From Robert Frost to Cognitive Poetics: A Theory of Poetic Experience

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Statement of Authentication

The work presented in this thesis is, to the best of my knowledge and belief, original except as acknowledged in the text. I hereby declare that I have not submitted this material, either in full or in part, for a degree at this or any other institution.

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# Table of Contents

Abstract .............................................................................................................................. iii

Introduction ......................................................................................................................... 1

   1.1. Robert Frost, Metaphor, and James’s Theory of Mind ........................................... 28
   1.2. The Limitations of Language .................................................................................. 33
   1.3. At Home in Metaphor .............................................................................................. 38
       1.3.1. Metaphor and Confusion ................................................................................. 42
       1.3.2. Metaphor, Belief, and Emotion ...................................................................... 48
       1.3.3. Belief and Make-Believe ............................................................................... 54
   2.1. The Theory of Correspondence .............................................................................. 61
   2.2. Childhood, Embodiment, and Correspondence ..................................................... 68
       2.2.1. Mimesis and Imitation ..................................................................................... 76
   2.3. James’s Theory of Emotion ..................................................................................... 81
       2.3.1. Natural Metaphors ............................................................................................ 88
   3.1. Robert Frost and the Sound of Sense .................................................................. 93
   3.2. In the Mouth of the Sentence-Sound ................................................................. 96
   3.3. Form and Metre .................................................................................................. 100
   3.4. The Fringe of Affinities and the Sentence-Sound ............................................... 105
   3.4.1. The Feeling of Words ....................................................................................... 110

Conclusion ......................................................................................................................... 114

2. Poetry as an Experience: John Dewey’s Theory of Aesthetic Experience Reconsidered .... 117
   1.1. Aesthetic Experience: The Restoration of Continuity ........................................... 119
   1.2. Rhythm in Nature and Experience ...................................................................... 125
       1.2.1. “An Experience” ............................................................................................ 133
   1.3. Dewey’s Principle of Continuity .......................................................................... 137
       1.3.1. Part-Whole Continuity ................................................................................. 140
       1.3.2. Synecdochism .............................................................................................. 143
   1.4. “Body-Mind” ...................................................................................................... 151
       2.1. Language and the Organic Roots of the Mind .................................................. 158
       2.1.1. Compartmentalisation .................................................................................. 162
       2.2. “Loaded Dice” .............................................................................................. 169
       2.2.1. “The Cave of the Mouth” ........................................................................... 180
2.2.2. Expression and the “Act of Art” ................................................................. 186
Conclusion........................................................................................................... 190

   1.1. The Theory of Feedback ........................................................................... 194
   1.1.1. Feedback and Emotion ......................................................................... 201
   1.2. Somaesthetics .......................................................................................... 206
   1.3. The Integrated Nature of Human Embodiment ...................................... 209
   1.3.1. “A Metaphor for Metaphoring” ........................................................... 215
   1.4. A Return to James’s Theory of Emotion .................................................. 218
   2.1. Damasio and the Structure of Emotion ..................................................... 223
   2.1.1. “Smooth Functioning” ......................................................................... 225
   2.2. Homeostasis and Emotion ...................................................................... 233
   2.2.1. Emotions, Background Emotions, and the “Animation of the Face” .... 235
   2.2.2. “In the Mouths of Men” ...................................................................... 242
   2.2.3. “Casual Voluntary Mimicking”: Limitations and Variations ............ 250
   2.3. Rhythm and Emotion .............................................................................. 255
   2.4. “As-If Body Loop” .................................................................................. 261
   2.4.1. Empathic Projection ............................................................................ 266
   2.5. Metaphorical Mapping ............................................................................ 271
Conclusion........................................................................................................... 277

4. Reading the Mind of the Poem: Metaphoric Experience and the Attribution of Intentionality 281
   1.1. Image Schemata: Context and Background ............................................. 283
   1.2. Image Schemata ...................................................................................... 293
   1.2.1. Image Schemata, Structure, and Meaning .......................................... 303
   1.2.2. Meaning and Constraint .................................................................... 307
   1.3. Metaphor and Metaphorical Projections ................................................. 310
   2.1. “Be Like Me” ........................................................................................ 319
   2.2. Mind-Reading ......................................................................................... 328
   2.3. The Intentional Stance .......................................................................... 340
   2.3.1. Mind-Havers and the Problems of the Intentional Stance .................. 343
   2.4. As-If Intentionality ............................................................................... 347
Conclusion........................................................................................................... 355
Conclusion........................................................................................................... 358

Bibliography ..................................................................................................... 363
Abstract

The poetic experience – the experience of reading poetry – is fundamentally an embodied, mimetic and metaphoric experience. It is an experience available to all who can read the poem because the poetic experience is predicated on the common constitution and orientation of the human body. The poetic experience entails a complex dynamic of meaning-making that is predicated on the fundamental processes of the human body. This embodied, mimetic and metaphoric dynamic was perceived by the poet Robert Frost, who formulated a series of diverse poetic and aesthetic theories. These theories, loosely speaking, are: his theory of metaphor; theory of correspondence; and his theory of sentence-sound. These theories, however, are underdeveloped and scattered across fifty years of letters, essays, notes, and lectures. This thesis brings together and synthesises this disparate material in order to formulate a single coherent theory of poetic experience.

The poetic experience is dependent on the embodied processes of meaning-making which are, in essence, imitated by the reader of the poem, who engages in a process I call self-recital. This engenders a change within the body of the reader, which in turn changes his or her perception and understanding. The reader adopts the posture, or stance, of the poem and is thereby put in the state of mind of the poem. This is essential to making sense of the poem. The reader, in essence, must revert to the meaning-making processes that were employed to produce the poem. This is, in one instance, a rapport or “correspondence” shared between reader and poet, but in another, larger instance, it is a correspondence shared between all potential readers, because of the common embodiment shared by all human beings.
This thesis, however, goes beyond Frost’s original ideas. Or, rather, it brings these ideas into the context of more contemporary research, most significantly, areas of modern research including neuroscience, cognitive science, and the philosophy of mind. This Frostian theory of poetic experience resonates with contemporary research into the role of the body and brain in meaning-making. In fact, many of Frost’s ideas prove to be highly prescient with regard to more contemporary research, while resonating strongly with the theorists of his day. William James and John Dewey are significant with regard to the latter; Mark Johnson and Antonio Damasio are significant with regard to the former.

In effect, this thesis triangulates the synthesised Frostian theory of poetic experience with the Pragmatists, James and Dewey, and our modern understanding of the body and mind. Modern researchers, like Johnson and Damasio, but also Daniel Dennett and other theorists who feature in this thesis, can be seen as the inheritors of the Pragmatist tradition. Triangulated in this way, the theory of poetic experience as espoused here has important implications for our understanding, not only of poetry and other aesthetic experiences, but for the processes of meaning-making more broadly.
Introduction

This thesis begins with Robert Frost; but it is not about Frost or his poetry. It begins by treating Frost as a serious thinker or theorist on poetry and poetics. In this thesis, I will reconstruct a single, coherent theory of poetry and the poetic experience – that is the experience of reading poetry – based on the extant prose of Frost. From his letters, lectures, notebooks, and conversations I will synthesise a theory of poetic experience. I will bring together some of Frost’s most notable ideas, or “theories” loosely speaking, to produce a broader poetic theory, which can be shown to resonate with contemporary research in areas such as the philosophy of mind, cognitive science, and even neuroscience. In some cases, Frost’s ideas are highly prescient of later developments, albeit expressed in his inimitable manner.

Frost’s ideas resonate with contemporary knowledge about human experience and understanding, and indeed can be shown to shed light on seemingly disparate aspects of our experience. Conversely, modern scientific knowledge can be seen to validate many of Frost’s claims. Frost was no scientist, but he had a remarkable insight into the human condition; while this may come through in his poetry, it can also be seen in his scattered theoretical ideas – once they are brought together. From Frost’s work I will synthesise a theory of embodied poetic experience. This is the first goal of this thesis; once this theory of embodied poetic experience has been synthesised, the work of expanding and consolidating its argument will take a number of turns. Importantly, this theory will be grounded in pragmatist philosophy, namely through William James and John Dewey; the former had a major influence on Frost, and this will provide the groundwork for launching into more
contemporary research, ranging from cognitive literary theory and poetics, to cognitive science and neuroscience.

The argument I intend to make is complex. To make my argument I will draw on a number of prominent thinkers and theorists in a variety of fields, from philosophy and cognitive science to neuroscience. Most importantly, I will employ a number of ideas from Frost. It is from Frost that the central tenets of my thesis are drawn; that is, that the poetic experience, the experience of reading and engaging with the poem, is embodied, mimetic, and metaphoric. Frost, however, unlike many of his contemporaries, never produced a single coherent body of poetic theory; instead, Frost floated many of his ideas throughout his career in lectures, letters, essays, discussions, and in his notebooks.

There are three key ideas, or “theories,” that emerge from Frost’s extant prose: his theory of metaphor, his theory of correspondence, and his theory of sentence-sounds. These are the three theories which form the basis of the theory of poetic experience. In synthesising these fragments, however, I will need to rely on other theorists to lubricate the process. There already exists a substantial and diverse scholarship on Frost, which will be useful; in addition to these secondary sources, I will draw significantly on the American philosopher William James who was, arguably, the single biggest influence on Frost’s intellectual development.

The influence of William James on Robert Frost has been much discussed.¹ James was still at Harvard when Frost attended; however, due to James’s poor health, Frost would

be unable to attend any of his classes. Nevertheless, James left an indelible impression on Frost: “The most valuable teacher I had at Harvard,” Frost says, “I never had […] William James. His books meant a great deal to me.” Two texts that were of particular significance to Frost, and which will be of great use in my analysis, were the essay “The Will to Believe” and James’s magnum opus: The Principles of Psychology. Frost would use the shorter Psychology: A Briefer Course, among other texts, in his time as a teacher.

Frost and James provide the nucleus around which I will build my argument. James, more than any other thinker, will help to consolidate the seemingly disparate ideas of Frost into a unified theory; it is in relation to key Jamesian ideas, such as James’s theory of emotion, his conceptualisation of belief, and his notion of the “fringe of affinities,” that I will synthesise Frost’s fragmentary ideas into a single theory. Furthermore, James provides important theoretical grounding, which will allow me to broaden my analysis, particularly into the fields of cognitive science and neuroscience. Numerous contemporary researchers, such as Mark Johnson and Antonio Damasio, have drawn upon James’s work, and have been engaged in the recovery of James’s theories.

I will use the aforementioned theorists and others, including John Dewey, Daniel Dennett, and Richard Shusterman, to demonstrate the contemporary relevance of Frost’s ideas, synthesised into a new theory of poetic experience. Theorists such as Dennett, while not working directly from James, are the modern inheritors of the pragmatist and scientific tradition that James is instrumental in propagating. The conceptual tools they develop can be understood in terms of the cognitive and physiological processes that James first begins to

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4 Jay Parini, Robert Frost: A Life, 61.
5 Shaw, “The Poetics of Pragmatism,” 159.
analyse, and which are subsequently taken up and developed by the likes of Johnson, Damasio, and Shusterman in their research.

In chapter one I begin the synthesis of Frost’s disparate theories, using James and recent scholarship surrounding Frost’s prose. I argue that Frost’s theories can be understood in the context of a larger theory of poetic experience. I further argue that, through the prism of some of James’s more prominent theories, Frost’s theories can be seen to resonate with contemporary developments in cognitive science. This last point will be fully developed in subsequent chapters as those contemporary thinkers and theorists are introduced and their ideas discussed. A brief outline of Frost’s theories, how they relate, and how James helps to elucidate the dynamic in which they operate together coherently will help to foreground the argument of chapter one.

Metaphor is the central plank to Frost’s aesthetic theory. Metaphor, for Frost, is fundamental not only to poetry but to all human thought and meaning; all human meaning, that is, is metaphoric in nature. Poetry, Frost argues, is where we are “best taught the manage of metaphor,”⁶ where we receive our “education in metaphor.” This poetic education reverberates throughout our lives, helping us to be more “at home in metaphor” and the “figurative values” by which we understand and navigate our environment.⁷ This education in metaphor teaches us that metaphors break down at some point, and that we must constantly renew our engagement with our meaning-making processes, which are ultimately metaphoric.

In the poetic experience the reader embodies the metaphoric processes by which the poem is first constituted; this is achieved, initially, through what I call “self-recital,” which is

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⁷ Ibid., p.721.
related to Frost’s theory of sentence-sounds. This mimetic process is a creative act, as Frost says the “thing is to get another poetic something going – one step more poetic anywhere.” This, Frost calls the “aesthetic moral.”8 In embodying the poem the reader reproduces the creative act. This is a mimetic act, but it is not mere repetition.

There is a vital intersubjective dynamic at play in the poetic experience that takes the experience beyond mere mimesis and into the realms of what I call “mimetic rapport”: an interaction between human beings grounded in their mimetic, and ultimately embodied, capacities for learning and understanding the world and each other. These embodied and mimetic capacities are the ultimate source of our meaning-making; they are the source of our metaphoric processes through which we understand the world and each other.

Frost’s theory of “correspondence” is a form of mimetic rapport. The reader mimics not only the poet, but every other potential reader of the poem. It is a correspondence of “the invisible muscles of the mouth and throat,”9 which every reader has, and a correspondence of “mind convincing mind that it can uncurl and wave the same filaments of subtlety.”10 These filaments of subtlety originate in the metaphoric processes of thought, which are in turn grounded in the embodied processes of meaning-making. Poetry educates us in the subtleties of metaphor by drawing us into the process.

Correspondence, for Frost, is a connection between human minds; art, and poetry in particular, is a means of facilitating that intersubjective connection: “correspondence in art,”

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10 Ibid.
Frost says, “is all.”\textsuperscript{11} The “aesthetic moral” then is to engage in correspondence with other minds, convincing them that one’s mind “can uncurl and wave the same filaments of subtlety.”\textsuperscript{12} This act of convincing relates to the embodied metaphoric processes inherent to each potential reader. The act of correspondence in the poetic experience, furthermore, is a metaphoric act, but it is nonetheless an act of embodied mimetic rapport. It is the same processes that each reader calls upon in the act of self-recital to make sense of the poem.

In a physical sense, Frost’s theory of poetic experience revolves around the reader’s ability to adopt what he calls the “voice-posture”\textsuperscript{13} of the poem; this voice-posture is produced by the “strained relations”\textsuperscript{14} between the words and “sentence-sounds” – the vocal sounds which underpin those words – of the poem. In adopting the voice-posture the reader does not simply read the poem, but reads it in a way that he can hear the poem “in his mind’s ear as if aloud.”\textsuperscript{15} In adopting the voice-posture the reader takes up a physical as well as metaphorical stance. The reader, in essence, mimics the poem, embodying the metaphoric meaning-making process of the poem.

Crucial to synthesising Frost’s disparate theories is James’s theory of embodied emotion. Furthermore, James’s theory of embodied emotion is crucial to connecting the synthesised theory of poetic experience to contemporary theories of embodiment. James’ theory underpins the embodied and mimetic capacity of self-recital. If emotions are indeed embodied then the physical changes that the reader undergoes in “adopting the voice posture

\textsuperscript{11} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{12} Ibid.
of the poem” will have an effect on his or her emotional state. This embodiment is alluded to in Frost’s theory of correspondence, but it is also alluded to in Frost’s definition of a poem as “the emotion of having a thought.” Frost’s definition further serves to emphasise the interconnectedness between emotion and our metaphoric meaning-making processes.

Our meaning-making processes are not abstract, but are grounded in embodied experience. Our emotional responses to things in the environment provide us with the basis for meaning. Emotion, in short, is what connects us to the environment and informs us of the consequences of our actions and the significance of objects and events. Emotions inform us about the state of our body and about the things that act upon it. Emotions, as such, are an integral part of our embodied system of meaning-making. In subsequent chapters this matrix of embodied meaning will be developed through the introduction of more contemporary theorists, many of whom have built on James’s original ideas.

There is one more idea of James’s worth mentioning here: the “fringe of affinities.” The fringe of affinities entails a series of relations that unfold outward from a particular focal point, or “nucleus,” which are integral in the meaning of that nucleus. That is, any given object upon which we can consciously focus is only meaningful because of the network of relations it bears to other objects at the “fringes” of our conscious focus. “Knowledge about a thing is knowledge of its relations,” James says. “Of most of its relations” he goes on to say “we are only aware in the penumbral nascent way of a ‘fringe’ of unarticulated affinities about it.” Nothing is meaningful in isolation; any object of experience is tied to the broader experience in the environment in which that object is found.

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This fringe of affinities resonates with Frost’s emphasis on metaphor. Our metaphoric processes, in fact, rely on the network of relations surrounding any given object of thought. The fringe of affinities is suggestive of the potential extensions of meaning surrounding any given object, and any further “poetic step” is taken through the suggestiveness of the fringe. The subtlety of which “mind must convince mind” is found in this fringe of affinities. It can be argued that, metaphorically speaking, the “filaments of subtlety,” which are anchored in our embodied experience, are “uncurled and waved” in the vast fringe of affinities.

In chapter two I consider the work of John Dewey, a contemporary of Frost and colleague of James. Dewey is important to this thesis for a number of reasons. Dewey, following James, is a pragmatist, and his particular focus is on the nature of human experience. Of importance in this regard is his work on aesthetics. Dewey takes the pragmatic approach into the realm of aesthetic theory in a way that James does not. Dewey, however, grounds his aesthetic theory in the same matrix of embodied meaning-making as James and Frost. Dewey provides an explicit aesthetic dimension to the theory of poetic experience espoused here. Dewey, along with James, provides the theory of poetic experience with a conceptual and contextual framework that embeds it in a wider intellectual tradition. This will permit a more in-depth integration with contemporary theorists and research.

Dewey’s aesthetic and experiential theories provide three crucial conceptual tools to expand my argument: his notion of “body-mind,” his “principle of continuity,” and, most importantly, his theory of aesthetic experience. The term “poetic experience,” in fact, has been deliberately chosen to resonate with Dewey’s “aesthetic experience.” The former, Dewey ultimately argues, is a sub-category of the latter. “Literature,” including poetry,
Dewey argues, is a special sub-category of the aesthetic experience by virtue of its relationship to human speech, or “the art of communication”\(^{18}\) as he calls it. The notion of body-mind and the principle of continuity are not explicitly developed as a part of Dewey’s theory of aesthetic experience, but, as I will show, are nevertheless integral to it.

Dewey’s theory of aesthetic experience is an attempt to re-assert the connection between aesthetic experience and everyday experience, through the commonality of the environment in which both are possible. Aesthetic experience, Dewey argues, is not exclusive to galleries and museums; nor is everyday experience merely the amalgamation of the banal and uninteresting. There is continuity between the two “modes” of experience by virtue of the common environment and the common embodiment shared by all human beings. As such, the aesthetic experience has value for our everyday experience and our everyday understanding of the world around us. That is, aesthetic experience “enriches” everyday experience.\(^{19}\)

Aesthetic experience is continuous with the same embodied meaning-making processes as everyday experience; as such, the metaphoric, emotional, and mimetic processes that underpin our learning about and navigating through our environment are integral to our aesthetic experience. Aesthetic experience is about enriching the rhythm of these processes, and thereby enriching our capacity to understand the world and to communicate with one another about it. “Rhythm” is no arbitrary choice of words; it captures the fluctuations and changes in the patterns of activity and the processes of understanding that constitute our on-going experience. “Rhythm,” Dewey says, is “the ordered variations of change,”\(^{20}\) by which he means that things change in relatively predictable ways; ways which affect us, ways which we can perceive, and ways that we can take part in or influence.

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\(^{19}\) Ibid., 12-13
\(^{20}\) Ibid., 160
We are grounded in our environment through our sensitivity to the rhythm of embodied processes and environmental or experiential patterns. Aesthetic experience is a kind of “education” in the rhythms of internal and external change; the poetic experience, by virtue of the “art of communication,” is an education in physiological rhythms – the throat, the lungs, the heart – as well as environmental rhythms, in terms of patterns of experience manifested in the metaphors, beliefs, and “figurative values” by which we understand and represent the world. The Frostian theory of poetic experience fits into this Deweyan dynamic with its emphasis on embodiment, intersubjectivity, and metaphor.

Two further ideas that Dewey develops tangential to his aesthetic theory are worth mentioning as they help to illustrate how his theory of aesthetic experience is embedded in broader pragmatic principles. Dewey’s notion of body-mind and his principle of continuity exemplify the significance of embodiment to experience, and both can be seen to underpin his theory of aesthetic experience. In both concepts the body lies at the centre of the matrix of experience, but the body itself is necessarily located in an environment. According to Dewey then, there is a line of continuity extending between the mind, the body, and the environment; it is through understanding this continuity that the task of restoring continuity between aesthetic and everyday experience begins.21

Dewey’s notion of body-mind is a response to the Cartesian separation of body and mind. Dewey explains that the term body-mind “simply designates what actually takes place when a living body is implicated in situations of discourse, communication, and

21 Ibid., 2
participation.” The mind and the body are implicated in a situation as a unified whole, or rather, as an organism. The potential of all human experience is grounded in this triangulation of mind-body-environment. Body-mindedness, then, is the basis for aesthetic experience. The poetic experience, as a special sub-category of aesthetic experience, far from merely benefiting from this continuity, is, in fact, the prime example of aesthetic body-mindedness because of its grounding in human speech and the “art of communication.” The mimetic rapport – the correspondence – that is engendered through the poetic experience is a metaphoric “situation of discourse, communication, and participation.”

Dewey’s notion of body-mind is consistent with his principle of continuity, which can be seen as the underlying principle that governs both his notion of body-mind and his theory of aesthetic experience. There are two kinds of continuity to which the principle of continuity refers: higher-lower and inner-out continuity. A third can be derived from these two: part-whole continuity. The notion of body-mind is emblematic of all three: firstly, the “higher” functions of the mind are continuous with the “lower” functions of the body. Secondly, the body-mind is situated within the environment; the inner operations of the body-mind are affected by the outer activities and events of the environment.

Thirdly, our experience itself is predicated on the “reciprocal interpretation of parts and whole.” By “reciprocal interpretation” Dewey means that the parts of the whole stand in a dynamic relationship to one another, not as isolable parts; there is an accumulation of meaning in this reciprocal transaction of meaning. Such parts, Dewey says, “stand in rhythmic connection” to one another, which “reinforce one another as variations that build up

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23 Dewey, Art as Experience, 177.
as an integrated complex experience.”24 This part-whole dynamic resonates with Frost’s aesthetic theories, particularly in light of what is often referred to as Frost’s “synecdochism.” That is, the way in which part and whole, and parts within a whole, interact; also, the way in which the part can stand for, or is suggestive of, the whole. This is important with regard to our meaning-making processes, particularly surrounding metaphor and relations between the objects of our experience.

This further resonates with James’s “fringe of affinities,” the nucleus of which can be seen as the “part” which suggests a larger meaning, and therefore a broader “whole.” This is true of the correspondence of the poetic experience: a singular poetic experience is both suggestive of the larger meaning of poetic practice, but it is also suggestive of the wider meaning-making processes and processors, or minds. The reader, as such, stands in synecdochic relationship to the whole potential readership of poetry. It is in this part-whole dynamic that the reader is both convinced of the potential for subtlety in the minds of others and is equipped, or rather “educated,” to convince others of his ability to uncurl and wave the same filaments of subtlety.

From chapter three the focus shifts, carrying the Frostian and pragmatist arguments of the previous two chapters into a modern context of cognitive and scientific research. The primary focus of chapter three will be the role of emotion in the poetic experience. Frost has already said that “a poem is the emotion of having a thought,” and James has also argued that emotion is embodied. In chapter three I will extrapolate upon the embodied, emotional dynamic of the poetic experience using more contemporary research. To this end, I will employ a number of theorists; however, there is a clear focus on the work of neuroscientist,

24 Ibid.
Antonio Damasio. Importantly, James’s theory of emotion forms the bedrock of Damasio’s own theory. In addition to Damasio, Richard Shusterman (for whom James and Dewey also serve a foundational role), Mark Johnson, and Norman Holland will also be important in this chapter.

Damasio’s research into the neurological basis of emotions is central to chapter three. Of particular importance will be the fundamental grounding of emotion in bodily processes, such as homeostasis. This connection between emotions and homeostasis is the vital link between James and Damasio, but also between Damasio and Holland and, by extension, Frost. Holland, working with the same set of Frostian concepts as discussed in chapter one in demonstrating his own “theory of feedback,” will touch on the relationship between emotion and homeostasis. Holland’s theory of feedback is focused on literary experience, while Damasio’s theory of embodied emotion is broader ranging. Considered together, they serve to illustrate the emotional, embodied dynamic that underpins the poetic experience.

Holland’s theory of feedback rests on a metaphoric relationship between the act of reading and homeostatic processes. Feedback is a phenomenon related to homeostasis which Holland uses as a metaphor for the act of reading. Feedback is a part of the self-correcting processes within the body helping to maintain balance; information “feeds back” into the homeostatic system so that adjustments can be made and balance re-established within the system to ensure the smooth functioning of the organism. This same process, Holland argues, characterises the process of reading: in essence, the act of reading constitutes an environment which presents the reader with stimuli; the stimuli initiates changes in the reader in the form of emotional responses, which in turn changes the behaviour or actions, or, rather,

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the disposition that underlines the behaviour or actions, of the reader.\textsuperscript{26} This, for Holland, constitutes a “feedback loop.”\textsuperscript{27}

Damasio’s theory can, arguably, be seen as an extension of Holland’s. Damasio’s theory of embodied emotion, however, goes further and into greater depth with regard to the role of emotion as a governing force in our experience. Damasio makes the link between emotion and homeostasis (among other body systems), and thereby human experience which is mediated via the body, explicit. That is to say, there is distinct continuity between the deeply embedded bodily processes, such as homeostasis, and the higher metaphoric processes that operate at the level of, say, the act of reading. Damasio’s theory, as such, resonates with Dewey, in particular, with regard to the central tenet of his aesthetic and experiential theory: “continuity.” Damasio’s research, in addition to contemporising James, can also be seen to support Dewey.

Dewey’s “principle of continuity” resonates with Damasio’s “nesting principle,” which governs the hierarchy of emotion in his theory. Damasio postulates three levels of emotion: background emotions, primary or universal emotions, and secondary or social emotions. Background emotions are the most fundamental, and are more aligned with the state of the body, such as “well-being or malaise, calm or tension.”\textsuperscript{28} Primary emotions, Damasio explains, “include fear, anger, disgust, surprise, sadness, and happiness – the emotions that first come to mind whenever the term emotion is invoked.”\textsuperscript{29} By contrast, secondary, or social emotions include “sympathy, embarrassment, shame, guilt, pride,

\textsuperscript{26} Ibid., 72.
\textsuperscript{27} See Ibid., 72-76.
\textsuperscript{29} Antonio Damasio, Looking for Spinoza: Joy, Sorrow, and the Feeling Brain (New York: Harvest Book/Harcourt Inc., 2003), 44.
jealousy, envy, gratitude, admiration, indignation, and contempt.” Background emotions are the most fundamental level of emotions, and closest to the regulatory activities of the body, while secondary emotions are socially acquired.

Each level of emotion, according to Damasio, is “nested” in – that is, continuous with but by no means reducible to – the one below it. Damasio explains how, for instance, the “social emotion” of contempt is continuous with disgust “a primary emotion that evolved in association with the automatic and beneficial rejection of potentially toxic foods.” The importance of this continuity is clear when he goes on to say: “Even the words we use to describe situations of contempt, and moral outrage – we profess to be disgusted – revolve around the nesting.” Indirectly, Damasio is identifying the continuity between our most fundamental bodily processes, and our “higher” meaning-making processes.

This continuity is important, because it is the basis of our correspondence. The correspondence of the eyes and lips and “the invisible muscles of the throat” give way to the correspondence of mind with mind. The physiological underpinnings of the higher meaning-making processes can be made explicit by the fact that the neurological connection between the organs of the mouth and certain emotion centres in the brain overlap. It can be seen that the special status that Dewey gives to sound, in particular, human oral sound and the “art of communication,” is grounded in the neurophysiological constitution of the human body by which communication is made possible. The realisation in the early stages of correspondence that our lips and the lips of others, as Frost says, “were the same and can make the same

30 Ibid., 45.
31 Ibid.
32 Ibid.
33 Ibid., 63.
sounds” is a profound moment of mimetic rapport. Self-recital in the poetic experience is, metaphorically speaking, a return to, or reiteration of, this intersubjective realisation.

The final aspect of Damasio’s argument that I will mention here is, arguably, his most important contribution: the “as-if body loop.” Damasio, like many other theorists, while lauding James for his insight on the embodiment of emotion, is nonetheless critical of James for certain weak points in his theory. Damasio’s criticism of James, importantly, leads Damasio to formulate a model of emotional response that includes a “supplementary mechanism” for triggering emotions, something that James’s theory lacks. This supplementary mechanism is the as-if body loop, which is an extension of the normal processes in the body loop, or the somatosensory system that informs the brain how the body is doing. The activity of the somatosensory system provides continuous updates to the brain about the state of the body and allows the organism to respond to changes in its environment. This is, in its simplest form, the body loop in action.

The “as-if body loop” is, in a sense, the body mimicking its own emotional responses. This “supplementary mechanism” allows emotional responses to be triggered without the specific emotion-inducer or stimuli being present. This extension, or projection, of our emotional faculties beyond our immediate circumstances is the basis for empathy, mimetic rapport, and, ultimately, our capacity to correspond. Our capacity for correspondence through poetic experience is predicated on this projective capacity of the as-if body loop. The as-if body loop allows us to experience the “emotion of having a thought” that is the poem; without the as-if body loop we would not be able to (metaphorically) occupy the same position as every other reader in the act of self-recital. The “as-if body loop” is ultimately

35 Damasio, The Feeling of What Happens, 149.
continuous with background emotions, the state of the body, and the somatosensory and homeostatic processes that maintain the organism – the human – in its environment. The Frostian theory of poetic experience being developed here can be seen to encapsulate this continuity, at least in terms of its aesthetic dimensions.

The as-if body loop can be seen as essential to the metaphoric processes at the heart of the poetic experience; furthermore, it can be seen as a metaphoric experience quite apart from any aesthetic stimuli. Our common constitution means that correspondence is possible, and that the as-if body loop is an extension of those bodily processes into the metaphoric realm where aesthetic experience takes place. The poetic experience, more specifically, is grounded in the neurophysiological continuity within and between human faces. Human verbal sounds, with their special communicative status, accompany the as-if mechanisms into the metaphoric realm; our ability to mimic one another through words and their underlying sentence-sounds provides the ideal platform for commonly constituted organisms to share emotional and intellectual experiences without the need for the immediate presence of others.

Damasio’s research and theoretical work is highly complementary to the Frostian and pragmatist material that underpins the theory of poetic experience espoused here. Indeed, it can be seen to elaborate and refine many important concepts, most obviously with regard to James’s theory of emotion, but also, for example, with regard to Frost’s theory of correspondence: the as-if body loop – the “supplementary mechanism” – can be seen as the neurophysiological basis for the mimetic and metaphoric connection of correspondence. The as-if body loop can be seen as the mechanism for the “invisible” correspondence of “mind convincing mind that it can uncurl and wave the same filaments of subtlety” that first begins with the “visible” correspondence of eyes with eyes, and “the visible motions of the lips.”
The focus of chapter four moves from the emotions to the mind, in particular the metaphorical processes of meaning-making. Here, the metaphorical nature of embodied experience is discussed. In this chapter I show that we are not merely organisms responding emotionally to the stimuli of our environment, but that we have creative input into our experiences, continuous with, or extending from, but not reducible to, our emotional responses. Our common constitution is the source of our metaphorical understanding; that is, we are able to abstract from the world patterns of behaviour and experience and share these patterns with one another because of our environmental and physiological continuity. The same physiological structures that predicate emotion also predicate metaphor.

The philosopher Mark Johnson provides the concept of “image schemata,” which is integral to this chapter. There are other concepts that are important to this chapter, such as the “intentional stance” provided by Daniel Dennett, and “mind-reading” by Lisa Zunshine, but it is the theory of image schemata that provides the conceptual tap-root for this chapter. Image schemata, according to Johnson, are fundamental patterns of experience grounded in human embodied experience. These patterns, furthermore, are the source of higher metaphor; put another way, metaphors are continuous with, or “nested” in, image schemata.

“Image schemata,” Johnson says, “are abstract patterns in our experience and understanding.”36 They “are not propositional in any of the standard senses of the term, and yet they are central to meaning and to the inferences we make.”37 There are certain basic patterns of human behaviour and activity from which we produce image schemata. “Typical image schemas of bodily movements” Johnson says “include SOURCE-PATH-GOAL, UP-

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37 Ibid., 2.
DOWN (verticality), INTO-OUT OF, TOWARD-AWAY FROM, and STRAIGHT-CURVED.”\textsuperscript{38} These are just some of the basic patterns that recur in our experience of the world around us, not just individually but as a species. These patterns are not peculiar to any individual, but are “shared cultural modes of experience and help to determine the nature of our meaningful, coherent understanding of our ‘world.’”\textsuperscript{39}

“These structures [of image schemata] are not rigid or fixed” Johnson tells us, “but are altered in their application to particular situations.”\textsuperscript{40} While these structures are grounded in our embodiment, they have diverse applications; metaphorically speaking, one end is tied to the body, while the other end is untied, free to be applied to particular situations. Viewed in this way, the structure of image schemata can be seen to parallel the “filaments of subtlety” at the heart of Frost’s theory of correspondence. “Metaphorical projection” is, according to Johnson, “only one way” to wave such filaments, another is through metonymy. Metaphor, however, is a “better example,” he says, “because it allows us a glimpse of the creation of meaningful structure via projections and elaborations of image schemata.”\textsuperscript{41} Metaphor, that is, is more demonstrative of the meaning-making process that begins with embodied experience and terminates in the figurative values by which we understand our world.

Metaphor, then, is continuous with image schemata; our education in metaphor is thus an education in the diverse and imaginative applications of fundamental experiential patterns. What is more, the universality of image schemata is important to our capacity to correspond with one another. Poetry presents us, the reader, with metaphor, not only in the form of the metaphors it uses, but the metaphoric processes it engenders in us through the mimetic act of

\textsuperscript{39} Ibid., 14.
\textsuperscript{40} Johnson, The Body in the Mind, 21.
\textsuperscript{41} Ibid., 100.
self-recital. The embodied continuity of our mental and emotional processes becomes an intersubjective continuity through mimetic rapport and metaphoric projection. This is the dynamic that ultimately underpins the Frostian theory of poetic experience being developed in this thesis.

One final concept from chapter four, which helps to consolidate the intersubjective dynamic of the poetic experience, is worth discussing. Dennett calls the concept the “intentional stance,” while Zunshine calls it “mind-reading,” or “theory of mind.” More broadly, the concept can be termed the attribution of intentionality, or mind. The basic premise of this concept is that, we understand the behaviour or activity of an entity, whether human or not, by treating it as if it possessed a mind. Dennett’s conception of the intentional stance is broader that Zunshine’s, but Zunshine’s is focused more specifically on literature and literary experience. As such, it is important to consider the attribution of intentionality in both narrow and broad terms.

“Intentionality” Dennett explains “in the philosophical sense is just aboutness. Something exhibits intentionality if its competence is in some way about something else.” In particular, intentionality is a property of mental states (though not all mental states); Beliefs and desires are prime examples of the intentionality of mental states. Emotions and emotional attachments also possess this quality of aboutness. The intentional stance, then, is a stance towards other entities, treating them as if they were possessed of the same mindedness that exhibits intentionality that we possess. That is, we understand the behaviour or activities of an entity by projecting upon them the same mental processes by which we understand the world, at the heart of which is our own embodiment and metaphorical processes.

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Understood in another way, we infer from the behaviour or activities of other entities a presence of mind by way of recurring experiential patterns. There is a mimetic underpinning to this process of mind-reading. We are “prodded” towards mind-reading, as Zunshine argues, “from the beginning of our awareness” because there is a social impetus to mind-read.\textsuperscript{43} We are surrounded by other human beings who have the same eyes, lips, and invisible muscles of the throat. We see behaviours or actions that we can mimic and infer the mental states behind them. We do this, not only with other people, but with animals as well as more abstract approximations of human interaction.

Abstract or imaginative approximations are the source of aesthetic experience, and, as Dewey has said, literature holds a privileged position among the arts because of its special relationship to human speech. The embodiment of poetry through the act of self-recital engenders a unique circumstance in which the reader, mimicking the poem, also mimics the emotional and mental state of the poem. This is a part of the meaning-making process, but it is also a part of the process whereby we seek to understand what others (humans, animals, non-human entities) mean by their own actions. The act of making meaning and the act of understanding the meaning-making of others converge in the self-recital of the poem; put another way, the reader of the poem reads the mind of the poem, but in order to do so he must adopt its posture or stance: the reader, in essence, is reading his own mind.

While the mind the reader is reading is, essentially, his own, it is, at the same time, \textit{not} his own. There is a simultaneous projection and embodiment in the poetic experience, which is crucial to the reader’s ability to abstractly correspond. The thoughts of the poem are

not the reader’s own, but, through the mimetic engagement with the poem, the reader takes up the thoughts, or the mental state, of the poem in order to understand its meaning. This is the metaphorical loop, the as-if loop or the feedback loop, that the reader enters into through the mimetic engagement with the poem, and this is the essence of the correspondence that the reader enters into with every other potential reader of the poem.

By synthesising Frost’s original and seemingly disparate ideas into a single coherent theory, buttressed with pragmatist theories of experience, including aesthetic experience, a Frostian theory of poetic experience can be developed that resonates with contemporary research into the mind and body. Contemporary theories of meaning and experience provided by the likes of Johnson, Damasio, Dennett, and others, which all benefit from the conceptual pioneering of the likes of James and Dewey, help to elaborate and expand upon the Frostian theory of poetic experience. Conversely, this theory of poetic experience can be seen as a prism through which a modern understanding of human experience and the vast and diverse evidence on which it is based can be integrated into a single perspective. Human experience and understanding are fundamentally embodied, mimetic, and metaphoric – the poetic experience brings together these elements into a single abstract experience that can be shared and diffused throughout a like-minded (like-body-minded) population.

The theory of poetic experience espoused here provides a framework for understanding ostensibly disparate aspects of human experience as deeply integrated; aesthetic experience, and poetic experience in particular, offers not merely a window through which to passively view this dynamic at work, but a means of actively engaging with it. There is a moral dimension to this engagement because it enriches our understanding and educates us in our own meaning-making processes, and, by extension, the meaning-making
processes of our fellow human beings. Aesthetic experience is continuous with everyday experience, but it is poetic experience that delves the very depths of those fundamental processes whereby we produce our understanding of the world.

The purpose of this chapter is two-fold. Firstly, it will map out a theory of poetic experience, grounded in the prose of Robert Frost; this will be achieved by synthesising three of Frost’s more significant aesthetic concepts, or theories: his theory of metaphor, his theory of correspondence, and his theory of sentence-sounds. At the same time, this chapter will also demonstrate the influence that William James had on Frost in the formulation of these theories. Through this dual approach, I will begin to establish Frost’s relevance to modern aesthetic and poetic theory, while at the same time laying the groundwork for a re-assertion of a pragmatic aesthetics. This will, in subsequent chapters, lead to a re-evaluation of the aesthetics of everyday experience in the light of a theory of poetic experience that emerges from Frost.

While Frost never wrote down a systematic theory, one can be reconstructed from his various lectures, letters, and essays. I will address each of Frost’s aesthetic theories separately, but in so doing I will build a picture of a broader theory of poetic experience that unites them. While these three theories will be considered in turn, they are deeply interconnected in Frost’s broader aesthetics and are best understood together. In order to assist my task of synthesising Frost’s theoretical work I will draw on the sizeable scholarship (both during his life-time and more recently) that surrounds him. This will also help in drawing together the ideas of Frost and James.

This chapter will also begin to illustrate the prescience of Frost’s ideas in a contemporary context. This prescience will be further demonstrated in subsequent chapters.
In this chapter, however, I will show the contemporary resonance of Frost’s ideas through incorporating research from modern cognitive science. This will be helped by the fact that many of the scholars I will be employing in this chapter (and this thesis more broadly) draw some of their material from William James, such as Mark Johnson, Richard Shusterman, and Antonio Damasio. Others, such as Norman Holland and Merlin Donald, do not draw directly on James, but can be shown to hold complementary views. The picture of the human mind that emerges from modern cognitive science will not only help to expand upon many of Frost’s nascent ideas, such as his concept of “correspondence,” but also to illustrate why they remain relevant today.

A summary of the three theories is useful in order to give an indication of the synthesis that will be undertaken in this chapter. The first and most important theory is metaphor as it underpins the other two, and as such will be pivotal in establishing the theory of poetic experience in this chapter. Frost’s conception of metaphor is closely related to that of Nietzsche,\(^1\) and more recently George Lakoff and Mark Johnson. Metaphor, for Frost, is not only central to poetry, but is central to human thought. Poetry, for Frost, is crucial in understanding metaphor. Alongside metaphor, there is the theory of correspondence which pertains to the way human beings communicate through variation and subtlety in expression. Poetry, again, plays a role because through poetry we learn such subtlety. Finally, in his theory of sentence-sounds Frost makes a distinction between words and the sounds out of which words are made. A tension exists in the relationship between the two that permits a variation of meaning and emotion than can exist in words alone.

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James’s influence on Frost is undeniable, particularly with regard to his conception of the mind and his embodied theory of emotion, which are pervasive throughout Frost’s theories. The relationship between emotion and thought that emerges from James’s pragmatism is vital to Frost’s poetics. Frost ultimately conceives of poetry as “a felt-thought thing”; this reflects the embodied nature of the poetic experience that underpins the entire argument throughout this thesis.

Some context will be useful for this analysis. It is important to note that the three theories arose over a period of decades. This, in conjunction with the fact that Frost did not write a systematic theory, makes the task of synthesis more difficult. Some perspective can be gained on the arc of Frost’s theoretical development through a brief explication of what Robert Hass calls the three major periods of Frost’s career: “In the first major period, what I would call the aesthetic phase, Frost was concerned entirely with an original theory of versification, which he called ‘the sound of sense.’” It was during this phase that he “recognised the dramatic possibilities inherent in colloquial speech rhythms.”³ There is a considerable Jamesian influence on the ideas that developed out of this period as I will show later.

“The second major period in Frost’s career,” which Hass calls “his metaphorical phase, began in the mid-1920s.” “According to the Frost of this phase” Hass continues, metaphor was not merely an ornamental figure of speech but, as James and Nietzsche had argued, a complex psychological process by which one could arrive at a fresh

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understanding of life. […] In this phase of his career, Frost continually argued that poets should accept their responsibility to disrupt conventional thought.⁴

Some of Frost’s most insightful pieces come from this period, including his most comprehensive statements on metaphor, as well as the nascent thoughts of his theory of correspondence. “The last major phase,” Hass concludes “what I would call Frost’s expressionist phase, corresponds nicely to the poet’s rejuvenated spirit of the late 1930s.” This period “marks a significant withdrawal from his earlier insistence upon the poet as autonomous ‘maker’ and upon poetry as consciously crafted form.”⁵

This last point, however, should not be construed as Frost’s abandoning the work of the previous periods. This period marks a return to his lyrical roots, and an embrace of “a poetics of organic form.”⁶ Hass, however, points out, that “he maintained throughout his life a strong belief that external form was necessary to constrain the wild impulses of the imagination.”⁷ The tensions Frost saw as so productive in his earliest phase, such as those that underpin his theory of sentence-sounds, remained with him throughout his career. Tension characterises the arc of Frost’s poetic development in various ways; it is an underlying aspect throughout his poetry as well as his theoretical work.

Central to all of Frost’s work, his poetry and his aesthetic theories, is his theory of metaphor. While Frost’s three theories are interconnected, the theory of metaphor is crucial to understanding the other two. According to Hass’s chronology, it is during his middle phase that Frost produces some of his most important writing on metaphor. Furthermore, it is also

⁴ Ibid., 130.  
⁵ Ibid.  
⁶ Ibid., 131.  
⁷ Ibid.
the period in which he first begins to espouse his theory of correspondence. As this chapter progresses, the intimate relationship between Frost’s theories will emerge. Starting with metaphor will help foreground the connections that will be important to demonstrate the unity of Frost’s theories.

1.1. Robert Frost, Metaphor, and James’s Theory of Mind

For Frost, metaphor was not only central to poetry; it was central to human thought. Metaphor, he says, is “all there is of thinking.” Indeed, he says “I have wanted in late years to go further and further in making metaphor the whole of thinking.” Frost shares this perspective on the centrality of metaphor with a long line of thinkers, from Nietzsche to George Lakoff and Mark Johnson. As Lakoff and Johnson argue:

Metaphor is typically viewed as characteristic of language alone, a matter of words rather than thought or action. For this reason, most people think they can get along perfectly well without metaphor […] On the contrary […] metaphor is pervasive in everyday life, not just in language but in thought and action. Our ordinary conceptual system, in terms of which we both think and act, is fundamentally metaphorical in nature.

While metaphor may be “the whole of thinking,” it does not follow that we can simply posit any metaphor we like and expect it to be understood. Metaphor has its limits, and those limits emerge from the limitations of our thinking, and more broadly our embodiment. It is through

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9 Ibid., 720.
poetry, however, that “we are best taught the manage [sic] of metaphor.” Frost outlines the importance of metaphor in a number of ways. Those who are not “educated by metaphor” face a gap of understanding:

Because they have not been educated enough to find their way around in contemporary literature. They don’t know what they may safely like in the libraries and galleries. They don’t know how to judge an editorial when they see one. They don’t know how to judge a political campaign. They don’t know when they are being fooled by a metaphor, an analogy, a parable.

Metaphor, Frost is arguing, is the root of understanding. Lacking that understanding has real-world consequences for understanding the uses and abuses to which metaphor is put. The second part of Frost’s argument focuses on what he calls “enthusiasm tamed by metaphor.” Frost is referring to the way metaphor shapes one’s understanding and expression from its wilder states:

There is the enthusiasm like a blinding light, or the enthusiasm of the deafening shout, the crude enthusiasm that you get uneducated by poetry, outside of poetry. It is exemplified in what I might call “sunset raving.” You look westward toward the sunset, or […] eastward toward the sunrise, and you rave. It is oh’s and ah’s with you and no more.

It is desirable to tame this “enthusiasm” to make ourselves more understandable, while at the same time allowing us to understand others, as Frost says: “I do not think anybody ever

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12 Ibid., 719.
13 Ibid.
knows the discreet use of metaphor, his own or other people’s, the discreet handling of metaphor, unless he has been properly educated in poetry.”

It is through poetry, then, that we acquire our “education by metaphor.”

Frost goes on to explain how poetry is the best place for this education by metaphor:

“Poetry begins in trivial metaphors, pretty metaphors, “grace” metaphors, and goes on to the profoundest thinking that we have. Poetry provides the one permissible way of saying one thing and meaning another. People say, “why don’t you say what you mean?” We never do that, do we, being all of us too much poets. We like to talk in parables and in hints and in indirections – whether from diffidence or some other instinct.”

Frost is making a number of points here, the most important of which is that poetry provides the one permissible way of saying one thing and meaning another, by which he means that although we can invent new metaphors, or new associations between disparate things, the appropriate location for such experimentation is in poetry. To “say one thing and mean another” outside of poetry would, most likely, be problematic. Frost, however, also says that “we like to talk in parables and in hints and in indirections.” This is by no means a contradiction; rather it reinforces the metaphorical nature of our thoughts.

Frost’s theory of metaphor resonates with key aspects of James’s model of the mind that he develops through the Principles of Psychology, and later Psychology: A Briefer Course. Of particular importance is the notion of the “stream of thought,” or consciousness.

14 Ibid.
15 Ibid.
This notion is crucial for understanding Frost’s intentions when he talks about the metaphoric licence of poetry and the indirection of our “talk.” There is, it will be shown, a tension between these two elements. This tension is grounded on a misunderstanding of words, particularly regarding their ostensibly fixed and invariable meaning. This tension, however, is in part what allows poetry to have the effect it does through its metaphoric licence.

We talk in indirections, as Frost says, because our thoughts are grounded in associations, or as James would say “feelings of relations”; our thoughts are “fringed with affinities” of which we are not fully aware. “Knowledge about a thing is knowledge of its relations,” James says. “Of most of its relations” he goes on to say “we are only aware in the penumbral nascent way of a ‘fringe’ of unarticulated affinities about it.”\(^{16}\) The psychic fringe is the collected sense of relations that a thing, a thought, a word, has to countless other things in our consciousness. Our knowledge of a thing is grounded in this vast contextual field. What James is essentially saying is that nothing ever comes to consciousness – whether in experience or in memory – as an isolated whole, but is accompanied by countless connections to other things.

“The most remarkable feature of the fringe” as Bruce Mangan explains, is “its power to imply or suggest, at a given moment, the presence of detailed information that is not, at that moment, in consciousness.”\(^{17}\) There is always something more that is being suggested to us in our consciousness that our words cannot capture. The fringe provides us with contextual information, but only through this suggestive capacity; we cannot turn our focus to this fringe, because in doing so the fringe “moves” to accommodate a new point of focus, or

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“nucleus” as Mangan says. Our thoughts are always fringed in this way; what is more, there is always a suggestiveness of relations and directions: “We all of us have this permanent consciousness of whither our thought is going. It is a feeling like any other, a feeling of what thoughts are next to arise, before they have arisen.” Our thoughts are not singular and isolated, but a part of a continuum that is characterised by relations of things unfolding over time and in particular directions.

The suggestiveness of the fringe bears a strong correlation with Frost’s theory of metaphor and the importance of poetry, as Frost says in one of his notebooks: “Only preparation for suggestiveness is definite meaning.” If the fringe is always just out of view, it follows that it cannot be directly spoken about. This is why Frost says that it is preparation for suggestiveness that is definite meaning. There is, however, another aspect of James’s model of the mind that lends further credence to this point, particularly with regard to the way language reflects upon, or rather interferes with, our stream of thought. While we may be conscious of whither our thought is going we are not necessarily equipped with the means to discuss or express it. We lack a language for the fringe of affinities, but it nevertheless informs language and communication more broadly. James elaborates on this point where he discusses the distinction between the substantive and the transitive parts of thought. James uses an analogy of a bird’s flight to explain the difference between the transitive and substantive in the stream of thought: “like a bird’s life, it seems to be made of an alternation of flights and perchings.” “The resting places,” he goes on to say,

18 Ibid., 676.
19 James, The Principles of Psychology, 165.
are usually occupied by sensorial imaginations of some sort, whose peculiarity is that they can be held before the mind for an indefinite time, and contemplated without changing; the places of flight are filled with thoughts of relations, static or dynamic, that for the most part obtain between the matters contemplated in the periods of comparative rest.  

What he means, as Mark Johnson explains is that “thought moves from one temporary resting place (one substantive image or idea) to another. In between, there is a feeling of the direction, rhythms, and pulses of our transition from one ‘place’ (stable image or idea) to another.” Our focus on the substantive parts of thought relegates the transitive parts to a subordinate, almost invisible role. This is problematic as James points out: “so inveterate has our habit become of recognising the existence of the substantive parts alone, that language almost refuses to lend itself to any other use.” Important aspects of our experience and understanding are essentially inexpressible from the perspective of our language use.

1.2. The Limitations of Language

Our “inveterate habit,” and the substantive bias that it leads to, poses peculiar problems to communication in light of the indirectness of our speech. This problem is illustrated by our reliance on cliché in conversation. We speak with indirection because our language is limited to the substantive parts of thought, yet we are aware of the “fringe of affinities” that surrounds our understanding of the things we seek to talk about. We feel that there are further relations and that our language is incapable of capturing them. We may

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21 James, *Principles of Psychology*, 158.
23 James, *Principles of Psychology*, 159.
resort to clichés to get our meaning across. Cliché is indirect because it is an expression that is borrowed from elsewhere and is used in place of an original expression; cliché, in essence, presents us with pre-generated meaning and it is assumed to be merely an issue of applying it to the situation for it to make sense.

The resort to cliché is indicative of the problems inherent to the substantive bias in language because of its prevalence. It illustrates a defensiveness in the face of the uncertainty of our ability to express; instead of original expression we fall back on a reliable currency of stock responses. The problem with this is that it masks whatever characteristic differences there are in the thoughts we are trying to express, in essence, homogenising them. Our thoughts, James argues, are never quite the same, even when the facts with which our thoughts were occupied recur:

It is obvious and palpable that our state of mind is never precisely the same. Every thought we have of a given fact is, strictly speaking, unique, and only bears a resemblance of kind with our other thoughts of the same fact. When the identical fact recurs, we must think of it in a fresh manner, see it under a somewhat different angle, apprehend it in different relations from those in which it last appeared.24

While our “state of mind is never precisely the same,” the language which we use to discuss our thoughts remains the same. A problem remains, however, namely that the difference between our thoughts on a given fact is not a radical difference, but an accumulative one. That is to say, our most recent thought about a given fact differs from the previous one because the most recent one contains, at least in the “psychic fringe,” the memory of the

24 Ibid., 151.
previous thought (not to mention all those prior to that). The fixed nature of language makes it difficult for us to take account of such changes, from the subtle to the obvious. “Language works against our perception of the truth.”

James bluntly puts it. This is particularly acute when it comes to understanding our own thoughts:

We name our thoughts simply, each after its thing, as if each knew its own thing and nothing else. What each really knows is clearly the thing it is named for, with dimly perhaps a thousand other things. It ought to be named after all of them, but it never is. Some of them are always things known a moment ago more clearly; others are things to be known more clearly a moment hence.

Giving fixed and simple names to thoughts that subtly shift over time is how, for James, language works against our perception of the truth. Naming our thoughts, however, is unavoidable. We necessarily label our thoughts in order to communicate them. It is only through this process that we may develop concepts that are of any use, from the simplest concepts regarding the use of tools to the most abstract and complex. Mark Johnson builds on James’s critique, while smoothing the rougher edges of it, by focussing on concepts and their role in thought and language:

Our language of “concepts” is just our way of saying that we are able to mark various meaningful qualities and patterns within our experience, and we are able to mark these distinctions in a way that permits us to recognise something that is the same over and over across different experiences and thoughts.

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25 Ibid., 156.
26 Ibid.
The language of concepts allows us to carve out particular elements of experience to focus on in any particular event or instance. But this does not eliminate the influence of the fringe of affinities to direct and suggest our understanding of a particular concept in relation to countless other thoughts and experiences that we have had. Johnson goes on to point out that James is cautioning us “not to hypostatize these discriminations within our experience into ethereal entities called ‘concepts.’”  

Johnson identifies the source of this hypostatisation:

Change, chance, and contingency are a fundamental part of life that can sometimes leave us feeling helpless and out of control. In our desperation over this inescapable flux of existence, we reach out for anything we think might lift us above change to some eternal realm of fixed forms and standards of value. We go so far as to fool ourselves into thinking that there must exist absolute, unchanging forms and principles against which all our finite, changing, embodied experience can be measured, once and for all.  

There is a fear, then, that compels us towards hypostatisation. Johnson goes on to say that “if these forms actually did exist, then our job as knowers would be simply to discover these eternal patterns and learn how to apply them to guide our lives.” The problem is that such eternal patterns do not exist, yet “we are seduced into the illusion that concepts are fixed entities – universals – that stand apart from and above the vicissitudes of bodily perceptual experience.”

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28 Ibid.
29 Ibid., 104.
30 Ibid., 105.
31 Ibid., 90.
Instead of thinking of concepts as fixed entities, Johnson explains, we should consider the act of “conceptualising”:

Conceptualising involves recognising distinctions within the flow of our experience. From the perceptual continuum, we select an aspect, typically an aspect that recurs across many experiences and many types of experiences. We select things that matter for us, things that have value, meaning, and significance, such as various qualities, shapes, and relations.\(^{32}\)

Conceptualising as an act, as Johnson posits it, involves a degree of abstraction, but it also involves a degree of association. It is not only that we select an aspect to focus on, but the objects present themselves to be focused on because they have meaning, value, or are in some way significant to us. According to the “law of mental association by contiguity,” as James puts it: “objects once experienced together tend to become associated in the imagination, so that when any one of them is thought of, the others are likely to be thought of also, in the same order of sequence or coexistence as before.”\(^{33}\)

Concepts, though useful tools, become hypostatised through habitual association. They become etherealised through the erroneous assumption that what they have provided in the way of useful results or actions from their application will always remain the same. The substantive bias of language in fact supports this assumption. Regardless of this, the transitive relations between substantive thoughts remain, while the suggestive fringe of affinities is constantly changing because our experience is constantly changing as well. The sense of

\(^{32}\) Ibid., 88-89.

\(^{33}\) James, *Principles of Psychology*, 367.
relations, and with it the proper appreciation of experiential change, is repressed by the fixation of language.

1.3. At Home in Metaphor

Metaphor remains the basis of thought, but our habitual language-use comes to stultify our ability to engage with it so as to yield new relations in keeping with our cumulative experience. As Frost says in his notebook: “many [if not all] of our words show a trace of a metaphorical origin. But in daily use they have become obsolete.”

Central to those “metaphorical origins” will be the sentence-sounds, which I will address later. Elsewhere, Frost writes that poetry provides “the renewal of words”: “if words as we find them seem worn [out] with daily use it is for poetry to renew them.” In a letter to Robert Coffin he reiterates the point: “poetry is the renewal of words forever and ever. Poetry is that by which we live forever and ever unjaded. Poetry is that by which the world is never old.”

The renewal of words, then, is a renewal of the world.

Our experience of the world is dominated by the words we use to talk about it; as those words become “worn out with daily use” they become vague tokens of the objects of our experience. The relationship between words or terms and the world to which they point may become as indirect and opaque as proverbs and clichés that are traded without much, if any, connection to their metaphoric origins. The loss of origins means the loss of originality. The renewal of words, reconnecting them with their metaphoric origins, however, should not be confused with a reassertion of their original meaning. The renewal of words for Frost

34 Frost, Notebooks, 495.
entails re-engaging language with its metaphoric base. This is a broader proposition than renewing individual words.

Language encapsulates not just names and labels, but values and relations among the objects of our experience as a reflection of thought. That is, the metaphoric nature of thought pertains to the relations and values of things that we encounter in our environment. Language is merely an extension of this metaphoric system. Metaphor, however, does not entail fixed or definite relations and values. Metaphor breaks down. Not only do words become “worn out” the very metaphoric basis of language is unstable. The need for “renewal” is doubly important under such circumstances. Frost captures this point in two important paragraphs:

Unless you have had your proper poetical education in the metaphor, you are not safe anywhere. Because you are not at ease with figurative values: you don’t know the metaphor in its strength and its weaknesses. You don’t know how far you may expect to ride it and when it may break down with you.  

Frost goes on to highlight the precarious nature of metaphor:

All metaphors break down somewhere. That is the beauty of it. It is touch and go with the metaphor, and until you have lived with it long enough you don’t know when it is going. You don’t know how much you can get out of it, and when it will cease to yield. It is a very living thing. It is as life itself.

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38 Ibid., 723.
In these two paragraphs Frost reiterates the importance of metaphor but adds the caveat that “all metaphors break down somewhere.” That is, metaphoric thinking does not produce permanent states of meaning. Rather, like “life itself,” metaphoric relations change. As the world changes, so must the object relations that underpin our understanding. Values are thus “figurative.” The underlying point to the changefulness of metaphor is that it mirrors the changefulness of the world around us. The importance of a metaphoric education is that we learn to adapt and to see the subtleties of change, both in the world and in our relation to it.

There is a potential problem in the relationship between the fact that “all metaphors break down” and the words, whose “metaphoric origins” have through “daily use […] become obsolete.” At first glance, one might consider that, if all metaphors do indeed break down, then it is only natural that the “metaphoric origins” of the words become obsolete. However, it must be remembered that our metaphoric mode of understanding is a reflection of the changefulness of “life itself.” The metaphoric origin of words resides, in its broadest sense, in the necessary adaptiveness of metaphoric thought. The connection of words to their metaphoric origins becomes obsolete because words do not adapt to the changing world. Words “in daily use” carry fixed values, as distinct from the figurative values generated by our metaphoric processes in our experience in, and of, the world.

That all metaphors break down somewhere may lead to the conclusion that, if none of them last anyway, all metaphors are equally valid. This, however, is not the case. Metaphor is not a simple abstraction but is an experienced thing. While our experience with metaphor is intended to stretch our understanding of our experience more broadly, it cannot be stretched beyond the limit of one’s fringe of affinities. That is, there is a felt quality in the relations between the objects of the metaphor that is grounded in our cumulative experience. This is
the background against which metaphors are tested to see how far they can go before they break down. As Jeffrey Hart says

Frost was wary of metaphor and needed to be persuaded of identities between disparate things; he used lyrics to test experience when he ventured a metaphor, testing even, or especially, contradictory experience. Metaphor had to be earned against the pressure of scepticism.39

“In Frost,” Richard Poirier says in concurrence, “the ideal aspect of metaphor exists only that it may be tested.”40 This notion of a “metaphorical test” will be important throughout this thesis and will be touched upon in this chapter, and then again more significantly in chapter three.

It is not just the metaphor that is tested in poetry, however, but our capacity to understand and engage with it. That is to say, the test of metaphor is the test of ourselves. Central to this test is how we cope with the metaphoric stretching of our understanding of relations and how we respond to it. This involves an element of confusion, but in a very delicate, and finely balanced way. Something that is easily recognised is easily assimilated into one’s understanding and labelled; something that is too alien is easily discarded. This is the tension in which the encounter with metaphor through poetry manifests in its most effective and profound way.

Poetry is able to test metaphor against our experience and understanding because of the gap that exists between what our language can say about our thoughts, and the sense of relation and direction that underpin our thoughts, yet which eludes language. Poetry is able to leverage the expectation that comes with the fixed nature of our language and concepts against the underlying uncertainty that language cannot say all that we want – or need – it to. Poetry, in essence, turns our attention back towards the indeterminate spaces of consciousness (indeterminate because no adequate language exists to affix meaning to it) by subverting language.

1.3.1. Metaphor and Confusion

The irony of Frost’s “education by poetry” is that, in order for us to recover our awareness of the metaphorical basis of thinking, we are subject to an experience of confusion; a more profound confusion than we find in our everyday activities. Richard Poirier explains:

Confusion is the source of metaphor and the inducement to a clarification of it, even though the clarification can be no more than locally reassuring. Metaphor helps resolve the confusion that initiated it and leads us back, if we push too far, to the point of confusion once again. 41

Confusion as the “source of metaphor,” but also as the possible outcome if we take it too far, leaves us in a precarious state. One would rightly wonder how poetry, underpinned by such a state, could recover the awareness as being argued here. The relationship between poetry and confusion appears problematic. As Hart says,

41 Ibid., 210.
Frost has said more than once that poetry is a “momentary stay against confusion,” meaning that an achieved poem creates a permanent shape amid untidy and even chaotic experience.\textsuperscript{42}

Mark Richardson further extrapolates this point:

The authority of the poem – its stay against confusion – is arrived at dialectically through the experience of confusion itself. The assertion of self first involves a certain experience of “giving way”. The poet saves his “self” by losing it. He opens himself up to contingency only the better, in the last instance, to recover and assert the language of effort and self-control.\textsuperscript{43}

The dialectical engagement with confusion leads to the recovery and assertion of self-control. Not only the poet, but the reader in reconstructing the poet’s meaning-making processes, must “give way” to the realities of contingency and rebuild, metaphorically speaking, the meaning of the poem. Habitual or conventional structures of meaning are undermined, and it takes “effort and self-control” to understand in the wake of this confusion.

In the encounter with metaphor we are being presented with the flaws in our habitual mode of understanding. The onus is upon the reader to come to terms with the confusion, and the only way to do so is to allow the non-linguistic, or pre-linguistic, aspects of consciousness to direct the flow of the experience. Language is a part of the experience, but it does not control or delineate it in the way we are used to in our talk of concepts. The experience of

\textsuperscript{42} Hart, “Robert Frost and T. S. Eliot,” 573.
reading a poem is characterised by an unfolding sense of relations, and not a fixed meaning or concept that stands in place of the poem, explaining it. The habitual urge to delineate the meaning of a poem in definite terms, however, is still very strong. This urge can best be illustrated by the problem of paraphrase in poetry, whether it is by a professional critic or an average reader.44

Put simply, paraphrase is the attempt to re-state what the poem says in other words. Paraphrase is problematic because at its core is the assumption that the poem can be understood to the point where the poem is no longer needed, and can be replaced by a simpler proposition, or set of propositions, that says what the poem really means. This is a reductive approach to poetry, one that betrays the essential unease we feel with poetry. Cleanth Brooks, a contemporary of Frost’s, famously addressed the problem of paraphrase:

If […] simple propositions offered seem in their forthright simplicity to make too easy the victory of the poem over any possible statement of its meaning, then let the reader try to formulate a proposition that will say what the poem says. As his proposition approaches adequacy, he will find, not only that it has increased greatly in length, but that it has begun to fill itself up with reservations and qualifications – and most significant of all – the formulator will find that he has himself begun to fall back upon metaphors of his own in his attempt to indicate what the poem says. In sum, his proposition, as it approaches adequacy, ceases to be a proposition.45

In our attempts to re-state what the poem says we inevitably fall back on our own metaphors. The problem with paraphrase is that the necessity of metaphor goes unacknowledged. The confusion is irreconcilable under such circumstances because there is no dialectical encounter. Paraphrase is really a retreat from confusion, paradoxically, by pushing the explanation of the poem to its breaking point. One ends up back in the confusion one was trying to escape; by pushing too hard for a direct explanation one ends up talking in “hints and suggestions and parables.”

Paraphrase is a failure to understand the fundamental role of metaphor. What is more, it is a paradoxical reluctance to engage on a poetic level with poetry. It is paradoxical because in resisting such a level of engagement, in trying to assert a fixed meaning to the poem, we fall back on the very source of poetry we sought to overcome. Paraphrase leaves us clutching at clichés and standardised responses, which minimise the effect the poem can have; namely, to stretch our understanding by generating new relations against the backdrop of our experience.

For Frost, the act of poetic creation is not one-sided. For there to be a proper “renewal” the reader must engage in the same metaphor-making processes as the poet; paraphrase is not renewal. The poet and the reader reflect one another in their poetic experience. As Frost says, “no tears in the writer, no tears in the reader. No surprise for the writer, no surprise for the reader.” And later: “it must be a revelation, or series of revelations, as much for the poet as for the reader.” The reader’s experience mirrors that of the poet’s. “The reader,” Sheldon Liebman explains, “must undergo the experience of poem

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47 Ibid., 441.
The reader mimics the poet not simply to understand the poet’s words, but to take part in the larger processes of metaphor-making. The reader’s “education in metaphor,” as such, does not stop at the poem in front of him. His engagement with a single poem is metaphoric of a larger engagement.

There are two points Frost makes that help lay the groundwork for this larger engagement of the poetic experience. Firstly, a poem is not an isolated entity. “A poem” Frost says, “is best read in the light of all the other poems ever written.” Secondly, there is an “aesthetic moral” to the poetic experience. The aesthetic moral “is to go any poem one better, […] to get another poetic something going – one step more poetic anywhere.” A poem is read against the background of other poems, against one’s broader knowledge, not just of poetry but of metaphor. The more one reads the larger, within one’s understanding, is the background on which to draw. Just as importantly, however, the poetic experience is about “getting another poetic something going”; creating new poetic or metaphoric meaning. Getting “among the poems” is crucial to taking that “one step more poetic anywhere.”

It is important to note, that the “aesthetic moral” does not entail one must write poetry. Frost says explicitly: “some people think I want people to write poetry, but I don’t; that is, I don’t necessarily, I only want people to write if they want to write poetry.” The “one step more poetic anywhere” pertains to a deeper transformation of one’s metaphoric understanding. That step is indeed taken “anywhere” so long as it is poetic, or rather, metaphoric. To put it another way, our education in metaphor allows us to test our

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metaphoric understanding against our experience. Conversely, it allows us to test the objects of our experience against our metaphoric understanding.

To be at ease with metaphor means to constantly encounter it, and because all metaphor inevitably breaks down the necessity to constantly engage with it always remains. This necessity, in conjunction with the limitations of language, is in large part the cause of unease. Our desire for certainty leads us to assert a linguistic understanding over our experiences. Such understanding, however, is predicated on habitual associations. The flaws inherent to such understanding are exposed in the experience with poetry. The experience with poetry, our confrontation with the metaphor and our confusion in the face of it, places the burden of understanding on us in a way that keeps us from falling back on our habitual mode of understanding and linguistic expression.

What is mandated by the encounter with poetry is not the assertion of prior meaning, but, reiterating Richardson, “self-control.” In its most practical sense, self-control would manifest in resisting the urge to paraphrase the poem; more fundamentally, to resist the desire for certainty that results in the urge to paraphrase. Self-control becomes a question of choice in the metaphoric testing of the poetic experience. Choosing, that is, the next poetic step to take in resolving the confusion we are faced with in the encounter with poetry. We can choose to fall back on our habitual understanding and restate the poem in terms we already know, or move forward, taking ownership of our role in the meaning-making.

There is a serious cause to which Frost seeks to put one’s “education by poetry.” Poetry is not a trivial thing, but holds the key to our ability to express ourselves and communicate with others. Metaphor is not an abstract thing. Rather metaphor lies at the heart
of all “figurative values.” This includes the beliefs by which we live our lives. Our beliefs are figurative because they stand for the relationships – to humans, to homelands, to God – that structure our experience of the world. It is to this relationship between metaphor and belief that I now turn, first by returning to James.

### 1.3.2. Metaphor, Belief, and Emotion

Belief is a metaphoric embodiment of one’s relationship to, and understanding of, the world. One’s understanding of the world is limited by one’s point of view, and what one is able to say about the world from that point of view. Belief is bound up in the language that we use. Beliefs are habitual, because they are the same explanations for things that one returns to time and again. This can even take on the form of cliché: a statement repeated like a mantra. A belief, however, is a special kind of metaphoric relationship in which the believer stands in a real and actionable way toward the rest of the world. That is, beliefs compel the believer to act in a particular way based on this relationship. Beliefs are actionable metaphors.

Belief serves another purpose that makes it important to discuss here. The beliefs one holds are particularly important in our relationships with, and understanding of, other people. Our understanding of other people is bound up in our understanding of their beliefs. How others understand the world, what they believe, is important to our understanding of the world. This fact is important when it comes to Frost’s theory of correspondence. What is also important about belief, in addition to its metaphoric basis and its role in human relationality, is the importance of emotion. While the role of emotions will be discussed in the section on
the theory of correspondence, and in greater depth in chapter three, some groundwork can be laid here.

Along with his *Principles of Psychology*, James’s essay “The Will to Believe,” influenced Frost enormously, as numerous authors have highlighted. In this essay James constructs a nuanced argument about the way we make decisions with regard to our beliefs in the face of “hypotheses” that challenge them. The options that arise out of these hypotheses can be judged on how pressing they are within the context of our pre-established belief. They are either “live or dead,” “forced or avoidable,” or “trivial or momentous,” in this regard. “We may call an option a genuine option” James says, “when it is of the forced, living, and momentous kind.” By living or dead option, James means that the choice is important or has consequences with regard to one’s belief, or is of no importance or is simply an abstract choice. By forced or avoidable, James means whether a choice must be made between the two options or whether not choosing either is equally possible. While momentous and trivial options are options that are unique and of great importance, or options that are commonplace and offering no lasting impression, respectively.

“Genuine options” however, are rare. We are rarely in a position that is so urgent where a choice must be made that cannot be tempered by a bit of scepticism. As James says, “the choice between believing truth or falsehood is seldom forced. The attitude of sceptical balance is therefore the absolutely wise one if we would escape mistakes.” This kind of scepticism, however, is an intellectual scepticism. There are questions put to us that we are

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54 Ibid., 211.
55 Ibid.
unable to resolve intellectually, such as moral questions, and it is our “passional nature,” as James calls it, that must decide the answer:

Our passional nature not only lawfully may, but must, decide an option between propositions, whenever it is a genuine option that cannot by its nature be decided on intellectual grounds; for to say, under such circumstances, “Do not decide, but leave the question open,” is itself a passional decision, - just like deciding yes or no, - and is attended with the same risk of losing the truth.\textsuperscript{56}

Our “passional nature,” our emotions as opposed to our intellect, is what grounds our beliefs. James makes this point explicit: “In its inner nature, belief, or the sense of reality, is a sort of feeling more allied to the emotions than anything else.”\textsuperscript{57} What James is saying is that our emotions are what alert us in the most pressing cases in any given situation, and which impel us to decide on a course of action.

Emotions have a natural priority over the intellect, as James argues: “if your heart does not want a world of moral reality, your head will assuredly never make you believe in one.”\textsuperscript{58} That is, that the felt quality of belief with its concomitant emotional attachments comes first. The intellect can only decide – or not – because the option is commensurate with one’s beliefs already. The intellectual choice becomes a question of how best to satisfy the belief. The belief itself not being under threat.

Emotions are communicative states of the body that ground our beliefs with a felt quality. It is to these felt beliefs that hypotheses can be put and decided upon by the intellect.

\textsuperscript{56} Ibid., 205.
\textsuperscript{57} James, \textit{Principles of Psychology}, 636.
\textsuperscript{58} James, “Will to Believe,” 213.
Beliefs, however, are not abstract; beliefs are experiential. A belief that has no applicability to experience is of no value. Emotions inform us of how things are going for us in our environment (this point I will discuss in great detail in chapter three); if our “passional nature” is the ultimate ground of our beliefs, then it stands to reason that our beliefs are implicated in our experience. As such, there is more to our beliefs than just our emotions and intellect.

It is not only our emotions or our thoughts that are implicated in our beliefs. Were it so, then our beliefs would be entirely subjective. There is an intersubjective element to our beliefs that James identifies:

Our faith is faith in someone else’s faith […]. Our belief in truth itself, for instance, that there is a truth, and that our minds and it are made for each other, what is it but a passionate affirmation of desire, in which our social system backs us up?  

Our “faith in someone else’s faith” implies intersubjectivity. This mutual faith is predicated on a shared structure of experience that underpins both individual’s “faith.” This shared structure of experience is grounded first in the common embodiment of both individuals, and secondly in the common environment shared by both. The “social system” which “backs us up” is also grounded in this shared structure of experience. Our social system can back us up because the constituents of that system – others, whose faith we can have faith in – share our passional nature and are endowed with a similar intellect. What is more, we occupy the same environment from which the objects of our experience are mutually drawn. The “hypotheses”

59 Ibid., 203-4.
that are likely to test our beliefs are constrained by this structure. That is, the “live options”
that we are confronted with, are, by and large, products of the social system that backs us up.

The moral dimensions of James’s argument resonate with Frost. As a result, Frost
incorporates some of James’s argument into his own aesthetic theory. Of particular
significance is James’s emphasis on the power and importance of belief in one’s relationship
with others, and in particular God. James also advocates that we have a right to believe, and
that this right should be respected. What is more, James argues that we have a right to risk
our beliefs. These ideas, as I will show, resonate strongly with Frost.

The question of one’s relationship with God, for James and for Frost, is an important
moral question. The question of God is a “genuine option” because one cannot hold a
sceptical position (James formulates this argument, in part, in response to “Pascal’s
Wager,” although there is a clear resonance between the two arguments). Scepticism is not
possible when it comes to the religious question, for it is just as though one decided not to
believe at all: “we cannot escape the issue by remaining sceptical and waiting for more light,
because, although we do avoid error in that way if religion be untrue, we lose the good, if it
be true, just as certainly as if we positively chose to disbelieve.” James illustrates the point
by way of analogy:

It is as if a man should hesitate indefinitely to ask a certain woman to marry him
because he was not perfectly sure that she would prove an angel after he brought her

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60 Ibid., 200-1.
61 Ibid., 215.
home. Would he not cut himself off from that particular angel-possibility as decisively as if he went and married someone else?\textsuperscript{62}

James uses the analogy of personal relations to illustrate the dilemma of belief. There is, in cases such as James maps out, no intellectual means to attain certainty. It is, in part, the choosing itself that constitutes the belief. The choosing itself will not fulfil the “angel-possibility,” but not choosing at all would be the same as abandoning the possibility altogether. James is not suggesting that there is no risk in choosing, but he is implying that no choice at all is the bigger risk.

James makes the point explicit about the power of belief: “There are […] cases where a fact cannot come at all unless a preliminary faith exists in its coming.”\textsuperscript{63} This is true, in part, because that faith affects one’s behaviour: one will act in accordance if one believes certain facts about a situation; by acting as if they are the case, those facts have the effect of being true. James makes this point, again with an example about human relationships, answering a hypothetical question “Do you like me?”:

Whether you do or not depends, in countless instances, on whether I meet you halfway, am willing to assume that you must like me, and show you trust and expectation. The previous faith on my part in your liking’s existence is in such cases what makes your liking come.\textsuperscript{64}

It is this “trust and expectation,” which are extensions of one’s faith, that are crucial to the realisation of belief. Trust and expectation are felt qualities and serve to ground experience in

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{62} Ibid.
  \item \textsuperscript{63} Ibid., 214.
  \item \textsuperscript{64} Ibid., 213.
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an embodied way. The experience of belief, and the relations in which such beliefs place us within the world, is felt through these qualities.

James is explicit about the unity of moral questions, in the guise particularly of the question of religion, and the question of personal relations: “the more perfect and more eternal aspect of the universe is represented in our religions as having personal form.”\textsuperscript{65} That is, what is worthwhile in the universe can be demonstrated in religious understanding, but in particular as it comes to us as having personal form: “The universe is no longer a more It to us, but a Thou, if we are religious; and any relation that may be possible from person to person might be possible here.”\textsuperscript{66}

Moral questions are ones of relations. While James couches this point in religious terms, it can be extrapolated to a broader point: “we have a right to believe at our own risk any hypothesis that is live enough to tempt our will.”\textsuperscript{67} What is more “we ought […] delicately and profoundly to respect one another’s mental freedom.”\textsuperscript{68} That is, to respect one another’s right to believe, because we cannot have the certainty of absolutism. James exhorts us to trust one another because we are all in the same situation.

1.3.3. Belief and Make-Believe

James’s ideas on choice and belief resonate with Frost; ideas Frost would come to incorporate in his own theorising, particularly in the formulation of his “four beliefs,” which I will discuss shortly. Frost is perhaps more of a sceptic than James suggests we should be, but

\textsuperscript{65} Ibid., 216.
\textsuperscript{66} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{67} Ibid., 217.
\textsuperscript{68} Ibid., 218.
Frost is nevertheless a Jamesian empiricist, seeking knowledge though reticent to claim its certainty. Frost approaches this search for knowledge as a creative enterprise, where James is more interested in expounding the virtues of science. Frost was not opposed to science, but rather preferred to view science as a part of the humanities. This may help to explain the way in which Frost adopted, and adapted, many of James’s ideas to his own creative ends.

Of central importance to Frost, however, is the way in which James melds together one’s relationship with God and one’s relationship with other people to provide the framework for a unifying morality, as Frost says in one of his notebooks: “Who can find out what men want who can find out what God wants [sic].” While James talks about the right to believe, respecting and trusting each other’s right to believe, Frost takes a different approach. One that involves the testing of beliefs in the same way we test metaphors to see how far they can take us before they break down. This approach betrays Frost’s uneasiness with absolutist attitudes, especially of the scientists of his day. Frost’s uneasiness, however, was also symptomatic of the tensions between his religious views and his amenability toward Darwinism.

For Frost, there always seems to be the shadow of uncertainty looming over the certainty that belief, religious or otherwise, might have to offer. Belief is an act of will as Frost sees it, but belief is always bound up by our experience against which it should be tested. For Frost, belief, like any metaphor, existed only so that it could be tested. Robert Pack sums up Frost’s attitude toward belief:

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69 Peter J. Stanlis, Robert Frost: The Poet as Philosopher (Wilmington: Intercollegiate Studies Institute, 2007), 60.
70 Frost, Notebooks, 327.
71 For further discussion of Frost’s relationship with Darwinism see Robert Faggen, Robert Frost and the Challenge of Darwin (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, 1997); also, Stanlis, Robert Frost: The Poet as Philosopher, 27-56.; also, Hass, Going by Contraries, 45-88.
Belief, contending against “uncertainty,” was for Frost a made rather than a found thing; it was grounded in assertion, and always it possessed some spirit of play, as in “making believe,” the imagination’s realm of conjecture, of speculation, of “as if.”

It is in the realm of “as if” that poetry can assert anything at all. But this is a paradox: to assert something in the context of this realm of “as if” is not to assert in the way of a proposition. It is in the spirit of play and making believe that the ethical imperative of poetry is revealed: “The person who gets close enough to poetry […] is going to know more about the word belief than anybody else knows, even in religion nowadays.”

It is important to note that Frost says *the word* “belief.” To use the word belief, to say that something is a belief or that something is what I believe, is to give it personal authority. Belief is a concept, or label, applied to an isolated thought or set of thoughts that we have conceptualised. More than just conceptualised, however, beliefs become absolute forms of meaning, distinct from metaphorical understanding.

It is through the effort of make-believe that we may understand what “belief” really consists of. It is not make-believe for its own sake, however, but make-believe that is grounded in the testing of metaphor against one’s own experiences and understanding. Make-believe is not fantasy. As Pack says “there are limits […] to the fictions that Frost will grant speculative credibility.” Pack goes on, returning to a crucial point:

As Frost has claimed, “All metaphor breaks down somewhere,” and because of Frost’s stoical unwillingness to allow belief to become a sentimental form of wished-

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73 Frost, “Education by Poetry,” 726.
for consolation in the face of what he perceives as Darwinian nature’s essential indifference, Frost has also adopted an antithetical attitude toward belief, even a scepticism about the human inclination to believe that benevolent meanings can be found in the known universe.  

The essential indifference of nature plays an important role in Frost’s poetry and philosophy. It is particularly important in his theory of correspondence, which I will deal with shortly.

Frost held a dualistic and paradoxical stance toward belief that was grounded on the instability of metaphor. But this, for him, is a saving grace; poetry, because of its metaphorical license, was a source of redemption. Frost conceives of a dynamic of “four beliefs” that constitute the basis of our understanding as we move through life. These beliefs are: the self-belief, the love-belief, the art-belief, and the national-belief. There is, however, a fifth belief, the God-belief, but this is an over-arching belief.

These beliefs are related to one another. The self-belief Frost describes as a “personal belief, which is a knowledge that you don’t want to tell other people about because you cannot prove that you know.”

“A young man” Frost says “knows more about himself than he is able to prove to anyone.” “In his foreknowledge” he adds “he has something that is going to believe itself into fulfilment.” That it is something that “is going to believe itself into fulfilment,” for Frost, is what underpins all belief. The second belief, the love-belief, similarly, is “the belief in someone else, a relationship of two that is going to be believed into

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74 Pack, Belief and Uncertainty, 155.
75 Ibid., 727.
76 Ibid., 726.
77 Ibid.
fulfilment.” This belief, however, Frost tells us, can fail. The self- and the love- belief are by turns fundamental and intimate, but both are equally built on the willed sense of belief that is an extension of the testing of metaphor and figurative values.

The love-belief and the self-belief are related to the third belief, the art-belief; it too is grounded in willed belief: “Every time a poem is written, […] it is written not by cunning, but by belief. The beauty […] is more felt than known.” In another text Frost makes a claim that helps shed light on the art-belief and its relation to the first two. “The figure a poem makes” Frost tells us, “it begins in delight and ends in wisdom. The figure is the same as for love.” The poem is “believed into fulfilment.” It “begins in delight,” Frost reiterates, “and ends in a clarification of life – not necessarily a great clarification, […] but in a momentary stay against confusion.” Its clarification is “a revelation as much for the poet as for the reader.” While it may only be momentary, it is enough to take “another step poetic anywhere.”

The art-belief is pivotal to the self-belief and the love-belief for two reasons. Firstly, through the art-belief we can find expression for the knowledge we have but for which we have no proof. While secondly, the product of the art-belief, poetry in Frost’s case, stands as a figure not only of something that is “believed into fulfilment” but also as a figure of human relationality. The art-belief can be seen as a metaphoric projection of the willed/relational dynamic that underpins the self- and love- beliefs. The art-belief is fundamentally expressive, and is a means of both communicating and testing our understanding. The art-belief makes

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78 Ibid.
79 Ibid.
81 Ibid.
possible the testing of the relations and values that we take for granted in our daily lives by returning us to the fundamental processes from which those values and relations emerge.

The final two beliefs, the national-belief and the God-belief are also about relationality, but on a larger scale. The national-belief, Frost says, “we enter into socially with each other, […] to bring [about] the future of the country.” The national-belief can be seen as an extension of the first two, and might more generally be understood as the social-belief. All these beliefs, the self-, the love-, the art-, and the national-belief, “are all closely related to the God-belief, that the belief in God is a relationship you enter into with Him to bring about the future.” The national-belief and the god-belief are both future-oriented, but both equally require the willed belief that first emerges in the self-belief. There is, then, continuity between each of these beliefs.

A number of points can be surmised from this brief explication of Frost’s hierarchy of beliefs. Firstly, what underpins all of these beliefs is their fundamentally willed nature, and this echoes James’s comprehension of belief as something that we have a right to test against experience or other hypotheses. Secondly, along the same lines, that the veracity of these beliefs is essentially intersubjective, or relational. Thirdly, and more closely related to Frost’s theory of metaphor, beliefs are extensions of figurative values that emerge from metaphoric processes; beliefs, as I said earlier, are actionable metaphors. Nevertheless, their fulfilment relies on their successful testing. Metaphoric testing is an integral part of our experience because of the implications it has for our capacity to believe, and our ability to act on those beliefs.

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83 Ibid., 726.
While we have a choice between hypotheses, as James has argued, the choice is inherently bound up by our experiences, our social situation, and more intimately our personal relationships. Frost, however, takes James’s theory in a different direction. While respecting the right of others to believe is a moral imperative, it is only so within the context of the metaphoric testing that takes place against the backdrop of our changing experience. And it is through poetry, or the art-belief, that we are best equipped to face such tests.

Frost’s poetry and aesthetic theories are at their most insightful and evocative in dealing with these various relationships. The four (though really five) beliefs are related to what he calls “two fears”: the fear of God and the fear of Man. Frost’s emphasis on belief, it can be argued, is really a response to these fears. These beliefs, made rather than found, are a response to one’s being ill at ease in the world, and it is only through poetry that we can come to be at ease with figurative values. Being at ease is only momentary, however, because the metaphors on which we rely to communicate our understanding, both to ourselves and to others, break down.

Even if poetry allows us to say one thing and mean another, when the poem is finished, what it expresses is susceptible to fixation. The poem can itself become a cliché – Frost’s poem, *The Road Not Taken*, is a prime example; if all metaphors break down somewhere then even the metaphors of poetry must break down as well. This necessitates a constant self-renewal: of poetry, of metaphor, of beliefs. The fringe of affinities in our stream of thought provides limitless potential for this renewal. Though it can never become the focus of our attention, poetry comes nearest to bringing us into contact with it by subverting our habitual language.
The poetic experience is a fundamentally metaphoric experience, which tests our knowledge of the world by stretching the values and relations that populate the fringe of affinities of any given object of our experience. The poetic experience is, however, also intersubjective, because it is a shared experience. Our figurative values are bound up with the figurative values of others, “our faith is faith in someone else’s faith.” In the next section, I will address Frost’s theory of correspondence, which introduces an explicitly intersubjective dynamic to the theory of poetic experience. What is more, Frost’s theory of correspondence will ground the poetic experience in the embodiment that underpins our everyday experience.

2.1. The Theory of Correspondence

Frost’s theory of metaphor cannot be fully appreciated without understanding his theory of correspondence. Metaphor is not just a facet of poetry for Frost, but a facet of human experience. Belief, and the metaphorical processes that underpin our beliefs, is central to our experiences. More-so, belief and its fulfilment through our relationships – with God and with others – is the crucial test of their viability. Metaphor is not just experienced by us as individuals but collectively, whether through conversation or through wider institutional metaphors. Metaphor is not abstract, but experiential and social.

Frost’s theory of correspondence provides an important link between poetic experience and everyday experience, ultimately because both are grounded in the same metaphoric and embodied processes. That is, correspondence is an aspect of both everyday and poetic experience. In chapter two, I will show the significance of the relationship between poetic (or aesthetic) and everyday experience based on this common platform. In this section I will lay the groundwork for the embodied and intersubjective dynamics that
underpin our experience and understanding. Firstly, I will discuss and analyse Frost’s theory of correspondence. The theory of correspondence, however, is the least developed of Frost’s ideas. Some contemporary research in cognitive science will help to mitigate this problem.

Three key areas in particular are worth focussing on: childhood development, mimesis, and (as already briefly discussed) emotion. As I will show, these three areas are crucial to understanding Frost’s theory of correspondence, and more broadly are integral to the theory of poetic experience as argued here. Importantly, underpinning the focus on childhood development, mimesis, and emotion will be the role of the face in human expression and communication. The face is central to Frost’s theory of correspondence, as will be made clear shortly. The face, I will argue throughout this thesis, is the locus of human meaning.

Frost’s most significant statements on correspondence come from an introduction he wrote for his friend, E. A. Robinson’s book *King Jasper*. Frost begins by discussing numerous aspects of then-contemporary poetic experiments, contrasting the “new ways to be new” that did away with all the conventions of poetry with the “old-fashioned way to be new.” What was at issue was difference: “there is such a thing as being too willing to be different.” Frost remonstrates. But he does not mean only in poetry, but in life more broadly. He goes on to explain:

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There is the fear that we shan’t prove worthy in the eyes of someone who knows us at least as well as we know ourselves. That is the fear of god. And there is the fear of man – the fear that men won’t understand us and we shall be cut off from them.\footnote{Ibid.}

He then goes on, in one of his most important statements, to put forward his theory of correspondence:

We begin in infancy by establishing correspondence of eyes with eyes. We recognised that they were the same feature and we could do the same things with them. We went on to the visible motion of the lips – smile answered smile; then cautiously, by trial and error, to compare the invisible muscles of the mouth and throat. They were the same and could make the same sounds. We were still together. From here on the wonder grows. It has been said that recognition in art is all. Better say correspondence is all. Mind must convince mind that it can uncurl and wave the same filaments of subtlety, soul convince soul that it can give off the same shimmers of eternity. At no point would anyone but a brute fool want to break off this correspondence. It is all there is to satisfaction; and it is salutary to live in fear of its being broken off.\footnote{Ibid., 742.}

Frost is making a number of substantial claims in these two paragraphs that need unpacking.

On the issue of difference, Frost is not asserting that difference or expressions of difference are necessarily bad. He is asserting that there is such a thing as being too different, so much so that one is cut off from other men, and he sees a connection to this general principle in the practice of poetry during his time. What is worthwhile is not absolute
difference, but a difference that manifests, rather, in the subtlety and variation of expression. Frost does not mean expression for its own sake, but expression for the sake of “mind convincing mind that it can uncurl and wave the same filaments of subtlety.”

The fear of God and the fear of Man compel us to be understood by others, but in such a way as to maintain our moral standing. We must convince others that our minds, and hence our experiences of the world, are as diverse and as fluid as theirs. Absolute difference would be as dangerous as absolute fixity in our expressions. The subtlety of expression that Frost is talking about is as an embodied mode of understanding. This embodied mode of understanding, he points out, is with us from infancy. What is more, this embodied mode of understanding remains with us into our adult lives, and it remains the basis of our engagement with the world around us.

The fear of God and the fear of Man – the “two fears” – are very much related to the five beliefs from the previous section, the self-belief, the love-belief, the art-belief, the national-belief and the God-belief: they are grounded in the needs of human relationality and understanding. The two fears, however, are really grounded upon the fear of not being understood by others, a fear of solipsistic isolation. This isolation, to put it briefly, is a result of the closing down of meaning that emerges in our habitual understanding; because we are limited in what we can say about the world through conventional means – the substantive fixation of language – our comprehension of the world becomes equally limited.

In the second paragraph, Frost illustrates crucial stages in childhood development that form the foundation of socialising and learning. The correspondence of “eyes with eyes,” then lips, where “smile answered smile,” and then the “invisible muscles of the mouth and
throat,” are all evidence of mimetic embodied processes. Frost is also highlighting the progression from the initial intersubjective exchanges of eye contact and facial mimicry to verbal exchanges. The transition of correspondence from “the visible motion of the lips” to the invisible facial muscles shows they “were the same and could make the same sounds.” The transition from correspondence of the “visible” to the “invisible” is telling. The “wonder” that grows is indicative of the growing realisation of the connection between the superficial correspondences of facial gestures to the deeper correspondences of the minds behind the faces.

Frost is moving towards this deeper correspondence, but before he arrives at the correspondence of minds he interposes “art” as a medium of correspondence. Frost also makes a distinction between recognition and correspondence. The implication is that recognition is merely passive, whereas correspondence is active. Given what Frost has said about the mimetic nature of correspondence, particularly in regard to the face, this is a reasonable conclusion. Correspondence in art, then, involves active, mimetic engagement. This point is also implied in Frost’s “aesthetic moral” of “getting another poetic something going.” It is not enough just to recognise what a poem is doing, but to engage in the act of metaphor-making yourself.

At the heart of correspondence, Frost says, is a crucial act of acknowledgement and engagement: “mind must convince mind that it can uncurl and wave the same filaments of subtlety.” Mind convinces mind through subtlety; that is, that one is endowed with an adaptive mind capable of perceiving nuance and difference in the environment. This has moral significance because this subtlety is, in essence, an assurance of one mind to another that it is capable of perceiving the nuance and difference of other minds. A mind endowed
with subtlety is receptive to other minds, their figurative values and beliefs. Subtlety, then, and the convincing of other minds, is a manifestation of one’s being “at ease with figurative values.”

Some have interpreted Frost’s theory of correspondence as a correspondence between poet and reader. Mark Richardson argues, that “it is the correspondence of the artist to his community.” While others have pointed to a broader interpretation, as Johannes Kjorven says: “what Frost refers to as the ‘correspondence’ in and between persons – their mutual impact – is one of his constant and original themes.” I am arguing that correspondence is broader. Correspondence takes place between the reader and every other potential reader of the poem. If one reader is able to read and understand the poem, to take up its posture, then so must other readers. The reader occupies the position of every other reader.

The correspondence between readers in the poetic experience is metaphorical, but it is grounded in their common embodiment and expressed through their mimetic capabilities. Correspondence is grounded in the felt experience of mimicking a poem and the subsequent metaphorical thought-processes that are evoked. The poem is what Frost calls “a thought-felt thing”; poetry is not an abstract work of art, but is a deeply embodied experience. “A poem,” Frost says more specifically, “is the emotion of having a thought.” Thoughts are induced through emotion, because emotions are embodied. A change in the state of the body produces emotional changes, which in turn affect higher thought-processes. Mimetic

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engagement, which we are primed for from birth and which forms the basis of our correspondence, induces such changes in the state of the body.

Frost makes the connection between metaphor and emotion explicit: “emotion emoves [sic] a word from its base for the moment by metaphor, but often in the long run even on to a new base. The institution, the form, the word, have […] to be renewed from the root of the spirit.”

Emotion is the basis of renewal and metaphor is its tool. The metaphoric origin of words, and more broadly language, is grounded in the embodied, and ultimately emotional experience of the world that we share with others. The metaphoric values and relations that we express through words have emotional value. This emotional value has its origins in our embodied mimetic engagement with others and our environment. Our metaphoric thought-processes organises those values and relations into a coherent network or map. While the words we use to communicate and express this network lock it into place, so to speak, as they get “worn out with daily use” and their metaphoric origins recede.

The idea of embodied emotions is not unique to Frost. Again, it comes from William James, whose theory of emotion is important to the argument I am making in this thesis. I will address James’s theory of emotion shortly. Because we have the same neurological and physiological make-up, and undergo the same developmental processes, we share the same platform for experience. We can experience the same emotions and have the same thoughts. This is the basis of correspondence. What is more, it is the basis for the “aesthetic moral,” of generating new meaning and renewing our engagement with our most fundamental forms of meaning-making. The moral of correspondence and the “aesthetic moral” are one and the same. The “renewal of words” is correspondence.

Frost’s theory of correspondence has important implications for our understanding of experience, particularly from a cognitive science perspective. This is because present in Frost’s theory of correspondence is the nascent continuity of embodied and mental activity, and, concomitantly, the connections between everyday and aesthetic experience. Frost’s references to significant moments in the arc of childhood development are a case in point, and one that I will return to throughout this thesis. In the next section, I will briefly examine the parallels between Frost’s theory of correspondence and the modern understanding of childhood development; this will facilitate the discussion in the subsequent section on mimesis as, I will show, the two are related. Mimesis, it will be seen, is paramount to our social development as children and throughout our adult lives; as such, mimesis, or mimetic engagement, underpins our everyday and aesthetic experiences.

2.2. Childhood, Embodiment, and Correspondence

Poetic experience is an extension of our most original mode of understanding and engagement with the world. This is because poetic experience is grounded in correspondence. As Mark Richardson, summarising Frost’s theory, argues: “we must correspond or be driven insane by isolation. The writing of poetry is […] but an extension of our earliest experiments in correspondence, our earliest efforts to socialise the self.”92 Not only the writing of poetry, but the reading of it as well as Frost alluded to earlier, the reader essentially mimicking the creative process. Imitation, or mimesis, is an innate mode of engagement that forms the basis of learning and socialising. Poetic and aesthetic experience, then, are extensions of this original intersubjectivity. Through our contemporary understanding of cognitive science and

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childhood development, the prescience of this connection in Frost’s theory can be more fully appreciated.

In this subsection, I will briefly discuss a few important points about childhood development, focusing particularly on embodied and facial interactions, such as facial recognition, and their implications for Frost’s theory of correspondence. I will then move on to consider embodiment more broadly as the locus of mimetic, or imitative, engagement, and as a source metaphor. Both our mimetic and metaphoric capacities are extensions of our original embodied mode of understanding. Cognitive scientist and philosopher Mark Johnson will be particularly useful in establishing the primacy of our embodied mode of understanding and its metaphoric extensions, while, later, Merlin Donald will be important in positing the role of mimesis.

Poetry, and art more broadly, are but extensions of our “earliest experiments in correspondence” and therefore are continuous with them. The poetic experience, however, is not a return to some state of child-like delight; rather, it is a more advanced form of experimentation. As we grow we acquire more intricate means of socialising, namely language. Language, however, does not come to supplant our original embodied mode of understanding, but is rather layered on top of it. Mark Johnson makes the point:

The many bodily ways by which infants and children find and make meaning are not transcended and left behind when children eventually grow into adulthood. On the contrary, these very same sources of meaning are carried forward into, and thus
underlie and make possible, our mature acts of understanding, conceptualising, and reasoning.  

There is a strong resonance here with Frost’s theory of correspondence. Poirier takes this point further, saying that for Frost “a precursor of the poet would be the child ‘lost in play.’”\textsuperscript{94} “Poetry” he continues,

is in a sense the area of performance where a residue of the infant’s sense of omnipotence, the infant’s illusion of totally creative power over “things” and “objects,” confronts and must negotiate with the so-called reality principle.\textsuperscript{95}

Poirier’s reference to the “reality principle” is poignant; Freud makes a similar point about the relationship between the artist and the child “lost in play.”\textsuperscript{96} While Frost would baulk at the association with Freud, it can be seen that the seeds of metaphoric testing are present in our negotiations with the reality principle. Correspondence is not a return to omnipotence, however; rather, it is a return to negotiations.

A metaphor or belief cannot be asserted for how things are simply because it is the one we prefer. Wished-for consolation of this kind is dangerous and can lead to a kind of solipsism. Our negotiations are inherently bound up in our bodily experiences before we have any linguistic understanding of them. The first social or intersubjective experiences of the child, as Frost identifies, are purely embodied, not only of “eyes with eyes” and “lips with lips,” but other physical gestures as well. As Johnson points out,

\textsuperscript{93} Johnson, \textit{Meaning of the Body}, 33.  
\textsuperscript{94} Poirier, \textit{The Work of Knowing}, 320.  
\textsuperscript{95} Ibid., 330.  
When the child later begins to acquire language, these bodily gestures, expressive displays of intersubjective engagement will sometimes be accompanied by linguistic utterances, though they are typically not dependent on such utterances.  

These “bodily gestures” and “expressive displays,” are a language prior to the linguistic variety: a “body language.” While a broader definition of body language to include all bodily gestures certainly helps to underscore the embodied nature of correspondence, it is primarily in the face that correspondence is best exemplified. The reason, to foreshadow an argument for later in this chapter, is firstly, because our faces are the most expressive parts of our body, and secondly, because language originates out of the mouth. The face is the locus of meaning, where verbal sounds and non-verbal expressions converge.

The role of the face, and in particular the role of eye contact, is crucial to correspondence, indeed to all intersubjective experiences. Johnson explains this point in terms of mutual gaze; the example he gives is worth quoting at length:

If you were to bend over your baby’s crib in order to talk “baby talk” to her, how would you do this? Without thinking, you would automatically align your face with your baby’s. You would position yourself alongside her crib and then lean over her, cocking your head to create eye contact and facial alignment. If you picked her up, you would support her with your hands and align her face with yours, thereby establishing mutual gaze. You would go out of your way to engage your baby in this way because you instinctively know that this face-to-face alignment is an optimal way

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to establish visual, olfactory, and verbal communication. Nobody ever taught you to align your face with the baby’s – you just do it, and thereby you are about to connect, intuitively and directly, with her. Moreover, humans have a face-recognition centre in their brains and are very good at facial recognition.\(^9^8\)

Johnson’s emphasis on the innate nature of face-to-face contact and its importance in bonding and development in infancy resonates with Frost’s own emphasis on the correspondence of faces, of “eyes with eyes” and lips with lips. The intuition of proper facial alignment is an aspect of our inherent face-recognition capacity and is a precondition for face-to-face correspondence. Correspondence, however, goes beyond face-to-face engagements. Nevertheless, correspondence, for Frost, begins with the earliest forms of social engagement through face-to-face encounters. Art is the highest form of human engagement, but this is because it is linked through embodiment with the most original form of human engagement.

In a sense, art is a re-engagement of our original mode of experience and understanding. This is not to be misconstrued, however, as a return to a “child-like state” of imagination. Rather, our experience with art re-engages our metaphoric understanding, pertaining specifically to our orientation in our environment and the relations among the objects of our experience. In the next chapter, I will consider this point more explicitly when I come to analyse the aesthetic philosophy of John Dewey. In particular, Dewey’s notion of “aesthetic experience” will be important in understanding how art re-engages our original mode of experience.

Implicit in Johnson’s point regarding the inherent capacity for face-to-face engagement is the role of human embodiment as the foundation of our experience. Frost’s correspondence, as such, with its allusions to face-to-face engagement, is also grounded in human embodiment. Our capacity to correspond is built upon the common constitution and orientation of the human body, and, by extension of our common embodiment, the relations to the environment that we share. While our experiences differ from person to person, the platform by which experience is made possible is the same: the same eyes, the same “invisible muscles of the mouth,” by which we can make the same sounds. That we can make the same sounds means we can communicate with one another. That we have the same platform for experience means we can share our experiences and knowledge of the world.

There are three aspects of embodiment that are important here; firstly, embodiment entails bodily locatedness, that one is located in a physical space; secondly, that a part of our embodiment involves the imitation, or mimicry, of others; and thirdly, that emotion is intimately bound up in our bodily activity. All of these aspects are linked in our experience and are present from infancy. What is more, the located, emotional and mimetic aspects of our embodied nature heavily influence our metaphorical understanding, and as such provide our language with a great deal of its material. While I will deal with these in turn, it is important to understand that they are interrelated. It is also important to note that I am largely dealing with the nascent ideas of Frost and James. These ideas will be further developed in subsequent chapters.

Our bodily location and movement are key components for how we engage with, and understand, the world. The very constitution of our bodies orients us toward the world. As Johnson’s example of cradling a baby illustrates, we have an innate sense of up and down,
but also of back and front, forward and backward. What is more, it is not just a question of
knowing which way to hold a baby, how to optimise our face-to-face engagement with her,
the baby herself will know as well. She knows the right way up, and what are the best angles
to engage face-to-face with other people. The innateness of our orientation has implications
for our mimetic mode of understanding. It would be hard to engage in imitative behaviour
from the “wrong position” (though not impossible).

Our bodily orientation provides many of our most basic metaphors, or what Johnson
calls image schemata. I will discuss image schema in greater detail in chapter four; a
definition will suffice for the moment: “a dynamic pattern that functions somewhat like an
abstract structure of an image, and thereby connects up a vast range of different experiences
that manifest this same recurring structure.”\textsuperscript{99} That is, an image schema is something like a
mould through which experiences of a similar structure or shape can be compared. Johnson
elsewhere offers core examples of orientational or movement-based image schema: “Typical
image schemas of bodily movements include SOURCE-PATH-GOAL, UP-DOWN
(verticality), INTO-OUT OF, TOWARD-AWAY FROM, and STRAIGHT-CURVED.”\textsuperscript{100} Or
in a more specific example that Lakoff and Johnson provide, “Happy is up; sad is down”:

I’m feeling \textit{up}. That \textit{boosted} my spirits. My spirits \textit{rose}. You’re in \textit{high} spirits.

Thinking about her always gives me a \textit{lift}. I’m feeling down. I’m \textit{depressed}. He’s
really \textit{low} these days. I \textit{fell} into a depression. My spirits \textit{sank}.\textsuperscript{101}

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99 Mark Johnson, \textit{The Body in the Mind: The Bodily Basis of Meaning, Imagination, and Reason} (Chicago:
101 Lakoff and Johnson, \textit{Metaphors We Live By}, 15.
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These simple statements might be passed off as mundane expressions we use day-to-day. But Lakoff and Johnson highlight the continuity of their metaphorical and embodied meaning. “Down” is almost always associated with negative feelings or qualities of experience, while “up” is the opposite.

The corollary of this point is that bodily orientation is common to all, and, as such, is a source of common metaphors, or image schema. In order to understand one another’s metaphors we must be constituted in the same way physically. By extension, our experiences, characterised by our common constitution, are also shared. Bodily constitution and orientation then, are key sources of information that are often overlooked by more abstract and disembodied modes of understanding.

Foreshadowing a key point from chapter two, Johnson links bodily movement and rhythm, particularly with regard to music and dance, in this orientation-based mode of understanding:

We know the meanings of various movements and gestures in dance precisely because we know the feeling and meaning of our own bodily gestures. We know how it feels when our bodies sway gracefully and rhythmically versus when we slip and fall, or jump back in fright. We know intuitively what it means to “be up” and happy, just as we know what it means to “feel low” when we are depressed. Our bodily posture and openness to the world is upright and expansive when we are joyful, and it is drooping and contracting when we are sad.102

102 Johnson, Meaning of the Body, 45.
There is an integrated quality of experience surrounding our embodied constitution, orientation, movement, and posture, as Johnson’s example illustrates. The imitative, or mimetic, and emotional aspects of our embodied understanding are grounded in the dynamic of these four elements. These are innate sources of understanding that underpin correspondence, and Frost’s theory of correspondence must be understood in light of them. “Mind convincing mind,” as Frost has said, entails the immanence of the body as well. To understand the significance of this dynamic I need to turn to the mimetic elements of our embodiment.

2.2.1. Mimesis and Imitation

Imitation is the most critical learning tool that a child has, but it remains with us throughout our lives. As James says, “man is essentially the imitative animal. His whole educability and in fact the whole history of civilisation depend on this trait, which his strong tendencies to rivalry, jealousy, and acquisitiveness reinforce.”

There is a mimetic rapport that exists between human beings that propagates social bonding through imitative exchanges. By mimetic rapport I mean simply the form of interaction grounded in our imitative capacities, which are in turn predicated on the common constitution and orientation of the human body. That is to say, we can imitate because we share the same physiological and neurological construction, as well as the same environment.

103 James, Principles of Psychology, 716.
104 Ibid.
The rapport we share is innate and pre-linguistic and is integral to childhood learning as well as social bonding. Frost’s correspondence, as such, is a form of mimetic rapport.

Mimesis, in the sense I am using in this thesis, is not mere repetition, however; the agency and volition of human beings is such that changes to patterns of behaviour, especially at the level of mimesis, are possible. The capacity to both imitate and vary the patterns of imitation – for instance, in games where children imitate facial expressions or body motions, such as “follow the leader” – is what allows us to engage in rhythmic exchanges with one another. Language is one such rhythmic exchange, as it is ultimately a product of mimetic learning and engagement.

Man as “the imitative animal” is an idea that still resonates today. Contemporary researchers, such as Merlin Donald and Antonio Damasio have developed their own theories along similarly mimetic lines. Damasio, a neuroscientist, who I will discuss in greater detail in chapter three, builds on James’s postulation of embodied emotions in developing his own theory of emotions. The essence of Damasio’s theory (from the perspective of this thesis) is the capacity of the body to recreate emotions abstractly, or “as if” we were feeling them in a real situation that triggered them, through neural networks. Through this recreation of emotional responses we can empathise with the experiences of others. This, I will argue, is essentially mimetic.

Merlin Donald, on the other hand, while not directly influenced by James, develops a broader theory of mimetic development, a theory he calls “biocultural.” Donald takes a broader evolutionary perspective in the formulation of his theory. Mimesis, he argues, is a

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primary tool for learning. Furthermore, mimesis precedes language, and, in fact, lays the grounds for it:

Mimesis enabled early hominids to refine many skills, including cutting, throwing, manufacturing tools, and making intentional vocal sounds. Although not yet language, these sounds were nevertheless expressive. We call such vocal modulations prosody.\textsuperscript{106}

Mimesis is critical to social bonding and is, as Donald says “closest to our cultural zero point.”\textsuperscript{107} Furthermore, “it is also closest to emotion.”\textsuperscript{108} This is because “it involves both the conscious elaboration and the suppression of emotion.”\textsuperscript{109} This latter point, however, will be particularly important in chapter three.

The imitative aspects of our embodiment are vital to our social being. This is, in part, the crux of Frost’s theory of correspondence. Correspondence, as such, is grounded in felt experience; furthermore, it is felt experience against a background of shared experience. Johnson sums up this point:

We are not solitary, autonomous creatures who individually and singly construct models of our world in our head. On the contrary, we learn about our world in and through others. We inhabit a shared world, and we share meaning from the start, even if we are completely unaware of this while we are infants. In other words, \textit{body-based intersubjectivity} – our being with others via bodily expression, gesture, imitation, and

\textsuperscript{106} Ibid., 261.
\textsuperscript{107} Ibid., 263.
\textsuperscript{108} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{109} Ibid.
interaction – is constitutive of our very identity from our earliest days, and it is the birthplace of meaning.¹¹⁰

Our learning about the world “in and through others” resonates with James’s “our faith is faith in the faith of others.” There is a deep “body-based intersubjectivity” at play, because fundamentally we can occupy the same position. We can meet one another’s gaze and immediately understand what is taking place. What is more, because we are able to follow one another’s gaze to trace one’s line of sight to an object through joint visual attention, we have an intuitive spatial awareness that allows us to accommodate the slight shift in angle. There is a mimetic inference that takes place on such occasions, and is evidence of a “body-based intersubjectivity,” or mimetic rapport.

Correspondence is mimetic; it is a form of mimetic rapport. It is not imitative, however, in the sense of mere repetition, although repetition is involved. The potential for novelty and variation is inherent in our mimetic behaviour. While mimesis is a fundamental learning tool it is a part of a hierarchy of learning tools. What is imitated, by an infant for instance, is not simply “programmed in” to be repeated later. Rather, it is retained in a more fluid sense. Mimetic behaviours are accumulated and can be blended, whether in practice or abstractly, later on. The emergence of language, which follows on from our early mimetic education, is one means by which we can blend mimetic behaviours. We do not need language to do this; it is a higher, yet dependent, extension of mimetic engagement.

Mimesis precedes language, as Donald says: “mimesis is logically prior to language because without it, we cannot rehearse or refine any skill.”¹¹¹ Mimetic rehearsal pertains to

¹¹⁰ Johnson, Meaning of the Body, 51.
behavioural and environmental patterns: we are able to imitate what we see and navigate ourselves around the environments for which those behaviours are most appropriate. Our understanding, and imitation, of behavioural and environmental patterns is relational, and thus metaphorical. Language is an extension of this metaphorical engagement.

Correspondence, then, particularly in poetry, is an act, not simply of linguistic or verbal communication, but of embodied expression. Importantly, it is mutual embodied expression because it is fundamentally mimetic.

Our mimetic capacity gives us a sense of belonging and community, and allows us to take up the perspective of others. But there is another side to this “power,” as James says, there is “a peculiar sense of power in stretching one’s own personality so as to include that of a strange person.”112 This has both positive and negative potential. This “sense of power” can be problematic, because it can lead to a kind of narcissism, one that discounts the agency of others at the expense of one’s own ego or self-importance. This peculiar sense of power can also have a positive effect. Furthermore, it is crucial to our social being. Our capacity to imitate contributes to our capacity to empathise, and by extension, obviously, to our capacity to deceive. Our ability to take up the position of other human beings also allows us the capacity to understand things from their perspective. That is, at least, the idea.

One might ask what stops us from taking the self-interested approach and using our capacity for personal gain. We get a hint of what Frost intends from one of his notebooks where he asks “why do we stay with each other in human society [?]” His answer: “to show self control.”113 It is “self-control” that is the response to the confusion in the experience of metaphor. Failure to show self-control in the face of this confusion leaves us without

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111 Donald, A Mind so Rare, 268.
112 James, Principles of Psychology, 716.
113 Frost, Notebooks, 252.
understanding; failure to show self-control in human society would leave us isolated from others. Self-control exhibits itself through the subtlety of our expression, not through an attempt to fix or close down meaning and to hold others to those meanings, but to open up and invite others in. Correspondence is self-control. It is “a momentary stay against confusion.” Imitation and recognition are bases for correspondence, but they must be adapted to the flux and accumulation of experience through the agent’s active engagement with uncertainty and the confusion that accompanies it.

The imitation that underpins correspondence grants us access to alternate “hypotheses” against which to test our beliefs and our experiences. It also gives us experiences from alternate perspectives against which to test our beliefs. It is through correspondence that we can respect the right of others to believe, not only by understanding their beliefs from their perspective, but by reaffirming the common embodiment of each other’s experiences. There is one final element of correspondence that needs to be analysed, and that is the importance of emotion. I have mentioned a number of points regarding emotion already in this section, most importantly the embodied nature of emotion. However, to fully appreciate emotion as embodied, and therefore the role of emotion in correspondence and poetic experience, I must turn to its source: William James’s theory of emotion.

2.3. James’s Theory of Emotion

James’s theory of emotion is one of his most original, if controversial, contributions. In short, James postulated that emotions are an entirely body-based phenomenon, rather than entities in the head. This idea has received renewed interest and exposure through the recent work of Mark Johnson and Richard Shusterman, and Antonio Damasio. James, in his own
words, explains: “My theory […] is that the bodily changes follow directly the perception of the exciting fact, and that our feeling of the same changes as they occur is the emotion.”¹¹⁴ He goes on to extrapolate that

we feel sorry because we cry, angry because we strike, afraid because we tremble, and not that we cry, strike, or tremble, because we are sorry, angry, or fearful, as the case may be. Without the bodily states following on the perception, the latter would be purely cognitive in form, pale, colourless, destitute of emotional warmth. We might then see the bear, and judge it best to run, receive the insult and deem it right to strike, but we should not actually feel afraid or angry.¹¹⁵

This statement, among others, has been at the centre of much of the debate and criticism surrounding James’s theory. I will address these criticisms in chapter three. James is arguing that emotions are not thoughts inside the head, but are bound up with the body. Emotions are a felt quality of the body in its situatedness, not a reflection, but bound up in the experience. We usually speak of individual emotions, labelling them and discussing their characteristics; while this can be useful, however, emotions labelled in this way can quickly fall victim to the absolutism of words. Emotions become abstract concepts. In so converting them we drag them out of the flow of thought and experience.

“James” Shusterman explains, “held that bodily feelings are not merely cognitively useful in organising our experience but that they also constitute our most basic sense of self.”¹¹⁶ This was in contradiction to the “established psychological view of his time [that]

¹¹⁴ James, Principles of Psychology, 743.
¹¹⁵ Ibid., 743.
regarded emotions as purely mental events.”\textsuperscript{117} James, himself, says explicitly: “A purely disembodied human emotion is a nonentity […] for us, emotion dissociated from all bodily feeling is inconceivable.”\textsuperscript{118} Emotions are grounded in the body, which in turn grounds us in the environment. Emotions are not bound by conceptual constraints, only by bodily and environmental constraints. Because of this “there is no limit to the number of possible different emotions which may exist, [furthermore] the emotions of different individuals may vary indefinitely, both as to their constitution and as to objects which call them forth.”\textsuperscript{119} If we hypostatise our emotions through the labels we give them, there is a danger of missing this “indefinite variety” of emotional experiences.

There are three elements of James’s theory of emotion that are important to touch on at this point. Firstly, following on from his assertion that emotions are embodied, the influence of physical actions or responses to emotions; secondly, what might be called the habituation or repetition of emotions and its effect on the feeling of emotion; and thirdly, what James calls “the principle of reacting similarly to analogous-feeling stimuli,”\textsuperscript{120} or the way in which stimuli from different domains can evoke similar responses. The embodied nature of emotions means that emotion plays a broader role in our interaction in the environment and with other similarly emotionally endowed human beings. Our emotions are more broadly accessible on a physical level to observation and stimulation, than if they really were just entities in the head.

Emotions play a crucial role in informing us of how things are going in our experience, and directing our responses. While we can be overcome with emotions at times,

\textsuperscript{117} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{118} James, \textit{Principles of Psychology}, 745.
\textsuperscript{119} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{120} Ibid., 763.
we can also exert some control over them consciously. Emotions are dynamic in the sense that they evoke responses from us in regard to the stimuli that (ostensibly) causes that emotion. Fear, for instance, invokes a “fight or flight” response in the face of a threat. Such responses, in turn, impact on our emotions. James makes the point:

Everyone knows how panic is increased by flight, and how the giving way to the symptoms of grief or anger increases those passions themselves. Each fit of sobbing makes the sorrow more acute, and calls forth another fit stronger still, until at last repose only ensues with lassitude and with the apparent exhaustion of the machinery. In rage, it is notorious how we “work ourselves up” to a climax by repeated outbreaks of expression. Refuse to express a passion, and it dies. Count to ten before you vent your anger, and its occasion seems ridiculous. Whistling to keep up courage is no mere figure of speech. On the other hand, sit all day in a moping posture, sigh, and reply to everything with a dismal voice, and your melancholy lingers.121

Emotions, James appears to be saying, are exacerbated or allayed by our responses to them. James enumerates a range of different responses and their effects: “working ourselves up” through “repeated outbreaks of expression”; “counting to ten”; “whistling”; “moping posture” and “a dismal voice.” Each response entails a physical state or action, predominantly surrounding facial or vocal expressions. In the case of moping posture the body may be slumped forward with shoulders hanging low; the dismal voice may, in part, be a result of the posture and its effects on the lungs and the “invisible muscles of the mouth and throat.” If emotions are physiologically based, then the position, posture, and activity of the body must be involved in the manifestations of emotion. It further follows that stimuli that act upon the

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121 Ibid., 751.
body and its processes can have an influence on our emotional states and responses. States of the body, that is to say, however arrived at, affect how we feel at any given moment, as James observes: “we feel things differently according as we are sleepy or awake, hungry or full, fresh or tired.”122 The change of season and the progress of age act upon us similarly.

Emotions are inherently world-involving elements of our embodiment. They occur and subside over periods of time based on internal and external pressures or stimuli. That is, they occur in the continuum of experience, with all its concomitant fringe of relations. Emotions can occur because of a habitual association with a particular object or set of objects. But on the other hand, as James has already said, there is an infinite array of possible relations and emotional associations or responses that can be made because of the variance between the emotions of individuals. James makes an important point about this dynamic: emotions, he says, tend to “blunt themselves by repetition more rapidly than any other sort of feeling.”123 James says more pointedly:

The more we exercise ourselves at anything, the fewer muscles we employ; and just so, the oftener we meet an object, the more definitely we think and behave about it; and the less is the organic perturbation to which it gives rise.124

James is talking here specifically about emotional attachments to the various objects of our experience. The more we encounter a given object the more habitual our responses to that object become, the less pronounced the emotional attachment to that object becomes. As a result, the range of responses to a given emotional stimuli is minimised. Meaning, we employ

122 James, *Principles of Psychology*, 151.
123 Ibid., 760.
124 Ibid.
fewer responses to objects whose emotional attachments are well-defined through repetitive exposure.

An environment populated by such habitual objects is impoverished and bland. Emotional attachments that are dulled do not evoke new responses or relations among the objects of our experience, and our “inveterate” language only makes new responses or relations harder by concretising, or hypostatising, those attachments. Conversely, it could be argued that habitual emotional attachment reinforces the substantive bias of language by providing fixed responses to the objects and object relations to which our language refers. In either case, it is this blunting and dulling of language and emotional attachment that poetry, and art more broadly, undermines. Poetry can do this because of the “indefinite variety” of emotions inherent to their embodied nature. What this means, however, is that poetry must itself be an embodied act, or at least the roots of poetry and the poetic experience must be embodied.

The poetic experience as an embodied act will be discussed in the last section of this chapter when I come to address Frost’s theory of sentence-sounds. The embodied act of reading poetry itself I call “self-recital.” The implications of emotion to self-recital will not be fully understood until chapter three, but it is important to lay the groundwork now, particularly from the perspective of Frost’s theoretical contributions. That is, it is important to outline and analyse Frost’s and James’s ideas first, before developing their ideas through the prism of more modern research.

There is one further element of James’s theory of emotions to discuss before moving on. James makes a specific link between emotional responses and responses to physical
stimuli, what he calls the “principle of reacting similarly to analogous-feeling stimuli.”\textsuperscript{125} There is a mimetic influence here, but notably, not between individuals, but across the body. James uses the example of “symbolic gustatory movements” to explain: “As soon as any experience arises which has an affinity with the feeling of sweet, or bitter, or sour, the same movements are executed which would result from the taste in point.”\textsuperscript{126} James continues:

Certainly the emotions of disgust and satisfaction do express themselves in this mimetic way. Disgust is an incipient regurgitation or retching, limiting its expression often to the grimace of the lips and nose; satisfaction goes with a sucking smile, or tasting motion of the lips.\textsuperscript{127}

Mimetic connections are not just made from person to person, but across experiential domains. To draw a connection between one mode of embodied or sensory engagement – in this instance gustatory – and an emotional state is indicative of the underlying unity of our embodied experience. While repetition may dull the impact of such cross-modal integration, as James has already said there is an infinite variety of emotions that are possible due to their embodied nature.

James’s gustatory example correlates with Johnson’s point earlier about the influence of bodily orientation and constitution on our understanding. An emotional response of disgust or, for instance, something that “leaves a sour taste in the mouth” which might be accompanied by pursed or puckered lips, is an intrinsically felt emotional metaphor. It is acted out, so to speak, because of the connection between two different kinds of disgust: physical and moral. James’s example also indicates a metaphoric connection between

\textsuperscript{125} Ibid., 763.
\textsuperscript{126} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{127} Ibid.
different domains. This is important with regard to emotional expression, as it furnishes us with a great deal of “disgust” emotional responses, words like “rotten” or “squalid” for instance used to describe the disgusting object or event. The experience goes deeper, however, than the words that can be used.

Disgust is a good example in this regard. As I discussed in chapter three, Antonio Damasio explicitly takes up the example of disgust in positing his theory. A part of Damasio’s argument is that emotion emerges from evolutionary pressures. That is, emotions serve our basic survival needs and inform our relationship with the world. The emotional response of disgust, with its associated “retching” or gagging, would be an appropriate response to something that is detrimental to one’s survival, like rotten or infected meat. Furthermore, disgust would be a response to something that is unnatural or corrupted (hence, rotten). This association of what is detrimental can be translated to moral or social realms; a similar visceral reaction is possible to something that is morally objectionable. We associate the gagging reflex of physical disgust to a moral issue that is detrimental or corrupted in some way.

2.3.1. Natural Metaphors

As illustrated above, there are physical sources for our metaphors and beliefs, by which we understand and communicate about our world, not only intellectually or abstractly, where we can draw parallels or extend by analogy, but emotionally as well. We embody metaphor in a very profound way, which gives us a common platform for communication. James’s theory of embodied emotions is crucial to Frost’s overarching aesthetic theory.
James’s theory of emotions is exemplary of the unity between the body and the mind on which we ground our understanding and experience. John Sears captures this point:

Frost’s model for the human mind is the body, or, to put it in James’s terms, the body and the mind are one. Emotions and the sensations which accompany emotions, thoughts, and the movements which follow thoughts do not exist separately.¹²⁸

This unity provides a cornerstone to Frost’s aesthetics, because it “establishes on a physiological basis that miracle of connection between the inner and outer worlds – between feeling and gesture, thought and event.”¹²⁹ Sears goes on to make a crucial link:

For Frost this connection is important because it implies that emotions produce their own natural metaphors: they are continually made visible in figures of action and gestures of the body.¹³⁰

That such “natural metaphors,” such as expressions of disgust, are grounded in emotions means they are publicly accessible on the level of embodiment. They are visible in our physical expressions.

Frost establishes the connection between metaphor and emotion in various places. In “The Constant Symbol,” Frost says “Every poem is a new metaphor inside or it is nothing.”¹³¹ Shortly after, he says “a poem is the emotion of having a thought.”¹³²

¹²⁹ Ibid., 349.
¹³⁰ Ibid., 350.
¹³² Ibid., 788.
metaphors, to reiterate, cannot be invented abstractly, as intellectual curiosities, but must be grounded in the felt qualities of embodiment. A poem that does not possess such felt qualities is “nothing,” while a poem that forces its metaphors will break down and be less than nothing because it fails to test the reader or to leave them with any lasting quality of feeling or emotion.

What is more, the relationship between emotion and metaphor is grounded in human relationality: “How can the world know anything so intimate as what we were intending to do?” Frost asks. “The answer is the world presumes to know.” Frost goes on to say, “The ruling passion in man is not as Viennese as is claimed. It is rather a gregarious instinct to keep together by minding each other’s business.” The passages just quoted appear between those quoted in my previous paragraph, indicating the mediating role Frost sees for poetry. By “Viennese” Frost is referring to Freudianism, which Frost rejected. The “gregarious instinct” that Frost offers in response indicates that there is not only a physical basis to our experience and understanding, but also a social basis.

Our embodiment not only brings together the mind and the body, dissolving the conceptual disunity of the two, it also provides the basis for human relationality. Our bodies are the same – they are constituted in the same way and oriented toward the world the same way – and can do the same things. We are interested in each other because we are accessible to each other; we reflect the similarities of a common embodiment, hence common experience, to one another. That is, we can see ourselves, at least in part, in others, and vice versa. We can, however, become cut off from one another, or such access and reflection can become so habitual that generalisations and assumptions creep in. Our understanding

133 Ibid., 787.
becomes fixed based on a limited set of such recognitions to which any new encounters must be assimilated.

What is required is “renewal.” Poetry is not just the renewal of words, but of understanding. Poetry plays a mediating role in our understanding as such, because of its emotional or “thought-felt” quality as an experiential test. Poetry straddles the private-public domains, of thoughts and feelings on the one hand, and emotional and physical responses on the other, maintaining the continuity between them. It resists the disembodied understanding of mind and body, which gives way to absolutist fallacies of meaning, such as that emotions are entities within the head, or that words have an absolute meaning.

The reader of poetry engages in a public act, which at the same time is privately experienced. The poem stands as a virtual interlocutor with the reader, but one that extracts from the reader a private and intense experience. It does this, in part, because it tests the reader’s metaphoric understanding, but also because it draws the reader into a mimetic relationship with the poem itself (this point will be discussed in the final section of this chapter on Frost’s theory of sentence-sounds). The reader takes up the stance of the poem – a poetic stance – partaking of its meaning-making, not only abstractly but physically. We take part in the poem’s metaphoric testing in a very physical, embodied way.

Metaphor, emotion, and human relationality are all elements in Frost’s theory of correspondence, underpinned by both willed-belief and fear, the essential tension in Frost’s universe. The poem sits amidst this experiential dynamic as a “symbol” of the will: “every poem is an epitome of the great predicament; a figure of the will braving alien
entanglements.” By “alien entanglements” Frost is primarily referring to the “indifferent” Darwinian world, but this also includes our entanglements with other people. In spite of the embodied nature of our experience in the world, it must be remembered correspondence is not a given. It can be broken off, even if only by a “brute fool.”

Deception and narcissism are still possible regardless of our “gregarious instinct.” While in children the ability to imitate is a crucial learning tool, in adults, as discussed earlier, it can be turned to manipulation and deception. It is entirely possible, as James discusses in the case of actors, for emotions to be outwardly mimicked yet for no feeling of them found in the person mimicking. While James argues that this is the exception rather than the rule, it nevertheless presents us with a potential gap; one that is essentially “willed” because we can choose how we relate with one another, whether through empathy and thoughtful expression, or narcissistically and deceptively.

Poetry sharpens us up by challenging our understanding and doesn’t allow us to settle on any particular understanding for too long. The pursuit of subtlety and variation is a moral imperative because it resists the dullness of repetition and absolutism that makes us vulnerable to deception, or makes us self-involved through absolute certainty. We are made complicit in poetry’s meaning and thus complicit in our own confusion, and only through engaging with it directly can we emerge from it with a new “clarification of life,” however small. This private experience is a public act because it is accessible to everyone in the form of the written poem, and in the common constitution of all who read it.

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134 Ibid., 787.
135 James, *Principles of Psychology*, 751.
Poetry, for Frost, is a battle of variety contending against repetition, not just at the level of the poem, but at the fundamental level of thought and emotion, which has at stake our relationship with the world. Our education in metaphor that poetry provides is an education in our own experience through the prism of our figurative values and the way in which those values come into being. This allows us, not only to understand the contingent nature of our values, but also to understand the experiences of others in the same vein: because we are the same and can make the same expressions.

One last question remains, however. While I have discussed the centrality of metaphor to both poetry and thinking, as well as the imperative of human relationality built upon it and the embodied mode of understanding that underpins our experience as such, it now remains to ground the experience of poetry in this dynamic. The metaphoric licence of poetry is one part of this grounding. But if that were all that was required, then anything that dabbled even a little metaphorically could be called poetry. Poetry is not just about metaphor. Poetry is metaphor. Poetry embodies the experience of metaphor better than any other literary or artistic form. To understand this point, we must understand what, arguably, is Frost’s most original poetic theory: the theory of sentence-sounds.

3.1. Robert Frost and the Sound of Sense

Robert Frost’s theory sentence-sounds is alternately called the theory of the sound of sense. Frost shifts between the two in his various letters, notes, and lectures and at one point drops the terms altogether, though the idea remains embedded in his poetry and prose.
throughout his career. The sound of sense pertains, in part, to the rhythm not only of the poem but of human speech in general. This rhythm, however, emerges out of a tension that Frost identifies between the sound of the sentence (hence sentence-sounds) and the words within the sentence. This sentence-sound has meaning that is distinct from the meaning of the words.

Frost develops his theory of sentence-sounds in a series of letters primarily to John Bartlett and Sidney Cox. To Bartlett Frost says directly: “I give you a new definition of a sentence: A sentence is a sound in itself on which other sounds called words may be strung.” Frost’s letter is worth quoting at length:

You may string words together without a sentence-sound to string them on just as you may tie clothes together by the sleeves and stretch them without a clothes line between two trees, but – it is bad for the clothes.

The number of words you may string on one sentence-sound is not fixed but there is always a danger of over loading.

The sentence-sounds are very definite entities. (This is no literary mysticism I am preaching.) They are as definite as words. It is not impossible that they could be collected in a book though I don’t at present see on what system that would be catalogued.

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They are apprehended by the ear. They are gathered by the ear from the vernacular and brought into books. Many of them are already familiar to us in books. I think no writer invents them. The most original writer only catches them fresh from talk, where they grow spontaneously.

A man is all a writer if all his words are strung on definite recognisable sentence-sounds. The voice of the imagination, the speaking voice must know certainly how to behave how to posture in every sentence he offers.

A word about recognition: In literature it is our business to give people the thing that will make them say, “oh yes I know what you mean.” It is never to tell them something they don’t know, but something they know and hadn’t thought of saying. It must be something they recognise.

This is perhaps Frost’s most comprehensive statement on sentence-sounds. A number of points are worth summarising before moving on to closer analysis. Firstly, it stands to reason that the sentence-sound necessarily precedes words in some way if the latter are to be “strung” on the former. Secondly, such sentence-sounds have no maximum length, but can be stretched too far. It can be surmised from this point that the upper limit that Frost envisages is limited, in part, by the speaking voice, and in part by the capacity of a sentence to contain a coherent idea. These two points are related.

Sentence-sounds are not invented by the writer, but rather are “gathered by the ear,” by which Frost means firstly they are spoken (which pertains to the limitations of the

138 Ibid., 675.
speaking voice through the breath), and secondly they are heard (which pertains to the limitations of one’s ability to audibly follow the train of thought of another). A sentence-sound that is too long will be too difficult to speak at an appropriate pace, which may tax the listener’s ability to make sense of what is being said. Furthermore, the sentence-sound may be overloaded with words, trying to say too much in one breath, for the listener to make sense of it.

The final, and perhaps most important point to take from the letter, is the notion of the “voice posture”; that “the voice of the imagination, the speaking voice must know certainly how to behave how to posture in every sentence.” Frost makes this point numerous times, emphasising more explicitly in an earlier letter: “the reader must be at no loss to give his voice the posture proper to the sentence.” By posture Frost means not only the tone of voice, but the pace and the rhythm of voice. This is one of Frost’s more problematic concepts and requires some piecing together. This will be clarified by returning to some of William James’s ideas discussed earlier in this chapter, such as the “fringe of affinities.” First, however, I need to discuss the embodied dimensions of sentence-sounds.

3.2. In the Mouth of the Sentence-Sound

In a letter to Sidney Cox, Frost writes: “words exist in the mouth not in books. You can’t fix them and you don’t want to fix them. You want them to adapt their sounds to

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persons and places and times. You want them to change and be different.” Frost here asserts two things. Firstly, words are grounded in human expression, and not bound to the page. As he says in one of his notebooks: “you must remember that no sentence is quite on the page any way. The sentence concept that holds the words together is supplied by the voice.” Secondly, Frost is arguing for variety in expression. Such variety, however, is limited by the fact that sentence-sounds are “caught” rather than “invented.” What Frost is most concerned with is the way these sentence-sounds interact with the metre of poetry. A few points from an earlier letter to John Bartlett will help explain these issues.

For Frost, the existence of sentence-sounds is best exemplified by subtracting the words from the sounds: “the best place to get the abstract sound of sense is from voices behind a door that cuts off the words.” He goes on to give an example: “Ask yourself how these sentences would sound without the words in which they are embodied”:

You mean to tell me you can’t read?
I said no such thing.
Well read then.
You’re not my teacher.

This is just one of Frost’s examples. “Those sounds” Frost concludes, “are summoned by the audile imagination [sic] and they must be positive, strong, and definitely and unmistakably indicated by the context.” The context of the above example is argumentative, which

135 Frost, *Notebooks*, 133.
136 Frost to Bartlett, 4th July 1913, 664.
137 Ibid., 665.
138 Ibid.
comes through strongly, but the sound of sense alone is not enough. The sound of sense – or sentence-sound – must interact in tension with the beat of the metre in poetry.

In a subsequent letter to Bartlett, Frost goes into greater detail with his analysis of sentence-sounds, using an early version of one of his own poems, “A Patch of Old Snow”:

In the corner of the wall where the bushes haven’t been trimmed, there is a patch of old snow like a blow-away newspaper that has come to rest there. And it is dirty as with the print and news of a day I have forgotten, if I ever read it.146

The published version of this poem is different, but this is the example of the poem that Frost proceeds to analyse for sentence-sounds which correspond to the two sentences of the poem as it is written here:

The first sentence sound will do but it is merely ordinary and bookish: it is entirely subordinate in interest to the meaning of the words strung on it. But half the effectiveness of the second sentence is in the very special tone with which you must say news of a day I have forgotten – if I ever read it.147

The second sentence, Frost argues, is a better sentence-sound. The second sentence is dramatic. It *does* something, the posture of which is relatively simple for the voice to adopt: “news of a day I have forgotten” is read slower because of its lengthening beat, followed by a pause, and then “if I ever read it,” which is read at “normal” (iambic) pace. This structure is more obvious in the published version of the poem:

146 Frost to Bartlett, 22nd February 1914, 676.
147 Ibid.
The news of a day I’ve forgotten –
If I ever read it.\textsuperscript{148}

The gap is pregnant with thought, and the subsequent change in direction of the sentence is in response to the dawning fact that the news of a day is, in fact, forgotten. With that realisation comes the change in tone, which is signalled to the reader by the em-dash and line-break. One final example is worth mentioning: “One of the examples of a sentence sound that Frost liked to use” John Sears writes “is the line from Hamlet: ‘so I have heard, and do in part believe it.’”\textsuperscript{149} Sears goes on to recount, as one critic objected:

There are a number of ways of reading that line […] Although the second part of the sentence clearly calls for a change of tone, it is hard to believe that the text dictates to the actor a particular tone for either half of the sentence.\textsuperscript{150}

Such criticism, however, misses the point. Were it obvious what tone the text dictated, one would only need to follow on without engaging with the nuances of sound. While Frost insists that the reader must be at no loss to posture their voice as the sentence calls for, there is a suggestiveness that places some onus on the reader. Were the exact posture of the sentence present on the page then all that would be necessary is its imitation. And such mechanical imitation is what Frost wants to avoid. It is subtlety in correspondence that Frost is after in the poetic experience, not mere repetition.


\textsuperscript{150} John Sears, “Robert Frost and the Imagists,” 475.
The reader comes to know the posture of sentence-sounds from their constant engagement with poetry. It is not only through circulating amongst poems that one gains an appreciation for the subtlety and variations of metaphor, but the subtlety and variations of sentence-sounds as well. Frost makes the connection explicit in one of his notebooks:

Metaphor is not only in thought it is in the sentence sounds as well. We are playing at other sounds than the ones you would expect in the place. Metaphor is make believe. Metaphor is [...] everything out of its place. It is the whole of poetry in one sense.151

In a letter to Bartlett, Frost says more directly: “the sentence sound often says more than the words. It may even as in irony convey a meaning opposite to the words.”152 Irony, for Frost, is perhaps the best example of the tension between words and sentence-sounds, where the ironic meaning is “out of its place.” The voice-posture of irony, for example, then, is metaphoric, “saying one thing and meaning another.” As such, the metaphoric nature of sentence-sounds entails the embodied processes of meaning-making, which, importantly, can be imitated. Poetry, however, is not just spoken, but written down. It exists as an object. The poetic object exists, for the most part, by virtue of certain formal features, such as metre, and it is to poetic form I will now turn.

3.3. Form and Metre

Metre as a component of poetic form, for Frost, is a structure that expresses “self-control,” standing particularly as a figure of the will as it “braves alien entanglements.” It is a

151 Frost, Notebooks, 113.
152 Frost to Bartlett, 22nd February 1914, 677.
means of control, more importantly self-control, not only for the writer, but for the reader as well. Form, for Frost, and metre in particular, is integral to the poetic experience. Form, however, has existential significance beyond poetry. As Frost says in a letter to *The Amherst Student*, his alumni newspaper:

> We people are thrust forward out of the suggestions of form in the rolling clouds of nature. In us nature reaches its height of form and through us exceeds itself. When in doubt there is always form for us to go on with.\(^{153}\)

This quote resonates strongly with Donald’s observation that “we are the means whereby the physical universe has finally reflected back on itself,” that we produce a “cultural universe” by virtue of the universe having exceeded itself through us.\(^{154}\) Form is the means by which the will of man braves the alien entanglements of the Darwinian universe. Form is what is imposed by man onto nature. Not, however, arbitrarily or absolutely. Man is always working with the “suggestions of form” to give a definite form to the objects of his experience. Frost goes on to say

> Anyone who has achieved the least form to be sure of it, is lost to the larger excruciations. […]. The artist, the poet might be expected to be the most aware of such assurance. But it is really everybody’s sanity to feel it and live by it. Fortunately, too, no forms are more engrossing, gratifying, comforting, staying than those lesser ones we throw off, like vortex rings of smoke, all our individual enterprise and

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\(^{154}\) Donald, *A Mind So Rare*, 300.
needing nobody’s cooperation; a basket, a letter, a garden, a room, an idea, a picture, a poem.¹⁵⁵

These small forms are small victories of individual sanity, but even as individual activities they are all bound up by some necessary material onto which the will imposes form. In a poem, it is the imposition of metre on pre-existing sentence-sounds in order to draw out the tension between the sentence-sounds and the words.

This “strained relation” is a part of the metaphorical test that the poetic experience is meant to embody. This is why metre is vital; not only for its audible qualities, but its visual qualities as well. The difference, for instance, between the published and unpublished version of “An Old Patch of Snow” illustrates the importance of form. It is easier to grasp the voice-posture from the published version. Even though sentence-sounds do exist in the mouth, they must also serve a purpose on the page. The written sentence, Frost says, “is before all else [...] a notation for suggesting significant tones of voice.”¹⁵⁶ By looking at the published version of “An Old Patch of Snow” compared to the one in the letter this point becomes more obvious. The line-break and the em-dash help to mark the change in tone between the statement about forgetting and the expression of forgetting.

“A Patch of Old Snow”

There’s a patch of old snow in a corner

That I should have guessed

Was a blow-away paper the rain

¹⁵⁵ Frost to Bartlett, 22nd February 1914, 740.
¹⁵⁶ Frost, Notebooks, 640.
Had brought to rest.

It is speckled with grime as if
Small print overspread it,
The news of a day I’ve forgotten –
If I ever read it.\textsuperscript{157}

The structure of the poem affects the pace at which the reader can read, and this is important for grasping the necessary voice-postures: “the best reader of all is one who will read, can read, no faster than he can hear the lines and sentences in his mind’s ear as if aloud. Frequently poetry has slowed him down by its metric or measured pace.”\textsuperscript{158} This slowing down is crucial to the poetic experience. Between the measured pace of reading and posture of the voice it can be seen that the poem is acting on the imitative tendencies of the reader. What is taking place is a kind of recital even if not actually out loud: a self-recital. The reader who takes up the posture of the sentence, constrained to read at the pace the poem will allow takes up the stance of the poet; or rather, takes up the stance of the poem. This is a form of imitative embodiment. The reader takes up the posture, not only of making the sounds of the poem but of the whole process of meaning-making in the poem.

The measured pace of the poem embodies the attitude of self-control set against the natural sounds of the voice that, outside of poetry, are susceptible to the “sunset ravings” of a certain kind of “enthusiasm.” What is more, by drawing the reader into adopting the posture of the poem the reader is made complicit in their own confusion; confusion, that is, in the face of the metaphor whose meaning-making they have been made complicit in through

\textsuperscript{157} Frost, “A Patch of Old Snow,” 107.
\textsuperscript{158} Frost, “Poetry and School,” 809.
mimicry. The self-recital of the poem is the embodiment of the dialectical encounter with confusion, out of which a recovery and renewal of words and understanding is made possible. It is a recovery because one is partaking in the form of the poem, and it is a renewal because one is experiencing the tension between words and sentence-sounds, and encountering the arbitrary nature of definitions that are given to words.

The dynamic tension that exists between metre and sentence-sounds, then, is crucial to poetry. It helps to draw out the tension between the words and the sentence-sounds, and to get the reader into the right postures for understanding. The potential for meaning that exists within this tension is central to the poetic experience, one’s understanding of metaphor, and one’s correspondence with others. The full impact of metre on the sentence-sounds cannot be fully understood, however, without understanding the full significance of sentence-sounds, as Stanlis warns us, “it would be a great mistake to conclude […] that all this [regarding the sentence-sound] is merely concerned with the phonetic techniques of poetry.”

The sentence-sound goes deeper than technique, as Richard Poirier says, returning to the crucial relationship between metaphor and sentence-sounds foreshadowed earlier: “the metaphoric value of sentence sounds is that they refer to or are ‘like’ certain dispositions and temperaments of the human mind.” The sentence-sounds are not just sounds, but relate to our most fundamental thinking as an embodiment of their form. What is more, in “mimicking” the “fluid movements of consciousness” the sentence-sounds approximate the fluidity of experience. To understand this relationship, it is important to return to William James.

161 Hass, *Going by Contraries*, 139.
3.4. The Fringe of Affinities and the Sentence-Sound

James is crucial to understanding what Poirier calls “the metaphoric value of sentence-sounds.” James, it can be seen, provides Frost with much of the groundwork that his theory is built on. Importantly, James’s influence in this regard can be found in much the same material that was encountered at the beginning of this chapter. That is to say, this chapter will end in much the same way it began. A quote from James will help to explain:

The truth is that large tracts of human speech are nothing but signs of direction in thought, of which direction we nevertheless have an acutely discriminative sense, though no definite sensorial image plays any part in it whatsoever.\(^\text{162}\)

This is from the same chapter “The Stream of Thought,” in *The Principles of Psychology*, that discussed the fringe of affinities and the substantive and transitive parts of thought. James is making the connection between speech and thought, but it is also important to point out that prior to this quotation James also says (quoted earlier) that “language works against our perception of the truth.” James is not contradictory here; rather he is making a distinction between “human speech” and “language”; a distinction arguably parallel with Frost’s sentence-sounds and words.

James continues at length, building on his metaphor of the bird’s flight, as he discusses the nature of this relationship between human speech and the direction of thought:

Sensorial images are stable psychic facts; we can hold them still and look at them as long as we like. These bare images of logical movement, on the contrary, are psychic

\(^{162}\) James, *Principles of Psychology*, 164.
transitions, always on the wing, so to speak, and not to be glimpsed except in flight. Their function is to lead from one set of images to another. As they pass, we feel both the waxing and the waning images in a way altogether peculiar and a way quite different from the way of their full presence. If we try to hold fast the feeling of direction, the full presence comes and the feeling of direction is lost. The blank verbal scheme of the logical movement gives us the fleeting sense of the movement as we read it, quite as well as does a rational sentence awakening definite imaginations by its words. ①63

James is arguing that there is a dynamic at play in our expression that is related to the flow of our thoughts. The sense of direction is transitive and cannot be brought into focus, though it is highly suggestive of the relations of the substantive sense of meaning. What is more, James is arguing that there is a felt quality to this sense of direction and movement. This felt quality is what underpins the meaning of an expression.

Sentence-sounds, or the “blank verbal schemes,” have a felt quality to them that is allied to the felt quality of their related thoughts. The “flights and perchings” of transitive thought to substantive thought are reflected in the sentence structure itself: “The rhythm of language expresses this, where every thought is expressed in a sentence, and every sentence is closed by a period.” ①64 The sentence, then, is a stream of felt relations that culminates in an idea; though not an idea reducible to a substantive explication, not without something being lost in the translation. The substantive bias in our language, of words in particular, overlooks the transitive parts of thought. The tension between words and sentence-sounds is indicative of this fact.

①63 Ibid.
①64 Ibid., 158.
James illustrates his point about the relation between sentences and ideas by posing a question:

How comes it about that a man reading something aloud for the first time is able immediately to emphasise all his words aright, unless from the very first he have a sense of at least the form of the sentence yet to come, which sense is fused with his consciousness of the present word, and modifies its emphasis in his mind so as to make him give it the proper accent as he utters it?\textsuperscript{165}

This resonates with what Frost says about sentence-sounds, particularly the notion of how the reader may “give the proper accent” to the sentence. James, however, is talking about the grammatical structure of the sentence:

Emphasis of this kind is almost altogether a matter of grammatical construction. If we read “no more” we expect presently to come upon a “than”; if we read “however” at the outset of a sentence it is a “yet,” “still,” or a “nevertheless,” that we expect. A noun in a certain position demands a verb in a certain mood and number, in another position it expects a relative pronoun. Adjectives call for nouns, verbs for adverbs, etc., etc.\textsuperscript{166}

For Frost, these grammatical structures are merely among the sentence-notations that indicate to the reader the posture proper to the sentence-sound that underpins the sentence as a whole.

\textsuperscript{165} Ibid., 164.
\textsuperscript{166} Ibid.
James, however, identifies a way in which sentence-sounds can be identified in a more explicit way than Frost does.

James is arguing about necessary relationships between words. Essentially, there is an interdependence between individual words, in the same way that there is an interdependence between words in general and sentence-sounds. Words as uttered are qualitatively different to words in static isolation. Sentence-sounds provide the expressive human context on which words are subsequently strung:

Each word, in such a sentence, is felt, not only as a word, but as having a meaning. The “meaning” of a word taken thus dynamically in a sentence may be quite different from its meaning when taken statically or without context. The dynamic meaning is usually reduced to the bare fringe we have described, of felt suitability or unfitness to the context and conclusion.167

Words in a sentence-sound are analogous to objects of thought in the fringe of affinities; they are connected beyond their immediate meaning that is often given as a dictionary definition. There is an unfolding of meaning in the sentence as the words travel along the sentence-sound, but that meaning is a suggestion of relations and direction.

The posture the voice is to take is indicated in the tension between words in their unfolding relations. This is often dictated by grammatical necessity, while the direction is indicated by prior relations in the sentence, and in preceding sentences. There is a cumulative effect in this experience, and because there is a cumulative effect there is a predictive or

167 Ibid., 171.
anticipatory effect. This correlates with the point James made earlier in this chapter that “we all of us have this permanent consciousness of whither our thought is going. It is a feeling like any other, a feeling of what thoughts are next to arise, before they have arisen.” Frost captures this point in his theory of sentence-sounds, but it is James who is more explicit in making the point.

Because James focuses on the relationships between words he is able to be more explicit, but his argument helps to underpin what Frost is trying to do. James links the psychic fringe with words unfolding in the sentence in a way that is most applicable to Frost’s sentence-sounds:

I believe that in all cases where the words are understood, the total idea may be and usually is present not only before and after the phrase has been spoken, but also whilst each separate word is uttered. It is the overtone, halo, or fringe of the word, as spoken in that sentence. It is never absent; no word in an understood sentence comes to consciousness as a mere noise. We feel its meaning as it passes; and although our object is known everywhere, now from the point of view, if we may so call it, of this word, now from the point of view of that. And in our feeling each word there chimes an echo or foretaste of every other.

The meaning of words is steeped in the flow of the sentence-sounds. They are never “mere noise,” but they emerge from a fundamental embodied process that is inherently expressive. Donald argues that language has “mimetic roots,” the meaningfulness of language is thus grounded in the reciprocal imitative dimensions of human relations. That is, we can

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168 Ibid., 165.
169 Ibid., 182.
170 Donald, A Mind so Rare, 274.
understand meaningful sounds because we can make them ourselves. Words emerge from these mimetic roots, but retain their meaningfulness only against the background of the more fundamental expressiveness from which they emerge. These mimetic roots are a part of the “fringe of the word” because mimesis is the root of expression; not just verbal, but also non-verbal expression. Metaphor, furthermore, is central to any form of expression. The relationship between language and its mimetic roots is metaphorical, as is the relationship between words and sentence-sounds.

The fringe of words is indicative of their metaphorical origin. “Many […] of our words” Frost says, “show traces of a metaphorical origin.” These metaphorical origins are the connections between words, and their pre-linguistic connections to the mimetic origins of expression. Without these connections there would be no fringe or sentence-sounds, and without the fringe or sentence-sounds words would be isolated and “mere noise.” We feel the meaning of words because of the embodied, mimetic, and metaphoric roots of language. The meaning of words becomes problematic when they are removed from their metaphorical origins – such as through hypostatisation. By placing words in “strained relations” with the sentence-sound the poet re-engages the fringe of relations and so undertakes the “renewal of words.” By mimicking the poem, the reader partakes of that renewal.

3.4.1. The Feeling of Words

James’s notion of the felt quality of meaning is worth further discussion. While James argues that the meaning of a word is taken “dynamically in a sentence,” and that this meaning

171 Frost, Notebooks, 495.
has a felt quality, he also makes the claim that words themselves can have felt meaning in this way: “we ought to say a feeling of ‘and,’ a feeling of ‘if,’ a feeling of ‘but,’ and a feeling of ‘by,’ quite as readily as we say a feeling of ‘blue’ or a feeling of ‘cold.’” Importantly, the examples James uses – “and,” “if,” “but,” “by” – are the connective tissue of sentences, which are often brushed over in the flight from one perching to the next.

“Can you feel William James’s ‘but’?” Mark Johnson asks. “If you can’t, then there is something wrong with you, something repressed or submerged in your understanding,” he continues. “To feel James’s ‘but’,,” Johnson goes on, “is to feel the quality of a situation as a kind of hesitancy or qualification of something asserted or proposed.” One can say this about any of the connective tissue in sentences. The felt quality of “if,” for example, would be anticipatory, or conditional. While it is similar to “but” in that it changes the direction and tone of the statement in which it appears, it changes them in a way less explicit than “but.” If “but” has the felt quality of hesitancy, then “if” has the felt quality of contingent choice.

“But” anticipates a particular conclusion (usually a negation), whereas “if” leaves the conclusion open, or hanging. “If” can also anticipate a “then,” which usually will qualify the “if” with a particular conclusion or consequence, such as “if you do x, then y will happen,” but the initial “if” remains contingent and open.

Johnson uses an example to explain the feeling of “but”: “when you think ‘I may go to the party, but I won’t have fun,’ you are expressing some unsatisfactory qualification of your anticipated situation.” Johnson’s example could be re-worded as an “if” statement: “If I go to the party, I won’t have fun.” There is a “then” that could go in the middle of that statement, though it isn’t necessary; its presence is felt nonetheless. As Johnson says “if you

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174 James, *Principles of Psychology*, 159.
176 Ibid.
start out with an if-thought, then a then-thought must soon follow”\(^\text{177}\); the “then” need not be explicit, but it is thought. While the two statements can be said to express the same proposition logically (\(x = y\)), they present different moods, or aspects, of the meaning they intend. What is more, they also indicate the posture of the voice differently.

“I may,” it should be noted, also plays a role in the way the sentence unfolds. “If” opens the sentence with the suspense of equal choice and sets up the emphasis of the subsequent “then-thought.” “I may” is more suggestive than “if,” and, as such, is less forceful. The “but” takes on the tone more of an interjection as a result. “If” is more forceful because it leaves the option open, only to be closed down by the substance of the then-thought. Whereas “I may” is a softer more suggestive tone that has a greater sense of invitation to the listener than “if” and is, in fact, more open with its potential conclusion. It could be followed by an if-thought or a however-thought, not just a but-thought. The suggestiveness of “I may” leads to a more emphatic interjection of “but.”

There is a correlation here with Frost and sentence-sounds. This correlation extends to Frost’s definition of sentences on the page, the sentence-notations. The sentence-notations are meant to indicate to the reader the posture his or her voice is to take for the sentence-sound. This includes the words as much as it does the punctuation or form of the poem. The connective tissue – the ands, the buts, the ifs, the bys – play a crucial role in this because they indicate the relationships of words, and propel the sentence by way of its relations. But these words, as James says, have a feeling about them. This is because they stand for the relations among the substantive parts, and correspond to the felt sense of relation that unfolds from the psychic fringe, and, as a parallel, unfolds in the sentence.

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177 Ibid., 95.
While Frost emphasises the tension of the sentence-sound against the words, it is the words that must nevertheless be written down, but written down in such a way as to lend themselves to the appropriate posture the voice is to take. It is the relationships between the words, including the connective tissue, that stands for the sentence-sounds and generates the meaning of the poem. The visual element of the words on the page, not just as words in isolation but in relation to the other words in the sentence, are the sentence-notation that gives the sense of direction and of relation to the sentence-sound as a whole.

Without these felt qualities we could not have emotional expression. Firstly, because the words would lack any physical sense – hence any relations amongst words would lack any physical sense. And secondly, the embodiment of the words through the voice posture would lack variation. If the words as uttered did not feel a certain way to be uttered then there would be no sense of accumulated meaning leading from one word to the next, from one sentence to the next. It would be more like the “language” of computer programming rather than an expressive language. Without the felt quality of words, they could not be placed in strained relations with the sentence-sound. What is more, the reader could not be placed in “strained relation” with the poem through the imitative embodiment of the poem because it would not feel like anything to do so.

If it doesn’t feel like anything to speak the words, then the notion of adopting the “proper posture” of the sentence makes no sense. While the sentence-sound mimics the stream of thought, there is no meaning without the words. The feeling of the words can contrast with the feeling of the underlying sentence-sound (the flow of the sentence-thought, so to speak) to produce alternative feelings in the reading. This is critical to the “indirection”
of the poem, that is, the suggestiveness of the poem. Furthermore, the tension between words and sentence-sounds can engender misdirection which can result in the kind of confusion discussed earlier. The “sentence-notations” on the page play a vital role in providing this tension in the poem for either indirection or misdirection. What is more, the necessity of sentence-notation, of metre and form, makes the poem a decidedly public object, accessible to the literate and those willing to take up the challenge of its metaphoric test.

**Conclusion**

In this chapter I have sought to show how three of Frost’s most significant poetic theories combine to form a single coherent theory of poetic experience. I have also sought to illustrate the strong and pervasive influence of William James on Frost’s theories. This influence has helped to provide a degree of cohesion among Frost’s disparate ideas. Furthermore, I have sought to show that the ideas of James and Frost have a contemporary resonance, which is evidenced by the resurgence in scholarship in the work of both men. In subsequent chapters I will continue to return to this scholarship and build on it.

The poetic experience is a complex experience, but it is grounded in our original embodied and mimetic mode of understanding and engagement with the world. While metaphor might be all there is to thinking, our metaphoric understanding of the world is grounded in this original mode. What is more, language only emerges through our embodiment, the unique physiology of our bodies, as an extension of our metaphoric understanding. We use language to express and communicate the relations and values we perceive in our environment. At the same time, language is continuous with the very embodiment that enables those relations and values to be perceived.
Our education in metaphor equips us to correspond with one another by not only showing us subtlety at work, but by making us complicit in it. In the poetic experience, the reader must re-engage the full range of meaning-making processes, from imitation all the way to metaphoric thought. The two revelations that follow are both embodied. The first revelation is that these processes are continuous, or integrated, and that they are grounded in the most fundamental forms of human relations. Secondly, that, by virtue of our common human embodiment which is the basis for human relations, all human beings are capable of sharing the same thoughts. Importantly, these thoughts are grounded in the same thought processes, which are responsive to subtleties and difference. These subtleties can be communicated, clarifications reached, and relations renewed if we are properly educated by poetry.

In the next chapter I will focus on the aesthetic theory of John Dewey. I will seek to triangulate Dewey’s aesthetic theory with the theory of poetic experience as well as aspects of James’s work discussed in this chapter, such as his theory of emotions, the limitations of language, and the fringe of affinities. In the next chapter I intend to show the common links between Frost’s and Dewey’s respective ideas. In particular, I will focus on the embodied nature of the aesthetic (or poetic) experience, as well as the importance of aesthetic experience to enriching human relationality and understanding. Both Dewey and Frost conceive of the aesthetic experience as an enriching and enlivening experience that challenges and changes our understanding of the world and each other.

Frost’s ideas are not radical. In fact, as contemporary research is showing, and as I will show in subsequent chapters, many of Frost’s ideas harmonise with the modern
understanding of the brain and the body. This is, in part, due to James’s influence. As such, I will continue to track the recent re-vitalisation of James, through scholars such as Mark Johnson, Antonio Damasio, and others. This will be vital to demonstrating the prescience of Frost’s ideas. This will ultimately lead to current debates in the fields of cognitive science. However, I believe that in following the pragmatic line of argument (and the broader pragmatic influence on Frost) throughout this thesis, the relevance of Frost’s ideas to present debates can be readily established.
2. Poetry as *an* Experience: John Dewey’s Theory of Aesthetic Experience Reconsidered

In the previous chapter I focused on the relationship between Robert Frost and William James, particularly in terms of the philosophical influence of the latter on the former. I sought to illustrate important links between the theoretical works of James and the theoretical works of Frost in order to show their correlations of thought, as well as to unify Frost’s diverse thoughts into a single aesthetic theory. James is crucial to understanding Frost’s theoretical origins, as well as his motivations. Considering James and Frost together helps to lay the groundwork for this chapter in which I will introduce the aesthetic theory of John Dewey, a colleague of James and contemporary of Frost.

Dewey is important for a number of reasons. Firstly, he continues the pragmatic line of argument, following James. James has provided a number of vital conceptual tools, such as his theory of emotion and the “fringe of affinities”; Dewey provides others, such as his notion of “body-mind,” his “principle of continuity,” and, most importantly, his theory of aesthetic experience. This pragmatic line of argument is grounded in the centrality of embodied experience to human understanding; that is, our understanding is not abstract or set apart from our experience, our experience is both embodied and located in an environment. Beyond James, however, Dewey establishes an aesthetic dimension for this pragmatic line of argument.

Secondly, and relatedly, Dewey’s theory of aesthetic experience helps to consolidate the theory of poetic experience being developed here; poetic experience is, essentially, a sub-species of aesthetic experience. Poetry, and literature more broadly, according to Dewey, is a
special sub-species of aesthetic experience owing to its unique relationship with human sound. This emphasis on sound resonates with Frost’s aesthetics mapped out in the previous chapter, especially with regard to Frost’s theory of sentence-sounds. In this chapter I will illustrate these important parallels between Frost’s and Dewey’s aesthetics.

Primarily, I will draw on Dewey’s *Art as Experience*, his seminal work on aesthetics, but I will also draw on aspects of his broader theory of experience. The theory of poetic experience developed in the previous chapter shares important parallels with Dewey’s theory of aesthetic experience. In addition to the importance of human sound, there are parallels regarding the importance of embodiment. Embodiment, in fact, underpins the sound which gives literature and poetry its special status among the arts. Dewey’s aesthetic, and broader experiential, theory helps provide a framework into which the theory of poetic experience fits; it also provides useful concepts that help to expand upon those already used in the previous chapter, including Frost’s theory of sentence-sounds and his theory of correspondence.

Dewey’s aesthetic theory has received extensive analysis and interpretation.¹ Due to the limitations of space, I will use only those aspects of Dewey’s argument that are conducive to my own, and particularly those that are sympathetic to Frost’s aesthetic theory. As with James and Frost in the previous chapter, I seek to engage in the contemporary recovery of Dewey’s aesthetic theory. By triangulating Frost, James, and Dewey in this way, I will postulate a theory of poetic experience. This triangulation will be aided by the inclusion of modern theorists, such as Mark Johnson, Richard Shusterman, and (later) Antonio Damasio,

who are variously engaged in the contemporary recovery of James and Dewey. These theorists will help to strengthen the framework of the poetic experience that I seek to build around Frost’s original ideas.

1.1 Aesthetic Experience: The Restoration of Continuity

Dewey’s aesthetic theory centres on restoring the continuity that exists between aesthetic and everyday experience. Both forms of experience, he argues, are predicated on the same “events, doings, and sufferings that are universally recognised to constitute experience.” This continuity entails two things. Firstly, what one might call “physiological” continuity, and secondly, “environmental” continuity. Simply put, the human body – its constitution and orientation – and the human environment are intimately bound up in aesthetic experience as well as everyday experience. Restoring this continuity is about restoring the value of aesthetic experience for enriching our understanding of ourselves and our environment.

In terms of physiological continuity, a few points can be made. Firstly, it is the whole body that is involved in the experience, not just an abstract “mind.” This is because a crucial element of the aesthetic experience – any experience for that matter – is the presence of emotion. Emotion, as James argued in the previous chapter, has physiological dimensions. The “organic substratum” as Richard Shusterman explains is “the sustaining source of the emotional energies of art which make it so enhancive to life.” Dewey’s aesthetic theory accords with James’s theory of emotion, at least this far (Dewey, however, augments James’s theory of emotion, but this will be dealt with in the next chapter). Secondly, this

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physiological continuity is indicative of a physiological continuity between individuals that are constituted in the same way. Shusterman again explains:

This essential physiological stratum is not confined to the artist. The perceiver, too, must engage her natural feelings and energies as well as her physiological sensorimotor responses in order to appreciate art, which for Dewey, amounts to reconstituting something as art in aesthetic experience.\(^4\)

The common physiological constitution between artist and perceiver, indeed, between all perceivers, is the foundation on which the edifice of art is built. What the artist produces in creating the art-work, the perceiver reproduces in perceiving it. Dewey says, “the artist embodies in himself the attitude of the perceiver while he works.”\(^5\) The perceiver, in turn, embodies in himself the attitude of the artist while he undergoes the aesthetic experience. This is correspondence. The perceiver does not simply recognise the objects of the art-work, but re-creates the processes by which the art-work was first produced. This is essentially a mimetic process, the art-work – or the “art-product” as Dewey calls it – plays a vital intercessional role in generating the mimetic experience.

Environmental continuity, simply put, pertains to our location within our environment; all our experiences are bound up within an environment. Coupled with our physiological continuity, this creates a shared space in which mimetic and embodied experiences take place. Our knowledge of the world, ourselves, and each other, is built on these shared experiences. Furthermore, “for Dewey,” Shusterman writes, “all art is the product of interaction between the living organism and its environment, an undergoing and a

\(^4\) Ibid.
doing which involves a reorganisation of energies, actions, and materials.” It is a reorganisation of “energies, actions, and materials” so as to make the environment more meaningful for the human beings who inhabit it.

For Dewey, our relationship with our environment is crucial to aesthetic experience. We are a part of our environment – including other human beings – not separate from it. The point of aesthetic experience, in fact, is to renew and reaffirm this relationship. Our environment, however, is characterised by contingency. As a consequence, there is a fundamental strain of contingency that runs through our experience because our experience is inevitably tied to the environment we inhabit. Things change. And we do not have the kind of control over the events and objects of our experience as we might like.

This changefulness, however, is essential to life, as Dewey explains:

Life itself consists of phases in which the organism falls out of step with the march of surrounding things and then recovers unison with it – either through effort or by some happy chance. And, in a growing life, the recovery is never merely return to a prior state, for it is enriched by the state of disparity and resistance through which it has successfully passed. If the gap between organism and environment is too wide, the creature dies. If its activity is not enhanced by the temporary alienation, it merely subsists. Life grows when a temporary falling out is a transition to a more extensive balance of the energies of the organism with those of the conditions under which it lives.\(^7\)

Life, Dewey is essentially arguing, is about adapting to change; life, in order to grow, requires change. Life, Dewey is ultimately saying, is a struggle:

At every moment, the living creature is exposed to dangers from its surroundings, and at every moment, it must draw upon something in its surroundings to satisfy its needs. The career and destiny of a living being are bound up with its interchanges with its environment, not externally but in the most intimate way.8

This notion of life as a struggle accords with Frost’s own perspective regarding the creative potential of “tension” in its various forms. The tension that such struggle creates is not necessarily a destructive force, but a productive one. The struggle compels us towards a higher state of understanding of and integration with our surroundings. The cost of failure to adapt, in one sense, is “subsistence”; the cost of failure in another sense is death. The tension from this “trial by existence” is the source of all aesthetic potential. The “enrichment” that comes from “successfully passing through states of disparity and resistance” can be reproduced through art. Art is imitative, or rather mimetic. Art, our aesthetic experience with art, is an embodiment of this process of “recovering unison” with our environment. Art is not a mere simulacrum of the process; it is the very process of recovery itself.

There is a further parallel between Frost and Dewey on the point of struggle and the phases of disunity worth mentioning. That “life consists of phases in which the organism falls out of step with the march of surrounding things” resonates with Frost’s notion of the breakdown of metaphor. “All metaphors break down somewhere,” Frost has said; this

8 Ibid.
The instability of metaphor “is a very living thing. It is as life itself.” The instability of metaphor is emblematic of these phases of disunity when metaphor, understood as the figurative values and relations of the objects of our experience, “ceases to yield” an actionable understanding of “the march of surrounding things.” The “renewal of words,” then, is emblematic of a “recovery of unison” through a renewed engagement with the metaphoric origins of our language and thought.

Recovery of unison, by whatever means, results, not in an abstract enrichment, but a felt enrichment. The proof of such unison, so to speak, is the attendance of a physical change in the one undergoing the experience. “A more extensive balance of energies,” or “inner harmony,” Dewey says “is attained only when, by some means, terms are made with the environment.” We must “come to terms” with an environment that is marked by contingency and change. “When it occurs” Dewey says of this coming to terms, “on any other than an objective basis, it is illusory – in extreme cases to the point of insanity.” “Fortunately,” he goes on to say “for variety in experience, terms are made in many ways.” Art is not the only way, but it is the most emblematic of human endeavour.

Two things about Dewey’s theory of aesthetic experience resonate with Frost. Firstly, as already mentioned, the essential tension of the struggle for life and its creative potential; and secondly, the notion of “reunion” with the environment through the resolution of that tension in the aesthetic experience. The resolution of this tension in Dewey, however, is much more broadly “environmental” than in Frost’s theory of correspondence. Frost’s theory of correspondence relates specifically to human beings, as Mark Richardson argues: “the

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10 Dewey, Art as Experience, 15.  
11 Ibid.  
12 Ibid.
‘correspondence’ in poetry, in all art […] is by no means the correspondence of the artwork to the world.”\textsuperscript{13} The artwork does not fit “into the nature of the Universe,”\textsuperscript{14} but rather “into the ‘nature’ of people – into the ‘nature’ of the community.”\textsuperscript{15} Human community is constituted at the intersection of our physiological and environmental continuity. It is at this intersection that art is a potential site for the resolution of experiential tension.

It is not an “objective” resolution, however; rather it is an intersubjective one. The aesthetic experience, and more specifically correspondence as an aesthetic experience, is about coming to terms with the human world. Man’s presence in his environment is a part of the environmental tension in which man finds himself. Any resolution of such tension must be a human one. The enrichment of experience, and the “more extensive balance of energies” that results, must also be human. The aesthetic experience is “objective” (that is, bearing a descriptive or explanatory relationship to the world) insofar as the experience has intersubjective meaning. Meaning, that is, that can be shared by a community; a community that is borne out of the physiological – or mimetic – continuity of humanity, and the environmental continuity of that group of individuals that make up a specific community.

The importance of continuity in both aesthetic and everyday experience should not be underestimated. I will return specifically to what is known as Dewey’s “principle of continuity” shortly to fully illustrate this point. Before that, however, I need to turn to another important element of Dewey’s theory that will help to contextualise and exemplify this principle. While there is a struggle for existence in our experience of the environment there is also order and organisation. There is, of course, disorder and disorganisation at times, but, as

\textsuperscript{13} Mark Richardson, \textit{The Ordeal of Robert Frost} (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1997), 150.
\textsuperscript{15} Richardson, \textit{The Ordeal of Robert Frost}, 150.
Dewey has said, “life consists of phases” of order and disorder. Dewey characterises these phases as “rhythmic.” That is, there are patterns of behaviour and activity in ourselves and in our environment that we experience, and our experience of them is rhythmic. Rhythm is an essential component of experience, and it is to rhythm I now turn.

1.2. Rhythm in Nature and Experience

Rhythm is a quality of experience that entails the organisation of the different aspects of that experience into a unified whole. Rhythm entails a particular experience of change in which that change is experienced as coherent, cumulative, and purposeful. Rhythm, Dewey says simply, is the “ordered variation of changes.”16 Rhythm is a quality of the tensions of environmental struggle that merge, so to speak, when there is a balance of energies, building towards a culmination. “Rhythm” as Scott Stroud says, is “the cumulative variation that develops in an orderly fashion that delineates an experience from others, as well as giving that experience its integrated quality.”17 Environmental struggle is not random or chaotic, though it can of course seem that way; rather, it is purposeful and has direction, moving towards a meaningful culmination. When it has this sense of purpose and direction what is experienced is rhythmic; it accumulates toward a denouement.

Such a rhythmic experience is accompanied by a sense of clarity. Clarity, however, that something is happening; that there is accumulation towards culmination. This is not specifically a reference to art, though rhythm definitely exists in art. The rhythmic sense of experience is not limited to art; the aesthetic experience is merely a mimetic adaptation of

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what is an entirely organic experience. Dewey asserts that rhythm is a primary quality of nature itself. Any sense of rhythm in art is derived from this original source:

The first characteristic of the environing world that makes possible the existence of artistic form is rhythm. There is rhythm in nature before poetry, painting, architecture and music exist. Were it not so, rhythm as an essential property of form would be merely superimposed upon material, not an operation through which material effects its own culmination in experience.\(^{18}\)

Rhythm is the property of “the environing world” in terms of the changes that take place within it. Dewey also asserts that rhythm is central to all types of human inquiry, including “astronomy, geology, dynamics, and kinematics” even “mathematics.”\(^{19}\) These fields of inquiry all record or trace the ordered variations of changes in the world. Rhythm pervades all fields of science and all forms of art, and this “common interest,” Dewey argues, “is still the tie which holds science and art in kinship.”\(^{20}\)

“Because rhythm is a universal scheme of existence, underlying all realisation of order in change” Dewey says, “it pervades all the arts, literary, musical, plastic and architectural, as well as […] dance.”\(^{21}\) Dewey goes on to say that “underneath the rhythm of every art and of every work of art there lies, as a substratum in the depths of the subconsciousness, the basic pattern of the relations of the live creature to his environment.”\(^{22}\) These “basic patterns” of relations echo Johnson’s theory of image schemata, which I will discuss in chapter four.

\(^{19}\) Ibid., 155.
\(^{20}\) Ibid., 156.
\(^{21}\) Ibid.
\(^{22}\) Ibid.
The rhythm embodied in art, then, is emblematic of the rhythm that more broadly pervades nature. Our aesthetic experience is, by extension, emblematic of that process whereby “terms are made with the environment.” Rhythm, as such, is also characteristic of our relationship to change, in particular the changefulness of “the environing world.” Art is only possible because we are sensitive to the rhythm of change in nature. Art is indicative of our sensitivity to natural rhythm, but also of our interaction with and use of it:

The very existence of art as an objective phenomenon using natural materials and media is proof that nature signifies nothing less than the whole complex of the results of the interaction of man, with his memories and hopes, understanding and desire.\(^{23}\)

Art, Dewey is saying, is evidence of man’s engagement with his environment. More significantly, art is a unique engagement with this environment. Art is a means of coming to terms with it; furthermore, it is a means of enriching our understanding of, and experience in, our environment.

Earlier, Dewey argued that “life consists of phases in which the organism falls out of step with the march of surrounding things and then recovers unison with it”; for humans, art is a means of this recovery. We are sensitive to these “phases” and experience them as rhythmic; because of this, we can convert this recognition of rhythm into art and further understand our relationship with our environment. Dewey provides a brief explanation of this aesthetic process:

\(^{23}\) Ibid., 158.
The rhythm of loss and integration with environment and recovery of unison not only persists in man but becomes conscious with him; its conditions are material out of which he forms purposes. Emotion is the conscious sign of a break, actual or impending. The discord is the occasion that induces reflection. Desire for restoration of the union converts mere emotion into interest in objects as conditions of realisation of harmony. With the realisation, material of reflection is incorporated into objects as their meaning.  

There are two points in this excerpt that resonate with Frost. Firstly, there is a corollary between the “rhythm of loss and integration” and the dynamic of confusion and self-control in the poetic experience as mapped out in the previous chapter. That is, the dialectical encounter with confusion, the assertion of self-control and the ultimate recovery of self, is a rhythmic experience. Secondly, the assertion that this process “not only persists in man, but becomes conscious with him” is reminiscent of Frost’s statement: “in us nature reaches its height of form and through us exceeds itself.”  

Nature “exceeds itself” in us because we are able to recognise its rhythms, as well as re-create and re-fashion them.

Rhythm as “the ordered variation of changes” also implies accumulation and complexity. This is especially true of rhythm as a quality of experience. Rhythm is not change for change’s sake; it is the ordered variation of changes. This goes to the heart of Dewey’s aesthetics. In contradistinction to Freud, who sees reversion to a prior state as the primary drive of any living thing, Dewey argues for its opposite: growth and greater

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24 Ibid., 14.
Rhythm in “the environing world” is not mere repetition; it is an accumulation of meaning that grows out of the tension and resistance that characterises our changeful world. This is, in essence, the ordering principle of rhythm. There is a Darwinian element to this point. Dewey makes the point that greater complexity entails greater sensitivity to rhythm, and this is the source of aesthetic benefit in us:

As an organism increases in complexity, the rhythms of struggle and consummation in its relation to its environment are varied and prolonged, and they come to include within themselves an endless variety of sub-rhythms. The designs of living are widened and enriched. Fulfilment is more massive and more subtly shaded.

The more complex an organism is the more complex the behaviour it can engage in, within, and toward its environment. It is more sensitive to its environment’s changes, and thus more sensitive and capable of recognising the rhythms of its environment. A more complex organism is also more capable of engaging in its own rhythmic patterns.

Complexity is not limited to the individual organism. Greater complexity entails greater social complexity as well. In the previous chapter, Merlin Donald was cited arguing that mimesis plays a critical role in our “biocultural” evolution, while above I made the point that our rhythmic engagement with nature is mimetic. Donald consolidates the link between rhythm and mimesis, but adds an important caveat that presents a problem for Dewey’s conception of rhythm espoused thus far. “Rhythm,” Donald says “is a uniquely human attribute; no other creature spontaneously tracks and imitates rhythms in the way humans do,

_26_ Dewey takes umbrage with Freud’s theory of the “death instinct,” sometimes referred to as “the Nirvana principle”: “We envisage with pleasure Nirvana and a uniform heavenly bliss only because they are projected upon the background of our present world of stress and conflict.” See page 15. There is an embedded critique of Freud early on in _Art as Experience_. See pages12-17.

_27_ Dewey, _Art as Experience_, 23.
without training.”\textsuperscript{28} “Rhythmic ability is supramodal,” he goes on to say, by which he means that “once a rhythm is established, it may be played out with any motor modality, including the hands, feet, head, mouth, or the whole body.”\textsuperscript{29} Rhythm can be carried, or played out, across the entire body, and is thus fundamentally an embodied phenomenon.

Rhythm is evidence, Donald argues, of a fundamental “mimetic controller,”\textsuperscript{30} an overarching manager of disparate rhythmic operations or modalities, and which “can interrelate the activities of these modalities in an incredibly subtle and rapid manner.”\textsuperscript{31} “Rhythm,” Donald concludes “is, in a sense, the quintessential mimetic skill, requiring the coordination of disparate aspects and modalities of movement.”\textsuperscript{32} However, Donald goes on to say that

Rhythm […] is different from other mimetic devices; it does not directly reproduce, represent, or signify any aspect of the natural world. It has to be regarded as a mimetic game, usually a reciprocal game, which is played for its own sake.\textsuperscript{33}

This is where Donald appears to differ from Dewey. Donald appears to distance man’s rhythmic nature from natural rhythm; however, two points from the above quote soften this apparent difference. Firstly, that rhythm does not signify any aspect of the natural world does not imply that there is no rhythm in nature, or that man is not sensitive to it. Rhythm is supramodal in the sense that it can carry, or be carried across, different modalities of the body. Rhythm is a template or a platform, a means of providing a shared stage for disparate

\textsuperscript{29} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{30} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{31} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{32} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{33} Ibid., 187.
modalities. Rhythm is not content, but the form in which content is blended or conveyed. It is “uniquely human” because of the complex nature of this rhythmic blending of modalities.

Secondly, that rhythm is “a reciprocal game” aligns Donald closer to Frost’s intersubjective correspondence than to Dewey’s aesthetic “environmentalism” highlighted earlier. That is, that the artwork does not fit “into the nature of the Universe,”34 but rather “into the ‘nature’ of people – into the ‘nature’ of the community.”35 Furthermore, this idea of rhythm as a “reciprocal game” resonates with the notion of mimetic rapport: that our intersubjective engagement is not based purely in imitative behaviour, in simply aping the actions of others, but is grounded in transactions and reciprocations between community members or participants. While humans can, indeed, mimic one another, we can go beyond mere mimicry: we can vary the rhythm through changing the pattern of our actions. Rhythm, the reciprocal game of human rhythm, is emblematic of this fact.

Frost’s theory of correspondence then, is not merely mimetic, but is a form of mimetic rapport. It is, as such, rhythmic in that it plays across the different modalities of the human body, which can be imitated or mimicked by any other body that is similarly constituted and orientated. Furthermore, and quite importantly, the rhythm of correspondence can be varied by its participants. Correspondence is not unthinking imitation, but a form of participation in which a mutual experience can be transmitted between similarly constituted and orientated participants rhythmically. Regarding the act of reading (in general), for instance, Donald observes that

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34 Frost, “Remarks on Receiving the Gold Medal,” 779.
35 Richardson. *The Ordeal of Robert Frost*, 150.
Reading seldom achieves what either author or reader originally intended […].
Instead it elicits an intuition of possible knowledge and provides a motive force to move the imagination in a certain direction.\textsuperscript{36}

“It hints” he says, in a point that coalesces with Frost’s and Dewey’s aesthetics, “at possibilities, at novel states of being that we might, with luck and hard work, attain, if only for a moment.”\textsuperscript{37} Rhythm is critical to the suggestiveness of meaning as it facilitates the “hints and suggestions” of the poetic experience. Correspondence is predicated on the embodied capacity for similarly constituted entities to mimic, and by mimicking understand, each other’s behaviour. But it is always an imperfect mimesis; what is more, variations can be made to any imitated behaviour, changing the rhythm, or the pattern, of mimetic exchange.

Central to why “reading seldom achieves what either author or reader originally intended” is the frailty of language. James commented on the problems of language in the previous chapter, and later in this chapter I will draw upon Dewey’s argument regarding the problems of language. Dewey’s argument accords with James, but he takes it further, arguing that language cannot “reduplicate” experience; that its primary purpose is to direct us toward an experience. This resonates with both Donald and Frost. It is this failure to reduplicate experience that is critical to its potential to “hint at possibilities” and “novel states of being.” Language has a rhythm because it is predicated on human speech, which is in turn grounded in human embodiment and physiological processes. Dewey ultimately gives “literature” a special status among the arts because of this relationship with human sound. I will argue that poetry holds a special status among the literary arts because of its peculiar relationship to human sound.

\textsuperscript{36} Merlin Donald, \textit{A Mind so Rare: The Evolution of Human Consciousness} (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2002), 275.
\textsuperscript{37} Ibid.
While Dewey and Donald appear to be at odds over the nature of rhythm – or natural rhythm – it nonetheless serves as a kind of “carriage service” for human experience that is grounded in human embodiment. Whether conceived as a mimetic engagement with nature or a mimetic game with others, rhythm is inherent to human expression and communication. Rhythm is the basis for correspondence because it is mimetic in origin, and therefore intersubjective. Rhythm, as evidence of a “mimetic controller,” provides a platform for other mimetic capacities, such as those related to “prosodic mimetic skill,”38 which is a more specific form of mimesis. In the previous chapter, I quoted Donald’s argument that language has “mimetic roots,” which suggests the connection between language, prosody, and more pervasive mimetic engagement, of which rhythm is evidence. Later in this chapter, Dewey asserts a “principle of continuity,” and subsequently a theory of language and sound, that will consolidate the relationship between language, rhythm, embodiment and the environment. Closer analysis of Dewey’s aesthetic and experiential theory will demonstrate that he and Donald are in broader agreement than so far suggested.

1.2.1. “An Experience”

Rhythm, however conceived, is the quality of a unified experience. Our “normal” experience is disjointed, plagued by countless interruptions and distractions, but “an experience,”39 an aesthetic experience, is uniquely qualified by unity. As Dewey says:

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38 Donald, Origins of the Modern Mind, 187.
39 When referring to a unified or aesthetic experience as distinct from ordinary experience, Dewey often italicizes it as “an experience.” This typographical device has since been used in subsequent scholarship and will be used throughout this discussion.
An experience has a unity that gives it its name, that meal, that storm, that rupture of friendship. The existence of this unity is constituted by a single quality that pervades the entire experience in spite of the variation of its constituent parts.  

Rhythm is the quality of that unified experience. It is not simply an amalgamation of “constituent parts” into a unified whole; the experience of wholeness is pervasive. The rhythmic aesthetic experience is an experience of continuous unfolding, accumulating towards culmination. “In such experiences” Dewey says, “every successive part flows freely, without seam and without unfilled blanks, into what ensues.” “Because of continuous merging” Dewey goes on to say, “there are no holes, mechanical junctions, and dead centres when we have an experience. There are pauses, places of rest, but they punctuate and define the quality of movement.” An experience, an aesthetic experience, is one in which we feel the gathering momentum of events, not simply as some monolithic, vague wholeness, but as a series of changes that belong to the continuum of changes. Thomas Alexander sums up this point:

The primary feature of an experience is that it is an affair of temporal development. Not only is there progression, but there is progressive integration which gathers the temporal phases together as belonging, relating to each other, sustaining and interacting with each other in a tensive, dramatic unity so that there is a cumulative sense of an overall event being accomplished or brought to completion. Each phase or moment must be grasped as a phase or part of a larger whole; the sense of the whole must be present in the parts.

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41 Ibid., 37.
42 Ibid., 38.
Again, at the root of the rhythmic experience is the relationship between part and whole. Not only a relationship, but an interpenetration, as Alexander says “the sense of the whole must be present in the parts.” Dewey calls this the “pervasive operative presence,” which I will address later in this chapter.

Rhythm in art is built on the successful recreation of part-whole relations and structures in the art-product. That is, rhythm is the presence of an integration of parts in the constitution of the whole. This presence is experienced as whole through the “temporal development” and accumulation of those parts towards dénouement. This arc of development entails the building of tension, through suspense and expectation, and subsequent release at the point of culmination. The relationship of those parts is what produces the tension and the “energy” which propels the reader or audience forward. The rise and fall of tension is rhythmic and produces the effect of accumulation: “each beat, in differentiating a part within the whole, adds to the force of what went before while creating a suspense that is a demand for something to come.” Dewey also describes this process as a “quickening” that brings together the past, present, and future in a single experience. One does not experience each “beat” of rhythmic progress separately, but in relation to the other beats that have built up at any given point, and the beats that this accumulation promises yet to come.

This “quickening” is analogous to the way a poem works. As the American poet Stephen Dobyns says, “it is the momentum of language that carries us along, while both form

45 Dewey, Art as Experience, 161.
46 Ibid., 17.
and content create further energy and expectation to propel us through the poem.\footnote{Stephen Dobyns, “Pacing: The Way a Poem Moves,” in \textit{Best Words, Best Order: Essays on Poetry}, 2nd ed. (1996; repr., New York: Palgrave-Macmillan, 2003), 137.} “The poet,” Dobyns says, “must imagine the reader picking up the poem, looking at it, reading the first line, then deciding to read the second. He or she must imagine the reader moving from indifference to curiosity to interest to anticipation.”\footnote{Ibid., 132.} Meaning accumulates through this process because the “momentum of language” and the transition from “indifference” to “anticipation” are a part of the embodied meaning-making process. That is, the reader is not passively waiting for meaning to be revealed, his anticipation is self-fulfilling in the sense that by reading the poem – riding the momentum of language, so to speak – he is making the meaning. This rhythmic quickening is a felt dynamic of the poetic experience.

Before dealing with poetry in terms of aesthetic experience and environmental relations, I will examine a few more of Dewey’s ideas that are important to understanding his aesthetic theory. Two ideas are of particular importance, namely, his “principle of continuity” and his notion of “body-mind.” These ideas, however, are not explicit in Dewey’s aesthetic theory; they come from elsewhere in his body of work. Nevertheless, these ideas are central to his aesthetic theory. I have already mentioned continuity in terms of physiological and environmental continuity; Dewey’s principle of continuity is the very thing that underpins this aspect of his aesthetic theory. Dewey’s notion of “body-mind” on the other hand, is pertinent to the physiological continuity in our experience.
1.3. Dewey’s Principle of Continuity

Dewey’s principle of continuity extends from his naturalistic aesthetics, but is more wide-ranging than aesthetics. While *Logic: The Theory of Inquiry*,49 in which Dewey’s most significant statements on the principle of continuity appear, was published after *Art as Experience*, it can be seen that the principle of continuity underpins much of Dewey’s aesthetics. The principle of continuity pertains more to a “naturalistic logic” than to aesthetics, but the relationship between the two will be made clear.

The principle of continuity, at its most basic, pertains to organic development, most notably in terms of biological development, but also experiential development. That is, there is a continuum of growth and movement, whether in our evolution or our experience, where less complex states lead to more complex states. No extraneous influence, so the logic of the argument goes, should be needed to account for the trajectory of growth or development. Understanding the principle of continuity, then, and applying the principle to our understanding of the relations, primarily between body and brain and environment, is crucial to understanding the notion of the embodied experience of poetry.

In Dewey’s own words:

The primary postulate of a naturalistic theory of logic is continuity of the lower (less complex) and the higher (more complex) activities and forms. The idea of continuity is not self-explanatory. But its meaning excludes complete rupture on one side and mere repetition of identities on the other; it precludes reduction of the “higher” to the

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“lower” just as it precludes breaks and gaps. The growth and development of any living organism from seed to maturity illustrates the meaning of continuity.\(^{50}\)

While Dewey is talking about a theory of logic, the “primary postulate” of continuity applies to all forms of understanding and experience. To violate the principle of continuity in, say, aesthetics would be to violate an important underlying force of unity in our experience. The principle of continuity reflects the emphasis on accumulation. Furthermore, continuity is compatible with part-whole relations, particularly with regard to the interpenetrative nature of meaning. This will be particularly important to note when I come to address Frost’s “synecdochic perspective” shortly. While the part might “stand for the whole,” the part can only stand for the whole as such if the meaning of the whole is present in the part. The emphasis on a part is not reductive in such an instance; rather, it allows the unfolding of the meaning of the whole from a particular point of focus. This allows for variation in the experience of meaning, while remaining faithful to the continuity between “lesser” part and “greater” whole.

Dewey says elsewhere of continuity, particularly as it applies to “rational operations” in relation to “organic activities,” that “rational operations grow out of organic activities, without being identical with that from which they emerge.”\(^{51}\) This is characteristic of the relationship between the body and the brain. The rational operations of the brain emerge from the organic activities of the body; the former is not reducible to the latter, but the latter is indispensable to the former. Dewey goes on to say, most importantly:

\(^{50}\) Ibid., 23.  
\(^{51}\) Ibid.
There is an adjustment of means to consequences in the activities of living creatures, even though not directed by deliberate purpose. Human beings in the ordinary or ‘natural’ processes of living come to make these adjustments purposely, the purpose being limited at first to local situations as they arise. In the course of time […] the intent is so generalised that inquiry is freed from limitation to special circumstances.\(^52\)

Continuity here takes on an experiential colouring. Continuity is driven by accumulating purpose; not, however, by teleology. It is in the normal processes of living that we track our adjustments to contingent stimuli. Our experience becomes more complex, or richer, by virtue of the continuity and accumulation of our engagement with the world around us. While, as Dewey says, these “purposeful adjustments” are limited and localised at first, the intent moves in “wider circles,” so to speak, and become more generalised.

Mark Johnson consolidates two important facets of Dewey’s principle of continuity that are worth considering here. Regarding “continuity” Johnson says

Dewey employs at least two different senses of the term. Higher-lower continuity is the twofold claim that “higher” organisms are not the result of some additional ontological kind emerging in the history of the world, and also that our “higher” self (reason, will) is not utterly different in kind from our “lower” self (perception, emotion, imagination). Inner-outer continuity is the denial that what is inner (e.g., mental) needs ontological principles for its explanation that are different from those used to explain the outer (e.g., the physical).\(^53\)

\(^52\) Ibid.

Higher-lower and inner-outer continuity form what could be considered a matrix of continuity. That is, roughly speaking, there is an intersection of higher-lower and inner-outer continuity that emerges most acutely in the human being. Our more complex operations are continuous with, though accumulated from and not reducible to, less complex operations (still present today in less complex organisms). These operations, essentially “mental” operations, are not fundamentally separate from our more physical operations.

1.3.1. Part-Whole Continuity

I would add a third kind of continuity that is implicit in Dewey’s principle: that of part-whole continuity. By part-whole continuity I mean that the parts of a whole are dynamically integrated in the processes in and of that whole. The most obvious example of this continuity extends from the focal point of the two other forms of continuity mentioned above: the human body. The parts of the human body are constituents of the whole, but it is the dynamic activity of these various parts that characterise the living human being. The whole is not simply the sum of its parts. The various parts of the body can, of course, be classified according to function and the various “systems” to which they contribute. What is more, they can be classified according to their emergence in human evolution. The brain is a particularly fruitful example of functional and evolutionary classification. Nevertheless, human embodiment is a dynamic process extending from these aspects or systems of the human body, but is not simply reducible to them.

Part-whole continuity is implicit in aesthetic experience. Rhythm is produced through the relations of part and whole, as well as between parts, in what Dewey calls the “reciprocal
interpretation of parts and whole.”

By “reciprocal interpretation” Dewey means that the parts of the whole stand in a dynamic relationship to one another, not as isolable parts; there is an accumulation of meaning in this reciprocal transaction of meaning. Such parts, Dewey says, “stand in rhythmic connection” to one another, which “reinforce one another as variations that build up as an integrated complex experience.”

To quote Alexander again: “each phase or moment must be grasped as a phase or part of a larger whole; the sense of the whole must be present in the parts.” An experience – an experience – is “intelligible” to the degree that this “reciprocal interpretation” “renders individuality of parts and their relationship in the whole” accessible to the perceiver.

Aesthetic experience, as such, is grounded in the reciprocal interpretation of part-whole continuity, which entails the accumulation of that experience as “an integrated complex experience.” Of aesthetic experience Dewey has said: “there are no holes, mechanical junctions, and dead centres when we have an experience.” While of continuity he said: “it precludes reduction of the ‘higher’ to the ‘lower’ just as it precludes breaks and gaps.” An aesthetic experience, then, is an experience of continuity in which the constituent parts of that experience are integrated in such a way that there is fluid cumulative motion towards an end. Such an experience is not reducible to the sum of its parts; rather, it is the peculiar synergy of their relations that constitutes the experience.

Part-whole continuity is a characteristic of numerous other systems, processes, or relations, including man and his environment, the body and its parts, man and his community.

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54 Dewey, *Art as Experience*, 177.
55 Ibid.
57 Dewey, *Art as Experience*, 221.
58 Ibid., 38.
These are not isolated part-whole systems of relations. As whole systems of relations, they bear further relations to each other. The body and its parts, as a whole man, for instance, is a part of his environment as well as his community. To take this analysis further, it can be seen that the environment is “present in the parts” of the body. For instance, evolutionary pressures have caused a great leap in the development of the human brain. Furthermore, different parts of the brain have evolved at different times. Man’s relationship to his community is also changed by having a more complex brain.

The part-whole relationship of art and the human world is merely an extension of this complex network of relations. What is more, art-products are constituted through the part-whole relations of the materials they use. In trying to “restore continuity” between aesthetic and everyday experience, Dewey is simply reasserting the interpenetration and continuity of these different domains of human activity. That is, aesthetic experience is grounded equally as much as everyday experience in the constitution of the human body and its orientation within its environment. This environment includes the human community, and this community is possible because of the physiological continuity between human bodies.

Art is a part of the human experience in its environment. Art is a shared experience because it emerges from the shared capacities of human embodiment. As such, art is a part of the human community. As Stephen Dobyns puts it “art helps establish community, it takes us out of our isolation and helps us to see ourselves in relation to the physical, emotional, spiritual, and intellectual world around us.” Aesthetic experience is that process whereby continuity is not only re-affirmed with the broadly human environment, but renews our engagement with and understanding of it. Art, as a part of this broader human whole, is a

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means of reflecting upon and renewing the part we play in our environment and community. There is a “looping” dynamic implied in this process: that the aesthetic experience returns us to a more fundamental mode of understanding. I will take up this idea, however, in chapter three.

1.3.2. Synecdochism

This analysis of part-whole continuity reveals an important correlation between Dewey and Frost that can be extrapolated by looking at an element of Frost’s poetics that has only been hinted at thus far: his “synecdochic perspective,” sometimes referred to as his “synecdochism.” Simply put, synecdoche, that figure of speech where the part stands for the whole, is taken to a much more pervasive, philosophical, level with Frost. In this section, I will explain and analyse Frost’s synecdochism. I will demonstrate its grounding in part-whole relations and the resonance of Frost’s synecdochism with Dewey’s principle of continuity more broadly. Analysis of Frost’s synecdochism will provide an over-arching perspective, or prism through which to view the theory of poetic experience as argued here, rendering it a more cohesive theory.

Frost’s synecdochism, as a philosophical perspective or “world-view,” has a number of implications. Firstly, it pertains to the presence of “samples” in poetry, that is, the objects of experience employed in the poem that stand for, and therefore are suggestive of, larger bodies or entities, their relations and values. Similarly, poems themselves can be seen as parts that are suggestive of the larger whole of poetry; as Frost has said, “a poem is best read in light of every other poem every written.” Frost’s synecdochism also encapsulates the metaphoric nature of correspondence as I have been arguing in this thesis: the reader stands
for every other reader in mimicking the poem. Frost’s synecdochism can also be seen to encapsulate the embeddedness of man in, or as a part of, the environment. Frost’s synecdochism is a useful tool, at least in a contextualising sense, for understanding Dewey’s task of restoring continuity between aesthetic and everyday experience.

Synecdoche, George Lakoff and Mark Johnson tell us, is a special kind of metonymy, a figure of speech that is related to metaphor. Metonymy, they explain, uses “one entity to refer to another that is related to it”\(^61\); while with synecdoche “the part stands for the whole.”\(^62\) Lakoff and Johnson argue that while metonymy and metaphor are “different kinds of processes,” they are, nevertheless, processes that pertain to relations amongst objects and people. Both allow entities to stand in relation to other entities, and in relation to a broader environment of entities. Synecdoche, as a special kind of metonymy, allows for a unique perspective on the relations between parts and the whole, particularly as it pertains to human beings.

Synecdoche, as a figure of speech and a philosophical perspective, is central for Frost; he even calls himself a “synecdochist”: “I started calling myself a synecdochist when others called themselves imagists or vorticists,”\(^63\) Elizabeth Sergeant quotes him as saying. As Reginald Cook explains, “He preferred to call himself ‘a synecdochist,’ realising […] the importance of the part to suggest the whole.”\(^64\) Sergeant, again, quotes Frost as saying:

\(^{62}\) Ibid., 36.
I believe in what Greeks called synecdoche: the philosophy of the part for the whole; skirting the hem of the goddess. All that an artist needs is samples. Enough success to know what money is like; enough love to know what women are like.\footnote{Elizabeth Shepley Sergeant, “Robert Frost: A Good Greek out of New England,” in\textit{ The New Republic}, 30\textsuperscript{th} September 1925, 144.}

Elsewhere, he writes “A little of anything goes a long way in art, […] a little in the fist to manipulate is all I ask.”\footnote{Robert Frost to Sidney Cox, 19\textsuperscript{th} September 1929, in \textit{Frost: Collected Poems, Prose, and Plays}, ed. Richard Poirier and Mark Richardson (New York: The Library of America. 1995), 715.} Frost is talking about the figures he uses in his poetry, the “samples” he uses “to manipulate” in crafting a poem. Frost defends his right to these poetic samples: “I needn’t qualify as a specialist in botany and astronomy for a license to invoke flowers and stars in my poetry.”\footnote{Ibid., 714.} The same applies to the reader. “Samples” are all a reader needs, and are far more conducive to “getting another poetic something going” than “an undertaking to tell all to the last scrapings of the brain pan.”\footnote{Ibid.} Poetic sampling, then, is at the heart of the “preparation for suggestiveness” that constitutes our “education in metaphor.”

“Samples” are both the reader’s and the writer’s foothold into an experience in poetry. The poem itself, furthermore, is a sample, both of poetry at large and a sample of metaphor-making. Poetry, to reiterate, is an education in metaphor, and metaphor permeates our experience and understanding of the world around us. We are in the world (the environment) and a part of it; it is also a part of us. Our understanding of the world, furthermore, shapes the meaningfulness of the world. That is, the world we live in is a human world, and while the influence of the environment is present in us – as Dewey says its “pervasive operative presence” – we are present in the meaning of the world: our understanding of the world stands for the world we live in.
This is, essentially, a reference to metaphor and the figurative values and relations that emerge from our ongoing metaphoric processes. Our understanding of the world is a map or model of values and relations, what one would more generally call a belief-system. This is a metaphoric projection of values and relations. Any given object that is significant enough to carry some kind of value (in chapter three, this kind of valuation, I will argue, is predominantly emotional), resonates with relations to other objects throughout that model. The value of an object is not isolated, but is connected to a larger set of objects. This strikes a familiar Jamesian note, for this is the basis of James’s postulation of a “fringe of affinities” or relations. Any given object resonates with values and relations, and is immersed in the wider network of affinities that makes one’s world meaningful.

A “poetic sample” is suggestive of larger meaning when it strikes the right chord in relation to this larger fringe of affinities. A poem, to reiterate Frost’s earlier point, “is best read in the light of every other poem” so as to enhance the potential for such resonances. A poem is also read in the light of one’s accumulation of metaphoric values and relations. In the latter instance, this is, as I argued in chapter one, the basis of the “metaphoric test” in the poetic experience. The value of an object of experience is emblematic of the wider network of values in which it is found.

Any object that is meaningful to us, therefore, is only meaningful in relation to its larger fringe of affinities. The task of the poet is to affect this resonance. Frost has said as much, where he says that the job of the poet is “never to tell [the reader] something they
don’t know, but something they know and hadn’t thought of saying.” Elsewhere he says, the “delight is in the surprise of remembering something I didn’t know I knew.” There is an element of uncanniness that characterises the poetic experience in which familiarity gives way to something hitherto unknown, but which, in a reciprocal way, each sheds light on the other. Norman Holland captures the point: “Frost uses small knowns to call forth and manage big unknowns.” This is a synecdochic dynamic.

“Small knowns,” or samples, are a means of inviting the reader into the poem to come to terms with a larger unknown. This is implicit in the quote by Frost in the previous chapter where he talks about the virtues of form, the “lesser forms” that save us from the “larger excruciations.” Form, in poetry, and more broadly in life, is a synecdochic mechanism for imparting human values in a world that threatens us with a lack of meaning. The poem itself is a figure for this larger “predicament” we are faced with in life: “every poem is an epitome of the great predicament; a figure of the will braving alien entanglements.” The poem, and the poetic experience more broadly, is a means of mediating, if not ameliorating, this predicament by testing and renewing our metaphoric understanding of the world.

The poem as a figure that epitomises the great human predicament is a strong theme in Frost’s synecdochism. The “figure a poem makes” stands for a larger engagement with nature and the human world; it “begins in delight and ends in wisdom,” as Frost has said.

George Bagby deconstructs this famous line to illustrate its synecdochic implications:

73 Frost, “The Figure a Poem Makes,” 777.
“The figure” – a word that may mean both underlying metaphor or synecdoche and underlying structure – which “a poem makes” begins in the “delight” of observing a particular object or scene or action; it ends in the “wisdom” of grasping the larger human insight of which the observed phenomenon is the partial embodiment.  

The “wisdom” that follows the “delight” is the “clarification of life,” the “momentary stay against confusion.” But the poem is also “a figure of the will braving alien entanglements.” It is a penetration into a larger unknown, so as to “come to terms” with it. It is an experience of immersion, and not of static concepts or categories.

Synecdoche, for Frost, provides a way of understanding the relationships of the individual amongst larger wholes, such as the community, the world, or the universe. It represents the human will braving alien entanglements in order to come to terms with these larger excruciations, albeit momentarily. As Judith Oster states, synecdoche, for Frost, is a “worldview.” This is only because, to requote Frost, “in us nature reaches its height of form and through us exceeds itself.” The focal point of a synecdochic worldview must be the human being, through whom the potential of the relationship between part and whole is made conscious.

Synecdoche implies a larger meaning than the one that is given. This is, arguably, its most important element, because through a synecdochic perspective one is located in the midst of unfolding meaning. This is an experience with metaphor; for even when we understand what is before us, there is always the suggestion of something larger of which it

is, and we are, a part. It is the same with poetry, including the act of reading poetry, as Oster points out: “the way we take the poem, the poem as synecdoche in a larger meaning, the act of reading that poem as synecdoche in the larger act of reading poems, and beyond that, in finding meanings or, better yet, meaning – this too is synecdochic.”76 The act of reading is itself synecdochic. While the poem stands in relation to every other poem ever written, it can equally be said that the reader stands in relation to every other reader. The synecdochic act of reading, therefore, is an act of correspondence. Or rather, correspondence is synecdochic.

The poem is the figure of this convergence, and the poetic experience is a sample of this convergence. Correspondence in the poetic experience is achieved by virtue of the rhythmic processes in which we participate, originating in our mimetic engagement with the poem and reverberating throughout the body. The denouement of correspondence is metaphoric and synecdochic, but thoroughly embodied by virtue of the underlying rhythm of the experience. Rhythm, that is, not simply that of the lyrical rhythm of the poem, but the rhythmic change that takes place in the body itself, which self-recital initiates.

The reader, in the act of self-recital, embodies the larger rhythms of nature in the poetic experience. This is what the body is conditioned to do: to respond and adapt to the rhythms of its environment, a component of which is the ability to mimic natural rhythms. This is further indication of the “operative presence” of the environment within the body. Rhythm permeates our experience through an interpenetration of natural and physiological rhythms. While Donald ostensibly disagrees with Dewey that rhythm does not directly “signify any aspect of the natural world,” Donald’s position can be seen to be more sympathetic with Frost’s primarily intersubjective position espoused earlier, as “a mimetic

76 Ibid., 59.
game […] a reciprocal game, played for its own sake.” Rhythm is human regardless, whether it is “uniquely human” or an extension of natural rhythm, and is, as such, intersubjective.

The three kinds of continuity discussed here are related. “As an organism increases in complexity,” so increases the complexity of its relations, in terms of “inner-outer,” “higher-lower,” and “part-whole.” The parts of that organism, the relationship between its parts, become more complex. The human brain is the perfect example of this. The relationship between the “inner” world of the organism and the “outer” world of its environment, furthermore, become more complex because more interaction between the two is possible. The less complex, or “lower,” aspects of the organism are not supplanted in favour of the “higher” more complex ones; the higher are, in fact, built on top of the lower. Those higher aspects, however, are not reducible to the lower aspects.

Inner-outer continuity further entails that what is higher remains interpenetrated with the environment to the same extent that the lower aspects are, out of which the higher aspects emerge. That is, simply because something is higher, or more “exalted,” like the human brain, it does not mean that it is further removed from the demands and pressures of the environment than lower aspects. In fact, as I will show, Dewey argues for a body-based understanding of the brain, or mind, in what he calls the “body-mind.” The mind is embedded in the body, which is embedded in the environment. The mind, as such, is a part of the body, which is a part of the environment. Conversely, the environment is encoded in the body and the mind, because the body evolved in its environment, and especially in response to the threats and opportunities of its environment. The “inner” world of the mind is related to the “outer” world of the environment, and subsequently is a “part” of that larger “whole.” The “higher” aspects of the mind are continuous with the “lower” aspects of the body.
Before moving on to deal with language and poetry in the context of aesthetic experience, one further element of Dewey’s work must be introduced and explained: his notion of “body-mind.” Body-mind encapsulates Dewey’s principle of continuity, particularly in terms of “higher-lower” continuity. Understanding what Dewey means by body-mind will help to consolidate the point that experience is embodied, and that this is the source of all higher understanding. Aesthetic and poetic experience, as such, is grounded in the continuity that Dewey’s notion of body-mind encapsulates. Dewey’s notion of body-mind, in fact, precedes both his aesthetic theory and his principle of continuity, and it can be seen as a precursor in the development of both arguments. What is more, it can be seen as central to Dewey’s “task” of restoring continuity between everyday and aesthetic experience.

1.4. “Body-Mind”

Dewey’s postulation of body-mind arises in response to the Cartesian separation of body and mind. Dewey seeks a unified understanding of the body and mind in the organism. One may talk about the brain and its various parts and one may talk about the body and its various parts, but it must always be against the background of the whole organism. Those “parts” are necessarily implicated in the activity of the organism within its environment. The term body-mind, Dewey explains “simply designates what actually takes place when a living body is implicated in situations of discourse, communication, and participation.”77 Body-mind, then, is the emergent quality of one’s being in the environment, acting upon it and being acted upon by it.

Body-mind pertains explicitly to embodiment, not just to the dynamic nature of the body and its internal processes, but of embodiment in the environment. The implication of body-mind in a situation goes to the very essence of embodiment. Dewey elaborates on his notion of “body-mind,” which helps to explain the integrated nature of embodiment:

In the hyphenated phrase body-mind, “body” designates the continued and conserved, the registered and cumulative operation of factors continuous with the rest of nature, inanimate as well as animate; while “mind” designates the characters and consequences which are differential, indicative of features which emerge when “body” is engaged in a wider, more complex and interdependent situation.78

The seeds of continuity are present in Dewey’s explanation of body-mind. Of particular note is the emphasis on organisation, both within the body and with regard to the situations that engender body-mind activity. By organisation it is meant, in line with the fundamental tenets of the principle of continuity, that there is a serial progression from lower to higher order objects and events. The “mind” is not reducible to the processes of the “body,” but it is “indicative of features which emerge when body is engaged in a wider complex and interdependent situation.” There can be no disembodied mind; neither can there be a “situation” without a mind to register it as such. The fact that a situation or an experience occurs is evidence of the mind recognising a pattern of objects and events unfolding that are of consequence to, and therefore acting upon, the body.

Continuity is as much a defining aspect of a body-minded organism in its environment as it is characteristic of the experience and motivations of a body-minded

78 Ibid.
organism in its environment. There is not only continuity, but organisation. Organisation is perhaps a stronger word because it implies part-whole continuity. The root-word of organisation, as well as organism, being “organ,” organisation thus pertains to dynamic relations among constituent parts in order to produce a functioning whole. It is not the ideal of a functioning whole towards which the parts are intelligibly directed, rather a functioning whole – whether it’s a plant, an animal, or an ecosystem – is a result of the interactions of its parts and the “work” that they do together. Dewey sums up this complex interdependence and foreshadows some of its consequences:

Whenever the activities of the constituent parts of an organised pattern of activity are of such a nature as to conduce to the perpetuation of the patterned activity, there exists the basis of sensitivity. Each “part” of an organism is itself organised, and so of the “parts” of the part. Hence its selective bias in interactions with environing things is exercised so as to maintain itself, while also maintaining the whole of which it is a member. The root-tips of a plant interact with chemical properties of the soil in such ways as to serve organised life activity; and in such ways as to exact from the rest of the organism their own share of requisite nutrition. This pervasive operative presence of the whole in the part and of the part in the whole constitutes susceptibility – the capacity of feeling – whether or no this potentiality be actualised in plant life. 79

We can understand what Dewey means by sensitivity and susceptibility in terms of sensitivity and susceptibility to the “rhythm,” the “order variations of changes” in one’s embodied experience. Our sensitivity, or capacity, to feel the changes in the world around us are characteristic of our “situatedness.” This is because we are sensitive to the changes in our

79 Ibid., 256.
environment. Changes, that is, in the environment have an effect on us. We not only recognise these changes, we form patterns of activity from them that are significant to our experience and understanding of the world around us. We are susceptible to those changes; we feel them. It is because we feel them that they are significant. And it is because we are susceptible and sensitive to the changes in our environment that we are intimately a part of it.

The presence of mind is proof of an organisational relationship between organism and environment: “Every ‘mind’ that we are empirically acquainted with” Dewey says, “is found in connection with some organised body. Every such body exists in a natural medium to which it sustains some adaptive connection.” Mind is the consciousness of the environment in which, as Frost says, “nature reaches its height of form and through us exceeds itself.” But this is only the case because of the connection between mind and environment via the body.

In *Art as Experience*, Dewey insists that “mind is primarily a verb. It denotes all the ways in which we deal consciously and expressly with the situations in which we find ourselves.” Mind, understood “primarily as a verb,” helps to re-affirm the connection between mind and body, and indeed mind and environment. Mind is active and immersed in the body and environment. Dewey gives a few examples of mind-as-verb:

It signifies memory. We are reminded of this and that. Mind also signifies attention. We not only keep things in mind, but we bring mind to bear on our problems and perplexities. Mind also signifies purpose; we have a mind to do this and that. […] Mind is care in the sense of solicitude, anxiety, as well as of active looking after

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80 Ibid., 277-78.
things that need to be tended; we mind our step, our course of action, emotionally as well as thoughtfully.\textsuperscript{82}

Mind is deeply implicated in the processes, or rhythms, of the body, which is in turn, deeply implicated in the rhythms of the environment. Nature “becomes conscious with” and “exceeds itself” in the activities of the mind, because through the activities of the mind the rhythms of nature are taken up in its meaning-making processes. The rhythms of the mind use the rhythms and materials of nature, which in turn changes the meaning of those natural rhythms and materials for the organism. Mind, it can be argued, is the activity whereby susceptibility and sensitivity to rhythm becomes conscious, in which the minded entity, mindful of its susceptibility and sensitivity, engages in the rhythms of change.

Mind, while it is emergent in and because of the body, does not simply register environmental changes, but responds to them. More simply, the mind responds to situations; closing the “loop” of continuity, so to speak. We are not just continuous in terms of our physical make-up and the evolution of our physical being, but we are continuous with the environment. This is a simplified way to understand the complex dynamic activity of body-mind in its environment, but our capacity for complex and rich experience extends from the interdependence and interpenetration of our body, mind, and the world we live in.

Mind-as-verb is also synecdochic. More so, mind-as-verb is embodied in a synecdochic way. That is, the mind represents to itself the environment the body-mind inhabits; furthermore, it represents the activities of the body-mind in its environment. The mind-as-verb is the locus of embodied participation in the environment, but also, as Dewey

\textsuperscript{82} Ibid., 274.
has said, “memory”; memory of past activity as well as the accumulation of activity. The mind-as-verb, as such, is intimately involved in the “quickening” of “past, present, and future” in experience, both aesthetic and everyday. This notion of the mind as synecdochic locus of embodied meaning-making will be addressed in greater detail in subsequent chapters; in chapter three, for instance, when I address Antonio Damasio’s theory of embodied emotion and in chapter four when I address Mark Johnson’s theory of image schemata.

The mind has organic roots in the body. By virtue of these roots, the mind is continuous with its environment. Problems arise, however, when these roots are denied, separating the mind from the body to produce two separate arenas of activity. For instance, there is the problem of how the body and mind interact, but there is also the problem of how separate minds interact as well. These problems have implications for other aspects of human activity, such as language. If minds and bodies are separate, then the role of language in communication is thrown into doubt. I will discuss this problem when I come to address Dewey’s notion of compartmentalisation later in this chapter. Language has mimetic roots, and the mind has organic roots; the body in its environment is the locus for both. Dewey’s aesthetic theory, and his philosophy more broadly, is aimed at reuniting the body and mind in experience.

The mind, by virtue of its continuity with the body, is continuous with the environment. What the mind does, as such, is mimetic with regard to its environment, and what we might call its content is emblematic of the actions and events in which the body-mind takes part. Our ability to continue to act successfully in our environment is predicated on our capacity to generate models or patterns of experience that yield actionable options.
These models or patterns are grounded in the values and relations that constitute our worldview or belief-system, and as such are generated through embodied experience and tested metaphorically, both against subsequent experience, or, in the case of aesthetic experience, abstractly.

Language, ultimately, is the extension of our metaphoric processes and patterns into an abstract arena. Language, then, is continuous with the “lower order” processes of the body, most obviously those aspects of the physiology that contribute to the making of vocal sounds, the lungs, the throat, and the mouth. Poetic experience is synecdochic, even in this physiological connection; the “renewal of words,” which aims to reengage words with their “metaphoric origins,” pertains to the mimetic mechanisms from which language emerges, in short, what Donald called our “prosodic mimetic skill.” Language is facilitated by our ability to imitate and mimic each other; the words we use are symbolic of this mimetic facilitation. The renewal of words is a renewal of their metaphoric as well as their mimetic roots, as I will soon show.

In the next section, I will argue that language is, in fact, proof of our embodied continuity. This is important to consider because later in this chapter I will turn to Dewey’s argument that literature as an artistic genre have a special status because of language. It stands to reason that if, as Dewey says his task is to “restore continuity” between aesthetic and everyday experience, and if aesthetic experience is predicated on the interactions between man and environment, and, furthermore, if literature and poetry have an exalted status among the arts by virtue of their “medium” (that is, language), then there must be continuity between language and the embodied basis of aesthetic experience.
2.1. Language and the Organic Roots of the Mind

Denying mind its organic roots, separating it from its body and its environment, poses two important questions. One question relates to how disembodied minds interact with one another; the other relates to aesthetic experience. If minds are not continuous with bodies and environments, a mechanism needs to be introduced to explain how minds interact with one another. If minds are isolated entities in the head, then the nature of experience, and furthermore aesthetic experience, also requires a new mechanism. Of the latter, Dewey argues that this discontinuity is the cause of the “compartmentalisation” of art. The former, it can be seen, relates to what is commonly known as “the problem of other minds.” The two issues are related.

Dewey addresses the problem of other minds by drawing a parallel:

The problem of how one person knows the existence of other persons, is [...] like the problem of how one animal can associate with other animals, since other is other. A creature generated in a conjunctive union, dependent upon others (as are at least all higher forms) for perpetuation of its being, and carrying in its own structure the organs and marks of its intimate connection with others will know other creatures if it knows itself.\(^83\)

There is an implicit appeal to continuity in the parallel between “persons” and “animals.” Furthermore, there is an implicit reference to correspondence in the form of the “conjunctive union” to which Dewey refers. By “the problem of how one person knows the existence of other persons,” Dewey is not referring purely to physical existence. He means personhood;

\(^83\) Dewey, *Experience and Nature*, 278.
that “other persons” are persons just like the first, for whom the problem is posed. The recognition of personhood is dependent on the recognition of mindedness. If mind is an independent, ultimately disembodied, entity then the problem is on what basis two unperceivable entities can form a conjunctive union, or engage in correspondence.

The conjunctive union of lower-order animals is communicative and behavioural, essentially embodied, as Dewey explains: “animals are connected with each other in inclusive schemes of behaviour by means of signalling acts.” There is a mimetic dimension to these “signalling acts.” Dewey goes on to say that “in consequence of which certain acts and consequences are deferred until a joint action made possible by the signalling occurs.” In other words, there is a behavioural dynamic that is communicative of the intentions of an animal, for instance a lion, which is accessible to other lions that lets them co-ordinate an ambush. Lions imitate one another for the benefit of the whole group. For humans, it’s a different dynamic:

In the human being, this function becomes language, communication, discourse, in virtue of which the consequences of the experience of one form of life are integrated in the behaviour of others.

It is important to note that Dewey says “this function becomes language.” This point resonates with Donald, who in the last chapter argued that “mimesis” precedes language, and that language “has mimetic roots.” Language does not supplant our own “signalling acts,” like facial expressions and body language; rather, language is continuous with them.

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84 Ibid., 280.
85 Ibid.
86 Ibid.
87 Johnson, Meaning of the Body, 33.
Language is central to how “one person knows the existence of other persons.” Language, furthermore, is central to the way “mind convinces mind that it can uncurl and wave the same filaments of subtlety.” But this is only the case because language is continuous with our non-linguistic forms of communication. Language that is isolated from the embodiment of the speaker is analogous to the separation of the mind from the body. That is, language that is abstract and absolute gives the impression that language consists of “ethereal entities” that have absolute values. The hypostatisiation of concepts, for instance, gives the impression that there is some “eternal realm of fixed forms and standards of value” against which to measure our experience. This eternal realm can only be reached by a pure mind, through contemplation or meditation. It can be seen that the hypostatisiation of language, and the separation of the mind from the body that marks many philosophical and spiritual beliefs throughout history, mutually compound one another.

This intersection of language and mind is worth further consideration. Language has considerable limitations when it comes to representing our thoughts; this is because, as James argued in the previous chapter, language is incapable of capturing the transitive elements of thought. Language focuses, rather, on the substantive parts. The difference being that the substantive elements “can be held before the mind for an indefinite time, and contemplated without changing,” while the transitive elements “are filled with thoughts of relations, static or dynamic, that for the most part obtain between the matters contemplated in the periods of comparative rest.” The substantive bias is what gives the impression of an eternal realm of fixed forms. That these forms “can be held before the mind for an indefinite time, and contemplated without changing” further lends the impression that the mind has special access

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89 Ibid.
to this higher realm; a higher realm that is represented by the language with which we contemplate it.

The failure of language to apprehend the transitive parts of thought limits, not only our ability to express our thoughts properly, but also our understanding of the mind itself. Our thoughts are fluid, yet our way of talking about and expressing our thoughts are not. Hypostatisation is a natural consequence of this problem, as is compartmentalisation, or the rigid classification of the objects and events of our experience and environment (which I will address shortly). By establishing fixed categories we lend certainty to our understanding of the world. Things fit into these categories, and we need only understand how to fit them in to understand the world. It stands to reason that if we can think about these categories then our minds must have some access to the eternal realm in which they reside. This is problematic because it removes the mind from the world.

The isolated mind has implications for the body-minded creature, its experience and understanding of itself and its world. As Dewey says, “in making mind purely immaterial […] the body ceases to be living and becomes a dead lump.” 90 Dewey goes on to say that,

This conception of mind as an isolated being underlies the conception that esthetic experience is merely something “in mind,” and strengthens the conception which isolates the esthetic from those modes of experience in which the body is actively engaged with the things of nature and life. 91

90 Dewey, Art as Experience, 275.
91 Ibid.
The abstraction of language contributes to this isolation, essentially turning the mind-as-verb into the mind-as-noun: the thing or place in which abstract contemplation, the contemplation of “concepts,” takes place. This is as opposed to the mind-as-verb that engages in, as Mark Johnson said in the previous chapter, “conceptualising” as an ongoing process.

2.1.1. Compartmentalisation

The “conception of the mind as an isolated being” lies at the heart of what Dewey calls “compartmentalisation.” Compartmentalisation is crucial to understanding Dewey’s theory of aesthetic experience and his broader goal of recovering the continuity of aesthetic experience with everyday experience. “Compartmentalisation” is related to “hypostatisation”; both interfere with the flow of experience. Hypostatisation rigidifies concepts, while compartmentalisation rigidifies categories, or “classificational distinctions.”92 In chapter one, Johnson argued that we shouldn’t think about concepts as fixed entities, rather we should think about the process of “conceptualising.” Understood in this way, the process of conceptualising retains its continuity. Compartmentalisation, on the other hand, relates to categories, which, in a similar vein to Johnson’s “conceptualising,” would be better understood as “categorising,” entailing an ongoing process that takes account of contingent circumstance.

Compartmentalisation is problematic because it denies the fluidity and changefulness of the objects which are classified or categorised. Compartmentalisation isn’t necessarily a goal that we intentionally seek. Rather, it is a general process, extending from more basic

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92 Shusterman, Pragmatist Aesthetics, 16.
modes of understanding. As Lakoff and Johnson say we are natural “categorisers,” but this natural inclination can be hi-jacked by our “desperation” to escape the contingency of nature. “We reach out,” as Johnson has said, “for anything we think might lift us above change to some eternal realm of fixed forms and standards of value.” That is, hypostatisation. This is compounded by the limitations, or the “substantive bias,” of language also mentioned in chapter one. Fixed concepts and categories obscure our view of the world. Dewey’s explanation of compartmentalisation is worth quoting at length because it returns us to a previous point:

The institutional life of mankind is marked by disorganisation. This disorder is often disguised by the fact that it takes the form of static division into classes, and this static separation is accepted as the very essence of order as long as it is so fixed and so accepted as not to generate open conflict. Life is compartmentalised and the institutionalised compartments are classified as high and as low; their values as profane and spiritual, as material and ideal. Interests are related to one another externally and mechanically, through a system of checks and balances. Since religion, morals, politics, business has each its own compartment, within which it is fitting each should remain, art, too, must have its peculiar and private realm. Compartmentalisation of occupations and interests brings about separation of that mode of activity commonly called “practice” from insight, of imagination from executive doing, of significant purpose from work, of emotion from thought and doing. Each of these has, too, its own place in which it must abide. Those who write

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94 Johnson, Meaning of the Body, 104.
the anatomy of experience then suppose that these divisions inhere in the very
collection of human nature.\textsuperscript{95}

If everything has its place, fixed and divided into classes, then the “threat” of “open conflict”
is, arguably, abated. Any resolution of conflict, at any rate, can be deduced from the
categories and classes of fixed meaning that constitute our seemingly organised and finite
“institutional life.”

The above quote is perhaps Dewey’s most comprehensive statement regarding
compartmentalisation. Dewey’s argument more generally, Shusterman says, is “sketchy.”\textsuperscript{96}
Some important points can be gleaned, however, as Shusterman helps to draw out.\textsuperscript{97}
Shusterman explains one of the problems that Dewey identifies as central to
compartmentalisation: “by separating and separately studying what in experience is a salient
whole we tend to distort and impoverish our understanding of that experienced whole as a
whole.”\textsuperscript{98} An experience that is “\textit{an} experience,” for Dewey, is a unified whole: “The
existence of this unity is constituted by a single quality that pervades the entire experience in
spite of the variation of its constituent parts.”\textsuperscript{99} By separating and analysing these constituent
parts, we undermine this “single quality” thereby impoverishing our understanding of the
whole.

“Indeed,” as Shusterman points out, “the parts themselves would not even appear as
they do, were it not for their integration into the whole from which compartmentalisation

\textsuperscript{95} Dewey, \textit{Art as Experience}, 21.
\textsuperscript{96} Shusterman, \textit{Pragmatist Aesthetics}, 16.
\textsuperscript{97} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{98} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{99} Dewey, \textit{Art as Experience}, 38.
An experience can be characterised by numerous qualities from different constituent parts, but the identification of these parts and their contributory qualities occurs only after the fact. The experience itself has the characteristic of a single felt quality. The unity of an experience is constituted by the seamless integration of its constituent parts.

Art and the aesthetic experience are victims of compartmentalisation on a number of levels. On one level, as has already been mentioned, the isolation of the mind from the body leads to a conception of aesthetic experience as being a purely mental experience. While on another level, art has been “relegated to the museum and gallery.” In this latter instance, the art-product has been compartmentalised, and separated off from the rest of experience. Art is to be considered separate, and this naturally has an effect on how art is experienced. These two levels are related. The compartmentalisation that the art gallery represents can be seen as characteristic of the compartmentalisation of the mind. The art gallery becomes a place of contemplation and meditation in which the mind can engage with the eternal forms it encounters. The “dead lump” of the body is merely the vehicle used to move from one form to the next.

The compartmentalisation of art has many other side-effects, such as the commodification of art. Of particular importance to discuss, is the effect it has on the artists themselves, and what Dewey calls “a peculiar esthetic ‘individualism’.” Of the artist, Dewey says:

Artists find it incumbent upon them to betake themselves to their work as an isolated means of “self-expression.” In order not to cater to the trend of economic forces, they

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100 Shusterman, *Pragmatist Aesthetics*, 16.
102 Ibid., 8.
often feel obliged to exaggerate their separateness to the point of eccentricity.

Consequently artistic products take on to a still greater degree the air of something independent and esoteric.\textsuperscript{103}

This kind of self-expression, Dewey later refers to as “self-exposure” and “a spewing forth.”\textsuperscript{104} It is not only the artist but their audience that succumbs to this notion of art as self-exposure. The self-exposure of this “peculiar esthetic individualism” is not conducive to aesthetic experience or correspondence; neither is compartmentalisation more broadly. Compartmentalisation isolates the experience itself, while the peculiar individualism that results in response isolates the individuals. Aesthetic experience in both cases becomes deeply personal and subjective, as opposed to a collective or intersubjective experience.

Dewey’s “self-exposure” is reminiscent of two things that Frost says. Firstly, as quoted in chapter one, that “there is such a thing as being too willing to be different.” While secondly, as Frost says elsewhere (already partly quoted in this chapter): “there is no greater fallacy going than that art is expression – an undertaking to tell all to the last scrapings of the brain pan.”\textsuperscript{105} He goes on to say, “I needn’t qualify as a specialist in botany and astronomy for a license to invoke flowers and stars in my poetry.”\textsuperscript{106} The “scrapings of the brain pan” and the “spewing forth” of self-exposure are variations of the same “peculiar esthetic individualism,” in that they both betray an excess or over-exposure in the poem. The American poet and contemporary of Frost, Theodore Roethke adds another: “the poem that is merely painful revelations: my impulse is to tell you everything – which may destroy

\begin{footnotes}
\item[103] Ibid.
\item[104] Ibid., 64.
\item[106] Ibid.
\end{footnotes}
everything.” One might summarise these forms of over-exposure under the rubric of esotericism, or subjectivism.

Frost was himself critical of the kind of esotericism practiced by his poetic rivals, Ezra Pound and T. S. Eliot; that is, at least, what he accused them of. In a letter to his daughter, Lesley, he writes “From Pound down to Eliot they have striven for distinction by a show of learning […]. They quote and you try to see if you can place the quotation.” That is, elevating themselves through “a show of learning” above the average reader. Frost even went so far as to parody Eliot’s use of footnotes in *Waste Land* in his own *New Hampshire.* Nevertheless, Eliot, in accordance with Dewey and Frost, is resistant to aesthetic subjectivism, at least theoretically speaking, with regard to some of his own poetic ideas, such as the “objective correlative” and his “Impersonal theory of poetry.” Ironically, the movement of which Eliot was seen as a vanguard, Modernism, precipitated the “relegation” of poetry to the schools and universities as an object of scholarly study: a form of compartmentalisation from which poetry still requires significant recovery.

Compartmentalisation disrupts continuity of all three kinds, higher-lower, inner-outer, part-whole, by erecting barriers. This impedes any rhythm or resonance that, for instance, a

part might have for suggesting the larger whole. In a Jamesian sense, compartmentalisation
curbs the reverberations of suggestive meaning throughout the fringe of affinities by isolation
the particular object – the “nucleus” – at the heart of the experience. In a Frostian
synecdochic sense, that particular object is the part, or the sample, that is suggestive of the
wider whole; the small known that summons forth and manages larger unknowns. Fringe
relations cannot be suggested, and therefore the synecdochic dynamic of the poetic
experience cannot be activated, if every part, or sample, is fastidiously compartmentalised.
As such, there can be no rhythm, and therefore no aesthetic experience.

Compartmentalisation violates the continuity of both everyday and aesthetic
experience in subtle and extreme ways. In its subtle form, it is mere complacency regarding
the fixed values and relations of things; in its more extreme form, it is an outright denial of
value that can skew one’s view of the world. Compartmentalisation erects barriers that
obstruct the continuity of experience by sealing up in its inelastic compartments the products
of ongoing conceptualisation and categorisation. That is not to say that concepts and
categories are not useful, but the hermetic nature of compartmentalisation gives them priority
over the processes by which those concepts and categories are formed. This is, partly, a
symptom of the “inveterate habit” of language to ignore the transitive movements of thought,
and focus solely on the substantive “perchings.” In essence, the process of meaning-making
in any form of experience is corralled in favour of the preconceived product – the concept to
be applied, or the category in which to locate the given object of experience.

Our “education in metaphor” subverts this stifling process. The poetic experience
renews the metaphoric origins of words. When, “through daily use,” words lose contact with
their metaphoric origins they become rigid, obscuring the fluency – or “suggestiveness” – of
their communicativeness, grounded in human vocal sounds and rhythm.

Compartmentalisation can only be undermined, and words renewed, through reasserting the continuity of experience. In this chapter, I have mentioned three kinds of continuity: higher-lower, inner-outer, and part-whole. More generically, these kinds of continuity pertain to what I called physiological and environmental continuity. Rhythm, furthermore, is characteristic of continuity at every level; that is, a process of change and accumulation, building towards a denouement, a “clarification” or enrichment of life. The poetic experience, as a variation of aesthetic experience, is ideal for illustrating the subversion of compartmentalisation and the restoration of continuity.

2.2. “Loaded Dice”

Compartmentalisation is a symptom of the denial of continuity, not only the denial of continuity to our experiences but to our very selves. The problems of language are a primary cause of this denial of continuity. This is not only because of the inability of language to apprehend the transitive parts of thought, but as Dewey argues more broadly, “language comes infinitely short of paralleling the variegated surface of nature.”

"Language, then, fails to apprehend the transitive elements of thought; it also fails to apprehend the diversity of nature. “Not only is it impossible that language should duplicate the infinite variety of individualised qualities that exist,” Dewey goes on to say, “it is wholly undesirable and unneeded that it should do so.” The role of language, Dewey argues, is not to try and represent the world, but to present a means for accessing and sharing it. Dewey says in the same paragraph that:

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114 Ibid.
115 Ibid.
The unique quality of a quality is found in experience itself; it is there and sufficiently there not to need reduplication in language. The latter serves its scientific or its intellectual purpose as it gives directions as to how to come upon these qualities in experience.\footnote{Ibid.}

What language is best at, Dewey says, is “giving directions” to those qualities whereupon an experience may be had. Language does not “reduplicate” an experience, but it facilitates one. Dewey goes on to say of these directions, “the more generalised and simple the direction the better.”\footnote{Ibid.} Most importantly of all, Dewey argues that words have a “poetic purpose”: “words serve their poetic purpose in the degree in which they summon and evoke into active operation the vital responses that are present whenever we experience qualities.”\footnote{Ibid.} The “vital responses” to which Dewey refers are embodied responses. The “poetic purpose” of words, then, is to engender an embodied response.

The poetic purpose of words to engender a vital embodied response resonates with Frost’s “renewal of words,” in that it returns us to their metaphoric origins. These metaphoric origins are the embodied and mimetic roots of language. The most obvious example of these origins is, as Frost would say, “the sounds in the mouths of men.” But there are other “roots” that relate to the way in which we understand the world around us. These latter roots pertain to the constitution and orientation of our bodies; our knowledge of the world comes from the way in which we occupy and move about in it. Vocal sounds, which are the physical roots of language, are a means of communicating, or “signalling,” in relation to our environmental orientation. A dog barks at a stranger, or a lion roars as a warning to interlopers; these are forms of vocal signalling. Human language is a natural extension of our own vocal signalling.
Furthermore, vocalisation in any animal is dependent on the constitution of its body. We can speak because of the peculiar way our bodies are organised, and we use our language as a means of orienting ourselves with regard to our environment.

Human language is an extension of meaningful human sounds, which are in turn extensions of our embodiment and our mimetic engagement with others. We engage with others in a mimetic way within a common environment, and our language is conditioned towards this correspondence. Language directs us toward experience, and it does this best when its directions are “generalised and simple.” Those directions are poetic when they engender vital embodied responses. There are two important points here that require separate consideration, though they are intimately related. Firstly, for any vital response to be possible, language-use must be directed towards its embodied origins, in the sounds of speech. As I will show, Dewey asserts the primacy of sound in aesthetic experience, an argument which resonates strongly with Frost’s notion of strained relations between words and sentence-sounds.

Secondly, the “generalised and simple” directions of language relates to the world in an open and accessible way. This is in contrast to the esotericism of the “peculiar esthetic individualism” that emerges in response to the museum conception of art. In simple terms, this means relying on the common material of the shared environment, and the common experiences of the community. The common material of these generalised and simple directions resonates with Frost’s synecdochic sampling. It is at this level, Frost argues, that the poet works best. The “delight in remembering something I didn’t know I knew,” which for Frost is the essence of the poetic experience, comes from the re-working of the common material of experience.
A few further points can be made about generalised and simple directions in poetic language. Frost has said that the poet must give the reader something he recognises, something he knew “but hadn’t thought of saying.” This is as much about renewing words, or language more broadly, as it is about triggering the relations and values that are attached to any given object of experience. The fringe of affinities is central to the experience that the poem directs us toward. “Recognition in art,” it must be remembered, is not “all.” These reverberations throughout the fringe of affinities must lead to “another poetic step” being taken. That step need not be another poem, but the step is metaphoric in origin. The very fringe of affinities that provide us with the overtones of meaning must change, and therefore change the context of our understanding or attachment to the object, or objects, in question, and more broadly our understanding and experience of the environment that is populated by the objects of our experience.

It is “poetic samples” that furnish us with “generalised and simple directions,” which subsequently immerses us in the synecdochic dynamic of the poetic experience. The poet, Theodore Roethke, captures this point when he says, “we know that some words, like hill, plow, mother, window, bird, fish, are so drenched with human association, they sometimes can make even bad poems evocative.” Objects “drenched with human association” like those Roethke mentions are evocative because of their meaningfulness to us, not simply as individuals, but as a community. Our personal experiences of many such objects have cultural “halos.”

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Words are “drenched with human association” through their ongoing use in human language, more precisely, spoken language. Constant use, however, can wear them down to bare tokens, much in need of renewal. That they are “drenched with human association” provides a platform for their renewal; that is, “the overtone, halo, or fringe of the word” can be stretched and manipulated to produce new meaning. The renewal of words, however, can only take place within the context of language as spoken. Language, it must be remembered, is continuous with the lower-order processes of the body. In terms of spoken language, this means the organs that produce vocal sounds. Both Dewey and Frost assert the centrality of spoken language and the physiological link to their respective aesthetic theories. Dewey makes a special case for literature and poetry, exalting them above other forms of art because of their use of language and sound, which resonates with Frost.

Dewey’s theory of sound also helps to turn the argument back toward the role of rhythm in art. Sound has a natural and obvious relationship to rhythm, represented most obviously in music and singing. But sound is also informative of change in the environment. Sound and the sense of hearing are so important to the experience of any organism that Dewey argues, “because of the connections of hearing with all parts of the organism, sound has more reverberations and resonances than any other sense.”120 The “reverberations and resonances” of sound are directly related to the “vital responses” of the organism. It is this connection that Dewey uses to argue for the special status of literature and poetry.

Dewey argues that literature and poetry are, more than any other art, the ideal artistic form for addressing human experience: “Art breaks through barriers that divide human beings, which are impermeable in ordinary association. This force of art, common to all the

120 Dewey, Art as Experience, 248.
arts, is most fully manifested in literature.”¹²¹ This is because of the centrality of language to literature and our everyday communication. Literature, Dewey further argues, has a unique trait that makes it stand out from the other arts: sound. More specifically, literature deals with human sounds. Language and sound together make speech, and this is the unique location of literature.

Because of its unique relationship with sound, Dewey says literature “plays with loaded dice,”¹²² compared to other forms of art, even music. While music is also sound-based, literature has the added advantage of sound that has been further transformed by the “art of communication.” Dewey says:

Sounds, which are directly or as symbolised in print, their medium, are not sounds as such, as in music, but sounds that have been subjected to transforming art before literature deals with them. For words exist before the art of letters and words have been formed out of raw sounds by the art of communication.¹²³

Human speech is the product of the transformation of raw sounds through the art of communication. The “material” of literature, as a result, “has an intellectual force superior to that of any other art.”¹²⁴ There is more than “intellectual force” to sound, however. Sound has emotional force as well.

Dewey is referring to more than just human speech when he talks of “raw sound.” Dewey is also referring to the capacity to hear sounds as well as the capacity to make them.

¹²¹ Ibid.
¹²² Ibid., 249.
¹²³ Ibid.
¹²⁴ Ibid.
The two are naturally paired, and together they play a dynamic role in any organism’s activity in its environment. Put simply, “sound is the conveyor of what impends, of what is happening as an indication of what is likely to happen.”125 It is indicative of changes in an organism’s immediate environment: “sound stimulates directly to immediate change because it reports a change,”126 Dewey goes on to say that “sound agitates directly, as a commotion of the organism itself.”127 “It is sound” Dewey reminds us, “that makes us jump.”128 Dewey uses the examples of “a footfall, the breaking of a twig, the rustling of underbrush,”129 to illustrate his point. The “import” of sound, he argues “is measured by the care animal and savage take to make no noise as they move.”130 The slightest sound is enough to inform us of impending change in our environment before any other sense can.

The “direct agitation” of sound is emotive because it affects the body; it is an immediate link between the environment and the living organism. As I observed in the previous chapter, the role of emotions is to let the organism know how things are going for it in its environment. It was further argued that emotions are physiologically-based. Dewey’s argument, as such, has some merit. Dewey takes his argument further, however, saying that, “sound has the power of direct emotional expression. A sound is itself threatening, whining, soothing, depressing, fierce, tender, soporific, in its own quality.”131 Sounds don’t just “make us jump”; they are more complex, and indeed more expressive, because they emanate directly from living organisms in nature.

125 Ibid., 246.
126 Ibid.
127 Ibid., 247.
128 Ibid., 246.
129 Ibid.
130 Ibid.
131 Ibid., 247.
It is these latter sounds that the “art of communication” has fashioned into more explicit expressions, into words and sentences. “Soothing sounds” can become soothing words, or a soothing story. Whining sounds can become pleading in response to fierce sounds that have become explicit threats. These are the transformed sounds that provide literature with loaded dice. These transformed sounds, however, are only beneficial against the backdrop of the emotional agitation of sound more broadly. That is, language does not supplant the sounds from which it is formed. As Dewey says:

Sounds do not cease to be sound when they become articulate speech; but they do take on new distinctions and arrangements, just as do materials used in tools and machines, without ceasing to be the materials they formerly were.132

“Articulate speech” is an extension of original and meaningful human sounds. Words are the tools of this articulation, but they only retain their meaningfulness by virtue of their continuity with the human sounds that underpin them. Words, through the “new distinctions and arrangements” of original sound, offer a higher, more complex level of articulation and expression than “raw sounds” by themselves.

While Dewey is critical of the capacity of language to “reduplicate” experiences in nature, he nonetheless acknowledges its role in human society:

It sustains a continuing culture. For this reason words carry an almost infinite charge of overtone and resonances. […] It is informed with the temperament and the ways of

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viewing and interpreting life that are characteristic of the culture of a continuing social group.133

Words are vehicles for expression because they retain cultural meaning over time and can be “passed around” as cultural tokens. They never lose their overtone, their “fringe,” so long as they retain a connection to speech, and thus to raw sound. This is the “metaphorical origin” of words. The metaphorical origin of words resides in the continuing culture which those words help to sustain.

This last point resonates with Donald’s argument about the primacy of mimesis in human cultural development in the previous chapter. “We are culture mongers,” Donald writes, “driven by the very nature of our awareness to seek refuge and solace in community. We connect with and learn from others to a unique degree. Symbolic thought is a by-product of this fact, and so is language.”134 He goes on to say “the first priority was not to speak, use words, or develop grammars. It was to bond as a group, to learn to share attention and to set up the social patterns that would sustain such sharing and bonding in the species.”135 The role of language is to share and sustain these “social patterns.” Language only achieves this so long as it maintains contact with the original mimetic processes on which our social patterns are based.

A sustained culture requires living speech. That is, for language to be sustained it must be spoken, it implies a speaker as well as a listener. Dewey says this explicitly:

“language exists only when it is listened to as well as spoken. The hearer is an indispensable

133 Dewey, Art as Experience, 249.
134 Merlin Donald, A Mind so Rare, 253.
135 Ibid.
Speech keeps language close to its metaphoric origins. It keeps the intellectual and emotional force of words and sounds in dynamic tension. From this dynamic tension the potential of expression emerges. This point resonates with Frost’s juxtaposition of words and sentence-sounds. In poetry, words and sentence-sounds are placed in “strained relations,” which generates the “high possibility of emotional expression.” While language may fall short of reduplicating natural experience, it is its connection to the raw sounds of human speech that sustains its meaningfulness for us. When language loses this connection its capacity for meaning is impoverished; what is more, the culture that language helped to sustain dies.

Language is a more complex rendering of already meaningful sounds, as Dewey has argued. But language is not simply re-fashioned sound in an abstract sense; language is fashioned from human vocal sounds, and human vocal sounds – the voice – emerge from the body: the lungs, the throat, the mouth. Human sounds pull double-duty. Dewey says that “sounds come from outside the body, but sound itself is near, intimate; […] we feel the clash of vibrations throughout our whole body.” When we speak, however, the sounds come from inside the body with their concomitant “intimate vibrations”; even more intimate given they originate from the inside.

The double-duty I refer to is that human sounds – the human voice – are both emotionally “stirring” from the inside and the outside. For instance, the sudden whine of a human in pain is just as liable to “make us jump” as a predator sneaking up behind us who treads on a twig. The sound is as meaningful for the one who cries as it is for the one who

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hears it. The sound induces in the latter an emotional response to the change in the state of
the former. The sound “reports a change” in the activity that the change interrupts. Two men
might have been hunting, for instance, when the former falls over breaking his leg and cries
out in pain. This constitutes a break in the rhythm of their behaviour.

Human vocal sounds fashioned into language, as such, are communicative as well as
expressive. In its simplest terms, to take the example of the two hunters further, the cry of one
in pain is expressive; it expresses his state of being in pain. As such, it “reports a change” in
the state of affairs; this is, in turn, communicative to the other hunter and engenders a
response from him. The latter’s understanding that the former is in pain is a mimetic
transaction. Again, simply put, we know what a cry of pain sounds like because we know
what it is to be in pain and to cry out as such.

Living speech is the nexus of meaning in a human world. Words, the tools of living
speech, are the tools by which we engage with and refashion our world. The infinite variety
of words and sentence-sounds on which to string them is the source of renewal because of the
communicative and expressive depth such variety presents us with. The sustenance and
renewal of human culture is dependent on this variety and depth. More specifically, human
culture is sustained and renewed through communication and expression, engendering
participation. Poetry, because of its unique relationship with living speech, engenders an
intimate form of participation unlike any other art-form.
2.2.1. “The Cave of the Mouth”

Poetry renews language through re-engaging the metaphorical origins of words, by placing the words in strained relation with the sentence-sounds. This is a renewal of the intellectual and emotional force of words and sounds through experimenting with the infinite variety of combinations. The rawness of emotional expression is given new piquancy through articulation, while the intellectual scope of language is expanded through a greater depth of felt meaning. What is felt, in particular, is a broader fringe of relations. We feel the meaning of our language in a broader context, and in relation to the meanings of countless other things. These are metaphorical connections; they are not intellectually abstract, but physically felt.

Metaphor is crucial in any complex language. But there is no metaphor if that language is disconnected from its mimetic roots. Metaphorical connections are felt in the fringe of relations, or affinities, that surround our thoughts and our words. These affinities are emotional, but they have an intellectual extension by virtue of our capacity to articulate them to others through words and sentences. We can convey the quality of an experience and its suggestive fringe of relations through literature, and more specifically through poetry. We can do this because of the dynamic meaning-making process that goes into producing a poem and the materials it employs.

Poetry employs language and sound, and retains its mimetic roots through self-recital (reading the poem at a pace to hear it “in the mind’s ear as if aloud”\(^139\)). This is a metaphorical as well as an emotional experience because it activates the “vital responses” of

the reader. Through mimicking the voice-postures of the poem, the reader is complicit in the meaning-making of the poem. In self-recital, the reader takes up the “strained relations” of words and sentence-sounds. But in doing so, the reader also engages in a metaphorical process. Words, when employed for their “poetic purpose,” retain their metaphoric origins, central to which are the “raw sounds” “in the cave of the mouth.” More specifically, words are placed in strained relation with their metaphoric origins, with sentence-sounds, for the purposes of generating new meaning. This tension is the source of new meaning, which the reader must make sense of, or “come to terms” with, through engaging his own metaphoric processes of understanding.

The tension of the strained relations in the poetic experience brings the reader into contact with rhythm. Not just rhythm in terms of the rhythm of the poem, but the more pervasive rhythms that characterise our experience. The former, however, are emblematic of the latter. The strained relations of the poetic experience bring the reader into strained relation with his environment. Or, rather, the poetic experiences breaks the rhythm of the reader’s everyday experience and understanding of his world, compelling him to take up the poem’s rhythmic perspective, so to speak, so as to make sense of it. The aesthetic “enrichment” comes when the reader resolves the tension by understanding the poem, but in relation to his everyday experience of the world. That is, the poetic experience leads to, as Frost says, a “clarification of life,” however small.

Such an understanding takes the form of the poem’s resonance in the reader’s mind. Frost makes two statements that explain this point. Firstly he says, for the poet, that “the utmost of ambition is to lodge a few poems will be hard to get rid of, to lodge a few

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irreducible bits”¹⁴¹ in the minds of readers. Elsewhere he says of poems that they stick “like burrs thrown on your clothes.” You don’t have to cling to them, he says, “they will cling to you.” He goes on to say “they will come lilting to mind unexpectedly in the most remote situations.”¹⁴² By which he means that something about a situation calls to mind a poem, or a part of a poem. That is, a new association is made between a situation or experience and a poem (such associations, however, can go either way: a poem can remind one of an experience and call it to mind). This is the clarification and enrichment that the poetic experience provides.

In a more general sense, poetry and literature furnish us with myriad references by which to make sense of our world and our relationships. As Dewey points out: “we observe, note, and judge the people about us in terms that are derived from literature, including, of course, biography and history with novel and drama.”¹⁴³ This is a point that echoes still today. Literary theorist Rita Felski, for instance, argues similarly: “when we speak to each other, our words are hand-me-downs, well-worn tokens used by countless others before us, the detritus of endless myths and movies, poetry anthologies and political speeches.”¹⁴⁴ The point of the poetic experience, however, is to break away from these “well-worn tokens,” to renew our words and refresh our understanding.

These “irreducible bits” and “tokens” are samples, or parts of – and therefore suggestive of – larger bodies or systems of entities, their values and relations. They reflect the change, however subtle, in the network of relations that constitute our belief-systems, or more

¹⁴³ Dewey, Art as Experience, 252.
broadly our figurative values. “Well-worn tokens” don’t come “lilting to mind” in any surprising or novel way because, through “daily use,” they have been worn down, their metaphoric origins “obsolete.” The irreducible bits that do “cling to us” are novel in the sense that they remind us “of something we didn’t know we knew,” and even in “remote situations” they resonate with our experience and change, however slightly, our worldview. This is fundamentally synecdochic.

The poetic experience, as such, stands in relation to everyday experience. The poetic experience enriches our comprehension of our environment and our capacity to communicate that enriched comprehension, or to correspond with others. Because of its association with human speech, poetry (and literature more broadly) is the most expressive and communicative of all the art-forms. Human speech is an extension of our innately mimetic cultural drive and is instrumental to our “social bonding.” It is only instrumental, however, so long as it promotes bonding and participation amongst its users. Literature, because it is expressive, is the art-form most conducive to communication, and indeed, correspondence:

The expressions that constitute art are communication in its pure and undefiled form. Art breaks through barriers that divide human beings, which are impermeable in ordinary association. This force of art, common to all the arts, is most fully manifested in literature. Its medium is already formed by communication, something that can hardly be asserted of any other art. There may be arguments ingeniously elaborated and plausibly couched about the moral and the humane function of other arts. There can be none about the art of letters.145

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145 Dewey, Art as Experience, 254.
The “moral and humane function” of “the art of letters” is grounded in the “art of communication.” This moral and humane function is correspondence. Dewey says two things that help to consolidate this point. Dewey has already said that, “the artist embodies in himself the attitude of the perceiver while he works.” But he also says that “what is true of the producer is true of the perceiver.” The perceiver, in perceiving the “art-product,” embodies the attitude of the artist. “The work of art” Dewey says “is complete only as it works in the experience of others than the one who created it.” In terms of poetry Dewey says, in a point that resonates with Frost, that “a new poem is created by everyone who reads poetically.” This is similar to Frost’s “aesthetic moral”; the reader must embody the creative process of the poet: “to get another poetic something going – one step more poetic anywhere.”

In the second point that Dewey makes which resonates with Frost, he actually uses the term “correspondence,” albeit in a different context. It can be seen, however, that Dewey’s “correspondence” (in response to Herbert Spencer’s “definition of life and mind [as] correspondence of an inner order with an outer order”), shares remarkable similarities with Frost’s:

The genuine correspondence of life and mind with nature is like the correspondence of two persons who “correspond” in order to learn each one of the acts, ideas and intents of the other one, in such ways as to modify one’s own intents, ideas and acts.

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146 Ibid., 50.
147 Ibid., 112.
148 Ibid., 110.
149 Ibid., 112.
151 Dewey, Experience and Nature, 283.
and to substitute partaking in a common and inclusive situation for separate and independent performances.\textsuperscript{152}

This kind of correspondence as “partaking in a common and inclusive situation” is sympathetic with Frost’s correspondence as “mind convincing mind that it can uncurl and wave the same filaments of subtlety.” In the poetic experience, correspondence in both senses is available to “everyone who reads poetically.” The expressiveness of the poem, and by extension its communicativeness, is taken up by the reader in mimicking the poem. While it is a personal experience, the reader engages correspondence of both kinds in the broadest intersubjective sense. He “partakes in a common and inclusive situation” that everyone who reads poetically can partake in, and because of which, he engages in the act of “mind convincing mind that it can uncurl and wave the same filaments of subtlety.”

What is “convincing” about this experience, and is central to the “moral and humane function” of poetry, is the realisation embedded in the experience that if the reader who “reads poetically” can “come to terms” with the poem, then so can everyone who reads poetically. The poem may not only come “lilting to mind” of a reader, it may, quite independently of any single reader, clarify and enrich an experience of an entire community. The latter instance is the height of “a common and inclusive situation” and the epitome of subtlety. Each reader comes to terms with the poem by themselves, but in doing so they must activate the same physiological and metaphoric processes as every other reader. The reader may come out with their own personal take on the poem, but he or she shares in the common experience of such embodied activities in the poetic experience.

\textsuperscript{152} Ibid.
2.2.2. Expression and the “Act of Art”

Because of its continuity with human embodiment, language is bound up with other forms of expression. Language is expressive against the background of other non-linguistic forms of expression. At this point, more needs to be said about expression, not just in terms of language, but in the broader framework of embodiment. Expression is more than just verbal expression. Verbal expression must be understood in conjunction with non-verbal forms of expression, such as facial expressions and body language. Words are not expressive when they are isolated from their origins. Expression is a fundamentally embodied activity. Ultimately, it is emotional, because it relates to how one feels at any given moment, and which is reflective of how things are going for the expressive organism. A cry in pain is as expressive as a smile, and both are telling for how things are going for the organism or person to whom those expressions belong. Crying or smiling are aspects of an organic dynamic of expressive behaviour, as Dewey says:

The act that expresses welcome uses the smile, the outreached hand, the lighting up of the face as media, not consciously but because they have become organic means of communicating delight upon meeting a valued friend.\(^\text{153}\)

There is an inherent expressiveness to human behaviour which is present with us from the beginning of childhood. The process whereby the child learns what effects his expressions has on adults Dewey calls “art in incipiency.”\(^\text{154}\) The child begins to act out of conscious intent: “the child may now cry for a purpose [or] bestow his smiles as inducements” for instance. “An activity that was ‘natural’” Dewey explains “is transformed because it is


\(^{154}\) Ibid., 65.
undertaken as a means to a consciously entertained consequence.”155 “Such transformation” he goes on to say “may be artful rather than esthetic.” By “artful” Dewey means deceitful or crafty. In the act of welcome, for instance, “the fawning smile and conventional smirk of greeting are artifices.” However, Dewey goes on to explain

The genuinely gracious act of welcome contains also a change of an attitude that was once a blind and “natural” manifestation of impulsion into an act of art, something performed in view of its place or relation in the processes of intimate human intercourse.156

The expressiveness of a welcome, with the “smile, outreached hand, and lighting of the face” is reflective of a “change of attitude.” Such expression, furthermore, becomes conscious as “an act of art.” Dewey appears to be implying that anything, including a greeting, can be an “act of art” or aesthetic experience. What he is identifying, however, is the continuity of aesthetic and everyday experience. The possibility of an aesthetic experience in an everyday context cannot be discounted in light of this continuity. More importantly, Dewey identifies that an “act of art” is “something performed in view of its place or relation in the processes of human intercourse.” That is, the aesthetic experience is fundamentally intersubjective. While aesthetic experience may enrich our understanding of our environment, it is always against the background of a shared environment. Aesthetic experience brings to bear a greater consciousness of the human world to those humans who engage in “acts of art.”

Through an act of art there is an act of renewal; an act of renewed engagement with the human world. This renewal implies part-whole continuity; it is a renewal of the human in

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155 Ibid.
156 Ibid.
the human world. Conversely, it is also the renewal of the human world *in the human*. By which it is meant, the meaningfulness of the environment, shaped through human actions both concrete and abstract, is renewed through aesthetic experience. More so than renewed, but changed and enriched, as Dewey says:

> Through art, meanings of objects that are otherwise dumb, inchoate, restricted, and resisted are clarified and concentrated, and not by thought working laboriously upon them, nor by escape into a world of mere sense, but by creation of a new experience.\(^{157}\)

This “new experience” engenders new expression in both the perceiver and the objects of that experience “that are otherwise dumb.” Importantly, these objects become expressive because of the perceiver. It is the perceiver who transforms the “art-product” into a “work of art.”\(^ {158}\) The expressive object stands in relation to the expressiveness of the perceiver, which in turn is emblematic of the perceiver’s renewed engagement with his world. The “expressive object,” as such, stands as a dynamic symbol for man’s renewed relationship with his world. It is a dynamic symbol because it becomes “activated,” so to speak, by the perceiver’s engagement with it. A poem, for instance, is activated when it is read. The reader embodies the poem; the expressiveness of the poem becomes active as the reader adopts the expressiveness of the poem.

Art also brings us back into contact with the original expressiveness of objects which have hitherto been covered over through convention and habit, and, indeed, compartmentalisation. As Dewey says:

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\(^{157}\) Ibid., 138.  
\(^{158}\) Ibid., 222.
Art throws off the covers that hide the expressiveness of experienced things; it quickens us from the slackness of routine and enables us to forget ourselves by finding ourselves in the delight of experiencing the world about us in its varied qualities and forms. It intercepts every shade of expressiveness found in objects and orders them in a new experience of life.\footnote{Ibid., 108.}

The “expressiveness of experienced things” comes alive in the expression of the perceiver. This is most evident in the poetic experience, and this is because, as Dewey has already said, literature and poetry work with the “loaded dice” of sounds, which are naturally expressive, and words, which are articulations of that expressiveness.

Renewing the expressiveness of objects through the embodiment of the perceiver is not simply a matter of representation. Renewal, rather, is a matter of mimetic recreation. The art-product must be conducive to the perceiver’s mimetic embodiment of the creative process. Language, Dewey has already stated, falls short of duplicating nature. Furthermore, he has said, this is not its function. The literary art-product, then, is not simply a representation or duplication of nature. The “poetic purpose” of language is to provide “generalised and simple” directions in order to evoke in the perceiver – the reader – an experience.
Conclusion

The aesthetic experience is an experience that returns us to the original rhythms of our embodiment. Our rhythmic aesthetic experience is continuous with the rhythms of nature. Art re-engages us in the most fundamental acts of meaning-making, which are mimetic and metaphoric. The poetic experience is a variation of aesthetic experience, and because of its medium—sound—it is closest to our most fundamental functions of meaning-making and expression. The poem calls upon our mimetic and metaphoric capacities more than any other work of art. As such, the poetic experience immerses us in natural rhythm, and the meaning-making processes that follow, more than any other genre.

What is more, the poetic experience is a deeply intersubjective experience because of the various lines of continuity—environmental continuity and embodied continuity—that provides its material and its platform. There is a metaphoric and mimetic continuity between readers by virtue of their common embodiment. This is the basis of correspondence; the correspondence, as Frost says, of “eyes with eyes” and “lips with lips.” The reader mimics not only the poet but every other reader of the poem; in the instance of reading he stands for every other reader in a synecdochic relationship. This is a metaphoric relationship, but it is also embodied because the reader, in the act of self-recital, must employ the same physiological and mental capacities to imitate the poem as every other reader.

There is mimetic rapport in this relationship through the reader’s adopting what Frost calls “the voice posture” of the poem in the act of self-recital; a posture, or stance, a poetic stance if you will, which every other reader also must adopt in order to make sense of the poem. In this way, the reader takes up the thoughts expressed in the poem as if they were his or her own. These thoughts carry no definitive meaning, however; rather, the meaning of the
poem is characterised by “hints and suggestions.” Anyone who “reads poetically” shares in the suggestiveness of the poem. It is suggestiveness, not definitive or compartmentalised meaning, that allows for “mind [to] convince mind that it can uncurl and wave the same filaments of subtlety.” And it is the rhythm of the poetic experience, built on the common embodiment of readers, which provides us with the platform for this shared experience.

New understanding, new relations and values of the objects of one’s experience and one’s environment, is arrived at through the metaphoric testing in the poetic experience. It is an abstract experience, but it is a universal experience, capable of being shared by everyone who “reads poetically.” Our common embodiment and orientation means we share the same rhythms of existence and can experience and process the same objects in our environment, testing and renewing their relations and values, especially when their values and relations appear to break down.

In the next chapter, I will outline more specifically the embodied mechanisms by which a poetic experience is had. I will show that these mechanisms are grounded in the very physiological mechanisms that connect us to our environment, and by virtue of our common constitution these mechanisms are the source of our intersubjectivity. I will argue that emotion emerges from our embodied processes. Furthermore, I will argue that emotion is central to poetic experience. The mode of expression by which we embody and understand the poem, what I have called self-recital and what Frost calls adopting the “voice-posture” of the poem, is directly linked to emotion through the physiological processes that constitute the act of self-recital.
I will also argue in the next chapter that metaphor and emotion relate to each other in the sense that metaphor is the extension of patterns of experience, which are, in large part, constituted through emotional responses and attachments to objects, actions, and events in our environment. The poetic experience, and the aesthetic experience more broadly, is a metaphorical experience. It is an extension of the continuum of embodied experience into more abstract, figurative or imaginative, realms of human experience and understanding. This allows us to renew and enrich our understanding of ourselves and our environment by generating new meaning through metaphor.

In this chapter, I will develop a theory of embodied experience that underpins poetic experience. In particular, I will discuss a number of theoretical perspectives that emphasise the felt qualities of embodied experience. This chapter will build on key concepts from the previous chapter, most importantly the part-whole relationship we share with our environment, including other human beings. What will be of particular importance in this chapter is the relationship between emotion and metaphor in experience. This relationship is foundational to the poetic experience. It has already been argued that thinking is metaphorical. It has also been argued that emotions are physiological, not just in the head. The mimetic nature of the poetic experience, as such, implies a relationship between emotion and metaphor.

The relationship between metaphor and emotion is grounded in our embodiment, not only with regard to our bodies but with regard to our embeddedness in our environment. Metaphor is an extension of our embodiment, the manifestation of our understanding of the world as received through our embodied experience. Metaphors are examples of our embodied relations in and with the world, but also our perceptions of the world through our embodied perspective. This entails the emotional element of our embodiment because emotions are crucial in informing us about our environment. Metaphor, however, allows us to extend our understanding beyond our bodies, that is, we are not limited only to what happens to our bodies.

Understanding the relations between metaphor and emotion is crucial to understanding how Frost’s ideas converge in a single unified theory of poetic experience. The
embodied nature of experience necessarily entails the embodied nature of aesthetic, or poetic, experience. Metaphor, I have argued, has embodied origins, while it has also been argued that emotion is fundamentally embodied. It has also been argued that metaphor and emotion pervade the poetic experience. Turning to more contemporary theorists, such as Antonio Damasio and Richard Shusterman, who are variously engaged in the recovery of James and Dewey, will help to elucidate these connections and develop a physiological model of the poetic experience.

Firstly, however, I need to address Norman Holland’s theory of feedback, which provides two vital lynchpins to this chapter’s argument. Firstly, Holland, more specifically than either Shusterman or Damasio, posits an embodied dynamic to the experience of literature in his theory of feedback. Secondly, Holland uses Frost extensively in developing his theory. Aspects of Holland’s theory can also be shown to resonate with James and Dewey. As with James and Dewey, Holland emphasises a kind of hypothetical or “experiential” testing through which one engages with one’s environment and enriches one’s understanding of the world.

1.1. The Theory of Feedback

Holland’s theory of feedback makes a number of points that are important in the broader theory of intersubjectivity that I am developing in this thesis. Of importance is the way Holland grounds the literary experience in human embodiment. Holland draws parallels between our everyday experience and our literary experience, arguing that they emerge out of the same basic processes. The primary process he focuses on is that of feedback. This focus allows Holland to develop a metaphorical equivalence between what goes on inside our
bodies and what our bodies go through in our experiences in our environment. What makes Holland’s theory of feedback particularly important here is the fact he uses Frost to make a number of points. Holland, in fact, draws substantially on Frost’s philosophical and aesthetic theories. As I will show, there are parallels between the theory of feedback and Dewey’s broader experiential theory, especially with regard to Dewey’s principle of continuity. Such parallels also extend to William James, particularly with regard to the embodied nature of emotion.

At the heart of Holland’s theory of feedback is homeostasis, “the idea that the body’s systems of chemicals and hormones self-correct so as to maintain various balances.” 1 Holland uses feedback as a metaphor for the act of reading, but at the same time grounds the act of reading in the physiological process of homeostasis. When I come to address Damasio’s theory of embodied emotions – derived from his “somatic marker theory” – this notion will make more sense. In essence, Damasio makes the argument that Holland elliptically suggests. Nevertheless, for both Holland and Damasio, homeostasis plays a fundamental role in our behaviour. The innate drive for inner balance plays a deep motivational role in the way we act in our environment. Holland develops a metaphorical argument out of homeostasis, while Damasio develops an understanding of emotion grounded in it.

Holland uses the term feedback to mean a process of testing and adjustment of the “hypotheses” we put out into the world to direct our behaviour. Holland explains:

By my behaviour I put a hypothesis out into the environment to see what my environment will return. Then I compare that return, a perception, to my standard –

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the perception I want to have – and I add or subtract from my behavioural output, my
“hypothesis,” to elicit a return that feels right according to my standard. In other
words, I seek a return that leaves me with no more error than I can comfortably
tolerate.\(^2\)

There is a distinct Jamesian quality about Holland’s use of the term “hypothesis,” though he
does not make reference to James. As James has said “we have a right to believe at our own
risk any hypothesis that is alive enough to tempt our will.” The poetic experience is alive, so
to speak, because embodied by the reader, and we risk its hypothesis by embodying it.

Holland draws heavily on Frost, but it is important to point out that Holland is not
developing his theory out of Frost’s; rather, he sees Frost as an exemplar of his theory of
feedback. Of interest to Holland is Frost’s synecdochic perspective, but also what Holland
refers to as his emphasis on “balance.” Holland, furthermore, identifies the embodied
elements of Frost’s poetic theory. In terms of the latter, Holland captures this point
succinctly: “to read, Frost used the same skills with which he wrote. He read as he wrote and
he wrote as he read.”\(^3\) This is the same perspective that Frost encouraged in his readers: the
“aesthetic moral” “to get another poetic something going.”\(^4\) This required both reading and
writing.

This synergy of reading and writing for Holland is also pertinent to the emphasis on
balancing he sees taking place in Frost. Two elements of Frost’s theory are important here.

Holland sees this balance in Frost’s theory of sentence-sounds, particularly the tension

\(^2\) Ibid., 77.
\(^3\) Ibid., 138.
Richardson (New York: The Library of America, 1995), 824.
between “meaning and meter,” quoting a conversation between Frost and Robert Penn Warren: “the one’s holding the thing back and the other’s pushing it forward – and so on, back and forward.” And again: “I want something there – the other thing – something to hold and something for me to put a strain on.” This “sense of balance” extends even to Frost’s “psychological” theories; namely, Frost’s “theory of correspondence,” as chiefly mapped out in the “Introduction to King Jasper,” which Holland quotes at length. Having quoted the important section (already quoted in chapter one) Holland says, “It is the most important balancing for him. Writer and reader mirror each other.” They “mirror” each other, that is, through the reader’s mimetic engagement with the poem through the tension of the sentence-sounds.

The hypotheses that the reader tests are the meanings produced through the “strained relations” of words and sentence-sounds, even if they are just “inner sentences.” Their correctness is a matter of how they make the reader feel. It is not a question of whether the reader feels the “right” emotion for the scene depicted, however, but whether there is a new emotion that gives a renewed piquancy to some aspect of experience through the poetic experience. A poem, as the poet Stephen Dobyns says, is a “metaphor for some aspect of the existing world,” whose intent, as Frost says, is a “clarification of life.” The experience of the poem is not merely the recognition of a scene with its habitually associated emotion or feeling. Such an experience would not be enriching, and would simply reflect and reaffirm the status quo of one’s own understanding. Two further elements make Holland’s theory particularly useful here. Firstly, the role of metaphor as potential “hypotheses”; and secondly,

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6 Ibid., 47.
7 Ibid.
the importance of what Holland calls “inner sentences,” which bears an important relationship with Frost’s theory of sentence-sounds. Or as Holland explains more directly, “we understand speech by generating speech inside ourselves.”\(^\text{10}\) What I have termed self-recital.

Feedback requires a quality of enrichment, or novelty, as well as constancy for it to be a valuable process in human experience. This applies to our experience with, and of, one another, as Holland points out:

To see the constancy in one another, we need to see it against newness, and to see newness as newness we need to be aware of constancy. We humans perceive one another […] through a dialectic of sameness and difference.\(^\text{11}\)

“A dialectic of sameness and difference,” not just with regard to experience with other humans, but to the experience with, in, and of, nature itself, is vital to understanding the dynamic of human experience. This resonates with both Frost and Dewey, for whom tension is crucial both in poetry and in aesthetic experience.

Holland draws on Frost’s synecdochism to explain the “dialectic of sameness and difference.” He says: “Frost uses small knowns to call forth and manage big unknowns.”\(^\text{12}\) This is similar to what Stephen Dobyns says, that “the writer is playing what we know against what we don’t know.”\(^\text{13}\) The balance of knowns and unknowns results in an illumination of the latter by the former. It must be remembered, as Frost has said, it is never

\(^\text{10}\) Holland, *The Brain of Robert Frost*, 86.
\(^\text{11}\) Ibid., 38.
\(^\text{12}\) Ibid., 44.
the job of the poet to tell the reader something they don’t know. Equally, from Dewey’s perspective, it is not enough just to tell them something they already (think they) know. Clarification is not reiteration, but nor is it complete alterity. The “work” of art is the balance between the familiar and the unfamiliar.

To illustrate his theory of feedback, Holland uses the example of driving a car. “Imagine” he says “that you are driving in the mountains of Crete”; the road never “stays straight for very long” and has “a series of hairpin turns on the edge of the mountain.” The road is narrow and has “no guardrails, only a shrine for a quick prayer as you tumble off the cliff.” He continues, capturing the point of the analogy: “Mentally, you might say to yourself, to feel safe, I should stay about a metre from the right hand edge of the road.” Holland then goes on to describe a complex “loop” of cognitive processing:

Accordingly, as you drive along, if you see that the distance between your right front wheel and the right edge of the road has become less than a metre […] you feel a bit tense, and you turn the steering wheel left until the right front wheel is again a metre from the edge of the road.15

“How from your output,” Holland goes on to say, “you are feeding back information, your perception of the right front wheel’s position.”16 Your actions test the conditions under which you are acting so that you may adjust your actions to better suit the conditions. You change the standard of behaviour (driving at a certain distance from the edge) as the information feedback progresses. Holland concludes:

14 Holland, The Brain of Robert Frost, 72.
15 Ibid., 73.
16 Ibid., 73.
You compare that information to the position you had earlier decided on. From the difference you detect between the standard you had set and the position you now see, you derive another piece of information: how far to move the steering wheel so as to position the right front wheel to achieve zero difference between its position and your standard and so to close the feedback loop.\(^{17}\)

What Holland is describing is a receptive but active model of behaviour and perception. That is, Holland is postulating a unified model of experience in which the actions of the agent within his environment directly influence his perception of that environment. As Holland summarises, perhaps controversially, “behaviour controls perception.”\(^ {18}\) This is controversial because it suggests that the influence only goes one way; that behaviour only influences perception and not vice versa. This is not the case. In spite of Holland’s unequivocal assertion, behaviour and perception are involved, rather, in reciprocal influence: behaviour influences perception, perception influences behaviour. This is the essence of the feedback “loop” that is central to Holland’s argument.

Regardless of the over-statement, Holland’s point has merit. “Behaviour” he argues “serves to create the perception you desire,” in terms of the example, “namely, to see your right front wheel is at least one metre from the edge of the road”\(^ {19}\); in other words, the “standard” you have set for your experience. Holland’s theory of feedback locates the agent at the centre of perception through the consequences of his behaviour. It is through action and choice that particular perceptions emerge; those perceptions are a consequence of those choices. The driver chose to drive along the mountain pass, and it is in that situation, by virtue of his behaviour, that he finds himself. His behaviour is both the choice to drive along

\(^{17}\) Ibid.

\(^{18}\) Ibid., 78.

\(^{19}\) Ibid.
that mountain pass as well as the subsequent behaviour of driving along that mountain pass, avoiding the edge.

The perceptions that unfold as a result of one’s behaviour, and in particular as a result of one’s choices, are continuous with those behaviours. That is, relevant perceptions necessarily follow from our choices so as to inform us of the consequences of those choices. Our choices – and our behaviour more broadly – however, must be equally continuous with our perception. There are exceptions. The perceptions we expect, or the situations we expect to find ourselves in as a result of our choices, don’t always come to fruition. Expectation, then, makes our behaviour and perception problematic. What is more, we can also behave or choose in spite of contrary, even absent, perceptual cues. We can choose and be disappointed with the result, and we can choose a course of action that our perception does not necessarily offer to us.

1.1.1. Feedback and Emotion

The feedback loop is not simply the product of the interaction between perception and behaviour. It entails the accumulation of experience as well. The feedback of behaviour and perception must also include the feedback of past behaviours and perceptions. Furthermore, it must include the qualities of past experiences. Perceptions are not abstract; they have a felt quality, as Dewey argues:

An act of perception proceeds by waves that extend serially throughout the entire organism. There is, therefore, no such thing in perception as seeing or hearing plus emotion. The perceived object or scene is emotionally pervaded throughout. When an
aroused emotion does not permeate the material that is perceived or thought of, it is either preliminary or pathological.\textsuperscript{20}

It must feel like something to perceive, and this feeling necessarily influences our behaviour. Our choices put us in situations where felt perception emerges, and from which perception further choices are made. Emotion, as such, must play a necessary role in the feedback process.

Emotion plays a crucial role in the feedback because emotion is an embodied process that is ultimately continuous, as Damasio argues, with homeostatic and other regulatory embodied processes. Holland acknowledges the important role of emotion in his theory of feedback, that they “guide the whole system.” Holland goes on to explain:

How I drive through the mountain roads in Crete depends upon how I feel as I look at those cliffs without guardrails. If I have a low anxiety level, I will not mind getting close to the edge. If I am a nervous driver, I will stay a good metre away or more.\textsuperscript{21}

Emotion is the grounding element in our experience, because it lets us know how things are going. “Because the whole process rests on what you desire, what is ‘correct’ depends finally on how you feel about the external events in relation to your internal desire.”\textsuperscript{22} Emotion, then, is indicative of how external circumstance influences the internal sense of balance. While each person may have a different threshold at which anxiety kicks in, the relationship between emotion and one’s internal balance is the same for everyone.

\textsuperscript{20} John Dewey, \textit{Art as Experience} (1934; repr., New York: Perigee, 2005), 55.
\textsuperscript{21} Holland, \textit{The Brain of Robert Frost}, 79.
\textsuperscript{22} Ibid.
Emotion gives the feedback loop its experiential quality. Without it, the feedback process would simply be a mechanical process. This is not to say that emotion is somehow added to the process to give it a felt quality; emotion emerges with and through our biological processes. Emotion is continuous with our biological evolution. Emotion emerges to provide information on the success of the processes as they influence the living organism in the world. At their most basic, emotions correlate to punishment-reward or pleasure and pain responses. These same responses are grounded in the physiological processes that are responsible for those responses. Holland identifies these processes and responses as originating in the limbic system, “one of the most ancient parts of the brain.” There is continuity between our physiology and our emotions.

This continuity is essential to our survival, and the argument for this continuity between our physiology and our emotions goes right back to James. Our understanding of this continuity is not without its problems, however. There are numerous criticisms of James’s articulation of this relationship (which I will address shortly). There has, however, been some considerable advancement in recovering this relationship, from the likes of Shusterman and Damasio, for instance. Emotion, seen as continuous with our cognitive and physiological development, underpins our experience giving it its felt quality. Emotion does more than just colour our experience, it gives it value and orientation. This aspect of emotion is implicit in the pleasure-pain or punishment-reward systems. That is, pleasure and pain are essential in behavioural conditioning. The point of which is to ensure the long term success of the organism by providing it with information about what is beneficial or detrimental to its well-being.

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23 Ibid., 80.
24 Ibid.
Emotion provides a complex map of experience, both actual and potential. Actual because of the emotional responses of past experience, and potential because of the accumulation of past experiences, as well as innate responses “pre-programmed” for various situations. It is quite natural to feel fear in the face of a sheer drop down the side of a cliff, or an on-coming predator like a bear. We accumulate emotional experiences; that accumulation is central to the meaning and value of the world we live in. Not simply what has been meaningful for us until now, but what remains meaningful or promises meaning for us in the future. The meaning or value of objects is necessarily emotional, and they endure over time because they endure in our bodies. What this means is that, while emotions are continuous with our physiology, emotions provide experiential continuity by imparting the felt value to the objects and events of our experience. These values persist into the future, providing a framework of value with which to structure and understand future experiences.

Implicit, then, in the theory of feedback is a future for the agent. That is, while the process may work around a previously set standard against which to test one’s hypothesis through present actions and events, it nevertheless is future-oriented. While there is an innate drive to reduce internal tension – by avoiding the cliff’s edge, for instance – this does not equate to a desire for quiescence, or in Freudian terms a death drive. Driving off the cliff would achieve that; no feedback is required. Implicit in Holland’s example is the goal-oriented or future-directed nature of the driver’s actions. His feelings about the edge of the cliff exist for a variety of reasons, but chief amongst them is the reason he is out on the road in the first place: his destination. The driver has a future point in time that he is moving towards and that, too, informs how he feels about how things are going for him out on the road.
The driver is not seeking to revert to a prior state, but rather he seeks to enrich his current state, thereby ushering in a future state. While constancy or homeostasis may direct us in maintaining a balance of inner tension, to minimise excitations, there is, as Dewey argues, a drive toward new experience that aids in our growth as living beings. Feedback is a model that serves to propagate growth while maintaining the integrity of the individual, which further serves in laying the platform for future growth. This platform is built on the accumulation of experience, including emotional responses to objects and events. Feedback, as such, is useful for understanding the “strained relations” between contingency (in nature) and constancy (in the human body).

Feedback, in fact, implicitly acknowledges a key aspect of Dewey’s aesthetics. Aesthetic experience is only possible because of the potential for strained relations between contingency and constancy. Dewey says,

There are two sorts of possible worlds in which esthetic experience would not occur. In a world of mere flux, change would not be cumulative; it would not move toward a close. Stability and rest would have no being. Equally it is true, however, that a world that is finished, ended, would have no traits of suspense and crisis, and would offer no opportunity for resolution. Where everything is already complete, there is no fulfilment.25

Feedback, as a model of experience, is continuous with a world in which “suspense and crisis” are defining characteristics. Feedback is also continuous with the processes of our body. There is inner-outer and higher-lower continuity expressed in the model of feedback.

25 Dewey, _Art as Experience_, 15.
What is more, there is part-whole continuity because feedback locates us as an integral part of the environment, our engagement with and in which generates our experience. Our understanding of the environment can only come from our experience with it, and our experience with the environment must be continuous with it. The “pervasive operative presence” of the environment is necessarily present in our experience of it.

At this point, it is important to briefly turn to Richard Shusterman’s theory of somaesthetics, which will help buttress Holland’s argument. Shusterman’s theory covers a broader range of issues than I intend to cover; however, somaesthetics is useful because it focuses on the physiology of aesthetic experience. Holland, on the other hand, is developing more of a metaphorical understanding of the poetic experience. In particular, Shusterman’s focus on the muscularity of aesthetic experience will help to illustrate, for instance, the physiological dynamic of reading that is important to the theory of poetic experience I am developing here. Importantly, Shusterman’s theory is, in part, derived from an analysis of both Dewey’s and James’s Pragmatism, as such, it provides an important point of triangulation.

1.2. Somaesthetics

Shusterman’s theory coalesces with Holland’s, and provides a stronger focus for the body in the feedback dynamic. A brief outline of somaesthetics will be useful, before proceeding to a closer analysis and integration of Shusterman’s ideas into my argument. The field of somaesthetics is Shusterman’s own creation, and is intended as a sub-discipline of aesthetics that he has devised to re-establish the body as central to aesthetic experience. Shusterman describes somaesthetics as “concerned with the critical study and meliorative
cultivation of how we experience and use the living body (or soma) as a site of sensory appreciation (aesthesis) and creative self-fashioning.” Shusterman’s intentions are far broader than mine. Shusterman’s work does, however, cover themes that are similar to the ones that I wish to cover. The lineage of the field of somaesthetics as he posits it is also traceable back to Dewey and James. The centrality of the body also brings him into proximity with Mark Johnson.

One of Shusterman’s chief aims is reconciling the place of the human body in broader (particularly Western) philosophy:

Recognising the body’s complex ontological structure as both material object in the world and intentional subjectivity directed toward the world, somaesthetics is concerned not only with the body’s external form or representation but also with its lived experience; somaesthetics works toward improved awareness of our feelings, thus providing greater insight into both our passing moods and lasting attitudes.

The human body is both “in” and “about,” or directed toward, the world; not one then the other, but both at once. This is a crucial point that is often misunderstood; the worst examples of such misunderstanding can be found in the Cartesian split between body and mind. Somaesthetics shares a melioristic goal with Dewey and Frost: an “improved awareness of our feelings,” a “clarification of life” and an “enrichment of lived experience.”

Shusterman’s somaesthetics is an attempt to recover the sensuousness of embodied experience as the basis for art and aesthetic experience. He seeks a “cultivation” of the body,

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27 Ibid., 20.
but not in the sense one might understand it in the frenzy over body-image. Shusterman nevertheless has to recover somaesthetics from such negative associations. That is, Shusterman has to recover somaesthetics, and the body more generally, from the compartmentalisation of the body, from “accusations” that it

alienates, reifies, and fragments the body, treating it as an external means and mechanism that is anatomised into separate areas of intensive labour for ostentatious measurable results and the sale of countless commodities marketed to achieve them.²⁸

Shusterman goes on to identify the various compartmentalised aspects of this treatment of the body:

Hence we find our preoccupation with body measurements and with specialised fitness classed devoted to “abs,” thighs, butts, and so forth; hence the billion-dollar cosmetics industry with its specialised products for different body parts.²⁹

The purpose of Shusterman’s somaesthetics is to break down these barriers, not to support or entrench them:

We should recall that the body constitutes an essential, fundamental dimension of our identity. It forms our primal perspective or mode of engagement with the world, determining (often unconsciously) our choice of ends and means by structuring the

²⁹ Ibid., 306.
very needs, habits, interests, pleasures, and capacities on which those ends and means rely for their significance. 30

Shusterman’s purpose is not so much to do with appearances, but with the fundamental experience and “pleasure” of one’s own embodiment. The “complex ontological structure” of the body as both “in” and “about” the world is the source of our “primal perspective.” It is also the locus of the feedback loop that characterises both our internal and external experience. The structure of the body, including unseen and even unfelt inner processes, provides structure for experience.

This last point may seem obvious, but its consequences are considerable. To take a banal point, an emphasis on one’s fitness through daily exercise will have the effect of improved strength and stamina. Improvements in both areas allow for a greater range of physical activities. Exercise increases the capability of the individual who undertakes such exercise. Put simply, as we get fit we can do more. This applies as much to mental exercise – reading and studying – as it does to physical exercise. We sharpen our minds so we can do more with them. What is problematic, as Shusterman has already pointed out, however, is when there is a compartmentalised focus which isolates individual parts from the whole. Compartmentalisation affects the nature of our experience, for instance, in the “cosmetic” compartmentalisation of the body, by changing our perception of that part, and therefore of that part within the whole.

1.3. The Integrated Nature of Human Embodiment

30 Shusterman, Body Consciousness, 2-3.
It is not being argued that it isn’t appropriate to exercise, or only to exercise within the context of one’s everyday experience or needs. We are, as a species, uniquely capable of preparing for future undetermined experiences. It is why we educate our children, to equip them with knowledge and skills to prepare them for their future without actually knowing what their future, such as their future careers, might hold. The point is, while we may be able to focus on one particular part of our embodied experience, it is always against the background of the whole. Any change to a particular part has ramifications for the whole.

Understanding the integrated nature of part and whole in human embodiment is crucial to understanding the way in which we experience our environment. At its most fundamental this part-whole relationship pertains to the body and mind. At its most superficial, this part-whole relationship can be summed up by the “preoccupation with measurements” mentioned earlier. There are, however, subtler manifestations of part-whole relationships within human embodied experience that illustrate, quite gracefully, the depth of integration between parts, and between part and whole. Of particular interest to this thesis are the physiological relationships that underpin perception. The relationship between behaviour and perception has already been asserted by Holland, but crucial to this assertion is the relationship between more fundamental functions of the body to which that behaviour belongs.

As Shusterman argues, without the body there is no perception at all: “Physiologically speaking,” he says “there is no perception without movement and no movement without some
use of our muscle system.” This is true, even in the most subtle cases, as Shusterman explains:

Without proper functioning of ciliary muscles in our eyes, we could not properly see close details, which requires adjustment in the lens of the eye. And without proper mastery of the extrinsic muscles of the eyes and those of the eyelids, one could not focus one’s eyes or move one’s gaze to scan a painting. Further, without a proper control of the muscles in the neck and an adequate muscle tone there, the connoisseur would not even be able to keep her head erect and sufficiently stationary in order to focus and see clearly.

While Shusterman uses the example of looking at a painting, the principle applies to one’s physical engagement with all forms of art, including poetry. His focussing on the eye muscles is particularly useful with regard to reading poetry. Frost has argued that poetry should be read at a pace for the poem to be heard “in the mind’s ear as if aloud.” This necessarily has an effect on the muscles of the eye in the act of reading.

This point must be made explicit. The pace at which the reader may read the poem affects the muscles that are vital to reading. That pace is set by the form and rhythm of the poem. This involves not only the eye muscles but the muscles used for breathing. Reading at a pace to “hear” the words, even if not spoken aloud, is linked to the speaking of those words.

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32 Ibid., 37.
and the inhalation and exhalation of breath. This implies a “physiological link” in the act of reading. The “sound” of the poem, Holland says elsewhere, “involves us in motor activity as we say or imagine ourselves saying the poet’s carefully chosen vowels and consonants.”

This “motor activity” is neurological as well as physiological, as I will show when I come to discuss Damasio’s work.

This motor activity pertains to the “invisible muscles of the mouth and throat” and is, ultimately, a form of mimesis in which the reader reproduces the processes of meaning-making that are used to produce the poem, ostensibly mirroring the poet, but more broadly mirroring the whole potential community of readers. We use our brains differently when processing “poetic language,” Holland tells us. More broadly, we use our bodies differently in understanding poetic language. This is a crucial plank in the argument of this thesis. It could be said, more specifically, that we use our body-minds differently in this process, because it is a holistic or integrated process and not, strictly speaking, a mental activity.

Through the subtle manipulation of muscles and breath the reader is drawn in to embody the poem. This is also the site at which hypotheses are tested, both in terms of the meaning of the words, and in the sounds of the words as well. Frost has already said the reader must be at no loss to adopt the right-voice posture, while William James has marvelled at how easy it seems to get the sounds right:

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35 Norman Holland, Literature and the Brain (Gainesville: The PsyArt Foundation, 2009), 99.
36 Ibid., 244.
How comes it about that a man reading something aloud for the first time is able immediately to emphasise all his words aright, unless from the very first he have a sense of at least the form of the sentence yet to come.\textsuperscript{37}

By emphasising “all his words aright” the speaker successfully tests his capacity for speech and by extension understanding (speech, after all, as James argues, is indicative of human thought\textsuperscript{38}). When there is a mispronunciation or misreading, “such as ‘casualty’ for ‘causality,’ or ‘perpetual’ for ‘perceptual,’” within the context of a sentence, James claims, even the most relaxed listener can correct the misstep.\textsuperscript{39} Or as Dewey argues how a “misplaced accent” disturbs the flow, or the shape, of the sentence.\textsuperscript{40}

In both cases Dewey and James are discussing the recognition of word-sounds within the context of the sentence. Proper accent and pronunciation affects the pace at which the reader reads, and so have an effect on their perception, both in a physical sense (in terms of the muscles used in their face) and in terms of the way in which the poem unfolds as an experience for them. What Frost calls “eye reading”\textsuperscript{41} could also be placed in this category of misreading. The “eye reader” pays no attention to the sounds, trying only to glean information from the poem.

The testing, and  \textit{successful} testing, of sounds is related to the testing of ideas, both of which develop along the same lines, as Holland argues:

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{38} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{39} Dewey, \textit{Art as Experience}, 170.
\textsuperscript{40} Ibid., 119.
\textsuperscript{41} Frost, “Poetry and School,” 809.
\end{flushright}
We know that one month old infants can distinguish phonetic differences (between p and b, say) from simple acoustic variations. Evidently, then, we are born with some of the hypotheses we need for the internal speech we use in understanding language wired in. At a more sophisticated stage, we speak internally according to the grammar and syntax we have learned in childhood and school. In still a different mode of processing, we frame what we hear into a coherent scenario or model by drawing on our knowledge of the world. We frame hypotheses from all kinds of extra-linguistic knowledge, like spatial relations, contexts, social practice, probabilities, logic, motives, or causality. We use these kinds of information to frame hypotheses that what we are hearing or reading confirm or disconfirm.\footnote{Holland, \textit{The Brain of Robert Frost}, 86.}

The “extra-linguistic knowledge” from which we frame hypotheses resonates strongly with Johnson conception of “image schemata,” which we derive from our bodily constitution and orientation. I will deal with Johnson’s theory of image schema in the next chapter; essentially these are the experiential patterns that form the basis of our interactions with and in the environment. While Holland calls these extra-linguistic, many are better understood as pre-linguistic or existing prior to language. “Spatial relations,” for instance are pre-linguistic. “Social practices,” according to Merlin Donald, by and large, are also pre-linguistic.\footnote{See, for instance, Merlin Donald, \textit{A Mind so Rare: The Evolution of Human Consciousness} (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2002), 252-300.} Language is a tool for propagating social practices, but language is also reliant on spatial relations. Without adequately developed spatial relation skills large chunks of language would make no sense.

Holland makes three crucial connections in the above quote. Firstly, that a child’s engagement with sound, particularly differentiating between sounds, occurs from an early

\footnote{Holland, \textit{The Brain of Robert Frost}, 86.}
\footnote{See, for instance, Merlin Donald, \textit{A Mind so Rare: The Evolution of Human Consciousness} (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2002), 252-300.}
age; secondly, he notes that this is a precursor to the internal speech needed for testing hypotheses; and thirdly that, through experience and education more sophisticated levels of engagement begin to overlay those original capacities. This hierarchy of development resonates with both Johnson and Donald; later, “higher” levels of language come to overlay, but not supplant, the original embodied and mimetic sensuousness on which it is based.

There is, then, an original sensuousness that underpins our higher modes of understanding. The Russian-born American poet, Joseph Brodsky, captures this point about the sensuous capacities of the child: “A child” he says, “is always first of all an aesthete: he responds to appearances, to surfaces, to shapes and forms.”44 We bring this original aestheticism into our adult life; that original attention paid to “surfaces, shapes, and forms,” furnishes our extra-linguistic knowledge of the world, which we convert into linguistic expressions through metaphor. Even the words that are used to express metaphors are metaphor, for they too have shape; as Dewey says, “in ordinary perception we recognise and identify things by their shapes; even words and sentences have shapes, when heard as well as when seen.”45 Our original sensuousness is the source of this recognition.

1.3.1. “A Metaphor for Metaphoring”

Our original aestheticism is the source of our “primal perspective,” and provides us with the “extra-linguistic knowledge” with which we navigate and understand the world. Our orientation towards the world, our location in the world, is the source of our metaphors. The role of “feedback” in our orientation, that is, our testing of the world through acting upon it in order to achieve a perception that is conducive to our desire, is equally metaphorical.

45 Dewey, Art as Experience, 119.
Feedback, that is, is an embodied means to a sustained pleasurable equilibrium with the environment. Feedback’s metaphoric value is clear, as Holland explains:

The process of feedback is a metaphor for metaphoring. We can use the feedback picture to image metaphor building itself. We can hypothesise – put out – a metaphor, and according to the feedback we get from the world and from our fellow humans we conclude if it is a good metaphor or a bad one and revise it accordingly. It is in this sense that a good metaphor is “true,” and truth (in our sceptical century) no more than a good metaphor.\(^{46}\)

Holland’s theory of feedback, his “metaphor for metaphoring,” is grounded in our embodied experience. Even Holland’s primary premise, that “behaviour controls perception,” presupposes the body, which Shusterman “re-integrates,” so to speak, into our understanding of experience by asserting the “muscularity of thought”\(^{47}\) that is at the heart of both everyday and aesthetic experience. There is a reciprocal integration between body, mind, and environment. These, the argument goes, don’t exist separately as abstractions or categorisations. While they can be discussed separately, as is often necessary, the fundamental interpenetration that exists between them in our embodied experience must be asserted wherever possible.

For both Holland and Shusterman, human embodiment is the locus of meaning. It provides the objective material and common perspective (and the objective material by virtue of the common perspective it provides) that all humans are capable of taking up. We are embedded in our environment, and the processes of our body are attuned to the processes of


\(^{47}\) Shusterman, *Body Consciousness*, 144.
the environment in which we have evolved. Our aesthetic experience is predicated on the same bodily systems (such as the muscles that control ocular focus), and the same dynamic feedback processes that occur both in the body, and between the body and the environment that allow for optimal behavioural adjustment.

There is a missing element in this argument, however. This missing link is implied in Holland’s description of feedback as a “metaphor for metaphoring.” That is, the role that “metaphoring,” as an extension of embodied and environmental engagement, plays. Metaphoring, under the argument put forward so far, must be continuous with our embodiment. It is an extension of our embodied processes. Under Holland’s conception, metaphor is an extension of the feedback process whereby we engage with and adjust to our environment. Metaphoring, as such, must also be continuous with our emotions because, our emotions, after all, “guide the whole system.” This, ultimately, is the vital cross-over I seek to analyse in this chapter, and more broadly in this thesis.

However, to properly analyse the relationship between emotion and metaphor, and therefore the body, requires a return to a few previous points, namely, to James’s theory of emotion which was primarily discussed in chapter one. Furthermore, addressing some of the criticisms of James’s theory will allow me to move towards Damasio’s theory of emotion, which is crucial to understanding the embodied nature of emotion. It is important to understand these criticisms, including Damasio’s, as his theory of emotion is, in part, built on his recovery and augmentation of James’s primary postulate, that emotions are grounded in the body.
1.4. A Return to James’s Theory of Emotion

Much of the controversy that surrounds James’s theory of emotion come from that famous expression (quoted in chapter one) about the bodily source of emotions: that we are sad because we cry. Shusterman laments the “conceptual sloppiness and stylistic exaggerations,” particularly of James’s earliest attempts at theorising, namely that often-cited quote: “this catchy, oft-cited formula” he says “confusingly reduces the wealth of bodily reactions involved in emotion […] down to certain explicit, well-defined, large-scale body movements like crying, striking, running, trembling.” Where, as illustrated earlier, Shusterman argues that there are minute, even invisible muscular movements involved in our perception. This has implications for the “muscularity” of emotion, because, as I will show, perception and emotion are not isolated processes.

“James’s famous slogan” Shusterman goes on to say, “also falsely suggests that each general emotion (such as fear, anger, sorrow, joy, etc.) has one fixed and easily observed body behaviour that defines it and that emotions should thus be understood in essentially behaviouristic terms.” This would make James’s theory highly problematic, and largely unpalatable today. Shusterman points out, however, that “James in fact held neither of these views.” James, in fact, held that “emotion could vary significantly in different people and in different situations and that emotions themselves admit of unlimited variety despite our tendency to group them under a limited set of general names.” The “tendency to group emotions under a limited set of general names” is the very essence of compartmentalisation. Emotions, however, are far more fluid.

48 James, Principles of Psychology, 743.
49 Shusterman, Body Consciousness, 148.
50 Ibid.
51 Ibid.
52 Ibid.
53 Ibid.
A further problem, Shusterman notes, was James’s poor differentiation “between mere bodily changes and the feeling of those changes as what causes or constitutes the emotion.”

James, Shusterman goes on, “did not sufficiently distinguish the organic constitution of emotion from the emotion’s intentional content or object, which can also be thought to define an emotion because it is what the emotion is about.” This would seem to reinforce the behaviouristic fallacy that, in Shusterman’s criticism, emerges from James’s famous, but “unfortunate,” quotation. Shusterman exemplifies the distinction between object and constitution:

My bodily sensations of trembling, loss of breath, muscle contraction may essentially contribute to my emotion of fearing an approaching lion (rather than my mere judging the lion to be dangerous), but the object of my fear is really the lion, not these bodily changes or my feelings of these changes.

To conflate the object and constitution of emotion risks minimising the role of emotion in experience in a similar but opposite way to that which James was reacting against: emotion, instead of being “disembodied” becomes entirely bodily based.

Damasio has a similar criticism to Shusterman: “James made no provision for an alternative or supplementary mechanism to generate the feeling that corresponds to a body excited by emotion. In the Jamesian view, the body is always interposed in the process.”

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54 Ibid.
55 Ibid., 148-49.
56 Ibid., 149.
Damasio is moving towards his own theory of a “supplementary mechanism,” which will be important later on. Damasio goes on to explain:

James postulated a basic mechanism in which particular stimuli in the environment excite, by means of an innately set and inflexible mechanism, a specific pattern of bodily reaction. There was no need to evaluate the significance of the stimuli in order for the reaction to occur.\(^5\)

That is, James’s theory of emotion appears to be a very blunt dynamic, lacking subtlety and nuance. When James does try to differentiate between what he calls “coarser” and “subtler” emotions, he once again over-reaches, saying of these subtler emotions:

These are the moral, intellectual, and aesthetic feelings. Conords of sounds, of colours, of lines, logical consistencies, teleological fitnesses, affect us with a pleasure that seems ingrained in the very form of the representation itself, and to borrow nothing from any reverberation surging up from the parts below the brain.\(^6\)

The last clause is of most interest: that these subtler emotions “borrow nothing from any reverberation surging up from the parts below the brain.” This is problematic because it splits emotion into two kinds; it compartmentalises emotion. James’s subsequent defence of this partition only confuses the issue.

These subtler “cerebral” emotions are problematic because they appear to border on disembodied emotions, something James is arguing expressly against. In an early essay,

\(^5\) Ibid.
\(^6\) James, *Principles of Psychology*, 755.
Dewey refutes the special isolation of these emotions, and attempts to recover James from himself and his critics. What was problematic for James’s theory, as Dewey saw it, and what misled Mr. James’s critics [...] was not so much his language, as it was the absence of all attempts on his part to connect the emotional seizure with the other phases of the concrete emotion-experience.\textsuperscript{60}

Dewey goes on to explain by example, “what the whole condition of being angry, or hopeful or sorry may be, Mr. James nowhere says, nor does he indicate why or how the ‘feel’ of anger is related to them.”\textsuperscript{61} It is this failure to consider the whole experience that led James to make his “slap-dash” assertions and over-look the integrated nature of emotional experience. It is this failure to connect “the emotional seizure” with the “concrete emotion-experience” that, arguably, leads James to posit the more cerebral emotions.

Dewey recovers James, somewhat, by postulating a transactional basis for the emotions. That is, emotions aren’t found purely inside the body, but rather are characteristic of engagement with the environment. “Emotion” he argues, “is something called out by objects”; emotions are a “response to an objective situation.”\textsuperscript{62} In sum, he says, “Emotion is an indication of intimate participation [...] in some scene of nature or life.”\textsuperscript{63} Elsewhere Dewey asserts this point more generally, saying that “an emotion is implicated in a situation.”\textsuperscript{64} Perhaps controversially, however, he also says “experience is emotional but

\textsuperscript{61} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{63} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{64} Dewey, \textit{Art as Experience}, 69.
there are no separate things called emotions in it.” What he means in this last quote is that emotions are not isolated, either inside the head or inside the body. Rather, emotions are a part of experience.

Dewey’s theory of aesthetic experience serves, in part, to recover James’s theory of emotion. This is because in the aesthetic experience, the body – or body-mind – is implicated in an experience through “intimate participation” that evokes “vital responses.” The aesthetic experience is emotional, in the sense that an emotional response is called up by an object, namely the art-product, but also what the art-product stands for and in relation to in a synecdochic sense. Emotions are proof of the physical immersion of the body-minded organism in its environment, and the “pervasive operative presence” of the environment in that organism. Aesthetic experience re-invigorates this dynamic, and enriches it through “hypothetical testing.” Damasio will help to expand this argument further.

There are two things worth taking out of this brief examination of the criticism surrounding James’s theory: one is the lack of alternative or supplementary emotional mechanisms, while the other is the lack of a holistic experiential integration of emotion. Dewey’s conception of emotion as situational helps to address the latter issue, although it, too, is a vague notion. In terms of the former issue, regarding the “supplementary mechanism,” Damasio provides a thoroughgoing response in his formulation of the “as-if body loop.” This supplementary mechanism, importantly, helps to explain the pervasive, or situational, nature of emotion. The “concrete emotion-experience” is, indeed, situational, in terms of the environmental stimuli and “inducers” that cause emotions. Damasio’s as-if body

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65 Ibid., 43.
66 Ibid., 224.
loop, against the background of other aspects of his theory of emotion, is pivotal to understanding this point.

2.1. Damasio and the Structure of Emotion

Damasio seeks to recover James’s theory of emotion, augmenting it with his own research. Damasio’s theory of emotion is useful for understanding the embodied nature of the poetic experience, and illustrates the embodied nature of experience more broadly. That Damasio builds on many of James’s original insights, such as the physiological basis of emotion, provides valuable support and continuity for the theory of poetic experience that I am developing in this thesis.

Damasio’s theory provides a number of important concepts. In particular, the concepts of “background emotions” and the “as-if body loop” are two of the most important; underpinning both of these concepts, however, is Damasio’s postulation of homeostasis and the somatosensory system (what Damasio calls the “body loop”) as fundamental to the generation of emotion. Emotion, Damasio argues, is indicative of the state of being of the organism in its environment. “Background emotions” are the most fundamental form of such emotions. While the “as-if body loop” is the mechanism whereby one can mimic changes in the body-state as if they were really happening. That is, the as-if body loop is an “abstract” activation of the body loop-proper for the purposes of imitating an emotional response.
The work of William James is, for Damasio, “an anchor” for his own theory.\(^67\) Though, as Damasio admits, this does not entail an endorsement of all of James’s ideas.\(^68\) The Jamesian anchor to Damasio’s theory is the idea that the body is “the seat of thinking,” as James says:

> We think; and as we think we feel our bodily selves as the seat of the thinking. If the thinking be our thinking, it must be suffused through all its parts with the peculiar warmth and intimacy that make it come as ours.\(^69\)

The state of our body influences the state of our mind; how we feel fundamentally influences the way we think.\(^70\) We feel our thinking, and emotions are central to the felt nature of thoughts. Emotions, in Damasio’s theory, are “somatic markers,” as Damasio explains: “when contents that pertain to the self occur in the mind stream, they provoke the appearance of a marker, which joins the mind stream as an image, juxtaposed to the image that prompted it.”\(^71\) A better description of this process is that emotions are evidence of changing body-states and relate to the continual mapping of those body-states in the progression of an experience.

I will focus on the concepts of background emotions, the body loop, and as-if body loop in Damasio’s work, as these concepts are more directly relevant to my argument. These concepts also strongly correlate with Holland’s, Dewey’s, and Frost’s theoretical contributions so far. For instance, with regard to Frost, Damasio’s discussion of emotional

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\(^68\) Ibid.

\(^69\) James, *Principles of Psychology*, 156-57

\(^70\) Ibid., 151.

expression will bear upon Frost’s theory of sentence-sounds, particularly in terms of their physiological dimensions as “the sounds in the mouths of men”; this, in turn, is significant with regard to Frost’s theory of correspondence, which is also physiologically-based, or, embodied, as I will show. First, however, it is important to establish the link between homeostasis and emotion, which is, arguably, the cornerstone of Damasio’s broader theoretical work. Homeostasis, at least metaphorically speaking, is also the foundation of Holland’s theory of feedback, so understanding homeostasis provides a vital point of triangulation between Holland, Damasio, and Frost (this, on top of the triangulation already asserted between Frost, James, and Dewey).

2.1.1. “Smooth Functioning”

“The single word homeostasis,” Damasio says “is convenient shorthand for the ensemble of regulations and the resulting state of regulated life”; explaining elsewhere:

Homeostasis refers to the coordinated and largely automated physiological reactions required to maintain steady internal states in a living organism. Homeostasis describes the automatic regulation of temperature, oxygen concentration, or pH in your body.

Homeostasis is that process that maintains the inner balance of an organism so that it can continue to operate effectively in its environment. While homeostasis may be concerned with the internal milieu of the organism, it is always with reference to that organism’s activity in its environment. Homeostasis presents a platform for activity in the environment, prompting further beneficial behaviour in the organism. So while homeostatic processes are going on,

73 Damasio, The Feeling of What Happens, 57.
unconsciously, there is always a prompt to act in a way that is consistent with maintaining that inner balance the body needs.

“Whatever else a living organism does,” Mark Johnson says, summarising Damasio’s point, “it must at all costs continually monitor its own internal bodily states.” It must do so to ensure “smooth functioning” in its environment, “otherwise,” Johnson goes on to say in a phrase reminiscent of Dewey, “the organism will fall out of harmony with its environment and cease to function adequately within its current situation, and in extreme cases it may even die.” Falling “out of harmony with its environment” necessitates a subsequent “recovery of unison” to return to “smooth functioning.” The disruption in the “smooth functioning” of the organism gives rise to the hypothetical testing in search of resolving the tension that is caused by the disruption. This is the same trigger in Holland’s example of driving along a mountain road as a form of feedback. The theory of feedback, as Holland acknowledges, is predicated on the concept of homeostasis. The testing of hypotheses is an extension of homeostatic activity into explicit experience. Hypothetical testing is continuous with, though not reducible to, such activities.

There are a number of implications worth making explicit here. The first is that homeostatic regulation is the basis for all higher processes of the body, or “body-mind.” This adheres to the higher-lower continuity of Dewey’s principle. Furthermore, homeostasis is intimately related with environmental activity, which implies inner-outer continuity. This posits homeostatic processes as central to experience, both everyday and aesthetic. That is not to say, however, that homeostasis is the end-goal of experience, rather it is that fundamental

75 Ibid.
set of processes which allow for “higher-order” experience to take place. Homeostasis, in short, is not what we have in mind when we act in the world, but it is going on in the background promoting the smooth functioning that allows us to act.

While homeostasis is essential to physiological well-being, Damasio, importantly, takes the concept further, postulating a level of “sociocultural homeostasis.” That is, a “higher” level of “homeostasis” characterised by “conscious reflection,” distinct from, but in reciprocal engagement with, the more automatic responses of “lower” homeostatic processes. “Sociocultural homeostasis,” Damasio argues, “was added on as a new functional layer of life management, but” he emphasises, “biological homeostasis remained.”

Sociocultural homeostasis, he explains “is shaped by the workings of many minds whose brains have first been constructed in a certain way under the guidance of specific genomes.” Damasio, then, identifies continuity between the “lower” biological processes and “higher” collective or cultural activities.

Sociocultural homeostasis resonates with both Holland’s theory of “feedback,” as well as Donald’s “biocultural” theory. Damasio even links homeostasis to the emergence of art itself. Sociocultural homeostasis resonates with Holland’s theory of feedback in that both entail an increasing complexity of biological processes emerging as intersubjective and cultural processes. Similarly, Holland posits a hierarchical progression of feedback loops that ultimately produce a “cultural” feedback loop, in which he situates the act of reading. Furthermore, on a more philosophical level, Damasio’s postulation of sociocultural homeostasis also resonates with the sentiment, expressed by Frost, that “in us nature reaches

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77 Damasio, *Self Comes to Mind*, 310.
78 Ibid., 312.
79 Ibid., 312-13.
its height of form and through us exceeds itself\textsuperscript{81} – a sentiment shared by both Donald\textsuperscript{82} and Dewey.\textsuperscript{83} That is, through increasing biological and social complexity human beings are able to reflect upon and change aspects of the world around us. Nature exceeds itself through us precisely because we have transcended the automatic processes that govern life. Art is a manifestation of this transcendence.

While homeostatic processes are important to our higher modes of experience and understanding, it is important to understand homeostasis as primarily an internal process. This means the homeostatic mechanisms are internal, and, as such, embodied. The relationship between homeostasis and the external world is best expressed through the relationship between homeostasis and emotion. In order to understand this relationship, however, it is important to analyse the physiological basis of homeostasis. Central to homeostasis is the somatosensory system of the body, which, furthermore, is also the basis of what Damasio calls the body loop.

The somatosensory system, Damasio says, “is responsible for both the external senses of touch, temperature, pain, and the internal senses of joint position, visceral state, and pain.”\textsuperscript{84} It is not a single system, rather “it is a combination of several subsystems, each of which conveys signals to the brain about the state of very different aspects of the body.”\textsuperscript{85} There are two different mechanisms across the various sub-systems that the somatosensory system uses. Firstly, neuronal “in terms of the nerve fibres that carry the signals from the body to the central nervous system, and they are also different in the number, type, and

\textsuperscript{82} Dewey, Art as Experience, 14.
\textsuperscript{83} Merlin Donald, A Mind so Rare: The Evolution of Human Consciousness (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2002), 300.
\textsuperscript{84} Damasio, Descartes’ Error, 65.
\textsuperscript{85} Damasio, The Feeling of What Happens, 149.
position of the central nervous system relays onto which they map their signals”86; while the other mechanism is chemical, primarily through the bloodstream.

While there are numerous distinctions and variations in the somatosensory system, “the varied aspects of somatosensory signalling work in parallel and in fine cooperation to produce, at multiple levels of the central nervous system […], myriad maps of the multidimensional aspects of the body-state at any given time.”87 It is this idea of “maps,” in particular “neural maps” or patterns, that is important here. The activity of the somatosensory system provides continuous updates to the brain about the state of the body and allows the organism to respond to changes in its environment. This is, in its simplest form, the body loop in action.

The body loop is this process of registering changes in body-state, however subtle, in a continuous loop via “humoral” (chemical) and neural pathways. “As a result of both types of signal,” Damasio says “the body landscape is changed and is subsequently represented in somatosensory structures of the central nervous system, from the brain stem on up.”88 The body loop is central to our embodiment, and is the grounding for higher cognitive activity. Without this inherent awareness of body-state, in the service of maintaining the body’s integrity in a changing environment, the organism, the human being, would have nothing to go off, so to speak, about how to optimise its behaviour in its environment.

The body loop produces a map of the body’s state at any given time. This is the “continual monitoring” that goes on inside the body. This perpetual map-making is the origins of what we understand to be the self, although not as we recognise it in our conscious

86 Ibid.
87 Ibid.
88 Ibid., 281.
life. At its base, the body loop produces a fundamental but non-conscious map of the embodied self. Damasio refers to this fundamental self as the “proto-self,” which he describes as “a coherent collection of neural patterns which map, moment by moment, the state of the physical structure of the organism in its many dimensions.”

Damasio adds that “we are not conscious of the proto-self. Language is not part of the structure of the proto-self. The proto-self has no powers of perception and holds no knowledge.” The body-mapping processes of the somatosensory system produce this proto-self on which higher models of understanding and experience are built.

The proto-self, however, is not immutable. Because it is, as I would argue, the encapsulation of the body loop, it is affected by changes in body-state caused by external as well as internal factors. The proto-self, in fact, registers changes in body-state. The proto-self is emblematic of the continual monitoring and mapping that occurs in the somatosensory system. In a sense, the proto-self is the background of our embodiment. As such, the proto-self is implicated in our experience at a fundamental level. Damasio provides an example of “a car zooming toward you” to explain. This situation causes “an emotion called fear” and initiates many changes in your body-state: “the gut, the heart, and the skin respond quickly.” Damasio goes on to say:

Many of the changes that take place as the car approaches are happening to the multidimensional brain representation of the body proper that existed fleetingly in the instants immediately before the episode began unfolding; they are happening to the proto-self in your organism.

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90 Ibid.
91 Ibid., 146.
There are minute changes in the body in response to the fast-approaching car, and these changes necessarily change the body-map that represents them. Damasio goes into further detail about such changes:

Retinal images change rapidly as a result of the approaching object, but for them to remain in focus, there must be adjustments in the muscles that control the lens and the pupil; the muscles that control the position of the eyeball; and the muscles that control the head, the neck, and the trunk.92

Here Damasio explores issues similar to those discussed by Shusterman. There are minute changes in the body as it adapts to a fast-changing situation. The bodily changes involved are such so as to keep up with the changes in the environment in order that the organism can retain its physical integrity; its responses are a survival instinct. The kinds of responses entailed here by Damasio go beyond simple internal regulation of the body-state. They involve higher cognitive and embodied capacities that include the environment in, what Damasio calls, the “survival values” that an organism develops over time.

Damasio’s example is also similar to the example used by Holland, though from a different perspective. The primary difference being that in Damasio’s example the event is clearly a surprise, while Holland uses the example of driving along a cliff as a vehicle for explaining the interactions between behaviour and perception. Damasio is using the example from the perspective of a pedestrian to illustrate the rapid changes in the somatosensory system in order to show the underlying activity involved in perception and behaviour. Both entail adjustments to changes in one’s environment, albeit at different rates of change. At the

92 Ibid., 147.
core of both examples, however, is the same stable constitution and orientation of the human body.

Holland’s example entails a steadily unfolding situation in which the individual is largely in control; the “survival value” of not falling off the cliff to one’s death is integral to the “standard” that is applied in the experiential “test” of driving along a mountain road. While Damasio’s example entails a situation unfolding at such a speed one must react instinctively from the most basic survival instinct. There is a continuity that extends from basic internal balance to environmental equilibrium, in which the body is fundamentally implicated. The capacity to think, the role of the mind in reflecting upon what is acting upon the body of which it is a part so as to act in response, is central to this process, but so too is emotion. Emotion is a central strand that runs through all experience, and is, indeed, vital to the higher functions of thinking. The continuity between emotion and thought goes hand-in-hand with the continuity of body and mind, or body-mind.

Emotions are central to the communication of body-states within the processes of body-mind. The changes of body-state that occur to the proto-self are qualified with emotion, in the case of both Holland’s and Damasio’s examples varying degrees of fear. The emotion is not an additive, but rather is central to the processes of changing body-states. Emotion pertains to the significance of the events of change to the organism. Damasio is more thorough with his treatment of the issue. Emotions evolved with us. That is to say, as we evolved so did our emotions. Emotions extend from basic homeostatic need and operate through the same somatosensory mechanisms, hence James’s original argument that emotions arise in the body. It is to this relationship between homeostasis and emotion that I now directly turn.
2.2. Homeostasis and Emotion

Arguably, Damasio’s most fundamental claim, at least as far as this thesis is concerned, is that emotions are extensions of homeostatic processes. Damasio says explicitly: “Emotions are part and parcel of the regulation we call homeostasis.” Emotion, he argues, is an expression of the connection of “virtually every object or situation in our experience” to “the fundamental values of homeostatic regulation.” That is, “reward and punishment; pleasure or pain; approach or withdrawal; personal advantage or disadvantage,” even good and evil. “At their most basic,” Damasio goes on to say, emotions “are poised to avoid the loss of integrity that is a harbinger of death or death itself, as well as to endorse a source of energy, shelter, or sex.” “Emotions of all shades,” in sum, “eventually help connect homeostatic regulation and survival ‘values’ to numerous events and objects in our autobiographical experience.” Emotions endorse certain objects, events, or actions in an organism’s experience, providing value by which to judge future choices of the same.

Emotions are a primary source of value in our experience and understanding of the world, and the generating of emotional responses is predicated on homeostatic regulation. Emotions are a means of extending and reinforcing “survival values” beyond the “smooth functioning” of internal organs and chemical states into the environmental activity of the whole organism. Emotions, in short, are evidence of greater complexity in an organism, as Damasio sums up in his most recent book:

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93 Ibid., 40.
94 Damasio, The Feeling of What Happens, 58.
95 Ibid.
96 Ibid., 54.
97 Ibid.
As organisms evolved, the programs underlying homeostasis became more complex, in terms of the conditions that prompted their engagement and the range of results. Those more complex programs gradually became what we now know as drives, motivations, and emotions.\(^9^8\)

This resonates with Dewey’s emphasis on complexity in chapter two, in which as complexity increases “the designs of living are widened and enriched [and] fulfilment is more massive and more subtly shaded.”\(^9^9\) Damasio’s postulation of emotion as grounded in homeostatic processes provides the vital link between emotion as a quality of experience and our fundamental embodied processes. That is, Damasio’s theory reinforces Dewey’s principle of continuity, which in turn further helps to reinforce the argument that poetic experience is a fundamentally embodied experience. This latter point will be expanded upon more fully later in this chapter.

Damasio further develops his understanding of the relationship between homeostasis and emotion along lines that echo Dewey’s principle of continuity with what he calls the “nesting principle.” This nesting principle demonstrates the way in which higher-level mechanisms – and, eventually, emotions – are at least partly consisted of lower-order mechanisms. Damasio is worth quoting at length:

> When we survey the list of regulatory reactions that ensure our homeostasis we glean a curious construction plan. It consists of having parts of simpler reactions incorporated as components of more elaborate ones, a nesting of the simple within the complex. *Some* of the machinery of the immune system and of metabolic regulation is

\(^9^8\) Damasio, *Self Comes to Mind*, 58.

incorporated in the machinery of drives and motivations (most of which revolve around metabolic corrections and all of which involve pain or pleasure). Some of the machinery from all the prior levels – reflexes, immune responses, metabolic balancing, pain or pleasure behaviours, drives – is incorporated in the machinery of the emotions-proper.  

Crucially, Damasio goes on to say, that “the different tiers of emotions-proper are assembled on the very same principle.” I will discuss these “different tiers of emotions” shortly. There are two related points that can be taken from the previous quotation. Firstly, that “parts of simpler reactions [are] incorporated as components of more elaborate ones”; secondly, however, and significantly, this means that more elaborate reactions are not reducible to the simpler reactions. This is in line with that aspect of Dewey’s principle of continuity that prohibits reduction of higher to lower orders.

The most important point from the perspective of my argument in the above quote comes in the final sentence that “some of the machinery from all the prior levels […] is incorporated in the machinery of the emotions-proper.” This, coupled with Damasio’s assertion that “the different tiers of emotion are assembled on the same principle” implies that there is continuity from fundamental homeostatic processes to the highest forms of emotion and emotional expression. And it is to the “emotions-proper” that I now turn.

2.2.1. Emotions, Background Emotions, and the "Animation of the Face"

Damasio posits three basic strata of emotions: background emotions; primary, or universal, emotions; and secondary, or social, emotions. A brief explanation of each is useful.

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100 Damasio, *Looking For Spinoza*, 37.
101 Ibid., 38.
“Background emotions,” Damasio explains “are composite expressions of those regulatory actions as they unfold and intersect moment by moment in our lives.” Background emotions include “well-being or malaise, calm or tension.” Primary emotions, Damasio explains, “include fear, anger, disgust, surprise, sadness, and happiness – the emotions that first come to mind whenever the term emotion is invoked.” While secondary, or social emotions include “sympathy, embarrassment, shame, guilt, pride, jealousy, envy, gratitude, admiration, indignation, and contempt.” Background emotions are the most fundamental level of emotions, and closest to the regulatory activities of the body, while secondary emotions are socially acquired.

Damasio asserts that the nesting principle applies to all levels of emotion, which means they are continuous with one another. Damasio explains by way of example:

Think of how the social emotion “contempt” borrows the facial expressions of “disgust,” a primary emotion that evolved in association with the automatic and beneficial rejection of potentially toxic foods. Even the words we use to describe situations of contempt, and moral outrage – we profess to be disgusted – revolve around the nesting.

Damasio traces the social emotion of contempt, by way of disgust, back to its very physical origins in “the automatic and beneficial rejection of toxic foods.” The background emotion that is associated with beneficial rejection, that is the “retinue of regulatory reactions” that occur and change the mapped state of the body, would be something like ill-at-ease, or a

102 Ibid., 44.
104 Damasio, *Looking for Spinoza*, 44.
105 Ibid., 45.
106 Ibid.
diminution in “well-being.” As such, the background emotion in which disgust is nested, and in which contempt is ultimately nested, would be a sense of ill-at-ease or a diminution in well-being in response to that which induces the contempt. That which we find contemptible makes us ill-at-ease, making us queasy or producing a sense of unwellness.

Importantly, Damasio also highlights the fact that “even the words we use […] revolve around the nesting.” This gives some indication of the “metaphoric origins” of words, and, more broadly, the “mimetic roots” of language. This point, however, will be taken up later in this chapter, and again in the next chapter when I come to discuss the importance of experiential patterns, or “image schemata,” to our experience. My primary focus in this section will be on background emotions. This is for a number of reasons. Firstly, background emotions are the emotional stratum that tracks, or rather indicates, changes in body-state. This is important for positing the embodied nature of the poetic experience as I have been arguing. The changes in body-state resulting from the act of self-recital are important to achieving correspondence; it is the physiological connection that makes the metaphorical connections possible.

The second, and related, reason is that the act of self-recital initiates changes in the state of the body, in the eyes, in the mouth and throat, even in the larger muscles of the body. What is more, the reader’s capacity to mimic the rhythms of the poem is conducive to mimicking the thoughts that ride those rhythms, so to speak, in our expressions. “The human brain is a mimic of the irrepresible variety,” Damasio says, explaining that

107 Damasio, *Self Comes to Mind*, 68.
the brain has the ability to represent aspects of the structure of non-brain things and events, which includes the actions carried out by our organism and its components, like limbs, parts of the phonatory apparatus, and so forth.¹⁰⁸

Background emotions, I will argue, provide crucial signals of changes in the state of the body induced by our mimetic engagement with poetry. As such, understanding background emotions will be vital to understanding the effects of the poetic experience at a physiological and emotional level.

A few important points about background emotions are worth establishing. Firstly, while background emotions are essentially related to the regulatory processes, they can be affected, or induced, by external means: while “the processes of regulating life itself can cause background emotions” Damasio asserts, “so can continued processes of mental conflict.”¹⁰⁹ Damasio explains that

Background emotions can be caused by prolonged physical effort – from the “high” that follows jogging to the “low” of uninteresting, nonrhythmical labour – and by brooding over a decision that you find difficult to make – […] or by savouring the prospect of some wonderful pleasure that may await you.¹¹⁰

There are intricate relationships illustrated even in the few examples Damasio uses for background emotion-inducers. The last example, for instance, entails future emotional engagement. A future pleasure could be receiving an award at a lavish ceremony. This would arguably entail the social emotion of “pride,” but also the primary emotion of “happiness.”

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.
¹⁰⁹ Damasio, The Feeling of What Happens, 52.
¹¹⁰ Ibid.
This event, however, has not yet happened; rather, one is “savouring the prospect” of it, which is the inducer of the background emotion. The background emotion in the case of the example would be a variation of well-being, something like “cheerfulness” or “enthusiasm.”

Secondly, while background emotions are not as obvious as primary or secondary emotions, they are nonetheless detectable in terms of body posture and facial expressions. Both of these points are related in the sense that changes to physical posture and facial expressions can induce background emotions. Background emotions are crucial to the way in which we experience a given event or encounter with a given object. As a corollary to their importance in communicating the body-state (to our brain via somatosensory systems), background emotions are also communicative to others in a similar way. We can “detect background emotions by subtle details of body posture, speed and contour of movements, minimal changes in the amount and speed of eye movements, and in the degree of contraction of facial muscles.” Arguably the most important of the “telltale signals” of background emotions, Damasio says, is “the animation of the face.” The face is the locus of correspondence in human experience, including and particularly the poetic experience.

If “the animation of the face” is indicative of background emotions then, arguably and conversely, it follows that the mimetic engagement with poetry, which is centred on the facial and vocal postures of the reader, is an inducer of background emotions. As such, the poetic experience entails a change in the body-state of the reader. This, in turn, lays the foundations for correspondence and metaphoric thought. “A poem” Robert Frost has said “is the emotion

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111 On page 52 of *The Feeling of What Happens* Damasio asserts “enthusiasm” and “cheerfulness” as attributions of background emotion: “When we sense that a person is ‘tense’ or ‘edgy,’ ‘discouraged’ or ‘enthusiastic,’ ‘down’ or ‘cheerful,’ […] we are detecting background emotions.”


113 Ibid., 92.
of having a thought.”

He has also posited a mimetic basis for correspondence, both in life
and art. The means of the inducement and detection of background emotions, and the
changes in body-state they represent, can be seen through the prism of poetic experience as
operating in a reciprocal, or feedback, loop. Further analysis of Damasio’s theory of emotion
will bear this relationship out.

While Damasio posits a relationship between “the animation of the face” and
background emotions, there is some discontinuity in his account. On the one hand he says
“the presence of background emotion can be established from the nature of facial expressions
and from the dynamic profile of limb movements and posture.” On the other hand he says
that “background emotions do not use the differentiated repertoire of explicit facial
expressions that easily define primary and social emotions.” He does go on to say,
however, that “they are also richly expressed in musculoskeletal changes, for instance, in
subtle body posture and overall shaping of body movement.” There is an apparent
contradiction here.

There is only a contradiction, however, if one takes “the nature of facial expressions”
to be the same as “explicit facial expressions.” By “differentiated repertoire” Damasio means
the wide variety of explicit expressions, such as a smile, a frown, raised eyebrows, a smirk,
even flared nostrils. A smile, for instance, is usually taken as an expression of happiness, a
primary emotion. While the context or situation in which one is happy will give some clue as
to its cause; receiving an award at a lavish function, for instance, would indicate the

Mark Richardson (New York: The Library of America, 1995), 788.
and Mark Richardson (New York: The Library of America, 1995), 741.
117 Ibid., 53.
118 Ibid.
secondary emotion of pride. What is important to background emotions are the various muscles that are necessary to the facial expression of smiling, but are not identified explicitly in the act of smiling. This includes the posture of the award-recipient, upright and with the head held high. A smile is a strong indication of one’s mood but it is not a signal in isolation, rather it is built on a complex embodied system.

Primary and secondary emotions may have a “differentiated repertoire of facial expressions,” but they are just one part of a larger dynamic of emotional expression that is not always so overt as a smile or a frown. The nature of a facial expression is bound up in the context of the body, its posture and positioning, as well as the context of the experience. The background emotion pertains to the state of being of the organism, the human. The changes in the proto-self while driving along a mountain road, or being borne down upon by an on-coming car, induce, at different rates, changes in the body. These changes and their impending consequences for the organism as a whole are then communicated to the brain. Fear at the unfolding situation, in either case, is underpinned by tension in the body. The fear is directed toward the danger; the tension is the state of the body.

The happiness of the award-recipient is in stark contrast to the fear of the pedestrian or motorist. The former is standing upright with his head up and his chest out and a smile on his face, while the latter is clenched, his muscles taut, his stomach twisted, his eyes wide-open or his pupils dilated, perhaps his mouth agape. The smile or the open-mouth are aspects of an explicit facial expression, they are indicative of, but not reducible to, the underlying state of the body which is the nature of that facial expression. Crucial to its nature is the context or the situation that induces it.
2.2.2. “In the Mouths of Men”

There are two related points from Damasio’s work that directly concern poetry that need to be considered here. The first point relates to the connection between the physiology of facial expressions and emotions, while the second points to the relationship between emotions and verbal expression. Together these two points lend support to Frost’s claims about sentence-sounds and the physiology of expression: that is, the importance of “the sounds in the mouths of men,” and the correspondence of “the invisible muscles of the mouth and throat.” For humans, the face is the locus of meaning; this is not merely a figure of speech. As the following points will show, there is a fundamental link between emotion, speech, and facial expressions. Much of human meaning is centred on the face, where the eyes, the ears, and the mouth converge.

Damasio has already said the background emotions pertain mostly to underlying homeostatic activity, that the inducers of background emotions are largely internal. He has also said that the proto-self, which is the coherent unity of these underlying homeostatic processes, is not the same self we have a sense of at a conscious level, the “autobiographical self” as Damasio calls it, and that, furthermore, “language is not part of its structure.” Background emotions are not isolated, however, to what occurs in the proto-self. Damasio’s assertion that language is not a part of the proto-self nevertheless raises an issue about the relationship between language and background emotions that needs to be properly understood.

This problem is best understood in terms of the difference between abstract language and its spoken origins. Abstract language is not part of the proto-self, but the physiological basis of language, as a spoken tool, is. This is most obvious in the case of the heart and the
lungs. More specifically, regarding the physiological and neurological underpinnings of facial expressions, Damasio says,

The basal forebrain and hypothalamic nuclei that control the movement of the face, tongue, pharynx, and larynx are the ultimate executors of many behaviours, simple as well as complex, that define the emotions, from courting or fleeing to laughing and crying. The complex repertoires of actions we observe are the result of the exquisite coordination of the activities of those nuclei that contribute parts of the execution in a well-concerted order and concurrence.\(^{119}\)

Damasio is making a number of vital connections here. First and foremost, Damasio identifies the link between the neurological centres – “the basal forebrain and hypothalamic nuclei” – with the physiological aspects they control – “the face, tongue, pharynx, and larynx.” There is then a behavioural extension – “the complex repertoires of actions” – that is continuous with the underlying physiological and neurological activity.

The pharynx, larynx, and tongue, among other facial muscles, are crucial to our ability to speak. Our capacity for language is continuous with these underlying activities. The structure of the face and the mouth allows us to shape the sounds that come from the inhalation and exhalation of air, in particular as they pass through the larynx. The tongue and lips allow us to shape these sounds. That the neurological centres of the brain that control the activities of these parts of our body are also “the ultimate executors of many behaviours that define the emotions” is indicative of the continuity between our capacity to express ourselves verbally and our capacity to express our emotions.

\(^{119}\) Damasio, *Looking For Spinoza*, 63.
The larynx plays a number of vital roles, not only with regard to speech, as David Crystal points out:

From a biological point of view, the larynx acts as a valve, controlling the flow of air to and from the lungs, and preventing food, foreign bodies, or other substances from entering the lungs. Also, by closing the vocal folds, it is possible to build up pressure within the lungs, such as would be required for all forms of muscular effort, as in lifting, defecating, and coughing.120

Crystal goes on to say, “in the course of evolution, the larynx has been adapted to provide the main source of sound for speech.”121 Not only is the larynx crucial for speech, it is also crucial for protecting the organism from “foreign bodies,” as well as expelling them, but the larynx also is vital for “all forms of muscular effort.”

The larynx, one could say, is the site of convergence for many essential human behaviours and emotions. For instance, the emotion of disgust is connected to the “beneficial rejection of toxic foods” – the gagging, or coughing, or choking occurs in the throat – while Damasio has already asserted that background emotions are often affected by “prolonged physical effort.” Damasio has also asserted the connection between certain emotional behaviours, such as laughing and crying, and the neural centres that control the set of organs in the mouth, including the larynx.

121 Ibid.
While speaking may not be the same as coughing or crying or laughing, speech nonetheless has a relationship with emotion by virtue of the neurological and physiological structures that endow us with speech. Damasio might have already said that language is not a part of the proto-self, but the ability to express ourselves verbally is continuous with the structures that pertain to our homeostatic regulation. What is more, Damasio acknowledges the relationship between our use of language and our most fundamental states of being – our background emotions. He says:

Words and sentences, from the simple “Yes,” “No,” and “Hello” to “Good Morning” or “Good-bye,” are usually uttered with a background emotional inflection. The inflection is an instance of prosody, the musical, tonal accompaniment to the speech sounds that constitute the words. Prosody can express not just background emotions, but specific emotions as well. For instance, you can tell someone, in the most loving tone, “Oh! Go away!” and you can also say, “How nice to see you” with a prosody that unmistakably registers indifference.\(^{122}\)

Our expressions, even the mundane, are layered with meaning, in particular, emotional meaning, which also is indicative of our emotional attachments. For instance, how we say “hello” or “good morning” to someone will bear the marks of, among other things, how we feel toward that person, but also how we feel “in general.” The former betrays our attachment to that person, while the latter betrays our background emotional state. It is not uncommon that our background emotions influence how we feel towards others in certain situations.

\(^{122}\) Damasio, *The Feeling of What Happens*, 92.
Tone of voice is crucial in our meaning-making. Without variations of tone our words would be robotic and “cold.” Tone of voice, for Frost, is “in the mouths of men,” and tone of voice relies on the organs in the mouths of men to produce meaning in our speech. There can be no tone without these organs. There could be no speech without these organs arranged as they are. Our tone of voice, and our capacity to express ourselves verbally more broadly, emerges from what Dewey called “raw sounds”\textsuperscript{123}; it is our mouths and their unique physiology that allows us to “shape” the air into sounds as it passes through our vocal folds from our lungs. That we have the same physiology in this regard provides a crucial link between us as human beings; not only are our mouths the same, they can “make the same sounds.”

Two further points are worth making before moving on. Firstly, inherent in Damasio’s example of background emotional inflections is the potential for tone of voice and word meaning to be placed in tension, or “strained relation.” Secondly, and relatedly, as Crystal points out, there are limitations on how we can vary our tone of voice.\textsuperscript{124} That we can give “contrary” emotional inflections to words implies that the sound is more emotive than the words. This, specifically, is the “strained relations” Frost emphasises when he talks about sentence-sounds. The limitation on the degree of variation in our tone is grounded in the physiology of our mouths; as such, the strained relation of words and sentence-sounds is grounded in this limitation.

That is not to say, however, that the potential for such strained relations is limited. The use of words gives us something new with which to place our tone – our sentence-sounds – in strained relation. If we had no words our capacity to communicate would be limited.

\textsuperscript{123} Dewey traces the continuity of “raw sounds” in what I called his “theory of sound” in Chapter Two: “words exist before the art of letters and words have been formed out of raw sounds by the art of communication.”

\textsuperscript{124} Crystal, \textit{How Language Works}, 73.
That is, at least, our audible communications would be; we know animals use an array of non-aural techniques, such as scentimg and marking, to communicate. The words we use are not reducible to the sounds out of which they are shaped, but there is a continuity that underlies them both. There is a “nesting” arrangement between words and sounds, just as there is between emotions and homeostatic functions. We can place words and sentence-sounds in strained relation because of their continuity, because the former is not strictly reducible to the latter.

These strained relations allow us to correspond with one another because we are capable of engaging in the same “strain” of expression. Correspondence, it must be remembered, also entails the correspondence of “the invisible muscles of the mouth and throat.”\textsuperscript{125} We, too, can manipulate our tone of voice when we say “hello” or “good morning,” and we can do it with more than just “indifference.” We can infuse our “good morning” with contempt, for instance. Damasio has already used the example of contempt as a secondary emotion, demonstrating its connection to disgust, a primary emotion. He further argued that “even the words we use to describe situations of contempt, and moral outrage […] revolve around the nesting.”\textsuperscript{126} The expression of contempt through an otherwise neutral or banal statement, such as “hello” or “good morning,” illustrates the potential for strained relations between tone of voice, or sentence-sounds, and the words we use. In the case of contempt this strained relation may be involuntary.

Furthermore, contempt, through its connection to disgust and “beneficial rejection,” illustrates the metaphoric origins of words. James has already suggested the continuity

\textsuperscript{125} Robert Frost, “Introduction to King Jasper,” 742.
\textsuperscript{126} Damasio, Looking For Spinoza, 45.
between physiological disgust and expressions of moral or metaphoric disgust. Such expressions are “symbolic gustatory movements” and “mimetic,” based on what James calls the “principle of reacting similarly to analogous-feeling stimuli.” Contemptuous expressions, such as “he disgusts me” or “he makes me sick,” are grounded in this principle, which along with Damasio’s nesting principle, can be seen to relate to Dewey’s principle of continuity. While they are mimetic, they are also metaphoric because such expressions extend, or are projections of, and therefore not reducible to, their mimetic origins.

The example of contempt is not quite what Frost has in mind when he talks about sentence-sounds. He is more specifically referring to longer chains of sounds, or sentence-length sounds. The principle is nonetheless the same. The tension between tone of voice and the words operates in the same way, as Frost argues: “remember that the sentence sound often says more than the words. It may even as in irony convey a meaning opposite to the words.” The “sounds in the mouths of men,” their tone of voice, is what makes this tension possible. By intentionally saying “more than the words” through this strained relation we are able to “renew” words and enrich our understanding, as well as acquire newer and subtler variations of expression and communication.

This is a crucial source of our correspondence. There is an interesting tension between our structural similarity – the same eyes, mouth, lungs, and so on – and the variations of expression through these structures. It is a necessary tension. The similarities of our constitution allow us to experience the variations of expression that only come with the introduction of words. The variations in expression, the tension that we can create between

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127 James, Principles of Psychology, 763.
128 Ibid.
our structural limitations and the words we use, compels us to respond. This is what might be called “the force of novelty” which compels a response. By response I mean recognition of difference, however subtle, in the present objects of experience. We must “come to terms” with these new objects and what they mean for us; if they do mean anything, it is usually through some form of emotional attachment.

It is worth remembering that Holland has already said that we perceive each other through “a dialectic of sameness and difference”; we see difference against the background of sameness and sameness against difference. We recognise each other in this dialectic, but it is only because our sameness is fundamentally embodied: our eyes are the same, and our lips are the same and can make the same sound. This dialectic, however, is necessarily mimetic given that it relies on the sameness of our embodiment. This raises other issues. While it has already been asserted that there are limitations on our expression of tone, there are further limitations, pertaining in particular to mimicry, that are necessary to consider.

In considering these limitations it will also be necessary to deal with a number of emerging theoretical tensions between Damasio and Holland. In particular, there is tension over the nature and extent of our control over certain aspects of our bodily processes and the embodied foundations of our experience more broadly. There is a question, for instance, regarding just how much control we have over our mimetic capabilities. These theoretical tensions, however, are not insurmountable. Further analysis will diffuse any ostensible tensions, and provide a synthesis between Holland and Damasio on the issue of emotions.
2.2.3. “Casual Voluntary Mimicking”: Limitations and Variations

The distinction between Holland and Damasio centres, largely, around the question of control. This distinction is illustrated in their respective driving-related examples. In Holland’s theory he asserts that there is a link between perception and behaviour, whereby “behaviour,” in his words, “controls perception.” This is a critical link in the experiential feedback “loop” that Holland proposes as underpinning the act of reading. For Damasio, however, the notion of behaviour controlling perception, particularly with regard to emotion, is problematic. The issue of mimicry provides an important platform for analysis. While Damasio does not deny mimetic behaviour to humans, he holds reservations about explicit emotional mimicry, saying:

Casual voluntary mimicking of expressions of emotion is easily detected as fake – something always fails, whether in the configuration of the facial muscles or in the tone of voice. The result of this state of affairs is that in most of us who are not actors, emotions are a fairly good index of how conducive the environment is to our well-being, or, at least, how conducive it seems to our mind.  

James makes a similar point about actors and emotional mimicry. There is a limitation on how well one can control one’s emotions, which necessarily impacts on the relationship between behaviour and perception. Emotion does indeed provide a relatively stable source of information about “how conducive the environment is to our well-being.” Emotion cannot be randomly induced and still retain any productive attachment to their original intent. If emotions were random that would make them pathological and dangerous. Emotions must be

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131 James, *Principles of Psychology*, 751.
relevant to purposeful behaviour in the face of environmental cues or inducers. Holland himself has acknowledged this, arguing that emotions are central to the feedback loop, “emotion guides the whole system.” Emotions, however, are not fixed or impervious to change.

“Casual voluntary mimicking” is difficult because the consistency of emotional attachment and response is important to the “survival values” our emotions provide us. This limitation, however, is a virtue for aesthetic experience because it provides the anchor in a shared set of physiological responses on which the mimetic correspondence of the aesthetic experience is based. Put simply, were we more successful at casual voluntary mimicking there would be no basis for mimicking at all. If we could imitate without flaw or detection, the question must be asked, what, exactly, is being mimicked if we are all perfect mimics. This lack of perfect mimesis is vital to what Donald, cited in chapter one, calls “reciprocal mimetic games,” such as those involving rhythm, or recurring patterns of behaviour played out via the body. Lack of perfect mimesis opens the way for invention and adaptation, beyond mere repetition. There must, however, be some basis for imitation, an anchor-point which permits a degree of mimetic tolerance in our mimetic rapport: a range of behaviours or responses that are distinguishable from, but nevertheless identifiable as mimetically continuous with, the original imitable behaviour.

Correspondence and aesthetic experience rely on such an anchor-point. Without a degree of mimetic tolerance, there would be no “filaments of subtly” to uncurl and wave, and convince other minds of one’s mindedness; nor would there be an “aesthetic moral” of “getting another poetic something going” because there would either be too much flexibility.

132 Holland, The Brain of Robert Frost, 79.
for there to be any consistent meaning to persist, or there would be too much rigidity for new meaning to emerge. Such extremes resonate with the “two possible worlds” of Dewey, cited earlier, one of flux and one of fixity, in which aesthetic experience is not possible.

Our emotional and physiological responses to environmental stimuli, grounded in our common constitution and orientation, provide an important site of anchorage, affording us the consistency, but also the flexibility, needed for correspondence and shared aesthetic experience. Emotional attachments to certain objects of experience, for instance, provide an important example. Damasio argues that “certain sorts of objects or events tend to be systematically linked more to a certain kind of emotion more than to others.”134 He goes on to say that

in spite of all the possible individual variations in the expression of an emotion and in spite of the fact that we can have mixed emotions, there is a rough correspondence between classes of emotion inducers and the resulting emotional state.135

There is a consistency to the emotions induced by certain kinds of objects in our lives and the values with which they imbue our experience. This point resonates with James’s “fringe of affinities.” That certain “stimuli” regularly induce certain emotions indicates a web of relations between objects and emotional responses. Such objects, however, are never experienced in isolation; our emotional attachment to them is always against the larger background of other objects, events, and actions in which they are encountered and the broader context of our lives. The full significance of James’s fringe of affinities will be made clearer when I discuss Damasio’s concept of the “as-if body loop” shortly.

135 Ibid.
Related to the “rough correspondence” of emotions and their inducers is the structural invariance of the body in which those emotions are induced. That is, the consistency of emotional attachment and response to certain objects is grounded in the physiological processes that generate emotion through the “body loop.” Furthermore, “individual variations” both “in the expression of an emotion” and in the attachments of emotions to objects, is predicated on this structural invariance. As Damasio says, “there is a dispositional arrangement available in the organism’s structure that modifies the inner workings of the organism,” to ensure “that the environmental variations do not cause a correspondingly large and excessive variation of activity within.”\textsuperscript{136} This point resonates with Dewey’s emphasis on the “rhythm of loss and integration” of the organism’s relationship with its environment. As such, it can be seen that this “dispositional arrangement” has some bearing on the potential for aesthetic experience.

The structural invariance of our embodiment, our constitution and orientation, allows for objects in our environment to become meaningful. Those objects mean something to us in terms of “survival values,” or more abstractly, in terms of “figurative values,” because our body does not change, relative, at least, to the changefulness of the environment. We cannot simply change the value of those objects or our relations to them without considerable effort. The consistency of emotional inducers is the point of reference for our mimetic engagement with others. There is, at least, a solid core of physiological and emotional responses and attachments in every human being that can be accessed, however imperfectly, through our mimetic engagement. Correspondence relies on the core similarities of this proto-self, as does, as I will show shortly, the “as-if body loop” and empathy.

\textsuperscript{136} Ibid., 136.
While there are structural limitations to our experience, there is still a great deal of variation. We do have flexibility, albeit within certain boundaries. These boundaries are based on our physiology and based on what is on offer in the environment at any given time. There is, however, one caveat that should be considered. It pertains to our experience within these boundaries and it has to do with our breathing and speech. Damasio eventually acknowledges this exception:

One partial exception to the extremely limited control we have over the internal milieu and viscera concerns respiratory control, over which we need to exert some voluntary action, because autonomic respiration and voluntary vocalisation for speech and singing use the same instrument.\(^{137}\)

Our ability to control our breathing, even if only for the purposes of speech and singing, is immensely important to the way we experience our world. Our ability to speak, our ability to use language, is our most important tool and is indispensable in overcoming the limitations placed on us by the structural invariance of our embodiment. In spite of the fact that language has its own problems and limitations, our language use, our ability to speak, which flows from the body, is dynamically linked to our embodied experience. Our capacity to make and express metaphors, which have as their basis the orientation and constitution of our embodiment and embodied experiences, is testament to this fact.

Language, speaking, is an exertion of control in our experience. It is, as Damasio says, only *partial* control, but it is *necessarily* only partial control. Our capacity to speak must

\(^{137}\) Ibid., 40.
be continuous with the rest of our physiology; it is something that has grown out of various developments in our evolution (standing upright, for instance), and is bound by that arc of development. Our ability to write down our language is something different again, but it is also continuous with, because based on, our spoken language. The continuity of our capacity to speak with “lower” elements of our embodiment can be seen in the simple case of being “out of breath.” After running a long distance say, and trying to speak, one has to “catch” one’s breath in order to speak properly.

Only having partial control, however, allows for one important aspect of our experience: “sensitivity” to rhythm. More than just sensitivity to rhythm, partial control allows us to partake of rhythm. This is true not only of speech or singing, but dancing or any other physical activity. We are sensitive to rhythm because we can fall out of rhythm, we can stumble and skip a beat. More than that, we can recognise when we’ve lost the rhythm because we experience the loss of rhythm. Sometimes losing the rhythm, such as being out of step in a formal dance, is a trivial thing; it could be minor and incidental, or a cause of embarrassment if people notice.

2.3. Rhythm and Emotion

As I argued in chapter two, rhythm is fundamental to our engagement with and understanding of our environment. This is a key component not only of our experience in general, but of aesthetic experience as well. Rhythm is the quality of an organism’s “smooth functioning” in its environment. In the aesthetic experience, however, the experience of rhythm is manipulated, for lack of a better word, in order to produce an experience that is characterised by discord and subsequent resolution. It is emotional in the sense, as Dewey
explains it, that “emotion is the conscious sign of a break, actual or impending.”\footnote{Dewey, \textit{Art as Experience}, 14.} That is, the sense of discord has a physiological manifestation that reverberates throughout the body which constitute changes in body-states.

These body-states are fundamentally emotional. Resolution, as such, pertains to a “coming to terms” with the emotional break. “Discord is the occasion that induces reflection,” Dewey says. Going on to say, that,

Desire for restoration of the union [with one’s environment] converts mere emotion into interest in objects as conditions of realisation of harmony. With the realisation, material of reflection is incorporated into objects as their meaning.\footnote{Ibid.}

The meaning of a work of art is a product of the experience of resolving “emotion into interest in objects as conditions of realisation of harmony.” The meaning of a work of art, such as a poem, revolves around the experience of “discord,” or “confusion,” followed by reflection and the restoration of environmental union being “incorporated into objects as their meaning.” The work of art, as such, stands as, what I would call, a “rhythmic peak” of human activity, a crystallisation of “interest in objects” that sharpens our awareness of the objects of our experience.

By experiencing rhythm, particularly in the meaning-making process in the poetic experience that impels us to make the rhythm of the artwork ourselves, we find ourselves in the flow of meaning in which the meaning of particular objects emerges against the backdrop of their broader relations. In Jamesian terms, this flow of meaning refers to the fringe of
relations. The sense of rhythmic discord, as such, would relate to changes of relations at the fringe. In Frostian terms, this means metaphor. In the poetic experience the strained relations of sentence-sounds and words gives way to the strained metaphoric relations of objects. The resolution of this multilayered strain is a renewal and enrichment of our understanding of some aspect of the existing world, and therefore a renewal of “interest in objects” and an incorporation of our renewed understanding of those objects “into objects as their meaning.”

The “actual or impending” break in the rhythm of our experience, of which “emotion is the conscious sign,” might be better understood as the breakdown of “smooth functioning.” That is, conditions have changed in our immediate environment, such as a car bearing down on us at break-neck speed, and this has implications for our current state of being. Emotion is not a separate entity or activity in this event, but entails consciousness of the object of emotional response at the same time. In the case of the car bearing down upon us, there is not much time for “induced reflection”; our “interest” in the object of the runaway car is simply to get out of the way. Holland’s example, however, is different, because it entails an element of control coupled with the “survival values” of not driving off a cliff.

The driver is in control, he is conscious of the danger and the necessary actions to avoid it, but he is also informed by emotion when he gets too close to the edge. His rhythm is “broken” when he feels fear at being too close to the edge and so has to respond. There is extended co-ordination of internal activity and external behaviour that constitutes the whole concrete emotion-experience. There is purposeful behaviour, on the part of the driver, extending from the complex and dynamic activity of the embodied organism. Crucially, it is by choice. The driver chooses to drive along the road. The unfolding transactions of
continuous activity – between the body, the brain, and the environment – are the hallmarks of feedback, and what ultimately amounts to experiential testing.

Such testing behaviour, as Holland has already pointed out, affects how we perceive our environment, including our emotional responses. Such testing entails some degree of control. It also entails, however, some degree of no control. If we had total control over all the conditions of a test there wouldn’t be anything to actually test. To use a scientific metaphor, when we conduct a test we are testing the variables; in a scientific experiment we are testing for certain results, while in an experiential test we are testing ourselves. The same principle applies to aesthetic experience; aesthetic experience is a form of hypothetical or experiential testing. In aesthetic experience we are “in the driver’s seat,” so to speak. This is particularly true of poetry. We are the speaker of the poem but we are also its audience. This is a rare circumstance in any domain of experience.

It has already been said that poetry, in particular metaphor, is a test of ourselves. It has also been said that metaphor is not just an abstract conceptualisation, but is grounded in our embodiment. It has also been asserted that there is a definite physiological basis to our aesthetic experience, which further entails emotional experience. It can be seen to follow, then, that poetry, far from being an abstract art form, goes to the heart of our embodiment by testing our underlying capacity to experience, not just on an intellectual level but on a physical level as well.

This unity is central to Frost’s aesthetics. It is also central to Frost’s theory of correspondence because it entails a form of expression and communication based on our common constitution and orientation. Poetry, however, is not simply a reiteration of common
experience, but is a test of that experience. It is not meant to portray objects or experiences that simply induce emotions that are “systematically linked” to those objects. This would be a form of sentimentalism where emotional attachments are simply reaffirmed. Poetry challenges such attachments. What is more, poetry is meant to renew our engagement with the objects with which we already have attachments.

In chapter one I asserted that the experience of reading a poem involved “strained relations,” not only between words and sentence-sound, but between reader and poem. This strain can be seen, thanks to Shusterman and Damasio, in the responsiveness of the body of the reader, particularly regarding the musculature of their upper body, head and neck. The “upper body” because of the need to control one’s breathing, to keep it firstly at a steady pace (it is hard to read if one is out of breath) but also, in the case of poetry, to read the poem at a pace that one can hear it in “the mind’s ear as if aloud”140 to catch the rhythm of the poem. The head and neck muscles are important to maintaining steady engagement and “eye contact” with the poem, just as it would be with either a painting on a wall, a speeding car, or a winding cliff.

This strain is a susceptible state. Not, however, because a poem engenders explicit facial expressions. A poem does not call upon the reader to make broad emotional facial mimicries. We become susceptible because of the change in body-state engendered by our engagement with the poem. What we become susceptible to are subtle emotional states deriving, in part, from background emotions, but also from the as-if body loop. Our susceptibility to the emotional states that come with the embodiment of a poem is made possible by the partial control we have over our physiological activity, such as breathing.

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140 Frost, “Poetry and School,” 809.
Damasio provides the example of an opera singer, Maria Joao Pires, explaining how it appeared, under test conditions, that she could control her emotional responses during performance. He says:

She could virtually flatten her skin-conductance graph at will and change her heart rate, to boot. Behaviourally, she changed as well. The profile of background emotions was rearranged, and some of the specific emotive behaviours were eliminated, e.g., there was less movement of the head and facial musculature.\textsuperscript{141}

Damasio concludes, that “there are some exceptions to be found after all, perhaps more so in those whose lifework consists of creating magic through emotion.”\textsuperscript{142} When one considers the earlier exemption about actors and their ability for “casual voluntary mimicking” of facial features compared to the rest of us, one gets the sense that exceptions to the rule about such control are limited only to those in a professional capacity. Such professional capacity, however, whether it be an actor or a singer, is built on the same foundations of human embodiment common to all of us; actors and singers can only “create magic through emotion” because we share this common embodiment with them. Such exemptions, while perhaps best exemplified in professional artists, must, by such necessity, be available to everyone; otherwise we, the audience, could not be moved by their work.

What Damasio’s example nevertheless shows is that there is a link between our capacity for expression and background emotions. This link is most noticeable in the partial control we have over our breathing, but also more broadly in the stance we take in order to express. That is, we can affect the basic feeling of our state of being, and so affect the way we

\textsuperscript{141} Damasio, \textit{The Feeling of What Happens}, 50.
\textsuperscript{142} Ibid.
subsequently engage with and perceive the objects of our experience. Again, it is not total control over emotion; rather, it is an entry point into the experiential loop of action, thought, and feeling. We can direct our experiences, but we cannot control them.

2.4. “As-If Body Loop”

It now remains to address Damasio’s concept of the “as-if body loop,” arguably his most important concept, at least in terms of this thesis. The as-if body loop is the “supplementary mechanism” for emotional stimulation (or rather, simulation) that Damasio contends is lacking in James’s theory of emotion. The as-if body loop is important on a number of levels: firstly, it is fundamental for our capacity for empathy, the ability to feel what others are feeling. Empathy plays a vital role in our intersubjectivity; as such, the as-if body loop has implications for correspondence, both in our everyday experience and in our aesthetic, or poetic, experience as well. Secondly, and related to this last point, the as-if body loop allows us to project emotional experiences, a kind of “empathic projection,” on to human and non-human entities alike. Put simply, we can empathise with more than just the immediate experiences of others; the as-if body loop allows for metaphoric flexibility with our own emotions, engendering a wider range of figurative values and relations than if our emotions were locked up in our heads or even in our bodies.

The “as-if body loop” derives from the body loop; however, as the name suggests, it is only as if the body – the somatosensory system – were activated. Damasio says, in one of his earliest formulations of the idea: “I believe […] that in numerous instances the brain
learns to concoct the fainter image of an ‘emotional’ body-state, without having to re-enact it in the body proper.” He explains that, fundamentally, in this alternative mechanism, the body is bypassed and the prefrontal cortices and amygdala merely tell the somatosensory cortex to organise itself in the explicit activity pattern that it would have assumed had the body been placed in the desired state and signalled upward accordingly. The somatosensory cortex works as if it were receiving signals about a particular body state, and although “as if” activity cannot be precisely the same as the activity pattern generated by a real body state, it may still influence decision making.

In other words, there is a mimicking of the “body maps” inside the brain that register changes in the broader somatosensory system. The loop is shortened, so to speak, by by-passing the rest of the body. The brain, Damasio appears to be arguing, has this capacity to internalise and “replay” past experiences, at least in terms of relevant body-states. “There are thus neural devices” Damasio says, “that help us feel ‘as if’ we were having an emotional state, as if the body were being activated and modified. Such devices permit us to bypass the body and avoid a slow and energy consuming process.” This last sentence gives an indication of how such bypasses might have emerged. There is benefit in developing short-cuts that reduce the energy load placed on the body to process previously experienced body-states. Damasio explains the emergence of as-if states in terms of our early childhood development:

“As if” mechanisms are a result of development. It is likely that as we were being socially tuned in infancy and childhood, most of our decision making was shaped by

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143 Damasio, Descartes’ Error, 155.
144 Ibid., 184.
145 Ibid., 155.
somatic states related to punishment and reward. But as we matured and repeated situations were categorised, the need to rely on somatic states for every instance of decision making decreased, and yet another level of economic automation developed. Decision-making strategies began depending on such “as if” symbols of somatic states.\textsuperscript{146}

These as-if mechanisms, and subsequent “as if symbols of somatic states” are central to mimetic behaviour. By lightening the load, retaining somatic (body) states and permitting access to these retained states, we are capable of projective emotional states like empathy. Furthermore, as-if mechanisms allow us to predict how we might feel in the future under certain conditions. It is possible, then, to mimic future experiential conditions, to a degree, without actually being subject to those conditions, so long as there is a substantial repertoire of somatic and emotional states already retained within the organism’s brain. There is, of course, a limit to this capacity. While we can influence our emotions, we cannot simply invent them from nothing. There is always a degree of uncertainty in our experience, not only in terms of our environment, but also in terms of our body and brain. Damasio speculates:

\begin{quote}
The brain probably cannot predict the exact landscape the body will assume, after it unleashes a barrage of neural and chemical signals on the body, no more than it can predict all the imponderables of a specific situation as it unfolds in real life and real time. Whether for an emotional state or a nonemotional background state, the body landscape is always new and hardly ever stereotyped. If all of our feelings were of the
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{146} Ibid., 184.
“as if” type, we would have no notion of the ever-changing modulation of affect that is such a salient trait of our mind.\textsuperscript{147}

In spite of the structural invariance of the body, there is still an element of uncertainty about how the body will respond to the varied stimuli, whether originating from inside or outside the body, in our experience. All our feelings cannot be of the as-if type, originating from the as-if body loop, because they must still retain their continuity with the original body loop. The as-if body loop, and all its subsequent activity, is an extension of more fundamental activity; it has emerged out of necessity in our experience in order to facilitate our basic needs for survival.

The as-if body loop allows us, rather, to turn back, with greater creative control, toward our state of being, as well as allowing us to turn back toward our own experience that nevertheless must arise from a state of being. This allows us to reconstitute an experience of an object or an event in terms of our emotional attachment to it. What is more, we can test this emotional attachment through challenging the relevant somatic state. The ability to “re-live” past traumas so as to overcome the emotional turmoil attached to them testifies to this fact. Whole fields of therapy are premised on this innate human ability.

Implied in this capacity, it must be said, is the propensity to involuntarily retain traumatic emotional attachments. The capacity to voluntarily recall the trauma is predicated on this involuntary disposition. If we never retained those traumatic experiences, their memory and associated emotional responses, then there would be nothing to re-live. This points to a fundamental issue in human development, as Damasio explains:

\textsuperscript{147} Ibid., 158.
One of the main aspects of the history of human development pertains to how most objects that surround our brains become capable of triggering some form of emotion or another, weak or strong, good or bad, and can do so consciously or unconsciously.\(^\text{148}\)

Colloquially speaking, we are sponges that absorb, among other things, emotional associations to the objects and events encountered in our environment. Damasio uses an insightful example worth considering here:

Think of the house where once, as a child, you may have had an experience of intense fear. When you visit that house today you may feel uncomfortable without any cause for the discomfort other than the fact that, long ago, you had a powerful negative emotion in those same surroundings. It may even happen that in a different but somewhat similar house you experience the same discomfort, again for no reason other than you can detect the brain’s record of a comparable object and situation.\(^\text{149}\)

The example of a fearful childhood experience with subsequent association to the object or location persisting into adulthood is an excellent one; while Damasio’s inclusion of a “somewhat similar house” triggering a similar discomfort illustrates a few important points. The vulnerability of childhood, in terms of the impressionability of our embodiment during early experiences, translates into associations that endure through to adulthood, implying continuity of experience. While the potential of similar objects in triggering emotional

\(^{148}\) Damasio, *Looking for Spinoza*, 55.

\(^{149}\) Ibid.
responses later in life indicates the fluidity of associations that can be engendered by the original impression.

We can be “tricked,” so to speak, into recalling or re-living past experiences in terms of our emotional attachments. It need not be the same object, the same house, but one that is similar enough that we misrecognise it. What is more, this need not be by accident, either. We can choose to recall or re-live the experience. We can choose to go back to the house where those painful feelings or memories originate. We can choose to go back, either in real life or return in our minds and “conjure up” the feelings from memory. The latter is the basis of a great deal of psychotherapy.

There are, then, a number of ways in which emotions can be triggered through an encounter with objects, consciously or unconsciously, in real life or through imaginative re-visiting. Furthermore, because of our capacity to retain embodied experience – through patterns of body mapping in the somatosensory network – coupled with our capacity to share our experiences, we can express and communicate these experiences with one another. We can, conversely, absorb the qualities – the thoughts, the feelings, the emotions – of those experiences communicated by others. These are not abstract communications like transferring packets of data between two computers; rather, communication is a felt experience in itself.

2.4.1. Empathic Projection

At the beginning of this section, I mentioned the importance of the as-if body loop to empathy, mentioning also the potential of “empathic projection.” It is important to consider empathic projection as an aspect of the as-if body loop at this point as it is central to both our
intersubjective relations, that is, our ability to correspond with others, as well as our
sensitivity to aesthetic and poetic experience. As I have been arguing, building from Frost,
the poetic experience is intersubjective; poetry is a form of correspondence, and this entails
empathy. Empathic projection, importantly, is, as Mark Johnson argues, metaphoric; this is
perhaps the crucial link between intersubjectivity and the aesthetic experience.

The internal simulation that the as-if body loop makes possible is what is responsible
for “turning the emotion of sympathy into a feeling of empathy.”\textsuperscript{150} Damasio uses an example
of hearing about an accident second-hand:

Think, for example, of being told about a horrible accident in which someone was
badly injured. For a moment you may feel a twinge of pain that mirrors in your mind
the pain of the person in question. You feel as if you were the victim, and the feeling
may be more or less intense depending on the dimension of the accident or on your
knowledge of the person involved.\textsuperscript{151}

Damasio then proceeds to explain, in terms of body maps inside the brain, what is going on in
such a situation:

It involves an internal brain simulation that consists of rapid modification of ongoing
body maps. This is achieved when certain brain regions, such as the
prefrontal/premotor cortices, directly signal the body-sensing brain regions.\textsuperscript{152}

\textsuperscript{150} Ibid., 115.
\textsuperscript{151} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{152} Ibid.
Put simply, one brain region “directly signalling” another brain region is the evidence from which Damasio surmises the bypass mechanisms he call “as-if” mechanisms. It can further be surmised from this association between the as-if body loop and empathy that the energy-savings that come with bypassing the body-proper are also important to the capacity of empathic feelings. The energy saved in this way might, in fact, enable empathic connections, and through such energy-savings enrich the experiential capacity of the individual by allowing him to share experiences in a qualitative way with others.

One further caveat about the relationship between the as-if body loop and empathy needs to be made explicit, that is the mimetic capacity of our behaviour. Empathy is mimetic, while the as-if body loop is a fundamental mechanism that allows for embodied mimetic activity, an internal mimetic device. By internal mimicry, however, I mean the capacity to imitate internal states; the as-if body loop allows for the imitation or reconstruction of states related to the body loop. Empathy is more than this. Mark Johnson and George Lakoff make several crucial links between empathy and imitative behaviour:

From earliest childhood we are able to imitate – to smile when someone smiles at us, to lift an arm when some lifts an arm, to wave when some waves. Imitating makes use of an ability to project, to conceptualise oneself as inhabiting the body of another. Empathy is the extension of this ability to the realm of emotions – not just to move as someone else moves, but to feel as some else feels.153

If empathy is an extension of our imitative, or mimetic, capacities to the realm of emotions, then the “as-if body loop” is an underlying element that facilitates empathy. That the capacity

153 George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, Philosophy in the Flesh: The Embodied Mind and its Challenge to Western Thought (New York: Basic Books, 1999), 280-81
to imitate is with us “from earliest childhood,” indeed even “from birth,” is indicative of the continuity of empathy within our biological and social development. Or in Damasio’s terms, empathy is nested within various underlying emotional responses and physiological processes.

The “as-if body loop” allows for empathetic experiences, their emotions in particular, to register as felt. Regardless of whether such feelings are “fainter” than “real” somatosensory activity, empathy is fundamental to what it means to be human. Without empathy there can be no correspondence. Indeed, the absence of empathy is widely considered to be pathological. Empathy, however, is not the same as experiencing the same thing as the person being empathised with. It is not “identical” in the strict sense of the term. Johnson makes the point that empathy is, in part, metaphorical; or, at least, is understood metaphorically:

Empathy is the capacity to take up the perspective of another person, that is, to see things as that person sees them and to feel what that person feels. It is conceptualised metaphorically as the capacity to project your consciousness into other people, so that you can experience what they experience, the way they experience it. This is metaphorical, because we cannot literally inhabit another person’s consciousness.

While empathy is “conceptualised metaphorically,” it is no less a real experience for the empathiser. This is because it is grounded in the real embodied capacities of the empathiser, who, it should be added, is constituted in the same body-minded way as the person or persons with whom he is empathising. Empathy does not require physical contact or even proximity.

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154 Ibid., 565.
155 Ibid., 309.
What empathy requires is common ground. This grounding is provided by our embodiment, not simply in terms of our bodily similarities, but the continuity of our embodiment with, and in, our environment. The logic of Damasio’s nesting principle applies as much to our location within and relationship with the environment as it does to the different levels of emotion and physiological activity.

By understanding empathy as an embodied metaphorical activity that extends from our mimetic capacities, both internal and external, the full scope of what empathy is capable of can be ascertained. Empathy not only encompasses our engagement with other human beings, but with the world, the environment, more broadly. Lakoff and Johnson emphasises this point:

The environment is not an “other” to us. It is not a collection of things that we encounter. Rather, it is part of our being. It is the locus of our existence and identity. We cannot and do not exist apart from it. It is through empathic projection that we come to know our environment, understand how we are part of it and how it is part of us. This is the bodily mechanism by which we can participate in nature, not just as hikers or climbers or swimmers, but as part of nature itself, part of a larger, all-encompassing whole.\(^{156}\)

Here we are seeing the convergence of a number of points. Empathy is related to both the as-if body loop – and therefore the body loop – as well as the feedback loop. Empathy is grounded in the bodily mechanisms of emotion, which are central to the meaningfulness of the feedback loop as it operates in our behaviour and perception. Empathy is both a behaviour

\(^{156}\) Ibid., 566.
and a perception that is made possible by the various “loops” operating in our organism; the very continuity of these loops makes empathy possible because they tie perception and behaviour together. “Empathic projection” underpins the “hypotheses” we put out into our environment in the process of feedback. Empathic projection, particularly with regard to the “environmental” dimension that Lakoff and Johnson attribute to it, provides the distinctly human emotional and experiential colouring to those hypotheses. We stand as empathic filters by virtue of the as-if body loop, which allows us to translate the objects, actions, and events of our experience into the common embodied language of emotion and feeling.

2.5. Metaphorical Mapping

Empathy is not some abstraction, but, as Damasio has indicated, it is predicated on the mapping of emotions within the brain and body. The metaphor of “mapping” has been used by Damasio to capture the way emotions are activated within the body, such as in neural and somatosensory maps. The “as-if body loop” activates these various body maps, by-passing the body-proper to do so. These maps are activated in empathic projection. Projection, understood as “projecting on to something else” can be extrapolated to include the mapping of things in the external world. That is, we are projecting a map that serves to organise and explain, or to give value and meaning, to objects and events in our environment. Our emotional attachment to objects, it can be argued, provides not only an internal map of body-states but a projective map of meaning and value.

To carry this metaphor further, we map the world around us in terms of its meaning and value. Such mapping is mirrored in the mapping of our body-states inside our body and brain. The meaning and value of the objects of our experience come from the emotional
impressions they leave on those internal systems, on the body loop. That our emotional attachment to objects leave an imprint in the form of a map that can be re-activated is indicative of the potential of the as-if body loop and empathy. Empathy allows us to feel as if we were experiencing someone else’s experiences, feeling someone else’s feelings. Empathy, however, allows us to do more than just feel what others feel. Empathy allows us to impart feelings to others – and not just other people – by virtue of this “mirror mapping,” the metaphorical projection of empathy as well as the activation of internal body-states through the as-if body loop.

“Mirror mapping,” then, is shorthand for this dual process of the internal mimicry of emotional states and the projection of those same emotional states onto others. It is this mirror mapping process that allows us to empathise with the world around us, and draw value and meaning from it in the form of attachments to objects. What is more, it also grants us a degree of flexibility with our emotional attachments. This is, in part, the source of our partial control over our emotions. I use the term mirror mapping quite deliberately for another reason: “mirror neurons.” Mirror neurons are, potentially, the neurological link between perception and action, the mimetic engine of intersubjectivity. I will not go into great detail about mirror neurons here, as this would move too much in the direction of neuroscience, and this is not my aim. Furthermore, mirror neuron theory is not without its problems. It is possible, however, that mirror neurons have implications for aesthetic experience; but that is another thesis entirely.

Put briefly, mirror neurons are neurons that activate in both the perception of actions in others as well as in one’s own actions. Through the activation of these mirror neurons we can understand the actions of others as if we were engaging in the same action. The neurons that are activated are the same for both. Damasio himself says, of his as-if body loop that: “I believe the ‘as-if body loop’ mechanism […] draws on a variant of this mechanism.”\(^{158}\) This is a reasonable conjecture, and indicates the possible direction for future research of the significance of mirror neurons in aesthetic experience. In his most recent book, Damasio exclaims more directly that “so-called mirror neurons are, in effect, the ultimate as-if device.”\(^{159}\) Some research, however, has been conducted into the aesthetic dimensions of mirror neurons.\(^{160}\) Holland further suggests that “mirror neurons may also bear on our emotional response to poetic language.”\(^{161}\) While the notion of mirror mapping is suggestive of this link, I believe it captures strongly the intentions of Damasio’s “as-if body loop” and Mark Johnson’s “empathic projection.”

We can engage in empathic projection willingly because the as-if body loop by-passes the body-proper. Not only can we empathise with the plight of someone who has been in an accident even though we did not witness it, we can impart value and meaning to objects, events, and even people, we have no direct experience of. We do this through acts of association, which is partly a cognitive activity; the meaningfulness of such “abstract,” or rather metaphorical, associations is, however, derived from experiential associations with their concomitant emotional value. In short, because of our capacity to mirror map, such as empathic projection, we can enrich our understanding beyond immediate experience.

\(^{158}\) Damasio, *Looking for Spinoza*, 115.
\(^{159}\) Damasio, *Self Comes to Mind*, 110.
\(^{161}\) Holland, *Literature and the Brain*, 97.
Furthermore, it can be argued, the as-if body loop is evidence of the connection between emotion and metaphor. The “as-if body loop,” as the source of “empathic projection,” resonates with Dewey’s claim that metaphor is primarily an “emotional identification,” wherein an “object emotionally akin to the direct object of emotion takes the place of the latter. It acts in place of a direct caress, of hesitating approach, of trying to carry by storm.” I would expand Dewey’s use of the word “object” to include event or action. In the next chapter, I will argue that experiential patterns, or what Mark Johnson calls image schemata, which underpin the objects, events, and actions of our experience, provide the basis for shared experience and correspondence; these experiential patterns rely on the proper functioning of the as-if body loop in order to facilitate the shared emotional identification that constitutes aesthetic and poetic experience.

We can make “emotional identifications” through metaphor as a means of both broadening and refining our understanding. We can expand, to use James’s term, our “fringe of affinities” through empathic projection. “Knowledge about a thing” it must be remembered, “is knowledge of its relations.” These relations, however, are felt relations, as the process that generates associations is fundamentally embodied. The “emotional identification” that underpins metaphor, therefore, serves to stretch our fringe of relations. This fringe of relations, however, as James has said, is “unarticulated.” “We are only aware,” James says, of most relations “in the penumbral nascent way of a ‘fringe’ of unarticulated affinities about it.”

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162 Dewey, Art as Experience, 79.
163 Ibid.
164 James, Principles of Psychology, 167.
165 Ibid.
The fringe of affinities is unarticulated because conscious focus is not brought to bear on all the relations surrounding a given thought. In fact, we cannot focus on all the relations of a given thought. Nevertheless, the fringe informs our understanding of whatever object or topic is the focus of our attention. These relations are “felt in the fringes,” particularly “the relation of harmony and discord, of furtherance or hindrance of the topic.”\(^{166}\) By which James means whether a possible relation “feels all right.” Feeling “all right” in relation to these fringe relations is a part of our thought processes, as James says, “any thought the quality of whose fringe lets us feel ourselves ‘all right,’ is an acceptable member of our thinking, whatever kind of thought it may otherwise be.”\(^{167}\) Simply put, the fringe is the felt relations of our thoughts.

Empathic projection enables us to continually expand our fringe of relations by imbuing our thoughts with new emotional identifications. The result of our hypothetical or metaphorical testing is to add new strands of relations to this fringe. A parallel can be drawn between the addition of such strands and the connection and activation of neurons in our brain, particularly in our early years. Based on the arguments made thus far, such a parallel, or nested relationship, is entirely appropriate. The “felt relations” of the fringe of affinities implies some kind of emotional connection; these felt relations, following Dewey and Damasio, must have some kind of embodied dimension, even if only in an “as-if” way.

Without an emotional dimension the fringe of affinities could not be felt. Without the emotion dimension, such fringe relations would be impoverished. They would not be grounded in embodied experience, and therefore not continuous with bodily and environmental processes. Things going on inside and outside the body are related through the

\(^{166}\) Ibid., 168.
\(^{167}\) Ibid.
body; the body, that is, is both “in” and “about” the environment. For anything to be related to something else in our thought processes, even at a “nascent” and “unarticulated” level, it must be related through embodied experience, which means maintaining continuity with the underlying processes of our experience, in the body – or body-mind – as well as in the environment.

The poetic experience is a surrogate or approximation of the fringe-expanding experiences provided by the as-if body loop and empathic projection. Frost’s theory of correspondence, and the “aesthetic moral” of “getting another poetic something going,” are predicated on the activities of the as-if body loop that link the physiological processes of the body loop to the metaphorical mapping of empathic projection. The poetic experience activates the as-if body loop abstractly, and it is this activation of the as-if body loop that constitutes the correspondence, the synecdochic and metaphoric connection, between everyone who “reads poetically.” That is, the as-if activation is in response to a proxy – the poem – by which the as-if mechanisms of other readers are similarly activated. The poetic experience, then, entails a metaphoric empathic projection brought about by physiological and neurological activity.

There is, then, an expansion of fringe meaning, of the fringe of association by which we understand the world and share that understanding with each other. That is, to use Frost’s terminology, there is an expansion of the “figurative values,” at least potentially, that constitute our understanding. The “one step more poetic anywhere” of Frost’s aesthetic moral is an acknowledgement, or perhaps an encouragement, to not only expand the fringe of affinities but to explore that newly created space. “All metaphor breaks down somewhere,” Frost reminds us, so we must continue to explore new avenues of meaning and value; and this
is achieved through the physiology of meaning-making that begins at the very core of the human organism.

Conclusion

Our experience, both in an everyday and an aesthetic sense, is predicated on our embodiment. The processes of our body are intimately implicated in our experience. There is continuity between our experience and these processes. That is, our body processes, or rather, our body-mind processes, are the basis for experience, and what constitutes experience are those actions, objects, or events that act upon, emerge from, or otherwise impact those processes. Evolution has geared us toward action within our environment; as such, there is a “pervasive operative presence” of the environment within our bodily processes. Continuity, then, is the underlying characteristic of experience in a biological and environmental sense. Not only are we continuous with and in our environment, we are continuous with others with whom we co-inhabit the environment. Continuity, as such, is the foundation of experience and communication, and ultimately correspondence.

Holland’s theory of feedback is evidence of continuity in action. While Damasio’s as-if body loop illustrates the metaphoric extensions to which our continuous experience can be stretched. Both argue for the embodied nature of our experience. Emotion, furthermore, is the experiential proof of continuity that both rely upon. Without the physiological phenomena of emotion the feedback loop would break down, while the as-if loop would be impossible. Put plainly, if emotions are not registered in body maps, experience has no continuity with the environment. In terms of the feedback loop, without emotion there is nothing of significance for the body to respond to; driving along the mountain pass, for instance, it doesn’t feel like
anything to get too close to the edge, so the imperative to act is absent or diminished. In terms of the as-if loop, without emotion there would be no resonance between similar actions, objects, or events; one might recognise similarities abstractly, but the visceral response would be absent.

Ultimately, without emotion there is no empathy. We cannot carry over what it is like to feel a particular way in a given situation to another situation with similar characteristics. This is the diminishment of metaphorical and mimetic capacities to project, rehearse, and re-enact situations abstractly (that is, without having to literally recreate the conditions for such situations). Aesthetic experience, then, is inherently emotional. The poetic experience, as such, is acutely emotional because it directly acts upon the emotional centres of our physiology: the “invisible muscles of the mouth and throat,” the lungs and the diaphragm as well. Furthermore, these organs and muscles are responsible for our expressive and communicative capacities. In the self-recital of the poetic experience there is both a physiological feedback loop, as well as a metaphorical projective as-if loop via the same mechanisms.

In the poetic experience, the reader occupies a vital intersection at which lines of continuity converge: physiological, cultural, environmental, and importantly, intersubjective. The feedback loop of poetic experience generates an as-if experience in the reader, which is only possible because of the common constitution and orientation of all potential readers. The reader stands in relation to the poem in a synecdochic fashion. The reader stands for all readers. This is a metaphoric and mimetic link between all readers, not just reader and poet. The “subtleties” with which “mind must convince mind” through correspondence are extensions of this body-minded dynamic.
The poetic experience is a pervasive act of correspondence on par with a broader cultural loop, a *cultural* feedback loop. The poetic experience, it can be said, stands as a figure for broader cultural exchanges or correspondences. The poetic experience is nevertheless continuous with our original body-minded, environmentally-embedded, nature. Our common continuity means we are bound up in cultural and social “feedback loops” predicated on the more fundamental ones discussed throughout this chapter. Art is the perfect example of such cultural loops. The continuity of our embodied experience arguably reaches its highest form of expression in art because it is the branching out of our embodied experience into metaphorical realms. Metaphorical realms that are, however, continuous with their embodied origins. Metaphors extend from our embodied experience, in a manner of speaking, out into the world. Metaphors stand for something in our experience, mapping our understanding of the world, while at the same time there are processes mapping our experience within our bodies.

In the next chapter, I will return to metaphor, primarily in the form of Mark Johnson’s theory of “image schemata.” The theory of image schemata provides the strongest argument for the embodied nature of metaphor. Image schemata are the basic patterns of experience that stem from our embodied experience in our environment. Correspondence hinges on our ability to share these patterns of experience. Furthermore, correspondence depends on our ability to know what’s in the minds of others. Understanding the minds of others is, in part, predicated on these shared experiential patterns. We “read the minds” of others, in part, because they possess the same basic set of image schemata. We can “project” patterns of experience to infer the motivations and thought processes behind the behaviours of others. To this end, I will also discuss the process of “mind reading” or the “intentional stance” in the
next chapter. Minds, I will argue in the next chapter, are connected through patterns of experience, which ultimately are the basis for metaphor. The poetic experience links minds together through these common experiential patterns by acting upon our common embodied processes. That is, minds are connected through metaphor, and poetry is the ideal location for metaphorical testing.
4. Reading the Mind of the Poem: Metaphoric Experience and the Attribution of Intentionality

In the previous chapter, I explored the emotional components of the poetic experience. In this chapter, I intend to explore the mental components of the poetic experience. There are two important aspects that I will focus on which governs the division of the chapter into two subsections. Firstly, I will address with the theory of image schemata and its relationship to metaphor; metaphor, throughout this thesis, has played a pivotal role and it will be analysed in terms of its embodied origins in image schemata, or the fundamental experiential patterns that form the basis of our understanding of the world. Primarily, I will focus on Mark Johnson’s postulation of image schemata. The theory of image schemata is important because it identifies the metaphoric basis of our understanding in the constitution and orientation of the human body.

Put simply, the theory of image schemata provides continuity between the higher order metaphorical projections – and, importantly, the use of metaphor in poetry – and the embodied functions of meaning-making. Mimesis, for instance, and our mimetic rapport more broadly, is predicated on the shared patterns and shapes of our bodies and environments; metaphors, as Johnson argues, are an extension of these image schemata, and therefore are “nested,” to use Damasio’s terminology, in the embodied and mimetic processes that we rely on to make sense of the world and each other, particularly prior to the acquisition of language.

The second aspect that I will address in this chapter pertains to what I will call the attribution of intentionality, or mind, (“attribution” for short). Put briefly, attribution is the
way in which we attribute, ascribe, or otherwise impute mental, or intentional, states or content to human and non-human entities based on observed behaviour, actions, or events. That is, we understand the behaviour of others through applying or projecting our own experiential patterns onto their actions; as a result, we discern the thoughts and motivations of others. Two theorists in particular are important for this part of my argument: Daniel Dennett and Lisa Zunshine. In their theories they refer to attribution, respectively, as “the intentional stance” and “mind-reading.”

Attribution of mind resonates with Frost’s theory of correspondence, while the theory of image schemata can be seen to link correspondence – which, for Frost, is grounded in embodied, mimetic process – to our metaphorical processes of meaning-making. That is, through the self-recital of the poem, and the embodying of the same metaphoric processes whereby the poem was originally constructed, so as to produce (or re-produce) its meaning, the reader is turned back toward the fundamental processes of meaning-making, which are predicated on image schemata, which are in turn grounded in the embodied experience of the reader, indeed, all potential readers.

In the first instance, correspondence is achieved, abstractly, in the embodying and testing of the fundamental metaphoric processes, which are universal among human beings. That is, the poetic experience convinces us of the mindedness and the subtlety of others’ mindedness through the potentially shared experience of self-recital. In the second instance, correspondence is achieved through changing the perception of the reader with regard to the potential subtlety of other minds. There is a moral dimension to this process. This is perhaps the most complex aspect of the argument of my thesis and will require some unpacking.
1.1. Image Schemata: Context and Background

One of the primary purposes of Johnson’s theory of image schemata is to locate metaphorical understanding within the confines of embodied experience. This makes it important for the argument I am putting forward in this thesis. Some of the background to the development of Johnson’s theory, however, is also important; it is worth briefly addressing that background before launching into the theory-proper. This is because Johnson develops his theory against other theories of meaning, particularly those which reduce the importance of metaphor in our meaning-making processes. Of particular interest here is John Searle and certain aspects of his theory of meaning, which Johnson uses and in a way subverts, to help ground image schemata in embodied experience.

Johnson develops his theory of image schemata, in part, against a strain of what he calls Objectivism, which, in his words, is “the tradition that treats meaning and rationality as purely conceptual, propositional, and algorithmic, and therefore in no way dependent on metaphorical extensions of nonpropositional image schemata.”¹ “Objectivism,” he explains more directly, “treats all meaning as conceptually and propositionally expressible in literal terms that can correspond to objective aspects of reality.”² Johnson includes a number of eminent thinkers, such as Searle, as well as Davidson and Frege, among others under this title. This is a broad category, with numerous entailments, not all of which are relevant to the argument at hand. It is the final clause in the first quote that is most important to my thesis. Johnson’s “non-Objectivist” theory of meaning revolves around re-establishing the centrality of “metaphorical extensions of nonpropositional image schemata.”

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² Ibid., 5.
The crucial distinction between Johnson’s theory of meaning and the Objectivist theory of meaning, as far as this thesis is concerned, is this: “A metaphor is not merely a linguistic expression (a form of words) used for artistic or rhetorical purposes; instead, it is a process of human understanding by which we achieve meaningful experience that we can make sense of.”\(^3\) This is a position that strongly accords with Frost’s account of metaphor as “all there is of thinking.”\(^4\) It is the relegation of metaphor as a meaning-making process that ostensibly binds the Objectivists together in Johnson’s conception. Davidson, for instance, who restricts metaphor to its propositional content,\(^5\) or Searle, who says:

It just seems to be a fact about our mental capacities that we are able to interpret certain sorts of metaphor without the application of any underlying “rules” or “principles” other than the sheer ability to make certain associations. I don’t know any better way to describe these abilities than to say that they are non-representational mental capacities.\(^6\)

“It is a fact about our sensibility,” he says elsewhere, “that we just do perceive a connection”\(^7\) between the disparate elements of a metaphor, and thereby make sense of it. The notion of a “sheer ability to make certain associations” that explains why we can “interpret certain sorts of metaphor” is unsatisfying. Metaphor is fundamental to human thought. Metaphor, the capacity to understand and interpret metaphor, is not “just a fact about our mental capacities” or “our sensibility,” nor is it “a sheer ability.”

\(^3\) Ibid., 15.
The above quote arguably best encapsulates the problem for Johnson. This quote is, in a sense, emblematic of the refusal of Objectivists to deal with the problem of metaphor; instead, reducing the significance of metaphor in their pursuit of literal meaning. Johnson sums up the implications of an Objectivist approach to meaning for metaphor, of which Searle’s is but one:

To sum up the Objectivist view of metaphor: the objective world has its structure, and our concepts and propositions, to be correct, must correspond to that structure. Only literal concepts and propositions can do that, since metaphors assert cross-categorical identities that do not exist objectively in reality. Metaphors may exist as cognitive processes of our understanding, but their meaning must be reducible to some set of literal concepts and propositions.8

The Objectivist approach, then, is reductive, and employs a form of compartmentalisation. Metaphor, rather than being the interbreeding of two disparate and compartmentalised concepts that correspond explicitly to the outside world, and must, logically, be reducible to the same, is proof of the connectedness that underlies those “objective” compartments. Plainly put, metaphorical understanding precedes the fixity of the Objectivised knowledge of “literal concepts and propositions.” It is this compartmentalisation of meaning that makes Searle’s understanding of metaphor weak.

Against this propositional literalism, Johnson proposes the non-Objectivist theory of image schemata, recovering the pre-eminence of metaphor in meaning-making. Of particular

importance to his argument, at least to this thesis, is the theory of meaning of John Searle, certain aspects of which Johnson re-appropriates to his theory. Searle occupies a half-way position in Johnson’s Objectivist/non-Objectivist dichotomy. Johnson identifies two major points of congruence between Searle’s theory and his own, but he also identifies one critical disjunction (among other differences which Johnson details but which I won’t go into here). Two points of congruence are, first, that “meaning always involves human intentionality,” that is, meaning always involves human mental states which are about something; and second, that “all meaning is context-dependent.”9 Pertinent to the latter point is Searle’s theory of the Network and the Background, which I will address shortly.

The major point of difference between Searle and Johnson, as Johnson identifies it, revolves around the issue of intentionality. Johnson explains:

In general, the principal basis for my disagreement with Searle is an important difference in our respective notions of intentionality. On Searle’s account, mental states have intentionality insofar as they are directed toward “states of affairs” in the world. On my account, the mental states are directed at our experience of states of affairs in the world. But experience is always a matter of understanding, and so “states of affairs” never really stand over against our web of intentionality. Searle’s view of the Background is ultimately his way of trying to get “outside” language, intentionality, and understanding to “plug into” the objective world.10

Intentionality, which, to use Searle’s useful definition, “is that property of many mental states and events by which they are directed at or about or of objects and states of affairs in the

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9 Ibid., 181.
10 Ibid., 189.
world,“11 is a contested notion in philosophy. Its full significance will be made clear later in this chapter when I come to discuss the attribution of intentionality. The directedness or aboutness of mental states is more commonly understood in terms of beliefs, desires, even emotions: intentional states are states of mind that take an object – whether abstract or concrete – as their focus. That is, they are about or are directed at that object, the intentional object or content.

Most philosophers make a distinction between intrinsic intentionality and derived intentionality. For Searle, for instance, “intrinsic intentionality is the aboutness of our thoughts, our beliefs, our desires, our intentions (intentions in the ordinary sense).”12 While derived intentionality is “exhibited by some of our artefacts: our words, sentences, books, maps, pictures, computer programs.”13 Such artefacts “have intentionality only by courtesy of a kind of generous loan from our minds.”14 Others, such as Daniel Dennett, give a wider scope to intentionality, particularly through his theory of the intentional stance, which I will discuss later in this chapter.

An issue of concern, particularly with regard to the processes of meaning-making, is the relationship between intrinsic and derived intentionality. Searle posits a “double level of intentionality,” whereby the intentionality of the mind is “imposed” upon the artefact to loan the artefact its meaning.15 This bifurcation is problematic, however, in light of the principle of continuity. While Searle is right to postulate a double level of intentionality, it is better to view such levels in the same manner as emotion, as discussed in chapter three. That is, levels

11 Searle, Intentionality, 1.
12 Ibid., vii.
13 Ibid.
14 Ibid.
15 Ibid., 27.
of intentionality are “nested”: “higher” levels of intentionality emerge from, but are not reducible to, lower levels.

At the most fundamental level, intentionality is nested in “preintentional” capacities: capacities that belong to the processes of the body, neurological and physiological capacities, which are necessary for intentional states but are not intentional themselves. Homeostasis, for instance, would be considered preintentional. This is the level at which, for Johnson, Searle’s argument is particularly problematic. The bifurcation of intrinsic and derived intentionality stems from Searle’s fundamental delimitation of the role preintentional capacities in the meaning-making process. Searle, among other Objectivists, attempts to narrow the focus of our understanding of meaning to the linguistic imposition of meaning, bridging the gap, so to speak, between mind and the world of artefacts that they themselves have made. Johnson, with his non-Objectivist theory of meaning, is attempting to re-establish the continuity of the meaning-making process.

Johnson, shifts the focus of intentionality as a part of the meaning-making process from mental states that are “directed toward states of affairs in the world,” to mental states that are “directed at our experience of states of affairs in the world,” and it is the structure of that experience that he argues is, essentially, metaphoric. Fundamentally, the structure of experience is one of recurring patterns in the form of image schemata, from which metaphoric projections into the world, characterising states of affairs through our patterned experience of the world, can be made.

By emphasising the “experience of states of affairs in the world” Johnson is interposing the body of the experiencing subject, not only into the understanding of the states
of affairs in the world, but as the mediating factor. Put simply, we experience the world with and through our bodies. Hence, our understanding of the world is embodied. Embodied meaning-making processes, then, are central to Johnson’s non-Objectivist theory of image schemata. Johnson argues:

In order for us to have meaningful, connected experiences that we can comprehend and reason about, there must be pattern and order to our actions, perceptions, and conceptions. A schema is a recurrent pattern, shape, and regularity in, or of, these ongoing ordering activities. These patterns emerge as meaningful structures for use chiefly at the level of our bodily movements through space, or manipulation of objects, and our perceptual interactions.\(^\text{16}\)

These patterns are the image schemata, and perhaps their most salient feature (particularly from a non-Objectivist perspective) is that they are non-propositional,\(^\text{17}\) indeed, they are prelinguistic.\(^\text{18}\) These patterns can be “considerably refined and elaborated as a result of the acquisition of language and the conceptual system that language makes possible. These structures are part of meaning and understanding.”\(^\text{19}\) Put simply, image schemata precede language; as a corollary then, metaphor is not merely a rhetorical device, rather, language is an elaboration and refinement of our metaphorical understanding, which stems from our basic image schemata, or patterns of experience.

The intentionality, the “aboutness,” of our mental states, then, is mediated by these patterns because these patterns are generated and perpetuated by our embodied engagement

\(^{17}\) Ibid., 23.
\(^{18}\) Ibid., 48.
\(^{19}\) Ibid.
in the world. The “states of affairs” of this world are made meaningful by our being embodied in the world. Language is an elaboration or refinement of our understanding of these states of affairs, which is predicated on the image schemata, the experiential patterns, which are produced through our embodied existence. Understanding, importantly, changes with these patterns, or with new applications of these patterns through metaphoric projection, for instance. This point, that understanding changes as patterns or their metaphoric applications change, is critical to the poetic experience.

Metaphor, that is, has “the power to create a new reality,” as Lakoff and Johnson explain: “this can begin to happen when we start to comprehend our experience in terms of a metaphor, and it becomes a deeper reality when we begin to act in terms of it.” That is, we “come to terms” with a new metaphoric understanding, even just a new “actionable metaphor.” Metaphor, however, has this reality-changing capacity because of its continuity with more fundamental image schemata that are grounded in our embodiment. That is, metaphor allows us to engage with the patterns of our own experience and engage in reality-changing experiments, for lack of a better word. Metaphor, then, is about our embodied experience, because grounded in our embodied experience. There is a suggestion of a feedback dynamic here, which I will touch on shortly.

One further issue needs to be discussed before moving on to a more positive analysis of Johnson’s theory of image schemata. Johnson, in his critique of Searle, pays special attention to his theory of the Network and the Background. The Background is of particular importance because, for Searle, this is where meaning essentially ends, but for Johnson, this is where image schemata begin. The Background, for Searle, is simply “a bedrock of mental

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21 Ibid.
capacities.”22 The Background is preintentional; lacking, that is, the quality of “aboutness” that intentional states, such as thoughts and emotions, possess.

The Background nonetheless is a precondition for intentional states, which exist in a Network of interconnected states; “the Network,” Searle says, “shades off into a Background of capacities.”23 The Network and the Background are fundamentally connected: an intentional state is only possible by virtue of the Background, while any given intentional state is connected to other such states to varying degrees. Searle, however, is not alone in postulating the existence of a Background or Network. Searle’s Network of intentional states bears a resemblance to James’s “fringe of affinities,” while Dewey postulated a nascent form of “the Background.”24

The preintentional capacities of the Background include “walking, eating, grasping, perceiving, recognising, and the preintentional stance that takes account of the solidity of things, and the independent existence of objects and other people.”25 There is a clear resonance between such capacities and the patterns of experience that form image schemata. This, however, is not the direction in which Searle takes his theory, as Johnson explains:

The alleged preintentional character of the Background provides Searle with a way of stepping outside the potentially infinite series of connected intentional states that might be relevant to the meaning of any given utterance. The Background terminates

22 Searle, Intentionality, 143.
23 Ibid., p.151
25 Searle, Intentionality, 143.
the quest for further explanation by serving as a “given” of physical skills and stances that claims to need no further analysis, since it is not intentional.\textsuperscript{26}

In other words, Searle postulates a division between preintentional and intentional states, which effectively seals the Background off from any consideration of meaning. Johnson, quite rightly, objects:

There is no clear and distinct demarcation between intentional mental states and preintentional mental and bodily capacities. Image schemata (which are preintentional in Searle’s sense) can be conceptually elaborated to establish connections in our network of meanings. We seem to have a continuum rather than a dichotomous gap.\textsuperscript{27}

This last point, that “we seem to have a continuum rather than a dichotomous gap,” is conceptually important because it entails the continuity that underpins our embodied experience. Intentional states can be seen to be “nested” in preintentional capacities, in much the same way that emotions are nested as discussed in the previous chapter. This continuity can be extrapolated (and will be later in this chapter) to include “as-if” intentionality, or a projection of intentionality on to others.

In chapter three, the argument was put forward that there is continuity of meaning-making processes beginning with homeostatic processes. Both Holland and Damasio extended this process to a conscious, and indeed cultural, level of meaning-making. That is, “higher-order” meaning-making processes are ultimately nested in “lower-order” bodily processes. Searle’s closing off of the Background from higher-order meaning-making is

\textsuperscript{26} Johnson, \textit{Body in the Mind}, 187.
\textsuperscript{27} Ibid., 188.
problematic with regard to this continuity. Homeostasis, even the somatosensory system, can be considered “preintentional,” and it was shown how they contribute to hierarchy of meaning. The delimitation of the Background from higher meaning-making endeavours would, essentially, seal off the “body loop” from the “as-if body loop,” this is, in part, reflected in Searle’s criticism of Dennett’s theory of the intentional stance, and the efficacy of “as-if intentionality,” which I will discuss later in this chapter. First however, I must turn to the theory-proper of image schemata and its relationship with metaphor.

1.2. Image Schemata

“Our reality,” Johnson tells us, “is shaped by the patterns of our bodily movements, the contours of our spatial and temporal orientation, and the forms of our interactions with objects.”28 He goes on to say that “it is never merely a matter of abstract conceptualisation and propositional judgements.”29 These patterns form the foundations of our experience because of their enduring nature, and from these patterns we derive concepts to explain and direct our experience; concepts which, in turn, we can elaborate upon and refine with language. These patterns emerge from the Background capacities of the body; and it is these patterns that, ultimately, produce meaning.

“Iimage schemata” Johnson explains “are those recurring structures of, or in, our perceptual interactions, bodily experiences, and cognitive operations.”30 They are “abstract patterns in our experience and understanding.”31 Image schemata, to reiterate, are “not

28 Ibid., xix.
29 Ibid.
30 Ibid., 79.
31 Ibid., 2.
propositional”\textsuperscript{32} and are “prelinguistic,”\textsuperscript{33} although they are capable of being refined by language.\textsuperscript{34} That is, image schemata underpin our understanding prior to language; the acquisition of language does not supplant these experiential patterns, rather it supplements them. As Johnson, quoted in chapter one, argues, the bodily movements and gestures that characterise infant learning – which implies mimetic learning – “are not transcended and left behind when children eventually grow into adulthood”\textsuperscript{35}; the patterns of bodily movements and gestures, and the environmental interactions they engender, remain distinctly meaningful even after the acquisition of language.

Image schemata are “gestalt structures,”\textsuperscript{36} although they have a “small number of parts or components that stand in very definite relations to one another.”\textsuperscript{37} Breaking down image schemata into constituent parts, however, “will destroy the meaningful unity that makes it the particular gestalt that it is.”\textsuperscript{38} By analogy, an atom has constituent parts, but by splitting it, it ceases to be the atom that it is. These gestalt structures are dynamic “because they have definite internal structure that can be figuratively extended to structure our understanding of formal relations among concepts and propositions.”\textsuperscript{39} The meaningful, pre-linguistic and non-propositional, unity of the gestalt structures of image schemata can be figuratively extended to map our understanding, not just of the relations of the objects of our experience but of the “formal relations among concepts and propositions” that are of a second order to those objects, their relations, and our experience of those objects and their relations.

\textsuperscript{32} Ibid., 23.
\textsuperscript{33} Ibid., 48.
\textsuperscript{34} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{36} Johnson, \textit{Body in the Mind}, 44.
\textsuperscript{37} Ibid., 79.
\textsuperscript{38} Ibid., 44.
\textsuperscript{39} Ibid., 38.
Second order, because our conceptual and propositional understanding is predicated on our perception and experience of those objects and their relations.

It is the “meaningful unity” of the basic image schemata that shapes our understanding of the world; and it is this meaningful unity that equips us with structures, abstract structures, by which we represent the world to ourselves and each other. Just as importantly, however, this meaningful unity allows us to affect our environment, to track and to take part in its changes; in short, the meaningful unity of image schemata allows us to engage in the rhythm, the “ordered variation of changes,” of our environment.

Image schemata, then, are fundamental to human knowledge because they are derived from our embodied experience of the world; that is, image schemata are grounded in the common constitution and orientation of our bodies. Our experience and understanding of the world is characterised by the regular and recurring actions, objects, and events we encounter in the world, as well as the regular and recurring movements and processes of our bodies. Patterns emerge because there is regularity and recurrence of actions or processes, for instance. That is, because actions and processes recur, we can develop abstract models or maps of actions, objects, and events; equally important, we can develop an understanding of the movements and processes of other human beings. Image schemata are the most fundamental, irreducible kind of experiential pattern. Metaphors, I will show, are extensions of image schemata into more complex patterns.

Image schemata and metaphor are related, but they are not the same thing. Image schemata and metaphor are continuous, or nested. Put simply, image schemata are fundamental experiential patterns while metaphors are their extensions or projections. This is,
perhaps, a simplistic rendering of the picture I seek to portray, but it is, nonetheless, useful to keep in mind as I elaborate the more intricate relationship between image schemata and metaphor. A parallel might be useful to illustrate this relationship. The relationship between image schemata and metaphor can be understood in a similar way to the “nested levels” of emotions. The relationship between image schemata and metaphor, or metaphorical projections, is comparable to the relationship between background emotions and “higher” primary and secondary emotions. This is more than just a cosmetic parallel, however.

Image schemata are not “abstract” in the usual sense of that word; rather, they are basic structures or patterns in our experience and understanding, not overtly detailed as, say, a memory or specific event might be: “image schemata are not rich, concrete images or mental pictures.” These patterns are embodied and experiential, as opposed to being “intellectual” as the term “abstract” in its usual sense often implies. Image schemata are patterns that emerge from our experience in the world as mediated by and through our bodies. These patterns, then, are intimately connected to the constitution and orientation of our embodiment. Such patterns reflect both the opportunities and limitations of our embodiment in our environment and the subsequent experiences that such opportunities and limitations shape.

The kinds of examples of image schemata that Johnson uses illustrate just how fundamental they are (some of which I will address in greater detail shortly); for instance, CONTAINER, CENTRE-PERIPHERY, PATH, and BALANCE. These schemata are derived from the way in which we are situated in the world and the way our bodies perceive

40 Ibid., 23.
41 To differentiate between the common usage of a word and a word used specifically to denote an “image schema” I have capitalised the term in full; Johnson, to achieve the same end, uses a different font. The choice is merely to illustrate unambiguously when a word is being used to formally denote an image schema.
and interact with it. Image schemata are central to the continuity between our embodied experience and our more abstract understanding of the world. The PATH schema, for instance, is quite straightforward:

In every case of PATHS there are always the same parts: (1) a source, or starting point; (2) a goal, or end-point; and (3) a sequence of contiguous locations connecting the source with the goal. Paths are thus routes for moving from one point to another.42

Johnson discusses many others,43 and includes a non-exhaustive list of about thirty.44 It is from the internal structure of the PATH image schema, for instance, that we can extrapolate a large number of metaphorical projections with the PATH schema as its foundation. Johnson uses the example of the conceptual metaphor PURPOSES ARE PHYSICAL GOALS as one such extrapolation:

Here goals are understood as end points toward which my various physical actions can be directed. In the metaphor we are thus understanding very abstract purposes (such as writing a book, getting a Ph.D., finding happiness) in terms of the performance of various physical acts in reaching a spatial goal.45

This is just one of many examples; I will discuss others later in this section. These basic experiential patterns are pervasive and universal. Pervasive in the sense that we can identify, apply, or reconstruct them in a wide variety of ways; this is by virtue of their small number of definite parts that can be figuratively extended. They are universal by virtue of the fact that

42 Johnson, Body in the Mind, 113.
43 See Ibid., 112-126.
44 Ibid., 126.
these experiential patterns are predicated on the embodied processes of the human body; this is the basis by which, through mimetic rapport and language, we share a common world.

There is an intersubjective dimension to these experiential schemata by virtue of the commonality of our embodiment. We do not just share the same orientation and constitution, the natural logic of our common embodiment extends to our subsequent experiences as well. This is a crucial point, as Johnson explains:

> These embodied patterns do not remain private or peculiar to the person who experiences them. Our community helps us interpret and codify many of our felt patterns. They become shared cultural modes of experience and help to determine the nature of our meaningful, coherent understanding of our “world.”

“These embodied patterns” are a pivotal link in our intersubjective correspondence, they are not “private” because they are the product of our common embodiment, as well as communal interpretation. We do, of course, have private thoughts and feelings, and our experiences are very much ours, but the structure of those thoughts, feelings, and experiences is common to all human beings by virtue of our common embodiment; thereby, the extension of “embodied patterns” to more “abstract” levels, from image schemata to metaphor, is also common to all human beings.

Image schemata are vital to our experience because they are the basis for the recognition of the objects of our experience. Not simply for things we have encountered before, but for things that have structural similarities; things that we are not necessarily

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46 Ibid., 14.
familiar with, but in which we can recognise familiar structural or behavioural aspects. We recognise both similarity and difference through the image schemata that comprise our experiential modelling. Johnson explains:

Even our most simple encounters with objects, such as the perception of a cup, involve schemata that make it possible for us to recognise different kinds of things and events as being different kinds. Our perceptual schemata are the various possible structures that our experience must fit if it is to be coherent and comprehensible.  

The recurring patterns of these experiential image schemata allow us to make sense of the world around us. While for our experience to be “coherent and comprehensible” it must fit into some schematic structure, this does not mean that image schemata are “imposed” from outside our experience; rather, image schemata are organic to our experience. The abstract patterns, in effect, act as a feedback for the physical experience, providing a map against which that experience can be tested and confirmed, or changed accordingly. The feedback process, in Holland’s conception, predicates the malleability of image schemata; that we can, indeed, “change our schemas and metaphors,” something which echoes the sentiment of Lakoff and Johnson.  

Our experience “fits” the schemata often in such a way that we don’t realise it. It is a natural process that structures our experience in this way. If we had to constantly and consciously assess every piece of stimuli to ensure it fits the “right” schema, our experience would be very different than what it is. The cognitive workload would be intolerable. In this

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49 Lakoff and Johnson, Metaphors we Live By, 145.
way, image schemata are a part of the “Background.” The process of structuring experience goes on in the background, much like computer programs operating in the background so that the interface is free for other, more direct tasks. Consequently, “image schemata,” Johnson says, “as structures emerging in our perceptual interactions and bodily behaviours, fall clearly into Searle’s notion of Background.” Image schemata operate within the neurophysiological Background, registering as neural patterns the experiential patterns of the organism, while at the same time enabling this patterning process by virtue of the constitution and orientation of the organism.

The “computer program” analogy in the previous paragraph should not be taken too far, as it leads to an entirely different argument. But it does help to illustrate the point, relatively speaking. It can be argued that there are “motor programs” that are a part of the constitution and orientation of the human body. This is uncontentious. Our bodies must be able to do things, and doing things requires structure. This structure can be found in our neurological and physiological make-up (and at a deeper level in our DNA). Johnson, in contradistinction to Searle, maps out the importance of these underlying “programmatic” features; it is worth quoting at length:

I would argue that there is much more to be said about physical skills and their role in meaning than Searle would lead us to believe. Specifically, they are not just physical skills, consisting of neural connections, about which we can say no more; rather, they involve structured motor programs. Those programs involve image schemata and gestalt structures that recur over and over again in various related skilful performances. These structured movements, in turn, depend on schemata for

50 Johnson, Body in the Mind, 183.
perceptual interactions. If there were not such regular, recurring schemata, we could never recognise the structure of situations such that we could skilfully interact with them. When I walk, for example, I must recognise patterns in my environment to which I respond on the basis of the structures I perceive. It is true that my body does this responding, and I am not performing a rapid set of rule-governed calculations; yet, I must at least perceive certain structures which direct, shape, and help me to monitor my skilful responses, with varying degrees of adequacy.\(^5^1\)

There is an emerging “loop” dynamic in the role image schemata play in directing and shaping our experience. Image schemata emerge because of the nature of our embodiment. We understand, for instance, the directional relations of UP, DOWN, FRONT, and BACK because of the constitution and orientation of our bodies. These schemas are a result of the “motor programs” inherent to our neurophysiology, as Johnson says, these “programs involve image schemata and gestalt structures that recur over and over again in various related skilful performances.”\(^5^2\) In turn, however, image schemata help to structure our subsequent experience, perception and movement. As Johnson has already said, “these structured movements, in turn, depend on schemata for perceptual interactions.” Image schemata are not simply programmed into us like software, they are far more dynamic, and, as a result, so are our experiences.

Image schemata are not rigid; the meaning we may ascribe to a schematic structure is not fixed in the way that the meaning of a concept is fixed, or hypostatised. The structures of our experience, then, while relatively stable, also resist fixity:

\(^5^1\) Ibid., 186.
\(^5^2\) Ibid.
These structures are not rigid or fixed, however, but are altered in their application to particular situations. Furthermore, they are not just templates for conceptualising past experience; some schemata are plans of a sort for interacting with objects and persons. They give expectations and anticipations that influence our interactions with our environment.\textsuperscript{53}

Johnson explains the source of the potential for this sense of rigidity: “what we typically regard as fixed meanings are merely sedimented or stabilised structures that emerge as recurring patterns in our understanding."\textsuperscript{54} Image schemata can change with experience. Or rather, the application of image schemata in structuring our experience can change. And what this means is that application of image schemata can be tested.

This last point resonates with Frost’s theory of correspondence. A parallel can be drawn between the malleability of image schemata and the “filaments of subtlety” with which minds must convince each other of their mindedness. In this metaphoric parallel the filaments of subtlety, like the image schemata, are anchored in embodied experience but are unattached at the other end where they can be “uncurled and waved,” “altered in their application to particular situations” or tested through poetic metaphor to see how far such an application can be taken before it “breaks down.” While this is a metaphorical parallel, there is a physiological basis: both image schemata and correspondence are predicated on the common constitution and orientation of the human body. As such, correspondence and image schemata can be seen as a part of the same meaning-making process.

\textsuperscript{53} Ibid., 21.
\textsuperscript{54} Ibid., 175.
1.2.1. Image Schemata, Structure, and Meaning

So far I have attempted to establish image schemata as pervasive, basic, and malleable, as well as continuous, or nested, within our more fundamental neurophysiological processes. I have also made the nascent suggestion that image schemata are a part of an experiential loop. In order to fully develop this argument, however, more must be said about the nature of image schemata, particularly its relationship with metaphor. This will involve three further elements of Johnson’s postulation of image schemata. Firstly, I will turn to the structure of image schemata; secondly, I will discuss how, in Johnson’s words, image schemata “constrains meaning”; and thirdly, I will examine the “metaphorical projections” that image schemata permit.

Image schemata are characteristically gestalt structures. They are patterns of experience which have a holistic quality that allows us to recognise seemingly novel encounters in accordance with pre-existing event structures that indicate how this new experience might unfold. A “coherent and comprehensible” experience “fits” a schematic structure. This metaphor can be extended, however, by saying the experience “fits” a pre-existing “mould.” While this at first may seem a superficial shift in terminology, it actually comprises the use of a dominant image schema, that of the CONTAINER schema. Damasio’s nesting principle, as an example, employs the CONTAINER schema.

My shift in terminology, albeit a minor example, illustrates the presence of an underlying schema. If we analyse it further and focus on the shift as being from the term “structure” to the term “mould,” we can see that the shift pivots on the word “fit.” What is more, we can also see that there is an “if/then” logical structure. Put simply, if an experience “fits” the “schematic structure,” then it is “coherent and comprehensible.” If we then replace
the term “schematic structure” with “mould” then the logic and the meaning of the sentence remain intact. We can make sense of the shift from structure to mould because both terms share the underlying CONTAINER schema; they both “hold things in place,” providing shape and form to that which they contain.

One, of course, can object that not all structures are containers. Internal structure, for instance, like a skeleton, nevertheless gives shape to that in which it is contained. Moulds, however, are external – usually uncomplicated – devices that give shape to that which is put inside. The answer is already suggested in the objection. There is no such thing as a structure that doesn’t structure something. Whether the structure is the container or is contained, the structure is identifiable as that which provides structure. The mould is a particular kind of structure. It is, as such, a more specific application (more obvious, though not necessarily more accurate) of the image schemata of CONTAINER. If the experience “fits” then it is nonetheless coherent and comprehensible.

The CONTAINER schema is one of the more prominent schemata we use; it is pervasive, basic, and malleable. There is not just one kind of containment that we talk about, but we can recognise the pattern of containment in many things. My manipulation of the terms “structure” and “mould” revolve around the notion of “fit,” which in one of its applications pertains specifically to containers, that is, fitting inside. The generic CONTAINER schema remains the same, but the image, the visualisation, is what is changed by the change of term. We would visualise the “fit” differently depending on whether we are talking about a “schematic structure” or a “mould” or a “frame” or “pattern.” This is because schemata are not “fixed and rigid”; rather, image schemata are flexible because they have inner structures of their own. While they are basic, they are not fixed.
While image schemata may be gestalt structures, they are also characterised by part-whole relations, as Johnson tells us:

Typical schemata will have parts and relations. The parts might consist of a set of entities (such as people, props, events, states, sources, goals). The relations might include causal relations, temporal sequences, part-whole patterns, relative locations, agent-patient structures, or instrumental relations. Normally, however, a given schema will have a small number of parts standing in simple relations. In the CONTAINER schema, for instance, in particular my shift from “structure” to “mould,” there are basic parts. “Containers” Johnson says, “have at least the minimal structure of a boundary, an interior, and an exterior.” For something to fit something else, even in the abstract sense of an experience fitting an experiential mould, it must fit within these boundaries. These boundaries, furthermore, define the form, structure, or shape of that which is to fit inside.

These “small parts” in “simple relations” provide both flexibility and stability in our understanding of the recurring patterns in our experience. If image schemata are indeed malleable, then this malleability must also exist at the level of these small parts in simple relations. Arguably, then, we can conceptualise them as “moving parts” within the image schemata that allows for its application in a wide variety of encounters and experiences. If image schemata themselves are not “rigid and fixed” then it stands to reason that the components of a given image schemata are not. Schemata are, after all, experiential patterns,

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55 Ibid., 28.
and for a pattern to exist there must be parts that stand in relation to one another. It is the nature of those relations that determines the pattern, and those parts and relations are determined, in large part, by our interaction with those parts. We are, after all, the ones who recognise the patterns, and those patterns must be recognised from a particular point of view, and that is always from the point of view of our embodiment.

Malleable, however, does not mean amorphous. Image schemata still provide structure to our understanding and experience, and that means image schemata must retain some degree of structure regardless of their application. That there are moveable parts within the image schemata does not entail that those parts are removable. Johnson makes this point: image schemata “have definite parts and structural relations that emerge chiefly at the level of our physical or bodily perception and movement.” He goes on to re-iterate “even though schemata are definite structures, they are dynamic patterns rather than fixed and static images.” The definiteness of the structure and its parts is by virtue of our “bodily perception and movement.” Their dynamism is by virtue of the changing environment, that we can perceive it and move through it. What is more, that we can respond to it, and adapt to it because we can perceive it and move through it in the way our embodiment allows us.

The definite structure of our bodies, then, provides the “definite” structure of our image schemata. Our embodiment structures our experience, the patterns of which are reflected in our image schemata, which, in turn, serve to structure our experience by providing us with abstract and recognisable patterns. This allows us to navigate through our world with a degree of predictability. The internal structure of image schemata is central to enabling this process of meaning-making because while it is malleable it is also constraining

57 Johnson, Body in the Mind, 28.
58 Ibid., 29.
on the process of meaning-making. Image schemata do not change randomly. Rather, as Dewey might say, they change “rhythmically”; they allow for an “ordered variation of change,” while providing structure to our experience and understanding in any given situation.

1.2.2. Meaning and Constraint

While image schemata have an adaptable quality, this is, arguably, only of secondary importance to their ability to constrain understanding. That is, any adaptability the image schemata might have is only to maintain a necessary level of constraint over our meaning-making processes, as Johnson argues:

Image schemata constrain inferences (and thus reasoning) in certain basic and important ways. They can do this because they have definite internal structure that can be figuratively extended to structure our understanding of formal relations among concepts and propositions.59

In this quotation three important points converge. Firstly, Johnson makes the claim that image schemata constrain inferences; secondly, he says that this is by virtue of their “definite internal structure,” the moveable but not removable parts; and thirdly, what is constrained in this way are the “figurative extensions,” the metaphorical extensions, of the image schemata. In this subsection, I will deal with the second point, though a few general remarks are worth making.

59 Ibid., 38.
Firstly, it is worth noting that Johnson is identifying a relationship characterised by continuity. The body – with its “movements and perceptions” – gives rise to the internal structure of the image schemata, which structures and constrains the “figurative extensions” of those schemata, which in turn structures and constrains “our understanding of formal relations among concepts and propositions.” In light of this, it is not unreasonable to say that the body constrains our understanding of formal relations among concepts and propositions.

In saying that image schemata constrain meaning it is simply meant that image schemata provide structure through which meaning can be formed; for with structure – whether we conceptualise it as a mould or other shaping structure – come opportunities as well as limitations for meaning-making. As Johnson argues:

To say that image schemata “constrain” our meaning and understanding and that metaphorical systems “constrain” our reasoning is to say that they establish a range of possible patterns of understanding and reasoning. They are like channels in which something can move with a certain limited, relative freedom. Some movements (inferences) are not possible at all. They are ruled out by the image schemata and metaphors. But within these limits, there is a measure of freedom or variability that is heavily context-dependent. Which inferences are sanctioned will depend […] on the metaphorically organised background against which phenomena appear, questions are posed, investigations are performed, and hypotheses are formulated.60

It can be seen from Johnson’s argument that my “moving parts” analogy regarding the parts of image schemata has some merit. The “limited, relative freedom” through which some

60 Ibid., 137.
inferential “movements” can be made is by virtue of those “definite parts” that constitute the image schemata. Importantly, the movements of the definite parts of an image schema are “context-dependent.” That is, dependent on the context of the application of the schemata.

While my use of the term “mould” in place of “structure” is not an inferential movement in the sense of reasoning that Johnson is talking about, the constraining aspect of the image schemata nonetheless applies. In order for me to “move” from structure to mould the basic “definite parts” must remain the same for both. That is, there must be “a boundary, an interior, and an exterior.” That is the minimal structure by which we can comprehend the image schema CONTAINER. I am constrained in my metaphorical movement by these definite but moveable parts. If what I propose lacks any semblance of “a boundary, an interior and an exterior,” then the logic of the point I am trying to make breaks down.

The consequence of such constraint means that if I want to change the definite parts of the schema, then I have to change the whole schema for my “movement” to make sense. This is because image schemata are not arbitrary patterns, but patterns of experience; the structure of any particular image schema is grounded in the embodied nature of our experiences that give rise to them. There is nothing to stop me, of course, from reformulating what I am trying to express with the structure/mould shift into a different schema. I could say, instead, that for an experience to be coherent and comprehensible it must reflect – not fit – an image schema, and this would entail a MATCHING schema.

The image schema we use, or the schematic stance we take, determines how we make sense of an experience or stimuli. We are not limited, however, to employing one schematic stance at a time: we can recognise multiple patterns at once. Furthermore, we can recognise
and apply patterns across “domains” of different schema. We are always primed to recognise patterns. To say that we “employ” schematic stances is a bit misleading as our ability to recognise patterns is always “on,” it doesn’t require conscious thought; these experiential patterns are, after all, grounded in our neurophysiological make-up. As such, our schematic stance, or the potential for schematic stance, is always on in the Background.

We can, of course, intentionally cross schematic domains in the process of understanding. It stands to reason that if the definite parts of the image schemata are not “fixed and rigid,” and the schemata themselves are not “fixed and rigid,” then the application of image schemata cannot be “fixed and rigid.” Image schemata are the base level of experiential pattern, but our understanding does not begin and end with them. Image schemata allow for “higher level” activities of metaphorical “projections,” connections, and interpretations. Image schemata do not exist in isolation from one another – though we can identify them and their parts – rather, they exist in a network, and this allows us to cross map or blend the limited number of schema we have in diverse and novel ways.

1.3. Metaphor and Metaphorical Projections

Metaphorical projection relates to image schemata in a constructive way. That is, metaphorical projection – or just metaphor – is the process whereby experiential patterns are rendered more specific with regard to the context or situation. Metaphor is generative in this regard, and a more complex process than simply recognising patterns. Metaphorical projections are a higher level of “imaginative” application of schematic structure, while it is not the only one it is one of the best to analyse, as Johnson explains:
Metaphorical projection is only one way we achieve order and structure in our experience that we can make sense of. Another type of projective structure is metonymy, which deals with part-whole relations. But metaphor proves to be one of the better examples of imaginative schematic operations, because it allows us a glimpse of the creation of meaningful structure via projections and elaborations of image schemata […]. The epistemic importance of metaphor is thus seen to rest on its role as an experiential process in which structure is generated and projected in our understanding, construed in the broad sense.61

Metonymy and synecdoche, or part-whole relations more broadly, have already featured significantly in this thesis, as has metaphor. Interestingly, Johnson asserts that both serve as “imaginative schematic operations” for generating and projecting experiential patterns and processes “in our understanding.” While Johnson says metaphor is better at illustrating such operations, this is because metaphor offers a wider application, and greater cross-domain mapping, of underlying schema. Metaphor and metonymy, at least as schematic operations, are not mutually exclusive devices as such, but share in the continuity of schematic operations.

Metaphor, as an experiential process, is about mapping our understanding in terms of underlying patterns. Metaphor is not just about registering or recognising patterns, but generating them from the store of patterns available to us. These patterns are present both within us, in our sensorimotor pathways and “motor programs” and in the environment around us. For the most part, our schematic processes, the recognition and application of image schemata, are automatic, as are many of our metaphorical projections. We can,

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61 Ibid., 100.
however, reconstruct those schemata without any physical experiential pattern or stimuli being presented to us to activate it. We do not need to be confronted with a container, for instance, to mentally reconstruct a CONTAINER schema. Even if we are presented with stimuli that might direct us toward a certain schema, we can reconfigure our understanding of it so that another schema is more applicable.

Our understanding of any given stimuli or object of experience is grounded in the strands of relations that can be followed out from it through these schematic operations. Our metaphorical processes not only entail the recognition of image schemata in our experience, but the network of relations that unfold from the object, event, or entity. As William James has said, “knowledge about a thing is knowledge of its relations.”\(^62\) Johnson likewise argues:

> Meaning is thus always a matter of relatedness (as a form of intentionality). An event becomes meaningful by pointing beyond itself to prior event structures in experience or toward possible future structures. The event is meaningful insofar as it stands against, and is related to, a background stretching from the past into the future. A word or sentence is meaningful because it calls to mind a set of related structures of understanding that are directed either to some set of structures in experience (either actual or potential), or else to other symbols.\(^63\)

Even an intentional state, such as an emotion or a belief, is structured around underlying experiential patterns, the projection and application of which is metaphorical.

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\(^63\) Johnson, *Body in the Mind*, 177.
A metaphorical projection of an image schemata, in a simple sense, is a qualification of how the image schemata applies in a given situation; that is, for instance, moving from the basic CONTAINER schema to a particular application of it. What Johnson refers to as the “primary” or “conceptual” metaphor of the CATEGORY AS CONTAINER metaphor is a case in point. This metaphorical extension is a common one in our experience, in which

A conceptual category is understood metaphorically as an abstract container for physical and abstract entities. For example, we say that the category “human” is contained in the category “animals,” which is contained in the category “living things.” Similarly, we may ask “Which category is this tree in?”

The previous discussion of an experience “fitting” an image schema is a form of the CATEGORY AS CONTAINER metaphor. The act of fitting an experience to an image schema (though an automatic process) can be seen as a form of categorisation, which relies on the CONTAINER schema. While we can categorise experiences in terms of experiential patterns, such categorisation can fall victim to compartmentalisation. This would have ramifications for the wider network of schema and metaphoric extensions.

The CATEGORY AS CONTAINER metaphor operates at a level higher than the CONTAINER schema at the “primary” or “conceptual” level of metaphorical projection. This level, in which a schema becomes more specific in its application, is most easily identified by the use of words such as “is,” “as,” and “are” in the description or title of the

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64 See also, George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, Philosophy in the Flesh: The Embodied Mind and its Challenge to Western Thought (New York: Basic Books, 1999), 49; see also, Joseph Grady, “Foundations of Meaning: Primary Metaphors and Primary Scenes” (PhD Diss., University of California, Berkley), 1997.
65 Lakoff and Johnson provide numerous other examples of primary metaphors; see Lakoff and Johnson. Philosophy in the Flesh, 50-54.
metaphorical extension, such as in CATEGORIES AS CONTAINERS, or MORE IS UP. As a rule of thumb, an image schema is a single term, while a primary metaphorical extension involves the schema (or a derivative term) as the object or complement, a simple qualifying term as the subject, and what in chapter one I called the connective tissue of sentences, words such as “is,” “are,” “as,” and so on. These words, James said, have “a feeling” about them.67 This connective tissue is important because it indicates the relationship between subject and object in a metaphorical extension of an image schema.

These primary extensions are not so much applied as acquired through experience. As such, I would argue, they are still preintentional. Of these basic metaphors Johnson argues that “we acquire them automatically and unconsciously via the normal process of neural learning and may be unaware that we have them. We have no choice in this process.”68 Johnson and Lakoff go on to add that “when the embodied experiences in the world are universal, then the corresponding primary metaphors are universally acquired. This explains the widespread occurrence around the world of a great many primary metaphors.”69 That is, because there is a common embodiment shared by human beings we all share the same generic experiential schemata, out of which emerge the basic metaphors that inform our experience and our understanding of our environment.

These basic metaphorical extensions are indicative of the nuanced movements of the “definite parts” of an image schema – usually in conjunction with other schemata – because of environmental pressure on our embodied experience. While we may understand our experiences in terms of basic patterns, those patterns have the potential for a diverse range of extensions. Those extensions are themselves patterns, but they are richer and more detailed

67 James, Principles of Psychology, 159.
68 Lakoff and Johnson, Philosophy in the Flesh, 56.
69 Ibid.
patterns. They are continuous with the underlying generic patterns; however, they are not reducible to them. These basic metaphorical extensions, what is more, are continuous with the physiology and neurology that further underlies our experiential patterns. The moving parts of the image schemata are constrained by the possible movements of the body through its environment; these recurring movements through our environment are registered as our basic metaphorical extensions.

In previous chapters I have discussed the primary emotion of disgust, its grounding in physiological functions, and its relationship with the secondary emotion of contempt. I have followed these connections through James and Damasio. I would further argue that disgust, and by extension contempt, are grounded in the experiential pattern of “beneficial rejection.” GAGGING, as such, might be the image schemata of which disgust and contempt are “higher order” extensions. James already foreshadowed this continuity with what he called the “principle of reacting similarly to analogous-feeling stimuli.”70 There is continuity, or nesting, between GAGGING, disgust, and contempt. Importantly, this example shows that there is continuity between emotion and metaphor.

Contempt exists as a social emotion, ultimately a judgement of others based on the accumulation of figurative values and relations through one’s experience. That is, against the background of one’s worldview. The feeling of contempt, while continuous with the physiology of the gag reflex, obviously it is not reducible to the gag reflex; this is because there are fringe relations – the various entailments of figurative values and relations accumulated through experience – that shape and contextualise the contemptuous feeling.

70 James, Principles of Psychology, 763.
Contempt, what one will find contemptible in others, differs from person to person because of differences in the fringe of affinities that inform one’s worldview. Contempt is just one example of the continuity between the “moving parts” of embodied experience (in this instance, the moving parts of the gag reflex) with metaphoric extensions, namely, into the realms of figurative values and personal judgements by which we navigate our environment. It has been useful because it helps to highlight the connection between James and Damasio; moreover, it has been useful because it draws the focus, as Frost would say, to “the invisible muscles of the mouth and throat,” illustrating the physiological continuity.

Metaphor as an extension of image schemata has important ramifications for poetic experience, particularly for correspondence: the filaments of subtlety with which minds must convince one another of their mindedness are analogous to the use of metaphor. Frost, it must be remembered, argues that metaphor is “all there is of thinking.”\(^71\) And it is in poetry that we are “best taught the manage of metaphor.”\(^72\) If, furthermore, correspondence is “all there is” to art, and that, to reiterate, correspondence is the act of “mind convincing mind that it can uncurl and wave the same filaments of subtlety,”\(^73\) then it follows that metaphor is central to correspondence. If metaphor is central to correspondence and if metaphor is the “higher order” projections of image schemata then correspondence and image schemata are linked in a very fundamental way.

This relationship can be seen to be characterised by a loop dynamic when one considers that correspondence in art is predicated on the “visible motion of the lips” and the

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\(^{71}\) Robert Frost, “Education by Poetry,” 725.  
\(^{72}\) Ibid.  
“invisible muscles of the mouth and throat"\textsuperscript{74}; that is, the correspondence of the poetic experience, the physical act of self-recital, is predicated on a mimetic engagement wherein the reader can “hear the lines and sentences in his mind’s ear as if aloud.”\textsuperscript{75} The reader puts into practice the mimetic patterns of behaviour reminiscent (although certainly not reducible to) the original acts of mimetic learning in order to understand the meaning of the poem at its metaphorical level. That is, to understand the metaphor the reader must reproduce the metaphoric processes by which it is created, and this entails the embodiment of the poem through self-recital.

We can engage in metaphoric thinking outside poetry, of course. But poetry allows us to test abstractly the patterns, metaphors, figurative values, in short, the very metaphoric meaning-making processes, by which we understand the world around us. Poetry is the testing of experiential patterns and their metaphoric extensions. More specifically, the poetic experience is a test of our metaphoric processes. Through this poetic testing we engage in an abstract but inclusive process, occupying, synecdochically, the same position as every other potential reader. We are constituted the same and oriented toward our environment the same; as such, we share the same basic image schemata and the same basic metaphoric extensions. We are connected to each other through our embodiment.

One last issue remains to be considered. We recognise more than just patterns or schema and the extensions of metaphor; we recognise the mental operations that make use of, and indeed rely on, those patterns and metaphors. That is, we see the mind behind the patterns. This is implied in Frost’s distinction between recognition and correspondence. It is not enough just to recognise, we must engage with the mind behind the metaphors. In the

\textsuperscript{74} Ibid.

poetic experience, we are not just testing our metaphoric processes of meaning-making; we are testing the metaphoric processes of meaning-making of all like-minded human beings.

In the next section, I will explore the relationship more explicitly between poetic experience and image schemata, or experiential patterns. Importantly, this will lead to a consideration of a number of related concepts that pertain to the extrapolation of mind or thought to others from the recognition of such patterns. These concepts are variously referred to as “mind-reading,” “theory of mind,” or “the intentional stance,” but all involve the attribution of mind, or intentionality more broadly, to human and non-human entities based on the observable patterns of behaviour. Put simply, we attribute mindedness to human and non-human entities based on the experiential patterns revolving around various actions, objects, and events familiar to our environment that we recognise – or believe we recognise – and impute the thought-processes, motivations, desires, or emotions, that are familiar (from our perspective) to those patterns.

Certain actions, objects, and events are usually accompanied by certain kinds of mental, or intentional, responses, including and especially, as Damasio has pointed out emotional responses. This in itself constitutes a series of patterns – patterns about what is going on in the minds of people during or in the presence of certain actions, objects, or events – that we use to form our higher metaphoric projections or figurative values by which we understand the world. The attribution of mind, or intentionality, as I will show, is pivotal to the poetic experience.

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76 Damasio, *The Feeling of What Happens*, 56.
2.1. “Be Like Me”

In chapter one I referred to William James’s essay “The Will to Believe,” in which he argued that “we have a right to believe at our own risk any hypothesis that is live enough to tempt our will.” It is “at our own risk” because the hypothesis we would believe – which we may further understand to be schematically grounded – may be confirmed or disconfirmed by our experience. We risk our belief every time we seek to fit our experience into a complex schematic structure, such as a moral belief. We test our metaphorical extensions and projections against our experience and vice-versa. This testing involves, then, pattern-recognition from a fundamental level, not merely recognising the prescriptive end-result. The contingency of our environment and the flexibility of our image schemata necessitate this testing to ensure that our understanding of the world is “up to date,” so to speak, and that we will continue to function smoothly into the future.

Poetry, as I have been arguing throughout this thesis, plays an important role in metaphoric testing. This is because, in the poetic experience, we are turned back towards the metaphoric basis of our understanding. And this entails experiential patterns and pattern-recognition. Metaphor and patterns are linked in the structure of our experience. It is through metaphoric projection that we make sense of our world because it is an extension of experiential patterns, culminating in figurative values and relations that we consolidate into a worldview or belief-system (the veracity and cohesion of one’s belief-system, however, is another matter). Poetry, as Stephen Dobyns argues, is intimately involved in our understanding of our experiential patterns and their metaphorical extensions:

To seek metaphor is to seek underlying pattern. To expect pattern among apparently random phenomena is part of the Romantic condition, since it requires a belief if not in unity, then in connection. As human beings, we are problem solvers, imposers of form […] and part of the pleasure of poetry is that it imposes pattern.\(^{78}\)

Poetry “imposes pattern,” or rather generates it through as-if mechanisms. Poetic metaphor is a re-shaping of experiential patterns in new ways. Poetic metaphor is not arbitrary or mere “intellectual comparison”\(^{79}\); it is bound by the same constraints on movement as is our reasoning. When poetry “imposes pattern” it cannot violate the “definite parts” of the more fundamental schema. Poetry, however, is not simply the repetition of patterns. Poetry is the generation of new metaphor, and therefore the application of experiential patterns in new ways. More than this, it is about testing new metaphors – new combinations of patterns and extensions – against our experience, and vice-versa.

Metaphor can, indeed, “change reality” as Lakoff and Johnson have observed. It is in the poetic experience, however, that we are best educated in the use of metaphor. Poetry is the ideal laboratory for seeing “how far you may expect to ride it and when it may break down with you.”\(^{80}\) More so than just testing metaphor, however, the poetic experience tests our metaphoric processes of meaning-making, and this reaches right down to the image schemata, and the embodied processes that underpin our experience and, ultimately, our understanding.

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\(^{79}\) Dewey, *Art as Experience*, 79.

\(^{80}\) Robert Frost, “Education by Poetry,” 721.
The role of the poet, as Frost has said, is not to tell the reader something they don’t know, but something they knew but hadn’t thought of saying. Poetry, or poetic metaphor, then is continuous with our fundamental schemata and their metaphoric extensions. One might be tempted to say that poetic metaphor is the most complex kind of metaphoric extension. Therefore, it would be the extension furthest from the embodied grounding of the schemata. This conclusion seems only natural if we also consider poetry to be a more advanced use of language than everyday expressions. Language, logically, comes after preintentional schemata and their basic extensions; language therefore is higher on the scale of meaning-making processes, but is nevertheless nested with these lower processes. The conclusion of poetry as a more advanced form of language, however, is problematic.

Poetic metaphor moves beyond simple metaphoric extensions, beyond even the more common extensions we use every day. Poetry is not language as it is used every day because a poem is not an everyday use of language; poetry returns us to the “metaphoric origins” of words. Poetry, as the “renewal of words,” cannot, then, be a further abstraction of words or language more generally. Poetry returns us to the embodied roots of language, reinvigorating our ability to express ourselves and communicate with one another. Crucial to the model of the poetic experience I am developing – and central to its intersubjective nature – is the role of mimicry in the “self-recital” of the poem. If image schemata emerge through our embodied experience, and our metaphoric extensions of those schemata are continuous with those fundamental experiential patterns, then our encounter with metaphor is an embodied one. Poetic experience, then, is continuous with our fundamental schematic understanding of the world.

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Mimesis, it should be remembered, is a fundamental form of learning. Through mimesis we are able to follow patterns of experience in others. What is more, through the mimetic knowledge shared between human beings we are able to engage in social bonding, the basis of which I have referred to previously as mimetic rapport. While mimetic rapport is fundamental to learning and social bonding, it does not imply a mechanical repetition of behaviour; the capacity of abstraction, that is, distilling imitable patterns and attending to them imaginatively or abstractly, allows for variation in mimetic production and reproduction. Without variation there could be no art, and therefore no aesthetic or poetic experience. There would be no need for art or language with which to reflect upon our experiences as human beings, because our experience would be mere repetition. Because we can abstract, because we can act, think, and feel as if something is or is not the case, we can hypothesise and alter our understanding of reality, for instance through language.

Mimesis, nonetheless, as Donald reminds us, is prior to language.\(^82\) This is obvious when one observes young children. As adults, however, we are able to apply language in the schematic-operations we undertake, as well as “translate” our mimetic understanding into words. The acquisition of language, as Johnson reminds us, does negate “the many bodily ways by which infants and children find and make meaning,” including and especially mimesis.\(^83\) Rather than repeating what we see others do, we can simply describe it. This process also has a reverse application: we can enact schematic operations – simple or complex – that have been described to us. We can enact them physically – someone tells us to do a particular task and we follow their orders – or we can “enact” them imaginatively, as if we were really doing them. This as-if activity has real effects in the human body as


Damasio has shown. We have as-if mechanisms as a means of mimicking and rehearsing our behaviour and responses to all manner of stimuli.

Poetry, however, is not simply a “description” of complex schematic processes which the reader can simply follow and re-construct for himself. Poetry requires mimetic engagement for its meaning-making to occur. It is not simply the imposition of patterns through words; it plays on the innate capacity for making meaningful sounds as well. These sounds, which are embodied and expressed via bodily processes, are vital to the mimetic process of self-recital. They are communicative beyond words through such things as tone and pacing, and ultimately rhythm; words only have the shape they do because of the rise and fall of the rhythmic sounds of speech. Poetry places the words and the sounds “on which they are strung” in strained relation as a part of the metaphorical testing that takes place. And this strained relation, by virtue of its embodiment, is physically felt.

When we engage with the poem through self-recital we are acting as if the words are our own. It is not only the words that are our own, but the metaphor, or metaphors, and the underlying experiential patterns. They are not our own, however, in the sense that we are making them up ourselves. The words, the sounds, the shapes, and the metaphors are written by someone else (we can, of course, read our own poetry, but that is a different experience). Mark Richardson previously argued that “correspondence” is this relationship between the individual reader and the author, while I have been arguing that correspondence is more broadly intersubjective.

The poet Joseph Brodsky appears to agree with Richardson about the privacy of this relationship, saying that “A novel or a poem is not a monologue but a conversation of a writer with a reader, a conversation, I repeat, that is very private, excluding all others.” This may characterise the act of reading the poem – self-recital – but it does not characterise the objectivity or independence of the poem. That is to say, the poem outlasts any given reading. While the conversation is private, the influence of the poem also outlasts the reading of it: “it remains with a person for the rest of his life in the form of memory, foggy or distinct; and sooner or later, appropriately or not, it conditions a person’s conduct,” Brodsky confesses. Elsewhere, Brodsky says

A poem, as it were, tells a reader, “Be like me.” And at the moment of reading you become what you read, you become the state of the language which is a poem, and its epiphany or its revelation is yours. They are still yours once you shut the book, since you can’t revert to not having had them.

That the poem can say “be like me” is testament to its independence from its author. It is also a testament to its public nature; the poem can say “be like me” to anyone who can read it. The “conversation” of a particular reader may be private, but it is a conversation anyone can have. Furthermore, that the poem “conditions a person’s conduct” is also indicative of the common underlying patterns and extensions that all potential readers have. It conditions a person’s conduct because it is continuous with our fundamental patterns and extensions. The way in which it conditions our conduct is through drawing us into a mimetic relationship with it, testing our grasp of those experiential patterns.

86 Ibid.
Mimesis is central to our experiential learning, as both Donald and Johnson have observed. We learn much of our experiential structure from seeing it in others and imitating it. We learn numerous practices by seeing and doing them. More fundamentally, however, we generate emotional rapport through mimesis with others, most specifically through facial expressions. Furthermore, we learn emotional articulation through mimesis as Donald says: “mimetic capacity has huge emotional ramifications because it involves both the conscious elaboration and the suppression of emotion.”88 We have emotions because we have bodies, but we acquire more specific forms of expression through seeing such expressions in others. While we have only “partial control” over our emotional responses, we can fashion our expressions more particularly.

The partial control we have over our emotions is similar to the partial control we can exert over the moving parts of our experiential patterns. This is no mere parallel, however, but is indicative of the continuity between our experiential schemata and our emotions. Emotions structure our experience. Both emotions and experiential patterns are, by and large, intentional (or preintentional) and pattern-oriented. Emotions inform our view of the world, both in particular situations and in general. This is because particular situations contain various levels of patterns and their extensions. We cannot perceive them all equally well because some “shade off into the Background” or are operating “at the fringe”; nevertheless, our emotional attachments or responses to specific objects or events inform our understanding of similar objects or events that display or possess similar patterns, as Damasio has observed.

88 Donald, A Mind so Rare, 263.
Emotional responses can therefore be triggered by similar patterns of experience. This, of course, is no revelation. Most people have had such experiences. A house, to use Damasio’s example from the previous chapter, which may look similar to the one we grew up in, may trigger an emotional response to the events that transpired in the real house as if it were the real house. This is a form of misrecognition that entails emotional attachment and response, various layers of schematic processing, as well as involuntary activation of as-if mechanisms. Our heart races and our stomach churns, only to realise it is not the house of our childhood, and it therefore does not contain any of the memories associated with the real house. This is a common, albeit basic, experience.

Poetry, however, does not present us with this kind of experience. Rather, poetry enjoins us to bring the experience into being. It is not a case of accidental misrecognition, but one of subversion in which the reader is complicit in creating the conditions for the manipulation of his experiential understanding. In saying “be like me” the poem makes the reader the maker of meaning. Once written, Stephen Dobyns argues, the poem “belongs to the reader”89; I would go further in suggesting that, in the poetic experience, the reader belongs to the poem. This is no mere embellishment given the strain that is placed on the reader in mimicking the poem. In this strained relation, the reader’s schematic processes and mimetic capabilities are tested. In adopting the posture of the poem, reconstructing the experiential patterns as if they were his own, the reader relinquishes some of his control to the poem.

The reader’s emotional response is partially controlled by the poem in this way. It has this power because through the mimetic interaction the reader’s ownership of the meaning-

making process is not absolute. The words of the poem are not his words, but he is mimicking them. This is a strange experience. The reader gives up part of his agency to engage in the meaning-making process. In relinquishing control in this manner he makes himself susceptible to further “strained relations” between himself and his own intentional attachments, the patterns and metaphors and “figurative values” that constitute his worldview. The poem, however, cannot make him believe something he otherwise wouldn’t. The poem acts at the level of pattern-recognition and metaphoric formation, on the processes by which beliefs and other intentional states are articulated and made intelligible.

Dobyns says that this experience involves a fundamental surprise, where “I,” the reader, “suddenly come face to face with myself and my view of the world. And that face-to-face quality occurs during the moment when part of me is struck by the precision of the metaphor and another part is still trying to understand.” He goes on to say “there is a moment of combined knowing and not-knowing where we confront ourselves.” This is because we are “being like the poem.” We are being like it because we are mimicking it. We encounter ourselves face-to-face because, in a figurative sense, we are mirroring the poem. More profoundly, however, we are engaging in an intersubjective correspondence because the poem exists independently of us. We are not just corresponding with the author, but with everyone else who can read the poem because they too will encounter themselves and their metaphorical capacities.

Being like the poem, however, it is important to remember, is not a monotonous imitation. Two things are going on, both of which are interconnected: first, we are mimicking the poem; but second, we are also trying to understand the poem, to make sense of it. Poetry

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91 Ibid.
requires the first in order to achieve the second, but the second is not reducible to the first. We can, of course, make sense of poems in other ways; we can analyse a poem and pull it apart looking for symbolism and allusion, but this would not constitute a poetic experience. The poetic experience, to reiterate, entails a metaphoric testing, a testing of our metaphoric meaning-making processes. As Dobyns implies, and as is implied by Frost’s theory of correspondence, we engage in a strange kind of conversation with the poem – well, with ourselves embodying the poem through the act of self-recital.

There is an abstract mimetic rapport, an as if rapport, at play here, which operates as a surrogate intersubjective process of understanding (of which conversation is one variant). We are engaging with the poem empathetically, the same fundamental processes at work that would be employed in conversation, or in any other kind of intersubjective exchange. In the next subsection, I will explore the primary mechanism by which we understand others in this as if intersubjective way and how this as-if-ness is central to poetic experience. Various called “mind-reading,” “theory of mind,” or the “intentional stance” this mechanism of attributing mind to others (including non-human entities) is crucial for understanding the poetic experience, especially with regard to Frost’s theory of correspondence.

2.2. Mind-Reading

Where the reader “suddenly comes face to face with himself” he also comes face to face with what Rita Felski calls “the generalised other.”92 This is because the reader is engaging in a mimetic process of meaning-making, a process that is universal in the sense that all human beings are capable of it. This is correspondence as metaphoric projection. The

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reader is corresponding abstractly with every other reader, a generalised other. This is a
strange experience in which one is thinking thoughts that, essentially, are not one’s own.

This is the experience with metaphor that Frost captured in chapter one: “The
strangeness is all in thinking two things at once, in being in two places at once.”93 In the
poetic experience, the mind of the reader is in two places at once; in the first instance
mimicking the poem, while in the second trying to make sense of it. The latter is related to
the former by virtue of continuity. That is, the reader’s attempt to understand the poem is
predicated on his mimetic engagement with it. More broadly, we use our experiential patterns
and mimetic grounding to understand the activities and behaviours of others, even other non-
humans.

This process of making sense of the behaviour and activities of others entails a
projection of experiential patterns, mediated by our capacity to mimic those activities. As
such, this process entails metaphoric projection. This process can be understood in reference
to what I termed “attribution of intentionality.” In this subsection, I will analyse two such
attributive models: what is commonly called “mind-reading,” and the “intentional stance.”
For the former I will focus on Lisa Zunshine’s treatment, which has a literary focus, while the
latter is Daniel Dennett’s own conception.94 Both, I will argue, are aspects of our model of
understanding the world, not just other human beings, but non-human entities as well.

University Press, 2006), 126.
94 In her 2006 book, Why We Read Fiction: Theory of Mind and the Novel, Zunshine makes mention of Dennett,
albeit scarcely; offering the observation, among others, that Dennett’s intentional stance is one of the
“alternatives to the theory of mind approach” (See fn4, p166). Zunshine’s focus, however, as the subtitle of her
book indicates, is on the novel. My synthesis of her treatment of mind-reading and Dennett’s intentional stance,
in relation to poetry and the poetic experience, illustrates the similarities of their respective theories. What is
more, while my focus is on poetry, it is evident that significant aspects of the theory being developed in this
thesis can be applied to the experience of the novel. This, however, is a topic for another day.
I will argue that we adopt a stance much like the intentional stance when we read poetry: a “poetic stance.” I am not arguing that we adopt the intentional stance toward poetry, but an analysis of Dennett’s concept will help to yield a more comprehensive understanding of the poetic stance. Put simply, we treat the poem in a way that resembles the attribution of intentionality characteristic of both mind-reading and the intentional stance. In essence, we treat the poem as if it had intentional content in a way similar to encounters with other minded entities. A poem, of course, is not a minded entity; Searle would argue that it has derived intentionality. This, however, would be a simplistic conclusion. The poem is not simply a collection of words whose meaning is imposed upon them by a mind. In the act of self-recital the intentional content of the poem becomes that of the reader’s mind. Furthermore, the experiential patterns also “belong” to the reader through mimesis.

The patterns of meaning that are supposedly derived in the poem become the patterns of meaning in the reader’s body-mind through mimetic engagement. The reader comes face to face with his own meaning-making processes. The process of understanding the poem is not merely one of applying past congruities to the new metaphor, but of testing and adapting one’s process of understanding. This is a familiar yet strange experience. It is familiar because the reader is the one having these thoughts and feelings, yet strange because they are not the reader’s thoughts and feelings. To understand these thoughts, which the reader is having yet are not his, he must understand them in terms of his own understanding.

This last statement is ostensibly tautological, yet it is central to the “face to face confrontation” one has with oneself and one’s “world view” in one’s mimetic engagement with the poem. Mind-reading and the intentional stance are extensions of this mimetic engagement because in mimicking we are attempting to make sense of the actions and
behaviours we perceive. In the case of self-recital, the behaviour is our own, but the thoughts and feelings are being mimicked. Through mimicking them we are attempting to understand them, yet through this mimicry we are making ourselves vulnerable to the “confusion” of new metaphors. It is no longer a process of applying well-worn patterns to assimilate them to our understanding, but of adapting our understanding to these new metaphors. We “read” the “mind” of the poem, because it is both our mind and not our mind, while it is at the same time accessible to everyone who can read it.

Before moving on to a deeper analysis of the ideas just stated, I should address a criticism. It is problematic to deal with poetry – or any text for that matter – as if it were a minded entity, simply because they are not, as literary theorist Rita Felski argues:

Conceiving of books as persons and the act of reading as a face-to-face encounter, however, are analogies that can only lead us astray. Texts cannot think, feel, or act; if they have any impact on the world they do so via the intercession of those who read them.\textsuperscript{95}

Felski goes on to say, however, that “while books are not subjects, they are not just objects, not simply random things stranded among countless other things.”\textsuperscript{96} Felski is talking about “books,” more specifically about novels. Her argument, however, is as applicable to poetry as it is to any text. Importantly, Felski acknowledges that the “intercession” of the reader is paramount to the “impact on the world” that the text has. She goes on to say:

\textsuperscript{95} Felski, \textit{Uses of Literature}, 32.
\textsuperscript{96} Ibid.
While we do not usually mistake books for persons, we often think of them as conveying the attitude of persons, as upholding or questioning ideas and collective ways of thinking.\textsuperscript{97}

The text is not a person, but it conveys certain qualities of “persons” in a collective sense. “Reading, in this sense,” she concludes, “is akin to an encounter with a generalised other.”\textsuperscript{98}

The notion of an “encounter with a generalised other” bears a strong resemblance to Frost’s notion of correspondence.

Reading a poem, however, is different to reading a novel or some other work of fiction. It is at once more intimate and more estranging than when one reads a novel. The reader of a novel does not mimic the novel in the same way he mimics the poem, though there is a mimetic relationship between reader and text that takes place either way. The novel reader can, of course, recognise himself in a character in the novel; he recognises aspects of his behaviour or mentality as his own. This is central to the novel’s effect. A poem, however, reaches down to the fundamental processes by which such recognition can take place. The novel reader recognises patterns of behaviour, thoughts, and feelings in a character that emerge through underlying embodied processes, the poem takes us, the reader who “reads poetically,” back to those embodied processes.

Arguably, the most fundamental difference between poetry and the novel is the significance of what Frost calls “sentence-sounds,” or more broadly prosody, to poetry. In particular, in Frost’s theory of sentence-sounds, the importance lies in the “strained relations” between words and sentence-sounds and the change in meaning that such strain can produce.

\textsuperscript{97} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{98} Ibid.
Perhaps more importantly, is the pathway toward embodiment that the emphasis on sentence-sounds provides. A poem, it must be remembered, must be read at a pace at which the reader can “hear the lines and sentences in his mind’s ear as if aloud.”99 This is the basis of what I have called self-recital: the recital of the poem to oneself, usually in silence. But it is this peculiar act of reading that engenders physiological changes in the reader (discussed in chapter three), which forms the basis for poetic experience and, ultimately, correspondence.

We can never perfectly adopt the “voice posture” of the poem, there is always some distance between what the author intends and what the reader infers. This is unimportant; in fact, perfect mimesis is entirely undesirable. What is important is that attitude or mood is conveyed through the mimesis. “The poem,” Frost reminds us, “is the emotion of having a thought.”100 Poetry and the novel are not different by kind, of course. Both benefit, as Dewey has argued, from the transformation of raw sounds by “the art of communication”101; poetry, however, does not simply benefit from the art of communication, it is a test of that art of communication. The reading of poetry is a turning back of language toward its metaphoric and mimetic origins. Poetry, in a sense, is more like a feedback loop, in that it generates, alters, and tests meaning through the patterns of meaning-making (mental and physiological) of which language is itself an extension.

The extension of experiential pattern recognition into the realm of fictional narrative is, thus, different to the metaphoric testing that the poem engenders. Both nevertheless rely on the same dynamic of understanding. Recognising in a character a set of thoughts, feelings, and behaviours requires the attribution of intentionality; it requires that we understand the

actions of the character as if he had a mind like our own. Where the novel, by and large, describes the intentional content – directly or indirectly – the poem enjoins us to have them for ourselves in an immanently embodied way. We adopt a mind-reading stance towards fictional characters as much as we do towards the poem. We seek to understand the motivation of the entity we are faced with as if it possessed a human mind. In the latter instance, the poem does possess a human mind: it “possesses” the mind of the reader.

It is at this point that I need to turn the theory of “mind-reading,” its importance to literature, and especially poetry. As Lisa Zunshine explains, “mind-reading is a term used by cognitive psychologists to describe our ability to explain people’s behaviour in terms of their thoughts, feelings, beliefs, and desires.”\(^{102}\) In other words, mind-reading is the process by which we connect the observable behaviour of a person with their underlying states of mind. When we recognise certain patterns of behaviour this allows us to associate congruous mental states that we understand to be the driving force behind the behaviour. We can recognise these patterns of behaviour, largely, because we understand those patterns, and their various extensions, from our own experience. This is projective in the sense that we are mapping the mental state of an individual on to their behaviour. We are able to project these mental states because the observed behaviour is associated with a given state, or set of states, that we know experientially.

“Mind reading,” then, might be better termed “body-mind reading,” because we are not simply interpreting in an abstract sense the actions of another person. Central to mind-reading is mimesis; we understand such actions because we know those actions, and, crucially, their underlying mental and intentional states, from our own experience. This

process is innate. Mind-reading is a process that we engage in without much conscious effort, in fact, as Zunshine says,

our tendency to explain observed behaviour in terms of underlying mental states seems to be so effortless and automatic because our evolved cognitive architecture “prods” us toward learning and practicing mind-reading daily, from the beginning of our awareness.  

The structures, or “architecture,” that shape and enable our ability to mind-read, and more fundamentally recognise and map experiential patterns in the world and in others, also “prods” us to do so. This architecture, which entails our schematic and metaphorical operations, is not passive in the sense that it is merely waiting to be applied by us; it is always operating, if only in the background. “Mind-reading,” Zunshine says, is “effortless in the sense that we intuitively connect people’s behaviour to their mental states.”

“We know it because we see it because we do it. “The cognitive mechanisms that evolved to process information about human thoughts and feelings” Zunshine argues, “are constantly on the alert checking out their environment for cues that fit their input conditions.” It is only natural that they are “constantly on the alert,” for if we had to consciously activate these mechanisms we would suffer from cognitive overload. It is not so different to the homeostatic operations of our body. If we had to think about breathing all the time, for instance, nothing else could be possible. As such, we do not constantly process every “cue” or piece of information that

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103 Ibid., 272.
104 Ibid., 277.
105 Ibid., 273.
presents itself to our senses. This is why we have a “background set of capacities,” both neurologically and physiologically, that shape, enable, and prod our experiences in the world.

Our mind-reading capacities, then, are always “hungry”\textsuperscript{106}; as Zunshine argues, the “cognitive adaptations for mind-reading are promiscuous, voracious, and proactive.”\textsuperscript{107} Going on to say that,

their very condition of being is a constant stimulation delivered either by direct interactions with other people or by imaginary approximations of such interactions, which include countless forms of representational art and narrative.\textsuperscript{108}

That is to say that these adaptations are “loose” enough to include the as-if interactions of art and literature as potential “cues.” Our somatosensory system and our “as-if mechanisms” play a crucial role in our mimetic engagement with others, which in turn is central to our capacity to (body-)mind-read. Furthermore, the very presence of these as-if mechanisms imply that the cues need not be real or physically present.

Because of this looseness, fiction, and art more generally, is able “to ‘cheat’ these mechanisms into believing that they are in the presence of material that they were designed to process.”\textsuperscript{109} This is particularly acute with regard to the poetic experience, given that, as I have been arguing, the reader becomes complicit in the meaning-making process. “Literature,” Zunshine says generally, “pervasively capitalises on and stimulates [mind-reading] mechanisms that evolved to deal with real people, even as readers remain aware on


\textsuperscript{107} Ibid., 68.

\textsuperscript{108} Ibid.

some level that fictive characters are not real people at all.”\textsuperscript{110} The ability to cheat our mind-reading mechanisms is indicative of the looseness of our mind-reading adaptations. More broadly, it is evidence of the as-if body loop.

Our mind-reading abilities, however, are not fool-proof. At the heart of our ability to explain the behaviour of others is a paradox, as Zunshine explains: “we perceive people’s observable behaviour as both a highly informative and at the same time quite unreliable source of information about their minds.”\textsuperscript{111} This is because while we may recognise behaviour and associate it with concomitant thoughts and feelings, we cannot be absolutely sure that such an association is the right one. As Zunshine rightly points out “we can remember situations when our thoughts did not fit the circumstances, and no observable behaviour could reveal them to people around us, or so we hope.”\textsuperscript{112} So while we may have experiential knowledge of behavioural patterns and related internal states, we also know, from experience, that sometimes those patterns don’t always equate to those states.

If we had absolute knowledge of the mental states of others in this manner our experiences would be very different. What is more, it would indicate that the structure of our understanding and experience is not what we know it to be. Absolute knowledge through mimetic and mind-reading processes would require an absolute level of cause and effect, that any given behaviour can only be caused by a certain mental state. We would then be absolutely sure of our own actions because the relations between internal states and external behaviour could not be otherwise. While this is a simplistic rendering of the alternative to the “informative but unreliable” picture of our mind-reading capacities, it cannot be the case.

\textsuperscript{110} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{111} Zunshine, “Theory of Mind and Fictions of Embodied Transparency,” 69.
\textsuperscript{112} Ibid., 71.
We can say that our mind-reading capacities have a high degree of success but with a margin of error. We know our mind-reading capacities have a high degree of success because they regularly provide us with predictive information in our everyday experiences. That is, most behaviours correlate regularly with certain sets of internal states, if not very specific ones. Sometimes they don’t; mostly they do. Again, the majority of this mind-reading activity goes on unconsciously so we can navigate our environment. We really only have to stop and think about the mental states of others when this automatic process breaks down, when we find ourselves within the margin of error and our “predictions” fail.

The fact that our mind-reading can fail is related to the capacity of literature, and art more broadly, to “cheat” our mind-reading capacities in “reading” certain materials as legitimate cues. We can, of course, voluntarily engage in this aesthetic deception; much of the pleasure of reading a novel is about immersing oneself in the plotline and characters. We do not need to be unknowingly tricked; we are quite capable of “suspending our disbelief” and allowing ourselves to be so tricked. “The fact of the matter” Malcolm Budd reminds us, “is that we possess the capacity to entertain a thought without accepting it, the capacity to make believe, without believing.”113 When we pick up the text we begin this process of “make believe.”

What a poem, or any other text, does once the reading process has begun, however, is a different matter. The structure of our experience is the product of the transaction between ourselves, the reader, and the text. The text “belongs to us,” in Dobyns’s sense, but at the same time we belong to the text. This is, I would argue, most acute in the poetic experience. Because of the looseness of our mind-reading capabilities, which allow it to both “fail” at

times and be “cheated” at others, in conjunction with its “constant alertness” we are not fully in control of the processes once they begin. Again, we only have “partial control” over these processes. While we can choose to begin reading and choose to end reading – even mid-text – we cannot fully control the meaning-making processes. This is because our experience is structured by both our environment and our bodies, and the structures of our environment and our bodies constrain meaning at higher metaphoric levels.

Mind-reading is built on the regularity of our experiential patterns and their shared nature. We can posit a mind, and all that that entails, because of the existence of common experiential patterns. These patterns, however, are not fixed; there is room for variation and novelty. This is guaranteed at the most fundamental level of the image schemata because they have “moving parts,” and this necessarily has an effect “higher up” the chain, or further out along the “web” of inter-related intentional and preintentional states. These moving parts, arguably, contribute to the looseness, or the broader applicability, of our higher mind-reading capabilities. We are not limited to fixed meanings or relations; we can push and pull the fundamental moving parts and their higher correlates in our process of understanding.

Simply put, our mind-reading capabilities do not apply a system of fixed values to the environment in which they operate. Mind-reading is not a closed system, nor does it imply that one exists. That is, a closed system of “mind-havers” with a fixed set of experiential patterns through which the behaviour of all mind-havers can be interpreted. This would imply that we do have absolute access to each other’s minds, which is not the case. That mind-reading does not imply a closed system is easily illustrated by the fact that we can use mind-reading on non-human animals, even non-human non-animal entities. In fact, we often do this without intending to. As Daniel Dennett points out, our ability to “read minds” is a highly
versatile tool, both in our dealings with each other, and with the objects of our experience more broadly. And it is to Daniel Dennett that I now turn.

### 2.3. The Intentional Stance

Dennett’s treatment of mind-reading is broader than Zunshine’s. Dennett sees a broader applicability for what he calls “the intentional stance” in describing or explaining various behaviours of non-human things; he sees the predictive capacity of the intentional stance as taking in a wider array of “minds” than just those of humans. This is really just a difference of degree, for mind-reading and the intentional stance are very similar, as Dennett tells us:

> The intentional stance is the strategy of interpreting the behaviour of an entity (person, animal, artefact, whatever) by treating it as if it were a rational agent who governed its “choice” of “action” by a “consideration” of its “beliefs” and desires.

> “The basic strategy of the intentional stance” Dennett goes on to say, “is to treat the entity in question as an agent, in order to predict – and thereby explain, in one sense – its actions or moves.” By positing intentional content to “an entity” or an “intentional system” we can explain or predict its behaviour. We do this already with other human beings; we understand their actions or movements by positing mental content, most often the intentional content of beliefs, desires, and emotions. What is more, as Dennett says concurring with Zunshine, that “our use of the intentional strategy is so habitual and effortless that the role it plays in

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115 Ibid., 36.
shaping our expectations about people is easily overlooked.”

Dennett, however, argues that the intentional stance has a predictive capacity toward non-human things as well, and this has implications for research into the functions of such entities.

Dennett uses the term “intentional systems” for those entities whose behaviour can be interpreted by the intentional stance. Dennett includes as intentional systems some of the following: “Self-replicating macromolecules, thermostats, amoebas, plants, rats, bats, people, and chess-playing computers are all intentional systems – some much more interesting than others.” That Dennett includes non-living things as intentional systems gives an indication of the kinds of objections his theory faces. Setting aside such objections for the moment, however, it can be seen that each example has some discernible “aboutness” that can help explain its function – some more obvious than others. There is a basic intentional analysis that can be applied, even to thermostats, that gives us an idea of what a given entity is “about.”

To say that a thermostat is “about” the temperature of the room is an awkward way of saying what a thermostat does. It’s awkward because no-one really says it that way. What one might normally say is that the thermostat tells you what the temperature is, or one might ask “what does the thermostat say?” This is not an uncommon way of speaking about things like thermostats, watches, or street signs. That the thermostat has something to “say” or “tell” implies intentionality. This, however, can be challenged as a linguistic sleight of hand, or that we are merely being lazy in asking what the temperature measurement is on the thermostat. Our explanation of what the thermostat does can be more precisely expressed to eschew any semblance of intentionality.

117 Dennett, Kinds of Minds, 36.
118 Ibid., 45.
Dennett acknowledges this by explaining that there are two other “stances” that we can employ to explain the actions and movements of things: the physical stance and the design stance. Briefly, the physical stance is the way in which we understand things in terms of physics and the physical structure of the entity in question; this is the stance of the physical sciences. While the design stance, as the name suggests, relies on an understanding of the design of a given entity to furnish us with an understanding of its function and predictions of future actions. A part of the design stance is the assumption that the thing is, in fact, designed, which makes it a “riskier” stance than the physical stance. Importantly, Dennett identifies a relationship between the design stance and the intentional stance, which, he says, can be seen as a “subspecies of the design stance, in which the designed thing is an agent of sorts.”

Dennett does not claim that the intentional stance is as accurate as the physical stance or the design stance. It is, however, the most humanistic and readily available to us, despite its flaws. What is more, on a practical level, the intentional stance is the most reliable when it comes to understanding other minded entities, as Dennett says:

Adopting the intentional stance is not just a good idea but the key to unravelling the mysteries of the mind – all kinds of minds. It is a method that exploits similarities in order to discover differences – the huge collection of differences that have accumulated between the minds of our ancestors and ours, and also between our minds and those of our fellow inhabitants of the planet.

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119 Ibid., 39.
120 Ibid., 36.
The other two stances cannot provide us with the kind of understanding we need to engage with other minds. The intentional stance has an experiential quality that they simply lack. The intentional stance pivots on what Holland called a “dialectic of sameness and difference”¹²¹ that has “accumulated between minds”; not just minds, but body-minds in their diverse environments that influence and shape their experience. This dialectic of similarity and difference on which the intentional stance pivots can be seen to encompass the variability of our underlying experiential patterns and their metaphoric extensions. This is because the behaviour it seeks to understand is continuous with, if not based on, the same. Difference is seen against the background of the fundamental similarities of our embodiment and the structure to our experience it provides.

2.3.1. Mind-Havers and the Problems of the Intentional Stance

The Intentional stance is about understanding human patterns of behaviour and their underlying mental states in human terms. The intentional stance, then, can be seen as a metaphoric mapping of our understanding of our own mental states and behaviours on to the behaviours of others so as to understand their mental state. But, asks Dennett, if

the intentional stance is the attitude or perspective we routinely adopt toward one another, so adopting the intentional stance toward something else seems to be deliberately anthropomorphising it. How could this possibly be a good idea?¹²²

This, of course, is the danger, but it highlights the fundamental importance of the intentional stance. It is only natural that we seek to understand things in terms of our own understanding

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¹²² Dennett, *Kinds of Minds*, 35.
and experience. We accumulate experience and understanding, and by extension we accumulate differences with others. Quite naturally, we seek to understand our experience in terms of the experiences and understandings we have accumulated.

Such understanding is always human; furthermore, it’s also personal. We accumulate personal experience and understanding through a shared experiential frame populated by common patterns. Our personal differences are contrasted against the background of this shared frame. It is difficult, then, to resist the charge of anthropomorphism that seems to inhere in the intentional stance. If we start treating thermostats or computers as intentional systems on par with human minds we begin to blur the lines of humanity. Yet, we cannot help but understand the world in human terms, and we cannot help ourselves from doing it in a “habitual and effortless” way.

The potential anthropomorphism of the intentional stance, however, should not be eschewed. It is indicative of the fundamental platform for us, as humans, to communicate a shared understanding of the world, the human and the non-human alike. We are able to apply our experiential patterns to animals, for instance, and understand and predict their behaviour with few problems. This is facilitated, in large part, by the similarities we share with them. We have bodies that do similar things and contain similar organs. We can predict their behaviour in “human terms” – ascribing human thoughts and feelings – because much of our own behaviour is nested within “lower” animal behaviour, such as those surrounding food, sex, and body waste.

There are a number of dangers associated with both anthropomorphism and Dennett’s intentional stance, however, that are worth considering. Anthropomorphising non-human
things can lead to attributing a status or level of mind that carries with it significant consequences, as Dennett explains:

Membership in the class of things that have minds provides an all-important guarantee: the guarantee of a certain sort of moral standing. Only mind-havers can care; only mind-havers can mind what happens.\textsuperscript{123}

It is the adjustment to the “moral standing” of a given entity that is a potential problem when it comes to the intentional stance. Dennett goes on to explain this problem:

Your caring automatically counts for something in the moral equation. If flowers have minds, then what we do to flowers can matter to them, and not just to those who care about what happens to flowers.\textsuperscript{124}

Something that has a mind like we do must also have the same moral standing as we do, and if, through some anthropomorphic trick, we convince ourselves of the like-mindedness of a non-human entity then we come close to this problematic position. If we do not step outside the intentional stance, into say, a more rigorous stance, we might end up thinking that everything is possessed of a mind just like we are and all that that entails.

Dennett highlights the precarious position we are put in by adopting the intentional stance, not only in terms of overattribution, or going too far with it, but also in terms of underattribution, or not going far enough:

\textsuperscript{123} Ibid., 5.  
\textsuperscript{124} Ibid., 6.
To overattribute minds – to “make friends with” your houseplants or lie awake at night worrying about the welfare of the computer asleep at your desk – is, at worst, a silly error of credulity. To underattribute minds – to disregard or discount or deny the experience, the suffering and joy, the thwarted ambitions and frustrated desires of a mind-having person or animal – would be a terrible sin.\textsuperscript{125}

On the one hand, we can overattribute mind to non-human things; we can see too much of ourselves in them through their behaviour. On the other hand we can underattribute mind to non-human (even human) entities. We can be taken in by the “human” qualities of our pet and grant to them the same moral standing as our own, but we can also resist this identification to an equally extreme degree that sees us deny moral standing to other entities, including humans.

“Both errors” Dennett tells us, “could have serious moral consequences.”\textsuperscript{126} Going on to say that “If we overattributed minds […], this might lead us to sacrifice the interests of many legitimate interest-holders – our friends, our pets, ourselves – for nothing of genuine moral importance.”\textsuperscript{127} By that same token, if we underattribute mind we also “sacrifice the interests” of those “legitimate interest-holders.” Underattributing mind to animals changes their moral status just as much as overattributing mind to them. Even other humans can fall foul of this problem, particularly that of underattribution. It is not an uncommon event for us to discount the mental capacity of other human beings based on our “reading” of their actions and words.

\textsuperscript{125} Ibid., 7.
\textsuperscript{126} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{127} Ibid.
In its most banal state, underattribution arises from intellectual disagreements. When one accuses another of “not understanding the issues,” or when one calls someone “stupid,” “naïve,” or “ignorant” in relation to a disagreement, these are examples of underattribution. Questioning the intelligence or mental or moral aptitude of another human being is a common form of underattribution. At its heart is the diminishment of the other’s mindedness. That is, because they don’t understand things the way I do, they aren’t as well-endowed mentally (or morally) as I am. This, I would argue, is a breakdown in correspondence.

The moral dimension of Frost’s theory of correspondence can be illustrated pursuant to the above point. The morality of correspondence resides in its capacity for mind convincing mind “that it can uncurl and wave the same filaments of subtlety”; one might call this the morality of subtlety. “None but a brute fool,” Frost reminds us, “would break off this correspondence”128, such a brute fool can be understood in terms of the rigidity of their beliefs, the figurative values or “actionable metaphors” by which they navigate the world and the concomitant resistance to the “reality-changing” powers of new metaphors. The poetic experience, by testing our metaphoric meaning-making processes helps to inoculate us against such brutal foolishness.

2.4. As-If Intentionality

Attributing intentionality to non-human or non-minded things is a powerful conceptual tool. Dennett’s “intentional stance” captures the use of this tool in a wide variety of circumstances. The intentional stance, however, is not without its critics, Searle among

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them. At the root of Searle’s criticism is the status the intentional stance gives to what he calls “as-if intentionality.” Numerous problems regarding “mind-reading” and the intentional stance, their fallibility and vulnerabilities, have already been broached. But these have been problems of the process in action, such as the vulnerability of mind-reading to being “tricked,” and of over- or under- attributing mindedness. As-if intentionality (distinct from intrinsic and derived) underpins the mind-reading process, and its status as a conveyor of value and meaning is crucial to understanding the aesthetic experience.

Searle’s criticism of the intentional stance derives from the fact that it blurs a number of boundaries between humans, animals, and non-minded entities. In short, Searle’s criticism is that Dennett reduces all such entities to “intentional systems.” Dennett’s postulation of “original” intentionality as belonging to natural selection, making us essentially “survival machines for genes,” would appear to support the basis for this claim. On a less abstract level, the status of animal mindedness and the sharp distinction between animals and non-animal machines is blurred in terms of intentionality by the catch-all application of the intentional stance. This distinction in the treatment of animal mindedness is quite illustrative of the fundamental differences between the two men on the issue of as-if intentionality.

While Dennett acknowledges that the intentional stance “also works on most other mammals most of the time,” Searle is more committed to the reality of animal consciousness. “Humans,” Searle argues “are biologically continuous with the rest of the

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130 Dennett, Kinds of Minds, 298.

131 Dennett, The Intentional Stance, 22.
animal kingdom”\textsuperscript{132}; this is the basis for our attributions of intentionality to them, not an abstract tool. Searle takes exception to the intentional stance and the notion of intentional systems because of the broader range of what can be included in the category of intentional systems. Put simply, where Searle privileges actual animal mindedness and intentionality, Dennett privileges the mechanism or tool by which such mindedness and intentionality are attributed. Searle objects to Dennett’s “shifting” of intrinsic intentionality to an “observer relative ascriptions,”\textsuperscript{133} where Dennett objects to Searle’s disregard for “as if intentionality.”\textsuperscript{134}

The intentional stance, for Searle, allows too much leeway for the attribution of mindedness to such things as computers. Computers do not have real beliefs and desires; attributing beliefs and desires to them, then, is pointless. There is, then, a discontinuity between the apparent beliefs and desires and the underlying processes on which those ascriptions are overlaid. There is, for Searle, a gap in the causal relationship. Dennett, to his credit, does caution against misuse of the intentional stance, though Dennett himself nevertheless moves in a direction that Searle cannot accept (for instance, with regard to Artificial Intelligence). Searle, for his part, limits the potential for ascriptions of intentionality, isolating as if intentionality from the other two (intrinsic and derived). This, however, limits the capacity of human meaning-making.

“As if intentionality” Searle cautions us, “should not be confused with derived intentionality. Derived intentionality is genuine intentionality all right but it is derived from the intrinsic intentionality of actual intentional agents such as speakers of a language.”\textsuperscript{135}

\textsuperscript{132} Ibid., 64.
\textsuperscript{134} Dennett, \textit{Kinds of Minds}, 73.
\textsuperscript{135} Searle, \textit{Consciousness and Language}, 116.
“Intrinsic intentionality,” Searle says elsewhere, “is a phenomenon that humans and certain other animals have as part of their biological nature.”\(^{136}\) Whereas as-if intentionality is merely “convenient […] jargon”\(^{137}\) naively used in the intentional stance.\(^{138}\) The problem, for Searle, is the conflation of as-if intentionality, through the use of this “convenient jargon,” with real intrinsic intentionality.

“As-if intentionality,” Searle says bluntly “is not intentionality at all.”\(^{139}\) Searle goes on to say that “when I say of a system that it has as-if intentionality, that does not attribute intentionality to it. It merely says that the system behaves as if it had intentionality, even though it does not.”\(^{140}\) Searle goes on to give the example of tree rings: “If I say ‘These tree rings contain information about the age of the tree,’ that is not a literal ascription of intentionality.”\(^{141}\) This denial of as-if intentionality ties in with Searle’s “Objectivist” approach to meaning, which Johnson criticised earlier. That is, Searle and other Objectivists seek to isolate meaning to literal propositions; Searle denies the Background from the meaning-making process and, as a result, he must also deny the role of metaphoric projections – expressions of as-if intentionality – in the meaning-making process as well.

Metaphoric projections are extensions of image schemata which are generated by virtue of our embodiment and bodily processes in interaction with the environment. Empathic projections are extensions of our emotional states into the world; empathic projections are, however, metaphoric projections “because we cannot literally inhabit another person’s


\(^{137}\) Ibid.

\(^{138}\) Ibid., 81.

\(^{139}\) Ibid., 116.

\(^{140}\) Ibid., 116-117.

\(^{141}\) Ibid., 119.
consciousness.” These empathic-metaphoric projections rely on the efficacy of as-if intentionality to “feed back” information about the world, including, but not limited to, other human beings, in terms that are understandable to the human body-mind. The as-if body loop is the mechanism whereby we can both project and receive states of being and the concomitant mental states abstractly, yet still feel the information in an embodied way.

Searle argues, however, with some justification, that the denial of the distinction between as-if intentionality and intrinsic intentionality poses the problem of “reductio ad absurdum”: “If you deny the distinction, it turns out that everything in the universe has intentionality.” As-if intentionality, then, is a degenerate form of intentionality that can lead us astray, perhaps in the direction of overattribution; however, I would argue, the outright denial of as-if intentionality leads us in the opposite direction toward underattribution. The value of as-if intentionality lies in its reflection (or projection) of human values in a universe that is otherwise inhuman.

Understood in terms of aesthetic experience, as-if intentionality is the means by which we renew our engagement with the world and is fundamental to the meaningfulness of our metaphoric projections. As-if intentionality is the means of converting into the common currency of human values – human perspective, emotions, and relations – that which is not human. This makes the universe communicable. More specifically, it allows humans to communicate with one another from a common platform; in short, correspondence. “As-if” values aren’t permanent or fixed. After all: “all metaphors break down somewhere.” The human condition is a constant process of renewal. The impermanence of as-if values, of our

142 Lakoff and Johnson, Philosophy in the Flesh, 309.
143 John Searle, Rediscovery of the Mind, 81.
figurative values and relations, ironically, is testament to the enduring relevance of the various as-if mechanisms of our meaning-making processes.

Discounting as-if intentionality can lead to underattribution because it raises the question of how far we can go with the attribution of mindedness. As far as the intentionality of animals is concerned, Searle does not claim that it is as-if intentionality but a more rudimentary form of intrinsic intentionality. This is not in dispute. The way in which we describe the thoughts and feelings of animals, however, particularly as analogous to human thoughts and feelings, is problematic. Mind-reading, or the intentional stance, is a projective capability akin to empathy, which means it draws on our own body-states and processes, through mimetic interaction, to comprehend the observed behaviour. This was discussed in chapter three.

What is projective about the intentional stance is the mapping of inner states on to the behaviour of an “intentional system.” This projection entails a feedback loop; what is thus projected “closes the loop,” in terms of a prediction about the behaviour, which then provides us with information for our response. The as-if-ness is two-fold: firstly in terms of the activation of the as-if body loop, and secondly the generation of as-if intentionality. The animal may, indeed, have a form of intrinsic intentionality, but the explanations, particularly in human terms, of the specific qualities, properties, or contents of that animal’s intentionality are projected via the human body (body-mind) on to it through the intentional stance. It is, via the feedback loop of the intentional stance as an embodied process, as if the animal had thoughts and feelings as if it were human.
Our understanding of the behaviour of an animal is a conversion into human terms of what we already share in terms of more fundamental intentional and preintentional states. This conversion, as Dennett cautions, can import too much “clarity” to our understanding of the behaviour or phenomena in question.  

But if, as Searle says, we have no other way of understanding behaviour, at least of animals, then it must stand to reason that there is always this danger of importing too much clarity into our understanding. While Searle denies the validity of as-if intentionality, it nevertheless is a part of our understanding of observed behaviour, not just of other humans or animals.

To deny the validity of as-if intentionality as a source of knowledge puts, at best, a kink in the feedback loop of our experience and understanding. We can only understand the world by projecting our model of understanding onto, and into, the world. We must make it a human world, and this means risking “too much clarity” in our hypothetical testing of the world. Our mind-reading capabilities are not infallible, and can indeed be tricked, but it is their imperfection that makes our understanding of the world what it is. And with the infinite variety of metaphorical extensions of a relatively small number of foundational schemata, the generative potential of our intersubjective experiences is far richer than if we try to de-humanise the world.

The world we live in is and always will be a human world. There is not only the pervasive presence of the environment in man; there is the pervasive presence of man in his environment that makes that environment meaningful. Without man there is no moral standing in the world. We are biologically continuous with other animals; we just have more highly developed brains. And it is our more highly developed brains that allow us to project

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144 Dennett, *Kinds of Minds*, 57.
back onto the world that which occurs in our brains. Literature and art only exist because we have such brains, and as such are a means of projecting and extending our understanding into the world. Art is the ultimate employment of our as-if mechanisms, and it is through art that we can feel the reality of as-if intentionality.

Without the potential of as-if intentionality to mean something – and to be felt to mean something – the poetic experience would not be possible. Conversely, without the poetic experience the potential of as-if intentionality would be greatly diminished. Poetry tests our ability to stretch the relations of things in our understanding and the meanings that emerge from this kind of metaphoric testing. It is, as James has argued, our right to risk our beliefs, and we risk our beliefs through the hypothetical testing of new metaphors – new relations amongst the objects, actions, and events of our experience. As Frost cautions, however, we can only take our metaphors so far before they break down. We can go too far with attributing as-if intentionality, for instance, but that does not invalidate the mechanisms and capabilities, such as mind-reading, that allow us to do so.

We expand our understanding of the world through the attributions of mind to non-human things. It is a means of penetrating their otherwise oblique surfaces, and making them more amenable to a human world. Poetry, and art more broadly, is a humanistic laboratory in which this takes place. In the poetic experience we experience as-if intentionality as our own through mimesis and mind-reading. That is, we experience the intentional content of the poem through mimicking the poem, taking up its “posture.” We cannot help but read the mind of the poem because it is our mind we are ultimately reading. In this way, we experience in a very physical way the as-if-ness of the poem.
The poem compels the reader to “get another poetic something going,” what Frost called the “aesthetic moral.” The poetic experience – and aesthetic experience more broadly – is a creative experience to see how far we can extend our patterns of experience in the form of metaphors, but always against the background of human embodiment from which such patterns emerge. Our embodiment both enables and limits our experience. Our experience is further enabled and limited by our environment. Our bodies and our environment are dynamically interrelated in our experience; art expands the scope for experience and understanding by acting on the patterns of experience that emerge through this dynamic process. Aesthetic experience, and poetic experience specifically, is continuous with our embodied mode of understanding. What is more, aesthetic experience is an extension of, and a reflection on, our embodied mode of understanding.

Conclusion

In the poetic experience we engage in a form of mind-reading, adopting an intentional, or rather poetic, stance. In the act of reading we engage in recreating the meaning-making process through mimicking the poem, and by mimicking the poem we take up its posture or stance. We adopt the thoughts and emotional states of the poem, but at the same time we attempt to make sense of its meaning. Because its potential for meaning is reliant upon our meaning-making processes our attempts to make sense of the poem entails making sense of, or rather coming to terms with our own meaning-making process. The mind we are reading is our own.

This is a strange experience. It entails the employment of our ability to produce and project experiential patterns, or image schemata, onto other entities and even the environment.
itself in order to make sense of the objects, actions, and events taking place around us. These experiential patterns are embodied, with their reference point anchored in our embodiment. The experiential patterns we project, then, are grounded in our, that is human, embodiment. The poetic experience also entails our capacity to mimic or imitate, which is also grounded in the constitution and orientation common to all humans. What we imitate are patterns of behaviour that we can reproduce by virtue of our common embodiment. Because we have this mimetic capacity we can also come to understand the motivations and ideas of those acting in ways that we, too, can reproduce. This is mind-reading.

The intentional stance is an extension of this mimetic capacity that all humans share and, generally speaking, allows us to understand the activities and behaviours of non-human things. It is not without its risks, but it is central to our capacity to generate and retain figurative values and relations, in short, to believe. It is also central to our ability to communicate the common values and relations, which are generated through embodied experience, with others like ourselves. We attribute intentionality and risk the clarity of mindedness in non-minded things in order to evaluate and communicate with other human beings. This is correspondence. It is an open ended process because our evaluations – our metaphors – inevitably break down.

In the poetic experience we mimic patterns of experience; as a result, we produce the mind of the poem. The patterns of the poetic experience are subtle and centred around the physiology of the face; we reproduce the emotional state of the poem which primes us for metaphoric thinking. That is, we are induced into a state which is conducive to metaphoric thought. Metaphoric relations are grounded in the emotional values attached to objects, actions, and events through our embodied experience. Our embodied experience lays the
groundwork for metaphoric relations through the production and reproduction of experiential patterns, while emotion provides feedback for various behaviours through the attachment of survival values.

Our understanding of the world takes the form of the expression of different values and relations amongst the objects, actions, and events encountered in our experience. These values and relations are metaphoric as are their expressions. The poetic experience exposes us, the reader, to the vast metaphoric structure of meaning and the processes whereby meaning is made. These processes are all embodied, even when they take the form of the written word; the written word, ultimately, is continuous with speech, which is continuous with the physiological processes for producing sound, which is continuous with the neurological processes for registering and recording the physiological changes and responses to environmental stimuli. This continuity could be traced back extensively.

The poetic experience is a feedback loop and demonstrates that we, humans, are the locus of meaning. What is more, poetry reveals we are a part of a larger cultural loop of meaning-making, an intersubjective network of correspondence taking many forms. The poetic experience takes the form of an abstract, or metaphoric, correspondence that promotes and prompts the re-engagement with, and renewal of, our own meaning-making processes. Poetry, like no other art-form, brings together the various meaning-making capacities of mimesis, mind-reading, and metaphor that underpin our learning and evolution. By adopting the “voice-posture” of the poem we are taking part, not only in the renewal of words, but the renewal of the human world.
Conclusion

I began this thesis by synthesising the disparate and diverse ideas of Robert Frost into a single, coherent theory; this synthesis formed the basis of the theory of poetic experience outlined in this thesis. William James, who had a major influence on Frost, and John Dewey, provided a “pragmatic” framework, not only for the reconstruction of Frost’s ideas, but also for connecting them with a contemporary understanding of human experience. The intellectual influence of James on Frost, combined with the renascence surrounding James and Dewey, in the form of Mark Johnson, Antonio Damasio, and others, including, more broadly, the modern inheritors of the pragmatist tradition like Daniel Dennett, has provided ample opportunity for this reconstruction and triangulation of this Frostian theory of poetic experience.

In chapter one, I discussed and synthesised three key ideas, or theories, of Frost’s: his theory of metaphor, his theory of correspondence, and his theory of sentence-sounds. Critical to this synthesis were the ideas of William James, particularly those revolving around belief, emotion, and certain structures of meaning, namely the role of language in meaning-making and the “fringe of affinities.” It was established in this chapter that the poetic experience is predicated on three key elements of the meaning-making process: metaphor, mimesis, and emotion, all of which are aspects of our original embodied mode of understanding.

The poetic experience is a complex experience grounded in this original embodied mode of understanding. Our metaphoric understanding of the world is also grounded in this original mode; in fact, metaphor is an extension of our embodied mode of understanding into an “abstract” realm. It is here that the poetic experience occurs, but it is, nevertheless, an embodied, felt experience by virtue of the mimetic dimension of “self-recital.” In imitating
the poem we adopt the same posture that every other potential reader would; in so doing, we stand in relation to every other potential reader, in an act of metaphoric correspondence.

In chapter two, I moved the focus of the discussion to John Dewey and his theory of aesthetic experience. Dewey’s pragmatic aesthetics complements, and indeed advances, the Frostian-Jamesian dynamic that underpins the poetic experience. The poetic experience is itself a special sub-species of the aesthetic experience. Dewey’s theory grounds aesthetic experience in human embodiment, upon which, importantly, our everyday experience is also predicated. There is continuity between aesthetic and everyday experience by virtue of this common basis, in what Dewey calls “body-mind”: the integrated unity of the body, mind, and the environment in human experience. The poetic experience is a body-minded experience, acting not only on the reader’s mind, but resonating throughout the reader’s body.

The aesthetic experience is an experience that returns us to the original rhythms of our embodiment. The poetic experience in particular, by virtue of its special relationship with human sounds, returns us to the rhythms of our original meaning-making processes. What is more, because of its body-minded basis, we can share the experience with other body-minded organism. That is, body-mind not only entails the continuity of our “higher” process with our “lower” processes, ultimately grounding us in the environment, it entails the continuity between body-minded organisms. The aesthetic experience, furthermore, is continuous with our everyday experience for the same reason. The poetic experience, then, like aesthetic experience more broadly, has the capacity for enriching our everyday experience and understanding by re-engaging our embodied meaning-making processes, which are, in essence, intersubjective by virtue our body-minded continuity.
In chapter three, I explored at greater depth the role of emotion in meaning-making. Emotion provides our experience with felt qualities; emotion, however, is the product of embodied processes. James first postulated a theory of embodied emotion, albeit not without some significant criticism. Antonio Damasio develops a more comprehensive theory of embodied emotion, entailing a hierarchy of emotional response, the origins of which are found in fundamental physiological processes and systems, including homeostasis and the somatosensory system. Emotion, he argues, is embodied. What is more, Damasio develops a “supplementary mechanism” that allows for emotions to be abstractly activated, which he calls the “as-if body loop.” The as-if body loop allows us to experience emotional responses without the actual stimuli immediately present. The as-if body loop, as such, is the mechanism which enables empathy.

Emotions tell us how things are going for us in our environment; emotions, moreover, provide the objects of our experience with values. The fringe of affinities is filled with the objects of our experience because there is emotional resonance and relations among those objects. The as-if body loop, the abstract, projective capacity of our emotions, allows for the fringe to be stretched and manipulated in subtle and meaningful ways. The as-if body loop, as such, is central to the mimetic and metaphoric dynamic of the poetic experience. Because of the as-if body loop, emotional meaning that surrounds the objects of our experience can be stretched and tested in the poetic experience, with new meaning, new relations, the result. The as-if body loop makes the abstract experience of metaphoric relations a felt experience, meaning that the poetic experience is abstract as well as felt, metaphoric as well as emotional.

In chapter four, I discussed the theory of image schemata, as postulated by Mark Johnson, and what is variously known as the “intentional stance,” or “mind-reading.” Image
schemata are the fundamental patterns of experience, which are determined by human constitution and orientation. These patterns are the basis for all higher metaphors, and are the basis of our understanding of the world; that is, our understanding of the world is metaphoric. The metaphoric patterns by which we understand the world are grounded in the emotional values attached to objects, actions, and events through our embodied experience. The poetic experience, then, by acting upon our embodied processes of meaning-making, which are predicated on the same constitution and orientation of the body through which image schemata emerge, returns us to our original embodied mode of understanding, renewing our engagement with objects of our experience and the meaning-making process.

More than just renewing our engagement with the embodied processes of meaning-making, the poetic experience has a vital intersubjective dimension. In the poetic experience, we engage in an imitation of the poem; we adopt the posture or stance of the poem. This is an extension of our “mimetic rapport,” the way in which we innately engage with other human beings through facial expressions and body language. In a similar way, we adopt the thoughts and emotional states of the poem by “reading the mind” of the poem.

We read the mind of the poem by adopting its stance, thereby mimicking the meaning-making processes that were essential in creating it. This is the essence of the abstract metaphoric correspondence of the poetic experience. The mind we are reading in the poetic experience is both ours and not ours; the thoughts, or rather thought-processes, are both ours and not ours. We are adopting them from a source outside ourselves, the surrogate of the poem. We recreate the metaphoric and schematic patterns through mimesis so as to understand the poem; it is the same for every other potential reader of the poem. As such, it is an intersubjective experience.
When we sit down to read a poem (or a few), it is like picking up a mirror. But a poem is no mere shiny surface that reflects with perfect faith our physical actions. The poetic experience engenders in us, the reader, a series of subtle cognitive and neurophysiological changes; in a way, it is the reader who is the mirror of the poem because it is the reader who reflects the actions of the poem. The mind of the reader reflects the face of the poem in a complex mimetic process of meaning-making.
**Bibliography**


