

Locating the Lyric Speaker

Subjectivity, Place, and Affect in CAConrad's Poetics of Procedure

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For Poppy, and past selves

Abstract:

In this thesis, the radical poetry of CAConrad is explored in relation to ecocriticism and affect theory in order to reassess the position of the lyric subject. CAConrad's poetics are based on (soma)tic exercises that place and trace the body in the world, which goes against popular Romantic notions of the lyric speaker as an isolated subject. Rather, the political engagement with the world that the (soma)tics facilitate opens up new dimensions to the poems. These show the lyric subject as moving in its poetic and worldly environment, which is further elaborated on by connecting affect and its material status to language and the subject in relation to author and reader. The subject is taken out of isolation and into the world and is shown to be an agent of resistance in its capability to affect and be affected.

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Introduction

From the moment I started dancing, I began discovering the importance of physicality, both on the dance floor and in life. My body, capable of movement, of affection and affectedness, was key to interacting with and establishing knowledge of the world outside me. Because of folk dancing, I started to realise that movement often travels further than one might expect – the way I move at the start of a line can impact all the people in it, and as a separate group, we interact with everyone else on the floor.

Similarly, a set of words can come to influence the greater world. This is most obvious when they take the shape of performative utterances, a term coined by J.L. Austin denoting speech acts that actively affect change on aspects of the world rather than merely describing them, such as a judge declaring “I sentence you. . .” during a court case¹. In the case of such words on the page, however, the connection between them and the body uttering them is mostly absent. Although we may speak of a ‘body of work,’ the relation between the word and the physical reality of author, text, and reader is overlooked in much literary criticism. This is especially interesting in relation to lyric poetry, as it is a genre that obtained its popularity from the Romantic idea that it is the form in which individual, subjective, emotion or experience is expressed through a disembodied lyric “I” and in this way “liberate the spirit not *from* but *in* feeling” (Hegel 1112).

In the past years, however, the American contemporary poet CAConrad has centralised the connection between the physical world, their² own material environment, and their poetry through the development of “(soma)tic poetry,” which they introduce in their first collection as

a praxis I’ve developed to more fully engage the everyday through writing.

Soma is an Indo-Persian word that means ‘the divine.’ *Somatic* is Greek. Its

¹ See also Kosofsky Sedgwick 3-5

² CAConrad uses they/them pronouns (“Bio”)

meaning translates as ‘the tissue’ or ‘nervous system.’ The goal is to coalesce soma and somatic, while triangulating patterns of experience with the world around us. Experiences that are unorthodox steps in the writing process can shift the poet’s perception of the quotidian (*Beautiful 1*)

With these procedures, CAConrad emphasises the connection between the material reality of the poet and their poetry itself. Furthermore, their statement highlights the necessity of a sensitive stance in relation to the world around us, both on an everyday (or worldly), and spiritual level. The rituals centre the poet in their environment, and the notes CAConrad takes during the rituals are the departing point for writing.

The attention to the situation of the poet in the world, both in physical and socio-cultural sense, is generally considered central to American 21st-century poetics. Lisa Sewell, for example, traces the emergence of “a lyric mode that is historically aware, socially generative, and overtly interested in moving toward an expansive and connective consciousness” (4). This sentiment of connectedness is more urgently expressed by CAConrad, who “cannot stress enough how much this mechanistic world, as it becomes more and more efficient, resulting in ever increasing brutality, has required me to FIND MY BODY to FIND MY PLANET in order to find my poetry” (*Beautiful 1*). Here they make clear that the body and the physical planet are capital and precedential to their poetry, which seeks to use practical procedure, or ritual, to “find” poetry. Furthermore, CAConrad underscores the felt tension between this “mechanistic world,” alluding to the politico-economic climate of the United States, and the natural and creative aspects of poetry.

Although in the North American and European publishing circuit CAConrad’s radical poetics have not gone unnoticed, their work and its theoretical implications have not been discussed much by literary scholars. Online, they are very present through their plethora of blogpost websites, active social media presence, and regular podcasts. Furthermore, they

often write for *Poetry* magazine's blog *Harriet*, have been the subject of a documentary (*The Life of Conrad*), and travel between various art and educational institutions giving (soma)tic poetry workshops. Their work has received substantial acclaim, most notably a Lambda Literary Award (2017) and a Creative Capital grant (2019). Nonetheless, critical attention to their practice around "(soma)tics," has been scarce, which mostly has to do with the fact that the approach is so new. Only Tracy K. Smith and Daniel Poppick have laterally engaged with CAConrad's radical poetics in a discussion of various writers. Smith asks what its consequences are of the changing relation between lyric I and the community it speaks to, and Poppick notes that it "asks us to rethink the question of what we might need to do for poetry to truly enter our lives" (n.p). They do not, however, attempt to answer these questions, which further shows that it is important to theorise the poetry rituals and their subversion of notions about lyric subjectivity.

This thesis has the aim to initiate a discussion of the implications of CAConrad's physical poetics on notions of the lyric subject and its place in the world and text. This will be informed by lyric theory, but also by recent theoretical developments in the fields of affect and ecocritical studies. The lyric as a poetic genre can be said to originate in classical Greece, but the most influential and currently dominant notion of it came into existence in the Romantic period, in which the lyric as "passionate expression" was established (Culler 77). Most notably, (lyric) poetry was singular in its subjectivity, focused on "the inward man" (Mill 94) rather than a representation of action or life. The poet/speaker, thus, exist in reflective isolation, often referred to by use a popular quote from John Stuart Mill, who wrote that "poetry is overheard . . . Poetry is feeling confessing itself to itself" (95). Although this solipsistic element of the lyric has been renegotiated by numerous poets and scholars since Mill's time, CAConrad's physical poetics put further pressure on the isolated subjectivity of

the lyric speaker, challenging this notion explicitly by a committed attention to physical realities.

Because CAConrad's work is unprecedented, just as any academic inquiry about their (soma)tics, it is useful to review the way they position the lyric "I" in light of other recent theories. In a world that is plagued by several crises on the short and long term, the isolationism idealised by Mill is a luxury many find they cannot afford, /// which necessitates using theories that focus on human subjectivity and its place in the world. Most notably, these are affect theory and ecocriticism, two modes of criticism that have become increasingly popular during the 1990's. These frameworks help with placing CAConrad's activist attention to material circumstances and the environment in context. Ecocriticism has been defined as a field "devoted to the investigation of relations between literature and the natural world" (*Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms*). Poetic engagement with the environment was made especially relevant by Jonathan Skinner and the founding of the magazine *Ecopoetics*.

Affect theory has gained popularity in the past decades as a renewed critical attention to emotions, or broader, affects. Although intuitively this turn to subjective properties might seem to be in opposition to the concerns of ecocriticism, Schaefer writes that "[a]s a method, affect theory asks *what bodies do* – what they want, where they go, what they think, how they decide—and especially how bodies are impelled by forces other than language and reason" (1). This focus on movement is especially useful for engaging with CAConrad's affecting body and lyrics, but also implies the question how *other* bodies are moved, either in the physical world or in embodied sensations – as can originate in encounters with text. Although Seigworth and Gregg note that "[t]here is no single, generalizable theory of affect" (3), they link the essays in their collection by an attention to "what transpires in the affective bloom-space of an ever-processual materiality" (9). With this, they suggest that affect can flower anywhere, that it is in constant movement, and also that it is highly materialistic, rather than

cognitive. The importance of process is equally important in CAConrad's work, and the subjective dimension of the lyric makes it especially fit for readings informed by affective experiences and positions. *Where* exactly is the speaker of the poem located? Is the lyric subject an isolated non-existence, or can it be an embodied presence?

The poetics of CAConrad, then, which are partially based on affective mo(ve)ments and interactions that connect place, body, and text, necessitate rethinking the lyric subject past the conventional boundaries of romantic isolation. In this thesis, I aim to analyse CAConrad's (soma)tic poems informed by the connection of various theories of poetry, ecocriticism, and affect. I hope to break ground for a lyric of affect by repositioning the lyric speaker *in* the world. My argument will be made in three stages, each featuring close readings of CAConrad's work. Firstly, I will discuss their poetry in light of lyric theory. Secondly, I will further discuss eco-poetics and the concept of affect to consider lyric movement and how poetry posits the position of the body and subject in the world. Finally, I will connect these theories to rethink the lyric subject. From this follows the argument that CAConrad's poetic procedures are moments of subversion in which current mechanist structures of society are perforated and the body and mind, at least momentarily, become *untamed*. Because of its exploring and ground-breaking nature, this study will be one of breadth rather than depth, although the latter will be explored by close readings. The aim is to generate attention for and understanding of a mode of writing that repeatedly relates the material body to the text, and to generate ideas for further research.

Locating the Lyric Subject

Stephanie Burt's review³ of *The Lyric Theory Reader* is titled "What is this Thing Called Lyric?" Even though Burt argues for an aspect of continuity in the use of the term across several centuries, this does not diminish the *Reader's* editors' contention that the lyric is "a moving target" (Jackson and Prins 6). Burt's title mostly seems to be an allusion to the lyric that *was* and, at the same time what it can become which the *Reader* similarly is testament to. Precisely because of its ever-changing scope, various aspects of lyric poetry have been under much discussion, but, as Jackson and Prins note, there is "a general sense that the lyric is the genre of personal expression, a sense assumed whenever we talk about 'the lyric I'" (6). This emphasis on the personal has its source in the Romantic period, both by German poets and philosophers, and later by English theorists such as John Stuart Mill, whose contention that "poetry is overheard" is one of the most quoted statements in lyric theory. Although he does not mention the lyric by name, the personal expression Mill sees as central to good poetry is encompassed by the modern use of the term, as noted by scholars such as Jonathan Culler (76-77) and Herbert F. Tucker (144). As written in the introduction, Mill states that "[p]oetry is feeling confessing itself to itself, in moments of solitude, and embodying itself in symbols which are the nearest possible representations of the feeling in the exact shape in which it exists in the poet's mind" (95). This passage reflects the emphasis on the isolation of the poem's speaker, with text as the only connection between (feeling) mind and world. First, this invokes the Cartesian and post-Enlightenment dualism emphasising the separation between mind and body. The attention to the 'feeling embodying itself' adds to the tension between the cerebral, internal and material, external realities. At the same time, Mill takes for granted that poetry needs to represent the internally felt, even when the expression can only approach that feeling – poetry, from this perspective, is more focused

³ Originally published under the name "Stephen Burt."

on expressing the internally felt artfully than attempting to affect or influence the external world.

It is fair to say that the concept of the lyric “I” itself has changed significantly over the last two centuries. Unlike Mill’s definition of poetry, which emphasised on its mimesis of the poet’s interior state, the popular dramatic monologues of Browning and Tennyson and, later, the 20th century New Criticism uncoupled the poet from the poem’s speaker. In the 1970s, he North-American Language poets, influenced by post-structuralism, wrote in their manifesto that “the self as the central and final term of creative practice is being challenged and exploded in our work” in favour of the collective. Marjorie Perloff, however, argues that the subject is not annihilated by “movement ethos,” but that its different position arises from a lesser “*authority* ascribed to the speaking voice” and that “the subject, far from being at the center of the discourse ... is located only at its interstices.” The poetic mode of, for example, Susan Howe or Ron Silliman “is not a Romantic *Einfühlung* into the external –is there an external?– world” (432). Perloff’s repositioning of the subject is based on “the critical need to discriminate difference, to define the signature of the individual lyric subject in its complex negotiations with its larger cultural and historical field of operation” (434). This reminder of the importance of context echoes Sewell’s emphasis on a subject embedded in its culture but does not address her contention that it moves to “an expansive and connective consciousness.”

The movement from a subject at the interstices to a subject that, à la T.S. Eliot, does “digest and transmute,” – not tradition or “the mind of Europe,” as in Eliot’s case, but also its immediate surroundings – points to the poet’s changed place in society. Rather than Eliot’s contention that “the conscious present is an awareness of the past” (n.p.), Gray and Keniston introduce a “poetics of engagement” rather than the heavy and often dismissed designation “political poetry” by noting that in the 21st century, “writing about the world is no longer

different from writing about the self" (3). The subject is deeply embedded in and aware of its socio-economical position and seeks to reflect on the structures and events in society. This awareness permeates CAConrad's being, which they not only express in interviews but also in their poetics as they ask "HOW do I manage to get up in the morning KNOWING that my taxes pay for bullets and bombs to kill the people of Iraq and Afghanistan? . . . HOW often do I think about being complicit in the degradation of life on Earth? (*Beautiful* 117). This outcry, its emotion and powerlessness heightened by capitalisation, implicitly speaks for all (American) taxpayers through assuming the subjective "I." Eleanor Wilner extends on this tension between subject and society when she writes that "[t]he individual consciousness . . . is the nexus of a private and a public world, of the singular and the choral, a unique instance in a collective and cultural continuum. . . . [S]ubjects are given by the moment in which we live, and which lives in us (14). The (slightly idealistic) implication of this is that any individual is an equally important part of the fabric of society, and any lyrical expression of experience is equally valuable. Subjects in the poem, however, are in this view still products of expression – not of the personal, but of "a collective and cultural continuum." It does not implicate that the speaker is taken out of its lyric isolation and its state of being *overheard* is not necessarily changed. As part of a text that is firmly posited as cultural reflection of the world, however, the lyric subject must be re-evaluated relative to author and audience.

This relationship is crucial in CAConrad's poetics, as they make tangible the textual boundaries of lyric spaces. It is therefore important to consider their (soma)tic rituals, resulting poems, and essays in relation to each other, as well as how they are positioned individually. The (soma)tic procedures are written both in the first and second person.: "Listen to Philip Glass on the floor, on *your* back, very still, in, the, dark, just, you, and, Mr. Glass. *I* chose the song 'MUSIC IN CONTRARY MOTION'" (*Beautiful* 56, emphasis mine). This results in a style of personal account and direction, which forces the reader into a

heightened experience of their own physicality: the majority of the report written in a style of imperative address is an undeniable invitation to move the self in and through the ritual that CAConrad proposes. This is also conveyed by the fact that many of the rituals are written for someone. The somatic discussed here for example, is “– for Joshua Beckman.” At the same time, the personal circumstances that CAConrad describes transfer a sense of completion and imply that the proposed actions are a factual account of the poet’s procedure.

This is further substantiated by CAConrad’s presentation of the (soma)tics. The rituals are always paired with the poems through the lay-out of *Beautiful*: the accounts of the rituals are printed with white font on a black page as in a negative photograph, and the resulting poems are printed ‘as normal’ with black letters on a white page.

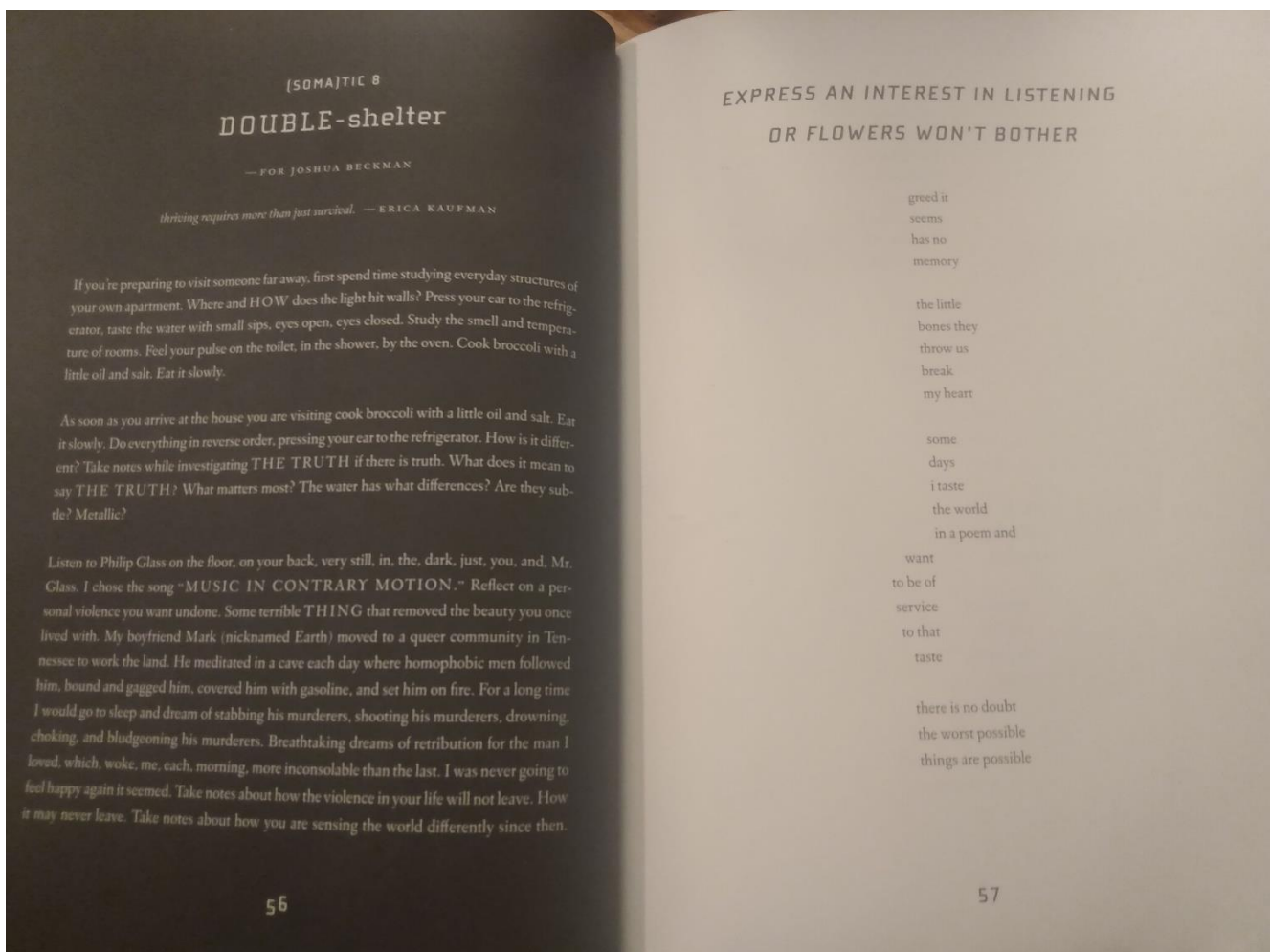


Figure 1: “DOUBLE-shelter” and accompanying poem (*Beautiful* 56-57).

Through this, the (soma)tic exercise becomes the blueprint or source, and its development results in the neighbouring accompanying poem. In line with the photographic metaphor, it is important to note that different prints can be made from a negative, the ritual. Not all the writing (the “notes”) produced from the ritual ends up in the poem, which CAConrad explains in an interview:

“I do the ritual but I’m writing notes for the poem consistently throughout the ritual. In the end, I have this body of notes. . . . Here’s a tiny little poem that just fits in the middle of one page but it comes from thirteen and half pages of eight and a half by eleven single-spaced printed out paper. (“Extreme” n.p.)

Each set of notes, each negative, is an opportunity for as many resulting poems as combinations of words, which are almost infinite. CAConrad elsewhere writes, “(Soma)tic rituals orchestrate the space of the writing. . . . Any additional ingredient in the ritual, or shift of an existing ingredient will also alter the poem” (“SPR Introduction”). This implies that the poems are like traces of the ritual’s occurrence and its impact on the world.

On the other hand, this is not always apparent from reading the poems on their own. The poem above, that emerges from the DOUBLE-shelter (soma)tic, bears little overt trace of the encounter with ‘Mr. Glass,’ except for an allusion to music through the ‘Listening’ in the title. At the same time, it has many features characteristic to the lyric. It has a distinct speaker, who even meditates on poetic being: “I taste / the world / in a poem” (see Figure 1, lines 10-19) and uses various traditional poetic devices such as enjambment and personification: “it’s best to let / flowers do / the talking” (28-30). However, what catches the eye and positions the poem in a more avant-garde tradition is the particular use of stanzaic arrangement on the page. As can be read and seen, the use of space in the poem provides an open-ness that leaves room for silence and simultaneously underlines the fragmented state of the speaker, emphasised by the positioning of ‘break’ between ‘us’ and ‘my’ (8-10). The short lines are

then contrasted with the final stanza on this page, which is printed as a block and is not only textually but also emotionally heavy (20-22). The poem's form and content both serve the representation of a subjective experience, but they are by no means an expressive witness to the actions and experiences described in the (soma)tic exercise.

Another aspect of the relation between CAConrad's procedure and resulting poetry that needs to be considered is that of publication. In their monographic collections of (soma)tics, the exercises and poems are connected through their relative positions, but in many of CAConrad's (online) poetry publications, such as in *POETRY Magazine*, *The American Poetry Review*, and some of their work on *Poetry.org*, the procedure is not published. Likewise, the (soma)tic exercises they share on their blog are rarely accompanied by resulting poems. This at least indicates that the rituals are not seen as a part of the actual text of a poem by some major publishers, but also implies that the poems bear more copyright value than the (soma)tics. I do not know the specific details of the transactional considerations, but this firmly places the (soma)tics in a public space that is located in a faraway corner of the internet yet accessible to everyone with an internet connection, open to replication. The poems, on the other hand, exist in culturally acclaimed spaces but also bear the weight of genre-specific expectations and evaluation. This schism also points toward an institutional idea that CAConrad's procedural approach to their poetry need not be established as integral to it.

From this exploration of CAConrad's poetics, it becomes clear that the subject cannot be simply located in the poem, as it is not clear what the poem *is*. It is the remains of a process which stems from physical action and the author's body in the world, but simultaneously the same exercise is written down so it can be replicated by a reader or the dedicatee. The subject is on the move and can take on many shapes and voices. To situate it, the romantic idea of isolation is not useful anymore, either of consciousness or of place. More

recent theoretical approaches that focus on environment, connection, and physical presence are thus needed to redefine the lyric subject(ivities) that CAConrad conjures.

Body, Environment, Poem

Although from the excerpts discussed earlier CA Conrad's poetry can be situated as politically engaged, it is difficult to define a single subject, partially because their poetics ask to redefine the scope of lyric poetry. However, their activist energy is consistent and pervasive, both within and outside their poetry. Their concerns are not only socio-political but are also directed towards the state of the environment, as the influence of humanity on global and local ecosystems has become exceedingly clear. In an interview, they state:

Humans are changing the sonic landscape, and the loss of our organic, wild vibration is part of that change. Another, newer ingredient to this ritual is to spend time in the vast abandoned, bankrupted shopping malls and other megastructures across America. My Instagram account is devoted to photos of weeds breaking through cement. ("In Conversation")

In literary circles, the term "ecopoetics" has gained widespread recognition after the publication of the homonymous journal by Jonathan Skinner in 2001. In the first edition, he writes that "contemporary poetry's complexities might actually be useful for extending and developing [the] perception [of the natural world]" ("Editor's Statement" 5). In *American Literature in Transition* Skinner expands on this:

One version of ecopoetics brings ecology (an understanding of Earth systems including human ecology) together with the systems-aware writing of the 'New American' poetry, and conversely brings awareness of the writing environment into discussions of ecology. (322-23)

This gives the understanding that ecopoetics does not revolve around writing about nature, but also uses natural systems, or ecologies, as a structural element for the writing and reading of poetry. With this in mind, it is helpful to think about poems as ecologies inhabited by subjects and simultaneously think about poetry *in* and *as part of* an environment. This attention to

environment is especially relevant for CAC Conrad's poetry, which springs from interaction outside of the isolated mind and an embodiment that is inherently spatial.

CAC Conrad's engagement with other ecologies becomes clear in the exercises that necessitate going 'outside,' and many of their rituals are based on interactions with the non-human. In their first manifesto on (soma)tics, they write that poets have to "RESIST the urge to subdue our spirits and lose ourselves in the hypnotic beep of machines, of war, in the banal need for power, and things. With our poems and creative core, we must RETURN THIS WORLD to its seismic levels of wildness" (*Beautiful 2*). In combination with the title of their second collection, *Ecodeviance: (Soma)tics for the Future Wilderness*, this strongly emphasises their stance that the current state of society is mechanistic and anti-creative. The title also bears this in its linguistic ambiguity: the (soma)tics are claimed to be written "for" (to be done or read during) a future time of wilderness, but at the same time they could be seen as a method to help *restore* or bring about the wilderness, thus becoming an activist tool.

The importance that CAC Conrad attributes to the untamed, or uncultivated – that which exists in the periphery of the anthropocentric consciousness – is apparent in a (soma)tic such as "Arboreal Crystal Aria:"

Find a plant, tree, some living nonhuman entity you want to communicate with. . . . I then touched the tree . . . I stayed this way for fifteen minutes, quiet, with my eyes closed, letting the communication course through me and into the crystal for processing. (*Ecodeviance 30*)

Here, the human body becomes only another medium in a wider network of communication, with the only difference that it has access to language and scripture: "[t]rees don't need to ask us anything, but they have plenty to tell us and I let my crystal tell me and let the notes flow out of me." This human capability also gains a horrifying overtone when CAC Conrad writes about their awareness of "my pen carving into paper, paper made of tree, wood. There I was,

the human carving my own thoughts in my oblivious imperialism. What love do I really have outside my own kind of animal?" The resulting poem bears little trace of the arboreal, but it does revolve about an unstoppable demise that is based in both language and ecology. This is clear from the title, "Everything's Called Something Else Before It's Called Famine" (*Ecodeviance* 31), but also in the poem itself:

we're experiencing an
awkward font moment in
the text today a place in
history my
country will
not escape
vase of polyester blooms and
poets weakening poetry with despair (lines 1-8)

This excerpt is full of linguistically playful ambiguities, such as the echo of a 'fond' moment combined with the material reality of the text on the page, and the paradoxical, garden-path-like position of 'blooms,' which can be read as a verb or the plural of blossoms. Furthermore, there is an implicit criticism to other poets who despair too much. Rather, CAConrad embraces the unavoidable downhill movement and concludes that "there is nothing now / nothing nothing nothing / we won't do to be / a soundtrack for the / sunlight brigade" (31-35). First, the repetition of nothing is ironic as it is both *extra* present yet literally signifies lack of presence, and further adds to the sense of (linguistic) extinction. Furthermore, both in sound through the triple repetition of "nothing" and the final "-light brigade" there is a strong echo of Victorian poet Alfred Tennyson's poem, "The Charge of the Light Brigade." This poem was written in praise of soldiers of the Crimean war, but here poets "won't do to be / a soundtrack," implying that poetry cannot only have a supporting role in worldly events. At the

same time, poets “wont’t do” because language might be insufficient on its own, which is why it is important to also consider the physical conditions CAConrad proposes.

When the poem is read in light of the (soma)tic ritual, the linguistic crisis is revealed to be an ecological crisis as well. If the poem is a result of notes based on an interaction with, or at least an engagement with, a tree, mediated by a crystal, who exactly is the poem’s speaker? Is the tree telling the poet to stop, because “we are centuries from / bearing the proper love” (27-28), or is that inability a consequence of the material premises of the procedure, namely the mutilation of a tree in order to write? The crisis of the font is not only that of shape, but of medium itself. The relation between procedure and poem adds this layer which would otherwise be lost, or at least less visible. At the same time, this is a relation between the poet-in-the-world, the subject as it is portrayed in the procedures, and the subject(s) within the poem. Both the subjects and texts relate to each other and bear traces of, or can provide commentary on, the texts they are part of (i.e. the (soma)tic, resulting poem, and comments made by CAConrad during interviews or in essays). These different texts and subjectivities, however, all exist in relation to society and events in the world, such as CAConrad’s own procedures. Their poetry then, is not only critical about the relationship between humans and the environment but also is based on interaction with it. On one hand, the lyric speaker in their poems is expressing discontent in the poems, but their language is based on the poet’s actions in the physical world.

Affect Theory and the Lyric Subject

In the previous chapter, it has become clear that the subject is not only a part in a text or in our body, but also dependent on its environment, in the broadest sense: the speaker in CAConrad's poetry is always based on the poets' physical movements in the world. This is not only the case for CAConrad's poetry, of course, but valid for all writing: text is always created in movement, in speech or other motoric form. The difference is that CAConrad actively draws attention to the physicality of their creative process and incorporates it in their work. The experiences of the poet are not expressed in a lyrical isolation to simply be overheard but have become an integral part of the poems. How then, should we speak about the lyric subject? In CAConrad's poetry, it is already residing somewhere in the notes they take during the (soma)tic exercise. In a similar fashion to a sculptor creating an artwork out of rough material, CAConrad reworks the unpolished text from their notes to reveal their final poem. The lyric "I" might not resemble the poet or reflect her/them/him but emerges through the poet's experience.

Affect theory can help understand how this is different from previous approaches to the lyric subject, as it focuses on embodiment and materiality in issues concerning the mind-body, or rather, the cognition-affect divide. Although emotions have always been considered as integral to human experience, academic attention has mostly been focused on Cartesian solipsistic cognition rather than thinking through the relation between physical experience and thought. This has changed in the past decades through neuroscientific research in the field of affective science which "presents algorithmically specified, empirically supported, logically rigorous accounts of emotion." Patrick Colm Hogan differentiates this scientific branch of affect studies from affect theory as the latter is used in order to develop "a politically oriented critique of institutions, discourses, and other social structures and practices" (6). Affect in itself "bears an intense and thoroughly immanent neutrality" and thus can be seen as

independent to ideological imprints on the body (Seigworth and Gregg 10). This idea, however, is problematised by Ruth Leys, who argues that many affect theory scholars in the humanities are overly committed to “anti-intentionalism” in affect studies. In their effort to show that the body precedes thought or meaning, Leys argues, they reinstate the same Cartesian dualism they oppose.

What is interesting about her critique, is her note that some contemporary affect theorists who “are committed to overturning the human-nonhuman animal divide” eschew cognitivism because it “is held to be tied to the human capacity for producing linguistic propositions, a position that appears to create a sharp divide between humans and nonhuman animals.” She continues, however, that cognitivism does not limit “the capacity for cognition and intentionality to human animals. Nor is [it] opposed to the idea that humans and nonhuman animals are emotionally embodied creatures and that this fact is of the highest importance.” (470). This attention to linguistic and cognitive capacity is important for CAC Conrad’s poetics because it does not exclude language formation from affective transmission. Although the structures of language might be ideologically marked, the way it arises during the (soma)tics in a mode that resembles automated writing might be more embodied than it is in moments of conscious linguistic formation, its art associated with ‘traditional’ poetry (or any writing, for that matter).

On another, more practical level, the critical attention to affect opens up interpretative possibilities. Whether affects are intentional or not, “affect is persistent proof of a body’s never less than ongoing immersion in and among the world’s obstinacies and rhythms” (Seigworth and Gregg 1). This repetitive focus on the body in the world, with “bodies defined not by an outer skin-envelope or other surface boundary but by their potential to reciprocate or co-participate in the passages of affect” (2), does not only reflect the basis of CAC Conrad’s (soma)tomic project, but also draws attention to the inescapability of affect: every transmission,

every movement that is eventually felt by something or someone, is part of this affective network. From this perspective, CAConrad's communication with their surroundings in "Arboreal Crystal Aria" is an affective transmission. Similarly, affect drives the transmissions between physicality, poet, and text, all contributing to CAConrad's (soma)tics. In the same vein, readers are affected by their encounter with the text. This all-encompassing presence, however, reminds that "[w]ith affect, a body is as much outside itself as in itself – webbed in its relations – until ultimately such firm distinctions cease to matter" (Seigworth and Gregg 3). This idea of connection and connectedness also relates back to the poetry of engagement and the subject as embedded in its socio-cultural surroundings, but also can be applied to natural ecologies. The appearance of a collection titled *Affective Ecocriticism* then, should not be surprising, as Kyle Bladow and Jennifer Ladino write: "[o]ur environments . . . direct how we process information" (2). If we look at the lyric "I," and the coming-into-being and ever-processual becoming of that speaker, the lyric subject bridges the gap between and moves among author, text, and reader. Or, as CAConrad writes

Every poem written is filtered through the circumstances of the poet, through the diet of the poet. Just as unique is every reader of poems, for a thousand different readers of a poem equals a thousand different poems. We are here relying on one another whether or not we wish it. (*Beautiful 2*)

The lyric subject, then, is a multitude and its different positions, both in- and outside of the poems are necessary for the interpretation of their poems in all their breadth and depth.

Untaming the Subject

By placing CAConrad's poetics in an affective and environmental context, their procedures emerge as a way of connecting body, experience and text in a relentless engagement with their surroundings. This is not only a politically activist engagement, but is also a way to create an explicit relation with their immediate physical surroundings:

These rituals create what I refer to as an 'extreme present' where the many facets of what is around me wherever I am can come together through a sharper lens. It has been inspiring that (Soma)tics reveal the creative viability of everything around me. (*Ecodeviance xi*)

This engagement with their surroundings does not only influence CAConrad's lyrics but is also deeply consequential for their position in the world. In the focus on creativity, experience, and the environment, CAConrad is the embodiment of the affected/ing subject. This position is intentional, and they use its affective activist potential to their own end: "[w]ith our poems and creative core, we must RETURN THIS WORLD to its seismic levels of wildness." (*Beautiful 2*). At first glance, this seems to contradict the ritualised (soma)tanic exercises, nor is it compatible with the lyric desire to inhabit subjectivities other than the self in the form of personification; as Drew Milne states: "[h]owever much humans imagine bonds with the wild, not even poetic identification can liberate itself from the taming of nature for human purposes" (366). CAConrad, however, does not imply that other voices can be appropriated, but seems to point towards the search for an animalistic, uncultured poetic state of mind.

In CAConrad's world, the body does not lie, does not pretend; the body merely moves and (inter)acts. This might seem utopian, especially post-Foucault, but, as CAConrad writes, "wondering how to love / this world without / sounding silly? / ah, too late" (*Beautiful 15*). Living in this world is not something that can be done cognitively or only in language; rather,

social conventions need to be overcome in order to “love / this world”. How extreme this present is becomes clear from some of the more explicitly abject (soma)tic rituals, such as “White Helium:”

smear snot or blood or semen or pussy juice or earwax or piss or vomit or shit
or spit or sweat or whatever excretion you have available onto your balloon.

Hold on to the string as it floats above you. . . . Your excretions had just been
floating above you the night before, what was in your dreams?” (*Beautiful* 12).

CAConrad’s poetic method propels their body past power structures, at least momentarily, in a moment that reminds of the Bakhtinian carnivalesque in its sheer grotesqueness. This subversion disrupts any social convention, which opens up an affective space in which the poet “can outrun the internal editor, to fully thrust [them/her/himself] in the middle of the ritual, and to arrive at that moment where all rebuke over words and their customs fall away” (“SPR: Basics”). Although there is not much research that combines affect and its connection to language, this moment is one where the attempt is made to strip off some of the discursive paradigms of human language. True to the carnivalesque, the ritual is a moment in which the power relations have shifted, and the lyric subject born out of it can express “I am going to / resist I am / resistance in the making” (*Beautiful* 15). This resistance is not only asserted by the lyric speaker, but is also acted out in the preceding ritual. In this way, the environment of the poet is as important as the textual reality of the lyric speaker, and the affective spaces they move through create a sense of connection and continuity. The lyric subject is, at least in CAConrad’s poetics, out of isolation and in the world, ready for political resistance.

Conclusion

In this thesis, I have used CAC Conrad's poetic method to help define the current turning point in the mode and status of twenty-first-century lyric poetry. The aim was to argue that the current lyric speaker is not the isolated, romantic, essence of a subject/subjectivity, but that it can be firmly rooted as part of the world, and as an acting agent in it. To do so, it was necessary to reconsider the place of author, speaker, and reader and to position the entity known as a lyric "I." The conclusion was drawn that that position is not fixed, and that CAC Conrad's poetics, with its aim to use creative and physical engagement as precedential to poetry, reflect that the subject position is not in isolation, but within movement.

Secondly, the concept of ecopoetics has been used to point towards the potential of poetry as a possible site of change in its environment. Furthermore, the lyric as a separate ecology has been pointed toward in order to consider how subjectivity is in motion, especially in relation to the procedural and contextual aspects of CAC Conrad's lyrics. Considering the multiplicity of the subject position has been shown to be of value for interpretation of the poems, as they are based on CAC Conrad's movement in the world, but the poems can also be interpreted in light of a speaker in isolation. The subsequent consideration of affect theory as a way to combine the ritual and poem through an embodied linguistic approach, as CAC Conrad does, shows that subjecthood is not static, but its movement are part of the affective and interpretative value of the poems.

Finally, the turn to an affective subject has been explored further in order to uncover one of the interpretative possibilities of approaching it as procedural rather than isolated, namely in relation to the grotesque. This Bakhtinian subversive approach is based on the anti-hierarchical aspects of physical baseness and can be extended upon further by considering Kristeva and the abject (see Vice). These theories that focus on society and the physical are useful to further explore the corporeal theme in CAC Conrad's poetry, as well as in the

procedures. Alternatively, the position of language and the embodied subject can be considered in relation to post-structuralist (de)positioning of the author and the deconstruction of language as inherently political; by trying to silence their “internal editor,” CAConrad refuses to accept this aspect of language as salient. Alternatively, their engagement with the world and language can also inspire a more philosophical approach, based in phenomenology and/or the thought of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, who have influenced many affect theorists. Finally, the exploring nature of the procedures and the attention they require in their engagement with the environment, CAConrad’s approach lends itself extremely well to practice-based research. A reflection on this, including a proposed (soma)tic that should help anyone write their academic work, can be found in the appendix. The lyric subject, in the meantime, moves through the affective fabric of this world, ready to be uncovered wherever we may want to read and write it.

Appendix: Some Reflections and a Home-Brewed (Soma)tic

In this document, I write myself. I have written the endless cups of coffee and tea, staying up late at night, tears, jubilation, the whole spectrum. In this text, a piece of me resides, even though academic conventions deem it should be as untraceable as possible. Perhaps this thesis in the end is mostly this: an implicit argument for the importance of environment. Although there is a lot of interpretation of texts as-is, or research into reader's responses to texts, many authors do not speak up about their own circumstances – they have to push the text away at some point when it's done. However, bearing testimony to what shapes our writing also helps reflect on our own position. My privilege as I'm sitting in my parents' house, with their unwavering support, decent wi-fi connection, looking out onto our garden is also part of this thesis. My subjectivity, identity as an (academic) writer is partially based on this.

Reflecting on our environment as writers can not only enhance the reader's experience but lay bare some of our own biases and help understand the nature of our subjectivity. This does not always take the lyric "I" out of isolation but does help putting it in conversation. Nor does it take away the freedom of readerly response; as CAConrad writes themselves, "[e]very poem written is filtered through the circumstances of the poet" (*Beautiful 2*).

Rather than eliminating the multiplicity of subjectivities that the lyric "I" can become, the unrelentless focus on the writer's environment allows to become aware, and go against, a tunnel view on holism, because it always acknowledges particularity in search for a communal factor.

Writing our subjectivity is writing our environment is writing our subjectivity, or at least, by modern, materialistic standards, so we might as well have fun with it.

A (Soma)tic for Academic Writers

– *FOR Mia You & Cathelein Aaftink*

Everyday, when you sit at your table, soak up your surroundings. Where are you writing? How? Is everything in the right alignment within the structure of the space? If not, rearrange until your immediate surroundings reflect the state of mind you want to write in. **DO NOT POSTPONE THIS.** You and your writing is what matters now and clutter does not have a place there.

Prepare a hot beverage of your choice and sit with it at your desk. Look in front of you. What do you see? Has it changed since the last time you were here? What do you hear? Can you hear the sound of your own heart&body, a faint reminder you are alive and you are **HERE, WRITER.** Sip your beverage and stare some more.

Take a breath and take notes of whatever bubbles up. Notes, notes, note everything down that is keeping you from your practice. When the stream dries up, unclench your body and mind your posture. Take another sip and then **WRITE LIKE THE WIND THAT RUSHES OUTSIDE.** Nothing can stop you.

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