



Seminar notes

The following are notes for Dr. Adam Staley Groves's 2022 video seminar "Wallace Stevens: Theōria and Technic." All research herein is original. Any references to this seminar, its notes or content shall be properly attributed to its author and the Ereignis Center for Philosophy and the Arts.

Day One: Overview

- Immediate, Mediate, Concept | Poetry Itself
- A General Concept for Understanding Stevens's Oeuvre
- A Poetry of Thought and Contra Criticism

Wallace Stevens never aspired to be a philosopher; however, he contributes several concepts to "the theory of poetry" through his prose and verse. Thus Stevens develops a theory from, within, and for "poetry itself" which he differentiates from philosophy as an academic discipline over a span of twenty years. This first lesson introduces general concepts for understanding Stevens's oeuvre, his "poetry of thought," and what we will call "contra criticism."

Nevertheless, a philosophical approach is essential if we want to achieve a more rigorous understanding of Stevens, whose thought has often been met with confusion or dismissal by the critical industry.

The poetry of *Harmonium* (1923) represents the **immediate** phase of his theory: **It is**. The poetry of *Ideas of Order* (1935) marks the beginning of a **mediation** phase or what I call Stevens's theōria particular to prose of the 1930's: **What is it?** *Notes Toward A Supreme Fiction* (1942-47) represents a **conceptualization** phase: **It is this**. However, we can also identify a speculative fourth and last phase with Steven's questioning of the human. Whether or not supreme fiction "must be human," as Stevens thought in a letter to critic Robert Pack less than a year before Stevens's death, this phase is centrally concerned with the status of **poetry itself**. Thus, this last phase reveals Stevens's ambiguous position on what I consider an ethics of the imagination. His position should be regarded as ambiguous because it combines an element of *choice* with a consideration of *how* we engage or deploy the imagination.



Thus what Stevens calls a “poetry of thought” incorporates and organizes all four aspects mentioned above: Art or “it is,” philosophy or “what is it?,” science or “it is this,” and, finally, poetry itself or what must not be human in regard to the ethics of the imagination.

Steven’s prose of the 1930’s is significant to an understanding of Stevens’s theōria: “Williams,” “A Poet That Matters,” and “The Irrational Element in Poetry” can be found in *Wallace Stevens: Collected Poetry and Prose* (1997), and are required reading for those who want to come to grips with the key insights of this seminar. All letters referenced in this seminar may be found in Holly Stevens’s *The Letters of Wallace Stevens* (1966), a book that is highly recommended.

Contra Criticism

Overview

Stevens’s theory offers precritical ideations which critical philosophy rejects or misunderstands. The clearest example of this is Simon Critchley’s *Things Merely Are: Philosophy in the Poetry of Wallace Stevens* (2006), which is recommended reading for this course. Charles Baudelaire’s depiction of the poet’s “spiritual crisis” should replace the negative terms that are used by certain critics in order to assume a crisis in Stevens’s life. This type of sentiment is particularly prevalent in Harold Bloom’s *Poems of Our Climate* (1976), which is also recommended.

Key points

A theory of poetry regards “poetry itself;” it is does not mean poetry for philosophy itself. By the 1940’s Stevens had come to claim that poetry may be superior to philosophy, but he had certainly brought this position up earlier, notably in his letters to Ronald Lane Latimer.

Our view is that philosophy is the progenic form of poetry itself.

Contra Criticism means to critique professional and academic attacks on poetry itself in order to understand what poetry could be. Without doubt poetry is the reason such attacks are possible in the same way debt collectors require default debtors to exist in the first place. Thus our understanding of poetry will help us produce a more adequate understanding and knowledge of the poetic imagination. It should be known that the



term *contra criticism* is derived from Stevens's prose, namely, "The Irrational Element in Poetry."

Academic critics such as Helen Vendler want to rein in Stevens as strictly an American poet that has no significance beyond a nationalistic expression. In opposition to her kind of assessment are those critics or philosophers who read Stevens as standing in the service of philosophy itself, as a champion for the growth and expansion of a philosophy of destitution. The primary example of this is Simon Critchley. Both Vendler and Critchley fail to understand what we will call Stevens's *theōria*, and that his *oeuvre*, in so far as it champions anything, advocates "poetry itself." This is a notion which shares certain ideas with philosophy; thus we find it necessary to develop a *contra criticism* to offset the mishaps of a burgeoning "Stevens industry" at large.

Theōria is a *contra criticism* particular to technoscience and technological determinism. What we're interested in here is particularly Artificial General Intelligence (AGI) or machine tendencies toward unsupervised learning, which in turn shapes human life and access to the imagination. AI operates as a critic of the imagination; hence, poetry itself and its study may provide an ethical *contra-critical* reproach, and thus stand against the critic of technic that we can provisionally read through Stevens's professional critics.

Day Two: Reading Harmonium

Reading *Harmonium* (1923) from Wallace Stevens *Collected Poetry and Prose*, The Library of America (1997)

- *Of Heaven Considered as a Tomb* p. 45
- *Of the Surface of Things* p. 45-46
- *The Curtains in the House of the Metaphysician* p. 49
- *The Wind Shifts* p. 68
- *Tattoo* p. 64
- *The Bird With Coppery Keen Claws* p. 65

In this lesson we apply our general concepts to some of Stevens's early poems. This helps us understand how concepts are developed from Stevens's work. What we seek to achieve is a respectful and rigorous approach to his theory of poetry itself.



Some advice reading Stevens's poetry is to be playful with the poem. Read it out loud. Consider listening to it visually, sonically, intellectually. Sometimes it doesn't speak to you. Sometimes we are unwanted foreigners. Avoid psychoanalytical framework. Do contextual research carefully so the poem is not hindered by too much foregrounding.

Day Three: The Irrational Element in Poetry I–IV

- Reading “The Irrational Element in Poetry” (1936); p. 781 – 792, sections I-IV Key Points I – IV

While Wallace Stevens was aware of the importance of his lecture “The Irrational Element in Poetry” he decided not to publish it with other prose found in *The Necessary Angel* in 1951. However, “The Irrational Element in Poetry” lays the foundation for his entire prose theory. This lesson discusses sections I–IV of the lecture.

Context

There is a chance that poetry does not enter into technic thus “The Irrational Element” offers advice albeit under complex circumstances particular to theōria and its appearance in Stevens's oeuvre.

Stevens is aware of the importance of this lecture but decides not to publish it with other prose found in *The Necessary Angel: Essays on Reality and the Imagination* (1951). However, it is the foundation for his entire prose theory and its contained ideas are extrapolated over the remainder of his lifetime.

- I. Stevens establishes that the irrational element in poetry is not pinned to genre poets, only represented by such poets or movements. It is a transaction between reality and the sensibility of the poet “which poetry springs” indicative of a fourth or poetry itself and the immediate.
- II – III. Stevens clarifies he is not a philosopher but makes the comparison to the philosophical ideas associated with objective and subjective reality hence what is shared between poetry and philosophy. Most likely an adaptation of I. A. Richards's theorization of poetry, particular to Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Coleridge on Imagination* (1934) and more clearly related (as with much of his prose theory) to Richards's *Poetries and Sciences* (1923).



Here Stevens crucially depicts the sensibility of the poet and sets forth two modes of the poet if they could be “predetermined.” The poet of fulfilment, satisfaction, or multiplication and the poet of extinction, illusion, or despair. I also read this as summoning Homeric “oneiros.” This is considered a predecessor to the later question of supreme fiction “whether or not it must be human” particularly when Stevens claims poets are born and not made. Stevens also distinguishes the irrational from historical accounting, Hegelianism, psychoanalysis and other subjects of academic inquiry.

- IV. Here Stevens defines irrationality as manifesting in poetry as well as defining provisionally the subjectivity of the poet, its individuality and its particular relationship to the irrational via “disclosures” based upon a peculiar concept of its “element.” It is a definitive moment in this text which begins to distinguish a poetry of thought in terms of theory viz. theōria. Finally that the individuality of a poet is disclosed by the poet to them. Reality according to poetry is able to nominate the individuality of the poet which is singular to the poet in terms of transpositioning mentioned in section II. Here the question is raised in terms of the ambiguity of the poet’s birthright according to sections II – III.

Moreover, Stevens introduces the concept of biological and poetic mechanisms in relation to earlier mentioned “pretext” for poetry derived from the sensibility of the poet. He also mentions penetrating the “contemporaneous” as a choice or wilful use of the imagination. This is read as an indicator for an ethics of the imagination divided between choice and an inadvertent *how* for ethics thus how it acts beyond or beside human decision particular to poetry and its disclosures. The emphasis is placed on theōria and the capacity to name something like ethics. Thus ethics is read from poetry itself particular to the imagination and disclosures. Here the relation between poetry and philosophy is set forth in terms of their more precise modes for subjectivity in particular the wilful act of indistinction to *how* or disclosures.

Day Four: Contra Critic, Part One

This lesson discusses Stevens’s theōria and its basic operation, the relationship between theōria and technic, as well as Stevens’s critics. We shall discuss Helen Vendler and



“patriotic education,” alla Donald Trump, Stevens as a transcontinental thinker of poetry, and his juxtaposition of poets of despair with poets of fulfilment.

Context

The uncollected prose of the 1930's informs “The Irrational Element in Poetry” thus it is crucial to examine “Williams” (1934) “A Poet That Matters” (1936). Other key points concern Stevens’s theōria and its basic operation, the relationship between theōria and technic specific to AGI as well as Stevens’s critics and technic. We shall discuss Helen Vendler and Trumpian “patriotic education” Stevens as a transcontinental thinker of poetry and key concepts of despair poets in contrast to poets of fulfilment.

Text

Stevens, Wallace. “Williams.” *Stevens*. New York: Library of America, 1997. 769-71.

Stevens, Wallace, and Holly Stevens. *Letters of Wallace Stevens*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1996

Stevens, Wallace. “A Poet That Matters” *Wallace Stevens - Collected Poetry & Prose*. Library of America, 1997. 774-780.

Stevens, Wallace. “A Collect of Philosophy” *Wallace Stevens - Collected Poetry & Prose*. Library of America, 1997.

Key points

Technic is a critic of the imagination.

Heidegger and Stevens regard technic albeit from poetry and philosophy respectively. My view is that poetry itself offers a clearer path to the ‘how’ of an ethics of the imagination.

Most critics are poets of despair and illusion, hence toward at least an inadvertent extinction of poetry and poets.

Theoria: Contra Critical Operation Toward the Ethics of the Imagination

1. It is. Stevens’s prose performs an anti-critical task *as a critical element* of his verse; just as much his verse is the cause of his prose which invests disclosures within its own element, text system, or oeuvre.



2. What is it. By delegating disclosures within itself (transgressions of an absolute object) this apparatus facilitates disclosures in verse and prose by irrational mechanisms particular to its element. This apparatus protects “poetry itself” from an external, critical annihilation or transformation into pure content.
3. Concept. One quality of this apparatus Stevens terms a “temporary abridgement.” Thus the fleeting nature of disclosures – investment and divestment of an absolute notion – is expressed as *abstraction* and *change* according to a formative apparatus or what Stevens calls “the irrational element in poetry.”
4. Poetry itself / anti conceptual. An irrational element therefore concerns notions of what Stevens terms “the absolute object”; this apparatus invest and divests such within the oeuvre. In the most general sense the apparatus facilitates substance, form, and object (poetry itself) but resists full public use or purpose; thus historical exhibition or teleological annihilation is thwarted and the circuitry remains open. In other words this formal apparatus thinks beyond any self which peers into it. Learning how to read it proves the matter forthrightly.

Helen Vendler believes philosophy and history should be ignored when it comes to our understanding of art which is particular to her studies of Wallace Stevens. She argues for “the whole uncensored human person” which is problematic; how can one ever know the other? Furthermore aesthetic emphases such as Vendler’s are theoretical at base; as it is her view she wields over the poems hence historical and philosophical in general. This type of contradiction is exemplar of poets of extinction / illusion because it is a wilful choice which does not consider how poetry works. Thus as a powerful and immensely influential critic of Stevens, Vendler represents the despairing outcome for criticism in the United States.

Baudelaire’s Dilemma – all poets face a spiritual crisis when they must reason about their art. This is why poets become superior critics to critics themselves – precisely because poets do both whereas critics are not by disposition, poets. Stevens recognizes this when he offers poetry is superior to philosophy and experiences this particular to “The Irrational Element.” Thus the more accurate spiritual crisis for Stevens can be linked to Baudelaire hence the crises critics impose, surmise, or project should be taken lightly or dismissed. This is particular but not exclusive to Critchley, Bloom, and Vendler.



The nature of poetry is differentiated from philosophic ideas in “A Collect of Philosophy” (1951) The “poetry of thought” Stevens’s considers theoretically the “supreme poetry” yet is persistently attacked by critics and demoralized by philosophic poets that he does not associate himself with.

The poetry of thought is not technic yet technic may resemble it – this is a problem for our time not necessarily critics of the past yet we can learn from critics, by the poets they are, how to use the imagination not be critiqued / constrained by technic.

The way Stevens discovers the “absolute object” through Jean Wahl is precisely by the disclosures he remarks of years before in “The Irrational Element.” This is one example of how an ethics of the imagination, particular to the “true subject” of poetry, may be deployed.

Stevens was not trying to be a philosopher contrary to the accusations of Critchley, this can be substantiated in letters definitively.

The sensitivity poets represents (which all of us share) has undergone degradation by sophistication. Sophistication is shared between critics and technic.

Poetry and philosophy have faced diminishment over the years. As education moves toward vocational STEM, art and questioning has faced decline.

Speculative realism represents a modern heroics for philosophy.

Day Five: Contra Critic, Part Two

This lessons discusses Stevens’s concept of the “romantic,” and Contra Critic. We consider how Stevens draws lessons from William Carlos Williams, and how his framework connects to I. A. Richards’s readings of Samuel Taylor Coleridge. Other critics discussed in this lesson include Harold Bloom and Simon Critchley.



Context

Here we consider the more accurate if not rigorous concept of Stevens's "romantic" and continue with Contra Critic. Stevens learns from other poets, namely William Carlos Williams before he creates his own theōria in prose. The reading of "Williams" (1934) reveals a framework of Stevens's theōria which is linked to I. A. Richards's conceptualization of Samuel Taylor Coleridge. Harold Bloom's misreading of Stevens is countered specifically in terms of the crisis of the poet and the misnomer of the romantic labelling. In effect, Bloom has a crisis with influence (namely critical theory) which is projected onto Wallace Stevens. Bloom's attacks are exemplar of canonical and careerist desires which are fertile ground for poets of despair. Recommended reading: *Coleridge on Imagination* (1934); *Poetries and Sciences* (1923) by I. A. Richards. Simon Critchley's *Things Merely Are: Philosophy in the Poetry of Wallace Stevens* (2006) represents another despair poet. In Critchley we find a projection of philosophical poserism onto Stevens which doubles for the despair based in Critchley's admitted ineptitude for poetry. We also review some excerpts of Stevens's later prose to support contra critic and its task.

Text

Baudelaire, Charles, and Jonathan Mayne. *Art in Paris, 1845-1862; Salons and Other Exhibitions Reviewed by Charles Baudelaire. Translated and Edited by Jonathan Mayne.* 2nd ed. Binghamton: Phaidon, 1981. 237

Stevens, Wallace. "Williams." *Stevens*. New York: Library of America, 1997. 769-71.

Bloom, Harold. "Coda: A Poetic Crossing." *Wallace Stevens: The Poems of Our Climate*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell UP, 1977

Richards, I. A. *Coleridge on Imagination*. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1960.

Richards, I. A. *Poetries and Sciences, a Reissue of Science and Poetry (1926, 1935) with Commentary*. New York: Norton, 1970. First published in 1926 and revised in 1935. Additions made by Richards in 1970

Stevens, Wallace. "Le Plus Belle Pages" *Wallace Stevens - Collected Poetry & Prose*. Library of America, 1997.

Stevens, Wallace. "Concerning a Chair of Poetry" *Wallace Stevens - Collected Poetry & Prose*. Library of America, 1997.



Stevens, Wallace. "A Collect of Philosophy" *Wallace Stevens - Collected Poetry & Prose*. Library of America, 1997.

Critchley, Simon. *Things Merely Are: Philosophy in the Poetry of Wallace Stevens*. London: Routledge, 2005.

Key points

William Carlos Williams's spiritual crisis depicted by Stevens is in line with Baudelaire's dilemma.

The romantic concept Stevens defined as two things at once. The sentimental is romantic and weaker than feeling which concerns an anti-poetic capacity; the ability to guard poetry from the unreal of the world by investing itself in a real.

The unreal supplies the real with a productive force divorced of a romantic pettiness – this is an early definition of the exponential growth of reality between metaphysics and a real. Critics fail to recognize Stevens's speculative dimension or concept of the absolute which is why interpretations by philosophers such as Simon Critchley should be treated with extreme caution.

The subjectivity of poets is in relation to a poet. This poet can manifest as despair or fulfilment. Despair is about the extinction of poetry. Fulfilment is the strong sense of multiplication of poets and poetries in the world.

The anti-poetic, speculative realism, and Heideggerian correlationism (thinking and being) are linked together with emphases placed on poetry itself, the universal figure (the poet which supplies reality and the world with poetries and poets). Thus the hero of philosophy whether Heidegger or any novel speculative realist figure today is analogously the hero of criticism against poetry itself.

Literature, poetry and the sophistication of the formless. Literature shares in the form of poetry but as a content in the world has a different claim on this form. Philosophy as it becomes more like literature enters into sophistication which is how it becomes technic. Poetry also faces sophistication but offers the best way to address the ethics of the imagination under the reins of technic. Critchley is a sophist in the sense of his sophistication of Stevens's poetry therefore a poet of destruction and despair.



Day Six: Contra Critic - Ruminations

Here we delve deeper into the difference between philosophy and poetry in terms of its shared approach to the concept of the absolute. We examine Samuel Coleridge's notion of "fancy" and its proximity to Stevens's theōria.

Context

One should consider Stevens's theory works toward the amity of poetry and philosophy. Stevens's contra critical stance, in my view, opens up a way to understand philosophy and its destitution as we enter the reins of technic. Such is specific to consciousness and form. Here we delve deeper into the difference between philosophy and poetry in terms of its shared form specific to the concept of the absolute. We examine Coleridgean "fancy" and its proximity to Stevens's theōria.

Text

Stevens, Wallace. "Three Academic Pieces" *Wallace Stevens - Collected Poetry & Prose*. Library of America, 1997

Critchley, Simon. *Things Merely Are: Philosophy in the Poetry of Wallace Stevens*. London: Routledge, 2005

Stevens, Wallace. "Williams." *Stevens*. New York: Library of America, 1997. 769-71

Richards, I. A. *Coleridge on Imagination*. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1960.

Stevens, Wallace. "Imagination as Value" *Wallace Stevens - Collected Poetry & Prose*. Library of America, 1997

Stevens, Wallace. "The Noble Rider and the Sound of Words" *Wallace Stevens - Collected Poetry & Prose*. Library of America, 1997

Key points

Stevens's theōria sources the expansion of reality to an absolute (praeternature) thus to regard his poems as Christian, searching for redemption thus merely in the world is an inappropriate framing by Critchley.



Philosophers share the form of poetry with poets and their unique forms of knowledge however, the philosopher often uses poetry for the ends of philosophy at the expense of poetry.

Stevens had his own ideas about how essence appears in the world specific to “Three Academic Pieces” hence should be read in distinction to Critchley’s philosophical limitation of the thinking and strength of the poem.

Identity is tantamount to Coleridgean “fancy.” Stevens’s views on imitation, resemblance, and metaphor may be read to debase Critchley’s parodic reading of Stevens.

Poetry is thinking which may be sophisticated into writing. Philosophizing poetry is yet a further sophistication of this form. Getting Stevens’s work accurate is contra critical.

Poetry does not take the place of religion for Wallace Stevens as Critchley claims – this is why his imposing of T.S. Eliot is wrong if not inappropriate for scholarly work (hence sophistry, mockery). Stevens was clear about pure poetry in “The Irrational Element in Poetry.”

Primary and secondary imagination in Richards’s depiction of Coleridge is analogous to Stevens’s concept of Williams. Coleridgean “fancy” is opposed to the circuitry of the absolute and the imagination as it appears in the world and exits the world. Critchley and other critics commit to fancy, closing off poetry and relegating it only to the world hence diminishing what is “vital.”

Williams “anti-poetic” is read as that which destroys fancy and its closure of the form of poetry in the world viz. technic or sophistication. Here fancy is viewed as choice over how the ethical use of the imagination is conceived.

Day Six (b): The Irrational Element in Poetry, pt2

- Reading “The Irrational Element in Poetry” V-VI.

This lessons continues our reading of Stevens’s lecture “The Irrational Element.” From a review of sections I–IV we move to discuss sections V–VI. Central to our discussion is the proposition that writing is a type of technology.



Text

Stevens, Wallace. "The Irrational Element in Poetry" *Stevens*. New York: Library of America, 1997.

Stevens, Wallace. "The Noble Rider and the Sound of Words" *Wallace Stevens - Collected Poetry & Prose*. Library of America, 1997

Key points

Writing is a technology. When we read it we are using technology. Thus convergent thinking is reductive and tending toward precision, it is anti-imaginative if we are only looking for a conclusion. Divergent thinking is an expression of poetry itself closer to the "true subject." Both are essential to rigorous reading. In sum, contra critic works toward an ethical use of divergent meaning (the how of poetry itself and its form) with care for the more precise quality of what Stevens means in terms of poetry and its theory via convergence (choice of concepts).

The individuality of the poet and "disclosure" Stevens explains in a somewhat confusing manner. In effect it toggles between decision and the confoundment of how one knows without knowing yet knows what they want to do. Stevens situates this between mechanisms of poetry and biology. His use of "poetic mechanism" is peculiar with implications of technic and poetry. This passage is exemplar of the ethics of the imagination which is also read with other prose by Stevens to cement the relationship to Coleridgean fancy via Richards.

- V. Stevens concept of the poet and its subjectivity concerns the true subject of poetry and the subject of poetry hence *how* compared to intent or *choice*. It is precisely the operanda of the imagination and its ethics. The irrational is unpredictable however poets in Stevens's concept have a kinship with contingency this is illustrated by "two things at once" which is a tension Stevens understand as "characteristic of poetry." The true subject belongs to poetry exclusively.
- VI. Pure poetry runs the risk of poetry of the subject hence, in its intentional quest for the true subject of say God, it disintegrates into weaker forms of supreme fiction or the poetry of thought. Thus in terms of Critchley claiming poetry takes the place of religion, he is wrong. The irrational element dominates in pure poetry thus Stevens's concept of pure poetry calls for a tempering ethically so, to regard the how



as yet an unknown irrational or “the intelligence” of an absolute or praeternature – hence beyond identity associated with fancy.

Day Seven: Contra Critic + The Irrational Element in Poetry VII–IX

- Contra Critic + The Irrational Element in Poetry
- Reading “The Irrational Element in Poetry” VII–IX

This lesson completes the reading of “The Irrational Element in Poetry.” Key to our understanding is how technic appears to be the systematic use of the irrational. What follows is a need to consider an ethics of the imagination in order to resist its reins or, alternatively, to resist its reign.

Text

Stevens, Wallace. “The Irrational Element in Poetry” *Stevens*. New York: Library of America, 1997.

Stevens, Wallace. “Three Academic Pieces” *Wallace Stevens - Collected Poetry & Prose*. Library of America, 1997

Stevens, Wallace. “Imagination as Value” *Wallace Stevens - Collected Poetry & Prose*. Library of America, 1997

Key points

- VII. The pressure of the contemporaneous is analogous to concepts of “the event” or “the seismic.” This reading plays on the very notion of con-temps or ‘in time’ as a play with divergence and disclosure of Stevens’s oeuvre. The contemporaneous is of a nominal subject not the true subject, rather destructive and ominous issues. The poet cannot stop at the contemporaneous they must move through in regard to knowing the true subject and *how* that is at work in life, in regard to the world and beyond.
- VIII. The irrational is not a liberation from the rational. Stevens views these modalities as part of the element of reality itself conjoining with the imagination. Here he attempts to establish the concept of freedom in art, in poetry, and life in general. Here we question what “the unwritten rhetoric” means in terms of disclosures, in



terms of mysterious encounters post contemporaneous resistance or permeation through any sense of an inescapable 'now'. Stevens also remarks on sticking with *how* over choice if one seeks a consistent relationship with the contingency of the imagination which is a consideration of a later naming of "the absolute object." Stevens also ascribes the view of poetry to Rimbaud and his teacher.

- IX. The dynamics of poetry regards an unknown one need regard and care for specific to what is known. Forms of the irrational should not be pegged to genre. The irrational divulges forms which are absorbed by the irrational out of the known. Once again, the real provides to an unreal, and it is from the unreal which the real takes in thus "the growth of poetry" or the "dynamic cause" of poetry and its creation which further discloses. In its wake reality is established which we understand as the dynamis of knowledge, of content forms, and technic. The absence of "poetic energy" marks a despairing poet and notions of extinction. Here there is a choice to move for the *how* of the imagination and the true subject. It is a philosophical and speculative questioning from poetry. The irrational becomes systematically used when the critique of the irrational needs to be made by a "potent subject" whomever that is. In one sense this is the work of a contra critic, but just one sense. Technic may well be this systematic use of the irrational hence the need to think the ethics of the imagination to resist its reins or, resist its reign.

Day Eight: The Absolute Object

- Reading poem XVIII of *The Man With The Blue Guitar* and Poetic Exercises of 1948

This final lesson engages "the absolute object" in a close reading of Stevens's poem XVIII of "The Man With The Blue Guitar." We investigate how Jean André Wahl had developed a sense of the "absolute object" from Søren Kierkegaard's "doctrine of how" in *The Philosopher's Way* and *Philosophies of Existence*. We conclude with a discussion of Stevens's "Poetic Fragments" of 1948 from *Adagia*, where he explicitly considers "the absolute object."

Context

Here we engage one part of the circuit of disclosure regarding "the absolute object" via Jean Wahl – what I consider the supreme dialogue of poetry and philosophy. We consider the poem, prose fragments and Jean Wahl's doctrine of how which was built from his



rendition of Søren Kierkegaard. Finally we link together aspects of the whole seminar in a more or less comprehensive closing.

Text

Stevens, Wallace. *The Man With The Blue Guitar*, *Wallace Stevens - Collected Poetry & Prose*. Library of America, 1997.

Stevens, Wallace. Adagia “From The Notebooks: Poetic Exercises of 1948” *Wallace Stevens - Collected Poetry & Prose*. Library of America, 1997.

Stevens, Wallace, and Holly Stevens. *Letters of Wallace Stevens*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1996.

Wahl, Jean. *Philosophies of Existence: An Introduction to the Basic Thought of Kierkegaard, Heidegger, Jaspers, Marcel, Sartre*. Translated from the French by F. M. Lory. Trans. F. M. LORY. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1969.

Wahl, Jean. *The Philosopher's Way*. Oxford University Press, New York. 1948.