, which feels jarring. The reader experiences the two words as forced and frustrated rather than flowing, and the energy of the thought cannot sustain itself. The thought "here and now" is lost, as the comma marks a disruption in the flow of energy. As previously stated, Olson contends that at all points a poem is an energy discharge. The reader must be kept moving. He writes, "the process at all points, in any given poem always, always one perception must must must MOVE, INSTANTER, ON ANOTHER!" (16). Therefore, any pause in the poem must be absolutely necessary, must point to a deliberate stoppage of energy in the line, or the line will lose its energy. Creeley, by revealing his poetic and thinking process at the end of the stanza, illustrates that thoughts are lost not through lack of concentration, but through a loss of energy. After the comma, the line continues to trail off with the three-syllabled "sentiment—" (13). Creeley uses the dash as a visual and aural extension of the "t" sound. Therefore, the final sound lingers aurally, and it has the appearance of trailing off on the page itself. The stress falls on the first syllable "sen," and only that syllable. This means that, though

the final syllable is a “t,” which would normally produce a stronger, harder sound, there is a softening effect because “ment” is unstressed. Furthermore, the combination of the unstressed “ment” and the dash also produce an airy, trailing-off effect found also in the previous lines. The “sentiment—” of line three clearly functions *with* “here and now” at the end of the line but also points the reader forward. Like Dickinson’s dash, the effect on the reader is to look backward and then forward because the dash feels connected both to what comes before, and what comes after. Also, the line moves both into the margin and toward “to begin again,” in line four because the word “to” is not capitalized. The word “sentiment” closes the first stanza and points toward the next. What results is a fragmented phrase encompassed by the dashes. Creeley, therefore, uses the sounds and the punctuation to affect the reader physiologically and literally, as the dashes influence the reader to move forward or backward, and connect particular thoughts. These thoughts, or rather the thinking process, is also connected to the phrasing. The word “sentiment” is the dismissal of this particular thought because it is going nowhere. The “here and now” is sentiment, but so is the entire thought that began it. It is in this third line that the reader gets the first impression that, however vague, what is being questioned is reality. With the phrase “here and now,” Creeley calls attention to time, and with the word “sentiment,” its relation to the human subject is questioned. The word “sentiment” is a chastisement of the writer himself, and of maybe anyone else who thinks the “here and now” is anything other than what it is. Because the word “sentiment” leaves the reader with a feeling of dismissal, the dash helps to solidify this feeling on the page. The dash shows that the thought is not even worthy of a period, as one would give a statement. Form is thus an extension of content and, as Olson would contend, the

thought is lost because the energy that created it is lost. This line of thinking is going nowhere, thus on the page the dash is used to point aimlessly into the distance. The combination of phrasing and punctuation, therefore, remind the reader of her/his corporeality and temporality as she/he reads. By drawing the reader's attention to her/his breath and the sounds of words, Creeley actively involves the reader not only in her/his thinking process, but in Creeley's thinking process. Through this interaction, Creeley is able to show that the particular thoughts in "The Edge" are related, as well as demonstrate that it is the thinking process itself that connects him to his reader.

These visual and aural effects that influence the reader corporeally and temporally through language and punctuation are used consistently throughout the first seven stanzas, making the poem consistent with the thinking process Creeley creates, as well as influencing the reader to participate and move along with Creeley. As the poem unfolds, Creeley demonstrates a keen attention to not only the physical appearance of the end words, but also to the sounds of each end word, as well. The way the reader pronounces each word involves the reader corporeally. She/he is involved rhythmically through the breath, and also temporally, through the physical use of the lips and tongue to speak each word. The sounds feel lingering or punched through because of the involvement of the reader, thus, without the reader, the poem cannot fully realize its form. Since the poem relies so heavily upon sound and all that this entails, it is imperative the poem be read aloud so a reader can bring her/his typical experience, of both language and the world, to the page. Sound itself is admired on the page as it is created visually and aurally, and these sounds will help Creeley establish a common connection with the reader. The

experience of language and all language can do is shared between poet and reader. As the poet moves through sound, so does the reader.

Since the first stanza ended by trailing off of the page, in stanza two, Creeley must make the poem, and thus the reader, move again. To accomplish this, Creeley relies upon the energy of diction. He writes “to begin again,” in order to restart the sounding process, as well as the thinking process, once more (14). The phrase is charged. It is not only a deliberate attempt by the poet to try again, but a direct address to the reader to move with him, to not give up yet. Though the objects did not produce any concrete thoughts at the end of stanza one, the thinking process the thoughts initiated is not halted completely. A connection is also made between the movement of “here and now” and “to begin again.” Because “here and now” seems a direct reference to human existence, the reader can take “to begin again” as literal or metaphorical. Creeley is telling himself and the reader to begin the thinking process again, but he may also be making a reference to beginning life again, or starting over. Any cognition relies upon past cognition. It is impossible to be thinking without thinking of something, thus the double meaning demonstrates that we often think both literally and metaphorically at the same time. Husserl writes, “Howsoever I perceive, imagine, judge, infer, howsoever these acts may be certain or uncertain, whether or not they have objects that exist as far as the perceiving itself is concerned, it is absolutely clear and certain that I am perceiving this or that, and as far as the judgment is concerned that I am judging this or that, etc.” (23). All cognitive acts, then, lead to other cognitive acts. One does not go around thinking specific, precise thoughts all the time. Rather, thinking is an ongoing process, bringing seemingly disparate thoughts and objects into connection with one another through thinking about

them. The mind is constantly searching, constantly associating, because the mind is constantly experiencing. Writes Patocka,

That experience contains no isolated contents, nothing that is not interrelated, is for Husserl no mere fact explicable in terms of factual psychological regularity (as the laws of association). Just as those collective formations known as quantities arise on the basis of the psychic relation of colligation, so the intention of the universal arises on the basis of a “psychic,” that is, free, relation which is not determined by the mere contents of a thing or, better, by the activity of examining and grasping particulars, of coextension of individual moments of these particularities—simply, activities oriented a priori to colligation in diversity, to synthesis and unity. Association is possible only because experience strives throughout for unity, for the coextension of the common. (80)

Though unfruitful in terms of specificity, the objects in “The Edge” do connect with what follows precisely because they follow for Creeley. The reader will allow Creeley these associations since the reader is intuitively searching for unity among disparate objects.

As stanza two continues, Creeley gets closer to sustaining a particular object, but, as demonstrated by the use of diction, punctuation, and phrasing, he loses focus and momentum relatively quickly. Within this continuing frustration, the reader realizes the poem’s odd movement will not be isolated to a single stanza. It is within stanza two that “The Edge” begins to reinforce the zigzag nature of thought. The thoughts seem unrelated in the mind of the reader, yet by relying upon the reader’s common experience

of language, Creeley is able to make the thoughts connect. As Steven Pinker previously demonstrated, the reader is searching for meaningful phrase chunks because within any individual sentence, there will be one or more chunks to help the reader understand the thought. Writes Pinker, “The pieces of bigger sentences are held together, in order, as a set of branches growing out of a common node” (101). Sentences are thus held together by what Pinker calls a “mental tree” (101). Continues Pinker, “grouping words into phrases is also necessary to connect grammatical sentences with their proper meanings, chunks of mentalese” (101). In lines four through six, Creeley uses phrasing similar to the opening line of the poem: “forfeit / in whatever sense an end, / to give up thought of it” (l 4-6). This “whatever sense an end” is much like “whatever edge.” With the two lines Creeley thus intimates the objects “edge” and “end,” but he then takes the objects out of focus with the use of the word “whatever.” These objects, unlike “there’s an apple on the table,” are pointed to but not made vivid. This time, in other words, the object itself is in question. “End” is, again, an open-ended word. The word surely refers to the end of the thinking process, but it may also refer to literal death, to the “end” of existence. Moving forward and backward through the first stanza over real and imaginary distances, the reader cannot help but make this association. There are many associations simply because of Creeley’s diction in this line, and it is the use of the dash at the end of line six that continues the string of associations. The phrase “to give up thought of it—” works with the previous line, “in whatever sense an end,” and the following line, “hanging on to the weather’s edge” (l 5,7). The reader is thus inspired to think of the “it” as the “end” as well as connect the “it” to the “edge” in the next line. The dashes, for Creeley, are less moments of pause and more instruments of connection

that show interrelatedness. This makes sense because the poem itself is about the interrelatedness of ideas, thoughts, and existence. Therefore, the dashes serve to connect seemingly disparate ideas, showing that Creeley, like Husserl, may see consciousness as an extension rather than a separate entity. In *Bird*, Maurice Natanson says of Husserl's notion of consciousness that "Consciousness is, thus, in its very structure, in an implicit relation to the world it seeks to know, and seeks to know that world precisely to the extent that it is 'of' it in some way" (x). The reader, then, seeks to know, to understand, throughout a poem because the poem, like all other objects, is an extension of the reader's own consciousness. The poem is "like" consciousness in some way, and the reader is familiar with its structures. Thus the reader feels immediately connected to it, seeks to know it, as its objects and the articulation of them are both familiar and strange.

In "The Edge," Creeley deliberately uses a series of phrase chunks that seem unrelated, yet through his use of diction and punctuation, the phrases gather, connect, and become meaningful to the reader. Lines one through 22, for instance, comprise a single sentence, with a period at the end of line 22. Each chunk is experienced as a singular entity because of the use of commas and dashes; however, the chunks are also experienced collectively because, as an English speaker, the reader is searching for, needs, a period to close the sentence. The chunks are assumed to function together, are assumed to be related, because they are in one sentence. Thus Creeley's moving from chunk to chunk is frustrating for the reader in its lack of focus. However, by using phrasal units, Creeley is able to sustain the reader's interest. As in "Do you think...," Creeley relies upon the common experience of language and consciousness to unite him and the reader as each moves through the poem. While in "Do you think..." Creeley

shows how the mind can spin out of control, in “The Edge” he shows how the mind can move back and forth, retrace its steps, move forward and backward in starts and stops. The poem, therefore, reflects Creeley’s thinking process as it is articulated in language structures. These language structures move the reader through the poem so the reader experiences, corporeally and temporally, each syllable in the poem as a meaningful expression.

Creeley uses syllabication as a means, therefore, to relay his own utterance of thought, as well as to involve the reader in each step of the process of those thoughts. Each syllable shows the language, and thus the thought, moving forward, backward, or in strange directions. The stress patterns created by syllabication register corporeally and temporally in the reader, and so the reader is affected physiologically and emotionally. As stanza two continues, the syllables are concentrated in the middle and ends of the first two lines: “to beGIN aGAIN, FORfeit / in whatEVer SENSE an END, / to GIVE UP THOUGHT of it—“ (l 4-6). The word “end” at the end of line six sounds much like “edge” in the first stanza. Though the “d” is a dental sound, produced by slightly opening the lips, the “nd” produces a nasal sound, which resonates and vibrates like “edge”; it is the “dg” in the middle of “edge” and the “n” sound in the middle of “end” that sticks with the reader. Both linger because of the sounds themselves. But as the stanza ends there is the same effect as in line three. The monosyllabic “thought” gets a stress, but the phrase “of it” is weak, both in rhythm and in content. The reader is not sure what “it” Creeley is referring to, thus the placement of the unstressed “of it” and the dash serve to push the thought into the margin with a trailing-off effect (l 6). “It” at this point is deliberately open and is deliberately softened by using the word at a place in the line that will be

unstressed. The “end” escapes Creeley as it does the reader, thus the specifics are not as important as the emotion created. Frustration is experienced in any activity that has no end, whether the activity is thinking or existing. Thus the effect is the same as “sentiment—“ in line three. Stanzas one and two, though not exactly the same in terms of stress pattern, establish a rhythm that is unmistakable. The second stanza ends much like the first, with a dash that makes the line trail off: “to give up thought of it—” (16). Thus these two stanzas are strikingly similar. Each replicates what often occurs at the beginning of the thinking process. Thinking is sustained not so much through thinking about concrete objects but because the act of thinking creates energy. As writes Olson, “I am dogmatic, that the head shows in the syllable. The dance of the intellect is there, among them, prose or verse” (19). Olson does not only mean that through the choice of the syllable the poet is able to show his intellect, although he certainly means this. More importantly, Olson demonstrates that thinking has an intimate and powerful relationship with the language we use to articulate our thoughts. Even in the syllable, the mind is at work, energizing the thoughts that will emerge. Thus, because there were what seemed to be successful starts in this stanza of “The Edge,” one should not be disheartened because they go nowhere specific at this point. As contends Husserl in “Lecture I,”

Whether in the act of intuiting or in the act of thinking, in the natural mode of reflection we are turned to *the objects* as they are given to use each time and as a matter of course, even though they are given in different ways and in different modes of being, according to the source and level of our cognition. In perception, for instance, a thing stands before our eyes as a matter of course. It is there, among other things, living or lifeless, animate

or inanimate. It is, in short, within a world of which part is perceived, as are the individual things themselves, and of which part is contextually supplied by memory from whence it spreads out into the indeterminate and the unknown. (13)

Objects, contends Husserl, are continually given to us, both through perception and imagination. The objects are part of a contextual world and, therefore, as long as there are objects, there will be associations between them. Thoughts are the articulations of these associations. It is not that each thought must logically connect, but rather that each object must lead to another object. Creeley successfully connects the objects because his thoughts bring the associations about. It is through his use of punctuation and language structures, therefore, that Creeley is able to sustain the energy of seemingly disconnected ideas and transfer this energy to the reader.

In stanzas three and four, Creeley radically alters the punctuation that, by now, the reader has come to anticipate – the dash entirely disappears. Creeley uses only commas until the end of stanza five. This serves as the first notable change in overall tone and cadence. The abundant use of the comma is experienced by the reader as less frustrating and more fluidly connected; therefore, the references to objects in stanzas three, four, and the beginning of five, have more possibility, although they are still clearly unsatisfying. Thoughts will not only produce energy in these stanzas but sustain the energy through movements between concrete objects. To begin stanza three, Creeley writes, “HANGing ON to the WEATHER’s EDGE” (l 7). This time the edge has more detail, though it is abstract. Now the reader has a specific edge to imagine. She too can hang on to it, as Creeley is doing. Of course the notion of hanging on to anything implies at least some

desperation. To hang on, especially to the edge of weather, seems particularly foreboding. The weather is a force that always changes, so there is the implication that Creeley is hanging on to something impermanent, intangible, and without solidity. Yet hanging on to any edge, even if it is the weather's, feels more satisfying to the reader than the phrase "to give up thought of it" from the previous stanza (l 6). The edge of weather is the first successfully imagined object, and this fruitful thought leads to other objects that are connected in consciousness. This shift toward the positive is also reflected in the tone change, as Creeley ends line eight without punctuation, enjambling line eight into line nine. This is only the second time thus far where such treatment occurs, and the lack of punctuation serves to propel the line forward with energy, rather than mark it with a distinct stress. When Creeley writes, "HOPE, a sufficiency, THINKing / of LOVE'S Accident," there is energy created through the suspension of the line, and this is echoed with the use of the word "hope" (l 8-9). The word "hope" seems a literal message to the reader that not only is Creeley reminded of hope in this moment, but also that the reader should experience this hope, as well. "Hope," in this moment, is "a sufficiency," sustaining the thought and the line. As Creeley continues into the next stanza, however, the "hope" of line eight is countered with pessimism. The word "this" at the end of stanza three lingers both visually and aurally, with the sound of the "s" as the final syllable and an obvious white space created below the polysyllabic "thinking" at the end of line eight. The pause shows a pause in Creeley's thinking process that is experienced by the reader as both anticipatory and frustrating. The word "this" feels abandoned at the end of the line and, although this is an indication to the reader that the thought will continue, the knowledge that this thought is not as fluid as the previous thoughts marks a

change in tone.

The tone created by the lingering “this,” therefore, sets the tone for the entire stanza four, as its enjambment sets the pace. The use of commas throughout move the poem quickly, but this movement is not a sign of fruitful thoughts but rather desperation. Obviously, the momentary optimism of “hope” is lost when Creeley writes, “this / LONG WAY COME with no PURpose” (l 9-10). If love, for Creeley, is an “accident,” then the purpose of love is obviously altered from a positive, purposeful notion into the realm of the unknown. The reader is struck at Creeley’s admitted unfamiliarity with love, and this feeling continues into the lines that follow: “FACE aGAIN, CHANGing, / these HANDS, FEET, beYOND me”(l 11-12). In previous lines, the reader learned that in this moment love is unfamiliar to Creeley. In lines 11 and 12, Creeley relays that even his own body feels removed and unfamiliar. The stresses on “face,” “chang,” “hands,” and “feet” reinforce Creeley’s frustration. The lines reveal not merely a metaphorical attempt by Creeley to feel and familiarize himself with his own body, but a literal attempt as well. As each body part changes, it moves beyond his mental and emotional grasp and, therefore, beyond the reader’s grasp as well. Moreover, while the three syllables found in the phrases “hanging on” and “long way come” begin each stanza with force, unlike in the first two stanzas, the third line of the third stanza does not trail off into space and time (l 7,10). To illustrate the connection between lines, Creeley uses the unstressed, monosyllabic “this.” The word “this” commonly has a referent, thus it is clearly connected with what follows in the next stanza. Moreover, unlike in the previous stanza, Creeley does not use a dash at the end line nine. The phrase “this / long way come with no purpose,” therefore, is the first image that clearly carries one stanza into the next. In

addition, the word “this” shows that the line logically connects with the next series of thoughts (19-10). The thoughts that follow help make the vague “this” more specific. The first image, “edge,” is lost quickly, and Creeley must “begin again” in the second stanza. However, as Creeley moves into stanza four, he is able to sustain the thought and focus on it briefly, because the thoughts are meant to move into each other. In other words, Creeley stays with the thought of “this” longer, and this brings a momentary sense of relief. The reader also experiences this feeling of satisfaction at being able to hold onto an object. Because there is a physical extension on the page, and because the line ends with a comma and not a dash, this implies continuation. The physical extension, then, also causes a corporeal and temporal extension for the reader. The sound of “s” on the end of “this” lingers into the next line, and thus the line is experienced as fluid, but hesitating, as the word “this” ends the line rather than beginning the next. Posits Diehl on this lack of fluidity, “For Creeley, rhythm is the self, not knowing for sure where it will stumble ‘to get to wherever,’ and Creeley’s lines, ending over and over again inside phrases, help create this stumbling, hesitant, searching self” (344). As Creeley searches for the next thoughts and the language that will articulate them, so must the reader experience this fluid yet hesitant moving.

In addition to the change in pace, it is within stanza four that the tone becomes clearly personal, even intimate, as the commas bring external and internal experiences into association. When Creeley anxiously explores his own “face,” “hands,” and “feet,” the reader feels Creeley’s desperation and frustration. Moreover, the phrase “face again,” suggests he is considering his face not for the first time but as though he has considered it, confronted it, many times before. This experience unites Creeley with his reader

because without a deliberate reference to “my” face, there is enough openness for the line to apply to the reader. Any human face becomes strange when examined in detail and contemplated. In the line and in the stanza, therefore, the reader glimpses Creeley’s searching self, as Diehl deems it. There is something in his face, maybe all faces, that bothers him, and thus he must return to it as though searching for clarity or answers. Thus the anxious tone created by the abundant use of commas helps Creeley move the stanza, and the reader, with a particular momentum. The lines are gaining speed, yet the speed is experienced by the reader as desperation. The cadence created by the commas allows Creeley to branch his thoughts in an unexpected way, as the reader does not have time to think about the thoughts but rather must simply experience them as they race along. Creeley is able to connect concrete images with abstract thoughts, therefore, because of his cadence and punctuation. When Creeley moves from a “long way come,” which is unspecific, to a concrete image of his own physical features, the connection occurs only because the phrases are united by commas (l 10). When he writes, “changing, / these hands, feet, beyond me,” the images of “face,” “hands” and “feet” are momentarily concrete and clearly interrelated in a list of features as evidenced by the commas; yet this time the thoughts are not so much lost as continued (l 11-12). The comma at the end of line 12, “beyond me,” does not have the same pointing effect as the dash. The dash creates a long pause, an elongation, while the comma produces a weaker, shorter pause. However, Creeley uses end words in this stanza to create a combination of end sounds that linger: “purpose,” “changing,” “me.” For instance, the stresses on the first syllables of “purpose” and “changing” serve to soften their final syllables. Moreover, the “s” sound in “purpose” and the “ing” sound in “changing” create similar

hissing and nasal sounds as found in the previous stanzas. The “s” and “ing” constructions create sounds that linger, and this means that the end sounds eventually taper off, become weaker. In addition, because of the previous construction of sounds, the phrase “coming home” in the next stanza comes softly, and simply becomes part of the stream of thoughts at this point, not random, certainly, but not separate. He writes, “COMing HOME, an Intersection, / CROSSing of ONE and Many, / HAVing ALL, HAVing Nothing—“ (l 13-15). The softened and unstressed final sound of “tion” along with “ny” from “many” and “ing” from “nothing” create a similar feel. Thus stanza five continues the stream of thoughts as Creeley, for the first time in the poem, gives the reader an idea of what the speaker is doing while thinking—driving. This activity makes the poem personal, but not necessarily subjective. Who hasn’t thought deep thoughts while driving? Moreover, the notion of driving, doing something that is both freeing and routine, adds to the momentum of the poem, as lines 13 and 14 move quickly because of Creeley’s commas. However, as line 14 moves into line 15, there is a clear break in the momentum. The comma functions in the same way as in the previous four lines. For the reader, the comma indicates the continuation of a list, a stream, and thus the reader is moved slightly forward, but this stanza is more like the first two stanzas than the previous two. The line begins strong and ends with the two-syllable word “nothing—” as well as a dash (l 15). The dash is a sudden jolt to the reader, much as the thought was experienced by Creeley. As contends Husserl, through language, “We find an expression for what immediate experience presents” (13). In a poem, a particular word may not be enough to conjure a specific emotion in the reader. Without the dash after “nothing,” the word “nothing” is experienced entirely differently by the reader. The dash, in this sense, not

only draws the reader's attention to the word "nothing," but also to how the thought of "having nothing" feels. With the dash, Creeley's momentum is broken, and so is the reader's. This particular stream of thoughts is lost. Like the first two stanzas, however, the effect of the dash is not so much a thud as a trailing away. The dash points forward and combines with the resonance of "ing" in "nothing" (l 15). By now the reader recognizes the effect and realizes the dash, combined with a particular sound, is only the ending of that particular thought. The use of punctuation is not so much thought out as created along the way. As posits Diehl,

Creeley's lines aren't measured in advance – they in a sense "wait" for that place in the syntax where a pause can help create "an occasion intimate with, in fact, the issue of, its [the poem's] own nature rather than to an abstract decision of 'form' taken from prior instance" (Creeley, *Words*). Such an exploratory activity helps Creeley avoid "intention," the notion that a poem packages what is already known, a notion at odds with Creeley's sense of poem as experience. (342)

The intimacy between Creeley and the reader is created because of shared experience. It is not only the common experience of driving through an intersection that is shared, but also the common experience of trying to language experience. Language is a common experience, as is the difficulty of rendering our thoughts into language. When Creeley writes, "having all, / having nothing—" he is, again, referring to the literal experience of the poem, that is, not having a fruitful thought, and also not having anything in life, is not possessing anything worthwhile. The emotion created through the use of the dash is at once frustrating and humbling. Creeley observes that life can be crippling, but at least it

is a concrete observation. The reader moves with Creeley through the emotion because the dash moves the reader both into the margin and forward. Creeley moves the reader through the poem by affecting and influencing the reader directly through her/his body. Each movement of the body is also a mental movement, as Creeley leads the reader through the variations required to intuit essence. Moreover, because Creeley had to become corporeally and emotionally involved with each object in the poem, so must the reader; and this means Creeley can, at no time, leave the reader behind. Creeley's poetic process, therefore, is similar to the way in which Husserl describes essence. Essence, in phenomenological terms, is not only an arrival at a particular givenness of an object, but also the process the subject undergoes to arrive at this givenness. Creeley's responsibility, then, is to urge the reader to participate and actively engage throughout the entire poem otherwise, the final intuited essence will be meaningless to her/him. It is the delicate and meticulous creation of the thinking process on the page that helps Creeley involve the reader at every single point in the poem. As "The Edge" moves forward, it is the thinking process that will bring Creeley and the reader into relationship.

Therefore, as the poem continues into stanza six, Creeley is able to shift from thinking about seemingly disparate objects to thinking about thinking. By stanza six, the reader is moving with Creeley, and is corporeally and temporally involved, thus it does not matter if the shift is logical in meaning. All that matters is that the reader continues to feel involved with Creeley as he moves along. Within stanza six, the reader witnesses and, therefore, experiences Creeley moving from the attempt to have tangible thoughts, working through the thinking process, to thinking about the nature of cognition. Through these various imaginary variations, Creeley is led not only to progressively concrete

thoughts, but to the essence of cognition. Writes Husserl, “If we inquire into the essence of cognition, then whatever status it and our doubts about its reaching the object may have one thing is clear: that cognition itself is a name for a manifold sphere of being which can be given to us absolutely, and which can be given absolutely each time in the particular case” (“Lecture II” 23). As Creeley moves into stanza six, there is similar languaging as with “to begin again” from stanza two. The next imaginary variation is produced when Creeley writes, “FEELing THOUGHT, HEART, HEAD” (l 16). Without a comma between “feeling” and “thought,” the line is experienced by the reader as a direct address. The line demonstrates that Creeley is “feeling” the literal and figurative relationship between “thought,” “heart” and “head,” so the reader should be feeling, both literally and emotionally, as well. Moreover, Creeley appears to be conjuring Olson with the association. Olson writes in “Projective Verse,” as previously mentioned, that verse is “the HEAD, by way of the EAR, to the SYLLABLE / the HEART, by way of the BREATH, to the LINE” (19). As Creeley questions this relationship in his mind, the relationship is made tangible on the page by bringing the words together. Creeley can literally feel his head, but he obviously cannot literally feel his heart or a thought. But by bringing the literal and abstract objects into relation, Creeley demonstrates his frustration at trying to get somewhere, get at what really matters in life. He is searching everywhere for meaning, both on his tangible body and in his imagination, but does not have a revelation. There are more questions than answers as Creeley continues, “generALities, ALL Abstract— / no PLACE for ME or MINE—” (l 17-18). Creeley is not only questioning where thought originates, in the heart or the head, but also how thought, any thought, can be owned. He is frustrated with the notion that all the things that matter are

abstract. He cannot touch them. He cannot figure himself into them, somehow. Yet these lines also represent Creeley's first fruitful observations about the nature of cognition, the nature of the thinking process. Creeley ends the first line with three monosyllabic words, all which receive a stress. This serves to push line 16 into line 17. "Thought," "heart" and "head" are all "generalities." Like the "face" that is "changing" in line 11, and the "hands" and "feet" that moved "beyond" Creeley, these concrete features do not retain their concreteness. By line 17, the objects are "all abstract—," thus Creeley shows not the flowing, zig-zag effect of free thoughts, but rather frustration (l 17). Both lines 17 and 18 end with dashes, and line 16 has a series of one-word thoughts, each of which, as discussed previously, earns a stress. The thoughts seem forced now, as there is a frustration building. In stanzas one through six, the end sounds are projected, propelled outward. The words move away, into the margins. Thus the words themselves, the sounds they produce, are interrelated. The thoughts are beyond Creeley; they are not, in a sense, his. He can thus only hold on to each of them for a short while. He tries to make connections, and sometimes does, however, other times the thoughts linger, stall, zig-zag, slip away. This is the nature of cognition, as writes Husserl:

But all the same I am now working on an absolute foundation: namely, this perception is, and remains, as long as it lasts, something absolute, something here and now, something that in itself is what it is, something by which I can measure as by an ultimate standard what being and being given can mean and here must mean, at least, obviously, as far as the sort of being and being given is concerned with a "here and now" exemplifies.

And that goes for all specific ways of thinking, whenever they are given.

(“Lecture II” 24)

Thoughts, in phenomenological terms, never stand in isolation, and are, always, essentially temporal. Thoughts, then, have a duration. On the page, Creeley is able to illustrate this duration by having thoughts appear and then suddenly disappear. In this manner, Creeley not only successfully conveys that all thoughts lead to other thoughts, but also that thoughts are connected to each moment in the poem. Moreover, as corporeality is also essentially temporal in nature, each time a thought comes and goes, the reader is reminded of her/his body in a particular moment. The thought, the moment, Creeley, and the reader become connected through Creeley’s meticulous recreation of the thinking process, and consciousness, on the page. Through the use of diction, punctuation, and articulation, Creeley is able to connect the thoughts but also allow each to stand in isolation as connected to a specific moment. The end sounds of “thought,” “heart” and “head,” for instance, build upon one another through alliteration, but stand apart as each monosyllabic word is experienced by the reader as a forced, individual sound. Thus the first line of the stanza does not trail off. Rather, there is a distinct punch with each word, ending with the thud of “head” (l 16). In lines 17 and 18, the dash has a similar affect on the page, as each line appears to trail off into the margin, however, the end sounds of “abstract” and “mine” are more solid. These are not the airy or resonant final syllables of stanzas one through five. The reader feels desperation, moreover, with “me” or “mine,” words used often by children to demonstrate possession, or a childish attempt to hang on to something. Creeley establishes an urgency, then, through the stanza, and this energy finally reaches its climax in stanza seven.

In stanza seven, the poem continues to gravitate towards the personal as Creeley uses the first-person “I” for the first time in “The Edge.” Creeley begins with the declarative statement, “I TAKE the WORLD and LOSE it” (l 19). The sudden appearance of the “I” indicates further, final desperation, and serves to make the previous relatively abstract thoughts even more intimate and revealing to the reader. The “I” is determined to hold the thought, and to hold on to its object – “the world” (l 19). Unlike in the other stanzas, Creeley focuses upon “the world” for the next three successive lines. He is able to hold the thought, and thus so is the reader. In his determination, the “I” is also, however, vulnerable. The “I” connects Creeley to himself but also to the reader, in that by switching to the first person, the activity becomes subjective and intimate. The “I” appears as a final desperate act of the ego to assert itself, but the assertion is out of desperation, not confidence. To indicate that his frustration with the thinking process is experienced by all human beings, Creeley closes the line with— “and lose it” (l 19). The ego is immediately consumed, fearful of, the gravity of the thoughts surrounding it. It is as if Creeley’s assertion of ego is immediately rebuked. Writes Patocka on Husserl’s free I,

Thus a free being, a free I, is corporeal in its entire substance; however, the primordial corporeity of a free being, capable of speaking of itself as “I,” calling itself a subject, is a subjectival corporeity on whose basis and on the ground of an absolutely near objectivity perennially constituted in it, there first arises a relation to our own corporeity as fully equivalent with other objects in the world. (148)

The free I, then, is wholly a body, and a body in relation to all the other objects in the world, yet in these powerful lines, Creeley is at first fearful of this revelation that he is a lone “I” within life, and within the poem. The “I” must be realized as subject, but it also must move beyond the ego to the transcendental ego to intuit essence. The “I” in the line, then, is both an active attempt on Creeley’s part to take control of his thoughts, and thus the world, and also a realization that the poem is beyond the “I” because existence is beyond the “I.” Existence is not his, inevitably, to own. Therefore, Creeley’s must first recognize himself in relation to the world in order to move beyond the notion of mere possession. In this movement, and in this release of the first-person “I,” Creeley urges the reader to move beyond the “I,” as well. To intuit the essence of existence, then, the subject must take the “I” into account yet must, inevitably, move beyond it. As Creeley moves into the next series of lines, “the world” is taken through the necessary series of variations that represent Creeley’s letting go of the personal, individual world, to a more meaningful notion of existence.

In lines 19 to 20, Creeley first tries to hold on to the notion of his world with “miss it, misplace it” (l 20). The phrase “miss it” indicates Creeley’s displeasure at losing “the world,” but also the displeasure at losing the idea of that world. He then attempts to “put it back or try to, / can’t” (l 19-21). In each of these lines, the breath stays internal because of the preponderance of “t” sounds, especially on the final syllables. The breath is thus stopped. The reader feels a change in tone with the forceful punch of each “t,” and with Creeley’s choices in diction that comprise the stanza. Creeley uses the monosyllabic “it” at the ends of lines 19 and 20, and once in the middle of line 20. The “it” has a halting effect, even in the middle of the line. As Creeley tries to control his

thoughts about “the world,” the sounds help transfer his frustration and desperation to the reader. The “t” sound produces both a sense of action and a sense of frustration; the word “it” is repeated over and over. This is also the first time Creeley expresses a desire to take control of his thoughts rather than letting his thoughts come naturally: “I take the world” (l 19). However, he also must suffer the annoyance and frustration when the world is lost to him: “and lose it” (l 19). This frustration is further emphasized with the use of repetition, the same kind of repetition any person might use to try to get her/his thoughts back on the right track. The repetition of “it,” “miss it, misplace it, / put it back or try to,” expresses Creeley’s frustration not only with himself but with *thinking itself*, and its limitations. The imaginary variations also come quickly. The “t” sound in “it” is short. The sound does not linger, so the reader experiences the “t” as a full stop, even within the line. None of the possibilities, “put it back or try to / can’t,” are revealing what Creeley is searching for, so he must move through them quickly (l 21). Creeley’s diction in the entire stanza further helps produce the effect of quick, forced thoughts, and frustration: “take,” “put,” “back,” “try to,” “can’t” (l 19-21). These thoughts are experienced by the reader as forced because each is expressed with a stress on the monosyllabic words, and because the words themselves are all active verbs. The lines feel harsh and judgmental to the reader because of the combination of stresses and sounds. Unlike in stanza four, wherein the content was also harsh but weaker in effect because of the passive voice, the deliberate use of a succession of active verbs in stanza seven heightens the effect of the content. The stresses on these verbs, as well as the halting “t” sounds, continue into the next stanza with the line, “FIND it, FOOL it, Even FEEL it” (l 22). The monosyllabic verbs, “find,” “fool,” and “feel,” also refer back to the

subject “I” at the beginning of the previous stanza, and thus the list of active, desperate verbs continues to frustrate the reader. However, unlike the “p” and “ck” sounds in the previous stanza, which have a stopping effect, this stanza emphasizes the alliteration of “f” sounds. Though the word “it” continues into the first line of this stanza, the harsh effect is countered with the soft, though clearly pushed, sounds of “find,” “fool” and “feel” (l 22). Thus the first line of stanza eight begins to soften the tone somewhat. The “f” sounds are the climax of the thinking process as the final, building energy is expelled. Clearly Creeley wants to incorporate two distinct feels. One feeling is intense frustration, and the other is of lessening, released frustration. The climax of frustration that began in stanza seven is now coming to a close.

This is also evidenced by his use of a period after the phrase “even feel it” (l 22). The “t” sounds are not emphasized, even at the end of the line. Rather, the reader is left with the breathy “f” sound. The “f” sound is much less intense, is instead open, as with the “if” at the end of each of the first lines in “Do you think...” The reader, then, experiences the alliteration like a final expelling of air as the spinning thoughts finally exhaust themselves. The energy changes from manic to calm and steady with the alliteration, as well as the period. The period successfully ends both the thoughts and the frustration brought about because of those thoughts. The reader, then, experiences a sense of relief when a long-awaited period appears after the first line of stanza eight. This period is the first period in the poem, and thus all the thoughts that come before it are not only related, but build off one another. Creeley, as well as the reader, is forced to carry the ever-increasing burden of these building thoughts until the period appears. Creeley used either punctuation or enjambment to move each of the previous lines into

each other. At this point in the poem, the period marks an obvious place for Creeley, and the reader, to pause, take a breath, reflect, and rethink. As writes Husserl in Lecture II in reference to imaginary variations,

All of these, however, can also be data in the imagination; they can “as it were” stand before our eyes and yet not stand before them as actualities, as actually accomplished perceptions, judgments, etc., even then, they are, in a certain sense, data. They are there *open to intuition*. We talk about them not just in vague hints and empty intention. We inspect them, and while inspecting them we can observe their essence, their constitution, their intrinsic character, and we can make our speech conform in a pure measure to what is “seen” in its full clarity. (24)

Imaginary variations, therefore, are not merely passed through but must be inspected, fully considered, during and after the process. On the page, with the use of that important, awaited-for period, Creeley indicates a clear stoppage in his thinking, and thus imaginary variations. Moreover, the period creates not only a sense of closure at the end of the process, but also a moment of uninterrupted silence. The reader is influenced to take a longer pause when she/he reads a period, a much longer pause than is created through enjambment or a comma. The temporal experience of the line, then, is affected by this silence, and, in that silence, it can be assumed that Creeley, and thus the reader, is intuiting about the previous imaginary variations and where those variations have led them both.

It is in stanza eight wherein Creeley has a breakthrough, and the reader experiences Creeley move beyond the “I” toward a pure, intelligent, and purposeful

observation. As Creeley moves into the final five lines of the poem, “The SNOW from a HIGH SKY, / GREY, FLOATS DOWN to me SOFTly,” his tone shifts to one of peace and calm, as he allows the long trail of seemingly unconnected thoughts to lead him toward the essence of “being” (l 23-24). Essence, for Husserl, remember, can only be intuited through exploration, through imaginary variation. Without these initial tortuous, fragmented thoughts, Creeley’s observation of snow falling, and the revelation that follows, would not be possible. Writes Judith Butler in her Introduction to Natanson’s *Bird*

Husserl made clear that it was only through an imaginary experimentation that the essence of the object might be known. Such an experiment of imaginary variation not only takes time, enumerating the variety of perspectives by which an object might be constituted and known, but it also lays out the temporality of the object itself, the sedimentation of its features, the specific time of its unfolding. The object known through imaginary variation is never the same as the actual object, and yet that actual object is revealed as a possible permutation or adumbration of the object in the course of its imaginary travels. Thus, the point of such a phenomenological thought-experiment is not to fix the actuality of the object, but to render its actuality into a possibility: to show the contingency of *this* appearance within the temporal horizon of the object as a unity of its own possibilities. (xii)

Therefore, the process of imaginary variation is not only corporeal, but temporal. Each moment, as previously mentioned, is an important part of the process. Not only are the

thoughts in lines one through 22 essential to this process, but also the time in which it took to experience those thoughts. Creeley, then, moves the reader through both a corporeal and temporal experience with the imaginary variations in “The Edge.” With the closure and silence created by the period at the end of line 22, Creeley slows his thoughts, and gives both himself and the reader time to reflect. At this point in the poem, and in Creeley’s thinking, it all comes together – that is, it becomes apparent where all the previous thoughts were going. The lines “The snow from a high sky, / grey, floats down to me softy,” are the most fluid, natural, and unforced lines in the poem. In this stanza, the fragments are interrupted by both a full sentence (one of two in the poem) and a full thought. Again, as posits Olson, the form and content are interrelated. Lines 23 and 24 combine to form the first grammatically complete sentence in the poem, and this stands in direct contrast to lines one through 18, which are clearly fragmented. Even lines 19 through 22, which seem to comprise a complete sentence, appear fragmented, as illustrated by the monosyllabic words and two-word phrases such as “miss it” and “find it” (l 22). These lines thus do not feel like complete sentences, but rather a series of fragments, forced together. However, the sound is completely different in line 23. At the end of line 23, the stutter steps of thought, as represented by the series of erratic fragments, are ended by a period. This period gives the reader the chance to make her/his first significant pause in the poem. Though the dashes at the ends of lines in stanzas one, two, five and six also make the reader pause, a dash only causes a momentary pause. The dashes at the ends of these lines point forward, reminding the reader that she/he should pause but then move on. However, in stanza eight, the observation happens more simply. The observation is not forced, and it does not come from within Creeley. Rather, the

moment happens outside of himself – it is an observation of the outside world without interference from Creeley’s complicated thoughts. Moreover, with stresses on “snow” and “high sky,” the lines are experienced as open. As Creeley opens himself to the world, and allows the frustration to dissipate, the lines open to the reader on the page. Form is an extension of content in this stanza. The thinking process changes from a desperate and forced undertaking to a more peaceful, less frustrating unfolding. As posits Olson,

Because breath allows *all* the speech-force of language back in (speech is the ‘solid’ of verse, is the secret of a poem’s energy), because, now, a poem has, by speech, solidity, everything in it can now be treated as solids, objects, things: and, though insisting upon the absolute difference of the reality of verse from that other dispersed and distributed thing, yet each of these elements of a poem can be allowed to have the play of their separate energies and can be allowed, once the poem is well composed, to keep, as those other objects do, their proper confusions. (“Projective Verse” 20-21)

Diction, and its articulation through speech, creates tension. Speech makes a poem corporeal and temporal, as the reader produces the sounds within the poem. As the diction and punctuation change, necessarily the tone is also changed. Through the beginning of stanza eight, Creeley embodied the experience of frustration, to mirror the frustration that can be experienced in any thinking process.

However, with these final stanzas, Creeley illustrates that the thinking process can also be fruitful and enjoyable. To show how the thoughts from line 23 to the end of the

poem differ from the rest of the poem, therefore, Creeley must make the tone shift apparent on the page, and thus for the reader. Creeley accomplishes this with noticeable stresses on a vowel sound that has not yet occurred thus far in the poem — the long “i.” The long “i” created by both “high” and “sky” feel uplifting and positive, rather than frustrating (l 23). The repetition of the sound marks a noticeable tone shift in the poem. Moreover, unlike many of the previous end words, such as “edge” and “end,” “thinking” and “purpose” are created either by pushing up into the nasal cavity or forcing through the teeth. The long “I” in “high” and “sky” is created with a completely open mouth. There is clarity behind this sound, as the long “I” receives a forceful breath like the “t” sound, but the “I” sound also lingers because it is a vowel. Moreover, in line 24, the stresses on the monosyllabic “grey” and “floats down” add to the open, airy effect. There is a long “a” sound in “grey,” which also lingers, and the “s” from “floats” carries into the “d” in the word “down” and also into the final word of the line, “softly” (l 24). The elongation of the “s” sound creates a feeling of calm up until the last word of line 24. Creeley is able to articulate this observation for the reader not only through diction but through the sounds created. The purity of the sounds, their openness, is thus experienced by the reader physiologically and emotionally, bringing Creeley and the reader together in a common, united experience. As contends Patocka on phenomenology, “The most important of all the prospects this philosophy opened is the perspective of the unity, of the mutual interlocking and interdependence of humans and the world, an interdependence which will not let us consider the world without taking humans into account, or humans without taking into account the world” (172). Because all poems are a reference to experience, and we do our experiencing in the world, then through the

poem, Creeley and the reader are brought into relation with one another. Creeley's confusion is the reader's confusion, and Creeley's clarity is also the reader's. This long anticipated clarity finally reveals itself in stanza nine, the final stanza of "The Edge."

Therefore, the clarity of thought – and thus the clarity of sound – builds as Creeley moves into the final revelation: "This MUST be the EDGE / of Being beFORE the THOUGHT of it / BLURS it, can ONLY TRY to reCALL it" (l 25-27) This stanza is the other deliberately complete sentence of the poem. It is not only complete in its grammatical structure, the phrase *looks* complete on the page. The first two lines use no internal or end punctuation, and because the other lines in the poem create a scattered, fragmented feel and look, the reader notices the difference in this stanza. Therefore, stanza nine not only looks different from any of the other stanzas, it feels and sounds different, as well. For this reason, the word "edge" at the end of line 25 does not have the same feel as the "edge" in line one. The "edge" in line one lingered and was lost, and the comma served to pause on the sound of "dg," but the "edge" in line 25 does not linger because there is no comma. This "edge" is a particular edge that becomes clear in line 26 with the added specifics, "the edge of being" (l 26). This "edge," then, does not feel harsh, rough, jagged. Instead, it softens as it is pushed quietly into the next line. This softening affects the reader physiologically as well as emotionally. With a complete thought, the reader's breath is relaxed. Moreover, as Creeley supplies more details in this thought, "the edge of being," the reader is not straining to connect this thought to any previous thought, or searching for meaning. The meaning comes easily with this phrase, and the reader experiences the line as unforced and fluid.

It is no coincidence, of course, that the essence of being is revealed after the first complete, succinct, and fluid sentence in the poem. The pure and relaxed observation, “The snow from a high sky, / grey, floats down to me softly,” indicates an opening outward for Creeley, and thus the reader (l 23-24). The observation that the snow is falling “softly” resonates in Creeley and, then, the reader, as the line is delivered without hesitant syllabication, or the use of a dash. This is a moment of purity wherein Creeley, for the first time in the poem, not only sees clearly but experiences clearly. There is nothing to pull this thought in another direction. There is no interruption from the world, whether internal or external. Rather, this moment is pure observation. The snow is seen as it is, as it exists. The reader, too, experiences the line as distinct from the others in the poem. The commas feel gentle, and serve to slow the momentum of the thought, rather than push it forward with intensity. It is only because of this pure, peaceful moment that Creeley is able to make the final, most crucial observation of the poem. Line 26 continues to feel easily and more simply delivered than the previous stanzas, and is experienced by the reader as fluid, because there are no commas or other punctuation to interrupt it: “of being before the thought of it” (l 26). The force created by the alliteration of the “b” sounds pushes the line forward, and the “it” at the end of the line is softer than the previous series of “its” because there is no comma or period indicating a stop on the “t” sound. Instead, this “it” pushes into the next line. The “t” is softer than the previous “t” sounds in the poem because of the “b” sounds that surround it. The only comma occurs in line 27, “blurs it,” but this also does not accomplish the staccato effect found in

the other stanzas. What follows, “can only try to recall it,” is a further rumination on the same thought (l 27). Therefore, the “it” before the comma is also softened, and what comes after serves as continuation. Lines 25 through 27 thus stand as a second complete, clear thought, carried through until the end of the poem. The stanza looks clear, feels clear, and the *thought itself* in the line is clear. The “z” sound at the end of “blurs” resonates, as does the “l” sound at the end of “recall” (l 27). The words are not pushed or pulled by Creeley. Instead, the words are energized by the play of sounds between them; therefore, Creeley lets the words have room to move freely.

Line 27, and thus the poem, ends with a satisfying, peaceful tone, and this tone is transferred to the reader. Creeley, then, comes to “the edge of being” through the experience of the snow falling. The “edge of being,” then, as posits Creeley, can be experienced only as it is, before any thoughts about it change it. Being, existence, is most fully understood only in its activity, through living. Perhaps “being” is not meant to be thought about, but to simply exist as it is through experiencing. Only corporeal, temporal beings can bring about existence through experiencing. As contends Patocka,

All meaning, all synthesis for Husserl is an objectification; consciousness is in tune with the order of the world only insofar as it is the movement of an idealizing objectification. If that is so, then the subject-body as a thing means that, on some level, this movement of *thought* discovers itself within the world as a *thing*, an object. Though, undoubtedly, it is an unusual object: because it is precisely the movement of the synthesis of meaning, it can never be merely objectified, but must always harbor

within it an element of the openness to things, thus exhibiting the trait of pure subjectivity. And an originary one as well: for the body, precisely as the locus of the pure subject, is the center from which the synthesis of the world takes place, the center of an orientation to something that can never be an object but which makes any relation to any object possible. (xix)

It is only through the experience of having a corporeal, temporal body that human beings experience the world in a similarly corporeal, temporal, meaning-bestowing way.

Experiencing through our bodies allows us insight into the order of the world, and allows us to intuit the essence of any given object. This essence is also experienced through our bodies, as the object is brought into relation with us in a whole new, fascinating way.

It is with new emotion toward the object “being” that Creeley leaves the reader in “The Edge.” As in “Do you think...,” the reader is again experiencing after the poem is complete on the page. Writes Sylvester, “Creeley’s works exist, so to speak, spatially, as well as in time. All writing obliges us to remember and to jump back, but Creeley’s poems oblige us to be aware that we ourselves are doing the remembering, and the poems oblige us, by getting at a fundamental motion of the mind, to move away from the poems” (209). While essence is revealed in a moment, that essence is forever part of the reader’s memory and thus further experiences beyond the world of the poem. Each essence affects one’s overall experience of what once seemed an ordinary world. As writes Patocka, we discover “each such paradox pointing again to the mysteriousness of the ordinary and familiar so that we could almost say that the more commonplace something is, the more mysterious it is” (3). Creeley, therefore, not only uses Husserl’s imaginary variation to intuit an essence, he also concerns himself with what Husserl

deems the beginning of any theory of knowledge: “inquiring into the essence of cognition” (“Lecture I” 17). Creeley, like Husserl, believes that an understanding of cognition and allowing cognition to do what it does – roam, connect, move – is essential to realize the essence of any object. By taking the reader through the thinking process with him, Creeley inspires thought in the reader, but also encourages the reader to think about thinking, inquire into the nature of cognition, as Husserl might say. In this sense, Creeley leads the reader, but does not control her/him. Creeley points, directs, moves and, finally, encourages the reader to move away, thoughtfully, back into her/his world with a whole new perspective.

CHAPTER VI

ART AS ESSENCE IN “SHADOW”

In an interview from *Tales Out of School* with John Sinclair and Robin Eichele, Robert Creeley comments on his experience of raising birds:

We had this plan of having a garden, which we did have, and it gave us potatoes and corn and beans and all that. I was absorbed with pigeons and chickens; I was really fascinated by both of them. I was raising a variety of breeds and I had a very good friend at the time named Ira Grant, who any breeder of Barred Rocks would remember, he was a very, *very*, you know, *great* old man. I learned more about poetry as an actual activity from raising chickens than I did from any professor at the university. I learned more from this chicken farmer about how do you pay attention to things. He had no embarrassment confronting his own attention. He did not try to distract you with something else. (8)

For Creeley, the meticulous attention that must be paid to raise show birds is the same meticulous attention that must be paid while writing poetry – and living life. It is through observation that Creeley learns not only *how* to focus but *where*, recognizing seemingly mundane tasks and mundane objects as the stuff of poetry. A shadow, like a pigeon, is a common, quite ordinary thing. However, from a phenomenological perspective, it is in

the observation of the ordinary that the extraordinary presents itself.

In “Shadow,” Creeley avoids becoming sentimental by exploring the shadow in its relationship to reality and, therefore, in its relationship to his own reality. As Creeley illustrates with “apple,” shadow is less natural object and more entity, working in relationship to the world both Creeley and the shadow seek to know. In short, “Shadow” is Creeley’s most direct poem involving Husserl’s intentionality and essence. Through his exploration, Creeley finds commonalities between a shadow and the poet. The shadow gains intentionality, desire, and essence, revealing that “Shadow” is not only about what a shadow does, but about what it is, what its possibilities are. Creeley discusses the shadow as though it has an intentional consciousness, much like the artist himself. The consciousness of shadow, therefore, is like Creeley’s own consciousness, and like that of the reader’s. It is again through relationship with the object that Creeley is able to understand “shadow” as having an intentional existence.

Any intentional existence, whether the shadow’s or Creeley’s, should not be understood as having a purpose in life, but rather as moving through life with purposeful intent. Since consciousness, for Husserl, is an extension, not a recreation, consciousness can only be understood as it exists in relation to its world. In Natanson’s *Bird*, Judith Butler writes, “Intentionality thus characterizes a certain isomorphism between consciousness and its world” (x). That is, consciousness resembles the world because it is an extension of this world. Intentionality refers to the way in which consciousness builds, or layers, through a series of intentional acts. To intention an object is not to create that object. Rather, the essence of the object is given to the subject only through associative acts that occur in the mind of the subject. In “Shadow,” Creeley gives an

inanimate object consciousness through intentionality. The shadow in the poem does not merely have human traits – it is an extension of Creeley’s world. Thus, Creeley is also an extension of its world, as well as the reader’s. The shadow and Creeley are related because Creeley brings them into relation through the poem. Writes Patocka on Husserl’s intentionality, “Thus intentionality proves to be at the root of appearance, or the manifestation of the object. It becomes possible to trace its ‘genesis,’ its ‘constitution,’ because the object is not merely intentionally *given* but *constructed* in the intentional activity” (65). Creeley, as the poet, is doing the initial constructing, bringing objects into relationship; yet, eventually, the shadow will do its own constructing, as will the reader. All intentionality is about being an active participant, bringing new associations through relationship. Moreover, because such a relationship forms in the poem, Creeley cannot help but see the shadow as like himself. Thus, it is logical that the shadow in the poem becomes, for Creeley, representative of all shadows, and, perhaps, all intentional subjects. “Shadow,” therefore, like “apple,” “edge” or “being,” has an essence that is revealed through imaginary variation. Through this series of acts, Creeley is able to show the shadow as a thinking, creative, intentional force that moves methodically.

Both Creeley and the shadow in the poem exhibit this movement of intentionality because both not only move methodically but also with attention and focus. Both think as they move, revealing that their movements are based upon careful observation and evaluation. The overall form of “Shadow” exemplifies the sudden starts and stops of intentionality and, moreover, the poem also moves the way a shadow moves, revealing that Creeley is moving along with the shadow, and that Creeley urges the reader to move along with both of them. In the poem, by using punctuation, diction, and syntax, Creeley

creates the creeping effect of a shadow's intentional movement. The shadow, for Creeley, does not move arbitrarily, rather, because the final product of a shadow can be a recognizable object, the shadow must move purposely to form its creation. A shadow's movements, therefore, are intentional. A shadow does not arbitrarily move in different directions, or stop. Rather, a shadow, like an artist, moves through phases until its creation is complete. Creeley's first line, "There is a shadow," is similar to the first line of "The Edge" (l 1). Both poems begin with the simple act of perceiving a singular object, without any deeper observation. As evidenced by the other poems explored thus far in this thesis, Creeley intends a poem to recreate his actual experience with an object, from beginning to end. No matter how pedantic each act might seem, each is important in creating the overall form and emotion of the poem. Conveys Creeley, "And I feel that when people read my poems most sympathetically, they are reading with me as I am writing with them" (*Tales Out of School* 26). It is essential for the reader to move as he moves, otherwise, as with "Do you think..." and "The Edge," the reader will not experience the imaginary variations with Creeley, and the overall form will not be realized. Thus, while this first act is a mere literal perception, it is telling that Creeley is drawn to this particular object – shadow. At this point in the poem, Creeley does not know why he is drawn to this object, and neither does the reader. However, the act begins the process of intentionality, and thus what follows will reveal something about both the subject and the object. Remember that intentionality is purposeful, even methodical, though during the act the subject may not understand its choices or progression. As revealed in Creeley's "The Edge," our thoughts sometimes appear random, without any possible connection or logical starts and stops. Yet Husserl posits

that all thoughts necessarily lead to other thoughts, and this chain is always purposeful, leading somewhere. States Butler in Natanson's *Bird*, "the intuition of essences takes place in sudden starts, in the immediacy of the moment" and, "that in presenting the world consciousness enacts the very intentionality it seeks to know" (xv). Intentionality, therefore, is a purposeful seeking, moving toward the particular objects that fascinate the subject. Both Creeley and the shadow move in purposeful ways. Moving is not simply a means to get from place to place, but purposeful seeking and exploration of the world. Objects are not so much found as given, through the very act of moving itself. Thus, as Creeley takes this particular object, shadow, through its series of imaginary variations, the object is changed in the imagination of the reader.

The imaginary variations in "Shadow" begin in line two, and this is also where the poem begins to exhibit the movement that will continue throughout the stanza, a movement that closely resembles the deliberate movement of Husserl's intentionality. When Creeley writes that a shadow is "to intention a place," with the word "intention" he obviously means that shadows are not real places. This seems obvious. Yet by using the word "intention," Creeley also implies that the place is intentional, chosen, as though intending a place is an intentional, creative act. The "Shadow," for Creeley, is creative. That is, the shadow does not simply exist as any other object. It has purpose and intention: it creates. To intention also implies something meant or said, as though through intentioning a place, the shadow is saying something about that place. Moreover, the phrase "to intention" suggests movement because the word "to" is usually used in conjunction with a verb form. Using another phrase, such as "there is a shadow / that intentions a place," may be similar in meaning. However, Creeley's choice of the verb

form moves the poem forward, and also urges the reader to focus on the shadow and not on Creeley. While “that intentions” sounds like an observation, wherein the focus is on the person doing the observing, “to intention” is less obtrusive and puts the focus on the shadow. The word “to” feels purposeful to the reader; therefore, the shadow is spoken of as moving purposefully with intentionality.

Moreover, the structure of the stanzas helps Creeley move the poem forward. The momentum created by the process of intentionality has a direct effect on the reader; the reader senses the lines want and need to move forward, as though they are heading toward something. Lines one and two feel like a complete sentence, and the reader experiences them as such. However, line two does not contain a period, nor does line three begin with a capital letter. Instead, the entire poem is punctuated as one long sentence without any internal punctuation or capitalization to indicate the endings or beginnings of new sentences. Creeley is, again, relying on the familiar conventions of language in order to allow the reader to help realize the poem’s form. The poem must be looked at and read for one to realize the effect of the stanza. The poem appears to weave in and out along the right edge, and the fact that there is no internal punctuation is immediately visible. Yet there are full sentences within the poem, and they do have logical starts and stops because of Creeley’s use of subjects and verbs. The word “it” in “it comes through and,” is the first word of line three and, though it is not capitalized, the word feels like the subject of a new sentence. By using a monosyllabic word as the first word in the line, Creeley places on the word, and thus its placement and stress give “it” emphasis. Creeley will use the word “it” throughout the rest of the poem to indicate the beginnings and endings of thoughts. The word “it” acts as a subject and a place to pause,

both on the page and in the mind of the reader. When the reader hears the word “it,” she/he naturally pauses, which serves as an interruption in the flow of the new sentence, and also serves to sufficiently close the previous thought. In other words, “it” acts as both a new subject and a mental period to close the previous thought before moving on. In this way, the sentences work together and separately, each functioning as a sentence (or observation) in itself and as a seamless, fluid extension. The movement is both isolated and connected, as further demonstrated by Creeley’s use of punctuation. While a period indicates a full stop to the reader, the introduction of a new subject influences the reader to move forward but also make a mental note that the previous thought is complete. Creeley does not want any full stops within the poem, since full stops would stop the momentum of the poem, and this would not reinforce the movement of the shadow. Thus, the lines creep forward, sometimes slowly, sometimes more quickly, and with brief pauses at various places, until the final period in line 12. Each imaginary variation, therefore, works in isolation and with every other line in the poem, establishing for the reader the movement of Creeley’s thinking mind as it moves with the shadow’s movements. Also, the imaginary variations begin to show the shadow as a moving, independent entity, not a stagnant recreation. As the poem continues, the shadow will become more and more autonomous as its movements take over the poem.

In lines three and four, the reader gets the first intimation that Creeley is coming to a realization about the shadow’s essence as an autonomous, intentional, purposeful, moving entity. When Creeley writes “it comes through and,” the word “comes” sets the entire poem in the present tense, which has the effect of urgency on the reader (13).

Cynthia Dubin Edelberg writes that in Creeley’s poem “I Keep To Myself Such

Measures....” “Creeley’s use of the present tense throughout the poem suggests the spontaneity of his realization” (“Robert Creeley’s Words: The Comedy of the Intellect,” 269). The present tense throughout “Shadow” creates similar effects, helping the reader understand that Creeley is observing the shadow in the moment and thus his realizations are also happening in the moment. The tense also shows that Creeley’s desire is for the reader to experience the shadow along with Creeley. Moreover, in this line Creeley shows that the shadow is moving of its own volition, rather than moving because he sees it moving. The phrase “it comes through” is much different than “I see it come through.” With “it” as the subject, and the monosyllabic word that receives a stress, the shadow is the focus, rather than Creeley. The phrase also suggests that the shadow emerges as if having waited to do so, as though the shadow exists even when not observed. The typical reader will not think of shadows of existing, as having existence, even when not seen; yet “it” can only come through if “it” is already a shadow, beyond the perception of the viewer. The shadow, then, is not only a shadow because Creeley observes it. Rather, the shadow exists on its own, without a necessary observer and even when not producing a visible shadow. This autonomous existence is further emphasized by Creeley’s omission of details. The word “through” could logically be followed by “my window” or other such specifics, but with the omission, Creeley lets the reader know that this shadow can be any shadow, and is like all shadows. This is the first line in the poem that suggests that Creeley is no longer merely observing the shadow for the sake of observing it, but rather to get at something about it, to get at its essential nature.

However, Creeley’s tone changes as he moves into line four and, again, the shift in momentum affects the reader. When Creeley continues with “is itself,” the “and” at

the end of line three is enjambed, producing a noticeable pause, as if Creeley is thinking about what to say next, or about how to articulate what he is thinking. In addition, the “and” is the first indication in the poem that Creeley wants the reader to move as he moves. The enjambment indicates a pause in thinking, and thus it is in this moment that the reader first notices her/his relationship with Creeley. Lines one and two read like a full sentence, and since line two is not enjambed, the words read, at least partially, at the pace the reader wants to read them. However, because line three is enjambed, the reader has no choice but to pause where Creeley pauses. Thus the line marks the first place where the reader notices the cadence of the poem, and that this cadence will be influenced by Creeley’s thinking and writing. The enjambment also comes just before Creeley’s observation that a shadow is itself, which is the first radical imaginary variation in the poem. From this point on in the poem, the shadow’s traits and movements will be in reference to this “self.” The observation is the first step toward intuiting the essence of “shadow,” since this is the first radical departure from the ordinary shadow with which the reader is familiar. Most commonly, a shadow is viewed in reference to the object it shadows, as in *shadow of a tree*, yet, Creeley’s use of the phrase “is itself” reveals that no matter what object the shadow is shadowing, the shadow has a self beyond that semblance. The use of the word “self” also implies that, for Creeley, the shadow has a body, at least in his imagination. The shadow is only capable of being a “self,” and creating, if it is able to interact with the world. The introduction of “itself” is the first indication that Creeley is imagining the shadow as in literal relationship with the world it seeks to know.

Through this act of imagination, Creeley also brings himself in closer relation to

the shadow. In a sense, Creeley is speaking for the shadow in the poem, as well as himself. Further indication of this revelation is the pause on “and,” which heightens the feeling of expectation in the reader, as the coordinating conjunction marks an obvious place where something will next be revealed. Stresses on the words “is” and “self” from “itself,” also draw attention to the observation. Further, the beginning of line four marks the imaginary variation that will direct the rest of the poem. Each subsequent variation serves to reinforce and make more specific the radical observation that a shadow is a “self.” In the phenomenological sense, the observation means that a shadow has an evident givenness, can be seen as itself and in its various forms. Writes Husserl in Lecture IV,

Thus if we hold fast to the absolute-givenness of which we already know that it does not signify the self-givenness of genuine (*reell*) particulars, not even the absolute particulars of the *cogitatio*, then the question arises as to how far it extends and as to the extent which, and the sense in which, it ties itself down to the sphere of *cogitationes* / and the universals which are abstracted from them. If one has cast off the first and most immediate prejudice, which sees the only absolute datum in the particular *cogitatio* and in the sphere of the genuinely (*reell*) immanent things, one must now also do away with the further and no less immediate prejudice, according to which newly self-given objects spring up *only* in general intuitions derived from the sphere of *cogitationes*. (50)

Having begun with the simple observation, “There is a shadow,” Creeley moves beyond this observation with “is itself” (l 1, 4). Creeley reveals in this observation that he is

capable of seeing the shadow beyond its typical possibilities, that is as a seemingly unreal object that imitates real objects. When Creeley remarks that the shadow “is itself,” this implies not only that the shadow exists on its own, but that the shadow has a self that is unified, unchanging, despite the fact that the role it plays is to imitate other objects. The shadow, instead, exhibits the self-givenness of intentionality, as it moves independently and meticulously through its own creative process and, because of this, the shadow can be seen and understood as having an essence. Shadow, in Creeley’s phenomenological terms, can only always be *shadow*.

The series of observations by Creeley that begin in line four, further serve to show that the shadow has an essence because it is able to move through its creative process, a process that will have striking similarities to intentionality and to Creeley’s own poetic process. With the phrase “each stasis,” Creeley not only expresses that the shadow is beginning to create something, but also tells something about the way in which a shadow creates. The word “each” can be understood in one of two ways. First, “each” may refer to each *shadow of something* that a shadow creates. Or second, “each” may imply that there are a series of acts that a shadow undertakes in order for a *shadow of something* to be complete. Since Creeley is observing a singular shadow, it is more likely that the second way to understand “each” works best with the poem. Creeley is clearly watching (or, at least, imagining) with intensity, and it would be difficult to observe more than one shadow at a time with this focus. Further, the word “stasis” implies that the process has a series of points wherein the shadow pauses or stops. Therefore, “each stasis,” ironically, implies movement, as the word “each” shows that the shadow is moving. This movement is also emphasized, again, by Creeley’s enjambment of line four into line five. This

enjambment will continue through the rest of the poem, each imaginary variation beginning in one line and continuing into the next. This enjambment, again, moves the poem forward, but also indicates how Creeley makes the observations: one at a time, moving and pausing as the shadow moves and pauses. The phrase “each stasis” reveals that Creeley sees each part of the shadow’s creative process as imperative to the final complete shadow. Creeley sees the shadow moving through a series of steps, rather than seeing the final, completed shadow. Thus, if the shadow is indeed moving through a series of steps, those steps must be based on some internal process, perhaps the shadow’s imagination. This would be very similar to Creeley’s process. Remember, Creeley emphasizes that he has never set out to write a poem about anything in particular; he does not choose his subjects. It is the process of writing that is most important to him; the actual writing is more important than having something to “say” about a subject. In an interview with Creeley, Linda Wagner asks, “You don’t, then, have any ‘point’ to make, to use a common term of reference?” Creeley replies,

I have a point to make when I begin writing insofar as I can write; that is, the point I wish to make is that I am writing. Writing to me is the primary articulation that’s possible to me. So when I write, that’s what I’m at work with, or that’s what I’m trying to gain, an articulation of what confronts me, which I can’t really realize or anticipate prior to the writing. I think I said—to egocentrically quote myself—in the introduction to *Gold Diggers*, well over ten years ago, that if you say one thing it will always lead to more than you had thought to say. This has always been my experience. (46)

Creeley has writing as his primary articulation, and a shadow has “shadowing,” if you will, as its primary articulation. Like Creeley, the shadow does not necessarily set out to say something about an object, but through its shadowing, it does, in fact, say something. The line “to intention a place” implies that the shadow chooses a place; yet, it also implies that the shadow does not know exactly what will be said about that place until the shadowing process is complete. The use of “a place” may seem vague, but Creeley, remember, is emphasizing the process over the final product. With “each stasis,” the shadow moves closer to the final artistic creation, much the same way Creeley moves forward with each syllable, and each line. For Creeley, the shadow’s movement is intentional because it is purposeful. As he watches (or imagines) the shadow, Creeley gets the sense that the shadow knows what it is doing, that the shadow is urged to move much the same way Creeley’s words urge him to move.

This idea of a knowing, thinking shadow is expressed most explicitly in the next lines when Creeley writes, “of its mindedness ex- / plicit” (l 5-6). The stress on the syllable “mind” puts emphasis on this part of the word, and the use of the possessive “its” clearly refers to the “mindedness” of the shadow, not to the “mindedness” of Creeley, or of the “place” in line two. Clearly, Creeley urges the reader to also see the shadow as possessing and using a mind. Moreover, the word “mindedness” is the noun form of the adjective “minded,” which not only means having a mind, but having a mind of a specific type. The word, then, not only points to the shadow as a minded self, but to a particular kind of minded self, with a thinking, creative mind. The “mindedness” Creeley refers to obviously shows a connection between the shadow and the poet. This shadow, like Creeley, is thinking before and during its creative process, through “each

stasis.” “Each stasis” happens in the consciousness of the shadow before it reaches the perceptible shadow

In addition, the word “ex- / plicit” also joins Creeley and the shadow in the thinking process. One possible explanation for the line break is that to put the entire word “explicit” in line five would disrupt the momentum of the poem. Without the enjambment, the line ends flat, and there is nothing to push the reader into line six. However, a second, and I think more intriguing, explanation is that Creeley actually pauses after the syllable “ex-“ because the shadow’s movement pauses. Creeley is moving with the shadow, and as the shadow may have paused in this moment, so must Creeley. Moreover, Creeley’s primary articulation, as he calls it, is writing. Thus, while the shadow is moving, Creeley is thinking and writing. There are millions of words that begin with the prefix -ex that may have fit within the poem – extraordinary, exact, explosive. But as the shadow is looking to make each stasis of its creation explicit, Creeley must also make his articulation explicit. He pauses to wait for the shadow, *and* to find the right word to articulate the moment. Perhaps Creeley did think to use another word first, but changes his mind in the moment, or because the shadow moves in such a way after the pause as to elicit another word. In either case, the pause affects both Creeley and the reader. Creeley desires the reader to move along with him, and to create this pause in thinking and movement on the page is a literal expression of the moment for the reader that will be experienced in a particular way. In “I Know That I Hear You,” William Sylvester, in reference to the following lines from Creeley – “What is the / day of the / year we / sit in with / such fear” – writes,

In both of these examples, the pattern on the page implies a way of

reading, or perhaps more accurately, the pattern on the page indicates the common center that all individual readings will probably share, or, as Creeley has put it, the length of the line is like a bar of music. The lines are not arranged as a counterpoint between rhetorical lengths and syntactical units; the length of a line is the length of a thought, or perhaps, the length of a motion of thought. The incomplete phrase “What is the” does not “suggest” expectation. As isolated on the page, the phrase *states* an expectation, a tension within the mind. The phrase “sit in with” does not *suggest* physical accompaniment; it *states* it, so that the next segment, “such fear,” creates a change of place in the mind, a movement from the outer world to the inner, and it is the change itself which is important.

(196-197)

When Creeley writes, “What is the,” the tension experienced by Creeley in the thinking and writing is also experienced by the reader in the reading. Based on the conventions of the English language, the reader expects an object to follow the definite article “the.” This creates not only tension, but expectation. Creeley, remember, is trying to make an emotion literal on the page, not merely suggest it. As previously discussed, when Creeley states that he is “writing with” the reader, he does not mean he is writing with them in mind. Rather, the poem should literally move with him so the reader can move with him (*Tales Out of School* 26). With the syllable “ex-“ ending the line, this not only creates hesitation in the mind of the reader, but anticipation and expectation. As with the enjambed “and” in line three, using the “ex-“ as an enjambed syllable affects the reader visually, emotionally, and intellectually. Since the reader already experienced the

expectation created by the enjambed “and” in line three, and its successive imaginary variation, the reader will anticipate just such a variation in line six. The word “ex- / plicit” may not be what the reader is expecting, but the prefix “ex-“ with a hyphen obviously means the rest of the word will follow, and the momentum created by the prefix heightens the expectation. Moreover, the word “explicit,” like the word “its,” successfully urges the reader to focus on the shadow and not on Creeley. For instance, a word such as “extraordinary” is a judgment on Creeley’s part, the word revealing how Creeley feels about the shadow’s movement. Such a judgment says more about Creeley than about the shadow. However, the word “explicit,” though not devoid of emotion, focuses the reader on the shadow’s accomplishment, rather than on how Creeley is feeling about that accomplishment. In addition, the word “explicit” further emphasizes that “each stasis” is necessary for the *shadow of something* to be complete. As “explicit” means to be fully revealed without ambiguity, the word choice implies that “each stasis” not only reveals something to the observer, but also to and about the shadow. If the shadow is moving through each stasis with such focus, such explicitness, then its mind cannot fully know what the *shadow of something* will look like until the process is complete. The focus for the shadow, as for Creeley, is not on the end result but the process, the activity. States Creeley in the Linda Wagner interview, “In writing I’m telling something to myself, curiously, that I didn’t have the knowing of previously,” and, “I write what I don’t know, in that sense” (*Tales Out of School* 26). The use of the word “explicit” reveals that it is the process of the shadow that fascinates Creeley, not the end result. In the process, Creeley can identify with the shadow, as each moves in synch with its primary mode of articulation. It is through this identification with the shadow that

Creeley is able to intuit its essence.

As the poem continues, the relationship between Creeley and the shadow becomes even more intimate, as the shadow begins to show its possibility as having a purposeful existence. The phrase “walled into / semblance” in lines six and seven shows Creeley’s identification with the shadow, but also marks a shift in tone. At first, the phrase “walled” feels negative to the reader. To be “walled” into anything feels frustrating and constraining; yet the word “walled” may not necessarily be wholly negative. First, the word “walled” intensifies Creeley’s relationship with the shadow, as this line further illustrates commonalities between the poet and the shadow. The shadow is “walled into / semblance” because the shadow’s role is to create the appearance of something else. No matter its perfection, a shadow of a tree will always be a shadow of a tree and not the tree itself. Much the same can be said about a poem. A poem about a shadow (forgive me for saying the poem is *about* a shadow) will always only be a poem about a shadow, and will never actually be the shadow itself. Again referring to Hines in *The Later Poetry of Wallace Stevens*, in “The Blue Guitar,” “He complains that he can only *approach* the world of things in the poem. Each approach is a version of reality, not reality” (62). Thus a poem is also “walled into / semblance,” as is the poet. However, unlike Stevens, Creeley does not indicate that a poet, nor a shadow, want to be anything other than what they are in the poem. Any hint of dissatisfaction in its role, as I will touch on more extensively in a moment, is immediately resolved. Moreover, a second reading of the word “walled” may indicate that Creeley means the shadow is so perfect in its creation that the place it intends appears walled in. The shadow may be bound by *shadow of tree*, but it may also so perfectly intimate a tree that the tree appears to have rigid, solid

borders. To come so close to the appearance of an actual tree is an accomplishment, as is getting the reader to come so close to the actual experience of the poet. It is possible, then, to read the line in two ways, and I think Creeley meant for the reader to do so, since the feeling of frustration is not the focus of the poem. The poem begins with the possibility that shadows have an intentional existence, and the idea that even a shadow can influence its own existence feels quite positive. The shadow, as Creeley sees and understands it, is beyond its specious appearances. Remember, the end result, the *shadow of something*, is not privileged over the *process of creating* the shadow of something. That is, the shadow, for Creeley, is most fascinating in its creative activity, and this creative activity should be understood as the shadow's essence. Moreover, never in the poem does Creeley "name" the shadow. He does not title the poem "Shadow of a Tree," for instance, nor does he state anywhere in the poem that the shadow is trying to create *shadow of a tree*. The end result of what a shadow is creating is irrelevant, as this observation would only point to this particular shadow, and Creeley sees in this particular shadow the essence of *shadow*.

Moreover, the tone is further complicated in the following line when Creeley writes, "it is a / seemingly living place" (l 6-7). Again, upon our first reading, the "it" most logically refers to the shadow. Yet, upon further examination, the "it" does not necessarily refer to "shadow," but rather to the place the shadow creates. The word "is" can also be understood as "becomes"; the shadow "is" in this moment a "seemingly living place." Perhaps Creeley means that the shadow, in this moment, *is* the place that it intends. The use of the word "place" may, therefore, indicate that the place is "seemingly living," but not that the shadow is seemingly living. Creeley does not write that "it is

seemingly living,” which would most obviously refer to the shadow as the “it.” But with the addition of the word “place,” the place feels separate from the shadow, as it does in line two, “to intention a place.” The shadow, for Creeley, can stand alone. Since the shadow is separate from the place it intentions, the place, too, has intentionality separate from the shadow that creates it. Like the shadow, the poem, at least to some extent, has a life, intentionality, apart from the poet. Creeley, again, brings the shadow and poet into direct comparison. To further articulate this comparison, the lines begin to gather together as the poem moves forward; just as the shadow begins to take shape, so does the poem. This gathering shows the temporal movement of the poem; no line stands only in isolation but is, instead, working with all the lines that come before and after it. Lines three through eight function together, with each line containing the beginning of the next line. The phrase “it is a” begins in line seven but continues into line eight with “seemingly living place” (l 7-8). In this way, the lines read as a continuing observation, with the phrase “seemingly living place” referring back to “each stasis” (l 4). This may mean that each place through each stasis is seemingly alive, which sounds and feels much more positive than calling the shadow “seemingly living.” This reading would also successfully move the poem forward: “each stasis” of the shadow seems alive, as the shadow moves through the stasis to the final shadow of something. The form of the poem is about movement, even through “stasis.” Moreover, because the next four lines begin with another “it” that acts as a subject, the word marks the beginning of a wholly new thought and the closure of the previous, enjambed thoughts. In line nine, Creeley expresses the intentionality of the shadow by taking focus off the shadow’s actions and on the motivation behind those actions. It is through his realization of motivation that

Creeley comes to intuit the shadow's essence.

The phrase "it wants" shows that, for Creeley, the shadow desires, just as the poet desires. The reference to "its mindedness" in line five revealed that Creeley understands the shadow as thinking, thus, the word "wants" must necessarily point to the shadow's desire to know something. Creeley, in choosing the object shadow, reveals that there is something about the shadow he desires to know. And in this process of intentionality, Creeley realizes that the shadow also exhibits intentionality. The phrase "it wants" also has a switch in stress pattern, putting emphasis on the word "wants" rather than "it" as in the previous lines. The shift successfully points the reader toward what the shadow does. Since Creeley desires the reader to focus on the process of writing a poem, it makes sense he would also draw attention to the process the shadow performs to become a completed shadow. In addition, the word "wants" is not followed by an object. In this way, the line reads as a broad statement about shadows, not merely this particular shadow. The line is Creeley's feeling about the shadow making process. Moreover, if the shadow is motivated by "want," this implies that the shadow also seeks its object, searches to find meaning in it. Intentionality is "an active *forming* and *intending* of the world. All objects are 'intentional objects'" (Selden 103). This active forming can only stem from a desire to know one's world, and this knowing is done through the choosing and associating of intentional objects. Like Creeley, the shadow seeks to know – it moves through the world with purpose, as does the poet. The next phrase in the poem, "it fades," literally refers to the fading of the shadow, but also to the fading desire of the shadow (l 9). The stress in the phrase is also on the word "fades," like "wants," putting emphasis on the action of the shadow. In this sense, therefore, the shadow can be understood as desiring

to understand a particular object and then understanding that object through its shadowing of the object. Once the *shadow of something* is complete, it can be understood that the shadow successfully knows what it wanted to know about the object. The process, then, is not so much controlled by the object but led by it, as the shadow is in relationship with its object, much the same way Creeley has a relationship, an association, with the shadow through his writing about it. The interval between the wanting to know and the completion of knowing can vary, depending upon what is revealed during the process.

The shadow's creative process, again, has similarities to Creeley's intentional writing process. In the same interview with Wagner, Creeley discusses how much time it takes for him to write a poem. He states,

For me, it's literally the time it takes to type it—because I *do* work in this fashion of simply sitting down and writing, usually without any process of revision. So that if it goes—or, rather, comes—in an opening way, it continues until it closes, and that's usually when I stop [...] I'll start writing and fooling around, like they say, and something will start to cohere, I'll begin following it as it occurs. It may lead to its own conclusion or to its own entity. Then, very possibly because of the stimulus of that, something further will begin to come. That seems to be the way I do it. (61)

Privileging the moment over revision shows Creeley's belief that what is most accurate and creative is revealed during the process of the initial writing, and not during revision. Moreover, Creeley reveals in this statement that there is a relationship between the object

and himself. Creeley starts writing and follows whatever “coheres.” He follows the moment, then. The two, subject and object, work in collusion with each other, the object influencing Creeley about when and how to move, and when to end the poem. The phrase “it / comes and goes” may refer, then, both to Creeley’s writing process, and to the presence of the shadow. Without the sun, a shadow may fade unexpectedly. Yet in “Shadow,” Creeley clearly understands the shadow as having influence in its coming and going. Both “comes” and “goes” receive a stress, similarly to the stress patterns created with “wants” and “fades” (l 10, 9). This again puts focus on the shadow’s actions, and emphasizes that the actions are purposeful and independent. Indeed, Creeley makes no reference to the sun throughout the poem; thus, it feels to the reader as though the shadow is independent and autonomous. The phrase “it is here and gone,” for instance, sounds as if the shadow has no control over its actions. The phrase is from the point of view of the observer alone. But “it / comes and goes” sounds as though the shadow comes and goes as it pleases, as though the shadow has its own reasons for coming and going. Moreover, the phrase “it / comes and goes” brings Creeley into relationship with the shadow, as he worked through the various methods throughout the poem. Creeley is the point of reference – the shadow can only come and go in relation to him. Finally, the word choices of “comes” and “goes” bring Creeley’s world and the shadow’s world together. Writes Thomas J. Hines on Steven’s “The Blue Guitar,” “instead of the simple transfer from world to poem there is an active interchange between the two” (*The Later Poetry of Wallace Stevens* 78). Similarly, line 10 solidifies the idea that the poem is not an individual effort, but an exchange. Without the shadow, there would be no impetus for Creeley to write, and without Creeley, there would be no one to intuit the shadow’s

essence. It is up to Creeley, and the reader, to observe and, in a sense, engage with the shadow's creative process. And, as with the reading of a poem, the shadow's essence can only be understood after the process is completed. It is only within the final lines of the poem, after each of these imaginary variations, that Creeley is able to fully understand *shadow*.

The shadow's essence is revealed through Creeley's observation of not only the *shadow of something*, but of the shadow's creative process. Writes Butler in Natanson's *Bird*, "What is, then, the object that the phenomenologist seeks to know? It is not a list of the object's features or the variety of its forms, but what persists as an ideal unity in the course of imaginary variations, something which is called its 'essence'" (xi). The entire list of features, then, is important, as each reveals a new possibility of the object. Only by working through the entire list can the subject intuit an essence. In these final lines, the list finally comes to an end. While, each of the enjambed phrases, beginning in line two, "to intention a place," can be understood as an imaginary variation, until the end of the poem, the variations do not entirely make sense. That is, until line 10, Creeley seems to be making thoughtful observations about the shadow, but not necessarily about what is most important about the shadow. Essence is that which persists throughout the imaginary variations, and what becomes more clear with each variation. With lines such as "it comes through and / is itself" and "each stasis / of its mindedness ex- / plicit," Creeley keeps coming back to what is constant about the shadow, and what is constant is its creative process (l 3-6). In lines 10, 11, and 12, Creeley writes, "it puts / a yellow flower in a pot / in a circle and looks." Again, the emphasis is on the verb "puts," which draws attention to the action of the shadow; yet the specifics of "a yellow flower in a pot"

may seem like a regression on Creeley's part. After all, Creeley made particular reference to essence in the previous lines, such as "it comes through and / is itself" (l 4). However, in ending the poem with reference to what the shadow is specifically doing, he also leaves the reader focused on the activity of the shadow, "it puts" and "looks" (l 10, 12). In this way, the poem ends with emphasis on the process the shadow undertakes. Therefore, Creeley reveals that the shadow is, in essence, its *process*. Though the shadow will produce many shadows of something, what is most important is that the shadow exhibits intentionality, actively choosing intentional objects as it moves through the process of recreating them. The verb "puts" again intimates that the shadow is directly influencing the creative process. "It puts" is an active phrase, not a passive one. Also, this is the first time in the poem wherein the reader gets to see what the shadow is creating. Notice, as previously mentioned, that Creeley does not point to the shadow of something. Rather, he describes the shadow of something in terms of the shadow creating it, with "it puts" and "a yellow flower in a pot in a circle" (l 10-11). When Creeley describes the image in this manner, it appears quite abstract to the reader. The shadow created is not easily recognized as something specific, but as an individual artistic creation. In this way, the shadow seems to be creating in a way that is only possible for an artist, as it creates a world that is beyond reality but intentions reality. Putting a "yellow flower in a pot" does not seem beyond the scope of an average artist, but with the line "in a circle," the shadow adds a final abstract touch to what could have been a cliched, pretty, ordinary image. The word "yellow" also indicates that Creeley understands the shadow as acting in reality. Obviously, shadows cannot appear in color, but with the reference to the actual yellow flower, Creeley reveals that the shadow works

in exchange with the world, not apart from it. The “yellow flower” is put in the pot by the shadow, thus the shadow is creating with reality as its reference, and also has a relationship with the world it seeks to know. When Creeley sees the shadow as interacting with the real world, he can understand that the shadow is bringing itself in relation to that world, the same way Creeley brings himself in relation to the shadow through his poem. Like Creeley, the shadow is in relation to other objects in its world, using its own “body” to locate itself. Writes Patocka,

The bodily “I can” is the consciousness of freedom. Only an incarnate being integrated into the rest of reality in a bodily-aesthesiological, meaning-bestowing, meaningful field can be free. It is, however, a *freedom in dependence*. In order to bring anything whatever about, we depend on this bodily field and on all that opens before us within it. (144)

The bodily field, as Patocka deems it, is necessary not only to locate ourselves within temporal structures, but also to experience ourselves bodily in relation to our world.

When the shadow “puts” the tangible yellow flower into a pot, Creeley gives the shadow a body, at least of some kind, and this can only mean he sees the shadow as an intentional “I,” like himself. The shadow interacts with the world much the same way Creeley does, then, through their respective creative acts.

Moreover, the final word of the poem, “looks,” also exhibits commonalities between the shadow and Creeley. First, the word “looks” is active and shows intent; while another word, such as “sees,” might be interpreted as passive and without judgment. Second, “looks” ends the poem. Thus the reader leaves the poem with the final acting of the shadow, looking at its creation. Since the poem ends with a verb, the

reader does not fully understand if the shadow is looking to admire its work, or to see if its work is “right.” Without this indication, the reader is left with the feeling of purposeful activity, rather than dissatisfaction, which may help to resolve the complications inherent in “walled into / semblance” and “seemingly living place” (l 6-8). The shadow, for Creeley, does not expressly feel dissatisfied with its work. Yet what the final word does achieve is to bring Creeley, again, in relation to the shadow. To end the poem, “it puts / a yellow flower in a pot / in a circle,” finishes the poem with an emphasis on the final creation, but to end the poem with “and looks” puts the focus on the artist, the shadow. Either the shadow is looking, as an artist would, at what it has created, or it is looking for its next object. In either case, for Creeley, the phrase indicates that the shadow moves through its world with intentionality, moving through the world actively and not passively. The shadow is active in its creative process, as Creeley is active in his own. Without the process, *shadow* would be different. Thus, while the shadow “comes through and / is itself,” the shadow cannot be separated from its creative process.

Without the creative process, the shadow is not “itself” (l 3-4). Any creative process is intimately connected to its artist. Creeley’s process is, therefore, intimately connected with the words he uses. Relates Creeley in an interview with Michael Andre, “I feel that writing is primarily the experience of language, and the diversity of contexts, and the diversity of changes and significations. I’m frankly and selfishly interested in the word. I’m interested in discovering what words can say” (*Tales Out of School* 103). For Creeley, the only way to experience language is to use it. Only through using words can one discover what words can say and do. Likewise, only through interacting with the real world can a shadow discover the world’s possibilities.

Through Creeley, then, what is possible for a shadow is permanently altered in his own mind, and in the mind of the reader. Learning to pay attention to things not only means paying attention to the minutiae of life, but also to those things that are taken for granted. A shadow is part of our ordinary world. People see shadows without giving them much thought. Yet, like the raising of chickens, Creeley intuited that there is something beyond the ordinariness of the activity, beyond what is naturally given to the eye of the perceiver. As the poem ends, the reader understands *shadow* in an entirely different way, not only as beyond the limitations of reality, but beyond the scope of her/his imagination. Creeley successfully brings the shadow into relation with the reader because of the shadow's final creation – a yellow flower in a pot in a circle. This act shows the shadow as engaged with the reader's tangible world, and thus the idea of *shadow* is different from what it was in the beginning of the poem. Remember that Creeley began with the simple observation, "There is a shadow" (l 1). Yet by the end of the poem, the shadow is relieved from its ordinary existence, full of possibility, and engaged with the world as an intentional being. Creeley, too, discovers something about his writing through writing about shadows. As he states in *Tales Out of School*, Creeley writes in order to know what he did not know previously. Through the writing act, Creeley not only comes to understand *shadow*, but also that the poet himself is like the shadow — purposeful, meticulous, and open to seeing the ordinary world in new ways.

CHAPTER VII

CONCLUSION

The day my fork became strange to me is one I will never forget. It seems an odd incident to remember; yet from that day, I understood how useful phenomenology is as not only a rigorous science, but also as a means to see the extraordinary in the ordinary, and to understand and explore literature with new vigor and insight. If phenomenology could make a fork interesting, I could not wait to find out what it could do with a text. While this thesis is not the first paper I've written using phenomenology, this thesis has, by far, become the most fruitful and rewarding – thanks, of course, to the talents of Mr. Creeley.

The Robert Creeley poems that I explored in this thesis, “Do you think...,” “The Edge,” and “Shadow,” are only three of the hundreds I read and examined in order to decide which to explore here. What became obvious to me in my examination was not only that Creeley's collections were replete with phenomenological under- and overtones, but also that these themes applied throughout his massive body of work, stretching through decades. In nearly every poem, from *Words* to *A Day Book* to *It*, I found a man approaching poetry similarly to how Edmund Husserl approached the world. As I began to see phenomenology throughout Creeley's collections, it became obvious that Creeley's

entire approach was phenomenological, which meant that I could choose a poem from each of his collections. However, this was a daunting task beyond the scope of this thesis. Therefore, I decided to focus on those poems that first inspired me to write this thesis in the first place. Those chosen had the most obvious phenomenological under/overtones, were the most useful to the reader to understand Creeley's approach, and those I simply became most frustrated with. Frustration, I have found, is often the first step toward revelation, as Creeley shows us in "The Edge." Thus far throughout my research, the notions of intentionality, imaginary variation, and intuiting essence are those that interest me most, and the three poems I discussed are very useful in exploring these concepts.

"Do you think. ." was chosen, at least in part, because of that damned apple that haunted me for nights. Forks and apples. Moreover, I wanted to focus on the poem because in my research I found that very little is written about it. "Do you think..." deserves consideration as one of Creeley's finest, and as one of the most useful as an entrance into Creeley's style and perspective. The poem is one of the best examples of an exploration of corporeal and temporal phenomenological structures that I have read to date. Husserl contends that words are things, and Creeley supports this in "Do you think...". Creeley's use of language in the poem shows that not only is he concerned with how the poem looks on the page and is read, but also how language itself can be used to affect/effect the reader. Most notable, in my opinion, is the deliberate use of commas to challenge breath in each of the successive stanzas. The use of punctuation, or lack thereof, moreover, is directly tied to the thought process. Both Husserl and Olson contend that our thoughts always lead to other thoughts, and Creeley shows in "Do you

think..." that the language and punctuation used in a poem can be used to represent this process. The poem is phenomenological not only because of its content, but because of its structure, a structure that comes from the content itself. Finally, "Do you think..." is, quite simply, interesting and challenging to read. As the reader moves with Creeley through the poem, the reader-poet relationship becomes intensely intimate — a feat that some critics of Creeley charge is missing from many of his poems. Creeley shows us in "Do you think..." that he is not only aware of, but in close relationship with, his reader. The imaginary variations rely upon the reader, showing that Creeley considers his reader not merely as an afterthought, but as he is writing. Many poets consider their audience, but few think of this audience with each breath throughout a poem. When I read this poem, I feel respected by Creeley, as though he is considering me as an integral and challenging part of his poem. This poet-reader relationship is, of course, even more challenging in "The Edge."

It is Creeley's continually complex and delicate relationship with the reader that first interested me in "The Edge." This poem is my favorite of Creeley's, largely because it tests my patience and moves me beyond words. As "Do you think..." is one of the best examples of corporeality and temporality, "The Edge" is one of the best I've read as an example of intuiting essence. What strikes me most as I move through the poem is that with each change in direction, each movement forward, backward, sideways, Creeley is able to move me with him without making me, the reader, feel as though I am being manipulated or controlled. I want to move with him. I feel I have to. The poem, through its imaginary variations, creates a desired sense of arrival, a sense that relief is coming, is necessary, and that my patience will be rewarded. In short, I trust Creeley in "The Edge,"

largely because as the reader I understand and believe that he, too, is going through each of these emotional, intellectual, and spiritual changes. Far from making me feel removed from the poem, “The Edge” reveals that the reader is necessary for a Creeley poem to take shape.

Robert Creeley and *John Milton*?

These two seem strange bedfellows. Creeley, of course, finds his place alongside the other Black Mountain poets, and among the Modern and contemporary poets. John Milton is, without question, a Renaissance poet. Yet it is John Milton who led me to a better understanding of and appreciation for Robert Creeley. As I was writing a paper on John Milton for a graduate class on the Renaissance, I started thinking about time and place and, moreover, how phenomenology could link poets together beyond time and place, through a shared perspective on reality. Milton, deeply religious and political, has suffered, in my estimation, because of his beliefs. That is, the majority of criticism written about John Milton in the 1990s and 2000s uses historicism as its foundation. As Milton’s views are political and clearly responsive to the particular political issues of the Renaissance, Milton has been stuck, permanently, in the Renaissance, and this is a real problem for any poet. Historical restraints are damaging because once a poet’s work is deemed irrelevant to the contemporary time period, and to contemporary lives, even literary scholars will be less likely to continue to explore the poet’s work. Who explores John Milton today? Renaissance scholars. Nothing against Renaissance scholars, but like many other historical groups, they must find new ways to explore Renaissance poets or these poets will be forever constrained, limited, and even out-dated for a contemporary

audience. As writes Stanley Fish in “Why Milton Matters: Or, Against Historicism,” in *Milton Studies* (2005),

If you think of Milton as being in competition with Thomas Hobbes, John Harrington, John Locke, John Liburne, William Prynne – a competition he would most likely lose – the fact that he wrote in verse will no doubt be noted, but it will not take center stage, and the history of the poetic conventions – along with the imperatives for performance encoded in those conventions and the meaning-making recipes they provide – will first become background and then, after a while, fade from sight; and fading with them will be any recollection of why – as an instance of what general purpose – Milton wrote these things in the first place. (2)

In other words, if the poet’s historical time period is the focus of Milton – or any other poet – the work of the poem itself will be lost.

In my phenomenological exploration of Milton, namely “Comus,” I came to understand that Milton’s ideas reach far beyond his time period and far beyond politics and religion. Milton used political and religious themes because they were important to him, of course, but moreover, in my opinion, he used these themes to interest his audience. He could count on his audience’s knowledge of the Bible and other religious texts, as well as important political events, and these overtones are what would bring the audience to the page. However, underneath these political and religious beliefs is a man struggling to understand his relationship to reality, with his emphasis on the body and its movements, inner and outer spacial relationships, and movement between time and place. Throughout Milton’s work, Milton puts his characters (Adam and Eve, the Lady,

Samson), in dangerous situations associated with a particular place, and it is largely through the relationships with and between bodies that the characters are able to escape or save themselves. For instance, the Lady in *Comus* uses her body to navigate her way through a new and dangerous situation outside of her familiar castle – namely being lost in the woods alone. When the Lady states, “This way the noise was, if mine ear be true,” and “Shall I inform my unacquainted feet / In the blind mazes of this tangled wood,” he shows that the Lady is using her body, and her relationship to other bodies, to establish *truth* (l 170, l 179). It is only through her body that she can reorient her self to this new situation, this new reality. As this exploration appears in other Milton works, including *Paradise Lost* and *Samson Agonistes*, Milton, for me, is clearly interested in more than his particular time, but in time itself, using the body as his vehicle of exploration. This was something of a revelation for me, because this meant that other poets I had not been interested in – as I, too, was among those who considered the Renaissance and Renaissance poets now irrelevant – were important, even useful, in my continued interest in phenomenology. In order to move forward, one must look back. This is what I did, as phenomenological papers on Emily Dickinson, Walt Whitman, and Zora Neale Hurston followed. Without John Milton, I may not have been interested in moving through time with open eyes. In short, without him, I may not have come to Robert Creeley.

Creeley, like Milton, has similar issues with his readership. Many people, including some experts of American poetry, find Creeley’s work too personal, too obscure at times, to be interpretable. Creeley’s distinct and imaginative use of words is usually at the root of such charges. Charles Altieri, for instance, though obviously an admirer of Creeley’s work overall, claims that the particulars “come into focus and

significance almost in spite of the words thinking provides” (“A Poetics of Conjecture,” 517). However, while Creeley is an obscure poet whose poems are often difficult to read on the page, let alone interpret, it is his challenging relationship with the reader that does, and should, interest the reader. When I tell other graduate students about my thesis and its focus on Creeley, a few seem intrigued, but the majority are unimpressed and disinterested. He is not a big name, I respond, but he has big ideas. Like Milton scholars, including Stanley Fish, Barbara K. Lewalski, and Joseph Wittreich – who recently responded with vigor in a 2005 *Milton Studies* to explain “Why Milton Matters” – it seems my biggest obstacle is to explain, and hopefully illustrate, why Creeley matters. Put simply and directly, Creeley matters because his influence is felt and will be felt for many years, though many do not acknowledge, or seem to not understand, his influence or approach. As writes Robert Hallberg in “Robert Creeley and the Pleasures of System,”

Creeley’s poetry, then, is intimate and disembodied at the same time, like a late-night phone call. He moves back and forth between the convention of sincerity and the discipline of systematic abstraction. His work can be underestimated if either term of this relationship between sincerity and systematic abstractness is taken as the last word.” (378)

Creeley’s work, therefore, strikes a balance between the real and the experimental, taking into account how language moves and moves us, but also how it can extend and grow, pushing its limits through conscientious use. Those contemporary poets who try to articulate accurate speech patterns on the page, consider spatial relationships between words and punctuation, and continue to experiment with and challenge language, owe

Creeley a tremendous debt. Moreover, if contemporary poets continue to be influenced by Creeley, whether knowingly or unknowingly, this means that phenomenology will remain an essential and viable lens through which to examine contemporary American poets. Phenomenology has seen a resurgence in the past five years, and is being used in many different fields. This interest, no doubt, has something to do with the fact that as poets are again interested in the nature of thought and reality, and phenomenology is one of the most useful lenses through which to explore this kind of interest.

Lisa Jarnot and Cornelius Eady

Lisa Jarnot is one of the many New York poets influenced by Creeley. She has published two full-length collections, *Some Other Kind of Mission* (1996) and *Ring of Fire* (2001). Jarnot studied with Creeley at the State University of New York at Buffalo, and his influence abounds in her work. Much like Creeley, her poems feature a lot of repetition and variation, and pay particular attention to the sound of the human voice. She is also influenced by visual art and activity, such as dance. As writes Daniel Kane in *What is Poetry. Conversations with the American Avant-Garde*, Jarnot is inspired by the performances of Merce Cunningham, and the cubist technique of Picasso. What is best about Jarnot is that she keeps Creeley alive in the subtleties, those things that can be both Creeley's and hers, in a clearly respectful and interesting use. In "Emporor Wu," Jarnot uses Creeley-like repetition throughout, showing how she, like Creeley, is concerned with the complexities of the thought process and how this process can be accurately and delicately represented in language. Moreover, she uses Creeley's "like they say" throughout the poem. The refrain pays homage to Creeley, but does not overshadow the

poem. Jarnot uses it delicately with lines such as “(maintaining the inner truth / of the favorable outlook, like they say)” and “with a heart free of prejudice, like they say” (l 8-9, 18-19). Most importantly, it is the feeling created in “Emperor Wu” that reminds the reader of Creeley. The lines build in intensity and complexity until the final three-line stanza, wherein the reader feels a great sense of relief and revelation. Like Olson and Creeley before her, Jarnot is able to use rhythm, punctuation, and the direct, active imagination of the reader to not only interest the reader, but to keep the reader involved through the entire poem. The energy created in “Emperor Wu” is reminiscent of both Creeley and Olson, as the words unwind and eventually come back toward themselves. Moreover, her approach recalls Husserl’s idea that words are things – to be both used and appreciated. It is this willingness to see words as connected with human existence that makes a phenomenological approach one of the best lenses into Jarnot’s and other contemporary American poets’ work.

Another of these phenomenological American poets is Cornelius Eady. Of course, it is a bit more of a stretch to call Creeley an influence on Cornelius Eady. Yet poems such as “Piss (Father)” and “Home (Running Man),” are fused with the same jazz rhythms that mesmerized and inspired Creeley. Eady’s use of lone monosyllabic words to break staccato rhythms, such as “As he rained / Down / On us” and “Black boys, / Our backs / Stained” (l 25-27, 28-30), are similar to Creeley’s style in poems such as “Eight Plus,” which includes the stanza: “World’s / still got / four / corners” (l 81-84). Moreover, Eady’s call-and-response pays attention to casual speech patterns in lines such as “The word got around:” from “When He Left (Miss Look).” Both Creeley and Eady explore the relationship between jazz and speech, and how those rhythms affect the

reader. Though Eady's subjects are less obscure, the ways in which Eady discusses his subjects are similar to Creeley. It is the rhythm of language and its connection to human thought and life that unites these two poets.

2000 and Beyond

During the 1980s and 1990s, phenomenology was a popular approach within literary studies, particularly for women in academia. Like Creeley, many feminists returned to the body as a central, common component of human existence. Of course, this return was not without dissention. Other feminists charged, and still charge, that phenomenology – or any corporeal focus – would only reinforce traditional ideas of subjectivity based on Cartesian dualism. However warranted the charge, the corporeal feminists proved that they came to Husserl's theories in order to reconfigure women's bodies, and to dispel traditional notions of subjectivity. Among the corporeal feminists using phenomenological approaches is Elizabeth Grosz.

Elizabeth Grosz's monumental work *Volatile Bodies. Toward a Corporeal Feminism* (1994) includes a foundation based upon Deleuze and Guattari's *A Thousand Plateaus*, as well as Merleau Ponty's *The Phenomenology of Perception*. In it, Grosz takes on the Western dualism that permeates philosophical thought, and reintroduces women's bodies as viable, positive – though highly complex and complicated – entities. Grosz writes, "Dualism, in short, is responsible for the modern forms of elevation of consciousness (a specifically modern version of the notion of soul, introduced by Descartes) above corporeality" (7). With consciousness as "an island unto itself," as writes Grosz, anything associated with the body will be associated with nature and not

the mind or logic (7) Grosz concludes that only by reconsidering all human existence as embodied can women reclaim their bodies as being in a position of privilege, rather than in a position of lack. She writes,

I hope to show that the body, or rather, bodies, cannot be adequately understood as ahistorical, precultural, or natural objects in any simple way; they are not only inscribed, marked, engraved, by social pressures external to them but are the products, the direct effects, of the very social constitution of nature itself. It is not simply that the body is represented in a variety of ways according to historical, social, and cultural exigencies while it remains basically the same; these factors actively produce the body as a body of a determinate type. (Introduction x)

Like Husserl and Merleau-Ponty before her, Grosz turns to the body as a living, moving object – an object like and unlike other objects. Only through shared corporeality, concludes Grosz, can women's bodies be understood and refigured, and can traditional notions of dualism and dualistic thought be displaced in favor of a more centralized, corporeal logic. Grosz's corporeal focus marks a return to the body, and phenomenology is continually combined with other approaches now throughout feminist studies. Even psychoanalytical feminists, such as Irigaray and Kristeva, turned to a psychoanalytical-phenomenological approach (largely based on Merleau-Ponty) in order to discuss the necessary eradication of women's role as object or representative as lack. It is just such explorations that are, in my opinion, the future of phenomenological studies.

As women's voices continue to gain the value and respect they deserve in contemporary America, and around the world, phenomenology will provide a necessary

and fruitful foundation for women to discuss themselves, their bodies, their poetry, and consciousness.

Moreover, it is consciousness and the mind that are again at the forefront of academic and scientific thought as we move into the 21st century. This is further evidenced by the rise in popularity of cognitive theory. With this popularity there is also a return to phenomenological theory, as the ideas of Edmund Husserl supply cognitive theory's foundation. In my opinion, it is a combination of the two approaches that provides the best approach to both contemporary thought and contemporary poetry. Both theories are rooted in the world and in the experience of the subject, so it makes sense to look to theories of experience in order to examine these works. As Husserl writes in *Experience and Judgment*, the world "is the universal ground of belief pregiven for every experience of individual objects"(28). No matter the poet, subject, emotion, or language, it is experience in the world that is the basis for all poetry.

Final Thoughts

I began this thesis by stating that Husserl's phenomenology is a useful instrument. For Husserl, the philosophy allowed him to examine the world as a perpetual beginner, seeing the world and each object in it with fresh, active eyes. Phenomenology, in my opinion, is one of the few philosophies that is both highly imaginative and yet practical, one that can be used in a variety of fields and disciplines, as well as in real life. When I began this thesis, I hoped to understand the poetry of Robert Creeley more clearly. This happened. Moreover, what also happened is that I now understand phenomenology more clearly, as well. Philosophies are meant to be used. Every time I use phenomenology, I

am excited about what I think are its endless possibilities. Husserl's philosophy continues to invigorate works I had long ago ceased exploring because I thought their possibilities had been exhausted. Phenomenology also allows me to look forward, during this resurgence, in the hopeful application to contemporary poets and authors.

Phenomenology, with its insistence on attentive participation and relationship between the world and the subject, deserves its rightful place alongside the other major literary criticisms. I hope to be a part of its spread and development so that more people, not just serious scholars of literature, can see their forks more clearly. It's a start.

APPENDIX

“Do you think . . .” from *A Day Book*

Do you think that if
you once do what you want
to do you will want not to do it.

Do you think that if
there's an apple on the table

and somebody eats it, it
won't be there anymore.

Do you think that if
two people are in love with one another,
one or the other has got to be
less in love than the other at
some point in the otherwise happy relationship.

Do you think that if
you once take a breath, you're by
that committed to taking the next one
and so on until the very process of
breathing's an endlessly expanding need
almost of its own necessity forever.

Do you THINK that if
you once DO what you WANT
to DO you will want NOT to DO it.

Do you THINK that if
there's an Apple on the Table
and SOMEbody EATS it, it
won't BE there anymore.

Do you THINK that if
 two PEOPLe are in LOVE with one anOTHER,
 ONE or the OTHER has GOT to be
 LESS in LOVE than the OTHER at
 SOME POINT in the OTHERwise HAPpy reLAtionship.

Do you THINK that if
 You once take a BREATH, you're by
 That committed to TAKing the next one
 And SO on until the Very PROcess of
 BREATHing's an ENDlessly expanding NEED
 Almost of its own necessity forEVER.

"Shadow"

There is a shadow
 to intention a place
 it comes through and
 is itself each stasis
 of its mindedness ex-
 plicit walled into
 semblance it is a
 seemingly living place
 it wants it fades it
 comes and goes it puts
 a yellow flower in a pot
 in a circle and looks.

There is a SHAdow
 to mTENTion a PLACE /
 it COMES THROUGH and
 is itSELF / each STAsis
 of its MINDEdness ex-
 PLIcit / WALLED Into
 SEMblance / it is a

SEEMingly LIVIng PLACE /

it WANTS / it FADES / it
COMES and GOES / it PUTS

a YELlow FLOWer in a POT

in a CIRcle and LOOKS.

“The Edge”

Long over whatever edge,
backward a false distance,
here and now, sentiment—

to begin again, forfeit
in whatever sense an end,
to give up thought of it—

hanging on to the weather’s edge,

hope, a sufficiency, thinking
of love’s accident, this

long way come with no purpose,
face again, changing,
these hands, feet, beyond me,

coming home, an intersection,
crossing of one and many,
having all, having nothing—

Feeling thought, heart, head

generalities, all abstract—
no place for me or mine—

I take the world and lose it,
miss it, misplace it,
put it back or try to, can’t

find it, fool it, even feel it.
The snow from a high sky,
grey, floats down to me softly.

This must be the edge

LONG Over whatEVer EDGE,
BACKward a FALSE DIStance,
HERE and NOW, SENTiment---

to beGIN aGAIN, FORfeit
in whatEVer SENSE an END,
to GIVE UP THOUGHT of it—

HANGing ON to the WEATHer’s
EDGE

HOPE, a suffICIency, THINKing
of LOVE’S Accident, this

LONG WAY with no PURpose,
FACE aGAIN, CHANGing,
these HANDS, FEET, beYOND me,

COMing HOME, an INTERsection,
CROSSing of ONE and MANY,
HAVing ALL, HAVing Nothing—

FEELing THOUGHT, HEART,
HEAD

generALities, ALL Abstract---
no PLACE for ME or MINE—

I TAKE the WORLD and LOSE it,
MISS it, misPLACE it,
PUT it BACK or TRY to, CAN’T

FIND it, FOOL it, Even FEEL it.
The SNOW from a HIGH SKY,
GREY, FLOATS DOWN to me
SOFTly,

This MUST be the EDGE

of being before the thought of it
blurs it, can only try to recall it

of Being beFORE the THOUGHT of it
BLURS it, can ONly TRY to reCALL
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