Selfie

Poetry, Social Change & Ecological Connection

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Introduction

Paul Valéry said, poetry is a "language within a language." Poetry is not, however, a separate language any more than words are easily separated from each other.

> Surely you have noticed the curious fact that some *word* which is perfectly clear when you hear it or use it in current language, and causes no trouble when it is caught in the quick pace of an ordinary phrase, becomes magically embarrassing, introduces a strange resistance, and foils all efforts of definition as soon as you take it out of circulation to examine it apart, and seek a meaning in it after having re- moved it from its momentary function?[1]

Multiple definitions of the same word accept some responsibility for Valéry's difficulties. Meanings intersect and different words have similar meanings. The history of words, as distinct from current usage, adds complexity to understanding individual words. And through their relationships to other words like position in a sequence, part of speech, and logic in a phrase, words function more effectively in a variety of uses from poetry to public relations to recipes.

Words together with spaces and punctuation form poems. The choice of words and their order, informed by authorial intention, past events, immediate sensations, ideas, and a host of prior constructions of language, emerge from sources like other poems, daily speech, and the process of writing. An immense diversity of poetic components and possibilities

encourages writers to limit the mechanisms they use for comprehensibility, to assert their style, and to seek common ground with a group of peers. Ezra Pound's famous equation, "DICHTEN = CONDENSARE,"[2] may have been an aesthetic decree, but there are other environmental, biological forces and explanations propelling individual and group tendencies in the same direction.

At the same time, life expands and so does poetry. Assemblages of poetry, composed of assorted poems, poets, methods, mechanisms, and tendencies of writing, operate together in concert and in conflict. Their processes connect through an ecological network, a phrase that is not only a figure of speech but also demonstrates how other scales of life in the biosphere operate linguistically as language functions ecologically.

Poetry is derived from, nourishes, inflects, and infects other language structures in one's self, society, and surroundings. Poetry is part of, confused with, overlapping, and yet distinguishable from other language acts. Models of poetry inhabit larger models to shape how people use language for meaning and joy, to inform thought, and to spur action. That ecology scales down to poetry, and poetic models scale up somewhat.

By reading poetry through these lists of the multiple identities of poets and poems, I intend to focus less on poetry as an autonomous art and more on how it relates to, reacts with, and intersects other processes in the biosphere. For now, enough has been written on uniqueness. Although poetry can be fruitfully considered independently, in *Selfie* I approach it more as an ecological process connected to other writing, other uses of language, other disciplines of thought, and social and environmental activism. Through these channels, poetry can contribute to an apparatus of change for rethinking one's self, social relations, and living interactions with one's surroundings.

Not all writers consider poetry as active, connective, and influential. Instead, many poets treat poetry as an isolated, genuine, and self-governing practice, a kind of independent organism. The poet as outcast appears famously in Samuel Taylor Coleridge's "Rime of the Ancient Mariner." Edgar Allan Poe appeared for Charles Baudelaire as the image of isolation: "the United States was for Poe only a vast prison through which he ran, hither and thither, with the feverish agitation of a being created to breathe in a purer world."[3] Then, consider the solitary image of the Fascist Pound locked in a cage in Pisa.

Yet despite their temperamental differences, John Keats and Percy Shelley spent time together in 1817. Pound acted as secretary to William Butler Yeats. John Ashbery and James Schuyler wrote *A Nest of Ninnies* together. The Beats traveled together in *On the Road* by Jack Kerouac. To this day, Saint Mark's Poetry Project acts as a gathering place for poets of the eponymous New York School. Over centuries, Asian poets developed widely used collaborative forms. In the late 1970s, five language writers— Bruce Andrews, Charles Bernstein, Ray DiPalma, Steve McCaffery, and Ron Silliman—collaborated in their signature poem cycle, *Legend*. In line with other multiples, poets often write in series: Dante Alighieri's *La Vita Nuova*, Rainier Maria Rilke's *Sonnets to Orpheus*, Zhai Yongming's "Woman," and Bob Perelman's *Jack and Jill in Troy* make it clear that poems are often written together.

At the level of understanding, poetry famously inscribes multiple meanings. Even W. H. Auden's famous phrase, "Poetry makes nothing happen," has at least two separate references: nothing as ineffectual, that is, remaining within poetry, and nothing as invoking the void, a larger frame than daily traffic. In the same stanza of Auden's poem "In Memory of W.B. Yeats," poetry also "flows," "it survives, / a way of happening."[4] These are not nothings, they are actions, what poetry does, one initialed poet to another.

Adding to Auden's poetic activities, William Wordsworth's poet re-collects after the event.[5] Wallace Stevens' poetry "must resist the intelligence / Almost successfully," and resist identity, "A brune figure in winter evening resists / Identity."[6] For Gwendolyn Brooks poetry "Is Life Distilled."[7] perhaps from Emily Dickinson's "Distills amazing sense."[8] For Lyn Hejinian poetry rejects closure.[9] For Will Alexander the poet scatters criteria and engenders gnostic recognition.[10] These diverse identities and actions of the poet and poem connect in an ecology of language that each poet creates, assumes, and shares with their group of readers and other writers. Some poems flicker and some are concrete. Readers might like some poems and styles better. Readers may think that certain times call for a particular poetics; some may think poetry is eternal. As bell hooks says: "Poetry sustains life. Of this I am certain."[11]

In *Selfie,* I will suggest that through these many linked actions and conditions of poets and poems, poetry changes how we think about language, ourselves, our societies, and our surroundings. Sometimes poets understand their own poetry's scope, context, and impact while other poets focus closely on the poem and ignore or even avoid peripheral

concerns. In *Selfie*, I shape an awareness of how poetry can contribute to environmental conditions, in addition to individual thought and social concerns.

But why and how would changes in language help slow global warming? How can poetry read by so few people affect the monstrous scale of global processes? I want to discuss that incongruity in this book, not to solve a problem, but to show the connections, scaling, and similarity between processes like poetry and climate, to build an extensible model.

Although people see and know the future danger of climate change, they are often compelled to act on more immediate concerns such as small pleasures, daily threats to their agency, social benefits to their groups, and methods to gain near-term objectives for family, government, profit, thought processes, and poetry. These intervening demands of lives, careers, and social groups tend to dominate the more distant and difficult-to-imagine changes from global warming. Examining the actual and immediate causes of climate change helps clarify this struggle between near-term challenges and distant threats.

Emissions of greenhouse gases from six industries—transportation, energy, manufacturing, construction, mining, and agriculture—cause global warming. Industrial processes are linked to systems in the biosphere. *The Climate Report*: "These interconnected systems are increasingly vulnerable to cascading impacts that are often difficult to predict…"[12] Getting ahead of the problem pays: "Every $1 spend on preparation saves society an average of $4" later on.[13] For decision makers in control of these processes, the incentive to reduce emissions will not easily emerge from the current torrent of global expansion and unquestioned humanist assumptions. Immediate self-interest prevents owners and influencers from actually changing their behavior even when they acknowledge the risks of global warming. Yet obscuring these connections make change more difficult and costly.

Changing these complex apparatuses that civilization built to protect the lives and limbs of citizens poses further difficulty for leadership. No one person or group controls the complex supply chains that drive emissions. Only concerted action can plan effective change. Residual biases push the politicians of many large countries toward passively accepting spewing pollutants into our air in order to retain jobs and security. Biases include consumer narcissism, private surplus, financialized production, competitive self-interest, models of nature as too large and perfect to be

affected by mere mortals as the optimum principles of social interaction, and language constructions that separate and foment argument instead of understanding multiple points of view as components of an ecosystem of ideas. The items in this list of biases are usually considered separately to deflect individual leaders from making the sacrifices and combinations necessary to slow climate change.

Individuals, citizens, and consumers in both capitalist and socialist ecosystems have difficulty changing their habits around plastic and petroleum without help from language renewal, new narratives, and meaningful regulation. While developed nations will need to implement wrenching changes in how their people live day to day, digital technology and social media sensitize users to interpret even minor alterations in habits, facts, and attitudes as threats to their stability and agency. I don't propose people change their minds by reading a poem, but poetry warping language and creating new phrasing does participate and acts as a heuristic for climate change. As Henry David Thoreau opined:

O Nature! I do not aspire
To be the highest in thy quire,—
To be a meteor in the sky,
Or comet that may range on high.

But those aspiring to influence events cannot hide as he hoped in the next quatrain:

Only a zephyr that may blow
Among the reeds by the river low;
Give me thy most privy place
Where to run my airy race.[14]

Most wealthy people will not change how they think about and treat their surroundings without significant pressure being placed on their self-image, their group affiliations—family, community, ideas, and supply chains—and their assumptions about the availability of resources needed to secure their safety and freedom to pursue self-interest. Appeals by science to facts about climate change have only convinced some people and appear insufficient by themselves to force wholesale policy change in the time we have left to avoid the collapse of many societies.

Fortunately, poetry explores, in both incisive and fuzzy detail, the questions of scalability in the biosphere, how one thing stands for another,

creating real connections between things as physical, mental, ethical, and linguistic similarities and equivalents. Metaphor, one of poetry's methods, dictates many of our assumptions, explored in the chapter "Networks of Metaphor." At another level, we know how to change these views of self, society, and surroundings; we've done it before by refocusing language and distributing messages, concepts, and aspirations through channels that influence opinion. Americans changed how we thought about ourselves after World War I and World War II and again after the Viet Nam War and again after 9/11, demonstrating that changes in group identity occur frequently, and public information and novel language support those changes. Europe, Africa, and Asia have gone through similar adjustments in identity. At both the distilled level of poetry and the practical level of public relations, minds can be prepared, encouraged, and propelled to change by altering linguistic ecosystems.

Russian intellectuals and poets have changed their views of self and state after the Revolution, again since the death of V.I. Lenin, and again since the collapse of the Soviet Union. Chinese women, especially the poets I know among Third Generation writers and Original Poets (who prefer to remain anonymous), tell me that they think differently about themselves and their agency today than their grandmothers did before the Revolution. The rising classes in India now look beyond its shores to an expanded set of values as they assume roles in the global technology culture. A person living *in* society and their self-image formed *by* society are very different from those of my youth just after World War II. We can change the assumptions of people and even of leaders by changing language and relationships through specific and documented connections.

Methods used to implement change have an eerie similarity. George Creel and Woodrow Wilson worked with the Committee on Public Information in World War I to change how Europeans viewed America. Edward Bernays convinced consumers to accept fluoride in drinking water and dozens of other products through *The Engineering of Consent*, the title of his 1955 book.[15] And who was not more careful with campfires after Smokey the Bear said, "Only *you*…"? A trusted general convinced America that Iraq was about to use weapons of mass destruction that did not exist. Some of these campaigns were true, some false, and some redirected citizens' attention toward where leadership wanted them to focus—all worked through "informing" (and conforming) the public view.

In a specific example, the term "climate change" was toned down from "climactic change" in its original use in 1956. Frank Luntz, the Republican pollster and strategist, worked to replace the inflammatory term "global warming" with the neutral term "climate change," saying "'climate change' suggests a more controllable and less emotional challenge," even as he and his cohorts sought to avoid scientific consensus.[16]

The public relations professionals who promote methods to slow climate change need impetus from informed citizens, financing from willing corporations, understanding of scalar complexities from science, scalable language innovations from poetry, and leadership to execute consistent programs of the size and extent required to adapt corporate mentality in the huge populations of nations such as the US, China, Russia, Japan, and India, the chief contributors to climate change. Underlying changes in societies and cultures will inevitably materialize as the environment degrades, but it would be useful, and, without understatement, one might say urgent, to begin alterations before they are enforced by social collapse.

To accomplish similar changes in support of green initiatives, underlying concepts of how individual agency operates, social structure evolves with habitat, and human/planetary hierarchies interact through language must be adapted for considerable and urgent consumption. *Selfie: Poetry, Social Change & Ecological Connection* demonstrates one reasonably complete model, how such an adaptation might work through rethinking poetry, what poetry does, and how poetry does it. Alternative grammars, reconceiving metaphor, and adapting form increase our awareness of a non-singular way of using language, scaling up to how people operate with the world and world operates with us.

Poetry already provides tools and methods to present the complexities of non-linear climate systems to readers in a way that has been difficult for biologists and climate scientists to communicate with facts. I want to focus on language writing[17] and the group of experimental and avant garde poetry rather than ecopoetry[18] because language writing tends, with notable exceptions like Jed Rasula's *This Compost*[19] and Caroline Bergvall's *Drift*,[20] Cecilia Vicuña's language performances in many parts of the world,[21] and Bob Grenier's "Northern New Hampshire"[22] to include both personal perspectives and the relations between individuals and society—a limit that most political leadership shares. Addressing the inherent and often unintended connections of language-centered writing

to its ecosystems deals directly with the problem of expanding readers' outlook to include our surroundings. Ecopoetry and ecopoetics are more directly and transparently concerned with environment. For ecopoetics, the problem of changing perspectives seems less urgent and at the same time more difficult. Many poets focused on "nature" already use non-descriptive writing.

Language-centered writing and some other experimental strategies use alternative structures that might change individual and group biases. Beyond that poetry can be an effective agent of change through the memorable phrases in the verses of popular music, the descriptions of ecopoetry, activist verses from Thoreau through contemporary Native American ecopoets like Tommy Pico, and evocative verses by the millions. These musical verses and poems have largely asserted a love of nature and reiterated nature's separation from humanity.

The environmental model in *Selfie* proposes that poetries and poetics are built toward multiple perspectives. Just as diverse individual identities, group affiliations, and habitats support life, so varieties of style and method support poetry. Understanding that there are many poetries and that each poetry affects readers differently at different levels begins to change the ideological boundaries of poetry and even the very characteristics of those boundaries. Poetry can be applied to the ways people conceptualize and act on climate change through both specialized and daily use of language. Readers, writers, publishers, and distributors of poetry already expect multi-level perspectives from poetry in the way components of a metaphor (and figures of speech, like synecdoche) perform their roles by linking two or more domains, scales, and dimensions. Can we extend that expectation of metaphoric linkage to other domains, like climate, so readers can expect and accept multiple meanings, solutions, and ways of living in their surroundings?

I titled this book *Selfie* because I realize that I am building its multi-dimensional model from my own point view as well as making connective sense. Tellingly, the background of any selfie is often the reason for taking the photo then and there. In the background, you'll see where I am, who I'm with, how I adapt my perspective to different locations, and adopt other relevant writers. I want to show the background in different lights that reveal even a single habitat as multiple. I try to remain cautious about myself recognizing that many selfies obscure the background by making the self-image too large in the frame. I hope my discretion in these

matters will not be construed as lack of commitment to my argument or the collective poetry.

I have already written on climate change and poetry, starting with *Our Nuclear Heritage*, a loose narrative, poetry, and essay text published in the early 1990s, then *Oops!*, mostly essays with poetry, followed by *Entangled Bank*, poetry built around the environmental model, and most recently *The Oligarch*, a rewriting of Niccolò Machiavelli's *The Prince*, to show the difference between form and operations of governance in political ecosystems.

I also support waiting until age begins to obscure memory before writing any autobiography. Performing this objective is another reason I focus on the language-centered writing that I have been immersed in during 40 years of writing, editing, and publishing, hence the plethora of citations from Roof Books where I have been the primary editor. It's what I know and where I've been, a hybrid of my own and academic discourses, a selfie in the context of poetry.

The specialized ways poetry acts on readers, as an assemblage of individual insights, public language, and non-fiction, appear to be direct, indirect, and at multiple levels rather than telling us what to do like a sermon. So, a more accurate picture of how poetry might affect the mentalities associated with climate change can be gained from looking at the complex sets of connections than from descriptions of self, society, and location isolated from each other. This multi-level model will tend to be more accurate than the easily inferred, charming stories about what happened to me. But to be thorough and because narrative operates through any sequence, there are several places in *Selfie*'s sequence of events where I recount my own tales and allow others a voice to tell as well.

I'm thinking at the moment about diversions in the *Decameron* since I'm writing this introduction in the middle of the Covid-19 plague. But *Selfie* is not intended as a distraction or even only documentation, a "photograph that one has taken of oneself, *esp.* one taken with a smartphone or webcam and shared via social media."[23] *Selfie* is intended to be a series of grammatic and rhetorical examples connected across multiple contexts, a model. I hope you'll read this book not so much as an argument for one way of looking at, interacting with, and being shaped by environment, but as a many-to-many set of methods demonstrating how multi-level perspectives build connections between and within selves, to others, and to shared surroundings differently than usually expected.

Although *Selfie* performs various versions of my own identity, I would not assume that I, as an individual, can have much immediate impact. Most environmental reformers discount the effect of the individual on the planetary environment, preferring to work on industrial, political, and conceptual processes. The popular press, however, being an industry itself, often ignores how industry affects climate change. Instead, corporate media makes lists of things that you, the all-important, consuming individual, can do like power your home with renewable energy, maintain your vehicles, recycle your trash, and not waste the food you buy.

Although there's nothing wrong with recycling, these lists steer you back to yourself instead of focusing outward. Focusing outward, not merely inward toward self-knowledge, is one of the key skills individuals can develop in support of environmentalism. To avoid naïve dualism, I point out that good understanding of oneself improves the accuracy of perceptions of externalities.

At another level, in the regions that cause the most pollution like the US, both mass cultures, with their focus on sentiment, and high cultures, with their focus on how society affects individuals and aesthetics, encourage writers, readers, and politically aware citizens to concentrate on themselves and their peer groups for answers to social problems. Mass and high culture tend to drive people's attention inward, which is also how people tend to respond to uncertainty. I am writing *Selfie* as a way to clarify the actions between selves and societies by adding ecosystems to propel a more thorough comparison than psychology and social critique as a liberal pair.

Meanwhile, almost imperceptibly, yet widely discussed in the news media, the pressures of external threats as diverse as climate change, autocracy, and illness overwhelm and victimize writers who continue to focus on themselves and their groups. Studies of the impact of stress on individuals produce some results I didn't expect. In their article "Acute social and physical stress interact to influence social behavior: The role of social anxiety," Bernadette von Dawans et al. remark:

> We found significant influences on various subjective increases in stress by physical and social stress, but no interaction effect. Cortisol was significantly increased by physical stress, and the heart rate was modulated by physical and social stress as well as their combination. Social anxiety modulated the subjective stress response but not the cortisol or heart rate

response. With respect to behavior, our results show that social and physical stress interacted to modulate trust, trustworthiness, and sharing. While social stress and physical stress alone reduced prosocial behavior, a combination of the two stressor modalities could restore prosociality. Social stress alone reduced nonsocial risk behavior regardless of physical stress. Social anxiety was associated with higher subjective stress responses and higher levels of trust.[24]

Selfie concentrates on balancing individual, social, and ecological interactions and identifying connections, that is, the paths of interaction between them. In this way, language, bodies, societies, and ecosystems are framed to look like more like each other with ecosystems writ at multiple scales supporting social interactions and multiple individual identities in fluctuating surroundings.

From movies to poetry, contemporary art frequently promotes resistance as the best way to foment change. (Remember the Wallace Stevens quotation above?) The environmental model maintains that, although resistance is important to climate change, its power operates effectively only in concert with building alternative agendas. Otherwise, resistance can appear childish or narcissistic. Individual and social resistance to polluting power, implementing new methods to reduce pollution, and developing the skill to understand and absorb other points of view together build the complex entity sufficient to change production methods and reduce reliance on polluting and mono-logical systems.

The environmental model predicts that as climate adjusts individuals and groups will begin to feel differently about themselves, write and act differently, adapting to change like most organisms. *Selfie* assumes that individuals and social groups will adapt future selves increasingly around climate stresses. Inversely, variations in collective behavior will influence climate as they have already. Poetry moves individuals and poetry is changed by social and environmental forces. The types and quantities of food available to eat, the weather, what we see and hear from friends, the kinds of houses we live in, and what public and social media will say about us are all impacted by local climate conditions including the climate of public discourse in specialties like poetry and the climate of individual thought. We accept this generalization because as Raymond Holder Wheeler says climate in different parts of the world significantly affects how we interact and build our cultures.[25]

The Australian Academy of Sciences points out that humans have lived in a relatively stable climate for the past eight to 12,000 years.[26] Now, as industry rapidly changes climate, uncertainty and conflict among neighboring individuals and groups increase. Humans, according to Sabine Perch-Nielsen et. al., begin to move about more, seeking security.[27] Even as we need collective action, the stresses of climate change make our differences appear more threatening due to threats to our bodies and the availability of resources to sustain us. Compare global capitalists' well-funded fantasy of escape to Mars, families who cannot easily leave their small city with its contaminated water supply (Flint, Michigan is a well-publicized example), and worldwide reactions to desperate migrations from Central America, Africa, and the Middle East documented in a White House Report on migration.[28]

Capitalism drives human expansion and exploitation of environment without renewal, but at the same time environment shapes capitalism. As uncertainty increases, negative reactions to other people amplify while unscrupulous politicians exploit this distrust of difference to gain power for further extraction of wealth by the oligarchs that support their regimes. All this occurs at the same time that we need coordinated action and cultural change to manage industries and ways of working. Yet the most effective structure for initiating change, small group action, means oligarchy also promotes change even as an oligarch's primary concern remains to stay in power. Writing and activism around climate can adapt attitudes of leaders to our surroundings, but it's not an efficient process. Projecting and working with a model that includes habitat, social interaction, and individual behavior with their specific connections helps people adapt:

Adopt to Adapt
We can adopt
and then adapt.
We are adept at that.

Many components of our selves contribute to our ability to adapt: genetic, epigenetic, event, memory, posture, and feedback mechanisms within individuals as well as complex connections with society and habitat including observation, those second-order dynamics. The model characterizes these components' inter- and intra-action together as environmental, intending to reinscribe the ways humanism has negotiated
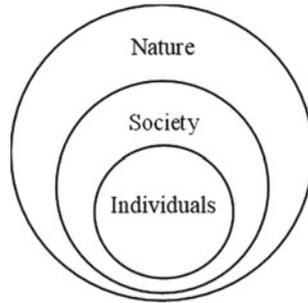
Fig. 1   Humanist model of individuals, society & nature

multiple individual points of view about what's me and not me, self and non-self. Humanism has represented selves, societies, and habitats as a series of concentric circles with the individual at the core, society in the middle, surrounded by nature as a location (Fig. 1).

Both Platonism (where humans see distorted cave shadows while the bright sun of nature reveals the truth that we "will not be able to see anything at all of what are now called realities"[29]) and some Buddhism (where critiques of the society's goals appeal to idealized meditation on self in nature to illuminate human illusions) separate humanity and nature in concentric regions.

In contrast to nature as ideal and separate from distorted human views, the environmental model proposes that natural processes are as inefficient and indeterminate as human minds and cultures. As Charles Darwin and contemporaries like paleontologist Stephen Jay Gould point out, organisms and processes in the biosphere need only to function in an ongoing manner, because organisms derive from a common ancestor.

> Evolution is the conviction that organisms developed their current forms by an extended history of continual transformation, and that ties of genealogy bind all living things into one nexus[30]

Organisms do not have to be perfect, they are not perfect, and they will not become perfect. As climate changes under our noses, appeals to the perfection of nature should be readily perceived as deceptive, even as we look to biomimicry for some solutions to global warming. Humans cannot become perfect on these paths and functioning in an ongoing

manner appears desirable. Poems cannot become perfect and an effective critique of poetry aligns with the rest of the biosphere by accepting ranges of possibilities rather than the idée fixe of perfection. Each step toward the ideal must be real and therefore tentative, able to be changed as editing words in a poem.

Climate change is not only a capitalist problem, but a result of the human desire to make life easier, less risky, and more controllable. Both socialism and capitalism strive to improve human welfare by exploiting natural resources. Public social exploitation and private capital exploitation result in similar pollution patterns in China, India, and US. When socialists focus on self and society, they easily lose sight of habitats. When capitalists focus solely on personal well-being, they decrease their understanding of the needs of others and their impact on our surroundings. Optimistic action with others through careful review of our minds, our collective needs, and our habitats increases compassion.

To solve these problems caused by modern industry, some people support retreating to values of the past. Although traditional cultures can be useful as an example in addressing climate change, no single past model remembered as ideal can integrate all the contemporary complexities of diverse and dynamic individual psyches, defended group identities, huge populations, and multiple ways that people look at and are constituted by their surroundings.

As organisms and selves, we continue to attempt to reposition the world from a single perspective, yours in your case and mine in mine. I can feel myself wanting to simplify this text toward a singularity as I write these sentences. Linear reading of sentences pushes me to find a specific thought. Paragraph structure pushes me in the direction of finding myself in what I link together. As Gertrude Stein says in her essay "Poetry and Grammar" that shaped *Selfie*'s early chapters, "Sentences are not emotional but paragraphs are."[31] These categories push me further that direction of paragraphs as well and require rethinking how they interact.

Looking at the world from multiple perspectives means that practical and theoretical solutions can only be accurate within quite wide ranges as is clear when reviewing any historical system. Accepting this rangy reality remains difficult for even well-disciplined people. The knotty conflicts of self-interest do not disappear when expanding the purpose of and writing toward decentering humanity in our model of the biosphere.

As a group of civilizations sharing the same biosphere, we no longer have time to wait for everyone to think the same way, although increasing autocracy around the world pursues regional homogenization. We humans will benefit from increasing the speed of change toward sustainable cultures to match the speed of climate change. We will benefit from identifying with policies that include awareness of our surroundings. To do so, we can absorb the social value of diversity and ecological connectivity from our habitats. Put another way, I and we and even they must find ways to act not only through personal and social impulses but also to refract desire through and in response to place/location/situation. We are always in multiple, simultaneous states of being. Inversely, climate structures frequently scale even as scalar discontinuities persist. In fact, scale implies gaps in size and dimension as one scale is distinguished from another. At the same time, scales are linked by comparison.

We are connected differently

and multiply;

places, too, are changing.

Poetry has changed in similar ways for millennia with styles succeeding one another, thus poets and other people, too, must already be good, if noisy, at adapting. That noise might be politically or genetically dialectical. New poems are criticized by older poets and critics until they die or stop being read by a new generation and new ideas are accepted. But culture for the most part has not acknowledged multiplicity except through politics to gain control of marginal groups' votes.

Instead, many influential people promote the delusion of an inviolable unity of identities called self to mirror and reinforce how our organisms protect our bodies. Practically, both animal and plant bodies are generally denser than the air around them. Our vision of ourselves is distorted in some ways as a matter of survival. At the same time, we imagine that non-human activities operate with pristine perfection. Let us actively seek to comprehend and act on the fragility of our surroundings rather than have understanding thrust upon us.

The environmental person that the model proposes is constructed in Group 1 through language and parts of speech, since our definitions of ourselves appear in the words, concepts, and images that we identify with. To be honest as a writer, I acknowledge my starting point and my motivation to understand the people around me. Continuing from Group 1's pronouns and articles, nouns and verbs, the particles and building blocks of the social identities of class, ability, gender, and race, Group 2 moves

to investigate syntax, metaphor, and the social values of flows associated with scale and probability. In Group 3, environmental social structures and inclusive hierarchy add potential practices to environmental models.

Throughout I have attempted to undermine any single reading of the text and intention. I try to avoid Aristotelian argument to confirm a single hypothesis, although I'm sure linearity creeps in as explanation. Some readers have complained that this technique makes the book difficult to read. But the difference in possibilities between the individual/society binary and the four-part structure of self, society, environment, and connection makes the problem both harder to describe in linear sentences and more likely to support climate change remediation.

In the chapters that follow, I have written in both poetry and prose and imported the language of others. I have used images and matrices to encourage multiple readings and reading methods. I keep telling myself to apologize for so many generalizations. In these ways, the page can be read in multiple, material dimensions—each word sinks and rises, held less tightly to its plane—so the effect of multiple perspectives is instantiated in the text.

Farmers know how to use the methods of plants and animals to grow food rather than implementing demonstrable falsehoods that support profits for landowners while sterilizing the soil. Poets know how to use the methods they find in the language as it structures the biosphere. Yet many revert to the partial representations of individual perception and social critique. The new generation of poets will compromise plain truth when the unvarnished facts will harm people, as long as we can attribute minimal damage done through the spin. But when the falsehood generates too much damage, we repair our strategy and take risks. In uncertain times, judgment becomes more problematic. To help address this conflict, the environmental model builds inconsistencies into actions and words. Only readoption of continually updated models and adaptation to our sites of action make life on a dynamic planet possible. There is no desirable end point.

Multidirectional Writing

"I have to be affected to say 'I' at all." *Judith Butler*

"I didn't mean to become an I." *Trish Salah*

The Particles

This chapter introduces how *Selfie* understands the relationships between individuals, social groups, and ecosystems by proposing physical and conceptual connectors both within and between each component of the biosphere. Particles of language such as pronouns and articles build multiple identities through examples from second wave feminism and twenty-first-century identity politics. Environmental identity willingly breaks existing grammatical agreement to increase social and environmental cohesion. Scale is a key relationship for climate change and invokes similarity as a third term in the binary of equality. Similarity works to bind ecosystems together. Finally, the chapter shows a diagram of the four-part environmental model of self and begins to derive how the model is built in accordance with a few historical and contemporary poetries.

* * *

> For a long time I have hesitated to write a book on women. The subject is irritating, especially to women; and it is not new. Enough ink has been spilled in the quarrelling over feminism, now practically over, and perhaps we should say no more about it.[1]

These sentences read oddly in retrospect since it appears Simone de Beauvoir's "subject" will not go away.

   Pronouns played a big role in the 1970s. I remember struggling to rewrite my speech during those years. I stopped using *his* and *him* as defaults, tried not to balk at being corrected when my habits of speech took over, and followed the discussion of alternative constructions.

Now again pronouns evolve around
me as individuals and in coordination,
as multitudes grasp that they are
they, not only he and she,
and not only trans people,
who may be addressed as they want.
All are laminated *they*s,
I embedded, the binary broke;
and with it the disparaging governance
of I/Other : Us/Them crumbles.

You can call yourself your desire:
community scales of performing
assemble us all into they.

   This transformation reshapes my perceptions of a unitary self, separate from nature's perfection and beauty.

Suppose non-human nature
is imperfect, improbable, unpredictable
as people. I and our surroundings
assemble similarly in layers, interacting
through our trees of families and resources.

In this construction,
we marks our differences,
alike in certain ways,
different in others.
In this way, *we* rearranges
phenomena, shifting
across social groups to social fabric,
across meals to food groups
to molecules interacting,
to interspecies collaboration
that builds organisms.

Fortunately, difference creates:
Small temperature differences create matter:
linking different molecules creates
life: two different sexes create
persons : multiple races, genders,
classes, and points of view strengthen society.

Similar rhyme create verse:
Similar patterns create style:

Portraits are similar to how we see us:
Differences and similarities:
Identity is multiple
abstractions from events.

    Total agreement like complete equality remains entropic and disappears the subject. Even writing at any one level threatens poetries' diversity, societies' readings, and ecosystems' fabrics. Yet within these stanzas, inherent in this use of *we*, lurks a risky *ought* that threatens general consent with autocracy, and myself with losing confidence. But since language continues to be inherently polyvocal, *we* includes *me* and *you*, connected reader. Stress attracts the solo poetic voice.

    But can something as simple as questioning what grammarians call agreement and increasing weight on plural pronouns threaten social cohesion? Probably not by itself, although questioning grammar does evoke energetic responses. Rather than fretting over grammatical and ungrammatical constructions, can we accept difference beyond the politics of differently gendered people, showing how these changes in grammar are no less cognitively efficient? According to Julie Foertsch et. al., one does apparently read slower when expected grammatical constructions are not followed.[1]

    Selfie asks readers to consider slow reading as a way to understand poetry. For those demanding speed in the cognitive network at every step, consider how reading slower helps support entire classes of people. Consider, too, how rushing often triggers errors. Outside of grammar, questioning inspires reflection *and* threatens fragile connections, encouraging reconnection, multiple connection, and highlights the power of connection. All of these changes are possible and possibly useful in unlearning biases that drive emissions.

I Can Follow Grammar like This
Grammar like this can be followed
by changes in culture and production
quicker than historic rates of social change,
a viral substitution of productive and reproductive process.

In environmental models, the trajectory of agreement differs from the binary world. So does unidirectional progress. *We* suggests that *I* is one of many instances, of many roles people take precipitating individuals and interactions. Not everything, however, is plural and *I* rebuilds trust around probability.

Talking about number calculates
a sustainable understanding
where I and you
are one and many

Here is a foray toward an environmental model. Organisms operate with conditional autonomy to breathe, to eat, to reproduce, and to thrive. As I perform these functions, I separate myself and "sing myself." In this way, beings with outlines, not only through ego, but also through our bodies, initially posit a simple binary: *my* organism and the world, an organismic binary.

Defending my own body against microbes, predators, and intra-species competition facilitates reproduction promoting survival as Darwin points out in *The Origin of Species*.[2] Identifying and defending include such diverse activities as accumulating surplus, building a shelter for security and to secure a mate, farming for food, and sexual selection between individuals. As David Rothenberg points out in *Survival of the Beautiful*, building a bower, making music, and writing poetry are aesthetic functions implicated in sexual selection.[3]

As part of this organismic binary, the mind, through the medial prefrontal cortex of the brain, continually makes decisions about its status regarding that which is and is not self, encouraging conflict, confrontation, and reflection on future consequences of social activities including altruism. Imaging researcher Arnaud D'Argembeau reveals:

> One of the most consistent findings has been that the ventromedial prefrontal cortex (vMPFC) is activated when people contemplate various aspects of themselves and their life, such their traits, experiences, preferences, abilities, and goals.[4]