

# From '0', the Logic of Imagination, to 'Ground Zero', the Imagination of Logic: The Enigmas of Wallace Stevens' 'Blackbird' and Current US Action

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## **Abstract**

Wallace Stevens has signified 'the logic of imagination' in his "Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Blackbird" with the image of the blackbird that is the focal point of many debates. Stevens, the Post-Modern theorist, who rejects the logic derived from universal norms and based on pure and absolute reason, substitutes the power of imagination for it. For him, imagination recreates the objective world by synthesizing it. When perceived, the object, having been nullified, is reinterpreted and attributed meaning through the mechanism of imagination. By this way, man brings order and meaning to the disordered and chaotic universe with the ideas he develops. Therefore, imagination is a plane of reality whereby the object is present through concrete perception and absent through abstract perception. This Post-Modern perception resonates with the angle of perception that is claimed by the US following the incident of 'the ground zero' when the towers of the World Trade Center were demolished. In line with this, the twin towers being both present in minds as abstraction and absent as concrete have become a reference point in American National imagination. Taking a leap onward from this point, US has seemed to declare war on international terror. However, in this study, it is put forward that America does not take action with the logic of imagination that is a Post-Modern approach, but with the power of imagination of the US Empire that is a Post-Post-Modern approach. According to this, US international policy makers that accept the references of the Nation State America as absolute and permanent reality have created the concept of virtual reality to fill in the void that has appeared after the towers with democracy, equality, life, liberty, pursuit of happiness, American ego, the Church built on the rock and the

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philosophical logic of the western mind, the composition of virtual myth. This approach is the power of 'the imagination of logic.'

**Key words:** Zero, ground zero, universal norms, absolute permanency, logic, power of imagination, Post-Modern warfare, Post-Post-Modern, virtual reality.

## Özet

Wallace Stevens, "Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Blackbird" başlıklı şiirinde yarattığı ve pek çok tartışmanın odak noktası olan 'kara karga' imgesi ile 'hayal gücünün mantığını' betimlemiştir. Evrensel normlara dayalı, salt akılcı ve değişmez mantığı kabul etmeyen Post-Modernist kuramcı Stevens, bunun yerine hayal gücünü koymaktadır. Ona göre, hayal, nesnel dünyayı sentezleyerek yeniden yaratır. Algılandığında, nesnel varlık sıfırlanarak hayal mekanizmasıyla yeniden yorumlanır, anlamlaştırılır. Böylece, insan hayal gücüyle anlamsız, düzensiz ve kaotik evrene geliştirdiği fikirler bağlamında bir düzen ve anlam getirir. Şu halde, hayal, nesnenin hem somut bir algılamaya ile var olduğu hem de soyutlanarak yok olduğu bir gerçeklik düzlemidir. Bu Post-Modern algılama, 'sıfır noktası' olarak adlandırılan Dünya Ticaret Merkezi kulelerinin terror saldırısıyla yerle bir edildiği olayla birlikte Amerika Birleşik Devletleri'nin benimsediği bir bakış açısıyla da örtüşmektedir. Buna göre, hem zihinlerde soyut olarak var olan hem de nesnel bir gerçeklik olarak yok olan ikiz kuleler, Amerikan ulusal hayal gücünde bir referans noktası olmuştur. Bu noktadan hareketle Amerika uluslararası teröre savaş açmış gibi görünmektedir. Ancak, bu çalışmada, Amerika'nın, post-Modern bir yaklaşım olan hayal gücünün mantığıyla değil, Post-Post-Modern bir yaklaşım ile, Amerikan İmparatorluğu'nun hayal gücü ile hareket ettiği öne sürülmektedir. Buna göre, Ulus Devlet A.B.D.'nin referanslarını mutlak ve değişmez gerçeklik olarak kabul eden dış siyaset odakları, ikiz kulelerden geriye kalan boşluğu demokrasi, eşitlik, yaşam hakkı, bağımsızlık, mutluluk arayışı hakkı, Amerikan egosu ile ve 'kayanın üzerine inşa edilen Kilise' kriterleriyle sanal bir gerçeklik mitosunu yaratarak doldurmuştur. Bu yaklaşım, mantığın hayal gücüdür.

**Anahtar kelimeler:** Sıfır, sıfır noktası, evrensel normlar, mutlak değişmezlik, mantık, hayal gücü, Post-modern savaş, Post-post-modern, sanal gerçeklik.

The difficulty of interpreting Wallace Stevens' "Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Blackbird"<sup>1</sup> arises at the point where the reader seeks to find a logical answer to the nature of the blackbird. The blackbird dominates the entire poem of thirteen stanzas. Its function, rather than its nature, has to be understood as a unifying motif and presence. Since it is a common denominator, it may be interpreted- which is the easiest way out- as metaphysical conceit.<sup>2</sup> Or one may consort to a labyrinthine turmoil of the mind to decipher it. As Robert Frost has put it, "I have taken the less traveled by [of two roads that diverged in a yellow wood], / And that has made all the difference."<sup>3</sup> After repudiating all emotional and sentimental possibilities, the blackbird emerges as a constant element

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1 See the entire poem at *End Notes*.

2 Metaphysical conceit, which is an unusual, far-fetched, central and extended metaphor generated from a solid and physical fact, runs all through the poem and alludes to some emotional or philosophical yearning.

3 Robert Frost, "The Road Not Taken"

that establishes ‘a central logic’, suggestive of a central vortex or axis around which possibilities of correlations among events and concepts must be formed. Yet, it signifying a central logic does not mean that Stevens approves of it. Quite the contrary, the idea of the central logic is Stevens’ sarcastic outlook upon normatively oriented orthodox and dogmatic mind. He not only refutes the validity and reliability of such a faith in central logic by nullifying it always, but also Hegelian Dialectic<sup>4</sup>, a false assumption which does not take us to anywhere, let alone to the ideal, where no antitheses can be produced.

### I. Deciphering the Function of ‘The Blackbird’ as an Enigma

The central logic in the case of Stevens’ poetry establishes itself as a must for any conventionally oriented mind. Such a mind is instigated by logos which is a normative thought pattern based on a system of knowledge derived from reason. The knowledge is systematized in the way that there is a divine and universal first cause. Working in line with this systematic way of establishing logical arguments, logo-centric pattern of thought leads one to seek for correlations as of binary oppositions, such as right and wrong, moral and immoral, god and man, white and black, man and woman, reality and illusion, good and evil, essence and form. Since in each binary opposition the first term is dominant over the second term, logo-centric approach becomes biased against each second term, that is, right, moral, god, white, man, reality, good and essence are always considered as universally accepted clichés signifying what is divine and universally right and true; whereas, wrong, immoral, man, black, woman, illusion, evil and form are biased as signifiers of what is wrong. Therefore, each second signifies what is impure and distinct from the logic of the universal first cause, the rational principle, or the logic of god. Wallace Stevens rejects this first cause; neither does he consort to classical logos, rejecting both and the pattern of conventional reasoning. Rather, he accepts the multitudinous possibilities of creations of imagination when he says,

When the blackbird flew out of sight,  
It marked the edge  
Of one of many circles.

Because of the normatively oriented metaphysical and orthodox teaching, the reader of Wallace Stevens’ “Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Blackbird” is continuously frustrated as Stevens’ poem becomes an emblem of Deconstructionist discourse.<sup>5</sup> Ironically, he

4 Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (1770-1831): *The Hegelian Dialectic*

5 Once one realizes that what seems to be an event is really a construct of a quasi-linguistic system, then one is in a position to undo the construct or to recognize that the construct, by its very nature, has already undone, dismantled, or deconstructed itself – with far-reaching implications. Deconstruction affords a perspective from which any number of modern movements can be seen as parts of a generalized shift from a logo-centric metaphysics of presence to a new recognition of the play of differences among

first constructs binary oppositions between the white (snowy) and black (blackbird) (I); the rigid stillness (twenty snowy mountains) and movement (the only moving thing was the eye of the blackbird); perception in depth (three dimensional) and two dimensional perception (II); action and inertia (III); articulation and silence (V); solid facts- the real and philosophical-ideal issues that urge imagination and establish the mood (VI, VII); isolation, intellectual or poetic quarantine and seclusion, and gregariousness (VIII); energy of life and fear of death (XIII). The binary oppositions are deliberately created by the poet. He creates them so as to bait the biased traditionally oriented minds. This effort on behalf of the poet is to construct what readers usually demand to hear from Stevens' persona. Just when his readers are content with binary oppositions and get ready for taking a biased stand against any of the opposite suggestions, the poet, then, offers 'oneness' of binary oppositions: "The two are one. / They are a plural, a right and left, a pair"<sup>6</sup>. After deconstructing what has already been constructed as of binary oppositions, he lets the blackbird as a central object-not to signify the central logic-get situated at the heart of each stanza, thus attracting and drenching the entire selective attention of the reader: the rest, other than the blackbird, gets blurred and obscure. When any one of the binary juxtapositions begins to dominate over the other, the blackbird intrudes<sup>7</sup> and destroys the intention of the reader to seek for the Logos. Therefore, the blackbird is refined from all, becoming possibilities of suggestion and signification.

"Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Blackbird" seems to reveal the blackbird as an object of art, and locates it at the heart of the poem to signify "the indecipherable cause of the mood which is man's response to nature, ... the real, ... the principle of our relation to the universe, ... our compulsions, ... our despair at death, ... our line of vision, ... our line of thought, ... it is the determining focus of our relation." (Vendler, 76-77) Such aesthetic and philosophical overtones attributed to the nature of the blackbird, again, become traps that readers and critics are more than willing to fall in unless they are equated with the logic of imagination. The blackbird with its unpleasant and ugly outlook, being solid and real, as a blackbird is expected to be, is sure to depict a new form of aesthetical understanding, and it can be taken as a parody of the Romantic imagination that has created "the nightingale"<sup>8</sup>. Or, it can be abstracted into a philosophical understanding.

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relations (Refer to Jacques Derrida and Ferdinand de Saussure) Deconstructionism rejects the first cause or logic because everything breeds what comes after itself. Therefore, nothing is pure, but a blend of culture, discourse, condition and text that form it. Similarly, nothing can be regarded as purely real or universal, or nothing is fictitious. (Holman, 129)

6 From "Notes Towards a Supreme Fiction", Wallace Stevens

7 A Postmodern parody of "The Raven" by Edgar Allan Poe where the raven, the ebony bird that has perched and sat, unmoving, has come from the land of the dead to haunt (disturb) the persona.

8 Antithesis of Poe's raven. John Keats refers to nightingale as, "Thou wast not born for death, immortal Bird!" in "Ode to a Nightingale"

Yet, Wallace Stevens is against both approaches as he openly declares his idea on both issues:

The imagination creates nothing. We are able to romanticize and to give blue jays fifteen toes, but if there was no such thing as a bird, we could not create it...  
Dreams are hash. (Stevens 1966: 46)

Stevens does not consort to creating a romanticized image of nature while referring to imagination because it is “romantic falsification” which is self-deception (Vendler 1981:19). “Dreams are hash” is a statement that highlights Stevens’ outlook upon a world which is dominated by uncertainty, disorder and chaos. Dream is an outward projection of the human will to impose order upon disorder. Now that man has lost those happier days of the past when he used to have strong faith in God, His supreme logic, the first cause or the first idea that was the essential truth, he helplessly seeks for a rationale out of the objects of nature or the objects of the physical world to find some transcendent rationale.<sup>9</sup> He then transforms them into something unreal. The effort in establishing, a rationale is for the quest of a lost god, an absolute purpose, or meaning, together with an absolute logic that would all solve the complexity of a disordered universe. Expectancy for absolute order remains a spiritual yearning, an emptiness that craves to be filled in. It is human imagination or dream that man generates in order to fill in the emptiness. He desires to cling to the objects as representing the truth or the solid fact, but as everything is transformative and nothing is permanently unchanging, he desperately turns to himself as the only truth he can perceive. Vendler (19) has reached at the same conclusion that for Stevens, “That which one believes is the truth,” thus continuing with her findings that “the truth is not a transcendence but merely oneself”, a synthesis which is explicitly articulated by Stevens:

The truth is that a man’s sense of the world dictates his subjects to him and that this sense is derived from his personality, his temperament, over which he has little control and possibly none, except superficially. (Vendler, 7)

Thus the poet as the subject focuses on the object and transforms it in line with his idea of it, so that it signifies logic in the universe which imagination puts into order. Since it is the new world order that is established by the poet, it is identical with him, being his self-reflexive expression. Thus the subject and the object become identically one, both being there as permanently present, yet not being there as permanently absent. Their oneness establishes only one reality which is an abstract image or an idea that appears

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9 Transcendental philosophy as constructed by Ralph Waldo Emerson established the trinity of God, man and nature, the union of which is ‘the over-soul’. The over-soul is identical with perfection and universal, essential truth. Transcendentalism was the last philosophy which led the human spirit to grasp ideal perfection beyond physical limitations.

in the mind of the poet. The idea of man remains as the only solid fact which is mere imagination. Nothing exists outside imagination, as imagination is the all-embracing faculty that transforms all what have been perceived; or all which are in imagination have associations with reality, the idea. The idea establishes one's sense of the world, the order one seeks for. The idea is completely subjective and it is there to fill in the vacuum due to a lack of certainty for universal order. Now that the divine logic of god, his sense of the universe and his universal order cannot be taken as ultimate reference points man derives meaning and his sense of order out of his perceptions using his imagination as central logic and reality. This is what Vendler (136) depicts as "the journey of imagination into nature or as nature's discovery of space in the imagination." In neither of the cases, nature signifies an ultimate reference point on which man bases his perception of reality and develops his faith in an absolute and universal reality. It is rather the human imagination that defines all, combining and transforming "The imagined and the real/Thought and the truth/.../All confusion solved."<sup>10</sup> This post modern understanding leads man to the acceptance of his existence as mere fiction, which is the modified and transformed form of the things and associations.<sup>11</sup> Since the entire existence is depicted through the logic of imagination, nothing is permanent, unchanging or absolute, and therefore, can be taken as representing central logic, essential truth or a corner stone on which an argument can be initiated. All absolutes, in the name of laws, norms or ethical values, are dumped by Wallace Stevens.

### **Mathematical Verification of 'Imagination' as Central Logic**

Through mathematical approach, which is universally accepted as the indisputable discourse of scientifically verifiable signifier of logic, the abovementioned findings can be put more straightforwardly. To begin with, the nature of the blackbird is axiomatic, that is, the blackbird is "**aphorism** whose truth is held to be self-evident. In logic an axiom is a premise accepted as true without the need of demonstration and is used in building an argument." (Holman, 42) Therefore, the blackbird is there in the poem as a predominant solid fact that is meant to initiate an argument. Without the blackbird, there is no possible argument to be initiated. Since the existence of the blackbird cannot be ignored, it becomes a focal point of attraction that forces the readers' line of thought or vision. It establishes the readers' relation with the universe and his idea of it where the blackbird is. At this point, the reader automatically accepts the blackbird as the only

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10 "The Man With the Blue Guitar", Wallace Stevens

11 The recurring themes of these debates are between essentialism and anti-foundationalism, universalism and relativism, where enlightenment thinking is seen to represent the former and postmodernism the latter. This is why theorists as diverse as Nietzsche, Lacan, Foucault, Derrida, and Butler have been labeled "postmodern", not because they formed a historical intellectual grouping but because they are seen by their critics to reject the possibility of universal, normative and ethical judgments. See Wikipedia, [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Criticism\\_of\\_postmodernism](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Criticism_of_postmodernism)

solid fact, and a law that cannot be questioned. The blackbird as an axiom, from this perspective, is anything that is the product of imagination that initiates an argument.

The reason as to why axioms should be taken as the bases for literary discussions is that they initiate the functioning of logic (imagination) that transforms reality. The logic must be forced in order that it may generate newer correlations, combinations, intersections, and probabilities. The logic sets certain equations by using the elements in the poem. Each equation is like the simple axiom which goes as  $2+2=4$ ,  $6+2=4$ ,  $2 \times 2=4$ ,  $8/2=4$ , etc. In each of the axiomatic equations which are the products of mere imagination<sup>12</sup>, there are three basic components. In other words, the essential logic of imagination calls for three basic units for the composition of one basic equation. When the above equations are examined, it can be observed that '4' is obtained. Therefore, 4 is the result that can be obtained through various combinations of components. These combinations are transformed correlations which reveal the number '4' as a constant value. In the case of the poem, if every stanza is taken for an equation, each is equal to the blackbird, which signifies the constant value. Let's take two stanzas from the poem to demonstrate the logic: From stanza II, Stevens implies the necessity for three basic units for any equation to be set,

I was of three minds,  
Like a tree  
In which there are three blackbirds.

It can be put forward that any logical equation is of three components. These components in stanza IV are a man, a woman and a blackbird.

A man and a woman  
Are one.  
A man and a woman and a blackbird  
Are one.

Out of the first correlation in the above quotation, 'a man' and 'a woman' can be identified as the idea of man, the mental picture of unity and oneness. If 'oneness' is signified by a mathematical symbol '1', then there emerges a mathematical equation for the first correlation as:

Man+Woman = 1

Similarly, if another equation is to be derived from the second correlation from the above quotation, the mathematical equation can be depicted as:

<sup>12</sup> All numbers, and, therefore, equations are axiomatic and products of scientific logic which is the product of mere imagination. For instance, there is no number as "2" because  $1.999\dots$  goes to  $+\infty$  (the infinity). Moreover, because of the same fact, there is no '1' neither there is '9'. (Akin, 137)

Man+Woman+Blackbird =1

Since both equations are equal to 1, the following equation can be obtained

Man+Woman = Man+Woman+Blackbird

From this equation, the Blackbird is equal to

Man –Man+Woman –Woman=Blackbird

0=Blackbird

“0” has no numerical value, but it cannot be ignored, because it is there. It also signifies what is not there. Therefore, ‘0’ is different from other numbers because it signifies both a presence and absence. It signifies the idea of man, or his essential logic, which is his imagination. Imagination can be explained by another mathematical axiom: “The set having no elements is called the empty set or the null set and is designated by the symbol  $\emptyset$ . We now assert that  $\emptyset \subseteq A$ <sup>13</sup> for any set A.” (Allen, 2) Therefore, Blackbird, as a null set is the proper subset of every given set, i.e., it is in every set, but it does not yield any of the elements of any given set.

Since “0” signifies the initial natural number, the blackbird stands for the initial step for the functioning of logic, which is imagination. In each stanza, the blackbird appears as the constant reminder of this initial step, or “the elementary logic” that the reader must take and consider when establishing logical correlations and setting “language, and the careful statement of basic incidence relationships through the use of appropriate symbolism.” (Allen, ix) For Wallace Stevens, the language is poetry and the appropriate symbol is the blackbird<sup>14</sup>, which is seemingly irrelevant to the context of the poem; yet it serves his purpose in urging the reader to initiate logical questioning about what seems illogical. Therefore, the correlation is in the mind of the beholder, as long as he lets “a new intelligence prevail” and hinders the “stale intelligence of the past.” (McMichael, 1654) The blackbird, the null element “0”, or the elementary logic establishes the poem, “the poem of the act of the mind.”<sup>15</sup> (McMichael, 1667)

## II. Post-Modern Imperialism

From Wallace Stevens’ post-modern depiction of logic of imagination, the post-modern world today has come to a new understanding and interpretation of the essential logic, which is virtually created for securing benefits and privileges of first world states in the global arena. This has been the logic on which the Empire is established.

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13 The sign ‘ $\subseteq$ ’ is ‘proper subset of’

14 It may also be  $\mathbf{0}$  or  $\emptyset$ , as well.

15 From “Of Modern Poetry” by Wallace Stevens.

The term “Post-Modern” refers to a wide range of dynamics that has emerged either as a reaction or in continuation of the “modern” period that extended from the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century to 1945. The year marks the detonation of two consecutive atomic bombs in Hiroshima and Nagasaki, the incidents marked historically as “Ground Zero.”<sup>16</sup> These two incidents terminated the modern period during which man witnessed the foundation of “nation states.” The chaos of atomic detonations stimulated the so-called “Cold War”, a period during which a bi-polarized and ancipital world frantically sought for stability and normalization in international relationships. Following the period by the end of the 1980’s, the concept of the nation state began to lose its significance; national ideals, identities and strategies were deconstructed, and the old, plutocratic “Empire” re-emerged as the result of “Post Modernity” and economic strategies of Globalization. It was evident that the world order had already been manipulated by the dynamics set forth by globalization, which caused an uneven distribution of powers. Although Holm and Sørensen (1995: 3) claim that there was no normatively new world order due to uneven globalization, they highlight that the role and the type of the state changed. The authors refer to one significant point: the reference point which states presume as fixed and absolute so as to execute their function has not changed at all.<sup>17</sup>

The new role and the type of the state is the updated version of the old Empire which reveals itself through Global capitalism, identical with American popular culture and consumerism. It is expansionist, and its basic strategy is colonization of under-developed and developing nation states. The lurking of the Empire from the past into the current global arena has become an epidemic fashion. Some nation states of the past claim current global recognition and sovereignty through concealed and masked identities defined by democracy, liberty and equality, yet they consort to strategies applied by imperialism. An example in this paper will be the USA, being a perfect prototype of such double identity. It, therefore, can be deduced that, in the Post-Modern world there are two Americas: one is the USA, the nation state, and the other, the US Empire whose power comes from big corporate bodies, magnates and capitalists backed up by socio-political and socio-economic powers such as the media, oil companies or weapon producers. The latter, the Empire, consorts to Post-Post-Modern strategies.

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16 “Ground zero” is a term which refers to the point where a bomb is detonated.

17 The authors: “Have uneven globalization and the end of the Cold War produced a new world order? Our answer is no. Certainly there is not a new world order in the normative sense of the term. An international order built on ideas of justice, freedom, and peace has served as reference point for much of the debate on the so-called new world order.” And they continue: “We see changed role for the state in the system. We see new forms of sovereignty and changes in the relationship between politics and economics. This leads us in the direction of searching for new and different types of states.” (3)

## **From the Nation State to the Empire**

Post-Post-Modern practices of the US Empire are based on exploitation of traditional and conventional US ideals such as those formulated by John Quincy Adams as “Monroe Doctrine” on December 2, 1823, and coined by John L. Sullivan in *The New York Times* in December, 1845 as “Manifest Destiny”, as well as “Open Door Policy (The Chinese Affair).” These being for all times national ideals and policies on which the nation state is founded, determine, as of now, the foreign or global policies of the US Empire. The Empire claims them as its right to initiate direct action against some ‘other’ potential evil or against what it determines as global terrorism. While the US Nation State acts with principles of conventional ethics, the Empire disguised as the nation state launches the imperial forces for global ambush, with a strategy that ignores ethics.

The Empire has financial power, multinational partners and crushing economic force, a paradigm known as globalization. As the strategies denoted by Post-Modern imperialistic warfare<sup>18</sup>, it makes use of “Ground Zero” to initiate its march over global overseas. Ground zero in this context is a term which refers to the point where the twin towers of the World Trade Center were demolished by Al-Qaeda attacks on September 11th. Like the devastated Hiroshima and Nagasaki, historically marked as the ground zero, the ruins of the World Trade Center have enabled the Empire to claim a virtual reference point or a corner stone to initiate a Post-Modern war for the invasion of the world. Exploiting the old ideals of the US Nation State, (such as democracy, equality, life, liberty and pursuit of happiness<sup>19</sup>, as well as “Monroe Doctrine”<sup>20</sup> and Manifest Destiny<sup>21</sup>) the imperial invasion continues in the Middle East [Iraq] and Afghanistan, aiming to hit subsequently Iran, North Korea and China.

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18 This is ... “post-modern warfare”: wars which do not unfold in linear form across space and time, but rather wars where the home front and battleground become blurred, wars without a clear beginning and end. See <http://kingsofwar.wordpress.com/2007/11/16/learning-post-modern-warfare>

19 As penned by Thomas Jefferson, “We hold these truths to be self-evident: That all men are created equal; that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights; that among these are life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness; that, to secure these rights, governments are instituted among men, driving their just powers from the consent of the governed ....” (Norton, 165)

20 The Monroe Doctrine was declared in a few paragraphs of President James Monroe’s seventh annual message to Congress on December 2, 1823. Monroe warned European countries not to interfere in the Western Hemisphere, stating “that the American continents . . . are henceforth not to be considered as subjects for future colonization by any European powers.” The Monroe Doctrine became a cornerstone of future US. foreign policy, and US becoming the police force of the world. See <http://www.loc.gov/rr/program/bib/ourdocs/Monroe.html>

21 Manifest Destiny, the original text reads, “iz the science ov going tew bust, or enny other place before you git there. There is such a thing az manifest destiny, but when it occurs it iz like the number ov rings on the rakoon’s tale, ov no great consequence only for ornament.” (Boorstin, 273)

## **The Nature and Backgrounds of Virtual Reference Point**

History, philosophy, theology, mythology and even positive sciences have sought a universal corner stone to initiate thinking since there is no universally permanent and stable reference point in the universe. The need for such a point is to initiate logical and credible comparisons as of relative issues, compiled under an inclusive term known as ‘knowledge.’ Knowledge embodies accurate and correct evaluations with respect to assumptions that are agreed on and derived from universally accepted axioms. However, the fact is, none of the assumptions is ultimately and absolutely correct, accurate and reliable, as they lack a universally permanent and fixed reference point.

Religious dogmas, for instance, take it for granted that there is the absolute, denoted as the infinite, which is a connotation for God, Allah, Tao or any creator yielding universal logic. Jesus Christ, as accounted in the Bible, refers to His spiritual church as the corner stone for Christian Faith. In Christ’s teaching, St.Peter and the word of God are offered as the reference point, “the Church built on the rock”, to initiate universally reliable knowledge.

15 Jesus said to them: But who do you say I am?

16 Simon Peter answered and said: You are Christ, the Son of the living God.

17 And Jesus answering, said to him: Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonas, because flesh and blood have not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven

18 And I say to you: That you are Peter; and upon this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. (Matthew 16: 15-18)

When, though, man begins to question the reliability of knowledge, or grasps that no knowledge is deduced from a universal reference point, philosophy emerges as “the great art of thinking, [that is] compressed down into its essentials as initiated by Ionian philosophers of the ancient Greece: thus the endless labyrinths of philosophical thinking and questions [are] eliminated or, at least, much simplified by basic assumptions” that may be located on a virtual universal reference point.

All philosophical thought stems from two viewpoints that clash with each other concerning the observation of natural phenomena. Initiated by Ionian school, the timeless debate between absolutism and fluxion opens up two distinct routes that perplex the universal human mind. Absolutism, identical with permanency and ‘being’, finds its opposite in fluxion, identical with change or ‘becoming’. While these two opposing views appear as thesis and anti-thesis against each other, they also converge into becoming the outcomes of a single idea as a synthesis. The single idea is a derivation of the basic and eternal curiosity about the unknown nature of some force, an element, some energy or, as modern religions suggest, a god to whom permanency and absolutism is attributed. While everything changes in the process of becoming, only this basic creator does not

change. In other words, the creator functions as an independent variable, which does not change but initiates, or causes for the change, whereas everything that is included within the universe is forced to change, thus becoming a dependent variable.<sup>22</sup>

22 (Akin 2007, 33-36) Yet, besides abstract thinking that locates god at the center of the universe, scientific curiosity, rational thinking and observation of natural phenomena were initiated in Ionia, Asia Minor. The first of the Ionian philosophers, Thales of Miletus, begins with examining nature where he observes a continuous flux, and postulated that there must be one single basic substance of which all the forms of being are made, so that the process of change is simply the transformation of the basic element. The first question Thales asked, then, is *What is the single element, the basic stuff, of which the universe is composed?* (Lamm, 45)

His main concern is about an unchanging single element that does not change but transform into newer elements, thus becoming. His assumption is that the basic element, that is water, has an endless potential of generating newer elements out of itself. It will not be a far-fetched idea that man's creation out of water as the fundamental source of the universe can be traced back to this original idea. While Thales questions the single element, Anaximandros gets preoccupied with the second step as to how this basic element, matter in his case, generates newer elements out of its own potential:

Anaximandros, came up with the second question of importance, *How do specific things emerge from the basic element?* (Lamm, 45)

One traces how the Ionian mind synthesizes its main concern about nature: find an independent variable, that is 'the basic element' and base every discussion on this postulate. Therefore, for them, there is definitely something in nature and universe that does not change, which is taken for granted. Although initially a concrete element, this gradually begins to assume a more abstract characteristic through the efforts of Herakleitos of Ephesus. Herakleitos attributes some universal capability to the so-called basic element as some authority that controls and regulates the process of change. This authority, or force, does not change because it is the change itself: he saw the universe not as one changing substance but rather as change itself.

Herakleitos raised a third important question, *What guides the process of change?*... [he] denied the possibility of existence, for he felt that the universe was in a process of flow, not fixed. His basic belief is that nothing is; every-thing is becoming." (Lamm, 46)

Herakleitos' philosophy is self-contradictory in that while the 'controlling force' stays permanent, it regulates repetitive or recurrent patterns in nature. In other words, it regulates the natural phenomena so that nothing changes (which is postulated by the theories and laws of positive sciences) as in the example of "an elm tree" producing only elm trees, but nothing else. Therefore, he does not question the nature of change but the nature of the controlling force, which is god, the permanent and the corner stone, in its popular expression.

Universal reality is associated with what is unchanging, or seems to be unchanging, because "The mind can equate permanence with reality and say that only the things, or thing, that are absolutely permanent and unchanging are real." (Lamm, 46) The human eye seeks for the permanent as a static reference point that controls the change in the universe so that everything can be evaluated as relative to that point. Unable to find one in the physical world, it associates permanency with an abstraction that is created as a superior power, a divine force or some god that signifies the static reference point. Therefore, the task of divine force is not easy because it has to resist the principle of change. So far, philosophy discusses three factors: that which does not change, the permanent, the static, the 'is', the god-like independent variable; that which changes, the flux, the 'becoming', the transforming; and, that which is ordered and systematized.

Another example from philosophy which questions the virtual corner stone onto which knowledge is to be built is with Socrates addressing Glaucon:

‘Then comes the moment, my dear Glaucon, when everything is at stake. And that is why it should be our first care to abandon all other forms of knowledge. And seek and study that which will show us how to perceive and find the man who will give us the knowledge and ability to tell a good life from a bad one and always choose the better course so far as we can.’ (Taylor, 452)

Socrates suggests abandoning ‘all other forms of knowledge’ as they do not and cannot yield any reliable information of universal validity and viability. His proposition for the virtual corner stone is “... the power of the dialectic; it treats assumptions not as principles, but as assumptions in the true sense. That is, as starting points and steps in ascent to something which involves no assumption and is the first principle (*archē*) of everything.” (Taylor, 511:b) For Socrates, assumption itself, when treated with dialectic, becomes the universal source of knowledge, thus, the first principle.

Like him, Aristotle puts forward that reliable knowledge be sought for as distinct from already available knowledge. He ushers the questioning mind to the source of genuine knowledge, derived with respect to a permanent reference point: the original idea, “the first mover or the first cause”. He believes that

Each individual tree, man, or other material thing was *matter* and that it also expressed an idea which he called *form*. The form had been given material existence by the *first mover or first cause*. (Welty, 252)

Aristotle and Plato’s quest for the universal corner stone has been a common denominator for universal curiosity. Both religious dogma and philosophical outlook are based on some faith that is a derivative of an assumption or aphorism proposed as an axiom. The axiom itself is a direct referent to despair of man in quest for a permanently established reference point. Such a point, though axiomatic and virtual, is a need for man to initiate his march onwards to any destiny he is questioning. It is a firm and solid ground to base his argument, to prove himself rightful and be satisfied with his correct path of action: the corner stone opens up means to justify the end.

### **Conclusion**

Wallace Stevens marks a radical change from the normative past in establishing a pattern of thought that is the ‘logic of imagination.’ With his synthesis of condition of man in a chaotic and disordered universe, he proposes that whatsoever has been learned from the universal cultural reservoir of man has been a compilation of myth. His understanding and diagnosis depict a futile effort in man in seeking out for a universal reference point onto which some universal logic be established as absolutely signifying

the universal truth. Having grasped that there is none, he existentially returns to himself, and explores the logic behind his imaginative capability as the only fact. He finds out that it is human imagination which embodies truth, filters it and transforms it. The idea of man is that outcome which is shaped by imagination, casting sense of order to the disordered universe. This notion of imagination is different from the romantic notion, which learns and finds the sense of order from and in nature.

Wallace Stevens' logic of imagination is set on a simple mathematical equation: imagination begins to function with the presence of an object which is recreated in the imaginative faculty. The object there is both absent as concrete (the thing) and present as abstract (the thing imagined). When the concrete and the abstract reflections cancel each other, there remains 'nothing' to be equaled with '0'. '0' is the point from which the process of imagination is set into functioning. The process does not consider any universally accepted norm as corner stone, but follows its own track of logic to fill in the void of meaninglessness.

When Stevens' post-modern approach is applied to 'ground zero' effect, it may, as it seems, be concluded that US followed a similar track of logic in taking the site of catastrophe as the point to initiate the process of imagination function with the absence of the twin towers of World Trade Center. It declared post-modern war without frontiers against global terrorism, and has been observed so far to be in quest of such frontiers as far as the logic of imagination takes it.

Yet, in fact, this is not the case. The US does not follow Stevens' logic of imagination, but rather the logic that the US Empire bases its argument. The US has shifted from the conventional state to the Empire, taking its logical references from the norms of the past of the US Nation State. During the process of what is to be called as Post-Post-Modern, the US Empire acts as if it has taken 'ground zero' as a reference point, but, in fact, it fills the gap and pit of detonations with a virtual reality (that is why, first there were two beams of projector lights that were thought to stand for the collapsed towers). The virtual reality enriched and made credible by the introduction of the corner stone referential product of the US Nation State. Taking national signifiers of life, liberty and pursuit of happiness, democracy and equality, as well as absolutism and permanency of the US ego, together with Church built on the rock and the philosophical logic of the western mind, the composition of virtual reality, the myth has been erected in the place of the towers. Now, it is time to return once again to Wallace Stevens: the logic of imagination is set free to cast order upon a chaotic world. From the Post-Modern poet who believed in 'the poem of the act of the mind' to the Post-Post-Modern Empire that believes in 'the war of the act of the essential logic', transformation of global economy continues.

END NOTE

*Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Blackbird* by Wallace Stevens

I

Among twenty snowy mountains,  
The only moving thing  
Was the eye of the blackbird.

II

I was of three minds,  
Like a tree  
In which there are three blackbirds.

III

The blackbird whirled in the autumn winds.  
It was a small part of the pantomime.

IV

A man and a woman  
Are one.  
A man and a woman and a blackbird  
Are one.

V

I do not know which to prefer,  
The beauty of inflections  
Or the beauty of innuendoes,  
The blackbird whistling  
Or just after.

VI

Icicles filled the long window  
With barbaric glass.  
The shadow of the blackbird  
Crossed it, to and fro.  
The mood  
Traced in the shadow  
An indecipherable cause.

VII

O thin men of Haddam,  
Why do you imagine golden birds?

Do you not see how the blackbird  
Walks around the feet  
Of the women about you?

VIII

I know noble accents  
And lucid, inescapable rhythms;  
But I know, too,  
That the blackbird is involved  
In what I know.

IX

When the blackbird flew out of sight,  
It marked the edge  
Of one of many circles.

X

At the sight of blackbirds  
Flying in a green light,  
Even the bawds of euphony  
Would cry out sharply.

XI

He rode over Connecticut  
In a glass coach.  
Once, a fear pierced him,  
In that he mistook  
The shadow of his equipage  
For blackbirds.

XII

The river is moving.  
The blackbird must be flying.

XIII

It was evening all afternoon.  
It was snowing  
And it was going to snow.  
The blackbird sat  
In the cedar-limbs.

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