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Doing and Interpreting Lyrical Sociology:

Living in Detroit

Gregory Joseph Wurm

A thesis submitted to the faculty of
Brigham Young University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Science

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ABSTRACT

Doing and Interpreting Lyrical Sociology: Living in Detroit

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This thesis examines, experiments with, and theorizes the value of lyrical sociology as an approach to social scientific research. A lyrical sociology, as proposed by Andrew Abbott, seeks to describe an author's emotional response to a phenomenon rather than explain it. This allows for a researcher's own experience to play a role in the research process in a way that helps the reader to connect emotionally and ethically to both the world they read about and the world they themselves are a part of. It has valuable implications for the way researchers relate to their research, their research subjects, their audience, and ultimately their own lives. I start by situating lyrical sociology within the broader context of the discipline, and the social sciences more generally, and then elaborate upon the specific stance and mechanics required of the writer and reader of lyrical works. Next, I present a series of lyrical vignettes about the time I spent living as a missionary in inner-city Detroit. Lastly, I give an analysis and reflection on what I learned from the process of writing and reading these stories and then conclude with a discussion on future directions lyrical sociology can take.

Keywords: lyrical sociology, narrative, ethics, emotion, ethnography, reading, urban sociology, theory

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Doing and Interpreting Lyrical Sociology: Living in Detroit

In the first chapter of his 2015 book, *Reconstructing Sociology: The Critical Realist Approach*, Douglas Porpora asks, “Do we need a philosophy of science or metatheory?” and answers, “Well, yes. The fact is you already have one. The question is whether you have the right one” (7). Every sociological enterprise is built on a series of assumptions about the way the world is, the way it works, and the way we come to this knowledge. Though these guiding beliefs are not explicitly acknowledged or communicated in the course of our day to day research, from time to time it is helpful, even necessary, to reflexively think about how we do sociology. In a 2007 article titled, “Against Narrative: A Preface to Lyrical Sociology,” Andrew Abbott does just this.

Abbott seeks to develop an approach to doing sociology that avoids the general story-telling structure inherent in most conventional ways of research and report, whether quantitative or qualitative, and re-imagines the role of the social researcher. While quantitative methods rely upon “reified variables” and qualitative methods upon “concrete actors” (Abbott 2007a:70), both seek to tell a story of the data they gather, namely ‘what happened and why?’ In this way, the two methodologies, which are often pitted against one another, are more similar than different in that they are both acutely aimed toward explanation. Lyrical sociology, however, rather than trying to explain the world through sequences of variables or events, envisions an approach to sociology that centers on an “image or images” of the social world at a particular moment in time. Doing so allows the researcher to view reality in “different ways, through different lenses,” and “evoke the sources of [his or her own] emotional reaction” (76). Lyrical sociology is thus, for Abbott, a “particular author’s emotional relation to a certain kind of social moment” (77)

rather than a general researcher's distanced—often causal—interpretation of a temporal sequence.

Abbott's article, which is part of his larger project toward the development of a genuinely "processual sociology" (Abbott 2016b), outlines this lyrical approach in detail by drawing upon literary theory, the philosophy of time and emotion, as well as a variety of previous sociological works that he identifies as either lyrical or narrative. Of those he places in the lyrical camp, he mentions, among others, Harvey Zorbaugh's (1929) *The Gold Coast and the Slum*, Bronisław Malinowski's ([1922] 1961) *Argonauts of the Western Pacific*, Michael Bell's (1994) *Childerley*, and Nicholas Christakis' (1999) *Death Foretold*. Reviews of these works, by readers other than Abbott, highlight precisely what Abbott contends make them exemplary of the lyrical impulse he hopes to establish in other social scientific writing (Abbott 2007a:96) and are worth giving and commenting on here briefly.

Of Zorbaugh's book, a Chicago-based ecumenical magazine wrote, "Here is a type of sociological investigation which is equally marked by human interest and scientific method" ("Christian Century" 1929). In the preface to *Argonauts*, Sir James G. Frazer praises Malinowski's approach:

It is characteristic of Dr. Malinowski's method that he takes full account of the complexity of human nature. He sees man, so to say, in the round and not in the flat. He remembers that man is a creature of emotion at least as much as of reason... The man of science, like the man of letters, is too apt to view mankind only in the abstract, selecting for his consideration a single side of our complex and many-sided being (Frazer [1922] 1961:ix).

Abbott himself says of Malinowski: “Malinowski wants us to see the Trobrianders as he saw and felt them. He falls out of his scientific pose again and again, not because he is a Westerner or a colonialist or a Pole or a man, but because he is too good a lyricist not to” (2007a:75).

In lyrical sociology, the scientific and the humanistic are not mutually exclusive but pursued simultaneously as offering a more rounded view of social life. Research is still to be conducted intellectually within a “framework of rigor” (96), but not at the expense of the author’s own emotional engagement with the research. In fact, Abbott suggests that in Zorbaugh’s case, “it is to some extent the rigor of his book—its multiple roots in interviews, document search, and observation—that *allows* him to see what is so exciting about the new North Side” (74; emphasis in original). And, no doubt, passionate engagement with one’s topic can likewise be helpful in pushing through the taxing meticulousness required of all worthwhile inquiry.

In the final few lines reviewing Bell’s book *Childerly*, sociologist Wendy Griswold concludes:

The reader, this reader anyway, finishes *Childerley* with the feeling that she has just returned from visiting a remote Hampshire village and has learned something, not just about that place, but about human social life lived in other places and lived through place itself. Bell has succeeded in doing what all ethnographies aim at, which is to convey something of the experience of T. S. Eliot’s traveler in “Little Gidding:” “We shall not cease from exploration/And the end of all our exploring/Will be to arrive where we started/And know the place for the first time” (Griswold 1995:1651).

A rigorous intellectual and emotional engagement with one’s work proffers an entirely unique sort of experience for the reader. As medical anthropologist Daniel Moerman described after

reading Christakis's *Death Foretold*, "Reading this book was, for me, a curious experience. I read a lot of medicine; my interests require that I read the reports of many randomized controlled trials. But here, I was confronted with a book!" (Moerman 2001:133).

The first two reviewers express the uniqueness of the works reviewed in terms of how they capture the multifaceted nature of human and social experience. The other two reviewers focus on the experience of reading itself and how each came away with a type of knowledge and understanding that was different, even inexplicable, to what they receive from other types of similar works. What Abbott does in giving us these examples is provide support for his rather deductive new theory of social research. He puts his finger on what makes each of these pieces distinct and calls it *lyrical sociology*, stating that his aim is to "make old things look new and perhaps provide us with a new way of reading the work of some of our colleagues, if not a new way of writing our own" (2007a:73).

Since 2007, some have taken up the first part of this call, specifically to "look for whatever pieces of lyrical sociology we can find" (73), to read previous works in a new light. Brinkmann points to writings of French novelist Michel Houellebecq (2009a) and Danish poet and filmmaker Jørgen Leth (2000b). Stock (2010) finds the lyrical impulse in William F. Whyte's *Street Corner Society* and James Agee's and Walker Evan's *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men*. Penfold-Mounce, Beer, and Burrows (2011) even locate it in the hit television series "The Wire." However, as far as I can detect, no one has yet to take up the second part of Abbott's invitation and actually implement the lyrical approach at the outset of their research, to write

their own lyrical sociology.¹ Indeed, Abbott notes that of even the works he cites, they “were almost never conceived as wholly lyrical works” (2007a:73).²

In this thesis, I apply the insights of lyrical sociology to write about the time I lived as a missionary in inner-city Detroit. For Abbott, this setting is ideal since “the laws of human nature and society are nowhere more evident than in the city” (72). My purposes are twofold: first, to provide unique insight into the emotional tenor of the city, as Abbott would prescribe, and second to provide a model for doing lyrical sociology from the ground up.³ The methodological approach(es) I utilize is part ethnography and part autoethnography in that the resulting selection (chapter 4) includes vignettes that focus directly on my experiences with other people in Detroit and vignettes that document my own personal experiences apart from these relationships. The lyric allows for this sort of “in-between-ness” (Siddique 2011), since it is not committed to any one way of getting at the social, but only one way of conveying that engagement.

During the time these experiences take place (from about July 2009 to June 2011), my purpose was not to conduct research but rather perform specific ecclesiastical duties related to my assignment as a missionary. Thus, I have had to rely upon journals, photos, conversations with former acquaintances, and the techniques of introspection and emotional recall (Bochner and Ellis 2002:210) to mine my mind retrospectively for the most sociologically pertinent memories. I have also visited the city twice since then and driven, biked, and walked around the areas I used to live and work (southwest Detroit from downtown to Dearborn everywhere below

¹ Wakeman (2014) includes a short excerpt from his field notes that he purposely writes lyrically (as Abbott would have it), but the piece itself in its entirety is not a standalone lyrical work. Nettleton (2013) also references Abbott’s lyrical sociology throughout her paper, but the qualitative data she shares has nothing of her own emotional reactions to qualify as being strictly lyrical either.

² The lyricity of previous works were accidental (or natural) perhaps, rather than intentional; or, if anything, they took their literary cues from outside the discipline rather than from within it. The point is that previous lyrical works existed before Abbott’s piece on lyrical sociology but have not yet to come forth in their entirety as such since.

³ As Wall (2008) notes, new approaches to inquiry are often easier to talk about—or theorize on—than to actually do.

1-mile road) to help regain a thickness to my memories—though all the experiences included here come from my first few years there.

Regarding rigor, as a missionary I spent every day for the two years from approximately 11am to 9pm amongst Detroiters—in homes, on porches, at parks, in grocery stores, on buses, in laundromats, at hospitals, in abandoned buildings, and, most commonly, just out on the street—rain, snow, or shine.⁴ I talked to people about their dreams, faith, fears, challenges, families, and whatever else they felt like sharing. As a religious representative, people would not only divulge unsolicited thoughts and feelings, at levels and in ways that seem unlikely to be offered to traditional social scientific researchers, but would also behave in ways that were perhaps more natural than if being observed by these same unfamiliar outsiders—that is, until sufficient rapport had been established. The reason why is because missionaries were a part of the fabric of social life in Detroit. As an individual, I was new to the city; but as an institutional actor, missionaries had a history with people that transcended my own time there.⁵

The empirical portion of the thesis consists of these vignettes. Before entering into them though, I take on the theoretical task of situating lyrical sociology in contrast to narrative and among several of the prominent social scientific research methodologies and approaches in use today. I will argue, with Abbott, that lyrical sociology is more than a method, but is instead a way of seeing, or more specifically a way to present a certain way of seeing the world that

⁴ A missionary's typical schedule was to arise at 6:30 in the morning, prepare one's self for the day and then study from 8-10am (for me, 11am because I was Spanish speaking and did an hour of language study). After morning studies, we would go out until 9:00/9:30pm returning only for an hour or two for lunch/dinner sometime in the early or late afternoon. If we were not in a house giving a presentation, we were walking or riding our bikes around and talking to people on the street, on buses, or knocking doors. By the end of my time in Detroit, I had knocked on almost every door in Southwest Detroit at least once, probably twice, and some three times.

⁵ Missionaries were sent to Detroit in as early as 1831 (Browne 1985:1), though have only had a sustained enough presence in the city to make this claim for the past few decades or so.

Abbott describes as “continuously in the process of making, remaking, and unmaking itself (and other things), instant by instant” (Abbott 2016b:ix).

For Abbott lyrical sociology springs forth in response to this very processual ontology. I will agree with him that we need to rethink social ontology, and thus epistemology too, but will ground lyrical sociology in ethics rather than ontology, epistemology, or aesthetics even. Of the latter, some scholars interpret Abbott’s piece primarily along these lines, calling lyrical sociology “as close to art as sociology can get” (Tåhlin 2011:1078). And, it is easy to see why they would do so. Abbott draws chiefly upon lyrical poetry and other humanities-based approaches and says that he is primarily following in the tradition of Brown’s *A Poetic for Sociology* (1977), “a book that derives aesthetic canons for sociological thinking from the vocabularies of literary, dramatic, and artistic analysis” (Abbott 2007a:70).⁶ However, he is constantly at pains to also point to a humanistic and moral dimension that I will consider as the ethical. For him the lyric is more than just stylistic writing, but must be, at its core, an assertion against narrative and “its most familiar avatar in the social sciences—explanation” (73). In this way, his project overlaps in crucial ways with the ethical phenomenology of Emmanuel Levinas, a Lithuanian-born Jewish and French thinker, who emphasized the need to avoid the totalizing reduction of people, places, and times in both lived life and intellectual practice.

Zygmunt Bauman writes that Levinas is perhaps “the greatest moral philosopher of the twentieth century,” that his philosophy uniquely provides a way to uncover an ethical demand that is powerful without being forceful (Bauman 1991:214). Though any one aspect of Levinas’s

⁶ Abbott (2007a:74 footnote 13) leans in the aesthetic direction when discussing how he makes sense of the debates over the merits of a shift toward greater subjectivity in the research process. He says, “But while we may differ about whether this shift was desirable or lamentable, seeing it as right or wrong, scientific or unscientific, is a mistake. The proper question is whether it is aesthetically successful. The problem with the new subjectivity may be less that it is bad social science than that it is bad poetry.”

approach is too involved to spell out in its entirety here, at times throughout the thesis I will point to it, especially in places that he adds to or challenges Abbott. For, even in Abbott's masterfully crafted piece, there is still a lacuna between the aesthetics he describes and the type of ethics he prescribes. I will argue that Levinas, and those who follow in his tradition (mostly moral philosophers and literary critics: Attridge 2017; Craig 2010; Eaglestone 1997; Faulconer 2005; McDonald 2008, for example), have the intellectual resources to help fill this gap.

The thesis will thus proceed as follows: after situating lyrical sociology within the broader context of the discipline, and the social sciences more generally (chapter 1), I will elaborate upon the specific stance and mechanics required of the writer (chapter 2) and reader (chapter 3) of lyrical works. Then, I will present my series of vignettes about the time I spent living in Detroit (chapter 4). Lastly, I will give an analysis and reflection on what I learned from the process of writing and reading these stories (chapter 5), since, as Takata and Leiting (1987) suggest, there are certain insights you can only "learn by doing." I conclude with a discussion on future directions lyrical sociology can take.

CHAPTER 1: SITUATING LYRICAL SOCIOLOGY

Titles matter. If crafted well, they arouse curiosity and embody the argument of a piece—and are often what is most retained in the quick pace of academic reading. As such, Abbott’s title, “Against Narrative: A Preface to Lyrical Sociology,” fits the bill. As it suggests, his piece juxtaposes narrative with an alternative approach he calls lyrical sociology. His article consists of developing what he means by both narrative and lyrical and brands itself as a preface, or a prolegomenon to a more broader theory of the lyric. Given this, more theoretical work is needed for the idea of lyric to become sufficiently coherent and translatable. This will be my task throughout the thesis but especially here. In this chapter, I first look briefly at the origin of the lyric outside of sociology and examine how Abbott conceives of it, and narrative, in his own work. I then discuss at length how Abbott positions lyrical sociology in contrast to what he considers as narrative and give examples of three popular approaches entwined with narrative thinking. I end by looking at how lyrical sociology is more than a method, but an approach that can be used across a variety of methodological approaches depending on whether they meet certain criteria.

Understanding Lyric and Narrative in Contemporary Sociology

Lyric, in the popular usage, is thought of today in the plural—lyrics—to refer to the words of a song. In the original Greek, lyric signified such a song, “rendered to the accompaniment of a lyre” (Abrams 2005:154). A lyre was a small harp-like instrument that was played along with a type of poetry that was rightfully called, lyrical poetry. In the lyra family was also the *kithara*, which is the etymological root of “guitar.” Lyrical poetry was different than epic or narrative poetry, which was often accompanied by a flute. A lyric today, in literary theory, is a “fairly short poem, uttered by a single speaker, who expresses a state of mind or a

process of perception, thought or feeling” (153), while an epic is a long verse narrative often featuring a heroic figure and an overcoming plot. While epic narratives are temporally sequential, and have a strong teleology, lyrics are thought to hover in the timeless present.

Morgan (2009:3-4) contrasts the two:

Whereas narrative requires temporal progression and sequentiality, lyric is a suspended moment that stops the time of narrative and focuses instead on the “now” of composition and reception. Within this moment of suspended time, the poet can give free play to thought and emotion, associating ideas and images that would not be linked by the chains of cause and effect that typically govern narrative. The lyric poet can also make use of this freedom from temporal progression to linger on the formal and figurative aspects of language, thus calling attention to it *as* language. In contrast, the interests of narrative cannot afford to dwell indefinitely on the formal beauties of its language: instead, a narrative must make clear what is happening in the story, thus requiring a more straightforward use of language (emphasis in original).

These distinctions between narrative and lyric have striking parallels with the way Abbott conceives the two. This is because, for the most part, he derives his theory of lyrical sociology from lyrical poetry (2007a:73), claiming even at one point that “[t]he history of genres in poetry is surprisingly like the history of genres within sociology itself” (71).⁷

Interestingly enough, starting around the early 1990s, and shortly before, Abbott argued for an approach to social inquiry grounded in narrative (though in a more restricted sense than he

⁷ However, this point needs to be clarified. He says that in the field of poetics, “There is a hankering after work that is instructive, a suppression of the emotional (at least other than the moralistic), [and] an insistence on high, important topics” (71). While this seems to be the way he sees contemporary sociology too, he also observes that “contemporary poets have largely stopped writing epics, odes, and the other formal subgenres of poetry” (83). For Abbott then, it’s as if the fields of poetry and sociology not only *do* follow similar trajectories, but that they *should*, with poetry leading the way.

opposes in his piece on lyrical sociology). Critical of the variable-based sociology that had its roots in logical positivism, he proposed an alternative approach he called “narrative positivism” (Abbott 1992a). By narrative, he meant process or story, where social reality was conceived as happening in “sequences of actions located within constraining or enabling structures” (428). And by positivism, though he later remarks the term was mostly used rhetorically as a “guise” (Abbott 2007b:196),⁸ he meant an approach to studying social reality that consisted of conceptualizing and relating various units of analysis through rigorous measurement and “formal, usually statistical, models” (Abbott 1990b:436). Narrative positivism was seen as a way to challenge the basic premises behind causal thinking in variable-based approaches.

To show this distinction, consider the simple rectangular layout of a quantitative dataset. In the spreadsheet form, rows typically include units such as individual actors, entities, cases, or events and columns the demographic, attitudinal, or other attributional properties of the rows, represented by variables. The variable-based approach analyzes variables in terms of their variance in relation to other variables. For example, what is the effect of the variable representing a person’s race, class, or gender on the variable representing their educational or occupational achievement? In the variable approach then, only the relationships between the columns matter. A narrative approach, by contrast, focuses on the relationships between the rows, between “particular social actors, in particular social places, at particular social times” (Abbott 1992a:428). Reality does not occur in “time-bounded snap shots within which ‘causes’ affect one another... but as stories, cascades of events” (Abbott 1991:227).

⁸ Abbott believed that “positivism and interpretation [were] not in fact opposed ends of a spectrum, but different moments of one process.” By interpretation he meant, “the position that holds that intersubjectivity in social life dictates the use of non-positivist methods-e.g., *verstehende* methods” (Abbott 1990b:436). Thus, his project can be seen as attempting to reconcile the two paradigms.

In the narrative positivist approach then, time and history play a central role, with the actor as the ultimate driver. Variable based approaches, he says, “attribute causality to the variables – hypostatized social characteristics – rather than to agents; variables do things, not social actors. Stories disappear (Abbott 1992a:428). The only narratives that exist in these accounts are the stories the social scientist can tell about relations between variables, but this has the problem of imputing agency onto properties, or qualities of actors, rather than being a quality of actors themselves.⁹ As he says elsewhere, “It is when a variable ‘does something’ narratively that [analysts] think themselves to be speaking most directly of causality” (Abbott 1992b:58). Therefore, in this sense, both variable-based and narrative positivist approaches tell stories—the one thinking across cases (columns) and the other thinking along them (rows) (Abbott 1990a:148).

It is from this place that Abbott positions his lyrical sociology. He writes in his 2007 piece, “[A]nalytic social science and the new narratives of the 1990s are simply different versions of the same thing: stories in the one case of variables and in the other of actors” (70). He maps the two versions of storytelling onto mainstream quantitative and qualitative methodologies respectively, though aptly recognizes that qualitative work can take on a variable-based approach (e.g. Ragin 1987) and quantitative approaches, as proposed, could proceed along strongly narrative positivist lines, as actor-, or event-, centered. In this taxonomy, both species of quantitative and qualitative approaches lie within the same larger genus of narrative he opposes to the lyric. The lyric is thus of a different order, existing outside the rectangular box of columns and rows, or outside of storytelling all together (see figure 1).

(Figure 1 about here)

⁹ Abbott (1992a:432) writes that a world in which forces act upon forces is “a terrain removed from human activity.”

Separating Lyric and Narrative

Abbott emphasizes the need to conceptually distinguish between the more general category of narrative and uniquely lyrical modes of comprehension. “If we cannot separate the two,” he writes, “then the lyric focus on moments is just part of the larger enterprise of telling a story, whether of causes or of actions” (2007a:82). Those who conflate narrative and lyrical ways of thinking often do so under the assumption that “all lyric is historical” (82), and therefore reduce the present to the determinacy of past events (or past events to the even further past). Adorno (1989:160), for example, writes how “objective historical forces rouse themselves in the [lyric] poem” (quoted in Abbott 2007a:82). Those who argue for a radical separation go so far as to argue that the lyric is “fundamentally anti-historical,” focused entirely on the present “to the exclusion of other times” (Abbott 2007a:84).¹⁰ Abbott clearly favors the latter view, though with some qualifications.

First off, Abbott says that the present, or the lyrical moment, “need not be literally instantaneous,” but can “last for months if not years” (85). In fact, time itself can be better understood as a series of presents. The crime of narrative, and especially most historical sociology, is that it sacrifices the past’s presents to the present’s present, to the “what we know now” of an event rather than to the mysterious unfolding of the future at that time. He writes:

Historical narrative, as customarily understood . . . trac[es] events from beginning to end via the succession of events in the middle. What such narrative loses, of course, is the fact that each one of the intermediate events was a present at one point, and hence open to

¹⁰ The “anti-historical” nature of the lyric is better thought of as an “infolding of past and future into a nonnarrative present” (Abbott 2007a:84 footnote 20), rather than an essential exclusion of either (past or present). Lyrical sociology is still therefore historical in the true sense—and radically so—in that it is very much so concerned with the passage of time (though as passing away and transitory rather than as a fixed and permanent structure). There is a dialectic of sorts between this “infolding of past and future” into the present and the unfolding of the past and future from the present that the lyric is well suited to capture.

all sorts of realizations, not just the one that obtained in actuality. . . . The longer the narrative we tell, the heavier is this weight of teleology, the less our story can be an unfolding of unknowns, and the more we feel ahead of time the inevitable emergence of whatever end did in fact close that particular narrative (86).

A lyrical approach, with its focus on the presents of the past, is thus the only way to preserve the pastness of the past—or rather the past’s own indexical presentness¹¹—as well as do justice to those who lived in it (a point I will return to in chapter 2).

The second qualification Abbott would have is that lyrical sociology is only “anti-historical” in one sense. Related to the previous point, the extended presents, which are the focus of the lyrical standpoint, always exist within “clear bookends of historical transition” (85).

Whatever the length of the moment the social scientist writes about (months or years), it is always a selection out of an immemorial past and, by this writing, a projection into a contingent future.¹² The necessary “framing of the moment with transitions on both sides,” Abbott writes, “*intensifies* our sense of it as a moment, precisely because it is embedded in a continuous and inevitable flow of time and change” (85 emphasis in original).

The difference between this contextualization of the moment to that which is done in narrative approaches is that the latter provides an overarching explanatory framework that connects all of the events while the structure of the former, or the lyric, exists merely as a “loose

¹¹ Attridge (2017:146) writes of the presentness of the past, “This present is unlike the present of the objects that I see around me, or of the words on the page as material entities; the very presentness of the words I read is premised on their pastness, on their having been written by another person in a different present”. Thus, by focusing on the presentness of the past, lyrical sociology is opposed to the pastness of the present, which would be the historically determined view of the present.

¹² Regarding the lyrics relationship to the future, Attridge (2017:85) writes that a text is “never entirely insulated from the contingencies of the history into which it is projected and within which it is read.” This means that the text itself exists in the same way as the subjects of the text; it is both written and read at specific times and places by specific writers and readers. Moreover, a text can be both written and read over a duration of different presents, making a determinate interpretation of it impossible.

framework holding together disparate images” (81). In contrast to the lengthy and weighty narratives critiqued above, Abbott writes then that “the indeterminate character of historical passage moment to moment is actually clearest in the shortest possible narratives: that is, in purely momentary “stories,” or—in another word—in lyrics” (86). Therefore, though Abbott is “against narrative,” he is not against the use of *narratives* (or stories); and the same could be said of the way he relates to history (not anti-historical, but anti-reductive approaches to history that reduce variegated phenomena to monochrome explanations).

The separation between narrative and lyrical ways of thinking can also be viewed as a separation between narrative and narratives, history (from the time and place of one objective historian) and histories (from the times and places of many historical actors), explanation and explanations, etc., but this point too must be clarified. Pluralizing terms is surely not a new theoretical maneuver. Many others have challenged singular reductionist logics by arguing for shifts in perspective from such concepts as modernity to modernities (Eisenstadt 2000), family to families (Morgan 2011), and secularism to secularisms (Casanova 2006). Though these are worthwhile critiques, pluralization can easily slip into conceptual relativism and incoherence if taken to the extreme, such as with Brinkmann (2009b) who uses lyrical sociology to praise Danish poet Jørgen Leth for his technique of writing poetry that duplicates precisely the fragmented observations he makes in his notebooks. Lyrical sociology, though, cannot just be a series of random fieldnotes, no matter how “lyrical” each of the individual bits are. There has to be some sort of analytic framework, even if it’s a “loose” one (Abbott 2007a:81), and there has to exist historical “bookends” (85) from which the researcher can contextualize the lyrical

moment(s) of their study.¹³ Lyrical sociology can thus be said to exist somewhere between the two extremes of rigid modernist narrative and disjointed postmodern narratives.¹⁴

Reverting to narrative ways of thinking is typical of how most qualitative research methodologies defend themselves from such allegations of relativism, mere description, or theoretical non-generativity.¹⁵ Grounded theory, for example, tries to code words and/or patterns to determine the broader sociological “story,” with the intent of using them as evidence to speak to the most admired qualitative question of all, “what is this a case of?” (Lincoln and Guba 1985). The extended case method, as Michael Burawoy (1998:5) writes, seeks to “extract the general from the unique, to move from the ‘micro’ to the ‘macro,’ and to connect the present to the past in anticipation of the future, all by building on preexisting theory” (quoted in Abbott

¹³ Though Abbott doesn’t explicitly defend himself from this critique (perhaps purposefully), it can be implied from these ancillary remarks and from the examples he gives of lyrical texts which manifestly don’t take on this form.

¹⁴ Lyrical sociology, as I interpret Abbott, can be said to exist somewhere between modernist narrative and postmodernist narratives. It doesn’t lose sight of its goal in its critique, that is “to find the laws of social life” (Abbott 2007a:72). Though it remains a forceful challenge to the absolutist tendency of trying to explain everything (Brinkmann 2015:621), it is, or what I would argue should be, also equally challenging to the absolutist retreat from explanation entirely. Others see this need for lyrical sociology to lie somewhere in the middle (or outside) of the two extremes. Isaac Reed (2011:90 footnote 1) writes, “Although Abbott articulates quite well a core aspect of hermeneutic sociology—the willingness to openly engage the social actions of interest in all their strangeness and concreteness—I am of the view that interpretive analysis can have a lyrical moment that is then elaborated into an explanation—an explanation that attends to causes excluded by, and uses schemas foreign to, the more standard explanatory projects of social science.” And Michael Bell (2011:17), who Abbott praises for his strikingly lyrical ethnography, likewise states, “I, too, am impatient with the continued conception of sociology as merely an “explanatory science,” to quote the common phrase. And I, too, seek to widen the communicative possibilities of sociology. But, as will emerge, I am not “against narrative,” as Abbott proclaims himself. Nor am I opposed to explanation. Rather, I ask for a sociology that is not *only* explanatory and not *only* narrative (especially such opaque and listless narrative). Plus, I try to do more than re-create the experience of social discovery [Abbott 2007a:70]. I try to create it and to understand the conditions of the unexplainable that creation, in contrast to mere reproduction, entails (parentheses in original). Though both Reed and Bell evidently oppose Abbott’s strong stance against narrative and explanation, I would argue that Abbott might even agree with them, or at least not disagree entirely with their critiques. This is because Abbott focuses his piece more on the issue of moving the discipline from explanation to *evocation*—not from explaining in the wrong way to explaining in the right way—and so it isn’t really clear if he would abandon the explanatory project completely. This is an astute move, in my opinion, so that lyrical sociology doesn’t just become another way of getting at the same thing as narrative, explanation. However, I would note, just because a lyrical sociology doesn’t pursue explanation, it doesn’t mean the grounds for explanation could not ensue from the better, or at least different, type of knowledge that the lyric provides—or even the grounds for the unexplainable, as Bell suggests.

¹⁵ Abbott expresses how lyrical sociology too has been accused of being “‘just description,’ ‘mere journalism,’ ‘not causal,’ ‘not really sociological,’ and so on” (2007a:96 footnote 42). Sadly, he mentions he had to cut his analysis and presumed rebuttal to these accusations in the interest of space. I also note that these more qualitative methods also emerge in reaction to positivism but end up becoming more like it than different.

2007a:87). And, auto-ethnographers argue that the research subject's own self can be the subject of their sociological study since that self is socially constituted.¹⁶

In all of these approaches, the move from 'micro' to 'macro' is relatively easy, since the 'macro' is theorized to be located in the 'micro.'¹⁷ Or, in other words, since larger forces determine individual situations, studying individual cases can help the researcher likewise determine these very same larger forces.¹⁸ The entire enterprise, however, is a justificatory narrative built on "mixing 'large' and 'small' things" (Abbott 2007a:80). People's lives are explained both temporally and socially, Abbott writes, "not in terms of how they experience it but in terms of some larger narrative or social structure in which they are embedded" (95).¹⁹ The lyrical moment is put "in the service of (larger) narrative" (87), rather than the other way around (83), and the indescribable reality of the local present is reduced to whatever story can be told about it.

¹⁶ As Adams and Manning (2015:352) state, "The primary assumption of autoethnography is that (general) culture flows through the (specific) self; a person cannot live absent of or from cultural influences. Thus, autoethnographers presume that writing about the self is simultaneously writing about cultural values, practices, and experiences."

¹⁷ Abbott does not believe that you can find the generalized other in the self—or the macro in the micro, like many symbolic interactionists do—but only a particular self in relation to particular others. This idea had its origins in George Herbert Mead. Summarizing Mead, Abbott says, "[W]hile Mead succeeded admirably at showing individual/society dualism, he did so that the price of removing all particularity." Furthermore, he adds that "the price of Mead's merger of the individual and the social was the forfeiting of a truly temporal account of either the individual or the social level, and more specifically of the emergence and fixation of differences at the social level." (Abbott 2016a:153-154). Abbott's main critique of Mead is towards the abstractness of his theories: "Mead... envisioned an abstract situation of interaction and theorized how such an abstract form of interaction could in principle prove to be the origin of both the individual consciousness on the one hand and the set of general rules constitutive of a social entity (the generalized other) on the other hand" (2009:151). Though he says it was an improvement on the contractarian ideas of the time, based on "abstract individualism," he says Mead's position was an abstract interactionism (151). This he says might have been because of the "polemical necessity" to speak according to the legal vernacular of English and French contractarians, with "not only the contractarian logic but also the mechanically associative psychology" (160) constraining the expression of his ideas. Lyrical sociology would allow for the communication of experiences of concrete interaction, which is the only type of interaction that there 'really' is.

¹⁸ Latour (2005:22) writes, "When sociologists of the social pronounce the words 'society,' 'power,' 'structure,' and 'context,' they often jump straight ahead to connect vast arrays of life and history, to mobilize gigantic forces, to detect dramatic patterns emerging out of confusing interactions, to see everywhere in the cases at hand yet more examples of well-known types, to reveal behind the scenes some dark powers pulling the strings."

¹⁹ Or, as Levinas (1969:21) asserts, "Individuals are reduced to being bearers of forces that command them unbeknown to themselves."

This story is not the same as any possible collection of stories that a researcher gathers from his or her fieldwork, interviews, surveys, or even their own personal experiences while conducting these data gathering efforts. In fact, as mentioned previously, the best pieces of lyrical sociology consist of such “purely momentary ‘stories’” (86). This story is the story that is told in the analysis of the stories that are gathered or constructed. It is the story in the sociological sense rather than in a literary one.²⁰ Abbott specifies further what he means when he says he is against narrative, “This does not mean that [the lyric] cannot contain narrative elements . . . But that its ultimate, framing structure should not be the telling of a story.” On the flip side, Abbott tells that “many analyses that are conceived narratively have strongly lyrical subsections” (2007a:73). Therefore, though lyrics can have elements of narrative and narratives can have elements of the lyrical, it is this second order narrative, of narratizing the narratives (or lyric), which Abbott argues against.

A good (or rather bad) example of this is seen in Abbott’s (2007a:77 footnote 17) comments about Nicholas Christakis’s (1999) book on the dysfunctions of prognostication. Although he praises the book for its profound lyricism, he notes that the last chapter—entitled “A Duty to Prognosticate”—switches tone into moralizing narrative. The book is based off dozens of interviews and hundreds of documents Christakis performed and gathered, which include many stories de facto. Up until the last chapter, Abbott explains, Christakis simply tries to bring the phenomenon of prognosticating to the forefront, “to show us how it makes him and other physicians feel: confused, tentative, threatened, but also curiously and almost magically

²⁰ Flyvbjerg (2006:238) tells how he avoids the reductive story-telling tendency in case study research: “First, when writing up a case study, I demur from the role of omniscient narrator and summarizer. Instead, I tell the story in its diversity, allowing the story to unfold from the many-sided, complex, and sometimes conflicting stories that the actors in the case have told me. Second, I avoid linking the case with the theories of any one academic specialization. Instead I relate the case to broader philosophical positions that cut across specializations. In this way I try to leave scope for readers of different backgrounds to make different interpretations and draw diverse conclusions regarding the question of what the case is a case of.”

powerful” (2007a:77). The last chapter on the duty to prognosticate, though, Christakis moralizes, or summarizes what is to be learned, from all the previous (lyrical) chapters, retroactively risking the narratization of everything that had hitherto been lyrical—as if it had all only been written to this end. This is what I mean by narratizing the narrative (or lyric).²¹

The emotional and ethical power of Christakis’s book comes from the stories throughout rather than the (moralizing) story he tells about them at the end. As the reviewer of his book quoted before—Daniel Moerman (2001:133)—also wrote, “[T]he book is not about the ordinary matters of this disease or that, this drug or that. It is much less about medicine than about meta-medicine, an account of how medicine is practiced and why.”²² The power of focusing on particular people, places, and times—as ends in themselves rather than as means to larger cosmic or structural narratives—is that by so doing you bring a dimension into the writing that transcends any narrative reading that could be offered (Abbott 2007a:83). The problem is that many of us still read with “narratively conditioned Western eyes” (74) and look for overarching themes, lessons, or explanations.²³ It is work like Abbotts (and mine I hope) that help to bring about different ways of imagining the immense value of “‘small’ things” (80).²⁴

²¹ As I will discuss in chapter 3, this narratization risks foreclosing on the uniquely lyrical result of the study.

²² By “why,” Moerman most likely means “why” in terms of the doctor’s personal motivations (i.e. their passionate reason for being a doctor) rather than the functional reasons for why medicine is practiced in general. Christakis’s book clearly fits with the former.

²³ A softer approach would be to hint at, suggest, or lead one to believe rather than to tell an outright causal story between small and large things (Abbott 2007a:80). Yet, though as preferable as this might even be, this is still not the primary purpose of the lyric (see note 14 on Reed and Bell).

²⁴ As seen in the three previous examples (grounded theory, extended case method, and autoethnography), noticing the connection between the self and society is at the core of sociological thinking, all the way from C. Wright Mills’ ‘sociological imagination’, where the “vivid awareness of the relationship between experience and the wider society” (Mills 1959) is said to be paramount to any study of either private or public life. Abbott isn’t denying that this association exists. He’s only questioning the way it is said to exist, and the conclusions derived therein. He would agree with Roth (2005:3), who believes that “the individual and its society... mutually presuppose one another,” but would argue that “they do so not under abstract but under very particular circumstances” (Abbott 2016a:163). Abbott says that this admittedly “makes their mutual interdependence so difficult to theorize,” but that to try and do so is also what makes it “so worthwhile” (163).

Though many methodological approaches employed today (even qualitative ones) are put to use in very narrative ways, parts of the approaches though, such as induction (as in grounded theory), deduction (as in the extended case method), and the allowance for the subjectivity of the author (as in autoethnography), are not inherently narrative activities on their own. They have their part in lyrical sociology as well and are, in fact, quite natural processes for anyone who thinks seriously about the social world. The problem comes in the way these methods try and justify themselves. They try to beat quantitative approaches, which are almost always geared toward explanation, at their own game, suggesting perhaps that ‘micro is the new macro’, that specific instances are the best way to get at broader questions. But, in the process, they miss out on other potential viable contributions, one’s that aren’t as easy to justify, or quantify, because in many ways their justifications lie outside what mainstream sociology deems valuable, and capable of measuring.

I will elaborate upon these unique benefits of lyrical sociology in the following chapters. In the next section though, I want to continue my discussion on what the lyric might have to say about other social scientific methodologies by turning to an examination of the specific criteria that makes a piece of lyrical sociology precisely what it is, an assertion against narrative (Abbott 2007a:73). By being an assertion against narrative, lyrical sociology cannot simply be against it in the negative sense that it is only not-narrative. Pieces that are purely descriptive (as some accuse lyrical sociology and other qualitatively inclined methodologies to be), which refrain from explanation, could rightfully fall into this category. However, lyrical sociology is more than this. It aims to do something beyond just description (especially in a detached and objective way). It has a telos (though quite different from that of narrative). And, it is more than just an

absence. If anything, lyrical sociology is not the absence of narrative, but narrative is the absence of lyric.²⁵

Methodological Implications: Criteria for Lyrical Sociology

Abbott gives specific criteria to judge lyrical from non-lyrical works, which depend mostly on the writer's stance toward the world he or she writes about and the reader. I will discuss the stance in detail in the next chapter. Here I draw upon three main parts of it though for a lyrical writer—that they be emotionally engaged (in the right way), subjectively located (placed in a specific “here”), and temporally present (part of a specific moment in time, an indexical “now”)—in order to elaborate on how lyrical sociology fits in with questions of methodology. Abbott refers to various works that meet any one of eight different combinations of these three criteria of the stance (see table 1). For a piece to be lyrical it must meet all three. By knowing the exact conditions for lyrical works, it helps to provide both a rubric by which to know lyrical sociology when you see it as well as suggest a blueprint for constructing one's own lyrical texts. It allows for more flexibility in one's methodological approach(es) since, as we will see, the lyrical stance isn't strictly limited to one or a few choice methodologies (though it is seemingly more suited for some), as well is not a methodology itself. It is more than a methodology, but a way we, as methodologists, relate to the world our methods help us to discover and construct.

(Table 1 about here)

For example, Abbott tells how ethnographic methods share important qualities with lyrical sociology, to the extent that one could almost consider them synonyms. “It is written by a

²⁵ Michael Bell (2011:22) writes, “Total explanation can only survive through its rituals of avoidance of the messiness, contradiction, incommensurability, motion, surprise, and originality that seem so evident and relevant in the everyday life and concerns of the social actor.”

particular person. Since it involves being somewhere, it is usually about a moment. And it often embodies intense personal engagement. So it meets the three basic requisites of the lyrical stance by its very nature” (2007a:86). However, as Abbott shows, this conclusion does not necessarily hold true in either direction of comparison. All ethnography is not lyrical nor is all lyrical sociology purely ethnography. The truth is more nuanced, and exciting.

First, he writes, “The engagement of an ethnographer need not be a direct and emotional one” (86). Abbott tells how the British social anthropologist Edmund Leach (1954) rigorously combined both his ethnographic knowledge (primarily from his time serving in the Burma army) with a vast amount of other published research on the hill tribes of Burma, but that his work “lack[ed] any authorial emotion other than a withering sarcasm directed at structural-functional colleagues” (Abbott 2007a:87). Secondly, Abbott observes, “[M]odern ethnography is not necessarily about moments or places” (87). He points out that ethnographers often either embed their fieldwork in “larger historical flow[s]” or in “larger regional or social structure[s]” (87), which removes them from the indexical present and place required of the lyrical stance.²⁶ Therefore, all three criteria that ethnography and lyrical sociology would seem to align on naturally, can become misaligned in any or all of the ways mentioned.

Now to the reverse point that all lyrical sociology need not be pure ethnography. Abbott writes, “imagine—on the basis of theoretical argument—how a lyrical impulse might express itself in historical sociology or quantitative sociology as well.” He gives Nicholas Christakis’s work as a case in point of the latter, calling it, somewhat amusingly, “real sociology—hard-core

²⁶ Abbott (2007a:85) says that certain approaches to sociology, such as historical sociology, are written beautifully and “hence ‘lyrical’ in the lay sense” but not in the “technical sense” if they do not situate themselves within a distinctly non-narrative temporal framework. The same could be said of place.

quantitative analysis combined with endless, almost obsessed interviewing” (77).²⁷ Like Zorbaugh, Christakis brings methodological rigor to his research that enhances, rather than detracts, from the book’s lyricality. The quantitative side of it no doubt must be coupled with other non-quantitative factors—such as the fact that Christakis himself is a physician and was thus intimately engaged with the study’s topic and its eventual audience—in order for it to be a successful lyric. Therefore, to extend the propositional logic of the lyric/ethnography relation, I would argue that not all lyrical ethnography needs to be quantitative, but that all lyrical quantitative work should probably have an ethnographic dimension, even if it is simply a personal experience with the topic in another setting that has helped to sensitize and enliven the researcher to the issue or issues under study. This is perhaps the even deeper layer than makes Christakis’s book so lyrical.

On the dedication page to his book, Christakis (1999) tells how when he was six years old, his mother was given a 10 percent chance of living longer than three weeks. Fortunately, he says that she ended up living for nineteen more years, but that this error in prognostication proved to have more far-reaching consequences for him than he could have ever foreseen. He writes, “I spent my boyhood always fearing that her lifelong chemotherapy would stop working, constantly wondering whether my mother would live or die, and both craving and detesting prognostic precision. This ambivalence did not change when I became a physician myself.”

Abbott says that Christakis’s “overarching lyrical stance is struck on the dedication page;” the “damnable ambivalence he himself feels as a practicing physician” (2007a:77) is presumably the

²⁷ Abbott (2007a:77) writes that “Christakis’s book shows that lyrical writing in my sense—writing whose chief intent is to convey a particular author’s emotional relation to a certain kind of social moment—is quite possible even in predominantly quantitative work. The book thus illustrates not only the anti-narrative character of lyrical sociology, but also its insistence on the communication of passion, even at the possible expense of abstract representation of reality.”

very ambivalence that he carried in from his childhood. It is what makes his treatment of the topic so sweeping, so moving, so real to life, so lyrical.

Christakis is not the first one to have multiple points of contact for his specific academic interest. As a counter to Christakis's very personal book, Abbott tells of Scott Snook's monograph, *Friendly Fire* (2000), that documents the events leading up to the 1994 shoot down of two United States Army helicopters over northern Iraq by two United States Air Force fighter jets in an incident of friendly fire (misidentifying them as Iraqi helicopters), killing all 26 military and civilian peacekeepers aboard. Snook, like Christakis, has both a professional and personal motivation for writing his book, being both a military-man himself for almost twenty years as well as also having been the victim of friendly fire during his service. However, as Abbott states, "In a setting that is an invitation to lyricism, this author with every right to wax lyrical about how humans experience chance and intention and meaning simply refuses to deviate from his narrative path" (2007a:78). He rather dispassionately analyzes all the antecedent events that eventuated in the tragic shutdown and focuses only on "the causal question at hand: How did this happen?" (78).²⁸ Though his conclusion is rather fascinating (and disturbing)—that as oxymoronic as it sounds, the shutdown was a "normal accident" (see Perrow 1984)—the resulting book is "relentlessly mimetic and artificial" rather than "passionate and naturalistic" (Abbott 2007a:77). Thus, a personal connection to a research question does not necessarily lead to emotional engagement; and likewise, I would add, you do not need such a drastic

²⁸ Alternative approaches and questions Abbott (2007a:78) proposes, that supposedly would lead to greater lyrical insight, would have included looking at the "agonizing side of this event—the remorse of the pilots, the shamefacedness of the Air Force, the 'what happened to everyone after the fact' . . . We never even find out how the shutdown was identified as a friendly shutdown, how the news spread within a day to the Secretary of Defense, or what the initial reactions were." All of these angles could have added a lyrical element to the book and perhaps existed alongside the explanatory questions he mostly explores. Though, for it to be lyrical, the explanatory questions and concerns would have to take a secondary role to these others.

autobiographical impetus for becoming affectively engaged either. You merely need an entry point, small or large, and the courage and ability to walk through it.

Even if Snook allowed himself to be more emotionally engaged throughout the book, his overall analysis is still constructed in a temporally narrative and explanatory fashion and would therefore have to be rethought in order for his work to be considered lyrical in the sense that Abbott describes. Other authors Abbott cites meet varying conditions of the lyrical stance. Massey and Denton (1993) are emotionally engaged about the topic of segregation (though in a non-lyrical or moralistic way) but are not temporally (or subjectively) located. Fleck ([1935] 1979) is temporally focused on the lyrical moment of science in the study of syphilis but is not sufficiently engaged emotionally to be counted as lyrical. And, Riesman (1950)'s *The Lonely Crowd* is exceptionally subjective—indeed, Abbott writes that “[o]ne comes away from it with a very strong sense indeed of David Riesman as a person: a reflective moralizer located somewhere between bemused geniality, conservative reaction, and visionary critique”—but never does he let his emotions “overmaster him” to create a “stabbing sense of the humane” (Abbott 2007a:75). All these authors meet some of the criteria of the lyrical stance, but not others, and therefore each fall short of the lyrical designation.²⁹

A final consideration in evaluating and understanding what makes a lyrical work lyrical, and how a lyrical approach transcends methodology, is elaborating further upon the one requirement of the author to be emotionally engaged. In the preceding paragraphs where I discussed the three components of the lyrical stance in relation to various approaches, I put

²⁹ Though each of these required aspects of lyricism exist on a continuum, to judge a works lyricality by averaging them could be misleading. Each has a threshold of its own and its only if the individual threshold of one of the specific criteria is surpassed can the evaluation of the pieces lyricality continue. It's like taking three classes during a semester that are all pass/fail, wherein you can only advance onto the next grade if you pass all three (not just if your averages in all the classes combined equal up to a passing score).

parenthetical comments after discussing writers who were indeed emotionally engaged in order to qualify what was meant by this engagement. The proper emotional engagement, as far as Abbott explains explicitly, is best described in the positive perhaps as a lyrical one. For example, Abbott tells how although Marx often wears his emotions on his sleeves— of “seething anger and a thoroughgoing contempt”—they are “moralizing emotions, not lyrical ones” (2007a:85 footnote 22). But, this doesn’t help all that much in specifying the unique emotional engagement of a lyrical sociologist, because it uses the very terms it is describing to describe itself. The other hint that Abbott gives is what the engagement is not; the emotional engagement is not a moralizing relationship where the author speaks down a series of *oughts* inferred from their series of *is*’s, or findings (or previously held beliefs and assumptions).³⁰

There is no room in the lyrical stance for prescribing actionable policies, regulations, ethical codes, or activist agendas, or at least not for centering upon these purposes. However, this is not to say that the lyrical engagement wouldn’t or couldn’t affect all of these aims.³¹ The word, and distinction, that I would put forth is that the lyrical stance of emotional engagement is an *ethical* relation between concrete individuals, rather than an abstract moralizing one or an unspecified “emotional relation” (Abbott 2007a:77, 92). As McDonald (2008:19) describes the difference:

Traditionally, morality has been characterized as the rules and conventions used to guide a person’s conduct or behavior, such rules and conventions having reference to a “rationality” whose crucial if not defining feature is, as in the case of Kant’s “categorical

³⁰ He calls this emotional engagement an expression of “nonmoral emotions” (Abbott 2007a:82). But again, this doesn’t do anything to affirm what lyrical sociology *is*.

³¹ Attridge (2017:178) writes that “the special value of a non-moral discourse of ethics is that it can provide insights into the fundamental conditions of the moral-political domain, the world of rules, programs, categories, without being reduced to them.”

imperative,” its universality. “Ethics,” by contrast, connotes the more personalized, less universal and consequently less rigorously rationalizable aspects of our moral interaction with others in the world.

Morality, as an ethical system, is rationalizable and narratizable. Ethics, as a personalized (though not subjective) relation, resists rationalization and is lyrical. Though Abbott doesn’t himself use this specific terminology of the ethical (as opposed to the moral), it would have been (and will be) helpful throughout to plainly distinguish the specific type of emotional relation for which he advocates.

Lyrical writers must therefore be all of these things at once: ethically and emotionally engaged with their work and research questions, subjectively located within the world they both write about and are a part of, and, likewise, temporally present in these same worlds. If they neglect entirely or lack considerably in any one of these areas, their work becomes like all other forms of narrative sociology, primarily geared toward explanation rather than emotional evocation and ethical transformation. This has broad implications for how we think about the way lyrical sociology fits in with other social scientific methodologies or approaches. It is not a new methodology with radically new tools for data collection and analysis, besides perhaps those used in the presentation of such data and the thinking through of it—though, in reality, these have existed in many classical sociological texts and outside of the discipline for centuries. Nor is it a mere linguistic approach centered solely on more tentative and honest ways of explaining the social in contrast to the overly confident language of causality exhibited in narrative forms of research—though it does perhaps have this feature. Lyrical sociology is a more general approach to the research process that guides methodological considerations rather than just another methodology one could or could not choose to use depending on the question at hand.

To reduce lyrical sociology to ethnography, autoethnography, literature, participant observation, “just description,” “mere journalism” (2007a:96), or “popular writing” would, Abbott says, “short circuit a more serious consideration” (73). All of these approaches, and more (such as quantitative studies, case methods, comparative-historical research, ethnomethodology / conversation analysis, visual studies, archival and textual analysis, etc.), can be conceived lyrically or non-lyrically.³² Lyrical sociology is therefore more than a methodology. It is a meta-methodology, a “rhetorical form” (85), that transcends, even as it competes with, narrative modes of research and report. In the next chapter, I will look at the three facets of the lyrical stance discussed here in greater detail—as well as the mechanics or literary devices employed in the construction of lyrical texts. By fleshing out the rudimentary principles of what makes lyrical sociology distinct, we will be better equipped to not only recognize it but use it too.

³² I don’t have the space here to show how each of these approaches could take on a lyrical or narrative form. Visual sociology, and even photography in general, seems close to the lyrical approach in its use of images (actual rather than verbally created). However, images can be used to explain and tell a story and/or a moral (even if a work is just one image) or they can be used lyrically to juxtapose different people, places, and times in such as to elicit an emotional and ethical response that transcends whatever argument could be made.

CHAPTER 2: STANCE AND MECHANICS OF WRITER

Abbott outlines his formal theory of the lyric under two main categories: stance and mechanics. He defines stance as, “an author’s attitude toward what he or she writes and toward his or her audience” and the mechanics as the “devices an author uses in constructing his or her text” (2007a:73). Of the two, Abbott says that the stance is more important. It is at the “heart of the lyrical impulse” (73) and is from where the “chief mechanical differences between a lyrical and a narrative sociology stem” (76). Thus, I will address the question of the lyrical stance first before proceeding to a discussion of the mechanics. In both sections, I will not only summarize what Abbott says, but also suggest points beyond his thinking, most significantly in the direction of ethics.

As mentioned previously, Abbott draws extensively upon literary theory in order to flesh out his theory of lyrical sociology. However, there are many schools of criticism within the field: historical criticism, formalism and new criticism, structuralism, deconstruction and post-structuralism, Marxism and critical theory, new historicism and cultural poetics, and reader-response criticism, to name a few. Though Abbott doesn’t explicitly align himself with any specific school of thought, besides equating structuralism with narrative (2007a:70) and relying upon Paul de Man (83-85), a deconstructivist, to flesh out some of the nuances of his theory, I will, in pointing to ethics, draw upon the burgeoning field of ethical criticism to suggest the ethical potential of lyrical sociology.

Within the field of ethical criticism, there are a variety of approaches as well. I focus on a Levinas inspired version whose method of criticism, much like the lyric, transcends method, or at least cannot be reduced to it. Eaglestone (1997:165), a literary theorist who follows in this tradition, argues, “There cannot be a Levinasian ethical criticism *per se*, because as soon as a

way of reading becomes a methodology, an orthodoxy or a totalizing system, it loses its ability to interrupt, to fracture the said” (emphasis in original). By fracturing the said, he means the ability of the irreducible person of the other, as either research subject or writer, to speak through whatever literal meaning a text could be said to have. In terms of lyrical sociology, this means that the theory of the lyric itself will always be evolving and irreducible to a single delineable approach. Nevertheless, though it is a “necessary impoverishment” (Faulconer 2005:54), the theory of the lyric is a something rather than a nothing. It is an inexhaustible alternative to narrative by this very inexhaustibility. I now turn to its main features—its stance and mechanics—all the while throughout weaving a discussion of ethics inspired by Levinas and Levinasian thinkers.

Stance: Writer

The stance of the lyrical writer is a relational one and finds itself at the core of Abbott’s thinking about lyrical sociology. The writer has “a specific emotional relation toward both audience and material,” Abbott writes (2007a:92). This comes out in both the tone they use in directing their remarks to some future reader and in the feelings that they both have and convey toward the world they study (73-74). In this section, I want to look at the lyrical stance along the three dimensions I drew upon in the last chapter: emotionally engaged (in a lyrical way), subjectively located, and temporally present. I will argue, though, that the emotional relation Abbott envisions, which is necessarily tied up in the specific spatial and temporal position of the writer, is better thought of as an ethical one, and that this can be inferred from examples in Abbott’s own text.

Emotional Engagement

Abbott writes that the lyric involves “an intense participation in the object studied, which

the writer wants to recreate for the reader” (74). Like the example of Christakis discussed previously, the writer must be intimately involved in their research question and have a stake in whatever answer or answers they find, if there be any. They are “not unwilling to be seen wrestling with [their] data, to be seen confused and hesitant” (75), because the value of their research is “less in the conclusions, than in the mode of arriving at them” (Mill 1977:168; quoted in Swedberg 2012). The writer lets the reader in on the ground floor of the research process before everything is packaged neatly and sent off to the lab for hypothesis testing. The reader can only feel the writer’s level of intensity when they are given this kind of access.

Abbott believes that the writer is a facilitator of the relationship between the studied object and the reader. However, their intermediary role is not distanced or ironic, as if the writer merely introduced the two and then left the room (Abbott 2007a:74).³³ They stay close—very close—poking and prodding each to get them to reveal more and more in cycles of endless (self)disclosure and closure. Throughout, the writer makes themselves vulnerable as well. The relationship between writer and reader (and world) is founded on the utmost sincerity. If, by chance, there is “an irony to the lyricism,” Abbott writes, “it is an irony shared with the object and the reader, not an irony that positions the writer outside the experience of investigation and report” (74). The writer isn’t just a passive medium who transmits the world to the reader without interfering, but is, at all times, engaged with both.

This relentless engagement with both object and reader helps the reader to connect emotionally—and ethically—to both the world they read about and the world they themselves are a part of. The reader feels something when they read that they can’t quite discern (like the reviewers of Bell’s *Childerly* and Christakis’ *Death Foretold*), but experience as a call. Literary

³³ Abbott (2007a:74) remarks how “it is a commonplace of sociology today that engagement with one’s topic is not ‘scientific,’ as if distance and irony were the only legitimate stance for sociological writing.”

theorist Charles Altieri (1998:293) writes that:

Aesthetic emotion may even be considered a strange kind of affect because it tends not to be focussed on any particulars within the work but to characterize the force by which we respond to the piece as a whole, as if we were willing to take responsibility for who we became by virtue of our participation in it.³⁴

To invoke the popular, but true, phrasing, ‘With great power comes great responsibility’ (Uncle Ben). Emotionally evocative texts have power to pull the reader into a state of mind that is quite different from normal social scientific writing, as well as make demands upon them that cannot be reduced to the works content alone. It is a combination of both stasis and kinesis, of both engaged rumination and active receptivity in the form of a response (Richardson & Lockridge 1998:328-330; see also Brinkmann 2009b). Moreover, these aesthetic dimensions, and the responses they engender, are thought of as being “one and the same” with ethics (Wittgenstein 1974:86; see also note 13 in Altieri 1998:297). However, this can be either problematic or desirable, depending on the level of actual engagement of writer and reader.

Conflating aesthetics and ethics often results in the stance of the former becoming the stance of the latter. In the context of Levinas’s rather pessimistic view on art, Craig (2010:182) comments, “Levinas is highly sensitive to the dangers of making ethics aesthetic-as if ethics were something from which one might disengage, or gawk at from a distance.” Levinas rightfully saw art as potentially reductive of the real and immediate ethical relations that undergird social life. However, Craig adds, “But there is an even greater danger in leaving ethics without any emotional impact . . . [and] producing a theory that bears no connection with the living feel and unsystematic complexity of life” (Craig 2010:182). Art and ethics need each

³⁴ Wilkes (2009:1) writes how “artistic expression can open communication between the self and the Other, allowing the viewer or reader to accept responsibility for the act of witnessing the artist’s representation.”

other.

Non-artistic, or “scientific,” approaches can of course be equally as reductive as artistic ones. And, in many instances, artistic works arise in response to these overly reductionistic depictions of reality. However, if the writer or reader is not careful, they can get so caught up in the artistic experience that they actually lose their bearings in the real. Van Manen (2002:238) writes how experiencing emotion can be a sign that a researcher has achieved the type of engagement necessary for the proper transmission of social experience but that “there is always the danger that we are merely enchanted by the superficial haunt of shallow sentimentality or catchy formulations; that is why it is good practice to check again the effect of the text several days after writing it.” Because lyrical sociology is about the moment, the writer must stay in it in order to appropriately convey it, rather than get lost in it.³⁵

Abbott cautions against two particular emotions that pull a writer out of the lyrical mode and moment: outrage and nostalgia. Both, he writes, “far from finding something magical and special in the indexical here and now, judge the here and now to be wanting by comparison with this other idealized state” (2007a:93)—or abstract there and then. While outrage envisions an idealized other present that the current “here” lacks (such as a state of equality), nostalgia imagined a golden past, which the current “now” does not have either.³⁶ Both are therefore “comparative emotion[s]” (93) and involve two distinct locations each—outrage spatially and nostalgia temporally. The one location is a real one—a real indexical here or now—and the other is a non-location referred to simply as an “elsewhere” (93).

³⁵ Abbott (2007a:96) writes, “There is a place in social science for writing that conveys an author’s emotional apprehension of social moments, that does this within the framework of rigor and investigative detachment that we all consider the precondition of our work as social scientists.” Just as it is possible to overthink a certain situation, researchers can also over-feel them too. A focus on concrete others, and one’s responsibility toward them, helps to prevent extremes of reductive thinking or feeling.

³⁶ Abbott (2007a:93) identifies progressivism as the reverse of nostalgia but says that it is equally as narrative and comparative.

The problem with both these emotions—outrage (often in a moralizing form) rooted in anger and nostalgia rooted in sadness—is that they aim “not to awaken in the reader an emotional state but rather a desire for action” (93),³⁷ making them moral or political emotions rather than truly ethical ones. This is when conflating aesthetics and ethics becomes problematic. Lyrical emotions, which I am arguing are synonymous with ethical ones, are grounded in a particular author’s experiences of real people in real times and real places, while non-lyrical, or narrative, emotions pit the “particular experiences of individuals in tension with dominant expressions of discursive power” (Neumann 1996:189). The difference is that one maintains its focus on the ethical encounter of concrete actors while the other shifts into moralizing about the distance between *is* and *ought*. Abbott therefore argues for a sociology of non-advocacy, “interested in understanding the social world (as a value enterprise) rather than in changing it” (Abbott 2007b:204).³⁸ In this way, ethics can be separated from the moral and the political.

This ethical impulse seems to be what underlies Abbott’s specific way of identifying lyrical works from non-lyrical ones. For Marx, his emotions were moralizing rather than lyrical because his portrayal of the evil done by the wealthy to the poor was primarily to advance his moral position on the rich rather than to express his “feelings towards the poor. . . . The importance of famine dead,” Abbott writes, “is for Marx’s argument, not for themselves as

³⁷ Dromi and Illouz (2010:19) believe that to galvanize the reader into making some sort of action-based commitment is, in fact, the best reason why one should involve themselves emotionally in a text. They write, “Making oneself present in the text of an argument, a literary work, or another form of artistic expression by letting the audience know how one feels becomes a means of expressing one’s moral sense, in the hope of moving others toward a commitment.” Abbott would argue that this kind of emotional engagement is actually more political than moral (in the true sense that I am calling ethics) and advocates instead for the place of “nonmoral emotions” (2007a:82) in sociology. In fact, he believes that this is what made the most admired works in sociology what they were; and that today, “perhaps it is not so much our moral timidity and our obsession with professionalism, as Burawoy (2005) has argued [in his piece on Public Sociology], but rather our colorless imaginations and our plodding moralism that have driven sociology from the public stage” (Abbott 2007a:72).

³⁸ This overlaps in important ways with a Weberian value-sphere approach and his idea of an “ethics of responsibility” (Starr 1999).

human beings” (2007a:85). Likewise, regarding Snook, Abbott emphasizes the warrant for his book comes from the “human consequence of 26 unexpected deaths” (78) rather than from the rarity of the event itself, though this is hardly underscored in the book. And, with Riesman, his fault was that he never arrived at a level of lyricism required to create a “stabbing sense of the humane” (75).

Abbott’s concerns are existential and ethical. The best lyrical sociologists focus on questions that transcend the situations they are in (77).³⁹ This transcendence, though, occurs through engagement rather than detachment, through lyrical emotions (such as “humane sympathy” or the “sublime”) rather than narrative ones, and through ethical motivations rather than moralistic or political ones. Such a stance, in Abbott’s view, is “our best hope for a humanist sociology, one that can be profoundly moral without being political” (96). It is a type of sociology that is “moral without being ‘moralistic’” (Fowers and Tjeltveit 2013:390) and is therefore, of necessity, not narrative, since “narrative cannot be other than moralizing” (Abbott 2007a:72). It is, in short, a lyrical sociology.

Subjective Location

As the previous section details, the writer’s subjective “here” and “now” matters significantly for the type of emotional experience they have and the relationship this establishes with the reader. Abbott writes how, “The lyrical impulse is located in a particular consciousness, that of a particular writer who is in a particular place” (2007a:74). However, unlike traditional sociological methods, which try to limit or hide this subjectivity, in the lyrical approach, subjectivity is conspicuous. The lyrical writer is always aware of his or her self as more than just

³⁹ Concerning Christakis’ book, Abbott (2007a:77) describe the tension that always ensues in a prognostic situation with “the imponderability of an outcome that will be probabilistic for the doctor, but deterministic for the patient, who will either live or die.” And that, “Seen this way, as an asymmetric situation that opposes probability and determination, the prognostic situation far transcends medicine.”

a recording device, “but as the person whose emotional experience of a social world is at the heart of his or her writing” (74). The text that proceeds from them bears their own personal signature. They are implicated in it and by it, as it is both a window into the social world as seen by and through them, and thus a window into their own souls too. The lyrical work of a subjectively located writer is therefore incapable of being morally neutral. It always makes claims about the social world anchored in critically self-reflective “strong evaluations” (Taylor 1976:282).⁴⁰

The sources of these evaluations and emotional reactions are their own pre-judgments (or prejudices), the a priori understandings, beliefs, and attitudes they carry into the world they experience. Lopate, the author of *The Art of the Personal Essay*—which genre has many important points of overlap with the lyric—describes how essayists deal with these pre-judgements in their writing:

The essayist is someone who lives with the guilty knowledge that he is "prejudiced". . . and has a strong predisposition for or against certain everyday phenomena. It then becomes his business to attend to these inner signals, these stomach growls, these seemingly in-defensible intuitions, and try to analyze what lies underneath them, the better to judge them (1995:xxxix).

The form of the writing, whether of the lyric or the essay, is a process for judging one’s judgments (both a priori and a posteriori) and is, in this way, itself a judgment. However, Lopate adds, quoting Georg Lukács ([1911] 2010:34), “the essential, the value-determining thing about

⁴⁰ In strong evaluations, “desires are classified in such categories as higher or lower virtuous or vicious, more or less fulfilling, more or less refined, profound or superficial, noble or base; where they are judged as belonging to different modes of life, fragmented or integrated, alienated or free, saintly or merely human, courageous or pusillanimous, and so on.” They are compared to weak evaluations, where actions are weighed “simply to determine convenience, or how to make different desires compossible – he might resolve to put off eating although hungry, because later he could both eat and swim – or how to get the overall satisfaction” (Taylor 1976:282).

it is not the verdict... but the process of judging” (Lopate 1995:xxx). The way the writer sees the world—and writes about it—is just as important as the world they see. Or, as Abbott (2007a:76) puts it, “Lyricism lies in its approach to these things, not in the things themselves.”

Since all seeing is perspectival, there is no “view from nowhere” (Nagel 1986)⁴¹ and no way to escape the subjective position of the writer or the inevitably ethical (or unethical) choices they make as human agents when constructing their texts. An artist, like a scientist, cannot merely represent the world non-perspectivally, or non-evaluatively. Nor can they represent it non-reflexively, at least if they are being honest (and ethical) about their representations. As Anderson (1996:18) writes, “To engage in strong evaluation, then, is to grapple with the question of whether one wants to be the sort of person who is moved in the way one finds oneself being moved.” As the text becomes a mechanism for judging one’s own judgements, the lyrical writer finds themselves ethically responsible within a world they write about and within a world they write to, to both an object and a reader.

Temporal Presentness

Abbott emphasizes that a lyrical sociology is always located in time. He writes how the lyrical writer “consciously create[s] the image of a world in a moment, a snapshot of another world in being, even as that world changed” (2007a:75). The ontological fact of the world for a lyricist is that the world is dynamic and changing.⁴² To capture this though, contrary to what is conventionally held to be more rigorous methodology (longitudinal as opposed to cross-sectional research), the lyrical cross-section of a moment in time is neither static nor linear. Abbott writes

⁴¹ Abbott (2007a:91 footnote 36) calls this the “dimensional view” rather than the indexical one. For an interesting discussion on how anti-colonialist projects paradoxically created a different type of “view from nowhere” in the very process of trying to abolish it see Abbott (2007a:91-92).

⁴² To reiterate the points made in the last section, the lyricist does not simply try and capture the dynamics of the living and changing world, since they recognize that they themselves are always living in it and changing it too. And, moreover, they give each person and situation they write about these privileges and responsibilities as well; for that is how they see theirs and other’s subjectivity, as both a privilege and a responsibility.

that, “To see a moment as complete in itself yet absolutely transitory is thus the foundation of the lyric sensibility” (84). The lyrical lens focuses on the stillness of the turning world (84 footnote 20).

The way a moment is complete in itself is through processes of repetition, where entities are conceived as being “events that keep happening in the same way” (Abbott 1995:873). The way the moment is absolutely transitory is that its existence is always oriented toward death. McDonald (2008:30), referencing Levinas, states, “The alterity of time can be accessed only by means of the Moment, by means of that eternity of presentness which is an eternal repetition: that impossibility of time which is the omnipresence of death.” The affirming of the present moment is where the ethical quality of the lyric resides. As I foreshadowed in chapter one, the only way to do justice to the pastness of the past is to focus on its indexical presentness.⁴³ This is because, for Levinas, “death is always unjust and never natural”, yet it is also always a reality to which “the moment’s evanescence, the radical alterity” of time itself testifies (McDonald 2008:30). Thus, the temporality of the lyric is both more just and humane in its obligation to the present as well as truer to reality in its depiction of passing time. As Abbott (2007a:90) writes, “In lyric, we hear the whisper of possibility and the sigh of passage.”

Humans are neither deterministically reducible or everlastingly reifiable. They remain both infinite and finite at the same time, but all within (rather than outside) the time they live. In narrative, Branigan (1992:4) writes, “some person, object, or situation undergoes a particular type of change and this change is measured by a sequence of attributions which apply to the thing at different times.” The emphasis on the change from moment to moment (i.e. the causal

⁴³ Likewise, the same insights go for traveling through social space. Abbott (2007a:91) writes, “Lyrical sociology’s sense of disposition is its spatial analogue of temporal passage. To the evanescent quality of ‘nowness’ in time it adds an equivalent sense of the changing quality of ‘hereness’ as we move in social space, of what we might call not evanescence but ‘intervanescence.’”

link or sequence), rather than the moment itself, entails a singular story with “a beginning, a middle, and an end, or as a model with independent, intervening, and dependent variables” (Abbott 2007a:71). The longer or more global this change is, the more it can be “signified in the overall relationships established among the totality of the elements (Branigan 1992:4) and not through the irreducible quality of the individual parts.

A lyrical work is always more than the sum of its individual parts, or its set of moments or stories, but at the same time it is inexorably dependent upon them as moments in themselves for the emergent and irreducible features to which the reader responds. Iser (1978:16) notes that, “Large-scale texts such as novels or epics cannot be continually ‘present’ to the reader with an identical degree of intensity.” The ability of the lyric to remain “continually ‘present’” is what makes the lyric an art (as in a difficult task) and is tied to the other two parts of the lyrical stance. The lyricist must remain emotionally engaged and spatially located not “outside the situation but in it” (Abbott 2007a:74) if they are to stay within time too. Just as there is no “view from nowhere”, there is no view outside of time. The lyric, like life, is a judgement from the beginning to end, not just in its final conclusion (if there be one). Levinas (1969:23) writes, “It is not the last judgment that is decisive, but the judgment of all the instants in time, when the living are judged.” Judgement, by which I mean the ethical evaluations of a particular writer (or reader), therefore has a temporal dimension as well that is missing in narrative.⁴⁴

There is much more to say about each of the components of the lyrical stance. My intention has been to not only re-present what Abbott has said concerning it, but to point to how the stance, which he primarily sees as emotional, is ethical too. The way the writer relates to the

⁴⁴ In narrative, the reader can only judge the writer on whether they agree with their conclusions based on the evidence and reasons provided throughout the text. In a lyrical work, the reader’s question isn’t whether to agree or disagree with the writer, but whether they themselves (the reader) are living right. They are being judged by their reading of the text just as much as they are judging it.

world, the reader, and their own here and now has drastic implications for the ability of their writing to evoke legitimate ethical responses in readers. To add to this discussion, Abbott mentions specific ways in which the writing of the text should proceed if this stance is to be properly communicated.

Mechanics: Writer

I organize Abbott's discussion of the lyrical mechanics around two main groups of distinction: the difference between story and image and the difference between the theoretical, moral, and emotional imagination. I also point to the techniques of figuration and personification for lyrical writing in order to suggest a way to use language for purposes other than conveying meaning, or simple feeling either. Like discussed with the lyrical stance, mechanics done right or wrong has ethical implications.

The most important mechanical difference Abbott sees between narrative and lyric is between story and image (2007a:76). While the former is aimed toward "recounting, explaining, [and] comprehending," the latter aims at using a "single image to communicate a mood, an emotional sense of social reality" (73). The lyrical image is, more accurately, a bricolage made up of "congeries of images" (76) that are selected, shaped by, and give shape to the impression of a single image (Boswell and Corbett 2015). Northrop Frye (2002:35) writes how "[o]ur impressions of human life are picked up one by one, and remain for most of us loose and disorganized. But we constantly find things in literature that suddenly coordinate and bring into focus a great many such impressions." This is what the lyric does, when done right. It looks at the complex, and often disorganized, image of a social situation—with all its quirks, caveats, and contingencies—and "confronts us with our temporal and social spatial particularities in the very process of showing us those of others" (Abbott 2007a:96). By doing so, it produces the unique

emotion of “humane sympathy” (95) and a cohesive feeling-based sense of social reality.

Abbott, referencing Wordsworth, calls the ability to juxtapose strong images and evoke powerful personal feelings, the “emotional imagination” and contrasts it to the theoretical and moral imagination (Abbott 2007a:72; see also Jacobsen and Marshman 2008). Lopate (1995:xxiv) tells how with the theoretical imagination’s factual or formal writing, “literary effect is secondary to serious purpose” (from Holman and Harmon's 1992 *A Handbook to Literature*). With both the moral and emotional imagination, obtaining a literary effect from the text is crucial, if not the main rhetorical strategy. Though, as our discussion has shown, the effects are different.

In lyrical sociology, as Abbott envisions it, the literary effect would necessarily need to be specified further as the *lyrical* effect only (Brinkmann 2012:154). It would be an ethical effect rather than a moralizing one. As Altieri (1998:3) writes, “Any adequate account of the ethical force potential in literary experience needs to focus on states most clearly present in lyric experience.” Other types of writing can yield “kinetic” responses, but lyrical writing is about looking for a specific type of response that is ethical and humane. This is why Abbott warns “lyrical sociology must be more than wonderful writing and literary bravura.” People can and do confuse the emotional imagination with the moral imagination all the time in such stylistic texts. Mechanics matter though in order to produce the appropriate lyrical effects. Though Wordsworth would suggest that a crucial component to the emotional imagination is using informal “simple terms, not jargon” (Abbott 2007a:72), the lyric is anything from a formal (without form). Abbott writes that “Lyrical writing is as disciplined and formalized—perhaps more so—than other kinds of writing” (73). There are specific ways to go about it, certain preconditions.

Two of these ways are using the techniques of personification and figurative language.

Both, Abbott tells, are used to “give a striking image” and to convey both the “emotional tenor” of the described social phenomenon and the writer’s own “powerful reaction” to it (82). For example, Abbott starts his piece with an excerpt from Harvey Zorbaugh’s (1929) *The Gold Coast and the Slum* where he compares the Chicago Loop to a heart, which “pump[s] in a ceaseless stream the three millions of population of the city into and out of its central business district” (1). With this image, wrought by metaphor, we can envision the daily dynamics of the city far better than if we blandly stated the statistics of commuters within and out of the city. We also see Zorbaugh’s emotional reaction to this part of the city, which Abbott identifies as astonishment (2007a:74), through his use of the heart as the metaphor rather than something else (e.g. comparing the city’s flux of people to the monotonous movements of worker ants in and out of a mound).

With literal language a person means exactly what they say, but with figurative language (such as metaphors and similes), what a person says is not exactly what they mean. Saying something different than what one means is how a writer speaks through whatever thematic, propositional, or literal meaning a text could be said to have. It is the only way in which an emotional and ethical relation can be established with the reader, as opposed to a relation to a commonly recognized *narrative* discourse—which would be a totalizing discourse of the said.⁴⁵ Thus, these linguistic techniques are a way to connect the reader with the writer and with the world the writer writes about. As the writer employs them, and comes to the writing with the proper emotional, spatial, and temporal stance, they will be able to awaken in the reader the same feelings and sensitivities that enliven them, with the ultimate effect being the transmission of ethical responsibility in the form of a call. This occurs in a particular way, as Attridge (2017:181)

⁴⁵ This has potential overlaps with Levinas’s conception of the “saying” and the “said” (Levinas [1974] 1998).

describes:

The distinctive ethical demand made by the literary work is not to be identified with its characters or its plot, with the human intercourse and judgments it portrays, with its depictions of virtues and vices or of the difficulty of separating these; all these can be found in other discourses, such as historical writing or journalistic reporting. It is not a question of literature's capacity to provide a moral education; that too is a property it shares with other kinds of writing. Rather, it is to be found in what makes it literature: its staging of the fundamental processes whereby language works upon us and upon the world.

The invitation into an emotional and ethical relation with the writer, and studied object, comes to the reader through a text that has been fashioned in a way as to allow it. The next chapter will look at the role of the reader in receiving all of what a well-constructed lyrical sociology has to offer.

CHAPTER 3: STANCE AND MECHANICS OF READER

This chapter examines the role of the reader in reading lyrical works. Bruner (1993:40) writes about the potential truth available in autobiography: “The ‘rightness’ of any autobiographical version is relative to the intentions and conventions that govern its construction or its interpretation.” This can be said of the lyrical approach, and whatever mode of writing really. The ‘intentions’ (stance) and ‘conventions’ (mechanics) of the writer and reader have the power to reveal or obscure the ‘truth,’ or lyrical and ethical experience of a piece, inasmuch as they are or are not followed. There are certain rules and prerequisites that the writer and reader either must be aware of and adhere to—or do naturally—if they are to successfully realize and receive the full potential of a lyrical work.

Foundational among these prerequisites regard the relationship between the writer and reader. As the adage goes, ‘It’s not what you say but how you say it that matters most.’ Whereas Abbott discusses tone mostly in terms of the writer, as part of the stance or attitude he or she takes towards the reader (Abbott 2007a:74), in this chapter, I discuss it in terms of the reader and the stance or attitude he or she takes towards the writer: ‘It’s not (just) what you read but how you read that matters.’ And this tone of “how you read” also entails certain mechanics of its own as well. I start with looking at the reader’s stance and how it can evolve through ones reading (and rereading) of a text and then turn to an examination of the actual mechanics of reading lyrical texts, and how they differ from other types of social scientific reading.

Stance: Reader

Like in the previous chapter’s section on the stance of the writer, I will argue that reading lyrically is more than just an “emotional relation” that the reader has toward the writer (in this case) and the text (or the what or who the text is about), but the stance is inherently an ethical

relation all the way through. I start by discussing how the ethical proceeds the ontological and objective knowledge through experience, then discuss the commitment of the reader to converting to the writer's way of thinking, and finish by discussing different readers responses to lyrical works and offer some thoughts on how to be sure one is responding in the right way.

Commenting on E. P. Thompson's *The Making of the English Working Class* (1963), Abbott (2007a:81) writes, "[Lyrical sociology] promises the 'personification' of people not before seen as persons." It gets its power to do this by positioning the particular self in relation with a particular other, rather than a generalized version of either (see note 17). This relationality is what makes the lyric ethical.⁴⁶ And, through the revelation of the other's alterity "reason . . . is found to be in a position to receive" (Levinas 1969:51), which makes it scientific too.⁴⁷ The encounter, real or vicarious, is "the ground of objective knowledge" (Faulconer 2005:52) and "[k]nowing becomes knowing of a fact only if it is at the same time critical, if it puts itself into question, goes back beyond its origin' (Levinas 1969:82). Once knowledge becomes an object of consciousness, it is reduced to the ability of language to comprehend it.

Faulconer (2005) tells how in the social sciences forming concepts about people is inevitable. Though they will always be inadequate or impoverished versions of the truth, which lies 'beyond being', they are necessary. However, if they are never called into question by the otherness of the other, they become unfounded, atemporal, and unrepresentative. In a way, concepts exist to be ruptured. Levinas (1969:43) says, "We name this calling into question of my spontaneity by the presence of the Other ethics." A sociology that lacks an approach for both

⁴⁶ As Piaget ([1932]1965:196) writes, "Apart from our relations to others there can be no moral necessity."

⁴⁷ This is why Levinas (1969:45-48, 304) argued for 'Ethics as First Philosophy.' As well, the notable Scottish philosopher John MacMurray (1935:21) argued that science is "emotionally conditioned." He writes how "the main difficulty that faces us in the development of a scientific knowledge of the world lies not in the outside world but in our own emotional life. It is the desire to retain beliefs to which we are emotionally attached for some reason or other. It is the tendency to make the wish father to the thought." I would argue that both thoughts and feelings spring forth from the ethical stance of the subject.

doing and presenting this can never be ethical. Though what exists ‘beyond being’ cannot be captured with language (in the literal sense at least), Faulconer (2005:52) points out that for Levinas, it is not “beyond our experiential knowledge.” Thus, we need an approach, or a way of writing, which can both account for and convey the otherness of the other experientially.⁴⁸

For the reader, this means that “the understanding of [a] text always requires, in some sense, a conversion to the text's way of thinking” (Bruns 1992:813). If the reader is to experience the world of the writer and have an encounter with the other of the study, they must not do to the writer what the writer has made sure not to do to themselves: “not place himself or herself outside the situation but in it” (Abbott 2007a:74). Indeed, the reader must place themselves in the writer’s very shoes if they are to understand anything about the situation, from a lyrical standpoint, which is in stark contrast with what Wolcott (1994:12-13) suggests for descriptive qualitative researchers; to have them “remove themselves from the picture, leaving the setting to communicate directly with the reader.” The lyrical reader only knows of a social situation, in its fullness, through the writer. They do not—and cannot—come to a knowledge of the world in spite of the writer, as if the writer distorted their view, but only because of them. The writer is the mediator of the medium of the text. To remove them would be to remove the part of experience that is the most human,⁴⁹ and thus the most valuable for the type of humanist sociology Abbott envisions.

In affirming the writer’s own experience, and thus converting to their way of thinking, the reader denies themselves and their own opinions. Paradoxically though, they find themselves

⁴⁸ Just like Faulconer (2005), Abbott believes that narrative “dissolves into lyric (rather than the other way around, as happens in the eyes of some sociologists)” (Abbott 2007a:83). To create a place for lyrical sociology, one must relinquish the narrative impulse and realize that this impulse and all its moralizing comes from lyrical experience in the first place. Why not allow for the immediacy of lyric if lyric is what ultimately allows for narrative?

⁴⁹ Dunlop (1984:17) writes, “Human beings cannot remain human if they leave a great part of themselves behind.”

more affirmed, and more human—perhaps even more than human. Lewis (1961:138, 141) writes:

In the moral sphere, every act of justice or charity involves putting ourselves in the other person's place and thus transcending our own competitive particularity... in reading great literature I become a thousand men and yet remain myself. ... I see with a myriad of eyes, but it is still I who see. Here, as in worship, in love, in moral action, and in knowing, I transcend myself; and am never more myself than when I do.

The root of this self-transcendence that the reader experiences is the transcendence of the other (both the writer and the object of the writer's investigation), which is at the heart of all ethical experience (Faulconer 2005:51).⁵⁰ As Son (2002:vi) writes, "I propose that we view the lyric subject not simply as a consciousness of something, but as a release from oneself or, more fundamentally, as a relationship with alterity." It is the other's irreducibility, their 'beyond being,' that "ruptures the horizon of [the reader's] intentions" (Faulconer 2005:51). Whatever emotional stance the reader has going in, towards the writer or towards the writer's object, will be different than the stance they have going out. Iser (1972:296) writes:

Reading reflects the structure of experience to the extent that we must suspend the ideas and attitudes that shape our personality before we can experience the unfamiliar world of the literary text. But during this process, something happens to us.

The something that happens is that the readers purposes are reshaped by the text, the encounter with the other through it. Reading lyrical sociology is therefore not about interpreting a text, but

⁵⁰ Faulconer (2005:51) writes, commenting on Levinas, "Ethical experience is not an experience of the value of the other. Ethical knowledge is not a knowledge of what counts as good behavior in relation to others. Levinas is not using the word ethical as we expect. Rather than an experience of the value of another, ethical experience is transcendent experience, access to a something – someone – exterior to myself... Thus, for Levinas ethics is the relation to what transcends, to the transcendence of the other person, a relation that makes possible the ordered, ordinary experience of the everyday."

about reinterpreting one's way of seeing the world.⁵¹ As Rosemarie Anderson (2000:44) writes, "In articulating preliminary lenses, the intuitive researcher [or lyrical reader] places preliminary lenses in full scrutiny and invites their transformation, revision, removal, amplification, and refinement as cycles of interpretation proceed."

As the reader reads and rereads they will gain something new every time, because they have become someone new every time. If a work ceases to teach, it's not because it lacks lessons to be learned, but because the reader has ceased to learn, change, and evolve with it (assuming again that the text is fashioned in such a way as to allow this). Because they have stopped receiving, it has stopped giving—not the other way around. Thus, Lewis (1961:11) writes how "the true reader reads every work seriously in the sense that he reads it whole-heartedly, makes himself as receptive as he can." As they do this, they will see the world in "different ways" and "through different lenses" (Abbott 2007a:76) and begin to develop a more complete picture of the social world.

One important question to consider is if the receptivity from writer to reader is an honest one. Does the reader really enter into the writer's own experience and feel what they feel, discovering real truths about themselves and the world on their way? Or, do they merely feel what they want to feel and resonate with the things that they already find true? As Davis (2006:278) asks it:

Does something happen when we read, or has everything significant already happened before we even pick up the text? Does the text have the capacity to transform us, or do

⁵¹ Bruns (1992:813) writes that in reading true works of literature, "[W]e always end up having to reinterpret ourselves, and even change ourselves, in the light of the text. To understand a text is not only to grasp its meaning; it is to understand the claim that it has on us. Most often this claim is critical in the strong sense, as when a text exposes us to our prejudices, by which Gadamer means not only our private, subjective dispositions but, more important, the conceptual frameworks we inhabit and to which we appeal when we try to make sense of things. More is at stake in interpretation than interpretation. What would it be for a text to explode the conceptual world of the one who seeks to interpret it?"

we simply appropriate it as our reflecting mirror? Are we constituted through our encounters with the other, or can the other only be encountered insofar as it already conforms to what we want of it?

It is possible that people experience works as lyrical only because the works evoke the feelings that already conform to their existing beliefs. Or, as McDonnell, Bail, and Tavory (2017) recently suggested, some people resonate not with what they find true but what they find useful. Altieri (1998:292) likewise notices this tendency: “In our experiences of the lyrical at least, willing often takes place less through an interpretation of what is true or good about the text than an attachment to what is powerful within it.”

The whole purpose of the stance and mechanics of this chapter, and the previous one, is to help the reader to recognize if they are resonating on grounds other than the lyrical or ethical (i.e. the moral, the theoretical, the political). In fact, Attridge (2017:176) would argue that the truly ethical has no grounds, at least not in the conventional sense:

Not only is there no moral or pragmatic ground for responsibility, there is also no philosophical ground. The ethical force that conditions the creative act is ungrounded—here Levinas’s difficult thinking is valuable—because it is prior to any possible grounds. Without responsibility for the other, as we have seen, there would be no other; with no other, repeatedly appearing, always different, there would be no same, no self, no society, no morality.

The relationship with the other precedes ethics, which fits with what Abbott says in a different piece, about how “a new normative ontology must, first, embody a genuine theory of particularity” (Abbott 2015:13). In the experience with the other, the writer, reader, whoever, sees their own thinking self and purposes thrown to the side in a radical call to responsibility and

knowing that can only be described as mystery, rather than resonance. As Levinas (1987:75) writes of the effect of the ethical encounter:

But this precisely indicates that the other is in no way another myself, participating with me in a common existence. The relationship with the other is not an idyllic and harmonious relationship of communion, or a sympathy through which we put ourselves in the other's place; we recognize the other as resembling us, but exterior to us; the relationship with the other is a relationship with a Mystery.

Abbott does a good job at describing how this encounter occurs. He hits the nail on the head when he says that “particularity... is something we share” (2007a:96). This simple observation could sum up the main thrust in Levinas’s thought and is the proper ethical stance of the reader. It is a knowledge that readers continue to evolve into the more they read and reread various lyrical works.

Though Abbott doesn’t explicitly make the relational-ethical connection to the extent that Levinas does, to me, this ethical relationality seems to lie at the heart of his motivations for rethinking ontology and epistemology.⁵² Reflecting back on his previous work critiquing variable-based approaches, he writes:

Now to be sure, subsequent reflection has persuaded me that one could make the case that there was a values critique implicit in this strand of my work; recoding human individuals as the mere intersections of reified variables did turn out to be an important—perhaps the most important—way that social scientists contributed to the formation of mass society.

⁵² Nowhere is this more evident than in his recent book, *Varieties of Social Imagination*, where, under the alias of Barbara Celarent (2017), he includes a series of reviews (published in *AJS* from July 2009 to November 2015) on the works of others from distant times and places. Abbott states that this was Professor Celarent’s guiding morality: “One should take the past and the other seriously: on their own terms, not as not-yet-realized or garbled versions of one's own supposed perfection or even one's own supposed ideals. After all, we will ourselves be past soon enough, and we are someone else’s other already” (xiv). A true sociologist honors the otherness of the other.

Therefore, to take a stand against variables-based methods was in its own way a rebellion against the massification and dehumanization of people. But that certainly wasn't my original intent (2007b:197).

Using Levinas to read Abbott helps to differentiate lyrical sociology from the aesthetic and from the types of moralism Abbott both resists and even advocates. Of the latter, the "values critique" implicit in Abbott's work and his proposal for a more humanist sociology (Abbott 2007a:96; Abbott 2007b), Levinas would argue, doesn't go far enough. "Humanism," Levinas writes, "has to be denounced because it is not sufficiently human" (Levinas [1981] 1998:128). I would argue that this latter type of ethical concern is present in Abbott's work, even if not explicitly stated, and that for a lyrical sociology to be ethical, both the writer and reader must attune themselves to the ethical nature the entire research process, from pre-production to post-consumption. This involves both understanding and implementing the proper lyrical stance and mechanics throughout. I now turn to a discussion on the specific mechanics required of the reader of lyrical texts.

Mechanics: Reader

A large part of the work to transmit feeling from writer to reader is determined by the writer. Abbott writes how the emotional imagination of the writer must "juxtapose strong images and powerful feelings to awaken in a reader the emotion that the poet has himself felt" (2007a:72). There are rules the writer must follow since, as Dobie (2011:137) says, the text provides "the materials and determines the boundaries for the creative act of reading."⁵³ However, the text itself does not and cannot replace the focus of mind required of the reader to produce a lyrical response. Stanley Fish (1980:326) writes of this aesthetic response in poetry, "It

⁵³ As Iser (1972:287) likewise comments, "The 'stars' in a literary text are fixed; the lines that join them are variable."

is not that the presence of poetic qualities compels a certain kind of attention but that the paying of a certain kind of attention results in the emergence of poetic qualities.” Thus, the lyricality of a text, as given by the writer, is a necessary but not sufficient condition for its lyricism to be received by the reader. The reader must do their part.

In this section, I want to focus on the particular ways in which to read lyrical texts and show how these ways differ from other types of reading in terms of their effort, attention, skill, and feeling. Abbott (2007a:94) stresses the importance of “audience participation.” He writes, “If one reads only to find the narrative or structural account of a temporal and social present, the lyrical text will read as a disappointment.” For those who read and are receptive to the lyrical experience of a text, they will find that an account with both affective and ethical dimensions that provide not only a different kind of knowledge about the social world but, more notably, suggest a different way of knowing.

Lewis (1961:19), in a book on literary criticism, writes that, “The first demand any work of art makes upon us is surrender. Look. Listen. Receive. Get yourself out of the way”; and that, “There is no good asking first whether the work before you deserves such a surrender, for until you have surrendered you cannot possibly find out.” He calls his book *An Experiment in Criticism*, because he experiments with the question of whether ‘bad’ books are ‘bad’ because they are poorly written or because they are poorly read. He writes, “Normally we judge men’s literary taste by the things they read. [My] question [is] whether there might be some advantage in reversing the process and judging literature by the way men read it” (104).

Donald Hall (1983) writes about four kinds of reading. The first he calls reading for information. Applying his ideas to academics, this kind of reading involves quickly scanning journal articles, books, and/or periodicals, looking for key findings or figures, and ignoring

material that is irrelevant. The second kind is reading for ideas. This type of reading occurs slowly with much time “spent with the eyes turned away from the pages, reflecting on the text (165). In the social sciences, while the first is characteristic of how one might read an empirical article, especially quantitative, the second is how one would read a theoretical piece.

The third way of reading Hall identifies is what he calls reading to escape, or “narcotic reading” (165). This is reading done in exchange for the pleasure a text gives, whether of excitement or relaxation. He says that this reader is, ironically, “interested not in experience and feeling but in turning off the possibilities of experience and feeling” (165), arguing that “once the characters reach into the reader's feelings, he [the reader] is able to stop reading, or glance away, or superimpose his own daydreams” (165-166). The last kind of reading he calls reading to engage. This type of reading is slow, and deliberate, and focuses on every word. Like Fish (1980), alluded to above, it requires all the attention of their mind. Hall (1983) writes:

[T]he great writers reward this attention. Only by the full exercise of our powers to receive language can we absorb their intelligence and their imagination. This kind of reading goes through the ear--though the eye takes in the print, and decodes it into sound—to the throat and the understanding, and it can never be quick. It is slow and sensual, a deep pleasure that begins with touch and ends with the sort of comprehension that we associate with dream. . . . To read literature is to be intimately involved with the words on the page, and never to think of them as the embodiments of ideas which can be expressed in other terms. . . . Great literature, if we read it well, opens us up to the world, and makes us more sensitive to it, as if we acquired eyes that could see through things and ears that could hear smaller sounds (164-5).

This describes lyrical reading, and writing, in a nut shell. While, as Culler (1997:77) says, “Narrative poems recount an event; lyrics, we might say, strive to be an event.”⁵⁴ Lyrical readers don’t just read for information, ideas, or pleasure, but read to become one with “the person whose emotional experience of a social world is at the heart of his or her writing” (Abbott 2007a:74). If done properly (assuming that which one reads permits it), reading a lyrically inspired text can help to reconcile the reader with the writer through its words, or rather through the experience of the text as a whole (Flyvbjerg 2006:241), and the unique effect it has on them.⁵⁵ Rather than merely re-presenting reality, words bring it forth anew—every time a little different (depending on how one reads it)—and allow the reader to re-live it, as if for the first time, each time (which seems to be in line with how Bell envisions the lyric too; see note 14).⁵⁶

Laurel Richardson (2000:11) tells how in evocative forms of writing, the writer is constantly “holding back on interpretation [and] asking the reader to emotionally ‘relive’ the events with the writer.” The same goes for reading. The reader must also hold back on interpreting, in the way interpretation is traditionally conceived, if they are to experience the text in the way that it is intended. In the study of poetry, for example, Van Manen (1944:39) writes, “it is inappropriate to ask for a conclusion or a summary [i.e. to interpret] ... To summarize a

⁵⁴ Or, as he says in another place, “If narrative is about what happens next, lyric is about what happens now— in the reader’s engagement with each line” (Culler 2008:202).

⁵⁵ With Levinas’ understanding of empathy, a complete reconciliation of writer and reader (as well the writer and the people he or she writes about) is impossible (Levinas 1987:75-76, 90). Fusion is both an illusion and a reduction of the other’s radical otherness. However, this doesn’t mean that one should avoid taking steps in that direction. In fact, moving towards the other, or at least facing them, is at the heart of his idea of the ethical encounter.

⁵⁶ Attridge (2017:150) stresses how, in literature, every word matters:

In some kinds of text, the author’s creative labor is centered on the manipulation of ideas, the construction of arguments, the representation of existing entities in a new light, or the imagination of hitherto non-existent entities. In other kinds of text, the ones we call literary, such labor is combined with, and is in a certain sense always subject to, the selection and arrangement of words. In these works, otherness and singularity arise from the encounter with the words themselves, their sequence, their suggestiveness, their patterning, their interrelations, their sounds and rhythms. To re-experience the otherness of a work of this type, it is not enough to recall the arguments made, the ideas introduced, the images conjured up; it is necessary to re-read or recall the words, in their created order.

poem in order to present the result would destroy the result because the poem itself is the result. The poem is the thing.” There is no lyrical truth value in merely recounting what happened or in reading such a recounting. To do so would destroy the event of lyric. Information can be imparted but experience must, at the risk of being tautological, be experienced!

In lyrical sociology, the presentation of the empirical data in the form of a text—constituted in many cases by the first hand ethnographic experience of the writer-as-methodological-instrument (Lucas 2016:21 footnote 23)—is not distinct from the interpretation of his or her experience, because the experience itself is already an interpretation in the moment of creative decision when it is put into words on a page. Abbott (2007a:84) quotes Paul de Man (1983:152) who says, “The ambivalence of writing is such that it can be considered both an act and an interpretative process that follows an act with which it cannot coincide.” The stance and mechanics of writing lyrical sociology ensure that this interpretation is conveyed in a way that fits the data, or the emotional experience of the writer, as closely as humanly possible. Inasmuch as it does, or attempts to, the writing is said to meet what T.S. Eliot has famously described as an “objective correlative” wherein the author tries to describe, “a set of objects, a situation, a chain of events which [are] the formula of [a] particular emotion; such that when the external facts, which must terminate in sensory experience, are given, the emotion is immediately evoked” (Eliot 1951:145; referenced in Abbott 2007a:94 footnote 40).

Eliot’s idea of an objective correlative has been critiqued as offering a somewhat representational and deterministic view of language, which is understandable if the text is, as Rosenblatt (1978:23) believes, “merely an object of paper and ink until some reader responds to the marks on the page as verbal symbols.” However, in lyrical sociology words have a non-verbal quality as well. They are also musical. Each word adds rhythm and tone to a text. Words

make noise, whether spoken aloud or internalized in a reader's own head.⁵⁷ The way they are arranged suggest crescendos and decrescendos, pauses and sudden starts, accelerandos and ritardandos that transcend their merely symbolic meanings, and which carry a force of their own. The reader who tunes in to these non-verbal features is one who has learned to "read between the lines."⁵⁸ In doing this, through some process as ineffable as experience itself, the reader, who is worthy of it, responds to the writer themselves, not just marks on a page.

This takes an enormous amount of effort and skill (or natural ability). Lewis (1961:98) writes:

When the art of reading poetry requires talents hardly less exalted than the art of writing it, readers cannot be much more numerous than poets. If you write a piece for the fiddle that only one performer in a hundred can play you must not expect to hear it very often performed.

Reading can thus be considered a performance, where practice makes perfect.⁵⁹ As with playing the fiddle, the piano, or some other solo instrument, there are those who sight-read a piece once and think they know it.⁶⁰ Then there are those who play a piece again and again, only to discover

⁵⁷ Hall (1983:164) writes, "If we read a work of literature properly, we read slowly, and we hear all the words. If our lips do not actually move, it's only laziness. The muscles in our throats move, and come together when we see the word 'squeeze.' We hear the sounds so accurately that if a syllable is missing in a line of poetry we hear the lack, though we may not know what we are lacking. In prose we accept the rhythms, and hear the adjacent sounds. We also register a track of feeling through the metaphors and associations of words."

⁵⁸ McDonald (2008:29) draws upon and quotes Levinas to tell just how this "between the lines" phenomenon relates to poetry's unique ability to be between time too, and thus disruptive of narrative plot: "It is in the interiority of the moment that the alterity of time is encountered. the source of poetry's musical impower, its interruption of the synchronic continuities of philosophical language, is the interstices of time, the *entretemps*: 'it is of the essence of art to signify only between the lines—in the intervals of time, between times [*entretemps*]—like a foot-print that would precede the step, or an echo preceding the sound of a voice' [Levinas [1975] 1996:7]."

⁵⁹ Attridge (2017:133-134) says, "[T]he literary work exists only in performance," but recognizes that "[m]ost of the sentences we read or hear we do not perform, in this sense; we recognize, apprehend, interpret them, perhaps feel or do something as an immediate consequence, but we treat their words cognitively and instrumentally." Oatley (1999) sees reading as a performance in the sense that it is a simulation that is run on the minds of readers.

⁶⁰ Lewis (1961:13) writes how, "There are those who read only when there is nothing better to do, gobble up each story to 'find out what happened', and seldom go back to it; others who reread and are profoundly moved." To go through a piece of music once, you might come away knowing what is there, what it consists of, and what to expect if you were to play it again. But, to go through multiple iterations of a piece, you will know why what is there is

that there is more depth than they had previously realized.⁶¹ A work of art, like a person, can never be fully grasped. Thus, the medium of the lyric is its greatest message for sociology (McLuhan 1994), namely its irreducibility of persons through its irreducibility as a form.⁶²

The recognition of the alterity of the other person, which is at the heart of the ethical encounter, is made manifest through “the alterity, or otherness, of the artwork” (McDonald 2008:16), wherein the textual encounter becomes a personal encounter (Buell 1999:13) and the experience of the sublime (Abbott 2007a:96) is transformed into “an experience of other people” (Alford 2002:37). Thus, there is a relationship between the writer and the text they write and the reader and the text they read, as well as the world the text is about and the worlds the writer and reader both inhabit. The lyrical stance involves all of the personal and ethical considerations for having a lyrical experience while the lyrical mechanics involves the approach to the text one takes, or the textual considerations for the communication of that experience. As Eaglestone (1997:94) writes, “ethics and language are intertwined in an inescapable way,” so too are the stance and mechanics of lyrical sociology.

there. You will start to understand not just the music, but the musician too, and all their idiosyncrasies. This is when you become a master yourself and composer in your own right, as if you could have written the piece yourself.

⁶¹ This new depth is not unrealized in the sense that it wasn't known, but in the sense that it wasn't known in the way it is now known. Becker (1982:x), for example, writes, “I think it is generally true that sociology does not discover what no one ever knew before, in this differing from the natural sciences. Rather, good social science produces a deeper understanding of things that many people are already pretty much aware of.”

⁶² Giving a place for lyrical sociology in the social sciences, and sociology in particular, not only allows for *one* irreducible approach to social inquiry (the lyrical), but would make the *overall* approach to research more open and less reducible. As Smelser ([1994] 2014:76) writes of a discipline between science, humanism, and art, “the benefit is living in a field that refuses to seal itself into a closed paradigm and threatens to exhaust itself, but, rather, retains the qualities of intellectual openness and imagination.”

CHAPTER 4: VIGNETTES

Given the understanding of the lyric I have suggested so far, I turn now to the empirical portion of the piece in an attempt to do a lyrical sociology from the ground up. Drawing upon my experience living as a missionary in inner-city Detroit, what follows is a series of vignettes detailing the city, the people I met, and my own emotional experience as a temporally and subjectively located human being trying to make sense of both. For the reader, the opportunity here is to apply the stance and mechanics detailed in the previous sections in order to see and feel what life was like in Detroit. In the next chapter, I describe my process in writing them and my own experience in reading them. This chapter, though, is meant to give the student of lyrical sociology a first-hand experience with a lyrical piece, by one who has wrought it not by accident, but intentionally.

Robby Austin

My mission companion and I visited a man almost every week named Robby Austin.⁶³ Robby was white—the only one on his street—and in his thirties, with tattoos all up and down his arms and, though he had a girlfriend in the suburbs, he lived alone. When we would visit, he would always, without invitation, enter into war stories about living in Detroit, making it hard to get into the lesson, but worth it. To me, his war stories were just life stories, because in Detroit, life was war.

“If I was in Detroit, I would have killed him!” Robby tells us. His sister’s boyfriend, who lived outside of the city in the suburb of Lincoln Park, had abused her, and Robby Austin was furious. Though I probably would have just encouraged her to file a police report, Tommy took matters into his own hands when it came to family. He told us how, with his sister on the phone

⁶³ Pseudonyms are used.

giving him directions, he drove over to the boyfriend's house, knocked on the door, and asked the person who answered to go and get the boyfriend so he could "talk to him for a minute."

Immediately as the boyfriend stepped out, Robby grabbed him by the lapel, threw him off the porch, and started beating him with his fists. As he told us this, he rose up from his sunken couch and punched the air in front of him. Robby continued telling us how he dragged his opponent to the street and, leaving him for a moment, went to his car to get his gun. With his sister still on the phone, which was now in his pocket, she yelled "Get him Robby!" Without hesitating, Robby grabbed the gun and told us he heard a voice in his head guiding him what to do next.

Going back to the boyfriend, he kneeled over him, flipped his gun around and, holding it by the barrel, started to hit him in the mouth with the other end, knocking in a couple of his teeth. Robby threatened him, still reenacting to us pointing his finger in the rhythm of his words: "If you ever touch my sister again, I will kill you!" I glanced quickly over at my companion, noticing his mouth and eyes were just as wide open as mine, and asked curiously, "How long ago was this?" He told us, "Oh, just the other day." I cringed.

Robby stood up, walked to the window, and peeked out the blinds. We sat on the couch in the dim light of his front room trying to teach him a missionary lesson but kept getting distracted by his stories. They seemed so wild and crazy to me, and I loved hearing them. He explained that his sister's boyfriend was in a motorcycle gang and that they threatened to come and shoot up his house. I realized we were in the front of the house and easy targets for a frontal assault. Though I liked hearing his stories, I didn't really want to become a part of one.

The night before, his buddy and he waited for the boyfriend and gang all night, laying on their bellies on the grass across the street with their assault rifles. They dressed up in all black,

hoping that when the gang came, they would surprise them by an attack from behind. Though sadly, as he put it, they didn't come. I envisioned the carnage of bikes and bodies had they.

Robby had about eighty plants of marijuana growing in his basement and slept in his kitchen at night with his machine gun, just in case anyone (competitors) tried to come in and destroy his crop. He told us that if we ever told anyone about his little plantation, he would kill us. Tattle-telling, whistle-blowing, or “narking,” as Detroiters called it, was about the worse thing one could do, according to the code on the street—worse than murder. We promised we wouldn't say anything.

I was absorbed by the craziness of his stories, of his life, of who he was, of what he did to survive. It was the same with house fires, with hearing gunshots, with collecting bullet shells on the side of the road, with hearing the sound of rap music blasted through tinted windows, with seeing urban blight all around: trashed, burnt down, boarded up, and closed Detroit. It horrified me and it fascinated me at the same time. The city was so different to me than back home, as if from a post-apocalyptic movie. But I was in it. And, I couldn't wait to go home and tell everyone about it; about how I, like Robby, survived—about how brave I was.

Childhood

When I was in first grade, in Arizona, I fantasized as I lay in bed at night of saving my classmates from an estranged gunman. I would bravely take a bullet for the curly haired red-head girl I had a crush on and survive, just barely, becoming a hero to her and everyone else in the school. The grade-year before as a kindergartener, my favorite movie was Kindergarten Cop, with Arnold Schwarzenegger. I watched it at my Grandma's house at least once a day after school, sometimes twice. Arnold Schwarzenegger, as John Kimball, was an undercover cop who posed as a teacher to save the school from just such a scenario. He succeeded but got shot,

though won the heart and honor of a woman his age. I wanted to be like him; strong, courageous, and recognized.

We moved to Texas where there was a boy who lived on my street named Mitch. He had a gun and hated my friends. One of my friend's older brothers punched him on the corner of the street in front of my house a few days earlier and nearly broke his own hand he hit him so hard. Mitch told us to watch our backs. I skipped school for a week, telling my parents "My stomach hurts," though it actually kind of did. I had heartburn and acid reflux. When I went back, I saw Mitch in the hall. He looked at me funny. I went to the nurse and asked to leave early, throwing up in my mouth as I waited for my mom.

We visited my family in Arizona over Christmas Break and went out to the desert to celebrate the New Years. My cousins, brother, and uncle left to go out hunting before it got dark, but I stayed behind and hid, crying on the back seat of my cousin's F-150. I hated guns. I laid flat below the line of the windows to avoid any stray bullets that might come my way. I heard shots close by. They came over and gestured to me to join them. I didn't. I couldn't. "Guns are loud and hurt my ears," I told them. "I'll just sit in the truck." They called me a baby.

In high school, at a gas station, I was drinking a Slurpee in the back of my truck late at night with a couple of friends from school. A lowered beat up sports car pulled up next to us with a deep bass pounding to a song one of my friends recognized, to which he started singing along. Two white guys, one skinny one chubby, got out and the chubby one thought we were making fun of him. He was wearing a sleeveless tank top and his arms jiggled as he came up to the bed of the truck waving them, "What? You got a problem?"

He wanted a fight, and even slapped one of my friends, who was a football player, in the back of the head, but my friend and all of us kept our cool and they eventually left. When I got

home, I sat in my room paralyzed on my computer chair for what seemed like an hour, in silence, with my eyes fixed on the floor, trying to slow down my heartbeat and breathe.

After this experience, I did not want to go out anymore. I kindly refused all invitations from my friends, whenever they called or texted, giving excuses. Since I kept turning them down over the phone, they came over to my house to try and persuade me in person. They invited me to go to a movie I really wanted to see. I told them I had laundry to do. “On a Friday night?” they contested. I felt terrible as I rejected them, especially to their faces, sad that I couldn’t go to see the movie, frustrated with my own fear, but safe that I was still home.

Mission Assignment

I was so excited when I got my mission assignment in the mail, until I saw where to. “You are hereby called to labor in the Michigan, Detroit mission ... for a period of twenty-four months.” “What!” I screamed inside. “Cool.” I said out loud to the group of family and friends who came to see me open it. I had told one of these friends a couple weeks before sending in my application that I wanted to go somewhere out of the country, warm, and not a big city. I gave him three examples, of places that I for sure did not want to go: “New York, Chicago, or Detroit.” I knew these cities were “ghetto” and unsafe for people like me (white, middle-class). And, since I was already afraid to go out in my own suburban hometown of Gilbert, Arizona, which was ranked one of the safest cities in the U.S., how could I go to one of the most dangerous?

One of my cousins immediately hopped on the computer and started spitting off facts about the high number of violent crimes, homicides, thefts, and everything else about Detroit I didn’t want to hear, but already suspected. My worst nightmare was coming true. I literally thought I was going to die, and the statistics didn’t convince me otherwise. Some of my friends

and family could sense my hesitancy and nervousness. I told them it was because of the cold, that I didn't want to freeze to death. Being from Arizona and about only 2% body fat, it was a good excuse, but it wasn't the real reason.

Prayer

I prayed desperately that I would be safe on my mission and have the courage to go—and stay—that I wouldn't have a panic attack. I did a year of community college before my mission and took an introductory psychology class in which we learned about various mental illnesses. There was one that sounded uncomfortably familiar: agoraphobia—fear of situations that might cause panic, helplessness, or embarrassment—and I self-diagnosed.

Most of my family members prayed for me as well, so I was told. I say most, because my Dad is an Atheist, and would never do such a thing. My Dad had two sons, one who was serving in the army in Afghanistan, my brother, and me who was serving a mission in Detroit. Of the two of us, he was more worried about me. Though I believed in a Divine power to protect me, he said at least my brother had a gun.

Dogs

Dogs were, if not the greatest threat, at least the most common one. They would scavenge the city for food and, with primal instincts, chase us as we rode by like prey. As a missionary, I learned a few ways to deal with aggressive dogs that also turned out to work well against aggressive people. For instance, if a group of teenagers, who looked hungry for action, ever came towards us on the same side of the street, we would never cross the street to avoid them—because then they would know we were afraid. Instead, we would walk towards them smiling with excitement and say, “We're missionaries!” Then they would run from us.

With dogs, if I barked at them first or more intensely, I could dissuade them from

pursuing me. Once, my companion and I were riding at about half-speed when a medium sized, long haired, black mutt came bolting out of a backyard gate that was usually closed and started chasing us. Impulsively I started to pedal quicker, but saw that the dog was slower, so I slowed down allowing it to catch up to me, just to see what it would do.

It barked and barked as it ran along side of me and then threw its head at my heel trying to bite it, which panicked me. My first reaction was to yell at it. However, my yell was a yelp, and sounded more like a bark, so I went with it and continued to bark at it. When I did, the dog slowed down and then stopped, standing in the middle of the street with its head cocked to the side and with puzzled eyes.

There were also more proactive ways to deal with the dog problem. We told one young man we were teaching about how there were dogs that chased us by his house. The next day he surprised us by saying, “You know them dogs?” We said, “Yeah.” “We’ll you ain’t gotta worry ‘bout them no more.” “What do you mean?” “My boy took care of them.” Holding his hand out like a gun, “Pop. Pop.”

Sandra

Detroiters often seemed accustomed to many of the threats and chaos I observed. One day we talked outside on the porch to Sandra, a hard to find Hispanic lady from the Church. Her two youngest, a boy and a girl, were contently playing in the front yard. A couple houses down, a middle-aged man dressed in all black, blinged-out with a silver chain necklace and dazzling wristwatch, was on his phone having a heated discussion with someone on the other end. He paced back and forth in front of his house while he waved his hands in the air, yelled, and cursed. This worried me a little, but I reassured myself that he wasn’t mad at me.

Sandra talked calmly. After evading us all winter, we finally caught her outside. It was a

beautiful spring day, not too hot yet; a perfect time to be out. Down the road, two teenage boys with sagging pants came walking slowly down the middle of the street in our direction. One held his belt and next to his hand I saw the grip of a gun sticking out. Is that what I thought it was? I tensed up and kept an eye on it, and him, but also tried to not let him see me looking, hoping they would leave us alone.

The children filled the air with the music of motor sounds as they ran and pushed small trucks through the grass. Sandra idled and revved on about her husband. Across the street were two unoccupied houses: one was hollowed inside, burnt, and abandoned; the other was mostly ash and trash, with weeds attempting to overtake it, only the foundation and a few charcoaled supports remaining. On Sandra's side of the street, between her and her noisy neighbor, was a well-kept garden she planted in memory of her oldest girl who was kidnapped and killed years ago. They found her burnt bones and clothing debris inside a wooden chest in the brush of an empty lot.

The boys continued walking, owning the street. They passed by the noisy neighbor, the memorial, and finally got to us, but didn't stop, confront, or even seem to notice us, and eventually swaggered out of sight. I sighed in relief. The angry man got off his phone and went inside. We closed our conversation with Sandra and said bye to the kids, who played on, like their mother, no matter what.

House Fire

We saw smoke rising above the cityscape a few blocks away. Fires were common, seeing them almost every other week; once, three times in one day. This one was black and billowing, which must have meant it was still fresh. We had some extra time before lunch, so we decided to investigate. We sped over and rolled up on our bikes just as the fire engines did.

The house, which was a two-story, looked like it had been abandoned for a while. Bright orange flames shot out the windows and door. It was beautiful. We could feel the heat across the street. Others who heard the sirens came out to watch as well, one man even brought a lawn chair; a neighborhood block party. We saw an older Hispanic man we taught earlier that day, also on his bike watching. I tried to tell him in broken Spanish a joke about how religion was like fire insurance for those who didn't want to burn in hell. Maybe my Spanish was bad, but he didn't laugh.

The firemen hurried to pull the heavy hoses close enough to shoot inside the house. One wall looked like it was about to collapse. The flames were big, and the struggle was real, so I asked my companion to take a picture of me in front of the house. Not knowing how to pose, I smiled and gave a thumbs-up. Behind the burning house, a man with white headphones and no shirt mowed his lawn and whistled.

Felip

Felip was a Hispanic man married with three daughters who was not a member of our church. We caught him on the sidewalk in front of his house just as he got home from work and straddled our bikes as we talked. Others were out as well. His neighbor, who told us he was Baptist, sat on the front steps and watched his granddaughter ride her pink scooter. A group of about five or six young men stood in the grass near the porch of the house across the street. It was cooler to be outside this time of the year, especially in the early evening.

Tires screeched behind Felip. A light blue Grand Marquis came to a halt at the intersection on the corner, stopping just past the point where it could turn. It sat there for a moment. I looked around. All eyes were fixed on the car. Except Felip's, which only glanced back quickly when he heard the noise. The car reversed and then turned to come down the street

toward us. It crept slowly and then stopped. The windows were tinted all black. A loud boom came from inside the car—a subwoofer—and then it proceeded, pulsing down the street, pounding its chest.

Across the street, the teens turned from facing each other to facing the car, following it as it moved. They stood more erect, pushing out their chests too, and cocked their heads to look down at the car. A few hands went down under their shirts into their pants. I swung my leg from over my bike and stood next to it instead, preparing to jump belly-first behind a nearby car at the first sight or sound of a gun.

Felip continued talking. My companion, who was closer to him, tried to resolve some of his concerns with religion in general, explaining to him about how our church was different. I felt queasy. My chest was tight and my heart thumped with the bass.

The car passed at a snail's pace and then sped off, screeching its tires again. The guys across the street freed their hands and turned again to casual conversation. I heard them mention something about someone getting shot recently. Felip was still talking to my companion. I hadn't heard a word he said. He needed to go in and get supper though. We scheduled a time to come back. My companion wanted to keep going down the street and talk to more people. I suggested we leave.

Flin

My companion and I, and the other set of Spanish speaking missionaries who worked in the area, helped an older guy named Flin, who wasn't a member of our church. Once a week, we helped pack his house up for an impending move to the suburbs. He lived in Corktown, a historic Irish district just west of the city center, in an old two-story house that was literally, in some places, filled to the ceiling with boxes and books. He had been having trouble recently with

people breaking in and decided it was time to move. He loved Detroit, had been raised there his whole life, and was Irish to the core. At one point, he was the city's historiographer, which I thought suited him well when I reflected on how much old stuff he had.

As a courtesy, he would come pick us up in his car from our apartments on the days we went by to help him. It was our weekly Tuesday ritual all through the winter and into the spring. On an early spring morning, when the snow had finally given in, Frank came and picked us and the other missionaries up. As we made our way to his house, he started driving a different direction, though we didn't even realize at first. Flin was funny and sometimes insisted on going down certain streets just because he liked the way they sounded (e.g. the street John Kronk), and the other missionary companionship and we were busy exchanging Detroit horror stories from the previous week: a drug bust, a drive-by shooting, a house fire. Though these events were becoming less surprising to us, they were still fun to tell about. Flin just told us to pray for these people.

He stopped the car on a random street and got out. One of the missionaries rolled down the window and yelled, rolling his eyes, "Flin, what are you doing?" He had his phone out and said "Come on. We need a photo." I looked around and saw that the house we were pulled in front of had two beautiful blooming magnolia trees. They were so beautiful and pink, in fact, that they seemed out of place. Flin flew out of the car as we all dragged our feet to the foot of the tree, trying not to step on the apron of petals that had fallen at the edge. Giving cheesy smiles, Flin told us to be serious and snapped a picture with his phone.

We got back in the car and made our way again toward his house. On a main street again, as if trying to dodge an animal, he swerved right onto another small street. We each screamed "Flin!" What was he doing now? He pointed his finger out the window and exclaimed, "Oh my,

look at those flowers!” With a collective sigh we followed him out of the car again as he, and some of the other missionaries now, snapped close-ups of every variety of wildflower that had grown up in the empty lot.

Next to us was a dilapidated house that had been the victim of a fire not too long ago. I looked around and pulled out my camera, setting its timer, and put it gently on the ground in the midst of the field of flowers, tactically angled in the direction of the house. Scooting back about ten steps, I kneeled and smiled, making sure not to obscure the background. I was wearing my new University of Michigan jacket. “This will be such a cool shot to send home,” I thought.

Auto Show

We rode the bus downtown to the Auto show held at Detroit’s Cobo Center, which happened once a year and attracted visitors from all over the U.S. The event ran for a little over a week, allowing us to go on our day off. On route, we talked with Bottle Man—as we called him—a guy we knew very little about except that he was always on the bus and was always collecting bottles. He was usually the only one who talked on the bus, whether to someone else or to himself, though we were one of the few who talked back. When we did, he would get really excited and louder, telling us jumbled stories about current events, TV shows, and history. At certain parts in our exchange, he would tell us how to respond, imploring, “Say that’s amazing.” If we didn’t say what he asked, he would repeat himself until we did.

“That’s amazing.”

Other people on the bus laughed as we humored him. I even snuck a video with my camera to show my family when I got home. They would probably think he was as funny as I did.

When we arrived, I could tell that hardly anyone visiting the car show was local, partly

because of their attire, but mostly because of their skin color. Most people at the show were white and where we worked, in Southwest Detroit, most people were either Black or Hispanic. We walked toward the entry of the auto show. I could see through the doors crowds of people and could hear loud upbeat music playing over the PA system. Inside, there were fast cars, big trucks, and slick SUV's, beautiful women in skimpy outfits posing next to them, flashing lights from commercials on screens and from above and around all the different exhibits.

I immediately felt out of place and wanted to turn back, but I assured myself that it was our day off and we were supposed to have fun and ease up a little. I also felt strangely put off, almost offended, and a little territorial; like people were there without my permission. I felt like I should have had an all-access pass, that I should have been a VIP, along with my other missionary companions, and that we should have been able to bring as many guests as we wanted; Robby, Sandra, Felip, Flin, Bottle Man. We were the ones who really knew Detroit. We were Detroit. Not these rich white people from the suburbs, I thought. They only knew about this one little area downtown, the part the city kept clean to attract visitors' tax revenue.

At the minivans, I saw an anomaly, a little black girl sitting in the back of one that had a chess-set built into it. She was sitting so cute and smiling, so I ran up and waited for the white people who were close by to get out of the frame and then took a picture of her, making it seem like I was just taking a picture of the van. In a sea of suburbanites, she was what I wanted to see. She was the Detroit I knew and loved. She was me.

Car

On a Sunday night, my mission companion and I were coming home late from a church meeting, riding in the car of an older Hispanic couple we had invited, Miguel and Andria. We had been visiting them for a while. And although they were not yet members, they would happily

come with us to church events, give us rides, and feed us whenever we came over. We loved them! They also happened to be undocumented immigrants from Mexico and were very aware of their sensitive status. We were all tired and sat quietly as we made our way back for the night.

Waiting at a stoplight close to both our houses, on Livernois and Michigan Avenue, the light turned green and, on the corner diagonally from us, a man commenced to cross the street. Out of nowhere, a car coming from the other direction made a quick right and hit him, knocking him under the wheels and driving over him like a speed bump.

Our immigrant friend paused accelerating for a second as we watched the man attempt to get up and walk it off but fall back down, grimacing in pain. In shock at what had just happened, I wondered, like Miguel seemed to, if we should stop to help, but his wife hurriedly told us, “We can’t stop. We can’t risk being around the cops.” I didn’t say anything. So, we drove off just like the guy who hit him.

L-Dog

I don’t remember what L-dog’s real name was. He lived in a 20-story housing project downtown next to someone who ordered a free Bible from a commercial the church was running locally. We were supposed to visit the guy who ordered the Bible, but when we knocked on his door, his neighbor, L-dog, thought we were knocking for him. He told us his real name but said we could just call him L-dog and asked if we could come back another day.

When we did, he excitedly welcomed us in and invited us to sit down at the dining room table, which separated the tiny kitchen from the meager living room. We pulled out our chairs and sat down. L-dog made small talk as he searched through the cabinets for some juice mix. He found it, grabbed a pitcher halfway full of water, and then came and joined us on the opposite side of the table.

He told us how he “love [himself] some purple drank” and started pouring in a generous amount of mix, which looked like off-brand grape-Kool-Aid. After what seemed like more than enough, and when I finally thought he was finished, he took the lid off the carton and poured in the rest of the container. Stirring it with a long metal spoon, he held the pitcher to his mouth, took a sip, smacked his lips, and said, “Got it just right”; smiled and asked, “Want some?”

I replied, “No thank you,” thinking in my head I didn’t want diabetes, and my companion said no as well. We continued our conversation. He told us about the Tiger Woods scandal in graphic detail, despite our attempts to switch the conversation, and then began to brag about how “adaptable” he was. He explained how you could drop him in the middle of Brazil amongst a cannibalistic tribe and he would survive, because he knew how to fit in. He said though, on the flip side, if you put him with the cannibals on Wall Street, in a board meeting with the wealthiest CEO’s in the country, that he could also “talk the talk” and “walk the walk.”

We thought he was crazy, or at least I did. We ran into a lot of people like him on the street, usually drunk, but L-dog wasn’t drunk. He was just crazy. That’s what made it fun. He was funny. We laughed with him, but mostly at him. We decided to try and get back to our purpose as missionaries and be more serious, so we asked him a little bit about his family. He got up from the kitchen table, walked a few steps to the other side of the living room to the TV stand, where he had a small golden picture frame he grabbed and brought back for us to see. He handed it to me and explained that it was a photo of his son. The twenty-year-old boy in the picture was in Class A military attire. “Oh cool,” I said, surprised he had a son in the military.

L-dog told us that his son was in the Marines, that he went to Afghanistan and that they “sent him home in a box.” I looked up confused, still smiling at how lively he was, thinking it was a joke—or another one of his weird expressions—but his face was serious. He told us that

his son was blown up by a grenade and came home in “three pieces.” “Oh,” I realized. I didn’t know what to say. The mood shifted. He sat down again and slumped in his chair. The sun shined softly through the window onto his mostly bald head. My companion and I sat motionless and just stared. My breathing slowed. We had an arsenal of lessons and scriptures about life after death we could have used to comfort him, but none of them felt right. All we could do was sit and look at him as he sat slumped, lost in thoughts too sacred to interrupt. After about thirty seconds though, which felt like an hour, he perked up and said, “Ya’ll sure you’re not thirsty?”

CHAPTER 5: ANALYSIS

The above vignettes constitute what a lyrical sociology might look like if it were to be deliberately produced from the onset. Following the rules of the stance and mechanics of the writer, as detailed in chapter two, I sought to adhere to what Abbott and other experts on the genre have suggested. In this chapter, I discuss the insights I gained from actually writing my own lyrical vignettes—as opposed to simply theorizing about the lyric from past works—and point to some of the intentional literary moves I made while constructing them. I also relate and reflect on a few of the experiences others and I had while reading and rereading them in order to provide more insights into the writing and reading process. All of this I do in hopes of helping to further bridge the gap between the theory of the lyric and the application of it.

Lessons Learned: Writing

In writing the vignettes, I had to be sure to maintain the lyrical position of not taking a position, at least explicitly. I had to withhold judgment, resist the urge to moralize, overcome the temptation to draw “objective” conclusions based on my observations, add present-perspective commentary, apologize for the unflattering way I viewed the city then, use technical language, or coerce—explicitly or implicitly—the reader to a specific point. Instead, I sought to simply tell of my experiences, and to treat them the way empiricists treat data; to let them speak for themselves (Öhlen 2003:565).⁶⁴

Avoid Concluding and Moralizing

The temptation to tell the reader what I wanted them to understand from my vignettes—

⁶⁴ Any reflection or analysis I did upon my experience would be an interpretation and, in a sense, just as valid as anyone else’s. The point in writing these as stand-alone vignettes was to allow the whole of the experience to be interpreted without the need for interpreting my interpretations. It was to “draw an audience into a collective experience in which a version of truth is demonstrated for the collective to judge” (Butler 1997:928). To try and interpret or analyze during the vignettes would compromise the whole endeavor by breaking the continuity of lived experiences I was trying to relate (see van Manen 1997:353).

to wrap-up, conclude, or moralize—was especially difficult at the end. In the early drafting, I used titles to help me keep track of what experiences I was telling and where I was at in them. For my last fragment, I literally used the words, “Wrap-up” as the title for it and wrote a vignette attempting to do so (to wrap it up). This however, from a lyrical perspective, is counter-productive.

The art of lyrical writing is that if it is done correctly, *an* understanding will come on its own, without having to tell anything, conclude, or wrap-up, which is in sharp contrast to narrative writing (see note 20). Narrative writing demands that the writer ties everything back in for the reader. It requires a definitive conclusion to be drawn. However, the lyric advocates for more openness to the world, which allows it (the world) to speak to you, in the way it (the writing about the world) speaks to you. Needless to say, I changed both the title and the content of my last vignette.

Abbott suggests that we should also avoid moralizing. He calls those who don't implicate themselves “distanced and judgmental,” whose view of the world we only see through “the writing about it that makes them so angry” (2007a:74). However, this is okay when the “engagement remains immediate, almost apperceptive.” For example, when I was at the auto show reflecting upon my own culture (white, middle-class) this was done from the perspective of me at that time. And, I implicated myself back into that very culture, even as I was questioning it, when I took a photo of the black girl in the mini-van, as if she was an animal at the zoo.

Passion over Perspective

In Abbott's (2007a) piece, he references Nicholas Christakis' (1999) book *Death Foretold*, which discusses the dysfunctions of prognostication, as an example of a lyric that could easily have been a narrative. He describes how one would have expected the book to start

with an account of “patients and their illnesses,” then “doctors and their qualities,” and finally “the flow of prognostic information throughout the disease course,” but instead, Christakis “simply circles around the image of the doctors telling (more often, not telling) patients about the future” (76). Of Christakis, Abbott writes, “He is not an abstracted sociologist outside the situation, nor is he a consistent advocate for one or another position within the ranks of medicine itself” (77). Though Christakis might be unbiased, he is not neutral.

I had spent two years living in the heart of Detroit and, as a sociologist, have made understanding the city part of my professional pursuit. Throughout both my experience and my studies, I have formed definite opinions as to the reasons for Detroit’s unique circumstances, to say the least, as well as have had many thoughts as to how to help or change it. I have more first-hand experience than most who theorize about this particular city. However, according to the lyric, this still does not give me the grounds to speak down my viewpoint with authority. The lyric is a humble endeavor in that it seeks above all to “emphasize the vividness of [my] passion toward the world [I study]” (Abbott 2007a:76) not my perspective on it. Only then can the reader truly understand *for themselves* what was seen and felt, instead of having to rely upon the writer’s word alone.

The Feeling of Ambivalence

Abbott says that the real aim of Christakis was, “to make us feel the damnable ambivalence doctors face about prognosis; indeed, the damnable ambivalence he himself feels as a practicing physician” (2007a:77). The purpose of his writing was not to argue one side of the issue or prescribe a solution to reconcile the two sides, but rather to help the reader to *feel* the tension between two contradictory perspectives. Evoking these feelings of “damnable ambivalence” is precisely what makes authors like Christakis “hard to pin down” (77). It allows

the reader to have a more open relationship with the writer because just as the writer has refused to reduce the social world he or she writes about, they themselves become less reducible, or less able to be reduced.

Likewise, in my vignettes, I sought for ambivalence in writing them. For example, just like there is an apparent virtue to “tattle-telling, whistle-blowing, or narking” (as described in the section on Robby Austin); there is also the virtue of loyalty, confidentiality, and shared vulnerability between the missionaries and the “criminals.” As Deener (2017:374) suggests in a recent piece, “Rather than seeing ambiguity [i.e. ambivalence] as something sociologists should avoid or need to overcome... ambiguity can be used as an asset in the development of cases.” Thus, throughout my writing, I always tried to convey my complex thoughts and feelings. Perhaps the best lyricists are themselves conflicted. Like the approach itself, they don’t just present ambivalent situations, they themselves are ambivalent, “hard to pin down.”

Common Language and Informality

Abbott writes, “Wordsworth wanted lyric to be expressed in common language. So, too, do we now say sociology should be written in simple terms, not in jargon” (2007a:72). I took this informal approach in my essays. Like most qualitative approaches, I tried to insert dialog between Detroiters and me which was not polished up, interpreted, or second-hand, but raw, real, and direct. I also sought to use the kind of language and thinking I would have used then, which was pre-sociological.⁶⁵

Another way of capturing the informal tone of the lyric was to be vulnerable and honest with the reader, revealing my personal emotional reality, fears, and anxieties. Self-disclosure adds to the common subjectivity of the text and helps to set up a relationship with the reader who

⁶⁵ This language of the lifeworld (Habermas 1984) may actually become harder to access the more one becomes devoted to the scientific or intellectual sphere (Weber 1958).

hopefully reciprocates and realizes their own emotional nature. Informality and non-impersonality has the ability to break down barriers between people, whether it be between the writer and the reader themselves, or between disciplines, who's specialized technical language is understandable only to those trained in that discipline.

Time and Context

The structure of my lyrical vignettes was intentionally non-linear. They jumped around in time. Chronological order doesn't matter in the way it does in narrative writing. This is because the focus was the emotional mosaic of my experiences, not the cause and effect relationship of events. In lyricism, memory is more important than chronology. For some of the experiences, I just remembered *that* they happened, not exactly *when* they happened. I could have looked throughout my journals to pinpoint exact dates, but that would have been beyond the point. The point was to create a collaged emotional effect, which any independent vignette could add to.

The lyric gives the author the freedom and ability to jump wherever they want in time. Though sometimes, in order to give the jump context, the writer first has a literary obligation to provide such context, which a narrative (starting from the beginning) builds into itself by nature. I did this in individual fragments, such as in the vignette of the house fire when I told about how common fires were, and in the whole paper, as I did with discussing my childhood fears, which gave the context for the abnormal fear of violence or "craziness"—as I considered it—I both dreaded and experienced in Detroit.

Generalization of the Particular

With the lyric, the goal is to allow the reader to decide for him or herself whether there is a generalization to be made, a truth to be discovered. Lopate (1995:x1) writes how, "The concrete details of personal experience earn the generalization (often an aphorism), and the generalization

sends the author [and reader] back for more particulars.” Now, we must be careful here, like we discussed in chapter 1, to not mix “‘large’ and ‘small’ things” (Abbott 2007a:80). The move from the micro to the macro (and back) can quickly become a narrative one. The difference is in the type of movement, or the type of generalization, that the lyric is bringing about.

Abbott (2007a:94) describes how in encountering other’s “mutability and particularity, we see our own.” This is because the chasm between readers and subjects is crossed by “moral recognition of the common humanity we share with those we read about.” This is the chasm that I crossed upon hearing about L-dog’s son who died in the war. It left me motionless and speechless, because when I saw him in a moment of sincerity and unveiled suffering, it stopped me from seeing him as mere entertainment. I stopped seeing him as part of the story I had constructed about Detroit and Detroiters like him. Abbott says that this “tense yoking of the vertigo of indexical difference with the comfort of human sympathy” is “the central emotion aroused by lyrical sociology” (95).

Lessons Learned: Reading

I also had valuable experiences from interacting with others who read my vignettes and from reading the vignettes myself, which yielded further insights into the challenges and opportunities of the lyrical approach.

With Others

Throughout the various stages this thesis has gone through, I had the opportunity from time to time to share my vignettes with professors, friends, strangers, and even people from Detroit. On the scholarly level, I noticed a disconnect for some between the experience of the lyric and the subsequent evaluation of it. There were certain people (professors and graduate students both within and outside the discipline of sociology) who would generally enjoy reading

of my experiences in Detroit—and resonate with them, as intended, on an emotional level—but afterwards, they would question their sociological value.⁶⁶ Abbott tells how reviewers of Malinowski's *Argonauts of the Western Pacific* and E. P. Thompson's *The Making of the English Working Class*—both of which he identifies as lyrical—had similar reactions to the readers I mention. He says of some of the reviewers, that they “appreciated [the books] extraordinary passion and vividness but thought they saw an insufficiently coherent narrative or argument. . . . Readers are thus often unwilling to read the lyrical text as anything but a failed narrative” (2007a:95). This is likewise what happened with my vignettes and, to a large extent, is what the other sections of the thesis attempt to address (especially chapters 1-3)—the value of such a non-narrative mode of comprehension.

Another experience I had when sharing my vignettes with people came from presenting at a poster session. During this, strangers and colleagues (those who knew me but not my work) walked around the session room and had the chance to get an elevator version of different people's current research. My poster was organized very much like my paper: introducing lyrical sociology, telling what it is (i.e. the required stance and mechanics), then a sample vignette, and ending with a brief conclusion. When people started at the top left with the theory, their eyes would start to glaze over, and their faces would become evidently disinterested before they even got to the vignettes, if they got to them at all. (The same thing happened when I would describe my poster out loud as well). Then, I switched my approach.

When people now came to my poster, I would tell them to read the vignette first (the one about the house fire). I would watch them and could tell where they were at in it by their audible

⁶⁶ What I'm saying is that these were not people who “criticize[ed] the lens after looking *at* it instead of *through* it” (Lewis 1961:35). They were people who read the vignettes and enjoyed them but would then immediately revert to narrative ways of thinking, almost unwittingly.

and visual cues (laughing at my unsuccessful Spanish joke and grinning in disbelief about the guy who continued mowing his lawn behind the burning house). After they finished, I could explain to them what just happened, how the way in which I wrote up the story of the house fire vignette evoked feelings in them and gave a different understanding of an instance in Detroit that other sociological approaches were less equipped to capture and transmit. They were much more engaged in these discussions after they had an experience with an example of lyrical sociology than when they just read about it in the abstract.

The last insight I gained from having other people read my vignettes occurred when I shared my paper with a contact from Detroit. The individual, who at one point was deeply involved in one of South West Detroit's most prominent gangs, is not featured in any of the current vignettes (though in the draft stages I had actually written one about him). However, he enjoyed reading about my different experiences with other people and situations and remarked that, although he usually didn't like to read, he read the whole piece in one sitting. For him, it sparked memories of certain streets and places he used to walk and visit in Detroit (he has since moved out of the city). He told me about these specific instances that my piece brought to his mind in great detail, almost lyrical detail. The interesting point here then was that by reading of my experiences, it opened him up to his own.

My own

My own experiences reading and rereading my vignettes have also varied throughout the numerous stages of constructing them. As well, my experience as a reader is surely different than others because the experiences being conveyed are/were my own. Yet, it is interesting how I resonate with different vignettes at different times, as if sometimes I can't empathize with the writer who I once was and other times I understand myself and my experiences in such new

ways that it's as if I am only now finally coming to see who I always was.⁶⁷ This makes the reading experience more like if I was actually reading someone else's stories. The person I was when I wrote them and the person I am when I am reading them are two different people. Therefore, similar reader-writer dynamics are still at play even when I am/was both writer and reader.

One interesting but, to a large extent, unfortunate thing that has happened since I have written about my experiences in Detroit—and have subsequently read, edited, and re-written them many times—is that many of my raw memories have been replaced by the words I have finally settled on to relate these experiences. When I think back to the time I live in Detroit, for the memories I have written about, I actually think now to the text itself rather than to the memories that gave rise to the text. Therefore, my experience has become one-step removed and my real memories blurred with my constructed memories, which are always a necessary reduction.

From the writer's point of view, this is a sacrifice or a gift. But, from the reader's, it is a welcome offering. For the reader of another person's experiences, words are all they have. Because of this, the real and the imagined are not blurred because the imagined is the real, for them, and is all there is. The real is imagined through the words such that knowledge of particular events can be retained like muscle-memory in the same way that real memories are embedded in the mind through processes of subjective experience. As Attridge (2017:158) writes of poetry:

⁶⁷ Iser (1972:285) writes, "On a second reading familiar occurrences now tend to appear in a new light and seem to be at times corrected, at times enriched." This is why reflection is valuable as a writer, which, in one form of it, literally entails reading what you write. Rereading your own work is a reflexive enterprise, yet, though reflective as it may be, the text doesn't necessarily "reflect" in the same way every time. The text, and you, evolve simultaneously, making the rereading process refining to both.

What I carry away from my reading of the poem is not primarily an idea or an image, or a series of ideas and images, but a memory of this specific sequence of words, a memory suffused by the qualities of my experience of them—and, paradoxical as it may sound, this memory may remain even when I have forgotten the words. As long as I retain a memory of the “form” of the words, of how they happened, and happened to me, in a certain order, and with certain effects, I retain something of the poem.

Thus, reading works of poetry, literature, or lyrical sociology can have lingering effects on readers in the same way that real experience does—through memories, whether conscious or not.

The last lesson I learned from reading and rereading my vignettes is that lyrical (or literary) experience cannot be forced. I remember at one point in the research and writing process ambitiously seeking to experiment with my own vignettes to see what sort of value I could get from them by reading them over and over again. As a believer in the principle of rereading, I thought that I could extract an infinite amount of new knowledge if I persistently returned to the text with an ever-examining eye. However, despite (or because of) these grand intentions, I ended up just making myself frustrated. All of the connections I was drawing were narrative ones, and speculative to say the least. I wasn't feeling anything like I had during previous readings. I was simply trying too hard. Once I realized this though, I was able to “relax into lyricism” (Abbott 2007a:75) and the appropriate feelings, insights, and intuitions started again to flow.⁶⁸

⁶⁸ Attridge (2017:180) again hits the nail on the head: “The ethics of literary reading is less a matter of the exercise of a certain kind of effort on each reading—though it is that (including the effort of disencumbering the reading self)—than a disposition, a habit, a way of being in the world of words.”

CONCLUSION

In this paper, I have sought to situate and expound upon the theory of the lyric as well as construct, and document, for the first time, a lyrical sociology from the ground up in a way congruent with the principles of Abbott's innovative 2007 piece. Unlike the narratives of traditional social science, my aim was not at explanation, but at the emotional center of experience. From implementing the lyrical stance and mechanics, I have presented a series of vignettes that give the reader a sense of the emotional reality of the inner-city, as experienced by me—the experiencer—who is just as real a person as the people and situations I wrote about. By not denying my own subjectivity, while at the same time being careful not to impose it, I hope to have demonstrated the value of the lyric in helping readers to witness social phenomena in a more inclusive way. And, by evoking the reader's own responses of humane sympathy, to see the world in “different ways” and through “different lenses” (Abbott 2007a:76), it is, as Abbott envisions, “our best hope for a humanist sociology, one that can be profoundly moral without being political” (96).

Regarding the future of lyrical sociology, one bold approach would be to take it in the direction of the ethical as I have suggested. This could build off other work Abbott has recently done on the need for a normative subdiscipline in the field of sociology (Abbott 2018). The ethical, as I have conceived it—from a Levinasian perspective—would differ somewhat from the blend of canonical and legalistic normative approaches he recommends. But, even taking up a not so perfect conception of the normative would still be a good start. In the even further future, perhaps, the field of sociology could see its own “double turn” as the field of literature and moral philosophy has seen—where there was a “‘turn to ethics’ in literary studies and, conversely, a ‘turn to literature’ in (moral) philosophy” (Eskin 2004:557). The sociological equivalent, though,

would be a turn to lyrical sociology (Abbott 2007a) in normative inquiry (Abbott 2018) and a turn to ethics (the present piece) in lyrical sociology.

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TABLES

Table 1: Criteria for Lyrical Sociology

	Emotionally Engaged	Subjectively Located	Temporally Present	Example(s)*
1	Yes	Yes	Yes	Zorbaugh, Malinowski, Bell, Christakis, Thompson
2	Yes	No	Yes	
3	No	Yes	Yes	
4	No	No	Yes	Fleck
5	Yes	Yes	No	Verdery, Burawoy
6	Yes	No	No	Massey and Denton
7	No	Yes	No	Riesman, Leach
8	No	No	No	Snook

**Note: These are all tentative placements since Abbott doesn't specify whether each work meets all the conditions or not. I also note that rows 5 and 6 of those answering in the affirmative to the "engaged emotionally" condition, are (mostly) all emotionally engaged, to different degrees, in non-lyrical ways.*

FIGURES

Figure 1: Narrative vs. Lyrical

