

The Empire of Neomemory

CHAINLINKS

The Empire of Neomemory

by Heriberto Yépez

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TRANSLATORS' NOTE Three translators worked on this version of *The Empire of Neomemory*; each of us translated one chapter. While we were in conversation amongst ourselves and with Heriberto throughout the process, the individual chapters reflect slight differences in each translator's interpretation of Heriberto's work and style, and to some extent of the poetics of translation. In addition, Heriberto was an active collaborator with us in the process of making this translation—adding and subtracting, tweaking and translating alongside us—and his vision informed our translation choices at many junctures. One aspect of the original text that seemed to us especially important to highlight is the frequent use of terms in English. Rather than footnoting each usage, we have indicated terms originally written in English in italics and included them in a list at the end of each chapter. These italics are in addition to the italicized Spanish words in the original text.

COVER IMAGE The image reproduces a page from a flipbook called *Folgers from Black Mountain Groan* by Michael Myers, Ed Dorn, and Teter Holbrook and published by Zephyrus Image in 1977. The book reproduces drawings by Myers of Olson standing in front of a weather map. When the book is flipped he moves his finger back and forth over his lips, mimicking a familiar action used to get babies to laugh.

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THRESHOLD

The cybermnemonic is a means of production for unconnected images. It is a process for the fragmentation of reality, experience, and memory; by means of the cybermnemonic illusion—since the cybermnemonic cannot be anything but fantasy—the Oxident accumulates.

Accumulates images for its reoccurrence.

Language converted into space for only-echo.

The cybermnemonic is the dream of a neomemory.

The cybermnemonic is the foundation of Empire.

Without cybermnemonics there is no *pantopia*.

“America” is the cybermnemonic.



And yet, death—will free us from everything.

Including the “Universe.”

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*written for eight hands
by Jen Hofer, Christian Nagler,
Brian Whitener, & Heriberto Yépez*

I.
AMERICA
PSEUDO-
PATRIARCHY
PANTOPIA

Εδιζήσαμην εμεωυτον
—Heraclitus, B 101

Going Postal

It all begins with a man wanting to deliver a letter. A man looking for addresses; the second in this lineage. He carries with him a sack full of others' words. Words he doesn't know. It all begins with this man knocking on your door. A pantopian's story.

Can a biography explain an empire? Possibly, if there is a shared metaphysics. And if it explains nothing, can you blame the error on madness? In this man's work, we find the workings of an empire, thanks to *co-control by analogy*. I will not tell the story of an individual. I will leave the relation between life and empire open. I will touch the fibers of a corpo-graphy. I will touch the telephysical structure of a government.

Born in 1910 in Worcester Massachusetts, Charles was the son of Karl Joseph, a Swedish immigrant who became a postman after coming to the United States. Charles was to have a lifelong relationship with the epistolary. He was a man who only seemed to think by means of *correspondence*. He was a split man, who healed only in dialogue, under the fantasy that the other was a part of himself, a Humpty Dumpty made of others, put back together again. This man is the mad emissary.

An emissary of the dying gods of the Oxident* and of the nascent empire of the United States. The poet known, almost unanimously, as the father of those so-called “New American Poets”—the generation of the beatniks and the counterculture—and the poet who is, like Pound, Stein, or Ginsberg, a communicating vessel for studying an entire civilization. Olson’s tracks lead us to the avatars of empire. Biocriticism of the geopolitical.

This messenger sent out or acquired his best ideas in letters; even his essays and poems are mail. Life of a wounded Hermes; everything in him was remittance and postal hope.

(*Who* and *letter* are two emissions that co-fantasize each other. The time will come in which no *I* will be able to sustain itself without its character of addressee and sender. Everything will be *postal*; this is the full meaning of *Going Postal*. This postalization will lay the foundation of the empire to come.)

Did Olson feel so far from the world that the closest communication would require the unfathomable distance of the intimate-discursive letter? Throughout his life he remained convinced that living persons and documents of the past were letters received, letters written for him. (In the *panalogy* everything is seen from the perspective of *destiny* or *synchrony*. Everything has become arachnid analogy.) Between him and his closest neighbor there were always centuries of distance. He was already member of a lineage that was itself a gathering of phantasms.

For Pound, the poet was the antenna of a race-epoch; for

* Heriberto uses this term throughout the text, a combination of Occidental and oxidized. It also refers to an “Oxident” that includes Mexico, with the “x” signifying the quincunx, discussed later in the book. He is playing with Peruvian poet César Vallejo’s use of the term in poem LXIII (“Amanece lloviendo”) of *Trilce* (1922). The line reads: “y en mal asfaltado oxidente de muebles hindúes/ vira, se asienta apenas el destino” (“and on the misasphalted oxident of hindu furniture/ veering, destiny hardly settles,” trans. Clayton Eshleman from *The Complete Poetry*, University of California Press, 2009, p. 295). (Trans. note)

Olson, its desperate mailbox.

Olson idealized his father. His life, in many ways, was a continuation of Karl's. (When a father doesn't finish his own life, his descendants continue it, but in so doing they leave their own lives incomplete; an incompleteness impossible to repair, an incompleteness that will be hereditary, in order to continue transfamilial *co-control*, the invisible game of diminished energy, of the transmission of intermittence.) It was his father who instilled in Olson the desire to be a successful student and who interested him in historemes of Worcester and Gloucester—historemes that then became the epicenters of his poetic work. Paradoxically, Karl saw in Charles everything that he *imagined* that he himself had wanted to be, while Charles saw in his father everything that he needed to understand. When Olson writes "The Post Office" (1948) he recalls that for his progenitor education was the newspaper. Curiously, for Olson, poetry was always reportage. Perhaps no other North American* poet had been as influenced by information from periodicals as Olson. His mature poetry, based on anecdotes, ciphers, and local characters, is representative of a time whose form would be provided by *information*.

What is information? Language transformed in exchange; increasingly static exchange. Information is the world structured by syntagmatic dialogue. Information functions by compression. An era of silence is ruled by the repressive; an era of information by the compressive. Every word becomes abbreviation in a world of compressed individuals, who transmit amongst themselves an increasing amount of compressed information. Each individual is a port of emission and reception, a port that finally will become

* Heriberto uses the common Latin American idiom *norteamerica/norteamericano* to refer to the United States and its subjects. We have chosen to avoid the version of this term that is most idiomatic in the American English context *America/American* because of its totalizing claim, preferring instead to use *North America(n)* where the U.S. context is clear and *USAmerica(n)* where it is less clear. For more discussion of this issue see the notes on translation process that follow the text. (Trans. note)

a point, an atom of information. Their only happiness: to become an infomeme of some cybermnemics.

Of his mother, Mary, Olson doesn't appear to have had fond memories. He turned her into patriarchal memory, probably because that was how she auto-memorialized herself all the time. Olson said he inherited his laziness and indecision from her. (She was the source of the wound, no doubt.) Mrs. Olson was Catholic, and superstitious; extremely Puritanical in matters of "sin" and bodies. A good portion of that enormous distance that Olson always maintained with respect to his body, he learned from his mother, for whom all corporeality was risk. We cannot understand Olson if we do not understand the abyss his mother sowed between him and his body, early on, to the point of his conceiving of it as his lugubrious satellite or golden cloud. When he got to Mexico, many years later, Olson was mostly surprised at the manner in which the descendants of the Mayans—as he said in "The Human Universe" (1951)—took pleasure in one another, in the natural closeness of their bodies.

It was as if the distance between Olson and his body could only be restored by a complicated postal system. Something similar was the case with women. Olson always maintained distance—like his father, who his mother had chosen precisely for his being a firm man, who became, at a certain moment, an alcoholic. (The firmness of a man is directly proportional to his averted vertigo.) Through his whole life Olson had a fear of the feminine body. Olson knew that to come close to a woman was not only to come close to the open body he had learned to fear through his mother, but also, above all, to come close to a woman, as he knew very well, was to come close to his own body. (Why does woman signify body, psycho-historically? Because the parallel fantasy indicates that *male* signifies *mind*. Genders were put in place in order to survive dualisms.) "Woman" is that which the "male" unknows of himself. And vice versa.

In order to not come close, Olson, very early on, became a devoted student. From a very early age he sought to become cultured. And it is to have another body, to make it possible to flee from the real body, that our civilization teaches us to construct a fantasy body, the body of requested information, the imaginary body that one constructs, we might say, by reading, by selection of others' memories, cybermnemic editing. And for those of us who continue on the path of the imaginary co-body, the body of the poem, the story, the essay, the body, the text—the body is transformed into the replacement-body. I do not want to live here. I want to live in language. The word is the island where I am moving to. The text will become the history of the loss of our body. The text is both the balm and the poison.

Since then, reading Ovid—with the *Metamorphoses* as his preferred book, of course—Olson wanted to exchange his flesh and blood body for a body made of pure utterances. (And more than utterances, utterances as traces of his relation with others.) We cannot overlook the fact that Olson would become famous, precisely for his essay “Projective Verse” (1950)—cited extensively in the autobiography of William Carlos Williams—in which he described how to make a text breathe. I believe no one has noted until now that one of the most paradigmatic essays of North American poetics takes as its fundamental concern how to pass the breath of the body (sexual) to the replacement-body (the textual body). “Projective Verse” is a tract about how to make a text into a living body that breathes—assisted, says Olson, by the mechanographic machine—how to make of the text, one might say, a *Frankenstein* or *spiritual cyborg*. Above all, however, the essay is an instruction manual that indicates how to pass our energy and breath from the body (sexual) into the body (mechanical-linguistic). What Olson was looking for was to transfer his life from the fearsome body into the artificial body. His literature, as strange as this might sound, is prolegomenon to the exploration of the

post-human. Or, better yet, as I would prefer to say: Olson speculates on the *neocorpus*.

In 1920, when Olson was around ten years old, his father applied for a week of vacation in order to visit Plymouth with his son. The supervisor granted permission, but then suspended it at the last minute. The letter-carrier disobeyed the order and left on the trip with his son. They walked on a replica of the Mayflower; they visited tombs and attended a fair. When they returned, the Post Office decided to punish the insubordinate letter-carrier. They severely reduced his salary. They changed his route. This was, in fact, the management's retaliation against the elder Olson's attempts to organize other postal employees for better working conditions and from this moment his fate turned. Olson's father turned into a mostly wretched being. "I better spell the situation out. Postal employees do not have the right to strike...they had my father and they didn't let go. The postal system has resemblances to the army."* It was probably then when Karl's alcoholism became much worse. From this moment, Olson would be witness to a clandestine demolition. The North American system compressed Karl. Upon compression, he reinforced the North American system; Karl compressed others, above all those closest to him. The family is the information produced and the medium by which the produced information is disseminated. The information comprises the fami-lyric form. Family and information are closely related. The family informs the individual, giving him or her the internal form of the family structure in which he or she participates. The subject becomes the synthesis of the family structure. He or she appears separate from it,

* "The Post Office," in *Collected Prose*, Donald Allen and Benjamin Friedlander (eds.), University of California Press, Berkeley, 1997, pp. 220 and 225. For biographical information on Olson I am indebted to Tom Clark's biography *Charles Olson: The Allegory of a Poet's Life*. I want to highlight that Olson phrase, "The postal system has resemblances to the army"—which takes new meanings once we understand his writing is "postal" and thus resembles "army."

but in reality is unable to decompress this information and will reproduce the familiar structure in which he or she was in-formed. Members of the family who were integrated into the subjective system reappear in subsequent generations; they sprout like metapersonas who will substitute for real subjects, superimposed on their existence, replacing them and converting them into clones and cloners of a given familial structure: carriers of multiple interior metapersonas.

Up to the final days, his father *resisted*. Olson said his father was not broken before his superiors. He endured everything that they did to force him to resign. His father, *sentenced*, would not be defeated; he simply died. Note Olson's definition of the resistance of the body and the organism in "The Resistance" (1953), which is no more than a dramatic, secret loa for his father, even though it is dedicated to Jean Riboud. All of his letters were addressed in such a way. Throughout his whole life, Olson sang to his father.

All that his father silenced, Olson turned into song. Olson decided to become an orator. He arduously prepared himself to make his voice heard; that is, his own voice and the voice declaimed and repaired the silences of his father. It was no accident that Olson, then 18 years old, placed third in the 1928 National Oratorical Contest in Washington—which he might have won if he had not come down with a psychosomatic cold. Thanks to the prize, Olson travelled to Europe, where, in Ireland, he met none other than W.B. Yeats.

Olson felt the pride of the proletariat class to which he belonged. At the same time, however, he continued to fantasize about belonging to a spectacular genealogy, and while talking with Yeats about his family, the latter, in accordance with his customary mental illusionism, assured the North American youth that his mother's aunt was Mary Hines (lover of the blind poet Raftery, at one time considered "the most beautiful woman in all of West Ireland"). Olson, from early on, searched for a genealogy. It was precisely

what he was searching for in Mexico, by making himself a spiritual foster child of the Mayans (as he had done with the Sumerians). This search was, in good measure, because he could not accept his real family.

If one looks for a fantasy co-body it is because one has rejected one's real body. On the same trip during which Olson fantasized about being related to legendary figures, a beautiful prostitute in Colonia invited him to go to bed with her. Olson was still a virgin. And, befitting a man that has decided to choose the replacement-body, Olson said *no*. In that prostitute figure, Olson invested attraction and fear, distance and resistance.

Co-body, Short Story, and Bradbury

A very significant expression of American language is “*going postal*.” The *postal*—imagined by Bukowski, the delirious ex-postal employee and writer—has acquired a special status through a series of assassinations and crimes committed by North American postal employees in the last few decades. “*Going postal*” is to go crazy, violent, stressed, *wacko*, *nuts*, to kill *co-workers*, to lose one's head, to *rampage violently*. (*Going postal* is a form of the *snap*, the *flip*, *wang!*) And the *postal*, for North American culture, signifies a form of emotional alienation, of derangement, of being crushed by the quantity of work, by the systematic handling of circulated inventories of information, by the mania of classification, masculine solitude, perpetual pressure, workday alienation, pedestrian semblance of prudence that must be maintained in a social environment of meticulous control.

One of the best stories for understanding the full significance of the postal is “The Great Wide World Over There” by Ray Bradbury: one of his most celebrated stories and included in the collection *The Golden Apples of the Sun* (1953). “The Great Wide World” tells the tale of Cora and

her husband Tom. They live isolated from the world and are illiterate. Cora envies her neighbor, Mrs. Brabbam, whose mailbox is always full of letters from the wide, distant world. But life takes a turn; that summer Cora's cousin Benjy arrives. Benjy knows how to read and write and he redacts letters that put Cora in communication with the exterior world. Cora, for lack of family to write to, responds instead to advertisements and solicits junk mail from various companies. Cora then discovers that the correspondence her neighbor pretends to receive is in fact nothing more than letters she leaves in her own mailbox, in order to hide her complete solitude.

Bradbury's piece is a cryptic short story, whose theme is the place of the writer in rural America. (And the place of the writer in an impersonal society is an alienated one.) I speak of this story because, I believe, it reveals the world in which North American writers of the first half of the twentieth century were created. The world of the closed-off U.S. citizen and the mythology of the exterior world; which includes the fantasy of Mexico as more alive, but also illegal, sexual, and dangerous, that is, "more human."

We must note that the old letters that Mrs. Brabbam periodically reintroduces into her own mailbox so as to appear beloved by the external world, as Bradbury tells us, were stolen many years ago from Mrs. Ortega, the Mexican woman who works in the grocery store. The Mexican occupies a special place in Bradbury's imagination; a topos very similar to that which it occupies in the general North American imaginary: that of a co-body, warmer, and at the same time inferior, ("some")*body* from which information may be stolen, retrieved, "*recovered*." For the North American, the Mexican is the pseudo-maternal. The archetypal North American mother is cold. Her psyche is dominated by patriarchal heroic information, estranging her from herself and constituting her as a matriarchal monad. The North American, therefore, is in need of warm

feminine energy. He searches for this energy with anxiety, with naïveté, in all sorts of others—other cultures, other women—with an intermittent rancor of not having received it from the original mother, from the progenitive feminine force, such that any aggression received from the substitute neo-mother is responded to with all this accumulated anger. The U.S.-Mexico wars, in good measure, are due to the ambivalent relations between the patriarchy and the American Soul. The United States wishes to receive from Mexico all that it hasn't received from its own matriarch. *I'm-not-here, is the name of the American Mother.*

There are two other Mexican stories by Bradbury in *The Golden Apples of the Sun* that require our attention. "I See You Never" tells the story of Ramírez, a Mexican who travelled from Mexico City to San Diego and then from San Diego to Los Angeles to work. He rents a room from Mrs. O'Brian, but is arrested by the police, since his work visa has expired six months ago. He says goodbye to his landlord with the expression, "I see you never." The celebrated end of the story narrates how, after Mr. Ramírez's definitive farewell, Mrs. O'Brian stops eating, as she suddenly realizes (for the first time) that she will, in fact, never see him again. In this story, once again, the Mexican represents lost love, maternal absence. Mexico is a regression.

In "En la Noche," Bradbury narrates a neoverision of the Mexican Llorona. The story is about Mrs. Navarrez, who spends her nights crying for her husband, Joe, who has been sent off to war. Her neighbors can't sleep because of her sobs, cries, and wails, and the men resolve to choose one of themselves to give her a scampish solace. It is Mr. Villanazul, who steals into her bedroom at night and has sex with her for two minutes, achieving peace for all, including his wife. Both stories revolve around a body-that-says-goodbye. In one, the body of the Mexican who will abandon California; in the other, the Mexican body that has left for the war. I do not believe in hermeneutics, but I do believe in the

hermenautical.* I believe that stories manifest not only the conscious and unconscious life of individuals, but also, due to atrophy, the visible and invisible “History” of the cultures that have given rise to them. Bradbury’s Mexican stories deal with the absent Mexican co-body, its historical arrival and expulsion from the North American body, from its co-presence. And not only does the Mexican co-body determine North American identity, by way of witchcraft (and labor), we might say, but also its literary imagination has been contained by this secret co-body. What Bradbury’s stories insinuate is that American solitude has to do with the separation from Mexico, with the co-bodies always absent, relative to each other, one with respect to both. The United States and Mexico are *doubles*.

It is the Mexican body that co-defines the distant North American body; it is the indigenous body that is the profound co-body of both. I am my absent body.

In “The Great Wide World Over There,” writing towards and about distance defines the story. This is a story, as we said before, about the social place of the writer, about some components of North American writing. One of these writers, Cora, alludes—without knowing it, as do all effective symbols—to illiteracy and to the illusion of receiving news from Afar, fundamental components of what is, for Oxidentals, the text: reception of messages. Another is Tom, the spouse irritated by Cora’s inclinations, the masculine element, suspicious of writing, for whom there is only obeying orders and constructing a mailbox adequate for the letters his spouse will receive. On the other hand, there is Benjy, the young scribe, who writes to survive and who manages to enable Cora—as she wanted—who doesn’t learn to write by herself. And of

* The Spanish here is a play on the word *hermenéutica* or hermeneutics. In place of *hermenéutica*, Heriberto’s text reads *hermenáutica*, which carries the sense of navigation, of hermeneutic interpretation as sea voyage. (Trans. note)

course, finally, we have Brabbam (probably the closest to Bradbury's own self-image) the old woman who pretends to receive letters from far-away places, when, in reality these are letters she stole from a Mexican woman.

There is nothing that is not tragicomedy.

I have gone into some detail with Bradbury because we will see this same fictional story in another biographical variation in the *Mayan Letters* of Charles Olson and Mexico and in its accompanying characters: his lover Frances, his wife Connie, the Mexican Hipólito Sánchez, his correspondents Creeley and Corman. The story of Olson in Mexico—like that of Burroughs or Kerouac—is the story of madness through the delirious mystery of the co-body. It is as if Olson is Cora, ingenuously wishing to have the secrets of the Mexican glyphs read to him by Sánchez; and he is the glutton Benjy writing letters to all sort of places; and he is Tom eternally grumbling about the damned Mexicans and about the domestic chores and Connie's demands; and he is Brabbam, most of all, Brabbam, feigning the reception of letters from afar, when his letters and their alleged replies were letters stolen from Mexican culture. Letters never received.

What is tragicomic about the book is that we are all its constituent parts. We are all of its characters, simultaneously. We cannot escape what we eject from ourselves. A book is the impossibility of the mirror dissolving into its fragments. Not that it is impossible to avoid repetition; rather we have secured for ourselves a civilization in which it is impossible not to fall back into it. Our very name is the unerring principle of the double. The word could be its own nirvana, but it has been sculpted into an illegitimate wave, a frozen wave.

During the 1950s the same story was repeating itself everywhere, as happens in every era. In the micro and in the macro—monstrosity of relapse—the same signified is being shouted: false! False! False! All of this is FALSE!

In an empire, the macro is printed in the micro. The

system's laws seep into everything, to extend the reign of the taut line wire.*

Analogy is eternal damnation. We have learned to love the poverty of forms. We have learned to repudiate what negates the existence of the uniform, what suggests that the One could liberate itself from its similarity to the other. If the analogous did not exist, what would exist instead would be the independent. But this civilization is analogical. This civilization iterates itself in all its subsystems. It repeats its face until it becomes the face of a god trapped inside its fractal.

This is also what Bradbury's story relates, since, in a closed society, writing is a synthesis that converts time into space. The young scribe Benjy was a species of Aleph (Borges) or walking vortex (Pound). In the eyes of Cora, he "had seen cities and oceans and had been in sites where things were better."[†] Not that this was true, but that closed societies imagine it to be so. The pantopia is the delirium coming out of cultures that have been shrunken down. We must note that, in many senses, Bradbury's story and Borges's are analogous. In both, a minor man of letters becomes the key to envisioning the Aleph, in a house on the verge of vanishing into its provincial ignorance.

As in Baudelaire—by means of the *dandy* (replete, glutted with the images of all things)—in Bradbury there is a hoarder-subject (more vulgar), a young man who, in the eyes of the provincial Cora, has seen everything. But Benjy is not the only Aleph or Vortex of the story. There is also the mailbox, where Cora waits for the whole world to converge, from a free copy of the Sealed Book that spoke of ancient Knowledge lost in the mists of time and Occult Temples

* Here Heriberto uses the phrase *hilo tirante*—which means literally taut wire or the *trama* or plot of something, but which is also a pun on tyrant—an alternate meaning could be tyrannical thread. (Trans. note)

† "The Great Wide World Over There," *Golden Apples of the Sun*, New York, William Morrow, 1997, p. 84.

of Antiquity and Buried Sanctuaries, to packets of seeds of giant sunflowers, to remedies for heartburn, to a biweekly crime magazine, to coin collectors' catalogues, to brochures of novelties, and lists of magic numbers, and recipes for getting rid of arthritis, and samples of flyswatters. Is there any *short story* that is not, in one way or another, a *pantopia*?

North American civilization constantly attempts to represent others, every other. The short story is one of many North American pantopias.

The *short story* is one way out of circular time. As philosophy was the exit route the Greeks took to leave the eternal circling of cyclic time, the *short story* is an abbreviation—mnemotechnic trick—of what was once narrated through repetition, the circular and the periodical. The North American short story knew how to trap in a nut what before had escaped in the long elliptical path of the tiger.

The *short story*, then, is an avatar of Oxidental linear time. It is one of its bodies. Therefore it is possible to understand the world that produced the story, through these stories, not because the world truly fits in a story, but instead because through the short story the *reduction* that culture makes of the world is described. How it fantasizes its containment. Every story is a false Aleph, like that of Garay street. The short story is a particular form of *pantopia*, a miniscule site that pretends to house the totality of beings. The modern short story could only be conceived by empires like Russia and the United States that search for the temporal synthesis of their possessive ambition; while the novel belongs to smaller, we might say, territories, cultures, periods, or even empires that long for spatial expansion.

The story predicts the conversion of our existence into *short story*.

If *History* was the senile invention of Europe, the invention of the *short history*, of the *quick reminder*, corresponds to the United States. The United States made an adaptation of *History*, turning it into *quick memory*, *briefing*, mere *memo*.

All story has closure as its theme. Reduction. Sudden limits. Born in Poe as an oppressive genre, the story is a capsule of claustrophobia in which time pretends to be trapped in a quick space. The story—temporal narration turned spatial limit—attempts to store away the All thanks to the perfect synthesis and linear time. What genre is more linear than that of the story?—if Europe invented the novel, the neo-Ocident invented the *short story*, and in this mutation we can see the shift that occurred between these Co-Oxidents. In comparison with the long novelistic reign of Europe, that of the United States will be succinct. The North American empire will be brief, as brief, technical, and fantastic as the best science fiction stories.

Olson, Pseudo-Patriarchy, and Melville

In 1928, upon returning from Europe, where he had acquired, via Yeats, a new genealogy—exactly what Olson had been looking for, in different ways, his whole life!—Olson applied to Wesleyan University in Middletown, Connecticut. As the years had passed, Olson's distance to the world had increased, initially caused by his height. Olson was six feet, seven inches tall. His body was the giant he most feared.

He already had a strong interest in poetry and in performance, and at times he wanted to become a journalist. He was part of the debate team, already exercising his talent for mnemonics and retention, which did not prevent him from feeling at a disadvantage with his friends, like he was an “intellectual pygmy.” As the years progressed his problems with his father intensified. During his visits home, young Olson's arrogance caused friction with his father. Around 1930, he was working as a postman during the summers. Olson's complex was that he did not want to become his father and yet he followed in his father's footsteps. What you

run from, follows you. What you flee from, shapes you. Tell me who you flee from becoming and I'll tell you who you will be.

At twenty-one years of age Olson began another of the tormented patriarchal relations of his life: his study of Herman Melville. Begun as a master's thesis at Wesleyan, this work would occupy practically two decades. At the beginning he avoided reading critical studies, and for a long time he only consumed Melville's works and collaborated on situating Melville's personal library. His trips to the Northeast were fruitful and from Melville's books and annotations, which were located in his descendants' homes and in storage at various sites, Olson learned the art of "producing" *clues*. It was during the constant, uneven preparation of this work, rewritten numerous times, that Olson learned not only to overvalue, to plagiarize, and to fear the plagiarism of his own ideas, but also to combine his own theses with the unhinged use of academic sources, with a view towards the reconstruction of an *edenic preterit* bound to a prophetic future. Melville became his super-alter-I.

In 1935 Olson's father died of a cerebral hemorrhage. A few days before his death, Karl asked his son Charles to lend him a suitcase. Karl was going to a convention in Cleveland. Worsening their relations, Olson refused, alleging that he would himself use it soon, and fell asleep. Karl became so enraged that Olson then felt guilty at possibly having contributed to his father's demise. This anecdote, related by Olson in his personal diaries, is one of many that reveal a key feature of patriarchal relations. It is the son who refuses to transmit the legacy (the suitcase) to the father. The tyranny does not originate from the father. The tyranny originates from Oedipus.

The suitcase symbolized the new genealogy Olson had acquired in Europe. His fantastic past and his illusory future. His anti-now. By refusing his father, what Oedipus did was refuse the mutual bond. In the "patriarchy" it is the son who

has the power; it is he who grants or denies bonds with the father. One can also see this in the story of Jesus, who, before dying on the cross, accuses his father of having abandoned him. It can also be seen in Sophocles' Oedipus and Shakespeare's Hamlet. All of them are sons that only establish bonds after the death of the Father, when the patriarchy is the empire of the son.

The father is only the authoritarian co-body *a posteriori*.

The father provides the son's physical body; the son engenders the mental body of the father. The father is the grandson of the son. Patriarchy is absurd, a decapitated head used as a helmet. Acephalos charged with the restoration of *capital*, i.e. the *heading*.

When Olson refuses to lend his suitcase to his father, causing, in Olson's imagination, his death, Oedipus kills his father. This is not exactly the parricide that will found (due to Freudian guilt) the patriarchy. With the imaginary assassination of the father—let's not overlook his pseudo-parricidal character—what is avoided is a real connection between Oedipus and his presumed father. Patriarchy only takes place in Oedipus's mind. When the father and Oedipus are actually together, there is friction, separation. When the father is not there, the parricide is hoped for and is, at the same time, the presumed foundation of their bond and the impossibility of lineage. The patriarchy is a fantasy occurring *a posteriori* in the mind of Oedipus, as was his pseudo-parricide. The Father, throughout his life, never has power over Oedipus. Later on, Oedipus will use the name of the Father to punish others. The name of the father will be the disguise of Oedipus's reign.

Freudian psychoanalysis is part of the Oedipal myth. And the myth of Oedipus dictates that it is Oedipus who has killed his father, when this is not the case. And the myth dictates that Oedipus marries his mother, when this is also a fantasy. The myth of Oedipus consists of hiding the control the son desires, attributing it to the father. The myth of

Oedipus is the Oxident's grand projection, in order to rewrite its past as linear and to hide the fantasy of its control in the present. And this includes as well the Artaudian-Deleuzean body-without-organs, and also the anti-Oedipus, which is merely the Osiric archipelago, the language game in which the Father, now the ex-Father, becomes a crippled Ubu. And this includes the loose organs, the parodic temptation to reconstitute the father, a riddle attributable to the retooled power of the son (a puzzle within reach of the redistributive power of the son), supreme lord of neomemory.

Pantopia, Burnout, and Comedy

It is no coincidence that Borges translated (rewrote) Melville's "Bartleby." On various occasions Borges wrote about the fictional relation between father and son, between whom is established the imaginary relation of doubles, mirrors, dreams, or golems. Among many other things, Borges's work is a *metaphysical* comedy about the *apocryphal* nature of the relation between father and son. A labyrinthine and, above all, fantastical relation.

The father is the apocrypha created by the son.

I say comic because, as we know, Borges's relation to philosophy is post-philosophical. Borges saw philosophy as an aesthete (and false European) who arrived at the banquet when it was occupied exclusively by phantasms. A contemporary of critical theory and logical positivism, Borges is one of the multiple (and impossible) deaths of philosophy. I believe that to understand Borgesian irony one must remember how the Argentinean conceived of his own tradition: as a combinatorial free-play, detached from the European legacy.* And we must also keep in mind the

* See his essay "El escritor argentino y la tradición" ("The Argentine Writer and Tradition") in *Discusión* (1932).

concept of irony Hegel described in his *Aesthetic Lessons*. Hegel tied irony to an almost solipsistic I for whom nothing is serious or important because all is a product and axiology of his or her absolute I:

...this virtuosity of an ironical artistic life apprehends itself as a divine creative genius for which anything and everything is only an unsubstantial creature...because he is just as able to destroy it as to create it...So then the individual who lives in this way as an artist...by his being a genius, this relation to his own specific reality, his particular actions, as well as to what is absolute and universal, is at the same time null; his attitude to it all is ironical. These three points comprise the general meaning of the divine irony of genius, as this concentration of the *ego* into itself, for which all bonds are snapped and which can live only in the bliss of self-enjoyment...Out of this comes misfortune, and the contradiction that, on the one hand, the subject does want to penetrate into truth and longs for objectivity, but, on the other, cannot renounce his isolation and withdrawal into himself...[this] is the source of yearning and a *morbid* beautiful soul.*

This irony is very similar to that of Borges (and to Baudelaire's *dandy*), a solipsistic *outcast* who has appropriated everything, recycling and reorganizing it. He can take nothing seriously because it all has the same value; even more so because this value-granting is done by himself. And this value-granting solipsistic subject, capriciously absolutist, has for some time now refused to give value to anything, and so his appropriation of the world—his favorite pantopia! —has led him to burnout and to indifference.

Burnout is the perfect crime. Be it Bartleby, Funes,

* G. W. F. Hegel, *Aesthetics: Lectures on Fine Art*, trans. T. M. Knox, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1991, pp. 65-7.

or *the dandy*,* let's not ignore the fact that the *fed up man*, within the vociferous yawn of his dissipation, hides the fact that he has appropriated All. Burnout is theft.† Weariness is a strategy for appropriating the world. "I am weary of Everything" means I possess everything. Which will always be false. Not only because the All does not exist properly but because to appropriate it is the pantopic and the pantopic is the illusory.

This is the first great trick of weariness: the trick of its appropriation, the trick of its looting. This theft will be hidden beneath the giant complaint, beneath the shouted apathy or the ironic gesture. Boredom is a theft that denies its own agency, its own action, depreciating what it has stolen. The burnt out man appears to get away with what's his, because it can be argued that he possesses it ALL! —and he is satiated with this, Same as Always—he continues arguing that "in truth... I don't want it." Because the All which the burnt out man has appropriated is an All-Undesired, the burnout pretends to reject it, however, as we see, the rejection of the possessed All is the same trick by which he retains it. The burnout is not responsible for his illusion of having it *all*. The burnout is no more than an involuntary comedian. It is not an accident that excess forms the basis of imperial life.

But if weariness is the base of pantopia, what is pantopia? Pantopia is the pseudo-All. Pantopia is defined by its inten-

* Of course for Baudelaire in "On the essence of laughter and in general, on the comic in the plastic arts" (1855), laughter is a manifestation of the superiority of man, a gesture of his bitter omnipotence, so to speak. Also, he says, laughter happens because man is *double*.

† In the original: "Lo harto es el hurto." Here Heriberto plays on the similarity of *harto*, translated here as *burnout*, but which also carries the significations of *fed up*, *glutted*, or *wearied*—and *hurto* (theft). Throughout the text Heriberto uses three cognates, *harto*, *hastio*, and *hartazgo*, with slightly different shades of meaning. We have chosen to translate them most often in the following manner: *harto*—fed up; *hastio*—weariness; *hartazgo*—burnout. (Trans. note)

tion to impose as cosmic model its anti-temporal inventory, that is, a new version of linear time, its trans-historic consumerism, and imperial memory. Pantopia is the total inventory. If in the *quincunx*, the entities arise, develop and die, wasted in the space-time of which they are emanations and results of forces, in pantopia there has been created the illusion of permanence under the artificial shelter of a total space, in which what once was separated through time is now collected. Pantopia is the absolute (or selective) topological accumulation, in sight of the imperial fantasy of the disappearance of time understood as death.

Pantopia is wanting it all at the same time. Therefore pantopia and fear, pantopia and satiation, pantopia and consumerism, pantopia and empire, are tied together.

Fathers Everywhere: Olson

In 1936 Olson met another of his imaginary fathers: the writer Edward Dahlberg, the man who, according to Olson, taught him to write. Years later, Olson would remember him as the man who plagiarized his ideas about Melville. Meanwhile, it was Dahlberg who fulfilled the role Olson feverishly conceded to other men, that of playing with his ego. Elevating him out of all proportion when necessary, or—Olson's greater need—pummeling him with ferocious critiques in order to cast him down.* Another father whom Olson searched for and maintained all these years was Freud,

* I will not delve into the theme of the guru here. This point by Chögyam Trungpa will suffice: "We begin to play a game, a game of wanting to open, wanting to be involved in a love affair with our guru, and then wanting to run away from him. If we get too close to our spiritual friend, then we begin to feel overpowered by him... You tend to get too close to the teacher, but once you do, you get burned. Then you want to run away altogether... You begin to realize that wanting to be near and wanting to be far away from the guru is simply your own game." (*Cutting Through Spiritual Materialism*, Shambala, Boston, 2002, p. 43). Again and again, Olson seemed to get stuck in this type of apprenticeship.

who allowed him to interpret his own life. It is curious that again and again Olson fantasized about discovering paternities, whether of paternal origins of some idea, a theme in Melville, or some aspect of his existence. Without a doubt, Olson proved that the Father is an interpolation.

As time passed, Olson's thought became more nationalistic. The wartime environment did not permit much debate. In addition, Olson studied at the American Civilization program at Harvard. His doctoral thesis again revolved around Melville. In 1939 he abandoned the doctorate without finishing said thesis, which was becoming more and more intangible. During his time at Harvard, however, he met many people and, here his oscillation between egotism and insecurity began, as did his hypochondria and somaticization. (For example, from an early age, every time Olson felt he had to prove his masculinity, whether it was due to a competition, exam, deadline, or sexual encounter, he would come down with a cold, making literal the expression *cold feet* which, at root, concerns a lack of received "feminine" energy, a lack of "contact with the earth.") Immersed as he was in fantasies, Olson was also, of course, a great cinephile. Tom Clark has remarked that much of Olson's diaries are dedicated to film commentary. Olson considered Charlie Chaplin the Homer of his time, and in the art of montage, which he practiced in "The Kingfishers," Eisenstein was his teacher. Olson was a member of the Harvard Film Society. Thanks to his talents as an orator, Olson presented the films during the screenings. Here is something that has not been sufficiently noted: Olson thought of the world not like a book, but instead as a film. Olson's models were cinematographic and this was a key source of his parataxis.

Olson was a man created in the Great Depression and guided by Hollywood's vision.

Olson is "America." Nightmare of analogy: Maximus.

In claiming that Olson is America, I don't believe, of

course, that a man can really represent an entire culture. But precisely because America has worked so hard, more than any other culture before it, at being represented by the image of certain personas, Olson represents this impossibility of representing America. Of Olson and America, we can say one thing: *they are not*.

History, Precursor to Pantopia

Shakespeare, Heidegger, Kafka, Borges, and Olson are authors for whom it remains clear that *patriarchy is an artificial linear history*. Patriarchy is not sustained by fathers. Patriarchy is constructed by pseudo-sons. It is sons who fabricate a falsely hereditary line. It is the pseudo-sons who lay the foundation of the Oedipal structure. It is not the Law or the Name of the Father that reigns over the patriarchy, but instead the fantasies of the pseudo-son. The post-Oedipus, the Edited Oedipus, the Patriarchal authority is an illusion created by each generation to keep hidden, by means of this fantasy, its own desire to be dominated and to dominate others, the fantasy that others, not the pseudo-sons themselves, are exercising power. So much has been wrought by men in refusing to accept that we are the most terrible gods.

Linear history, Oedipal history, is our fantasy, and to perpetuate it we invented the myth of an authoritarianism arising from the preterit, even though authority can only be exercised from the present. Borges, whose work was concerned with the manipulation of time, claimed that each author invents his precursors. Or, to put it in Phillip K. Dick's terms, the Oedipal structure is a *Counter-Clock World*, a world where, as in this Dick novel, the libraries destroy books and the dead emerge from their graves. The best-kept secret of linear occidental time is that it is written from the future to the past.

about various figures he identified as “the fathers.”* From his then-mentor Dahlberg to Roosevelt and Hitler, what Olson desired was to do away with his own responsibility, creating reckless relations of dependency. He did this economically—until 1940 it was Dahlberg who paid his rent—and also intellectually—Olson depended on others’ opinions in order to know how much to value what he did. This was how Olson constructed his auto-patriarchal fantasy by not accepting the actual man who was his father Karl—on the one hand idealizing him, and on the other, devaluing him—since the starting point of patriarchy is the rejection of the concrete corporeal father. Once the father has disappeared, man turns into the pseudo-son of imaginary fathers.

Patriarchs, like matriarchs, are made up purely of fantasies. Oedipus is the nostalgia of the yoke.

Deleuze and Guattari held that it was the paranoia of the father that laid the foundation for Oedipus. They tried to rethink the Oedipal, but they got it wrong, since it is the delirium of each individual, of each generation, that is attributed to pseudo-fathers. The patriarchal authorities do not exist; they are only our desire to have masters. Paranoia assembles Oedipus. The paranoia that Deleuze and Guattari so exalt continues being a pantopian decapitalist technique.

Levi-Strauss was not mistaken when he argued that the Freudian version was just another variant of the Oedipus myth, together with that of Sophocles. And Freud’s theory

* “Meanwhile a disturbing process of projection continued in his dreams, which were densely populated by paternal images, ‘fathers’ in the guise of powerful men of the world, from Franklin D. Roosevelt to Adolf Hitler. It occurred to him that perhaps behind those images the ghost of Karl was hovering... ‘I rupture these friendships with men violently... I use women to do it... Connie with Dahlberg.’ Dahlberg represented his negative connection with the past, Connie his ‘object of the future’” in Tom Clark, *Charles Olson: The Allegory of the Poet’s Life*, North Atlantic Books, Berkeley, 2000, p. 71. In any case, it would be a while before his wife Connie could convince Olson to get a job. It is no secret that Olson was somewhat of a slacker. Typical, certainly, of some intellectuals. Olson was Benjy.

is also a re-edit made by the son. It is no accident that some of the main defenders of the Freudian Oedipal theory have been literary critics and poets like Olson, who interpreted his life and the life of literature exclusively in terms of parricide, fathers, and Oedipus.

What Freud made possible was a rewriting. A rewriting of the dream, of everyday life, and of the whole of civilization. After Freudian psychoanalysis, the human was reinterpreted—in retrospect—as the history of the patriarchy. It was this Freudian invention that Olson assumed as his own, again and again, in his work and in his life. The Oedipal is one of the forms in which the fiction of linear time is constructed.

So how is linear time produced? By retrospectively reorganizing an idea of the future and the past, by artificially linking together the constitutive parts of this re-editing of memory with a paranoid thesis. The thesis that time is charged with a Signified, the paranoid thesis that there is a History, and above all that there is Space, the absolute container of what is sent from Elsewhere. The idea of Space is a fabula created by paranoia. A paranoia that claims that Space is the receptacle of what comes from elsewhere, a There...and what comes from There, passes away, but “Space” remains.

Many have criticized the modern idea of History. But history was only the initial phase in the construction of something greater; in the same way that “History” encapsulated time, so it is that “History” itself remains encapsulated inside something greater. History is but one of the aberrations, one of the precursors, of *Pantopia*, the grandest of the paranoid theses.

Olson: I am I and My Propaganda

In October 1939, Olson moved to New York. Months before, Olson sent a letter to an acquaintance he had always

felt attraction towards. He invited her to spend the weekend with him. She didn't have much interest in Olson, but when she read the letter out loud to her younger sister, a girl named Connie, the latter was interested in getting to know him. A little while later they were a couple. This new relationship made Olson's economic and sexual problems worse. He never got along with Connie's family. They thought he was a mooch. Over many months, Olson spent time living in other people's houses, couch-surfing, asking for loans he never paid back, living in the imaginary world of books and his interminable dinner discourses with hosts who just wanted him to shut up so they could finish eating. Going to see a movie, for Olson, was sometimes the closest he came to "reality."

Connie became pregnant. Olson suggested an abortion and she finally accepted. They lived a little longer on Connie's savings, but pressured by the exigencies of existence, in 1941 he joined the ACLU in New York. Until the end of 1942, newly unemployed and having skipped out on his landlord, Olson moved to Washington, where he finally landed a stable job.

Olson worked as assistant chief in the Foreign Language Division of the Office of War Information, an agency charged to produce propaganda directed at ethnic groups inside the United States by the North American government. The post arrived just in time, as his relationship with Connie was wavering. Moreover, Olson's verbal talent and his patriotic imaginary made him a perfect fit as an intellectual bureaucrat of the American propaganda machine.

On the one hand, he continued to idealize the United States immigrant, an idealization he inherited from his father, and on the other hand his gift for nationalist rhetoric and his talents as a writer made him a key employee in the apparatus of petty propaganda. Despite his patriotic fervor, however, Olson was frightened he would be sent to the front, which he avoided by lying to the government. (In

order to escape being sent to the battlefield like others he knew, Olson had filled out forms claiming that Connie and her mother depended on him financially, which was, at the moment, the exact opposite of reality.) But it was not this disinformation at the recruitment office that ultimately kept him praising the war from behind a desk, but instead it was his unusual height, which made him *unfit* to be called into combat.

Of course his U.S. critics have scarcely wanted to admit the extent to which propaganda weaves together Olson's work. His position in the Office of War Information would never be erased from his thinking; not even when he abandoned his post in 1944, due to issues with censorship in the Office. According to the Republicans, it was an agency dedicated to propaganda in support of Roosevelt, who Olson admired excessively, without a doubt. Olson then went on to look for other positions, but in 1945, with Roosevelt's death, he decided to move to Key West, Florida, to revive his literary career. In any case, Olson never ceased to be a propagandist for the North American Empire.

Oh Bartleby! Oh Humanity! Genealogy of the Scrivener and Wall Street

This long story by Melville, the complete title of which is "Bartleby the Scrivener: A Story of Wall Street" (1853) contains many mysteries, probably more mysteries than a calm, sane mind can tolerate. Bartleby is the threat of a mental border state.

The piece tells the story of the copyist Bartleby who is hired by a Wall Street lawyer. Bartleby was a "pallidly neat, pitiably respectable, incurably forlorn"* figure. He was an

* "Bartleby the Scrivener: A Story of Wall-Street," in *Great Short Works of Herman Melville*, Harper Perennial Modern Classics, New York, 2004, p. 46.

efficient copyist, the most dependable in the office, confesses the lawyer-narrator. However, on asking him to check his own copies, he refuses, with words that have been celebrated and that are the epitome of the character throughout the rest of the story: "I would prefer not to." This ceremonious and nontraditional expression let's note first off is a reworking of the expression "I'd rather not." (We cannot forget that the original version of Melville's text begins with the lawyer saying: "I am a rather elderly man.") Bartleby then, at root, represents a rebellion against the lawyer's authoritative words.

As the story progresses, Bartleby refuses more and more tasks, until he is fired by the lawyer, who up to this moment had a certain tenderness towards and protected Bartleby. Due to the attention given to Bartleby's odd character, critics have generally overlooked that the attorney's behavior is no less strange. He too is driven to rather anomalous behaviors: protecting the scrivener at all costs, not calling attention to his insubordinate employee, letting him sleep in the office, then offering him his own house, taking care of him during his last days in jail, etc. "Bartleby the Scrivener" is not the story of one curious character, but rather of two identically strange men. This duality is inscribed in the double character of its title, on the one hand "Bartleby the Scrivener" and on the other "A Story of Wall Street."

Bartleby is a *drop-out*, an *outcast*. Echoing Thoreau's "civil disobedience," Melville constructs a character who practices passive resistance ("Nothing so aggravates an earnest person as a passive resistance"[†] writes Melville). Bartleby gradually refuses to participate in the mechanism of Wall Street, from his position as a scrivener. The rarefied ambiance of this masterful story, which takes on metaphysical and psychological resonances, blurs the fact that Bartleby is a critique of

* Ibid., p. 39.

† Ibid., p. 50.

capitalism. In the narrative, one protagonist refuses to participate and finally fulfills, in one way, his role in the social machinery. To go on a hunger strike, to become *homeless*, or to be arrested and die in prison; none of it matters to him.

I agree with Deleuze that this story is not a “metaphor for the writer.”* But, as Deleuze also suggests, *Bartleby is the story, literally, of one scrivener*. Melville narrates for us here a certain relation between a representative of Wall Street power and a scribe. And the relation—the true theme of the piece—is crucial for understanding the history of the relation between capitalist power and writing.

The first thing *Bartleby prefers not to*: to check that the copies he makes of legal documents are accurate. He knows he is a copyist, so he doesn’t want to have to recognize that his work is a faithful replica of the words of capitalism, of its State and commercial laws. *Bartleby*, before anything else, is the writer—socially devalued†—of a capitalist society, whose emblem is Wall Street, and one who refuses to recognize that his work is a copy of what he believes he is rejecting. What he does not want to realize, *this scribe*—and here I include myself—is that his words are copies of the words of the Law of Capital and of the State.

Writing is the double unconscious of the Oxident. It is the son who has not wanted to acknowledge that he reliably repeats patriarchal words; it is he himself, the faithful copyist, who reinstates them.

Paradoxically, this is a passive resistance, *Bartleby’s*, which begins by denying the replicative character of writing. This is the great tragicomedy of the modern world’s thinkers, scientists, artists, and literati: we do not realize that our own words, images, and ideas are copies of the authorities’ words.

* “*Bartleby; or the Formula*,” trans. Daniel W. Smith and Michael A. Greco in *Essays Critical and Clinical*, Verso, London, 1998, p. 68.

† Melville’s brother worked on Wall Street and looked on Melville’s profession with a certain contempt.

All of us are no more than renegade copyists.

Bartleby is the story of the writer's passive resistance told by the voice of North American capitalism's rejected paternalism. The other great protagonist, the narrator of Bartleby's tale, is an attorney who takes the resistant copyist under his wing. He does not explain why he has decided to protect Bartleby so diligently, why it is that he is impelled irresistibly to dote on him. He gives Bartleby shelter, food; he pleads with him to fulfill his agreed role; he protects him from the mob; he looks after him when he is detained by the police; and he stays with him until his death. *This is what is most uncanny*: it is the State that has protected and made materially possible the supposed rebellion led by writing.

What the attorney allows Bartleby to do is *abandon his work*. From beginning to end, this is a story about *labor*. From the beginning, in which the other three employees are described*—two scriveners and a messenger—to the

* These three employees, who are very significant in the beginning of this story, and the prison cook at the end, remain to be analyzed. The same attorney-narrator tells us that the employees preceding Bartleby are key to the narrative, as they are "indispensable for an adequate intelligence of the protagonist of my tale." These characters represent prior phases of what "Bartleby" represents. They represent prior forms of the late, renegade scrivener. Turkey the scrivener is an old man, we are told, whose efficiency increases until midday and then seriously decreases until 6pm when the sun goes down. It is clear that this scrivener is a solar scrivener, a man directed by the sun, who in the afternoon becomes useless, even though he insists on continuing to work (and to committing errors). Nippers, a scrivener of some twenty-five years, is not dominated by the sun, but by "ambition and indigestion." He is skillful with the mechanical, impatient, and in reality "knows not what he wants," always desiring, at bottom, to "be rid of a scrivener's table"; Nippers was an alcoholic pauper. Ginger Nut was the porter handyman whose principal function was to bring biscuits to the other two copyists. Turkey symbolizes a sort of late technician of the sacred, an exhausted visionary who once operated during cultures ruled by solar cycles. Nippers represents the poet-thinker of the last more than two millennia, that messenger we know so well, and Ginger Nut, simply, represents the degraded state of the "messenger" who is raised from other failed "messengers." Ginger Nut is the messenger who thinks only of the lowest, most comfortable, and the ridiculous, the "biscuits." I will leave the complete deciphering of Melville's three characters, who represent phases of the degradation of the old divine messenger, to the reader. Compare, then, these late avatars of the divine messenger with

narrative of Bartleby in the office—and his gradual refusal to obey and fulfill his task—until the end, in which the previous job of the renegade scrivener is revealed, the story is a labor chronicle. Paradoxically, it is capitalism that allows this scrivener to escape his work.

Let us remember that the other scriveners and the attorney himself, at moments, are found using the very words of Bartleby, “I prefer not to...” They respond without realizing, as if suggesting the manner in which the scrivener influences his peers, in the very apparatus of the State; with the words of a contradictory passive resistance, with the transmission of an impossible refusal.

The paternal attorney’s loving protection has a limit, however, and arriving at it, the scrivener ends up in the street, in prison, and then dead of starvation. And there is another condition that governs the relation between this renegade scribe and the Wall Street attorney: the latter is ignorant of the scribe’s history.

Everything Wall Street knows of the scribe, of its copyist, concerns the period that it has lived together with him. That is, capitalism only knows the late history of thought and poetry. It only knows what has become of the scribe during the patriarchy, which, as I already said, is a pseudo-patriarchy, so that in the end, the words the attorney speaks are the renegade scrivener’s words. They are the words that bind each to the other.

Let us note—as in the story of Olson’s suitcase—that it is the paternal figure who tries to strengthen his bond with the renegade son, and the son refuses this gesture even if he ends up living with the father a long time. Like Jesus who, after denying the father, gives his life to Him, so the penultimate line of the story suggests that Bartleby has given life, with his death, to the attorney. (“On errands of life, these

those represented by Poe’s detective Dupin, Bradbury’s rascal Benjy, and Bukowski’s alcoholic postman Chinaski.

letters speed to death.”) On having seen death, certainly, the attorney claimed that Bartleby now rests with his own, “with kings and counselors.”* Everything in Melville’s tale speaks volumes about the secretly *sympiotic* relation between Bartleby and Wall Street.

The story of the scrivener is the story of how the capitalist patriarchy wants to protect the discouraged son, but the son refuses, because he suffers like an incorrigible, passively rebellious orphan. He is disappointed by every parent, and at the same time, he is in search of an impossible parent, an imaginary parent. The scrivener, then, rejects the protective wing of the business-parent and flees in order to become a vagabond, an errant being, a soul whose denouement will be starvation and death from exposure.

At the end of the story, the attorney reveals that rumors have circulated that before he and the scrivener knew each other, Bartleby was a subaltern/junior employee (*clerk*) in the *Dead Letter Office* in Washington. “Dead letters! does it not sound like dead men?”† the attorney remarks. I will leave a complete examination of “Bartleby the Scrivener: a Story of Wall Street” for another time—the second part of the title is often neglected, both in the United States and by its Spanish-language translators, who fall back on the first *I prefer not to* of Bartleby himself: denying that we are the story of Wall Street, the street of the wall, the alley with no exit.

What then was the scrivener before entering into the renegade business with capitalism? Bartleby, we are told, worked with dead letters, those that do not arrive at their destination for one reason or another. Bartleby, then, is part of the postal tradition of North American literature (that also includes Poe’s “Purloined Letter”). The *postal* is the first resonance of the “post-modern” that Olson will speak of, and in Melville’s mysterious story it refers to the moment

* Op. cit., p. 73.

† Ibid., p. 73.

before the alley with no exit. Before the symbiosis between writing and capital, the scrivener, we are told, had a distinct job in the patriarchy, since “dead letters” refer as much to the administration of the death of God, as to the religious condition of writing itself, in its condition of epistolary un-received, unheard, because writing before capitalism was dedicated to administering the (unsuccessful) communication with the divine. The (Modern) writer as *failed technician of the sacred*.

It was his prior job that caused his current bad attitude towards life. The scrivener arrived on the scene of capitalism melancholic, frustrated, disappointed with himself, skeptical of real communication, crushed, sunk in his interior world, separated from everything and everyone. The scrivener arrived into capitalism tormented by the loneliness caused by his failure. He could not communicate with us. His letters failed.

Before becoming an especially insubordinate subaltern, the scrivener had another job, the job that gave him his current bent.* Having failed in what he tried to accomplish—to communicate with otherness!—the scrivener went from being the disappointed one—disappointed with himself, a disappointment of the Other—to being the one who disappoints.

The scrivener was a divine messenger. And he failed in that mission.

He became a failed messenger.

The capitalist patriarchy, then, welcomed him.

The scrivener, reluctantly, accepted.

Unable to accept his new patron’s vile, inferior love, tormented by the memory of his old job, the disillusioned

* A part of Olson understood very well the scrivener’s transition. “Sun-worshippers had more sense than we. They revered something organic and necessary to flesh and bone. We give our faith to the State” (“Dostoevsky and *The Possessed*” in *Collected Prose*, p. 126). Writing this in 1940, Olson, however, was not slow to join the propaganda apparatus of the North American State. Poets: the *castati* caste.

scrivener came to be the servant saboteur of his undesired master.

As a failed technician of the sacred before taking on the form of renegade copyist of Wall Street, the Oxidental scribe is condemned to nihilism, to pure passive resistance, a being protected by the paternal State, an Oedipal being. The scribe is condemned to death, to dying among the ruins of his wavering between a metaphysical unemployment and a subservience to capitalism.

Co-bodies of each other: scribe and New York attorney, writer and State, thought and capitalism, secret *symbiosis*, silent union of the apparently distinct, truncated relation and therefore not unreal. Since the union of the two is the most uncanny, the saddest and most disappointing, it is the very loop of the complete failure of the human project. All of us are Bartleby. Copyists, clandestine propagandists of capitalism with no exit.

Oedipus Deciphered

We are two millennium removed from the secret that Oedipus hides.

It is not without reason that so many versions of this myth—almost all of them involuntary— have accumulated. The number of (false) interpretations is no accident either. It is probably only today, now that the Oedipus myth is untenable, that its hidden truth can be deciphered. What the Oedipus myth shows is everything that man is willing to fantasize in order to not deal with reality.

A fundamental feature of the Oedipus myth is the amount of false versions produced, avatars of denial. It should not go unremarked that it was precisely the Oedipus myth that made us aware that a myth is composed of all its variants. *Inside* the very story of Oedipus there are versions of the same myth. The version that initiates the disorder of

versions is that of the oracle of Delphi, who announces to Laius that the son he bears with Jocasta will kill him and marry his wife. This same Laius, who, according to legend introduced homosexuality into Greece, apparently had little trouble abandoning his infant son, since he had already been warned that his son would kill him.

Laius's homoeroticism is notoriously neglected in the interpretation of Oedipus. Freud was unable to name how the Oedipal is not universal. The Oedipal occurs when there is a father-patriarchy with a homoerotic conflict, an obsession with analogy.

As far as the Oedipal-psychological, this "complex" appears when the masculine desire for the feminine is displaced onto others—inspired by the patriarchal turn—creating a problematic inter-masculine relation and an image of the feminine as threatening.

The Oedipal is born not from a desire to possess the mother, since this is the fantasy that appears afterwards. The principle of the so-called "Oedipus complex" is a cultural-familial situation in which a masculine desire for the feminine is criticized, because love for the woman is seen as inferior, something that must be repressed. Thus is born the idea that it is the son who is in love with the mother (as symbol of the *minor man*, of the *pre-man*). For the son, the "Oedipal complex" means that one should—because of the imagined inferiority of woman—love the Father, and the love for the mother should be exchanged for a "superior" inter-masculine love. Masculine relations, therefore, remain tinged with the resentment of this co-deception.

In the Greek tale, as soon as his son is born, Laius orders one of his servants to kill the baby. The servant does not kill him. He hangs him from a tree—and this hanging from the tree by his feet symbolizes the reverse-time that Oedipus will be inserted into thereafter. The servant, returning from the woods, does not tell the truth to Laius, and the versions of Oedipus, inside of this very world, multiply.

The myth of Oedipus, inside itself, is many.

Thus, the version, inside the myth, does not lie, when it claims that king Laius was killed by a band of multiple thieves. In effect, there were many...many Oedipuses...who attacked and killed him.

Oedipus will be the impossible being. Oedipus is the protagonist of various simultaneous histories. That of a dead newborn prince. That of a secretly surviving prince. That of a phantasmal son announced by the oracle. From its beginning, what the Oedipus myth narrates is the impossibility that someone could claim for oneself the Oedipal identity, since the fundamental fate of Oedipus is not to know if he is actually "Oedipus."

From now on we should understand that inside these stories there will be various Oedipus-es, but none of them will be Oedipus. Oedipus is none of them, but rather the identity they search for.

The story of Oedipus begins with the story of his destiny told by the oracle. The story of Oedipus begins with the fantasy of a condemned future.

The story of Oedipus also begins with Oedipus upside down.*

The baby that Laius's servant hangs from the tree will have swollen feet.

We know by this swelling that the story of Oedipus is the story of a man who falters. The myth of Oedipus will be the story of a man who does not know how to support himself, who knows not what his sustenance is. Not only is he confused with respect to his origin and his destiny, Oedipus is confused to the very core of his being.

We must not, therefore, pay any attention to the version Oedipus has of himself.

* This inversion refers not only to the inauguration of inverted linear time but also to a regression, a descent, an attempt to re-enter the uterus (symbol of someone who will come to be dominated by the unconscious).

This will be the error that the interpreters of the myth commit: to believe that Oedipus's version is the true and central one, without knowing that Oedipus's version of himself is only one more version. We are not dealing with his history/story, but rather with his dream or fantasy.

There in the woods, the messenger Phorbas hears Oedipus's cry, gathers him up, and brings him to the king of Corinth. How do we know that the baby with swollen feet Phorbas delivers to the royal palace is really a baby that he has found, and not his own son that he has rejected? It might seem exaggerated to pose this type of question to a myth. But we are dealing here with a fundamental myth. A myth that turns on the question of the true father of Oedipus, and the answer is that the father of Oedipus could be any one of them. Both kings and servants.*

It is evident that the myth of Oedipus, from its beginnings, involves the relation between master and slave. The servants who carry Oedipus from one family to another are made invisible. This is the trick of the servant of History: to fade into the background. The myth of Oedipus has as another of its beginnings that Oedipus is transmitted by servants.

Oedipus is a myth constructed by servants, a myth made to be heard by masters.

The myth that the father is not threatened anymore, that the danger his son represented has died.

* When the messenger and Oedipus converse in the pivotal scene of the tragedy, at the point of the *anagnorisis*, notice that the messenger tells Oedipus that Polybus did not father him. "What are you saying? Polybus was not my father?" asks Oedipus. The messenger responds: "He was not your father any more than I." In this passage we find another of the keys to understand this myth in all its profundity. The messengers are also the authors of "Oedipus." "How is it that he who fathered me is equal with he who has nothing to do with me?" and the messenger answers: "As neither he nor I fathered you." And when Oedipus sends for Laius's slave-shepherd-messenger and speaks with him, he asks him as well if the infant that was delivered to this other slave-shepherd-messenger was his own son or another man's. Notice then that this infant's paternity was a matter of four. The quaternary game between the two kings and the two messengers is, so to speak, the four legs that comprises the first Oedipus.

The myth that the delivered baby will be the beloved son. This is a story of deceived parents. This is a story of sabotaging slaves.

This is a story with many versions. Constructed against the master.

Slave versions. Stories of the dominated.

The story of Oedipus contains the versions of servants and prophets mixed together. Because the servants who unbind and deliver Oedipus are messengers.

After becoming the son of the king Polybus and the queen Merope, Oedipus becomes a gallant prince. Sophocles relates that a drunk man insults Oedipus during a festival, claiming that Oedipus is an adopted son. The prince then begins a search for his true origins and this search takes him to the oracle who announces that Oedipus will kill his father and marry his mother. Oedipus escapes from Corinth.

On his trip, he meets with the entourage of King Laius of Thebes at the site where “three roads” converge—as we see, the triad will preside over a large part of the Oedipal imaginary—and here (this version should not be taken as the only possible one) Oedipus confronts the group and kills Laius, without knowing, of course, that Laius was supposedly his true father. If we are congruent with Oedipal logic, beyond the Sophoclean resolution, then we must wonder is Laius really the father of Oedipus, or is this identification another of the mistakes that compose the Oedipal? And even if this was the case, was Laius really the man Oedipus assassinated at the site where the three roads converge?

There are many parts of Oedipus that both Sophocles’s *Oedipus Tyrannus* and Freud’s psychoanalytic theories have led us to believe are completely resolved. But there are basic points about which we are mistaken regarding this fundamental myth of the patriarchy. Probably the most scandalous is that the answer Oedipus gives to the riddle

of the sphinx—which is not contained in Sophocles*—is a false or at least only partial solution to the enigma. Oedipus does not adequately solve the mystery of the sphinx. In Sophocles, it is Tiresias who emphasizes how little Oedipus understands not only of the oracle but of interpretation in general. “You are not a good diviner of enigmas,” he says.

Before continuing it is necessary to ask ourselves who is the sphinx? (The sphinx that could not be deciphered.)

In the context of civilization, the *sphinx* appears when the feminine is seen as monstrous, mysterious and destructive. (It is possible that the sphinx, as it appears in the canonical Oedipal myth, is a Greek variant of the *vagina-dentata* or the *spider woman*.) The sphinx is the vision the relatively early patriarchy formed of the feminine, endowing it, on the one hand, with mystic knowledge, and on the other, marking it as inferior, an enemy to subdue and destroy, having first stripped it of its knowledge. The sphinx is the old priestess as seen by the subsequent, increasingly misogynist patriarchy.

As Lévi-Strauss claimed, the names of the triad Labdacus-Laius-Oedipus possess a common trait of referring to the difficulty of maintaining an upright position.† Lévi-Strauss reads this feature in relation to the theory of the “autochthonous origin of man.”‡

* Alternate versions are found throughout ancient Greece; see for example, *Apollodorus*, vol. I, James George Frazer (ed.), Heinemann, London, 1921, p. 339-351.

† “All the names have a common feature... [they] refer to difficulties walking straight and standing upright.... In mythology it is a universal characteristic of men born from the Earth that at the moment they emerge from the depth they either cannot walk or walk clumsily” (“The Structural Study of Myth” in *Structural Anthropology*, Basic Books, New York, 1963, p. 215). What is the Lévi-Straussian version of the Oedipal myth? Oedipus is made of parts. Oedipus continues his fragmentation, becoming this version in a series of loose parts—an Osiric Oedipus—which can recombine without end. Oedipus has become machine.

‡ *Ibid.*, p. 213.

But if it is evident that the Oedipal myth is related to early theories of how man originated, one should not lose sight of the fact that it also refers to *masculine anxiety*. An anxiety that is linked to the capacity to maintain “erection.”

The myth of Oedipus is phallic anxiety.

A part of the myth refers to the erectile potency of the penis (and to what the erection symbolizes in psycho-sociopolitical terms). The “swaying” of which Lévi-Strauss speaks in relation to the mythical characters that sprout from the earth, is largely the figure of the penis leaving the vagina, debilitated, limp. Oedipus, “swollen feet,” symbolizes the fantasy of an “engorged penis,” as Laius is taken to be the implicit symbol of a “clumsy/crooked/limping” phallus, which is attached to common social fantasies about homosexuality as “deviation” from the norm. Labdacus represents the “crippled/lame/invalid,” as symbol of partial or total impotence.*

The Oedipal results from matriarchal and patriarchal excesses. Oedipal fantasies are the subsequent fantasies of the war of the sexes.

Oedipus, as victor over the sphinx—which etymologically signifies *woman who strangles*—is the victor over the “strangler-womb,” strangler-vagina, which leaves the penis flaccid, beaten, *castrated*. Oedipus is the desire not to lose the masculine power—symbolized by the erect penis, the engorged phallus; the Oedipal is involved in the anxiety over the loss of masculine potency, in relation to the feminine. As much the case in the sexual as in the political.

But the Oedipal has still wider dimensions than the psychological, sexual, political, or historical.

The riddle of the sphinx asks what is two-legged, three-legged, four-legged (dipod, tripod, tetrapod) but has only one voice. “Only the change in nature among those who

* Labdacus died torn apart by the Bacchae. The lineage of Labdacus is the lineage of the fear of being destroyed by feminine violence.

frequent the sky, the air, and the sea. When supported over the greater number of feet, its members have less force,” Levi-Strauss ends.* The solution given is far from satisfying considering the gravity of the riddle. It is said that Oedipus solved the riddle by claiming that this creature is man, who as a baby walks on four legs, is bipedal as an adult, and in old age, needing a cane, is tripodal.

This solution to the riddle is incorrect because its solution cannot be so trivial. That is, the riddle is more than a witty challenge—what the riddle interrogates is of greater depth. The riddle asks after what has sustained, historically and psychically, man in his very existence.

At the dawn of thought, Man had four limbs, when the paradigm for understanding the universe was a quadripartite model—for example, in models of the four directions, the four seasons, or the four corners of the world or in the model based on the mythical trip of the sun through the sky and the underworld (which survives in our age not only in the four cardinal points but also in multiple symbologies, like that of the cross). The quadruped of the riddle refers to the general model of *four principles* that archaic man uses to support his hermeneutic relation to reality.

This model has also been based on the dialectic of the two principles, on *dualism*. This bipedal support or double has survived, forcefully, during the history of Oxidental civilization. It is not that the bipartite has completely replaced the quadripartite. On the contrary, remnants of both models coexist, although the dualist conception is the predominant one as it is the general Oxidental model for explicating the inherent structure of “totality.”

The Oedipal, however, bets on a tripartite model. What the Oedipal theorizes is the *late triad*.

This triad will be what founds the father-son-mother trio and the Christian Trinity, and is what will give form

to many models of reality in modernity (for example, the triangulations of Freud's system, especially that of the superego-ego-Id and the many triads of Hegel.)*

The riddle, then, must be interpreted in a wider context. If the creature in question is man, then it is man meant different than the way the witty and ingenious response has been interpreted up to now. Rather, the riddle alludes to what is most profound in Oxidental civilization.

The riddle of the sphinx refers to the form of man's understanding of the structure of space-time. As we know, there is another riddle that the sphinx poses. The sphinx asks who are the two sisters, where one bore the other, and the other bore the first.†

Day and Night is the answer.

This other riddle of the sphinx reveals that such riddles refer to models of becoming, to the forms in which reality produces itself. The night-day model, like the quadripartite models, and the dualist and triadic one, allow us to see that these riddles refer to what runs deepest in Oxidental civilization.

* The interpretation Hegel makes of the Oedipus myth has been one of the most penetrating. According to Hegel, Oedipus is the moment in which the *classical* overcomes the *symbolic*. The Egyptian-sphinx-symbolic is decoded by the Greek-Oedipal-consciousness. "Oedipus, giving the solution, *Man*, precipitated the Sphinx to the rock. The solution and liberation of that Oriental Spirit, which in Egypt had advanced so far as to propose the problem, is certainly this: that the Inner Being (the Essence) of Nature is Thought, which has its existence only in the human consciousness..." (*The Philosophy of History*, Dover, New York, no year, p. 220). The fall of the sphinx, certainly, into an abyss, indicates that the symbolic that the sphinx represents—as Hegel knew well—left the visible to plunge into the *precipice of the unconscious*. So it is not that the sphinx has ceased to be, as Hegel believed and as in general is believed in the methodology of post-modern criticism, but that the symbols speak from and for the unconscious. Neither the concept nor the symbol overcome one another or substitute for each other. They operate simultaneously.

† The first mention of this other riddle is found on a Greek vessel (dated between 470–460 AD). It is cited in commentaries on Euripides's lost work on Oedipus and in connection with Euripides's *The Phoenicians* as well as other sources. The first author that speaks of the Sphinx appears to be Hesiod.

The Oedipal conception—that of the triadic model—suggests exhaustion; the man walks with a cane as he has lost his strength. There is a good deal of truth in this conception since the Oedipal has come to represent precisely Oxidental man's anxious search for sustenance in the weak familial model of patriarchy.

Poor Oedipus! With him was born Oxidental man's dependence on concepts that cripple him.

Oedipus is a symbol of control. Oedipus means not knowing our origin. Not knowing our purpose here on Earth. Oedipus means becoming a *tyrannized tyrant*.

Much have we lamented the way in which the tyrant tyrannizes but we have paid much less attention to how the tyrant is tyrannized by the popular chorus and by the messages of the "wise." Oedipus is a tyrant who is full of voices. Oedipus, who for some is the first Oxidental representation of the search for truth, ends up depending on information, narration, memory, and the interpretations of others to be able to know who he is. Tiresias tyrannizes him. Creon tyrannizes him. He is tyrannized by Jocasta. He is tyrannized, finally, by the messengers.

Oedipus symbolizes each of us, each of us as dependent. Let's not forget that Oedipus ends, like Bartleby, by becoming a vagabond. He has become an old wretch, blind, *homeless*. All of this has happened to Oedipus because he has believed in the truths of others, because he has struggled in search of an unreal genealogy. The error of Oedipus is to look for *support*. His tyrant is the cane. Upon hearing the words of such meta-narratives, divinations, sphinxes, slave-messengers, Oedipus fragmented. On turning into a fragmented sovereign, his parts become his tyrant-slaves. All the characters of the Oedipus myth are fragments of himself, which he does not at all recognize as his own. All the figures in a story are alienations of oneself. *All history is the story of a subdivision*. History is fragmentation.

blinded because he has stopped believing that he can know himself, that he can transform himself, without having to become an other through the visions, stories, memories, judgments, and models of others. Oedipus is the master that looks for masters. Including looking for masters among the slaves.

If we had listened carefully we would have heard the Oedipus tragedy whispering that *we should not even have general models of reality*. To live under the auspice of whatever system—The Four, The Three, The Two—is to live under tyranny, as is to live under the control of the ONE.

The Oedipus myth narrates the loss of sovereignty, the loss of absolute liberty. It is the birth of an authoritarian confusion, brought on by oneself, due to a need for security and submission to others, and this includes submission to the lowest, to the supposed gods, to the *pueblo*,* or to society, to certain principles that we have decided govern our life. Oedipus is a poor man who has lost everything because he has decided to crawl, he has decided to look for other feet and to make his own swollen. The myth of Oedipus is the *refusal of man to stand on his own*.

What Oedipus refuses to see: man stands only under his own power.

Maximus Larval

There are times when we must deviate from our course, when one must wander, because only then can we understand this man. In the last few pages I have summarized millennia. I know that to do so is to behave ridiculously, as one always appears ridiculous when trying to capture the infinite.

* There is no comprehensive English equivalent for this word, which signifies various rhetorical syntheses of ideas of land, nation, people, town, community and popular majority. We have chosen to retain the original term, italicized, in all instances. (Trans. note)

However, I wanted to cover the critical story of the “divine messenger” who becomes the “scribe-copyist” of capitalist patriarchy, and afterwards, to tell the story of the master of this capitalist-patriarchy: the tyrant tyrannized by his slave-parts. And it is the ex-messenger who weaves fantasies that drive the sovereign mad.

Language that no longer communicates with the divine (modern literature, the sciences, the arts, philosophy, and the mass media) constructs images that the sovereigns (i.e., the State and capitalism) will assume as their own, attempting to form themselves according to what their slaves have imagined. (*Ideology*, then, is not only the naturalized justification that sustains certain classes in power, but also the mode in which these same classes are crazy for such fantasies. *Ideology* is Don Quixote.) This is the relation that prevails between culture and rulers. Culture imagines what the rulers will end up wanting to make real. In this way, the sovereigns are led to ruin, because the undoing of sovereigns is to pay attention to the fantasies of their slaves; and here the sovereign is as much the State as each individual who might, at another time, be his own master.

The fantasies that Olson would weave transposed North American propaganda into a new lyric sphere: “I am Gilgamesh / An Ur-world there is in me / to inhabit.”* Tending to the expansive, Charles Olson quickly lost any reservation. He wanted for himself the immediately immense, the complete delivery of the vast. Hardly would he begin a project, then would he lose control of it. From his first period as a writer, before his job in the Office of War Information, and then when resuming it after the death of Roosevelt, Olson lived his writing through the fantasy of hypertrophy.

During his youth, this gigantism was more than once

* *Charles Olson and Frances Boldereff: A Modern Correspondence*, Wesleyan University Press, 1999, p. 36.

mutilated, shrunk by circumstances, or severed by haste. In general, the grandeur of his fantasies was cut down by the disproportion of his intentions and by the reality of his actual abilities. In his drive for status, Olson created mental worlds that evanesced in an instant. Before the simplest bonfire he imagined himself Prometheus. Olson aspired to verbal excesses.

Olson was erratic. He was excessively enthused. He was one of those men who after one insight or clue, believes he knows everything about the subject, abandoning all other work or daily tasks to dedicate himself, full of enthusiasm, to his little spark of knowledge. Such men, of course, are quickly exhausted, because what sustains them are those instantaneous megalomanias and so they flag a little after understanding the impersonal magnitude of their project.

Olson despaired. He shifted from one plan to another. Hardly had he embarked on a piece when he would elephantize it mentally until it became impractical. A project of writing some four poems on the tarot—a project that involved illustrations by his friend Corrado Cagli—quickly turned, in his fantasy, into a monumental work. Un-executable.* Wanting it all, wanting it all right now, characterized the early Olson.

In 1946, *Call Me Ishmael* was already finished. After many drafts and many essays, he had decided to finish it following a different tack. His drafts were rather schematic, so the book took on the form of a series of *essayemes*, notes and sketches, in short, hardly an academic structure, though Olson pretended it was an academic, erudite success.

Olson nurtured grand hopes. Once the book was completed, Olson remained unhappy with its execution. And so it goes with an enthusiasm which starts big and then produces an extreme exhaustion a little further down the road.

* Inspired by Cagli's work, however, Olson prepared his poem "The Preface."

When it appeared in print a year later, the work was not well received. But even before its appearance, Olson suspected that *Call Me Ishmael* was not his master work. His enthusiasm wavered, always wavered. Olson's feelings—especially those of the early Olson who, although he was an adult man when he began writing, was practically a novice as a writer—were always ambivalent feelings, excesses, swaying passions, so to speak.

He needed a major work, a titanic one on which to found a solid reputation. So during his trips he began a research project, library by library, on the American Northeast. Heeding the counsel of his delusions of grandeur, Olson, of course, believed he had found his masterpiece: a syncretic epic of America. He would rewrite Pound's *Cantos* with the Americanist optimism of Whitman.

In this epic would be combined the histories of the indigenous, the whites, and the blacks. "Operation Red, White & Black" was the title he gave it in February of 1947. The military flavor of this title cannot go unremarked. Maybe this is a good moment to remember that Olson, not only a fervid nationalist but a fervid U.S. nationalist, retained until the end of his career a tendency to conceive of writing and the writer in a metaphoric relation to the military. For North American liberals (the vast majority of his readers and disciples) it might hurt to admit something that is very clear: Olson was guided by his mentality as a war veteran.

Olson's ideas, his methods, his perspectives—which would be very clear in his vision of Mexico—derived from a military vision of the world, a military imperialist vision. About this issue I want to immediately note three facts. First, that the military in his thought was not, in the great majority of cases, something explicit. To understand his imperialist militarism one must de-translate him, since in Olson the imperialist militarism became a poetic, metaphoric code, in short, *literature*: his war veteran's vision camouflaged itself until it became subtle poetry. Second, this mentality does

not in any way devalue his literary work. On the contrary, it gives it context, in the same way that Nietzsche's anti-semitic mentality does not devalue his thought or how Pound's fascism does not lessen the importance of his verse. Olson was a North American nationalist, blind to the majority of imperialism's atrocities, which, without him realizing it, he supported in his literary thought. And finally, none of this has been noticed by Olson scholars.

There's another thing it has been difficult for scholars of Olson in the United States to recognize: the importance of kitsch in his thought. "Operation Red, White, and Black" is part of an American vision of the world, which owes much, certainly, to Pound's fascist multiculturalism, to Whitman's imperialist topology, and to Hollywood romanticism. Olson wanted to synthesize the myths of the whole continent in a single work, guided by maximal, excessive, romantic, cheesy, kitschy fantasy. By 1948, influenced by his lecture on Dante and the *melting pot*, he devised a character called "Orpheus West" in which the stories of Quetzalcoatl, Cabeza de Vaca, Ishmael, Orpheus, and other heroes were fused in an exotic juxtaposition.

As Barthes pointed out just five years later in *Mythologies* (1954–1957), twentieth century bourgeois thought is characterized by the construction of mythologies in which the cultural is assumed to be "natural," "universal," "human." Olson is a bourgeois thinker. He constructed a grand family of heroes, explorers, pilgrims, that became one self in the end: him. From these first totalizing projects (failed and abandoned quickly by Olson) until his magnum opus—the poems of Maximus, the super-persona—Charles Olson wanted to catalogue the totality of the human experience by means of a funnel. Olson wanted to be Man.

In the same book, Barthes gently ridicules a photography exhibition "The Great Family of Man" which had just arrived in Paris from the United States. According to Barthes, this post-war exhibition sought to display the total

Unity of cultures via “the universality of human actions in the daily life of all the cultures of the world: birth, death, work, knowledge, fun...[that] there is a family of Man.”* Barthes maintained a sardonic critical, attitude, regarding such an attempt at a full multicultural uniting. According to Barthes, this “Adamization” of experience betrays a desire to eternalize and lyricize historical conditions until they evaporate and are erased, for the good of a unified capitalist vision.

Olson is an Adamist. If Olson worked with myth across all of his work it is because myth allowed him to deemphasize contradictions and erase differences. Myth allowed him to do away with *history*, because history was only the first phase. If history was constructed in order to fragment cultures, now, in order to continue fragmenting them, it was necessary to fragment history itself.

Myth allowed Olson to allege that his models and approaches were Edenic, universal, primordial, ancestral, perennial. In his reconstruction of myths, Olson eliminates antithesis. He makes One of the many. In myth, Olson *fuses*. Synthesizes. To pass off his vision as the very essence of primary man. There is something that his Anglo commentarists do not want to admit: myth in Olson performs an imperialist function. His ethnopoetics is Americanization.

His deployment of myth is of course demagogic, exaggerated, sententious. In “The Kingfishers” (1949), the poem where he combined the Greek and the Aztec with Mao Tse Tung (translated from the French) Olson grants himself the authority of a life-granting force:

What does not change / is the will to change†

This first verse—that became a motto of American counter-

* *Mythologies*, Hill and Wang, New York, 1972, p. 100.

† *Collected Poems*, University of California Press, Berkeley, 1997. p. 86.

poetics with its will to renew poetics—obviously paraphrases Heraclitus. What does not change is actually the reference to Heraclitus. What does not change is the pledge of allegiance to the West as Origin. What continues to be ironic is that the American reception of this sentence—which would quickly inspire the beatnik generation and American counter-poetics up to the seventies—took this inaugural verse as a cosmic principle, that is to say, a *purity*, a discovery in which Olson claimed the *naturalness of the vanguard*, that is, the universality of change. The irony—and we see now that irony is not ever believing in the naïveté of a new dawn—is that this cosmic verse of Olson’s is nothing more than the paraphrase of a Greek thinker. Olson did not take this universal law from his observation of the universe, he took it from a textual citation.

Olson joined the most new with the most archaic. This was how he established his authority, by making himself the representative of the ancestral-transcultural. In “The Kingfishers” Olson sought to speak of the natural structure of the very universe, of man, of his internal world and of the earthly revolution, and he wanted to speak of all this from a voice that is patriarchal, direct, from an immortal wisdom. However, Olson’s references to the Aztecs in the early part of his poem were extracted from *The Conquest of Mexico* (1843) by William H. Prescott. He certainly had this book in his mind when he lived in Mexico, and it guided his experience there. I am insisting on this point: what Olson would claim as discoveries are nothing more than reconstructions; what he will call origins are merely bibliographic sources; what he considers universal laws are no more than his opinions. The opinions of a lyrical experimentalism combined with those of an imaginary North American war veteran. Olson’s grandfather is Whitman, that other poetic veteran, who transformed the North American expansionist principle and its model of “democracy” into free verse and colloquial pantheism.

Olson's first exposure to kingfishers as symbols of renewal came to him during a party, where a drunk art curator mentioned something about the blue of the kingfishers. His correspondence with Frances Boldereff would also influence him greatly in the drafting of the poem. The citation of Mao is in French in Olson's poem because it is a citation of his conversation with Jean Riboud. "The Kingfishers," the poem that begins Olson's Mexican imaginary, is full of intertextuality, of other voices that have become fused in his text of booming breath.

I am no Greek, hath not th'advantage
And of course, no Roman

[...]

...If I have any taste
it is only because I have interested myself
In what was slain in the sun

I pose you your question:

shall you uncover honey / where maggots are?

I hunt among stones.*

"I hunt among stones" is his announcement that his search will be in the direction of the ancient, the original, the direct, the natural. It is no accident that he considered it a searching among *stones*, that is, among the symbolic elements of the natural and the primitive, and not among *ruins*, that is, among the cultural remnants in which actually Olson searched. *Olson hunted among archives*. Olson wanted to appear as a hunter in nature, an archeologist of *dawns*, when

in truth he was an archeologist of *knowledge*, a library-dweller trying to pass for an aboriginal.

The difference between hunting among stones and hunting among ruins is what Olson wanted to hide. Olson wanted his bibliographic investigation to be taken for direct intuitions, and he wanted his conversations with others to pass for solitary illuminations—he wanted his investigation of the cooked (ruins) to pass for discoveries of the raw (stones). Not admitting that his work forms a part of the *archive*, he fancied himself in direct contact with the Pristine.

This behavior, moreover, is a typical characteristic of the lyric, since the lyric is anything that does not want to have an expiration date, the lyric is the individual (historic, particular) assuming the guise of the Archetypal Eternal. The lyric is the fantasy of the Unlimited.

What Olson desires is to legislate. To be the authority, the one who guards universal laws.

The one who takes over the knowledge of other cultures and in his re-mythologizing, discovers the “universal.” Robert von Hallberg recalls that “The didactic Maximus always wants to show that particular people and events are *instances* of general laws.”* The paradox is that Olson’s *paradise* is constructed from diverse *sources*. What he called origins, human essence, perennial myth, are no more than perceptions of his own Anglophone culture. *Origins* in Olson are *citations*. His origins are second-hand sources. What he called *origins* are TRANSLATIONS.

His morning, in reality, is an afternoon.

Prose and Takeover

Continuing in the vein of his magisterial paragustia, of his

* Charles Olson, *The Scholar's Art*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, 1978, p. 169.

will to appropriate the Other, of his eagerness to compose a vast epic, a synthetic supermythology, Olson imagined some days that he could compose choreographies, and in others that he might work in film, and in still others, that he might become an expert in the Western Gold Rush. Throughout these years, his wife Connie became accustomed to seeing how quickly Charles's house of cards fell, only to be exchanged for another. She was certainly discontent. Their sex life proved difficult. She supported him financially.

Olson was depressed. He wanted to get rid of his literary parents, though he didn't stop looking for new ones. He could not find a way out of the erroneous structure of the imaginary parricide. Moreover, Olson's unemployment sharpened his desire and need to conquer the U.S. literary world. It wasn't until Connie underwent an abortion in 1948 that Olson looked for work.

His mentor Edward Dahlberg retired from his position as professor of Black Mountain College, an experimental school in North Carolina. Dahlberg was tired of dealing with his students; he had just divorced and was discouraged. Dahlberg proposed to Olson that he take over his position. Olson, feeling the pressure of Connie's medical bills, had no other option but to accept. At first, he was worried that teaching would impede the writing of his master work, but he soon discovered that Black Mountain was a good fit. It was a place where he could evangelize: now he explained his vision to the youth. Olson was, as is well known, a man with a special ability to promote his ideas. Although initially provoked by Connie's abortion, Olson quickly found himself at home at Black Mountain.

Olson was an emphatically competitive man. He longed to compose a work on a grand scale, a totalizing masterwork. He wanted to overcome Joyce, and most of all, Pound. Although Olson is claimed as post-modern—he was the first to employ this term in literature in English—his desires belonged to a classical and modern will: the will to

produce a masterwork, a long work. Strictly speaking, he could not actually be post-modern because, like Pound, he wanted to write an *incorporative work* (and the incorporative was the very paradigm of modernity). In Olson's case, he wanted to incorporate a continent, letting in what Pound did not permit: the indigenous and the oral contemporary. (Contemporary American speech came to Olson by way of the young Robert Creeley, with whom he would construct a voluminous correspondence from 1950 onwards.) Olson was encyclopedic. From Sumeria to psychoanalysis and from Greece to Montezuma. He wanted to be wider than Pound. And Pound and Olson share something: they are both *bankers*.

The text, for them, is a bank. An accumulation of foreign capital. Their erudition is a hoarding, a site where they attempt a final unification.

It is no accident, as Olson knew, that the first Greek prose writer, Anaximander, was the first to develop a world map. Prose is bound to empire.

The bank was operationalized by what Olson called "assault prose." The military character of this expression is not incidental. Assault meant assertive prose, portentous, comprehensive, generalized, a prose that does not doubt any of its claims, even if they are outbursts. His prose is a writing of the advance, an avalanche, a pillage, and seizure of power. Olson always thought of writing in a militaristic manner. To write, for Olson, was *expeditionary*. Olson is one more North American expedition. He is an emblem of North American imperialism. He was, in fact, one of its open apologists. Olson is defined by *banking* and *expedition*.*

His demons were his expectations. He wanted to be

* Olson's "assault prose" has a precursor in Neal Cassidy and Jack Kerouac's "kick writing." Both are forms of prose directed by masculine force, by macho-adrenaline, by the subjugation of impulsive writing, hungry to pour itself onto the page in a muscular, machinic manner: in Olson in the mode of a tank, in Kerouac that of an automobile.

one of the greats. At the end of the forties, when Olson realized that he still did not have the power to compete with Poundian verse, he turned to prose, whose *res extensa* admits oceans. Poetry is the art of knowing how to clarify, so, excepting the long poem, poetry requires centripetal conciseness. Olson admired everything large, everything wide. His admiration for the Pacific Ocean—an admiration he learned from Melville—is an impulse that points to the tremendous.

Olson's first book, *Call Me Ishmael* (1947), has a will to include everything. Although it is written in the manner of a ship's log, it condenses; it cuts. Olson worked by concentrating, oceans turned into morphemes. This was his technique: to press vastness into language. But this technique did not yield instant gratification, since not just anyone can untangle all the packets integrated in the syllabic, all the knowledge embedded between letters. When his first book of poems *Y & X* appeared, the reviews indicated that it was too cerebral, its language was too encrypted. Only people with whom he had exchanged ideas, those who knew his codes, claimed to understand his poetry. Olson despaired when his early work was not immediately celebrated by others. He could not believe they missed how each verse, each line was a string of pearls he had rescued from the deep, a splendid synthesis, fortresses whose bricks were Pandora's boxes.

In fact, Olson's style is dictated by two forces: his ambition to encompass totality and his rush to demonstrate it. So his writing, from here on forward, took the form of a shipwrecked bottle that dreams of swallowing the whole sea. His choice of the whale was no accident. If the theme of his first book of prose is *Moby Dick* it is because Olson's ambition was to capture the largest subject he could with the quick assuredness of his broad hands. To make the whale fit in the palm of a hand. And then to press the whale inside the fist until it compressed into a grain of sea salt on the tip of an ancient finger.

To summarize in a single point long centuries of uninterrupted potlatch.

And to squeeze the grain of sea salt in order to provoke a gigantic leak, a primitive, unstoppable tsunami, that would make this miniscule grain of salt discharge oceans of whale oil covering everything and inventing a new space-time in which there will arise a whole new biosphere.

In *Call Me Ishmael*, Olson explored not only Melville or *Moby Dick*, but, primarily, the United States' concept of space. He was not the only author at this time who was centrally concerned with *space*. Since the forties, Lezama Lima had been working on a notion of "gnostic space," and explicitly put forth in his seminars of 1957. Meanwhile, in the extreme south of the continent, Borges in "The Garden of Forking Paths" (1941) described a tenuous space where perception could observe all times converging into one plane, a synchrony and polytopia he would explore in many of his stories and essays, until arriving at the concept of the "Aleph" (1949).

It should not be forgotten, however, that the revision of the concept of space in Lezama and Melville was Whitmanic, whereas in Borges any accumulation produces monstrosity. In Olson, there was no comparable irony. Olson was convinced of the need to fuse, to press the All into the One.

Quantum physics had been moving towards a reconsideration of space-time since the beginning of the century. In many senses, quantum physics prefigured what Borges, Lezama, and Olson proposed in their texts. All of them worked with various *transdictions* that turned on how to fuse disparate elements and how to contain the universe in a single elementary particle, an element that could be verse, word, syllable, or letter. In short, they interrogated how to tie the variegated into the same knot. Olson was interested in this proposition not only because of his closeness to Joyce, with the concept of Jungian archetype, with the ideas of Lawrence, and with his familiarity with the theories of Heisenberg, but

also because his haste to anchor everything he had consumed in books, soliloquies, and conversations, demanded that he develop a textuality in which the many, the infinite, stayed summarized in the brief, the syllabic, and the little.

Call Me Ishmael is a book that is marked by a sense of haste. It is made of fragments, islets of text, inspired not so much by Nietzsche as by the author of *Leaves of Grass*. Olson's theme is the interminable—the Pacific, the delirium of Melville, the pursuit of a demonic whale, an apology for North American expansionism—and, even still, *Call Me Ishmael* feels like a self-enclosed, tiny monad. *Call Me Ishmael* is an archipelago of reflections.

In 1946, when Olson visited Pound—who was held in St. Elizabeth psychiatric hospital after his lawyer had him committed after having him judged mentally incompetent to stand trial for national treason due to his collaboration with Italian Fascism—Olson left Pound a copy of his unpublished manuscript on Melville. The text pleased Pound precisely because it served as an introduction to an author who he personally had not had time nor interest to investigate deeply, as he confessed. Olson began to understand more and more clearly that his spiritual structure was found in the preparation of diminutive summas.

His very encounter with Pound was the continuation of his art of merging. His biographer Tom Clark writes:

Although never openly sexual and mostly sublimated like a professional friendship, his relation with Cagli took on similar dimensions, in his point of view, to those relations that had emerged with strong masculine figures like Edward Dahlberg in the past, or in this then, with Ezra Pound: a pattern of excessive dependence, on its way to a powerful affect beyond the limits of mere casual camaraderie.*

Olson converged with the other. He fused the knowledge of the other in himself. From Dahlberg, Pound, and Cagli he would move on, a little later, to Frances Boldereff and Robert Creeley. If Olson's work refers, primarily, to expansion towards the other, towards the fusion with and appropriation of the other, then this desire to merge was also operational in his personal life. Olson devours the other, swallows the other into his own life, and likewise, is devoured by his prey. The Whale that devours Jonah. Olson is, fundamentally, an *anthropophage*. He is also the cannibalized.

Prose means takeover.

Polychrony of the Text

A text speaks various languages. Various languages simultaneously. Hermeneutics supposes that each text has a double. And structuralist semiotics treats the text as composed of parts. The text, in truth, as is well known, is various. But it is not a text composed of others' parts (only). This has been the error of the ideology that has guided the post-modern school of thought. The text is various texts and the text we read is only the *apparent* text we perceive, the *text-apparent* is constructed in the reader's perception through the superimposition of only some of its texts. The page is not a palimpsest, as has been said, but rather a tower-of-texts.

Let's imagine a glass plate onto which a text has been inscribed. This glass plate is covered with another similar glass plate onto which another text has been inscribed. And another plate, always, is placed underneath. This forms a tower of glass.

The reader only observes the last plate. What is read are the words of this last plate, along with the words that show through the transparent spaces from the plates below.

The text-apparent is made of parts belonging to distinct

layers-levels. As only its surface is read, that is its “top floor,” it is not immediately apparent that the text we read is composed of words actually inscribed onto other levels, in other texts. The syntagmas are not real. They are an illusion created by the superimposition of plates. What appears linear in space is in reality separated by distinct times.

The text is a polychrony. Reading is a will-to-homochrony (impossible).

But this polychrony has been forgotten by the Oxident, a civilization based in the fantasy of imposing homochrony.

The polychrony of the text, then, is taken as a homochrony, as a unified space.

The space into which the polychrony is impoverished is this text-apparent. The upper floor of this tower made up of levels of glass. The top floor, the apparent-roof, where we see a text composed of what can be seen from there of the texts written on the levels below, their visible fragments, their remains.

This roof—the page—is taken for a panopticon. Of course, it is a false panopticon or, in other words, there are nothing but false panopticons. Total vision cannot be achieved. The panopticon is one of the Oxident’s fantasies of control.

Each level of the tower is its own time. There is no way of knowing all the words written there, because these words pertain to another time.

Each time is inviolable. There is no panoptic space or panoptic vision that can gain power over all texts. We can only contemplate their remains.

Let’s imagine that we are flying over a stunning, breathtaking splendorous city.

A city on the sea, an amazing island.

What those who fly over this apparent city do not know is that it is only an apparition.

What from on high seems like a city is actually an optical illusion.

A false panopticon, an impossible pantopia.

The island city is really an optical illusion produced by a series of ruins that are not even on the same level, so this apparent city is composed of ruins of various submerged cities, floating, at different depths, between which there are supposedly transparent divisions.

These parts only seem united from above. And their false juncture, their false coherence, produces the appearance of a complete island, of a unitary and complete city.

Such is the tower of text.

The book itself demonstrates its authentic structure.

If we open a page, we open, indeed, a window. On this window words are written and this window allows us to see the words written on other pages, the pages below. So the text of each page of a book is made of words from other pages. The structuralists and the post-structuralists know this, but they ruined it with their conception of unified time, of monochrony and pantopia—because they have not gone beyond the idea of the “Universe.”

Each book is a Babellic tower. What we read, what we listen to is the artificial product of combining separate words, statements, letters, echoes of other times, of other worlds, separated from each other, worlds that cannot actually be turned into, or taken as a unified space.

The pantext does not exist. Polychrony is what we have. And we cannot have it.

So all interpretation, all reading, is based on a fantasy. The fantasy that the text-apparent is a unitary-text, the fantasy that all the information in a text can be recuperated, and that the text only exists in a single time.

Glean, dear reader, the consequences of all this.

I Take Space

was also one of the tentative titles for the book. The phrase resonates with *taking time*—in the sense of apprehending, taking-over, grabbing, capturing space. Olson continues: “I take SPACE (*I consider space*) to be the central fact for man born in America (United States), from Folsom cave to now. I spell it large because it comes large here. Large, and without mercy.”*

“Large and without mercy.” The beginning of this book is a fragment of Olson’s personal time, his secret *biochronia*.†

Olson, as we know, was an immense man. His more than six and half feet of height defined his existence. His height made him feel, as he himself came to say, like a dwarf on the inside. And it will be Olson’s body more than his mind that defines much of the meaning in his texts. Of course, the constitutive idealism of the Oxident—that is, its patriarchy‡—means we rarely consider that bodies can determine the meanings of texts.

At the same time, of course, the structure of the text-apparent obscures the author’s body. In the text-apparent only its distant remains are found.

So the text speaks of the distant biochrony and cannot speak of it completely.

The author is and is not present in the text.

Olson writes in the opening of *Ishmael*: “I take space. I occupy space. I consider space to be the central fact for man (I, Olson) born in America.” The question here is: what does America mean? And the book will be his answer.

* *Call Me Ishmael*, City Lights, San Francisco, 1947, p. 11.

† I asked Heriberto what he meant by this term and he responded: “Life-Time; his life as a time in its own, like a ‘room’s of own one,’ biochronia, biotemporality, biotime, and because his ‘chronia’ is also an account (like in ‘chronicle,’ cronica), it’s a time-life aware of its structure.” (Trans. note)

‡ Any system that argues for the preeminence of thought over the body can be considered an avatar of the patriarchy. Thus, the patriarchy is not only capitalization (*caput*, capitalism) but also separation of the head from the body (decapitation, decapitalism).

“I take space. I occupy space. I consider space to be the central fact for man (I, Olson) born in American, from Folsom cave, that is, the uterus, until now. I write it, space, I turn it uppercase, I hypertrophize it, because I have been large. Large and without mercy.”

“Large and without mercy.” According to his biography, his wife Connie said of Olson that he “doesn’t have human warmth.”* For Olson, certainly, it was the text that concealed his other times, above all, his early time, uterine-time, maternal-time. Language, and especially ideas, formed the cloud architecture that permitted Olson to see only partially the earlier moments that constituted them, earlier times that Olson did not accept.

It is here that Olson’s biochronia merges with another level of the tower of text. The level where the imperialist pantopia speaks. It was the circumstances of Olson’s life—his distance from his own body, his fantasies of becoming and differentiating himself from his father, his tormented relation with sex, his lack of feminine energy, his anxiety to sustain himself on genealogical fantasies and to link himself in his fantasies with other debilitated men, to imagine himself as a floating mind and, at the same time, as a giant—which made him into a lightning rod for the fantasies of Empire. Olson is a subject in whom all the ills of United States Empire are collected. The most painful and the most luminous.

We can locate the fantasies of empire using words of the text-apparent because individual biochrony and pantopic fantasy share the same structure. Their illusion is practically the same. Olson is part of the American dream, the dream

* “In moments of frustration she accused him of lacking completely in human warmth, of using his verbal mastery to hide his lack of intimacy” (Tom Clark, *The Allegory of a Poet’s Life* p. 118). Olson was not nurtured by feminine energy, which is given by the mother. He was not nurtured by this energy because it could only be given by a woman tied to his body. As a result of not being nurtured, his body separated from itself, beginning with the legs and separating a central emotional area—the chest—from his head.

of expansionism in all its variants. It is with the purpose of understanding this empire that I have written this book. Olson in and of himself does not interest me; I am interested in his character as a microanalogy for decoding the psycho-poetics of Empire. Philosophy tries to comprehend reality through a discussion of abstract concepts produced by floating masculine heads (decapitalisms); in contrast, what I want to understand is the present via concrete bodies, historical microanalysis via the hunt for biosymbols. Using the text, I want to see through it to glimpse the *substructure* and the *superstructure*.

If poetry is beautiful it is because it sings the song of Empire. The music that nourishes us.

“Americans still fancy themselves such democrats. But their triumphs are of the machine,” says Olson, not in condemnation of this impulse, but in celebration of it. “To Melville it was not the will to be free but the will to overwhelm nature that lies at the bottom of us as individuals and a people.”* Olson sees in Melville his alter ego. He magnifies him, and Olson’s critical spirit quickly vanishes in his love for the expansive. “He had become a specialist: he had all space concentrated into the form of a whale called Moby-Dick.”† Olson’s choice was not mistaken. The demons of the American “people,” the fantasy of its cohesion, were also concentrated in Melville, “...American, one aim, lordship over nature.”‡

Melville is no more than Olson’s projection.

What Olson finds in Melville are his own secret fantasies. “Beginner—and interested in beginnings. Melville had a way of reaching back through time until he got history

* *Call Me Ishmael*, p. 12.

† *Ibid.*, p. 12.

‡ *Ibid.*, p. 13.

pushed back so far he turned time into space.”* *Converting time into space* will be the fantasy that constitutes the pantopia. What Olson desires—as the imperfect double of an impossible United States—is to end time, because time is death and empire is the denial of death. He dreams of fragmenting History to turn it into a scrapheap, consuming it, reusing it, removing the wound that causes time and fantasizing of an architecture of a unified world, the world that imperialism dreams of: a world totally under the mind’s control.

If one wants to convert time into space it is because one desires to capture time in a specific zone, a zone-of-control; to transform the infinite (time) into a *finite space*.

“He was homeless in his land, his society, his self.”†
Olson–Melville’s fantasy was of a time become space and of a space concentrated in itself—a consequence of their biochronia’s and their culture’s generalized state of alienation. A metaphysical orphan. His fantasies of taking control. Control appears where one has lost contact, where there is separation. And in immense separation one desires to recover control of the distant, to include it, contain it, possess it. Solitude is the seed of imperial desire.

“The *White Whale* is more exact than *Leaves of Grass*. Because it is America, all of her space, the malice, the root.”‡
Like Hegel’s philosophy of history or Descartes’ *cogito*, Olson–Melville is a way of conceiving imperialism, a fascination that our civilization has with absolute power. What is special about Olson is the depth to which he sank into this dream, the confusion that lay in him. The technical beauty of that dream.

The parallels between Olson’s Melville and Olson’s own life are too many to delve into all of them here. What inter-

* Ibid., p. 14.

† Ibid., p. 14.

‡ Ibid., p. 15.

ests me is rather what “America” signified for Olson:

To MAGNIFY is the mark of *Moby-Dick*. As with workers, castaways, so with the scope and space of the sea, the prose, the Whale, the Ship and, OVER ALL, the Captain. It is the technical act compelled by the American fact. Cubits of tragic stature. Put it this way. Three forces operated to bring about the dimensions of *Moby-Dick*: Melville, a man of MYTH, antemosaic; an experience of SPACE, its power and price, America; and ancient magnitudes of TRAGEDY, Shakespeare.*

Olson’s mark will be exaggeration, above all, in the central cybernetic figure of the “Captain,” the male-leader who in the form of a father or president will be magnified. This, as Olson says, is the result of hegemonic American culture’s deep and long-lasting influence. “America” is dictating his ideas. What he calls “America” is an idealization of the substructure, the social unconscious, to which he belongs.

There are three forces, says Olson, that constitute this hypertrophy: 1) “a man of MYTH, antemosaic,” that is, an identity that has been forged through the mythic—the Oedipal—an identity that is an “antemosaic,” an identity that has established its false genealogy, its fantasized genealogy, all the way back to its “origins.” 2) An experience of SPACE, hypertrophied, exaggerated, capitalized, “its power and price,” an experience of hypertrophic, capitalist space, political “America.” 3) “Ancient magnitudes of TRAGEDY, Shakespeare,” that is, a deterministic analogy, the superstition of a tragic destiny, reinforced by the Oedipus myth, a patriarchal tragedy (secret tragicomedy of masters and slaves) mediated by late European, Shakespearean civilization, a metapersona and a hereditary trans-generational familial structure that clones itself and is, at the same time,

a cultural archive, a self-enacting civilization in psycho-historical becoming. (Olson claimed that Melville derived part of his work from reading Shakespeare. He appropriated it.)

The three forces that Olson speaks about are the components of the Co-Oxidant.

The Oedipal-mythic extends itself back to its “origins.” His obsession is with pantopia. His neo-tragic spirit binds the United States to Europe.

This third point is critical because on it Olson based the potential for aesthetic representations of imperialist fantasies: “It is necessary now to consider *Antony and Cleopatra*, the play Melville penciled most heavily. Rome was the world, and Shakespeare gives his people and the action imperial size.”* For Olson, Melville represented the moment that the imperial drama of the United States brilliantly crystallized, the moment the United States was given *imperial size* through Melville’s poetic spirit.

Let’s remember that it is the masters who are driven crazy by the slaves’ imagination. It is the slave-messengers who grant them *imperial size*, who hypertrophy them and perpetuate a self-destructive search for pantopia.

For the American has the Roman feeling about the world. It is his to dispose of. He strides it, with possession of it. His property. Has he not conquered it with his machines? He bends its resources to his will. The pax of legions? The Americanization of the world. Who else is lord?†

As we can see, Olson is not critical of this “American-ization of the world.” A *New Deal* fanatic, Democratic triumphalist, Olson became a spokesperson—implicitly at times, very openly at other times—for imperialism. At the same time,

* Ibid., p. 71.

† Ibid., p. 66.

Olson is conscious that such “lordship,” that of Captain Ahab, leads to shipwreck, as Melville also knew. “Collapse of a hero through solipsism which brings down a world.”* Solipsism—all solipsism is pantopian—is what demolishes the world, the empire, but which is also its primary motor. Olson was conquered by the beauty of solipsism. It seems sublime to him. It seems tragically beautiful, beautifully tragic, death by hypertrophy, *fragmentation survivor*. “All scattered in the bottom of the sea.”†

Call Me Ishmael

Does Olson fully identify with Ahab? No. He identifies with an *other aspect* of imperial hypertrophy. He identifies with “Ishmael, the orphan who survives the destruction.”‡ Olson-Ishmael adds another dimension to the imperial tale. This co-relation adds the question of the survivor, the fragmented-man, who is in love with the Grand Tragic Tale that he continues to tell, who is, in fact, its author, because he is the narrator of this tale of splendor and downfall. He is its true author.

“Melville wanted a god. Space was the first, before time, earth, man.”§ In every part of imperial hypertrophy, in Ahab and Ishmael, Space is God. “Space was the paradise Melville was exile of.”¶ Olson knew to what extent “Melville was agonized over paternity. He suffered as a son. He had lost

* Ibid., p. 73.

† Ibid., p. 73.

‡ Ibid., p. 81.

§ Ibid., p. 82.

¶ Ibid.

the source. He demanded to know the father.”* The links between the pantopic and the patriarchal are clear. They are entangled.

Ishmael is the part that narrates. Ahab is the demonic part that falls. Ishmael, as surviving servant, is the slave-storyteller, who becomes the master collapsed in myth. But his role was not created only after the fall, because the slave-teller, as we have seen, is the one who accelerates the fall, the one who convinces the master that he must fulfill the myth.

It is space, and its feeding on man, that is the essence of his vision, bred in him here in America, and it is time which is at the heart of Christianity...objects lost their gravity as they bulk in space...‘My memory is a life beyond birth.’ His natural sense of time was in its relation to space. It was not diverted as [sensation of time] Christ’s was, away from the object, to the individual, and the passage of the personal soul. To Melville the intimate and the concrete of the present, as for example he felt it at Constantinople, enabled a man to loose himself into space and time and, in their dimensions, to feel and comprehend such an object as the Pyramids, to create, in like dimensions, an Ahab and a White Whale. Time was not a line drawn straight ahead toward future, a logic of good and evil. Time returned on itself. It had density, as space had, and events were objects accumulated within it, around which men could move as they moved in space. The acts of men as a group stood, put down in time, as a pyramid was, to be reexamined, reenacted.†

The notion of space that Olson–Melville arrived at is very intriguing. Time functions like space’s *statuary*, time is objectified—similar to in Hegel—as a series of stationary

* Ibid.

† Ibid., pp. 87–89.

events. That is, time becomes architecture within space. This is the notion of historical time of old civilizations. A civilization that has accumulated so much history that ruins swarm through it. Where time is conceived as a *monumental* function of space.

In Olson, temporal becoming is translated into isolated events. These events become little theaters. Zones where events—Ahab or the White Whale, their tragic encounter—can be rediscovered, because they have been constituted—inside spatialized time—as monument.

Time, moreover, leads to these monuments.

Does Olson not define time in terms of tourism?

In Olson, time becomes space because it is a fantasy of time as fixed, eternalized events, as signposts directing all becoming.

In this idea of time, he attempted to found empire.

You can only possess what is immovable. And time is what cannot be apprehended, continuous change and fleetingness. A culture arrives at the idea of spatialized time, of a progress of time that builds monuments, that colonizes becoming itself by affixing historical touristic plaques in its wake, that colonizes when it cannot confront death, when it is guarding against oblivion.

Time is the enemy of empire.

Space is the foundation of totalitarianism.

Empires possess spaces, converting them into ruins, making time a series of event-theatres. (In this way the ancient empires extend their “ownership” of space by means of their ruins.) But the conversion of time into space and the subsequent fixation of a (paratactic) path of event-theatres does not only occur in geographic space, but above all in mental space, that is, in interior time *converted* into mental space, in the internal life of the mind converted into a road of pre-fixed sites, into scenes, which will come to be re-updated again and again.

The arrival of this phase is the arrival of imperialism.

...an experience of *SPACE* most Americans are only now entering on, 100 years after Melville...space has a stubborn way of sticking to Americans, penetrating all the way in, accompanying them. It is the exterior fact... Trajectory. We must go over space, or we wither.*

Fake Fakes: *USA, Science Fiction, and The Bible*

Philip K. Dick never abandoned the mentality of the 1950s. Is there any American who has ever truly abandoned it? For Dick it took dozens of stories and dozens of novels to “realize” his work was the Bible. Has there been any author more representative of the American dream than the author of *Now Wait for Last Year*? Philip K. Dick shared with Charles Olson the avatarized belief in time transformed into chunks of space. If, according to Olson, time constructs scenes—mostly tragic—and these scenes are converted into permanent amphitheatres, into amusement parks, through which time itself will then guide us, then Dick, the master of American science fiction, imagines an unreal time that repeats in *loops* the fabulas of the Oxident.

To analyze and demonstrate all the ways Dick conceived of time in his work would be a life-long project. One observation can perhaps serve as a baseline: Dick’s insight was that linear time can be undone. Dick belongs to a civilization that equates *time* and *history*. To subvert this notion of time means we will have to traverse an inventory, a museum, a house of mirrors, a technology that perpetuates the illusion of linearity. Only in Borges do we find such chronovisions. It is no accident, certainly, that the *blurb* the Vintage publishers use on Dick’s books is “...our homegrown Borges” (from Ursula K. LeGuin). Indeed, this type of commercial praise (typical of the North American publishing and film

industries) reveals the retro logic and the cloning paradigm that drives this civilization. For them Dick is an updated version, a *redux* or cloning of Kafka-Borges (an artificial iteration, “homemade,” an Organic Borges).

Dick’s lecture “How to Build a Universe That Doesn’t Fall Apart Two Days Later” (1975, 1985) gives a useful summary of his thought. In this text, Dick outlines his concept of *fake fakes*. “For example, at Disneyland there are false birds that operate with electric motors and that emit sounds when you pass close to them. Suppose that one night we snuck into Disneyland and substituted the artificial birds with real birds. Imagine the authorities’ horror when they discovered the cruel trick.”* Dick predicts that then people would bring real hippopotamuses and lions, and the amusement park would have to be closed.

It must be recognized that the first Oxidental to profoundly think about *simulacra* was not Baudrillard, but Philip K. Dick. All of his work is an investigation of *concealment*. (But is there any idea of Baudrillard’s that did not have an American precursor? The end of critical theory was, precisely, its Northamericanitis. Deleuze loved North Americans, and Derrida never realized it but he always was one of them. We are all Extra-Americans.)

Dick’s thesis about *fake fakes* is a variant on another idea, which he relates pages later, in a (supposedly) autobiographical tale. Dick recalls that in 1974 Doubleday—and here the publisher’s name is important as well—released *Flow My Tears, The Policeman Said*. The novel is about the life of Kathy, an *underground* agent who works for the police. The novel, Dick says, was written in 1970. But in 1971, he actually met a woman named Kathy who trafficked in drugs and who, at the end of their friendship, revealed to Dick that she was connected with the police.

* “How to Build a Universe That Doesn’t Fall Apart Two Days Later” in *The Shifting Realities of Philip K. Dick. Selected Literary and Philosophical Writings*, Lawrence Sutin (ed.) Vintage, New York, 1996, p. 264.

Clearly, Dick is the one who is lying.

Who has rewritten his life so that it is full of *precognitions* is none other than Dick himself. Dick was a mythomaniac. “Our memories are spurious, like our memories of dreams; the white spaces are filled in retrospect. And falsified.”* While he believed he was criticizing the TV and the Nixon government, Dick was actually speaking of himself. Dick, above all, forgets that his stories would inspire governmental methods of control:

One afternoon I was talking with my priest...and I mentioned to him an important scene around the end of the novel, in which a character called Felix Buckman meets with a black man in one of those gas-stations that’s open 24 hours, and they started talking. As I described the scene in more and more detail, my priest grew progressively more restless. Finally he said: “That’s a scene from *Acts* in the bible. In *Acts*, the person who meets the black man in the road is named Philip, like you.”†

According to Dick, he had managed to relate incidents from a particular book of the Bible without having read it. “But the mystery did not end there...two months after, very late at night, I walked to the mailbox...”‡ Dick’s invented histories—his personal *fake fakes*—even though false, still explain both himself and the culture to which he belongs. It is our lies that reveal our truths. And, as we know, the appearance of a mailbox in this story of his is not gratuitous. In the Oxidental mentality the mailbox represents—especially to the North American—a reminder of the underlying function of the intellectual, his role as *messenger of otherness*. After

* Ibid., p. 266.

† Ibid., p. 268.

‡ Ibid., p. 268.

returning from the mailbox, Dick approached a man he had seen trying to steal an automobile. It was a black man who had run out of gas.

The scene he described in his novel, which was part of the Bible, was now made true in his own life, so Dick argues. Finally, Dick accompanies the black man to a 24-hour gas station. The gas station is exactly like the one he had imagined in his novel.

My theory is this: *time is not real*...despite all the change we see, there exists a landscape underlying the world of changes, and this invisible underlying landscape is from the Bible; it is specifically, the period that immediately follows the death of Christ; it is, in other words, the period of time of *Acts*...if time is real and it is circa 50 A.D. then why do we see 1978 A.D. And if we are really living in the Roman Empire, somewhere in Syria, why do we see the United States?*

Centuries before Philip K. Dick, Saint Augustine argued that the City of God and the earthly city were confused with each other and in the end times they would separate from each other before our eyes. (Separation by parousia was an idea that fascinated Dick.) Dick's notion of time is one that constructs *events* that will then be eternal *loops*, and that such facts will reoccur for those that travel in time (his conception of time was precisely that of Disneyland). Moreover, time itself directs us to such fixed stops—the gas station—again and again, establishing a temporal becoming whose mission is to guide us to stationary facts, already determined beforehand.

This model of time combines a submodel of cyclical time—that is, various cyclical subtimes running in series—inside of a wider model of linear time. This model of time is made up of mini-times each separate and whole, but linked

to each other linearly, as if they were a series of reels or gears turning on their own axis, driving a chain and turning all together. This, for certain, is an oft-used model of time in imperial culture.

In Dick's variant, we will be liberated from the eternal return of the same by *parousia*. (Even though for Christianity *parousia*—in Greek, *presence*—signifies a second advent of Christ.) This model, in some way doubled, of multiple circular times happening in linear time is also the model that is symbolically contained in the myth of Penelope, the lover who awaits the return of her beloved.

Penelope spends twenty years waiting for Ulysses. She has plotted the perfect plan to make her suitors wait as well. As we know, she promises to choose one of them when she finishes weaving the fabric, but the weaving of the fabric never ends, because each night Penelope unweaves what during the day she has woven. What this story symbolizes is circular time operating by means of the nocturnal destruction of what has been elaborated in the daylight hours.* But this game of multiple cyclical times—including both times that move forward and backward—comes to a close when Ulysses arrives, putting an end to this multiplicity of cyclic times, making it clear that they are part of a linear-hegemonic time.

The returns of Ulysses and Christ are avatars of the myth of cyclic, plural time contained inside a long linear time, and it is this exact same model of time that is frequently found in science fiction, especially in Philip K. Dick. It is not an accident that Dick was convinced of the Judeo-Christian vision of the world, arguing that the underlying *landscape*—note the spatial denotation of time here—is the landscape of biblical events, his secret *loop*. Science fiction is the theology of our time.

A theology made of interpolations. These interpolations

* The myth of Penelope also alludes to the process of disintegration and de-contextualization of nocturnal dreams.

are developed by the representatives of the Oxident's poetic imagination, the slaves of the master state. This symbiosis between thought and power, curiously, is revealed by Dick—without his realizing it—in another of his (unreal) anecdotes that he reinvents in his “How to Build a Universe” lecture (a lecture that certainly never took place):

Just when the Supreme Court decided that the Nixon's recordings had to be delivered to the special prosecutor, I was eating in a restaurant in Yorba Linda, the town where Nixon went to school—where he grew up, worked in a grocery store, where there is a park with his name, and of course that is where his house was. I opened the fortune cookie and this was my fortune

ACTIONS DONE IN SECRET ARE
THE WAY TO BE DISCOVERED.

I sent the piece of paper to the White House, mentioning that the Chinese restaurant is located a mile from Nixon's original house, and I wrote: “I believe you have made a mistake; by accident I got Mr. Nixon's fortune. Does he have mine?” The White House never responded.*

But the postal messenger's luck, the scrivener's luck—Oh Bartleby! Oh Attorney of Wall Street! Oh Olson! Oh United States!—despite the ironic blindness of the sender, is the same luck as the master's, as the president's. What Dick did not know is that there was no mistake. As in the case of the *fake fakes* where Disneyland's artificial birds are eventually replaced with real birds, the fortune cookie the scrivener got was the right one.

The scribe does not know that the tragic destiny he describes in his visions, concepts, characters, actions, and

interpretations are premonitions that realize his own destiny as a scribe. Just as Nixon had to hand over the recordings that would incriminate him, so Dick blindly sent the evidence to the White House, the evidence that the scribe's words would be discovered for what they are: *fake fakes*. Scribe and president, slave and master, are one and the same. The destiny that one gives to the other belongs to both of them. They are imprisoned in the same fantasy.

Oh Hegel, there is no difference between master and slave! The slave is nothing more than a master who no longer knows he is a master and the master is nothing more than a slave who no longer knows he is a slave. ("Master" and "slave" are the first and last name of *Co-control*). Imperialist time—that of Olson and Hegel, that of Penelope and Dick—is made of circular-slave times in a caravan chained to an illusory linear-master time.

From Whitman to Olson, from Melville to Dick, North American literature is part of the Judeo-Christian tradition. Its concept of time is a simulacra of biblical (fixed) time. Science fiction fragmented the Bible and put together pastiches and bricolages with these fragments. Its innovation consists, of course, in mixing this dream with that of capitalism: *to recombine stationary fragments into which time has been fantasized*. Penelope's weaving turned to puzzle. A second-hand puzzle. A puzzle made of the pieces of heterogeneous puzzles. A puzzle whose final solution is impossible because its pieces do not form any landscape in reality, do not fit together. But nobody notices that this is a crude bricolage; above the false puzzle is printed the question (on the back of a cereal box): "*Where's Waldo?*" or "*What's wrong with this picture?*" And so, paranoia is turned into criteria of truth. And the United States can continue.

Time increases its velocity. And to what end? Maybe we were told two thousand years ago. Or maybe it wasn't so long, maybe it has been a hallucination that so much

time has passed. Maybe it was a week ago, or maybe even earlier today. Maybe time is not only increasing its velocity but that, also, its going to end.*

And this theory—which Borges also pursued, through Bertrand Russell—has so fascinated North America that it based its central fiction on it: the idea that if time is an illusion and underneath it is found true *spatial* reality (the landscape), then it might well be that beneath the Grand Illusion we will find an Empire of the Truth. If all reality simply began this morning, then surely everything has the (biblical) form of an American Rome.

The Meeting of Ishmael and Medea

Olson imagined reality as a pantopia, that is, as a space that swallows everything, a “projective space” in which the world is eaten. A little after the appearance of *Call Me Ishmael* and its delusional theories of an absolute space—gone unnoticed by the critics until the present—Olson would receive a letter written on November 22, 1947. It was an enthusiastic greeting from a reader. Her name was Frances Motz Boldereff, a book designer from Pennsylvania State College. Boldereff was a very cultured woman—versed in Russian culture, a Joyce specialist—divorced with one daughter. When their correspondence began, she was 42 years old and he was 37. The correspondence quickly took on romantic overtones. Frances was a woman who quickly delivered up her soul and Charles was a psychophage who rapidly devoured it.

A few months after the start of this postal relationship, Connie became pregnant again. The correspondence between he and Frances, for certain, arrived while Connie was working, so it was some time before she was aware

of the affair. Connie's pregnancy ended due to difficulties caused by her first abortion. Her relation with Olson continued to have problems. At the same time, Olson's relationship with Frances grew at an accelerated pace. Life with Connie was based in quotidian reality and bodily contact, but the one maintained with Frances was based in what Olson valued most: fantasy.

The months passed and it was evident that Olson had fallen in love with her, with his words, with the echoes of himself he found in those letters. She treated him like a giant—in the copy of the April 9th, 1949 letter, annotated: “Re Maximus”—putting him together with the giants of literature and thinking—Nietzsche, Blake, Lawrence, Joyce, Rimbaud. Their letters, then, were written in a linguistic world somewhere between the hysterical and the sublime, full of bibliographic references and Edenic affections. Frances inundated Olson with affections that were impossible for a man like him not to be profoundly moved by.

Olson arranged to meet physically with Frances in November. After their meeting and during their correspondence, she was clearly his teacher, even though she took the secondary position. Sharon Thesen writes:

In addition to desiring her sexually, he desired her insight, acumen, scholarship and canny knowledge of the underground stream of his thought.

It was Boldereff who introduced Olson to the work of Samuel Kramer on the Sumerian sources of the Gilgamesh myth; Boldereff whose letters often provided words and images for Olson's poems; Boldereff who helped formulate the notion of what he came to call the postmodern, a way of reclaiming the vitality and “directness” (13 January 1950) of a worldview Boldereff called the “unHebraic” (14 March 1950); Boldereff who led Olson to Edith Porada's work on cylinder seals, to the notion of form as “obedience” to the laws of nature,

to an impatience with the “whole inherited puff ball” (2 January 1950); Boldereff who posited the “core idea” of form as an activity that “can only be done line by line, not by story” (26 December 1949); Boldereff’s training as a book designer that inspired Olson to consider the role of typographical spacing as units of meaning, of “breath” as constituting meaning much more immediately than the rhetoric of debate.

It was Boldereff who encouraged Olson in the notion of a poem as a construct of energy and therefore Boldereff who stands behind the ideas in “Projective Verse.” When Olson sent Boldereff a copy of “Projective Verse,” Boldereff replied that “the essay is terrific...the main points have points lying behind them which are all Motz points...my critique of my time for myself” (13 February 1950).*

Olson was rigid. Profoundly split between his body and his mind, a man who lived in separation, as if body and mind were two distinct men, two half-asleep twins, just outside of a nostalgic ex lasso, and invisible. And she was a door. A door to union, to the relaxation of this division, to the entrance in the skin, a fresh glass of water that says welcome to your own life.

Olson admitted even to imitating Boldereff’s speech patterns: “now four months since you saw me under that mask which almost drive you off...Olson continues... to warm his face and body, loosen the visored grip on his flesh, by way of the very gestures, the very bottomed speech, the beautiful *release* of MOTZ!” (17 march 1950).†

* *Charles Olson and Frances Boldereff: A Modern Correspondence*, Ralph Maud and Sharon Thesen (eds.), Wesleyan University Press, Middletown, 1999, p. xv.

† *Ibid.*, p. xv.

Boldereff was the madness that guided Olson's lucidity. And the lucidity that invited madness.

Some time later, what Olson saw in Mexico would be the same thing he had admired in Boldereff, this *contact* with herself, this folding into her skin, this self-belonging. There was a desire in Olson to abandon distance, to acquire immediacy. Boldereff and ancestral cultures—Mexico was gaining more and more importance in his thinking—inspired in Olson these ideas of reconciliation with himself.

The *will to cohere* that is the center of Olson's work can also be understood as his search for a principle that would give cohesion to all the parts of himself that fought within him, all the parts he was cut off from, because what a poet looks for outside drives his inner life. All the separated information and perceptions that Olson wanted to make cohere in the poem were, likewise, the divisions he wanted to abolish inside of himself. For Olson, the division that time produces in the history of the world so hurt him that he dedicated his poetry to the cauterizing of the wound.

"It is not the Greeks I blame...we do not find ways to hew to experience as it is, in our definition and expression of it, in other words, find ways to stay in the human universe, and not be led to partition reality at any point, in any way" (157). Olson's great error was to believe—as Pound believed and as the Oxident has believed for two millennia—that there are *parts*; and also, that these parts can be either *essential* parts or *contingent* parts. And that the essential ones—sometimes *x* according to Pound, Olson, etc, and sometimes *y* according to some other authority—are those that must be recovered, while the contingent parts are dispensable and must be taken out of the poem or out of History, either through parataxis, memory, will-to-cohesion or some other eideticizing, essentialist, editorial, or critical principle. Olson wanted to reorganize parts; the whole, as such, did not convince him. So despite being

interested in full contact with himself, the full contact of the world with himself, in the end, Olson turned back to the old method, the Oxidental method: *to separate*.

This is the critical drama that gave form to Olson: to unconsciously oscillate between a desire to recover lost parts—Sumerian, Mayan, American—to recover codes, so as to obtain new perceptions (through the projective) and, on the other hand, to discriminate—searching out the Centers, dispensing with the unnecessary—to divide, *to split reality*. Olson never abandoned partition.

For Olson, Boldereff and Mexico were symbols of the other possibility, the re-union, cohesion, the fullness of contact. He read them both, however, through the rational method of partition. Boldereff's secret, however, was that the freedom she represented did not belong to her in reality, because this freedom was also his fantasy, an ideal. She was also alienated from her sources.

My Blood, His Ink

The epistolary correspondence between them shows the remarkable variety of Boldereff's ideas. Her conception of time is especially insistent. "Today is your birthday—Dunne's *Experiment with Time* gives me such a detached feeling towards what appear to be events in time—I am so convinced you were always there—and that I have always at all times been wholly in love with you."*

* *A Modern Correspondence* p. 100. This book of Dunne's is one of the Borgesian sources of his conception of time. Olson would respond to Boldereff: "you/say that Dunne confirms your knowledge that time is not the truth/ I tell/ you YOU confirm mine" (p. 101). For Boldereff, Dunne showed how to "have time in its place" (that is, to conceive of time as if it were space). As one can see in the letter of January 10, 1950, Dunne—translated by Boldereff—is one of the sources Olson utilized to arrive at the notion of a time replaced by an omnivorous space (gluttony or pantopia). Another author that Boldereff made Olson reread was Whitman.

Saint Augustine, with parousia the earthly city and the City of God would separate, and if, according to Dick, when we clear reality of optical illusions, what remains is Rome circa 50 A.D. then, according to Boldereff, after getting rid of the concealing fiction, what remains beneath it all is a *couple*. The couple of she and Olson.

Boldereff was a thinker of delusional ideas. She idolized Olson, she believed he was the direct spokesman of God, a Christ. “I believe you serve God.”* She arrived at the idea that Olson should speak with his wife Connie, so that the three of them might live together. Boldereff believed that “All men are part and parcel of each other. . . I admit and see and act the fact that my language is formed from the breast of Connie.”† And she simultaneously conceived of herself as Olson’s ink. “Forever it will never be possible to separate Olson from Motz because my blood is his ink.”‡ Boldereff believed these ideas with such intensity that her words could be read literally.

I know that in this world there is, literally, hundreds of men who love Rimbaud and consider him their special property. Despite this fact, I *know* that Rimbaud belongs to me—I am prepared to prove that he had an outlook on the impulse of my life so I can say that he was the poet—I the words.§

Boldereff believed herself to be Rimbaud’s words. She was a thinker of unique notions. Her concept of identity was always intriguing. She devalued the “flesh” and, at the same time, she loved Blake—one of the strongest defenders of

* Ibid., p. 168.

† Ibid., p. 221.

‡ Ibid., p. 184.

§ Ibid., p. 528.

the body, who considered it the visible portion of the soul. Boldereff believed that her true body was made of words, she felt by means of words—having long desexualized her own body—and visible reality seemed to her an illusion forged to hide a permanent eternal space. It was these concepts of identity that brought her, for example, to the decision not to publish some of her books under her own name: The little book, *A Primer of Morals of Medea* (1949) bears no name; *A Blakean Translation of Joyce's Circe* (1965), is “Anonymous”; *Verbo Voco Visual* (1981) is attributed to “Thomas Phipps” and *Time as Joyce Tells It* (no publication year) to “Reighard Motz.” Some of the theses of these books, certainly, deserve a whole work of commentary. Boldereff was an original and erudite thinker, classical of breath, and officially deranged.

Another of her notions that is quite relevant to our discussion is that she conceived of herself as Medea, “slave of Nature,” who had been ordered: “You will give, as you have always given, but with this difference—you will not possess, but you will let free” (item 25 of the *Primer*). Boldereff-Medea believed she was obligated to give. And so she did. She gave a good part of her ideas to Olson. And Olson, who lived under the inverse myth, accepted, because although Medea is all-giver or *potlatch*, Maximus is omnivore, pantopia. Between them there met two poetic extremes: the poetics of giving and the poetics of accumulation. The two extremes that have structured the history of poetry.

Boldereff-Medea represents the passion of the *gift*, to make *summa* and to sacrifice this *summa* of knowledge to the hands of Maximus, he who robs, appropriates, and warehouses. The basis of pantopia is theft:

Melville...knew how to appropriate the work of others.
He read to write...Edward Dahlberg calls originality,
the act of a cutpurse Autolykus who makes his thefts as

invisible as possible...Melville's books batten on other men's books.*

Incidentally, Olson reminds us that when Chione's beauty and Hermes' interpretation are united, they give birth to Autolycus, namely, the fine thief. When we interpret poetically what consistently happens is the theft of others' ideas. Poetic interpretation is Autolycus. No wonder it has been one of the Co-Oxidant's preferred methods.

Motz Mexico

Olson began to live love as a space. Not even to live love *in* space, but love as a space. Not only did he refuse to live it in time—movement of the body, becoming together—but also love had been converted into a space-that-doesn't-take-place, a space that opens and dissipates, an abstract space that becomes activity—the letter—and closes just as it is manifested, a space that opens and consumes the opening, a secure space, hidden, a space that is its own anti-space. Notice that when Olson defends the preeminence of space over time, the space of which he speaks is a purely mental space, a fictive space, a no-place space.

The love of the distant lover, of the distant remittant, has become a zone or a non-place, in the sense of Augé. An intensity at the bottom of writing. "You'll see, heart, that you are dealing with a profoundly abstract man. It is a defect, I am disposed to speculate...My acts are those, these hours, these letters, those are my acts now. And that you receive them you receive me, it is bigger than any other thing, bigger, obviously, at the moment, your presence, my love" (Letter from Olson, September 1, 1950).† She was an increas-

* "Shakespeare, or the discovery of *Moby-Dick*" in *Collected Prose*, p. 39.

† *A Modern Correspondence*, p. 537.

ingly pure idea in his mind, because the lover that loves at a distance is protected from separation through a transformation of the beloved into a series of images, into an odd phantasm, who can be loved mentally or can be abandoned at the bottom of the unconscious. One way or another, the beloved being, turned mental, becomes a projection of the lover, in a pure part of his mind, a philosopheme, perhaps, a form that is less painful at a distance, a love experienced not by going to another city, or to another body, but which takes place in one's own thinking, a love that has become only words.

In their letters, Frances and Olson spoke increasingly about "hope." In this moment, the space of love was no longer "separation" but had become instead "waiting." But it was not a true time, not a duration. Nor was it an Osiric time in which the dispersed parts, the deliveries, would reunite, having been separated by "waiting." Instead it was the reopening of a verbal place or a mental image, a "waiting" that did not follow a time-line, but was an immobile sparkle that fades in and out at the same site, a sedentary intermittence, waiting on a radiance whose twilight occurs at the same site as its fleeting luminescence, a sun in-transfer, a sun that does not move from its site but disappears at a set time and in its disappearance becomes the very passage of time, the "waiting" space that devours itself, gnawing at the separation, emphasizing the vigilance.

The no-response is a zone full of words and images, of responses produced on one's own, out of anticipations or unilateral decisions, out of fantasies or paranoias, the no-response is the madness and the desperation of the lover, it is the fearsome entrance into love that has become mind. The love that is increasingly further from the body. The love that is more and more diluted in language.

The conception of space and time that Olson would develop with respect to his amorous relation, his correspondence, "waiting," "separation," words with Frances would be

another of the decisive influences in his experience of time and space during his trip to Mexico. His speculations about the Mayans, about their thinking and their culture is coextensive with what he had thought and felt for his lover a few months earlier. It was in this love that Olson's ideas about time and space found their finished form, ideas which had been crystallized in the definitive draft of *Call Me Ishmael*, but that would not be fully realized until his relation with Frances.

The form of a space that forms itself. The idea of a time separated from itself, a time interrupted and gathered spatially. The idea of the necessity of a map—topology—to understand it all; these and other ideas were decisively influenced by his long-distance love, his love letters with Frances Boldereff. When he arrived in Mexico—precisely to get away from her—these ideas would then determine his understanding of *there*, to the extent that these ideas had been prefigured by his reading of Pound, Whorf, Fenollosa. “Mexico” would be an extension of Olson's love for “Motz.”

Months before Boldereff and Olson stopped writing romantically to each other, Connie discovered a letter. Olson proposed to his epistolary lover that they continue writing in secret, but Boldereff refused to enter “by the back door” and to “be treated like a negro,” according to her own words.* Their romance ended in a curious way. On September 3, 1950, Boldereff sent Olson a letter in which she told him she had met a young black man, attractive and with a nice body, with whom she had made love and who she thought she would see again soon. Olson had hardly received this letter when he did what he had not done in a long time: he physically drove to Brooklyn where Boldereff lived. In any case, their relationship was never the same. It did not resume.

Olson returned to his plans to travel to Mexico—to forget Frances.

Omnivore Interpretation

Is Olson an autolytic writer? Yes, he is, in good measure. Although his autolytic interpretation lacks a certain poetic beauty (seen in Boldereff, for example) since Olson privileged the intellect. “I am, as man is, omnivore,”* Olson wrote to Boldereff. The omnivorous and the analytical, the omnivorous and the interpretation have too many ties. Olson represents imperialist interpretation, made of thefts, made of incorporations of information from diverse sources, interpretation that is classified in a photographic-cinematographic space, where the abolition of time is imagined, whose procedure *expresses* the operation of capitalism.

When Walter Benjamin thought the relation between the superstructure and the economic structure he produced a variation on the traditional Marxist model. He did not think of the superstructure—literature, for example—as a mere *reflection* of the economic base, but as its *expression*:

If the infrastructure, in a certain form (in the materials of thought and experience) determines the superstructure, but if such determination is not reducible to the simple reflection, then how can we characterize it? As its expression. The superstructure is the expression of the infrastructure. The economic conditions under which society exists are expressed in the superstructure, precisely as, in sleep, a full stomach does not find its reflection but its expression in the content of dreams... The collective...expressed the conditions of its life. These

conditions find their expression in the dream and in its interpretation upon waking.*

In this chapter, for example, a macrocosm unravels—Co-Oxident, United States—through the analysis of certain microcosms—*short stories*, passages from the life of Olson, poetic imageries. Is this a feasible form of interpretation or is it a new excess of the totalitarian dream? It is. To interpret the world through its minutiae is possible, but only when we know that we think *as over-stuffed*.

Benjamin did not see all the meanings contained in his loaded image. To represent our relation with the dream, Benjamin alludes to a man who has eaten too much, who has fallen asleep after overfilling his stomach. This image is no accident, it is the image of the *over-stuffed*, the Oxidental man. Benjamin did not speak of him beyond having seen him eat and sleep, but here we can ask the following: what kind of dreams can such a man have? His dreams will correspond to the excesses of his consumption, they will be oneiric images of devouring, since pantopic images will emerge from out of this over-stuffed man. Pantopia is the dream of a civilization that has gone to sleep having swallowed everything.

Therefore, across the pantopic images we can discern the imagery of a stuffed, sleeping man. Co-Oxident. Imperialism. But, even this approach participates in the burnout, owing much to totalitarianism. Decoding as a product of accumulation.

Benjamin conceived of interpretation as a form of waking itself, as an act that takes place on the border between dream and waking. According to him, the past is a dream and the present is the waking from this dream. We must interpret the ruins of the past—as it is deposited in the present—in order to comprehend the meaning of this dream. The function of each present is to wake from the

past. What we cannot neglect is that the dreams we analyze are not to be interpreted as if they are the dreams of a single entity, since the ruins of the past that are placed in the present are ruins of many universes.

The universe is expressed in each thing. Each tiny detail expresses the universe. What we hope is that by analyzing things we will decipher the structure of the Whole. So the hypothesis is that each microcosm is the expression of the macrocosmos. And up to this point the procedure works, but what happens next has been subject to confusion, and to understand what should follow we need a paradigm shift.

To recapitulate: each thing is the expression of the universe. If we analyze something then we can know the universe of which this thing is the expression. But our way of proceeding analytically has contained a monumental error for many years, too many. The error has consisted in our taking things as if they were part of the *same universe*.

And through the analysis of these elements we forge an image of the Whole. But this image of the Whole is false, because the parts analyzed do not belong to a shared universe. Each is an expression of its own universe, distinct from the others. Thus, our image of the Whole is fictitious.

The Whole cannot be analyzed. In reality, there is no such thing as the *Whole*. All the Wholes that civilization has thought are absolutist fictions, totalitarianisms. Each thing is the expression of a distinct universe. There is no single macrocosm. The United States does not exist. It is only a pantopia.

The pantopia is an image that allows us to know the Whole of the Co-Oxidant, since it is, precisely, minutiae, poetic imagery, at times explicit, at times implicit, moving throughout this civilization. I am sure that the pantopia's imagery will be the greatest mistake the Co-Oxidant will bequeath to the world, its accursed share, difficult to erase. But our final image of a world that created the pantopia cannot be a real image, a complete image, because the pan-

topia, its pieces, have been gathered from distinct worlds, and the image of the world—from-which-the-pantopia-comes is a fiction, because this world cannot be reconstituted, this world never existed. Pantopia has created it in different versions, in different worlds, and as such our analyses cannot be reduced to the remains of a single universe. The image of the world can only be known from the inside. And what binds some things to others—turning back to the totalitarianism of a shared universe!—is called fiction, is called lying.

All of what the Co-Oxident signifies cannot be said. Primarily, because no Whole exists, and the Co-Oxident—pseudo-Whole from its beginning—is the least real of worlds. The Co-Oxident is its own fantasy. I will close this chapter by saying that all of what I have said of Charles Olson is the method by which I recognize and do not recognize myself. Olson represents all of what there is in each one of us of the Co-Oxident, all of what is there and, at the same time, all of what cannot be in us of this Whole, which is in itself impossible. All of us are Olson. Each one of us constitutes an avatar of the United States.

English Word List: *Going Postal / wacko / nuts / co-workers / rampage / violently / snap / flip / short story / I'm-not-here, is the name of the American Mother / quick memory / briefing / memo / dandy / cold feet / Counter-Clock World / unfit / drop-out / outcast / homeless / clerk / Dead Letter Office / I prefer not to / postal / I hunt among stones / I take SPACE / loops / redux / blurb / fake fakes / underground / co-control / "Where's Waldo?" / "What's wrong with this picture?" / Will to cohere / Experiment with time / primer / potlatch*

II. CO-OXIDENT KINH-TIME EMPIRE

America is therefore the land of the future, where, in the ages that lie before us, the burden of the World's History shall reveal itself—perhaps in a contest between North and South America.

—G. W. F. Hegel, *The Philosophy of History*

Co-Oxidant

The Oxident, fantasized master, experienced its first deaths: the first half of the twentieth century. Beginning more than two thousand years previously, Europe was prisoner to the illusion that it could dominate the world. But that illusion would begin to dissipate. The fall would occur. European hegemony was going to collapse, victim of an internal war. Europe would lose its role as leader of civilization, a role invented by the Greeks and Romans during so-called antiquity—an era which was, in truth, more of a late stage than a dawn. What we have lost is not our childhood. What we have lost is our old age. We are not even *old*. The Oxident wanders far from its body. This meandering has been called “thought.” May we someday, hopefully, encounter the smoke of its mirror.

In a century of barbed wire, alongside imminent suffering, delusions of control that had entered a new, later phase occurred with increasing speed. Supposed democracies fought against the territorial expansion of the totalitarian dream led by Adolf Hitler—a frustrated artist who took advantage of the crisis in Germany after its defeat in that other predeath, as represented by the first World War; Hitler came to power and instituted the terror that was everyone’s

secret desire. Germany had plans to impose its project over and above the dream of control held by European democracies and by Soviet totalitarianism. These were the ravings of a dying man, as the baphometric Oxident would soon come to know its own great decapitation; Europe's defeat was ready. Hitler represented European will come to fruition. When Europe became aware of its teleology, traced out over centuries, it preferred to escape from itself and relinquish its post. In any case, a new upstart was drawing near, the next figure condemned to death, the second death of the Oxident.

Some decades earlier, the United States had appeared.

During the sixteenth century, England and other European nations established colonies in North America. By the beginning of the eighteenth century, England had gained control of all of those colonies made up of immigrants, in large part thanks to the extermination of the indigenous *pueblos*. The immigrants, however, wanted to cease being a colony and in 1776 they proclaimed their independence, which meant nothing more than the legalization of their exclusive right to exploit a land that was not theirs, of territory that had already been siezed. The United States of America, crazy young thing, represented the bifurcation of the Oxident. From that moment forward, whether it lived or died, the Oxident would exist twice over. The Co-Oxident had been born. Of course, the Mexican Co-Oxident had existed for some time already, though it played the role not of Quixote, but of Sánchez: the two elements necessary in order for Co-Control to be established.

Among all that we have *not* thought about, of course, there it is, that thing we call (here) Co-Oxident, which for many might be merely a neologism, but which addresses a fundamental reality—that of a correlative miasma that requires this hateful neologism, hateful and unavoidable, because neologism emerges when a word demands to suggest its own ghosts. All word games are materializations of

the unconscious bodies of words within their visible bodies. Neologisms, those *xólotl*—simultaneously monsters and companions—are co-bodies that have become indispensable to one another. They are the *nahual-graft** that has come to require a haunted word to describe its glued-together animas. Neologism uses metamorphic ceremony to mask the word that believed itself to be closed. Neologistic language is an invasion and a making-phantom.

The United States, Mexico, America as the Co-Oxident. The Oxident as an impossible unity, as a co-body increasingly tormented, the division of its loss of zenithicity, its terror of the nadir, now duplicated, split by the Atlantic.

We should not disregard, further, that its history contains more than one co-body: although the United States is the *co-body* of European civilization, first its offspring and now practically its head policeman, when the United States appeared as such in the last quarter of the eighteenth century, its territorial body would have to multiply by four before it would reach its current state of hypertrophy. It was only in 1847 that the United States finally developed its essence and body. This genesis, likewise, is altered memory: the United States took form thanks to the rending of Mexico. Since that time, the United States and Mexico are, clandestinely, co-bodies.

As we can see, the co-body appears after fragmentation.

None of us fails to recognize that human beings have not been understood. Human mystery, however, derives from co-being. What has remained obscured is the co-body.

* Like many terms in contemporary Mexican Spanish, *nahual* is a term that originated in the Nahuatl language. Heriberto explains that in popular use, a *nahual* is basically a person's double: "each person has their *nahual* (or *nagual*), which might be a coyote, a dog, an eagle: an animal with which we are linked. What happens to that animal also happens to us." Heriberto also referred me to the Wikipedia entry for the term (es.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nahual) which explains the *nahual* as a person's link with the world of the sacred, and is usually manifested as an animal familiar or spiritual guide in the form of an animal. (Trans. note)

Dualism has intuited it, and at the same time, has clouded it. But our animality reveals it. We are born in a co-body state between ourselves and our mothers. Therein is the mystery. The co-body.

The co-body is the source of light and of darkness.

From within that cave, To Be is *Co-*. And co-humans—men, women—have developed without regard for their co-being. It is no coincidence that the co-human should currently be called “man.” The co-human is what has been severed. What has severed it is the Oxident. But since nothing escapes the *co*, we can see already that the Oxident is, in reality (at least), two. In reality, the Oxident is multiple.

The Oxident is a tribe that has been in a process of formation for centuries: to the Oxident of Europe and the Oxident of the United States it’s indispensable to add other extant Oxidents, those that formed in Latin America as well as the plural Orients, in order to later come to the realization that the Co-Oxident has been on the rise for centuries under the rule of the demon known as quantity.

The Oxident is not (solely) a region in the world. It is a paralysis suffered in the face of the vision that what follows a fall into the abyss is a reluctance to enter into the mouth of the earth. The Oxident is the false underworld, it is the being that clings at the edge of the narrow gorge with its mouth exploded, its teeth become claws: praise to the Oxident!

Of course, the *co* of its body—the co-Oxidental body—is what causes the Oxident to experience a range of deaths. It could not be any other way. Death is the prologue to death.

The idea of the unity of Oxidental civilization is spurious. We can wake up from the dream of a totalizing world. When we wake up, we will discover that we are various worlds simultaneously. The Oxident, as such, does not exist. Only simulations of its conjectural indivisibility exist. Only avatars of a hangman’s oasis exist: a diverse range of versions of a singular imaginary gallows. It is no accident that this

civilization should believe in its own unity. We are dealing here with a series of cultures among which a kindred belief system exists: the superstition that *one* singular world exists. It becomes, therefore, difficult to think otherwise—becomes, therefore, difficult to think here—because it was such a long time ago that we fell into the *dream of the uni-versal*.

In order to negate the coexistence of various incompatible cosmos, the myth of Harmony was created—but this is merely a hypocritical surface to replace a horrifying reality. “Oxidant” is the fantasy of co-control that is generated out of the impossible interaction among a range of monads; at the same time, it is the fantasy of being the master of this pseudo-community.

On the other hand, it seems incredible to me that up to now we have not contemplated the Co-Oxidant. Apparently the moment to contemplate it has arrived. The monster has become inevitable.

One of its most evident features, then, is that the Oxidental—constituted as *lack*, as an occluded concomitance—erratically seeks its co-bodies. The Oxident will wander in search of its invisible limbs, condemned to abundant error, without ever becoming aware of its co-bodies. It seeks them, almost always without knowing it or ensnared by its own reflections. It seeks them, secretly, in order to move through the drama of alterity.

To contemplate the *co* is a vast enterprise. It’s helpful in some way, I suppose, to contemplate the Co-Oxidant. Perhaps upon contemplating it, we might discover something of that *co* that is in our roots, and seems at the same time to be highly artificial. But even so, to contemplate the Co-Oxidant would be a labor of many volumes, of infinite work. Co-Oxidant would drive us insane. When an individual confronts their co-bodies, their “psychosis” explodes. When it’s a civilization we’re dealing with, the thing that has begun to explode is we ourselves. We are the delirium of paralysis.

In this way, after having robbed half the Mexican body and after having saved the European body—in order to prolong its agony—and having elevated itself to the position of Oxidental leader, the United States intensified its dreams of having transformed itself into the master. Together with this foolishness, a crepuscular imaginary began to form, within which this political circumstance developed co-bodies in narrative and poetic imagination. The United States constructed images and ideas of control. One of these protagonists of the “American dream”—whose definitive form would be achieved in the fifties—has always seemed to me to be especially representative of this fantasy. I’m referring to that tranquil exegete Herman Melville, and that soul tormented by love, a poet divided in two. Our aforementioned warrior of imperialist information. Let us not forget: when the co-body has gone crazy, when it has become a stranger to itself, *it accumulates*.

An American man in the strictest sense of that impoverished condition. And someone who longed to escape from the closed-mindedness of “America.” On the one hand, a man of military paradigms; on the other, a traveler in search of wise otherness. What we have here is a North American writer who decided he could find the secrets of his own civilization in Mexico, following a long tradition of Oxidentals who have imagined Mexico as the inverted double of Oxidental decadence, from Malcolm Lowry to Antonin Artaud.

He didn’t know it, but when he went off in search of Mayan secrets, he activated a new avatar of the North American journey to its underworldly co-body: if Europe is the celestial co-body of North America, Mexico is an infrareal co-body. During those same years, Burroughs and Kerouac also went in search of Mexican otherness, on an initiation voyage that defined them until their death. The same was true for the banker Gordon Wasson, who was on the hunt for magic mushrooms and the ultimate secrets of

ancestral shamanism. Charles Olson joined this list of North Americans.

I am convinced that beginning with his journey to Mexico, given all the worlds that journey entailed, it's possible to understand what the United States is and what Co-Oxident is. Let's continue, then.

“Griingo-Go, Grrriing-Go:” Mind, Naiveté, Kitsch

Separated from Motz—the woman made of words—Olson found his new correspondent, Robert Creeley, a young poet. It had been William Carlos Williams who had recommended Creeley to him in a letter from April 1950. That same year—in October—his essay “Projective Verse” appeared, a gnostic gospel of the counterculture. In December, Olson received good news: a new law passed by the North American government would allow him to cash out the retirement fund he held thanks to his old job in the Gloucester post office. With that money, he decided to travel to Mexico, the country whose secrets he wanted to discover. The Woelffers, friends of his, had recounted to him their sojourn in Mexico in a small fishing village called Lerma, in Campeche. They gave him the address of the house—twenty dollars a month rent, which at that time was approximately 172 pesos. On more than one occasion, Olson had wanted to travel to Mexico. But from the time of his relationship with Bolderoff, co-body of both his and Connie's, the need to explore alterity had become impossible to postpone further. Everything seemed ready for his departure to the South. To forget Frances. To discover the Maya. To live by the sea, at 10 10th Street, with a nice terrace.

As he was about to set off, Olson also received some bad news: his mother was at death's door.

He made an emergency trip to Worcester. He arrived

hours before Mary Olson died, on Christmas day. (That same day, as it happens, the great Mexican poet Xavier Villaurrutia died.) When his mother died, Olson's tribulations regarding her returned. The feminine was his phantasm. The feminine was the unknown.

After the burial of his real mother, Olson took up his departure for Mexico once again. But the presence of death was in the atmosphere. Olson knew that he had never understood her. He knew that he had not been nourished by her. Olson was a man with painful feminine deficiencies.

His journey in Mexico—damn psychology—would remain tainted by the death of his mother, by his far-flung escape from Frances, by his complicated personal mythology. What we cannot lose sight of is that Olson didn't travel to Mexico. He traveled to his memory. He wanted to replace one memory with another. For a North American, everything is the sign of something else. Olson's Mexican experience, starting with the boat in which he arrived to Mexico—the Bennestvet Boving—was a colossal juxtaposition in which realities were substituted by bibliographic memories, mental images, poltergeist fantasies. After ten days of maritime travel, Olson set foot in Mérida, in the state of Yucatán. It was the first week of February of 1951.

More bad news: when he arrived at the Carnegie Institute, he was informed that the anthropologist (Robert Barlow) he had been hoping would help him to understand the Maya world had recently taken his own life. Barlow had committed suicide on New Year's, after having been blackmailed in relation to his homosexuality. Mexico would become the country in which every guide became lost. Welcome.

Someone from the Carnegie recommended, however, that he look for Hipólito Sánchez, the assistant to the director of the Museo Arqueológico de Campeche (Campeche Archeological Museum), which was where Olson headed, together with Connie, on a tourist bus. As

soon as they downed a couple of drinks together in a cantina, Hipólito immediately became Olson's friend in beer and in Mayan-style wildness. Among other things, Hipólito had a considerable collection of drawings he had made of the glyphs on the steps of the Mayan pyramids in Copán, Honduras. Olson was thoroughly charmed by those drawings. They would unleash his inspiration.

When the Olsons arrived in Lerma, to the house they had rented from the United States, they encountered new sources of displeasure. The flat was in terrible condition. Not even the toilet was working. There was neither electricity nor running water. Connie took offense, but not too much because she knew that in this hovel there was no way her husband could once again invent apocryphal trips to be able to see Frances. She was willing to stay here, if it meant keeping him far away from his esoterist lover. Olson, for his part, invented reasons to endure the situation. Olson (All Sun) was always hatching some fantasy, some supposed premonition or idea, to justify every aspect of his existence. He could not accept even the most minimal defeat. Everything within him was a display of grandeur, the witty expression of a predestined teleology. In his letters, we read that he felt content to return to primitive living conditions. To live in one's mind has many advantages; principally, not to have to live in the real world. What we call "mind" is nothing more than the way we lie to ourselves about where our body truly is. The mind is a kidnapping that has not even taken place.

In reality, Olson lived in an untidy coastal hovel in Lerma; in his imagination, he inhabited the paleolithic era.

Further, the reception the Olsons had received had been somewhat chilling for the couple. As they made their way down the road laden with dirt clods, a pack of kids continuously yelled after them: "griingo-Go, grrriing-Go." A welcome-farewell that, according to his own recounting, was testimony to the "unbelievable underground hate" Mexicans

harbor against people from the United States. Mexicans have a harsh funereal-comic relationship with their co-bodies. Mockery and co-body are fused.

This sing-song hatred dates back to the North American invasion of 1846 and the theft of more than half of Mexico's national territory. How many times this hatred has been denied! The North Americans regularly cross the Pacific or the Atlantic to invent enemies for themselves, probably because they don't want to accept that their greatest enemy, and their oldest, is located just a few meters away. Of his 1925 trip to Mexico, Mayakovsky noted:

Cachupín and *gringo*—these are the two main swear words in Mexico.

“*Cachupín*” is a Spaniard. Over the five hundred years from the time of the invasion of Cortés, this word has faded, decayed, and lost its acerbity.

But “*gringo*” even now rings out like a slap in the face (when they stormed into Mexico, the American troops, they would sing “Green go the rushes, oh...,” the soldier's son—and the first words were shortened into the swear word).

An example: a Mexican on crutches. Walking with a woman. The woman is English. There's a passer-by. He looks at the English woman and yells:

“Gringo!”

The Mexican drops his crutch and pulls out his Colt.*

But, as is customary, the Anglo-Saxon—in this case Mayakovsky's translator into English—plays the fool, noting:

Mayakovsky's “folk etymology” of *gringo* may here be questionable (apart from the song running “green grow

* *My Discovery of America*, Modern Voices/Hesperus Press Limited, London, 2005, pp. 32-33. The term “*cachupín*” is a misspelling/misunderstanding of “*gachupín*,” which is the actual term used in Mexico. (Trans. note)

the rushes, oh”). Dictionaries (e.g. Webster) link the word to *griego*: “Greek,” or “foreigner.”*

So many Oxidental fantasies! So many delusions of grandeur! Once again, the MIND prevents the Oxidental from forming a consciousness of reality. Reason—ha!—is simply called *denial*. “Reason” is to refuse to accept.

Can you possibly imagine a group of Mexican kids and campesinos receiving the North American invaders with an invocation to the *Greeks*? The Oxident does not want to accept that Mexico detests it. Not only because Mexico knows itself to be Non-Oxidental, but rather, and above all, because it knows itself to be entirely Oxidental by accident. Oxidental and Accidental. The Accidental Oxident.

The Co- between the different Co-Oxidents is repulsion. There is no synthetic dialectic. It is magnetic. And within the magnetic dialectic, what prevails is the repellantcy between magnets.

For his part, Olson faced Mexican hatred again and again. Like Artaud, Lawrence, and Burroughs, Olson soon exchanged his idealized love for Mexico for a relationship of aversion. The *pueblos* he had earlier imagined as idyllic were now described as “shit towns.” Mesoamerica was discovered to be “Americanized.” Beloved Oxidental, the return to the Golden Age would always have Golden Showers[†] in store. The Gold you seek turns to Shit. The return to the uterus will always be a Bad Trip. *She* turning into *Shit*.

Little by little, the journey of any foreign poet in Mexico,

* Ibid., p. 134.

† In conversation about this term, Heriberto and I discussed the unexpected differences between the term “Golden Showers” in English—implying sexual activity involving urine—and the term “Baño dorado” in Spanish. “Golden Showers” is a literal translation of “Baño dorado,” though in some instances the colloquial meaning of the term in Spanish can also imply sexual activity involving both urine and feces, hence Heriberto’s relating of “Baño dorado” with gold turning to shit. (Trans. note)

take thee note of their stories, turns into the journey toward a fall. Mexican demons assault them. Burroughs called this phenomenon—without realizing that it was precisely this he was naming—*Possession*. (The possession that led him to kill his wife Joan in Mexico City in 1951.)

With the help of Dos Equis beer, Olson got used to Mexico little by little. He lost 50 pounds. Connie got pregnant. He began to learn snippets of Spanish and Maya thanks to his neighbor, “Martínez.” He began to excavate the immediate surroundings near his home and soon encountered “ruins”—of no great importance though in his fantasy, however, he would transform them into matchless “treasures.” After he discovered some small remains on a quick trip to Campeche, Olson visited Raúl Pavón, director of the Museo de Antropología (Museum of Anthropology), who made fun of this gringo “amateur.” Olson raved nonsensically. His letters were full of complaints, curses, and resentments against Mexican and North American academics. The entire world is wrong, except him (sometimes) and his correspondents. Olson’s outrageous mental processes weren’t caused by drugs or accumulated rage, as would be the case for Artaud or Burroughs. Like a good North American—a *Good American*—Olson went crazy with *naiveté*.

Naiveté is meanness that doesn’t recognize itself. Naiveté is meanness hysterical over itself. Naifs don’t know what they already know. They replace their experience with memories of the pre-lived. They place a veil of pseudo-innocence over all things. Naifs don’t believe in what will come. They live in the pre-present. They avoid contact with reality, interposing a time between themselves and the present time, placing before that present an ether that protects them. Naiveté is the greatest danger. Naifs will never be responsible for themselves. It is the perfect crime, absolute impunity.

with glyphs. He convinced himself (once again) that he had encountered a treasure of incalculable worth. (For which he had to haggle.) What did Olson say to himself about that bone? According to him, it was Quetzalcóatl's femur! To follow Olson in Mexico is to follow the journey kitsch makes to the "Origin."

By "kitsch" I understand the *signified* saturated with all its *signifiers*. And the *signifier* that is saturated with all its *signifieds*. Kitsch, then, is the inability to forget. Kitsch is that Signified that accumulates all its Signifiers, that parades all its avatars around and also the avatar that plucks away, one by one, as an eternal family, all the gods it has represented. Kitsch makes of an arbitrary link an oligarchical link. That which cannot accept that the senses die. Kitsch is what happens when memory atrophies and becomes a memory of itself, omni-mnemia. Kitsch is placing memory over and above experience. Kitch is ceasing to live, that is, ceasing to die, in order to juxtapose this non-life onto this non-death, the Permanent, that is, artificial memory. Kitsch is not letting go. Kitsch is the Oxidental. Kitsch is Identity and Eternity. Kitsch is the Great Artificial Memory.

Kitsch is the man knocking on the door. Delivering his message. The Absolute Final Message. Kitsch is the fact that you return always to this point. Kitsch is time that cannot explode.

Each thing Olson encountered in Mexico became an evocation of something else. Nothing could be experienced in and of itself. Everything was a reference.

Who had been the captain of the boat on which he had arrived in Mexico? It hadn't been the *skipper* of a small boat: it had been "the great Carl Olsen of Gloucester." The United States consists in the replacement of what is, of things-as-they-are, with the hypertrophied-referential. Olson had discovered the surviving bone of the Great Quetzalcóatl!—or, as he preferred to call him in his letters, the Great "Quetz"! The United States is the abbreviation of all experiences.

During his whole journey, Olson clung to the glyphed bone, convinced that it was the “Rosetta Stone of Mayan studies.”

Mecate plus Goodyear: “Dept of Disappearing Culture”*

The venture of colonization—understanding colonization not as the effective conquest of another culture, whatever that might mean, but rather as the spectacle that a culture undertakes for itself, through the projections it launches upon the other; conquest is a scene—necessitates the construction of a junkyard-wasteland, a zone of recycling, re: space-time, *swap-meeting place*, a free commerce-in-signs zone, a *culture of fragmentation*, where illusions of dominance might be produced. A) The fantasy that native culture is effectively the fragmented culture manufactured by observation (participant). B) The fantasy that native culture *in another time* was other, *pure*... among other units of illusion. Too many.

To read and unread the Maya, Olson swiftly undertook the configuration of an intermediary space. Finding it impossible to accept that he did not know, he constructed a layer of decipherable unreality, a layer that saved him from having to experience the obscure as a terrible epidermis. The unknown was horrifying to him. The unknown had to be interchanged for the cognizable; for that which hermeneutics analyzes minutely until it can deliver you a Happy Analgesic. The Calm of Control. Has sleep now come to thee? (Nothing has escaped your Reason.)

In the light of Mayan culture, Olson hatched a space-

* Mecate is twine or cord, often woven into reins or used to form the upper part of the sandals known as huaraches, worn all over Mexico and Central America and particularly common among indigenous communities. Some huaraches have mecate tops attached to soles made from old tires; hence the title “Mecate plus Goodyear.” (Trans. note)

time of (furious) re-codification. He (de)scribes that time-space by constructing a market of hybrid artifacts, from within a perception of inebriated angry bricolage. Olson juxtaposed elements of both civilizations within a mode we might call ruinous-ironic:

tues. (carlos, the letter carrier, abt due / sort of the village idiot, i take it: walks like no fisherman, smiles like a gringo, and is altogether not native, is “allegre,” *slap-happy*, and of whom I am most fond: yesterday, bringing yr letter, he holds out two us air mal sts (enclosed)! I say, how come, and, as I understood, he had noticed that, they had not been cancelled. So he had carefully removed them from the envelopes, and brought them to me! So here they are, for you.

You will imagine, knowing my bias toward just such close use of things, how much all these people make sense to me (coca-cola tops are the boys’ *tiddley-winks*; the valves of bicycle tubes, are toy guns; bottles are used and re-used, even sold, as cans are; old tires are the base footwear of this whole peninsula (the modern Maya sandal is, rope plus Goodyear); light is candle or kerosene, and one light to a house, even when it is a foco, for electricidad.*

The issue here is that one culture cannot understand another from within the otherness it seeks to decipher, because that otherness is indecipherable. As Machado said, the “essential heterogeneity of being” cannot be abolished, not by a game of tiddlywinks nor by rigid hermeneutics nor feline intu-

* Letter to Creeley from February 19, 1951, in *Selected Writings*, New Directions, New York, 1966, pp. 75-76.

ition.* In order to decipher the other—in this case, Mayan culture—Olson had to construct an intermediary space, a mixed culture—that is, a culture in which differences might be converted into synthesis, where the *exotic* might make way for the *hybrid*;[†] to imagine that intermediary culture, that culture-in-passing or “third nation” that makes it possible to resolve in fantasy the contradictions unresolved in reality.[‡] The hybrid and the mythic are one and the same. They are the false reconciliation of opposites. The function of the postmodern category of the hybrid is to simulate that contradiction has ceased to exist. (The hybrid is kitsch that desires to avoid dismantling. The separation of the one in relation to the other and to itself. The hybrid is kitsch in recuperation of the Same.) A simulation that opposites have merged. When everything that occurs is exactly the opposite. We pertain to an era ruled by *fission*. Everything is in process of disintegrating.

Olson managed to simulate that he had understood a culture by describing how it “mixed” with his own. He simulated contact through the hybrid. He thus gave life to a new avatar of kitsch, the *happy-hybrid*, possibly only in the mind of the remixer. But this mix of the one and the

* Antonio Machado, “Juan de Mairena” (ca. 1936). In *Antonio Machado. Poesía y Prosa*, ed. by José Luis Cano, Brujera, p. 301.

† Serge Gruzinski posits the *cool* prose, used in music reviews, that imitates the intercultural mixes of certain musical currents as an example of hybrid global language; he says: “This passage reveals the poverty of representations and discourse spurred by the acceleration and intensification of planetwide intermingling... Beyond its vagueness, this increasingly common discourse is not as neutral or spontaneous as it appears. It could be seen as a language of recognition used by new international elites whose rootlessness, cosmopolitanism, and eclecticism call for wholesale borrowings from ‘world cultures.’ It supposedly reflects a social phenomenon, a growing awareness of groups accustomed to consume everything the planet can offer them, for whom hybridism seems to be supplanting exoticism,” from *The Mestizo Mind: The Intellectual Dynamics of Colonization and Globalization*, Routledge, London, 2002 p. 57.

‡ Lévi-Strauss defines myth as Benjamin defines fairytales, as a relaxing of tragic thought, a fantasized solution to the rending of opposites.

other is fascism itself. Fascism goes hand in hand with kitsch because they are two sides of the same false coin. (The coin that pretends to be another.) Fascism is remix. A fascist culture is a culture that composes understandings of the other using elements of itself. Fascism is also what its own culture configures through the recycling of elements recombined from itself. The fascist is that which is set in stone in the remix. Fascism is repetition. Fascism is the composition of Otherness utilizing images of the memory-of-itself.

Once installed, that intermediary zone—semiotic zone—opens a monadic displaced communication: though the deciphering of a culture cannot occur from within that culture—given that our deciphering tends to be enacted from an outside, though perhaps an outside that believes itself to be a *delving into the other*—neither can it be achieved, not even, from within the deciphering culture. (From within Olson's United States.) The culture of the other is not deciphered—this we already know—from within that culture—to decipher is colonialist—but neither is it deciphered from within the deciphering culture, since culture shock has already produced an irreparable fragmentation on both sides. Thus, to decipher is colonialist-post;* accidental counterconquest, involuntary anthropophagy achieved by the Oxidental Master himself, who, upon deciphering the culture of the other—now the other par excellence, the

* When I queried Heriberto about the inversion of “post-colonialist,” he replied: “In Spanish you can easily put an adjective either before or after a noun, so it is easy to create word plays, whereby ‘anti-colonialism’ can be shifted to become ‘colonialism-anti.’ ‘Colonialism-post’ alludes to a variety of circumstances that have proffered new masks to colonialism. For example, a post-modern colonialism: a colonialism that uses categories or institutions that are supposedly post-colonial—what we might refer to as a certain liberal academy—in order to further its imperialist maneuvers under a more democratic guise. Or also, simply, a colonialism that persists after post-colonialism, even a post-colonial-colonialism.” Given this explanation and the range of resonances of a term like “colonialist-post,” I read this term to reference a post-colonialism that continues to foreground colonialism, over and above any “post” that might suggest the phenomena of colonialism are things of the past. (Trans. note)

indio—fragments his own culture, almost never with an awareness of this partitioning, accumulating atop the fragmentation and combination of signs the route whereby the signs that correspond to his culture might be devoured by the signs-of-the-other.

In his 1943 essay “Aqui foi o sul que venceu” (“In Brazil, The South Won”), experimental theorist Oswald de Andrade wrote that “everything mixes, interpenetrates, is half one thing and half another, fish and lantern, telephone, astral body and straight pin. . . It is necessary to spy on the morning that’s emerging.”* For de Andrade, the mixing of Occidental signs with American (Brazilian) signs was part of anthropophagy, the absorption of the sacred enemy, taboo, in order to transform it into a totem. When Olson enlists recycled artifacts, remixed from the Mayan world of the fifties, he does so in order to highlight the vacuousness of the combinations and re-uses which are “in every sense not native,” like the mailman he describes with *disparaging sympathy* as he walks as no fisherman would and smiles like a “gringo.” In the “Mayan” world Olson describes with choler, the signs of loss of identity and history in the Mexico where Olson believed he had arrived are interposed over one another, as the mix of Mexican mecate and rubber from Goodyear tires seems to him to be a sign of curious decadence and loss of meaning. On the contrary, the Brazilian theory of “anthropophagy”—the mix of elements of the modern with the primitive, of the fish, and the lantern—is a preview of the consumption the Third World will put into practice in its religious devouring of the goods, technologies, and knowledge of the Oxident.

In his dichotomous moralism, Olson created a resounding riotous music against the post-Mayan hodgepodge, from within his belief in the consumption of a civilization that, as De Andrade warned, was not only itself devoured, but also,

* Oswald de Andrade, “Aqui foi o sul que venceu” in *Ponta de lança*, Editora Globo, São Paulo, 1991, p. 71

and likewise, devours. What is tragicomic in this encounter is that once contact has been made between the sewing machine and the umbrella, the dissection table, like the dissection table it is, slices them to pieces. In the encounter of the one with the other, the one and the other become fragmented. The Romantics believed it was possible to reconcile opposites or, at least, that the coincidence and juxtaposition of opposites was “marvelous”—oh French-Uruguayan Lautréamont—when, in reality, it was in the encounter of opposites that synthesis was demonstrated to be impossible and the only thing that occurred was continuing disintegration. The dissection table always imposes itself.

When opposites enter into relation, out of their creative friction multiple gods appear. Synthesis is unreal. Only dissection is real. To write is this dissection table. Each door disintegrates when you knock on it. Each thing, when you come to it: labyrinth. Those who wish to understand the other will only lose themselves. The most foolish among them will call this anti-realm “empire.”

_ucking_ish: The Maya on the Hunt for Protein and Fat

Olson belongs to a caste of Oxidental poets who travel to Mexico to gather the traces of the pre-Hispanic past Oxident has romanticized; to seek the cultures in which European Romanticism deposits its hopes of encountering the Good Savage. Less than two decades earlier, Antonin Artaud had been in Mexico. Like Artaud, Olson perceived Mexico through delirium, outbursts, pseudo-prophetic hyperbole, gibberish, dyslexia, anachronisms. Regarding a Rarámuri rite, Artaud emphatically declared:

On the 16th of September, the day on which Mexicans celebrate their independence, I saw in Norogachic, in the

heart of the Tarahumara Sierra, the rite of the kings of Atlantis as Plato describes it in the pages of *Critias*. . . . The Tarahumara, whom I believe to be the direct descendants of the Atlanteans, continue to devote themselves to the observance of magical rites. Let those who do not believe me go into the Tarahumara Sierra. . . . You may think what you will of the comparison I am making. In any case, since Plato never went to Mexico and since the Tarahumara Indians never saw him, it must be acknowledged that the idea of this sacred rite came to them from the same fabulous and prehistoric source. And this is what I have tried to suggest here.*

Of course, this was not the first time the origin of Mexican indigenous cultures was attributed to another, non-American *pueblo*. Fray Bartolomé de las Casas attributed the construction of such fabulous buildings to the ten lost tribes of Israel, since it seemed to him implausible that *Indios* of the time would have been able to execute such feats. Artaud would not be the first to establish a link between Atlantis and Mexican Indian cultures. Oviedo and Gómara, in their Indian chronicles, had also thought they recognized the work of the influence of Atlantis among ancient Mexicans. These *third worlds* the Spanish “conquistadores” had constructed in order to be able to accept or interpret “Indio” culture—whose name is already a *third world* where it’s entirely clear what is really being named: the misunderstanding that is an imposed third world—had reached such a level of significance that the second bishop of Yucatán, Fray Diego de Landa, in his *Relación de las cosas de Yucatán* (*An Account of the Things of Yucatán*)—written in 1566—felt himself compelled to clarify that the Mayan buildings had not been built

* “The Rite of the Kings of Atlantis,” in *The Peyote Dance*, trans. Helen Weaver, Farrar, Straus and Giroux, New York, 1976, pp. 64 and 69.

“by other nations, but rather by *Indios*.”*

In a commentary regarding “La montaña de los signos” (“The Mountain of Signs”), another text in which Artaud declared that the Rarámuri are the direct descendents of Atlantis, Carlos Montemayor notes:

Perhaps ensnared by excitement, Artaud overlooked a few details from the original narrative and added a few elements, using his excellent theatrical imagination. . . . At no moment did Plato mention that there should be music or song.[†]

An ordinary analysis might observe that the Romantic European poet refuses to comprehend the Rarámuri from their own lens or from a less absurd perspective, and this undoubtedly demonstrates that a certain sector of Occidental culture—even that represented by Artaud, the most liberal, visionary, and extravagant tradition of European intellect—is (of course!) incapable of understanding otherness through the lens of otherness—impossibility—and falls back on the denial that he has made an interpretation from a position of sameness or self-sameness. In the end, creating a comparison of the Rarámuri through Plato, the very center of classical Oxidental culture, reveals Artaud’s profound incapacity, and that of Surrealism and Romanticism in general, to get outside themselves, even when they directly encounter the most distant otherness (the Rarámuri), to whom they persist in attributing their fantasies, projections, imaginaries. Oxidentals who attribute their late-breaking references in order to later exploit them as a discovery made from early on. The Oxident devours itself. Its entire anthropology is tragically ouroboric. In his delirious way, when Artaud

* Diego de Landa, *Relación de las cosas de Yucatán*, Auguste Durand, Paris, 1864, p. 32.

† *Los tarahumara. Pueblo de estrellas y barrancas*, Aldus, Mexico City, 1999, p. 7.

interprets the Rarámuri and turns them into descendents of Greek myth, he demonstrates the Eurocentric colonialism of which not even he—or perhaps he less than anyone—could rid himself.*

Yet at the same time that this colonialism operates from within the shock of two cultures, it also produces what we have observed in the mecate plus Goodyear, where the Maya have not only been devoured by technology, but the Mayan mecate also ties technology down, and ultimately devours it and places it at their feet. They step on it at every turn. Only if we remain in the sphere of colonialist vision—a vision in which the crushing of native cultures predominates—will we fail to perceive that conquest and counterconquest always occur simultaneously, each being an illusion of domination represented by the self-same and never actually over and above the respective other. Neither conquest nor counterconquest is possible. Both are illusions of control.

If Artaud could not see the Rarámuri rite because of the imposition of these Platonic images, colonizing the Rarámuri texture,[†] in the same way, the Platonic images were colonized by the Rarámuri rite: in the final instance, the Platonic myth was also distorted, unread, transgressed,

* Like a number of other people who have studied the “Tarhumara” (a distortion of Rarámuri, which means those who advance well, those who move forward as they should, progressing spiritually), Montemayor notes as well that they have been defined through use of a Homeric image, in which *rarámuri* comes to signify “light feet,” like Achilles.

† Heriberto uses the word *tejido* here, which can variously be translated as texture, cloth, fabric. I queried him as to the usage here and he responded: “‘Tejido’ has been one of the more ancient metaphors for ‘life’; life as ‘tejido’ (weaving), and because ‘tejido’ in Spanish conveys not only an object (‘un tejido bonito que compré ayer’) but also the act in itself (‘la labor del tejido,’ ‘the act of weaving’), the word seems very good for the sort of thing (again, tejido, ha!) which I want to do with the word. First, as metaphor for life (ancient metaphor, both in India, Mexico, Greece—the figure of the Three Fates, has been very important in my thinking about this); then, because ‘tejido’ is etimologically related to ‘texto’ (textile), so because both ‘tejido’ and ‘texto’ are textile, the word appeals to me. So it includes ‘life’ as fabrication, and ‘textuality,’ writing. In my sense of the word, it includes both social fabric and the act of writing.” (Trans. note)

traversed by images of Mexican otherness. Both textures mutated when they came into contact *in the third world* manufactured by their dislocated encounter.

Olson's ravings about the Maya, like Artaud's, are many, and they are humorous in the extreme. Unlike Artaud's deliriums—which possessed magical resonances—Olson's speculations about the Maya are repeatedly crude or brutal, worthy of any *suffer* or *marine* visiting Mexico as a tourist.

that the sea, precisely the FISH, was of first imaginative importance to the Maya (as well, of course, crucial to his food economy...where maize was (the inland slopes of the cordilleras, Guatemala) cuts the people off from the most abundant source of protein and fat there is, the sea...I take it I could, if I wanted to, demonstrate, that the movement into the Yucatan peninsula might just have been a push for protein & fats (contradicting the mystery abt same that all of these half-heads of great name keep pushing along to perpetuate their profession)*

The image itself, in its unconsciousness, allows us to glimpse the devouring role of the Maya, to whom Olson attributed a hunger for protein and fat, in a comico-pragmatic turn; as if Olson's mistakes might reveal more than the moments when he spoke aptly. As he traced the incredible image of the Maya migrating in search of protein and fat—in which he could function as nothing other than a projection of North American consumer society of the fifties—that grotesque and involuntarily hilarious image, however, returned to the Maya precisely that which we might critique in Olson at this stage: the *active* role of culture which, with its “*crazy-stupid*” images—to use an expression Olson tended to use in those days—might seem undermined by crude fantasies about the Maya. Without

realizing it, Olson caused the Maya to practice semiotic anthropophagy as an instantaneous result of the delirium-of-the-bard with which he attempted to colonize them.

The text of this letter reaches such heights of explosive signification, of fishable centrifugicity, that just when he is on the verge of delving further into his disquisition about the importance of *fish* in Mayan life, the “f” key on his typewriter breaks and his letter continues in handwriting:

Goddam son of a bitch, if the “f” in the machine didn’t just go & bust—fuck it. Will have to go Campeche, & hope to christ a fix possible.

Well, to hell with fish—I obviously can’t say much more about them, today, without the “f” on this fucking machine.*

In what may well be an act of pure pataphysics that destiny plays on Olson—or objective Hegelian chance or Jungian synchronicity—the breaking-down of his typewriter, on the F key itself, further reinforces his image of a text that maps how the sign of the “Maya” ravenously devours that very text whole. Olson wrote this, incidentally, in an impoverished and corroded English, rarefied by the atmosphere of Spanish/Maya and by the telegraphic game Olson imposed on himself within the epistolary genre, as well as his projective and shorthand idiolect.

Artaud’s fantasy functioned according to his anxiety for profundity. Artaud overanalyzed Rarámuri rites and overcodified them with codes extracted from his own civilization. He extended his knowledge of the not-I through a summa of knowledges that pertained to the European I. Olson, on the other hand, damaged the contemporary Maya by negating the Mayan I—a Mayan I negated, though it was already a fantasy from the moment it became a Mayan-I;

Olson exercised the fantasy of negating a fantasy—through the process of fantasizing that the Mayan I (fantasized in order to be negated) has no profundity whatsoever.

The Stupidity of Poetry

Anyone who retraces Olson's hermetic journey to Mexico might say—hasn't he made himself sufficiently ridiculous already? We must learn from the experience of poets. They must become our sacred clowns, and at the same time, our political clowns. All of them—from Li Po to Hölderlin, from Netzahualcōyotl to Jarry, from Blake to Neruda—have been confused by the gods. All of them are dolts. And they have been confused, above all, by empires. The gods have played oppressive tricks on them. And the empires have imposed their dreams upon them. All of them must succumb to the tragi-comedy of revelation. Revelation is always false. The message must always arrive in error. Hermes errs.

All of them shall succumb to the tragi-comedy of power. The power that corrupts. The society to which they belong prohibits them from moving radically outside the dominant ideology. Poets make certain. Poets are lightning rods. An antenna of an era, an antenna whipped by lightning. The signals they pick up as they are struck dead. They are the signals of the gods. And, in the case of modern poets, they are signals of dying gods, deities with errant signals. They are the radial sites of the dominant ideology that are confused with formerly sacred signals. Poets do not know how to distinguish between the two and even if they could discern the differences, they would probably say the same thing anyway. Modern poets could have no other destiny than to go crazy.

Poets are driven crazy by the words of the gods. They are driven crazy by the words of other men. The poet is the amphibian of delirium.

It is not given to us to understand the truth. It is given to us to understand the erratic.

Poets are maximum errors. In them the human project is ripped apart. Each of them is an Icarus-esque descent, a hazard of Altazor, precocious precipitation. I say precocious because we—all of us—will precipitate. But poets do not wait for death to occur in order for the collapse to occur. Poets lose hope. Poets encounter the precipice promptly. That precipice, when it is not the precipice of death, is a ridiculous precipice.

There resides the value of their adventure. They have dared to crash.

The prudish are destined to receive the truth. (The truth you desire, whichever truth.) The reckless can expect to receive absolute lies. Of course Burroughs, Artaud, and Olson lied. All of them were prey to unknown spirits. All of them went crazy. Each time I leave this country I become aware of what good sense is. But here good sense is unattainable. Rationalism would never be practicable here. Unless it were practiced by a firing squad. Like Maximilian. This is not about a romance. This is about delirium.

Consequently, poets deserve all our laughter—because everything they have done they have done in the name not of the gravity of truth, of the pseudo-life of negated death, but rather in the name of the disintegration of peals of laughter, the disintegration of the truth, disintegration that begins with poets themselves, though they might not know it. The poets are here so we can laugh at them.

Man comes from on high. But from on high, he has fallen. We have not managed to leave the planet, the planet which is not, by any means, our origin. Our origin is the unknown. That is why any search for an origin will end in failure, because the origin is absent. It does not lie in what is visible. The poet is a person who flies. But their flight will always go wrong. Their destiny is the ground. Their destiny is to be the butt of our jokes.

Dazed by the signs from the sky and the inferno, from their biography and culture, poets are a living stupor. The tragi-comedy of the poet is to become stupid.

The Regime of Perspective: Cartographies and Cornfields

The delirium Olson manufactured originated in the presupposition that the Maya are *superficial*, while Artaud's delirium was manufactured out of the presupposition that the Rarámuri are *abysmal*. When I write *superficial* and *abysmal* I might wish to erase the connotations these vocables possess—*superficial* in the sense of surface or petty; *abysmal* as deep and therefore superior, more valuable—because both paradigms offer up deliriums which are potentially immense: each, however, starting from its own location. Properly speaking, Olson interpreted from within a *perspective* about the Maya, while Artaud interpreted through a *descent*. A descent that would soon become an introspection, while Olson's perspective corresponded to a military vision.

Olson conceived of everything as a militia. (He even considered love to be a form of guerrilla warfare.) Olson needed to make war plans in any territory where he entered, especially if the territory in question was imaginary, a fantastical country.

Advocating a military vision, Olson complained a number of times in his letters about, for instance, the inexactitude of the maps depicting Mayan sites. Olson sought, above all, to devise the cartography that would allow him to move freely in the Mayan world, a world he conceived as a perspective, as a map, as a pure *surface*. Olson only saw horizons. He placed horizons where there were ravines.

Nothing could be more different than Artaud's vertical vision, wherein the most relevant feature is descent and ascent in the *indio* world. Artaud lost perspective and

cartography to such an extent that any observer would have serious doubts about the plausibility of his travels in that region of Mexican territory. Artaud thought of all things *indio*, above all, in terms of their relationship with the underworld, the inferno, the Below. Artaud's hermeneusis regarding the *indio*—to encounter them *underground*—is so de rigueur in his commentary that it can be observed, we might say, in “The Peyote Rite Among the Tarahumara,” (in *The Peyote Dance* written in 1943), when he describes the peyote dance he had experienced years earlier in the Sierra Tarahumara:

They repeated this sequence eight times. But after the fourth time their faces, which had taken on a lively expression, never ceased to be radiant. The eighth time they looked toward the Priest, who then moved with a dominating and menacing air to the furthest end of the Holy of Holies, where things are in contact with the North. And with his cane he drew in the air a huge 8. But the scream that he uttered at that moment could have overthrown *the hellish labor pains of the head man black with his ancient sin*, in the words of the old buried poem of the Maya of Yucatan; and I do not remember ever in my life hearing anything that revealed more clearly or resonantly to what depths the human will descends to raise its foreknowledge of night.*

Guided by the regime of perspective, as Olson initiated his approach to the Mayan world he did not just concern himself with the imperfection of the maps:

I had the feeling, already in Merida, that the Peabody-Carnegie gang, whatever they may have done, 50, or

* “The Peyote Rite Among the Tarahumara,” in *The Peyote Dance*, trans. Helen Weaver, Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1976, pp. 32-3.

25 years ago, were, now, missing the job, were typical pedants or academics, and were playing some state & low professional game. Like this: that, at this date, it was no longer so important to uncover buried cities and restore same, as it was to strike in anew by two paths: (1) what I have already sounded off to you about, the living Maya language and what its perdurables, because language is so tough, may well contain in the heads of these living farmers back one block, from this street, or wherever, the deeper in, I imagine, the more and (2) in the present context the important one: a total reconnaissance of *all* sites (laugh as they did at me in Merida, the “experts”) instead of (as the Carnegie-Mexican Govt is about to launch) the recovery of the 3rd of the Maya Metropolises here in the peninsula, Mayapan.

The joker is, they are “advanced” enough to justify the Mayapan operation as a step to discover more abt the economic & political life of the ancient Maya! Which, of course, kills me. Here I am the aestheticist...I am the one who is arguing that the correct way to come to an estimate of that dense & total thing is not, again, to measure the walls of a huge city but to get down, before it is too late, on a flat thing called a map, as complete a survey as possible of all, all present ruins, small as most of them are.*

The regime of perspective shows him that it is inappropriate to go down—to discover buried Mayan cities—as what is more apt, according to the regime, is to move along the horizontal-cartographic plane. Even when he praised the Maya, upon this first *inspection* what he admires in them is a certain place where “the view is so lovely,” without being able to abandon in those moments the regime of perspective. Olson conceives of himself as someone who was proposing another type of operation, since “Operation Mayapan,” because it was

based on a vertical trajectory, on a descent-disinterring, was “*crazy, stupido.*”

Keeping in *view* the surface of the regime of perspective, Olson constructed fantasies in which he attributed to the Maya and their contemporary scholars a state of being “blinded by corn” at the same time that he critiqued the agricultural methods of the Maya, which ruined the surface of their fields of crops in a matter of just a few years. What Olson saw in the Maya were cornfields that needed to be cleared away lest they block the gaze. Olson did not understand that the corn myth refers to the penetration of the seed into the earth, to its descent, and its subsequent emergence from the underworld. His vision of corn was horizontal, instead of vertical, which would have been more congruent with the indigenous vision.

Olson thus remained trapped within himself, and he thus sabotaged his own investigations, rejecting descent or ascent, attempting to achieve some level route of advance. He himself intuited this two weeks later, when he commented on the outbursts cited above: “Perhaps, as I sd before, I am only arguing with myself.”* It is no coincidence that he should choose the horizontal plane, *the leveled-out*, the regime of the (surveillance) perspective: as the psychology of displacement or imaginary journeys of the psyche confirm, the individual who refuses to abandon old patterns of life and attempt new creative solutions is characterized by a rejection or fear of displacement of self below/above during a “directed daydream.”†

Those who do not wish to touch on their past (their “interior hell”) or believe it is impossible to get out of the circumstances they have experienced (“to rise up”) will find it difficult to go down or rise up imaginarily in a fantasy

* Ibid., p. 83.

† See, for example, *El ensueño dirigido y el inconsciente*, J. Launay, J. Levine and G. Maurey, Paidós, Buenos Aires/Barcelona, 1982.

or daydream, finding it more relevant, comfortable, familiar and less “fantastical” to travel on level surfaces. We can say nothing of Olson’s personal psyche at this point, since any speculation in that realm would be but a fantasy or projection on our part. What we can speak to is the imaginary of the text, of “Olson.” In that imaginary—the regime of perspective, which is the regime of a civilization of military surveillance, of cartographic advance—that is, of imperialism—vision has become impoverished due to the lack of will to ascend or descend, in a sort of *neurotic horizontality* or *leveled paranoia*. The Oxident fundamentally remains on a horizontal axis; it is constituted as the negation of descent. In the same way that we now cannot know anything for certain about Olson’s personal psyche, neither could he understand anything about the Maya; rather, he barely had access to the intermediate world, that *third world*, that he had constructed out of the ruins that resulted from the clash of cultures. In this intermediate or third world—as I prefer to call it to maximize irony—Olson found himself obliged to understand the other through a broken mirror; and the same was true for himself. And this is what the experience of colonization produces in the colonizer, since colonizers do not only destroy the possibility of understanding the other-culture as a Totality when they fragment it, but they themselves are also fragmented, they self-destruct, impeding even their own access to themselves, to their own identity. The experience of colonization, then, is a self-destruction on both sides. The dissection table that becomes a pantopia.

Lawrence, Olson, and Quetzalcóatl

Quetzalcóatl, glyphs, and the Mayan concept of space-time were Olson’s three great Mexicanist themes.

D.H. Lawrence’s fantasies are behind Charles Olson’s fantasies. Olson’s vision of Mexico, in large measure, grows

out of Lawrence's. (According to Ralph Maud, *Fantasia of the Unconscious* "brought Olson to Mexico.")* In the prologue to his work, Lawrence described a prior science:

I honestly think that the great pagan world of which Egypt and Greece were the last living terms, the great pagan world which preceded our own era once, had a vast and perhaps perfect science of its own, a science in terms of life. In our era this science crumbled into magic and charlatany. But even wisdom crumbles.

I believe that this great science previous to ours and quite different in constitution and nature from our science once was universal, established all over the then-existing globe. I believe it was esoteric, invested in a large priesthood.†

According to Lawrence, this science belonged to the Glacial Period. After the decadence of this knowledge, its content survives "half forgotten," remembered in the form of "rituals, gestures, and myths." Lawrence was seeking a symbology that might return to him the secret knowledge of the laws of man, life, and the universe.

Olson wished to discover that prior knowledge inspired by Lawrence and, after his journey to Mexico, by Jung. Olson called this knowledge the "Laws." In order to discover those Laws, he turned to Mexico.

It was also D. H. Lawrence who aroused in Olson a curiosity about Quetzalcóatl. (In the novel *The Plumed Serpent*, the character of Don Ramón embodies the so-called "Religion of Quetzalcóatl.") In his novel, and in other areas of his work, Lawrence speculates about the meanings of this figure. For Lawrence, the religion of Quetzalcóatl

* *Charles Olson's Reading: A Biography*, Southern Illinois University Press, Illinois, 1996, p. 87.

† *Fantasia of the Unconscious*, Penguin Books, New York, 1988, p. 12.

was opposed to Christianity and was based on virile love, as well as on the unconscious and its polytheism. In this religion, Lawrence proposed that one purpose of the Mexican Revolution was the return of the pre-Hispanic gods; if Don Ramón (Carrasco) is Quetzalcóatl, General Cipriano Viedma is Huitzilopochtli, the Aztec god of war. With Lawrence, the Oxident sounded the violin strings of its maximal kitsch.*

Kitsch designed to decipher the Other. The inevitable kitsch—occurring each time the signs of a system (“culture”) are utilized in order to interpret (*dominate*) another. Each time a space and/or a time is juxtaposed over another, kitsch reverberates its plumage! Kitsch and hermeneutics are Siamese twins. *The Da Vinci Code* was possible thanks to Dante.

What do the 1950s—los años cincuenta—represent? (The años sin cuenta, years uncounted, years of oblivion.)† They are the past and the future in association. If History existed at some point, it existed in the fifties. In the North

* “In short, Quetzalcoatl and Huitzilopochtli are the only ancient Mexican gods who play substantial roles in either version of *The Plumed Serpent*. In the first, the two men merely set themselves up as living symbols by pretending to be manifestations of the gods. Occult symbolism is not introduced until the penultimate chapter and is largely borrowed from Theosophy and Rosicrucianism... The Quetzalcoatlism of *The Plumed Serpent*, then, may be dubious in its Mesoamericanism, but it is not dubiously Lawrencean... In sum, though the Oaxaca version of the religion is more fully developed, Lawrence still transmits few authentic pre-Columbian elements... The novel’s religion is meant to enhance life. Among other things, it brings new life to a white woman...” in Ross Parmenter, *Lawrence in Oaxaca: A Quest for the Novelist in Mexico*, Peregrine Smith Books, Salt Lake City, 1984, pp. 295, 297–298.

† The Spanish original here reads: “¿Qué son los años cincuenta? (Los años sin cuenta).” The word “cincuenta” (fifty, or in the phrase “años cincuenta,” the fifties) is a homophone of the phrase “sin cuenta,” which means with no count/accounting, or uncountable, and/or “sin darse cuenta,” without being aware or without consciousness—i.e. oblivious. After spending way too long attempting to find a congruent homophonic play with the words “decade,” “nineteen” and “fifties,” I decided that perhaps the best way to unsettle the uncountable obliviousness of English would be to import the word-play Heriberto instigates in the Spanish. (Trans. note)

American 50s. Black and white and science fiction, at that time, were one and the same. The 50s would be for the following decades a sort of Middle Ages *one-night-stand*.

The 1950s will be our fifteen minutes of Eternal Return. Superman became Super Man. Zarathustra + Hollywood = 9-11.

Each time North Americans imagine the preterite—and each time they draw nearer to the most distant of them—they draw ever nearer to seeing everything from the point of view of the 1950s. Olson and the Beats are not a coincidence. The white man, the hegemonic man, *the American*, did not begin seriously to rewrite his artificial memory until the 1950s. What Romanticism was for Modernity, the 50s will be for the North American empire. And they will be its Middle Ages—its Middle Ages express, *fast food classics!* And they will be its Paleolithic. And they will be its Golden Age. And they will be its UFO Age. And they will be its Greeks. And they will be its post-Fordism. And the 1950s will be everything. And there will be nothing but 1950s for the USA. There will not be anything more, no future other than Neverlands revisited by Ronald Reagan and Michael Jackson. Our two main choices will be either to resort to a trickle-down-*fifties* or simply to Moonwalk back to that decade.

Olson = 1950s. *New Eternity!*

Neoternity: a dilemma whether To Be or Not-To-Be the Military-Industrial Complex.

1961? *Already too late*, Dear Eisenhower.

Olson was convinced that Quetzalcóatl had been a mariner, that his underworld was nothing more than the high seas. For him, “The excision of the (imported) Mayan Kukulcan figure points concomitantly to the larger issues of sea travel and migration...that Olson later pursues in *Maximus*.”* Olson did not notice, to start with, that horizontal displace-

* André Spears, “Warlords of Atlantis: Chasing the Demon of Analogy in the America(s) of Lawrence, Artaud and Olson,” 2001, p. 28 (epc.buffalo.edu/authors/blog/andrespears.pdf).

ment is not a defining aspect of Quetzalcóatl and instead that ascension and descent are. And even less did he notice that Quetzalcóatl involves the deepest senses. For Olson, the sacred was “Quetz.” And Quetz was him.

One month after his arrival in Lerma, Olson seemed decided—though he would soon abandon the project, as was his custom—to write a biography of Quetzalcóatl-Kukulkán, exactly as Barlow had wished to do with Moctezuma. Olson was interested in Q/K because he represented a figure at once wise and governing. Because of his connection to the sea. More than a plumed serpent, Olson imagined him as a “little sea horse,” as “a kid/of the water,” as it was evident to him, he wrote to Creeley, that what “one discovers here is the sea.” Olson both saw Kukulkán with Melville’s eyes and also wanted to repeat his book about Melville here, this time with a Mayan backdrop. Call Me Quetz. He had convinced himself that his focus in Mexico would be the “Sea.”

SO THAT, the whole picture has shifted wider & out, west: in fact, what i ought to be, am, proposing, is, “THE SEA IN MAYAN AND MEXICAN CULTURES & ECONOMIES.

AND

AND, somewhere in this mixing of the two geographies is the key to why there is a KUKULKAN here, & QUETZ there: same man, same imagery (the serpent with fuzz) (SEA-SERPENT?)*

It had been Lawrence’s mistaken “religion of Quetzalcóatl” that had inspired Olson’s interest in Quetzalcóatl who, incidentally, had appeared in the first versions of “The Kingfishers” and “The Praises.” But, little by little, Olson’s lack of information drove him to another topic and he moved from a desire to biographically reconstruct the life

of Quetzalcóatl-Kukulcán to a desire to comment on Mayan writing, which existed “somewhere in this mixing of the two geographies,” in which the United States and Mexico are juxtaposed to support the fantasy of “same man, same imagery” (colonial hermeneutics with poetic fuzz around the edges). This time, however, we shall not follow Olson as he takes this leap.

What was it that Olson did not comprehend in Quetzalcóatl?

Meanings of the Plumed-Serpent

In order to comprehend what Quetzalcóatl means, we must set aside his identification with various historical or purely narrative figures. Of course Quetzalcóatl represents a symbolization that occurs starting with one or more pre-Hispanic sovereigns. But “Quetzalcóatl” does not reduce to those sovereigns. Similarly, neither does the meaning of “Buddha” refer exclusively to a real figure, but rather references a cosmovision, a method of transcendence, personified by Guatama or some Toltec or Mayan priest-king.

What, then, does Quetzalcóatl mean? Quetzalcóatl means “plumed-serpent” or “serpentine-bird.” (Some have argued that it might mean “beautiful twin.”) Be it the one or be it the other (or both), Quetzalcóatl is a concept that unites opposites, a sort of synthesis. Quetzalcóatl is an alchemical symbol of enantiodromia. Quetzalcóatl alludes to the *double*. Quetzalcóatl is a theory about what the double is.

This theory indicates that when two elements come together—germination from Below; fertilizing from Above—a transcendent duality is achieved. Quetzalcóatl is a *method* for achieving a superior state: metanoia.

Of course, within this notion we can find traces of historical experience. For example: the pre-Hispanic belief that it was necessary to merge the nomadic—historical origin of

indio cultures—with the sedentary. We should not forget that Topiltzin Quetzalcóatl, the shaman-king of Tula, was the son—actually or symbolically—of a barbarian/nomad warrior (“chichimeca”) and a woman from Nahua civilization. That is, “Quetzalcóatl” is associated with indigenous cultures’ duality of nomadic-civilized forms of existence which is, simultaneously, a division/contraposition between the northern/barbarian and the Mesoamerican-imperial. In Quetzalcóatl this duality becomes transcendence.

According to this concept, different indigenous *pueblos* coded the knowledge that their spiritual progress had been achieved thanks to overcoming the differences between the two determining forms of existence within that cosmos, pertaining to dozens of co-existent cultures. Quetzalcóatl is a spiritual methodology addressing co-bodies.

The concept of Quetzalcóatl is, in and of itself, the production of an ethnic and cultural mix, a characteristic of Mexican cultures themselves. In no way did this mixing begin with the Spanish conquest. Mixing was the rule among cultures well before the arrival of the Spanish; the mix with the Spanish was simply the continuation of the transditional *patterns of transformation* of these cultures.

Above all, the quetzalcoátlican method refers to the fecund re-union of the individual’s internal dyad. If the dyad ensnares itself, if *the two forces are woven together*, power and creation are produced. (Sovereignty and creativity are the fundamental characteristics associated with the plumed-serpent.) When the metaphor entered into decadence, the power that quetzalcoátlicizing confers grew to be understood as political power. Originally—that is, psychically—it referred to spiritual power.

Rebirth: to emerge from the unidimensional. Quetzalcóatl—symbolically associated with the cycle of corn*—implies a traversing of the psychic regions of the

* “The cycle of death and resurrection of the corn plant became the paradigm for processes of creation among Mesoamerican peoples... This creation was verified in the underworld, through the transformation of

quincunce*—a cycle of solar ascent and descent: transmutation through the journey of antagonisms. It has to do with war—numen of the creativore—which has as its function fertility. Corn, a plant that unites the infra with the supra. A seed that must be buried, and then die, in order to produce life (within the infraworld) and once it becomes a stalk it produces fruit, one part of which is sacrificed once again to the earth (to germinal death) in order to emerge as a corn-cob. The cycle of corn among pre-Hispanic *pueblos* alludes equally to the functioning of the origin of life, to labor, the growth and death of humans, and to the quincunce of each instant, and in the case of secret wisdom, what it is that must die in order for the soul to be reborn. Quetzalcóatl—at other times called Kukulcán, Nakxit, or Gucumatz—is not just a conceptual orientation, but also an ecstatic technique, a specific shamanic path. (We should not forget, however, that Quetzalcóatl is one of two methods. One of two shamanisms. The other path—which we will not address here—was called Tezcatlipoca.)

Quetzalcóatl refers to how language is born. Language, according to this theory, was born when man united the earthly with the celestial. It was born via the re-ligation of the inferior and the superior. When an individual revitalizes that re-ligation, the individual evolves spiritually. The individ-

matter worn down to energy,” in Enrique Florescano, *Quetzalcóatl y los mitos fundadores de Mesoamérica*, Taurus, Mexico City, 2004, p. 21.

- * When I suggested that Heriberto clarify his vision of the complex term “quincunce” in this context, he wrote: “Quincunce is the symbol that provides the foundation for the ‘Mexican’ pre-Hispanic cosmovision: it is a cosmogram signaling the center and four corners of the universe.” The term “quincunx” in English usually refers to a geometric design of five coplanar points arranged in the formation of a cross, like the five dots on a domino or playing die. As the term “quincunx” in English does not carry the same spiritual and cosmo-imaginary charge as “quincunce” does in Spanish, and because I welcome the opportunity to “Mexicanize” the translation of this text by allowing Spanish to “invade” (and perhaps even “conquer”) English, I have chosen to use the term “quincunce” as it appears in Heriberto’s text. (Trans. note)

ual becomes a creator. The description of this method occurs through mythic symbolizations. Quetzalcóatl is a method of psychic alchemy. (Though it remains clear that alchemy in and of itself is, in its profundity, a metaphor for methodologies of metamorphoses in states of mind.) Quetzalcóatl is a series of teachings about how people might transcend their habitual condition. How people might elevate themselves above rules.† Quetzalcóatl is measure and excess.

Indigenous cultures came to the conclusion that it was necessary to unite forces. The force-of-below, symbolized by the serpent, and the force-of-above, symbolized by the quetzal bird; the shield of Mexico still bears what is basically this same symbol, of Aztec origin (the eagle perched on a nopal, devouring a serpent). What we have here, by the way, is a similar concept to that symbolized by the Jewish star of David—the union of two triangles in different orientations—which as a symbol is even related to the union of the horizontal plane with the vertical, symbolized in the Christian cross. Quetzalcóatl symbolizes the union of opposite forces as a method of overcoming obstacles.

The bird, force of the superior-going-down is symbolized in different ways in pre-Hispanic cultures. (Pre-Hispanic gods are, as León-Portilla has already clarified,

† Probably the person who best understood Quetzalcóatl as a “philosophical structure” was Laurette Séjourné: “It turns out, then, that the importance of Quetzalcóatl resides not in his being a social individual, but rather in his being the central archetype of a philosophical structure in which man, sovereign in the end over his decisions, succeeds in converting a perishable mass into luminous energy... Quetzalcóatl is the first man to become a god: it is the very formula of this triumph that itself constitutes his teaching. It is not, then, a matter of a divinity that dispenses grace, but rather of a mortal who discovers a new human dimension in which he causes his fellow-men to become participants... This cycle, constantly associated with Quetzalcóatl, can signal nothing more than the lapse provided to individuals during which they must fulfill the task of mediating between realities which without those individuals would remain irremediably separate... It was understood that the great cosmic work should begin with the work of each individual upon himself,” in *El universo de Quetzalcóatl*, Fondo de Cultura Económica, Mexico City, 1962, pp. 17-18, 133, 136 and 140.

representations of concepts.) One of the representations of the force of the superior-going-down is, for example, Cuauhtémoc (literally falling-eagle) and another, we might venture, is Tláloc, deity of rain. In both cases, we are talking about a power in the sky that descends to earth. But the two forces are the same. Rubén Bonifaz Nuño says: “Tláloc is Tlaltecuhlti; Taltecuhlti is Tláloc.”*

Quetzalcóatl: uniting path toward acquiring wisdom. We’re talking here about a concept. Not exactly a “god” or a mythic-historical figure. Quetzalcóatl is like the man who became a god. He becomes a god by turning himself into the plumed-serpent. Tall rush that unites Underworlds and Heavens.

Quetzalcóatl is the mouth. Giant reed from which language emerges.

Language is Quetzalcóatl.

Name for the initiation of *speech*, “Quetzalcoátl” is the spiritual name *Indio pueblos* gave to language.

Glyphs, Olson, and Fenollosa

Olson saw the world through the eyes of others. In some sense, the presence of others in his eyes/I’s is coherent with

* This Mexican poet has gone beyond what any other scholars of this subject matter have been able to achieve, in terms of the innovation and spirituality of his thesis, which is dedicated to deciphering—through pre-Hispanic iconography—the meaning of the two serpents, among other symbols. As in the case of the symbol of Quetzalcóatl, the implication is of a definition of man at a point when the two forces become connected and produce creation. “Olmec culture was constructed around a particular concept of man... Two features in the way faces were figured define the aforementioned concept: the characteristic cross-eyed position of the eyes, and the form of the mouth; the latter indicates the capacity to initiate creation, making the exercise of divine power possible. So for them, in essential union, man turns out to be the sage who knows the truth and the principal creator of the universe,” in *Hombres y serpientes. Iconografía olmeca*, Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, Mexico City, 1996, p. 122.

his post-ego utopian poetics. At the same time, however, his post-ego desire was fulfilled through colonial high-culture spectacle. We carry the “History” we want to destroy glued onto our retinas. (History is a metastasis. It disperses. It obturates the doors of perception.) Many North Americans have no eyes. And have only images of other times. As if they have only the decade of the 1950s. A retail non-time existing in a pseudo-world. Nostalgia become the most convulsive horror.

In his essay “The Chinese Written Character as a Medium for Poetry,” the final version of which was edited by Pound, the sinologist Ernest Fenollosa set forth a horde of ideas. Olson would pillage these in order to make them his own, and with them define the nature of poetry, time-space, and, paradoxically, the Maya.

“Things are only the terminal points, or rather, the meeting points of action, cross-sections, so to speak, cut through actions, [photographic] *snapshots* [taken of them],” Fenollosa wrote.* His disquisitions about how this “transfer-ence of force” occurred within utterances prefigured what Olson would write three decades later in his speculations around the projective (1950). In the immediate environs of his journey to Mexico, Olson rethought—while wishing for his influence not to be too readily noted—the thesis of Fenollosa’s essay. (His attacks, we might say, against the grammar in Greek writing, in his 1951 essay “Human Universe,” originated in large part in the sinologist’s ideas.) When Olson arrived in Mexico and began increasingly to reflect on Mayan writing, he rethought it in terms that were enormously similar to those Fenollosa had utilized in order to comment on the pictorial nature of Chinese writing.

Olson, then, was not so much commenting on the Maya as dialoguing with Fenollosa (and Pound).

* *The Chinese Written Character as a Medium for Poetry: A Critical Edition*, Fordham University Press, New York, 2008, p. 82.

For example, GLYPHS. I begin to bear in. What I wrote to you, abt the glyph as verse, seems more and more true. As a matter of fact, perhaps more important (for me) than the study of Maya, living Maya, is this other thing, the study of the glyphs. For here—beyond everything—is the real increment, the exact same raise, for me, as those “poems” on the clay tablets of Sumeria... Here is ideogram in a state much more available than Chinese. Here it is, as it was, in this geography (ours). And by god if no one—no one—has seen the glyphs as what they are! They have all been so blinded by not knowing their “meanings” that they have missed the real point, that, in themselves as *images*, they tell, tell, tell!*

Olson strove diligently—his letter-writing with Cid Corman and Creeley bears witness to this—to create either a book about the art of Mayan glyphs illustrated with Hipólito Sánchez’s drawings or an exhibition that he argued would be as important as the Armory Show. What was it that sustained Olson’s interest in the glyphs? His interpretation of them as “design” or “graphics,” as a *medium to convert time into space*. It was the glyphs that led Olson to his subject matter: the notion of space-time among the Maya, a subject he had been carrying with him. Olson defined time precisely as a “load” to carry—from the time of his Melvillean explorations. According to Olson, the glyphs were proof that for the Maya, “...time, in their minds, was *mass & weight!*”† In a letter to Corman at the end of May, he wrote:

the art of the language of glyphs
IS

* *Charles Olson & Robert Creeley: The Complete Correspondence*, Black Sparrow Press, vol. 5, p. 91.

† *Ibid.*, p. 106.

motion in time on stone*

In his letter to Creeley on March 28, he declared:

for it strikes me, the principle behind all this is: *language as, root, graphic*: sound, not as time, but as object in space, as mass, to be pushed around, to be heard as things are eaten, as, in process, of the organism not the “mind” or “taste” or “aesthetics”... LANGUAGE AS STONE AND CLAY...a show, somewhere, of MAYA & SUMER together!†

As we have already seen—thanks to *Call Me Ishmael*—Olson formed part of the modern and post-modern tendency toward spatialization of time, one of the conditions of any imperialist formation. The function of poets is to create images of this spatialization-of-time; it is given to them to be the pantopians of the Oxident. It is given to poets to destroy time, to consolidate the notion of a total space. A “show” to get ether “together” with every-thing else.

Olson sensed that among the Maya he might encounter a topological concept of chronology—and the glyph, according to him, was the key. In the glyph, the future had become image. Time had become stone.

The problem Olson and other great modern and post-modern poets share is this: How to dispel time? How to transform events into accumulation? How to manufacture a space that might contain EVERYTHING? That is: *to avoid the disintegration of time*.

The poet is pantopian. Without the poet-pantopian there is no Empire.

* *Letters for Origin 1950-1956*, Albert Glover (ed.), Paragon House, New York, 1969, p. 55.

† *Complete Correspondence*, vol. 5, p. 109.

Olson, Whorf, and the Hopi Model of Time-Space

In more than one instance Olson cites Benjamin Lee Whorf as one of his key sources, though—in fine Olsonian tradition—with the infrequency and critique that are indispensable in order to diminish any visible debt. Fenollosa and Whorf are two of the writers who most heavily influenced Olson’s ideas. Together with Sapir, Whorf is famous for having claimed that structures of language influence our way of seeing the world. What we call *Reality* is a construction of our language. As Nietzsche and Wittgenstein knew, our grammar is our metaphysics. In an article from 1950—published in number 16 of the *International Journal of American Linguistics*—Whorf demonstrated that there are cultures that do not have words for what we Oxidentals call “time.” In “An American Indian Model of the Universe,” Whorf argues that the Hopi indigenous people have different notions of time and space, distinct from those of European origin. The idea of time flowing forward does not exist among the Hopi: “The Hopi language is seen to contain no words, grammatical forms, constructions or expressions that refer directly to what we call ‘time,’ or to past, present, or future. . . . Hopi language contains no reference to ‘time,’ either explicit or implicit.”* In accordance with the very tendencies of a modern mentality, Whorf understood the Hopi cosmovision to be significantly closer to a concept of space. According to him, it was not just that a notion of time as a flow moving through space did not exist among the Hopi, but also that space here is instead more closely related to a space that is shifting.

Translating Hopi ideas, Whorf claimed that instead of our division of a “time” in the past, present, and future, they consider that there are two realms. In one, which might be translated as the *manifest*—or “objective,” as Whorf says, pro-

* “An American Indian Model of the Universe,” in *Language, Thought and Reality. Selected Writings of Benjamin Lee Whorf*, John B. Carroll (ed.), Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Cambridge, 1956, pp. 57–58.

viding a glimpse of his residual positivism—the Hopi situate all that has been accessible to the senses, the physical history of the universe, all that we might call past and present, but without distinguishing between the two. Alongside the manifest, the Hopi maintain the existence of the *manifesting*—or “subjective”—where they locate everything we might classify as “future,” in addition to what exists in the heart-mind of people, animals, plants, and things. All of this is present, however, in seeds, expectations, images, or desires.

What is manifesting is already in the world. Though this is not expressed by Whorf, in this vision of the world, the *manifest* is nothing more than one phase in the realization of the *manifesting*. What Whorf also does not articulate, probably because he did not have sufficient information, is that the Hopi model of space-time is a variation on the model of the *quincunx*.^{*} The Hopi are yet another version of the same notion of time-space that originated in pre-Hispanic times and was shared by indigenous groups from Central America to North America. (I suspect this model of time-space is also shared by South American groups.) In this conception, space and time are not separated. They are the same process.

“Space” itself is not a container of events—as in Oxidental metaphysics—but rather “space” is produced by the processes that likewise produce the objective. “Space” is an effect of the unfolding of developments. Space rises from the center like smoke from the fire. Space is emergence.

* Whorf, of course, is conscious of the relationship of this notion to the traditional indigenous quadripartite model of the universe: “As far as space is concerned, the subjective is a mental realm, a realm of no space in the objective sense, but it seems to be symbolically related to the vertical dimension and its poles the zenith and the underground, as well as to the ‘heart’ of things, which correspond to our word ‘inner’ in the metaphorical sense. Corresponding to each point in the objective world is such a vertical and vitally INNER axis which is what we call the wellspring of the future. . . From each subjective axis, which may be thought of as more or less vertical and like the growth-axis of a plant, extends the objective realm in every physical direction, though these directions are typified more especially by the horizontal plane and its four cardinal points.” *Ibid.*, p. 62.

Are pantopia and quincunce the same thing? It is a valid question in a society that has not yet become aware that its greatest thinkers are pantopians and the word itself is a neologism and the concept of the quincunce is yet more strange...But the question, nonetheless, is indispensable.

Olson's vision of space—which is the vision of a significant number of modern and modern-post* poets—is similar to the Hopi vision, for instance. But only seemingly. In both models, time is abolished. But in the modern Oxidental model—especially in the model of North American poetics whose forefathers are Whitman-Pound-Olson—space is conserved as a fixed (imperial) receptacle where what is produced in the future is collected and where—and this is never lost from sight—“history” (linear time) has ceased and in some cases the very notion of “becoming” (the flow of time) has been negated. Ancestral cultures possessed more advanced notions than ours. Their notions negate ours; that of time, for instance, because their notions would seek to demonstrate the unity of all phenomena, accepting the cycles of alternation of light-darkness (heaven/underworld) and making clear that the separation of the one from the other that notions of past, present, and future cause to emerge in the everyday mind are false, as all entities are apparitions of the processes that give them form.

In the pantopian model, on the other hand, time is negated in order to preserve disconnected fragments. Time is broken in order for its constituent pieces to remain station-

* In response to a request to expand on his use of the term “modern-post,” Heriberto writes: “When I say ‘modern-post’ I implicate the so-called ‘post-modern.’ ‘Post-modern’ would mean a cultural product, agent or stage beyond the ‘modern,’ a description of something that has successfully surpassed the ‘modern,’ leaving it behind, going beyond it. So by saying ‘modern-post’ I mean to describe an entity—in this case a poet—that *desires* to go beyond the modern, because the modern in itself contains that desire. ‘Modern-post’ refers to entities still trapped in modernity, though probably in denial. Or the intense desire to be truly post-modern. Probably at this stage most of us are modern-post, that is, still-capitalist—wishing not-to-be.” (Trans. note)

ary, in order for its choice ruins to become fixed. Time is destroyed, but only in order to insure the containing condition of absolutized space. Consumer society developed the pantopia, as a “spiritual” avatar of its will-to-accumulate.

Olson called the pantopia and the will-to-accumulate the “will-to-cohere.” Within this model time is destroyed in order to *fill space with entities*.

Time has been changed into memory. And space, in its reconfiguration, has been transformed into the *reordering of memory*—that is, into *fascism*.

Moses of Yucatán

Unfaithful, erotically split, divided, labyrinthized by his mythomania, fantasizing, vacillating between his totemic patriotic loyalty to the United States and his compulsion toward a knowledge of the clandestine cultures of the world, ubiquitous bifurcated, deformed out of pure interbelittled disfragments, polyphonic excisions, and Janusian self-throat-slittings, Olson desperately hunted down a principle that might unite it all.

How to make it all cohere. How to build a co-here where everything existing is united. Olson’s “*will to cohere*” has only been understood in the dimension of coherence, of Apollonian integration; that is, of logic, of meta-recounting of atypical junctures, yet not in its dimension as a site, as pantopia, as co-space, *co-here* or *co-where*. What Olson sought was Melville’s and Whitman’s “America,” Pound’s “vortex,” Borges’s “Aleph” (but without jeers or apocryphy). Like Baudelaire’s dandy, Olson’s delirium had to do with perceiving everything and capturing it all in the memory of a possessive omninstant, the hunt for which would have neither lack nor blemish. Olson sought a law that might make the Co-Here possible.

threshold, this totalizing, pantopian project of Olson's must succumb like an infinitely fragile mirror, in which each piece or shard of the broken mirror shatters into other fragments charged with the same magic, as its curse has not been precisely an illustrious misfortune, but rather yet another of the same interminable sentences: with each fragment of the broken mirror there simultaneously takes place the tragicomic relapse of the whole image, of the reflection re-emerging complete, as in an impossible abolition of identity, which reappears complete in each chunk though each time it is more minuscule and with this cloning of everything, there likewise takes place its infinite and compulsory rupture. Olson set off to seek the principle that might unite everything precisely there—in writing—where everything is superimposition and apocryphal division, a multitude of countertongues, a panchronic gift of parallel Babels.

How to devour? How to bring together? How to produce an assembly? These were the questions that intrigued Charles Olson immediately before and during his actual time in Mexico, in 1951. The obsessive medusa ruled the inquiry that would occupy all his work: which principles should reign in the summa-poem?

In Mexico, Olson sought a principle that might unite the one with the other, the missing link in the chain of immediate ontologies, the synergetic methodology of the secret connection between one thing and another. Olson was operating in a world in which each thing was separated from the next by an abyss. In order to avoid the vertigo each point caused, Olson strove to trace the vertebra that runs through all entities, in order to turn it into a rod* for composing poems.

* Here Heriberto figures the vertebra as “a bone that can be imagined as a stick (and even as a kind of knife/sword/needle that might cut/run through things). I then relate it to ‘vara’ as in ‘wand’ (magic) and ‘measuring’ rod (to refer to meter/poetry).” These nuances are not present in English, where the sonic relationships between “vertebra,” “wand” and “rod” are merely a vague assonance; hence this note. (Trans. note)

Olson was not interested in composing a work made of separate, autonomous poems, because for him islands lacked connection. Olson's paradigm held Pound and Williams as center and hypostasis, as both seemed to him to be poets working within complete, intertwined worlds, not just with separate pieces. Olson was a novelist of poetry.

In a letter from March 8, Olson told Robert Creeley about the eclipse he had observed in Lerma, where, incidentally, he said his interest had been piqued by the fact that his mestizo and Maya neighbors would go out to see the eclipse, unlike in the United States, where, according to him, nobody gave a damn about going out to see eclipses. Olson recounted to Creeley that those "descendants of astronomers" used smoked mirrors, photographic negatives, or rolled-up newspapers, as if he wanted to tell Creeley that any object is telescopic and that there is a panoptic shadow over everything.

Olson was intrigued by the *methodology for encounter* of his teachers:

...Ez's* epic solves problem by his ego: his single emotion breaks all down to his equals or inferiors (so far as I can see only two, possibly, are admitted, by him, to be his betters—Confucius, & Dante. Which assumption, that there are intelligent men whom he can outtalk, is beautiful because it destroys historical time, and

thus creates the methodology of the Cantos, viz, a space-field where, by inversion, though the material is all time material, he has driven through it so sharply by the beak of his ego, that, he has turned time into what we must now have, space & its live air

* Olson refers here to Ezra Pound. One of Pound's foundational ideas is that "An epic is a poem including history," in *ABC of Reading* (1934), New Directions, New York, 1987, p. 46.

((secondary contrast is Joyce, who, it comes to me now, did not improve on Duns Scotus Erigenus, or the Irish of the time the Irish were the culture-bosses, what was it, 7th-9th century, or something: he tried to get at the problem by running one language into another so as to create a universal language of the unconscious. Which is, finally, mush & shit, that is, now. Not so, then, DSE or Irishers, for then Europe was, both in language & dream, of that order.

((((further thot: Joyce, the Commercial Traveller: the worship of IARichards*—by the same people, accurately enough, who mug Joyce—is more honest: that is, that this internationalizing of language is more relevant to commerce, now, than it is to the aesthetic problem.

(((((all this a better way to say, he, ENDER

the primary contrast, for our purposes is, BILL[†]: his Pat is exact opposite of Ez's, that is, Bill HAS an emotional system which is capable of extensions & comprehensions the ego-system (the Old Deal, Ez as Cento Man, here dates) is not. Yet

by making his substance historical of one city (the Joyce deal), Bill completely licks himself, lets time roll him under as Ez does not, and thus, so far as what is the more important, methodology, contributes noth-

* I. A. Richards is an English linguist. Together with C. K. Ogden—the promoter of Basic English, a vocabulary of 850 words for international use—Richards is the author of the celebrated treatise *The Meaning of Meaning*, the first edition of which was written between 1910 and 1923.

† Olson here refers to William Carlos Williams. “Pat” refers to the poem *Paterson*, an extended epic poem that focuses on life in the city of that name.

ing, in fact, delays, deters, and hampers, by not having
busted through the very problem which Ez has so
brilliantly faced, & beat

Which ought to—if my mouth had words in it, this
morning—bring you to see why I hammer, on, nomina-
tion, thus:

each of the above jobs are HALVES, that is,
I take it (1) that the EGO AS BEAK is bent and busted
but (2) whatever it is that we can call its replacement
(Bill very much a little of it) HAS, SO FAR, not been
able to bring any time so abreast of us that we are in this
present air, going straight out, of our selves, into it

You see, I followed you, a bit back, when, in responding
on Tarot & Maya, you sd, sure, & it's whatever you or
anyone makes hot, is hot. Of course.

& two: that, we already have both (1) the ego as respon-
sible to more than itself and (2) absolute clarity, that, time,
is done, as effect of work in hand

Perhaps, as I sd before, I am only arguing with myself,
that is, I am trying to see how to throw the materials I am
interested in so that they take, with all impact of a correct
methodology AND WITH THE ALTERNATIVE TO
THE EGO-POSITION*

Olson was interested in the principle of relation among
materials. He wished to come upon a method or rule that
might provide a foundation for the union of one word
with another, of one image with the next. Olson's search is
the search of a poet—that is, the hunt for a delusion. This
was very probably the Ariadne's thread that Mallarmé had

refused to track, the metaphysical coherence surrealism took up once more when it sought to encounter an abracadabra automatism in whose lock-picking anarchy words might be joined in accordance with the “true functioning of thought,” beyond syntax made false by rationalism. Olson was hunting for the most profound link, the profound bridge between one vocable and another, such that there would be no quirks in the weave.

To write individual poems was not his greatest aim, though Olson did write some (early) single poems. Olson wanted to create an epic work, like Pound’s. His question was how to organize such an epic, in accordance with which principles. His two references were Pound and Williams. Of course, the real reference of the *total poem* in North American poetry is Walt Whitman. If Olson failed to take him into account, it was because it was not until Allen Ginsberg’s work that Whitman regained bardic prestige among twentieth century North American poets. Olson cut short the U.S. history of the total poem because Whitman was considered amateur, feral, vulgar, unworthy. Even in his disregard of Whitman, we can see the ways that Olson was blinded by Pound. About Whitman, a young Pound had written, in 1909:

From this side of the Atlantic I am for the first time able to read Whitman...the only one of the conventionally recognised ‘American poets’ who is worth reading.

He *is* America. His crudity is an exceeding great stench, but it *is* America...He is disgusting. He is an exceedingly nauseating pill, but he accomplishes his mission.

Entirely free from the renaissance humanist ideal of the complete man or from the Greek idealism, he is content to be what he is, and he is his time and his people. He is a genius because he has vision of what he is and of his function. He knows that he is a beginning and not a classically finished work.

I honour him for he prophesied me while I can only recognise him as a forebear of whom I ought to be proud.*

Whitman organized materials and jammed them together, following his own pantheism, his poetics of enthusiastic paratactical erasure and re-drawing, in order to achieve a poem that might be a geography where incompatible cartographies could coincide, in a happy meeting of distances and dis-instances. A Whitmaniacal happiness gives coherence to the conjunction of mountains and soldiers, cities and plows. Though Olson may not have recognized it—attributing primacy to Pound—it was Whitman who established, in the context of North American poetry, that the poem was a *zone* more than a *time*. When Fredric Jameson[†] argues that in the late capitalist phase with its cultural logic, “postmodernism,” the predominance of the spatial over the temporal has come to the fore—according to him, the temporal paradigm predominated during the avant-garde era—he makes a monumental error, since *spatialization* is the fundamental element not just of Whitman’s and Pound’s poetry, but also, in general, of U.S. culture, from its very origins. (*The States-United is the dystopia of the Co-Here.*)[‡]

* “What I feel about Walt Whitman,” in *Early Writings: Poems and Prose*, ed. by Ira B. Nadel, Penguin Books, New York, 2005, p. 187.

† “...our daily life, our psychic experiences, our cultural languages, are today dominated by categories of space rather than by categories of time, as in the preceding period of high modernism,” in *Postmodernism, Or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, Duke University Press, Durham, 1990, p. 16.

‡ The original here reads: *Estados-Unidos es la distopía del Co-Aquí*—so more “accurately,” the translation might read: *United-States is the dystopia of the Co-Here*. However, the hyphenated phrase “estados-unidos” in Spanish emphasizes the idea that states are being united in a way that the phrase “united-states” does not, it seems to me, effectively achieve in English. Further, Heriberto and I were interested in extending an exploration of the phrasal inversions (“modern-post,” for instance) he employs as a way of simultaneously problematizing and expanding phrases that have

Having freed himself from *metrics*, Whitman freed himself from the poem understood as *temporality*. Free verse opens space. Bergsonian duration surreptitiously exchanged for pantopia. (Pantopia: absolute co-here; co- of all possible heres.) Whitman was the U.S. poet who initiated the national poem as space. Total place. Pantopia: space where All has been accumulated. Pantopia: panic topos. Starting with Whitman, North American poets would dedicate themselves to topology.

Whitman united through *celebration*. In the ode there is room for everything.

Pound, according to Olson, united through *ego*.

Pound would say he was gathering the “members of Osiris.”* For Pound, a poet should create a complete cosmos, to include us within it. For Olson, Pound’s criterion of conjunction was questionable. It was an egocentric, monadic, whimsical world; at the end of the day, a bohemian world. According to which principle did Pound join one thing with another? Olson responded, based on his I-centered taste, that elective anarchy seemed to Olson insufficient and arbitrary. Olson wanted a principle of congregation that might be practically scientific, logocentric. Referring to Dahlberg and Pound, Olson wrote Creeley: “What burns me, is, they never speak, in their slash at the State or the Economy, basically, for anyone but themselves. And thus, it is Bohemianism.”†

In Canto XCVII, Pound mixes—or to put it more aptly, crams together—Seneca and 1859, Roosevelt and von Humboldt, Greek and Chinese ideograms, his uncle William and Saint Thomas Aquinas, Latin and the gothic art of

become central to critical theorizations of poetics and post-colonialism.
(Trans. note)

* “I Gather the Limbs of Osiris,” *Selected Prose*, New Directions, New York, 1973, p. 19.

† *Selected Writings*, p. 84.

India—according to which principle? Whim.

Pound is a “genius.” Olson was upset by this individualism. Ironically, in a play on words around Pound’s phrase regarding the epic—word-play was a genre Olson criticized, paradoxically, for being overly whimsical—Olson said of Pound’s work that it was “History-plus-ego.”

What pleased Olson was that Pound united *everything* as a conquering of time because he manufactured a synchrony. The poem as a *place* for gathering. A berth, a port, yet in Pound a risky and baseless catharsis (discharge), according to Olson, while what he was seeking was a *certain catharsis*, a certainty of discharge.

The model of the poem as a pantopia—one that gathered a simultaneity of names, data, everything-ologies*—destroys historical time and does away with dichronics, the time that excludes one event from another, because in the *total place* of the modern poem, everything occurs in a zone where time, as a line, is no longer.

Chronology abolished in the gains of the panoptical landscape.

In Olson’s work, landscape is possession. (In Olson, “landscape” means what the gaze can possess, nature trapped, become *property*. “*Landscape*: ‘a portion of land which the eye / can comprehend in a single view’ // to bring the land into the eye’s view.”† This concept of landscape pertains to a logic of conquest, in which the gaze not only defines the land, but in addition comprehends it, from within its own enclosed boundaries. It is not a gaze that opens and accepts what has

* When I asked Heriberto about the term “*todologías*” in Spanish—inquiring if I was reading the term correctly as the “ology” of “everything” (todo = all or everything), he explained that it is not his neologism, but rather “a word created by a Mexican writer (Vasconcelos) that means ‘study of All/Everything.’ In Spanish, incidentally, “*todólogo*” (everything-ologist) is used ironically to describe someone who has ideas or opinions about everything.” (Trans. note)

opened, but a gaze that encloses and defines. It is the gaze of a solipsistic hunter, Bishop Berkeley, megalomaniacal idealism.) In Olson, landscape is *box*.

William Carlos Williams—"Bill," as Olson says—aided him in getting outside the Poundian ego, though his solution, Olson says, is (also) a failure. Williams fails because he opts for the same solution as Joyce. To cause the "*will to cohere*" to settle into place, now not within a brilliant, erudite, personal ego—like Pound's—but rather within a *city*. (In "The Gate and the Center," Olson addressed the fact that for the Sumerians, "a city was a coherence which, for the first time since the ice, gave man the chance to join knowledge to culture," and later he attempted to utilize the individual as a foundation: energy is larger than man. . . "Quickly, therefore, the EXCEPTIONAL man, the 'hero,' loses his description as 'genius'—his 'birth' is mere instrumentation for application to the energy he did not create. . .") Olson remained trapped between these two criteria (individual, city), at times rejecting both entirely—as in his Mexican letter to Creeley—accusing them of being "modern" methodologies that needed to be replaced by their *post*. And it is important not to lose sight of the fact that the primary reason Olson rejected these "methodologies" was his desire to encounter one of his own, distinct from that of his predecessors, from whom he wished patriarchally and heroically to distinguish himself, as he hoped to surpass them. In other instances, however, Olson, who was probably incapable of locating another, distinct foundation, appealed to concepts like "law" or "energy," thus finding a rhetorical strategy in order to justify the use of avatars of the "city" (modern) or the "individual" ("energetic") as a basis for the *will to cohere*. Olson's work is a pendulum-swing.

Open parenthesis: Olson's idea that Joyce chose the local, a city, as a central storehouse, was not shared by Pound.

The latter, in his celebrated review of *Dubliners*, clarified that “Good writing, good presentation can be specifically local, but it must not depend on locality. Mr Joyce does not present ‘types’ but individuals.”* Joyce chose not only a city, as Olson recalled, nor an individual, as Pound recalled and Olson wished not to recall; rather, in order to locate his total work—Dublin—he also chose a *day*. This temporal facet of *Ulysses* is an element the author of *Maximus* did not want to recall, perhaps because he did not perceive it—Olson is, to put it one way, chronophobic—though he gave Williams as much of a thrashing as Joyce, because it seemed to Olson reactionary to choose a city (in 1951), and particularly in Williams, of whom he declared: “Bill, with all respect, don’t know fr nothing abt what a city *is*.”† Williams had a pastoral idea of the North American city—an idea that was almost premodern.

Pound, in other words, took recourse in his subjective authority:

Pound’s methodology obliterates chronology. Selected individuals and events of the *Cantos* exist simultaneously in an eternal present...Pound’s triumph over time occurs in Pound’s own mind...But the limitation of Pound’s vision is no less real: the actual, the historical, the geochemical, and the mythological come together in Pound’s mind. In Olson’s judgment Pound’s ego assumes too much responsibility; it brings to coherence the elements of experience Olson wanted to cohere, but it does so through the vision of one man, a vision that lacks a firm-enough anchor in the contemporary objective reality outside of Pound’s mind...Pound’s vision is too much his own; his idiosyncratic interpretations of history

* “‘Dubliners’ and Mr. James Joyce,” in *Literary Essays of Ezra Pound*, ed. T. S. Eliot, New Directions, New York, 1954, p. 41.

† *Selected Writings*, p. 84.

and socioeconomic problems, for instance, are finally not shareable.*

Pound was a writer convinced that the individual is the *paideuma*—“the spiritual essence of culture in general,” according to the definition of his beloved Frobenius. For the organizer of the *Cantos*—Nietzsche would have agreed with Pound—the individual is the figure who provides order and all eras and places are subordinate to the editing of one man, the only determinant. “Civilization is individual. The truth is the individual,” he writes.†

Writing to Creeley, Olson said he wanted a civilization beyond individual creation, a civilization whose form might not be the imaginary work of the (aristocratic) Poundian individual. Olson desired an objective criterion, a positive criterion. He desired that the principle of union of things and words in the poem might obey not the subjective ego, and even less so the order that the choice of the *local* might suggest—as in Williams’ *Paterson*; rather, he desired that the elements of the poem might be unified by irrevocable forces and that the reuniting form of the poem would follow Universal Laws.

Olson failed.

He had come to Mexico precisely with the hope of encountering such universal laws, inscribed in Mayan glyphs. Olson came to Mexico seeking the central key to his work, a key that would provide order to long poems, beyond *ego* or *city*. But Olson was not able to decipher the metaphysical principles he wanted to uncover in ancient cultures and the “cosmos.” After five months on the Yucatán Peninsula, Olson moved on. His presence

* Robert von Hallberg, “Toward a Poetics for the Long Poem: Olson’s Relations to Pound and Williams,” in *Charles Olson: The Scholar’s Art*, pp. 47–48 and 51.

† *Literary Essays*, p. 355.

was required at Black Mountain and he agreed to return. By the time of his April 14th letter to Creeley, Olson confessed that it didn't matter much to him—his literal words: “I feel as though I'd never care a fuck”—if he never again heard anything more about “Mayan things.” His said that his thirst for knowledge of these spaces had receded. Olson returned to the United States on July 5th on his way to Black Mountain College. There, however, he claimed to have discovered all the Mayan secrets. He read to his students—we know this from his biographer, Tom Clark—from the draft of the essay he had penned during his Mexican sojourn, “Human Universe,” which he sometimes thought should be titled “The Laws.” The unforgettable opening of “Human Universe” is “There are laws, that is to say, the human universe is as discoverable as that other.”*

Olson, having just recently returned from Mexico, boasted about his triumphs to his unconditional audience of disciples:

Expounding his antihumanistic corrective code for his faithful writing-student followers (“my tribe”), Olson would now take on not only the textual emphases but the teaching style of some ancient patriarch, oracular, dogmatic and utterly committed to the significance of his message...As he lectured he produced speedy notational hieroglyphs graven not on stone but on slate, a snakelike trail of blue-chalk scribblings that uncoiled across and beyond a white chalkboard...Hypochondriac as always, he permitted no windows to be opened while he taught...A Moses come back from the Yucatán...†

The powers Olson claimed to hold were empty. He

* *Collected Prose*, p. 155.

† Tom Clark, *op. cit.*, p. 204.

claimed to possess a knowledge that, in reality, he could not expurgate. Olson could not suckle at the breast of Mayan stones. Nonetheless, he claimed to have extracted the deepest knowledge. If Olson came to Mexico it had been specifically to move beyond Pound. His North American critics had not paid sufficient attention to this undeniable fact. The two essays he worked on in the Mexican context, “Human Universe” and “The Gate and the Center,” address precisely the search for *another methodology for uniting* beyond the ego (Pound) or the city (Joyce and Williams).

The proof of Olson’s categorical failure is that, despite his announcement—as Moses of Yucatán—that he was familiar with the Laws of the Human Universe, that he had surpassed the paradigms of the Ego and the City, Olson based his principal work—and there is practically unanimous consensus among critics about which work this is: *The Maximus Poems*—around Maximus, the voice of a sort of superman—like Meta-Pound!—and around the city of Gloucester—like Williams’ Paterson!

In his master work, Olson followed the path of Pound’s ego and Joyce-W.C.W.’s city. In order to create unity, he chose precisely the two errors he pointed out to Creeley in his epistle. Olson was the summa of what he himself considered to be the two greatest wandering souls. Olson remained within a patriarchal tradition. He crowned it. His greatest poem is driven by the ego and by the city. Olson’s Mexican journey failed. The stone remained unintelligible.

Olson’s Failure, Olson’s Sixth Sense

Olson failed in Mexico because he did not have the tools necessary to understand what he had come to understand. He failed, simply because he was not sure what it was he wanted to understand. And when he was close—suspecting that what Mayan culture could offer him was its notion of

time-space—that is, when he was close to beginning an exploration around ideas of the kinh and the quincunce, he did not persevere. He wished to be faithful to his vacillations. He did not research the meaning of Quetzalcóatl. He imitated Lawrence and improvised. He did not observe the glyphs. He transcreated Fenollosa. He did not investigate the kinh. He overstepped Whorf.

What blinded Olson was precisely the *will to cohere*. Not to be able to forget. To bring to one culture what originated in another.

What Olson did not understand is that the space he believed to be absolute was also directed toward its dissolution.

What Olson did not understand is that space and time are two phases of the same disintegration.

And, nonetheless, he and the Maya truly had something in common: Olson and the Maya were obsessed with *legislation*.

Certainly, there was one area where Olson did not err, some sixth sense which guided him despite his vacillations: Mesoamerican civilization shared an imperial idea of time. I define an imperial idea of time as an idea in which time is considered to be space:

Our recent discoveries suggest that a remarkable amount of Mesoamerican ideology was incorporated into the broader aspects of the design of their cities... We have identified an element of Mesoamerican ideology that was incorporated in the general design...and in the relationship between their structures. Periods of time that form part of the calendar, like, for instance, the solar year, the ritual calendar, and the cycle of Venus are represented as distances on the land. Measured time has come to be measured space...It will be interesting to see whether sites such as Tula or Tenayuca reflect simply a direct imitation of Teotihuacán, or whether

they reflect the same principle we've seen in Monte Albán and Teotihuacán, wherein time is expressed as space.*

To convert time into space, to imagine the pantopia. I have wanted to study “Olson” by way of these pages, because in Olson the North American *empire* is hooked to the pre-Hispanic *empire*; he is the incidental chain linking various pantopias. The Maya,

(w)ithout a doubt are the only people in the world who have deified not just time in general, but also each of the periods of which time consists. They conceived of time simultaneously under the rubric of cycles, as a succession of phases which fit together one within the other, and as an infinite duration in the past and the future.†

The Maya traced a relationship in stone between *time* and *writing*. They were the *pueblo* who transformed time into a stone future. Sun, fixity of incandescence.

That is a similarity we ourselves share as well, though time in our thinking has not become stone only, but also image, image which—like openwork stone—unleashes memory. But unlike the stone of registry, the image, in its phantom-like persistence convened out of the Negation of Nothing—a hole open to the void, extraction from within what has been nihilized—in its condition of evanescence once again topples toward its grave immateriality desiring forgetfulness.

But the Maya detained this *will toward amnesia*, which arrives quickly following the manifestation of the *will toward*

* *Tiempo sagrado, espacio sagrado: Astronomía, calendario y arquitectura en Monte Albán y Teotihuacán*, Ramón E. Peller and Marcus Winter, Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia, Mexico City, 2001, pp. 1 and 16.

† Jacques Soustelle, *Los mayas*, Fondo de Cultura Económica, Mexico City, 1996, p. 183.

cohesion. Further, they avoided the total death of a cycle, its extinction, by linking it with another. Thus they conceived the immortality of the One.

They initiated the spatialization of time. Time = writing. A conception that does not only modify what (we) understand as time, but also what we understand as writing.

For the Maya, time was a ray, a petroglyph, a groove in which the flow of time was connected to another groove connected to another groove. Time was not just the flow but also the rivers in which the flow moved upstream. Thus time is the rain and the channels in this rock.

Theory of the Quincunce

In its primary meaning, the quincunce is the cosmogram that demonstrates the intersection of the vertical and the horizontal at one point: the “center” or “heart.” Out of this intersection the four paths of the world—time-space—emerge. (The central point at which underworlds and heavens coincide, as we have already seen, is understood as Quetzalcóatl.) The quincunce is a picto-theory of the origin of reality.

Of the origin of the world.

Of the origin of humanity.

And of the origin of each phenomenon (image or object).

The Spanish presumed that they were dealing with only one kind of map. In reality, the quincunce, more than a cartography of the physical, though its structure served to provide some order to the use and comprehension of territorial space, was not a matter of the bidimensional.* And

* “*The quincunce is a holographic vision of the plane, the four directions and the center which is the point of intersection of the vertical axis with the horizontal plane or Tlaltícpac...* The multiple divisions that seem to unfold in Mexica sculpture respond to a holographic intuition of the

above all it was especially not a model that referred exclusively to the macro elements of the world—that is, the form of the world or the relationship between the underworldly and the celestial. Rather, the quincunce alludes to general phenomenology, from the micro to the universal.

The quincunce has to do fundamentally with a *model of explanation for how phenomena bio-psychically germinate*—from human gestation to the mental processes that make internal spiritual renewal or intellectual creation possible—and, at the same time, the quincunce is a metaphorical description of the process contained within the becoming-of-beings.

The quincunce is a model for how phenomena are produced. A model that synthesizes the processes by which reality gestates and appears.

If there is something that should be understood about time-space from pre-Hispanic models it is that these models involve allusions to a range of cycles. The quincunce—or kinh, among the Maya—are forms of representation that do not refer solely to an object but rather to various objects. The quincunce is a representation depicting what various cycles have in common—whether internal, cosmic, animal, spiritual, astronomical, perceptive, or mood-related.* The

universe, which codifies and decodifies the total image through multiple foldings and unfoldings executed through the demolition of planes... The development of folded and unfolded images according to geometric codifications *implies an integration of time and space*... What is most important in the formal, synthetic system of Mexica sculpture is the geometric codification implicit in the folds and unfoldings, because it illuminates *essential laws of universal structuring*...” (italics mine) in Iliana Godoy Patiño, *Pensamiento en piedra. Forma y expresión de lo sagrado en la escultura mexica*, Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, Mexico City, 2004, pp. 150–151 and 153.

- * “The question of how and why a period of 260 days was chosen for the divinatory cycle is much contested. Common answers include: (1) that this cycle was simply created by a permutation of its subcycles 13 and 20, both of which are important numbers in Mesoamerican thought; (2) that the 260-day period is the interval between zenithal transits of the sun near the latitude 15° North; (3) that a double *tzolkin* (520 days) equaled three eclipse half-years; and (4) that 260 days equaled nine lunations, each consisting of slightly less than 29 days—or the same number of months

indigenous language functions in this way all the time—traditionally defined by us as “mythic” or “allegorical,” and perhaps also understood as *synesthetic*, insofar as it requires the participation of various senses in order to be understood. Both the quincunce and the Mayan model of kinh—and other of their linguistic structures—took on the given form for representing various cycles of the macro and the micro, the external and the internal, suggesting that every circle is concentric. Every event is the spiraling conch of every other.

The Mayan conception of time, incidentally, might originate with the body.*

In the Oxident, the equivalent of the quincunce would be metaphysics + ontology + physics. Though in comparing two cultures it is only possible to manufacture monsters or kitsch in order to understand what Oxidentals might do so as to execute a representation analogous to that of the quincunce, we might imagine a model of the atom that could potentially be simultaneously a representation of general parthenogenesis alongside a world map and diagram of the psyche.

In other words, the quincunce metaphorically describes which phases, processes, or laws reality obeys.

It is the link between the external and the internal.

It is the series of patterns or cycles things follow.

a woman is pregnant. J. Eric S. Thompson specifically attacked this last view... Nevertheless, Momostecans as well as Maxeños (the people of Chichicastenango) explicitly offer the period of human gestation as an explanation for the 260-day cycle... a human model for the divinatory calendar is quite consistent with the explicit connection, in the larger divinatory system, between the external cosmos and the internal human microcosm,” in Barbara Tedlock, *Time and the Highland Maya*, University of New Mexico Press, Albuquerque, 1982, p. 93.

* “This so-called *vigesimal* system probably originated from the primitive habit of counting digits on both the hands and feet of the ancient Maya merchant... Given the astronomical, numerological and biological coincidences, there is the feeling that, regardless of its origins, the number grew to be significant because the Maya recognized how manifestly it reflected so many of nature’s cycles,” in Anthony F. Aveni, *Skywatchers of Ancient Mexico*, University of Texas Press, Austin, 1980, pp. 138 and 151.

The quincunce is mandala, calendar, and cycle of experience; it is a description of the big bang and a rod scraping at a stone and causing sparks of fire to fly.

The quincunce is the series of cycles—twenty, according to these cultures—which follow one from the other every instant. The twenty cycles that make the transmutation of certain forms into others possible, as well as the appearance of each of them. And it is, at the same time, the description of the passage through the nine underworlds and the thirteen successive heavens.

The quincunce is the method for elevating ourselves spiritually and the inevitable destiny of beings.

The quincunce demonstrates the unity of space and time, as the forward movement of the meanings of pre-time combine with the inherent meanings of pre-space; together, in their interaction, they construct the phenomenon of the world and its occurrence-being.

The quincunce is Ometéotl.*

Of Nomadic Time

In pre-Hispanic Mexican thought there is a conflict between fusion and fission. Some tend toward a cosmivision that defines reality as singly-begotten. Other groups posit the functioning of various realities, a sort of hurricanic beginning of the world, in which time-space is interwoven, toward a configuration of realities that are separate from one another, each obedient to its own regime.

In this cosmivision, the notion of a Unique Reality is decapitated. And we should not forget that decapitation is one of the concepts that most frequently recurs within this ancestral way of thinking, as if to intuit that the thing

* Heriberto explains that Ometéotl is a reference to the principle of feminine and masculine that guides all of reality according to ancient Mexico (or “Aztec”) thought. (Trans. note)

decapitated multiplies its avatars, until they are irreducibly proffered one to the other, separated in advance.

Even among the Aztecs, despite their imperialist nature, we can find powerful traces of this pluralist conception:

Mexican cosmological thinking does not radically distinguish space from time: above all, it refuses to conceive of space as a neutral and homogenous medium, independent of the development of duration... According to this thinking, there is not one space and one time, but rather time-spaces in which natural phenomena and human events are embedded, and which are imbued with the very qualities of each place and each instant. Each “instant-place,” complexes of site and occurrence, determines in an irresistible and foreseeable way everything that will be encountered there.*

Here space and time are understood not as the site or the moment when events occur, but rather as the conditions that give form to events themselves. Thus one region possesses laws that are distinct from another's. They are two autonomous cosmos. This way of understanding the real originates in nomadic cultures. Displacement and factionalism provide these forms of existence with a multidimensional conception, in which we do not inhabit one world, but rather an infinity of worlds, each one sovereign unto itself, separate. This is what I refer to above as “hurricaneic.”

Let's imagine various hurricanes, each determining in its interior, in its tug, the form in which events will occur inside it, each distinct, thanks to the intestinal movement of its force. Each hurricane would have its own world and despite its apparent accompanied advance, each hurricane would have its own laws. This tribe of hurricanes is a model

* Jacques Soustelle, *El universo de los aztecas*, Fondo de Cultura Económica, Mexico City, 1996, pp. 174-175.

similar to the ideas Mexican nomadic cultures held in relation to themselves. A tribe was a pack of unique, separate worlds.

The very goal of these cultures was to avoid falling into the trap of common sense, the superficial structure of which proclaimed the illusion of a shared reality, a mutualism, which in truth was non-existent.

The Huicholes...do not delimit a territory more or less focused around a stable center, but rather time itself moves, is dynamic, throughout various wanderings... movement does not take place in space and time, but rather movement generates spaces and time...Space increases and decreases in accordance with the action of the wanderers.*

Among Mexican cultures, despite their growing sedentarism, this ancient idea perseveres.

It might be quite useful to break with the linearity of our preconceptions of the origins of civilization, a linearity which normally announces itself as an overcoming of nomadism, toward a supposedly superior state, one identified with civilization. It may very well be that nomadism had to do with a phase which, in some cases, reappears in order to counteract civilizing forces and their implicit *monotopia* and *monochrony*. Common sense and Science might direct us toward the formation of mental *symploke*, a principle of unification that extreme nomadic cultures, with their belief in a radical plurality of realities seek to impede completely. (Pierre Clastres, for example, alleges that war—in tribal societies like those in the Amazon—functioned to insure dispersion, preserve independent law, and avoid annexation and the formation of a single State. For Clastres, the

* Ingrid Geist, "El espacio-tiempo huichol" in the magazine *México Indígena*, Instituto Nacional Indigenista, no. 16-17, 1991, p. 65.

goal of primitive society was to maintain wars that might prevent the development of a State.) Pluralism was so deeply ingrained in their structure that the very notion of interior life was at the very least verticillate, when it wasn't entirely anti-monic, as it was among the Rarárumi—erroneously called Tarahumaras—who sustained a belief in the existence of a range of diverse souls in contrast to the interior of the body.*

Monism arrived with the Empire, just as it arrived, actually, in Greece, at the hands of Socrates-Plato, preceded by (pre-Socratic) cosmovisions, according to which the plural is real.† What Plato and Plotinus, Kant and Hegel were in relation to the Oxident, so, in many senses, were the Aztecs in relation to our context—and above all, the Maya, with their unified concept of time-space, which still survives centuries later.‡ And, nonetheless, some elements of the nomadic model of time-space cannot be eliminated from our interpretation of the Maya vision, the most pantopic of our American civilizations.

It is not possible to think that the ancient Maya had

* “The Rarámuris conceive of human beings as composed of a body and one or more souls...The body itself is animated by the soul or souls that live within it...Each person possesses different souls distributed throughout the interior of the body. Each of these enjoys a certain autonomy; different souls may be in different places at the same time and may experience different destinies” in William L. Merrill, *Almas rarámuris*, Instituto Nacional Indigenista, Mexico City, 1992, pp. 138-139.

† Horst Matthai's research demonstrates that among pre-Socratic thinkers, there exists “a theory of infinite worlds...Heraclitus had in mind not only infinite worlds, *successive* but also *simultaneous* κόσμοι, but further, that each one of these contained within itself infinite numbers of those worlds” in *Heráclito el oscuro*, Universidad Autónoma de Baja California, Mexicali, 1997, pp. 135-136.

‡ “Time and space form a single structural primordial reality to modern Chamulas. For them, as for their Ancient Maya forbears, time and space are a unitary concept whose primary referent is the sun deity,” in Gary H. Gossen, *Chamulas in the World of the Sun: Time and Space in a Maya Oral Tradition*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, 1974, p. 30.

only one cyclical vision of time. Time is a category of social thought, and it seems to me difficult to imagine that the different strata of which Maya society consisted in the past should have developed social practices along the same spatio-temporal guidelines... All these practices reflect certain conceptions of time. The fact that the dead were buried in the interiors of houses or near homes, their insertion into the space of the living, reinforces the idea of a time which is cyclical (from generation to generation), closed (related to a single family), continuous (uniting the past with the present by way of the home and a certain sensation of stability), topological (associated with a fixed place) and long-lasting (obliging all descendants who had reached old age to move elsewhere)... This reevaluation of the concept of time allows us to divide Maya society into two basic social classes: the class that controlled the past and were keepers of historical memory and the class that lacked a particular personal history. By virtue of the fact that times are organized and structured collectively, their conceptualization depended on the social status of those who would provide time with a particular meaning. Therefore, in Maya society the concept of a fixed time which occurred naturally did not exist; time was always an aspect of local culture, and depending on the context, according to different social strata, different ideas of time came into play.*

As if what was taking place were to refuse to live according to one single law, anarchizing itself from any deterministic symplek, from any attempt to govern according to one single principle. Among the Maya, this struggle between different models of time was exalted until it became the distinctive feature of this *pueblo*: to think of time infinitely.

* Stanislaw Iwaniszewski, "Ideas sobre el tiempo en la sociedad maya," in the journal *Arqueología mexicana*, vol. VIII, no., 47, Mexico City, January-February, 2001, pp. 52-53 and 55.

A Mayan Theory of Time: KINH Structure

The great men of Athens would not have felt out of place in a gathering of Maya priests and rulers, but had the conversation turned on the subject of the philosophical aspects of time, the Athenians—or, for that matter, representatives of any of the great civilizations of history—would have been at sea. No other people in history has taken such an interest in time as the Maya.*

Thompson was not exaggerating. No group dedicated such effort to the “abysmal problem of time” as Maya culture, inheritor and creator of the highest concepts that have yet been elaborated regarding time.† As Cardoza y Aragón have said, “The Greeks are the Maya of Europe.”‡ No civilization like theirs, including our own, has attempted to dominate to such an extent the knowledge of what occurs. Many cultures have imagined the Eternal Return. Only the Maya dedicated their entire existence to establishing the laws that determine the day-to-day and instant-to-instant functioning of the Eternal Return.

“KINH” was the principle of Mayan divinity. Except it is necessary to remember that in ancient Mexican cultures, “god” signified *process*. All the gods in the pre-Hispanic pantheon are the unfolding of a single concept.§ Let us

* J. Eric S. Thompson, *The Rise and Fall of Maya Civilization*, University of Oklahoma Press, Norman, 1973, p. 137.

† Jorge Luis Borges, “El jardín de los senderos que se bifurcan,” in *Obras completas*, Emecé, Buenos Aires, 1974, p. 479.

‡ Luis Cardoza y Aragón, *El Río. Novelas de Caballería*, Fondo de Cultura Económica, Mexico City, 1996, p. 203.

§ “The multitude of gods that appear on the calendars seems to be in reality one single figure that changes according to the time and space it occupies, just as human creatures change in different phrases of their lives,” in Laurette Séjourné, *Cosmogonía mesoamericana*, Siglo XXI, Mexico City, 2004, p. 154. The “gods” are the descriptions of each transformation

not forget that in the beginning there was Ometéotl. The dual-lord. His two manifestations are Quetzalcóatl and Tezcatlipoca. Quetzalcóatl corresponds to the encounter of the forces-of-above with the forces-of-below, from the perspective of ascent. Of how the force-of above goes down and how the force-of-below goes up. And Tezcatlipoca corresponds to descent in general. Tezcatlipoca is the journey to the underworld.* (Quetzalcóatl and Tezcatlipoca are doubles; they are one and the same.) And when Ometéotl—the one who lives according to his own law, the one who exists for himself, the one who is all gods simultaneously—manifests a friction within the duality of the bright and the dark, like the rod in friction with the rock, fragmentation is produced.

Fundamental undivided reality (Ometéotl) becomes duality (Quetzalcóatl and Tezcatlipoca) and from the encounter of these opposites-doubles it is not a synthesis that occurs but rather “flaming water”—tremendous energetic process. Opposites have collided and from that collision—not from their synthesis, but from their living

of the universe and of personality, of the atomic and that which pertains to earthlings, of the solar and the spiritual. Each “god” is a concept that defines a phase of a process. Each “god” is one stage in the totality of becoming.

- * The journey to the underworld, in pre-Hispanic cultures, is symbolized through the figure of the dog. Thanks to the fact that the dog descends, the light appears in the form of a bird. Humans were formed in a cave. Historically and uterinely. And in order for a subject to become a creator, that subject must once again enter into their inferno. And must hit bottom and survive it and be reborn, free of any alien law: family, society, culture. The subject must be freed from any empire that is not their own. Of the infernal origin of the light, Artaud writes “...the fall it must experience in order to rediscover in solid and opaque form the expression of light itself” (in “The Alchemical Theater,” in *The Theater and its Double*, Grove Press, New York, 1958); unfortunately he himself, having come to Mexico in search of a medicinal science, had too little patience and too much arrogance to be able to understand what he intuited so powerfully. Genetically and biographically, Artaud fit the profile of a shaman. His unconscious led him to become one. Unfortunately, his flight did not quite soar into the sky. He did not manage to get away from the underworld. Nonetheless, few Oxidentals have known it better than he did.

crash—emerges what we know as *reality*. The world is the product of the struggle between two forces. All objects, phenomena, ideas, sensations, all things, space, and time are made by the struggle between the two elements that make up Ometéotl.

“Kinh.” This Mayan concept has been translated as “sun,” “day,” “time.” The Maya divided the future into growing cycles. *Kines* are the days. *Uinales* are the cycles of twenty kines. *Times* the cycles composed of 360 kines. A *katún*, a cycle composed of twenty tunes (that is, $360 \times 20 = 7200$ days). And the *baktúnes*, 20 katunes (that is, $360 \times 20 \times 20 = 144,000$ days).

“Sun” should be understood in its astronomical dimension and in its symbolic dimension. We, the Oxidentals, define the symbol as the greatest rupture. A sublime and rudimentary desire to represent the infinite. In pre-Hispanic cultures, the symbol was understood as the obvious unity of the elemental with the secret. *Kinh* was the sun and it was the sun and its metaphors.

“Sun” here means the star that provides the natural force activating the cycles of life on the planet. Seed of energy. And it is the case that the sun is the seed of fire of which we are the fruit. And when death comes we will be seeds of sun.

And “Sun” also means *apparition* or “actualization.” The latter—probably—is the most relevant (conceptual) translation of *kinh*. What the Maya wanted to say with the term *kinh* was *how the real is actualized*.

“Kinh” means cycle. And the series of cycles that make up what is to come. Each cycle was a deity.

The time of the Maya was astronomic—we should not forget that they were the greatest astronomers of antiquity—and it was a psychological-spiritual time. Here knowledge is allegorical.

What has stood out about *kinh* is its chronological element. But I think its spiritual and physical element is more relevant. *Kinh* refers to the route of transformation of the

soul, to its journey through “underworlds” and “heavens.” (That which deep psychology studies.) And it refers to the structure of energy-matter. (The very same thing physics deciphers, in our time.)

Kinh is the symbol of the interrelation of time-space. It is the proprioceptive movement that founds and forges space and time. (We should not forget that time is an attribute of kinh, but so is consciousness, and space, and matter.)

Kinh is the description of how the appearance of events functions. (For that reason, the system of kinh may be used as a method of divination.) This esoteric knowledge described the astronomical influences—reasons explaining how phenomena—from climactic to intimate—occur and which causes originated in the microworld—the state of internal composition of matter and energy: which relationships existed between what is/occurs and the Totality, the micro Totality and the macro Totality, the (undivided) Totality.

Kinh is the phenomenology of the cycles the world fulfills at each instant so as to manifest itself as “world.”

Kinh is composed of periods. As far as we know, the minimal unity of these periods are the *kines*. There are twenty of these. (Graphically, each is represented by a glyph.) Each earthly day does not only contain the influence of a god. Each day is a god, as we have said. Each day fulfills, in and of itself, a process of (trans)formation. Thus, the Maya developed an almanac by which to know which force might be favorable or unfavorable each day.

However, and we should not forget this, it was not only the influence of the corresponding kinh that each day suffered—enjoyed, but also the influence of the uinal (“month”), tun (“year”), katún and baktún to which it pertained, as well as to other cycles measured by the Maya (the vague year with 365 days or the periods of Venus, for

example). The wise dedicated themselves to recognizing and measuring the factors—the kinesthesia of the kinh, to so speak—that determined events.*

Long story recounting the calculation of a wait. Each time the melodramas were greater. It is death that awaits me. It is the renaissance or return. It is the light flowing out of a crab. It is the burning water it generates. I am the seed of another life. The knowledge of pre-Hispanic cultures—from Ráramuri rites to the *Popol Vuh*—has to do with how the earthly animal rises through thought and language to become a solar being. Each pre-Hispanic culture is a different methodology to achieve this trans-formation.

Kinh is a metamorphosis and development of the quincunce. It is its unfolding.

If the quincunce is the general model of the world—the base-cycle—the system of kinh is how that cycle transmigrates within itself.

Time, Memory, and Empire

In their belief that the same recurring forces acted through all our days and through all the cosmic ages, the Maya had set off on a hunt for Laws. It is they—and not the Greeks—

* “...as the ruler of each katún wielded the same influences each time a katún returned, history was expected to repeat itself in cycles of 260 years. Accordingly, if the priest looked up what had occurred at previous appearances of a given katún, he had a picture of what would happen when that katún returned. Details would vary, but in broad outline events would follow the established pattern,” Thompson, op. cit., p. 141. One part of the kinh system might be based on minute records that had been developed by other generations of priests. The occurrences and tendencies of each day might have been incorporated into that priest’s systems by memory: thus forming a mix of science based in observation of society and nature, and a corpus of theories, speculations, intuitions and predictions yet to be verified. The Maya were obsessed with resolving all the circuitous traces of the future. This is clear, though it destabilizes many Oxidental understandings, that Maya astronomy could only have been developed after many centuries spent gathering observations and mathematics.

who are our closest forerunners. It was the Maya who were the first truly to observe the Empire.

The structure of time, for them, was poetically represented as sacred porters who carried a “load” through the future-to-come.* The load was carried on the back and sustained by a harness across the forehead.

This image cannot be incidental. For them, the back signified the past. The harness across the forehead signified that we carry the weight of the past forward, through our minds. The Maya, then, were a civilization, like ours, based in memory.

A civilization of predestination and of archive.

The nomadic shamans became scientist-priests. Men of the archive. The Maya sought to control everything. Above all, the passage of time. Even the palpitation of the blood was under inquiry in their intimate laws, perhaps because the blessed tragedy of existence was considered by them to be a heaven of hard stone, a land that with each step revealed itself to be a cloud vanishing. The Maya lived in a ferocious and beautiful world in which each law was an angel that helped achieve an understanding of the calculations of cold death, the brilliance of the burning sun; to know why it is we die, to understand the form of time was the greatest con-

* “As the unity of time was conceived as a load that needed to be transported for a certain distance along the path, durations could be easily expressed in terms of distance... Certainly the notion of the passing off of the baton among porters of time is the spatial equivalent of the temporal notion of a period of time... Not all porters of time were relieved of their load in all the resting places along the path to eternity, since the duration of a temporal period could be expressed in terms of a certain corresponding distance; the actual distance traversed by the path along which each porter of time must transport their load, depending on the length of the period they carried on their back. Given that the day is of a shorter duration than the year, the number carrying the period of a day (*kin*) received relief daily, while the porter of a year (porter of the period known as *tun*) must wait for 365 days to pass before giving over their load,” in “El hombre, la carga y el camino: antiguos conceptos mayas sobre tiempo y espacio, y el sistema zinacanteco de cargos,” in *Los zinacantecos. Un pueblo tzotzil de los Altos de Chiapas*, Evon Z. Vogt (ed.), Instituto Nacional Indigenista, Mexico City, 1992, pp. 356-357.

solation, the broadest of good fortunes. At each step—arid mortality, forest of anguish—the Maya thinker sought that music of the mind that is called *response*, twin knowledge of oppression, because to postulate the existence of a cosmos ruled by mutually concentric rings, by gears, is a response that is as lovely as it is terrible.

The laws imposed by each kinh were preserved. (During the course of a *uinal*, for examples, successive kinhs continued to amass, aggregating their effects on the future.) In the Maya universe, humans could only accumulate more legislation.

Among the Maya, the wise sought knowledge of the rules that patterned the kaleidoscopic face. They were not willing to allow that chance might exist in any world. As soon as even the suspicion of accident was glimpsed, they sought out a new norm. Every labyrinth might be redoubled by them, until it was returned to its form of a perfect celestial box, perfectly encapsulating understanding. The Maya people who plunged their eyes in the firmament did not seek to disappear without first having deciphered the laws that ruled over their own disappearance.

Time is not a linear flow, but rather a linked set of wheels. A circle of circles.

That was their response. A moon, which even in its waning, forms a ring with all other moons.

As if the clouds might be subtle stones that have no other purpose than to split off like other stones forming clouds.

Every circle is a law. People, in this cosmos, are subject to a multiple order, a series of laws—different calendars-of-legislation—which co-determine their existence, with cumulative effects. (Hegel never even dreamt of this multi-phenomenology! No European, ever, had devised such a web, an atrocity only possible among a people feverishly delirious from mathematics made of jaguar jade or the Xibalba of each instant.) The Maya, then, constructed a co-controlled system of time-space which in reality is a new path in relation to the

teachings of cultures that conceived of time-space as an autonomous region-period, as its own world.

A rough and winding authoritarian path, in the Maya-universe, the subject comes to be a *part*, and is no longer a Totality in itself. Like a bewildered Pascal, the Maya performed a kind of philosophical sorcery in order to become a bone in a stellar skeleton, in which they were only dust, in the end, a brief intense flash. It was the job of this part to decipher the Laws that ruled over them. This was their maximum wisdom. Splendid brightness for barely one omnivorous second. Multifarious, both the Maya and the Aztecs allow us to perceive a growing authoritarianism, a path quite distinct from other indigenous teachings, where the central teaching was to convert the individual into their own creator. That was therefore the essence of these thinkers: to poetically assert that the essence of beings can only be fulfilled when an exchange is possible thanks to our dark creative nucleus, our periodic neolight. This message can undoubtedly be heard in Mayan thought and at the same time seems diminished by their conception of time-space as the summa of interminable laws, like a spider web of constraints that time-space retains for its own functions, a cord to lash down all your questions.

Kinh is a system of infinite laws. Its government is never-ending.

Might it not be, perhaps, desirable to free ourselves from all these laws? To transcend them. All laws are yokes. All determinations are vassalage, slavery. Mexican pre-Hispanic thought—like Greek thought, Hindu thought, Chinese thought—possesses a splendid unity. And Mexican pre-Hispanic thought—like Greek thought, Hindu thought, Chinese thought—entails different positions, some of which are in conflict. Certainly Maya thought is a modification—innovation or decadence, however we want to see it—of other currents and indigenous theses about existence.

After all, the concept-of-concepts symbolized by the plumed-serpent had already existed from the time of the Olmecs and even, it seems, before then. The Maya were the very last, and waged revolt with every number, so as not to be a vacillating corpse or shipwrecked destiny. They made a proud attempt. Their mathematics were powerful, a war against erosion.

But even within this belated pre-Hispanic thought there exist signs that the goal of the most nocturnal of wisdoms was to liberate ourselves from all laws, to become autotelic. Upon executing the full journey through the four internal regions of the quincunce—which has to do with a representation, above all, of the psyche—the individual becomes lord-of-themself, obeying no law other than their own.

The quincunce, then, is the arena in which one wisdom battles another. The wisdom that seeks to liberate itself from any previously-determined law and the wisdom that desires to eternally etch its stone dogmas.

What we call *our contradictions* is the chaotic clamor of all the vast number of our ancestors. A demonic conjunction, without a doubt, immemorial impossibility and useless truth.

If we analyze the concept of Ometéotl/Tloque Nahuaque outside the monotheism which can easily imprison it if we are not careful, it is obvious that it does not have to do with the attribute of a single “god,” but rather with the culmination of a process accessible to any individual. The process does not refer to the origin of the cosmos—alluding to a supposed One God Creator—but rather to the process of the origin of the Sovereign Being.

This vision—typical, for instance, of the thinker Netzahualcóyotl—might signify that, unlike those who followed the model of *one* reality dominated by distinct “gods”/“laws,” in reality, all those “gods”/“laws” were the manifestation of a single being. This single being, in every case, bears relation to the singular individual, that individual

who, in and of themselves, contains everything within themselves already.*

Each individual might be *Tloque Nahuaque*. The figure of this absolute, autonomous “god” was the metaphor around the goal of illumination and obscurization. To become the figure governing over yourself, a self-sustaining being, outside any other law, outside any alien law, seemed to be the greatest goal. I am *Ometéotl*.

Which would contrast with the system of *kinh*, within which people are structured by a legion of infinite laws. These two tendencies might be reconciled, of course, but I think that were we to do so, we would adulterate the richness of Mexican philosophical thought. The Maya altered and recodified the philosophy of other indigenous cultures. Their objective: to conceive of a reality made up of *inescapable* laws.

The Maya revoked the liberty of each time-space, subjecting each of these to a General Law, a Plural General Law.

The very principle of the complex system of *kinh* is based in the desire for different models of time, different temporal-spatialities represented in different calendars to

* “Clavijero, for his part, when he addressed in his *Historia* the idea the ancient Mexicans had around the supreme being, translated *Tloque Nahuaque* as ‘he who contains everything within him.’ And Garibay, in turn, putting Náhuatl thought in terms closer to our own frame of mind, translated: ‘he who is joined with all, and with whom all is joined... the attribute... specifically was attributed to *Ometéotl*...’ In his *Historia Eclesiástica Indiana*, Mendieta... after making reference to the meaning of *Ipalnemohuani*, wrote: ‘And they also called him *Moyucoyatzin ayac oquiyoacux, ayac oquipic*, which means that no one created him or formed him, but rather he alone through his authority and his will did it all...’ With the goal of better understanding the brief Náhuatl text preserved by Mendieta, we will offer here a new translation of the passage, as exact as possible: *Mo-yocuya-tzin* is a word composed of the verb we already know, *yucuya* (or *yocoya*: to invent, to forge through thought); and the reflexive prefix *mo-* (one, to oneself). Joining these elements together, we find that the word *moyocoya-tzin* means ‘Lord who thinks or invents himself’... This is the supreme climax of Náhuatl philosophical thought,” in León Portilla, *La filosofía náhuatl. Estudiada en sus fuentes*, Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, Mexico City, 1983, pp. 166-167 and 169-171.

be made to agree—in a sort of *post-established harmony*—in order to subordinate them to a great totalizing project. It would not be impossible for the Maya to have inherited—from their own history and that of other *pueblos*—different models of time and then to convert those into the pieces of a larger universal clock. To locate in a single regime what had before remained separate, because it may very well be that time-space is separate from time-space, given that it is not one thing, but rather infinitely another. The Maya, however, sought to establish a single governing force over all times. KINH would be the system which would simultaneously allow the clear signs of a range of models of time—autonomous times—to be seen as well as the clear sign of their hegemonic systemization, their imperial attempt at *one center*.

The Maya linked together distinct nomadic times. What this civilization did was to interweave within a *system* what other cultures—principally nomadic cultures—conceived as a series of autonomous circles: different space-times that were separate from one another. If space-time is a world apart from all others within the nomadic model of time, the Maya—upon deciding to become a systematic society, a civilization—that is, a *civilization of co-control*—transformed multiple nomadic autonomous space-times into a chain of connected times.

For some cultures, space-time was plural. Each space-time was its own world, with its own laws. What the Maya did was to put all of those models of time, so to speak, within a single system, making them consecutive and simultaneously cyclical. The play made by the Maya was both brilliant and horrific.

The foundation of an empire is precisely this transformation of autonomous times into times hooked together. To turn nomads into systemized porters, working alongside other porters.

The future for them was a variation of the preterite. The

influx of baktúnes, katunes, tunes, uinales, and kines repeated all the cycles of cycles. All occurrences were echoes.

The Maya preserved the migratory structure of time and cloistered it within a living-mechanism that provided support for their calculations.

The Maya established a General Law, a sequence of United Times. They were the first truly to conceive, scientifically, a universal totalitarian image. And it is the case that the Maya, too, experienced their respective Oxident: their sun had corroded and they plunged once again into a profoundly deep night. KINH is the proof, simultaneously, of their zenith and of their west.

The Maya were the first *cybermnemics*.

English Word List: *denial / she / shit / Good American / skipper / wasteland / swap-meeting place / slap-happy / tiddley-winks / happy-hybrid / surfer / marine / crazy, stupido / fish / crazy-stupid / one-night-stand / the American / fast food / classics / fifties / New Eternity / already too late / snapshots / How to make it all cohere. How to build a co-here where everything existing is united. co-here / co-where / post (as a prefix) / will to cohere*

III.
NEOMEMORY
MODERNITY-POST
CYBERMNEMICS

We are the last “first” people.

—Charles Olson, *Call Me Ishmael*

Apocalypse Now (Redux)

The “American” dream is the dream of a new memory. From its poets to its industry of spectacle, from Whitman, Pound, and Olson to the Hollywood *blockbusters* both pre and post-9/11, at the center of the USAmerican imaginary is the dream of creating an artificial memory.

The idea of a general rewriting of the archives inhabits all of our civilizations. Theory, above all, beginning with the Hegelian concept of “History,” has been a theory of rewriting, that is, of *interpolation*, via concepts such as “bricolage” (Lévi-Strauss), “deconstruction” (Derrida), “palimpsest” (Genette), or “heteroglossia” and “carnivalization” (Bhaktin). Structuralism (from Saussure to Barthes) thought of society and language as a grand recombinatory system of *languages*, an *ars combinatoria* of arbitrary signs and reformulations of collective memory. From the thesis of Propp that Russian folk tales reorder a series of finite “functions,” a play of involuntary memory, a folkloric cryptomnesia, to the “intertextuality” of Kristeva, Oxidental theory has interpreted reality via *montage*, in other words, paratactic reordering, an anagram of Mnemosyne.

If the theorists mentioned above defined language and society as being composed of *machines of montage*, post-struc-

turalism (from Foucault to Deleuze) imagined language and culture as a more promiscuous combination of fragments. Both tendencies in the Oxident reimagined the *texture* as a collection of pieces. Modern theory and, above all, that of the twentieth century, is a “vision-ary” theory which starts from the central fantasy that culture is a vast memory that functions via its rewriting of itself, its *freak*, its *redo*, its *cut*.

Nevertheless, more than in cultural theory, it has been in cinema where this Oxidental fantasy has crystallized in its most splendid form. From collage and montage to the cut up and the schizo, the logics of organization in our era are deliriums of an apocryphal memory, made of snippets.

This hybrid memory is visible in the poetics of Olson and Pound, but it is in film where it is most clearly seen. Take for instance, *Total Recall* (1990) which is adapted from a short story by Philip K. Dick, “We Can Remember It for You Wholesale” (1966), and stars Arnold Schwarzenegger, who in 2003 would become governor of California as a result of a *recall*. In *Total Recall*, Quaid, a simple employee of a construction firm or a *guy-next-door* for the 21st century, contracts the ReCALL Company to have false memories (an “extra-factual memory” Dick would say) implanted of a vacation on Mars in order to save some money. However, the service fails (or doesn’t...) and Quaid finds himself amongst mutant Martians governed by a dictatorial system.

On Mars (or, better yet, *Maybe Mars*), Quaid recuperates the memory of his past life as Hauser, the head of security on the Martian planet. He remembers the existence of an ancient technology that can free oxygen into the Martian atmosphere and as a result liberate the “mutants” from colonial rule. *Total Recall* would be not only the implantation of a series of images of techno-memory in the actual U.S. population, but also a premonition of the confusions between reality and fantasy that occurred during the wars of Bush 1, Iraq 1, 9/11, Bush 2, and Iraq 2. At one and same

time, Quaid is Al-Qaida and Homeland Security.*

Vanilla Sky (2001) is a quick remake and *takeover* of the Spanish film *Abre los ojos* (*Open Your Eyes*, 1997) and an unacknowledged pastiche of Philip K. Dick, wherein Penelope Cruz *remakes*—in the remake—her original role. It is the story of *million-dollar Casanova* and *plastic-playboy* David Aames' (Tom Cruise) inability to distinguish between memo-reality and techno-fantasy. Cruise's character is a Jekyll and Hyde, who after an accident disfigures his *clean-cut* face and damages his memory, confuses the (exotic) Sofia, his Spanish lover, and the *you-wish-girl-next-door* Julie, his New York girlfriend. However, these experiences are really just a product of a "lucid dream" provided by the company Life Extension, a cryogenics company specializing in *entertainment-existence*.

Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind (2004) is, once again, a film inspired by a Philip K. Dick short story, this time in an emphatically romantic remaking. Joel (Jim Carrey) and Clementine (Kate Winslet) meet but don't realize this is not the first time, as they previously dated and decided to erase that unpleasant memory. In this narrative, the company that intervenes into people's memories is known as Lacuna Inc. Clementine contacts them first, and then Joel, destroyed by her decision, visits them as well. During the procedure, however, Joel tries to preserve at least one memory of Clementine. In this film, the idea of editing memory via a *targeted removal* of certain experiences is given a melancholy cast not seen in prior memory films. (It was, in fact, Dick himself who criticized science fiction for not knowing how to deal with romance). This same year, 2004, saw the release of *The Final Cut*, where Robin Williams (Alan) is a "cutter" (or "sin eater") whose job is to edit the video recorded on "Zoe chips" installed in people at birth. After dying, "cut-

* If the intention of Philip K. Dick was to construct critical dystopias of American society—or, as he called them, *simulacra*—Hollywood makes Dick's fantasies *fashionable* and desirable for *mainstream America*.

ters” such as Alan edit the images (*footage*) from a person’s life creating a “rememory” to be shown during their funeral.

Inspired by *Total Recall* and Baudrillard’s theory of the simulacrum, there are other classic Hollywood films that deal with the installation of a virtual reality linked to a *clean-up* of memory, such as *The Matrix* (1999), *The Matrix Reloaded* (2003), and *The Matrix Revolutions* (2003). Before this series, there was *The Truman Show* (1998), which was, once again, inspired by Philip K. Dick, this time his novel *Time Out of Joint* (1959). In *The Truman Show*, Jim Carey plays the character Truman, who has been part of a television show for his entire life, but without knowing it. Truman, however, retains the memory of his first love from adolescence and cuts out parts of pictures from magazines and joins them together, so that, thanks to collage, he keeps alive his memory of this particular girl.

Hollywood has also produced a series of films concerning future memory, starring *precogs*, such as in the Dickian *Minority Report* (2002), in which a group of mutants have “memories of the future” that enable them to foresee crimes. Of course, this type of film forms a part of a larger cinematic tradition that utilizes elements of memory edits, replacement, or slips, such as *Blade Runner* (1982),* the science fiction comedy *Men in Black* (1995), with Tommy Lee Jones and Will Smith, and the unforgettable *Memento* (2000). In *Memento*, Leonard (Guy Pearce) loses his memory (repeatedly) as a result of a blow he received from the man who raped and killed his wife, the man whom Leonard is now attempting to find. Leonard’s only way of remembering

* *Blade Runner* was, of course, inspired by the Dick novel *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* (1968). The phrase *blade runner* is part of the title of a script written by William Burroughs (*Bladerunner, A Movie*, 1979) based in the novella *The Bladerunner* (1974) by Alan E. Nourse. The works of both Nourse and Burroughs have little to do with those of Dick and the film by Ridley Scott. However, the history of the title and authors illustrate perfectly the essence of the relation between the *cut up*, *cut-and-paste*, *take-over*, *mix-up*, *mismatch*, and the replacement of identity. (Trans. note)

things is to write notes to himself, to take Polaroids, and to tattoo himself.

In *Paycheck* (2003), John (Ben Affleck), a “reverse engineer,” has his memory erased after having worked for three years in a secret project for the Allcom company. The film’s title is taken from the check worth 92 million dollars that John decides to exchange for an envelop filled with a set of disparate objects (car keys, cigarettes, a stamp, etc.), which he feels could be the key to remembering his lost life. (Parataxis can be life-saving...) In the same year, 2003, *The I Inside* appeared, another film where the central character awakens in a hospital bed with no notion of what has happened in the preceding two years (a figure which could easily be extended to almost any USAmerican citizen).

In *The Butterfly Effect* (2004), Evan (Ashton Kutcher) suffers *black outs* when confronted with stressful situations, as did Mike (River Phoenix) in *My Own Private Idaho* (1991), which was made, as director Gus Van Sant has stated, with the method of the cut up in mind. In *The Butterfly Effect*, however, Evan reads his diaries from adolescence and then travels back into the past to redo parts of it, a situation which had already been given a filmic treatment in the pop classic *Back to the Future* (1985), with Michael J. Fox, and again in *The Net* (1995). In the latter, Sandra Bullock (Angela) lives her life over the internet, isolated in her house and depressed, in part, because her mother is suffering from Alzheimer’s. Her identity is then stolen (*deleted* as the movie poster says). When her information is eliminated from every official database, from the banks to the DMV, her existence, for all intents and purposes, loses its reality and she is then replaced by another woman, a fake Angela. The number of Hollywood and non-Hollywood films that deal with the thematics of rememory is so great that it sometimes seems that USAmerican cinema consists, first and foremost, in forgetting that the last premier is identical to the film that will be the next box office hit. This obsession derives from the

fact that U.S. hegemonic—*hegememonic*—culture is sustained by apocryphal memories.

In David Lynch's *Lost Highway* (1997, co-written with Barry Gifford), one of the central characters, Fred, discovers someone has entered his home during the night and videotaped he and his wife sleeping. In a subsequent interrogation by the police, Fred states: "I'd like to remember things my own way." "What do you mean by that?" replies the annoyed detective. Fred: "How I remember them, not necessarily how they happened."* Fred doesn't remember having killed his wife. *Lost Highway* is the lost highway of personal information.

Cinema is training for war. What institution of USAmerican culture is not a preparation for war? From videogames to the family, in the United States everything is a preparation for war. Technologies train us for other technologies in the making, exercises for passing between one reality and another, to cross, remain, and survive in the interzone or interface. This zone is what, above all, from the 1950s onward, is known as the "Twilight Zone," the *neo-uncanny*, which is also connected to the USAmerican mass aesthetic and to categories such as *pop*, *haunted*, *awesome*, *creepy*, *cool*, *vintage*, *fake*, *wacko*, *cute*, *nice*—categories which all have to do with a "pathetics" of memory, an aesthetics of aversion and the *look*, religions of rememory.†

With the advent of late twentieth century memory manipulation technologies, from the Internet to genetic

* *Lost Highway*. Dir. David Lynch. Perf. Bill Pullman, Patricia Arquette, Balthazar Getty. 1997. DVD. October Films, 1997.

† Heriberto's original reads, "...todas ellas vinculados a una patética de los recuerdos, estéticas de la aversión y el *look*, religiones de la memoria." I queried him about "una patética," which exists in most dictionaries as an adjective (*pathetic* in English) but not as a noun. Heriberto responded: "'Patética' refers to a discipline/science of 'pathos' (passions/emotions) and in general reactions; like saying 'ethics,' in this case 'pathetics' (?)." We went with *pathetics*—a term that hopefully will soon have wide circulation. (Trans. note)

engineering, and at the height of the *mass media*, a set of desires and fears, both sides of the same *counterfeit* coin,* have appeared concerning the recreation of memory. It was cinema, above all before and after 9/11, that intensified, catalyzed the sensation that, in any moment, memory could be reordered. (The Replay of the Two Towers collapsing is the Only Thing You Can Be Sure Of. This TV-Déjà-Vu should stick in your mind as a signal that everything happening before and after can be ultimately changed thanks to rewind and fast-forward control remote technologies). This tendency, however, did not begin in fin-de-siècle USAmerican cinema. The beginning was *Casablanca* (1942), a sort of ground zero of *mnemic cinema*.

A couple, Ilsa and Laszlo, who are being pursued by Nazis, arrive at a bar where they hope to secure visas that will permit them to leave Casablanca for Lisbon (from whence they'll make for the United States, to "freedom"). Ilsa, played by Ingrid Bergman, is surprised to see there, in the bar, Rick, played by Humphrey Bogart, an old love, her ex-Parisian flame. It is clear that the memory of their relationship is alive in both of them. Rick helps with securing the visas, even though he and Ilsa have agreed to get back together and Laszlo senses that something has occurred between them. In the film's celebrated ending, one of most persistent mnemes (units of memory) in USAmerican *hegemonic* culture, Rick tells Ilsa to flee to Lisbon in the plane, alleging that the "cause" is more important than his romantic life. In order to repair the situation between Ilsa and her husband, Rick invents a story that, "in reality," Ilsa pretended to like him to get their documents and, in the end, what Laszlo had perceived as signs of Ilsa's passion for Rick, were, "in truth," signs of her love for Laszlo. Laszlo appears convinced by this manipulation of facts and circumstances which Rick unfolds for him. This is the classic scene

in USAmerican cinema, practically the “first,” of the *remake* of memory. A *remake* of the preeminence of “war” over “love.” Of a *memory fix* over reality.

Between *Casablanca* and Desert Storm II there is a perfect logical continuity of the coverage of war. Hollywood is an experiment in the most daring reorganization of memory since Hegel.

Casablanca was, above all, a war film. Not only did its release coincide with the Allied landing in North Africa, but it also provided an education as to the national “essences” of French, German, Italian, and USAmericans, a *sentimental education for war*. Hollywood is nothing more than post-Nazi propaganda.

Bogart embodies the United States, a combination of cynicism and heroism, including Rick’s final homoerotic line delivered from the embrace of a corrupt cop, after having renounced love for war: “Louis, I think that this is the beginning of a beautiful friendship.”* This line foreshadows the “beautiful friendship” that, beginning in the 1940s, the United States would have with its role as corrupt world cop and with its presumptive military accomplices.

The end of *Casablanca*, of course, has been one of the most parodied, cited, and remade in the history of the silver screen.† This influence is not without reason. *Casablanca* is,

* *Casablanca*. Dir. Michael Curtiz. Perf. Humphrey Bogart, Ingrid Bergman, Claude Rains, and Paul Henreid. Warner Brothers, 1942.

† The early films of Woody Allen, for example, depend to a great extent on an aesthetic of comedic re-memory. In *What’s Up, Tiger Lily?* (1966), Allen made a redub in English of a Japanese spy film, while *Take the Money and Run* (1969) is a trans-genre mockumentary. In *Zelig* (1983), Allen revisits the mockumentary, with Zelig who suffers from a strange disorder in which being accepted into a social group changes his appearance. In this film, set in the 1920s and 30s, Allen manipulates the newsreel making clear that History is what occurs in a *memory slip*. *Sleeper* (1973) is a sci-fi comedy remake of H. G. Wells’ *The Sleeper Awakes* that narrates the history of Miles Monroe (Allen) placed in cryogenic immersion and awoken 200 years later by scientific rebels to join the underground and overthrow the government. When Miles is captured by government forces, his memory is re-programmed to make him think he is Miss America. Analyzing

fundamentally, a film about how *a story can be retold*. Film is re-telling. Cinema is the art that corresponds to an age in which meta-narrative was substituted for narrative, an age in which story was exchanged for the play of possible versions. We can only be *cut ups* or *cutters*. HIStory-Telling is finished. What remains is editing.

Enter the Interzone

Ambiguity of letting go, a guided tour through détournement, waltz between detachment and concern, *yes* and *no* of remembrance, culture of *delete*, *wipe out*, and *erasing*, and likewise of *recovery*, *comback*, and memorabilia, the only thing that maintains the United States united are these (isolated) states of mind. Becoming? A souvenir. Is there a true void, a real sunyata, or actual nirvana? No. There is only the *Recycle Bin*.

A considerable portion of USAmerican culture emerges from the fantasy of remaking identity by remaking memory. From the idea of *bad timing* to real time, from the hard drive to *re-run*, from *remake* to *make-over* (and *make-up* and *make-believe*), from *brainwash* to *X-Files*, from *High School Reunion* to video camera, from the *director's cut* to pastiche, from cyborg to remix, from *just-in-time* inventory to overtime, from Big Brother state to reality shows, from *flashback* to psychoanalysis, from neurolinguistic programming to *blogs* and YouTube, from Photoshop to cut-and-paste, from *movie-sequel* to *credit history*, from Basic English to the neo-speak of Freedom Fries, from *search engines* to hackers, and from retro

the way in which the manipulation of memory, information banks, and images intervene in Allen's work, from *Bananas* (1971) to *Stardust Memories* (1980) and more recent films like *Hollywood Ending* (2002), would require a book in itself. I will limit myself then to just noting here that the best parodic remake of *Casablanca* was Woody Allen's *Play It Again, Sam* (1972) in which a Bogart, visible only to Allen, guides him in repeating the romance that Bogart lived in the original film.

to sci-fi, “America” is a back and forth A-memory (anti-memory). Cybermemics at hand, whatever you wish can be fixed any time in(side) *No-Time*. USAmerican society is obsessed with personalizing, increasing, combining, updating, reconfiguring, replacing, and *reloading* remembrance. Stupid Amnesia.

The contribution of the United States to Oxidental civilization has been to give consistency and representation to the limbo between the real and the mental, between life and fantasy, between the Platonic Idea and the material world. This intermediary zone is an anomalous bridge, a passage to disparity, a transition or suspicion between the two habitual worlds of Oxidental dualism, to which is added this zone of miscommunication, of betraying translation, dysfunctional border, pathogenic readaptation, *dreamland*, “desert of the real,” *waiting room*, no place, *spooky place*, fantasy island, *middle of nowhere*, virtual reality, *outerspace*, or *what-the-fuck*. The United States has been the macabre attempt to represent the third unreal: *Paris, Texas!** The United States: Went-Blank-Land.

Replay? The United States is the project of the construction of an intermediary space, a *buffer-zone*, or an “event horizon.” The United States consists of the fabrication of *Interzone*.

* *Paris, Texas* (1984) is one of the most interesting films of Wim Wenders and was written by American playwright Sam Shepard. The film tells the story of an amnesiac who wanders, without direction, for four years, mentally lost, until his brother finds him and tries to understand what happened to his wife (Nastassja Kinski, in the role of a prostitute) and his son Hunter. Born and raised (trained) in a “prophetic” culture, I consider cinema an involuntary premonition or blind prophecy. What Oxidental cinema fortells is that the United States will suffer a *fade into less than nothingness* and will experience it as a nation that feels foreign, strange. Due to its immigrant origins, the United States, via its psychotechnology, will extend its origin as *creepy place* to enter into an “unknown dimension.” *Deadbeat No-Town. Where have we gone?*

As Time Goes By (Re-Visited)

The United States is a desperate attempt to unite memories that are found disjointed, in distinct epochs, civilizations, and minds, lost or geographically dispersed. The United States is the project of uniting false memories, of forming the United Memories of America.

Happyness—the search for which determines the “essence” of USAmerican life—is no more than the method (relatively unconscious) that this culture has invented to keep at bay (out of perception) anything that could sabotage the dream of maintaining beautiful memories.

Traumatic archive or tempting foreign cultural heritage, the Oxident wants to overhaul all memory. It is paradoxical, nonetheless, that cinema knew that this dream was dystopic, while poets, up to the present, have believed it to be heroic, glorious, and experimental.

“To write poetry is to make memory,” said Heidegger.* It is not by chance that in this essay on *Andenken* (literally, to think of, “remembrance” or “memory”), based on a poem of Holderlin, Heidegger adds a defense of conservative notions of *identity* and *nation* and establishes the *poet as legislator*, as it is the poet’s “memory” that will be the basis for the law to come. A memory that Heidegger calls “poetic” and “foundational.” A legislative memory, a total law. The memory-law of Heidegger is an ancestralizing memory, based in the refantasy of Greek and German motherlands, while the memory-law that the USAmerican imaginary aspires to is, before anything else, technological. (The hermeneutic of Heidegger is based in pseudo-etymological re-memories). From hermeneutics to hermenautics.

The longing for a new memory is an immigrant dream. (To immigrate to a country is not so much to immigrate to

* “Remembrance,” *Elucidations of Holderlin’s Poetry*, Humanity Books, Amherst, 2000.

another territory, but to immigrate to another memory.) Is there a more USAmerican fantasy than that of eliminating certain memories, erasing pasts, reconstructing an artificial, free memory? The United States has wanted to forget Africa and Europe and since the nineteenth century to forget Asia and Latin America, to forget the place you were pulled out of and from whence you came. Lethe Light, the forgetting of USAmerica is not a slow letting-go. It is the juxtaposition of the *junkyard*, brusque extirpation, and reprogramming.

If a nation formed by immigrants, as the United States is, wants to erect a centripetal control it has to install a system for constructing common neomemories, a new collective semiconscious, a cool co-lection, neomommy, or ideomoral manna. The spectacle industry—especially cinema—took on the responsibility of *retelling* under this new common framework the stories of disparate communities in order to generate a shared re:imaginary, which is reinforced daily by television and whose sensibility is imparted through the sentimental education of mass music. (And now trans-excerpted and re-distributed through e-social networks.) The United States abolishes historical memory, personal and national, in favor of a spectacle—that is, a system of imagistic relations—or a methodology (a system of artifices like those practiced by the avant gardes) in which it is possible to process, eradicate, select, or re-formulate the mnemonic. Without this manipulation of memory, the United States could not exist. The States are in general, mnemonic macrosystems, technologies of remembrance. The United States did not invent the manipulation of memory but this culture is its culminating exacerbation and, at the same time, its *clown* clone.

The United States, starting now, will be cloned in every culture. Torquing Olson a bit: We Are The *First* Last People.

Poetry, Neo-Mneme, and Mnemo-Technics

In this work of the creation of a technology for controlling memory—this cyber-mnematic—we find not only mass culture but also—as sublime foreshadowing—the main vein of U.S. poetry and some of its seminal ideas. We cannot understand ideas such as “post-modern” without situating them in this series of illusions of pantopia and the cyber-mnematic which began to appear after the Second World War in the works of authors like William Burroughs and Philip K. Dick and, in another register, Charles Olson: the mnemo-technicians of the United States.

In the ideas of Olson we can see the influence of the work of Ezra Pound. Olson hits upon his idea of the post-modern during his study of Pound’s works, which will be a fact that he will later try to erase from the memory of his readers. (Is literature anything more than the intent to damage remembrance? In the service of the decomposition of genealogies?) In his *Cantos*, Pound had extended Whitman, amplifying his idea of a cosmos of percepts, a collection of images extracted cartographically. However, Pound wanted to reconstruct not only “America”—as did Walt, Man of the Book—but also the Oxident and the Orient (*his* China, since India, according to Ez didn’t merit much mention) using citations and combinations: collage, bricolage, rewriting. This checkerboard of facts, texts, ideograms, figures, and eras would give a retrospective unity to the disparity, brought together by Pound’s genius and erudition, to realize the “Song of the Tribe,” an archive of aural information. From Whitman and Pound, U.S. poetry also formed part of the project of *neomemory*. Different from fin-de-siècle cinema, this neomemory is not nightmarish or dystopian, rather the neomemory projected by USAmerican poetry is considered sublime and subversive. The two fields in which U.S. representation has best thought neomemory have never been linked. Their analogy has not been noted. Hollywood

and USAmerican poetry think the same nightmare.

What Olson dug through other civilizations to find was a non-Greek logic. In his opinion, language, from the Greeks forward, wants to pass as the universe. Discourse supplanted reality which was multifaceted, but conventional grammar inherited from the Greeks ordered the world linearly, partially. Olson critiqued discourse for editing the world. He wanted to find a form of representation that did not cut off, cut deals (or cut down) as much.*

We have lived long in a generalizing time, at least since 450 B.C. And it has had its effects on the best of men, on the best of things. Logos, or discourse, for example, in that time, so worked its abstractions into our concept and use of language that language's other function, speech, seems so in need of restoration that several of us go back to hieroglyphs or to ideograms to right the balance.... We stay unaware how the two means of discourse the Greeks appear to have invented hugely intermit our participation in our experience, and so prevent discovery.... It comes out a demonstration, a separating out, an act of classification, and so, a stopping...it has turned false.... We do not find ways to hew to experience as it is...to find ways to stay in the human universe, and not be led to partition reality at any point, in any way. For this is just what we do...†

* The original text contains an untranslatable play on words here: "Él quiere dar con una forma de representación que no corte, que no trunque (o trueque) tanto." Trunque, from *truncar*, is to cut short, to truncate, while trueque is barter (or, abstractly, exchange). We've opted to create another play on words using *corte*, from *cortar*, or cut. Another potential option was to stay with truncate (*trunque*) and use something like "trade off" for trueque, but trade off, while capturing the economic semantics of trueque, muddies the waters with respect to Olson's critique of discourse and thus we decided to translate more for sense than style here. (Trans. note)

† "Human Universe," in *Complete Prose*, pp. 155-157.

On this point, Olson turns to the Mayan world for support, although he only celebrates the ancient Maya, as the present-day Maya appear to him “poor failures of the modern world” (incapable of providing for themselves, so Olson notes, water in June even though they knew that a drought was coming).^{*} The principle of cutting histories, of interrupting them, Olson applies to the Maya (imperceptibly) establishing—as the vast majority of his contemporaries—a rupture between the ancient Maya and those of the present day. This cut then allows for the creation of an illusionary history of Mayans separated from our day and age and Mayans of the present separated from their origins: Mayans separated from Mayans by a caesura, spatialized Mayans. Olson, then, extends—although he frequently complains about it—the vision of time as space, typical of the Oxident.

But if Olson critiqued modern language for editing, what, at the end of the day, he proposes is nothing more than reediting it. What Olson searches for is another manner of *slicing*.

Across his work, Olson developed an idea of time as recutable space, as film that can be reshaped, as he explained to Cid Corman, from Lerma, in this letter of June 10:

one quick note: motion is *not* time. That is, at each of its extremes, time takes on more the nature of space. You forget they are one: space-time. And that, depending on the position and the mass of either, we read them more one or the other. For example, past time, at its outer limits—or present time, e.g., stretched at night by stars—does not, to our sense, move. The extension is so great that, given the law of our senses, the *effect* is—like a design— instantaneous, and thus, because we take it in at once, is, static—though this is a false word, and if I replace it by plastic, I think you will see more clearly what I intend.

For example, circular motion (or cyclical) is plastic, as against time as a progression.*

In this letter, incidentally, Olson mentions to Corman that Eberhart writes using clichés, words of other men, “his ‘variety’ is mere eclecticism” and he accuses him of having “no rhythmic perception whatsoever. He has never learned lesson #1: that he who has rhythm has the universe.”† It is paradoxical that Olson accuses Eberhart of robbing words, especially if we take into account that the idea of having rhythm is to control the universe is something Olson took from Novalis. This fact, of course, he does not mention to Corman. What Olson wants to make clear is that “time is inseparable from space” and as a result he turns to the glyphs, Mayan inscriptions, that according to him should be read cinemagratophically; “the eye has to move narratively” in order to understand them. The glyphs as rocks did not interest him. He was interested in them as images. What Olson finally proposed, as we have seen, is to read the Mayan glyphs as one looks at a film.

Olson declared, again and again, that time had been ruptured into fragments:

Is time. Is how, it's grabbed hold of. Is, so grabbed, how, it can be pushed, this instance, so hard, it is turned into, space. Is—or so I take it—one precise conceit for defining, what, is usually left as, life, or, what's this all about. That is: that each of us is, this, operation: break time back, breaks its back, break through it, make it, do what is also us, disposition in space‡

* *Letters for Origin*, p. 61.

† *Ibid.*, p. 61.

‡ *Charles Olson and Robert Creeley: The Complete Correspondence*, vol. 5, p. 65.

We cannot forget that in the same letter to Robert Creeley (March 9, 1951) Olson defines verse as the sense of

CONJUNCTION & DISPLACEMENT, the sense of, C
& D, D & C, etc
etc. Is verse.

Is quite another thing than time.

Is buildings. Is

des ign.

Is —for our trade—

THE DISJUNCT, language
in order to occupy space, *be* object (it being so hugely as
intervals TIME) has to be thrown around, re-assembled,
in order that i speak, the man whose interstices it is the
re-make of

((Is the other side: of Kukulkan
perhaps ?:

VIOLENCE*

Olson praises the “DISJUNCT” because it is what can re-occupy space, be an object, “reassembled.” Life, in Olson, is *bionic* Life.

The way in which Olson recommends writing (his *projective*) was displacing, blasting, undoing, uprooting fragments from their context (in the case of *Maximus*, recompiling histories, facts, names, dates, myths, and reordering them) making retro-parataxis of what one time, in his vision, had a consecutive, linear order (“Greek”). Olson developed a critique of the concept of linear time combined with an expansionist necessity of converting time into cartography. *Mapping*. According to Olson, parataxis reestablished a Natural Order that Cultural Order (“Greek”) had hidden.†

* Ibid., p. 66.

† “Homer is innocent of any *concept* of time, and *chronos*, in the idioms in which he does use it, covers periods of waiting or delay or doing noth-

Olson wanted to convert time into a map of memories, a space of rearranged remembrances and “energetic” refurbished bursts of re-expressed meanderings. Olson, cartographer of mnemes.

Avatars of Neomemory

The Oxidental concept of linear “History” is necessarily linked to the notion of a story that can be recombined, undone, remastered, fragmented. Modernism and post-modernism are not opposite nor even successive. They are complementary. (The Adam and Eve of the concept of *history*.) Only for entertainment purposes have we believed that a so-called “post-modern” had come after—historically and ideologically—the “modern.” They were simultaneous. (This division, of course, is a product of their own dividing logic.) They are interleaved, they accompany each other. Both are Oxidental strategies of spatializing time, of reediting images or their central narrative threads. Modernism and postmodernism—outline of a linear master macronarrative or reordering of multiple parts—are both alternative mnemotechnics for fabricating neomemories.

Recycling elements and adding others to *historical memory* is how a *neomemory* is constructed.

But a *historical memory* is a *neomemory* that has been naturalized. History is a hegemonic homogenization of neomemories. History is formed to create empires—not forgetting that *empire* (from *imperium*, *imperare*) relates to prepare, arrange, and also stop in, against, towards, and is

ing... We require *mapping*” (“Review of Eric A. Havelock’s *Preface to Plato*,” in *Collected Prose*, p. 356). This review is where Olson defends his idea of parataxis, which he defines as placing acts into a different order, “in the order of their occurrence in nature, instead of by an order of discourse, or ‘grammar’.”

even linked to *paring*;^{*} *empire* means to pause time in a space, to confine, to give order(s) to it. History creates empires of divergent neomemories, in order to cancel their diversity and reweave—censoring and recycling them—a centripetal version, a lineal reedit. Paradoxically, History is a neomemory that has forgotten its status as cultural construction; that is, History is a dehistoricized neomemory. A neomemory that is assumed as Absolute. History is no more than a neomemory that has been successful.

On one hand, the aim of a neomemory is metonymic replacement. Neomemory is an arithmetic in which parts are subtracted from *historical memory*—be it of an individual or of a culture, those wounded, insignificant, mediocre, peripheral parts, the etceteras or remains—subtracted in order to obtain a database of new, purified, sublime mnemonics.

To this neomemory base are added isolated remembrances, extracted from other fragmented memories (or from their simulacra). Neomemory is apocryphal. The apocryphal of neomemory is composed of a remix of surviving parts of the first memory plus parts of foreign memories. The project of constructing a neomemory, therefore, consists above all in the replacement of a unitary totality, presumably durational, for a series of re-related parts. Neomemory is juxtaposed with a metanarrative or master narrative that gives it order. Or, in other cases, language games, linguistic microsystems are used to make possible a Re-CombiNation of old and new parts.[†] Memories and new pieces are then manipulated

* As we discuss in the “translators’” notes, Heriberto has rewritten parts of this book as we were translating it—in a process of co-translation or post-translation (translation-post). The original text reads here : “...no olvidemos que imperio significa *parar* en, contra, hacia; detener el tiempo en un espacio.” All the amplifications and additions here are by Heriberto. We have not noted all the places where this occurs in the text, but we thought one example would be perhaps interesting for the reader. (Trans. note)

† Jung’s definition of the unconscious as collective unconscious composed of

into a topographic memory, wherein the neomemory acts as a theatre of operation or, better still, a film made of cuts of itself and other films.

Redistribution of—fictional—unities of memory (the *mnemes*), pieces (fantastic) of a becoming cut into bits (by pseudo-thinking). Our technology foreshadows the machine that we imagine, a pantopia of neomemory. The pantopic machine: that which makes possible the *infinite selection* of spatial fragments (images) into which time has been fragmented.

Neomemory, remix or *remake*, converts time into a function of space. In neomemory, time is a reinstalled succession, a pseudo-time, because neomemory is, at the end of the day, the space of cuts.

Neomemory—in reality, post-memory (here, as it almost always does, *post* means *pseudo*).

Neomemory or Ex-time.

This post-memory requires, in order to be realized, that everything become one of its images. The central project of Modernity (and its pseudo-post) consists of this: Everything made image. The All converted into the means by which images are related amongst themselves. The form of transcending the project of realizing neomemories is to avoid the exchange of life for image. If we do not form images of our lives and our histories, neomemories cannot be implanted.

History, Memory, and the Now

The problem is not that time has been broken, that time has ceased to be conceived as linear or narrative. The problem is that from the beginning of civilization, time was thought of

shared parts—subterranean macro-memory—is also an avatar of this form of understanding the real, as a mixed archive. Jung is Ur-Juke Box.

as a thread that united that which from a given starting point was thought of as a set of fragments.

Once the concept of history as a *series of events* appears, the slow emergence of the dream of a neomemory becomes unavoidable. There is no history that does not mutate into apocrypha. There is no history that does not mutate into neomemory. The true problem, then, is the conception of existence as accumulation, as a successive history. Thinking as a post-modern and thinking historically are variations of the same strategy: *thinking through accumulation*.

To not know how to forget.

Thus, I have said that these are Oxidental poets because they *amass*. Their poetics is a capitalist poetics, which hordes, which monopolizes, which rejoins, which appropriates. Neomemory = private property. Can poetry be something other than greed? Nothing more than a compilation of ruins? A hunt amongst rocks or banks of information? Just this, the poem, only that: *more and more and more....*? Or could it be that the most radical poetry was that whose signs managed to trap nothing, that did not desire the permanence of meaning in its material body or syntactic associations? Images that evaporate all content as soon as it is sensed? (The musician and poet John Cage liked to say that there is poetry when we perceive that we possess nothing).^{*} Or as Machado wrote: “Search for the you that / is never you / and can never be.”[†] Under this understanding of poetry, poetry means detachment. Poetry as neither profit nor loss. Poetry is not property; poetry is gift.

* “Our poetry now / is the / realization / that / we possess / nothing / . / Anything / therefore / is a delight / (since we / do not / possess it) / and thus / need not / fear its loss,” sings the “Julliard Conference” of Cage (included in *A Year from Monday*, Wesleyan University Press, New England, 1967, p. 106). Cage, of course, hoped that one day the United States would be no more than just another country in the world, no more, no less.

† *Antonio Machado. Poesía y Prosa*, ed. by José Luis Cano, Bruguera, Barcelona, p. 301.

Nevertheless, all the central concepts of Oxidental civilization are in ruins. Neomemory is not the putrification of “memory”; rather, “memory” is the seed of this subsequent fantasy. *Memory* is already a concept of accumulation. Memory is already capitalistic; is totalitarian, is *control*. Memory is already the invitation to begin cybernetics—as grammar, “body armor,” family and State.* “Memory” and “history” have been the germs of these absolutist dystopias, in which the human, stricken by fear—that is, the desire to possess everything, and the image of losing it—erects in the fantasy a capacity to (anally?) *retain* existence. Here we find the human paranoia that full possession will slip through our grasp, and to prevent this from happening, we construct memories (correlated images) that allow us to escape the *present*, that permit us to write linear history, to feel secure in its meaning and direction. The fantasy of “memory,” the illusion of “history.”

Memory was invented because humans were thought to be constituted by Loss. (The loss of their animality, the loss of the mother, the loss of their existence.) Because of this wound we fabricate our memory, which is a compulsion to avoid the reoccurrence of loss. Memory is fear. Memory is the evasion of the now. Memory is structure, system, regimen. Memory is the master. Memory is inventory. Owner and master, memory is the very principle of the general economy of the Oxident. (History is its collective avatar.) Wisdom implies a detachment towards the illusion of having memory. Wisdom is not memorization. Wisdom forgets.

Olson was close. But, towards the end of the fight, he got turned around. He oxidized.

* “Body armour” (cf. *Panzerung* in the German or “coraza corporal” in Heriberto’s original) is a term from the work of Wilhelm Reich. *Panzerung*, roughly “plating” (as in platemail armor) or “armored” as in panzer division or armored division, is a key term in Reich’s turn from (Freudian) talk therapy to psycho-therapy that involves the body, an early and controversial aspect of his work. (Trans. note)

History as *events*. That is, social, or national, or “cultural,” or “intellectual.” I think it’s *now* mostly hogwash. *Morphology* has knocked this stuff cockeyed. And except for Frobenius—or such a *clear* man as Sauer (who’s no historian except in the initial sense of *istorin*, to find out for oneself)—I think the best thing is to have yourself catch it up as you have to, (a) because so few even good men will bother with it; and (b) the sequence of events you will want for yourself—just as you want geography: the *locus* is not both place & time (topology).*

In an article ironically entitled “GrandPa, Goodbye,” Olson critiqued Pound, alleging that “his conversation, as so much of the *Cantos*, is recall, stories of Picabia, Yeats (Willie), Fordie, Frobenius, Hauptmann. . . . I don’t think it has been sufficiently observed, if it has been observed, how much his work is a structure of mnemonics raised on a reed, nostalgia.”† What is curious is that Olson also was a collector. Not only of bibliographic citations but of conversations and letters. His work is also collection and nostalgia. It is robbery, looting: it is the United States.

Olson inhabited a form of indecision and ambivalence. He did not find a true alternative to the position of fragmented time (“history”), because his proposals—“morphology” (of culture), proprioception, projective, “archeology of tomorrow”—still retained elements of the Oxidental mechanistic vision, the paradigm of fragmentation. Olson, although he took steps in this direction—placing in question the traditional concept of *history*, challenging its linearity—he did this in order to take firmer control of events, to aggravate an imperialist *appropriation*, the Oxidental madness for seizing control and manipulating even time itself, the final delirium. (All of this, of course, disguised as poetry, which has been the

* “A Bibliography on America for Ed Dorn,” in *Collected Prose*, p. 308.

† “GrandPa, GoodBye,” in *Collected Prose*, p. 146.

avored disguise of the Oxident.) Each time that civilization attempts to save itself, it relapses.

Says Olson, raging against photography: “That is my own profound disbelief in PHOTOS. I fucking well abhor same camera as another machine. Think it reduces, shreds, blunts RETENTION, by this organism, or anyone, attacks, as does all recording instruments, MEMORIA. And thus, the usages AFTER retention. Anyhow, figure, our job (specifically ours) is to retain & then use WITHOUT artificial means of reproduction.”* Olson critiques the camera for memoristically taking control of the world in an imperfect form! If the camera is inferior it is because it impedes retention. If there is something that Olson cannot be reproached for is it precisely having invented a new argument against photography, a sport at which, I believe, he bested Baudelaire, Benjamin, Bourdieu, and Baudrillard. For Olson, the camera is detestable because it is rudimentary memory. According to Olson, we must increase our cybermnemonic capacity.

The idea that man is *modified time* deeply permeates Olson’s work—as in all of the Oxident. Humans, Olson held, originally lived 130 years. “Or so Bogomolets’ researchers... seem to prove” and taking a leap he asserts, “Time, for example, has been cut down to size.”† Man defined as cut time.

Olson oscillated. He spoke of a *now*. But at the same time he advocated a refashioning of the parts, that is, he spoke of fragmentation. Olson recut.

By means of the wisdom of other cultures, Olson and the Oxident, during late modernity, began to understand other forms of thinking becoming. But in his hurry to control, Olson’s (too quick) interpretation was idiotic. Olson made of the “now” an instrument for arbitrarily reordering events, undoing history, reconfiguring it, dehistoricizing. He could have

* *Charles Olson and Robert Creeley: The Complete Correspondence*, vol. 5, p. 163.

† “The Resistance,” in *Collected Prose*, p. 174.

transcended history. But he instead reinstalled it. (*Recharged*).

What has to be battered down, completely, is that this has anything to do with stage of development. Au contraire. The capacity for (1) the observation & (2) the invention has no more to do with brick or no wheels or metal or stone than you and I are different from, sd peoples: we are like. Therefore, there is no “history.” (I still keep going back to, the notion, this is (we are) merely, the *second time* (that’s much history as I’ll permit in, which ain’t history at all: seems so, only, because we have been all dragooned into a notion that, what came between was, better. Which is eatable shit, for the likes of those who like, same.*

Olson spoke of a *first time*—the Sumerians, the Maya—in which true wisdom had been found and he believed that he belonged to the Second Time. *Between* this First and Second Time one could construct a bridge. (This is what Olson calls History, and condemns.) But according to Olson, in the *between* there was no “development” or “progress” or “evolution.” We have then two times separated by a dead or mediocre time, an invalid lacunae. As such, Olson made an amputation of History. (This amputation only was possible, because the fiction of a total body had been previously constructed. Amputation, in truth, is one of the possibilities contemplated by the original set up.)

According to this model there are only two times: non-Oxidental antiquity and post-modernity. (Modernity, for Olson, did not count, it was an extra epoch.) Olson postulated the existence of an obstacle-time or between-time that should be passed over. In accordance with this vision, it was necessary to extirpate from ourselves this disastrous interval. What Olson suggests is an anagramatics of History. In his tripartite History, the intermediate section is trimmed off,

to form, a “box-epoch” composed of the parts previously separated by the interval. It is very significant that Olson named this moment, as we have noted before, *box*. “Box,” as in “mailbox,” where letters (poetry) are delivered or not. As in Melville’s “Bartleby,” so relevant to Olson’s world, this term appears to suggest that the two epochs of History are one extensive *Dead Letter Office*. This epoch appears as a great mailbox where the letters sent were never received and where they were warehoused unattended, never arriving at their destination. Not only were the letters never answered, they are unopened letters. Letters closed in on themselves. To characterize an entire era, that of Oxidental civilization, as a mailbox of dead letters, Olson indicated that this middle section was an impediment to coming into contact with the first. History must be shaken up, rearticulated, because of this interpolation of a false middle, an extra intermediary.*

There is in operation here a replacement of the concept of History by that of *Remake*. The idea of a *second time* or a *return* has been accepted as a given by our civilization. The

* In the personal imaginary of Olson, does this image refer to an attempt to reestablish a link with his mother, the link which his own experience with personal and cultural patriarchy interrupted? And so what prevented Olson from integrating this middle was his being cut off from the *mother*. (Mother as First Time. Son as “Second Time.” And between them, an unnamed and bad time, Father Time, a time one needs to get rid of. But not only this but other cartographies are present in this *complex* model of Time according to Olson.) When I say that Olson considered himself to be cut off from the mother, I don’t mean just his mother, who effectively he was separated from, but something more profound. And it is also that his physical mother maintained separated her two parts, as Olson did, via the thick wall or open interval of patriarchal thought, that separated her from his body, eroticism, and thought. What Olson was separated from was himself and in the image of the Oxidental box, he semi-consciously realized what had been divided was his adhesion to the patriarchal box. The errors of Olson result from his silly need to remain within a version of the Oedipus myth. His errors are due as well to his patrilinear fantasies. Having dedicated a good part of his life to the Office of Dead Letters, symbol of a sterile uterus or male vagina, the BOX is not just a topochronic error (the pre-eminence of space over time) but also the act of sending those messages toward a reader (the patriarchal) who cannot receive them. Creating thus a useless correspondence, a long period of letters that can have no answer.

return of the Golden Age, the Renaissance, the Messiah, or Jesus. This idea of the “second coming” implies that the future is a reediting of the past. As a conception of reality, the Oxident includes in its key ideas the fantasy that the past will have to become memory, that it will be reinstalled in the future. The Oxident is transmemory.

For the Oxident, History does not exist. But ReHistory does exist. A second time or second act that proves that the first also was a sequel.

The *now* of Olson, then, is, in truth, an anti-now. It is replete with collections and archives, with references and prequels.

Olson confused *perceptions* with *memories*. Perception can only occur in the present. Theoretically, he proposed a writing of the *now* (“The distinction here is between language as the act of the instant and language as the act of thought about the instant.”)* But the basis of his writing is information, historical archive, that is, memory. This confusion between perception and memory is what leads Olson to be a critic of the linear conception of time—as postmodern vanguardists and thinkers will be—and of the Oxident (basing himself in information accumulated by anthropology and archeology). However, his rupture with these paradigms was not sufficiently radical because his conception of space and time is, at their root, imperialistic and his comprehension of perception is based in memory. The *now* that Olson utilized is paradoxically a *retrospective now*.

It is a now that is, in reality, *yesterday*.

Nowness is indivisible. The now does not have parts. It is a time without chronology. It is a pure total instant, without partition or leaks. It is the now as thought by Parmenides, by Taoism, and by some healing arts. Olson and other Oxidental thinkers considered this now as the basis of a profound notion of “time.” But, one way or another, they

lost it. This now in the Oxident is confused with a form of hedonist presentism, of *now* (“in process”) turned into the News of Progress, or the pragmatist *already* or *today*.

But the *now* surpasses these understandings.

The Now is a time that does not separate from itself or consume its own moments, that does not detach itself and is self-founding duration. In the now there is not past or future. There is not loss. But there is neither present, that is, evanesce or suddenness. The now is eternalization, not eternity. It is a movement in which speaking of the difference between flux and fragmentation does not make sense. The now is a process of development, of appearing and dissipation. In the now things emerge, following a pattern and this pattern in itself disappears to give rise to another, in the continuity of the process. And the process can change and the now is this constant transformation, this liberty. The project of finding “now” was Olson’s project, which is a spiritual project. But this project was mixed with a profoundly imperialistic paradigm that both conceals and projects itself through its religious and aesthetic dimensions.

Cinematics of the Projective

Olson has a secret relation with the cinematographic. His poetry, built on fragmentation and rediting, recalls a line from Walter Benjamin on cinema (and its difference from painting) that the vision of “the cameraman consists of multiple fragments which are assembled under a new law.”* This is exactly what Olson does, in splitting time and converting it into space, into the only existing dimension as he will argue throughout *Call Me Ishmael*. (Montage of simultaneities and the spawning of fantastic encounters of the disparate

* “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction,” *Illuminations*, p. 234.

is the logic shared by the avant garde and advertising). This cinematographic logic is also a logic of war. Virilio's "an artificial unity of time by means of a real unity of place"* (concerning the relation between the history of cinema and the history of war) are perfectly applicable to the method and ideology of Olson.

A good part of the vocabulary of Olson is military, from the idea of the poem as a *field of action* (taken from WCW) to the very concept of projective verse—Olson's most celebrated creation—in which the "projective" reunites, exactly, the cinematographic with the bellicose. "Projective" is as much an allusion to "projection" as to "projectile," pointing to the perfect integration of cinematographic vision and combat in any neo-mnemonic project. Neomemory—via either the industry of cinema or utopias, as formulated in theory or literature—is the necessary emotional and perceptual reeducation for the citizens of the Oxidental military-industrial complex.

That consensus indispensable for readiness before the war-screen.

Olson's ingenuous critics have interpreted the projective as Olson described it in his canonical 1950 essay as a type of verse that serves to transfer energy from the poet to the reader, one based in perception and respiration as units of measure. "Projective" because it maintains the reader and the poet in a rhythm that advances forward, quickly, not like a typewriter (as Olson liked to believe) but like a tank. In a profound way, "projective" signifies the *keep it going* of a campaign, a combination of unstoppable *cowboy* and the cinematography of Vertov, in which it is necessary to move joyously from one image to another, from one angle to another, without stopping, until the end, because there is no end, just one image after another, continuously, enthusiastically.

* Paul Virilio, *War and Cinema. The Logistics of Perception*, Verso, New York, 1989, p. 13.

Olson wrote (citing Edward Dahlberg): “ONE PERCEPTION MUST IMMEDIATELY AND DIRECTLY LEAD TO A FURTHER PERCEPTION.”*

Is not this principle appropriated by Olson practically identical with Vertov’s idea that aligning “fragments of real energy that via the art of montage accumulate to form a total whole”?† Olson continues: “Keep moving, keep in, speed, the nerves, their speed, the perceptions, theirs, the acts, the split second acts, the whole business, keep it moving as fast as you can, citizen.”‡ Projective verse and the projective are an aesthetics of military speed, of the enthusiasm of the soldier and the cameraman of the battlefield. It is the poetics of a triumphalist culture of the post-war period. Projective is *take over, enemy seizure*.

The only difference between Olson and Vertov is that Vertov was honest with respect to his intentions to make political propaganda. Olson was not. His most honest book is *Call Me Ishmael*, where he makes clear that he works in service of a poetic epistemology of USAmerican empire: “For the American has the Roman feeling about the world. It is his, to dispose of. He strides it, with possession of it. His property. Has he not conquered it with his machines? He bends its resources to his will. The pax of legions? The Americanization of the world. Who else is lord?”§ And although his work is spiced with declarations like this, his U.S. readers flagrantly ignore the relationship between USAmerican canonical writing and imperialism, a reflex typical of USAmerican hegemonic intellectuals, but in this case one that includes the USAmerican experimental literary left, in need of a radical re-reading of the ideological

* Olson, *Selected*, p. 17.

† Dziga Vertov, *Kino-Eye*, University of California Press, Berkeley, 1984.

‡ “Projective Verse,” in *Collected Prose*, p. 240.

§ “Shakespeare, concluded,” in *Call Me Ishmael*, p. 66.

foundations of its current poetics.*

In the projective there is also a manipulation of histories, “queer combination”:

I have been an ability—a machine—up to
now. An act of “history,” my own, and my father’s,
together, a queer [Gloucester-sense] combination
of completing something both visionary—or illusions
(projection? literally
lantern-slides, on the sheet, in the front-room Worcester,
on the wall, and the lantern always getting too hot
and I burning my fingers—& burning my
nerves as in fact John says or Vincent Ferrini they too
had to deal with their father’s existence.†

As Charles Stein has noted “magic lantern-slides” refer to the technological precursors of cinema, where an image is projected on a sheet or screen.‡ Without going to deeply into this, here and in other places, Olson’s work suggests that the projective technique serves to set up “queer combinations” of lives, in this case images of Olson mixed with those of his father, in the passionate ambivalence of technical fusion. The “queer” in “[Gloucester-sense]” is both the strange and the homoerotic. The post-modern is, then, the homoeroticism in which some parts of the body, in an autotelic onanistic unfolding, are mixed with another’s: the lives of the father-son are interwoven, having been turned into a series of

* Olson himself links the projective and Americanization. “The Americanization of the world, now, 1950” (*Letters for Origin 1950-1956*, p. 9) he wrote to Cid Corman, from Washington, October 21, 1950.

† *The Maximus Poems*, University of California Press, Berkeley, 1983, p. 495.

‡ *The Secret of the Black Chrysanthemum: The Poetic Cosmology of Charles Olson and His Use of the Writings of C.G. Jung*, Station Hill Press, Barrytown, 1987, p. 33. Chuck Stein, in his marvelous investigation, identifies several of the psychoanalytic meanings of the projective, but leaves to one side the ones related to the cinema-military that I am outlining here.

images. Cinema understood in Olson's terms is the projection of a remix of images of life in queer combination. A meeting of dissimilar times in a space which homogenizes them.

On the other hand, projection in Olson means as well *prediction*. In his letter of October 3, 1951 to Creeley, for example, he argues that any attempt to revalorize the "box" (to return to Oxidental authorities) to found a *neo-* (neo-christianism, neoclassism, neoscientificism, neorevolution) can only lead to a "science fiction or comic strip, false 'projection.'" This allows us to see that projection is *prospective*, it refers to a future. In multiple ways then the projective has much less to do with a poetics of energy and respiration than with a poetics of military movement and *information gathering* turned poetic sublime.

The projective in Olson is techno-logistical.

Theory of the Pseudo-World

"*Fragmented* views of reality regroup themselves into a new unity as a *separate psuedoworld* that can only be looked at," says the voice that reads the film script of *Society of the Spectacle* in 1973, based on the book published six years before. What has happened with Debord since then? The present-day Left should be founded on this book and not on Mama Marx's *Capital*. The post-modern is the spectacular.

Debord's book is, perhaps, the most radical of the twentieth century, and its definition of spectacle, the most accurate portrait of the last few decades. How can the spectacle be overcome? The spectacle can only be overcome through a cessation of the internal fantasy. The media spectacle, in reality, is the most democratic representation of all. In fact, even today media technology has not been able to reproduce the spectacular technology of the Oxidental mind. The psychological fantasy of any Oxidental individual outstrips in terms of evasion, production of escapist images, suffer-

ing, and happiness the most banal irrealities of the worst Hollywood producers, the most exaggerated soap opera, the most insipid pornography, and the most over-the-top promise of the most crooked television politician. . . . The fantasies of the human mind continue to outstrip the entertainment industry, which is just its pale reflection, the most democratic representation that man has been able to concoct. The spectacle of the entertainment industry is poor compared with the production of spectacular images that civilization has used for millennia to relate to itself.

Debord grasped many things. But he did not understand that media spectacle is an attempt to place in externally visible images, the images that were internally elaborated by individuals to soothe their dissatisfaction, their flight, and their fear. Debord missed this because of his Marxism.

Marxism supposed that the internal is a product of the social. In idealism and good part of Eastern thought, the material is a mental product. Both ignore that the social is the imperfect reflection of an internal world, and the internal the imperfect reflection of social order. There are, at least, two distinct worlds. Cronos is at least two.

It is exactly the imperfection of this co-order—inequality or asymmetry—that produces these spheres that modify each other, in an attempt to make them identical. This is the pathological longing of modern society: to supplant one reality for another. The internal and the social, the individual and the mass, are maintained in Oxidental civilization in a relation of will to *co-control*, in an impossibility of one controlling the other.

During this dream of one sphere dominating the other, the mechanisms of control of each augmented, producing something similar to a neurotic escalation or arms race between the two. The social and the individual wished to convert the other into their replica. (The spectacle is just the tip of the iceberg of this will-to-identity.) To convert the other into its double, each sphere (each time) constructs the

illusion of its opening (communication) towards the other. And each mimics the attractive elements of the other via a repetition and incorporation of the ingredients of this foreign sphere, in order to achieve a certain common identity, with an appearance of certain shared parts. This basic strategy of the duplication of the world is neomemory.

The social world pretends to be the neomemory of the individual world, and vice versa, in order to perpetrate the fantasy of communication, identity, and a co-world.

With this we can understand (theoretically) the relation between the individual and the social, between the internal and the external that has, for centuries, plagued the Oxident. The relation between the “spiritual” and the “material” is nothing more than that which is established in each respective dream of control over the other.

The media want consumers to dream the dreams of their images; individuals want the dreams of the media to be identical to their own. Since absolute similarity cannot be achieved, the technology of appearances becomes infinite.

Between one distinct world and another are constructed “shared” co-worlds (neomemories) that suppose a relation, a common plane or alliance. This is, moving beyond Debord, what I understand as spectacle: the illusion of a shared world, becoming similar via imaginary relations. The idea of a world, the idea of Whole, the idea of a macro-, the idea of a co- is already the spectacle.

Cinema, television, macrotechnology can be overcome, but this will not bring the well-being that their enemies desire and in the name of which they want to overthrow the media. While human fantasy continues to grow, the need to reduce the gap between internal fantasy and external media in order to represent it (confirm it) will continue. Moreover, this gap will be translated into new machines that promise and then suspend the creation (in screens and images) of the illusions of man who has detached from the here and now, the neo-man who has escaped from his body.

The technology of the spectacle will end when man ceases to have images of his infancy, to exchange his present for these memories, becoming a father inspired by the images that he has of his father; when he loses the desire for cars and houses; when he does not imagine himself a winner, handsome, sexy, or what is the same ugly, fat, a loser, guilty, evil, a victim, in all of the roles and judgments that are based in mental images. Images which are fantastically linked with other individuals-worlds, images that were set up to create a shared space-time, “objective” and “intersubjective.” The most damaging spectacle, the most murderous, the most distracting, the most terrible, and at the same time the most poetic, most comfortable, occurs, in each moment, in the personal artifices of our minds. When we believe we are directly linked with the other.

We have perpetrated a system in which internal images (that is, *demands*) are transformed into external images, so that we can then pretend that our real life is similar to these images. (The images that bind us to others.) The images that were transmitted by our parents and are reinforced by institutions, by machines (by all those pseudo-wes, although, strictly speaking, any we is a pseudo) and we bestow them, modified, neomemorized, to the following generations, that will live the same tragicomedy of pretending that the world has the form of their fantasies and that each individual life has the form of these external fantasies.

To truly break with the spectacle what must be first overcome is the present-day regime of the mind: the desire to live in accordance with neomemory. This ruse is what the spectacle renders invisible: neomemories have the critical function of producing the illusion of world-One, an intermediary zone or macro-space, that can be shared by distinct temporal moments.

Is it possible to escape the spectacle? Writing itself belongs to it. All our concepts are concepts-of-spectacle, from God to Science. Debord himself believed in History. It

is not by chance that his films are, paradoxically, neomemories constructed thanks to the *détournement* of films, TV programs, *newsreels*, etc. Though he uses fragments of spectacle to critique the spectacle, Debord remains spectacular, not only in his anti-films, but also in the very images that direct his thought. Debord was guided by Marxist and, in general, revolutionary images of modernity: he thought of individuals as beings who would hurl themselves (as a group) against the system that oppresses them.

Debord failed to see that modernity begins precisely with this image: that of individuals attributing their yoke to others outside themselves and their liberation to a mass movement. This is the separating spectacular image (number one) because it separates individuals from their own responsibility for their semi-conscious enslavement and serves as a self-deception of what is confirmed daily: their participation in a system of pseudo-control that is the individual itself. The Revolution, the masses rising up, the enmity towards States and technology are nothing more than masks that Oxidental individuals utilize to remain in this non-existent orbit of images.

Space is spectacle.

Co-Inheritances

A key to twilight in the Oxident: the return of the spectre of the “post-modern.” The concept acquired its canonical meaning with Lyotard and his postulation of the end of master narratives, the end of “History.” It is not unimportant that *The Postmodern Condition* (1979) as a “report on knowledge” was written by Lyotard (for the government of Quebec) playing with the form of an academic investigation. Note that this theory of aesthetic fragmentation is somewhat a book of hoax facts and fictive theory; a procedure, in the final analysis, essentially identical to that of a master narrative

or “History.” Clearly, that which is announced as finished, can never be done away with. Again and again we witness: History cannot be fragmented once and for all, as “History” is the result of fragmentation. The Post is the condition of the Modern.

But before Lyotard and “postmodernism”—a vague term for a series of post-war aesthetic, primarily US American, movements—the “post-modern” enjoyed several prequels. One of these was Olson. In Olson’s imaginary genealogy, the postmodern was what did not derive from Pound, Joyce, and Williams, the moderns. His essay “Gate and the Center,” begun in Mexico, elaborates a post-Pound methodology. Olson writes: “A straight man has to uneducate himself first.”*

The notion of a *straight man* calls our attention to the fact that in many cultures, the rectilinear is the norm, which corresponds to our linear notion of time, our master narrative. What Olson added was unlearning, deprogramming. This “unlearning,” as he argues, is the oft cited Olsonian concept of “will to cohere.” This *coherence*, co-inheritance, inheritance of the other, appropriated inheritance, presumably shared, is, in reality, reorganization, re-inheritance, reediting, *redux*. The will to cohere is the will to reassign inheritances, the will to revise last testaments. Will, here, is reassigning; will to cohere is the reassigning of archives, reversal of witnessing, reassigning of inheritances, coherence is insanity and *recall*.

If we translate, then, Olson’s phrase says: linear man has to reassign inheritances.

Linear man has to reassign inheritances in order to *maintain himself as linear*.

This reassignment to safeguard linearity is History. History is always post.

History is the reassignment of a linear order to create another linear order. History is the reorganization of frag-

ments for a new linear sequence. Thus, the “historical” and the “post-modern” are fuzzy synonyms.

“The sequence of events you will want for yourself” (Olson). “I’d like to remember things my own way” (Lynch).

In Olson’s take on the postmodern, the notion of the loss of a modern master narrative is implicit, but there is something else: the installation of an intermittent tale, of a resumption of a recovered continuity.

My shift is that I take it the present is prologue, not the past.... There are only two live pasts—your own (and that hugely included your parents), and one other which we don’t yet have the vocabulary for, because the West has stayed so ignorant, and the East has lived off the old far too long.... I have spent most of my life seeking out and putting down the ‘Laws’ of these two pasts, to the degree that I am permitted to see them (instead of the boring historical and evolutionary one which the West has been so busy about since Thucydides) simply because I have found them in the present.... Now, I spend most of my time studying the Sumerians and Mayans, transposing the poems and the inscriptions they left. The will to cohere in both these people is what I see in us, in now....

Therefore I find it awkward to call myself a poet or writer. If there are no walls there are no names. This is the morning, after the dispersion, and the work of the morning is methodology: how to use oneself, and on what. That is my profession. I am an archeologist of morning. And the writing and acts which I find bear on the present job are (I) from Homer back, not forward; and (II) from Melville on, particularly himself, Dostoevsky, Rimbaud, and Lawrence. These were modern men who projected what we are and what we are in, who broke the spell. They put men forward into

the post-modern, the post-humanist, the post-historic, the going live present, the “Beautiful Thing.”**

Olson’s error—as will be the rule during all late theory—consists in arguing that the *post* is distinct from the *modern*; that the *post* is dissimilar to the *historical*. Without admitting that they belong to the same logic: the logic of (linear) Time. Time understood as space. Avatars of the pantopia.

Pioneer of the Post-Modern

The central clues to Olson’s notion of the “post-modern” can be found in his correspondence with Frances Boldereff. The underlying idea: the post-temporal. Olson was a “Man of Space.” His proposal was to leave behind the notion of Time:

...the work of Proust, Bergson, Eliot, Joyce et al is of a dead past and of no more than technical interest. ... From Dante to Pound it has been problems of time which troubled the artist and concepts of time which governed men. It is no longer so. ... Anthropology has proved [that there existed] men of such durance in time as to push time so far back, and ahead, as to turn time into space. ... Space revises time-man...†

The post-modern is the fantasy of a pre-time and a post-time, a no-time or *achronos* that becomes *topochronic*, a *no-time* that mutates into Space. The post-modern is pro-space; the post-modern is total space, the space that Olson wrote about in *Call Me Ishmael*. Imagine that from one moment to the next time stops and all that before was born and perished via

* “The Present Is Prologue,” *Collected Prose*, pp. 205-7.

† “About Space,” in *A Modern Correspondance*, pp. 254-6.

the temporal now arrives, warehoused and stagnating, in pure space. This retentive space which eternally houses the multiple entities formerly destroyed by time is pantopia. A multifaceted safe haven. A space that wants to be immortal. "America."

The first time that Olson utilized the term post-modern was in a letter of August 9, 1951, after his return from Mexico (its use in "The Present is Prologue" is from 1952). In his letter on August 14, Creeley responds that, of course, "space is our history." They have established that the post-modern is, above all, an intensifying of the idea of absolute space, unitary space that the Oxident clutches to, to the detriment of incompatible spaces or multiple spaces.

For many years, Olson was not recognized as the pioneering founder of the concept of the post-modern.* It was Perry Anderson who pointed this out, but unfortunately Anderson's text was destined for a university audience, that is to say, it was a sort of *spectacular* text, in which Olson remained unexamined, given no more thought once he had been established as the precursor of Fredric Jameson.

Ralph Maud in "Charles Olson's Archaic Postmodern" complained that the primacy that Anderson gave to Olson had not helped Olson's reputation much in the history of ideas and, what is more, "the word [*post-modern*] had been perverted far from its original sense, certainly inverting it into the opposite of what Olson wanted to say."† But Maud, so useful for understanding the genealogy of Olson's ideas,‡

* "It was here, then, that the elements for an affirmative conception of the postmodern were first assembled. In Olson, an aesthetic theory was linked to a prophetic history, with an agenda allying poetic innovation with political revolution.... Black Mountain College, of which he was the last Principal, shut its doors in 1954. In the years of reaction, his poetry became more straggling and gnomic. The referent of the postmodern lapsed" (Perry Anderson, *The Origins of Postmodernity*, Verso, New York, 1998, p. 12).

† See *Minutes of the Charles Olson Society*, September 2001, number 42 or see www.charlesolson.ca/Files/archaic1.htm

‡ See for instance, *Charles Olson's Reading: A Biography*, Southern Illinois

commits the same error as the vast majority of Olson critics: idealizing him. Olson was only possible in the context of a rising USAmerican Empire, in which new poetics meant both experimental aesthetic form as an extension of political expansionism and political expansionism trying to transform itself through aesthetic experimental form. As with Whitman and Pound, Olson's work is pantopic and imperialistic, and thus, "poetic."

Olson's pioneering use of the term post-modern has much in common with the use given to it since the 1970s. The central project of postmodernism from Jencks to Lyotard, from Venturi to Jameson—pantopic space, anti-chronology—was already present in Olson, who was the first to develop it in relation to the term post-modern, although not the first to deploy it systematically in poetry (that honor in the United States goes to Whitman and Pound). In this way, the meaning Olson gave to the postmodern not only has not been corrupted, but moreover it has been extended. And due to a certain general unfamiliarity with his work, Olson has not been recognized as the initiator of postmodernist discourse. Olson names the foundational myth that these others will develop: the myth of an achronic recartography, a no-time. The theory of a space that has destroyed temporality. A destruction of a more temporal European conception of "History" in favor of a more USAmerican reordering of "Space."

The description of Jenks continues to be the best description of the post-modern. Eclecticism, he says, is the "natural evolution" of a culture of *choice*. The post-modern is the aesthetic of a consumer society and is the space in which we take refuge from the real activity of time, namely periodic revolution and the inevitability of death.

The post-modern is another of the Oxident's strategies to secure a place in posterity. Another trick for deceiving

ourselves into thinking that we have escaped death:

If Le Corbusier's space is the equivalent of a Cubist collage, then Post-Modern space is as dense and rich as a Schwitters' *Merz*. Indeed one could say it developed partly if indirectly from Kurt Schwitters' great *Merz*build, the column of memories that he constructed inside his house which was a literal accretion of every aspect of his life (unfortunately the assemblage was destroyed by the Nazis).*

It is precisely Jencks who recalls that eclectic means "I select." We see in the postmodern this connection to the experience of the ruin everywhere. In either constructing a *memory* starting from the ruins of everyday life or in the destiny of this memory: to be destroyed by war. The post-modern is a negation of death. Technique of administrative society, resignation of ruins.

Other references to the post-modern are found in letters from August 20 and October 3, 1951. In the first, Olson argues that post-modern man, as opposed to modern man, "knows that he belongs" to the universe. He has, according to Olson, an immediate relation with the world, as if the post-modern had removed the uncertainty or anguish of man's relation to the world. Reordering the events of the world's history—from the familiar to the cosmic—the post-modern creature "feels at home." In a letter of October 3, Olson established that 1950 is the beginning of the Post-Modern Era, after "1945 (that ACT)." He established, as well, that there is a "BOX" of history, running from 500 ACE to 1950, where the wisest men of his age are still trapped, rummaging through it. For Olson, this Box is the period of the West's formation and it must be dispensed with. Not only is it notable that Olson returns to conceive of time in terms of

* Charles Jencks, *The Language of Post-Modern Architecture*, Rizzoli, New York, 1984, p. 118.

space, as a box, but also that he sees it as the container from which he will extract the materials, the “quantity,” from which his new map-inventory will be made. The quantitative is the measure of the post-modern.

Olson says to Creeley, in a letter of August 9, 1951 (having returned from Mexico):

I am led to this notion: the post-modern world was projected by two earlier facts—(a) the voyages of the 15th & 16th Century making all the earth a known quantity (thus, geographical quantity absolute); and (b) 19th Century, the machine, leading to (1) the tripling of population and (2) the same maximal as the geographic in communication systems and the reproductive ones...*

We can see here that the post-modern has as its starting point the birth of an idea (illusory) of total space—the Earth, as a “known quantity”—that is, the post-modern is born from the reduction of space. The Earth as “known quantity” is a poor Earth, an Earth that has lost its *mystery*, an Earth of which we can have fantasies of control, of being completely “covered” and, along with this strategic reduction, this *pantopization* of the Earth, the Earth converted into a pantopia of itself, the machine. Post-modernity is, then, a contained and quantitative space, a space whose limits are known and which is a no-time ruled by technology.

I have written, elsewhere, that the pantopia is a spatial fantasy in which time has been made to disappear. Time, in the pantopia, has been converted into space, into constituent fragments (parts) of total space. But as post-modern poets, science fiction, and Hollywood films have vaguely intuited, the role that time used to play—birth, growth, reproduction, and death—is now attributed to technology. Technology is the time of the pantopia.

Rememory, Retrogression, and Death Throes

Concepts are catacombs. The idea conceals. The concept hides more than it announces. It is a knot. A knot that strangulates.

Olson's concept of the post-modern holds within its composition the "Un-hebraic" of Boldereff. Would we know this if the letters between Frances and Charles had not been published? We probably would have never known. Which reveals an alimentary, elemental gnosis: each word is correspondence. Nutrient, each letter, epistle. Where do letters come from? From the province of your epistles, your words, in which there is more than your ideas, there is your body, your silences. Doubt of connection or exaggeration of intimacy. Heaviness of waiting. Madness of receiving your letter.

Olson, kleptomaniac, invasive, cryptomnesic, takes the ideas of his lover, and remakes them, exaggerating them, turning them authoritarian, making the words of a Medea and maenads, vocables (mandates) of a preacher whose pulpit is in the offing. What she encodes, he unweaves.

At Black Mountain and in his essays, Olson remakes what he has heard from others, what he plucks from his intellectual lovers, what he archives under another name. (Every concept is re-archivization of another.) It is not by chance that Olson desires to erase the entire corpus of the Oxident, from Socrates to Hiroshima, making as if the (nonexistent) Oxident did not form a part of his own body. (The corpus of the Oxident, the corpus of Olson.) Olson wanted to receive the inheritance having discarded the cadaver. (Of mourning.) Olson wanted to be orphan, unfathered. Disconcerted, vainglorious, foaming, he complained to Creeley in 1951 of those critics who shouted "Pound!" at reading him; bitterly he complained of these attributions. A good part of his body of work is an attempt to erase Pound from it, a palimpsest, too oedipal to be real, either as a parricide (success) or falling under the paternal shadow. (Oedipus

is never real. Just playing at ghosts. Oedipus is paranoia and simulacrum. Between the father and son that establish Oedipus, there a pair of heteronyms are constructed, a pair of fakes.) The same that happens with Pound, happens with Frances...Olson wanted to keep her as a secret as well.

In great part (in excess), Mexico had been a method for occulting, distancing himself, from the body of Frances. Mexico, during 1951, took the place of Frances, 1950.

All that had generated from and for Frances, now passed over to Creeley beginning with the Maya, the projective. Once again, a good portion of Olson's discoveries had been extracted from predecessors or alimentary sources. His journey to Mexico had been a flight from Frances, a distance so that his wife Connie would feel more secure and so that Olson himself could leave behind the memory of Frances, who replaced him with a beautiful young black boy, according to what he revealed or invented in one of his final letters. Mexico, then, was the occultation of the body of Frances and the attempt to erase this subterranean history, this co-history.

Once again. Olson wanted to erase Boldereff. He wanted to erase Pound. He wanted to erase the history of the Oxident, the "box" as he called it, a "box" that would become a tomb, a mailbox of dead letters. With Olson, thus, there was always something to extract, a memory that wanted removing, a history that had to be censored, a missing piece. The act of this slashing is what Olson called "post." "Rememory."

Proflection is the term used to describe a situation in which two speakers avoid dialoging via the exchange of laudatory clichés. The prefix *post* is proflexive. The prefix *post* signifies *pseudo, retro, un*. It is utilized, however, for a culture or individual who thinks themselves beyond what, in reality, they have elected to naturalize, perpetuate, occult. The *post*, in post-modernity, post-colonialism, post-history, post-human, is the feigning of "overcoming." The *post* is the most

recent superstition of “Progress.”

Olson had recourse to the idea of the *post-modern* in order to consummate and overcome—in a sense similar to Hegel—the Maya and the Sumerians, Pound and Boldereff, W. C. Williams and Creeley. Olson is no more than the extension of his correspondents. The *post* of Olson is *evasion*.

The evasion of “History.” The evasion of the history of his passion. The evasion of the history of the imperialist civilization to which he belonged. The evasion of the historicity of his arguments, which he thinks are eternal, which he takes and announces as “Laws.” The *post* is the occultation of the continuity of his project with all that he claims to have broken with. The *post* is the flaunting of a rupture that did not occur.

The *post* is a false positive.* It bestows on temporality a (secretly) oedipal structure. Thus, the idea of the *post* attempts to persuade us that there has been a confrontation, a collision of forces, in which either a parricide or overcoming occurred, a moving beyond this conflict, a resolution, or a passage to another site. The *post* is nothing more than Hegel. The *post* is nothing more than Oedipus.

The *post* is the renovation of the central theses of the Oxident. The *post* is the most “modern.”

There is not post-modernity. There is modernity-post.

If since the 1950s one speaks in the Oxident of the “postmodern” it is because the authoritarianism of the Oxident finds it convenient to argue that it has detached itself from its own history. The United States as a new

* The original contains a difficult to translate play on words here: “El *post* es *postizo*.” *Postizo* as an adjective referring usually to teeth, smiles, or mustaches is “false,” (*postizo de pelo* is a hairpiece or extensions) and obviously it contains *post* within it, giving us, in a literal rendering, something like “the *post*/false is *post*/false.” One option might have been “The *post* is prosthetic,” but the ableist overtones of the phrase were disturbing. We tried to render this play in the end by taking it in a different direction while maintaining the overall implication that the *post* is hollow. (Trans. note)

beginning, as a new promised land in order to restart a set of socially failed but politically successful (control) projects. If one speaks of the *post* starting with the post-war period, it is because the war wanted to not be interrupted. The idea of a pause or rupture with prior history serves the Oxident as an alibi to return to extending the worst of Modernity—its desire to edit the history of other *pueblos*, to manipulate memory, to say that it has broken with the concept of linear time in order to perfect it—as all the atrocities of Modernity, its looting, patricide, oedipalism, Eurocentrism, are prolonged. Constructing the myth that the Oxidental “box” has ceased to function and a “new time” has begun in order to shirk responsibilities or shy away from continuities, that is, radical forgetting. The *post* is another capsule of Orwellian neo-speak.

When Olson decrees that he has overcome everything from Platonic rationalism to the atomic bomb, he constructs the most comfortable, most USAmerican of ideas: the myth that exonerates the Oxident of all of its crimes. The post-modern is the illusion that consummates the *cybermnemonic*, that is, the control of memory.

Cybermnemonic, a remix of historical information that attempts to reconfigure in space what has been stripped out of time. The cybermnemonic is the fantasy of reordering past events, of erasing the inconvenient—erasing the Oxident and the Modern—and selecting the parts that reproduce narratives of action or eternal salvation. The cybermnemonic is the method that the Oxident has used—from its *happy few* to its *mass media*—to feign a *moving beyond*, an eclectic dismantling of its macrocontinuity in favor of reproducing it in the form of microstories and remixes. The cybermnemonic is the alteration in the continuity of memory, the fragmentation of duration, to construct a world of singular images whose linearity has been covered over, hidden. Surreptitious restoration of hegemony. The *ποίησις* of the Oxident is nothing more than part of its spectacle.

And, on the other hand, we could understand, as part of humankind, the Olsonian myth, the general myth of the post-modern. It is the attempt to begin again. It is the senile project to realize forgetting for reformatting purposes. If the cybermnemonic has had in the last centuries many avatars and forms is it because it is impossible; it is because it belongs to a civilization that manipulates its memory, that wants to control it, because it is a moribund memory, a memory looking at the record of its final images. The cybermnemonic is the death throes of the Oxident.

Studying the gaze of those who are about to die, F. González-Crussi recalls that during the Renaissance there existed a “Brotherhood of Saint John the Beheaded.” One of its functions was to help those condemned to death cross over to hell in a presumably pious manner. They helped with confession and the making of a will—which, incidentally, proves to us that when a culture, from its literature to its thought, has become confessional or testimonial, it anticipates its own extinction. In addition, however, they provided a rather strange service: that of keeping in the line of sight of the condemned a placard covered with a Christian image so that the condemned would leave this world with this image in mind. The image was maintained in their line of sight until the last possible moment:

The condemned man is led toward the scaffold walking backward. Surely, this is not done out of a merciful desire to spare him the sight of the fearsome instrument of his impending annihilation. This peculiar advancing by retrogression is done so that the man can keep his eyes continually fixed on the tablet that a member of the brotherhood keeps all the time in front of his eyes, and sometimes presses against his face, so that he can kiss it.*

* F. González-Crussi, *On Seeing Things Seen, Unseen and Obscene*, Overlook Duckworth, New York, 2006, p. 88.

Involved as we have been, starting from the Renaissance, in the construction of a “History” . . . Is not, perhaps, our relation with television or cinema, with the monitor in general, analogous to that image placed before the condemned in Rome? It is not, perhaps, the very concept of “Renaissance” (rebirth) a pure retro image aimed at occulting what, in truth, awaits us? Could our retrogressions, from the Renaissance to Olson’s archeology of tomorrow, be manifestations, precisely, of our advance to the gallows? Hollywood, moreover, upholds that those on the threshold of their own death see fragmented, sequential images, of their life pass before their eyes. “See, look, perceive the flux of the world in its finest details” (*On Seeing*) could be effectively the final desire of a dying civilization.

Flash Back. History. Blast to the Past. Cinematography. Going back. Every image in front of your eyes. Obvious institutions—clandestine returns—of moribund cultures.

On the Function of Critique

Marx was fond of saying that “criticism is no passion of the head, but the head of passion.”* Marx has been one of the writers to best understand the nature of critique. Marx knew it: critique has a war function.

For Marx the form that critique took was the critique of religion. From there we can note that critique has a staging function, as according to Marx religion had raised God above man, so critique would now raise man above God. Perhaps this is not the space-time to delve into the profound relation (and, therefore, unnoticed) between the Marxian concept of *critique* and that of the *remake*. The very work of Marx is a *remake*! A remake of Hegel, as Marx himself states

* Karl Marx, *Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right*, <http://www.bopsecrets.org/CF/marx-hegel.htm>

in the preface to the second edition (1873) of *Capital*, in which he explains that it is necessary to invert Hegel, placing the *material* where Hegel had put the *ideal*. Here Marx conceives of himself as Re-Hegel.

(Marx's method, by the way, closely resembles Lautréamont's appropriation poetics.)*

Hegelian replicant, Marxist critique is, at base, a re-turn or supplanting. Marx takes already formed histories (religion or, we might say, Hegelian phenomenology) and reedits them, superimposing new figures on the old. When Marx conceives of philosophy as a "handmaiden of history," he is not only indicating that thought has as its aim a political operation performed on historical archives, but also his phrase is already a *redux*, repun, of the well known medieval saying of philosophy as "handmaiden of theology." In Marx, critique is the opium of the retouch.

Joyce and Marx are the fathers of deconstruction, are rearchivists.

This labor of substitution of some parts for others is a central element of nineteenth century thought, a thought of unmasking. (We can think of the function of word games in Nietzsche and in the meaning Freud will give to the slip, dreams, and jokes.) What others have called the school of suspicion, I will call the *school of replacement*, in which a concept is hermeneutized, that is, exchanged for another, re-placed in a new order, supplanted, juxtaposed. Marx, Nietzsche, and Freud remask. For these authors, a concept is revelation, but not in its hermeneutic sense (de-occultation) but in its photographic sense in which each notion or text is the negative that reveals a new image that is the negative of another image that is the negative of another image that is... The triad of suspicion (Marx, Nietzsche, and Freud, the paranoid trio!) analyze

* "Plagiarism is necessary. Progress implies it. It closely grasps an author's sentence, uses his expressions, deletes a false idea, replaces it with the right one" in "Poesies," in *Maldoror & the Complete Works of the Comte de Lautréamont*, Exact Change, Cambridge, 1994, p. 240.

interpretation as journey-in-time, as crab-time (retrogressive) but, also, suspicion is journey-to-the-future, recovering, neomask. Some have wanted to see this as critique (deconstruction, in reality, is one of its aspects). Deconstruction realizes forwards or outwards, what suspicion thinks that it realizes backwards or inwards. But both are movements of analog replacement. Rewriting, operations of substitution of parts of prior discourses for new ones. Hermeneutics and deconstruction are, in either direction, a-chronic, neomemory.

Critique is necessarily *rememory*.

The essay, a genre invented by the critical spirit, is an assay because it is the attempt to substitute for a reality a thinking-about-it. The essay is the attempt that is made, each time, to jumpstart a technology for supplanting reality. What the essay is assaying is the installation of a mental reality, which it wants to superimpose over lived reality.

Making a rememory of Hegel, Marx writes in *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Napoleon* that Hegel says that all the greatest events and figures of universal history appear twice. But, Marx notes, we have to add to Hegel that history occurs first as tragedy and then as farce. As we can see, Hegel's most important idea was created by Marx.

Or vice versa.

Critique, then, has been associated with an idea of the re:History. A technology of memory. Marx writes:

History is thorough and goes through many phases when carrying an old form to the grave. The last phases of a world-historical form is its *comedy*. The gods of Greece, already tragically wounded to death in Aeschylus's tragedy *Prometheus Bound*, had to re-die a comic death in Lucian's *Dialogues*. Why this course of history? So that humanity should part with its past *cheerfully*.*

According to Marx, Germany has this historical task, that of the happy goodbye. The *replay* of the end has a relation with eclecticism. Marx asserts that like in the Roman pantheon where gods from all nations are found, in the Holy Roman Empire are found the sins of all forms of politics: “political-aesthetic gluttony” says Marx.* But Marx ignored that comic replay does not have only one return, but that it is extended via different cultures in a *loop*. The post-modernity of each contemporary culture, from China to Japan, from the United States to Mexico, from India to France, repeats its own particular *loop* in which each culture remixes historical fragments, obeying their own political-aesthetic gluttony. This *loop* constructs the appearance of a regime-of-things or interminable status quo, and it is the repetition that produces the comedic finale, which appears as a perpetual carnival but which is nothing more than a symptom of a culture’s death throes.

The comic loop characteristic of a historical denouement is what also has been called “post-modernism,” that eclecticism in which all political-aesthetic sovereignties are recycled. We recognize, of course, that this phenomenon has come into sharper focus during the twilight of the Oxident, but that it is also present across the entirety of a historical sequence. That is: *linear time is the extension of a loop*. The line of Oxidental time is not a straight succession of heterogeneous elements. Rather it is the recombination of the constituent fragments of these heterogeneous elements, along the length of its mixed loop, that produces the appearance of a linear time.

In a civilization of innumerable masters, there is no definitive goodbye, rather only periodic farewells. And linear time,

Cambridge, p. 11.

* *A Contribution to the Critique of Hegel’s Philosophy of Right Introduction*, www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1843/critique-hpr/intro.htm. Translation emended.

which characterized the Oxident, is made, precisely, from the *looping* sequence of all these regimes. Linear time, thus, is a *film-loop*.

Hegel, of course, idealizing this fragmentary time, alleged that “progress” was spiral, the direction of “Absolute Spirit” or “History.” Marx was not wrong in remaking Hegel. In Hegel, we have a great practitioner of rememory, a grand Aleph, the grand Alephaphile of Oxidental philosophy, at the stage before the Oxident would exaggerate his method, passing from Absolute-History to Absolute-Space, a millimeter from passing over into No-Time. But it would not be in Hegel where the pantopia would find form, because it was too early for the advent of the achronic. The phenomenology of Hegel is rather a panchronos, a cinematography in which the Absolute throws its gradual parousias across the whole of time. In Hegel, the fusion of all the fragments, the total congregation of all avatars, which is pantopia, was still a utopia, as this fusion (the Absolute) was, practically, unrealizable in a space. Hegel still fantasized about an absolute time.* But after Hegel, the totalitarian fantasy would become the property of the topologists.

In the present moment, I think it essential to understand the character of the *film-loop* of linear time because only by understanding it in its real movement can it be unraveled. Linear time is made of a sequence of recycled images. History is the same as the spectacle. It is the greatest spectacle of them all.

And critique is its preferred weapon, the ruse of neomemory, the foreman of quantity, the delight at the plunder of imperialism. Is there any Oxidental institution that is not neomemory? I seriously doubt it. But this is not the worst part. The worst part is that today is only the dawn of the cybermnemonic.

* I believe Hegel did not think the pantopia because he suspended his reflections on the United States.

On the Function of Critique (2)

“Now, as of this morning, what impresses me, is, that there is a very important connection between quantity and the function of CRITIQUE,” wrote Olson on August 9, 1951. Immersed in his own political-aesthetic gluttony, Olson postulated that the postmodern era is the “AGE of QUANTITY.” This age of quantity demands a “heightening of that servant of clarity, the CRITICAL FUNCTION... the Culture of Clarity.”* And Olson asked himself if the first to compose in accordance with these quantities of references—“Confucius, the Greeks, Propertius, the Provençals, Shigaku”—was Pound or if the *Divine Comedy* was the first critical poem, that is, transhistorical-quantitative-referential. Olson, then, asked to be “at once archaic and culture-wise.”†

Through the visions of Olson—the visions of an USAmerican poet ruled by *kitsch* and erudition, a military viewpoint, appropriation, Make It New, Jung, and Whitehead—we can track critique and its key role in the development of the cybermnemonic imaginary. What is clear in Olson is that critique can be an unexpected friend of imperialism. He writes: “The very *expansions* which post-modern life have involved us...in other words, i think i am saying that the function of critique is behind *everything*...quantity cannot be managed with out it.”‡ In Olson then, critique serves as *accumulation* and *expansion*. Being conquest, critique administers knowledges, collects them, distributes. Critique is the selection and administration of the accumulation of knowledge, the election and management of cultural capital. Olson celebrates, for example, that nineteenth century archeology made possible his use of

* Charles Olson and Robert Creeley: *The Complete Correspondence*, vol. 7, p. 75.

† Ibid., p. 75-6.

‡ Ibid., p. 77.

Sumerian poems and that the age of mechanical production “has made all art a disposable museum.” Critique is regimental.

Perry Anderson also employs critique in the sense of Olson, as the administration of knowledges, in order to legitimate his personal reordering of history. As Anderson writes: “With this break-out from the Occident, the idea of the postmodern has come full circle back to its original inspiration, as a time when the dominance of the West would cease. Olson’s visionary confidence was not misplaced; *The Kingfishers* could virtually be read as a brevet for Jameson’s achievement.”* *Brevet* is a military term and concerns the certification or commission that permits a soldier to temporarily hold a position of greater responsibility. This allows us to see, among other things, how Anderson brings together disparate elements—the theses of Olson and those of Jameson—to construct a linear hegemonic order, a rearranging that leaves Jameson—the favored thinker of Anderson—at the summit of thought on the postmodern, as it is clear that *The Origins of Postmodernity* was written, above all, to canonize Jameson. This projection of Anderson, of course, is as spurious as the errors of Olson concerning the Mayans or the Sumerians. Both Anderson and Jameson maintain, precisely, a modern/post-modern logic: rearranging parts to fix in place a neomemory.†

Critique is the means by which “YOU MAKE ALL

* Anderson, Op. Cit, p. 75.

† Bob Perelman argues that Jameson’s *Postmodernism or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* utilizes a schizophrenic logic, despite the fact that Jameson directs his critique precisely at this very logic. “In the overall organization of its materials, his essay is itself paratactic: Andy Warhol’s *Diamond Dust Shoes*, my poem ‘China,’ Michael Herr’s *Dispatches*, the Bonaventura Hotel...” (in “Parataxis and Narrative: The New Sentence in Theory and Practice,” in *Artifice and Indeterminacy. An Anthology of New Poetics*, Christopher Beach (ed.), University of Alabama Press, Tuscaloosa, 1998, p. 28).

DISPLACEMENTS AND DISPOSITIONS / *count*.”*

What critique manages to do is place itself in charge of the securing of fragments of knowledge so that it can reorganize them. If the post-modern is the quantitative selection of images that are decided to be representative of an epoch, critique is the method of arriving at these particular images. *Critique*, and what I term *cybermnemetics*, are correlated. The function of critique is the selection of information and its arranging into new informational units. Critique is the production of a neomemory, an incorporation that displaces “memories” (dates, places, persons, acts, moments, images) and reconfigures them. The “critical”: the cybermnemetic.

Because of this, by means of critique we can never leave the Oxident—the Oxident itself is a critical method. As long as we remain critical, we will remain Oxidentalized. We are also part of this loop. We are also reorganizing, fragmenting, doing critique. We cannot find an exit from the Oxident, because what is most pressing and most immediate, easiest and what is inevitably produced is to save memory, is to make of this existence “History.” What is most difficult to imagine, on the other hand, is amnesia: the only exit that already seems impossible to us is nothing more than forgetting.

How can one rebel against an entire civilization? Can one destroy millennia in a single instant? Or is it a delusional to attempt such a leap? The pantopia, we know, is impossible, but daily we attempt to realize it, because our existence has no other name, circumscribed as it is in mnemo-technologies, from rhyme to the family, from the screen to our given names. The entire Oxident is based in the word *aletheia*.

Aletheia, as we know from the pre-Socratics to Heidegger, means, literally, not-forgetting. How to rebel against memory in a civilization whose notion of truth is based in the demand to not forget? To take on memory in

this civilization would appear to be madness, taking into account that memory is, from the Greeks on, the synonym of truth. And yet, the Lethe, this river that leads to forgetting, calls out to us again and again, because now more than ever forgetting is the only way of continuing. When I imagine how to exit this generalized *film-loop*, the only thing that I can see in my mind is a bonfire that burns itself out.

The Pueblo of Neomemory

The United States is, as I have said, the most potent force driving these fantasies of pantopia and cybermnemetics. Formed out of the *terror of losing it all*, the United States has reestablished *co-control*. USAmerican literature, in one form or another, reinvents these fantasies. From the work of Olson to the parody (a la Woody Allen) that Charles Bernstein makes of “projective verse,” from the investigative poetry of Ed Sanders constructed with monads of information to the *cut ups* of Burroughs that sampler of the body-of-reorgans from the “plagiarisms” of Kathy Acker and her intense prose, made of blocks to the techniques of the post-Language poets, USAmerican poetry, in its dream of a *symposium of the Whole*, as in the “new sentence,” has been a critical poetry, a pantopic poetry, based in *displacement* and parataxis, based in neomemory.

A culture based in memory will always be conservative. And all of us are conservative. All of us are now the “United States.”

There is no *pueblo* that is more inside its own loop than the United States. And knowing themselves as a late culture, the United States has been obsessed with reordering history in order to make it end with itself. And also because the USAmericans suspect that their hegemony is permanently under assault, the cybermnemetic is one of their most wide-spread means of defense.

The paradox, nonetheless, is that the *pueblo* that has been most obsessed with the *remake* will be the first bonfire to burn itself out. The paradox is that the *pueblo* that has most fantasized about cybermnnetics, the United States, will end up being completely forgotten. Having manipulated memory, its existence one day will be judged as completely apocryphal, artificial, over-produced. In the future, the United States will be considered a *hoax*. It will be said that the United States is only a debilitating paramnesia. After its fall, it will not have (even) History. In the future, the United States only will have the form of *déjà vu*.

There are Laws: Taking Down the Pantopia

“There are laws,” begins Olson’s essay “Human Universe” written in Mexico. How does one create the illusion that there are general laws? The foundation of time reduced to space is, precisely, the supposition that there exist laws that function in the same way (homogeneously) across all (heterogeneous) times. If different times are united by the same laws, then, these times are not separated and thus form a single space.

This belief is the basis of totalitarian thought, in all its forms. Television fabricates images—and society fabricates images for television—and the spectacular relations between these fragments produce the fallacy of a commonly held reality: the space of a “nation,” a “territory,” an “epoch.” The takeover of the center of Oaxaca by striking teachers, the flooding in Ciudad Juarez, and civil resistance in Mexico City, in co-existence with the war between Libya and Israel, the state of maximum alert in the United States and England—these events are represented in discourse and the news as symptoms of the same phenomenon, as *events related to each other*. The pantopia has penetrated deeply into our semi-consciousness and is situated at the border between the

unconscious and conscious, in such a way that it permeates, in both directions, human thought. It is thus the Interzone or semi-consciousness that has become the key site in our present-day psyche. Pantopia seems so “natural” to us that doubting that its events are related and even considering that each event might obey its own laws in the space-time in which it is realized, as distinct from other space-times, can only appear a strange or at least very unusual idea.

Olson was not entirely wrong. He had come to Mexico looking for the traces of another concept of time. His error was not having been sufficiently patient to generate a personal time that would be capable of grasping Mesoamerican cultural notions of time, of not leaving behind the time of USAmerican English as he knew it. Moreover, Olson encountered an indigenous culture with an essential similarity to his own: a culture that had mutated towards a notion of *imperial time*. We have discussed before the ideas of time of the Maya and present-day indigenous communities in Mexico and the United States and we know that the Maya fluctuated between ancient notions of time as plural and an imperial political decision of forming a total calendar—their model of *kin*. The Maya were a civilization based in a single time, or a set of universal laws which ruled in the same way, macro and micro. However, the greatness of the Maya was that their notion of time captures many models of time—each one functioning in accord with its own process—under a mysterious macro mathematical and poetic model. For the Maya, *kin* functioned as a cycle of time that turned around itself—and that periodically changed its motor, its god—and this changing cycle functioned as a component of a larger cycle, composed of various smaller cycles, and this new cycle as a component of another larger cycle... And thus, for the ancient Maya time was a series of distinct cycles placed one inside another, concentric or centripetal times. In the Mayan chronovision, imperial notions of time—pantopic—are combined with nomadic understandings. Mayan *hegemnemic*

Time could be defined as an enormous machine of molecular appropriation of other micro-cultural-times.

Imperial ideas transform time into space. Nomadic ideas, on the other hand, tend to understand time as a multiplicity of times. These times—tribes of monads—are autonomous from each other, each one obeying its own laws. (The notion of a single spatialized time is linked to the historical appearance of the State.) The Rarámuri, for example, developed a model based on the existence of more than one internal time, sustaining the existence of various “souls” that simultaneously co-existed within the human body. While the Huichol believe that when a pair of nomad groups meet two different times collide. This understanding of time not only functions to plumb the profound nature of the human animal but also to impede the formation of a unitary political order, a system of centralized control.

For cybermnenetics to be possible, a civilization has to choke off the nomadic notions of space-time and to institute a general calendar, a hegemonic, spatialized notion of time, “universal.” The Maya and Aztecs conserved nomadic notions of plural space-times, although in debased and manipulated forms, used to justify an Imperial centralized order, based in numerical science, just as in Oxidental empires from Greek antiquity to the United States. In the roots of these empires there exists as well nomadic notions of time as polytopic and polychronic, wherein time is represented in diverse forms, precisely, because there is not one time but rather many times, with each forming its own world.

Writing is, certainly, pantopic.

What imperial documents—from official histories to poets and mass media, from films to nightly news—do is make sequential images of distinct space-times, creating the mediatic simulation that they belong to the same visual horizon of events. The creation of the illusion of a total space-time simultaneously shared by all is a lie that builds

up a social coexistence. It is this fantasy that I have called *pantopia*: the notion of a total space, individuated from every other space, which contains all things, all events, ordered under the same set of laws, under the same *empire*. This idea, of course, is the cruelest of all of them. The pantopia is absolute control: the pantopia is the inexistence of time.

In the pantopic fantasy, time does not annihilate things, allowing death to liberate the world from itself and allowing the world to be always *incomplete*, which should be the idea that governs us, *incompleteness* not Totality. Without death, beings are allowed to share, cryogenetically, the same site, forever. In the pantopia, time as individual measure, as *auto-chronology*, in which each being lives its own chaosmos, is not allowed to exist.

In the pantopia, time as death and the successive forgetting of each world have disappeared, and time as its own-law, as individual-time, not determined by the laws of another time has disappeared as well. The pantopic is the fantasy of creating a space—whose avatar can be a poetics or a global empire—from which nothing can escape.

As in the house in Buñuel's *The Exterminating Angel*, once one enters, for some unknown reason, one cannot leave. In Olson, the pantopia took the form of not a totalizing agglomeration (as in the theory of the black hole or the vortex in Pound or in the Aleph of Borges) but in the gaze. Again and again in his work, Olson speaks of a gaze that can hoard everything it falls upon.* The pantopic is thought throughout his work more and more in terms of a screen.

In the present state of civilization, the pantopia is reinforced daily by television. I am not referring exclusively to the device that plays the role of *pater familias*, but to television in a broader sense and of which the contemporary

* According to George Butterick, it was reading Chaucer that Olson found the story that Troilus could see the world "in one single glance" and he saw the Herat from the seventh sphere, after dying in battle. (See note 109 from Butterick in *Correspondence*, vol. 6.)

television set is but a rudimentary precursor of coming televisions. Television makes it possible—as state legislation, monolingualism, and writing once did—for distinct space-times that do not share common laws to appear to possess one via the daily compiling and updating of images that produce the cinematographic illusion of real time and a common omni-space, amongst what are, in reality, dissimilar realities, separate-cosmos.

If images are the units of pantopia, then to undo its regime it is indispensable, before anything less, to impede the formation of images, thereby destroying *spectacle*. Impeding the function of empires signifies preserving languages alive and increasing the number of them, as in the passage from one language to another—in the impossibility of translation—supposedly common notions, shared images are destroyed, undone. Languages are the primordial defense against the pantopia, as each language is its own chaosmos. And if not letting go of memory produces pantopias, *ergo*, the cure is to forget.

Against the Universe

All of our civilization is based in the cybermnemonic. As such, it is too much to ask of any poet or filmmaker that they escape the paradigm of memory control and their conditional dreams of mnemonic control. Science as well is an epiphenomena of the cybermnemonic delirium.

One moment in which the Oxident was on the brink of accepting that its centralized memory was nothing more than a *hoax*, was during the discussions around Stephen Hawking's "Paradox of Information." According to the traditional theory of black holes, they are formed when a supermassive object, such as a giant star, collapses, creating a "singularity," a point of infinite gravity. Around the singularity is established a region of space whose frontier is known

as *the event horizon*.^{*} Hawking originally argued that crossing the event horizon meant the complete loss of whatever information has crossed it, thus anything that entered a black hole would never return. This thesis violated one of the basic principles of physics, that of reversibility, according to which everything in the universe retains the information of the processes of which it has formed a part.

Sustaining this position cost Hawking more than one follower. It would be the beginning of his decline in the scientific community, as his conception of entropy scandalized a community governed by dogmas, such as that of the absolute memory of the universe, its omniscience. At the end of the twentieth century, Hawking partially retracted his claims and the theory in which the universe was subject to a loss of information was abandoned even by Hawking himself. Physics returned to its steady state.

Science depends on a universe that retains its structuring principles, that is to say, that possesses fixed laws. If the universe did not possess them, science would become pataphysics, a discourse of exceptions. Non-Sense.

Hawking gave in, after having taken the most radical step forward since Copernicus. Memory is a provisional order. Forgetting is the final substrate of the real. It could be that the laws of the Universe change. It could be that the law of gravity, for example, in some universe after or parallel to ours, does not exist.

Disorder exists. The universe is losing information. The universe is a detriment to its own memory. Gradually amnesic, its health. The only cells that duplicate without losing information in their DNA during mitosis are cancerous cells. Cancer, cybermnemics of the body. A society that does not forget, a life that does not forget, becomes cancerous. All

* I would love to discuss this problem not in the language of contemporary physics but in that of Argentinean metaphysics: in place of “singularity” read “aleph” (Borges) and in place of “event horizon” read “strike of events” (Macedonio Fernández). Physics is a branch of metaphysics.

cure is detachment.

The universe forgets.

Our central pantopia is the idea of a “Universe.”

The universe, at a given moment, is not.

The universe, at a given moment, loses its laws. It becomes the orphan of its principles.

A pattern that lasts longer than any perception could last looks like eternity.

The so-called universe—what should be called something else, like *alterverse*, for example—dispels its own order. Thus, the universe is one-never-the-same. If we could tolerate the basic uncertainty of the alterverse we would understand that it is useless to try to get to know it and that the universe is not only an impossible science because of its vastness or due to the narrowness of the human mind. The alterverse is unknowable because its laws are also historical, because they come also to form a part of amnesia itself, the maternal forgetting.

Like a serpent, the alterverse sheds its skin, completely, gradually, or, in an unexpected leap; as total destruction or renovation, the serpent loses everything.

Is its changing of laws periodic? No. There is not a meta-law that directs its radical change. How do I know? I don't know.

The chaosmos is liberated from its ground—like a person whose amorous encounters are motivated, in large part, by his or her short term cellular memory, who, suddenly, cuts against the pre-determined tendency and breaks with destiny, thanks to the cells that also forget, that do not reproduce or recharge.

But forgetting can be an accident, not a will.

The laws of the “Universe” are its self-consciousness on mute, but its own body rebels against permanence. The chaosmos, in its long de-history, is intermittent.

Memory is chimera.

I have said that the chaosmos is historical, that its rules

falter. I must correct myself: the All (that is the Loss) is amnesia. The alterverse or chaosmos is amnesiac.

Memory and History are identical. They are the very impossibility of Control.

The world is an archipelago in time. Each universe is a macro-island that in its own consistency, pulses. But space-time mutates, and its information is lost for ever and where before was its body, there is now another obeying different laws, and between universe and universe, the illusion of fixity. If synchronically there are parallel universes—each ruled by its own laws—also diachronically heteroclitic chaosmoses disappear and appear, separated from each other by an uncrossable abyss, by a pulsating irregularity. Science becomes an absurdity if it doesn't heed that principles discovered today will serve only for a certain, indeterminate, perishing space-time because life is a life always inside another death. All memory is temporal. All laws will perish. All history has limits. All texture loses its plot.

We attempt to return to a universe distinct from the actual alterverse, to try to unite the loose pieces, memories, or reconstruction. What happened in the far-off past and what will happen in the real future, we will never be able to know. We must accept that memory cannot be remade, rather it fails. We must remember that memory is a fantasy. We must abandon the illusion of identity. History is neomemory, an avatar without an original. If we want to return to the origin of the universe, we can only, at best, return to one of its origins. This is only possible if, perhaps, chaotic, the alterverse has not passed through a mutation of its laws and as such has already freed itself from its past.

All that I am saying, I know, has no foundation. Nothing can, because obedience to a set of principles can only be temporal. The successive or simultaneous norms of the universe have as a frontier its death. For a text or for a planet, for a galaxy or for a universe, so on earth as in a black hole, everything will be provisional.

I am not saying that regularly the *big bang* reoccurs—in the case that it was, indeed, the event or method by which *this* universe was formed—as it's possible that a point of infinite compression is not the only means of creating a cosmos or, perhaps, the universe is born already old, suddenly. Or it might originate in different points—*co-big bangs*—that then fuse or fight to fundamentally alter the laws of the others, of their respective existences. This could be a total war, with various universes simultaneously or successively colliding, coaffecting each other from a distance or as already intertwined bodies trying to impose their laws as nothing more than interstellar guerillas whose objective is to infiltrate, dominate, rebirth, or kill other universes.

Disordering one another, resisting the influxes of otherness, becoming unequal, the alterverse maintains its liberty, its discharge. The irreversible is the true. Our practices, ideas, and social fantasies concerning the functioning of the cosmos as obeying a single set of laws is another of the specters of our totalitarian thought. We have thought of the chaosmos as if it was a total State. The notion of a “Universe” is that of a detestable absolutist omnisystem, whose laws enslave everything via eternity. Self-deception and swallowing whole, we must abandon the idea of the existence of a Totality, as the chaotic is the definitive proof of the existence of freedom. So that the I might be Sovereign we must let go of all General Laws. I know negating the existence of the Universe is absurd but however absurd, I assert it. The Universe will never happen.

English Word List: *Apocalypse Now* / *blockbusters* / *freak* / *redo* / *cut* / *recall* / *guy next-door* / *remake* / *take-over* / *auto-remake* / *million dollar* / *plastic-playboy* / *clean-cut* / *you-wish-girl-next-door* / *entertainment-existence* / *target removal* / *clean-up* / *footage* / *precogs* / *black outs* / *mainstream America* / *“reverse engineer”* / *deleted* / *neo-uncanny* / *pop* / *haunted* / *awesome* / *creepy* / *cool* / *vintage* / *fake* / *cute* / *nice* / *counterfeit* / *memory fix* / *underground* / *cut-ups* / *cutters* / *delete* / *wipe out* / *erasing* / *Enter the Interzone* / *recovery* / *comeback* / *make-over* / *make-up* / *make-believe* / *brainwash* / *flashback* /

movie-sequel / credit history / reload / dreamland / waiting room / spooky place / middle of nowhere / outerspace / what-the-fuck / creepy place / Deadbeat No-Town. Where have we gone? / Replay / buffer zone / As Time Goes By / happiness / junkyard / clown / We Are The First Last People / mapping / Juke Box / cut down to size / Box / mailbox / Dead Letter Office / keep it going / cowboy / take over / enemy seizure / queer combination / information gathering / sexy / newsreels / straight man / will to cohere / recall / choice / post / happy few / mass media / Flash Back / Blast to the Past / Every image in front of your eyes / rememory / loop / culture-wise / film-loop / symposium of the Whole / displacement / hoax / big bang

NOTES ON
PROCESS FOR A
TRANSLATION-
IN-PROCESS

written for eight hands

by Jen Hofer, Christian Nagler,
Brian Whitener, & Heriberto Yépez

A Note On These Notes

We decided to write in four-person plural: as a “we” constituted around the making of this book for ChainLinks, as four very different people who share some affinities, as a “collaborative jumble” willing to be mistaken for one another, or just to be mistaken (a willingness central to the tasks of translating and writing). We wanted to make a text that might reflect selves in conversation, and we wanted to reflect and unravel some of our confusions, to speak transparently about our challenges, to illustrate concretely that translation is neither easy nor comfortable nor a solid ground on which to stand—it is, rather, trembly and vibrational, like sound waves (listening) or like the space between beings (conversation).

We wanted to reflect on a unique situation: as translators who are in some ways inside Empire (more on this in a bit), translating a book written against the languages of Empire, written by and translating with an author who both speaks fluently and knows inside and out these imperial languages and their traps and feints. At first, we called this—this process of translating collaboratively with and against languages—a post-translation. But in the face of a book that argues persuasively against the figure of the post, we have decided to

call our practice: translation.

Translation: we recognize and appreciate that in writing as a collaboratively jumbled “we,” each of us at different moments may end up seeming to advocate ideas with which we do not agree. Translation: to sustain such discomforts. Translation: not only refinement, but reverberation—not the smoothness of space, but topographies of time—not coherence, but multiplicity—not authoritativeness, but honest exploration. Translation: because we are dying inside this Empire.

Translating English into English

One of the problems with translating the original text of *Imperio* is that many English-language words appear in the Spanish-language original, usually italicized. On the level of the translation, we were confronted with the problem simply of what to do. Place those words in Spanish, aiming for a similar “effect”? The effect would not be the same: English is a colonizing language, Spanish—in the contemporary U.S. context—is not. Moreover, many English-language words are recognizable and somewhat understandable in Spanish, where in most English-language reading contexts, the Spanish terms would read as “illegible” signs. Another potential solution: keep those terms in English, but with notes? Too many notes—boring, awkward, unnecessary. Simply remove the italics and any reference to that linguistic multiplicity? Too untrue to the text, an erasure that veers away from translation into the realm of editing or rewriting. In the end, our decision was to keep the terms in English, with italics, and to place a list of the words originally appearing in English at the end of each chapter. This approach emerged in conversation amongst the four of us, from our differential reading of the book’s strategies and desires, and raised what for us became a central question during our time with this

project: the relation between translation and Empire.

The use of English in the original text opened out onto a wider set of problematics—the critical strategies of *Imperio* on the level of language—and led us to reflect on what we meant by “translation.” In the 1960s and 70s, dependency theory and its practitioners critiqued U.S. cultural imperialism and argued for a cultural strategy of decolonization (see for example *Para leer al Pato Donald* [*How to Read Donald Duck*] by Ariel Dorfman and Armand Mattelart). Since this time, however, in the period of “globalization,” U.S. imperial culture—best represented by the Motion Picture Association’s Jack Valenti jetting around the globe forcing open foreign markets for Hollywood products—has won out, at least ideologically and commercially. *Imperio* re-establishes this critique not by rejecting the form of the beast (as was common in anti-imperial critiques on the Latin American Left in the 1960s), but by going deep inside its vocabulary, to sound out its hollow core.

Imperio is the work of a technician who has attentively (possibly even affectionately) studied the target for many years before beginning a journey, a quest. The method: to take the specific, technical language of the empire’s memory machine and turn it inside out, to turn it not against itself (a strategy that would result in mere refusal, the unacknowledgement of Empire’s totalizing capabilities, itself a totalizing impulse), but rather to chart its fundamental emptiness, the play of mirrors of its spectacle. The method: to analyze, re-enact, de-enact, the omnipresent yet also chimerical nature of imperial culture, both past and present. Translation: how to reflect this method and its various effects in a different—and differently imperial—language? Given our understanding of how *Imperio* functions, we needed a translation that would neither exaggerate the book’s claims (Brave new world! Non-imperial culture!) nor denigrate them (the sub-altern speaks, albeit softly, albeit madly)—a translation that would walk the fine and not-very-linear

line between inversion, utopia, overcoming and return of the same, totalizing of Empire, no escape—a translation that would not function as a neutralization of cartography (yet would, as well, preserve its very suspicion of cartography, its insistence on the temporal)—a translation that would respect the madness and gravity and necessity of trying to think the destruction of the memory machine and technics of Empire.

Apropos cartography, another technical (or linguistic-topological) problem we encountered—which quickly signaled the geopolitical and philosophical complexities presented by both the original text and our approach as translators—was how to delineate geographic regions and their connotations in a clear and consistent way that reflected the references in the original text. Our hope was to avoid reifying ideas of a United States monopoly over the master-continental signifier *America*, and at the same time to avoid confirming an English-language reader's unconscious sense that the United States is the underived form of Europe's New World, its telos, or at least without giving the sense that this text, its Spanish imaginary, shares that fantasy. This is a problem that will be familiar to most translators and speakers of Spanish; it has been discussed at length by many non-Anglo-American critics of Empire from Jose Martí and Alberto Masferrer to Claribel Alegría and Eduardo Galeano. *Imperio*, in accordance with customary usage in Latin America, consistently refers to the area north of the US/Mexico border—and specifically to the U.S.—as Norteamérica. But Mexico, as a broad landmass north of the isthmus of *Central America*, is included in the English sense of North America—it is claimed (and claims itself) as part of the North geographically and economically (in, for example, the North American Free Trade Agreement), though not linguistically, politically, or popularly. What to do, then, with terms like *Norteamérica* or *norteamericano*? Condense them into the clunky, more particularly nationalist *USAmerica(n)* and thus partition off, perhaps as Heriberto's text does to

some extent, Canada from the North's imperial history? Or stick close to the Spanish with *North America* and risk an uncanny historical slippage between colonizer and colonized (an option which Heriberto's text at certain points might welcome)? This is a language usage issue—a matter of the proper name—that performs the laceration of the US/Mexico border, its artificiality and its oscillatory utility. It is a translation issue that makes vivid *Imperio's* figuration of the United States and Mexico as fantasy *co-bodies*.

As the reader will have noticed, our solution to this problem was to adopt a term (though not uniformly) that Jen frequently uses, both in her writing and in her translation practice, USAmerica(n). Like all “solutions” it has certain limitations. While, generally speaking, *norteamericano* in a Spanish-language context refers primarily to the United States, strictly speaking one could imagine it applying, psychogeographically at least, to Canada. So that is one overtone that drops out with our usage of USAmerica(n). However, the usefulness of the selected application of the term is two-fold, as we see it. First, it allows us to bring out the focal point of *Imperio's* critique: the United States. It was important to all of us involved in this project that the translation did not mitigate, smooth over, contain, or dampen the book's insistence on and directness in its critique of U.S. empire. Second, in a work that generates much of its conceptual space through linguistic reappropriation and invention, we felt like the spirit of USAmerica(n) was in keeping with the book's overall project—a project we would describe as something like forgetting without dying.

Positionality and Imperial Translation

Heriberto has been arguing for years—often while staring pointedly, playfully, seriously, directly, and always provocatively at any translators-into-English who are in the room

where he might happen to be speaking—that all translation is a colonial act. To be sure, colonial acts and their actors abound. In the late 90s, along with the rise of a new form of U.S. Empire, a more internalized, crowd-sourced, “Post-Fordist” version, it became a common thing, in the United States, to talk about your passport. Like in a dating profile: “I’ve got my passport and I’m ready to travel.” (Implicitly suggesting that being undocumented is unsexy? Thanks to those willing to be openly undocumented and unafraid, we know for sure that’s not the case!) Similarly, it became common in certain U.S. social sectors to talk about Tokyo, London, and Paris as if they were places everyone visits all the time (*Lost in Translation*), when cosmopolitan privilege, the special status of the American dollar/subject became normalized. American tourists are notorious for traveling places without knowing the language, for blundering forth; whereas British tourists, historically, *always know the language*, because they believe they have constructed a world (an empire) that speaks only English. *Imperio*, in its best moments, asks a historical question of us, one that traverses these histories: the question not of difference, or the celebration of difference *tout court*, but rather what kind of difference and how much difference is different enough? For many years, this problem of difference and its politics has been spatialized: a problem of assessing the terrain of Empire and our position in it. Is this trench in which we hide one of Empire? Is it deep enough? Or is it too deep? Are we too far inside? Not far enough?

All the practitioners of translation who worked on this volume (and as the authorship of these notes indicates, the writer of the volume himself is one of the practitioners of its translation) have lived “outside” or in the liminal borderlands of their “native” country in some way, and for significant time. Does it make a difference that some of us have as our natal *barco* the ship of Empire, a dark cradle, a wicked one? Surely. And surely this is not simply an issue of position,

of space, but of time: of lived experience, of registers and adaptations housed deep in a somatic tissue. In other words, simply: irreversibility. In other words: we would like it to be obvious that something has changed in the space-time between us, practitioners of *translation*, and Olson, imperial translator but also limit case of Empire. But what? (Our bodies). And how? (In time). And is it not a symptom of imperialism to claim to be free of imperialist tendencies? (Should we try to forget?)

Clearly, positionality matters, as there are scores of poets, artists, writers, thinkers, administrators, and presidents out there who still think exactly like Olson, or worse. However, it is not enough simply to champion difference (we've known that at least since the Clinton era of multiculturalism, right?). So, the matter must be then to initiate a different kind of difference, or throw of the dice betting (*apostando*) on a certain kind of difference. As practitioners of translation, we want to cease to be "interpreters"—transferring, defining, limiting the meaning(s) of a text. (Though what else does translation do, but interpret, transfer, define, limit?) We want, rather, two things—and recognize we may be left wanting them. First, we want to walk this fine line of difference, a difference that recognizes it exists only on and in and through the terrain of language, but which does not attempt simply to deform, escape from, or "overturn" imperial language. What translation looks for, then, is an edge to language that would cut against empire, a difference (another difference) that could serve as a detonator against the language of Imperial difference. In the terrain of neo-memory, of the loss of historical memory and its replacement by *total recall*, the *fake*, the *cut*, the *haunted redo*, the *vintage wipeout*, the *creepy brainwash*, the detonator is the very language of Imperial memory repositioned, replayed, remixed, seeking a different edge. Second, we want to refuse on some level the spatiality of the way difference has been thought and the spatiality of the way Empire and subjectivity have been

thought (inside/outside, positionality, etc). For us this has not meant forgetting positionality but rather asking: how do I put this language into my body? (rather than putting my body into this language?) The (only) answer we have: through translation, through time, through this passage—the demands and resistances *Imperio* and Empire require of us.

Is it a gamble? Yes.

Do we have another option? No. Yes. No.

We think translation is colonialist. We say this not only as a way of “accusing” Western translators, but because we ourselves are translators, that is, colonialists. Saying translation is colonialist is an anti-epic including our own histories (we reimagine Pound’s “An epic is a poem including history.”)* The act of making text under the sign of another’s authorship (the act of translation) frames decisions to bring out or suppress certain histories embedded in the target language. English is full of these histories; they pulse just beneath the surface or flash off the chrome of idioms and they reveal their shape in the inflections of cognates. Many passages in *Imperio* pose unique problems, in that the potential readability of the English is often vexed from the inside by the very imperial figures and figurations *Imperio* works to de-naturalize. These knots demand particularly elegant (or congruently knotted) solutions, discovery of which is limited in some cases by the relative lexical breadth or “fluency” of each of the three translators, and in other cases because those solutions may not exist. In both cases—“failure” on the part of the translator and “failure” on the part of the language—a historical disjunction is laid open to view, like a wound between languages, a fissure that both tongues circumnavigate cautiously, awkwardly unable to fully claim or disown a sentence.

It may seem strange to attribute agency to the languages

* “Date Line,” in *Literary Essays of Ezra Pound*, T. S. Eliot (ed.), New Directions, 1968, New York, p. 86.

themselves, but this is an impression the experience of translation encourages; when one language “possesses” another, and isn’t liable to exorcism by poetics or mechanics, then what’s created, if only for the length of an auxiliary verb, is a sort of ambling stranger, a momentary subject who mutters in “translationese,” a sort of schizo who expresses “inappropriate affect,” dramatizing what were originally banal details or occulting what were crucial nuances, abstracting what was once effortless prosody (though is any writing actually effortless?). For the most part we have tried to discipline these strangers (though may ourselves have ended up disciplined by them), to urge them back into the comfortable swagger of their proper histories, out of habit, and also out of respectful service to *Imperio*, to the coherence of its critique, to its readerly pleasures. But with three (four) translators, there is a proliferation of subtle strangers: little problems. We could even say that one of the benefits of translation is that its little problems are almost infinite.

We believe that once we become aware of translation as colonialist, we have an opportunity to question it and to change it, without the rush to solve these problems too quickly—but with the responsibility to address the problem as such. Translation means becoming aware of the material and ideological history of both the original text and the process of translation and the relationship of the two languages in play—and even (or perhaps inherently) becoming open to the impossibility of a translation as such. We believe we are all part of a transition, and while we may not always or reliably be part of the solution, at the very least we don’t believe in the normative colonial dream of Modern translation. That is: we are not Olson, even as we carry the (neo) memory of Olson within us.

We would like to think—for reasons we have hopefully made evident here—that the work each of us has done outside the borders of our “original” countries seeks to question rather than pronounce, to reflect back on our “own” cultures

rather than explain someone else's, to resist expertise and the idea that a visitor to "elsewhere" (or anyone, really) can be the gatekeeper for access to that culture—but rather that by opening ourselves to very different geographies, syntaxes, registers, and perspectives we are able to enact our curiosities more ethically and more expansively. To continue, that is, through time, as a question, refusing its spatializing, refusing the position of the master archivist, of the gendered subject who assembles the terrain of Empire.

We Are Everywhere, Like It Or Not

In light of *Imperio's* painstaking identification of the various threads in a bundle of fantasy—in poetics, in narrative, in tourism and its long tail of cultural appropriation—as *pantopian*, the imperial fantasy of experiencing everything at once (a fantasy which finds a specific form in Ray Kurzweil's technophilic myth of the *Singularity*, a sort of tipping point in the omnipresent immanence of available information), we want to ask what an engaged translator might make of the act of translation in the age of Google Translate. Three-fourths of us write from California, where over the course of one week in late summer, all the Silicon Valley power elite and their ideological fiefs, techno-primitives, and new agers dreaming of a unified culture, would-be Hollywood moguls and self-proclaimed artists living in gentrified lofts no working artist could afford, return to the metropolises from their temporary DIYsneyworld of global consciousness in the Nevada desert on the very site where John Fremont and his band of explorers massacred a group of indigenous people, and then went on to "liberate" California from Mexico with the orchestrated mail-art fraud of the Bear Flag Rebellion. If we could say that translators bear our colonial roles (the interpreter as employee and companion to explorers, conquistadors, missionaries, anthropologists, prospectors; diviners

of local religious and legal texts with the aim of best adapting their ideas to foreign rule and absentee commandeering of resources—and in the present-day, interpreters as the *maître d's* to torturers, occupiers, and the living drones who enact the on-the-ground violence of imperialist policy), then how do we interpret the current crowd-sourced construction and refinement of translation algorithms? And how might a reflection on the automation of linguistic border areas shed light on the comparatively quaint figure of the human *literary* translator, who appears as if in antique garb, like a reënactor of colonial history?

Maybe it's unfair, or inaccurate, to compare a person, or the idea of a person, with a tool, or the idea of a tool. But perhaps it is exactly this that is the problem: that an idea of a tool (a fantasy of the tool that can do everything, made by everyone, instantaneously accessible to everyone, or to an idea of everyone) comes to replace some careful, temporally lived experience of the text, which is also a mythology, a dreamed horizon of contact, but perhaps, in its stubbornness, a valuable one. A human one, an embodied one, an experience available only to people, not to machines.

This is one thing we can say of practitioners of translation: we remain committed to the full duration of reading, for better or worse. Like *Imperio*, translators might develop an awareness of the colonial technology of the linear form of the text; we set the parallel lines of text, in their respective “source” and “target” (those quasi-military terms) languages, next to each other, compare and interpret the space between. No, not space, this is the imperialist imagination at work, better to say that translators touch the connective tissue of the lexica, the fascial-linguistic trains that expand and contract between tongues. Translators, at the very least, make a testament to a “complete” reading of the text. Because that person has written down some quantitative equivalent of what has been read. A translator might then appear as one of those pious and obsolete “lovers of read-

ing;" *reading*, which contains the whole colonial past in the patterns of its grain, its requirements, its competency tests, its narcissistic litmus of "civilization," but which, at least (maybe) is not the locus of the imperial problem *here* and *now*, in the same way that Spanish, that colonial language, is at least not an imperial language (as was mentioned earlier in this introduction) *here* and *now* in North America.

So translators are colonialists, but less like railroad barons or stock traders and more like rag-pickers or recyclers of bottles or peddlers of knife-sharpening tools and kitchen utensils perambulating from neighborhood to neighborhood, obstinately harmless in our laborious lugging of the text back and forth between languages, radically inappropriate. Translators make a show of this labor, and engaged practitioners of translation are aware that this show is just as important as the text itself—it is the new text we tend to call the "translation." So, yes, translators uphold, by default, the colonial act of reading, supporting the linear myth of the text and its origins, the fantasy that there is such a thing as a language out of which or into which we might translate. But an engaged translation perhaps refuses the next step, which is the position beyond reading: the hyper-citative, accumulative, personal-archival possession of the text (or the idea of the text), the *kindling* of the text, compressing it into a capsule, a *link* or a *file*. Resistant translators (aware of our own engagements and our own debts), as a species of endurance artist, cannot erase the sensation of lived time "contained" in the file. As translators we remain skeptical of—in *Imperio's* words—the "*quick memory, briefing, mere memo.*" As translators we are close enough to the text to know that it will not be possessed, will not be *zipped* and stowed and forgotten. We might say that engaged or resistant translation is an active grieving of that final intractable distance.

Could this be a little desperate, though? This desire to resuscitate, or to keep alive, the resistant edge of translation. To oscillate in and out of a range of ideas around what

translation might or might not be. Desperate measures for desperate times, perhaps, or perhaps simply the infective inflection of the original text on its closest and most critical, most affectionate readers: *Imperio* enacts all kinds of resistances on all kinds of signs. And we too should keep trying, yes, keep resisting, yes. (Don't resist. Riot). But also allow the moment of complicity back in again and again (as *Imperio* does so often: "what I have said of Charles Olson is the method by which I recognize myself"): "All translation is colonialist." But also keep the complicity circulating: each one of us is a translator, or is many translators.

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ChainLinks is a spinoff project of the journal *Chain*. The goal is to produce books that might change people's minds, might agitate for (thought) reform, might shift perspectives. This project also continues *Chain's* desire to provide space for work that slips through genre cracks and falls outside of disciplinary boundaries. The series editors are Jena Osman and Juliana Spahr; each individual volume is put together by guest editors. For more on how to submit a volume proposal, see www.chainarts.org. This book is made possible with support from 'A 'A Arts, Chain Arts, Mills College, Temple University, and generous contributions from individuals and subscribers.

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