Charles Olson's ecological poetics

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Charles Olson's ecological poetics

by

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I. INTRODUCTION

One of the most vital developments in contemporary American poetry is the poetics of ecology. In the major productions of Gary Snyder, *Myths and Texts* and *The Back Country*, we see ecological values elaborated from reference points as apparently diverse as that of the ancient Orient and that of the American Indian. In the poetry of A. R. Ammons, especially in his most famous volume, *Corson's Inlet*, we see a dialectic operating in which the poet's mental resources are both opposed to and corrected by the show of nature. As both these poets have acknowledged, one of the original forces in the development of this literature is the poetry and essays of the late Charles Olson. We see in Olson philosophical justification for Snyder's cultural primitivism. We find, too, metaphysical and epistemological underpinnings for Ammons' dialectic, which utilizes some of Olson's most famous concepts, such as that of the poetic "field."

The purpose of this essay is to examine the sources and presentments of Olson's ecological values. In the first place, we will identify the principal concepts informing these values. The texts for this discussion will be Olson's major prose writings and geographer Carl Sauer's "The Morphology of Landscape," which, we will see, exerted a major influence on Olson, in this context. Second, we will show how Olson embodied and presented these values in his most famous poetic work, *The Maximus Poems*. 
II. THE MORPHOLOGY OF LANDSCAPE

In Olson's most famous essay, "Human Universe," he railed against the tendency of our civilization to regard the natural landscape as a commodity to be exploited for purposes other than harmonic sustenance of life:1

If man chooses to treat external reality any differently than as part of his own process, in other words as anything other than relevant to his own inner life, then he will (being such a froward thing, and bound to use his energy willy-nilly, nature is so subtle) use it otherwise. He will use it just exactly as he has used it now for too long, for arbitrary and willful purposes which, in their effects, not only change the face of nature but actually arrest and divert her force until man turns it even against herself, he is so powerful, this little thing. But what little willful modern man will not recognize is, that when he turns it against her he turns it against himself, held in the hand of nature as man forever is, to his use of himself if he choose, to his disuse, as he has.

Olson is describing the destructiveness of a dispensation of capitalistic nihilism. In The Maximus Poems, he names this dispensation "pejorocracy," which literally means "to rule to make worse." To elaborate the above statement and to define its underpinnings, we will begin by examining "The Morphology of Landscape," a landmark essay by Olson's acknowledged mentor, geographer Carl Ortwin Sauer.2

In A Bibliography on America for Ed Dorn, a letter to Olson's poetry student at Black Mountain College, Olson recommends Sauer to the poet as one of the "new scientists of man," whom Olson sees as "a vast improvement on almost all the 'creative' men who have gone alongside of same (say, Peek-gas-so, Prrrroost, JJJJoys, all but Chaplin."3 From Sauer's discussion of the "morphology of landscape," the poet will gain a methodology of knowing the relationship between a culture and its habitat. The poet will learn how the elemental conditions in which men find themselves limit that
human expression we call variously "culture."

As its title suggests, Sauer's essay is about the changes which a given landscape undergoes over time. But "The Morphology of Landscape" is also polemical, addressed to Sauer's colleagues in the field:

Geography is distinctly anthropocentric, in the sense of value or use of the earth to man. We are interested in that part of the areal scene that concerns us as human beings because we are part of it, live with it, are limited by it and modify it. (p. 325)

Sauer embodies this thesis everywhere in his discussion of the changing face of nature. For example, in his treatment of the problem of developing a more adequate scientific language for geography, he says that "popular terminology is a fairly reliable warrant of the significance of the form, as implied by its adoption." (p. 330) If the topographic form is thus significant, then it must have a name.

The changes in the natural landscape which man brings about form the core of interest in Sauer's geography:

The natural landscape is being subjected to transformation at the hands of man, the last and for us the most important morphologic factor. By his cultures he makes use of the natural forms, in many cases alters them, in some destroys them. . . . (p. 341)

. . . the physical area is the sum of all natural resources that man has at his disposal in the area. It is beyond his power to add to them; he may "develop" them, ignore them in part, or subtract from them by exploitation. . . . (pp. 325-26)

There is a strictly geographic way of thinking of culture; namely, as the impress of the works of man upon the area. . . . (p. 326)

In the following diagram, Sauer summarizes the relationship between culture and the natural world:
"The cultural landscape is fashioned from a natural landscape by a culture group. Culture is the agent, the natural area is the medium, the cultural landscape the result." (p. 343)

Sauer's endeavor is to treat the morphology of landscape with as much scientific objectivity and precision as possible; hence, he is concerned purely with man's record upon the landscape, not with subjective matters such "the energy, customs, or beliefs of man." (p. 342) In his diagram, these subjective matters are signified by the "XX" under "FORMS." However, Sauer is implicitly aware of the impact of these phenomena on the natural landscape:

The natural landscape is of course of fundamental importance, for it supplies the materials out of which the cultural landscape is formed. The shaping force, however, lies in the culture itself. Within the wide limits of the physical equipment of the area lie many possible choices for man. . . . (p. 343)

What Sauer leaves unsaid is that the "energy, customs, or beliefs of man," these primary constituents of culture, often enough precede man's contact with a natural area, or literally defy it. Such aberrations are common with the migration of fully-developed cultures to new and different natural areas. His positioning of the "XX" symbol in his diagram suggests that these phenomena follow the contact of man and environment, as surely they
This is the meaning of adaptation, through which, aided by those suggestions which man has derived from nature, perhaps by an imitative process, . . . we get the feeling of harmony between the human habitation and the landscape into which it so fittingly blends. (p. 343)

But human habitation and natural landscape do not always "fittingly blend," and an instance of acute disharmony between man and nature is largely the subject of Charles Olson's Maximus Poems. For, though the "energy, customs, or beliefs of man" may be outside the realm of the geographer because irreducible to scientific analysis, these phenomena are easily the particular concern of the artist.
III. THE HUMAN UNIVERSE

Olson's ecological values are elaborated in many of his major prose works as well as in The Maximus Poems. The basic premise which informs these values is Sauer's, that of the finitude of the natural world which man is forever "held in the hand of." In "Human Universe," Olson expresses the need that man attend carefully to the particulars of experience as they come at him. The particulars of the natural world are in perpetual flux, or in a continual state of becoming. If man greets this experience with preconceived systems of perception (as we would expect a displaced culture group to do), his responses cannot be in harmony with the stimuli. Olson's discussion recalls Sauer's reference to the kind of adaptation informed by an "imitative process":

For there is this other part of motion which we call life to be examined anew, that thing we overlove, man's action, which . . . (when it is good) is the equal of all intake plus all transposing. It deserves this word, that it is the equal of its cause only when it proceeds unbroken from the threshold of man through him and back out again, without loss of quality, to the external world from which it came. . . . The meeting edge of man and the world is also his cutting edge. If man is active, it is exactly here where experience comes in that it is delivered back, and if he stays fresh at the coming in he will be fresh at his going out. . . . Man does influence external reality. . . . (p. 11)

Inattention to the subtle processes of external nature can and does engender man's destructiveness. What is suggested above—that this contempt is coextensive with man's contempt for his own natural body, the organ of his sustenance—is underlined earlier in the essay:

For the truth is, that the management of external nature so that none of its virtu is lost, in vegetables or in art, is as much a delicate juggling of her content as is the same
juggling by any one of us of our own. And when men are not such jugglers, are not able to manage a means of expression the equal of their own or nature’s intricacy, the flesh does choke. . . . (p. 8)

An exemplary principle for the proper "juggling" of nature’s content is attributed to the hero of Olson’s stylistically-innovative "Apollonius of Tyana: A Dance, with Some Words, for Two Actors":

And he ate no animal food and he wore nothing made of animal skin. Blood seemed to him of consequence. His feeling was, that man has no right to use anything but what, like a crop or the wool of a sheep, can grow again--like trees can grow, if top soil is not the price paid for cutting a stand off, as war cuts off men after their mothers can bear again . . .

The essential enlargement Olson makes upon the work of Sauer is the application of the ratio between nature’s intricacy and the intricacy of the natural human body. Both of these bodies--the inside and outside of the human universe--are finite and subject to the same elemental forces:

What Apollonius was first taught was, that how a tree sways is as much of the matter as is how you sway; how any hanging thing is as you hang by the hook of gravitation, hang, as a pendulum swings: how, to heal, is also how you eat . . .

(30)

But, as the quotation on "little willful modern man" which began this essay indicates, Olson’s endeavor is to correct the destructive course of contemporary civilization. The manifestations of this contempt for our bodies and for our world are too obvious to recite; they are all around us. In trying to correct our course, Olson directs our attention in nearly all of his works to pre-Socratic reference points. For Olson believed that the seeds of our civilization were sown in the conceptions of Socrates and of Aristotle, as well. In his Letters for Origin, Olson holds forth at length on the culture of the ancient Sumerians.
his positive reference point is the civilization of the Mayas. After a lengthy representation of the naturalistic, mythic insight of the Mayas, Olson exuberantly proffers to us the vitality of their world: "O, they were hot for the world they lived in, these Maya, hot to get it down the way it was--the way it is, my fellow citizens." (p. 15) We recall the reference point invoked by Gary Snyder, that of the North American Indian. In this context, we need no more than note that certain tribal lines endured 2,000 years in diverse areas of the continent, before they were more or less undone by the imperialism of a culture now busy congratulating itself for having survived 200 years. Amid the gathering noise of its bicentennial celebration, the latter culture continues to deplete the vital natural resources of the continent ever closer to exhaustion. We sympathize with Olson's exasperation at "little willful modern man's" characteristic refusal to learn from these past cultures:

Or a people different from himself--they will be the subject of historians' studies or of tourists' curiosity, and be let go at that, no matter how much they may disclose values he and his kind, you would think, could make use of. I have found, for example, that the hieroglyphs of the Maya disclose a placement of themselves toward nature of enormous contradiction to ourselves, and yet I am not aware that any of the possible usages of this difference have been allowed to seep out into present society. . . . It is unbearable what knowledge of the past has been allowed to become, what function human memory has been dribbled out to in the hands of these learned monsters whom people are led to think "know." (pp. 11-12)

Alongside the positive reference points of the likes of the Mayas, Olson endeavored to expose and explode reference points informing contemporary civilization. The latter venture is the burden of The Maximus Poems. We will presently investigate the procedural underpinnings of that work.
IV. TO KNOW AND MAKE KNOWN

In *A Bibliography on America* for Ed Dorn, Olson advises his student that in order to know and make known the reality of any "place person thing event," the poet must possess as much hard evidence surrounding the subject as possible. (p. 9) If one's subject is the relationship between a culture and its natural habitat, he must know the history of that relation. The significance of this demand in the context of general American poetics is the implication that standing on the street corner or in the woods and letting one's intuition "go to it" is simply not enough.

In terms of Sauer's diagram of the triple connection between culture and landscape, the poet must have as many of the facts as possible touching on the interaction of the items under "FORMS" and the natural landscape. In short, he must wade through the record of "the impress of the works of man upon the area." These "facts" must be retrieved from the primary sources, in the usual sense employed in the historical discipline: legal records and documents, accounts by eye-witnesses, logs, ledgers, even diaries. (p. 7-9) No one, including Olson, would deny the inevitable element of subjectivity even in the most apparently-factual documents. The idea is to accept that subjective element as an unavoidable and, so, legitimate dimension of the record, especially since the energy of that subjectivity may be the document's most urgent quality.8

But a congeries of "facts," by any definition, does not constitute history. Taking the hint by way of William Carlos Williams' *In the American Grain*, Olson posited the conception of history first provided by Herodotus: "istorin in him appears to mean 'finding out for oneself,' instead of depending on hearsay."9 "Hearsay" should be read as "secondary
historical sources," in the broadest sense, from curb-stone speculation to college introductory history texts.

Given the evidence, the individual poet must depend on the exercise of his own imagination to form conceptions and judgements about his subject: "I believe there is simply ourselves, and where we are has a particularity which we'd better use because that's about all we got. Otherwise we're running around looking for somebody else's stuff." The artistic representation of the poet's resulting image of the truth completes the proper cycle of engagement with an object of experience:

. . . the process of the imagination is from 1) a place person thing event--to--2) the naming of it--to--3) the reenactment or representation of it, in other words

object name image or story (Bibliography on America, p. 9)

As Olson's arrows indicate, the dimensions of the process are mutually sustaining. In the art work, we should find all three phases embodied. In the final portion of this essay, we will show how The Maximus Poems exemplify this method of knowing and making known the ecological values elaborated above.
V. THE MAXIMUS POEMS

Maximus, the speaker of the poems, is only "not quite" Olson himself. We need not resort to the fact that Olson often called himself "Maximus" (which in itself is not very interesting) to sustain this. For Maximus' word in every way echoes the word of the essayist-Olson we have examined. Maximus, for Olson, is an organ of the word. He is an overwhelming presence of the sea city of Gloucester, Massachusetts, who would confront the citizenry with the condition of that little culture:

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

The condition of the culture is critical. Man's relation to the elemental processes of the world has been seriously adulterated. For Maximus is writing his "letters" to the Gloucester of the 1950's, to a culture dominated by commercialism. In the first letter ("I, Maximus of Gloucester, to You"), Maximus records the difficulty of significant contact with the elements in such a cultural landscape:

But that which matters, that which insists, that which will last,
that! o my people, where shall you find it, how, where,
where shall you listen
when all is become billboards, when, all, even silence,
is spray-gunned?
(p. 2)

That "which will last" is man's dependence upon the natural world; "it is the elements men stand in the midst of." (p. 6) And for Maximus, as for Olson, the processes of the natural landscape are wholly relevant to a man's inner processes. How shall his citizens "listen" when "even our
bird . . . cannot be heard/when even you, when sound itself is neoned in?" (p. 2) A life within such a cultural landscape may finally blunt a man's drive to make contact with the elemental forces of life, with life's "underpart":

And a man slumped, attentionless, against pink shingles
o sea city) (p. 2)

The dulling of a man's instinctual response to life is coextensive with his removal from vital contact with life's elemental forces. In the "pejorocracy" (Maximus' name for the cultural dispensation), man's place in the natural world is opaque, obscured. The glittering, tawdry surfaces of contemporary life must be removed:

love is not easy
but how shall you know, New England, now that pejorocracy is here, how
that street-cars, o Oregon, twitter in the afternoon, offend a black-gold loin?
* * * * *
(o Gloucester-man, weave
your birds and fingers new, your roof-tops, clean shit upon racks sunned on American braid
with others like you . . .
o kill kill kill kill kill those who advertise you out) (pp. 3-4)
As the final strophe of this passage suggests, advertising men are among Maximus' worst human examples. Throughout The Maximus Poems advertising men exemplify the cultural dispensation for which ownership is the informing value. In terms of man's dependency upon and need to exist in harmony with nature, the dispensation is, or has, no "rule" at all. Pejorocracy, as suggested above, is capitalistic nihilism. Pecuniary gain has become the end of interaction between man and the elements. At the emotional core of the culture, wonder at the fecundity of Gloucester's waters has been displaced by the lure of enrichment. Advertising men are of particular interest to Maximus because language is the primary instrument of their activity:

Let those who use words cheap, who use us cheap take themselves out of the way
Let them not talk of what is good for the city
* * * * * * *
Let them . . . leave Gloucester
in the present shame of, the wondership stolen by, ownership (p. 9)

Maximus insists that man must give all his attention to the actual, unfolding particulars of the world, that man must shun the destructive noise of contemporary society, the "mu-sick" of pejorocracy. But he does not refer the reader exclusively to citizens who have denied the demand:

While she /pejorocracy/ stares, out of her painted face, no matter the deathly mu-sick, the demand will arouse some of these men and women (p. 8)

The men and women in The Maximus Poems who respond to the demand are the
citizens of the "hidden city" of Gloucester Maximus names "polis." What distinguishes these people is their ability to "hear" above the "mu-sick" of pejorocracy, to "see" beneath the tawdry surfaces of the cultural landscape: "polis is/eyes." The ability of these citizens to direct their attention to the elemental forces of existence must come from within, their ability to respond must be generated and directed individually, since the collective in which they grew up attempted only to direct their responses to commercial realities. An example is the wife of a Gloucester physician:

Only the lady
has got it straight. She looks
as the best of my people look
in one direction, her direction, they know

it is elements men stand in the midst of . . . (p. 6)

The "lady" is a citizen of the "hidden city" which Maximus calls his own, a commonwealth which is "off-shore, by islands hidden in the blood." Throughout the middle and latter portions of The Maximus Poems, Maximus presents a history of Gloucester. That history is a record of the self-aggrandizing exploitation of nature by the incarnations of the pejorocracy and the efforts of the citizens of polis to adapt to the natural landscape, to endure in harmony with it.

In the short section of the volume entitled "History is the Memory of Time," Maximus recounts an event that occurred on Cape Anne, the present site of Gloucester, in the seventeenth century. The event can be summarized as follows: a group of Dorset fishermen, led by a man named Hewes, are enduring the extreme adversity of the coastal winter of 1625-26. Their grounds are forcibly taken over by Plymouth Puritans who, led by Miles
Standish, have been attempting to set up a corporate fishing business on
the site. We are interested in the way the account is presented and in
the significance Maximus attaches to the event.

Maximus, like the Olson of The Special View of History, would be "an
historian as Herodotus was, looking/for oneself for the evidence." (pp. 100-
01). His account is appropriately shot through with documentary detail:

1622 to 1626 was the fish rush

10 boats New England waters
the year before, then BANG:

37 vessels (mostly Damariscove?) 1622,
45 Piscataqua and Cape Anne, 1623
50, 1624--& WAR, with Spain

1625/6; Gloucester's year,
when she must have been a cowtown from the roar
of men after, fish:

how many vessels how many men
in the Harbour?
@ 40 to 60 per ship?
200--or 2000? (p. 112)

These are details of the situation which leads to the event. Where Max-
imus' exuberance obtrudes ("she must have been a cowtown from the roar/
of men after, fish"), it is his right, since he is responding to hard ev-
idence. Where the evidence is not "hard" (@ 40 to 60 per ship?"), Max-
imus owns it. His inclusion of the indefinite details suggests that he
is emphasizing the insufficiency of the record alone as history. The ac-
count of the fight itself should be quoted in its entirety:

That year the STAGE FIGHT -- and as much a Western as
why not, with Hewes' men backed up on the stage they'd taken
by right of hand from Plymouth poorJohns hadn't yet got to
fishing that season (stayed in bed)
Miles Standish,
probably looking just like they tell us coal shuttle
on head silly pistol cocked at Hewes’ chest slashed trousers
ballooning over bow legs

Hewes & men backing back on stage toward
water,
pushing hogsheads into place for barricade, meanwhile Standish
small chimney fuming ("lousy Christian" says Rev Hubbard
didn’t know
enough to turn other fowling piece

Hewes had reason
to give way: 3 Plymouth vessels
on station, the Charity, 100 tons,
Capt Peirce who quieted
Standish, but the other two
Company ships fr London ... (pp. 112-13)

Again we have documentary detail, we have evidence. But we also have a
distinct sense of moral judgement: Hewes’ men are the good guys, Stand-
dish’s men the bad. The latter are the bad guys because they want the
fishing grounds for money. Further, they are "outsiders," they are not
interested in making a life in and with this setting. Their lives are in
Plymouth, their business with England. Hewes’ men have settled at the
site which they had taken over when their predecessors had been slow to
respond to the beginning of the fishing season, had "stayed in bed." In
short, the "Plymouth poor Johns" had not been attentive to nature’s gen-
erous offer. Finally, we see in the final strophe of the section that
Maximus commends Hewes’ men for defending the gift of nature to them:

They should raise a monument
to a fisherman crouched down
behind a hogshead, protecting
his dried fish

(pp. 114)

The difference between these early citizens of polis and these early
pejorocrats is completely relevant to the citizens of contemporary
Gloucester, as Maximus suggests by three acts of naming. First, there is the designation of the event as the "STAGE FIGHT" (typed in all-caps just in case we do not notice). For "stage" is to be taken in a sense beyond the topographic designation: it is a "stage," too, in the sense of an artistic representation of a recurrent human situation. Second, Maximus' feeling that the event is "as much a Western as/why not" posits the place of the "STAGE FIGHT" in the American tradition. Third, there is the entitling of the account itself: "History is the Memory of Time." Maximus', or Olson's, point is that "history" is nominally the recognition that motion in the universe gives rise to the concept of time. The importance of past events is that they are present. Human attitudes give rise to human events, and an attitude, though 350 years and however much space distant, is but a consciousness away--for better or worse.11

The contemporary carriers of polis are likewise distinguished by their effort to live with reference to the natural world, to gear their existences to the "elements men stand in the midst of." Their endeavor is more difficult than ever, for they must "hear" despite the nearly ubiquitous "mu-sick" of the pejorocracy. Not even Maximus himself is immune:

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

(p. 13)

Yet, despite the "deathly mu-sick," some can "hear" still. Maximus stands
on a Gloucester wharf with a local lad. They view two ships moored in the wharf. The first "glitters" but is ill-suited for the sea: "She had raked masts, and they were unstepped,/fitted loose in her deck, like a neck in a collar." (p. 7) The lad turns his attention to another, simpler, but sturdier vessel: "he turned to a Glousterman, a big one,/burthed a-longside this queer one, and said:/'I'll own her one day'." (p. 7)

Throughout the volume, fisherman are emblematic men, for fish is the one life-giving element which the natural landscape of the Gloucester area holds in abundance. The fisherman's difference is that his life is directed towards the sea, traditional emblem of the elemental forces of existence. Their backs are to the "city," the pejorocracy. The city of Maximus' fishermen is "off-shore, by islands hidden in the blood." Maximus himself is a "fisherman," a "wind and water man," a fisherman of the real:

I measure my song,
measure the sources of my song,
measure me, measure
my forces

(p. 44)

For it is the burden of the poet to see the pattern in human events. These are his waters. The "sources" of the poet (the past of Gloucester) are part of his "measure" in this venture, just as his "forces" (speech-force) help generate the moral history of the culture, help fashion his "song." Maximus becomes himself an example of how the eyes are used properly. The difference between his activity and that of any of us relates to vocation, merely:

Eyes,
& polis,
fishermen,
& poets
or in every human head I've known is
both:
the attention, and
the care
however much each of us
chooses our own
kin and
concentration

(p. 28)

In his third letter to the citizens of Gloucester, Maximus presents
both the concrete significance and the methodology of the fight against
pejorocracv:

Tansy buttons, tansy
for my city
Tansy for their noses

Tansy for them,
tansy for Gloucester to take the smell
of all owners,
the smell

Tansy
for all of us

(p. 9)

The tansy flower becomes Maximus' emblem of what our attention must lock
into: the elemental world which supports our lives. The tansy is in per-
flect harmony with that world, part and parcel of it. The tansy becomes
the perfect antidote (it is strong-smelling and traditionally imbued with
medicinal power) for the stink of ownership which, in fact, is without
substance, except in a perverted human universe, a pejorocracy, a dispen-
sation of capitalistic nihilism. When ownership as an end in itself be-
comes the motivation for any man's activity, his attention is on the void
and his resulting action can be no better than irrelevant, and is likely
to be destructive (Lake Erie died because corporate profit was held above
life). The imperative comes down to the demand that any of us first pay
attention to our own waters (world), and then take care that the processes which are any of our actions take the world itself, its going on, as the single referrent:

> There are no hierarchies, no infinite, no such many as mass, there are only eyes in all heads, to be looked out of (p. 29)

In The Maximus Poems, Olson is directly indebted to the work of Carl Sauer. For Maximus depends upon "the impress of the works of man upon the area" in the documentation and presentation of his "song." But this account of the relationship of a culture group and its habitat is a moral one, and Sauer's work only shows the poet how to gather the evidence out of which history may be fashioned via individual imagination. The distinction of The Maximus Poems is the marriage of documentary responsibility with the sanctity of individual perception of the particularity of experience which they embody.
FOOTNOTES

1 Charles Olson, "Human Universe," Human Universe and Other Essays, ed. Donald Allen (New York: Grove Press, 1967), p. 11. All subsequent references to this essay will be made in the text by page number.

2 Carl Sauer, "The Morphology of Landscape," Land and Life, ed. John Leighly (Berkeley: Univ. of Calif. Press, 1963). All subsequent references to this work will be made in the text by page number.

3 Charles Olson, Additional Prose: A Bibliography on America, Proprioception, & Other Notes & Essays, ed. G. F. Butterick (Bolinas, Calif.: Four Seasons, 1974), p. 6. All subsequent references to this work will be made in the text by page number.


5 Charles Olson, "Apollonius of Tyana," Human Universe and Other Essays, p. 30. All subsequent references to this work will be made in the text by page number.

6 Olson believed that with Socrates' position of abstract, transcendent forms and Aristotle's development of logic and classification, man was effectively cut-off from the natural world. Language and knowledge became "conceptual." Olson's position was that in pre-Socratic cultures language and knowledge were still metaphorical, hence, "natural." His most cogent discussion of this subject is found on pp. 1-6 of "Human Universe."


8 Olson's discussion of narrative techniques ("Document" and "Narrator In") in "Introduction to Robert Creeley" (Human Universe and Other Essays, pp. 127-28) parallels this accommodation of the subjective in historical documents.


11 The notion that "history is presence" is the general thesis of Olson's Special View of History.