

Research Article

Indeterminacy and Personism in Postmodern American Poetry: A Study of Selected Meaningless Poets

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Abstract

True to its culture of breaking boundaries and overlapping edges, postmodern art, as well as theory has become a veritable terrain for artistic experimentation and innovation as advocated by Ezra Pound's phrase "Make it New". It is definitely in the light of showcasing such novelty that this paper is borne. The paper sets out to discuss postmodern poetics drawing examples from the poems of five authors: Charles Olson, Frank O'Hara, Allen Ginsberg, John Cage and Robert Duncan. The article basically sets out to answer the question what is postmodern or cyber poetry and what are its defining aesthetics? It also attempts a comparative analysis of postmodernist poetics and the aesthetics of the poets under study. The paper is hinged on the hypothesis that besides unintelligibility and indeterminacy, personism and spontaneity, - the distancing of the author and proceduralism (the self-consciousness of postmodern improvisation), self-reflexivity, and reader engagement are some of the hall marks of postmodern poetry. By debunking grammar and syntax, and emphasizing pastiche and the meaninglessness of their poems; these poets demonstrate that far from organic unity and decorum, postmodern poetry exemplifies playful pluralism and "other" worlds and voices of contemporary postmodern experience. The paper submits that postmodern poets are derivative poets who engage in post-language lyric, and cyber technology as a form of poetics.

Keywords

Boundaries, Postmodern, Art, Experimentation, Innovation, Pastiche, Proceduralism

1. Introduction

There is a certain kind of cryptology which is inherent in postmodern poetry, especially as we agree that postmodern poetry typically points towards the direction of post-language lyric poetry. This implies poetry that is void of meaning and certainty, sense and syntax due to the consciousness of the creative process, as well as self-reflexivity of postmodern fiction. As such, representation, essentially becomes a crucial term in postmodern theory and discourse.

Linda Hutcheon (1989) argues that postmodernism is essentially culturally grounded and apolitical. She contends

that:

Postmodernism manifests itself in many fields of cultural endeavour – architecture, literature, photography, film, painting, video, dance, music and elsewhere. In general terms it takes the form of self-conscious, self-contradictory, and self-undermining. [1].

The notion of self-reflexivity is therefore emphasized in Hutcheon's definition of postmodern art which articulates the paradoxes of the self-portrait of the postmodern artist. As a ubiquitous term, postmodernism must be understood as a

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radical debunking of culturally accepted norms and values.

Postmodern works therefore carry with them a Benjaminian “aura” as far as the referent is associated with authenticity than the original. Walter Benjamin (1969) in “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction” posits that: “although the work of art has always been reproducible, even the most perfect reproduction of a work of art is lacking in one element: its presence in time and space, its unique existence at the place where it happens to be. [2]”. The critic therefore situates the dialectics between the appearance and reality of postmodern art and situates the controversy between simulations and reality/authenticity.

The Benjaminian ambiguity between artistic authenticity and reproduction correlates with Baudrillard’s notion of postmodern art as a simulacrum of the fictive representation of (non) cultural patterns of contemporary millennial, postmodernist culture. In *Simulacra and Simulations*, Jean Baudrillard (2010) posits that: “today abstraction is no longer that of the map, the double, the mirror, or the concept. Simulation is no longer that of a territory, a referential being, or a substance. It is the generation by models of a real without origin or reality: a hyperreal. [3]”. It therefore becomes obvious obvious that both the creation and interpretation of postmodern art has become a crucial area in contemporary literary theory and criticism.

2. What Is Postmodern Poetry

The term “postmodern poetry” was first used by Charles Olson in 1953 to refer to avant-garde American poets who were writing in the post-war period, particularly referring to those who historically cover the period following World War II to the present. Citing Hoover, (2013), Emmanuel N. Ekindeone & Acho L. Lem (2025) in “Understanding the Post in Postmodern American Poetry” perceives postmodern poetry as one that:

“decenters authority and encourages a prismatic view of the poem preferring “empty words” to the transcendental signified, the actual to the metaphysical, postmodern poetry follows a constructivist rather than an expressionist theory of composition as method is interwoven with intuition towards the drive in poetic composition”. [4].

By discussing experimentation and innovation as hallmarks of postmodern poetry, they argue that postmodern poetry is a bricolage of multiple poetics. They associate with this group the improvisations of the Black Mountain poets such as Robert Duncan; the digital acrostics and poetics of Aleatory poets such as John Cage; the lipogrammatic pluralisms of Newlipo poets such as Harrytte Mullen; the illegibility of Conceptual poets such as Charles Olson and Frank O’Hara; the sampling photoshop of Cyber poets such as John Cage and Brian Kimm; and the oblique phrasing of Flarf poets such as Gary Sullivan who trace their origins to the elasticity of breadth by Beat Generation poets such as Allen Ginsberg.

Virgil Nemoianu (2010) in *Postmodern & Cultural identi-*

ties: Conflicts and Coexistences, argues that: “while postmodern literature and culture are not difficult to define. we do not know whether it will continue for a long time.[5]”.

It is obvious that popular postmodern culture has significantly altered perceptions of truth and reality in contemporary modern society. This is based on the pluralist interpretations and multiple meanings derivable from postmodernist works. The culture of late capitalism and the contemporary consumerist culture have given way to a chaotic representation of postmodern society in art as one in a permanent search for identity, equilibrium, meaning, and truth.

Frederic Jameson (1991) in “Postmodernism or The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism” observes that:

The last few years have been marked by an inverted millenarianism, in which premonitions of the future, catastrophic or redemptive, have been replaced by senses of the end of this or that (the end of ideology, art, or social class; the ‘crisis’ of Leninism, social democracy, or the welfare state, etc., etc.): taken together, all of these perhaps constitute what is increasingly called postmodernism. [6].

In many ways are the poems analyzed in this paper, self-conscious representations of the creative mind at work. Hence, whether they are parodizing, or using pastiche and/or bricolage, Frank O’Hara’s, Charles Olson’s, Allen Ginsberg’s, Robert Duncan’s and John Cage’s, poetry prove that the borders between high art and mass or popular culture; and those between the discourses of art and the discourses of the world are regularly crossed in postmodern theory and practice.

2.1. The Poetics of Place in Olson’s “In Cold Hell, in Thicket”

Charles Olson (1910-1970) rejected a political career for poetry. His first book of poetry *Y & X* (1948), appeared a year after his brilliant study of Herman Melville’s *Moby Dick*. As a lecturer at Black Mountain College, an experimental institution on North Carolina, Olson wrote most of his outstanding poems including “In Cold Hell, in Thicket” “The King Fishers” as well his manifesto “Projective Verse” (1950). As the intellectual back bone of experimental poetry, Olson’s poetry emphasizes the “proprioceptive” or inward character of human speech. The poetics of place is important in poetry because it attempts to relate poetry to the body, paying attention to place and space. Olson’s poems emphasize poetry as process, and portray the poet as an “open” filed composer.

The poem “In Cold Hell, in Thicket” is written in two parts, with three and two stanza’s respectively. In the first part of the poem, the persona immediately presents the religious question of where men go to when they die “Heaven” or “Hell”. Borrowed from the religious medieval age, the theme of salvation versus damnation projects the religious dilemma of the postmodern subject. The representation of a spiritual crisis in the life of the postmodern subject is probably what Olson foregrounds in this poem. Olson addresses the theme of death from the perspective of the metaphysical poets. As an abstract

concept, no one knows what life after death looks like, given the debunking of the notion of religion as a postmodern meta-narrative. The poet also raises the existential question of life as a struggle, a confrontation with adversity and puns upon the word “cold” which is symbolic of frigidity, and can be interpreted as indifference, insensible, etc.[Confer Roget’s Thesaurus, 31]. The poet wails at the despair of life, caused by wars and bitter words, even as soldiers are knocked down as he claims to have been. The speaker questions God about man’s plan, place and purpose on earth as well as in the hereafter when he notes:

God, that man, as his acts must, as there is always
A thing he can do. He can raise himself, he raises
On a reed he raises his
Or, if it is me, what
He has to say.[7].

The subject of the poem soon changes from the first person “I”, to the third person “(s) he”, showing the inconsistency of the subject of the poem, whose object is a myriad representation of imaginations of life after death. The poet suggests that there is no happy man; as man’s life is typically a sort of hell for he who is not privileged, imageless, unpleasured. From a postmodernist reading, people of color, and those who suffer racism, as well as those who are stigmatized and marginalized because they are downtrodden are already living in a kind of hell. Definitely not the fiery pit of fire alluded to in Jonathan Edwards’s “Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God”, but a sort of cold hell on earth. This sordid picture of life as miserable sets the naturalistic tone of the poem which can be related to the stark realism of modernism.

How shall he who is not happy, who has been so made unclear
Who is no longer privileged to be at ease, who
In this brush stands
Reluctant, imageless, unpleasured, caught in a sort of hell, how
Shall he convert this underbrush, how turn this unbidden place
How trace and arch again
The necessary goddess. [7].

The symbolic representation of the earth as a wilderness is certainly not new in literary discourse; however, the question of man’s role in it, as well as his purpose of living is nuanced by the consumerist challenge between the material and the spiritual. This crisis fixates the notion of personism in post-modern poetry which borders on man as either a material or spiritual being.

It is this dilemma that raises the notion of transcendentalism, Oslon poses the question “Who am I ?”; while maintaining that man cannot raise himself up (transcend) from the consumer culture of contemporary experience. In a sense, Oslon becomes the “Transparent eyeball” viewing all aspects of nature through him, as much as Walt Whitman does in “Song of Myself”. The poet states:

Who am I but a fix, and another a particle, and the congerly

particles carefully picked
One by another
As in thick thicket, each
Smallest branch, plant, fern, root
-Roots lie, on the surface, as nerves are laid open
Must now (the bitterness of the taste of her) be
Isolated, observed, picked over, measured, raised
As though a word, an accuracy were a pincer. [7].

True to Buddhist and other teachings, death could be considered as going over to, a sort of transition from one state of life to another. However, in this poem “hell” is not a place, but a state of being.

The second part of the poem the poet does not exteriorize but interiorize hell. It is the coat of your own self, the ragged sleeves seen by any bitch or common character. It is what reveals the beast in us and separates us from our loved ones. The dualism of the human person is what the poet is evoking here. Man is capable of good but also of bad. But his character not withstanding would not raise him up if he does not transcend this wilderness. This is so because man has become his own worst enemy. Oslon states “that a man, men are now their won wood and thus their own hell and paradise. [7].”

The question for Oslon is not whether we shall cross over, (for it is certain that we will/shall); but about where we cross to. He seems to remind us as does the morality play *Everyman*; that it is only our good deeds which shall determine where we go beyond the grave. In conclusion, Oslon’s poem juxtaposes the notion of hell not as an immediate space or future state; but as a permanent subject of the postmodern mind. Religion as a meta-narrative is questioned in this poem which no doubt reveals notion about the inevitability of death versus the quest for spiritual immortality as recurrent postmodern subjects. Wavering as a human trait is also expressed in the poem as the poet attempts a psychoanalysis of the death-obsessed mind. The poem boils down to question of choice, as crucial in story of our spiritual battle between good and evil. As conceptual poetry, the poem rotates around the notion of death, presented as an abstract idea which straddles different (fe) male subjects. The intelligibility of the meaning of the poem is weird, especially as syntax is used to defer meaning. Hence, the reader is compelled to examine hints to the artist’s thoughts about death, while being aware of the creativity within the lines. Without any particular rhyme and rhythm, another outstanding technique of the poem is the breath which is at times short, and at times exhaustive. These tendencies become a characteristic of Oslon’s poetry, which is no doubt innovative, although it differs significantly from the poetics of John Cage, as we shall realise in the next paragraph.

2.2. Cyber Poetics in John Cage’s “25 Mesostics Re and Not Re Mark Tobey” and “Writing in Cantos”

Unlike Charles Oslon’s “In Cold Hell in Thicket” which borders on the abstract, transcendent, romantic and existen-

tialist notion of life and death, hell and paradise; John Cage's poetry is typically "mesostics" and not as conceptual as Osłon's poem. As son of an inventor, John Cage (1912-1992) was both an inventor and a genius composer who experimented not only with fiction but with music. His poetry is influenced by Zen Buddhism and Dadaism. He is credited to have discovered the use of mesostics – a form of acrostics as an aid to composition. By using texts of his predecessors such as James Joyce and Ezra Pound, Cage was able to produce compositions by chance. It is worth noting that sampling is the primary technique of cyber poetry which consists in cutting and pasting for creative production. Within the context of cyber poetry, Cage's poem shows the dematerialization of language, as well as the indeterminacy about the status of the author as ego. His unique style is found in "25 Mesostics Re and Not Re Mark Tobey"

it was iMpossible
to do Anything;
the dooR
was locKed
i won The first game
he wOn the second
in Boston
nExt

Year, he'll be teaching philosophy. [7].

John Cage essentially resorts to a kind of puzzle in which words have to be constructed from irregular verses. The possibility of writing poetry in prose is expressed in this poem which combines words to spell out the name of MARK TOBEY. The ideas on the poem rotate from ordinarily winning games, to interpreting paintings, reading meaning in books, checking in at the airport, metro, etc.

The dis familiarity with the author of the text is addressed in the fifth segment of the poem. In this segment the poet criticizes the quest for truth, as well as the (con) textual approach to literary criticism. This seems to be in defiance to New Criticism and their text-based approach to literary studies when the poet asserts that:

She told Me
his wAy
of Reading
assumes that the booK he's reading is true. [7].

The question about "his way" of reading correlates to Formalism, Structuralism and other "text-based" approaches to literary criticism which were debunked at the dawn of the modernist era. The "truth" therefore which implies the meaning of the text, raises the controversy about the question of whether the meaning of the text can be deduced from the text, the author, or the context. According to postmodern critics, the "truth" does not reside in the text because, extra-textual factors such as the culture, historical background, and author's biography are indispensable towards arriving at the meaning of texts. Out of difference was New Historicism and other "isms" borne. In essence, the notion of modernist avant-garde art, provides the bedrock for postmodernist art

which breaks away from convention by celebrating experimentations and innovation.. Other experimental segments in Cage's poem reveal notions of capitalism, travel-prestige, class differentiation and strategizing. Cage's penchant for art is again reiterated when states:

Waiting for the bus, I happened to look at the paveMent
I wAs standing on;
Noticed no diffeRence between
looKing at art or away from it
the chinese children accepted the freedoMs
I gAve them
after
my bacK was turned
Pauline served lunch on The
flOor
But
objEcted
to the waY galka was using her knife and fork
The
dOors ad windows are open
why Bring it back?
I'd forgottEn where it was.
You could have kept it ...
All it is a Melody
of mAny
coloRs
Klangfarbenmelodie. [7].

The idea about closure of the artistic process and product is here debunked by the poet whose lines thrive on experimentation, not imitation. The loose-endish interpretation of the verses of this segment project a pluralistic reading of the poems meaning. Hence, the figurative consideration of the house as the text implies that the key to the house is theory. But this does not limit access to the house via the door itself but also through the window.

Postmodern art is both self-conscious and self-reflexive and therefore reflects within and without. Because of the lack of rigidity, no single theory as Hirsch (1976) argues can possibly exhaust the meaning of a text. In exploring the complexities of literary meaning and interpretation, he argues that texts have multiple layers of interpretation from which the critically coins the concept of to the "Bable" of interpretation as symbolic of the confusion arising from plural-dimensional readings aimed at deciphering the meaning of texts. In *The Aims of Interpretation*, Eric Donald Jr. Hirsch (1976) stipulates that:

The object of interpretation is precisely that which cannot be defined by the ontological status of a text, since the distinguishing characteristic of a text is that from it not just one but many disparate complexes of meaning can be construed. On the contrary, the object, of interpretation is no automatic given, but a task that the interpreter sets him-self. He decides what he wants to actualize and what purpose his actualization should achieve. [8].

For the author, poetic melody derives from harmony of the different 'colors' and shades, bringing to mind a rainbow

paradigm of (de) meaning. References to media culture, popular culture, advertising, culinary ethics, and the recursion to the suburbia are some of the vignettes of this poem inspired by contemporary experience. The dialectics of looking at art or away from it brings to the fore questions about the discrepancy between text-based approaches to literature (such as Formalism, structuralism, New Criticism, Deconstruction); and context based approaches (such as New Historicism, Psychoanalysis, Feminism, Post colonialism, etc). References to movies, music, and paintings in the poem underscore the emphasis the poet places on the subject of the arts. From its gestalt configuration, the poem as a whole has no meaning since it is a self-conscious improvisation, or experimentation of what lines can be drawn from the name Mark Tobey.

Cage's extremism in the experimentation of mesostics is also vivid in "Writing through the Cantos". In this poem, the artist improvises with the name of one of the greatest precursors of the modernist movement, Ezra Pound. The modernist movement was enkindled with Pound's phrase "Make it New"; as a result, many of the artists who associate themselves with high modernism or postmodernism, look to Ezra Pound for artistic inspiration.

"Writing through the Cantos" is a very strikingly post-modernist poem. It's language and syntax lend no meaning, as the poem is basically derived from the name EZRA POUND with which Cage engages in playful pluralism. The lines are loaded with words although the artist uses capitalization to highlight his acrostics. Cage is probably borrowing from Pound's "In a Station of the Metro" when he begins the poem thus:

And thEn with bronZe lance heads beaRing yet Arms -3-4
sheeP slain Of plUto stroNg praiseD
thE narrow glaZes the uptUrned nipple As 11
sPeak tO rUy oN his gooDs
womEn in maZe of aiR wAs 18
Penis whO disliked langUage skiN profiteers Drinking 64
icE gaZing at theiR plAin 69
jE suis xtZbk49ht paRts of this to mAdison 154
Pui gemistO giU di pietRo Negator D'usura 421-6
sacro nEmori von humboldt agassiZ maR wAy 598
Price sOldiers delUged the old hawk damN saDist 603
papErs von schultZ and albuqueRque chArles second c. 5
674
Planes liOns jUmPs scorpioNs guve light waDsworth in
town house in ... 781. [7].

Cage finished writing this poem in 1982 as a veritable example of extreme experimentation. It took him several years to arrive at these artistic productions with the name EZRA POUND highlighted on every line. This is cyber poetry at its best given that the computer's auto-grammatical detector offers corrections to the words and syntax which in this case have been deliberately ignored for artistic purpose. By experimenting with words, Cage defies English grammar and syntax by producing nonsensical lines which provide no hints at all as to the meaning of the poem. The artist's self-con-

sciousness is expressed in long and short alternating verses with the name EZRA POUND expressed in a variety of languages including English, Yiddish, French and Spanish. It is obvious that as a post-language lyric, his emphasis is rather placed on the process and procedure than the product. The end product therefore becomes the original and real product, not imagined but spontaneously crafted. These poems actually engage the readers as well, as they endeavor to read sense and make meaning from the absurd lexical structures, which in themselves refer to multiple things. As readers, we are more attracted to the mind of the artist at work, rather than the object of his attention. Cage's attempt at freeing language from syntax is quite lucid in over 782 nonsensical lines which engulf the reader into a maze of interpretations.

2.3. Gay Poetics in Robert Duncan's "The Torso Passages 18"

Far from the playful pluralism of mesostics as cyber poetry, Robert Duncan's poetry is revolutionary in the sense that it addresses the theme of homosexuality in some of his poems. Born in Oakland, California Robert Duncan (1919-1988), considers himself as a derivative poet whose pastiche is composed from artists as diverse as Dante, Pound, Blake, Stein, Yeats, etc. Often associated with the Black Mountain Poets, Duncan's poetry is attracted to the mystical, as well as to the romanticists penchant for emotion (feeling) over reason. His poetry may blend experimental and traditional forms but is quite queer in its approach to sexuality.

In defiance to the sexual wars that marked the 1950s and 60s, the feminist movement was born. This movement adopted a radical approach to gender roles and female sexuality within a context of patriarchal institutions which oppressed and stereo typically configured women. The rise of gay movements in the 1960s could be interpreted as an attempt at debunking the concept of the "Oedipus" as advanced by Freud. The complexity of sexual identity thus became the subject of many postmodern poets.

In "The Torso Passages 18", Duncan expresses the love he has for his partner, as he admires the male body. The sensitivity of such a body is centered around certain parts such as the mouth, the neck, the clavicle, the nipples, the navel, the groin. The poem is written in the form of a dialogue between two interlocutors – one speaking to the other. He begins by dwelling on the illusive idea as to why homosexuality exists. The 'other's image and the treasure of his mouth prompt the speaker to have homosexual instincts. Describing his body as leading to paradise and the trembling caused by his fiery eyes, the persona soon admits to have fallen in love because:

His look
Pierces my side – fire eyes
I have been waiting for you he said:
I know what you desire....
You do not yet know, but through me..
I am there, gathering me, you gather

Your self.

For my Other is not a woman but a man

The king upon whose bosom let me lie. [7].

Anti-oedipal discourse as relating to the notion of the schizoid, was first advanced by Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari. The French critics debunk Freud's thesis of the heterosexual male, while focusing on schizophrenia as the cause of sexual disorientation experienced by lesbians and gay. The American society gradually started accepting gay standards, now understood as Bohemian standards during the 1960s and 1970s after the first gay parades were held in New York City, Los Angeles and Chicago on June 28th 1970.

In *American Dreams: The United States Since 1945*, Brands (2010) traces some changes in American culture after 1945. In "Beyond the Closet", Brands contends that:

For most of American history, homosexuality had been denied or outlawed or both. Artists of a particular bohemian type could survive rumors of a preference for members of the same sex; Walt Whitman and Gertrude Stein, after they had attained a certain stature, hardly bothered to deny their homosexuality...But for everyone else, to reveal one's homosexuality would be to commit occupational and social suicide. Voters would abandon elected officials shown to be gay; school superintendents would fire teachers; bishops would defrock ministers; audiences would boycott actors...Things started to change in the 1960s. For all the repression both external and internal of homosexuality, most American cities contained neighborhoods where gay men and women gathered in bars, restaurants and coffee-houses [9].

Duncan is certainly writing in the 1960s and 70s, at the time when Gay rights, like Black rights was gradually making their way into the public arena. By the 1970s and 80s, the conventional thinking about gays had begun to change as some bold ones began to come out of the closet. There is definitely no doubt that Duncan's poem is a concerted effort to introduce homosexuality into mainstream sexuality discourses. For many of the poets of the San Francisco Renaissance, homosexuality became a new imperative which accentuates the notion of defiance and deviance. The poem adopts a psychoanalytic stance and bespeaks the notion of intimate personism through the crisis of sexual identity prevalent in contemporary postmodern society. However, not all postmodern poets address the question of homosexuality and homophobia as we shall discover the poetics of Frank O'Hara, the next poet we shall be examining in this paper.

2.4. Personism in Frank O'Hara's 'The Day Lady Died' and Beating Breadth in Allen Ginsberg's 'Howl'

The spontaneity of everyday life and the classical use of wit and charm is what characterizes Frank O'Hara's poetry. O'Hara studied at Harvard where met John Ashberry and Kenneth Koch who also had tremendous influence on his

works. He published two collections of poetry *Meditations in an Emergency* (1957) and *Lunch Poems* (1964) and an essay on his poetics "*Personism: A Manifesto*". Burrowing from William Carlos Williams's emphasis on the use of American vernacular, he unveils the urban popular culture of the 1950s and 1960s in his poems. O'Hara's poetic inspiration extends to the great French poet Guillaume Apollinaire. He adopts Apollinaire's conversational style which was criticized by some as being stupid, and too sentimental. Immediacy, honesty and fearlessness are among the attractive qualities of his style.

The transcendental tone of Ralph Waldo Emerson, and particularly Walt Whitman is present in the beginning line of "Meditations in an Emergency" where O'Hara, true to romantic tradition celebrates nature "even treed understand me! Good Heavens, I lie under them, too, don't I. I am just like a pile of leaves. [7]". This phrase draws inspiration from Walt Whitman's *Leaves of Grass*, a manifesto of American transcendentalism. The poem is in a constant state of restlessness as it celebrates boredom. The speaker of the poem is "always looking away"; not out of curiosity, but out of the duty to be attentive. The attention here is likened to the creative process. By choosing to go where you don't want me to, the poet underscores the fact of breaking away from canon, revolting, deferring, debunking conventions to create what according to many cannot be considered as poetry on the basis of intelligibility. Yet, its depiction of everyday events such as taking the subway, eating a hamburger and the curious anxiety of passive observation is recurrent in O'Hara's works.

In 'The Day Lady Died', which is O'Hara's elegy for Billie Holiday, the poet uses lots of enjambments and irregular rhyme patterns. Although the poem is visually appealing, the difficulty of deciphering its meaning arises from its lack of punctuation. It is difficult for readers to temporally situate the poem in time and space despite the allusion to the Bastille Day (July, 1789). The mere mention of Ghanaian poets and Behan's new play *Les Negres* lends a racist hint to the poem, as it plays out in the culture war – what he refers to in "Meditations in an Emergency" as "robes of whiteness. [7]". The conversational style is what distinguishes O'Hara from the others.

As the leading figure of the Beat generation, Allen Ginsberg's (1926-1997) poetry does not require the intellectual complexity, formalism and decorum of the early postwar period. Using prose sentences, Ginsberg's poetry highlights consciousness of the person, breathing rhythm and American idiom. The spontaneity of his style is evident in "Howl":

"who chained themselves to subways for the endless ride from Battery to holy Bronx on denzardine until the noise of wheels and children brought them down shuddering mouth-wracked and battered bleak of brain all drained of brilliance in the drear light of zoo"[7].

Apart from the first line of the poem which reads "I saw the best minds of my generation" etc, Ginsberg relied on the word "who" to keep the beat, as his imagination flares into the unknown. Ginsberg actually seems to be extending Whit-

man's verse even as he tries one physical inspiration of thought continued in the elasticity of a breath. Hence, what Ginsberg experiences is not a prosody of sorts, but a rhapsody of thoughts thanks to his long breath. Although written for Carl Solomon, the poem catalogs ordinary American experiences of the period with flashes of multiculturalism in his allusion to Colorado, Harlem, Brooklyn Bridge, Denver, Alcatraz etc. Ginsberg's lines are very long and may not be logically appealing but are creatively sublime in as much as artistic creativity is concerned. His breadth is extremely long and captures the extreme attempt of illogical speech. The poem seems to talk about we and them. They who "ate fire in paint hotels or drank turpentine in paradise Alle, death or purgatoried their torsos night after night with dreams, with drugs, with walking nightmares, alcohol and cock and endless balls" [7]. Hence, "who" becomes the source of the creativity: - who talked, who jumped, who studied, who disappeared, who burned, who distributed, who broke, who wandered, who howled, who copulated, who sang out, who cooked, who coughed, who wept, who journeyed, who balled, who hiccuped, who barreled, who crashed, who retired, who dreamt - who becomes the word which the poet invents and drags out so much so that he is out of breadth by the time the line ends.

Charles Olson in "Projective Verse" stipulates that: "breath allows all the speech-force of language back in (speech is the "solid" of verse, is the secret of a poem's energy), because, now a poem [can be written] against syntax, in fact against grammar generally [7]. Breathing and speech therefore brings about a new cadence in poetry, one akin to contemporary poetry. Ginsberg takes advantage of the machine's multiple margins to allow the "who" stand out, while the poet comments on ideas as they flow in his mind, conscious of the process, not necessarily of the product.

3. Discussion

We have been able to demonstrate using the poems under study, that postmodern poets are essentially breaking boundaries of poetic canon by resorting to techniques and aesthetics which are both innovative and experimental. Olson, Cage, O'Hara, Duncan and Ginsberg all adopt indeterminacy as an aesthetic in their works. Their poetics differ considerably; for while Olson, Duncan and O'Hara demonstrate a residual poetics based on American transcendentalism and existentialism; Cage and Ginsberg as typical aleatory poets rely on chance for their compositions. Their art reflect spontaneity and is characteristically illegible and indeterminate. Based on this argument, we can deduce that as conceptual poets, they thrive on unoriginality, falsification, appropriation, plagiarism, and boredom.

"In Cold Hell in Thicket" written from an existential premise addresses the Metaphysical subject of death, Charles Olson addresses the abstract subject of death in a more or less ambiguous manner. The meaning of the poem is only hinted via clues which the reader must interpret for understanding.

The irregular structure of the poem may suggest the complexity of fully comprehending life after death.

John Cage's "25 Mesostics, Re and Not Re Mark Tobey" and "Writing in Canto's" utilize digital technology which renders them as cyber poetry. Cage's poems lay the emphasis on the postmodern notion of "open poetry" considering that they challenge the idea of artistic closure. Although the poems address many subjects, Cage's artistic inspiration is geared towards a sense of vagueness, hinged on the poetic quest at demeaning.

Robert Duncan's "The Torso Passages 18" can be viewed as a poem that showcases both sexual deviance as well as poetic defiance. By addressing the cultural "in-between" communities such as the LGBTQ, Duncan debunks sexual categorization and deconstructs gender configurations resulting to identity crisis and sexual otherness in postmodern culture and society.

Frank O'Hara's "The Day Lady Died" and Allen Ginsberg's "Howl" are distinctive exercises in postmodernist poetry. While the latter's can be considered an elegy written in romantic tradition; the former's represents a catalog of thoughts and phrases which constitute a rhapsody of sort, with the word "who" serving as the beat for poetic improvisation.

4. Recommendations

It must be reiterated that our study does not set out the exhaust the meaning and interpretation of the poems under study but to objectively compare the poets' poetics. However, it must be stated that each of the poets examined in this paper, are worthy of a more profound study. A profound analysis of the experimentation of poetic breadth is crucial in Allen Ginsberg's "Howl" - "Conflict and Confusion in Allen Ginsberg's "Howl" could be an interesting topic for investigation.

Considering that postmodernism has its origins in high modernism, a careful study of the poetics of Ezra Pound, Amiri Baraka and Bob Dylan could also serve a significant contribution to scholarship on this subject.

5. Conclusion

The poetry of the postmodern period is characteristically post-language lyric aided by cyber effects. Such poetry as we have demonstrated is devoid of meaning, given that its interpretation cannot be hinged on a linguistic context. This is due to the fact that the poets intentionally defy grammatical and syntactic structures for artistic purpose. Although, experimentation remains central to postmodernist poetics, there is however a residual tendency in its subject and style.

The American postmodernist poets studied in this paper, rely on the romantic idea of spontaneity; but forge ahead with such revolutionary poetics never seen before in American poetry. The language of their poetry is not closed, but opens up to multiple layers of interpretation. Its syntax and grammar

have been intentionally altered for poetic effect, much to the neglect of any patterns, norms, canons or conventions.

In spite of their description as derivative poets, certain aspects of their poetry have left trails which have gradually become the convention of Postmodern poetry. The characteristics of postmodern poetry such as neglect for grammar and syntax; the distancing of the author from his work; the exhaustion of length and breadth; self-conscious and self-reflexive art; and reader-engaged poetry, have found their way into what can be considered as the canon of postmodern poetry. Nevertheless, in their quest for a radical new aesthetic, they rely on the influence of past movements such as Dadaism, Romanticism, Mysticism, and American Transcendentalism.

Our study has been able to show that postmodern American poetry is fundamentally process-centered than product-oriented. Its interpretation can be myriad but its meaning is indeterminate. Although postmodernism can sometimes be seen as signaling the end of history; postmodern poetry on the other hand does not only signal the end of artistic cultural aesthetics but the uniformity of linguistic typologies given the “babel” of interpretations of texts – a veritable terrain of debate affiliated to literary interpretation in postmodern discourse.

Abbreviations

LGBTQ Lesbian/Gay/Bisexual/Transgender/Queer

Author Contributions

Njume Emmanuel Ekindesone is the sole author. The author read and approved the final manuscript.

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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