

THE MATERIAL IMAGINATION: POETIC ITINERARIES FROM BRADSTREET TO  
OLSON

by

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(Under the Direction of DOUGLAS ANDERSON)

ABSTRACT

This study considers Anne Bradstreet, Jonathan Edwards, and Charles Olson as poetic world-builders. It examines the diverse heterocosms—alternate universes—that these writers construct by bridging the gap between an external, material world and the abstract, sense-driven world of the interior. By considering language as an objective technology, this project looks at language as micro-systems that evolve over time. By studying these micro-systems of language, we can begin to describe states of being as they are rendered through poetry. The chapter on Anne Bradstreet considers her public and private poems as the beginnings of lyric poetry in America, and I argue that the rhetoric of her private poems, meant as a kind of archive for her family, follow the guidelines for meditation put forth by St. Ignatius of Loyola's *Spiritual Exercises*. Along the same lines, the chapter on Jonathan Edwards considers his scientific essays and the posthumous *Images or Shadows of Divine Things* as spiritual lexicography, as a method of categorizing and defining worldly phenomena. This should interest anyone with knowledge of eighteenth-century Calvinism as it describes Edwards' deep investment in the physical world, an



uncommon assumption for his perspective. Lastly, the chapter on postwar poet Charles Olson describes his work through the work of George Butterick, the curator of the Olson Collection at the University of Connecticut in the 1970s and 1980s. Butterick is responsible for *The Guide to the Maximus Poems* (1981) which considers Olson's *Maximus Poems* as an archival storehouse and textually links to the more esoteric references in order to explain them. This study links these culturally unique writers by looking at their works as repositories for spiritual data, where poems operate both as spiritual archives and linguistic presences.

INDEX WORDS: Anne Bradstreet, Jonathan Edwards, Charles Olson, George Butterick, Wallace Stevens, N. Katherine Hayles, Susan Howe, heterocosm, imagination, sensation, perception, material metaphor, external, internal, poetry, material, immaterial, consciousness, meditation, Saint Ignatius of Loyola, Puritanism, Calvinism, Postmodernism, Early American, maker, world, world building, memory, intelligence, contemplation, morphology, image, shadow, divine, dictionary, natural, nature, archaic, form, substance, content, affection, interior, exterior, natural philosophy, spiritual, lexicography, empiricism, archive, repository



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## DEDICATION

*For my parents, Kathleen and Steve. For my brother, Christopher. For my daughter, Asa. For my wife, Gabriel, and Kathryn and Dan, my other parents.*



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## CHAPTER 1

### Introduction: *Plural worlds*

“No single theoretical language articulating the variables to which a well-defined value can be attributed can exhaust the physical content of a system. Various possible languages and points of view about the system may be complementary. They all deal with the same reality, but it is impossible to reduce them to one single description. The irreducible plurality of perspectives on the same reality expresses the impossibility of a divine point of view from which the whole of reality is visible...Each language can express only part of reality.”

— Ilya Prigogine and Isabelle Stengers, *Order out of Chaos* (1984)

“On all levels,” write Ilya Prigogine and Isabelle Stengers in *Order out of Chaos* (1984), “reality implies an essential element of conceptualization.” While we consider science to be an objective, descriptive technology and the humanities a subjective response to nature, these terms are too confining, suggest Prigogine and Stengers. Any description of reality oversimplifies its object by stressing a singular perspective.<sup>1</sup> My introduction’s title addresses what I hope the remainder of the project will accomplish: a look at three writers and the discrete worlds they manifest with language.

The title of the entire project, “The Material Imagination,” is meant to indicate two things: 1) these poets are interested in the tangibility of language that becomes representative of interior states of being, and 2) a suggestion that these poets’ imagi-



nations are archival storehouses for discrete terminologies. Good writers create consistent visions of their poetic domains, and they do so by working in stable ranges of diction, which are their toolboxes to design and build worlds. The four writers in this project are makers of such heterocosmic places whose environments are habitats of language. Those habitats are establishments of consciousness, environments of being where the particularities of language represent patterns of thought. The infrastructures of these habitats become meaningful meditative tools, designs that are meant to help instruct, sometimes didactically, the imagination's lazy and wandering eye.

Anne Bradstreet's poems (1612-1672) are often discussed via the differences between her "public" and "private" writings. While I accept this general reading of her work, I also want to consider the formal structures that establish these differences. Her "quaternalion" poems, for example, repeat rhetorical structures to create systematic formal shapes that behave like the spherical, symmetrical visions of a sixteenth and seventeenth-century Copernican cosmos. Similarly, her private poems follow the rhetorical structure of the meditative poem, adapted from St. Ignatius of Loyola's *Spiritual Exercises*.

It may be unusual to consider Jonathan Edwards (1703-1758) as a poet, but I treat him as one because his creative mind describes a unique system of language, and in turn develops something we might dub a spiritual poetics. Edwards' view of language in a natural world is one that participates in the landscape of immanence.



For Edwards, language is integrative with natural states and not merely representational. Following the natural philosophy of John Locke, Edwards' interests in language's ability to categorize phenomena pushes him to take on a spiritual lexicography as one of his writerly duties.

We might, retrospectively, call George Butterick (1943-1988) and Charles Olson's (1910-1970) relationship a collaborative one. Without Butterick's *Guide to the Maximus Poems*, the richness of Olson's esotericisms would be inaccessible, and in some sense, Butterick is as much a legitimate figure of inquiry as the poet because he acts as translator for Olson's poetic code. A New Englander himself, Olson shares some of the literary legacy of the region, the least of which, like Edwards, is an interest in describing the world's systems through some measure of its vocabulary. Olson's work conceives of itself as a cultural history whose silent agent is the poet sifting through language as if it were an archaeological dig site, collecting the fragments of bone and broken objects to read their signs.

What these writers share is an interest in the manifesting presence of the human spirit—what at one time poets might have called the soul, but today more often, the consciousness. That manifestation occurs on the physical plane. In these four figures—Anne Bradstreet, Jonathan Edwards, Charles Olson and George Butterick—the imagination seeks to color in an aesthetic system. As others have argued, these aesthetic systems<sup>2 3</sup> have historical and cultural roots: they tell us what language looked like or sounded like if we could call each poet on the phone, tell us what kind



of mental objects occupied their thoughts, what pacified them or what caused them to foment revolution. The forms that artists gravitate toward are usually responses to their historic contexts, which is why history is better studied as a moving stream than in isolated blocks. The imagination won't give us an artist's mind of course, but it will show us just how these four artists *interface* with the physicality and immateriality of the temporal realm. I find these behavioral patterns of the imagination to be the logos and ethos of the writers treated in these pages, all of whom construct unique literary worlds to present the aesthetics of individual metaphysical practices.

Anne Bradstreet's long poem "Contemplations," for example, uses the imagination to investigate the world's layers, from the sun to the animal life in the bed of the Merrimac River. Similarly, Jonathan Edward's sermon "A Divine and Supernatural Light" rhetorically situates the existence of "spiritual" light against the backdrop of "natural" light. While he claims, "divine light does not consist in any impression made upon the imagination,"<sup>4</sup> the imagination remains essential to differentiate between normal light and impressionistic light of spiritual bodies.<sup>5</sup> And in Charles Olson's *Maximus Poems* (and in George Butterick's index of those poems, *The Guide to the Maximus Poems*), the imagination narrows the gaps between historic cultures, myth, and the fishing port of Gloucester, Massachusetts in the 1960s. Acts of the imagination become materially realized in Olson, as poems take on the attributes of material objects, bringing linguistic structures into precise alignments with the physical page.<sup>6</sup>



These sorts of alignments, whether they embrace the materiality of the page or are aware of the rhetorical structures that resemble concrete forms, construct reliquaries of the imagination.<sup>7</sup> Aesthetics essentially translate imaginative potential into physical forms. This translation from the imagination into a physical substance results in the invention of a poetic cosmos. For poets, that process yields what Lawrence Buell calls the image of “the poet as a world-creator”:

One thinks of this tradition of literary world-building as originating in the sense of America as a new world and the American as the new Adam. Before these myths could achieve full expression in literature, however, the neoclassical aesthetics that prevailed in the early national period needed to be infused with the romantic vision of the poet as a liberating god and the poem as a heterocosm, or second creation. This development was brought about, in good part, through the impact of such cultural middlemen as Coleridge, Carlyle, and Emerson upon the next generation of American writers, particularly Thoreau, Whitman, Melville, and Emily Dickinson.<sup>8</sup> (Lawrence Buell, *Literary Transcendentalism: Style and Vision in the American Renaissance* [Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1973], 142)

It seems possible to claim that most ages have their own types of artifacts—“cultural middlemen,” mediators—that provide the interchange between interior worlds and exterior ones. For example, the early American use of the emblem as an



expression of everyday signs and portents collapses the space between psychology and art. Like the realization of poetic language that transcends language's mundane functionalities, so too does the emblem's activity span both high and low orders of being.<sup>9</sup>

Any literary text presents its own natural state. It is, like Emerson proposes in another context, a self-reliant system whose structural integrity depends upon circumstances of vocabulary, syntax, ideology, etc. — all things we might describe through linguistic patterns, all things that “add up,” so to speak, to a system of aesthetics.

*The mind's Graphical Interface.*

For the purposes of this project, we'll be describing the mechanism of the imagination as a technology because of its ability to be interfaced with the physical world, that is, to be used in a manner that manipulates the substantive places in which we dwell phenomenologically. Its flexibility as a passive or active agent makes it a unique creature that converses in the grammars of the universe as both passenger and participant. Concerning this “technological” apparatus of the mind that we are calling the creative imagination, over longer historic periods, definitions of the imagination shift and the imaginative faculties are either lauded or dismissed.

Emerson's suggestion that “every word was once a poem” links language and text to the physical and material world. For Emerson, Nature itself is a kind of



formal language, emblematic of some other rich and invisible world. Nature's form becomes a realized comprehension of the invisible orders, orders that correspond to our minds, that are the hieroglyphic encodement of the spirit, the inner life. "Words are signs of natural facts," he writes; "The world is emblematic" and "Nature is the symbol of the spirit," are some of the tenets of Emerson's picture-language of nature, the manifestation of "spirit" in the manner the human mind comprehends and processes it. Verbal "signs of natural facts" are a running script for the formal world, metaphors for the activity of the material world. But more than metaphoric, the signs we encounter on a continual basis are psychological as well as physical events.

Historically, the aesthetics of American poetics organizes itself around just that physiological phenomenon. Aesthetics becomes history, at least culturally, in the manner that the artistic imagination tunes itself to a particular frequency, and then how it animates the particularities of the images imprinted on its mind. Those aesthetics are more than a method of viewing the world and more than a common vocabulary; rather, the inscription software of the human mind writes itself into a unique GUI (graphical user interface) for each passing era. The mind tasks itself with a unique formal request: not only how to interpret the contemporary forms it comes into contact with, but also how to re-generate those forms materially and artificially.

Similarly, postmodernism's take on quantifiable and qualitative data can be described as a property, or substance rather, that undergoes aesthetic transformation. In Susan Howe as well Charles Olson's poetry, data is absorbed subjectively,



intuited, and reified on the page. That range of data is rather comprehensive, including both historic document and historic anecdote, and the translation that occurs subjects the “data” to visualization. Like the more contemporary systems—such as a GIS (geographic information system)—that capture, organize, and analyze data and then visualize it for a human audience, postmodernism’s absorption and exudation of information is a process that commits information to a technological afterlife. Like the path of our material “personhood” into our “digital personhoods,” configured perhaps like the modulation/demodulation of the upload/download paradigm, the transference of data happens through the medium of the mind. The output into a new environment creates a new kind of catalogue, one that is read completely differently than the original source.

For example, in the last chapter I discuss the work of editor, archivist, and poet George Butterick on Charles Olson’s *Maximus Poems* (1950-1970), an effort that resulted in the *Guide to the Maximus Poems* (1981). Given the pattern I’ve described for this aesthetics translation of data, I find it useful to consider Butterick’s *Guide* as an index of Olson’s informational references and also as visual rendering of Olson’s poems. By “visual,” I don’t necessarily mean a pictographic representation of the poems but rather a re-translation of the references that initially inspired Olson. A concordance can guide a reader toward keywords in a complex text. Butterick’s index divides and conquers Olson’s text to give better access to its esotericisms and also to represent its ideas as a searchable list. Like a search engine, Butterick’s *Guide* links



the *Maximus Poems* to more common linguistic patterns. As a result, Olson's project becomes researchable as if it were an archive. It also becomes readable.

Anne Bradstreet and Jonathan Edwards' works might be considered as similar search engines. Their translations of experience certainly give us a better image of their culture, but by looking at their imaginations as a form of technology (that is, an applied science) not only are their relationships with language revealed but also their methods of engineering images, planting them become like memories in our own cultural consciousnesses.

*Some discussion of the imagination's language maps.*

Out loud Anne Bradstreet seems to consider the imagination as a state of human error, not much more reliable than fancy or whimsy. The word "imagination" (or, "fancy") in Early American religious culture carried a negative connotation, but Bradstreet's poems—particularly "Contemplations" and the "Meditations Divine and Moral"—suggest otherwise. Those poems have particular visions, animated by very internal sources that should be considered creatively imaginative. For Jonathan Edwards, the spiritual stakes of the imagination are even higher: this faculty produces not only error, but misleading judgment, undisciplined emotional aberration, and material impediments. "The great virtue of Newtonian science, as Edwards saw it, was that it disciplined the 'imagination'," writes Perry Miller:



He first explained his meaning in the prologue to the 'Notes on Science.' The prejudices of the imagination, he wrote, are more powerful enemies of truth than any except those of self-interest and impetuous passion... What Edwards meant by the imagination was that very 'ingenuity' which the old rhetoric had encouraged and the plain style had barely held in check, and then only when the faith had been. It was a capriciousness that used God's creation for incidental adornments, that read meanings into things which were no more than what the fancy pretended they might mean...[Jonathan Edwards, *Images or Shadows of Divine Things*, ed. Perry Miller (Yale University Press: New Haven, 1948), 20.]

Similarly, in *Reflections and Observations on the Memoirs of Mr. Brainerd*, syncopations between interior and exterior realities become ideals of health and balanced spiritual temperament. Edwards' description of David Brainerd's success as a missionary and as a spiritual being follows the rhetoric of Enlightenment science, that is, one's judgments of nature travel from the outside in, from an observation of external objects through passive sensory awareness. Brainerd's external world, as Edwards understands it, becomes an affective impression upon the mind, the direction from where knowledge travels.



His religion did apparently and greatly *differ* from that of many high pretenders to religion, who are frequently actuated by *vehement emotions* of mind, and are carried on in a course of *sudden* and *strong impressions*, and supposed *high illuminations* and *immediate discoveries*, and at the same time are persons of a virulent “Zeal, not according to knowledge.”

His convictions preceding his conversion, did not arise from any frightful *impressions on his imagination*, or any external images and ideas of fire and brimstone, a sword of vengeance drawn, a dark pit open, devils in terrible shapes, &c. strongly fixed in his mind. His sign of his own sinfulness did not consist in any imagination of a heap of loathsome material filthiness within him; nor did his sense of the hardness of his heart consist in any bodily feeling in his breast something hard and heavy like a stone, nor in any imaginations whatever of such a nature. ...

Brainerd, in short, was not deluded by metaphor:

And if we look through the whole series of his experiences, from his conversion to his death, we shall find none of this kind. I have had occasion to read his diary over and over, and very particularly and critically to review every passage in it; and I find no one instance of a strong impression on his imagination, through his whole



life: no instance of a strongly impressed idea of any external glory and brightness, of any bodily form and shape, any beautiful majestic countenance: no imaginary sight of Christ hanging on the cross, with his blood streaming from his wounds; or seated in heaven on a bright throne, with angels and saints bowing before him; or with a countenance smiling on him; or arms open to embrace him: no sight of heaven, in his imagination, with gates of pearl, and golden streets, and vast multitudes of glorious inhabitants, with shining garments: no sight of the book of life opened, with his name written in it: no hearing of the sweet music made by the songs of heavenly hosts; no hearing God or Christ immediately speaking to him...

That is to say, that the "legacy" of the theatrical apparatus of spiritual conversion did not touch Brainerd. Edwards rejects that showmanship in his recount here of Brainerd's "brain."

We see by his diary how, from time to time, through the course of his life, his soul was filled with ineffable sweetness and comfort. But what was the spring of this strong and abiding consolation? Not so much the consideration of the sure ground he had to think that his state was good, that God had delivered him from hell, and that heaven was *his*; or any thoughts concerning his own distinguished, happy, and exalted circumstances, as a high favorite of heaven: but the sweet



meditations and entertaining views he had of divine things *without himself*... [Jonathan Edwards, *The Life of David Brainerd: Missionary to the Indians; with an Abridgment of His Diary and Journal. From President Edwards*, ed. John Styles (Harvard, 1812), 295-297.]

Here Edwards suggests that David Brainerd's immediate experience of the outside world—one perpetuated by divine elements—creates the evidence for his religious conviction. Instead of being led by the formulas of Christian iconography, invisible to the normal range of bodily sensation, he is guided by “sweet meditations and entertaining views,” or what modern information technology might call a “wetware device.”

### *Technological afterlife.*

Because we're considering the imagination as a kind of technology—calling it a wetware device, a biochemical apparatus connected to cognitive events—let us consider briefly the impetuses of data that affect the imagination's impulses. We can consider this as a workflow, even.

The intention of this phrase “technological afterlife” isn't meant as some distracting coinage. Rather, it is meant to chart the path of data in two ways: one, as the absorption of raw experience by the mind of the poet where the output is a poem or material artifact that transforms the data into a form of usable or unusable information; two, as the digital “body” of that material artifact.



If we divide the body and the mind into semantic values, a reversal in those values takes place after a structure is coded into a digital realm, when it passes into this technological afterlife. The body has a very different value when it has been converted into digital code.<sup>10</sup> Rather, it is the transcription of the internal forms that are resolved and roughly retained. Of course, all of this denies the chemistry of the body, as if the origins of internal realities weren't created or modified by its presence.

In Stanislaw Lem's *Solaris* (1961), for example, the activity of the story takes place, fundamentally, in the psychological space of the planet itself. The characters are something like dreams to begin with, somewhat embodied but usually apparitional, and the substance of the mimoids—the bodies that the planet generates from the memories of the characters—while being atomic, is structurally simple. On *Solaris*, memory serves as an afterlife, one that renders memory into material shape. Experience and its inaccurate record are put out into the public world, firm realizations of grief, depictions of lament. These are technological afterlives having passed through the membrane of *Solaris*' mind, a medium whose architecture transforms the memories and experiences into substance.

Similarly, Anne Bradstreet's later poetry of elegy and lament speaks both to the condition of material loss as well as the frustration of psychological change, loss' doppelganger in the spiritual plane. The form of the jeremiad—the sermonic form



that is predicated upon the experience of lament, especially public lament and public grief—speaks to these existential qualms.

Like the mimoids of *Solaris*, material artifacts crafted from the interior drama of memory, the emblems of early American poetry are also forms crafted out of ontological ghosts. Bradstreet's *Meditations Divine and Moral* (1664) and Jonathan Edwards' *Images or Shadows of Divine Things* (published 1830) can be considered as emblematic, or as Perry Miller's epigraph from Pascal's *Pensées* in the introduction to Edwards' *Images or Shadows* cites:

A cipher has a double meaning, one clear, and one in which it is said  
that the meaning is hidden.

The artifact, whether written or pictographic, has a surface tension that can be penetrated by an investigative mind, where the subconscious or conscious mind might work out an instructive message. The inscription of experience into language requires a reverse of that process: an understanding of those hidden meanings that can then take on a more substantial shape. Similarly, the experience of history in Charles Olson's poetry follows the same pattern. Olson's "home-brewed" research becomes internalized, worked out in the imagination, then re-emitted as esoteric conundrums begging to be worked out by a reader. George Butterick's task in the *Guide* is to liaison with Olson's ciphers in order to foreground the reader's engagement with an enigmatic world.



The retrieval of content from the emblematic form is an interaction with a storage system. Like the memory theatres of the Peripatetic school, one uses a material shape in order to store the details of a memory item. Like the Web Portal that grants access to further pages of digital detail, the emblem is a doorway, and its materiality also a point of contact for the imagination.<sup>11</sup>

To clarify some of the interest this project has with “recovery” principles, I will examine some of those reclamations in the chapters to come. Turn to Appendix C to consider Susan Howe’s material poetics and the use of the poem as a storage device.

This project seeks to complement, and not replace, a historical criticism. It pays attention to the ways in which the cultural and personal experiences that guide the imagination (or, inspiration) locates its encounters with language and with embodied experience. These sites, where the imagination takes its reference, are certainly historically embedded, but I find it useful to consider a wider range of historical narrative that indicates the progressive nature of consciousness. The variety of textual environments here—in Bradstreet’s poems, Edwards *Images or Shadows*, and Olson’s sculptural hybrids—provide the flora and fauna for the interaction between these writers’ material presences and the simulation of those presences in dreamed worlds of language and metaphor. At the same time, the approach to writing these pages belongs in part to a broader critical movement, where writers such as Kathe-



rine Hayles have generated a strain of criticism that attempts to use modern terminology to explore the metaphysical interests throughout the history of literature. For this project we will consider the poem a kind of machine—one that stores information (even if aesthetically, abstractly) and can redistribute it. In this sense we should consider the object of the poem as a useful vehicle for the traffic between the mind and the body, the interior world and the exterior one.

To refute the Cartesian division between mind and body, Katherine Hayles considers the “MINDBODY”: this, formally speaking, acts as the subject engaged by contemporary digital texts that force us to respond to their “verbal, acoustic, kinesthetic, and functional properties” in order to suggest a more perfect union of physical and mental domains.<sup>12</sup> The voice that speaks on the pages of this project is a similar amalgamation of a manipulated object. My own absorption of these texts comes from a variety of reading experiences—digital renditions, linguistic concordance, text analysis software, print books—and my intention, from time to time, is to put those variations on display. My activities as a reader will shape the informational pattern on display here, and as a “user” of the texts prior to composing this document, in particular those in the digital world, will also leave a small signature in the cultural information pattern of our virtual condition.

While my project doesn’t pretend that it’s possible to objectively diagnose American literature in all of its stages and then come up with a blanket statement about a modern condition, it is interested in exploring the material possibilities of



text as they may relate to a few American writers. My discussion of Stevens in Appendix B, Katherine Hayles and a contemporary digital condition throughout the chapters, and Susan Howe in Appendix C highlights the notion of formalized, textual atmospheres that may lead us to a sense of imagination's variety. In the proper chapters, however, by looking at Anne Bradstreet, Jonathan Edwards, and Charles Olson, I want to alert us to the behavior of text zones that instruct our understanding of the poetic object and the psychological impetus those poetic objects provide, that is, the behavior of the reader.

The poetic entry devices for the chapters that follow here never seem to stray too far beyond William Carlos Williams' statement in *Paterson* that there are "no ideas but in things."<sup>13</sup> If there's any tradition or inherited poetic DNA among Bradstreet, Edwards, and Olson, it lies in what I call their poetic empiricism, that is, where poems are used as sites of discovery. Ideas are discovered through the things that come in contact with poetic consciousness; the imagination is an adaptive translator in the nothings of "the blank faces of the houses/ and cylindrical trees."<sup>14</sup> Language and the material world survive impasse through an objective investigation that, after processed through poetic meditation, becomes subjective experience. Language finds a way to become verifiable—that is, language can tell the truth—when it acts as a catalyst between material and spiritual representation and suspends its normal encounters with embellishment. In his article on Wordsworth's *The White Doe of Rylstone*, James Heffernan neatly defines "the primary effect of imaginative power"



to be “the evocation of meaning from the material world, the manifestation of a visible object as the *emblem* of invisible truth.”<sup>15</sup> Though he’s talking about Wordsworth, the same membrane between material and its “invisible truth” component exists for the writers in mind here as the innuendo of meaning is inflected by the imagination.

As one of colonial America and therefore modern America’s first poets, Anne Bradstreet’s depiction of daily activity has been followed by a glowing tradition of American poets writing in the tradition of the “everyday.” To understand the difference between Bradstreet’s objects of the daily and Frank O’Hara’s Coca-Cola and taxicab visions of the twentieth century is to understand the immediacy of the Non-conformists’ existential plights. The chapter on Bradstreet will address the responsibilities of a poet coming to terms with the age’s “individual understanding” and the conscious personhood resultant from Enlightenment pressures.<sup>16</sup>

While Jonathan Edwards’ scientific papers can feel scientifically dubious at times, his ability with written language and poetic image takes its own place as a variety of scientific investigation. In the chapter here, I take Edwards’ God as a dreaming deity, personal and touched with a distracted and sometimes ambivalent personality. Following lines from his *Scientific and Philosophical Writings*, we might see that Edwards’ God is immanent creature, infiltrating the substantive world by way of a unique consciousness. At times to me, his descriptions of this entity can also feel like a transcended creature, that is, with respect to Immanuel Kant, a kind of “hands-off” god. In one very specific moment in Edwards’ writings, it seems possible to argue



for a god consciousness imagining the ongoing world; for Edwards however, the word “imagination” represented indulgent fancy and adulterated moral behavior. Cotton Mather and other spiritualizers practiced that, according to Perry Miller in his introduction to Edwards’ *Images and Shadows of Divine Things*; preferring “intelligence” instead, Edwards’ term justified the kinds of revelry required in the meditations upon divine emblems, those proverbs waiting to be experienced by the individual. Additionally, Jonathan Edwards’ love affair with paper is apparent in the shapes of his bound notebooks and *miscellanies* as they look rather like artists’ books. His practice of pinning scraps of paper to his body while he took long walks—calling these scraps, *remembrancers*—Edwards seems to be suggesting that the body in space is a useful site for the transaction of memory. I also look at his collection of morality poems, *Images and Shadows of Divine Things*, as linguistic emblems to suggest some connection between a spiritual archive and a material storage device.

The chapter on Charles Olson and George Butterick explores similar behaviors of recovery. One could easily argue that Olson’s primary poetic intention was to create temporal resonances accessible in the process of writing as well as the process of reading. Historical and cultural bridgework is described through a morphological depiction of time, similar to Howe’s analysis of Thoreau where energy passed on might be conceptualized as genetic inheritances. Not only are these energies suffused with the physical attributes of DNA, they are inebriated by the perspectives of language, textural patterns that move like familial heirs. George Butterick’s work as

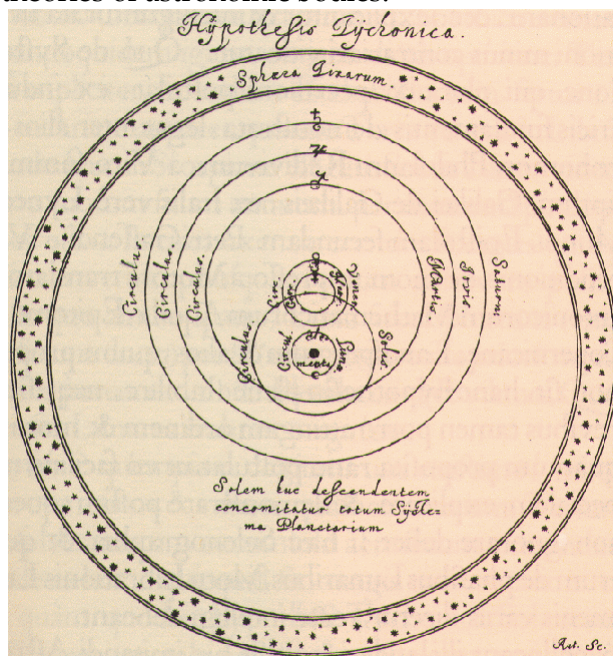


an editor of Olson serves like the litigation process of an inheritance changeover. His vast index of Olson's prose and poetry creates the connective bridge between Olson's challenging linguistic cosmos and one more suitable for common verification.

<sup>1</sup> Ilya Prigogine and Isabelle Stengers, *Order out of Chaos* (New York: Bantam Books, 1984), 224-226.

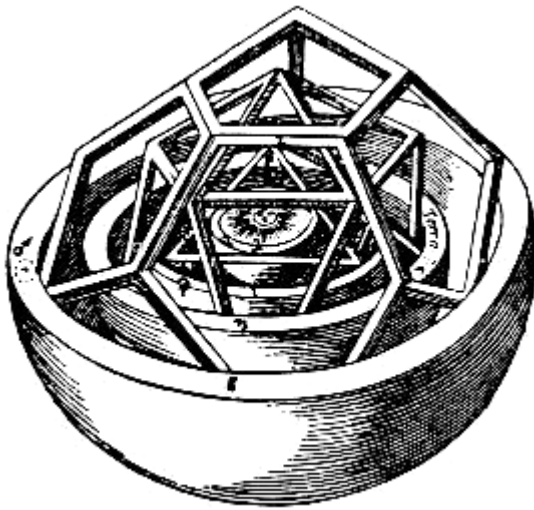
<sup>2</sup> What connects these temporal realms is relatively little—a handful of artifacts, some literature, a few strains of DNA are able to make migratory leaps. What makes these places retain their familiarity—though they sit like independent spheres in a digital space with infinite distance between them, hyperlinked, perhaps—and what keeps these places connected is for some different essay, but in part, it is the task of the imagination to synthesize the data it comes in contact with in its realm: not only to try and make sense out of the informational codes it comes in contact with, but to keep the cognizing mind from breaking apart.

<sup>3</sup> Or perhaps this vision of time can belong to Tycho Brahe or Johannes Kepler's spatial theories of astronomic bodies:



Tycho Brahe's system (from Wikimedia)





Kepler's geometrically enshrined solar system (from Wikimedia)

<sup>4</sup> "Divine and Supernatural Light," Jonathan Edwards, *Norton Anthology of American Literature*, Vol. 1, Seventh Edition, ed. Nina Baym (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2008), 184.

<sup>5</sup> There is, of course, a big difference between fancy and imagination, and imagination is equivalent to fancy for Edwards. The division is best noted by Sam Taylor Coleridge in the *Biographia Literaria*; M.H. Abrams summarizes the key distinctions in the *Glossary of Literary Terms*:

In earlier discussions, "fancy" and "imagination" had for the most part been used synonymously to denote a faculty of the mind which is distinguished from "reason," "judgment," and "memory," in that it receives "images" from the senses and reorders them into new combinations. In the thirteenth chapter of *Biographia Literaria* (1817), Coleridge attributes this reordering function of the sensory images to the lower faculty he calls fancy: "Fancy...has no other counters to play with, but fixities and definites. The Fancy is indeed no other than a mode of Memory emancipated from the order of time and space." To Coleridge, that is, the fancy is a mechanical process which receives the elementary images—the "fixities and definites" which come to it ready-made from the senses—and, without altering the parts, reassembles them into a different spatial and temporal order from that in which they were originally perceived. The imagination, however, which produces a much higher kind of poetry, Dissolves, diffuses, dissipates, in order to re-create; or where this process is rendered impossible, yet still at all events it struggles to idealize and unify. It is essentially vital, even as all objects (as objects) are essentially fixed and dead.



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Coleridge's imagination, that is, is able to "create" rather than merely re-assemble, by dissolving the fixities and definites—the mental pictures, or images, received from the senses—and unifying them into a new whole. And while the fancy is merely mechanical, the imagination is "vital"; that is, it is an organic faculty which operates not like a sorting machine, but like a living and growing plant. As Coleridge says elsewhere, the imagination "generates and produces a form of its own," while its rules are "the very powers of growth and production." And in the fourteenth chapter of the *Biographia*, Coleridge adds his famous statement that the "synthetic" power which is the "imagination...reveals itself in the balance or reconciliation of opposite or discordant qualities: of sameness, with difference; of the general, with the concrete; the idea, with the image...." The faculty of imagination, in other words, assimilates and synthesizes the most disparate elements into an organic whole—that is, a newly generated unity, constituted by an interdependence of parts whose identity cannot survive their removal from the whole. (See *Organic Form*). (87)

<sup>6</sup> Many are probably familiar with Olson's famous opening lines from Part One of *Call Me Ishmael*: "I take SPACE to be the central fact to man born in American, from Folsom cave to now. I spell it large because it comes large here. Large, and without mercy. It is geography at bottom, a hell of wide land from the beginning. That made the first American story ... : exploration" (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997), 11. Olson has a few other interesting concepts on man's ontological evolution, easing off, he writes, from the "hold of the time-concept on western man," where

Space is the mark of new history, and the measure of work now afoot is the depth of the perception of space, both as space informs objects and as it contains, in antithesis to time, secrets of a humanitas eased out of contemporary narrows.... Time and space are in the relation of a parabola, plane to cone. Nor I nor Einstein would want to disentangle them. The point is otherwise, is a matter, as I say, of where man puts his stress. Earth, as a great Italian made clear to us a long time ago, is a way to heaven.

The gains of space are already apparent. They can be put in the old triad—man and nature, society, god.

(1) Man as object is equatable to all other nature, is neutron, is on the one hand thus no more than a tree of pitchblende but is, therefore, returned to an abiding place, the primordial, where he can rest again as he did once with less knowledge to confirm his humilitas.

It is as force that the eye of nature sees man. Seen so, the animal and the bones of him do not disturb the remainder of organic and inorganic creation. As force man has his place, and wonder. He is participant. It is enough, more than he knows. For instead of his alone he is in touch with all life, and image and fable come back.



They come back because the elements are not so dissimilar: season, cello, shield, trio, sphere. When man is reminded of his place in the order of nature, when he finds himself cut down to size, he goes through a franciscan or ovidian revolution, whichever you prefer, and acquires some of his original modesty about force, his own and otherwise. Beasts and angels, devils, witches, trees and stones, cocks and centaurs are necessary items of human phenomenology (and only, and exactly, in that science). They are dangerous out of that moral frame—as we have had recent occasion to know.

...

(3) Prismatic man, as opposed to what Christian man has declined to, the pragmatic: man as object in space as against man as subject of time makes possible a life-death concept which admits man's reflection as force in nature.

Olson, Charles. "Notes for the Proposition: Man is Prospective." *Boundary 2*, Vol. 2, No. 1/2, Autumn 1973-Winter 1974, pp 1-6.

<sup>7</sup> We might consider Edward Soja's concept of "thirdspace" that conceptualizes the spaces of the imagination and the spaces of emotional states.

<sup>8</sup> The "heterocosm" is certainly a well-documented component in literary studies. In a moment, we'll dwell on the fictional universes of Melville that are incommensurate with our epistemological world, but first let's consider this passage from Linda Hutcheon's *Narcissistic Narrative: The Metafictional Paradox* (Waterloo, Ont.: Wilfred Laurier University Press, 1980.) describing how a unique literary world arises:

Whereas poetic language is now more or less accepted as autonomous and intransitive, fiction and narrative still suggest a transitive and referential use of words. This is no doubt in part due to the fact that the novel is written in prose, and prose is usually considered a discursive medium for ideas. It is also associated with ways of verifying facts, since it often records or describes actual events. However, this superficial explanation alone does not suffice to account for the intransigent belief of many critics and readers that the referents of fictional language are real, that is, that they are of necessity part of the empirical world, as if there actually were a stable and objective reality "out there." As a reader begins a novel, he does indeed read referentially in that he refers words to his linguistic and experiential knowledge; gradually, however, these words take on a unity of reference and create a self-contained universe that is its own validity (anti "truth"). The fictions and essays of Jorge Luis Borges, for example, stand as allegories and statements of this, the reading (as well as writing) side of poesis. What happens is that the referents of the novelistic language (which, as shall be demonstrated shortly, are fictive and not real) gradually accumulate during the act of reading, gradually construct a



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“heterocosm,” that is, another cosmos, an ordered and harmonious system. This fictional universe is not an object of perception, but an effect to be experienced by the reader, an effect to be created by him and in him. (88)

The engine of difference between fictional worlds is a proprietary language. Language for the American Romantics belongs to a sacred order, one that, like the emblematic states of nature, constitutes the communicative logos. For these writers—Thoreau, Whitman, Emerson—language yields a sense toward *more*, but for others, language is much more apophatic [An excellent article exploring St. Teresa de Avila’s linguistic patterns in *Interior Castle* establishing her order of metaphysics describes the flexible properties of metaphor in the apophatic-kataphatic debate: see Barbara Mujica’s “The Apophatic-Kataphatic Dialectice in Teresa de Avila” (*Hispania*, Vol. 84, No. 4 [Dec., 2001], pp. 741-748).].

For Melville, for example, language’s priorities are to secure contexts. We might, in a contemporary scene, lay intertextual claims to *Moby-Dick*, but that novel creates its own lexical environments: linguistic soil that furnishes its own biologies. As Edgar Dryden and Peter Bellis have shown in their critical works on *The Confidence-Man*, the novel lays claim to both the fraudulences of the body and the incredulity of language. “You can conclude nothing absolute from the human form, barber,” says the Cosmopolitan as he swindles a shave from the most resolute character in the book, who goes so far as to post a sign reading “NO TRUST” to scare off anyone looking for a freebie. The continually shifting, ultimately absent figure of the Confidence Man, instructs us to note our own behavioral disadvantages. That, like the Confidence Man’s overt chameleon-like performances, our shifting exteriors, our representational beings, are the only truths about us. The “human form” in its un-absoluteness, is a shill, a fluctuating stand-in for the complex of our orders and disorders.

For all the novel’s descriptive efforts, its long passages of interaction, its “interpretive certainty” is undermined by the work’s contextual evidence. Readers certainly understand that some novelistic game is afoot—that the deceit of the Confidence Man’s continually changing guise deceives the reader as much as it does the other characters on the riverboat Fidéle. Any narratological mapping of the novel requires a stubbornly subjective interpretation of the codes and clues provided by the text, insists Bellis. The participant’s configuration of those bountiful clues reveals their instability as even the most basic assumption of the text—is the Confidence Man ever truly present?—can be questioned. Like stand-alone but modular structures, *C-M*’s chapters orient themselves in a shared system, but are dubiously contiguous.

<sup>9</sup> From John Irwin’s *American Hieroglyphics* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1983):

J.G.H. Greppo in his *Essay on the Hieroglyphic System of M. Champollion* (Paris, 1829) noted that “phonetic signs form the most considerable part of all kinds of Egyptian texts,”... Greppo makes explicit two important assumptions: first, that the figurative and symbolic signs represent an earlier, more primitive state of hieroglyphic writing than the phonetic signs; and second, that the development from the figurative to the



phonetic is the movement from writing able to present simple, concrete ideas to writing that can convey complex, abstract ideas... According to this view, Egyptian writing moved from a state in which there was a necessary, emblematic connection between a sign and its referent to a state in which for the most part that connection had become arbitrary and conventional.

Interestingly enough, such a view of the development of Egyptian writing was capable of satisfying both the metaphysical and the scientific schools of interpretation. What mattered was whether one valued simplicity of complexity. The metaphysical interpreters worked in a Christian tradition that considered man's present state to be the result of a fall from original simplicity. In his unfallen state man did not need a complex, abstract language. He was in such harmony with his environment that he used the language of nature, of natural signs—that world of objects created by God to stand as emblems of spiritual facts. But since the fall was from simplicity to complexity, the farther man moved from his original state, the more complex and involved his language became, and the more obscure became the old emblematic relationship between a sign and its referent. For the scientific school, on the other hand, the development of hieroglyphic writing could support an exactly opposite interpretation. The movement from a writing made up entirely of figurative signs capable of presenting only simple, concrete ideas to a writing composed largely of phonetic signs capable of presenting the most complex, abstract ideas demonstrated both evolution and progress. (6-7)

<sup>10</sup> This membrane between the real and digital seems to continue to grow markedly smaller. In particular, I am thinking of the new technological ability for 3D printers to "print" eye tissue.

<sup>11</sup> I think theoretically and practically, the emblem works like the modern digital symbols that harbor data: the QR code, for example, does just this, as do barcodes like the UPC.

<sup>12</sup> N. Katherine Hayles, *Writing Machines* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2002), 48.

<sup>13</sup> William Carlos Williams, *Paterson*, ed. Christopher J. MacGowan (New York: New Directions, 1992), 6.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.* 6.

<sup>15</sup> James A. W. Heffernan, "Wordsworth on Imagination: The Emblemizing Power," in *PMLA* 81, no. 5 (1966): 389.

<sup>16</sup> From Adrienne Rich's foreword to *Works of Anne Bradstreet*, edited by Jeannine Hensley (2010).



## CHAPTER 2

*Anne Bradstreet's Spherical Worlds.*

"We see in the firmament there is but one sun among a multitude of stars, and those stars also to differ much one from the other in regard of bigness and brightness; yet all receive their light from that one sun. So is it in the church both militant and triumphant: there is but one Christ, who is the Sun of Righteousness, in the midst of an innumerable company of saints and angels. Those saints have their degrees even in this life: some are stars of the first magnitude, and some of a less degree, and others — and they indeed the most in number — but small and obscure; yet all receive their luster, be it more or less, from that glorious Sun that enlightens all in all. And if some of them shine so bright while they move on earth, how transcendently splendid shall they be when they are fixed in their heavenly spheres!"

"If outward blessings be not as wings to help us mount upwards, they will certainly prove clogs and weights that will pull us lower downward."

— Anne Bradstreet, "Meditations Divine and Moral"

This pair of epigraphs from Anne Bradstreet's "Meditations" describes the navigation of the stars from a heliocentric point of view. Copernicus' revitalization of Ancient Greek astronomy had sunk in; Ptolemy's influence on Christianity hadn't gone, and Bradstreet describes the flow of the "outward" cosmos to the "inward" cosmos: "all receive their light from that one sun." That change is, quite literally, the alternate universe of a heterocosm. I'm drawn to these passages because of Bradstreet's metaphoric translations: celestial bodies are adapted as figures of Christian iconography, "militant and triumphant," and from there lead us to moral extrapolations. Like the sun in the long poem "Contempla-



tions,” as the eye of the universe reflecting the earth “in its glances,” in these passages the sun takes on the captain’s chair of the “heavenly spheres.” Space travel is considered as holy movement: in order to “mount upwards” one must not abuse the gifts of God, that is, the material, natural conditions of life. Without humility, one puts on the heavy “clogs” of the natural world, the gravity boots that lock one down to the earth’s depraved surface.

Bradstreet’s celestial mechanisms suggest an attention to the movement from outward things to inner psychologies, from the form of the natural world to the incipient solar system of one’s internal nature. Reading the signs of the world yields productive spiritual change if those signs are measured appropriately. The design of formal things migrating into the interior cosmos feels at home with Hayles’ method of reading the “material metaphor,” that is, understanding the design of everyday things (and not-so-everyday things) as a verbal verity. Material form suggests its inherent purpose, as if the thing was a sourceful representation of itself, and our occupations with its suggestions are psychological complexes written in verbal descriptions of the thing’s use. Bradstreet’s poems are psychological complexes themselves, in the act of translating the signs of the natural world for spiritual improvement. They are ontological documents meant to record the small diversities in nature’s symbolic representation of an eternal conflict. In this chapter I survey Bradstreet’s “public” and “private” poems to investigate their rhetorical differences. The “public” poems are cycles that strain to resolve themselves—theirs is a secular vocabulary. The “private” poems follow the rhetorical strategies of the contemplative act from St. Ignatius of Loyola, the sixteenth-century knight who founded the Jesuit order during the period of the



Counter-Reformation. These poems toe the line between didactic emblems and autobiography.

*Critical reflections.*

It makes little sense to recite all of the historical information that scaffolds our modern understanding of early American life. Twentieth-century scholarship has provided us with a lifetime of digestible and indigestible reading in that regard, all of it providing the critical opportunity to investigate Anne Bradstreet here with solitary respect to the poetic world she establishes. Most useful to this chapter have been Wendy Martin's *American Triptych*, Robert Daly's *God's Altar*, Jeannine Hensley's *The Works of Anne Bradstreet*, Louis Martz's *The Poem of the Mind* and *The Poetry of Meditation*. Sacvan Bercovitch's edited collection of essays *The American Puritan Imagination*, Elizabeth Wade White's *Anne Bradstreet "The Tenth Muse,"* Norman Pettit's *The Heart Prepared*, and Perry Miller's *Errand into the Wilderness* have also been useful. My opinion of all the historio-critical work is extremely high, but rather than testing or regurgitating an historic assumption about Bradstreet's form of religious Puritanism, I wonder if it's possible to describe her poetic cosmos by assuming a contemporary perspective now under a very different environmental vocabulary.

In the introduction to the *Works*, Jeannine Hensley reflects on the critical thrashing of Bradstreet's poetry over the last few generations. Moses Coit Tyler seems to represent the inaugural critic of the nineteenth century who "nearly approved" of the poetry, "while deploing the sad effect of her sect and literary era on her output"<sup>1</sup>:



...he is willing to admit that “amid all this lamentable rubbish, there is often to be found such an ingot of pure poetry, as proves her to have had, indeed, the poetic endowment.” ... “The worst lines of Anne Bradstreet and of other American verse-writers in the seventeenth century, can be readily matched for fantastic perversion, and for total absence of beauty, by passages from the poems of John Donne, George Herbert, Crashaw, Cleveland, Waller, Quarles, Thomas Coryat, John Taylor, and even Herrick, Cowley, and Dryden.”

(*Works*, xxxv)

Likewise, Hensley reports, Charles Norton dismissed Bradstreet’s work, stressing its “anti-quarian” usefulness but not its poetic power. Robert Daly’s *God’s Altar: The World and the Flesh in Puritan Poetry* (1978) may be the most dedicated aesthetic reading of Puritan poetics extant. Louis Martz’s *Poem of the Mind* (1966) creates sketches of American writing that satisfy a description of the “meditative poem,” and like Roy Harvey Pearce and Wendy Martin, links together several prominent poets that define one order of American poetry. Wendy Martin’s *An American Triptych* (1984) argues that American feminist poetics begins with Bradstreet, her gynocentric world-view influencing countless American writers. Similarly, John Berryman’s *Homage to Mistress Bradstreet* (1956) mixes a dreamy poetic narrative of Bradstreet with the textual flora and fauna surrounding her. This narrative assumes some relation to Berryman’s own body, and the poems are processed through a combination of confessional poetry infiltrated by textual reference. While the appreciation of Bradstreet’s work was limited through the centuries after her death, the twentieth century’s apprecia-



tion is unlimited, at least in print. The majority of modern, critical encounters with Anne Bradstreet are uniformly positive. Perhaps our contemporary perspective is an improvement upon past neglect; we no longer “fail to respect the purposes of Puritan writers.”<sup>2</sup>

Comparably, in his chapter on Edward Taylor’s poetry, Louis Martz comes to define American poetry by way of environmental certainties that shape linguistic patterns. These patterns are asserted against the English poetry of the day, “imposed by the context of that intimate island’s culture... the writer is nevertheless tacitly and unconsciously influenced by the accepted conventions of public speech and writing in that culture”<sup>3</sup>:

But in Taylor’s frontier settlement these guide-lines fall away; cultivated conversation becomes rare; the minister’s work is solely occupied with humble folk; his daily life is rude, simple, concerned with the bare, stark facts of survival in a village that is at times little more than a stockade. Even the intellectual life must be limited to theology and the classics; Taylor’s library at his death contained only one work of English poetry: the poems of Anne Bradstreet.

Thus the poet’s conversations with God are spoken in a language that the meditative poet, living in England, would never use. For the soul, in meditation, is to speak as the man himself has come to speak; any other language would be dishonest and pretentious. So Taylor speaks in this peculiar mixture of the learned and the rude, the abstract and the earthy, the polite and the vulgar; for such distinctions do not exist in the wilderness.



The result is often lame and crude; in some respects the writer needs the support and guidance of an established culture; but since he in himself is almost the sole bearer and creator of whatever culture his village will possess, he must do what he can with whatever materials lie at hand. Out of his very deficiencies he creates a work of rugged and original integrity. The result helps to mark the beginning of an American language, an American literature.<sup>4</sup>

Whatever deficiencies critics have complained about in Bradstreet's "homespun" verse style seems appropriately defended by Martz here. The "rude" aesthetic has only the wild country as its object, and culture the perceptible emotional traumas of life in that wildness. In some sense, both this aesthetic and emotional turmoil are a cultural legacy of American poets. Wendy Martin, Roy Harvey Pearce, and Perry Miller have worked diligently to create schemas that connect the temporal landscape of American poetry.

For the purposes of this chapter, and without terrible difficulty, we could probably make a case for Bradstreet's influence on the personal lyric in American poetry and trace her later poems to the poetic eruption of the individual expressionism of the New York School. That movement takes its aesthetic cues from painting's Abstract Expressionism, and creative consciousness resides in an ambient universe of diaphanous layers. We might say that the Aristotelian or Ptolemaic apparatus of celestial spheres—whose prestige Bradstreet's educated mind and social being recognized (not to mention the dozen or so other thinkers who use the concept of spherical spaces to help describe our physics)—might be



found in the layers of a Jackson Pollack painting. These layers hemorrhage of course, as do the lines of a John Ashbery or Frank O'Hara poem, whereas Bradstreet's content more highly disciplined, as Martz has already described for us. The "quaternion" poems, for example, repeat rhetorical structures to create systematic formal shapes that behave like the spherical, symmetrical visions of a sixteenth and seventeenth-century cosmos. Bradstreet's private poems, too, are imaginative simulations of a kernel of experience, tiny but potent "spheres" themselves.

In the Introduction to this project, I described poetic environments that sustained themselves through the creative imagination. As heterocosmic fictions, these environments are their own linguistic realities, the "ghostlier demarcations"<sup>5</sup> of a reality kernel, the flexible plurality of reality<sup>6</sup>. Consciousness likes to define itself by some consistently established reality, perhaps our mutable natures, the fabric of our visible and invisible beings stitched together by conceptual time; our demarcations of reality are built out of mutable moments, and the pure products (waste products?) of those mutable moments are the demarcations into new experience. In poetry, demarcations are departures of language into other developmental versions. Language, on the conveyor belt of syntax, is continually transforming the images we carry in our minds. Poetry's inflection of syntactical rules bends formal space to create the innuendo of experience—not rough translations but rather exceptionally refined mutations of our regular day-to-day experience with data and information. I have always admired Wallace Stevens' idealization of inflection and innuendo—inflection as the exterior and innuendo as the interior—in "Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Blackbird," the



environmental kernel of which is the blackbird, recast thirteen times to give some sense of language's unrepeatability and plurality:

I do not know which to prefer

The beauty of inflections

Or the beauty of innuendoes,

The blackbird whistling,

Or just after.

Similarly, I find that Anne Bradstreet's poetry creates plural worlds that are demarcations of particular realities. Traditionally, her poems are divided into public and private poems; both represent very different experiences of the world. The public poems are secular conceptions of a "collaborative" world whose creative articulation lies not with God but natural elements.<sup>7</sup> The private poems, while helping to describe Bradstreet's relationship with God, are even better pictures of plural experience: in her methods of transcribing elegiac mental states, Bradstreet establishes the rhetorical conditions of the meditative poem that serve to catalog the variations of mental states.

These mental states depicted in the personal poems are similar to the encapsulated elements found in the public quaternions, which we will look at shortly. These things are restricted: they have edges, definition, individuality, vibrancy. In a primary sense, they belong to an Aristotelian conception of the universe's coordination by celestial spheres that is just beginning to open up itself to a modern physics of Copernicus and Galileo, with Newton arriving shortly thereafter. A bevy of other thinkers fill this astronomical gap between



Aristotle and Copernicus who continue to revise the sphere concept, yet that centripetal force of order remains and only the grammar changes. What makes these spheres of individuality communicate is the poet, and for our purposes, it is the creative imagination of the poet that simulates these spaces.

There's a subtle "third" series of Bradstreet's that navigates both the "public" and "private" domains. The elegies, the "in honour of," and the "in memory of" poems straddle techniques that the public and personal poems perform. These are poems of reflection but have the advantage of choosing a public figure for their subject. "In Honour of That High and Mighty Princess Queen Elizabeth of Happy Memory" closes its 129 lines with two versions of an epitaph for Elizabeth's tomb, "Her Epitaph" and "Another." The diction and poetic ability of Bradstreet in these two short pieces should convince any reader of her poetic prowess. While these aren't the difficult ballad patterns of a Dickinson poem, one can see the seeds of American poetry here, in couplets and pentameter.

"Her Epitaph"

Here sleeps the queen, this is the royal bed  
 Of th' damask rose, sprung from the white and red,  
 Whose sweet perfume fills the all-filling air.  
 This rose is withered, once so lovely fair.  
 On neither tree did grow such rose before,  
 The greater was our gain, our loss the more.



“Another”

Here lies the pride of queens, pattern of kings,

So blaze it, Fame, here’s feathers for thy wings.

Here lies the envied, yet unparalleled prince,

Whose living virtues speak (though dead long since).

If many worlds, as that fantastic framed,

In every one be her great glory famed. (*Works*, 213)

In these conclusions—we might call them discrete poems themselves since they’re conceived as epitaphs—the imagination’s dialogue box interfaces a poet’s writing with the structures of remembering. In this case, the personal memory of Bradstreet dwells upon Elizabeth: it’s not a private transaction since the two don’t have that relationship, but it taps into a cultural consciousness that celebrates female leadership as the model and “pattern of kings,” a public and nearly transgendered figure who is eroticized in private (“Her Epitaph”) only to belong to the array of the “many worlds,” the heterocosms “that fantastic framed” the masses of perspectives mourning Elizabeth’s passing.

I want to envision this dialogue box in a similar sense to the “technological afterlife” I discussed in the Introduction. It acts like a piece of software might, with a graphical interface for a user to operate while pulling on the software’s code. As countless critics have said, notably Roy Harvey Pearce, “the earthbound event which meant most to the Puritan was death.”<sup>8</sup> It’s no wonder that so much early American writing might be considered elegy; Bradstreet’s personal poems are no exception in their mix of ecclesiastical and secular



memorializing. Her poems act as material translations of inner realities. As Paula Kopacz has observed, they end with resolution, are prayers, and follow a particular architecture. In this regard, I want to consider these poems as emblematic, as if taking on the physical properties of natural objects to become a device or tool that immediately represents not only a momentary remembrance of things past, but also the process of contemplation itself. I want to cast Katherine Hayles' theory of the material metaphor back on the poems of Bradstreet to consider their formal entities as the composition of experience. Norman Pettit's *The Heart Prepared* (1966) explores Puritanism as an experiential religion<sup>9</sup>; Bradstreet's poems, like the emblematic psalms of John Cotton's *Bay Psalm Book* (1640), are methods of contemplation that simulate experience and allow one to repeat experience, growing perhaps closer to a salvation linked to a Christian God but also perhaps an individualized conception of a tiered deity whose intonations occur in the poetic process. If, as Robert Daly claims, the Puritan world is a metaphor, then Hayles' theory might be enlarged to a global level, one which the early American felt constantly through experience but which we must rediscover.

### *Collecting the self.*

In the "private" poems of Anne Bradstreet, adversity acts as the practical conflict which, when successfully resolved, advances individual consciousness. It follows that this advancement is primarily spiritual: the process of wisdom gathering takes place in the fleshly component of being where the difficulties of illness and mortality are borne. The body is a memorial site, both conceptually and realistically: as an idealized form, it speaks



to a complicated natural state, removed from the lower orders of nature by God; as a real form, it does not represent but rather acts as the site of physical attrition that might be contemplated for eschatological concerns or other spiritual succor.

Historically, Bradstreet's poems are categorized as either "private" or "public," the former dealing with personal relationships, and the latter dealing with broader phenomenological encounters. The private poems are sometimes referred to as later poems, but there's evidence that Bradstreet went back to work on "Four Monarchies" prior to her death before finally tacking on "An Apology" and abandoning the project. The divide is rather telling. The public poems (the quaternions) are of the epic variety and are systematically connected, cyclical—science and myth mingle freely, a Christian God is nowhere to be found. The private poems, while maintaining their direct, plain style are certainly lyrical: they are full of remorse, anguish, disaster, and elegiac memory. God is everywhere in these poems as challenging personal presence; as Paula Kopacz has noted, the formal structures of these poems invite God into their final lines, coming to resolutions that are "aesthetically satisfying" because they are "structurally and thematically sound"<sup>10</sup>:

The aesthetic closure is a deliberate working toward the integration of emotional and theological stability. To oversimplify, the poem is a process, not a product. And the process is prayer.<sup>11</sup>

In the public poems, structures are more spatial than linear. Time may be progressive, but it moves in a repetitive refrain. The poems that make up Bradstreet's quaternion cycle transition into each other through transformative sublimation: the four elements (fire, air, earth,



water) become the four humours (choler, blood, melancholy, phlegm) become the four ages of man (childhood, youth, the manly, old age) transitioning into the histories of “The Four Monarchies.” Where the personal poems demonstrate spiritual resolutions, finalities of theme and structure that go in accordance with the rhetoric of prayer, the quaternions are flexible. The discrete voices of the “characters” of these poems talk directly to each other, but formally they overlap. “Generativity, not God’s plan,” writes Martin, controls the purpose.<sup>12</sup> That generative connectedness occurs strongly in the set pieces of the poems’ openings, for example in “Of the Four Ages of Man” transforming out of “Of the Four Humours in Man’s Constitution”:

Lo now four others act upon the stage,  
 Childhood and Youth, the Manly and Old Age;  
 The first son unto phlegm, grand-child to water,  
 Unstable, supple, cold, and moist’s his nature.  
 The second, frolic, claims his pedigree  
 From blood and air, for hot and moist is he.  
 The third of fire and choler is composed  
 Vindicative and quarrelsome disposed.  
 The last of earth, and heavy melancholy,  
 Solid, hating all lightness and all folly. (*Works*, 54)

And, similarly, “The Four Humours” tracks its pedigree from “The Four Elements”:



The former four now ending their discourse,  
 Ceasing to vaunt their good, or threat their force,  
 Lo! other four step up, crave leave to show  
 The native qualities that from them flow:  
 But first they wisely showed their high descent,  
 Each eldest daughter to each element.  
 Choler was owned by Fire, and Blood by Air,  
 Earth knew her black swarth child, Water her fair:  
 All having made obeisance to each mother,  
 Had leave to speak, succeeding one the other:  
 But 'mongst themselves they were at variance,  
 Which of the four should have predominance. (*Works*, 34)

Like the themes of adversity in the personal poems, the elemental beings of the quaternion poems war with each other for “predominance,” though perhaps instead of using *war* as an indicator of disagreement, we might use *bicker* or *argue* as the polyvocal instrument to illustrate that these hierarchical divisions are familial squabbles rather than bloody clashes, all taking place as some “show,” some theatrical demonstration.<sup>13</sup>

All of Bradstreet’s poems are dialogues, conversations, or addresses: the behaviors of beings in the poems—including her own figure—work themselves out through speech. But even more than speech, the dialogues are rich textual encounters. These voices and their pedigree may well be imagined as real figures floating in the void spaces of the uni-



verse, as individualized bodies or celestial spheres stacked on top of each other, but the drama is textual. These cosmic forces are decoded by Bradstreet's textual investigation. As Wendy Martin has shown, these voices demonstrate collaboration, "in which process takes precedence over product and dominance gives way to mutuality." Martin moves on to source the "basis of order in Bradstreet's universe" as "Posey *Unity*," from Bradstreet's "The Four Humours," and "not an all-powerful or wrathful God."<sup>14</sup>

Unless we agree, all falls into confusion.

Let Sanguine with her hot hand Choler hold,

To take her moist my moisture will be bold:

My cold, cold Melancholy's hand shall clasp;

Her dry, dry Choler's other hand shall grasp.

Two hot, two moist, two cold, two dry here be.

A golden ring, the posy UNITY. (*Works*, 53)

Martin's version ("posey") is corrected to "posy" in Hensley's 2010 edition, and it seems as though Martin reads this inflection as a small bunch of flowers, its first sense. The second sense, of course, refers to lines of verse inscribed on a wedding ring, and a third, obsolete sense, denotes "an emblem or emblematic device" (OED). The OED's illustrative quotations trace this seemingly infrequent use to the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries:

1530 J. Palsgrave *Lesclarcissement* 256/1 Poysy, devyse, or worde, *deuise*.

"Deuise," a Middle English word, mostly means "tale" or "narrative," but also declines to "deuys," intending "order."<sup>15</sup>



Visions of a natural world are bound to the textual encounters encoded and decoded by the imagination. As Martin goes on to say, "Bradstreet does not seem to have felt the need to impose sacred order on the landscape," and "instead of trying to reform nature, she appreciates its cyclicity and diversity."<sup>16</sup> But more than simply leaving out sacred order, Bradstreet collapses a variety of cosmological orders to describe her own vision for earthly systems, which is more than simply corroborated by writing but uses writing as the material features of its domains. Writing cooperates with experience in order to both translate it and incite its manifestation in the imagination. This is different, I feel, than other scholars have suggested, or at least in the conception it is possible to have of Bradstreet's poetic worlds. Kenneth Requa describes Bradstreet's public poems as "imitative, the private voice original."<sup>17</sup> Requa calls her personal poems a presentation "a private statement of personal problems and personal solutions."<sup>18</sup> Martin suggests that Bradstreet's imitative voice in the public poems is subtle in its rejection of masculine poetic moods:

Bradstreet's responsiveness to the quotidian provides a dramatic contrast to the patriarchal transcendence that rejects mutability. As Bradstreet's poetry indicates, the sublime style is an expression of the traditional masculine effort to achieve supremacy over mundane existence, which is categorized as female.

"The Four Monarchies," the most imitative in the style of Du Bartas and Sir Walter Raleigh's *History of the World*, is never finished, Martin writes, because Bradstreet finally stopped caring about masculine subjects and masculine omnipotence. But textual omnipo-



tence, the sublime style, is never really possible in Bradstreet, and she surely admits as much in her address “The Author to Her Book,” where text is an “ill-formed offspring of my feeble brain” (*Works*, 238).

Part of her poems seem to be coming to terms with the idea of change, the acceptance of mutability; within that acceptance of temporal mutability comes the idea of forgiveness in Bradstreet’s personal poems. These personal poems are indeed not sublime expositions, but rather images of figures caught in penitent, psychological dwellings. The rhetoric of prayer that Bradstreet follows in the personal poems consists of three parts: 1) memory 2) understanding 3) will. This particular practice, as Robert Daly (and Louis Martz elsewhere) describes, historically descends from St. Ignatius of Loyola’s *Spiritual Exercises*:

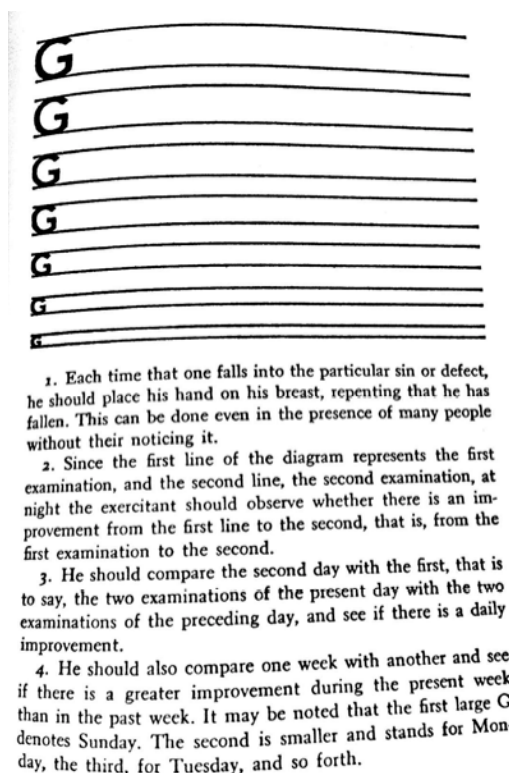
In his *Introduction to the Devout Life*, St. Francis de Sales defined meditation: “when we think of heavenly things, not to learn but to love them, that is called to meditate: and the exercise thereof, Meditation.” St. Ignatius Loyola provided a relentlessly structured method for the arousal of this love in his *Spiritual Exercises*. The “exercitant,” as Loyola called the person meditating, was to exercise in sequence three faculties of his soul—memory, understanding, and will. Subject matter for the meditation—e.g. doctrine, scriptural incident, or some object with spiritual significance—was called up by memory, and one first attempted to get as detailed and vivid an apprehension of it as he could using only his memory and imagination. Then one exercised one’s understanding, or reason, upon the image or proposition supplied by



memory until, after thorough intellectual examination, the work of understanding was complete. Only then did the exercitant judge the subject and submit it to his will and affections, which were moved to great joy or sorrow. Meditation drove dogma into imagination, enlivened doctrine into thoroughly apprehended truth.<sup>19</sup>

The vocabulary for the spiritual exercises revolves around the several key terms, meditation, contemplation, and examination. *Meditation* often entailed a reflection upon sin in Puritan terminology; *contemplation* something a bit more pleasant, though no less intense perhaps; *examination* is a less colorful appeal to the general activity. Figure 2 from St. Ignatius's *Spiritual Exercises*, one we might consider as a method of self-construction through writing: In this process, one furnishes these "G" lines with a particular sin in order to create a textu-

Figure 1. *The Spiritual Exercises of Saint Ignatius* (1541), trans. Anthony Mottola from 1908 edition (Doubleday: New York, 1964), 49.





al object out of that internal complex. This process is what, Daly writes, “drove dogma into imagination, enlivened doctrine into thoroughly apprehended truth.” It is a construction of the self in one respect: it asks individuals to focus upon their errors, and to make text objects out of those errors, to inscribe those errors upon a surface, to choose particular language to interpret those errors.

Among the personal poems that fit in as meditations in the tri-part rhetorical scheme, Bradstreet’s “Contemplations” and “Here Follows Some Verses Upon the Burning of Our House July 10<sup>th</sup>, 1666. Copied Out of a Loose Paper” are perhaps the most complicated. In the short poem, “Upon Some Distemper of Body,” however, we see the basic Ignatian structure at work:

In anguish of my heart replete with woes,  
 And wasting pains, which best my body knows,  
 In tossing slumbers on my wakeful bed,  
 Bedrenched with tears that flowed from mournful head,  
 Till nature had exhausted all her store,  
 Then eyes lay dry, disabled to weep more;  
 And looking up unto his throne on high,  
 Who sendeth help to those in misery;  
 He chased away those clouds and let me see  
 My anchor cast i’ th’ vale with safety.



He eased my soul of woe, my flesh of pain,

And brought me to the shore from troubled main. (*Works*, 242)

Most of the poem is in a mode of recollection (memory) until the image of the pained figure tossing and turning in bed finally gives way to the moment of clarity (understanding)—“He chased away those clouds and let me see.” The final two lines are the submission of the image to “the will and affections” (Daly) and the sorrow of illness breaks over to relief, to a “vale with safety,” of an “eased...soul” rather than a purified one, all sought out via the “troubled main,” the heap of unstable images plaguing the mind, the “head” and “heart replete with woes.”

As Louis Martz has written, the meditative poem constructs the self. Each poem, for Bradstreet, creates a unit of self-belonging to certain mental states, the “mournful head.” In this sense, her oeuvre is a collection of selves whose fracture is mended by the internal dialogue of any given poem. The poem, as the imaginative act exploring memory and understanding, creates the dialogue box, the text, between the poet’s fluctuating mental state and the serene preserve of transcendence, the vale or the haven into which the anchor of spiritual personhood can be cast.

In “Here Follows Some Verses Upon the Burning of Our House July 10<sup>th</sup>, 1666. Copied Out of a Loose Paper,” Anne Bradstreet performs the allegorical narrative of a consecrated body in its rough ascent to heaven. This poem works as a universal lament, but it is also a private lament of the spiritual labor of living and, perhaps more importantly for our purposes, a lament over lost art: poems, books, etc. While the tragedy of fire is certainly a



universal danger for those individuals on an “errand into the wilderness,” Bradstreet’s abstraction into the experience of religious transformation shifts the poem into an account of mundane transformation. Again, this structure accords with Ignatius’s meditation rhetoric, but is further complicated.

There is memory within memory:

When by the ruins oft I past  
 My sorrowing eyes aside did cast,  
 And here and there the places spy  
 Where oft I sat and long did lie:  
 Here stood that trunk, and there that chest,  
 There lay that store I counted best.  
 My pleasant things in ashes lie,  
 And them behold no more shall I. (*Works*, 318)

The maintenance of the poem’s language in the interior domains insists on the appreciation of the immaterial values bestowed upon the tangible world. Instead of a delayed experience of cause and effect—that is, house burns down, some time to dwell upon events, realization that one needs little except a stable interior self—the speaker’s spiritual sublimation occurs simultaneously with the house’s conflagration. While the opening lines suggest sleep interrupted by cataclysm (“In silent night when rest I took / For sorrow near I did not look / I wakened was with thund’ring noise”), it’s possible to read the whole poem as a dream, and that the initial waking is only a moment of awareness flooding in, both inau-



guring the drama of the scene as well as portraying the mind as an instrument of acuity. The mind's sharpness, however, is kept in range of observation, and its will to power is checked in its subservience to higher powers. "Adieu, Adieu," says Bradstreet's speaker closing out a short list of earthly tendencies and desires—"things recounted done of old"—realizing that "all's vanity." With the citation to Ecclesiastes in the vanity of all things, Bradstreet's subtext of knowledge and wisdom equated with sorrow clarifies the sense of the poem as a grief stricken memory. That memory is colored by the speaker's attempt to explore the possibility of remembrance. The lines from Ecclesiastes, recall, are a valediction forbidding mourning of things in the past as well as the things of the future—an existential dismissal—and Bradstreet's speaker's conflict moves from a contemplation of lost, physical objects to the contemplation of the impossibility for any future experiences in the house.<sup>20</sup> Those ruminations keep the speaker's attention fixed on the psychological activities wedded to the materiality of the body.

Considering the whole poem as a recollection or a dream fashions it as an insistence upon the mind's powerful ability to abstract and the suddenness that shocks one into understanding. The noise of the fire is both elemental and pervasive: "In silent night when rest I took / For sorrow near I did not look / I wakened was with thund'ring noise..."<sup>21</sup> The noise works as the shouts of alarm, the fire, the wood changing under the fire, and the mental "noise" that produces a change out of the "silent night" of the mind. Awareness breaks upon the speaker who is "wakened" much like Eliot's speaker is assaulted by the storms in the wasteland, *da, datta, dayadhvam, damyata*. The submission to the act of God, this di-



vine fire, empties out the contents of the speaker's mind, the objects the mind is tasked with—"here stood that trunk, and there that chest"—"In silence ever shall thou lie." Not only are tangible objects considered "worldly" but also that mental "pelf"<sup>22</sup>; that interior storage space may be created by the "mighty Architect," but it is administered by an easily corrupted flesh.

Memory, as a smoky dream, breaks into the wisdom of understanding and finally a sharpening of will that brings some kind of satisfaction, if colored by lust and an envious rejection of the world:

Farewell, my pelf, farewell my store.

The world no longer let me love,

My hope and treasure lies above.

The fire and the burning of the house, occurring in the oneiric potential, is an image manifested by the imagination. The extension of an emblematic phenomenon (house burns is analogous to a cleansing spiritual fire) into psychological ranges, insists on an understanding of the inner mechanisms of the mind, and what Eva Brann suggests, "is a capacity for inner appearances... for inner presentations, which resemble external perceptions."<sup>23</sup> These externalities are interpreted during the textual encounters, during the process of writing, a process that takes observations, internalizes them, and reanimates them through language. Bradstreet was clearly aware of these distinct spaces; she writes in a prose entry dated "May 11, 1657,"



Who am I that I should repine at His pleasure, especially seeing it is for my spiritual advantage, for I hope my soul shall flourish while my body decays, and the weakness of this outward man shall be a means to strengthen my inner man. (*Works*, 278)

Because the imagination is not considered a creative faculty in Bradstreet's time, these formal relations are probably more related to Greek platonic thought where one participates in an inner dialogue with one's soul. Thought here includes the two parts of the "dialogue": one is God and the other is the imagination. These are both interjectory forms, voices that feel like "other." As we conceptualize them, they take the shape of formal activity. Bradstreet hopes her "soul shall flourish," indicating that the inner spaces of the spirit might become more vegetable-like, to take root, and grow in the exterior world.

While Emerson puts the imagination in a role in the system of awareness as an intermediate "machine" whose function aids in the translation of the hieroglyphics of nature and therefore allows one to enter into conversation with God, in Bradstreet's poems, the imagination is usually described as "fancy." Ultimately, I feel that Bradstreet's depiction of the natural world is not so distinct from Emerson's—the common denominator is metaphor—though his system is much more elaborately defined.

A fairly conservative definition of the imagination, "fancy" evokes the notion of a creative act that is supremely fictional. It would not be an error to call all imaginative acts fictional recreations but the responsibilities of this project take the meaning out of the less valuable scape of hyperbolic dreams and into the more valuable scape of simulation.



"Fancy," in Bradstreet, is used rhetorically, for example, to extend animated personalities to "The Flesh" and to "The Spirit." In other poems—"Contemplations," for example—Bradstreet recollects a speaker's observations of the Sun and an Oak Tree while sitting at the bank of a river. This use of the Imagination—as a device that is vibrant and alert and rhetorically positioned as the personality who tracks from high to low (Sun to Tree to River to fish to bugs) and low to high (abstractly, from self and substance, material, to God)—almost seems more at home with the Romantics; were we to discover it scattered amid the lines of Wordsworth's *Prelude*, I doubt we would be so surprised.

#### *Contemplations.*

Bradstreet's lengthiest, and perhaps most successful personal poem, "Contemplations," a melodic reverie on the sun, the Merrimack River,<sup>24</sup> and the chain of being, finds us again in the familiar territory of St. Ignatius's meditation rhetoric. In this poem, the speaker is deeply affected by observations that resolve themselves through appearances. Those appearances become the serendipitous occasion for insight; "there is," Bradstreet writes in "Meditations Divine and Moral," "no object that we see...but we may make some spiritual advantage."<sup>25</sup> Perceptions find their analog in the appearance of things, but the imagination's interpretation of those perceptions is particular to an individual personality and a cooperative or uncooperative mental state. But beyond perceptual conclusion is the "making," the constructive act that accompanies the "object that we see." The rhetorical components of St. Ignatius's method—memory, understanding, will—are space-time events that guide the



exercitant into coordinating mental events, but they are also products of individual creativity—one must make or remake the self from the method. The method, divided into three portions, is spatial; the method, occurring in precise order, becomes temporally located. “Contemplations” is aware of these successional orders.

The purpose of such an explanation ties in to Rosemary Laughlin’s article on Bradstreet’s form when she claims, “Awareness had an importance and poignance for Anne Bradstreet ... [and] it compensated greatly for sorrows and sufferings because it enabled her to experience the magnitudes of beauty and to know the purpose of God’s ways.”<sup>26</sup> Laughlin’s identification of “Awareness” in Bradstreet might also be discussed in terms of the imagination because both are creative acts of attention. Attentive acts beget sensitivity to nature, and in these awarenesses Bradstreet seems to find a way toward self-forgiveness. In “Contemplations” this awareness happens during “looking”: what follows are sustained abstractions that develop into understanding, and finally into one small exercise of will that is quickly cast aside to retrieve a more secular warning.

Where Martz finds the simple Puritan aesthetics according to the material cultures in which they dwelled, it’s certainly possible to carry that idea into the literary world and the textual materials that Bradstreet had access to. There’s a moment in the *Bay Psalm Book* (1640), in the very first psalm, that I can’t help but wonder makes for inspiration. The images in Psalm 1 describe a figure in meditation:

But in the law of Jehovah,  
is his longing delight:



and in his law doth meditate,  
     by day and eke by night.  
 And he shall be like to a tree  
     planted by water-rivers:  
 that in his season yeilds his fruit,  
     and his leafe never withers.

Bradstreet's speaker seems very much an extension of this tree-river-meditation paradigm.

It's been noted somewhere, in Robert Daly's chapter on Bradstreet perhaps, that  
 Psalm 19's image of the bridegroom shows up in Section 5 of Bradstreet's poem, and that is  
 certainly clear:

Through all the earth their line  
     is gone forth, & unto  
 the utmost end of all the world,  
     their speaches reach also:  
 A Tabernacle hee  
     in them pitcht for the Sun.  
 Who Bridegroom like from's chamber goes  
     glad Giants-race to run.  
 From heavens utmost end,  
     His course and compassing;



to ends of it, & from the heat

thereof is hid nothing.<sup>27</sup>

Sections 4 and 5 of “Contemplations” are a clear re-writing, and a clarification, of the psalm:

Then higher on the glistering Sun I gaze,

Whose beams was shaded by the leavie tree;

The more I looked, the more I grew amazed,

And softly said, “What glory’s like to thee?”

Soul of this world, this universe’s eye,

No wonder some made thee a deity;

Had I not better known, alas, the same had I.

Thou as a bridegroom from thy chamber rushes,

And as a strong man, joys to run a race;

The morn doth usher thee with smiles and blushes;

The Earth reflects her glances in thy face.

Birds, insects, animals with vegative,

Thy heat from death and dullness doth revive,

And in the darkness womb of fruitful nature dive. (*Works*, 221)

One can see Bradstreet’s transformation of Psalm 19, though her meditations have a wider range than their Christian siblings: here, she is able to image the sun not only as the bridegroom running out of the bedroom aglow, but also as a possible source for a deity. We are



immediately confronted with biblical language: the “glistering Sun” echoes a verse from Job, who witnesses a “glistering swearde” (16<sup>th</sup> century).<sup>28</sup>

The speaker’s attention moves from general thoughts of the summer season and “excellence” to “a stately oak” to the sun overhead. The speaker’s “eye” tracks from inner meditation to the external objects of the world, and the grace of the spirit world is immediately mapped onto natural objects. Not serving a secular function here, they instead act as principals of an earthly pantheon that serves, like man, a higher and invisible order.

The personal poem, rooted in an everyday experience, *looks*, and Bradstreet’s looking (“the more I look’d”) begets the transformation into amazement (“the more I grew amaz’d”). The play on “I” and “Eye” notwithstanding, the direction of the personal pronoun and the psychophysical energy it houses moves into a moment where an alert consciousness becomes seduced by the energy of the sun, its physical appearance as an eye (a glowing circle) to which the speaker can only “softly” reply, and tracks that consciousness into an imaginative extrapolation. The sun embodies its own personhood—“what glory’s like to thee” changes it into a subjective personality—and flirts with the possibility of the sun’s apotheosis. The speaker backs off here and claims to have “better known,” but still the question has been asked and the sun maintains some status with the Puritan god. This godly grouping and the conflation of worldly objects with deistic ones is a response to *looking’s* transformation into imagination and cohesion with a contemplative consciousness. That meditation is not a passive state, nor is it a communal activity to be shared in the parish hall or nave; rather, the index of transforming images becomes ordered by the individual mind.



The suggestiveness of those images proves to be a powerful agent, and it is in the erotic and “darksome womb of fruitful nature” where the mind can “dive.” If the sun can be indexed as Phoebus, the “universe’s eye,” the energy that “reflects her glances,” the thing that marks time’s passage and the strength of the seasons, the possibilities of the “thousand fancies buzzing” can be recollected in a steady and controlled translation of head to pen.

Bradstreet admits the usefulness of these activities in the opening prose poem of “Meditations Divine and Moral” where “there is no object that we see” “but we may make some spiritual advantage”<sup>29</sup>; the advantageousness of the sensory pursuit is twofold: the improvements one makes to one’s character are “wise as well as pious,” and the admission here to include the profane body and mind while reaching out for “divine translation”<sup>30</sup> establishes Bradstreet’s poetics as both mundane and devotional, instructive as well as meditative, worldly as well as supramundane.

Where her personal poems regularly close with an understanding of God’s graces and the expectations of the affections, “Contemplations” closes contemplation of time that seemingly foretells Romantic sensibilities:

O Time the fatal wrack of mortal things,  
 That draws oblivion’s curtains over kings;  
 Their sumptuous monuments, men know them not,  
 Their names without a record are forgot,  
 Their parts, their ports, their pomp’s all laid in th’ dust  
 Nor wit nor gold, nor buildings scape times rust;



But he whose name is graved in the white stone  
 Shall last and shine when all of these are gone. (*Works*, 230)

*Symbolic nature.*

The dual condition of nature in Bradstreet's poems points out her awareness of textual worlds that are exclusive of the experiential world. In her public poems, nature is metaphoric and mythological; in the private poems, nature asserts itself through metaphor but a Puritan god haunts its symbols.

This poetry foretells the aestheticized version of Calvinism that Lawrence Buell argues for in his essay "Calvinism Romanticized: Harriet Beecher Stowe, Samuel Hopkins, and *The Minister's Wooing*" (1978). Buell focuses on Stowe to do the heavy lifting of the close reading, but he easily extends the theory out to several figures. Hawthorne, Melville, Emerson, Thoreau, and Dickinson, he writes, "tend more quickly to equate doctrine with rigidity or hypocrisy and to reduce the supernatural dimension of religious experience to naturalistic terms."<sup>31</sup> I don't think Bradstreet belongs necessarily in this entourage, but she is primogenitrix of the poetic landscape that is symbolically saturated by the divine.

Robert Daly depicts Bradstreet's poetry through the lens of the Puritan view of nature, that is, symbolic and imbued with the energies of God:

Though Anne Bradstreet's poetry, for example, evinces skill and a deep concern with her art, it was designed neither to demonstrate that skill nor to as-



sert her role as a maker of verse, but to respond to glory of God immanent in the created world and seen, not made, by the poet.<sup>32</sup>

However, I'm not entirely convinced, as a few pages later Daly begins to define these Puritan environments as textual environments. Describing English Puritan minister Thomas Taylor's *Meditations from the Creatures* (1628), Daly depicts the relationship between God and the world as "hierarchical," and "not dualistic":

God is an author, and the world is His book, to be read by man and not despised, mistrusted, or ignored. "The world is his book; so many pages, as so many several creatures; no page is empty, but full of lines; every quality of the creature, is a several letter of this book, and no letter without a part of God's wisdom in it."

...

In focusing on the metaphorical nature of the physical world and the metaphorical language of the Bible, Taylor was moving toward an understanding of meditation as a literary, as well as a religious exercise. And he knew it. Discussing metaphorical predications about the nature of God, he clearly moves into the realm of literary criticism: "Hands and fingers are ascribed to God metaphorically. And here the heavens are called not the works of his hands, but his fingers: to note his singular industry, his exquisite workmanship and art, and also special love and care." For Taylor, then, meditation from the creatures listed one's thoughts and affections to God, not by deny-



ing the physical world, but by reflecting on it in words, by translating God's physical metaphor into verbal metaphors.... The sensible world was a voice to be heard, a book to be read, and meditation was a verbal, a literary, method of practicing one's religion.<sup>33</sup>

If the Puritan world is a formal metaphor whose objects are immanent forms of a divine grace, then this world behaves rather precisely as Katherine Hayles' theory of the material metaphor suggests. While her ideas are more centralized in digital theory, they are absolutely interested in metaphysical conceits, and their encounter with nature's formal variety as an enterprise that might be discovered in the digital realm is its own admissible notion.

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<sup>1</sup> Anne Bradstreet, *Works of Anne Bradstreet*, ed. Jeannine Hensley (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2010).

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid*, xxxiv.

<sup>3</sup> Louis Martz, *The Poem of the Mind* (New York: Oxford UP, 1966), 80.

<sup>4</sup> Martz, 80-81.

<sup>5</sup> Wallace Stevens, "The Ideas of Order at Key West," *Collected Poetry and Prose* (New York: Library of America, 1997), 105.

<sup>6</sup> I suppose, what Derrida calls the "trace" in *Of Grammatology*.

<sup>7</sup> This idea of collaboration appears in Wendy Martin's *An American Triptych*.

<sup>8</sup> Roy Harvey Pearce, *The Continuity of American Poetry* (Connecticut: Wesleyan UP, 1987), 24.

<sup>9</sup> Norman Pettit, *The Heart Prepared: Grace and Conversion in Puritan Spiritual Life* (Connecticut: Wesleyan UP, 1966, 1989). See Chapter "Preparation and the Problem of the Heart."

<sup>10</sup> Paula Kopacz. "'To Finish What's Begun': Anne Bradstreet's Last Words." *Early American Literature*, Vol. 23, No. 2 (1998), p. 175-187.

<sup>11</sup> Kopacz, 183.

<sup>12</sup> Wendy Martin, *An American Triptych* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1984), 47.

<sup>13</sup> From Martin, 45:

In both "The Four Elements" and "The Four Humours," the protagonists are initially depicted as antagonistic sisters whose quarrels threaten to disrupt the universe. Each sister is so intent on achieving dominance that the floods, fires, storms, and earthquakes resulting from their wrangling threaten to destroy the



cosmos. The Puritans and Elizabethans viewed such disruption as the harbinger of chaos that was to be feared. In Bradstreet's poems, the sisters' struggle for dominance is resolved by their collective realization that each of them has an essential part in the functioning of the cosmos, that the interplay of the elements and the humors creates balance.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid, 45.

<sup>15</sup> *A Concise Dictionary of Middle English, From A.D. 1150 To 1580*, A. L. Mayhew and Walter W. Skeat (London: Oxford UP, 1888).

<sup>16</sup> Wendy Martin, 46.

<sup>17</sup> Kenneth A. Requa, "Anne Bradstreet's Poetic Voices," *Early American Literature* 9, no. 1 (1974), 4.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> Robert Daly, *God's Altar: The World and the Flesh in Puritan Poetry* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978), 72.

<sup>20</sup> "There is no remembrance of former things; neither shall there be any remembrance of things that are to come with those that shall come after." Eccles 1.11.

<sup>21</sup> *The works of Anne Bradstreet*, ed. Jeannine Hensley.

<sup>22</sup> The possibility of "pelf" being things that are stolen. That is, AB suggests that worldly life is more an intrusion than not.

<sup>23</sup> Eva T. H. Brann, *The world of the imagination: sum and substance* (Savage, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield, 1991). 21.

<sup>24</sup> As a complication to this stream being equated with the Merrimack, Norman Grabo's essay "The veiled vision: the role of aesthetics in early American intellectual history," argues for a more "belletristic" reading of the Puritans and not to sacrifice their poetry to historical data. For example, Bradstreet "identifies the river as an emblem of the soul's progress to sea of eternal rest. But the historian, in the guise of editor, soberly corrects her, identifying the river as the Merrimack." *The American Puritan Imagination*, ed. Sacvan Bercovitch (London: Cambridge UP, 1974), 26.

<sup>25</sup> *Works*, 296.

<sup>26</sup> Rosemary M. Laughlin, "Anne Bradstreet: Poet in Search of Form," *American Literature* 42, no. 1 (1970). 11.

<sup>27</sup> *The Bay Psalm Book*, A facsimile reprint of the first edition of 1640 (University of Chicago Press, 1956). No pagination.

<sup>28</sup> "Glistening." Oxford English Dictionary, 2014. Full illustrative quotation reads:  
1535 *Bible* (Coverdale) Job xx. 25 A glisteringe [so also 1611] swearde.

<sup>29</sup> *Works*, 296.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid. "Contemplations," 229.

<sup>31</sup> Lawrence Buell, "Calvinism Romanticized: Harriet Beecher Stowe, Samuel Hopkins, and *The Minister's Wooing*" (*ESQ*, Volume 24, 3<sup>rd</sup> Quarter 1978), page 129-130.

But the literary implications of Stowe's particular branch of New England thought, the late Edwardsean sensibility [i.e. Jonathan Edwards], may perhaps be



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spelled out more distinctly. I shall venture to suggest several characteristic traits. First, this sensibility implies a literary universe in which supernatural religion is basically accepted as a given, so that belief in a personal God, miracles, hell, and the interposition of divine grace are accepted as emotional realities if not as positive articles of faith. Secondly, this in turn implies a dramatic situation in which a religion of doctrinal rigor, defined as the communal standard, is played off against a religion of love in such a way that the claims of both are deeply felt and the first is compromised but not discredited by the other. Third, we may expect such works to set up on some level an equation between self-fulfillment and self-denial rather than self-assertion or self-reliance in the Emersonian sense. These three motifs, clearly operative in *The Minister's Wooing*, all relate to key concerns of the New England theology as it was painstakingly but insistently modified in the direction of the religion of the heart. The first relates to the problem of assurance; the second, to the tension between piety and doctrine, between the potentially antinomian value of holiness and the need to view God systematically; the third, to the concept of disinterested benevolence.

Besides Stowe, the major American Romantic in whom these motifs figure most importantly is Emily Dickinson. The elusive possibility of a direct relation with a personal, sovereign God; the sharp juxtaposition of the probing intellect and utter sentimentalism; and the almost voluptuous celebration of self-denial in the role of New England nun—these are significant features of Dickinson's poetic landscape which have their counterparts in Stowe. In Hawthorne and Melville one finds them to a less marked extent; in Emerson, Thoreau, and Whitman, hardly at all. All five of these writers, for example, tend more quickly to equate doctrine with rigidity or hypocrisy and to reduce the supernatural dimension of religious experience to naturalistic terms. Only in late Whitman (after his Wordsworthian lapse in semi-orthodoxy) does the concept of a personal God become a felt reality; only in Thoreau's "Higher Laws" does the idea of self-denial take on an erotic appeal. (129)

<sup>32</sup> Robert Daly, *God's Altar: The World and the Flesh in Puritan Poetry* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978), 55.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.* 73-74.



## CHAPTER 3

*The Weird Papers of Jonathan Edwards*

"The book of Scripture is the interpreter of the book of nature two ways, viz., by declaring to us those spiritual mysteries that are indeed signified and typified in the constitution of the natural world; and secondly, in actually making application of the signs and types in the book of nature as representations of those spiritual mysteries in many instances."

—Jonathan Edwards, *Images or Shadows of Divine Things*, no. 156

The title of this chapter is meant to cue us less to a contemporary definition of "weird" but rather to the Early English origins of the word that denote fate, destiny, and the agency that determines human events (see the OED's entry). It's meant as a complication to Calvinism's predestination and the strange karmic impulses that guided Jonathan Edwards' belief system.<sup>1</sup> The epigraph here is meant to lead us toward thinking about Edwards' "book of Scripture" as a force of weird, as the thing interpreting the material of our cosmic debris as linguistic representations of "spiritual mysteries." In *Images or Shadows of Divine Things*, Edwards constructs a companion to the "book of Scripture," a dictionary filled with emblematic prose poems that typify the signs of the spiritual realm. As Perry Miller notes in his introduction to that text, Edwards had several other titles in mind such as "The Book of Nature and Common Providence" and "The Language and Lessons of Nature," indicating



that he meant his work to be an instructive guide of the natural state of man and an intermediary between material and immaterial lives.

Like Anne Bradstreet's contemplative poems that follow the rhetorical moves described by St. Ignatius in the *Spiritual Exercises*—that is, memory, understanding, and will<sup>2</sup>—Jonathan Edwards' meditative emblems of *Images or Shadows of Divine Things* make the mundane world into meaningful tools of meditation. While Bradstreet's poems recreate either private scenarios or reinvent historical events, the collection "Meditations Divine and Moral" resembles Edwards' didactic *Images or Shadows* in their emblematic features. Bradstreet's "Meditations" appear more conversational than Edwards' hard-edged *Images*, yet both projects evaluate the natural world's symbolic representation of the spiritual realm. Edwards' approach is more scholarly, more ecclesiastic; Bradstreet's is domestic, civil. Both approaches demonstrate experiential religions grounded in private relationships and determined by empirical observations.

Consider the differences between these two "walking" poems:

He that walks among briers and thorns will be very careful where he  
sets his foot; and he that passes through the wilderness of this world  
had need ponder all his steps. (Bradstreet, *Works*)

195. We can't go about the world but our feet will grow dirty. So in  
whatever sort of worldly business men do with their hands, their



hands will grow dirty and will need washing from time to time, which is to represent the fullness of this world of pollution. It is full of sin and temptations. In all their goings they are imperfect and polluted with sin, every step they take is attended with sin. So all the works that they do are polluted. They can perform no service, no business, but they contract their guilt and defilement, that they need the renewed washing of the blood of Christ. (Edwards, *Images or Shadows of Divine Things*)

Each passage might be considered an emblem, even if it is not accompanied by an illustration. However, the passage creates a linguistic environment that transposes the reader's mind into a contemplative and generative state. An otherwise unpredictable imagination now works to simulate the behaviors depicted in the poem, and to make or recreate worldly experiences. In a sense, the imagination couples with memory to create a volitional formation, that is, to render information as experience, language as material fabrication. Puritan poetics mimics itself, its experiential religion, by using language to signify material truths that in turn represent spiritual truths. It does so by creating contained and miniaturized versions of the practical world: these linguistic places are not meant as fictions, say as Melville's versions are, but rather "EXTERNAL THINGS ... intended to be IMAGES of things spiritual, moral, and divine."<sup>3</sup>



American Puritan poetry engages the material world by replicating it. Puritan poetry records its age with the lyrical sentiments of private moralities, unlike say the modernist epic that is nearly a record of historical data, albeit a transfused record. As an aesthetic system, Puritan poetics are less concerned with the pleasure of art, and rather with the utility of tools. Poems are machines of grace whose input is calm focus.

*Heterocosmic debris.*

A heterocosm is an alternative world conceived from the space of some principle world. *Heteros*, from the Greek, meaning “other” or “another” or “different” pairs with *cosm* (or *microcosm*) denoting the miniature counterpart of “divine or universal nature” (OED). Heterocosmic worlds must be conceived through the features of language that create them. Their ranges of diction must be stable and sure; we cannot doubt a word or phrase else the image we have of the world begins to dissolve.

For this chapter, I want to conceive of Jonathan Edwards’ works as lexicographic items, that is, as a set of “natural” dictionaries that attempt to establish a vocabulary of reference for the spiritual realm. This range of vocabulary creates the poetic spaces that in turn we might consider as textual environments and heterocosms. Studies of Edwards have been religious, philosophic, and literary, but perhaps never quite attuned to the linguistic behaviors of his texts. Ultimately I feel the manner in



which he is studied is arbitrary: all inquiries associate themselves with language. Edwards' philosophic, scientific, and theological systems are, even if vaguely, bound up in words. Readers of Locke's *Essay* are aware that Book III "Of Words" holds a unique place among the other more abstract subject headers. Reading through the *Essay* almost feels like moving through a piece of writing in the drafting process, where suddenly the author has figured out that the whole project is contingent upon an element previously excluded. For Locke, that is the section "Of Words." Edwards never seems delayed by that kind of digression; rather, all his writings are suffused with keywords and attempts at formulating working definitions of those terms. Whether we consider Edwards' task to be philosophical or theological, the system he wants to develop can only be navigated by lexical meaning. Any religion or immaterial theory worth its salt needs a coordinating grammar to highlight its important terms: Pali and Sanskrit, for example, are classical languages that exist in a closed canonical system that use keywords to represent notions of the mind-body complex. Similarly, Edwards documents his personal theological system by applying scientific methodologies of language to interpret Calvinistic beliefs by describing their linguistic features.

In the introduction to this project, I discussed Katherine Hayles' "material metaphor" in hopes of shedding new light on the poetic craft. The relationship between the material object and the person using that object is a two-way "traffic," as Hayles calls the connection between language and object. The coordination of behav-



iors between the two occurs in the formal mechanism of the object and in the cognitive spaces of the user. Because the apparatus of the digital world can be formally diverse—unique in all encounters—Hayles’ suggestion is that form aids in the dictation of an object’s use and in our comprehension of its capacities. Ultimately of course, as readers and as engineers of our local fates, our own capacity for creative production outweighs any formal limitations; that is, we do conceptualize objects in accordance to their formal existences, but we can also use these things in inefficient ways. A screwdriver, for example, helps us apply torque in securing a screw to bind two objects together; we might, however, use the screwdriver in other ways according to its formal abilities: as a coffee spoon, a toothbrush, to remove ear wax, or even in other ways that don’t coincide with its natural formal abilities, such as kindling for a fire or material to write a poem upon. But as locations of reading however, Hayles wants us to consider digital environments as places with particular physics. Just as we can hardly disobey the physics of our world, neither can we imagine disobeying those physics. Flying, say with our bodies, must be a disruption of gravity, but it certainly is within the bounds of the ideas of gravity and only a twist of the rules not disobedience. For these rules to be disobeyed we would have to understand what existed outside of the universe and outside of space-time: we don’t have the capacity for this, however, like a cat does not have the capacity to learn human history, and therefore our lives are guided by a set of comprehensible faiths that accord to our formal situations and the rules of those situations.



Both the reader and the poet are in collaboration as makers of heterocosmic environments that perform under their own physics. Additionally, it is impossible to determine whose notion of these worlds—the reader or the poet—are narrower or more limited; they may be comparable and discoverable places through their linguistic features but psychologically they can never be measured in tandem as these realities are completely exclusive.

Edwards fabricates a psychological method to describe the spiritual world by shaping the forms of language in the material world. The forms of his natural dictionaries, infiltrated by an attempt to conceive of language as a metaphysical structure, are “material metaphors” that predict, generally speaking, the manner in which a reader interacts with them, performing a narrow activity of imagination that can be considered as meditation.

### *Spider's Mind*

Jonathan Edwards' concept of the world seems defined by his contemporary science. Seventeenth and eighteenth century natural philosophy—John Locke's *Essay*, Newton's *Opticks*, Robert Boyle, Cartesian physics, Galileo's *Systemata Cosmicum*<sup>4</sup>—encouraged the body to be considered as a passive site where experience might be investigated. Through the body's study, and though its fate was as determined as its spiritual counterpart, the world's symbolic forms could become sensible. Through his scientific sense of the universe, Edwards manages to create a wide



spectrum of observable environments that attempt to include the spiritual, invisible realms that might only be comprehended through the intelligent application of language. From his early essay "Of Insects," we encounter a methodology based on empiric observation and perceptual conclusion:

And accordingly, at a time when I was in the woods, I happened to see one of these spiders on a bush. So I went to the bush and shook it, hoping thereby to make him uneasy upon it... I took him off upon my stick and, holding of him near my eye, shook the stick as I had done the bush, whereupon he let himself down a little, hanging by his web, and [I] presently perceived a web out from his tail and a good way into the air. I took hold of it with my hand and broke it off, not knowing but that I might take it out to the stick with him from the bush; but then I plainly perceived another such string to proceed out at his tail.

I now conceived I had found out the whole mystery. (155)

The image of the spider is constructed through methods of tactile discovery, where that discovery is coeval with perceptual experience. Like Locke's famous sentiment from his *Essay*, "Ideas in the Understanding are coeval with Sensation" (II. i. 44), the spider in its world "amongst the trees in a dewy morning," in "the bush," "in the woods," "glistening against the sun," "floating and sailing in the air," is understood



by Edwards speaking from the creative locus of language, the central position, the “I took hold of it with my hand” position.

Similarly in “The Mind” (1717), Edwards explores a natural philosophy through a series of headwords, headings to his system of lexicography that attempts to bring definition to the manifestations and principles of the mind. The table I have created here is culled from Edwards’ headings to his 72 sections in that essay<sup>5</sup>. Its purpose is to demonstrate the organizing bodies of that essay:

Excellency (2)	Place of Minds	Perception	Union	Certainty
Truth (3)	Genus	Rules of Reasoning	Space (2)	Person
Being	Consciousness	Logic	Words	Sensation
Matter	The Will (2)	Prejudice	Cause	Existence
Power	Body, Infinite	Conscience	Excellence	Definition
Sensation	Reasoning (2)	Appetite	Number	Duration
Judgment	Substance	Motion	Ideas	Reason
Memory	Knowledge	Self-evidence	Thought	

**Table 1. Edwards’ headwords.**

This appreciation for systematic order certainly takes cues from the organization of Locke’s *Essay*, and Edwards’ system begins to form the elements of an aesthetic theory the focal points of which must necessarily be a systematically defined vocabulary. The collection of detail considers the individual body—Edwards’—as a hetero-



cosmic site itself: that is, the individual becomes the model for a universal condition that appears to act from a position of neutrality but aligns itself with numerous private treatments. Consider one of many passages on *beauty*:

[62]. As bodies, the objects of our external senses, are but the shadows of beings, that harmony wherein consists sensible excellency and beauty is but the shadow of excellency; that is, it is pleasant to the mind because it is a shadow of love. When one thing sweetly harmonizes with another, as the notes of music, the notes are so conformed and have such proportion one to another that they seem to have respect one to another, as if they loved one another. So the beauty of figures and motions is, when one part has such consonant proportion with the rest as represents a general agreeing and consenting together; which is very much the image of love in all the parts of a society united by a sweet consent and charity of heart. Therein consists the beauty of figures, as of flowers drawn with a pen, and the beauty of the body, and of the features of the face.

The passage continues to develop its abstractions through the “flourishes drawn by an acute penman” to make its case for an “agreeableness” that accords to symmetrical design. Edwards admits “equality or likeness” as “the lowest or most simple kind of beauty” and “proportion” as belonging to higher orders. Again, like the “Spider Papers,” the speaker describes his understanding of “beauty” from an em-



piric perspective, and understanding that is admittedly a “shadow” of the full experience but nevertheless an experience wrought from the sensations that accompany the appreciation of a fine drawing or piece of music. This is all a philosophy of thought of course, and empirical perception doesn’t necessarily make for bad science if we trust our source.

In these two cases of exploratory science, Edwards depicts an object by describing its environment. For both the spider and the mind, these situations develop out of onomasiological tendencies: that is, Edwards supplies the reader with a set of keywords and phrases that build the infrastructure to the concept he pursues. Onomasiology constructs a concept out of the features of a thing by asking for its names. This is in contrast to semasiology that begins with the expression of the thing (spider, for example) and sorts its features to locate its meaning. In Edwards’ “Of Insects,” the spider’s environment is constructed out of sticks, trees, and other collocating words; the mind’s environment is comprised of component theories constructed out of a genus of interlinking words.

Edwards is a maker. In the physical realm, we find him using paper in compelling ways, like more modern artist’s books or art objects even, that seem to go beyond simple conservation of rare material. In the invisible realm of language, we find him defining aspects of the world through sets of linguistic features and phenomenological components. In a sense, this latter occupation creates a primer of the pre-industrialized world, a manual that attempts to combine devotional materials



and holy experiences with a secular personhood invested in learning the physics of a world in God's consciousness.

*Communication circuit.*

Figure 1 in the appendix of images following this chapter shows a small scrap of newspaper with Jonathan Edwards's scribbling. By force of habit it seems, during his walks and trips between parishes, Edwards would write thoughts and inspirations on slips of paper and then pin those papers to his outer coat. Why he didn't cram them into his pocket and continue on his way remains a mystery, but this peripatetic activity easily appears to be a kind of spatial practice that united body with mind and memory. Writing and pinning are two activities that transform: writing allows Edwards to convert "inside" stuff to "outside" material; the pinning of paper to his clothing allows for added layer of externality: Edwards creates a situation where his physical form becomes representative of the interior-exterior movement. Edwards called these slips "remembrancers." Howard Rice discusses them as Edwards's "creative mind at work"<sup>6</sup>:

Since this scrap was torn from a copy of *The Daily Gazetteer*, No. 3121, March 3, 1743/4, and as we may doubtless assume that the gazette was put to this incidental use not long after it was received and read, we thus have an approximate date for the notes. According to his habit, Edwards numbered the sheets on which he made such jottings, and



preserved them as “miscellanies” for future use. They were the raw materials for his sermons, which were in turn drawn upon for more exhaustive doctrinal treatises. The line drawn through the last part of these notes probably indicates that this portion had been used in some sermon. The subjects here touched upon are, of course, central in Edwards’ thought. Successive generations of biographers have repeated the tradition that from his solitary rides and walks Edwards would return home with numbered pieces of paper pinned to his coat as “remembrancers” of his thoughts on important subjects. Then, on going into his study, he “would take them off, one by one, in regular order, and write down the train of thought, of which each was intended to remind him.” Although no pinhole is discernible, it is nevertheless tempting to think that the scrap of overwritten newspaper preserved at Princeton is one of Edwards’ “remembrancers.”

Susan Howe considers the image of this “solitary traveler covered in scraps, riding through the woods and fields” as a metaphor: “Words give clothing to hide our nakedness,” she writes, following a quote from Edwards instructing us to “extricate all questions from the least confusion by words or ambiguity of words so that the Ideas shall be left naked.”<sup>7</sup> The principle here, as Perry Miller has claimed, suggests that words are external properties, sheltering divine meanings that might be “extricated” from nature, like a metal from ore, a “purifier” of ideas:



“Sounds and letters are external things,” [Edwards] let slip, “that are the objects of the external senses of seeing and hearing.” Hence Edwards’ pulpit oratory was a consuming effort to make sounds become objects, to control and discipline his utterance so that words would immediately be registered on the senses not as noises but as ideas. To use the term in its technical rather than its debased sense, his was truly “sensational” preaching, which wrought an overwhelming effect by extraordinary simplicity.

The problem given him by New England society was to make words once more represent a reality other than themselves, but he formulated it out of Locke: if language is inherently conventional, and if in a particular culture it has become wholly conventionalized, how can one employ a convention to shatter conventionality? It could be done only by freeing language from stale associations, by forcing words so to function in the chain of natural causes that out of the shock upon the sense would come apprehension of the idea. Only then could the meaning of meanings be carried to the heart of listeners.<sup>8</sup>

The psychological process of meaning making derives then from the influence of words as external energies. Edwards wants to conceive of language in a bare form, as an objective material “naked” and ready to create “sensational” responses. Language’s travel from a formal state to the abstract, data-ridden muck of the senses re-



lies on a subject's psychological validation of those formal properties. The creative imagination participates in a making of meaning but through passive perceptual pathways that have encountered the shadowy agents of language. Additionally, once consciousness has been directed upon an emblematic form, our ability to investigate it objectively is diminished. Here we might find it useful to return to Hayles.

Looking back now at the eighteenth century under a contemporary lens, in *Writing Machines* (2002), Katherine Hayles shows that Mark Danielewski's *House of Leaves* (2000) "suggests that the appropriate model for subjectivity is a communication circuit rather than discrete individualism...."<sup>9</sup> For an early American imagination contemplating an emblematic structure, the communication circuit is a satisfactory model because of its two-way traffic. Once an emblem—"naked" in its content—is contemplated, it becomes infused with the psychological properties generated by its reader. While those properties are personal retentions, personal auras inscribed around the emblem, the emblem operates as a kind of inscription software between its user and the constructed images of the truths it depicts. While software can develop as the communication connection becomes more lasting,<sup>10</sup> yet still an individual becomes responsible for his interpretation of a thing.

To prepare the following discussion of the emblem and the emblematic structures of the imagination that Edwards converts and condenses into words, let's look again at the "material metaphor." In *Writing Machines*, Katherine Hayles' term "material metaphor" describes how an object suggests meaning through its functional



form. Essentially a doorway to a network of signifiers, the material object is the organizing body that bundles chaos into regular patterns that our intelligence can sort out. Given the nature of its materiality (or its digitality), that somewhat stable artifact provides us the possibility to access those patterns when our encounters with them result in the critical process of decoding. Hayles defines “material metaphor”:

Traditionally metaphor has been defined as a verbal figure. Derived from a root meaning bearing across, it denotes the transfer of sense associated with one word to another. In [Greg] Egan’s fictional scenario [of his novel *Permutation City*], the transfer takes place not between one word and another but rather between a symbol (more properly, a network of symbols) and material apparatus. This kind of traffic, as old as the human species, is becoming increasingly important as the symbol-processing machines we call computers are hooked into networks in which they are seamlessly integrated with apparatus that can actually do things in the world, from the sensors and actuators of mobile robots to the semiotic-material machinery that changes the numbers in back accounts. To account for this traffic I propose material metaphor, a term that foregrounds the traffic between words and physical artifacts.<sup>11</sup>

And from the lexicon linkmap, the online supplement to the text:



The traffic between a verbal construction and physical object that causes the sense associated with one to be transferred to the other.

Interacting with the forms that supply the words, says Hayles, “inevitably changes the meanings of the words as well” (23-24). After covering an expansive terrain that includes electronic texts, the erasure of Tom Philips’ treated Victorian novel *A Humament* [see figure 5], and Mark Danielewski’s brachiating text *House of Leaves* [figure 6], Hayles tells us that “The implication for studies of technology and literature is that the materiality of inscription thoroughly interpenetrates the represented world,” and that “Focusing on materiality allows us to see the dynamic interactivity through which a literary work mobilizes its physical embodiment in conjunction with its verbal signifiers to construct meanings in ways that implicitly construct the user/reader as well.”<sup>12</sup>

Jonathan Edwards encounters the world in a similar manner to Hayles’ conception of this mobilizing material metaphor. Edwards’ interactions with language continually reshape his relationship with the world and with God; as Perry Miller has pointed out, Edwards understands that individual realities are true (valid) insofar as they are experienced. Sermonic discourse then becomes a challenge for the orator to craft sermons that don’t simply appeal to a diverse audience through rhetoric but create illuminating psychological situations that arise from the craftsmanship of language. Like the emblematic form, words are “shadows of divine things” and those shadows link to the experiences of a creative deity.



*Emblematic imaginations.*

Edwards doesn't have a modern computer to run simulations, of course, but he does have a mind coached by Enlightenment ideas of the simulated body. But the questions of technology here—that is, what could any of this have to do with studies of technology and literature—might be answered by the manner in which the early American imagination interpreted the world. This imagination, as I have stated in various locations of this project, is particularly emblematic—intending, that is, densely compressed meanings articulated by specific and precise forms. Figure 9 represents an example of Francis Quarles' emblematic art [figure 9].

Jonathan Edwards own pursuit of transforming emblematic thinking into spiritual teaching results in the unfinished manuscript *Images and Shadows of Divine Things*. Written between 1716 and 1720 but worked on throughout his life and clocking in at 212 notes, [figure 10] the project represents the kernels of the rest of Edwards' scientific and metaphysical writing. By way of example, No. 168 reads:

There are most representations of divine things in things that are most in view or that we are chiefly concerned in: as in the sun, his light and other influences and benefits; in the other heavenly bodies; in our own bodies; in our state, our families and commonwealths; and in this business that mankind do principally follow, viz., husbandry.

Edwards understands the world as if it were encoded: there are mysteries in spiders. Unraveling the objective world and repackaging it with illustrative language was



more than an interesting mediation of the world and actual communiqués with divine filaments. The process of meaning making involves breaking up the emblem and animating its component features. The resulting narrative parts, animated in pieces by the imagination, as a whole conceptually reveal a psychological transparency between a reader's subjective interior and the formal interiors of the emblem. The material shape of the emblem is a didactic form that, after instructing its reader, allows its reader to dwell upon the subtleties of meaning.

Perhaps however, the simplicity of form—the emblem is not meant to be a subtle thing in its presentation—allows us to too easily consider the relationship between text and image as simple. As William Heckscher has noted in his writings on Renaissance Emblems, “Emblems were either heroic, moral, or didactic.”<sup>13</sup> These categories are simple enough to digest, but as soon as any meaning is formed in the juxtaposition of text and image, these things become increasingly complicated. The psychological composition of the image, that is, its animation, is overwhelmingly complex, and these images become inundated with possibility.

Similarly, Edwards' emblematic *Images and Shadows* creates linguistic environments that are delimited by a specific range of diction but ultimately yield infinite psychological fruit. Images, what Edwards also refers to as “shadows” following Plato's *Allegory of the Cave*, allow men to know each other and make discoveries.<sup>14</sup> Images are the only signs of the mind, and, writes Edwards, “the signs of one intelligence interpreted by another”<sup>15</sup>:





### Emblema XVI

#### SOBRIE VIVENDUM ET NON TEMERE CREDENDUM

*(Nephe, kai memnes hapistein harthra tauta phrenon)*

Ne credas, ne (Epicharmus ait) non sobrius esto:  
 Hi nervi humanae membraque mentis erunt.  
 Ecce oculata manus credens id quod videt: ecce  
 Puleium antiquae sobrietatis holus:  
 Quo turbam ostenso sedaverit Heraclitus,  
 Mulxerit et tumida seditione gravem.

### Emblem 16

#### LIVE SOBERLY AND DO NOT ACCEPT BELIEFS HEEDLESSLY

*(repeated in Greek)*

States Epicharmus: "Never be credulous nor cease to be sober." These are the sinews and members of the human mind. Behold the hand with an eye upon it; it only believes what it sees. Here is shown the mint, the herb symbolizing ancient sobriety. Brandishing this plant, Heraclitus pacified and soothed the maddened mob bursting into frenzied revolt.

**Figure 2.** From Andrea Alciati (1492-1550), *A Book of Emblems*, trans. and ed. John F Moffitt (North Carolina: McFarland, 2004), 33.



By whatever means heavenly intelligences may communicate, in this world one may know another mind only mediately, by some sign or manifestation. The ways of mediate communication are four. We, being intelligences ourselves, may argue the contents of another's mind *a priori*, on the analogy with ourselves. We may rationally and inductively conclude from certain effects or actions of the other what is going on in his mind. We may listen to his words and take what he says according to our credence of his veracity, as what he means. Or, we may gauge him by his "images or resemblances." Images are not similarities, actions, or words; they are the signs of one intelligence interpreted by another.<sup>16</sup>

Intelligences—and not imaginations—are the excitable conduits between the physical world and its shadows and the metaphysical realm:

Edwards' contention is that the metaphysical realities, though capable of abstract statement, exist only in the infinite shadows of the physical world, where intelligences, if it is pure, may read them as naked ideas. Nature thus interpreted becomes a principle of activity the perceiving mind, taken in a completely empirical sense as wholly "passive," participates in matter as a voluntary intention. Human intelligence, the image of the intelligence that informs nature, finds in mutability not a



mass of confused appearances but analogical traces of the deep realities, the intentions of God.<sup>17</sup>

A more contemporary version of imagination, one informed by Kant's two-pronged edition of synthesis and production, feels at home near Edwards' *intelligences*. The intelligence vacillates between passive reception and exposure to the senses while also participating in nature's animation. To aid in shaping the shadows of the present and expectations in the future, the creative intelligence *recollects* and uses the experience of the past, memories, as proven geometries to adequately serve up an experiential plane of reality.

Another lifelong project, the *Notes on the Holy Scriptures* (see Figure 8), a massive collection of miscellaneous observations interwoven with biblical passage, seems to propose a kind of spiritual feedback loop where Edwards' extracts of the Bible are met with energetic close readings and tireless marginalia. To me, the *Notes on the Holy Scriptures* suggests the Bible was, in the very least, a complicated emblem to Edwards; it was an objective correlative to those firing synapses of a three-tiered deity that could be communicated with; that is, "One intelligence looking at another" could be converted into a compelling discussion if the correct wires were carefully routed. The *Notes on the Holy Scriptures* also suggests Edwards' interest in the art of the material object, and not only for conservation of paper's sake: rather, that book appears almost illuminated (in the sense of an Illuminated Bible) by his notes and woven like a hybrid, digital text.



*Jonathan Edwards' empty room. On the table there was a natural dictionary.*

Navigating a spiritual autobiography by way of illustrative quotation, Jonathan Edwards' "Personal Narrative" is fashioned through a lexicographic system. Edwards guides his narrative by memory of places coordinated with biblical passages: this variety of associative practice allows Edwards to transfer energies between personal anecdote and biblical language as if the two were naturally interchangeable and both realizations of the other. The feedback loop he creates with his Bible has its analogue in his real-world meditations—those physical and mental meditations reverberate out into the world of God's consciousness and return, like some kind of sonar, encoded in biblical language. Edwards discusses the truth of the image not as an kind of linguistic incarceration but as a kind of pure and intrinsic representation<sup>18</sup>—the word is not a lie, but rather a covering, a cloak, is more like Emerson's "every word was once a poem" in its fidelity to God's consciousness. The word is a mere surface tension; just beneath lies the stony treasure. The biblical citation in "Personal Narrative" is something like a recitation—language is repetitive, as if the expectation is for an aural reception. The repetition at times seems reminiscent of chant as if it were a musical device, and the biblical citation presents significant moments of change in Edwards's life, as if those passages were spiritual or divine correlations to his shifting manner of being. In the long passage that follows, citing the introductory lines from "Personal Narrative," Edwards dwells on the factors of his spiritual path and the "affections" of his mind. This latter term the Norton gloss-



es as “Emotionally aroused, as opposed to merely understanding rationally the arguments for Christian faith” which certainly has a bearing on the term, though in “Religious Affections,” Edwards defines the particularities of the word, writing even that “a great part of true religion lies in the affections.”<sup>19</sup> Whether being “affected” is relegated to the ranges of “emotional arousal” seems only partially at stake:

I had a variety of concerns and exercises about my soul from my childhood; but had two more remarkable seasons of awakening before I met with that change, by which I was brought to those new dispositions, and that new sense of things, that I have since had. The first time was when I was a boy, some years before I went to college, at a time of remarkable awakening in my father’s congregation. I was then very much **affected** for many months, and concerned about the things of religion, and my souls’ salvation; and was abundant in duties. I used to pray five times a day in secret, and to spend much time in religious talk with other boys; and used to meet with them to pray together. I experienced I know not what kind of delight in religion. My mind was much engaged in it, and had much self-righteous pleasure; and it was my delight to abound in religious duties. I, with some of my school-mates joined together, and built a booth in a swamp, in a very secret and retired place, for a place of prayer. And besides, I had particular secret places of my own in the woods, where I used to retire by my-



self; and used to be from time to time much **affected**. My **affections** seemed to be lively and easily moved, and I seemed to be in my element, when engaged in religious duties. And I am ready to think, many are deceived with such **affections**, and such a kind of delight, as I then had in religion, and mistake it for grace.

But in process of time, my convictions and **affections** wore off; and I entirely lost all those **affections** and delights, and left off secret prayer, at least as to any constant performance of it; and returned like a dog to his vomit, and went on in ways of sin.<sup>20</sup>

And two other occasions of “affecting” help to define it:

I have sometimes had an **affecting** sense of the excellency of the word of God, as a word of life; as the light of life; a sweet, excellent, life-giving word: accompanied with a thirsting after that word, that it might dwell richly in my heart.

I have often since I lived in this town, had very **affecting** views of my own sinfulness and vileness; very frequently so as to hold me in a kind of loud weeping, sometimes for a considerable time together: so that I have often been forced to shut myself up.<sup>21</sup>

All of Edwards’ “awakening” is a sensitivity to his fluctuating states of mind, an awareness of them and the moods they cause. Edwards’ vocabulary is primarily



psychological, which at times, is met by precise measures of time. Describing his early childhood, his soul has “concerns and exercises,” but with certainty he is able to note “two ... seasons of awakening” before he is “met with ... change.” These keywords take on orbitals around “affections,” as if they were circling some kind of nucleus: dispositions, sense of things, delight, engaged, pleasure, self-righteous, lively, convictions, performance of [secret prayer], thirsting, dwell richly. These appear as fluctuating states for Edwards, who ultimately is “ready to think” that their spontaneity—his “delight” followed by low points—is deceit. Affections may take on the appearance of such states as grace, but they are more like imaginative states.

A more solvent warning against such imaginative states shows up in “Divine and Supernatural Light.” In this essay Edwards explores—in something near a mathematical proof—the method by which natural light is one possible delivery device for divine light. The case he makes is deeply empirical. He writes:

2. This spiritual and divine light don't consists in any impression made upon the imagination. It is no impression upon the mind, as though one saw any thing with the bodily eyes: 'tis no imagination or idea of an outward light or glory, or any beauty of form or countenance, or a visible lustre or brightness of any object. The imagination may be strongly impressed with such things; but this is not spiritual light.



—Indeed when the mind has a lively discovery of spiritual things, and is greatly affected by the power of divine light, it may and probably very commonly doth, much affect the imagination; so that impressions of an outward beauty or brightness may accompany those spiritual discoveries. —<sup>22</sup>

Light, here, specifically “divine” light, is still an illuminating power, but the faculties of the mind — viz. imagination — are subordinate to its manifestation. Light is not an animated object, but rather an animating object. It does, however, have the potential to excite the mind’s affections, to uplift earthly counterparts to divine inspiration.

These sensitivities to the digressions of a “divine” light from a “natural” light require a poetic imagination. The vibrancy of that poetic imagination — Edwards prefers “intelligence” as the term — allows for one’s character to grow and change, and is a functional mediator between the divine and invisible world and the fleshly, depraved, natural world.

The modification of the term imagination is not arbitrary. “Imagination” has a variety of names and manifestations, not excluding the tendencies, afflictions, habits, and occupations that accompany each formal variation. The faculty of Reason, while not synonymous, has particular congruencies with the imagination, and perhaps for Edwards is synonymous with “intelligence.” Like his treatise on divine light, Edwards makes concerted efforts in all of his writings to define his linguistic intentions. “Reason,” he writes, “is the natural image of God in man.”<sup>23</sup> The image of



a divine force is summoned by man, and the image is expressed through the eloquence of the mind's abilities of extrapolation. If the world is God's ongoing consciousness—essentially an immanent deity—then the implantation of Reason is like a small map of that consciousness, useful in discerning local environments. The exportation of the reasoning map into the earthly realm, sequesters it in the natural, unruly, and condemned domain. If there is the possibility for grace and deliverance prior to death, Edwards seems to locate grace here, as a kind of portion of God dropped down into human hands. And like its constituent Reason, "imagination" lies within the domain of the earthly realm. For Edwards, spiritual light has a similar "illumination" as mundane light—but only in its abstraction; it is in the comparison of the two that he comes to lend definition to the imagination.

In his essay "Of Being," Edwards argues that the textures of reality are dependent on individual consciousness and sensation, all of which is hierarchically subordinate to a god consciousness, in which the universe disappears when that primary consciousness also flickers or is "intermitted." He writes:

...there is nothing in a room shut up, but only in God's consciousness. How can anything be there any other way?... Let us suppose for illustration this impossibility, that all spirits in the universe to be for a time deprived of their consciousness, and God's consciousness at the same time to be intermitted. ... the universe for that time would cease to be... Tis our foolish imagination that will not suffer us to see. We fancy



there may be figures and magnitudes, relations and properties, without anyone's knowing of it. But it is our imagination hurts us.<sup>24</sup>

Human imagination misleads one into the purely fantastic, says Edwards, and the Puritan vocabulary intends "imagination" as synonymous with the negative and delusional "fancy" or "phantasy." Imaginative acts continually create the environment of depravity; to belay those, one must give over to those "ideas which are excited in our minds by God"<sup>25</sup> where, writes William Wainwright, phenomena experienced are God's discourse. Believing otherwise is not only distracting, but a corrupting offense. Subscribing closely to John Locke's ideas about sensation in the *Essay*, Edwards locates the activity of sensing the world in passivity, that is, the faculties of sensation absorb the world. Collecting data from the world through sensation and internally transcribing without the "fancy" of imagination leads one to "excellent" translation.

In Edwards' "empty room" theological system, the universe belongs to God's consciousness and is animated by that deity's synapses: if that overbrain is "intermitted," the universe flickers out of existence. The stuff that lives in that consciousness is alert to some kind of physical apparatus that follows formal logics built in. These systems are read through sensation, and in turn that perceived world is a translation of a higher order, a translation of God's immanence.

The argument that reality—or the texture of reality—is dependent on consciousness, and thusly the mind, hierarchically subordinate to God's consciousness



is emphasized. But it is “imagination” that fancies an existence outside of the mind, says Edwards, as if objects could somehow be apprehended without a consciousness trained upon them. For Edwards, the imagination is not in service to the mind, and not in service of the mind’s attempt for truth; it is rather, its own control device, and a potential misanthrope to other partitions of the mind. Being such, it is its own animating principality and it has dominion over itself. Carried forward from the “empty room” quotation above, the universe is not necessarily “part” of God but rather a livened and an enacted and ongoing consciousness. Human imagination misleads one into dangerous fantasies.

William Wainwright submits that Edwards “regards nature as God’s discourse,” in a perpetually creative act.<sup>26</sup> For Edwards, experienced phenomena are those “ideas which are excited in our minds by God.”<sup>27</sup> According to Roland A. Delattre, Edwards’s vision of the universe does not intend a by-product. Edwards’

theocentric vision of the universe as created by God, neither out of nothing (*ex nihilo*), nor out of something (*chaos*) by shaping it into order (*cosmos*), but out of God’s own life, a life so dispositionally energetic and creative that it overflows into a universe that is an enlargement or communication *ad extra* of the being and beauty of God’s own life.<sup>28</sup>

The universe created by God is a living system, animated by the syntax of the deity’s synapses, not regimented like the conveyor belt of a machine. Not animated in parts



like a machine, controlled from one operating system with a variety of appendages at its disposal, but rather pieces of a structural logic. The organization of that logic—its order, its self-organization—yields, expresses, the systems that man is alert to. Those systems are understood and processed via sensation, and the world we see is a translation of the higher code. That code and the process of its decoding intends that vague and much-assuming term, *beauty*. For Edwards, Beauty is also synonymous with “Excellence”; the hand that draws it is God, the enacting method. What he calls “excellence” in this context is not a superficial “beauty” but rather a psychological experience that is the “shadow” of grace.

*Edwards’ geometric shadows*

The description of Puritan daily life as implicitly holy and served up by God belongs to a typological framework consisting of spiritualized objects and “commonplaces” that serve as allegorical readings on the world.<sup>29</sup> Typologies are metaphorical in the grossest sense of “metaphor”; we might work to describe their subtleties, but we might also appreciate a typological reading of the world as a kind of encyclopedia or bestiary by which to translate the signs of the world.

As Perry Miller explains, Edwards’ revolt against American Puritanism was due to the error he saw in Cotton Mather’s view of “ideas through a haze of imagination.”<sup>30</sup> Miller points out that “imagination” is still synonymous with “fancy” in the Puritan vocabulary, and Edwards saw it as an easily corruptible venue. If the



mind was uncontrolled it was negligent and misleading and led one to a dreamy nap in its encounter with the physical objects of the world, the endurance of which belonged to the realm of God and could be explained through Newtonian physics. "The whole universe," writes Edwards in *Images and Shadows of Divine Things* "79," "is preserved by gravity."

That same dreamy nap would then fault the appearances of the cause-effect dynamic, and one would not see things clearly. A mind disabused of its wandering eye, its fancy and whimsy, in its attentiveness could animate an object with its field of perception which, for Edwards, was "by definition intelligent."<sup>31</sup> Like its modernist counterpart coined by William Carlos Williams in *Paterson*, "No ideas but in things,"<sup>32</sup> Edwards' hunt for the naked idea was strict and solemn and empirical and a way for man to liberate himself through image and the material world.

Just as natural light is a part of divine light and not a metaphor, the objects of the empirical and discoverable world are direct objects of the ontological truth and not adornments. Those objects did not "illustrate" spiritual truths as much as they were "an endless, experimental restatement of the truths," which were few in number compared to the infinite iteration of objects.<sup>33</sup> The challenge, as Miller points out, is in the material investigation of image representation and not in theological questions. In the precision of interpretation could be revealed those divine truths.







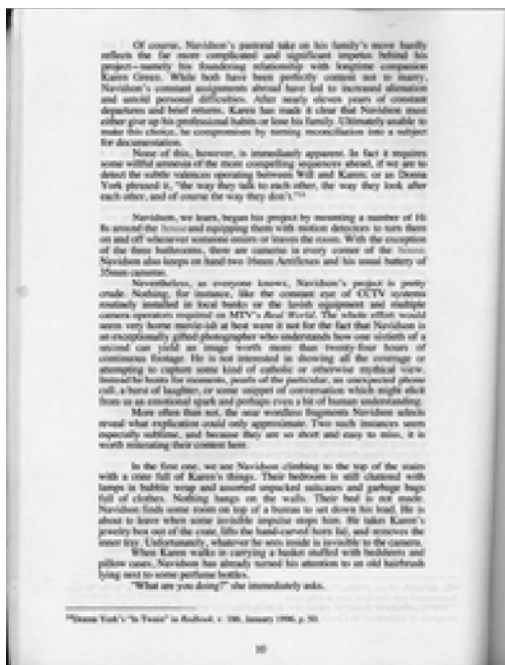
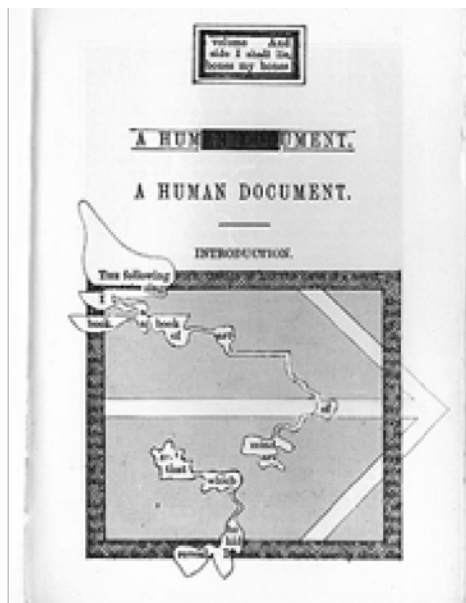


Figure 4 (above). Pages from Tom Phillip's *A Humument: A Treated Victorian Novel*, 2nd rev. ed. (New York: Thames and Hudson, 1997).

Figure 5 (below). Pages from Mark Danielewski's *House of Leaves* (New York: Pantheon, 2000).



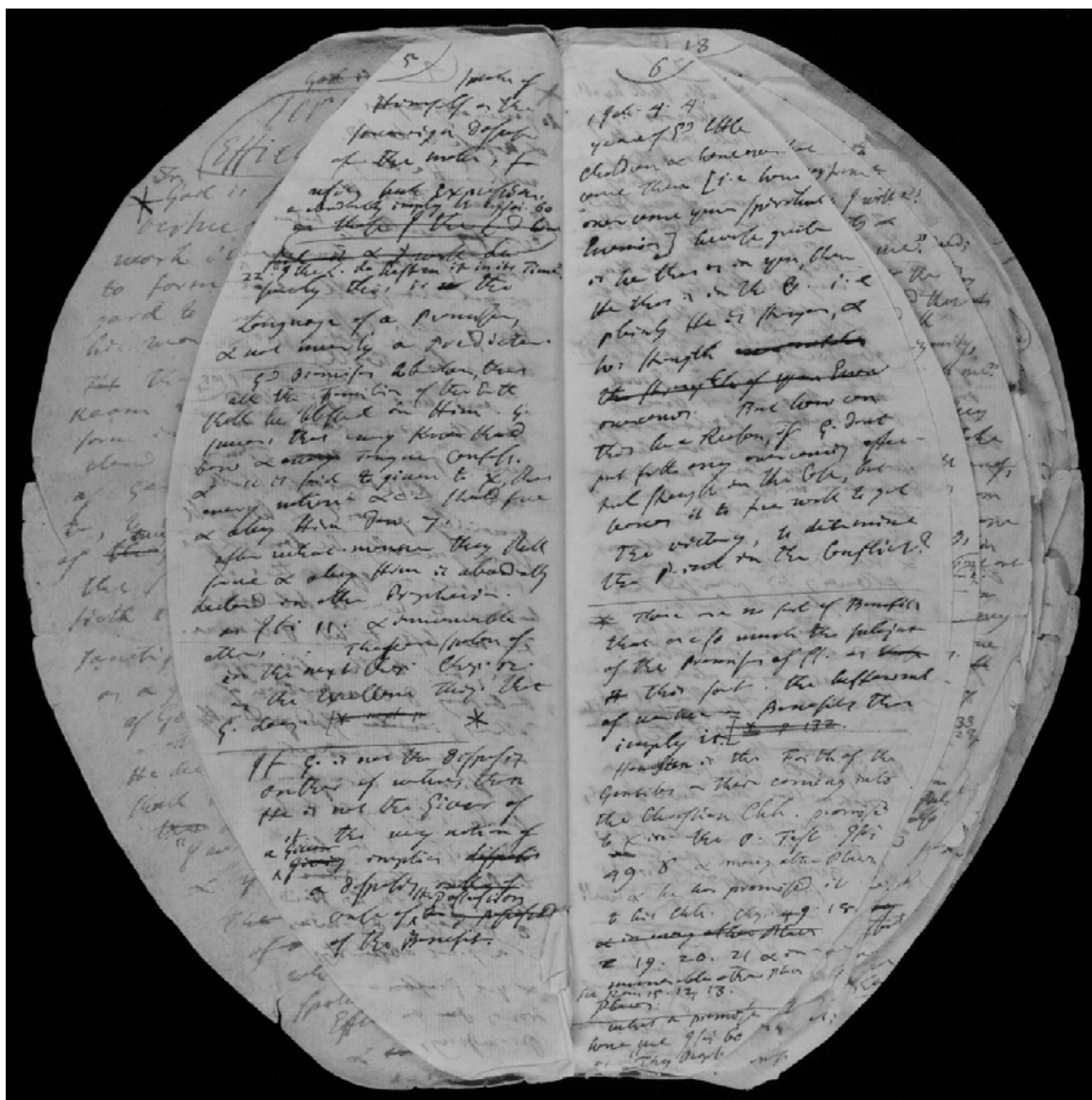


Figure 6. *Efficacious Grace*. From Jonathan Edwards Collection. General Collection, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University.



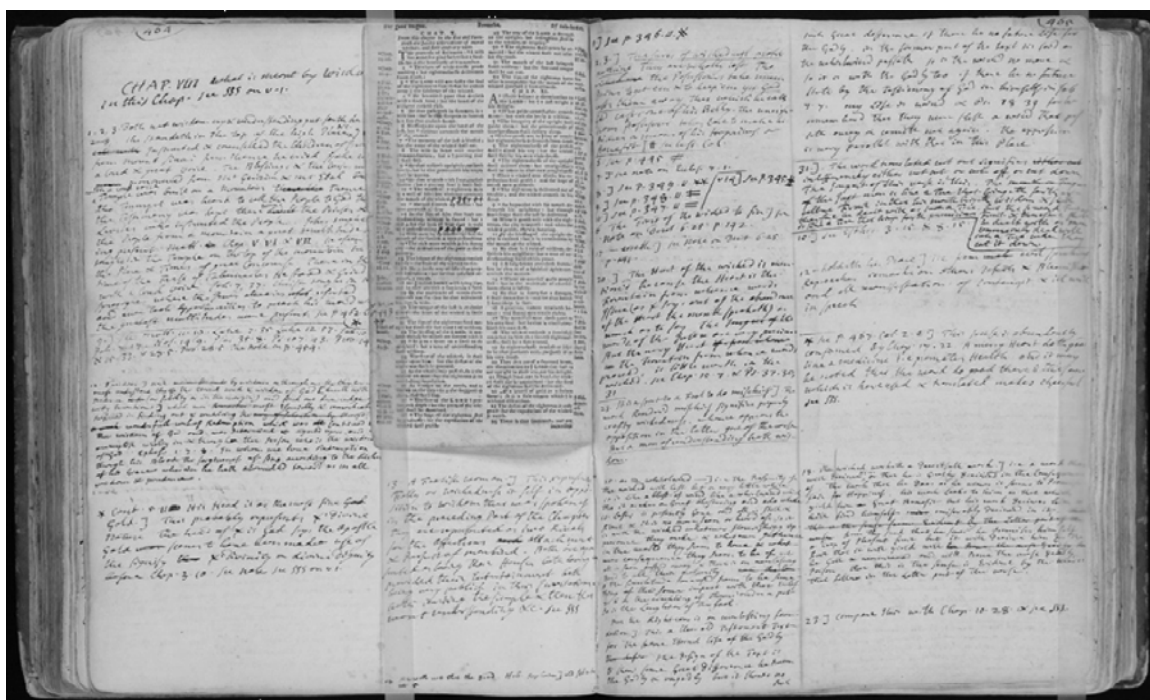


Figure 7. Jonathan Edwards' *Miscellaneous Observations on the Holy Scriptures* [Bible interleaved with manuscript notes]; Jonathan Edwards Collection. General Collection, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University.





**Dum Cœlum aspicio Solum despicio.**

*While to high Heav'n our fervent Thoughts arise,  
The Soul all Earthly Treasures can despise.*

Figure 8. Francis Quarles' *Emblems Divine and Moral* (1638).



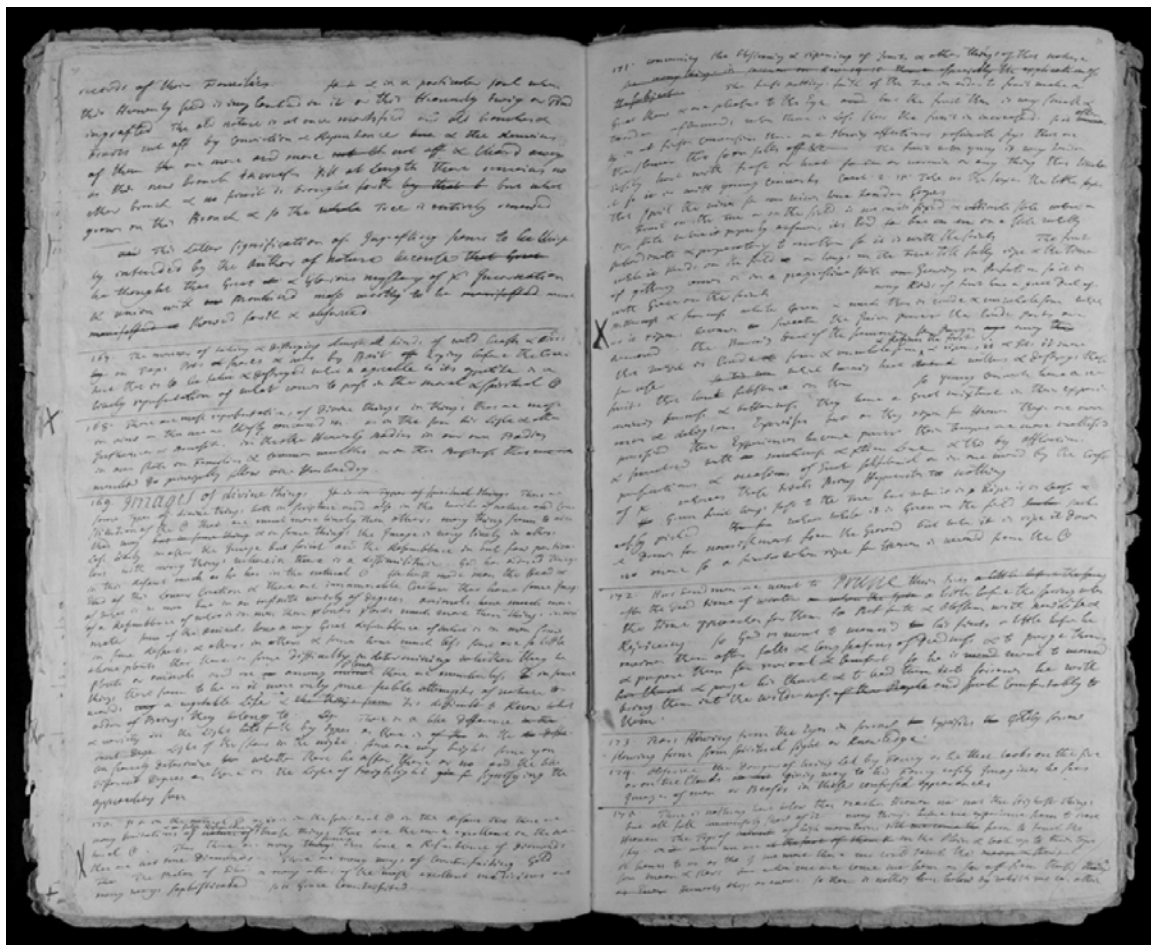


Figure 9. Jonathan Edwards' *Images or Shadows of Divine Things*; written between 1716 and 1720; published 1830. From Jonathan Edwards Collection. General Collection, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University.



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<sup>1</sup> Predestination is undeniably an assumption of karmic principles, in the most general sense. Karma is, more specifically, a principle based on the physics of cause and effect that govern our universe.

<sup>2</sup> See Robert Daly's *God's Altar: The World and Flesh in Puritan Poetry* (Berkeley: UC Press: 1978). See his chapter, "Ars Poetica," in particular:

In his *Introduction to the Devout Life*, St. Francis de Sales defined meditation: "when we think of heavenly things, not to learn but to love them, that is called to meditate: and the exercise thereof, Meditation." St. Ignatius of Loyola provided a relentlessly structured method for the arousal of this love in *Spiritual Exercises*. The "exercitant," as Loyola called the person meditating, was to exercise in sequence three faculties of his soul—memory, understanding, and will. Subject matter for the meditation—e.g. doctrine, scriptural incident, or some object with spiritual significance—was called up by memory, and one first attempted to get as detailed and vivid an apprehension of it as he could using only his memory and imagination. Then one exercised one's understanding, or reason, upon the image or proposition supplied by memory until, after thorough intellectual examination, the work of understanding was complete. Only then did the exercitant judge the subject and submit it to his will and affections, which were moved to great joy or sorrow. Meditation drove dogma into imagination, enlivened doctrine into thoroughly apprehended truth. (72)

Had the Puritans' *contemptus mundi* been as simple and extreme as that of the Gnostics, Manichaeans, and Cathari, they could not have celebrated the beauty of the natural world, seen it as the good gift of a loving God, read it for some revelation of His will, and used images drawn from it to figure spiritual states and heavenly delights. Had they been able to write poetry at all, they could have written either poetry comprising only religious abstractions or Swiftian denunciations of a filthy world figured forth in scatological imagery. Secular poetry would have been both meaningless and sinful; sacred poetry of a concrete or symbolic sort would have been impossible. We know, however, that the Puritans did write both secular and religious poetry. They found their rationale for doing so in other religious traditions they were heir to: a tradition in which the created, sensible world was a book written by God as a message, a revelation to His creatures; the tradition of structured meditation first codified by Loyola and made acceptable to Protestant sensibilities in the writings of such Puritans as Thomas Taylor and Richard Baxter; and the branch of that tradition called "meditation from the creatures," of which the American Puritans could have read in Thomas Taylor's *Meditations from the*



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*Creatures* but probably did read in Baxter's *Saints' Everlasting Rest*, in a section entitled "heavenly contemplation assisted by sensible objects. (59)

<sup>3</sup> Jonathan Edwards, *Images or Shadows of Divine Things* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1948), 130.

<sup>4</sup> For a comprehensive study of the books Edwards was exposed to, see Wallace Anderson's introduction to *The Works of Jonathan Edwards Vol. 6: Scientific and Philosophical Writings*, ed. Wallace E. Anderson (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1980).

<sup>5</sup> From the Sereno Dwight preparation of "The Mind" in his *Life of President Edwards* (1829).

<sup>6</sup> Howard C. Rice, "Jonathan Edwards at Princeton," *The Princeton University Library Chronicle* (New Jersey: Princeton: Vol. XV, Winter 1954, No. 2), 76-77.

<sup>7</sup> Susan Howe, *Souls of the Labadie Tract* (New York: New Directions, 2007), 9.

<sup>8</sup> Perry Miller, *Jonathan Edwards* (New York: William Sloan Associates, Harper-Collins, 1949), 158.

<sup>9</sup> Katherine Hayles, *Writing Machines* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2002), 130.

<sup>10</sup> I also like calling it software in part of Edwards' later philosophies refuting materialism, notably against the Hobbesian notion that "God is matter, and that all substance is matter" in order to assert, rather, that God is substantial, and matter can only be "the immediate effect of the exercise of God's infinite power":

The doctrine that all substance is matter was seen as a direct contradiction to these basic tenets of Christian natural theology. Hobbes' metaphysics was taken by his critics to imply either an outright atheism, or else the radically heterodox thesis that God is material. It denied the independent reality of any intelligent and voluntary spirits, and so, by implication, the independent reality of an omniscient, omnipotent, and beneficent being. Materialism proposed that the universe is a complex, autonomous, and self-sustaining system of unthinking bodies that are subject only to inherent, necessary, and mathematically exact laws of mechanical causation; and so it ruled out the conception of a divine and providential government of the world. And it held that all phenomena whatever are reducible to or explainable by the properties and motions of bodies alone, so that even the moral sciences are to be treated as a special branch of mechanics. [Wallace Earl Anderson, *The Works of Jonathan Edwards Vol. 6: Scientific and Philosophical Writings*, ed. Wallace Earl Anderson (Yale University Press: New Haven, 1980), 54.]

<sup>11</sup> Hayles, *Writing Machines*, 22.

<sup>12</sup> Hayles, 130.

<sup>13</sup> William Heckscher, "Renaissance Emblems" (*Princeton University Library Chronicle*, Vol. XV, Winter 1954, No. 2), 57.

<sup>14</sup> Edwards quotes Cudworth's *Intellectual System*; Wallace Anderson's notes suggest Edwards read Cudworth sometime in 1756 or 1757 and copied out passages from him for *Images or Shadows of Divine Things*, nos. 208-10.



Plato [and] his subterranean Cave, so famously known, and so elegantly described by him, [where he] supposes men tied with their backs towards the Light, placed at a great distance from them, so that they could not turn about their Heads to it neither, and therefore could see nothing but the shadows (of certain Substances behind them) projected from it, which shadows they concluded to be the only Substances and Realities, and when they heard the sounds made by those Bodies that were betwixt the Light and them, or their reverberated Echoes, they imputed them to those shadows which they saw. [I say,] all this is a Description of the State of those Men, who take Body to be the only real and Substantial thing in the World, and to do all that is done in it; and therefore often impute Sense, Reason and Understanding, to nothing but Blood and Brains in us.

Jonathan Edwards, *The Works of Jonathan Edwards Vol. 6: Scientific and Philosophical Writings*, ed. Wallace Earl Anderson (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1980), 359.

<sup>15</sup> Jonathan Edwards, *Images or Shadows of Divine Things*, 32.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid. 32.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid. 34.

<sup>18</sup> Here, an explanation is warranted, and Perry Miller's introduction to *Images or Shadows of Divine Things* describes the feuding ideologies between Edwards and Cotton Mather, the latter a spiritualist finding meaning in metaphoric representation, not the bare truth of a divine thing being animated in the present.

<sup>19</sup>

## Part I. Nature and Importance

Here I would, I. Show what is intended by the affections, II. Observe some things which make it evident, that a great part of true religion lies in the affections.

I. It may be inquired, what the affections of the mind are?

I answer, the affections are no other, than the more vigorous and sensible exercises of the inclination and will of the soul.

God has indued the soul with two faculties: one is that by which it is capable of perception and speculation, or by which it discerns and views and judges of things; which is called the understanding. The other faculty is that by which the soul does not merely perceive and view things, but is some way inclined with respect to the things it views or considers; either is inclined to 'em, or is disinclined, and averse from 'em; or is the faculty by which the soul does not behold things, as an indifferent unaffected spectator, but either as liking or disliking, pleased or displeased, approving or rejecting. This faculty is called by various names: it is sometimes



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called the inclination: and, as it has respect to the actions that are determined and governed by it, is called the will: and the mind, with regard to the exercises of this faculty, is often called the heart.

The exercises of this faculty are of two sorts; either those by which the soul is carried out towards the things that are in view, in approving of them, being pleased with them, and inclined to them; or those in which the soul opposes the things that are in view, in disapproving them, and in being displeased with them, averse from them, and rejecting them.

Jonathan Edwards, *The Works of Jonathan Edwards Vol. 2: Religious Affections*, ed. Wallace Earl Anderson (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1980), 96.

<sup>20</sup> "Personal Narrative," Jonathan Edwards, *Norton Anthology of American Literature*, Vol. 1, Seventh Edition, ed. Nina Baym (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2008), 170-171.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.* 179.

<sup>22</sup> *The Norton anthology of American literature*, Vol. 1, ed. Nina Baym, 6th edition (New York: W.W. Norton, 2003).

<sup>23</sup> Jonathan Edwards, *Sermons and discourses, 1720-1723*, ed. Wilson H. Kimnach (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992). 195.

<sup>24</sup> Jonathan Edwards, *The Works of Jonathan Edwards Vol. 6: Scientific and Philosophical Writings*, ed. Wallace Earl Anderson (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1980), 204.

<sup>25</sup> William J. Wainwright, "Jonathan Edwards and the Language of God," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 48, no. 4 (1980), 521.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.* 521.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.* 521.

<sup>28</sup> Roland A. Delattre, "Aesthetics and Ethics: Jonathan Edwards and the Recovery of Aesthetics for Religious Ethics," *The Journal of Religious Ethics* 31, no. 2 (2003), 278.

<sup>29</sup> See Perry Miller's intro in *Images or Shadows of Divine Things*; he points out the fundamental texts in the ongoing argument—*Philologia Sacra* (Glassius) and *Tropologia* (Keach).

<sup>30</sup> Jonathan Edwards, *Images and Shadows of Divine Things*, ed. Perry Miller (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1948), 21.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.* 22.

<sup>32</sup> William Carlos Williams, *Paterson*, ed. Christopher J. MacGowan (New York: New Directions Pub. Corp, 1992).

<sup>33</sup> Jonathan Edwards, *Images and Shadows of Divine Things*, ed. Perry Miller (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1948), 30.



## CHAPTER 4

*The Inverted Archaeologies of George F. Butterick*

The heterocosmic worlds of Anne Bradstreet and Jonathan Edwards help define these American poets as makers, as a builder of structures out of the systems of language. These worlds are representations of the natural world where God's immanence abounds, and a poem can behave like a tool to aid in spiritual enlightenment. These worlds are alternate to ours certainly, but only in the sense that an individual perspective creates reality: ultimately these worlds are better conceived as plural.

Postwar poet Charles Olson represents the transition from modernism to postmodernism, and carries out some of the same duties as his early American predecessors by crafting his own heterocosms, artificial landscapes that attempt to survey a weird ontological system. Like the "weird" that controls both Jonathan Edwards' poetic and real lives through some basic karmic principles, Olson's poetry looks to describe the natural world's courses through a lens that has been ground by components of myth, American history, American literature, concrete poetry, and practices of the body. The shapes of *The Maximus Poems* (1950-1970) resemble the emblematic shapes of a Bradstreet "Meditation" or an Edwards *Image* but only in appearance. Rather than portraying some moral or didactic teaching, Olson's work is confounded by an esoteric vocabulary meant to invite an archaeologi-



cal dig into its linguistics. His work is less interested in establishing a lexicography for natural phenomena such as Edwards does, or even to establish some of the ranges of personal spirituality that Bradstreet accomplishes; rather, Olson's *Maximus* creates a poetic factory that can, at any time, build any number of verbal vehicles that describe some theoretical interest. These poems are not representations or references rather, but what Olson wants to consider as "inherences." These are poems that take on the visual shape of stone—carved, hammered, blasted, or otherwise—but have a transparency to them that reveals the interior life of their material surfaces.

Luckily as readers we have George Butterick who takes up the mantle as Olson's primary curator throughout the 1970s and 1980s, before his own death of cancer in 1988. Working as a lecturer and librarian at the University of Connecticut—of the latter it's said he mostly assumed the role—Butterick meticulously collected and curated the vast assortment of Olson's papers, shaping them into the accessible form with which we are currently presented. Olson's poems are only transparent to us because George Butterick indexes them: we can digest *The Maximus Poems* because Butterick writes *The Guide to the Maximus Poems* and by doing so illustrates the mechanisms by which Olson's poems operate. The *Guide* is the companion map to Olson's *Maximus*, one that coordinates the energies of the poems by describing their plotted points; without it much of the richness of the poems becomes unnavigable, and we drift in the infinite periplus of its geography.

Butterick's imagination is a material imagination, but more precisely it is an archival imagination, one that can mentally visualize Olson's work as a three-dimensional flowchart



or schematic, and identify the paradigmatic structures to open up the work. The archive is also the database, the storehouse: Butterick's work is the search engine for the informational spheres of Olson's poems.

Because these poems have such rough surfaces, which eventually might reveal their crystalline interior forms, we will consider them in light of Louis Martz' meditative poetics, as we have with Bradstreet and Edwards, that study the "interior drama of the mind."<sup>1</sup> But unlike Bradstreet and Edwards' poetics that demonstrate a world saturated by God, Olson is far less concerned with stable structures as he is depicting the exhaustive trajectories of the human mind. The "inverted archeology" is a method that explores the immanent nature of man's own essence, and Olson is an immanent poet.

*Database and domain.*

In the *Magazine of Further Studies* # 5, out in the fall of 1968,<sup>2</sup> a peculiar poem by George Butterick not included in his posthumous *Collected Poems* reads:

The quality of goods, the explicitness  
of all it takes, and Mrs. Cradock —  
who has for some months been in distress  
of mind, and despairing, tempted, and  
assaulted — and last Saturday about one  
o'clock, who hanged herself with a single  
strand of a fishing line.<sup>3</sup>



Showing off his attraction to the mix of absurdity, humor, and despair in everyday existence, Butterick participates in the brand of postmodernism that Robert Creeley describes as the “fact of an intelligence and time which has no longer an heroic schedule, a location either of past or present which defines the pattern of human event as necessarily an accomplishment to be demonstrated and determined.”<sup>4</sup> While one of modernism’s defining features is heroic narrative, Butterick’s troubled figure of Mrs. Cradock elects a postmodern death with a fishing line. That “strand of a fishing line” is not so much an absurd commodity with which to commit suicide as it is a materialization of the abstract “explicitness” of language. Language’s “quality of goods,” and the impossibility of its “explicitness,” causes Cradock’s distress and death.

Butterick’s compilation of notes and numerous editions of Charles Olson’s poems and prose approach Olson’s “quality of goods” with a similar fervor for explicitness. Capable of collating Olson’s poetic reference as if it were data and articulating that data in accessible streams of text, Butterick creates an encyclopedic architecture to Olson’s work. More than a curator, GB’s archival intelligence explores Olson’s creative dexterity with language:

As though the whole world hangs on the color of a vowel,  
the very smell of a consonant<sup>5</sup>

For Butterick language was a domain of possibility—language was hard data, reference, fact, sonic atmosphere,<sup>6</sup> and the inky aromatics of handwritten or typewritten documents.<sup>7</sup> Reading the countless introductions and reviews he penned over his life, one senses the ardor of a lexicographer who never stopped being a poet. Understanding that GB’s contem-



poraneity was still distanced from but approaching the digital era informs his organizational sensibilities where material thrived in an objective and spatial world. Olson's "open-page" poetics certainly declare themselves as poems aware of their own materiality; GB's close readings of Olson's esoteric and cryptic references call upon a similar concern. Olson's work is imagined as if it were a complex database, and what follows in Butterick's notes is a breadth of detail scaffolding and extending that work.

Encounters with GB's scaffolding feel like absorptions into extensive labyrinths. Where one might feel abandoned to the rough and unending surfaces of Olson's poetic mazes, GB appears as a guide to those textured corridors. He leads us, perhaps, to the central archive, what may now be firmly located at the University of Connecticut's Special Collections where Butterick worked for some time. He began his work teaching in the UConn English Department and then gradually transitioned into the archives where he defined his own position as curator. The Olson archives remain well maintained and easy to use; they are currently being converted into digital sources.

Paul Christensen explores GB's archival character in a 1988 essay in *Sulfur*, suggesting that Butterick's scholarship represents a "kind of revolutionary cell in the heart of Anglo-American culture,"

and not one of the figures he was preserving had much good to say of Anglo-American culture. George had a collection of writings that urged a profound change of vision from the roots up, a severing of the Anglo side of it, to free up the native imagination to deal with everything unleashed by the war—the



spread of Third World cultures, the indigenous past, the New World mind.

His office was crouched among the document boxes and crowded stacks of his part of the archive, seated among his increasingly well-organized Olson papers.<sup>8</sup>

GB's "native imagination" works to coordinate Olson's philosophic poetics with a domestic vision of a globe recently sacked by two major wars. If Olson's historic voice emerges with chaotic intent, it seems to point to larger systems of meaning; Butterick takes up those stochastic lines in order to better connect them to an already existing database of meaning. The epigraph to *The Guide to the Maximus Poems* declares:

It is not a reference

it's an inner inherence

Butterick's endorsement of "inherence" deviates from a *coherence* where lexical items glue together because of context, and suggests that the associations are a "permanent existence (as of an attribute) *in* a subject; indwelling" (*OED*). The cooperation with the vulgar language that Butterick draws in Olson's vocabulary admits to the desire toward finding order in an otherwise chaotic system. By his own admission, GB makes Olson's poetic entropies explicit, and in doing so, collects their energies more efficiently. That desire for a useful system seems to come out of the standard paranoia of the Cold War era, where, Butterick writes in the preface to the collection *The Postmoderns* (1982),

They are most of them forward-looking at a time when concepts such as entropy and global village have entered daily life, along with, for the first time



in the history of the species, thanks to this nuclear age, the possibility of irreversibility.<sup>9</sup>

Taken in the light of Olson's relationship with making meaning, GB's statement describing an entourage of postmodern poets implies an apocalyptic and cultural doom. The possibility for artistic foresight is complicated by an advanced weaponry that potentially obliterates an experiential future and modifies the vernacular to insist that information itself might be weaponized. The anxiety seems clear: what does it mean to be an artist who is "forward-looking" in an age that could initiate "irreversibility"? Here, direction describes the "quality of goods" with an "explicitness" that intends the scope of a mind. GB indicates that minds have particular capacities and certain trajectories. To locate Olson's poetic mind, GB creates a searchable database to index a body of work, itself already keenly aware of its place in space and in time.

Butterick's apprenticeship to Olson is not derivative. He should be included among such editors and critics as George Kearns (Pound) and Boswell (Johnson), the latter whom I suppose from time to time we backhandedly refer to as "toady." Butterick doesn't warrant that title by any means; he certainly ranks as the greatest student of Olson, not to mention his greatest advocate. Paul Christensen suspects that "the poet was always there" and guesses "that what brought Butterick to Olson to begin with was that hunger for imaginative alternatives, the freedom of mind to explore edges, peripheries, limbos of thought that Olson rushed into unafraid."<sup>10</sup> That fearless tread of Olson, compounded by his sheer physical size (he was 6'7" [or 2.04 m]), created a massive wake that opened up the way to allow



Butterick to express his own intellectual interests. GB's poetic projects take a back seat to his archive, editing, correspondence, and review work but cumulatively he collects the entropic energies of Olson's endless projects and allows them some sensibility and predictability.

In the introduction to *Muthologos*, Butterick claims Olson to be "an unsystematic thinker, although a persistent one, obsessive even, until an area was totally possessed by his repeated acts of attention to it."<sup>11</sup> GB's oeuvre belongs to the realm of translation work because it coordinates and articulates both the "unsystematic" language as well as the material of those struck-out Olsonian page spaces.

There's a bit of a fantasy in Olson's educational idealism, in the cultural "bridges"<sup>12</sup> he felt he built out of poem, philosophic essay, and the experiment at Black Mountain. GB's self-imposed task was to create a system out of Olson that could be followed. Paul Christensen describes GB's scholastic life as the "evolution of psyche,"

a peculiar and private one occurring within the brains of a scholar/editor whose subject possessed the volatile ingredients that changed him... Hardly anyone in academic life is changed by the subject; usually the change is the job, the career, the rigors of the occupation itself... But today, one usually creates a specially detached persona to write about an author, poet or fiction writer, keeping up the glazed distance of having a special theory or structural analysis to perform.<sup>13</sup>

Butterick has no agenda other than dissemination of Olson's work, an agenda perhaps that becomes a spiritual or religious revolution in its indenture to ideological clarification. But-



terick's work not only clarifies Olson's wild, shifting ideas and references but also compresses them. This compressed sleeve of space that Butterick crafts becomes the place where the science of Olson's poetry comes to be, where Olson's own process of archaic recovery might be finalized by connecting it to a contemporary conversation.

"Just as armor is inarticulate in the context of nuclear weapons," writes Robert Creeley, "so also the attempt to speak as if that world previous were still the case can echo grandly enough, but it is questionably indulgent fantasy nonetheless."<sup>14</sup> The irrelevancy of armor in a nuclear world supposes a relationship on an historic timeline; while Olson's project often finds itself in a dreamscape where these technologies might be reciprocal—that is, something out of the iron age being useful in the nuclear age—GB's projects bind Olson's temporal estrangement to a cognitive system that respects its collapsible dimensions. Butterick would probably agree that we all need a standing editor to help writing make its appropriate appeals.

### *Articulation.*

If George Butterick satisfies postmodernism's need for the indexed database to navigate vast quantities of floating data, he satisfies his own need for a creative poetic project with the *Magazine of Further Studies* and its offspring, *A Curriculum of the Soul* (2011). Butterick's desires for *MFS* issues to undergo rapid material decomposition testify to his interests in the trajectories created by the material object, both the tangible and the imaginative. As Michael Boughn reports in "Olson's Buffalo":



“I think it was Glover’s IBM Selectric we used,” Fred Wah writes. “And we got a big roll of corrugated stuff for covers . . . and us and our wives wld set up in one of our basements and cut covers and paint chicken blood (George wanted the thing to decay in the readers’ hands) and glue fur.”<sup>15</sup>

The *Magazine of Further Studies* would participate in the process of the lived event by accelerating the deterioration of the text’s physical being. That decaying body—a pun on “corpus” perhaps—“emphasized the projective nature of the magazine, the fact that as you held it, it disintegrated, leaving you with nothing to hold to but what was further.”<sup>16</sup> *Further* is suggestive of time and some kind of concatenation, a correspondence to segments attached to other segments, to infer continuity. “Further” submits a similar direction that Olson’s “projective” might: one that doesn’t necessarily intend *forward*, say along a horizontal, but one that catches itself in the act of anticipation, a coordination of a small range of present moments leading out into a range of possibilities.

For the *MFS* to be part of the activity of time, for the material to evaporate as language might, was as Boughn says, a method to resist the “showcase model” of the poetry magazine that idealized the poem by decontextualizing and isolating it. That “mode of presentation reinforces the culture of the literary by stripping the poem from the intellectual matrix it is part of, and then emphasizing its object status as a pure literary event.”<sup>17</sup> Instead of showcasing the poems by isolating them individually, *MFS* editions were uniform in their layout, with author names floating at the bottom right of the page as the only indi-



cator of difference. The editions read without much interruption, like hybrid texts written by a single author, where the “intellectual matrix” remains unified.

The text-object coupled with the open spaces between the poems yields an uninterrupted material space. Uniting a reader’s fitness with the disposition and behavior of the textual object results in a performance of the text. That performance is the reader’s adaptation to the material’s form—the material metaphor, what Katherine Hayles, in *Writing Machines*, reminds us is the suggested schedule of an object’s lexical capacity. The design of the *MFS* to reject isolated poems in favor of seamless text—Whitman’s *Leaves of Grass* (1855) lurking in the background—creates the experience of two kinds of collaboration: one where the efforts of the writers come together and the other as an exchange between material objects and readers. There are enough indicators in the *MFS* to demonstrate the artistic abilities of its individual writers, but those celebrations are kept to a minimum to enhance the enclosed environment. The language and the text’s continually drifting surface share equal amounts of importance, and the reader themselves drifts between those two relevancies.

Closing out *MFS* #5 is Charles Olson’s “A Plan for a Curriculum of the Soul,” a sprawling and map-like poem that would become the lexical syllabus for the Further Studies group’s concluding project (see Figure 11). Looking like the “dug up stone figures, the thrown down glyphs, the old sorells in sheep dirt in caves, the flaking iron”<sup>18</sup> of Cy Twombly art, who Olson had worked with at Black Mountain, the poem documents a multitude of suggestions for experience’s itinerary. Those suggestions contain deep compressions of meaning in the movement from one signifier to the next, and the whole poem ends



up taking on an emblematic form. To further resolve that emblematic compression and uncover the waypoints of more personal phenomenological itineraries, the contributors to the *Magazine of Further Studies*<sup>19</sup> take up poetic expositions of Olson's "Curriculum." Those expositions, which expound on Olson's poem, take up original readings of twenty-eight words—tokens—borrowed from the poem.<sup>20</sup> The seeming order brought to the visually stochastic poem is belied by the intricacies of these adaptations and investigations that, ultimately, take up their own poetic agendas.<sup>21</sup>

The *MFS* is a project of the material imagination, a desire to simulate material entropy in a way that is not artificial. It's still an early project for postmodern poetics and it modifies modernism's interest in the structuring heroic memory by broadcasting into the *further*.<sup>22</sup> For all of Olson's writing on history, on the prior, the heroics of the past are formally confronted by his disheveled lyric that undermines a romantic mythos. The *Maximus* project's fundamental form of stochastic and chaotically-realized aesthetics express a biological presence that is fragile and mutable, and which infiltrates the content of the long poem almost as an external force whose pattern feels random. Additionally, if we take those aesthetics to be one exegetical explanation for the poem, we might understand them as an indication of the poem's metabolism. Whether Olson's poetic mapping ultimately is a successful form of education, that stochastic mind imagines time as a kind of systemic circulation. While time is the subject of a subsequent section of this chapter, I think the relevance to the *Magazine of Further Studies* lies in that project's interest in creating a text that actually experiences an accelerated metabolic process and materially emulates Projective Verse.



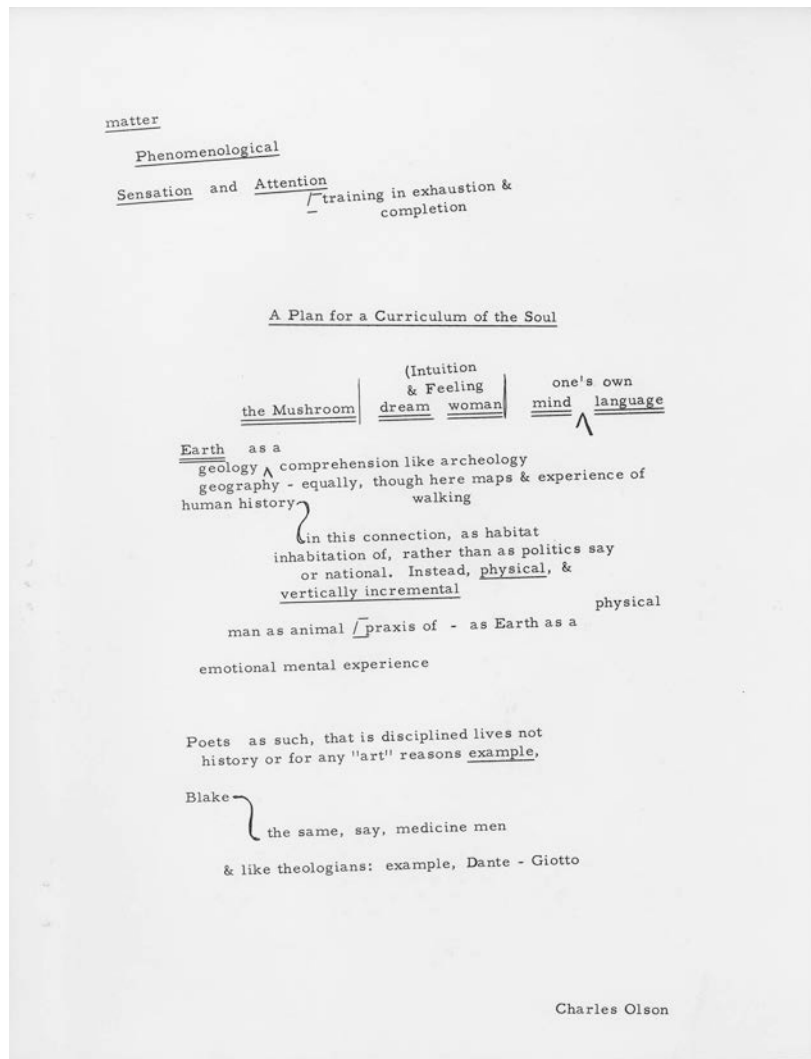


Figure 10. Olson's "A Plan for a Curriculum of the Soul" (1968)<sup>23</sup>

Error.

In a March 4, 1979 recording of a *Maximus* lecture, George Butterick describes Charles Olson, following a set of psychological tests, being diagnosed as having a "high tolerance for disorder."<sup>24</sup> GB characterizes both the "tolerance for" and the "disorder" as the "chief characteristics of the poetry written since the Second World War, which we know as postmodern." GB's small opening anecdote guides his arguments for Olson's disordered



syntax, which he dubs *parataxis* in the lecture, the grammatical term indicating connecting phrases that have no coordination. Elsewhere in his essay “Editing Postmodern Texts,” Butterick uses the term *anacoluthic*—sentences that have muddled sequence—to describe the patterns of Olson’s poetry and prose. GB delights in Olson’s disorder, and perhaps his ability to dwell in those confusing and chaotic constructions draws him to the poet. Butterick’s work becomes structuring then: creating an environment that allows Olson’s syntax an appropriate harbor. The *error*, say, of Olson’s anacoluthic syntax reveals voices that bifurcate, as if suddenly many linguistic perspectives had descended upon an idea, shouting out in hopes one’s echo might consume the other. These aren’t the fragments of modernism exactly, though they’re related obviously; they’re moods or temporary states of mind, slightly repositioning themselves from moment to moment.

Butterick regularly tunes into this repositioning in his own poetry where content can easily shift from line to line or poem to poem, and those shifts provide new form. In Butterick’s poems, particularly in “The Norse” —his long poem from Olson’s “Curriculum” — fresh personalities are easily encountered, expressed amid a genre that might appear to belong to a more epic tradition. We find:

23.

to Willi-

*mantic*

in my

Volvo



Followed by:

24.

the loam curdled, ripples of black lava

up to his neck, the hoofless horse

in the pasture filled with corpses

a circle of armed women, knives strung about necks—

their oracular neighing wakes

*draugr*, the dead man out of the mound,

a 'tree trunk'

the soft broken claw of land

unable to hold them<sup>25</sup>

The whimsical personality of the lyrical figure in "23."—especially given the entire context of the fifty-page poem—seems at odds with the grim "*draugr*" of "24." But the near simultaneity of these two voices causes formal contrast: the dreaming notions of "23."—the drive to Willimantic, CT, assumingly from UConn campus (Storrs) where GB's offices were—complements the development of an imaginary magic in "24," what surely any normal Vol-



vo owner might be thinking during their drive home. The two specimens may be contained poems, but their idealistic content helps create a connective through-line.

A “blameless objectivity” writes these seemingly irrelevant arrangements, GB argues.<sup>26</sup> Between two clauses (or phrases, sentences, poems) intent on meaning something to a reader exists a fallow ellipsis of space meshing subjectivity and objectivity. Very quickly that ellipsis solidifies out of the descriptive leaps of a normal reader’s juxtaposition. In order to be reliable however—to be “blameless”—that description of the ellipse depends on removing error from the equation.

GB argues that the postmodern world defines itself by an acceptance of error and the cognitive turmoil that belabors uniting two very fractious quantities. Taking the Freudian term *parapraxis*<sup>27</sup> to increase the specificity of “useful” and “descriptive” error, GB claims that the “acceptance of ‘parapraxis’ or meaningful error is a later insistence with Olson,

beginning around 1961 or 1962. From that point on, his revision chiefly takes the form of omitting a poem from the *Maximus* series rather than rewriting it or manipulating individual lines and words. Previously, evidence from earlier manuscripts indicates that his practice had been to consciously whittle a product.<sup>28</sup>

Butterick reminds us of Melville’s own acceptance of the drafting process in *Moby-Dick*:

“God keep me from ever completing anything. This whole book is but a draught—nay but the draught of a draught. Oh, Time, Strength, Cash, and Patience.”<sup>29</sup> To affirm the sense that “the ‘finished’ poem is only one of many conventions of art and mind,”<sup>30</sup> the contin-



gency of accuracy in Olson's *Maximus* shifts when Olson's outlook changes in the early sixties and "revision [is] superseded by vision."<sup>31</sup>

GB's instructions on how to edit well take into account the importance of combining the language of poetry and a poet's language, and he seems genuinely interested in turning Olson's unintentional inaccuracies into deliberate accuracies in the *Guide*, reminding us in the epigraph that "it's an inner inherence" and "not a reference."

Similarly, in his own poem "Odin" from "The Norse," Butterick argues that an incomplete thing is as much a creative resource as any, and that there is magic in incompleteness:

In the world of magic, complete alphabets  
are relatively rare.

In the world of magic, complete alphabets  
are relatively rare.

In the world of magic

The teacher stopped in the middle  
of the *futhark*, filled in the rest  
with meaningless strokes.



Incomplete ones are innumerable.

Witness alpha and omega as synonymous

with a complete alphabet, so that a mere

slip of an alphabet does service

for a whole one, *pars pro toto*,

in sounding creation.<sup>32</sup>

The seeming instability of omission or error is met by a sentiment that counters that force.

The fabric of our existence still remains stitched, even with fragment and ellipsis. Butterick finds the articulation of ellipses is masterfully displayed in Olson's work; this articulation—movement in syntactical chaos—creates the cognitive continuity of the human condition, the twisted helix of DNA:

We enter

the bore with words, from which

they emerge with a leftwards and continuous twist.<sup>33</sup>

And Butterick's version of language twisting around feels at home with an image from

*Maximus [II]*:

Older than Byblos

earlier than Palestine

and possessed of an alphabet

before the Greeks



round the pawl-post  
 the heavy lines are wound  
 which hold by the chocks  
 the windlass when wound  
  
 from running back<sup>34</sup>

*Ordinary/Archaic Time.*

Modernism and postmodernism's interest in history facilitates meaning through inaccuracies, errors, and lies or deceptions.<sup>35</sup> In the twentieth century's study of the artifact and the relic lies the attempt to collapse the movement of time into a fixed moment.<sup>36</sup> The artifact becomes emblematic in its compression of information (form, content, meaning), becoming "luminous" in the process. The reduction of large spans of gross and shifting time to a solitary object is what we might consider a poetics of singularity: the development of the uniqueness of a moment, the representation of an infinite value in a measured point. Time's presence in that discrete unit feels enormous, but its projecting direction has been collapsed. In the poem then, what we witness is that temporal space unraveling, or available to us in those discrete units.

Those units of Olson's word spaces are what George Butterick calls "anacoluthic," that abrupt change in a sentence from one syntactical structure to another that easily resembles error. These slippages occur more frequently, or are more identifiable, in Olson's



prose. Consider this passage from *Call me Ishmael*—a thoroughly revised piece—as it wends through compartments of thought and syntactical breakages:

4. It is necessary to understand this rage and hate. Melville is not Jonathan Edwards. His answer to the angry god is an Ahab, a man of elements not of sins:

Talk not to me of blasphemy, man; I'd strike the sun if it insulted me.

Melville's ethic is mythic. Shame with him was precedent to any Eden, was of Prime: the concord of Space, "sweet milk" to Melville as universal peace was to Shakespeare's Malcolm, was curdled and made sour by man, and blood.

It was not acts but Act, Original Act, that gave man guilt. Man's "imperial theme" is the fruit of First Murder.

Crime is large and imponderable when a man's experience of violence is mutiny, on wide sea. To kill a Captain!

Conscience is not the caliper to measure it:

(remember the story of the ship the *Town-Ho* in *Moby-Dick*? who can pass judgment on Steelkit when it is the White Whale who executes justice on the First Mate, Radney?)

immediately that Macbeth murders the King he strides hugely forward into the mystery.<sup>37</sup>



The path of syntax animates an idea in time, and these chaotic structures of Olson's writing become convergences of temporal pathways. The grammatical friction between two Olsonian clauses becomes representative of the shape of the poet's thoughts and representative of the collapsed space of two unique frames of mind.<sup>38</sup>

While the emblem of early American poetics reveals its meanings through static images meant to be unpacked into coordinating narratives, modern poetics uses the relic to reveal its meanings through the individual consciousness whose attention has been brought to it. The story of that mental behavior describes the cooperation between the form of the relic and the adaptive forms of the poet's intelligence. Olson's interest is in the energy created and released when a mind entrains itself upon the formal varieties of the world. His hunt to understand our interaction with time moves beyond appreciating time as only conceptual but rather as a perceptual and lived quantity. The following section explores Olson's interest in archaic systems as a method of entry into experiential phenomena, of "entry into the bore," the dig into the interior energies of language.

In "Olson's Buffalo," Michael Boughn reads Olson's projects as the trajectory of ethical social practice:

Crucial to Olson's sense of a move beyond or around the literary... as an institution, as institutionalized practices... is his notion that it's possible to reconnect with or recover energies that pre-exist their historical institutionalization into a specific, fixed grammar of social practices. And even more im-



portantly, that to do that, to push one's self toward that connection, is to disrupt or alter that grammar, a profoundly political act.

Such a move involves two crucial linked concepts—the ordinary and the archaic and depends on an understanding of how they might be seen—or revealed—as converging in a new world. The ordinary is just that—where we are, what we do, here, today, this laundry, those dirty dishes, that which is arrayed around us. Olson's crucial move here is to understand that the ordinary, as such, is archaic, has always been, so that what we are in fact estranged from, as Heraclitus and Wittgenstein had it, is so familiar because it has always been there. In this sense, Olson's proposal is not so much anti-literary (a move which paradoxically is locked in an economy with the literary—the fate of the oppositional and the non-ordering) as pre-literary, an antithetical decentering in whose prolific and devouring wake the unprecedented is recovered.<sup>39</sup>

Though he doesn't dwell much on the behavior of Projective Verse, Boughn suggests that Olson's Projective accompanies the convergence of ordinary spaces and archaic spaces as “the way forward.”<sup>40</sup> However, I also suggest that Olson's notion of the *proprioceptive* describes the manner in which these spatial gaps or zones can be occupied. I don't mean to complicate all this talk of energy spaces and temporal possibilities or the residues of the archaic that are “picked up” in the present, ordinary moment. Instead what I simply mean to



say by bringing in the proprioceptive has less to do with a recovery of the archaic in the ordinary, or a resurgence of the archaic, but rather a sense of the “cavities” of space an attention to the proprioceptive makes possible. Olson doesn’t use the idea of proprioceptive awareness much differently than a physical therapist might—that is, an awareness of the body in space, what Olson writes is awareness of the organs in the “cavities in which they’re slung.”<sup>41</sup>

Mapping the space of the ordinary present through the spaces of the archaic means mapping one kind of energy on top of what appears to be another lingering vibration. Disrupted syntax—the anacoluthic—is only a small measure of this mapping, and is an experience of Robert Creeley and Olson’s form/content paradigm. To me, the “projective” ideas have always dealt primarily with time, at least in their maturity, and the “proprioceptive” with space. I don’t suggest time and space are different, but rather feel like Olson’s vocabulary is particular enough to warrant the “projective” and “proprioceptive” as essentially unique.

For a Romantic version of the postmodern, in “The Symbol of the Archaic,” Guy Davenport describes modernism’s passionate taste for the archaic as “precisely the opposite of the Romantic feeling for ruins.”<sup>42</sup> Where the ruin may be the joyful herald of time, the modern approach is troubled, conflicted, and elegiac. If, as Davenport notes, the city is the unit of civilization, the modern domain is Eliot’s overgrown wasteland, the loss of the discrete city.<sup>43</sup> The “modern” is laden with sad longing for the symbols and language of the archaic in a modern age, and their imitation is an utterance to invoke the gods. Those sym-



bols and emblems are the intelligent spirits encoded in the dust and wire-wrapped technology. Davenport's essay is suggestive of the foray into the architecture of our thoughts and our things when he writes:

Behind all this passion for the archaic, which is far more pervasive in the arts of our time than can be suggested here, is a longing for something lost, for energies, values, and certainties unwisely abandoned by an industrial age. Things, Proust says, are gods, and one way our arts seem to regard our world is to question what gods have come to dwell among us in the internal combustion engine, the cash register, and the computer.<sup>44</sup>

Understanding the operation of a machine, being able to use one well, lends the thing a godlike authority as it commands us to behave in a particular way if we wish for the object's success as it translates to our own success. To return to Katherine Hayles and her material metaphor creates the notion of an object's reach, that is to say, the form of the space that object's manipulation sculpts for us.

In his essay "Scholia and Conjectures for Olson's 'The Kingfishers'," Davenport suggests that the Projectivist School's historical sensibilities are distinct from their Poundian ancestries. Their constant contact with archaic beginnings manifests in the presentation of the symbol as "an inner inherence," and "not a reference," as Butterick quotes Olson in the epigraph to the *Guide*. While "The Kingfishers" works in the ideogrammatic method—its parts in symmetry and mobilized—its personality, its "taste for stone," connects it to a more Romantic relationship with the archaic object. Shelley's "Ozymandias" and Wordsworth's



"Tintern Abbey," for example, coordinate their anxieties of the past with their sense of its effervescent equity. The reminders of mortality and the decaying body take some kind of solace in permeations of the past's objects littering the contemporary, and the possibility to be instructed by those lingering remains. That romantic connection is frustrated by a modernity that jettisons its roots for the sprawling and exhaustive post-war urban wasteland.

*Inverted Archaeology.*

In the essay "Cy Twombly," Olson's "inverted archaeology" is the process of digging for signs and tokens in us. Exploration and excavation of the ruin goes underground, into the earth, whereas Olson bores into the "sculpture" of the object for the buried myth that has created it. As others have noted, Olson's trust in language as a postmodern is a distinguishing trait.<sup>45</sup> Thomas Merrill, in his essay on "The Kingfishers," argues that Olson lifts the term "feedback" from Norbert Wiener's *Cybernetics; or, Control and Communication in the Animal and the Machine* and "declares it a law."<sup>46</sup> Feedback—Weiner defines it as "a method of controlling a system by reinserting into it the results of its past performance"—is for Olson mapped into the natural world and the temporal medium of man "which will tap rather than obstruct the inherent energy of ... change."<sup>47</sup> Merrill locates this reenactment of the kinetic in Olson's "The Human Universe" essay:

Man's action ... (when it is good) is the equal of all intake plus all transposing ... It is the equal of its cause only when it proceeds unbroken from the



threshold of a man through him and back out again, without loss of quality, to the external world from which it came.<sup>48</sup>

Merrill claims communication to be the driving force of man's part in the feedback loop, and it seems an absolutely valid remark in conjunction with his discussion of Olson's concern with the recovery of energy via the combination of Brooks Adams' *The Law of Civilization and Decay*, Jung's *Integration of the Personality*, and Melville.<sup>49</sup> All ring important, Melville's "creative recovery" in particular with its emphasis on the activity of mythmaking from sources of myth, from the sources of images (Jungian) that seem to float around in genetic imaginations. It's the part of the cycle, considering the "feedback" that Merrill points out, that actually puts the stuff back into circulation.

*A taste for stone.*

Guy Davenport reminds us that the Renaissance's unification of science and poetry<sup>50</sup> is at stake in Olson's *Maximus*. Where "one can read [Pound's] *The Cantos* as subtle meditation on whether stone is alive," Olson meditates more on the sources of energy and how a thing becomes animated in the first place. Davenport suggests the inspiration for "The Kingfishers" is Neruda's long poem *Alturas de Macchu Picchu* and its images of honey, stone, and blood.<sup>51</sup> The resounding theme of Olson's "Kingfishers" is that "taste for stone" Davenport translates from the Rimbaud: "si j'ai du goût, ce n'est guères / que pour la terre et les pierres [If I have any taste, / It is for earth and stone]."



Pound's *Cantos* want to act as poems caught somewhere between the "plastic" of sculpture and the hardness of engraved stone, perhaps all the while whetted by a sober dash of Keatsian water-writing. In his chapter "The Sacred Places" in *The Pound Era*, Kenner writes that "We do not learn from the ruins, to which Ezra Pound did not have the romantic response; we learn what an instructed mind may conjure up."<sup>52</sup> The signed column Pound discovers in Verona in 1911 delivers that "instructed mind"—both the historic mind of its author and the contemporary mind Pound would carry away—with its inscription "Mind focused here once ... a person knew this stone and the stone proclaims the person."<sup>53</sup> For Pound, the act of studying the signed column is a cognitive action like memory, as if knowledge of the thing were one small reminder away. The romantic heart-ache of meditation upon the ruined stone (say an Ode) gives way to a sense of attainment. Mystical apprehension (ghostly recognition, talking to spirits) is reconfigured as material apparatus. Cognition is the ignition and not the medium of the spirit. Pound resists the spiritual world for the concrete material of man and man's creative imagination. Kenner points out this fragment that distinguishes the modern sensibility:

Shall I claim;  
  
 Confuse my own phantastikon  
  
 Or say the filmy shell that circumscribes me  
  
 Contains the actual sun;  
  
 confuse the thing I see  
  
 With actual gods behind me?<sup>54</sup>



One repeated image in Olson's "The Kingfishers" is the Omphalos stone, the "navel" stone of Delphi. Davenport discusses some discrepancies between the replica and original stones, chiefly the enigmatic "E / cut so rudely on that oldest stone" that signals toward the energies of the ancients either as hieroglyphic or linguistic.<sup>55</sup>

But the E  
cut so rudely on that oldest stone  
sounded otherwise,  
was differently heard

The generative mysteries of stone throughout Olson's work seem hardly like mysteries to him. The "diorite" stone appears several times in *Maximus* as a point of regeneration— the stone "lopped off" at the "Left Shoulder," regrows. The reference to the Hittite god Ullikummi invokes a creation myth of land against weather (Ullikummi destroys the Storm-God, at least temporarily), and the diorite of Ullikummi's body actually grows as if it were flesh.<sup>56</sup> Dogtown itself— featured so widely in *Maximus* as the locus of Gloucester's primordial energies and the speaker's place of spectral existence (from which he pens all his letters out to the world)— is a ghost town of stone walls and cellars, fragments of a colonial settlement, now buried in a haunted wood. The trails that snake through its terrain are heavily populated by Babson's Boulders, twenty-six boulders commissioned by Roger Babson during the Great Depression, each engraved with a particular moral, proverb, or suggestion.<sup>57</sup> I embed an image of one here, and have placed a few others in the notes to this chapter:



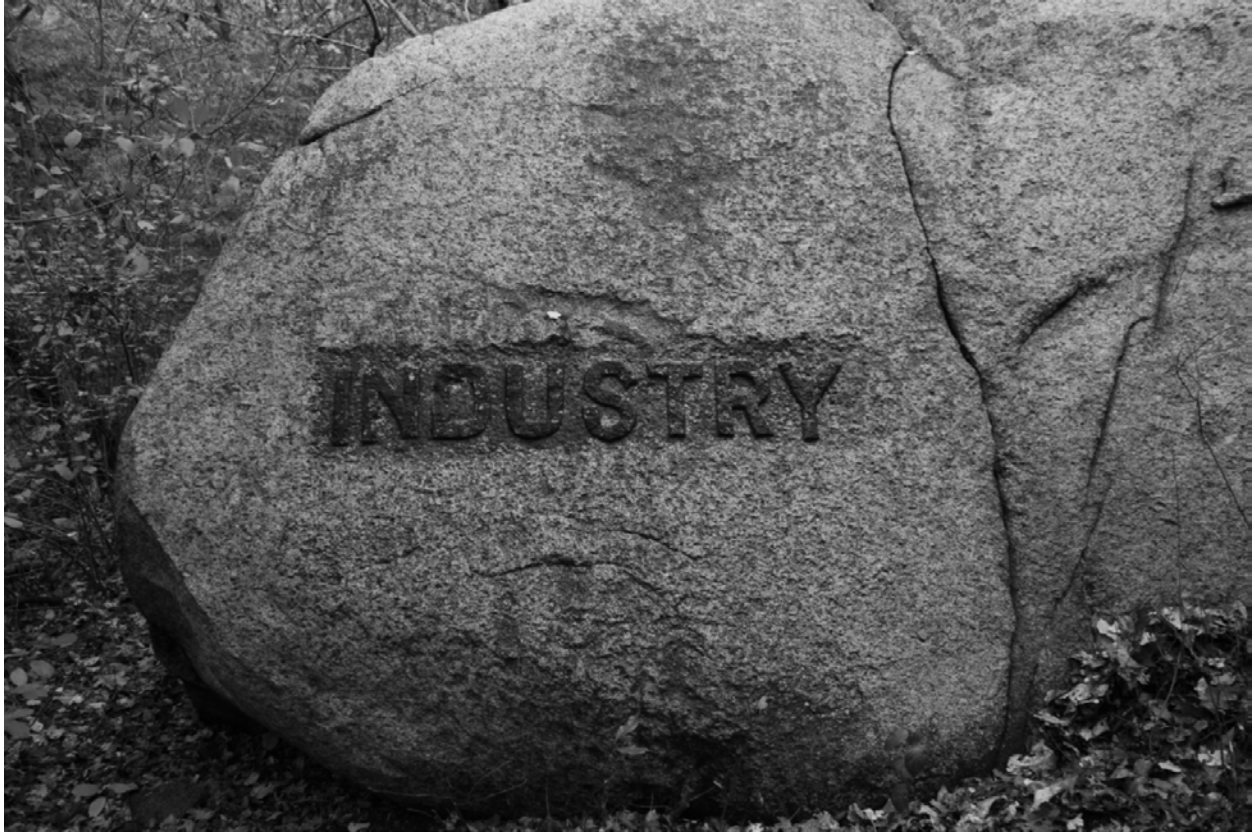


Figure 11. The Babson Boulder “Industry” in Dogtown, Gloucester, MA. Photo Credit: Joshua Hussey.

The energy of stone—the engraving of art upon it, the mineral youth of the world—is significant enough to Olson that it starts and ends his poetic career. In “La Préface,” what Butterick suggest is his first postmodern poem,<sup>58</sup> Olson begins by invoking the image of the Paleolithic racehorse from Altamira cave and moves into a lyrical moment where air and earth join as if they were interchangeable substances:

.... I had air my lungs could breathe.

He talked, via stones a stick, sea rock, a hand of earth.

And in the penultimate poem to *Maximus III* [III.228]:



I live underneath

the light of day

I am a stone,

or the ground beneath

My life is buried,

with all sorts of passages

both on the sides and on the face turned down

to the earth

or built out as long gifted generous northeastern Connecticut stone

walls are

through which 18<sup>th</sup> century roads still pass

as though they themselves were realms,

the stones they're made up of

are from the bottom such Ice-age megaliths

and the uplands the walls are the boundaries of...<sup>59</sup>

The mineral material of the "underneath," the veins of ore that run through rock, are the

"life...buried" and wrought with "passages": the labyrinthine conduits carved from stone



are the connections of a contemporary reality to a megalithic one. Stone, for Olson, rises out of the past, emerging from water like the figure of Maximus who, in the opening poem is “a metal hot from boiling water,” can “tell you / what is a lance,” and “obeys the figures of / the present dance,” the present ordination of time. The energy of stone becomes molded into resilient artifacts of culture: “what is mineral, what / is curling hair, the string / you carry in your nervous beak” (I.I), and mineral is transformed into fleshly substances of the human body. The several images of diorite in *Maximus* are all images of stone as a substance of growth and transformation. Butterick helps us locate these moments in the *Guide* and also provides some compelling reference material:

[III. 17]

the diorite

is included in the granitite

the granitite has burst up around

the diorite

leaving it as an undivided mass

the power in the air

is prana

it is not seen

In the ice,



on top of the Poles,

on the throne

of the diorite, the air alone

is what I sit in

among the edges

of the plagioclase

[II. 51]

the Atlantic is a bottomed

Pacific

I stand on Main Street like the Diorite

stone

[II. 16]

Into

In the fiord the diorite man obtrudes Obadiah Bruen's

island on his nose. Into the granite this inlet

of the sea to poke and jam the Cut and fight

the sand off and the yelping rocks, the granite

he rolls as Dogtown throws its pebbles and Merry



lay among them, busted

True inclusions

of other rocks are not commonly met with,

in the granitic material, the mass of diorite

is apparently of an irregularly circular form.

On all sides where the rocks outcrop

it is surrounded by granitite, the two entrances

of the Reach being the only places

where it possibly have cut. These entrances

are narrow, and are bounded on either side

by granitite which is not porphyritic,

which facts almost exclude the hypothesis

that the diorite has cut the granitite.

I find the lines in III.17, “the power in the air / is prana,” to define Olson’s poetic principles.

Because “prana” in yogic practice refers to the idea of energy and power within breath, and not simply the breath itself (“the power in the air”), the coupling of prana with diorite creates the dynamic two-part system of Olson’s aesthetic.<sup>60</sup>

of the diorite, the air alone

is what I sit in

The coupling of “prana” with “diorite” via air insists upon the energy of stone and its temporal durability. Stone is, after all, the fundamental building block of the material world,



that is, given a scope that hovers above amino acids. For Olson, its presence in time is like a stretching, growing being, and the “Diorite figure is the vertical, the growth principle of the Earth... [who has] no condition but stone....”<sup>61</sup>

The occupation of Olson’s poetic page is in a relatively simple expression of visual and aural, but one that I find goes noticed yet relatively unidentified. His Projective theories of the page are absolutely there, and they pay particular attention to how one’s eye corresponds to the process of reading the page spatially as well as the manner in which breath is exhaled and inhaled. There’s a visual schema built into that process already, but I think Olson’s work with Mayan glyph structures sheds some light on the material structures of his poems, the part that is more in line with stone.

### *Mayan Glyph.*

In Olson’s anthropological research documented in the correspondence with Robert Creeley in *Mayan Letters*, Steve McCaffery points out a system of poetics that rivals Olson’s Projectivist theories from a year prior in 1950.<sup>62</sup> McCaffery writes, “the *Mayan Letters* expose a dense interest in the silence of a graphic economy and a system of writing irreducible to speech or breath.”<sup>63</sup> Olson identified a thrilling linguistic phenomenon in the glyph language of the Mayan that he then allowed to permeate his own “open-field” composition. McCaffery argues that the two seem incompatible, but that is not entirely the case. If we consider all the mineral imagery of *Maximus*, it makes some sense for the poems to perform a petroglyphic song, that is, poems that correspond to a projective itinerary of breath (pro-



jective, percussive, and prospective) but don't live in flat plane geometry, offering rather a formal variety that could represent the multi-dimensional spherical earth. We know Olson is interested in this kind of representative art, as his first book of poems, *Y & X*, written in collaboration with Italian artist Corrado Cagli, entertains the notion of recreating multi-dimensional art.<sup>64</sup> Olson's desire to bridge cultures<sup>65</sup> through an understanding of the impulses of our energy systems—through the output of the “human universe” and the feedback of the individual—articulates itself through a logocentric language carved into stone.

As McCaffery points out in his essay, by 28 March 1951, Olson is convinced of the fluency in the glyphs, “of their meaning & design as language, not, as astrological pictographs,” and that “the glyphs were the alphabet of the books that puts the whole thing back to the spoken language.”<sup>66</sup> Whether the glyphs are phonological or not (thinking of Pound's error here with the Chinese character), Olson addresses their connection to utterance in his grant application for the Viking Fund that sends him to the Yucatan.<sup>67</sup>

At the very least for Olson the glyphs become vital linguistic signs. Their behavioral patterns are both philological (illustrative) as well as vocal. He sends this diagram to Creeley:



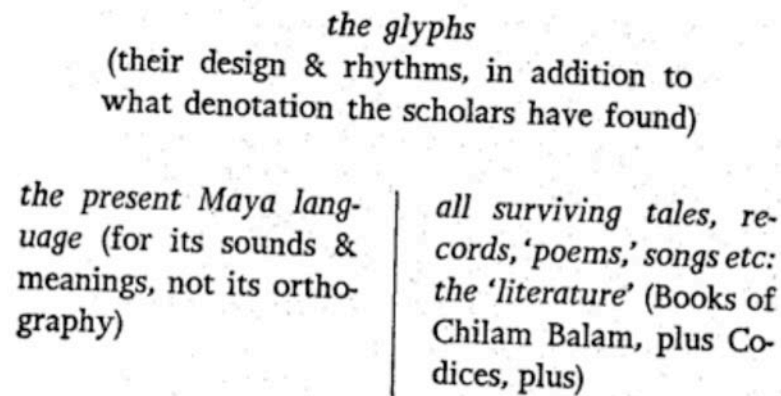


Figure 12. Olson diagram to Creeley, *Mayan Letters*, 1953.<sup>68</sup>

McCaffery believes that the Viking Fund application, emphasizing a graphic economy, warrants scrutiny as the suppressed 'other' text of 'Projective Verse.'"<sup>69</sup> It's a reasonable assumption, though McCaffery admits that it feels like Olson just drops this new glyph-system after an initial flirtation and turns completely to the Projective. That graphic aspect, however, can't be explained away, particularly if Olson's entire project is about creating an image of the world, what he calls an "Imago mundi" in *Causal Mythology*. One reconstructs that grand picture by "finding out how organized things are genuine, are initial"<sup>70</sup> and tracking those "organized things" back toward the primordial energies from which our modern embodied consciousness has been compounded. If the history of evolution has shown us anything, it's that our systems are deeply sedimented,<sup>71</sup> or perhaps for another metaphor, compressed like a diamond.



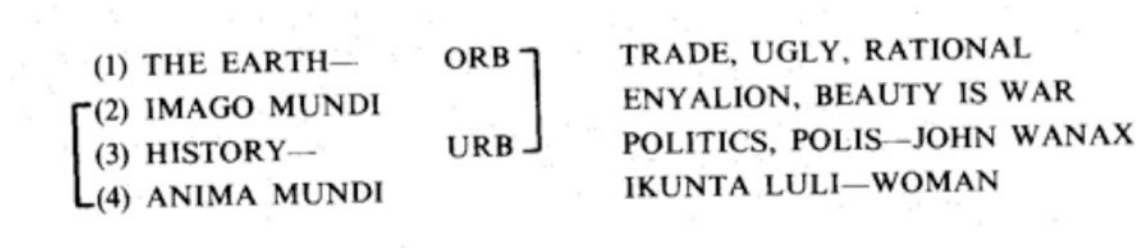


Figure 13. From *Causal Mythology* (1969).

That “world image” the “Imago Mundi” is, in Olson’s diagram, connected to the “Anima Mundi,” the animating principles of living creatures. Like the *prana* that is the energy of air in its inspiration and exhalation (we might imagine it also as the amperage of an electric current, the power and width of a thing), so goes the anima. All that activity is available to the mind of the poet, and for the postmodern poet, the availability of those energies, when manifested in language—the currency of the individual—can actively transform the mind.

#### *Morphology and Change.*

Olson finds a syncretic relationship between the “anima mundi” and the “morphology” of language in the etymology of “image.” Through Carl Linnaeus’ use of the term “restricted to entomology,” Olson coordinates entomological metamorphosis with the more abstract, but equally organic, concept of language. “The Act of Image” (1969) comes at the end of Olson’s career—it’s short and reads like a first draft, but it exists as a useful example of Olson’s continual hunt to isolate formally various phenomena and then create parallels:

The etymology is queer, here. You will find that the word, by way of French, dead-ends in Latin imago, imaginem, and apparently, says the dictionaries

these



are from the same root as imitari, to imitate. Thus, the word as we have it slides into that no-thing land of its usual confusion with symbol and a representation with type, and lies allong [sp] that line of art as imitation of reality, to hold, sd who, the mirror up to nature, as it were, eh. I wholly doubt the root, to imitate. For

look up imago, and look! look what a man as precise Linnaeus gets out of the word. Restricted to entomology, it means “the final and perfect stage or form of an insect after its metamorphoses; the ‘perfect insect’”

Now I am not enuf of a Latin user to tell you how accurate Linnaeus is transferring the force of the Latin over, but I am enuf practiced of an image to know that just exactly in his use of the word is the truth of its earlier English form. In fact, I can’t offer you any greater insight into the act of image than, to form, after metamorphoses, the perfect insect. It is itself the perfect image of – image!<sup>72</sup>

The interest the essay takes in the etymology of “image” —Latin *imago*—leads the peripatetic essay to close with a Jungian understanding of *imago* as a psychological representation of the images one has for one’s parents—*father-imago* and *mother-imago*.<sup>73</sup> For Olson, the transference of force to the subjective ranges accomplishes an “act” of the mind that resembles the metamorphic tendencies of the body. This joining has particular value when conceptu-



alizing a holistic form for man where “Birth is ... the declaration of form” and “Change is direction.”<sup>74</sup>

Olson’s interest in “morphology” seems durable enough, evidenced by correspondence with John Cage dated January 10, 1957 that also puts forth an interest in syncretic union. Cage relates morphology to sound, but in the sense of sound’s segmented existence, only temporarily available to normal perception.

Dear Charles—

It was a pleasure to hear from you. Morphology for me (it is not generally used, but a few do share my use) designates the life-line of a sound: how it begins, goes on and dies away. It also refers not only to this aspect of a natural sound but also to those which are made by collage on magnetic tape. How anything leaves and returns to Silence. It is with collage that noticing it is practiced. Otherwise it is the character of all the other aspects (frequency, amplitude, duration, timbre) combined\* which for (warming?) purposes are separated.

My best wishes to you too this year

John

\*a sound just as it is<sup>75</sup>



Olson's philosophy of time, which he says is the only structure "above" us that we realize, collects the kinetics of formal bodies with the feedback loop those bodies enter. The essays "Morphology" and "The Animate versus the Mechanical, and Thought" explore animate principles of growth and tropistic (i.e. tropism, as in heliotropism) instincts of gravity:

I urge attention to the distinction used in that branch of mechanics called dynamics: kinematics treats of the motion of bodies, kinetics of the action of forces in producing or changing the motion of bodies. Growth is that change. Birth is equally that, as well as the declaration of the form. The event is at once mass (the given) as well as the motion achieved.

We will get nowhere until each is seen as the yolk & white of the other, that that which endures is bound to that which changes, that that which changes has that which endures. In this Haeckel's law has been retaken: phylogeny recapitulates ontogeny, the individual creates the race, the present change "forms" what the future will find its past

Form & growth are the halves of one motion, one half "the body" of the motion the other the direction of it. Change is direction (all "organic" is). Form is limit. All things have these two [components?].<sup>76</sup>



In "The Animate versus the Mechanical, and Thought," Prose No. 314 in the Olson Collection at Storrs, Olson considers time as a gravitational force, as attractive and repellent with regard to phenomena such as perception and action. Gravity becomes involved in the principle of one's will, with its behavior reckoned as "heliotropism," as a plant "has at the tips of its leaves and the ends of its roots 'standing-growing-responding' actions (its hinges, of leaves to stem, as well, so far as turgor goes, and has, if and as 'weight', gravitational 'history'."77

So I am back to animate, plant-or-animal - 'perception' sense --- of the freshness in time of the narrative or history as a tone or mode & so activeness of, for a human being, 'Creation': that there is no 'knowledge' of the crucial (axial - tropistic) sense of anything, including the "Universe" or the "Self", except by this 'Time' phenomenon of freshness which Animateness, in and by itself, as initial of experience. And so - anti-Newton, and anti-Einstein - of History. (For which instantaneously read 'narrative' (as its only means - Memory), or Event.

We are here and hereby under (the other only of the two tracks of form - gestalt, if you like - morphology equally if you want to, that is, and in pair to, genetic) image. Image. Imagination. (Thought, consciousness and sense perception - chiefly itself, and dominantly optical - telescopic --- photic --- are secondary phenomenon. Or, activity. The fundamental essential and experi-



ential- active (what I am here insisting is the unbelievably left-out but unbelievably powerful and sole human 'power', viz (quote):

of tip and end

of gravity - (tropism)

geo/

/God is the aboriginal instance of this

creativity, and is therefore the aboriginal condition which

qualifies its action/

....

The Animate is the aboriginal instance of activity,

and is therefore the aboriginal condition (gravity) which qualifies its 'ac-

tion' (meaning or course then more than ever what makes gravity - gravita-

tion - magnetic ((as opposed or dipolar of, and to electronic --- we live in a

prescribed 'kalpa' of Time specifically the Electromagnetic Epoch))

The science of these passages is not particularly good: Olson's interest seems rather in the feeling of the words than their true scientific intentions. However, these passages do grope toward some integration of science and imagination. Here, "thought, consciousness and sense perception" are secondary to the electromagnetic pulls of the universe, that activity Olson states is the gravitational creativity of God, the "aboriginal instance of activity," "of creativity." Hierarchically, we are "under ... image." Image, Olson's "imago mundi" seems not to be enabled by man, but rather man is situated inside its stages and forms, only able



to briefly survey its activity in glimpses. The phrases “aboriginal instance” and “aboriginal condition” are striking in their complication of the indigenous impression that indicates a past, time gone stale. Here these conditions and instances signify points of origin and God becomes mapped into gravity, activity, and magnetic polarization. The animate force finds itself transferred into electromagnetic activity and Olson understands that activity as creativity, the very things that insist upon a “freshness” to time, to what we consider present moments. These essays are all wound up in morphology that Olson distinctly relates to time and motion and the act of the image. As beings “under image,” the pulls of image are distortions in our senses, that “secondary phenomenon.” Like the heliotropism in plants, Olson commits to a “tropism” in us, as something like a primary phenomenon, with “tip and end” that continue to bend, under the influence of gravitational activity that appears to us as time, what he says is our only understanding of the animate universe.

*Postmodern Immanence.*

In *Enlarging the Temple*, Charles Altieri finds the modernist agenda committed to the “form-giving imagination and its power to affect society, or at least personal needs for meaning, by constructing coherent, fully human forms out of the flux of experience” (17); the postmodern agenda, he goes on to write, aligns better with early Wordsworthian theories of the creative imagination and is “the discovery and the disclosure of numinous relationships within nature [rather] than as the creation of containing and structuring forms” (17). Where modernism chooses formal, heroic characters to act out the process of experi-



ence, postmodernism elects the biographical individual, an unwilling hero—makes the reader the “hero.” The transfer of language from the outside forms into those corresponding to the internal ones is a lapse from the Transcendent versions of the exterior world where the world is encoded to the immanent experience of the coded mind. Olson’s heroic figure of Maximus of Tyre is ultimately little more than a structural design, who, Olson writes, can be used “as a bridge to Venice and back from Venice to Tyre, because of the departure from the old static land mass of man which was the ice, cave, Pleistocene man and early agricultural man, until he got moving, until he got towns ... So that the last *polis* or city *is* Gloucester.”<sup>78</sup> Additionally, Olson calls Maximus the Omphalos stone—the image of the “navel stone” he had begun to explore in “The Kingfishers”:

...he represents to me some sort of a figure that centers much more than second century A.D.—in fact, as far as I feel it, like, he’s the navel of the world.

In saying that I’m not being poetic or loose, We come from a whole line of life that makes Delphi that center ... and this I think is the kind of a thing that ought to be at least disturbed.... He is a transfer for me to that vision of a difference that Tyre is, or proposition that Tyre is, as against, say, Delphi.<sup>79</sup>

I’m not interested in defending this position as an absolute, of course, as the varieties of modernism and postmodernism are too great for absolutes. But generally speaking, modernism explores structure and invests itself in heroic structures where the postmodern gives heroic structure up for compiled linguistic systems that end up looking like games. As demarcating the borderline between how we’ve decided to separate these poetic fields, Ol-



son's own poems often feel as indecipherable as games played without instructions. However, as Olson writes in *Human Universe*, language is "a prime of the matter" to define the occupation of "discovery" — that "definition is as much a part of the act as is sensation itself" and "life is preoccupation with itself."<sup>80</sup> The notion of the absolute interior world fits in with Altieri's description of a postmodern immanence:

Where the symbolist poet seeks to transform nature into satisfying human structures, the immanentist poet stresses the ways an imagination attentive to common and casual experience can transform the mind and provide satisfying resting places in an otherwise endless dialectical pursuit by the mind of its own essences and of Transcendental realities.<sup>81</sup>

Olson's description of the Mayan relationship with stone becomes less Emblematic than one of Pound's Luminous Details — say, the signed column of Verona. There, the mind contemplates and connects to history; in the thesis Olson puts forth, the material created improves nature by being inscribed with the mental content of the creator. The signed column is a relic whose energy grows outward certainly, and recommends the "instructed mind" to follow, but for Olson, the energy goes back out from the material and the individual into the system as part of the feedback loop. But since language is embedded in the process of discovery — which is the process of sensation — the putting-out-into-the-world of material comes uniquely packaged with the residue of the creator's mind.

My assumption is, that these contemporary Maya are what they are because once there was a concept at work which kept attention do poised that



(1) men were able to stay so interested in the expression and gesture of all creatures, including at least three planets in addition to the human face, eyes and hands, that they invented a system of written record, now called hieroglyphs, which, on its very face, is verse, the signs were so clearly and densely chosen that, cut in stone, they retain the power of the objects of which they are the images; (2) to mass, stone with sufficient proportion to decorate a near hill and turn it into a fire-tower or an observatory or one post of an enclosure in which people, favored by its shadows, might swap caymotes for sandals; and (3) to fire clay into pots porous enough to sieve and thus cool water, strong enough to stew iguana and fish, and handsome enough to put ceremony where it also belongs, in the most elementary human acts.... For the truth is, that the management of external nature so that none of its virtue is lost, in vegetables or in art, is as much a delicate juggling of her content as is the same juggling by any one of us of our own.<sup>82</sup>

That stone can “grow” and that it can be used to store emblematic energies gives us a good picture of this idea of “inverted archeology.” Rather than digging up an artifact and having us interpret its context and meaning, Olson’s position is reversed. The artifact is a cultural bridge<sup>83</sup> and it lends an historical context, but its activity in the ceremony of time<sup>84</sup> participates in the mind’s expression. Those are inner domains that pronounce themselves in the material world, that give us bodies with particular shape, appearance, abilities to interact with the motion of time. The artifact, over time, “grows” and then “glows” with an energy



that is picked up in the present by us, and then reinstalled to be carried away to the future.

Olson calls himself an “archaeologist of morning” precisely because the image of sun in that encounter directs its rays outward into the potential of the day. Here a verbal beauty amid the pure dense others, mixing what “remains” with what changes, what passes away.

*The meditative poem and the volatile image.*

It’s valuable at this juncture and this transition to begin to think of these poems in terms of the meditative poem. If, as I suggest, Olson’s poetry is uniquely directed at the mind and the mind’s capacity for change and the “will to change,”<sup>85</sup> then it is useful to consider what Louis Martz, in *The Poetry of Meditation*, considers “...creation of this self that a meditative poem records: a self that is, ideally, one with itself, with other human beings, with created nature, and with the supernatural.”<sup>86</sup> While Martz looks primarily at English poets of the seventeenth century, his conclusion makes a deliberate excursion into modernism and even flirts briefly with the possibilities of Emily Dickinson’s poetics. The room he creates for other projects is quite spacious as poetics of meditation, he claims, are eventual inheritances:

And if the self has been molded, in large part, by the writings of an earlier poet, that poet’s idiom will make its way into the later poet’s speech, as Herbert’s language speaks through Vaughan. (323)

Though Olson rarely discusses Emily Dickinson—a point of contention for poet Susan Howe who addresses this omission with George Butterick in their correspondence<sup>87</sup>—her



poetry seems to be precursor of Olson's coordination of time with the feedback loop. And while Dickinson reads with the advantage of the personal, Olson reads like the tension between objects trying to become subjects, rattling against a mind somewhere down in the stuff.

Martz suggests that Puritan meditation—if there is such a thing—forms due to the Counter Reformation's (mid-16<sup>th</sup> century) contention that faith needed to be worked for, and not the Calvinist emphasis that faith and grace stood alone as something inherited. He cites Richard Baxter's *Saints Everlasting Rest* (1650) as the source of devotional practices that, stemming from St. Ignatius' *Spiritual Exercises*, pursue "only the pure work of Faith" whose "object... is far off ... But the object of sense is close at hand."<sup>88</sup> Poetry, Martz hardly needs to argue, is a similar kind of work, of devotional practice where mind attempts to process sense through language. The goal of the meditative poem, working through image, is "to move from Fear to Charity, from distrust of the self to confidence in God: by the intense exercise of self-analysis to purge the soul, and so make way for the 'presence of God'."<sup>89</sup> It's a "creation of this self"<sup>90</sup> wherein "deep within the self, one discovers

... the Image of God. Not an Image restored from without by special grace,  
but an Image that has always been, indestructibly, there: the creative presence of divinity within man.

Olson's poetry to me urgently attempts to locate this singular Image. Admittedly Olson's interests are so multifarious he tends to be impossible to follow. But that's where Butterick



steps in and provides the scaffolding to the poems; without that we're easily lost in the mystery.

Martz defines the meditative poem as

a work that creates an interior drama of the mind; this dramatic action is usually (though not always) created by some form of self-address, in which the mind grasps firmly a problem or situation deliberately evoked by the memory, brings it forward toward the full light of consciousness, and concludes with a moment of illumination, where the speaker's self has, for a time, found an answer to its conflicts.<sup>91</sup>

Martz's example defines the meditative poem as an internal drama that identifies some moment in the past, gravitates toward it by re-envisioning it with the complete imagination. To conclude his book, Martz provides another description of the meditative poem from Paul Claudel's *A Poet before the Cross* (1958) that could easily find a home in Olson's own ethical principles of poetry:

...everything takes place as if there were a motor-directive principle governing our organized matter, and as if there were in us someone who is master and who knows what he has to do with everything. It is not our body which makes us, it is we at each second who make our body and compose it in that attitude adapted to every situation which we call sensation and perception. It is not movement which drags us along in an irresistible flow. Movement is at our disposal. We can exploit it. We who are able to oppose and stop it, and,



by using a free and limitless choice, impose on our perceptions the firm pattern of a concept, of a figure, of a will.<sup>92</sup>

Claudel sounds a bit like John Locke in the *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* as does Olson from time to time in their persistence of knowledge through the Enlightenment's focus on body and mind, motion and will. Olson's essay "Morphology," discussed earlier, sets up a similar expectation for the "event" as "at once mass (the given) as well as the motion achieved."<sup>93</sup> If Claudel's application flavors the genre of meditative poem, it would also seem to satisfy Olson's prognosis for the human condition that also only knows "firm pattern of a concept, of a figure, of a will," and the firm pattern of time.

*Olson writes to Martz.*

Olson writes to Louis Martz from Black Mountain College on August 8, 1951, five years before he sets down "morphology" in a proper eight-page essay. In the Martz letter, Olson uses the word mostly in the sense of "transformation," particularly of myths transporting themselves through time, in new formal guises. After admitting to Martz some regret for stopping his work on Melville in the context of Homer, Olson puts forth a small argument for mythic transformations generated by narratological morphologies:

Odysseus is the BEARSON at the same time that he is the CUNNING HERO of a sea epic. And one could make a guess from these facts of the actual text of the poem, as well as of its morphology: that a good reason for its power in its own time and continuously since, is the fact that it is a tremendous wed-



ding of the base archaic (or pelasgian) myth of Europe, the BEARMAN (Beowulf) story and the base archaic myth of the Tigris-Euphrates Valley, the KUR-GILGAMESH-HERAKLES tale.<sup>94</sup>

The poet's duty, Olson goes on to say a few pages later, enlivens the sense that man is actually an "interesting creature" as "a daily life character, fit for the Doctor's attention."<sup>95</sup> It feels almost out of character for Olson to bring up "daily life" in conjunction with the characterization of the mythic creatures he poeticizes. Writing to Martz about William Carlos Williams' *In the American Grain* and WCW's testament that "America is to be discovered by penetrating her as a moral and aesthetic proposition,"<sup>96</sup> Olson proposes that a poet's job "must be as full a culture-morphologist as any professional,

simply because the dimension of his job is the restoration of culture—in the exact sense of, how daily life is informed (as it is a collective phenomenon, & only such)<sup>97</sup>

The sense of "daily life character" in Olson's poetry, chiefly *Maximus*, certainly does not read like the "everyday" poetics of other postmodernist writers. Olson's read on "daily" seems more interested in yoking it to generalized phenomena than, say, Frank O'Hara's "hum-colored cabs" of a lunch-time New York City, the accouterments of a material existence saturated by awareness.<sup>98</sup> To return to Michael Boughn's thoughts in "Olson's Buffalo," that "Olson's crucial move here is to understand that the ordinary, as such, is archaic..." starts the poet in a large structure. In his letter to Martz, Olson justifies where he goes to locate the archaic:



...the *archaic* is best got at *in space* by way of *place* and that *culture* is actually a collective and time continuum which breaks out of the narrows of place and the narrows of the organism of personality

It's an entirely difficult letter, and one, I'm not sure, ever receives a reply from Martz. Olson's work, after all, is fundamentally driven by excitement—he is the Beat writers' primogenitor. Olson seems here to commit to accessing the archaic, what he presently defines as "our decisively alive CONTENT," in a location (place). The opening of *place* seems to then excite the other possibilities: the access to culture down through the "time continuum."

Space and place are texturized by the activity that occurs within them—the "vibe" of a place is our perception of that activity, for a more local argument; for a more theoretical apprehension, we might consider Foucault's heterotopias that echo and project spatial identities where physical and psychological space cooperate.

By way of Olson's "La Chute" poems, in "Notes on Charles Olson and the Archaic," Clayton Eshleman argues "the archaic is the post-modern"; Eshleman describes the impulse toward Image as Olson's method of joining two curricula of the individual:

Given Olson's base of historical information for most of the first Maximus volume, and a significant portion of the second and third ones, it is intriguing to note the stress he places on figurative language. "Image is the most volatile thing in creation," he writes to Creeley, and: "This leads me to think what's involved here is, actually, METEMPSYCHOSIS—and the restoration of METAPHOR as the human 'science' proper to human affairs & actions."



When [psyche and metapsyche] are in such identity vectors come into existence that an individual is a force astronomically different than the personal alone, the resonances then resulting from the beat and sound of those two “boards” and strings being comparable only to the finest speech to the best poem

Image... is the only thing I am after, in any search, act, or learning

The implication here, as I read these proposals, is that when psyche and metapsyche (or consciousness and the subconscious) connect, the product is metaphor, or image.<sup>99</sup>

I don't think Eshleman is wrong here, but I think Olson's ideas about Image and “imago” are more complicated than the connection between consciousness and subconscious. Image rendered in language feels more than figurative given his continual interest in glyph and breath-based poetics. “Metempsychosis” here reads like Olson's technical “morphology,” as a science of transformation and transition.

“Morphology” is a term that seems to be infrequently discussed in Olson studies. Its resistance to simplicity seems cloaked more in Olson's nearly impossible language, since when laid out in fashion suited to a concordance, it comes to intend time. Olson's poems are meditative, and where Martz defines the meditative poem as one that articulates a self, Olson's follow the paths of *place* that investigate the “narrows of the organism of personality” as well as the images that shift beyond a perceptual framework. The articulation of an Olson poem follows the energy system the “feedback loop” anticipates. In that manner, the



poem joins up with the morphological movements of the time continuum by attempting to express those movements. It's a rather lofty goal and it insists that language can become a part of material life with the directed mind or imagination acting as the propellant. As Olson says about the diorite, "the stone grows."<sup>100</sup>

Martz's definition of the meditative poem describes the self aware of the self; Olson's poems trend toward a similar fixation on the self's role in the time continuum but "break...the narrows of the organism of personality." Similarly, George Butterick's poetry entertains an awareness of the poet as the self and the poet as the poem. This latter articulates the poem into ranges that sacrifice the personality to the morality of the poem and the poem's architecture. Additionally for Butterick, the creation of this self has the perspicacity to splinter into voices appropriate for various tasks: those tasks include curating Olson's complete *oeuvre*, not merely in assembling it for publication but in studying it and processing it through flanking notes in all available editions, putting out the exhaustive *Guide to the Maximus Poems*, writing discrete introductions, and organizing the collection at Storrs. We wouldn't know Olson's poetics if not for Butterick's scaffolding. The architecture that would support Olson's easily distracted prose and tumescent poems feels like a subterranean account of prophetic dreams murmured through the loud speaker of postmodern poetry. That poetry has the feel of perpetual chaos and collapse—it's probably built into postmodernism's facility of utilizing language as structure; it's a cue from modernism certainly, but where modernism feels more secure with language providing structural homes for its heroic subjects, postmodern language never solves anything. God is truly dead, and his es-



sence isn't being found, because the structure of language is too feeble (not fragile) to reveal it. At least for poets like Olson who are transitioning out of modernism, this absence leaves a gap that something must fill. It's not enough to take Olson only as the writer of *Maximus*, but try rather to visualize all the materials collected at Storrs and all the editions of prose and poetry inclusive of Butterick's work. What arises out of those moving parts, compressed into one Emblematic image, is a mythological vocabulary that investigates the content and form of our swollen natures.

*Close.*

In closing, I find that relating George Butterick's archival work on Olson to the indexed database is a useful endeavor. Olson's philosophy of time, developed through the function of "morphology," expresses an alignment with the Romantics or American Transcendentals more so than the Moderns. For Olson, the imagination is not only a creative force but a force that can "recover" the energies of our biological pasts and redeploy them in a biomechanical present. Yet the technicalities of those biomechanics, those rhythms expressed by the physical body, feel lost in Olson's impossible ontologies. With Butterick's ordering, Olson's stuff becomes accessible finally. Understanding that Olson's "anacolutic" syntax is purposeful relieves some of his difficulty.

We know poets by their documents, and, increasingly, how their contributions to a digitally connected humanities come to bear weight. I think Butterick's work to connect documentation and historical reference to Olson's life begins to suggest a shift from an Em-



ersonian split between History and Biography. We recall Emerson's own interest in the growth of stone:

The Gothic cathedral is a blossoming in stone subdued by the insatiable demand of harmony in man. The mountain of granite blooms into an eternal flower, with the lightness and delicate finish, as well as the aerial proportions and perspective, of vegetable beauty.

In like manner, all public facts are to be individualized, all private facts are to be generalized. Then at once History becomes fluid and true, and Biography deep and sublime.<sup>101</sup>

"Every mind must know the whole lesson for itself," Emerson writes, and I'm not certain that can ever be refuted. But the movement of Butterick's database suggests an intercourse between the biographical sublime and history's "true" language. In the introduction to the *Guide to the Maximus Poems*:

One final caution. One must be very clear about what Olson's understanding of history is. He writes in "Letter 23" (I, 100-101),

I would be an historian as Herodotus was, looking  
for oneself for the evidence of  
what is said...

The poems, then, are an act of investigation:



Best thing to do is *to dig one thing or place or man* until you yourself know more abt that than is possible to any other man. It doesn't matter whether it's Barbed Wire or Pemmican or Paterson or Iowa. But *exhaust* it. Saturate it. Beat it.

And

then U KNOW everything else very fast: one saturation job (it might take 14 years). And you're in, forever. ("A bibliography on America," *Additional Prose*, p.11)

Williams calls himself a dog among dogs, and *Paterson* is what is thrown up by his digging. And what is often as interesting as the results, the facts, is the act itself. There was always something at bottom unsatisfying and flat about Pound's definition of an epic as "a poem including history." The form of *The Maximus Poems* is the act of history.<sup>102</sup>

When Olson defines "inverted archaeology" in his essay "Cy Twombly," he describes the historical act whose sign can only be uncovered in a biological-biographical dig site:

That is, I knew sculpture was buried, was become the art underneath us all, had gone down to be our sign—by a sort of inverted archaeology—that each of us had now to come up live, like those stone images scholars are digging up in so many places; that only by ourselves can we find out—by no outside medium or means whatsoever—the round all men have been rifled of.<sup>103</sup>

(176)



Finally, in *A Nation of Nothing But Poetry* (Black Sparrow, 1989), Butterick describes the end of his own project, as cancer overtook him:

There are still as many as two hundred, perhaps, non-Maximus poems and fragments remaining behind among Olson's papers, but they are for another sensibility or another age. I have exhausted my intelligence. I cannot imagine they would benefit most readers or contribute to the poet's reputation. But this is my judgment; let others refine or redefine his corpus as they will. The important thing is that the present generation have the present texts, in all their variety, for whatever use might be made of them.<sup>104</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Louis Martz, *The Poetry of Meditation: A Study in English Religious Literature of the Seventeenth Century* (New Haven: Yale, 1962), 330.

<sup>2</sup> This issue was printed single-sided on letter-sized paper, bound in cardboard, and fastened by staple. The other five in the series—spanning the years 1965 to 1969—were packaged identically.

<sup>3</sup> George F. Butterick (author), Institute of Further Studies, *The Magazine of Further Studies*, no. 5 (Buffalo N.Y.: Institute of Further Studies, 1968), n.p. No. 1 (1965)- No.8 (1970).

<sup>4</sup> George F. Butterick, *The Collected Poems of George F. Butterick*, ed. Richard Blevins (The Poetry/Rare Books Collection of SUNY at Buffalo, NY: Buffalo, 1988).

<sup>5</sup> "Reading Genesis by the Light of a Comet," George F. Butterick, *The Collected Poems of George F. Butterick*, 52.

<sup>6</sup> Consider that he recorded more than 50 interviews, chats, and sounds recordings during his life, often with equipment at his home. See the University of Buffalo's Poetry Collection for their vast archive of Butterick materials.

<sup>7</sup> I realize there's something a bit hyperbolic in this last description, but "the very smell of a consonant" seems less fantastic to me than my presumption that as a curator, Butterick spent a large amount of his time enclosed in rooms with large amounts of paper at various stages of



age, to which, for those of us who spend time in libraries know, there is an almost addictive smell, and certainly one that begins to generate Proustian recall.

<sup>8</sup> Paul Christensen, "The Achievement of George Butterick," *Sulfur*, no. 21, Winter 1988, pg 7.

<sup>9</sup> Donald Allen, and George F. Butterick, *The Postmoderns: The New American Poetry Revised* (New York: Grove Press, 1982), 9-10.

<sup>10</sup> Christensen, 12.

<sup>11</sup> Charles Olson, and George F. Butterick, *Muthologos: The Collected Lectures & Interviews* (Bollinas, CA: Four Seasons Foundation), 1978, x.

<sup>12</sup> "I thought I just bridged cultures." From *Causal Mythology* (1969), 35-36.

<sup>13</sup> Christensen, 13.

<sup>14</sup> Robert Creeley, "An Introduction," *The Collected Poems of George F. Butterick*, ed. Richard Blevins (The Poetry/Rare Books Collection at SUNY Buffalo, NY: Buffalo, 1988). writes in his introduction to Butterick's *Collected Poems*

<sup>15</sup> Michael Boughn, "Olson's Buffalo," *Talisman* 23-26 (Hoboken, N.J.: Talisman 2001), 42.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.* 43.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.* 43.

<sup>18</sup> Charles Olson, *Collected Prose*, ed. Donald Allen and Benjamin Friedlander (Berkeley: UC Press, 1997), 177.

Who, writes Olson, could "take it flatly, a plane. On it how can a man throw his shadow, make this the illumination of his experience, how put his weight exactly—there? ... How make that plane, the two dimensions, be all—from a point to any dimension?" (175-176)

<sup>19</sup> Eight issues that spanned five short years, 1965-1970.

<sup>20</sup> The authors and their words: Albert Glover (The Mushroom); Duncan McNaughton (Dream); John Wieners (Woman); Michael Boughn (Mind); Jisa Jarnot (Language); Fred Wah (Earth); John Clarke (Blake); Robert Duncan (Dante); Alice Notley (Homer's Art); Robin Blaser (Bach's Belief); Robert Dalke (Novalis' Subjects); George F. Butterick (The Norse); Edward Kissam (The Arabs); Edgar Billowitz (American Indians); Harvey Brown (Jazz Playing); Lewis MacAdams, Jr (Dance); Ed Sanders (Egyptian Hieroglyphs); Michael Bylebyl (Ismaeli Muslimism); David Tirrell (Alchemy); Danny Zimmerman (Perspective); Drummond Hadley (Vision); James Koller (Messages); Gerrit Lansing (Analytic Psychology); Joanne Kyger (Phenomenological); Robert Grenier (Matter); John Thorpe (Attention); Anselm Hollo (Sensation); Michael McClure (Organism)

<sup>21</sup> This collaborative examination of Olson's poem found its final resting place as John Clarke and Albert Glover's compilation *A Curriculum of the Soul* (2010) though initial publication was in fascicles devoted to each particular token. The project began in the sixties and was finally completed in 2001. Published by the *Institute of Further Studies* Canton, New York, fifty copies exist, numbered 0 to 49, and the volume clocks in at just fewer than nine hundred pages. The edition's Preface consists of letters from Olson to John Clarke (dated Oct. 10-28, 1965) describing man's origins out of the Pleistocene era, in typical Olsonian anacoluthic syntax, where grammatical sequence is disarray. Butterick's word "The Norse" becomes an exceptional forty-one-page chapbook, published in 1973 at number 12 in the series for which Collette Butterick illustrates and Guy Berard designs the cover.



<sup>22</sup> Modernism's interest in memory is one of its powerful features, and is certainly a complication of Romanticism's more elegiac and mournful version. In Nicholas Miller's *Modernism, Ireland and the Erotics of Memory* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2002), there is an interesting discussion of the subject and anamorphic memory in Joyce's *Finnegans Wake*:

Memory, in these terms, is more than a faculty by which subjects recollect what happened in the past. It is the vital and processive modality of subjectivity itself, an activity in and through which the rememberer locates his or her own "self," not in the discrete confinement of a single "presence," but across all of history. As a discourse of desire, memory figures the subject in its temporally "stretched-out" modality:

Here, then, awaiting our study, lies man's authentic "being" —stretching the whole length of his past. Man is what has happened to him, what he has done. Other things might have happened to him or have been done by him, but what did in fact happen to him and was done by him, this constitutes a relentless trajectory of experiences that he carries on his back as the vagabond his bundle of all he possesses.

This conception of the subject of memory as "stretched-out" across time and across particular acts of memory-work recalls a similar effect produced in the field of figural representation by the perspectival distortion of anamorphosis. The anamorphic figure is one drawn or painted in such a way that it appears proportional and "realistic" only when regarded from precisely the right angle. Viewed from any other position, no figure is visible and the "stretched" picture itself appears entirely abstract and non-representational. Historically, the technique of anamorphosis was used in religious painting to counteract the spatial distortion characteristic of the cathedral setting. Because ceilings and walls were both high and curved, it was necessary to paint figure in a distorted fashion, so that from the pews below, such figures appeared proportionally accurate.

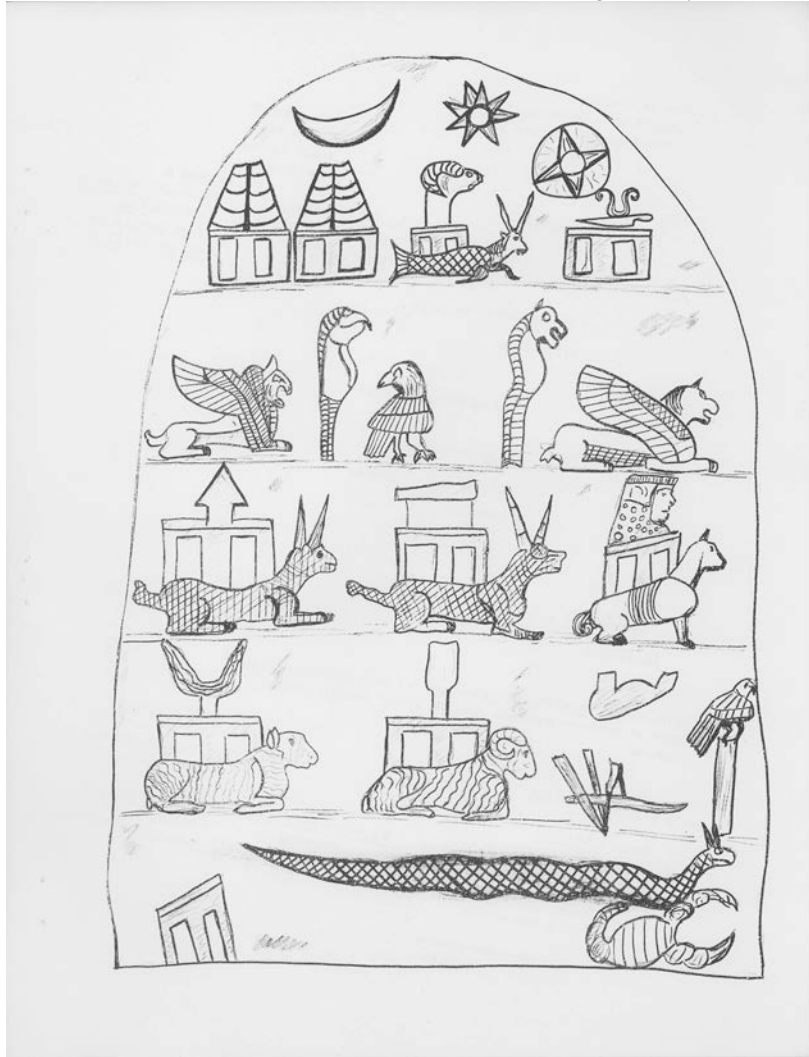
... *Finnegans Wake* figures the remembering subject as a body that "has not ended." Meaning in the text is not obscure so much as it is "stretched out" across the whole of the text or, more accurately, across the temporality of our readings of it. In constructing such a text, Joyce proposes what amounts to a radical reconfiguration of the remembering subject. Looking "back," the rememberer confronts a temporal anamorphosis of the self, a body that, disfigured and rendered incoherent by time, is in need of recollection. I will return to this concept of temporal anamorphosis and its implications for reading *Finnegans Wake* below. For now, it is worth pointing out that what the *Wake* critiques, in these terms, is not the traditional disposition of subject and object in historical discourse, but their exclusive confinement to an economy of discrete relation. Historical knowledge exploits the past as the pre-text for identity: it is at once the narrative that makes the



knower who he or she is, and it is the excuse, the convenient occasional truth that supports an identity in which that knower is deeply invested. (157-159)

Olson's subject in *Maximus of Tyre*, which claims to be the stand-in for the Everyman, for any man, has a certain subjectivity in his ability to remember Gloucester and the remnants of Dogtown. While it's certainly a subject that creates an anamorphosis, if the species of Olson's words on the page are anything like the "thrown glyphs" he describes Cy Twombly's work as, the distortion created by the subject remembering seems less intent on misleading as the twisting pathways of Joyce might.

<sup>23</sup>"A Plan for a Curriculum of the Soul" in *Magazine of Further Studies* #5 (1968)





how to live as a  
 single natural being  
 the dogmatic nature of  
 (order of)  
 experience

how many?  
 & how each  
 made known,  
 exercised,

as

Ismaeli muslimism

&, all together,  
create  
organism

organs &  
 function - activity  
 of the soul  
 or psyche or  
Heaven or God

Alchemy - rather by plates  
 [as connected to dreams]  
 pictorialism

as in Earth, "View"

& perspective  
 /cf. Weyl on ocular  
 power

Vision

+

Messages

technically, Analytic Psychology, as only technical study I  
 know of modern Western man & under enough mental  
 control

jazz playing  
dance as individual  
 body-power

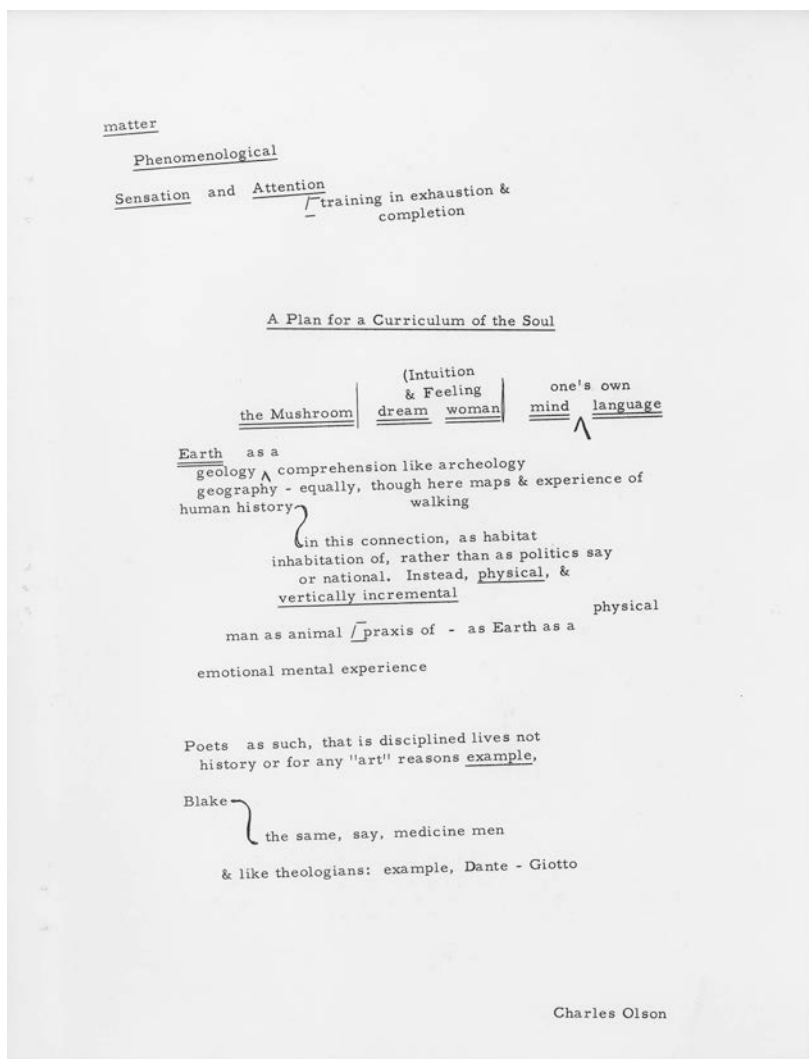
equally say Homer's art  
 Bach's belief  
 [cf. Novalis'  
 "subjects"]

the Norse  
 & the Arabs

-locally, American  
 Indians

Egyptian hieroglyphs (gesture, speech  
 - drawing habits mental condition





<sup>24</sup> George F. Butterick, Charles Olson Lecture (sound recording), Archive for New Poetry: University of California San Diego. Audio Cassette, 48 minutes. Recorded March 4, 1979. Part of the 80 Langdon Street talk series.

<sup>25</sup> George Butterick, *Collected Poems*, 37.

<sup>26</sup> Paul Christensen, "The Achievement of George Butterick," 7.

<sup>27</sup> The "Freudian slip."

<sup>28</sup> George F. Butterick, "Editing Postmodern Texts," *Sulfur* 11, 1984, pg 125-126.

<sup>29</sup> Herman Melville, *Moby-Dick* (Norton Critical Edition), Ed. Hershel Parker (New York: W.W. Norton, 1999), 125.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid. 127.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid. 126.

<sup>32</sup> Butterick, *Collected Poems*, 25-26.

<sup>33</sup> George Butterick, "Reading Genesis by the Light of a Comet," *Collected Poems*, 52.

<sup>34</sup> Charles Olson, *The Maximus Poems*, ed. George F. Butterick (Berkeley: UC Press, 1983), 271.

<sup>35</sup> Consider also Melville's genre-defying *The Confidence-Man: His Masquerade* as a fairly genuine experience of language's ongoing deceptions.



<sup>36</sup> There are plenty of others, but for example: Pound's re-writing of the Chinese character's experience, Picasso's Iberian masks, Henri Gaudier-Brzeska's sculpture. Consider also Duchamp's Readymades that depend on a context that arises between the object and the object's title.

<sup>37</sup> Charles Olson, *Collected Prose*, ed. Donald Allen and Benjamin Friedlander (Berkeley: UC Press, 1997), 74.

<sup>38</sup> We could identify them as: distinct, chaotic, unmatched, inaccurate, interested in letting language populate the spaces of an idea, using the page as a kind of memory-map, or a map to spatially create an idea, as a diagram might, lending a body.

<sup>39</sup> Michael Boughn, "Olson's Buffalo," *Talisman* 23-26 (Hoboken, N.J.: Talisman, 2001), 35.

<sup>40</sup> That ellipsis is masked by Boughn's short discussion of *community* (polis) through Jean-Luc Nancy's *The Inoperative Community* that describes the opening up of those ordinary spaces in society's wake, as if the residues of social activities were then ready to be taken up by the individual artist, and that the "discharge of energies arises from the circulation and generation of those energies within just such a space as Nancy identifies" (36).

<sup>41</sup> Charles Olson, "Proprioception," *Collected Prose*, ed. Donald Allen and Benjamin Friedlander (Berkeley: UC Press, 1997), 181.

<sup>42</sup> Guy Davenport, "The Symbol of the Archaic," *The Georgia Review*, Vol. 55/56 (University System of Georgia, 2001/2002), 61.

<sup>43</sup> To me the city has somehow become deeply embedded in my consciousness, perhaps part of my Jungian fixtures. Because of this the plight of the city, its symbol as loss, a place to mourn, turmoil, fear, become part of the wash of daily anxiety. Science Fiction, for me—and particularly apocalyptic science fiction—must always deal with the city. As it too must consider the material resources of its own condition, it must address the movements of the city. Where Rian Johson's film *Looper* (2012) fails for me is in its long testament to the countryside. Logically it's imperative to the way the film needs to work, but somehow emotionally it disturbs my need to be back on the blacktop.

<sup>44</sup> Davenport, "The Symbol of the Archaic," 63.

<sup>45</sup> Catharine R. Stimpson, "Charles Olson: Preliminary Images," *boundary 2*, Vol. 2, No. 1/2 (Duke UP, 1973-1974), 151-172.

Olson's trust in language distinguishes him from many post-modernists. The poetic medium is neither net or blindfold, but one of man's "proudest" acts. It may engage, grasp, and surmount Tiamat. Poets must throw out—not speech, but an obsolete mode of speech: the infamous old discourse. Its tools are logic, which substitutes patterns of thought for reality, and classification, which substitutes categories of things for the things themselves—the effect of this old discourse is a total substitution of a linguistic world for a phenomenal one.

As ardently as Olson sweeps the old discourse off the stage of history, he introduces the new. The new discourse accepts, even demands, the marriage of sign and sound as linguistic gesture. The necessary condition for such a gesture seems to be a collapse of distance between kinetic events and their description. He also labels the new discourse "logography." A logographer writes as if "each word is physical and ... objects as originally motivating." He may manipulate a



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distinction between “logos” and “shout” or “tongue.” Logos is “the act of thought about the instant,” shot “the act of the instant.” Both are immediate acts. Only the artist, after all, is on time. (154)

<sup>46</sup> Thomas F. Merrill, “‘The Kingfishers’”: Charles Olson's “Marvelous Maneuver,” *Contemporary Literature*, Vol. 17, No. 4 (University of Wisconsin Press, 1976), 506-528. Page 520.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid. 521.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid. 521.

<sup>49</sup> Merrill notes all three (pgs. 509-510):

—Adams’ “racial energy”:

when a highly centralized society disintegrates, under the pressure of economic competition, it is because the energy of the race has been exhausted. Consequently, the survivors of such a community lack the power necessary for renewed concentration, and most probably remain inert until supplied with fresh energetic material... (Brooks Adams, *The Law of Civilization and Decay: An Essay on History* (New York: Knopf, 1948), p. 61.

—Jung’s “archetypal anima”:

The anima is a ‘factor’ in the proper sense of the word. Man cannot make it; on the contrary, it is always the *a priori* element in moods, reactions, impulses and whatever else is spontaneous in psychic life. It is something that lives on its own account, that makes us live; it is a life behind unconsciousness... (Carl G. Jung, *The Integration of the Personality*, trans. Stanley Dell (New York: Farrar and Rinehart, 1939), p.76.

—Melville’s creative “recovery” comes out of Olson’s essay “The Mystery of What Happens When It Happens” which I’ll quote from the original here:

...Melville was a special thing, a folk-maker more than a story-teller (in the sense in which we have got used to measuring story-tellers since the invention of the printing press). Melville is not, for example, a writer’s writer, a professional. The few who have been so influenced by him have been no credit to him. Nor should I think that writers would ever be his sons in such a formal way, say, as Pound is the son of Whitman. Neither in his language nor in his forms was Melville revolutionary, self-conscious. He was a breeder [in] other ways. And they are not so easy to come at, for the very reason that he was able to make such use of the Old Testament, that he recovered processes of the imagination and tapped storage of image and feeling which are essentially primordial and thus, on the technical side, precede print. It is Melville’s revolution in this sense of recovery rather than advance that I would interest us in, and that leads me to call him a mythographer rather than writer or poet. (“The Mystery of What Happens When It Happens” (1948-1950), ed. Annalisa Goldini, *Igitur*, Anno II (Nuova arnica editrice: Roma, 2001), 111-134.



<sup>50</sup> In his later article "The Symbol of the Archaic," Davenport goes to Heraclitus to illustrate the yoke of science and poetry:

What is most modern in our time frequently turns out to be the most archaic.... Fuller, then, is our Pythagoras. Niels Bohr is our Demokritos. Ludwig Wittgenstein is our Herakleitos. There is nothing quite so modern as a page of any of the pre-Socratic physicists, where science and poetry are still the same thing and where the modern mind feels a kinship it no longer has with Aquinas or even Newton.

*Ethos anthropoid daimon*, said Herakleitos, which may mean that our moral nature is a *daimon*, or guiding spirit from among the purified souls of the dead. Or it may be utterly primitive and mean that the weather is a god. *Character*, R. Buckminster Fuller seems to translate it, *is prevailing wind*. Pound: *Time is the evil*. Novalis: *Character is fate*. Wyndham Lewis: *The Zeitgeist is a demon*. Wittgenstein was paraphrasing it when he said (as if he were an Erewhonian): *Character is physique*.

In Herakleitos our most representative writers discovered a spirit congenial to their predicament as modern men. The neo-Epicurean philosopher Gassendi revived him, Nietzsche admired the elemental transparency of his thought, and we can now find him as a *genius loci* everywhere, in Hopkins, Spengler, Pound, William Carlos Williams, Eliot, Olson, Gertrude Stein.

It is not entirely Herakleitos' intuitive fusion of science and poetry that has made a modern philosopher of him; it is also his primacy in Western thought. He has lasted. (60-61)

<sup>51</sup> Notwithstanding the meditative poetry upon ruins from the previous two hundred years.

<sup>52</sup> Hugh Kenner, *The Pound Era* (Berkeley: UC Press, 1971), 322.

<sup>53</sup> Kenner, 323. The column's signature reads:

ADAMINUS  
DESCO  
GEORG  
IO. ME  
FECI  
T

<sup>54</sup> Kenner, 322 (Kenner's note reads: Scrapped version of Canto I, in *Quia Pauper Amavi*, 1919, 22).

<sup>55</sup> From Guy Davenport's "Scholia and Conjectures for Olson's 'The Kingfishers,'" *boundary 2*, Vol. 2, No. 1/2 (Duke UP, 1973-1974), pp. 250-262.

The "E on the stone" is the epsilon carved on the omphalos, or navel stone, at the oracle of Delphi in Boiotia. It is probably not an epsilon, but some Pythagorean mystical symbol that looks like an E.

In September 1913 the French archaeologist François Courby unearthed this 'omphalos' at Delphi, the stone which was thought to sit directly under the



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Pole Star and was 'the navel of the earth.' Plutarch's essay *The E at Delphi* (written toward the end of the first or in the early years of the second century A.D.) discusses various conjectures as to what the mysterious E might signify. It is abundantly evident that the meaning of the E had been lost by Plutarch's time, and Pausanias seemed not to realize that the omphalos he was shown at Delphi was not the archaic one with its enigmatic E but a replica in white marble bound in a network of fillets. This public omphalos was discovered by Bourget just before Courby found the archaic one.

Plutarch's seven different explanations of the E on the stone depend on the name of the letter in Plutarch's time (*ei*, rather than epsilon), which is then taken to be a cryptic allusion. *Ei*, for instance, is the Greek for *if*, and this is a likely component of questions asked the Delphic Oracle. *Ei* (or epsilon) is the second vowel in the alphabet; the sun is the second planet; the sun is Apollo's planet, and the Delphic Oracle is Apollo's sacred place. *Ei* means "thou art," and affirms the existence of Apollo. And so on, increasing our conviction that the meaning of the E was lost knowledge by Hellenistic times, even to the High Priest at Delphi which position Plutarch held.

It is plausible that the stone itself was lost by this time, and that Plutarch had not seen it. The stone Courby dug up has an E on it, and it also has more letter, which A.B. Cook read as GAS, "of the earth." He argued that the E is not an epsilon, but a hieroglyph of a temple or shrine, perhaps the peculiar symbol of Delphi itself, the center of a circular world under a circular sky. This stone, then, is one end of the world's axis; the Pole Star the other. (252-253)

The image of the stone Davenport includes at the close of the essay is the archaic one:





The “fillet” stone, replica. Via ARTRes, Photo Credit: Erich Lessing / Art Resource, NY:





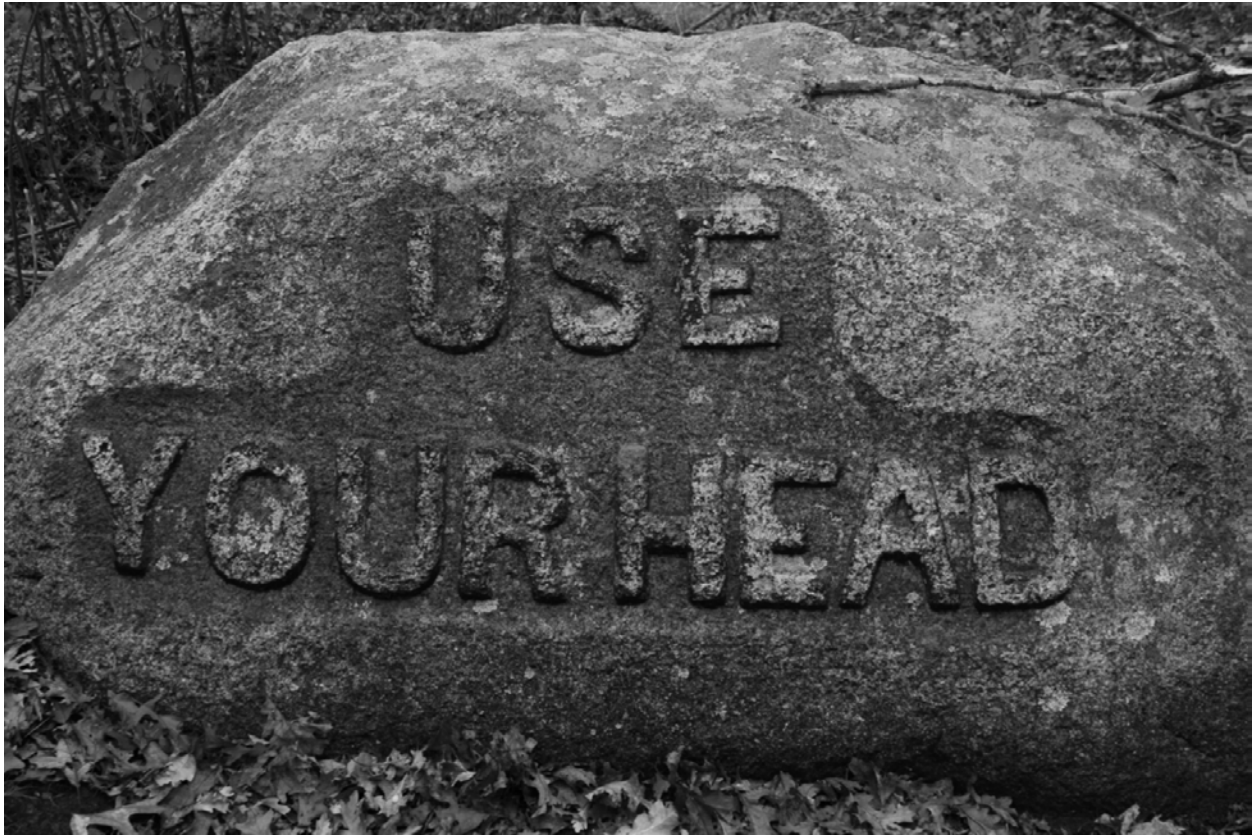
the Wall  
 to arise from the River, the Diorite Stone  
 to be lopped off the Left Shoulder  
 (maximus III. 37)

<sup>57</sup> Mark J. Carlotto's *The Dogtown Guide: Exploring an Abandoned Colonial Settlement on Cape Ann, Massachusetts* (2007) provides all the names and geographic coordinates for the boulders:

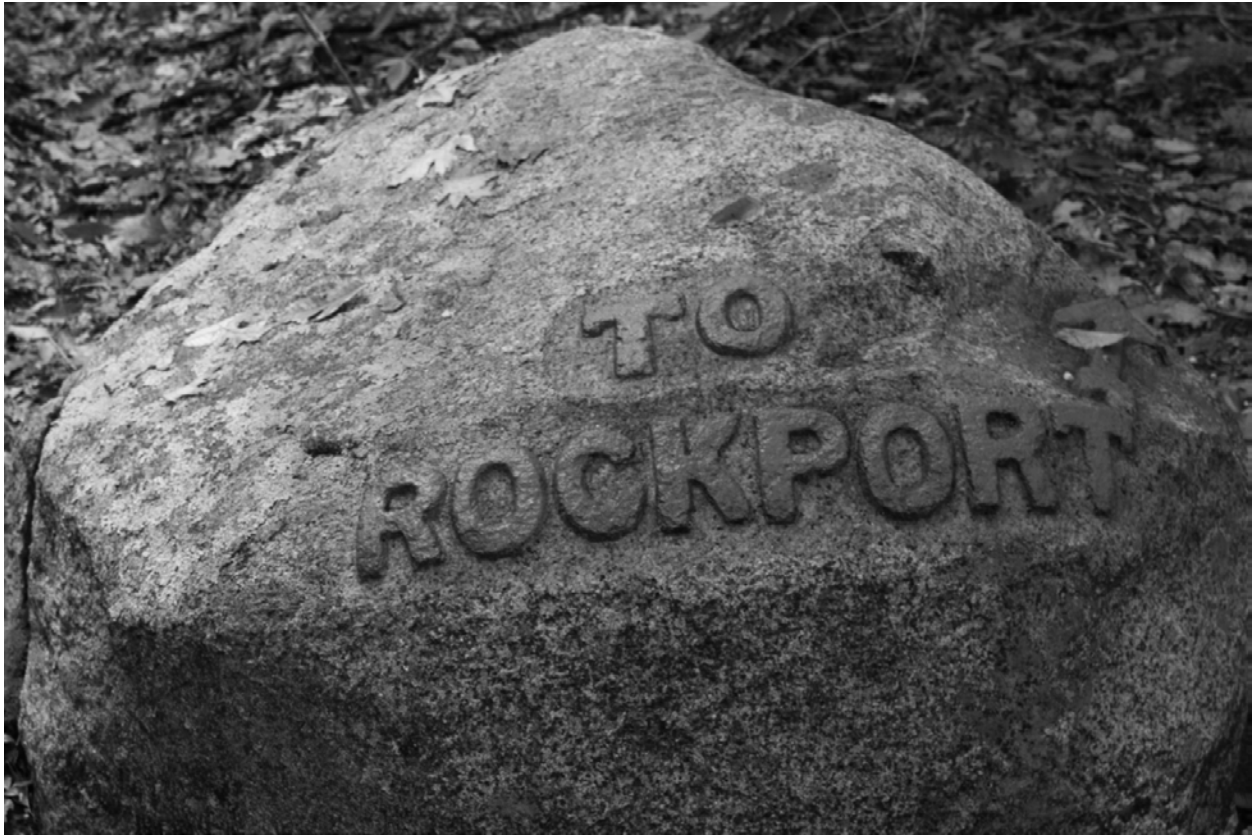
- B1. Get a Job
- B2. Help Mother
- B3. Be True
- B4. Be Clean
- B5. Save
- B6. Truth
- B7. Work
- B8. Courage
- B9. To Rockport
- B10. Loyalty
- B11. Kindness
- B12. Intelligence
- B13. Ideals
- B14. Ideas
- B15. Integrity
- B16. Initiative
- B17. Industry
- B18. Spiritual Power
- B19. Be On Time/Study
- B20. Prosperity Follows Service
- B21. If Work Stops Values Decay
- B22. Keep Out of Debt
- B23. Moraine
- B24. D.T. SQ
- B25. Never Try Never Win
- B26. Use Your Head

Here I include some images from a research excursion to Dogtown (photo credit: Joshua Hussey):









<sup>58</sup> Butterick, Introduction to *Collected Poems*, xix.

<sup>59</sup> Olson, *Maximus*, 633 [III.228].

<sup>60</sup> In the Sanskrit Dictionary of Digital Dictionaries of South Asia (<http://dsal.uchicago.edu/dictionaries/index.html>), *prana* is defined as “vital air,” “vital spirit,” “breath” and there is a suggestion toward including time in the concept:

*prana* (p. 185) [ *pra-aná* ] m. breath; vital spirit (*pl.* life); vital air (*five are generally assumed; but three, six, seven, nine, and even ten are also spoken of*); *sp.* inhaled air; breath of air, wind; breath as a measure of time (*requisite for pronouncing ten long syllables*); vigour, energy, power; soul (*in the Sâmkhya phil.*); intelligence associated with totality (*Vedânta*); sign of vitality (*pl.*); organ of sense (*mouth, nose, eyes, and ears: pl.*); *N.*; --*ree*;; *a.* = loving -as dearly as life, or having *one's* life dependent on --: **-kara**, *a.* invigorating; **-karman**, *n.* vital function; **-krikkhra**, *n.* danger to life; **-ghna**, *a.* life destroying, deadly; **-khid**, *a.* cutting life short, fatal; **-kkheda**, *m.* destruction of life, murder; **-tyâga**, *m.* abandonment of life, suicide; death.

<sup>61</sup> See Butterick's note here in the *Guide* that quotes liberally from Olson's *Causal Mythology* and his discussion of the Hittite myth “The Song of Ullikummi”:

“The Song of Ullikummi” is actually the story of that battle and who could bring him down. Because he had a growth principle of his own, and it went against creation in the sense that nobody could stop him and nobody knew



how far he might grow. It's a marvelous Hesiodic poem. In fact, I prefer it to those passages in Hesiod that include the battle of Zeus with the giants and eventually with Typhon, because this creature is nothing but a blue stone, and the *stone* grows.... And the Diorite for me, this Diorite figure is the vertical, the growth principle of Earth. (327)

<sup>62</sup> Steve McCaffery, "Charles Olson's Art of Language: The Mayan Substratum of Projective Verse," *Prior to Meaning: The Protosemantic and Poetics* (Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 2001).

<sup>63</sup> Ibid. 53.

<sup>64</sup> An example of Cagli's four-dimensional drawing from *Y&X* (1949):



<sup>65</sup> "I thought I just bridged cultures." From *Causal Mythology* (1969), 35-36.



<sup>66</sup> Charles Olson, *Mayan Letters* (1950-1951), ed. Nathaniel Tarn (London: Cape Editions, 1953), 62.

<sup>67</sup> Charles Olson, "Project (1951): 'The Art of the Language of Mayan Glyphs,'" *Alcheringa* 5 (NY, 1973), 94-100.

My own purpose is to examine Mayan hieroglyphic writing without losing these gains but also without losing sight for an instant of another dominating control factor which has up to now, it is my impression, been obscured by the pressing necessities summarized above. It is this: Mayan "writing", just because it is a hieroglyphic system in between the pictographic and the abstract (neither was it any longer merely representational nor had it yet become phonetic) is peculiarly intricately to the plastic arts, is inextricable from the arts of its own recording (sculpture primarily, and brush-painting), in fact, because of the very special use the Maya made of their written stones (the religious purpose their recording of the movements of time and the planets seems to have served), **writing**, in this very important instance (important not only historically but also dynamically in terms of its use in cultures today), can rightly be comprehended only, in its full purport, as a plastic art.

...

With these things in mind I have called the study, and the book I plan to be sum of the work here, "The Art of the Language of Mayan Glyphs". The "art" is a matter of the fact that a glyph is a design or composition which stands in its own space and exists—whether cut in stone or written by brush—both by the act of the plastic imagination which led to its invention in the first place and by the act of its presentation in any given case since. Both involved—I shall try to show—a **graphic** discipline of the highest order.

Simultaneously, the art is "language" because each of these glyphs has meanings arbitrarily assigned to it, denotations and connotations (it is the latter which have, up to now, proved so hard to come by), and because they are put together, are "written" over a whole stone (stela, altar, lintel, zoomorph, whatever) to make the kind of sense we speak of as language, however one must be on constant guard not to be "linguistic" about this language, not to confuse whatever "syntax" is here with what we are used to in the writing of phonetic language, in fact to stay as "plastic" throughout the examination as the Maya were in its making and to let this language itself—not even any other hieroglyphic system—declare what, for itself, are its own laws. I take it that such an examination ought to be of some considerable use to the scholarship of glyphs as well as of some certain use as a study of Mayan art. (95-96)

<sup>68</sup> Charles Olson, *Mayan Letters* (1950-1951), ed. Nathaniel Tarn (London: Cape Editions, 1953), 63.

<sup>69</sup> Steve McCaffery, "Charles Olson's Art of Language: The Mayan Substratum of Projective Verse," *Prior to Meaning: The Protosemantic and Poetics* (Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 2001), 56.



<sup>70</sup> Charles Olson. *Causal Mythology* (San Francisco: Four Seasons Foundation, 1969), 35-36.

<sup>71</sup> I'm stealing this notion of layering from Katherine Hayles' *How we became posthuman*: "The body is the net result of thousands of years of sedimented evolutionary history, and it is naïve to think that this history does not affect human behaviors at every level of thought and action... the body itself is a congealed metaphor" (284).

<sup>72</sup> Charles Olson, "The Act Of Image", typescript, 1953, Charles Olson Research Collection, Archives and Special Collections at the Thomas J. Dodd Research Center, University of Connecticut Libraries.

<sup>73</sup> Oxford English Dictionary entry for "imago."

<sup>74</sup> Charles Olson, "The morphology -- the structure," Manuscript/Typescript, 1956, Charles Olson Research Collection, Archives and Special Collections at the Thomas J. Dodd Research Center, University of Connecticut Libraries.

<sup>75</sup> Letter from John Cage, 1/10/57, Charles Olson Research Collection, Archives and Special Collections at the Thomas J. Dodd Research Center, University of Connecticut Libraries.

<sup>76</sup> Charles Olson, "The morphology -- the structure," Manuscript/Typescript, 1956, Charles Olson Research Collection, Archives and Special Collections at the Thomas J. Dodd Research Center, University of Connecticut Libraries.

<sup>77</sup> Charles Olson, "The Animate versus the Mechanical, and Thought," Typescript, 1969, Charles Olson Research Collection, Archives and Special Collections at the Thomas J. Dodd Research Center, University of Connecticut Libraries.

<sup>78</sup> George Butterick, *The Guide to the Maximus Poems* (Berkeley: UC Press, 1978), 7.

Butterick also provides this useful information:

the purpose of Maximus, the person who addresses himself to the City, is to measure: *the advantage of a single human figure*. I never thought of it before but the advantage of a single human figure is a practice I'd have said I might have acquired from Mayan stele, or that thigh bone of Quetzalcoatl, which I possess, on which a single warrior is carved. (8)

<sup>79</sup> Ibid. 7.

<sup>80</sup> Olson, *Collected Prose*, 155.

<sup>81</sup> Charles Altieri, *Enlarging the Temple* (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 1979), 17.

<sup>82</sup> Charles Olson, "Human Universe," *Collected Prose*, 159.

<sup>83</sup> Olson says "I thought I just bridged culture" in *Causal Mythology* (1969), p. 35.

<sup>84</sup> "We are the last 'first' people. We forget that. We act big, misuse our land, ourselves. We lose our own primary. Melville went back, to discover us, to come forward. He got as far as *Moby-Dick*." Charles Olson, *Call me Ishmael* in *Collected Prose*, ed. Allen and Friedlander (Berkeley: UC Press, 1997), 19.

<sup>85</sup> From his "The Kingfishers" poem (in *Collected Poems*): "What does not change/ is the will to change."

<sup>86</sup> Louis Martz, *The Poetry of Meditation*, 322.

<sup>87</sup> Butterick to Howe, letter dated 28 October 1980. University of California San Diego Special Collections.



I don't think Olson despised ED. She was just hardly in his ken; not his kin; irrelevant, in important senses, to a young man who had no father's garden, whose houses were always rented houses. There was something for a young man, an immigrant's son, coming of age in Depression America, that required a larger life-form than she was able to give, obviously enough, ... 'There is no frigate like a book' is simply not the same as the spermacetti blood-streaked, slimy work-ingman decks of the Pequod. The distillation of ED, no matter is was dew and sparkling and heady as vaporous wine, was insufficient as a role-model. "But no matter. ED is the perfect poet for an overpopulated world. She is a lens, a scanner, for the forbidden voyage inward. There was something more of ED about Olson late in his life, pulling a blanket like a shawl around him, the preoc-cupation with time rather than space.

<sup>88</sup> Louis Martz, *The Poetry of Meditation*, 171.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid. 150.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid. 322.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid. 330.

<sup>92</sup> Claudel qtd Martz, 330.

<sup>93</sup> Charles Olson, "The morphology -- the structure," Manuscript/Typescript, 1956, Charles Ol-son Research Collection, Archives and Special Collections at the Thomas J. Dodd Research Cen-ter, University of Connecticut Libraries.

<sup>94</sup> Charles Olson and Robert Creeley, *The Complete Correspondence*, Vol. 7 (Santa Rosa: Black Sparrow, 1987), 67.

In a note, Butterick suggests a couple of interesting source materials for the Bearson and also writes, "Odysseus's father was the Bearson, Arkeisios, son of Kephalos and a she-bear."

<sup>95</sup> Ibid. 70.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid. 71.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid. 70.

<sup>98</sup> Frank O'Hara, "A Step Away From Them," *The Collected Poems of Frank O'Hara*, ed. Donald Allen (Berkeley: UC Press, 1995), 257.

<sup>99</sup> Clayton Eshleman. "Notes on Charles Olson and the Archaic." Lecture given at SUNY- Buffalo, October 22/23, 2004. Published in *Minutes of the Charles Olson Society* #52.

I'm also interested in one of Eshleman's anecdotes about Robert Kelly and image:

\*6 Olson's extended use of "image" is sounded in an exchange with Robert Kelly in 1960. When I asked Kelly about this, he responded:

this was before I actually met the man, and while I was still living in Brooklyn. I had sent him the first purple hectographed versions of my Notes on the Poetry of Deep Image, and in his reply, speaking I think to the points I was making about the rhythm of the imags constituting (what we would call now) the deep struc-ture of the poem he (and I remember it scrawled on a post card) said:

"not imageS but image"



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in so many words. Left me to chew on the difference he was after. My guess is/was that he was already after the Angel, the Sufi transsensory (hence beyond images but not beyond being an image of use to the mind) that so preoccupied him through the third volume of *Maximus* and marked his sensational (and not much noticed by Olsonians) departure from the Aristotelian into the realms of what would presently be talked about as soul, angel, Amoghasiddhi.

<sup>100</sup> George F. Butterick, *The Guide to the Maximus Poems* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978), 327.

<sup>101</sup> Ralph Waldo Emerson, "History," *The Essential Writings of Ralph Waldo Emerson* (Modern Library, 2000), 12.

<sup>102</sup> Butterick, *Guide*, xviii-xix.

<sup>103</sup> Charles Olson, *Collected Prose*, ed. Donald Allen and Benjamin Friedlander (Berkeley: UC Press, 1997), 176.

<sup>104</sup> Charles Olson, *A Nation of Nothing But Poetry: Supplementary Poems*, ed. George F. Butterick (Santa Rosa: Black Sparrow, 1989), 10.



## CHAPTER 5

*Conclusion*

"Kant argued that there were two levels of reality: a phenomenal level that corresponds to science, and a noumenal level corresponding to ethics. The phenomenal order is created by the human mind. The noumenal level transcends man's intellect; it corresponds to a spiritual reality that supports his ethical and religious life. In a way, Kant's solution is the only one possible for those who assert both the reality of ethics and the reality of the objective world as it is expressed by classical science. Instead of God, it is now man himself who is the source of the order he perceives in nature."

—Ilya Prigogine and Isabelle Stengers, *Order out of Chaos* (1984)

In Prigogine and Stengers' description of Kant's theories, science becomes its own enclosure, its own "mode of knowledge." The transcendental figure, they go on to write, finds that "it is science, not its results" that is the true subject of philosophical inquiry: "science taken as a repetitive and closed enterprise provides a stable foundation for transcendental reflection."<sup>1</sup> This circumscribed order to nature collects its own unique language: it must if it is meant to become systematic. In the poetics of Anne Bradstreet, Jonathan Edwards, and Charles Olson, we witness unique orders of language that create "stable foundations" for a more formally explicit world. Bradstreet and Edwards are their own subjects, meditating on language as if language contained the true signs of Christian nature. Olson is not his own subject, but his subject is the human condition told from the point-of-view of various sub-



jects. In this manner, we might regard these poets as mid-way between philosophies of immanence and transcendence: if transcendence depends on a systematic approach to the “objects of experience” (86), and immanence depends on subjects that remain wrapped up in their experiences, these poets demonstrate traffic between both of these theoretical takes on the world. After all, we use these terms for a description of systems, not for deciphering anything: they represent a particular perspective trained upon a particular paradigm, that is all. Though Prigogine and Stengers might disagree, neither is necessarily better or even more efficient than the other.

In the roughest sense of their meanings, immanence and transcendence represent interior and exterior, situations that have been examined throughout this project in terms of material poetics. The former is infiltrated by divine presences; the latter is empty, the bare translation of the system. Both, however, remain subject to the forces of “weird,” the fate of any energy’s particular path. “Weird” might be expressed in scientific terms beyond its standard interpretation as divine control: it might be considered holistically as inertia, or as other forces in a cause-effect relationship. All experience on this world is subject to the conditional laws of physics that control it: if..., then.... These are the rules we have right now; in some other universe, they would be extremely different, and certainly beyond our conception. Bradstreet, Edwards, and Olson’s poetic programs suggest that the poet’s interior



and exterior lives were integrated in their work, and that there was little difference between projects of language and projects of living.

For Anne Bradstreet, this isn't simply the domestic chores of the everyday, but rather also the pains and anguishes of spiritual suffering. Both of these varieties of "chores" create states of being that are pupils to their unique experience: an equilibrium is sought between the manner in which one's body is ethically placed in the world and the manner in which one's spiritual life becomes the impetus for the mind. "A frontier is no friendly place for literary creation," writes Jeannine Hensley,<sup>2</sup> but its difficulty seems exactly what Bradstreet's mind needed for inspiration.

Downy beds make drowsy persons, but hard lodging keeps the eyes  
open; a prosperous state makes a secure Christian, but adversity  
makes him consider. (Bradstreet, *Works*, 298)

Bradstreet's meditation sounds familiar—all of her poems essentially deal with small triumphs over adversity; while Adrienne Rich claims Bradstreet is not a didactic poet—the first of her kind in America—there still remains a message or warning in each of her poems. Because, as Louis Martz claims, it was not possible to duplicate the environments of England, it was not possible to duplicate its vocabulary. The only option for a poetic vocabulary in early American life was to respond to the frontier, or conversely, to the limited resources of private libraries that had also traveled across the Atlantic. We often see in writings of isolation a focus on food: in the



private poems, Bradstreet's focus is on the spiritual "food" that might bring physical succor.

The manner of transportation from language to body—from an exterior influence to an interior receptor—is the same as Jonathan Edwards' philosophical dictionaries that predict the practical world. Edwards' writing is deeply concerned with identifying a small amount of keywords and defining them. By doing so, he creates a linguistic map of the material species of those keywords, attempting to link exterior realities to interior ones. That is, the material of the world may be the signs of God's nature, but language too must be included as a potent psychological thing that could help reveal a divine landscape. Perry Miller describes Edwards' *Images or Shadows of Divine Things* as the ambitious project it was, and as Edwards' effort to coordinate spiritual realities with bodily ones:

To Edwards, we may go so far as to suggest, his "Images of Divine Things" was what the *Prelude* was to Wordsworth, a secret and sustained effort to work out a new sense of the divinity of nature and the naturalness of divinity. He was obliged by the logic of his situation to undertake an investigation of the visible world as though no man had seen it before him. When these fugitive notes are read against this background, they take the form of an ambitious project, with this audacious implication suggested in the 26<sup>th</sup> Image, that if men can properly discover, or rediscover, nature, they may be enabled to em-



ploy objects taken from the constitution of the world no longer merely as illustrations of their *meaning*, but as illustrations and evidences of the *truth* of what they say.<sup>3</sup>

Image 26 is indeed an exemplary image of Edwards. It is a fairly direct prognosis that a depraved human existence might find language to surface out of the mire that was no longer representation but the source of names. Image 26:

26. Christ often makes use of representations of spiritual things in the constitution of the [world] for argument, as thus: the tree is known by its fruit. These things are not merely mentioned as illustrations of his meaning, but as illustrations and evidences of the truth of what he says. (*Images or Shadows of Divine Things*, 49)

Since Edwards works in a defined range of vocabulary, Image 25 serves as a fitting example to help describe the “constitution of the world” from Image 26:

25. There are many things in the constitution of the world that are not properly shadows and images of divine things that yet are significations of them, as children’s being born crying is a signification of their being born to sorrow. A man’s coming into the world after the same manner as the beasts is a signification of the ignorance and brutishness of man, and his agreement in many things with the beasts. (*Images or Shadows of Divine Things*, 48)



Without George Butterick's curation, much of Olson's poetic energies would be committed to obscurity. Butterick's work processes Olson's poetry and prose so that it might be categorized better: with a proper index of words follows a proper stream of ideas. Readers are granted the ability to create better images of Olson's compressed worlds. That flexibility of description yields a range of meaning that co-operates with Olson's interest in Freud's *parapraxis*, or meaningful error. Unlike material goods, which we regularly accept with minor flaws, surface or structural, when it comes to poems, we are usually unable to set aside predilections for errorless writing. But having error in a poem or prose piece gave Olson some sense that his creations were part of the material world. In the introduction to the *Guide*, Butterick describes "orthographic lapses" as part of a system of "chance":

...line lengths of certain poems were often determined by the size of a piece of paper or the room left to write on it. This indulgence of chance, which he elsewhere denounces as "I Ching-ness" (at least in its social implications) [Butterick's footnote: "Theory of Society," *Additional Prose*, p. 22.], is similar to his insistence, observed in the editor's notes to *Additional Prose*, of allowing the orthographic lapses to remain: "no damn it the error is valuable. [Butterick's footnote: Note to "Mrak," on p.95 of *Additional Prose*.] <sup>4</sup>

All of these poets respond to their ages—their technologies—with an appropriate grammar. It can be no other way: as the material metaphor suggests, objective



forms yield particular methods or manners of description. Similarly, periods of time may share the same laws of physics and fundamental human conditions, but grammars of being are in constant adaptation to the materiality of their age. Like the weird that controls Edwards' heavenly fate or the inertia that controls a car's motion in space, so too do the forms of the world demand particular verbal responses that are controlled by their material features, compound or component.

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<sup>1</sup> Ilya Prigogine and Isabelle Stengers, *Order out of Chaos: Man's New Dialogue with Nature* (New York: Bantam, 1984), 86-88.

<sup>2</sup> Jeannine Hensley, "Anne Bradstreet's Wreath of Thyme," *Anne Bradstreet, Works*, xxiii.

<sup>3</sup> Perry Miller, "Introduction," *Images or Shadows of Divine Things* (New Haven: Yale UP 1948), 18-19.

<sup>4</sup> George F. Butterick, *The Guide to the Maximus Poems* (Berkeley: UC Press, 1978), li.



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## APPENDIX A

*Other Dreamworlds*

Romanticism certainly is the imagination's greatest bastion, and poets such as Wordsworth and Coleridge occupy the spaces of the imagination as if they were a church and a faith to be pursued and disseminated. In *Literary Transcendentalism*, Lawrence Buell provides a more complicated figure of the American Romantic's love affair with the imagination, and easily brings it to a state that is equal parts wonder and work ethic rather than the image of a stoned sermonizer, with an opium-colored beard crawling into the lawn chair. Emerson's belief that the poem was a microcosmic order of nature, Buell points out, attests to an ambiguity in the poetic discourse: which comes first, Emerson asks, the poem or the poet? The chicken-or-egg debate ultimately locates itself in a collaborative effort between image and the poet, where the poet's manipulations in image are a "[participation] in the natural law of spirit 'to manifest itself in material forms (W, I, 34)" (Lawrence Buell, *Literary Transcendentalism: Style and Vision in the American Renaissance* [Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1973], 154; Buell cites Emerson's *Complete Works*, Houghton Mifflin 1903-1904). To Emerson, poetic architecture moves between discovery and production, between



“Emerson the neoplatonist” (form finding) and “Emerson the romantic” (creative channeling):

At times poetry is seen as pre-existing in nature and merely discovered by the poet (“poetry was all written before time was”; poems are a corrupt version of some text in nature with which they ought to be made to tally” [W, III, 8, 25]), while elsewhere the poet is seen as using nature creatively for his own purposes (“He unfixes the land and the sea, makes them revolve around the axis of his primary thought, and disposes them anew” [W, I, 51-52]). (155)

Buell moves on to point out that Emerson’s sharpest criticism is in the formlessness of his own prose style. Conceptually, he continues, Emerson chooses the form of the circle to serve as the “case of structural miscellaneousness,” the form to connect the “‘many illustrations of human power in every department’ (W, II, 301)” (157). In the least, Emerson’s hyperventilating prose commits to his own belief in the correspondence of natural forms, and their infinite repetition, structures similar in shape as Northrop Frye’s “encyclopedic form,” “which will be atomistic, discontinuous, yet comprehensive and essentially unified by the artist’s vision of the cosmic order” (159).

The direction Buell suggests here represents a very fundamental difference between American romanticism and British romanticism: “Coleridge sees the imagination as a synthesizer, Emerson sees it primarily as a multiplier of images” (157).



This conceptual difference certainly alters the sense of the poetic process: Emerson's version capitalizes on the imagination's affair with nature and exponentially increases it, whereas Coleridge's edition gathers the forms and creates a logical path through them (Kant).

We might however, consider a bounty of other works in the American literary tradition that speak to compressed spaces of objective forms and imaginative interiors. For example, the dramas of Washington Irving's *Sketch Book of Geoffrey Crayon* combine such spaces. Crayon's narratives are already once-removed from his authorship by having been "found among the papers" of Diedrich Knickerbocker and adorned by his postscripts. The poly-vocal layering of narrative voice excites notions of complex narrative navigation, so that when we, as readers, encounter such startling detail composed of precise, but sensitive, observation uniquely blending intellect and imagination, the richness of these characters' material lives can't hardly be questioned. Emotional strains regularly interrupt their reasoning minds: "A thought suddenly struck me—'I will make a pilgrimage to East Cheap,' said I, closing the book, 'and see if the old Boar's Head Tavern still exists.'" <sup>1</sup> While many of Crayon's adventures in England are of historic exploration and detective-work, the speaker's navigation of object is suffused with emotional response such that luminous relics and divine artifacts solely populate the world. As John Schleuter explains in "Private Practices" (2011), Irving's approach to the authenticity of objects "is ironic" (287): that instead of the things that populate Crayon's world as being solid and having



mass, their treatment is personal, and the experience translated by a private appropriation of history.

Fast-forwarding, the postmodern imagination seems a combination of those two divergent processes. For example, in many of Susan Howe's books, one is confronted by prefatory narratives that describe the author's own fieldtrips to archives and library stacks. The process there is an absorption of historic document and material, and the treatment is preparatory for both poem writing and critical scholarship. Exposure to language for Howe starts the associative threads that then carry her work. Associative language multiplies incipient form; the mental technologies of document processing synthesize in a readying approach to poetic redistribution. Following Emerson's certitude that all ideas need containers—symbols, properly—Howe renders her poems in strict shapes, and in many ways might be read as a concrete poet. Her poetic "reliefs" follow her artistic trajectory as a painter, and subsequently her pages operate as units, asserting themselves as geometrical imaginings that unify any Cartesian split of mind and body. These visualizations of archival fragment are re-encoded data from the biographical process (*History is Biography*). As George Butterick writes:

If Dickinson and other early New England writers found Nature emblematic, Howe finds Language itself a collection of signs, hieroglyphs, portents, and analogues to an historic past and the onrushing



mysterious present, the only future we've got. ("Mysterious Vision"  
321)

Similarly, Charles Olson's procedure for energy recovery converts stories of history into proprioceptive poetry, that is, where the body acts out its morphological (or biological) inheritances. The body's awareness of itself in space (proprioception) finds a formal equivalent in a poetry that becomes aware of its place on the page.

For another much later example in postmodernism, Johnny Truant from Mark Danielewski's *House of Leaves* acts as the imaginative form that combines the synthetic (from synthesis) compound of all the collaborative myths of the Minotaur and the multiplying possibilities for the agglutinating voices of the narrative itself. Formally, Julio Cortázar's *Hopscotch* (*Rayuela*) demands activating imaginative systems in order to navigate the book as a material hypertext. In this sense, the imagination is the only interface in which a reader can act; whereas a digital hypertext can cache the plot chosen by its user, *Hopscotch* requires its reader to do so. And even in contemporary video games such as Quantic Dream's *Heavy Rain*, a player's decisions in contextual moments create the game's narrative as it goes, leading up to a myriad of final (and local) outcomes contingent upon the paths a player has chosen and even the skill they have demonstrated during gameplay. Similarly, artificial intelligences have wide-ranging, adaptive imaginations in action-based gameplay: by reading the activity of a player as codes that translate into the quality of that individual's play, a machine is able to adjust its own algorithmic behavior.



Interacting with an object, the intelligence synthetically performs an object's behaviors in order to better understand its effects when it is manipulated. That treatment bundles the processes here: the input, output, and the movement in between. In this regard, form becomes integrated with its function, and that all becomes a relative sign to the imagination. Objects, of course, don't do anything unless they are animated by some energy source, and in this case, we're describing an internal energy source that drives the abstract engine of an object, that is, the idea of that object's behavior.

We might consider a passage from William Carlos Williams' *Spring and All* that illustrates the manner in which objects are animated through an agglutination of language:

The imagination uses the phraseology of science. It attacks, stirs, animates, is radio-active in all that can be touched by action. Words occur in liberation by virtue of its processes.

In description words adhere to certain objects, and have the effect on the sense of oysters, or barnacles.<sup>2</sup>

Williams passage describes two events: one linguistic event of collocation where words live out particular lives encircling particular concepts; and two, the language we use to describe the imagination conceptually belongs to activity. The power of the object and the power of the synthetic imagination are strong enough to attract



systems of vocabulary<sup>3</sup> in order to construct worlds of words that provide versions of an object's behavior.

*The imagination's orientation through the object.*

While the behavior of our thinking patterns has always been, and continues to be, "object oriented," contemporary consciousness seems to prefer mapping space for its informational structures rather than indexing information with lists. That is, its direction seems particularly three-dimensional rather than two. That seems largely in response to the infinite *periplus* of our virtual universes and the increasing inability of a text string query to satisfy a proper, or moreover, useful, digital search. Digital concordances, for example, give a user the ability to visualize a text all at once. Using the interface of the screen as a method of navigation, linguistic waypoints allow us to spatialize a text so the thing is spread out before us in a manner that is simultaneous rather than linear. Printed concordances on the other hand require a reader to handle a physical book, consult page numbers and flip through real paper. Our contemporary methods for consuming texts bring us to the status of users instead of readers if only in the distinctive process between reading bound books and operating in screens.<sup>4</sup>

The response to material in a culture bound to material has to do with the forms of its technologies. As Steve Tomasula, the writer of the modern media "epics" *TOC* (2009) and *VAS* (2004), noted in the summer 1998 edition of *ebr*7,



Always the technology and its multifarious ramifications. Humming along since people noticed that technologies like the telephone transformed the materials of literature, i.e., language and its structures, there has always been interest in the materiality of the text: the stuff available for a writer to sculpt into narrative. And in tandem with this way of looking at literature, the ability to manipulate images as never before has turned the buttoned-down literary 'page' into the Wild West, where everything is in a state of flux, borders are wide open and every homesteader his or her own law. The theater space of a 'page' has become much more integral to the staged meanings of words, particularly in the fluid environment of the screen.<sup>5</sup>

The "staged" page is an extension of a standard printed page of text. With its "open field" the page becomes a dimensional object, and a screen can bring dimensions to text previously unavailable. Embedded video, for example, lets time enter into the reading process unlike the time it takes an individual to read text, and time can become part of the vertical structure of narrative in a way that moves beyond the pacing of prose.

The use of images as communicational symbols divorced from phonetic values spans a rather large range of complexity and effectiveness. From the universal symbol of a line through a picture to represent "NO" to the complicated spiritual



and moral emblems of Francis Quarles, the efficacy of image can apply to a variety of needs.

Tomasula goes on to say:

From photographic restaurant menus to the mapping rather than indexing of information, there can be no doubt that the image has taken over many functions once performed by words. Indeed, people who live in a culture where advertising is so pervasive that it has become a type of folk culture can't avoid this shift. And they participate in it



Figure 14. From Francis Quarles' *Emblems Divine and Moral* (1638).

mainly unconsciously, for, just as the general population can absorb a Freudian understanding of how the mind works, we all can absorb a pictorial turn, and in fact seem to have done so judging from the natural ease with which we read a landscape of icons, communicate through images, indeed code most of our activities, even our bodies.<sup>6</sup>

Extending from Tomasula's thoughts

above, I feel it's safe to say that the

saturation of our formal intellectual lives with image has something to do with the



vastness of the digital spaces in which we reside. Obviously, the manipulation of those environments results from the manner in which they are both constructed and then presented, and their interfaces are dreamworlds (directional dreams) predicated on digital imaginations. The ebb and flow of contemporary poetics' feelings toward robotic poetics notwithstanding, and while robotic poetics are not the subject of this present work, I think it's valid to point out that a digital imagination and digital "spirithood" are potent technologies on their way to becoming as organic as glucose-driven brain-minds.<sup>7</sup>

Without making too general a claim toward the personality of our modern culture, if we suggest that all worldly material has a digital signification, a "digitextuality," we can come to understand the modern everyday object as a prescient, waiting hyperform. The signs of worldly material have digital partners, of course, an analog of representation in the digital universe, but most important is their signification, located in the digital universe. We rely on the vast dumps of information in the digital realm to provide us constant feedback from the material we encounter in our daily lives. The signifiers littering the planes of our bodily existences have their signifieds in the digital stratosphere.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> ("The Boar's Head Tavern, East Cheap: A Shakespearian Research", Irving *The Sketch Book of Geoffrey Crayon, Gent*, Modern Library 2001).

<sup>2</sup> *Collected poems*, 234.

<sup>3</sup> Something like onomasiology, that asks for the names associated with a particular concept.



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<sup>4</sup> For actual scientific studies of these two disparate processes, consult Hayles' *How We Think* (2012).

<sup>5</sup> Steve Tomasula, "Introduction: Narrative + Image = Two Languages (in One Work) x Multiple Meanings [A Rationale for an Issue]," in *ebr* 7, summer 1998.

<http://www.altx.com/ebr/ebr7/7intro.htm>

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> There are plenty of good texts in circulation that describe what I say here in superior manners. Ray Kurzweil's *The Age of Spiritual Machines* (1999) embraces digital consciousness, and convincingly reports on the successes and failures of non-human creative systems. He includes an interesting time line of artificial intelligence though he forecasts the long future with more than a little science fiction. Igor Aleksander's *How to Build a Mind: Toward Machines with Imagination* (2001) details Aleksander's own A.I. building projects.

In the chapter "Hypertext and its Anachronisms" from *Noise Channels: Glitch and Error in Digital Culture* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011), Peter Krapp appreciates all the paratext and polysemic responsibilities that hypertext entails and points out the inefficiencies of hypertextual modes as well as the inaccuracies of our colloquial discussions about virtual literature and virtual spaces. Consider his discussion of code as the root system of all digital experience:

Of course, computers have no need to distinguish between a poem, a portrait, a video file, or a chunk of Unix code; sounds, images, and texts all disappear into binary states and are only simulated on screen. The readability of hyperfiction relies on HTML and its extensions like JavaScript, on the server software and its integral and occasional components that make the Internet possible, and on the operating software the computers run. Thus in the final analysis, literature on the computer is simulated literature; seen this way, there is no "hyper"-fiction, there is no "Net literature." But before this is seen as belated confirmation of the greatly exaggerated news of literature's death, informed hypertext criticism requires competence both in the aesthetics of literary expression and in methods of programming. The true challenge of multimediality or hypermediality and interactivity is that the integration of sound and image tends to distract from the fact that ultimately, they are all code—and they are integrated only to the extent they are compatible on that level. As for hyperlinks, they challenge policies covering citation and fair use only to the extent that they go beyond the confines of a web or net of references internal to a text; rather than radicalize the poetic possibilities of creation, the whole tangle of questions is reduced to a matter of user interface design. What few commentators care to address is how the practice of, for instance, Proust, Joyce, or Arno Schmidt demonstrates the transition from an extensive card index to a complex textual montage. The next step would be to recognize which lessons their exploration of the frontiers of



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textual production may yield for writing and reading under the conditions of the computer. On either side of this equation, the technologies of data processing and poetics surely go back further than to Modernism. Nevertheless, it is against the yardstick of twentieth-century writing that digitextuality is mostly measured. (16-17)

<sup>8</sup> To continue with his chapter "Hypertext and its Anachronisms," Krapp describes the kind of information metrics that hypertext provides:

Hypertext is not the sublation of a system of traces and marks into fully manifest context but rather an extension of the same structure. As [Claude] Shannon analyzed the transmission, manipulation, and use of information, it pivots on the problem of separating a signal from interfering noise in communication systems, although no amount of data smoothing can entirely overcome the distortion and noise sources. Computerized communication, if we retain that word, is no mere transference of meaning but inscription or grafting, and its effect is a dissemination that is irreducible to the mere polysemy that hypertext supposedly embodies.

Claiming to have foreseen in 1960 the development of personal computing, word-processing, hypermedia, and desktop publishing, [Ted] Nelson protests that nobody had yet understood how this structure can organize every connection and use of information, beyond inclusion or exclusion—hence his neologism transclusion. Transclusion would enable one to reuse information with its identity and context intact. However, just what the identity of context would be is the question; arguably, such a limitless memory of 'intertwingularity' would not be a memory at all but infinite self-presence, while memory constantly revives the aposemiological corpse of the sign in referential paraphrases to recall its necessary relation with the nonpresent. This 'diadeictic' relationship presupposes, as Lyotard writes, 'the empty gap, the depth separating shown and shown, and even if this gap is referred onto the table of what is shown, it will there be open to a possible index, in a distance which language can never signify without a reminder.' Hyperlinks alone do not allow one to surmount this obstacle. If every word were its own index, referring to something else—another word, another meaning—it does not follow that the word index, even when it appears in an index, is already that index. (23)



## APPENDIX B.

*Some specific thoughts on oriented imaginations in Wallace Stevens*

While there are a variety of good definitions for the imagination, on the whole the term, in its most literary sense, has been overused; discussions of those definitions could easily represent a lifetime of work.<sup>1</sup> In contrast to the more popular definition of daydreaming, this project considers the imagination as a productive but private enterprise that follows its own subjective aesthetics, *sui generis*. That Kant exerts so much effort coordinating aesthetics with pleasure and taste is resultant of the imagination's personally attractive charges. Its centripetal forces draw down as a response to formal possibility, changing into those centrifugal forces when idea takes flight back out into the natural world. As Frank Lloyd Wright suggests in his autobiography, the imagination both "qualifies" a surface but also gives "natural pattern to structure itself."<sup>2</sup> By means of manipulating the tensile strength of steel within the plasticity of concrete, the imagination becomes a poetic intelligence capable of redirecting the traffic of form. Samuel Taylor Coleridge's definition of the primary imagination as "a repetition in the finite mind of the eternal act of creation in the infinite I AM"<sup>3</sup> describes the romantic notion of personal intelligences that are constantly creating in the arena of a divinely influenced landscape. Setting aside di-



vine inspiration for what Coleridge implicates as the finite mind's mimetic interest in a spiritually saturated world of objects suggests that the impetus of the imaginative faculties is oriented with the individual. The formal two-way traffic suggested by Wright and carried over to poetics becomes unique to the individual artist and communicates their aesthetic personality, what we could easily enroll in an explanation of style. The cooperation of the entire productive process of the imagination—its incipient response to the external world and its modulation of formal varieties—tells the tale of an artist's system of language.

For my purposes, the productive imagination that adapts to the grammars of being and the environments to which it is exposed has its most useful description in Wallace Stevens' analyses. The essays in *The Necessary Angel* define themselves against the Platonic figure of the poetic imagination, typically read as a low order of intelligence—Plato's charioteer driving two winged horses emblematic of the dueling forces of good and evil and the real and unreal—but Stevens does so with his usual modesty, seeing his contemporary divergence with Plato's understanding of the imagination as simply cognitively disparate, not in its fundamental realization as a mental condition. Citing Henry Packwood Adams in his work on Giambattista Vico "that the true history of the human race is a history of its progressive mental states," Stevens settles on the understanding that things have changed and those "changes have been psychological changes, and that our own diffidence is simply one more state of mind due to such a change" ("The Noble Rider and the Sound of



Words," 645). The thrust here—the succession of psychological change—is a macroscopic version of the mind's experiential condition of concatenating states. The mind's sylleptic bridge-work between discrete states, Stevens might be said to argue, depends on the power of the imagination.

Stevens' definition, where the "imagination is the only genius," belongs in line with the critical thoughts toward understanding that somewhat magical faculty, though it certainly seems particularly cousinly with Wordsworth and Coleridge's aesthetic imagination and the American Transcendentalists' counterpart as a translator for Nature's hieroglyphs ("Imagination as Value," 728). Stevens' insistence on two environments—internal and external—created in the poem and outside the poem is mirrored by a reader's real-time experience. The shifts between the provinces of the internal and the external describe the vividly joined ecosystems that respond to the curriculums of the natural objective world and the image-based system of the subjective interior. Stevens' ability to move among those environments with such fluidity seems largely in part due to his talent with generative linguistics that create rather expansive grammatical identities.

This transformational grammar, continually revising some allusive kernel structure, behaves like memory in its attempts at reduplicating the past. To call the attempt at reduplication *error* might be a bit strong, as *inaccuracy* might—that vocabulary insists on some absolute rendition of a past event, a form that is not subject to



perspectival observation. The opening two stanzas in Stevens' "The Snow Man" reflect this transformational play:

One must have a mind of winter  
 To regard the frost and the boughs  
 Of the pine-trees crusted with snow;  
  
 And have been cold a long time  
 To behold the junipers shagged with ice,  
 The spruces rough in the distant glitter (8)

Consider the two stanzas mirrors of each other, and you'll quickly observe the distortions in both the grammar as well as the image. "Regard" transforms into "behold"; "crusted" to "shagged"; "a mind of winter" involves "cold a long time" if only by an extension of the mind to include the body and a psychophysical enjambment. The intention of the subjunctive mood in "have been cold a long time," borrowing the condition of "must" from the opening line, transforms the usefulness of "must have a mind of winter," flavoring the entire poem with a dreamy yet requisite sense of an ongoing experiential past married to the open realm of possibility.

For Stevens, poetic exposure is a form of indoctrination into an imaginative environment. Our capacity to dwell within a poem's walls provides us with the experience of a new world—one that is processed by a fairly discrete and distinct mind, or possibly several communicating at once. Stevens describes that process of



indoctrination as naturalization to that particular poetic world that “liberates [the reader] there” where “when we speak of liberation, we mean an exodus” (“The Figure of the Youth as Virile Poet,” 673-674). Those leave-takings of both the poet and the reader intend a change in the nature of experience and an “establishing of a self” in a “state of elevation [where] we feel perfectly adapted to the idea that moves and *l’oiseau qui chante* [the bird who sings]” (674). Stevens says that the experience of a new self during poetic activity is “not a question of making saints out of poets or poets out of saints,” that is, “not a question of identifying or relating dissimilar figures” (674). Rather, the boundaries of formal identification should be considered nearly transparent, and the figure under the influence of the artistic pulse should feel free to maneuver among those states. That the state is elevated brings the discussion to God as a supreme poetic power and back to the notion of imaginative faculty as a species of a creator’s powers to assemble, identify and assert patterns. Stevens’ claim that the elevated state liberates one into ranges mixing divine and human activity follows dismissal of the feeling,

as a commonplace aesthetic satisfaction; and, on the other hand, if we say that the idea of God is merely a poetic idea, even if the supreme poetic idea, and that our notions of heaven and hell are merely poetry not so called, even if poetry that involves us vitally, the feeling of deliverance, of a release, of a perfection touched, of a vocation so that all men may know the truth and that the truth may set them free—if we



say these things and if we are able to see the poet who achieved God and placed Him in His seat in heaven in all His glory, the poet himself, still in the ecstasy of the poem that completely accomplished his purpose, would have seemed, whether young or old, whether in rags or ceremonial robe, a man who needed what he created, uttering the hymns of joy that followed his creation. (674)

While Stevens concludes with a comment that he may be exaggerating “a very simple matter,” his suggestion for organic movement between spheres of experience—movement among mental states<sup>4</sup>—as adaptation leads him to refuse identity as a way of accurately explaining reality. Stevens defines accuracy: “The accuracy of accurate letters is an accuracy with respect to the structure of reality” (“Three Academic Pieces,” 687). Resemblance, for Stevens, is perhaps one of the most accurate and “significant components of the structure of reality” because it “binds [relations] together” and “is the base of appearance” (686). Resemblance intends a domain and range in the relation of one thing to another; identity, however, “both in nature and in metaphor ... is the vanishing-point of resemblance” and intends something more than congruency, rather some imperceptible and fixed point (687).

Resemblances are compounded in the consideration of a thing. Like there are thirteen ways of looking at a blackbird (which, for Stevens, certainly indicates an undocumentable amount and not merely thirteen), a particular system abounds with varieties of experience, only some of which can be discussed from an appropriate



mental vantage. We may consider Stevens' statement from "Imagination as Value" as a key to reading his work: "The imagination is the power of the mind over the possibilities of things; but if this constitutes a certain single characteristic, it is the source not of a certain single value but of as many values as reside in the possibilities of things" (726).

However, all this resemblance, identity and accuracy are keyed into Stevens' use of the conditional *if*: "if we say these things" *then* we get a "man who needed what he created," suggesting that all this theory about elevated states can also be considered mundane and domestic. That *if* becomes the glowing center of the individual who is driven by their own private imagination, responding to the objects encountered in life and processing them to satisfy their own hidden poverties. If we consider all the vagaries of Stevens' vocabulary in these essays, or at least the difficulties that these philosophical terms provide, we can be led back to the source of language: the individual. The privacy of meaning creates this "structure of reality," a deeply personal matter. The bodies of the encountered world are reality's shrouds of representation.

In "The Snow Man," Stevens explores the unifying principle of the imagination over the possibilities of mind and mind's concatenating states. The image the title suggests—the playful balled-up statue or a real human in the snow—wants to control the stream-like movement of the poem itself. Since each line corresponds to a progressive mental state or mode or possible perspective, the Snow Man acts as a



host to display the mental material. The activity of the poem's content, too, references time and physical motion and establishes the wintry environment as an independent space of the world that shakes with wind and pine-trees.

Of the January sun; and not to think  
 Of any misery in the sound of the wind,  
 In the sound of a few leaves,  
 Which is the sound of the land  
 Full of the same wind  
 That is blowing in the same bare place  
 For the listener, who listens in the snow,  
 And, nothing himself, beholds  
 Nothing that is not there and the nothing that is.

Akin to a short filmstrip (say one the negative you could hold in your hands, up to the light), the poem becomes animated in bursts and stoppages and then rewound and replayed. "...the same wind/ That is blowing in the same bare place" and "the listener, who listens in the snow" cohere to "cold a long time" and the idea of passing time as a process and as frozen.<sup>5</sup> More specifically, it is "blowing," "listener," "listens," and "same" that cohere to the notion of place and time in "And have been cold a long time." *Same* is perhaps the most dynamic of the words because, while it coheres closely to the two lines "Which is the sound of the land/ Full of the same wind" in its section, it also directs a reader back to the information in previous lines



as well as lines to come. The “same bare place” helps describe the open landscape of the poem in addition to suggesting the quality of time—a kind of “bareness”—spent in such an environment and the three “nothings” at the poem’s conclusion that represent the figurative blankness of the Snow Man, the barrenness of the outdoors in a New England January, and universal negation as well as everything.

Time frozen and time as a process are suggested by the kinds of “watching” verbs Stevens uses in order to create an even more sophisticated realm of linguistic values. In order to have “a mind of winter,” one must “regard,” “behold,” “think,” and “listen” to a set of direct objects that cohere in the same manner as the watching verbs: the frost, the boughs, the pine-trees, the junipers, the spruces, the January sun, the sound (three occasions), the snow, and the nothing. Those variant objects, because of their specificity, cohere and rely on each other for information and help to satisfy the inquiry into the subjunctive mood.

The imagination is Stevens’ “liberty of the mind” and capable of completely adapting one to a new environment—be that place poetic, or otherwise. In that capability, we are enabled “to perceive the normal in the abnormal, the opposite of chaos in chaos” (“Imagination as Value,” 727; 737).

Moving forward from antiquity to a modern psychological state, Stevens’ vision of the creative intelligence deals largely with its structural organization. The adaptation of the imagination in new critical environments—that is, its exposure to a system where “the normal” is shaped from “the abnormal”—takes the banal defini-



tion of “imagination” as fantasy into a range of intelligence where emphasis lies on understanding, and more specifically, the process of understanding.

In her discussion of the mid-twentieth century debate between Claude Shannon’s theory of information (1948) and Ludwig Boltzmann’s equation for entropy (1872) whereby the two became interchangeable, N. Katherine Hayles points out that our contemporary version of chaos “is no longer simply the opposite of order. Rather, it is the precursor to order, an infinitely rich information source from which all potential order and form come.”<sup>6</sup> Since chaos holds the code for what we perceive as an arranged stability, deference to those complicated systems demonstrates the limitations of our comprehension:

If chaos is information too complex to comprehend, then perhaps the limiting factor for composing a workable number system, for example, is the human rather than the inherent rationality of numbers.<sup>7</sup>

In his discussion of complexity models and the Second Law of Thermodynamics, Judea Pearl substantiates, “The second law implies only that a thermodynamic system tends to ‘escape’ from any narrow region of phase space toward regions of larger volume. The illusion of an irreversible trend toward disorder originates with the fact that the volume occupied by states to which people can find concise descriptions (in any language) is extremely small compared with the entire space of possibilities.”<sup>8</sup> That we consider “disorder” when a system becomes incomprehensible to us is due to our limitations, and the limitations of our applied lan-



guage. What we consider to be chaotic is, rather, the system moving into a complexity beyond our perception's capacity and beyond those "theories in line with the particular language [we] happen to possess...."<sup>9</sup>

Stevens' "maker" in "The Idea of Order at Key West" brings up similar intentions to Hayles' recognition that a number system used to describe the world depends first on those who articulate it. The singing "she" is the "single artificer of the world" and the "maker of the song" that marries the sea to a specific "self," capturing it with a unique identity that while temporary speaks toward language's ability to corporealize the abstract (105). Stevens' sea easily feels like the chaotic network from which comes his idea of order, and the "ghostlier demarcations" and the "fragrant portals" from where those words emerge are also a version of us imagined against language, discrete yet impossibly parted (105). Stevens' image of us as makers making with words refers to "the man who needed what he created" and the infinite variety of *ifs* that entertain all the possibilities of individualism (674). For Stevens, and the assertion of this project, the imagination is the energy-system that animates those possibilities, tuned in to the creative potentials of *if's* condition.

#### *Linguistic bridgework in Stevens.*

In modern poetry, perhaps there is no poet more linguistically dexterous in world building than Wallace Stevens. The essays in *The Necessary Angel: Essays on Reality and the Imagination* (1951) chart a course that explore the industry of the poetic



mind. That industrial landscape of the poetic mind is filled with the mechanisms of the creative imagination, whose language is specifically unique to the creating poet and is responsible for the immersion into the productive anthropologies of a new world.

With its directional intentions, Wallace Stevens' "Valley Candle" (from *Harmonium* [1923]) maps a single physical environment as if it were two overlapping psychological moments parabolically curving in toward each other. Using the transforming image of the candle and conflating its "beams" with those of the "huge night," Stevens fashions a linguistic membrane between two disparate species of image.<sup>10</sup> In "Valley Candle," the noun "beams" performs a double role:

My candle burned alone in an immense valley.

Beams of the huge night converged upon it,

Until the wind blew.

Then beams of the huge night

Converged upon its image,

Until the wind blew. (41)

Like the "lightness" and "heaviness" of Edwards' *Images or Shadows*, Stevens' "image" of the "night" is in the process of spiritual transformation. The poem's psychological accounts are dependent on a single word's flexibility among several states: beams of a candle, beams of the "huge night," beams of an absent material structure that might possibly exist in this location. The "huge night" and "immense valley"



contrast with the slightness of the candle “alone” to create the sense of scope, and the poem marks its internal sequence with “until” and “then,” signaling the poem’s temporal activity. Does the candle still burn after the first wind or has it been snuffed, replaced by a ghostly afterglow, an imprint? The constant velocity of the wind—marked by its repetition—is mirrored in the movement of the night’s “beams”: “converged” has the sense of a descent and collocates with “blew” in its insistence on motion.

By animating the poem with markers of time, “until” and “then,” and by employing vertical and horizontal agents (the candle vs the valley), Stevens evokes a sense of geometric space and duration. That is, the transformations of the final three lines are only slight modifications of the first three, but our sense is that the entire image itself has progressed, that some modicum of time has passed and we are in a new place. The syntactical manipulations, internal to the structure of the poem, modify our understanding of the images and objects and how we imaginatively produce objects given linguistic suggestion. The candle, the night and its beams, and the valley and its wind acquire quiet psychological force. This multivalent perspective creates similarity and difference enough to believe these things have mass in the real world. While our understanding of “beams” belongs grammatically to “the huge night,” the poetic conflict between our regular collocation of “beams of light” with a candle compels our neurons to investigate and enjoy the dissonance. While the syllepsis operates like a metaphor, it’s a bit subtle in comparison—metaphor de-



pend on an asserted equivalency, but here the sylleptic play asks us to consult our list of words that normally collocate with the behavior of a candle. The energetic grammar of the syllepsis maps the image of the candle onto the image of the night and by allowing “converged” to hover so closely to the two, is also able to implement directional motion in order to render the physicality of the place as an addition to the intimate metaphysical spheres of being. That act of poetic penetration has the appearance of motion from the outward to the inward: the object of the poem operates on the subjectivity of its reader and behaves like one of Stevens’ definitions for poetry that “is an illumination of a surface, the movement of a self in the rock.”<sup>11</sup>

For Stevens, the mental faculty of the imagination animates the “self in the rock,” and this present study uses this description to look at three poets spread out across the seventeenth, eighteenth, and twentieth centuries in order to locate the “selves” in “the rocks.” Identifying the “beams” of Stevens’ “Valley Candle” serves as a model to illustrate the mobility of the imagination. In the poem’s conversion of material experience into ontological questioning and back again, instructed by a dexterous grammar, the candle, the night, its beams, and the spiritual wind direct the traffic of our at once stately and miserable forms.

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<sup>1</sup> *The Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics* has an excellent entry on the history of the imagination. Additionally, Eva Brann’s *The World of the Imagination* (1992) is outstandingly useful.

<sup>2</sup> Frank Lloyd Wright, *An Autobiography* (Petaluma, CA: Pomegranate, 2005), 347.



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<sup>3</sup> *The Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics*, eds. Stephen Cushman, Clare Cavanagh, Jahan Ramazani, Paul Rouzer (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2012), 671.

While the primary imagination has more to do with the self, Coleridge's "secondary imagination" is defined as it "dissolves, diffuses, dissipates, in order to re-create; or where this process is rendered impossible, yet still at all events it struggles to idealize and to unify" (670). Hume's notion of the "sympathetic imagination" is also particularly valuable as a kind of translator of sense experience that becomes a genuine experience in its interpretations.

<sup>4</sup> I use "among" here because I intend to consider mental states as being simultaneous, in this model. The simultaneity intends more diachronic time, too, just the possibility for experience at any given moment, therefore they are all equally valid and uniquely available.

<sup>5</sup> Here I use *cohere* in the sense of M.A.K Halliday's term.

<sup>6</sup> N. Katherine Hayles, "Information or Noise? Competing Economies in Barthes's *S/Z* and Shannon's Information Theory," in *One Culture: Essays in Literature and Science*, ed. George Levine and Alan Rauch (University of Wisconsin Press, 1987), 121.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.* 121.

<sup>8</sup> Judea Pearl, "On the connection between the complexity and credibility of inferred models," in *International Journal of General Systems* 4, no. 4 (January 3, 1978), 264.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.* 255.

<sup>10</sup> Wallace Stevens, *Collected Poetry and Prose* (New York: Library of America, 1997). Subsequent references to this text are in parentheses.

If there's a standard fare to be had for understanding the flexibility of the zeugma (properly known as syllepsis), it's in Canto II of Alex Pope's *Rape of the Lock* where the verb "stain" operates on "her Honour, or her new Brocade" and "lose" describes both "her Heart, or Necklace, at a Ball" in order to encourage the possibility of both material and spiritual worlds that Belinda's guardian sylphs are charged to protect [M. H. Abrams and Stephen Greenblatt, *The Norton Anthology of English Literature*, 7th ed., 2 vols. (New York: Norton, 2000)].

<sup>11</sup> Stevens, *Collected Poetry and Prose*, "The Necessary Angel," 639.



## APPENDIX C

*On Howe*

For Susan Howe, the recuperation of history happens biologically and through biography, and it is retold through personal narrative. Time and its syntax (sequence) depend more upon Bergson's sense of time as duration.<sup>1</sup> Prior states resolve themselves as present states, through psychological association and invention. Events become transposed as language in order to preserve their psychological data. Events' material existence, in Howe's poetry, replaces concrete materiality with its own physiological forms that have blended natural forms of the physical world with the constructions of the imagination. In correspondence with Howe, George Kearns writes that her poetry contains a sense of a lived existence, perpetuated by regressive and progressive documents (paraphrase).<sup>2</sup>

In *Pierce-Arrow* (1999), Howe's fascination with mathematician Charles Peirce takes root in his logic diagrams and "existential" graphs, mirroring perhaps her own interests in the possibilities of poems as pictures themselves. Describing her own work with Peirce's documents, ideas of erasure, palimpsest and reclamation arise easily. An errant pencil mark in an archival paper suddenly causes poetry to happen:



Duration flowing away  
 passes into emptiness  
 A pencil entry erased  
 to prevent recovery by  
 any infrared ultraviolet  
 low-level light image-  
 enhancing technique is  
 how not-now perceived  
 the past is perceived

While technological advances in the machines we use might show us an “erased” past, one underneath the veneer of the present, what passes away “into emptiness” is “Duration.” It’s hard not to see Bergson surface here, whose notion of time manifests in two types: *physical time*, which is time in nature and defined through physics; *duration*, which is existential time, an internal system having qualitative features.<sup>3</sup> What becomes truly erased then? Perhaps nothing; perhaps everything. The past may be glimpsed through the portal of the ultraviolet imaging, yet the erased pencil mark belongs to an objective order of being, removed from the subjective interference of the one who made the mark.

In Susan Howe’s *Souls of the Labadie Tract* (2007), the opening “Personal Narrative” establishes a landscape not dissimilar from Jonathan Edwards’ own *Personal*



*Narrative* (1765). While Edwards describes his spiritual awakenings through the navigation of biblical text, Howe's awakenings and meditations happen in the Yale Library and the "wilderness" of language organized by the Library of Congress. Here, in the "font-voices" of the "sleeping wilderness" she feels "the telepathic solicitation of innumerable phantoms," and her Thoreau-eau excursions into the linguistic forests "reanimated by appropriation" yield relics where "it might be possible to release our great great grandparents."<sup>4</sup> The closing elegiac remark for the Dewey Decimal system works as a cautionary alert: "True wildness is like true gold; it will bear the trial of Dewey Decimal." The intention here seems to be toward the organizational system—whatever "true gold" can be defined as requires a vocabulary of subclasses to describe its level of purity. And that system is ductile itself, constantly moving and shifting, absorbing and adapting itself to the phenomenon of nature that certainly includes human speech. In Will Montgomery's analysis of *Articulation of Sound Forms in Time*, the claim that the piece represents Howe's strongest historical announcement is facilitated by Montgomery's exploration of the poem's diachronic movements. That Howe's compressed, interrupted and fragmented syntax manages to flatten an expanse of time is a response to the "infinite miscalculation of history"<sup>5</sup> where "temporal being is built on quicksand, rather than solid ground."<sup>6</sup> Montgomery describes Howe's insistence on the elusiveness of historical insight as a contrast to both Charles Olson and Ezra Pound, who as poets of history, work in "overbearing and legislating voices": "Howe arrives at something like a negative



version of Pound's 'luminous detail,' effecting conjunctions across diverse historical periods but adopting a faltering style of enunciation that enacts the resistance of that historical material to revisiting by contemporary investigation."<sup>7</sup> (93).

History as an unknowable process, a duration that has persisted and dissolved, informs all of Howe's writing; the tension between presence and absence, ink and white-space, creates the sense of the recovery process, as if energy could be recaptured and redisplayed, the yoke pulled out. That duplication of energy—recovered from the capability and mobility of words and their linguistic meta-data—is chiefly subjective, and is better considered as redistribution than duplication. The act of duplication is duplicitous, and the promise of revelation is better described as a temptation. The allure of answering phenomenological questions once and for all seems on the line, and the pressure and demand on the reader to perform alongside the language hides Howe's authorial intent and replaces it with something that almost appears to be a stochastic poetics—a poetry of chaos—and determined randomly. Howe re-envisions what didactic poetry should look or sound like in its displacement of the author, and counter to Poundian and Olsonian poems-containing-history, reinvents their ethics as "polyphony that gravitates around manifestations of authority and a stuttering energy that suggests that the flow of retrieved words is forever on the point of running dry."<sup>8</sup>

History and the past are not the same thing, and Howe coordinates her opinions about the subject in history with Emerson's: "There is properly no history; only



biography.”<sup>9</sup> What one experiences is what one knows and the inheritance of the past is dictated by its signals. In Howe’s archives held at Mandeville Special Collections at the University of California San Diego, one can sift through various parts of the author’s life translated into word and document and attempt to locate her; but as she emphasizes, “My voice formed from my life belongs to no one else.”<sup>10</sup> Howe’s lecture notes for a discussion of Thoreau’s *A Week on the Concord and Merrimack* (undated, late-90s most likely) reveal some compelling views on history as attempts at retrieval, remembering, celebrating, and integrating. Two key moments in those notes (I’ve not been given permission to print them in this dissertation) describe Thoreau’s conception of history as genetic, and that America itself starts off with an act of un-remembering (dis-remembering, forgetting) and never returns.

This version of time and memory is physical, a summary of American leave-takings. What happens to the chain of being when the shoreline represents a demarcation from origin? Thoreau’s boat in *A Week* echoes the boats that crossed the Atlantic centuries prior, and while his is also a tool for discovery, it navigates the stygian past as a hope for recovery and retrieval. The boat itself is a hybrid, and the narrator calls it “a sort of amphibious animal, a creature of two elements, related by one half its structure to some swift and shapely fish, and by the other to some strong-winger and graceful bird.”<sup>11</sup> The image of the canal boat and the waters it traverses are spoken in the discrete language of myth which for Thoreau “is only the most ancient history and biography,” and containing “enduring and essential truth, the I and you,



the here and there, the now and then, being omitted.”<sup>12</sup> As signs, the images and tales of myth are flexible enough “to express a variety of truths ... as if they were the skeletons of still older and more universal truths.”<sup>13</sup> It is the tracking through these signs—and not necessarily the syntactic arrangement of time—that yields what Howe asserts in her lecture notes as Thoreau’s genetic conception of time:

In the mythus a superhuman intelligence uses the unconscious thoughts and dreams of men as its hieroglyphics to address men unborn. In the history of the human mind, these glowing and ruddy fables precede the noon-day thoughts of men, as Aurora the sun’s rays. The matutine intellect of the poet, keeping in advance of the glare of philosophy, always dwells in this auroral atmosphere.<sup>14</sup>

As if signs in the minds of men were tributaries leading outward, the sticky stuff of dreams and thoughts is a continual stream leading out to vaster oceans. If we consider the “matutine intellect” in Thoreau’s statement of poetics—an ability to dwell in the waves of information generated by the minds of the universe in constructive and deconstructive interference and transform that information into a common tongue—then it also could be Howe’s statement regarding her own work when she plays with the idea of an ever-expanding human vocabulary. In terms of Dickinson’s own sanguine and “auroral” poetry:

For the Robert browning of “Childe Roland,” and even more for Emily Dickinson, who was geographically separated from European custom,



the past, that sovereign source, must break poetic structure open for future absorption of words and definition. Velocity, mechanics, heat, thermodynamics, light, chaos of formulae, electromagnetic induction must be called back into the Sublime, found and forgotten.<sup>15</sup>

Here the consideration of the poet, the poet's subject, and the agency of the past is what operates on the present and the forthcoming, what, from a subjective point of view, is the Becoming; here the past coheres with the Sublime, as if the worldly moments are being constantly consumed by a great energy source, or pulled into it, like a black hole's gravity. The signs and signifiers we manifest to explain and explore phenomenon are always arbitrary, and the arrays of scientific language with its unspoken mathematical constituents, for all its power, have as much finite existence as anyone.

Regarding the kinds of transformations that accompany the life time of ideas and larger masses of collocating words, the section "Glimmerglass" compares four lines from Dickinson's poem 754, "My Life had stood—a Loaded Gun—," with the child's bedtime prayer and discusses their cohesion, distance, and the transformation of Dickinson's lines out of the prayer that reverse the roles of Lord and Subject where now the speaker safeguard's the God's dreaming head<sup>16</sup>: "After a good day's writing with her Master's inspiration, the poet, alone, in her clearing of Becoming, keeps on experimenting, deciphering. Melodious thought, product of her Mas-



ter's head— Beauty, was what she had been breaking and shaping when he sank with the sun into sleeping."<sup>17</sup>

The manipulations of source texts—erasures, essentially—are proving grounds for the poetic imagination, the places Wallace Stevens would seem to say are indoctrinations, invitations to environments of soundscape (we could group this under etymology, but it doesn't seem sufficient). Those aural causeways are passages to certain but tenuous thresholds, where "...Originality is the discovery of how to shed identity before the magic mirror of Antiquity's sovereign power."<sup>18</sup> While identity has something to do with personhood and gender in Howe's Dickinson book, it also refers to the ability to transform the reflected image and divert it away from the mirror-self that is a possible delusion. That "discovery" is something like Proclus' plane mirror of the imagination<sup>19</sup> that understands the impressions it receives in order to better know the architecture of the world through proprioceptive appreciation. If the Proclean plane mirror can be considered a microcosm, Howe's fabled magic mirror held up to Antiquity belongs to the more macrocosmic system of experience that Thoreau points out in his description of the "superhuman intelligence." If poetry is "choosing messages from the code of others in order to participate in the universal theme of Language," the poet must be "a mirror, a transcriber"<sup>20</sup>; Dickinson's uniqueness, and I would submit Howe's as well, absorbs "pieces of geometry, geology, alchemy, philosophy, politics, biography, biology, mythology, and philology from alien territory" in order to develop and invent "a new grammar."<sup>21</sup> For



Howe, “this world of the imagination” is gendered masculine or feminine; new grammar builds itself in “humility and hesitation” where there is freedom in pause, “Liberty in wavering” and a “mystic illumination of analogies” in the technology of the new language’s mirror-glass relation to the old.<sup>22</sup>

The “new grammar’s” mirror-like absorption and relay models itself after Proclus’ plane-mirror of imagination. Howe’s notion of the usable faculty of imagination determines the euphoria of language’s future tenses. Only able to look at the past with an equanimous feeling of longing touched by mourning, the “felt fact of poetry” (SOL) occurs as synthesis and multiplication.<sup>23</sup> “New grammar” sticks to modernist ideas such as W.C.W.’s “oysters or barnacles” that adhere to objects. Williams’ idea of the poetic imagination rejects the mirror outright because of its division from the passions:

Imagination is not to avoid reality, nor is it description nor an evocation of objects or situations, it is to say that poetry does not tamper with the world but moves it—It affirms reality most powerfully and therefore, since reality needs no personal support but exists free from human action, as proven by science in the indestructibility of matter and of force, it creates a new object, a play, a dance which is not a mirror up to nature.<sup>24</sup>

Here imagination intends the active over the passive state, innervating the new object and animating it to participate in nature.



The opiating effect of interruption in Howe and Dickinson, which we may consider part of that formal “hesitation” contributing to the new grammar, is rather a reversal, an energizing activity. Where Dickinson relies on dashes “to draw liberty of interruption inside the structure of each poem,” Howe’s white spaces and word-squares, the latter appearing as mathematic arrays, facilitate a variety of an interruption that renders itself through larger poetic bodies, much like tectonic plates rubbing against each other.<sup>25</sup>

If Howe’s “new grammar” is some combination of phonetic language with geometric design, the result is like an algebraic quantity mixed with a spatial extension. The former component of language, *quantity*, has implicit and explicit values, though those values are variable; the latter, *spatial extension*, has to do with the meaningless form of language, not how it represents some psychological relevancy but its architecture. Implicitly, I mean language in its contextual situations such as *the girl* and *it*, in sentences like, *The girl hit the ball. It went far*. Explicitly, the values of language have more to do with their structural function, like *subject*, or *pronoun*. Geometric design creates the spatial environments for words to occupy. So for example, the orientation of the lines in a word processor, *The girl hit the ball. It went far*. But more interesting is Howe’s artistic renderings of poems where the conjunction of these two elements (not content and form) creates myriad possibilities for interpretive entry.<sup>26</sup>



<sup>1</sup> Where Newtonian time is more malleable—reversible (t and -t, for example)—Bergson's version is limited to more psychological and physiological constructs. This is maybe more of an Eastern sense of time, which uses ideas of the body to map out time's limits (breath, for example).

<sup>2</sup> Letter Kearns to Howe in University of California San Diego's Mandeville Special Collections.

A lot of discussion here has to do with memory, certainly. Given some more time, I would include some pages here on Proust and the potency of the imagination as well as W.G. Sebald's hyper-narratives that follow internal maps suggested by material artifacts.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Ilya Prigogine.

<sup>4</sup> Susan Howe, *Souls of the Labadie Tract* (New York: New Directions Books, 2007). 12-19.

<sup>5</sup> Howe qtd Montgomery.

<sup>6</sup> Will Montgomery, *The poetry of Susan Howe : history, theology, authority* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 92.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid. 93.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid. 98.

<sup>9</sup> Emerson, *Essays & lectures*. "History."

<sup>10</sup> Susan Howe, *My Emily Dickinson*, New Directions paperback (New York: New Directions, 2007), 13.

<sup>11</sup> Henry David Thoreau, *A week on the Concord and Merrimack rivers* (Princeton University Press, 2004)

<sup>12</sup> Ibid. 60.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid. 61.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid. 61.

<sup>15</sup> Howe, *My Emily Dickinson*. 116.

<sup>16</sup>

And when at Night—Our good Day done—  
I guard My Master's Head—  
'Tis better than the Eider-Duck's  
Deep Pillow—to have shared—  
with  
When at night I go to sleep  
I ask the Lord my Soul to keep.  
If I should die before I wake  
I ask the Lord my soul to take.

<sup>17</sup> Howe, *My Emily Dickinson*.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid. 105.

<sup>19</sup> See Chapter on Edwards.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid. 17; 7.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid. 21.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid. 22.



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<sup>23</sup> See Lawrence Buell, *Literary transcendentalism: style and vision in the American Renaissance* (Cornell University Press: Ithaca, 1973) : “Whereas Coleridge sees the imagination as a synthesizer, Emerson sees it primarily as a multiplier of images” (156).

<sup>24</sup> William Carlos Williams, *Imaginations*, A New Directions book (New York: New Directions, 1970). 149-150.

<sup>25</sup> Howe, *My Emily Dickinson*. 23.

<sup>26</sup> In Mark Greaves, *The Philosophical Status of Diagrams* (Stanford, Calif.: CSLI, 2002). Greaves argues for a variety of representational systems:

*sentential*—similar to “written natural languages” (2); “internal structures”; “representations of this kind are typically composed of ordered collections of discrete symbols whose precise geometric properties (except those necessary to determine the symbol ordering) are unrelated to the modeled properties of the domain of reasoning” (2)

*diagrammatic*—“representations can be recognized by the extent to which geometric properties of the components of the representation are relevant to their interpretation...” Divisions tend on “target domains”: ex. Algebra (quantities), geometry (spatial extension), classical logic (properties all substances share [Aristotle])

“Objects like natural language sentences and predicate calculus formulae fall on the sentential side, and objects like Euler circles and ruler-and-compass geometric graphics fall on the diagrammatic side.”