A BOUQUET OF MOTION:
THE PRACTICAL SCIENCE OF CHARLES OLSON

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Abstract

Throughout his writing life, Charles Olson came back repeatedly to Heraclitus's statement that "man is estranged from that with which he is most familiar"--the "familiar," in this case, being the practice of ourselves in the world. In an effort to counter this estrangement, Olson sought to establish a discipline that would allow us to be reborn inside the world and, from there, to take up once again the formal possibilities and responsibilities of a human life. What he hoped to accomplish was, in fact, a science of human being.

Three of the operative terms of that science form the subject of this thesis. They are topos, tropos and typos. These terms are taken not as static categories of experience or knowledge but, rather, as tensors and vectors of the physis of Olson's "human universe." At the risk of hypostatizing, I suggest that these terms can initially be understood as, respectively, the coherence of space, the motions of the self, and the expression of the human. Viewed as a single concrescent action, these three terms are, in Olson's work, the flowering of the will to live--"will" being, for Olson, "the innate voluntarism of to live . . . the infinitive of being." No mere descriptive science, this "practical" science offers not only a way of understanding human process, but also a way of enacting it.

The operations of this science also form the basis of an aesthetic. An examination of the first volume of The Maximus

Poems reveals how those operations are translated into a poetic practice. In outlining the relation between the science and the poetics and poetry, I draw on Olson's lectures and essays from the period 1950-1968. In recognizing and in making use of the active dimensions of these three words, Olson has been able to restate the problem of man's estrangement in terms that actually map a way back into the world.

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Key to Abbreviations of Works Cited

Works by Charles Olson:

AP Additional Prose

HU Human Universe and Other Essays

LFO Letters for Origin

MP The Maximus Poems (Ed. George Butterick)

O Olson: The Journal of the Charles Olson Archives

PT "Poetry and Truth" in Muthologos II

"SD" "A Syllabary for a Dancer" in Maps No.4

SVH The Special View of History

TMP The Maximus Poems

Secondary Works:

BPF Between Past and Future - Hannah Arendt

Guide A Guide to the Maximus Poems of Charles Olson - George Butterick

Key A Key to Whitehead's Process and Reality - Ed. Donald Sherburne

Themis Themis: A Study of the Social Origins of Greek Religion - Jane Ellen Harrison

Introduction: A Science of Human Business

> Can one restate man in any way to repossess him of his dynamic? Charles Olson - Human Universe

In the Spring of 1953 at Black Mountain College, Charles Olson delivered a series of lectures that launched the Institute of the New Sciences of Man. Through his choice of epigraph for the Institute lectures, he pointed up his sense of what was at stake in these lectures. The quotation is from Heraclitus, and is one that came to be well-used by Olson throughout his writing life: "Man is estranged from that with which he is most familiar."[1] The lectures set out to challenge "the present state of knowledge" which had given rise to that estrangement, and to put forward some working terms for a new science that would re-admit the familiar:

> It is . . . [no] longer any gain to pose the Socrates injunction. Another one is in order if you are to begin to know: it is this one, "Admit yourself."
> And with that I turn scientist. (O 10, 71)

In a later lecture called "THE AREA, and the DISCIPLINE of, TOTALITY," Olson elaborates on his task:

> My present purpose is to attack estrangement, to suggest an alternative, to declare another field. I mean, a distinguishable and definable area of experience which has to be called totality, I suggest, simply because it is all of everything there is to know and to feel; and that to inhabit it and to act from and by it takes a discipline as describable and as useful as the area itself. (O 10, 95)

This discipline of totality stands in opposition to received

notions of scientific method, particularly the legacy of nineteenth-century positivism which viewed the function of science as primarily that of ascertaining facts and framing laws. Olson's criticisms of this reductive method can be heard in the following comments of Alfred North Whitehead (one of Olson's self-acknowledged companions in thought[2])--Whitehead is speaking here of one of the "general danger[s] inherent in modern science"[3]:

> [Science's] methodological procedure is exclusive and intolerant . . . It fixes attention on a definite group of abstractions, neglects everything else, and elicits every scrap of information and theory which is relevant to what it has retained.[4]

For Olson, this exclusivity was a desertion of the real, and this mode of abstracting was the only expression available to a "celibacy of the intellect which is divorced from the concrete contemplation of complete facts."[5] His own understanding of science had put down other roots:

> My joy of science is such, I am apt to forget most people have a double-trouble: they are either captive of its mechanisms (unable to see how Heisenberg restored science to man) or they are full of the old religion-art suspicion of it as the robber of the lustre of the day-dreams of man . . . (O 10, 21)

In the project to locate and to determine the inclusiveness of the familiar, Olson would be a scientist as Heisenberg was. In particular, it was Werner Heisenberg's discovery of the "Uncertainty Principle" which was of seminal importance to Olson, and to many other writers and thinkers of the twentieth century. In his research, as noted by Hannah Arendt:

> Heisenberg showed conclusively that there is a definite and final limit to the accuracy of all measurements obtainable by man-devised instruments for those "mysterious messengers from the real world." The uncertainty principle "asserts that there are certain pairs of quantities, like the position and velocity of a particle, that are related in such a way that determining one of them with increased precision necessarily entails determining the other one with reduced precision."[6]

For Olson, it must have seemed as if his own human processes were being named in the unceasing activity of "those mysterious messengers." In attempting to stop things in order to observe and to name, "you [fail] to get what you are after--so far as human beings go, [their] life."[7] Or, as Olson noted plainly, "[y]ou can't stop."[8] The fundamental error of descriptive science lies in its need to postulate a stoppage as a necessary condition of observation. In the background, one can hear Archimedes saying: "Give me a place to stand and I can move the world." In another context, in an essay called "The Conquest of Space and the Stature of Man," Hannah Arendt draws on Franz Kafka's comments on the Archimedean project in order to drive home the despair and the horror of cleaving to such arbitrary "givens" as the necessity of "objective" distance:

> Man, he said "found the Archimedean point but he used it against himself; it seems that he was permitted to find it only under this condition. (BPF 278)

Space travel was but the climactic movement of a trajectory of estrangement that had been earlier authorized by Descartes's questioning of the truth-revealing capacity of man's senses. Against this impulse which would move us "off the earth to the

universe"(O 10, 16), Olson perceived his project as one of restoring the familiar, of restoring the practice of man on the earth. In order to return to the world, one had to apprehend the dynamic character of life in a way that would not alienate the process itself: hence Olson's recognition that "[t]here's only one thing you can do about kinetic, re-enact it."[9]

In the third Institute lecture, Olson begins to define his use of such words as "kinetic," and to draw out further the consequences of the changed attentions of the recent physics where the focal point is

> . . . [n]ot any longer so much the constituents of things as their behaviors: eg. tropisms, any forces, whether innate to the organism or innate to its experience (thus forces from the outside on it) thus dynamics, especially that branch of it which is called kinetics (fr dynasthai = to be able) (even a unit of force in physics call[ed] dyne)
>
> The physics of motion has had some unrecognized or unadmitted human consequences . . .
>
> What I am saying is that the physical laws have come home to man--& decisively, & have deliberately involved him in discovering the physics of his own motions. (O 10, 17)

In trying to find a language equal to the demands of a new science of man, Olson recognized that "[n]o old vocabularies will do" (O 10, 19). Confronted with the need to begin again, he appropriates certain terms from physics and biology but notes that, for the moment, they too must remain tentative:

> And my reason is a careful one--that just exactly the animation of the human thing, the predicament that we are the living organism we ourselves are defining, trying to get at the truth of the motion of, makes necessary a complimentary [sic] principle to that uncertainty one of Werner Heisenberg's (as of natural science)--what I have else-

> where called the called-for principle of conjecture--that allowance that the practice of the science of man is too new to yet be sure our nouns for its states are adequate, the states themselves are so verbal! (O 10, 18)

Later on in the lecture, he notes that

> The statement or language problem is a devilish one, & . . . I take it it is the crucial one: we'll not be engaging ourselves with the totality of the problem of the phenomenon of man (& be moving toward a science of same) if we don't admit, from the start, that the language proper to same is yet to be discovered. (O 10, 19)

This search for a usable vocabulary always remained a crucial one for Olson, and throughout his writing, we find him testing new terms repeatedly, "pick[ing them] over as careful as strawberries, to get any old hulls of attachment off 'em, and to keep all rot out of the shortcake" (O 10, 19). In this thesis, I will be working with three such terms. Taken as an inseparable trinity, these terms set out the dynamics of the process and the science of human being: they are topos, tropos, and typos. From the time they first appear in the May, 1959 "Letter to Elaine Feinstein," they continue to figure prominently in Olson's thinking. This is not to say that the force of these terms was not felt in the earlier writing. The implicit and active presence of those terms is an instance of what Olson has described on another occasion as that "marvelous maneuver," which is "the writer's ability to get will ass-backwards--in that wonderful sense that one does what one knows before one knows what one does."[10] One is led by words as much as one leads them.

In the "Feinstein" letter, Olson suggests that they can be

taken simply as "Place(topos plus one's own bent plus what one can know" (HU 98). As well, "built in" to this trio "is the connection, in each of us, to Cosmos" (HU 98). It is there, in the connection to cosmos or world, in the achievement of the familiar, that these terms can be taken most usefully and most fruitfully. In this study, they will be taken not as monolithic markers of the boundaries of Olson's system of thought, but as constitutive moments of advance into a world of form. That is to say, I take these terms not as cornerstones of systematic thought but as the life of structure itself. Because these terms do not reveal themselves as discrete functions, the task of taking them up individually within the framework of an academic study can prove troublesome. Some overlaps will be unavoidable and, perhaps, even desirable. In any case, I offer the following comments by Olson as a reminder of their desired unity--the passage is taken from the 1968 lecture "Poetry and Truth":

> . . . there has been now for nine years, three words that have constantly forced me down, or kept me in, or possibly steadied me . . . I get in that marvelous problem of which, like an assortment of candies, which one I will take first. And I don't really care, because I can't get away from any of them.[11]

In the first chapter, then, I will take up the issue of topos. As other critics have noted (and I am essentially in agreement here), topos can be taken as space, place or ground.[12] Where I begin to differ with this correlation is in the angle of orientation. The issue goes back to Olson's uncertainty about the adequacy of our nouns for the many states and stances any of

us is. Because "the states themselves are so verbal," I suggest that topos be taken primarily as a principle of extension directed toward an active possibility of coherence. That is to say, place, space and ground are always in the process of being achieved. I will be examining how topos can be made and unmade. The first section of Chapter One will deal largely with the latter, particularly, the way in which the loss of an objectively given world and our concomitant descent into culturally sanctioned forms of subjectivism work together to erase the very image of topos from human memory. Living in a time when "distraction had become attractive to so many,"[13] Olson took on the work of resisting and of countering the growing dispersion of a language, a politics and an epistemology. His engagement with topos was ultimately a matter of laying bare for his fellow citizens the necessity of their connectedness, to each other and to the earth.

The second chapter will focus on tropos and, in particular, on how it reveals itself as a method of composition in the poem "Tyrian Businesses." Tropos derives from the Greek and means "turning." In relation to topos, it becomes the motive force of extension. Tropos points to the capacity and the desire to respond and to act. In the poetry, the need for maximal attention to the demand of world is as fundamental as the subsequent intention, or, method and direction of one's acting into the world. The subject-object relationship (which Olson would formulate as object-object) is conceived as one of

reciprocity:

> Responding to the environment, being able to answer it, is life itself. Whatever engenders a particular response of the organism in a specific situation . . . is the center of its life. This is what at a higher level of complexity, in human beings, is called the self. Conceived in this way, self is less a metaphysical abstract than the basic fact of life. Self also has no meaning "in itself," for without the environment to engage and test its capacity to respond, it would have no living existence.[14]

The notion of answerability suggested by this passage draws forward another dimension of tropos--that of the morality of our intentions:

> What man is (as against nature's) is his own ordering of his motion--and is there any truer way of stating the present beauty of morality? For the lovely human thing is the presence of the will in us to form (O 10, 17)

The will, in attending to its formal responsibilities, can never forget that there is a world to answer to. For Olson, the issue of imperatives--"There are these necessities / are bigger than we are"[15]--and our obedience to them, underlies all three of these terms.

In typos, the subject of the third chapter, the imperative is a will to expression. In Olson's Push, Sherman Paul suggests that typos can be taken as the act of "imprinting, [or,] registering one's force."[16] For Olson, one of the purposes of art is to "express the thing felt" (O 10, 58). "Don't be too quick to forget," Olson cautions,

> how much our reporting of what we do, say, hear, feel is the action of our love & life, at least is the act of it so far as we can get it anywhere where we can deal with it as a thing in existence & experienced--

> that expression, in whatever form, that desire: to communicate, is more than just something afterwards is itself so embedded in what we do, say, hear, see, feel that compulsion, to tell. (O 10, 64-65)

In suggesting that expression is "more than just something afterwards," Olson puts forward the idea of expression as ontological function; that is, "what is is, in the final analysis, what is said" (O 10, 65). Holding to this belief, Olson is led into a lifelong engagement with history and mythology, two forms of experience which he perceived as operating on the basis of "what is said." In The Special View of History, Olson writes: "History is story. It means nothing else as a noun. Herodotus was the first to use the word . . . and he used it as a verb: to find out for yourself. Then you tell" (SVH 26). And then you are told; or, simply, you are. In one of the Institute lectures, Olson speaks of the etymology of the word "mythology":

> It is a curious word, was, even with the Greeks. For it is essentially made up of two nouns resting on two verbs & both of the same meaning, except that one is in the active & the other in the passive voice. Muthos & Logos. And the straightest & simplest translation turns out to be the most useful of all:
>
> TO SPEAK (legein) of WHAT IS SAID (mythos)
>
> (O 10, 62)

If "narrative itself is the reality" (O 10,64), then history and mythology become of use to Olson as practical ontologies, as ways of simultaneously performing and knowing one's being. At the moment one tells one's tale, one achieves in Olson's sense of typos, "the standing condition of . . . [the] substantive or object or manifest or solid or material" (PT 34) of one's life.

The object of one's life is now out there, to be used, to be taken up by others in the process of their own historical functioning; it has been made available for desire.

In putting forward these terms, I am not suggesting that Olson's thinking can be so readily packaged. Even a single reading of the writings will reveal that the thought does not develop in any rectilinear, systematic fashion that would permit such hypostatization. As well, the terms themselves are too labile for that. The principle of growth, in this instance, is of quite another order. For Olson,

> confusion is only the most impeccable ordering of growing things so that each won't beat out the other, so that pests of one will be prevented from crossing over the tangle and getting at other rows of the same, so that the soil will be renewed and renewed from the irregularity of the planting, so that there will be one huge root can come out like the moon tore out of the earth. (O 10, 71)

The effort of this study, then, will be to cultivate one such planting.

Notes to Introduction

[1] Charles Olson, "Beginning of 3rd Inst," Olson, No.10, (Fall 1978), p. 19. This issue of the Olson Journal will hereafter be cited in the text as O 10.

[2] Robin Blaser, in his article "The Violets: Charles Olson and Alfred North Whitehead," notes that Olson names Whitehead "my great master and the companion of my poems." Line, No.2 (Fall 1983), p. 71.

[3] Alfred North Whitehead, Science and the Modern World, (1925; rpt. New York: The Free Press, 1967), p. 200.

[4] Whitehead, Science, p. 200.

[5] Whitehead, Science, p. 197.

[6] Hannah Arendt, Between Past and Future, (1954; rpt. Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1977), p. 276. Hereafter cited in the text as BPF.

[7] Charles Olson, "Human Universe," in Human Universe and other essays, (New York: Grove Press, 1967), p. 10. The entire volume of essays will hereafter be cited in the text as HU.

[8] Charles Olson, The Special View of History, (Berkeley: Oyez, 1970), p. 42. Hereafter cited in the text as SVH.

[9] Charles Olson, "Poetry and Truth," in Muthologos, II (Bolinas: Four Seasons Foundation, 1979), p. 34. This lecture will hereafter be cited in the text as PT.

[10] Charles Olson, in Ann Charters, Olson/Melville: A Study in Affinity, (Berkeley: Oyez, 1968), p. 86.

[11] Charles Olson, "Poetry and Truth," in Muthologos, II (Bolinas: Four Seasons Foundation, 1979), p. 34. Hereafter cited in the text as PT.

[12] This particular correlation has been put forward by Don Byrd in Charles Olson's Maximus, (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1980), p. 168; and by Sherman Paul in Olson's Push, (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1978), p. 33.

[13] Charles Olson, "Maximus turns," in Olson, No.6 (Fall 1976), p. 57. This issue of the Olson Journal will hereafter be cited in the text as O 6.

[14] Katerina Clark, Michael Holquist, Mikhail Bakhtin, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1984), p. 66.

[15] Charles Olson, The Maximus Poems, (New York: Jargon/Corinth Books, 1960), p. 41. Hereafter cited in the text as TMP.

[16] Paul, Olson's Push, p. 34.

> . . . in necessity, fellow cits? what is your necessity? TMP 64

> . . . any of us who stay ignorant of how we are what we are in and by our bodies is not sufficiently alive. O 10, 70

> . . . COMPANY, what we all keep right now (why do we, bother about any other human being, why do we seek our fellows' company, what good is it--again: what makes us want to?
>
> That we do with what they did with, and do in & for--or at least give to, our fellows: is there any more than these two things which motivate anything behind this instant, or ahead or it, anything?
>
> hungry after my own kind, he sd. That's all, that will. And the best--and hardest thing is--to admit it as a will, a hunger which we are. And let it be that, and not cause, or end, not any metaphysics. Let it be what it is as sufficient evidence, sufficient motivation. O 10, 25

> O, they were hot for the world they lived in, these Maya, hot to get it down the way it was--the way it is, my fellow citizens. HU 15

In "The Present is Prologue," an autobiographical statement first published in 1955, Olson writes optimistically of the ability of the present to counter the estrangements of the past: "This is the morning, after the dispersion" and "[t]he will to cohere . . . is what I see in us, in now."[1] Four years later in "Letter, May 2,1959," the optimism has been tempered: "the

present / is worse give nothing now your credence / start all over (TMP 150). Olson's belief in the possibility of coherence, however, had its own resilience. That same month in the "Letter to Elaine Feinstein," he took steps to "start all over" by introducing a new set of terms with which to re-engage the world: topos, typos, and tropos. The first of those terms, topos (first, that is, only by order of discussion, not by way of any hierarchy of value) means, in one sense, "simply place" (PT 33). But place itself is not so easily known. For Olson, place is given by one's relation to a ground. And that relation will either be familiar or estranged. The drive toward the achievement of a familiar ground, whether it be physical, social or epistemological, stems from hunger as our first condition. When that condition itself is obscured, the estrangement is complete. Topos, then, more than "simply place," is a shared condition that is made, not found.

In the context of man's present estrangements, the object of that hunger is clear: it is a world that has been lost. In a related context, in an essay called "The Concept of History," Hannah Arendt ably outlines the extent and the implications of such a loss, including what has been offered in its place. I quote at some length here because I believe Arendt's discussion of our relation to both nature and history, both in this passage and elsewhere in her essay, helps to set the stage for an examination of the historical and philosophical dimensions of Olson's work:

> The modern age, with its growing world-alienation, has led to a situation where man, wherever he goes, encounters only himself. All the processes of the earth and the universe have revealed themselves either as man-made or as potentially man-made. These processes, after having devoured, as it were, the solid objectivity of the given, ended by rendering meaningless the one overall process which originally was conceived in order to give meaning to them, and to act, so to speak, as the eternal time-space into which they could all flow and thus be rid of their mutual conflicts and exclusiveness. This is what happened to our concept of history, as it happened to our concept of nature. In the situation of radical world-alienation, neither history nor nature is at all conceivable. This two-fold loss of the world . . . has left behind it a society of men who, without a common world which would at once relate and separate them, either live in desperate lonely separation or are pressed together into a mass. For a mass-society is nothing more than that kind of organized living which automatically establishes itself among human beings who are still related to one another but have lost the world once common to all of them. (BPF 89-90)

In this light, The Maximus Poems can be seen as a series of gestures toward a world common to all, toward what Olson, in the final volume of the poem, identifies as "an actual earth of value."[2] Olson recognized, however,

> that we grow up many
> And the single
> is not easily
> known (TMP 52)

particularly in the face of cultural confusions about the nature of that common world, confusions, in fact, about the reality of that world and our ability to know it.

Arendt traces the history of our present estrangement to what she regards as the "shortest and most fundamental expression [of our] world-alienation": Descartes's well-known assertion "de omnibus dubitandum est" (BPF 54). This assertion of doubt was

forged in the context of radical discoveries in the natural sciences of his time. Amongst them, the discovery that, contrary to the evidence of our senses, the earth in fact rotates around the sun, would have convinced many thinkers that our sensory apparati were no longer trustworthy bearers of truth and knowledge concerning the phenomenal world. The "school of suspicion,"[3] then,

> began when man, with the help of the telescope, turned his bodily eyes toward the universe . . . --seeing with the eyes of the mind, listening with the ears of the heart, and guided by the inner light of reason--and learned that his senses were not fitted for the universe, that his everyday experience, far from being able to constitute the model for the reception of truth and the acquisition of knowledge, was a constant source of error and delusion. (BPF 55)

No longer fitted to receive the world, man was cast into a desert of subjectivity, confronted with, in each grain of sand, the false limits of his atomistic condition. In this situation, the world could "no longer . . . [be] available on the terms of any kind of intimacy."[4] In another context, the literary critic Nathan Scott has written about extreme forms of subjectivity arising out of the alienating experience of contemporary urban existence:

> One might borrow a fine figure of Northrop Frye's and say that . . . the urban experience seems often to be like an interminable railway journey in the course of which, as twilight and evening gradually darken the swiftly passing landscape, "many of the objects that appear to be outside [the window pane prove, on re-examination, to be] . . . actually reflections of what is in the carriage," so that, once darkness fully settles down, "one enters a narcissistic world, where, except for a few lights here and there, we can see only the reflection of where we are."[5]

Early on, Olson had recognized the stifling effects that such narcissism and the subsequent abandonment of the objective world would have for the creative energies. In "Projective Verse," Olson wrote that:

> . . . the use of a man, by himself and thus by others, lies in how he conceives his relation to nature, that force to which he owes his somewhat small existence. If he sprawl, he shall find little to sing but himself, and shall sing, nature has such paradoxical ways, by way of artificial forms outside himself. (HU 59)

The "loss of nature," then, has been occasioned by two forms of estrangement: first, the loss of confidence in the truth-revealing capacity of the senses; and secondly, the loss of a world outside us through our withdrawal into the mere sensing of sensation.

According to Arendt, the "loss of history" was also partly attributable to another manifestation of subjectivism. While the unreliability of our senses prevents us from knowing the world given to us objectively, we are still capable of at least knowing what we ourselves have made. This recognition allowed the eighteenth-century historian Giambattista Vico to launch his attack on the Cartesian theory of knowledge. In his discussion of Vico's historiography in The Idea of History, R.G. Collingwood notes that Vico disputed not the validity of mathematical knowledge, but only the Cartesian idea that no other kind of knowledge was possible.[6] Vico contended that the more pressing issue lay in identifying a principle with which to distinguish between what could and could not be known. He subsequently found

that principle

> in the doctrine that verum et factum convertuntur: that is, the condition of being able to know anything truly, to understand it as opposed to merely perceiving it, is that the knower himself should have made it.[7]

Vico's reason for turning away from the study of nature (because man cannot "make nature") has now been largely invalidated by major advances in twentieth-century technology, particularly the technology that arose from the discoveries of nuclear physics. From the moment that man learned how to split the atom, he was then able to start new processes in nature. To the extent that we can act into nature, setting in motion new chains of actions whose ends we cannot determine, we can also "make" nature. After Vico, "history" became a man-made process. Prior to that, in the classical Greek conception of history, only those deeds or actions which were inherently great, that is, which revealed their greatness in and of themselves, were committed to the historical record. In the modern age, however, history was no longer conceived as the record of such singular actions; instead, through our Hegelian legacy, it was conceived as an all-encompassing process which lent intelligibility to the otherwise "melancholy haphazardness"[8] of individual events. In this formulation, mere time-sequence itself was accorded an importance previously unknown to it. But if the process is man-made, an element of arbitrariness is inescapable. The subjective has drawn the objective into itself. In discussing the significance of this realization for physics, Heisenberg comments that

> [t]he most important new result of nuclear physics was the recognition of the possibility of applying quite different types of natural laws, without contradiction, to one and the same physical event. (BPF 48-49)

Once again, as man tries to inquire into "things which neither are himself nor owe their existence to him, [he] will ultimately encounter nothing but himself, his own constructions, and the patterns of his actions"(BPF 86). Arendt points out that this element of arbitrariness threatens the very possibility of the meaningfulness of history. In holding to both the notion of history as process and, on the other hand, to the idea that we know only what we have made, we run the risk of

> meaninglessness inevitably resulting from the insight that [we] can choose to do whatever [we] want and some kind of meaning will always be the consequence. In both instances the perplexity is that the particular incident, the observable fact or single occurrence of nature, or the reported deed and event of history, have ceased to make sense without a universal process in which they are supposedly embedded; yet the moment man approaches this process in order to escape the haphazard character of the particular, in order to find meaning--order and necessity--his effort is rebutted by the answer from all sides: Any order, any necessity, any meaning you wish to impose will do. (BPF 88-89)

The result is a condition of comprehensive alienation which estranges us from our selves, our fellows, and the real.

"Among [this] debris of common wealths"(TMP 132), Olson will attempt to restore proper relations, to re-member a world. But it will not be easy, for the disintegration of a world invites the rapid entry of "the fake / which covers the emptiness" (MP 599) and which greases and lulls the attentions so that the very

brokenness of the human condition goes unnoticed. In "The Songs of Maximus," Olson points out that one of the difficulties lies in trying to re-admit hunger to a company already glutted on meretriciousness, on

> colored pictures
> of all things to eat: dirty
> postcards
> And words, words, words
> all over everything (TMP 13)

Simulacra replace substance; postcards debase and stand in for lived experience; and words, as undifferentiated mass, are merely used to cover over the real, not to discover it. Thus caught in the machinations of this masquerade, there can be "[n]o eyes or ears left / to do their own doings" (TMP 13). When all has been "invaded, appropriated, outraged, all senses / including the mind, that worker on what is" (TMP 13) lose the ability to perform their "own lives' acts" (TMP 34). What we are offered as compensation is "that other sense / made to give even the most wretched, or any of us, wretched, / that consolation (greased / lulled" (TMP 13). That "other sense" is what we inherit from Greek philosophy and the western scientific tradition. It is a "sense" which detaches us from the world rather than drawing us into closer proximity with it; it is the "gurry" of discourse. In "Human Universe," Olson writes:

> . . . the Greeks went on to declare a "UNIVERSE of discourse" . . . as though language was an absolute instead of (as even man is) instrument, and not to be extended . . . to cover what each, man and language, is in the hands of: what we share, and which is enough, of power and beauty, not to need an exaggeration of words especially that spreading one, "universe" . . . we stay unaware how two means of

> discourse the Greeks appear to have invented hugely intermit our participation in our experience, and so prevent discovery . . . With Aristotle, the two great means appear: logic and classification. And it is they that have so fastened themselves on habits of thought that action is interfered with, absolutely interfered with. . . . (HU 3-4)

The positivist scientific tradition has lulled us into the belief that knowledge, if it is to be considered legitimate, must be gained by these means. There is a gain, but it belongs to the mind, not to the sensing body. Our scientific knowledge has invaded the planet, and it is a voyage not of discovery, but of appropriation.

The situation is clearly "all / wrong" (TMP 13). And the question now, when we are all "covered with the gurry of it" (TMP 13), is

> where
> shall we go from here, what can we do
> when even the public conveyances
> sing?
> how can we go anywhere,
> even cross-town
> how get out of anywhere(the bodies
> all buried
> in shallow graves.

In the next song, "Song 4," Olson protests this usurpation of human capabilities by celebrating the return of difficulties, for in those difficulties one is forced to confront necessity once again:

> This morning of the small snow
> I count the blessings, the leak in the faucet
> which makes of the sink time . . .
> . . . . . .
> Or the plumbing,
> that it doesn't work, this I like, have even used paper
> clips
> as well as string to hold the ball up And flush it

with my hand
. . . . . .
Holes
in my shoes, that's all right, my fly
gaping, me out
at the elbows, the blessing
that difficulties are once more
(TMP 14)

In his Guide to The Maximus Poems, George Butterick offers a further gloss on the poem. The reference is to a letter from Olson to Robert Creeley where Olson writes:

> Funny, the way, I like the odds against: even the plumbing . . . Work with how it comes, don't fix--or rather DON'T BUY . . . what they've got to offer . . . Beat em. Beat em by not needing them. The WAY.[9]

The way back to the practice of the familiar is to acknowledge our own "necessity," not the necessity of the marketplace. When the odds are against us, we are called upon to pay attention, to act. It is not a matter of self-reliance for self-reliance's sake but, rather, that we remain capable of responding when the world demands it of us. Ironically, however, it seems that, in the present, the demand itself is suffering diminishment. In an interview with fellow Gloucester resident Herbert Kenny in August 1969, Olson notes regretfully that modern developments in fishing technology--"radar sonar radio telephones good engines / bed-check seaplanes goodness over and under us" (TMP 154)--have had the effect of removing the element of danger from fishing: "there's none of that sense of, of that you're up against the whole of nature."[10] The conversation keeps to this point for a few more minutes and it is worth noting here:

> CO: My father's job was to replace brick chimneys

with the new iron chimneys. But that meant he had to go up on stagings and that meant danger . . . it's that kind of a thing. I mean something I believe we possess crucially. I think our body is our soul. And if you don't have your body as a factor of creation, you don't have a soul.

HK: You mean you think that we need that element of danger for our best character?

CO: Well, I wouldn't say it's the nature of danger but it is the nature of perception, of attention, yes. Which is a spiritual condition. You could put it, intensity. I mean, the amount of slackness today, the lackness, the limpness, is all in the fact that you don't need attention any more, you don't need your perceptions any more. It's all taken care of for you by the environment of your automobile, your house, of the economy, of the money system. In fact there isn't any money, there's credit. In fact, it's worse. I mean this is a crazy sort of a post-nature, post-natural thing that the species has gotten into . . . And I thought, and I still think, creation is crucial; and if you don't stay close to it, you lose everything. That's all, just everything. (O 1, 30-31)

Though the objects of one's attention may change, "the first necessity of man, now & whenever, is [still] sharpness, exactness, precision" (O 10, 104). Buying instead of doing will ensure ease but, in buying, "you buy something all right, but what gets forgotten is, that you sell, in that moment of buying--you sell a whole disposition of self . . . " (Guide 28). So in the "agora" that America has become,

In the land of plenty, have
nothing to do with it
take the way of
the lowest,
including
your legs, go
contrary, go

sing (TMP 15)

In the final song of this series, Olson writes: "you sing, you / who also / wants"; one might also add--you, who can want.

ii

> If to affirm, be to expand one's isolated self;
> and if to deny, be to contract one's isolated self;
> then to respond is a suspension of all isolation.
> Herman Melville - Pierre, or the Ambiguities

> I believe that there is truth. To be accurate, I believe there is a truth. And it is just here, as of what I have called personage, that it bears: I believe each of us is more than a physiology or a will. I believe we are also an obedience. And what we obey--have to obey--is something we are in the hands of, not it in our hands alone. I refer to, the life in us. (O 10, 105)

Only if man has his body as a "factor of creation," can he then be "EXTENSIBLE in human directions" (HU 22). Topos is to be achieved through the joint action of attention and extension. In Olson's work, topos is to be fought for continually in the struggle between two opposing modes of action: the extensive and the shrinking. The object of their actions is the life of space itself. The one offers a way of living up to the world, while the other proposes a way of closing it down. At every moment in a life or in a poem, the formal choice is between answering to that which is alive, or attempting to enslave it. Implicit in this binary situation is an ethical question which, for Olson, turns on whether one comes down on the side of the "will of

power" or the "will of achievement." Olson takes his cue here from Keats's formulation of the "Man of Power" and the "Man of Achievement" (SVH 41). The former refers to those men who "have a 'proper self,' the 'Egotistical Sublime.' Against this [Keats] posed the man who has, quote, 'not any individuality, any determined Character,' his man of Negative Capability, or, the Man of Achievement" (SVH 41). In a section of The Special View of History called "Ethics," Olson writes

> . . . one gets two sorts of will, a will of power or a will of achievement. The first one is the one in which the will collapses back to subjective understanding--tries to make it by asserting the self as character. The second makes it by non-asserting the self as self. In other words the riddle is that the true self is not the asserting function but an obeying one, that the actionable is larger than the individual and so can be obeyed to (SVH 45)

To this way of thinking, the self is conceived "not [as] a single, fixed entity so much as a capacity, an energy."[11] The man who has "not any individuality, any determined Character," is a self in his ability to respond to the demands of his environment. And though this self is an "obeying" function, it is by no means passive or quiescent.

This issue of the parallel procedure of will and obedience has been taken up in another context by the biographers of the literary critic Mikhail Bakhtin. Bakhtin, whose work has only recently achieved posthumous prominence, is presently known for his formulation of "dialogism," a philosophy which conceives of the world in terms of communication and exchange. In a chapter from their biography entitled "The Architectonics of

Answerability," Katerina Clark and Michael Holquist point out that for Bakhtin, the world is always calling upon one to act, and that "to simply accept the values of [one's] particular time and place . . . is an avoidance of activity that has the effect of making [one's] life a subfunction of a self-imposed axiological reflex."[12] For Olson, the avoidance of activity would mean the death of space itself.

The life of space depends on extension and relations, and the tensor of that life is the double procedure of will and obedience. This formulation also has clear implications for the realm of politics. Polis, conceived as a public coherence, is the political expression of topos. The Greek ideal of polis offered an image of men treating each other as equals in a public realm of discourse. Imaged in this way, politics and freedom came to be viewed as synonymous. This view was possible if one conceived of freedom, not as freedom from the imposition of power, but rather, as the mutual exercise of power. When that mutuality is dissolved, freedom is threatened by totalitarianism.

In The Maximus Poems, the single, unchecked exercise of power results in human enslavement. Those who exercise this power are named in Olson's vocabulary as the "shrinkers"(TMP 46); that is, those who would collapse space into ownership, those who exercise the "will to limit which [is] a false form of the will to cohere."[13] The "shrinkers" are slave-traders like John Hawkins, whose immoral activities misappropriate and violate the space of human relations, whose name "in its French form

Haquin, / or in Spanish Aquines," in fact, in any language of human possibility, "became a sound of terror / in the narrow seas" (TMP 64). This violation of space becomes a shrinking of the earth itself.

There are others. The record of American history is not lacking for figures of the misdirection of energies and the collapse of space. In "Letter 10," Olson points out the "first of the shrinkers" (TMP 46): John Endecott, the first governor of the Massachusetts Bay Colony, who registered his contempt for his predecessor Roger Conant and the Dorchester Company Settlement by removing Conant's "big house" from its original location in Cape Ann to Naumkeag for his own use. The removal was also a gesture of contempt for place; the "newness" Endecott represented entertained no compunctions regarding the dismantling of the "old carpentry," the sundering of an older way of hewing together, of hewing to place. For Olson, this gesture extended beyond an isolated instance of personal animosity. It signaled the beginning of ways of thinking without reference to place. The consciousness which permitted space to be estranged, and all connectedness--to self, to others, to earth--to be flouted, would not hesitate later, in the Jacksonian period, to force the removal of entire populations of Native Americans from their traditional homelands.[14]

In "Letter 16," Olson offers yet another variety of "shrinker" in the form of Nathaniel Bowditch who

> founded insurance companies,
> from his knack for figures,

> and his years of trading for Mass. merchants
> as supercargo on Salem voyages
>
> He represents . . . that movement of NE monies
> away from primary production & trade
> to the several cankers of profit-making
> which have, like Agyasta, made America great.
>
> Meantime, of course, swallowing up
> the land and labor. And now,
> the world. (TMP 72)

"Agyasta," Butterick tells us in the Guide, is a mythological figure who is capable of swallowing the entire ocean:

> The story goes, that there had been a group of demons annoying certain Brahmin hermits by constantly disturbing their sacred ascetic routines. They would be chased into the ocean, but by night would emerge, as fresh as ever, and harass the holy men. The latter, in desperation, appealed to the celebrated saint. Agyasta solved the problem at a stroke by simply swallowing the sea. But now the earth was left without its water, and all its creatures were brought to the point of perishing. When a person tries to be particularly helpful, he sometimes causes more trouble than he resolves. So it was, at any rate, in the case of Agyasta with his boundless digestive fire. (Guide 110)

Olson's inquiry into "how men do use their lives"(TMP 59) reveals a history of misconceived actions, actions seldom undertaken with Agyasta's beneficent motives. The deathly consequences of such excesses in action threaten the ground of being of those at whom they are directed. The "digestive fire" of a Bowditch, which is capable of "swallowing up the land and labor," makes of polis, and of topos, an impossibility. Hunger itself is in danger of being swallowed up by the cankers of a new market system.

Largely engulfed as it was by this rapacious "fire," America was unable to perceive another kind of fire that had arrived at its shores even earlier. This other fire was typified

by Captain John Smith, an early English explorer of the New England coast whom Olson was to hold up as an exemplar of proper attention:

> The Capteyne
> he was, the eye he had
> for what New England offered,
> . . . how we are
> oxyacetylene, we come in that close
> when we do come in (TMP 50-51)

Oxyacetylene is a fuel made up of oxygen and acetylene, a combination which produces the hottest flame known for the cutting and welding of steel. Smith's vision, sharp and precise, likewise burned with equal intensity, as we too are capable of burning. The "fire" of a Smith is essentially transformative and generative, and its source is the body. Smith's "repossession" of what Olson in "Equal, to the Real Itself, That Is" refers to as "a character of being, a thing among things, which I shall call . . . physicality"(HU 118), enables Smith to be "the stater of / quantity and / precision"(TMP 122). It is that physicality, that "oxyacetylene" of a proper relation between physical organism and earth, which allows Smith "to come in that close" to a vision of the formal possibilities of a place. In "Apollonius of Tyana," Olson writes:

> St. Augustine said of his experience of recognition, "It was a conflagration of myself," but with Apollonius the terms stay physical in another way, and in that way are neither light nor fire--with him it is a burning surely, but with no thing consumed, on the contrary, it is as the action of the sun on us and on things, increase is the issue, more growth, more life, leaves, men. (HU 39)

Smith's is a similar action, but despite his ability to forward

the real, Smith was

> too early yet
> to be understood
> to be the sign
> of present
> paternities
> . . . . . .
> Smith
> was futile
>
> until the place
> and time burned
> with the same heat as
> the man (it isn't
> for us to say
>
> what a proper fire
> is, it's what
> like Corinth
> burning down
> produces bronze -- (TMP 122-23)

The generative capability of this kind of fire is contingent on the conditions of reality at any given moment. Consequently, one cannot specify a time or a form to its activity. In the Guide, Butterick's note on this passage refers us to a comment by Melville which Olson quotes in Call Me Ishmael:

> I somehow cling to the strange fancy, that, in all men hiddenly reside certain wondrous occult properties . . . which by some happy but very rare accident (as bronze was discovered by the melting of the iron and brass at the burning of Corinth) may chance to be called forth here on earth. (Guide 182)

The operation of contingency is primary in Olson's poetics. In The Special View of History, Olson points out its centrality to the matter of composition:

> Coincidence and proximity, because the space-time continuum is known, become the determinants of chance and accident and make possible creative success . . . purpose is seen to be contingent, not primordial . . . (SVH 49)

Smith could not will a conflagration any more than one could set out to perform a "meaningful" action. That is to say, meaning will emerge from the action; it cannot be specified as goal.[15]

This notion of "coincidence" and "proximity" has a history extending beyond the twentieth century. It can also be found in Vico's discussions of the development of theories of knowledge. His own thinking had led him to recognize that "ideas are propagated, not by 'diffusion,' like articles of commerce, but by the independent discovery of each nation of what it needs at any given stage of its development."[16] Examples of such independent discovery range from the discernible parallels in the analytical thought of such apparently dissimilar figures as William Morris and Karl Marx, to (closer to Olson's concerns) the roughly contemporaneous appearance of Christ and Apollonius of Tyana. On this point, Olson writes: "I wish you only to note how men spring up, when they are needed, like violets, on all sides, in the Spring, when winter has been too long" (HU 27).

This idea of answering to the necessities of one's own time and place is subverted by the "shrinkers" who only act in reference to their own personal necessity. But the exploitative fire which they bring to bear on their environment poses hazards even to themselves:

> If man chooses to treat external reality any different than as part of his own process, in other words as anything other than relevant to his own inner life, then he will (being such a froward thing, and bound to use his energy willy-nilly, nature is so subtle) use it otherwise. He will use it just exactly as he has used it now for too long, for arbitrary and willful purposes

which, in their effects, not only change the face
of nature but actually arrest and divert her
force until man turns it even against herself,
he is so powerful, this little thing. But what
little willful modern man will not recognize is,
that when he turns it against her he turns it
against himself, held in the hand of nature as
man forever is, to his use of himself if he choose,
to his disuse, as he has. (HU 11)

Given the results of his disuse of himself and nature:

one's forced
considering America,
to a single truth: the newness

the first men knew was almost
from the start dirtied
by second comers. About seven years
and you can carry cinders
in your hand for what

America was worth. May she be damned
for what she did so soon
to what was such a newing (TMP 134-35)

Olson saw that the "dirty restlessness"(MP 498) that was America's relationship to her own ground, was to turn back on itself, consuming, in the process, her own possibilities of extension and coherence. What remained was a "filthy land"(MP 498) of ashes and dross, a barrenness where

. . . we
who live at this poor end
of goods, & thing, & men,

when materials, of each,
are such a man can't eat
sleep walk move go
apart from his own dwelling,
the dirtiness of goodness

cheapness shit is
upon the world. We'll turn
to keep our house, turn to
houses where our kind,
and hungry after them,

not willing to bear one short walk
more out into even what they've done
to earth itself, find
company (TMP 134)

Those "who come from a housekeeping // which old mother Smith / started" (TMP 126) will turn, instead, to find company in the fire of flowers..

iii

. . . we are still in the business of finding out
how all action, and thought, have to be refounded.
(HU 119)

And how, now, to found, with the sacred & the profane--
both of them--
wore out

The beak's
there. And the pectoral.
The fins
for forwarding.

But to do it anew, now that even fishing . . .
(TMP 45)

Now that American primary industries had been bought out by the "merchandise men"(TMP 54), a new founding was in order if the topological was to be sought once again. However difficult it was to be in the face of increasing pejorocracy, Olson maintained that the ability to begin again remained latent. After all, "the beak's there"--the instrument of direction. "And the pectoral"--the pectoral fins function primarily to balance and to steer.

But "pectoral" also refers to the heart, a centering possibility. And there are "fins, for forwarding"--motion is to be once more. The primary elements of action have not been dispersed; they remain, a preparatory coherence--a dancer awaiting the dance.

In The Maximus Poems, the dance begins to find a form in the opening poem "I, Maximus of Gloucester, to You":

> Off-shore, by islands hidden in the blood
> jewels & miracles, I, Maximus
> a metal hot from boiling water, tell you
> what is a lance, who obeys the figures of
> the present dance (TMP 1)

"Maximus," the figure of maximal attention and extension in these poems, enters the scene to instruct his fellow citizens in the art of their own formal possibilities, their dances. He begins by noting his own attainment to form. Maximus is a "metal" (and "mettle") newly tempered in the foundry of a "boiling" primordial sea. He speaks from "off-shore," from the source of creation itself. But he is also inside creation, "hidden in the blood," in the vital fluency and necessity of our physicality. Maximus is thus the figure of the littoral, who remains in perpetual contact with beginnings, with one foot in creation and the other in origin. The littoral is the stance of creative advance. In a 1956 lecture on Whitehead, Olson writes:

> We are dealing with two
> fluencies each time we do a single thing, a primordial
> fluency
> In comes the roaring tide
> and a consequent one:
> Fast falls the even [17]

The instrument of his being is a sharpness and a pointedness which enables him to perform with precision the various figures

of the dance. The word "figures" maintains at least two pertinent meanings here: i) a series of movements in a dance; ii) numbers. He needs to be sharp and attentive if he is to properly engage specificity of movement, and quantity. Like his fellow dancer Apollonius of Tyana, he wants his dance to be alive to life, "to stay on its point, to hold all that it contains, not dissipate one ounce of it by any . . . generalizations" (HU 31-32). Hence the necessity of obedience to specifics of motion and quantity. It is to be remembered that the engagement is a "present" one, and is to remain so. The dance is continually re-made in order to accommodate the moving multiples of experience.

The lesson that Maximus offers is not a static precept but, rather, a condition of possibility for both human and poetic business. The ability to begin--that foot in the door of origin--stands us to the task of composing anew. The next line of the poem tells us that:

> the thing you're after
> may lie around the bend
> of the nest (second, time slain, the bird! the bird!
>
> And there! (strong) thrust, the mast!

Composing is an activity in space, and the thing Maximus is after is the coherence of the things composed. "Time [is] slain"; it is spatial relations that are to be taught now. And with the thrust of the mast (both upward and downward), a "vertical dimension of space" has been opened up.[18] But it is the bird which provides the image of proper attention. In his study of the entire series of the Maximus Poems, Don Byrd suggests a

passage from Olson's essay "Human Universe" as a useful gloss on the appearance of the bird here: "It was better to be a bird, as these [Mayans] seem to have been, they kept moving their heads so nervously to stay alive, to keep alerted to what they were surrounded by."[19] It is this kind of alertness that is needed to cut through the miasma of spectatorism and passivity which constitute the present condition of culture in America; it is a precondition to the accumulation of material for the composing of a nest:

> feather to feather added
> (and what is mineral, what
> is curling hair, the string
> you carry in your nervous beak, these
> make bulk, these, in the end, are
> the sum. (TMP 1)

Elsewhere in his writing, Olson had declared his belief that "perception is . . . primary" (AP 51). Here, the attentions carry in the necessary string to retie the real.

Out of the things that are carried in, a world of forms begins to appear. However, the forms are not created by divine or human fiat, but are, instead

> born of yourself, born
> of hay and cotton struts,
> of street-pickings, wharves, weeds
> you carry in, my bird
>
> of a bone of a fish
> of a straw, or will
> of a color, of a bell
> of yourself, torn
> (TMP 3)

Olson's insistence on man as "a [generative] thing among [generative] things" (after all, it's not "eunuchic object-

ivity"[20] that Olson is interested in), forms part of the "stance toward reality" which "brings verse" such as Olson's "into being" (HU 51). The verse is grounded in a practice of composition which Olson calls "logography." In a prose piece called "THE ADVANTAGE OF LITERACY IS / THAT WORDS CAN BE ON THE PAGE," Olson declares that language derives from the earth, and "words then are naming and logography is writing as though each word is physical and that objects are originally motivating" (AP 51). It is a mode of composition which allows man to be reborn inside the earth for "place / is no longer allowably / outside" (O 6,19-20).

The metaphysics of this situation can be located in Alfred North Whitehead's "philosophy of organism." In his discussion of Olson and Whitehead in Charles Olson: The Scholar's Art, Robert von Hallberg points out some aspects of Whitehead's views on the nature of objects and their modes of relations which have particular relevance for Olson's poetics:

> At the center of the object . . . is no nucleus of tangibility but instead a system of relationships. "This means that the essence of being is to be implicated in causal action on other beings."--[Whitehead] The point of Whitehead's process is not just the mutability of all entities but also their unity. Relationships are not simply "external" between entities which are complete unto themselves; relations between entities, Whitehead claims, have to do with the internal structure of each entity.[21]

In Process and Reality, Whitehead himself elaborates on this notion of interactive being:

> The potentiality for being an element in a real concrescence of many entities into one actuality, is

> the general metaphysical character attaching to all entities, actual and non-actual [i.e., to actual entities and eternal objects]. Every item in its universe is involved in each concrescence. In other words, it belongs to the nature of a 'being' that it is a potential for every 'becoming.' This is the principle of relativity . . . The philosophy of organism is mainly devoted to the task of making the notion of 'being present in another entity.'[22]

As Robin Blaser has so carefully brought to our attention in his recent article "The Violets: Charles Olson and Alfred North Whitehead," Olson's use of Whitehead was extensive and vital.[23] But even before Olson had begun his studied readings of Whitehead in 1955, he had written two years previously--as if in anticipation of the fragrance of the later thinking--"one is inhabited as well as inhabits" (O 10, 40). To be was, unavoidably, to be in the company of other things.

The mode of relations, both ontological and poetic, had been traced to an internal dynamic, a perpetual preparedness for form. But how potentiality was finally drawn into the phenomenal world was a matter beyond simple hunger or appetition. While hunger is acknowledged to be first need (by Olson, as well as by other cultures and times)--that which "makes us want to"--man is also more than omnivore; he is also "amorvore" (TMP 96). In the Hesiodic cosmogony, love comes forward after hunger. And in the opening poem of this volume, Maximus declares: "love is form" (TMP 1). By this reckoning, love is the labour of the master builder in the welter of material phenomena. Taken in to the dynamics of the body, it is lusimeles--"love which makes the limbs all-fire"(Guide 699)--which is the mode of the articulation

of a "human universe." In this sense, topos, as embodiment of extension and concretion, becomes the place of love made known.

The thrust of Olson's work is to locate and to make a place where man can be fully alive to the things around him, not estranged from them. Olson consistently argues against a cultural practice that breeds spectatorism, that diverts us from performing our "own lives' acts."[24] He insists instead that we step outside the "shallow graves" we walk in daily and begin to "[dwell] on the earth, not [as] slaves of it, but [as] lovers" (HU 39).

Notes to Chapter One

[1] Charles Olson, Additional Prose, ed. George Butterick, (Bolinas: Four Seasons Foundation, 1974), p. 40. Hereafter cited in the text as AP.

[2] Charles Olson, The Maximus Poems, ed. George Butterick, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983), p. 584. Hereafter cited in the text as MP to distinguish it from the first volume of the poems, also called The Maximus Poems. The first volume will be cited in the text as TMP.

[3] Friedrich Nietzsche, in Between Past and Future, p. 55.

[4] Nathan A.Scott, The Wild Prayer of Longing: Poetry and the Sacred, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1971), p. 25.

[5] Scott, p. 47.

[6] R.G. Collingwood, The Idea of History, (1946; rpt. London: Oxford University Press, 1970), pp. 63-71.

[7] Collingwood, p. 65.

[8] Immanuel Kant, in Between Past and Future, p. 82.

[9] Charles Olson, in George Butterick, A Guide to The Maximus Poems of Charles Olson, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980), p. 28. Hereafter cited in the text as Guide.

[10] Charles Olson, "I know men for whom everything matters," Olson No.1 (Spring 1974), p. 30. This issue of the Olson Journal will hereafter be cited in the text as O 1.

[11] Clark, Holquist, Bakhtin, p. 88.

[12] Clark, Holquist, Bakhtin, p. 88. Besides the quotation cited here, I am indebted to Bakhtin and his biographers for having prompted the title of this chapter, though the concerns of this study bear no direct relation to those of Bakhtin's proposed work The Architectonics of Answerability.

[13] Charles Olson, Letters for Origin: 1950-1955, ed. Albert Glover, (London: Cape Goliard Press, 1969), p. 105.

[14] Ronald Takaki, Iron Cages, (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1979), pp. 80-107.

[15] I am thinking here of Hannah Arendt's discussion of Marx's confusion of "meaning" and "end." The discussion begins with a distinction being made between the historiographical

theories of Vico and Marx. The two theories bear a superficial resemblance to each other through their common recognition that man "makes" history. But Vico's relationship to "history" was essentially contemplative while Marx sought to make his active. That is, Vico felt that historical truth was revealed to the backward-glancing historian who could oversee the entire process of history, overlooking the "narrow aims" of acting men in order to apprehend the "higher aims" which, like Hegel's "cunning of reason," realize themselves behind the backs of the historical actors. Marx added a teleological element to this understanding of history, and made the "higher aims" the "intended aims" of political action. But as Arendt points out: "The danger of transforming the unknown and unknowable 'higher aims' into planned and willed intentions was that meaning and meaningfulness were transformed into ends." Arendt then goes on to attribute much of the growing meaninglessness of the modern world to this confusion over meaning and end. See "History and Politics," in Between Past and Future, pp. 75-86.

[16] Collingwood, p. 71.

[17] Charles Olson, in Ann Charters, Olson/Melville: A Study in Affinity, (Berkeley: Oyez, 1968), p. 90.

[18] Byrd, p. 67.

[19] Byrd, p. 67.

[20] Johannes G. Droysen, in Between Past and Future, p. 49.

[21] Robert von Hallberg, Charles Olson: The Scholar's Art, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1978), pp. 96-97.

[22] Alfred North Whitehead, in A Key to Whitehead's Process and Reality, ed. Donald Sherburne, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981), pp. 23-24. Hereafter cited in the text as Key.

[23] For an extensive review of the relationship between Olson and Whitehead, see the article by Robin Blaser, "The Violets: Charles Olson and Alfred North Whitehead," Line, No.2 (Fall 1983), pp. 61-103.

[24] Olson, in Letters for Origin, pp. 102-107.

Chapter Two: The Physics of Responsibility

> . . . what is physics? It is the science of relations . . . Venus assembles the atoms, like the compounds. She is not transcendent like the other gods, but immanent in this world, the being of relation. She is identical to the relation . . . she inspires inclination, she *is* inclination.
>
> Michel Serres - *Hermes*

In opening a discussion of *tropos* during one of the Beloit lectures, Olson said: "Tropism, I think, is actually the riddler of the lot [i.e., topos / tropos / typos]. Or it's the management, or it's the maneuverer, or it's the . . . it's ourselves" (*PT* 34). If there is an actual "riddle" involved, it is most likely the one that Olson brought up in a lecture five years earlier: "What goes on 4, on 2, on 3? . . . Oedipus answered: Man" (*O* 10, 69). But with reference to *tropos*, the answer seems, at best, only half an answer because the nature of our being involves us in a twofold question: "WHAT YOU ARE (what is a man) and WHO YOU ARE (what is your name)" (*O* 10, 69). Olson would answer by saying that he was at once "both proper and common: both Charles Olson at the same time 'a man'" (*O* 10, 82). We are constantly "involved with filling out that thing, our name" (*O* 10, 82). The activity is unceasing simply because we do not remain the same from day to day. In its efforts to "individuate the common," a "proper noun" must remain attuned to the changeableness of the thing it seeks to name (*O* 10, 82). In a discussion of the ability of language to remain fresh in its

relation to particulars, Whitehead writes:

> Language arose with a dominating reference to an immediate situation. Whether it was signal or expression, above all things, it was this reaction to that situation in this environment. In the origin of language the particularity of the immediate present was an outstanding element in the meaning conveyed . . . Language has gradually achieved the abstraction of its meanings from the presupposition of any particular environment. The fact that the French dictionary is published in Paris, at a definite date, is irrelevant to the meaning of the words as explained in the dictionary. The French equivalent to the English word green, means just green, whatever be the state of Europe, or of the planetary system. Green is green and there is the end of it. There is nothing more to be said, when you once understand the word in reference to its meaning . . . we are much more civilized than our ancestors who could merely think of green in reference to some particular spring morning.[1]

On a particular almost-Spring morning in North Carolina, Olson delivers a lecture called "LANGUAGE, and MYTHOLOGY" (O 10, 76-84). In it, he discusses the advantages to be gained from engaging a subject that has not yet been emptied of its particulars by the process of abstraction:

> We have this pleasure, with Cro-Magnon: that everything he left comes at us as everything will come at us tomorrow, new--that is it will come out at us new if we don't put it off by letting the name of it make us already familiar with it when we aren't familiar with it at all (the sun, e.g., which, tomorrow, is a distinctly different sun than that one, today, provably different, just, that we, the air, and the clouds, plus conceivably its own furnaces, shall have varied just enough to make that majority it is which makes it common uncommon, so that tomorrow one can call it by a new proper name to indicate that difference, that, tomorrow, it is changed . . . (O 10, 82)

Names are never absolute; they are called up in response to specific things and events. In the same manner, there are no

absolute actions; instead, there are tropistic responses. In the lecture cited above, Olson extends the discussion by introducing a word that begins to suggest the kind of tropism that humans are involved in--the word is "photo-copic":

> . . . this word was suddenly the whole meaning of all our experience with photo--how can I say it--photo-copic: that we <u>are</u> darkness. That our . . . condition inside is dark . . . that the unknown is . . . your self's insides . . . that's exactly the whole meaning: that we become sure in the dark, that we move wherever we wish in the six directions with <u>that</u> light . . . I mean, literally, that to <u>light that dark</u> is to have come to whatever it is I think any of us seeks. And tropism, to my mind [returns to] when I knew there was a sun, I mean a helio inside myself . . . (<u>PT</u> 35)

In his etymological researches, and in his reading of Eric A. Havelock's <u>Preface to Plato</u>, Olson finds another name, a forgotten name, for the dark recesses of the self. In the Beloit lecture, he says: "I have to go back to a word which is in our whole lives but we don't go back to it in Greek--<u>ethos</u>. Which means 'cave of your inner being" (<u>PT</u> 41). Havelock notes that <u>ethea</u> may originally "have signified the 'lair' or 'haunt' of an animal," and that "in later Greek it develops into the meaning of personal behaviour-pattern or even personal character and so in Aristotle supplied the basis for the term 'ethics'."[2] <u>Ethea</u> seem to involve the "private instincts and family usage" rather than public codes of behaviour: "the word may originally have denoted the way a human being lived in his 'haunts'."[3] For Olson, then, the way one lives in oneself constitutes an <u>ethos</u>. From there, tying up both the earlier and the later senses of <u>ethea</u>, Olson notes that the way the self acts and moves involves a "morality

of motion" (O 10, 97), and that the latter involves man in something much larger than himself: a responsibility for a world. In a lecture that opens with Heraclitus's statement of man's estrangement, Olson proceeds to discuss the discipline required to counter that estrangement:

> I was . . . forced . . . to say in what way I took it man is now required to be responsible. And the answer was out of my mouth like my soul: he has to be totally responsible, he himself, each one of us; that each of us is a morality--or there is none at all; that it was obviously never any different, but, somehow, the incisiveness and overwhelmingness of the fact (and the required act) got obscured . . . now only an engagement with the totality of experience can equip us to be so responsible--that the motion of any one man is the mass and momentum of all only as he is at once the act of himself and the comprehension of the motion that all men are--that the single living truth is, that a man can so engage himself, and by so engaging himself, offer a principle to this time as men have offered principle to theirs. (O 10, 98)

In this formulation, ethea, the "private" and "family usage," is also tied to a public meaning. Havelock's discussion of ethea also includes a simultaneous discussion of the notion of nomos. The discussion centres on Hesiod's invocation to the Muses at the beginning of the Theogony. Hesiod defines the content of what the Muses sing as: "the custom-laws of all and the folk-ways of the immortals."[4] The Greek words for "custom-ways" and "folk-ways" are nomos and ethea. Havelock notes that nomoi becomes, in later Greek, the term for "laws," though still maintaining a strong sense of the force of usage and custom, as well as the later sense of statute. He goes on to suggest their respective areas of relevance:

> Ethea are no less binding than nomoi but are more personal . . . it could be easily extended to cover the mores of the human haunt which is the household and family, whereas the nomoi, which may be connected with the distribution of pasture, would look at custom and usage from a rather larger and more social point of view. Thus ethos would cover a man's proper feelings and reactions to intimates and enemies. Nomos would describe, as it does in Hesiod, the universal law of hard work or the prohibition instinctively observed against cannibalism.[5]

Hesiod's task, as charged by the Muses, was also to sing the nomoi and ethea. Olson saw in that task an effort relevant to the present state of culture where "the prince and the poet have to be able to pass to others the customs of men and the laws of gods"(PT 42). However, Olson's understanding of nomoi seems to have parted company with Havelock's. Olson says: "I ran both of these [words] in my machine some years earlier and was astonished to arrive at the fact that 'laws' mean cannibalism"(PT 42). He does not offer his sources on this point, but goes on to say that "laws"

> means appetite for your own kind, I suppose that's what cannibalism means. It does not mean eating animal food, it means eating your own. And that's law, laws; or the important--I mean the most important teachings that the Muses can claim that a prince and a poet have to . . . pass on to other human beings from their instruction. (PT 42)

Havelock had offered the prohibition against cannibalism as an example of the customs or laws that are passed on from generation to generation. If "laws" are taken to mean "path" or "way" instead of enforced statute (this is how Olson takes it in The Special View of History[6]), then the "appetite for your own kind" can be construed as simply the "way" or condition of the human

world, the "path" of coherence one takes in living with one's own kind. The prohibition against cannibalism in its literal sense is, when seen in these terms, also the necessary custom or way of a social existence. Whether Olson suffered a memory lapse in relation to the Havelock passage, or whether he located that meaning of "law" in some other source, is not of primary importance to the task he was engaged in. Both senses of nomoi are concerned with ways of maintaining a social coherence. The parallel procedure of ethea and nomoi in Hesiod and Homer discover a corollary in Olson's sense of the possibility of one man's motion taking on the "mass and momentum" of all men. In both those terms, the morality has its source in the procedures of life and the passing on of life.

In the lighting of that dark, the obedience to the helio inside himself, man can be "totally responsible," not just selfishly so. This "morality of motion" also proposes the way of a poetics. To return to an earlier point in the thesis, "if a man sprawl, he shall find little to sing but himself." But what the concern with tropos offers is that

> . . . if he stays inside himself, if he is contained within his nature as he is participant in the larger force, he will be able to listen, and his hearing through himself will give him secrets objects share. And by an inverse law his shapes will make their own way. It is in this sense that the projective act, which is the artist's act in the larger field of objects, leads to dimensions larger than the man. (HU 60)

The projective act is not possible when man attempts to dominate external reality; it is only as a participant aware of certain

limits, including his own physiology, that he can forward creation. Tropos, then, can be seen as the way of that participation, or, as the method of an obedience that re-opens a path between private and public issues.

ii

> To compose, at least by propensity, is to give to do . . .
>
> Roland Barthes - "Musica Practica"

In his essay "Musica Practica," Barthes observes that "there are two musics . . . the music one listens to [and] the music one plays."[7] The music one plays is

> a muscular music in which the part taken by the sense of hearing is one only of ratification, as though the body were hearing--and not 'the soul'; a music which is not played 'by heart': seated at the keyboard or the music stand, the body controls, conducts, co-ordinates, having itself to transcribe what it reads, making sound and meaning, the body as inscriber and not just transmitter, simple receiver. (Barthes 149)

This sense of the body as transcriber and inscriber belongs to a tradition of "practical music" which, according to Barthes, is lost to us today. Similarly, for Olson, the sense of a lost praxis continually draws forward the Heraclitus observation that man is estranged from that with which he is most familiar. In The Special View of History, Olson remarks that Keats and Heraclitus "defined the whole problem of the familiar by that . . . word--to function, or the actual process" (SVH 33). In terms of

the "ACTUAL," Olson tells us that the

> word is in good usage, and has an exact meaning: 'involving acts and action' and 'opposed to potential, virtual, theoretical, hypothetical, etc.' To act or not to act: can you drive the familiar situation of being a human any further? It turns out it isn't you (why the unit or the personal or the egotistical, that digit no matter how it is asserting itself, is secondary); it isn't you which is the final but something quite different: what you do. (SVH 33-34)

The opposition between the potential and the actual is a central rallying point in Olson's thinking. The importance of this opposition is pointed up in his choice of Maximus of Tyre as the figurehead for this sequence of poems. The Tyrian was a second century A.D. Greek philosopher who had initially established his philosophical stance within a Platonic school of thought, but who later adopted the teachings of the Cynics, teachings which placed "the end of life in practical and not theoretic virtue."[8]

Throughout The Maximus Poems, the deadnesses of the theoretic are made to give way to the quickening of the actual, and in this first volume, it is "Tyrian Businesses" which first delivers the method for that action. Up until this point in the volume--"Tyrian Businesses" is in fact Letter 8--Maximus has been concerned with directing Gloucester's attention toward the problems that threaten to dissolve the community; consequently, his exhortations have proclaimed the need for attention and the need to act. The next step then will be to discover how the "hands [can be] put to the eyes' commands" (TMP 32). Or, as Olson the self-professed "archaeologist of morning" writes: "This is the morning, after the dispersion, and the work of the morning

is methodology: how to use oneself and on what" (AP 40). If the primary question now is "how to use oneself," then the poet's role as rhetorician in these "Letters" can be called into question as well. According to the tenets of an older tradition of rhetorical theory--in this case, the Platonic--the function of the rhetorician (when he was exercising a "pure" rhetoric) was to move the soul of another in order that that soul begin to move itself. Olson formulates another conception of this function by way of yet another tradition--that of Herodotus, "the logographer"; in the Beloit lecture mentioned above, Olson states that "he who can tell the story right has actually not only, like, given you something, but has moved you on your own narrative" (PT 38). It is a kinetic that Olson is after here, a transference of energy rather than any stopped artifact of speech or writing. The fact that this poem appears without the designation of "Letter" and without explicit reference to "Maximus" proposes a shift away from the preceding emphasis on the role of the orator and the oration to an emphasis on the social possibilities to be enacted by the citizens's activities. This shift is also accompanied by a change of tone in the narrative: the hortatory tone of the earlier letters and songs now yields to a more subtly measured insistence, that is, an insistence measured by a desire from within, a desire and a preparedness to take up one's "busy-ness" and to move one's narrative. It is the actual businesses of a city that constitute the work of the poem now.

In a discussion of process, Olson says that "a METHODOLOGY is a science of HOW"(AP 8), and in "Tyrian Businesses," the HOW is met by an exercise:

> The waist of a lion,
> for a man to move properly
>
> And for a woman,
> who should move lazily,
> the weight of breasts
>
> This is the exercise for this morning (TMP 35)

The work of the morning involves proper movement. Taking his cue from the etymology of "proper" (from proprius, meaning one's own), Olson notes that "the familiar turns out to be simply that, there is a natural, proper and characteristic action of man," and that "function" simply means "to perform 'the natural, proper or characteristic action of anything'" (SVH 33). In this first section of the poem, we are to work with the given--the specific conditions of our physicality that simultaneously propose both possibility and limit for our movements. The point at which possibility and limit intersect constitutes a pivot which we must pay attention to if we are to move properly. The waist, for the man, is a pivot point that will allow him to turn his torso while in an upright position. The concern with "the weight of breasts" directs us to a consideration of gravity, or more specifically, a centre of gravity which has to do with how we hold ourselves to the earth, how we proceed in relation to the ground. Thus in proposing certain rules or principles of instrumentation, the exercise suggests not only how one can move but, also, how one should move.

Already, in this first section, the vertical and the horizontal have been implicated in a formulation of use. In section "2," the relationship of verticality to ground is established: "To dance / sitting down," involves taking root in the ground and achieving a proper vertical growth. But this is precisely what the American people seem to be incapable of: "They don't even yet know how to sit down, how to dance sitting down!"[9] The problem stems from the misuse of energies: while sections "1" and "2" announce a new methodology, sections "3" and "4" pronounce the deadendedness of an old methodology. In his essay "The Gate & the Center," Olson writes that "energy is larger than man, but . . . if he taps it as it is in himself, his uses of himself are EXTENSIBLE in human directions and degree not recently granted" (HU 22). The emphasis falls on the ability to make use of it "as it is in himself"; the misuse derives from attempting to subdue it in the way that St. George finally triumphs over the dragon:

> We have a curious way, here in the States, of being furious about the doing of anything, if we do it at all. When we dance for example. It is as though we thought to slay the Dragon we had to be as violent and thrashing as he is.[10]

The misuse goes back to a confused understanding of the nature of work, and its role in attacking chaos. In "A Syllabary for a Dancer" (an extremely useful companion piece to this poem), Olson takes this matter back to the story of Tiamat, the primal mother of the Babylonian creation myth and the embodiment of chaos. The story

> has it that she, halved, was the heavens and the earth, and that the blood of her husband, also slain, was the source of the birth of man. Man sprang up from the mixture of his blood and half her substance, the earth. Man took it he had to assail this parenthood--and the only weapon he had was his work, that it is work which brings reality into existence, reality, which is the first form imposed on chaos.[11]

Yet after this initial imposition of form, man is still left to contend with the chaos and the reality implicit in himself. And the American people continue to attack this inner chaos like a "first people," not realizing that "the enemy is [already] dead," that the ground has already been cleared by the efforts of an earlier "frontierism," and that the present now yields the possibility of vertical growth.

The verticality becomes a matter of proper stance: the vertical of the self that proceeds according to its own tropos, the "self-act" directed toward form. With this stance, man is capable of taking up "straight, nature's, live nature's force" (HU 23). Without it, he is but one of these

> aborted creatures in the crowd left over from the past who are so incapable of verticality they destroy horizontality, they are so anxious to lie down in the mud and die, they so wish to go back to where man came from, that dirty mixture of blood and Tiamat's mud. ("SD" 14)

In "A Syllabary," Olson remarks that one such "monster of the old will" is Martha Graham, who is

> . . . so far back she craves to be scalped,
> and dragged over the ground
> And because nobody has dragged her
> she has everybody do it. She does it. She wants clean sheets
> each night (TMP 35)

In her dance, she is capable only of rehearsing that one moment of primal creation. "She does it," each night returning to assail the ground like a first people. For Graham, the work of the morning is nothing more than putting clean sheets on that primal bed in preparation for a repetition of that initial performance. Her desire to be dragged over the ground, or to lie down, promotes an inactivity that is opposed by the more upright activities that comprise "Tyrian" businesses. Such inactivity in fact makes an enemy of dance: space is no longer familiar but, rather, estranged: the uses of a man are no longer extensible in human directions, thus denying any tropos. Being so far back, she loses the field of "the close"--used by Olson in the medieval sense of quarter--"which is nothing more and no thing else / than that which unborn form you are the content of."[12] This inactivity simply returns to a formlessness.

Sections "3" and "4" point up several instances of a debased attention which takes horizontality as its object. In the Guide, Butterick notes that the lines discussing the "international doll" refer to Madame Chiang Kai-Shek's (née Mei Ling Soong) visits to Washington in 1943 and in 1948. While the first visit was undertaken as part of the war effort, the second was pursued "without official invitation or welcome" (Guide 58). She enters the narrative here for two reasons: the first reason restates and furthers Graham's obsession with horizontality. The word "doll," as it is used here, carries two meanings, both of which bear equally on the matter of tropos. A "doll" is a small scale

figure of a human being, an object generally regarded as a plaything for children. As well, "doll" suggests an attractive but rather empty-headed young woman. One notes in both these definitions the evidence of an incapacity for self-acts. The idea of a plaything suggests children who, in section "4," are the ones who "want to go back, who want to lie down / in Tiamat" (TMP 35), and the notion of empty-headedness suggests a pre-occupation with the surface of things, a pre-occupation determined by the inability to root oneself in the ground. The "children" in this poem will remain children, always assailing that parenthood, and always denying themselves the possibility of vertical growth.

The question "Why is she put up with?" (TMP 35) locates the second reason for Madame Chiang Kai-Shek's continuing presence in this poem. One can hear in this query the echo of yet another question: "What business does she have being here"? And the answer is, clearly, no "business." The "business" of "the white house" is presumably the activity of administering the affairs of the public realm. Her business--especially on the second visit--seems to extend no further than a superficial concern with bed sheets. But since the primary responsibility for determining and holding to the nature of the business to be conducted lies with "the white house," it is the very concerns of that administration which are being called into question here. The "white house" can be seen as the centre of a possible coherence, but it is a coherence that will suffer dispersion once a proper attention to

public "Tyrian" business fails.

A growing sense of specious play is springing up around the words "doll," "ditties," and "children"; it is a kind of playing which interferes with the work of the morning, a playing driven by the egocentric will, which imposes yet another drag on this exercise in movement. The false measures imposed by ego can apportion only "ditties" and the "euphoria" of chaos (TMP 35). Kinetic is dead-ended in this old methodology.

But the blockage is soon cleared away. In section "5," the orator-pedagogue re-enters the narrative in full "command" of the "middle voice" (TMP 36). He now declares the triumph of the vertical over the horizontal: a "land-spout's / put all the diapers / up in the trees" (TMP 36). The force of vertical kinetics has flung up all those recalcitrant children who would otherwise crawl back to lie with the primal mother. Where there had previously been a search for a method of action directed towards the dance, there is now a proposal for a method of verbal action: it is to possess "what musicians call / the middle voice," and "to command it / is to be in business" (TMP 36). In this case, the business at hand is the business of the epic poet, telling the "tale of the tribe." In The Tale of the Tribe, Michael Bernstein speaks of Olson's efforts to restore the familiar to us by way of the lessons of history:

> the unique opportunity of the epic writer is . . . to reveal "history [as] the function of any of us," i.e., to let us see we possess the freedom to determine by what values both our individual lives and our society are governed, . . . [to] let us experience history as a series of choices adopted

> by living men in specific circumstances, [and to let us see that] previous historical decisions have created the social framework into which we are born, but [that] they do not limit our own capacity to choose again, to continue earlier patterns or to change our emphasis and create new ones in their place.[13]

The object of Olson's business is to allow us to take up those choices, to restore to us the possibilities of our own human practices.

Here, I propose two other conceptions of composition as a way of entry into Olson's poetic practice: the first is traced in the epigraph to this section: "to compose . . . is to give to do"(Barthes 153); the other is bound up with the Greek conception of rhapsoidia. Both techniques seek to resolve a relationship between the private and the public which presently exists as a condition of alienation. In "Projective Verse," Olson states that the poem "must, at all points, be a high energy-construct and, at all points, an energy discharge" (HU 52). In this context, "to give to do" is to pass on energy; that is, the reader will take away and use the energy the poem has made available. The activity of reading is to be forwarded by a new impetus; the text is to be considered not as a final, stopped artifact but rather as an ongoing textual (and textural) process. The reader is continually "crossing its writing with a fresh inscription"(Barthes 153), and in so doing, is continually crossing over into his own narrative, continually drawing it into the field of "the close" (RB 8).

To have the use of the middle voice is to be in possession

of a method of verbal action. As for the body, so for the voice: instrumentation is once more. Tropos also becomes a consideration here: it involves finding one's own voice, i.e., discovering the "natural, proper, or characteristic action" (SVH 33) of one's own speech. The proper use of the middle voice then--if one acknowledges that the "kinetic is the act of life"("SD" 12)--is to transfer energy, that is, by telling it right, to move others on their own narrative, to allow them to take up their own histories. Within this kinetic there is also the pursuit of a coherence. The Greek rhapsōidia means literally "songs stitched together," and refers to a technique of oral poetry (Guide 102). The songs that are being stitched together are not only Maximus's songs but, also, your and my songs, and the middle voice can be seen to function here as the thread that sews them together. Thus we are offered a poetic practice that advances kinetic and coherence, and which clearly establishes the figure of the poet as a "dancing thinker" ("SD" 9). But just as the dancer must pay attention to the "inhering limits of the body" ("SD" 10), so must the poet pay attention to the inhering limits of language. He must work with the knowledge that "There may be no more names than there are objects / There can be no more verbs than there are actions" (TMP 36). Only with this "confidence of limit" can he proceed, or obtain to a proper tropos. This is the work or the exercise for this morning, and "it is still morning" because the enactment of kinetic locates one in a practice of "newing."

The first part of this poem has proposed a method of action that re-enacts kinetic; what we encounter in part II is a method of attention and composition that draws in a coherence. But coherence is not to be taken as completed form, for "the motive . . . of reality is process, not goal" (SVH 49). And this is what is given in the first line: "a hollow muscular organ which, by contracting vigorously, keeps up the" (TMP 36)--process, not goal. This definition stems from the fifth edition of Webster's Collegiate Dictionary which defines "heart" as: "A hollow muscular organ which, by contracting rhythmically, keeps up the circulation of the blood" (Guide 60). In this poem, the object of that action--the circulation of the blood--has been left out, thus focussing attention on the gathering momentum itself. To be able to maintain this kind of attention is "to have the heart" to disturb finalities, to render the definitive transitive. What we meet in dictionaries as "definitions" are statements of final meaning which purport to extend their applications beyond the lexicological moment of their appearance in a given volume. Olson's concern with particularity, however, directs him to "those things which do not carry their end any further than their reality in themselves" ("SD" 10). Words are always to be freed for present use, for present life. The word "rhythmically," which occurs in the Webster's definition, is replaced here by "vigorously," a change perhaps prompted by the need to denote an intensity of action rather than a simple recurrence. In crossing the original definition with his own

inscription, Olson has successfully brought it into use.

However, this still leaves unanswered the question of how these things are to be put to use. At first glance, the striking collection of words and phrases in this part of the poem seems to comprise little more than a random collocation of disconnected language events, a situation certain to discombobulate if not frustrate even the most negatively capable reader. But after a more considered reading, a specific principle of ordering does begin to emerge. The discussion of "heart" is followed by a partial description of "heather": "a whorl of green bracts at the base." This description of heather appears in Webster's on the same page as the entry for "heart" (Guide 60). Heather is defined as "A species of heath . . . having a rose-colored calyx with a whorl of green bracts at the base,-ling"--"ling" is yet another variety of heath plant. However, in its situation here in the poem, it maintains a double (if not triple, i.e., "ling cod") reference. The word functions like a gate through which a variety of meanings pass: the preceding line associates it with heather while the succeeding line--"she is known as"--turns it over to an association with Mei Ling Soong. "She is known as" "Ling," which is to say that this is her familiar name, the name that is used to distinguish her from her sisters, who also bear the character "Soong" (the surname) and "Mei" in their names. It is the "base" from which she proceeds. For the Chinese, it is customary to carry one character over into each child's name (though this is broken down along gender lines), so that while

all the children bear a common surname, all the females would share a common second character--in this case, "Mei"--and all the males yet another, thus leaving only the last character to function as a variable.

This concern with naming and defining points up the necessity of calling things by their proper names, of exercising that "old measure of care" (TMP 22) which is capable of recognizing that waters are tides, and are not gods. In "Letter 5," Olson castigates Vincent Ferrini for his inattention to the reality of things in themselves:

> . . . winds, Ferrini,
> which are never 4, which have their grave dangers (as
> writing does)
> just because weather
> is very precise to
> the quarter it comes from (as writing is,
> if it is as good as
> (TMP 25)

This same measure of care operates in the recognition that "Weather / comes generally / under the / metaphrast" (TMP 36). The poet must "know the quarters / of the weather, where it comes from, where it goes" (TMP 53), just as he must command the "metaphrasis"--the exact turn of phrase or speech. Again, it is to turn one's attention to, and to make use of, "the natural, proper, or characteristic action of anything" (SVH 33), and of oneself--which brings us to the discussion of "metacenter": "(When M is above G, all's / well. When below, there's / upset. When M and G are coincident, / it is not very interesting)" (TMP 36). This is a rephrasing of the definition of "metacenter" in Webster's, and, not surprisingly, it appears on the page before

the entry for "metaphrast." The issue here involves the stability of a body in relation to a centre of gravity. "Metacenter" is defined as "The point of intersection (M) [in the illustration] of the vertical through the center of buoyancy (B) of a floating body with the vertical through the new center of buoyancy (B_1) when the body is displaced however little. When M is above the center of gravity (G) of the floating body, the position of the body is stable; when below it, unstable; when coincident with it, neutral" (Guide 61). It is this last statement which is particularly suggestive in the context of the foregoing concerns with verticality and tropos. When M is coincident with G, the position of the body is neutral, or as Olson would have it, "it is not very interesting." It holds no interest for the poet because it is simply an instance of the same old thing, that same old centre of gravity which dragged everything over the ground--namely, horizontality. When M and G are coincident, it means that the intersecting activity of the verticals have had no telling effect on the position of the body.

The principle of ordering begins to reveal itself: there is a definition of heart followed by an instance of its use in the idiomatic expression "to have the heart"; then there is a definition of heather followed by the naming of a specific variety of heather, i.e., "ling"; but "ling" functions homonymously and refers also to the proper name of Madame Chiang Kai-Shek. This punning is followed by a rhyme which pushes "heather" into "weather," and then by way of a rhyme of

conceptual occasions, "weather" turns up under "metaphrast." A "metaphrast" is one who translates, who effects a change from one order of words to another; thus, he is one who knows "where it comes from" and "where it goes," one who is capable of the literal translation of energies. The definition of "metacenter" appears at this point not just because of its physical proximity to "metaphrast" but because changes in the weather generate metacenters. And with its implications of adjusting to new centers, "metacenter" returns to the centering rhythms of the heart.

The elusively tangential now stands revealed as actual kinship. It is the logographer who performs these revelations through the practice of "word writing" (AP 20); that is to say, the logographic poem issues forth by means of an attention to all possible facets and textures--i.e., visual, semantic, sonoric--of given words. In this dance, it is not the poet who leads but, rather, the materials or words that lead him. Poems are not to be made by an aggressive act of will; instead, creation is to occur "by the success of its own accident" (SVH 48). Once again, "Coincidence and proximity, because the space-time continuum is known, become the determinants of chance and accident and make possible creative success" (SVH 49). Words or objects should not suffer impositions. In the logographic poem, things are not willfully changed, "They only stand more revealed" (TMP 5).

The necessity of attention and care in the matter of one's poetic business has now been stated, but an orientation for that

perceptual commotion has yet to be specified. In section "1" the question "how we use ourselves and on what" or how "each of us / chooses our own / kin and / concentration" (TMP 28), is met by a declaration of stance. Both sections "1" and "2" proceed by way of a series of puns on tropos. Section "1" is composed of two entries from Webster's: the first is for "nasturtium":

> [L. a cress, prop., nose-twist, in allusion to its pungency, fr. nasus nose + torquere, to twist.] Hort. Any of a genus (Tropaeolum, family Tropaeolaceae) of herbs bearing showy spurred red and yellow flowers and having pungent seeds and flower buds. (Guide 61)

The second is for "Tropaeolum":

> [. . . fr. Gk. tropaion trophy. See TROPHY. So named because likened to ancient trophies.] Bot. Any of a genus (Tropaeolum) of tropical American diffuse or climbing pungent herbs with lobed or dissected peltate leaves and showy, variously colored flowers; esp., a garden species (T.majus), the nasturtium. (Guide 61)

"Peltate" means shaped like a shield; thus, for Maximus, "the nasturtium / is my shield." And with this armamentarium (both "lance" and "shield"), he stands to the task of defeating Tiamat. Maximus will slay the dragon and collect his "trophy" for having turned back that horizontality. But he is no furiously thrashing St. George--he will conquer by dancing sitting down. "Poised on the base of the spine . . . growing, and waving from the spine, like flowers are, or branches, on a tree" ("SD" 15), like his nasturtium is, Maximus will demonstrate his own vertical tropism. He is a self-rooted "tropical American," "diffuse" because he moves outward to encounter things in space, and "climbing pungent" because he would assert verticality and sharpness

(defying that old gravity), telling us "what is a lance, who obeys the figures of / the present dance." And in his own turnings in space, his own tropes in language, he will show himself "so variously colored," the person, likewise, standing more revealed.

The last line ends with a definite article, poised expectantly at the edge of the page awaiting the next turn of attention which comes in the description of the "toc," a "tropic bird." The definition of "tropic bird" appears on the same page of Webster's as the entry for "tropaeolum"; this bird is "any of several birds (genus Phaethon) found chiefly in tropical seas (Guide 62). In a letter to Robert Creeley, Olson had referred to the bird as "that toc bird."[14] In the turning, things stand more revealed; thus the toc "plucks its tail to free the handsome green eye from / redundant feathers Which, then, it switches / to admire itself" (TMP 37). This orientation toward the revelation of beauty is a characteristic action of the toc. It is an instance of the self being brought to bear on itself, which is what "reflection" is: to bend back or return, as Olson returns to the story of the farmer, an incident he had earlier recounted in that letter to Creeley.

So a methodology of use will have its source in self-acts, but the exercise of "one's own bent" still requires an appropriate locus. To be extensible in human directions is to perform within an "actual earth of value." Thus if "the seedling / of morning" (TMP 37) is to put down roots and grow, then some

ground clearing is in order here. The "first hours of" morning constitute the re-entry of light, a light which is necessary if one is "to move" and if one is to remove "the night's presences." But the task will not be easy: the comma after the word "move" slows down the action momentarily, pointing to the difficulties of climbing up out of that bed of night. The light allows for a heightening of attention which immediately involves Maximus in a further perceptual commotion. If we are to know what to use ourselves on, we must first learn to see what possibilities exist. That is what Eli Whitney did when he "noticed, / the cotton picks easiest" (TMP 37) at a particular time and in a particular way. He then put that seeing to use in the invention of the cotton gin. However, not all things move so easily at this time: for example, "when it has rained . . . the muscles are not as good," they lose "some exactitude of response" ("SD" 12). But it is to be remembered that this is, after all, only the beginning of the work of emergence--though, already, within that emergence a dignity stands revealed, as Maximus's flower "after rain, wears / such diadem" (TMP 37). In this section, the lines take part in a staggered descent across the page, suggesting the motion of stepping; but it is a stepping in which each step is taken before it is known where the foot will light. Only a quickness of attention in each instance will save Maximus from falling. Thus he is carried forward from the diadem, or headband, worn by his flower to the image of a man whose head is encircled by a "necklace" of teeth. In a section devoted to

beginnings, we are suddenly confronted by death. "Caries" refers to the progressive destruction of bone or tooth (in this case, tooth decay), and derives from the Greek word Ker, meaning death. At this point, the poem literally steps back momentarily; i.e., the next four lines are lined up at the left hand margin. It is as if the unexpected appearance of death in the perceptual field has forced Olson to a reconsideration of the scene (and seen). The reconsideration becomes an injunction to redirect the attentions: "He sd: Notice / the whiteness, not / the odor of the dead night" (TMP 37). These lines allude to one of Christ's sayings: "'What a stench,' said the disciples, / when passing the carrion of a dog. / 'How white the teeth are!' said Jesus" (Guide 63). The lesson offered here concerns the need to direct our attentions to that which is alive rather than that which is dead. This last step from "caries" to "carrion" serves as a point of departure for a radical re-visioning of all that came before. Deadness and darkness are not to be dwelt upon; instead, it is the whiteness and light inhering in the previous lines--i.e., the white cotton and white teeth, the bright diadem--which now stand more revealed and available for use. As well, the earlier suggestion of the cotton gin takes on a further significance here. A cotton gin is a machine that separates the seeds, hulls, and other foreign materials from cotton, thus leaving only the central portion of the cotton plant for use; so too, "not all experience itself--per se--is usable" (SVH 30). The ground is to be cleared of any deadnesses, or unusable undergrowth, before any

rooting can take place.

In section "4," the poem continues to turn back on itself; from "carrion" comes "carcass," specifically, the carcass of the lion in the story of Samson and the Philistines (Guide 64). In the story, Samson slays a lion, and when he returns some time later he discovers an abundance of honey in the carcass. Here, even the dead is made to yield some sustenance for the living. By this point in the poem, the "How" of the opening "exercise" of proper movement has been practiced many times over. The "lion" and the "woman" appear here in yet another order of relation, this time brought into association through their respective capacities to provide a means of nurture, i.e., the "honey in the lion" and "the honey / in woman" (TMP 38). The poem has thus circled back to the beginning but only to draw that beginning forward into another configuration of meaning, one which, in its suggestion of nurture, affords ever more relational possibilities.

Such a possibility is manifested in the link between nurture and the definition of well-being which opens section "5." It is "eudaemonia" that is being defined here; it appears in Webster's as "well-being; happiness; esp., in Aristotle's use, felicity resulting from life of activity in accordance with reason" (Guide 64). The possibility of this well-being is evident, but the reference point is not. "Which is the question": one's business is to be conducted "in accordance with what?" (TMP 38). If "reason" is no longer available as a measure, then a new measure

and orientation must be found. And it has been found. Felicity will result from a life of activity in accordance with the tropic centre; i.e., (returning for a moment to Olson's sense of function and the familiar), the tropic centre is at the heart of the natural, proper, and characteristic action of anything, or specifically of the human. Upset will occur when that natural or proper action is violated; here, proper action begins to assume a moral dimension. The "nature of the cargo" (TMP 38) maintains a backward reference to an incident first suggested in "Letter 2" as well as a forward reference to the story of "Moulton's folly" (TMP 39). The "cargo" of "Letter 2" was slaves: "they hid, or tried to hide, the fact the cargo their ships brought back / was black" (TMP 5). For Moulton, part of the cargo was to have been salvaged lumber. In both cases, it is an improper use--of both people and ships--that is at issue. Were Gloucester's "businesses" in fact founded on slavery rather than fishing?

The disturbance caused by "the wind," "a rip," or "the nature of the cargo" are all results of the simultaneous thrust of contrary or opposing motions, i.e., a natural or proper movement is threatened or thwarted by a contrary movement. For instance, a "rip" is a body of water that has been made rough by the meeting of opposing tides, currents or winds. In the case of the wind or the rip, the disturbance is elemental; but in the case of this "cargo," the disturbance is moral. These problems of use are bound up in questions of motion and direction, and in these final two sections of the poem, the single, controlling

image that emerges to focus these concerns is that of the swastika. In her study of Greek religious sources, Themis, Jane Ellen Harrison describes the swastika as a "symbol of motion and direction."[15] The word "swastika" is derived from the Sanskrit su, meaning "well" and asti, meaning "it is": "When the direction of the croix-gammée is to the right it is swastika, all is well; when, as much more rarely, the direction is to the left, it is sauvastika, and all is evil" (Themis 525). The movement to the right traces the course of the sun, and "the notion of following the sun is of course worldwide. Starting no doubt in practical magic, it ended in a vague feeling of 'luck'" (Themis 525). Section "5" depicts how motion can be stopped altogether if the attentions are misdirected. "Energy can be lost" (SW 63), and in fact does get lost when Moulton turns his attention to that "filth and lumber man is led by" (SW 63). It is the "dead sticks cross-wise" (TMP 39), that deadness and horizontality, which finally chews up the "screws" leaving the Hawes "dead in the water" with no power. The self-act is overtaken by the selfish act; kinetic is thwarted by greed.

Improper use is destructive; when energy is used for arbitrary or willful purposes, it can turn upon the man who uses it so--his "luck" can turn on him. Thus, in the final section, the concern is again with proper use. "Definition" is not a way of fixing universals but is, instead, a way of measuring things according to specific instances of use. Knowledge is to become familiar once more:

> It has been the immense task of the last century and a half to get man back to what he knows. I repeat that phrase: to what he knows. For it turns out to coincide exactly with that other phrase: to what he does. (SVH 29)

Given the choice of a definition as abstraction--as dictionary entry--or of definition as use, Maximus will choose the one which restores man to the practice of it in his own life: "futtocks / we call 'em" (TMP 40). As if determined to bear down even harder on this method of composition, Maximus presses one more dictionary entry into use: "fylfot," which appears on the same page as the entry for "futtocks," is another name for the swastika (Guide 64-65); the "fylfot" was also a figure that was used heraldically. If the nasturtium is Maximus's shield, then the fylfot/swastika will constitute his heraldic bearings. The image of the great cross with arms continued at right angles suggests a visual pun on "one's own bent"; like the flower waving from the spine, the bent arms propose the motion and the energy that will move one out into one's own "luck" (TMP 40). While it is we who give a name to things like "futtocks," it is "she" (TMP 40) who names herself because she is the very condition of one's own bent, i.e., tropos will always name itself. The poem too has named itself, named its "business," which is to give us the work and the locus of a perpetual "newing." It should be noted that "swastika," besides signifying luck, is also associated with morning. Thus the poem continually re-opens itself to a commotion of revelation, forever standing more revealed. The only "end" in the poem lies in an intention: METHODOLOGY, where

the act of composing a poem and a life is a continuous gesture of love reaching out into the unformed world:

> It is undone business
> I speak of this morning,
> with the sea
> stretching out
> from my feet
>
> (TMP 53)

Notes to Chapter Two

[1] Alfred North Whitehead, Modes of Thought, (1938; rpt. New York: The Free Press, 1966), p. 38.

[2] Eric A. Havelock, Preface to Plato, (1963; rpt. New York: Grosset & Dunlap, 1971), p. 63.

[3] Havelock, p. 63.

[4] Havelock, p. 63.

[5] Havelock, p. 63.

[6] Olson, SVH, pp. 54-55.

[7] Roland Barthes, Image/Music/Text, (New York: Hill and Wang, 1977), p. 149. Hereafter cited in the text as (Barthes).

[8] Thomas Taylor, The Dissertations of Maximus Tyrius, (1804) pp. iii-iv, as quoted in Butterick's Guide, p. 6. I am indebted to Mr. Butterick for the identification of a number of references and sources which I have made use of in this chapter, and in other parts of the thesis. The following references, in particular, were invaluable: the identification of the "international doll" as Madame Chiang Kai-Shek (née Mei Ling Soong); of the fifth edition of Webster's Collegiate Dictionary as the source for Olson's definitions in part II of the poem; of the Biblical reference to Samson; of the notebook entry containing one of Christ's sayings; and of Olson's familiarity with Jane Harrison's work on Greek religion, Themis.

[9] Charles Olson, "A Syllabary for a Dancer," Maps, No.4 (1971), p. 14. Hereafter cited in the text as "SD."

[10] Olson, "Syllabary," p. 13.

[11] Olson, "Syllabary," p. 13.

[12] Charles Olson, Reading at Berkeley, (San Francisco: Coyote, 1966), p. 8. Hereafter cited in the text as RB.

[13] Michael Bernstein, The Tale of the Tribe, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980), p. 235.

[14] Charles Olson, Selected Writings, ed. Robert Creeley, (New York: New Directions Books, 1966), p. 122.

[15] Jane Ellen Harrison, Themis, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1927), p. 525. Hereafter cited in the text as

Themis.

Chapter Three: The Archaeology of Expression

> Just to have her body in my mind (to objectify the possibility, the
>
> Heavenly Flower of
> One's own possibility . . .
>
> Charles Olson - The Maximus Poems

> . . . expression is the gift from the world as many to the world as one.
>
> Alfred North Whitehead - Modes of Thought

> You see, Cid, I am more and more persuaded that the revolution I am responsible for is this one, the identity of a person and their expression (that these are not separable) . . .
>
> Charles Olson - Letters For Origin

Over the course of three Spring evenings in 1968, Olson "tried to build, in one week, both structure and a corpus, built really upon three words" (PT 43-44). On this third evening, he begins his lecture by observing that:

> On Monday night I at least took a crack at arguing a world which has value [topos lecture], and on Wednesday I made a further, I mean another attempt to see if I could at least identify any one of us as a flower, or such a possibility [tropos lecture]. And tonight my job is to see if I can characterize what, in using the word type or typos, I mean by blow upon the world. At such a point, one enters the area of, in a real sense, finality--which was at the beginning and is not known until it is finished . . . By type, and what I mean by imprint--I think characterizes all creation. (PT 44)

Some comments made during the previous lecture offer a further gloss on Olson's sense of "imprint":

> We get our word type--which interests me, I suppose, as a writer--from [typos]. If any of you have ever

> seen a piece of movable type, at the bottom is the letter and the block is above. So that in order, really, to imagine a printer doing it . . . he's under your words in order to make the letters of them . . . In fact, literally, I would go so far . . . to think that you write that way. That you write as though you were underneath the letters. (PT 34)

To write as though one were underneath the letters suggests the action of pushing words up out of the self into the world. I believe it is just such an action that characterizes Olson's sense of our ontological function. To give objectified form to the possibilities within oneself is to return to the world as actuality what one has previously entertained as potentiality. The vocabulary here is borrowed from Whitehead, particularly from his discussions of the "ontological principle":

> The actual world is built up of actual occasions; and by the ontological principle whatever things there are in any sense of 'existence,' are derived by abstraction from actual occasions . . . The most general term 'thing'--or, equivalently, 'entity'--means nothing else than to be one of the 'many' which find their niches in each instance of concrescence . . . 'Actuality' means nothing else than this ultimate entry into the concrete . . . the ontological principle is the first stage in constituting a theory embracing the notions of 'actual entity,' 'givenness,' and 'process.' Just as 'potentiality for process' is the meaning of the more general term 'entity,' or 'thing'; so 'decision' is the additional meaning imported by the word 'actual' into the phrase 'actual entity.' 'Actuality' is the decision amid 'potentiality.' (Key 18-19)

Olson's readings of Whitehead's Process and Reality would have familiarized him with the workings of this particular principle. But for Olson, actuality, as the entry into the concrete, only specifies the first stage of the entry into a common world. The

next stage involves communicating that concreteness. In "The Praises," Olson points out this twofold procedure:

> What is necessary is
> containment,
> that that which has been found out by work, may, by
> work, be passed on
> (without due loss of force)
> for use
> USE [1]

Once the transmission is accomplished, the process would have arrived at a stage which Whitehead calls the achievement of a "nexus," which is "a set of actual entities in the unity of the relatedness constituted by their prehensions of each other, or--what is the same thing conversely expressed--constituted by their objectifications in each other" (Key 77-78). Returning again to the poetics, Olson observes that "one can define the act of art as vector which, having become private and thus acquired vision, ploughs the vision back by way of primordial things. Only thus can it have consequence."[2] Only thus can one be said to have repaid the "daily larcenies of the lung."[3] It is this argument against passive parasitism that prompts Olson to hold up William Stevens, an early Gloucester shipwright, as an exemplar of active production:

> That carpenter is much on my mind:
> I think he was the first Maximus
>
> Anyhow, he was the first to make things,
> not just live off nature
> (TMP 31)

In the process of interaction between oneself and "givenness," such acts as Stevens's contribute to the vocabulary of being. The "finality" which is eventually known is not oneself, but what

one does or makes. It is some such recognition that leads Olson to say: "one must ask that any act of yours or my life or anyone else's, be not actually that life but its act or production. And that is something which is essentially our language" (PT 36). Each act or production (I am thinking here of Hart Crane's assertion that each new poem is like a new word which enters the language, enriching it for all) constitutes a new "word" in a language of being, and the articulation of such words becomes an instance of "our life turn[ing] to tale" (O 10, 65).

In this context, expression can be seen as the method of typos; it is the mode of registering one's force in the world. For Olson, there are two primary grammars of human expression: history and mythology. It may be more accurate to say that there once were two such grammars, for "history" and "mythology," as they are presently misunderstood, are no longer capable of the kind of expression that so interested Olson. In "Human Universe," Olson upbraids the historian Arnold Toynbee for his tendency to

> diminish the energy once here expended into the sieve phonetic words have become to be offered like one of nature's pastes that we call jewels to be hung as a decoration of knowledge upon some Christian and therefore eternal and holy neck. It is unbearable what knowledge of the past has been allowed to become, what function of human memory has been dribbled out to in the hands of these learned monsters whom people are led to think "know." They know nothing in not knowing how to reify what they do know. What is worse, they do not know how to pass over to us the energy implicit in any high work of the past because they purposely destroy that energy as dangerous to the states for which they work--which it is, for any concrete thing is a danger to rhetoricians and politicians . . .

(HU 12)

From another perspective, the historian and philosopher R.G.Collingwood similarly criticizes Toynbee for destroying the energy of the past. Collingwood points out that Toynbee's work belongs within a tradition of historical positivism, that is, an historiography which derives its working principles from natural science. "These principles," Collingwood writes, "are based on the conception of external relations," both between events themselves, and between events and observers. Perhaps the most significant loss for history (as Collingwood conceived of it), lies in the fact that Toynbee

> . . . misconceives the relation between the historical process and the historian who knows it. He regards the historian as the intelligent spectator of history, in the same way in which the scientist is the intelligent spectator of nature: he fails to see that the historian is an integral element in the process of history itself, reviving in himself the experiences of which he achieves historical knowledge. Just as the various parts of the process are misconceived as placed outside one another, so the process as a whole and the historian are outside one another . . . [consequently,] history is converted into nature, and the past, instead of living in the present, as it does in history, is conceived as a dead past, as it is in nature.[4]

The key issue here for Collingwood (as I suspect it would have been for Olson too had he chosen to formulate the problem in this way) is choosing between "externality" and "integrality." As spectator, one is always removed from the "going reality" (Olson's word); for Collingwood, who felt that history was "for" human self-knowledge, Toynbee's Archimedean stance guaranteed his own banishment from any true historical knowledge.[5] Through his

inability to "re-enact" past events, to exercise the "historical imagination" (Collingwood's words), the energy of those events was lost. While Collingwood's historiography would have struck some sympathetic chords in Olson (Olson, in fact, owned a copy of Collingwood's The Idea of History), the critique of and the break with "scientific history" was still not as radical a gesture as Olson wished to make himself. In the end, Collingwood's historiography still remained within the formal confines of theories of knowledge rather than branching out into theories of active being.

This is not to say that Olson did not concern himself with epistemology--he did, but he dealt with it as epistemology in the service of the vita activa.[6] In his study of Olson's pedagogy, Robert von Hallberg makes a similar point:

> The alteration of epistemological priorities is merely the first phase of recovery from what Olson describes as estrangement from the familiar. In "ABCs 2" he names the stages of a process that moves from concrescence to perception to formal activity:
>
> > of rhythm is image
> > of image is knowing
> > of knowing there is
> > a construct
>
> . . . the rhythm of molecules, of energy, presents an image, but only that, because the closer one looks at "matter" the more insubstantial it becomes. The percipient subject can then "know" this image; this is the epistemological phase of Olson's thought. The last phase is ethical: from his knowledge man constructs a form, or else he is not fully human. (Hallberg 90-91)

But it is not simply the construction of form that makes one human, for it is hardly better to be the "Isolato"-maker than the

"Isolato"-spectator. In a poem intended for but subsequently withheld from the Maximus sequence--"Maximus, to Gloucester--Letter #34--Olson makes the observation that once form is achieved, it is to be passed on:

> the struggle of form.
> . . . . . .
> Get your terms straight. Then you can say what anything is.
> That will be what you mean. Then what it is--that's
> for somebody else.
> (O 6, 55)

The "what" is for others; in acknowledging that communicativeness, one also acknowledges the essential human condition of plurality and the corresponding need to establish relations of value within it. In her writing, Hannah Arendt notes repeatedly that "in Latin 'to live' . . . always coincided with inter homines esse 'to be in the company of men'" (BPF 73). But even beyond the human world, the concept of passing on is fundamental. In Modes of Thought, Whitehead writes:

> Expression is the diffusion, in the environment, of something initially entertained in the experience of the expressor. No conscious determination is necessarily involved; only the impulse to diffuse. This urge is one of the simplest characteristics of animal nature. It is the most fundamental evidence of our presupposition of the world without.[7]

History, as it stood to the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, was largely the dead-end of mute classification, of a "eunuchic objectivity"[8] posing as vital knowledge. If Olson was to find a history capable of expression, he would have to look elsewhere. In "Letter 23" Olson declares: "I would be an historian as Herodotus was, looking / for oneself for the

evidence of / what is said" (TMP 100-101). Always the littoralist (and in this case also the literalist), Olson returns to beginnings in the figure of Herodotus, the generally acknowledged father of western history. In opposition to a Toynbee who "treats [historical knowledge] as if it were something he finds ready-made in books,"[9] Olson brings forward the Herodotean notion of istorin. Olson's source for this information is J.A.K. Thomson's The Art of the Logos (Guide 146). In one of the Institute of the New Sciences of Man lectures (prepared three years before the lectures which form the basis of The Special View of History), Olson provides a gloss for this term:

> Thomson says: "istorin in [Herodotus] appears to mean "finding out for oneself" (what we would mean by documentation or research)--going to sources--not depending on hearsay. In other words, The History of Herodotus, is Herodotus' Evidence of What is Said. History, then, is restored to its proper function of a methodology, not at all a content itself: it is only "to find out": it itself goes to root histor, meaning "knowing," and meaning knowing the story: the first meaning of history in one dictionary even today is: "A narrative of events; a tale; a story." And as you know, the word story itself is only the same word shortened. (O 10, 63)

Unlike Toynbee, Olson will engage rather than simply arrange the elements of the historical record. History is to be taken as a methodology for coming to "know the story." Implicit in the word "evidence" is the sense that the traces of something are to be presented, to be told. In her essay "The Concept of History," Hannah Arendt points out that that implicit suggestion is, in fact, an explicit aspect of the meaning of istorin:

> Herodotus, the first historian, did not yet have at his disposal a word for history. He uses the word ἱστορεῖν [istorein], but not in the sense of "historical narrative." Like εἰδέναι [eidenai] to know, the word ἱστορία [istoria] is derived from ἰδ-, [id-] to see, and ἵστωρ [istor] means originally "eyewitness," then the one who examines witnesses and obtains truth through inquiry. Hence ἱστορεῖν [istorein] has a double meaning: to testify and to inquire. (BPF 284-285)

In this context, the methodology of history would explicitly entail both finding out for oneself and testifying publicly about what one has found. Olson would undoubtedly have welcomed the additional etymological information that both testimony and inquiry are built into istorin, for it quietly reinforces his own sense of the necessity of telling a tale.

Taken as methodology, the practice of history begins to move away from its externalizing tendencies. In The Special View of History, three years after Olson offered the above definition of history, the understanding and the language of history has noticeably changed. Instead of "methodology," history is now "the function of any one of us" (SVH 17). Olson goes on to say:

> Let me try it this way: that a life is the historical function of the individual. History is the intensity of the life process--its life value. By this I do not mean to imply any imparted value, whether moral, aesthetic or intellectual; the life value is simply conditioned by its determining power, which is manifested in definite historical operations ("effects"). And of course taking it this way, I do not at all mean that history is a force (the most wicked present fallacy of all . . .). (SVH 18)

Part of the change in emphasis can be attributed to his reading of Whitehead in the intervening years. In the opening section of The Special View of History, Olson himself acknowledges the

presence of Whitehead in those lectures: "It will be seen within how thoroughly I take it Whitehead has written the metaphysic of the reality we have acquired" (SVH 16). And in the passage quoted above, it is possible to discern how Olson has begun to leaven his own thinking with Whitehead's work. I am thinking here of Whitehead's theory of "objectification." In A Key to Whitehead's Process and Reality, Donald Sherburne offers a useful explanation of this theory--he is quoting Whitehead throughout the passage:

> "The discussion of how the particular occasions become original elements for a new creation is termed the theory of objectification . . . The functioning of one actual entity in the self-creation of another actual entity is the 'objectification' of the former for the latter actual entity." (Key 231)

Sherburne goes on to discuss the theory of objectification in relation to the "Principle of Relativity." This principle, as I noted in Chapter One, states that

> the potentiality for being an element in a real concrescence of many entities into one actuality is the one general metaphysical character attaching to all entities, actual and non-actual. (Key 23-24)

Sherburne elaborates on this notion saying:

> This means that each actual occasion, once it has become and reached its satisfaction, loses its subjectivity, its own immediacy of becoming, and serves as a datum for succeeding generations of actual entities, which incorporate it, in some aspect, into their very being by prehending it as a datum to be absorbed into their own concrescences. The subject-predicate, substance-quality, particular-universal dichotomies, which stem from Aristotle . . . are all repudiated by this theory of objectification. (Key 232)

The "concrescence" that Sherburne brings up here refers to "the

growing together of a many into the unity of a one" (Key 212). In The Special View of History, Olson translates into the terms of the macroscopic world his understanding of the stages in the process of that concrescence:

> I return . . . to the three stages of feeling. The first is that in which the multiples of anything crowd in on the individual; the second is that most individual stage when he or she seeks to impose his or her own order of order on the multiples; and the third stage is the stage called satisfaction, in which the true order is seen to be the confrontation of two interchanging forces which can be called God and the World. (SVH 50)

In the earlier passage from The Special View, Olson speaks of a "determining power, which is manifested in definite historical operations ("effects")." The "determining power" and the "effects" can be likened to the second and third stages of feeling as Olson has presented them. The "effects," in particular, can be viewed as the objectification of the life process which, having reached the stage of satisfaction, "loses its subjectivity" and is passed on as a "datum for succeeding generations" of historical actors. In a related context, Arendt discusses the origin of history in reference to one such instance of objectification:

> Not historically but poetically speaking, its beginning lies . . . in the moment when Ulysses, at the court of the Phaeacians, listened to the story of his own deeds and sufferings, to the story of his life, now a thing outside himself, an "object" for all to see and hear. What had been sheer occurrence now became "history." But the transformation of single events and occurrences into history was essentially the same "imitation of action" in words which was later employed in Greek tragedy . . . The scene where Ulysses listens to the story of his own life is paradigmatic for both history and poetry; the

> "reconciliation with reality" . . . came about through the tears of remembrance. The deepest human motive for history and poetry appears here in unparalleled purity: since listener, actor and sufferer are the same person, all motives of sheer curiosity and lust for new information, which, of course, have always played a large role in both historical inquiry and aesthetic pleasure, are naturally missing in Ulysses himself, who would have been bored rather than moved if history were only news and poetry only entertainment. (BPF 45)

The objectification of Ulysses's life offers the way to a "reconciliation with reality" through "remembrance." In one sense, this method of reconciliation is also applicable to Olson's thinking though both the nature of that reality and that remembrance have changed radically. The objectification served as a way to remember Ulysses to the world. But the very need to be remembered, to be immortalized, involved pre-Platonic Greek culture in a troubling paradox:

> The paradox is that, on the one hand, everything was seen and measured against the background of the things that are forever [nature], while, on the other, true human greatness was understood . . . to reside in deeds and words, and was . . . represented by Achilles, "the doer of great deeds and the speaker of great words" . . . (BPF 45-46)

The irony is that "greatness," which is bound up with permanence, should, in its human manifestation be bound up with the most ephemeral and futile activities of men. They are ephemeral and futile simply because they do not outlive the moment of their performance. The early Greek solution was to offer immortality through the words of the poets. However, a later and a more philosophical and radically decisive solution appeared in the work of Plato and Aristotle. Since they no longer regarded man

as the highest being, they also no longer believed it possible for man to achieve immortality through his words and deeds. Plato and Aristotle subsequently turned away from the realm of human affairs as a possible training ground for immortality and, instead, declared that immortalizing could only be achieved in the realm of contemplation. For them,

> . . . the proper attitude of mortals, once they had reached the neighbourhood of the immortal, was actionless and speechless contemplation: the Aristotelian nous, the highest and most human capacity of pure vision, cannot translate into words what it beholds. (BPF 47)

The same could be said of the Platonic vision of ultimate truth; consequently,

> . . . the old paradox was resolved by the philosophers by denying to man not the capacity to "immortalize," but the capability of measuring himself and his own deeds against the everlasting greatness of the cosmos, of matching, as it were, the immortality of nature and the gods with an immortal greatness of his own. The solution clearly comes about at the expense of the "doer of great deeds and the speaker of great words." (BPF 47)

On this latter point, Olson would largely agree--the terms of this solution effectively estrange us from the practices of the human body. In The Special View of History, Olson writes: "Man is not ideal, and life is not an isolation, and the falsest estrangement of all, which set in with logic and classification in the 5th century, is contemplation" (SVH 25).

In the context of pre-Platonic Greek society, the failure to be remembered implies the isolation of the individual in time. Immortality was conceived in temporal and subjective terms. For Olson, however, the remembrance is of another order; that is, it

operates in spatial terms rather than temporal ones, and the immortality was cast in the manner of Whitehead's notion of "objective immortality":

> The attainment of a peculiar definiteness is the final cause which animates a particular process; and its attainment halts its process, so that by transcendence it passes into its objective immortality as a new objective condition added to the riches of definiteness attainable, the 'real potentiality' of the universe. (Key 233)

The action/event/word having expressed itself, "loses its subjective immediacy" and achieves the immortality of a new objective condition in the world. It has become fact. In The Special View of History, Olson speaks of the need to restore a principle of fact: "I cannot begin to indicate what history is if the dimension of fact as the place of the cluster of belief isn't understood to be at the heart of it" (SVH 30). When the facts are known--that is, known "in the only way that knowledge makes sense, that is methodological, it can be used" (SVH 30)--one's story can be told. It is then re-membered to the world as "real-potentiality," an object for others to use. As Olson points out:

> . . . a man is himself an object, whatever he may take to be his advantages, the more likely to recognize himself as such the greater his advantages, particularly at that moment that he achieves an humilitas sufficient to make him of use. (HU 60)

The only allowable immortality for Olson is the one that is made with each new act, not the one that hypostatizes single events. Remembrance is a way to make space alive in each instant, to fill out the extent of each instant. "History," after all, "is the practice of space in time" (SVH 27).

Given these changed terms of experience, "the deepest human motive" for history and poetry can be seen as a "creative advance into novelty." The vocabulary is Whitehead's, but the occasion is Olson's littoralist poetics. In "I, Maximus of Gloucester, to You," the primordial sea and the created land stand to each other in a relation of permanence and flux. In Whitehead, the corresponding metaphysical terms are "God" and "World." In the following passage from Process and Reality, Olson's poetics are translated into cosmological terms:

> Opposed elements stand to each other in mutual requirement. In their unity, they inhibit or contrast. God and the World stand to each other in this opposed requirement. God is the infinite ground of all mentality, the unity of vision seeking physical multiplicity. The world is the multiplicity of finites, actualities seeking a perfected unity. Neither God, nor the world, reaches static completion. Both are in the grip of the ultimate metaphysical ground, the creative advance into novelty. Either of them, God and the World, is the instrument of novelty for the other.[9]

It is the responsibility of the "subject" to become a "superject"; that is, as well as taking in, one is required to pass back out. In another of the Institute lectures, Olson begins to limn the dimensions of that necessity:

> Generation can be seen literally to be the climate of our being as decisively as the place of it is that internal environment we call our selves, the individual . . . Do I need to press on any of you the huge extent to which we are compelled? If I leave it that life is generation no matter how far it does go away from sex & reproduction--no matter how much so much of our time is free for other actions than that swift one--then why death is of such moment of this matter may now be seen: that death is large not because it is merely the end of any of us as individuals (that mortality), but that we are thrown at or against death--we are propelled

> to fight it--because it represents the denial of, not just any one of us, but the denial of that which makes life so powerful, and so precious to us in a way also distinguishable from just that we, each of us, has it--that is, generation itself, that we too can--must generate--in whatever we do, not only in such biology as that we can, that we do, and that we cease, but generate in everything we do. (O 10, 36)

History, too, is a condition as compelling as generation, but it is specifically human generation:

> The condition of man is a continuum we hereby declare to be called as it has always been meant, history. It means "knowing": Hister. Find out what it's about. Can one offer a determinative more exact to that which any of us is impelled to do without any choice in the matter? That is, otherwise, one is forced to talk about "life." But it has never been a satisfactory word because it means what nature offers, not what man DOES. One can indeed live. But curiousity? [sic] It is only satisfied by the creation of the history of one's self. What makes us want to, a Lady asked me. It is what I mean by no choice. History, is to want to. It is the built-in. (SVH 28)

And it is "the one way to restore the familiar to us--to stop treating us cheap" (SVH 29). The "eunuchic objectivity" of history, that selfless, lifeless academic affair, is overtaken by the generative objectivity of istorin. The tenses of this generative objectivity are both present and future; history entails both a finding out of "what" one is, that is, the extent of the human (Olson's interest in archaeology, in beginnings), and of "who" one is, the "intensity of the life process" that situates us always "at the point of genesis,"[11] from there to tell the tale of it.

Alongside history, there is another form of story that engages the human: mythology--or "mutho-logos," the "practice of life as story" (SVH 21). In tackling the question "What did happen?", Olson notes that one is faced with two alternatives: "make it up; or try to find out. Both are necessary" (SVH 20). In a lecture called "The Language, of Mythology," Olson discusses at length an instance of one particular author "making it up." The writer is Homer and the "made-up" text is The Odyssey. In his reading of Victor Bérard's book Did Homer Live?, Olson encountered an argument on the nature of Homer's method of composition which helped him to hone his own sense of the mythological:

> . . . the Odyssey has this series of places which are signified by single figures: Cyclops, Circe, Calypso, etc. And what Bérard has shown is that these proper nouns were not in the language (as Agamemnon was, or Achilles, say, or Odysseus himself) before the poem was written. Where, then, did they come from. This is most Bérard's contribution. He has analyzed them, and shows that behind each is a Semitic word which, in each case, is a description of a coast condition of vital import as landmark to seamen:
>
> for example, Circe is Sea-Hawk
> Cyclops is
> Kalypso is
>
> (O 10, 79)

What is of interest to Olson here is writing as a process of composition. Where does it begin? In Bérard's reading of Homer, it begins with attention to the objects in the geographical environment. A failure of attention under the circumstances of a

sea voyage could prove disastrous. Olson notes that after that initial act of attention,

> Homer took these proper names--Rock Like a Ship, a She Like a Hawk, a Land of One-Eyes . . . and did the root act of all mythology: he took the simile, that act of recognition which is in itself an act of shapes--is just such an act as to shape clay into an Adam or a bison--is metamorphosis . . . Homer took that necessity of ourselves that we name the new thing by what it is most like that we know . . . he merely invoked that motion of metamorphosis which requires naming a step further out: he projected that motion into story, as all men convert their own implicit busynesses into actions. (O 10, 83)

In projecting that motion into story, what Homer has done is to state reality "in exactly those terms by which a human being experiences reality: personages, events, & things; who, what, how. It does not explain or compare . . . it re-enacts . . . " (O 10, 66). The impulse to tell is a built-in. And the fact that

> expression . . . is more than just something afterwards . . . & . . . that all this--this tropism, I believe it must properly be called, that out of the organism of our life, our life turns to tale--is why I . . . believe the one true word to cover reality is this one that it is mythological, that it is, mind you, what is said." (O 10, 64-65)

On this basis, Olson formulates his "science of mythology," the "ultimate science of man because it rests itself on a content which can be said to be the inextricable human content: that what is is, in the final analysis, what is said" (O 10, 65). Unless this is understood, one falls into

> those predicaments of stasis which overtake all societies which lose this real crazy subtlety of myth and rite--that anything we say or do is what is. You get the predicament of being as determinable or describable, or all mechanism; you get the intellectual enjoyment of the problem of being, or

> metaphysics; or you get that poor, contemplative substitute for mythology--religion, or the contemplation of a being who is pure being without the utter human necessity of exercising it called G O D or god. (O 10, 65)

The thrust of Olson's "science" is to allow man to regain the practice of himself that he had lost to contemplation in the fifth century B.C.. He has regained the measure of his words and deeds, and with that restoration, the familiar is also restored.

Olson notes, on one occasion, that the "mythological present" is the familiar (O 10, 97). And with that assertion, the poet-scientist "determines, and isolates the field proper to the study" of "who you are" (O 10, 71). He begins his work by clearing away the old "pslopologies" and "pslychologies" which would assert either

> (1) that who you are is a mechanism like what you are, your body, or (2), that who you are is so different from your body, and earth, that we must have a word the soul to leave us to neglect ourselves for ever, and turn the whole job over to a master of souls called god, who dwells in an equally smudged place called paradise . . . (O 10, 71)

Who we are, Olson finally observes, is the "experience of the mythological" or, "to use the quick word for who we are," the experience of the "psyche" (O 10, 73). And the psyche has "an action unique to itself" which enables it to engage the real: "What the action . . . is, is the act of image, one of the least dealt with, and yet one of the greatest commons, of the familiar human experience" (O 10, 73). Olson takes his sense of image from Linnaeus's definition of imago:

> Restricted to entomology, it means "the final and perfect stage or form of an insect after its meta-

> morphoses" . . . I can't offer you any greater insight into the act of image than, to form, after metamorphoses, the perfect insect. It is itself the perfect image of--image. (O 10, 74)

A word of explanation concerning the word "perfect" might be in order here. By "perfect," Olson did not mean completed and static form. Rather, he would insist that "when either perfection or form is achieved, it is already imperfect or less than the necessary form by the very fact of its coming into its own existence: it has pushed the limit of possibility by its own achievement" (SVH 29). It is again another instance of objectification, where "its attainment halts its process" and it subsequently passes into the "real potentiality" of the world. It might be added (though Olson does not mention this explicitly) that imago is also defined as "an insect in its final, adult, sexually mature, and typically winged state."[12] Thus after the metamorphoses, what one has is a form capable of generating out of itself. And because the imaginal state is a winged state, it is never static.

If we then take this act of image as the "crucial factor" in the experience of the mythological, it becomes clearer how mythology offers another grammar of expression. The act of image is the tensor of the experience of the psyche (or "mythological present"). I return for a moment to the poem "ABCs 2" where Olson offers those words dictated to him in a dream:

> of rhythm is image
> of image is knowing
> of knowing there is
> a construct

Out of the rhythm of metamorphoses, there emerges an image, an imago. That winged, generative creature can then be known, in the only way that knowing makes sense to Olson, "that is methodological, it can be used." The implicit motion of that "winged, imaginal state" (O 6, 55) can then be projected into the construct of story. As the principle of fact, or objectification, constitutes a crucial factor in the historian's work, so likewise, the act of image constitutes a crucial factor in the mythologist's or poet's work (Olson considers these terms to be synonymous--[SVH 21]).

Some time after he made these comments, he encountered the work of Jane Ellen Harrison, specifically her study of the origins of Greek religion, Themis. Her analysis of myth, in particular, offered Olson a way of confirming and extending his understanding of the notion of mythology. Her etymological researches yielded some results similar to those of Olson's:

> "A myth is to us now-a-days, a 'purely fictitious narrative.' When we say a thing is 'mythical,' we mean it is non-existent. We have travelled in this matter far from ancient thinking and feeling. A mythos to the Greek was primarily just a thing spoken, uttered by the mouth [the two words share the Greek root mu]. Its antithesis or rather correlative is the thing done, enacted, the ergon or work. Old Phoinix says to Achilles, 'Thy father Peleus sent me to teach you to be both
>
> words the speaker and deeds the doer.'
>
> "The primary meaning of myth in religion is just the same [Olson omits "as in early literature"]: it is the spoken correlative of the acted rite, the thing done; it is to legomenonx as contrasted with or rather related to to dromenon. (SVH 21-22)

The passage makes clear that "myth" once addressed man's capacities as both "a speaking as well as a motor animal" (SVH

22). The "myths" were simply the things uttered by the mouth. However, the "things said" have fallen into serious disrepute as a result of the "split of science and fiction" which produced an "either-or" situation--that is, one could either "make it up" or "try to find out" (SVH 20). The latter alternative eventually prevailed in the form of scientific inquiry (which also appropriated the term logos to mean "reason"), and the former became entirely discredited as a truth-telling organ. Plato "used the word 'mouth' as an insult, to say it lies, and called poets muthologists" (SVH 20). It is interesting to note, however, that Herodotus called himself, "and was taken seriously as" a "mythologist," a teller of what is said (SVH 21). Though as Olson observes, "Herodotus may have been aware of a difference he was making when he did add the word 'history'" (SVH 20).

Further along in the chapter where Olson finds the above analysis of myth, Harrison notes that speech and action were but "two different ways of expressing emotion, two forms of reaction" (Themis 328). It seems that, in terms of ritual value, there was no major hierarchical distinction between to legomenonx and to dromenon. They are both functions of the human kinetic. This is how Olson understands the relation when he writes, immediately after the quoted passage on myth: "things said are things done" (SVH 22). This is the capping of statements he had made in another lecture of the same period:

> . . . they are one and not two things, that one can't do anything right without the right words to go with it. And I mean go with it. Go with

> it
> Do it. And say it. Motor speech and motor movement. One sanction and the same binding force.[13]

It is the same re-enactive kinetic that operates in both these areas of activity. Five years earlier, Olson had written in the essay "Human Universe":

> . . . he who possesses rhythm possesses the universe. And . . . art is the only twin life has [because] art does not seek to describe, but to enact. And if man is once more to possess intent in his life, and to take up the responsibility implicit in his life, he has to comprehend his own process as intact, from outside, by way of his skin, in, and by his powers of conversion, out again. (HU 10)

In this assessment of the method by which one makes oneself, or a poem, Olson states the necessity of meeting life with life, or, of meeting process with process. Only by doing so can one begin to live up to the world, to make oneself "equal to the real itself" (HU 117). Speech, or action,

> (when it is good) is the equal of all intake plus all transposing. It deserves this word, that it is the equal of its cause only when it proceeds unbroken from the threshold of a man through him and back out again, without loss of quality, to the external world from which it came, whether that external world take the shape of another human being or of the several human beings hidden by the generalization "society" or of things themselves. In other words, the proposition here is that man at his peril breaks the full circuit of object, image, action at any point. The meeting edge of man and the world is also his cutting edge. If man is active, it is exactly here where experience comes in that it is delivered back, and if he stays fresh at the coming in he will be fresh at his going out. If he does not, all that he does inside his house is stale . . . (HU 11)

As methodologies or grammars of expression, history and mythology are the means by which one uses oneself in the

"creative advance toward novelty." As Olson has noted, on different occasions, they are both means by which to possess man of the familiar--that is, his practice of himself. But, as Olson has also asked on numerous occasions, "what makes us want to?" He was to answer that with the realization that "to be is compulsion, is the launcher of 'to do'" (O 10, 85). "Being," for Olson, is always bound up with the necessary exercise of it; thus in "the practice of life as story," "to compose is [continually] to give to do." With this in mind, I have referred to both history and mythology (in Olsonian terms) as practical ontologies. That is to say, they offer not mere descriptions of the nature of our experience, but rather, ways of continually forwarding that experience and, extending our engagement with the real.

Notes to Chapter Three

[1] Charles Olson, The Distances, (New York: Evergreen Books, 1960), p. 26.

[2] Charles Olson, in Ann Charters, Olson/Melville: A Study in Affinity, (Berkeley: Oyez, 1968), p. 88.

[3] A.M. Klein, The Collected Poems of A.M. Klein, Ed. Miriam Waddington, (Toronto: McGraw-Hill Ryerson, 1974), p. 335.

[4] Collingwood, p. 164.

[5] Collingwood discusses his sense of the value of history in the Introduction to The Idea of History, pp. 1-13.

[6] I take my understanding of this phrase from Hannah Arendt. In one sense, it means simply the "life of action." It is frequently used in the formulation of a traditional hierarchy involving the vita contemplativa and the vita activa. The vita activa itself is further divided into three categories, themselves forming a hierarchy of types of action from highest to lowest: 1) the acting of the statesman; 2) the making of the craftsman; 3) the labouring that provides the necessities to sustain the physical organism.

[7] Alfred North Whitehead, Modes of Thought, (1938; rpt. New York: Free Press, 1968), p. 21. Hereafter cited in the text as MT.

[8] Johannes G. Droysen, in Between Past and Future, p. 49.

[9] Collingwood, p. 163.

[10] Alfred North Whitehead, Process and Reality, (1929; rpt. New York: Free Press, 1969), p. 411.

[11] Robert Duncan, in The Special View of History, p. 11. Duncan is speaking here about a lecture that Olson gave in San Francisco in 1957: "When Charles talked in San Francisco, it was the Whitehead view of history as past and future, and the fact that we're at the point of genesis and that the end of things is back of us."

[12] Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary, p. 571.

[13] Charles Olson, in Olson/Melville, p. 89.

Conclusion

> Self-renunciation, the renunciation of life and all human needs, is its principal thesis. The less you eat, drink and buy books; the less you go to the theatre, the dance hall, the public house; the less you think, love, theorize, sing, paint, fence, etc., the more you save--the greater becomes your treasure . . . your capital. The less you are, the less you express your own life, the greater is your alienated life, the more you have, the greater is your store of estranged being.
>
> Karl Marx - "The Meaning of Human Requirements"

now like Leroy and Malcolm
X the final wave
of wash upon this
desperate
ugly
cruel
Land this Nation
which never
lets anyone
come to
shore

Charles Olson - The Maximus Poems

"In the land of plenty . . . have nothing," and one might then have the possibility of one's self. Olson recognized early on that the plenitude America offered was but "a house these days / so much somebody else's, / especially, / Congoleum's" (TMP 14). If one was to come into one's own house, one had to refuse that other one. For Olson, that refusal formed the basis of a poetics where neither words nor people nor nature were to be misappropriated in that way. In the gurry of commerce spawned by the "merchandise men' (TMP 54), Olson would try to recover "a place where people are still natives, and where human / business is

still the business."[1]

Never one to walk away from the particulars of his own place and time, Olson continued throughout his writing career to indict America for its failure to admit fundamental human requirements and capabilities. But he also recognized that the dimensions of the quarrel extended beyond the "methodology [of] the fast buck."[2] There was that much earlier interference pattern which had proclaimed itself a "universe of discourse." As a result, language itself needed to be restored to a position of primacy in our experience. In an effort to regain the familiar in both his life and his writing, Olson turned to another order of "housekeeping," to another methodology, that is, "methodos":

> with a way
> with a via, with a path (weg, that which died, and does not die, which it is any man's job--and the more so now, when the old way is dead, long live the methodology
> in other words, the science of the path--what could be more exactly what we are involved in--it is not the path, but it is the way the path is discovered!
> (LFO 106)

In this sense, topos, tropos and typos are the terms of a practical science which point a way to the familiar, to the imago of our own shores. These are terms which, by his own admission, have "steadied" him and "kept [him] in" in his practice of himself and his writing. A writer "goes by words"[3] and, in reflecting on an earlier set of terms--"space, myth, fact, object" which are taken up and expanded in the later trinity--Olson notes how his understanding of those terms was an instance of "blind perceptivity,"[4] (that sense of not hesitating to step even though

one does not know in advance where one's foot will light), of "blind obedience to words which were my private nomenclatures of knowledges as men are violets and share a hillside at moments of renascence in man the species' experience of the Real."[5] And if "the obedience is still reasonably exact," this later trinity will resituate him for "another season on that same said hillside."[6] "Valuation is distinctly blind," he notes, and "so a man has no course but, with care, to propose it, to propose his valuation"[7] --which is what he has done in offering the terms of a possible intimacy with "an actual earth of value."

In tending that hillside, Olson has gathered together the very "motions our wills are the gardeners of" (O 10, 18):

> the blow is Creation
> & the Twist the Nasturtium
> is any one of ourselves
> And the Place of it All?
> Mother Earth Alone
> (MP 634)

And in this, the penultimate poem of the entire Maximus sequence, the "plantings" have been returned to the earth, from there to bloom again.

Notes to Conclusion

[1] Charles Olson, "The Story of an Olson, and Bad Thing," in Archaeologist of Morning, (New York: Grossman Publishers, 1973). There is no pagination in this volume of poetry.

[2] "The Story of an Olson, and Bad Thing."

[3] Charles Olson, in Olson/Melville, p. 85.

[4] Charles Olson, in Olson/Melville, p. 87.

[5] Charles Olson, in Olson/Melville, p. 87.

[6] Charles Olson, in Olson/Melville, p. 87.

[7] Charles Olson, in Olson/Melville, p. 89.

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