

These LXI stanzas were written between Paris and Tunis, from spring to fall 1984, in the energy of passion, at that time in which revelations, previously attributed to living gods, change into unconditional epiphanies, Aya inscribes her name on the notebooks of the betrothed who lead the song, in her actuality, she revives the medieval Nidam, the young Persian, elder sister of Beatrice, with whom Ibn Arabi fell in love, in Mecca, in the year 598 of the Hegira, and who was the woman who inspired his Tarjuman al-Ashwaq, "The Interpreter of Ardent Desires," the divan in which certain motifs travel from one shore to the other, crossing centuries and languages, as if to accept the celebration of love, the source of movement, without which the universe would be void.

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TA'WIL & HENRI CORBIN: A Legacy for Radical American Poetics

by Eric Mottram

Ta'wil is, etymologically and inversely, to cause to return, to lead back, to restore to one's origins and to the place where one comes home, consequently to return to the true and original meaning of a text...

Ta'wil finally appears as the mainspring of every spirituality...going beyond all servitudes to the letter, all opinions accepted ready-made. Doubtless it is in Ismailean theosophy that it appears from the beginning as a fundamental procedure, with an exemplary flexibility and fertility. It is here too that thinkers were led to reflect upon the operation itself and its implications, and here that we can be most speedily informed concerning a procedure that engages the entire soul because it brings into play the soul's most secret sources of energy...

"He who practices the ta'wil is the one who turns his speech from the external form towards the inner reality."... The ta'wil causes the letter to regress to its true and original meaning, "with which" the figures of the exoteric letter symbolize.... The symbol is not an artificially constructed sign; it flows in the soul spontaneously to announce something that cannot be expressed otherwise.... To penetrate the meaning of a symbol is in no sense equivalent to making it superfluous or abolishing it, for it always remains the sole expression of the signified thing with which it symbolizes. .

— Henri Corbin, *Avicenna and the Visionary Recital* (1950).¹

I

In 1953 Basil Bunting wrote to Louis Zukofsky:²

Reverting to the West has made me more convinced than before that we've got to learn almost everything from the East (which, to the measure of my limited experience, is the lands of Islam) before there's a chance of any peace of mind or dignity for most of us. And that's a way of saying to hell with material welfare, and, logically, all

the laws and references and adages designed to procure it.

Bunting at the age of fifty-three could cite his first-hand experiences of Islam obtained while working in Persia and studying the culture. In America, Charles Olson drew towards certain aspects of Sufism through reading *Avicenna and the Visionary Recital* (1950) by Henry Corbin, the distinguished French professor of Islamic religion at the Sorbonne in the 1950s. Olson created a number of charts or "signs" or, as George Butterick calls them, "acts of investigation"³ that were intended to be published as a book. Their design is a chart of relationship and juxtaposition to stimulate investigation for "the science of man" - in 1953 he proposed an Institute of the Science of Man - part of his sense of history as "finding out for oneself." "A statement of methodology," Butterick calls it, and part of what is designated by the title of his fine essay, "Human Universe" (1951), an alternative to "wisdom as such"⁴ through possible universals created from shifting discovery, from the individual's creative "proprioception" or movement of his self as he creates himself in an "introceptive" condition. In Whitehead's *Process and Reality* (1929) Olson found a definition of Active Imagination that would later be placed with Corbin's work - "Neither God, nor the World, reaches static completion. Both are in the grip of the ultimate physical ground, the creative advance into novelty. Either of them, God and the World, is the instrument of novelty for the other." But this requires, Olson understood, certainly by 1963, a chart of actions:⁵

We require *mapping*. By topological law that the proximate a microcosm is literally as absolute as the other one, and, in the fact that something like ripples. But in any case that a syntax of apposition is 'true' to the 'order' which does obtain...and the *dotha* or judgment arises from this more accurate paratax, or is made more possible as an experience of experience, vision dream seeming [*doxa*] sitting-in, and the self-rising...

In a second note, two years later, to his review of Havelock's *Preface to Plato*, Olson offers two basic statements on terms needed to navigate the religious-philosophical inheritance: "(1), that the gods and heroes of mythology are *metaphors* and (2), that both gods and heroes are conspicuous and public." Olson's 1968 prospectus for work to be done, *A Plan for a Curriculum of the Soul*, proposed to be completed by 1973, has a chart as basis, whose titles

include "Ismaili Muslimism" and "Vision," texts written later by Michael Bylebil and Drummond Hadley. These items are placed in the plan with:⁶

human history

in this connection, as habitat
inhabitation of, rather than as politics say
or national. Instead, *physical*, &
vertically incremental

physical

man as animal [praxis of - as Earth as an
emotional mental experience

Poets as such, that is disciplined lives not
history or for any "art" reasons *example*,

Blake

the same, say, medicine men
& like theologians, example, Dante - Giotto

One of several investigations of his "chart" was a talk for the University of California Poetry Conference of 1965: "Causal Mythology."⁷ Olson proposes four stages of discourse: the Earth, the Image of the World, History or City, and the Spirit of the World. He adds an epigraph from the opening of Richard Wilhelm's 1945 translation of *The Secret of the Golden Flower*: "that which exists through itself is what is called meaning." As in the 1953 prospectus, "The Chiasma,"⁸ he wishes to define mythology as "literally the activeness, the possible activeness and personalness of experiencing it as such." This becomes "the connectivity" of the *Maximus* poems, and of the charts, especially the "Bibliography on America for Ed Dorn" (1955). The issue is information towards "the original visionary experience of having been you," the "person" who is there, axial with history and process, the structure of "total placement." In "Bk ii, ch.37" in *Maximus Poems IV, V, VI* he writes:

my memory is
the history of time

....

I am making a mappemunde, It is to include my being

It is called here, at this point and point of time
Peloria

Art can enact this discovery as "the only twin life has - its only valid metaphysics... if man is once more to possess intent in his life, and to take up the responsibility implicit in his life, he has to comprehend his own process as intact, from outside, by way of his skin, in, and by his own powers of conversion, out again."⁹ The four-part process of causal mythology can inaugurate the conversions, with the map-maker within his map, the World. Through a Hittite myth of the diorite stone, Olson proposes a vertical "growth principle of the Earth," which, through the lapis, the transforming agent, he applied to the human life. Reading these opening sections with Corbin's texts in mind, the vocabulary already suggests Olson's absorption of the Avicenna materials.

He begins direct use of Corbin's *Avicenna* with his earlier original "visionary experience of having been you" - similar to Robert Duncan's "visional experience." Olson says "I was very lucky once to have what poets call visions. They are literally either given things or voices which come to you from cause." In his edition of this lecture, Butterick draws attention to Olson's account of a 1958 "dream-message" that said, "Everything issues from the Black Chrysanthemum, and nothing is anything but itself measured so." In 1966 Olson also relates this to experience "under the Sacred Mushroom." In this same essay, "Experience and Measurement," he also refers to Avicenna's angels: "the Guardians to know and to order" - "the Scribes to obey (what is known and the order which follows it." In "Causal Mythology," Corbin is quoted - from the *Recital of Hayy ibn Yaqzan* - with the understanding that "the principle would seem to be that the only interest of a spiritual exercise is production."

The recital concerns two kinds of powers: order/control and action/writing, the right and left angels or intelligences. In the transcription of outtakes from the 1966 National Educational Television film on Olson, he again uses the Avicenna recital.¹⁰ He has been speaking of a Muslim belief that "most of life is, literally, the understanding that you don't understand. And only the Muslims have sense enough to credit that as being a perfect - I mean, not an indecent or a put-down, but...nature, again." He adds a passage from Heraclitus which he had used at least since 1953 - "Man is estranged from that with which he is most familiar" - and one from Charles Saunders Peirce, defining pragmatism in 1878: "Thought is belief. Belief is

action." He uses the latter towards a sense of the "end," in "Against Wisdom as Such" many years earlier: "I've lived fifty-five years and this year's found out that, of course...that gets the absolute end around us the right way: the absolute is the end, not the beginning." This is achieved by imagination, or what Corbin describes as Active Imagination: those figures and forms which we have to discover and to resist not understanding, and yet still continue strenuous functions of imagination and its art. Now Olson uses Heidegger's term "preparation" for the scribe's action:

The poet today, an American poet, comes from a great preparation, which is, that if he obeys he writes. This is angelology, the back-to-back of anthropology, and the lacking half of all nineteenth century thought between Darwinian, Freudian, and Marxian and Einsteinian.

Here he draws in Keats, cited so purposefully in *The Special View of History* (1970, originally lectures from Black Mountain College in 1956), and two American painters:

that Beauty and Truth - or Beauty, Truth is all you need to know and all, I think, you may know, or something, in this life. But that's it, those two things. And I believe that the American painters, namely Mr. Pollock and Mr. Kline, in 1948 - and I am of their time - solved the problem of how to live. The problem since has been how to be at all. And this is a more interesting problem, and it's being garbled and gobbled.

By 1966 the Active Imagination had become more urgently necessary. America had developed its brutal, crazed power. Even four years ealier, Olson could grasp a more positive strength - for instance in "A House Built by Capt. John Somes 1763":¹¹

I was a Gnostic possibly, I ain't any longer at least to my present problems something neither Buddhist nor Gnostic will do, but because ideas are only what live, or the Forms ideas are the statement of, it would be valuable if we now had a completely Indo-Europeanized American dictionary...

Butterick notes¹² that Olson had read in 1960 and 1961 Hans Jonas's *The Gnostic Religion* and Corbin's "Cyclical Time in Mazdaism and Ismailism," together with Henri Charles Puech's "Gnosis and Time," in the *Eranos Yearbook* entitled *Man and Time*.¹³ During the last weeks of his life, in the winter of 1969-70, he returned powerfully to these resources of proprioception in his final writing, "The Secret of the Black Chrysanthemum."¹⁴

But to return first to "Causal Mythology" and Olson's use of Hayy ibn Yaqzan's account of the adept who reaches a clime of "the terrestrial angels." The right side group "know and order," while the left "obey and act." Among them are two "to whom the human being is entrusted, those who are called 'Guardians and Noble Scribes'.... He who is to the right belongs to the angels who order; to him it falls to dictate. He who is to the left belongs to the angels who act; to him it falls to write. It is this interaction that leads to the posterity of the Primary Creation." Olson does not quote this last statement, but he comments that this is another example of the "dipolar" in mythology. From what follows, it is clear that he is within his characteristic field of how "the Earth gets to be achieved": "we are born, ourselves, with a picture of the world...the whole of creation...[an] imago mundi." Two "conditions of writing" appear: one "based on what I do or what others do," the other "from the darkness of one's own initiation":

...even the overt spiritual exercise of initiation is initial in us. We are, we are, spiritual exercise, by having been born.

Olson then connects this with Blake's fourfold man in *A Descriptive Catalogue of Pictures* (1809), "Number V."¹⁵ The fourfold original man "was self-divided, and his real humanity slain on the stems of generation":

The Strong man represents the human sublime. The Beautiful man represents the human pathetic, which was in the wars of Eden divided into male and female. The Ugly man represents the human reason...

The crucial connection for Olson follows:

The Artist has considered his strong Man as a receptacle of Wisdom,

a sublime energizer...

The strong Man acts from conscious superiority, and marches on in fearless dependence on the divine decrees, raging with the inspirations of a prophetic mind. The Beautiful Man acts from duty, and anxious solicitude for the fates of those for whom he combats. The Ugly Man acts from love of carnage, and delight in the savage barbarities of war, rushing with sportive precipitation into the very teeth of the affrighted enemy...

The aim of *Jerusalem* is the fourfold Man in that human universe that Blake envisages in the final plate:¹⁶ "the Jerusalem we have always known," part of our "illumination." Olson's "causal mythology" for a human universe is built from materials in *The Secret of the Golden Flower*, the Hurrian-Hittite "Song of Ullikummi," Corbin's *Avicenna* and Blake's *Descriptive Catalogue*, with skills born of necessity. Read in this context, his poems are his Recital, discovering his local in Massachusetts history as part of his causal inheritance, taking their place in the Active Imagination of the *Maximus Poems*, with mythology defined as "literally the activeness and personalness of experiencing [the Earth] as such," the order given in the four terms: the Earth, Imago Mundi, History and the American.¹⁷

The discovery of usable information is characteristic. The larger ambition of necessity is already there in "The Chiasma" in 1953, initially stated as a "base science ARCHEOLOGY (the re-opening of the backward horizons of man NOT as anthropoid" - and the "emergence of CULTURE-MORPHOLOGY." He defines his term for the present "stage" as "post-modernism," long before it had been hacked to extinction by journalistic academics, "in order that the theory of *openness* may be free even from the very gains which made the openness possible." Laws may be produced but not at the risk of "structure, statements & acts" tested by "observation of behavior." The challenge to the condition of western culture at mid-century is already present. Olson says to his students:

I am assuming any one of you is prepared to entertain the idea that we are already beyond rationalism, beyond Humanism, beyond realism [--conceptualism, nominalism]. Europe(an) post-rationalism, Western civilization as a whole, post-Humanism - and so cruelly caught in an either-or...

He also includes "that phoney enemy, Communism." Those intent on "a new civilization" are "phenomenologists" examining any "universals" as phenomena before any "formulations of general laws sufficient to become validities, sanctions, or modes of behaviour & probable enough to be a new base to society." This "dynamics" includes the idea of a "cultural landscape" as what we do to "the smallest item" and "the whole earth."

Ten years later, in "On History," a discussion with Robert Duncan, Robert Creeley, Allen Ginsberg and Philip Whalen, Olson spoke on history as "our memory" and used Corbin again:¹⁸

the beautiful idea of the Muslims that you're walking towards that angel - the actual occurrence is on the Cinvat Bridge in the text - who's coming towards you...a moment when you pass through your angel and become the creature, not of the two, but of the fact that you are without any chance involved with another figure who is you, who is coming towards you in time as you proceed forward in time...

Olson discovered this "configuration of the Fravarti, the tutelary angel" in Corbin's "Cyclical Time," although it appears in a number of that scholar's works. He transfers the location from the bridge that leads to the Day of Judgment, to Paradise or Hell, to his present concerns with transformation towards a fully functional Active Imagination.¹⁹ Individuation takes place as the soul interacts with history as information absorbed in memory - Heidegger's poet's preparation and readiness for his act of imaginative creation. Duncan and Creeley urge Olson to repeat "Place; & Names" (1962), which includes:²⁰

the complementarity of
cosmos (complementary to individual
or private) and not to cities or
events in the way it has, in
a mistaken secondary way, been
understood.

In "Later Tyrian Business" (*Maximus Poems IV, V, VI* - the poem dates from 1961) the possible product is "a 'Soul' of the World...the Anima Mundi."

Corbin's Cinvat Bridge appears briefly in *Maximus Poems IV, V, VI*,²¹ and the angelically produced soul in "Maximus, at the Harbor"²²: "Paradise is a person. Come into this world./The soul is a magnificent Angel./And the thought of its thought is the rage /of Ocean : *apophainesthai*." The passage used from "Cyclical Time" concerns the Mazdaist person who embodies the archetype of ability to activate *ta'wil* to control existence and information, "the internal metamorphosis, the state of discerning lucidity." In fact, Olson quotes Corbin, but part of what is not quoted reads: "Every thought, every word, every good action is a person." The analysis required "'may well be called phenomenological." The next passage Olson uses deals with the Greek term meaning "that which shows forth":

since the reality of the act, of the event, is thus reduced to the person who enacts it and understood as that person's mode of existence, every verb is mentally conjugated in the middle voice (e.g., the *apophainesthai* of the phenomenology which shows itself the *phainomenon*)

This became essential for Olson's sense of an Active Imagination, with "action, thought, or word having their term in the agent: they are reflected and personified in him; they are in 'every instance' this person...he is what his action *makes him be*." The poet's preparedness and responsibility, and the mode of middle voice, may be produced here. In this poem: "the soul/in its progressive rise...passes in & out/of more difficult things/and by so passing/ *apophainesthai*." The poem concludes with "the Perfect Child." Corbin explains how this condition of "exegete" is also given through the Gnostic idea of the Perfect Child or Primordial Adam, a figure of intelligence in Paradise, an idea that haunts poets as different as William Blake and Robert Duncan, an image not crudely of lost ability but of possible human recovery of ability. The ambition is active imagination towards intelligent understanding and therefore true creativity. In "Under the Mushroom," a 1963 discussion of his experience with Timothy Leary and the psilocybin-producing mushroom at Harvard in the winter of 1960-61, Olson again employs, at the conclusion of his narrative, a context from Corbin's essay. On this occasion it is for the experience of what is covered by the crude word "eternity," and the necessity for a space-time word with more factual detail. He does not quote Corbin, but a remembered passage is summarized: that the Islamic philosophers "supply a complete narrative to

epochs, so that you've got time stretching out as far out into overtime as we think, more easily, of space stretching out or, as they say, expanding."²³

In 1968 the Institute of Further Studies at SUNY Buffalo published "'Clear, Shining Water', De Vries says, *Altgermanische Religionsgeschichte* (Berlin, 1957), Vol II, p.380." Olson is again researching the functions of myth in cultural studies and in the preparation of the poet - this time, the Three Sisters or goddesses, the Parcae, etc. His starting point is:²⁴

the etymological part of *ta'wil*...the other part, if I take Corbin right, in a footnote in *Avicenna and the Visionary Recital*, is topological - and this present instance seems very much perhaps the (vertical) topological matter, of all matters which can find a basis for a physics of psyche at this revolutionary point in re-taking the cosmology of creation as fact, both in instant and in consequence, thus prevailing, hidden or no, in whatever is up anywhere for whomever the more so now...

The scientific study of location, in every sense, is required to situate myth in time and place of cultural processes: topology is essential. Olson is working the ground that concerned Buckminster Fuller, particularly in a paper, "written at Black Mountain College in 1949," entitled "Total Thinking"-which would be a good title for Olson's enterprise, and that of Corbin's "Mazdaism and Ismailism."

Fuller begins:²⁵

Man, in degrees beyond all other creatures known to him, consciously participates - albeit meagrely - in the selective mutations and accelerations of his own evolution. This is accomplished as a subordinate modification and a component function of his sum total relative dynamic equilibrium as he speeds within the comprehensive and complex interactions of universe (which he alludes to locally as environment)... Every shift (in the energy balance accomplished at earth's crust) affects all universe. Though fantastic, this is scientific fact.

Fuller's version of Olson's investigations is a need for "comprehensive disciplines and the developed ability to synthesize." But "man shows synergetic re-genius inferior to Nature's regeneration." On the point of

active interior preparation, Fuller is close to Corbin and Olson when he speaks of the need now to relate "the now reliable sensation of an inwardness and outwardness," and kindred senses of inward and downward, to "plural centres":

...he will come naturally to this new sustaining awareness of the impossibility of his doing ought but sustain his equilibrious and navigable position. If there is no inherent "down" in universe, man cannot sink.

This is not a semantic abstraction. What did man mean when he said, "Up"? Unless one is standing on the other's shoulders, the direction "up" for any two men one the curved face of earth is always geometrically different...

While one man is explaining to another what he means by "up," the earth has moved, and "as man now flies about the earth, the absurdity of his up-and-down reference becomes apparent." In and out, down and up are relative: "Truth is a relationship."

The relevant passages in *Avicenna and the Visionary Recital* are the ones quoted as epigraphs at the start of this essay.²⁶ "The Animate versus the Mechanical, and Thought" (1969)²⁷ impressively summarises and intensifies these issues in Olson's lifelong investigation of poetics and their prime personal and social functions, and constitutes his own version of a phenomenology of perception. A passage in Merleau-Ponty's *Phenomenology of Perception* may be used as an indicative parallel:²⁸

To have a body is to possess a universal setting, a schema of all types of perceptual unfolding and of all those inter-sensory correspondences which lie beyond the segment of the world which we are actually perceiving. A thing is, therefore, not actually *given* in perception, it is internally taken up by us, reconstituted and experienced by us in so far as it is bound up with a world, the basic structures of which we carry with us, and of which it is merely one of many possible concrete forms. Although part of our living experience, it is nevertheless transcendent in relation to our life because the human body, with its habits which weave round it a human environment, has running through it a movement towards the world itself.... Human life is defined in terms of this power

which it has of denying itself in objective thought, a power which stems from its primordial attachment to the world...

What needs to be elucidated, then, is this primary comprehension of the world...

So Olson begins:

Gravity, in fact, but pre- or postmechanics. That is, not effect (Newtonian) not proof (Recent) but experiential: phenomenological, perceptual, actionable.

In fact 'history', as, in that sense, difference from 'astronomy': that event (in Merleau-Ponty's sense - narrative) is a perceptual - that would be primordial -element of experience so much so that it 'carries' throughout the system - the system being 'Creation' - as 'element' (or 'weight') as profound as any mechanical measurable or demonstrable 'truth'; that event is a condition of organism.

Like Fuller, Olson states cosmology, both here and throughout *The Maximus Poems*, as "ends and boundaries," "space activities" in creation, the condition of thought, the state of the "animate." This particular essay's set of what McLuhan would call "probes" now leads to an "addition" on Corbin written a little later. First, he proposes history as "inverse square of distance" rather than of "the event" - using his time-space ideas again. Experience is the criterion: "the great unadmitted limit" - "anything inexperienced in the weight or matter of the organism is not transacted - traversed," and therefore not in fact known. It is an issue of:

'perception' sense---of the freshness in time of the narrative or history as a tone or mode & so activeness of, for a human being, 'Creation' that there is no 'knowledge' of the crucial (axial - tropistic) sense of *anything*, including the "Universe" or the "Self," except by this 'Time' phenomenon of freshness which Animatedness, *in and by itself*, as initial of experience.

And by "narrative" and "event" is meant "its only means - Memory." The relevant passage in *Phenomenology of Perception* can again be linked to the exegesis of *ta'wil* and its symbology:

The miracle of consciousness consists in bringing to light, through attention, phenomena which re-establish the unity of the object in a new dimension at the very moment when they destroy it. Thus attention is neither an association of images, nor the return to itself of thought already in control of its objects, but the active constitution of a new object which makes explicit and articulate what was until then presented as no more than an indeterminate horizon.

Olson is concerned with the genetic formation of image, gestalt, morphology: that is, as with Corbin's figures, Active Imagination:

Thought, consciousness and sense perception...the fundamental essential and experiential - active...the unbelievably left-out unbelievably powerful and sole human 'powers'...

The Animate is the aboriginal instance of activity....Hermes...

Olson concludes with Corbin's "constantly affirmed homology [relationships, correspondences] among *the iniatic cosmos, the world of nature, and the celestial world*" - "a principle of likeness" (which is also a Fuller basis). Hermes might be thought a cursory reference to Corbin's *The Man of Light in Iranian Sufism*, but this volume dates from 1971 (translation 1978). The figure of Hermes and the penetrations of Hermeticism in Islamic theosophy are particular not only to this book. In *Avicenna*, Corbin shows Hermes as "the ancestor of philosophers" for his world, particularly for Gnosis in Islam: "There was a Gnosis in Islam as there was a Gnosis in Christianity." The reference in "The Animate versus the Mechanical, and Thought" probably emerges from Corbin's excellent account of Hermes's visionary encounter with Poimandres in one of several visions of ecstasy, of the kind known to Suhrawardi and Avicenna. It is exactly the kind of myth of enlightenment that would appeal to Olson, and indeed to others engaged in radical poetics:²⁹

"I," said he, "am Poimandres, the Mind [*Nous*] of the Sovereignty...I know what you wish, for indeed I am with you everywhere...." Forthwith all things changed in aspect before me, and were opened out in a moment. And I beheld a boundless view; all was changed into light, a mild and joyous light. And when I raised my head again, I saw in my mind that the light consisted of innumerable

Powers, and had come to be...a world without bounds...

Corbin comments: "It is of this ecstasy of Hermes that there is a trace in Suhrawardi, the Form of Light replies to Hermes: 'I am thy Perfect Nature'."

In 1972, the present writer published "Pound, Olson and The Secret of the Golden Flower,"³⁰ which considered, in part, Olson's engagements with the *I Ching* and Richard Wolheim's edition of *The Secret of the Golden Flower* (1962). In "Against Wisdom as Such" (1954), Olson checked the *I Ching's* advocacy of "separable" wisdom - separable from man - through "the morphology of forms which is everywhere and everything." This is the poet's function, material to Olson's "An Ode on Nativity" (1951)³¹ and that passage in "Against Wisdom as Such"³² where he records that he read the *I Ching* critically for what he took to be its advocacy of "separable" wisdom, separated from the man, a matter of signs and symbols in secret or in sect:

wisdom, like style, is the man...wisdom itself, or at least the cultivation of energy-states per se, thrives on secrecy, on sect, and - at exactly the times we are in - finds its pleasure in conspiracy.

The poetic action here closely resembles Gaston Bachelard's resistance to psychoanalytic interpretation:

[the poet] is not free to be part of, or to be any, sect...there are no symbols to him, there are only his own compound forms, and each one solely the issue of the time of the moment of its creation, not any ultimate except what he in his heat and that instant in its solidity yield. That the poet cannot afford to traffick in any "sign" other than his one, his self, the man or woman he is. Otherwise God does rush in. And art is washed away, turned into that second force, religion.

The "secular way" is that of *wise*, the Anglo-Saxon for "wise as a way of being or acting." But religious *stuff* from "the East" can be interpreted healthily:

I believe that the traditional order of water to fire to light - that is, as of the sectaries, as well as the Ionian physicists, that except a man be born of water and the spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God - has to be retaken. Light was the sign of the triumph of love

and spirit before electronics. And we are after.

Olson cuts through the alchemic and gnostic to: "all but heat is symbolic ...reductive"; and as much as he uses *The Secret of the Golden Flower* for its processes of energy transformations, he resists its yogic and alchemic inferences. And both he and Robert Duncan (in "The H.D. Book II, 4/5") criticize Pound's total light process as centre of a poet's enlightenment in the *Cantos*. Olson's essay concludes:

A song is heat. There may be light, but light and beauty is not the state of: the state is the grip of (and it is not feverish, is very cool, is - the eyes are -) how did they get that way?

Pound, Olson and Duncan are concerned for rebirth and birth, the "circulation of light" and the creation of a divine seed-kernel - in *The Secret of the Golden Flower*, an initiation process of Creation in the Self. The book contains those images of life-energies common to Asian and Eastern Mediterranean cultures: the light of the eye, the light of the sun and moon, the birth of light from water and fire in the earth-body. Olson's "Bibliography on America for Ed Dorn" (1964) and "Proprioception" (1965) project the issues for a poetics of creativity deeply connected with those of Corbin's Sufis. And the Perfect Child - already in "An Ode on Nativity" - appears as "the boy within ourselves- the *puer aeternus*, the Christ, who must be born in us and who, in another way, is the bridegroom of the soul..."³³

These are conditions for fulfilling consciousness, to be the "exceptional man" ("The Gate and the Centre," 1951), the man who in the form of Apoloniuss of Tyana (1952) remains silent for five years and descends into place of "the light of the mind" in order to regain his form as "an alert man," "middle term, as it were, /between gods and man."³⁴ In a 1965 letter to Jack Clarke, Olson wrote: "Knowing is simply purifying oneself to be tuned in - to play the music" - again, a form of Heidegger's "preparation." This can take the form of recognition, a dance of recognition, an experience of recognition. The "conflagration of my self":

...the terms stay physical in another way, in that way are neither light nor fire - with him it is a burning, surely, it is as the action of the sun on us and on things, increase is the issue, more growth, more

life, more life, leaves men.³⁵

These concerns not only connect with Olson's use of Corbin but with his use of Blake's Fourfold Man and, in the "Ethics" section of *The Special View of History* (1956), Keats' "Man of Achievement" or the man of Negative Capability who resists "irritable reaching after fact and reason": "he is exposing two different methodologies: reaching after fact is the experimental method and reaching after reason is logic." Olson offers his reading as part of his use of "process" (after Heraclitus and Whitehead):

To stay in mysteries, uncertainties, doubts, then, is Keats' way of talking about staying in process in order to realize the ontogenetic in the face of the philogenetic, not to slip into the error of trying to fix things by an irritable reaching after fact and reason.

Olson then situates this proposition with Heisenberg's Uncertainty Principle and against impositional power: "the slip of the whole holding to POWER from power," and allowing this to develop Character; "the Man of Negative Capability isn't either individual or of any determined 'Character'... The Chinese text can give an extraordinary parallel to passages in Corbin that Olson and others have used:³⁶

Since the heart and the breath are mutually dependent, the circulation of the light must be united with the rhythm of breathing. For this, light of the ear is above all necessary. There is a light of the eye and a light of the ear. The light of the eye is the united light of the sun and moon outside. The light of the ear is the united seed of sun and moon within. The seed is thus the light in crystallized form. Both have the same origin and are different only in name. Therefore, understanding (ear) and clarity (eye) are one and the same effective light.

The "man of achievement" emerges out of living in this process and not one of dominance or submission, power or subservience. He avoids the division of separations, boundary and stasis. Olson's access to these Asian procedures fulfil Jung's own need in the appendix to Wolheim's edition of *The Secret of the Golden Flower*: to "spin the spiritual threads from Europe back to Asia." Olson's awareness of the personal and social risks involved

are present in the 1963 "Under the Mushroom" talk, emphasizing the necessity for a "curriculum," as he stated it in Vancouver earlier that year and further used it in opening his Modern Poetry course at Buffalo: "a triad of politics, theology and epistemology." In his notes to the talk George Butterick valuably records Olson's classroom amplification of the terms in 1964:³⁷

He related the terms politics, or the Greek *physis* 'nature', to "necessity"; epistemology, or nouns 'mind,' to "possibility"; and religion, or *theos* 'God,' to the "imaginable."

Towards the end of his "mushroom" talk, Olson relates his discourse on will to a passage in Jung's *Psychological Types* on four basic functions: "thinking and feeling, sensation and intuition" and then to his own chance discovery of *Phenomenology of Perception*, and his sense of "arche text" and archetype, again using an Asian process:³⁸

...being a Tantrist [a believer in the weave of groundwork, system and doctrine], I utterly believe that you can talk language, literally, human language as reporting from text. Literally, from text....And that "this original text is perception itself" [from *Phenomenology of Perception*]. What gets us really home if you talk poetry.

And then, as stated earlier in this essay, he employs how Corbin's Muslim writers "supply a complete narrative to epoch." In "The Contents" section of *The Special View of History* he gives the "subject": "actual willful man." We need all the process of information we can assemble in order to combat "that horrible fallacy" of imposing "history" as "fate":

a life is the historical function of the individual. History is the intensity of the life process - its *life valve*...conditioned by its *determining* power, which is manifested in definite historical operations.

History is not "a force (the most wicked present fallacy of all)." Olson cites Oliver Wendell Holmes, that "the irresistible is usually only that which hasn't been resisted." The discourse then moves to the Active Imagination. In "The Stance":

It isn't a question of fiction versus knowing....At no point outside fiction can one be sure.

What did happen? Two alternatives: make it up, or try to find out. Both are necessary. We inherit an either/or, from the split of science and fiction...

This action calls for courage towards ("On History") "two results of discrimination... despair and faith." Both terms are included in "humilitas," which is not "humility...that horror and practice of western man." Confidence is also required: "History is the confidence of limit as a man is caught in the assumption and power of change" ("The View"). "Achievement" is therefore as opposed to "power" ("The Factors") as open to closed, creative incompleteness to power-identity. Power is not genius. The separation of the terms "individual" and "society" is "the garbage you are asked to listen to." There is no or - "you have to have company." This is generic to "process" (and is akin to Fuller's *I Seem to Be a Verb*).³⁹

Therefore Olson, in fact, corrects Nietzsche: "Two sorts of will, a will to power or a will of achievement." And he includes art as "the order of man, specifically man, and not nature not history, not a creator God but simply man's own powers of imposing form on content." The upshot of twentieth century indeterminacy principles is the reinforcement of human creativity principles. Here Olson may be placed with John Cage's fearless sense of removing directional purpose; in "Kosmos" he writes (and it recalls both Fuller and Whitehead):

...life is the chance success of a play of creative accidents. It is the principle of randomness seen in its essential application, not in any serial order imposed at random on either chance or accident...but in the factual observation of how creation does occur: by the success of its own accident...*coincidence* and *proximity*, because the space-time continuum is known, become the determinants of *chance* and *accident* and make possible *creative success*....The motive...of reality is process not goal...

But "in the last stage" occurs "satisfaction, when both the enjoyment and the desire are one (the desire for form is the creative force, or what has usually been called God), the process of feeling becomes the reality and man

is 'satisfied'."

In the "Muthos" section of *The Special View of History*, Olson begins to enter those necessities articulated by his reading of Corbin: "the kosmos inside a human being - the order harmony which we usually call our individual or personal experience. Or what is variously called the private life, the intimate, the self, whatever." The process is "the passage of acts [as] a two-way circuit, in and out." Creation is "the multiples at play," and within them is "leaning in a direction which produces a result which is called success." Mythology is "our own inside sense" of multiples and personal life, "the most vertical of all the several quanta of experience, the person's own private quantum."

These emphases are seriously undermined by Olson's neglect of the inheritance of and training to myths in any culture, and of the maintenance or destruction of them by the controls within any state. Not until the end of this section does he state three "inclusive factors in the single life" as:

Eros

Economos to preside over, direct, rule, your own house

Ethos (custom use habit fashion manner usage practices: a rite ceremony
institution ordinance

((in aesthetics, *ethos* is the moral, ideal or universal element in a work of art as distinguished from that which is emotional in its appeal or subjective...

But he does include the power of desire within "common law" as a "path" of behaviour:

it is with EROS that mythology is concerned. Which amounts to saying that as a psyche man is only an order comparable to kosmos when he or she is in love - that only love is order in the vertical of the self.

This is a presence in "I, Maximus of Gloucester, to You" (c.1950), where, in section one, Olson uses the myth of Eros rising out of the egg-stone; and in section four: "one loves only form/and form only comes /into existence when/the thing is born." In the penultimate section of *The Special View of History*, subtitled "The Laws," this is developed into:

...each one of us has the desire for the good (Love), we move in beauty (Aphrodite), we care for the Real (Truth or idea), and we have to do something about it, whatever we do (we Will).

But the problem of using the Active Imagination is to implement this "methodology," as Olson does characteristically in his writings, since "Man is estranged from that with which he is most familiar" (Heraclitus).

So that Olson's Herodotean investigations require the double process of exegesis in *ta'wil*. In 1975, Butterick published a 1966 manuscript found in Olson's papers, bearing the statement of location: "Wednesday night March 16th/1966," and showing the poet working for a combination of his philosophical resources. The paper is entitled "Experience and Measurement,"⁴⁰ and begins: "Is there *anything* imaginably else?" Four years before his death, he had become deeply aware of the sacrificial costs to his life of what he called "the attempt to acquire complete concentration (the conventual)..." - "I really do prefer soul to society; and think that the conventual is now solely the imagination which applies." Through a dream, he returns to the Black Chrysanthemum, *The Secret of the Golden Flower*, and the interactions of the need to measure when we are part of what is measurable and immeasurable, the One, and the need to find out what the urge to meaning is. He returns to Whitehead's calling his work "the philosophy of organism" and his experience of, rather than thinking about, these processes "under the Sacred Mushroom":

that everyone & everything is nothing but itself so that all - everything - is therefore well....it's all too real and way beyond any attitude or seeking some greater or bigger answer than what so plainly is quite in front of us all the anywhere whatever it is: that it is....This then becomes Measurement...

He includes Greek, Norse, Nahuatl, Sanskrit and Iroquois words and cultural locations for experience of the body-mind of human self within the cosmos - a highly private sense, and therefore to be spoken of or written warily if at all. Naming is dangerous - in some cultural actions, sacrilegious, secret:

I have spelled this out - & spilled purposely what is known as the

"Secret" - to put an end forever to what I consider no longer interesting: that any art or science shall any longer get away with such exactness and time as life takes, and not be or address itself to, at least *measure*, and to *meaning*.

Neither adept nor a pusher of sect or group, he wishes to state experientially the conditions of art and reason. Then he once again uses Corbin's *Avicenna*: the two angels, one to know and order, the other to obey "what is known and the order which follows from it" and to act. This same year, a poem for *The Maximus Poems: Volume Three*, beginning "the Mountain of no difference," uses the same Corbin materials - the Guardian angel of order, the Scribe who writes, towards:⁴¹

...a discrete & continuous conduction

of the life from a sequence of events measurable

in time none of this is contestable....

...my Beloved's head grows to Heaven,

does my Life grow

out of my "life" Likewise--likewise?

This is combined, in "Experience and Measurement," with Whitehead on "measurement" in *Process and Reality*: "a systematic procedure dependent on the dominant societies of the cosmic epoch" and an analysis in which there are "no infinitesimals," only "finite segments," since, in Olson's modification of Heraclitus, "All does rhyme."

Still ("keeping my attentions as clear," as he wrote in 1968),⁴² in his final writing, in hospital, on six sheets of paper towel, Olson is still, in 1970, discovering, how to summarize his lifetime concerns, his location in that Chrysanthemum - the original Greek means "golden flower." He refers to Hermann Weyl and Ernst Mach, used early in his career. In fact, the writing is nearest to his fine essay of 1951, for *Origin*, "The Gate and the Center," in its inclusiveness, its need to "hold your life, this powerful thing." The action is in fact a massively condensed chart of needed positions and language, for

fundamental vision and action, recording a lifetime's work. In the fifth section of "The Secret of the Black Chrysanthemum" he writes:⁴³

But behind it all, backwards (Ocean forwards *ta'wil* the Angel of Cinvat
Bridge you will pass through if you
propose it
the 1st Angel (of the Pleroma -
the 1st *samsarar*
the "2nd Angel *farushta*
the 3rd angel your own
outside Creation outside God himself....

[Muslim]
so that his Angelology ('good' virtue (strength)

Under the pressures of his last few years Olson fervently devoted as much energy as he could muster to his experience-knowledge project. On July 23rd, 1968, he wrote:⁴⁴

Time's
unbearable complexity - as though our souls
could never be the equal of our bodies, its
devouring
occurring, at such a rate only knowing
Ko Hung says white and preserving
black (that the mystery-unity is seen only in the sun
- as against the Truth unity and
will make us unsuccessful
in the desire for death

Olson had tracked down the Taoist philosopher and alchemist and is using part of his writing here.⁴⁵ The issues infer already a main passage in "The Secret of the Black Chrysanthemum":

the
transformative

"Through time & exact definition the
intelligenda....

analogy: Black Chrysanthemum means you
knowing that, that you are nothing but yourself, and, that
which exists through itself

is what is called Meaning....

The Active imagination now works through a career of experience: *samsara* - the Hindu and Buddhist unending cycle of birth and rebirth; Jung's *Psychology and Alchemy*; Weyl's *Philosophy of Mathematics and Science* for the "manifold" as principle of measurement, and "absolute constants in nature" signified as "two pure numbers"; various forms of elixir in *The Secret of the Golden Flower*, the Hittite "Song of Ullikumi"; Norse cosmology for the Serpent of Midgard, primeval giants from whom Earth was made, Niflheim - home of the dead, etc.; Planck's quantum theory; the Buddhist Noble Eightfold Path for right living; Hesiod's *Theogony*, Whitehead, Eric Havelock, Enyalios - war god of Knossos Linear B tablets, and much more, towards "homo Maximus/Anthropos," Jung's terms for archetypal man, the man developed by self and culture into a viable life of Active Imagination. The exegetical process necessary to "lead the soul back to truth" is *ta'wil*, taken up from Corbin, together with the Cinvat Bridge angel and the Gnostic term for plenitude of fulness of God, the Man of Power as Achievement, "pleroma."

In Corbin's "Cyclical Time," Olson found terms for decisions of imaginative investigation, bearings that Robert Duncan also uses. Corbin begins with questions from a fourth-century Mazdean manual: "Do I belong to Ohrmazd or to Ahriman? To the angels or the demons?" The reply is: to the wisdom of the angel not the spirit of darkness, to the lineage of "primordial Man, Anthropos": "my vocation [is] to think of Ohrmazd as present existence (*hastik*), which has always existed..." Absolute birth and death moments are refused, and a non-dimensional time and existence are postulated, as some physicists do today, a simultaneity rather than separations. Corbin proposes "a sonorous space" of metamorphoses. Ahriman is the principle of restriction, limited dimensionality, and a rigid definition of personal existence. The person belonging to Ohrmazd enacts his part of this cosmic drama of process: "time without shore, without origin"

as against "limited time or 'the time of long domination'." This scheme is archetypal without the fatal mythical repetitiousness of Jung and his disciples, particularly Joseph Campbell, and the Eternal Return brigade, who have one answer for everything. Refusal of "opposition between idea and matter, or between universal and perceptible" checks the absurd Christian idea of Fall, but could well engage Blake's idea of Fall into division as a kind of victory for Ahriman. In Mazdaism, "a transition to the state of *getik* [an earthly visible material state]" is not a fall but "a fulfillment and plenitude." The demon of the Contrary Powers promotes "the arena of struggle" which is not the Heraclitean idea of war used in Olson's "Enyallon" poem, performed in "Causal Mythology"; nor is it the cruelly ridiculous Christian-Muslim "Holy War" and its "prize." Such conflicts destroy "the dimension of light," the processual future, the will to change that does not change. The figure of "a luminous being" is no abstraction, but the way a human being may enter the cosmological - a main issue throughout Olson's career. The angel Mithras mediates the opposition between light and its antagonist, a figure who has "gained victory over himself," a main a major force, therefore, in the drama of the Ishmaelite Gnosis. The gnostic element in Mazdaism counters the futility of any idea of a Saviour coming to save from sins: it could never happen.

In Mazdaism, three acts occur in the world's twelve millennia: creation, creation transferred to *getic*; the catastrophe of the Negator's destruction of material Creation into the mixture we experience; the victory of Light. Ohrmazd is "luminous, clear-eyed, full of vigour resulting from perfect endowment and not from brutal and violent nature." He is resuscitated as the ideal dimension.

This summary is a small selection from a complex and concentrated configuration of "imagination" which enables the visionary to connect angelic with personal, celestial with earthly. Imagination enables a confrontation with Ahriman or Counter-Creation, who knows this takes enormous time and energy, and therefore may retard the outcome for Ohrmazd's Light. Art is a weapon of Ohrmazd, the awakening of Creation and Redemption and therefore individuality and differentiation in the Self. Hope is embodied in the combat, especially since Ohrmazd is not an omnipotent god imposing Law, trials, sufferings and submission without understanding. His is an ethic of companionship in combat. He is not an immutable, immobile deity but creative acts of imagination. The essential idea is "a unity mediating between the duality of Light and Darkness." In

summary, Corbin writes: "every creature is composed of his earthly part and of his celestial part, his archetype or angel" - and "fractions of time (months, days, hours) may themselves be visualized as persons (angels and archangels whose names they bear and who are their event)." The whole self is figured as an angel or *paredros*, similar to the Hermetic *Agathos Daimon*: "In Hermeticism the *Nous* is at once a god, the faculty of intuitive knowledge in man, and his tutelary angel (as *Agathos Daimon*). This is the active structuring of a man of achievement, to use Olson's ideal from Keats, and without it he is open to the invasions of Ahriman. He omits the principle of growth, of the existential leap that frees from repetitive restrictions, the limits of body, time and evil. As in the vision of *Poimandres*, the gates open before the achieving man as he confronts forms of light, "a passing beyond."

Part two of Corbin's essay concerns the complex controversies of Ismaili philosophy - that is, it could not be rigidly held; indeed, discussions on different kinds of time continue as we investigate needs to measure durations, distances, time measured and unmeasured. Corbin's immediate concern is the relations between changing state and possible eternal principles, articulated through the Gnostic idea of *Anthropos* or the Perfect Child, "the true posterity of Adam" (also a concern of Robert Duncan's).⁴⁶ This is a dramaturgy of potentiality through exegesis, *ta'wil*, and through it the possibility of exodus from Darkness:

Even while one is materially present in this world, there is a mode of being in Paradise; but it goes without saying, that this *mode of being*, Paradise, can be realized, can exist "in the true sense," only in a person who precisely is this Paradise.

In his prefatory essay for this volume, "The Time of Eranos," Corbin writes, in 1956, of the current need to "substitute the hermeneutics of the human individual for the pseudodialectic of facts" accepted as "objective evidence." His discourse here can read like a "curriculum of further studies" in Olson's sense of necessity:

...to explain does not yet necessarily mean to 'understand'...the individual can be neither deduced nor explained...On the contrary, it is the individual who explains very many things to us, namely all the things that he *implies* and that would not have existed without him, if he had not begun to be.

Corbin is aware of the opposition from insistences of "the socialization of consciousness: anonymity, depersonalization, the abdication of the human will before the dialectic net that it began to weave itself, only to fall into its own snare." "Relations between wills...are not abstract energies" in fictions of "main currents," "meaning of history" and "collective wills," which confer on the individual a sense of unreality. Against what Lacan, somewhat later called "fictive unity," Corbin stakes a claim for "hermeneutics as science of the individual," as opposed to the alienations of "historical dialectics."

Olson probably read this introduction, and certainly its "gists and piths" would find a response in his own needs to document and understand will, and change. Corbin believes that a main functional value of hermeneutics is to place the past as "signs" in the present, and throughout his Islamic writings he draws attention to tackling "the oversimple theory that thinks it explains a being by situating it in an abstract time which is everybody's time and hence no one's."

From the "visionary recital" form in *Avicenna* Olson could draw the idea of a composition that avoided unrequired restrictive definitions of either prose or poetry, a form "in which the thinker recaptures his spiritual autobiography...a literary genre that is characteristic of Persian culture," a form of esotericism which, from Greek etymological origin, "expresses a notion current in every traditional culture: inward things, hidden things, suprasensible occurrences....Each mode of comprehension corresponds to the interpreter's mode of being." Avicenna's "thought" "defines a particular situation of human life in relation to...cosmos that is taken as a magnitude *to be situated*." Understanding and definition take into account "the spiritual universes that the human being has borne within him, has expressed and developed in the forms of myths, symbols, or dogmas." These constructions "finally show him their connection with his inmost self, so that the secret motivations of which he himself was not yet conscious when he projected his system lie revealed." This revelation is a crucial rupture in experience in "his most personal adventure," the dawn of a new experience. The works of Avicenna and Suhrawardi contain "narratives of inner initiations" based on results of theory and experience and presenting the image of the world each of us may carry, "an *a priori* expressing the deepest being of the person, what depth psychology calls an *imago*." Each of us carries his *imago mundi*, and "projects it into a more or less coherent universe, which becomes the

stage on which his destiny is played out." We may not be conscious of it and experience it as imposed on us and others, but it is imposed on ourselves: "It ceases in proportion to such an acquisition of consciousness as permits the soul triumphantly to pass beyond the circles that held it prisoner." The soul conquers "its own fetters" as it successively "passes through on the way from its Exile." This is the action of *imago mundi* Olson uses in "Causal Mythology," and which William Burroughs employs, in an Egyptian form, in *The Western Lands* in 1987. It is the crucial life of the Active Intelligence that dominates this philosophy:

The Angel *individuates himself* under the features of a definite person, whose annunciation corresponds to the degree of experience of the soul to which he announces himself: it is through the integration of all its powers that the soul opens itself to the transconscious and anticipates its own totality...*homo integer*. The genuineness of this experience of spiritual maturity is attested in the measure to which a being attains the power to shape its own symbol...

The resulting work, in its field of symbolism, is permanently alive, not transcended. Nor can the author "himself exhaust the significance of his work." It produces "fresh transcendences"; a past of these works is not "outpassed." Contrary to the West's traditions of monadic systems, this presents an openness to interpretations of texts and recitals. The implications are nearer Heidegger's sense of the need for poetry, and to Olson's need for a culturally various "curriculum," drawing on whatever experience is needed for information:

It is not a question of struggling against a dying past, nor of accepting a past that is dead...[but] to understand what once made this past *possible*, caused its advent, was its *future*....The decision of the future falls to the soul, depends upon how the soul understands *itself*, upon its refusal or acceptance of a new birth.

Corbin's elucidations of Avicenna here advance a possible reception for the creative western, later twentieth-century person, a recognition of his "situation," and system as "the cipher" of such a situation; and a way of countering the academic excesses of "post-structuralism," "deconstruction," "hyperaesthetics" and the rest:

To decipher...is not to accumulate a vain erudition of things, but to open our own possibility to ourselves....One cannot *free oneself* from the past without *freeing that past* itself; but to free it is to give it a future again, to make it significant...one transcends only by adopting; what one rejects outright or what one refuses to see remains as it is, not integrated into consciousness, a source of the most formidable psychoses.

The philosophic artist of the Active Intelligence avoids the neurosis of a present deluding itself with an assumed significance of novelty based on ignorance and refusal. These processes and values are not "a capital to be exploited, claimed, contended for against rivals. The precedence that they confer is a precedence in tasks and responsibilities." Their users share "the obligation of spiritual families to revalorize" them, "not to contend with one another for honours."

To distinguish the embodiment of Active Intelligence from philosophers or religionists - and, indeed, from wretchedly purist and contentious traditions of "aesthetics" and "artistry" of the West - Corbin cites Ibn 'Arabi's placing of them in the Hermes lineage, a continuation of the Gnostic speculations. As "a *Weltreligion*," Gnosis penetrated both Islam and Christianity, with variations, and within Iranian groups, including Sufism. The implication remains: "To integrate a world, to make it one's own, also implies that one has emerged from it to make it enter into oneself." Otherwise, experience of the systems of the universe and "the Faustian space of our universe of limitless extension" fragments us, leaves the soul "defenceless and unconscious." It "flings itself into all the compensations offered it and alienates its being in them." One major French thinker of our time, Michel Serres, began in 1968, to collect his versions of Active Intelligence under the appropriate title *Hermes*. His aim is to "counter the prevalent notion of two cultures - scientific and humanistic - between which no communication is possible." His procedures acknowledge that "whether knowledge is written in philosophical, literary, or scientific language it nevertheless articulates a common set of problems that transcend academic disciplines and artificial boundaries."⁴⁷ Corbin's Sufis are part of the pre-Socratic and Platonic legacy in "the East," and Serres' action recognizes cognizant issues: "We know now that our subjectivity is not an illusion to be overcome, but that it is another part of

reality, no less than any other part." Therefore Serres reinserts "the subjective domain into modern scientific discourse," and like the Sufis uses Active Imagination, or Philosophy - *philia/sophia*, love of wisdom knowledge - to "attempt to see on a large scale, to be in full possession of a multiple, and sometimes connected intellection." That is, "the foundation of knowledge presupposes neither one philosophical discourse nor one scientific discourse, but only regional epistemologies. Multiplication, regionalization, localization: to see on a large scale thus means to travel through as much space as possible...multiple times, spaces, and cultural formations." This is the mythical journey of Hermes, god of ingenuity, music, measures, sciences and orators, the ancestor of Ulysses' voyage. Hermes stole back Zeus's tendons from the monster Typhon and reassembled them, restored division to totality and circulation after mutilation." Hermes is the reconstructor of an explanatory system - myth"; he "connects, disconnects and reconnects the endless variety of the space he traverses." This Active Imagination is accomplished through "a new field...namely literature...the infinite pursuit of this work in progress." So Hermes the Guide shapes the desire of Pound, and then Olson, Duncan, and Zukofsky in America, and before them James Joyce.

The *Recital of Hayy ibn Yaqzan* that Olson used in "Causal Mythology" concerns direction, how the soul is guided to orientation through a dramaturgy of perceptive connections, a journey to escape imprisonment. But as Olson and his fellow poets well knew, and anyone engaged in the journey, the interpreter begins to know in what ways he is a stranger in a society of estrangement, discovers the anticipation not to rely on being a citizen of any city, a national of any nation. The journeying self needs:⁴⁸

a powerful source of psychic energy...if the imaginative activity...is to be capable of creating beyond common expressions and outworn or interchangeable symbolisms, a sufficient field of inner freedom for the manifestation of the image of this self.

Avicenna's and Suhrawardi's presentation of this source as angel or demon, the startling experience given as mental vision or waking dream - "Was it a vision or a waking dream?" - is necessary in order not to reduce the Active Intelligence to any casual interpretation of creativity. This is Olson's reason for using *Avicenna* in "Causal Mythology," and implying a further passage

in Corbin:

To speak of the "Angels of which we are part," or of their combat as of a combat they wage for a part of themselves, is to refer to a fundamental aspect of the dramaturgy shared by all gnostics, by all who are *strangers* to this world. The Self is neither a metaphor nor an ideogram...

But it does include the "guardian angel, guide and companion" in a variety of forms. Corbin cites examples, one of whose visions, as the present essay has already mentioned, attracted Pound, the figure of Hermes experiencing *Nous* as Poimandres, who reveals a light of "innumerable Powers," "a world without bounds," the Guide who becomes Dante's Virgil through whom he discovers individuality and relationships with interpretative philosophy and conjunction, the operation of *ta'wil*. The need is to "to perform our own *ta'wil*," "a fundamental procedure, with an exemplary flexibility and fertility." The relationship of poetry to the recital is clear: "the text of the recital is itself a *ta'wil* of the psychic Event..." - which can be linked with Whitehead's sense of *event*, which Olson inherited. The key function of the visionary or initiatory recital is an experience "personally lived," told "only in the first person," the story "re-cited," the personalization of the Active Intelligence, the essential commitment, the total performance. At the end of his *Recital of Occidental Exile*, Suhrawardi declares: "It is I who am in this recital." Corbin speaks of "the text of our recitals being the track of this exegesis or this exodus of the soul." Rather than a reproduction of *ta'wil*, it is a reciting of it, the hermeneutics of the action, and it produces "a new situation of man in the cosmos." The symbols are the process. The event is not abstract but personal, what Olson calls essential personal history, an awakening, the Sufic Active Intelligence which is not reducible to intellect or rationalization. It is, as already stated, perceptual, encountering the world, in a phenomenological sense. The world discovered is the imaginable - "sensible organs" and "pure Active Imagination" inseparable in the action of *ta'wil*, exegesis of texts, recitals from the soul. Later in *Avicenna*, Corbin cites research showing "the existence of Castilian, Latin, French and Italian translations of [Islamic texts] from as early as the thirteenth century." He cites Miguel Asin Palacios's *La Escatologia musulmana en la Divina Comedia* (1943). The Sufic exegesis of the soul seems to have been a European fact - in Corbin's words:⁴⁹

a whole literature on...the recital of the celestial ascent...The Sufi or the *arif* (the adept, the gnostic) becomes the type of the spiritual hero who in his ecstasies rises to the summits of contemplative life and of the bliss of vision... studies have shown how the Beatrice of the *Vita nuova* typifies the Active intelligence or Wisdom-Sophia...she, for example, who in Guido Cavalcanti takes the name of Giovanna...

(Pound presented the "donna," initially through Cavalcanti and others, throughout the *Cantos*). Active intelligence is here activated by the poet falling in love with what one Italian poet calls "*l'amorosa Madonna Intelligenza*" who makes the soul her residence.

Throughout *Avicenna*, Corbin notes parallel instances in "the psychological researches of C.G.Jung," but does not cite particular passages. Olson took into the curriculum of his poetry exactly the instruments for exegesis that furthered his gnostic journey, as Butterick's *Guide to the Maximus Poems* makes eminently clear. One example from *Maximus IV, V, VI*, dating from 1959, will have to suffice here: the two sections of "Maximus, from Dogtown - II," in which Gloucester, Massachusetts, the main location of the collection, is placed in a context of "the Black Chrysanthemum," the Golden Flower, Algonquin and Norse myths, reinforced from Jung's *Psychology and Alchemy* to establish genetic origins, the Monad, given as Monogenes, the integrated self, "also called the 'dark light'."

II

In his 1972 lecture at Johns Hopkins University, "The Creative," Robert Creeley uses Corbin extensively in a discussion that draws in Pound, Olson, Zukofsky and Duncan, and Jackson Pollock's distinctions between art and nature that elucidate the uselessness of the notion of "abstract" art. From Corbin's preface to *Creative Imagination in the Sufism of Ibn 'Arabi*, written between 1956 and 1958, Creeley uses the relationships between the phenomenology of perception and poetics Olson had noted in his 1969 essay. Corbin is concerned with how phenomenology enables an examination of experienced relationships with the world "without reducing the objective data...to data of sense perception or limiting the field of true

and meaningful knowledge to the mere operations of rational understanding....To say that the imagination (or love, or sympathy, or any other sentiment).induces knowledge, and knowledge of an 'object' which is proper to it, no longer smacks of paradox." As a commentary on Zukofsky's sense of writing "out of deep need," Creeley again uses *Creative Imagination* for the idea of *himma* - in Corbin's words, "the act of meditating, conceiving, imagining, projecting, ardently desiring," a "vital force," "mysterious power," "the representational faculty" of the Active Imagination, the intention to create something. Creeley does not quote a following passage that is very much part of Corbin's usefulness to poets:

"Thanks to his representational faculty (*wahm*) everyman creates in his Active imagination things having existence only in this faculty. This is the general rule. By his *himma* the gnostic creates something which exists outside the seat of this faculty..." In the case of the gnostic (*arif*), the Active Imagination serves the *himma* which, by its concentration, is capable of creating objects, of producing changes in the outside world.

For Corbin, Ibn 'Arabi, a Spanish-born Arab philosopher, exemplifies Sufism, emergent among the Shi'ites in the late tenth and early eleventh centuries. (Corbin himself served at one time as director of the department of Iranic studies at the Institut Franco-Iranien in Teheran.) The introduction to *Creative Imagination* speaks of "the prophetic psychology on which rested the spirit of symbolic exegesis...the *ta'wil*" (etymologically the "carrying back" of a thing to its "principle"), which "provides a secure foundation for the radical autonomy of the individual" understanding through transmutation into image that "signifies what is to be signified." "The metaphysical tragedy" is "the disappearance of...the world of correspondences and substantive images, whose specific organ of knowledge was the active imagination." The exegesis technique is needed to regain this apprehension:

...a symbol is never 'explained' once and for all, but must be deciphered over and over again, just as a musical score is never deciphered once and for all, but calls for ever new execution.

That is, the necessity and ability for performance in the widest trained

sense. *Ta'wil* presupposes the Active Imagination in performance that includes invention and apprehension in the interactive universe of "sensory, historical, and juridical facts." Therefore, "either the human community must offer a structure in which [this] esoterism is an organic compact; or else it must suffer all the consequences implied by a rejection." To a phenomenologist of structures, *ta'wil*...reveals the rigorous laws of its objectivity." Initiation into it marks a rebirth into "the continued openness of prophetic hermeneutics" for the person developing these abilities": "The active imagination guides, anticipates, moulds sense perception....The Burning Bush is only a brushwood fire if it is merely perceived by the sensory organs."

The implied respect for a responsible exceptional ability is a main statement in Corbin, and a major guide for the western poets needing to function within both personal and social transformations in the late twentieth-century decades of destructive crises: "the transformation of all history of events into a symbolic history of spiritual man, enacted in a temporality in which are accomplished all the synchronisms that are inconceivable in historical time." The Active Imagination deeply infers a responsibility that defies any excusatory nonsense of "elitism"; nor is it populist, nor can it be "taught uniformly to all, because each man is the measure of what he can understand." The implication for "the community of *ta'wil*" is the necessity of what Ibn 'Arabi calls the *tajdad al-khalq*, "the recurrence of the creative act," a tradition present transhistorically. Corbin's example is the contrast between historical linearity, a longitudinal process, with control from classical "perspective" ideas - a main elucidatory text here would be Marshall McLuhan and Harley Parker's *Through the Vanishing Point* (1968) - and spatial image in a sixteenth-century Iranian iconographic representation of paradise - "a word that comes to us, through the Greek *paradeisos*, from Persian...*pairi-daéza*." Corbin briefly inserts the West's inheritance of the *hortus conclusus* and Christianity's dictatorial exclusion from Eden - "and to th'Eastern Gate/ Led them....They looking back, all th'Eastern side beheld/ Of Paradise, so late their happie seat" - and the consequent soul's journey through the universe's concentric spheres, and perhaps a recognition of the Phoenix in the woods of Paradise. Columbus, Marco Polo and Sir John Mandeville held it in their beliefs' sights. It is the scheme of the *Phoenix* (OE ninth century), the thirteenth-century *Roman de la Rose*, Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde* and Dante's *Divine Comedy*, in which the Sufi image of Paradise is conclusive - place of rest in stillness, where love

and the mind become one, a "place" of light and enlightenment:

...an enclosure planted with trees...at the centre of which ("centre of the world") stands a pavillion, which here seems to have its correspondence with the Ka'aba.... All the elements are represented in their real dimensions ("in the present"), in each case perpendicularly to the axis of the viewer's vision. The viewer is not meant to immobilize himself at a particular point, enjoying the privilege of of "presentness" and to raise his eyes from this fixed point; he must *raise himself* towards each of the elements represented. Contemplation of the image becomes a mental itinerary, an inner accomplishment...the whole forms a unity of qualitative time, in which past and future are simultaneously in the *present*. This iconography does not correspond to the perspectives of the historical consciousness...

Believers in this structure in Sufism and kindred disciplines have in common:

the perception of an over-all unity, calling for perspectives, depths, transparencies, appeals, which the "realists" of the letter or of dogma have no need of or reject....There is no need to construct this multidimensional world; we discover it by virtue of a principle of equilibrium and of harmony. Ismailian Gnosis effects the intuitive discovery through the universal science of the Scales, which indicates the invisible that is the necessary counterweight to the visible. The theosophies of Light have merely applied the laws of their own perspective, interpreting esoterically the geometrical laws of optics; the *ta'wil* is this esoteric science of the Scales and of optics...

The function of the Active Imagination is to comprehend this science, to penetrate it as a seer penetrates and interprets, the creative imagination: "In *ta'wil* one must carry sensible forms back to imaginative forms and then rise to still higher meanings..." But "each being...cannot possibly have the Whole" (Ibn 'Arabi); something is always withdrawn, hidden, because of the nature of human involvement's limitations. To a later, western student, this suggests Alfred Korzybski's major concept given in the very first issue of *ETC: A Review of General Semantics* (volume 1, number 1): "In a non-

Aristotelian, infinite-valued orientation, we do not assume that what we say can cover all the characteristics of a situation, and so we remain conscious of a permanent et cetera instead of having the dogmatic, period-and-stop attitude." This became the basis of his "attempt to build a science of man, or a non-Aristotelian system, or a theory of sanity" (see *Science and Sanity*, first published in 1933).

Ibn 'Arabi kept the action as inter-personal as possible, partly as a safeguard against false disciplinary enclosure. He quotes a saying of Sahl Tustari: "The divine suzerainty has a secret, and it is thou ...the being to whom one speaks; if (this thou) should disappear, this suzerainty would also cease to be." He himself says: "I was a hidden Treasure, I longed to be known." This phenomenological situation of the power of perceptions in endless discoveries within impossible completion is stated by Corbin as "an essential dialogical situation which no imputation of neonism can impair" - neonism being the desire to replace one law by another equally dominant. Earlier he uses Ibn 'Arabi's little book *Mawaqif al-nujum*, the orbits of the stars, to reach into *ta'wil* once again. Ibn 'Arabi writes: "it is a book which enables a beginner to dispense with a master." The stages of the way to enlightenment follow, and these were partly taken up, as noted earlier, by Robert Creeley. But now Corbin needs to emphasize the fears of authority confronted, with individuals enabled to interpret themselves: "throughout Western Islam this sufficed to alarm the authorities, jealous of the legalitarian religion and of the literal truth." Therefore Ibn 'Arabi had a presentiment that his life in Andalusia would soon become impossible:

Whoever departed from literalism was suspected of fomenting political disorder.... His only hope of finding a wider audience, of meeting with greater tolerance, lay in leaving Andalusia, the Maghreb, and the atmosphere created by Almuhad sultans, the Eastern Islamic world where indeed so many of his disciples were to thrive down through the centuries.

So began his second phase of wandering "the Near East" in search of *Khidr*, the figure of knowledge and imagination "free from the servitude of the literal religion."

Charles L. Sandford's *The Quest for Paradise: Europe and the American Moral Imagination*, concerns American culture's main twentieth-century theme: "the dispossession from paradise."⁵⁰ He cites Fitzgerald, Hart

Crane's *The Bridge*, Jeffers, Sandburg, Faulkner, Hemingway, Kerouac and Ferlinghetti. But the western American version of this desire differs from the Sufi in its sense of authority and refusal of it, of self-assertion against environmental pressures: "the Edenic dream is thus compounded of tendencies both assertive and regressive. The image of Paradise, taken by itself, would seem to be at once an image of desire, an image for the realization and fulfillment of self and an image for the surrender of self." For Sandford this "grows out of the desire to achieve an ultimate state of blissful resignation," in turn originating in biological speculation on "the tendency of organic life to revert to its origins." "The revolutionary implications of the Edenic dream" once realized "became the narcissistic symbol of conservative retrenchment."

Corbin's work with the Sufis does raise issues of the relationship between revolution and process (issues that helpfully modify Thomas Kuhn's structure of change based on elements within and outside the paradigm of temporary equilibrium and Paul Feyerabend's sense of the exclusions necessary for the creation of theory in the sciences).⁵¹ In *The Concept of Comparative Philosophy* (1974)⁵² Corbin again places his Sufi materials in the context of other cultures. He begins with distinctions between Husserl's "phenomenology of strict observance" and Heidegger's "existential phenomenology," and moves towards methods by which phenomena are revealed in an epiphanic action: "The Logos or principle of the phenomenon, phenomenology, is to tell the hidden, the invisible present beneath the visible" - the processes of *ta'wil* that enact the structures of phenomena or "the system of forms of manifestation." He relates this to Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit* and to "the problem of why what one calls historicism is the result of the decomposition or of the explosion of the Hegelian system," enquiring into "the place of history" and where it is "enacted" - "Just what is it that the historicity of man consists of and what does it not consist of?" And what is the function of the West's "redemption of vanished civilizations" and use of archaeology? Corbin concludes: "it is remarkable how the great encyclopaedic collections of historical synthesis have to be rethought and made all over again just about every thirty years." He criticizes the "pseudo-causality" that believes every ideology is:

nothing but a superstructure raised on a socioeconomic infrastructure, a dogma arbitrarily transformed into a principle of explanation which itself remains unexplained...does not man

organize this world, his economic and political office in this world, as a function of the sense he gives to his own presence in the world, according to his vision of another world, without which one seeks in vain for a direction in this one?

Corbin begins his response with a plea for the concept of his title:

A humanity which stopped studying more and more deeply its history would be a humanity suffering from amnesia; it would be just like a person who had just lost his memory....Always the same mania. The state of society is held to be the primary datum, when in fact it merely precedes every empirical state of affairs....So-called modern thought...is relentlessly set upon closing up all the outlets which could lead out beyond this world [and refuses] any transcendent meaning.

He refers us back to Suhrawardi and others penetrating the *Malakut*, "the invisible subtle world, the world of the soul," refusing to "destroy the phenomena" as "rationalist historical criticism does":

The dominant conception of our days is to represent man as being *in history*...history as external, exoteric, which succumbs to the mirage of a historical causality which it introduces there itself....[The] opposite view considers that it is history that is *in man*...interior history, esoteric in the etymological sense of the word...[objectivised] in the web of exterior facts which result on each occasion of the intermingling of human wills.

And *ta'wil* is the hermeneutical method for investigating these phenomena and the hidden - "the phenomenology of the *barzakh*, the world of the imaginal." Corbin offers "three model comparative themes." Briefly, these are Plato's notion in the *Timaeus* of archetypal entities "which give themselves to the intellect alone" and which Suhrawardi interpreted into his scheme; secondly, the *mundus imaginalis* (Henry More's neo-platonic *quarta dimensio*); thirdly, the dramaturgy of conflict between the Ohrmazdian powers of light and the Ahrimanian powers of darkness - in Corbin's terms "that field of consciousness which is experienced as being *in man*." He postulates "a moment...in the XII century, when Avicenna was translated

into Latin in Toledo, a moment when our cultures in East and West correspond to the same type...when the concept of science was inseparable from its spiritual context...those alchemists for whom the operation undertaken in the laboratory only attained its end if it was accompanied by an interior transmutation of the man...the interior birth of the spiritual man." The separation thereafter exemplifies the disaster.

In *Mundus Imaginalis or The Imaginary and the Imaginal* (1972)⁵³ Corbin considers his use of the Latin term to correct any equation of "imaginary" with "unreal" or "utopian." His Islamic philosophers designate an "eighth clime" perceived by "imaginative consciousness, cognitive imagination." The Persian term is *Na-Koja-Abad*, "the country of nowhere." Suhrawardi's twelfth-century initiatory narratives begin with a visionary asking a supernatural being of great beauty who he is and where he comes from - the position of the Gnostic experience, the personal history of the Stranger, the captive aspiring to return home. In one of these, *The Crimson Archangel*, the escaped captive - that is, he has momentarily left the world of sensible experience - finds himself in the desert in the presence of an apparent youth whose answer is: "I am the eldest child of the Creator" (the Gnostic *Protokistos*, the First-Created). He appears in pure (purple) light, attenuated to this colour by the darkness of the earthly world and its creatures. "I come from Mount Qa," he says, "where you will return, once you are free of your shackles." Having no extension in space, it is the site of experiencing *ta exo*, the outer and visible, the exoteric, and *ta eso*, the inner, invisible, the esoteric. But this experience of intelligence does not separate thinking and being. The senses, imagination and intellect correspond to the triad of body, soul and mind. Soul is the world of the image, *mündus imaginalis*, of perception, imaginative power, with a cognitive function Corbin calls "noetic," the apparatus that Olson used, as shown earlier in this essay. (Corbin also relates it to the world of the theosophist and visionary Swedenborg, one of the origins of Henry James's obsession with "the thing behind"). In this revolutionary experience "all the faculties of the soul then become as if they were one faculty, which is the capacity to configurate and typify" - "imagination is thus solidly placed around the axis" of sensible and intellectual cognition - "a type of control to protect imagination from straying and from reckless wastage." The *imaginal* body is Corbin's term for the resurrected body, transformed senses, the nowhere City, the road to the "lost continent," the other reality - distinguished from "the fantastic, the horrible, the macabre, the miserable, and the absurd." In conclusion Corbin

makes a further crucial distinction: from "the civilization of the image," obsessed with magazines, films and television - and no doubt today he would include video-games and other electric processors. His generalization is too sweeping, but the issues of media-control and attention-reduction certainly demand critical analysis. As he says, "the greater this reduction, the more people lose their sense of the *imaginal* and the more they are condemned to producing nothing but fiction."

In 1951 the translator of Jean-Paul Sartre's *L'Imaginaire* (1940) had difficulties in translating the title term and its usages, since "imaginary" has derogatory meanings of unreal and fanciful. Sartre states his aim⁵⁴ as "to describe the great function of consciousness to create a world of unrealities, or 'imagination' and its noetic correlation, the imaginary." But translation betrays since Sartre requires *imaginaire* to mean something nearer to Corbin's *imaginal*, something that "designates not only the unity and the totality of its psychical structures, but indicates each of these structures in its particular nature." For example, "the consciousness of the image" and "the perpetual consciousness, using the term in one sense of the senses of the German word *Bewußtsein*" - three of them being knowledge, consciousness and recollection. Sartre's study of "the imaginative life" is therefore as open as the action of *ta'wil* and the Active Imagination:

It is the very nature of consciousness to be intentional and a consciousness that would cease to be conscious of something would for that reason cease to exist. We know, besides, that the totality of the real, so long as it is grasped by consciousness, is the world...if the consciousness is to imagine, it must be able to posit the world in its synthetic totality, and, it must be able to posit the imagined object as being out of reach of this synthetic totality, that is, to posit the world as a nothingness in relation to the image.

Imagination needs the freedom of being able "to define itself by a 'being-in-the-world' which is at once the constitution and the negation of the world...it is the whole of consciousness as it realizes its freedom....The unreal is produced outside of the world by a consciousness which *stays in the world* and it is because he is transcendently free that man can imagine." "The work of art" is "a particular event within this freedom, which is why the controllers of closed or entropic systems - religions, nation-states, ideologies - generally fear and loathe it, whatever they may ostensibly

pretend. It has no analogues; it "refers to nothing but itself"; it is experienced "in the imaginary." The association made in this essay is further reinforced by what follows: "Aesthetic contemplation is an induced dream and the passing into the real is actual waking up."

For a later and more physiological account of these functions, J. Allan Hobson's *The Dreaming Brain* (1990) is useful, although he is insecure in his differentiations between "autocreativity" and creating a work of art.⁵⁵ It has to be re-emphasized that the new - Harold Rosenberg's "tradition of the new," Whitehead's "novelty," and other forms - is beyond theology, computerology, computer-mathematical physics and the Prigogine-Stengers theory of an ameliorating, hopeful Second Law of Thermodynamics.⁵⁶ And the processes of Zen *satori* remain relevant, versions of Suhrawardi's Stranger aspiring to return home, to be transformed - when, to use the celebrated Zen saying, rivers and mountains are rivers and mountains. But Corbin's "order of reality," the "*Mundus Imaginalis*" of his "Persian Platonists," is a social or community necessary to substantiate the individual. A useful twentieth-century example would be the collaboration of John Cage and the dancer-choreographer Merce Cunningham. Corbin emphasizes multiple approaches and entrances, what Robert Duncan considers as necessary "multiphasic" characteristics of responsible poetry, and for which Fuller employs the term "comprehensive design," the action of the artist-philosopher. Corbin speaks of "a place out of place, a 'place' that is not contained in any other place, in a *topos*, making it possible to give an answer to the question 'where' by a gesture of the hand." Cage's compositions often generate this *topos* moment, through something of the Zen gestural moments of insight he has inherited, and traced in the gestures of the dance systems of Cunningham, to a calm beyond excitement. Corbin writes: "Leaving the where, the *ubi* category, is equivalent to leaving the outer or natural appearances that cloak the hidden inner realities." The *imaginal* in action is always experiential, that sense, for instance, of writing as an engagement in discovery about which Michel Foucault spoke to two of his interviewers, one in *Remarks on Marx*, the other in *Foucault Live*:⁵⁷

An experience is something you come out of changed...I write precisely because I don't know yet what to think about a subject that attracts my interest. In so doing, the book transforms me, changes what I think...

There's no fixed, definite rule, but a series of precise

considerations of completed works which can help me define other possible objects of investigation....What I write does not prescribe anything, nor to others. At most, its character is instrumental and visionary or dream-like...

I dream of the intellectual destroyer of evidence and universalities, the one who in the inertias and constraints of the present, locates and marks the weak points, the openings, the lines of power, who incessantly displaces himself, doesn't know exactly where he is heading nor what he'll think tomorrow because he is too attentive to the present; who, in passing, contributes the posing of the question of knowing whether the revolution is worth it, and what kind of revolution and what effort, it being understood that they alone who are willing to risk their lives to bring it about can answer the question.

It is this sense of experiential, imaginal investigation for transformation that generates Corbin's Sufis and is a main constituent defining the role of the Guide. In *The Man of Light in Iranian Sufism*⁵⁸ he details the interactions between "outer fact" and the training of experience, so that *ta'wil* may be employed. He quotes Alaoddawleh Semnani, "one of the great names in Iranian Sufism," saying, in 1336, "the integrity of the heart, of the inner hearing is a necessary condition if the inspired spiritual seeker is to...receive the *ta'wil* of his inner super-sensory master," and achieve the "physiology of the man of light...of the subtle organ whose growth is nothing other than the ontogenesis of the 'resurrection body'." This is also given as a trust, a responsibility.

Each being having passed from the heavenly or subtle (*menok*) state to the visible state (*getik*, a material state which in Mazdaean conception implies by itself neither evil nor darkness, the latter being Ahrimanic counter-powers, which are themselves a spiritual order)...[Ohrmazd] would not have been able to protect his Creation of light against the assault of the counter-creation of Ahriman [without the presence of his particular form of the Guide].

III

The sense of trust and responsibility described in Corbin is also notable in the work of Robert Duncan, especially his use of the material from *The Man of Light* for the "Passages" poems in *Bending the Bow* (1968), and their sense of being necessarily - to use Corbin's phrase in chapter 2, section 3 - one of "those who have chosen." For Duncan, Ahriman can be taken in the 1960s as those Americans in governmental, economic, military and educational power that disgraced the country, during the years in which the "Passages" were composed and publicly performed. "Tribal Memories - Passages 1" uses the figure of Attis, a form of Hermes, and its presence in W. C. Wright's *The Works of the Emperor Julian* (1963). "The Architecture - Passages 9 6/6/64" cites *The Secret Books of the Egyptian Gnostics*, Festugière's *La Révélation d'Hermès Trismégiste* and Avicenna. "Reflections" speaks of "the great passages of Charles Olson's *Maximus* resounding theogony" and adds:⁵⁹

Charles Olson, how strangely I have altered and used and would keep the wisdom, the man, the self I choose, after your warnings against wisdom as such, as if it were "solely the issue of the time of the moment of its creation, not any ultimate except what the author in his heat and that instant in its solidity yield."

"The Fire - Passages 13" cites Renaissance neo-platonists, but "Chords - Passages 14" uses W.K.C. Guthrie's *Orpheus and Greek Religion* for the processes of Psyche, Eros and myths of awakening - "These things reborn within Zeus, happening anew./ 'A dazzling light . . . aither . . . Eros . . . Night' /where we are/ ...the Shining Land." "Moving the Moving Image Passages 17" contains "Grand Mi'raj," the figure of ascension and transformation in Corbin's texts and commentaries on the *mundus imaginalis*, as well as G.R.S. Mead's *Thrice Great Hermes*. In "Preface to a Reading..." (1970) Duncan places himself as "poet performing" in the Hermetic Tradition, and in the poem Hermes speaks (in performance, Duncan chanted this section) "his 'Perfect Sermon,' as it is called in the Hermetic Tradition." Then the poem ends:

"This one a great daimon, intermediate
between the divine and what perishes..."

"His intermediate powers are many,
and this one is Eros"

John Cage's open scales

"who will be faced with the entire field of sound"

"In Place of a Passage 22" begins "That Freedom and the Law are identical/
and are the Nature of Man - Paradise." The direct criticism of America's
interventions in South East Asia, and their bases in the very structure of the
nation's controls, in "Passages 26 -The Soldiers," are held within the Sufic
order:

The first Evil is that which has power over you.

Coercion, this is Ahriman.

In the endless Dark the T.V.screen,
the lying speech and pictures selling its time and produce,
corpses of its victims burned black by napalm

-- Ahriman, the inner need for the salesman's pitch --

....

Habit, this is Ahriman.

The first Evil is that which conscripts you,

spreading his "goods" over Asia. He moves in, you let him

move in, in your own interest, and it serves you right...

The bomber-planes, the war-profiteering and the destruction of a culture -
"This is Ahriman, the blind Improver of Life/ flying his high standards."
Duncan's context is that "warfare" Corbin analyzes, between Light and "the

ravage of Ahriman," and the choice whether to take part in that struggle or not, to become "those who have chosen" against Ahriman's contamination. The Sufi Light and Darkness forces become a politicized modification of Manicheism.

In "The Self in Postmodern Poetry"⁶⁰ Duncan refers to "the Hermetic circle my parents had followed," and in lectures at Kent State University in October 1972, "Pound, Eliot and H.D.: The Cult of the Gods," he said that at the age of seventeen "I was seeking to make real what I was through cabalistic Christianity and a popular Hermeticism." In part of *The H.D. Book* entitled "Occult Matters,"⁶¹ he recalls his family training on the nature and function of teachers, meaning Christ, Buddha and, above all, Hermes whose love "suggested a reality that was duplicit. Love, I was taught, had once been, in an other life, hatred; and hatred, love." His grandmother joined "a group to form a Hermetic Brotherhood," with an extensive library. These were major bases for Duncan's later "multiphasic" cultural inheritance, his study of Yeats' position in the hermetic tradition, and his work in comparative religion and folklore. In "Ideas of the Meaning Form,"⁶² Duncan showed, like Olson, his concern for "Negative Capability," and in *The Truth and Life of Myth: An Essay in Essential Autobiography*⁶³ - another of his important 1960s essays - he quotes Festugière's *Hermès Trismégiste*, and then recalls the effect of Coleridge. Read later, it becomes clear how Duncan had been prepared for his use of Corbin: "Myth might spring from the Imagination that Coleridge calls primary: 'the living Power and prime Agent of all human Perception,' and as such belongs to the order of high Poetry." Then he quotes *Biographia Literaria*:

To find no contradiction in the union of old and new is to contemplate the Ancient of days and all his works with feelings as fresh, as if all had then sprung forth at the creative fiat; characterizes the mind that feels the riddle of the world, and may help to unravel it. To carry on the feelings of childhood into the powers of manhood; to combine the child's sense of wonder and novelty with the appearances, which every day for perhaps forty years had rendered familiar:

With sun and moon and stars throught the year
And man and woman;

This is the character and privilege of genius - and one of the marks

which distinguish genius from talents...

[The poet rescues] the most admitted truths from the impotence caused by the very circumstance of their universal admission.

Duncan then cites from the Homeric *Hymn to Hermes* the story of the Child-God, and to place the figure of Hermes inventor of "the bow and the lyre... fire and fictions, or truths so invented that they are unbelievable," and "the sources of invention" being "the disguise of what is so" - materials also used in "Towards an Open Universe."⁶⁴ He also recalls dangers for the adept of Active Imagination, those that Suhrawardi sensed, and present in Dante:

The Christian Dante will be guided not only by Beatrice, who may be, as Henry Corbin argues in his *Avicenna*, an angelic power, the Active Imagination, but he will be guided also by the authority of the poet Virgil....Joan will be tried by ecclesiastical court and burned at the stake for talking with such demonic powers as Dante's angels in the *Vita Nuova* are.

In "Rites of Participation" (1968)⁶⁵ he again recalls these sources, used in "Passages" 17 and 26:

Dante has back of *The Divine Comedy* his magics to call upon: the magic of the poetic and the mystic descent or ascent in to the eternal world, drawing upon the practice of the dream-vision...of the Mi'raj, the spiritual transportations of the Sufi Recital...The People of the Truth and the People of the Lie, the Zoroastrians called adherents of peaceful agricultural ways and the adherents of war; but Ahura Mazda, the Lord of Truth, was to become a War-Lord, for His was the One Truth, and all the other truths were lies.

The same Corbin locations are taken up in "Man's Fulfillment in Order and Strife" (1969)⁶⁶ -Dante's Sufic Beatrice, angel power, the Active Intellect - but now they become part of Duncan's extended vision of his times as part of a human continuity. The order of "all persons in time" and "things which are measured by time" - he is citing Dante's *De Monarchia* - "must include the multiplicity of other religions and philosophies, of all instances in which man comes into apprehensions of what he is":

For us today, the intelligence of man's earlier works - the intelligence of the shaping hand at work on the axe blades of obsidian - belongs to the great work. The goal not only could not lie in any one kingdom, but not in any one civilization.... In space it meant that the goal must include the Moslem, the Jewish, the Byzantine, as well as the Roman Catholic. But Dante's father had died a heretic, and Dante had his own origins in the Romance traditions of the Provence where gnostic cult and Kabbala mixed with Hermetic Islam. The multiplicity of the human potentiality upon which Dante insists meant that he knew that true order must ensure freedom and peace - in order that each individual be free to actualize his own potential.

Duncan then quotes Aristotle, used by Dante: "Under a perverted government a good man is a bad citizen, but under a right one, a good man and a good citizen are convertible terms."

Duncan's use of Corbin is present throughout his prose work and part of the preparation is there in "The H.D. Book, Part II, chapter 5, section 2" (1961, revised 1963),⁶⁷ with a need to use Vaughan and the seventeenth century Hermeticists, and kindred neo-platonists, towards a concept of poetic form: "The fabric of history, of memory...must be continually woven in order to exist *because it is not the fabric of the past but the fabric of the present that we weave.*" Duncan places this within William James's terms for plurality: "there will be some scenes which turn out to have only a personal, not a conventional reality." He quotes Vaughan's *Anthroposophia Theomagica* and Yeats on Mallarmé, towards a poetics "drawn to find out hidden content, working to bring us into a new consciousness in magic, away from the abstract and absolute, towards the coordination of above and below." Conflict and contrary in the *bios* is here referred to that image of pitch blend/radium in Williams' *Paterson*, book IV, section 2, and to Freud's bringing from "the festering darkness...into the light of day the vanished goods." The rich store underground was to be restored in the sight of man and god. In "The H.D. Book, Part II: Nights and Days, Chapter 11" (1961),⁶⁸ Duncan returns to criticism of "self-expression and likewise self-possession in verse [that] would set up an 'I' that is the private property of the writer in the place of the 'I' in which all men may participate":

The 'your,' 'my,' 'us,' 'we,' 'I,' 'me' of the poet's work, and the other

'you,' 'your,' 'they,' 'them' are pronouns of a play, members or persons of a world drama in division. These are no more at liberty, no more seek liberty than they pursue happiness, for the sense of poetic justice or form that is history reveals them all actors or chorus of a work that now we see is a self-creative drama at play.

This drama requires radical exegesis into the structure of Active Imagination. Already Duncan knew Festugière's *Hermès Tristémégiste* and his idea of *fictiones littéraires*: the merging of revelations with poetry. Dante's vision of Amor, master of transformations in dream and consciousness towards his art's functions, is "analogous" to Beatrice's form, and a form of "the true light":

But poets are allowed, Dante argues, a "greater licence in speech" than composers in prose. The poets spok to inanimate things as if they had sense and reason and have made them speak together, and not only real things but unreal things.

In another excerpt from "Nights and Days," dated to 1963,⁶⁹ like Norman O. Brown (more on Brown later), Duncan draws in *Finnegans Wake*, since it "has its roots among letters and in the body, as it were moved by the stars." And in a passage on H.D.'s *Tribute to the Angels*:

The Renaissance Platonist Ficino had designed a magic to evoke the powers of angelic orders, Regents of the Planets...the seven stars are, as stars are in the Cabbalistic imagination of Ficino, angelic powers: *Raphael, Gabriel, Azrael, Uriel, Annael, Michael, Zadkiel*. They are, in their hours, guardians...The old gods and the new, the Greek world and the Christian-Judaic world, have been found in the synthesis of a poetic-theurgy. As in the Cabbalistic system, the source of the voice, the self, is hidden. These angels-gods-guardians are attendants of the poetry itself, the voice of its manifestations.

In 1967, Duncan published "Returning to *Les Chimères* of Gérard de Nerval," citing Denis Saurat's *Literature and Occult Tradition* - "a book I had followed in 1953" - for a doctrine held in common by Spenser, Milton, Blake, Shelley, Goethe, Wagner, Nietzsche and Hugo:⁷⁰

Their pantheism [contains] the doctrine of the division of God into innumerable creatures, which generally renders all creatures equally divine and mortal or immortal in the same way, the feeling of kinship with animals being particularly striking...

Duncan connects this with Nerval's "*un esprit agissante*," "an active spirit," extended to "an active intellect": "If Dante knew, as Henri Corbin argues he did, of the Active Intellect or Intelligence, angel of the Holy Spirit, may not the neo-Pythagoreans of the Romantic Revival have known too of such an identity of intellect and spirit, an angel will and power at work in creation?" This intellect-spirit Duncan uses to reinforce his sense of responsibility for "creative imagination" to oppose the behaviour of:

a maddened administration, an ego-maniacal president, and a State Department of conspirators and traitors to international order [who] are laying waste Viet-Nam and plotting in Africa, South America and Asia against governments, in the name of the opposition of capitalism and communism, taking over the terms Marx gave to history as thesis and antithesis[.] I should rightly be wary of the war of opposites and should seek the synthesis or syntony of ideas rather than the antithesis.

Later, he characteristically states the case for "multiphasic" multiplicity, the transformatory intellect/imagination, and then moves towards his own resource:

To articulate at all is to bring into action all the definitions of differences, one from the other; to articulate the terms of a poetic theory is to raise a challenge in Poetry....The principle I found in Whitehead's *Process and Reality* that the intellect seeks to transform conflicting elements into contrasting elements could never be set into action if elements were conceived of as things in themselves complete. So, I see my creative imagination raising a war in things in order to come into the world of opposites and contraries, to hear that clash of arms in the cosmos that haunted Yeats - so that Heraklitus and Boehme see a strife at the heart of the Divine Creative Will itself....Syncretic orders are dead once they are to be taken for

granted, for they depend upon the dramatic awareness of the elements bound in the whole for their sense of aliveness. Here, as in physics, the difference between the inorganic and the organic, the *bios*, is that between a crystallized form and a form of the unresolved inner struggle. It is to keep Poetry itself alive that we crave the challenge of contradiction.

In the same collection Duncan places a 1966 version of part of "Passages 26," relating war to "soul in the poem," and the conflict of "individual property rights" and "properties of our common humanity." The conflict at the heart of "the American Way" as capitalist conflict is placed in Corbin's territory:

Mithra and Ahura Mazda have one common enemy - the Lie - falsehood and disorder - the Lie which manifests itself through the Destructive Spirit, violence and the *daevas* who incorporate violence...

"From the Day Book" (1963)⁷¹ had already cited and quoted from *Avicenna*:

This figure [Angelic Intelligence, Beatrice] imposes itself in the imperious manner of a central symbol, appealing to man's mental vision under the complementary feminine aspect that makes his total being.

Then Duncan places Corbin on the Sufic origin of images for Active Intelligence:

Here is perhaps one of the most beautiful chapters in the very long 'history' of the Active Intelligence, which still remains to be written, and which is certainly not a 'history' in the accepted sense of the word, because it takes place entirely in the souls of poets and philosophers.

As Duncan writes in "Man's Fulfillment in Order and Strife," after he has been re-reading Dante's *De Monarchia* in 1969: "The World Order, for Dante, is a work of art."

In his last books - *Ground Work: Before the War* (1983) and *Ground Work*

II: *In the Dark* (1987), Duncan returns to the Corbin world. In the first, he works with "the circuit of Jalal al-Din Rumi," the great Sufi writer who died in 1273. Perhaps Duncan recalled a passage in *Creative Imagination*:⁷² "as Jallaluddin also says, each of our eternal individualities is a word, a divine Word, emitted by the Breath of Divine Compassion, the 'social incarnation' of the soul." Corbin is present, too, in the exhilarations of Active Imagination in the final section: "in your eyes gnostic revelations/come to me, Hermes/Darkness and quickens my speech." In the second book's "An Eros/Amor/Love Cycle," part 3, "Structure of Rime," he includes "The Epigraph in squence from Rumi, *Divan-e Kabir*." "In Waking" includes: "from Rumi/ the line of the Lord of Love/ delivers himself up from his hunger. / He lays himself down in the nets of creation to find his release." In "The Regulators": "But there is no act that is not chained in its joy, Comedian, to the sufferings of the world!" "In Blood's Domaine" introduces the angels of evil as forces of syphilis, cancer and tuberculosis - "these Angels are attendants of lives raging within life, under these Wings we dread/ viruses, bacilli come home to thrive in us." In conclusion the mortally sick poet writes: "What Angel, what Gift of the Poem, has brought into my body/ this sickness of living?" But then "After Passage" places an individual's experience with the world conflict: "And if terror be the threshold of Angel In-Formation, the Masters of Nuclear Power, malevolent dreamers, knowing and unknowing undo the inner structure at the atomic level to release its energies":

The other face of the Angel, not now of War but of Peace-Time uses -
from the promised power stations radio-active waste death-
leakings

come into the hour glass.

This fine poem also includes a hope and a question arising from experience of a life-long *ta'wil*:

The lovely singer who again sends his message to the world from
the elm tree
is innocent of the holocaust

Will I outlive the end of the rime I meant to come to?

IV

Duncan deeply respected Norman O. Brown's *Hermes the Thief and Love's Body* - a book of "radical transformation," as he called it. In 1980-81 Brown himself engaged the Corbin materials in a lecture series entitled "The Prophetic Tradition: The Challenge of Islam."⁷³ "The Prophetic Tradition" is an essay condensing some of the materials. It begins exactly where Duncan engaged Dante:

We will not get "Blake and Tradition" right until we see the tradition as the Prophetic Tradition, including Judaism, Christianity and Islam...it is to recover the prophetic sense of the unity of world history, discredited by its association with Westernizing triumphalism, the idea of progress, and Hegelian teleology. It is to recover in the twentieth century, in spite of despondence, as Blake did in also dark days, the original prophetic realism and radicalism.

Brown takes up a definition of Islam in *Creative Imagination* as "a transformation on Arab soil of Jewish religion that had itself been transformed by Gnostic Judaeo-Christianity." Brown details this process, and uses, as Duncan did, Dante's *De Monarchia*, but extends with Islamic tradition as "an attempt to unify the opposites which in the West give us Dante on the one hand and Machiavelli on the other....Three centuries of intransigent, polymorphously inventive, revolutionary politics; not enough studied by Marxists or Muslims." He uses Corbin's descriptions of transformatory experience and the creative imagination in Ibn 'Arabi, and places "the stunning heterodoxy" of Blake's vision in "The Laocoon" which links the study and practice as the action of "The Eternal Body of Man The Imagination," the human divine. He quotes Corbin at length on esoteric vision towards transfiguration, the figure of Light as the real, the human goal, and on the relationships between Sufism and Christianity. He also uses the connection between Coleridge on the primary imagination and the Hermetic traditions that Duncan made, and cites Olson's encounter with Corbin that produced, for instance: "Paradise is a person. Come into this world./ The soul is a magnificent angel." His summary of Corbin's

presentation of Avicenna and Ibn 'Arabi is emphatic: "Their theoretical work enfranchised and legitimated the individual search for visionary experience, for the Angel, on a mass scale." And he adds Rumi's angel "in all of us, waiting to be born":

Brown⁷⁴ stresses "the distinction between literal meaning and something beyond...between surface and substance, between *zahir* and *batin*," and adds the possible politics of authority moving into the authoritarian: "There is therefore a basic distinction between *ta'wil*, the symbolic and hermeneutic interpretation of the inner meaning, and *tafsir* the literal explanation of the external aspect of the Book." But this led to a kind of wisdom which in the fullness of time came to be most notoriously represented by, on the one hand, the Sufi master (*pir*) and, on the other, the Shi'ite imam, "a principle of authoritative guidance in interpretation," and matters of legislation and imperative statement. *Khidr* or the Green or the Evergreen (the sacred colour of Islam) is an eternal, invisible omnipresence, essence or spirit of life renewal, but is possibly converted: "The eternal protector of the community will appear at the Return at the head of the armies of the Mahdi who will fill the earth with justice" - which sounds like a force of Ahriman. But the Sufis attribute illumination and speculation to the inspiration of *Khidr*. Brown understands *Creative Imagination* as an organized analysis of these issues. The rendezvous of Moses and *Khidr* is the prototype of the mystic voyages under a spiritual guide; and again the issue out of Dante: "Civilization becomes strong enough to absorb into its own system some of the strong medicine of Islam, Dante under the guidance of Virgil or Beatrice." (Brown adds a note on the Sunni dissenter Rashid Rida.) *Khidr* flees persecution and, having found the Fountain of Life, lives concealed on a remote island. He is linked to the Seven Sleepers myth through sleep as "the image of that extinction of self, that condition of being with God which characterizes the saint (*wah*) as distinct from the prophet (*nabi*)." And Night is the dark night of the soul, night of power. Brown cites Kevin and the night in *Finnegans Wake*, and, through Bach's "Wachet auf...", sleepers awakening at the end of time. But this may also be a prophecy of *jihad* the fight against the enemy, even if the Imam's authority is challenged by modern "disappearance of authority." Brown draws in Joyce's "reamalgamerge" (*Finnegans Wake*) and "the seim anew" to bring Corbin's materials into the arena of his own book *Closing Time*: "Simultaneous totality, as in *Finnegans Wake*: or, more generally, in what Umberto Eco called "The Poetics of the Open Work - an infinite contained

within finiteness. The work therefore has infinite aspects, because each of them, and any moment of it, contains the totality of the work' [Eco]":

Eco is trying to characterize a revolution in the aesthetic sensibility of the West: we are the first generation in the West able to read the Koran, if we are able to read *Finnegans Wake*....The affinity between this most recalcitrant of sacred texts and this most avant-garde of literary experiments is a sign of our times. Joyce was fully aware of the connection, as [J.S.] Atherton shows in the most exciting chapter of *The Books at the Wake*....In both the Koran and *Finnegans Wake* this effect of simultaneous totality involves systematic violation of the classic rules of unity, propriety and harmony; bewildering changes of subject; abrupt juxtaposition of incongruities....The whole texture is one of interruption (Joyce's "enterruption"); collision (Joyce's "collideorscope"); abrupt collage, or bricolage, of disconnected ejaculations, disjecta membra, miscellaneous fragments....In the Koran as in *Finnegans Wake* there is a destruction of language...[the consequent] bewilderment is part of the message: "Through the windr of a wonder in a wildr is a weltr as a wirbl of a warbl is a world."

How do you start a new civilization - in the seventh or the twentieth century C.E., with all that history weighing like an Alp on the brains of the living? Out of the rubble of the old: there is no other way. "He dumptied the wholeborrow of rubbages on to the soil there."...First you trash or junk the old; as in *Finnegans Wake*, or the Koran; reducing preexistent traditions to rubble.

But this is part of a restructuring towards a new syncretism:

To start a new civilization is not to introduce some new refinement in higher culture but to change the imagination of the masses, the folk who shape and are shaped by folklore and folktales. Prophecy is an operation in what Vico called vulgar metaphysics....Islam stays with the dream-life of the masses, the eschatological imagination of the lowly and oppressed. The dream-life of the masses, discarded by the elite of the Enlightenment as superstition - the stone which the builders rejected - becomes in the twentieth century the Golden

Bough for the return to the archetypal unconscious, *quod semper, quod ubique, quod ab omnibus*. Here Comes Everybody.

- pre-existent traditions, like *Finnegans Wake*, "pulverized into condensed atoms or etyms of meaning: the anihilation of the etym [Brown is quoting the book]. Out of this dust the world is to be made new." Muhammad Iqbal writes in his *Javid-nama* - "that syncretistic resumption of the Koranic, Dantesque, Faustian journey through all worlds and all history":

the Koran -
a hundred new worlds lie within its verses,
whole centuries are involved in its moments...

and when one world grows old upon [the believer's] bosom,
the Koran gives him another world!

Brown's commentary extends our grasps of *ta'wil*:

The Koran is not responsible for the way Islam developed into a closed system... [and the transformation of] all the luxuriant cosmic imagery of the Koran into legalistic prose. In the tragic views of history taken by the Shiites, things went wrong from the moment the Prophet died.

Answering questions on the Prophet and the Khidr, Ibn 'Arabi said "that he had plunged into an ocean on whose shore the prophets remained behind standing." Or, to return to the American poets' sense of multiplicity and proprioception, through Olson's "Bibliography on America for Ed Dorn":⁷⁵

one must henceforth apply to quantity as a principle
and to process as the most interesting fact *all attention* Results, as of
historical study:

(a) it is not how much one knows but in what field of context it
is retained, and used (*millennia & quantity*)

(b) how, as yourself as individual, you are acquiring & using
same in acts of form - what use are you making of acquired
information (*person & process*)...

"Bibliography" therefore means index to information towards person and process, in this case for a distinguished American poet, the young Edward Dorn, who needs to stand within a multiple "America." In fact, Olson's processes of knowledge necessarily become a chart, "a drawing," of spatial relationships in time. Another version would be the curriculum for Black Mountain College as "a city," or that relationship in "The Advantage of Literacy is that Words can be on the Page"⁷⁶ between etymology and alphabet as the art of logography, the mythological, proprioception and "phenomenology in place" - with the vision of the Virgin as goddess of discovery, "the Lady of Good Voyage," "Our Lady/ of the Portuguese Church/ a sea-/ goddess," protectress of the city of Gloucester, Massachusetts.⁷⁷ "The errors of etc is/ the substance of/ all being - / what does/ go on, & is always going on &/ is..."⁷⁸ And such "proprioception" would include Michael McClure's passage in *Organism*.⁷⁹

THE TOTAL AMOUNT OF GENETIC MATERIAL IN CELLS
PROBABLY INCREASED THEN, AS IT IS KNOWN TO DO TODAY
(IN PART AT LEAST) BY GENETIC DUPLICATIONS.

THE SCIENCE OF THE SUFIS AIMS AT DETACHING THE
HEART FROM ALL THAT IS NOT GOD, AND AT GIVING TO IT
FOR SOLE OCCUPATION THE MEDITATION OF THE DIVINE
BEING.

TENTACLE CLAW FEATHER SHIT MEAT ROAR TRACERY
WOLF ROSE HUNGER PRAISE
Cyclones spinning over glaciers
Confetti lying on empty beaches.
Antelope skull among ferns.
Child dancing on a cliff in the sunset...

That Olson's work had succession is clear from at least one remarkable book from the late John Clarke, who became Director of the Institute of Further Studies at Buffalo. His *From Feathers to Iron: A Concourse of World Poetics*⁸⁰ uses at least twenty-three citations from Corbin towards the establishment of a poetics, including:

The cognitive function of imagination provides the foundation for a rigorous *analogical* knowledge permitting us to evade the dilemma of current rationalism, which gives us only a choice between the two

banal dualistic terms of either "matter" or "mind." Ultimately, the 'socialization' of conscience is bound to replace the matter or mind dilemma by another no less fatal, that of "history" or "myth"...

No matter how high you might be able to go by rockets or Sputniks, you will never have progressed one inch toward [the *elsewhere*], because the 'threshold' will not have been crossed...

The kind of usage John Clarke maintains can only be briefly exemplified here:

Within what Corbin calls 'retarded eternity', the ennead of Prometheus' punishment for giving man 'fire' at the beginning rather than the end of time, which in the 'Father's' plan was to come from 'clay', it could take forever...

In the performance of the exegetic procedure Henry Corbin calls *ta'wil* the "hermeneutic circle" closes and the question of "to what" a text refers resolves itself in "to whom" it refers, or, as he says, to whom it "leads back"...

And Clarke quotes from Olson's "The Animate versus the Mechanical, and Thought":

...I am speaking here to speak within, or across the 'range' of a principle of likeness which includes, and seeks to 'cover' what Henry Corbin reminds me is a constantly affirmed homology among the *initiativ cosmos*, the world of nature, and the *celestial world*...

V

In December 1973, George Quasha and Charles Stein, poets of a later generation, begin to elucidate Robert Kelly's poetry using *ta'wil* in discussion with him: "*Ta'wil* or How to Read."⁸¹ They begin with Corbin's *Avicenna* definition: "the exegesis that leads the soul back to its truth." And

then from "Cyclical Time": "the technique of interior or spiritual exegesis." They wish to read language as "signifying or 'signalling' events in consciousness." Their purpose is to revive the term "imagination" through the Sufic term, since imagination has lost "the cutting edge of a Coleridge or Blake" usage. The Sufic action has a necessary generative or creative sense. Reading Kelly's poetry, they sense that the poem as process reveals what lies in consciousness. This could also be placed as a recall of the seventeenth-century neo-Platonists as well as the Platonic element in Sufism. The text is infinite in interpretation because no single authority can provide a singular complete reading. Stein summarises: "the exercise of *ta'wil* is at once *your* act and *God's* act." In the Sufic process "it's not a question there being variant *ta'wils* on a given text, but there are different events in which the Imagination is called into action." Kelly adds the instance of Ibn 'Arabi's "poems that were taken as erotic poems, but when he published an interpretation of them a *ta'wil*, an exegesis, the authorities were set at rest." The text obtained its authenticity. So there appear to be at least two meanings for *ta'wil*: Moslem orthodoxy gives dogmatic exegesis, while Sufic "heresy" provides exegetical authority of the individual mind.

Kelly then emphasises more firmly the idea of "the visionary recital" as, for him, the ideal poem. But this poem is necessarily "hard" because it replaces religion by enabling the poet, and his best readers, to perform the sacramental or magic art for themselves, "transmutatively." Kelly speaks of *ta'wil* as "a knowledge of when to go from one of those levels [the medieval Christian levels of literal, allegorical, anagogical and moral] to another." The three poets discuss techniques of exegesis for the products of imagination, and Kelly's sense of the fourth section of his book-length poem *The Loom* (1975) in relation to the Arabic "recital." He moves from Corbin's detailed and historical culture towards his own belief in poems as multiple "process," and Quasha shifts it further to Blake's instructions for *Jerusalem*: "to rouse the faculties to act" (and he does not place this historically within Blake's early nineteenth-century England). Kelly then launches into how "poem" replaces "religion" as its "enemy":

...it represents the development of the growth of consciousness that we can transcend the religion that purports sacramentally or magically to perform an act for us, and instead forces to the point of performing it for ourselves, transmutatively...

Stein reintroduces Kelly's idea of "the poem as *ta'wil* of its own first line," which Kelly changes to how to find "the energy to go to the next line, and in that the energy to go forward...the Recital emerges. The narrative develops..." But Kelly is never content with just one seed to grow from: "the Recital which seems to be developing only one seed turns out by the time it's finished...to have developed all the seeds. And it's all there. And I stand in awe of that narrative process." In that process-performance, "I want to create a boredom, not simply to tolerate it by virtue of repetition or some other boring process." The unlikely but characteristic comparison is what Stein calls - and Kelly agrees - "all those 'dull' middle *Cantos*." Quasha gently demurs: "People who object to those tend to be the people who take the *Cantos* as a whole" but the other two fail to discuss this.

It is not a particularly penetrating discussion, in fact, although it does represent a further interest in Corbin's work, and Kelly does admit that for him "the actual terms of the Recital are non-paraphraseable, but still exegetable, somehow." Other works by Corbin are not mentioned, nor is Joseph Needham's introduction to volume two of *Science and Civilisation in China*,⁸² in which it becomes clear that Muslim culture has little sense of "process" in the Americans' sense, and certainly no socio-evolutionary sense. Needham quotes Said Husain Nasr on wisdom as a static cosmic *sapientia* or *gnosis*, with "divine theology," Queen of the Sciences, as usual in medieval cultures, the pinnacle of the system. Needham points out that such a pattern "denies the equality of the forms of human experience, and it divorces Islamic natural science from the grand onward-going movement of the natural science of all humanity." The scientific revolution of the Renaissance becomes simply, as it was for Pope Maffeo Barberini, Galileo's persecutor, a "desacralisation of Nature."

The Sufic aim for Needham - and Kelly and his Bard College interlocutors would concur in their application to poetics - is to resacralise Nature in a religious world-view. Nasr is categorical: the Islamic refusal of modern science is not decadent but a refusal of the secular. Islam maintained the medieval synthesis; the European Renaissance developed science and society as process. Sufic society is fundamentally an agrarian and craft society of hierarchy and fixed inherited teaching, relying on grace or *baraka* to be injected into the system to maintain it. (This term is not mentioned by the Americans, although Leroi Jones used it when he changed his name in the mid 1960s).

Doctrine needs an injection from the centre or "what lies behind" or its priests and acolytes. This is the procedure that Olson and other Americans using Corbin reject in the name of "human universe." But the metaphysical absolute of neo-Platonism and its versions in Corbin's Sufis remained a possibility, never totally rejected, although they still needed Sufic human phenomenological perception actions of the Active Imagination. In "The Creative," Creeley, for example, requires what Corbin terms "the full noetic value of the Imagination" to produce Olson's Man of Achievement, and creative imagination in a materialist, rationalistic technocratic society. He returns to Corbin through Jung's two worlds, the *creatura* and the *pleroma*, "the mind's world, the world of ideas, differences, distinctions, thought," and "the world of physical event purely, having no 'idea' of itself, no imagination." Western habits of asking "which one is better" cannot work:

You can go on being a sternly humanistic rationalist, but it won't get you *here*. Because *there* will always be here too, to really drive you out of your head...One wants to keep growing. One looks for whatever signs seem the issue of that possibility...

"Creative" cannot be "an attitude of choice." You have to pay attention "to all that came to attention...Olson's sense, that art is only the twin life has." The "I," as Wittgenstein puts it, is what is "deeply mysterious":

In a world of objects, *mess*, this is the only one manifestation of existence that cannot see itself as literal *thing*...what I feel to be the creative has location in this place of personal identity.

Creeley lastly recalls Pound's sense of how "make it new" at the end of his career becomes: "I have brought the great ball of crystal;/ who can lift it?/ Can you enter the great acorn of light?" But Canto CXVI in fact refers here to the heroic as Herakles' failure to grasp the acorn. In Canto LXXVI: "Tangibility by no means *atasal* / but the great crystal can be weighed in the hand." *Atasal* is apparently Avicenna's term for "union with God," although Corbin does not - unless the usage has been missed - employ it. Elsewhere, Pound's "That the goddess turn crystal within her" might well be another reference to the Active Imagination.

In his "Prologue" to *Spiritual Body and Celestial Earth*,⁸³ Corbin refers

his explorations to "the judgement which each one bears in himself of himself and thanks to which he takes on the entire responsibility for himself." And further, to the necessity to:

overcome the peril of the 'second death', so clearly discerned by the most ancient Hermeticism, and which postulates the "descent into Hell." For it is from the soul itself, from the celestial Earth of the soul, that the 'spiritual flesh' is constituted- the supersensory and at the same time perfectly concrete *caro spiritualis*. A 'dead soul', in the sense that a soul can die, could not be its substance.

The need to overcome this "peril" is constant, and never more urgent than now. Corbin writes for "the prepared seeker" as well as the person who, in eighteenth century France, - was called the 'honnête homme', the open-minded man to whom the scholar owes consideration, the more so in that his kind is perhaps doomed, owing to contemporary conditions, to disappear." So that his terms - theosophy, esotericism, initiation, etc. - are not for exclusive claims to authority teachings, but for "hidden supersensory things, to the discretion which the words themselves suggest...and to the spiritual birth that causes the perception of those hidden things to open." Corbin's implications suggest therefore that preparation for creativity might certainly imply initiation and esotericism, and how these actions interfere with falsely loose "democratic" insistences on easy "communication" in its most passive and bullying senses. Preparation might well be doomed, in Corbin's sense - this "eruption of another world into our knowledge," an eruption that rends the fabric of our categories and their necessities, of our evidences and their norms, and one that cannot be perceived by the organ of ordinary knowledge [and] that can be neither proven nor disputed by means of ordinary argumentation." This is Corbin's Sufic "world of Hurqalyan," "the interworld... the vanished consciousness of this assembly of universes," "'the Earth of Visions', the Earth which confers on visionary apperceptions their truth, the world through which resurrection comes to pass," that makes "history" real. So that *ta'wil* is the needed "hermeneutics of symbols," the Active Imagination. Corbin, in chapter one, "The Mazdean Imago Terrae," summarises his interpretations:

The Active Imagination thus induced will not produce some

arbitrary even lyrical, construction standing between us and "reality," but, will on the contrary, function directly as a faculty and organ of knowledge just as *real* as - if not more real than - the sense organs. However, it will perceive in the manner proper to it. The organ is not a sensory faculty but an archetype-Image that it possessed from the beginning: it is not something derived from any outer perception. And the property of this Image will be precisely that of effecting the translation of sensory data, their resolution into the purity of the subtle world, in order to restore them as symbols to be deciphered, the "key" being imprinted in the soul itself...the authenticity of the Event and its full reality consist of this visionary act and of the apparition vouchsafed by it....The Active Imagination is the organ of metamorphosis...[ta'wil] etymologically means 'to bring back the data to their origin...to their donor.' For this, the same data must be recaptured at each of the degrees of being or levels through which they had to "descend" in order to reach the mode of being corresponding to the plane on which they are evident to our ordinary consciousness. This practice has the effect of causing the planes to symbolize *with* one another....The *ta'wil*...is a matter of *harmonic perception*, of hearing identical sound (the same verse, the same *hadith*, even an entire text) on several levels simultaneously...the secret of the progression of chords, in harmony, depends upon the *ta'wil* of a given chord...

Back in 1947, Charles Olson wrote in *Call Me Ishmael*⁸⁴ of the Homeric example of Ulysses, and the terms are those of Corbin's "honnête homme":

...already pushing against the limits, seeking a way out. Homer gave his hero the central quality of the man to come: *search, the individual responsible for himself*... By 1400, in Dante's hands Ulysses is again prospective. He is already Atlantic man....The Atlantic crossed, the new land America known, the dream's death lay around the Horn, where West returned East. The Pacific is the end of the UNKNOWN which Homer's and Dante's Ulysses open men's eyes to. END of individual responsible only to himself.

Olson quotes Melville's notes for *Moby-Dick* within the flyleaf of the last volume of his Shakespeare set : "- not the (black art) Goetic but Theurgic

magic - seeks converse with the Intelligence, Power, the Angel." And Olson adds: "its source is Greek 'goetos', meaning variously trickster, juggler and as here, magician. (Plato called literature 'Goeteia')... 'Theurgic', in sharp contrast, is an accurate term for a kind of occult art of the Neoplatonists in which, through self-purification and sacred rites, the aid of the divine was evoked." Olson was later, like Duncan and the other Americans discussed in this essay, to find the "converse" in the opposed Angels of Intelligence and black evil in Corbin's Sufic entrances, an action of human potentiality in the essential navigation of perception and knowledge, through practices of Active Imagination. But also for producing the birth of humanity, a future "whose emergence is...subsequent to the great catastrophe, to the 'day after', the invasion by 'Evil'."

In 1987, with his masterly novel *The Western Lands*⁸⁵ William Burroughs re-entered the locations of false and possibly beneficent Paradises, through his concern with the ancient Egyptian sense of a territory through which the dead travel investigatorily to discover their particular immortalities, those of the race. That is, the lives, knowledge and beliefs they held are now their eternity in fulfillment. They have to journey through the dangers historically invented by human beings - dreams both good and evil. For Paradise, therefore, read human potentiality, including, as Burroughs believes, the need to leave the completed and deadening world, with or without atomic apocalypse, and find the next biological mutation, probably beyond Earth and in a space location as yet unknown and uncontaminated by the human, free of "the basic God standard of Fear and Danger":

Swamis, Rinpoches, practitioners of IS: "That's all there to it, folks, what is here, right now in front of you, and once you grasp the IS, you got the WILL BE."

Uncouth survivalists, bristling with weapons, secret deadly contagion on all sides...

The danger remains powerful as the seeker reaches Ancient Egypt and its simulacra. His only weapons are clear:

So the One God, backed by secular powers, is forced on the masses in the name of Islam, Christianity, the State, for all secular leaders

want to be the One. To be intelligent or observant under such a blanket of oppression is to be "subversive."

And the old gods will eke out a wretched, degraded existence as folklore for the tourists...

The seeker has moved through the *ta'wil* of his investigations. Now he has to:

step...from word into silences. From Time into Space. The Pilgrimage to the Western Lands has started, the voyage through the Land of the Dead. Waves of exhilaration sweep the planet, awash in seas of silence. There is hope and purpose in these faces, for every pilgrim must meet and overcome his own death.

In fact, the seeker inherits that necessity for the Active Imagination that Henri Corbin offers us through his gift of Iranian translations.

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4 Olson, *Additional Prose*, p.81, nt.2.

5 Charles Olson, "Review of Eric A. Havelock's *Preface to Plato*," in Olson, *Additional Prose*, pp. 53, 55.

6 Charles Olson, *A Plan For A Curriculum of the Soul*, ed. John Clarke, (New York: Nemesis Distribution), nos. 18 (1972) and 21 (1972). Olson's prospectus appears as the series programme.

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- 11 Olson, *Additional Prose*, p.43.
- 12 In Olson, *Additional Prose*, p.91.
- 13 Joseph Campbell, ed., *Man and Time*, Eranos Yearbook, Bollingen Series XXX:3 (New York: Pantheon Books, 1957).
- 14 Charles Olson, "The Secret of the Black Chrysanthemum," *Olson: The Journal of the Charles Olson Archives*, No.3, spring 1975, pp.64-92.
- 15 William Blake, *The Poetry and Prose of William Blake*, ed. David Erdman (New York: Doubleday, 1970), pp.533, 535.
- 16 William Blake, *The Illuminated Blake*, ed. David Erdman (New York: Doubleday, 1974), p.379.
- 17 c.f. Eric Mottram, "Charles Olson's Rebirth between Power and Love," *Sixpack*, Winter 1973/74, pp.95-114.
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- 19 Henri Corbin, "Cyclical Time in Mazdaism and Ismailism," in Campbell, ed., *Man and Time*, p.202, nt.
- 20 Olson, *Muthologos*, vol.1, p.2.
- 21 Charles Olson, *The Maximus Poems*, ed. George Butterick (Berkeley: California University Press, 1983), p.217.
- 22 Olson, *The Maximus Poems*, ed. Butterick, p.240.
- 23 Olson, *Muthologos*, vol.1, p.61.
- 24 Olson, *Additional Prose*, p.71.
- 25 R. Buckminster Fuller, "Total Thinking," in *Ideas and Integrity* (New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1963), pp.225-243.
- 26 See also Charles Olson, *Poetry and Truth* (San Francisco: Four Seasons, 1971), pp.61, 63.
- 27 In *lo* no.6, Ethnoastronomy Issue, summer 1969, pp.100-3; Olson, *Additional Prose*, pp.74-77.
- 28 Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, trans. Collin Smith (orig. 1962; London: Routledge, 1989), p.326.
- 29 Corbin, *Avicenna*, pp.14, 22, 91.
- 30 Eric Mottram, "Pound, Olson, and the Secret of the Black Chrysanthemum," *Chapman*, vol.II, no.2, summer 1972, pp.20-31, 55-64.
- 31 Charles Olson, *The Collected Poems of Charles Olson*, ed. George Butterick (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), p.245.
- 32 Olson, *Human Universe*, pp.67-71.
- 33 *The Secret of the Golden Flower: A Chinese Book of Life*, trans. & commentary Richard Wollheim (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, rev. ed. 1962), pp.8-9; see also Mottram, "Pound, Olson and The Secret of the Black Chrysanthemum".
- 34 Charles Olson, "Apollonius of Tyana," in Olson, *Selected Writings*, ed. Robert Creeley (New York: New Directions, 1966), pp.141-2.; Eric Mottram, "Charles Olson's Apollonius of Tyana," *Sixpack* no.3-4, 1973.
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43 Olson, "The Secret of the Black Chrysanthemum," p.68.

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45 See also Olson, *The Maximus Poems*, ed. Butterick, p.589; and George F. Butterick, *Guide to the Maximus Poems of Charles Olson* (Berkeley: University of California Press 1978), pp.627-28.

46 See Eric Mottram, "Heroic Survival Through Ecstatic Form: Robert Duncan's *Roots and Branches*," in *Scales of the Marvellous*, eds. Robert Bertholf and Ian W. Reid (New York: New Directions, 1979), pp.138-42.

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by Gavin Selerie

33

The whole matter is a woven text
put on and then put off:
soul itself is a wrappage
exuding darlings and perfume,
every line a would-be jewel.
We are cheated and cozened
by heaped-on figures
overweaponed or heavily gated,
by letter-struck mobsters
throwing up enticements
and offscoured epithets.
Here go spasms of ingenuity
with their viewy jackets and spines
proving that snow is black.

The seasons of an English heart
are workshop-pieces slugged out
to a readable ease
or catch-word feats
determined by committee.
Your serviceable voice zooms in
to a sunshine and lager trail,
lilies and butterflies yielding
to a wacky re-enchantment.
Serious concerns are propertied
by the puffed one-liner
robustly up sending
a robust nothing.

Behind it all the reigning sub-editor
tenders a soupçon of painterly business
but, holidaying out with urinous cant,