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RE/MEMBERING PLACE: IDEOGRAMMIC MEMORY
IN EZRA POUND'S *THE CANTOS**

Abstract: In the aftermath of twentieth-century wars writing was, perhaps, one of the very few means available to work through horror and misery. Because of its ability to configure imagined spaces, literature became a way out of reality as much as a door into its deepest waters. In writing, authors managed to dissect terror from the *safety* of imagination. They also contrived to replace ruins and wreckage with hope for the future and possibility. This is particularly true of poetry. In their retrieval of fragments of the past, poets like Ezra Pound, elicited an emotional response to what seemed an impossible situation; sought an answer and a form of representation to the illegibility of a discourse also shattered by war. Their poetry offered a way out of mourning and desperation; opened paths to social reconstruction. It could be said, thence, that, as a leading proponent of this type of modernist poetry, in his *Cantos* Pound develops a literary language that, despite being undoubtedly influenced by previous tradition – particularly by Fenollosa's ideogram, produces a new understanding of memory and history. Pound elaborates a language that helps humanity overcome the boundaries of the written word that had potentially lost meaning, logic and sequence. He perceives historical deeds as experiences that can (and should) be retrieved in poetry and deems writing an act of memory. Pound's fragment retrieval is both metaphorical and literal, seeking to recover hopeful instances of the past as he searches for the unifying constituent of diverse elements. This article examines the interaction of images and words as Pound's new theory of the poetic image, through which the poet favors natural associations and tries to restore historical pasts. In the midst of outright destruction, Pound's *Cantos* are said to *construct* landscapes that break linear chronologies to find the common threat of the present and the past. In so doing, he fills a shattered reality back with hope and light.

Keywords: Modernism, Ezra Pound, *The Cantos*, ideogrammic memory, time, space, poetic language, images.

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ЗА/ПОМИНАЯ МЕСТО: ИДЕОГРАММАТИЧЕСКАЯ
ПАМЯТЬ В «КАНТОС» ЭЗРЫ ПАУНДА*

Аннотация: После войн XX века письмо, создание литературы, было, пожалуй, одним из немногих доступных средств для преодоления психологической травмы. Благодаря своей способности создавать воображаемые пространства литература стала выходом из реальности, но и средством проникновения в глубины бытия. В литературе преодолеть ужас помогала безопасная сфера воображения. Писатели могли заменить руины и обломки прошлого надеждой на будущее. Это особенно верно в отношении поэзии. Эзра Паунд был одним из тех поэтов, которые могли, собрав осколки прошлого, вызвать эмоциональный отклик на, казалось бы, безвыходную ситуацию, отыскать форму репрезентации бессвязного, разрушенного войной дискурса. Поэзия помогала преодолеть горе и отчаяние, открывала пути к восстановлению общества. Можно утверждать, что Паунд, шедший в авангарде модернистской поэзии, в «Песнях» создал литературный язык, который, несмотря на несомненное влияние традиции, в частности, понятия идеогаммы у Э. Феноллозы, по-новому интерпретировал память как феномен, непосредственно связанный с воссозданием чувства места. Паунд разрабатывает язык, помогающий человечеству преодолеть границы письменного слова, которое потенциально потеряло смысл и логику. Он воспринимает исторические события как опыт, который может – и должен быть воссоздан в поэзии, и считает создание такой поэзии актом памяти. «Песни», собирающие воедино осколки, знаки, утраченные художественные символы, представляют собой индивидуальное воссоздание прошлого, позволяющее примириться с социальной травмой. В статье рассматривается взаимодействие образов и слов в свете паундовской теории поэтического образа, посредством которого поэт поддерживает естественные ассоциации и пытается восстановить историческое прошлое, чтобы вспомнить – и переосмыслить место. На фоне всеобщего разрушения Паунд в «Песнях» создает мнемонические ландшафты, «целебные места», пытаясь найти смыслы, которые наполняют реальность надеждой и светом.

Ключевые слова: модернизм, Эзра Паунд, «Песни», идеогамматическая память, время, пространство, поэтический язык, образы.

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The examination of the past as the outcome of present uncertainties has become a repeated practice in the writing of literature, refiguring the implications that go with the notion of that which was but no longer is. Understanding past events as necessarily over is a conception inherently tied to a linear configuration of time, which implies that we are only capable of moving forward in a horizontal straight temporal line, unaffected by events that took place a long time ago. This notion seems invalid for modernist poets who, instead, subscribe to Ortega y Gasset's conception of the past. Ortega perceives history as a living entity that cyclically renews itself and thus continues to affect the present.¹ For poets like Pound, past events are not deemed past because they reflect that which happened to other people long ago, but because they tell us what was, is and, in a way, will be. They set the ground for self-interpretation and help us identify our place in the world and our world as a place.

One could thus claim that the modernist poet resorts to the organic relation between image and word Ernest Fenollosa once saw in the ideogram² to gather those elements that can help him make sense of the degenerating world surrounding him; to, perhaps, heal from memory into imagined space. In this paper, I will examine Pound's new theory of the poetic image conceived as the interaction of images and words through which the poet favors natural associations and tries to restore historical pasts by means of 'ideogrammic memory.'³ I will present an overview of Pound's application of this theory in the *Cantos*, where it solidified most evidently, to later analyze the relevance of the moments of illumination that fill the poem with light. In his vorticist manifesto, Pound already advocated for the juxtaposition of picture and discourse to create a mobile, visual *logos*, a "VORTEX [...] into which ideas are constantly rushing."³ Drawing on Fenollosa's views on the Chinese ideogram, Pound's writing in the *Cantos* becomes the place *from which and into which* the poet can restore the past, acquiring a new sense of the present and of history. And, in so doing, he repairs shattered postwar landscapes.

¹ Ortega y Gasset, J. *History as System*, transl. by Helene Weyl. New York: Norton, 1961: 212.

² Fenollosa, E. *The Chinese Written Character as a Medium for Poetry*. San Francisco, CA: City Lights Books, 1964.

³ Pound, E. *A Memoir of Gaudier-Brzeska*. New York: John Lane, 1916: 106.

As he builds a trans-temporal *locus* rooted in the immanence of art, Pound resorts to a different understanding of time and space to inquire into the processes of cultural transmission, memory and history production. His vortex in the *Cantos* represents and defines the relation between the subjective and the objective for the poet but also in history. By rendering his own postbellum personal account in the form of a figurative vortex-like epic, Pound's poetry manages to relate to his own experience as much as it accesses the realms of collective memory. And it is this shared sense of history, myth and tradition what will contribute to the shaping of a common understanding of violent events. In his *Cantos*, Pound spurs the consciousness about destructive repetitions throughout history and, despite his acknowledged sense of contradiction, glimpses at moments of pure light that can regenerate a contemporary wasteland. The notion of iterative history is easily perceived in the poem as the direct result of a culture of materialism and capitalism that Pound vigorously opposes.⁴ The moments of illumination that contradict this economics remain unexplained, challenging textual coherence to provide mnemonic spaces of belonging. After all, the *Cantos* is but a deliberate practice of 'ideogrammic memory' solidified into poetic form to give meaning, coherence and purpose to the ruins of humanity, working through the aftermath of bloodshed from an imagined crossroads where time meets, or perhaps becomes, space⁵ in order to be filled with myths, tradition and visual art.

Towards a Poetics of Spatial Memory

In the *Cantos*, Pound introduces time in a continuum, as a living entity that is not forgotten and unchanging, as a whole that encompasses past, present and future. He sees Fenollosa's ideogram as a modern *ars poetica*,⁶ through which the poet traces the etymological evolution of a

⁴ Hugh Kenner examines this aspect of Pound's poetry in Kenner, Hugh. *The Pound Era*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1971: 315.

⁵ This idea is explored by Viorica Patea, to whom I am greatly indebted, in her essay "Eliot's and Pound's Declensions of the Past and Present: When Time Becomes Space." *Transatlantica* 1 (2016), n.p.

⁶ Fenollosa, E. *The Chinese Written Character as a Medium for Poetry: An Ars Poetica*, with a foreword and notes by Ezra Pound. London: Stanley Nott, 1936 (1918).

word, elicits the abstract from concrete elements and sees the unifying threat between them. This is, perhaps, why Pound writes in “The Serious Artist” that

We might come to believe that the thing that matters in art is a sort of energy, something more or less like electricity or radio-activity, a force transfusing, welding, and unifying. A force rather like water when it spurts up through very bright sand and sets it in swift motion.⁷

And it is because of this conception of time, mediated by the ideogrammic method, that the poet resorts to a special poetic form that can encompass the unifying essence of the ideogram. A form that offers spatial elements (be they sculptures, paintings or places) to articulate history out of chronology and from those persistent elements that are sustained over time, merging the tenses. In his *Cantos*, Pound reproduces the dynamics of the ideogram in his understanding of temporality and sets time away from unidirectional timelines. Instead, he makes use of a spatial form in which future, present and past are proved to be correlated, coexistent. Space thereby becomes the common constituent linking together human experience, which allows the poet to reformulate history.

In a way, it seems as if the language of the poet was inherently bound to a reproduction of both symbolic and material space. From Wordsworth’s romantic landscapes where “emotion[s] were to be] recollected in tranquility”⁸ to imagist definitions of poetry, one can easily perceive a sense of spatiality in the poetic rhetoric key to aesthetic intuition and creative performance. As can easily be supposed, the portrayal of these ‘representational spaces’⁹ is, however, not the same for every poet. Whilst space for the romantics could be defined (in very general terms) as

⁷ Pound, E. “The Serious Artist.” *Literary Essays of Ezra Pound*, ed., introd. by T.S. Eliot. London: Faber and Faber, 1913: 49. It seems quite interesting that Pound later referred to passages from this text as “[e]xample[s] of ideogrammic method [...] before having access to the Fenollosa papers” [Pound, E. *The ABC of Reading*. New York: New Directions Books, 1934: 96].

⁸ Wordsworth, W. “Preface to the *Lyrical Ballads*.” *Poetical Works of William Wordsworth*, eds. Thomas Hutchinson and Ernest De Selincourt. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1969: 740.

⁹ Lefebvre, H. *The Production of Space*, transl. by Donald Nicholson-Smith. Cambridge: Blackwell, 1991.

a symbolic background and inspiration for emotional interpretation and subjectivity, for modernist poets like T. S. Eliot and Ezra Pound spatiality is what enables the poet's identification with figures of the past. It is a meeting point across time, and is also essential to the proper functioning of poetic language, allowing for their new understanding of history. For these poets, writing is a practice of historical reconstruction that brings poetry closer to the artwork made in the abstract and plastic arts. They paint and sculpt with words in an attempt to make visible those instances they consider authentic, moments of *virtu* lost in time. And they do so by conjuring images that connect 'the substantial' and the symbolic, that bring together present and past.

This correlation is perhaps better illustrated in those mythical instances in which the poet resorts to nature in order to encounter wilderness, beauty, light, art.¹⁰ The images he evokes, also known as ideograms, indicate that the poet renounces abstraction to enter alternative forms of language. "A true noun, an isolated thing, does not exist in nature," affirmed Ernest Fenollosa¹¹ anticipating the essential juxtaposition of concrete elements that would later become Pound's dynamic ideogram, the key to his poetry. Fenollosa described poetic discourse as a cross-sectional experience, emphasizing the impossibility to find or even perceive in nature the abstract ideas Western language conveys. He rather approached the Chinese conception of reality in which the interaction between a given object and its function becomes dynamic, relational, perceptible: "things in motion, motion in things."¹² Fenollosa's words suggest a continual transference of energy in which powers are constantly re-arranged and in movement. They hint at the existence of a language in/of Nature that distributes its elements imitating the natural order of things. Poetic language is now reformulated to escape abstraction and follow the visual, associative pattern of natural processes. The symbolic is made palpable, visible, performed. Fenollosa's argument brings forth the possibility of a fluid association – or should I say communication – between message and reality that escapes the restrictions of abstraction and remains in constant transformation, '*ideas constantly*

¹⁰ A case specific analysis of each of these instances is, however, out of the reach of this paper.

¹¹ Fenollosa, E. *The Chinese Written Character as a Medium for Poetry*. San Francisco, CA: City Lights Books, 1964: 10.

¹² *Ibid.*

rushing.¹³ The interaction between the written word and the evoked image is therefore fundamental for any poet who aims to access the natural world since poetic language becomes a matter of putting together image and word, of words with pictorial qualities, of ideograms. This conception of *langue poétique* is the basis of Pound's vortex in which history is not necessarily trapped orbiting around itself in the eye of a perpetual windstorm, but rather repeats and revises itself striving for coherence, or a new message in the present. The vortex is the route through which ideograms reach representation and reality anew.

Facing a reality fraught with danger and loss, Pound resorts to writing in an attempt to *relive* those historical events, myths and artworks that give meaning to humanity and to *relieve*, to ease, the pain and loss of disconnection and war. He tries to restore history in natural terms turning narrative time into a conglomerate space made of temporal layers that are interrelated. By juxtaposing previous, present and future experience, Pound renders history alive. As one writes, the past reverberates into the present building a new form of temporality in which the different tenses intermingle. As such, these historical recollections point to the sedimentary essence of space, shifting from the horizontal axis of linear progression to a perception of time as an accumulation of places. Or, as Viorica Patea masterfully puts it, "historical re-construction [is now] envisaged as a process of aesthetic intuition during which the interpreter like the visionary artist tried to resurrect the 'lived experience' of a particular time no longer there."¹⁴ Thus, whilst the real monuments, statues and spaces of modernity get invaded by the violence of usury and war, Pound's *Cantos* offers vistas into the artistic landscapes of the past which, despite his final tone of disillusionment, manage to relate the present and the past in the poet's imagination. To denounce the futility of war and the healing potential of *re/membering* art.

Pound's perception of poetic time and space (and Eliot's for that matter) probably has to do with his detachment from previous interpretations of history with pretensions of objectivity, the historian being a mere repository of data and facts. For him, however, the poet cannot seal himself off from the events he is describing. Instead, he becomes

¹³ Pound, E. *A Memoir of Gaudier-Brzeska*: 106.

¹⁴ Patea, V. "Eliot's and Pound's Declensions of the Past and Present..."

existentially involved in the act of historical observation. As he writes, the modern poet establishes a complex inter-relation between the observer and the observed, the present and the past, the logical progression of time and the residual layers that accumulate in given spaces holding past stories and memories: “ply over ply.”¹⁵ The poet connects with the spaces he (or the art he speaks of) occupies and thus reflects on their connection, which is likewise mirrored by his usage of a language that avoids abstraction: the ideogram perceived as the language of memory.

History is then envisaged as a breathing entity that revises itself in a continuum. And as such the *Cantos* is but a port of entry into the past, the present and the future, but also an imagined space of representation wherein every event the poet deems worthy of recuperating intersects with fragments from different eras and lands. The *Cantos* is in itself Pound’s “paradiso,”¹⁶ a realm where despite the horrors and miseries of war he can render beauty. For in the midst of destruction, literature can open paths of light and hope. In his poem, he reformulates temporality and makes it the task of the poet to recover and revisit significant episodes from his own past in order to safeguard his hopeless present.¹⁷ Recollecting spatialized fragments from the past becomes a subjective practice of retrieval and reconstruction that merges the tenses in order to revise history and the past with it. Because for Pound, as James Longenbach phrases it, “history does not exist as a sequence of events that occurred in the past; rather, it is a function of the historian’s effort to understand the past in the present.”¹⁸ That is, history is to be produced and reproduced, examined and re-examined by the poet, for it perpetually affects everyday life.

Even as Longenbach’s approach to the historicity of humankind serves to explain Pound’s fixation with the aftereffects of past events and *far-away* lands, one could still argue against the relevance of the pictorial in this modern understanding of temporality. If the key is spatiality, does

¹⁵ Pound, E. *The Cantos*. New York: John Lane, 1916: 29/15 (Canto IV).

¹⁶ This is cited many times in the poem. As in Pound, Ezra. *The Cantos*: 22/102, for example.

¹⁷ His past here understood as personal identification with historical figures, but also as the history of humankind.

¹⁸ Longenbach, J. *Modernist Poetics of History: Pound, Eliot and the Sense of the Past*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1987: 14.

one really need the ideogram to portray it? When the poet retrieves history, he reproduces places in the form of evoked images that contrast with the chaos outside the text. This chaotic world is mirrored in the fragmentation of the narrative, exemplified by syntactically unfinished sentences and a very wide and unexplained metareferential framework. The feeling of confusion that results from the text's form is a conscious decision of the poet, who opposes the obscurity of the narrative built-up to the light of the ideograms he selects: the two sides of the same coin portrayed and rendered visible for the reader in content and in form. The obscurity and unintelligibility of his everyday practice set against the confidence and possibility of regeneration that result from aesthetic survival. Perhaps, fragmentation, rupture of sequence as a way out of chronology and into his new sense of history. And it is in the midst of this ontological dilemma that the revival of past myths becomes a truth to live by for Pound. That is tradition in the trend of Eliot, which "cannot be inherited, and if you want it you must obtain it by greater labour." A tradition that involves Eliot's "historical sense," which at the same time implies "a perception not only of the pastness of the past, but of its presence."¹⁹ The rupture of temporal continuity is thus conscious and unconscious at once, for the poet is aware of the present influence of the past, the 'historical sense' Eliot eludes to, but does not necessarily realize that breaking the temporal line might put an end to the 'sense of modernity' that he places in the formal ideogrammic structure of his *Cantos*.

Pound himself maintains that the poet "can't follow the Dantesque cosmos in an age of experiment" for Dante's theological faith is to be substituted by a sense of mythical tradition, paganism and artistic beauty.²⁰ As such, the poet develops a new form that fits his desire to 'make poetry new,' the vortex, and configures his 'ragbag epic' meeting such criteria. The minute form meets content, however, the fracture of temporal progression casts doubts on the actual modernity of his epic, for, as Paul Ricoeur suggests, "we [might have been] attempting to distinguish 'our' modernity from that of 'others,' from that of those who, before us, declared

¹⁹ Eliot, T.S. "Tradition and Individual Talent." *The Sacred Wood: Essays on Poetry and Criticism*. London: Faber and Faber, 1928: 38.

²⁰ Pound qtd. in Hall, Donald. "Ezra Pound: An Interview." *Ezra Pound's Cantos: A Casebook*, ed. Peter Makin. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006: 258.

themselves to be modern. From a repetitive, iterative concept, [however,] the concept of modernity now becomes the indicator within our discourse of a singularity comparable to that of the here and the now of our corporal condition.”²¹ In other words, the minute the temporal line gets disrupted, so does ‘the sense of modernity,’ as that which the poet considers new is made of fragments of the past that were already believed to be innovative in another time. The metaphysical implications of this breach of meaning could be synthesized in a new concept of history, fluid and iterative, and in a distinctive narrative “ethos of uncertainty”²² characteristic of repressed emotion and possibly translated from the self-doubt of Pound’s poetic persona, which the narrator equally embraces and casts aside by the end of his epic poem.²³

The relevance of the ideogram is thus uncontested, for it is the most direct source of meaning in the poem.²⁴ The ideogram transmits the *Cantos*’ message at an instinctual level, prompting diverse emotional reactions that make the readers empathize with Pound’s “ego scriptor.”²⁵ It translates the frictions and tensions of uncertain times and of the individual who lives through them into a visual language rooted in collective history. It does not delve into those emotions. It never questions the poem’s hopeful message either. Instead, it reminds the reader of redeeming sites while pointing at terror from its very textual absence, purposefully or not. Understanding the message of these cantos is, then, not based on their linguistic coherence, but on the emotional impact the poem has the ability to convey. This is the reason why the *Cantos* is often regarded as an undecipherable poem, for, apparently, only those with the necessary historical knowledge, aesthetic intuition and artistic insight can access its many layers of significance. And, whilst such complaints might seem reasonable when one exclusively

²¹ Ricoeur, P. *Memory, History, Forgetting*, transl. by Kathleen Blamey and David Pellauer. Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 2004: 308.

²² LaCapra, D. *Writing History, Writing Trauma*. London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001: 197.

²³ In canto CXVI, Pound laments a lack of coherence in his poem that heightens the overall feeling of confusion his reader may feel. The hopeful message the *Cantos* conveys remains unaltered. Yet, the difficulty to articulate certain thoughts or emotions seems to be hinted too.

²⁴ And, ironically, the most difficult to disentangle.

²⁵ Pound, E. *The Cantos*: 64/360.

focuses on the poem's interreferential frame, its formal structure proves them inaccurate.²⁶

Faced with the void of a (post-)war new normal, Pound seems impelled to strive for the survival of what he deems a universal tradition. Despite his relentless return to spatial figurations (be they places, sculptures or paintings), Pound seems aware of the destruction of their physical physiognomy, attempting to protect their metaphysical integrity instead. To do so, the poet reconciles time and space into a controlled narrative environment that, as Aleida Assmann argues in a different context, "does not simply oppose temporal history to a timeless tradition," but enables the interaction of different epochs and traditions through the conjunction of a series of remembered but temporally asynchronous artistic products.²⁷ The poet therefore relies on collective memory to recuperate those artifacts reminiscent of past times, searching for the unifying thread that links them to the present. Mnemonic recollection becomes the means to foster an ontological shift that gives meaning back to human existence. However, a second contention seems in place. If Pound seeks a reconstitution of global experience, how can a subjective view be an acceptable catalyst? And in which ways is the interplay between objective and subjective experience in his recollections relevant in the poem? Maurice Halbwachs suggests that our recollections of the past are based on our own individualized accounts of lived events as much as in the collective memories the community holds of those events. In his own words, "the individual remembers by placing himself in the perspective of the group, but one may also affirm that the memory of the group realizes and manifests itself in individual memories."²⁸ Halbwachs' take on collective memory might provide an answer to the validity of individual experience regarding processes of social remembrance. Even when Pound's account in the *Cantos* is evidently

²⁶ In no way do I mean to imply that its broad constellation of references can be fully decoded at an emotional level. Instead, I maintain that the main message of the poem, that of dislocation and relocation of historical elements in an attempt to reconfigure history and find common ground between the present and the past, is transmitted thanks to the poem's ideogrammic structure and the emotional contagion it elicits.

²⁷ Assmann, A. "Exorcizing the Demon of Chronology: T.S. Eliot's Reinvention of Tradition." *T.S. Eliot and the Concept of Tradition*, eds. Giovanni Cianci and Jason Harding, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007: 19.

²⁸ Halbwachs, M. *On Collective Memory*, transl. by Lewis A. Coser. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1992: 40.

subjective — he selects what goes in, the interplay between individual and collective memories appears as grounds for common truths.

Following this line of thought, the configuration of history is dependent, in the *Cantos*, on Pound's mnemonic strategies. The poet is not to be an objective historian. Instead he will search in history for past figures and characters with whom he feels identified, away from abstraction. Referring to the salience of 'proper names,' Emmanuel Levinas argues for the application of a language that entails mental visual representation in order to trigger a transformation in our common understanding of the past. He maintains that "[p]erhaps the names of persons whose saying signifies a face [...] will enable us to divine, behind the downfall of discourse, the end of a certain intelligibility and the drawing of a new one. What is coming to a close may be rationality tied exclusively to the being that is sustained by words."²⁹ Levinas anticipates a discursive collapse at the linguistic level that would require a more evocative substitute; a language whose effects can be easily traced in the *Cantos*. It is this new communicative pattern, more semiotic than semantic, that enables the recognition of a new understanding of history.

The contradictions deriving from this premise seemed to be one of Pound's preoccupations³⁰ who, attempting to write the grand narrative of humankind, encountered the difficulties of providing an authentic rendering of its many facets. Pound attempted to make poetry new.³¹ The apparent inconsistencies that lay at the core of the *Cantos* are, then, a sign of the divergence to be encountered in the clash of individual experience and collective memory, of objective subtraction of key elements from the past and subjective dissection of the objects removed in the present. The poet's intention, however, is none other than to provide "divine vision and cures for social disease," as George Kearns points out.³² The *Cantos* innovative application of ideograms relies on the poet's understanding and practice of memory as the basis for the ideogram. It is because of the way in which Ezra Pound re/members that his epic poem gains meaning even within a

²⁹ Levinas, E. *Proper Names*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1996: 4-5.

³⁰ This can be inferred from his late comments on the poem stating that his "notes do not cohere" (Pound, Ezra. *The Cantos*: 116/817).

³¹ This was Pound's essential motto in his vorticist manifesto.

³² Kearns, G. *Ezra Pound*. The *Cantos*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989: 1.

seemingly chaotic structure. As he incorporates any and every moment, artistic object or historical figure that he considers relevant to the salvation of humanity,³³ Pound draws on a new mnemonic practice that not only evokes space but snatches its most valuable fragments from the past and brings them into an empty page to comfort, instruct and reassure his reader. He does so by drawing on what Kearns considers the tenets of medieval times, “*ut moveat, ut doceat, ut delectat,*” to move, teach and delight.³⁴ This theoretical ABC of literary practice gives the poet and the poem a new role. The former becomes not only a re-teller or historian but the savior of his present and the teacher of any future generations to come. Similarly, the latter turns into a roadmap for answers that will continue to elicit diverse emotional responses in its readers. Pound establishes a connection between humanity and his poem³⁵ too, as both re/member their ethos with hope for the future. The poem becomes in itself an ideogram that helps us remember the past endured by others and find connections with our present. It turns into a catalyst that allows us to hear the shattered echoes of re-assembling the present in poetic space and understand where we come from in order to decide where we want to head to.

To define the *Cantos* as a historical almanac in search of spreading a message of possibility, survival and regeneration is to recognize the ache from which such message stems and the difficulties endured to assemble it. As the figure in charge of historical (re)production, Pound’s poetic persona attempts to bring to the fore the forgotten value of artistic creation. He re/members. And perhaps we must understand this in a double sense. On the one hand, the act of remembering speaks of the reproduction of the past into the present through a poetic language that conveys its spatial structure; on the other, though, it refers to a process of *stitching* together those fragments of temporality the poet is capable of recollecting in the form of images that share a common root, a unifying trait. Bearing this in mind, the relation

³³ In this sense, it must also be taken into consideration that Pound includes figures that he admires and others that he seems to despise. For some insight on this matter, see Noel Stock’s analysis of Pound’s transformation of his *Cantos* into a “political weapon” [Stock, N. *Reading the Cantos: The Study of Meaning in Ezra Pound*. New York: Pantheon, 1966: 91].

³⁴ Kearns, G. *Ezra Pound*. The *Cantos*: 2.

³⁵ Nassar, E. P. *The Cantos of Ezra Pound*. Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1975: 16.

between poetic image and language becomes increasingly apparent. The written feeds from the visual and elicits an emotional response. When writing, the modernist poet weaves a tapestry of historical experiences that provides the reader with a sense of continuity based on the accumulation of positive images. The sense of sequence is then established in visual terms (either pictorial, spatial or both), not in temporal ones. Time is relegated to the background as the poet explores the possibilities of the visual seeking the historical awareness and emotional awakening of his reader.

In *Twilight Memories* Andreas Huyssen affirms that “all representation – whether in language, narrative, image, or recorded sound – is based on memory [and that] memory, even and especially in its belatedness, is itself based on representation.”³⁶ That is, representation is not an exact copy of what we experience, but the result of repetition and revision mediated by memory and subjectivity. As such, Pound’s historical recollections gain in significance, as they become a cultural product of the time the author lived: a period characterized by the polar opposition between a desire to ‘make discourse new’ and a need to remember, recover and root in the past; between the search for a “paradiso terrestre” only attainable in writing and the ubiquity of earthly destruction and war.

Pound’s decision to write his *Cantos* as a fragmentary piece captures the anxiety of the era he endured, when the destructive presence of war occupied almost every physical and creative space available. From ruins to discourse, the places of modernity shifted into unknown rooms governed by uncertainty, frustration and darkness. The *Cantos* hints at this obscurity, reflecting the confusion the poet must have felt writing a poem of salvation in an era of outright destruction. Even as the *Cantos* seeks a space it cannot fully materialize, its urge to find a natural language that would communicate evocatively is utterly accomplished, leaving aside the straightjacketed language of abstraction. So is his depiction of a new historical sense.

Pound decides to embark on a journey towards a new epic that can save humanity from its own self-destructiveness. His very ambitious premise leads him to a reformulation of Whitman’s ragbag epic³⁷ in which he compiles personal, social and cultural memories in the form of

³⁶ Huyssen, A. *Twilight Memories: Marking Time in a Culture of Amnesia*. New York: Routledge, 1995: 2.

³⁷ Kearns, G. *Ezra Pound*. The *Cantos*: 57.

ideograms. For Pound, his *paradiso terrestre* is comprised of a collection of transcendental instants that the poet “ha[s] shelved (shored) [against his ruins].”³⁸ Pound’s epic is, then, a modern museum of ideograms that offers visions of the past to help the poet cope with a disconsolate present. In his revision of the museum as a cultural paradigm of (post)modernity, Huyssen maintains that even when “a traditional society without a secular teleological concept of history does not need a museum, modernity is unthinkable without its museal project.” For Huyssen, the museum “enables the moderns to negotiate and to articulate a relationship to the past that is always also a relationship to the transitory.”³⁹ An ‘image’ in motion. An ideogram through which, and into which the fragments the poet has shelved remain *constantly rushing*. The dynamism imbued to the symbolic figure of the museum – the living archive that the *Cantos* stands for – speaks of a reconfiguration of poetic language that reproduces natural patterns to render history alive.

In the *Cantos*, Pound displays his genuine relation to the past. If the process of remaking history is indeed a process of repetition and revision; then the past is not an entity inherently belonging in half-forgotten memories, but a sequence that, as Huyssen maintains, ought to be “articulated to become memory,”⁴⁰ recognized not by its absence in the present, but by its presence. Ideogramic memory in Pound’s *Cantos* thus stands for the poet’s attempts to alter the perception of time and history in order to access the redeeming possibilities of the written word, the evoked image. When the present is unbearable, poetry becomes an act of remembering, of recuperating the past through memories of an ideogrammic kind in order to help the poet, society and the culture they both inhabit and shape reconnect and heal.

In his *Cantos*, Ezra Pound decides to reproduce episodes from the past through a language that conveys the spatial and structural qualities of historical spaces. These spaces are re/membered through artistic and mythical constructions that, in the form of images, reflect the saving possibilities of art. As Pound puts together these fragments, brings them into the

³⁸ Pound, E. *The Cantos*: 22/102.

³⁹ Huyssen, A. *Twilight Memories*: 15-16.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*: 2.

present, revisits them and locates them in a vertical narrative construction that seeks new layers of meaning, Pound materializes the loss the wars have left behind. The absence yet to be filled. His descriptions no longer belong to a discourse of poetic abstraction, but rather follow Fenollosa's teachings to introduce the ideogram as a medium for memory that enables the interconnection of cross-sectional pictures that constitute a new epic tapestry for the history of representation. Seeking to transform the destructive spaces of materialism, economic injustice and violence that pervaded modernity, *The Cantos* adopts the form of a vortex where images move dynamically, intersecting, relating to one another in an attempt to catalyze, convey and render emotion organically; in an effort to, perhaps, come to terms with the horror of bloodshed and move from obscure, unreliable and dislocated hideouts into familiar places of the past re/membered as shelter during the storm.

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