Here is a portrait of an enthusiast:

He has always been, first and foremost, a teacher and a campaigner. He has always been impelled, not merely to find out for himself how poetry should be written, but to pass on the benefit of his discoveries to others; not simply to make these benefits available; but to insist upon their being received. He would cajole, and almost coerce, other men into writing well: so that he often presents the appearance of a man trying to convey to a very deaf person the fact that the house is on fire. Every change he has advocated has always struck him as being of instant urgency. ... He has cared deeply that his contemporaries and juniors should write well; he has cared less for his personal achievement than for the life of letters and art. One of the lessons to be learnt from his critical prose and from his correspondence is the lesson to care unselfishly for the art one serves.¹

This is T. S. Eliot on Ezra Pound, from the introduction to Eliot’s selection of Pound’s Literary Essays. It is a good likeness: Eliot presenting his own best sense of his poetic colleague while also drawing on Pound’s idea of himself; Eliot’s terms being quite largely taken from the critical prose he is introducing. The Pound on show is an enthusiast. He is a teacher, a campaigner and an advocate; he is gripped by commitments that strike him as instantly urgent; he has always wanted to make the benefits of his discoveries available to others; he is one of the few writers for whom the state of the art is more important than his own achievement. Which said, his insisting and cajoling could border on coercion, though his was, as Eliot presents it, a curiously passive coercion: he has ‘always been impelled’ to make discoveries and to pass them on; everything was in the name of the art he ‘serves’. Poundian enthusiasm, in other words, as Eliot wants apologetically to put it, can sometimes tip over into authoritarianism, and it was founded – and here there is not an apology – on an act of servility.

Here’s another portrait of the enthusiast:

When I consider his work as a whole I find more style than form; at moments more style, more deliberate nobility and the means to convey it
than in any other contemporary poet known to me, but it is constantly interrupted, broken, twisted into nothing by its proper opposite, nervous obsession, nightmare, stammering confusion; he is an economist, poet, politician, raging at malignants with inexplicable characters and motives, grotesque figures out of a child’s book of beasts. This loss of self-control, common among uneducated revolutionists, is rare – Shelley had it in some degree – among men of Ezra Pound’s culture and erudition.²

As a description of Pound this is typical, W B. Yeats, in the introduction to the Oxford Book of Modern Verse, piling up verbs and nouns to indicate the variousness of his subject. Primarily, though, there are two Pounds here, relating to Yeats’ sense of early and late. It is the later that dominates – Yeats is writing in the mid-1950s amid a torrent of Poundian tracts and pamphlets – and what comes through is a picture of a writer who can neither stem nor order the flow, who presents the behaviour of the ill-educated, a writer who, above all, has lost self-control. Yeats’ image thus supplements Eliot’s, describing the Pound that Eliot – writing as he, Macleish and others were seeking to secure Pound’s release from St. Elizabeth’s – was keen to overlook: interrupted, stammering, raging at malignants.

And now here is Pound himself, presenting an image of enthusiasm in Guide to Kulchur, and smuggling through, in the process, a self-portrait or two:

There is no doubt whatsoever that human beings are subject to emotion and that they attain to very fine, enjoyable and dynamic emotional states, which cause them to emit what to careful chartered accountants may seem intemperate language ... which comes down into a man and produces superior ecstasies, feelings of regained youth, super-youth and so forth, not to be surpassed by the first glass of absinthe...

Two mystic states can be dissociated; the ecstatic-beneficent-and-benevolent, contemplation of the divine love, the divine splendour with goodwill, toward others.

And the bestial, namely the fanatical, the man on fire with God and anxious to stick his snotty nose into other men’s business or reprove his neighbour for having a set of tropisms different from that of the fanatic’s, or for having the courage to live more greatly and openly.

The second set of mystic states is manifest in scarcity economists, in repressors, etc.

The first state is a dynamism. It has, time and again, driven men to great living, it has given them courage to go on for decades in the face of public stupidity.³

Establishing Pound’s enthusiasm is a fraught and complicated business. Fraught because, in all his voluminous writings, ‘enthusiasm’ is a word Pound
rarely uses, and when he does it is without great charge, and typically to
derogatory effect. Generally speaking, in fact, ‘enthusiasm’ features little in
high Modernist writing, though Marianne Moore presents an exception. This
is no surprise. Modernism, as directed by Pound, involved rebranding art as an
anti-Romantic, aristocratic activity. Enthusiasm, from this point of view, was
a Romantic idea, rehabilitated but also, as Jon Mee argues, regulated in the
face of eighteenth-century political suspicions, suspicions recently
rearticulated for Modernism by Nietzsche. ‘In an even more decisive and
profound sense,’ Nietzsche asserts in On the Genealogy of Morality, ‘the last
political nobility in Europe, that of the French seventeenth and eighteenth
centuries, collapsed under the ressentiment-instincts of the rabble, — the
world had never heard greater rejoicing and more uproarious enthusiasm.’
Nietzsche’s argument is with ressentiment, which he takes to be the principle
of slave morality, a category, as he presents it and claims to historicize it, shot
through with anti-Semitism. In this context enthusiasm features as a
manifestation of the resentful rabble. This is not to imply a direct link
between Nietzsche and Pound. It is, though, to make graphic the fact that
given the aristocratic guise in which Pound was pleased to cast the artist, the
term ‘enthusiasm’ was likely to have a limited or debased currency. All of
which is frankly to acknowledge that to present Pound as an enthusiast is to
argue against the grain.

Except that Pound was an enthusiast. He was an enthusiast in the
Modern, less freighted sense that Eliot describes; in the sense that he
campaigned for, advocated and promoted his contemporaries. Joyce,
recognizing his own early debt to Pound, described him as ‘a miracle worker’.
He pressed and insisted and boosted and communicated. He put and kept
Modernist art in circulation. But he was also an enthusiast in the stricter
sense: the sense, as he presents it in Guide to Kulchur, of emotional states
coming down into a person causing them to emit intemperate language. Or as
he put it a few pages later in that work, and, as he notes for the benefit of Mr
Eliot, who had asked him what he believes:

our time has overshadowed the mysteries by an overemphasis on the
individual. ... Eleusis did not distort truth by exaggerating the individual,
neither could it have violated the individual spirit. Only in the high air
and the great clarity can there be a just estimation of values. Romantic
poetry, on the other hand, almost requires the concept of reincarnation as
part of its mechanism. No apter metaphor having been found for certain
emotional colours. I assert that the Gods exist. (GK, 299)

Pound, it will be argued, never did come up with an apter metaphor for the
emotional colours he most wanted to claim for poetry. More than any Modern
poet, including Eliot, Pound addressed himself to the question of the poet’s
vocation in the twentieth century, and central to that vocation – to the production and distribution of work – was the model of writer as enthusiast. It is possible to hear this in the first of the states he presents in Guide to Kulchur: the state characterized as ‘ecstatic-beneficent-and- benevolent’, and as supplying a person – Pound himself no doubt – with the courage to ‘go on for decades in the face of public stupidity’. Pound’s self-appointed function, according to this definition, as Modern poet, and in the face of public stupidity, is to circulate culture. But there is also the second state to reckon with: ‘the man on fire with God and axioms to stick his snotty nose into other men’s business’. Pound wants to associate this state with other people – ‘scarcity economists, repressors etc.’ – but clearly it describes him also. He was a fanatical anti-Semite, expressly reproving Jews for holding a ‘set of tropisms’ not his own.

This is why determining Pound’s enthusiasm is complex. On the one hand, from a certain point of view, he invented the figure of the Modern poet, building into twentieth-century poetry a defining mobility of expression and action. On the other hand, in re-evaluating the poet’s vocation, in his even contemplating ‘vocation’, he engaged in lines of thought which ran freely to fanaticism, and which produced a confidence that when turned to hatred resulted in unstoppable and unspeakable prejudice. And what has to be emphasized is that these two aspects of Pound’s enthusiasm are, in him, deeply interlinked. So while in this book he is presented as a necessary development between the circulatory aesthetics of Thoreau and the cultural free-wheeling of O’Hara, another account – and not, it should be noted, necessarily a disapproving one – might show him leading poetry into isolation, exile and martyrdom. In Pound himself it is not possible to disentangle these two versions of enthusiasm. For readers what is presented, importantly, is a choice.

Calling

Pound’s early poetry – the poems he published in the volumes A Lume Spento (1908), A Quinzaine for this Yule (1908), Personae (1909) Exultations (1909), and Canzoni (1911), from which he selected to form the first section of The Shorter Poems of Ezra Pound (1926) – can seem tentative, haphazard and quite un-Modern. Casting about for things to write, he translates, mostly from the Troubadours, writes versions of and poems after other poets’ work, performs eccentric formal experiments, pastiches, lampoons, drifts in and out of mythology, addresses himself to historic figures, and every so often risks a manner of his own. In retrospect he made sense of these forays by gathering them up under the rubric of Personae, suggesting, as he had in his essay on Vorticism, a deliberate attempt to arrive at a sense of himself as poet through
the adoption of others’ style and modes. Or as he put it in his 1929 postscript to the preface on the republication of *The Spirit of Romance*:

> The detached critic may, I hope, find ... some signs of coherence, some proof that I started with a definite intention, and that what has up to now appeared an aimless picking up of tidbits has been governed by a plan which became clearer and more definite as I proceeded.⁵

What this retrospective theorizing should not be taken to imply is that in his early poems Pound knew what he was doing. The lesser, truer, but aesthetically more far-reaching judgement is that in those early poems Pound was intelligently aware precisely that he didn’t know what he was doing. There is not, therefore, an order to be found in early Pound. There is, however, a continuous impulse. What Pound somehow appreciated at a very early stage in his writing – and in a way not predicted by his early reading or education – was the foundationlessness of Modern art in general, but of contemporary poetry in particular. This insight was the germ of his decisive contribution to Modernism. It also remained a constant in his own work. So while there is a world of difference between the slim, sometimes exuberant, but more typically wan elegance of the early poems, and the scope, vigour and intermittent bad temper of *The Cantos*, what remains true is the sense of the poet always bringing himself, and his work — and its motivation, and its audience – into being. What Pound starts to investigate, in other words, in the work published between 1908 and 1911, and then never stops investigating, is what, if anything, constitutes the call for Modern poetry.

Call, ‘the call’, is, in this context, a loaded term, heavy as it with the idea of vocation — calling — without which religious enthusiasm, George Fox’s say, would never get off the ground. It is loaded also in that, in a moment, I will be making reference to Heidegger, and in particular to his series of lectures *What Is Called Thinking?* But ‘call’ is also a Poundian term, and one that carries pressure and weight in his writing from the beginning. So amid all the various voices and voicings of the early poems, an idea of the call is relatively constant. Take ‘La Fraisne’, spoken by a once ‘gaunt, grave councillor’ – a bureaucrat, it is worth noting, for later reference – who is ‘drawn’ away from his old habits, but not just drawn, ‘called’:

> She hath called me from mine old ways  
> She hath hushed my rancour of council,  
> Bidding me praise.⁶

‘She’ is the muse. The poem’s speaker reports that he responds to the call, and that ‘now’, as a consequence, ‘men call me mad’. Another example — there has necessarily to be some piling up of examples here — is in ‘In Durance’, a
more Modern poem, in respect of situation and diction, predicated on the opening statement that ‘I am homesick after mine own kind’, where his own kind are not fellow nationals (this is a Crawfordsville poem) but kindred artistic spirits. The poem turns on a call:

When come they, surging of power, ‘DAEMON,’
‘Quasi KALOUN.’ S.T. says Beauty is most that, a ‘calling to the soul.’
Well then, so call they, the swirlers out of the mist of my soul,
They that come mewards, bearing old magic.

The call, and the need for a calling, is clear here, even though partly mystified, Pound’s habit of reverting to semi-mythical formulations of the nature and source of art being a further constant in his career. One more example, from ‘Guido Invites you Thus’, with Cavalcanti, as in Dante’s original sonnet, enunciating the call:

Talk me no love talk, no bought-cheap fiddl'ry,
Mine is the ship and thine the merchandise,
All the blind earth knows not th'emprise
Whereeto thou calledst and whereto I call.

The point here is not that Pound, speaking though these personae, considers himself called; rather, that he needs to be, that he needs the structure of demand, the impression of third-party requirement implicit in the idea of the call, in order to venture poetry. ‘No apter metaphor having been found,’ as he puts it in Guide to Kulchur, ‘I assert that the gods exist.’ There are two aspects to this statement, the assertion, which I’ll come on to, and the metaphor. In one sense Pound never did come up with an apter metaphor for poetic production than the circuit implied in this assertion, no metaphor more equal to the experience of writing poetry than the taking in of the divinity registered by ‘enthusiasm’. He resorts quite precisely to the metaphor at various moments through his career. His fixation on ‘Eleusis’ is an instance of this, but so is the formulation he presents in ‘Axiomata’ (1921), where he reproduces the metaphor albeit in semi-Modern, semi-technical terms:

1 The intimate essence of the universe is not of the same nature as our own consciousness.
2 Our own consciousness is incapable of having produced the universe.
3 God, therefore, exists. That is to say, there is no reason for not applying the term God, Theos, to the intimate essence.
4 The universe exists. By exists we mean normally: is perceptible to our consciousness or deducible by human reason from data perceptible to our consciousness.7

This sounds a bit Modern because of the bullet points, and the logical positivist diction, but Pound is not asserting anything here that Emerson could not have agreed with. Nor is there anything in the mode of production described in the early poem ‘De AEgypto’ to which Whitman, say, would have needed to object.

To write the acceptable word...
My mouth to chant the pure singing!

Who hath the mouth to receive it,
The song of the Lotus of Kumi?

I, even I, am he who knoweth the roads
Through the sky, and the wind thereof is my body.

{P, 18}

Whitman would not need have disagreed with this sentiment because in one sense, in the manner of pastiche, it is him speaking it, and ‘De AEgypto’ is unusual, even in early Pound, in formulating so conventional a sense of the enthusiastic utterance. Such a resort to poetic convention is more common in the prose. In the poetry the intention is almost always — the assertion in Guide to Kulchur notwithstanding — precisely to formulate a more Modern metaphor.

Early Pound, then, is not called but craves a call, and out of this craving there evolves an ongoing investigation into what can be said to call poetry and the poet into being. Often the call is implicit in a subject or an addressee, as in ‘Na Audiart’, where ‘Bertran of Born’ has to compose a woman equal to the ‘Lady Maent of Montagnac’, her rejection of him imposing a demand on the poet which Pound revisited, and the sense of which he made more complex, in ‘“Dompna Pois de me No’us Cal!”’ and ‘Near Perigord’. The call on ‘Marvoil’ is simpler, his last will and testament recording ‘“Vers and canzone to the Countess of Beziers / In return for the first kiss she gave me”’ {P, 22}. ‘Night Litany’ calls directly to ‘God’, ‘O Dieu, purifiez nos coeurs! / Purifiez nos coeurs!’ {P, 24}. ‘Famam Librosque Cano’ calls to the future and to the audience it may or may not hold for Pound. ‘Cino’ calls to those who have forgotten him, and to the sun. Amid this welter of calls there is, in fact, no decisive call, Pound’s various voices in this period remaining resolutely hollow, sounding utterances with no conviction of their necessity. And yet, or rather as a consequence of this, he and his speakers are forever calling...
themselves ‘poet’, asserting themselves as such, as in the opening lines of ‘And Thus in Nineveh’:

Aye! I am a poet and upon my tomb  
Shall maidens scatter rose leaves  
And men myrtles.

[P, 23]

And again later, if a little less confidently: ‘Yet I am a poet’. ‘Cino’ asserts that he has been and still is a poet – ‘Bah! I have sung women in three cities’; likewise ‘Piere Vidal Old’ – ‘And every jongleur knew me in his song’. And similarly, of course, Pound himself, who expended great energy once he got to London insisting to publishers and editors that he was, in fact, a poet. There’s a photograph, for instance, reproduced in Humphrey Carpenter’s life of Pound, which records the so-called ‘Poets’ outing’ to visit WS. Blunt. Pound wrote subsequently that Blunt seemed uncertain whether ‘we were a deputation of poets or horse-breeders’. Of the six visiting, four – Victor Plarr, Sturge Moore, Richard Aldington and ES. Flint – could, by the look of them at least, have been horse-breeders, or bank managers, or accountants, or pretty much anything else. The other two, by the look of them – Yeats with his round glasses and his bow-tie, and Pound with turned-out collar, goatee beard and swept-up hair – assert themselves as poets, as writers of calling.

It is a value of Pound’s early poetry that it documents the difficulty of bringing Modern poetry into being, and one index of that difficulty is the complex sense of the call he quickly evolved. Thus the idea of the call, the idea that some external agency will be perceived to issue a call, is integral to the structure of much early Pound. Equally structural, however, is his continuing, almost systematic refusal to accept any of the metaphors articulating a requirement on the poet, and which he is himself enunciating, as apt. The strength of the early poems, and what carried Pound towards a Modernism, was this refusal. Later, his insistence on the idea of the vocation of the poet can be thought to be at the root of his authoritarianism and his martyrdom. At this very early stage, however, Pound’s poetry should be understood as a quite coherent, increasingly definite enquiry into its own calling, as an ongoing, committed and defining consideration of what, if anything, calls for poetry. Which is where Heidegger can come in.

Heidegger’s lectures, entitled Was heisst Denken? (equally well translated, so David Farrell Krell suggests, as ‘What is called thinking?’, and ‘What calls for thinking?’), illuminate Pound’s situation as a poet in his early work in various ways. Like Pound, Heidegger wants to preserve a trace of the
enthusiastic circuit in his image of mental operations: ‘What is thought is the gift given in thinking back, given because we incline toward it. Only when we are so inclined toward what in itself is to be thought about, only then are we capable of thinking.’ What Heidegger wants to preserve is the sense of external agency or presence, that in thought something is given. As with Pound, however, Heidegger can no longer presume in any simple way a relation between thinking and its object, or more specifically that such an object might be readily identifiable. Thinking, for Heidegger, must be, very largely, a self-sustaining activity, save for the sustenance that comes of the search for its proper object. As he says: ‘Man learns when he disposes everything he does so that it answers to whatever addresses him as essential. We learn to think by giving heed to what there is to think about.’ There is a trace of Emerson here, in the fullness of the commitment called for, in the sense of the questions, ‘What is a man good for without enthusiasm? and what is enthusiasm but this daring of ruin for its object?’ Pound himself proceeded in something like the way Heidegger describes: becoming instrumental in and central to Modern poetry because he addressed himself to the question, constantly, of what might be essential. It is apt to think of him, in other words, as giving heed to what poetry might now properly be about.

There are cross-illuminations beyond the outlining of the basic predicament – the clarity in Heidegger’s presentation of which owes in some part to the fact that he is writing some forty years after the predicament first began to make itself felt to the likes of Pound. Like Pound then (as we will see), Heidegger is suspicious of the university, having little confidence that it is an environment conducive to thinking, the problem being that universities have lost the relatedness to the media they work with, without which a craft of any kind — thinking is a craft by analogy for Heidegger, poetry being one in name – becomes determined exclusively by business concerns. The university, Heidegger wants to argue, cannot stomach the necessary risk and disjunction involved in thought, such that,

In contrast to a steady progress, where we move unawares from one thing to the next and everything remains alike, the leap takes us abruptly to a place where everything is different, so different that it strikes us as strange ... Though we may not founder in such a leap, what the leap takes us to will confound us.

This, though Pound spoke of jumping not leaping, is the thought of The Cantos. ‘People think me crazy,’ Pound observed, ‘When I make a jump instead of a step, just as if all jumps were unsound and never carried one anywhere’ (SP, 123). (Jumps do, of course, carry one somewhere, and The Cantos jump very productively at times. Equally, however, the step, as in
O’Hara, can sometimes prove just confounding enough.) Chiefly, though, it’s through ‘the call’ that Heidegger can be thought to illuminate Pound, through his sense of the term’s implications, remembering that as he formulates them he has a sense of enthusiasm in mind. Thus:

We are playing with the verb ‘to call’.... But if we are to hear the question in a sense that asks for what it is that directs us to think, we find ourselves suddenly compelled to accept the verb ‘to call’ in a signification that is strange to us, or at least no longer familiar.

We are now supposed to use the word ‘to call’ in a signification that one might paraphrase approximately with the verbs summon, demand, instruct, direct ... But the ‘call’ does not necessarily imply demand, still less command; it rather implies an anticipatory reaching out for something that is reached by our call, through our calling.12

Heidegger presents two operations here which, helpfully, carry us from an aspect of Thoreau’s enthusiasm to an aspect of Pound’s. Thus, in drawing out the meaning of calling, Heidegger pins his faith on what he terms the original signification. Old meanings, he, like Thoreau, wants always to argue, make a call to things that new names tend to obscure, and so for the call to be heard older significations have to be allowed through. What this implies is a power in the act of naming, as if naming a thing could bring it into being, as if ‘By naming we call on what is present to arrive’. Pound believed this wholeheartedly: his entire early career was an act of naming as bringing into being. He named himself a poet to assert that he was one. He named a movement, Imagism, to bring it about. He named fellow writers major contemporaries – Eliot, Joyce, Lewis – to ensure that they became what he wanted them to be. And what this naming as calling into being points to again, and what Heidegger helps illuminate in Pound, is the nature of the pursuit of apter metaphors. The enthusiast’s sense of the call is central to both writers’ thought, without either being able in any simple way to envision the agency from which this might issue. Heidegger tries to get around this by paraphrasing, with the very verbs summon, demand, instruct, direct. Pound Modernised himself by taking a similar turn.

**Demanding**

With Ezra Pound it’s good to think in terms of dates. Later, dates would feature in the fabric of his work, with the aim, in *The Cantos*, of rendering history present. Early in his career his thinking and, more precisely, his terminology, developed so fast – he modernized himself at such a rate — that dates are necessary as markers of transition. He introduced the idea of dating poetry and the development of the poet in his prose; his essay on ‘Vorticism’, for instance,
followed by ‘A Retrospect’, clearly establishing the time frames first of Imagism then of Vorticism. The point, quite largely, was to make the shifts in the poet’s thought a matter of moment – a practice O’Hara, immortally, carried on. To set the date, then, by 1911 Pound more or less knew what he was doing. It was in 1911 that he wrote the bulk of *Ripostes*, a more confident, well-directed book than any he’d published before, the title, this time, not waiting for a call but issuing a response. In 1911, also, he began to publish a series of articles in *The New Age*, under the un-Modern title ‘I gather the Limbs of Osiris’, in which he presented for the first time, to anybody who cared to listen, a ‘New Method in Scholarship’, being ‘the method of Luminous Detail, a method most vigorously hostile to the prevailing mode of today’ (SP, 21). That he had a sure sense of purpose by this stage is evident in the content here, the luminous detail subsequently becoming an enduring principle of his work. But it is evident, also, in the approach, the sales pitch, the ‘I’ve-got-a-new-methodism’. Pound’s self-appointed purpose by 1911 was to establish a demand in England, and after that in America, for Modern art (writing in particular) where the word is properly ‘establish’ not ‘create’, though creating a demand was unquestionably part of it.

As Pound understood it, establishing a demand for modern writing was a complicated, risky, labour-intensive process. Thus on the one hand he set out, deliberately and concertedly, to establish what one can term an aesthetic demand for poetry. The question was, what, in the Modern period, could be thought to make a call on the poet such that his or her poetry might be deemed necessary? What might properly be called the source of Modern poetry? To what should the poet give heed? Simultaneous with this aesthetic sense of establishing a demand was the need, as Pound saw it, to create a readership or audience for the work which hadn’t yet but probably would soon come into being. This was a practical measure in that writers need sustaining, but it was an aesthetic measure also in that partly what sustains a writer is the sense of readerly demand: the reader’s demand acting as a call to the writer, confirming his or her sense of what is necessary work. Pound, in other words, was trying to replicate the enthusiastic circuit; he was trying to simulate the mechanisms and effects of the process whereby the writer’s allure was secured by an appeal to an implied divinity. What this required was a complex relation to the market. Largely he worked in despite and in defiance of the market, circulating the work of his contemporaries in acts of peerless generosity. Lewis reported on this, noting that, ‘Pound has been superlatively generous.... He does not in the least mind being in service to somebody [as to other people it is usually found] if they have great talent’. Likewise Hemingway observed, ‘Pound the major poet devoting, say, one fifth of his time to poetry. With the rest of his time he tried to advance the fortunes, both material and artistic, of his friends.’ But what establishing a demand also
required was, wherever possible, playing the market, or at least playing with the market’s means, hence Lewis’s double description of Pound as ‘a poet and an impresario, at that time an unexpected combination’. Hence the ‘new-methodism’, and also the hyperbole surrounding Imagism, both presenting that form of enthusiasm which critics, reading him through his nineteenth-century Idaho childhood, sometimes term boosterism; Pound catching on quick to the idea that if the Modern movement was to get off the ground, it had to be alluringly branded.

In his poems, the requirement to establish a demand for poetry involved Pound in a purposive if not systematic trying out of previous and new modes of poetic production or sources of poetry, *Lustra* being his single most dynamic book in this respect. The book opens with a definition, by way of an epigraph, which self-consciously determines a demand:

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Definition: *Lustrum*: an offering for the sins of
the whole people, made by the censors at the
expiration of their five years of office, etc. Elementary
Latin Dictionary of Charlton T. Lewis.
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This is the way of atonement, poetry by this definition finding its calling, in a secular age, in the sins of the people and the culture, where the sins are of the order of taste, discernment and language use. It is an odd note for the book to start on. There are poems in *Lustra* which seek a function in martyrdom: ‘The Condolence’ addresses itself to ‘fellow sufferers’; ‘Ité’ directs the poet’s songs to ‘Seek ever to stand in the hard Sophoclean light / And take your wounds from it gladly’ (P, 83, 96). These, though, are strictly performances, melodramatisations of martyrdom. *Lustra*, on the whole, is a light-footed volume, the deeply unattractive image of modern poet as martyr being a production of late Pound, *The Cantos* in particular.

Another possible source of poetry in *Lustra* is the milieu, ‘Causa’, for instance, aiming to establish a cause in the form of a self-conscious elite. In full the poem reads:

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I join these words for four people,
Some others may overhear them,
O world, I am sorry for you,
You do not know these four people.
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The sense of demand built in here is that provided by the minority audience, the readership that will read exactly enough to call for something from the
poet. Actually, of course, the poem is both, also, a provocation to those who might overhear and a complaint against an existing milieu, Georgian literary London, which was not sufficiently exacting to call forth significant poetry. Pound had voiced this dissatisfaction before. In Au Salon’ he had identified

This our reward for our works,
sic crescit gloria mundi:
Some circle of not more than three
that we prefer to play up to,
Some few whom we’d rather please
than hear the whole aegrum vulgus
Splitting its beery jowl
a-meawling our praises.

(P, 51)

The problem, however, was that if ‘the whole aegrum vulgus’ was inadequate to the task of making a demand for poetry, so were the salons. ‘Portrait d’une Femme’, in a characteristically misogynist positing of a modern woman as insufficient cause for writing, presents a society woman as degraded muse and so as an instance of poetry’s absent demand:

Your mind and you are our Sargasso Sea,
London has swept about you this score years
And bright ships left you this or that in fee:
Ideas, old gossip, oddments of all things,
Strange spars of knowledge and dimmed wares of price.
Great minds have sought you – lacking someone else.

(P. 57)

The misogyny here is especially gratuitous in that the woman barely exists. What she stands for is the absence in the environment Pound inherited in London of an urgent call on the poet’s powers.

One response to the failings of the existing milieu to present an agency capable of demanding poetry was that the poet should act as source himself. A number of poems in Lustra thus practise a sort of summoning, the poet himself calling on and to himself, as in the opening to ‘Further Instructions’:

Come, my songs, let us express our baser passions,
Let us express our envy of the man with a steady job and no
worry about the future.

(P, 95)

It is not needless to say that the man with a steady job had, no doubt, numerous worries about the future. His function in Pound’s poem, as with the
woman in ‘Portrait d’une Femme’ is simply to dramatize the poet’s bohemian situation, to generate the impression of isolation that gives him a sense of himself. ‘Salvationists’, likewise, summons itself:

Come, my songs, let us speak of perfection –
We shall get ourselves rather disliked.

(P, 100)

Such Poundian ‘summoning’ constitutes a significantly post-Romantic procedure. So while, by one definition, the term implies a third party, meaning authoritatively to call on somebody to be present, especially to appear in a court of law, a second definition means to cause to emerge from within oneself. These two meanings direct one to the predicament of the Modern poet as Pound experienced it. As he saw it there was no substantive third-party summons, there was no call, and at worst, therefore, the poet would have to summon himself. This, however, was not Pound’s preferred option. For whatever reason, to do with the history of art or the history of self, what Pound appears to have wanted most of his life was that he should be summoned. What he craved was a call, a requirement made by somebody else – Mussolini, for instance – that he should act. Eventually, of course, he was summoned, to appear before a Washington court on the charge of treason, though characteristically the obligation was self-generated.

One further response in this period to the failure of the milieu to issue a demand was to seek out and present situations where the demand for poetry was clearly articulated. Medieval Provence had already provided one such situation, the troubadours’ proximity to power, and the patronage of power, offering a model, or at least a historical consolation, to Pound. A better model, however, or at least an aesthetically more promising one, was the Chinese as mediated by Fenollosa and presented by Pound in 1915 as Cathay. The poems of Cathay are beautiful in many ways it would be a pleasure to expand on at length, but in ways also that probably do not need rehearsing here. Except to observe that more than any work in early Pound, with the exception of ‘The Seafarer’, ‘Near Perigord’ and ‘Hugh Selwyn Mauberley’, the poems that make up Cathay are driven and coloured by necessity. A number are enunciated in time of war, providing reports from the front or from the home front, presenting situations that would otherwise go unknown or forgotten. Thus from ‘Song of the Bowmen of Shu’:

When we set out, the willows were drooping with spring,
We come back in the snow,
We go slowly, we are hungry and thirsty,
Our mind is full of sorrow, who will know of our grief?

(P, 131)
Distributing: Ezra Pound

From ‘Lament of the Frontier Guard’:

Ah, how shall you know the dreary sorrow at the North Gate,  
With Riboku’s name forgotten,  
And we guardsmen fed to the tigers.

(P, 137)

And from ‘The River-Merchant’s Wife: A Letter’, communicating what otherwise she and her husband would experience together:

The leaves fall early this autumn, in wind.  
The paired butterflies are already yellow with August  
Over the grass in the West garden;  
They hurt me. I grow older.

(P, 134)

What Pound discovers, and passes on, in Cathay is a poetry that understands itself as necessary, providing reports on circumstances that would otherwise go unpresented. What he presents also, however, is a system of patronage summoning the poet to work, as in ‘Exile’s Letter’, where Rihaku is explicitly called for:

And one May he had you send for me,  
despite the long distance.  
And what with the broken wheels and so on, I won’t say it wasn’t hard going,  
Over roads twisted like sheep’s guts.

(P, 138)

But, or rather ‘And’, as the poem has it, ‘what a reception’. In a Poundian sense the beauty of the surface of the Cathay poems should, very largely, be understood as an index of their demand.

What this account of how early Pound established demand has not yet mentioned is Imagism, Pound’s contribution to which appeared chiefly in Lustra, but his fullest formation of which was published in 1914, as an essay on ‘Vorticism’, in the Fortnightly Review, and then reprinted in Gaudier-Brzeska: A Memoir. ‘Imagism’ was first thrust onto the world in the form of a bogus pre-existing demand, Pound requiring F. S. Flint to put his name to an article to appear in Poetry in March 1913, in which he was to appear as investigative critic, writing, as the opening of the piece had it, ‘In response to many requests for information regarding Imagism and the Imagistes’. A retrospective – Pound had, by now, more than mastered the art of selfinflation – the essay on ‘Vorticism’ presents both movements as a complex of calls and urgencies, and is a high point in Pound’s effort in this period to establish a need for Modern writing. Everything about the essay, in fact, serves the
purpose of establishing a demand. As he re-presents the essay in *Gaudier-Brzeska*, Pound opens by quoting his own fundamental tenet of Vorticism: ‘Every concept, every emotion presents itself to the vivid consciousness in some primary form. It belongs to the art of this form. If sound, to music; if formed words, to literature’.\(^{15}\) Whether this is true or not is not the issue; Pound, as Maud Ellmann points out, doesn’t philosophize, he puts ideas into action. What matters here is the impression of ‘necessity’ created by the idea of ‘belonging’, and created also in the definitions of lyricism and Imagism:

There is a sort of poetry where music, sheer melody, seems as if it were just bursting into speech.
There is another sort of poetry where painting or sculpture seems as if it were ‘just coming over into speech’. (GB, 82)

Poetry, according to these definitions, cannot be helped, is necessary; there is a call for it, it is a requirement of certain human situations. Art, Pound goes on, of the ‘first intensity’ – a phrase which both describes a demand (for enunciation) and creates a demand (by its allure) – is work which would ‘need a hundred works of any other kind to explain it’ (GB, 84). Imagism, as he records it, had this necessity about it – and here we have to notice that there is no change of rhetorical pitch as he moves from, for instance, *The Divine Comedy* to ‘In a Station of the Metro’. That poem, he recalls, emerged out of the sense that ‘I could not find any words that seemed to me worthy, or as lovely as that emotion’. What this means is that he was not equal to it yet; the emotional-intellectual complex (resulting in the image) had issued a demand to which he became equal, or which was, at any rate, equalled, not in the sense that he found words, but in the sense that ‘there came an equation’ (GB, 87). It is here, in this relation to his environment, that Pound considered he had established a demand for the Modern poet. The demand occasioning the poem was Modern in that the situation was urban and fleeting. The poem was necessary – was to be understood as necessary – in that as an ‘equation’ it had truth and inevitability about it. Nor did the necessity only consist in the relation of words to intellectual-emotional complex; it carried over also into the naming of the art that complex brought forth:

The image is not an idea. It is a radiant node or cluster; it is what I can, and must perforce, call a VORTEX, from which, and through which, and into which, ideas are constantly rushing. In decency one can only call it a VORTEX. And from this necessity came the name ‘Vorticism’. *Nomina sunt consequentia rerum* [names are the consequence of things], and never was that statement of Aquinas more true than in the case of the vorticist movement. (GB, 92)

What is apparent is how much Pound wanted to believe in the ‘necessity’ of the vortex. What he craved was to be able to call a thing by a given name on
the grounds that no other name was permissible, that the unnamed thing called forth the name, and that the name called the waiting thing into being. He wanted, as a poet, to heed the call. What should be apparent also, however, is that in his seeking after an apter metaphor, he has, whether he would have liked it or not, fallen back on the trope of enthusiasm.-Except that here it is not the artist that is enthusiastic but rather the word, ‘from which, and through which, and into which ideas are constantly rushing’. One could, in all decency, name Pound an enthusiast at this point, or at least an enthusiastic writer, a writer for whom his medium existed to permit the rushing into and from of ideas, a rushing Maud Ellmann commented on under the rubric of impersonality when she noted the ‘worded breezes of these early texts’.16 Simply to name Pound an enthusiast, heedful as that term is of the conventional circuit Vorticism is here modelled upon, would, however, be largely to miss the point. What Pound did through the nineteen-teens was pursue and identify apter metaphors, not discarding the fundamental procedure of enthusiasm but making it new. The term ‘Vortex’ is part of this, but so too is the terminology with which, in his note, Pound ends his essay, and where, as he says, ‘Certain things seem to demand metrical expression, or expression in a rhythm more agitated than the rhythms acceptable to prose’ (GB, 94). The word here is ‘demand’; the poetic word, as Pound had come to see it here, being ‘demanded’.

The trouble was that, as Pound pressed on, no substantive demand emerged; in a supply and demand environment, or at any rate in England, there was little or no call for his work. Naturally enough, then, as he continued to investigate the requirement, or otherwise, for Modern poetry, what he wrote in the late nineteen-teens were a series of poems in which he rendered more complex the idea of writing and its demands. ‘Near Perigord’ is a strong instance of this, Pound massively complicating the relation between Bertran de Born and Maent that previously he had presented in ‘Na Audiart’ and ‘‘Dompna Pois de me No’us Cal”, de Born being characterized in terms of his difficult and devious relation to political power. The culminating example, however, is ‘Hugh Selwyn Mauberley’, where the idea of the demand and the idea of the call are dissociated. ‘What the age demands’ in that poem, as articulated by the siren voices of its first part, is emphatically not what the age requires. And the trouble in part is with the rhetoric of ‘demand’ and the economy it implies, with the fact that in a literary marketplace poetry can barely survive. The preferred term is therefore once again the call, witness the poem’s epigraph:

‘Vocat oestus in umbram’
– Nemesianus, Ec. IV.
'The heat calls us into the shade'. Wherever the heat emanates from – whether it is the heat of cultural hell or the warmth of the sun – the call is clear; the poet in the present age must retreat into the shade. It was a call that would eventually mean marginality, exile, martyrdom, arrest and incarceration.

**Distributing**

Pound reviewed C. H. Douglas's *Economic Democracy* in 1920. How he came to be reading economic theory at this time, he explained in another of his retrospectives, 'Murder by Capital', published in *The Criterion* in July 1933. Once again tracking the twists and turns of his own career, Pound puts the question: ‘what can drive a man interested almost exclusively in the arts, into social theory or into a study of the “gross material aspects”, videlicet economic aspects of the present?’ [SP, 198]. Writing in the midst of the depression, at a time of massive unemployment, Pound reflects that,

> The unemployment problem that I have been faced with, for a quarter of a century, is not or has not been the unemployment of nine or five million ... it has been the problem of the unemployment of Gaudier-Brzeska, T. S. Eliot, Wyndham Lewis the painter, E. P. the present writer. [SP, 200]

Mass unemployment features in the Cantos. As Canto XLVI observes:

- FIVE million youths without jobs
- FOUR million adult illiterates
- 15 million ‘vocational misfits’, that is with small chance for jobs
- NINE million persons annual, injured in preventable industrial accidents
- One hundred thousand violent crimes. The United States ov America
- 3rd year of the reign of F. Roosevelt, signed F. Delano, his uncle.17

Unemployment is waste of human potential, and as such, as waste, was for Pound unquestionably an aesthetic issue: the elimination of redundancy having been a central feature of his programme for the Modernization of poetry since at least 1913. More than mass unemployment, however, it is the unemployment of the artist that troubles him. Twenty years ago, he observes in ‘Murder by Capital’,

> before ‘one’, ‘we’, ‘the present writer’ or his acquaintances had begun to think about ‘cold subjects like economics' one began to notice that the social order hated any art of maximum intensity and preferred dilutions. The best artists were unemployed ... long before ... the unemployment crises began to make the front page in the newspapers. [SP, 197]

Behind the word ‘unemployment’ one can hear the word ‘demand’, or lack of, and behind the word ‘demand’ one can hear the word ‘call’, or lack of.
There were, he notes in 1933, ‘15 million “vocational misfits”’. Pound, Eliot, Lewis and Gaudier-Brzeska experienced a crisis of unemployment avant la lettre because, as he saw it, in an economy organized according to the principle of the market, the works issuing from their vocation supplied no demand.

In *Econorfiic Democracy* C. H. Douglas reads like Thoreau. ‘Systems,’ he says, ‘were made for men, and not men for systems, and the interest of man which is self-development, is above all systems.’ In part, as in Thoreau, the problem is one of time: the working day should be shortened, and by recourse, as Douglas sees it — this isn’t Thoreauvian – to labour-saving devices. ‘It is essential,’ he says, ‘that the individual should be released1 for ‘other pursuits than the maintenance of life’. In part also, however, and again as in Thoreau, the problem has to do with things. Thus in the first place, systems of production have resulted in a ‘complete divorcement between the worker and the finished product’. And then, more acutely still, having been divorced sociologically and metaphysically from things in the production process, they are too often not reacquainted with the things they need at the point of consumption. Thoreau’s response to these problems was to explore forms of circulation other than by money, money being that which effected the breach between people and things. Douglas, operating in a more advanced industrial environment, while clinging to the rhetoric of organic relations, requires a tougher mechanism than Thoreau provides, and so in his lexicon ‘circulation’ becomes ‘distribution’. The objective of ‘social credit’ theory, he says, is ‘a reasonably uniform and plentiful distribution of simple necessaries; food, clothes, housing’. His aim is to ensure that ‘every individual can avail himself of the benefits of science and mechanism’, to arrange, as he puts it, ‘for the equitable distribution of the whole product’.18

Prior to reading Douglas, Pound’s preferred term for the movement of things and artefacts through society and culture had been ‘circulation’. In ‘Cantico del Sole’, published in ‘Instigations’ in 1920, he had ruminated that

The thought of what America would be like
If the Classics had a wide circulation
Troubles my sleep,
The thought of what America,
The thought of what America,
The thought of what America would be like
If the Classics had a wide circulation
Troubles my sleep.

\[P, 182\]
Is that good troubling or bad troubling? Does Pound lie awake worried or excited? The poem declines to be clear. What is clear is the terminology, and its place in Pound’s thought at this time. Thus throughout the nineteen-teens, his enthusiastic mobilizing of Modernism had largely taken the form, straightforwardly, of getting, or trying to get, works into circulation. He had published writers in anthologies, presented them to editors, insisted on their value to publishers, and detailed their merits in review. And this activity could hardly be thought to have been to no avail, given the publication in 1922 of *Ulysses* and *The Waste Land*; but by then Pound had come to dwell on the lack of demand for the work he had championed, and distribution – with its promise of getting the things people needed to them – became central to his theorizing and practice. Like ‘the call’, and like ‘demand’, the idea of distribution in Pound is complex, demonstrating once again the fraught and dangerous nature of his enthusiasm. Thus as he came to put it in *ABC of Economics*, ‘Probably the only economic problem needing emergency solution in our time is the problem of distribution.... *There is Enough*. How are you going to get it from where it is, or can be, to where it is not and is needed?’ (SP, 204—5). At its best, when it is not repeating itself or digressing beyond readability, *ABC of Economics* is a popularization, as Pound hoped, of Douglas and Silvio Gessell [author of *The National Economic Order*], the graphic, tub-thumping phrasing adding verbal force to the social credit message. And it is important not to underestimate the centrality of this to Pound; few things mattered more to him, as his thinking widened into political economy, than the movement of things from one place to another, the practicalities of which became integral to his thinking about culture. He was fond, for instance, of quoting Kipling’s phrase, ‘Transportation is civilization,’ commenting that ‘Whatever interferes with the “traffic and all that it implies” is evil. A tunnel is worth more than a dynasty’ (SP, 169). From which it followed that Pound was an early advocate of a tunnel between England and France. What complicates this distributive thinking is that if *ABC of Economics* is a popularization of Douglas and Gessell, it is also a popularization of Mussolini, whose claim was precisely that he was able to get a thing from where it was to where it was needed. ‘Distribution’ in Pound thus came to be stained, like so much else, by his enthusiasm for Fascism, the stain running through this poetry, from *The Cantos* back.

Making things available had long since been axiomatic to Pound. When he argued, in *How to Read*, that when ‘the application of word to thing goes rotten ... the whole machinery of social and of individual thought and order goes to pot,’ he was amplifying the claim he had made in ‘I gather the Limbs of Osiris’ that ‘it is not until poetry lives again “close to the thing” that it will be a vital part of contemporary life’ (LE, 21; SE, 41). Pound was also recalling
Imagism, of course, with its headline demand for a ‘Direct treatment of the “thing”’. How to treat the thing directly, or what kind of thing he had in mind, is far from clear. More interesting, and more durable, is the subtler version of Imagism’s first demand that emerged in the essay on ‘Vorticism’ as the idea of ‘presenting’. ‘Ibycus and Liu Ch’e,’ he asserts by way of illustration, ‘presented the “Image”’, and likewise, ‘when the poet speaks of “Dawn in russet mantle clad,” he presents something which the painter cannot present’ (GB, 83, 84). The subtlety here is that what Pound presents in such an image is not exactly the “thing”. What is presented, rather, so Pound would like to think, is the thing’s precise equivalent. There is a proximity, a nearness, in such verbal formulations, in the arrangements of their sounds, to the situation at hand, such that the situation presented can be thought to have directed, or demanded, or required, or necessitated the expression. Thus if the thing – dawn – is not precisely made available in Shakespeare’s formulation, language has been made available to the thing. As in Thoreau, then, the purpose of writing, if not quite to make things available – though neither writer ever relinquishes this yearning – is to be present at the scene of things, to be present at events, with such presence, as Pound argues, constituting the high points of a life and a culture.

Education, it followed for Pound, consisted in “getting wise” in the rawest and hardest boiled sense of that ... argot’, the problem being that, ‘This active, instant, and present awareness is NOT handed out in colleges and by the system of public and/or popular education’ (GK, 52). Likewise religion: ‘The essence of religion,’ as Pound put it, echoing Thoreau’s sense of oracular serenity, ‘is the present tense’ (SP, 72). And it is in the interest of such high points, such instances of being present, the ‘top-flights of the mind’ as Pound put it, that The Cantos, at their best, are directed. Thus if the least readable parts of The Cantos are among the history sections, the Adams Cantos for instance, so equally Pound’s handling of history, in the first thirty Cantos, provides some of the work’s most gripping moments. Clark Emery was right in suggesting that the intention in such Cantos is not to bring ‘history to the reader’ but to ‘bring the reader into history’, that the ‘reader will not witness an event or an accomplished fact but will seem to be a participant in the event’. The notion of presenting, of making present, thus never goes away in Pound, and there is a reading of The Cantos to be had from what they set out to make present. Even so, as regards poetry’s relation to things and to their availability, ‘distributing’ becomes a more powerful term than ‘presenting’ in Pound’s thinking, witness his remark, in ABC of Economics, that the problem of distribution is ‘as much our question as Hamlet’s melancholy was the problem of the renaissance dyspeptic’ (SP, 205).
To complete Pound’s analogy, if melancholy was integral to Shakespeare’s major work, so distribution should be integral to major work of the Modern age, and *The Cantos* therefore can be properly understood as a distributive and distributing work. This is repeatedly evident in the poem’s handling of economics, of course, Canto XII, like many other Cantos, asking what is ‘likely to ease distribution’. It is evident, also, in the poem’s politics, Canto XIII, for instance, the first of the Confucian Cantos, centring on a discussion of how the wise ruler might distribute order. But it is also in the poem’s primary method, in its relation to and way of handling things, as is apparent, I would argue, in the justly famous Canto XLIX. A Confucian Canto, offering, as Pound saw it, a ‘glimpse of paradise’, Canto XLIX has as its familiar Poundian subject the relation between light and things:

```
Comes then snow scur on the river
And a world is covered with jade
Small boat floats like a lanthorn,
The flowing water clots as with cold. And at San Yin
they are a people of leisure.
Wild geese swoop to the sand-bar,
Clouds gather about the hole of the window
Broad water; geese line out with the autumn
Rooks clatter over the fishermen’s lanthorns,
A light moves on the north sky line;
where the young boys prod stones for shrimp.
In seventeen hundred came Tsing to these hill lakes.
A light moves on the south sky line.
(C, 244-5)
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This is exemplary Pound – Pound exemplifying and at his best – the passage pulling together many of the threads of his enthusiasm. Thus it matters, of course, that these ‘are a people of leisure’, that they are able to pursue things other than the maintenance of life. It matters also, as the Canto later implies, that they are outside, or above system. ‘Imperial power is?’, the people are heard quizzically to ask, ‘and to us what is it?’ It matters also, of course, that here, as so often, as Pound approaches a Thoreauvian oracular stillness, he is voicing another’s words, the passage quoted having its source in a sixteenth-century manuscript of Chinese and Japanese poems which, as William Cookson points out, came into Pound’s possession via his father. By this characteristic enunciatory gesture, one voice incorporated into another, *The Cantos* are always practising an enthusiastic mode.

What matters most, however, is this Canto’s sense of things. As with the ‘Image’, the passage works by an equivalence. We are not in the presence of things, though we could perhaps be lulled into thinking so. Rather, Pound
finds an equivalence in language for the way things are made available. What makes things available in the world, from a Poundian point of view, is light, a defining quality of which is precisely that it distributes itself equally. Things are shown. Light affords access. What the poetry does is to simulate that distribution, Pound’s long process of Modernization – the ongoing elimination of unnecessary diction and emphasis – resulting here in lines whose poetic attention is distributed equally across all its elements; in which all the elements of the poem, all the nouns and all the actions, are rendered equally available, equally present.

Beyond a certain date, there is no escaping the stain of Fascism in Pound – stain in the sense that Philip Roth speaks of the human stain, as going all through, as affecting everything – and while there are great contradictions and inconsistencies in his writing, there are major continuities also, themes that find development in all aspects and corners of his work. So there is no difficulty in appreciating why Pound should have thought Canto XLIX a glimpse of paradise, suffused as it is with light, a light which makes all things available. But what’s on show also is a Fascist aesthetic, the distributive poetic having made common cause with an authoritarian response to the problems of demand.

Preventing

The things Pound most wanted to move from where they were to where they needed to be were books. ‘FOR A NATIONAL CULTURE,’ he argued in ‘NATIONAL CULTURE: A MANIFESTO 1938,’ ‘the first step is stocktaking: what is there of it solid. The second step is to make this available and to facilitate access to it’ (SP, 136). Demanding as he was, and given that the demand on the poet and the reader was invariably difficulty – ‘beauty is difficult’ as he reiterates in the first of The Pisan Cantos – it is easy to overlook Pound’s commitment [his terms] to access and availability. He is very clear about this: culture — he calls it ‘heritage’ in this manifesto, so that here again the stain of Fascism is apparent – should be made available; people should have access to it. He claims always to have thought this. ‘For one thing,’ he writes in ‘Murder by Capital’,

I don’t care about ‘minority culture’. I have never cared a damn about snobbisms or for writing ultimately for the few. Perhaps that is an exaggeration. Perhaps I was a worse young man than I think I was.

Serious art is unpopular at its birth. But it ultimately forms the mass culture. Not at full strength? Perhaps at full strength. [SP, 201]
Pound is coy here. Almost certainly in the nineteen-teens he wrote for a few, and not purely by accident but by design, as a way of generating a call for his work. What is undeniable is that in the 1930s Pound was actively committed to the task of popularizing literature, where popularizing meant getting books to people, making literature widely available. His term is access, and we should hear two implications in that. In the first place, there have been too few writers in the Modernist tradition since Pound who have felt the need to argue publicly for widespread access to literature, and writing in that tradition has almost certainly suffered for its failure to appreciate the non-compromising distinction between work which makes demands – ‘beauty is difficult’ – and the need for a cultural apparatus, and a demeanour toward the culture, that might ensure access (Pound’s term) to such work. In the second place, however, there is absolutely no slither from access to what is now thought of as accessibility; no implication for the character of the work itself in the argument that it should be made available. Pound’s strategy for holding this line was to construe himself as a distributor rather than a critic – in the terms of this book it seems fair to view him here as an enthusiast – so that significant work was to be presented, ‘exhibited’ to borrow the term he uses in ABC of Reading, with just sufficient (meaning minimal) critical apparatus.

To take Pound at his word here is to steer towards what Maud Ellmann termed his ‘poetics of impersonality’, and so towards the disingenuities that underpinned all aspects of his self-effacement. This is true on a simple level, in that, as The Cantos demonstrate consistently, an exhibition entails a selection, a mind mediating the spectator’s relation with the apparently unmediated artefact. And it is true in the more complex sense that Pound, of all writers, requires commentary, and that where the critic is inclined simply to exhibit him, as in the case, for instance, of William Cookson’s A Guide to The Cantos of Ezra Pound, what invariably follows is an apology for crimes of hate that criticism is prepared to expose. Thus, in Cookson’s highly informative and in some senses invaluable guide, he observes how Pound quotes fondly from the Old Testament in The Pisan Cantos (the Bible being one of the few books he had available to him at the Disciplinary Training Centre), suggesting: ‘It is to be doubted that anyone who was at heart an anti-Semite would have expressed these sentiments’. To confirm which he quotes Kenner (from a review of Letters of Captivity) remarking apropos the same debt to the Hebrew Bible in The Pisan Cantos that Pound’s anti-Semitism ‘may have begun to dissipate in the Pisan cage. I know that I once brought a Jewish friend to visit him at St. Elizabeth’s, and they got on well, and the friend went back another time. And one moral is, beware of generalizations.’

So the defence is that ‘in his heart’ he was not an anti-Semite, or that he was
friendly to friends of friends who were Jews. One moral, therefore, is beware the Poundian commentary whose primary method is presentation. At the same time, and without closing one’s mind to the ways Pound’s thought colluded with itself, there is something, especially now, to be learned from his impulse to exhibit, to ensure access. Take teaching, which as Pound argued meant allowing people to learn, where allowing people to learn meant, primarily, ensuring access. Which sounds uncontroversial, except when set against his claim, in ‘Definitions’, that ‘The aim of state education has been (historically) to prevent people from discovering that the classics are worth reading. In this endeavour it has been almost wholly successful’ (SP, 183). Central among the preventers were bureaucrats, educational bureaucrats in particular, and it is in this aspect of his thinking that Pound’s popularizing speaks to the present moment.

Pound is good on bureaucrats. ‘Bureaucrats are a pox,’ he heckles at the beginning of his essay ‘Bureaucracy the Fail of Jehovah’ (SP, 187). ‘They are supposed to be necessary,’ but then, ‘Certain chemicals in the body are supposed to be necessary to life, but cause death the moment they increase beyond a suitable limit.’ (SP, 187). The abuse is gratifying, but the argument goes beyond abuse, chiming with his insistence on the need to make things present. Thus in its educational form, bureaucracy is quite rigorously addressed in an essay entitled ‘Provincialism the Enemy’. The case is not difficult to understand (which is not, of course, to say that historically it has been understood); in its truthfulness, however, and its pertinence to the current British climate, it is worth hearing in some detail. Speaking as a former doctoral student, Pound observes: ‘No one who has not been one of a gang of young men all heading for scholastic “honors” knows how easy it is to have the mind switched off... all considerations of the values of life, and switched on to some minute, unvital detail.’ (SP, 162)

This doesn’t matter in the individual case, except that as individual cases are reproduced across the system the effect is of a general deadening and mechanization. He hears from the university only – note – ‘boasts of efficiency and of “results produced”’, and finds there the practice of ‘hammering the student into a piece of mechanism for the accretion of details, and of habituating men to consider themselves as bits of mechanism for one use or another: in contrast to considering first what they are in being’ (SP, 165). ‘The bulk of scholarship,’ he contends, ‘has gone under completely: the fascination of technical and mechanical education has been extremely seductive.’ Nor was the process of seduction difficult, the mechanization of the universities being entirely of a piece with critical and scholarly practice, with the development of ‘apparatus criticus’, and the insistence on ““original research””, the ‘demand’ for which results in a ‘retabulation of data, and a
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retabulation of tables already retabulated’ (SP, 167). Pound’s career-long assault on the universities is sometimes put down to personal bitterness, his own academic career, following his failure to secure a PhD, having dwindled into nothing. But to dismiss it as such is to miss the force of his complaint. He was on to the modern university, and especially the English Department, early, and what he saw with great clarity was that,

The moment you teach a man to study literature not for its own delight, but for some exterior reason ... you begin his destruction, you begin to prepare his mind for all sorts of acts to be undertaken for exterior reasons “of State”, etc., without regard to their merit. (SP, 167)

This might seem an easy charge to fling. What does it mean, a person might ask, ‘to teach literature for its own delight’? What really is meant by destruction? What are ‘exterior reasons “of state”’? What does it mean, as he claims elsewhere in the essay, that to take a person’s ‘mind off the human value of the poem he is reading will begin his dehumanization’?

Here, in answer to these questions, is a luminous detail:

**MODULE PROPOSAL**

1. The title of the module:

2. The Department which will be responsible for management of the module:

3. The start date of the module:

4. The number of students expected to take the module:

5. Modules to be withdrawn on the introduction of this proposed module and consultation with other relevant Departments and Faculties regarding the withdrawal:

6. The level of the module:

7. The number of credits which the module represents:

8. Which term(s) the module is to be taught in (or other teaching pattern):

9. Pre-requisite and co-requisite modules:
10 The programmes of study to which the module contributes:

11 The intended subject specific learning outcomes and, as appropriate, their relationship to programme learning outcomes:

12 The intended generic learning outcomes and, as appropriate, their relationship to programme learning outcomes:

13 A synopsis of the curriculum:

14 Indicative reading list:

15 Learning and teaching methods, including the nature and number of contact hours and the total study hours which will be expected of students, and how these relate to achievement of the intended learning outcomes:

16 Assessment methods and how these relate to testing achievement of the intended learning outcomes:

This is a form, generic enough no doubt, which a university teacher has to fill in when proposing to teach a course. The form can be completed with almost no reference to literary content: it has to be readable by bureaucrats, so the less subject-specificity the better. What are called for, almost exclusively, are external reasons for study: the form wants to know about outcomes, where outcomes will be externally determined measures. After completion, the form will begin an arduous journey, to a departmental Learning and Teaching meeting (and probably back), to a department meeting, and then on to faculty, where faculty Learning and Teaching will scrutinize it (for generic fit, for consistency with other such documents), and will probably send it back, via the departmental Learning and Teaching committee, to the teacher for a comment.

All of this is a problem. It is a problem because bureaucracy kills enthusiasm. Bureaucracy blocks – produces a series of structural interventions which amount to blockages – and so prevents the circulation of works and values that enthusiasm sets in motion. The terms of the form and the process infect and disrupt thinking. They become the medium through which teacher and student encounter each other, or rather the barrier erected between teacher, student and book. And yet bureaucracy, by default, also produces enthusiasm, in that historically enthusiasm has flared at moments of
overbearing apparatus. Such structures produce an intense desire for immediacy, for a direct contact with things, and in his or her intensity the enthusiast is liable to become extreme.

Pound’s thinking about bureaucracy was thoroughgoing, traced back through Church history. Thus ‘Christ,’ he contends, was not ‘constructing a code for the administrating empire but a modus vivendi for the individual’ (SP, 57). When this relation is lost, ‘when this immediate sight is lacking the cult dilutes into verbal formulation ... a highly debatable intellectual paraphernalia usually without cultural force’ (SP, 59). From which it follows that ‘the Church, as bureaucracy and as vested interest was the worst enemy of “faith”’ (SP, 121). Or as he puts it in Guide to Kulchur, ‘A live religion can not be maintained by scripture. It has got to go into effect repeatedly in the persons of the participants’ (GK, 191). This is Pound’s enthusiasm. It goes to the heart of his thought. Or rather, it goes to the heart of his thinking about thinking. He draws a distinction in Guide to Kulchur between two kinds of ‘ideas’: ‘Ideas which exist and/or are discussed in a species of vacuum ... and ideas which are intended to “go into action”, or to guide action'; the history of a culture being, as he contends, ‘the history of ideas going into action’ (GK, 34, 44). What bureaucracy prevents – what, from this way of viewing things, it exists to prevent – is the kind of culture that can be produced by ideas going into action. The Cantos, at their best – chiefly in ‘A Draft of XXX Cantos’, ‘The Fifth Decad of Cantos XLII-LI’ and The Pisan Cantos LXXIV-LXXXIV- are a riposte to this. They incorporate into themselves the practices and languages which act as blockages and stops on the distribution of works and values. By contrast they advocate and embody movement. They jump in order to confound. They distribute by voicing words not their own. They testify to the difficulty of making things available to people, and to the necessity, always, of mobilizing thought.

‘Ezra Pound speaking’

Just before Ezra Pound boarded the boat that would take him from America to Italy, after his release from St. Elizabeth’s, following a twelve-and-a-half- year incarceration, he ended a conversation with attending journalists by giving a Fascist salute. It would be fortunate if one could disassociate such a gesture from Pound’s enthusiastic mobilization of literature, but this can’t be done. In the first place, his popularization of ‘essential’ literature was of a piece with his personal programme for Fascism, ‘the publication of essential parts of our heritage’ being central, as he saw it, to ‘a national or racial culture’ (SP, 131). More than this, his idea of mobility is deeply entangled with his anti-
Semitism, as, for instance, Canto XXXV would appear to show. ‘So this is [may we take it],’ the Canto opens, ‘Mitteleuropa’. Which is to say, we may take it, ‘Mitteleuropa’ as opposed to Confucian China or Malatesta’s Tuscany. What we find there, as Pound has it, is a bourgeoisie, but more specifically, a community of Jewish people, and what the Canto presents are closed relations and closed circuits, ‘the intramural, the almost intravaginal warmth of / hebrew affections, in the family, and nearly everything else ...’ (C, 172-3). The Canto is expressly anti-Semitic, Pound going out of his way to mock the voice which speaks of ‘a peautiful chewisch poy’. And what the Canto stands for, what it means to symbolize, is the absence of circulation, distribution and mobility; and the prevalence, by contrast, of overfamiliarity, networks and stasis. Prejudice is the opposite of presenting, the obtruding of pre-existing mental categories over detail, and in this sense only, a person might try to dis-integrate Pound’s anti-Semitism from his enthusiastic commitment to good (which is to say, in his terms, direct as opposed to abstracted or generalized) writing. In another sense, however, his anti-Semitic rants – in The Cantos, but more so in the radio broadcasts – are consistent with his sense of calling. Through the late 1930s into the 1950s, as numerous friends, former friends and acquaintances avowed, and as the writings make all too clear, the role Pound cast himself in was that of prophet or martyr, calling on the culture to listen to what it ought, as he saw it, to hear; to what he, with the authority stemming from his sense of vocation, had to say. ‘All he wants,’ wrote Charles Olson, ‘is the purring and tears of fellow fascists ... Poor, poor Pound, the great gift, the true intellectual, being confined and maltreated by the Administration. SHIT.’ And so, in the end, in his appearances in court and in his incarceration, Pound cut a historically familiar figure: the ranting, self-assured, self-elected individual versus the combined forces of the American state. Out of which standoff arises a choice. Pound presented Modern poetry with one of its favoured guises: poet as martyr, exiled, out in the cold. He also presented it with an image of mobility, with the task of keeping things moving. Marianne Moore, for one, as we shall see next, developed a language conducive to the latter.

Notes

3 Ezra Pound, Guide to Kulchur, New York, New Directions, 1938, p. 223; hereafter referred to in the text as GK.
10 Ibid., p. 370.
11 Ibid., p. 377.
12 Ibid., p. 386.
13 Carpenter, *Serious Character*, p. 188.
14 Cited in Carpenter, *Serious Character*, p. 196.
21 Carpenter, *Serious Character*, p. 737.