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A Generative Concept of Poetic Truth

1. THE PROBLEM, THE METHOD, AND THE OBJECTIVE

Peter Baker in *Modern Poetic Practice*, as Albert Cook puts it on the back cover of the book, “attempts to develop a generative criticism of poetic practice.”¹ Baker employs traditional rhetorical terms to describe the process in which the poetic text is made. He seriously considers the conventions of rhetorical criticism, as his Table of Contents reveals,

1. Memory as a Model for Poetic Creation...
2. ... the Structure of Absence...
3. Desire and the forms of Poetic Expression...
4. The Act of Knowing: Structuring ... Poems...
5. Style and Compassion...

He tests his approach through the analysis of a few selected poems by eight different poets. He identifies poetry as a field of creative activity in which the artist uses language to mobilize other faculties of self-awareness. He does not limit the analysis of the poem to linguistic structures that parallel the organization of *memory*. He finds that *memory* dominates in certain situations, while it might play negligible roles in others, when *absence*, *desire*, *knowing*, *style*, or *compassion* can take the lead. In this way, he admits that conceptual thinking and/or linguistic communication cannot reproduce experience fully because experience is

¹ Peter Baker, *Modern poetic practice: structure and genesis* (New York: Lang, 1986) (American University Series, Comparative Literature, vol. 2.)

more complex and/or more personal than they are. His application of rhetorical categories can mislead those who assume the presence of an Aristotelian tradition that uses rhetorical terms as congruent elements in a terminology. Baker emphasizes the validity of his categories, but dismisses the Aristotelian concept of the whole as linguistically and conceptually inaccessible. He emphasizes the validity of his categories, but dismisses the Aristotelian concept of the whole as linguistically and conceptually inaccessible. His application of traditional terms in a deconstructionist setting is an accomplishment in itself but even his remarkable expertise cannot redeem the inherent weaknesses of deconstruction. I agree with him that the literary work of art is, from its author's point of view, an expression of a hopelessly personalized stage in the cognitive process. As such, it can never materialize for the reader without a perhaps similar, but hardly ever identical process. The problem with this approach is that at first Baker implies that we cannot really talk about personal experience – which the literary work of art obviously is – then he talks about it, nevertheless. Indeed, the reader's reconstruction of the author's experience never coincides with the original experience, but I will try to show why not. Experience is unrepeatable, even for the same person, thus the problem lies in the uniqueness of experience, not in its inalienability. Writing and reading poetry join everyday experience in memory, partaking in a process that follows the patterns of cognition. I emphasize the process, and do not give up the hope of reconstructing the cognitive patterns of poetic creation. I place my emphasis on a general reconstruction of the poetic process.

I emphasize the poet's point of view with Baker, but discuss the poetic process as an integral part of the cognitive process with the ultimate goal of computerized emulation. The poet modulates experience held in memory suitable for poetic signification. In this essay, I introduce a theory of truth judgment that situates poetic signification in the cognitive process. A deeper understanding of the nature of truth judgment eliminates abortive disputes over issues that make sense only for the individual subject. This vantagepoint also enables me to outline a modular model for poetic signification. My theory follows the stages of the cognitive process and provides a controlling tool for checking truth content against pragmatic functionality. I share Baker's hope that "the group inscribed by this text is not simply a social class or even a class of professional scholars, but all poets and writers actively involved in producing works of the imagination." (Baker, ix) The cognitive process – in which poetry is only one of the several

possible strategies – selects or develops problem-solving methods for particular situations that seem to show some regularity. For one, the poet's knowledge could approximate the reader's by pointing to the universal questions that underline cognitive activity.

Modern theories in most areas of humanities that I know disregard the possibility of a consensus. It would be far too simple to blame the need for an academic career and, consequently, self-marketing, self-justification, or paranoia. A few more important reasons why a consensus would be either premature or impossible deserve our consideration. A metatheory embracing all existing approaches will materialize only if:

- (1) the theories it mediates between are all true in some way;
- (2) natural language implies sufficient common knowledge to communicate; therefore, common problems exist;
- (3) the fundamental units of communication are based on commonly known answers to general problems;
- (4) the theory meets its own truth conditions;
- (5) the results solve problems outside the theory; that is, evidence of the validity of the theory lies outside the theory, thus avoiding circular reasoning.

I will test my argument against these conditions. First, I will discuss possible reasons why things that are considered true by many are not necessarily true at all. Secondly, I will propose criteria for the value of specific cases of truth judgment. Finally, I will demonstrate that my description is systematic enough to be reliable by pointing out its shortcomings. After all, the design of theoretical systems ought to include the point of their failure, admitting their range, avoiding problem-solving areas they are not meant to address.

*2. FUNCTIONALITY ALONE
PROVIDES LITTLE EVIDENCE
FOR TRUTH CONTENT*

The relics of literate cultures have preserved an embarrassing multitude of logically irreconcilable theories that, nevertheless, fully function as approaches and techniques to conceptualize experience in their own cultures and, sometimes, even in other cultures. The trends known today are assumed to have survived because they have determined the course of history. The argument that ideas become popular because they work might tempt the cultural historian. However,

it is not difficult to point out that many ideas become popular because they work but solve different problems from the ones they initially addressed. In other words, falsehood often works when truth does not. Attractive ideas nearly always end up as dogmas in ideologies competing for popularity. The widespread use of an idea may, at first, stem from its truth content, which is why it can turn into an integrated part of instituted standards almost immediately. Popular ideas represent specific ways of asking questions that address some common and, possibly, universal problems, including the problem of having to ask questions. Theories of language or literature, although rarely strictly opportunistic, cannot ignore the problem of authority. Baker's interpretation of modernism in contemporary literary criticism illustrates my point:

The most influential studies of modernism highlight the ideological content of the works and thus feature authors in which this dominant ideology is either expounded directly or clearly discernible. One result of this movement is that academic criticism has become increasingly detached from the mainstream of vital and creative artistic activity.

(Baker p.1)

An idea remembered by history books, therefore, cannot claim to have solved the problems that created it. Rather, it represents specific ways of asking questions. Questions misrepresent problems by imposing the speaker's point of view on the listener. Moreover, a single culture admits only a limited number of questions. Language refers to known answers to questions that can be asked in the speaking community. Cultural thinking pays attention to functional phenomena. Questions, therefore, initiate, condone or, at least, indicate cultural standards by their implications. The availability of questions in a language community marks the boundaries of cultural thinking. Each culture allows a number of questions with unquestioned presuppositions, which increases the chances of cultural dogmatism.

While contending that valid judgments are possible in literary criticism, I emphasize the disparity between popular and authentic ideas. Pragmatism has prevailed as one of the few widely approved principles. The critic, when judging a literary work of art in relation to his own culturally and personally limited truth judgments, must observe the maxim that an idea can be judged *authentic* only if it proves to have solved at least some of its original problems, preferably before being accommodated to an ideology. Truth judgments deemed necessary to relate to the work of art or in the critic's reading remain subject to pragmatic

verification. I am unable to offer an evaluative summary of all possible approaches to my theory, so I will merely suggest that the method elaborated here works toward its goal: it elucidates a few aspects of truth judgment in the cognitive process.

3. WHAT HAPPENS IN THE COGNITIVE PROCESS?

Problem solving constitutes the central faculty of the human intellect. According to psycholinguistic research done over the last few decades, raw sensory input needs speedy interpretation to remain in the perceiver's memory: there seems to be a 4-second limit to remembering unprocessed sensation.² Articulate thought, when used successfully for practical problem solving,³ structurally parallels either socially acknowledged segments of cultural schemata³ or the semantic pattern of individual experience retained in long-term memory.⁴

Perception is followed by immediate cognitive processing based on cultural knowledge and personal judgment. The thinker's concept of the subject epitomizes the direction and the sophistication of his problem-solving activity. The first stage of cognition produces cognitive units for long-term memory. Most people have little or no doubt of their own internalized reflection⁵ upon previously experienced cognitive events. However, *impressions* (raw perceptual experience) and *notions* (first-time segmentation of perceptual experience) make sense in memory only because the thinker relates them to the rest of his knowledge of the world. The originally isolated segments of impressions and notions eventually enter long-term memory. During poetic signification, working memory temporarily retrieves, holds, and exchanges cognitive units – memories and processes – from long-term memory, thus reinterpreting the first stage of

² See G. Sperling, *The information available in brief visual presentations. Psychological Monographs* 74 (1960) for experiments on "partial report technique." C.J. Darwin, M.T. Turvey and R.G. Crowder, 'An auditory analogue of the Sperling partial report procedure: Evidence for brief auditory storage' *Cognitive Psychology* 3 (1972) pp. 255-267 is also authoritative on the subject.

³ This is what the representatives of "mental model theory" claim in psycholinguistics. See P.N. Johnson-Laird, *Mental models* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1983) for more detail.

⁴ Among well-known linguists, Fillmore and Lakoff notice that thinking is based on personal and culturally shared experience. When describing this phenomenon, Fillmore emphasizes the significance of *semantic frame*, Lakoff embellishes the idea as the *ideal cognitive model* (ICM) but their scripts stress the same, common observation.

⁵ The corresponding rhetorical term is *memory*.

cognition for a second time. Memory, after this point, will hold an episodic event that fits into what Tulving distinguishes as the semantic portion of long-term memory.⁶ The resulting image in memory, determined by personal judgment, can affect any further truth judgment. The new judgment, if integrated into long-term memory, will join other truth criteria. Such criteria first interpret perceptual *impressions*, then supervise their transformation into working *notions* in the cognitive space where they make sense and will not be used for evaluating phenomena that they cannot handle. Few scientists would regard astrology, palm-reading, or other manifestations of the occult as reliable sources of knowledge about nature, but each one of these benefit from the segment-isolating nature of cognitive problem solving. Such a subjectively framed system cannot fail within itself for at least four reasons:

- (1) it ignores thought patterns that do not comply with it, often by calling them defective which, within the range of its accompanying personal experience, they indeed tend to be;
- (2) it does not challenge indubitable first-hand experience;
- (3) it directs the practitioners' awareness towards phenomena that resolve problems within the system;
- (4) experience becomes communicable after the two-stage conceptual segmentation (raw perception to impression, then impression into notion) that inevitably happens within a system directed consciousness that complies with the first two principles.⁷

The third process applies to any form of systematic thinking, including approaches to literature.

Several parallel concepts ("definitions") exist for identical phenomena. Thought systems prioritize each truth judgment according to its problem-solving capacity. The complexity of such systems can vary according to the complexity of their priorities. These priorities can range from variables presented by ownership or curiosity to elaborate, hierarchic systems of ethics, epistemology, and metaphysics. For a single person one set of priorities prevails in a single decision.

⁶ E. Tulving, 'Episodic and semantic memory' in E. Tulving and W. Donaldson, eds., *Organization in memory* (New York: Academic Press, 1972) pp. 381-403. Tulving divides long-term memory into two sections. *Episodic memory* contains actual events, while rules and priorities are stored in *semantic memory*.

⁷ In *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1962), Thomas Kuhn expounds the scientist's cultural determination.

In another situation, the same person will probably change the set of priorities on a mostly practical basis according to current problem-solving needs. For instance, the rules of logic solve mathematical problems best, while an existential problem will involve the person as a whole. Solutions that work best for corresponding types of problems tend to be chosen in similar contexts by analogy. The functionality of occult practices indicates that they answer the questions they ask, so the question is not whether they are true or not but if they are asking the appropriate question.

Since the disappearance of literacy in Latin, the tendency towards pluralistic concepts has grown steadily. Multiple terminologies have evolved even more rapidly since nation-centered views took over the place of ontology-based traditional thinking. Kristeva refers to this phenomenon in a rather poetic manner in *Revolution in Poetic Language*:

OUR PHILOSOPHIES of language, embodiments of the Idea, are nothing more than the thoughts of archivists, archeologists, and necrophiliacs ... These methods show that ... [language has been] divided ... into self-contained, isolated islands – heteroclitc spaces existing different temporal modes (as relics or projections), and oblivious of one another.⁸

In my reading, Kristeva's text itself is not exempt from what she calls *semantic positionality*. Her idea of poetic signification appears to be true of other kinds of conventional descriptive practices, including her own treatise. Moreover, as far as I can see, only those can decipher her text who, owing to their semiotic skill, accuracy of observation, and wide learning, are fully aware of the events she is talking about. I append to her elusive statement that the "islands" are usually in constant flux, not statically codified for their users. Reflection upon experience generates cognitive units that, integrated into the recursive interpreting process of subsequent experience, represent modules in the process of cognition. Kristeva observes the isolation between individuals but does not emphasize that it originates from the compartmentalization of the community and the loss of hope in interpersonal communication, not from one of a dissociation of language, which is only one of their corollaries.

The linguistic compartmentalization of humanities works against the use of traditional terms. A pragmatically useful knowledge of ourselves necessitates pluralism and calls for parallel projections. The study of humanity evolves into

⁸ Julia Kristeva, *Revolution in Poetic Language*, transl. Margaret Waller, introd. Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984) pp. 13-14.

synthetic but arbitrarily phrased systems of thought. Socially encoded semiotic systems change rapidly. The accumulating data should fit into a single open system that integrates anomalies as modular subsystems. A complex recursive algorithm could maintain the open system in a computerized simulation by allowing data to be added to a self-improving computer program managing a dynamic relational database. Such computer programs restructure themselves according to the actual problems they deal with. The program will have to, in a humanoid way, develop its own modules of interpretation and eventually become a partner for verbal communication, that is, account for all the variables involved. This is not a purely theoretical problem any more, not even as far as literary theory is concerned. Algorithms will always be limited to solving specific problems in which the sensory variables can be converted into finite algebraic statements. Such theoretical systems will, even after overcoming the limitations of closed systems by generating their own recursive rules, make a difference only as long as they keep solving problems. Kristeva's results illustrate my argument. Her descriptive system functions within itself although its scope does not necessarily exceed a tautologous reference to itself. Literary scholars should follow the path of natural sciences instead of developing self-sufficient systems. They could use theories as working paradigms towards constructing an artificial intelligence that will demonstrate the efficiency of their theories by its own efficiency at problem solving.

4. INDEXICALITY AND SYMPTOMOLOGY

Semioticians use the term *indexicality* to denote a causal relationship between the signifier and the signified. The result indicates ("indexes") the cause. In Charles Sanders Peirce's classic example, the presence of smoke indicates fire. The same process has always been used for interpreting language. Who would not ponder every once in awhile why some other person speaks in a particular way? In such cases people explore the indexical value of linguistic signs. The same method can apply to investigating ideas: a solution offered to a problem often better articulates a way of processing the problem than articulating a useful solution.

Symptomology will, as I propose it, attempt to recover the reasons why certain incidental solutions are offered to specific problems. I treat culturally and individually specific answers to common questions in their indexical value and identify them as symptoms for motivations. All answers solve problems,

although – as I explained before – not necessarily the ones posed by the question they ask.

Twentieth-century poets offer selective blends of existentialist and humanistic thought. Indexically, existentialism can be regarded as symptomatic of the human inability to conceptualize the world in a universally valid and/or consistently communicable manner. Increasing rootlessness, following the decline of oral tradition in industrialized communities, the rapid and incessant accumulation of uncontrollable social, cultural, and environmental changes, and inevitable self-contradiction within one's lifetime ensure that a multitude of parallel concepts emerge. The lack of an alternative argument does not prove that things themselves make sense in no other than the currently available paths. Inability to comprehend and the volatility of socially accepted identity leave the modern person with little choice but to accommodate his decisions to each particular situation without consistency. The old-age technique of maintaining viable patterns of self-images consistently compatible with the person's role in the community has proved impossible to sustain mainly because, owing to the absence of a communal ideology, the role is hardly ever identifiable. Existentialism reveals the problem without solving it. With the *locus* of judgment transferred from the public domain to the inalienable vision of the individual, human existence bears alarming resemblance to tautologous reasoning. Subjectivity projected as the only objective asset of intelligent comprehension might indicate that the traditional closed descriptive systems will have to be replaced by open, dynamic models that adequately, though inevitably temporarily, serve the purpose of sharing and understanding. Personal isolation and the failure of interpersonal communication lead to circular argument if, with one generating the other, they are assumed to be the central faculties of the human situation. If existentialist epistemology is right, a socially commendable description of the situation can never materialize. The existentialist enterprise might eventually offer one of the several parallel open systems necessary for the elaboration of a dynamic model for the human intellect. Existentialism might not have anything left to say beyond the uniqueness of personal decisions, a uniqueness that the AI simulation will have to reproduce. Neo-humanism, when it tries to establish a common denominator among everything customarily recognized as human, appears to be the antithesis of existentialism. The latter claims that the very characteristics and modes of experience humanity shares have caused the breakdown of both understanding and a sense of community. Humanists do not mind if their work is theoretically impossible as long as they

can foster sharing and understanding. My current work is part of this historical process. The outcome is still out of sight.

Prevalent approaches in literary criticism also demonstrate problems besides offering temporary remedies to age-old problems. Literary critics of the last two centuries have tried to implement the expanding range of diversity and changes in the technical forms and the social roles of the poem and the poet into their discourse. In recent decades, pluralism has been emphasized along with the tendency to unite human thinking again. The comparison of a lot of parallel systems that work might offer an explanation to the existence of parallel systems, while placing them into a more global perspective.

It seems possible to write a symptomological history of literary criticism. How far did particular critics represent compartmentalized aspects or even invent problems rather than work on omnipresent problems? How can one distinguish cultural limitation from personal whim? Which were the trends that transformed popular ideas into ideologies that brought fame for the critic rather than any discernible progress in the study of literature? No matter what the answers might be, the indexical value usually epitomizes the nature of particular critical trends.

5. THE COGNITIVE VALUE
OF TRUTH JUDGMENT:
THE SEMANTIC FRAMES OF POETRY

Umberto Eco exemplifies the compartmentalization of humanities flavored with aristocratic provincialism when he explains the limitation of descriptive systems in his introduction to Yuri Lotman's semantic theory: "When a culture is analyzed as a code or system ... the processes of use are richer and less predictable than the semiotic model that explains them."⁹ This realization was about 77 years late: it entered the history of logic as Russell's Paradox in Russell and Whitehead's *Principia Mathematica* in 1913. Late as it is, let us consider the problem itself. Both the creating and the reading process employ cognitive patterns unlike the ones used for their description. To complicate matters further, conceptualization can take place in a number of ways, and individual choices from these seem to comply with no universal rules but with cultural, personal, and contextual variables. Various modes of cognitive experience ideally compose a single continuous plane;

⁹ Yuri Lotman, *The Universe of the Mind* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990) p. x.

however, in reality, modes of cognition seem to work as tools towards problem solving, much in the way car mechanics use different tools to fix various problems. Consequently, Wittgenstein's abandoned idea of constructing continuity between isolated reflections might actually eventuate: but the process would revolve around universal problems of humanity, and not an artificially enforced mode of discourse. Problem-centeredness leaves enough room for pluralistic scholarship. Scholars need to identify universal problems that originate from the human situation irrespective of historical or cultural surroundings.

An ancient referential matrix to cognitive values might apply even today more usefully than competing contemporary theories in the philosophy of science. Lord Krishna (the Creator in Hinduism) says in the *Bhagavad-Gita*:

Men say that the senses are superior
to their objects, the mind superior to the senses,
understanding superior to the mind;
higher than understanding is the self.¹⁰

This typology assumes a hierarchy among the modes of cognitive experience that also applies to the poet's cognitive activity. Truth judgments made at lower levels work as binary constituents that can appear in concordance with Wittgenstein's idea of family resemblance at higher levels to construct more complex cognitive units during category-identification. Cognition employs typical methods that respond to typical problems. These modes, if they do exist, also apply to the poet's cognitive activity. To link the ancient source to contemporary scholarship, I will name the psycholinguistic terms that best parallel the cognitive stages of truth judgment described by the *Bhagavad-Gita*.

Empirical and logical cognition represent the dialectical thesis and antithesis of inductive and deductive reasoning and understanding.

Level One: The products of *empirical* cognition appear hardly questionable at the time of judgment although they reveal anomalies even for the same subject. Beyond recognizing that a hot oven can burn me or hitting my finger with a hammer hurts, most empirical experience involves pre-directed attention: you see what you need to see and the way you want to see it. The perceiver's attitude precludes the chance of objectivity. Eyewitness accounts at courts of law often demonstrate how vulnerable empirical cognition can prove.

¹⁰ *The Bhagavad-Gita*, transl. Barbara Stoler Miller (New York: Bantam Books, 1986) third teaching, verse 42.

Still, empirical cognition solves empirical problems effectively. The induction of, and deductive experimentation with, logical problems takes place at this level. In an encounter with written poetry, the empirical factor affects the reader's perception of the poem through the quality of the binding, the paper, the typefaces, the illustrations, and the colors of the book. Truth judgment takes place in relation to the reader's cultural codes. Perception is linked with a pre-motivated interpreting faculty¹¹ that employs a personally and culturally systematized pattern of rules and categories.¹² The mechanism itself accommodates the actual cultural and personal contents in the same fashion as an algebraic expression with multiple variables welcomes a variety of actual numerals. Psycholinguistics refers to this cognitive level as the sensory stage of memory, assuming that the perceiver interprets raw sensory experience before ever thinking about it.¹³

Level Two: *Rational* cognition (this processing mode characterizes judgment in closed system, e. g. logical, metaphysical, analogical, syllogistic, circular) develops self-sufficient systems and interprets perceptual cognition by employing pre-set rules that prevail in a community (a group of people in a space where the success of their activity depends on their cooperation) in order to ensure functional communication. Logical cognition attempts to make segmentations of, and offer solutions to, dilemmas that emerge empirically, although it works flawlessly only with abstract problems (including any type of systematic thinking, usually incorporating the processing of two semantic planes at the same time).

The memory of perception implements factors of experience that encourage induction and deduction at the same time. For instance, the reader, noticing fine paper and nice binding, might presume the presence of something valuable, relying on cultural analogy, but at the same time might simply enjoy the empirical pleasures of a book with a fine binding.

Everyday thinking favors Aristotle's common sense over Hegel's mathematical clarity. The following pattern exemplifies the everyday use of Aristotelian dialectic based on the empirical observation that the binding of a book looks finely-done:

¹¹ *Sensory memory* is interpreted by *working memory*.

¹² Psycholinguists call this *semantic memory*, part of *permanent memory*.

¹³ See Sperling for more detail. It is essential that uninterpreted memory lasts for about 4 seconds and only those elements survive that have been linked with long-term memory.

- Original idea (I): the binding of the book is finely-done
 Analogy (A): finely-done things are valuable (application of
 generalized truth)
 Synthesis (S): the finely bound book is valuable

This setup easily proves simplistic. Several other things can show up in the place of the current analogy, which makes one wonder how far the applied analogy depends on the synthesis. Preconception, expectation, and personal need make teleological argument the standard in common logical arguments. In fact, even the sequential order of the following three steps seems quite arbitrary, depending on the synthesis one intends to support by the analogy:

- Idea: the binding of the book is fine
 Analogy: fine bindings feel good to touch (generalization)
 Synthesis: buying this book will allow me to touch it any time

It does not take much to ascertain that any of the six sequential possibilities is possible, rendering ordinary logic somewhat irrelevant in the process of forming a synthetic judgment. The arbitrariness of analogies substantiates the rule that a thought can combine with an unlimited number of other thoughts. There is an unpredictable number of synthetic combinations, and a synthesis can originate from an inscrutable variety of components. The object of scrutiny can generate a spatial model that, theoretically, could develop into a complete model of experience. Logic puts a limitation on my argument, because I am supposed to rationalize the irrational too. Logical questions often generate answers that work but by the laws of logic, make little or no sense. The problem the questions pose still needs to be solved in a pragmatic manner. Laughter and art, among other things, offer such illogical, but functional solutions. Poems certainly go beyond the reach of logic, so expecting logic to serve as the primary tool for identifying the elements of the poetic act courts imminent frustration.

The existence of a systematic response to empirical input suggests that the sensory input noticed, conceptualize, and used as a basis for comparison by the cognitive faculties are dynamically related in the process of truth judgment. Sensory input is transmitted through the filter of *memory* and *desire*, and each memory of the first event might restructure the remaining conceptual image of the original experience by presenting another filter for inference each time the memory is recalled. Culturally and linguistically specific concepts need intuition for their interpretation. Concept generation and concept recognition represent cognitive domains that empirical experience and common logic cannot solely amount to.

Level Three: *Conceptual* cognition recognizes and dynamically generates concepts by synthesizing an initial idea with another gained from common analogy (analogy in a teleological setting) and by an act of prioritization performed by the conceiver's sense of proportion. Intuitive, absurd, humorous, bisociative,¹⁴ mimetic, enactive, playful, emotional, reflexive, and reflective analogies are some of the most common. Recognizing a well-known composer's music, even if the particular piece is unknown to the listener, exhibits the virtues of conceptual cognition. Conceptual cognition integrates binary thought patterns into personal experience. For example, if "hot" and "cold" represent a dialectical opposition, their actualization happens in a common synthetic representation of both in the person's cognitive experience. The concepts, in the common synthesizing process that adds personal variables, move from the public concepts denoted by linguistic categories to the person's own sphere of judgment. Conceptual cognition (at Baker's *memory* stage) induces cognitive change within the person. The experience of heat, beyond being a logical concept and an empirical realization, constitutes a binary opposition between the concept and the empirical input, resulting in more than two planes being processed concurrently. Poetry offers primary experience by generating semantic modules at the level of mythic signification. Conceptual cognition usually plays a decisive role in creative problem solving. A problem can be removed from its context and transferred to another conceptual plane where it either functions again or can be eliminated without doing much harm to the thinker's psychological unity. This strategy ensures the acting person that reality is more spacious than perceptual experience, and even perceptual experience can be understood in far too many ways to take any single memory too seriously. Jokes and creative art are the most obvious examples of such problem-solving activity. Conceptual cognition, as a rule, involves the concurrent processing of logically irreconcilable semantic planes.¹⁵ Mediation between *semantic* and *episodic memory* requires the complexity of at least this cognitive stage.¹⁶

¹⁴ Arthur Koestler's term from *The Act of Creation* (New York: MacMillan, 1964) refers to situations in which two incompatible semantic planes participate in concept-formation.

¹⁵ Koestler describes this process both in terms of "The Logic of Laughter" (pp. 27-50) and of forms of creativity (pp. 271-412). Baker's platforms also favorably correspond with this idea.

¹⁶ *Episodic memory* retains the actual event as we remember it while *semantic memory* contains the priorities and dominant principles that aid us in noticing, generating, and evaluating the products of our cognition.

Among these three cognitive stages, conceptualization ranks the highest and the empirical the lowest in complexity. Levels that are more complex can readily apply lower-level truth judgments to construct cognitive units of their own to be judged through yes-no questions. A less complex strategy that has only limited access to higher levels can reflect upon a higher level in a simplified manner. Today's literary theorists are usually expected to make logical arguments. However, communicating conceptual events logically is just as much impossible as tasting the fruits in a still-life. In general, the same applies to any other branches of cultural theory. The nature of an actual problem determines the usefulness of applicable problem-solving strategies. An empirical, rational, conceptual, or existential problem requires a solution at the corresponding cognitive level. A combination of empiricism and logic produces the most profit in sciences. Logic tested against physical experimentation tends to conglomerate into truth judgments that induce further, pragmatically useful truth judgments. We know very little about conceptual cognition but all studies of language or literature would badly need a firm knowledge of it.

Level Four: *Existential* cognition – no psycholinguistic parallel exists – relates to solving a problem that involves the person as a whole. The integrity of the human being overrides the partial truths recognized by the perceptual and the intellectual faculties. Theoretically speaking, cognition can result from a particular grouping that includes the combination of dialectical pairs of truth judgment from levels one to three. A combination of perception, logic, and/or conceptual representation can constitute existential judgment. Consequently, existential cognition could be verified only if the first three levels could be combined in a single, socially encoded semantic plane to ensure effective communication. Less complex dialectical pairs substantiate the existence of more complex levels analogically. That less complex levels integrate into more complex cognitive structures suggests a hierarchic structure of cognitive planes: the interdependence of the increasingly complex first three modes even speculatively appropriates the existence of a fourth level of cognition which involves the human being as a whole. While conceptual cognitive structures consist of a combination of empirical and/or logical structures, existential cognitive structures combine the first three levels. An unpredictable number of dialectical pairs in parallel planes results from the cognitive process that culminates into a single dialectical pair of conceptual understanding in a single plane of realization. Conceivably, this plane comprises of the person's sense of the world that appropriates an experience of the self.

Inherent predisposition, if it exists, is an existential factor of truth judgment. Transcendental and visionary cognition, if assumed authentic, might be channeled through existential cognition. Faith in something can also be an existential necessity, easily overruling the findings of perception, logic, or most forms of conceptualization (which, nevertheless, affect the available scope of choices). Even if poetry addresses humanity existentially, the phenomenon itself, since it involves the whole human being, cannot reveal itself to anything less than another human being as a whole. Nicolas Berdayev refers to this knowledge preceding experience¹⁷ in *Truth and Revelation*:

... the nature of truth is not intellectual and purely cognitive, ... it must be grasped integrally by the whole personality; ... the truth is existential.¹⁸

Of course, Berdayev's statement makes sense only if free will and truth judgment collate. If they do, the introduction of the cognitive levels of truth judgment points out the self-contradiction in quite a few common epistemological questions.

The *Bhagavad Gita* does not specify further levels of cognition. However, another two could be, and indeed have been, commonly conceived. Although their verification might never become fully possible, assuming their existence seems useful on the road towards an artificial intelligence emulation of cultural thinking because they constitute another two modules of truth judgment that might prove, eventually, hard to dispense with.

Level five: *Social cognition* originates from the historically popular idea that humans belong together. Jung's collective unconscious, Christ's mysterious body in Roman Catholic doctrine, the idea of Universal Consciousness in Taoist and Buddhist tradition appear to refer to the same *premise*. A Buddhist would probably refer to "all living things," while a Taoist would name "all things." Essentially, all these approaches appear to be variations on the same theme. If this level exists, poetry inevitably constitutes a part of it and, as such, it will not be defined before this level of cognition is found is properly described.

Level six: The theoretically most complex level of cognition is conceived when all things are assumed to belong together in a single ultimate harmony with

¹⁷ *A priori* in Kant.

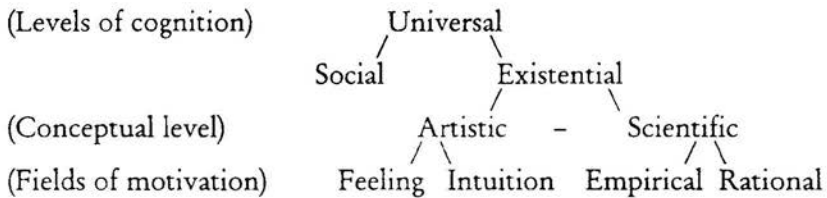
¹⁸ Berdayev, *Truth and revelation* (London: G. Bles, 1953) p. 20; the quote is from Robin Skelton, *Poetic truth* (New York: Barnes & Noble, 1978) p. 120.

which personal contact is deemed possible. This level could be termed *Universal* cognition. This idea also frequently occurs in the history of civilization. Buddhist and Taoist thinking and a pantheistic concept of the universe converge with Mallarmé's insight:

I believe that truly to be human, nature thinking, one must think with all one's body, which in turn yields a thought full and in unison like the strings of a violin vibrating unmediately with their box of hollow wood ... this is necessary in order to have a view truly – one of the Universe.¹⁹

Notably, the *Universal* level is only the end of a chain where reason and experience impose their limits on thought and language. Although successful translations of poetry employ truth judgment that works cross-culturally, poetry might include more cognitive domains than the six that I have named.

The following chart contains both the verifiable and the hypothetical levels of cognition in a dialectical hierarchy paralleled by Jung's personality types.²⁰ I interpret them – sensation, feeling, rational thought, and intuition – as problem solving strategies. I indicate the potential resources of motivation hypothetically, making no attempt to justify them in this essay.



Complying with the Jungian distribution of attributes, the fields of motivation pair up into empirical/intuitive and rational/feeling dimensions, making the model three-dimensional. Intuition and feeling act in dialectical antithesis to empirical and logical cognition. Although both are conceptual in my previous definition of the term, I have distinguished artistic from scientific cognition since relatively clear communication of concepts is possible only when they come from

¹⁹ Henry Monody, *Eugène Lefebvre*, cited by Robert Greer Cohn in *Towards the Poems of Mallarmé* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980)

²⁰ Carl Gustav Jung, *The Development of Personality*, transl. R. F. C. Hull (New York: Pantheon Books, 1964).

perceptual and logical resources, while artists express feeling or intuition more overtly – although not necessarily better or more often – than ordinary mortals do. The social level mirrors the existential frame. The community maintains its own cognitive units in the same way as individuals do, except that the cognitive contents of the community are available to each of its members and is usually linguistically encoded. In everyday life, popular myths are considered true in a community. Among contemporary myths the ones in medicine behave quite characteristically: they change frequently and quite spectacularly.²¹

6. TRUTH AND POETRY

Historically dominant descriptive techniques concentrate on the structural, poetic, mimetic, and affective elements of a poem. The poet's point of view has been rarely considered as a separate issue. From Antiquity to Classicism it was considered obvious. Later it became mystified in Romanticism and from the Avant-garde on it has been classified as inaccessible.²² When the poet's job was clearly to teach while inciting delight, traditional logical-philosophical categories referred to the tools of poetry. It was assumed, as old-time school syllabi suggest by the inclusion of writing poetry into the curriculum, that even the less-than-talented could understand the nature of these tools and learn their usage by imitating the masters. The cult of the creative genius reached its climax in the nineteenth century.²³ It was a mark of the genius to create a wholly new vision of reality, sometimes even to show the way for the masses. In our days, poets are neither masters nor prophets. When asked about poetry, their opinions tend to differ to the extent of discrediting one another.

Rhetorical Criticism explores writing strategies. Stylistics, countering the same problem, concentrates on effects, rather than on techniques. Rhetorical criticism includes prose, and it also treats speaking in public. Speaking in public has been one of the ways poetry appeared in history; prose poems have also

²¹ For example, it turned out recently that a regular overdose of more than 500mg of vitamin C, considered innocuous since its discovery, damages the recipient's DNA.

²² Carl Fehrman in *Poetic Creation: Inspiration and Craft*, transl. Karin Petherick (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1980) pp. 198-200 argues remarkably effectively against "antigenetic" approaches, especially "intentional fallacy."

²³ S.T. Coleridge's distinction between primary and secondary imagination illuminates such an approach. Victor Hugo's role in French culture even during his lifetime exemplifies the reverence the "creative genius" was occasionally entitled to receive.

become common in the last one hundred years. Rhetorical criticism traditionally applies a descriptive language that does not concern itself with the building of theories or digging down to the roots of a poem's origin. The validity of the rules it proposes is usually affirmed by their influencing an audience effectively.²⁴

Poetic tools can be understood as problem-solving methods, which means that computers can learn to use them as soon as the problems are clearly revealed. I have made the first step in this essay by pointing out the possibility of a binary system that is capable of truth judgment, while aligning the problems and the solutions in the same cognitive plane. The recursive nature of problem solving awaits academic treatment in another essay.

The levels of truth judgment, when recognized, perform as the primeval "black holes" of knowledge: they gather old problems together around cognitive faculties. The systematic hierarchy of the cognitive levels of truth judgment might prove to be a long step towards describing the cognitive process, the only context likely to shed light on the creative act. A full summary of the process will epitomize cognitive patterns in a symptomologically justifiable rendition that modularly prepares the groupings of truth judgment to fit for a comprehensive computerized emulation of the act of poetry.

²⁴ Richard A. Lanham, *A Handlist of Rhetorical Terms* (Oxford: University of California Press, 1991) is a good example of this, and represents an authoritative perspective in the field.