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“Inhere as do the Suns –”

Light and Infinity

Ecopoetic aspects of Emily Dickinson’s Poetry

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Abstract

The present thesis examines the ecopoetical aspects of Emily Dickinson's poetry within the framework of Timothy Morton's environmental aesthetics. The main objective of my enquiry is to investigate the contemporary relevance of Dickinson's poems within the expanding field of environmental studies to explore their central role in a wider ecological context. These enquiries are related to Morton's model of coexistence, which is incorporated into his central concept of the ecological thought. The analysis examines the repetitive imagery of luminosity in the poems by applying a materialistic reading of Morton's ambient poetics. The synesthetic device, ellipsis, and Dickinson's poetics of circumference are used to analyze the poems. The analysis also draws parallels with Jacques Derrida's concept of hospitality and Emmanuel Levinas's phenomenological philosophy related to transcendence of the other and infinity.

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Foreword

*Awake ye muses nine, sing me a strain divine,
Unwind the solemn twine and untie my valentine
(Emily Dickinson poem 1)*

“Awake ye muses nine, sing me a strain divine” opens the verse line of Emily Dickinson’s first poem with an apostrophe that calls out, arousing the muses to join a chorus that “sings” with an ambiguous and tenuous timbre of resounding voices and sound. In many respects this polyphonic music of “a divine strain” can be understood as resonating throughout Dickinson’s celebrated poetry, both implicitly and explicitly, like a sonorous wave, presenting a dense stream of poems to the world.

The muses aroused music and its celestial spheres have been an enduring fascination I have had in relation to Emily Dickinson’s poetry. During my previous studies in comparative literature at the University of Oslo I analysed a selection of her poetry, including poem 258, “There’s a certain Slant of light”. This is a poem that never ceases to pose questions and mesmerise. My interest in the synesthetic traits of her work has resulted in a specific interest in the atmospheric and musical aspects of her poetry alongside examining influences stemming from Romantic and Impressionist paintings with their emphasis on light and mystical luminosity. These points of departure have proven to be valuable and one of the reasons I have chosen to both open and close my analysis with this poem.

Another reason for choosing her poetry is because whilst studying Timothy Morton’s environmental philosophy, I began to see how Dickinson’s poetry and poetics and Morton’s concept of “the ecological thought” were interrelated. Simultaneously, I found six of her poems were included in *The Ecopoetry Anthology* (2013) edited by Ann Fisher-Wirth and Laura-Gray Street. This aroused my curiosity as to why her poems were categorised as “ecopoetry” and what this might imply within an ecopoetic field of enquiry. I have therefore included poem 1400, “What mystery pervades a well!” from this anthology and it has become an important component of my dissertation

Timothy Morton introduces *The Ecological Thought* (2010) with an epigraph by Emanuel Levinas: “Infinity overflows the thought that thinks it” (Morton, 2010). This quote has also had a mesmerising and haunting effect upon me. It traces my own trajectories related to exploring aspects of Dickinson’s poetry and poetics in correlation to this concept. As I continued to embark upon several of his main works, Levinas’s quote has continued to both

resonate with my reading and pose interesting questions along the intermediary stages of this project. Does the ecological thought equate to theories of infinity? Within which philosophical categories is it possible to situate this theory? What does “infinity” imply in terms of the role certain poetry and the arts are attributed when “thinking ecologically”? These are questions that will colour this dissertation and I believe are reflected with the opening verse lines of poem 1. How is this inaugurating verse line, “Awake ye muses nine, sing me a strain divine”, eco-poetical and related to the poems I have chosen to analyse in this dissertation?

Introduction

Poetry and the Environment

An exploration of Dickinson's poetry as eco-poetical emerges from the thematic frameworks of the burgeoning environmental crisis. This vast, complex and multi-faceted arena related to environmentalism requires a brief contextualisation. Louise Westling describes and epitomises the environmental crisis in *Literature and the Environment* (2014) as "a destructive tendency that has intensified throughout history", describing this as an "impulse born of the will to master nature (...) as landscapes on every continent were forcibly turned to human purposes, by advancing technologies and burgeoning populations, which have now brought us to what many fear is the brink of global collapse" (Westling 2014, 1). She further points to how "literary responses" by "writers" "have warned us" of the changes and the "environmental damage" that becomes increasingly more visible and accumulates during the nineteenth century. She explains that this is documented by, for example, "Charles Dickens' *Hard Times* (1854), John Steinbeck's *Grapes of Wrath* (1939) and Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* (1962)" (Westling 2014, 1). From these points of departure, she explains how, "In the past several decades, however, increasing dismay about environmental problems has produced new kinds of literature and a wide international focus of scholarly attention" (Westling 2014, 1).

It is from this complex arena that eco-poetics and intensified attention towards poetry emerges. The role that poetry presides over in an eco-poetical context needs to be explored. Clearly, as this dissertation focuses on selected poems by Dickinson, the role of poetry is central. In Wirth and Street's introduction to *The Eco-poetry Anthology* (2013), they demonstrate how William Carlos Williams' poem, "Asphodel, That Greeny Flower", exemplifies the "centrality" and "the urgency, of poetry to contemporary life" (Wirth and Street 2013, 1). This ardent affirmation of poetry's role within an environmental context is described as a poem's ability to assert "attentiveness, precision, tenderness toward existence – these are some of the qualities Williams is invoking and his lines grow more prescient as the world hurtles toward environmental disaster" (Wirth and Street 2013, 1). These assertions are later viewed in relationship to the vital role "imagination" has within an ecological

framework. They maintain that it is the lack of imagination that is an instigator of the environmental crisis:

We've become ever more convinced that the environmental is made possible by a profound failure of the imagination. What we humans disregard, what we fail to know and grasp, is easy to destroy: a mountaintop, a coral reef, a forest, a human community. Yet poetry returns us in countless ways to the world of our senses. It can act in Franz Kafka's phrase as "an ice axe to break the frozen sea inside us (Wirth and Street 2013, 1)

Poetry is claimed to function as an agent that awakens our perceptions and relationship with the world and existence and thawing the ice. That poetry is given such a prominent role can be traced back to Adorno's theories in "On Lyric Poetry and Society"¹ where he adamantly asserts that, "The greatness of works of art, however, consists solely in the fact that they give voice to what ideology hides. Their very success moves beyond false consciousness, whether intentional or not" (Adorno 1991, 39). Adorno's theories concerning the role of lyric poetry are relevant for the examination of Dickinson's poetry. The poetry written during the nineteenth century can be examined from Adorno's viewpoint of expressing that which "ideology hides". What is hidden or implicitly weaved in the poems may be a poetic expression that functions as a negation of the burgeoning environmental crisis that was already visible during the period in which she was writing.

This exploration of Dickinson's poetry as ecopoetical examines how the poems may awaken the imaginative faculties and subsequently "return us to the world of our senses" (Wirth and Street 2013, 1). Within the framework of an ecopoetical exploration of Dickinson's idiosyncratic poetry, Adorno's claim that "the lyric reveals itself to be more deeply grounded in society when it does not chime in with society" (Adorno 1991, 43) is an important aspect of departure because Dickinson's poems are not explicitly structured as political statements. Indeed, their elusiveness and elliptical attributes do not appear to "chime in with society" at all. Therefore, exploring the poetry as ecopoetical from this vantage point could determine and strengthen how poetry is central to contemporary environmentalism. In this dissertation, Dickinson's poetry is explored from an ecopoetic context reflecting

¹ Theodor Adorno's philosophy is firmly implemented into Timothy Morton's theories and is therefore central in relationship to the role he claims poetry has within a societal context. Morton explains why Adorno is important and claims that his philosophy can be viewed as ecological. He explains this as "Theodor Adorno whose writing has a strong, often explicit ecological flavor. Adorno based much of his work on the idea that modern society engages in a process of domination that establishes and exploits something "over there" called nature" (Morton 2009, 9).

Adorno's view of "the poem as a philosophical sundial telling the time of history" (Adorno 1991, 46). The "philosophical sundial" of Dickinson's poetry is examined from how it anticipates the current "time of history" that evolves within the field of environmental aesthetics with a particular emphasis on the poems' ambiguous resonances of lightness and darkness.

Resonances of Light

"There's a certain Slant of light," opens Dickinson's poem 258 with a resonance of light emerging from a mystical angle. Originally handwritten into her fascicles, dated 1861 and published for the first time posthumously in 1890, this poem has become one of the most famous and revered from the legacy, consisting of 1175 untitled poems. The "Slant" and "light" of poem 258 provide an example of her idiosyncratic perspective. The poetic techniques point to what is more widely described as the elusiveness or "strangeness" (Bloom 1994, 275) of the poetry. With its "certain Slant of light," poem 258 represents a continuous preoccupation with luminosity that has pervasive contours throughout the poetry. The persistent reoccurrence with varying degrees of luminosity alludes to Dickinson's inspiration, which can be traced to influences from Romantic poetry and early Impressionistic paintings². With its variations of "light" imagery, Dickinson's poetry is claimed to be inspired by the luminosity of a Wordsworthian tenure³. These influences accentuate the dominance of "light" that is derived from the Romantic tradition and implicitly weaved within the poems. The continuous emphasis on luminous imagery has been captured in an essay by Wendy Barker, "Emily Dickinson and Poetic Strategy", where she observes how she is ardently inspired with the metaphor of "light", using multitudes of related imagery in her poems. However, as she

² . Romanticism and Impressionism are important aspects of Dickinson's poetry. Judith Farr establishes how "Dickinson's was immediately compared to the visual arts when the 1890 publications of her poems appeared" (Farr 1998, 63).

³ Wordsworth's influence on Dickinson's has been documented in many criticisms. In a more recent article by Lhi-Hin Hsu the context is contextualized. Although this article has biographical perspectives, I still find it important in terms of identifying Wordsworth's influence on her poetry. "The light that never was on sea or land': William Wordsworth in America and Emily Dickinson's "Frostier" Style" she contextualizes this influence stating how "Her Wordsworthian references often involve one's "sharing" (or not sharing) of the Wordsworthian delight. In an earlier letter of the same year to her cousins, Dickinson alluded to a line, "The light that never was, on sea or land" in Wordsworth's "Elegiac Stanzas" for its idyllic vision: "I wish you were with me, not precisely here, but in those sweet mansions the mind likes to suppose . . . 'The light that never was on sea or land' might just as soon be had for the knocking" (Hsu 2016, 24).

points out, there is an interesting conflict inherent in the use of “light” imagery, whether it occurs metaphorically, metonymically or as a synecdoche:

Dickinson is, metaphorically, herself in conflict with the very light of day, which is literally caused by the sun. Dickinson was supremely aware of climate, of degrees of light, of the progression of a twenty-four-hour period we call a “day.” The words “sun” and “day” are the most frequently used nouns in the poems (sun is used 170 times, day 232 times, light 82 times, noon 76 times). (Barker 2002 81)

This explains how the Dickinsonian rendition of “light” was not expressing the bright, clear, dazzling “light” of a radiant sun or burning stars, but a luminosity of gradient resonances alluding to “orphyic”⁴ depths, as her famous poem 1129 illustrates: “The Truth must dazzle gradually / Or every man be blind –”. Henceforth, the imagery of “light” can be explained as a “light” that “gradually” and softly shines like the haziness of an afternoon, or as Barker suggests, “the shadowy times of late afternoon, and early morning, when subtle differentiations of light and shade are more visible” (Barker 2002, 88). The atmospheric imagery appeals to intricate formations and is compared to “the finest of subtleties, in varying points of view” (Barker 2002, 88). The nuances could also be likened to a kaleidoscopic nerve that radiates from multiple perspectives in the poetry. This can be detected in what Barker assumes is an enthused engagement with “negative capability” and verifies this context claiming that Dickinson “delighted in ambiguity and exulted in negative capability” (Barker 2002, 88). The “varying points of view” expressed by nuances of “light” throughout her poetry can be more widely understood as a permanent construct of negation that is identified in different criticisms of Dickinson’s work. Within the framework of this thesis, negation is examined from a point of departure in Adorno’s dialectic and the concept Morton applies in terms of “negative imagery”. These concepts are analysed in relation to the luminous resonances of the poetry.

Henceforth, repetitive forms of “light” that function spectrally throughout Dickinson’s poetry indicate how the phenomena of “light” can be investigated in terms of what is perceived as the poetry’s “negative capability” (Barker 2002, 88) referring to a kaleidoscopic

⁴ When I allude to Orphyic tones, I am suggesting allusions to the myth of Orpheus and how this has been applied in various literary criticisms. Maurice Blanchot’s article “Orpheus’ Gaze” exhibits the role of darkness and contextualizes Orpheus’ meeting with Eurydice as “a meeting with this darkness when the clear light of day are sacrificed to this sole aim: to look in the night at what the dark hides, the *other* night, the dissimulation that appears” (Blanchot 1982, 171).

nerve in the poems. Barker also identifies “light” in the poetry as varied: “There is more than one ‘light’ by which to view ‘reality’, Dickinson seems to suggest” (Barker 2002, 88). These variations of “light” also allude to the obscure tones of dark soil and earth, giving the shadier tones of her poetry a tactile, physical presence. The atmospheric sensuality is also comparable to darkness and exists in the sombre tones and “the dark of the underground life that generates possibility” (Barker 2002 88). An understanding of the poems as simultaneously radiant and etheric as they are dark, amorphous, sensual and tactile are an important aspect of this enquiry as the materialistic attributes of the poetry are central.

In the renowned reading of poem 258 by Harold Bloom, he similarly describes Dickinson’s use of “blanks” and imagery of light as a “transport” of “darkness” and, as he suggests, “I surmise that, for Dickinson, transports were as much affairs of the light as were blanks and the dark” and elaborating on this, he continues: “Her poem is a transport of negation, sublimely catching the blanks of blanks in a bull’s eye of vision, an oxymoronic ‘Heavenly Hurt’ or ‘imperial affliction’” (Bloom 2004, 282) and conclusively analyses poem 258’s particular “Slant of light” as not being of a landscape or nature but “a synecdoche for a particular slant in Dickinson’s own consciousness” (Bloom 1994, 283).

These interesting perspectives of Dickinson’s poetry have awakened my curiosity in terms of exploring how her preoccupation with “light” and its implementation into her poems is comparative of a “transport of negation” (Bloom 1994, 282). The main weave of this thesis examines a limited selection of Dickinson’s poetry and poetics and explores the synesthetic attributes of “light” in relationship to eco-poetical aspects and what this implies for the examination of the poetry as eco-poetic. The eco-poetical aspects are related to Morton and Levinas’s philosophy and how negation may be discerned.

Whilst working on these enquiries, it became apparent that the thesis has developed into investigating whether Morton’s eco-poetic theories are actually applicable in terms of analysing poetry. As the primary source of my enquiry, Dickinson’s poetry proved to be fertile ground for testing Morton’s hypothesis of “the ecological thought”. In addition, the enquiry and analysis of the poetry in relationship to environmental philosophy exhibited a reciprocal preoccupation with luminous imagery and subsequently established an implicit structure throughout my dissertation. I examine interrelated convergencies with the poems and the philosophy of Morton and Levinas. The purpose of my thesis is to contribute towards opening Dickinson’s poetry into an expanding contemporary sphere of literary research related to environmental philosophy and the field of “eco-poetics” and simultaneously analyse previous criticisms of her poetry and poetics within an eco-poetical framework.

Recent Reception and Research of Emily Dickinson's Poetry

The amount of research and constant interest in Dickinson's poetry offers a plethora of relevant material from earlier receptions by, for example, Richard B. Sewall, Judith Farr, and Harold Bloom, to contemporary research that appears in *The New Emily Dickinson Studies* (2019) edited by Michelle Kohler.

The magnitude of criticism resulted in a need to limit the material and consequently many insightful perspectives that would have been interesting to pursue were excluded. Yet, although it was demanding to limit myself to a selection of material from the density of existing criticisms of her poetry and poetics have been an asset when read within the context of "The ecological thought".

Although Dickinson has received a multi-faceted reception within different areas of scholarship, academic attention in the emerging arena of ecocriticism and ecopoetics is scarce. As Michelle Kohler claims in her introduction to *The New Emily Dickinson Studies* (2019), earlier Emily Dickinson scholarship has a tendency to have "invested a great deal of intellectual energy insisting on her strength and exceptionality. This has been a crucial project, pushing against stubborn mythologies that had rendered Dickinson isolated and deviant, an accidental writer of symptomatic poems" (Kohler 2019, 3). As a consequence, she has been given more weight and agency due to scholarship that has reassessed her poetry within proto-modernist and feministic studies:

These moves toward emphasizing Dickinson's control over her own poetics laid the groundwork for the late twentieth-century/early twenty-first-century Dickinson with whom we are familiar: a poet who is decidedly not withdrawn from the world but is attentive to many nineteenth-century American cultural, literary, and political contexts". (Kohler 2019, 3)

To perceive her poems as more embedded and in touch with the world and the environment is, as Kohler explains, "a transformation from alone and idiosyncratic to avidly engaged and often exemplary in her critical and poetic acumen" (Kohler 2019, 3). This change of perspectives and reception of her poetry has clearly created criticism that covers new and surprising contexts and is described as a "chartering of unknown territory". More recent studies contextualise Dickinson "in unfamiliar contexts – off center, embedded in collaborative spaces, and caught in circulations she does not control" (Kohler 2019, 2). It

would appear that this “decentering” of Dickinson can be seen as both relevant and supportive of my thesis because Kohler places her poetry more firmly in the world.⁵

Viewing her work as more embedded in the world is an interesting proposal and has resulted in descriptions of her poetry as being “enmeshed” in the world. This is a concept that also circulates in relation to literature that is environmental. Kohler explains “embedded” and “enmeshed” in the following citation as poetry that “co-evolves”.

Embedded in a very physical world, deeply susceptible to and permeated by it, caught up in unceasing circulations of organic and inorganic material, sounds, printed texts, technologies, identities, and physical sensations (...) she is enmeshed in different environments and co-evolving with others (humans and nonhumans). (Kohler 2019, 3)

What Kohler asserts here, is how Dickinson’s poetry actually circulates and inter-connects with the physical world in a manner that would be unimaginable 50 years ago. Applying Morton’s theories of “ambient poetics” as “a materialist way of reading texts” (Morton, 2007, 3) seems to coincide with Kohler’s assertions.

In *The New Emily Dickinson Studies* (2019), three essays are significant in terms of recent and emerging research related to an environmental and ecopoetic context. In “Dickinson and Historical Poetics”, Gillian Kidd Osborne mentions Morton on several occasions in relation to his criticism of what he determines as “ecomimesis”, which is a term I introduce later. Although not relevant for my thesis, “Emily Dickinson’s Posthuman Worlds: Biopoetics and Environmental Subjectivity” by Colleen Glenny Boggs represents a branch of environmental and critical contexts related to biopoetics. “Criterion for tune: Dickinson and Sound” by Christiana Purgh, while not explicitly about ecopoetics has relevance for my own analysis of Dickinson’s poems as the article examines the “sonorous” aspects of the poems that relate to the synesthetic device. Jessica Lee Curran’s doctoral dissertation “From Mourning to Meditation: Theorizing Ecopoetics, Thinking Ecology” (2012) includes, alongside other poets, a selection of Dickinson’s poems which are analysed in relation to Morton’s environmental theories. Curran’s examination of poem 1400 casts relevant findings

⁵ “We have turned symptom to skill; recluse to citizen; a confined human body to a capacious human mind. As we often know her now, Dickinson thinks and writes firmly *in* the world; she is firmly in control of her engagement with the world; and she is engaged with everything: nineteenth century religion, war, politics, literary culture, philosophy, music, art, science, Darwinism, trains and telegraphy. She is war critic, legal analyst, political theorist, wry lampooner of transcendentalism, William Jamesian philosopher, and avid reader of popular and journalistic discourses.” (Kohler 2019, 3)

in conjunction with my own investigation of the poetry in correlation with “the ecological thought”.

Earlier Criticism: The “Strangeness” of Dickinson’s Poetry

Of prime interest is what is described as the “strangeness” of Dickinson’s poetry. Criticism that sheds light on the neglect of her poetry within a deconstructionist reception is also significant when viewed alongside Morton’s environmental aesthetics. These perspectives function as a subversive stream throughout my dissertation, underlining the poems’ philosophical trajectories.

Dickinson has been described as “indeterminate” (Raab 1998, 277). This is an attribute that can be detected in her poetry and the enigmatic perspectives that poem 258 exemplifies. The inability to categorise her poetry within any definite literary or theoretical category continues to be of interest to readers and figures in critiques of her work. Hence, it seems possible to regard the ambiguity as a strength that acknowledges her work as a unique literary accomplishment and distinguishes her poems as visionary and ahead of the time, they were written⁶. The “indeterminate” quality of her poems has created an ongoing fascination that Harold Bloom captured when he describes her elusiveness as a form of “originality” and “strangeness” comparable to Shakespeare’s uniqueness: “Except for Shakespeare, Dickinson manifests more cognitive originality than any other Western poet since Dante” (Bloom 1994, 273).

The “strangeness” that is accentuated by Bloom in his essay “Emily Dickinson: Blanks, Transports, the Dark” (1994) is central in his assessment of her inclusion into his canon⁷: “Strangeness, as I keep discovering, is one of the prime requirements for entrance into the canon” (Bloom 1994, 292). “Strangeness” is also a central idea that Morton employs in his ecological theories⁸. Henceforth, the examination of her poetry as ecopoetical recycles Bloom’s insights of “strangeness” into a contemporaneous ecological framework and may

⁶ This idea of her poetry being visionary and ahead of its time is a point I will be returning to in this introduction as it is important for my thesis.

⁷ Richard Sewall explains in his introduction “The Continuing Presence of Emily Dickinson” how Harold Bloom’s inclusion of Emily Dickinson in *The Western Canon* (1994) has given “official sanction to her continuing presence” (Sewall 1996, 6). Therefore, it appears to be her “indeterminacy” and “originality” that situates her poetry as being continually relevant.⁷ This “indeterminate” vein becomes an enigmatic strength, a “strangeness” that situates her work as highly nonconform and difficult to categorize.

⁸ I shall be elaborating more on these terms and other relevant concepts of Timothy Morton’s ecological theories as they are central for my close readings throughout the different chapters.

also enhance and contribute to an ecopoetic reading of the *Western Canon* (1994), at least in relation to Dickinson's poetry.

Her intellectual strength is also considered an attribute of her "strangeness" when Bloom refers to her as having "a power of mind" and exhibiting "cognitive originality" (Bloom 1994, 273). He concludes and emphasises the importance of her expressive "strangeness" and "cognitive strength" as communing a form of "transport"⁹.

Her originality is unmatched even by the strength of her poetic descendants. Wallace Stevens, Hart Crane, Elizabeth Bishop. Her canonicity results from her achieved strangeness, her uncanny relation to the tradition. Even more, it ensues her cognitive strength and rhetorical agility not from her gender or from any gender-derived ideology. Her unique transport her Sublime, is founded upon her unnamings of all our certitudes into so many blanks; and it gives her, and her authentic readers another way to see, almost into the dark. (Bloom 1994, 288)

If one is to expand upon the concept of "strangeness" then perhaps "to see almost into the dark" can also be understood as an important ecopoetic aspect of her poetry. In addition, I suggest that her "strangeness", due to how it has influenced and can be detected in future modernist and contemporary poetry, also determines what Bloom refers to as a "transport" and legacy of her "strange" influence into present day contexts. There is wide consensus that her poetry, whilst written during Romanticism, has influenced modernist and contemporary writers, as her poetry continues to incite a current body of readers and critiques. For example, in her introduction to *Emily Dickinson. A Collection of Critical Essays* (1996), Judith Farr reaffirms the gravity her poems have incited for different poets:

That her poetry has informed modern poetry we learn from modern poets themselves. From the first, some of her best critics have been themselves distinguished poets (...) Theodor Roethke, e.e. cummings, Richard Wilbur, Robert Frost and W.H. Auden as men whose verse pays her the tribute of imitation. I would like to add the names of T.S. Eliot, William Carlos Williams, Hart Crane, and Robert Bly (who once imagined death as crossing a distance by night to the "chapel" of Dickinson's grave). To a whole line of women writers from Marianne Moore and Louise Bogan to Elizabeth Bishop and Adrienne Rich, she has been in feminist parlance, a "foremother". Calling Dickinson "modern" or "crypto modern" is a facile generalization from qualities that she does indeed project. (Farr 1996, 12)

⁹ These are aspects that I find important as observations for my own field of enquiry and "transport" will be a term that I will use where I consider appropriate. Dickinson's "transport" in terms of an ecopoetic arena.

The poetic technique referred to as “strangeness” has evidently influenced and been “transported” through to modernist and contemporary poets. This means that if Dickinson’s poetry “transports” “strangeness” and if this is an attribute of “the ecological thought”, then “strangeness” as an eco-poetical aspect could categorise a spectrum of other poets as eco-poetical. Hence, investigating eco-poetical aspects of Dickinson’s poetry indirectly encompasses a wide range of poets and their poetry, such as T.S. Eliot, William Carlos Williams through to Marianne Moore.

Emily Dickinson’s Poetry as Visionary

In his essay “Dickinson and Literary Theory”, Roland Hagenbüchle creates an overview of “the impact of critical thought on Dickinson” (Hagenbüchle 1998, 357)¹⁰. As he chronologically assesses the theoretical and critical reception of her poetry and exhibits the multi-faceted approaches to her poems, he poses the question, “What have the several approaches contributed to our overall understanding of Dickinson’s work, and (conversely) which are their respective blind spots?” (Hagenbüchle 1998, 357). Of particular interest are “the blind spots” related to Dickinson’s reception within the framework of deconstructionist theory¹¹. Hagenbüchle adamantly claims that deconstructionist aspects are teeming and present in Emily Dickinson’s poetry: “No doubt Dickinson’s paradoxical text, in conflict with itself, is invariably ahead of the critique. Deconstructive criticism only throws into relief what the poet has already done in full awareness of the issues in question. It is the critics’ demanding task to set forth how Dickinson is ahead” (Hagenbüchle 1998, 379). To be “ahead” of deconstructionist criticism is an important point that I now elaborate upon in terms of Morton’s theories and an aspect that has proven to be important for the analysis of her poems.

¹⁰ An example of the myriad of contexts where Dickinson’s poetry has been discussed is within “Impressionistic Beginnings, New Criticism, Structuralism, Archetypal and Myth Criticism, Psychoanalytical Criticism Biography in Context, Cultural Criticism, Feminist Criticism, Dialogic Criticism, Reader Response Theory, Phenomenology, Deconstruction and Hermeneutics ” is “What have the several approaches contributed to our overall understanding of Dickinson’s work, and (conversely) which are their respective blind spots?”(Hagenbüchle 1998, 357).

¹¹“One might wonder whether there is a specific rationale for the deconstructive neglect of Emily Dickinson’s work (...) No doubt Dickinson’s paradoxical text, in conflict with itself, is invariably ahead of the critique. Deconstructive criticism only throws into relief what the poet has already done in full awareness of the issues in question. It is the critics demanding task to set forth how Dickinson is ahead (...). In order to throw Dickinson’s astounding arsenal of deconstructive features into full relief, it would be requisite to examine, in detail, how the poetry’s (ant)agonistic elements are brought into play on all levels stylistic, rhetorical, aesthetic, and sociocultural (Hagenbüchle 1998, 379)

Firstly, Morton's ecological and environmental theory is derived and inspired by deconstructionist theory. In the introduction to *Ecology without Nature. Rethinking Environmental Aesthetics* (2007) Morton explains the importance of deconstructionist theory and philosophy in relation to ecocriticism, where he positions his own ecological constructs and distinguishes between postmodernism and deconstruction:

I do, however, distinguish between postmodernism, as cultural and ideological form, and *deconstruction*. *Ecology without Nature* is inspired by the way in which deconstruction searches out, with ruthless and brilliant intensity, points of contradiction and deep hesitation in systems of meaning. If ecological criticism had a more open and honest engagement with deconstruction, it would find a friend rather than an enemy. (Morton 2009, 6)

The theoretical framework related to deconstructionist philosophy in *Ecology without Nature. Rethinking Environmental Aesthetics* (2007) and in his later work is elaborated upon later; however, this citation positions him for now within deconstructivism, and is important to highlight. If it is correct that Dickinson's poetry was "ahead" of the time it was written and that a deconstructionist critic of her work should "throw into relief what the poet has already done in full awareness", then reading her poetry within the context of "the ecological thought" is a form of releasing and understanding her poems and poetics as a precursor of deconstructivism. Consequently, this aligns her within an ecological reference point, proving that she was "ahead of her time".

Another interesting observation is how Morton uses poetry from the Romantic period to exemplify his ecological theories, as he explains, for example, in his introduction to *Ecology without Nature. Rethinking Environmental Aesthetics* (2007):

Throughout this book, I read texts from the Romantic period, not only because they exemplify, but also because they do *not* accord with the various syndromes and symptoms that emerge from this very period. At the precise moment at which the trajectories of modern ecology were appearing other pathways became possible (...) I have chosen to discuss authors of English literature with whom I am familiar: Blake, Coleridge, Levertov, Wordsworth, Mary Shelley, Thoreau, Edward Thomas. Many agree that they are ecological authors, yet their attitudes are not simple or direct, especially in the context of the other writers. (Morton 2009, 7)

While the framework for “an environmental aesthetic” is in dialogue with a diversity of poets, interestingly Morton has not included Dickinson, despite the fact that she evolves from the Romantic era and also seems to incorporate deconstructivist aspects in the poetry. Morton’s exclusion of her poetry in his books has aroused my curiosity. I have found that there are many clear indications that her poetry deserves a more serious inclusion in Morton’s discourses because her work appears to be “ahead of her time” and incorporates deconstructive aspects.

Finally, the visionary attributes of Dickinson’s poetry indicating that she “is invariably ahead of the critique” (Hagenbüchle 1998, 379) are interesting. The anticipation of her poetry being “ahead”, somehow mystically placed within the future and defying the period it was written during the nineteenth century, forges yet another connection related to Morton’s “environmental aesthetics”. In *The Ecological Thought* (2010) he illustrates the visionary attributes of poetry from Percy Bysshe Shelley to emphasise the important role of art, stating ecological art is “Like the shadow of an idea not yet fully thought, a shadow from the future” (Morton 2010, 2). This demonstrates how he believes that “ecologically aware art” or “environmental art” casts and communicates from a future resonance or perhaps a dimension of “the infinite”¹². This thesis is similarly confirmed by Hagenblüche in his 1998 essay where he maintains that it is the critic’s role to shed light on and bring forth “the relief” of the poems’ visionary properties: “It is the critic’s demanding task to set forth how Dickinson is ahead” (Hagenbüchle 1998, 379). That Dickinson “is ahead” can also be redirected back to Bloom’s description of her philosophical abilities; he suggests how mysteriously “Emily Dickinson rethought everything for herself” (Bloom 1994, 272). Thus, this guides the discussion back to the “strangeness” of her poetry and why this trait is reiterated throughout this dissertation. These avenues from differing receptions of her poetry exemplify why an eco-poetical examination offers an alternative theoretical framework that can contextualise both Dickinson’s poetry and the influence of her legacy on prior and contemporaneous scholarship.

¹² These visionary properties attributed certain forms of “art” will be introduced and elaborated upon later on in my dissertation. Specifically, in the third chapter when I analyze poem 883 analyzing temporal aspects to the poem and questioning whether “ecological art” can generate “utopian energy”.

Theoretical Framework

Ecopoetics

Ecopoetics is a relatively new term that has evolved gradually since 1945 and has a certain unbounded capacity to include a host of different perspectives, that are not only limited to poetry but also to a spectre of different arenas. The diversity encompassing an ecopoetic field has been described in a recent anthology of essays, *Ecopoetics. Essays in the field* (2018), where the scope of this expanding area is explained as:

Ecopoetics can encompass experiments in community making, ranging from poetry and visual art, literary criticism, and performance to walking, foraging, farming, cooking, and being alongside each other, whether human or other than human, in space and place. The fullness of these practices reflects the Greek etymological roots of ecopoetics: “eco” from *oikos*, meaning “family,” “property,” and “house”, and poetics” from *poiesis*, meaning “to make,” in a broad sense”. (Hume and Osborne 2018, 2)

This description of the ecopoetic field establishes a point of departure to understand the magnitude of this ever-growing arena of study. In this dissertation I use the term “ecopoetics” in relation to poetry and poetics. I also choose to use it synonymously wherever ecopoetry may occur.¹³

In the introductory essay to “Ecopoetics as Expanded Critical Practice”, this term is described as “the incorporation of an ecological or environmental perspective into the study of poetics” (Hume and Osborne, 2018, 2). This infers that “ecopoetics” embraces a diverse field of ecological perspectives and can be understood as an arena that “is not meant to narrow but to open the conversation about poetry’s relationship to the environments” (Hume and Osborne, 2013, 2)¹⁴. It is thus explained to be a growing and expanding academic category of poetry and poetics and should be regarded and included as not merely a

¹³ “Ecopoetry” can be understood as synonymous with “ecopoetics” and has since the 1960’s become a literary category and expanding forum of study due to the escalating environmental crisis. This has been articulated by Wirth and Street as “In recent decades, the term “ecopoetry” has come into use to designate poetry that in some way is shaped by and responds specifically to that crisis” (Wirth and Street, 2013, 18).

¹⁴ To illustrate how this has been accomplished they refer to poetry anthologies from the past decade that have been edited by poets and include *The Ecopoetry Anthology* edited by Ann Fisher-Wirth and Laura-Gray Street, “*The Ecopoetry Anthology*, which showcases a range of formal techniques, suggesting connections among various periods, and schools, and traditions(...)demonstrate an expansive engagement with the concept of nature by poets, some of whom have been the most commonly anthologized and others who had previously been left out of nature poetry canons”(Hume and Osborne 2018, 3).

“subcategory” but a growing “coextension of post-1945 poetry and poetics” (Hume and Osborne, 2018, 3).

Henceforth, I explore this term as an important “coextension of poetry and poetics” (Hume and Osborne, 2018, 3) and use the categories from *The Ecopoetry Anthology* (2013) to place Dickinson within this amorphous field. In addition, I apply Morton’s “ambient poetics” as an important aspect of an “ecopoetic” enquiry as I analyse Dickinson’s poems. This contributes to a wider understanding of an ecological framework that relates to poetry and poetics. I now elaborate and outline relevant aspects of Morton’s environmental theories in relation to my dissertation.

An Outline of “The Ecological Thought”

We simply can’t unthink modernity. If there is any enchantment it lies in the future. The ecological “enchants the world,” if enchantment means exploring the profound and wonderful openness and intimacy of the mesh. What can we make of these new constellations? What art, literature, music, science and philosophy are suitable to it? Art can contain utopian energy. (Morton 2012, 104)

Morton’s theories challenge and explore environmental philosophy and offer alternative perspectives related to literary criticism and ecocriticism. Through the works¹⁵ studied for this project I have become aware of how his environmental philosophy is diverse, eclectic, esoteric and initially a complex territory to command due to the various aspects of interaction¹⁶. He describes the central theory as “the ecological thought” which embraces an environmental philosophy. His model enhances “coexistence” and develops an “intimacy” with what he regards as the “inherent mystery” of our lives and the environment. He envisions “coexistence” as creating an intimacy with all environments and lifeforms that defies an anthropocentric view and appropriation of the environment. These concepts are illustrated in *The Ecological Thought* (2010):

¹⁵ *Ecology Without Nature. Rethinking Environmental Aesthetics* (2007), *The Ecological Thought* (2010), *Dark Ecology. For a Logic of Future Existence* (2018), *Being Ecological* (2016), *Humankind. Solidarity with Nonhuman People* (2019).

¹⁶ As I have already mentioned, his theoretical fundament is connected to “developments in postmodern and deconstructive thinking” (Morton 2009, 22)

Ecology includes all the ways we imagine how we live together. Ecology is profoundly about coexistence. Existence is always coexistence. ‘No man is an island’. Human beings need each other as much as they need an environment. Human beings *are* each other’s environment (Morton 2014, 4)

What is particularly important for the discursive veins of this dissertation, and raises intricate questions, is the interesting assertion that ecological reflection demands “a particular kind of thinking”. Morton claims that “Once you start to think the ecological thought, you can’t unthink it (...) once it’s open, there’s no closing” (Morton 2010, 4). He explains that this is due to an action of “openness” (Morton 2010, 4). At a deeper level, the concept of “the ecological thought” and the action it entices relates to acknowledging the “Infinite”, to become intimate with the “unknown”. This is directly connected to Emmanuel Levinas’s philosophy¹⁷ that is defined as belonging to a phenomenological–descriptive approach to ethics¹⁸.

According to Morton, the “openness” and action attributed “the ecological thought” is generated within the “arts”. Therefore, the forum of “art” is given an important role. In his introduction to *Ecology without Nature. Rethinking an Environmental Aesthetics* (2007) he introduces and explores what he defines as “ambient poetics”, an aspect of “environmental aesthetics”. Within this forum I found relevant theoretical veins that are used in this dissertation. Morton defines ambient poetics as a means of analysing different media from an environmental perspective:

I outline a theory of *ambient poetics*, a materialist way of reading texts with a view to how they encode the literal space of their inscription—if there is such a thing—the spaces between the words, the margins of the page, the physical and social environment of the reader. This has a bearing on the poetics of sensibility out of which Romanticism emerged in the late eighteenth century. Environmental aesthetics is frequently if not always caught in this materialism. (Morton 2009, 3)

¹⁷ *Facing Nature. Levinas and Environmental Thought* seeks to cast perspectives on Levinas’s relevance for an environmental philosophy. The book determines Levinas’s position within this field although his philosophy has been ignored in many eco-critical forums. Thus, accordingly it is possible to “explore the myriad possibilities that Levinas presents for thinking about nature, humans and the relationship between them” (Edelglass 2012, viii).

¹⁸ Levinas’s philosophy will be further explained and explored in chapter 2 and chapter 3 of my dissertation.

Ambient poetics is therefore a materialistic means towards establishing an environmental aesthetics that can change ideas about nature and the environment. This hopeful transition is based upon changing the concept and idea of nature, “the very idea of nature (...) strange as it may sound, is getting in the way of ecological forms of culture, philosophy, politics and art” (Morton 2009, 1).

Morton gives “art” an important role and claims that our idea of “nature” and the paradoxes this incites can be transformed within the arena of art. He argues, “for it is art that the fantasies we have about nature takes shape—and dissolve”. Basically, ambient poetics is an aspect of the term he later establishes in *The Ecological Thought* (2010) and *Being Ecological* (2018) that comprises a vast field of philosophy, art and poetics that challenges many dominant assumptions. “But *Ecology without Nature* does challenge the assumptions that ground ecocriticism. It does so with the aim of not shutting down ecocriticism but of opening it” (Morton 2009, 9).

Subsequently, Morton adamantly creates discourses within this established field that intend to “open” ecocriticism instead of “shutting it down”¹⁹. His project from 2007 and through to current discourses appears to be a continuum and an elaboration of the concepts he establishes in *Ecology without Nature. Rethinking an Environmental Aesthetics* (2007). Therefore, ambient poetics is central for what he later develops and terms “the ecological thought”.

Method and Structure

Exploring ecopoetic aspects of Dickinson’s poetry²⁰ takes a point of departure by analysing the poetic techniques and materialistic aspects of her poetry in relation to theories of ambient poetics that incorporate theories of “negation”. My enquiry coincides with Morton’s claim that determines the role that “art” has in developing environmental thinking. As he conveys in *The Ecological Thought*:

¹⁹ Morton’s criticism of “ecocriticism” will be contextualized in the Chapter 3 of this dissertation when he uses the term “Bleak language” that will be deliberated upon.

²⁰ I have chosen to read the poems as they appear in the *The Complete Poems of Emily Dickinson* (1961) from T.A. Johnson’s edition. The numbering of the poems are as they appear in this edition.

Thinking the ecological thought is difficult: it involves becoming open, radically open—forever, without the possibility of closing again. Studying art provides a platform, because the environment is partly a matter of perception. Art forms have something to tell us about the environment, because they can make us question reality. (Morton 2010, 8)

The “openness” he refers to is interesting in terms of the way Dickinson’s poetry is also described as being “open” and creates “possibility”. To explore ecopoetic aspects demands a reading that “slows down”. Morton explains this praxis of slowing down and close reading as a contemplative process that encompasses what he describes as attentively “staying as open as possible in an opening questioning mode” (Morton 2010, 8). This mode of reading is, in fact, an ecological action. He explains this action as:

Thinking that is ecological, a contemplating that is doing. Reframing our world, our problems and ourselves is a part of the ecological project. This is what *praxis* means—action that is thoughtful and thought that is active. Aristotle asserted that the highest form of *praxis* was contemplation (Morton 2010, 9).

This indicates that at a meta-reflexive level, my masters project participates in an ecopoetic project that can perhaps be understood as an ecological action due to reading methods that intend to read slowly and contemplatively. This “*praxis*” allowed the poems to maintain a mode of “openness” as I analysed them. I allowed my analysis to be directed by what the poems revealed and exposed ecopoetically. This inevitably influenced the theoretical trajectories of this dissertation and resulted in some surprising findings.

Thirdly, the idea of “reframing our world” by exploring and examining art and initiating “thoughtful action” was an important incentive for this project and an inspiring idea for my analysis of Dickinson’s poems as I sought to “slow down” expose and unravel what might be interpreted as ecopoetic aspects using Morton’s concept of ambient poetics to support my analysis of her poems. Therefore, my intentional reading methods also contribute to identifying how this dissertation may interconnect with “the ecological thought”.

Structural Outline

This master’s dissertation is divided into three chapters. Chapters one and two open with an analysis of Dickinson’s poetry and Chapter Three elaborates the discoveries established in the prior chapters and introduces further aspects related to “the ecological thought”. Chapter One

commences with an analysis of poem 258, “There’s a certain Slant of light,” whereby I examine the imagery of “light” in relation to the synesthetic trope. I contextualise this within a musical aesthetic and further analyse theories related to Morton’s concept of “ecomimesis” and the environmental aesthetics of “ambient poetics”.

In Chapter Two I introduce and analyse poem 1400, “What mystery pervades a well!” I explore “the ecological thought” in terms of theories related to “the mesh”, “interconnectedness” and “the strange stranger”. I also introduce Derrida’s philosophy of “hospitality” and further analyse the poem in conjunction with Emmanuel Levinas’s theories of “ethics and the face”. Dickinson’s “poetics of circumference” as apophatic poetics is central when I re-examine the theory of negation.

Finally, in Chapter Three I return to Poem 258, “There’s a certain Slant of light” to re-establish and deepen the analysis of luminosity and the synesthetic device in the poem. I also introduce poem 883, “The poets light but Lamps –” to elaborate and introduce theories of “veering” and “attunement” related to poetry’s possibility of generating “utopian energy” as it pertains to “the ecological thought”. The term “spectral resonances” is established to encompass the spectral traits of luminous phenomena that the synesthetic device manifests in the poems. I include poem 1400 comparatively in my discussions when necessary. Finally, I conclude with an analysis of Levinas’s construct of “Il y a” that incorporates theories of negation and focuses on the materiality and resonances of light from a phenomenological perspective, discerning his category of the “Infinite”.

Chapter 1

In this opening chapter I shall commence with an analysis of poem 258. The central aspect that will be explored is the significance of the synesthetic trope in relationship to the environmental aesthetics of Timothy Morton. This chapter primarily focuses on the concepts of “ecomimesis” and “ambient poetics”. These constructs are further interrelated to theories of “the remark”, “the negative poetics of environmental thinking” “ecotone” and “the aeolian”. The importance a musical aesthetic had for the Romantic era and how this has influenced Dickinson’s poetry will also be contextualized. The relevance of musical aspects will be further linked to recent scholarship that engages with the role of “sonorous” attributes for a reading of her poetry as environmental. Dickinson’s idiosyncratic punctuation will additionally be discussed as it is an important technique that alludes to elliptical techniques of her work and is linked to musical traits and further aligned with concepts of “negation” and an environmental aesthetics.

Poem 258 “There's a certain Slant of light,”

Opening with the bleak light of a winter afternoon, the first quatrain of poem 258²¹ invites the reader immediately into an atmospheric landscape “There's a certain Slant of light, / Winter Afternoons – / That oppresses, like the Heft / Of Cathedral Tunes –” are reversed verse lines conveying a particular kind of light with a slanted movement that constitutes an uncanny oppressiveness. This is partly due to the simile that compares the “light,” with ecclesial music resonating from the suppressive melodies of a cathedral “Heft of Cathedral Tunes –”.

A strange paradox is instantaneously introduced where the ethereal nature of music “Tunes –” and a ray of “light,” are attributed descriptions of spatial weight and mass. These melodious “Cathedral Tunes –” that are paradoxically heavy or burdensome as described in “Heft”, seem to invoke images that are reminiscent of the sublime stature of a Gothic cathedral.

In such a construction the pointed, vertical columns with arches around the nave, usually reach up to swerving heights, with vaults that soar upwards creating spatial elements that render illusions of weightlessness despite the heavy edifice of stone.

²¹ The poem can be read in its entirety in Appendix 1.

The incandescent imagery within this comparative context can be equated to the way shafts of light actually enter cathedrals as for example Notre Dame in France. This comparison is derived from the experience one can have when entering such an architectural space, where the interior is often austere, somber and dark, yet, sunlight streams into the interior spaces from multiple angles, indicating different directions structured by the placement of stained-glass windows. The atmosphere inside is often saturated with different colours and the luminosity acts as a theatrical requisite. These prised resonances intermingle and occasionally appear to soar, with the powerful resonances of church organs, choir song, or the murmuring incantations of prayers and sermons, blended with scented incense the atmosphere is sensual but other-worldly. Cathedrals during such sequences are saturated with an enigmatic ambience where the atmosphere is intense, dense and all-pervasive as it seeps into the opaque, obscure spaces where light cannot enter and one as a recipient becomes submerged with this phenomenon.

The atmospheric description is comparable to the particular “Slant” and “light” that immerses the four quatrains of Dickinson’s poem. The first two stanza’s “There’s a certain Slant of light, / Winter Afternoons –” alludes to these luminous shafts of light that vibrate with the colour and music that intermittently occur inside Cathedrals. These ethereal qualities of music, whether they are hymns or a requiem emerge as momentary images and create contrasts against the heavy edifice of the cathedral’s stones. The association to the heavy oppressive and timeless quality of stone that the poem implicitly conveys is additionally enhanced and reflected in the structure of the poem’s four quatrains. These stanzas are also reminiscent of the stones that form and structure the cathedrals edifice. Such analogous parallels also reiterate the pedantic and predictable structure of psalms.²² Furthermore, the poem at a meta-poetic level, reflects the architecture of the “Cathedral”. The text on the paper like the stone foundation of a cathedral materializes the poem’s timeless architectural design that contains and conveys the mystical “Slant of light,”.

These vivid, phenomenological associations of the poem are rendered with the poetic technique of the synesthetic device. Synesthesia immerses the entire poem and is explicitly demonstrated in the “Slant of light,”, the auditive imagery of the “Cathedral Tunes –” and the

²² Dickinson’s relationship to psalms is referred to as “Dickinson’s meter is all too often connected to hymns and the divorced from the music that would have accompanied those hymns. Any nineteenth-century ballad meter hymn read as a poem sounds monotonous, mechanical and trite. But when it is sung, the music temporally expands the words often allotting several notes to a single word; and it adds texture through variations in tone and pitch.” “While there is no evidence that Dickinson had contemporary music in mind when she wrote her poems, her repeated references to herself as a singer and the hymns in which her culture was steeped mean that this possibility cannot be excluded (Farr 1996, 199).

concluding noun “Death –” in the last verse line of the fourth quatrain. The phenomena seems to swerve and fluctuate both around the imagined heaviness of the stone and also incorporates imagery that create an implicit oxymoron of “light,” and weight “Heft”. Synesthetic climaxes of undulating rhythms comparable to crescendos and decrescendos draw upon allusions of sacred liturgical music and this is additionally accentuated by the alliteration and assonances that correlate to the musicality of the language as the following examples demonstrate in the alliterations “l” “Slant of light,” and “H” “Heavenly Hurt,”.

In the concluding quatrain another example of an oxymoronic context related to the image of “light,” is apparent where the verbs to “come” and to “go” alternate and enhance the rhythmic crescendos “When it comes, the Landscape listens –” and “When it goes, ’tis like the Distance”. Other examples of oxymorons inherent in the poem that create tension and a dynamic, are the acts of listening and breathing “listens” as opposed to “shadows holding their breath”, “Distance,” and “Death –”. The transitions in this quatrain create an obscure darkened landscape where the synesthetic light that rhythmically comes and goes is unpredictable, enticing forth a landscape that both listens and also uncannily seems to connect with the strange “Slant of light,”. The personified imagery of “Shadows –” concluding with a dash, poses questions as to who or what stops breathing and who or what is listening? There is simultaneously as the acts of breathing and listening are halted, a continuum that is created by the specific punctuation of the verse lines, as the dashes prolong the movement of light throughout the temporal scape of the poem²³. When the light disappears, the “Landscape” is described as unanimated, the movement and tonal resonances of elegiac tunes terminates as the landscape recedes and finally expires in a silent dash of “Death –”. The synesthetic “Slant of light,” resonates beyond the structure of the poem into a reservoir of ambiguous silence.

The Context of a Musical Aesthetic

Dickinson’s relationship to music and the importance of “auditory images and aural figures” (Farr 1996, 207) is a generally accepted fact. Her repetitive use of poetic devices that explore and convey sonorous attributes in her poetry has also become a recent field of research and is interrelated with environmental theory. This central aspect of her poetry, as Christina Pugh identifies in her recent essay “Criterion for Tune: Dickinson and Sound” (2019) articulates:

²³ Dickinson’s poetic technique of idiosyncratic punctuation and how this is closely related to music and the musicality of her poems.

Throughout Emily Dickinson's poems, we hear hefty cathedral tunes, talking cornets, and bells of every aural stripe. The significance of these sounds with their variegated pitches, must not be lost as we begin to limn a "new" Dickinson, as it is impossible to overstate the role that sonic values play in the genesis and instantiations of her poems. (Kohler 2019, 66)

The preoccupation with a "sonorous" dimension was also prominent during the era Dickinson was writing and developing her poetry and poetics. This passionate response to music has also been analyzed and documented in letters she wrote. Judy Jo Small explains the importance a musical aesthetic had for her poetry explaining how it was often reliant on "auditory images and aural figures referring to metaphysical concepts" (Farr 1996, 207). The effects sound had on the meanings conveyed in Dickinson's poetry was a trait of her "keen auditory sensitivity" and "to the ways sound conveys meaning". (Farr 1996, 207)

It appears explicit that the ways in which she used "sound devices" in her work was a conscious and deliberate technique. The use of "auditory and aural images" can further be linked to inspiration that emerged from Verlaine and Emerson. Small verifies this influence by citing Verlaine who declared "Music is before everything" and she indicates how Emerson similarly claims how "whenever we are so finely organized that we can penetrate into that region where the air is music, we hear those primal warblings and attempt to write them down (Farr 1996, 211). Furthermore, she informs how Dickinson's poetry was influenced by Thomas Carlyle²⁴ and in his written discussion of the hero as poet states how "A musical thought is one spoken by a mind that has penetrated into the inmost heart of the thing; detected the inmost mystery of it, namely the melody that lies hidden in it: the inward harmony of coherence which is its soul (...) see deep enough, and you see musically, the heart of Nature being everywhere music, if you can only reach it" (Farr 1996, 211).

All of these influences stemming from different avenues related to music and the sublime were important facets of the Romantic era and a widely acknowledged fact. Small elaborates upon this explaining how "The association of music with sublimity permeated the age". She continues to describe how the Romantic era embraced the conception and aesthetic of music and cites Joseph Kerman who informs that "music became the paradigmatic art for the Romantics because it was the freest, the least tied down to earthly manifestations such as representation in painting and denotation in literature"(63). The valid of music is summed up

²⁴ "Whose portrait Dickinson kept on her wall" (Farr 1996, 211). Although I realize this is biographical facts that does not necessarily have any impact on my analysis of her work, I still find this information interesting as it amplifies the importance of a musical aesthetic.

in Walter Pater's renowned pronouncement "that all art constantly aspires towards the condition of music" (Farr 1996, 211). The aesthetic of music during the Romantic era inevitably signals an important theory that preoccupied many artists.

The influential and significant impact of music is supportive for contextualizing perspectives a musical aesthetic played for Dickinson's poetry. The idea of penetrating into the "heart of nature" of penetrating and listening into "the innermost heart of the thing" and aspiring to Walter Pater's renowned statement, stresses how the relationship of all art to music was relevant for many poets of this epoch (Farr 1996, 211). The notion of deep listening and attuning intimately to the environment are important aspects to maintain as an analysis of the synesthetic attributes of poem 258 will be further explored.

Ecomimesis

The influences stemming from music and the predominant role a musical aesthetic played for Dickinson's poetry, can be detected in the strange "light" kindled in poem 258 where exposure and concealment are at work. These movements created by the presence and absence of "light," incorporates a form of "negative imagery" that can be understood as circulating on an unstable oxymoronic axis of light, darkness and death. The instability of the poem's assumed axis generates an "ambience" that can be analyzed in relationship to Morton's theories of environmental aesthetics and particularly with the concepts of "ecomimesis" and "ambient poetics".

In *Ecology without Nature. Rethinking Environmental Aesthetics* (2007) Morton derives a theoretical platform in order to rethink an environmental aesthetics. In an eclectic and seeking manner, he develops a specific term that he defines as "ecomimesis". The theory of "ambience" incites a variation of interrelated concepts that predominantly restructures certain rhetorical assumptions linked to environmental writing and fictional genres of nature writing. He introduces the concept "ecomimesis" and exemplifies how many texts related to nature-writing or the environment employ certain strategies that reinforce a view of nature as being a stable and static entity by criticizing this construct he paves the way for an alternative philosophical framework.

He illustrates how, the intention and concept of "a solid, veridical and independent" notion of the environment, that can be detected in the writing processes related to nature writing seeks to create a concept of "nature" as a stable universe outside the text (Morton 2009, 30). This he asserts is only an illusion. For the actual writing process is in fact brought into a sphere

that he describes as containing “slippery, tricksterish qualities of never quite meaning what it says or saying what it means” (Morton 2009, 31). Hence, the rhetorical intention of such environmental writing, is as he describes, attempting to point at an environment that is both “authentic and authenticating” (Morton 2009, 31). However, this is a rhetorical device that is illusionary “The rhetorical device usually serves the purpose of coming clean about something “really” occurring, definitively “outside” the text” (Morton 2009, 31). To illustrate and elaborate upon a critique of this rhetorical device he explains how “ecomimesis” represents an alternative, and adamantly claims “The device -I call it *ecomimesis*- wants to go beyond the aesthetic dimension altogether. It wants to break out of the normative aesthetic frame, go beyond art” (Morton 2009, 31). What he is pointing to, is “a vivid evocation of atmosphere” (Morton 2009, 32).

Ecomimesis relates to what Morton perceives of as “An ambient poetics”. Henceforth, the “vivid evocation of atmosphere” is manifested as a trait of “ambient” theory. He explains and captures this in the following explanation:

Ecomimesis involves a poetics of *ambience*. Ambience denotes a sense of a circumambient, or surrounding, *world*. It suggests something material and physical, though somewhat intangible, as if space itself had a material aspect-an idea that should not, after Einstein, appear strange. Ambience derives from the Latin word *ambo*, “on both sides”. Ambient poetics could apply as easily to music, sculpture, or performance art. Ambience, that which surrounds on both sides can refer to the margins of a page, the silence before and after music, the frames and walls around a picture, the decorative spaces of a building (*paregon*), including *niches* for sculpture-a word that was later taken up in ecological language. Ambience gives rise to a highly specific version: the *nature* rendered by ecomimesis (Morton 2009, 34)

The concept of “ambience” adheres to a “surrounding world” and emphasizes attention to both interior and exterior environments. The ambiguity of this “device” results in a theory that is both complex and multi-faceted. He explains how “ambience” incorporates six different elements “rendering, the medial, the timbral, the Aeolian, tone and most fundamentally the remark” (Morton 2009, 34). These elements are not categorized as isolated entities but are permeable, linked with each other and interactive in “multi-media”, This is particularly related to the “synesthetic” device. In an explanatory manner he illustrates these terms as follows:

Rendering refers to the result of ambient poetics, its telos. Tone describes the material makeup. Medial, Aeolian and timbral refer to technical or “efficient” processes -effects. (...) The fact that the terminology derives from the diverse forms reflects the significance of multi-media in general, and synesthesia in particular, in inspiring the notion of an ambient poetics. (Morton 2009, 34)

Thus, “ambient poetics” derived from the concept of “ecomimesis” where “synesthesia” has a central influence forges a particular agenda in relationship to many art forms. Certain of these terms will now be highlighted before examining whether they interact with the synesthesia of Dickinson’s poem.

Ambient Poetics

Poem 258 with its opening shaft of “light,” initiates a definite sense of immediacy as it appears in the text. It creates a field infused with the ecclesial music of “Cathedral Tunes” and is pervaded with an “ambience” of architectural imagery. The translucent waning “Afternoon” haze resonating with aural tones has an enigmatic atmosphere that is definitely reminiscent of Romantic landscape paintings from the Nineteenth Century, such as the iconic painting by W. Turner *Rain, Steam and Speed* (1844)²⁵ painted with an enigmatic luminosity and devoid of a poignant light source. A landscape of light and subtle shades infuses the painting with a mysterious resonance as the gradients move across the canvas and are directed into the surfaces and generated visually through the painting, creating areas of shimmering surfaces and shaded recession. The “light,” and texture of the poem also has an equivalent gradient motion, comparable to the painting by Turner. There is a radiance that permeates the entire poem and generates a phenomenon that fathoms both a synesthetic dimension and creates echoes with the poetic devices that are used. This can be detected in the first verse line “There’s a certain Slant of light,” that creates an angled direction, by using alliteration in the phoneme’s “C” and “S”.

²⁵ This painting was finished in 1844 and poem 258 dates from 1861. The seventeen-year gap could insinuate that Dickinson was acquainted with Turner’s work at a later date. Although I do not impose that there is an influential relationship between his painting and her poetry, I do assume that there are similarities in the rendering of atmospheric tone and a use of synesthesia in both works due to the relevance a musical aesthetic had for this epoch and because she was acquainted with contemporaneous aesthetic theory. It is also documented how Romantic and early Impressionistic landscape painting influenced Dickinson. This has been particularly researched by Judith Farr “Dickinson’s nature poetry reflects her reading of Ruskin and her knowledge of Hudson River Painting. I would propose deeper study along these lines for evidence that techniques of painting and even the conceits of specific paintings are sometimes manifest in her poetry” (Farr 1996, 16).

The alliterative qualities of “L” from “Light” and “L” from “Slant” also reiterate and emphasize this movement in an onomatopoeic manner.

The synesthesia of the poem can be understood as creating a direct link to Morton’s “ambient poetics”. This releases an interesting hypothesis that questions, how the poems’ imagery could be linked with the different aspects of “ambient poetics”? In order to shed perspectives on this question, it is necessary to concentrate on the sub-categories of “ambient poetics” that Morton defines as the “Aeolian”, “tone” and the “re-mark”.

Ambience is explained as “an expansion of the space time continuum in an artwork, to the point at which time comes to a standstill” (Morton 2009, 43). In order to specify this claim and what tone “refers” to within an “ambient” aesthetic, he explains that from an environmental perspective “tone” is linked to “atmosphere”, referring to pitches and vibrations such as the resonating string of a cello or the general “circumambient” atmosphere of “place”. He thus elaborates and defines “Tone” as a place of “transition” denoting this phenomenon as “an ecotone” hence an “ecological transition” a threshold of conversion and “transition”.

Tone can denote the tension in a string or muscle (muscle tone) or a certain pitch. The way in which matter is vibrating. It also significantly, refers to a notion of place; hence “ecotone,” a zone of ecological transition. A rough equivalent is the German *Stimmung* (“mood” “attunement) (...) Tone accounts materially for that slippery word *atmosphere*. (Morton 2009, 43)

To deliberate more upon the significance of “tone”, “mood” and “atmosphere” within an ecological discourse he continues to explain how “Tone is useful because it ambiguously refers to the body and to the environment” (Morton 2009, 43). What he claims is that “the body (as it is called in contemporary art and theory) *is* the environment, in the conventional vulgar Cartesian sense.²⁶ “we inhabit the body” like a person living in a house. Environmental art makes us aware of our ears, just as much as it makes us aware of the atmosphere. But in so doing it nudges us out of vulgar Cartesianism, like phenomenological philosophy” (Morton 2009, 43).²⁷

²⁶ Timothy Morton adapts a subjective and crude criticism of Cartesian dualism. Later in his book *The Ecological Thought* (2010) and *Being Ecological* (2018a) the same critique is evident however Descartes is given a far more nuanced critique.

²⁷ Here Timothy Morton elaborates upon Merleau Ponty’s phenomenology “The linkage between perceiver and perceived” (Morton 2009, 44).

What constitutes an important role for an ecological perspective, is how an anthropocentric perspective is transformed when “tone” and “ambience” are experienced in a convergency of “atmosphere”. Yet, it is important to enquire what makes atmospheric conjunctions into “ecotones” or “zones of ecological transitions” and is it possible to detect this in poem 258? Morton proposes that “ecotones” are decentering agents’ claims are important aspects of “ambient poetics” because as he repeatedly asserts “Synesthetic works of art try to disrupt our sense of being centered, located in a specific place, inhabiting” the body” from a central point. Our senses are disorientated; we notice that our gaze is “over there,” our hearing is “outside” the room we are sitting in” (Morton 2009, 44).

The synesthetic experience can thus be understood as” a zone of ecological transition” as it is synonymous with the “disruption” of centeredness. In Dickinson’s poem the luminosity of the “Winter Afternoons –” and the oppressive weight of “Cathedral Tunes –” moves as previously suggested in a gradient fashion throughout the poem, akin to Turner’s painting *Rain, Steam and Speed* (1844). The “tone” of the poem like the painting, is both translucent and ethereal, yet heavy and oppressive. The verse line “Non may teach it – Any –” also accentuates the non-semantic feature of the “light,” and “Cathedral Tunes –”. A presence that cannot be articulated or taught. Hence, the “light,” disrupts, what is described as “a sense of being centered” from one particular viewpoint. The atmosphere, tone and pitch of “light,” has an all-pervasiveness that disorients. The luminosity has no center or source, similar to the Turner painting and has therefore connotations to “an ecotone” or “a zone of ecological transition”. The synesthetic “light,” disrupts a sense of being centered in a stable environment and creates an aesthetic experience that is transitional. Nature as a stable entity is deconstructed.

The “ecotone” is furthermore related to the concept of “Stasis” and is indicative of musical terminology. “Stasis” is explained as a standstill that becomes audible in a “musical suspension”, where one layer of sound changes more slowly than another layer” (Morton 2009, 44). These layers of sound and image related to “suspensions” or “suspension points” in a text coincide with the fourth quatrain. The concept of “stasis” can be detected as a musical dimension suspended in the verse lines “Heavenly Hurt, it gives us – / We can find no scar, / But internal difference – / Where the Meanings, are –”. The disparity of “internal difference” incorporates an ambiguous dissonance like a strange arrested, yet reverberating pitch. The dichotomy inherent in this image of “light,” functions both as stasis, a “suspension”, when “the light” disappears, yet strangely permeates the poem as a continuing “atmosphere”. It is implemented as an uncanny movement within the semantic weave of the text. The alternating tension inherent in the “light,” creates a tension that alludes to “internal difference” creating

“suspension” and “stasis”. Although the noun “Death –” abruptly concludes the poem in the last quatrain, the elliptical punctuation of the conclusive dash acts as a continuation of a “certain” tenure and indicative of a suspended disparity related to “ambience” or as Morton refers to as “an ecotone”.

Ellipsis

The “elliptical” plays an important role in terms of analyzing “ambient poetics” in Dickinson’s poetry. The way this trope is technically used in poem 258, suggests an environment that expands and embraces more than the narrative context of a certain time of day or landscape imagery, as the images of seasonal landscapes indicate “Winter Afternoons –” or a “Landscape”. The elliptical in the poem could be understood as creating an action that “decentralizes” the reader and refers to what Morton describes as a means of “nudging us out of Cartesianism”. What this insinuates is a shift from an anthropocentric to an eco-centric attunement. This occurs in the poem with the acoustic “light,” that immerses the poem, creating ambient strata and attuning with an environment that negates “a particular view of nature” that is constant and in Morton’s terms “authenticated”.

Synesthesia in the poem is a device that dislocates one’s “sense of being centered, of being located in a particular place, inhabiting the body from a particular point”. This decentering is accentuated by the elliptical qualities of poem 258. The elliptical is emphasized by the idiosyncratic use of punctuation and particularly in the repetitive use of dashes, such as in the fourth quatrain “When it comes the Landscape listens – / Shadows – hold their breath – / When it goes, 'tis like the Distance / On the look of Death –”. These verse lines show how Dickinson’s peculiar use of punctuation accentuates the elliptical attributes. There is an idiosyncratic rhythm that reoccurs and is amplified in the dashes that create pauses and silence, building up to an ambient tension in the last two verse lines where “Distance” and “Death –” are stressed with capitalization. The alliterative qualities of the consonant’s “D” add to the atmosphere of decline and acoustically in an onomatopoeic manner create a phonetic stress, that is abrupt, emphasizing the image of “Distance” and “Death –”. The continuum of silence proceeding “Death –” is emphasized by the dash as the final expression continues into the blankness of the white page.

These are elliptical intervals that obviously function as a negation to the semantic structure. Morton implies that “tone” is a matter of quantity, whether of rhythm or imagery” and that “this is how ambience enters the time dimension”. Hence, in connection to poem 258

the ambience of tone and atmosphere are created by, the imagery, the alliteration and the idiosyncratic use of punctuation. These elliptical aspects are directly equated with negation.

The Negative Poetics of Environmental Thinking

The ellipsis is furthermore a device that is incorporated into the concept of a “negative poetics”. In order to explain and understand what this term incorporates within the construct “ambient poetics” it appears necessary to understand how Morton contextualizes the theory of negation and poetics by aligning with Kant’s category of the sublime explaining how:

This language establishes a plateau on which all signals are equal in intensity-which might as well be silence. A negative quantity, the absence of something “there”, evokes a sense of sheer space. In Kant’s²⁸ terms, our mind recognizes its power to imagine what is not there: *Sublime is what even to be able to think proves that the mind has a power surpassing any standard of sense.* Kant demonstrates this by taking us on a journey of quantity, from the size of a tree, through that of a mountain, to the magnitude of the earth, and finally to the immense multitude of such Milky Way systems. The sublime transports the mind from the external to the internal one. (Morton 2009, 46)

By relating the theory of “ambient poetics” to Kant’s category of the Sublime he strengthens and supports the importance of “negation” that constitutes the elliptical device. To experience an evocative context of absence or the “the unknown”, is a means of forcing one “to imagine what is not there” and to recognize the mind’s ability to imagine” (Morton 2009, 46).

These constructs reflect the imaginative capacity that certain poetry conveys due to the “negative quantity” that it seems to produce. The poem by employing elliptical techniques can be further analyzed as an arena that establishes a pivotal point of transition, this can refer to what Morton calls “a transportation point” in the text. This “transportation point” functions as an opening where “negative imagery” allows the recipient of the poem to immerse with the unknown. Basically, what he implies is the burgeoning act of using one’s imagination to envision the mysterious and to envision “what is not there”. This is a vital capacity that poetry has. He articulates this action as an intense pause or slowing down:

Negative quantity, signified through ellipsis, or some other effect, is a suggestive transportation point in the text, which allows subjectivity to beam into it (...) This pausing is not a mere hiatus or stopping. It is a mere staying -in- place endowed with its own intensity. (Morton 2009, 46)

The ellipsis, therefore, plays an important role in terms of applying Morton's environmental aesthetics to poem 258, as it is definitively, an important figure of the poem. Negation can be further linked to a form of "negative imagery". He develops the theory by applying the theological term of "apophasis" and elaborates on this concept explaining how this form of "extreme negativity" enhances the materialistic qualities of the poem and by using Mallarmé and Heidegger' to exemplify "negative quantity" he explains how:

Negative imagery, or, *apophasis*-saying something in the negative. Negative theology asserts that God is not big, small, white, black, here, there...Extreme negativity consists in ellipsis (...) or silence. Even more extreme is placing a word under erasure as Mallarmé does (or consider Heidegger's word being). How do you pronounce a crossed -out word? The erasure compels us to pay attention to the graphic mark and the paper on which it is written (and the silence of the unspoken) (Morton 2009, 45)

Negative imagery, as explained by Morton, is an appropriate and illustrative theory that can be used for analyzing Dickinson's negation. In poem 258 the verse lines "Heavenly Hurt, it gives us – / We can find no scar, / But internal difference – / Where the Meanings, are –" builds up to a climax I would like to define as "negative quantity". The elliptical attributes that distinguish the absence of "light," by using dashes to amplify an action, that erases traces or "scars", creates a space that is beyond divisiveness. The synesthetic ambience of "light," could be understood as a "transportation point" in the poem due to its use of negation. The reader of the poem experiences a rhythmic intimacy and immersion with the phenomenon of "light," where an upheaval of sharp differentiations of foreground and background result in an ambiguous and shapeless interaction where spatiality, that normally divides imagery into foreground and background is dismantled as it continuously appears and disappears. The absent quantity of "light," continues to create confusion in terms of background and foreground, subject and object. The unpredictable dynamic is concluded in the final quatrain by repeating and amplifying the motion of coming and going "When it comes, the Landscape listens –/ When it goes, 'tis like the Distance". There is simultaneously a suspension here in the acute act of listening "the Landscape listens –", and the pulse of breath is halted and

freezes “Shadows –hold their breath –”. Yet, although the movement freezes it curiously continues as “negative imagery” due to the ellipsis signified by the concluding dash. Paradoxically, the “light,” has a continuing presence beyond the semantic structures of the poem, as it proceeds and is present as “negative imagery” inciting the mind to imagine what is not there and hence producing imaginative capacity in the reader of the poem. The synesthetic luminosity must be imagined.

The collapse of foreground and background due to the paradoxical “light,” also refers to what Morton defines as “an aeolian event” (Morton 2009, 47) and is a concept that correlates with the theory of “negative imagery”. This concept is explained as “a paradoxical situation in which foreground and background have collapsed in one sense but persist in another” (Morton 2009, 47). These transitional points can be detected in poem 258 with the disruption and interruption of “light,” where imagery such as the nouns “Cathedral Tunes”, “Landscape” and “Afternoon” that create spatial perspectives, are destroyed and disperse, due to the negational technique of the poem. This is exemplified when the “light,” disappears and dies in the final verse line with “Death –” yet simultaneously continues as negative imagery beyond the poem’s semantic nerve. This iconoclastic action instigated by the absence and the disappearance of “light,” seems to equate to “an aeolian event” where foreground and background continue in another spatial category or in Morton’s words “persist in another” (Morton 2009, 48). Yet what is important to maintain, is that foreground and background are never entirely destroyed. This is why Morton stresses the concept of the “re-mark” as an important concept of “ambient poetics”.

Hence, the concept of nature as a “stable” and permanent entity undergoes the same iconoclastic event as the figurative imagery in the poem. The poem’s negational action can be determined as additionally incorporating a “decentering” and an annihilation of anthropocentric perspectives, that as previously described are maintained within certain categories of nature writing. To explain this assertion in more depth it is necessary to return to the traits of luminosity present in Turner’s painting and compare this with the poem.

The ambiguous luminosity in the painting *Rain, Steam and Speed* (1844) immerses the figurative elements in light and dark tones, yet there is still a recognizable image of a blurred train vaguely composed frontally in the painting. The presence of the train situated in the painting is analogous to the “Landscape” of Dickinson’s poem that is structured in the same way, where the imagery never quite disappears but recedes and arrives with the “light,” from an “undifferentiated” background just like the train that emerges from a homogenous yet ambiguous field of erratic brushwork and colour saturation.

According to Morton a total collapse of foreground and background in a poem is not possible but can only be indicative, just like the Turner painting and poem 258. This is most probably why he introduces the concept of “the re-mark” as one of the most important concepts of “ambient poetics” because this device subtly differentiates between “space and place” just like the painting or the phenomena and landscape imagery of the poem. This device is distinguished as an “echo” or “flicker” in the text and originates from the art of painting and as Morton asserts is “the basic gesture” of “ambience”. He deduces that:

The re-mark is a fundamental property of ambience, its basic gesture. The remark is a kind of echo. It is a special mark (or a series of them) that makes us aware that we are in the presence of (significant marks). (...) A re-mark differentiates between *space* and *place*. In modern life this distinction is between objective (space) and subjective (place(phenomena)). (...) The illusive play of the re-mark establishes their difference out of an undifferentiated ground” (Morton 2009, 49)

In order to explain how the concept of the re-mark works in relationship to poetry he exemplifies this by experiences he has had with his students, explaining how “Every time I teach a class on ecological language at least one student asserts that “place” is what a person makes of “space” without reference to an outside”(Morton 2009, 49). He goes on to exemplify how this understanding of “place” is exactly how an anthropocentric view is enacted and elaborates upon this by saying “Even when it is external, place has become something that people *do* or construct; a space that, as it were, happens to someone (...) I am suggesting here that subjectivity and objectivity are just a hair’s breadth (if that) from each other. The illusive play of the re-mark establishes their difference out of an undifferentiated ground)” (Morton 2009, 49)

In poem 258 the “internal differences” inherent within the amorphous image of “light,” indicates that the “light” incorporates disparities “internal difference,” and appears to represent an “undifferentiated ground” where separation can exist. An opening and closure in the text, attunes the reader to an unstable space or environment, that negates an anthropocentric stance and alludes to an “aeolian event”. The poem concluding with “Death –” and the blankness of a dash then continuing into the whiteness of the page, creates both an atmosphere “stimmung” but also a void. The “there is” of the “light” which comes and goes forging presence and absence expresses an emptiness and a silence.²⁹

²⁹ In Chapter 3 I shall be elaborating more in-depth when I introduce Levinas’s theory of “Il y a”.

The eruption of subject and object, foreground and background becomes the “transportation point “of the poem, where one as a reader is attuned into the poem’s dichotomy of lightness and darkness. A “transport” (Bloom,1994) occurs where “negative quantity” is produced and the reader is maneuvered into an intimate dialogue with the density of darkness and silence, where “traces” are continuously “erased” yet repeatedly reappear to disappear again. The punctuation of the comma at the end of “light,” accentuates the continuing, incessant action. The synesthetic angles and “Slants” rhythmically coming and going at unpredictable intervals allude to strange echoes in the poem. These proposed echoes appear to relate to theories of “the re-mark”.

The “re-mark”

Morton explains Derrida’s theory of the *re-mark* as creating “echoes” throughout various texts, specifically those that he views as being ecological and adhering to his construct of “ambient poetics”. In terms of how to identify “the re-mark” he uses for example T.S. Eliot’s poetry stating how “In T.S. Eliot’s poetry, how do we recognize that some image of an external thing is actually an “objective correlative” for a subjective space?” (Morton 2009, 49). Morton answers this question by referring to “a flicker” stating how “Some very small flicker occurs. A re-mark flips an “objective” image into a subjective one” (Morton, 2009, 49). Basically, this sense of “flicker” is described as “minimalistic” and recognition happens when one asks how a text “differentiates” and explains that “to identify the *re-mark* is to answer the question; how little does the text need to differentiate between foreground and background, or between space and place?” (Morton 2009, 49). This question of differentiating foreground and background and understanding the boundaries that exist within them are relevant and can be detected in Poem 258 with its oxymoronic field of light and dark. The presence of a synesthetic light throughout poem 258, represents a dichotomous strain where the boundaries between light and dark, transience and standstill appear to be rendered with a “flickering” phenomenon of what might be identified as the “re-mark”. The “re-marks” of the poem occurs both within the juxtaposition of the imagery, the ambience of the synesthetic “light,” permeated with “Cathedral tunes” and also with the emphatic employment of punctuation.

The punctuation of poem 258 with its use of unexpected capitalization, frequent and explicit employment of dashes could signify a slight “flickering” or reverberating of “echoes” throughout the poem, signifying both negation and also what Morton asserts as a means of

identifying the slight variations that subtly “differentiate between foreground and background, or between space and place?” (Morton 2009, 49) The way Dickinson uses the dash in poem 258 seems to subtly differentiate foreground and background creating fluctuating nuances. As Morton explains, “the re-mark” fluctuates “between oppositional entities, the effect of ambience is always *anamorphic*-it can only be glimpsed as a fleeting, dissolving presence that flickers across our perception and cannot be brought front and center” (Morton 2009,51). The synesthetic “light,” of poem 258 also has this “fleeting, dissolving presence that flickers across our perception and cannot be brought front and center”. The idiosyncratic use of the dash is particularly relevant as a poetic device that establishes the “re-mark” as an aspect of “ambience” in the poem and will be further contextualized.

The Relevance of Punctuation

In an evocative introduction to the essay “Emily Dickinson’s Volcanic Punctuation”, Kamilla Denman³⁰ introduces her main thesis with a draft found in a posthumous diary by the poet.³¹ These first four verse lines are interesting to include as they explicitly illustrate a sense of “flickering” light and eruptive volcanic “echoes”. These are reverberations similar to what Morton describes as the Derridean concept of the “re-mark”. In the following verse lines this is apparent “A still –Volcano-life- / That flickered in the night – / When it was dark enough to do / Without erasing sight –”. This poem illustrates what Denman refers to as the “volcanic punctuation” of Dickinson’s poetry. The disruption of “conventional discourse” by employing an idiosyncratic and innovative use of punctuation can be understood as the subversive and eruptive qualities of her poetry.” (Denman 1996, 188). Denman’s point of departure is an analysis of her experimental use of punctuation and how she systematically defies grammatical rules that enhances a musical aesthetic and use of ellipsis:

³⁰ Jorid Sleire in the master’s thesis “‘A bird broke forth and sang’ Utvade aspekt ved Emily Dickinson’s fuglepoesi” (2013)” uses Denman’s article to explain Dickinson’s idiosyncratic punctuation in relation to songbirds in the poetry (Sleire 2013, 31)

³¹ Kamilla Denman cites the source of this poem as stemming from The Emily Dickinson Journal. Vol11, No.1. 1993. Reprinted by permission of the editors and author (Denman 1996, 188)

In the punctuation of her poetry, Dickinson creates a haunting, subversive impelling harmony of language, wordless sound (emotional tonality and musical rhythms), and silence. Like songs set to music, Dickinson's poems are accompanied by a punctuation of varying pauses, tones and rhythms that extend, modify, and emancipate her words, while pointing to the silent places from which language erupts (Denman 1996, 189)

The innovative punctuation suggests that Dickinson both disrupts grammatical conventions and evokes a musicality that points to "varying pauses, tones and rhythms that extend, modify, and emancipate her words, while pointing to the silent places from which language erupts" (Denman 1996, 189). The metaphor of an erupting volcano in the dark which Denman uses to explore the idiosyncratic punctuation of Dickinson's poetry are insights that are relevant to pursue in relationship to the "re-mark" and are curiously interesting because of the identical imagery of "flickering light" or resonating "echoes".

The excessive and experimental use of the dash in the poetry is explained as originating from the "the ellipsis", forging connections to what I have already suggested is an important poetic device that enhances "negative imagery" in the poetry. The significance of the dash as a technique to achieve ellipsis in the poetry is explained as:

the dash that dominates the prolific period is a horizontal stroke, on the level of this world. It both reaches out and holds at bay. Its origins in ellipsis connect it semantically to planets and cycles (rather than linear time and sequential grammatical progression) as well as to silence and the unexpressed. (Denman 1996, 197)

Thus, this enigmatic use of the dash, likened to the ellipsis, and regarded as a means of "fragmenting language" and making "unrelated words rush together" accumulates in what could be discerned as an intention to relate with the deeper connotations of music. She proposes that music came prior to language in Dickinson's conception of her poems "she saw herself as a translator of music into language" (Denman 1996, 198). The emphatic relationship and themes of music, in Dickinson's poetry, is an area that both literary criticism and also composers have been aware of. "Critics who complain of Dickinson's punctuation and those who defend it alike remark on its aural and rhythmic effects. Alan Helms likens the dynamic interplay of music and silence to poetry and punctuation" (Denman 1996, 198).

Dickinson's punctuation can thus be understood as a poetic device that she employed to express the elliptical dimensions of her poetry and renders as a technique that incorporates musical connotations. Symbolized in the flickering eruption of a volcano during the night, this

nocturnal “flickering” at a meta-poetic level can be read as a synecdoche for the nocturnal and mystical ambience of the “flickering” light a poem generates. This meta-poetic reflection is similarly present in poem 258.

Conclusively, Denman affirms, that the way Dickinson often utilizes the dash at the end of a poem is a means of alluding to openness, stating how “the dash at the end of the poem leaves the poem open, pointing towards silence” (Denman 1996, 202). This is explicit in poem 258, where in the closing verse line “Death –” ends with a dash and opens towards silence. Interestingly, the silence is understood as a “a fullness from which the most powerful language emerges” (Denman 1996, 202). This interpretation shows how the dash negates yet also opens towards silence that is immersed with language and articulations.

Thus, silence, fullness, powerful language, music become synonymous with the application of the dash. The dichotomy inherent in the “poetic silence” is likened to a “pregnant silence” as Denman so evocatively describes “The silence proceeding a flood, like poetic silence, is pregnant with lethal power. For all her interests in words and their arrangements, Dickinson was profoundly drawn to silence and the non-verbal” (Denman 1996, 203). The light of the erupting volcano, or the “Slant of light,” of poem 258 also alludes to this “pregnant silence”, that I believe can be weaved into the membranes of Morton’s concept of “ambient poetics” and later contextualized within the wider scope of “the ecological thought”.

Hence, the dash and the idiosyncratic capitalization of Dickinson’s poem 258 has powerful connotations related to Morton’s theories of “ambient poetics”.³² I maintain that the idiosyncratic use of dashes evokes aspects of “ambient poetics” and can be understood, as Derridean “flickering” and resonating “echoes”. Consequently, Dickinson’s punctuation can be regarded as a facet of “the re-mark”, “tone” and “an aeolian event” and subsequently an aspect of Morton’s environmental aesthetics that pertains to the significance of “negative imagery”.

³² The idiosyncratic use of punctuation is reminiscent of Adorno’s reflections on the relevance of punctuation “With every act of punctuation like every such musical cadence, one can tell whether there is an intention or whether it is pure sloppiness(…)In every punctuation mark thoughtfully avoided, writing pays homage to the sound it oppresses”(Adorno 1974, 97). Dickinson’s poems correlate with this theory of articulating an absence “cadence”.

Summary

My introductory analysis of poem 258 defines the enigmatic “light,” source that appears to resonate throughout the poem as synesthetic. The imagery generates what I define as an imaginative capacity derived from the synesthesia of the “light,” imagery. In a comparative analysis of Morton’s environmental aesthetics linked to “ecomimesis” and “ambient poetics” the poem has proven to incorporate “tone”, the “re-mark” and “negation”. These connections have shown how the poem creates a decentering and destabilizing effect that disrupts an anthropocentric perspective of “nature” and employs poetic techniques that correlate with “ambient poetics”. The synesthetic “light,” that comes and goes with elliptical figures creates an upheaval of foreground and background, thus creating a negotiable space that allows us to imagine the unimaginable “to recognize the mind’s ability to imagine” (Morton 2009, 46). In this chapter my analysis of the synesthesia of poem 258, can be read as an aspect of the environmental philosophy of Morton. The “synesthetic” ambience of “light” appears to generate what Morton calls “negative imagery” thus pertaining to an ecological zone of transition” that places poem 258 within an ecopoetic field of theory. The framework of this first chapter is an important foundation that will intermittently be reintroduced throughout my dissertation and definitively be rekindled in chapter 3.

Chapter 2

Poem 1400 “What mystery pervades a well!” is included in *The Eco-poetry Anthology* (2011) and is consequently within this context categorized as an example of “ecopoetry”. The “ecopoetic” aspects of this poem will be analyzed and determine its classification as a genre of “ecopoetry”. The analysis is comparative with Morton’s concept of “the ecological thought” taken from his books *The Ecological Thought* (2010) and *Being Ecological* (2018). Trajectories related to concepts of “the mesh” and the “the strange stranger”, have proven to be relevant and directed the philosophical discussion to encompass theories of Derridean “hospitality”, this has further led to an examination, of how poem 1400 correlates with Levinas’s philosophy of “The transcendence of the other”. Levinas’s category of “the Infinite” and his ethical address will be investigated and contextualized. Finally, this chapter will explore how Dickinson’s poetics of “Circumference” can be detected in poem 1400 and contribute to an exploration of the theoretical framework of negation. This additionally demonstrates how the poetics of “circumference” is equated with an environmental aesthetic and can be placed within the wider context of Morton’s eco-poetical framework.

“What mystery pervades a well!”

Poem 1400³³ opens with an astonished question related to the mysterious presence of a “well!”. In six quatrains the poem forms an image penetrating downwards upon the page in a medial fashion reinstating the imagery of a deep-water reservoir. The cylindrical form of this human construction, deeply wedged into the stratum of the earth and used as a utilitarian container for clean drinking water, poses philosophical questions related to its “mystery”. The questions ponder keen deliberation related to “nature” as a construct. The ubiquitous nerve of the poem is reflected in polemic themes of limits and the unlimited, of closeness and distance simultaneously the idea of interrelatedness is introduced.

The theme of the “limitless” is conveyed explicitly in the second quatrain where the speaker describes the omniscient and pervasive features of “the well”. An enigmatic climax ensues and is indicative of Dickinson’s “transport” of “the dark” (Bloom 1994, 288). The unknown tenebrism³⁴ of the poem is exemplified in a simile comparing the “well” to a void or

³³ Poem 1400 can be read in its entirety in Appendix 2

³⁴ Tenebrism refers to the dark passages in Baroque paintings “tenebrosso”. An example is in a painting by the female Baroque painter Artemisia Gentileschi *Judith with her Maidservant* (1613-14) where the dark tactile

chasm as the following verse lines depict “Whose limit none have ever seen, / But just his lid of glass – / Like looking every time you please / In an abyss’s face!” The poem increases the mystical points of convergence and the all-pervasiveness of the “well” as the verb to pervade “pervades” positioned in the first verse line creates an interconnectedness with the surrounding environment. The interrelatedness is explicitly shown, by linking the well-water and the grass, that grows around the borders of the “well” with the “The sedge”, a species of wild grass that grows upon swampy marshes or by the sea. These elements are interweaved and expressed several places in the poem. Firstly, in the third quatrain where the speaker of the poem questions how grass can grow so closely to the well “Can stand so close and look so bold / To what is awe to me.” and secondly in the fourth quatrain where the “grass” and “the sedge” are linked to each other “Related somehow they may be, / The sedge stands next the sea – / Where he is floorless /And does no timidity betray”. The interrelatedness, despite geographical distance indicates that both the natural grass bordering “the well”, and the “Sedge” surrounding the “sea” show no surprise “awe” or sense of enigmatic wonder, in contrast to the speaker of the poem who contemplates the “mystery” that reveals and unravels itself throughout the poem. It would appear that the “well”, “sea”, “grass” and the “sedge” all interweave and interconnect within a different plane than that of the speaker of the poem. Whereas the speaker observes these mysterious networks with a sense of disconnected surprise the natural phenomena of the poem appears to intimately connect in an indefinable network.

The disconnection of the speaker is amplified when “nature” in the fifth quatrain is personified metaphorically as a “stranger”, “But nature is a stranger yet;”. In a critical fashion the speaker declares that, those that cite nature most productively, or perhaps use “nature” as a representation for art, have never contemplated the “mystery” of “nature” as the following verse lines convey “Have never passed her haunted house, / Nor simplified her ghost”. The astonishing metaphors for “nature” as a “haunted house,” or “a ghost” are surprising and unexpected. The objectives of these metaphors and whether they refer to the impossible feat of defining “nature” are worth exploring? The poem appears to breach with an anthropocentric concept of “nature” akin to Morton’s criticism equated to “ecomimesis” and the genre of “nature writing”.

The metaphor of “ghost.” and haunted house,” point at vacancy or that nature is indeed a misconceived construct; an illusional framework. These images are further negated

passages of nuanced hues allow the light to become more visible. The effect has an oxymoronic play with fields of light and dark.

when the speaker expresses “That those that know her, know her less, /The nearer her they get”. This sense of not knowing nature or what one may identify as “nature” becomes according to the speaker, clearer and more amplified, the closer one starts to really spend time examining the phenomenal world. The more one contemplates, the more bewildered one becomes, as the first verse line conveys and is accentuated, by inserting an exclamation mark after “well!” The punctuation of the exclamation mark also functions visually, illustrating a drop falling into the well, like a raindrop or a stone and simultaneously reinstates the vertical form of the “well!” repeating the structure of the typed poem on the paper³⁵ and thus, reiterating three levels of interaction in the poem.

Dickinson’s simile of “nature” as a “stranger” indicates that the closer one interacts, the more in wonder one is of the surrounding world. The strangeness of “nature” and the inability to know, seems to be retained and symbolized by the metaphor of the “well!”. In a strange and futuristic vision, Poem 1400 written in 1877, thematically explores Morton’s concept of “the ecological thought”. It is therefore appropriate to analyze these “ecological” constructs with poem 1400.

The Mesh

In *The Ecological Thought* (2010) the implications of “strangeness” is explained as the interconnectedness of all beings within the mysterious “vastness” of the universe. This is viewed in correlation to “thinking interdependence” (Morton 2010, 39). In order to elaborate upon this theory Morton introduces his concept of “The mesh”. This concept is described as “the unimaginably gigantic mesh” that broadens our perspectives of “the interconnectedness of all beings” (Morton 2010, 38). The following citation elaborates on this:

If we think the ecological thought, two things happen. Our perspective becomes very vast. More and more aspects of the Universe become included in the ecological thought. At the same time, our view becomes very profound. If everything is interconnected to everything, what actually are the things which are interconnected? If the ecological thought is profound as well as vast, we can’t predict or anticipate just who or what -and can we tell between” who” and “what,” and how can we tell? -arrives at the intersections in the unimaginably gigantic mesh. (Morton 2010, 38)

³⁵ The visual materialistic connotations I refer to here will be elaborated upon and addressed when the phenomenological and materialistic aspects of Levinas theories are discussed and examined.

The metaphor of “the mesh” encompasses a category of the “infinite”, or as Morton claims the vastness of the “unimaginable”, that relates to the interconnection of all beings. The theory of “the mesh” is possible to identify and analyze in poem 1400 where nature is referred to in the fifth quatrain as a stranger “But nature is a stranger yet;”

“The mesh” as Morton deliberates has no center (Morton 2010, 38) and this corresponds with his concept of “interconnectedness” and the equality of all beings. The interconnection of exteriority and interiority accentuates the idea of equality. To illustrate this, he expands upon these theories stating how “Really thinking the mesh means letting go of an idea that it has a center. There is no being in the “middle” – what would middle mean anyway? How can one being be more important than another?” (Morton 2010, 38). The notion of negating a center or a middle ground is a significant aspect related to “The Ecological Thought”. He goes on to expand on the ambiguity of the form and structure of the “mesh” and its significance in terms of re-thinking nature and anthropocentrism, by “letting go “of “a center” (Morton 2010, 38). This he defines as:

If we keep thinking this “no center or edge” aspect of the mesh, we discover that there is no definite “within” or “outside” of beings. Everything is adapted to everything else.³⁶ This includes organs and the cells that constitute them. The mesh extends inside beings as well as among them. (...) Although there is no absolute, definite “inside” or “outside” we cannot get along without these concepts either. The mesh is highly paradoxical (...) The ecological thought permits no distance. Thinking interdependence involves dissolving the barrier between “over here” and “over there” and more fundamentally, the metaphysical illusion of rigid, narrow boundaries between inside and outside. (Morton, 2010, 38)

The opening quatrain of the poem with the verse lines “What mystery pervades a well! / That water lives so far - / A neighbor from another world / Residing in a jar” alludes to the concept of “the mesh”. The nouns “well”, “water”, “neighbor” “world” and “jar” could be regarded as metonymies that relate to ways of “thinking interdependence”. The concept of “interdependence” that eliminates the boundaries between “over here and over there” because there is no “center” or an “inside or outside” (Morton, 2010, 38) is explicitly illustrated in how the “water”, seems to signify a dispersal of a center, place and boundaries.

³⁶ Here Timothy Morton refers to Charles Darwin Origin of Species.

In many respects, immediate allusions to a holistic theory of nature are brought to mind, when compared with the all-pervasive nature of the well-water. However, according to Morton, interconnectedness does not imply holistic thinking and he disrupts this notion stating, “Total interconnectedness is not holistic” (Morton 2010, 39). Instead of a “holistic” theory, he accentuates how “interrelatedness” is a theory of “difference”. What he indicates is how “the mesh” links all beings “negatively and differentially” in “an open system without center or edge”. These are theoretical veins he adopts from both Saussure, Derrida and Levinas³⁷ :

Thinking interdependence involves thinking difference. This means confronting the fact that all beings are related to each other negatively and differentially, in an open system without center or edge. In a language, a word means what it means because of its difference with other words. There is nothing intrinsic to the word that makes it mean what it means³⁸. The same goes for how it sounds. The mesh is also made of negative difference, which means that it doesn’t contain positive, really existing (independent solid) things. (Morton 2010, 39)

In order to illustrate what he means by “negative difference” Morton employs the image of “Indra’s net” from “Buddhist scripture”³⁹ (Morton 2010, 39) to describe “interdependence”.

At every connection in this infinite net hangs a magnificently polished and infinitely faceted jewel, which reflects in each of its facets all the facets of every other jewel in the net. Since the net itself, the number of jewels, and the facets of every jewel are infinite, the number of reflections is infinite as well (Morton 2010, 40)

The metaphor for vastness, portrayed as a net with multifaceted “jewels”, reflecting a multitude of light fractions in an infinite number of directions explores what he refers to as “totality” but not the “totality” which is related to totalitarianism or as he asserts “about large things as opposed to small ones (Morton 2010,40). He explains that “Indra’s net implies that large and small things, near and far things, are all ‘near’. “Totality does not mean something closed, single, and independent, nor does it mean something predetermined and fixed; it has

³⁷ “Difference” will be further elaborated upon as it is an important component of Levinas’s philosophy and of poem 258.

³⁸ Relates to structuralist terminology derived from Ferdinand Saussure.

³⁹ Morton applies many examples from Buddhism and especially Tibetan Buddhism in order to illustrate concepts of “the ecological thought. He refers to his own Buddhist affinities and describes his voyages in Tibet. These are especially potent in his books *The Ecological Thought* (2010) and *Being Ecological* (2018)

no goal” (Morton 2010, 40).⁴⁰ The theory of “the mesh” becomes more vivid, when compared with the Buddhist myth and its images of “jewels” and infinite light reflections. This enhances the equivocality of this philosophical construct. He additionally introduces a central term for all the beings that participate in “the mesh” and defines them as “strange strangers”. This is illustrated in the following excerpt:

The mesh is vast yet intimate: there is no here or there, so everything is brought within our awareness. The more we analyze, the more ambiguous things become. We can’t really know who is at the junctions of the mesh before we meet them. Even when we meet them, they are liable to change before our eyes, and our view of them is also labile. These beings are the *strange stranger* (Morton 2010, 40)

Poem 1400 adheres and connects with aspects of “the mesh” and the theoretical weave of “the strange stranger”. In the poem’s fifth quatrain, the noun “stranger” is introduced as a metaphor for “nature” and in the last verse line is aligned with the poem’s second metaphor for “nature” being that of a “ghost”. “But nature is a stranger yet; / The ones that cite her most / Have never passed her haunted house, / Nor simplifies her ghost”. The explicit similarities with Morton’s concept of “the strange stranger” will be further reflected upon.

“Nature is a stranger yet”

Intimacy with the environment “the mesh” and “the strange stranger” is a congruent aspect of “the ecological thought”. Morton describes that in order to achieve closeness with the “mesh” one must open and contemplate the unfamiliar and the unknown. He identifies this state as a mode of defamiliarization “Intimacy itself is strange (...) We ignore the mesh because we are so familiar with it. Our familiarity forms the basis of the threatening intimacy that we too often push to the back of our minds” (Morton, 2010, 41). It appears that poem 1400 correlates with this theory of “intimacy” in an explicit way, forging an interconnection with “the ecological thought”. Somehow, to know nature less is to become more intimate with “the unknown” as the sixth quatrain claims “That those that know her, know her less / The nearer her they get”

The theory of the “strange, stranger” and the relevant role “intimacy” plays has also been articulated and observed by Jessica Lee Curran in her doctoral dissertation “From

⁴⁰ I shall elaborate more about “totalitarianism” in relationship to Levinas’s ethical philosophy.

Mourning to Meditation: Theorizing Eco-poetics”, *Thinking Ecology* (2012). In an analysis of poem 1400 and what she claims to be “one of the boldest statements of nature” by Dickinson (Curran 2012, 31) she proposes that “while Morton never turns to Dickinson, his language might have been borrowed from her” (Curran 2012, 31). Curran claims that:

In the ecological thought, one of Morton’s most compelling theoretical constructs centers on the notion of intimacy as fundamental to ecological thinking. In pushing the notion of “interconnectedness” to its full implications, Morton recognizes that interrelation depends upon recognition of the necessary boundaries that allow us to think through and experience interconnection. (Curran 2012, 31)

What she refers to here is how Dickinson’s poem is invested with eco-poetical theories related to “the mesh” and “the strange stranger”. She quotes Morton from *The Ecological Thought* (2010) in order to shed light on the intimacy that merges with concepts of “strangeness”, “interconnection”, “the mesh” and “intimacy” and how these are significant within the scope of environmental philosophy.

The ecological thought realizes that all beings are interconnected. This is the mesh. The ecological thought realizes that the boundaries between, and identities of being are affected by this interconnection. This is the strange stranger. The ecological thought finds itself next to other beings, neither me nor not-me. These other beings exist, but they don’t really exist. They are strange all the way down. The more intimately we know them, the more the stranger they become. The ecological thought is intimacy with the strangeness of the stranger. (Morton 2010, 94)

In poem 1400, it is explicit that “the ecological thought” is conjured forth and as Curran depicts appears to paraphrase Morton’s theories. The poem moves within an “interrelated” arena that both fathoms the limited and unlimited. The all-pervasive “mystery” suffusing the “well!” correlates with the “unimaginable” and infinite concept of “the mesh”.

However, although the poem in an explicit manner creates connections to the “strange stranger”, by employing the metaphor of “stranger” for “nature” and as Curran also recognizes, creates connections to the “ecological thought”, there are further aspects to this poem that are interesting and relevant to pursue. The poem will now be readdressed in order to deepen this territory of “intimacy” and aspects related to “strange strangers”.

The “Strange Stranger”

The surface water of the “well!”, defined as a “lid of glass” alludes to an eye or the dark opening of the pupil that peers outwards to the environment, yet also directs a gaze inward into a dark chasm. It likewise resembles a magnifying glass, exposing the world with a close-up, or a lens that renders microscopic proximity to that which is of interest and amplifies that which cannot be seen with the bare eye. At a meta-poetic level, the “lid of glass” symbolizes a threshold where poetry functions as a receptor and a container; a vessel of darkness and mystery, both reflecting and absorbing the world. It looks both outwards and inwards, containing, expanding and “dissolving” limits. However, the “lid of glass” stretched over the dark well-water, like a transparent membrane, additionally functions as a mirror, reflecting back images of the sky and the environment. This interchangeable surface also reflects back the “face” that peers onto the surface of the well water. The “glass lid” is static as the world reflected upon its surface is dynamic and transmutable.

Poem 1400 uses the metaphor of “an abyss’s face!” to describe the surface of “the well!”. This “face” could allude to many faces; the face of the organic formations of clouds, of an animal, insect, a bird reflected on the surface, or in fact a human face peering down into the depths of the well. Hence, that which is reflected on the surface of the water and depicted as a “face” reflects nature as “the stranger”, a transient surface; an image, peering back from the depths. The “well!” is perhaps a “host” functioning as a container for the all-pervasive “mystery”, and with its dark tenebrism acts as an anchorage for the infinite in a transmutable world. The fluidity and transitional is exemplified in the well-water that has no center as it “pervades” and is all-pervasive and acts as the visitor. Thus, the dark well-water and “nature” are synecdoche’s for the “mystery!” articulated in the first verse line.

The powerful personification of the surface of the well-water, that alludes to a face “an abyss’s face!” is an important attribute of the poem. Personifications such as the masculine pronoun used for the well-water “his lid” or how “nature” is personified with the feminine pronoun “her”, “That those that know her, know her less, / The nearer her they get” deserves further analysis as the interweaving of masculine and feminine pronouns, “his”, “he” and “her” also reinstate individual difference and simultaneously interrelatedness. The personified phenomena of poem 1400, can be read as intricately woven together into the “the mesh” and “the ecological thought”.

Personification as a Trope of “the strange stranger”

Personification in the poem might initially be analysed as an anthropocentric construct, when viewed in correlation with the concept of “the ecological thought”. The paradox of applying human pronouns to nature, yet simultaneously negating this familiarity, by applying the noun “stranger” as a metaphor for “nature”, or neutralizing the well-water into a personified face, that alludes to a chasm “an abyss’s face!” is interesting to pursue. Dickinson transforms the personifications into a foreign stature, as the following verse lines describe “a neighbor from another world / Residing in a jar”. Personifications can create momentary illusions of familiarity, yet this is disrupted, as the poem exemplifies, by repeating the verb to know “know her, know her less, / The nearer her they get.”. This illustrates that the closer one examines the natural world the more unfamiliar and elusive it becomes. Morton also articulates the inherent contradictions and difficulties with the trope of personification and elaborates on the significance of “strangeness” as follows:

Saying Humans are animals could get you in trouble. So, could saying “Humans are not animals”, for different meanings. The word “animal” shows how humans develop intolerances to strangeness and to the stranger. According to prevailing ideologies, we must become, or be thought of as, like “animals” (biocentrism) or they should be become or thought of like us (anthropocentrism). Neither choice is satisfactory. There is no way to maintain the strangeness of things (Morton 2010, 41)

He continues to illustrate the paradoxes related to applying a “biocentric” view to animals and humans, or the problem of applying human traits to animals as the poem exemplifies, by personifying nature and animals anthropocentrically. He views neither of these stances as acceptable. So, what is he actually attempting to convey by this criticism? He explains how “Equating humans with “animals” seems right. But, “animals” are often shorthand for tools or objects of instrumental reason- the equation doesn’t sound so clever when you put it that way. Humans are like “animals” but “animals” are not “animals” as we are beginning to see” (Morton 2010, 41). What he is actually pointing at here is once again the concept of “the strange stranger”. Animals are “strange strangers” “animals are not animals” exactly as the poem identifies in the verse line “know her, know her less”. He explores this thought by stating:

We should instead explore the paradoxes and fissures of identity *within* “human” and “animal”. Instead of animal I use *strange stranger*. This stranger isn’t just strange. She, or he, or it-can we tell? how? -is strangely strange. Their strangeness itself is strange. We can never absolutely figure them out. If we could then all we would have is a ready-made box to put them in and we would just be looking at the box and not at the strange strangers. They are intrinsically strange. Do we know for sure whether they are sentient or not? Do we know whether they are alive or not? Their strangeness is a part of who they are After all they might be us and what could be stranger than what is familiar (Morton 2010, 41)

The rhetorical questions posed here are related to acknowledging the inherent and elusive inconsistencies of the relationship between humans and animals, or as he prefers to define as “strange strangers”. This promotes a theory that is an invitation towards acknowledging intimacy and creating acts of “intimate” relating. This is however, an action that also creates anxiety “Our familiarity forms the basis of the threatening intimacy which we too often push to the back of our minds” (Morton 2010, 41). The reason why he implies that “intimacy” with “the strange stranger” is rejected and creates anxiety, is due to the fact that it forces one to accept ideas and thoughts related to the “mesh” and to the “interrelatedness” of all beings. To accept this “strangeness”, is as he describes, to awaken to a “vast and unimaginable” existence. To embrace existence, represents overwhelming proportions for the human mind to excavate, simultaneously as our anthropocentric and self-privileged status will disappear. This is obviously threatening both at a personal level and societal level.

Returning back to Poem 1400 and to the personification that is explicitly rendered throughout the poem, particularly with the enigmatic personification of the “face” reflected on the surface of “the well!”, it is necessary to examine how the personifications of the poem, create analogies connected to the “strange stranger” and the “infinite”. In order to delve more deeply into this question, the concept of “The “strange stranger” will be further addressed in relationship to the concept of “hospitality”. Morton explains how the concept of “strange strangers” is derived from Jacque Derrida (Morton 2010, 143).

Conditional and Unconditional Hospitality

How does “hospitality” relate to the “strange stranger” and consequently have connotations to Poem 1400? Derrida is important for Morton’s theories and he often refers to his philosophy as relevant for the development of “the ecological thought”, that encompasses concepts

related to the “the strange stranger” and “the mesh” In “Hospitality” from *Acts of Religion* (2002) Derrida introduces “hospitality” as a central concept:

Hospitality – if there is any –must, would have to, open itself to an other that is not mine, my hôte, my other. Not even my neighbor or my brother (Levinas always says that the other, the other man, man as the other, is *my* neighbor, my universal brother, in humanity. At bottom, this *is* one of our larger questions: is hospitality reserved and confined, to man, to the universal brother?(...) Hospitality, therefore–if there is any–must, would have to, open itself to an other that is not mine, my hôte my other, not even my neighbor or my brother, perhaps an animal –”(Derrida 2002, 363)

What Derrida begins with in this passage is to frame the ambiguous realm of conditional and unconditional hospitality, where he also includes animals.⁴¹ Hospitality is defined in the above passage as a noun “it”, “Hospitality, therefore–if there is any–must, would have to, open itself to an other that is not mine, my hôte my other, not even my neighbor or my brother, perhaps an animal –”(Derrida 2002, 363). Hence, the open field that “hospitality” pertains to is anticipated as an enigmatic dimension that opens to “an other”. What Derrida is referring to here, is a concept of absolute “hospitality”. However, before elaborating upon “absolute hospitality” it is important to first cast differentiating perspectives on this composite concept, in order to contextualize these actions of kindness, in Morton’s ecological theories and Dickinson’s poem.

In an informative article concerned with Derrida and Levinas’s theories of “Hospitality” Mark W. Westmoreland sheds light on perspectives related to concepts of “conditional and unconditional hospitality” (Westmorland 2008, 1). Introducing this theory, he commences with the following dialogue:

Come in. Welcome. Be my guest and I will be yours. Shall we ask, in accordance with the Derridean question, “Is not hospitality an interruption of the self?”. What is the relationship between the interruptions and the moment one enters the host’s home? Derrida calls us toward a new understanding of hospitality-as an interruption. (Westmorland 2008, 1)

The reciprocal interaction of hospitality and kindness that appears so tangible and colloquial in the above dialogue introduces interactions that are tangential in terms of differing

⁴¹ The inclusion of animals is an additional development that he elaborates upon and taken from Levinas’s primary venture into this construct where animals are initially not included.

discourses of “hospitality”. Before approaching Derridean “hospitality” as an action of “interruption” and how this is connected to Poem 1400 it is necessary to highlight certain traits of “hospitality”.

In an explanation that applies a landscape, consisting of luminous horizons illustrating traits of “hospitality”, Westmoreland describes how “Throughout most of Derrida’s work, there lurks an oasis of hospitality, sometimes on the verge of the horizon. At other times it shines in the foreground. It is in these shining moments that we -both host and guest- will venture in order to grasp the foundation of Derrida’s thoughts on hospitality. Only then will we clearly see the horizon” (Westmoreland 2008, 1). These metonymic light glimpses of “shining moments” seem to be related to “hospitality” and will be elaborated upon.

Firstly, it is appropriate to differentiate what is referred to as “conditional” and “unconditional hospitality”. This is described as a modulated interchange where “An exchange takes place between the Host and the guest. In offering hospitality, in welcoming the other, the host imposes certain conditions upon the guest”, these are apparent by limitations such as the guest must “act within the limitations I establish” (Westmoreland 2008, 1) Henceforth, the conditions and limitations, applied by the host upon the guest, is derived upon conditional generosity and kindness. What does this imply? In order to delve deeper into this statement, it is necessary to introduce the metaphor of the home, because Derrida employs this example in order to discuss “absolute hospitality”. It is additionally within this context that his deliberations forge a more relevant connection to theories of “The strange stranger”. He explains how “conditional hospitality” is when “a host offering his or her home to a guest implies a sort of exchange between the two”, but “absolute hospitality” is unconditional “Hospitality as absolute, is bound by no laws or limitations (Westmoreland 2008, 5).

“Hospitality” that is “absolute” and “without limitations” is explained as beginning with acts of kindness that originate from an open “horizon” of silent openness. This concept is equivalent to the elliptical trope, introduced in Chapter One, because it is comparative with Dickinson’s poetry, alluding to silence and thresholds that open beyond language.

Silence is therefore an important trait of “hospitality” as indicated here “Indeed there is no need for speech, only silence” (Westmoreland 2008, 5). Thus, “absolute hospitality” occurs before the spoken word. This complex theory of Derridean and Levinasian “hospitality” is clarified in relationship to how language removes one from “singularity, “The first effect or first destination of language therefore involves depriving me of or delivering me

from my singularity. Once the host speaks, he “is no longer himself” (Westmore 2008, 5).⁴² What Derrida is pointing at here is how “unconditional hospitality” is manifested within the density of “silence” and alludes to Levinas’s concept of alterity and the “Infinite”. These constructs will be returned to and contextualized later on in this chapter. What is relevant to maintain now, is the important and central context of “silence” and “infinity”. This is exemplified with a citation by Derrida “I must welcome the infinite, and this is the first hospitality, beyond the capacity of the I -which is obviously the impossible itself” (Westmoreland 2008, 8).

Morton’s theory of the “strange stranger” gains another dimension when placed more firmly within the philosophy of Derridean “Hospitality”. It seems explicit that the concept of “strange strangers” is influenced by Derrida’s trajectory, where he deliberately includes animals into the framework of “hospitality”. Within the context of Morton’s assertions, “hospitality” should apply to all beings and is a concept implicitly incorporated into theories of “the mesh”. Thus, engagement with “strange strangers” that incorporates acts of “absolute hospitality” implies an openness pertaining to “the infinite”.

Kindness and actions of “hospitality” create an interruption of the self “an opening” for the “infinite” to reveal itself. This revelatory possibility can similarly be understood as a philosophy that is derived upon the constant landscape of “hospitality” that Westmoreland articulates (Westmoreland 2008, 1). Consequently, acts of kindness and “hospitality” create openings that generate “shining moments” and can be identified as trajectories of “the infinite”⁴³. This theory is an important aspect of “the mesh” and of “the strange stranger” and will be further examined in poem 1400.

“The well!” as Host “A neighbor from another world / Residing in a jar”

The theoretical weave of “hospitality” and “the strange stranger” can be related to poem 1400? The poem’s sense of wonder “What mystery pervades a well!” and its startled emotion of “awe” seems to be derivative of an “interruption” aligned with “hospitality’s” role of “interrupting the self”. The “interruption” could be understood as stemming from the exclamatory question concerned with “the well!” and its “mystery”. The speaker of the poem

⁴² What “singularity” refers to here is Levinas’s ethical philosophy related to the transcendence of the other. I shall be elaborating upon this later on.

⁴³ The “shining moments” alluding to “hospitality” that “opens itself” (Derrida 2002, 363) can be further related to Derrida’s theory of “l’avenir” that equates with the “infinite” a category of Levinas’s philosophy. I shall explain “l’avenir” more thoroughly in chapter 3.

is “interrupted” from a subjective perspective, when confronted with the surface of the well water and questions its origins. By acknowledging the foreignness and strangeness of nature “A neighbor from another world / Residing in a jar” the speaker of the poem is drawn into a relationship with the face of the water and its “abysmal” depths. The architecture of the “well” as host for the water, that arrives from a distant world, is representative of an action of “hospitality”. The vessel is open and “pervades” the unfathomable “mystery” that the first verse line rhetorically examines. This exemplifies how “hospitality” in the poem, acts as an opening for “the Infinite” generated by the structure of “the well!” as host. This correlates with Derrida’s philosophical deduction of how “Hospitality, therefore—if there is any—must, would have to, open itself to an other that is not mine, my hôte my other, not even my neighbor or my brother, perhaps an animal —” (Derrida 2002, 363). The “well” appears to both open and receive silently and this deduces how an action of unconditional “hospitality” is conducted in the poem. The “well” accommodates and is always open.

Poem 1400 at a meta-poetic level becomes a metaphor for poetry’s ability to host “the infinite” and to accommodate “the strange stranger”. This is exemplified in the manner the speaker of the poem acknowledges the strangeness of nature “But nature is a stranger yet”. The silent well-water relates to “negative imagery”, that transcends temporal and spatial categories “limits none have ever seen,”, and is a synecdoche for an opening that is “beyond words”, synonymous with the elliptical trope, used by Dickinson throughout her poetry to signify the indefinable and non-semantic. The “well” and its dark chasm of water becomes “an ecological zone of transition” (Morton 2009, 44). similar to the “light,” of poem 258.

The poem functions at several levels. Firstly, it allows “nature” to be acknowledged as a “stranger” and reveals an interrelatedness of phenomena that aligns the poem with Morton’s concepts of “the mesh” and “the strange stranger”. Secondly, the meta-poetic level discerns how the poem functions as a host for philosophical reflections related to “hospitality” and “infinity. Moreover, the poem’s powerful verse lines “Like looking every time you please / In an abyss’s face!” introduces how the stanzas function as vessels for “transcendence” contextualizing a connection and interrelatedness to Levinas’s philosophy concerned with the “transcendence of the other”. This in turn reflects the connection with “the ecological thought” that merges with Levinas’s philosophy.

Transcendence of the Other “Like looking every time you please / In an abyss’s face!”

In *Totality and Infinity* Levinas’s theories related to “Ethics and the Face” commences with the following passage and is interesting as it represents a central aspect of his philosophy:

Inasmuch as the access to beings concerns vision, it dominates those beings, exercises a power over them. A thing is *given*, offers itself to me. In gaining access to it I maintain myself within the same. The face is present in its refusal to be contained. In this sense it cannot be comprehended, that is, encompassed. It is neither seen nor touched-for in visual or tactile sensation the identity of the I envelops the alterity of the object, which becomes precisely a content. (Levinas 1991, 194).

In these passages a main trajectory related to what is explained as the “transcendence of the Other” is introduced. Levinas’s seeks to understand and discuss in a negational manner that the face cannot be limited “The face is present in its refusal to be contained” (Levinas 1991, 194). This proposition is interesting, in terms of the ecopoetic dimensions of Dickinson’s poems and in relationship to “the ecological thought”. Firstly, I intend to contextualize Levinas’s views related to “systems of totality” and concepts of “Infinity”, these additionally include how he understands language as having a “totalizing role” and therefore establishes a methodology for the role of language, that is a model of excess, termed as “emphasis” and “epiphanies”. These aspects are all interrelated to Morton’s theories of “the ecological thought” and are prominent in my analysis of poem 1400.

In *The Gift of the Other. Levinas, Derrida and a Theology of Hospitality* (2014) Andrew Shepherd explains how:

In *Totality and Infinity* Levinas attempts to speak of the transcendence of the Other made manifest to the subject through the complex concept of the Face. According to Levinas, the face of the Other appears to us and demands our response, but its appearance is not a phenomenon as one would normally understand it (Shepherd 2014, 23).

The philosophy of Levinas relates to a wider discussion where the face’s “refusal to be contained” is an action of negation and represents a rejection of “anti-humanist tendencies” (Shepherd 2014, 18). His intention is to attempt to “change the nature of the Western

philosophical tradition”⁴⁴ The negation of the “face” is a prominent aspect determining an alternative philosophy, explained as a refusal to accommodate “totalizing philosophies” and is central as a “philosophy of Infinity, encountered through the transcendence of the Other” (Shepherd 2014, 18). Therefore, the “transcendence of the Other” engages and conveys what is described as a project centered around concepts of “Infinity”. His “philosophy of Infinity” is adopted by Morton where he applies Levinas’s theories to his environmental philosophy “the ecological thought” and incorporates aspects that he considers central as a means of confronting the current context of an environmental crisis.

However, to understand more fully the concept of “infinity” and how Morton applies this to his theories, it is important to cast a glance at the origins of this influence. Levinas’s theory of “Infinity” aspires from Descartes. This influence is explained as “when we think of and conceive of infinity, infinity itself exceeds the idea one can have of it”⁴⁵. The way Levinas further develops Descartes theory and applies it to his framework, is that he “takes this Cartesian concept and applies this formal structure of thought, which emphasizes inequality, non-reciprocity and asymmetry, to the relationship of the subject to the human Other. (Shepherd 2014, 19). Levinas’s theory related to “The transcendence of the other” maintains an asymmetrical “alterity” that negates “sameness” and therefore also intends to oppose “totalitarian” perceptions which have according to Levinas resulted in an “anti-humanism” (Shepherd 2014, 18). This notion is also adopted by Morton when earlier in this chapter, his thoughts about “the strange stranger” are apparent. He articulates how “Total interconnectedness isn’t holistic” We’re definitely not talking about totalitarianism and we’re not talking about large things as opposed to small ones” (Morton 2010, 40). He also reinstates the relevance of asymmetrical relationships in *Being Ecological* (2018) which inevitably amplifies the philosophy of Levinas “I am playing a tune called *myself* to which you are attuned, but which itself is attuned to you, so that we have an asymmetrical chiasmus between myself and me, between me and you” (Morton 2018, 163).

Thus, the asymmetrical interaction with the Other by virtue of “the face” alludes to a concept of the “infinite”. This resonates affirmatively when Levinas claims that “the Other is infinite” (Shepherd 2014, 19). “Infinity” is explained as “the structure” of “pre-ontological alterity”, that is “beyond essence and being” but can be deciphered and understood by

⁴⁴ In Chapter three I will be elaborating more on Levinas’ criticism of what he defines as “totalitarian” systems.

⁴⁵ Shepherd explains how “Descartes concept of infinity derives from the divine whereas Levinas situates “Infinity” in the “transcendence of the other”. “While for Descartes this structure of infinity was applied to the divine- God always exceeds the concept of God that we as subject think” (Shepherd 2014, 19)

relational “ethical interaction with the Other” (Shepherd, 2014, 19). In *Totality and Infinity. An Essay on Exteriority* (1969) from the chapter “Infinity of the face” Levinas expands upon the significance of the face:

The relation between the Other and me, which dawns forth in his expression, issues neither in number nor in concept. The Other remains infinitely transcendent, infinitely foreign; his face in which his epiphany is produced, and which appeals to me breaks with the world that can be common to us, whose virtualities are inscribed in our nature and developed by our existence. Speech proceeds from absolute difference (Levinas 1991, 194)

What he articulates here is exactly what is expanded upon in the construct of “the strange stranger”. That when relating to the “Other” one is encountered by a strange unknown “the infinitely transcendent and foreign”. This is in alignment with Morton, when he declares how “The mesh is vast yet intimate: there is no here or there, so everything is brought within our awareness. The more we analyze the more ambiguous things become” (Morton 2010, 40).

The infinite concept of the “mesh” embraces the infinite and mysterious vastness that interconnects the diversity of all “strange strangers”. This sense of incorporating all beings is an important and central concept of “The Ecological Thought”. However, the impossibility of ever being able to truly fathom or “know” the “Other” is clarified when he explains how:

The strange stranger, conversely, is something or someone whose existence we cannot anticipate. Even when strange strangers showed up, even if they lived with us for a thousand years, we might never know whether we had exhausted our getting-to-know process. We wouldn’t know what we did not know about them-these aspects would be unknown unknowns” (Morton 2010, 42)

Consequently, what he is alluding to is how the “transcendence of the face” the elusiveness of acknowledging the “unknown unknowns” upon encountering the “Other” refers to what Levinas describes as the mystery of the “Other”. This reinstates his assertion of how “The face is present in its refusal to be contained” (Levinas 1991, 194). This action of “refusal to be contained” revivifies what Morton articulates in terms of accepting and recognizing the “unimaginable” attributes of the mesh and the interrelatedness of “unknowns”. Hence, Levinas’s theory of “the Other as infinite” is what Morton is inducing in his environmental philosophy.

Morton's contribution of including "animals" referred to as "strange, strangers" into the concept of "the mesh", develops Levinas's theory. Although Levinas does include some animals into his philosophy it is only an insignificant inclusion as Morton explains;

Emmanuel Levinas, fearless thinker of our infinite obligations to others, grudgingly includes some "animals" within his idea of the "face" This term for the *thisness* and presence of the actual other person- "the infinite which blinks". (Morton 2010, 44)

These allusions to the "flickering" fluctuating" presence that is present in the face of the other "the infinite which blinks" is thus extended to include animals and all beings. To respond to the mystical countenance attributed the transcendence of the "face" and the "epiphanies" that can occur when meeting and acknowledging the "Other" is to respond with reverence. These are also significant attributes of "the ecological thought" because as Morton insists, the meeting of other beings is always an encounter with "transcendent beings" and "the unknown unknowns".

The illumination of a "blink" is therefore an "epiphany" that is present in the face of the other, as Levinas illustrates "The Other remains infinitely transcendent, infinitely foreign; his face in which his epiphany is produced and which appeals to me, breaks with the world that can be common to us, whose virtualities are inscribed in our nature and developed by our existence". This "blink" or "epiphany" allows the subject, in relation to the "Other" to discern and experience a "break" or disruption that Levinas believes "breaks with the world that can be common to us". These "epiphanies" are acknowledgments of the "transcendence" of the Other. Of the "infinite" which exists as a non-semantic category.

So, what Morton appears to be alluding to, when he explicitly incorporates "animals" and other organisms into Levinas's concept, is that through the relational encounter with the "strange stranger" whether it be a human, an insect, or a plant, the enactment of these meetings may produce the same epiphanies that Levinas describes as "blinks". These epiphanies are I find, analogous with Derridean "shining moments" that occur when actions of "absolute hospitality" are generated between humans. They act as destabilizing and defamiliarizing moments or resonances. From my analysis of Dickinson's poetry these "epiphanies" can be traced into the poetic techniques of her poems such as the epiphany of the exclamation mark "What mystery pervades a well!" or "Like looking every time you please / In an abyss's face!". Where the face of the "well" generates epiphanies that can be deduced to "infinity".

The concept of “absolute Hospitality” which has previously been exemplified both in relationship to Derrida and Levinas, is relevant to return to and is interweaved with the concept of “responsibility” and “Hospitality” for the Other. Shepherd explains this as “For Levinas, morality flowing from the alterity of the Other, is again simply a given and is expressed in the concept of “infinite responsibility”, that is, “the duty we have to the Other”. To elaborate on this, he continues to explain how it is the “sheer facticity of the Other, the transcendence of the ethical encounter, “face to face” with the Other, that is the compulsion and motivation for ethnicity. The question for Levinas is not “why should we respond to the Other” but rather “How can we not respond to the Other” (...) This experience of the transcendence and infinity of the Other-of our infinite responsibility before “the gaze of the face” is not something that we can give a rational account of, but rather is an inexpressible subjective experience (...) the givenness of ethnicity-is what it means to be human, and is ultimately beyond the capacity of language to explain” (Shepherd 2014, 34).

What is explained here, is related to how absolute hospitality is a component of dense silence, an aspect that has continuously been returned to, as central for both “the ecological thought” and Dickinson’s poetry. Hence, “absolute hospitality”, through the encounter with “the face” of the “Other” resides within this ambiguous non-verbal sphere. Nevertheless, it is important to establish, how according to Levinas, “silence” is not an “incorporeal” category but incorporated into a phenomenology of the body. His deliberation of the “corporeal nature” of language is explained as:

The corporeal nature of Levinas’ language is not purely figurative or metaphorical. In Levinas’ thought the ethical demand of the transcendence of the Other, works itself out in the physical world which we inhabit and his “ethics” as Bernhard Waldenfels suggests, “are rooted in a phenomenology of the body” The transcendence of the Other is not a mystical transcendence, but rather is a transcendence that calls the subject to “infinite responsibility” and ethical action in the physical world of being”(Shepherd 2014, 26)

The concept of “the strange stranger”, is derived from theories of “Hospitality” and interrelated to Levinas’s philosophy, concerned with “the transcendence of the Other”. From these connections, the discussions and weave of Morton’s theories related to “the ecological thought”, are enriched and made more apparent. For if one is to adopt Levinas’s idea, involving “infinite responsibility”, as “an ethical action”, linked to “the subject”, as an agent of “transcendence in the physical world”, then Morton’s theoretical vein is charged with

incentives of “absolute hospitality” and “infinite responsibility”. These traits are centered within each individual, and this is consequentially synonymous with ecological action that would be an effect of “the ecological thought”. This is derived from the sensual realm of silence. The important role silence evokes in Levinas’s theories related to “absolute hospitality”, “infinite responsibility”, “alterity” and “the face of transcendence” is evidently central and correlates with what he determines, as the “totalizing tendencies of discourse”⁴⁶ and the importance of “putting into language and therefore bringing into being that which is beyond ” (Shepherd 2014, 28).

From this complex arena, where language can easily become an instrument that forges a “totalizing tendency”, negating subjectivity and “ethical responsibility”, the attribute of “silence” constitutes a central role. Levinas develops and attempts to incorporate in his philosophical prose, a method that avoids “totalization”. The method he applies is described as a method of “sublimation” meaning a “transferral of meaning”. This is explained as a technique of “emphasis”. The methodology applied by Levinas is reflected in the complexity of his prose. Derrida deciphers the higher objective of what Levinas intended to convey as an attempt at expressing “that which is beyond being” (Shepherd 2014, 28).

The methodology applied by Levinas to express that which is “beyond language” is already, consistently applied, in poem 1400. Levinas’s philosophy of “the transcendence of the face” and “its refusal to be contained” compared to Dickinson’s verse lines portraying the transient surface of a “well” as “An abyss’s face” will be analyzed within the philosophical framework of Levinas’s category of the “infinite” and Morton’s concepts of “unknown unknowns” and the “the mesh”.

The Face of Infinity “An abyss’s face!”

Poem 1400 is reminiscent of the theoretical weave of theories related to “unconditional hospitality” and the “infinite” responsibility that is exposed in the gaze and apparition of the “face”. This is apparent in the poem’s intention to articulate a category of the “Infinite”. The poem is directed at “putting into language and therefore bringing into being that which is beyond being” (Shepherd 2014, 28). This gesture of articulating “the pre-ontological structure⁴⁷, the welcoming of the other that is present in human subjectivity” appears to be

⁴⁶ In the third chapter I shall elaborate more on the relevance of subjectivity, alterity and the context of “language as totalizing.

inherent in poem 1400 where “negative imagery” contained in the “well” is present and generates a dark obliqueness assimilated in the apparition of the personified water “an abyss’s face!”. A “face!” that transcends the circumference of the “well” and seems to fathom Levinas’s concept of infinity. The momentary perception of the “abyss’s face” additionally forges interesting parallels to Levinas’ assertion of how “A thing is *given*, offers itself to me. In gaining access to it I maintain myself within the same. The face is present in its refusal to be contained. In this sense it cannot be comprehended, that is, encompassed” (Levinas, 1991, 194).

In poem 1400 “the face” as a personification alluding to “nature” as “a neighbor” from another world”, could be understood as relating to what is “beyond”, and therefore transcends the limitations of the well’s cylindrical architecture. The surface of the well-water, the “lid of glass” correlates to what Levinas maintains as “the faces refusal to be contained” (Levinas, 1991, 194) because the surface of the “water”, its “Lid of glass” is interconnected to the surrounding hemispheres. The silent “face” is apparent yet simultaneously dissolves, into an all-pervasive ambience. Subsequently, “the well” becomes symbolic of a “mystery”, a silent container, yet, is itself also contained by the surrounding environment. The “abyss’s face!” is a synecdoche for the pervading “unknown”, that opens as a momentary epiphany, equivalent to Levinas’s theories of “transcendence”. The “blinking” “epiphany” of the “face!” is amplified with the way the punctuation of the exclamation mark creates a “blink”, as accentuated in “The abyss’s face!”. The poem defamiliarizes the utilitarian “well!” and establishes an intimacy with a pre-ontological category, that in Morton’s words is defined as the “unknown unknown”. The “well” as meta-poetic can furthermore be framed within Dickinson’s poetics of “Circumference”. The circular structure of “the well” and the way it expands its limits, reflects in an explicit manner Dickinson’ poetics of “Circumference”.

“Circumference” An Ecopoetic Perspective

The “well” and its mystical presence relates to numerous poems by Dickinson that are preoccupied with the form and concept of “circumference”. As Josef Raab articulates, it is “impossible to reach any consensus on which exactly are to be considered her most “meta-poetic poems” since, to a certain degree, all of Emily Dickinson’s poetry could be read as dealing with the poet and her art” (Raab 1998, 274).

In the introduction to *Emily Dickinson. A Collection of Critical Essays* (1996) Judith Farr explains how “Circumference was her Emersonian term for poetry, the sum of meaning.

Her real business she claims was writing poetry” (Farr 1996, 10). “Circumference” is further described as a term that correlates with limits and the limitless as Laura Gribben emphasizes:

Circumference marks the border line of symbolic and linguistic order. This border is a highly charged point of convergence where oppositions are collapsed, boundaries are explored, and meaning originates. Circumference is also the space within a circle where life is lived, pain is felt, and death is observed. (Gribben 1993, 2)

What is relevant in terms of expanding upon this concept in connection to poem 1400 is how “Circumference” is defined as both creating a limit and then dissolving the boundaries of the thematic content in order to produce new “meaning”. The situation of being “on the edge of a circumference” and dissolving this boundary, is clearly similar to Morton’s construct of “the mesh” when he describes how “The mesh is highly paradoxical (...) The ecological thought permits no distance. Thinking interdependence involves dissolving the barrier between “over here” and “over there” and more fundamentally, the metaphysical illusion of rigid, narrow boundaries between inside and outside” (Morton 2009, 31). This correlation is clearly in alignment with Dickinson’s poetics of “Circumference”.

Poem 1400 evidently incorporates Dickinson’s poetics. The circular form, of the “well” and its transparent “lid of glass” are metonymies that can be read within the framework of “Circumference”. The confines of the circular form, paradoxically also expand, as the structure of the “well!” is dissolved by the “negative imagery” of the dark and obscure “abyss”. The void which is most explicit in the second quatrain “Whose limit none have ever seen, / But just his lid of glass- / Like looking every time you please / In an abyss’s face!” suffuses the entire poem as an unlimited, negative presence. Hence, the dark, orphic tenebrism is a presence, that in an apophatic tenor expresses silence. Poem 1400 compels the reader to forge an intimacy with the mystery of the “well!” as the first verse line “circumferentially” emanates the enigmatic “What mystery pervades a well!”.

“awe” An Attribute of “Circumference”

Levinas’s methodology of “emphasis” and “epiphany” are important reoccurring trajectories of language, that attempt to echo that which is beyond the limits of language. Poem 1400 similarly utilizes “awe”, where the speaker of the poem in the third quatrain exclaims how “The grass does not appear afraid, / At what is awe to me.”. The experience of “awe” is an

important processual technique and component to Dickinson's poetics and is particularly related to the concept of "Circumference". Raab induces that her "poetry is meant to overcome awe, yet at the same time is the generator of awe" and to illustrate this point he cites Dickinson "I work to drive the awe away, yet awe impels the work" (Raab 1998, 283). The poem within this context is "supposed to be like a living being" (Raab 1998, 283). The corporeal description of Dickinson's poetry as "a living being" reinstates how "awe" is an important attribute of "Circumference". The physical attributes that generate "awe" are described as "circumferential approximation". This means that "awe" is expected to "emanate from the poem". (Raab 1998, 284). In order to illustrate this method and exemplify what "circumferential approximation" incorporates, he introduces poem 1620 "Circumference thou Bride of Awe / Possessing thou shalt be / Possessed by every hallowed Knight / That dares to covet thee.". This poem, which is one of Dickinson's most renowned poems directly expresses the concept of "Circumference" and illustrates how "the awe of experience is linked to the circumference, that is the poet's realm" (Raab 1998, 284). "Circumference" is further elaborated upon as "taking the form of a sudden illumination" that expands upon "circumference" as there is no center:

The artist's task, therefore, is to re-create awe (...). She does so by "fit(ing) into place" experiences (It is typical of Dickinson that experience takes the form of a sudden illumination, which would imply a center in which the insight originates. Since the center itself cannot be grasped, Dickinson focuses on its circumference, which expresses the eternity surrounding the center as well as the unfulfilled desire of reaching that center. (Raab 1998, 284)

Thus, Dickinson's poetics of "Circumference" constitutes movements that are both "internal" and "external" without a center. The expression of "awe" is explained as "sudden illuminations" that open the field of poetic expression and pertains to "processual technique" that appears spontaneous. The dynamics of Dickinson's poetics reflects Raab's claim, of how "Meaning with this proto-modernist is in a flux, rather than resting on stable and static concepts" (Raab 1998, 286).

The notion of "processual" "fluctuation" and the "instability" of the poetry is likewise reminiscent of Morton's theories that criticize anthropocentric genres of "nature poetry" as creating a concept of "nature" as stable (Morton 2010, 30). Dickinson's poetics reflect his concept of the "Mesh and how it "has "no center" or "edge". "Circumference" destabilizes and deconstructs "nature" and the "eco-mimetic" structures of "nature writing". "Awe", as a

dynamic technique of “circumference” reflects Morton’s idea of how “the ecological thought” aspires to “mystery”, “strangeness” and “unfamiliarity”. The volatility of “circumference” seeks an “eternal” center yet simultaneously exhibits the tension and paradox of not “reaching that center. (Raab 1998, 284). The paradox of “no center”, shows how Dickinson’s poetics incorporates ellipsis as a method to accommodate poetics of “circumference”.

“Circumference” is equated with negation and an apophatic poetics that attempts at expressing that which cannot be expressed. In William Franke’s article “The Missing All” Emily Dickinson’s Apophatic Poetics”, he determines that “Dickinson’s poetry is best understood as a form of negative theology or what I will call “apophatic” discourse” he describes this as “apophasis”, the Greek word for negation” (Franke 2008, 61). This is contextualized as “a radical negation of language (...)” (Franke 2008, 61). He continues to explain how this form of negative communication is “an encounter, in incommunicable registers of experience, with the Inexpressible, marked by a backing off from language (*apo-* “away from,” *phasis-* “speech” or assertion)” (Franke 2008, 62). This action of “backing off from language” is described as “registered in language, language that in various ways unsays itself. The resultant apophatic modes of discourse, in their very wide diffusion throughout Western culture, especially in the domains of philosophy, religion, and literature, can be seen to have had a decisive bearing on Dickinson’s writing” (Franke 2008, 62). He accordingly implies that Dickinson’s poems “whether conscious or not” uses negation or “the apophatic tradition” to defy what he calls “the limits of her ability to express the reality she endeavors to approach and the experience she aims to convey in her poetry” this he describes as her intention to express “obliquely, a “beyond” language” (Franke 2008, 62).

To convey “a beyond language” and “expressing the inexpressible” through “negative communication” is a context that repeats itself and is interweaved in Dickinson’s poetry and likewise, constitutes a theoretical framework for Levinas’s and Morton’s philosophy. “Circumference” can therefore, from this examination, be understood as an ecopoetical strategy of poem 1400 that reflects Levinas’s theories related to “pre-ontological structures”. These structures are detected as epiphanies in the silent “face” of the “Other”. The tenor of poem 1400 creates negative presence manifested in the dark “recess” of the “well” and acts as a generator of “awe”. The negative presence that is produced by the poem is a method of “circumferential differentiation”. This implies that the “circumferential approximation” of poem 1400 emanates a form of “ambience” related to Morton’s “ambient poetics”. The discovery from the analysis of Dickinson’s poetics indicates that both poem 1400 and

“circumference” can be defined as eco-poetical and correlate with various trajectories of “the ecological thought”.

Summary

Poem 1400 has been analyzed in comparison to Morton’s theories of “The ecological thought”. The analysis has provided evidence of how the poem alludes to such concepts as “the mesh”, “the strange stranger” and theories related to Derridean “hospitality”. The poem has also provided an interesting philosophical context that is connected to Levinas’s theory of the “transcendence of the other” centered around concepts of “Infinity”. The philosophical model that emphasizes “the transcendence of the face” has proven to be fertile ground in terms of examining poem 1400 and is emphatically recognized by the surface of the well-water that is compared to “An abyss’s face!”. Themes of limits and limitlessness further relate to Dickinson’s poetics of “circumference”. The poem exhibits how limits are expanded upon and henceforth renders the elliptical signature of “water” as an all-pervasive phenomenon. The water is similarly an agent for “darkness and obscurity, where “The well” emanates a darker resonance throughout and is interweaved into the fabric of the entire poem, pertaining to negation. Apophatic poetics, with its emphasis on the non-semantic is likewise an aspect of negation, inherent in Dickinson’s poetics of “circumference”. The parallels of Dickinson’s poetics with Morton’s “ecological thought” shows how “circumference” can be regarded as eco-poetical. This further anchors Dickinson’s poem 1400 as a precursor of environmental poetics. As this chapter has demonstrated, poem 1400 appears to “paraphrase” Morton’s theoretical framework of an environmental philosophy. The poem and its poetics of “circumference” is conclusively a vessel for environmental philosophy and contemplation.

Chapter 3

The general contours of this final chapter readdresses aspects of “ambient poetics” to explore and elaborate upon concepts of “transcendence” and “infinity”. The examination enhances the materialistic reading of the poems and opens the analysis of the poetry into further ecological perspectives. There will be a particular emphasis on the variations of “light” inherent in poem 258, poem 1400 and poem 833. The term “spectral resonances” is a term I have crafted as a strategy for theorizing the enigmatic phenomena of “light” that is explored in differing poetical contexts of Dickinson’s poems. This opens the phenomena of “light,” to encompass both light, shade, darkness and materiality. The synesthetic trope, and Morton’s aspects of “spectral phenomenology”, are the concepts immanently synthesized into the amorphousness that I define as “spectral resonances” and will be incorporated into Morton’s framework of what he coins as “Dark Ecology”. Concepts of “dark ecology” will be analysed in relationship to poem 258 and *The Chapel Paintings* (1971) by Mark Rothko in order to exemplify the centrality of the synesthetic device as an aspect of “the ecological thought” and “ambient poetics”. Poem 833 navigates the enquiry to question whether poetry can generate “utopian energy”. The final summarizing analysis returns to poem 258 and examines the materiality of the synesthetic light in relationship to the Levinasian concept of “Il y a” and correlations to the infinite.

“But internal difference where the meanings are”

In *Totality and Infinity. An Essay on Exteriority* (1969) in the chapter “Separation and Discourse” Levinas explains how “The idea of Infinity implies separation” (Levinas 1991, 53). In the following excerpt this is explained in more detail:

The idea of Infinity implies the separation of the same with regard to the other, but this separation cannot rest on an opposition to the other which would be purely anti-thetical. Thesis and antithesis, in repelling one another, call for one another. (Levinas 1991, 53)

The concept of “infinity” cannot be reduced to a symbiotic “sameness” and is determined as “non intergrateable” (Levinas 1991, 53). This indicates that an experience of “transcendence” occurs as a recognition of this “separation” equated to the inherent “singularity” and limitlessness of the “other”. As Levinas eloquently states “separation is a necessity in order to

experience the production of infinity overflowing it's idea and therefore separated from the I inhabited by this idea" (Levinas 1991, 53). This intricate formulation can be explained as Levinas's main philosophical scheme that is developed as a sublimation to counteract what he criticizes as the Western philosophical tradition of ontology; defined as "philosophies of totality" with a specific criticism to Heidegger.⁴⁸ Levinas's criticism is summarized by Shepherd:

For Levinas, "totalizing" philosophies, in their quest to find meaning in ontological questions, are indifferent to the "Other" and exhibit anti-humanist tendencies which lead ultimately to the horrors of the Holocaust. Such philosophy, Levinas believes, is not merely incapable of responding to the ethical challenges posed by the post-holocaust world, but is, itself, partly to blame for a world of inhumanity. In contrast to these philosophies of *Totality*, Levinas articulates a philosophy of Infinity, encountered through the transcendence of the Other. (Shepherd 218, 18)

These philosophies rejected by Levinas and later Morton and perceived of, as conceptions of "Totality"⁴⁹ are counteracted by what is developed as "a metaphysical asymmetry" (Levinas 1991, 53), categorized as "pre-ontological". Therefore, Levinas's main concepts can be explained as encompassing "alterity" that is "beyond essence and being" and is recognized and manifested in the world through "the ethical relation with the face of the Other", as explained in the previous chapter of this dissertation. The tangible perception of "the pre-ontological" is poignantly summarized in the following citation:

⁴⁸ This is derived as a criticism from Plato to Heidegger and is determined as a philosophy that "can be interpreted as an attempt at universal synthesis, a reduction of all experience, of all that is reasonable, to a totality wherein consciousness embraces the world, leaves nothing outside of itself, and thus becomes an absolute thought" (Shepherd 2014, 19).

⁴⁹ Levinas's opposition to Western philosophical ontology has been by many scholars perceived of as "a polemic against his former teacher Martin Heidegger. Initially attracted to the ontological philosophy of Heidegger with its search for meaning in Being (Dasein) Levinas saw Heidegger's support of National Socialism during the Second World War as the inevitable socio-political-ethical corollary of the totalizing thematizing nature of such philosophy" (Shepherd 2014, 19). This polemic is also signified by Morton when he criticizes Heidegger for maintaining an anthropocentric philosophical project and accentuates this in *Being Ecological* (2018) stating how Heidegger determines Dasein as "exclusively human" and claims "And while there is nothing to suggest that Dasein can't be exclusively human, this is exactly the assertion that Heidegger blunders into. Dasein isn't quite there, constantly it's a flickering lamplight. But for Heidegger its exclusively Human (...). None of this makes sense on Heidegger's own terms. This is what OOO is arguing. De-Nazifying Heidegger doesn't mean ignoring him or bypassing him. De-Nazifying Heidegger actually means being more *Heideggerian than Heidegger*" (Morton 2018, 48). I find this interesting as Heidegger is often given an important role in terms of eco-poetics where for example in *The Cambridge Introduction to Literature and the Environment* (2011) Heidegger's role is explained as central "Heidegger(1889-1976), the one incontestably major philosopher of the twentieth century whose work has been intimately connected with environmental thinking"(Clark 2011, 55). Hence, posing Levinas in a central role within environmental philosophy, replaces what may be assumed as totalitarian concepts, with the anti-totalitarian perspectives of "the ecological thought" due to its affinity with Levinas's philosophy.

The Other is infinite. This idea of infinity; this pre-ontological alterity; is the core principle around which Levinas's philosophy is gathered. This pre-ontological alterity is *beyond essence* and *being* but its formal structure can be seen in the concrete phenomenon of our ethical interaction with the Other. For Levinas, "the ethical relation with the face of the other person is the *social* expression of this formal structure. (Critchley 2008, 15)

Levinas's "ethical relation with the Other" is an experience determined as "contours of a relation to something that is always in excess of whatever idea I may have of it, that always escapes me" (Critchley 2008, 14). Thus the "ethical relation" originates from Levinas's central concept claiming how "In thinking infinity the I from the first *thinks more than it thinks*" (Critchley 2008, 14). This model is further developed into "concrete content" due to his stature as a phenomenologist: "As Levinas is a phenomenologist, it then becomes a question for him of trying to locate some concrete content for this formal structure" (Critchley 2008, 14). The "infinite" of "the Other" is thus a tangible result, of how perceiving the "infinite" of the other is placed into human interaction. "The way in which the other presents himself, exceeding the *idea of the other in me*, we here name face" (Critchley 2008, 15). The idea and experience of "the other in me" is summarized as producing a shape that produces "a curvature of intersubjective space" (Critchley 2008, 15). A concept from Levinas, that is further developed by Blanchot as Critchley clarifies:

Thus, the ethical relation to the other produces what Levinas calls, in a favorite formulation, rightly picked up by Blanchot, 'a curvature of inter-subjective space', that can only be totalized by falsely imagining oneself occupying some God-like position outside of that relation (TI 291)" (Critchley 2008, 15)

By navigating the discussion back to analyze poem 258, it seems apparent that the structures of "light" may be viewed in correlation to Levinas's theories of "infinity" and "the ethical relation with the other". This is particularly explicit in relationship to the verse lines "But, internal difference, / Where the Meanings, are –", where Levinas's theories of "separateness" and "Infinity" have a close affinity to the poem. This can be detected in the reoccurring phenomena that appears fleetingly from the "Winter" skies. The "light," functioning as a synecdoche of the "infinite" in the "other". The "Other" in this context being the natural phenomena of waning winter sunlight and its environs. Dickinson's poem expands "the

ethical relation” to include the environment⁵⁰ in contrast to Levinas’s model that is predominantly an encounter with the “Other” in terms of human interaction.

The poem points at an encounter with the “other”, as an interaction with the environment and consequently places the poem, within a philosophically oriented ecological context. Such a placement is structured in the way the poem’s “Slant of light,” appears to transfigure into a Levinasian “curvature of inter-subjective space” (Critchly 2008, 15). The speaker of poem 258 is not positioned outside of the relation with the landscape imagery and its mysterious “light,” but discerns and connects with the “infinite” from a position of separation. This conclusively denies the speaker an anthropocentric placement “by falsely imagining oneself occupying some God-like position outside of that relation (TI 291)” (Critchley 2008, 15). The “Slant of light,” is an “irreducible relation”. This analogy with Levinas’s theory of “An irreducible Relation” can be detected in the following citation:

The idea of Infinity in us. To have the idea of Infinity it is necessary to exist as separated. This separation cannot be produced as only echoing the transcendence of Infinity, for then the separation would be maintained within a correlation that would restore totality and render transcendence illusory. But the idea of Infinity is transcendence itself. the overflowing of an adequate idea. If totality cannot be constituted it is because Infinity does not permit itself to be integrated. It is not the insufficiency of the I that prevents totalization, but the Infinity of the Other. (Levinas 1991 80)

Poem 258, in many respects reflects these ideas of “Infinity” and “transcendence” by representing an enigmatic “light” source that is “Other” and exists as an infinite “unintegrated” presence. At a meta-poetic level, the poem also becomes a vessel, a “container” of an “overflowing” idea of “Light,” thus functioning as an expression of “Infinity”. This is exemplified by Levinas’s assertion of how “the idea of Infinity is transcendence itself” (Levinas 1991 80).

The analogy of Levinas’s concepts of “Infinity” and “transcendence” in connection to poem 258 is linked to “The ecological thought”. Morton subversively incorporates Levinas’s constructs” to his own ecological thinking. However, what he also successively does, as he develops his theories of “the ecological thought”, is to connect Levinas’s theories, to apply not only to humanity, but to all sentient beings. This expansion is as previously discussed also

detected in Dickinson's poem where "the ethical other" is presented in terms of natural phenomena.

Initial intentions, of opposing any form of totality that dehumanizes, is elaborated upon by Morton, as he similarly views actions of dehumanization to include the destruction of eco-systems and the mass extinction of other sentient beings. Subsequently, it is within this assimilation of Levinas's and Morton's philosophy that poem 258 can be positioned. Morton also advocates "difference" as an important concept of "The ecological thought". This is related to constructs of "The mesh" and "The strange stranger". He adamantly asserts:

The ecological thought" permits no distance. Thinking interdependence involves dissolving the barrier between "over here" and "over there" and more fundamentally, the metaphysical illusion of rigid narrow boundaries between inside and outside. Thinking interdependence involves thinking difference. This means confronting the fact that all beings are related to each other negatively and differentially in an open system without center or edge (Morton 2010, 39)

Consequently, the "Slant of light," pervaded with "Meanings" of "internal difference" can be equated to "ideas of infinity". The "difference" inherent in the "light," is the Levinasian "separateness" required for recognition of "infinity" and "transcendence" to occur. As Levinas asserts "The idea of Infinity in us. To have the idea of Infinity it is necessary to exist as separated" (Levinas 1991, 80). The analogy of poem 258 with the Levinasian model of "Infinity" further relates this analysis and its discoveries with "the ecological thought".

"Spectral Resonances"

Poem 258 with its a ray of "Light" directed over a winter landscape, during the waning luminosity of an afternoon, generates as already maintained, an uncanny synesthesia alluding to an interior space, where an "ambient" tone can be detected. The "light," imagery could allude to "spectral resonances" and correlates with Morton's theory introduced in *Humankind. Solidarity with Nonhuman People* (2019) where he categorizes and develops his environmental philosophy, within a phenomenological context defined as "Spectral Phenomenology". He explains how "Specter could mean "apparition", but it could also mean "horrifying object," or it could mean "illusion," or it could mean "the shadow of a thing." The word "specter" is spectral by its own definition, wavering between appearance and being. In

the specter, we encounter the ghostly presence of beings not yet formatted according to Nature” (Morton 2019, 55). By contextualizing Dickinson’s phenomena of “light” as “spectral” it permits the resonances to be understood as phenomena, that appears randomly from unknown angles and at temporal intervals. The phenomenological aspect of “light” is undefinable and fluctuates as Morton describes “between appearance and being” (Morton 2019, 55). A wavering, that could be understood as generating a pulse, or phenomenological “openness”. The instability of the apparitional “light,” in poem 258 is suggestive of thresholds or portals, that appear to resonate with uncanny disparities and will be examined from differing aspects of Morton’s and Levinas’s environmental philosophy.

Portals

The imagery of a waning luminosity that occurs during “Winter Afternoons –” refers to the time during dusk, when a meeting point between lightness and darkness mixes and fuses with the reclining day. The intermediary stage of “light,” at this time of day often has an opaque diffused timbre, where outlines and edges softly merge. This description of “light” at dusk is similar to the atmospheric paintings of Mark Rothko⁵¹. Morton uses these paintings in *Being Ecological* (2018a) as examples, to illustrate concepts related to temporal structures where the future is claimed to emanate from certain forms of art and in this case the Rothko paintings.

The temporal theory he assigns an ecological framework originates from Derrida and is initially derived from Blanchot’s writings. The influences are explained as “Derrida is fascinated by the messianic structure, implied within Blanchot’s writing – the idea of the Messiah as the singular Other, whom we await but who’s arrival never occurs” (Shepherd 2014, 52). Henceforth, “Openness” and the “impossibility” of future closure, are central for Derrida as it “forms the basis for Derrida’s understanding of the future as *impossible*” (Shepherd 2014, 52). The “openness” that Derrida formulates as a concept of temporality, is important to understand, as an aspect of Morton’s environmental philosophy and a term often referred to as “l’arrivant”⁵². He explains “l’arrivant” as:

⁵¹ David Porter in “Strangely Abstracted Images” claims that Dickinson’s poetry has “abstracted sensations” and he compares this to abstract artists such as Kandinsky and Mark Rothko “Abstract expressionist artists have sought representations of this sort of experience...incipient abstract forms occurs in...Franz Kline and Rothko”(Porter 1996, 147)

⁵² The futurity of Derrida is inherent in his theories of “Hospitality” and referred to in Chapter Two where I cite him: “Hospitality, therefore—if there is any—must, would have to, open itself to an other that is not mine, my hôte my other, not even my neighbor or my brother, perhaps an animal—”(Derrida 2002, 363). The “opening” correlates with “l’avenir”.

a new understanding of time leading to an ethical posture of openness. One awaits the arrival of the messiah with longing and expectation, but the fact that the messiah never actually arrives prevents time from being sealed off, the future from being foreclosed.” (Shepherd 2014, 52).

According to Morton, this “openness” that has “an ethical posture”⁵³ can be generated in certain art forms such as the *Rothko Chapel Paintings*. (1971). This implies that the unpredictable “future” is never closed but continually generated, as an opening to the “impossible”. This is relevant for understanding eco-poetical aspects of Dickinson’s poetry. A comparative analysis of Dickinson’s poem, with the abstract expressionist colour field paintings by Mark Rothko, will explore certain constructs of “openness”.

The fourteen large, black-maroon, monochromatic canvases of the Rothko Chapel hover and float in a fused light, reminiscent of the “light” in poem 258. The poem and the paintings both absorb and transmit a soft atmosphere. This is represented by the stained sfumato⁵⁴ edges of the rectangles in the paintings and the “spectral resonances” of the poem. These colour field paintings emanate an enigmatic “ambience”. Their non-representational imagery could allude to landscape imagery, yet their silent abstractions, work more within the concepts, Morton terms as “ambient”. Both poem 258 and the Rothko paintings create “portals” and thresholds that are mysterious and solemn. There is a melancholic, elegiac timbre to the luminosity, both of the poem and the paintings, where the atmosphere is dark and creates recesses one can “attune” with. Morton describes the aesthetic experience of the Rothko paintings as “you find the sort of attunement that happens in there very uncomfortable. It’s because you can’t shrug it off or dismiss it as some unreal, ideological effect. Something is really happening –” (Morton 2018a, 164). The phenomenological experience is equated to the paintings as transitions “portals” and therefore comparative to Derrida’s theory of “l’arrivant”. This is illustrated explicitly, when he asserts “A Rothko chapel painting is a portal: just what might come through? Such a painting is a doorway for

⁵⁴ Sfumato, from Italian, meaning “smoke” is the painting technique introduced by Leonardo da Vinci in order to create soft, merging transitions from light to shaded dark areas. I discovered after I had used this term in my dissertation that it interestingly is likewise related to the poetry. In Cameron’s essay she refers to David Porter’s description of Dickinson’s poetry as “ here is the verbal equivalent of *sfumato*, the technique in expressionistic paintings whereby information ... on a canvas is only given piecemeal and thereby necessarily stimulates the imaginative projection of the viewer, who out of his experience supplies the missing ... context”(Cameron 1998, 138).

what Derrida calls *l'arrivant* (verb or noun), the *future future*, the irreducible, unpredictable one". (Morton 2018a, 165)

The idea that a painting or a poem is a portal or a vessel that futurity can stream through is an important aspect of "the ecological thought". The atmospheric "ambience" that is experienced by the action of "attunement" can be additionally attributed to the verb "to veer". Morton describes "a veering quality" (Morton 2018a, 167), as an experience that one attunes to when reading a poem or perceiving a Rothko painting. What one does according to this theory is to "attune" to the movement of "veering". The term derived from the verb to veer "veering" is explained as originating from a definition of "environment" and described as an action of interactive dynamics. "To veer, to swerve towards: am I choosing to do it? Or am I being pulled?" Morton further uses the metaphor of the sea, to illustrate this movement "An environment is not a neutral empty box but an ocean filled with currents and surges. It environs. It veers around (...) bending the terrestrial and ecological into the cosmological. The torsion of deep space, beaming into the cold water of this stream like bent light" (Morton 2018a, 167). Thus, "veering" is a metonym for "the currents and surges" that one "attunes" to. These descriptions of "veering" return the enquiry back to Derrida's theory of "L'arrivant" where the enigmatic image of "a beam of bent light", can allude to constructs of temporality. The "beam of bent light" generates an opening where one can experience the "veering" environment".

Poem 258 also adheres to the concept of "veering". The enigmatic angle of "light," "comes" and "goes" suffusing the poem with a synesthetic ambience, parallel to the "veering" of the *Rothko Chapel Paintings* (1971), or as I have mentioned earlier, the painting by Turner (1844) that also "veers" with gradient luminosity. The resonances and "ambience" of both the paintings and poem 258 reverberate with a seething obscurity. The tones of "light," at dusk are likewise rendered with melancholic suggestion. Expressions like "oppresses", "Heft", "Heavenly Hurt", "Despair-" "Distance" and "Death" are metonymies that emphatically emphasize a melancholic tone and produce an elegiac, synesthetic "ambience" that infiltrates and pervades the structure of the poem. In a similar manner, poem 1400 "What mystery pervades a well!" also relates to this darker resonance; a darkness that absorbs and is saturated as a negative presence. Both these poems "veer" with currents that are identifiable as aspects of Morton's concept of "Dark Ecology".

Dark Ecology

Poem 258 “There’s a certain Slant of light,” and poem 1400 “What mystery pervades a well!” incorporates light and dark timbres. The “Slant of light,” resonates with a mellow luminosity of dusk, whereas “the well” water refers to the darker obscurity of an “abyss”. The gradient resonances suggestively allude to “The ecological thought” and connect to Morton’s concept “Dark Ecology” where he compares this concept, with the nocturnal Norwegian light of winter depicted as:

My approach to ecological thought can be characterized as something I call ‘dark ecology’ Dark ecology doesn’t mean the absence of light. It’s more like Norway in the winter, or the summer for that matter, the way the light in the arctic reveals something slippery and evanescent about itself (...) Light as such isn’t directly present, you can’t pin it down and you can’t fully illuminate it: what illuminates the illuminator?(...) It can’t reach everywhere all at once, as relativity theory teaches us.(Morton 2018a, 54)

The atmosphere of “evanescent light” relates to what he equates to as a “Dantean forest” and asserts how “In a universe governed by the speed of light, parts are hidden, withdrawn, obscure. The dark Dantean forest of the universe, an underwater forest of rippling weeds (...) It means that you can’t be omnipresent or omniscient” (Morton 2018a, 170). He continues to explain how “Each entity in Einstein’s universe is like the veering turbulence in a stream, a world tube or vortex that cannot know all. There is a darkness that cannot be dispelled”. (Morton 2018a, 171). It is within this dark obscurity, that Morton’s discourse foresees, where environmental thought needs to delve and “attune”.

The necessity to encompass and nurture obscurity in order to develop an ecological mode of thought, is directly related to the concept of “openness”. When introducing “Dark Ecology” in *Being Ecological* (2018a) the initiating sentence “Things are open” illustrates an aspect related to “The mesh” where he explains how “things aren’t totally keyed to human lamplight, they aren’t totally meshed together, because in that world nothing could happen, there would just be this completely locked together jigsaw that you could never take apart or put back together”. To illustrate this point, he additionally cites John Cage “The world is teeming. Anything could happen” (Morton 2018a, 171). This sense of “potential”; an unpredictable expansion and flexibility that underlines life and dwells in obscurity, is compatible with both poem 258 and 1400 that incorporates an ambiguous “specter”. These

“spectral resonances” are necessary components that indirectly pertain to ecological action due to the thoughts and phenomena, that are consistently generated from the unknown source of the poem.

The reason why Morton perceives “evanescent light” as central to “the ecological thought” is because it creates a constant ethical awareness and what I would like to describe as a form of humility, a means of approaching the “strangeness” of the world and its existents from as Dickinson’s poem 258 portrays a different angle “a certain Slant”. The opposite of this awareness and ethical action is what he describes as a “bleak certainty”. “Bleak certainty”⁵⁵ removes and obliterates what he determines as crucial for an ecological thinking, indicating how “ambience” and “attunement” to “The Mesh”, forge ecological action that can inhibit pollution and mass extinction. He exemplifies and justifies this position and asserts “So, the strangeness with which we encounter the fact that we are responsible for a mass extinction is an intrinsic part of it and not to be deleted. Yelling at people that we are making lifeforms go extinct isn’t nice because it deletes the strangeness. And saying conversely that everything goes extinct anyway (...) that also tries to delete the strangeness. This kind of bleak certainty misses how things are” (Morton 2018a, 54). The “bleak certainty” that cancels out the ambiguous and “evanescent” is compared and contrasted to a Tibetan Buddhist state termed “bardo, the time between one life and the next.” The “between” state is described as having “a dream like quality” (Morton 2018a, 55).

Basically, what Morton is pointing at, is how it is important to acknowledge and maintain a constant awareness of an obscure mixture of lightness and darkness; a “between state” described as a “dreamlike quality”. He adamantly stresses that ignoring “The Mesh” instigates “damage to life forms, damage to thinking, damage to experience” this damage has as he continues to assert, already happened “The violence has already occurred, in the form of the abjection and the dehumanizing of some humans. We humans contain human symbionts as part of the way in which we are human; we couldn’t live without them. We are not human all the way through. We and all lifeforms exist in an ambiguous space in between rigid categories” (Morton 2018a, 56).

Hence, the “bleak certainty” Morton criticizes as misconstruing and ignoring the inherent “teeming” strangeness” of the world and its environs, is precisely what inhibits an

⁵⁵Bleak certainty, as I analyze this concept pointing at the way language according to Levinas severs humans from the pre-ontological the “infinite”. “Bleak certainty” closes the connection to “the mesh” and inhibits “transcendence” due to the way language is employed. Ecological art can connect one to this pre-ontological status by an acute listening and attunement to the other.

understanding and acknowledgment of “ecological reality”. He also criticizes certain forms of ecological information and ecological action as having a negative influence on what he perceives of, as actions wanting to “wake us up from this bardo-like-dream-” because according to Morton, it is exactly this state that “is most real about ecological reality”. Hence, what he refers to as misconstrued ecological information, is as he claims, deterrence away from “the ecological thought” and making “ecological politics and ecological philosophy utterly impossible” (Morton 2018a, 56).

Conclusively, the criticism of what he determines as “Bleak language”, can be redirected back to Levinas’s critique of how language can lead to “totalizing tendencies of discourse”. Hence, the necessity to “attune” to the environment is an ecological action that responds to Levinas’s advocacy of “putting into language and therefore bringing into being that which is beyond” (Shepherd 2014, 28).

From this position he advocates the crucial necessity, to nurture and acknowledge “strangeness” and the ubiquitous “light” of the “mesh”. Ecological thinking and action require the obscure tenebrism of “dark ecology”. These concepts are enacted, within fields of “ambience”, that certain art forms “open” and emanate. It is exactly within this philosophical context of “the ecological thought” and “dark ecology”, Dickinson’s poems and poetics can be positioned. The poems, in comparison with the theoretical weave of Morton’s theories, appears to generate ecological awareness due to their “spectral resonances”. If they are construed as “ecological”, then this subsequently necessitates an examination of whether they adhere to Morton’s concepts of “art as utopian”.

Art as Utopian Energy

The meta-poetic field of Dickinson’s poetry harnesses the paradox of expressing in language that which is “beyond language”. One of her central veins is the poetics of “circumference”. In an earlier quote by Bloom suggesting how the elliptical device and “negation”, utilized in the poetry, navigates the reader “in the dark”, is reciprocal with the “veering” and “dreamlike” quality that Morton emphasizes, as a central aspect of “the ecological thought”. The “veering” attributes, that a poem may possess, suggests “a transportation point” (Morton 2009, 46). A poem’s “transport” or “openness” correlates with a central idea from Shelley’s “A Defence of Poetry” that Morton adopts to accentuate and illustrate theories of “the ecological thought”:

Like the shadow of an idea not yet fully thought, a shadow from the future (...) the ecological thought creeps over other ideas until nowhere is left untouched by its dark presence (Morton 2010, 2)

The simile, comparing the “The Ecological Thought” with dark pervasive “shadows” is a fascinating vision and correlates with Derrida’s temporal concept of “l’avenir”. Shelley’s poetics are in fact cited several times by Morton in *The Ecological Thought* (2010) in order to emphasize and illustrate temporal concepts that poetry establishes. This is illustrated accordingly, with the following citation, that uses metaphors of “mirrors” to strengthen the proposition “The mirrors of the gigantic shadows which futurity casts upon the present” (Morton 2010, 98). Shelley’s metaphor of a poem as a mirror can suggest the “spectral resonances” that a poem radiates at multiple angles and “curvatures”.

Dickinson’s poetry seems to encompass this resonant oxymoronic axis of light and shadow. The synesthesia of poem 258 veers with “spectral resonances” and could be equated with Shelley’s poetics, that pertains to utopianism and is supported by Morton. This is advocated in the following citation, when he states explicitly, that “Art can contain utopian energy. As Percy Shelley put it, art is a kind of shadow from the future that looms into our present world (Morton 2010,104). Henceforth, art as visionary and “open” assertively indicates that Dickinson’s poems can be regarded as examples of how a poem can generate “utopian energy”. This will be examined in poem 883 and further examined in the last section of this chapter.

“Inhere as do the Suns –”

In poem 883 ⁵⁶ “The poets light but Lamps –” Dickinson expands the poetics of “Circumference” to apply to the future context of a poem’s reception and its ability to commune with future generations. In the opening verse line, the poets are described in a tentative fashion as igniting “Lamps –” “The poets light but Lamps –”. These “Lamps –” that terminate with a dash, accentuate a continuous movement, that expands outside of the poem’s “Circumference –”. This stresses how “light” as a synecdoche for poetry and its poetic devices, radiates beyond the framework of the text and perhaps generates energy. In the first quatrain the “Wicks” are claimed to inspire and arouse a flickering luminosity corresponding

⁵⁶ Poem 883 can be read in its entirety in appendix 3.

to the live flame of a lantern “The Wicks they stimulate –”. However, the third and fourth verse lines appear to differentiate between poems that are created from a “vital Light” and those that lack vibrancy “vital Light. The animated inspiration is directly due to the poets’ vision and ability to process this through language, poetic methods and techniques. A “vital” vision is therefore a necessity, in order to create an immanent source of “light” that can be kindled and generated from within the constructs of the poem.

The second stanza opening with the verse line “Inhere as do the Suns –” signifies a reflexive gesture that maneuvers and returns the “Light –” back to the boundaries and structures of the poem and in a materialistic manner describes an interior space. “Inhere” contains a universe of stars, “Suns –”, suggestive of an expanding inner cosmos. The poem becomes a vessel of an unimaginably vast universe of stars, that is immediately accessible for the recipients of the poem. At a meta-poetic level, the ambiguity of “Circumference –” is interpreted by future generations through their differing perspectives and receptions. This is articulated as “Each age a Lens”. These alternating perceptions influence the way “Circumference –” is interpreted and applied, implying that there is no stable or predictable center or meaning as all is in flux. The poem revolves in an indefinable space of “circumferential approximation” akin to concepts of “the mesh”, as unpredictable and “strange”. These indications correlate with the poem as an expression of what Shelley claims to be poetry’s “utopian energy”.

In order to delve more into the question of “utopian energy”, it is particularly relevant to return to the first verse line of the second quatrain “Inhere as do the Suns –”, to reflect upon “utopianism”. The poem at a meta-poetic level is a lantern for these multiple “Suns –”, the dash accentuating the continuation of this radiant imagery out into the “beyond”, signifies how the poem is an opening that generates the “Light –” from multiple light sources and embodies a “spectral” quality. The “spectral” illumination of Dickinson’s poems has been earlier discerned by Raab as means of extracting meanings although he does not use “spectral” as a definition:

the poem itself becomes the radiating center, whose “Circumference” will affect present and future readers. The text will keep shedding light on the issues or subjects with which it deals. The various “lenses” or viewpoints of successive generations will all distill their own kind of light out of the shining poem, which implies that the poem must be open rather than closed in order to allow for such a range of meanings. (Raab 1998, 289)

The implications for readers and generations to be able to “distill” “their own kind of light from the poem” due to a poetry’s openness, can be redirected back to what Morton refers to as a poem’s “transportation point” the poem’s ellipsis or negative imagery that creates a pivotal juncture where subjectivity can beam into it” (Morton 2009, 46). This “openness” or opening can further be related to what is referred to as “a possibility space”.

Possibility Space

“Inhere as do the Suns –” could be contextualized as analogous with Morton’s metaphors of thresholds “the open portals” of art”. A “space” that illuminates and resonates from alternating perspectives like a kaleidoscope. In Dickinson’s poetry this has also been referred to as an arena for “possibility”. Raab illustrates how “her poetry is a realm of ‘Possibility’ and introduces the first stanza of poem 657 to illustrate and justify this point “ I dwell in Possibility – / A fairer House than Prose – / More numerous of Windows – / Superior – for Doors – ”. he continues to illustrate how the “windows” and “Doors” are “metonyms for the openness that a poet requires; they open up possibilities of imaginative creation that straightforward prose cannot” (Raab 1998, 290). The “Doors” and “Windows” that poetry opens, as Dickinson’s poem proposes, are indicative of the thresholds and portals Morton discusses in relationship to the “dreamlike quality”, certain art “opens” and emanates. These “dreamlike” ambiences are decidedly, both for Dickinson and Morton, a necessity in terms of cultivating and communicating portals “of possibility”. According to Morton, this relates to myriads of art forms as well as poems, as he exemplifies with the maroon *Chapel Paintings* by Rothko, or when he analyzes excerpts of “Paradise Lost” by Milton in several of his books. In accordance with these theories, Poem 883 also potentially generates luminosity “Light –” and represents “veering” “possibility spaces”, that affects present and future readers” (Raab 1998, 289). The “flickering” “Light” of the poem akin to an expanding cosmos of “Suns –” creates portals “Doors “and “Windows”. Hence, these “possibility spaces” that poem 883 “opens” are connected to the processual processes of manifesting and writing a poem and are explicitly meta-poetic. These will be examined and anchored in the notion of how art can be “utopian”.

The Processual as Ecological

Dickinson poems are described by many scholars of her work as being “processual”, a method of writing poetry described as “moments of epiphany”. These elusive experiences that her poems capture, have been articulated as her ability to “transcend ordinary verbal expression”. They consist in ‘thoughts’ that are unique and incomparable. Thoughts that come a ‘single time’ that cannot be reduced to any common currency of words” (Franke 2008, 69). This notion is reinforced, when her writing processes are depicted as spontaneous “she puts several options down on the page, a technique that makes her poetry processual. “Meaning with this proto-modernist is in a flux rather than resting on stable and static concepts” (Raab 1998, 286). The method of processual writing, that is reflected in Dickinson’s poetry and is exemplified by in Poem 1382 “It comes, without a consternation – / Dissolves – the same – / But leaves a sumptuous Destitution – / Without a Name –” can be further elaborated upon as processes akin to Percy Shelley’s thoughts from “A Defense of Poetry” declaring how “When composition begins, inspiration is already on the decline, and the most glorious poetry that has ever been communicated to the world is probably a feeble shadow of the original conception of the poet”(Raab 1998, 287). The spontaneous act of inspired writing amplifies the notion that the poem always attempts to express a “conception” of that which is “beyond language”, therefore the elliptical device and negative imagery are central components within this method of writing. The process of spontaneous writing becomes an act that appears to connect to an elusive source; expressing that which cannot be expressed and in a Dickinsonian term could be related to “Circumferential”.

The processual methods and techniques of Dickinson’s poetry have been compared by Judith Farr to techniques that are similarly used when painting or drawing. Her fascicles of poetry are associated with “the portfolio and sketchbook traditions” (Farr 1998, 62). This written technique equated to drawing and sketching is further examined by linguistic critics who perceive of the poems as “a diction bordering on the art-aesthetic in calling the poems a hesitating collection of independent perceptual moments which picture reality in discontinuous and disparate frames of sense information” (Farr 1998, 63). The perceptual and what one might refer to as “moments of epiphany” is additionally contextualized within the frame of Impressionism. As Farr explains, Impressionism was introduced and “formally established in 1874 and casually used in Dickinson’s lifetime” (Farr 1998, 64). The influence of Impressionistic technique is claimed by Farr to have influenced Dickinson’s techniques.

These influences can be detected with the way “light” is rendered for example in poem 258. The impressionistic technique is explained as:

impressionism,” (...) was thought to characterize the rapid sketch-staccato quality of some of her verses. It seemed to describe her fascination with the play of light on forms which appears in many poems like “There’s a certain Slant of light,” (Farr 1998, 64)

The instantaneous process that is insinuated by Farr, places Dickinson’s poetry within a materialistic framework. The seemingly “sketch-staccato quality” renders the poems with a “corporeal” presence that is obviously exemplified more potently in terms of her original manuscripts; the handwritten fascicles amplifies the sketch like quality of the poems. The processual techniques that accentuate the materialistic qualities of the poems correspond accordingly with Levinas’s trajectories and subsequently Morton’s. These are significant points to maintain when Levinas’s concept “Il y a” will be examined.

Returning back to poem 883, it is thus possible to identify the processual methods. The thematic vein of the first verse line “The poets light but Lamps –” coincides with the techniques and can be further related to the ecopoetic aspects that have already been examined in poems 258 and 1400. The “Lamps –” and “Wicks” are ignited by poets and continue to radiate, if the moment of conceiving a poem is expressed from sudden moments of spontaneous inspiration “vital Light –”. In relationship to the poem it would appear that the processual is communicated as actions that create thresholds “portals” in the poem allowing ambiguous resonances to illuminate both from within the materialistic attributes of the poem and in relationship to the reception and contextual experience of “Circumference –”.

This process has specific parallels to theories in *Humankind. Solidarity with Nonhuman People* (2019) where Morton introduces a chapter called “Specters”. The mystical process of writing poetry is likewise proven to be utilized by Dickinson. In regard to Morton’s hypothesis, this consequently reflects the theory of art as a generator of “utopian energy”. To illustrate the theory, he describes Milton’s creative processes whilst writing “Paradise Lost” “the poem just poured out of him” (Morton 2019, 57). This description of a poem fluently flowing forth like a stream or an underground current can be directly related to the imagination that he claims is ambiguous and unpredictable, stating how it is “directly present; can’t be pointed to straight forwardly; it has a spectral existence that includes a basic ontological uncertainty” (Morton 2019, 56). Milton’s writing process is additionally elaborated upon by explaining how there is not a dualism between mind and body when in the

act of attuning and writing “the spontaneously thingly, sensuous quality of Milton-who-can’t-help-it is what emerges as a gorgeous poem. If only in the imagery, this softens the edges of the word “act” and sharpens the agency of the word “behave”. Thus, this spontaneous action of writing a poem is described as ones “species being” “Production, as in the writing of a brilliant poem, is the thing you can’t help doing, your species-being”. This “spontaneous action” he argues is in opposition and in a stark polemic to “Capitalist exploitation” (Morton 2019, 56). and production.

Hence, the act of writing a poem from the processual state of “revelation” or “epiphany” is an ecological act that is directly connected to the “spectral” dimension of life. Consequently, Dickinson’s processual writing exemplified in her poems and poetics explores what Morton, within a contemporary context calls “the spectral”. Spectrality⁵⁷ can be understood as an expanded trajectory of “the Mesh” and this is illustrated in the following excerpt “The more we think ecological beings – a human – a tree – an ecosystem – a cloud – the more we find ourselves obliged to think them not as dead or alive, but as spectral (...) ecological beings are spectral”. This region that the spectral signifies is an ambiguous region which has “been excluded from traditional Western logic” (Morton 2019, 55). What Morton induces and adamantly advocates is how Capitalism exploits the spontaneous action of writing a poem, exemplified by Milton’s creation of “Paradise Lost”, in exactly the same way as the environment is appropriated by anthropocentrism. This is also clearly defined and criticized in the following citation “labour can be equated with the productivity of the soil— both are conveniently spontaneous bits of ‘nature’ that Capitalism can turn into blank screens for value computation” (Morton 2019, 60).

This exploitation of “creativity” creates a schism and alienation which results in a deeply wedged anthropocentrism. An alienation both from the perspective of the transcendence of the self and a separation from the inter-connectedness with the “spectral”; “the mesh”. This form of alienation is formulated as removing the mysterious and enigmatic dimensions from life, as the following excerpt asserts “Demystification, rudely stripping the appearance from things and laying them bare, is the capitalist operation, par excellence” (Morton 2019, 61). This act of “stripping the appearance from things” also relates to what he refers to as “bleak certainty” which can further be viewed in conjunction with blocking actions of “attunement”.

⁵⁷ “The spectral” can also be understood in comparison to how he uses the “Indian myth Indras Net” to describe metaphorically “the mesh”. Hence “the spectral” and “the mesh” are interrelated constructs.

Thus, “moments of epiphany” or the spontaneous processes of writing poems that is explicitly weaved into the first quatrain of poem 883 “The poets light but Lamps – / Themselves – go – out –/ The Wicks they stimulate –/ If vital Light –” can be viewed as synonymous with the “spectral”.

The poem illustrates within the context of Morton’s theories “an ecological action” this further connects the “processual” method of writing to the spectral trajectories of “the mesh” and of “the strange stranger”. Moreover, “spectrality” is exemplified and clearly evident in the imagery of the fifth verse line where in a self-reflexive gesture the poem becomes a prism; a generator of light. In this context the poem correlates with Shelley’s poetics when he in “A Defence of Poetry” determines poetry as generators of “utopian energy”. The fifth verse line explicitly expresses with self-referentiality this model of poetics “Inhere as do the Suns –”

Dickinson’s poems have been examined by multiple scholars as texts that both employ and exhibit processual methods that can be defined as modes of “epiphany”. In correlation to Morton’s environmental aesthetics, these techniques correlate to the “spectral”. The processes are both analogous with Levinas’s philosophy and Derrida’s construct of futurity “l’avenir”. Poem 883 and its resonant verse line “Inhere as do the Suns –” is an explicit example of “ecopoetic” aspects of “Circumference” that is structured into most of her poems. Consequentially, the reciprocity discovered in this analysis further identifies why Dickinson’s perspectives correlate with “the ecological thought”. The poetry generates a “utopian energy” that resonates with alternating “specters” in conjunction with “the mesh”. The processual methods and “spectral resonances” create accordingly “circumferential approximation” implying that the poem is a generator of “awe”. Dickinson’s poems can therefore be placed and framed in Morton’s criticism and be positioned in a polemic to anthropocentrism and the current exploitation of the environment.

Conclusively, from this examination of poem 883, the poem pertains to a phenomenological arena that “veers” with resonances that may equate with “utopian energy”. Written during the nineteenth century, the poem of Dickinson appears to generate a futurity, which can posthumously be understood as pertaining to an ecological awareness. The poem with its poetics of “circumference” and its connotations to the act of “processual writing” can be identified from this examination, as deconstructing anthropocentric perceptions of nature and allude to an “openness” that anchors the stanzas within a “utopian” framework. This proposal can be traced to the contours of Levinas’s theories of “Infinity and Transcendence”.

“Il y a” “There’s a certain Slant of light,”

“There’s a certain Slant of light,” will conclusively be read within constructs related to Levinas’s theory of “Il y a” and “ambient poetics” situating Dickinson’s poem more firmly within a phenomenological framework. The concept of “Il y a” is an important aspect of Morton’s “ecological thought”, appearing in several of his books and articles both directly and indirectly and is an important facet of environmental philosophy. Furthermore, it is important to recognize how the poetics of “ambient poetics” plays a significant role in relationship to Dickinson’s poems, with an emphasis on the fluctuating synesthetic accents of light and dark. In *The Ecological Thought* (2010) the “materiality” of art is claimed by Morton to be important, stating how “Environmental art must deeply explore materiality. There are poems that, like music, experiment with tones and timbres –the very matter and energy out of which sound is made” (Morton 2010, 109). What the “materiality” of art signifies, is exemplified with different artists that experiment with “pure colour” such as the painter “Yves Klein’s with his luminous blues”⁵⁸. The “materiality” of art within this framework also incorporates poetry and is central in terms of how “the ecological thought” is comprised of a “materialistic” experience, that correlates with “the unimaginable vastness of the mesh” (Morton 2010, 38). The examples and emphasis on “materiality” are inherent in the scope of his theoretical work and can be traced back to *Ecology without Nature. Rethinking an Environmental Aesthetics* (2007) where he in his introduction states how:

Ecology without Nature starts with a detailed examination of how art represents the environment. This helps us to see that “nature” is an arbitrary rhetorical construct, empty of independent, genuine existence behind or beyond the texts we create about it. The rhetoric of nature depends upon something I define as an ambient poetics a way of conjuring up a sense of surrounding atmosphere or world. My argument follows Angus Fletcher’s recent work on an emerging American poetics of the environment. His suggestive idea that the long sinuous lines in Whitman and his descendants establish ways of reaching out towards and beyond horizons, and of creating an open-ended idea of nature, is a valuable account of a specific form of poetics. I associate it as he does with developments in postmodern and deconstructive thinking. (Morton 2009, 22)

⁵⁸ Timothy Morton uses minimalist and monochromatic paintings as examples to depict the importance of “materiality” in relationship to environmental thought and reflection. Both Mark Rothko’s paintings and Yves Klein’s pure blue pigment paintings are abstract and non-figurative. The materiality and objecthood of these paintings can thus be regarded as examples of “materiality” that corresponds with Levinas’s aesthetic philosophy.

The concept of “ambient poetics” can therefore be determined as a theory which pertains to “materiality” and incites “an open-ended idea of nature” (Morton 2009, 22). The openness is a construct, that can in turn be redirected back to Levinas and his philosophical theories related to art and poetry.

Levinas’s aesthetic theory of art, may be employed and placed within many different art forms and genres, however, in order to explore and contextualize Levinas’s aesthetic it is necessary to understand how modernism and the preoccupation with the material and sensual dimensions of art, particularly modernist poetry and painting, influenced Levinas’s aesthetic philosophy. Gerald L. Bruns, writing about Levinas’s “Concepts of art and poetry” defines Levinas’s aesthetic theory into two categories “an aesthetics of materiality” and of the “visible”. The materiality of poetry influenced by Mallarmé’s poetry assists Levinas in developing his concept of “Il y a”. Bruns explains how this concept is derived and introduced in 1947 in *De l’existence à l’existant* and explores what can be defined as “limit-experiences (fatigue, insomnia and the experience of art) that are irreducible to categories of cognition and whose analyses serve as a way of exploring subjectivity beyond the limits of conventional phenomenology”(Bruns 2002, 211).The “limit experiences” Levinas refers to, that are developed from Mallarmé, are defined as “a phenomenology without phenomena”; a negation of viewing art as mere “representations” but rather understanding how art “materializes” things. These concepts are contextualized as follows:

Levinas takes recourse to Mallarméan aesthetics as a way of introducing the concept of the il y a – if ‘concept’ is the word, since the term is meant to suggest the possibility of existence without existents, a pure exteriority of being without appearance, and thus a phenomenology without phenomena. As Levinas figures it, the work of art (by which Levinas, in this context means the *modern* artwork) opens up this possibility of existence without being because it makes everyday things present by extracting them from the perspectives of the world.(...)The idea is that in art our relation to things is no longer one of knowing and making visible. Art does not represent things, it *materializes* them; or as Levinas would prefer, it presents things in their *materiality* and not as representations. It is clear that Levinas is thinking of the work of art as something very different from the work of intentional consciousness (...) its intention is to present reality as it is in itself, after the world has come to an end as if on the hither side of the world that consciousness represents to itself. (Bruns 2002, 211)

The theory that art “materializes” and does not merely present representations of reality but a “materiality” that is a “reality”, existing negatively “as if on the hither side of life” coincides with Dickinson’s poetics of “Circumference” and the “ambient” traits of her poems. The Levinasian theory of “materiality” also responds to Morton’s examples, that have been previously used to exemplify the concept of “veering”. The Rothko paintings illustrate how the stained atmospheric paintings, open up portals of “veering” and fundamentally generate an enigmatic “ambience”. The waxing and waning “ambience” of the paintings with their dark monochromatic materiality also corresponds to the examples Morton uses in *The Ecological Thought* of Yves Klein’s blue, pigmented paintings that are used to further exemplify the significance of “materiality” within an ecological way of thinking. The point of using these particular examples, can be comprehended as a way to illustrate the conception of art’s ability, to “materialize” reality as a “phenomenology without phenomena”, a reality that navigates within the concept of “Il y a”.

To expand and explain this dimension of Levinas’s aesthetic philosophy, I shall return to what Bruns defines as the “non aesthetic” philosophy of Levinas, an aesthetics he describes as one of “darkness”. Stating “Levinas’s analysis opens up what one might call the non-aesthetic dimension of the work of art; or put differently, Levinasian aesthetics is an aesthetics of darkness rather than of light, of materiality as against spirit”. (Bruns 2002, 213). The “darkness” and obscurity in Levinas’s aesthetic philosophy equates with the experience he terms as “Il y a”:

Il y a as an experience of a world emptied of its objects. One has to imagine inhabiting a space which is no longer a life world, as if after the world has come to an end. In *Totalité et Infini* Levinas writes: ‘When reduced to pure and naked existence, like the existence of the shades Ulysses visits in Hades, life dissolves into a shadow. (Bruns 2002, 213)

The experience is depicted as “an experience of exteriority” that is existent in art objects or poetry. Thus, images are “existents” and not mere representations. They enact an influence upon the participator or recipient. According to Levinas “An image marks a hold over us rather than our initiative: a fundamental passivity. An image works like a rhythm” (Bruns 2002, 214). The theory of an image, either from a poem or a painting, creating a rhythmic pulse and having “a hold over us” resembles what Morton describes, when he introduces the action of “veering” in terms of the Rothko paintings “To veer, to swerve towards: am I choosing to do it? Or am I being pulled?” (Morton 2018, 167). This can be further extended to

Dickinson's poem of an "ambient" beam "Slant of light,". The sense a work of art opening and influencing the environment, may inevitably be understood within Morton's context of the "mesh" because the work of art, emanates an experience of "the mesh" and is an experience of "Il y a". In order to expand upon art's ability to have "a hold over us" Bruns cites Levinas:

An image works like a rhythm, which represents a unique situation where we cannot speak of consent, assumption, initiative or freedom, because the subject is caught up and carried away by it...It is so not even despite itself, for in rhythm there is no longer a oneself, but rather a sort of passage from oneself to anonymity. (Bruns 2002, 214)

The idea that "rhythm" and the currents that are manifested by poetry and music create a situation of a "dark light, *present*" where the subject is immersed in "rhythm" and as Levinas states "no longer oneself, but rather a passage from oneself to anonymity" is interesting and relevant in terms of understanding how Morton's "ecological thought" is derived and developed from Levinas. This concept of arts ability to create an experience of "anonymity" is further illustrated as:

In the experience of the image, Levinas says, the subject is no longer a 'being in the world' (...) the image implies a reversal of power that turns the subject into a being 'among things', wandering among things as a thing, as part of the spectacle. It is exterior to itself, but with an exterior which is not that of the body, since the pain of the I-actor is felt by the I-spectator, although not through compassion. Here we have the exteriority of the inward (...) the subject is no longer correlative with a world but is, so to speak, outside of it. Perhaps one should say exposed to it" (Bruns 2002, 214)

To be "exposed" to the world, by the experience poetry and music "materializes" in us as participators, is an interesting component of "the ecological thought". However, how does this aesthetic philosophy contribute to concepts of "materiality" within Morton's environmental theory? These concepts can be specifically directed at "ambient poetics"? This question may be answered by returning to the theory of "Il y a", where imagery is explained as a materialistic presence "An image is, so to speak not a piece of consciousness, but a piece of the *il y a*: it is a materialization of being, a way a cadaver is an image of the deceased". (Bruns 2002, 215). This means that the dimension a poem, music or a painting opens is a component of "Il y a". This can be elaborated upon in the following citation "A symbol in

reverse (...) the image no longer belongs to the order of the visible. 'It belongs to an ontological dimension that does not extend between us and a reality to be captured, a dimension where commerce with reality is a rhythm' (Bruns 2002, 215).

This explanation of art, as a resonating component of "Il y a" that transforms the subject or recipient of the artform, into a "a being 'among things', wandering among things as a thing", has explicit connotations to theories of "the mesh" and "the strange stranger". For it induces that the recipient, of for example a painting or a poem, experiences what is previously depicted as "a light dark present" an "exposure" to an existential reality. The role that music and poetry constitutes in relationship to connecting and interrelating with "limit-experiences" or "the hither side of life" is as I understand, a fundamental aspect of "the ecological thought" and only strengthens the important role certain art forms have in relationship to creating such situations and experiences. Art as agents of existential experience, forge an understanding of the interrelatedness of all life and maintain a cognition of what Morton defines as an intimacy with "unknown unknowns" or the Levinasian category of "the infinite". Therefore, to view Levinas's philosophy within the context of the "ecological thought" strengthens the position "art" creates as a "possibility space" which in turn can influence an ecological way of relating to the environment.

The theory of "Il y a" seems be the "portal" or "transportation point" from where "ambient poetics" resonates. Morton gives Levinas's concept of "Il y a" attention and significance, as he seeks to create, construct and rethink "environmental aesthetics" with a particular emphasis on "ambient poetics". He refers to Levinas's "Il y a" as "it is" as a "flesh-creeping-quality of pure existence" and elaborates upon this by explaining how "*There is* transcends inwardness as well as exteriority," subject and object" (Morton 2009, 60). This experience of "pure existence", is according to Morton, exactly what makes us aware of "ambience" or as he also calls it "tone". He illustrates this as "*It is* or *there is* makes us aware of *tone*, both inside and outside our bodies. There is more or less tension in the environment (...) Levinas's onomatopoeia is disembodied" (Morton 2009, 60). In this poignant citation by Levinas and utilized by Morton, important aspects of "ambient poetics" is strengthened in terms of correlating Dickinson's poetry and "the ecological thought" within an ecopoetic sphere that pertains to darkness:

When the forms of things are dissolved in the night, the darkness of the night, which is neither an object nor the quality of an object, invades like a presence. In the night we are not riven to it, we are not dealing with anything. But this nothing is not that of pure nothingness. There is no longer *this* or *that*; there is not "something." But this universal absence is in turn a presence, an absolutely unavoidable presence. It is not the dialectical counterpart of absence, and we do not grasp it through a thought. It is immediately there. There is no discourse. Nothing responds to us, but this silence, the voice of this silence is understood and frightens like the silence of those infinite spaces Pascal speaks of. *There is* is an impersonal form, like in it rains, or it is warm. Its anonymity (Morton 2009, 60)

This "universal presence" which is "an impersonal form" that resonates "rhythmically" through the "material" attributes of a poem or music as a negative presence, is a fascinating theory that Morton embraces in order to change "environmental aesthetics".

To illustrate how it is possible to apply Levinas's theory of "Il y a" to a poem he uses a poem by Denise Levertov "To the Reader" claiming how Levertov "figures nature as a series of reading-writing processes continuing in some other key, around and beyond the act of reading a text (...) instead of *here is* the poem says *there is*" (Morton 2009, 30). In terms of this analysis of Levertov's poem, it seems evident that Dickinson's poem 258 is clearly a precursor of this analysis and correlates with Levinas's aesthetic philosophy of "Il y a". Dickinson's poem 258 can be read in the same manner as the analysis of Levertov's poem.

This can be proven, by returning back to the opening analysis of Poem 258 in the first chapter, where I established a close reading of the luminous imagery from the first verse line "There's a certain Slant of light," as expressing synesthetic attributes. The angle of the imagery with its onomatopoeic resonances and rhythms create resonances of light and dark, that, as suggested earlier, infuses the entire poem with ambient gradations. The phenomena of "light," has a rhythmic pulse, as the concluding quatrain conveys, where actions of appearing and disappearing phenomena are continuous "When it comes, the Landscape Listens -" "When it goes, 'tis like the Distance". This pulsating fluctuation allows the poem to be read analogously with Levinas's theory of "Il y a", as the poem's imagery and technique appears to "materialize" the resonances of enigmatic "light," in rhythmic pulses, bringing the reader of the poem into an "ambient" dimension that both materializes the "light," by synesthetic movements and also creates "passageways" to what Levinas depicts as "limit experiences". These "limit experiences", connects the reader to the experience of distance, that in a simile is compared to the state of death "Death -" accentuating the mystery of "absence" as the last quatrain illustrates "When it comes, the Landscape Listens - / Shadows - hold their breath - /

When it goes, 'tis like the Distance / On the look of Death –". These verse lines describe how the enigmatic "Light –" moves through thresholds of presence and absence, that Levinas's theories perceives of, as parallel to "universal absence", that "is in turn a presence, an absolutely unavoidable presence" (Morton 2009, 60). In fact, according to Levinas this enigmatic presence is an all-encompassing presence of infinite scope "infinity" and is encompassed by his theory of "Il y a".

By examining poem 258 in relationship to Levinas's concept of "Il y a", the idea that the phenomena of "light," "materializes" a universal presence through its elusive angles and resonances seems justifiable. The poem's first verse line already states this by opening the poem with "There's" and is inevitably synonymous with "There is" "Il y a". "There's a certain Slant of light," defines the presence and materialization of the phenomena of "light," both through the imagery but also by utilizing onomatopoeia identified in the assonances, alliterations and rhythms of the luminous imagery. This shows how the phenomena materializes and reverberates with resonances and musicality creating an ambience that is maintained throughout the poem. This uncanny presence of "light," imagery, creates a situation that can be compared to what Levinas calls a "Light, dark present". Bruns explains this concept by asking a poignant question "What is it for things to be present in a dark light?" (Bruns 2002, 220). With the last word of the poem, that ends with death and a dash "Death-" a continuum is created, a movement beyond the poem, as the "Slant of light," disappears into an obscure, ambiguous darkness, that "veeringly" both draws the reader in and continues to resonate outside the perimeter of the poem, henceforth transforming it into "negative imagery". The phenomena of "light" is described by Levinas as "Light (lumière) is that through which something is other than myself, but already as if it came from me (...) it does not have a fundamental strangeness" (Bruns 2002, 220). This sense of "light" becoming an internalized phenomenon of the subject is linked to one of Levinas's main philosophical veins, and as I have explained at the beginning of this chapter, has to do with the importance of "singularity". This means that an internalization of "light" denies an experience of "transcendence" as Levinas states "the separation of the I with regard to the other must result from a positive movement. *Correlation does not suffice as a category for transcendence* (Levinas 1991, 53).

Dickinson's poem explores "separateness" exemplified in the second quatrain, that maintains how the "Slant of light," creates a strange sense of anguish or anxiety, but simultaneously also harbours "Meanings" and "internal difference". The incandescence of poem 258 maintains this "separateness" as it rhythmically moves polemically in darkness and

tainted brightness. The “light,” negates and refuses to become an internalized phenomenon for the reader of the poem, but instead creates an opening towards what I opt to regard as Levinas’s category of “infinity”.

Therefore, the luminous beam, resides negatively within this enigmatic sphere, defined as “*irréalité*” pertaining to a “Light dark present”. The “Light dark present” existing in certain categories of art is explained as “a darkening event”. What he means by this is how darkness maintains an experience of “reality” although it negates and is situated on the “hither side”. He describes this as:

The illuminated object is something one encounters, but from the very fact that it is illuminated one encounters it as if it came from us. It does not have fundamental strangeness’ Art as ‘an event of the darkening being’ would thus be a way of setting things free of the light in which they exist for me. It would be a way of restoring to things their fundamental strangeness. (Bruns 2002, 220)

Poem 258 appears to enact this, as it manifests an enigmatic resonance, that can both illuminate at a subjective level, but also in its absence and rhythmic differentiation, where it consistently appears and disappears, “comes” and “goes”, be regarded as “an event of darkening” or as Levinas states a means of “restoring to things their fundamental strangeness”(Bruns 2002, 220). In this reading it is intriguing how the synesthetic ambience of “There’s a certain Slant of light,” corresponds precisely to the concept of “Il y a”, representing portals that “veer” to and with the “strangeness” of existence.

At a meta-poetic level, poem 258 implicitly encompasses Dickinson’s poetics of “Circumference” and “Circumferential approximation” as it resonates within different dimensions creating limits and limitlessness by expansion and contraction, utilizing synesthetic devices to generate resonances “spectral resonances”. The poem and its poetics create “limit experiences” thus creating portals of transcendence in the poem correlated to “strangeness” “mystery”, or in Levinas’s terms “Infinity”.

Conclusively, the synesthesia of poem 258 equates and exemplifies “ambient poetics”. The poem opens a “possibility space” that generates an “event” of a “light dark present” or “a darkening event”. These discoveries of the phenomena of “light,” alluding to materialistic resonances, exemplifies how the phenomena displays affinity with Levinas’s concept of “Il y a” and depicts an expansion of “light,” beyond the limits of the poem and henceforth proves that it exceeds its own boundaries and “circumference”. The extension of “the certain Slant of light,” that relates to “negative imagery”, as determined by the concluding noun “Death –” ,

appears to return or “restore” both the speaker of the poem and the reader to the “spectral resonances” that pertain to the inherent “strangeness” of the phenomena. In correlation with Levinas’s theory “light,” proves that it “can surpass its idea” being that of “light,” (Levinas, 1991, 49). The poem resonates “ambient poetics” that pertains to “the infinite” and can consequently be regarded as an aspect of “the ecological thought”. This equation, thus indicates and determines poem 258 as a vessel of “the infinite”. These discoveries prove that the initiating verse line “There’s a certain Slant of light,” is an eco-poetical “event” and furthermore demonstrates how Dickinson’s poetics of poem 258 emanates and “overflows” with “spectral resonances” and is a transport of “the infinite” in correlation with Levinas’s concept of how “Infinity overflows the thought that thinks it” (Morton 2010).

Summary

The differing accents of light and dark resonances in Dickinson’s poems have been analyzed in this chapter within alternating contexts related to theories pertaining to “the ecological thought”. In many ways this chapter can be described as having a polyphonic composition of differentiating theories that are intricately interrelated. Firstly, the enquiry has cast perspectives on the concept of “difference” as exemplified in poem 258 and furthermore been analyzed in correlation to Levinas’s ethical philosophy, integrating the philosophical contours of theories such as “separateness” “infinity” and “transcendence”. The intention of this analysis was to explore how the poem reciprocally engages philosophical constructs that are equated with Levinas’s framework and hence provides evidence of Dickinson’s poetry and its philosophical richness.

Secondly, the different terms Morton applies, in order to examine theories related to the category of “spectral phenomenology” are introduced, such as “attunement”, “veering” and “spectrality”. These have been examined both in relationship to Mark Rothko’s Chapel Paintings and poem 1400. Within this context Derrida’s theory of l’arrivant” has been tentatively introduced as an aspect of “the ecological thought”. The predominant emphasis with the “ambient” structures of “light”, has resulted in developing the term “spectral resonances” as an endeavour to encompass the thematic structure and differentiations of luminosity prevalent in Dickinson’s poetry. The reason why this liberty has been taken is due to the analytical development of constructs of “light,” that has evolved throughout the chapters and required a term that somehow opens and simultaneously encompasses both light and dark gradations.

Thirdly, poetry as a construct of “utopian energy” has been anchored into the discussion of environmental philosophy and consequently cast perspectives upon the role of art within an eco-poetic field of enquiry. Poem 883 has been analyzed within this context in order to examine how Dickinson’s poetry reflects Morton’s incentives of utopian constructs. The processual methods and acts of writing have been aspects that are connected to “the ecological thought”.

Finally, poem 258 is comparatively analyzed with Levinas’s theory of “Il y a”. The analysis synthesizes the aspects that have been anchored in the enquiry related to “the ecological thought”. Conclusively, the discoveries maintain how poem 258 exhibits the eco-poetical framework of Morton’s environmental philosophy “the ecological thought” and consequently Levinas’s construct of “infinity” is integrated into the “spectral resonances of poem 258.

Conclusion

The introductory passages of this dissertation opened with the summoning couplet of Dickinson's poem 1 which, in an aroused appeal, invites the nine muses to sing in polyphonic keys: "Awake ye muses nine, sing me a strain divine, / Unwind the solemn twine, and tie my Valentine!" These verse lines exemplify how the "strain" of resonant voices could be understood as an intentional poetic technique that is present both implicitly and explicitly throughout Dickinson's oeuvre of 1175 handwritten poems, metaphorically referred to as love letters. The myriad of resonances displayed in these verse lines have been explored in the reoccurring imagery of luminous variations that I refer to in this thesis as "light", "phenomena" and "spectral resonances". These resonances of alternating imagery have been examined in relation to poem 258, poem 1400 and poem 883.

The main objective of my enquiry was to investigate eco-poetic aspects of the poems and strive to determine their classification as eco-poetical. The resonant "phenomena" of the poetry was examined by applying a "materialistic reading" method related to Morton's environmental aesthetics of "ambient poetics" and "the ecological thought". The central poetic techniques explored are the synesthetic device, the ellipsis, and Dickinson's poetics of "circumference". These literary devices are interrelated to a theoretical weave of negation and anchored in an ambiguous and "strange" presence or, as this thesis has determined, a "pre-ontological category" that is indicative of Morton's and Levinas's theories. The analysis of these devices in the poetry has established their interrelatedness with Morton's hypothesis pertaining to "ambient poetics" and "the ecological thought" and further, reflects the important role poetry and art constitutes within the burgeoning environmental crisis.

The exploration of Dickinson's poetry consequently exhibits and confirms Morton's claim of poetry's ability to create "openness" – "possibility spaces" that supposedly generate "utopian energy". Similarly, the poetry is "deconstructive" due to its "destabilizing" devices, which confirms how it envisions future philosophical categories and contexts affirming Morton's claim when he applies Shelley's assertion of how poetry is "Like the shadow of an idea not yet fully thought, a shadow from the future" (Morton 2010, 2). The examination of the poetry and the discoveries made convey why it can be classified as eco-poetical and this further contextualises the idea that when the poems were written, they were ahead of their time.

The ambiguous presence and "strain" of resonant sound introduced in the first poem is an "openness" that correlates with the Levinasian category of the "Infinite". I now specify the

discoveries made in the different chapters by reiterating the main points as they are conveyed in the conclusive summaries of each chapter, therefore justifying the claims that classify the poems as ecopoetical.

The first chapter introduced poem 258. The central aspect analysed was the imagery of “light”, explicitly asserted in the first verse line, “There’s a certain Slant of light,”. The synaesthesia of the “light” imagery was subsequently explored in relationship to “eco mimesis” and “ambient poetics”, where “synaesthesia” is a central aspect. The comparative analysis resulted in the detection of several points of convergence. These are apparent in the idiosyncratic punctuation of the poem that is a method of ellipsis. The unusual use of dashes acts as a continuation of a “certain” tenure and what I believe is indicative of “ambience” or what Morton refers to as “an ecotone” that produces “negative imagery” in the poem.

The imagery of “light” by the way it appears and disappears distinguishes the negation. The synaesthesia of the “light” that resonates rhythmically throughout the poem is correlated to aspects such as “tone”, the “re-mark” and “negation”. As I previously claimed, these connections reveal how the poem creates a decentring and destabilising effect that disrupts an anthropocentric perspective of “nature” by using poetic techniques that correlate with “ambient poetics”. The synesthetic “light,” that “comes” and “goes” with elliptical figures creates an upheaval of foreground and background, thus creating a space that allows the reader to imagine the unimaginable and to “to recognize the mind’s ability to imagine” (Morton 2009, 46). Consequently, the first chapter confirms the “ambient poetics” of poem 258 and determines how the “Slant of light” with its “fluctuating and flickering presence” is an ecopoetical aspect.

Secondly, poem 1400, “What mystery pervades a well!” has proven to be interrelated with Morton’s construct of “the ecological thought” and, as I demonstrate, the poem paraphrases the central aspects of “the ecological thought” (Curran 2012) that highlights the philosophical vision structured within the poem. Furthermore, the analysis provides evidence of how the poem alludes to such concepts as “the mesh”, “the strange stranger” and theories related to Derridean “hospitality”. The poem has also provided an interesting philosophical context that is connected to Levinas’s theory of the “transcendence of the Other”, centred on concepts of “Infinity”. The philosophical model that emphasises “the transcendence of the face” is proven to be fertile ground in terms of examining poem 1400 and is emphatically recognised by the surface of the well water that is compared to “An abyss’s face!” Themes of limits and limitlessness relate to Dickinson’s poetics of “circumference”. The poem exhibits how limits are expanded upon and render the elliptical signature of “water” in poem 1400 as an all-pervasive phenomenon. The water is similarly an agent for “darkness and obscurity where “The

well!” emanates a darker resonance and is registered throughout the entire poem creating “negative imagery” that is indicative of negation. With its emphasis on the non-semantic “beyond the sayable”, apophatic poetics is an aspect of negation and inherent in Dickinson’s poetics of “circumference” and in poem 1400. In addition, the parallels of Dickinson’s poetics with Morton’s “ecological thought” show how “circumference” can be regarded as an eco-poetical aspect of the poem. This anchors Dickinson’s poem 1400 as a precursor of “ambient poetics”.

An exploration of poem 258 deciphers how “light”, as a synecdoche for silence, reciprocally engages with philosophical constructs that are equated with Levinas’s framework of theories such as “separateness”, “infinity” and “transcendence”. This analysis provides evidence of the poem’s philosophical density in terms of conveying a pre-ontological model. The predominant emphasis on the “ambient” structures of “light” has been analysed in terms of art as a generator of “utopian energy”. This has clearly been anchored into the discussion of environmental philosophy and consequently cast perspectives upon the role of art within an eco-poetic field of enquiry. Poem 883 was analysed within this context to examine how Dickinson’s poetry reflects Morton’s utopian constructs. The processual methods and acts of writing are aspects that are connected to “the ecological thought” and are proven to be reciprocal of Dickinson’s poem. Within this analysis, the fifth verse line, “Inhere as do the Suns –” explicitly visualises the spectral phenomenology Morton applies to view the role of poetry as a “utopian” expression.

Finally, poem 258 is comparatively analysed with Levinas’s theory of “Il y a”. The analysis synthesises the aspects anchored in the enquiry related to “the ecological thought”. Conclusively, the discoveries maintain how the analysed poems exhibit the framework of “the ecological thought” and consequently Levinas’s construct of “Infinity” is proven to be integrated into the “spectral resonances” of poem 258. This conclusive exploration of poem 258 conveys how the poem’s phenomena emanate and “overflow” with “spectral resonances” and is a transport of “the infinite” in correlation with Levinas’s concept of how “Infinity overflows the thought that thinks it” (Morton 2010).

The discoveries made throughout the chapters exhibit how the resonances of “light” and “dark” and what I determine as gradations of “spectral resonances” are a negation present in Dickinson’s poems, that create a “transportation point”, allowing the recipient of the poems to merge with the “unknown”. To merge with the strange unknown resonances or, in Levinas’s terms, the “il y a”, interconnects one to the vastness of “the mesh” and “strange

strangers”. The “openness” of the poem creates an “intimacy” with an unknown presence. Morton defines negation within the framework of “ambient poetics” as:

A universal absence” that is “in turn a presence, an absolutely unavoidable presence. It is not the dialectical counterpoint of absence, and we do not grasp it through a thought. It is immediately there. There is no discourse. Nothing responds to us, but this silence, the voice of this silence is understood and frightens like the silence of those infinite spaces Pascal speaks of.” (Morton 2009, 60)

Dickinson’s ambiguous “resonances” have been proven to relate to the “silent and infinite spaces” that respond to “Il y a”. The synaesthesia of the poems’ differing “spectral resonances” hence correlate with “an absent presence” and can be regarded as an important trope of ambient poetics and determine how the synesthetic device is a component of ecopoetics. This establishes how the synesthetic “light resonances” of the poetry can be understood as a “universal presence” which is categorised as “an impersonal form” that resonates “rhythmically” through the “material” attributes of a poem, or music as a negative presence, and is a theory Morton embraces to change “environmental aesthetics” (Morton 2009, 60).

Within this context of negation, the “strangeness” attributed to Dickinson’s poetry by Bloom, who asserts that the “unique transport” of her poetry offers its readers “another way to see almost in the dark” (Bloom 1994, 288), can be transferred to the ecopoetical framework of Morton’s environmental aesthetic. “Strangeness” can be identified as analogous with “a universal absence” present in a poem and is “in turn a presence, an absolutely unavoidable presence” (Morton 2009, 60). To relate to this “universal absence” is a means of “seeing” or navigating “in the almost dark” (Bloom 1994, 288). Thus, the synaesthesia in Dickinson’s poems is “an ecozone”, an “ecological transition” (Morton 2009, 44), or a “transport” of “strangeness” that situates Bloom’s theories within an ecopoetical arena.

The “spectral resonances” examined in poem 258, “There’s a certain Slant of light” or in the darker resonances of Poem 1400, “What mystery pervades a well!” and in the immanently generated luminosity of poem 883, “Inhere as do the Suns –” exhibit how Dickinson’s poetry resonates with the synesthetic “voices” of the “muses” initiated in poem 1. The “ambient poetics” immanent in the polyphonic keys of these verse lines create a “universal absence” that is “present” as a category of “the infinite”. These “resonances”, when understood from the investigation of this dissertation, can be placed within an ecopoetic

context. This placement determines Dickinson's poetry as eco-poetical. Clearly, the legacy of her poetry can be regarded as eco-poetical poems firmly embedded in the world. This places the poetry within an important arena where they can be understood as generating what Morton refers to as "utopian energy". The currents and "cadences" (Adorno 1974, 97) of the poetry connects the reader intimately with the "strangeness" of "the unknown unknowns". The experience of "absence" or the "the unknown" is a means of forcing one "to imagine what is not there" and to recognise the mind's ability to imagine" (Morton 2009, 46). These constructs reflect the imaginative capacity that certain poetry incites and conveys.

Dickinson's poetry has a vital role in terms of its eco-poetical stature because it forges an intimate connection with existence and kindles the luminous and resonant regions of the imaginative faculties. As the introduction of this dissertation conveyed, "the environmental crisis is made possible by a profound failure of the imagination. What we humans disregard, what we fail to know and grasp, is easy to destroy" (Wirth and Street, 2013, 17). Poetry can attune one to the "strangeness" of existence and act, as Franz Kafka asserts, "to break the frozen sea inside us' awakening our dulled perceptions and feelings. This is the power of all poetry. With regard to the environment, it is particularly the power of eco-poetry" (Wirth and Gray Street 2013, 17).

Whether Dickinson's poetry can arouse and awaken the imagination is a hypothetical question. However, the legacy of her poetry as conveyed in poem 883 in the second quatrain is an invitation for each era to "disseminate" and contextualise the poems from their perceptions. "Inhere as do the Suns – / Each age a Lens / Disseminating their / Circumference –". The contemporary "Lens" of eco-poetic reflection is the context of this thesis and can be related to be the current environmental crisis. Dickinson's poetry can open "possibility spaces" that generate "spectral resonances" attuning one to "the Infinite" and allowing "the ecological thought" to occur in relation to Levinas's assertion of how "Infinity overflows the thought that thinks it". The polyphonic voices of the muses resonate from the unimaginable vastness of "the mesh" and emanate in Dickinson's poetry, connecting one to "the infinite", as poem 883 conveys: "Inhere as do the Suns –".

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Appendix 1

Poem 258

There's a certain Slant of light,
Winter Afternoons –
That oppresses, like the Heft
Of Cathedral Tunes –

Heavenly Hurt, it gives us –
We can find no scar,
But internal difference,
Where the Meanings, are –

None may teach it – Any –
'Tis the Seal Despair –
An imperial affliction
Sent us of the Air –

When it comes, the Landscape listens –
Shadows – hold their breath –
When it goes, 'tis like the Distance
On the look of Death –

Appendix 2

Poem 1400

What mystery pervades a well!
That water lives so far –
A neighbor from another world
Residing in a jar

Whose limit none has ever seen,
But just his lid of glass –
Like looking every time you please
In an abyss's face!

The grass does not appear afraid,
I often wonder he
Can stand so close and look so bold
At what is awe to me.

Related somehow they may be,
The sedge stands near the sea –
Where he is floorless
And does no timidity betray

But nature is a stranger yet:
The ones that cite her most
Have never passed her haunted house,
Nor simplified her ghost.

To pity those that know her not
Is helped by the regret
That those who know her, know her less
The nearer her they get.

Appendix 3

Poem 883

The Poets Light but Lamps
Themselves – go out –
The Wicks they stimulate –
If vital Light

Inhere as do the Suns –
Each Age a Lens
Disseminating their
Circumference –