TENSION AND TIME IN CHARLES OLSON'S POETRY

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ABSTRACT

The primary act of nature is the transfer of energy. One thing passes its energy on to other things. This is how life survives. Each thing is receiving energy from other things and transferring its own energy to still other things. Nature is like an unending transitive sentence. If nature is transitive then poetry also must be transitive. For the poet receives energy from certain objects and transfers that energy via the poem over to the reader. The poet must be a conductor of the energy. He must be like a nerve connecting the object to the reader, making sure that all the impulses he receives from the object will be picked up and transmitted to the reader. He wants to give the reader excitement equal to the excitement the object stimulated in him. He does not want to lose any of the original power and spirit of the object in transferring it to the reader.

To keep the object alive the poet must enact the object. He must allow the object to transfer its energy, its identity, over to the reader. The poet helps this process by trying to coincide with the object and experience the object from the inside-out. He tries to apprehend the very growth-urge and motivating principle of the object, what causes it to act the way it does. He intuits the shape of
the object, what it looks like. He even tries to grasp the object's "intentions" (its tendencies) and desires. Once he has identified with the object then his imagination goes to work. He lets the object act out its desires. He lets it fantasize. He enters a dream with the object where the object is allowed to become whatever it "wants" to become. It grows out of itself. It transforms into various images that seem to be the direct descendants of itself. The imagination allows the object to continually dissolve and re-create itself and thus play out its inherent fate. Through imagination the object performs itself and acts itself out for the reader. And the poet must write at the speed of imagination if he is to conduct all the split-second images that issue from the object.

To identify with the object the poet must first get into tension with the object. Every object, whether it be concrete or emotional, has tension. The tension of an object is its force of form. The way its parts are pulled into one another and cohere. Tension, in other words, is tropism. It is the way the object behaves and grows. The poet must identify with the object's tension. He must find the same tension in himself. He must feel the pull and strain of the object in himself. His whole body must be tense with the object. His heart must imitate the rhythm of the object and his throat imitate the squeeze of the object in order to
squeeze it into words. If the poet writes a poem about a
tree, he does not contemplate what words go with "treeness";
rather he begins imitating the tension of the tree. And
imitating the tension of the tree creates a vortex into
which the words are naturally pulled. The words that erupt
will send forth not especially the look of the tree but the
emotional pull of the tree, its tension. The words will be
tense with the nerve of the tree itself. This is the act
of metaphor, the words leaping immediately from the object
to the reader.

   The poet, then, does not try to embalm the object, but
to "enact" it. He does not try to paralyze the object, to
photograph it (as a still picture) but to let the object
evolve as if it were a movie picture. He wants to dramatize
the object, to make it act out its fate. The poet does not
want to analyze the object into its separate parts, but feel
the cohesion of those parts, their tropism, and follow the
tendencies of that tropism into speech and imagery. The
poet does not seek to abstract any transcendental "essences"
from the object, but rather release the object itself into
action, thus liberating any "essences" it may partake.
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Olson's viewpoint is ecological: the interdependence of man as a poet and as a "creature of nature" with his environment. Ecology teaches man to be humble for he owes his physical survival to the vegetation and the animals that feed him. Ecology teaches that every bird, bug, or fungus in a certain system has significance in the energy balance of that system. The random killing of one specie of plant or animal could upset the energy balance of the entire system. Man is part and parcel of a large system of food transferences in which, for example, carbon and nitrogen feeds algae, algae feed goldfish, goldfish feeds salmon, salmon feeds man, and man feeds carbon and nitrogen back to algae. Thus ecology sees man as energy transferred from the smallest food particles all the way over to man. This sounds like Olson's definition of a poem as "energy transferred from where the poet got it (he will have some several causations), by way of the poem itself to, all the way over to the reader." Man is ecologically just if he treats the environment the way it treats him by replenishing its nourishment with his own nourishment. The poet is just if he offers the reader excitement equal to the excitement the environment stimulated in him. This
is Olson's energy-construct, energy-discharge theory—not to lose any thrill from the perceiving of the thing to the writing of it to the listening of it by the reader. "The feedback is the law."
The essential act of nature is the transfer of energy. One thing passes and diffuses its energy on to other things. As in ecology, the sun passes its energy to the plants which in turn pass energy to animals who pass their energy back into the ground, the air, or to other animals, and so on. Nature is an immense feeding and discharging of energy, an immense transfer of energy. This is how life survives. Everything is transferring and receiving energy and since everything needs energy everything is changing. "Motion leaks everywhere, like electricity from an exposed wire." In the transfer of energy one thing promotes another into action. Nature is like an unending transitive sentence continually distributing energy. Even seemingly intransitive objects distribute energy. Rock burns heat and reflects light. Man is really a verb who is "a bundle of functions." Since everything is transferring energy and is in a process of change, the form of anything is merely an extension of its energy at any particular moment. "A thing can be measured in its mass only by arbitrarily assuming a stopping of its motion." 

If nature is continually in motion then poetry, which is the elbow of nature, must also be in motion. If nature is a kinetic, then poetry must also be a kinetic. It must transfer energy as well. It must perform the process of change. As Olson says, "There is only one thing you can do about kinetic, re-enact it." Poetry does not seek to paralyse
life in its act, to photograph it, but to move along with it at its rate, its various rates. It does not seek to stop the flow of life at a certain point and measure it but to identify itself with the life flow. It does not seek to abstract the transcendental "essences" from things, but to release the things themselves into action, thus liberating any "essences" they may partake. As Olson says, "Art does not seek to describe but to enact."  

A particular ecological problem is the chance that some of the food energy will be lost in its transference from source to receiver. For as the food passes from sun to plant to man, some of the original energy is already lost by the time it reaches man. The problem is the same in poetry. The poet must transfer energy from where he gets it (the source) by way of the poem over to the reader. By the time it gets to the reader some of the original power and spirit of the source may be lost. It is as if the reader is eating sunshine third-hand. Olson states the problem thus:

what is the process by which a poet gets in, at all points energy at least the equivalent of the energy which propelled him in the first place, yet an energy which is peculiar to verse alone and which will be obviously, also different from the energy which the reader, because he is a third term, will take away? 

To prevent any possible loss of energy to the reader the poet must be inspired when he writes. If he is writing about a tree as soon as he absorbs the full terror and mystery
of that tree he should turn around and immediately terrorize the reader with the tree that is still raging in him. He should act it right out for the reader. For it means he has tapped the tree's secret principle, its earnestness, and he can share it with the reader. The reader will be thoroughly scared by the zeal that reflects from the poet. Just as when one receives a beautiful letter from a friend one should answer it immediately to carry the momentum of love or idea from the friend's letter into his own. No time should be lost from the surprise of the first letter. The poet should be a live wire immediately connecting the source to the listener. He makes sure the fullest voltage possible goes through the wire so that none of the meaning or enthusiasm of the thing gets lost: the poem "must, at all points, be a high energy-construct and, at all points, a high energy-discharge."^8

The concern is over the loss of power in the transition from source to reader. There may be too many middlemen. For the source must pass first through the poet then to the poem before it gets to the reader. What if either the personality of the poet or the lethargic words of the poem drain some of the original excitement away from the source. To be sure, the poet must not impose his ego or intellect upon the source. The source must be a ventriloquist to him: the dog must make him bark, the rose make him blush. He must be a verb to the
source. Like a medium, a psychic medium he allows himself to be possessed by the source. He is a ouija board to the world which meets him at "skin's edge" and he becomes sensitive to the subtlest of disturbances and accidents.

If there were only one skin in the world connecting everything, and if it were pervious, then nothing would be lost, not the energy or meaning of the thing. Everything would flow into everything else and know itself like a single mind. Mouse would hardly know his difference from the plant that feeds him. The reader would take away everything the poem fed him. Like a universal lung between all things there would be a complete exchange of gasses and absorption of fresh material. Anything inhaled, say kingfisher's feathers or Aztec gold, would be immediately absorbed, understood, and relevant. Idea and feeling, idea and rhythm would be the same and the speed and ardor of the original experience would be immediately transmitted.

Nature is a great heart that continually pumps through life and gives man energy. It is the inner kinetic that charges and re-fuels the powers that arouse him into being each second. The poet is a dynamo converting nature's energy into his own energies. He is a vector, a vehicle of immediacy, for he "feels what is there (in nature) and transforms it (directly) into what is here (in the poem)." He must act instantaneously to maintain the heat of nature. Nature enters
him so rapidly that each of his organs must immediately
pick her up and transform her; he writes at the quickness of
his ear, eye and heart. Heart to nature, he is the pulse of
nature, hooked into the rhythms of all things. Ear to nature
he shares its secrets. He vibrates to the touch of nature
and calls out all its names. As Williams says, "(Man) is
nature—in action."\(^{10}\)

Man is inherently plugged into nature. As Coleridge
says, man "shares the same ground with nature. . . . For all
we see, feel, and touch the substance is and must be in our­selves."\(^{11}\) Whatever man perceives he can imitate. His con­siciousness is both "the focus and mirror of nature";\(^{12}\) it
understands "the germinal causes in nature." Not only can man
imitate nature but he can imitate it intelligently. There is
no act or law in nature that cannot be recreated or re-germin­ated in the consciousness. Through his consciousness man can
thus find in himself all "the living and life-producing ideas"
of nature.
Bergson says there is a stream of life that flows through all men as well as all other living things. Bergson calls it "the flow of the inner life." It is in continual flow in all people and its currents move so fast and so subtly merge into each other that it is difficult to fix upon any one of them separately. It is like a vast circulatory system in nature. It is in continual movement and passes between all living things, and allows different things (beings) to immediately penetrate and sympathize with each other. The stream of life is the stream of sympathy. Bergson also refers to this inner stream as the \textit{elan vital} since it is the impulse of life itself, the instinctive surge of life. It is so fundamental that to feel it is to feel the growth urge in all life. One cannot fully sense it with his ears and eyes. One feels only its quickness, the continual surge, the charge and re-charge of it. One feels the urge and tug of it in all living things.

So fast does this stream flow, so rapid is the rate of sympathy, that most people are frightened of it. The flow of the world's sympathy is too poignant for them. They try to find a stable framework outside the flux to hold on to, unendangered by the quickness of life (but at the sacrifice of love and adventure). They seek permanency. They offer themselves the illusion of a bank they can rest upon, a fixed state they can grip to. They draw squares over the flux in themselves and pretend they are those squares. They grip to
the illusion of one name (instead of all names), one personality (instead of the heart of nature herself), one mode of expression (instead of talking in the tongues of the stream).

To become sensitive to the stream the poet must either utterly relax or clench himself into sympathetic pain and desire with all life. At that moment, there is an emotional pull tugging at his heart. The river of sympathy starts to take route through him. He feels he is at the source of sympathy. At that moment all living things (lemons, trees, horses, human beings) seem to take residence in his heart. All living things seem to share the same cause, spring from the same desire, and grow from the same urge. At that moment, he can understand the motivating principle of anything and thereby choose to "be" anything he wants to be. He can imitate the urge of anything. For at that moment, he is a major conduit in that vast circulatory system that pumps through everything.

This is the state of intuition. During intuition the poet allows himself to flow within the stream and there interpenetrates with its currents. He enters the emotional pull of all things, the growth urge. He can get into the tug of anything, person, animal or plant, and implicitly apprehend its motivating principle. He can feel each thing's own desire and the way it expresses its desire into form (e.g., the way a flower desires to blossom forth into color
and petals). Because the stream interflows he can find the same desire, the same principle in himself. He is in emotional union with the thing and can imitate the thrust, the urge of that emotion.

The poet in intuition must first feel the thing's "growth from within." He must look at each thing as if it had an urge to be. He must try to see this urge (even in a phone, or a bowl, or a piece of fruit), the urge to be what it is—or maybe the urge of each thing to be more than what it is, to be a person, for example. He must sense its struggle to be a person (even his sports coat, or his typewriter). The feeling of intuition is so basic and intense that it reduces man to feeling like a seed again. He feels all knotted up, intricate, like a seed; and he feels his own growth urge. Once he feels his own growth urge he can feel anything's growth urge.

To intuit a lemon, for example, he puts his whole concentration into lemonness. He tries to identify with the growth urge of the lemon. He strains to feel what motivates the lemon to be lemon and not orange or grapefruit. He imagines himself twisted into a lemon seed. Then, feeling coincident with lemon power, he yearns to erupt into globular fruit, and shiver with sunshine power. Many of the lemon feelings he can easily identify with because they are basic to many living things: the feeling of growing, the feeling of core and seed, the feeling of fruit inside and rind out-
side, the feeling of body blooming out of mind (seed), fruit from flower.

Intuition is thus power of sympathy. The poet experiences the object from the inside-out. For in that state of inner tension his consciousness permeates other consciousness' (Bergson calls this "psychological endosmosis.") Through intuition the poet feels contemporary with all humanity and coincident with all living things. Thus Bergson calls intuition "immediate consciousness, a vision which is scarcely distinguishable from the object seen, a knowledge which is contact and even coincidence." Through intuition the poet feels implicit to the object. He participates with the object and moves with its tendencies. He experiences the object as a single impulse, rather than as a bunch of separate events or mere sum of its parts. He feels what the object feels. Its raison d'être and character are directly revealed and relevant to him. It is as though the object's whole lifetime is catalyzed into one moment, and the poet sees, in a "flash," what the object has "gone through" and what it "aspires to be." It is as though he stands "in its shoes."

Bergson gives an example of intuiting a character in a novel:

. . . take a character whose adventures make up the subject of a novel. The novelist may multiply traits of a character, make his hero speak and act as much as he likes: all this has not the same value as the simple and indivisible
feeling I should experience if I were to coincide for a single moment with the personage himself. The actions, gestures and words would then appear to flow naturally, as though from their source. They would no longer be accidents making up the idea I had of the character, constantly enriching this idea without ever succeeding in completing it. The character would be given to me all at once in its entirety, and the thousand and one incidents which make it manifest, instead of adding to the idea and enriching it, would, on the contrary, seem to me to fall away from it without in any way exhausting or impoverishing its essence. I get a different point of view regarding the person with every added detail I am given. All the traits which describe it to me, yet which can only enable me to know it by comparisons with persons or things I already know, are signs by which it is more or less symbolically expressed. Symbols and points of view then place me outside it; they give me only what it has in common with others and what does not belong properly to it. But what is properly itself, what constitutes its essence, cannot be perceived from without, being internal by definition, nor be expressed by symbols being incommensurable with everything else. Description, history and analysis in this case leave me in the relative. Only by coinciding with the person itself would I possess the absolute.

To achieve intuition the poet must make an effort to grip into the force of life. For the first feeling of intuition is like a birth contraction. As though he and the object are being born into the world together. It is a matter of getting back to "germinal causes." It is a matter of getting to the heart of the thing like getting to a tense acorn and then writing out that heart letting it blossom forth into an oak. The poet must write quickly for he is writing from a birth impulsion. The writing must happen in a single push. Any stray diversions or intermissions from
the writing and the spring of the thing gets lost along with the implicit organization and emotional charge it engendered. T.E. Hulme, in quoting Bergson, talks about intuition in respect to writing:

"Anyone who has attempted any literary composition knows that when the subject has been thoroughly studied and all the notes collected, it is necessary, before one begins to work on the composition itself, to make sometimes a difficult effort to place oneself as it were at the heart of the subject." In this state of tension one receives an impulsion, a sense of direction, which, when it develops itself as it goes along, picks up and makes use of all the notes that have been made before. The point to notice here is that at the beginning of this act, at this moment of tension, all the separate elements which before and after were separated out, were gathered up together in this act of intuition. 18

The intuition is thus like a muscle that tightens the world into itself and then lets it go.

The intellect differs from the intuition because it observes nature from the outside instead of entering into it. It does not try to coincide with the object or move with its current. Its method is to explain the object--to lay it out flat on a plane 19--and study its various elements. It then tries to see the causal relationship of each element to each other element, how the mechanism of the thing works. Thus instead of apprehending the growth of a flower as a single undivided impulse (as intuition would) it divides the flower into its separate components to see how each part helps make the flower grow.
The intellect is not holistic. It does not try to capture the whole and organic feeling of an object, how its parts fuse together into a single melody. It does not try to apprehend the uniqueness of an object, the "thing-itself." Rather it compares the object to other objects, how the structure of one differs from the structure of another. Thus, to the intellect, a grapefruit is a pumpkin except with a different atomic structure.

The intellect cannot deal with objects whose parts are inseparable. Such objects Hulme calls "intensive manifolds"—their parts subtly interpenetrate to make a continuous whole. For example, a facial expression cannot be fully explained (laid out flat into separate parts) for the parts of the face blend together to form that unique expression. Also, an emotion cannot be completely analysed for it "is composed of a thousand different elements which dissolve into and permeate each other without any precise outline." The same indivisibility occurs in a painting or in a whole civilization. Such things are best apprehended by an inward (intuitive) sympathy which tries to capture the "mind" of the thing.

There are, then, two methods of apprehending reality: the intuition and the intellect. The intuition coincides with the object and gets a whole simultaneous sense of it, the intellect observes the object as a mechanism of separate
working parts. The intuition tries to apprehend the unique quality of the object, the intellect sees the object as a repositioning of the same old atoms. As Bergson says, intuition is "the sympathy by which one is transported into the interior of an object in order to coincide with what there is unique and consequently inexpressible in it. Analysis, on the contrary, is the operation which reduces the object to elements already known, that is, common to that object and to others. Analyzing then consists in expressing a thing in terms of what it is not."\textsuperscript{22} The poet takes the way of the intuition.

When the poet intuits an object he begins a stream of feeling with that object. He and the object participate in a kind of creative growth. They feel each other, affect each other, and grow from these affections. They begin a history, an evolution together. In other words, that stream of sympathy is an actual stream of thoughts, perceptions and currents between the two which like any stream is continually evolving. This evolving stream of feeling is what Bergson calls "psychological time" or "real time."

Bergson explains the concept of time thus:

\ldots time is what hinders everything from being given at once. It retards, or rather it is retardation. It must therefore, be elaboration. Would it not then be a vehicle of creation and of choice? Would not the existence of time prove that there is indetermination in things? Would not time be that indetermination itself?\textsuperscript{23}
By "retardation" Bergson does not mean "slowness" but rather that life has not been given all at once. Life is not complete. It has not been summed up and finalized in a Creator or single Theory. Creation (time) is thus still happening. It is in the process of working itself out ("elaborate": ex + labor—it works itself out). Time is growth. Time is creative evolution. "Time is efficacious." It produces new and novel things.

In the case of inorganic matter or mechanisms time does not create anything new. For mechanisms operate by fixed principles, and inorganic matter is definite and cannot be elaborated on. For example, when an aspirin is dropped into water the time it takes to dissolve may be lengthened or shortened without changing the basic nature of the aspirin. For an aspirin is composed of discrete particles that will remain constant no matter how quickly or slowly dissolved. Time does not affect the aspirin. It does not produce anything new in it. Likewise, a machine can move at a very rapid or slow speed without changing the fundamental nature of the machine.

But in the case of consciousness or living matter time is effective:

... to the artist who creates a picture, time is no longer an interval that can be lengthened or shortened. To contract it would be to modify the invention itself. The time taken up by the invention is one with the invention itself. It is the actual living progress of the thought, a
kind of vital process like ripening ... real time is an absolute thing which cannot be contracted or hastened because in it real work is being done, really new things are appearing. ... Time then is creation. In real time you get real creation and so real freedom. 25

"Real time" then is time as growth, the growth of consciousness. Real time does not measure reality, it creates reality.

Real time ... is flux, the continuity of transition, it is change itself that is real ... reality is a line in the drawing ... time is mobility ... time is what is happening, and it is what causes everything to happen ... its essence being to flow ... an unceasing creation ... A becoming never the same, never repeating itself, but always producing novelty, continually ripening and creating ...
Consciousness experiences "real time" in itself. The mind is continually ripening. It is like a creative melody\textsuperscript{26} that is maturing. It matures through synthesis. It is always sensing and perceiving anew the world (or object), and re-composing itself in the light of this new experience. It is always combining the new with the old, the present moment with the past consciousness and the mind grows out of this convergence.

At each moment the whole of consciousness is gathered up and re-synthesized by the present. It is as though consciousness is "perpetually perishing"\textsuperscript{27} and re-distributing its material into the future. New thought, new unities are always being born. If man allows the present to continually quicken and re-synthesize his whole consciousness then he moves contemporary with the force of life itself and blooms with its multeity. His consciousness then becomes an "uninterrupted prolongation of the past into the present"\textsuperscript{28} whose "power (is already) flowing to meet the next occurrence."

Consciousness is thus always alert to the present and is carried right into the present as active potential to be shaped by that present. It is always made new by the present. No thought ever repeats itself. ("No one crosses the same river twice.")\textsuperscript{29} The whole of past thought is constantly being modified by the present. Consciousness is an evolution that is "ceaselessly becoming."
The flow of the mind is continuous and indivisible. It is an "uninterrupted prolongation." To try to divide it into separate states would be like trying to separate the currents of a running stream. The phases of consciousness "melt into one another with not the least tendency to be separated. . . ." Perception itself is an indivisible act ("Vision is to the eye what movement is to a path.") Each perception becomes implicitly entangled in the next perception. "Anterior perceptions remain bound up with present perceptions and the immediate future itself becomes outlined in the present."^31

Because each perception carries part of the last perception along with it there is a kind of "objective immortality"^32 in consciousness. No thought or perception ever gets lost but is transformed and carried into future perceptions. "Objective immortality" is the appropriation of the past by the living present "whereby what is divested of its own living immediacy becomes a living component in other living immediacies of becoming."^33 Consciousness enacts a continual eucharist, a transubstantiation of one body (perception) into other bodies.

This transubstantiation of the past into the future is the method by which the object (the source) is transported over to the reader without loss of excitement. For the object is allowed to transform into other objects in the poem. These
other objects may differ somewhat from the initial object but as its direct descendants they all hint at the same source. For instance, the car in "As the Dead Prey Upon Us" transforms into a movie projector, a victrola, a plastic playpen, and a rocking chair. Though these may seem different from the car, they are all objects that isolate the body or anesthetize the senses as the car does. "Objective immortality" therefore recognizes that an object in a poem is mortal, and that as it dies it gives birth to a succession of related objects which immortalize it (and thereby carry the source over to the reader).

In other words, the poet does not embalm the object in the poem but allows it to evolve. The poet is a "time mechanic." He "brings (the object) across time." He allows the object to transform into other objects and thereby keep its excitement flowing. The poem acts like a nervous system where every comma, word or metaphor is a synapse that receives the object and re-charges it into new power and play. Each moment of the poem re-synthesizes and quickens the object to keep it fresh, to keep its power flowing and blooming into the present moment. At each moment "power flows to meet the next occurrence." This is the act of metaphor, how the object "gets across" to the reader. The poet does not try to enshrine the object to commemorate it; he lets the object enter the dynamic nervous system or food-chain of the poem and be transubstantiated. The eucharist is an act of worship.
The poem has "objective immortality" not only in the degeneration of a metaphor or metamorphosis of an image, but also in the prolongation of its rhythm, and the accidental outgrowths (inflections) of word-sounds. These also help perpetuate the momentum and spirit of the source over to the reader. All these methods will be demonstrated.
CHAPTER 2

IMAGINATION

The object of poetry as Jack Spicer says is "to make things visible rather than to make pictures of them . . . the lemon (in the poem) to be a lemon that the reader could cut or squeeze or taste."\(^{36}\) If the lemon itself is released by the poem it will declare its own forms, its own rhythms. It will stand for itself and in this way the reader may share the "secrets that objects share."\(^{37}\)

To make the lemon visible in the poem is difficult though. One cannot merely copy it bound for bound, surface for surface. For this would be like presenting the "mass" of the thing like a statue or a still picture and completely neglecting its life and motion. Rather, the poet seeks to "enact" the lemon so that it performs a drama of lemon being and becoming. He lets the lemon fantasize, carry out its desires and associations as freely as it wants. If it wants to return to seed, good, it may return to seed. If it wants to bite itself and taste its acid, it may do so. If it wants to take off its rind and bask in the glory of naked fruit, it may have the pleasure. In fact, William Carlos Williams says "the poem is a dream, a daydream of wish fulfillment."\(^{38}\)
The poet may be or act anyway he wants in it, as in a psycho-
drama. He may be a lemon or a woman, or even a lemon
pretending it's a woman. The important thing is allowing
the lemon to fantasize and "enact" its desires.

In other words, once the poet has intuited the lemon
and has sympathetically entered its "mind," then his imagi-
ation goes to work. He lets the lemon act out its desires.
He lets it fantasize. He lets it have nightmares where it is
being chased by a grapefruit or falls in love with an orange.
He lets it do whatever it wants; make and unmake itself. For
once the poet is initially in sympathy with the lemon he
cannot help but do lemon-type things.

The act of the imagination is like the act of metabolism.
Metabolism is the process of the body by which nutritive
material is built up into living matter and protoplasm is
broken down into simpler substances to perform special functions.
The two together constitute change. Metabolism means change.
Change is a continual breaking down and building up. The
same process occurs everywhere in nature: a continual decaying
or breaking down, a resynthesizing and building up.

Metabolism is like the act of the imagination. The
imagination "dissolves, diffuses, dissipates in order to
recreate . . . it is essentially \textit{vital}, even as all objects
(as objects) are essentially fixed and dead."\textsuperscript{39} The action
of the imagination is to make the object or the situation fluid. It sets it in motion. It melts down the object for the purpose of re-performing it. Its enzymes break the object down into its basic dramatic components and let them act themselves out. It breaks images down into sub-images as in a dream and builds them anew. It allows the images to fantasize. Just as the rubber and thread of the tires in "As the Dead Prey Upon Us" can fantasize they are the dead souls clinging together in the living room. The imagination breaks words and phrases down into their vital constituents, their vital protoplasm and shapes them anew. The imagination is essentially metabolic: it transforms the carbohydrates of the world into caloric energy. It runs the world off. Like a runner it breathes the world afresh and expels the old continually (as Williams says, "To raise the beat of the brain to bring it oxygen."\(^{40}\)) This is the transcendental experience of the poem. A "dissolving" for the purpose of "recreating." The poet takes apart the world, melts it down, and then recreates it. "The characteristic of being melted is for the object to have lost the form it was in. It can be played with, made into a new form as we desire."\(^{41}\)

The imagination is thus like the act of dreaming where the mind breaks down the images of the day into their basic dramatic constituents and forges them anew into new play. Williams thus compares the awakening of the imagination to the act of falling asleep:
At first all the images, one or many which fill the mind, are fixed. . . . We look at the ceiling and review the fixities of the day, the month, the year, the lifetime. Then it begins; that happy time when the image becomes broken or begins to break up, becomes a little fluid—or is affected, floats brokenly in the fluid. The rigidities yield—like ice in March, the magic month. They coalesce and, finally, merciful sleep intervenes. . . . (When) possessed by the imagination, we are really asleep tho' we may awake. 42

The imagination is a breaking-up and re-creating, breaking-up and re-creating process. It converts any static object into a melody or fantasy to be played out.

In "Variations Done for Gerald van de Wiele," for example, the imagination takes the dogwood tree, the apple tree, the birds and bees, the morning and night, breaks them down into their basic dramatic energies, their basic lusts and allows them to act themselves out. Each thing ravishes and whips the next thing in its fury. The imagination is the driving passion of metamorphosis. It breaks each object down and transforms it into the next object. The imagination moves by its own desire at the speed of its desire. The doves in their great desire transform into the bees, the bees into the birds, the birds into the flowers—all kinds of flowers, "yellow flowers, white flowers." The imagination dissolves the morning, which stood "up straight," into the flow of the afternoon which in turn becomes crazy with delight and transforms into night breaking into the song of the whippoorwill and the intense blue of the full moon. Each
thing pregnant with desire engenders other things. The imagination in its great yearning for change and fulfillment rushes forth and ravishes and whips each thing onward: it forces the thing to change. "The body whips the soul" to make it catch up. And everything is "drummed" to "get busy" and "get across" to the next thing. The imagination is the act of love which forces each thing to "move," to "break out," to "show forth." It "demands the elixir," it is the elixir, the drug by which one thing can transmute into other things and thus indefinitely prolong its life.

The act of imagination is what Coleridge calls capturing the *natura naturans*: nature as a present participle, nature naturing. The poet becomes an active valve in the flow of, the growth of the lemon. He does not merely "copy" the lemon (line for line) or treat it as a finished product (*natura naturata*: nature as a past participle). He does not anthropomorphize, impose himself upon the lemon. Rather he wants to lemonmorphize; to enter the lemon kinetic. He yields to the metabolic process of nature, the constant building up and breaking down of energy, which is the process of imagination as well. Coleridge says "the artist must imitate that which is within, that which is active through form and figure . . . as we unconsciously imitate those whom we love." The poet is lead along by his love for the lemon, and as he is lead he falls in love with the lemon, imitating it, mimicking its moves, as the two are falling.
CHAPTER 3

THE KNOT

The poem must be given an initial thrust to set it in motion. It must be sprung. That is, there must be an initial tension or twist that twists the persona of the poem into a knot and then springs him loose. It is like what was said of intuition—a muscle wound up and then let go. The poet as rope made of every fiber of the world twists himself torturously into one tight knot—and in so doing knots himself into the world knot. He knots himself into all men and women, angels and demons, heaven and hell. In the act of constriction he gathers them all up into himself. He is like a tourniquet with the blood of the world held in his one heart. His voice becomes a gnarl of their voices, a "snarl of the sources." When he unwinds he becomes an orchestra to all the sympathies and players that inhere in that knot.
The poem must begin with this knot and the poem is not over till this knot has completely unwound. This knot is what causes the necessary tension or fever which drives everything else (sound, syllable, rhythm, image). It is as though the knot creates a vortex that pulls into it the metaphors and sounds peculiar to its twist and then whirls them out toward the reader. For example, the poet must first knot himself into the lives of the dead in "As the Dead Prey Upon Us." He must feel the strain of the dead, of those constricted and imprisoned in mortal weariness. He must be that constriction himself. He must feel netted, tense, frustrated, weighted down. In this intense state he may become through sympathy everything else in the world that is likewise constrained, frustrated, netted. So that the poet does not have to search for the metaphors to be used in the poem, they naturally arise in him—the car that traps, the nets and ladders that ensnare, the equipments that weigh down the soul—are in emotional and metaphoric union with the poet's tension. All the poet needs do is act out this tension; that is, act out a psychodrama of all these constricted parts in himself who make up the "characters" in the poem. He allows each "character," each metaphor to play out any gesture of its desire—to talk Negro talk, to walk the jackass, to gab like an old woman, to listen to the victrola—so that they may work out that tension and finally be released from the nets of being. But
the poet must first achieve that emotional tension in himself that pushes the poem and pulls the metaphors, images, words, and rhythm into it. If the various elements in the poem abide by this tension then the poem will have a unity of behavior. And the reader will move through the poem drawn into the same vortex at the same speed of that vortex and thereby undergo the same emotional tension that the poet underwent.

The poet must again get into a certain tension to write "Variations Done for Gerald van de Wiele." It is a particular fever of desire that has created the poem, the desire that thinks of itself as a diesel, grinding and plowing the ground. The important thing to note is that this fever, this pitch of excitement, has been consummated in the poet before the poem has begun and it is only a matter of allowing this pent-up charge to unwind and rush into the poem. The poet is so knotted up with the charge he becomes impersonal, he becomes anything in the world that shares that same fever: birds bursting into a multitude, whippoorwills drumming the night, bees ravishing flowers, a moon blue from desire. The words of the poem are caught in the force of the desire, and cling to its peculiar craziness: the body "whips," the seasons "seize," the night's tractor "grinds," and "the matutinal cock clangs." It is a charge that has gone crazy or rather not crazy, but has attained a singleness of effort.
and everything in its peculiar emotional path is yielded up to it. The poet again does not choose his words, they are yielded up in the rush.

This unwinding knot or fever is the push of the poem that melts one thing into another, breaks form out of form (bees out of birds), and starts the "rain (that) forces every­thing." The poem pushes its way into being once the initial tension has been given. Its onrush is almost inevitable, as though the transmutation of birds into bees into diesel into April into nightjar is inevitable, as inevitable as a rope untwisting. It is a charge, an acceleration that is not a wild abandon but is an inevitable perpetuation--of a certain world contortion, a certain melody, a certain emotion. The poem throws itself out of itself. It grows out of itself. Like all growth it obeys the laws of generation (genus--family, kind) so that the various images and words are related, they obey the same tropism, they are like kin whose names echo each other ("bees," "birds," "seize," "clang," "drum," "grind") as they populate the poem with the blood of their progenitor.

To keep this push kinetic--to keep it propelled via language, language must be "the act of the instant." It must "meet head-on what goes on each split second." Language must act out the tension as it is happening. It must remain immediate and contemporary with that tension to maintain the sap of that tension. It must be the speech of
the actual surge of life into the present, into the moving and metamorphosing present. It must be coincident with time itself (the uninterrupted present) and be invigorated with the change of that present. It must be the direct quotation of "what is happening and what causes everything to happen." It accomplishes this through the breath and the ear.
CHAPTER 4

BREATH

The breath is like a runner the way it pumps into the present, charges and discharges, inspires the world afresh and gives the locomotive of the line fresh drive, fresh approach—continual inspiration. It converts the tension of the poem into working energy so that the line is caught in the urge of the present, in the rush of the elan.

Witness Olson's lines from "Song 3" ("Songs of Maximus"),

In the time of goodness,
go side, go
smashing, beat them, go as
(as near as you can

tear

Here the breath is like a locomotive forging and driving the line ahead. It has the surge of the present imperative. Since the breath is a direct valve of the heart it acts like a piston to the pent-up excitement and pulse of the heart. It is a syncopated piston. It purposely misses a beat so that the heart is thwarted and driven on by desire. It is exactly the breath's ability to syncopate that forces the line to move, to break away from any monotony. In the stops and pauses
so registered—the ends of lines, the commas, parentheses, stanza breaks—the breath can gather momentum for the push into the next line or word, and thus regenerates its charge. Watch it as it pushes and syncopates the line (approximately 1 unaccented beat for commas, parentheses, and 1 1/2 unaccented for ends of lines):

\[ \text{go side, go} \]
\[ \text{smashing, beat them, go as} \]
\[ \text{(as near as you can} \]
\[ \text{tear} \]

The effect is to frustrate the rhythm, to propel it, and make it finally tear forth into one final accented beat. Just as the other stanza, so frustrated and driven by the syncopation, rush toward a single climax in "piss," "sing," and "bare."

From "Song 1,"

colored pictures
of all things to eat: dirty postcards
And words, words, words
all over everything
No eyes or ears left
to do their own doings

The breath propels the poem not only by syncopating, but by causing a tension between vowels and consonants. The breath foments itself in the drum of "dirty," and in the opening and urging of "all over everything / No eyes or ears left
(the vowels urge open), "to do their own doings" (while the consonants drum shut). It is the vowel that is important. It urges and anguishes—it is the cryer. The consonant is an artificial impediment purposely placed so that the vowel may have the agony or ecstasy of bursting through it. The poet urges his breath like a saxophone player who sporadically closes the taps (consonants) for the ultimate joy of opening them and letting the vowel sound forth.

Likewise,

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

sing

Here again the breath forces the tension between the vowel and the consonant. At first the vowels are blocked by the hard consonants of "plenty," "nothing," "including," "contrary," and "take." As though the soul must first break from this plenty to release its vowel. For the "ake" in "take" aches to be heard, and the moan in "low" and "go" is finally relieved by "sing"—"s" a soft and yielding consonant letting the song sing out.
CHAPTER 5

RHYTHM

Everything has rhythm. Rhythm is the dynamic movement in anything—the pattern or trend of that movement. Everything has movement and thus everything has rhythm. A bird has rhythm. A flower has a certain rhythm. Its rhythm is its surge from its root towards exfoliation. Even a chair has rhythm. It expresses its rhythm in the stretch of its design, the way it yawns out from the seat. The chair is anxiously performing and mimicking its rhythm all the time—until such a time when it crumbles into junk and thenceforward performs the junk-rhythm, the junk dance. So that even still things have rhythm; they express a certain tension, a hint of movement, in their shape.

A thing may have not only one rhythm but many associated rhythms. The rhythms of a leaf are in the way it unfolds on the branch, tumbles toward the ground, and whorls centripetally with a host of other leaves. Although it has many rhythms, there is still a certain "leafness" about all its rhythms, so that one could talk of a leaf-rhythm. A person also has many associated rhythms. The same body that fox-trots can also mambo, tango, and twist. The same body that
hops can also saunter and gallop. Yet there is some general quality that defines human rhythm from leaf or bird rhythm. The typewriter also has associated rhythms in the punch of its keys and the swing of its carriage, yet there seems to be a general typewriter rhythm.

Each person in himself has a different rhythm from any other person. Some people are as slow and ponderous as crocodiles and this rhythm extends into everything they do. Others are as quick and snappish as snakes and their lash snaps into every activity. Yet every activity in itself has its own basic rhythm, no matter how much the personality affects it: so that there is a rhythm of rowing a boat, a rhythm of picking up a fork, and a rhythm of eating. Each has its own trend, its own peculiar grace. Even in mental life, thinking has a different rhythm than dreaming, and talking often has a different rhythm than writing.

Rhythm clings inevitably to everything then. But beyond the rhythms of each thing in itself, there may be some universal rhythm, some basal metabolism, which all rhythm springs from. And which when tapped could yield the rhythmic secrets of anything. The human heart itself seems to be a springboard to a great variety of rhythms. For the human being can at times imitate the rhythm of the monkey, the quick alertness of the cat, the slowness of the bear, and can even imitate the rhythms of bird-flight, rose-thrust, and chair-stretch.
Could it be that the heart itself is somehow in gear with all other beat in the world. The heart's beat is volatile, afterall, and can quicken or slow down as the emotion moves it. This would probably allow it to feel the fast pace of the mouse or the slowness of the brontosaurus. And if the emotional temperament of such animals is controlled by the rate of their heartbeat then the mouse would be very "nervous" and "on edge" and the brontosaurus very calm, lethargic, and with his eyes half-closed in laziness. Can man then feel the nervousness of the mouse or the lethargy of the brontosaurus through the variability of his own heart-beat. If so, then breath which is a valve of the heart, but a semi-independent valve, can project the many rhythms and moods of the heart into speech. For like the ear "which has collected, which has listened, which is so close to the mind that it is the mind's, that it has the mind's speed. . . ." so has the breath collected and listened to the heart, and is so close to the heart that it is the heart's, that it has the heart's speed. And like the ear which can imitate the sounds it hears, the breath can imitate and syncopate the various rhythms of the heart. Like a drummer tuned in to the beat of everything, it can imitate the rhythm and drive of any creature, mouse or dinosaur. Thus the poet begins with the premise that "he who possesses (his heart's) rhythms possesses the universe."
The heart thus acts as a gauge to intercept the rhythm of anything and transfers it to the breath and poem. Once the rhythm is initially pushed into the poem it moves of its own weight and velocity and falls into its particular dance. Just as when one starts to do a tango he falls into doing a tango. The future subject-matter and words-to-be in the poem fall into the tango as well. That is, the rhythm and emotion are the primary force from which everything else springs. One does not start writing about a tree; one begins imitating the force of the tree. And imitating the force creates a vortex into which the words are naturally pulled.

In "Variations Done for Gerald van de Wiele" it is the rhythm or force of desire that drives the poem. The rhythm breaks into bloom and forces everything, birds, bees, the whole human business, to break forth out of itself and join the rhythm.

we plow, we move,
we break out, we love

in a continual noun-verb, noun-verb, noun-verb thrust that yanks the force out of everything.

Everything is twisted into the torque of lust, the rhythm of lust. In its short sharp thrusts the rhythm is immediately transitive caught as it is in the verb of nature and passes like "lightning." The rhythm of lightning pro-creates the subject-matter of lightning, whatever is fast
and furious and transitive—the birds, the bees, the cock, the wind, the rain, and whatever else is "crazy" with energy—is generated and pulled into the acceleration of rhythm. The rhythm in this poem wants to go, and whatever objects or words can help make it go are yielded up to it. The rhythm drives everything to a frenzy. It makes each thing pound or beat the force out of the next thing: "The body whips the soul," "the whippoorwill . . . grinds his song," "even the night is drummed." "The wind, the rain" of the driving rhythm "forces everything." The fission in the poem is so fast that the verbs are sometimes not quick enough to keep the nouns from getting at each other's throats and drumming each other:

iris and lilac, birds
birds, yellow flowers
white flowers

The iris and lilac break forth and fuse into the birds, the birds transmute into a rush of yellow flowers which are so charged with desire they are white!

Even the syllables help the rhythm keep its go. The cantankerous consonants kick out the vowels like air suddenly punched out of the stomach, and the rhythm is thus driven out of everything making "the dogwood light up the day." Or the syllables, pregnant with desire, burst from being "blue from the full of the April moon," and burst as well in the bees and birds,
bees
dig the plum blossoms

and

iris and lilac, birds
birds... . .

and us, are busy. We are busy
if we can get by that whiskered bird

as though the bees and birds are so busy they burst into
blossom. It is not the alliteration itself that is important
but the rhythm that in its intense desire drives the sound
to recur, it is so pleased with the burst of it. The rhythm
compels the words (their vowels) to burst out of their jackets
and blossom in any way possible. It whips the "whippoorwill"
into song while "the wind forces everything." It "cracks
Nature's moulds" by making "the cock" "crow" and "clang."
The rhythm becomes a "Diesel" of desire that drives itself
to such a fever ("Delires!") that it compels the syllables
to break out of the language and talk in tongues, to lapse
into pure French, "O saisons, o chateux!"—O seasons, o
castles—as though the desire has reached the pinnacle of
its frenzy and transforms itself into the pure joy of
delirium, of speech.

In "As the Dead Prey Upon Us" it is the emotion of
weariness that inspires the rhythm. The poet starts off with
an appropriately somnambulant drone of
As the dead prey upon us,
they are the dead in ourselves

and the constant drag of the beat, and the resembling phrases

of

the dead upon us
the dead in ourselves
the dead upon us
the dead in ourselves

sound like a pendulum of doom swinging back and forth. It
sets up a drone, a *basso ostinato* for the rest of the poem to
flow from.

And the whole room was suddenly posters
and presentations
of brake linings and other automotive accessories,
cardboard displays,
the dead roaming from one to another.

In the five hindrances men and angels
stay caught in the net, in the immense nets
which spread out across each plane of being,
the multiple nets
which hamper.

In the first of these stanzas the rhythm is full of sleep,
or rather sleepless, the lazy listless drone of those
neither in the quick of sleep or wakefulness. Or as in the
second stanza the rhythm is caught in the gross nets of
cerebral discourse as the poet plods through the weight of
the dead to find the missing link that can awaken the souls
back to life or peaceful death. Like one plodding through
prose searching for the key into the poetic. The nets of
the prosaic spread out across the page hampering.
The rhythm then switches from insomniacal drone to rhapsodical complaint, the wail of a man to his mother,

O peace, my mother, I do not know how differently I could have done what I did or did not do.

That you are back each week
That you fall asleep with your face to the right
That you are as present there when I come in as you were when you were alive
That you are as solid, and your flesh is as I knew it, that you have the company I am used to your having
but oh that you all find it such a cheapness!
(o mother, if you had once touched me
o mother, if I had once touched you)

It has song instead of drone but is the slow doleful song of a chorus of mourners, beckoning, beseeching. The rhetorical "That you are back . . . that you fall . . . that you are . . . etc," uplifts the rhythm into a song of remorse and provides a tension of unrequited love that demands to be fulfilled.

It finds its requital in "the vent!" With the command of "You must have the vent . . . we must have what we want" the rhythm skips gears out of the drone and remorse of sleeplessness and into the imperative of life. Desire demands to be quited. The nets must be disentangled. The poet leads the charge:
O souls, burn
alive, burn now
that you may forever
have peace, have
what you crave
O souls,
go into everything . . .

Here the rhythm gets out of bed, throws off its sleeping
shrouds, and marches headlong into being alive. "Awake, men,
awake" it commands. The soul "has slipped the cog," "Nothing /
before the hand of man": the hand has taken the grip of, and
given the urge to life itself. The prose which horizontally
slumbered has awakened into the vertical poetic, and what
was once the monotony of sleep has broken into a burning,
raging fever.
Olson says "rhythm is time (not measure...). The root is rhein: to flow. And mastering the flow of the solid, time, we invoke others." By time he means psychological time—the flow of the consciousness. This flow is propulsive and creative because it has fresh focus continually. It perceives the world anew every second. It is free to witness and move with the fluxion in life because, indeed consciousness (when truly realized) is coincident with the pulsing movement of life itself. It is directly intimate with the law of change. Olson wants to grasp this propulsion of the mind and move along its "nerve," to follow the course of the excitement.

Rhythm is the propulsion of time. When anything is propelled its past is carried right into the thrust of the present. The momentum of the past pushes the rhythm into the future. It is like a man being chased. He runs so fast each movement of his body anticipates the next second. If a thing moves fast enough then its body contracts. The poem also seems to contract as the rhythm accelerates—the lines run shorter and quicker, the words huff and puff individually. When the rhythm is so charged it is as though the poet is taken out of himself and becomes part of a neutral or universal force (witness the change of rhythm in "Song 3" from the personal mode to the exultant).
Or witness the rhythm of getting into "the process,"

get on with it, keep moving, keep in, speed, 
the nerves, their speed, the perceptions, theirs, 
the acts, the split second acts, the whole 
business, keep it moving as fast as you can, 
citizen. 51

It is a reveille, a call-to-arms. Each word chases each other 
and the propulsion is so fast the past is thrust immediately 
into the present. The back seat driver has been thrust into 
the driver's seat who is already going out the windshield. 
Destiny is directly and immediately realised. So that there 
is only the present tense. One is not waiting for the action 
in the sentence to happen, for the subject to lead to a verb 
and predicate. Instead, the subject has gathered verb and 
predicate into itself and is immediately blossoming forth 
every second. Manifest destiny, the new frontier. Speech is 
no longer the drag, the harness it used to be, but is the 
quick and easy tool of the creative consciousness which is 
newly concrete at every second. The consciousness has 
entered the fluxion of life itself, the very pulsing movement 
of life which is coincident with change itself. And speech 
is pulled along with it. The words move faster and faster 
until speech is finally liberated into the present moment 
and attains a kind of satori of coexisting with the pulse 
of nature. It is elemental once more and thus creative and 
can say and be anything it wants to be in nature. The poet 
has become Nature writing. Carried into the fluxion he has
continual spontaneous and fresh focus. He perceives the world anew every second and consummates it into speech every second. This is the vertical poetic itself! as contrasted with horizontal prose. Here speech is constant emission, since it is one with the fluxion of life, and thus is constant inspiration of life. The reader reading the passage above moves at the speed of his nerves, at the rate of his blood. He enters the emotion of life and goes with it, with its impulsion. He moves at the rate of enthusiasm itself.

The speed and intense energy of "the process" are so fast and furious that one thinks of Fenellosa’s comment that if Nature were to write a sentence it would take all eternity. For Nature is expanding and imploding everywhere at once: "Motion leaks everywhere like electricity from an exposed wire." 52 The fact is that Nature—as fluxion and elan—does not write sentences but is a poet whose every gesture springs forth to generate thousands of other gestures. And the human poet when he writes within the speed of "the process" becomes the poet Nature who continually and momentaneously discharges a new world from his pen.

The chase of the rhythm occurs in alternating flashes of hot and cold. The rhythm gets wound up and then lets go, wound up and lets go every second. This is the driving fever of the rhythm. It acts like a generator that recharges itself momentaneously. A person who alternates a
hot sauna with an ice-cold shower experiences the same quick re-charging with his rise in blood-pressure. With the blood pounding into his brain he experiences fresh focus of the world every second, and feels the pulsing rush of life itself. Rhythm is loosed. "To raise the beat of the brain to bring it oxygen" which Williams sees as concomitant with the act of the imagination, the fluxion of life.

The poet must get the rhythm really hot and worked up, and then, while it's in the heat of its flow, forge it and shape it into words, careful not to lose its heat—the agility of the blacksmith. Thus Olson discusses "mastering the flow" of the rhythm: "And mastering the flow of the solid, time (rhythm), we invoke others. Because we take time and heat it, make it serve ourselves, our, form." Noticeably he makes the line serve him. He is like a man on a handball court who keeps the ball of the line moving all the time, keeping its velocity up, and aiming to score as much as possible. He keeps the ball within close bounds all the time, does not let it bounce willy-nilly. It is this dual of the quick ball and the alert man which gives the line its quick and control. He scores with "our" and "form"--they are repossessed of their infinitive. "Our" is no longer a vague pronoun but is a verb like "go" or "do." And with time broken and running there is no "form" except what the poet is forming.

Likewise, the line,
But there is a loss in Crane of what Fenellosa is so right about, in syntax, the sentence as first act of nature, as lightning, as passage of force from subject to object, quick, in this case, from Hart to me, in every case, from me to you, the VERB, between two nouns. 55

The sentence here practices what it preaches. It transfers force very quickly due to the short catapulting phrases. Olson again is in his handball court. "Quick" passes so quickly that whatever happens "from me to you" is immediately transferred. The ball of the line is not allowed to become flaccid with stale meaning. He could easily have said "The sentence must be transitive." But instead, meaning is made to be what it really is, coincident with energy itself and must stay in circuit like the handball. So Olson sensuously enacts Fenellosa's axiom. The poet actually makes the line, forges it while it is heated and passing.
If the breath gives locomotion and drama to the line, the ear provides the speech that plays within the line. Hence, melody and harmony. The ear is the tympanum to the world of sound. It is a drum for the world to percuss upon (sensitive to tune as well as beat: a drum and piano percussive). Through the skin of the ear the poet picks up all the slight accidents and disturbances of sound; the grace-notes of sound, how the syllables of sound fall towards each other in play. And the ear remembers the sound of each thing. The mind tells it what each thing "means" so the ear can associate the sound with its source. And the sounds seem appropriate to the sources they spring from: the "maw" of the mouth, the "spangle" of the star, the "doom" of the dead. The world seems onomatopoetic to the ear. It also enjoys the rhyme of sounds. How one sound moves quickly upon another sound intimating it and flattering it. How "kiss" falls toward "bless" and "bless" towards "curse"; how "weep" immediately falls upon "wail"; and "sunday" has an accident with "summer day." The sounds hear each other not especially because they alliterate but because they musculate (their sound and sense twist together) in the same
way. As soon as "bark" is given, "break" and "bite" snap at its neck. The ear knows the feeling of each sound, it feels the intent of each sound. It hears "writhe" clench itself like a muscle and writhe forth. It hears "call" call out like a crow cawing, seeking its echo. With the mind's help the ear joins syllable to syllable and word to word in a whole line to imitate the sound of a certain emotion. To give emotion a house to live in, a boat to row off from.

**Accidence** is the aural dance of words in the poem. Accidence is flexible to meanings of "agreeing with," "falling towards," "happening," "falling into grace," and "concordance" (accidence implying a dance resulting in concord). Its Latin roots might be **accido**: fall on, happen; **accedo**: approach, agree with; **cedo**: yield to. The English word "cadence" thus occurs when speech falls into flow, or falls towards a rest. Each word has continual accidents with other words that are like itself. A word is like a participle that participates accidentally. It falls out of itself when reflecting and inflecting upon itself. An accident in music is the "grace-note," a slightly played note which quickly **falls upon** a more substantial note. It informs that note. Words too inform one another: **accenting** and **accidenting** one another gracefully. Each word is a grace-note, desiring to fall towards a more agreeable word, to fall into grace. Each word is a grace-word responding gracefully, gratefully, imitating itself out of desire.
Language at first seems mysterious. A person is born into language just as a baby is born into a strange world. Words are strange to him. They "neither hide nor reveal" themselves. They are gifts to him from his predecessors, heirlooms, and their meanings, connotations, and myths have already accrued like sediment around the basic word over time just as a pearl slowly develops around a basic stone. The poet has to comprehend this sediment as well as possible. The best he can do is cross-examine the word about its origin and subsequent tradition. As Hugh Kenner states the problem,

Language is a Trojan horse by which the universe gets into the mind. The business of the artist is to be constantly aware that the horse houses armed warriors, even while admitting it to his own mental citadel. He has then a chance of winning them over, upon their emergence, and cross-questioning them about the collective consciousness outside of which they are the armed representatives. 56

That is, the words are armed with myths and associations. The word "water" means not only \( \text{H}_2\text{O} \) but has ideas of baptism and innocence clinging to it. The word "cross" is armed with sentiments of suffering and repentance. Rather than be caught unawares by the words' latent powers, the poet unlocks the myths entangled in the words. He can then use the words effectively for his own advantage, his own myth-making; he can maintain his words like a standing army of disciplined warriors with sharp weapons, and throw up his own front.
Once he understands the sediment around the words he forms a covenant with the words by which he promises to remember their original meanings and respect their mythic associations. Then he can use the words to ensnare others into these myths. The poet becomes a fisher of men. He incants the words as a priest incants ancient rites. He uses the words to evoke ancient and latent feelings rooted in the consciousness of men. He performs a kind of "anamnesis," an evoking and "recalling of something loved" and cherished. Anamnesis: "recalling or representing before God an event in the past so that it becomes here and now operative by its effects." By skillful incantation of the word "cross" or even "wood" he stirs a warmth and opens an old wound. By discretely pronouncing the word "water" at the right moment he enacts in the minds of his congregation the associations of "blessed font" and virgin spring. He uses the old words like old charms or relics. He never breaks the covenant. The word demands to be recalled and re-lifted, asking, as Christ asked of his disciples at the Last Supper, "Do this for a recalling of me." The words are a Thanksgiving of an old act.

The poet holds all objects in reverence. This is his first act of devotion. This he does before he names the objects. He regards objects not for their practical value but for their religious value, as gifts from the gods; or if the object is man-made, as an offering to the gods. He
thus treats all objects as "anathemata," given for sacred purposes. The raison d'être of every object is gratuitous, it exists for its own pleasure, or as sacrament to God. When an object is so held in reverence then its name will also be held in reverence. Such as "rose": the name lingers to bear witness to the beauty of the object. Or "pearl": the voice pronounces it slowly in testament of something so long composed by the oyster. Or "angel": one lifts the word hoping the sound will transubstantiate into spirit and commemorate the actual angel. One lets the word linger on his lips almost as one would study the texture of a jewel with his hand's touch--hoping that the feel and shimmer of the jewel will in some way be absorbed into the name of the jewel, hoping that the name "gold" will feel like gold, and "sapphire" shine like sapphire. Or that "pony" will have the gentle trot of the pony. And "foal" will have the tender feel of something just born out of its mother's fold. The names themselves are anathemata, blessed gifts in devotion to the object or to the gods who fashioned it.

The name carries the numen of the object. It carries the locked-in spirit of the object. Actually the word "name" comes from the Latin word nomen. But one wishes to relate nomen with numen (L.), the spirit or presiding power. One feels as if the spirit of the object is locked into the name of the object. The name, its nomen sounds like an omen of its destiny. Which is why names seem precious. As with
personal names. When a mother calls out to her son, "O David," she is calling for the spirit of David to answer. All Davids that ever were or will be harken to her call. Warriors and kings alike are aroused. It is the numen she calls, the spirit-body of the name. In the sound of a name there is the pull of a whole destiny. Each name is a patriarch or matriarch. "Diana" evokes a huntress, "Lawrence" one who is crowned with laurels. Each name shivers from being called. Or the person shivers who calls it. Thus the embarrassment or shyness in saying a name. The spirit resounds in the timbre of its call. Names are old glories.

What applies to people's names also applies to names of objects and names of functions. There is something in each word that lets a person recognize the origin of that word, that lets him feel the shape and trend of its destiny. Within each word there is a smaller and more ancient word that struggles to pronounce itself. Within each word there is a seed of that word, tough—as tough as the first time it was said. This is the etymon (Greek "true")—the true and primitive form of the word. It is the root-muscle of the word. The poet must discover that root-muscle and flex it to his desire. For it contains the original power of the word, the original intent and impulse of the word. The reader must try to voice that root-muscle in pronouncing the word: to make his tongue push the "lingua" in "language,"
to dramatize the "geist" in "ghost," to breathe the Aryan "as" (to breathe) back into "is." And thus reinforce the idea that life depends on breath, that when one breathes he breathes in "prana," vital world energy. When the poet says "That girl is pretty," the reader must breathe "is" deeply into his lungs to imitate prettiness being breathed into the girl. The poet wants to reintroduce the etymons "hus," "hud" and "hydan" back into the word "house," to show that "house" was originally a place to hide. So when the poet says "Let's to hydan" he means "Let's go home." The poet must write from the root on up. The reader must read from the root on up. Both must speak with first mouth, first emotion. Their words are "wurdum" and "verba" expelled from their Teutonic and Latin lungs to startle the listener into his "sawol" (Teutonic soul).

When a man names an object he names it immediately, direct from the excitement the thing arouses in him. The name he calls out is a physical reaction to the object itself. It carries the carnal passion of the object. As McClure says, when a man speaks words (names) the words must proceed direct from the real "meat" object through a man's "real meat lips and throat . . . to other meat spirit or listener." The words should not be abstract from life, but should be "part of physiology." Live tissue connecting the source to the listener. The words must be motivated by whatever motivates the object. They must move with the passion of the object,
and keep it moving, emoting. They must be tense with the nerve of the object, bright or heavy with the fire or gloom of the object. The word "jackass" for example is as raw as the day it was born. The same for the words "blood" and "bone." Such words are real ligament, connective tissue between source and listener. Within such a word is heard the warp and woof of the real world, the mimicry of the wild, the branches between living and non-living things.

In phonetic languages the passion of the object must be caught in the sound of the word. "Fire" emotes fear and ire. "House" reverberates "haunts" and ghosts. "Wrench" is wrenched from the throat. The poet depends largely on onomato-topoeia. The sounds of the words must somehow be visual. In ideogrammic languages, however, the poet need not rely on sounds. For he draws pictures that actually pantomime the visual action of reality.

The Chinese language is like a poetry that enacts reality. Its words are like pictures of reality that act out stories. The word for "mouth," for example, is a picture of a mouth with two words and a flame coming out of it. The word for "see" is an eye with two legs walking through space. The word for "shine" is a picture of the sun and the moon. Thus there is hardly a division between the word and the act. The word resembles and performs the object's act. Each word moves and comes to life: the mouth speaks, the eye sees, the
sun shines. Nothing is static. Everything performs its act, transfers its energy onto the next thing. Life is put into motion. The word for "spring" is a picture of the sun underlying the bursting forth of plants. The word for "water ripple" depicts a boat plus water thus showing how the boat causes the ripple. Each word is an actor alive to his cause and effect. He shows what moves him and how he moves others. Each word is a transitive act leading to other acts. It is like a visual drama unfolding and progressing, in which the pulse of life is seen continuing. The characters interact with each other and "work out their fate." There are no abstract nouns such as "freedom" or "love" except what is charaded by the characters. Nothing is abstracted from the process of what is happening and causing other things to happen.

Since the ideogram is primarily a language of action, the verb is the root of the language. It is the root insofar as no thing in nature is separated from its action. All nouns are things that are acting. They imply verbs. This is only natural. As Fenollosa explains, "The eye sees noun and verb as one: things in motion, motion in things" and thus the Chinese language does not separate them. The symbol for "man" has two legs walking, and so on. "The verb must be the primary fact of nature, since motion and change are all that we can recognize in her (nature)." All languages,
Fenollosa points out, originally have verbs at their roots. It is the most primitive and viable way of expressing the actions of nature. And all other parts of speech are arbitrary extensions of the verb. The pronoun "I," for instance, in Chinese is represented by a "spear in the hand," or by "five and a mouth" which signifies a weak and defensive "I," holding off a crowd by speaking. Both verbs. The preposition "by" in Chinese is represented by the character meaning "to cause"; to=to fall toward; in=to remain, to dwell. Any "'part of speech' is (thus) only what it does." So that each Chinese word is "full of the sap of nature."

Whatever its part of speech each word must be "like a sun," as highly charged with the passion of its source as possible. All words were once sun. Even some English intransitive verbs which have lost their ability to "sun" were originally active and transitive from their source. "The English 'not' equals the Sanskrit na, which may come from the root na, to be lost, to perish. 'Be' is from bhu, to grow." Rhythm="rhein:to flow."

It's like talking to a foreigner. If he doesn't understand your language you try to speak as emotively as possible. You would try to be perfectly clear and direct. Not to use superfluous words that just adorn and "decorate" speech, and which he wouldn't understand anyways. Rather your words should be so exciting, so shivering with the
emotion you're trying to get across that they transcend the language barrier. If you were trying to talk about the sun you would say sun with such verve that the foreigner would absolutely brighten up. Maybe not "sun" the object but certainly "sun" the emotion would carry across to him. As Spicer says "A really perfect poem could be perfectly translated by a person who did not know one word of the language it was written in." Because the poet would be talking in the tongue of the elan and the listener would be listening to the universal alive itself. And thus, "A really perfect poem has an infinitely small vocabulary" because it would have no excess of words (for adornment or ornament) but only purely emotive words that "stick to the real" and "push the real" into the poem.

The word then is a martyr for the real. He (the word) lives and dies ephemerally in his struggle to force the real into the open. His entire life struggle and talent is defined within the limits of the second he is evoked and heard. He is thus like an actor who with only a bare minimum of stage and time and within the limits of body and voice must unfold a passion or "catch a conscience." He gestures or pants with love for a moment and then succumbs. That he must die in the next second gives him cause to live acutely and passionately for the second he is alive in the hope of motivating a love or revealing a vision. He must be as vital
in his second as the object he acts out is vital in its second. Or else die unknown. He has no future or past to appeal to.
CHAPTER 7

TENSION

The poet does not use language as a substitute for reality. He uses it as the direct voice of that reality. Each thing in reality is so tense with life or so fluid that it seems about to spill itself forth into speech. As though the cat were just on the verge of speaking its "catness." As though the water, so caught in the curve of its ebb and flow were about to lapse into its water cantata. Or as though the sun were about to deliver its sun soprano. The poet catches each thing on its verge, on the tip of its tongue and he helps start it forth into speech. Everything is like an oracle to him, about to pronounce its secrets, about to release its mysterious names. Everything seems directly antecedent to speech. The poet provides the final spring by which each thing can mouth its act, can call itself forth into sound.

The poet must get into the spring of the object or emotion to speak it forth. The object is like a tense diving board that the poet jumps upon to test its weight and direction. A diving board or a tense tongue from which the poet can spring off into speech. But first he must identify with its tension. Everything has tension. Tension is the
strain of the thing, the strain of all its parts. Tension is what gives an object its form and its rhythm. Tension is what causes rhythm, what motivates it. Each thing has its own peculiar tension just as each thing has its own peculiar rhythm. Tension is the way each thing restrains and expresses its energy. Some things are "more" tense than others. They restrain their energy more. A rock is more tense than a river of water. Ice is more tense than steam. Earth is more tense than air. But everything has some tension; otherwise it would be completely diffuse, vague spirit. Tension is the force of its form. Form is the expression of tension. This is what Olson means by his "principle," the second law of open verse, that "form is an extension of content." That is, any form is in a state of active tension.

The poet can sympathize with the tension in anything. He can imitate that tension in himself. He can feel the tense anger in a snake about ready to bite. He can feel the tension in a bird's wings as they beat against air to fly. He can feel the tension in the ebb and flow of water as it reaches out to touch the shore, and then is drawn back, unrequited. He can feel the pull, the strain of a flower to break out of the soil and blossom forth. He can even feel the tension in a garden hose, in its constricted form, how it "wants" to spring out like a snake and water the ground.
Or he can find in himself, in his own slow maturation, the slow hard compression of a rock over a long period of time.

The poet thus first gets into sympathetic tension with the object. He feels the squeeze of the object into itself, and then tries to imitate that squeeze, to twist it into speech. His heart and throat grip the object like a tourniquet that tightens up and imitates the particular squeeze (tension) of the object. So that each word will be gnarled, shaped according to that tension, that emotional twist. His voice becomes that twist. This is the real meaning of onomatopoeia (poeia: to make; onoma: name=to make a name from the object). That is, the object's tension is wrenched into voice. As in "Song 2" where the throat writhes in short gasps to imitate the wretched state of the soul netted in the impediments of society,

all
wrong
And I am asked--ask myself (I, too, covered with the gurry of it) where shall we go from here, what can we do when even the public conveyances sing? how can we go anywhere, even cross-town how get out of anywhere (the bodies all buried in shallow graves?

There is a certain tension of wrench, of the painful twisting of the soul, when "wrong" is pronounced. With "ask" an urgency is invoked since the breath creates a void in drawing
in air to pronounce it. It begs escape from that void, and the painful soul whips out into "where," "what," and "when" to find avenues of release. The tension of the soul is sprung immediately into speech. It is urgently onomatopoeiac. Even "graves" must grind its grey sound into the poem, and the soul in its disgust evokes "gurry," the hard "g" gumming up the soul with its grease.

Or in "As the Dead Prey Upon Us" where the misery of the dead and doomed is wrenched into voice. The word "prey" sounds like "pray" and so one hears the persistent hungry drone of the insatiate dead as though at prayer. The snarl of the dead recurs in the constant murmur of their moans. They "roam" the "room" "poor and doomed" amid "the throng of the unknown young." The sound of the words is like a constant groan of people chained together in agony. So twisted is the agony, so perverted is the soul that when one tries to break out of the chains it sounds like a stupid "jackass." The body jerks out like a jackass to accomplish its desire. The word is immediately sprung from this desire. When the poet says the soul "stays caught in the net" the word "caught" sounds like a "call" that cannot release itself as easily as it should through the lap of the "ll" but is blocked by the hard nets of the "t." Each word has the force of the particular tension that moves it.
The poet does not search for words to convey the object or emotion. He squeezes the object into words. Through the pump of his heart and squeeze of his throat. If the object were a horse the poet would take the tension of the horse, gallop and all, and grind it through the horse-grinder of the throat, into horse-words. What comes out will be not only grunts and neighs but horse-vision and horse-mind. Or grind the force of the flower into flower words. The pulp that comes out will vibrate with the flower. But first the poet must sensuously experience how the throat can get into a sympathetic squeeze with the object and so grind it into words. Then the flower, so ground, will erupt and reincarnate its force into juicy flower vocabulary.

The words must pass directly from the object as from an oracle. They must continually oraculate, utter the inner mystery and tension of the object. Not speak about the mystery (circumference it cerebrally) but be a direct whorl of the object. If the poem is thus mysterious it is because it is spoken from the oracle. Strange names and utterances are pulled through the oracle's "throat." They will send forth not especially the look of the object nor its dimensions but the emotional pull of the object, its tension.
The poet writes from his gut. That is where mind and matter meet. That is where he finds the tension of anything in the world. His words are gut reactions. They are tense like knots. They shriek for a second and then contract. This is what makes each word urgent and tough. Like a seed, compact, charged with energy.

As from "Song 5,"

Appleseed

's gone back to
what any of us
New England

The poet is writing direct from the core of his being, from his American gut. He is letting America do the talking. The reader, to understand this poem, must read from his cultural gut. (One should read mostly all poems with his gut, where tension is located, not with his eyes). The reader must feel like the American seed. For who could understand this poem without being that seed himself. Does the poet not force the reader into the core of himself to find what is genuine and germain there. Does the poet not force him into the pit of the stomach where the roots of one are. Each word in the poem is like a pit. Whereas the bad poet is eager to let fly a flurry of floppy words as soon as he gets going, the effective poet treats every word like a dried terse pit stored with energy. As a pit it remains compact in itself, forceful, oracular, with specific
informative power. "New England" for example, is as dry and powerful as a flag. Or like a seed it has potential energy—the new foundland, the wellspring of the American dream, the colonial vision. It is powerful without being overly verbal; seedlike. Being the last words in the poem it is like an anthem that suddenly stands up and sings.

Even "'s" is strong by itself. As a possessive it is an exclamation of heritage. The American is of New England, of the new frontier, of the birthplace of liberty, of the sources. The wonder of the New World lies in store inside him (like an appleseed) whenever he wishes to use it. He is America's, and Appleseed's child. The "'s" is proud to stand alone.

In still another sense the "'s" is like the rural American contraction of "has" as in

"What happened to the field?"
"'s gone back to seed."

It has the flavor of idiom.

In either sense the "'s" pulls the reader back into the ground—of himself, into the pit of the stomach. It "goes back" to his source, his "what." "New England" and "Appleseed" are these sources or pits. They act as a "drying force," they hold the feelings in the poem tightly together, seedlike, not letting them wander like water. "New England" as original place from whence American civilization springs and "Apple-

seed" as original seed from which all fruit springs (as Johnny Appleseed--America, a dormant giant). Both original in the reader, in his core.
CHAPTER 8

POETRY VS DISCOURSE

If the word springs vertically from the source then it is concrete to that source. It is a projectile of that source. It does not pretend to "understand" that source since it is more an intuitive eruption than an intellectual explanation. It is more an actor than a playwright. More apprehensive than comprehensive. It is caught in the spring of the tension and has little time to "think" other than be born into speech.

One difference between poetry and discourse is the time both take to accomplish their goals. Discourse meditates, reflects before choosing the appropriate word. Its words do have time to "think" and to understand what they're doing. In poetry the time for reflection is practically nil because the poet must act quickly to follow the impulse of emotion, to stay within the spring of the object's tension. If the poet waits too long he loses the impulse and must wait till it is aroused in him again. Of course, after the poem has been written in its first draft the poet may review his words and seek le mot juste, but even then that requires less an intellectual effort than a moving back into the tension, and feeling the particular "body tone" of the object. Whereas
discourse is less impulsive and more concerned with the step-by-step disentanglement of every aspect of an idea.

Moreover, discourse dwells in the past, poetry in the impulse of the present (or thrust of the "historical present.") The purpose of discourse is to halt time and sort of say "Okay, we've gotten this far, now let's consider the meaning of life up to this point." And it takes life apart, analyses it, and abstracts from it certain general tendencies. It is empirical in that it selects from all experience general trends, motives, and laws that govern it. It seeks to unify and categorize experience under these laws. It is interested in what is general or neutral for all experience, forming laws that encompass all experience. It seeks to transcend the limitations of the moment, of the particular, for a broader viewpoint. It seeks to gather up particular experiences and bind them into theories.

Its vocabulary thus seeks words that generalize experience, and act like jello to gel a lot of experience together. Words such as "life" or "nature" or "reality" which conveniently but vaguely unify a whole group of things. Such words don't have to be sharp or poignant themselves since their intent is to neutralize, to round off the edges of sharp particulars, to take the bite out of individual items. Such words should not spontaneously spring from reality but should be deliberately and abstractly conceived to mollify
the individual bits of reality and absorb them into their fold. Such words extract whatever is common to individual experience and then throw out the individual idiosyncracies. Thus it uses words like "energy" which is the characterless denominator of all its separate acts, or "society" subtracted from all its individuals, and even the word "individual" is a generalization for all the various textures, faces, shapes and sizes that have ever been. Such general words whitewash the world down into monotones, to keep the world steady and easy to explain. To avoid a rebellion of divided particulars. The person who grows accustomed to using such words tends to think they actually depict reality instead of realizing that they are merely arbitrary bloodless patterns drawn over real sharp particulars. A person who uses such words all the time to discuss experience is like a monotheist. He believes that many things can fall under single categories, that life is reducible to a set of sexless "its"—neutral pronouns like "nature," "reality," "beauty," etc.

The poet, on the other hand, neither wants to white-wash the world nor turn it into jello. He wants to break it open and make it spill forth into all its various beauties. Like a treasure chest. Or the world as a piñata filled with gems, diamonds, rubies, each of a different texture and color. He wants his words to be "the act of the instant," full of the spill of experience. Full of surprises. Like jack-o-
lanterns, or jack-in-the-boxes that spring out. The poet hates dead weight, heavy categorical words that observe experience from the outside rather than springing from the pulse of the experience. He does not want to neutralize his poem with "meaning." To him meaning is what lives inside - the passion of the object. Meaning is so implicit to the inner tension and movement of an object as to be inextricable from it. He thus does not "think" while writing the poem. "Observation of any kind is . . . properly previous to the act of the poem, and . . . must not, for an instant, sap the going energy of the content towards its form." He acts. His speech springs like a jack-in-the-box from the tension of the object. He allows the object to perform like a fresh-fledged actor on the poetic stage and oraculate its own vocabulary. If the poet has a viewpoint, it is only this pluralism of the treasure chest, each separate jewel in the world performing in its own special way, aware only of its own majesties and wisdoms:

There are no hierarchies, no infinite, no such many as (mass, there are only eyes in all heads, to be looked out of. 78

The poet is not a general who manages his troops from headquarters, who talks in terms of divisions and battalions and who strategizes his battles; but rather a private who stays in the front-lines flush to experience itself, to seize
alive all its in-betweens. For him there is no such generality as "energy" but rather firecrackers, whippoorwills, bees, tractors, and snapdragons. The poet takes the security-blanket of "I" away from a man and leaves him on the tips of his eyes, ears, and toes. He takes the convenient handle of "it" away from him ("it's a sunny day," "it's a good life") and makes him name his causes.

The poet is like "a pedestrian taking you over the ground," over the rough ground, around the exact curves, and into the fissures of reality. This is the pleasure of his poetry. It keeps you "wrestling with the cinders" of the experience. Discourse, on the other hand, does not bother with these cinders, the "minutiae" of experience. Discourse is "a train which delivers you at a destination." It is very selective in what it says because its main intent is to hurry you toward a conclusion, to relate a certain idea. It disregards anything in the way of that goal. Like the tracks of any railway it "leaves out all the gaps of dirt between." As it labels and abstracts from huge chunks of experience it becomes more and more remote from the actual "go" and "cinder" of reality. Needless to say, when someone says "she is a girl" he leaves out all the idiosyncracies and tensions of the girl. When someone says "the cherry tree is red" he says nothing of the particularities of this cherry tree, or of what it feels to be a cherry tree. Or when someone says "I went to the store to buy some meat for dinner" he leaves out
the whole adventure of the store, the "tootsie rolls and Oh Boy Gum." These adventures and particularities concern the poet. Poetry is the way of the pioneer, discourse the way of the salesman. The salesman will try to sell you a table by saying, "This is a beautiful teak table direct from Thailand" and end there. The pioneer would lead you into the thick steamy jungle, hot with the shrieks of parrots and monkeys, the palm trees flourishing like pineapple groves, make you feel the slow absorption of water under the ancient jungle floor and the water rising up through the roots of the teak tree, make you feel the bend and warp of each teak branch as it thrusts its way through the overbrush, take you into the hut of the native who carves the tree into a table, plying the disciplined hand of the jungle to it. The poet gives you the process with all its "split-second acts," the very nerve of the table. He presents the finite character of the table, telling you no more about it than what it is—but within that limit he gives you all the whats of its is.
The secret of metaphor is that man is like a seed who contains in himself the whole world information. He contains in himself the principles, the causes, the whole telos that governs the world. He implicitly knows and resembles everything. Man is like a germ of all nature. Moreover, man is a complete teleology in himself. That is, if nature were a tree man would be immediately both seed and blossom of that tree, both acorn and oak, efficient cause and entelechy. Baby and God. If nature were a tree man would be implicitly intertwined into the root, stem, and branches of that tree. At every second he reabsorbs the world force and blossoms it forth, absorbs and blossoms. Like a seed that blooms into flower and returns back to seed every second. Each second the emotional intensity and intelligence of nature is renewed in him. He is freshly informed every second. Thus when man speaks he speaks like a growing tree. His words are like acorns, compact and proficient, that blossom forth metaphorically.

Because man abides by the same principles of growth that govern other natural creatures much of what he does resembles other natural acts. He cannot help this. His
acts are naturally metaphoric. As he yawns and stretches his arms in the morning he resembles the branches of a tree sprouting forth. As he straightens up and walks, he repeats in a few seconds the evolution of the vertebraic animal from fish to erect monkey. As he speaks with the fervor of his soul he is like a fruit opening up and yielding its jellies. As his blood circuits through his body it is like the sap of a tree being pulled from root to branch. In performing himself he intimates and performs all nature.

His words are also naturally metaphoric. Each word spoken consummates all life. The poet says "And"—and the eternal continuity takes place. "But"—and man's resistance to death is immortalized. Each word telescopes into concentric rings like a stone thrown into the middle of a still pond. Other similar forms ripple from it. He says "jaw" and all jaws that ever were—Samson's jackass jaw, the gaping jaw of a dead man, the jaws of Hades—or anything resembling "jaws" such as pliers or crane shovels metaphorically ripple from his one word. He says "beach" and immediately new frontier, railroad platform, "first place," and Mt. Ida (first post-diluvial beach) occur. Each word suggests its resembling forms. By talking he resembles the world. He imitates its likenesses.

Moreover, by the act of metaphor one man is all men. One man consummates all humanity. His blood is their blood
and through his vein and artery flows the sympathy that flows through all men. Thus there is only one man in the world just as there is only one woman in the world. And each person is that one man or woman. There is only one man and within him are all men, all emotion. The extremes of love, hate, and fear are pressed together in him like a seed. Within him are the cries and pangs of those torn from life and those wrenched into it. Within him is that wheel of return upon which all men are stretched taut as upon a rack of life, so that each of his words is taut, is spoke from that wheel.

Moreover, man carries his whole past inside him. His whole past recapitulates itself inside him every second like old blood and salt newly tasted. Not only as myth, legend, and tradition passed down to him but as relics of an old physiology. He stirs to "the salt beat of his blood." His teeth are as brittle as dinosaur bone. His heart as delicate as a frog's heart. His arms no less agile or clumsy than fish fins, his eyes reptilian in quickness. He is a million years old. And has the wisdom of a million years. The bones of the dead are inside him. He sings their songs and carries their weapons.

He is returned to his primacy every second. That is, he is as old and as new as nature always is every second. He remains primordial, "coeval with creation." He recapitulates his past, his entire phylogenical past every second.
He speaks not only for the present but for the past as well. He opens his old man's tortoise mouth to speak. He speaks with ancient tongue and newly cleft mouth.

Moreover, he seems eternal. As though within the hurricane of his personality lies the calm eye of eternity that "gazes coldly on life and death" and speaks with the judgment of the fathers ("the patrimony of past.") And thus he stammers into aphorism as though ancient kinsmen were stuttering at his door. He writes from an eternal cave, oracle. He writes like a prophet, as though eternal knowledge were contained in him. As Duncan says, "The authors are in eternity." Thus each thing he says is aphoristic, is for all time and all men. He is not only root, stem, and blossom of the tree but has the mind of the tree as it has existed through centuries. The cold clarity of its mind. "Ancient salt is best packing." 

The man so attuned to the sympathies and symmetries of the world is the master of metaphor. He is germ to the world and can identify with any of its acts. For him each human gesture is an icon cast for an instant in the hall of the human drama. For him when a new-born babe cries out a gull shrieks and a man breaks into praise of God simultaneously. Each act salutes all tantamount acts. No act or object gets lost but is kept alive in the sympathies.
When the word "metaphor" is spoken, "echo," "tantamount," and "reverberate" reverberate from it. Metaphor is not so much a figure of speech as a figure of the world itself. It is the discovery that the world is full of acts that resemble each other. A man cries out in pain and a siren screams. Metaphor. A candle is lit and an eye is opened. Metaphor. A man looks at a tree and sees in it his own arm, wrist and fingers in the movement from trunk to branches. Metaphor. Every act of opening or closing, springing forth or shutting down evokes thousands of other like acts in its name. As though the world is a family of a few basic acts--of birth, praise, grasp, and death--that repeat themselves endlessly in kindred acts. Each basic act immediately intimates (imitates) all its kindred acts. An eye opening intimates a flower blooming, an egg hatching, dawn breaking, a bird singing, a stream gushing forth. All metaphors of birth and release. A cup reverberates the Grail, the heart, the hands in prayer, the upturned flower. All metaphors of praise and oblation. A house reverberates the cave, the ark, the temple, the museum. Metaphor is endlessly generative and reverberative. The cross echoes the ship-mast, the scarecrow, the body caught in centrifuge. In metaphor one act binds many other acts into itself by its principle or shape of intention. Metaphor acts like a wrist to gather into itself all the strength and pull of similar acts so that when the one act is performed or spoken all its kindred acts will
discharge themselves like so many fingers pointing at various things in the world.

Metaphor is the organ of the equal. The poet insists on a democracy that makes things relate. Things often relate because they have homologous accidents. That is, they either look alike, act alike, or serve the same purpose. For example, a leaf is a leaf, and a hand is a hand. But a leaf is also a hand in so much as it looks like and knows like a hand. Both leaf and hand stretch and curl and reach out for food—the leaf as it exposes itself for photosynthesis. So through metaphor, leaf becomes hand. In the same way, sink becomes bathtub becomes digestive tract. Mouth becomes cave becomes oracle. Nervous system becomes jazz band becomes forest. Typewriter becomes piano. Poet becomes priest. Everything is in continuous testament to other things.

The poet aims to keep each act clean in the poem, so clean and primal that it reverberates many kindred acts and forces the reader into sympathetic suspension. To make each act nakedly evocative of humanity. And to make each word so tight with its scream that all humanity is consummated in it. So that even given the word "the," the truth, the triumph of even the smallest things, their "the" will be evoked like a prime mover. To keep each act (act:word) so clean and so stark that if "mouth" is mentioned immediately ancient cave is seen; or if "tongue" is mentioned an old lizard keenly
protrudes; or if "ship-mast" is mentioned Christ suddenly appears strapped to the cross and a gull with outstretched wings shrieks in the wind.

Metaphor provokes metamorphosis. One act easily converts itself into another act and still into another act and yet retains its basic impulse. The poet begins with a particular emotion and projects from it a set of metaphors which will hopefully be the equal of that emotion. In "Variations Done for Gerald van de Wiele" for example, the birds metamorphose into the bees which metamorphose into the wild flowers which in turn become a diesel of desire. They are all different objects, yet they are all metaphors of that same enthusiasm in nature. That enthusiasm has charged into countless forms each mimicking the next. There is a sheer delight that makes each thing metaphorize into the next thing and show forth in it. Thus metaphor is a chameleon that plays out many variations on the same theme. The car, for example, in "As the Dead Prey Upon Us" gathers its significance as it degenerates into the dead souls in the living room, the nets or ladders of being, and the bourgeois accessories of the playpen, the victrola, and the movie machine. In fact, every object in the poem that entangles the soul, that ensnares it in the endless grind of habit are impedimenta that burden the soul and distract it from paradise, all these objects are metaphorically obliged to each other: the victrola that
cyclically repeats itself as it revolves (suggesting man getting caught in the cliche phrases of life), the playpen that suggests the innocent soul being penned it, the rocking chair that suggests the rocking into sleep of the soul, anesthetizing it into limbo, all intimate the same thing, the bondage of the soul by the material world. This does not mean that the car gets lost, but on the contrary it becomes truly found. The playpen, the victrola, the rocker, the dead souls clinging together are the direct accidental outgrowths of the car. They are the variations that ripen out from the basic theme. They continually reintimate the car by reintimating the idea of hindrance. It is as though the car has re-incarnated itself into these other contraptions of entanglement.

The main object in the poem, be it a lemon, a car, or a kingfisher, goes through a metamorphosis (a metaphorical growth) in which it re-incarnates itself into other forms. A poetic object is thus like a radioactive element with countless half-lives that come into being as the object decays. The object decays into its related forms. This is what Jack Spicer means when he says that to truly make the object visible in the poem, to make it real, the poet must allow it to decay (as anything natural decays in time). For even "as things decay they bring their equivalents into being."88 So that all the forms in the object's evolution will "co-respond"; they will all intimate the same source.
SUMMARY

Somehow the poet finds in his own heart all the emotions in the world, in his own gut all the tensions in the world. He is like a seed who contains in himself the whole world information. As Coleridge asserts, "For of all we see, hear, feel and touch the substance is and must be in ourselves" and also that "(man's knowledge) is one with the germinal causes in nature." Man is germ to the world: he is implicit to the world. He seems to contain all rhythms of the world in himself (and thus can imitate any one rhythm), and all tensions in himself. As a seed he is a tense seed, and can imitate anything else that is tense, compact. In short, in performing himself he intimates and performs everything else in the world.

To imitate consciously anything else in the world, however, requires intuition. To imitate the rhythm and tension of an object the poet must first intuit it. Henri Bergson says there are two methods of understanding an object: analysis and intuition. Analysis divides the object into all its component parts and sees how each part affects the next part. It explains--separates the various parts out onto a plane (flat surface) to study the causal relationship between each part. Intuition, on the other hand, grasps
the whole sense of the object immediately and instinctively without having to separate it out into its various components. It identifies with the object: it implicitly understands its motives, its 'desires' and its 'ambitions.' It so implicitly understands the object that it may be said that to intuit an object is to coincide with it, to experience the object from the inside-out. Intuition does not think of the object as a mechanism of various parts as analysis would, but rather as a single undivided impulse. It places itself at the heart of the object, within the 'seed' of the object and feels the very growth-urge and tendency of the object.

The poet must experience intuition to write the poem. He must enter into implicit sympathy with whatever it is he is writing about. He must grasp the 'mind' of the object, its intention. He must identify with it in such a way that all the various elements that make up the object and which, to the unintuitive eye, may have seemed like mere appendages of the object, suddenly cohere into an organic and purposeful whole. So that everything about it seems entirely appropriate.

In order to intuit any object the poet must get into tension with the object. Every object has tension. Else it would be vague diffuse spirit. (Even emotion has tension; else it would have no force of feeling). The tension of
an object is its coherence, how all its features are tensely controlled into a certain unity. Tension is the design and rhythm of the object, the way its parts are pulled together. Tension is the strain, the 'nervousness' of an object, the way its structure expresses a certain yearning. By feeling the tension of the object the poet can feel its intention (tension: intention: tendency). He can feel its lines of force, its tendencies, the way it tends to resemble other things.

When the poet gets into tension with an object he knots himself into sympathy with the object. He sympathizes with the strain and pull of its parts. He entwines himself into that strain as if into the object's fate. He is so tense with the object that at the slightest touch he vibrates like a tuning-fork playing out all the melodies that are peculiar to that object, its overtones and undertones, disclosing who the object is, where it came from, and what it wants to be. In other words, he becomes the tension of the object and allows all the tendencies inherent in that tension to express themselves. He goes through a process of re-inventing the object. He reestablishes (intuits) the identity of the object and plays out all its affinities and resemblances. The object continually dissembles and reassembles itself into various images, as if in search of its true identity. It experiences the various avatars of its being. It constantly calls out
new names, new metaphors of itself, as if probing for its etymon, its primal name. This is the act of imagination. For once the poet is tense with the object then the imagination lets that tension unwind and play out all its fantasies (its fate).

Thus any time the mind gets into sympathetic tension with an object, then the object goes through a metaphoric declension or history of change. A bird may become a bee which may become a wildflower. This does not mean that the original bird gets lost (or that the intuition is misled) but only means that all its sympathies and affinities get played out. This successive de-structuring and re-structuring of an object by the mind's imagination may be called an act of transubstantiation since it seems that the object feeds upon itself to find its way to its essential 'being.'

The poem is thus both prospective and propulsive. It is prospective for when the poet has identified with the tension of the object and entwined himself within the knot of its fate, then the progress of the poem follows a certain inevitability, a certain metaphoric path, with a view to certain imagery. As though the object is bound to behave in a certain way, to hit upon certain resemblances of itself as it vibrates. The poem is propulsive because from the moment the poet starts an intuitive rush with the object it is like being drawn into a centripetal process or vortex that will not end till the object's tension is fully played
out. It is probably the same "process" that Olson refers to when he says "one perception must immediately and directly lead to a further perception . . . keep moving, keep in, speed, the nerves. . . ." The poet entwined in the tension of the object rides the nerve of the object as it moves him from one impulse to another, one image to another, one perception to another. If the poet is riding the nerve of the object then at every point in the poem there will be a continual pick-up and transmission of energy (fresh metaphor) just as energy sends continual impulses along a nerve. If the poet rides the nerve then the poem will be written in the present tense, meaning that the poet is presently in tension with the object (not a matter of "emotion recollected in tranquillity.")

If he rides the nerve the poem has "kinetic."

kinetic—

from kine

\textit{\textbf{tikos}} (Greek) - motion
related to \textit{\textbf{citare}} (Latin) - to set in motion, to rouse, to call, to cite
and \textit{\textbf{citatus}} (Latin) - quick, impetuous
related to \textit{\textbf{excite}}
\textit{\textbf{incite}} - to urge on, to set in rapid motion

That is, the poem quickly \textit{\textbf{enacts}} the object, it transforms the object into working speaking energy.

In tension with the object the poet must try to write quickly, almost impetuously, so that the whole 'history' of the object gets displayed and none of its excitement is lost.
To write so quickly, at the rate of the tension, is called writing in time. Bergson calls it "real time." Fenollosa emphasizes "the fundamental reality of time." Olson says "Rhythm is time (not measure . . . .) The root is 'rhein': to flow. And mastering the flow of the solid, time, we invoke others." They are all using "time" with the same meaning. By "time" they mean "the process," the propulsion of consciousness, specifically the rush of the imagination when the poet is in tension with the object. Time is the passage of force, the verb of change. As Fenollosa says, the primary law of nature is that "all acts are successive, even continuous; one causes or passes into another." This is evident in the continual dissolving and recreating of an object by the imagination, and the drama of changing imagery it undergoes. The poet must move with time, as quickly as it occurs, if he is to be conductor of all the split-second images that emanate from the object. For to move with time is to move at the speed of imagination, the speed of metaphor. The poet must break into "the process," "keep in, keep moving," he must "drive all nouns (objects) . . . back to process--to act." Only in time can the object act out its drama of being and becoming; only in time will the object be "alive," as though it were "a continuous moving picture."

When the poet is in tension with the object then he implicitly moves with the rhythm of the object. For the rhythm is, afterall, the flow of the parts of the object into itself.
The rhythm is naturally propelled out of the tension. The rhythm is keen, up front, at the mercy of the split-second breakaway of words, the images that project out of each other at the speed of fantasy. The poet merely gives vent to the rhythm through his breath. The rhythm must be propelled from the breath with the fervor peculiar to the tension.

At the moment of tension the poet's whole physiology knots up into sympathy with the object. His heart and throat grip the object like a tourniquet that tightens up to imitate the strain of the object, the tension of its parts (e.g., obviously the throat would constrict less in describing a balloon than in describing a snake about to lash out). So that each word will be gnarled, shaped according to that tension. This is the meaning of onomatopoeia (poeia: to make; onoma: name=to make a name from the object). That is, the object's tension is wrenched into voice. The words in the poem, then, must be live tissue connecting the object with the reader. The words must be impetuous, from the very 'mouth' of the object ("a snarl of the sources.") The poet must try to get so contemporary with the object, so tense with it, that the object speaks through him, naming and re-naming itself, as though announcing its own vocabulary. In other words, when the poet begins to write a poem about a tree, he does not contemplate what words go with "treeness"; rather he begins imitating the force of the tree. And imitat-
ing the force creates a vortex into which the words are naturally pulled. This is the act of metaphor, the words leaping immediately from the source to the reader. The words will then be tense with the nerve of the tree itself. The words must not be too loose and general in meaning but taut as the poet is taut to the object; or as Hulme says, "dry and hard" as though the words were issuing from the very bone of the object. The words as matrix of the real.

The poet in intuition, then, is like one strapped to the heart and nerve of the object, in utter sympathy with the object, and whose fate compels him to call out all the names of the object and recite its legends.
FOOTNOTES


2Ibid., p. 142.


4Ibid., p. 10.

5Ibid., p. 10.


7Ibid., p. 387.

8Ibid., p. 387.


12Ibid., p. 39.

14 Ibid., p. 35.
15 Ibid., p. 36.
16 Ibid., p. 36.
17 Ibid., pp. 188-189.
19 Ibid., p. 177.
20 Ibid., p. 179.
21 Hulme, p. 188.
22 Bergson, p. 190.
23 Ibid., p. 110.
24 Ibid., p. 28.
25 Hulme, pp. 196-197.
26 Bergson, p. 19.
28 Bergson, p. 35.
29 Whitehead, p. 43.
30 Hulme, p. 188.
31 Bergson, p. 186.
32 Whitehead, p. 94.
33 Sherburne, p. 16.


36 Ibid., p. 36.


40 Williams, "A Beginning on the Short Story (Notes)," p. 308.

41 Ibid., pp. 308-309.

42 Ibid., p. 307.


44 Ibid., p. 39.

45 Olson, "Human Universe," p. 4.


47 Bergson, p. 11.


50 Olson, "Against Wisdom As Such," *Human Universe and Other Essays*, p. 70.


52 Fenollosa, p. 142.
53 Williams, p. 308.
54 Olson, "Against Wisdom As Such," p. 70.
58 Ibid., p. 21.
63 Fenollosa, p. 140.
64 Ibid., p. 141.
65 Ibid., p. 140.
66 Ibid., p. 141.
67 Ibid., p. 146.
68 Ibid., p. 147.
69 Ibid., p. 147.
70 Fenollosa, p. 145.
71 Ibid., p. 154.
73 Spicer, p. 21.
74 Ibid., p. 21.
75 Ibid., p. 22.
79 Hulme, "Romanticism and Classicism," Speculations, p. 135.
80 Hulme, "Cinders," Speculations, p. 236.
81 Hulme, "Romanticism and Classicism," p. 135.
82 Hulme, "Cinders," p. 223.
83 Olson, Call Me Ishmael (San Francisco: City Lights, 1947), p. 13.
84 Ibid., p.116.
85 Ibid., p. 116.
88 Spicer, pp. 36-37.
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