“On My Volcano Grows the Grass”: Towards a Phenomenology of Desire in *Autobiography of Red*

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ABSTRACT.

This thesis establishes a phenomenology of desire in Anne Carson's novel-in-verse *Autobiography of Red*. It examines how desire constructs the self in the text and how it positions it in relation to its surrounding world. The self's status in the text is read through Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari's understanding of desire and their concepts *becoming* and *determinitorialisation* as explicated in *Anti-Oedipus* and *A Thousand Plateaus*.

These concepts are used to map the transformative power of desire in *Autobiography of Red* and provide an approach through which to understand the tenuous nature of self in the text. It reveals desire not as located solely in the relation between the text's protagonist Geryon and Herakles, but as a movement that animates and constructs the text. It reads the "red" of the title, the presence of the volcano, of lava, as essential to the text, mapping how the force of desire positions the self and undoes the notion of a phenomenal "background".

Deleuzian desire has linguistic implications and the thesis further extends the use of becoming and deterritorialisation to understand Carson's poetics and the text as the site that gives rise to a phenomenology of desire. The text is deterritorialised and Carson articulates a way of relaying experience beyond the representative mode.

The thesis offers a reading of *Autobiography of Red* with a Deleuzian theory of desire, which is a new approach in Carson scholarship. As such it hopes to open up both the poetic text and theoretic text to new understandings and create points of departure for further research.

Keywords: Anne Carson, Gilles Deleuze, Felix Guattari, desire, phenomenology, poetics, becoming, deterritorialisation, literary studies
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Title quote: Emily Dickinson quoted in *Autobiography of Red*, p.108
INTRODUCTION.

**Thesis aim**

This thesis aims to establish a phenomenology of desire in, and through a reading of, *Autobiography of Red* (1998) by Anne Carson. It will argue that desire is constitutive of self and central to its position in Carson’s novel-in-verse. It will explore whether desire is what ultimately causes the undoing of the bordered self, the appropriation and control of an individual “inside”, proposing a reading of the desiring self as de-centred.

Establishing desire as a transformative and constitutive force in *Autobiography of Red* opens up for an exploration of the ways in which desire impacts the self’s being-in-the-world.

These ways are examined in dialogue with Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari with especial emphasis put on concepts brought forward in *Anti-Oedipus* and *A Thousand Plateaus*. Through a reading of their concepts of desire, *becoming* and *deterritorialisation*, a phenomenology of desire will be traced in Carson’s text. The use of Deleuzian concepts will also map the connection between desire, the text’s phenomenological aspects and Carson’s poetics.

The thesis thus presents a reading of *Autobiography of Red* with a Deleuzian theory of desire, an approach to Carson’s writing on desire that has not been attempted before. As such it aims to open up both the poetic text and theoretic text to new understandings.

**Thesis questions**

How does desire construct and transform the self and its relation to the world in *Autobiography of Red*? What is the relation between desire and language in the conception of being and how does this ultimately give rise to a phenomenology of desire?
The main text that this thesis will engage with is Anne Carson's *Autobiography of Red*, which will be read in dialogue with Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari’s *Anti-Oedipus* and *A Thousand Plateaus*. Carson’s oeuvre spans many genres and there are many works that deal explicitly with desire, but only one novel has been chosen in order to focus the research and to ensure the space for an in-depth close reading of text.

I suggest a reading of *Autobiography of Red* as the protagonist’s, Geryon’s, failed project of unified self, a text in which autobiography comes to read as merely a fantasy of the own “inside”. Geryon establishes the creation of his autobiography as a project of “all inside things”, delineating a space removed and apart from “all outside things.”¹ The novel is also a romance, its narrative framed by Geryon’s desire for the older boy Herakles. For this reason I argue that this text is an exemplary site at which a phenomenology of desire is constructed. In the novel-in-verse, desire opens up the world: its transformative power points in the direction of a phenomenology, it comes to implicate a way of existing in the world.

Carson begins *Autobiography of Red* by situating it in relation to ancient Greek poet Stesichoros and his use of adjectives: “These small imported mechanisms are in charge of attaching everything in the world to its place in particularity. They are the latches of being.”² This claim is central to the text as it suggests the importance of language to the conception of being.

The story of Geryon is taken from the ancient Greek myth, which lyric poet Stesichoros put down in his poem *Geryoneis*. Carson rewrites this delineation and the relationship between supposed “source” and her own text. The frame that myth constitutes for the book and the uses that Carson puts it to further inscribes the importance of language to the thesis aim.

² Ibid., p.4
I have chosen to work with the concept “phenomenology of desire” in order to limit the theme of desire, which is the basis and underlying concern for much, if not all, of Carson’s work. This specific approach to desire thus offers a new perspective on how desire forms and informs her poetics. The term “poetics” in this thesis refers to the doing of text, its structure and performative properties.

On theory

The theoretical framework for the thesis is Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari’s *Anti-Oedipus and A Thousand Plateaus*. In *Anti-Oedipus* Deleuze and Guattari write against Freudian psychoanalysis and the Oedipal complex as the basis for thinking desire. They refuse desire as based in an essential lack and instead argue for it as a productive force, locating desire in the human as well as the natural world.

In *A Thousand Plateaus* Deleuze and Guattari initiates a radical change in the relation between self and world, and between self and phenomena. There is a phenomenology implied all through the text: “the question is directly one of perceptual semiotics. It’s not easy to see things in the middle (...) it’s not easy to see the grass in things and in words.” Deleuzian scholar Clare Colebrook explains this concept as the way in which the subject as well as the object are created through perception, rather than being a priori to it. She writes: “Rather than looking at perception as the way in which one term (the eye) grasps some content (the image to be interpreted), Deleuze’s politics of immanence extends to the micropolitics of pre-personal perceptions.” The idea of “perceptual semiotics” is essential to Carson’s poetics. The two concepts, both linked to desire, that will be used to explicate this idea, are *determinationalisation* and *becoming*.

Deterritorialisation exists in relation to territoriality; a term that points to how all things and everything that we perceive in life are made up of connections and forces. The things that we perceive to be stable entities are essentially unstable, subject to constant change and movement, always on the brink of deterritorialising. Deterritorialisation

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unsettles the connections, the codes and relations that make up a territory.
Deterritorialisation can refer both to a destabilisation of the earth, of the relation
between self and phenomena, and to a deterritorialisation in and of text.

Emphasis will also be put on Deleuze and Guattari’s concept of becoming in order to
explore the interconnection between desire, self and language. In becoming a
deterritorialisation takes place; the two concepts are very much interconnected.
Becoming is an interesting and stimulating approach to the transformative force and
experience that Carson ascribes to desire. The concept implies an immanent relation
between self and phenomena that is framed by constant change and flux. Colebrook
explains: “becoming is not the becoming of some being. There is becoming, from which
we perceive relatively stable points of being.”\(^5\) This means that there is no originary
stable world or being that becomes, but perpetual change that occasionally stabilizes
into what we perceive as such a world.

In his essay “Literature and Life\(^6\)” Deleuze also anchors this concept in text. He defines
writing as a state of becoming and defines literature as the becoming of language. In
becoming metaphor is undone and mimesis refused. Representational modes of writing
and thinking the world give place to a style that is “productive of the very form of our
thought.”\(^7\)

Through the concepts of deterritorialisation and becoming Deleuze and Guattari provide
a way of thinking about the self and its construction, through text and through desire,
which proves useful in understanding the decentred, floating and perpetually becoming
and un-becoming of Carson’s subjects as the premise of her poetics.

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\(^5\) Colebrook, *Understanding Deleuze*, p.52
\(^6\) Gilles Deleuze, ”Literature and Life” in *Critical Inquiry*, Vol.23, No.2 (trans. Daniel W.
Smith and Michael A. Greco, The University of Chicago Press, 1997)
\(^7\) Colebrook, p.51
On method

I want to keep close to the text. It is important to note that the aim is not necessarily to establish an overarching approach to Carson’s oeuvre in the scope of this thesis. The aim is to approach Carson as an author by way of a specific textual site, *Autobiography of Red*, and to open up for further research and more exhaustive accounts. The idea is in then rather to explore how her writing gives rise to a phenomenology of desire, whilst also investigating how such a concept can be applied to her work. For this reason I have limited the research to a close reading of one of her texts.

In other words, the thesis essentially asks two questions, what a phenomenology of desire might entail and how it informs Carson’s poetics. Therefore it is crucial to keep Carson in dialogue with the theoretical and philosophical frameworks. The idea is not simply to apply theory to text but to allow the textual examples to take part in establishing what a phenomenology of desire might be. Text itself is, and must be, the body and site of such a concept. To read Carson’s desire beyond psychoanalysis and its emphasis on lack also has linguistic implications, as writing is not thought on the basis of representing that which is absent, thus making the focus on her poetics especially significant.

The role and position of theory in the thesis is important. The project is in large part also an examination of the theory itself and how it works with literary text. I have devoted one whole chapter to the explication of the theoretical concepts used. The concepts are of such complexity that this work as a whole benefits from a more in-depth explanation of them to facilitate further reading. The concepts and terms tread into each other, are sometimes difficult to distinguish, which is at the core of the way they work and this interweaving necessitates a mapping of their relation to each other.

However, the considerate amount of space given to theory in the thesis is not primarily due to its intricacy. In *A Thousand Plateaus* Deleuze and Guattari withholds that the rhizome shakes something loose, “challenging the hegemony of the signifier.”8 Here there is a contingent but poetically tangible connection to Stesichoros’ unlatching of

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8 Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, p.15
being through the use of adjectives. Most importantly it says something about a point of contact between primary text and theoretical language, or rather about the blurring of these categories. There is a methodological claim to be made for approaching Carson’s writing through *A Thousand Plateaus* and *Anti-Oedipus* because of their own kind of aestheticized philosophy. There is something in Carson’s work, which perhaps in turn can be described as philosophical poetry, that resists more traditional theoretical frameworks as her own language defies a unifying perspective and categorisation, calling for poetic and proliferated readings. In a move towards this kind of reciprocal structure, Carson enters into both an intellectual as well as a poetic dialogue with Deleuze and Guattari.

To say that the poetry of *Anti-Oedipus* and *A Thousand Plateaus* has no importance is futile. Not only do Deleuze and Guattari frequently cite writers such as Marcel Proust and Virginia Woolf, but cite them in a way that anchors their own concepts in literary and poetic instances, such as the waves of Woolf washing ashore or the image of a sleeping Albertine turning into a plant. In both *Anti-Oedipus* and *A Thousand Plateaus*, the theory seems to evolve out of certain powerful images. There is the volcano; there is the grass. The texts follow their call and suggestions, in form and in structure. By taking hold of certain images in the theoretical works I have been able to read the books closely, textually, not only extracting concepts for application but ensuring that dialogue I seek, in order to open up Carson’s text as well as Deleuze and Guattari’s to new understandings by finding poetic points of contact between them. It is this affinity between all of the texts that initiated my own research and interest. The material has dictated the questions.

Deleuze and Guattari write: “We have been criticised for over-quoting literary authors. But when one writes, the only question is which other machine the literary machine can be plugged into, must be plugged into in order to work.”\(^9\) Carson’s textual selves and consequently their desire exist in, and work through, a network of texts and references, often displacing and decentering ancient Greek myth.

\(^9\) Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, p.4
The question that needs to be asked is; what does Deleuzian theory require of engagement with text? Deleuze and Guattari’s philosophy urges us to see things in the middle rather than “looking down on them from above”\textsuperscript{10}, which presents itself also as a method for reading and for writing. Academic writing requires, perhaps, a certain look from above, but I have attempted to go deeply into a text partly on the conditions of its own logic.

Finally, the use of the word “phenomenology” needs addressing. It is, in brief, the study of how consciousness and experience is structured. Deleuze questions the ontology of traditional phenomenology, essentially arguing that the perceiving subject is neither stable nor a priori to experience. It is perhaps a little dangerous, a little daring if not wrong, to draft a phenomenology through the work of Deleuze and Guattari. Phenomenology is an explicit theme in Autobiography of Red, making it an important node of analysis in the work and in this thesis. Why Deleuze and Guattari and not a “pure” phenomenologist? One of the main reasons for this is the Deleuzian concepts’ deep relation to the literary. The way they connect the self’s relation to the world, desire and language. The question here is how to approach it in a new theoretical way. By examining this theme within the framework of Deleuzian desire, and vice versa, something can be opened up – new answers, or rather new questions, will follow.

Deleuzian theory answers to the tension or disparity between linguistic convention and experience, and thus offers a way into the phenomenological aspects of Carson’s work in a manner that for example a phenomenologist such as Maurice Merleau-Ponty, who has previously been used in readings of Carson, does not.

There is extensive research on Deleuze’s relation to phenomenology and the ways in which Deleuzian theory both challenges and aligns with its concepts. This research is useful in that it justifies and aids an understanding of the phenomenological aspects as essential to Deleuze and Guattari’s concept of desire and concept of being in Anti-Oedipus and A Thousand Plateaus. The relation to traditional phenomenology is complex and the views on Deleuze’s position within the phenomenological field are many and divergent. Stephan Günzel argues that, “in contrast to other poststructuralist theorists,

\textsuperscript{10} Deleuze and Guattari, A Thousand Plateaus, p.23
Gilles Deleuze did not seek for a break-up with phenomenology.” Günel writes that Deleuze read other philosophers in a way in which a reconstruction of the philosophy at hand is achieved, rather than a criticism or rejection. In other words, a way of finding a “soft spot” in others’ work and from that spot constructing another and differential philosophy. It is with this commitment to potentiality that one should approach Deleuze and phenomenology. There is a tension between his philosophy and the phenomenological tradition; the relationship is not a case of total affinity, but tension can be fruitful.

Brian Massumi writes in the foreword to his translation of A Thousand Plateaus that the reader of the book is primarily invited to “incarnate it in a foreign medium, whether it be painting or politics.” He explains how the purpose of Deleuze’s philosophy is not to create concepts that “add up to a system of belief or an architecture of propositions that you either enter or you don’t”, but rather invites a certain potential in the “way a crowbar in willing hand envelops an energy of prying.” This thesis might take some prying, hopefully generating a productive energy along the way. And I ask with Massumi, “what new thoughts does it make possible to think? What new sensations and perceptions does it open in the body?”

Literature review and scope

There is no real canon to refer to when it comes to research and literature on Carson. News travel slow, it seems. Ecstatic Lyre (2015) is the first anthology of secondary literature on Carson’s oeuvre and it provides short essays on all her work to date. Many of the recent articles written on Carson are gathered here and it thus gives an accessible overview of current Carson research. Many of the articles examine desire as a force and theme in her writing. In the essay “Anne Carson’s Stereoscopic Poetics”, Jessica Fisher

12 Ibid.
14 Ibid.
15 Ibid.
suggests desire as the self-constitutive force I will also argue it to be. Although her approach diverges from my own with its reliance on Lacanian psychoanalysis, the essay proves useful in its emphasis on desire as constitutive of self and works as a foil and point of departure for discussion. Also Lily Hoang’s essay “From Geryon to G: Anne Carson’s Red Doc> and the Avatar”, although focussing on the later Red Doc>, provides productive nodes for further investigation. Hoang emphasises the textual body and the body as text as well as the importance of myth in Carson’s writing.

How to use and approach Eros the Bittersweet has been a methodological question that has required some consideration. Carson’s doctoral thesis on desire in ancient Greek lyric poetry is often consulted as an authoritative text in Carson scholarship. However, I do not necessarily want to create an authoritative framework but have chosen to depart from a specific textual site, Autobiography of Red. Joshua Wilkinson, the editor of Ecstatic Lyre, points in his introduction to Carson’s plea to “act so there is no use in a centre”, which for him becomes a methodological difficulty in putting together an anthology. In a similar way for me then, to avoid this authority has been an attempt to answer to that plea.

Although work has been done on the notion of desire and its importance for Carson’s work, there appears to be no extensive research on how it correlates to the phenomenological aspects of her texts. However, Stuart J. Murray’s article “The Autobiographical Self: Phenomenology and the Limits of Narrative Self-Possession in Anne Carson’s Autobiography of Red” (2005) deals explicitly with some of the topics of my proposed research. Murray’s focus is the correlation between phenomenology and autobiography in Carson’s novel. Drawing on the phenomenology of Martin Heidegger he questions whether the notion of “life” is closer to writing or to a sense of self and being, thus positing autobiography as a philosophical problem. This proves useful for my own research as it establishes Geryon’s sense of self as at least partly a phenomenological question. It is an important article that I have often also found cited by others writing on Carson.

There is not a lot of research on Carson in connection to Deleuze, despite the arguable affinity between her conception of language and becoming-self, and the rhizomatic agency in for example *A Thousand Plateaus*. She has not been favoured among writers in research on Deleuze and literature, which has tended toward modernist writers such as Marcel Proust, Virginia Woolf and Franz Kafka. However, two recent articles do in part link Carson with Deleuzian theory. Although they are by no means exhaustive accounts of the possible scope of such a relationship, they do take Deleuzian notions as starting points for explicating themes in Carson’s work.

In “Drawing Out a New Image of Thought: Anne Carson’s Radical Ekphrasis” (2013), Monique Tschofen examines Anne Carson’s poem “Seated Figure with Red Angle (1988) by Betty Goodwin” in relation to the drawing “Seated Figure with Red Angle” by Betty Goodwin, to which the poem is a response. Tschofen is concerned with the relation between word and image and the ways in which Carson has translated the visual into language. Tschofen takes as her point of departure Deleuze’s view of art as offering “a new image of thought,” arguing that Carson’s language creates the new spaces of becoming that Deleuze claims the arts are capable of opening up. Tschofen’s article proves useful in that she insists on an affinity between Carson’s poetics and Deleuze’s view on the potentiality and position of art in relation to “the central problems of philosophy and their relationship to human subjects.” She points out that Deleuze found these “new images” in writers such as Nietzsche and Proust, and through this article she comes to argue for the validity of reading Carson amongst them.

In Dina Georgis’ “Discarded Histories and Queer Affects in Anne Carson’s Autobiography of Red” (2014), Carson’s *Autobiography of Red* is read in relation to queer theory. Georgis maps the relation between language, being and queerness in the novel, drawing on Deleuze’s notion of being as “difference without a concept,” as laid out in *Difference and Repetition*. She argues that Carson’s text escapes naming of experience and instead...
suggests, “the difference of being can only be reached through the indirection of adjectives and metaphor, pictures in Geryon’s case, because the queer foreignness within has no other grammar.”

This refusal of naming human experience, in other words representation, is linked to what Deleuze defines as “a more profound and more artistic reality.” Since Georgis’ focus is queer theory and the queerness of being, the article has no direct bearing on my own project, but it does however highlight, in a similar way to Tschofen, an affinity between Carson’s poetics and a Deleuzian conception of being.

Carson’s prolific and proliferating work does not just entreat academic research and written response. Since I work in part from a place of poetry, using poetic images as catalysts, other responses are also of interest. Meriç Algün’s exhibition Finding the Edge (Galerie Nordenhake, Stockholm, 2017) takes its point of departure in Carson’s Eros the Bittersweet. On a large wooden shelf structure the book is displayed alongside video images of moving tectonic plates, parts of beehives, ferns and fossils. Algün’s concern is with the limits of eros; the gallery’s information text reads: “a series of new works that draws parallels between the separation of the continents and the origins of human desire.” The natural world with its spatiality and temporality is the overwhelming presence in the exhibition, along with several large volumes of books with titles such as: “Solid”, “Horizon”, “Liquid”, “Lava” and “Flow.” The earth is forever changing, the separation of the continents is not a complete and static separation, but one that continues to shift and move. Interestingly then, the borders of eros take on an earthly dimension, the installation suggesting a simultaneous movement of desire and world and questioning their absolute division.

In order to explain and map out the meaning of Deleuzian theory I have used Clare Colebrook’s Understanding Deleuze (2002). Colebrook’s book is both accessible and comprehensive, providing definitions of all Deleuze’s major concepts and terms. The other major work on Deleuze that I have turned to is Russell West-Pavlov’s Space in Theory: Kristeva, Foucault, Deleuze (2009). West-Pavlov offers a reading of the spatial

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21 Ibid.
elements of Deleuzian theory and by placing it alongside Foucault and Kristeva suggests reading the Deleuzian self’s relation to space in relation to, or as a further development of psychoanalysis and power critique. West-Pavlov also makes use of literary examples, such as Virginia Woolf, to explicate the theory, which implies an affinity to the method of Deleuze and Guattari themselves.

There is, as mentioned above, research on Deleuze’s relation to the phenomenological tradition. Although this thesis will not map this relation in detail, it can point in the direction of this research in order to provide something of a framework to my own use of Deleuzian theory.

Jack Reynolds and Jon Roffe, in “Deleuze and Merleau-Ponty: Immanence, Univocity and Phenomenology”, argue against a definite dichotomy between poststructuralism and phenomenology and write that despite differences between the two philosophers “something like a coexistence of planes obtains between Deleuze and Merleau-Ponty.”

They also highlight the fact that there has been relatively little research into their inter-relation, and claim it reductive to place Deleuze solely on the side of pure immanence in opposition to phenomenology.

Corry Shores, in “Body and World in Merleau-Ponty and Deleuze” begins by stating that although there is tension between Deleuzian theory and phenomenology there is also compatibility. He writes that he is interested in “not so much in what was the relationship of Deleuze’s ideas to phenomenology, but more in what it could become when we treat his criticisms as constructive critiques. Might it be possible to do phenomenology in a Deleuzian way?”

24 Ibid. See also Leonard Lawlor’s Thinking Through French Philosophy: The Being of the Question (Indiana University Press, 2003) for further research on Deleuze and phenomenology.
CHAPTER ONE.

To Make Love with Worlds: Deleuzian Desire

In *Anti-Oedipus* Deleuze and Guattari write:

A schizophrenic out for a walk is a better model than a neurotic lying on the analyst’s couch. A breath of fresh air, a relationship with the outside world. (...) Everything is a machine. Celestial machines, the stars or rainbows in the sky, alpine machines – all of them connected to those of his body.25

At the very beginning Deleuze and Guattari thus *localise* desire. They have no patience with Freud who cages his subject in the dusk of the analyst’s room, who turns off the machine and confines the body to the narrow space that the Oedipal complex constitutes. Desire is a desire of air and rainbows, only and always of a moving body in “a relationship with the outside world.”

Deleuze and Guattari write of “desiring-machines.” What is this machine? In what way is desire machinic? Colebrook explains a machine in the Deleuzian sense as an assemblage, a term that refers to how all bodies and all things are “the outcome of a process of connections.”26 All things that are conceived of as whole entities are in fact made up of connections and interactions, in other words, assemblages. The word “machinic” is used to underline that these wholes are constructed and never a priori to their molecular connections. This is true for all life and thus Deleuzian desire is “a process of increasing expansion, connection and creation”27 and a desiring-machine is the result of these connections. Desire does not originate from a bordered and pre-existent self, but is a productive process that produces the subject, and in that sense it is machinic.

26 Colebrook, *Understanding Deleuze*, p.xx
27 Ibid., p.xxii
Conceiving of desire as connection and production, rather than in terms of a movement towards bridging loss or separation, refuses it as a concept essentially based on lack. Deleuze and Guattari do credit psychoanalysis with the discovery of the production of desire and the unconscious, but argue that with the insistence on the Oedipal, production was replaced with representation, and that the unconscious became merely expressive rather than productive. The assertion of the Oedipal gives rise to a theatre where there ought to be a factory. According to Deleuze and Guattari, “the traditional logic of desire is all wrong from the very outset: from the very first step that the Platonic logic of desire forces us to take, making us choose between production and acquisition.” They argue that positioning desire on the side of acquisition or need, “causes us to look upon it as primarily a lack: a lack of an object, a lack of the real object.” Desire becomes locked between the two terms subject and object – the subject desiring what it does not have, and the desired object. Thus the subject itself is constituted in and by this essential negation. Instead, Colebrook explains, “desire can be thought of affirmatively. It is not that “I” have desires; it is from desire that an “I” or subject is effected.”

West-Pavlov argues that love, for Deleuze and Guattari, is an exemplification of a depersonalisation, which is a process that “resists the experience of personhood as separation.” It counters the reduction of subjectivity into a unifying identity under the restrictive laws of Oedipus. Love obliterates the person to reinstall the plenitude of a multiple person desiring another multiple person, rather than functioning from a place of lack. To exemplify this I want to turn to what Deleuze and Guattari write of love in A Thousand Plateaus:

“I no longer have any secrets, having lost my face, form and matter. I am now no more than a line. I have become capable of loving, not with an abstract, universal love, but a love I shall choose, and that shall choose me,

28 Deleuze and Guattari, Anti-Oedipus, p.25
29 Ibid., p.26
30 Ibid.
31 Colebrook, Understanding Deleuze, p.116
32 Russell West-Pavlov, Space in Theory: Kristeva, Foucault, Deleuze (Amsterdam, New York: Rodopi B.V., 2009), p.220
blindly, my double, just as selfless as I. One has been saved by and for love, by abandoning love and self.”

I have quoted this passage at length, not primarily for its content but for what is taking place in the text. Interestingly, the territory of the word “I” is obsessively insisted on, much more frequent in this short passage than in the rest of the chapter and it also counters Deleuze and Guattari’s insistence on the word “we” throughout the book. As the quote goes on, eventually this “I” turns into “one” thus performatively tracing the effectuation of self, this “I”, through desire whilst also asserting through the content of the passage the depersonalisation that desire generates.

In other words, in Deleuze and Guattari’s conception of the desiring-machine it is not the object that is missing but instead “the subject that is missing, or desire that lacks a fixed subject; there is no fixed subject unless there is repression.” There is an important distinction to be made here. Although the process of desire does constitutes subjects, these subjects are volatile: “Desiring-machines make us an organism; but at the very heart of this production, within the very production of this production, the body suffers from being organised in this way, from not having some other sort of organisation, or no organisation at all.” A subject is created as a residuum of the process and production of desire.” The desiring subject is never originary, always decentred. The self is volatile because it is created in the process of desire, it is desire, and thus it is forever processual, never completed or defined. The idea of a finished product as the result of the process is denied, a notion that “overtakes all idealistic categories and constitutes a cycle whose relationship to desire is that of an immanent principle.” Colebrook writes, “desire is not a relation between terms – the desire of the subject and the absent object, which they lack; desire is production. (...) There is then, just one immanent plane of life as desire, and not desiring subjects set over against an inert and lifeless object world.”

33 Deleuze and Guattari, A Thousand Plateaus, p.199
34 Deleuze and Guattari, Anti-Oedipus, p.28
35 Ibid., p.8
36 Ibid., p.28
37 Ibid., p.5
38 Colebrook, Understanding Deleuze, p.99
What is being drafted here through the refusal of lack as the basis of desire is the immanence of experience. Colebrook foregrounds immanence as one of Deleuze’s key concepts, explaining it as, “instead of thinking a God who then creates a transcendent world, or a subject who then knows a transcendent world, Deleuze argues for the immanence of life.”\(^{39}\) In this view of the world, thought is not “set over against the world such that it represents the world; thought is a part of the flux of the world. To think is not to represent life but to transform and act upon life.”\(^{40}\)

Desire as a motion shifts and shapes the world, in a never-ending processual relationship with its surroundings: at the same time exterior as interior. West-Pavlov argues that there is an interiority in Deleuzian theory, but contrary to Freud’s, his “interiority dictates the outer world.”\(^{41}\) Colebrook explains that inside and outside are part of the same single plane of being, Deleuze’s virtual totality, and a distinction can only be perceived when an actualisation of being takes place, such as the effectuation of the self. She writes, “the world, or the perception of some actual, outside and objective reality, is only possible when certain events of difference create a “fold” between inside and outside.”\(^{42}\) Or in the words of West-Pavlov, “space, in other words, is a process and territorialisation is that which creates the notion of inside and outside, the notion of limits and of zones.”\(^{43}\) The binary between these two notions is in other words complicated as they are inherently unstable.

Paul Gilbert and Kathleen Lennon explain this conception of desire as a “surface account”, arguing that it is founded on a recognition that “desire is central to our becoming subjects: our subjectivities are desiring subjectivities.”\(^{44}\) Gilbert and Lennon argue that this conception of desire, in which no a priori subject is supposed, denotes a lack of phenomenology of desire. However, I would argue that to be a reductive claim.

\(^{39}\) Colebrook, *Understanding Deleuze* p.xxiv
\(^{40}\) Ibid.
\(^{41}\) West-Pavlov, *Space in Theory*, p.227
\(^{42}\) Colebrook, p.53. The “fold” is an idea originally articulated by Maurice Merleau-Ponty. For comparisons between Deleuze’s and Merleau-Ponty’s use of “fold” and “folding” see e.g. Stephan Günzel “Deleuze and Phenomenology”.
\(^{43}\) West-Pavlov, p.180
Deleuze and Guattari do not eliminate the self in their conception of desire, but rather through that conception and the consequent conception of subjectivity, radically rethink the relation between self and world, self and phenomena. Desire is a question of stars and rainbows, a question of the self’s place in and experience of the outside world. More interesting than discarding the phenomenological implications completely is to see the productive connections of Deleuzian desire within that framework.

According to Russell West-Pavlov, for Deleuze,

meaning is spatial, located in the here and now, immediately attached to the sensuality of the present, but also unpredictable, productive. It is striking how close we are here to the later Kristeva, privileging the senses as the site of subjectivity.\(^{45}\)

West-Pavlov argues that the relation between self and world is one in which there never is a complete break between the two, that “autonomy and separateness”\(^{46}\) is an illusion, although one deeply rooted as the conventional way of thinking about the world.

*On deterritorialisation*

One key Deleuzian concept is that of *territoriality*. It is inextricably linked to the concept of desire whilst also making phenomenological claims. Through the concepts of *territorialisation* and *deterritorialisation*, Deleuze and Guattari undo the idea of the stable phenomenal world and the phenomenological “Earth” as established by Edmund Husserl in 1934. Husserl writes: “And I have a ground that does not move.”\(^{47}\) Deleuze

\(^{45}\) West-Pavlov, *Space in Theory*, p.216
\(^{46}\) Ibid., p.241
and Guattari write: “the Deterritorialised, the Glacial, the giant Molecule.”

They write of the Earth as a *Body without Organs*, “permeated by unformed, unstable matters, by flows in all directions, by free intensities or nomadic singularities, by mad or transitory particles.”

West-Pavlov points to an originary flow, to fluidity as the basis of reality and stability as the deviation from the norm. Territorialisation then, is what structures the flow, it is a process “and whatever results never loses its processual quality.” In other words, space, thought of through the notion of territory is inherently unstable and territorialisation is the continual process that creates spatial boundaries and parameters, which are always and already secondary to fluidity. Deleuze and Guattari explains that “territorialities then, are shot through with lines of flight testifying to the presence within them of movements of deterritorialisation and reterritorialization. In a certain sense, they are secondary.”

Colebrook explains territorialisation as the connection of forces that produce distinct wholes and that “any perception of life is already an ordering or territorialisation.” That is, all phenomena, every “whole”, is a process of territorialisation and can thus deterritorialise. In Stephan Günzel’s words, for Deleuze a “concept does not refer to an object, but expresses a territorial relation.” Territoriality undermines the referential thinking in phenomenological experience; the absolute figure of “Earth” challenged and overcome. The phenomenal ground is unstable, dynamic, perpetually moving. What about glaciers, Deleuze ad Guattari say. What about volcanoes.

Deterritorialisation is coexistent with the productive force of desire, its connections, change and movements. As the subject is effectuated it is also always and already on the brink of deterritorialising. It is in this context that West-Pavlov can write of the

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48 Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, p.40
49 Ibid.
50 Ibid., p.180
51 Ibid., p.55
52 Colebrook, *Understanding Deleuze*, p.xx
53 Günzel, “Deleuze and Phenomenology”, p.38
“spatializing multiplicities of love” in Deleuzian desire. Actualisations of being, such as the effectuation of the self, can also be called “zones of intensity”, which more clearly points to a spatial image of thought in the concept. As desire works through connections rather than separation there is a “constant renewal of the parameters of selfhood.” The space of desire is constantly changing.

On Becoming

The second concept that is essential to Deleuzian theory, as well as to this thesis, is the notion of becoming. Colebrook explains becoming as a challenge to Western thought, which begins in being. Being imagines “the stable knower or subject who views a world of change and becoming,” and further privileges man as this grounding being. Deleuze instead conceives of all of life as a “plane of becoming” and argues that what we perceive to be fixed entities is merely an effect of becoming. Thus, writes Colebrook, to be able to think and encounter life, “we need to no longer see life in fixed and immobile terms. This means that thinking itself has to become mobile and to free itself from the fixed foundations of man.” In A Thousand Plateaus, Deleuze and Guattari emphasise that becoming does not have a subject distinct from itself, and that the term as such appears in connection with another becoming with which it coexists; becoming-woman, becoming-imperceptible. Becoming is a deterritorialisation of the subject. In becoming one is deterritorialised.

Making love, Deleuze and Guattari write, is to become, but “not just becoming as one, or even two, but becoming as a hundred thousand.” Becoming is an opening up of the subject that allows for new connections to be made between things, and in that sense to

54 West-Pavlov, Space in Theory, p.210
55 Ibid., p.223
56 Colebrook, Understanding Deleuze p.xx
57 Ibid.
58 Deleuze and Guattari, A Thousand Plateaus, 238
59 Ibid., p.291
60 Ibid., p.325
become is “to world”, is “to make a world or worlds.”61 And so, “we always make love with worlds. And our love addresses itself to this libidinal property of our lover, to either close himself off or open up to more spacious worlds, to masses and large aggregates.”62

Becoming is however not a question of resemblance or identification. In fact Deleuze and Guattari argue that we “fall into a false alternative if we say that you either imitate or you are (...) There is a reality specific to becoming itself.”63

The meaning of the word “like” is central. Since becoming is not to imitate, “like” does not point in the direction of metaphor or towards a structural analogy of relations, but rather the word changes meaning when “made into expressions of becoming instead of signified states or signifying relations.”64 The concept is deeply linked to language as it is anchored in, or rather against, these linguistic terms. Rejecting mimesis, Deleuze and Guattari write: “the actual, lived emotion of having breasts does not resemble breasts; it does not represent them.”65

Although Deleuze and Guattari write of molecules and particles, “it would be futile to say that love has to do with proteins and society.”66 What then, does it have to do with? They write:

We think that Lawrence and Miller have a more accurate evaluation of sexuality than Freud, even from the viewpoint of the famous scientificity. It is not the neurotic stretched out on the couch who speaks to us of love, of its force and its despair.67

61 Deleuze and Guattari, A Thousand Plateaus, p.280
62 Deleuze and Guattari, Anti-Oedipus, p.323
63 Deleuze and Guattari, A Thousand Plateaus, p.238
64 Ibid., p.274
65 Deleuze and Guattari, Anti-Oedipus, p.21
66 Ibid., p.320
67 Ibid., p.321
Is there something inherently literary about love? Are writers better attuned to the flows of life, to the machinic workings of desire? The productive connections of Deleuzian desire are clearly connected to literature in its refusing of lack and the idea of representing that which is absent. Literature is an actualisation of being, the becoming of language. What Deleuze and Guattari point to in their singling out of Lawrence and Miller is that in their styles, one can trace desire at work; style is the place at which life is produced.
CHAPTER TWO.

Deterritorialising Self: Becoming-Red

_The reticent volcano keeps_  
_His never slumbering plan –_  
_Confided are his projects pink_  
_To no precarious man._

Emily Dickinson, No.1748

Deleuze and Guattari:

“It’s not easy to see things in the middle (...) it’s not easy to see the grass in things and in words.”

Geryon:

“Why is grass called blades? he asked them. Isn’t it because of the clicking?”

The surrounding world is for Geryon throughout _Autobiography of Red_ mercilessly unstable, which is perhaps what ultimately initiates his autobiographical project and desperate search for self. Rooms hurl themselves to the rim of the world, silence tosses itself and there is a constant slippage of self. What Geryon designates as the “outer things” is constantly threatening to dismantle his sense of self. The world cannot be kept at distance, he seems to be perpetually in the middle: “Children poured around him | and the intolerable red assault of grass and the smell of grass everywhere | was pulling him towards it | like a strong sea.” The world breaks down into smaller units: “Geryon

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68 Carson, _Autobiography of Red_, p.22  
69 Deleuze and Guattari, _A Thousand Plateaus_, p.23  
70 Carson, p.84  
71 Ibid., p.23
squinted. | Grass swam towards him and away." Geryon sees the grass; he speaks and experiences in the middle, from a place of constant decentring.

What is it to see the grass in things? What is it to be in the middle? The strong current of desire in *Autobiography of Red* places and displaces consciousness and being, and in order to fully grasp its transformative power one needs to consider the phenomenology it gives rise to. Desire opens up the world, unlatches the codes of being in the direction of a new position of self and a new way of existing in the world.

The current: lava. The text and Geryon’s life are permeated by the image of the volcano and the volcanic. The volcano is inextricably linked to the novel’s narrative, text and desire. From the book's cover-photo and the Emily Dickinson quote that introduces the story, to the very end, its presence is undeniable. It is at the core, at the edges – or rather, it undoes such parameters: it is the figure of the middle.

Chris Jennings writes:

> The volcano is the exemplar. An image of a boundary between interior and exterior, a normally placid surface punctuated by intense bursts from its core, it mirrors the pressure that builds within Geryon himself, his interior always threatening, or promising, to surface.

Although Jennings acknowledges the relation between the volcanic and Geryon’s self, the volcano is more than an image, more than a metaphor for passionate love. Rather it is structurally significant and the binary between interior and exterior that Jennings suggests is exactly what it undermines. Its meaning is more radical and profound. As the ultimate example of deterritorialisation, the volcanic challenges not only the structuring

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73 Chris Jennings, "The Erotic Poetics of Anne Carson" in *University of Toronto Quarterly* (Vol. 70, No. 4, 2001), p.932
properties of autobiography and the idea of a bordered self, but it also undoes any notion of a stable phenomenal world.

Being in the middle is not a stationary or originary position, to be between things is “a perpendicular direction, a transversal movement that sweeps one and the other away, a stream without beginning or end that undermines its banks and picks up speed in the middle.” It is deterritorialisation. Deterritorialisation exists in Deleuze and Guattari’s theory and in their texts as a perpetual slippage of limits and boundaries and whilst claiming flow and fluidity as the basis of reality rather than stability, does not suggest the loss of being, but rather, an acceleration of being, a speeding up, a moving away, a change of being across the threshold of what is known at the current time, in the present place, or within the present framework of knowledge.

In this explication of the concept, Russell West-Pavlov underlines its relation to experience and the experiencing subject. By foregrounding questions of time, place and knowledge he makes clear deterritorialisation as a radical shift in conventional perceptions of the world. He argues that Deleuze and Guattari with this concept want to propel us “over the threshold of current perception towards an unceasing transformation.” The volcanic is throughout Autobiography of Red a question of precisely time, place and frameworks of knowledge, and its movements construct and deconstruct the text.

One of the relationships into which the volcanic enters is that with photography. Photography is central to the text, as one of the forms that Geryon’s autobiography takes. A young Geryon takes a photograph of his mother’s rosebush for a school project.

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74 Deleuze and Guattari, A Thousand Plateaus, p.25
75 West-Pavlov, Space in Theory, p.204
76 Ibid., p.205
In the photograph, “Four of the roses were on fire. | They stood up straight and pure on the stalk, gripping the dark like prophets | and howling colossal intimacies | from the back of their fused throats.” 77 This quotes forces the question, what does a colossal intimacy look like? It is virtually unanswerable. It creates a tension, a break between the text and the photograph it refers to, thus exemplifying the relation between photographic reality and experience. The experience and meaning of it does not translate to this autobiographic documentation.

“Photography is disturbing. Photography is a way of playing with perceptual relationships.” 78 The “perceptual semiotics” of the photograph is challenged by the volcanic flow that animates the text. There is one particularly important photograph: “Red Patience”. Taken by Herakles’ grandmother it depicts the eruption of a volcano and makes a profound but unsettling impression on Geryon. Although not part of his autobiographical project, it stages the contradictory relation between the photograph and that which it tries to capture: “A photograph that has compressed | on its motionless surface | fifteen different moments of time, nine hundred seconds of bombs moving up | and ash moving down.” 79

Photography’s affinity to autobiography in the text establishes it as a kind of frame, a molar entity in which the flow and ripples of life and being are temporarily captured. Its constant interplay with the force and movement of the volcanic, stages the volatility of all seemingly stable entities and figured identities. In fragment XIX, “FROM THE ARCHAIC | TO | THE FAST SELF,” the self is written in the volcanic movement: “Like the terrestrial crust of the earth | which is proportionately ten times thinner than an eggshell, the skin of the soul is a miracle of mutual pressures.” 80 Geryon returns to the autobiography as a site of safety in moments “when too many intakes valves are open in the soul.” 81 The volcano appears as a frame as much as the opposite, a kind of eruptive parergon.

77 Carson, Autobiography of Red, p.84
78 Ibid., p.65
79 Ibid., p.51
80 Ibid., p.60
81 Ibid.
The impossibility of photography, the tension between the desire for stability and the reality of flow, highlights the phenomenology drafted in the text. There is no stable background or phenomenal world in *Autobiography of Red*. Early on, Geryon’s desire is framed in phenomenological terms. First, we remember Deleuze and Guattari’s schizophrenic out on his walk:

> Desire does not take as its object persons or things, but the entire surroundings that it traverses, the vibrations and flows of every sort to which it is joined, introducing therein breaks and captures – an always nomadic and migrant desire.\(^{82}\)

This is the scope of Geryon’s love. When Geryon first meets Herakles, in fragment VII “CHANGE”, the would-be logical world collapses. Although “change” on the surface refers to the quarters Herakles wants Geryon to lend him, it also alerts the reader to the shift that takes place as a connection is actualised between the two boys. Geryon sees Herakles for the first time, stepping of a bus from New Mexico, and “the world poured back and forth between their eyes once or twice.”\(^{83}\) The powerful connection formed between them draws the world around them into its movement, destabilising what would conventionally be the backdrop. They meet and “the huge night moved overhead | scattering drops of itself.”\(^{84}\) Geryon de-centres in the text, the delineation of voice made uncertain: “*Do you have change for a dollar?* | Geryon heard Geryon say.”\(^{85}\) This uncertainty is present throughout the text as voices are intertwined and their origins sometimes difficult to trace. The line breaks, the claim to verse, and irreverent punctuation makes dialogue unclear. The lack of first person narration, and the consequent scarcity of the word “I” in a text that makes autobiographic claims is also worth noting.

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\(^{82}\) Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus*, p.322

\(^{83}\) Carson, *Autobiography of Red*, p.39

\(^{84}\) Ibid.

\(^{85}\) Ibid.
The change is manifest also in the pivotal fragment notably named “SPACE AND TIME,” which opens with a statement – or is it a question? A hesitant, tentative, careful attempt at truth: “Up against another human being one’s own procedures take on definition.”

However, this “truth” destabilises, falls apart in the course of the page. Geryon spends all his time with Herakles, which changes the sense of his self not in the direction of a more clearly defined identity, but rather opens him up to the point of dissolution:

The instant of nature
forming between them drained every drop from the walls of his life
leaving behind just ghosts
rustling like an old map. He had nothing to say to anyone. He felt loose and shiny.

Several things are happening. Again, a world is at stake. The connection between the lovers forms a new “instant of nature”, speaking to the transformative and productive power of desire. In the same moment as the world around them shifts Geryon feels himself undone. He is in the kitchen speaking to his mother, grasping at his reality. Being in love: “my territories are out of grasp.”

This position of self that deterritorialisation ensures in the text can be read as instances of becoming-imperceptible. In Deleuze and Guattari’s notion of becoming the idea of becoming-imperceptible is especially linked to the movement of desire. Imperceptibility is at the end of all becomings, the limit towards which being reaches and from which it recoils. As with all becomings, becoming-imperceptible is not a constant state of being, but Deleuze and Guattari write of it as a moment: “a whole rhizomatic labour of perception, the moment when desire and perception meld.” In the movement of becoming-imperceptible, “perception will no longer reside in the relation between a

87 Ibid.
88 Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, p.199
89 Ibid., p.283
subject and an object, but rather in the movement serving as the limit of that relation, in the period associated with the subject and object.”90

This limit is actualised in “SPACE AND TIME”, which ends with a question that echoes throughout the text: “How does distance look?” is a simple direct question. It extends from a spaceless | within to the edge | of what can be loved. It depends on light.”91 Where is the self in this quote? Where is the self in relation to the distance? There is no centred point of origin from which distance is delineated. Both the concepts “distance” and “within” are made uncertain by the use of the word “look” to measure distance, and by the supposedly spatial concept of “within” described as “spaceless.” The idea of “look” itself is complicated when it cannot be attached to a bounded inside. How then do you measure the relation between the self and its surroundings? A territory is being formed here. The territory of the self depends on desire’s movements and not on a centred position of “within”. The self here is “spaceless”, this is not where the edge is, but rather the edge is a question of love’s movement, its limits. Perception is displaced; the “look” of distance resides in the parameters of this territory created by the force of desire.

Deleuze and Guattari further explain the movement towards imperceptibility:

You are longitude and latitude, a set of speeds and slownesses between unformed particles, a set of non-subjectified affects. You have the individuality of a day, a season, a year, a life - a climate, a wind, a fog, a swarm, a pack. Or at least you can have it, you can reach it.92

Or could it be: the individuality of a colour. Stesichoros:

“Exactly it is red that I like and there is a link between geology and character.”93

90 Deleuze and Guattari, A Thousand Plateaus, p.282
91 Carson, Autobiography of Red, p.43
92 Deleuze and Guattari, p.262
93 Carson, p.149
There is a possibility of red, of reaching. What does it mean to be red, to be geological? What does it mean that this is an autobiography of red? The colour's affinity to the volcano as well as to desire is evident, however its signification is constantly shifting and hard to locate in the text. Leif Erik Schenstead-Harris argues that the redness is “the sole quality held certain” about Geryon, but there is nothing certain about red. Heartbroken in a bookshop in Buenos Aires, Geryon picks up a book called *Philosophical Problems:*

... I will never know how you see red and you will never know how I see it. But this separation of consciousness is recognised only after a failure of communication, and our first movement is to believe in an undivided being between us... \(^95\)

The presence and position of red in the text undermines seeing as a certain way of knowing the world. Seeing indicates a knowing subject, an appropriating subject distanced from its surroundings. The territory and word that is “I” is rare throughout the text, and the connection between and absence of an I/eye is more than a clever play of words. The I/eye is displaced and the site of subjectivity is relocated to something less aligned with the logic of sight. Stuart J. Murray claims that “Carson’s Geryon forces us to re-examine the body as the site of experience and meaningful life.” \(^96\) The notion of “body” can be read in multiple ways, but taking Murray’s suggestion it can be understood as an immanence in the way that Geryon experiences. Meeting Herakles, the moment is described as “one of those moments | that is the opposite of blindness.” \(^97\) Yet, the opposite of blindness between them is not seeing, not in its conventional sense.

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\(^95\) Carson, *Autobiography of Red*, p.105


\(^97\) Carson, p.39
The relation between I/eye and world is one also of question and answer. This relation is foreshadowed in Appendix C, preceding the main narrative: “CLEARING UP THE QUESTION OF STESICHOROS' BLINDING BY HELEN.” First of all, the circular argument that ensues challenges the set-up of that relation. The question is never answered, it never gets further than "If Stesichoros was a blind man either we will lie or if not not." This appendix is significant as it links together the concepts of truth and sight early in the text. The circularity, the impossibility of the answer, puts the world at slant: “now that we are in reverse the whole landscape looks inside out.” Also in the final pages of the text, in a concluding interview with Stesichoros, seeing, or looking, is further complicated: “S: I was (very simply) in charge of seeing for the world after all seeing is just a substance.” The meaning of seeing is relocated to that which Murray posits as bodily immanence rather than implying a self apart from the world.

Parked in a car out on the highway together with Herakles, Geryon grapples with his feelings of desire.

X. SEX QUESTION.

Is it a question?

Herakles claims "Sex is a way of getting to know someone." As he speaks of satisfaction, “from far down the freeway came a sound | of fishhooks scraping the bottom of the world.” In this moment of forceful desire between them logics are undone – the suggestive sound of fishhooks speaks to an experience well beyond what Murray calls “the imperialism of the eye.”

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98 Autobiography of Red, p.18
99 Ibid., p.19
100 Ibid.
101 Ibid. p.148
102 Ibid., p.44
103 Ibid.
104 Ibid.
105 Murray, "The Autobiographical Self", p.109
And beyond the imperialism of the “I”. West-Pavlov writes: “Depersonalisation allows the connectivities of desire to have full rein.”106 In the car, Herakles speaks and “his voice washed | Geryon open.”107 This opening of the self, coupled with the curious images of world created in the passage indicates the full force of desire at work. An experience that denies the eye as the point of perception is drafted here, as “they jumped forward onto the back of the night. | Not touching | but joined in astonishment as two cuts lie parallel in the same flesh.”108 It does not correspond to a “truth” or a “reality” perceived by an eye, it confuses the call to an answer or rather, rejects the question.

Not once throughout Autobiography of Red does anyone comment on Geryon’s redness. It does not appear as a visible trait. The “reality” of being red is unsure, thus destabilising such concepts at large in the text. Red is however more than a metaphor or simile. Geryon is never like red. Rather the mystery of red can be read as a becoming-red. “Intolerable red assault of grass.” There goes “a wave of longing as strong as a color through Geryon.”109 Red is a feeling, is a motion, is a smell? Grass is red. Or rather, red is grass. Red is a position in the middle. The flow of lava suggestively disturbs the positions of and relation between subject and object: “What if you took a fifteen-minute exposure of a man in jail, let’s say the lava | has just reached his window? | he asked. I think you are confusing subject and object, she said. | Very likely, said Geryon.”110 The supposed subject of the camera is challenged in this dialogue between Geryon and Herakles’ grandmother; the relations of the photographic moment unsettled.

So what does it mean to Geryon to be red?

It was not the fear of ridicule, | to which everyday life as a winged red person had accommodated Geryon early in life, | but this blank desertion of his own mind | that threw him into despair.111

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106 West-Pavlov, Space in Theory, p.220
107 Carson, p.44
108 Ibid., p.45
109 Ibid., p.118
110 Ibid., p.52
111 Ibid., p.84
Being red is not a fear of ridicule, in other words, it is not something others can see and react to. It is not a fact of his visible appearance, but here it is rather linked to the “blank desertion” of his mind. These thoughts on the blank space of his mind are followed by a musing on the natural world around him: “It was the year he began to wonder about the noise that colors make. Roses came roaring across the garden at him. | He lay on his bed at night listening to the silver light of stars crashing against | the window screen.”¹¹² He can hear the cries of the roses and the clicking of the grass. Roses are red… But also: it is as if the self has been displaced, or rather emanates not from a bounded within, which is empty, but resides amongst the roses, amongst the stars, in the clicking grass with which he communicates. He is red, a perpetual movement towards imperceptibility.

Deleuze and Guattari write:

One is then like grass: one has made the world, everybody/everything, into a becoming, because one has made a necessarily communicating world, because one has suppressed in oneself everything that prevents us from slipping between things and growing in the midst of things.¹¹³

The instance of Geryon’s communication with the grass and roses appears in the fragment “MITWELT”, also the name of the café that Geryon frequents in Buenos Aires, the word readily recognisable as Heidegger’s term for the phenomenological world. Again a statement follows the title: “There is no person without a world.”¹¹⁴ This, along with the fragment’s title and the narrative’s relocation to Argentina, highlight Geryon’s struggle to position himself. He “felt himself starting | to slide off the surface of the room | like an olive off a plate. When the plate attained an angle of thirty degrees | he would vanish into his own blankness.”¹¹⁵

West-Pavlov points to how deterritorialisation “offers the possibility of escaping from

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¹¹² Carson, *Autobiography of Red*, p.84  
¹¹³ Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, p.280  
¹¹⁴ Carson, p.82  
¹¹⁵ Ibid., p.95
what or where “one” is, in the perspective of becoming “an other”. In fragment XII, “LAVA”, is an example of how red, as associated with lava, is a state of being that allows Geryon to slip in between different sites of consciousness. The passage follows Geryon’s arrival at Herakles’ grandmother’s house, at the foot of a volcano. It is the first time that the location of the narrative changes and Geryon struggles to find his place in relation to Herakles and to himself in relation to another.

He thought of women. | What is it like to be a woman | listening in the dark? Black mantle of silence stretches between them | like geothermal pressure. | Ascent of the rapist up the stairs seems as slow as lava. She listens | to the blank space where | his consciousness is, moving towards her. Lava can move as slow as | nine hours per inch. | Color and fluidity vary with its temperature from dark red and hard | (below 1,800 degrees centigrade) | to brilliant yellow and completely fluid (above 1,950 degrees centigrade). | She wonders if | he is listening too.

The becoming-woman that takes place in the text follows the motion of the volcano, its slow deterritorialisation. The “she” in the passage does not refer to any actual person in the narrative, but is a state into which Geryon drifts, a territory. Seamlessly he comes to inhabit the consciousness of this feminine pronoun. However, the movement itself, the drift, is red in its volcanic framing. The volcano, the red, interweaves with the motion of the self, deterritorialising it. Becoming-woman is according to Deleuze and Guattari at the beginning of all becomings, just as becoming-imperceptible is the final limit. It is a first threshold to eluding the dominant notion of a stable self and here it comes to exemplify the continuous slippage in the text. The destabilisation reoccurs: “He had been here before, dangling | inside the word she like a trinket at a belt. Spokes of red rang across his eyelids | in the blackness.”

116 West-Pavlov, Space in Theory, p.204
117 Carson, Autobiography of Red, p.48
118 Ibid., p.57
Let us return to the photograph.

The final seven fragments of *Autobiography of Red* are all named “PHOTOGRAPHS” and they coincide with an accelerated movement towards self-dissolution: “I am disappearing, he thought | but the photographs were worth it. | A volcano is not a mountain like others. Raising a camera to one’s face has effects | no one can calculate in advance.” The almost obsessive insistence on photography over these last few pages brings back into focus the tension between their supposed reality and Geryon’s experience of the world. These are pages of intense emotion. Geryon and Herakles are reunited, but not as lovers, and Geryon seem to exist simultaneously in the past and in some kind of unsure present. These final attempts to capture time and to “possess himself” to keep him in “the old days” through the stabilising frame of a photo, is yet again refused by the text: “Enormous pools of a moment kept opening around his hands | each time he tried to move them.” The photograph cannot, yet again, capture the time-space of full experience.

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120 Carson, p.146
121 Ibid., 141
122 Ibid., 136
CHAPTER THREE.

Deterritorialising Text: Carson’s Catastrophe

“I say catastrophe is an answer because I believe cliché is a question.”

The “sex question” that Geryon grapples with is a question also of language. The logics of seeing and Geryon’s relation to his world is ultimately undone through language, desire's deterritorialising effects acted out in Carson's poetics.

West-Pavlov writes, “The territory is thus a text, because it is the trace of a vector of attraction between two beings (...) Space itself is, as it were, a sort of love letter.” The text is a territory, a site at which being is negotiated and constructed. How do Carson's own poetics restructure experience? If love is not a question of proteins, is it a question of literature? And what exactly is the catastrophe?

Let us remember what Carson writes of adjectives:

“These small imported mechanisms are in charge of attaching everything in the world to its place in particularity. They are the latches of being.”

Something unlatches.

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123 Anne Carson, “Variations on the Right to Remain Silent”, Float (Alfred A. Knopf Publisher, New York, 2016) [Not paginated]
124 West-Pavlov, Space in Theory, p.180
125 Carson, Autobiography of Red, p.4
Early in the text and in his life, Geryon encounters the word “each”. It comes to him on the wind: “Hard morning winds were blowing life bolts against the sky each one blue enough | to begin a world of its own.”\(^{126}\) He struggles to grasp its meaning and its place; the word disassembles and although there is a space for it, it fails to signify. “Each” is admittedly a strange word, as a determiner it carries no meaning in isolation from a particular situation or other words – it has no corresponding reality of its own. Rather, it is a word that structures being and experience. Geryon finds the letters of the word hanging on “branches and furniture in the area”, he acknowledges its space although blank and “clothed himself in this strong word each.”\(^{127}\) Its meaning is spatial; it frames the relation between self and world. Geryon’s mother says: “Each means like you and your brother each have your own room.”\(^{128}\)

Then disaster strikes: “they moved Geryon into his brother’s room.”\(^{129}\) In the shared room, the meaning of the word “each” collapses in on itself, and with it Geryon’s sense of self and space. As a direct consequence of the two brothers sharing a room, his older brother sexually assaults Geryon in their bunk bed. The abstraction and separating structure of the word is replaced by physical violation and breached boundaries.

After the assault,

He lay very straight

in the fantastic temperatures

of the red pulse as it sank away and he thought about the difference between outside and inside.

Inside is mine, he thought.\(^{130}\)

\(^{127}\) Ibid.
\(^{128}\) Ibid.
\(^{129}\) Ibid.
\(^{130}\) Ibid., p.29
The assault triggers an almost obsessive questioning of the own self’s positioning in the world and it is as an attempted answer to these questions that Geryon begins his autobiography. In this work he “set down all inside things” and “coolly omitted all outside things.”131 The desperate desire for a bounded self and for an identity permeates the whole novel-in-verse. It vibrates and reverberates. As has been made clear in chapter two, this fantasy of the own “inside” is denied throughout the text. However, the importance given to the word “each” and the collapse of its meaning through the changing of rooms and consequent physical violence, bring into focus the relation between language and the experiencing self, between word and world. It necessitates the questioning of the text as body.

Stuart J. Murray, taking as his point of departure the phenomenology of Martin Heidegger, claims Geryon’s autobiographical project as the nexus of multiple converging questions:

Is “life” here closer to the act of writing (*graphein*), closer to the sense of oneself (*autos*), or something else altogether escaping the autobiography that strives to contain or convey it? And will that life be legible?132

Although failing to acknowledge the central textual position that the word “each” takes and its immediate connection to the brother’s violence, Murray does ask the right questions. He reads *Autobiography of Red* as an “aestheticization of experience” and in a footnote he clarifies the meaning of that phrase as a kind of “corporeal aesthetics” by which he suggests “we might refigure the relation between form and content – and language – through *aesthesis*, the immediate perception of the external world by the senses.”133 Foregrounding the phenomenological aspects of the text and of writing in general, he points to how Heidegger argues that what is closest to us experientially is

133 Ibid., p.108
furthest from us intellectually, least susceptible to writing or analysis and thus resisting representation and linguistic convention.

Murray favours Maurice Merleau-Ponty in his further attempts to answer these questions. However, the question of subject formation and the shaping of phenomenological experience in and through language are also productively read through Deleuze and Guattari’s deterritorialisation and becoming. The emphasis on writing in the Deleuzian concepts makes them useful for understanding the relation and disparity between linguistic convention and the experiencing self, which that convention cannot contain.

In his essay “Literature and Life” Deleuze writes:

To write is not to impose a form (of expression) on the matter of lived experience. (...) Writing is a question of becoming, always incomplete, always in the midst of being formed, and goes beyond the matter of any liveable or lived experience. It is a process, that is, a passage of Life.134

“Writing is inseparable from becoming,”135 he argues. Becoming is a way of relaying being in a “form of expression” outwith dominant modes and convention. The concept is deeply linked to the movement of literature. Deleuze makes a distinction between language and literature, arguing that it is “syntactic creation or style”136 that is the becoming of language, transforming it into literature. Literature is an attack on language, one that results in a simultaneous decomposition of the maternal language and the invention of a new. Language is seized by a kind of “delirium”, "a witch's line that escapes the dominant system."137

134 Deleuze, “Literature and Life”, p.225
135 Ibid.
136 Ibid., p.229
137 Ibid.
The “ideas” in a text are inextricably linked to the movement of language itself, “like an eternity that can only be revealed in a becoming, or a landscape that only appears in movement.” The way language looks, the way a sentence works, and the breaks and ruptures of text speak to ideas that are “outside” of language but at the same time inherent in precisely this movement. Content and expression are always and already intertwined, “always crossing over into each other, each with their own forms and deterritorialisations.” Deleuze and Guattari thus undermine “the hegemony of the signifier” and reject the linguistic structure in which language works on the basis of lack, on the representation of that which is absent. This links the workings of literature clearly to the workings of desire. To challenge the hegemony of the signifier is also what Deleuze and Guattari designate “to be in the middle”.

Stesichoros on description:

I: Description can we talk about description
S: What is the difference between a volcano and a guinea pig is not a description why is it like it is is a description
I: I take it you are speaking formally what about content
S: No difference

Stesichoros was the poet, writing “after Homer and before Gertrude Stein,” who set down the ancient Greek myth of Geryon in his lyric poem *Geryoneis*, of which only fragments remain. Carson includes sixteen of these fragments in her own translation, as a way into her own poem on Geryon. One of them reads: “Total Things Known About Geryon.” The rigid and framing claim of the fragment's title, in line with the claim to autobiography, is undermined at first glance by the form of the text, its streaming flow –

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138 Deleuze, “Literature and Life”, p.229
139 Colebrook, *Understanding Deleuze*, p.141-142
140 Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, p.15
142 Ibid., p.3
143 Ibid., p.14
words like lava – and the distinct lack of punctuation: “He loved lightning He lived on an island His mother was a | Nymph of a river that ran to the sea His father was a gold | Cutting tool Old scholia say that Stesichoros says (...)”  

What kind of fact is it that one’s father is a “gold cutting tool?”

For Deleuze, the becoming of language is in large part a question of syntax: “Syntax is the set of necessary detours that are created in each case to reveal the life in things.” He argues that there are no straight lines in neither language or in things. In other words, to create a new syntax, to break language in new ways, produces new “images” – a new consciousness and way of seeing the world.

Chris Jennings, writing of Carson’s translation, argues that the “temporal distance shifts when Carson translates, but distance remains as an integral part of a translation defined in terms of an essential lack.” She claims that although a perfect translation is unattainable and the two languages, English and ancient Greek, cannot be conflated, the distance between them “can be bridged.”

Geryon again: “How does distance look?”

This is a central question for Geryon, it informs the position of his self and of his desire. It is also a textual issue. For Jennings, the bridging has to do with desire: “Carson, like desire, bridges the gap between fragment and restoration, between Greek and English. She projects the possibility of fulfilment on its lack.” However, ridding ourselves of these notions of lack and acquisition, Carson’s use of language and translation here can instead be seen as a deterritorialisation.

145 Deleuze, “Literature and Life”, p.227
146 Jennings, “The Erotic Poetics of Anne Carson”, p.926
147 Ibid., p.927
148 Carson, p.43
149 Jennings, p.926-7
Deleuze and Guattari write in *A Thousand Plateaus* that atypical expressions are deterritorialisations of language.\(^{150}\) Carson skews the typical, creating unfamiliar, evocative phrases that point not in the direction of a readily perceivable reality, but rearticulates experience.

In the fragments preceding the main narrative of *Autobiography of Red*, Carson plays with the sentence – drawing it to the limit of comprehension. The conventional relation between terms in analogy is defamiliarised: “The boy neck lean At an odd slow angle sideways as when a | Poppy shames itself in a whip of Nude breeze.”\(^{151}\) Or in this sentence in fragment IX, in which the word “like” occupies a strange position between the two ends of a simile: “Geryon lay on the ground covering his ears The sound | Of the horses like roses being burned alive.”\(^{152}\) The strange relation between the two terms, the sound of horses and burning roses, comes to undermine the meaning of “like” altogether. And when Geryon and Herakles meet the moment is described thus: “They were to superior eels | at the bottom of the tank and they recognised each other like italics.”\(^{153}\)

The challenge to the signifier, being in the middle, is also synesthetic. Deleuze and Guattari describe how “an intensive trait starts working for itself, a hallucinatory perception, synaesthesia, perverse mutation, or play of images shakes loose.”\(^{154}\) Throughout the text, phenomenological synaesthesia undermines the relation between I/eye and world, as mapped in chapter two: “The sounds | was hot as a color inside.”\(^{155}\) Geryon can feel Herakles looking at him: “Herakles’ gaze | on him was like a gold tongue. Magma rising.”\(^{156}\) Smells drop heavy like velvet\(^{157}\) and Geryon makes “his way thickly”\(^{158}\) through space. The senses are confused and dislocated. These instances exemplify how things move in the text and how words exist in relation to each other to

\(^{150}\) Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, p.98
\(^{152}\) Ibid., p.12
\(^{153}\) Ibid., p.39
\(^{154}\) Deleuze and Guattari, p.15
\(^{155}\) Carson, p.108
\(^{156}\) Ibid. p.110
\(^{157}\) Ibid., p.45
\(^{158}\) Ibid., p.49
create new meanings and experiences. A centred point of perception, and any ordered delineation of space, is contested.

Deterritorialisation constitutes a different relation between self and world than the spatial structure measured out between the terms signifier and signified. It is catastrophic. Carson's poetics are catastrophic. *Catastrophe* – she takes the word from Deleuze.159

In her most recent collection of poems, *Float* (2016), Carson includes a short essay – “Variations on the Right to Remain Silent.” Here, through a reading of the fate of Jeanne d’Arc, the translation practice of Hölderlin and Francis Bacon’s art, Carson offers a way into her own poetics. Deleuze famously favours Bacon in his writings on art and phenomenology of art160 and Carson poignantly cites Deleuze, referring to how he in his book on Bacon uses the word “catastrophize” to describe the artist’s practice.

In the essay, Carson refers to her own irreverent translation practice, a catastrophising of language that obstinately refuses cliché, as a “sort of stammering.”161 This exact word reoccurs with Deleuze and Guattari in their explanation of becoming in *A Thousand Plateaus*. They write:

> It was Proust who said that “masterpieces are written in a kind of foreign language.” That is the same as stammering, making language stammer rather than stammering in speech. To be a foreigner but in one’s own tongue, not only when speaking a language other than one’s own.162

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159 Carson, “Variations on the Right to Remain Silent”
160 See *Francis Bacon: Logique de la sensation* (1981; Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 2002). English edition: *Francis Bacon: The Logic of Sensation* (trans. Daniel W. Smith, University of Minnesota Press, 2005). For further reading on Deleuze and phenomenology of art see Günzel “Deleuze and Phenomenology”, in which he argues that for Deleuze “it was obvious that phenomenology sooner or later would have to become a phenomenology of art.”
161 Carson, “Variations on the Right to Remain Silent”
162 Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, p.98
This stammering is a trace of the Deleuzian becoming. Carson sketches silence as the untranslatable, moments when question and answer do not correspond. Silence is, naturally, loud – eruptive. To be silent is a way of refusing to be subjected to conventional ways of being. Cliché is the mould to which we fit our way of existing in and experience the world. This resonates with what Colebrook writes of the notion of representation in Deleuzian theory, that “real thinking (...) is not disclosed in everyday common sense, but in bizarre cases of stupidity, creativity and even malevolence.” Beyond representation and common sense, beyond cliché, catastrophe is a way of rewriting the question of being. It is volcanic.

Carson uses Bacon as an example:

Bacon says we live through screens. What are these screens? They are part of our normal way of looking at the world, or rather our normal way of seeing the world without looking at it.

Bacon removes the screens, or at least alters them, unheges them through the way that he paints. Unlatches being as it were. Words are such screens. Carson points to how “Bacon extinguishes the usual relation of figure to ground, the usual passage of information at that place.” To rewrite this relation is to “put a stop on the cliché.” In her article “Drawing Out A New Image of Thought: Anne Carson’s Radical Ekphrasis”, Monique Tschofen links Deleuze’s theorising of language to Carson’s writing. She points to how Deleuze argues that the creative arts can offer news spaces of “possibility, movement and becoming.” These new spaces work not through recognition or habit, but through “unrecognisable terra incognita.” This parallels the relation that Carson sketches between cliché and catastrophe. A deterritorialisation takes place: in Bacon’s

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163 Colebrook, *Understanding Deleuze*, p.2
164 Carson, “Variations on the Right to Remain Silent”
165 Ibid.
166 Ibid.
167 Tschofen, “Drawing Out a New Image of Thought: Anne Carson’s Radical Ekphrasis”, p.239
168 Ibid. [my italics]
paintings and in Carson’s language. To break the conventional linguistic codes is to restructure experience, making it a question of phenomenology.

West-Pavlov claims that deterritorialisation “is resistant to coding because it follows the flows and undulations of becoming-being (...) In terms of thought, it can be understood as a mode of constant un-thinking, of re-thinking, of thinking anew.”169 It is a movement towards that which “cannot yet be represented,”170 a movement away from “the cage of codification – codification of social practice, rules of behaviour, modes of thought, axiomatic philosophies.”171 To establish deterritorialisation as a question also of language helps to explain Carson’s biggest move in Autobiography of Red: the use and abuse of myth. Lily Hoang writes: “to talk about Anne Carson is to talk about myth.”172 And although Hoang centres her essay on Carson’s later book Red Doc> she withholds: “to talk about Anne Carson is to talk about AoR.”173 In her attempt to define myth, Hoang explains that she will “take a nudge from Carson herself and bow to technology to generate a definition of myth in the language of the contemporary: the image.”174 This word, image, is helpful.

Tschofen argues that for Deleuze, “an image of thought does not refer to an actual image that could be seen with our eyes or imagined as seen through our eyes. (...) Rather, the phrase refers to the implicit invisible presuppositions about thinking that make thought possible.”175 In the Western philosophical tradition the dominant mode of thinking is representational, which Tschofen claims is a deficiency as it disallows change. To talk about myth is to talk about representation. Deleuze and Guattari write in Anti-Oedipus:

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169 West-Pavlov, Space in Theory, p.203
170 Ibid., p.202
171 Ibid.
172 Lily Hoang, “From Geryon to G: Anne Carson’s Red Doc> and the Avatar”, in Ecstatic Lyre, p.172
173 Ibid.
174 Ibid., p.174
175 Tschofen, “Drawing Out a New Image of Thought: Anne Carson’s Radical Ekphrasis”, p.239
For myth and tragedy are systems of symbolic representations that still refer desire to determinate exterior conditions as well as to particular objective codes – the body of the Earth – the despotic body – and that in this way confound the discovery of the abstract or subjective essence.\textsuperscript{176}

Desire and language are linked in the nexus of myth. Deleuze and Guattari argue that with the establishment of a sovereign Oedipus, “the whole of desiring-production is crushed, subjected to the requirements of representation.”\textsuperscript{177} In \textit{Autobiography of Red}, Carson undoes the representative mode and deconstructs linguistic codes.

Code in \textit{Autobiography of Red} begins with Homer. In the introductory essay on Stesichoros, Carson briefly traces the fundamental relationship between words and our experience of the world:

Homer’s epithets are a fixed diction with which Homer fastens every substance in the world to its aptest attribute and holds them in place for epic consumption. (...) “Consumption is not a passion for substances but a passion for the code”, says Baudrillard. So into the still surface of this code Stesichoros was born.\textsuperscript{178}

Stesichoros undoes the code, and so, of course, does Carson. She ripples the surface and deterritorialises myth. She makes her myth stammer.

Carson frames her novel-in-verse with other texts. The book opens with an essay on Stesichoros, followed by his poetry in Carson’s translation as well as three appendices, notably preceding the main narrative. Deleuze and Guattari explains the nature of a book, any book, that it “exists only through the outside and on the outside. (...) when one

\textsuperscript{176} Deleuze and Guattari, \textit{A Thousand Plateaus}, p.330
\textsuperscript{177} Deleuze and Guattari, \textit{Anti-Oedipus}, p.61
\textsuperscript{178} Carson, \textit{Autobiography of Red}, p.4-5
writes, the only question is which other machine the literary machine can be plugged into, must be plugged into in order to work.”

The machine that is *Autobiography of Red* is plugged into the machine of Greek myth. The narrative of the text works in and through the myth of Geryon from which it is ultimately derived. However, the notion of derivation or origin is fundamentally dislocated in Carson’s text. Any real sense of origin is lacking. The appendices are placed before the main narrative, emphasising the mythical frame. The “source” that is Stesichoros is purposely unreliable, as discussed in chapter two. Appendix B simply states, “No it is not the true story. | No you never went on the benched ships. | No you never came to the towers of Troy.”

Carson radically rewrites her supposed source material, undoing the very notion of source as she does so. In the Greek myth Geryon is “a strange winged red monster,” who herds his red cattle until Herakles kills him. This initial encounter with the text, its formal structure and layout, reveals the way Carson’s poetics point in the direction of a special quality that Deleuze and Guattari credit American and English writers with: “They know how to move between things, establish a logic of the AND, overthrow ontology, do away with foundations, nullify endings and beginnings.” It is a struggle that initiates a movement; “everything shifts.” As the volcano deterritorialises earth, Carson deterritorialises the body of the text – the frame, the surface.

The appendices and Carson’s introductory essay are thus inextricably linked to the story of Geryon and to the nature of his being. They are essential to how the text unfolds and creates meaning. The nature of these initial texts subverts the claim to autobiography. The construction of self is already from this initial interaction with the text displaced, refusing through its very structure the idea of the individual “inside” Geryon is so desperately clinging to.

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179 Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, p.4
181 Ibid., p.5
182 Deleuze and Guattari, p.25
183 Ibid.
CONCLUDING THOUGHTS.

And so, “What difference did Stesichoros make?”

Let me end at the beginning. Joshua Wilkinson poignantly writes in his introduction to *Ecstatic Lyre* that “Carson’s concept of being itself is transformed into something much more radically animal, other, peculiar, and in perpetual flux.”

I have taken hold of this notion and read this tenuous nature of the self and its relation to phenomena within the framework of Deleuzian desire. Working through Deleuze and Guattari’s notion of desire as productive and connective has allowed for a new approach to Carson’s *Autobiography of Red*. Deleuze and Guattari’s theory defies the idea of desire as based on lack and with it this thesis has challenged the psychoanalytic context that is prevalent in readings and scholarship on Carson.

The concepts of deterritorialisation and becoming help map the effects of desire in *Autobiography of Red*. Reading the position of Geryon in the text as a deterritorialisation of self allows for realising that desire cannot be localised solely within the parameters of the two bounded selves of Geryon and Herakles. It is not contained in their romance, but is a force that animates the text as a whole.

How can this position of self be understood in relation to the phenomenological claims of the text? The self and its world are always at stake, perpetually challenged and in contention. Deleuzian desire reconfigures the self’s being-in-the-world, opening up for a new way of reading experience in the text. Becoming and deterritorialisation deconstruct the subject-object structure supposed in traditional phenomenology. The world shifts with Geryon, as he with it.

*Autobiography of Red* abounds with volcanic movements, with mountain ranges and continental plates shifting, references to tsunamis and eruptions. There are the

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185 Wilkinson, “Introduction”, p.1
mountains around which Geryon and Herakles constantly circle: the mountain at Herakles’ grandmother, the mountains in Argentina and the louring mountains of the original Greek myth\textsuperscript{186}. One has here to take geology seriously. To read this text through deterritorialisation is to realise these mountains and its grass not just as a “setting” or “backdrop” to a narrative, but as integral to the unfolding of text. The Deleuzian approach of this thesis reveals this to be more than a complimentary framework and shows how “the perceptual semiotics” of the text reconfigures that relation between “figure” and “ground”.

In this reading the phenomenological aspects have been understood not only in relation to the text’s desire but also to its poetics. Deleuze and Guattari’s refusal of lack as the basis for desire has linguistic implications. Reading text as a becoming, an actualisation of being, and tracing its deterritorialisation, rather than as a representation of an a priori reality reveals the flows and workings of desire. Carson undoes the representative mode and deconstructs linguistic codes and so rewrites desire as well as experience. As language is opened up, order and syntax disturbed, a new relationship between self and world is configured. This gives rise to a phenomenology of desire. New connections between words create new worlds. The deterritorialisation of myth, with its initial claim to frame and source, further inscribes the nature of being and position of self, pointing to how the idea of a bounded inside is undermined in the text.

The attempt at conclusion calls for a reflection on method. This has been an exploratory and testing effort at a new kind of reading of \textit{Autobiography of Red}. Brian Massumi claims that when engaging with Deleuzian philosophy, “the question is not: is it true? But: does it work?”\textsuperscript{187} It seems to me Carson’s writing requires a similar approach. In \textit{Autobiography of Red} Carson creates her own parameters of reality, of truth, or rather challenges such notions. This proneness of both theoretic and poetic text to lend themselves to proliferate readings have inspired me to attempt new connections; to read Carson’s desire as Deleuzian, and to explore the Deleuzian concepts in the context

\textsuperscript{186} In \textit{The Labours of Herakles}, Herakles allegedly splits a mountain in two on his way to find Geryon and steal his cattle. Perseus Digital Library: http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/Herakles/cattle.html [accessed 07.05.18]

\textsuperscript{187} Massumi, "Translator’s Foreword", p.xv
of phenomenology.

Places of poetry – Carson’s, Deleuze’s, mine – are perhaps in conflict with academic structure and the wish to be clear. Further research might be more daring than I have been in this respect and contribute a more performative reading. I have not altogether abandoned that position of “looking down from above” at the material at hand. I withhold that the idiosyncratic language of Deleuze and Guattari and its poetic connection with Carson’s was my personal point of departure for this work, and justification, if you will, for the research. These poetic instances as I call them, have been given importance in the text.

Reflecting on my method, the use of phenomenology as concept and word warrants evaluation. I do not mean to equate phenomenology with geology (although quite an exciting thought). Still, phenomenology as a theme or question is an undeniable part of Autobiography of Red and has functioned in this thesis as a nexus in which desire and language can be studied together, as well as being a word through which the unstable and constantly dissolving state of self can be understood. What I have not done in this work is to give any lengthy or in-depth account of the relationship between Deleuzian philosophy and the phenomenological tradition. This has been a question of focusing the research; such an account would have made for a different thesis, and would be an interesting question to elaborate on for future work.

However, the thesis could perhaps have benefited from a more explicit exploration of the idea of “phenomenology of art” and what it means to Deleuze’s understanding of phenomenology. What I can say in brief here is that for Deleuze it denotes how perception has an autonomous existence in the work of art, isolated and apart from the subjective perceiver. In other words, the structure of perception and consciousness is made visible in the work. Although this reasoning refers primarily to painting, it could perhaps be translated into a textual practice, which is what I have begun in this work. My own insistence on words such as “site” and “body of text” in describing text, as well as the idea of territory itself, emphasises this surface on which a phenomenology is drafted. This might then be read in a way as to counter that which Gilbert and Lennon’s “Deleuze and Phenomenology” provides a good account of this question.
argued, namely that Deleuze’s “surface account” of desire necessarily implies a lack of a phenomenology of desire. It is perhaps a way of reconciling the emphasis on surface with phenomenology.

Readings of Carson with Deleuze has been explored in previous scholarship to a certain extent, although not extensively, centring on the affinity between Deleuzian philosophy and Carson’s poetics. I have extended this to further include desire and the relation of self to phenomena. This has also developed the question of Deleuze’s relation to phenomenology by examining it through a reading of an aesthetic object, and could perhaps suggest a node for further research along with the idea of phenomenology of art.

A suggestion for further research would also be to extend this reading to Carson’s later novel Red Doc> (2013). Red Doc> is a sequel of sorts to Autobiography of Red and any extensive comparative work on the two texts’ interconnection has yet to be made in Carson scholarship. In this later text the failure of bordered self is irreversibly cemented. It is a text that displaces and dissolves the notion of autobiography further: Geryon becoming-G. It is textually and formally different to Autobiography of Red, which would make a comparison even more interesting as it provides further opportunity to explore how language and form condition the questions asked in this thesis.
INTRODUCTION TO A WIDER AUDIENCE.

This thesis is a study of the Canadian poet Anne Carson’s novel-in-verse *Autobiography of Red*. It examines how desire, an important theme in Carson's text, constructs the self and affects its being-in-the-world. It will also trace the relation between language and desire and examine how that relation connects in the conception of being.

In Carson’s there are many works that deal explicitly with desire, but one single novel has been chosen in order to focus the research and to ensure the space for a thorough study of text. *Autobiography of Red* is a romance between the protagonist Geryon and an older boy, Herakles. However, this thesis argues that desire cannot be contained solely within that personal relation but rather that it is a movement, a transformative force, which conditions the self and structures the text.

This thesis engages Carson’s text in dialogue with the theory of Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, primarily their books *Anti-Oedipus* and *A Thousand Plateaus*. Deleuzian desire challenges a psychoanalytic understanding of desire based on lack and instead argues it to be a productive and connective force. Deleuze and Guattari’s concepts *deterritorialisation* and *becoming* are used to explain the connection between self, desire, the text’s phenomenological aspects and Carson’s poetics.

*Deterritorialisation* refers to how everything that we perceive to be stable entities are in fact inherently unstable territories created by connective forces. Bodies, selves, societies are all examples of territories. Deterritorialisation in turn unsettles the connections, the codes and relations that make up a territory. Becoming rejects the idea that thought begins in being; a being that then is susceptible to change. Closely intertwined with the concept of territorialisation, it thus points to how any fixed being is merely an effect of the process of becoming.

The thesis aims to establish a phenomenology of desire in *Autobiography of Red*. Phenomenology is a branch of philosophy devoted to the study of structures of consciousness from the perspective of an “I”. In this thesis this word functions as a nexus
of investigation in which questions of desire and poetics converge. It is not used in its traditional way in the sense that Deleuze and Guattari are not phenomenologists, and Deleuzian theory challenges the very notion of subject and object. However, it also rewrites the relation between self and phenomena and there is research mapping the possible affinity between Deleuze’s concepts and phenomenology.

This thesis works on the assumption that the tension between the two creates a productive space for inquiry and Deleuze and Guattari’s concept have the favourable capacity to encompass and account for the way that Carson’s use of language is connected to the thesis questions.

This thesis offers a new approach to Autobiography of Red in which desire can be read beyond the psychoanalytic framework that is common in Carson scholarship. As such it hopes to create nodes for further research.
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