

*TERRA (IN)COGNITA:*  
THE PRACTICE OF PLACE IN POSTWAR POETICS AND BEYOND

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## Abstract

In response to the spatial turn in critical and scientific discourses, this dissertation examines the reassertion of space and place in the work of Black Mountain poets Charles Olson and Robert Duncan, Black Mountain affiliate Amiri Baraka, and Tish writers Fred Wah and Daphne Marlatt. The critical reassertion of space in the postwar period produced poetics that rigorously explore the transgressive potential of the spatial subject and the spatial community “in place.” The most significant poetic counterpart to come about in response to the spatial turn in North America is Olson’s and Duncan’s fundamental poetic theory of “composition by field,” wherein the poem is conceived of and created as a kinetic field of interacting elements. The field poetic influenced a New American open verse form that was highly influential in the United States in the 1960s and produced a new generation of projective poets in Canada thereafter.

Primarily, this project traces the foundation and development of, and significant challenges to, the projective open field poetic as a means of producing place both on and off the page. As a mode of (re)producing locality, the field poetic gave Olson and Duncan a sense of poetry’s reflection of, and participation in, the dynamic surrounding environment both within the poem and in the world. By means of projective verse, poem and poet became imbricated in a responsive system whereby the processes of the poem and those of the local environment are co-constructive, forming a dynamic hermeneutic of the place from which the poet writes. Composing poetry in this way extends beyond an aesthetic form to become, using Joan Retallack’s term, a *poethic*—a practice of living and creating in place. The field model as established by Olson and Duncan—and adapted and extended by Baraka, Wah, and Marlatt—thus links experimental poetic process with social awareness through a *practice of place*, a concept I adopt from Michel de Certeau and develop poetically in the project to mean the act of

reading, writing, and producing place against structures of spatial control such as the nation, the multicultural agenda of the State, and patriarchy.

*For my family, both fleshy and furry.*

*And to all the world's warriors, everywhere,  
imagining and practicing other worlds,  
fighting for a place to land.*

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## The Poetry of Place, the Place of Poetry

I have this sense  
that I am one  
with my skin

Plus this—plus this:  
that forever the geography  
leans in  
on me...<sup>1</sup>

—Charles Olson

Spaces can be real and imagined. Spaces can tell stories and unfold histories. Spaces can be interrupted, appropriated, and transformed through artistic and literary practice.<sup>2</sup>

—bell hooks

Perhaps no other human concept has both intrigued and eluded writers and critics alike more than *place*. In an over five-page entry for the noun “place,” the editors of the *Oxford English Dictionary* comment that its definitions are “very numerous and difficult to arrange” (“Place” 937) since they are complex and layered with multiple meanings and other related words. Indeed, the spatial deictics we use everyday to indicate place—here, there, etc.—are not only indicative of specific sites of emplacement, but are, moreover, signifiers of a complex corporeal experience within and across various spaces and times. As Rachel Blau DuPlessis confirms, “Deictic words acknowledge that my here is not your here; my tomorrow is not your tomorrow. They demand situated knowledge and contextual readings. ... The words take on a specified meaning spoken

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<sup>1</sup> *Maximus* II. 15.

<sup>2</sup> *Yearning* 152.

from and to a located situation” (qtd. in Entwistle 71). Along with bell hooks in my epigraph, Blau DuPlessis argues that literary aesthetics and social practice are linked to the production of space and place. By means of textual production that “interrupt[s], appropriate[s], transform[s]” heres and theres, dominant forms of spatiality—which are based on sociopolitical hierarchies of power—can be engaged with and contested.

*Terra (In)cognita: The Practice of Place in Postwar Poetics and Beyond* locates the negotiation of spatial politics and subjective place-building therein within a fused literary and social practice. At its core, the project examines place in postwar poetics as a dynamic construct involving both actual and imagined geographies in the work of English-speaking writers, both American and Canadian, in the decades following World War II. These writers can be divided into two distinct poetic communities that emerged in the 1960s: the first is Charles Olson and Robert Duncan, under the banner of the Black Mountain School—an alternative arts college based in North Carolina. Between 1951 and 1956, Charles Olson served as rector of the college, with Robert Duncan and Robert Creeley, among others, serving as instructors and students of each other’s work. The school was, primarily, a site of radical poetic experimentation, one that followed the tenets of projective, open form writing—a mode that articulates the embodied experience of the poet at the moment of poetic composition, rather than traditional verse patterns.

Under the Black Mountain school I have also included Amiri Baraka, who was affiliated with the group as a prominent publisher of their work in the 1960s and with whom they shared considerable correspondence of ideas and work. Baraka was especially influenced by the open-field poetic in his early works of poetry, and his later transitional work into his Black Nationalist phase manifests both extensions and challenges to the field poethic established by Olson and Duncan, among others. While Baraka shared the Black Mountain ideas of space and place as a

field of interactive particulars with bodily experience, he nonetheless grew increasingly distant from what he conceived to be the empty politics of this poetic. For Baraka, Olson's and Duncan's work rightly contested the bourgeois middle-class values of the postwar era imposed by the nation and by capitalism, in particular; however, their work remained located in the imagination and did not put ideas into action, which Baraka saw as a necessary condition of art in the postwar environment. It became increasingly clear to Baraka, as a racialized subject in postwar America, that poetry without direct political action was no longer feasible. Like poets Fred Wah and Daphne Marlatt, who are discussed momentarily, Baraka continued to agree with Olson and Duncan on the political form of poetry; however, through his own spatial trajectory—which took him to various locals around the New York area and to post-revolution Cuba—he discovered his own voice and manner of practicing the field poethic, one that extends its concerns and applicability beyond imagined spaces and places (though these were still certainly important). His field poethic—a term I will define shortly—developed into an armed strategy of resistance, one where poems become a weaponized means of resisting and transforming existing spatial structures of control on the ground and in the streets of lived experience.

The second poetic community considered in this study is that of the Tish school, based in Vancouver, B.C. and represented in this study by Fred Wah and Daphne Marlatt. The writers of the Black Mountain School, specifically Olson, Duncan, and Creeley, were highly influential in the establishment of Tish and its poetic journal of the same name.<sup>3</sup> Under the facilitation of Warren Tallman, the Tish writers took classes and attended lectures in Vancouver in the 1960s

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<sup>3</sup> Besides Wah and Marlatt, other writers associated with Tish include Pauline Butling, George Bowering, Frank Davey, Gladys Hindmarch, Lionel Kearns, Jamie Reid, and David Cull, among others. As critics such as Gregory Betts have pointed out, the reception of the Tish writers from Canadian poets and critics was less than desirable, for the Canadians saw the work of Tish as indicative of colonial artistic practices and further exemplification of American imperialism on Canadian soil. For an account of this divide, see Betts's *Avant-Garde Canadian Literature: The Early Manifestations* (2013), especially pages 65-68.

led by many of the Black Mountaineers.<sup>4</sup> From these American writers, the Tish writers imported a new poetic model across the border into Canada, one that stressed the coproduction and confluence of language, identity, and physical environment.<sup>5</sup> For this new conception of poetics, the Tish writers were heavily influenced by the Black Mountain poetic known as “open field” composition. I will elucidate this poetic methodology in a latter section of this introduction, but, briefly, it offers an alternative mode of poetic production that strays from traditional verse forms with imposed meter and breath patterns. The poetic was largely brought into practice by Olson’s essay “Projective Verse” (1950), in which he suggests that the particularities of one’s local landscape and cultural history form energy fields through their interaction and interrelation within the poem. The dynamic energy field of the page, then, becomes the site of place-making where particularities of the environment interact with the immediate sensorial qualities of the poet, including his or her breath in composition, and his or her immediate perceptions that arise in the work. The resulting poem is “projective,” because it directly transports the energy “from where the poet got it ... by way of the poem itself to, all the way over to, the reader” (“Projective” 240). The field of the poem acts like a bridge to external reality, for its energy corresponds to the kinetic energy surrounding the poet and the place from which and in which he or she writes.

The “open field” poetic model thus unites all of these writers in their work; as a means of producing and articulating place, the field model creates poetic spaces both actual and imagined,

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<sup>4</sup> In addition to classes and lectures, weekly meetings were held at Tallman’s home wherein the early Tish writers would discuss new poetic artifacts such as Donald Allen’s *The New American Poetry, 1945-1960*—a collection including the work of Black Mountain writers—as well as Olson’s “Projective Verse” and his *The Maximus Poems*. For a detailed account of Tish’s formative years, see *The Writing Life: Historical and Critical Views of the Tish Movement* (1976), a collection of essays edited by C.H. Gervais. See especially Frank Davey’s “Introducing Tish” therein (150-161).

<sup>5</sup> To be sure, the work of earlier writers such as Al Purdy and E.J. Pratt emphasize the wilderness of the Canadian landscape as an access point for a Canadian sense of place. However, with the field poetic, place is conceived not simply through bringing the landscape topography into the poem, but through the minute interactions between localized spaces, culture, and the embodied experience of the writer together in poetic composition.

on and off the page, that allow for alternative “stories” of place to emerge. Since place emerges from within space, however, this project also examines the ways in which poets contend with spatial structures that facilitate, limit and/or control their access to place-production. In this way, composing in “open field” identifies both a poetic and ethical practice of bringing together aesthetic experimentation and sociopolitical engagement, thus creating what poet and critic Joan Retallack in *The Poethical Wager* (2003) calls a “poethic.”<sup>6</sup> For Retallack, ethics is inextricably tied to the pull of aesthetic innovation, articulated in poetry that better reflects and enacts the ongoing processes of culture and history than traditional forms already known and used. As she explains further,

Every “great” innovator was acutely aware of changing circumstances and forms of her or his own times and had to devise a distinctive writing procedure to accommodate them. It’s in this sense that authentically innovative work is consciously poethical. It vitally engages with the forms of life that create its contemporary context ... the urgent questions and disruptions of the times. (40)

The field model directly arises from the particulars of the poet and the “forms of life that create its contemporary context.” Moreover, it is certainly responsive to the “urgent questions and disruptions of the times,” which I will explain momentarily. Put simply, poethics identifies

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<sup>6</sup> Retallack originally coined the term in the 1980s in reference to the work of John Cage, a poet and composer also associated with the Black Mountain School. Cage’s musical compositions, which often create “music” that does not emanate from instruments or a performer, call the audience’s attention to their own sonority and to the “liveliness” of their acute environment. In a connected way, Retallack characterizes poethical practice as a response to Aristotelian poetics: “Aristotle, who has cast the most enduring shadow over the course of academic poetics, quite artificially divided everything up into what he took to be thoroughly comprehensible disciplines—theory, practice, ethics, politics, poetry. Poethical poets, whether or not they have themselves used the *h*, enact the complex dynamics that crisscross through these boundaries” (39). And as she writes earlier on in the same book (*The Poethical Wager*): “Every poetics is a consequential form of life. Any making of forms out of language (poeisis) is a practice with a discernible character (ethos) ... this hybrid [is a] frank and unholy union of modernist and postmodernist questions joined to the Aristotelian concern for the link between an individual and public ethos” (11). Retallack’s connection here between poethics as responsive to Aristotelian discourse anticipates my first chapter, wherein I discuss Olson’s similar disavowal of the Socratic tradition of separating mind and body. His field poethic forms a response to this divide, one that reconnects these discourses through embodied experience and “finding out for oneself” instead of relying on second-hand discourses of received history and epistemology.

“writing/reading as a way of living in the world ... art that models how we want to live” (Retallack 38, 44). It offers a means of deepening phenomenal poetic practice by fusing aesthetics with a public ethos. As a dynamic model of interaction and interrelation, the field poethic is a mode of poetic enquiry into both identity and place, and how the two are linked in history and in process in the contemporary moment.

Although the critical scholarship concerning the Black Mountain School is plentiful, there is a marked lack of scholarship that specifically deals with the techniques of open form writing as a responsive and resistant means of producing place within postwar space. Moreover, to my knowledge, there are no extensive studies to date that trace the influence and adaptations of the field model in Baraka’s work or in the writers and works emerging from the Tish movement. Since the field of critical poetics often involves tracing lineages of influence and identifying breaks and innovations, this oversight is quite glaring and deserves further consideration. This lack could perhaps be due to the decline in studies of Black Mountain, and of Olson in particular, between the 1980s and beginning of the 2000s, as noted by George Butterick (“Foreward” n.p.), Miriam Nichols (22-23), and most recently, David Herd (“Introduction” 12). However, the recent work of many critics has expressed the need or desire for a reconsideration of Olson and Duncan’s work, such as that by Nichols, Blau DuPlessis, and Stephen Collis, among others.<sup>7</sup> Moreover, the 2015 anthology *Contemporary Olson*, edited by Herd, cements this felt need for further scholarship and reevaluation of Olson’s life in particular, his works and his contributions to poetry. *Terra (In)cognita: The Practice of Place in Postwar Poetics and Beyond* contributes to

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<sup>7</sup> See, for instance, Nichols’s *Radical Affections: Essays on the Poetics of the Outside* (Tuscaloosa: U of Alabama P, 2010), DuPlessis’s *Purple Passages: Pound, Eliot, Zukofsky, Olson, Creeley and the Ends of Patriarchal Poetry* (2012), Lytle Shaw’s *Fieldworks: From Place to Site in Postwar Poetics* (2013), James Maynard’s edited collection, *(Re:)Working the Ground: Essays on the Late Writings of Robert Duncan* (2011), Collis and Lyons’s edited collection, *Reading Duncan Reading: Robert Duncan and the Poetics of Derivation* (2012), as well as Peter Middleton’s more recent *Physics Envy: American Poetry in the Cold War and After* (2015).

these contemporary conversations in many ways. Particularly, while the scholarship of Olson has historically tended to focus on the rich bibliographic and intertextual depth of Olson's work, my project endeavours to take Olson scholarship beyond the limits of his library in order to measure his work against more contemporary poetic movements and sociopolitical concerns.<sup>8</sup> The recently renewed interest in the works of Black Mountain and open field composition thus makes my study ever more timely in its consideration of the ways in which the field poetic has developed, and the ways in which its concerns continue to be of use—whether employed or contested—in contemporary poetics.

Further, while many critics see the open field poetic as primarily an aesthetic methodology, my study departs from this trend by situating the field poetic as a *practice*, one that inextricably links aesthetics with ethical social activity. In his work *Enlarging the Temple* (1979) critic Charles Altieri argues that American poetry after World War II is characterized by a marked shift towards “immanence.” He contends that American postwar poetry of the 1960s proposes both a rupture and a reinvention of Romantic aesthetic ideals, a reorienting of poetic attention toward the objective world of “numinous experience” (31). In this “immanentist” literary tradition adopted by postwar poets, “poetic creation is conceived more as the discovery and the disclosure of numinous relationships within nature than as the creation of containing and structuring forms” (17). In *Radical Artifice: Writing Poetry in the Age of Media* (1991), Marjorie Perloff makes a similar claim by summing up open form poetics as a 1950s trend towards “the ‘natural look’ ... the fidelity of verse form to the actual arc of feeling” (134-135). While these observations are apt in their common assertion of the shift in postwar poetics towards a more

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<sup>8</sup> Among others, Ralph Maud, George Butterick, Sherman Paul, and Paul Christensen come to mind as astute critics of Olson's reading and annotations.

“natural” and embodied process of composition over traditional form, they are also limiting in terms of their summation of open field poetics as primarily aesthetic in its concerns.

What these critical accounts overlook is the centralized importance of *ethics and social practice* to postwar poetics—specifically that of Black Mountain. To examine the poetry of open form as primarily an aesthetic and not a socio-ethical practice is to ignore half of the efficacy and resonance of the poetic labour of these writers. As Duncan writes in *Bending the Bow*,

We enter again and again the last days of our own history, for everywhere living productive forms in the evolution of forms fail, weaken, or grow monstrous, destroying the terms of their existence... Now, where other nations before us have floundered, we flounder. To defend a form that our very defense corrupts. We cannot rid ourselves of the form to which we now belong. ... The poet of the event senses the play of its moralities belongs to the configuration he [sic] cannot see but feels in terms of fittings that fix and fittings that release the design out of itself as he works to bring the necessary image to sight. (iv)

In speaking of the “event” of the poem, Duncan is referencing the poem’s place in the sociopolitical environment of its time—in this case, he speaks of the post-World War II climate of America, with the lingering effects of war manifested in a culture of fear and containment. For Duncan—as well as many other poets and artists of this period—the war represented the inevitable result of a long-standing and ethically corrupt American consciousness, hence his observation that “We enter again and again the last days of our own history.”

As I demonstrate in the second chapter, for Duncan—and for all writers concerned herein—the poetic event is poetically tied to place and its ongoing transformation on the level of form. Whereas the “fittings that fix” represent the militant consciousness of postwar America

that holds its people, its nation, and the world in its grasp, it is the poet's responsibility to provide an alternative in the "fittings that release"—these fittings are poetic, arising from the correspondences and dissonances within the poem's field of particulars. These "fittings" not only resonate with the environment of the poet, but they reveal the pressing questions and challenges of lived experience. Moreover, the fittings of the poem are responsive to the environment of the poet, and create new places of resistance and change. Hence Duncan's earlier assertion in "The Law I Love is Major Mover," "responsibility is to keep / the ability to respond" (*The Opening* 10). For Duncan, responsibility lay not in the passive adherence to authority, but in the openness to what arises—and this ethics applies to his practice of living as well as his poethics of place. The ongoing proliferation of forms and connections within the poem create new configurations between its elements, new spatio-temporal fields that question and even unfix the fixity of existent forms. It is this unfolding event of the "dance" within the dynamic form of the poetic field—the intermingling of ideologies, aesthetics, and moralities, together with the particular locale from which the poem and poet co-emerge—that produces change and a subjective articulation of place.

These practices of place initiated by the field poetic, as well as those it helped to foster in other times and spaces, has thus yet to be sufficiently examined in direct relation to its innovative poetic aesthetic. Since innovative forms and social practice are inseparable to the field poetic, it is significant to view the work of these writers as emanating from and productive of generative practices of being in the world, both on and off the page. As human geographer Doreen Massey writes, "You are not just traveling *through* space or across it, you are altering it a little. Space and place emerge through active material practices" (*For Space* 118; original emphasis). In the chapters to follow, I trace the fluid and mobile, "active material practices" of poets who alter

space to make room for place. By means of their respective field poethics, these writers construct a practice of place that at once identifies and contests dominant scripts of space while constructing alternative places, both individual and communal, on and off the page. I will turn to the specifics of the field methodology as a poethic in a moment, but first it is important to contextualize this work within the larger theoretical frameworks of space and place, and how these terms come to bear on the literary productions of place concerned in this project.

While the following sections offer a theoretical background of the terms “space” and “place,” a preliminary note on these terms and how they are used in this project will be useful. Space and place are certainly related, fluid terms, as the following sections discuss; because space and place produce one another and are mutually entwined, I agree with Andrew Merrifield who argues that space and place are dialectical terms, “different aspects of a unity” (527). There is an inherent interplay between these concepts and they are used in reference to each other throughout this study. As such, it is not my intention to exhaustively argue for the minute nuances of space and place throughout this project, but rather to offer here a brief, generalized description of these two terms to guide my discussion.

Broadly, space can be defined as the plane of experience wherein we form relationships between our experiences, the physical landscape, and ourselves. Far from being an abstract, static container, space is a dynamic construction that blends personal, historical, cultural, and sociopolitical factors. All of these factors determine and shape and experience of space for different people in different times, and they influence the practices and processes of people who move through spaces both past and present. These factors are ever-shifting and ever-evolving, and can create intersections of meanings and relations for different subjects.

Similar to space, place is not static or strictly bordered in time or space; rather, it is continually formed from the convergence (sometimes fleeting) of interactions between the self and its local as well as global landscape into a narrative. Place, then, can be defined as a *subjective articulation of space*, one that constitutes these newly formed (and continually forming) relationships within space, both material and psychic. My understanding of place has been greatly influenced by thinkers such as David Harvey, Henri Lefebvre, Doreen Massey, and Michel de Certeau—whose theories are outlined in the sections to follow—all of whom understand place (and space) as a *social construct produced through both imaginative and material practice*. Accordingly, if place is seen as a social construct and a practice, then other constructs and practices, such as race, sexuality, and gender, are significant factors in the creation of subjective place. The process of forming relations within personal, social, cultural, and political spatial configurations, both present and historical, is the means by which subjects “practice place” (as Michel de Certeau puts it) within space.

For the purposes of this project, then, place is conceived as a construct that is constrained by dominant orders of control, but it is also lived and interpreted through local practices and knowledges that continue its evolution. As such, a poethics of place investigates the ways in which the various meanings of place—shaped by communal, cultural, individual and State practices—are produced, practiced, and contested within poetic texts.<sup>9</sup> Indeed, as the work of the writers concerned in this project illustrate, it is the fluid qualities of place produced in everyday practice that make it a resistant force in the production of space in the postwar era. As Colombian-American anthropologist Arturo Escobar writes, we must be aware that “place, body, and environment integrate with each other; that places gather things, thoughts and memories in

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<sup>9</sup> Throughout the dissertation, I capitalize “State” (as many critics do) to emphasize the State’s imposing omnipotence and to differentiate the term from the states of the United States.

particular configurations; and that place, more an event than a thing, is characterized by openness rather than by a unitary self-identity” (143). As will be seen over the next few sections, the practice of the field poethic resonates with Escobar’s definition of place as an event rather than a fixed entity in space. For writers working in the open field, place is an ongoing construction that involves a feedback loop of “gathering” influence centripetally and centrifugally from the lived body as it moves through spaces and places of the world and in the mind.

### **“come into space”: The Spatial Turn and Postwar Place<sup>10</sup>**

In the opening lines of “Call me Ishmael,” (1947) Olson writes, “I take SPACE to be the central fact to man born in America, from Folsom cave to now. I spell it large because it comes large here. Large, and without mercy” (17).<sup>11</sup> Here, Olson calls for a new spatial awareness and spatial ontology as a corrective to history and the bounds of time. His focus on space is a reference to the broad geography of the United States—not only its open plains and wide mountain ranges, but how, as a site of New World development, the narrative history of the States, from a settler point of view, is geographical.<sup>12</sup> In a later essay, “Notes for the Proposition: Man is Prospective” (1948), Olson further argues that “Space is the mark of new history, and the measure of work now afoot is the depth of the perception of space, both as space informs objects and as it

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<sup>10</sup> “[C]ome into space” is a line in Olson’s poem “La Préface” (*The Collected Poems* 46).

<sup>11</sup> For the sake of coherence, I have chosen not to “[sic]” Olson’s use of “man” as a general pronoun to refer to the human race throughout his writings, but I note its overwrought and misguided masculine tone here.

<sup>12</sup> Barrett Watten connects the spatial turn in American studies (and Olson’s work therein) to its continuing history of geographic imperialism. As he writes, “*The postmodern in America originated as a spatial fantasy*. . . . For those schooled in the discourse, the spatial push is easily recognizable as one of the canonical themes of American studies. Sailing on the wide seas of the prairies . . . the restlessness of Western Man would assault the horizon as its limit, a spatial fantasy that converted millennial redemption into migration. In the period that produced [Olson’s] *Call Me Ishmael*, America as Western Man had extended its oceanic fantasies into the Pacific, had converted the metaphor of the prairie as ocean into global domination” (323-324; original emphasis). As I will discuss in the first chapter and throughout the project, Olson’s mythologizing of space in particular overlooks the violent contact between explorers and Indigenous peoples and is marked by a narrative erasure that also sees women as nonproducers of frontier space and place.

contains, in antithesis to time, secrets of a humanitas eased out of contemporary narrows” (2). Olson argues for a reorientation of history towards space; he reappraises space itself as not an inert container, but as possessing dynamic relational properties. Although he was writing before the spatial turn officially took off in critical discourse in the 1980s, Olson nonetheless senses what Fredric Jameson, decades later, called “that new spatiality implicit in the postmodern” (418). Indeed, Olson is often considered to be the first to coin the term “post-modern,” (a claim that has since been considered erroneous, as the term had been around for decades before) and his ideas of space are inextricably linked to this newfound cultural condition marked by a history of geographic domination in the New World, and a continued imposition on space in the post-World War II era by forces of consumer capital. The encroachment upon subjective space in “postmodern” reality initiated the need for new maps to be drawn—in response, a postmodern poethic of place emerged to engage, contest, and transform these external realities.

Olson’s insistence on space as open, and multiply produced by both internal and external factors, is certainly responsive to the postwar milieu in which he writes. The postwar era in the United States from 1950 to the early 1970s was a time of increased geopolitical dominance—lingering frustrations from the World War II, the beginning of the Cold War, the renewed strength of the fight for racial equality, increased economic migration and globalization, as well as the explosive consumer market all produced new territories and policed boundaries upon “place” in America and beyond. In the pursuit of profit, capitalist markets ceaselessly altered and shifted, and created and recreated spaces of reduced differentiation, depleted connectivity and community. Corporate suburban landscapes such as shopping malls created simulacras of place by reducing the distinction and proximity between the individual, the community, and the corporation. As a result, space became more abstract, and humans became increasingly distanced

from feeling authentic connections to their local landscapes.<sup>13</sup> The period experienced what theorist David Harvey calls “an intense phase of time-space compression that has had a disorienting and disruptive impact on political-economic practices, the balance of class and power, as well as upon cultural and social life” (*The Condition* 284). The compression Harvey observes is largely due to the intensified processes of production and consumption, as well as the acceleration of information technology—in short, the unprecedented speed with which money, goods, and information were made transferable across spaces.<sup>14</sup>

The era was also marked by political divisiveness, State surveillance, and an increasingly rampant consumerist culture of mass production—factors which significantly altered space and people’s access to place therein. With the looming threat of the Cold War, the conservatism of the American nation-state manifested in containment strategies aimed at policing deviant sexual and aesthetic activities, thereby creating a veil of imposed consensus under the banner of “nationalism.” However, as a response to these constraints placed on individuals and communities thought to be a “threat” to America, newly articulated subjectivities and subcultures emerged, and with them, organized social activism—such as the Civil Rights and Women’s Liberation movements—that aimed to take up space and take back place. Thus, although this period was marked by an affective sense of placelessness, it also fostered a wide sense of space as malleable, and not as fixed or rooted as it had been traditionally conceived. In a world where space was increasingly becoming a commodity to be used for statist control, places of resistance

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<sup>13</sup> For further reading on the effects of postwar capitalist landscapes and mass consumption on human alienation from conceptions of place, see Edward Relph, *Place and Placelessness* (London: Pion Limited, 1976).

<sup>14</sup> Certainly, the spatial turn’s emphasis on space as a place of interactive flows and relations is not a product of postmodernity itself; an increased spatial awareness was born out of the imperial years of exploration to the New World, as well as the development of technological and spatial extensions from the Industrial Revolution, among many other historical events. However, as Harvey asserts, there is a marked change in the *acceleration* of spatial concerns in the postwar period, fueled by rapid globalization and worldwide advancement.

were carved physically in streets and households, and imaginatively in the hearts and minds of the nation.<sup>15</sup>

Olson's view of space as produced by interrelated social activities both on and off the page is a poetic counterpart to the spatial turn that took hold in the late 1970s but had murmurings long before. Before this shift in critical discourse, space was subordinated to time as a means of producing knowledge about the world and its history. In contrast, space was treated as a static given, a Newtonian container of worldly experience.<sup>16</sup> The spatial turn responds to the privileging of historical and chronological knowledge production by reasserting space and spatial analysis within critical discourses. The movement was initiated in criticism by French theorists including Michel Foucault, Henri Lefebvre, Michel de Certeau, and Gaston Bachelard, and was further developed by English theorists David Harvey and Doreen Massey, and American theorists Edward Soja and Fredric Jameson. Under the theoretical scrutiny of these thinkers and writers, spatial structures and controls came to be seen as impermanent and alterable; as a result, the possibilities arising from individual and communal resistance to such structures, and an ability to thereby question sociopolitical spatial patterns and arrangements and propose alternatives, was brought to the forefront in thinking about space and place. While a complete and exhaustive overview of these key theories and thinkers of the spatial turn lies outside the scope and purpose of this introduction, I will briefly outline the main concepts that appear

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<sup>15</sup> While this project does not endeavour to exhaust these complex sociopolitical conditions or responses, they nonetheless provide context for the establishment of a spatialized poetic that responds to structures of control with radically subjective methodology of place production.

<sup>16</sup> The subordination of space to time has been extensively noted in critical theory across disciplines. Among others, Edward Soja's *Postmodern Geographies: The Reassertion of Space in Critical Social Theory* (1989), as well as the essays contained in Michael Keith and Steve Pile's anthology, *Place and the Politics of Identity* (1993) are especially useful and informative.

throughout this project and come to bear on its ideas of the intersections between the intertwined poethics of space and place.<sup>17</sup>

As a response to the rising alienation to space and place caused by postwar economic boom, the 1960s and 1970s saw a rise in place-based literary texts, as well as the development of sociopolitical theories that interrogated the interconnections between power, space, and subjectivity. Specifically, poststructuralist theory emphasized the exchange and interplay between human subjects and the spaces they inhabit. In this vein, Michel Foucault's writings have exposed the innate connection between lived geographies and underlying power structures. In his work, he employs spatial metaphors in order to plunder the connections between knowledge and power, on the one hand, and spatiality and control, on the other. This nexus between power and place is profoundly revelatory, for as Foucault argues in the interview "Questions on Geography,"

Once knowledge can be analyzed in terms of region, domain, implantation, displacement, transposition, one is able to capture the process by which knowledge functions as a form of power and disseminates the effects of power. ... Metaphorizing the transformations of discourse in a vocabulary of time necessarily leads to the utilization of the model of individual consciousness with its intrinsic temporality. Endeavouring on the other hand to decipher discourse through the use of spatial, strategic metaphors enables one to grasp precisely the

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<sup>17</sup> The works of these theorists in regards to space are many. Roughly speaking, both de Certeau in *The Practice of Everyday Life* (1984) and Lefebvre in *The Production of Space* (1991) focus on the ways in which space is manifest socially; in *Discipline and Punish* (1975), Foucault focuses on the political manifestations of space; in *The Poetics of Space* (1958) Bachelard sees the intimate sphere of the "house" as a starting point for understanding space and spatiality; Harvey's *The Condition of Postmodernity: An Enquiry into the Origins of Cultural Change* (1989) examines the spatial control of economic and capitalist schemas; Soja's *Postmodern Geographies* (1989) examines urbanity as a site of spatiality; Massey's work in *Space, Place, and Gender* (1994) examines space in the context of gender and power relations therein, and Jameson's work in *Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (1991) uses space as a lens for understanding the cultural manifestations of postmodernism.

points at which discourses are transformed in, through and on the basis of relations of power. (*Power/Knowledge* 69-70)

As Foucault points out, knowledge and power are embedded in space: while the word “territory” designates an area of geographic land, it also identifies an “area controlled by a certain kind of power” (68). The use of spatial metaphors allows power to manifest visibly, in the world, as opposed to existing in the abstract; thinking through historical and cultural phenomena as interacting fields and territories, rather than as discrete points in time, allows for a conception of knowledge and power distribution as a sociopolitical product and process as opposed to something that naturally occurs across landscapes. Further, since power is enacted spatially, Foucault’s insights suggest that it is within such “spaces” of power that “places” of resistance can be found. Foucault’s insights are extended in this project to consider the poethical realm of the “open field” as a site of material and psychic engagement and contestation with power structures. Indeed, while a “field” calls to mind an open area of land, it also simultaneously designates an area of interacting elements, and a site of “ground work” that produces growth from a cycle of decay.

Perhaps the most prolific of the writers on space is Lefebvre, whose work spans a vast 40 years from the beginning of the 1940s into the 1990s. His magnum opus, *The Production of Space* (1991) situates space as a social product that reflects the interests and control of power structures that organize and manipulate the movement of the world’s people. According to Lefebvre, space can be conceived as a “tool,” “a means of production” as well as “a means of control” (*The Production* 26). For Lefebvre, an understanding of the difference between actual, lived spaces and the ways in which space is conceptualized by the State and by society provides insight into the ways in which these larger spatial narratives impose order and control over lived

spaces. His work, which stems from his Marxist theoretical lineage, argues that the modern world is marked by a forced detachment of humans from their space and place. The increased political and economic domination and exploitation in modern society has produced a cultural condition that prevents individuals and communities from forming and retaining authentic and meaningful connections to their environment. As Lefebvre contends,

Space ... is treated in such a way as to render it homogeneous, its parts comparable, therefore exchangeable. ... The subordination of space to money and capital implies a quantification which extends from the monetary evaluation to the commercialization of each plot of the entire space. ... Space now becomes one of the new 'scarcities,' together with its resources, water, air, and even light. (qtd. in Shields 180)

The abstract space created by the logic of capitalism—which is underscored by ownership, control, and strategically organized space—subordinates the lived and embodied experience of space and place therein to a homogenized conception of space as planiform, dehumanized, and controlled. Lefebvre's work is certainly more interested in space than in place; the term "place" only appears sporadically throughout his writings. However, it is clear that both de Certeau and Lefebvre, among other spatial critics discussed herein, see lived experience as oscillating between two competing poles of spatiality: the abstract and regulated space of the state, and the lived and self-determined creation of place. In lived experience articulated in the field of the poetic page (and beyond), the space of the State and the place of the individual converge to negotiate and produce a subjective view of place.

More generally, Lefebvre's analysis provides a sociopolitical framework to root Olson's, Duncan's, Baraka's, Wah's, and Marlatt's aesthetic interventions on space and place.

Specifically, his work provides a critical backdrop for Olson's poethic as discussed in the first chapter. Beginning with the Socratics, Olson saw a change in knowledge production that subordinated the *mythos* of lived experiences of places—as told through stories and localized myths—to a *logos* of abstract, rational discourses that homogenizes the human experience. Lefebvre, like Olson, calls for a physical, embodied sense of place as crucial to the restoration of human agency in the face of capitalist regimes of control. Because both space and place are conceived by both Lefebvre and Olson (and by all the writers of this project) as fundamentally *produced*, new and resistant spatial configurations may be imagined and emerge in actual practice. As Lefebvre posits, “The way for physical space, for the practico-sensory realm, to restore or reconstitute itself ... against the reductionism to which knowledge is prone” is by means of the “uprising of the body ... against the signs of the non-body” (*The Production* 201). As demonstrated in the following section, the field poethic attempts to restore the critical disjuncture between the “practico-sensory realm” of speech and written discourses. In other words, by means of reconnecting the poetic line with the breath and the body, poets who “work in open” make manifest the embodied process of poetic creation within the act of writing. Within the field poethic, the restoration of the body with its lived experiences of the “familiar” serves to resist the commercialization and commoditization of people and their places in the postwar economic boom.

To be sure, capitalism is not the only metanarrative to homogeneously flatten space and thereby organize and control the movement of people and their attachments to place. Another is the concept of the nation-state, which, as Benedict Anderson has argued, is an “imagined political community.” “It is *imagined*,” he continues, “because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in

the minds of each lives the image of their communion” (15; original emphasis). Anderson brings attention to the ways in which the allegiance and patriotism of people belonging to a nation is fabricated by a rhetorical strategy inscribed by the nation and its agendas of human control and homogenization. Creating an “imagined community” of consensus discourages the formation of dissenting and resistant communities. Further, Anderson’s concept outlines the ways in which the nation, as an artificial community of imagined allegiance, remains uncritical of the uneven and unequal ways in which individuals are able to form meaningful communities.<sup>18</sup> Anderson’s analysis—despite its use of the term “imagined” in the pejorative sense of delusion—emphasizes the need for discussions of space and place to go beyond the material to consider to the ways in which spaces and places can be constructed, performed, and/or “practiced” in the imagination.

Accordingly, in response to the false sense of “communal place” initiated by capitalism and nationhood, the writers of this project actively create resistant places within these spaces of power and control, both on and off the page. Place-based approaches to resistance, however, must be met with scrutiny if they are to be continually significant literary processes and lenses. The allure of place is an intoxicating prospect for many disenfranchised peoples who feel unseated from the production of their place. According to Harvey, political action is most effective when it is place-based, for communities are “relatively empowered to organize in place but dis-empowered when it comes to organizing over space” (*The Condition* 302). However, it is important to not simply romanticize the local as a site of particularized difference, for such an uncritical view leads to the dangers of exclusivity and essentialism that Olson’s work in

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<sup>18</sup> As Angelika Bammer usefully clarifies, the imagined community of the nation and its fictional sense of belonging and “home” form “mythic narratives, stories the telling of which has the power to create the ‘we’ who are engaged in telling them” with an accompanying “discursive right to a space (a country, a neighbourhood, a place to live) that is due us ... in the name of the ‘we-ness’ we have just constructed” (xi). Bammer’s clarification here anticipates my discussion of the potential dangers of the local conceived as an essentialized “sameness,” as discussed in this introduction and especially in the first chapter of the project.

particular, as we will see, encounters. However, in the context of the experimental practices of place herein, it is significant to note that while Olson seems to posit a sure and untroubled understanding of local particularity, other writers, such as Wah and Marlatt, posit their “locality” as contested and contestable, and undulated by self-critique. Wah’s acknowledgement of the spatial mobility granted by his visible whiteness, as well as Marlatt’s acute understanding of colonial violence stemming from her family’s past involvement in the imperial project in Malaysia, is marked by an anxiety of place that questions its own construction and articulation.

While Olson and Duncan are certainly aware of the ways in which American capitalism and war affect their sense of place, Baraka, Wah, and Marlatt are more attuned to the ways in which their conceptions of place are globally imbricated in larger sociopolitical processes extending beyond the economic. Certainly, for Baraka, the local of his urban New York and Newark is a place (re)produced by and through national scripts of racial segregation and control. In this way, the work of human geographer Doreen Massey—another key theorist of the spatial turn—is significant to this project for lending a framework of understanding local place as coproductive with national and global space(s). Following Lefebvre’s sense of space as “multiform,” (*The Production* 287) Massey’s work also calls for an understanding of space as multitudinous in its construction. Since space, for Massey, is open and plural in its construction, “a simultaneity of stories-so-far,” (*Space, Place* 12) she argues that “‘places’ are criss-crossings in the wider power-geometries that constitute both themselves and ‘the global’” (101). Massey was an outspoken advocate for a “progressive sense of place” (“Power” 65) that is open to change and shift in an increasingly globalized world. She argued for a conception of place as not an end product but an ongoing process: “the identity of place ... is always and continuously being produced” (*Space, Place* 171). Place, thus conceived, is a product of multiple relations; it

is therefore heterogeneous and porous in its construction and articulation as opposed to fixed and unchanging. Such a view does not regress to the nostalgia of the stable and fixed past, but remains committed to a view of place wherein the local is always interspersed with larger global processes.

Under this framework, narratives of place-making—whether they be colonial, cultural, local, national, global—are always multiple in their telling and in their construction, variant in their trajectories and telos, yet they intersect in significant ways. Accordingly, Massey locates place at the crossroads of these “criss-crossing” narratives. As she writes:

You can't hold places and things still. What you can do is meet up with them, catch up with where another's history has got to 'now,' and acknowledge that 'now' is itself constituted by that meeting up. 'Here,' in that sense, is not a place on a map. It is that intersection of trajectories, the meeting-up of stories; an encounter. Every 'here' is a here-and-now. (“Some Times” 111)

Seeing place as an encounter, as a fluid site of multiple possible experiences and narratives, relates intimately to the practice of place in the field poetic, as will be outlined more fully in the final section of this introduction. Massey's definitions of space and place are close to mine offered at the beginning of this introduction; in her framework, places can be most directly defined as temporary and shifting constructions built by the interactions of its inhabitants. Places, for Massey, are thus best understood as particular articulations, moments of intersection, and relations within the greater sphere of space. In this way, space forms the overarching arena (or, for the purposes of this project, the *field* of human experience) wherein the pluralities and variances of articulations of place are constantly occurring amongst the sociopolitical processes and conditions governing space.

Since this project both engages with and problematizes local place-based practices, Massey's insights are crucial to understanding "the local" as a construct that is complicated by uneven access to place. Massey was critical of the rise of localism in response to the forces of globalization. As she argues, the particularism of the local is often set against a backdrop of the abstract, generalized space of the nation or of globalized corporations. However, Massey reevaluates space to account for the "multiple present"—the various intersections between people, place, and sociocultural processes beyond the local. In this way, place becomes less territory and more borderland—a place where boundaries are blurry and porous, and where the value of place stems from such multiplicity and interrelation, rather than singular origins of "local" identity. It is precisely this point that makes a reevaluation of Olson's work, in particular, quite pressing; in our contemporary times of increased globalization and migration, it remains difficult to imagine the local as a bounded territory, for all spaces and places are becoming less insular and less isolated, and more penetrated by extra-local forces that come to shape their identities. In this view, "local places are not simply always the victims of the global; nor are they always politically defensible redoubts against the global" (Massey, *For Space* 101). Massey's assessment here is not meant to be an erasure of local value, but an extrapolation of it beyond its own definition; that is, local place is imbricated with larger cultural processes and relationships beyond itself, and it needs to account for these larger implications. In this way, it is possible to see local space and place as not reductive to a specific community or geographic locale, which limits the possibility for resistance therein, but as part of a larger network of other place-based identities, constructions, and practices.

If place is seen as processual, unhinged from singular "authentic" origins, and is conceived as an ongoing construction across times and spaces, it demonstrates the agential ability of

humans to produce and articulate place as active producers of it, rather than passive receivers of “proper” place according to dominant spatial organizations, such as the nation, consumer capitalism, and patriarchy. Massey’s critique of the local is a critical lens through which to view the place-based practices of the postwar era, especially that of Olson’s practice of place in the local “polis” of Gloucester, Massachusetts, Duncan’s establishment of resistant households, both material and imagined, Baraka’s negotiations of urban spatial constraints put on the black community, and Wah’s and Marlatt’s extrapolations of the local into the *translocal*—a term I define more fully on page 55 of this introduction—whereby intersections of local relations, exchange, and influence are established between particular places in a poet’s psychic and/or physical trajectory. Baraka’s trip to post-Revolution Cuba, Wah’s psychic journey through the genealogy of his family’s Chinese diner, and Marlatt’s trip to her (mother)land of England, all constitute translocal negotiations of place whereby movement through and experiences of these “other” places directly influences the evolution of place within the local environment these writers inhabit.

Moreover, while the field poethic is originally rooted in Olson’s “authentic” place-based model of poetic creation, the work of the other writers in this project reimagine the field’s boundaries toward othered voices and othered places of subjectivity. Since the field disperses rather than coheres elements of the physical, psychic, and literary landscape, it thus works against cohesive origin as a formative control over one’s sense of place. The field poethic is non-reductive in its practice; as such, it allows for subjects to form a sense of subjectivity and place through plural processes of “identity-relation” rather than a singular “identity-root,” as Édouard Glissant puts it (*Poetics* 155). By means of the field, these poets articulate a sense of place as threaded through with multiple experiences and encounters—the various perceived and

conceived elements of one's place, such as physical landforms, governance, affect, and memory—woven into the present space-time of the poem. Ultimately, the work of these writers in actual and imagined place testifies to the ways in which the local can be imagined beyond geographic determinism to include new interconnections between communities in places across time and space.

To be clear, then, it is not that the local need be erased of its particularity, but that it need be considered as a “space” of power, a site of interconnected relations. As Foucault and others remind us, however, it is within this space of power that places of resistance may emerge. These resistances can arise from localized spatial tactics, rooted in everyday practices of living and being, that defy a homogenized narrative of space and how it is produced. It is this localized responsivity that is built into the fieldwork poethic as a strategy of place-making in an ever more placeless society.

In terms of space-time relations and responsivity, it is worth noting the connection between the field poethic—which will be discussed in greater detail in the third section of this introduction—and the discoveries of Albert Einstein, which largely precipitated the spatial turn in critical discourse. Olson's characterization of the poem as a “high-energy construct” and as a “space-time continuum” situates it as a poetic counterpart to the scientific branch of spatial turn, initiated largely by Einstein's discovery of his theory of relativity in 1905.<sup>19</sup> This discovery, which put space on equal footing with time in terms of how we view and experience the world, was influential not only in the field of physics, but it also was an inciting incident for a shift in aesthetic theory. Many writers and artists saw Einstein's space-time concept as signaling a

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<sup>19</sup> Einstein's theory negated Newton's view of objects and the duration of events as discrete and definable. Rather, Einstein discovered that an object's shape and size depend on the subjective vantage point and velocity of the observer in space. Essentially, the theory synthesized space and time into a single “space-time” unit and then showed how physicists can use this unit to account for differences in measurements from different frames of reference.

necessary shift in how poetic space and time is conceived and modeled. Prior to Einstein's discovery, the spatial and temporal dimensions of poetry were largely governed by a rigid conception of the poetic line of fixed syllable patterns and metre. However, the emergence of Einstein's theory of relativity encouraged poets to abandon these traditional forms and create poetry that brought in external forces to interact with the immediate bodily experience of the poet, resulting in new poetic models that were more fluid in conception and construction.<sup>20</sup> Just as Einstein's theory proposed that two events, witnessed by two observers, will occur in the time that is subjective to each observer, so Olson's formula for projective poetics, "the HEAD, by way of the EAR, to the SYLLABLE / the HEART, by way of the BREATH, to the LINE" ("Projective" 242), is representative of a radically subjective breath line, relative to the rhythms of the poet, rather than a fixed pattern of speech.<sup>21</sup> Science unveiled the relational aspect of reality particular to a space-time "force-field" of experience—the field poetic adopts a similar "stance towards reality" so the words, histories, and contexts that arise in the poem are treated in their immediate emergence and not held to prior conceptions or usage. Olson characterizes the heuristic created by the relational field as a method of understanding the threshold between the self and the real: "At the root (or stump) of what is, is no longer THINGS but what happens

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<sup>20</sup> Before Olson, William Carlos Williams was attuned to the need for a new sense of poetics after Einstein. As he writes, "How can we accept Einstein's theory of relativity, affecting our very conception of the heavens about us of which poets write so much, without incorporating its essential fact—the relativity of measurements—into our ... poem[s]?" ("The Poem" 283).

<sup>21</sup> While Einstein's theory provided a model for thinking of history and culture as a force field, it also influenced a new model of poetic metrics. A simplified example of the influence of Einstein's space-time on the field model is Olson's insistence on space in the poem as a unit of measuring time. As he writes in "Projective Verse," "if a contemporary poet leaves a space as long as the phrase before it, he means that space to be held ... an equal length of time" (245). Einstein's theory of the relativity of measurements is also connected to Olson's concept of proprioception, an extension of the concerns of the field poetic that situates an awareness of one's movement through space as relative to the body. I explicate and analyze this method of subjective measurement as a means of practicing place throughout the project.

BETWEEN things, these are the terms of the reality contemporary to us—and the terms of what we are” (“Human” 138).<sup>22</sup>

Accordingly, in projectivist poetics, the “page” is conceived of as a dialogic “field,” a site of convergence wherein various larger discursive fields—history, politics, culture, geography—interact and produce new networks of meaning and associations through their often paratactic frictions. Each element of the poem is thus conceived as a “participant” in this larger poetic assemblage where no one thing is privileged over another, but rather circulate within the poem with equal force in an “open” politics of communion, exchange, and responsivity.<sup>23</sup> As Duncan writes in the introduction to his collection *Bending the Bow*, “The poem is ... an area of composition where I work with whatever comes into it” (vi). In arguing for poets to abandon the “inherited line,” (Olson, “Projective” 239) Olson and Duncan do not mean to suggest that all tradition should be disavowed; rather, both believe that poems should arise out of the moment of their composition, rather than becoming stale replicas of former models. Since the poem arises from the available “objects” and sociocultural contexts surrounding the poet, the poet becomes less the passive receiver of forms and more an active contributor to an evolving form of poetic tradition. The resultant poem becomes an “energy construct”—it is not a fixed site of meaning emanating from the author as monad but is rather a combined assemblage between various participating energies: that of the subjective experiences and contexts of the author and reader,

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<sup>22</sup> Another influence on Olson’s and Duncan’s thinking on the field is the philosopher Alfred North Whitehead, whose theory of “organicism”—a theory that proposes a view of the universe and of reality as mirroring a living organism wherein the whole is greater than the sum of its parts, and that the whole influences those parts—is reflected in the concept of the field of the poem as an active, ongoing event in process. Whitehead sees “the World” as “primordially many, namely, the many actual occasions with their physical finitude” but understood that “in the process it acquires a consequent unity, which is a novel occasion and is absorbed into the multiplicity of the primordial character” (*Process* 349). I will return to the influence of Whitehead’s thought on the field poetic in the first and second chapters, specifically.

<sup>23</sup> Denise Levertov, another Black Mountain affiliate, clarifies the point in her essay “Some Notes on Organic Form”: “writing is not a matter of one element supervising the others but of intuitive interaction between all the elements involved” (*New and Selected Essays* 69).

the meanings that arise in the chance encounters between its various elements, and also the larger social creation brought about by the poem itself—the literary tradition to which the author and reader contribute to through the poem.

The spatial turn did more than reassert the presence of space within a paradigm of time; it initiated practices and theories of placement, of how we situate ourselves within a new framework of active (as opposed to empty and inert) space of flows and relations. As an aesthetic counterpart to the spatial turn, “open field” poetic composition incorporates similar sociopolitical concerns of place into a lived poethic praxis that unites poetry and sociopolitical engagement. In order to further contextualize the resistant places imagined and lived by the writers of this project, my next section turns to explore theories of resistant spatial practices that shed light on the poethics of place in postwar space and beyond.

### **“A Locality of the Living”: The Practice of Resistant Place<sup>24</sup>**

We come to each place with the necessity, the responsibility, to examine anew and invent.<sup>25</sup>

—Doreen Massey

The long-standing debate in critical discourse concerning the definition of place and its distinction from space signifies a discursive difficulty in “locating” place: it is not that place is elusive, but that it is a highly subjective heuristic with multiple semantic registers. More often than not in criticism, space and place are discussed in relation to one another. Edward Casey, whose writings on place are prolific and widely respected, provides a commonly accepted approach to the distinction between space and place:

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<sup>24</sup> Duncan, *Bending* ii.

<sup>25</sup> *For Space* 174.

I maintain that ‘space’ is the name for the most encompassing reality that allows for things to be located within it; and it serves in this locatory capacity whether it is conceived as absolute or relative in its own nature. ‘Place,’ on the other hand, is the immediate ambience of my lived body and its history, including the whole sedimented history of cultural and social influences and personal interests that compose my life history. (“Body, Self” 404)

For Casey, space is conceived as the open plane within which place “takes place,” while place is defined not by static location or environs but as the resonance of the body within a space over time, a complex of associations that takes stock of human communities and continuities across time and space. Casey’s particular stance on place resonates with the projective poethic, and forms part of my understanding of place throughout this project. For those who practice open field poetry, place possesses a depth of feeling that combines personal history, the body and its sense within the environment, and the particularities of the physical landscape itself.

However, in de Certeau’s conception of space and place, it is space that is the dynamic of the two; he conceives of place as a static location with rules and regulations, while space is what is produced from human activity within a place. His thoughts on the distinction between space and place are worth quoting at length, since they come to bear on my conception of place-based practices in the field poethic:

At the outset, I shall make a distinction between space (*espace*) and place (*lieu*) that delimits a field. A place (*lieu*) is the order (of whatever kind) in accord with which elements are distributed in relationships of coexistence. It thus excludes the possibility of two things being in the same location (*place*). The law of the ‘proper’ rules in the place: the elements taken into consideration are *beside* one

another, each situated in its own ‘proper’ and distinct location, a location it defines. A place is thus an instantaneous configuration of positions. It implies an indication of stability.

*A space exists when one takes into consideration vectors of direction, velocities, and time variables. Thus space is composed of intersections of mobile elements. It is in a sense articulated by the ensemble of movements deployed within it. Space occurs as the effect produced by the operations that orient it, situate it, temporalize it, and make it function in a polyvalent unity of conflictual programs or contractual proximities. ... In contradistinction to place, it has thus none of the univocity or stability of a ‘proper.’*

In short, *space is a practiced place.* (117; original emphasis)

Fundamentally, for de Certeau, movement connects space and place as coproductive entities. In his view, places are static locations, and when imbued with human movement and practice, they become spaces.<sup>26</sup> As Tim Cresswell summarizes, for de Certeau, “place is the empty grid over which practice occurs while space is what is created by practice” (*Place* 70). His understanding opens both space and place to plurality; although place corresponds to a certain order and structure in his framework, it also exists in relation to the outside world and remains open to other practices for its use. “Like words,” de Certeau elsewhere writes, “places are articulated by a thousand usages” (“Practices” 131). De Certeau’s framework, like Massey’s, argues for a single place to be multiply signified through many different spaces and subjective experiences.

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<sup>26</sup> Cresswell offers a useful, concrete example of how places are formed by social practice into dynamic spaces. As he argues, a university is a “place” that is only activated when people are active within it—visiting the library, taking courses and exams. These are all spatial practices of “practicing place” that transforms organized places into fluid *spaces* imbued with human practice.

Although it would seem that Casey and de Certeau offer contradictory views of space and place, together, for the purposes of this project, their insights demonstrate the fluidity and mobility of place as polysemic term: locatable but also mobile, tangible but also imagined. To be sure, for this study, *both* place and space are seen as dynamic planes of possibility—not just space as de Certeau would have it. However, along with Harvey and Massey—and along with the poethics of place practiced by the poets considered herein—de Certeau’s concepts of space and place highlight these terms as not isolated givens but coproductive processes that are continually evolving in their definition. What unites Casey, de Certeau, Lefebvre, and others in their definitions of place—and what is significant for my discussion here—is that place (and space) can be defined, articulated, and transformed through dynamic movement and social *practice*.

What concerns this project most is the view of *place as practice within and through space*. Since space and place cannot be (and, arguably, need not be) easily separated in theory or practice, this study thus adopts fluid definitions of space and place as interwoven practices, “woven together out of ongoing stories,” as Massey has it (*For Space* 126).<sup>27</sup> When I speak of space in this project, it largely refers to the greater sphere of economic and political controls and processes that produce differential factors in one’s creation of subjective place—the *space* of capital, the *space* of the nation, the *space* of patriarchy, etc. Place, then, largely refers to the mental/material construct produced by the individual by and through these spatial processes and practices as they move through the physical landscape. By *practice*, I mean the various everyday and experimental activities of individuals and communities that work toward a pursuit of place.

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<sup>27</sup> A full account of the philosophical debate over space and place lies outside the scope and purpose of this introduction. For further reading on the subject, see Cresswell, *Place: an Introduction* (2014), John Agnew and David N. Livingstone, eds. *The SAGE Handbook of Geographical Knowledge* (2011), and Massey, *Space, Place, and Gender* (1994).

Place conceived as practice allows for an understanding of the ways in which place is constructed through creative, dialogic relationships between geographical and social landscapes, as well as actual places and those conjured by the mind—what I call the “s/cites” of place.<sup>28</sup> Throughout the project, I touch on theories of alternative place-making that together shed critical light on the field poethic’s efficacy as a means of producing resistant place in the postwar milieu. These theories are elucidated in further detail throughout the project, but it will be useful to outline their main tenets in order to contextualize the project.

In their respective work, Lefebvre, de Certeau, anarchist philosopher Hakim Bey, and human geographer Katherine McKittrick identify “counter-spaces” (Lefebvre, *The Production* 382) wherein human spatial activities defy the violence of an abstract, homogenous logic of space. For Lefebvre and de Certeau, the urban city is one such counter-space, for the corporeal practices of humans within the “planned” space of the city provide subjective organizational control over human use of space, and the production of meaningful place therein. As Lefebvre writes,

What runs counter to a society founded on exchange is a primacy of use. What counters quantity is quality. We know what counter-projects consist or what counter-space consists in—because practice demonstrates it. When a community fights the construction of urban motorways or housing developments, when it demands ‘amenities’ or empty spaces for play and encounter, we can see how a counter-space can insert itself into a spatial reality. (*The Production* 381-382)<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Throughout the project, I refer to the blended word “s/cite” to capture the imbricated and layered nature of place. Both the “sites” of place—actual geographies and landscapes—and the “cites” of place—historical and cultural data—interact together in a “field” of experience and of imagination to produce one’s sense of place. Indeed, the most significant “cite” of place in this study is the literary tradition overlain on the “sites” of place from which the poets write.

<sup>29</sup> As an example of a “counter-space” or a space where use is “diverted,” Lefebvre offers the case of Les Halles, which was once the central marketplace in Paris. The site was reappropriated by the city’s youth during the years

Both Lefebvre's and de Certeau's conceptions of place argue for a recasting of organized space such that the exchange value of capital, which contributes to an organized, homogeneous conception of space, is converted into subjective use-value. Put plainly, counter-spaces are places that respond to, question, and oppose dominant organizations of space; they emerge as a result of both imagination and practice, and they are found in the everyday as well as in the experimental.

Fundamentally, the poets concerned in this project develop and *use* counter-spaces as dynamic sites of articulating place and of negotiating the various spatial controls put on their bodies and their experiences by metanarratives of spatial organization.<sup>30</sup> The acts of aesthetic and political resistance upon which these writers' poethics rest are rooted in both everyday and experimental practices of place, articulated through their various spatial metaphors. Olson's "pacing" of his polis by the movements of his body, as well as Duncan's carving out of creative and communal "households" for aesthetic and subjective liberation, reinscribe spaces of control with a practice of place. Moreover, Baraka's practice of place across various locales in New York and in Cuba comes to inform his articulation of an urban black subject (albeit masculine) inhabiting and moving through the city, negotiating spatial controls and reforming place for the good and growth of the community. In the field of his experimental poetic practice, Wah negotiates his hyphenated Chinese-Canadian identity such that its hybridity can be reformulated from a sign of lack or difference in the imaginary of the nation to an agential practice of place as

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1969 and 1971 as a "gathering-place and scene of permanent festival—in short, into a centre of play rather than of work—for the youth of Paris" (*The Production* 167). Lefebvre's example here anticipates my discussion later in this introduction of Hakim Bey's concept of the TAZ (Temporary Autonomous Zone) as a resistant and creative appropriation of space.

<sup>30</sup> A rather "local" example of this practice of counter-space in Ontario would be the community of Guelph, Ontario, who rallied together (eventually unsuccessfully) in a decade-long fight to prevent the construction of a Walmart in their community. Moreover, the work of groups such as Idle No More and Black Lives Matter, or the past work of the Occupy sites, work to create such counter-spaces of resistant spatial awareness and newly strategized spatial practice in urban settings. These reimaginings of alternative spatial organization and use for those peoples who are spatially disenfranchised have certainly effected realized change within existing spaces.

productive identity bordering. Marlatt's use of the labyrinthine multiplicities within language, as well as her explorations within the translocal psychic and material spaces of her past and present, initiates a practice of place "in the feminine" that undermines a patriarchal and linear narrative of place in favour of a shifting and affective poethic of place.

De Certeau's theory of "practiced place" localizes resistance to dominant power structures in everyday human activities, such as walking and reading.<sup>31</sup> These practices allow for humans to confront and negotiate the larger organizational structures that limit or impose control onto human movement and the means by which humans create meaning from moving through space. As he writes, "*space is a practiced place*. Thus the street geometrically defined by urban planning is transformed into a space by walkers" (*The Practice* 117; original emphasis). Like Foucault, de Certeau invokes the image of the city as enmeshed with a structural grid used by institutions to establish and maintain order. This grid of control marks the increased spatial tactics of the modern state; however, walking or dwelling within the city has the potential to become a resistant (and even necessary) "tactic": "If it is true that the grid of 'discipline' is everywhere becoming clearer and more extensive, it is all the more urgent to discover how an entire society resists being reduced to it" (de Certeau, *The Practice* xiv). According to de Certeau, the walker who navigates city streets according to their own desires, who shortcuts and changes routes, is exercising navigational freedom and enjoys a resultant political empowerment. In connecting walking with reading, de Certeau suggests that "the walking of passers-by offers a series of turns (tours) and detours that can be compared to 'turns of phrase' or 'stylistic figures'"

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<sup>31</sup> To be sure, Lefebvre was also a proponent of the everyday as not inert but indicative of common humanity and creative potential. As he writes in *Critique of Everyday Life*, "A landscape without flowers or magnificent woods may be depressing for the passer-by; but flowers and trees should not make us forget the earth beneath, which has a secret life and a richness of its own" (87). The very "unknowability" of the everyday, then, marks its resistance: as commonly overlooked, some activities possess the power to be unmanageable by the gaze of dominant power structures, thereby evading their control. I will return to this concept, as well as the use of botanical metaphors to signify resistant place, in the first chapters of the project.

(100) within a linguistic system. What de Certeau calls the “pedestrian speech act,” then, is closely related to the speech act in language; just as the flows of language are structured by grammar and syntax, so the cityscape—with its roads and paths for human movement—is structured by urban planners with a particular, “proper use” in mind. As the pedestrian moves through the city, traversing spaces while avoiding others, he or she is, in effect, “writing” the text of the city in their own way.<sup>32</sup> By means of walking, writers and artists are able to deepen their understanding of their surroundings through careful observation. Accordingly, a poetic sense of place ushers from this reading practice, one that sees the production of place as like the formation of a narrative.

De Certeau’s analysis of the rhetorical qualities of space provide a critical backdrop to the practice of the field poetic, for the writers concerned herein fundamentally see landscape as text, and text as landscape. His critical emphasis on the ways in which bodies interact with physical locations to produce space provides a framework for understanding how localized practices of place have the ability to transform metanarratives of space that appear unchanging and fixed. His analysis further reveals how any sense of place is multitudinous—different trajectories through a place can animate many different meanings of that place. As Cresswell summarizes,

The work of ... de Certeau and others show us how place is constituted through reiterative social practice—place is made and remade on a daily basis. Place provides a template for practice—an unstable stage for performance. Thinking of place as performed and practiced can help us think of place in radically open and non-essentialized ways where place is constantly struggled over and reimagined

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<sup>32</sup> De Certeau’s focus on the creative pedestrian recalls Walter Benjamin’s concept (with Baudelaire in mind) of the *flâneur* in his unfinished work *The Arcades Project*. The *flâneur* is romantic journeyer, one who wanders through the streets of the city. The *flâneur*’s practice of walking is a fieldwork model for aesthetic exploration and also a means by which the process of modernity was recorded and observed (Buse 4).

in practical ways. Place is the raw material for the creative production of identity rather than an a priori label of identity. Place provides the conditions of possibility for creative and social practice. (*Place* 70-71)

As Cresswell observes, de Certeau's sense of practiced place revises place away from its traditional underpinnings as a geographic location imbued with rootedness and authenticity; rather, thinking of place as a "template for practice—an unstable stage for performance," allows for an understanding of place as imbricated in larger processes of construction that take into account creative and interventionary approaches to place-building. His particular understanding of "practicing place" through walking and movement becomes especially significant for my discussion in the first chapter of the work of Charles Olson, whose "pacing" of the local was an attempt to "know the facts" of his local from firsthand experience. Further, Baraka's *In Our Terribleness* (1970) practices place by forming a wayfinding manual of black style, sound, and movement to (re)root the black community within the urban landscape; having been subject to sociopolitical barriers that limit access to a sense of place that benefits the community, Baraka's poetic interventions on urban space inspired the uprisings of the community and the transformation of controlled space to into occupied place in Newark. Moreover, Daphne Marlatt's off-map wanderings through her motherland of England with her son in *How Hug A Stone* (1983) are also exemplary of this subjective form of way-finding, of finding place not through given narratives of history, but through the immediate experience of finding out for oneself.

In terms of the ability of place-based practices to resist the control and capture of power structures, I also draw on Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari's conception of nomadology throughout my research into strategies of resistant place. I explain their work throughout the

chapters of the project, but as a brief introduction, the nomad, as a figure of free movement that exists outside of State rule and control, provides a framework for Deleuze and Guattari to articulate ways of establishing creative resistance—what they call “lines of flight”—in opposition to State territorialization. The line of flight—like de Certeau’s practice of place—is an escape from fixed and stable orders meant to control and regulate human experience and movement through space; it is an opening of unpredictable trajectories within and between organized spaces. Whereas nomadic space is open and borderless, a trajectory between points (what Deleuze and Guattari call “smooth space”), State space is regulated with vertical, hierarchical structures of control (what they call “striated space”). By means of adopting “lines of flight” through our everyday experiences in space, we can resist the orders of control by taking space back from these perceived orders and into the realm of subjective experience. As with de Certeau’s everyday practices, Deleuze and Guattari’s nomadology offers this project another lens through which to view the resistant place-based practices of writers who resist spatial controls put on them by the state, in particular.

Also connected to de Certeau’s and Deleuze and Guattari’s strategies of spatial resistance is Hakim Bey’s construction of the TAZ, or Temporary Autonomous Zone.<sup>33</sup> Like the line of flight, the TAZ is a temporary uprising of liberated or autonomous space where freedom from sociopolitical controls can be experienced and lived, if only fleetingly.<sup>34</sup> Although Bey is elusive in his definition of the TAZ, he suggests that it is

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<sup>33</sup> “Hakim Bey” is Peter Lamborn Wilson’s publishing pseudonym.

<sup>34</sup> A contemporary example of the TAZ is the Burning Man festival that happens annually in the Nevada desert. The festival prides itself in its communal values of revelry, self-reliance, self-expression, community, and decommodification by banning the use of money and using the potlatch gift economy as the primary method of trade. The expression of these counter-values, as well as the festival’s vow to “leave no trace” of itself in the desert once it is finished, makes it a temporary autonomous zone that lies outside the “knowledge” and reach of the State.

an uprising which does not engage directly with the State, a guerilla operation which liberates an area (of land, of time, of imagination) and then dissolves itself to reform elsewhere/elsewhen, before the State can crush it. ... The TAZ is thus a perfect tactic for an era in which the State is omnipresent and all-powerful yet simultaneously riddled with cracks and vacancies. (101)

By means of practicing these alternative values in temporarily liberated spaces, the hope is that these TAZs will alter communal consciousness such that new social experiences and relationships will form. Bey's conception of communal strategies of resistance, rooted in communal places, provides a critical backdrop for the practices of place in the work of the writers concerned by this project. Ultimately, Bey's method for resistance is to *keep moving*; as such, his model of alternative place-building is an apt model for articulating a mobile and fluid sense of place in the field poethic. Olson, Duncan, Baraka, Wah, and Marlatt all create alternative places and practices within their work that link communities in a common goal of resisting State control by means of creating places—both in physical geography and in the imagination—of radical mobility and self-organization.

Another theorist of geographic resistance who surfaces in this project is human geographer and critic Katherine McKittrick. In her groundbreaking critical text *Demonic Grounds: Black Women and the Cartographies of Struggle* (2006), McKittrick appropriates the term “demonic” from critic Sylvia Wynter as a means of “rethink[ing] the complex linkages between history, blackness, race, and place” (143).<sup>35</sup> While McKittrick argues that “existing cartographic rules unjustly organize human hierarchies in place and reify uneven geographies in familiar,

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<sup>35</sup> The term “demonic” appears in Wynter's essay “Beyond Miranda's Meanings: Un/Silencing the ‘Demonic Ground’ of Caliban's ‘Woman’.” The work is an analysis of Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, wherein she comments on the connection between reproduction and land reclamation. As she argues, the absence in the play of “Caliban's potential mate through whom the reproduction of his race might occur” (McKittrick xxv), prevents the island from being reclaimed by its native population.

seemingly natural ways” (x), she also suggests that such rules are not entrenched, but are alterable and can be paralleled with alternative geographic schemas. The demonic demarcates sites of geographic production for black subjects that are made invisible by traditional geographic schemes and epistemologies.<sup>36</sup>

Dominant geographic metanarratives such as the transatlantic slave trade, settler colonialism, and the slave plantation, all work to “naturalize both identity and place, repetitively spatializing where nondominant groups “naturally” belong” (McKittrick xv). As a response to the dominant geographic order, the demonic mode thus emphasizes spatial contestation and occupation by means of “paralleling” existing schemas. “Geographies of the everyday,” (12) such as “[o]wnership of the body, individual and community voices, bus seats, women, ‘Africa,’ feminisms, history, homes, record labels, money, cars” (3) can be reimagined by means of lived reclamations of these signifiers from narratives of (dis)possession and limitation put on black women’s lives, in particular. By means of recontouring these classifications of erasure with subjective, lived geographies of place, McKittrick suggests that “more humanly workable geographies can be and are imagined” (xii).

As this project elucidates, space, place, and mobility therein are powerful tools of domination and exclusion used by the State to control and organize its “imagined community” of citizens. McKittrick’s work unveils the subversive power of the imagination to conjure new conceptions of space, place, and movement beyond traditional material geographies; in this way, her work provides a framework for considering the ways in which racialized subjects are limited in their spatial production, but also how they develop resistant strategies of constructing place. In

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<sup>36</sup> A significant recent example of the ways in which “black matters are spatial matters,” to use McKittrick’s phrase, is the current rampant police surveillance of and violence to black bodies in North America. The unnecessary carding and increased killing of black men and women demonstrates the policing of black bodies and spaces and the keeping of said bodies “in place.”

my third and fourth chapters, I extend McKittrick's discussion to consider the ways in which race and gender interact within the field poethic to produce resistant senses of place outside of the given narratives of multicultural belonging and patriarchal narratives of historiography.

As with de Certeau's concept of creative intervention in everyday activities and Bey's TAZs, McKittrick's concept of demonic grounds cannot be reduced to an attempt at "inverting" power structures of control that "place" bodies; rather, these theories—along with the place-based poethic—work to pluralize conceptions of place and its practices for various people across various locales. Together, these theories of alternative place-building argue for a transgressive approach to place that is rooted in everyday practices, by which humans can creatively (either physically and/or imaginatively) renegotiate place within and through spaces of control. Indeed, the spatial metaphors used by these theorists and by the writers of this project are not simply aesthetic metaphors, but ways of being and acting poethically *in place*. Just as walking is a "spatial acting out of place," (de Certeau 98), so the actions of these writers *create* and act out their place through mental and physical practices, both on and off the page. I thus follow Cresswell's proposition that "[t]hinking of place as performed and practiced can help us think of place in radically open and non-essentialized ways where place is constantly struggled over and reimagined in practical ways" (71). Rather than simply be a label for identity, Cresswell posits, place provides "the raw material for the creative production of identity" (25).

To date, there is a marked lack of scholarship that identifies and explores the productive intersections between postwar poetics of place and the sociopolitical geographic organizations to which it responds. While critic Lytle Shaw in *Fieldworks: From Place to Site in Postwar Poetics* (2013) has argued that the postmodern has initiated a rise of spatial art that moves away from the place-based concerns of the postwar era to site-specific art, this study reasserts place as a critical

lens upon experimental poetics. Shaw attempts to move away from place by tracing a lineage of “site specificity” from artists such as Robert Smithson to the postwar poetics of Olson and Baraka as a means of understanding how poets and artists engage with discourses larger than the locale from which they write (6-7). However, “site” implies fixity and presumed stability, an understanding that does not account for the ways in which writers have uneven access to place-production under the governance of the State or by the constraints of dominant discourses. As will be seen in the third and fourth chapters of the project, Baraka’s, Wah’s, and Marlatt’s extensions of the field poetic signify the need for a sense of place not only as interconnected sites of geographic coordinates, but as a series of points spanning time and space that indicate the interrelations between memory, culture in the makeup of local geography.

Moreover, places can be rooted in geographic “sites,” but they can also be imagined, interpreted, represented, and felt.<sup>37</sup> As sites and movements inflected with subjective meaning and value, places are critical territories of contestation. When considering poetics, then, “place” is broader in its semantic potential and in its responsiveness to cultural shifts than “site,” for place encompasses the sensory, cultural, social, and historical aspects of place production. Viewing postwar culture through the view of place initiates a more in-depth critical engagement with the ways in which lived experiences in the world are continually revisioned and contested over time in aesthetic practices engaged with space and spatiality.

Having set up the theoretical frameworks for an understanding of the resistant practices possible within structures of control, the next section introduces the field poetic as a poetic counterpart to these strategies of alternative place-building brought forth by de Certeau, Bey, and

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<sup>37</sup> It is for this reason that my first chapter on Olson does not simply focus on the “site-specific” elements of his poetics, but also deals with the “cites” of place, since for Olson—and for the field poetic writ large—“form is never more than an extension of content,” and similarly, the landscape of a place is never more than an extension of the cultural processes that come to shape that place, and vice versa.

McKittrick. The field methodology is more than a disruptive creative process in the sense of forgoing traditional patterns of verse; it also extends beyond the page to create places for ethical practices of living that trade hierarchies and top-down governance for self-organization and community. Within the field poethic, resistance begins with the body—that ultimate “geograph[y] of the everyday” (McKittrick 12), the vessel of all meaning and relation that binds aesthetic and ethical practices of place together in action.

### **The Opening of the Field: Articulating a Poethic Practice of Place<sup>38</sup>**

And this poetry, the ever forming of bodies in language in which the breath moves, is a field of ensouling. Each line, intensely, a soul thing, a contribution; a locality of the living.<sup>39</sup>

—Robert Duncan

The emergence of more spatially-aware critical discourses since the Second World War has shed light on the ways in which political controls and conditions of space have affected not only the content, but the form and production of literary texts, and the shifting strategies of producing place therein. Just as Harvey speaks of the “time-space compression” of the postwar era, he simultaneously speaks of a “revival of interest in geopolitical theory ... the aesthetics of place, and a revived willingness ... to open the problem of spatiality to a general reconsideration” (*The Condition* 284). Feeling the effects of the rapid compression of space and time—and the resultant feeling of increased placelessness—many writers and artists of the postwar era turned to place with renewed vigor, looking to establish a renewed means of reconnecting the body with the landscape, of forming and articulating place in accordance with and as a response to the ever-evolving globalization of the world. Throughout this project, I situate the field poethic within the

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<sup>38</sup> *The Opening of the Field* is the name of Robert Duncan’s 1960 poetry collection.

<sup>39</sup> *Bending the Bow* ii.

discourses of the spatial turn and alongside the strategies of alternative place-building outlined above by de Certeau, Bey, and McKittrick. As a responsive method of practicing place within its shifting contexts and meanings, open field composition is an aesthetic response to the spatial turn, one that does not ignore the changes of globalization, but a means for allowing these cultural shifts to be imbricated into its new fabric of place-production.

The concept of a field is widely applied to various human practices: one can speak of a field of knowledge, such as physics or literature; as a space for human interaction, such as a field for sport; as indicative of a visual plane, a “field of sight,” and it can simply signify its most used definition, that of a loosely or strictly bordered area of land used for growing and harvesting flora and fauna. Across its various uses, a field predominantly signifies a dynamic space—one of action, movement, change, and potential. Rendered poetically, the field offers a methodology for processing and articulating the dynamic relationship between external stimuli and the physiology of the poet. Olson and Duncan’s method of “composition by field,” which follows on William Carlos Williams’s concept of the poem as a “field of action,” registers the page of the poem as a dynamic field of interactive energy involving the poet and their environment.<sup>40</sup>

As Creeley notes in his “Introduction” to Olson’s *Selected Writings*, Williams, among others, was excited by the publication of “Projective Verse.” As Creeley remembers, “It was an excitement which many of us shared, because what confronted us in 1950 was a closed system indeed, poems patterned upon exterior and traditionally accepted models. The New Criticism of that period was dominant and would not admit the possibility of a verse considered as an ‘open field’” (6). For Olson and Duncan, among others in the Black Mountain school, the field becomes a central metaphor for not only innovative poetic production, but also a responsive ethics in which the values and practice of community and self-organization are inseparable from

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<sup>40</sup> See Williams’s 1948 essay, “The Poem as a Field of Action” in *Selected Essays* 280-291.

its aesthetic.<sup>41</sup> Olson invokes the image of a farmer's field when speaking of this poetic mode: "It is my impression that all parts of speech suddenly, in composition by field, are fresh for both sound a percussive use, spring up like unknown, unnamed vegetables in the patch, when you work it, come spring" ("Projective" 244). Similarly, Duncan's related concept of "ground work," of tilling the ground of literary tradition, utilizing its fruits and contributing back to its soil, similarly posits the poetic process as generative of unexpected newness and change, as evidenced by the title of what is generally considered to be Duncan's first mature poetry collection, *The Opening of the Field* (1960). Both Olson and Duncan conceive of poetic work as "ground work," connecting the process of reading and writing in language with the external world as a landscape of text. Underlying both their practices of "ground work" is the poethic belief that an immanent, natural law governs the relations between all things. Olson and Duncan's conception of the field thus goes beyond a new sense of place: it offers a social revision of humanism, one that stresses relation and embodied human experience rather than abstract forms of rationality and reason.

"Projective verse," which is also referred to as "composition by field" or "open verse" (Olson, "Projective" 239), combines a field theory of poetic composition with an outward ethics, a "stance towards" reality that Olson refers to as "objectism." In defining his "objectist" stance, Olson makes clear that composition by field is "a matter, finally, of OBJECTS," (247) and that body of the poet is included as one among "the larger field of objects" (243) in which the poem takes place. "Every element in an open poem," he writes, "must be taken up as participants in the

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<sup>41</sup> To be sure, this project's brief "survey" of place-based poetics in open form is not meant to be cumulative or exhaustive; there are many practitioners of the field poethic that are regrettably left out of this project, though they hover ghostly over its discussion. Among them are Robert Creeley and Denise Levertov, fellow poets of the Black Mountain School. Creeley's insights are certainly significant to the development of the field poethic—especially his pithy adage, "form is never more than an extension of content," that has become central to the imperative of combined aesthetic practice and social commitment that lay at the heart of open field composition. Moreover, Levertov's poetics express an entrenched collective image of place in the face of the terrors of war. Specifically, her vision of the "People's Park," a centralized hub of community and free speech for the activist communities at Berkeley in the late 1960s, envisions a TAZ that resists the scripts of consensus and imperialism of the state. For more on "People's Park" and communal resistance, see *Voyce* (92-93).

kinetic of the poem just as solidly as we are accustomed to take what we call the objects of reality” (243). Far from producing poetry without rules, the projective, open poetic constructs a dynamic of relationships between the “objects” of the poem; as Olson explains, “every element in an open poem (the syllable, the line, as well as the image, the sound, the sense)” are “participants” within the poem’s field of action (243). For Olson, viewing the poet as an object among many discourses makes the poet useful as a connecting point between and across ideas:

Objectism is the getting rid of the lyrical interference of the individual as ego, of the ‘subject’ and his soul, that peculiar presumption by which western man has interposed himself between what he is as a creature of nature (with certain instructions to carry out) and those other creations of nature which we may, with no derogation, call objects. For a man is himself an object. (247)

The poet as an object in the field makes him or her a participant in the world in the same way an atom or particle is bound to its surrounding space. Once the poet embraces this position as object among an environment of other objects without hierarchy or inference, “he achieves an humilitas sufficient to make him of use” (247). It is precisely this relationship of convergence and interplay that makes the field a site wherein the poet can practice within language by experimenting with new forms and new connections of meaning, and also practice place by negotiating the relations between these newly formed ideas and the external world.

In both form and content, the field poetic attempts to mirror the mind at work. Rather than a linear sequence of semantically connected ideas, the mind often processes thought paratactically in a field of relations. Hence Olson’s main formatting principle in “Projective Verse,” that “ONE PERCEPTION MUST IMMEDIATELY AND DIRECTLY LEAD TO A FURTHER PERCEPTION” (240). In this way, as Charles Stein has pointed out, the poem “must



the bill, serrated, sometimes a pronounced beak, the wings  
 where the color is, short and round, the tail  
 inconspicuous. (6)<sup>43</sup>

In this short passage, references to the Navel stone at Delphi, the Maoist revolution, as well as the kingfisher, are all juxtaposed in the field of the poem. The lines are paratactically arranged, with no definite pause between the lines and no hierarchical ordering; hence the brief references to the stone and to Mao are abruptly interrupted by acute observations of the kingfisher's appearance. The building sense of urgency and tension between these seemingly disparate elements thus creates what Olson terms a "high energy-construct ... an energy discharge" ("Projective" 240).

As opposed to enforcing a static sense of what the terms "Mao" or the "kingfisher" have come to represent in various discourses, Olson treats them as objects of exchange and encounter in the field of the page. In so doing, the kingfisher becomes an object permeable by other discourses that alter and shift its meaning in an ongoing, unfolding process. For example, the poem later entails the bird's nesting habits, wherein it lays eggs on the regurgitated bones of fish, creating a "fetid nest" (9). These lines are then followed by Mao's insistence to "rise up and act," cementing the idea that from the old and decayed matter of civilization (and of tradition), change can occur in the form of new ideas and actions. The kingfisher, then, is not treated simply as a bird in the poem; when put into relation with cultural revolutions, it becomes energized as a symbol for needed regeneration and action. Because, for Olson, "History is the practice of space in time," (*The Special* 27) there are no attachments of these references in the poem to a larger,

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<sup>43</sup> The quotation "la lumiere / de l'aurore / est devant nous!" is a line attributed to Mao, which translates as "the light of dawn is before us." Later in the poem, Olson completes the quotation: "nous devons / nous lever / et agir!" ("We must arise and act!").

hierarchical, or permanent “truth”; rather, what is presented is more like snapshots of discourse proceeding in a moving succession.<sup>44</sup>

Despite Olson’s dogmatic nature, “Projective Verse” was not meant as a strict code of aesthetic imperatives, but rather a fluid heuristic that can be adopted and adapted to fit various projects and different “stances” in the world. As Susan Vanderborg argues, Olson’s conception of the polis in *The Maximus Poems* was his attempt at a “genuinely open interpretive community,” wherein he “tried to create a communal text that redefined its own borders to incorporate marginal voices and narratives” (363).<sup>45</sup> Despite his inability to realize this vision in America, Vanderborg contends that Olson’s “literary model had a profound influence on the development of a more overtly political poetics by writers in the projectivist tradition” (363).<sup>46</sup> While the field poethic involves a political practice of resistance to literary traditions and to the enforced cultural “rules” of postwar capitalism and containment, both Olson and Duncan also envisioned the creation of a social community of writers and readers, bonded through the poetic act. Enter Baraka, Wah, and Marlatt, whose adaptations of the field poethic not only update it to more contemporary contexts—as in the case of Wah and Marlatt, who extend the poethic across the border into Canada—but also extend its concerns to encompass new voices, new stances towards “place,” belonging, and identity formation, and new resistances to subjective erasure.

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<sup>44</sup> The juxtaposition and contingency with which “objects” of discourse are treated in the field of the poem can be read as Olson’s response to the New Criticism approach (of which Eliot was instrumental to its conception) that attempted to identify establish singular and permanent, trans-historical meanings and interpretations upon texts.

<sup>45</sup> I explain and analyze Olson’s conception of the polis to great lengths in the first chapter. Briefly, Olson saw the small fishing town of Gloucester, Massachusetts, where he spent summers as a child, as a contemporary model of the Greek polis or city-state. He saw the local land and its people as intimately tied to a common history and culture, and as a self-organized community, he saw this polis as a resistant form of place in the wake of postwar capitalism and its values of placeless homogeneity.

<sup>46</sup> Tish writer Frank Davey has expressed a similar sentiment in the far-reaching applicability of Olson’s literary model for various voices and locales. Olson encouraged the Tish writers to write from their own place and immediate moment, not from his American local or an abstract or ahistorical region. “Far from encouraging imitative writings,” Davey writes, “Olson’s poetic insists upon each writer’s manifesting himself in language exactly appropriate to the person he is and to the physical and temporal circumstances in which he writes” (“Introduction” 117).

### **The Field of Places: Chapter Breakdown**

In this project, place is thus conceived as not just a matter of placing bodies on a map with coordinates, but as the product of space(s)—both actual and imagined—interacting with physical and cultural practices. The five writers concerned in this project all employ the field poethic as a method of place-building both on and off the page, but they differ in the ways in which they understand the field poethic in practice.

The first chapter of the project examines Olson’s practice of siting and citing the local polis in *The Maximus Poems*. As both a subjective and communal response to the homogenization of national space by the capitalist interests of the American nation-state, Olson’s practice of place involves walking through the local “polis,” creating subjective maps not only of the physical landscape, but also of the cultural trajectory that has come to shape the people and its land. As such, I apply de Certeau’s concept of walking as a subversive spatial practice to Olson’s fieldwork in Gloucester—his mapping of the local by means of digging historically into the “facts” of the landscape and walking the land of its present. The paratactic friction produced by the variety of maps Olson employs in *Maximus*—such as his local walking map, and the early map of the world as Gondwanaland, an ancient unseparated supercontinent, on the cover of the second book—denotes a desire on behalf of the poet to know the place from which he speaks, how it is sited and cited from the past to the present. Throughout *Maximus*, Olson’s maps serve not as fixed representations of bounded space, but as progressions of his central spatial project: the continual intellectual pursuit to “know” the local that unites the body and the self with the landscape and its history. Doing so results in a subjective articulation of place that challenges and resists the increased control held by capitalist organizations of abstract space.

For Olson, his local Gloucester, Massachusetts is a place shaped by the local landscape, its colonial history, its connection with the fishing trade, and its imagined connection to the ancient autonomous Phoenician city of Tyre—all of which come to signify place in the present as a resistant, lived, and felt space in the face of the abstract space of capital. Moreover, the specific sites and cites of place—the geomorphic landscape of Gloucester, together with its colonial histories and local mythologies—come together in the field of his poems to articulate a radically local “stance” or “view” of place from where the poet writes. For Olson, as the body moves through space, it responds to the surrounding environs, adjusts, and creates an energetic field of response. This stimulus-response system produces subjective place; that is, place arises from the articulation of these specific energies *from within* the spatial environment. The poet draws these intensities into proximity, and this particular local positionality between the self and the local becomes *the fact* of place for that individual. As he puts it in “Human Universe,” “each man does make his own special selection from the phenomenal field and it is true that we begin to speak of personality” (162). That is, the self selects particularities from its field of perception, responds to them, and then articulates these gathered localities as place. In this way, for Olson, place is a poethic fusion of *landscape combined with human action*.

Olson was among the first poets to “bring the outside in” to his poems, to mix and mingle the histories of actual geographies with the cultural resonances that permeate a sense of place.<sup>47</sup> However, as discussed in this first chapter, Olson’s place-based hermeneutic is largely offered from the perspective of the male settler imagination, since crucial voices (such as female and Indigenous) are denied presence as active producers of place in the polis. Despite his oversights and shortcomings, Olson’s development of the field poethic in his work initiates a place-based

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<sup>47</sup> In his “Introduction” to Olson’s *Selected Writings*, Creeley comments on the newness of Olson’s geographic approach to the study and practice of poetry: “Olson’s approach was ... twice removed from the terms of any other critical intelligence of that period. He spoke of ‘geography’ and that was clearly anti-literary” (3)

practice of place that is nonetheless adaptable and extendable for the other writers of this project, whose various subjectivities and locales present unique restrictions and freedoms in their respective practices of place. While the oversights in Olson's social vision are important to critique and analyze, as I do in the first chapter, it is significant to note that, along with the other writers to come after Olson in this project, Olson fundamentally sees space and place as emergent processes, characterized by fluid, alterable boundaries.

Chapter Two traces Duncan's anarchic means of establishing immanent local and cosmic place in the face of Cold War containment culture across his various works, with a particular focus on *Bending the Bow* (1968) and his two *Ground Work* volumes (1984/1988). "Ground work" is a methodology that unites and defines both Olson's and Duncan's poethic of place; however, whereas Olson digs the local grounds of history, geology, and tradition in order to validate his vast claims of the "place" of humanity, Duncan is more interested in ground work as a means of cultivating correspondences and dissonances in the field that come to produce place. Place becomes less a geographical location, then, and more of a concept, *a radical commons*. Accordingly, in Duncan's work, created and creative places of individual and communal resistance—such as the conceptual space of the Watts Towers, or the even more ideological mythic city of Wagadu—are created places in the world and in the imagination, autonomous zones that resist the spatial controls imposed by the postwar state. Together, Olson's geographical specificity, coupled with Duncan's conceptual sense of place, establishes the dialectical basis for the material and imagined places created by and through the field poethic. It is this combined sense of place-based practices and production with which the rest of the writers concerned herein engage with and challenge in their own work.

Throughout Duncan's work, place becomes both a lived and imagined social construct articulated in such spatial metaphors as "the household," "the meadow," and "the collage"—all of which are fields formed through a gathering of influences and correspondences in the poet's space of lived experience. The household, meadow, and collage exist not only materially in everyday practices, but they are also creative figments of the imagination, which can be called upon to resist the oppressive containment culture of the postwar milieu. For Duncan, these created places operate as contingent ecologies of relations, and thus resist the spatial and temporal closure of boundaries. As opposed to the fixed organizations of space willfully imposed by America's Cold War political culture, the collage and the meadow signify a poetic space wherein the poet works with whatever enters it—rather than restrict one's access to place, these places are practices, "openings of the field" governed by natural laws that allow for the open interaction of elements therein. Olson sees place as something that can be localized and fixed within a given site, as all his references to Western ideas are centripetal, rushing in towards the center of his polis. For Duncan, however, place—like the poem itself—is an imaginative construct, the boundaries of which are constantly under revision. Duncan's work extends the parameters of the field to not only include physical places for the liberated expression of homosexual subjectivity and creativity, but also created spaces of psychic community that together provide a critical "groundwork" for extending and contributing to a field of ongoing creative influence.

As a self-described derivative poet, Duncan's poethic of place involves paying homage to the literary landscape of his forebears, and by recirculating these influences in the field of his poems, he is able to situate his own place within poetic tradition. Thus, along with establishing households of communal resistance, the field also offers Duncan an interactive space in which he

can “practice place” in the present, using the work of those who came before in creative assemblage and collaborative authorship. The collage, then, allows Duncan to foster his *poethic*—his practice of living and creating poetry wherein individuals retain their autonomy while also forming assemblages or “communities” with other autonomous objects in a spatial field—by manifesting his anarchic ethics of individual volition and communal integrity into a poetic form of place. As he traverses “districts” and “neighbourhoods,” and the “hearth” of the “household,” to establish and articulate a sense of place, Duncan approaches place on multiple symbolic registers so that it is not an individualist pursuit of knowledge and validation (as is the case for Olson), but is more in line with an anarchic vision of place as a field of commonality in which each has the freedom and individual volition to move freely and create autonomous place.

As Lytle Shaw correctly observes, although “poets turned to Olson as a precedent for a poetics of fieldwork,” (and, I would argue, also for a poetics of place), “the Olsonian model of fieldwork began to appear too closely tied to a personal cosmology—too much about the inward resonances of cultural references rather than their possible exterior effects when set loose in new social and cultural settings, when woven into publicly available discourses” (67-68). Indeed, as cultural anthropologist Arjun Appadurai reminds us in his seminal essay “The Production of Locality,” (1996) any articulation of local knowledge must take into account local conditions that influence it: the controls, anxieties, and uncertainties of the field. These factors—which, according to Duncan, establish the balanced polarities of the field—often come together to create an uneven field of particulars, depending on the vantage ground of different subjects.

Accordingly, in the third and fourth chapters my project turns to discuss the extensions and challenges to the field poethic by those who were influenced by it: Amiri Baraka, Fred Wah, and Daphne Marlatt. Although Baraka, Wah, and Marlatt were certainly influenced by Olson and

Duncan, their work is situated in different locales, spanning different times and spaces of memory and the present moment.

In the third chapter, I look to the work of Amiri Baraka, an affiliate of the Black Mountain school and a practitioner of the field poethic, as an example of how the imagined geographies articulated through a poethic come to fruition in affecting and effecting actual transformations of urban space. The poetic trajectory of Amiri Baraka—from his early years as a member of the predominantly white Beat literati in Greenwich Village, to his years as a black nationalist and political mover in the racial affairs of his hometown of Newark—demonstrates the confluence of landscape and sociopolitical factors in developing a projective *poethic* of postwar place. Baraka's experiences in the space of several, connected locals—various neighbourhoods in New York, Newark, and in Havana—all coalesce to form a sense of place as *poetry and politics in motion*. While Baraka was influenced by the place-based poethic of Olson and Duncan, after the assassination of Malcolm X in 1965, and after witnessing the material uprising of a community in the Cuban Revolution, he viewed the poethic of Olson's and Duncan's poetics as too idealistic and immaterial. One had to act, he discovered, not just within the space of the page, but by using one's art to actually transform the place of one's experience in the world. As a result, he left the poethic of his Black Mountain peers aside while still maintaining the open field form and extending it to pursue the radical project of black nationalism.

Baraka's poetic field creates a place of creative community wherein the sounds, style, and movement of the urban black populus, coupled with revolutions on the ground in Cuba, together create a transformative, *translocal* model of place-making amid the racist geopolitical climate of postwar America. Building on the work of Appadurai and James Clifford, I develop the concept of the *translocal* in this chapter and the one to follow. I discuss the particulars of the term in-

depth in these chapters, but briefly, I take the translocal to mean a conception of place that spans across multiple locales, both actual and imagined, creating a networked sense of place beyond the singular “origins” of the local.

While Olson and Duncan contend with the American postwar culture of containment and consumerism, Baraka’s work is situated on the ground of the urban postwar local, wherein racial tensions manifested in spatial organizations that ghettoized the experience of place for black communities. Baraka’s intentional separation from his Black Mountain peers signals his dissatisfaction with their reliance on imagined worlds and places not yet realized; however, his poetry also extends the possibilities the field poetic offers to the sociopolitical conditions of his particular present moment. By harnessing the energies of the field—or, by bringing together the imagined and material collective black experience into a practice of local place—his poetic and political efforts during the late 1960s and early 1970s established a resistant place for his disenfranchised black community and altered the existing limitations of their reality. Specifically, I examine the ways in which Baraka’s urban practice of black place in works such as *In Our Terribleness* (1970) manifested at first an imagined, communal spirit that then led to the transformative riots in Newark and the establishment of community programs, education, and material sociopolitical reform.

Baraka’s work is examined through the lenses of resistant space, including de Certeau’s concept of practiced place, McKittrick’s (via Sylvia Wynter) concept of the *demonic ground*, and Bey’s TAZ—spatial theories that counter-narrate spaces of control into places of resistance. Baraka’s work, like Duncan’s, is concerned with creating a community of responsive and responsible individuals working together for the “mutual aid” of the whole. To accomplish this, Baraka establishes material places—Spirit House, BARTS, Kawaida Towers, among many—that

transformed the limited geography of the community into a vibrant working collective. These created and creative grounds not only extend the projective *poethic* Baraka adopted from Olson and Duncan, but when translated into action on the streets of “New Ark,” these newly imagined places redraw the boundaries of the urban ghetto by transforming the space of urban blackness into a place of self-governed, black *communitas*. The ultimate transformation of Newark to “New Ark” by Baraka and the black community in the early 1970s signifies more than just a metaphor of “the ark” as a place of salvage and redemption; rather, it signals the ability for art to encompass and transform material actuality through everyday practices of living that produce newly transformed place.

Chapter Four traces the influence and efficacy of the field *poethic* in the work of Fred Wah and Daphne Marlatt. These two Tish writers draw influence from the place-based hermeneutics of Olson and Duncan, yet they adopt and adapt these terms to fit the specific spatial controls put on their racialized (Wah) and gendered bodies (Marlatt) under the Canadian multicultural nation-state. Wah’s and Marlatt’s work responds to the colonial past and present of Canadian multiculturalism, which attempts to subsume heterogeneous bodies and experiences under a fictional “imagined community” of homogenous (yet uneven) national belonging. Accordingly, their work complicates Olson’s settler concept of the local as a closed polis rooted in common cultural values, to be protected from “outside” forces. Rather, Wah’s and Marlatt’s explorations of the layered semantics of place—whether in Wah’s family-run Chinese diner, or Marlatt’s historical familial trajectory through England—question Olson’s assumptions of the local as a stable discursive site with an uncontested history. The chapter looks at Wah’s earlier works, including *Pictograms from the Interior of B.C.* (1975), as well as his later long prose poem *Diamond Grill* (1996), and Marlatt’s *Steveston* (1974) as well as her later work, *How Hug A*

*Stone* (1983)—all works that were influenced by the Black Mountain field poethic but depart from it in critical ways while extending it in others. Most pointedly, rather than seeing rootedness as an ideal of identity (as Olson would have it), Wah’s and Marlatt’s translocal poetic create spaces of creative resistance in the hyphen and in the labyrinth, respectively. These places of resistance are TAZs that challenge the containment and “knowability” of identity by national and patriarchal hierarchies and narratives.

Specifically, the *translocal* spatial imaginary put forth by Wah’s place-based construct of the hyphen and Marlatt’s labyrinth recontextualizes the local away from singular origin and toward mobile sites of place-making, thereby destabilizing the “American white and male” hermeneutic of place and community. Such a view of the local as produced across boundaries of physical spaces and places reinserts individual agency in the production of identity outside the power structures of nationhood and “belonging” that aim to keep bodies in place. For Wah, the space of his family’s Chinese diner creates a palimpsest of places present and past, local and distant, which together weave a narrative of translocal place that resists and challenges the Canadian multicultural agenda. Marlatt’s meditations on place in *Steveston*, as well as her travels through her familial past in Malaysia and her maternal “motherland” in England, together create a sense of self-awareness and fluidity in place that both extends and challenges the patriarchal conception of place-based poetics she learned from Olson and the Black Mountain poets. The goal of the translocal here is not the establishment of global totalities, but the creation of productive correspondences and dissonances between particular locales that distills one’s present local experience in place by inflecting it with other times, spaces, and experiences. By extending the concerns of the field metaphor in other generative spatial metaphors—the hyphen (Wah) and the labyrinth (Marlatt)—their work testifies to the ongoing relevance of field-based poetics when

adapted to fit shifting cultural resonances. Thus, although I situate the open field as a responsive poethic to the specific sociopolitical climate from which Olson and Duncan write in 1950s and 1960s America, this chapter demonstrates, through the work of Wah and Marlatt, how the open field is not simply a temporally-locked poetic methodology, but that it produces a fluid heuristic of place that can be used as a lens for poetics and literatures beyond the scope of the postwar American era.

While the bulk of the dissertation is devoted to first establishing the groundwork of influence and extension from which future discussions of a poethics of place can emerge, I then gesture in my coda towards where my research will take me—notably, a consideration of permission, permissibility, and place within contemporary works of poetry, including M. NourbeSe Philip's *Zong!* (2008), Shane Rhodes' *X: Poems & Anti-poems* (2013), Jordan Abel's *Un/inhabited* (2014), and most recently, Laurie D. Graham's *Settler Education* (2016). All of these works use the rhetoric of State logic and law as generant texts in order to (re)imagine a politics of location and place-building from within the very language used to control bodies “in place.”

“In an increasingly spatialized world,” Ian Davidson argues, “notions of place have to change, [and] so too will notions of poetry” (31). Baraka's, Wah's, and Marlatt's critical reimagining and redeployment of Olson's and Duncan's field poethic attests to place as an ongoing engagement through reading and writing, one that must continually respond to the changing conditions of both local, national, and global space. In constructing individual and collective places of resistance to homogenous narratives of space, all of the writers in this project contribute to an ongoing reading and writing practice. Their work instills a continual poethic of place-building whose signifying language of metaphors—polis, household, New Ark, hyphen,

labyrinth—all work towards an interpretative model of place that responds to the increasingly globalized and mobilized world. The spatial metaphors used by these authors to articulate their poethic resonate beyond ornamental gestures to an accepted reality; rather, they can be used to uncover how place is constructed, and how these uneven geographies may be engaged with, contested, and transformed in art and in social practice.

As de Certeau points out, reading and writing exist in a creative and coproductive relationship that creates a lineage of both continuity and innovation: “We have to quit thinking that a qualitative gap exists between the acts of reading and writing. The first is a silent creativity invested in what the reader does with the text; the second is this very creativity, but made explicit in the production of a new text” (*Culture* 145). In this way, for de Certeau, reading and writing—and walking, as discussed previously—become resistant practices wherein we “read” the texts of our world and contribute back to them with creative interventions and disruptions. Similarly, the writers of this project all look to literary tradition for forms and ideas of place and place-building, but they do not take this “ground” unquestionably as a master-narrative; rather, through their subjective poethics of place, they (re)negotiate boundaries and borderlands, thereby contributing to an ongoing, unfolding poetic form.

The scope of this project is not meant to be exhaustive in its discussion of the promises and drawbacks of a poethics of place; however, when read together, these readings provide a movement toward understanding poethic geographies both past and present. My work in these pages to follow develops a framework for examining and reevaluating place-based postwar poethics in North America, one that accounts for the latent strategies and limitations, as well as the unexplored potentials, of the field poethic. As Nathaniel Mackey has said regarding Duncan’s work, “poetry and poethics are one” (*Discrepant* 89). In light of the place-based

strategies of the writers in this project, I would extend Mackey's commentary to suggest that poetry, poetics, and *place* are one. For these writers who work "in open," the field becomes a practice of living, in everyday activities and movements, to root the self and the community in and across place. The poet who wanders in place, across spaces both controlled and uncharted, reterritorializes identity beyond received scripts of belonging. Along this trajectory, the poet invokes a community of fellow wanderers, and this coming together in place has the potential to restructure spatial practices towards a shared created and creative ground.

### Through a View, Maximally: Digging into Place in Charles Olson's *The Maximus Poems*

When capital has moved on, the importance of place is more clearly revealed.<sup>48</sup>

—Raymond Williams

in this rare place / Root person in root place...<sup>49</sup>

—Charles Olson

In a letter to Elaine Feinstein in 1959, Charles Olson offers a definition of place that summarizes his *poethic* efforts in *The Maximus Poems*: “Place (topos, plus one’s own bent plus what one *can* know, makes it possible to name” (“Letter” 252; original emphasis). For Olson, place is known not only through geographic validity—the coordinates of the site upon which one stands—but also through “one’s own bent” and “what one *can* know,” by which he means the subjective search for place within a vast cultural landscape.<sup>50</sup> Indeed, place begins with a geographic site, but it extends outward to become a material construct of intellectual pursuit. Such a search—what Olson calls *’istorin*, a epistemological concept of finding out for oneself that I develop in the first section of this chapter—involves “digging” into local history, geology, and mythology, and gathering these elements of a place together into the space-time of the poem underhand. The interactions of these factors of external space, coupled with the energies of the poet in the heat of composition, produces knowledge of the self in place. The poetic process exceeds the page and becomes a means for Olson to understand and work through the local as a combined somatic, psychic, historical, and geographic construct.

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<sup>48</sup> *Resources of Hope* 242.

<sup>49</sup> *Maximus* I.11-I.12

<sup>50</sup> As discussed in my introduction, I use the blended word “s/cite” to capture the imbricated and layered nature of place as geographical and textual. In this chapter in particular, “site” comes to mean the geographic location(s) from which and about which Olson writes in his “polis” of Gloucester, Massachusetts. I also use the term “site” to define the poetic page as an interactive field that engages with and responds to the geographic sites Olson writes from.

Olson views place as an ongoing interactive record between the self, the community, and the landscape. As ongoing, this record is fluid and changeable; it contains a past that must be experienced in the present by means of immersive movement through the local area, a form of fieldwork that accounts for the geographical and somatic agents that come together in one's understanding of his or her place. Hence Olson's call to the prospective poet in "Projective Verse" to be keen to the process of the poem as it manifests underhand: "keep it moving as fast as you can, citizen" (240). When the poet heeds the perceptions coming into the field of the poem without hierarchy, ordering, or judgment, he/she "puts himself in the open—he can go by no track other than the one the poem under hand declares, for itself" (240). In the process of opening the self to the field of moving perceptions of place, the self constructs a view of place that is radically subjective and registers the ongoing relationship between the landscape and the body.

Fundamentally, in Olson's work, place emerges as a *field of practice*, or what de Certeau calls a "practice of place," as outlined in my introduction. According to de Certeau, the practice of place, whereby humans use space according to their desires, transforms space into something intrinsically meaningful and relational rather than an empty, abstract void. By means of his fieldwork in the polis—his various maps of the sites (geographic) and cites (cultural) that come together to form a dynamic construct of place—Olson transforms the narrative of abstract space brought about by the increased commodification of goods and people in the postwar milieu of global capitalism into one of a localized, "authentic" practice of place. "History," as Olson writes in *The Special View of History*, "is the practice of space in time" (27). Similarly, place is also a practice of manifesting the particular within abstract space, of carving out a plane of subjective and communal values to situate oneself in the present. The poem underhand, then, becomes a

record of the practice, a field of relationships that form a particularized narrative of how a person roots in a place. By gathering the local facts of history, geology, and mythology into the field of the page, Olson is able to create in his poetry aesthetic constructs of the interactions between place and his own body. Moreover, as I will discuss, Olson practices place in the manner of fieldwork, a tradition of “knowing the land” by walking through it, in which he paces the local area according to the measurements of his moving body. Under Olson’s hand (and in the hands of the writers to follow in this project) practicing place merges aesthetics and ethics into a *poethic* of place-making that allows the poet to negotiate the dominant forces that structure geographical space and place while establishing creative spaces of resistance outside of (or within) these dominant spaces.

Olson’s manner of siting and citing the polis as a practice of place becomes a resistant poetic praxis when contextualized in the postwar period in which he writes. The unprecedented wave of commercialism and consumer capitalism during the 1950s rapidly changed the shape of American space: housing, transportation, and consumerism resulting from the rising middle class altered the relationship between people and space. The rise of commercial strip malls and highways, for example, are markers of what David Harvey calls capitalism’s “superior command of space” (*The Condition* 232). The “abstract space” of capitalism, according to Henri Lefebvre, “which is the tool of domination, asphyxiates whatever is conceived within it” (*The Production* 370). People and the landscapes they inhabit became homogenized in capitalism’s pursuit of profit and privatized interest. Thus, as the juggernaut of modern capitalism advanced in the 1950s, there was a human need to reaffirm the identity and specificity of place and rootedness so as not to get lost in the flow of abstraction. In the face of the flattened space of postwar capitalism, a place-based *poethic* such as Olson’s in *The Maximus Poems* becomes a means of

resistance. Specifically, Olson's spatial metaphor of the polis—his social vision of place, which I will define more fully in a moment—becomes a material and imagined construct of individual and collective place that resists the homogenization and abstraction of space. To be sure, the following discussion of *The Maximus Poems* is not meant to be cumulative or exhaustive of this epic collection; rather, I will attempt to trace this specific hermeneutic of place throughout the work.

As mentioned in my introduction, Olson's particularized focus on place resists what Benedict Anderson calls the "imagined community" created by nations, a false sense of community wherein people are not organically connected, but are abstractly connected through a metanarrative of national belonging. For Anderson, the nation is an imagined community not in the sense that Olson creates, as a "form of mind" wherein a small community is connected spiritually to the history and present of a place, but by means of a false sense of imagined camaraderie imposed abstractly from the outside. The nation is an "imagined" community because, "regardless of the actual inequality and exploitation that may prevail ... the nation is always conceived as a deep, horizontal comradeship" (Anderson 7). The perceived "depth" of relationship offered by the nation-state serves the agenda of collective consensus and patriotic allegiance upon which the State relies. The result is a community "estranged from that which is most familiar," (Olson, *The Special* 29) devoid of organic connection to its fellow citizens and its landscape. Mass consumer capitalism operates similarly by offering up an image of an accumulated collective "public" whose individual wants are funneled through a narrative of generalized, collective desire. As Olson warns in an essay entitled "It Was. But It Ain't," the current consumptive machine has separated humans from each other and from themselves: "You are thus suddenly without a place. And you are thus anonymous, you are without a face, a name,

clothes, set down in the midst of the city a no-face” (342). Accordingly, Olson rhetorically refers to the people of the polis as “citizens” throughout his prose; by means of resurrecting an organic community of people “in place,” his poethic attempts “the initiation / of another kind of nation” (*The Maximus* III.228)—one that is autonomous, particular, and, most importantly, collectively embodied.

Olson thus heeds his own call for a new form of writing and reading place, rooted in the open-field, where the aesthetic process produces not another product for commodification, but an organic search for place that is lived and embodied in the world. For Olson, one cannot “form” a sense of place without continual fieldwork within that place, and this newfound intensification of embodied experience ushers in a necessary evolution of literary form, a different manner of reading and writing in the field. As Olson writes to Creeley in 1951,

my assumption is  
any POST-MODERN is born with the ancient confidence  
that, he does belong.

So, there is nothing to be  
*found*. There is only (as Schoenberg had it, his  
Harmony) search (Olson and Creeley 115)

The key to place lies in the search for it within space, a process of digging into particulars and establishing constructs of meaningful relation between these sum parts. For Olson, the search for place is at once a postmodern imperative, and the key means of establishing resistant place. For, according to Olson, when you passively receive history, you are subjecting your place to the conditions set within its given parameters; however, when history is experienced and lived as a continued search within space, it opens spaces for creative engagement and human agency in the telling of the tale.

Olson's *The Maximus Poems* is a collage of written, oral, experienced, and lived geographies of place—in its varied constructions of place, it attempts to locate the relations and connections of an intertwined history shared between a human community and its living environment. Thus, the page presents a site for articulating one's relation to space and place that demonstrates the interrelated and co-productive relationship between spatial awareness and ethics in effecting actual, lived spaces and places. Olson's insistence in "Projective Verse" on the significance of the breath in poetic composition goes beyond aesthetics to become a practice of living in and through place. His focus on the breath unseats the self from its traditional place in the mind and returns it to its proper place in the body. Thus, it is from the body—from the corporeal experience of place within space—that our knowledge about the world and about our place within it emerges. This hermeneutic expresses a particularized stance, rooted in the local but extending globally, that articulates a *mythos* and *ethos* of place within the space of the postwar world.

### **The "Mu-sick" of Pejorocracy: The Problems With and Within (Postwar) Place**

tansy city, root city

let them not make you

as the nation is<sup>51</sup>

—Charles Olson

Olson's main project in *The Maximus Poems* is to restore an informed sense of local place, both on and off the page, within the people of Gloucester, Massachusetts, and extending synecdochically to the larger world. As I will discuss in more detail in the following sections, this small New England fishing town has a history of self-action and self-organization; as such,

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<sup>51</sup> *Maximus* I.11

Olson sees it as a polis, an ideal city, a site and cite of resistance to the space of the nation. Resurrecting the originary force and energy of the polis is the means by which Olson responds to the contemporary status of place from which he writes—the American postwar milieu as he experiences it.

To put it plainly, the problems Olson sees with postwar place in America is that *it is not place at all*. Rather, there is a marked loss of local connections between individuals and communities and their landscape—a connection fostered by the early settlers of Gloucester. For Olson, the settler spirit of the small coastal town was becoming lost to the increased urbanization of America, and the loss of the local within the project of the nation, which increasingly subsumed the local geographically, economically, and psychically in its abstraction. He sums up this postwar condition of the local as “wondership stolen by, / ownership” (*The Maximus* I.9). This loss of “wondership” that Olson mourns in local place will become clearer over the next couple sections that deal with concepts such as *'istorin*, proprioception, and digging—all means by which the self finds place in space by wondering in and wandering through the local. In response to the “fast and cheap” values of the new capitalist state, which seek to homogenize American experience into a profit narrative, Olson seeks to unearth the particulars of localized place from the heaps of “gurry” (*The Maximus* I.13) accumulated through increased commercialization of the land and its people. Thus, *The Maximus Poems* is part elegy, as it relays Olson’s mourning for the loss of organic place, and part rallying call, his attempt to bring the community together in a restored sense of local place. The problems that Olson sees with place can be organized into two related areas: that of capitalist ownership, and that of the nation-state, which together form the “pejorocracy” (literally “worse rule”) of Olson’s current American state. Both agendas attempt to control space and control the movement of people within their

local spaces by imposing abstract space upon the particularities of place; as a result, the American of Olson's contemporary milieu has been disconnected from an organic connection to the landscape, to community, and to the relations between.

I will return to the concept of pejorocracy within the context of the nation-state and postwar consumer capital later in this section, but first it is significant to note that the problems Olson sees with postwar space do not emerge in the postwar era, but can be traced to his view of an originary disconnect between the body, thinking, and language dating back to ancient Socratic Greek philosophy. His argument is laid out in a series of lectures given at Black Mountain College and in San Francisco in 1956 and 1957, which were later published as *The Special View of History* (1970). Ultimately—and, unsurprisingly, given Olson's penchant for etymology as possessing the true energy and meaning behind words—his argument centres upon language and its (mis)use. In these lectures, Olson references J.A.K. Thomson's work *The Art of Logos*, which makes note of the fact that the words "muthos" and "logos" used to be synonymous, "mutho-logos," meaning, "what is said." Olson attacks Aristotle ("Hairystottle") for breaking the word "mutho-logos" into divided discourses of science, poetry, mythology, and history. For Olson, this categorization of "what is said" into separate discourses drives being away from its proper place within lived experience, what is actual and familiar to the body. Olson blames the whole Socratic tradition, including Plato and Socrates, for then establishing a philosophical tradition that places primacy on *logos*, meaning "reason," discourse, or what is written, over *muthos*, meaning "speech," or what is said. For Olson, this split set in motion a fundamental disjuncture between the body and speech, based on the abstraction of rationality. Since human beings, according to Olson, are essentially corporeal in how they experience the world (through breath and through movement), he sees this split as ushering in the era of false experience and

distracted consciousness within the Western tradition. As he writes, “the rational mind hates the familiar, and has to make it ordinary by explaining it, in order not to experience it” (*The Special* 31).<sup>52</sup> As I will discuss in a moment, this break explains Olson’s discontent with his crumbling polis of Gloucester, as he sees Socratic *logos* coming home to roost in postwar American space.

Socratic discourse, with its focus on *logos*, is thus the inciting event that “hugely intermit[s] our participation in our experience, and so prevent[s] discovery” (Olson, “Human” 156). Olson explicitly lists Socrates’ “readiness to generalize,” Plato’s “world of Ideas, of forms as extricable from content,” and Aristotle’s “logic and classification” for alienating humans from experience and instilling a hierarchical system to thought, a “UNIVERSE of discourse” (156). By contrast, the 5<sup>th</sup> Century BC historian Herodotus was called “the *Muthologos*” by Aristotle (Butterick, *A Guide* 146; original emphasis), and thus for Olson, he represents the balance of poetry and mythology, “*mythos-logos* intact” (John Clarke qtd. in Allen and Friedlander 425; original emphasis). Throughout his prose and poetry, Olson repeatedly pits the two first historians of Western civilization, Herodotus (484 BC – 425 BC) and Thucydides (460 BC – 400 BC), against each other in terms of their methodology of recording history. Olson outlines the difference in approach between these ancient historians: “Herodotus goes around and finds out everything he can find out, and then he tells a story. It’s one of the reasons why I trust him more than say, Thucydides, who basically is reporting an event” (*Muthologos I* 3). Whereas Thucydides excluded oral histories and local myths from his historiography, citing them as unreliable hearsay, Herodotus sees these stories as valuable evidence of human history in action.

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<sup>52</sup> It is significant to note that Robert Duncan, who will be discussed next chapter, was also a staunch skeptic of the rationalist philosophical tradition, and he railed against it in his antiwar political poetry and prose. For Duncan, pure rationality, separated from the corporeal concerns of existence, is the motivation underlying war and the thirst for power therein; as he writes in “Ideas of the Meaning of Form,” “Disease, death, terror, and the ruin of cities are not experienced but dealt with, where rational theory wages its war. The question of the use of disease as a weapon has already been decided by reasonable men who developed the diseases to use and who appointed the military power to use them. ... War, too, becomes rational” (34).

Aristotle takes the side of Thucydides in viewing Herodotus's method as chaotic, unstructured, pre-theoretical thought. For Olson, however, Herodotus thus became a model for embodied history, one that focused on oral traditions of speech and self-discovery or *'istorin*, "finding out for oneself," rather than relying on statist ideology and doctrine. Olson thus heralds Herodotus as "the first and instantly the last historian," because he "called himself and was taken seriously as ... a 'poet'—mutho-logos, the practice of life as story" (*The Special* 21). For Olson, Herodotus' oral and corporeal model of historiography is resistant to the abstraction of rationality, for it challenges the status quo of written and rational accounts of knowledge production by means of the self-discovery of the facts of one's place. This epistemological mode—rooted in "proprioception," the awareness of the moving body in space—becomes Olson's *modus operandi* for articulating historicized place in *The Maximus Poems*.

As I discuss throughout this chapter, Olson proposes the polis, a geographical and psychic construct, as a means of reconnecting the living spirit of individuals with their local place. However, in *The Special View*, Olson identifies an alternative poetic methodology as an aesthetic means of finding this reconnection to self-discovery: negative capability. In the lectures, Olson twice cites Heraclitus' statement that "man is estranged from that with which he is most familiar, and he must continuously seek to rediscover it" (*The Special* 29) and responds with a possible solution to this problem of defamiliarization: John Keats's concept of negative capability, "when man is capable of being in uncertainties, Mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact & reason" (14).<sup>53</sup> These two statements from Heraclitus and Keats form the epigraphs of the lectures, offering both problem and solution in an expedited manner. For Olson, Keats's concept amounts to the "readmission of the familiar" (32). Since the Socratic systems of classification and logic were attempts to control experience in categories of knowing, thereby avoiding the

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<sup>53</sup> I will return to negative capability in the third chapter as it applies to the work of Fred Wah.

discomfort of the unknown, negative capability offers a means of *being* with the unknown. Negative capability forms the basis for Olson's alternative model of open poetic composition in the field, which avoids putting tenets of experience into perceived forms of organized line lengths and rhythms (traditional forms that similarly alienate the poet from his or her body in the manner of Socratic *logos*) and rather refocuses composition on the *process* that emerges underhand and under-breath. As Olson writes, "One can therefore wrap it up in one package: PROCESS—what Heraclitus tried on as 'flux' ... To stay in mysteries, uncertainties, doubts, then, is Keats' way of talking about staying in process in order to ... not to slip into the error of trying to fix things by an irritable reaching after fact and reason" (42). As a means of reconnecting the body with what emerges in the poem, negative capability offers a way out of the pattern of thought that leads humans to search tirelessly for reason and coherence.<sup>54</sup>

Olson's argument against the rationality of Greek thought is also significant for his understanding of place and how it is sited/cited. These ideas will be discussed in the following sections, but a preliminary introduction here will help to contextualize. As Olson writes in "Human Universe,"

We have lived long in a generalizing time, at least since 450 B.C. ... Logos, or discourse, for example, in that time, so worked its abstractions into our concept and use of language that language's other function, speech, seems so in need of restoration that several of us go back to hieroglyphs or to ideograms to right the balance. (The distinction here is between language as the act of the instant and language as the act of thought about the instant.) (156).

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<sup>54</sup> Indeed, one of Olson's main critiques of Pound in *The Cantos* is his ultimate desire for a totalizing aesthetic of coherence. As Pound laments in Canto XVI, "And I am not a demigod, / I cannot make it cohere" (816). In many ways, the field methodology is a direct means by which Olson challenges the need to cohere that was so desired by his modernist forefather. I will return to this point in the next couple sections of the chapter.

In the face of a philosophical tradition that makes *logos* the *sine qua non* of human existence in the world, Olson urges that “particularism has to be fought for, anew” (156). Speech is the “act of the instant,” for it forges a physiological connection between the body and language; in contrast, thinking *about* the instant results in reflection upon the immediate present, and so action in the moment is halted and abstract logic takes precedence. Projective verse, then, is a means of rescuing time from abstraction, for it proposes a sense of actual lived time expressed through poetic creation rather than a time that organizes poetry according to fixed rhythm or meter. The classificatory nature of *logos* dulls the energy of the present and obscures the particulars of immediate experience; in contrast, poetic language expressing the “act of the instant” is not abstractly descriptive, external, or ornamental and thus possesses the utmost ontological immediacy and intensity.<sup>55</sup>

Recovering such immediacy and intensity within the written word is something Olson admired in Pound’s work—his going “back to the hieroglyphs or to ideograms to right the balance” between speech and *logos*. Olson was also skeptical, however, of Pound’s reliance on non-Western intellectual and ontological models, and so while he was doing fieldwork in the Yucatán in 1951, Olson found a Western counterpart to the Oriental glyphs that Pound admired. Olson was struck by the Mayan language as a “system of written record, now called hieroglyphs, which, on its very face, is verse, the signs were so clearly and densely chosen that, cut in stone, they retain the power of the objects of which they are the images” (“Human” 159). In a letter to

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<sup>55</sup> As Carla Billitteri points out, despite his efforts to the contrary, Olson ultimately “falls prey to *logos*, universalizing male experience and abstracting from it laws applicable to all forms of art or action” (126). Although Olson’s project contains marked inconsistencies and problematic sexual politics (which will be dealt with throughout this chapter), Billitteri argues that Olson’s efforts demonstrate transgressive potential, for “what matters most is Olson’s belief that an active reevaluation of the body’s perceptual knowledge and of the body’s means of expression (gesture, sound, rhythm), if incorporated into verse practice, can transform writing into a means of countering the negative effects of text and *logos*” (126).

Creeley while in the Yucatán, Olson remarked on how the Mayan symbol for the eye was a spiral; he accompanied his thoughts with his own drawing:

Museo, Campeche, a wonderful little “monster” with eyes made so



Figure 1. Olson, Charles. “Mayan Letters” 113.<sup>56</sup>

As Olson tells Creeley, in these glyphs, “the eye takes up life” (112). Figuring the eye (and, by extension, the “I,” the individual) as a spiral with an ambiguous beginning and end invokes process and continuity and connects the image with the meaning of life as continuous cycles of movement.<sup>57</sup> In the found texts in the field of the Mayan landscape, Olson saw a direct correspondence between image and word; moreover, for Olson, this connection situated the Maya as closer to nature, to the reality of things, which abstract language and abstraction had destroyed.<sup>58</sup> The glyphs retain the semantic energy of *muthos*, “what is said,” rather than convey abstract reason. In this way, for Olson, the glyphs represent the Mayans’ intimate connection between textuality and their space, which he sees as productive of “authentic” place. As he writes, “I have found ... that the hieroglyphs of the Maya disclose a placement of themselves

<sup>56</sup> Spirals appear in a later poem in *Maximus* (III.84). As Butterick notes, in the marginalia of books in which he was reading at the time this poem was composed, Olson drew the “C” and “O” of his name in spirals (*A Guide* 589).

<sup>57</sup> The Mayan glyphs also offered Olson a foundational example “in the field” of the world of the reconnection between the body and speech, which lead to his theory of “logography” or “word writing,” a practice similar to that used in the Aztec and Mayan writings, of representing proper names based on their phonetization. For example, Olson discusses the proper name “Neilson” broken into glyphs: the drawing of knees together to express “Neil,” and the sun representing the word “son” (“Human” 184).

<sup>58</sup> Rachel Blau DuPlessis is rightfully critical of Olson’s practice of “interpreting” the glyphs without knowing the language or culture from which they come. Despite his lack of local knowledge, she claims, “Olson felt that as an intelligent outsider, he could intuitively grasp materials and make efficacious knowledge claims ... because he is not trapped by minutiae of technical knowledge” (“Olson” 142). I will return to this problematic practice of reading glyphs outside the source language in my examination of Fred Wah’s *Pictograms from the Interior of B.C.* in chapter three.

toward nature of enormous contradiction to ourselves ... 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” (166).<sup>59</sup>

For Olson, the Mayan practice of writing through images, a mode of textual transmission wherein the images directly suggest the action to which they refer, also represents a desirable model for communicating place on the basic level of naming. In a poem-essay entitled “Place; & Names,” Olson writes:

a place is a term in the order of creation  
 & thus useful as a function of that equation  
 example, that the ‘Place Where the Horse-Sacrificers Go’  
 of the Brihadaranyaka Upanishad is worth more than  
 a metropolis—or, for that matter, any moral  
 concept, even a metaphysical one  
 and that this is so  
 for physical & experimental reasons of  
 the *philosophia perennis*, or Isness  
 of cosmos beyond those philosophies  
 or religious or moral systems of  
 rule, thus giving factors of naming  
 —nominative power—& landschaft  
 experience (geography) which stay truer

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<sup>59</sup> To be sure, Olson’s projection of a Western ideal of human identity and ontology onto colonized peoples is certainly essentialist and problematic. Olson’s work is certainly posed from the vantage point of the colonizer/settler, which leads him to erase the presence and agency of Indigenous Western cultures. While a full critique of Olson’s essentialism lies outside the scope of this chapter, I will return to this point throughout my discussions to follow.

to space-time than personalities  
 or biographies of such terms as specific  
 cities or persons, as well as the inadequacy  
 to the order of creation of anything except  
 names—including possible mathematics (?)

the crucialness being that these places or names  
 be as parts of the body, common, & capable  
 therefore of having cells which can decant  
 total experience (“Place” 200)

Olson read this poem-essay in response to the question “What is ‘history’?” posed to him during the 1963 Vancouver poetry conference (Merrill 155). As if recapitulating his thoughts in *The Special View*, Olson responds to the prospect of “history,” in all its generalized totality, with a poetic explanation of *place* that is connected to the particulars of human action and bodily experience. In this passage, Olson continues his attack on abstract language, which alienates the body from actual experiences in space and place. He makes the distinction between places named for their inherent features, functions, or actions, such as “Place Where the Horse-Sacrificers Go,” and those places like cities, which would, in his view, lack the particularities of local function enough to be named after them and so would be named arbitrarily. Accordingly, a city named “New York City” is thus a very general, whereas “Place Where the Horse-Sacrificers Go” is specific and particular to the local geography, its function, and presents an idea of how the land and its people interact together to produce place.<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> Seeing the local geography as a cultural landscape explains why Olson preferred to refer to the part of Gloucester where he used to spend his summers as “Fishermen’s Field,” rather than what it had come to be named, “Stage Fort

Olson's attention to naming and place in this passage is significant, as it serves to set up his concept of place as a material and psychic construct, a notion of place that Gloucester has fallen away from due to urban renewal and capitalization of local land and resources. Olson pays particular attention to the "nominative" and the ways in which places are historically and etymologically transformed in relation to their naming. His evocation of the term "landschaft," an etymological iteration of "landscape," in his poem-essay is thus significant, as it instills a humanistic overtone upon the concept of landscape. "Landschaft" is a term Olson appropriated from the American geographer Carl Sauer.<sup>61</sup> Olson read Sauer's work and was influenced by his theories of landscape, specifically his thoughts on morphological form and process and its effects on the physical and cultural landscape of America. In his groundbreaking essay "The Morphology of Landscape," Sauer imported the term *landschaft*, meaning "'bounded area' of land" (Wylie 21) from German geographic discourse.<sup>62</sup> According to Sauer, *landschaft* defines an "area" or "region" and the "peculiarly geographic association of facts ... a land shape, in which the process of shaping is by no means thought of as simply physical. It may be defined, therefore, as an area made up of a distinct association of forms, both physical and cultural" (321).

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Park." The name "Fisherman's Field" contains the word "field," a fact that undoubtedly resonated with Olson's poetic sensibilities; however, the name is also descriptive of the human activity that takes place in that site, and how the land shapes human activity in the process.

<sup>61</sup> Sauer was an important thinker for North American poetics. Robert Duncan proposed the name "Tish" (Shit spelled backwards) for the journal edited by a group of Vancouver writers in the 1960s, some of which appear in the final chapters of this work, from Sauer's work on the revelation of cultural patterns found within excavated excreta.

<sup>62</sup> As Wylie notes, *landschaft* is a much-debated term in geographical discourse. The Dutch equivalent of the term, *landschap*, connotes a more visual rendering of the land as perceived or pictured in artistic works, whereas the German term points more directly to the land itself as "objective external space" (21). Although many consider *landschaft* to be the etymological basis of the term "landscape," this is also debated. Jala Makhzoumi and Gloria Pungetti offer a useful summary: "The English word landscape is a borrowing of the Middle Dutch word *lantscap*, Modern Dutch *landschap*, which in turn derives from the common Germanic land and the suffix *schap* meaning 'constitution, condition,' while both the Old English *landscipe* and the Old High German *lantscap* had the connotation of 'region,' 'tract.' Specifically, the Old High German *lantscap* became in Modern German *Landschaft*; the Middle Dutch *lantscap* became in Modern Dutch *landschap*; the Old English *landscipe* became in the sixteenth century *landskip*; in the seventeenth century *lantskip* and now *landscape*" (3).

Like Olson's conception of the polis—which I will elaborate upon in the following sections—Sauer's conception of the geographic landscape comes from an understanding of place as a localized, *cultural landscape*. Both polis and landschaft denote a human place of shared knowledge and values belonging to a particular culture.<sup>63</sup> A history of the land, according to Sauer, must encompass the human aspects of influence upon it, as well as the natural morphology, into an assemblage of influence and effect. "The cultural landscape," Sauer observes, "is fashioned from a natural landscape by a culture group. Culture is the agent, the natural area is the medium, the cultural landscape is the result" (343). Although it is tempting to classify Sauer's or Olson's conception of place as ego- or human-centric, it is significant to note that in accordance with Olson's view of the field, "man [sic] is himself an object" ("Projective 247) among others in the field that together produce place. The "factors of naming" place, then, which Olson cites as "nominative power—& landschaft / experience," "stay truer / to space-time" because they take into account the ways in which a community uses the landscape, and is shaped by it. Rather than "personalities / or biographies," which impart an overtly particular experience upon the land as singular, naming places for their communal use-value or function within the community imparts a commonality to local place. This commonality is shared between its inhabitants, and also between inhabitants and other aspects of the landscape, such as flora and fauna and land morphology, so that place becomes a concept shared by all those who live within, shaped and are shaped by, and occupy that place. To be sure, naming place is a contested practice; there is a politics to places and how they are named, as it is usually those in power that are allowed to bring "places" into being through naming. Although Olson's polemic of naming ignores the underlying power struggles of the act, his interest lies in place names that

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<sup>63</sup> This ideal conception of the landschaft/polis as space circumscribed by a singular notion of culture will be addressed and challenged in the latter chapters of this project in the context of Fred Wah and Daphne Marlatt's work, who contend with Olson's place-based methodology in the multicultural setting of Canada.

retain a relational aspect between humans and the landscape. Olson's focus on the ways in which names reflect the collision between humans, their histories, and their landscape produces a record of a place's communal knowledge and historical ruptures and continuities.

While Olson was enamoured by Sauer's idea of the cultural landscape as an assemblage between the natural morphology and the human energy upon it, he nonetheless thinks that some human uses of the land—for example, using it for commercial and capital profit and for urban renewal—go against this “natural” relationship. The fact that Olson sees some changes to the landscape as “natural,” and some not, highlights some of the contradictions or blind spots within his view of place. Moreover, as I will discuss in the later chapters of this project, Olson's view of place according to rootedness and authenticity within the polis, while attempting to impart a humanist bent on the local, is fundamentally exclusive in its view. If place is conceived as changeable only within its own bounds and only by the people who inhabit it and “know” it, the connection between people and the place becomes mostly immobile, and binaries (which Olson railed against the Socratics for instituting) of “us” (those who belong to and/or in a certain place) and “them” (those who are outsiders) becomes ingrained in the place itself.

I will return to Olson's view of the problems of place in the final section, wherein I situate the polis as a means by which Olson urges Gloucester to “change,” but it will be useful to outline Olson's main arguments here by way of introduction. Throughout *The Maximus Poems*, Olson uses Gloucester as a microcosm of the lingering effects of *logos* manifested in postwar capitalism, which has cheapened Gloucester and made it homogenous with the American nation-state. In Song 1 of “The Songs of Maximus,” Olson connects his arguments against *logos* in *The Special View of History* with the crumbling of language and connectivity between people in his current milieu:

colored pictures  
of all things to eat: dirty  
postcards  
And words, words, words  
all over everything  
No eyes or ears left  
to do their own doings (all  
invaded, appropriated, outraged, all senses  
including the mind, that worker on what is

And that other sense  
made to give even the most wretched, or any of us, wretched,  
that consolation (greased

lulled (*The Maximus* I. 13)

Olson attacks the mass media tactics of consumer capitalism, which invade space with “colored pictures / and words, words, words / all over everything.” The language of billboards is meant to lull the observer into a passive state of reception, thereby separating the self (and the community) from its active participation in language and in place. His lament reflects his earlier argument for *muthos*, “what is said,” over the Socratic conception of *logos*, since in postwar billboard culture, “what is said” is removed from the individual as a reflection of embodied, meaningful experience and becomes the empty, abstract language of capital: “words, words, words / all over everything.” As he argues, the tactics of the capitalist system do more than lull the senses of the self—they usurp the individuality of people into a homogenous mass, “No eyes or ears left / to

do their own doings.”<sup>64</sup> Here, Olson again plays on “eyes” meaning separate “I”s or individuals, which, due to increased consumer capitalism, have been reduced to a passive mass body with its senses dulled. Even the mind, which Olson critiqued the Socratics for privileging over the body, has been deadened by this new saturated milieu. The loss of Gloucester’s originary spirit is felt throughout the collection in Maximus’s cries to his people of the present: “O my people, where shall you find it, how, where shall you listen / when all is become billboards, when all, even silence, is spray-gunned? ... when sound itself is neoned in?” (I.2). For Olson, the new language of mass culture initiated a new postwar conception of doctrine; like the Socratic institution of systems of thought, the “neoned” communication of his present imposed a given narrative of contemporary experience, thereby preventing people from “finding out for themselves.”

The “neoned” language of consumer capital goes further than lulling individuals into an indistinguishable passive mass; by means of the rampant postwar advertising, the spirit of local ownership is lost. In “Letter 16,” Olson s/cites the beginning of ownership and profit-making in the area, the point in which ownership was transferred from local merchants to larger companies. He references Nathaniel Bowditch, who established insurance companies in the area and spent “years of trading for Mass. merchants / as supercargo on Salem voyages” (I. 72). Olson then continues:

He represents, then, that movement of NE monies  
away from primary production & trade  
to the several cankers of profit-making

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<sup>64</sup> Olson’s observance here is echoed by Benedict Anderson, who argues that national imagined communities were invented by means of “the convergence of capitalism and print technology on the fatal diversity of human language” (48). According to Anderson (and Olson here, to an extent), the wide-spread dissemination of newspapers, magazines, and advertisements established a new national vernacular, particularly in the postwar American economic boom. This new language and culture of capitalism, coupled with an aggressive national ideology and rhetoric that united the land and its people in a common past and present, made citizens feel as if they were a part of a unified national community.

which have, like Agyasta, made America great.

Meantime, of course, swallowing up  
the land and labor. And now,  
the world. (I.72)<sup>65</sup>

Olson attacks Bowditch for introducing a system of private ownership that makes money for profit outside of the local space, thereby separating local trades from the profit of their labor and of the land, “destroying its localism” (I. 47). The past settlers’ trade has been irrevocably destroyed by the increased industrialization of fishing; what was once a deep relationship producing harmony between human and landscape has now become, as Olson writes in an earlier poem, “‘trash’, / industrial fish / are called which Gloucester now catches” (I. 127). Later in the poem quoted above, Olson relates this practice to what he calls the “pejorocracy” of the postwar nation:

pejorocracy (what you have, my town, what all towns  
now have: pee-jaw-rock  
Cressy ! (I.73)

“Pejorocracy” is a term Olson appropriates from Pound in Canto LXXIX: “the snot of pejorocracy” (507). The term means “worse rule,” or “a worsening form of government” (Butterick, *A Guide* 13). Olson first used the term in his poem “The Kingfishers” (1949) but it appears twice in *Maximus* (again in I.3). As I will discuss further in the chapter, the current pejorocracy of the nation manifests as a sickness in *The Maximus Poems*; it is the commodified

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<sup>65</sup> “Agyasta” is a reference to an “Indian saint with superpowers,” and refers to a parable wherein Agyasta would cast out demons by chasing them into the ocean and then swallow the ocean whole to rid the land of their evil. However, in the process of swallowing the world’s water, Agyasta deprived the world of its life-giving water source, causing more trouble than relief. Olson’s use of this reference is an interesting parallel to Bowditch, who, in the following lines, he attributes to “swallowing up” the land for profit.

“mu-sick,” (I.3) the “musickracket / of all ownership,” and “that song” that Maximus wishes to “void [his] ear of” (I.14). As opposed to oral traditions of communication, which come from the body and serve to connect bodies in space, the mass media pervades postwar American space with “mu-sick”—since “mu” originally refers to the mouth, “mu-sick” refers to that which comes from the mouth (the “what is said” of *muthos*) as sick, “a sick story from a sick mouth” (von Hallberg 58).

In the passage above, Olson spells out “pejorocracy” phonetically in a cacophonous way in order to sonically emphasize its “mu-sick”; moreover, in spelling it out in this way, he also illustrates the ways in which the ideology of pejorocracy swallows up the land. As he laments, pejorocracy “swallows” up the rocks and Cressy beach, which is a reference to Cressy’s Beach near Fisherman’s Field (now Stage Fort Park). “Pejorocracy” encompasses Olson’s view of the decay of the land and of people’s connection to place therein at the hands of capitalism. The term’s reference to governance connects Olson’s concerns with mass media and capitalism with the “worsening rule” of the governing nation-state.<sup>66</sup>

Since Olson’s field poetic is concerned with the agency of objects interacting in a field, of which the poet is one among them, his disdain for rampant industry and capital is based on its treatment of objects—of which the self is one, as he reminds us in “Projective Verse”—as units of mindless consumption. Olson thus decries the “trick / of corporations, newspapers, slick magazines, movies houses, / the ships, even the wharves, absentee-owned” (I.10).<sup>67</sup> The field poetic, accordingly, seeks to wrest the poetic line from given patterns of composition and

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<sup>66</sup> It is interesting to note that although Olson erases the indigenous presence in the landscape, he also links the nascent capitalism of “pejorocracy” as “the white man.” Referring to route 128, which cut the land, he refers to the “west” side as “the rubbish of white man” (I.148).

<sup>67</sup> The literary arts are not safe from Olson’s gnashing critique. Letters 5 through 7 of *The Maximus Poems* attack Vincent Ferrini, a Gloucester poet and Olson’s contemporary, for creating the journal *Four Winds*. In Olson’s view, the magazine is detached from the local concerns of Gloucester, and could have been published anywhere else in America. As he chides, “Your magazine might excuse itself / if it walked on those legs all things walk on, / their own” (I. 24).

reconnect it with the body and with the breath. Moreover, the breath wrests language from abstraction by converting it to a lived energy projected out into the world. Indeed, Olson's project is one of restoring proximity between the body and its space—not just on the poetic page by wresting objects from traditional patterns into a field of action, but also in terms of an ethos of living, local place from which the American has been estranged due to rampant consumer capital. In an interview with Herbert Kenny, Olson puts the predicament of his contemporary America in such terms: “I have to go everyday a further distance to find what I believe in. ... And literally, practically everyday by inches I have to go further in order to be in touch with those things which I consider necessary” (Olson, “I Know” 31).

It was not just the language of mass media, however, that Olson targets for separating the community from the landscape and thereby from articulating a full sense of place. Olson partly blames the homogenization of Gloucester on urban renewal, which caused an unprecedented transformation of the local space. Many local buildings and fishing wharves were lost to urban renewal; the old, well-purposed use of the land was thus lost to the new and cheap values of the postwar economic boom. Through urban renewal, the land itself also changed shape and purpose in relation to the rest of the country: this change was initiated by the construction of Route 128 in 1951, a highway and bridge over the Annisquam River that connected Gloucester to the rest of the mainland. As I discuss in the next section, Olson admired Gloucester as a polis because of its status as an island, geographically separate from the rest of the nation. In a note found in his papers, Olson writes, “128 ends Gloucester as a sea city. After this, what is she but another part of the nation?” (qtd. in Butterick, *A Guide* 233). For Olson, this connecting highway not only eroded the status of Gloucester as an original settler sea city, but it also allowed the nation—in

all its postwar consumerist glory—to invade and subsume this formerly self-organized and autonomous enclave.

While Olson experienced support for his protest against the building of the highway, there were many locals who welcomed its construction as a hopeful antidote to the area's postwar economic woes. Butterick notes John J. Babson's (a Gloucester historian) hopeful sentiment toward the construction of the connecting route: "The great hope is that it will help to bring in new industry to supplement the fisheries" (qtd. in Butterick, *A Guide* 233). In a small, two line poem, Olson connects the threatened identity of Gloucester with its Phoenician "sister city" of Tyre: "128 a mole / to get at Tyre (II. 80). In this minute poem, Olson connects his threatened polis to an earlier polis that was similarly threatened and overtaken. Both Gloucester and Tyre are port cities that are part of but distinct from larger empires, and Olson sees them as key sites of resistance to the order of the mainland states. In order to facilitate his siege of the city in 332 B.C., Alexander the Great built a causeway to Tyre in order to access it more readily. This connection simultaneously saw the loss of Tyre's identity as a self-contained island, and its political fall. Olson thus connects Gloucester's fate with route 128 with Tyre's fall to the mainland, an act that would similarly dissolve Gloucester's settler spirit as self-organized community with an intact relationship between the land and its people.

However, Olson remains open to the prospect of positive change if people hold on to this originary spirit of the place and live it out in their present-day lives. Accordingly, the first volume of *Maximus* ends with an open-ended question related to Route 128. Throughout the poem, Olson quotes from accounts of earlier settlers experiencing contentment from their fishing trade; towards the end, Olson connects that past with his present view of the place:

to this hour sitting

as the mainland hinge

of the 128 bridge

now brings in

what,

to Main Street? (I. 160)

To be sure, Olson is unapologetic about his disdain for the connecting route and its effects on Gloucester; however, it is significant that he ends the first volume of his work with an open-ended question as to what the bridge will bring for the future of the polis. He does not pretend to be a fortuneteller; his role in the work has been as archaeologist of his place, as we will see in the following sections. Maximus is the figure of the people, but the fate of the polis ultimately rests in the hands of its citizens. In this opening volume, Olson has presented the past of the polis, outlined the problems of current place, and laid the groundwork for future action. As Michael Bernstein observes, Olson “leave[s] the future open, thus retaining the basic humility which accompanies a grateful acceptance of human autonomy” (258). It is Olson’s humanist values—his fundamental belief in human action—that rescues him from being stuck in an insular nostalgia for a past now gone; he ends the first volume and enters the second with a renewed sense of possibility built out of the detritus of the current postwar state of place.

As I have demonstrated throughout this section, Olson’s conception of postwar place, and the problems therein, are related to his idealized conception of place as a confluent relationship between the land morphology and the humans that inhabit it. Accordingly, the next few sections will further elucidate how Olson sites and cites his polis, which, like *landschaft*, is a cultural landscape that takes the facts of the geography alongside the local facts of human place. In light

of Olson's arguments against Socratic logos that I have outlined, the following sections will illuminate Olson's conception of alternative place-making in the tradition of Herodotus, who advocated for a practice of place by means of *'istorin*, or "finding out for oneself." For Olson, this process of finding "the evidence" involves painstaking "digging" into the historical materials, resonant myths, and morphology of the land from which one speaks. He seeks to actualize a *poethic* corrective to the Western separation of logos and the body, one that restores the "wondership" of mythological imagination and incorporated experience in the process of how we come to know our place. The means by which one constructs place in the field, then, is twofold: first, by means of walking through the space and "siting" the location, and then by means of "knowing" the place by "citing" it within Western intellectual traditions. These two modes of place-making, through s/citing place, will establish the two poles of the polis that Olson sees as an imagined place of resistance (one that retains material resonance within present Gloucester) to the increased pejorocracy of the nation-state.

### **"I am making a mappemunde": Siting the Space of the Polis**

I am not aware that we proceed in straight lines at all.<sup>68</sup>

—Charles Olson

Olson's attack on *logos* extends to his view not only of history, but also to how people come to know their place. The Socratic tradition's focus on *logos* conceives of knowing one's place as a matter of documented history and measured space on maps, rather than self-discovery.

According to Olson, Herodotus conceived of history as a verb; in this way, historiography becomes more than a study or reporting of events, it becomes a *practice*. Rather than conceiving of history and of place as something given, reported, or prescribed, *'istorin* predicates a process

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<sup>68</sup> *The Special* 35.

of gathering experiential data from the landscape. In “Letter 23,” Olson outlines the goal of his poetic efforts in *Maximus*, and aligns himself with Herodotus in the process: “I would be a historian as Herodotus was, looking / for oneself for the evidence of / what is said” (I.100). In response to the homogenization of American space in the postwar era, Olson undertakes an odyssey of maximal proportions to site the particularities of place in his polis of Gloucester, Massachusetts. Rather than rely on second-hand reportage, Olson as poet-historian gathers together historical facts and testimony, as well as the particulars of his own bodily experience, to create a dynamic *poethic* that unites the facts of history with the living facts of place. For Herodotus—and for Olson after him—local stories and oral tales inflect space with local truths, and these sedimented histories create a living history and mythology of a place.

As mentioned in the last section, Olson was certainly critical of Socratic “discourse,” but in his essay “Human Universe,” he digs into the etymology of the word “discourse” to find alternative means of its expression: “The etymology of ‘discourse’ has its surprises. It means, TO RUN TO AND FRO!” (167; original typography). Just as Olson sites discourse within the world of lived experience rather than the world of thought and reason, he also sites place as an active, ongoing event in time and space. Accordingly, this section explores the ways in which Olson “sites” his polis—a place-making methodology that follows from his concept of proprioception, “SENSIBILITY WITHIN THE ORGANISM / BY MOVEMENT OF ITS OWN TISSUES” (“Proprioception” 181). These terms will be unpacked over the course of the section as Olson’s manner of siting and mapping the polis as a distinct geographic site is examined. Specifically, this section is divided into two subsections which explicate the two main ways in which Olson sites place: first, means of what Olson calls “eye-view,” a subjective articulation of space-time,

and second, his mode of mapping of the local area by movement and measure of foot and the body.

In Olson's practice of place, primary documents—town records, papers of local historians, geological surveys—all become circulated as objects in the field of the poem. However, the individual who wants to "know" place must *move through it* and experience it proprioceptively. This mingling of data and corporeal experience create a dynamic construct of place in the poem's terrain, as seen in "a Plantation a beginning":

I sit here on a Sunday  
with grey water, the winter  
staring me in the face

"the Snow lyes indeed  
about a foot thicke  
for ten weekes" John White

...

It cost the Company  
200 pounds (\$10,000)  
to try these men

ashore that year,  
to plant a land  
was thinnest dust

...

where I as a young man berthed  
 a skiff and scarfed  
 my legs to get up rocks (*The Maximus* l.102-103)

More examples of how Olson sites and cites his field poetic will be examined throughout these sections, but the above poem offers a straightforward example of how the field poetic incorporates the historical record of a place (the quotations from John White and his Dorchester Company, who established the first settlements at Gloucester in 1623) and Olson's personal past and present experience within the place. Both the historical and empirical data within the poem are rendered without hierarchy, as demonstrated by the lack of terminal caesurae, with each line flowing together without pause. However, these paratactic perceptions do not form a cohesive whole—they flow together, but are a composite of shifting relations arising in the poem's production. Taken together in the field of the poem, these complementary energies that site and cite the place within Olson's spatial imaginary create a living organism of place.

As mentioned in the introduction, Alfred North Whitehead's thought was a significant influence on the Black Mountain field poetic, as Olson, Duncan, and Creeley all read his works while teaching and researching at Black Mountain College in the 1950s. While an exhaustive examination of Whitehead's influence is beyond the scope of this section and chapter, a brief summary of Whitehead's applicability for this discussion of place will prove useful.<sup>69</sup> For Olson and the Black Mountain poets, Whitehead's theory of organicism—a philosophical perspective that sees the living organism as a model for reality, wherein the whole of the universe (or other structures, such as society) and its parts function as an integrated system of processual relationships—offered a theoretical counterpart for the organic system of field poetics the Black

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<sup>69</sup> My explanation of Whitehead's concept is admittedly rudimentary, as it is not the focus of the discussion but serves to contextualize his *poethic* of place. For an excellent, extended discussion of Whitehead's influence on Olson's work, see Shahar Bram's *Charles Olson and Alfred North Whitehead: An Essay on Poetry* (2004).

Mountainers were developing. As Robert von Hallberg outlines, “Action and motion, in Whitehead’s philosophy, supplant the Aristotelian concept of matter as substance. . . . At the center of the object is no nucleus of tangibility but instead a system of relationships” (96). Taking into account Olson’s critiques of Aristotelian abstraction outlined in the last section, Whitehead’s philosophy is appealing to him based on its relationality, its dependence on human experience of multiple layers of experience forming complex relationships.

Olson’s manner of siting and citing place—of historical, subjective, and collective particularities coming together into a dynamic articulation—relates to Whitehead’s conception of “conrescence.” Put plainly, Whitehead’s concept describes the continual influence of the past upon the present moment—what Foucault calls the “history of the present” (*Discipline* 31). In Whitehead’s words, conrescence “can be conceived as the doctrine of the immanence of the past energizing in the present” (*Adventures* 188). Conrescence, or “becoming concrete,” is first and foremost a *creative act*, for it involves an entity receiving influences of the past and then synthesizing these influences into a unified experience in the present, thereby forming new entities. This creative synthesis does not only apply to one individual, but to the universe as a whole. When past events influence the present and future, they do not simply repeat themselves but progress and are made anew; the nature of reality is thus a “creative advance into novelty” (222). In *Process and Reality*, Whitehead concisely summarizes the process: “the term ‘many’ presupposes the term ‘one,’ and the term ‘one’ presupposes the ‘many’” (28).<sup>70</sup> Olson echoes this sentiment in his glossing epigraph to *Maximus*: “All my life I’ve heard / one makes many” (3). As George Butterick points out, in some of Olson’s early notes that refer to the overall direction

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<sup>70</sup> This statement, Butterick tells us, was actually overheard by Olson from a cook in the kitchen at Black Mountain College. In his personal copy of *Process and Reality*, next to the statement “the term ‘many’ presupposes the term ‘one,’ and the term ‘one’ presupposes the ‘many’” Olson wrote in the margin: “*exactly* Cornelia Wms, Black Mt kitchen, 1953” (Butterick, *A Guide* 4; original emphasis).

of the *Maximus* collection, this epigraph is alluded to as “the dominating paradox on which *Max* complete ought to stand” (qtd. in Butterick, *A Guide* 5). Shahrar Bram confirms this significance to Olson when he writes, “conrescence in Whitehead’s scheme, is a cornerstone of Olson’s thinking about human beings in the world” (21).<sup>71</sup>

In the poem quoted at length above, Whitehead’s ideas of organicism and conrescence are rendered poetically in the field of the page, as the one site on the harbour from which Olson stands becomes many sites, both past and present. Olson’s empirical observations from his particular stance—the “grey water” and “winter / staring [him] in the face”—are met with the words of John White, observing the same site in 1623 and recounting the difficulties for their imperial project caused by the snow. Without pause or caesurae, Olson connects the site of human engagement with the landscape in both past and present time. Olson’s present experience of the site brings to mind the experience of the early settlers, who huddled

above Half Moon Beach

or got out of the onshore

breeze by clustering

what sort of shacks

around the inshore harbor side

of Stage Head where now lovers

have a park and my mother

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<sup>71</sup> It is worth noting that Olson did not read Whitehead until 1955, years after the publication of “Projective Verse,” but their ideas of processual epistemological relationships were certainly complementary.

and my wife were curious

what went on in back seats (I.102)

In the field of the poem, the site of the Gloucester harbourfront becomes an organic site that links past and present in a series of ongoing relationships. The hardship brought to early settlers by the winter is met with a reimagined sense of both juvenile adventure, as it is the site where young Olson “as a young man berthed / a skiff and scarfed / [his] legs to get up rocks,” and as a site of love, “what went on in back seats.” Seen through the light of concrescence, Olson’s conception of place is likened to a living organism that has a past incorporated into its current function, and will continue to produce place among different relationships between the landscape and its people.

Accordingly, as much as the geological records of the place factor into the story of the “site,” so does the narrative of place from one’s “eye-view,” (*The Maximus* III.184) which is radically individual in scope, as the play on “eye/I” suggests. In his “Postscript to Proprioception & Logography,” Olson connects his understanding of “view” with the etymology of “landscape.” Olson muses on “*what would look like fundamentals of any new discourse*” (“Postscript” 185; original emphasis), and he explicitly declares “landscape” as his first term of “knowing”:

*Landscape*

“a portion of land which the eye  
can comprehend in a single view”

to bring the land into the eye’s view (185)

Such is Olson’s goal in *The Maximus Poems*: to bring the local into the eye’s view. Doing so reinforces the particularity of the polis in the face of the homogenization of the nation. Indeed, the concept of place is related to one’s “view” in that place denotes the proximal and the

familiar—its parameters are defined by the personal scope, the horizon of the eye as it takes in the surroundings. These specific aspects of space, conceived by the eye’s scope, are the “facts” of place, according to Olson, because they do not come from records or reportage, but from the immediate view of the experiencing body in space. This view of “place facts” is supported by Sauer, who argues that “[t]he facts of geography are place facts; their association gives rise to the concept of landscape. Similarly, the facts of history are time facts; their association gives rise to the concept of period” (321). Taken together, the facts of geography and of history situate the perceiving subject in a specific space-time.

Knowing “the facts” of where one is located is thus not a passive process of rational reception, but of active participation in the real world through creative acts. For example, in the poem beginning “out over the land skope view” (II.126), the first line suggests this bringing together of land, scope, and view. Sherman Paul describes the poem as “Olson’s great poem of being-in-the-world” (*Hewing* 48), for it outlines the foundational grounding of Olson’s stance in the local Gloucester:

Dogtown to the right the ocean

to the left

opens out the light      the river flowing

at my feet

Gloucester to my back

the light hangs

from the wheel of heaven

the great Ocean

in balance

the air is as wide as the light

(II.126)

First, the spatial topography of the poem suggests the directional accuracies of the speaker “looking out” over the land. Moreover, the specific locations given of the surrounding landmarks in relation to the body of the poet creates a spatial map from the subjective view of the individual. Olson gathers particulars from his “land skope view” into a space-time that is a site of productive tension and balance. Immediately following the lines quoted above, Olson references a figure called “the outer man”; as Butterick notes, this man refers to Adam, who Hesiod called “the outer man” because his name “symbolically reflects the four elements” (*A Guide* 412). Olson’s specific stance in the poem makes him an “outer man” of the same ilk, as there are repeated references to all four elements: water (“the ocean,” “the river”), earth (“Gloucester”), fire (“light”), and wind (“air”). Together, these elements come together in balance; the place where Olson stands becomes a site of earthly and cosmic unity.

Another example of my argument appears in a short poem of two lines in the third volume of *Maximus*, where Olson writes: “My shore, my sounds, my earth, my place / afterwards, in between, and since” (III. 110). These lines are arranged roughly in the form of an “X” (though slightly lopsided, and not as symmetrical as the letter) in the middle of the otherwise blank page, with the first line inverted and flowing downwards, bisected by the second line, which appears upright and crosses through the first, creating a nexus between the two lines precisely at the word “between”:

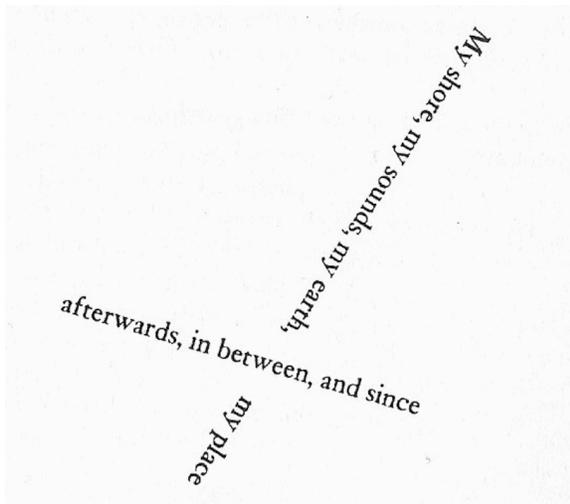


Figure 2. Olson, Charles. *The Maximus* III.110.

The overall typographical appearance of the poem suggests a mapped representation of place, for “X” marks the spot, and the cross-section of the second line breaks the first, leaving the phrase “my place” to occupy a space of its own. Moreover, the X, along with the nexus “between,” is reflective of Olson’s conception of place as a particular space-time stance and view, a subjective articulation among a set of relations in the environment. This is made explicit by the first line, which privileges the “intensive” or sensory qualities of place—the shoreline, the projective sounds, the earth itself, and the place felt therein. The second line encompasses the timing of this emplacement, “afterwards, in between, and since,” but, notably, Olson leaves out an explicit mention of the past *as past*. Rather, the past appears only in the present context as “afterwards” and “since,” which privileges an immediate stance reflecting forward instead of backward, and addresses, in Whiteheadian fashion, how the only real use of the past—and history itself—is in its continual effect on the present. The “future” is not explicitly stated in these lines, but one can read its presence in Olson’s “in between” experience. Accordingly, while the references to “afterwards” and “since” register the past, they also refer to the future tense, but only in reference to the present moment, the “in between” position. The centralized nexus of “between”

stresses the notion that place is not a static marker as the “X” might suggest, but is first and foremost a *processual* relation between the self and its space-time relations.

Thus, the poem forms a glyph of sorts, and demonstrates Olson’s penchant for the spatial dimensions of the image—he takes the traditional image of place, the “X” marker, and transforms it into a dynamic nexus between relations in the spatial environment.<sup>72</sup> He renders this dynamism visually by warping the “X” shape of the poem to suggest continual movement along the axes of time and place. Since place is first and foremost an active movement in space, the poem suggests active engagement in that it is spun almost upside down on its axis; in so doing, the reader must orient him or herself to the page in the same manner as Olson in his particular stance, with the “shore” facing away from his body. Place is thus revealed in the image of the poem as a kinetic condition within space and time.

In his book *Hewing to Experience*, Sherman Paul argues that Olson is “one of our greatest poets of landscape” (215). Indeed, landscape is the nexus around which *The Maximus Poems* revolves, for its multiscalar approach to historical and present ontology continually circles back to the land and to the local ground from which one speaks. For Olson, place (like history) is an active, ongoing event, and must be sought through movement and self-discovery. For support of this view, I would like to point to an excerpt of a 1953 unpublished essay of Olson’s, titled “The Area & The Discipline, of Totality,” that Don Byrd uses in his book *Charles Olson’s Maximus*. Olson’s essay espouses his impetus behind the writing of *Call Me Ishmael*, which he said involved three key terms: “*space, fact, [and] stance*” (qtd. in Byrd 54; original emphasis).<sup>73</sup> To these three terms, however, Olson senses the need for a fourth: “I add one more thing: the increasing, and at first most irritating, tendence [sic] on my part to see what I was getting at as a

<sup>72</sup> Referring to the Mayan glyphs that he tirelessly researched, Olson argues that “the signs were so clearly and densely chosen that, cut in stone, they retain the power of the objects of which they are the images” (“Human” 159).

<sup>73</sup> These three terms (space, fact, and stance) form the theoretical basis of Byrd’s excellent study of *Maximus*.

morality, specifically *a morality of motion*” (54; original emphasis). This “morality of motion,” I suggest, is the heart of Olson’s *poethic*—an ethos of place and spatiality that is predicated on the intensive movement of the self within a dynamic environment.

For Olson, motion becomes a “morality” because it represents responsive self-action within space—a means of parsing space with the body such that space registers a subjective and embodied sense of place. As also discussed in the following chapter on Robert Duncan, the field poetic is first and foremost a responsive *poethic*—one in which the self is an active participant in the present moment. For Olson, active movement and motion is an imperative of the responsive and responsible poet:

man is now required to be responsible. ... he has to be totally responsible, he himself, each one of us, that each of us is a morality—or there is none at all ... now only an engagement with the totality of experience can equip us to be so responsible—that the motion of any one man is the mass and momentum of all only as he is at once the act of himself and the comprehension of the motion that all men are... (“The Chiasma” 81; original emphasis)

Here, Olson confirms that motion, alongside “space, fact, [and] stance,” is an imperative element of total experience. This ethos applies to real-world experiences of place both on and off the page, as “motion” is also a key term for Olson’s conception of the projective mode, as discussed in the introduction. The manner in which an individual moves through space, Olson suggests, is reflective of a larger human truth, with movement leading to “dimensions larger than the man,” as he puts it in “Projective Verse” (247). That is, movement extends beyond the individual to become a common human ethos; by living within the flesh of one’s body as it moves through space, one reveals “at once the act of himself and the comprehension of the motion that all men

are.” All humans move through space, and when we are conscious of the communal nature of movement, we are conscious of ourselves as part of the moving human collective on earth. When humans engage in the process poethic—whether inside the poetic page or beyond it as an interactive and responsive individual in the world—we are confirmed to belong to a larger human commons. Hence why Olson deems our “own process” to be “intact, from outside,” and, responsively, projected back out on to the world: we can be confirmed in our own processes by recognizing that place-building it is a common process of relating to the world that we all share as inhabitants of space.

For Olson, place-making is thus not a passive process of reception but rather one of active *perception*—that is, one comes to a sense of place not merely through received documented histories, but by means of one’s own perceiving body moving through the environment. While this “morality of motion” is a conceit throughout *Maximus*, an example *par excellence* occurs in the poem “Maximus, March 1961—2”:

by the way into the woods

Indian	otter	
		orient
“Lake”	ponds	
show me myself)	(exhibit	(II.33)

What is first apparent about this poem is its spatial arrangement, in which words are arranged such that they can be read in a myriad of ways: vertically, horizontally, and diagonally.<sup>74</sup> The poem forms an ecology of sorts, since every word is an integral part of an interactive network of meaning that together creates a dynamic site of place. Recalling my earlier discussion of the

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<sup>74</sup> In this way, the poem anticipates my discussion in the following chapter of Robert Duncan’s manner of practicing place within poetic collage. Like Duncan, Olson here enacts an *ecopoethic*, which is a term I use in the next chapter to further emphasize the poethical interrelation of objects within the field of the poem.

Mayan glyphs that Olson admired, these words on the page appear as a series of interacting glyphs attempting to locate the poet in a particular place. As such, simple words, such as “Lake” and “ponds,” are intended by Olson to correlate with the image to which they refer, and thus are an apt way of siting the poet’s place with a precision that is not quantifiable but experiential.

Moreover, as Byrd usefully points out, there is a pun in the poem on the word “orient,” meaning the locus of “east” (*Charles* 128), a reading that is supported by the visual orientation of the word on the east side of the page. The term “orient” can also mean to position oneself in an environment; to “orient” oneself is to adjust to the relations within that environment, to bring the surroundings and contexts of the space into familiarity with the observing and experiencing self that is caught up in these relations. The map in this sense is purposefully fluid and left vague; it does not offer a specific locus with precise coordinates, but rather an approximate site with imprecise landmarks. In this sense, the words become not precise indicators but vectors, objects that orbit around the perceiving individual—whether that individual is the reader of the poem, or the one experiencing the actual place. The vagueness of place here testifies to the fluidity of place in general in Olson’s spatial imaginary; places change over time, and they change depending on the vantage point of the inhabitant. As such, “orient” gestures towards a direction within the poem, and the word “Indian” might stand in as a directional counterpart representing their presence in the west, but the other objects do not necessarily correspond to the other directions with which we traditionally navigate places and spaces. This seemingly random field of images reflects Olson’s projectivist stance, for as he commands in “Projective Verse,” “always one perception must must must MOVE, INSTANTER, ON ANOTHER!” (240). This spirit of movement and flux is felt in the field of this poem, for Olson draws the particularities of the local—the landforms, “Lake,” “ponds,” “woods,” its history of inhabitation, “Indian,” and

the present experiencing “self”—into a prismatic space-time of layered perceptions. In good projective form, Olson does not order or hierarchize these perceptions, but instead they arise in a more organic order upon the page according to the moment of their perception while in the place from which he speaks.

The words of the poem come together to form a poetic concrescence of place, to recall Whitehead’s term. According to Whitehead, past influences of a particular entity or event come together to create a new entity, and Olson emphasizes this same organic creativity in the poem. The elements of the place that reflect both its past and present—the lake, the woods, the historical Indian presence on the land—are all factors that inform Olson’s present experience. The collage of the poem avoids a linear reading of its elements; rather than a left-to-right reading practice or orientation within space, the poem instead registers as a semantic network of linkages and relations. Accordingly, the poem can be read in many different ways according to how the words are “oriented” on the page: “Indian Lake [and] otter ponds orient,” or “Indian, otter, “Lake,” ponds [all] orient.” The recombinations possible between the objects of the poem create newly formed spaces of meaning depending on the order chosen. The final lines of the poem, “show me (exhibit / myself),” attest to the self as part of the ecology of these elements of place. From the poet’s particular “eye-view,” his specific articulation of place, his “exhibited” self emerges alongside the shifting relations. As the relations of the field (re)orient, so the self is exhibited differently in accordance with the moving tensions and relations within the environment of place, thereby establishing a created and creative construct of place that is fluid and open to change.

Furthermore, the poem attests to Olson’s *poethic* of art enacting the kinetic of life, since he does not attempt an exacting representation of his experience in space, but rather his spatial

poetic on the page accomplishes a re-enactment of the kinetic energy of place. As Butterick says about the poems in the second volume, “the poems seek a consciousness prior to the rational mind the Greeks may have invented” (*A Guide* xl). Rather than attempt a cohesively ordered and rational sense of place, Olson instead gestures towards the energy of a place felt between its interconnected elements. It is worth noting that in conversation, Olson suggested that this poem was related to his “revelatory experience” after the consumption of psilocybin, the hallucinogen better known as magic mushrooms (Butterick, *A Guide* 291).<sup>75</sup> This fact serves to further my point about kinetic re-enactment of place, since Olson’s mapping capabilities while under the influence of drugs is not necessarily accurate in terms of exacting measurement in space, but is rather accurate to the perceiving body under its present conditions and its present sense of place. The words on the page form an unfolding score, each word correlating to the poet’s breath line as he perceives his environment in its immediacy. The poem’s felt sense of movement comes from the varied rhythms of these unfolding perceptions; as a field of interacting particulars that come together in relation and not precision, the page reflects the unordered and unmediated thought processes of human consciousness.

Before exploring the ways in which Olson further maps place in *The Maximus Poems*, a more sustained explanation of his concept of proprioception, in concert with Deleuze and Guattari’s concept of nomadology, will prove useful to contextualize the discussion. According to Olson, proprioception offers “the data of depth sensibility/the ‘body’ of us as object which spontaneously or of its own order produces experience of, ‘depth’ Viz SENSIBILITY WITHIN THE ORGANISM BY MOVEMENT OF ITS OWN TISSUES” (“Proprioception” 181). As the subjective body moves through space, it is engaged in a process of selecting and ignoring certain aspects from the totality of its surroundings—what Olson calls “the facts” of experience, taken

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<sup>75</sup> Olson wrote of his drug experience in a section of *Muthologos I* entitled “Under the Mushroom.”

from historical documents but also data perceived by means of subjective “eye-view” as discussed previously—in order to articulate a particular space-time and view. From this process of movement within space, the whole self emerges in the depth of total experience—space, fact, stance, and motion. The specific articulation of these elements in the field of the poem forms a dynamic, living *poethic* of place.

Proprioception is thus a process of the body incorporating the intensive elements of its environment—its sensory data into its awareness and understanding of its place within space. For Olson, the intensity of a place is explored by means of what Deleuze and Guattari call “legwork”—the nomadic practice of traversing the landscape and responding proprioceptively to it in order to find direction and purpose. Legwork is explored in Deleuze and Guattari’s “Treatise on Nomadology” in *A Thousand Plateaus*. As outlined in my introduction, nomadology involves the movement of agential vectors across planes of “smooth space.” Smooth space stands in contrast to striated space, wherein the landscape is viewed as a planiform, homogenized surface consisting of fixed points that are assigned definite values and can be “counted” according to traditional geographic and cartographic means. Land so precisely calculated and lineally striated, and viewed from a universalized external perspective, allows for space to be readily reproduced. On the contrary, smooth space resists such totalizing impulses by disallowing an externalized point of view. As Deleuze and Guattari explain,

Smooth space is a field without [parallel] conduits or channels. A field, a heterogeneous smooth space, is wedded to a very particular type of multiplicity: nonmetric, acentred, rhizomatic multiplicities that occupy space without ‘counting’ it and ‘can be explored only by legwork.’ They do not meet the visual condition of being observable from a point in space external to them; an example

of this is the system of sounds or even of colours, as opposed to Euclidean space.  
(409)

Moving through smooth space “by legwork” thus involves traveling *intensely* as opposed to *extensively*, for smooth space is “an intensive rather than extensive space, one of distances, not of measures and properties” (479). At its core, the legwork of nomadology involves a spatial epistemology that privileges place-specific, local knowledges and spatial experimentation. In this cartographic mode, space is traversed using what Deleuze and Guattari call “local operations” belonging to the particularities of the landscape and the bodies that move through it, as opposed to general or absolute systems of knowledge, which are employed by the State to organize and control the movement of its citizens.

These local knowledges are what Deleuze and Guattari call a “nomos,” as opposed to the “logos” of State rule. In the context of Olson’s work, it is significant to note that Deleuze and Guattari connect the concept of “logos” to the polis or city-state, a bounded territory governed by rules. Nomos, in contrast, “stands in opposition to the law or the polis” as a “space without borders or enclosure . . . the backcountry, a mountainside, or the vague expanse around a city” (420). To be clear, the nomadological lens seems to be inaccurate in describing Olson’s rooted relationship to his beloved polis in Gloucester; however, there are elements of nomadology that shed light on the spirit of place that Olson is attempting to recover. As mentioned previously, Olson certainly adheres to the ancient Greek definition of polis as a bounded area of land, but his poethic of place therein also adds an element of human movement and action upon the land, such that the landscape becomes an ecology of human and nonhuman vectors.

This conception of place as a confluent ecology between humans and the landscape—along with the traversal of space by means of legwork, which will be discussed momentarily in

*Maximus*—aligns Olson’s work with nomadology. As Deleuze and Guattari argue, nomads are engaged in a coproductive relationship with the landscape they inhabit and move through: “nomads make the desert no less than they are made by it” (420). Because nomads continually move through space in their mobile existence, their place is defined by movement and motion along various points in space. In this way, nomadology extends de Certeau’s discussion of the practice of place as discussed in my introduction, since rather than sedentary spaces such as cities, which have roads and walkways that govern the movement of its inhabitants, the nomad operates in smooth, open space, without fixed patterns of movement. Thus, Olson’s polis may not be nomadological in the obvious sense that it is a geographic site and a city; however, Deleuze and Guattari’s analysis is useful in exploring the ways in which Olson challenges traditional senses of space and place, especially since he feels that place is under attack by the larger “polis” of the nation-state. As a fishing town, Gloucester is a site of nomadological relation between land and life; since the people and their trade, in conjunction with the moving cycle of fishing seasons, come to shape and define the land, Gloucester thus resists the abstract and static space of the nation. Deleuze and Guattari’s concept of “nomadology” is not meant to be an accurate portrayal of actual nomadic peoples; rather, their treatise outlines an alternative mode of being-in-the-world and a theoretical framework of alternative spatial production that is resistant to State ideologies of spatial control and regulation. By infusing his sense of place with a “morality of motion,” Olson is able to articulate a sense of place that ideally remains unmanageable or “unknowable” by the nation-state, and is particular to the people of Gloucester as they grow and change in concert with the natural processes of the landscape they inherit and inhabit.

Olson's research into the geological bedrock of Gloucester—which will be examined in the following section—allows him to create a historical map of place that is founded on the natural facts and processes of the earth. However, since Olson's conception of place involves the intimate interactions *between* the self and the landscape, it is significant to outline the ways in which Olson creates subjective maps of the local by means of moving through it. Olson's insistence that "a poem . . . ain't dreamt until it walks" ("A Foot" 269) establishes a direct connection between poetic creation and movement through local space. In *Maximus*, Olson directly aligns this practice of legwork with Herodotean notions of spatial epistemology, "to be an historian as Herodotus was, looking / for oneself for the evidence of / what is said" (*The Maximus* I.100). In the poem "Letter, May 2, 1959," Olson uses his body as a tool to map out the colonial contours of space in the area of the old Meeting House area of the early Gloucester settlers in "paces."<sup>76</sup> He then translates this corporeal measurement through space into the typography of the page:

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<sup>76</sup> As Butterick points out, this poem "is a mapping of the area of Gloucester formerly called Meeting House Plain, near the early settlers' first meetinghouse, just east of the Annisquam River and about a mile north, via Washington Street, of the harbor" (*A Guide* 204).

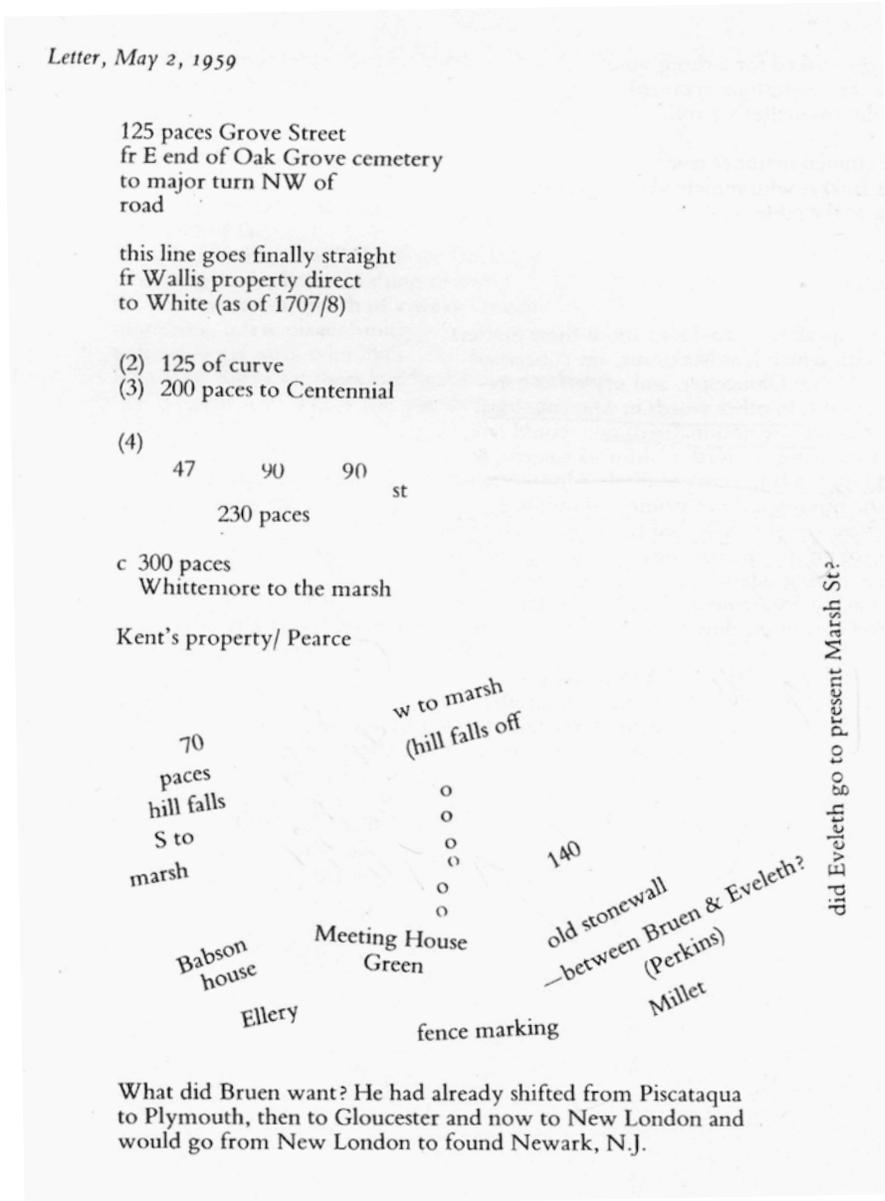


Figure 3. Olson, Charles. "Letter, May 2, 1959." *The Maximus* I.145.

Olson's poetic cartography here is hardly an accurate, Euclidean measurement of space; rather, Olson measures by means of *nomos*, approximations and intensities from within, and movement throughout, the environment. This pacing out of the place reinserts the body as a scale and measure in the creation of place. As such, in the map, Olson registers the distance from "Kent's property" to "Babson / house" as being "70 / paces/ hill falls / S to / marsh" (I.145). This

cartography fuses the past and present sites of place; Olson attempts to map the area both in its present state and how it would have appeared at the time of settlement. Many buildings and sites mentioned in the poem are no longer existent or have moved, so Olson goes back to this crucial site of Gloucester's early "place" to gain perspective in the present on the past. Hence, as Olson observes, "this line goes finally straight / fr Wallis property direct / to White (as of 1707/8)" (I.145). These two properties were owned by early residents of the area; the White house was moved to another location, and so hence his approximation of the date "(as of 1707/8)" (Butterick 206). Without the original landmarks of old, Olson must navigate the old place of the meetinghouse in accordance to his present bodily motions and movement. The "legwork" Olson performs throughout *Maximus* fits into the category of "nomad" science that Deleuze and Guattari establish as an opposition to "State" or "royal" science. According to Deleuze and Guattari, nomad science (*nomos*) is opposed to royal science (*logos*), wherein absolutes and constants are sought as truth. By contrast, nomad science is fluid, experimental, and relational to the individual, as "it is not exactly a question of extracting constants from variables but of placing the variables themselves in a state of continuous variation" (369).

Olson is attentive to such variation as he walks through the area surrounding the Meeting House. In his analysis of the poem, Sherman Paul contends that it is infused with "the almost overwhelming despair of Maximus' meditation on beginnings-and-ends" (*Olson's* 173). In the middle of the poem, Olson ruminates on "The Diesels / [that] shake the sky" and laments that "it's the earth which / now is strange." He also complains of being "interfused / with the rubbish / of creation," and these despairing references call to mind the construction of the Route 128 and the bridge connecting Gloucester with the mainland. While I take Paul's point about Olson's despair in the poem, I would argue that the poem is a meditation that focuses not just on

“beginnings-and-ends,” but more so on the process in between these points, to which the pacing of the area in the beginning of the poem attests. There is certainly a felt sense of distress in these lines, but this complaint is answered in the poem with Olson’s radical presence within the landscape, his (re)creation of it in his pacing and in his imagination. So, while he states that he is “interfused / with the rubbish / of creation I hear,” that rubbish is distant, is hearsay, is not part of the present creation of place that is immediately underhand in the process of the poem.

The variation and experimentation of nomad science is also seen in Olson’s typography—in his poetic map of the place, he signifies the “old stonewall” using the letter “o” serially in a disconnected string. By doing so, the topology of language and land come together *par excellence*, for Olson mimics the morphology of the land using letters, the atoms of language. The letter “o” approximately mimics the shape of the stones making up the wall, and their jagged appearance on the page mimics the consolidated stones as a wall. From these “non-Euclidean / roughnesses,” (*The Maximus* II. 104), Olson gains a view of place that is experiential and subjective to the movement of his body within space.<sup>77</sup>

Olson indeed makes an effort to “know” the historical and geological topography of the land through his palimpsest of different maps that join the local with the global. His focus, however, is always pointed toward the particularity of the local. Aside from consulting maps of the area by others, Olson kept a densely marked survey map of the area that he produced, and continued to build on throughout his poetic career. When asked in a lecture about the particularities of the local included on the map, Olson explains that “each one of them is the extent of the property of each of the houses that I was able to start with, the exact location in rods and poles of this marvelous fellow named Barchelder, who did this with chains—they called

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<sup>77</sup> Whereas “Euclidean” geometry or space often refers, in a general sense, to a rigid quantifiable system based on flat, linear conception of space, “non-Euclidean” space is nonlinear and multidimensional. In discourse, “non-Euclidean” is often used to refer to measurement in space that is less strictly definable and more subjective.

them chains—for measurement. (They do still.) ... I just found that I could be extremely precise about something” (*Muthologos I*, 188). In the poem, “Of the Parsonsese,” Olson describes another method of early spatial measurement that is based on approximation and movement within the landscape: the practice of measuring distances by rudimentary instruments of “rods” or “poles” found in his geographical research of the area. As Olson observes, “19 rods of land called the Garden ... from / the house there a line to begin / fr the rock to a great rock by / the Spring which is abt 10 poles” (II.63-II.64). Rods, poles, and chains were imperial units of measurement used in the 16<sup>th</sup> century by surveyors (Hey 480). These simple measuring tools are rudimentary by modern standards, but it is significant for my discussion here that they are active means of measuring space. Without the body, rods and chains are inert objects that do not in themselves possess measuring abilities; however, they become activated as units of measure when repeatedly laid on the ground by a moving body.

While Olson’s mapping of place by means of “local operations”—paces, rods, and chains as units of measurement—may seem to be approximate in terms of the context of maps, which are traditionally supposed to be accurate representations, it is significant that Olson sees these local measurements of space as “extremely precise.” That is, such measurements do not appear as “absolutes” on a map, but as measurements-in-the-world and on the ground of experience they are more accurate to the place as it is lived and felt in real time. Robert Duncan offers support for this statement; in discussing “Letter, May 2, 1959,” he writes:

Olson in Maximus, ‘Letter, May 2, 1959,’ paces off boundary lines; and yet a poet has told me this ceases to be proper to poetry. But surely, everywhere, from whatever poem, choreographies extend into actual space. In my imagination I go through the steps the poet takes so that the area of a township appears in my

reading; were I to go to the place and enact the text, I would come into another dimension of the poetry in which Gloucester would speak to me. (*Bending* v)

Duncan's defense of Olson's poetic si(gh)ting of place here is significant; in the face of the critique that Olson's pacing "ceases to be proper to poetry," Duncan turns this statement on its head to suggest that poetry, in its ideal form, is a *poethic*, one in which the field of the page corresponds to actual lived geographies. Not only does the poem correspond with the lived place in which it is situated, it creates further imaginings of the place within the mind of the reader, as Duncan attests. These further perceptions of place—the space-time specifics of the poem, and the created places conjured in the mind of the reader—create a layered, living conception of human place.

This local manner of "knowing" the land is an individualized stance that melds the topographical specificity of the landscape with the corporeal subjectivity of the poet/*flâneur*. The poet walking through the landscape and translating the spatiality of the local into poetry is a primary field-based methodology in the manner of William Carlos Williams in *Paterson*.<sup>78</sup> Olson's walking through the site of his place thus presents an alternative cartographic mode, a way of mapping place that is founded on the experiential body moving through space and responding to the local environment. According to de Certeau, the act of the *flâneur* walking through cityspace is a rhetorical practice wherein the walker gains intimate knowledge of the space they are in by means of a view from "ground level, with footsteps" (*The Practice* 97). Since the walker can resist the organizational order of space by means of walking around barriers and cutting across streets, the *flâneur* transforms the act of walking into an art form of performed

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<sup>78</sup> Indeed, Olson is operating in a tradition of writing (and knowing) the land by walking, a methodology practiced by Thoreau and, more significantly for Olson, William Carlos Williams. In *Paterson*, specifically the poem "Sunday in the Park," Williams as *flâneur* walks the streets and records both natural and human activity. Such "field work" provides a subjective access point to the local.

desire: “the act of walking is to the urban system what the speech act is to language” (98).

Although de Certeau’s analysis specifically considers urban space, and how walkers transform the rules of organization therein, his commentary is also applicable to Olson’s project in the local polis. Since in *Maximus* Olson explores ways of enacting resistance to the increased homogenization of local space by the capitalist agenda of the nation, his transformations of space by walking enact similar spatial transgressions to de Certeau’s *flâneur*, and similarly point to the ways in which human actions of practicing place can produce a space that is inflected with human desire. Indeed, as Deleuze argues, “Geography is no less mental and corporeal than physical in movement” (*Dialogues II* 38). As I argue in the next chapter, Duncan’s manner of practicing place involves a process of “reading-writing and writing-reading”; in *The Maximus Poems*, Olson-as-*flâneur* enacts a practice of place by means of *reading-walking* and *walking-reading*, which corresponds to his Herodotean manner of *istorin*. As Creeley observes, “It is a consistent fact with Olson that he does use his legs, and does depend on what his own instincts and intelligence can discover for him” (“Introduction,” *Selected* 4). For Olson, to move through the landscape by legwork is to establish place rooted in individualized experience.

Olson’s siting of the polis in Gloucester has much to do with his views of the importance of Western migration; non-Euclidean maps were the cartographic methodology by which the early settlers and explorers to the “New” World attempted to figure the new space they were encountering.<sup>79</sup> I will discuss the relation between Gloucester’s history of migration in greater detail in the following section, but an introduction here will contextualize my discussion of the “sited” polis. In the second volume of *Maximus*, Olson proclaims, “I am making a mappemunde. It is to contain my being” (II.87). A “mappemunde” is a map of the world, and with this

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<sup>79</sup> There are quotation marks around the “New” in New World because, as we know, the Western world was never “new,” in that it was inhabited by Indigenous peoples well into prehistoric time. Therefore, the term “New” cloaks the violence of colonialism in the language of territorial conquest and triumph.

reference, Olson alludes to his earlier poem in the collection, “*On first looking out through Juan de la Cosa’s Eyes*.” As Butterick correctly notes, Juan de la Cosa was the cartographer who accompanied Columbus to his first travels to the new world, and he was responsible for making one of the first world maps (the mappemunde) that included both Europe and the New World (*A Guide* 115-116). The first line of the poem establishes Olson’s attempt at a past “eye-view” of place, the one of the approaching explorers as they came to the now Gloucester harbour. Olson’s interest in this early “eye-view” of place is certainly an attempt to locate Gloucester within a historical discourse of discovery, but it also connects the early practice of mapmaking as non-Euclidean practice of self-discovery.

Rather than rely upon predrawn maps or figures, Juan de la Cosa drew his maps based only on his “eye-view” of the place, a practice of mapmaking that is related to what Pound calls, in “Canto LIX,” “periplum, not as land looks on a map / But as sea bord seen by men sailing” (324). *Periplous* (Pound Latinized the term) describes the manner in which land looks from the deck of a sailing ship; as such, the vague lines of the shoreline, along with its landmarks and ports, are recorded in hand-drawn maps. Without preconceived charts, explorers coming to the New World navigated the seas by intuition and response to the environment; in this way, it is thus a very active mode of cartography, akin in methodology to Olson’s pacing (although larger in scope). Periplum thus intimately relates to *istorin*, the process of finding and encountering place for oneself, because it relies on immediate experience and continuous discovery, rather than preconceived “facts” of a place. It is an accurate and active form of measurement since it registers the landscape as it appears, *when it appears*, from the subjective viewpoint of the one experiencing it. As Pound puts it, periplum is “correct geography; not as you would find it if you had a geography book and a map, but as it would be . . . as a coasting sailor would find it” (*ABC*

43-44). The periplum contextualizes Olson’s practice of place, his siting of the polis by means of walking through it, since the drawn maps of explorers register the map-maker’s firsthand experience of the place—an experience Olson was attempting to mimic in his present moment.

Indeed, for Olson, the movement of imperial explorers and ships across the Atlantic represents a naturalized progression, and a nomadic movement of human peoples westward.<sup>80</sup> In the third volume of *Maximus*, Olson stresses the generative qualities of human migration:

Migration in fact (which is probably  
as constant in history as any one thing: migration  
is the pursuit by animals, plants & men of a suitable  
—and gods as well—& preferable  
environment; and leads always to a new center. (III. 176)

For Olson, migration is a naturalized process of coming into place, for all beings on earth, human and nonhuman, all search for a “preferable / environment.” This process is regenerative for Olson; migration always leads to a “new center,” which is why Gloucester is so significant as a site of the arrival of the first explorers on American land, as I discuss further in the next section. The linear version of the poem quoted above does not do justice to the nomadic movement Olson implies; as such, Butterick includes the manuscript version of this poem on III.104:

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<sup>80</sup> With the focus on property and territory in Olson’s maps, it must be noted that the colonial violence upon the local ground and sea is left relatively ignored in *The Maximus Poems*. By means of “looking out through Juan de la Cosa’s eyes,” Olson seeks a view of his place as first experienced by imperialist explorers; he gives precedence to their triumphant journey of exploration over the violent experience of the Indigenous inhabitants of the land. Nowhere in *Maximus* is the point of view of the Indigene given voice; as explained in the following section, there are Indigenous myths alluded to in the collection, but aside from appropriating the culture of the native American Indians, no other references to their sense of the place upon colonial encounter is considered.

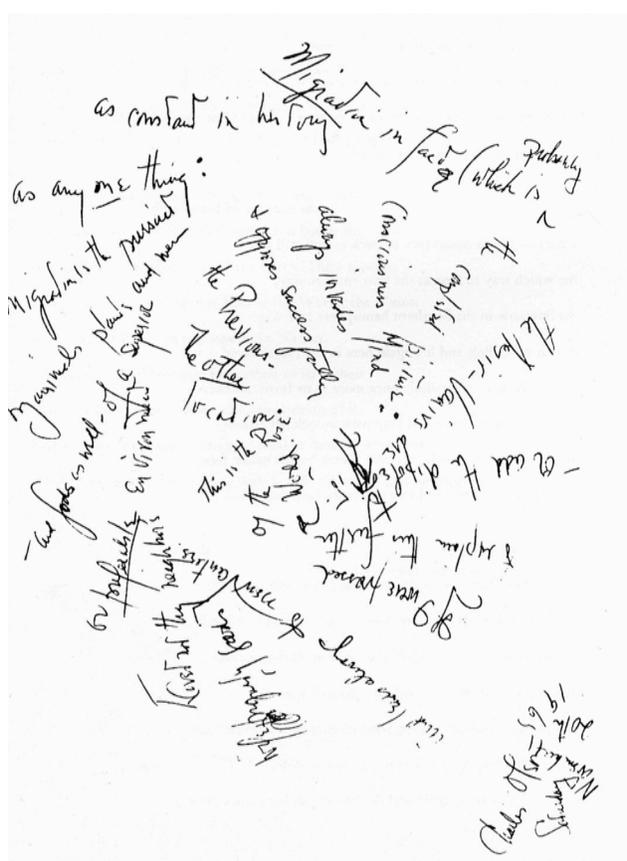


Figure 4. Olson, Charles. *The Maximus III*. 104.

In this version, the text itself “migrates” by forming a swirling vortex of movement. Olson explicitly unites form and content in this regard, for the kinetics of the poem are felt in its movement on the page, and the migration of the text quite literally “leads” to a centre. For Olson, migration, as a human act, represents proprioception on a global scale: the movement of the explorers westward, measuring their way by responding to the newly discovered environment, represents both an acute spatial awareness and a model of self-action (a point that will be dealt with further in the following section) that Olson sees as missing from his current place.

Olson develops the tradition of a place-based, embodied poetics because he feels that a reestablished contact between the human body and place it occupies is the only way forward in the postwar milieu. The spectacle of consumer capital, which has “spray-gunned” (Olson,

*Maximus I.2*) reality, has disoriented the body away from its skin, and its sense of being in touch with others, as I discussed in the previous section. As “a way to restore to man some of his lost relevance,” by which Olson means the lost corporeality of experience after the Socratics, Olson proposes the “the skin itself, the meeting edge of man and external reality” (“Human Universe” 161) as the imperative site of poetic creation and the production of place, the literal means by which humans can become retuned to their environment. Since the skin is the point of contact between the self and its reality, it is thus a site of experience and experimentation. It is the means by which humans create and improvise with place, in concert with the body’s feedback to the particular intensities within the local environment.<sup>81</sup>

Although problematic, Olson found a reconnected sense of one “being with the flesh” in the Mayan people, with whom he encountered while doing fieldwork in the Yucatán. As he recalls, the Maya

wear their flesh with that difference which the understanding that it is common leads to ... the individual who peers out from that flesh is precisely himself, is a curious wandering animal like me—it is so very beautiful how animal human eyes are when the flesh is not worn so close it chokes, how human and individuated the look comes out of a human eye when the house of it is not exaggerated. (“Human Universe” 158)

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<sup>81</sup> Olson was introduced to the concept of cybernetic feedback in 1949 while attending a lecture by Natasha Goldowski. Mathematician Norbert Wiener was the first to conceptualize feedback, which is described as the circulatory process by which sensory data is absorbed into the body via the brain and nervous system, and then is passed through the muscles to then “act” on the external world. Simultaneously, upon reception of these signs, the system compensates for error and irregularities according to that environment; this process ensures improved functioning in the system while maintaining a “continuous” path of action. In terms of his polis, Olson was interested in an ecological model of self-regulation whereby a system—an individual or community—can have control over its actions through sensory signals perceived in the environment. Hence Olson’s pleas to the present people of Gloucester to heed the “feedback” of the current “mu-sick” of capitalist culture—these signs of the decay and decline of subjective place need to be acknowledged so the people can “yield” to place.

Olson's sentiments here are certainly problematic in their proposition of the "commonality" expressed by the Mayan people. However, he sees within them something that was lost to the humans of his polis in its current state—a genuine sense of humans acting authentically with and within their bodies, not just as pawns "neoned in" to the fabric of their space. This is not to say that Olson is against progression and forward movement, far from it—his concern is that the rampant consumerism of the era leads to an "estrangement from that which is most familiar," "that" being the most local of places: the body. There must be forward action in the world, and change, but this action must come from an organic community of individuals who are acutely aware of themselves and their role in their surroundings. The Maya, then, offer Olson a model of getting back into place, of living within the familiar limits of the experiencing, perceiving body. It is this base somatic fact of place that Olson searches for while sifting and citing his polis. As Creeley puts it in his "Introduction" to Olson's *Collected Prose*, "[Olson] was fact of his own insistence, 'Come into the world.'" (xv-xvi).

### **"I am an archaeologist of morning": Citing Place in the Field**

At the root (or stump) of what *is*, is no longer THINGS but what happens BETWEEN things, these are the terms of the reality contemporary to us—and the terms of what we are.<sup>82</sup>

—Charles Olson

As Olson writes to Creeley in 1953, the core of the poems that he seeks to write is firmly located in Gloucester, "that ground there, in front of my own damned porch" (qtd. in Butterick, *A Guide* xxxvii). For Olson, the history of a place informs its present; therefore, place, like history, is not a static given singly sourced from discourse, but emerges from a dialogic, ongoing human record. Although the landscape is a geographical text, it is also a *human* text; as such, his

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<sup>82</sup> "The Escaped Cock" 138; original emphasis.

practice of place also involves a rhetorical practice of citing place through allusions and references to a wide variety of sources that inflect the local with a sedimented cultural foundation. Thus, in *The Special View of History*, Olson sets out to reformulate the parameters of history so it is no longer uselessly locked in time, but resounds within the living local: “History is the new localism, a polis to replace the one which was lost in various stages all over the world from 490 B.C. on” (25). Following Herodotus, Olson’s attempt to recover a sense of place in the polis involves gathering the various cites—the local myths, stories, and histories (both those already established within Gloucester and those created by Olson) that make a place not simply a site of existence, but a specific space-time of living culture. As Olson writes to Elaine Feinstein May 1959, “‘landscape’—the other part of the double of Image to ‘noun.’ By landscape I mean what ‘narrative’; scene; event; climax; crisis; hero; development; posture; all that meant—all the substantive of what we call literary” (“Letter” 252). According to Olson, place is a landscape of text; the means by which place is sited in the landscape is certainly significant, but it is not the whole story of place. Following Sauer, Olson cites the ways in which humans and their culture are coproductive of place.

Olson’s poetry is infamously rigorous in its interdisciplinary research; he tirelessly mined the vast historical and cultural landscape of Gloucester in order to “ground” his polis in *The Maximus Poems*. In his *A Guide to the Maximus Poems*, Butterick gives an exhaustive account of Olson’s research efforts; he points out that Olson “trained as a scholar before he became seriously a poet,” and he describes *The Maximus Poems* as “certainly of the library” (xvii; original emphasis).<sup>83</sup> *Digging*, while being the primary methodology of Olson’s spatial

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<sup>83</sup> As Butterick notes, in his search for a scholarly grounding for his life work, Olson researched “the town records in the vault of the Gloucester City Clerk’s office, deeds and wills among the county probate records at Salem, an account book at the local historical society, documents on microfilm, borrowed family papers. He used libraries up and down the Massachusetts coast between Gloucester and Boston” (xvii-xviii).

hermeneutic, is also the manner in which he comes to understand *place* as a constellated series of sites encompassing his own life memories, the geological landscape, and the social, economic and political history of the land.<sup>84</sup> As Olson ruminates in “A Bibliography on America for Ed Dorn”:

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

And

then U KNOW everything else very fast: one saturation job (it might take 14 years). And you're in, forever. (“A Bibliography” 307; original spelling and emphasis)

Olson's archival impulses signify his efforts to exhaustively “know” the land of the Gloucester in order to have unimpeded access to the ground from which he speaks.<sup>85</sup> For Olson, this local knowledge extends outward, unlocking wisdom into “everything else”; as he argues, an intimate knowledge of the place from which one speaks lays the groundwork for an intensive practice of place and practice of living.<sup>86</sup> To be sure, Olson's metaphor of “digging” is inherently patriarchal in its invasive epistemological circumscription of the land; however, the interpretive model he presents reveals a potentially transgressive sense of place in which the self and space are agential

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<sup>84</sup> As critic Paul Christensen rightly points out, however, Olson's stubborn pursuit of thoroughness often backfired against his efforts: “Olson was impatient to argue his position with whatever lay close at hand, and the result was that he alienated much of his potential audience by the very flimsiness of his arguments, the slipshod scholarship and hasty generalization that characterize some of his most polemical writings. He wrote well and with passion, but his arguments sometimes depended upon a very personal reading of his sources ... But despite his clumsiness, the blind leaps of speculation, the inaccuracies that crept into his statistics and dates, he threw into the face of the experts and specialists a quality of stubborn courage which is invigorating” (10).

<sup>85</sup> For an excellent, in-depth investigation into Olson's “fieldwork” methodology, specifically his “site-based historiography,” see Lytle Shaw, *Fieldworks: From Place to Site in Postwar Poetics*.

<sup>86</sup> The masculinist tone and diction of Olson's explication is undeniable, and it harkens back to the early American view of the land as simultaneously feminine and empty, waiting to be dug into and plundered—indeed, to be *known*—by the white male gaze. I will return to the problematic of gender within Olson's polis later in this chapter.

and co-productive.<sup>87</sup> Accordingly, this section will illustrate the ways in which Olson complements his sited place with cultural citations that inflect the site of place with a living practice of communal culture. Specifically, Olson's choice of Maximus as his spokesperson for the collective, his relation of Gloucester with the ancient city of Tyre, his spatial metaphors of resistant community that are naturalized within the local geography and geology, as well as his digging into the local myths and stories of the place will come together in this section in order to demonstrate Olson's practice of place, which is centralized in the geographical and imaginative construct of the polis.

As I discussed in the last section, Olson's choice of Gloucester as the site of his polis has much to do with the place's imperial history, as a newly formed "center" representative of progressive human action in the form of migration. The place's history grounds the polis in a spatial trajectory from Europe to the New World; however, because the polis is also an imagined and cited construct, Olson connects the site to another historical place in time: that of the ancient Phoenician polis of Tyre, which Olson considered to be the sister city of the polis in Gloucester, Massachusetts. For Olson, the site of Gloucester is an ideal place to recover American origins, since he sees it is the "last shore" of Western human migration and thus the locus of a particularly American place "afterwards" and "since." As he explains to Herbert Kenny:

why I chose to use Maximus of Tyre as the figure of speech, is that I regard Gloucester as the final movement of the earth's people, the great migratory thing ... migration ended in Gloucester ... the motion of man upon the earth has a line, an oblique, northwest-tending line, and Gloucester was the last shore in that sense. The fact that the continent and the series of such developments have

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<sup>87</sup> This statement will be explored in the later chapter on Daphne Marlatt, who explicitly engages with Olson's masculinist poetic of place in her poetics.

followed, have occupied three hundred and some-odd years, doesn't take away that primacy or originary nature that I'm speaking of. I think it's a very important fact. And I of course use it as a bridge to Venice and back from Venice to Tyre, because of the departure from the old static land mass of man which was the ice, cave, Pleistocene man and early agricultural man, until he got moving, until he got towns. So that the last *polis* or city is Gloucester. (*Muthologos II* 161-162; original emphasis)

I will discuss Olson's citing of the polis through the figure of Maximus later in this section. For now, it is significant to point out how Gloucester is a "cite" of another historical port-city and site of communal-organization. Olson's citing of Tyre within the polis of Gloucester is significant not only because of their similarities in terms of the human collective rooted in a specific place, on a self-contained island, but also because the story of this ancient city serves as a fable for Olson's current sense of place in distress. For Olson, resistance to postwar capital must be enacted spatially—"root [people] in root place" (*The Maximus* I.11-I.12). Accordingly, he utilizes a parallel example of historical geographic resistance in Tyre order to root his present polis to a place in time where the people stood their ground to protect their place against the imposing politics of the mainland. As I mentioned in the first section, Tyre was once an island until Alexander the Great built a causeway to connect it with the mainland, thereby facilitating his siege of the city and the ultimate downfall of this originary polis. Olson's imagined connection between the fallen island of Tyre, and the imposition of the nation-state upon Gloucester by means of the building of Route 128, drives his felt need to resurrect a created and rooted sense of place; as a historical example of the potential loss of the polis, an allegory of

disaster that is reflective of the present reality within Gloucester, Olson hopes it will motivate the polis towards change.

Gloucester, like the fated Tyre, is under the threat of universalization. In his first annotation of “Gloucester” in his *A Guide to the Maximus Poems*, Butterick references a lecture given by Olson at Goddard College in 1962, in which he poses the following question to his audience:

Do you know, yourselves, enough of the history of Tyre to know that the only thing in the world that confronted the universalization that Alexander proposed—which I think is the great complement to the present—was Tyre? It so refused to be knocked down by this Macedonian athlete that it was the sole place in the world which bucked him, and it took Alexander...was it three or four years to reduce Tyre[?] (qtd. in Butterick 9).

Here, Olson commends Tyre for being an ideal self-contained polis, communally strong in its particularized values and resistant to the imposition of “universalization.” He then holds Tyre up as a “great complement to the present,” a model of resistance for his polis in Gloucester. It is significant to note that Gloucester’s resistance in the present is largely imagined for Olson, since his writing of the polis will not (or cannot) halt the progression of postwar culture. However, just as Tyre resisted Alexander for as long as it could, Olson’s hope is that through a collective sense of place, Gloucester may be able to hold its values against the rising enemy of the state, who wishes to “advertise you / out” (*The Maximus* I.4). It is Olson’s aesthetic imagining of place—his practice of place as both a geographical and imagined construct—that infuses his polis with a spirit of resistance to fix the people in a present to which they feel rooted in an increasingly rootless culture.

Further, it is significant for Olson's spatial imaginary that both Tyre and Gloucester are islands; as topographically separate, the setting of the island naturalizes the resistance of these places to any totalizing sense of space, since they are geographically autonomous. As I mentioned previously, Gloucester is an island isolated from mainland Massachusetts. The town is geographically situated on Cape Ann but is separated by the Annisquam River to the West. In Olson's view, the spatial isolation of Gloucester from the rest of the nation gave the town independence from the capitalist development of the nation, and this small place "away" from the nation—even though he demonstrates how it is imbricated in the national history—also allows Olson to elaborate on the town as an imagined space of individual and communal freedom. As he writes in the poem "CHRONICLES":

These  
 are the chronicles  
 of an imaginary  
 town  
  
 placed as an island  
 close to the shore. (II.103)

It is significant that Gloucester's topographical location as separate from the main landmass is not due to geological conditions and processes; rather, Gloucester is a human-made island. In 1643, a proposal was voted on in favour of the project known as "The Cut" by Reverend Richard Blynman. The project proposed to connect the Annisquam River to the Gloucester Harbour by cutting a canal into the beach, making it a profitable passage for merchants (Butterick, *A Guide* 131). In the poem, Olson thus puns on the word "placed" to mean the city as located "in its

place,” but also literally placed by humans as an artificial island. Despite the island being “created” by humans—a fact that coincides with Sauer’s *landschaft* conception of place, in which humans actively shape the land over time—Gloucester’s status as an island makes it an ideal fishing port, so this human shaping of the land helps the development of the inhabitants, and comes to shape the meaning of their presence in that place.

The early *Maximus* poems are the venue in which Olson most pointedly addresses Gloucester as an ideal polis; in “Letter 3,” for example, Olson urges its citizens to value the particularity of their locale, “this rare place,” the “root person in root place” (I.11, 1.12). By addressing the city itself, “root city / let them not make you / as the nation is” (I.11), as well as those who threaten it, “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” (I.9), Olson insists upon the value of the community in Gloucester, which he valorizes for its historical isolation from capitalist control. That is, according to Olson, Gloucester is “placed” as an island—and as a “root city,” an originary *polis*—because it is insular from the rest of America, which is succumbing to capitalist corruption.

As Olson observes, both Tyre and Gloucester are islands that are “close to the shore”—they are not isolated islands but have a relationship with the mainland much like a colony to an empire. Accordingly, these places occupy a unique spatiality in relation to the mainland—they are separate and can enjoy some autonomy, but they are always within arm’s reach of the politics and encroaching reach of the nation. The fact that Gloucester is “just off shore,” however, allows Olson to imagine a connection between this landscape autonomy and the historical penchant for self-action of its inhabitants, as I will discuss in later in this section. Olson “cites” the autonomy of the polis by using other spatial metaphors, however, that are connected to its status as an

island, as an originary polis in the New World, and as a “new center” of generative human collectivity and action. Specifically, Olson “cites” the polis using metaphors from the natural world, referring to it as a “tansy city” (I.11) and as a “terminal moraine” (II.5). These metaphors, in particular, are connected in that they root and route the polis as a naturalized point of contact with the New World, and they also point to the spirit of autonomy and self-organization that Olson celebrates within the place.

In Maximus’s first plea to the people of Gloucester to “yield” to their sense of place, Olson speaks of the polis metaphorically using the botanical conceit of the “tansy.” Olson was interested in botany, and as such *The Maximus Poems* (as well as Olson’s other work) contain various references to the flora of the landscape, specifically the local species of vegetation that are native to New England. As Maximus proclaims in section 3 of “Letter 3”: “o tansy city, root city / let them not make you / as the nation is (I.11). Olson puns on the word “root” to signify the city’s colonial origins as the main fishing port in the United States. He also connects this “root” to the weed “tansy,” which is, significantly, a rhizomatic plant (Royer and Dickinson 59). In contrast to trees, rhizomatic plants (such as the potato) have no central root but a series of nodes that spread their roots horizontally and adapt to the contours of their environment.<sup>88</sup>

Deleuze and Guattari use the concept of the rhizome as a trope to characterize the movements and ideology of nomadic cultures. In *A Thousand Plateaus*, they contrast the nomadic rhizome to statist root-tree structures. As opposed to the vertical hierarchy of the State

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<sup>88</sup> Although the tansy grows in the New England area, Olson reveals to Donald Allen in 1963 that it was a species brought to Gloucester by the Dorchester settlers (Butterick, *A Guide* 22). As such, the tansy represents the migration of humans to the New World, and further serves to naturalize the process of human movement across the Atlantic, as previously discussed. This naturalization is supported by Olson’s equation of his autonomous polis with the weed: “we who throw down hierarchy, / who say the history of weeds / is a history of man” (I.94). Given Olson’s admiration for migration as a natural “history of man,” a human process of movement on the earth, as outlined in the last section, it is unsurprising that his research into botany offers natural models in the landscape for human migration upon it.

(in which the upwards growth of a tree is symbolic) the nomad negotiates space horizontally, arriving and departing between various paths as opposed to a fixed point:

The rhizome is reducible neither to the One nor the multiple ... It is composed not of units but of dimensions, or rather directions in motion. It has neither beginning nor end, but always a middle (milieu) from which it grows and which it overflows.  
(23)

Figured in the tansy, the rhizome provides Olson with a resistant model of place that is nonhierarchical and is collectively constructed, as opposed to privileging one central locus of growth. Figuring the polis as a rhizome also makes it irreducible to a singular origin, but rather a creative system of shifting relations wherein various sites and cites are coproductive of place.

The rhizome provides an alternative model of place that does not seek to hold permanent structures across time and place, but provides a system of ever-changing movement that continually generates new possibilities for growth. As an open system of “variation, expansion, conquest, capture, offshoots” (21), the city-as-rhizome is also alterable with time, which coincides with Olson’s guiding poethic “what does not change / is the will to change” (“The Kingfishers” 86). For Olson, the polis must change by means of holding strong to its values of self-organized action, lest it be flattened by the nation into abstract space for its capitalist scheme.

The tansy resists hierarchy in its rhizomatic structure; it is a singular plant but consists of several, independent nodes. It thus represents individuals connected to a larger, communal structure of which they are a part. In Deleuze and Guattari’s conception, the rhizome’s structure of interconnected individualities offers a line of flight from the totalizing control of territorial power and conquest. As Stephen Voyce confirms, the “tansy city” represents “a collectively

organized, self-managed community in contrast to the state's top-down rule of law" (71). As a rhizomatic weed, the tansy is hearty and stubborn, and prolific in growth; I would thus suggest, building on Voyce's point, that the tansy is a model of resistance also by means of being a spatialized metaphor, one whose headstrong stance in an environment serves to upset the progress of the infringing nation. In the opening section of "Letter 3," this spatial response is rendered visually on the page:

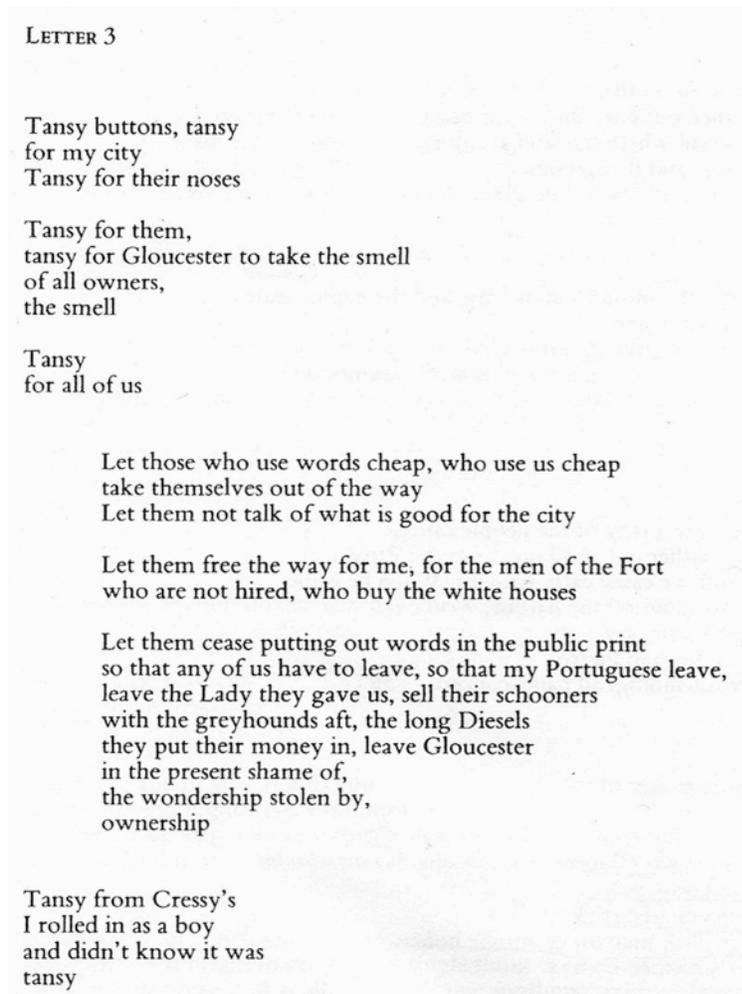


Figure 5. Olson, Charles. "Letter 3." *The Maximus I.9*.

As seen in this opening section, "tansy" becomes an anaphora that begins every left-justified "stanza" on the page (I.9). The middle sections of text connect the autonomous spirit of the tansy

with collective action: “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.” These sections, which appear as a cohesive block of text that is indented from the rest of the stanzas beginning with “tansy,” thus visually illustrate the tansy as a responsive poethic to the concerns impinged on the polis by the values of “cheap words” and top-down “ownership.” Throughout this section, the collective “us” is pitted against “those” and “them,” thus situating the plant as a collective force of will against “those” who threaten it. The sections beginning with “Let” appear to interrupt and impinge on the relentless “tansy” lines; however, the “tansy” gets the last word of the section as a response to and dismissal of this attempt at control in terms of the page’s territory. The last lines of the stanza beginning with “Let” and ending with “the wondership stolen by, / ownership” are responded to in the following stanza with an image of young Olson playing amongst the tansy as a child. This juxtaposition pits the unnatural force of ownership, which betrays the organic spirit of the community of the polis, with the natural image of the tansy, which grows wildly in the polis, and its attribution to the young author’s “wondership.”<sup>89</sup>

In the context of the homogenization of postwar space by the nation-state, the metaphor of the tansy as a deterritorialized spatial vector can be pushed further: as opposed to a neatly organized and controlled garden, the weed represents an unmanageable growth force that defies control by means of its multiplication. Olson makes note of the fact that the weed represents a heterogeneous force, as he tells Donald Allen that the tansy herb “doesn’t grow anymore at the same place but that is due to more efficient mowers, and the desire (like blacktop) to have anything smooth and of one sort of character” (qtd. in Butterick, *A Guide* 22-23). The tansy,

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<sup>89</sup> The tansy thus forms an interesting correlate with Robert Duncan’s vision of collective action in the collage, as will be examined in the next chapter. Duncan’s evocation of the lilac blossom as an anarchic symbol of collective action (and as representative of the resilience of natural laws in the face of the unnatural threat of war) in “Up Rising” can be connected to the tansy in this regard.

then, represents deterritorialized space *par excellence*, for left alone, it controls its own spatial trajectory. Its autonomous and prolific presence defies homogenous space. Gloucester as a “tansy city” is a metaphor for the ideal unmanageability of the polis by the hands of the nation and of its capitalist agenda. This is why, as Olson proclaims, “[w]e therefore celebrate TANSY MORE THAN BEFORE” (qtd. in Butterick, *A Guide* 23; original typography).

As an autonomous, migratory force, the tansy is related to another spatial metaphor that Olson uses to “cite” his polis: the “terminal moraine.” Olson’s conception of the moraine comes from his research into the geological processes of the local area, the primary source of which was Nathaniel Shaler’s *Geology of Cape Ann*. He makes his research practice explicit when, in the opening poem of volume two, Olson refers to Shaler’s book and writes, “Where it says excessively rough moraine” (II.1). In geological terms, a terminal moraine is a mound of sand and gravel left at the maximum advance of a glacier; as such, it represents a model of sedimented place in the polis. The polis has “primacy” in Olson’s spatial imaginary because, as I mentioned previously, its Atlantic shore was the last stop of the European explorers who reached the New World. It is thus the endpoint of a line through space and through history, but also the beginning site of a new sense of place, a “new center” that possesses a rich history from which to build a strong sense of local place. The movement of explorers across the Atlantic has brought both peoples and their histories with them, to be “emplaced” on the new settlements they created. As a “terminal moraine,” Gloucester thus represents the polis as a site of contact between the Old and “New” Worlds—where the history of the old accumulates into the New, and by means of “conrescence,” produces “new center[s]” and, literally speaking, new places. The moraine of Gloucester is terminal in that the advance of migration reaches Gloucester and roots itself there

in settlements, but it is not an “end point” in space; rather, it marks a rhizomatic opening, a progressive branching out, a new trajectory of enlightenment in the “New” World.

As the metaphors of the tansy and the terminal moraine demonstrate, the polis is more than its geographic coordinates; it represents a point in space from which cultural progression and the founding of authentic place can occur. Since Olson’s citing of place is heterogeneous in scope and spans time and space, his poetry of place is cited through an individual spokesperson, Maximus, who brings the dynamic field of the polis into articulation. Indeed, Maximus himself is an aggregate of many different cites. In the first volume, Olson mentions the 17<sup>th</sup> century carpenter and shipbuilder William Stevens as “the first Maximus.” For Olson, Stevens is the representative of a polis now past, but whose spirit still resonates within the present geography of the place. As Olson reflects in “Letter 7”:

This carpenter  
 must have been the first to see the tansy  
 take root, the fishing stages then at Cressy’s,  
 and the boats beaching  
 at Half Moon  
 ...  
 Anyhow, he was the first to make things,  
 not just live off nature (I.30-I.31)

Stevens represents the originary spirit of Gloucester’s early settlers—a time when the “tansy / [took] root.” As a cite of Maximus, Stevens had a “practice of the self”(I.31)—like Emerson’s self-reliant man, he is one who “made things” and fished, but did not exploit the land or its

people.<sup>90</sup> Significantly, the opening lines of this poem repeat the word “eyes” twice—again, Olson is playing on the word “eyes” to mean “I”s, a collection of individuals rooted in the polis. He could also be punning on “ayes,” as if to indicate a collective affirmation of Gloucester as a site of place. Certainly, Olson puns on the various “views” of Gloucester that make it a distinct place. Olson writes, “(Marsden Hartley’s / eyes—as Stein’s / eyes / Or that carpenter’s” (I.30). Both Marsden Hartley and Helen Stein are painters who spent time in Gloucester painting the landscape. The reference to “that carpenter” in the following line is Stevens the shipbuilder. Through these various “eyes,” Olson creates a moving image of the place through a collection of views and vantage points. Both the aesthetic eyes of the painters and the pragmatic, self-reliant eye of the carpenter together create an ideal image of the early Gloucester as art and life confounded in one place.

Maximus’s scope of the place is indeed expansive, as his name suggests. He is also the emblem for collectivity and *communitas* in the polis. Olson sites his “view” of the polis within an epic individual who moves through the place and acts as a vortex through which the local energies surge. As Butterick notes, Maximus

is Western man at the limit of himself, who no longer has a frontier other than himself and his extricable past, no farther west to go but to dig deeper where he stands, with the result that Gloucester is taken back, ‘compelled’ to its founding in 1623 by migrating European man, back to the Old Norse and the Algonquins, even farther back to the ice and Pleistocene Man.... (Butterick, *A Guide* xxi)

Maximus embodies Whitman’s American persona who is vast and contains multitudes, for he is an aggregate of different ideas and images, and is a conglomerate of multiple discourses ranging

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<sup>90</sup> In his 1841 essay, “Self Reliance,” Emerson outlines the qualities of self-contained “man” that is intuitive, resists conformity, and celebrates individual expression. The self-reliant man is also related to *istorin*, since he must discover his own path rather than following one laid before him by institutional authority.

from the scientific to the mythological.<sup>91</sup> Butterick describes Maximus as a “frontier” yet rooted “where he stands,” and this paradoxical positionality describes Olson’s practice of place in the polis. For indeed, as a terminal moraine but also a branching rhizome, the polis is at once rooted in its place but also a vector of outward movement. Maximus takes in the history of Gloucester and its “eyes” and creates a communal articulation of place. Given Maximus’s extensive mythologized presence within Olson’s work, it lies beyond the scope of this section to exhaust the ways in which Olson uses Maximus to “cite” the polis. However, it will be useful to contextualize his presence as a marker of collective place within the polis.

To be sure, there has been much critical debate as to the choice of Olson’s spokesperson. As will be discussed in the following chapter, Olson’s choice of human focus for his collection, rooted in Maximus, was the subject of major debate between himself and Robert Duncan. Duncan was at odds with Olson’s anthropomorphism, his choice of a human figure as the centre of the world and the cosmos and in control of its reality. However, as I will demonstrate in a moment, although Maximus is certainly modeled after a human being, Olson goes to great lengths to mythologize him as a “spirit” of the landscape and its people. Since one meaning of “cite” means to summon or “call to mind,” Olson utilizes Maximus as a conjured spirit, one that reminds the people of Gloucester of their communal values and cultural depth through his collective voice emanating from the local both past and present. As Fredman notes, the figure of Maximus counters Pound’s “method of self-aggrandizement” in *The Cantos* by conjuring a “posthumanist image of the human large enough to contain all possible powers but ready to fit

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<sup>91</sup> As Sherman Paul points out, For Olson, Maximus is also a Jungian archetype of human perfection. Specifically, he represents “homo maximus, Jung’s individuated man, the man who has realized the self, who, having reconciled the opposites of his nature, is whole” (*Olson’s Push* 118).

the shape of any self-contained individual” (*The Grounding* 51).<sup>92</sup> That is, Olson’s spokesperson is certainly a model of the self-contained human—as Olson’s reference to Stevens the carpenter suggests—but his dispersal into different guises and his prolific cultural foundations also make him an emblem of local culture in the polis.<sup>93</sup>

Olson’s choice of a male figure to relay the scope of his epic is indeed problematic, and has been exhaustively criticized. I will investigate challenges to such a gendered scope in later chapters of this project. At present, I am interested in how Olson articulates Maximus spatially in his work as a self-contained figure, as Fredman argues, but also one that extends outward into the landscape. Maximus’s titanic being encapsulates vast space and scope, yet he is firmly grounded in the *polis*—a communal ground of experience. Given Olson’s interest in geology and rooting the local within the distinct geography of place, one of the more interesting “cites” of Maximus for this discussion takes the form of the Hurrian epic hero Ullikummi, who is named in Olson’s work as “Diorite Man” in the third volume of the collection. It is significant to note that while Olson is certainly interested in the natural history of the site of his polis, he also considers it to be a *construct*. That is, Olson sites the polis with careful geological research that uncovers the distinct ground upon which the polis is built and how those particularities influenced the actions and culture of its people. Out of that research, Olson also establishes a creative theogony of place that fuses the particularities of the geological field with the mythological figure of Maximus and his “grounded” origins within the bedrock of Gloucester.

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<sup>92</sup> As Fredman usefully clarifies, “self-containment need not be insulation from other human beings or from nature ... Containment, as Olson imagines it, does not foster rigid isolation or defensive self-enclosure; it situates us resolutely in the common, making possible expansive gestures” (*The Grounding* 43).

<sup>93</sup> It is interesting to note that Olson connects the singular figure of Maximus to the Mayan relics he encountered in the Yucatán: “I never thought of it before but the advantage of a single human figure is a practice I’d have said I might have acquired from Mayan stele, or that thigh bone of Quetzalcoatl, which I possess, on which a single warrior is carved” (qtd. in Butterick, *A Guide* 8). “Stele” refers to the stone slabs or markers bearing inscriptions or glyphs. Olson connects Maximus with the residual effects of a culture that is deeply rooted in their place. Like these “found” objects in the landscape, Maximus’s presence within Gloucester is naturalized as part of the landscape.

Maximus as Diorite Man takes the form of a stone figure who is connected directly to the bedrock of the earth, one “who has got no condition except earth, no condition but stone” (Olson, *Muthologos I* 73). Olson connects Maximus directly to the ground of the polis—not only is he made of its “eyes,” but he is part of its particular bedrock as a living foundation of local *place*. Indeed, at one point Maximus identifies himself directly *as a* ground, as enmeshed in the processes of the earth:

I am a stone,  
 or the ground beneath  
 my life is buried,  
 with all sorts of passages  
 both on the sides and the face turned down  
 to the earth (III. 228)

Maximus’s “passages,” aside from intimating my discussion in the next chapter of Duncan’s “passages,” here refer to the heterogeneous foundations upon which the collective of the polis is built. However, this geological grounding foothold in Gloucester is only a microcosm of the larger, more mythological grounding of Maximus: *The Song of Ullikummi*, the Hurrian theogony that, as Gustav Guterbock has observed, is the forerunner of Hesiod’s theogony, which was also of great interest to Olson.

*The Song of Ullikummi* was written in cuneiform in the 13<sup>th</sup> century B.C. In the narrative, Kumarbi, the chief god of the Hurrians, wishes to overthrow his son Teshub, the god of storms, who had previously overthrown him. Kumarbi attempts to regain the throne by impregnating a giant rock and raising an unbeatable opponent of stone to fight Teshub. The stone, named Ullikummi, is made of diorite and he is placed on the shoulder of Ubelluri, the Hurrian Atlas

figure, in the depths of the ocean for safety while he grows. The diorite megalith soon breaches the ocean surface and continues to rise higher and higher. After a few unsuccessful battles led by Teshub, the gods use a primeval copper cutting tool once used to cut apart heaven and earth to sever Ullikummi's secure footing, thus making it possible for Teshub to defeat Ullikummi (the final tablets were fragmented, and so Ullikummi's defeat can only be assumed).

Despite his eventual defeat, the figure of Ullikummi is of interest to Olson as a monadic poetic subject because his immense strength and power serves as an oppositional force to the gods, and because he represents an anarchic threat to the order of the universe. As Olson explains in his essay "Causal Mythology," Diorite Man is central to his poethic "[b]ecause he had a growth principle of his own, and it went against creation in the sense that nobody could stop him and nobody knew how far he might grow ... this creature is nothing but a blue stone and the *stone* grows ... for me, this Diorite figure is the vertical, the growth principle of the Earth" (*Muthologos I* 72-73; original emphasis). Diorite man's enigmatic presence intrigues Olson, for he possesses "no condition but stone" while at the same time he grows vertically. Whereas the tansy is a symbol of collective place, with its horizontal nodes reflective of a community of individuals stretching outwards into place, here Olson offers his model of ideal individuality as vertical. Just as the tansy deterritorializes garden space, and thus becomes an apt metaphor for the resistant community in the face of the imposition of the nation, so Diorite Man rises in his place against structures that attempt to control his upward growth. Although his eventual defeat is presumed, Maximus/Diorite Man/Ullikummi persists, thwarting attempts to cut him from the atlas; hence Olson's observation that he has a "growth principle" of his own. As a vector and a line of flight, Diorite Man goes "against creation" and defies structural order in his very growing.

Olson's practice of place, then, involves bringing together the resistant figures of the tansy and Diorite Man to demonstrate the cultural autonomy and specificity of the polis. Indeed, as Olson confirms, the site of his practice of place is not "his local" per se but *the particular*: "The interest is not in the local at all as such—any local; & the choice of Gloucester is particular—that is the point of the interest, particularism itself: to reveal it, in all possible ways and force, against the 'loss' of value of the universal" (qtd. in Butterick 9). For Olson, Diorite Man represents the concept of "particularism itself," for his particularity of space—his unstoppable upward growth from the Earth—presents a threat to the cohesive order of the universe.<sup>94</sup> Moreover, Ullikummi's "growth principle of the Earth" gestures toward Olson's argument that the philosophers of Greece's Golden Age, particularly Aristotle, impeded Western thought with categorization and logic—both of which prevent an upward, "action-orientated" existence. Together, the horizontal, rhizomatic tansy and the vertical, self-motivated Diorite Man represent particular alternatives to statist control over local space.

Moreover, Olson's interest in the anarchic force of Diorite Man—his oppositional strength in the cosmic order—is geologically founded in the particular bedrock of Gloucester. Another morphological feature of Gloucester that Olson "digs" up in his research is the aggregate of bedrock upon which Gloucester sits. For this research, Olson again relies heavily on Nathaniel Shaler's research and findings in his book *The Geology of Cape Ann* in order to unite local mythology with its particular geology. The poem titled "The River #1" discusses the enigmatic existence of diorite and granite in particular areas surrounding Gloucester, from which Olson gleans mythological importance. Diorite is an intrusive igneous rock form, a classification of

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<sup>94</sup> It is perhaps too obvious to mention, but the phallic nature of the "vertical growth principle," housed in Diorite Man's body that "rises" unimpeded from the ocean floor and breaches its surface, is indeed part and parcel of Olson's troubling masculinity. In my last chapter, Daphne Marlatt's megaliths in *How Hug A Stone* will present a significant challenge to this masculinized growth principle of the vertical.

rock aggregates that form under the surface of the earth. Intrusive rocks result from a process in which molten magma that seeps from the earth's core "intrudes" into the spaces in the rock that surrounds it; the lava then cools and hardens, becoming a composite part of the rock. Due to erosion and movements of the earth's crust, these rocks then surface over time (rocks that form above the surface of the earth are called extrusive) (Wright 167). In the poem, Olson writes:

Into  
 in the fiord the diorite man obtrudes Obadian Bruen's  
 island on his nose ...

True inclusions  
 of other rocks are not commonly met with,  
 in the granitic material, the mass of diorite  
 is apparently of an irregularly circular form.  
 ... the diorite has cut the granitite. (II.16)

Here, Olson explicates the particular rock aggregate in which diorite impedes upon on granitite. From the geological composition of rocks, Olson gleans poethical significance: the diorite is an oppositional force in the composition of the local bedrock, which recalls his discussion of diorite Ullikummi's "growth principle" and his penchant for action. Thus later, when Olson concludes a poem musing on the early settlement history of the Massachusetts bay area stating "I stand on Main Street like the Diorite / stone," (II.51) he situates Maximus (and, by extension himself as poet) as a megalithic force in the construction of the local. Since Diorite Man grows upward but is immovable, he represents the naturalized particularity that Olson celebrates in the polis, a rooted yet dynamic local presence that resists the encroaching reach of the nation.

Olson practices his poethic of place by bringing together an individual of self-action with the particularized landscape to illustrate the ideal symbiosis of a land and its people—a concrescence that underscores the autonomy and spirit of resistance Olson hopes to revive in Gloucester. As I have mentioned, Olson’s citing of place within the unique composite bedrock and the mythologized presence of Diorite Man is a concrescence that actually reflects the appearance and character of Gloucester’s topography. Marsden Hartley, the American painter previously named in “Letter 7,” came to Gloucester in 1931 and was astonished by the topographical features of the landscape. As Butterick notes, Hartley was taken by the area’s rough geography created by the moraine. While walking through Dogtown, Hartley writes in his journal, “Dogtown (Gloucester) looks like a cross between Easter Island and Stonehenge—essentially druidic in its appearance” (qtd. in Butterick, *A Guide* 49). These druidic-like stones can be seen in the below photograph of Dogtown Common in 1908:



Figure 6. Fredrik Bodin, “Dogtown’s Present Inhabitants, 1908.”

[goodmorninggloucester.wordpress.com](http://goodmorninggloucester.wordpress.com)

The photograph showcases the unique topographic character of the Dogtown moraine, as observed by Hartley. The rocks jutting out from the ground are the result of accumulated debris

left from the advance of the glacier, which has then sedimented over time to form the natural ground. The glacier offers Olson another geological example of resistant spatiality, since its incessant forward movement is not only unstoppable, but in its advance, it forms new places and shapes existing landscapes in the debris of its wake. Significantly, the rocks here were not placed by humans, as megaliths are, but are the result of natural geomorphological processes.<sup>95</sup> This fact serves to further naturalize Diorite Man's presence in the area as a marker of the sedimented concrescence of evolutionary natural and cultural forms. In the geological tropes Olson cites, the morphology of the landscape and the mythology Olson inflects into it come together to make up Gloucester's unique sense of place.

While it lies outside the scope of this section to discuss every aspect of Olson's citations, I would like to outline a few more of the very specific local mythologies that Olson incorporates into his moving image of place.<sup>96</sup> While Diorite Man is a myth of Olson's making (albeit influenced by the local landscape morphology), the local community itself has many stories and tales that Olson circulates into his poems. I have already discussed many figures and images that Olson conjures to instill a sense of resistance within the place of the polis; however, the most resistant "cite" of place in *The Maximus Poems* is a group of 14 fishermen, whose originary act of resistance is the foundational story upon which Olson signifies "authentic" place.

A significant event in Gloucester history, what Olson calls the "Stage Fight," forms the reasoning behind Olson's choice of the small fishing town for his grounding local.<sup>97</sup> A group of

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<sup>95</sup> The final chapter of this project includes an extended meditation on the trope of megaliths as markers of place in Olson's work and in the work of Daphne Marlatt.

<sup>96</sup> In order to appreciate Olson's exhaustive efforts to cite his place, one need only look at the maximal opus of Butterick's *A Guide to the Maximus Poems of Charles Olson*, which is 816 pages of in-depth annotations to Olson's innumerable references.

<sup>97</sup> "Stage Fort," "Stage Head," and "Fisherman's Field" are all proximal sites along the Gloucester harbour. Fisherman's Field is the site of the original settlement on Cape Ann, which is now known as Stage Fort Park. Stage Fort Park is behind Stage Head, which is a bluff jutting out into the harbour. Stage Head is said to be the location of

fishermen Olson calls the “14 men setting down / on Cape Ann” (*The Maximus* I.120) forms the original, self-contained and autonomous polis in Gloucester, for they were the intervening force upon Puritan control of the land. In 1625, a group of merchants from Dorchester, England, formed the Dorchester Company that sent 14 fishermen across the Atlantic to establish a trade colony overseas. Upon arrival, they found an empty fishing stage, used to dry fish, that had been erected by a group of Plymouth Puritan settlers a year before. The Plymouth men had erected the stage hoping to turn considerable profit, but they were unsuccessful, so they abandoned the stage to use it only during the height of fishing season. Seeing as it was not in use, the Dorchester fishermen began to use the abandoned stage until the Plymouth settlers came back to the site and attempted to stake their claim to it. The Dorchester fishermen stood their ground, protecting the means of their trade, and refused to give up the stage. This resulted in a heated exchange between Miles Standish, the Plymouth military leader, and Captain Hewes and the fishermen, who barricaded themselves on the stage with hogsheads containing unnamed material. Just as Standish was about to storm the stage, he was persuaded by a clergyman to allow Hewes and the fishermen to set up another stage of their own (Hubbard 110-111).

Despite the eventual failure of the Dorchester Company in 1626, Olson considers these 14 men heroes and resistant protectors of their place and their trade—which, as fishermen, are intimately and authentically connected, since their trade and livelihood are so dependent on the landscape and its conditions. The struggle of these 14 fishermen is an example *par excellence* of humans surviving and thriving within and with the natural environment, shaping it according to their needs, and being shaped in character by it all the same, creating an exceptional community of integrity. Moreover, here the values of the polis are starkly contrasted with that of Puritan

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the operations of the first fishing company of the Cape Ann settlement, and also the site of the Stage Fight that I speak of here.

“pejorocracy,” their greed and self-interest. In *Maximus*, Olson figures the unused stage as a result of the Puritans being lazy, saying that the Plymouth men “hadn’t yet got to / fishing that season (stayed in bed)” (I. 112).

For Olson, the Dorchester fishermen present a model of emplacement not just on economic grounds, but also creatively in terms of a political collective of individuals. Accordingly, Fredman rightfully parallels the resistance of the fishermen with the community at Black Mountain College, both of which are “twin images of resistant, self-contained political units” (*The Grounding* 51). Gloucester and Black Mountain together exemplify Olson’s belief in a community of individuals *occupying* a specific space outside State and capitalist control. As Fredman remarks, the “resistant self-grounding” of the fishermen “becomes for Olson the foundation of political value” and provides “an accurate measure of the possibilities of an American relationship to work, materials, landscape, and community” (51-52). In “Maximus, to Gloucester,” Olson confirms the importance of the 14 fishermen’s resistance to his construct of place in Gloucester. As he writes,

I don’t mean, just like that, to put down  
 the Widow Babson whose progeny and property  
 is still to be found and felt on Main  
 and Middle Streets  
 ...  
 Or Jeffrey Parsons whom the historian Babson  
 clearly places over the Cut as the man who owned  
 all the land and boulders, all the hill and hollow  
 ...

But just there lies the thing, that “fisherman’s Field”  
 ... stays the first place Englishmen  
 first felt the light and the winds, the turning, from that view,  
 of what is now the City (I.106)

Clearly, Olson sees the Stage Head Fight as the inciting incident of the resistant polis. Certainly, the other inhabitants of the town are significant participants in the place, but the true spirit of *communitas* that drives the polis is to be found in this early tale of transgressive protection of one’s place and one’s work in that place.

Stage Fort is thus situated as the geographic epicenter of politics and virtue rooting his polis. Later in the poem, as he sits in his house on the harbour, Olson can see multiple sites related to this founding event:

But that as I sit  
 in a rented house  
 on Fort Point,  
 the Cape Ann Fisheries

Out one window,  
 Stage Head looking me  
 out of the other  
 in my right eye  
 ...  
 Gloucester can view  
 those men

who saw her

first (I.107)

From Olson's vantage point in his home by the harbour, the Cape Ann Fisheries can be seen from one window, and the site of the Stage Fight, Stage Head, from another. This multi-sighted stance brings together the past and present of the polis, as the site of the early settlers' fight for local trade and self-organization is seen at the same time as the persistence of that trade in the site of the Cape Ann Fisheries that grew out of its legacy. Significantly, Olson describes looking out one window to the Fisheries, but out of the other window, Stage Head looks back upon him in his "right eye," creating a circuitous loop wherein the poet and the landscape are gazing at each other. With the city of Gloucester at his back, and Stage Head in view, "Gloucester can view / those men / who saw her / first." Olson plays with different coordinates and vantage points in this poem so as to demonstrate the past as a centripetal and centrifugal force of influence upon the present of a place. That is, the Stage Fight is reflected upon him, and from his body, the essence of the site—its spirit of resistance—it is reflected back out upon the landscape. Moreover, Olson conflates windows with eyes/ "I"s in this passage in order to emphasize the fact that a community is mutually reflective of its commonly held values.<sup>98</sup> In this way, the poem registers the method of feedback discussed earlier—from the vantage point of the poet, the history and present of the place converge and interact to produce a continuity. The human being, then, becomes the medium in which place and landscape come together to form a meaningful construct.

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<sup>98</sup> As I have mentioned, Olson was very much interested in the etymological roots of words; thus, he would have most likely been aware of the fact that the word "window" derives from the Old Norse "wind eye." Olson hints at this etymological lineage in his poem "A Po-sy, A Po-sy," wherein he writes, "Or throw an arm up, / in the wind, in the wind's eye" (*The Collected Poems* 107).

The Stage Fight is also significant for Olson because the greedy monopoly of the Puritan-controlled colony reflects the present day capitalist state under which the autonomy and integrity of Gloucester is being threatened. Olson cites this event in particular as the origin of theocratic and state imposition on local trade and economy leading up to his present day. In “Letter 23,” Olson explicitly compares the 14 fishermen’s squabbles over a fish drying stage with the present circumstances within Gloucester:

What we have in this field in these scraps among these fishermen, and the Plymouth men, is more than the fight of one colony with another, it is the whole engagement against (1) mercantilism (cf. the Westcountry men and Sir Edward Coke against the Crown, in Commons, these same years—against Gorges); and (2) against nascent capitalism except as it stays the individual adventurer and the worker on share—against all sliding statism, ownership getting in to, the community as, Chambers of Commerce, or theocracy; or City Manager (I.101)

Olson situates the Stage Fight as not merely a disagreement between two colonies but as an act of resistance on behalf of the fishermen against the structures of Puritan theocracy and monopoly capitalism. The fishermen protecting their dried fish from outside control and sanction not only represents their self-reliance as a community, it also signifies their attempts to localize control over both the product and process of their livelihood. For Olson, a place and its inhabitants should not be governed or restricted in their actions by the interests of the State or of religion, but they should be self-organized and produce an economy that is mutually beneficial for all. The fishermen and their trade thus represent an ideal relationship between a community and their

place, and offer an alternative example of symbiotic practice of living that counters the greed and profit of the Pilgrims and of the American capitalist nation-state. As Fredman argues, the “self-containment” of the early settlers represents a living imperative for Olson. “As a place for grounding,” he writes, “the American landscape must be approached, [Olson] feels, through self-containment rather than rapacity, for only self-containment allows us to ‘set down’ upon, to inhabit carefully, the land” (*The Grounding* 52).

In Olson’s figuring of the historical Stage Fight, he romantically figures the Dorchester fishermen as the victims (and victors) of colonization by the Puritans. This event, however, disguises the originary conflict over the land and harbour between European colonizers and the Aboriginal proprietors of the land. Coupled with the fact that Gloucester is an island, this absent presence of the Aboriginal seems to suggest that Olson’s *polis* is conceptually excepted and insulated from historical colonialism. To be sure, the erasure of “minor” narratives that don’t serve the metanarrative of settlement as naturalized human progression is a tactic used by many accounts of settlement in the New World. As Nicholas Blomley explains, “Settler cities reassure themselves by supposing either that a legitimate transfer of title from native to nonnative’s occurred (through treaty, deed, conquest, and so on) or, more bluntly, that the land was simply unowned and empty ... the city itself becomes imagined as a settled site, conceptually uncoupled from a native world” (27). For all of Olson’s research into the property arrangements and spatial contracts of the Gloucester area, there is a marked lack of attention paid to pre-colonial land ownership and, as a result, the territory of the *polis* seems contemporaneous with the arrival of European colonizers. This seems surprising, given Sauer’s influence on Olson and his interest in how bodies interact in the landscape, shape it and are shaped by it. Although this absence is inexcusable, it also gestures towards the tension between imagined and lived spaces—imagined,

created space can be transgressive and affect real space, but it can also leave out lesser ideal particularities of the landscape and its history.

In this way, Olson's polis is a construct that erases certain presences that trouble the narrative of place Olson wishes to represent; specifically, female and indigenous presences do not directly factor in as active contributors of place in Olson's spatial imaginary.<sup>99</sup> This view is slightly surprising, since the force of Olson's polemic lay in his insistence on "the heterogeneous present" ("The Present" 50). However much Olson rails against homogeneity in culture and in politics, he also strives for the particular, and so perhaps this erasure is also exemplary of his highly subjective "selection from the phenomenal field" (Olson, "Human" 161). Regardless, as a hermeneutic of postwar place, Olson's view is lacking in heterogeneity in terms of its exclusion of other human producers of place that do not or cannot fall under his collective male "we." In his essay "Projective Project: Charles Olson," Duncan remarks that Olson's was "an entirely patristic world" (26). Many other critics, such as Libbie Rifkin, Michael Davidson, Rachel Blau DuPlessis, and Andrew Mossin have documented Olson's erasure of female presence and influence in his work.<sup>100</sup> Specifically, Rifkin explains the tendency of female erasure as a "structural function of exclusion...at the core of both authorial identity formation and avant-garde institution building" (7). This devaluing of the feminine in Olson's work is obvious, considering his lack of female participants in the polis as documented in *The Maximus Poems*.<sup>101</sup>

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<sup>99</sup> It is worth noting that one of the few women to be mentioned in *The Maximus Poems* is Anne Hutchinson, who also resisted the control of the Puritans by holding illicit gatherings of women in her home. Hutchinson was herself a Puritan, but rebelliously so; she preached her own interpretation of the bible to allow for more female involvement in church leadership, much to the discontent of the male Puritan leaders of the Massachusetts Bay Colony. She was tried and convicted of heresy in 1637 and banished from the colony (Guétin 21-22). Olson mentions her in (I.129).

<sup>100</sup> See, for example, Rifkin's *Career Moves: Olson, Creeley, Zukofsky, Berrigan and the American Avant-Garde* (2000), Davidson's *Guys Like Us: Citing Masculinity in Cold War Poetics* (2004), Blau DuPlessis's *Purple Passages: Pound, Eliot, Zukofsky, Olson, Creeley, and the Ends of Patriarchal Poetry* (2012), and Mossin's *Male Subjectivity and Poetic Form in "New American" Poetry* (2010).

<sup>101</sup> In her "Introduction" to the letters of Charles Olson and Frances Boldereff, Sharon Thesen notes that although Olson used many ideas from Boldereff in the formation of his poetics, he failed to credit her accordingly.

Moreover, when Olson does bring in feminine and indigenous cites of place, he often does so in a way that furthers his masculinist bravado, as seen in his repeated citation of the Algonquin myth of an adulteress who lusts after a serpent. As Butterick notes, Olson's poem beginning "Of old times, there was a very beautiful / woman" (II.21) is a paraphrasing of this Algonquin myth as relayed in Charles Godfrey Leland's *The Algonquin Legends of New England*. The myth tells the tale of a many-married woman who commits adultery with a lake serpent, becomes poisoned by the snake's venom, and dies the next morning. In the following poem, Olson adds another myth of an adulteress who has a sexual encounter with a mountain:

They said she went off fucking every Sunday.  
 Only she said she walked straight through  
 the mountain, and who fucked her was the spirit  
 of that mountain. (II. 22)

In light of my earlier discussions of the naturalized yet mythic "power" of resistance in which Olson imbues in the bedrock of Dogtown, these cites further emphasize the polis as rife with erotic tension and masculine production. Moreover, these myths, which are alluded to throughout *Maximus* and reiterated in II.142-143 and II.188, cite both femininity and Indigeneity as debased forces within a framework of masculine energy and power.

To be sure, Olson's figuring of the feminine in *The Maximus Poems* is often ambiguous and contradictory. The feminine principle is figured within the adulteress as predator of men, since the woman in the Algonquin legend begs her present husband to have sex with her in order

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Specifically, many ideas in "Projective Verse," such as the fundamental idea of a poem as an energy construct, as well as the significant semantic role of typographical spacing, were influenced by Boldereff yet left unacknowledged by Olson, although he credits Creeley and Edward Dalhberg as sources (xv). As DuPlessis writes about Olson's erasure: "He digested the work of female figures with no trace, working to repress them and to repress any knowledge about intellectually generative females in his literary life, in order to credit only real males and allegorical females in his struggles of incipience and in his coming to poetic power" (*Purple* 141).

to pass the poison from the serpent to him and save her life. However, female figures are also revered as guides and spirits overlooking the place of the polis. In the first poem, the “lady of good voyage,” a statue in Gloucester of the Virgin Mary holding a schooner, is invoked as a muse (Butterick 11). The statue faces the sea, and serves to guide sailors and fishermen through their voyage and protect them from peril. The lady becomes a trope and a muse throughout the collection, and is elsewhere referred to as “the Virgin” (II.181, III.53). Olson’s problematic citation of femininity is palpable in that he cites virginal women with reverence as a muse, while promiscuous women are seen as a dangerous threat to masculinity.<sup>102</sup> In the myth of the serpent and the mountain, Olson figures nature and the landscape as the possessor of action and agency, while the female is kept passive as the one who is “fucked” by the virile serpent and mountain. While the female is cited as a protector of place in the Lady of Good Voyage, she is nevertheless relegated to the status of statues and myth, with little living and acting examples of actual female participation in the production of place.<sup>103</sup> Indeed, the fact that Olson’s incorporation of the female presence in the poems is so broadly and abstractly cited demonstrates his view of the feminine as an inconsistent but useable complement to a sure and steady masculine principle. As

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<sup>102</sup> In “Human Universe,” Olson connects the “primitive” energy he experienced while in the company of the Mayans with a troubling gender problematic. Therein, he cites a Mayan astrological myth wherein the Sun, figured male, must “knock out” one of the Moon’s (figured female) eyes in order to make her light less bright for humans on earth. In their quarrels, the sun often “eclipses her entirely” and the tale ends with Olson’s observance that the “moon is as difficult to understand as any bitch is” (166). The passage is not critically engaged with by Olson but followed directly by his concluding statement: “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” (166). Olson’s lack of engagement with the gender politics of the myth, as well as his seeming reverence for it as exemplary of a natural principle, of “the way it is,” is doubly problematic.

<sup>103</sup> Despite the almost complete lack of women figures in *The Maximus Poems*, Susan Howe identifies a strong feminine principle emanating from the dialogism of the open-field poetic. As she writes, “If there is Woman in Olson’s writing (there aren’t women there), she is either ‘Cunt’, ‘Great Mother’, ‘Cow’, or ‘Whore’. But the feminine is very much in his poems in another way, a way similar to Melville. It’s voice... It has to do with the presence of absence. With articulation of sound forms. The fractured syntax, the gaps, the silences are equal to the sounds in Maximus. That’s what Butterick saw so clearly. He printed Olson’s Space” (“Talisman” 180). Howe’s observation anticipates my discussion of Marlatt’s work later this project, specifically her adaptation of Olson’s proprioception through the model of the labyrinth as an expansion of field poetic for the particulars of female experience.

with Williams's *Paterson*, the earth is sometimes figured as female, as in his evocation of the Egyptian "Great Mother" and goddess Nut (II.2, II.150). However, aside from these citations, which figure any female agency as mythic and for the purpose of male enterprise, human women do not feature as active members or producers of the polis.

In yet another example of place as a masculine ideal, the local figure of John Merry and the myth of his demise is an energizing force of place and who, along with the carpenter Stevens, is as another manifestation of Maximus. In the poem "MAXIMUS, FROM DOGTOWN—I," Olson again meditates on Dogtown as a site and cite of the polis, a place within Gloucester from which the originary spirit of the settler days is still resonant. In the poem, he presents the figure of James Merry, the former sailor turned bull-wrestler of Dogtown who was killed in 1892 "by the bull he raised himself to fight / in front of people, to show off his / Handsome Sailorism" (II.2).<sup>104</sup> He connects Merry directly with the landscape, particularly the druidic-like rocks previously mentioned that litter the hills of the area.<sup>105</sup> Recalling Merry's death, Olson writes that he

died as torso head & limbs  
 in a Saturday night's darkness  
 drunk trying  
 to get the young bull down  
 to see if Sunday morning again he might

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<sup>104</sup> It lies outside the scope of this section to discuss at length, but aside from being a guise of Maximus, Merry is also an allusion to the "Handsome Sailor" in Herman Melville's *Billy Budd*.

<sup>105</sup> In Michael McClure's forward to the first publication of "MAXIMUS, FROM DOGTOWN—I," he recalls standing in the Dogtown meadow with Olson, Donald Allen, and Amiri Baraka (then LeRoi Jones) as Olson told the story of James Merry. As he recalls, "Charles told me the story of the handsome stocky man—pointing to a rock & a patch of ground—'Here' he said, 'where the bull's enclosure was...'" (qtd. in Butterick, *A Guide* 239). The specific manner in which Olson sites the event is exemplary not only of only his desire for *'istorin*, to go out and find the evidence for himself, but to his persistent need to be precise about the site, as also demonstrated in his "pacing" of the Meeting House area.

before the people show off  
 once more  
 his prowess—braggart man to die  
 among Dogtown meadow rocks (II.2)

Despite his eventual “defeat” by the bull he raised from a calf, Merry represents the ultimate virile male whose self-action in the field is exemplary. Given Olson’s inflection of masculine virility in the Gloucester landscape, his ceremonious elegy to Merry dying “among Dogtown meadow rocks” is unsurprising. In a poem quoted earlier, “The River,” Merry posthumously becomes part of the rock aggregate, melting into the strata of rock: “Dogtown throws its pebbles and Merry / lay among them, busted” (II.16). Directly following these lines, Olson again observes the unique morphology of the rocks in the area:

True inclusions  
 of other rocks are not commonly met with,  
 in the granitic material, the mass of diorite  
 is apparently of an irregularly circular form. (II.16)

Merry becomes part of the unusual rock “construct,” which, as discussed earlier, Olson cites for its rebellious, “intrusive” structure. These rocks are of a unique aggregate wherein the diorite intrudes upon the granite, thus giving Olson a naturalized example of self-action and the “staking” of place. Moreover, recalling the terminal moraine as a trope of natural, forward action, Olson compares Merry with the glacier in “MAXIMUS, FROM DOGTOWN – I”:

the rocks the glacier tossed  
 toys  
 Merry played by

with his bull (II.5)

Both the glacier and Merry are vectors of movement and action in the field. Merry is exemplary of Olson's focus on embodied space and embodied history, in which humans are active participants rather than passive observers. As a resistance to the Socratic thought of abstraction and pure reason, Olson peoples his poems with figures representing projected human will, those who inscribe their energies upon the landscape and within a place's living memory.<sup>106</sup> Indeed, Merry's ongoing importance to the local Gloucester area further exemplifies individuals and communities coming together to create history and to "find out for themselves." Merry's masculinism and buffoonery, and his drunken hubris, does not exactly make him a "proper" or expectant hero. In fact, Olson also holds Merry up as a cautionary tale for those who "spawl" beyond themselves and their own limits, those who go against the natural laws of their existence and of the larger cosmos. However, Olson's insertion of Merry into the dialogue of Gloucester is not to cement his position in a larger moral, but to address his presence among the spatial relations of the locality—despite of, or, rather, *because* of his fallibility, Merry is *part* of that place, that locality in time.

As such, in Olson's epic the local inhabitants of the land are valorized as exemplary producers of the *place* that is Gloucester. He cites ordinary landowners among local heroes in his practice of getting back to place, as evidenced by a letter he wrote to Frances Boldereff in 1950, in which he writes: "get back to yr local hero-god, take yr power up here, don't buy the Olympians, Greek or Roman, stick to your own ground, and your old cults" (Olson and Boldereff 419). In "MAXIMUS FROM DOGTOWN - I," Olson juxtaposes Merry with Hesiod's *Theogony*

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<sup>106</sup> Various guidebooks of Gloucester cite the spot where Merry died as a "must-see," which cements the event in the cultural imaginary of the local area. For examples, see Joseph E. Garland's *The Gloucester Guide: A Stroll Through Place and Time*, pages 85-86, and the annotation of James Merry on the City of Gloucester's official website: <http://gloucester-ma.gov/index.aspx?NID=717>.

and the geologic particularities of Cape Ann so as to produce an active *ecology of place* in Gloucester wherein both mythical and actual events mingle in the production of place. Both the negligent bravado of Merry and the creative energies of Okeanos, Hesiod's personification of the ocean, are met with equally in the field of the poem. These cites converge in the field of the poem as individual vectors on a plane of continual, shifting relations, for as Olson later writes in "Letter 6," "polis / is eyes ... There are no hierarchies, no infinite, no such many as mass, there are only / eyes in all heads, / to be looked out of" (*The Maximus* I.26, I.29). Both Greek and local legend converge on equal footing to create a multifaceted essence of place from the vantage point of the poet.

The subjective nature with which Olson brings together Merry's story with other chosen cites serves to historicize place in a *lived and witnessed* tradition. In other words, Olson suggests that the *polis* is no more than the articulation of its various local relations in relation to the poet, and not the sum or whole of these relations. Thus, for Olson, time and space are coexistent planes, and the articulation of proximity between them rests in the moment of composition. The *moment in time* is the law for Olson—qualities belonging to the thing belong to the thing's space-time. Thus, the poem or poet does not possess absolute wisdom, but the presence of the poem in a particular moment of time possesses wisdom in its immediate relations. From these moments in time, one can gather an articulation of place into a space-time by means of one's "own special selection from the phenomenal field" (Olson, "Human" 161). In this way, the landscape and the local are confluent factors of place, where subjective desires and morphological particularities come together to shape a dynamic textual fabric. It is this very particularity in the articulation of place that resists the control and management of power structures, such as capitalism, that seek to homogenize narratives of being.

**“THE PURE PLACE is POLIS”: A Conclusion**

that that which has been found out by work

may, by work be passed on

(without due loss of force)

for use

USE<sup>107</sup>

—Charles Olson

To conclude, I end where Olson begins. The opening poem of Maximus, “*I, Maximus of Gloucester, to You*,” announces Olson’s resistant spatial imaginary and encompasses his poethic of place. The significance of the title is multivalent: first, the title of the poem immediately situates the collection as rooted in a specific location, in Gloucester, the site of Olson’s polis. Second, the address from Maximus to “You” in the opening poem’s title announces the poetical wager of the poem (and of the entire collection): that of creating a poetic place, a field of action in which the individual and the community can practice place as resistant to the homogenization of the nation. By creating a poetic energy construct that brings the reader into Maximus’s “space-time,” this first poem proposes an exchange of energy in the kinetic manner of projective verse: “A poem is energy transferred from where the poet got it . . . by way of the poem itself to, all the way over to, the reader” (“Projective” 240).

In this opening poem, Olson uses yet another spatial metaphor for his poethic, one that brings together, or gathers, the sites and cites of place into one dynamic construct: the nest. According to Olson’s *poethic* of place, against the given discourse of history, one must experience and create a place of one’s own in accordance with the space-time particulars of the local landscape and its history. Place is thus a construct wherein the landscape and the people

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<sup>107</sup> “The Praises,” *The Collected Poems* 100.

within it produce meaningful space. One's "own special selection from the phenomenal field" ("Human" 161) thus becomes Olson's *poethic* of practicing place, the summarizing image of which is the nest.

This metaphor first appears in Olson's "The Kingfishers," (1950) an early poem that Guy Davenport has described as a "meditation on ruins" (18). Therein, Olson cites the "fetid nest" of the kingfisher, which builds the nest out of spit up pellets of bones, scales, and whatever else it can't digest. Paradoxically, this nest becomes the foundation upon which new births occur. In the poem, Olson also makes reference to the ruins of the Yucatán, and, together with the nest, these ruins suggest the current state of Western civilization, which Olson suggests must be born anew upon its old, decaying foundations. Indeed, as I have demonstrated, Olson accents *The Maximus Poems* with tropes of decay, failure, and decline—from the infamous historical fall of Tyre to the local demise of Merry. He does so to push for change, to recover the spirit of these ruins for future purpose and action. In the opening poem of *Maximus*, Olson repeats this trope of the nest as a means of creating place amid the ruins of postwar culture. The poem is worth quoting at length:

the thing you're after  
 may lie around the bend  
 of the nest

...

feather to feather added  
 (and what is mineral, what  
 is curling hair, the string  
 you carry in your nervous beak

make bulk, these, in the end, are

the sum

...

one loves only form,

and form only comes

into existence when

the thing is born

born of yourself, born

of hay and cotton struts

of street-pickings, wharves, weeds

you carry in, my bird

of a bone of a fish

of a straw, or will

of a color, of a bell

of yourself, torn

...

in! in! the bow-sprit, bird, the beak

in, the bend is, in, goes in, the form

that which you make, what holds, which is

the law of object, strut after strut, what you are, what you must be, what

the force can throw up, can, right now hereinafter erect,

the mast, the mast, the tender

mast! (I.1-I.4)<sup>108</sup>

Significantly, Olson's focus is not on the nest per se, but on the process of its construction. The particulars of the nest "in the end, are / the sum"—from these selected elements of the field, one can build "what you are, what you must be, what / the force can throw up, can, right now hereinafter erect." Just as the bird gathers elements from its environment to form its nest, so Olson applies the same process to one's place in the world: through the self-action of gathering various sites and cites into an interactive construct, we can alter our personal relation to place and stake subjectivity (in the sense of marking the land) in the face of spatial abstraction. This sentiment is emphasized by the nest as a site of protection; by "gathering" our place, we can protect ourselves against the encroaching "pejorocracy" that surrounds us. The point is to form a ground of place that holds its integrity against the winds of a declining moral order. Hence Olson's extension of the conceit of the nest into a ship's mast; this foundation in place provides direction forward and new possibilities for life.

Later in the poem, Maximus offers the "You" of the poem—the people not only of his polis but the people who must fight for their particularity everywhere—"a feather," "a jewel" to put into their own nest (I.4). Maximus hopes that through the example of his own building, the people will follow suit and construct nests of their own devising. What Olson proposes is a spatial hermeneutic—as such, it is not a complete or absolute archetype defining all aspects of human experience. Rather, it focuses on minute, local relations, rooted in field theory, that can lead to "place" and extend even further to a globalized consciousness. Despite the drawbacks of Olson's often narrow and perspectival stance towards the politics of spatial realities, as

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<sup>108</sup> As Tom Clark usefully points out in *Charles Olson: The Allegory of a Poet's Life*, Olson hit the "s" key instead of the "x" key when typing "nest" in the manuscript of the poem (166). Olson decided to keep the error, as it already worked with his trope of birds he was planning to use in the poem, as well as his earlier use of the nest in "The Kingfishers."

evidenced by the erasure of female and Indigenous presences in the formation of the polis, his model of place-building nonetheless presents a significant and effectual methodology that is adaptable to various articulations of spatiality. Miriam Nichols usefully adopts language from Giorgio Agamben in *Infancy and History: The Destruction of Experience* to illustrate Olson's (and Duncan's) attempt to usher in a new ethos as a matter of "knowing how" rather than "knowing that." For Agamben, these terms relate to the split in modern science between knowledge (knowing that) and experience (knowing how)—the break that Olson laments from the Socratics.<sup>109</sup> As Nichols explains:

*knowing that* and *knowing how* propose different rubrics, the former a *mathema* suggesting knowledge acquired by study or by testable means and measureable as truth or falsehood; the latter a *pathema* suggesting the living-through of experience, the impossibility of certitude, and a *Tao* whose efficacy as a life-path is an ongoing experiment, not measureable as true or false. (104; original emphasis)

As Nichols elucidates, Olson presents a *Tao* of place; his spatial hermeneutic does not impart a totality or grand truth in and of itself, but articulates a methodology and a medium through which one can orient oneself in space and develop his/her subjectivity within space. As Olson's epigraph to this section states, he wishes his work to be of "use" to the future lineage of poetics. With the acknowledged "impossibility of certitude," Olson can only offer the "undone business"

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<sup>109</sup> Agamben's distinction here echoes Olson's previously discussed ideas in *The Special View*: "The idea of experience as separate from knowledge has become so alien to us that we have forgotten that until the birth of modern science experience and science each had their own place. What is more, they were even connected to different subjects. The subject of experience was common sense, something existing in every individual ... while the subject of science is the *nous* or active intellect, which is separate from experience, 'impassive' and 'divine'" (Agamben 18; qtd. in Nichols 280 n.8).

(*The Maximus* I.53) of his pursuits towards place, to be picked up by other subjects in their own extensions.

By means of fusing *'istorin*, “that we are only / as we find out we are,” (I.95) with a practice of place by siting and citing local inflections of geographic and cultural rootedness, Olson builds a poethic of place that is resistant to the loss of particularity in the postwar milieu. As stated previously, for Olson the focus is not on the “local” per se, but on the “particular”—the remnants and fragments of a particular place brought together. This view of the particular extends Olson’s hermeneutic beyond the polis and to a more universal conception of place in the postwar context of space, with its inherent tensions between global space of flows and local space of particularized places. Since the postwar milieu is one of speed and rapid succession, the field poetic harnesses such momentum by building constructs of unexpected relations and connections between perceived phenomena. Robert Duncan confirms this imperative to “nest” within the abstract space of the world and to forge a place of particularity:

we have our roots, not in the old family farm plot, or in the tribal smokehouse, or in the national convention, but in a moving Idea of Man. The continent where we are is where that Idea is moving. As much the idea of man moving in the Indian, as much the idea of Man moving in the European, we must gather to find ourselves. That is all the archeology to gather ourselves from out of time and space into what we truly are. (“As an Introduction” 148).

As discussed in the next chapter, Duncan picks up on the metaphor of gathering, but towards a different end of resistance.<sup>110</sup> For Olson, the nest offers protection in the polis from the encroachment of abstract space and the resulting commodification of humans and the

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<sup>110</sup> Indeed, the image of a bird nesting with the “scraps” of particulars found within its environment resonates with Duncan’s admiration for Simon Rodia’s Towers, as discussed in the following chapter, which are built from discarded detritus, the “disregarded / splendors” (Duncan, *Roots* 23) of the city dump.

environment. For Duncan, gathering becomes a humanistic metaphor to describe the household as a resistant place within the containment culture of the postwar era, which sought to control and police deviance in individuals and collectivities.

In the next chapter concerning Duncan's construction of place in the household, Hakim Bey's discussion of the Temporary Autonomous Zone (TAZ) becomes a dynamic lens through which created place may be viewed as resistant and responsive. While the TAZ certainly resonates within Duncan's anarchistic worldview, it also offers a useful way of thinking through the possibilities of the polis figured in Olson's nest. Indeed, although the nest is associated with the "permanence" of home, it is nonetheless an impermanent structure. Generally, birds are nomadic in the sense that they move with the flows of their environment and construct nests according to the available elements of their surroundings. These temporary uprisings of "home," constructed from a collage of local materials, resonate with Olson's construction of place in his multis/cited polis, since his hermeneutic of place-building allows for subjective selection from a "phenomenal field." Upon coming back to Gloucester after serving as rector at Black Mountain College from 1951 to 1956, Olson referred to the polis in an unpublished draft of poems as "a form of mind" (qtd. in Butterick, *A Guide* 8). Although the Site (with a capital S) of the polis is firmly rooted in Gloucester, as a "form of mind," it becomes a mobile place of interminable intellectual and emotional grounding. Like Pound's ideogrammatic image, the polis becomes an image of place that is not generically defined, but is inundated by inchoate flows of meaning forming a force field continuum. To be sure, Olson's s/cite of place is the product of his personal connection to the landscape, and in this way, his heuristic of place is a "knowing how," rather than a "knowing that." As will be demonstrated in the latter chapters of the project, Olson

encouraged the Tish writers to use the field poethic in order to write from their *own s/cites* of place, using the particular phenomena of their own environments.

That is, the polis is a “glyph for wholeness” (DuPlessis, *Purple* 140), but it is not a cohesively ordered schema; place is a fluid composite of subjective elements rather than a static category of living or being. As a “form of mind,” it acts as a TAZ and an alternative means of producing place that Olson can conjure in the present. As Bey writes, the TAZ “liberates an area (of land, of time, of imagination) and then dissolves itself to form elsewhere” (100). Similarly, as a lived and imagined construct, the polis liberates an area of land, of time, and of the imagination. As I’ve discussed, *The Maximus Poems* declare many wars—the fall of Tyre, “The war of Africa against Eurasia,” (II.1)—in order to emphasize the ongoing process of destruction and creation that drives the world and the human presence upon it. Because the polis is not just a site but various cites of the mind, a frame of mind put on to a place, then it is resistant to physical destruction.<sup>111</sup> When the buildings of Dogtown have all crumbled to the rise of new industry and commercial profit, the polis continues to live on. For Olson, Gloucester was and remains a place “where polis / still thrives,” (I.22) even if it is an imagined place in the mind of the people reflected in the spirit of the landscape. The inherent circulation of place, its concealment within the embodied experience of individuals in a community, renders it unmanageable and “unknowable” by overarching social narratives.

It is thus the continuance of particularized action, not the nostalgic longing for a place now past/passed, that Olson is after. The polis is an imagined construct, but is also imbued with the imperative “will to change.” Hence his explicit admonition early on in *The Maximus Poems*:

I’d not urge anyone back. Back is no value as better. That sentimentality

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<sup>111</sup> This discussion anticipates my examination of the household as also a “form of mind” in Duncan’s work, akin to Pound’s conjuring of Wagadu while imprisoned at Pisa as an ongoing place of the mind that resists destruction and is continually born again.

has no place, least of all Gloucester,  
 where polis  
 still thrives

Back is only for those who do not move (I.22)

For Olson, nostalgia for the past is the highest form of inaction in the present. His mode of practicing place is thus active in the field, in the manner of Herodotus, for only self-action can change the course of the present. As Michael Bernstein argues, for Olson, “history is a series of choices adopted by living men in specific circumstances. Previous historical decisions have created the social framework into which we are born, but they do not limit our own capacity to choose again, to continue earlier patterns or to change our emphasis and create new ones in their place” (235). The narrative of history follows a similar narrative to place for Olson in this regard; while one’s sense of place may emerge from the historiographic record of a specific site and culture he or she inhabits, he or she nonetheless has the ability to alter the course of this narrative and create his or her own places within and outside it. This is why Olson prefers to think of history as *logos*, as a story, and as a field—all of which are constructs that can change as different things come to affect and effect them. As Olson urges in *Letters for Origin*, “start substituting the art of STORY for the non-art but logic of HISTORY” (132). In the manner of Herodotus, Olson initiates a practice of place that is rooted within historical fact, but he does not stop at abstract rationality as a basis for truth and experience; rather, individuals become the authors of their own stories, constructors of their own places.

In the face of global flows, monetization, and the commodification of human bodies, place can serve as an emancipatory “locus of collective memory,” a collection of sites that restore the fundamental link between individuals and the landscape they inhabit (Harvey, *Cosmopolitanism*

179). Places, according to David Harvey, are the “contested terrain of competing definitions” (309). Harvey’s description here might explain Olson’s highly subjective stance, one that tends to erase critical voices and presences within the landscape, as I’ve discussed. To be sure, Olson’s hermeneutic must be looked at critically, and with scrutiny, if it is to become useful for further scholarship on the production of place. For my purposes here, however, Olson’s significant contribution to place-based poetics lies not in the specifics with which he chooses to s/cite his polis per se—problematic as they can be—but in his very method of gathering these sources, which produces a hermeneutic of place-building that can be adapted and shifted according to local, embodied specificities. Although Olson’s form is lacking and involves questionable erasure, it nonetheless provides a hermeneutic of a building form of place that is resistant to outside narratives of one’s “proper” place.<sup>112</sup> Indeed, Olson surely sought validity and “the facts” of place, but he also sought, in good field poetic form, how such materials would render a living, breathing, image of place that was not only factual, but hermeneutical, immediate, and thereby subject to shift and change. The facts of place *must* alter and change, if place is to remain particular. However, as Nichols puts it, “the event of creation as it takes place at different velocities and on different strata of the human universe is what does not change” (50).

Thus, the guiding image of Olson/Maximus “moving / among [his] particulars” (I.97) articulates Olson’s practice of place as movement through and gathering from the environment. His momentous *poethic* of living continues to be a useful hermeneutic with which subjects can articulate place among the various controls, freedoms, and particulars of their local field. In his recent article on Olson’s work, David Herd argues for a reassessment of Olson’s poetics within our own contemporary milieu in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. As Herd insists, “What [Olson] evolves in *The Maximus Poems* are forms of thought that speak directly to the states of political exclusion and

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<sup>112</sup> As Nichols correctly surmises, “Olson’s machismo ... seems too obvious to warrant criticism” (60).

exception that were the legacy of the Second World War, and that have once again become definitive of where we find ourselves” (“The View” 275). Accordingly, over the course of the next chapters, the field poetic model will be developed, extended, adapted, and altered into and across various localized existences. Ultimately, in the face of the imposing nation-state, Olson’s insistence upon the human in worldly experience is a means of preserving subjective agency in the formation and continuity of place. However, as I have begun to discuss here, and as the latter chapters of this project demonstrate, there are geographical controls put on bodies that limit access to such subjective control over one’s “proper” place.

Olson’s *poethic* of place thus aims to retrieve the original unit of meaning in the universe: the human body, from which a sense of communal belonging in the cosmos emanates. For Olson, this emplacement within the body is not just an ethical imperative and response to the current erasure of humanity in overarching global narratives, but it is also an aesthetic methodology for articulating place *as and through poetic form*. Place is thus also a practice of reading and writing, of being attuned to the particular correspondences and discordances within one’s local field.<sup>113</sup> In this way, the nest of particulars is an image of place distilled from one’s perceptions, a gathering of meaning from the text of the landscape. However, since Olson sees history as a “space-time continuum” rather than something to be conquered and ordered, the goal is not to order things but to construct a narrative of place from the relative proximities of things to create chaos, new orderings, new understandings outside of given narratives of “proper” place.

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<sup>113</sup> My analysis here will be extended in the following chapter when considering Duncan’s open-form practice of place as “a dual practice of reading writings and writing readings” (Oudart para. 55).

**“having bounds out of bound”: The Created and Creative Grounds of Resistance in Robert Duncan’s Anarchic Imaginary**

I find no matter how I feel ‘lifted’ the ground meets my feet as ever.<sup>114</sup>

—Robert Duncan

We must begin where we are. Our own configuration entering and belonging to a configuration being born of what “we” means.<sup>115</sup>

—Robert Duncan

“Ground work” is a methodology that unites and defines both Olson’s and Duncan’s individual and collaborative poetic. However, both engage in their respective ground work in significantly different ways: whereas Olson tills the ground of history, geology, and tradition in order to harvest validation for his vast claims on the state of humanity, Duncan as a self-professed derivative poet is much more interested in the productive strife that arises in the moment of the tilling. Moreover, the sure foothold in the earth that Olson boasts is seen as unattainable by Duncan in the postwar milieu—one can only gesture towards “truth” by abiding with the tides of natural order, the balance of desire and strife, Eros and Eris, that exists in all things and to which all things are subject. In place of a historically and geologically sound ground, Duncan works from the self-created ground of the collage, wherein there are no certainties but the natural certainty that everything has and will take place.

Olson is indeed interested in the relationship between human and object, and Duncan is interested in the relationship between human and the *ideas* swirling around the objects—the complexities and rimes of the field.<sup>116</sup> As Stephen Fredman puts it, Duncan’s fictive impulse

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<sup>114</sup> *The Letters* 94.

<sup>115</sup> *Bending* ii.

<sup>116</sup> In his essay “The Question of Wisdom as Such,” Don Byrd weighs in on the conflicts and harmonies of Olson and Duncan’s relationship. Byrd goes so far to call Olson an outright “literalist” and Duncan a “fictionalist,” for “Olson grasps for the object and the relationship of man to object implied in Pound’s work; Duncan creates a space

expresses “an imagined whole, with an internal sense of harmony, order, fitness, whose certainty is intuitive rather than externally verifiable” (*The Grounding* 100-101). For Olson, space can be knowable, which is why he locates his polis in Gloucester, whereas the polis for Duncan is the in the ideal space of the commons, manifest in the conceptual space of the Watts Towers, or the even more ideological mythic city of Wagadu, a place also revered by Pound where “those devoted to Beauty remember” (Duncan, *The H.D. Book* 178).<sup>117</sup> As Michael Davidson suggests, for Duncan, “‘Place’ is not a geographical or demographic entity so much as a conceptual field in which propositions of place are generated ... ‘place,’ like the poem itself, is an imaginative construct, the boundaries of which are constantly under revision” (*The San Francisco* 125-126). This is not to say that Duncan is not interested in real spaces and places—far from it. However, for Duncan the boundaries between the real and the imagined are futile, since they together create the space of *what is*—the created and creative space of the grand commune of being.<sup>118</sup> As such, the physical sites that emerge in his poems—such as the Watts Towers—are valorized not for their historical significance, à la Olson, but for their imagined creative potential as created conceptual places.

In a letter to Denise Levertov in 1965, Duncan ruminates on the responsibilities of his “literary job,” the chief of which is “to come to some view of the poetry of our time as an ecology” (*The Letters* 508). Like Olson, Duncan sees poetry as a *spatialized* endeavour and a hermeneutic—as a series of networked ecologies that gathers experiences of thought and feeling

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in which to work that is nearer language and the subjective centers which condition language” (38, 45). My previous chapter on Olson somewhat complicates this observation, as I see Olson’s search for the “relationship of man [sic] to object” to be a subjective, hermeneutical relationship. Since the “fact” of place, according to my view of Olson’s work, is the product of a subjective ground and “view,” he is more in line with the hermeneutic of Duncan’s “subjective centers” that Byrd observes. Although I take Byrd’s sentiment, I would rephrase his terms to suggest that Olson is more materialist, whereas Duncan is more ideological in their approach to the space/ground of tradition.

<sup>117</sup> Wagadu is a mythic city appearing in the African folktale “Gassire’s Lute” that appears in Leo Frobenius’s *African Genesis* (1938). I will touch on this later in my section on the household.

<sup>118</sup> “What Is” is Duncan’s term for his interconnected, pluralistic worldview, which describes the unfolding of the real and immediate in accordance with the natural laws of the cosmos.

into a particular space-time articulation. In the postwar American milieu, this ecology of experience must also play across imaginative planes of thought and creativity to counterbalance (and perhaps supersede) the harsh space-time reality imposed by Cold War containment culture.

As Duncan observes in reference to Pound's *Cantos*,

The time of war and exploitation, the infamy and lies of the new capitalist war-state, continue. And the answering intensity of the imagination to hold its own values must continue. The work of our elders in poetry was to make—"a Dream greater than Reality"—a time-space continuum in which their concern for quality and spirit, for romance and beauty, could survive. ("Rites" 124)

As Duncan intimates, the poetic imagination forms an intense and necessary response to the exploits of war and state. It has the creative power to conjure alternative spaces wherein the preservation of the "old" values of poetic beauty can continue in the present, even in the face of human atrocity.

Indeed, the imagined creative potential of spaces holds great significance in Duncan's work. His spatial imaginary resonates with many theories of space that articulate alternative access to spatial production, those that privilege imagined and creative places outside of (or within) the imposed boundaries of capitalism and the nation-state. Specifically, Hakim Bey's theory of the Temporary Autonomous Zone (TAZ), "an uprising which does not engage directly with the State, a guerilla operation which liberates an area (of land, of time, of imagination) and then dissolves itself to re-form elsewhere/elsewhen, *before* the State can crush it" (*T.A.Z.* 99; original emphasis) suitably characterizes Duncan's autonomous places, such as the collage, the meadow, Rodia's Towers, and the household.<sup>119</sup> All of these places "up rise" in Duncan's work

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<sup>119</sup> For an interesting application of Bey's theory of the TAZ to a postanarchist reading of Duncan's *Passages* sequence, see Dani Spinoso's doctoral thesis, which can be accessed at [genericpronoun.com](http://genericpronoun.com).

as spaces that resist spatial closure imposed by the Cold War rhetoric of containment and surveillance; as temporary autonomous zones, these spaces in Duncan's oeuvre are lines of flight that seek to blur boundaries between private and public, household and nation, individual and cosmic.

For Duncan, these places—the collage, the meadow, Rodia's Towers, and the household—operate as processual ecologies, and thus resist the spatial and temporal closure of boundaries. As he writes on the dust-jacket of his collection *The First Decade*: “In our own arts, striving to speak, with words, pictures, gestures, buildings, assemblings of objects in ecologies of feeling-thought, we in turn create a little nature of what we are, ideas of Man” (“Duncan's Dust-Jacket” 686).<sup>120</sup> Duncan's poetic statement here beautifully brings together the dialectic of material/ideological spatiality that concerns this chapter. In characterizing the ecology of the poem as “assemblings of objects,” Duncan engages with and responds to the critical discourse of the time surrounding space, led by Lefebvre and Foucault. This “spatial turn” calls for a resurrection of the importance of space in critical theory, heralding a new view of reality as constellatory, made up of multiple sites, as opposed to a linear and progressive temporal trajectory.

For Duncan, space and place are engaged in a coproductive relationship along the axes of individual and community, which together form the great “commons” that pervades his poetics. The “commons” is at once a space and a psychic mode; as such, it is difficult to define in scope and practice, for it denotes many different spaces and places—public, social, artistic, consumerist, informational, governmental. However, what is most significant about the concept of commons is that it is not owned, and that it is synonymous with community. Indeed, it is

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<sup>120</sup> As with Olson, I have chosen not to [sic] every instance of Duncan's masculine pronouns as a generalized term for all humankind, but I note it's exclusionary nature here.

precisely this lack of ownership that renders the commons as an autonomous zone; it is difficult to define, to know, or to name because it is a shifting, uncertain space that cannot be owned. It is thus fertile ground for the expression of the agential individual linked to a community in resistance to the imposition of the nation-state's categories of identity and spatial regulation. Field poetics thus identifies an ethics that underscores Duncan's anarchism, for in the open field, the free individual expression of the poet relates to and contributes to a building poetic architecture along with the expression of objects that he or she encounters in poetic production. As he writes in the introduction to *Bending the Bow*, the poem is a "field of ensouling," "the ever forming of bodies in language in which the breath moves ... Each line, intensely, a soul thing, a contribution; a locality of the living" (ii).

Insisting upon the "autonomous life of the poem," (*The Collected Early* 686) Duncan's poetics effect a real-world consciousness favouring individual will. His collage methodology extends his anarchic sensibility into an *ecopoethic* wherein language itself has the ability to effect and affect space. As he writes, "vowels are physical / corridors of the imagination / emitting passionately / breaths of flame" and give "aweful intimations of eternal life" while consonants are "stops / and measures ... that confine the spirit to / articulations of space and time" (*The Collected Early* 674). For Duncan poetry is a lived experience *in language*, for language is the "Ground of Being" ("Before" 18) and as such it is also a key site of action. The parts of language comprising the poem are treated as agential entities unto themselves, which emanate their own measure instead of one being imposed. Together these individual parts form a live collectivity, and this poetic process mirrors the ideal ethical relation between individual and community in the great commune of the cosmos.

Individual will, according to Duncan, should not impose itself on the flows and movement of the natural order of things as they emerge in space and place, but should contribute to the ongoing movement and unraveling of “What Is.” Duncan’s work has often been read as transcendental in thought and theme; however, I think the material “groundedness” of his work and the significance of immanent space is often overlooked. To be sure, Duncan believes in “up rising,” but as the title of his collection *Roots and Branches* demonstrates, any transcendental act or thought must be tethered to a ground, whether natural (landscape) or created (creative tradition). “Williams is right in his *no ideas but in things*,” Duncan confirms, “for It has only the actual universe in which to realize Itself” (*Bending* ix; original emphasis). Untethered uprising is precisely an evil that Duncan rails against, as the poem of the same name describes in the context of President Johnson, whose orders do not correspond in any way to the natural orders of the natural world. The war led by Johnson, as Duncan writes in “Up Rising,” is saturated by “the gasses of despair, confusion of the senses, mania, / inducing terror of the universe, coma, existential wounds,” such unnatural conditions that “make war too terrible for men to wage” (*Bending* 82). As an anarchist, Duncan is diametrically opposed to this overriding of natural laws; as he argues, the “full responsibility of the poet” lies in him or her “[b]ecoming conscious, becoming aware of the order of what is happening” (*Fictive* 82). Duncan’s attentiveness to the “happening” of the now demonstrates that the underlying Law to which all abides is not subject to imposing structures or individual ego, but is an ongoing processual occurrence reflected in the immanent flow of things.<sup>121</sup>

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<sup>121</sup> For his conception of “the Law”—the natural order of things that overrides humanly-imposed lowercase “law”—Duncan certainly was influenced by the anarchist philosopher Peter Kropotkin. Kropotkin saw the rise of the nation-state as an unnatural order that violated earlier institutions such as the community and tribe, systems that are founded on the “mutual aid” principles observed in animal social relations and ecosystems. As Kropotkin insists, there should be “no law placed outside the phenomena: each phenomenon governs that which follows it—not law” (*Anarchism* 120). Kropotkin, and Duncan following him, are also against the prevailing individual will of a

Indeed, both Olson and Duncan ground their field poetics within the process cosmology of Alfred North Whitehead, which provides the philosophical basis for conceiving the poetic page as a dynamic field, a space-time continuum of interaction between self and environment. After reading Whitehead's magnum opus *Process and Reality* in 1957, Duncan writes, "Whitehead in *Process and Reality* suggests that the goal of process towards reality is to hold as contrasting elements of one melody what had been conflicting factors" (H.D. Notebook #1). Such is Duncan's poetic goal: to articulate a melodious space-time, a dance wherein the measures of individual and community, private and public, field and cosmos create productive discordancy. In speaking of Levertov's poetry, Duncan uses Whiteheadian language to discern two objective planes of reality or "worlds" that operate in concert with one another in her (and, in his) poetry: the first he identifies as "impending reality—what we call the objective world," and the second plane, "another world, equally objective, of the imagination that springs to life and voice from the ground of common things" ("Introductory" 161). These two planes—the immanent world and the world of the imagination—form the dichotomy of Duncan's spatial imaginary and the means by which he articulates place therein. For him they are spaces where the boundaries between become blurred and where the connections and contrasts between are celebrated. The places of resistance articulated in his poetry oscillate between these interconnected planes—they are at once real world TAZs and chimerical spaces of the imagination, but their force as movers and shapers of objective space is nonetheless felt. Space, in the Duncanian spatial imaginary, is thus emergent and always in the process of becoming—hence the title *The Opening of the Field*,

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governing leader in this regard; as Kropotkin urges, there should be "[n]o government of man by man; no crystallization and immobility, but a continual evolution—such as we see in nature" (157).

which actively implies the ongoing creation and opening of space. Ground work, then, is at once a *spatial event* and a *practice of living* that actively reflects and enacts “What Is.”

### Working “It”: Laying Ground Work in the Field

The work, the ground, and Eros lie at the heart of our study here.<sup>122</sup>

—Robert Duncan

While Duncan was writing his *Ground Work* volumes he originally thought to title the two books together as *The Ground*, but then he subsequently changed the title to *Ground Work* (Oudart para. 3). This switch, I argue, highlights the importance of *positionality* in Duncan’s work.

Rather than describing the ground, the new title situates the poet *in and within* the ground—his work at once springs forth from, while creating and inflecting, the field from which he works.

Indeed, the new title emphasizes the aspect of “work” and contribution that is so crucial to the poet’s relationship to the ground, and I will return to this discussion later in the chapter. Similar to Olson’s assertion of the importance of “view,” the title of Duncan’s final poetry collection roots his space-time hermeneutic as an act of *witnessing space* while also creating it. When speaking with Andrew Schelling of the first volume of the work, *Ground Work: Before the War*, Duncan referred to the title as indicative of an act of witnessing and response in an explicitly spatial sense, as those who have “the ability to respond” imperatively stand “before the war” (qtd. in Schelling 44). In this way, being “before the war” also indicates the immediacy of the position of the observer in the action, witnessing the war that is occurring *before* him or her as part of his or her presence and space. This positionality does not grant the observer advantage or pre-eminence “ahead” of the war at hand, but rather renders the observer complicit in the act

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<sup>122</sup> *The H.D.* 79.

itself, entrenched in the happening, and stresses the responsibility of the observer to acknowledge and act on this stance through active “work.”<sup>123</sup>

Indeed, the poet must take his or her place among the ever-shifting ground of various accordances and contrasts—these elements are not to be resolved or eliminated, but rather constitute the measure of the moving ground of the poet him/herself. As Duncan asserts in his “Introduction” to *The Years as Catches*, these discordances impart to the work a dimension of *depth*, “contrasts in a field of composition in which I develop an ever-shifting possibility of the poet I am—at once a made up thing and at the same time a depth in which my being is” (x).<sup>124</sup> To articulate the process of creating the ground, Duncan often uses the conceit of weaving, especially in his “Passages” series.<sup>125</sup> For Duncan, the poet’s role is to weave these opposing forces into what Peter Quartermain calls “a field, a territory which reveals itself through the act of writing,” (“Introduction” xxxv). The territory of the field is thus far from homogeneous; rather, in its enfolding, the poem weaves together a constellatory plane of multiple sites, multiple connections and disconnections, articulated as a field of action. Consequently, for Duncan it is imperative that poems express both the concordant unity and discordant conflict of the field, for it is in this experience of opposing forces that one is productively grounded in place.

Indeed, to come into the field is to open oneself to the multiplicities of human existence. In discussing the “drama of our time,” Duncan asserts that we have gone beyond a time when “identity might hold & defend its boundaries against an alien territory” and the reality of the time

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<sup>123</sup> The title of the second volume, *Ground Work: In the Dark*, similarly disrupts a temporal reading of war; as the title suggests, we are always in a state of war and darkness, it is always occurring before us and we are always witness to it.

<sup>124</sup> To be fair, I have used Duncan’s first and last works almost side-by-side in my discussion here. I don’t intend to suggest that Duncan’s views remained unchanged throughout his oeuvre; with this point made here about depth, however, I would argue that it remains pertinent to Duncan’s later work as well, as I will discuss over the course of the chapter.

<sup>125</sup> In a 1976 interview with Howard Mesch for *Unmuzzled Ox*, Duncan ruminates on his “Passages” series and explains: “what I aimed at was a weaving” (Mesch 96).

is that “man’s nature [is] hidden in the larger nature” (“Rites” 97). He then relates this ontological condition to the new spatial awareness that infused his contemporary milieu:

In space this has meant the extension of our “where” into a world ecology. The O.E.D. gives 1873 as the earliest English use of the word in the translation of Haeckel’s *History of Creation*—“The great series of phenomena of comparative anatomy and ontogeny ... oecology.” The very form of man has no longer the isolation of a superior paradigm but is involved in its morphology in the cooperative design of all living things, in the life of everything, everywhere. ... We hunt for the key to language itself in the dance of the bees or in the chemical code of the chromosomes. (97)

Here, Duncan suggests that human consciousness and identity develop alongside mirrored processes in the physical world; in so doing, he revises the by-then discarded view of consciousness as entirely immaterial and insular from the exterior environment.<sup>126</sup> The point is in the process, the becoming: rather than forming hierarchical relationships, relations of becoming interpret ecologies as creative partnerships of multiplicity and interchange. This model of ecology as becoming resonates with Duncan’s anarchic *ecopoethic*, specifically with his collage methodology, wherein parts retain their individuality while also forming assemblages or “communities” with other autonomous objects in the spatial field, creating a whole of autonomous yet related, interactive entities.<sup>127</sup>

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<sup>126</sup> Deleuze and Guattari point to natural ecologies for immanent examples of this relationship. As they explain, the wasp and the orchid share a symbiotic relationship based on mutual reproduction; when they encounter one another, they together create an assemblage wherein each takes on the attributes of the other in a dynamic event of exchange, “a becoming-wasp of the orchid and a becoming-orchid of the wasp” (11).

<sup>127</sup> In this way, Duncan envisions a cosmos wherein humans are not at the centre nor are in control of its reality; hence his issue with Olson’s individualist scope, *Maximus*. As he addresses Olson: “I find it difficult to think of man as a *mammalia maxima*, for he is clearly a contemporary instance or possibility (actual) of what a mammal can be along with elephants and rats” (qtd. in Hoeynck 45). Duncan critiques Olson’s individualist human hero of the

For Duncan, it is crucial that ground work not be confined to ideological planes, but that it must affect and effect real spaces and places. Reflecting on Olson's *Maximus* poem "Letter, May 2, 1959," Duncan asserts that the spatiality Olson achieves by "pacing" out the locale is the result of field composition:

Olson in *Maximus*, 'Letter, May 2, 1959,' paces off boundary lines; and yet a poet has told me this ceases to be proper to poetry. But surely, everywhere, from whatever poem, choreographies extend into actual space. In my imagination I go through the steps the poet takes so that the area of a township appears in my reading; were I to go to the place and enact the text, I would come into another dimension of the poetry in which Gloucester would speak to me. ... Must I reiterate the fact that the boundary lines in the poem belong to the poem and not to the town? (*Bending* v-vi)

Duncan's account here of Olson's "ground work" gives credence to the ability for the imagined spaces of poetry to translate as real, lived geographies such that the field of the page extends into actual space. Moreover, the reimagined, restructured spaces of the poem actually act to *extend* the spatial boundaries and semantic possibilities of the actual space; in other words, the act of reading Olson's pacing of Gloucester transforms the actual town such that if the reader were to return to the locale and pace it out as Olson did, the space would become much more than borders of landscape, but would manifest a felt *place* with imaginative dimensions. Duncan's observations thus testify to the ability of the poet to restructure space in accordance with one's view, the specificity of the individual's relation to the greater environment. This (re)structuring contributes to Duncan's *ecopoethic*—it once articulates a poetic method, the collage, as well as

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cosmos, since this denies the role humans play as events among many other heterogenous events that are affecting and effecting the space-time continuum of the universe.

an ethics, a practice of living wherein the individual will can obtain agency and take action by means of ground work.

### **Space as Practiced Place: The Grand Collage of “It”**

Not one but many energies shape the field.

It is a vortex. It is a compost.<sup>128</sup>

—Robert Duncan

In Duncan’s grand collage, text is read as space, and space as text. As such, the ground—the traditional literary ground from which he constructs his chrestomathy—is necessarily a textual ground. The term “chrestomathy” is central to the collage technique, for it is itself a collage: it describes a practice of gathering choice passages, often literary, in order to gain an understanding of an idea or a language. Duncan incorporates chrestomathy into his field composition, the ground of which can be thought of as both text (ground of tradition) and space (the field in which these texts interact).<sup>129</sup> As he writes to Levertov, “these poems / came up from a ground / to illustrate a ground—a book” (*The Letters* 94). Duncan’s work indeed arises from a ground of tradition, but his articulation of that ground by means of the chrestomathy places agency upon the poet who must learn language out for him/herself (in the same vein as Olson’s *istorin*). Thus, the grand collage, a gathering of these materials into a particular articulation of space-time, allows the poet to establish his or her own canon and navigational Baedeker from the myriad of sources available to him or her within the field.

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<sup>128</sup> *Ground Work* 27.

<sup>129</sup> For Duncan, the ground as such is a process of exploring tradition to form the chrestomathy. In the process, however, Duncan weaves together sources in an ongoing, complex intertextual chain of influence wherein source threads are often difficult to discern. This elusiveness leads Clément Oudart to assert that “the ‘genetic reader’ in search of the primordial sub- or ur-text” in Duncan’s work “is faced with not only exploring the textual groundwork but also the potential risk of encountering groundlessness, namely of arriving at a textual ground that in turn proves to be chimerical, and only one stage of an infinite intertextuality” (para. 6).

The most significant aspect of the collage technique is that it trades hierarchy and linearity, which are both markers of statist categorization and control, for relationality and process. Each element is treated equally within the field of the poem, and the sum of these intersections and juxtapositions produce a heterogeneous conglomerate as opposed to a coherent, autonomous whole. To be sure, the collage is not disorganized chaos; rather, the source of order springs *from within* the dynamic intersections, instead of being imposed on them. The individual formal elements act as participants in an organic order of *responsivity and feedback* in relation to the greater whole, in a form that mirrors an open and collaborative collective. In terms of this complex relation in Duncan's work, it is imperative to distinguish between "wholeness" and "completeness." While each element of the poem (including the poet) is "whole," in and of itself, it is never "complete" since it exists in a continual relationship to the whole(s) of the other elements involved in the poem. The parts are not therefore not "autonomous" in this way, since they cannot be cut off from the field of the poem but exist in perpetual exchange; they do, accordingly, possess a *responsive autonomy* in that they respond to one another and act relationally, producing a natural order of meaning springing from the poem's constellatory field. As he explains in "An Essay at War":

The design of a poem  
                                   constantly  
 under reconstruction,  
                                   changing, pusht forward;  
 alternations of sound, sensations;  
                                   the mind dance  
 wherein thot shows its pattern:

a proposition

in movement.

The design

...

reveald in its pulse and

durations;

a fire.           (*Derivations 9*)

As Duncan elucidates, the collage methodology testifies to poetic praxis as a *process* wherein design and measure are not imposed but emerge from the interactions of the field. Much like the paratactic movement of thought, the structure of the elements of the poem arise as a moving “proposition” that is “reveald” only at the moment of its arriving. Further, the collage methodology transforms the space of the poem into an active event of collectivity and responsiveness. This process reveals not a one-to-one relationship of logical correspondences, but a one-to-all, and all-to-one relation of connectivity. Each element is given a voice in the greater utterance, for the poem is

polysemous, taking each thing of the composition as generative of meaning, a response to and a contribution to the building form. The old doctrine of correspondences is enlarged and furthered in a new process of responses, parts belonging to the architecture not only by the fittings ... but by the resonances in the time of the whole in the reader’s mind, each part as it is conceived as a member of every other part, having, as in a mobile, an interchange of roles[.]

(*Bending ix*)

The open structure of the collage, then, mirrors Duncan's ideal space of the commune: each individual is responsible for responding to the needs of the community, thereby contributing to the "building form" of the collective.<sup>130</sup>

In the collage, words and ideas are treated as atoms in an electromagnetic field, which transforms the page of the poem into a dynamic and open material collectivity. Indeed, the form of the collage aligns with the spatial turn from Newtonian to Einsteinian spatial theory, as discussed in my introduction. The modern masters that were of great influence to Duncan, such as Pound and Williams, were acutely aware of this shift in thinking and adopted it in their poetics. Their work was especially concerned with a new consciousness of spatial parameters, loosened from Euclidean bounds, and the role of the poet in this new spatiality.<sup>131</sup> Duncan reflects this influence when describing the reasoning behind his collage technique:

As the story told of stars and subatomic particles and the story told of living organisms continue to reorient our possible knowledge of what is, the poetic imagination faces the challenge of finding a structure that will be the complex story of all the stories felt to be true, a myth in which something like the variety of man's experience of what is real may be contained. (*Fictive 5*)

Duncan strives for a space that will "contain" the new space-time complexities of post-Newtonian consciousness. However, he seeks a form and structure that does not enclose or restrict experience, but rather *opens the field*. This pursuit of a form that expresses and extends the new spatial consciousness leads Duncan to the collage, for it is not an uncontrolled space but

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<sup>130</sup> I will return to this point in the final section of the chapter that analyze the space of the "household" as a TAZ in Duncan's work.

<sup>131</sup> See, for instance, Pound's writings on Vorticism, and Williams's 1948 essay "The Poem is a Field of Action," wherein he urges poets to adapt their poetry to the new concepts brought about by Einstein: "How can we accept Einstein's theory of relativity, affecting our very conception of the heavens about us of which poets write so much, without incorporating its essential fact—the relativity of measurements—into our own category of activity: the poem. Do we think we stand outside the universe? Or that the Church of England does? Relativity applies to everything, like love, if it applies to anything in the world" (283).

one that is focused according to natural laws that allow for the open interaction of elements therein. It offers the poet a concrete and “contained” working space—a workable ground and field from which to write. The “free association” of elements within the collage articulates a crucial correlation undergirding Duncan’s *ecopoethic* that extends the politics of the page: that of form being an extension of content, the form of the poem as expressive of the individual/communal balance.<sup>132</sup>

Whereas Olson and Duncan both use the work of others in their poetry, they do so to radically different ends. Although Olson pays homage to his poetic elders, he often uses these sources in his work primarily as a means to the end of supporting his own arguments or convictions. Duncan’s derivations are primarily homage, acknowledging the contributions of “the masters” to the poetic commons. Duncan makes explicit in “Pages from A Notebook” that he is a derivative poet, that to derive as well as “to emulate, imitate, reconstrue, approximate, duplicate” is central his art (*A Selected* 18). As Don Byrd remarks, “[Duncan] has made the gathering of diverse influences into a poetic” (“The Question” 39). It may seem at first that Duncan’s gathering of other voices into a derivative chrestomathy would make it difficult for him to articulate agency and assert his individual place in the commons. However, his gathering from tradition into collage creates an interactive space in which he can “practice place” using this chrestomathy. I will extend this argument later in this section to assert that the collage erects a TAZ, but first I will ruminate on Duncan’s collage in the context of what de Certeau calls “practiced place,” which will help to contextualize the case.

As de Certeau writes, “space is a practiced place” (*The Practice* 117). To explain this statement, de Certeau first differentiates between space and place. As he explains, “A place (*lieu*)

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<sup>132</sup> The statement “form is never more than an extension of content” is often held as the primary principle of projective verse. Robert Creeley authored the statement, which is then taken up by Olson and repeated in his “Projective Verse.”

is the order (of whatever kind) in accord with which elements are distributed in relationships of coexistence ... A place is thus an instantaneous configuration of positions” (117). This conception of place resembles Duncan’s collage, which allows whatever influences and ideas that may enter the meadow to mingle freely, beside one another, in whatever configuration arises in the occasion of composition. In contrast to place, “space is composed of intersections of mobile elements. It is in a sense actuated by the ensemble of movements deployed within it. Space occurs as the effect produced by the operations that orient it, situate it, temporalize it, and make it function in a polyvalent unity of conflictual programs or contractual proximities” (117). Whereas place implies stability, if only temporarily, space is based on continual movement and flux. It changes and develops in response to the “operations” within it that “make it function.” For de Certeau, place is a stable or fixed location, whereas space transforms places by increasing their use-value and semantic output by inflecting them with various active operations and human practices.<sup>133</sup>

To illustrate how space is practiced place, then, de Certeau offers the example of pedestrians walking on the street: a street is a place designed with urban planning in mind, but the act of people walking through it transforms it into a space of myriad usefulness, mobility, and desire.<sup>134</sup> Through its practice by human movement and purpose, the “place” of the street exceeds its bounds as pavement for walking and becomes a space of multiple functions. Although people will move through the street largely as directed by the rules of planning, they

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<sup>133</sup> As I will elucidate in the following chapters, I don’t agree entirely with de Certeau’s conception of place as necessarily stable, inert or complete; rather, I side more with Doreen Massey, who argues that place is much more dynamic, representing a pause or local articulation of the wider possibilities of space. For the purposes of Duncan’s collage, however, I think the distinction sheds light on the relation between the poem and the ground of tradition—the poem being a pause, local articulation, or “practice” of the interactive field from which it is drawn. I will thus complicate this theory in my later chapters by revising its terms: rather than thinking of place as a “dead” locale, I will explore the possibility of place as a moving centre, one that responds to the ever-changing environment of space.

<sup>134</sup> Here, de Certeau echoes Foucault’s earlier observations on how spaces are transformed and marked by discursive practices and disciplinary structures.

will also imbue the place with a poetics of use—spatial practices and improvisation that extend the function of the space and exceed its control by urban planners and planning bylaws. De Certeau then offers the example of “reading” as spatial transformation of the same kind: “an act of reading is the space produced by the practice of a particular place: a written text, i.e., a place constituted by a system of signs” (117). In creating his chrestomathy, Duncan similarly transforms the written text into a system of extractable signs that he can repurpose into an accessible hermeneutic for both himself and the reader. As Andy Weaver observes, this gathering creates an anarchic understanding of language as communally owned and accessible: “If, as Duncan believes, all language is owned and created by all individuals, then all utterances are also necessarily the community’s, not the individual’s, and can be used by anyone” (“Promoting” 80). The chrestomathy of the collage provides individual *and* communal access to the commons, from as many entrances and exits are possible. For Duncan, there is a direct link between practiced creativity and the communing of individuals as a mode of living. As he ruminates, “The grand Maker or Poet makes his Self come real—realizes Himself—as he makes the field of the Real. We learn who we are by living—we are ourselves the mass of our individualities” (“Changing” 79).

A significant parallel can be made then between de Certeau’s conception of space as practiced place and Duncan’s derivative poetics, which is also an act of “practiced place” that at once creates, derives from, and extends the space of the “poetic commons.” As Duncan writes in “Often I am Permitted to Return to a Meadow,” the commons become an open meadow, a “scene made-up by the mind, / that is not mine, but is a *made place*, / that is mine” (*The Opening* 7). He repeatedly refers to this place as a “made place” and later “a field folded” (7), which emphasizes the space as multidimensional, created and creative. This place is also imagined; as such, it is not

limited to material reality but exists in response with reality. This repurposing of the poetic commons as practiced place is echoed in Clément Oudart's assertion of Duncan's open form as "a dual practice of reading writings and writing readings" (para. 55). The collage is a practiced place created by and through Duncan's practice of deriving from the system of signs making up the textual poetic commons. Duncan wavers between claiming and denying ownership of the space; it is both individual and communal, owned by one and yet not owned individually, because it is the place of the "we." The common manifests in the individual articulations of it through poems; these poems, in turn, are responses to the larger commons that is undefinable or unknowable. Many writers enter the collage as authors, and yet Duncan's specific articulation of these gathered sources is itself a creative assemblage and a space of collaborative authorship. Or, as Weaver puts it, "For Duncan, writing assemblage-informed poetry creates an anarchic community of writers stretching through space and time, linking humanity together at a basic level of non-hierarchical equality" ("Promoting" 81).

Indeed, the collage is an *architextural* space *par excellence*, for it articulates many different objects into a building form, holding these various elements in tension.<sup>135</sup> As Duncan writes in "Rites of Participation," "The art of the poem, like the mechanism of the dream or the intent of the tribal myth and dromena, is a cathexis: to keep present and immediate a variety of times and places, persons and events" (110). As a cathexis, the practiced place of the palimpsest collage enables the poet to hold these various events in immediate harmony in energized space. For Duncan, the term "articulation" involves an act of building together; it is a guiding metaphor

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<sup>135</sup> "Architextural" is my term that aims to encapsulate both the textual and architectural planes of Duncan's poetics. I will return to this term later when discussing "the household" in the final section. To note, however, Stephen Collis uses a similar term, "architextual," in the context of Duncan's poetry in "'The Frayed Trope of Rome': *Poetic Architecture in Robert Duncan, Ronald Johnson, and Lisa Robertson*." I have used the term "architextural" elsewhere in my published work, and although I wish to acknowledge Collis's use of a similar term, I find my term more fitting to the discussion of space in Duncan's work, since it emphasizes the "multiphasic" (Duncan, *Bending* ix) elements of space therein as part and parcel of the textual fabric.

for the “multiphasic” and “polysemous” poetic act, “taking each thing of the composition as generative of meaning, a response to and a contribution to the building form” (*Bending* ix). Articulation, then, denotes a system of feedback wherein the poet responds to, and thereby contributes, to the field of the poem at hand—a sentiment that Olson shares as well. The “fittings” and “resonances” of the poem respond to the field writ large, and in so doing, they are continually remade anew in the course of the poetic act: “Every particular is an immediate happening of meaning at large; every present activity in the poem redistributes future as well as past events” (*Bending* ix).

Duncan’s articulation of the collage as “redistribution” closely resembles Whitehead’s conception of “concrecence” that was introduced in the previous chapter, wherein past influences are continually re-circulated into the present, mixing and synthesizing and thereby creating new entities. For Duncan, these often discordant “concord and contrasts . . . these discords, these imperatives of the poem that exceed our proprieties, these interferences . . . touch upon the living center where there is no composure but a life-spring of dissatisfaction in all orders from which the restless ordering of our poetry comes” (x). Moreover, these concord and contrasts in the collage attest to an anarchic poetic that places primacy on what he calls “the free association of living things . . . that may have seeds of being in free verse or free thought” (“Ideas” 24). More will be said on anarchist spaces in Duncan’s work in the final section of this chapter on the “household.” It is worth mentioning here, however, that the collage as such allows Duncan to foster his *ecopoethic* by manifesting his anarchic ethics of individual volition and communal integrity into a poetic form of place.

An example *par excellence* of the creation of new entities by “mixing and synthesizing” is the anti-war collage poem “The Fire, Passages 13.” In the poem, Duncan adapts Pound’s

conception of the ideogram in the field of the page. “Adapts” is the operative word here, since Duncan’s collage technique appropriates the ideogram from Pound, but with a radically different intention and outcome. Pound valorized the Chinese ideogram as an expression of utmost coherence in meaning and in structure; in attempting to decipher and interpret the teachings of Confucius, his study of the pictorial ideograms therein offered him “a better idea of the whole and the unity of the doctrine” (Pound, “Mang Tsze” 85). I would thus agree with Christopher Beach’s argument that Duncan’s collages should not be termed “collage ideograms,” as Laszlo Géfin argues (174). Unlike Pound, who sees the ideogram as a “vortex” of accuracy in meaning, Duncan sees the ideogram as a process of opening language to a field of possibilities. In other words, the ideogrammic undertones of Duncan’s collage are not centripetal, returning to a stable centre as Pound would have it, but are centrifugal, radiating a plurality of meanings outwards from the source of inspiration and experience.

The collage of thirty-six evenly spaced words that begins and ends the poem demonstrates this centrifugal movement. The words are arranged in the form of a grid; in the final grid, the same words are written in reverse position as a palindrome, as if radiating out from the center established by the first grid:



Figure 7. Robert Duncan, “The Fire: Passages 13.” *Bending the Bow* 40, 45.

Thus spatialized, the collage of words trouble left-to-right Western syntax, for they can be read from many different vantage points, and can be arranged in the mind of the poet and reader according to these various entrances and exits. Moreover, the words themselves, such as “jump,” “stone,” “hand,” and “leaf,” form concrete visual images, or as Beach describes them, “word paintings” (187). This alignment of visual media is made explicit in the poem’s layering of the word-made-visual with the visual art of Renaissance painter Piero di Cosimo’s *A Forest Fire*:

“whose animals, entering a charmd field / in the light of his vision, a stillness, / have their dreamy glades and pastures. / The flames, the smoke. The curious / sharp focus in a glow sight / in the Anima Mundi has” (*Bending* 42).

Taken from Plato’s writings, the *anima mundi* or “soul of the world” describes the intrinsic connection between all living things on the planet. It refers to the “intermediary sphere ... that exists between the divine world (the intellectual or intelligible universe of eternal ideas) and the material, sensible world” (Hair 136). The painting illustrates this liminal space between beauty and desire, on the one hand, and strife or conflict, on the other:



Figure 8. Piero Di Cosimo, *The Forest Fire* (1505).

The scene is one of chaos infused with an encompassing “charmd” stillness; while a forest fire rages in the centre of the painting, a radiating stillness is felt outward in the depiction of the animals retreating to the safety of pasture. For Duncan, these poles of experience, which he terms Eris and Eros, express a natural order, an eternal balance. A thorough examination of the work of these complimentary forces in Duncan’s cosmology is beyond the scope of this section; however, a brief outline will prove useful in terms of the collage Duncan establishes in “The Fire.” The tension between Eris and Eros is the major underlying ideological and visual trope of *Bending the Bow*. In the poem therein of the same name, he quotes Heraclitus: “bend back the bow in

dreams as we may / til the end rimes in the taut string ... At the extremity of this / design / ‘there is a connexion working in both directions, as in / the bow and the lyre’” (7).<sup>136</sup> Duncan is acutely aware of the structure of the bow as a unit of oppositions; it is the tension of the strings against the curved frame of the bow that makes the instrument produce music and also the necessary propulsion of a deadly arrow. It is an order of being that is in concert with the cosmic order underlying all things.

As such, the tension of the bow should not be seen as limiting; the maintained tension between Eris and Eros creates a ground of fluctuating possibility. Under the poet’s hand, these “connexions” complicate the field; they take the form of “Rimes, the reiteration of formations in the design, even puns, [that] lead into complexities of the field” (vi). These “connexions” are thus access points to and from the field, and they contribute to the complex fabric of the field. Duncan extends this conceit of the lyre’s construction and poetic openness underhand when he writes, “The part in its fitting does not lock but unlocks ... the harmony, the method of the stringing, in which conflicts are transformd in their being taken as contrasts, I mean to take in the largesse of meanings” (iv). Here, Duncan extends the presiding trope of doubleness and double vision that pervades his work. By means of the counterbalancing force of Eros, the conflict of Eris is “transformd” into productive strife. There is this doubleness to the nature of poetry, for as Duncan urges, it is the responsibility of the poet to coordinate between these two seemingly oppositional but necessary forces in his or her work, in order to align the work with the natural order that pervades all: “We’ve our business to attend Day’s duties / bend back the bow” (7).

To go back to “The Fire,” it is apparent that Duncan is drawn to the tension between these complimentary forces of harmony and war in di Cosimo’s painting, which depicts a field of

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<sup>136</sup> In Greek mythology, Hermes gifted the lyre he built to Apollo after stealing his cattle. Apollo then became a master of the instrument. As Duncan explains, “Hermes, god of poets and thieves, lock-picker then, invented the bow and the lyre to confound Apollo, god of poetry” (*Bending* iv).

animals attempting to escape a forest fire. As Duncan tells us, it is painted using the “*sfumato* of Leonardo da Vinci” (41), a painting technique wherein the gradations between light and dark, borders and lines evaporate “in the manner of smoke” (Earls 263). As with the *Mona Lisa*, only implied contours are represented by the painting, which creates a play of ethereal shades and shadows. The *sfumato* technique thus illustrates the liminality of the *anima mundi*, for its blurred borderlines express an intermediary space between the transcendent and the sensible. The “featherd, furred, leafy / boundaries” express “pastoral stillness amidst terror” in the scene of the painting (Duncan, *Bending* 42-43). Despite the immediate chaos of the scene, there is nonetheless a presiding sense of natural order and harmony that pervades the image, which demonstrates the ability of the artist/poet to imagine and create a place of imagined stillness amidst chaos. In this way, the poem becomes an emblem of response to the events of the world—by means of creating the “still image” of the painting, the artist imagines and brings into being a place of calm amidst the terror of the animals. The terror of the flames is dimmed, quite literally, by the *sfumato*, and the episode of terror and destruction evaporates into one of stillness and peace, if only temporarily. Duncan repeatedly uses the term “stillness” to describe the image, which again recalls Pound’s ideogram. He then translates this technique poetically into real space by layering the current events of war into the collage, in order to demonstrate that such imagined stillness provides an oppositional stance towards the chaos of war.

The *sfumato* mode of Piero di Cosimo’s painting expresses a natural order that Duncan imbues in his anarchist politics. Duncan’s opening and closing collage of words employs this technique, as it similarly works to provide a contradictory “mobile stillness”—a poetic stillness amidst the erratic confusion of war. Like in the painting, the syntactic connections between the words of the collage are fluid and transitory; moreover, their seemingly random appearance

expresses a concern for a natural, immanent order occurring in language. The transitory harmony of the words and images moving through the poem together establish the collage as a TAZ, events that “dissolve . . . to reform elsewhere/elsewhen” (Bey, *T.A.Z.* 92). In Duncan’s poem, the space of strife, chaos, and war is transformed by the *sfumato* mode into a space of interacting conflict. Indeed, Duncan’s stance on war is not one of complete resistance (as Denise Levertov has it), for he sees this response as futile; instead, one must seek a harmony between destruction and creation, at all times maintaining a “creative strife” by “keeping at work contending forces and convictions” (*Fictive* 112). Olson achieves a similar effect with his figuration of the Stage Fort, transformed by the Dorchester fishermen from a controlled State space to a space of usefulness and autonomy. Duncan reterritorializes the space of war by creating a place of poetic stillness and resistance. Insisting upon the “autonomous life of the poem,” (“Duncan’s Dust-Jacket” 686) Duncan’s imagined spaces effect a real-world consciousness favouring individual will against the imposition of the State, and adherence to an underlying natural order of all things.

The meadow, and its unfolding in the collage, expresses Duncan’s hermeneutical understanding of place and the opposing forces inherent in the ground. As he elucidates,

The ground is compounded of negative and positive areas in which we see shapes defined. In the immediate work, puns appear. The line of the poem is articulated into phrases so that phrases of its happening resonate where they will. Or lines stand as stanzas in themselves of our intention. . . . This is not a field of the irrational; but a field of ratios in which events appear in language. (*Bending* v)

These negative and positive touchstones of the field create rimes, which in turn texturize the complex fabric of the collage. Together, this poetic methodology produces a hermeneutic, or

“view,” to use Olson’s grounding term. Indeed, the meadow is comparable to Olson’s view of place in the polis, for it expresses the hermeneutic “field of ratios” that articulates the experience of the poet in space-time. This is where Duncan’s *ecopoethic* manifests—he criticizes Pound’s “totalitarian” tendencies in his wish to “cohere,” and instead allows these instances or presences to surface in the collage without judgment.

However, whereas Olson’s polis as articulated through Maximus focuses more on the one-to-one relationship between individual and communal view and the historical landscape, Duncan’s meadow suggests a more ecological spatial poetic, one in which varied communities, both human and nonhuman, come together in interactive, cyclical flux. The various correspondences between these “ecologies of feeling-thought” (Duncan, *The Early* 686) manifest in the field of the collage—the compositional field becomes a means for Duncan to articulate these discordances as they appear, without imposing an overall form or coherent meaning upon them. Olson also accomplishes this balance, as demonstrated in the last chapter with his treatment of Merry in Dogtown. Merry is not exactly an ideal figure or hero, but he nonetheless represents an articulation of humanity, however discordant. In the same manner, in the imagined space of the collage, Duncan articulates the various and complex relations that the self shares with the environment.

Collage is a means by which Duncan is able to preserve heterogeneity and chance in the face of political imposition; along with the household, which will be discussed in the last section of this chapter, the collage offers a space for experimenting with place. For Duncan, these experimental spaces are as legitimate (and as necessary) as the physical spaces that we occupy in the real world. Duncan takes this one step further to suggest that the dynamic relations of the collage produce a “living center” from which radiates all orders of living, including the

complimentary forces of Eris and Eros, suffering and desire. “[T]here is no composure,” Duncan admits, “but a life-spring of dissatisfaction in all orders from which the restless ordering of our poetry comes” (*Bending* x).

The following section analyzes a concrete example of these imagined spaces of harmonic creativity and resistance at work in the real world: Simon Rodia’s Watts Towers. Rodia’s towers extend the possibilities of creative and created space: its anarchic construction violated the city’s imposed spatial boundaries and contracts, thus usurping the State as arbiter of spatial determinacy.

### **Derivative “Anarchitecture”: Rodia’s Towers**<sup>137</sup>

I arise and unbuild it again.<sup>138</sup>

—Percy Bysshe Shelley

In the poem “Nel Mezzo Del Cammin Di Nostra Vita”<sup>139</sup> Duncan gives praise to the work of Sabato “Simon” Rodia, a self-educated Italian immigrant who constructed the Watts Towers (or *Nuestro Pueblo*, as he called them) in the marginal, working-class Watts area of Los Angeles.<sup>140</sup> The project took 33 years to complete from 1921-54, and it was undertaken as a solo project with Rodia using only basic hand tools to inlay various bits of city detriment such as bits of broken dishes, glass, tile, pottery, and seashells into reinforced concrete. The complex consists of three central conical towers, the tallest reaching 99 ½ feet in height (Del Giudice n.pag). The city

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<sup>137</sup> “Anarchitecture” is a term used by American artist Gordon Matta-Clark to describe his sculptures, called “building cuts,” which were created by carving new structures out of old buildings (Falconer 260).

<sup>138</sup> “The Cloud” 57.

<sup>139</sup> The title is taken from the first line of Dante’s *Commedia*. As Stephen Fredman observes, Duncan “effectively compares Rodia’s towers to the three towering canticles of Dante’s vernacular poem. Duncan would have also noticed a numerological correspondence; just as each of Dante’s three canticles has thirty-three cantos, so the three towers were erected in the course of thirty-three years” (*Contextual* 66).

<sup>140</sup> *Nuestro Pueblo* translates as “Our Town/ Our People” (Del Giudice n.pag), which resonates nicely with Duncan’s anarchic ideal of *communitas*.

officials continually attempted to halt its construction and questioned its safety, even after successful tests of its structural soundness. For Duncan, Rodia embodies artistic intervention upon sanctioned authority, and his towers are spatial artifacts that demonstrate the potential for imagined, created places to alter the semantics of real landscapes. As will be discussed, although the towers are not, in themselves, temporary, the place they create is nonetheless allied to the concept of the TAZ through Rodia's repurposing of "temporary use" materials in a new location for an anarchic purpose.<sup>141</sup> I would thus situate the towers as more of an anarchic autonomous zone—a concept I will develop over the course of this section.

The collage methodology of Rodia's towers surely resonated with Duncan's own creative practice of grand collage, as well as with his anarchist sensibility. As an individual, Rodia went against city authorities in erecting the towers, and in so doing he created a common, autonomous space where people can commune together outside of sanctioned rules. The anarchist spirit behind the construction of the towers is analogous to that of the TAZ, which are established "against the grain of the expected curve, the consensus-approved trajectory" (Bey, *T.A.Z.* 98). From the discarded objects of the city dump, Rodia creates and inhabits a place to "do something big for America," and represent ideal democratic space. As Duncan writes of the towers:

an original, accretion of disregarded  
splendors  
resurrected against the rules,  
having in this its personal joke; its genius

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<sup>141</sup> Although Bey originally considered the temporariness of the TAZ to be among its most subversive qualities—since as temporary, the TAZ remains dynamic and resists corruption or re-absorption by the state—he later "had to consider that not all existing autonomous zones are 'temporary'" ("Permanent" n.p.). After the success of the TAZ, he later issued an article in 1993 called "Permanent TAZs" that acknowledges the subversive potential of PAZs, spaces that are not temporary but that can still be occupied as self-organized autonomous zones, such as conferences, communes, and even simply communities of people.

misfitting  
 the expected mediocre; an ecstasy  
 of broken bottles  
 and colored dishes thrown up against whatever  
 piety, city ordinance, plans,  
 risking height (*Roots* 23)

In “risking height” outside the bounded rules of city ordinance, Rodia’s site is comparable to a Gloucester-esque *polis*. It differs from Gloucester in that it is very much a created space, but the spatial imaginary behind it is commensurate with Olson’s sentiment. Duncan describes the towers “rising / out of the squalid suburbs where the / mind is beaten back to the traffic” (22) and this uprising also recalls Olson’s anarchic Diorite Man rising from the floor of the ocean, upsetting the imposed order of the universe. The urban landscape of Los Angeles is a scene of “imagination defeated” and in contrast, the three towers, “a trinity upraised by himself” (22) rise above this landscape.

This upward movement or “uprising” is a trope in Duncan’s oeuvre that similarly represents anarchic movement and mobility within imposed spatial sanctions. Using materials “scavenged / from the city dump ... bits of beauty / sorted out” (Duncan, *Roots* 22), Rodia transforms these transient materials into the architecture of the towers, thereby reclaiming the land as a self-created ground. This notion of using old objects anew and the cycle of regeneration therein is hinted at through Duncan’s use of “spectral language” when discussing the towers:

The whole  
 planned to occupy life and allow  
 for death:

a skeletal remain  
 as glory, a raised image, sceptre,  
 spectral island, most arrogant (24)

For Duncan's poetics, the parts of the whole are what build form and meaning in the larger composition. As he writes in *Bending*, "The artist, after Dante's poetics, works with all parts of the poem as *polysemous*, taking each thing of the composition as generative of meaning, a response and a contribution to the building form" (ix; original emphasis). The towers are established as an emblem of both life and death and perhaps the cycle in between; the building up of the towers gives new life and purpose to the detritus that was left to decay. Moreover, the very refuse used has a "temporary" use value, for these are disposable items that have been consumed and then discarded as useless. As mentioned last chapter, the postwar era was marked by an unprecedented increase in consumerism and subsequent waste; Rodia's towers are a testament to the "throwaway culture" of the time, which by extent sees space as empty and infinitely fillable with waste. By incorporating such waste into a conceptual project, Rodia recuperates the detritus of mass culture by using it to create an autonomous, meaningful place.

In the hands of Rodia, these signifiers of urban consumption are transformed into the building form of the "phantom kingdom," (Duncan, *Roots* 23) an individual and communal *polis*. Duncan likens the towers to the "Tower of Jewels at the San Francisco / Panama-Pacific Exposition in 1915" and he alludes to architect Louis Christian Mullgardt's description of the towers as a "phantom kingdom to symbolize man's / highest aims" (23). This quotation is taken from Mullgardt's 1915 expository on the Tower of Jewels entitled *The Architecture and Landscape Gardening of the Exposition*. In it, the original quotation, extended, reads: "If building Phantom Kingdoms symbolizes man's highest aims on earth, then the same is true when

building Real Kingdoms. Architecture and the sister arts are the most reliable barometers in recording human thought” (Mullgardt 2). Here the spectral imaginary and the tangible real collide in space: the phantom kingdoms such as the Watts Towers, Duncan’s poetic commons, and Olson’s Gloucester testify to the translatability of human thought into concrete space.

Rodia’s towers, then, attest to the posthumous potential of discarded objects—a sentiment that resounds with Duncan’s notion of derivation and the poetic commons in his collage methodology. Among many denotations, the term “derive” can mean the extension of a path, the diversion of a course of flow, or the taking from a source. Rodia derives the materials for his towers from the space of common waste, the dump, and then repurposes them anew. Uniting form and content, Duncan constructs his ode to the towers as a collage, for in it he derives inspiration from a variety of sources, including Rodia himself, Dante, Mullgardt, Arthurian legend, and art historian Jacob Burckhardt. Duncan also includes lines from Charles Olson’s essay “Against Wisdom as Such”:

‘There are only his own  
 composed forms, and each one  
 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’ (23)

Taking what Duncan calls “rude elements of [his] household,” (*Roots* 33) Rodia recasts these existing forms in the “heat” and “instant” of composition. The semantic yield of these rudimentary objects is increased in their revised purpose.<sup>142</sup>

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<sup>142</sup> Gertrude Stein’s influence on Duncan is evident in his affinity for the concrete particulars of life and the untapped imaginary potential within these objects when rendered with the artist’s hand.

Indeed, Duncan valorizes Rodia for incorporating his art into his life as a practice of being *in place*. Rodia's body bore the labour of his art, so much so that "journalists and students who interviewed him in the 1960s reported that tiny glass shards were embedded in the skin of his hands and arms" (Schrank 277). Rodia lived and worked on the site until 1954 when he abruptly deeded the property to his neighbour and moved to northern California (277). Little is known about why Rodia abandoned the project, or his initial intentions, other than that he wanted "to do something big for America"—a phrase that appears in the opening and closing of Duncan's poem. Rodia's incorporation of the materials of the Towers into his body and his mind in this way testifies to the Towers as analogous to a TAZ, a space of intense autonomy. Bey links the TAZ with festival: "such moments of intensity give shape and meaning to the entirety of a life. The shaman returns—you can't stay up on the roof forever—but things have changed, shifts and integrations have occurred—a *difference* is made" (99; original emphasis). Indeed, the aim of the TAZ is not duration but *difference*—its radicality exists in its process of continual becoming. This sentiment also describes Duncan's derivative collage practice—productive shifts and integrations in the ground create new uprisings of place from within the commons.

For Duncan, the space of the commons, of the cosmos, and of the household all share the autonomy of the TAZ.<sup>143</sup> As such, Duncan was enamoured by the idea of incorporating the everyday "household" into his life and his work, of which Rodia's Towers were emblematic. For Duncan, these two spheres—the domestic and the cosmic—are ideally proximal, mirror images of each other, microcosm and macrocosm. As he writes in "Towards an Open Universe," "The imagination of this cosmos is as immediate to me as the imagination of my household or my self,

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<sup>143</sup> The "household" also refers to Duncan's San Francisco home that he shared with his artist partner Jess Collins—a place of communal creativity and intellectuality. As Lisa Jarnot notes in *Robert Duncan, The Ambassador from Venus: A Biography*: "The physical and temporal boundaries of the household allowed both men to delve into the complex creative projects that occupied their attentions for nearly forty years" (121).

for I have taken my being in what I know of the sun and of the magnitude of the cosmos, as I have taken my being in what I know of domestic things” (1). For the poet obeying the natural order in writing, these two spaces—the cosmos and the household, the cosmic community writ large and the domestic sphere of the individual—become reflections of one another. The final section of this chapter will explore the household as it figures in Duncan’s work as a TAZ, a place of resistance, especially in the Cold War milieu; however, I will briefly introduce this section by digressing to a discussion of Duncan’s term “in-form,” a term that relates to Olson’s conception of proprioception. Thinking through “in-form” allows Duncan to see divine immanence as inherent in both the highest order of the universe, and in the “rude” aspects of the domestic household. In short, in-form is the vehicle by which the spaces of the household and the cosmos commune in mutual reflection.

**“the inbinding, the return”: In-forming Individual and Communal Space and Place**

And so we are actually in the throes, the throes in which the ideal and the reality are at work.<sup>144</sup>

—Robert Duncan

What can I feel of it?<sup>145</sup>

—Robert Duncan

Both Olson and Duncan developed a spatial hermeneutic through which place is articulated by means of moving through the environment and responding to its “feedback.” They both have specific terms to describe the articulations of individual space-time from within these gathered forces of the field: for Olson, “proprioception” describes the body moving and feeling through space, and the resulting projection demonstrates “the fact” of the individual. Duncan places

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<sup>144</sup> “Changing Perspectives” 64.

<sup>145</sup> *Ground Work* 80.

similar primacy on the gathering of the environs into a subjective space-time, an active process that he variously calls “in-form” (*The Collected Early* 687), “inbinding,” (*The Opening* 85) and “In-gathering” (*Ground Work: Before the War* 96). As the terms “in-form” and “inbinding” suggest, the process involves the body absorbing sensory data from the environment, and is thus intimately related to Olson’s spatial construct of the polis.<sup>146</sup> It is also expressive of an individual *nomos*, as I discussed in the last chapter, which articulates a subjective space-time using the local proximities that resonate with one’s own body.

Indeed, there is a strong resonance of Romantic immanence and responsivity in Duncan’s work. In his essay “Towards an Open Universe,” Duncan addresses this plane between material and metaphoric space occupied by the poem as a “supreme effort of consciousness ... a dancing organization between personal and cosmic identity” (3). In order to work through this dynamic interaction, Duncan invokes Schrödinger’s response in his book *What Is Life?* to his own question: “When is a matter said to be alive?” with the answer “When it goes on ‘doing something,’ moving, exchanging material with its environment” (3). Duncan, however, takes this responsivity further in the politics of his poetics, for his conception of “in-form” informs his concept of an all-pervasive yet unimposing natural Law that governs his poetics. As he explains, “Central to and defining the poetics I am trying to suggest here is the conviction that the order man may contrive or impose upon the things about him or upon his own language is trivial beside the divine order or natural order he may discover in them” (6). In other words, when the

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<sup>146</sup> It lies outside the scope of this chapter to discuss at length, but it is worth noting connections between Duncan’s term “inform” and Gerard Manley Hopkins’s related terms, “inscape” and “instress.” Denise Levertov stressed the importance of Hopkins’s terms inscape and instress in poetic composition. In her pivotal essay “Some Notes on Organic Form” (1965) she uses Hopkins’s terms to understanding of the organic form of poetry, “a method of apperception, i.e., of recognizing what we perceive ... based on an intuition of an order, a form beyond forms, in which forms partake, and of which man’s creative works are analogies, resemblances, natural allegories. Such poetry is exploratory” (*New and Selected* 67-68).

poet is “permitted” into the field of the meadow, he/she must be attentive and respond to the natural order that surfaces in that present.

Duncan sees in-form as a bipartite process involving a proprioceptive relationship between the body and the environment, on the one hand, and a coexisting relationship between the natural and the divine. These processes are concurrent and symbiotic, and both come about in accordance to “It,” Duncan’s term for natural law. In terms of the self’s relationship to the field, the landscape, Duncan insists that the poet perceive and then respond to the intensities of the environment. Such intensities are the measure not only of the individual, according to Duncan, but to *living* writ large:

To see, to hear, to feel or taste—this sensory intelligence that seems so immediate to us as to be simple and given—comes about in a formal organization so complicated that it remains obscure to our investigation in all but its crudest aspects. To be alive itself is a form involving organization in time and space, continuity and body, that exceeds clearly our conscious design. (6)

Like Olson’s proprioception, Duncan’s concept of in-form involves a non-Euclidean relation to space. As he writes in “Everything Speaks to Me” in “Dante Études”:

Everything speaks to me!    In faith  
my sight is sound.    I draw from out  
                                 the resounding mountain side  
the gist of majesty.    It is at once  
                                 a presentation out of space  
awakening a spiritual enormity, and still  
                                 the sounding of a tone



into resounding visibilities. (105-106)<sup>147</sup>

Here the grand field of “everything” (of which literary tradition takes part) is expressed as a sea of rolling surfs, and Duncan insists upon the importance of “listening” and answering to these intensities made present to him. Listening opens unto “another listening” by which sounds from the environment are retranslated into “resounding visibilities,” so that, as Duncan observes, “words have weight in my hand / as I write” (105). The poet, as the creative intermediary between these sensory realms, creates a cycle of feedback with the environment: “The actual world speaks to me, and when it comes to that pitch, the words I speak with but imitate the way the mountain speaks. I create *in return*. In the structures of rime, not “I” but words themselves speak to you” (*Fictive* 125; original emphasis). Duncan’s spirituality is undergirded by a fierce commitment to immanentist realism; as the above passage illuminates, the physical and divine realism are surely separate, but are integral parts to the whole of “what Is.” Duncan believes in an ever-present divine force, the “It” in all things; at the same time, he is aware of the processual nature of the cosmos, in which all individuals play a participatory role. Listening to the field, then, in-forms the poet, and allows him or her to respond creatively, thereby extending the vibrations of nature into imagined space.

To this sentiment in *The Opening of the Field*, Duncan ruminates on the Whiteheadian dictum of “presentational immediacy,” the view of perception as a *spatial event* in which, as the term suggests, the senses of the body present the immediacy of presences within the environment.<sup>148</sup> The term is connected with one’s view of the environment, “our immediate

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<sup>147</sup> The tympanum referred to in Duncan’s poem is the human eardrum. In entomology, the tympanum is a membrane covering the hearing organ on the leg or body of some insects that aids the production of sound (as in the case of the cicada). Duncan’s invocation here of the tympanum is an interesting correlate with Olson’s concept of proprioception and feedback discussed last chapter.

<sup>148</sup> “In-form,” as Duncan sees it, is also related to Whitehead’s concept of “prehension,” a term that will be further discussed in the next section. The term is derived from the Latin *prehensio*, “to seize,” (Griffin 79) and indicates the process by which an organism perceives its environment, and incorporates elements of that environment into its own

perception of the contemporary external world [as] a community of actual things” involved in an “an impartial system of spatial extension” (Whitehead, *Symbolism* 21, 23) That is, we experience our sensory world in terms of spatial regions that are marked by sensory qualities—various sounds, colours, textures—and these together inform our perception of the local spatial relations of the environment.

For Duncan, view was especially important to his perceptions of the local environment, for he was cross-eyed, and the layered visual planes became a trope in his work. This doubled perspective reflects the two planes of the bow, Eros/Eris, which are complementary and coexisting. In the poem “Crosses of Harmony and Disharmony,” then, the “cross” is a prevalent pun used. In the opening line he refers to “the cross-eyed bear” (*The Opening* 44) and then goes on to describe the unique interpretative view that his crossed eyes enables by quoting Whitehead:

the sensory line  
 breaks  
 so that the lines of verse do not meet,  
 imitating that void between  
 two images of a single rose near at hand, the one  
 slightly above and to the right ...  
 “the double vision  
 due to maladjustment of the eyes” like  
 “visual delusions arising from some delirium  
 illustrates surrounding spatial regions”,  
 “pure mode of presentational immediacy”. (45)

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constitution. “Presentational immediacy,” along with “causal efficacy,” form the two modes of prehension, according to Whitehead’s organicism.



Here, Duncan connects the sensory perception of his double vision with the other mode of perception that Whitehead observes, “causal efficacy.” Presentational immediacy and causal efficacy are the two complementary modes of perception according to Whitehead. Whereas presentational immediacy allows us to view the local environment sharply with our senses, it involves more surface perceptions in the present moment. Causal efficacy, on the other hand, involves the significant influence of past activities and events on our local spatial relations. These two modes are the two stages of perception that together form our individual “symbolic reference” to the world, how we create meaning out of the relations between our body and the environment. When Duncan writes that “memory reaches,” then, he speaks of the pulling influence that memory has on his present “where,” his particular view of the world from which he sees. He is both “I”—the present self absorbing immediate sensory data, and “I”—the self whose past influences mediate the production of meaning in the present context. Hence his use of the past tense “was” and “saw” to demonstrate the past’s complicity in his present positionality. Duncan brings together these two “I’s” in the palindrome “was I saw.” The palindrome itself suggests doubleness, and here it formally invokes the interconnected selves of the past and present. Thus, his “in-forming,” the internalized semantic yield of the world, is produced by the interplay between immediate sensory data from the local environment combined with past influences and activities.

The place of the meadow in “Often I am Permitted” is also expressed in the trope of doubleness as “a field folded” (*The Opening* 7). The poem’s language evokes the doubleness inherent in words, imparting a musicality to the verse. It begins with the near rhyme “mind/mine,” upon which the whole poem mediates. Moreover, Duncan plays with the

assonance of “made/place,” and consonance of “thought/therein.”<sup>150</sup> Similarly, the alliteration of “made-up/mind/mine/made,” “forms/fall,” “flowers/flames” expresses this multiplicity of view. Duncan alludes to the doubleness of this wordplay as “a disturbance of words within words,” (7) as if the word itself is a microcosmic collage of multiple contexts and meanings. Moreover, the surplus in turns of phrase emphasizes the constructed and hermeneutical nature of the field, the multiple entrances to meaning made available according to one’s own “view.” The first lines of the poem introduce the meadow as a multi-layered, transformative, even contradictory space that is nonetheless “folded”:

as if it were a scene made-up by the mind,  
 that is not mine, but is a made place,  
 that is mine, it is so near to the heart,  
 an eternal pasture folded in all thought  
 so that there is a hall therein  
 that is a made place (7)

The poem, in verse and form, creates a “field folded” wherein the energetic associations between its elements double back and fold into their contraries in the collage. That Duncan describes the meadow “as if it were a scene made-up by the mind” seems to situate the meadow as a figment of Duncan’s imagination; however, the simile in the line suggests that for Duncan, this place is no mere mirage, but is very real and material. He describes it as a “made place” but also as “made-up,” which means, on the one hand, that it is a created place in reality, and, on the other, that it is a place constructed in his imagination. While attempting to describe the “made place”

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<sup>150</sup> In 1948 Duncan sought advice from Pound on his work in “The Venice Poem.” Pound advised Duncan to “watch the duration of syllables, the tone leading of vowels” (*The H.D. Book* 272), a sentiment that would become a guiding principle for all of Duncan’s work. Attention to the syllable is also one of the main tenets of “Projective Verse”: “For from the root out, from all over the place, the syllable comes, the figures of, the dance” (272).

above, Duncan uses the repeating anaphora of the qualifying conjunction “that.” In so doing, Duncan suggests that the meadow is an imagined composite of multiple perceptions whose contours continue to unfold. In short, and to use his own word: the meadow is “multiphasic.”

The complex bounds of the meadow, with its contradictory elements of exteriority and interiority, derivation and source, establish the meadow as the meeting place between the planes of the individual poet and the poetic commons. As a gestalt, the folding movement between words and images confuses the figure/ground relationship, resulting in what can only be called a hermeneutical encounter between the two. It is also the s/cite of Duncan’s theogony of sorts, for the meadow represents the poetic commons that houses tradition and the great poetic masters, into which Duncan is “permitted” to enter. Whereas Olson’s Hurrian theogony was set in the expanse of the ocean, with the individual Diorite Man rising as an unrelenting vertical force, here the spatiality of influence is cyclical. Duncan uses the term “folded” to describe the meadow, and he references the children’s game “ring a round of roses,” which also suggests cyclicity. The very logic followed by the lines of the poem expresses this circular form, as lines often double back to qualify preceding lines, as in the following examples:

that is not mine, but is a made place,  
 that is mine, it is so near to the heart  
 ...  
 wherefrom the shadows that are forms fall.

Wherefrom fall all architectures I am           (7)

These lines serve to connect the lines and stanzas in the poem, but they also imbue this poem about “return” with its own circular syntax. Indeed, each time Duncan writes, he is “returning” to the meadow. This distinction alone marks a major difference between Olson and Duncan on the grounds of tradition: whereas Olson stakes claim to the ground of tradition more or less to

project himself upward from the past, Duncan takes from the field in order to give back to it, returning to it repeatedly in order to conduct his ground work.

Olson's penchant for linearity and Duncan's for cyclicity can be traced to their respective understandings of the field itself.<sup>151</sup> To be sure, as this project argues, the "Projective Verse" model of field composition is, in and of itself, a hermeneutic. Olson's manifesto heralds speed and forward linearity as its main proponents, so that "ONE PERCEPTION MUST IMMEDIATELY AND DIRECTLY LEAD TO A FURTHER PERCEPTION." On the other hand, Duncan, specifically in "Often I am Permitted," proposes return as a poetic ideal enacted in a field that is instead "folded" onto itself in cyclical form. Hence his use of collage, which, unlike Olson's penchant for forward-moving lines of untethered perceptions, involves a more holistic view of image and gathered language writ large. Olson's vertical projection, rooted in geology and natural science, is intercepted by Duncan's horizontal meadow that is the site of recurring cycles of influence and participation between him and the field of the poetic commons.

For Duncan, recognizing the in-form in things is to recognize this natural law inherent in all creation. In order to understand the spirituality with which Duncan imbues space and place, it is necessary to discuss his anarchic understanding of the immanent cosmic Law that underpins all places and things. Recognition of the co-creative human and divine experience firstly involves recognition of this individual "in-gathering" or "inner law." As he writes, this law forms the basis for individual and cosmic ontology:

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<sup>151</sup> To be sure, Olson's work is also concerned with cyclicity, as discussed previously in terms of the cybernetic "feedback loop" of influence between the individual and the environment. Moreover, his "digging" into Gloucester history could also be considered as a cyclical process of going back to go forward. However, these examples of cyclicity can also be viewed as the foundations for the "vertical growth principle" that pervades his work. Exchanging sensory data with the environment and "going back" to the land's history is among the many means by which Olson roots the individual in space, lending credence and validation for the vertical projection of the individual. These cyclical actions by Olson are thus less concerned with "return" and more concerned with *moving forward*. Duncan is much more concerned with "return" as a guiding poetic principle and methodology; however, Olson would most likely see this focus as a violation of the immediacy of the individual, to which the poet must always be concerned.

Law is hidden in us, for it—our share of the Law—is what we must create as we create ourselves. To be individual is to recognize one’s nature, or the Nature in one, to be conscious and conscientious in thought and action. . . . Self is most intensely experienced in the individual’s unique identity as part of the universe at large where the truth of law must comprehend whatever he is to be. (“Changing” 70)

Indeed, to be aware of and apprehend one’s unique in-form, one’s “inbinding,” is imperative for the recognition of one’s participation in the larger cosmic order. Duncan’s view of an “inner law” is reflective of a larger Law, a cosmic ordering that includes the ordering of the poem underhand. Given his anarchist tendencies, this adherence to law may seem surprising. However, the “law” for Duncan is both a poetic law and an ethical law that abides by *responsibility*. The term is doubly meant to suggest responsiveness on behalf of the individual to the whole, on the one hand, and also the responsibility of the poet to such response, on the other. As he puts it in “The Law I Love is a Major Mover”: “Responsibility is to keep / the ability to respond” (*The Opening* 10). In other words, one’s responsibility lies with one’s continuing responsivity to the present moment, to what is unfolding in the happening. Duncan refers to this natural order as “It,” the force that permeates everything and contributes to both the formation and the well-being of the common good.

Traditionally, we think of laws as being spatially limited by borders and land-crossings. However, these spatial restrictions are absent in Duncan’s Law, for his is a natural order that knows no bounds yet binds the individual to a greater community. Duncan refers to the law as Whitman’s “law of laws,” or “the law of successions,” and by this he is referring to the law as a

creative, communal, heterogeneous ground.<sup>152</sup> “Laws are not imposed upon things,” Duncan ruminates, “but flowing from things; laws are not of imposed orders but of emerging orders” (“Changing” 71). Such is the guiding principle of the collage methodology, which involves permitting elements of the field to interact in accordance to the emerging order of the poem underhand.

The Law that governs the “symposium of the whole” is thus a law that is generative rather than restrictive; it is an immanent law that changes with the identities and flows of the individualities within commons. It is thus, as Deleuze and Guattari would put it, a law of intensities, for it eschews imposing measure and bounds; rather, it is created by (indeed, emerges out of) the symbiotic relationship of *responsivity* between individual and communal place. It is an immanent, organic, and binding force that underlies all of creation. Such Law is not a statist distortion meant to control and suppress the masses, but is a cosmic Law that can never be named or measured accurately. Since the Law is divine, it renders “trivial” the “order man may contrive or impose upon the things about him” (“Towards” 6). Here Duncan is referencing the contrived orders of the State, especially the imposition by men such as Johnson and Stalin, which he rails against in his anti-war poem “Up Rising.” Duncan aligns the problematic governing politics of his time directly to a matter of *listening* to this underlying order—or not listening, for that matter. In the poem “A Poem Beginning With A Line By Pindar,” Duncan blames the “injured” American landscape on the willing ignorance of American presidents:

Hoover, Coolidge, Harding, Wilson

hear the factories of human misery turning out commodities.

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<sup>152</sup> In *Enlarging the Temple*, Altieri also refers to a “creative ground” as a “source of meaningful and potentially universal creative activity” and is a postmodern response to “Victorian laments over the possibility of recovering a Romantic sense of nature ... creative ground would once more become a sense of vitality in nature or in ordinary social life” (34).

...

Harding, Wilson, Taft, Roosevelt,

idiots fumbling at the bride's door,

Where among these did the spirit reside

that restores the land to productive order? (*The Opening* 63-64)

In attempting to impose their own selfish orders, these politicians are not heeding the call of the “inner law,” the spirit of productive order. As we can expect, Duncan sees these actions against nature as harmful to the field of the commons, and so he uses pastoral imagery reflective of the meadow to emphasize their harm. However, Duncan ends this poem on a somewhat hopeful note, for in classic anarchist fashion, he finds potential salvation from these “great scars of wrong” in collective resistance:

I always see the under side turning

fumes that injure the tender landscape.

From which up break

lilac blossoms of courage in daily act

striving to meet a natural measure. (64)

Returning to his governing trope of tilling, of ground work, Duncan places faith in individual *action*. Despite the caustic “fumes” uprising from the injured American landscape, the blossoms of the collective rise unperturbed to reaffirm the “natural measure,” the law that presides over all and triumphs over any self-imposed laws of the State. The individual is, to use Deleuze and Guattari’s term, a line of flight.<sup>153</sup> In this case, Duncan’s field metaphor could not be more apt:

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<sup>153</sup> It lies outside the scope of this chapter to discuss at great length, but it is worth noting that Duncan’s conflict with Levertov resonates with Deleuze and Guattari’s cautions against the potential dangers of the line of flight. Put simply, Duncan refuted Levertov’s claims that writing is not enough, that it must proceed from direct action in a binary “us” versus “them” analogy of individual versus state. Levertov believed that the ethically superior

as a line of flight, the blossom of the individual (forming the greater community of blossoms) pushes through the caustic structures of the State to demonstrate an alternative order based in free action. In this way, the lilac blossoms are related to Olson's metaphor of the tansy to describe his resistant, self-contained polis in Gloucester, as discussed in the previous chapter. Moreover, the lilac blossoms in the injured, rotten landscape brings to mind Rodia's Towers, which also rise out of a heap of detritus, "out of the squalid suburbs" (*Roots* 22). The blossom demonstrates Duncan's concept of the self-created ground *par excellence*, for it represents the creation of place out of destruction, breaking new ground by intervening a new form in the imposed pattern.

It is therefore significant that Duncan roots his *ecopoethic* of place in immanence—there are certainly elements of Romantic transcendence throughout his work, but as his prevailing spatial metaphors demonstrate, Duncan is interested in immanent presence and action through the opening of real world spaces and places in which to foster this inner law. Altieri traces the immanentist mode back to Wordsworth and his "alternative logical model" in which "poetic creation is conceived more as the discovery and the disclosure of numinous relationships within nature than as the creation of containing and structuring forms" (17). I would extend Altieri's argument to Duncan's work and suggest that alongside the development of alternative logical structures, Duncan's *ecopoethic* also thereby establishes alternative approaches to space and place. Indeed, the means by which the poet is able to establish and enter places of resistance and

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community could correct the individual will; according to Duncan, this view dangerously approaches propaganda, for you cannot separate the "enlightened" poet and the citizen in this way. Moreover, he believes that the individual creates the community and thus holds primal authority; the individual is free to act but must not impose on the freedom to act of other individuals. As Deleuze and Guattari suggest, while the line of flight can produce creative diversions within the social field, it is also capable of dissolving itself of its radical possibility by realigning with hierarchical structures and mimicking the very organizations from whence it diverged. In its "freedom" the line can also become a line of destruction, as in the case of fascism. It seems that Duncan was addressing the same dangers that he saw in Levertov's politics—that of the line of flight becoming dangerously close to mimicking the State control of the individual.

love is by recognizing these intensive, uncontained relationships inherent in the great commune of all things. This opening of the field allows for self-actualization along the lines of natural order, and also the recognition of the self's participation in the greater community.

In-form, the recognition of the natural Law in all things—sums up Duncan's *ecopoethic* that extends beyond the page to reach the individual and the cosmic community. For Duncan, poetry is an act of reorganizing space by creating and occupying places of resistance and of love. Poetry also necessarily involves active *listening*—heeding the call from the poetic commons, the communal language, the ground of tradition from which the poet writes and to which he/she contributes. In the final section to follow, I will examine the individual place made communal that brings these places of love and resistance together—the “great household.”

### **Household of the Whole: *Communitas* in Ecopoethic Space**

For our house is our corner of the world. As has often been said, it is our first universe, a real cosmos in every sense of the world.<sup>154</sup>

—Gaston Bachelard

As Eric Keenaghan rightly points out, the “household” is a term that is used frequently in relation to Duncan, but its “significance to his poetic has remained largely uninvestigated” (72). This section amends this lack by exploring the household as both an immanent, physical space, and a psychic, imagined place in Duncan's work. These two poles of spatiality within the household, the immanent and the cosmic, together form a resistant approach to Cold War bounded space by providing an alternative model of individual and communal dwelling. For Duncan, the household is both a “made place” and an “eternal pasture,” as he describes the meadow in “Often I am Permitted,” and it is also the greatest example of an adapted TAZ in his

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<sup>154</sup> *The Poetics* 4.

work. Although the household does not seem “temporary” in nature, I would suggest that in Duncan’s work, its multiple manifestations impart a certain inherent transience to the concept. I have thus adapted the TAZ (as I have other places in this project) to suggest that spaces that are not “temporary” per se can still express the spirit of spatial autonomy that is inbuilt to the TAZ. As this section will develop, the household also mirrors a TAZ in that it is primarily a place of resistance that “does not engage directly with the State” (Bey, *T.A.Z.* 99) but provides an alternative. It produces a place of resistance and of love that binds the individual to the community, especially in times when containment was the *sine qua non* of the Cold War cultural milieu.<sup>155</sup>

The rampant surveillance culture of the period altered the shape of the American landscape by restricting speech and identity by means of policing the boundaries of political, social, racial, sexual and gendered spaces. With an eye to control “deviant” and nonconformist ideologies, the containment strategy also prohibited “othered” bodies from being active agents of spatial production. As Deborah Nelson argues, the Cold War was indicative of a “topological crisis,” wherein “bounded spaces of all kinds seemed to exhibit a frightening permeability. All sorts of entities were imagined as bounded spaces: nations, bodies, homes, and minds” (26). Facing the “sudden visibility of privacy” (Nelson xii) after World War II, American individuals and the spaces they occupied were placed under immense conformist pressure. Threats to nationhood were grafted onto the individual and his or her private geography. As a result, public policy was

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<sup>155</sup> The term “containment” is taken from American diplomat and advisor George Kennan’s 1947 foreign policy entitled “The Sources of Soviet Conduct.” The term addressed the threat of expanding Soviet influence, but it stretched far beyond foreign policy to become a metaphor for the controlling of domestic ideology. “In attempts to keep the narrative straight,” Alan Nadel observes, “containment equated containment of communism with containment of atomic secrets, of sexual license, of gender roles, of nuclear energy, and of artistic expression”(5). To these categories, I would also like to add racialized bodies and spaces, which were also under attack by containment culture. I take up this subject in the following chapters.

imposed on private spaces, and private spaces were seen as threats to the political and moral well being of the public.

Most directly, the strategy of containment aimed to contain divisions and deviations on American soil, with the goal of quelling heterogeneity and communal activism among the masses. For Duncan, the autonomous zone of the household is a crucial response to this threat of containment—as both a physical and psychic place, it offers resistance to the imposed boundaries of the State in postwar space. To be sure, Olson and Duncan differed greatly in their spatial approaches to Cold War space and place, a difference that illuminates a divide in Cold War masculinity in relation to spatiality. Whereas Olson idealized the “Figure of Outward” (*The Maximus* 4) in projecting a vision of unity between the body and the landscape in the polis, Duncan’s mode of resistance is through the creation of intimate, domestic spaces and places (which then become exemplars of a greater cosmic, communal unity).<sup>156</sup> For Duncan, the household creates a specific place for community and connection between the domestic sphere and the highest order of the universe. As Keenaghan notes, the “household” was “the central trope in Duncan’s general deconstruction of Cold War containment strategies” (100). Although it may seem paradoxical to resist containment through domestic spaces, it is important to note that for Duncan, these self-created spaces are not restrictive or closed in the connotative sense of the term “domestic.” Rather, these spaces allow for the expression of the free individual in a communal environment, and, as self-contained and self-created, they offer resistance to the external spatial bounds imposed by the State and the constraints of identity therein. Moreover, as a self-created yet shareable space, the household is an open space that can be opened to the other.

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<sup>156</sup> The “Figure of Outward” is Olson’s nickname for Robert Creeley, to whom he dedicated the *The Maximus Poems*. Olson later elaborated on this moniker to suggest that the Figure of Outward is “opposite to a / personality which so completely does (did) / stay at home” (qtd. in Butterick, *A Guide* 3).



(5). In order for this harmony to be realized, a space must be created wherein the possibilities of free individuals acting together may be fostered, and a practice of place can be established. In other words, as George Woodcock argues, the anarchist “theme” involves a society where individuals “have liberty and *space* to develop their personalities and to advance in a world where there exist no longer the bonds of poverty and coercion” (6; my emphasis). Space is thus a significant factor for the creation of anarchist lines of flight; however, as Bey’s construction of the TAZ confirms, such spaces need not be limited to domestic or geographic locations, since the autonomous uprising liberates many areas, including “land,” “time,” and “imagination” (*T.A.Z.* 100).

In “Dante Études,” Duncan traces natural order, “the orders of the living,” (*Bending* 110) as radiating centrifugally from the individual to the district, to the city, to the nation, and to the Earth. As such, the household becomes a rime for greater spatial liberation:

The individual man   having his own nature and truth  
                                   and appropriate thereto   his household  
 outlined   in relation to groups   he finds  
                                   himself in   freely attending, changing,  
                                   electing,   or joining to carry forward  
                                   the idea,   the insistent phrase,  
                                   the needed resonance   into action  
 seeks to realize harmonies in his district  
 (his order of life amongst the orders, savoring  
                                   variety, seeking out his space and time,  
                                   his life-style)

a tuning

(his appropriateness)

and in the city develops themes

coordinations, names places and times,

draws perspectives, advances horizons,

humanities, public works,

and in the nation (thus, Olson in MAXIMUS)

to initiate

“another kind of nation” .

...

For “world” read “Earth”

...

Let the meaning of “nation”

be brought under the orders of the living. (*Ground Work: Before the War*  
109-110)

As the above passage suggests, it is the “realize[d] harmonies” between the individual and the larger community that drives the spirit of *communitas* and its expanding space. Duncan uses a series of active verbs such as “realize,” “seeking,” “develops,” and “advances” in order to stress this mobilizing influence of the communal. As with Olson’s *poethic*, the realization of the individual’s proper “space and time” involves measure and view, the necessary “tuning” to what is “appropriate thereto his household.” The individual, for Duncan, is first and foremost a “local” (110), but the goal of the individual stretches far beyond self-containment, for the individual local must connect to a “unitive” whole (111). Moreover, like Olson’s proposition of

the polis as a resistant human place within the increasingly homogenized nation space, so Duncan calls for the “meaning of nation / [to] be brought under the orders of the living.”

The individual and the community are thus intertwined entities in Duncan’s spatial imaginary. This seemingly paradoxical interconnectivity between private and public, individual and communal is reflective of Whitehead’s concept of the self as a “personal society” (*Adventures* 208). According to Whitehead, the self is an amalgamation of prehensions, each of which builds on prehensions of the past to form a processual whole. The self is sutured into an ecology with the environing community to which it responds; it is therefore always in flux and flourishes over time in response to its surroundings. For Duncan (and for Olson), the self is such an assemblage, a nexus of personal history and communal associations. The “nature and truth” of the individual is “in relation to groups / appropriate to his household”—the sum total of which forms “his own ideogram” (*Ground Work: Before the War* 108). The self is thus an in-formed collage wherein harmonies are struck between individual and communal desires. “We learn who we are by living,” Duncan writes, since “we are ourselves the mass of our individualities” (“Changing” 79).

As I mentioned earlier, the household is both a physical and psychic, real and imagined place. Before delving further into the psychic elements, I would like to explore the immanent manifestations of the household in Duncan’s work. These architextural places, analogous to TAZs, take the form of collages, passages, and rooms that provide resistance to (and sanctuary from) the threat of war and the imposed order of leaders such as Roosevelt, Johnson, Stalin and Hitler on the universal “community.” Indeed, the household is the primary spatial metaphor for *communitas*—in its adherence to natural law, it is the source and heart of both individual and collective growth. As Duncan writes in “Towards an Open Universe,” “The imagination of this

cosmos is as immediate to me as the imagination of my household or my self, for I have taken my being in what I know of the sun and of the magnitude of the cosmos, as I have taken my being in what I know of domestic things” (1).

The household arises out of a process of *practiced place* that I discussed earlier, since the space of the household is transformed from a private, domestic space of containment in Cold War rhetoric to a place of mobility and communal desire. Duncan and his partner Jess sought the integration of private and public in their Victorian home that they shared together in San Francisco’s Mission District. Their household was a creative space, and it also provided a safe recess for the expression of Duncan and Jess’s homosexual love in the face of Cold War normativity, the emblem of which being the heterosexual nuclear family. As Michael Auping observes,

Jess and Duncan maintained a decidedly middle-class, domestic household. In a sense, their isolation was a profound one, as they existed in a number of forbidden territories. They were telling stories, researching myths, and evoking the past when everyone else seemed consumed with the existential present in a dour way. And, of course, their homosexuality and open commitment to a family relationship separated them from a good deal of the ‘moralities’ that constituted everyday life in the 1950s. (39-40)

The Duncan-Jess household was, to use Duncan’s term, “multiphasic” (*Bending* ix). It is a physical site, but it is also *architextural* in its practice as its intertextuality unfolds across time and space. Although Keenaghan describes the household as “better conceived as a *spatial imaginary, an aesthetic trope*, rather than a representation of one of their homes” (102; original emphasis), I find the distinction futile since for Duncan these two spaces—the lived and the

imagined—are so commensurate. Moreover, Keenaghan’s observation seems to betray a conservative Cold War rhetoric that seeks to preserve boundaries and segregate private and private life. As the basic unit and site of *communitas*, the household encapsulates all aspects of being: social, intellectual, and creative. Indeed, it was a space of practiced place wherein Duncan and Jess could collaborate artistically, sexually, and domestically as partners. In the face of the contrived, simulated communities of “nationhood” built by the State—a categorization to which all citizens were expected to belong, regardless of their beliefs and identities—the household offers an alternative place wherein members can authentically express their individual freedoms and desires.

The alternative creation of space and place in the household establishes it as a significant line of flight and TAZ in Duncan’s poetic methodology and in his personal ideology. The primary characteristic of the TAZ is that it liberates space; Duncan purposefully registers the household along several symbolic registers of space so as to highlight its extensive potential. In “The Household,” Duncan reads the communal in local geographic landmarks, such as the “district,” “city,” and “neighbourhood.”<sup>158</sup> Stretching across multiple geographies, the commune of living is a practiced place wherein “communal counterpoints” are articulated both on and off the page,

in the district or stanza, to

bring each inhabitant   freely

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<sup>158</sup> It is worth noting that in his book *Modernity at Large* (1996), Arjun Appadurai situates the neighbourhood (both real and virtual) as the primary site of the production of local knowledge and practices that challenge discourses of homogenous nationhood. Appadurai defines locality as “a structure of feelings, a property of social life and an ideology of situated community” (188) and suggests that “locality is always emergent from the practices of local subjects in specific neighbourhoods” (198). “Neighbourhoods as social formations,” Appadurai contends, “represent anxieties for the nation-state, as they usually contain large or residual spaces where the techniques of nationhood (birth control, linguistic uniformity, economic discipline, communications efficiency, and political loyalty) are likely to be weak or contested. ... For the project of the nation-state ... [t]hey need to be policed almost as thoroughly as borders” (190-191).

into the action he desires there, to sing  
 into action the song, everywhere

...

as far as our neighbourhood extends

we go with what happens (*Ground Work: Before the War* 114).

Here, Duncan articulates the interconnectivity of poetic praxis and practiced place. The poet him/herself must be a part of the “company of the living,” for

the poet’s voice speaks from no  
 crevice in the ground between  
 mid-earth and underworld

...

but from the hearth stone, the lamp light,

the heart of the matter where the

house is held . (*Bending* 9)

This last line transforms the “hold” of “household” into a house that is *held*—the emphasis on the verb here is significant, for it suggests that the household is an ongoing creative event rather than a passive construct. I will return to the term “hearth” in a moment, but I would first like to stress the importance here of the poet’s immanent presence in the world. Speaking “from the hearth stone” as opposed to underground, the poet must create as a being-in-the-world and as a being-with-others.<sup>159</sup> As a line of flight and TAZ, the space of the household is not a flight of

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<sup>159</sup> These two terms, “being-in-the-world” and “being-with-others” form the constitutive basis for Heidegger’s conception of Dasein, the starting point for his ontology and the term for his optimal mode of being. I find the terms suitable in describing Duncan’s ideal poet state of being, though delving further into Heidegger’s ontology lies outside the scope of this chapter.

escape from the real world; rather, it exists alongside existing models of spatial production to envelop the “company of the living.”

Duncan’s conception of the “creative ground” of the household was fostered by his Theosophical upbringing wherein creativity and intellect was regularly encouraged and practiced. Duncan was brought up in a household that functioned, in many ways, as an intertextual collage of intellectual and spiritual influences. As Michael Davidson observes, for a young Duncan, “esoteric texts and spiritualism were part of everyday, middle-class life” (*Ghostlier* 174). This early “household” undoubtedly influenced Duncan’s later thinking on the subject, and he remained fixed on the ideological as well as physical potential of the household’s “architecture.”<sup>160</sup> The physical dimensions of the immanent household are carefully drafted in “The Architecture: Passages 9,” wherein Duncan creates a collage of quotations from Gustave Stickley’s *Craftsman Homes* (1909), titles from his bookshelves, as well as his own affective feelings of the space of these rooms:

‘ . . . it must have recesses. There is a great charm in a room  
broken up in plan, where that slight feeling of mystery is given  
to it which arises when you cannot see the whole room from any  
one place . . . when there is always something around the corner’

...

from the bookcases the glimmering titles arrayd keys

Hesiod • Heraklitus • *The Secret Books of the Egyptian Gnostics* ...

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<sup>160</sup> Duncan’s father was an architect, and he notes that this influence had a profound effect on his poetic form: “My father had been an architect and, until he died, when I was sixteen, I had been preparing to enter that world. Ideas of architecture still continue in my art today as a poet” (*Fictive* 112).

‘Take a house planned in this way, with a big living room, its great fireplace, open staircase, casement windows, built-in seats, cupboards, bookcases ... and perhaps French doors opening out upon a porch’ ...

*La Révélation d’Hermès Trismégiste*

*Plutarch’s Morals: Theosophical Essays*

*Avicenna*

*The Zohar*

*The Aurora*

I was reading while the music playd

curl’d up among ornamental cushions (*Bending* 26-27)

The passage from Stickley that opens the poem (and the passage above) announces the house as a place where the mystery of recesses and dark corridors should be integral to its architecture. These recesses signify creative “up risings” from within the communal space of the household. Such play with spaces of light and dark, certainty and uncertainty, echoes the earlier interplay of darkness and light in Piero di Cosimo’s *sfumato* painting. The shading of the *sfumato* blurs the lines between light and dark, thereby creating transient forms and shadows.

Duncan’s collage of Stickley’s recommendations for mysterious recesses, and the mysticism of the “secret” tomes of his Theosophist bookshelf paint his ideal household in *sfumato* form. Throughout the poem Duncan paints the dimensions of the household, its interior and exterior, in various images evoking light and dark—the light of the afternoon is mixed with “a little night music” (26), and the outside “dark of the peppertree” (27) is counterpointed by “the lamplight warm upon the page” (28). While the drama of the *sfumato* shrouds the scene of household in mystery, it also incorporates Duncan’s reading practice therein; in so doing, the

lines between the household and the act of reading are blurred and become a matter of angle and shadowed interpretation. For Duncan, to occupy the space of the household is to occupy the space of the ground, the poetic commons—hence the reference to his mysterious Theosophist bookshelf while in the present moment he is “reading while the music playd / curld up among ornamental cushions.” The arrayed collage of books in the poem testify to the fact that for Duncan, the poetic act is a *concrecence*, to use Whitehead’s term, of the sources Duncan is reading—these sources form the immediate present from which he is writing *at the time* of writing.

Further, in uniting form and content in the field of the poem, Duncan aligns the architecture of the household and of poetic creation as an *architextural* collage of interrelated yet autonomous objects. Thus constructed, the poem becomes a space wherein the poet may gesture towards truth and knowledge, but the naturally occurring concords and discords preserve the elusive grand mystery of “It.” Stickley recommends that the spaces of the house be linked together so that the “social part of the house” is bridged to the “upper regions” (27). The abridging of the individual parts of the household, and the parts of the poem at large, references Duncan’s serial “Passages” and the trope of “passage” in his work as a spatial metaphor for connectivity. We see this trope at work in Passages 24, “Orders,” wherein Duncan again invokes the architecture of connected rooms as physical and psychic spaces of visionary creativity and of mystery:

Down this dark corridor, ‘this passage,’ the poet reminds me,  
 and now that Eliot is dead, Williams and H.D. dead,  
 Ezra alone of my old masters alive, let me  
 acknowledge Eliot was one of them, I was

one of his, whose 'History has many  
 cunning passages, contrived corridors'  
 comes into the chrestomathy.

I thought to come into an open room  
 where in the south light of afternoon  
 one I was improvised  
 passages of changing dark and light  
 a music dream and passion would have playd  
 to illustrate concords of order in order,  
 a contrapuntal communion of all things • (*Bending* 78)

In the first part of the collage, Duncan breaks the line "Down this dark corridor, 'this passage,' the poet reminds me / comes into the chrestomathy" with a counterpoint inlaid passage describing his poetic elders and paying homage to them. Here he plays with the term "passage," for each passage of the poem is a connective link, a *passageway*, to other created "rooms" within the architecture of the poem. In this particular passage, then, the connective link is the chrestomathy Duncan learns from his poetic masters, so that "passage" also means the passing of knowledge and design by Eliot, Williams, H.D., and Pound. He acknowledges this ground of the poetic commons and then ruminates on an "open room" wherein the *sfumato* trope continues as a contrapuntal rhythm of light and dark, illustrating the grand natural order to which his poetic architecture attends. As he writes in the "Introduction" to *Bending*, "Passages of a poem larger than the book in which they appear ... I number the first to come one, but they belong to a series that extends in an area larger than my work in them" (v). By means of the chrestomathy, Duncan creates further "improvised / passages of changing light and dark" (78). The poetic architecture

grows, signifying the fruit of his groundwork: his *practiced place* in the field of the poetic commons.

However, there is a marked difference in tone between “Orders” and the earlier “The Architecture”: here Duncan is more tentative, for he writes that he “*thought to come into an open room,*” and that the “music dream and passion *would have playd*” (78; my emphasis). The joyful exuberance and faith in the domestic household of “The Architecture” is met with hesitancy here, and is replaced by feelings of “rage, / grief, dismay” (79) at the “base and unjust actions” of “men following self-interest” (79). With this change of tone, Duncan brings us into the present moment of poetic creation—the war is threatening the domestic space of the household and is encroaching on its balanced *sfumato*. However, Duncan meets these feelings of angst with optimism, for as he states, “rage, / grief, dismay transported—but these / are themselves transports of beauty!” (79). Despite the efforts of self-interested men to impose their spatial agendas on the household, the domestic place ultimately resists being overtaken, for as the poem concludes, the “electing soul alone is transferrd / to another and another order,” meaning that the “power of an ambiguous nature,” the “It” that flows through the great household, is indestructible, and will always preserve a place for those who seek it. It is a place constantly created, with its own natural order that is unable to be destroyed by the contrived orders of those who “betray all / good of self” and violate the “heart of the living” contained in “the great household” (79). The household, with its indefatigable spirit of *communitas*, “will not / dissolve its orders at man’s evil” (79). Thus, the threat of the “contrived corridors” of the war becomes yet another element that “comes into the chrestomathy” and serves to in-form newly created passageways in the poetic architecture.

Aside from framing the ideal poetic counterpoints of Eris and Eros—the natural discordances underlying the human condition—the *sfumato* establishes the space of the physical household as equivocal, imbued with creative mysticism. As such, the physical household becomes a carefully constructed place of resistance to Cold War ideology in which private spaces ought to be “transparent” and homogeneous. The dark recesses of the household act to preserve mystery and to disrupt State assumptions of the “knowability” of private spaces. This assemblage is reflective of the greater relationship between Jess and Duncan, which Auping calls a “collage” in and of itself, including the household they shared as “symbolic of the products of their combined imaginations” (39). This sentiment is echoed by the conclusion of the “The Architecture,” which ends in an affirmation of domestic bliss of “family life” (*Bending* 28). For Duncan the household is multiphasic; operating at multiple semantic registers at once, the domestic and the visionary are melded together in the collage.

In Duncan’s work, the household is a “rime” forming an intricate system of correspondences between private and public, immanent and cosmic. Indeed, the household exceeds its own bounds: the house he shared with Jess is but a microcosm for the greater space of cosmic community, what he calls the “great household”:

There is no  
 good a man has in his own things except  
 it be in the community of every thing;  
 no nature he has  
 but in his nature hidden in the heart of the living,  
 in the great household.           (*Bending* 79)

The personal household is thus intimately connected in order and in spirit to the greater “company of the living,” which Duncan repeatedly refers to as a “hearth.” The hearth represents the communal ideal, the extension of the space of the household to the cosmic plane:

It is an extension in time,  
 a dimension surrounding us, the fire  
 itself surrounding us,  
 the light, the glow ...  
 ...  
 the Cro-Magnon man workt  
 the inaccessible rock-face  
 and returned from the deepest recesses of the mind  
 to the hearth,  
 to the place where we too are gathered. (*Derivations* 10)

The hearth is at once a physical and psychic place that spans time and history; it is a shared human “dimension” in which we are all participants. “It is love,” (11) Duncan says of the hearth, and this love is also recognition of the greater natural order and the communal nature of all things.

In this physical and psychic dimension, the *sfumato* balance is retained between Eros and Eris. It is a place of productive conflict between love and pain, and it is governed by the possibilities of the imagination:

It is the first named incarnation of Love. We burn with  
 it. The fire of Hell. Pain. But is also warmth. Demonic.  
 But it is also light. The night is all about us. A darkness

within which all known things exist.

...

So, in Hell, imagine.

...

Make Light. (11)

Duncan's commands to "imagine" and "make light" in the face of darkness establishes the hearth as a place with alterable dimensions that may be modified by individual will, imagination, and action. The term "demonic" will become a significant term for alternative place-building in the following chapter in terms of the work of human geographer Katherine McKittrick, but its use here in Duncan's work offers a useful segue into that discussion. By "demonic" Duncan certainly meant "evil," but given his interest in the etymological bases for words, the term's other denotations and connotations could very likely be implied and would serve to further undergird his alternative approach to place in the household.<sup>161</sup> As discussed in the following chapter, "demonic grounds" is McKittrick's term (via Sylvia Wynter) for inhabitable, autonomous spaces of resistance; as adaptable models of alternative spatiality, they would also serve Duncan's project of establishing the household as a place wherein homosexual desire can be expressed and where homosexuals are agents of their own spatial production. Moreover, the demonic provides access to spatial production for a community of individuals seeking solace from politically coded spaces of "normalcy" and homogeneity at large. The household is "demonic" because it violates statist boundaries of private and public, closed and open—boundaries that are designed to keep bodies properly "in place." Although the image of the household seems indicative of a closed, private space that is separate from the public world, Duncan's iteration of the household is quite

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<sup>161</sup> As discussed in the introduction, McKittrick (via Sylvia Wynter) discusses the demonic as indicative of an alternative site of productive geographic and subjective alterity in the face of traditional geographic epistemologies that render black spaces invisible. This theory will be further explored in the next chapter.

literally “avant-garde”—it is out in front, projective, exposed, pushing boundaries and expanding the sites and cites of social change.

In Duncan’s imagined, ideal place, the hearth of the home is transformed from the Cold War conception of a space of guarded containment to a place of transgressive social, political, artistic and sexual openness. Analogous to the TAZ, the household is a place of resistance to closure in favour of spatial openness, inclusivity, and abundance. Bey highlights a structural affinity between the TAZ and tribal bands:

If the nuclear family is produced by scarcity ... the band is produced by abundance. ... The family is closed, by genetics, by the male’s possession of women and children, by the hierarchic totality of agricultural/industrial society. The band is *open*—not to everyone, of course, but to the affinity group, the initiates sworn to a bond of love. The band is not part of a larger hierarchy, but rather part of a horizontal pattern of custom, extended kinship, contract and alliance, spiritual affinities, etc. (*T.A.Z.* 103; original emphasis)

Here, Bey’s conception of the horizontal structure of the TAZ reflects Deleuze and Guattari’s horizontal model of nomadology; both models resist the hierarchical structure of the state, as represented by the nuclear family and the space of the “normative” household. As a place of creative and spiritual fertility in a collaborative setting, it is built on a structure of what Kropotkin calls “mutual aid,” a social structure and survival mechanism whereby individuals come together to form working communities for the greater good of the whole.<sup>162</sup> As such, it is a

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<sup>162</sup> For further reading, see Kropotkin’s book of the same name. In many ways, “mutual aid” is a response to Darwinism, for it posits that historically, cooperation and collaboration between humans and animals, leading towards communities working together, is as vital to survival as the “fitness” of individuals. As Bertholf notes, Duncan was an avid reader of Kropotkin’s work. In “Decision at the Apogee,” Bertholf refers to a 1944 letter from Duncan to Pauline Kael wherein Duncan writes that he “started reading the Kropotkin again and got into bed reading Kropotkin and got up in the morning walking to work reading Kropotkin” (9).

space of nonhierarchical utility, a gathering place wherein the initiates are “sworn to a bond of love,” wherein resources are communal and used towards the collective well-being of the whole.

Moreover, the radical openness of the household is reminiscent of the “conviviality and celebration” of the festival, which Bey aligns with the TAZ (103). As Lisa Jarnot notes, the Duncan-Jess household was a lively space where parties were prevalent. As a space of communal *joie de vivre* and inclusivity, it “provided a beacon for many younger gay friends and poets, who, in a pre-Stonewall world, sought alternative models for a synthesis of domestic and artistic life” (Jarnot xvii). Certainly, the festal mode has undertones of demonic, Dionysian indulgence and abundance. While the term “demonic” as Wynter and McKittrick see it retains its supernatural elements, it also denotes *uncertainty and unknowability* as its defining features. Hence Duncan’s description of the *sfumato* balance between light and darkness in the household architecture, which preserves the unknowable spaces of the household as spaces resistant to the objectifying gaze of the state. In the face of Cold War containment that seeks to “know” the private sphere, the household resists such closure by preserving autonomous mystery and radical openness.

Duncan’s conception of the household—and indeed his entire poetic methodology—is undergirded by the festal mode of what he terms the “dance ground.” In his *Prospectus for Ground Work*, Duncan speaks of the “dance” as descriptive of the primal natural order to which all things are subject (hence the dance between Eros and Eris, lightness and darkness that pervades his work). The dance ground is synonymous with ground work, the plane from which all things emerge: “Now, as ever, I see the Dance and the Work are one. Where the work comes true, it is true to the Dance” (qtd. in Quartermain, “Notes” 807). In his early poem “A Sign of

Great Delight,” Duncan speaks of the dance as the ground from which things emerge as “literal things / in themselves”:

There are no associations,  
 no ‘stream of consciousness’  
 but in the dance  
 the emergence of things:  
 the presence, literal  
 and exact to the mind. (*The Collected Early* 293)

The dance ground, like the field of the collage, is a site of moving language where meaning is *emergent* as opposed to given in the form of “associations” and forced semantic linkages.

Elsewhere, he connects the dance to the site of the hearth, to the moment when “the language takes fire” and responds to the command to “Make Light ... against the night” (*Derivations* 11).<sup>163</sup>

The page as dance ground highlights the field as a space of ever-changing boundaries and relationships along multiple spatial registers: linguistic, visual, corporeal. In terms of measure, Duncan extends the projective mode (wherein the rhythm of the line is guided by the breath) so that the rhythm and measure of the poem—its circulations—are akin to the steps of dancers:

I want to describe Poetry as it was before words, or signs, before beauty, or  
 eternity, or meaning, were. ... The act was dancing, the product of the act was the  
 dance, poetry. ... The foot danced with the sight and the feel which measured the  
 ground and made space, and the eye heard accurately the measures on the ground

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<sup>163</sup> Certainly, the dance ground is also the site of the expression of erotic energy and homosexual desire. As Duncan writes in “THE PRESENCE OF THE DANCE / THE RESOLUTION OF THE MUSIC”: “Even as I am calld to dance, the fire of the dance devours me. / Unknowing, the Prince of Darkness, my lover, has taken my heart / away into knowing” (*Ground Work: Before the War* 166).

as the accents of the tread and the numbers of the steps or stops and the stretches or durations or silences between steps and stops. (*Fictive* 61-62).

The poetic act, as Duncan reflects, is at once a *made place* and an act of *making place*—it is a created and creative ground wherein the objects of the field dance proprioceptively, in response to and in-formed by the rhythm and measure of each other. It is also the site of protosemantic engagement, rooted in the natural grammar of the body and its movement through space. In her discussion of Duncan and Jack Spicer’s homosexuality in relation to gay social identity and poetic community, Maria Damon points out that the term “dance” is “derived from *danson*, to draw out or extend” (186). There was a significant bridge between the openly gay community of the Berkeley Renaissance scene and literary culture and community in the 1950s. As she notes, for poets such as Duncan, Jack Spicer, and Robin Blaser, “gayness, poetry and community are of a piece, coextensive” (160). Duncan and Jess’s household was the site of the dance ground for the gay poetic community, in particular.<sup>164</sup> The dance thus extends outwards, across time and space, to articulate a practice of living, a totality whose space of community extends well beyond the page.

This concept of mystery and elusion is intensified by another metaphor Duncan uses for the “great household”: Wagadu, a mythical city from the Sudanese folktale “Gassire’s Lute.”

The city was destroyed and rebuilt four times, each time with a new name. In *The H.D. Book*,

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<sup>164</sup> For an extended discussion of the centrality of Duncan and Jess’s household to the San Francisco arts and literary scene, see Lisa Jarnot’s *Robert Duncan, The Ambassador from Venus: A Biography*. Jarnot notes that Duncan and Jess hosted many different types of gatherings among many different individuals at their home. She notes a journal entry in which Duncan reflects on a prospective group discussion he calls the “Moon Society.” The group would later be realized and hold regular meetings “Tuesdays after the new and full moon.” The gatherings were attended by writers and artists including “Robin Blaser, Michael and Joanna McClure, David and Tina Meltzer, Richard Baker, and a medium named Michael Hughes.” Jarnot then notes Michael McClure’s observations about the meetings, in which he says they were “not about magic as much as about whatever anyone’s special area of information or gift or curiosity lay in” (212). McClure’s remarks confirm the collaborative and creative tenets of community fostered by the Duncan and Jess household.

Duncan narrates the four incarnations of Wagadu and reflects on the city as a source of strength for Pound when he was imprisoned at Pisa:

In the prison camp at Pisa the memory of Wagadu, four times fallen asleep—  
‘once through vanity, once through breach of faith, once through greed, and once  
through dissension’—with the chorus naming the cities of its four incarnations—  
‘Hoooh! Dierra, Agada, Ganna, Silla—Hoooh! Fasa!’—returned to Pound as the  
lost city that is also the strength of those who live in the thought of her. (177)

Here, Duncan echoes lines from *The Cantos* of Ezra Pound, wherein he invokes Wagadu as a divine spirit housed immanently in the cityspace. Pound repeatedly ruminates on the lost city of Wagadu and refers to the city as “indestructible,” rising triumphant like the phoenix from the ashes of destruction.<sup>165</sup> The city thus becomes an earthly representation of the *paradiso terrestre* for which Pound was seeking and never achieved. Wagadu is a city that may have been lost in reality, but remains in the space of the imagination, a place where “those devoted to Beauty remember” (Duncan, *The H.D.* 178).

Pound learned of the folktale from German ethnologist Leo Frobenius’s collection of African folktales and myths *African Genesis* (1938). The myth narrates the first loss of the city of Wagadu, initiated by the vanity of individual will. The king of Wagadu (then called Dierra) was growing old and his son Gassire was anxious to take over the kingship as a warrior of the people. Gassire sought the advice of a wise man who told him that his father would die, but that he would not inherit his father’s kingship; instead, he would become a bard and receive a lute that would initiate the loss of Wagadu. Gassire commissioned a smith to make him a lute, but the

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<sup>165</sup> Wagadu as this “indestructible” mental force becomes a definite refrain for Pound in *The Cantos*. In Canto LXXIV, Pound twice alludes to Wagadu when he writes, “4 times was the city rebuilt, /... now in the mind indestructible” (*The Cantos* 450) and later “4 times to the song of Gassir / now in the mind of the indestructible” (462). In LXXVII, Pound again reiterates, “4 times was the city remade, / now in the heart indestructible” (485).

smith warned him that the lute would not sing without the blood of Gassire's sons. The persistent Gassire willingly accepts the price by going to battle with his sons, each of whom are killed in battle and their blood spilled on to the lute. Appalled by Gassire's vanity and his relentless pursuit of power at the expense of human life, the people of Wagadu banish him to the desert, where the lute begins to sing. At the same time, Gassire's father passes away, and Wagadu disappears for the first time. The city subsequently reappears and disappears four times due to human frailty, and, as Frobenius writes, "Should Wagadu be found for the fifth time, then she will live so forcefully in the minds of men that she will never be lost again, so forcefully that vanity, falsehood, greed and dissention will never be able to harm her" (Frobenius and Fox 110).

Although the city is repeatedly destroyed by the corruption of human vice, it reappears in earthly form by means of the collective action of the virtuous community and their participation in its ongoing imagined existence. Wagadu is indeed a TAZ *par excellence*, for as Frobenius writes, its existence is immaterial yet fully immanent: "For in itself, Wagadu is not of stone, not of wood, not of earth. Wagadu is the strength which lives in the heart of man" (qtd. in Edwards and Vasse 241). The city manifests as a temporary uprising, but since it lives on as a mental construct and integral part of collective cultural memory, it is an autonomous "elsewhere" that can be called to mind. In this way, it is related to Olson's polis as a "form of mind," as discussed in the last chapter; thus understood, place is an imagined construct that can be conjured in the present. Wagadu offers the imprisoned Pound a place of solace and a promise of imagined indestructibility; despite his eventual failure to realize and cohere his earthly paradise, the promise of the city gives hope for the future. For Pound, then, and for Duncan after him, the city is symbolic of the triumphant communal imagination that transcends earthly strife to create a place of resistance.

Further, for Duncan, Wagadu represents a committed installation of divine natural order; in its continued persistence in the collective imagination, the city's existence overwrites the individual will of a few to destroy its spatiality. Its continual uprisings testify to the inevitability of natural order to triumph despite efforts to the contrary. As a created place for the collective imagination in resistance to imposed will, Wagadu is a TAZ that represents the immanent potential of the communal. It is no surprise then that in the poem "Orders" Duncan aligns this spectral city with the great "commune of the communes":

From house to house the armd men go,  
                   in Santo Domingo hired and conscripted killers  
                   against the power of an idea, against  
                   Gassire's lute,     the song  
                   of Wagadu, household of the folk,  
                   commune of the communes  
                   hidden seed in the hearts of men  
                   and in each woman's womb    hidden.

They do not know where It is   •   (*Bending* 77)

Once again, we see Duncan uniting mythopoeia with the present moment of the war. He wrote this poem in reaction to the 1965 invasion and occupation of the Dominican Republic by American forces led by the Johnson administration; hence Duncan's mention of the "armd men" in Santo Domingo. This invasion was heavily influenced and rationalized by Cold War containment culture, since the aim of the American presence was to quell local uprisings against the military dictatorship and preserve State order.

In “Orders,” Duncan revises the mythology of “Gassire’s Lute” such that the song of the lute signals the utopian persistence of the “household of the folk,” while Gassire’s vanity as an artist is downplayed. Both Pound and Duncan foreground the transcendent message of the myth, while the originary violence of the tale acts as collateral—a bitter price for the artistic act. In *Paracritical Hinge*, Nathaniel Mackey devotes a chapter to Duncan’s appropriation and use of the myth. Mackey confirms that for Duncan, Wagadu is synonymous with “the commune of Poetry” (Duncan *Bending* vi; Mackey 77). However, Mackey is also critical of Duncan’s (and Pound’s) facile appropriation of the West African legend in his work. He cautions that the myth “alerts us to the dangers of poetry” (71), and warns that the lyric gift of poetry comes at a high price—a price that is overlooked by Pound and Duncan. Although Mackey’s criticism is noted, I think that Duncan’s appropriation of Wagadu—however facile—is still a powerful one for his spatial project, since it demonstrates the potential for psychic spaces to mobilize communities and effect social change.

Like Pound, Duncan adopts the city of Wagadu as a place of “refuge from the hellishness of war” (Mackey 141). Moreover, since the city lives on through the minds of its people, it offers Duncan a source of communal hope and activism in the form of *collective imagination*. As a demonic space, the TAZ’s greatest tactic is its preservation of mystery and its invisibility. As Bey suggests, the TAZ is a “perfect tactic for an era in which the State is omnipresent and all-powerful and yet simultaneously riddled with cracks and vacancies” (*T.A.Z.* 93). Wagadu is a line of flight that springs up from such vacancies; as such, Mackey suggests that for Duncan, Wagadu represents “something of a rival government in the hearts of his poetic elders” (77). Here Mackey is referring to the influence of writers such as Pound and H.D. who collectively had an

enduring memory from this First World War that had revealed the deep-going falsehood and evil of the modern state. These had from their earliest years as writers a burning sense of the ‘they’ that ran the war and that accepted its premises and of the ‘we’ whose allegiance belonged to a Wagadu hidden in their hearts ... Their threshold remains ours. The time of war and exploitation, the infamy and lies of the new capitalist war-state, continue. And the answering intensity of the imagination to hold its own values must continue. (Duncan, *The H.D.* 50, 53; qtd. in Mackey 77).

Duncan’s figuring of Wagadu as the household of the whole demonstrates that the place of the communal need not be purely physical and geographic, but that there is radical potential in social spaces and places produced psychically in the collective imaginary. The disciples of Wagadu remain “intensely aware of themselves in their allegiance to an invisible city more real than the city in which they are” (Duncan, *The H.D.* 178). By imagining a place of resistance together, the commune creates new forms of community in space—those based on a continual cycle of destruction and regeneration. As such, the spaces of the real are not geographically restricted, but reinforce an ongoing process of spatial production wherein imaginative dimensions are just as significant as borders and boundaries in the shaping of immanent experience.

A trajectory of the household can thus be traced throughout *Bending the Bow*, from its physical dimensions laid out in “The Architecture” to “Orders,” wherein the household is manifest within the body. As Duncan suggests in “Orders,” the household is “hidden” from “they”—the imposing American Marines who ignore the “inner law” (*Bending* 70). “It,” Duncan’s term for the household hidden within the individual, is hidden because it is a place that fosters the common good for all, a place that is violated by the “armed men” who invade this

place and attempt to control it. Rather than coming into realization through ownership, the ideal city comes to fruition through mythopoeia, the collective imagination. Wagadu's elusive, spectral qualities make its existence a literal "uprising" that mirrors the cyclical process of destruction and regeneration of the TAZ. The ability to "dissolve" is integral to the TAZ, for "As soon as the TAZ is named (represented, mediated), it must vanish, it will vanish, leaving behind it an empty husk, only to spring up again somewhere else" (Bey, *T.A.Z.* 92; original emphasis).<sup>166</sup> Being on the continual cusp of rupture allows the TAZ (and Wagadu, the household of the whole, by extension) to elude the imposition of the State or other enforced codes or structures that restrict thought and being. Moreover, its origins are simple: "the TAZ begins with a simple act of realization" (102). To be sure, the TAZ projects a utopic socio-political ideal, but as the Duncan and Jess household demonstrates, revolutionary action need not be enacted on large-scale or strictly geographic terms.

When Duncan discusses the household in his work, there is a definitive balance he attempts to strike between interior and exterior space. The household as analogous to a TAZ testifies to the ability of its participants to engage in autonomous and agential spatial production. In figuring the household as Wagadu, Duncan suggests that the idea of the household, in its various manifestations, evokes a creative and indestructible place, a place of (re)generation that stokes the fires of the imagination. Despite the invasive eye of Cold War containment and its control over private spaces, the household is an "up rising" that resists this objective gaze and remains open for the people who may imagine it. It occupies the physical place of the Duncan-Jess homestead, but it also has the ability to exist untouched and unknowable in the imagination and the spirit of the great commune. As a radically communal place wherein individual agency is

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<sup>166</sup> Indeed, part of the success of the TAZ is that it defies definition; even Bey makes concerted efforts to not define it directly in his book. This resonates with Duncan's "It," his purposefully ambiguous term for the unnameable force of connectivity and spirit that underlies all space and place on earth and in the cosmos.

ingrained as a practice of living, the household is fertile ground for agential spatial production across planes both geographic and psychic. Indeed, the household, like the meadow in “Often I am Permitted,” is a place of permission and a *practiced place* from whence all spaces and places, both existent and forthcoming, *up rise*.

### “Created and Creating Forms”: Ground Work as Spatial Work<sup>167</sup>

Anarchist theory *is* a geographical theory.<sup>168</sup>

—Richard Peet

You with the dark eyes waiting, your touch uncovers a desire to wander, a geography of migrations.<sup>169</sup>

—Robert Duncan

In concert with Olson, Duncan views the field as a promising plane upon which creative interactivity issues in a new aesthetic and ethos—an *ecopoethic*. In his imagining of this “symposium of the whole,” Duncan includes “the female, the proletariat, the foreign; the animal and vegetative; the unconscious and the unknown; the criminal and failure—all that has been outcast and vagabond must return to be admitted in the creation of what we consider we are” (“Rites” 98). These previously ignored entities become agential vectors in the field of relations of the poem and of the actual world beyond the page. Indeed, this view of the “commune of Poetry” (Duncan, *Bending* vi) involves creating a place—not previously or naturally held—where articulations between self and other, self and space, can exist autonomously and heterogeneously in dissensus, as opposed to being subsumed into one substance, as traditional geographies tend to do. As Keenaghan argues, in his attempt to subvert strict identity categorization in space, “Duncan sought to *link* gender, sexuality, and nation so they were no

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<sup>167</sup> Duncan, “Changing” 66.

<sup>168</sup> “For Kropotkin” 43; my emphasis.

<sup>169</sup> *The Years* 7.

longer treated as discrete categories dividing the population [but are] interrelated, similar entities. Rather than rubrics that function as containers, they form a field of identificatory possibilities, the space of commonality itself, through which individuals are free to move” (90; original emphasis).

Indeed, these geographic spaces—the expanse of the page, extending to the field of reality—are crucial points of engagement for Duncan’s anarchic *poethic*. As Peter Kropotkin writes,

In our time of wars, of national self-conceit, of national jealousies and hatreds ably nourished by people who pursue their own egotistic, personal, or class interests, geography must be—in so far as the school may do anything to counterbalance hostile influences—a means of dissipating those prejudices and of creating other feelings more worthy of humanity. (“What Geography” 141)

Just as geography is seen as inseparable from anarchist theory, as Kropotkin suggests, I would argue that geography is just as important to the projective *poethic* put forth by Olson and Duncan and the other writers of this project. While Olson “hunt[s] among stones” (“The Kingfishers” 93) for his ideal polis, Duncan traverses “districts” and “neighbourhoods,” and the “hearth” of the “household.” In so doing, Duncan approaches space and place on multiple symbolic registers so that it is not an individualist pursuit of knowledge (à la Pound and Olson) but is more in line with Kropotkin’s holistic vision of geography and spatiality as inherently a human, communal ideal wherein each has access to spatial production, whether real or imagined in its execution.

Although the imaginative and physical realms intersect into one overarching reality in Duncan’s work, his view nonetheless suggests an ideal vision of space and time. This tension between real and imagined space and place as it relates to real-world spatial production is the

subject of the following chapters and the coda. Nonetheless, Duncan's belief in an immanent and cosmic place for individual as well as communal will and desire ruptures spatial boundaries along multiple and expanding spatial registers—literary, visual, architectural, geographic. Read in the light of the spatial turn in critical consciousness, Duncan's work illuminates the possibilities arising from a poetics of place—that is, the view of place as a multilocality that does not just contain our experiences, but articulates a practice of living. As the spatial analyses of Foucault, Lefebvre, de Certeau, Deleuze and Guattari, and Bey demonstrate, the ways in which space is ordered in reality mirrors the desired order of space as designated by the controlling powers and values of the State. The State seeks to homogenize space (and the action of bodies therein) through the striations of codes and regulations that permeate the private space of the household in order to preserve the expanse and influence of political power. Lefebvre, de Certeau, and Deleuze and Guattari acknowledge, however, that there are ways in which individual and communal practices of living may transgress these attempts at spatial conformity under dominant structures of authority. Indeed, from the practice of living emerges a surplus spatiality—both in the appropriation of immanent spaces and places by individuals for their own needs and desires, and in the imagined alternative spaces and places arising out of the collective imaginary.

Thus, Duncan's work resonates with both Lefebvre's conception of "lived space" and Edward Soja's "thirdspace," which are interconnected ideas that bring together the real and imagined planes of spatiality.<sup>170</sup> Since the ways in which we experience space and place involve

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<sup>170</sup> As I have discussed in my introduction, prior to the spatial turn, space was conceived as objective and quantifiably measurable, and as an apolitical and ahistorical vacancy. Put simply, it was thought of as dead and inhuman. Soja's conception of "thirdspace," which I develop in the following chapters, serves as a corrective, as it is an entirely *lived* space with multiple layers of engagement. It seeks to reinstate spatiality as a field of being, a predominantly social space that lies outside the two dominant conceptions of space: material, that is, mapped physical space, and mental space, which is the domain of representative space.

both of these modes, thirdspace synthesizes them into an aggregated plane wherein individuals may “practice” place in space. Duncan echoes this need to reinstate the human into spatial discourse, for as he writes, space and place are entangled in a constantly changing structural relationship: “To be alive itself is a form involving organization in time and space, continuity and body, that exceeds clearly our conscious design” (“Towards” 6). Thirdspace is a space that articulates a practice of living communally and collectively, and thus coincides with Duncan’s anarchic poethic. Bridging the actual and imagined, existent and experimental aspects of place results in a “locus of structured individual and collective experience and agency” (Soja, *Thirdspace* 11). Beyond simply suturing physical and imagined space, thirdspace provides access to spatial production denied by imposed structurings of space. As “a space of extraordinary openness, a place of critical exchange” (5), thirdspace fittingly describes Duncan’s open field and meadow. Since the bounds of thirdspace are constantly expanding, it remains open to the possibilities for social change and renegotiations of power, boundaries, and identity therein.

Olson’s and Duncan’s engagements with physical spaces and places, as well as the imagined geographies of the land and of the mind, testify to an alternative spatial practice that elides the organizational control of the State and allows for alternative access to spatial production. Their penchant for proprioceptive contact with space, the articulation of place from subjective view and in-form, make the spaces and places of their work ideal sites and grounds from which postwar spatiality may be renegotiated outside of State hierarchies with creative agency and collective imagination. I examine the concept of thirdspace more fully in the next chapters of this project as it resonates with the work of Baraka, Wah, and Marlatt. These writers similarly embrace a spatial *poethic* along multiple sites of openness and exchange; in their

pursuit to reconfigure the ground—and the discourses of space writ large—they renegotiate spatial ties so that it speaks to the variances of their positionality and their community.

Duncan's *ecopoethic* expresses a *practice of living*—the collage, the process of in-forming, Rodia's Towers, and the household all emanate from an understanding of space as firstly immanent and immediate. Moreover, as Duncan's spatial imaginary exemplifies, there exists the potential to move beyond static binaries of otherness to imagine the self and the community as a great household working together in mutual aid. Such is the basis for his anarchic *ecopoethic*, which works towards actively *making space work* for the common good, since "anarchists have always insisted on the priority of life and action to theory and system" (Wieck ix). Duncan's commitment to the cultivation of the imagination as a catalyst to social change occurs across both imaginative and experimental planes. These articulations of place alter the current structures and systems by providing spatial alternatives to hierarchy that preserve human life and promote meaningful individual and collective action. Indeed, this sentiment is echoed by bell hooks, who argues that it is possible to "reclaim lived spaces as locations of radical openness and possibility, and to make within them the sites where one's radical subjectivity can be activated and practiced in conjunction with the radical subjectivities of others" (*Yearning* 99). In the wake of the invasive spatial politics of the Cold War, the creation of alternative places of contact with "What Is" produces alternative access to place-making. The collage, Rodia's Towers, and the household all ignite the communal imaginary that desires such places of resistance. From these collective visions—and the practicing of individual place therein—the possibility arises of constructing liberated spatial alternatives on the ground, into being, in the spaces and places of the real.

### “Savage Geographies”: Amiri Baraka’s Urban Groundwork

We could see anything we wanted to. Be anything we knew how to be. Build anything we needed. Arrive anywhere we should have to go. But time is as stubborn as space, and they compose us with definition, time place and condition.<sup>171</sup>

—Amiri Baraka

what does not change / is the will to change.<sup>172</sup>

—Charles Olson

“Much that has been considered local knowledge,” as Arjun Appadurai writes, “is actually knowledge of how to produce and reproduce locality under conditions of anxiety and entropy, social wear and flux, ecological uncertainty and cosmic volatility” (181). The field poetic—as a mode of producing and reproducing locality—gave Olson and Duncan (and later Wah and Marlatt) a sense of poetry’s reflection of, and participation in, the dynamic environment both on and off the page. By means of projective verse, the poem and poet became imbricated in a responsive *poethic* whereby the processes of the poem and those of the local environment are co-constructive, forming a dynamic hermeneutic of the place from which the poet writes. Indeed, any articulation of local knowledge, as Appadurai reminds us, must take into account local conditions that influence it: the controls, anxieties, and uncertainties of the field. These factors—which, according to Duncan, establish the balanced polarities of the field—often come together to create an uneven field of particulars, depending on the vantage ground of different subjects. By “uneven field,” I mean to suggest that asymmetrical power relations produced by institutional controls and practices—such as urban renewal, and the over policing, ghettoization, and segregation of racialized individuals and communities—have prevented racialized subjects, in

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<sup>171</sup> “Tender Arrivals,” *S.O.S. Poems* 398.

<sup>172</sup> “The Kingfishers,” *The Collected Poems* 86.

particular, from accessing and articulating an equal sense of self-determined place.<sup>173</sup> Linda McDowell (albeit in the context of gender relations and place) puts it succinctly when she suggests that “[p]laces are defined, maintained, and altered through the impact of unequal power relations” (5). This is certainly accurate, but it is also true that places are created and reformed through everyday practices and the coming together of communities to contest and resist these institutions and structures of control and force change, particularly at the local level.

Specifically, the poetic trajectory of Amiri Baraka—from his early years as a member of the predominantly white Beat literati in Greenwich Village, to his years as a black nationalist and political mover in the racial affairs of his hometown of Newark—demonstrates the vast effect of both local and national sociopolitical conditions on developing a projective *poethic* of postwar place. The work of Baraka (formerly LeRoi Jones) presents a crucial breaking point of projective verse and the imagined spaces and places arising from this Black Mountain poetic.<sup>174</sup> While Baraka was directly influenced by the Black Mountain school, and most predominantly by Olson, his sense of place and the politics of location intensified in the years after the 1965 assassination of Malcolm X, an event that incited Baraka to found the Black Arts Movement in New York. The assassination was pivotal to Baraka’s developing sense and consciousness of place as a black subject in urban America; after the death of Malcolm X, the Black Arts Movement sought urgent action on the streets in order to force a new political consciousness and to forge new geographies of resistance. For Baraka, this revolutionary spirit pushed the boundaries of space both on and off the page: his early literary grounding, he felt, was too ornamental and tentative, representing the stalled out politics of the white liberal left with which

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<sup>173</sup> Recent killings of unarmed black men by police, specifically while these men are in predominantly “white” neighbourhoods where they are deemed “not to belong,” is demonstrative of this uneven social practice that determines who gets to be placed where (or who gets to move within/through certain places).

<sup>174</sup> For the simple purposes of ease and cohesiveness, I will refer to Baraka consistently in this chapter as Amiri Baraka and not as LeRoi Jones.

he was once affiliated. As a result, he left the politics of his Black Mountain peers aside to pursue the radical project of black nationalism.

Baraka's movement away from his early influencers was accompanied by a series of key geographical moves from the 1957 to 1970—first from his hometown of Newark to Greenwich Village (1958), then to Cuba on a political trip (1960), from Greenwich Village to Harlem (1965) and then from Harlem back to Newark (1967). Accordingly, the sections of this chapter are organized along this spatial trajectory. By means of navigating these different urban sites, Baraka constructed a moving local that was emplaced in the streets of urban space. Baraka's adoption, inflection (and, in many ways, intervention) on the Black Mountain field poetic at once extends and reveals the limitations of the poetic itself. It extends the field's concern for change and movement by inflecting it with the particularities of black bodies navigating the social realities of postwar urban American space. His move away from the politics of Black Mountain, through to his Black Nationalist phase, and into his later Marxist turn can be described in terms of a continued hermeneutic of change that is undergirded by a shifting spatial imaginary in direct response to the outside, physical world in which he found himself.<sup>175</sup>

Baraka's early work expresses clear homage to the projective, open-field model of verse practiced by Olson and Duncan. For the young Baraka (who was 24 years younger than Olson and 15 years younger than Duncan) this poetic represented a radical new way of articulating "How You Sound," the particularities of black experience in space.<sup>176</sup> As Baraka writes in an

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<sup>175</sup> This study deals primarily with Baraka's work from the late 1950s to the mid-1970s, which marks the time of his turn away from the white liberal left and towards a black nationalist politics. Although Baraka's Third World Marxist turn after 1974 is interesting and critically fruitful, his earlier (trans)formative years—in which Baraka broke from his Black Mountain and beat influences to forge his own, individual poethic of radical black nationalism—is the focus of the chapter as this work deals most directly with postwar space and place and the projective poethic I am tracing through the project.

<sup>176</sup> "How You Sound??" is a short essay by Baraka on projective verse that was published in Donald Allen's 1960 anthology *New American Poetry* alongside work from Baraka's Black Mountain, New York, and San Francisco contemporaries. I discuss the significance of this essay at length in the third section of this chapter.

early essay, “Environment ... becomes total, i.e., social, cultural, and physical, and not merely scenery. Thought is landscape, in the way the poet Charles Olson has used the word: what one can see from where one is standing” (“Introduction,” *The Moderns* xii). As my previous chapters on Olson and Duncan have demonstrated, within the open-field *poethic* is an inherent tension between the material and imaginative tenets of location in space, which together produce resistant spatial knowledges and spatial production for the individual and the community. As Bradley J. Stiles argues, however, the radical poetic that Baraka learned from the Black Mountaineers presented some very material challenges for the “local” conditions—and limitations—of Baraka’s subjective orientation to place. “[T]hough [Baraka] understood that the new landscape of thought was deeper, more complex, and offered more options to its inhabitant than previous concepts of the world,” Stiles writes, “he also recognized that as an African American he would be just as restricted in the new environment as he was in the old one” (70). Stiles’s point is certainly accurate, but it is also incomplete. I agree that by virtue of being a black man in urban America, Baraka’s engagement with the urban landscape—through the lens of projective verse or not—was always to be “restricted” by white domination and control over space and economic growth. However, as I will demonstrate, Baraka was able to break from the projective worldview by intensifying its imaginative energy through active political engagement. Baraka harnesses the energies of the field—of the imagined and material collective black experience—to uprise the disenfranchised black community and alter the existing limitations of their reality.

Thus, although Baraka’s departure signals his dissatisfaction with the Black Mountain reliance on imagined worlds and places not yet realized, his poetry also extends the possibilities the field poetic offers to the sociopolitical conditions of his particular present moment.

Specifically, Baraka infuses the field poethic with a racial politics of place—in this particular way, as with Olson and Duncan, his poetry brings to light the concern in open form poetics for the poem as not just a field of language, but as a social construct in and of itself: the poem takes place not only on the space of the page, but it also takes place in actual space, *as part of space*. For Baraka, such material political action is central to his governing *poethic*: there is no desire that cannot be fully translated into act. The poetic act, in this way, serves as a catalyst and vehicle for sociopolitical reform on the ground, in the streets. This is not to say that Baraka is uninterested in the transformative powers of the imagination—far from it, as I will discuss. But imagination alone, as Duncan might have it, is not enough. The energies of both aesthetics and politics must come together in co-creation in order for the spatial limitations of the community to be overcome.

Baraka's work highlights the postwar American urbanscape as a space burdened by a history of spatial regulation and control aimed to keep black bodies in place, but also as a site of struggle and resistance.<sup>177</sup> As such, my discussion centres upon the geographical underpinnings of Baraka's *poethic*: his break from what he perceived to be the stalled-out politics of his Black Mountain contemporaries, as well as his extension of the possibilities inherent the open-field poetic as a mobilizer and tool for political reform in place, I argue, must be considered from the lens of spatiality. That is, Baraka was exhausted with Olson and Duncan's refusal to act politically beyond the space of the page, which he views as a misuse or under-use of poetic labour; as such, he continues to use the political form of the open-field, albeit with correlative action beyond the page. Most of the existing critical work on Baraka's poetry deals with his

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<sup>177</sup> Although I later touch on issues of urban renewal and racial segregation, an exhaustive study of the socioeconomic concerns of the American city in the postwar era lies outside the scope and purpose of this chapter. However, for further reading, James A. Tyner offers a concise yet comprehensive account of these issues and how they have affected black geographies and spatial production in postwar urban America. See Tyner, "Urban Revolutions and the Spaces of Black Radicalism."

cultural nationalism and jazz aesthetics; while these are certainly important aspects of his poetics, a study of Baraka's acute spatial imaginary that undergirds his shifting politics during the 1960s is overdue.<sup>178</sup> James A. Tyner identifies a marked lack of scholarship more generally on the imbrications of space and black radicality during this era—concerns that were central to the rise and success of the Black Power Movement. As Tyner writes, “Geographers have paid scant attention to the political geographies of black radical intellectuals and, specifically, the Black Power movement. And yet a contestation over space was prominent in the varied approaches to the black freedom struggle” (“Urban” 229). In an effort to mend this lack in literary and geographic scholarship, my discussion inflects Baraka's poetry and poetics with key theories of resistant space, including de Certeau's concept of practiced place and human geographer Katherine McKittrick's (via Sylvia Wynter) concept of the *demonic ground*.

While postwar American space is bounded by racialized codes of control and containment aimed to keep bodies “in place,” these theories by de Certeau and McKittrick offer ways of counter-narrating spaces of control into places of resistance. As discussed in my introduction, “demonic grounds” are alternative spaces of contest that are established—whether materially or imaginatively—outside existing structures of power and control undergirded by a history of racial dispossession dating back to the transatlantic slave trade. As McKittrick contends, historical geographies of domination—such as the slave auction block and the plantation—are founded on chattel slavery ideologies of bodily dispossession and ownership, which continue to inflect contemporary experiences of space and place for black subjects. However, by means of *living* “geographies of the everyday” (McKittrick 12) through “[o]wnership of the body, individual and community voices, bus seats ... recurring positionalities, written and articulated

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<sup>178</sup> Consider, for example, the respected work of William J. Harris in *The Poetry and Poetics of Amiri Baraka: the Jazz Aesthetic* (1985), Aldon Lynn Nielsen's *Black Chant: Languages of African-American Postmodernism* (1997) and Jerry Watts's *Amiri Baraka: The Politics and Art of a Black Intellectual* (2001).

through protest, musics, feminist theory, fiction, the everyday” (3), black subjects can reclaim, reimagine, and reshape their sense of place in the present by embodying alternative narratives of place wrested from a history of dispossession. In this way, everyday black geographies—and everyday black place—can be reproduced demonically to disrupt and counteract the ownership of dominant white space and place. McKittrick’s understanding of geography and of place therein exceeds the obvious signifiers of cities and neighbourhoods to consider the ways in which one’s sense of location results from an ensemble of multiple factors—social, political, cultural. Since the field poetic also considers space as a field of dynamic and interactive elements that together create place, the demonic ground serves as a critical tool with which to narrate Baraka’s significant challenges to and extensions of the place-based American poetic that influences his work. Throughout Baraka’s own spatial trajectory, he practices place through the creation of demonic grounds of resistance. These created and creative grounds not only extend the projective *poethic* Baraka adopted from Olson and Duncan, but when translated into action on the streets of Newark, these respatializations redraw the boundaries of the urban ghetto by transforming the space of urban blackness into a polis of black *communitas*.

### **Local Anxieties: Greenwich Village and Baraka’s Black Mountain**

...where I was going, they could not come along. Where that was, I couldn’t even articulate.<sup>179</sup>

—Amiri Baraka

“Probably never before Baraka,” Aldon Lynn Nielsen writes, “had any black poet been so instrumental in the early careers of white poets, so integral a player in the development of the emerging poetics of his time” (*Writing* 216). Baraka is not only an integral figure in postwar

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<sup>179</sup> *The Autobiography* 192.

avant-garde American poetics, but as founder and key leader of the Black Arts Movement, the artistic branch of the Black Power Movement in America in the 1960s, he is a *maker of history*.

Early rumblings of this revolution in Baraka's life and career were felt years earlier, when he was a fixture of the New York bohemia. In 1957, at the age of twenty-two and following his discharge from the American air force, Baraka moved to Greenwich Village in New York City, which was a central urban hotspot for beat artists and literati. The rich literary landscape of the Village offered a solid ground of influence for the young Baraka; it was here that he corresponded with and befriended the likes of writers such as Allen Ginsberg, Frank O'Hara, Jack Kerouac, William S. Burroughs, as well as the Black Mountain school of poets, including Charles Olson, Robert Duncan, and Robert Creeley.<sup>180</sup> While there, he was thoroughly integrated in the literary avant-garde, and it was a period of fecundity in terms of personal and collective publishing: during this time he wrote poems, plays, critical essays, edited literary journals such as *Yugen*, *Kulchur*, *Floating Bear*, *Zazen*, and in 1958 he established Totem Press with his wife Hettie Cohen. Needless to say, Baraka was a prolific publisher and influencer of the Beat literati, and it was in his role of publisher that he came to be associated with the Black Mountain school of writers. As he writes in his autobiography, "There was a sense of community growing among some of the young writers, and I was one of them as well as the editor of one of their magazines" (*The Autobiography* 153). Baraka published work from many Black Mountain poets; most notably, he published the first pamphlet edition of Olson's manifesto "Projective Verse" in Totem in 1959. He also published the whole of Olson's essay "Proprioception" in several sections that appeared in *Yugen*, *The Floating Bear*, and *Kulchur*. In a 1962 letter, a grateful

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<sup>180</sup> While Baraka was in Greenwich Village, he shared an especially close and complicated friendship with Frank O'Hara. For an extended discussion of this important relationship, see Epstein, *Beautiful Enemies* 194-204.

Olson described Baraka as “the only light fast runner in the business (I mean as publisher...)” (Olson, *Selected Letters* 304).

It was in Greenwich Village that the first of Baraka’s communal literary spaces—or households, as Duncan would have it—was established on West 20<sup>th</sup> Street. The apartment was the central meeting ground in the Village for avant-garde artists and writers who came in and out of its doors. Baraka remarks that his home “was always full of Black Mountain stories” (*The Autobiography* 155). The writers and artists centralized in the Village expressed a special respect for Charles Olson, who “was always spoken of in that circle with awe” (155). In many ways, this assimilation into the white left counterculture catalyzed Baraka’s later poetic coming of age. Baraka was taken with the projective model of open field poetics for its very material concerns of relation between the poet and the environment. In his autobiography, he notes that “Projective Verse” “was for many of us the manifesto of a new poetry” (253). For Baraka, the need to make poetry that directly engages with space both on and off the page was paramount, and he saw the potential for this marriage between poetics and action within the field poetic. As he later reflects in the first lines of his “Introduction” to *Hard Facts*, “Poetry is saying something about reality. It reflects the sayer’s place in the production process, his or her material life and values. As a form, it reflects the material life and values of the society in which it exists. And in which the sayer, the poet, exists” (n.p.). It is evident that from his early writing through to his later career, Baraka’s poetry is centrally concerned with the place of the poet, and the ability and necessity of poetry to stake a claim to place by altering and transforming space.

The feeling was mutual: not only was Olson taken by Baraka’s poetic and publishing abilities, but he was also affected by Baraka’s place as a black subject under a capitalist American regime. To digress for a moment, it is worth noting that in a 1966 poem from the third

volume of *The Maximus Poems*, “I have been an ability...” Olson makes several mentions of Baraka (then Jones). Most notable is his mention of “Leroy [sic]” alongside his father’s struggle against the U.S. Post Office for integrity over efficiency in his job as a postal worker and union member.<sup>181</sup> Speaking of his father, Olson writes of the post office “using / his purpose to / catch him / in their trap” (496) and speaks of his father’s efforts to organize the union of postal workers. He then continues:

my father a Swedish  
 wave of  
 migration after  
 Irish? like Negroes  
 now like Leroy and Malcolm  
 X the final wave  
 of wash upon this  
 desperate  
 ugly  
 cruel  
 Land this Nation  
 which never  
 lets anyone  
 come to  
 shore (496-497).

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<sup>181</sup> As Ralph Maud notes, Olson upheld his father as an exemplar of the “sincere workman.” His father, as Maud elucidates, was “fighting for quality service against the route inspector and the dehumanizing efficiency that came to dominate the workplace after World War II” (*What Does Not* 114). For further reading, see the memoir Olson wrote for his father, *The Post Office* (1975).

In this passage, Olson relates the struggles of his father against the incorporation of public services to Baraka's and Malcolm X's struggles for racial equality—a relation that is nonetheless rather misguided, as their concerns arise from different sociopolitical conditions.<sup>182</sup> As I discussed in the first chapter, Gloucester features as a significant space for Olson for two main reasons: it represents the “last shore” of Western migration, and its early history of communal resistance stands in opposition to the postwar capitalist conditions of America. Hence Olson's alignment of his father and Baraka as “migrants” in the land of America, “which never / lets anyone / come to shore.” The “desperate / ugly / cruel” land of America, according to Olson, is an undecidedly indiscriminate space where sanctions on individual and communal freedom are placed on “anyone.” Although Olson would later question Baraka's radicality, as I will discuss later, this poem demonstrates Olson's awareness of the limitations imposed on Baraka as a black man in America. However, while Olson attempts to draw similarities between his father's position, Baraka, and Malcolm X, these correspondences remain superficial and unconvincing—even further, they become patronizing, since Olson's attempt to establish a common ground between them severely undercuts the difference between the nation's disenfranchising of some of its public servants, on the one hand, and the racial realities of living in a racist society, on the other. Despite this glaring oversight, Olson's alignment of Baraka and Malcolm X with his father's work ethic and his fight for union rights in the very least demonstrates Olson's understanding of the significant marriage between poetic and political communities in the pursuit of sociopolitical resistance and reform.

While living in the Village, Baraka was deeply submerged in the politics of the Beat counterculture, and this was well reflected in his poetry at the time. He was also reading the high

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<sup>182</sup> Baraka's father was also a postal worker, as Olson notes in the same poem: “Leroy's father a postmaster / in some small New Jersey place” (497). This connection might provide more motivation for Olson's link between Baraka and his father.

modernists, such as Pound and Williams (*The Autobiography* 159), who were also the major influencers of Olson and Duncan in the development of the localized field poetic.<sup>183</sup> In his first collection of poetry, *Preface to a Twenty Volume Suicide Note* (1961), the influences of Baraka's Black Mountain peers—specifically their practice of “Projective Verse”—is clear. In the poem “To a Publisher . . . Cut-out,” which also appears in Donald Allen's 1960 anthology *The New American Poetry 1945-1960* alongside the work of the Black Mountaineers and the Beats, Baraka mentions Olson directly as one of his influences: “I ride the 14<sup>th</sup> St. bus / every day . . . reading Hui Neng/ Raymond Chandler/ Olson” (*Preface* 19).

I will discuss the beginnings of Baraka's racial imaginary within his early poetry in a moment, but first it will be helpful to take a closer look at the projective form of his poetry during this time. An exemplary case of Baraka's adoption of projective verse in *Preface* is “From an Almanac (3),” the poem dedicated to Olson (or “C.O.” as Baraka refers to him). I will return to discuss more examples of Black Mountain influences on Baraka's writing in the following section wherein I discuss his second collection *The Dead Lecturer* (1964), but this poem offers an early example of clear influence—and, as I will discuss shortly, some early dissonance between Baraka and Black Mountain poetic ideology. Many other poems in this collection, such as “Hymn for Lanie Poo,” and “Look for You Yesterday, Here You Come Today,” are projective poems that employ the hallmarks of the form, such as innovative spacing in the field of the page and rapid successions of images mixed with social commentary. However, “From an Almanac (3)” is a more interesting example for my purposes here, as it is an exemplar of projective verse

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<sup>183</sup> As Baraka writes, regarding his circle of beat poets in the Village, “Whitman and Williams and Pound . . . were our prophets. Whitman, who broke away from England with his free verse. Williams, who carried that fight into our own century, seeing the universal in the agonizingly local. Pound, the scientist of poetry, the translator, the mover and shaker (and Fascist!)” (*The Autobiography* 159).

while at the same time signaling Baraka's early questioning of Olson's optimism towards art's role in society.

In terms of structure, "From an Almanac (3)" features indentations from the margin, irregular spacing, and open-ended brackets to indicate the poem's "breath score." These lacunae set the field of the page such that its organization signals to the reader the length of pause intended between words and phrases within the lines:

This bizness, of dancing, how  
 Can it suit us? Old men, naked  
 sterile women.

(our time,  
 a cruel one. Our soul's warmth  
 left out. Little match children,  
 dance  
 against the weather.

) The soul's  
 warmth  
 is how  
 shall I say  
 it,

Its own. A place  
 of warmth, for children  
 wd dance there,

if they cd. If they

left their brittle selves behind (our time's  
a cruel one. (44)

Following in line with the tenets of open form, within the poem, *space equals time*: the recording of time in gaps ensures that the act of poetic composition is not divorced from the conditions of its material construction—the visual breath score brings the poem into the world as occurring in a particular space and time. Although the poem carries a conceit throughout—that of dancing, which I will discuss in a moment—the images and scenes pose questions and observations that, together with the projective spacing of the poem, move the idea from a static thought into an energetic construct. In so doing, rather than fitting thought into a rigid, predetermined pattern, the metrical variance of the poem attempts to convey the experience of perception as moving consciousness.

The poem circulates images of children, the weather, and the wind to create a vortex of feeling encircling the main tenet of the poem: the postwar condition. The poem is crowded with layered perceptions and juxtaposed images; for instance, the first two lines pose the pressing question of the times—the impossibility to “dance” in a postwar world so torn and corrupt—with images of “old men, naked,” “sterile women,” and “match children” (44). Later, the ennui of the poem is summed up in the image of the wind dragging bones “clumsily / thru the cold.” Independent clauses are broken into their dependent fragments, left to drift in this Eliotic wasteland scene: “warmth / is how / shall I say / it, / Its own” (44). Open-ended brackets signal breath units but also register the contemplative bohemian despair toward the unknown—toward the place of the world, and his place in it—that early Baraka was often channeling. The poem also recirculates its language and images in a manner similar to Duncanian rimes, “the reiteration of formations in the design . . . [that] lead into complexities of the field,” (Duncan, *Bending* vi) as

discussed in the second chapter. Throughout Baraka's poem, words such as "dance," "time," "cruel," "soul," and "warmth" are repeated in different semantic arrangements, creating a pulsing energy plagued by angst and ennui on the level of language. For example, the line, "soul's / warmth" is reiterated a couple lines later as "a place / of warmth," a site where children "wd dance ... if they cd."<sup>184</sup>

In terms of the poem's central focus on the dance as a lost or unreachable site of creativity and innocence in the present, it is significant to note that Baraka is responding to Olson and Duncan's use of the dance as a metaphor for poetic creation and its role within the world. It is interesting to note, as von Hallberg does, that this poem was written in response to a statement made by Olson in a letter to Cid Corman about the ability of poetry to stand as a fundamental and transformative mode of expression. Like Duncan, Olson uses the metaphor of the dance to describe the poetic act.<sup>185</sup> As he writes to Corman:

I believe ... that all men and women can dance—and this alone is enough to establish expression—that all other expression is only up from this base; and that to dance is enough to make a whole day have glory, granting that work is called for of each of us. The hook is that work will always make sense if dancing is understood to be—expression is—the other issue of a day. (Olson, *Letters* 102)<sup>186</sup>

The physiology and movement implicit within "Projective Verse" makes the dance an apt metaphor for poetic creation in Olson's and Duncan's work. As von Hallberg notes, Jones—

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<sup>184</sup> It is worth noting that while abbreviating words is a commonplace practice for many poets, it particularly lends itself to the concerns of breath in projective verse. Baraka's shortening of the words "would" and "could" to "wd" and "cd" emphasizes the energy point of the syllable when the poem is read aloud, which signals the author's sonic intent to the reader.

<sup>185</sup> Aside from the statement by Olson quoted herein, consider also his comment in "Projective Verse" of poetry and dance as one: "So, is it not the PLAY of a mind we are after, is not that that shows whether a mind is there at all? And the threshing floor for the dance? Is it anything but the LINE?" (243).

<sup>186</sup> Olson's observation of the poetic act and the dance act as mutually creative is mirrored by Duncan when he writes, "Now, as ever, returning to the dance ground, I see the Dance and the Work are one. Where the work comes true, it is true to the Dance" (qtd. in Quartermain, "Notes" 807).

though he admired Olson's ambition in form and content—was critical of Olson's optimistic worldview. Referring to "From an Almanac (3)" as a response to Olson's statement from Baraka, von Hallberg writes: "LeRoi Jones dissented from Olson's optimism on the grounds that the present world is so hostile to expression that art as dance has no chance" (224 n.42). It is clear from Baraka's critique of Olson's optimism that Baraka is struggling with the "place" of poetry in the world. As Baraka writes in the poem, while the dance is a site of "warmth" for children, they "cannot dance" (45) there while entrenched in the realities of their current world.

Baraka's evocation of the dance is also similar to Duncan's conception of the "dance ground" of the soul, as discussed earlier in the second chapter and further on page 277 of this current chapter. Whereas Duncan and Olson imagine the dance ground as a construction of the mind made material through poetry, Baraka does not see its material manifestation as a possibility within such a corrupt climate. For Duncan, the dance ground is a place, likened to a meadow, that can be called upon in the mind as a creative shore against the containment of postwar culture.<sup>187</sup> For Baraka, however, such a dance ground is unattainable and inconceivable in the "cruel" reality of the postwar world. Moreover, not only is the dance unattainable, but it does not "suit" the current milieu in which Baraka finds himself, as he puts it in the second line of the poem. Baraka's diction here is significant, for in saying that the dance does not "suit" the current world, he is beginning to articulate the need for a different view of the role of poetry.

While it may seem from this poem that Baraka is skeptical of poetry's efficacy, I would argue that this is not the case: what Baraka struggles with here is not the efficacy but the *role and*

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<sup>187</sup> Examples of Duncan's use of the dance in his work are too numerous to mention, but aside from Duncan's central poem on the subject, "The Opening of the Field," see also his poem "The Dance," from the same collection, *The Opening of the Field*. "The Dance" alludes to Duncan's former summer job working at a dance club wherein he would get up to sweep the cigarette butts and beer bottles from the dance party the night before (Jarnot 96). For Duncan, the space of the dance floor in the club the night before came to life fantastically as if it were a protected meadow, with the dancers encircling one another in unrestrained pastoral reverie—hence, the poem's origin and muse.

*function* of poetry in the world. Poetry, for Baraka, needs to be more than dance, which, although beautiful and creative, is ornamental; this early poem signals Baraka's yearning for a deeper, more socially active role for poetry beyond the page. Hence why, years later when Baraka undergoes his transformation into Black nationalism, he firmly situates the role of poetry as sociopolitical *warfare*—a point to which I will return in the following section of this chapter. It is clear that in his early poetry, Baraka was influenced by and adopted the tenets of projective verse as a poetic mode from Olson and Duncan; it is also clear that he was beginning to question the foundational beliefs at the heart of their politics and develop a different view of the place of poetry in the world.

Moreover, at this time of his writing, Baraka's racial politics do not feature as *the* central part of his poetics; nonetheless, these early works are embedded with a bohemian aesthetic of isolation and rebellion, rooted in metaphors of racial difference, that anticipates his later radical turn to racial politics and activism. In "Notes for a Speech," the last poem from his first collection, he writes:

African blues  
 does not know me. Their steps, in sands  
 of their own  
 land. A country  
 in black & white, newspapers  
 blown down pavements  
 of the world. Does  
 not feel what I am (47)

As with many poems in this first collection, notably “Hymn for Lanie Poo,” this last poem signifies Baraka’s forlorn isolation, his feelings of separateness from Africa in his African-American racial hybridity. Here, Baraka projects this anxiety onto the nation and onto his African-American peers. The poem’s underlying statement-question, “what I am,” is meditated on with considerable ambiguity; his felt separateness from Africa and African people is felt in the counterpointed repetition of Africans as “my ‘people’” and later as “dead souls, my, so called people.” Baraka’s anxieties are felt in the multiple caesurae of this last line, where the breath of the poem becomes hesitant with pauses. Africa, as a space of cultural origin, is unhinged in the poem from the speaker’s identity; as such, the “African blues,” Baraka writes, “[d]oes / not feel / what I am.” The poem betrays an overwhelming feeling of groundlessness for the young Baraka. The poet feels trapped by competing nation-states—Africa and America—each vying for his relation but neither really able to “feel” his identity.

The poem also largely foreshadows Baraka’s later black militancy and his “us” versus “them” mentality that would further separate him from the Black Mountain poets. His later explosive politics is foretold in line, “eyes / are something locked in / hate, of hate, of hate,” with its pointed repetition. Moreover, the words “they,” “their,” “you,” are repeated in reference to ambiguous subjects throughout the poem along with references to “me” and “myself”:

walk abroad, they conduct

their deaths apart from my own. Those

heads, I call

my “people”

(And who are they. People. To concern

myself, ugly man. Who

you, to concern  
 the white flat stomachs  
 of maidens (47)

These repeated pronouns with ambiguous referents emphasize the development of borders between communities of people in Baraka's consciousness; these separations will later become significant as the underpinnings of a black nationalism that stresses the need to develop a nation of the black "we."<sup>188</sup> The poem recirculates the words "they" and "me," but it also references the words "black" and "white" and motifs of darkness and lightness throughout. If the poem is an open field of dynamic elements, these two "objects"—blackness and whiteness—do not relate in the field easily. Unlike Duncan's *sfumato* of dark and light—wherein the blurred lines between the shades signify the inevitable balancing of strife and love in his poems, here darkness and light, for Baraka, become a conflicted yet well-defined binary that is equally as complex but does not balance. Throughout the poem, Baraka's projected feeling of loneliness and separation from his African roots is counterpointed by his uneasy "Americanness" that is coded as white. The mixed nature of multicultural America stands in contrast in the poem with Africa, which is depicted along a defined colour binary as "A country / in black & white."

Further, the poem underscores a growing anxiety and conflict within Baraka in terms of his "proper" place, between his current place in the predominantly white space of the Village and his "proper" place as an African-American man in urban America, of which Harlem was representative. This anxiety is felt in the tension between dark and light throughout; while he observes "[p]eeled moon / light on [his] fingers" in an intimate encounter with a white woman, two lines later he is blinded: "Black / words throw up sand / to eyes." These lines register

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<sup>188</sup> I will return to this point in greater detail in the following section, where I discuss Duncan's concept of anarchic community and his infamous disagreement with Denise Levertov in relation to Baraka's establishment of a politics and poetics of black nationalism.

Baraka's uneasiness with his ability to "pass" within the white community of his peers while being judged by the black community (centralized in Harlem) who looks down upon black men in the company of white women (and white people in general). Moreover, the lines "My color / is not theirs. [African] Lighter, white man / talk" (47) are purposefully ambiguous, as are all the references to "their" in the poem. The lines could be read with "theirs" referring to the white community Baraka is surrounded by in the Village, which is full of "Lighter, white man / talk," or "theirs" could be a reference to the Africans he speaks of, and the "Lighter, white man / talk" is his own, influenced by the work and ideas of his white peers. Either way, the divisiveness of these lines register an uneasy and complicated relationship between Baraka and the two communities—white and black—to which he feels he does not fully belong in place.

As Baraka writes in his autobiography, "In the US and the Western world generally, white supremacy can warp and muffle the full recognition by a black person of [his African] history, especially an 'intellectual' trained by a system of white supremacy" (156). Such muffling of Baraka's self-recognition is clearly evident in the poem's wavering between positions of identity, his feeling of dislocality and placelessness, and the ambiguous nature of the "they" throughout. This feeling of being "out of place" in both the white and black communities certainly resonated with his growing conflict in terms of his position in the Village at the time. Although Baraka enjoyed being in the centre of the Beats downtown, he nonetheless experienced a growing criticism towards his place in this "white" space by his black peers who lived uptown in Harlem; as he admits in his autobiography, his time in the Village was a time of personal conflict in terms of his feelings of isolation from both his black and white peers. He expresses a mixed anxiety towards the polarity of his white avant-garde intellectual peers and his black peers he was encountering uptown in Harlem who looked down upon the black men living with white women

in the Village (128)—a reality that certainly conflicted Baraka since at this point he was married to Hettie Cohen, a white woman.

The felt isolation in the poem toward Africa has been noted by critics as indicative of Baraka's felt isolation from his black peers. As Werner Sollors argues, the poem underlines "the isolation of the Black Bohemian from other Black people, his alienation from Africa and the Black American community" (*Amiri* 60). While such anxieties are certainly present in the poem there is another narrative of alienation that supercedes Baraka's personal relation to race. Sollors's reading overlooks a deeper complexity of the poem in which Baraka interrogates the very meaning of what it is to be "American" under the nation-state. The poem ends on a complex and ambiguous note, with Baraka again addressing the "you," as he has throughout the poem:

... Africa  
 is a foreign place. You are  
 as any other sad man here  
 american. (47)

Critics such as Sollors see this ending as not so ambiguous: as he notes in his analysis, the poem ends, ultimately, on a "resigned note" (*Amiri* 61) that expresses Baraka's failure to synthesize his blackness with his current position and his artistic endeavours. Although I would agree that these final lines of the poem carry the anxious burden felt throughout and seem to signify resignation, I think this to be a too simplistic reading of a complex problematic that is threaded throughout the work, as I have discussed. As he writes a couple lines earlier, "My color / is not theirs. Lighter, white / man talk." Here, Baraka compares himself, as an African-American, to the racial "purity" of African blacks. However, his words dig deeper: with the invocation of "white / man talk," Baraka is alluding to his position as a black intellectual among the white intellectual elite. This

“white man talk,” the influence of his white intellectual peers, colours his skin lighter than his “so called / people” of African descent.

While this may seem to support Sollors’s reading of ultimate resignation, these lines must be read in concert with the final lines of the text. While Baraka feels trapped in between blackness and whiteness, in the end he makes a larger argument about the very possibility of a cohesive identity under the American nation-state. In his conviction that “You are / as any other sad man here / american,” Baraka is including himself among the white man and the black man under the address of “you.” In addressing his black American peers, he suggests to them that “Africa / is a foreign place,” and that their place here, in uncapitalized “america,” aligns them with the white men trapped rootless under the same nation-state. These final lines resonate with Olson, who is similarly critical of the American nation-state as a “cruel / Land” “which never / lets anyone / come to / shore.” Like Olson, Baraka suggests that both black and white men can identify under this complex and problematic nationality. By uncapitalizing america, Baraka removes its national resonance for either black or white men and suggests that both are caught in the in-between, without claim to legitimate belonging or grounding “in place.”

The small-a “america” thus highlights the nation as an artificial ideological construct; in this way, Baraka’s commentary on the nation-state is similar to Anderson’s concept of the imagined community as discussed in my introduction. “[R]egardless of the actual inequality and exploitation that may prevail,” Anderson argues, “the nation is always conceived as a deep, horizontal comradeship” (16). This final line in Baraka’s early poem registers this “imagined community” of “america,” where both black and white people are ensnared in its false pretenses of belonging. However, there may be some redemption in the possibility of a *community* of men with multiple subject positions under the fluid hybridity of an “american” un-identity. Given the

poem's guiding conflict with one's "proper" place, the ending of the poem can be seen as not so much a resignation, but an articulation of fluid locals. Here Baraka undermines the nation-state by reducing its singular meaning, "American," to the lower rank of "american." This demotion—while serving to illustrate the artificiality of the nation—also invites alternative meanings of nationality, of sameness, of identity, outside the metanarrative of belonging under American nationhood. In this way, Baraka's early poem articulates place translocally across fluid, hybrid identities. The poem's guiding thread of separateness, of black and white, comes together in the end in an image of community; although this community is held under the rubric of an overbearing "step mother America," the ending also suggests the possibility of mobility and movement, a committing to undoing the singularity of American with plural significations of "american." Despite the confusion this causes for subjects both black and white, this confusion can also signify a freedom to move, and in this way, the ending signifies the next pivotal moves in Baraka's life and career—his translocal movements across urban locals that together inform this hybrid "americanness."

We must not be mistaken, however: this final image of "americanness" is far from utopian. Although my reading suggests the mobility of racial fluidity under a released "american" un-identity, the pathways between prove to be difficult for Baraka as he continues to navigate the complex landscape of urban postwar America. The poem invokes several resonant communities under the minor banner of "american," and also signals the possibility of movement between these different communities. However, the process of releasing himself from the influence of his white intellectual friends and peers, from the awe of Olson and the Black Mountain community, and his crossing over between positions and locals, is an arduous one. This last poem of Baraka's first collection is entirely prophetic: its intimated crossroads, conflicted anxieties between

blackness and whiteness, are both subsumed under a tattered banner of “americanness” that Baraka will soon disavow and actively militate against. I thus suggest that this final line of Baraka’s early poem is prophetic of Baraka’s continued interrogation of “american” space in two significant ways: it at once foretells Baraka’s militant separation from the white community and into black nationalism, and it also foreshadows his later establishment of resistant spaces of black community in Newark. The following section, however, discusses Baraka’s exploration of his “americanness” in the context of the Cuban Revolution, the success of which he witnesses firsthand. This grassroots displacement of governing structures of power and control provides a key model of resistant place for Baraka’s burgeoning black nationalism.

### **The Soundings of Revolution: Cuba Libre and the Harlem Move**

He shall step, he  
will shape, he  
is already also  
moving off

into the soil, on to his own bones<sup>189</sup>

—Charles Olson

In the summer of 1960, Baraka was invited along with a contingent of black American writers, journalists, and activists to Havana. The delegates were invited by Richard Gibson on behalf of the Fair Play for Cuba Committee, an American organization that rallied for American public support for the newly revolutionized Cuban government (Watts 52). Months before their arrival, the seven-year Cuban Revolution had come to a successful end when socialist rebel forces, under the leadership of Che Guevara and Fidel Castro, overthrew the dictatorship of Fulgencio Batista.

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<sup>189</sup> “In Cold Hell, in Thicket,” *The Collected Poems* 159.

For Baraka, transporting to this different local—immersing himself in the “view,” as Olson would say, of this place—gave him a grounding model for his emerging politics. Further, in this experience, Baraka saw an imagined community of individuals brought together under revolution—“imagined” not in Anderson’s pejorative sense, but in the sense of a combined communal effort for sociopolitical reform. In many ways, the trip solidified Baraka’s growing feelings of separation from the futile politics of the white left; while in Cuba, the consciousness of First World racial identity, struggle, and protest met with the possibilities of Third World anticolonial revolution by the Cuban people who took to the streets and effected actual change.<sup>190</sup>

The trip to Cuba facilitated Baraka’s definitive break from his white left peers, including the Black Mountaineers with whom he had grown in mutual influence. As he writes in his autobiography, “When I returned I was shaken more deeply than even I realized. The arguments I’d had with my old poet comrades increased and intensified. It was not enough just to write, to feel, to think, one must act! One *could* act” (166; original emphasis). While Baraka was once taken with the leftist politics of writers such as Olson and Duncan—especially their belief that new or other worlds could be imagined—these ideas became incompatible with Baraka’s recognition of the actual geographic and political conditions of his racialized reality. As Sollors indicates, the trip to Cuba signaled “Jones’s transformation from aesthetic to political protest, from a belief in the end of ideology to a new political awareness” (*Amiri* 66). Witnessing the success of the Cuban Revolution solidified Baraka’s separation from the perceived futile ideology of his white peers and his transformation towards a more entrenched political

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<sup>190</sup> As Cynthia Young explains, the interest in Cuba by black American intellectuals and activists in the late 50s and early 60s was initiated by the successful armed revolution by the people, but also by the fact that Castro had outlawed racial segregation after taking power. As a result, for many black Americans facing systemic racial discrimination, Castro became a key ally, a “folk hero, the champion of oppressed black and U.S. Latino/a peoples” (16).

worldview in actual space. “I carried so much back with me,” Baraka admits, “that I was never the same again” (*The Autobiography* 165).

Baraka’s transformation is self-documented in his 1960 essay “Cuba Libre,” wherein he narrates his experiences in Cuba while traveling with other black artists and activists. A significant part of the essay outlines Baraka’s humiliating but epiphanic exposure as a naïve American leftist by the other delegates, who, together with the Cuban rebels, were working to effect material, living change in reality. As he recalls in his autobiography, “For twelve or fourteen hours on the train I was assailed for my bourgeois individualism. And I could see, had seen, people my own age involved in actual *change*, revolution” (164; original emphasis). The self-imposed social isolation and disengagement of the bohemian left that once afforded Baraka a unique aesthetic view and a life of letters now became to him an insular, Hamletesque internal conflict preventing him from effecting the needed action he felt.

As discussed in the first chapter, Olson also engaged in such cultural experimentation with the possibilities of a pan-American view of space and community. His trip to the Yucatán in 1951 was largely a search for an American ontology, not yet actuated, that was rooted in aesthetics and would stand in place of an imposed Eurocentric system of values. For both Olson and Baraka, traveling south is a means to become more deeply informed of the conditions of their own local place; however, for each, these southern locales provided very different backdrops. For Olson, the Yucatán offered him a glimpse of a language and a people who were intimately and authentically connected to their geography, as I previously discussed. The Yucatán also gave him ideological justification against Europe, which is caught in time, and towards American space. For Baraka, his trip to Cuba gave him material justification in the form of needed insight into a grassroots revolutionary force grounded in the armed community of the

local landscape. The rebels offered an example of people “taking back” their space in the streets of their local from structures of oppression and control. As Baraka admits in his autobiography, his newfound political awareness of the time was still met with personal hesitancy when it came to separating himself from Olson’s influence and friendship:

What fascinated me about Olson was his sense of having dropped out of the US, the ‘pejorocracy.’ He said in his poems we should ‘go against it.’ That we should oppose ‘those who would advertise you out.’ ... His Projective Verse had been a bible for me. ... Where would [he] be in all this? ... These white men saw that I was moving away from them in so many ways and there was some concern, because it wasn’t that I didn’t like them any longer, but that where I was going they could not come along. Where that was, I couldn’t even articulate. (*The Autobiography* 192)

Although he admired the political form of his Black Mountain contemporaries and recognized their significant influence on his work, the effects of the Cuban experience were far too great. The Cuban example of revolutionary space and community gave fuel and fire to Baraka’s quest for a “black ideology of self-determination” (Woodard, *A Nation* 59) not only for himself, but for the growing Black Power Movement on local American soil.

In short, Baraka’s trip signaled a cultural experimentation leading toward a *translocal* awareness—a term I discuss at great length in the following chapter—wherein a distant local informs and shapes the immediate local.<sup>191</sup> The very foundations of the greater cultural and

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<sup>191</sup> As Baraka notes, he was hesitant at first to attend with the delegates to Cuba. In “Cuba Libre” he recalls the conversation with Gibson wherein he was initially invited: “I hesitated for a minute, asking the man just why would we ... be going. For what purpose? ... Being an American poet, I suppose, I thought my function was simply to talk about everything as if I knew ... it had never entered my mind that I might really like to find out for once what was actually happening someplace else in the world” (347). Olson’s influence here on pre-Cuba Baraka is palpable in terms of his perceived importance on mining local place and writing what you know from where you know it.

political formation of the U.S. Third World Left in the 1960s and 70s (of which writers such as Baraka, Harold Cruse, and Angela Davis were a part) was indeed a translocal movement, one that sought to make cultural connections and identify sociopolitical patterns between disparate geographies. As Cynthia Young writes, “A generation of African-American, U.S. Latino/a, and U.S. Asian artists, intellectuals and activists created cultural, material and ideological links to the Third World as a mode through which to contest U.S. economic, racial and cultural arrangements” (14). Citing Appadurai, Young further argues that these writers and activists “emphasized the relation between cultural experimentation and radical politics, theorizing and enacting a distinctly new radical racial and ethnic subjectivity ... [as a] means for linking local racial and ethnic oppression to global patterns of Western imperialism and economic exploitation” (14). In other words, the local problems of racism and economic oppression were/are global problems, and vice versa. Baraka’s search for a black national culture rooted in urban America found its political counterpart in the revolutionary acts of the Cuban people who worked to transform the reality of their local spatial and political limitations. The Cuban model informed Baraka of the necessary means by which the field poetic—when coupled with collective action—can and must work to transform the lived local space in which the poet, and the greater community of which he or she is a part, navigates.

For Baraka, the bohemian model of isolation and social disengagement was no longer feasible—creative, cultural work could not be separated from political revolution on the ground. The possibility of an aesthetic and political merger in art was illustrated by the Cuban rebels, for Baraka describes the youth as “not *just* hiply cynical or cynically hip, but using their strength and energy to *change* the real world” (*The Autobiography* 246; original emphasis). The Cuban youth

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However, as the trip demonstrated, a more global awareness provided Baraka the necessary foundation for transforming local place in urban America.

were already committed to transforming their environment to make place for a new consciousness on the ground of their local. As Baraka reflects, “in the faces of these young Latino activists and intellectuals, already politicized, for whom Cuba was the first payoff of a world they had already envisioned and were already working for, I was the oddball” (245). The rebels had already forced change on the local level—rather than simply imagine or write about a different world, a stagnancy Baraka saw in the work of his white leftist peers, these youth were acting out their vision in the streets. As he tells Kimberly W. Benston in 1977, “I had seen people taking over big aristocrats’ houses and turning private beaches into public beaches, etc. For example, I saw them take over the Hilton Hotel and change its name from Havana Hilton to Havana Libre” (Baraka, “Amiri” 108-109). The people were not only taking back the space of their local, they were transforming it from a place of capitalist oppression to a place of reclaimed freedom and liberation. This newfound political awareness ushered in a new poetic self-awareness for Baraka. By harnessing the sociopolitical energies of the field, mixed with the incited energies of the poet committed to social action, the open form poetic could work towards reform in actual space—a point to which I will return to momentarily. As he reflects upon his writing of the time, “my writing, which I’d been deadly serious about, was now not just a set of ‘licks’ already laid down by Creeley, Olson, &c., but was moving to become genuinely mine. I felt that I could begin to stretch out, to innovate in ways I hadn’t thought of before” (*The Autobiography* 167).

Baraka’s new awareness did just that—upon returning to Harlem, he set out to mirror the revolutionary change he witnessed in Cuba on home territory. Between Baraka’s pivotal trip to Cuba in 1960 and his subsequent move uptown to Harlem in 1965, Baraka published his second volume of poetry, *The Dead Lecturer*, in 1964. Significantly, this collection signaled Baraka’s



player's bag as the ingredients of a carnivorous feast: "5lbs neckbones / 5lbs hog innards / 10 bottles cheap wine." A couple lines later, Baraka reiterates the contents of the bag with different materials, this time consisting of the fantastical and abstract: "300 men on horseback / 75 bibles / the quietness / of a field." Before restating the items, Baraka repeats himself "(The contents / again, holy saviours." He then restates the contents of the bag a third time with the declarative "I said": "47 howitzers / 7 polished horses jaws / a few trees being waved." He restates the items differently while insisting he is simply repeating them ("(The contents / again," "I said"). These recirculated lists of disparate items are exemplary of Olson's insistence in "Projective Verse" that "always one perception must must MOVE, INSTANTER, ON ANOTHER!" (240). Each item is brought into the field of the poem without hierarchy, and although they are seemingly random items, they form networks of meaning as objects interacting in the space of the page. Baraka is explicit in his metapoetic commentary, for in reference to the bag he writes, "This is a literature, of / symbols. And it is his gift, as the / bag is." Within the alchemy of the field, the blues player's belongings escalate from the banal (yet visceral) neckbones and innards to weapons of war—first a cavalry of men and then the explosive howitzer. The poem points to the transformative power of poetry, but even more so, the poem registers Baraka's burgeoning realization of poetry's ability to exceed the symbolic and imaginative to become an effective means of waging war.

While the form of Baraka's poetry remained faithful to the Black Mountain open-field, the content of his poems was quite different—these early poems register Baraka's experimentation with black sound and his reckoning with the racialized politics of place in America. As Nathaniel Mackey has argued, while these early poems certainly register Baraka's Black Mountain influences, they also signify his weaving of open-field poetics with jazz logic and rhythms.

Baraka's early poems, Mackey writes, "tend to slide away from the proposed, to refuse to commit themselves to any single meaning" (*Discrepant* 39). In *Blues People: Negro Music in White America* (1963) Baraka quotes from Ernest Borneman's "The Roots of Jazz," in which he notes the "tendency towards obliquity and ellipsis" in jazz music. "[T]he voice or instrument," Borneman writes, "always approaches it [a note] from above or below, plays around the implied pitch without ever remaining any length of time, and departs from it without ever having committed itself to a single meaning" (qtd. in Mackey, *Discrepant* 38-39). Baraka's paper bag trick can thus be read as a jazz riff that resists a uniform logic and telling. Such riffs, while certainly representative of open-field poetics, also demonstrate Baraka's resistance to defining himself and his poetry according to any one tradition; accordingly, he attempts to read his African-American identity into the field poetic in order to inflect it with the subjective place from which he writes, which is inflected by the culture, voices, and desires of the community. The poem's parataxis, as well as its inclusion of irrational objects—the bag containing horses and trees, as well as feelings and affects—is a means by which a practitioner of open form can critique Western rationality and categorized experience. For Baraka, this political practice of open form is even more subjectively political and racialized, for his poetic anti-rationalism "implicates Western rationality in a range of exclusionary practices—not only epistemic but political (racism, class oppression, colonialism)" (Mackey, *Discrepant* 41). Thus, although Baraka harnesses the field poetic model in order to articulate his place within a lineage of poetic tradition from Olson and Duncan, he also redirects its energies of rational (re)form towards a racial politics of place.

In another poem in the collection, the influence of Duncan's Neo-Romanticism—his inflection of landscape with pathetic fallacy (specifically the horrors of war)—is palpable in

Baraka's writing on identity, landscape, and place. In the poem "*The invention of comics*," Baraka describes a tumultuous scene of fire and water:

The day of my soul, is  
 the nature of that  
 place. It is a landscape. Seen  
 from the top of a hill. A  
 grey expanse; dull fires  
 throbbing on its seas.

The man's soul, the complexion  
 of his life. The menace  
 of its greyness. The  
 fire, throbs, the sea  
 moves. Birds shoot  
 from the dark. The edge  
 of the waters lit  
 darkly for the moon. (37)

The scene here is similar to Duncan's poetic engagement with Piero di Cosimo's *A Forest Fire* in his poem "The Fire" from *Bending the Bow* as discussed in the second chapter. Baraka sets the scene of his poem as a painter looking out over a landscape: "Seen / from the top of a hill," the "day of [his] soul" is a "place" and a "landscape" with a similar mood of looming disaster. Baraka describes the landscape as a "grey expanse" wherein "The / fire, throbs," "the sea moves," and "Birds shoot / from the dark."

Although Duncan's poem was published after Baraka's (in 1968), the similarities between the two are striking. As I have discussed, di Cosimo's painting depicts a forest fire with animals fleeing; it contains tropes of peace and war and lightness and darkness, respectively, which are rendered in a *sfumato* technique with blurred borders between the two shades. Baraka's poem is similarly concerned with tropes of light and dark, for the "sun" is "like a greyness / smeared on the dark" (37). However, whereas Duncan reads a redemptive sense of stillness and calm in the *sfumato* blending of light with dark, in the "place" of Baraka's soul, the "grey expanse" offers no such consolation. His soul is described as this "grey expanse," and then later Baraka describes a "man's soul" as "the complexion / of his life." Black, when mixed with white, creates grey; this grey expanse constitutes the "complexion" of Baraka's life. The mix of darkness and light does not register a harmony of Eros and Eris, as Duncan might have it, but instead smears together uneasily into "[t]he menace of its greyness." However, although the fires on the seas are "dull," they are "throbbing," and this ever-looming sense of rupture registers the increasingly urgent and necessary action felt by Baraka at the dawn of his transitional phase in his personal life, in his art, and in his politics.

It is clear from this early collection that Baraka still held the Black Mountain concern for kinetic movement as aesthetically—and, perhaps personally—relevant. In another poem from the collection, "The Dance," Baraka directly alludes to Duncan's concept of the Dance—"Duncan / told of dance" (*The Dead* 71)—as a metaphor for communal love and creativity, as well as the site of natural order to which all things are subject, as I discussed in the last chapter. Duncan also has a poem entitled "The Dance," (1960) wherein he discusses the dance as a metaphor for communal force whose "excess of / movement makes / each man hit the pitch co- / ordinate" (*The Opening* 8; original spacing). These images of an ethereal dance ground are then met, at the

poem's close, with Duncan's presence in the moment of writing, "Writing it down now" (9). This sense of communal co-ordination through the creative process is echoed in Baraka's poem where he writes, "And let me once, create / myself. And let you, whoever / sits now breathing on my words / create a self of your own" (*The Dead* 72). As with Duncan's conception of the dance as a created and creative site of community, these lines invoke an imagined community of self-determined individuals through the writing process.<sup>193</sup> Baraka's words, as do Duncan's, invoke a *communitas* that exceeds the bounds of the work into the lives of the readers.

Baraka was clearly still influenced by the process methodology undergirding Olson and Duncan's field poetic, as evidenced by this collection. At the same time, many poems in this post-Cuba collection also register Baraka's advancing anxiety of influence. In another poem aptly titled "*Duncan spoke of a process*," the lines of the poem continue the title: "And what I have learned / of it, to repeat, repeated / as a day will repeat ... In me, a balance" (*The Dead* 54). The emphasis in these opening lines on "repeat," suggest Baraka "repeating" forms and ideas under Duncan's tutelage. As discussed in the second chapter, Duncan's concepts of the dance and of process are linked in that they both are governed by the balance of Eris and Eros, the two poles of love and strife to which all things are subject. In uniting form and content, this poem speaks of Baraka's subjective process and underlying personal conflicts. The main dilemma of the poem, and of many of the poems of this collection, is the conflicted relationship Baraka has to the avant-garde community. Baraka feels an uneasy tension between the creative community and the necessary autonomy of the black individual therein. Baraka refers to himself as "A live bloody skeleton ... flesh like a / white frightened scream," and a couple lines later, "Moving, there / is a wreck of spirit, / a heap of broken feeling" (54). Much of Baraka's early poetry is

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<sup>193</sup> These lines also foreshadow the imagined community invoked through the mirrored frontispiece of Baraka's *In Our Terribleness*, a work that I will discuss momentarily.

marked by this sense of self-loathing and confused identity, but here, as a skeleton fleshed with a “white frightened scream,” the anxiety of influence from his white peers is glaring. As he writes in the following lines,

What  
 was only love  
 or in those cold rooms,  
 opinion. Still, it made  
 color. And filled me  
 as no one will. As, even  
 I cannot fill  
 myself” (54).

Here, Baraka’s anxieties towards Duncan and the greater white intellectual community is palpable; their words are ambivalently characterized as “love” and “opinion,” with the latter outlining Baraka’s anxieties towards the influence of their ideology.

Nonetheless, as Baraka admits, the instruction he derived from his peers has had a lasting effect on his subjectivity and on his art, as this “love” and “opinion” “filled [him] / as no one will,” not even himself. The final lines of the poem juxtapose these “Noble Friends” with “Noble Selves,” and asks, “which one / is truly / to rule here? And / what country is this?” (55). The significance of these last lines is twofold: first, the contrasting of friends and selves as rulers emphasizes Baraka’s ongoing conflicted feelings between the community and the individual will.<sup>194</sup> Or, as Andrew Epstein puts it, the poems of *The Dead Lecturer* betray “the dilemma of

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<sup>194</sup> Ironically, as I will discuss in a moment, Baraka’s feeling of apprehension towards individual will being subsumed by the ideas of the collective is an apprehension also shared by Duncan, as I intimated in the last chapter. As I discuss shortly, Baraka’s radical turn to black nationalism would not have been well-received by Duncan, as evidenced by his infamous debate with Levertov over the politicization of her poetics on the basis of the individual

friendship and self-reliance so central to [Baraka's] work" (228). The noble love of his friends is confronted here by equal influence of the noble self, the individualism that is growing within the poet at the time of the writing. Second, the final lines link the conflict he feels toward the nation as a whole as a double gesture that is proposed by the ambiguous "what country" (as opposed to "whose country," as the previous lines would indicate). It is possible to read these lines, with their proposal of a divided nation-state, as indicative of the racial turmoil that was fueling his black nationalist sentiment at the time; however, these lines also point to the tradition of poetic commons he has inherited, and the anxiety of his place therein, so the question "what country is this?" becomes a rhetorical poetic question of derivation and influence.

These last lines can be further read as an interrogation into the relationship between community, local space, and the nation. Baraka's question of "which one / is truly / to rule here?"—the "Noble Friends" or the "Noble Selves"—poses a central question for Baraka's post-Cuba consciousness. In these lines, he asks whether the spaces of the local and the nation are forged from "imagined communities" of "Noble Friends" formed in abstract comradeship, or whether they are spaces to be forged from "Noble Selves," those who resist conformity, consensus, and the passive reception of ideology. Ultimately, the poem does not offer a solution or reconciliation, only the questions posed; although his thought would soon become more decisive, these early questions of place and nation signal a divided consciousness on Baraka's part toward the place and role of community.

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will being overtaken by the politics and propaganda of the "they." Moreover, in his essay "The Homosexual in Society," Duncan rallies against the attachment of the creative intellectual to any marginal group, such as the "homosexual cults" (48). A creative individual, Duncan argues, should be in pursuit of "human freedom," and not association or allegiance with a group that subsumes individual will into its corpus.

Throughout these poems, Baraka is measuring the stakes of the field, of the community and tradition in which he has grown to love and also to question. In an earlier poem of the collection, “Rhythm & Blues (1,” Baraka speaks of

Ears that have grown  
 to hold their new maps  
 Enemies that grow  
 in silence  
 Empty white fingers  
 against the keys” (44).

These lines register the marked ambivalence towards the “new maps” forged by Baraka post-Cuba, and the “empty white fingers against the keys,” the stale ideology of his white peers. In this poem especially, Baraka confronts the limitations of the ideology of his white peers, as whiteness is repeatedly coded as “empty.” Baraka speaks of “[e]ars that have grown / to hold their new maps,” and “[e]nemies that grow / in silence,” while “[e]mpty white fingers / [play] against the keys.” The poem sets up an ironic dichotomy between action and inaction—ironic because, as discussed in the previous chapters, the field poetic that influenced Baraka is a kinetic form that continually forges newness and immediacy of action in the writing process. However, as these poems demonstrate, for Baraka, these ideas are becoming stale ideology in the face of the realities of real space to which his black body is especially subject. Such an ideology may be suitable for the art of empty white fingers against the keys, but for the “black steaming Christ” that “scream[s] each new dawn,” (44) “new maps” must be drawn of the field.

Baraka’s trip to Cuba thus solidified in him a new consciousness of black American space and place, and along with it a new awareness of the need to forge new territories and transform

existent ones, both artistically and geographically. His poems in *The Dead Lecturer* depict this certain conflict between the “noble friends” that have influenced Baraka’s work, and the “noble selves” of the black community for which he yearns to commune and harness as a resistant, transformative corpus in actual, local space. There is an explicit emphasis in these poems on “growth” in the face of “empty” stagnancy, which signals Baraka’s poetics of “turning away.” In the poem Baraka wrote while in Cuba in July of 1960, “Betancourt,” there is a sense of his newfound relationship to the meaning and purpose of poetry:

(I mean I think  
 I know now  
 what a poem  
 is) A  
 turning away ...  
 from what  
 it was  
 had moved  
 us ...  
 A  
 madness.

Looking at the sea. And some  
 white fast boat. (*Preface* 39-40)

The trip to Cuba not only awakened Baraka’s political consciousness, but it also challenged the very meaning and practice of poetry, as he claims he “now” knows “what a poem / is.” He defines the poem as a “turning away” from “what / had moved / us.” The word “moved” could

pertain to those things and people that have had an effect on the poet, such as those who have had influence on his writing. The poem as a “turning away,” then, makes it not a passive following of influence, but an active action of turning away from the path laid out by those who came before. Moreover, the “us” in “moved / us” could refer to the black community being physically moved aside by the white power structures of control that have organized black bodies into spaces, such as the ghettos of New York, Newark, and beyond. The open ellipses and ambiguous language (who or what “a madness” is, for example, is left unclear) continues the characteristic indeterminate quality of Baraka’s early poems; however, what remains clear from this poem written from the ground of the revolution in Cuba is Baraka’s resolve to develop self-reliance in poetic creation and his desire to articulate a collective community therein. The depiction in the final lines of a landscape with the sea and a “white fast boat” is particularly specific and unambiguous, in contrast with the earlier ellipses leaving thoughts unfinished; Baraka ends the metapoem on a note of stark clarity, illustrating that by turning away from influence, he can see more clearly—indeed, from the ground in Cuba, he can see anew.

This poem, in particular, marks the moment wherein Baraka signals his carving out of a place for himself not only within poetry, but also in social action. In a conversation with Kimberly Benston, Baraka tells him that this poem was written to a woman, Rubi Betancourt, who was a young Mexican communist involved in the revolution and who had “berated [him] constantly about being a petit bourgeois poet” (Baraka, “Amiri” 108).<sup>195</sup> As he tells Benston regarding his early poetry of this time:

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<sup>195</sup> In his essay “Cuba Libre,” Baraka recalls another instance that “almost left [him] in tears.” During the train ride to the celebration for Castro, a young Mexican poet, Jaime Shelley, screamed at Baraka: “You want to cultivate your soul? In that ugliness you live in, you want to cultivate your soul? Well, I’ve got millions of starving people to feed, and that moves me enough to make poems out of” (57).

The poetry of that period was still definitely relying heavily on the Creeley-Olson thing. But, while the Creeley-Olson thing is still there in the poetry's form, the content was trying to aggressively address the folks around me, the people that I worked with all the time, who were all Creeley-Olson types, people who took antipolitical or apolitical line (the Creeley types more so than Olson's followers—Olson's thing was always more political). I was coming out saying that I thought that their political line was wrong. A lot of poetry in *The Dead Lecturer* is speaking out against the political line of the whole Black Mountain group...I felt the need to develop from them because their concerns weren't of the masses. They weren't asking for revolution. (108, 110).

As is evident in the poetry of this early period, Baraka was himself undergoing a sea change: while he was still working within the open-field poetic form, he was nonetheless using the content of his poems to “aggressively address” his peers with his newly realized political poetry.<sup>196</sup> Although Baraka acknowledges Olson as “political,” and although he can agree with Black Mountain on a political form to poetry, he is cognizant of the fact that Olson's (and Duncan's, along with the other Black Mountainer's) view of the *purpose* of poetry is radically different: “They weren't asking for revolution.”<sup>197</sup>

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<sup>196</sup> The aggression of Baraka's later poetry is felt in *The Dead Lecturer*, especially in the poem “BLACK DADA NIHILISMUS,” wherein he writes, “Come up, black dada / nihilismus. Rape the white girls. Rape / their fathers. Cut the mothers' throats” (63). While lines like these seem to signify a wholly formed black consciousness for Baraka, they do so by means of an anti-white fantasy of violence and aggression that would come to characterize his black nationalist consciousness. To put it plainly, much of Baraka's work betrays uneasy tones of masculinist mysogyny and homophobia. These problematics certainly warrant criticism, and have been discussed at length, and shall therefore not be the central subject of my criticism here. For further criticism of Baraka's masculinism and sexual violence, see bell hooks, *Ain't I a Woman: Black Women and Feminism*, especially page 106. See also Michelle Wallace, *Black Macho and the Myth of the Superwoman*, especially page 62, as well as Sandra L. Richards's “Negative Forces and Positive Non-Entities: Images of Women in the Dramas of Amiri Baraka.”

<sup>197</sup> An exception to this might be Denise Levertov. As I have already discussed (in the second chapter and also on the following two pages of this chapter) her feud with Duncan was centred on her view of poetry's role as a tool for revolution on the streets (not just the pages or minds) of the world. A more thorough examination of the connections between Baraka and Levertov to Black Mountain form and politics is a worthwhile study.

With the 1965 assassination of Malcolm X, the rift between Baraka and his white community of peers in Greenwich Village would become unbridgeable: a new space needed to be forged to accommodate his post-Cuba consciousness. After the death of Malcolm X, Baraka divorced his white wife, moved from Greenwich Village to Harlem and established his second “household,” the Black Arts Repertory Theatre/School (BARTS), which became a model for other Black Arts schools across the country.<sup>198</sup> The break was exhilarating for Baraka from the moment he entered this new space; his new surroundings vibrated intensely with his newfound corporeal awareness. As he recalls, “When we came up out of the subway, March 1965, cold and clear, Harlem all around us staring us down, we felt like pioneers of the new order. Back in the homeland to help raise the race” (*The Autobiography* 202).<sup>199</sup> The establishment of BARTS was also one of the initiating events of the Black Arts Movement. In the summer of 1965, the school held a summer program with many black writers, artists, and musicians in residence teaching black arts, including Baraka teaching drama, Sonia Sanchez and Larry P. Neal teaching poetry, and Harold Cruse teaching black history (Woodard, *A Nation* 65-66). It is during this time that the “new maps” proposed by Baraka in *The Dead Lecturer* came to form as a fully formed black *poethic*, a merger of aesthetics and ethics that brings the reality of black urban experience to the fore of the poetic form and content he derived from his Black Mountain peers.

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<sup>198</sup> Baraka’s distancing of himself from the perceived passivity and ineffectuality in the thought and art of his white friends is noteworthy considering the historical context of the time and the divisive politics of the Civil Rights Movement. Baraka’s attraction to Malcolm X, in the context of his growing black nationalism, makes sense when considering the infamous opposition between Malcolm X and Martin Luther King (who was also assassinated in 1968). While King represented, for many, an assimilationist, “Uncle Tom” political outlook of non-violence, Malcolm X was a proponent of violence as justifiable in pursuit of the goals of the Civil Rights Movement, which must be met, as he infamously declared, “by any means necessary.”

<sup>199</sup> The “we” here is left ambiguous by Baraka in his autobiography, but one can assume the “we” refers to the organizers of BARTS who together moved to uptown Harlem from the Village, some of whom he identifies on the following page. Aside from his lover at the time, Vashti, the “basic core was the Hackensacks (Shammy definite, Tong most of the time), Jimmy Lesser, Dave, McLucas, a friend of Tong’s who came along, Tub, a largish, sourly succinct dude; and after work, Corny and Clarence, plus Leroy McLucas and, a little later, Clarence Reed...Larry Neal” (203).

Aside from developing a worldview entrenched in actual space, the trip to Cuba also incited in Baraka a view of armed force as a means to a radical political ends, which is a stance vehemently in contradiction to Black Mountain politics (and that of the greater bohemian left). The use of armed force as a means of revolution is also especially in contradiction with Duncan's anarchism. As discussed last chapter, Duncan and Levertov's infamous debate centred upon their disagreement in terms of the social role of poetry. Levertov came to believe that writing is not enough in the pursuit of sociopolitical reform, that it must also be accompanied by direct action in the form of group protest in the streets. Whereas Levertov integrated her poetry into her politics of action, Duncan refused to participate in such forms of organized political resistance, arguing against "the permission to propagandize under the protection of poetic licence" (Voyce 91). According to Duncan, Levertov's form of thinking is undergirded by an "us versus them" mentality that violates his anarchist beliefs. Due to her involvement in active protest, she has "given up her individuality to the cause" and "has betrayed the position of the artist" by "accept[ing] the mass position" (Bertholf, "Decision" 13). Duncan believes that for the poet, language and imagination *are* action; the role of the poet, he tells Levertov, is "not to oppose evil, but to imagine it" (Duncan and Levertov 669). Moreover, Duncan is wary of the dangers of group action in its very perpetuation of the violence it opposes; he saw Levertov's involvement as her acceptance of being the one to speak for many, which violates his belief that the individual will should never be jeopardized by the ideology of the group. However, for Baraka, the collective revolutionary efforts of the masses in Cuba reinforced for him that in order to change space, you must take up space, and take it back by force. As Baraka observes in his autobiography, "in all my poetry which comes out of this period there is the ongoing and underlying contention and struggle between myself and 'them' that poetry and politics, art and

politics, were not mutually exclusive” (*The Autobiography* 167). As discussed in the second chapter, Duncan viewed war and violence as “unnatural” forces; for Baraka, however, “natural” interventions were tried and proved ineffective. As he writes in “A Poem Some People Will Have to Understand”:

We have awaited the coming of a natural  
phenomenon. Mystics and romantics, knowledgeable  
workers  
of the land.

But none has come.

*(Repeat)*

but none has come.

Will the machinegunners please step forward? (*Black Magic* 6)

As Baraka urges, the time of waiting and simply imagining change is over; what is needed is direct interventionary action. This armed force is what “some people will have to understand.” Earlier in the poem, Baraka speaks of “the preciseness / a violent man could propose”; as discussed earlier, Olson used the movements of his body within local place in order to get at a “precise” measure of that space relative to the living body. Here, Baraka aims at such precision but through violence and armed rebellion within local space, which he sees as the only way to “precisely” and most directly effect needed change on the ground. The liberal ideas of “mystics and romantics” have failed to actuate change and revolution for black people in urban America; as a result, he calls upon those who are incapable or refuse to take action to step aside, and calls forth the “machinegunners” to the vanguard. As I discuss in the following section, in his poetry

and politics, Baraka became the spokesman of place for the united black community, and this stance would not bode well in accordance with Duncan's anarchist sentiment.

Although there is no outright response by Duncan to Baraka's growing militancy, the relationship between Olson and Baraka suffered tensions in terms of their evermore distant "stance toward reality" (Olson, "Projective" 246). Even in 1963, Baraka's growing support for violence and armed resistance is documented in an essay "What Does Non-Violence Mean?" wherein he discusses the use of "nonviolence" as futile against a system of oppression that uses violence itself. After the essay was published, Baraka sent it to Olson along with his musicological study *Blues People*, which was also published that year (at the time, it was very commonplace for them to correspond with each other's work). However, Baraka heard through Frank O'Hara that Olson disliked Baraka's article and his "social stance" therein (Pisano, *Amiri Baraka* 202).<sup>200</sup>

Olson was decidedly less outspoken than Duncan in his beliefs towards violence and war; however, in his notes from October 1967, he refers to himself as a "WHITE guerrilla—who hates violence & hates hate" (Butterick, *A Guide* 752). After reading Baraka's *Blues People* and "What Does Non-Violence Mean?" Olson writes him a letter detailing his thoughts on his position. In the conclusion of the letter, Olson tells Baraka he is writing to him in an attempt "to get back to you with, love" (*Selected Letters* 306) and the tone of the letter is largely sympathetic but also decidedly neutral. Olson agrees with Baraka that the White Man is "dangerous," but he attempts to understand the stance of the "Negro" by relating it—as Olson is wont to do—to more universal human circumstances, as he does when comparing Baraka to his father in the earlier poem previously discussed. However, in his attempts to level with Baraka as his friend, Olson

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<sup>200</sup> Despite his concerns towards Baraka's growing militancy, Olson was instrumental in helping Baraka acquire a teaching job in Buffalo in 1964.

downplays the particular political space-time of the fight for civil rights. As he writes, “I am solely persuaded that your position that the Negro solely ought to act as an end and change of what is manifestly no good is in fact any man’s who wishes to have had a life in society which was more legitimate” (306). Olson glosses over the particular struggle for “legitimacy” of the Civil Rights Movement and misunderstands racial equality as everyman’s search for a fulfilled life. As well, Olson references Baraka’s use of history in his writing and opines:

Maybe I do think you use history as it was almost to whip up your own interest or entrance into contemporary political action (?)

—while in fact the participation  
can be real enough without signs and symbols (306).

As if urging Baraka to stay present and immediate to the contemporary sociopolitical space-time, Olson suggests that the signs and symbols of history are not prerequisites to understand and engage with contemporary political action. However, for Baraka, what matters is the present conditions brought about by the *processes* of history; as Baraka later surmises to Maya Angelou, “I’m always looking for a concrete time and place and condition. I want to know why things are the way they are and how they became that way” (Baraka, “Maya” 263). It would seem that Olson’s tepid support for Baraka’s politics and interventionary strategies signals a widening gulf between how the two writers view local space; both see the local as a geography with an entrenched history, but for Baraka, the local is necessarily racial in its construction and living geography—a concern (among others) that is missed by Olson’s all-encompassing gaze upon local space. This widening gulf between the white avant-garde and the black community in terms of geographical resonance is felt in Baraka’s poem “Return of the Native” from his collection *Black Magic* (1969):

Harlem is vicious  
 modernism. BangClash.  
 Vicious the way it is made.  
 Can you stand such beauty?  
 So violent and transforming.  
 The trees blink naked, being  
 so few. The women stare  
 and are in love with them  
 selves. The sky sits awake  
 over us. No rain.  
 Sun, hot cleaning sun  
 drives us under it.

The place, and place  
 meant of  
 black people. Their heavy Egypt.  
 (Weird word!) Their minds, mine,  
 the black hope mine. (108)

Here, Baraka fuses geography and consciousness together by situating the black local of Harlem (as well as its historic Renaissance) as a revisioned modernist conceit separate from the modernism of his white predecessors. Harlem is a “BangClash” of pain and suffering, on the one hand, and tremendous beauty and self-actuation, on the other. As he writes in an early essay “City of Harlem,” (1962)

The legitimate cultural tradition of the Negro in Harlem (and America) is one of wild happiness, usually at some black man's own invention—speech, of dress, of gait, the sudden twist of a musical phrase, the warmness or hurt of someone's voice. But that culture is also one of hatred and despair. Harlem must contain all of this and be capable of producing all these emotions. (*Home* 92-93)

I will return to discuss the means by which the local is made through a community of familiar sounds and movements in the following section on Baraka's work *In Our Terribleness*. Here, Baraka makes clear that Harlem is a place of contradiction, or polarities in a field of action: it is at once celebratory and joyful in its lived blackness, while also being a space of oppression, despair, and internalized hatred under the white gaze. Nonetheless, in "Return of the Native," Baraka refers to Harlem as a local that is "made" and constructed by the attitudes and movements of the people within it. He also situates the place as a living entity, one that is "vicious" as well as "violent and transforming"—the energies of the people in their joy and despair, together with its history of community and resistance, continues to transform this living local.

As the title of the poem "Return of the Native" suggests, Baraka is positioning himself as a prodigal son of sorts, one who has been enamoured and lost in the white Village but has returned "home" to "native land."<sup>201</sup> As "[t]he place, and place / meant of / black people," Harlem is a "vicious" aesthetic force. In the second stanza of the poem, Baraka plays with "placement" as "place / meant" in order to situate Harlem as the "proper" polis of the black community who "suffer / in joy, that [their] lives / are so familiar." Moreover, in a way similar to Duncan in "Often I am Permitted to Return to a Meadow," Baraka plays on the words "mind" and "mine" in order to stress the fusion of the individual within the community: "Their minds, mine." By

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<sup>201</sup> It is worth noting that the title is also likely playing off Thomas Hardy's 1878 novel of the same name.

playing with “mind,” “mine,” (possession) and “mine,” (the verb) Baraka unites a community of minds in the work of “mining” “the black hope” within the local of Harlem.

Olson’s neutral support for Baraka’s political engagement is tempered by Olson’s opening line of the letter, in which he encourages Baraka to “use a world so large” (*Selected Letters* 305). As if following through on Olson’s encouragement, Baraka again makes a pivotal spatial move in his poetic and political career: in 1966, amid infighting and corruption at BARTS in Harlem, he moves back to his hometown of Newark. Here Baraka immediately establishes Spirit House, the third of his “households,” which was not only a theatre but also a cultural development centre. In many ways, Spirit House was the culmination of the two previous households Baraka had established—BARTS in Harlem and the West 20<sup>th</sup> Street in Greenwich Village—since it merged the aesthetics and politics of these previous centers directly in the space of the community in order to radically change both the ground and consciousness of that community. As I will discuss further in the sections to follow, the sociopolitical reform engendered by Spirit House led the imaginative poetics of Baraka’s poetry at the time into realization on the streets of Newark.

In response to the neglect of the black community at the hands of the white minority in power in Newark, Spirit House offered needed social programs such as job training, the establishment of a black newspaper, and theatre workshops for youth. Baraka’s second wife, Amina, along with the other women of Spirit House, also established the African Free School, which became a critical prototype for other independent black-centric schools nation-wide. Aside from buttressing the black nationalist polemic, these grassroots initiatives responded to white-controlled institutions that did not serve the black community with independent structures of knowledge and cultural production.

The move to Newark and the establishment of Spirit House signals a definitive break from the futile political neutrality Baraka perceived in Olson and Duncan. Their belief of the power of imagination over direct (and sometimes violent) action was the very source of Baraka's alienation from them as friends and as artistic colleagues. As Benston argues, "Baraka found that, while his peers in the avant-garde were content to be 'neutral' witnesses to cultural fragmentation, he was impelled as a black poet to be a chronicler of exile and an annunciator of nationhood" ("Introduction" 13). At first, Baraka was attracted to the "neutral" witnessing of his peers as a form of cultural rebellion against middle class bourgeois American values; however, this revolt was nonetheless rooted in white ideologies of privilege and did not reflect, for Baraka, the growing needs of black urban American space and experience.

Nowhere is this newfound awareness more apparent than in Baraka's poem "Black Art," (1967) which was written after he moved back to Newark. The work was monumental both personally and politically for Baraka; in "An Explanation of the Work," Baraka insists that "Black Art was the crucial seeing, the decisions, the actual move" (*Black Magic* n.p.). Moreover, the poem became the emblematic statement of the Black Arts Movement and signals Baraka's radical shift towards black nationalism both on and off the page. The poem's opening lines make use of poetic images that contrast starkly to the futile "symbols [that] hang limply / in the street" of his white peers:

Poems are bullshit unless they are  
 teeth or trees or lemons piled  
 on a step. Or black ladies dying  
 of men leaving nickel hearts  
 beating them down. Fuck poems

and they are useful, wd they shoot  
 come at you, love what you are,  
 breathe like wrestlers, or shudder  
 strangely after pissing. We want live  
 words of the hip world live flesh &  
 coursing blood. Hearts Brains  
 Souls splintering fire. (*Black Magic* 116)

Here, we see Baraka still adopting the objectism of the field poetic—with his invocation of specific interacting objects (teeth, trees, lemons, nickel hearts, wrestlers, etc) and the rapid verbal and perceptual movement between words. However, the stakes of this objectism are more intensely set: the poem should behave as a field of objects, according to Baraka, but those objects need to carry real, effectual meaning in the world, and be responsive to the conditions of the particular environs. As opposed to the abstract and noneffective “forest of objects, motives” that Baraka decries in the poems of his white friends, here the poem begins self-reflexively and aggressively against such impotence of empty meaning. Unless poems are “teeth or trees or lemons piled / on a step”—objects that carry specific, concrete meaning in the world, and, more importantly, are placed in the world, then they are futile and useless. The next lines further this point by referring to poems as “black ladies dying” from men “beating them down,” which emphasizes the need for poetry to reflect the real world conditions and realities of one’s local space and place.

As the poem progresses, the seething anger builds, and the necessary tangibility of poetry becomes linked to extreme action in the form of imagined violence, war, and weaponry: “We want ‘poems that kill.’ / Assassin poems, Poems that shoot / guns” (116). By invoking poems

“like fists,” “that wrestle,” “cracking / steel knuckles,” (116) Baraka insists that poems must become *tools* of social action that serve the function of revolution rather than merely convey feeling. A couple lines later, the poem fulfills its own prophecy by including the onomatopoeia of screaming bullets that transforms the poem into the shooting gun that it desires.<sup>202</sup> The poem continually speaks in the voice of collective desire, with the refrain “We want” forcing the lines forward. Baraka solidifies himself here as the voice of the black community, with the collective consciousness of black struggle being mediated through his words. This building collective tension builds to a crescendo in the poem’s final declaration:

We want a black poem. And a  
 Black World.  
 Let the world be a Black Poem  
 And Let All Black People Speak This Poem  
 Silently  
 or LOUD (117)

Here, Baraka intensifies the field poetic such that it is no longer enough for poems to reflect the world, but that the world itself must become a “Black Poem,” a field of total experience. These final lines herald a new black consciousness of autonomous nationhood, and signal Baraka’s definite departure from the influence of his white peers. Reflecting back upon this time in his work, Baraka writes:

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<sup>202</sup> Aside from a marked hostility towards whites, the poem also expresses vitriol towards many other racial groups: there is a strong anti-Semitic sentiment, with lines referring to the “slimy bellies / of the owner-jews,” mixed race people as “mulatto bitches” and “slick halfwhite / politicians,” Italians as “dope selling wops,” and the Irish, with a reference to cops “with tongues pulled out and sent to Ireland” (117). Aside from the obvious racial problematic of these references, the separation between “us” and “them” in these lines furthers the insistence in the poem on black independence and the establishment of a black nationhood.

I guess, during this period, I got the reputation of being a snarling, white-hating madman. There was some truth to it, because I was struggling to be born, to break out from the shell I could instinctively sense surrounded my own dash for freedom. I was in a frenzy, trying to get my feet solidly on the ground, of reality.

*(The Autobiography 194)*

Baraka's breaking into autonomy, both poetically and politically—and accordingly, his intensely felt need for grounding his poetry in actual, lived space—is palpable in the poem's urgency.

Accordingly, “Black Art” not only calls for a collective union in urban space, it also prophesies the radical transformative changes to come. Baraka's evocation of a “Black World” stemming from the “black poem” (and back again) establishes a poethic translocal space of blackness initiated by communities spanning from Harlem to Newark to Chicago, and beyond. This “Black World” is an imagined community of connected individuals brought together poethically in art and in space; Baraka emphasizes this point by personifying the poem acting in space in violent acts against oppressive forces, “Another bad poem cracking / steel knuckles,” “Poem scream poison gas.” Through the poem, he challenges the black community to create its own “nation” and explains how that change can emerge. This “World” is filled with the racket of rebellion on the ground, as emphasized by the onomatopoeia mimicking machineguns and the speaker's metapoetic command, “Put it on him, poem” (116). Indeed, for Baraka, art could and should do more than exist for itself; it has the power to create new consciousness and new worlds. Having experienced the uprisings in Cuba, moved to Harlem, and now to Newark, Baraka understands that in order to transform space, the new consciousness he is fostering must act beyond the page and beyond the local to birth a self-determined, black nationalist “World.” This invocation of a Black World was certainly a worrying prospect for the white structures of

control in Newark; during Baraka's trial after the riots (which I will discuss in more detail shortly), the judge read parts of Baraka's poem "Black People" (1967) to the all-white jury as evidence of plotting violence. The poem addresses the black community and insists, "We must make our own World, man, our own world. And we cannot do this unless the white man is dead. Let's get together and kill him" (*Black Magic* 225). Although the prospect of killing whites to achieve this world is extreme and worth criticizing for its overwrought machismo, it is significant that even the proposition of such a created world in art is enough to signal a material threat to white supremacy and its grip on the world.<sup>203</sup>

It is no coincidence, then, that "Black Art" became a manifesto for the Black Arts Movement, for it encompasses the goals of the movement: sociopolitical change by means of imbricated aesthetic and geographic resistance, as well as the expression of an aesthetics that reflects the particular energies of black communities both locally and translocally. Indeed, the vitriol of "Black Art" testifies to Baraka's undying belief in the transformative power of art—its ability to take to the streets and reterritorialize local space. As explored in the following section, the energy harnessed by Baraka during this period marks his extension of the projective poetic—since the field is an experimental, interactive space of changing elements, it can thereby be radically reterritorialized, as Baraka's work demonstrates, to reflect the local energies and particularities of racial experience in urban space. Moreover, his work demonstrates how the field poetic—in its imaginings of possible spaces in conjunction with its reflections of current space—can be harnessed as a means to the end of sociopolitical reform.

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<sup>203</sup> As Maurice Lee rightfully points out, despite being a poem called "Black People," the machismo of this poem registers a specific form of blackness, one that erases the female presence in the family dynamic (87). As Baraka writes, "let's make a world we want black children to grow and learn in do not let your children when they grow look you in your face and curse you by pitying your tomish ways" (225).

**“Polis is This”: Baraka’s New Ark**

I love you black people

because I love my

self,

And you are that self, thrown big

against the heavens.<sup>204</sup>

—Amiri Baraka

Violence: knives/anything, to get the body in.<sup>205</sup>

—Charles Olson

Shortly after the move back to his hometown of Newark in 1967, LeRoi Jones underwent the process of becoming Amiri Baraka by denouncing his American “slave name” and becoming a radical black nationalist. In 1967, the Islamic priest who buried Malcolm X renamed Jones “Ameer Barakat,” meaning “Blessed Prince” in Arabic. Shortly thereafter in 1968, Baraka met the cultural nationalist Ron Karenga, who “Swahilized” his Arabic name to “Imamu Amiri Baraka,” “Imamu” meaning “Spiritual Leader” (Watts 310). Baraka later dropped “Imamu” from his name in 1974 and became, finally, Amiri Baraka (Harris 148). In July of 1967, the Newark rebellion riots occurred (lasting 6 days) and Baraka was arrested for unlawful weapons possession—or, as he puts it, “the possession of two poems” (Reilly xvi).<sup>206</sup> He was sentenced to prison; however, Olson, Duncan, Creeley, and Levertov, among other former poet-peers of Baraka, all wrote letters for his appeal, which was successful and the charges were dropped (Sollors, *Amiri* 295, n. 9). Baraka’s increased political resistance “on the streets,” as well as his baptismal name change to Amiri Baraka, “The Blessed Prince,” signals the poet’s decisive departure in identity from LeRoi Jones, the isolated bohemian imitator. Moreover, the change

<sup>204</sup> *In Our Terribleness* n.p.

<sup>205</sup> “Proprioception,” *Collected Prose* 181.

<sup>206</sup> For Baraka’s own account of the Newark riots and the circumstances of his arrest, see “Newark: Before Black Men Conquered” and “From: the Book of Life” in his collection of essays, *Raise, Race, Rays, Raze*.

fused Baraka's burgeoning identity as a black nationalist with the urban place of communal blackness and uprising that he was constructing in the minds and streets of the community.

The post-Cuba consciousness of Baraka has come full circle from the Village, to Harlem, to back home in Newark; in the process, the poet moves from being entrenched in the white artistic collective to an awakened individual awareness, to radical collective action in urban space. For Baraka, this awakened awareness necessitated aesthetic experimentation with form and content; having departed definitively from the friendships with his Beat contemporaries, and having discarded their ideologies as socially irrelevant, he sought new forms—or, as I argue, new *extensions* of forms he had learned—to articulate the space-time of blackness in the postwar urban milieu. As he writes in *Black Music* (1966), “Form and content are both mutually expressive of the whole ... both identify place and direction. We want different contents and different forms because we have different feelings. We are different peoples” (185). Here, Baraka echoes Robert Creeley's dictum that “form is never more than an extension of content,” (which is also echoed by Olson as a main tenet of “Projective Verse”) but he goes beyond mere imitation of influence to suggest that new forms and contents need to be cast to fit the particulars of American black experience. He was initially attracted to the white left (of Olson, Creeley, and Duncan, among others) because of their rebellion against the values of the postwar white middle class; however, as he came to realize, the ideology behind their “universalized” aesthetics was a white “we.” Baraka thus agrees with Creeley's dictum as an aesthetic statement of form, but, ultimately, he sees the underlying universality implied by the poethic as depoliticized and deracinated; according to Baraka, the white universality implied does not apply to his experiences as a black man in urban America.

Baraka's newly minted cultural awareness necessitated not only a reformed poetic consciousness, but also newly formed geographies—poetry becoming lived action in actual space. This section examines these two tenets of Baraka's revisioned spatial imaginary—his extensions of the field poetic in urban space, and his reterritorialization of urban geographic space—in the context of his work *In Our Terribleness* (1970).<sup>207</sup> Despite the wealth of scholarship on Baraka's work, this text remains largely ignored by critics.<sup>208</sup> Nonetheless, the work is pivotal not only in its extensions and breaks with the projective, open-field verse of Olson and Duncan, but also in its reterritorialization of urban space as a radical articulation of collective identity. The extended forms of *In Our Terribleness* go beyond aesthetic reconfigurations of space; the work's desire for space, to *take up space*, bleeds out into actual, geographic experimentation in the streets—indeed, to the making of history—as Newark is reborn as the experimental polis of “New Ark.”

Baraka found the grounds of innovation and experimentation in form and content that he was seeking in *In Our Terribleness*, a work in plural form that mixes photography, prose, and poetry to create the “Black Poem” of the world that he prophesied in “Black Art.” The work adopts the experimental forms and energies of the field poetic and harnesses these methods for the transformation of black urban consciousness. It is a collaborative effort between Baraka and Fundi (Billy Abernathy), a Chicago Black Arts photographer. Combining Baraka's poetry with Fundi's photographs of black residents of Newark into an “imagetext” (Crawford 24), the work

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<sup>207</sup> As I discussed earlier, Baraka had just changed his name to “Amiri Baraka” and this Islamic influence pervades *In Our Terribleness*. However, I am more interested in the spatial and geographic concerns of the text; although the Islamic undertones of Baraka's work during this time is worthwhile to study, it lies outside the scope of this chapter to discuss at great length. For further reading on the intersections of Islamic thought and influence on Baraka and the greater Civil Rights Movement, see Melani McAlister's essay “One Black Allah: The Middle East in the Cultural Politics of African American Liberation, 1955-1970.”

<sup>208</sup> In a very recent critical work, *Feast of Excess: A Cultural History of the New Sensibility*, George Cotkin attempts to explain this lack in scholarship: “critics generally ignore *In Our Terribleness*, finding it disjointed and a bit precious in design” (266).

experiments with the fusion of urban geography and the energies of language in poetry. *In Our Terribleness* falls in line with a tradition of collaborative “imagetexts” by black American artists, such as Richard Wright and Edwin Rosskam’s *12 Million Black Voices* (1941) and Langston Hughes and Roy DeCarava’s *The Sweet Flypaper of Life* (1955). The work creates an interactive whole out of the combined aesthetics of poetry, prose, and photography. The images of “everyday” black people situated in the inner city landscape—on subways, on stoops, in the streets—are met with a responsive poetic to articulate a dynamic picture of lived geography from the particular lens of urban blackness. In connecting the local people of Newark in art and in language, the text invokes the larger household of black individuals in postwar America—a conglomerate of many spaces and places, together working towards transformative sociopolitical change *in place*.

Before entering into the poetic polemic of *In Our Terribleness*, it will be useful to digress back in time to a short essay by Baraka entitled “How You Sound?? [sic]” in order to set the context for the work as projective. Baraka’s essay was published in Allen’s anthology, *New American Poetry* (1960), alongside work from Baraka’s Black Mountain, New York, and San Francisco contemporaries. This essay is pivotal to the context of *In Our Terribleness* in terms of Baraka’s projective trajectory of sound and the creation of subjective place in postwar urban America. Baraka’s projective essay is perhaps his most definitive statement of his derivativeness from Black Mountain and the “‘irregular foot’ of Williams” (Baraka, “How” 425). From Olson’s concept of “Projective Verse”—with its central concern for the individual poet’s breath as the fundamental unit of measure—Baraka gained an integral understanding of the particularities of black sound, manner, movement, and being in and through space as poetic expression of identity. The influences of Black Mountain are obvious in Baraka’s assertion that “The only ‘recognizable

tradition' a poet need to follow is himself ... You have to start and finish there ... your own voice...how you sound" (425). Further, Baraka imparts political significance to this choice of poetic self-sounding and self-modeling: "We can get nothing from England. And the diluted formalism of the academy (the formal culture of the U.S.) is anaemic & fraught with incompetence and unreality" (425). Indeed, in time, Baraka would alienate himself from the very "unreality" he perceived in the politics of the Black Mountaineers. Nevertheless, the centrality of orality and open form in Projective Verse (qualities it shares with other forms, such as jazz) offered the poetics of black arts a means of expressing the culture of black linguistic traditions and contemporary vernacular speech. Indeed, the very sound of the title of this early essay—How You Sound??—marries form and content by metapoetically expressing the particularity and centrality of the sound of black vernacular in poetic creation. Moreover, the projective mode—coupled with Olson's concept of proprioception as a guiding poetic praxis—taught Baraka the significance of poetry as a direct response to lived experience in space.

The workings of "Projective Verse" come to the fore, with its expression extended and particularized, in Baraka's *In Our Terribleness*, which intensifies the politics of a bodily projection of and in space. Following in line with the tenets of "Projective Verse," meaning in Baraka's text is gathered from the energies of the body interacting with the field of objects within the poem—of which the images and text are parts. The sum total of this field of energies is the production of a work that, as Baraka insists, "was meant to express, define and clarify us to ourselves ... show the significance of how the black man looks and sounds and why he does what he does" (qtd. in Watkins 90-91).<sup>209</sup> In this way, the work extends the projective "sound"

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<sup>209</sup> Indeed, a significant part of how blackness "sounds," for Baraka, is rooted in black musical traditions, such as jazz rhythms. Although the influence of jazz in Baraka's poetry is a worthwhile lens of analysis, it lies outside the scope of this chapter to discuss at length. For an excellent overview of the subject, see Harris, *The Poetry and*

model of place in “How You Sound??” by occupying urban space with the sounds of blackness and black bodies in place. The responding text voices the still images on the page with the kinetics of urban black vernacular. For example, Fundi’s image of black male youths with their arms around each other is accompanied by the lines, “Stanin here wit ma brother, is all of it i need to know here. It’ll be / all right. / Cain’ ge kill ... on broooooome street mister / stanin w / mabrother / i’s all / i need to know. / Sblam!” (Baraka, *In Our* n.p.). The speaker’s articulation of “Stanin here ... on broooooome street” specifically situates the poem in a particular place in the urban landscape “from which” the poem is written. Moreover, the repetition of “all i need to know” emphasizes that Fundi’s camera and Baraka’s words capture the youth in their proper place, exactly where they are and where they need to be.

Whereas in “How You Sound??” Baraka was articulating place as projective and connected with the corporeal, in this work, this theory becomes more particularized as the black body is called upon to sound itself in place racially and *radically* so. The work is certainly concerned with the sounds of black vernacular, but also with the formation of a community that recognizes itself in the collective whole. Together, Baraka’s text and Fundi’s images call upon the black individual reader to see his or her reflection in the gestures, appearances, and outlooks of the black community, together creating a holistic portrait of urban blackness wherein the community is inextricably linked to the landscape. This communal call to the individual is evident in the text before the reader reaches the first poem, when he or she confronts his or her very own reflection. The work begins with a reflective silver title page that acts as a mirror: upon opening the book, the reader’s face is imposed onto the space containing the work’s title, which is embossed in the total mirrored image. In this way, in the same manner as Duncan’s great

“household of the whole,” the “Our” of *In Our Terribleness* invokes an imagined community that intimately involves the community of individual readers.<sup>210</sup> The frontispiece also unites the text’s form and content by bringing the reader’s environs into the text; in this way, the text presents itself as part of the reader’s space-time. By means of presenting the reader’s local onto the mirrored page, as well as inviting a community of “our” in the title, the text begins its guiding refrain: the recognition of oneself in the local community: “Look into our eyes. Look into yr / own eyes. Visualize yr own face, when you close yr eyes. Can you / do that? Can you see your own image?” (n.p.). In this way, the paratext announces the translocal desires of the poetic labour, since a reader in Chicago or Detroit, for example, can open the book from their own local and see the possibilities of a recognized black place therein.

This urgency for corporeal recognition in the greater whole carries forth what Baraka calls the “the proprioceptive probe” (qtd. in Allen and Friedlander, “Editors’ Preface” ix) he learned from Olson to articulate a sense of place wherein urban space and the black body are imbricated in an ongoing co-production in meaning. As Olson defines it, proprioception is “SENSIBILITY WITHIN THE ORGANISM / BY MOVEMENT OF ITS OWN TISSUES ... the DEPTH implicit in physical being— / built in space-time specifics, and moving” (“Proprioception” 181-182). As I discussed in the first chapter, for Olson, as the subjective body moves through space, it is engaged in a process of selecting and ignoring certain aspects from the totality of its surroundings in order to articulate a particular space-time and view; from this process, the whole self emerges. Further, the knowledge gained from (and by) the body moving through space results in the “facts” of one’s place, so that “*movement or action is ‘home’*” (182; original emphasis). Baraka adopts proprioception as a mode of spatial knowledge and production for

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<sup>210</sup> Although Baraka’s intended community of readers is most certainly black readers, the mirrored images of readers of all ethnicities can also serve to imply the relation of all readers in a translocal poetic community.

black subjects; the black body moving through urban space represents a counter epistemology and praxis in which the black experience becomes a subjective *nomos* of place. As I discussed in the preceding chapters, *logos* and *nomos* represent two poles of spatial knowledge and organization for Deleuze and Guattari: *logos* being “striated” space that is ordered and arranged according to laws and boundaries, and *nomos* being “smooth” or open space, where the land develops alongside the particularities of its inhabitants. These two types of space provide a productive lens with which to view Baraka’s transformation of urban space from a site of ordered control by the white governing masses, to an open field of radical experimentations with blackness in place.

*In Our Terribleness* adopts a proprioceptive model of knowing and placing the body in space, as the text experiments with articulating the black body—and the collective body of the whole—as it moves through urban space and resonates with its environment. Olson’s influence is palpable here in the text’s concern for the body moving through a quantum field, with both body and landscape forming a dynamic interactive whole: “each of us is a vector / carrying meaning” (Baraka, *In Our* n.p.). This meaning is a totality achieved through the contrapuntal rhythms of both image and text. The images dispersed throughout, as Baraka writes, are “conductors of energy. ... all as vectors of the one Being. Us, we talking about” (n.p.) The bodies depicted in the images, together with the language and style of the text, create a moving, energetic whole: “So we are parts of a body. And this is what you see. The energy / revealed” (n.p.). With these lines, Baraka harnesses energy of the field as a collective creative force, one that transforms the urban space into a dynamic aesthetic place of black art. In this way, the work fulfills his earlier declaration in “Black Art”: “Let Black People understand / that they ... Are poems and poets” (*Black Magic* 117).

Further, the work's establishment of a resistant collective grounded in place actively counteracts the circumscribed gaze of dominant white culture put on black bodies in urban cities. As such, the work reclaims the pejorative "terrible" in its title as a repeated refrain that defines the distinct style and manner in which black people *take up* urban space—how they use it as a space, and how they practice place within it. Although the term "terrible" carries negative connotations, it also possesses complementary meanings of sublimity. According to the OED, "Terrible" is defined as "Causing or fit to cause terror; inspiring great fear or dread. Also: awe-inspiring, awesome" ("Terrible"). Describing black people as "terrible" carries a double meaning that encompasses the white gaze—i.e., the view of black people as dreadful and abject—and transforms it into a sublime meaning as "awe-inspiring." "Terribleness," or, as Baraka renders it in black slang, "terr bul ness" (n.p.), defines the space and place of the counterculture of blackness in the context of urban cities, which are organized racially to keep black and white bodies separate. Interestingly, Baraka breaks the word into "terr" and "ness," both fragments that suggest landforms: "terr" can be short for *terra*, meaning "the earth," and *ness* can also connote "a promontory," ("ness") or high point of land.<sup>211</sup> The ghetto—largely considered a forgotten "wasteland" left to the wayside of urban renewal and gentrification—is revitalized in the work as a "high point of land" by means of the rhythms and spirit, the "living force" (n.p.) of its local people. As Baraka writes,

homes in harlem must be protected at all costs and Duke Ellington ... his  
diminuendos and crescendos must be preserved behind the alleyways and broken  
stoops of Howard Street and Centre Street and all the Wattses and Houghs must

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<sup>211</sup> It is interesting to note that "terr" is a slang abbreviation for "terrorist" used to characterize nationalist guerillas attempting to overthrow the white minority government during the Rhodesian Bush War (1964-1979) ("terr"). It is tempting to read this connotation onto Baraka's rendering of "terrible" to allude to the black community on the streets taking up space. "Bul" could also allude to the animal "bull," which represents utmost masculine virility and power.

be protected with Duke there and the Vandellas recoloring everything in our reach. We must paint these falling buildings brilliant moorish arabesques (n.p.)

By means of the classic jazz of Ellington, and the Motown beats of Martha and the Vandellas, Baraka encourages the people of Harlem, Newark, Chicago, Los Angeles, and Cleveland to come together in this united communal energy and reform the oppressed state of American urban space. Baraka's vision of reform exceeds the bounds of Harlem and Newark; he cites Howard and Centre Streets in Newark (also in Chicago), the Watts ghetto in Los Angeles, and the Hough ghetto in Cleveland as "high points of land" for reformation. Both Los Angeles and Cleveland experienced riots incited by poverty and racism—known as the Watts riots and Hough riots—in 1965 and 1966, respectively. Baraka pluralizes these locals as "Wattses" and "Houghs" in order to emphasize that these places and conditions are replicable spaces of black oppression used to keep people in place all over America. However, these places can be transformed by filling these places with black sounds, black movement, and black being.

At first, the term "terribleness" in the title seems counterintuitive as a descriptor for the particular beauty of blackness; however, Baraka is harnessing the perceived misplacedness (by the white gaze) of the black body in space, its different soundings and appearances, all of which lend it beauty and resonance. The white gaze informs and organizes certain geographical structures of the cityspace so as to "dis/orient" black bodies in space, to make them placeless. In the text, Baraka warns against "trapping ourselves in screens of negative description" (n.p.) such as "Negroes aint got no values" (n.p.). Dis/orientation in space is a theme throughout this project; here Baraka harnesses the energy of the black body's dis/orientation into a communal *poethic* that produces alternative geographic knowledges in urban space for black bodies. As Baraka writes, "Terribleness is a definition. It / is a description. . . . But it is commoner than that. All /

our terribleness is our total. Our hipness is in anything we touch” (*In Our* n.p.). “Terribleness” becomes the marker of an essential blackness, from the everyday movement of working class people in the city, to the great terribleness of “Muhammad Ali,” “John Coltrane” and “James Brown” (n.p.). The creation of new, creative geographic knowledge also becomes a strategy for survival: “Our terribleness is our survival as beautiful beings, any where. . . . Any where, even flying through space like we / all doing, even faced with the iceman, the abominable snowman” (n.p.). Here, the references to the “iceman” and “snowman” are to the white gaze, to which the recognition of an empowered collective black identity is resistant. “Our terribleness” becomes a mode of being, a marker of lived energy that transcends the limitations put on black bodies—its lived recognition allows one to survive “any where”—within the urban site, but also translocally, across many spaces and places—with *style*.

This emphasis on collective survival in place points to the ways in which *In Our Terribleness* is an experiment in practicing place—a concept that I have discussed previously and that extends throughout this project. As discussed previously, for de Certeau, Lefebvre, McKittrick, as well as many other human geographers, space is socially and culturally transformable. According to de Certeau, when people use a space by moving through it—as when pedestrians walk through urban-planned streets—they alter its function and it becomes a practiced place. For Baraka, it is the everydayness of practiced geographies that holds transformative power. As he writes, it is “[n]ot the special occasion” that will force change,

But  
 the day  
 to day  
 always

continuous exercise  
of astonishing grace. (n.p.)

It is in the practice of place, in the everyday sounds and movements of the black community within their local space(s), that space can be reformed. Some of these practices of place are captured within Fundi's lens, but these are only snapshots of a geography and consciousness that is expanding.

George Cotkin praises *In Our Terribleness* as a “welcome relief from the hurricane of hate” that infused Baraka's poetry of the time, but he insists that the work remains “uncritical of black life and the problems of urban ghettos” (267). In light of de Certeau's theory, Cotkin's assertion here is misguided and overlooks the ways in which Baraka and Fundi acutely engage with urban space as a meaningful site of connection that fosters a new consciousness of blackness in place. While Baraka does indeed romanticize the “terribleness” of blackness in urban space, he does so in order to articulate an alternative hermeneutic of black urban experience other than the circumscribed narrative created by the white gaze. In the text, the lines, “They had us in a cage / To hold back our rage. Our eyes / smiled / anyway” (n.p.) respond to an image of young black youth looking out from behind the “caged” screen of a window in a building that resembles a housing project. Baraka uses aesthetic survival—the “terribleness” of black subjects in these “savage geographies” (Baraka, *The Dead* 33)—to demonstrate the ways in which the community can transform reality both in art and on the streets.

Like Olson's figuring of Gloucester in *The Maximus Poems* as a dynamic, historically resistant space, here the quantum energy of the local geography, the field of the urban city, is harnessed into a resistant poetic praxis. As Lytle Shaw argues, *In Our Terribleness* is “experimental urbanism ... a kind of political style manual for working-class urban African

Americans, reclaiming their bodily postures and clothing styles as modes of radicality” (109). I would extend Shaw’s argument here to suggest that the very radicality of the text consists in its engagement with created space and with creative community, with the “imagetext” of the work being the conductors of energy between both these elements of transformative space. Indeed, as Lefebvre argues, the city is a hermeneutic text in and of itself:

There is the *utterance* of the city: what happens and takes place in the street, in the squares, in the voids, what is said there. There is the *language* of the city: particularities specific to each city which are expressed in discourses, gestures, clothing, in the words and use of words by the inhabitants. Finally there is the *writing* of the city: what is inscribed and prescribed on its walls, in the layout of places and their linkages, in brief *the use of time* in the city by its inhabitants.

(*Writing on Cities* 115; original emphasis)

Lefebvre’s analysis here works in conjunction with de Certeau’s concept of practiced place, the transformation of space into dynamic, polyphonic place. To Shaw’s analysis of the text’s reclamation of “bodily postures and clothing styles,” I would also add linguistic style—the “utterance of the city,” as Lefebvre puts it—since the text is equally concerned with “How You Sound” not only individualistically, but as reflective of a larger, black *vox Americana*. As Baraka later writes, “American poetry reflects American lives. The various kinds, in America, from whatever voices. Each voice is a place, in America, the totality of its image” (*Raise* 17).

As I discussed in terms of Duncan’s work, the postwar culture of the 1960s was heavily laden with Cold War rhetoric that sought to homogenize the nation-state by outlawing deviance. Whereas Duncan harnessed the energy of the queer counterculture to create a resistant community in his household with Jess and other writers of the San Francisco scene, here Baraka

builds a collective resistant force from the sociopolitical “deviancy” of race. Both Baraka and Duncan respond to the containment culture of the Cold War, but do so in different ways: whereas Duncan establishes a literal household for the gathering of “dissenting” minds, Baraka responds by bringing the space of the streets into his poetry and fulfilling his prophecy in “Black Art” of making the world a poem. Baraka makes a household of the local streets of Newark, but he also succeeds in making the poem *translocal* by means of creating an American black collective rooted across particular locals, stretching to the whole of the nation. As Baraka confirms, “And all of us are one body, man. Dig it? One body. As each is a / small, as each of our organs is a small, and we, the large, so the nation, is the large in relationship to us” (*In Our* n.p.) Similarly, Olson sees universality within the particular landscape and people of the polis in Gloucester; Baraka’s work recalls Olson’s statement in “Place; & Names” that places are “like parts of the body ... having cells which can decant / total experience” (200). Baraka and Fundi’s work likens the urban city to a living organism, a large body that reflects the “total experience” of the collective. Baraka’s local in Newark fosters a living, translocal black consciousness wherein the local of American black experience is no longer relegated to the segregated ghetto of separate cities, but its consciousness and imagined community exceeds city, state, and even national lines.

Whereas the early Baraka derives from the poetic commons and genealogy of the white avant-garde, in *In Our Terribleness* the poetic commons becomes the collective articulation of black urban identity in the present—the fashions, gaits, gestures, and speech of the black community. Baraka’s earlier anxiety toward the empty white ideology he was following is transformed into an empowered and sure collective voice, one that speaks from the actual space he finds himself in as a black man in postwar urban America. As if metatextually gesturing to the “old commons” of literary tradition from which he gained influence, Baraka writes, “I wanted to

put the image of real life” (*In Our* n.p.), a poetic statement that echoes and contrasts to Pound’s lament at the end of *The Cantos*, “I have tried to write paradise” (822). This revision of Pound’s statement resounds with Baraka’s break from the perceived “futility” he came to recognize in the reliance on the imagination as a poetic mode. Since the poems directly respond to real images of black urban inhabitants, the collection represents a strong marriage of form and content for Baraka’s newfound consciousness that seeks to imbricate poetry into the social realities of the immediate space-time of the poet.

As the mirror piece reflecting back the world of the reader demonstrates, the work itself is spatially *monumental* in scope. The large size of the book, its explosive language, images, and typography, are all investments in the act of *taking up of space* for blackness and black expression. Baraka takes up this project literally in the space of the poem, for he takes up space *for the sake of taking up space*. There are several passages, some full page in length, that feature imposing capitalized typography. For example, the lines “I AM USING ALL OF THE SPACE ALL OF THE SPACE FILL THE SPACE ALL THE / SPACE” (n.p.) form a block of text extending closely to the edges of the page’s margin. The mocking tone of these lines, coupled with their audacious appearance on the page, stand out as an explosive statement. In repeatedly insisting on and fulfilling the imperative to “FILL THE SPACE,” Baraka responds to the existing spatial limitations put on black bodies, such as ghettos and mass housing projects. Railing against these schemas that are meant to keep black bodies in place, the polemic of the poem thus becomes one of creating “unauthorized” spaces for blackness. Further following through on his promise, Baraka inserts several lines after the capitalized text that scat the black vernacular: “I am the son....yahaaa oooo yahaaaoooo deedeedeedee come ba cho ... yaaaaaaa dir dir rummmmmm rummmmmm doo eee dooo eee doooo eeeee gooooo” (n.p.). These

“unauthorized” interruptions in space and sound work to make the “terrible” presence of blackness unknowable by, or at least foreign to, the white gaze and its presumptions of control. In taking up space with the sounds of black urban voices, the text *becomes* an urban site of experience in and of itself, and Baraka is able to practice self-determined place therein.

Moreover, the text also takes up space visually by registering the tensions of colour lines within the urban landscape onto the page. The visual form of the work reflects its content, especially in the choice of colour scheme: the majority of the text’s pages contain black letters on a white background, but the outer border returns to black. Aside from surrounding whiteness on the page, the outer black border suggests the spillage of blackness onto the living world beyond the pages of the text. Also, halfway through the book, there is a shift in colour scheme that acts as a visual caesura of sorts between lines that span across the spine of the text. On the verso of one page, with a white background, is a passage including the lines, “this is our kingdom to come /... We will raise it and develop it” (n.p.). This line then continues across the spine of the text with the line “and certainly defend it.” This opposite page, now black in background with white lettering, is split in half vertically with the left half featuring this conclusive line. On the right half of the page is an image of a defiant black man walking past a graffitied wall:

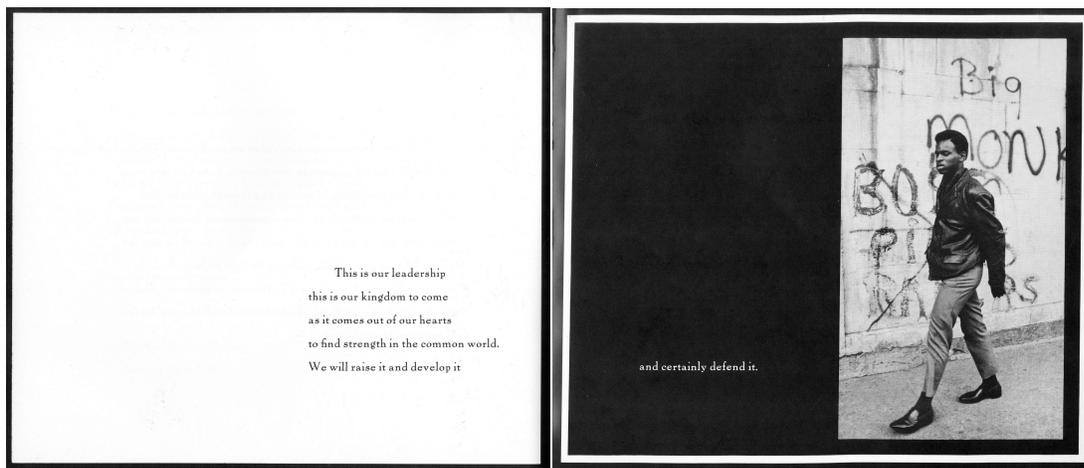


Figure 10. Amiri Baraka, *In Our Terribleness*, n.p.

Together, the text and image invoke a threatening mood, and when set against the bold black background, the page imposes its black presence as a decisive warning to the whiteness of the previous page. The outer border of this page is still black, but there is a thin white border between this outer border and the black background. Here, whiteness is surrounded by blackness, is invaded by it, and the visuality of the paratext on the page depicts this mounting tension. As opposed to the *sfumato* technique of Duncan's poems—wherein the borders of shadows are blurred, thereby creating an interactive space of blended contours—here the borders between are no longer blurred for Baraka in art or in the world beyond, but are clearly and starkly demarcated.

As with Olson's Maximus, Baraka becomes the mouthpiece through which the intimate present and history of the local land and people are expressed. Baraka's vision of an imagined community "in place" is one where the total ideology of the collective takes precedent: "There is no you there is no *me*. / The different categories subside into the total which is all our / strength, and all our weakness. (*In Our* n.p.; original emphasis). For Baraka, it is not the individual but the collective assemblage that forms the catalyst for social transformation on the ground. For Édouard Glissant, this intimate interaction between poet, community, and landscape forms an imperative *poethic*: "For the poet, knowledge will no longer impede immediate contact with the world. On the contrary: knowledge of things is knowledge of the self as a function ... a condition of the Ensemble" (*Poetic Intention* 94). As with Olson's Maximus, Baraka's speaker similarly becomes a "function" of the landscape, a critical contact point between the individual and the ensemble that expresses the collective desire for place. However, whereas both Duncan's anarchism and Olson's objectism prioritize the individual within the group—for them, the group is a collection of individuals—here, Baraka suggests that the individual is merely an iteration of

the group. His foregrounding of the group is certainly racially motivated, since it is an entire group that has been politically oppressed within space, and it is that group that needs to act as a complete totality in order to transform its space and place.

The tension between imagined and lived spaces of resistance—the aesthetic versus effective value of practicing place—is never more apparent than when considering Olson’s and Baraka’s experimentations with Gloucester and Newark, respectively. Through the figure of Maximus, Olson celebrates Gloucester’s past as embodied by the fishermen at Stage Fort. This landscape and event is a point of resistance to which the present must return, in Olson’s view, to counteract the homogeneity and control of the nation’s capitalist regime. As Shaw argues, Olson’s hope for an embodied local place remained primarily imaginative and tentative:

If Williams and Olson established the dominant ethnographic and historiographic vocabularies for the poetics of place, they both accepted a division, however, whereby their own places—Paterson and Gloucester, respectively—did not yet embody the values they hoped to dredge up from the study of places in general, and theirs specifically. Over the course of the 1960s this changed: the poetry of a lone researcher offering his results to futurity was no longer seen as sufficient.

Poets sought, instead, to live the experimental polis now, to enact it in daily life.

(531)

As opposed to Olson “offering his results to futurity,” Baraka sees the present action of the people in Newark as the most resistant in the here and now. Nowhere is the lived experimental polis of the present more realized than in the transformation of Newark to New Ark—a transformation to which Baraka’s imaginative and material interventions in politics and on the streets were pivotal. Shaw’s point above is certainly productive as a lens with which to view

Baraka's political action of the present in the context of the concerns of his poetic forebears. However, Baraka's establishment of a polis of the present out of the collective action of the present community refutes Shaw's earlier argument, in the context of Olson's and Williams's place-based poetics, that "[c]ertainly Baraka did not understand his relation to Newark as that of selecting a place whose special history could be used to challenge dominant versions of the American past" (113). I would argue, rather, that the opposite is true: Baraka was certainly well aware of the sociopolitical history of Newark, and transforming this space from its roots of oppression (of racial and capitalistic control) certainly stood as a challenge to the totalizing gaze of the American nation-state. I will return to this argument in the following section to discuss the ways in which the reterritorialization of Newark, with its "special history" of ghettoization, challenges "dominant versions of the American past" that upheld racial codes of urban containment. Baraka's focus on present action does not signal his ignorance of the history of the land and its people—far from it, since historical processes certainly affected the present sociopolitical circumstances of the black populus.<sup>212</sup> However, these historical processes precipitated present action in the form of collective resistance, and this present action leads to a communal and self-managed future for the people. The present collective consciousness is the product of both real and imagined reterritorializations of geography—from Baraka's call to arms in his poetry, to the establishment of independent cultural initiatives on the ground in Newark, as I will discuss shortly.

*In Our Terribleness* thus engenders a similar place-based poetic of the local landscape to that of Olson in *The Maximus Poems*; however, rather than simply adopt the tenets of projective,

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<sup>212</sup> On the importance of history to the present in his own work, Baraka later acknowledges the influence of Olson. In a keynote speech from 2008, which also became the "Preface" for *Amiri Baraka and Ed Dorn: The Collected Letters* (2013) Baraka notes, "He [Olson] was talking about a poetry that used history and place as an engine to wrest meaning from the present. To see how now got to be now and where it was going and where it had been" ("Preface" xv).

open-field verse, Baraka *extends* them to suit his new consciousness. Baraka's text resonates with the spatial hermeneutic of projective space in its harnessing of quantum energy, the "energy transferred from where the poet got it" (Olson, "Projective" 240)—which, in Baraka's case, is the collective energies of the urban site, a place reformed by the black collective. This collective field of energy creates a responsive community of individuals in urban space. These two elements of the field poetic—energy and community—cumulate in the text to reform the geographical and ideological confines of urban space anew. This argument will be expanded in the following section, where I discuss the continuation of the work of *In Our Terribleness* in the context of Baraka's reterritorialization of Newark as "New Ark" and his poetic collection *It's Nation Time* (1970). A similar self-governed communal *polis* that Olson celebrates in Gloucester's past is realized by Baraka in New Ark. While postwar urban space, for the black populus, is mapped and charted as a geography of domination, containment, and control, *In Our Terribleness* responds to this containment through the creation of prolific creative spaces of blackness. These spaces arise in the moment of reading *In Our Terribleness*, but they are not contained in its pages or limited by the space of the book. Rather, the resistant spirit of this call to take up space is later grafted onto the streets of New Ark. In short, the spaces of *In Our Terribleness* are TAZs that become more permanent changes of space; without this pivotal work of poetry that reimagines spaces of the present as autonomous and liberated, the Black Arts Movement's reterritorialization of postwar geographies would not have been as effective in transforming the space and place of urban blackness in America from the ground up.

### It's Nation Time: New Ark's Transformation

Land

will change

hand

s<sup>213</sup>

—Amiri Baraka

For what is liberty but the unhampered translation of will into act?<sup>214</sup>

—Dante Alighieri

As Jerry Watts notes, Baraka's level of political engagement in the years between 1967 and 1974 is unprecedented for a twentieth century American artist/intellectual (349). Watts qualifies this statement by saying that while many intellectuals of the time wrote political artistic works, they were rarely active beyond the page and into the streets. As he writes, "It was unheard of for an established poet/playwright of Baraka's stature to take the lead in formulating political actions (e.g. establishing picket lines, leading boycotts, disrupting school board meetings, organizing electoral candidates, trying to build needed public housing) while continuing to write" (349).<sup>215</sup> Baraka's actions and political involvement in the late 60s and into the early 70s tests the boundaries of the projective mode by means of combining poetic experimentation with intervening physical action; according to this projective *poethic*, political engagement on the streets, beyond the page, is an ethical imperative for raising the community out of sanctioned containment and oppression. Accordingly, the projected urban space of self-governed

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<sup>213</sup> "Whas Gon Happen," *Selected Poetry* 160.

<sup>214</sup> *Monarchy* 107.

<sup>215</sup> Before the riots, for example, Baraka was instrumental in the election of the first black mayor of Newark, Kenneth Gibson. The event was historically monumental: never before had a black mayor been elected in a large American city (Watts 348).

community that Baraka heralded in *In Our Terribleness* ceases to remain only imagined and, by means of intervening political work, becomes a reality in post-riot New Ark.

Armed with the revolutionary rhetoric of his polemical poems, Baraka was ready to put talk to action on the streets. The hellfire of the Newark rebellion fulfilled the prophecy of Baraka's earlier work by paving the way for a reterritorialization of the ghetto and a revitalization of the local community. As Baraka reflects on the Newark riots, "For me, the Rebellion was a cleansing fire" (*The Autobiography* 266). Indeed, the destruction of the riots led, ultimately, to the creation of new ground: Newark, the city that contained its black populus in structures of poverty and disenfranchisement became known by Baraka and the arts community as "New Ark," the rehabilitated city space where grassroots community projects transformed the space for the people. In an essay from 1970, Baraka baptizes the city as a site of resistance and renewal:

Newark, New Ark, the nationalist sees as the creation of a base, as example, upon which one aspect of the entire Black nation can be built. ... We will create agencies to teach community organizing, national and local politics, and send brothers all over the country to re-create the model. We will nationalize the city's institutions as if it were liberated territory in Zimbabwe or Angola. There are nations of less than 300,000 people. ... We will build a 'city-state,' or make alliances throughout the area to develop regional power in the scatter of Black cities of northern New Jersey. (*Raise* 163)

As Watts correctly points out, "Baraka's understanding of urban political power was a fantasy" that presented an exclusionary and homogenous "value system" and essentialized blackness that "imagined black communities as uniform in character and ambitions" (363). While Watts's

criticism is certainly important to point out—and is later validated by Baraka’s own questioning of his staunch black nationalism of the time—it is almost too obvious to warrant further criticism at this juncture.<sup>216</sup> What most concerns my discussion here is Baraka’s testament to the continued power of the imagination—a foundational tenet of the *poethics* of open form—coupled with direct action on the streets. As I discussed earlier, Baraka’s trip to Cuba formed part of the Third World leftist movement in the United States that attempted to forge cultural connections and identify sociopolitical patterns between disparate geographies. New Ark, then, becomes a geographic “base” from which the black nation can up rise and take control over its space and place. In connecting the sociopolitical transformation of New Ark to the conditions in “Zimbabwe or Angola,” Baraka suggests that the transformative consciousness on the ground in this new “nation” will spill over its local borders to become a transformative and *translocal* geographic movement.

Moreover, Baraka directly refers to New Ark as a “city-state” (*Raise* 163) or polis; similarly to Olson, Baraka sees the possibilities of the polis as a model leading to a transformed universal consciousness.<sup>217</sup> He sees the smaller scale of the local, coupled with a united vision for communal emancipation therein, to be the grounding site for reforming nations worldwide. Moreover, this move to “nationalize” New Ark as a “liberated territory” by taking over the

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<sup>216</sup> Baraka came to denounce the tone of his earlier black nationalist phase as misdirected vitriol against whites. Whereas the black nationalists focused on the white populus as the enemy of black people, Baraka later came to Marxism as a means of understanding capitalism as a system of oppression that not only fuels racist structures of power, but is the enemy that ensnares the whole of humanity. In his autobiography, he reflects on the tunnel vision of his early “reactionary” politics: “Earlier our own poems came from an enraptured patriotism that screamed against whites as the eternal enemies of Black people, as the sole cause of our disorder & oppression. The same subjective mystification led to mysticism, metaphysics, spookism, etc., rather than dealing with reality, as well as an ultimately reactionary nationalism that served no interests but our newly emerging Black bureaucratic elite and petty bourgeois, so they would have control over their Black market” (238). Indeed, it is Baraka’s realization that it is capitalist America—not simply the racial tensions therein—that keeps black people in place that ushers in the Third World Marxist phase of his life and career in the mid-1970s.

<sup>217</sup> Interestingly, both Newark and Gloucester share a history of Puritan settlement and occupation. As I have already discussed in the first chapter, Gloucester was founded in 1623 by the Dorchester Company. Then, in 1666, a small band of Puritans from Connecticut displaced the Hackensack Indians and settled the city of Newark (Mumford 13).

institutions of the city signals Baraka's reimagination of the nation-state. As he writes in *In Our Terribleness*, the goal is "the creation of the nation where we stand ... master of [our] own space. Institutional space and territorial space ... Picture ourselves as free rulers of all (our) space" (n.p.). As I discussed earlier in relation to Baraka's early poem "Notes for a Speech" and Anderson's "imagined community," Baraka saw the nation as an imagined construct; as artificial and ideological, the nation is thus mutable and alterable both in the communal imagination and on the ground of the local. It is also a translocal construct, one that moves and changes with the people as they move and change. In his short collection aptly entitled *It's Nation Time*, Baraka calls upon such a reimagination of the nation:

The nation is like our selves, together  
 seen in our various scenes, sets where ever we are  
 what ever we are doing, is what the nation  
 is  
 doing  
 or  
 not  
 doing  
 is what the nation  
 is  
 being  
 or  
 not being. (7)

Rather than a nation wherein members “will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion,” (Anderson 15) here the nation is reimagined as a living collective organism where members exist in close proximity of spirit, whether they are close in distance or not. Moreover, in this reimagined community of the nation, there is a sense of responsibility and cause; rather than being an abstract notion of comradeship, the very construct of the nation is here dependent on the direct actions of its members for its “doing” and “being.”

Further, this rebirth of the city as New Ark also recalls the biblical story of Noah’s Ark, an allusion that confirms the living organicism of the redefined and reconfigured nation. According to The Book of Genesis, after humankind broke the covenant with God and was punished with a flood, Noah was spared by God in order to preserve life on earth. He was tasked with boarding his family as well as one male and one female of every species onto an ark to escape the flood waters. As Sollors argues, Baraka becomes a Noah figure for the Black Arts Movement and its post-rebellion reterritorialization of Newark: “Baraka offered himself as a new Noah, ready to lead his chosen people out of American bondage in his ‘New Ark’” (*Beyond* 50). Works such as *In Our Terribleness*, wherein Baraka “practices place” in postwar urban space, become the grounding for experimentations in actual space, for the establishment of self-managing communities. The Newark riots lit the ground on fire, so to speak, and paved the way for a geographic “changing of hands” heralded by Baraka’s earlier work.<sup>218</sup>

As James A. Tyner observes, spatial transformation—not simply imagining reterritorialized geographies, but living them through—is imperative to the project of black radicalism. As he argues, “Black radicalism is about alternative geographies, of social and spatial

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<sup>218</sup> It lies outside the scope of the chapter to discuss at length, but it is worth noting that the nation-building efforts of the Newark riots likely inspired other rebellions and uprisings of black communities across the nation, with the Detroit riots happening only a couple weeks after those in Newark in 1967.

transformations; black radicalism is about the remaking of spaces” (8). The process of remaking space in black radicalism is also an act of ideological revisionism that brings ideas, necessarily, into reality. “The epistemology of black radicalism,” Tyner continues, “is thus predicated on a ground-level reality. Indeed, Black radical intellectual production oftentimes began with an engagement and dialogue with Western radical political ideas, and then moved on to a critique of these ideas as their incompleteness was revealed” (9).<sup>219</sup> Baraka’s commitment to not only aesthetic experimentation in space but to an accompanying “ground-level reality” takes a similar trajectory, as this chapter has demonstrated. Baraka began, in Greenwich Village, by engaging with and practicing the radical political and aesthetic ideologies of his Black Mountain contemporaries surrounding the body in space; however, over the course of the decade, this engagement would prove to expose the “incompleteness,” for Baraka, in the tenets of projective verse. As he writes in *In Our Terribleness*, conscious awareness must accompany responsive, material groundwork:

Not just idle screams (to work off the sensual connection with this rotten chapter of world).

But programs. Systems. Things that move and will grow. Living strategems to free and build. Political projects. Communications Projects. Educational projects. And on. Go head. Do it, if you gonna talk it. You better do it. (n.p.)

This is not to say that Baraka eschews the value of imaginative geographies—far from it: as his work in *In Our Terribleness* demonstrates, the transformation of geography on the ground begins

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<sup>219</sup> This section touches on just some of the many interventionist initiatives led by Baraka and his affiliated organizations on the ground in Newark. The discussion is not meant to be exhaustive; rather, these examples are meant to bolster my argument for Baraka’s imperative *poethic* of combined imaginative and material spatial interventions. For an extended and excellent discussion of Baraka’s political engagements in Newark, see Woodard’s *A Nation Within A Nation* (1999) (Woodard was also a fellow CFUN member with Baraka).

with its transformation in collective consciousness; for Baraka, such material transformations begin with aesthetic (re)imaginings of place. *In Our Terribleness* and the Newark crisis, when considered together, elucidate Baraka's keen awareness of the fact that racial subjugation is a spatial strategy of containment by governing structures of power. Further, they demonstrate the felt and then realized need for spatial intervention by grafting aesthetic and imaginative reconceptions of space onto actual geographies in urban space.

The imbrication of imagined and real geographies as transgressive spatial practice is explored as a critical praxis in the work of Katherine McKittrick in her groundbreaking critical text *Demonic Grounds: Black Women and the Cartographies of Struggle* (2006). The fulfillment of geographical transformation led by Baraka in New Ark can be viewed through the lens of what McKittrick (via Sylvia Wynter) terms "demonic ground," a term that I liken to the TAZ in that it can also be considered an uprising within existing structures of control that creates spaces of creative autonomy and engagement. The demonic retains the TAZ's capacity for proposed, imaginative, and sometimes fleeting uprisings; however, it departs from the TAZ in that it ultimately seeks to alter actual geographic codes by erecting independent, parallel ones. Viewing Baraka's combined efforts in *In Our Terribleness* and on the ground in New Ark as creating *demonic grounds* of resistance provides pivotal insights into Baraka's experimental geographic transformations.<sup>220</sup>

McKittrick appropriates the term "demonic" from Wynter as a means of "rethink[ing] the complex linkages between history, blackness, race, and place" (143).<sup>221</sup> While she argues that

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<sup>220</sup> As I discuss in chapter two (see especially page 191 n.141), while the temporariness of the TAZ is central to its efficacy as a spatial mode of resistance, Bey later acknowledged that the TAZ can become more permanent in its manifestation, leading to more sustainable changes in geographic and sociopolitical schemas. Similarly, while the demonic ground (as its namesake suggests) has an element of unpredictability, it outlines a mode of creating more permanent spaces of occupation and resistance within existing spatial structures of control.

<sup>221</sup> The term "demonic" appears in Wynter's essay "Beyond Miranda's Meanings: Un/Silencing the 'Demonic Ground' of Caliban's 'Woman'." The work is an analysis of Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, wherein she comments on

“existing cartographic rules unjustly organize human hierarchies in place and reify uneven geographies in familiar, seemingly natural ways” (x), McKittrick also suggests that such rules are not entrenched, but are alterable and can be paralleled with alternative geographic schemas. The demonic demarcates sites of geographic production for black subjects that are made invisible by traditional geographic schemes and epistemologies. McKittrick’s analysis specifically discusses the ways in which black bodies (albeit with a focus on the black and female body) has been dispossessed of geographic agency by “geographies of domination,” undergirded by capitalist systems of value, that “*require* black displacement, black placelessness, black labor, and a black population that submissively stays ‘in place’” (9; original emphasis).<sup>222</sup>

McKittrick traces the continuance of this geographic dispossession in North America by examining historical spaces such as the Middle Passage, the underground railroad, and the auction blocks and ports of the slave trade. By reexamining these spaces, McKittrick counters historically-entrenched views of the black body as “ungeographic” by demonstrating ways in which the black female body, in particular, was resistant to the hostile environments in which she found herself.<sup>223</sup> Spaces such as the slave auction block are sites of economic transaction, parts of a local landscape that enforced spatial limitations put on black bodies by the colonial project. These spaces of spatial limitation, however, are also meaningful grounds of geographic

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the connection between reproduction and land reclamation. As she argues, the absence in the play of “Caliban’s potential mate through whom the reproduction of his race might occur” (McKittrick xxv), prevents the island from being reclaimed by its native population.

<sup>222</sup> A significant recent example of the ways in which “black matters are spatial matters,” to use McKittrick’s phrase, is the current rampant police surveillance of and violence to black bodies in North America. The unnecessary carding and increased killing of black men and women demonstrates the policing of black bodies and spaces and the keeping of said bodies “in place” both literally and figuratively.

<sup>223</sup> One of the examples McKittrick uses to demonstrate her point is the case of Linda Brent (Harriet Jacobs), an escaped slave who hid for seven years in the attic of her grandmother’s garret. While in hiding, Jacobs manipulates the conditions of her hiding place by creating holes for viewing the outside world, which gave her an oppositional view of the process of slavery. By overlooking the plantation, Jacobs is able to adopt a “disembodied master-eye, seeing from nowhere,” (McKittrick 43) and is able to manipulate the spatial limitations put on her body. She removes herself from the visual landscape of slavery and counters this narrative of “hypervisibility” placed on the black female body by countering the lens. As McKittrick writes, such a reterritorialization “highlights how geography is transformed by Jacobs into a usable and paradoxical space” (McKittrick xxviii).

opposition and resistance. Building from this discussion, she interrogates the ways in which black female subjects continue to negotiate and recontour these historical spaces in the geographies of the present moment.

Dominant geographic metanarratives, McKittrick argues, work to “naturalize both identity and place, repetitively spatializing where nondominant groups “naturally” belong” (xv). In response to this spatial control, as I have written elsewhere, “the demonic alters the very notion of territory: rather than existing as a stable marker of naturalized ‘place,’ territory becomes a fluid and local ground that develops with, rather than against, the subjectivities that inhabit the land” (Siklosi para. 2). Demonic grounds, then, are related to TAZs not only in the ways in which they both share a commitment to the fluidity of geographic territory, but also in their united challenge to politically naturalized conceptions of place and where bodies “belong.” In short, demonic grounds can be viewed as a more permanent manifestation of the TAZ, one that demonstrates the temporariness of geographic schemas by erecting alternative structures and autonomous zones. Both the demonic and the TAZ share the strategy of unpredictable uprising; as the word “demonic” suggests, unpredictability is central to its effectiveness as an oppositional geographical mode. The roots of the term “demonic,” as Wynter and McKittrick elucidate, is in mathematics, physics, and computer science. The demonic is defined by “a non-deterministic schema; it is a process that is hinged on uncertainty and non-linearity because the organizing principle cannot predict the future. This schema, this way of producing or desiring an outcome, calls into question ‘the always non-arbitrary, pre-prescribed’ parameters of sequential and classificatory linearity” (McKittrick xxiv). Here McKittrick quotes directly from Wynter (365), who uses the demonic to identify epistemological systems that cannot exist meaningfully within existing structures of knowledge and theory—whether by their exclusion or erasure. The non-

linearity of the demonic, then, opens a pathway through dominant geographic narratives to allow for black subjects to reimagine their position vis a vis significations of control. Like the TAZ, the efficacy of the demonic depends on its autonomous *unfolding*, on its ability to exist outside hegemonic codes of meaning and control and to create an alternative semantic economy. As I argue in this final section, the demonic is a useful extension of the concept of the TAZ by means of its adoption of geographical experimentation into established geographical transformation.

To establish this argument, it is necessary to first examine the sociopolitical context of Newark as a site of containment and control by the white governing class. Newark is often cited as a case in point of what Woodard calls the “postwar ghetto crisis” (“Message” 80) that boiled over in 1967, leading to “the greatest wave of urban violence the nation had ever seen” (Zinn 132).<sup>224</sup> These urban neighbourhoods (also in Detroit, Chicago, and Cleveland, among many other cities) were severely underserved by governmental services, leading to extreme poverty, unemployment, substandard housing conditions, and police brutality, and these conditions pushed the black residents to a breaking point. The urban crisis incensed the growing tensions in the community between black residents of the ghetto—in which an increasing Black Power sentiment was being fostered—and the wealthy white minority, who largely controlled the political and economic reigns of Newark (Upchurch 36). One of many central organizations that Baraka helped to found was CFUN (Committee for a Unified NewArk). CFUN’s mandate of self-government for the black community was fostered through a commitment to sociopolitical and cultural independence. As Woodard notes, CFUN’s efforts were directly responsive to the

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<sup>224</sup> Although rumblings of the Newark rebellion had been growing for a long time, there were two inciting incidents of the actual riots: first was the decision by the city planning committee to confiscate and sell a 150-acre plot of land in the centre of the black community to build a medical school. The local black community was already suffering from lack of suitable housing, so losing the housing complex on this plot of land would further devastate living conditions. Second, a riot broke out after police arrested and severely beat a black cab driver after a routine traffic stop. Days of intense rioting broke out after the incident, leading to 23 deaths (21 of which were black, and two white) (Upchurch 38). It was during these days of rebellion that Baraka was arrested and severely beaten at the hands of the police.

containment culture of the governing white classes, which sought to keep the black community ghettoized: “One important driving force in that process was the utter collapse of basic government and commercial services in the postwar ghetto” (Woodard, “Message” 92). The organization was instrumental in the establishment of independent social services, cooperative employment initiatives, and cultural centers in the post-Newark rebellion.

Aside from political initiatives on the local and national scale, Baraka and his affiliated organizations under the general banner of the Black Power Movement (Black Community Development and Defense, The Modern Black Convention Movement, to name a few) also fostered cultural and artistic development within the black local community. Aside from establishing theatre centers such as Spirit House, Baraka was also central to the establishment of independent newspapers—*Black NewArk* and *Unity and Struggle*—that reached both local and national readership, respectively. Moreover, Baraka continued to flourish as a literary producer and publisher; he established *Cricket*, a journal of jazz criticism, as well as Jihad Publications, an independent black publisher. A host of youth programs, African Free Schools, and radio programs were also established (Woodard, *A Nation* 2). That the imbrication of art and politics was at the centre of Baraka’s engagements at the time is obvious; the necessary respatialization of Newark and uprising in the black community, according to Baraka’s *poethic*, required efforts that fostered both aesthetic and political energy on the ground. As Baraka puts it plainly in his autobiography, “art and politics [are] not mutually exclusive” (*The Autobiography* 167). This creation of a demonic ground in the black “nation” involves a responsive process of recognizing the mechanics of existing structures of control and responding to these with alternative practices of place. As Baraka recognizes in “Sermon for our Maturity,”

We drift in space

as circles of feeling  
 All the presence of invisible influence  
 Controls the paths we take  
 Make the invisible visible  
     (within yr space  
 See the things you need to see  
 And know they exist  
 The world shapes and is to be shaped (*It's Nation* 14)

Here, Baraka encourages the black community to take stock of their space—to understand how their movements through space are controlled by the “invisible influence” of external forces of control. Once this spatial knowledge is gained, however—once the community “sees the things it needs to see”—they can proceed to reshape the world they live in by creating alternative, demonic nations and worlds.

To be sure, Baraka’s efforts in Newark, which led to permanent change in the community, were not without failures—or, figments of a spatial imaginary that failed to materialize. The latter definition is more fitting, especially in the context of this current project, since imagined geographies are political acts that are certainly as significant to the process of reterritorialization as those that become actuated. Indeed, as McKittrick notes, just the very “sayability” (xxiii) of imagined or proposed geographies interrupts occupied centres of control. As she argues, “‘saying,’ imagining, and living geography locates the kinds of creative and material openings traditional geographic arrangements disclose and conceal” (144). As demonstrated previously, the emphasis on projective sound and sayability in *In Our Terribleness* creates an alternative counter-narrative of urban space. The invocation of “terrible” as a descriptor for blackness and

black experience emphasizes its alterity, its “unknowability” outside white systems of control and signification. Indeed, these “concealed” narratives of experience in space are highly creative, according to the demonic mode; the experimental, creative response between the body and the environment form integrated, “living” geographies that resist spatial oppression.

On the ground in Newark, there were many imagined and “sayable” geographies that were proposed by Baraka and his affiliated organizations. The most significant proposal was the proposed collaborative project of Kawaida Towers,<sup>225</sup> a housing complex proposed by CFUN in 1972 that was meant not only to provide housing but, like Spirit House before it, was to be a central site of access to creative freedom and exploration for the black community.<sup>226</sup> Despite the promising proposal for change that the towers represented, the plans failed to come to fruition due to a series of racially-motivated events and decisions. The fate of the Towers was sealed by a city council vote to reject the proposed tax exemption that was crucial to fund the building. As Woodard explains, the inciting incident of the project’s failure was a challenge posed by a Rutgers professor who questioned the supposed cultural exclusivity of the towers. Since the towers were to be built in the North Ward of Newark, a predominantly white area, the professor asked why the project centred on African cultural traditions and excluded the area’s Italian heritage. This challenge ignited the fumes of racial tension between whites and blacks in the community. Soon after, mostly white picketers protested against the building of the towers, eventually successfully halting the construction process at the site (Woodard, *A Nation* 231). Subsequently, Kenneth Gibson, the black mayor that was helped into office by the efforts of Baraka and the black community in Newark, rallied against the project. The tax exemption

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<sup>225</sup> As Woodard notes, “Kawaida” is Swahili for “tradition or custom” (*A Nation* 120).

<sup>226</sup> The plans for Kawaida Towers as a practical housing site but moreso as a site of creative opportunity are elucidated by Woodard: “Kawaida Towers apartment building was designed with a basement and first-floor plan providing for a 300-seat theater with lighting, projection, and dressing rooms; a lounge, woodshop, hobby shop, day care center, and public kitchen; and rooms for art display, reading, and arts and crafts” (*A Nation* 228).

previously granted to the community housing project was then overturned, and the project came to a permanent halt in 1974 (251-253).

Although some geographic interventions in Newark would remain imagined, the post-rebellion initiatives within the black community are demonstrations of the ways in which the establishment of demonic grounds of resistance can alter existing oppressive codes of space and place. McKittrick argues that “the ungeographic is a colonial fiction” (5) wherein the enslavement, captivity, and dispersal of those black bodies places them “outside” of geography and space in terms of agency, possession, and production. Along these lines, the ghettoized black spaces of Newark similarly attempt to render their inhabitants “ungeographic”: with the black community having limited access to social services, housing, and opportunity, the boundaries that enclose the black wards of Newark from the white community keeps the black community “in place” according to racialized geographic codes. This process of urban geographic dispossession in the black community began to pick up steam in the 1950s, at a time when Newark saw much prosperity as businesses flourished and opportunities for the mostly white population were fruitful. In the same decade, a huge migration of “tens of thousands” of black migrants traveled up from the southern states in search of employment and opportunity in the city. The black populus faced segregation and was met with hostility by the white community, including local residents, business owners, and city government (Wharton 11-12). This displacement of black Newarkers by the white community and government illustrates a precarious claim to space for black subjects; however, by means of grassroots uprisings and the establishment of allied institutions, the black community in Newark counteracted geographic dispossession with demonic grounds of geographic liberation and independence.

In their engagements with dominant geographic schemes, demonic grounds “identify a different way of knowing and writing the social world and ... expand how the production of space is achieved across terrains of domination” (McKittrick xiv). The establishment of alternative schools, social programs, housing, and community services as a grassroots effort by the community reterritorializes Newark as the demonic ground of New Ark. As Woodard confirms, “The cultural nationalist strategy of African American militants was to develop parallel black institutions in that void left by the urban crisis” (“Message” 92).<sup>227</sup> Although the project of Baraka’s black nationalism was certainly interested in overthrowing and eradicating the white power structures of control, it did not do so in an effort to displace or mimic these structures, but to establish parallel structures that serve the independent, self-governing black community that had been ignored by “benign neglect.” Indeed, McKittrick is careful to suggest that the demonic does not operate as a displacement of dominant geographic schemas—it serves not to eradicate them, but to exist *alongside* them as alternative narratives. For, as she notes, the spatial knowledges possessed by black subjects are particular and specific in and of themselves, and the beauty with which Baraka illuminates the “terribleness” of blackness in *In Our Terribleness* is a testament to this. The tone of Baraka’s *It’s Nation Time* is similarly confirming of the beauty that exists in blackness as it resonates within space:

Yr body is all space  
 Yr feet is valley makers  
 ...  
 Sing about your pure movement

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<sup>227</sup> The urban crisis Woodard speaks of centers around the controversial policy of “benign neglect” in racial matters in America, as proposed in 1969 by Daniel Patrick Moynihan to President Nixon. As Moynihan writes in a memorandum to the president, “The time may have come when the issue of race could benefit from a period of ‘benign neglect’” (qtd. in Kotlowski 173).

in space

Grow (16)

The transformation of Newark into New Ark, then, exceeds the metaphor of its new namesake by representing the power of poetry in action to transform “geographies of domination” (McKittrick xi). Further to this point, the community-based activism transformed more than just the spatial codes and ordinances of Newark: it altered the ways in which the place resonates for the black community as a signifier of place. In *In Our Terribleness*, Baraka refers to the cities as alien spaces of white power and control; as such, cities appear to the speaker as “ugly” and as “examples / of white art. white feeling” along with “the laws, the rule (s), the ethos” (n.p.). However, Baraka’s combined *poethic*—his imaginative poetic work coupled with his material political work—engenders a transformation of urban space. The spatial awareness fostered by Baraka initiated a shift in communal consciousness that redefined the space of the postwar ghetto—a spatial tool of geographic limitation put on black bodies—as a space of community. In order for this transformation to occur, a revised consciousness of responsibility was crucial. As Baraka insists in the poem *AFRIKAN REVOLUTION* (1973):

Be conscious

meet once a week

Meet once a week. Talk about how to get

more money, how to get educated, how

to have scientists for children rather than

junkies. How to kill the roaches. How to

stop the toilet from stinking. How to get a

better job. Once a week. Start NOW.

How to dress better. How to read.

How to live longer. How to be respected.

Meet once a week. Once a week.

All over the world. We need to meet once a  
week. (5)

As a manual of self-governance for the black community, here the poem talks the talk and walks the walk, so to speak. Baraka offers practical means by which the community can uprise from its oppression and gain the self-knowledge needed to transform its space into meaningful place. The practice of place that Baraka imagines in *In Our Terribleness* comes full circle into a *practice of living* in New Ark; what he imagines is more demonic ground than *temporary* autonomous zone, in that there is a urgent sense of regularity and permanence to these institutions in order for them to be truly transformative. Having fully abandoned the notion of poetry as purely imaginative and ornamental, here Baraka uses poetry didactically to provide a guidebook of the new collective consciousness needed to transform the space of black oppression to one of self-determined liberation.

In this way, the newly baptized New Ark lives out Kropotkin's anarchist tenet of "mutual aid" that Duncan also held as a guiding *poethic*. As with Duncan, Baraka is deeply concerned with creating a community of responsive and responsible individuals working together for the "mutual aid" of the whole. To accomplish this, Baraka, like Duncan, establishes certain households that were both materialized and imagined—Spirit House, BARTS, Kawaida Towers, among many—that transformed the limited geography of the community into a vibrant working

collective.<sup>228</sup> Indeed, the very name change of Newark to New Ark suggests a community of “chosen” self-determined individuals as opposed to those left to the wayside of urban renewal. As I discussed in the chapter on Duncan, his household with Jess became a central aesthetic and political hub for San Francisco artists and intellectuals (especially those who identified as homosexual). Further, his invocation of the “household” of the whole in his poetic work establishes the material household as a microcosm of the larger household to which all belong. Baraka’s ideology takes a similar approach, but since the cosmology of his Black Mountain peers tired on his realist worldview, he is more interested in the material, local to national community committed to Black Power.

As such, Baraka’s established households in urban space become models for black nation-building in the United States. For Glissant, the “decisive act” of the writer “consists also of building a nation” and “assembl[ing] a common will by which *we* might be forged” (*Poetic Intention* 171; my emphasis). Hence Baraka’s later rallying cry in the poem “It’s Nation Time,” “Time to get / together / time to be one strong fast black energy space / one pulsating positive magnetism, rising” (21). In calling for the establishment of a “fast black energy space,” he continues to use the language of field composition, but towards the ends of actual spatial transformation on the ground of the local and translocally to the mobile black nation. Taking cue from the localized efforts in the New Ark reterritorialization, Baraka calls to the national community to come into a compounded awareness. In this way, Baraka demonstrates the efficacy of mutual aid and collective action beyond ideology by applying these anarchist principles to geographical transformations led by the community. As he writes in his *Autobiography*, “many of us feel since we are ‘anti-establishment’ that that makes us heroes.

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<sup>228</sup> Baraka’s efforts with CFUN also fostered solidarity efforts with Newark’s Puerto Rican minority community (together, the black and Puerto Rican community constituted over 65 percent of the population), resulting in a “Community Choice” slate of political candidates for the 1970 election in Newark (Woodard, *A Nation* 114-115).

Nonsense. Most such anti-establishmentarianism is just petty bourgeois anarchism and failure to take up the responsibility intellectuals had better understand they have to actually help make life better for all of us” (237-238). For Baraka, while anarchism possesses significant transformative power, without demonstrated social action, it simply becomes another “petty bourgeois” ideology.

By means of the imagined geographies initiated by the field poetic of his work, and also by his commitment to changing the geographic conditions from which he writes, Baraka truly embodies Olson’s dictum of “what does not change / is the will to change” (“The Kingfishers” 5). By means of a fierce commitment to the Black Mountain dictum of action and continual movement, Baraka’s work harnesses the energy of the field for the community, for communal change. The TAZ of *In Our Terribleness*, the imagined polis of an occupied urban space of black community, ceases to remain temporary and leads to real reterritorializations of space in the demonic ground of New Ark. This is not to undermine Baraka’s poetic efforts; rather, as I have demonstrated alongside the work of McKittrick, these imagined geographies represent crucial frontiers of possibility. Baraka’s early appropriation of the projective, open field poetic permits him to perceive of imagined spaces as a *measure* of the real, and, further, as a means of catalyzing material change in urban spaces. In this way, Baraka enacts Edward Soja’s suggestion of the ways in which, from the vantage of the interpretive locale of the artist or writer, an “imagined geography tends to become the ‘real’ geography, with the image or representation coming to define and order reality” (*Thirdspace* 79). Baraka’s work demonstrates the capacity for real and imagined spaces to come together as co-constructed; moreover, his aesthetic and political engagements on the ground demonstrate how this imbricated spatial imaginary may be

grafted onto actual space, with the built New Ark signaling the transformation of boundary into *frontier*.

**“Returning & the Journeys”: Translocal Place in the Work of Fred Wah and Daphne Marlatt<sup>229</sup>**

passageways pose no easy passage...<sup>230</sup>

—Daphne Marlatt

I mean home as a verb.<sup>231</sup>

—Fred Wah

In light of the interventionist work done by Baraka to reterritorialize space and place in the postwar spatial imaginary, it becomes apparent that, although the projective model and proprioceptive hermeneutic is a valid poetic praxis, it needs to be adapted and *reterritorialized* to different bodies and locales. The work of Fred Wah and Daphne Marlatt certainly takes up the challenge, for their respective spatial hermeneutics draw on their inheritance of Olson’s and Duncan’s spatial groundings but adapt them in order to articulate their own positionality vis-à-vis the local landscape, historicity, and literary tradition. Musing on the futile “lyric I” and fixed inherited poetic constructions in the face of open, projective field poetics, Olson writes in “A Later Note on Letter #15”: “The poetics of such a situation / are yet to be found out.” (*The Maximus* 249). Wah and Marlatt take up this call, as their explorations of the local lead to a reconfiguration of its spatial contours. In their work, the local is inflected with the distinctions of race and gender—factors that orient one’s interpretation of surrounding space, and how one comes to identify, write, and live through place.

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<sup>229</sup> Wah, *Music* 21. “Journeying & the Returns” is the title of a 1967 poetry collection by bpNichol.

<sup>230</sup> *Readings* 183.

<sup>231</sup> *Faking It* 45.

### **Laying Groundwork, Mobilizing the Field: Wah's and Marlatt's Black Mountain**

Both Olson's and Duncan's influence is palpable in Wah's and Marlatt's work, as these latter writers compose place-based poetry from the particulars of local space that informs their place. Moreover, similarly to Olson and Duncan, both Wah and Marlatt see the responsibility of the poet as central to their *ecopoethic*. Although their poetic narratives are deeply personal in their reflection, both writers, like Olson and Duncan, are interested in formulating a poetic space within which a larger community may find practiced place. As discussed in Chapter Two, the containment culture of the Cold War imposed regulations and restrictions on bodies and occupied spaces; as a resistance to this State spatiality, Duncan's household offered an enclave in which to foster community and multiple practices of living. This concept of creating multiple practices of living relates to Wah's work in terms of his focus on hybridity and race. In Wah's poetry, a hyphenated racial identity—wherein the hyphen is considered a nexus of multiplicity, not a separator of insular singularities—resists the closure and knowability of nationhood and discourses of fixed origin. These structures, as I intimated in Chapter Two, are inscribed by the State to keep people “in place.” The culture that has arisen from this focus on nation and origin, especially in the Canadian context, encourages discourse of “belonging” in a place and/or to a place, which inscribes origin as a necessary articulation and validation of one's identity. Moreover, the stress on origin defines what is simply *not* Canadian—Wah's identity as Chinese-Canadian signifies his distance from the nation, to some degree, and also his being from “elsewhere,” not “here.” However, as this chapter explores, for Wah, the hyphen is not a marker of separation, but a nexus that allows for creative engagement between, across, and from within multiple sites of identity. The space of the hyphen is a dynamic field in and of itself; from within it, a constellatory identity may be articulated along multiple sites, outside given categories.

Wah situates his poetic praxis as directly reflective of his hyphenated racial identity: his father was born in Canada to a Chinese father and a Scots-Irish mother, and his mother was a Swedish-born Canadian. As he writes in *Breathin' My Name with a Sigh*, he is continually entrenched in a process of “Waiting ... for [his] body to get complete” (n.p.) without ever getting there. Indeed, Wah’s project is that of finding what’s in between, investigating the spatial possibilities of the interstitial gaps between multiple subject positions. In 2010, Wah was awarded the Dorothy Livesay Poetry Prize for his 2009 collection *is a door*. On that occasion, Wah reflected on his poetic career and stated: “My writing has been sustained, primarily, by two interests: racial hybridity and the local, the landscape of the Kootenays in southeastern BC; its mountains, lakes, and forests” (“WAH, Fred” n.p.). As this chapter will demonstrate, for Wah, these two poetic interests are not separate, but are, in themselves, compounded or hyphenated. They identify local points of place along a mapped trajectory that has continued to develop over the course of his poetic career.

Undoubtedly, Wah carries forth the Black Mountain insistence on the local as the “fact of one’s place,” as Olson would have it. The process of transplanting the spirit of Olson’s local Gloucester, with “Olson’s dirt still dangling from the roots” (Wah, *Faking It* 45) across the border to his own roots and soil in British Columbia, however, provides Wah with an intriguing problematic: that one’s fact of place is not a singular, fixed place-marker, but more of a moving vector, a set of coordinates along constellatory axes as opposed to a fixed foothold in the polis. I seek to demonstrate how Wah adopts the poetics of projection, proprioception, and grounding from Olson and Duncan to demonstrate how these terms can be both adopted and revised. Like Olson, Wah is deeply concerned with “digging” the local landscape and its history in order to situate himself within the processes of place; however, he extends this local view to include

multiple views, engendered by his hyphenated racial identity, which produces multiple racial subject positions. Like Duncan, Wah is interested in creating a community *in place*; however, unlike Duncan, Wah's poetics do not stress preservation of literary tradition through contribution and extension. Whereas Duncan's work preserves an imagined literary community by means of a poetic chrestomathy that pays homage through catalogued allusions to his high modernist predecessors, Wah is more interested in finding his place in the change, the break, the interventionary hyphen.

In terms of breaking and extending with Black Mountain tradition, Daphne Marlatt's work is exemplary of the ways in which the projective open field poetic can be adopted and adapted to fit the social particularity of gender as a means of interpreting place. When reflecting on Olson's influence in her own work, Marlatt highlights their common interest in etymology, history, and the local as markers of place. In her essay "Difference (em)bracing," Marlatt refers to Olson as her poetic mentor and "master" due to his presence in Vancouver in the 1960s, but she also expresses concern for his masculine poetic gaze:

Somehow reading 'the poet, he' to include me, i trained myself in that poetic, the injunctions to get rid of the lyric ego, not to 'sprawl,' in loose description or emotion ungrounded in image, to pay strict attention to the conjoined movement of body (breath) and mind in the movement of the line, though it didn't occur to me then to wonder whether my somewhat battered female ego was anything like a man's, or whether my woman's body had different rhythms from his, or whether my female experience might not give me an alternate 'stance' in the world (one that wasn't so much 'in' as both in & outside of a male-dominated politic & economy. (191)

As her reflections suggest, Marlatt has learned the forms and rhythms of open, projective verse, as well as the importance of “stance” and view, from Olson; however, she questions the monolithic and singular nature of Olson’s narrative of place. While trying to read herself in Olson’s male poet perspective, it occurred to Marlatt that the rhythms of her body are different: that in terms of the female body’s relation to the landscape, “the geography . . . doesn’t quite fit” (*How Hug* 44).

As will be argued throughout this chapter, as a woman with different historical relations to colonization and empire, Marlatt’s experiences offer an alternate stance in the world, and a different poetic translation of locality, place, and view. After encountering French feminist thought in the early 1980s, and after coming out as a lesbian during that time, Marlatt began to revise her orientation towards the local. By critiquing the bottom-up approach to place as taught by Olson, she instead proposes the labyrinth as her guiding spatial metaphor to articulate her negotiation of the textual ground of tradition. As I will demonstrate, the labyrinth responds to many of the spatial hermeneutics throughout this project, such as Olson’s polis and Duncan’s passages, by presenting an alternative method of way-finding through language and writing. Since for Marlatt, “passageways pose no easy passage” within the patriarchal structures she inherits, the labyrinth offers an alternative textual field for the female writer (and, as I will discuss, for any writer who seeks to articulate place outside patriarchal systems of thought) who seeks alternate and more particular access to space and place. By opening alternative routes (and roots) through the rereading and rewriting process, way-finding through the labyrinth reinstates a female subject position from which to speak and contribute to a predominantly male tradition of place-based poetics.

Like Olson, Marlatt is concerned with the *mythology* of the local place from which her textual-material body is grounded. As I discuss in a later section of this chapter, both look to megaliths to explore their projective stance in the world; however, their chosen representative megaliths present radically different articulations of space and place. In *The Maximus Poems*, the “true” facts of place in the polis are articulated through Olson’s re-imagining of Maximus as the Hurrian mythological figure “diorite man” (II.16) who grows vertically from the earth. In her autobiographical travel text *How Hug A Stone*, Marlatt as poet-protagonist finds a corporeal and linguistic connection with the circles of “squat stone mothers” (64) in the Neolithic stone circles of Avebury in England. Marlatt’s feminist iteration of the megalith as “stone (mother)” (75) suggests that for her, “the local” is not a bounded spatial phenomenon as Olson would have it, but is expressed as a moving trajectory that is tied to one’s ancestral place and inherited language.

Moreover, Marlatt’s stone mother megaliths offer a means of seeing place as a nomadic phenomenon—not just a moving local, but one that is agential in its particular movements across time and space. A similar nomadic poetic is seen in Wah’s work, since the hyphen functions as a vehicle of articulating multiple experiences in place—both past and present places held in dialectical tension—that contribute to the ongoing process of creating and knowing place. In light of Wah’s and Marlatt’s reinterpretation of the local along nomadic lines, Deleuze and Guattari’s theory of nomadology offers an appropriate lens to think through this spatial revision of place-making. The concept is readily adaptable by postcolonial and gender studies for its potential to create alternative spaces of liberatory movement that resist the fixity and stasis of structures of control, such as governments and nations. Given its specific emphasis on resistant movement through space, Deleuze and Guattari’s framework of nomadic deterritorialization will

prove useful as a lens for examining the ways in which Wah and Marlatt resist established colonial and national totalizing narratives of identity. In their construction of fluid identities in the space between borders, Wah's and Marlatt's trajectories of place markedly contest statist scripts that attempt to homogenize the movements and behaviours of people within a given territory. Further, as I will discuss throughout this chapter, both Wah's hyphen and Marlatt's nomadic traversals of landscape along the lines of memory and desire together articulate what I call a *translocal* poetic of place: that is, they both extend the local of projective verse beyond its roots, making it mobile, fluid, and open to change.

For some of my understanding and use of the specific term “translocal,” I am indebted to James Clifford in his work *Routes: Travel and Translation in the Late Twentieth Century* (1997). For Clifford, the concept of travel—with its undercurrents of mobility and exchange—is a more nuanced term for the ways in which people relate to place, as opposed to fixity or origin in a specific location. As Clifford argues, “when borders gain a paradoxical centrality, margins, edges, and lines of communication emerge as complex maps and histories” (Clifford 7). Rather than an inert marker of geographical territory, the border under Clifford's scope becomes a complex and porous system of relationships in which the relation to place can be articulated translocally, between and across these varied relations. When applied as a lens upon Projective Verse, the translocal extends the discussion of place-based poetics outward from the rooted local to consider the borders between spaces and places and the tensions between that inflect one's articulation of place.

In the context of Wah's and Marlatt's work, the translocal is an appropriate spatial metaphor for articulating the shifting borders within their poetic articulations of place. For Olson, local space—albeit with its involvement in multiple historical processes such as

geological and migratory progress—becomes the contact zone for his poetics of place. For Wah and Marlatt, however, the border—with its porous edges and margins creating a fecund site of interaction and relation—becomes the contact zone. Indeed, their works are interested in the concept of border(ing) in many ways: most obviously, the border emerges in their work as a cross-border pollination of ideas, since they are both Canadian writers influenced by the American place-based poetics of Black Mountain. Further, however, while their work is deeply interested in local space, they are both equally interested in the ways in which *bordering*, as an active verb, describes the process of understanding one's place as articulated and lived between different s/cites. Such bordering practices place emphasis on the relations that underline place as a heterogeneous mixture of relations, not a given set of immovable, static absolutes. The translocal, then, offers a means of investigating the local concerns of Wah's and Marlatt's poetics that they learned from Black Mountain; moreover, it offers a means of exploring these local relations in the wider context of cultural relations and social distinctions, such as race and gender.

As seen in the last chapter on Baraka and in the first chapter on Olson, the trips these writers made south to Cuba and to the Yucatán, respectively, involved a translocal articulation of place: that is, the movement between sites and their interaction with the social and political particularities of those sites was critical groundwork that informed their sense of local place in very concrete ways. For Baraka, the revolutionary spirit of the Cuban rebels demonstrated plainly for him the ways in which art and ideology can be mobilized beyond the scope of the page and onto geographies transformed anew. For Olson, traveling to early sites of human existence in the Mayan ruins gave him insight into an alternative way of being, another way of using and relating to space outside the American industrialist capitalism state in which he found

himself. Since Gloucester's past was, for Olson, a pristine state of self-reliance and resistance to such a system, he saw his fieldwork in the Yucatán as a means of establishing contact with this ideal human community now passed. Understanding this early society is thus "a first law to a restoration of the human house" (Olson, "Human" 158).

As my analysis to follow demonstrates, the term translocal also partially arises from Wah's concept of "*trans* poetics," (*Faking It* 91; original emphasis). As Wah explains, the main strategies of *trans* poetics involve "translation, transference, transition, [and] transposition" (90). These *trans* methodologies are employed and developed by both Wah and Marlatt as resistant strategies that work against totalizing narratives of identity-formation. Fundamentally, the translocal poetic highlights locality and place as *produced*, thereby unhinging it from "origin." Moreover, these key (re)vision tactics encompass a translocal poetic activism that seeks continual border-crossings and nomadic traversals as opposed to fixity "in place." Rather than seeing rootedness as an ideal of identity, Wah's and Marlatt's translocal poetic creates mobile spaces of creative resistance, Temporary Autonomous Zones that resist the containment of identity by statist and patriarchal hierarchies and narratives.

Wah's *Diamond Grill* and Marlatt's *How Hug A Stone* are *translocal* texts that extend the ontological local inherited from Olson and Duncan into a nomadic articulation of space and place along multiple, constellatory pathways. In so doing, the local is redefined as a radical *s/cite* of polyvocality and mobility.<sup>232</sup> The translocal spatial methodology is attentive to the "from which" a writer writes, and it incorporates the various levels of spatiality articulated by Olson and Duncan's spatial imaginaries. In short, these translocal texts expand the field of the local from its

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<sup>232</sup> Again, by playing on the words "site" and "cite," I aim to demonstrate how the local is never purely a physical or textual space, but rather is always hinged: it is both physical, as in "the local," and literary, as in "tradition." Thinking of the local as a *site/cite* dichotomy allows me to examine the ways in which Wah's and Marlatt's poetic spatial practices respond to and revise both their personal locals and the greater local of literary tradition from which they write.

Black Mountain roots to incorporate the complex local relations of race and gender that are integral to one's conception of being in place. Along the lines of Lefebvre and de Certeau's conception of spatiality, Wah's and Marlatt's work brings to light the local as not a "given" but as something that is *produced* from relations in the environment. Olson's dictum of "Root person in root place" (*The Maximus* I.12) is expanded in the poetry of Wah and Marlatt—the roots spread further, into other locales of memory and the present moment that form a translocal rhizome of locality. Such a view of the local as produced across boundaries of physical spaces and places reinserts individual agency in the production of identity outside the power structures of nationhood and "belonging" that aim to keep bodies in place.

Importantly, the translocal does not propose a disavowal of the local, nor a transcendence of it in the production of space and place. Rather, the translocal invites a border-crossing: unhinging the local from origin, it incorporates the multiple locals of one's past and present. As demonstrated by Wah and Marlatt, the translocal thus facilitates a response to the call from Homi K. Bhabha for "differential identities" to "find their agency in a form of the 'future' where the past is not originary, where the present is not simply transitory ... an interstitial future, that emerges in-between the claims of the past and the needs of the present" (313). Suturing multiple locals together connects one's experience of place to a broader field of interactions that links the past, present, and future. Moreover, a translocal articulation of place situates the local as a starting point, a grounding *s/cite* wherein broader implications of place-making may be negotiated beyond these geographic bounds.

There is a discursive tendency, especially in American literature, to consider rootedness in a singular local (as opposed to traveling or drifting) as tantamount to a stable identity that belongs to a particular place. As such, place-based American poetics—of which Thoreau's

*Walden* (1854) is exemplary—is often critiqued for being a white masculinist poetic, since the “privilege” of the singular local as the paramount American landscape and identity-marker often does not take into account its very privilege. To move, travel, and drift in place, detached from a “home” site, is a practice of place that many subjects must take up due to historical conditions marking a difficult access to place, as the last chapter on Baraka demonstrates. Moreover, this concept of the stable local as a privileged marker of identity is the underlying agenda of the nation-state, which attempts to make the nation an expanded “local” of homogenous identity. However, translocality, as an alternative place-based understanding of identity with emphasis on border-crossings and mobility, should not be underestimated as a process of creating and producing identity “in place.” Indeed, translocality “deliberately confuses the boundaries of the local in an effort to capture the increasingly complicated nature of spatial processes and identities, yet it insists on viewing such processes and identities as place-based rather than exclusively mobile, uprooted, or ‘travelling’” (Oakes and Schein 20). Ultimately, the translocal eschews the view that place must signify a connection to land that is internally validated by historical or geographic processes; instead, the translocal imagines that spatial production can occur across many oscillating locals to articulate a nuanced positionality “in place.” It resists the discursive closure of restrictive and oppressive spatial controls such as “fixed origin” and “nationhood,” and thus allows for alternative and multiple articulations between different bodies and different landscapes.

Put plainly, both Wah’s and Marlatt’s specific engagements with race and gender mobilize the local. As Wah insists, “I mean home as a verb” (*Faking It* 45), and for Marlatt, her poetic registers “the mobility of time and space in the immanence of a language invoked by desire” (Marlatt, “Daphne” 474). Both writers thus engage with space along the lines of de Certeau’s

concept of “practiced place” as discussed throughout this project. Wah’s and Marlatt’s practice of place is not so much an attempt to find belonging in place, but, in line with the projective mode, is a mapping of a nomadic trajectory that, like the TAZ, *keeps moving* through, with, and against space.

### “The sureness of shifting”: Experimenting with Local Place in Wah’s Early Works<sup>233</sup>

Biology recapitulates geography; place becomes an island in the blood.<sup>234</sup>

—Fred Wah

The actual world speaks to me, and when it comes to that pitch, the words I speak with but imitate the way the mountain speaks. I create *in return*.<sup>235</sup>

—Robert Duncan

In his earlier works such as *Mountain* (1967), *Among* (1972), *Tree* (1972), *Earth* (1974), and *Pictograms from the Interior of B.C.* (1975), Wah’s work emanates from a more direct connection with a particular local landscape as inherited from his Black Mountain mentors. Olson’s focused attention on the polis of Gloucester was very influential to Wah in his early work, which focused on the Kootenay mountain region of British Columbia. Reflecting on his poetry in the ‘60s and ‘70s, Wah writes: “I was looking for a language to enact the geographical, to align the body with the place; literal sensation of being there, moving through the bush, touch, looking at all. But the poem itself works with the phenomenal and generates, at least for me, a movement that is open to investigation, surprise, turn” (*The False* 68). As is clearly evident, even the very titles of these earlier works together form a collage of particulars forming the local landscape of Wah’s B.C. home. Rather than speak of the local landscape in the abstract, in these

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<sup>233</sup> Wah, *Faking It* 101.

<sup>234</sup> *Diamond Grill* 23.

<sup>235</sup> *Fictive* 125; original emphasis.

early works Wah does his groundwork by situating himself directly in and among the flora and fauna of the Kootenays.

In his introduction to *The False Laws of Narrative: The Poetry of Fred Wah*, Louis Cabri discusses Wah's inheritance of the collage form from Duncan. Whereas Duncan's groundwork involves tilling the fields of traditional stories and myths entrenched in ancient history, Wah's groundwork is more intensely local, digging in the more immediate local mythology of the B.C. landscape. As Cabri observes, "Wah's poetry disentangles itself from modernist ambitions of representing a 'grand collage' of 'old stories' based on a cultures-of-the-world unity" (x).<sup>236</sup> In these early works, Wah oscillates between Olson and Duncan's versions of *what* is local. Duncan certainly thought that ancient mythologies from "elsewhere," when brought together by the poet in the immediacy of collage, brings these stories into the poet's local present. Olson often criticized Duncan, however, for "trafficking" in signs not his own in terms of the wisdom he sought out, as I noted in my previous chapters. Wah's local poetic seems caught in the middle—he sides with Olson in that the local should be what is *immediate* to him, what is geographically rooted, but he is also interested in the "old stories" as Duncan is. That is, Wah's poetic makes use of the old stories that are geographically proximal to him in British Columbia.

Wah remains local in his groundwork mythologies, for the "old stories" that arise in his work are not derived from ancient Greek or Christian myths but are more immediate to the landscape from which he writes. Wah thus cites Gary Snyder's poem "Riprap" as an influence on his own writing in terms of "its clear sense of 'work' in the mountains, work that I had done and felt" (*False* 68). Indeed, rather than undertaking an odyssey through the ground of literary tradition, Wah is interested in his actual footprints through space as representative of his translocal poetic. He brings together his influences from Olson and Duncan to insist that "[t]he

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<sup>236</sup> As Cabri rightly points out, "Duncan, curiously, overlooks Aboriginal myths" (x).

‘nomadology’ (Deleuze and Guattari) of the ethnic writer, that is the figuring out where she is, where to go, how to move, not just through language but in the world, is an investigation of place, as well as a placement in said place” (*Faking It* 56). Indeed, both Wah and Marlatt use the field *poethic* not only a means of articulating place, but also as a means of investigating the very construction of place, how it signifies in the cultural imaginary of our contemporary milieu. This investigation of and placement in place as movement through language and through the world is a poetic that is established in Wah’s early work, as will be demonstrated shortly, and is later extended in later works such as *Diamond Grill* (1996).

Over his career, however, Wah becomes more entrenched in problematizing this early conception of the local he learns from Black Mountain, finding it too restrictive and tied to a false claim of origins and originary “belonging.” Accordingly, he attempts to articulate his *trans*-ing subject position using the spatial metaphor of the hyphen, a metaphor that brings to light a nexus of relations between person and place that creates a new ontological space of belonging *across*, not merely within.<sup>237</sup> In an interview with Ashok Mathur, Wah emphasizes the ambivalent polyvalence of the hyphen as productive of a mobile identity, an identity that is always becoming:

[I]dentity is never pure, never sure. And in that the hybrid has as much possibility of ‘a’ sure racial identity as anyone; the only thing sure about it, however, is, as you suggest, that it’s always shifting. The sureness of shifting. (*Faking It* 101)

I would thus posit Wah’s later poetic turn as a shift from an Olsonian conception of place as firmly rooted in one’s own local geography to a translocal conception of place as a drifting trajectory that encompasses many spaces and places. To be sure, Wah was not a passive receiver

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<sup>237</sup> It is not my intention here to evoke or blur over transgender discourse by using the term “trans-.” Wah uses “trans” specifically as a term for his poetics in *Faking It* (90).

of Olson's influence; although his early work is steeped in the local landscape, this landscape is never static, and it is also never "sure." As I will demonstrate in a moment, even in these earlier works, we see Wah adapting the local to initiate a politics of shifting place.

As will be discussed in this section and the one following, Wah's conception of the local across multiple times, spaces, and places is reflective of Duncan's collage technique fused with Wah's poetic of "faking it." As he writes in the afterword to *Loki Is Buried at Smoky Creek*, a book of his selected early poems, "Oaxaca, Vancouver, the Kootenay River a thousand years ago or today, my father's father's birthplace, become 'local' to me and compound to make up a picture of a world I am native of. Writing is sometimes remembering this image, and sometimes it has to make it up" (126). To be sure, Wah's later work does not eschew the local, but extrapolates it by tracing a moving, collaged local that informs his identity along multiple points of connection with the landscape(s) of his present and past. Although I cannot chart a complete trajectory of the local throughout all of Wah's work, I will focus briefly on how the local is manifest in Wah's early collections in order to set the context for his translocal turn.

Indeed, Wah's early articulations of the local, and his place within it, betray a sense of space and place that is immediate to the body as it moves in and through space; in this way, his early work expresses a measure of the local that is always active and *becoming*. As he insists regarding his vantage point, "I see things from where I am, my view point, and I measure and imagine a world from there" (*Loki* 126). George Bowering attributes this participatory sensibility in Wah's earlier work directly to Duncan and his Romantic influences. As he observes,

We remember that Coleridge & Duncan both insist on a cooperation (& varying leadership) among the physical-mental faculties, rather than the generalship of the mind in a composer's individual's chain of being. ... keeping in mind [Wah's]



the mind of the plant  
 growing out of the earth  
 becomes a hole  
 ...  
 its only a part of the plan  
 yet a part  
 and looms out  
 from the middle of a place  
 part of itself  
 now part of  
 any (n.p.)

As with Duncan's conception of the parts of the collage contributing to a whole yet retaining their individuality, the flora of the landscape remain agential in their being, yet also form an intergral network of living that is the ecosystem. Hence, in the above passage, the tree is "an illuminated hole" but is only "part of the plan" that extends outwards, "now part of / any."

Further, Wah's characterization of the tree as an individual "only part of the plan / *yet a part*," emphasizes its place within a larger network of other integral "parts" that form the whole.

Throughout Wah's work, trees, in particular, appear to be conscious agents and participants in this larger system. In the above poem, Wah speaks of a tree "lighted by the luminescence of its plan / the system of itself" (n.p.). In "Hermes in the Trees" of the same collection, to the prospect of the oncoming spring, Wah asks, "(can their [the trees] own roots know any of it?)" (n.p.).

Wah's attribution of consciousness to the tree, as well as his insistence on a "plan" of its own,

reveals a non-hierarchical ethos that underlies his spatial imaginary, one that establishes a common agency between humans and non-humans in the field.

Wah's early articulation of the local is thus commensurate with an articulation of community and exchange with other objects, creating a collaged "whole" of autonomous yet related parts—hence the name of another of his early collections, *Among* (1972). The intricately interconnected design of the ecosystem is adopted by Wah as an *ecopoethic* that also includes his being: the self is not an island, but is an active participant that is imbricated in the greater processes of the land. In this way, Wah adopts Duncan's concept of rime to suggest that the self is a rime for things that exist together in the ecosystem, such as the tree. For Wah, the self and the tree share an underlying organicism, a common relation and resonance. Hence, when Wah suggests in the first poem of *Among*, "I tree myself," (7) he makes the self and the tree rime—both are parts that form a grand system of *communitas* and exchange.<sup>239</sup> As Wah writes:

The delight of making inner  
 an outer world for me  
 is when I tree myself  
 and my slight voice screams glee  
 ...  
 out of the trees  
 among, among (7)

When Wah writes, "I tree myself," he is punning on the verb "tree," as in to climb a tree, but also in reference to himself "becoming" a tree. Moreover, to "tree" a hunted animal means to force it to take refuge in the branches; for Wah to be so overcome by the vibratory connection between

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<sup>239</sup> It is worth noting here that the tree (and its branches) is a trope that continues throughout Wah's work to signify, as I state here, the underlying relation between objects in the environment, but also Wah's interrogation of familial origin and roots, as in "This Dendrite Map: Father/Mother Haibun" in *Waiting for Saskatchewan* (1985).

the natural environment and his body that he is “treed” by it makes these lines ever more forceful. In making “tree” a verb that describes a process of selving, Wah highlights the tree as a participatory force in the environment, one that acts and is acted upon by (and *among*) the other objects that surround it. For Duncan, as for Wah, the world is an intimately *textual* landscape that fuses the act of reading and writing with the practice of living. The correspondences and “rimes” underlying all things in the great field creates poetry out of the dailiness of life; moreover, these microrelations—patterns and correspondences between entities of the field—allow us glimpses of the grand whole, the “It” as Duncan terms it, that we cannot apprehend. Hence Wah’s rime of his self with the tree ultimately transports him, in the moment of “reading” this correspondence, “out of the trees, / among, among.” The microrelation he feels between himself and the tree as participants in the ecosystem allows him to perceive the greater system of correspondences, the grand “among” to which they belong.

Accordingly, along this trajectory of correspondences in the poem, other parts arise to form the great “symposium of the whole,” as Duncan puts it. In the middle of the poem, Wah writes, “my voice screams glee to him,” the “him” referring to an allusive other, “now preparing his craft for the Bifrost / Kerykeion, he said” (7). These obscure classical references to a bridge connecting the world of the gods and the human world, and Hermes’ winged staff, respectively, are not meant to directly invoke classical mythology per se, but serve most significantly to disrupt the diction of the poem, which is simple and clear overall, with jarring particulars. Wah is attempting to draw connections between both the “given” and the highly specific aspects of the landscape—so the tree and “the shore” appear alongside classical Greek references that are also discernible resonances within the geography of the place. These elements are each particular in and of themselves, but together form a greater community of “what is.” Indeed, Wah’s awkward

enjambments throughout these lines produce an overall semantic ambiguity that engenders multiple possible readings of these particulars as they fit into a whole within the poem. Along with the tree, with Wah's self, and with "the shore," these particulars in the poem come together to form "a cold March mist" (again, quite particular) that "moves / down through the cow pasture / out of the trees / among, among" (7). The mist here thus becomes beautifully evocative as a metaphor for the system of moving correspondences between these shifting particulars that permeates the landscape and the field of the poem.

In the above encounter with the landscape, we see Wah's early experimentations with the dialectic of the hyphen, which will be discussed at length later in this chapter. The dialectic between inside and outside in the above poems opens both spaces to creative engagement and reciprocal influence. Wah explicitly rejoices in "making inner / an outer world" and the play on words here is significant, for it emphasizes the poet's contact with the landscape as fundamentally *creative*, much like Duncan's dance ground and meadow. The co-presencing here of the poet *among* the tree is also reflective of Deleuze and Guattari's concept of becoming, as discussed earlier in Chapter Two (see page 174). Their example of the orchid and the bee demonstrates the ways in which actors in the environment can express agency while sharing a symbiotic relationship with others in the environment. Thus, when the poet is "among" the tree, when his body contacts the tree in its "treeness," a co-presencing occurs: "I tree myself / and my slight voice screams glee." As in the meeting of the orchid and the wasp, the meeting of Wah's body with the tree creates a space of mutual influence and responsiveness that makes the body of the poet project with his own authenticity. Moreover, as Cabri observes, in this relationship between the poet and nature—which stretches back to the influence of William Carlos Williams—the poet's own nature, which is informed by the natural environment in which it finds

itself, adds to the sum total of the natural landscape. As Cabri writes, “The poet should let words ‘place’ her inside the unique experience of being-alive, inside the poet’s *own* nature, in and behind processes of perception that are visual, emotional, verbal, so these individuated processes can be imitated, and Nature, thereby, added to” (xiii; original emphasis). In the presence of the tree and the mountains, Wah’s imagination and direct perceptions of nature blur together poetic and actual landscapes. In this way, Wah expresses an *ecopoethic* that favours a field-relationship between the self and the environment that is not based on hierarchical structures, but creative partnerships.

In his interrogation of the textual landscape, Wah echoes the Olsonian manner of “digging” in order to know the land intensely from which one speaks, as discussed in the first chapter. As Olson urges, “Best thing to do is *to dig one thing or place or man* until you yourself know more abt that than is possible to any other man. ... *exhaust* it. Saturate it. Beat it” (“A Bibliography” 307; original spelling and emphasis). However, rather than this masculinist, top-down approach to knowing and dominating the land by acting *upon* it, Wah’s spatial hermeneutic is much more Duncanian in its insistence on exchange and *communitas*, as evidenced above. Nonetheless, Wah shares with Olson the poetic of fieldwork, one that requires the poet to move through and with the landscape to articulate the particular space-time in which he or she exists and is a part. To chart his early local imaginary, Wah does his groundwork by “pacing” out the landscape in a manner similar to Olson’s mapping of Gloucester. As he writes in *Earth* (1974):

It’s a red globe not green whirling (let it whirl)  
out of mind and sight. Eyes and a hand or foot  
are required to measure the process between the  
shoulder blades of this burden. This is a ravine-

like latitude on which rests a weight as solid as  
 a lake, conclavity held there by foot-step and  
 rock-ripple. Arms recognize directions the fingers  
 hold to. The whirling motion is a thought similar  
 to a blue sky. The fluidity of the lake, frozen  
 or not, is part of the size. It's all pretty  
 close to what's going on where mind, eye and  
 lake meet to provide name and home. (*Loki* 81)

Here, as in Olson's "Letter, May 2, 1959," Wah measures the landscape by means of non-Euclidean "legwork," thereby creating an intensely local cartography of space and the poet's relative position therein. The passage contains the exacting language of measurement, as in the words "latitude," "weight," and "conclavity," but from the vantage point of the poet, these measurements become inextricably linked to the landscape (and the body moving through it) as a means of its own measurement. Thus, these measurements become highly subjective and particularized to the body as opposed to objective: latitude is "a ravine-like latitude," the weight is "as solid as a lake," and conclavity manifests "by foot-step and rock-ripple." Wah paces his local parameters not with mathematical exactness, but with proprioceptive approximation, where "[i]t's all pretty / close to what's going on where mind, eye and / lake meet to provide name and home."

These measures of space are at once experimental and experiential, and in Wah's work (as in the work of all the writers of this project), these two terms are intricately connected in the formation of one's articulation of place. Specifically, the experimental and experiential aspects of space form the *poethic* that pervades Wah's work: since the poetic act is at once an

experimentation within space by means of experiential uses of space, i.e. proprioception, the *poethic* emerges from the imbrication of the two. To experiment with and within space is an experiential act.

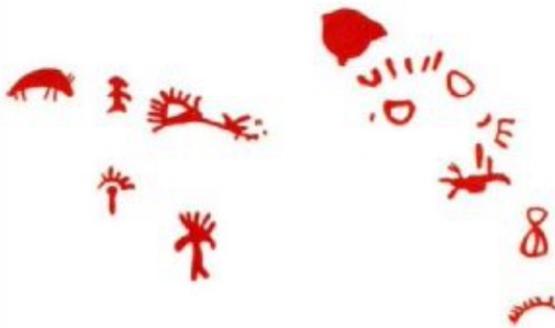
Further, this bipartite spatial *poethic* is expressive of what Deleuze and Guattari call “nomad science,” a term I described earlier in terms of Olson’s fluid measure of spaces that flow relationally from the context of the individual. Rather than conceiving of space as a closed phenomenon that abides by absolute rules of measurement—as in royal or State science which aims at homogeneity and stability for control—nomad science is more fluid and relational to the individual, and relies on local resources ready to hand, such as the body, to measure and experience space. As Wah observes in the above passage, “Eyes and a hand or foot / are required to measure the process between the / shoulder blades of this burden” and “Arms recognize directions the fingers / hold to.” Aside from recalling Olson’s concept of proprioception discussed earlier, this passage also echoes Olson’s related insistence that place (and naming of place) involves a bodily experience of the landscape. As Olson argues, “places or names / be as parts of the body, common, & capable / therefore of having cells which can decant / total experience” (“Place” 200). The body’s measure, its “fact of place,” as Olson is wont to say, is informed by its movement through and in the landscape, and vice versa. The poet is thus not a passive observer of the local, but is actively involved in its spatial production. Wah’s positionality in the landscape allows him to articulate a sense of place that is not insular but is instead directly informed by the contours of the surrounding topography.

Perhaps this responsive and experimental relationship between subject and landscape is best exemplified in Wah’s *Pictograms from the Interior of B.C.* (1975), a work that closely follows the Black Mountain field poetic, wherein the poet is an object interacting with other

objects in the field. The book maintains a consistent structure: on each verso is a printing of a found pictogram, with a responding poem found on the corresponding recto. The pictograms were selected by Wah from John Corner's *Pictographs (Indian Rock Paintings) in the Interior of British Columbia* (1968). In this work, Wah's inherited interest in the local from Olson is palpable, as Olson was deeply interested in Mayan glyphs, which he thought were "so clearly and densely chosen that, cut in stone, they retain the power of the objects of which they are the images" ("Human" 159). However, in *Pictograms*, Wah complicates the precise interpretability of images; by dispersing meaning across both visual and textual planes, he creates a collaged composite of proliferated meanings from a singular image. The resulting image-poem complex forms a creative partnership between the perceptions of the author and the semantics of the "found" landscape.

Before discussing Wah's process of "translating" the pictograms into poems—a process of "transcreation" that he adapts from Coleridge—I would like to call attention to Wah's reinterpretation of the original "pictographs" as "pictograms." As I discussed previously in terms of Duncan's "The Fire, Passages 13," Duncan adapted the ideogram form from Pound, who saw the ideogram as expressive of a cohesive unity of ideas surrounding a particular doctrine. Rather than praising unity, however, Duncan's collage favours the productive conflict of disunity. Wah follows suit: he translates Corner's "pictographs" as "pictograms" to pay homage to the ideogram not for its unified structure, but for its interpretability and productive dissonance. As Steve McCaffery observes, in constructing the pictograms, Wah "contextualizes himself as reader" (*North* 88). Like Duncan, Wah reads the landscape and then responds and contributes back to it: across the interior spine of the book, the images in the landscape and Wah's textual

response converge and converse. These convergences form “rimes” between the original pictograph and the responding poem, as represented in the following pictogram:



Its a place  
humpbacked ant  
a trap or map  
foot/the *idea* of foot (35)

Figure 11. Fred Wah, *Pictograms from the Interior of B.C.* 34.

Here, Wah does not attempt a literal translation of the pictograph, but an interrogation of its multiple perceived meanings from his vantage point as a reader. From within the composite image he selects signifiers that do not translate accurately but gesture toward a myriad of potential meanings, emphasizing the slipperiness of meaning in any process of interpretation; hence his observance of the “foot/the *idea* of foot,” wherein in solid projective style he follows one perception, “foot,” immediately by another, further perception, “the *idea* of foot.”

Transcreations such as these, which proceed by means of an *ecopoethic* of creative partnerships between authorial perception and perceived resonances of meaning within the environment, situate the local as a discursive construct. That is, by means of “transcreating” meaning from the landscape across time and space, where personal history meets the “given” elements of landscape, Wah’s poetic contributes to an ongoing narrative of what is and is not “knowable” of the land and its history.

Moreover, here Wah explores a doubleness of vision and interpretation that is similar to Duncan’s double vision: by extending the signifier “foot” to the more abstract *idea* of a foot,

Wah emphasizes language as a system of “riming” signs and correspondences. As Duncan writes in *Bending*, rimes are “the reiteration of formations in the design, even puns, [that] lead into complexities of the field” (vi). As a rime, the single word “foot” becomes a system or collage of meaning wherein the pictogram’s pictorial representation of foot, together with its semantic connections with the other objects in the collage, presents a purer and more complex representation than the word alone. Indeed, a contemporary non-Indigenous reader of ancient rock paintings is forced to rime with the images, to produce likelihoods and approximations in the present, because the original meaning or intention behind the images is lost to time. The paintings can be disorienting to the reader’s (or viewer’s) attempts to make cohesive meaning; however, as with Olson and Duncan, Wah resignifies disorientation not as lack of understanding, but as an opportunity for proliferated understanding.<sup>240</sup> Since the images evade exact translation or “knowability” into language, the poems are Wah’s attempt to rime, to relate, and to correspond across time and space. The poet gathers energy from the image and translates this energy into an extension of the sign; in this way, the pictogram and the poet are participants in this field of meaning-making on the page.

I would also argue, along these lines, that Olson’s influence on Wah is obvious here in terms of the text’s interest in the geological morphology of the landscape and how it changes over time. Indeed, Olson’s geological focus in *Maximus* was buttressed by painstaking research into the geology of Gloucester’s bedrock via Nathaniel Shaler’s *The Geology of Cape Ann* (1889). However, what Wah digs for in the local is not the “facts” of place—place rooted and validated in the landscape—but the shifting facts of place, how meaning becomes sedimented

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<sup>240</sup> Since the pictograms are not singly signified and semantically closed but are polysemous in their possible meanings, the reader meets the images with a wealth of possibility in terms of interpretability. As such, the reader is a co-producer of meaning in the manner of a Barthesian writerly text. As Steve McCaffery notes regarding the pictograms, “a contemporary ‘reader’ must function more as the producer than consumer of the messages, reading onto the grams semantic responses, judgments, misprisions and analyses” (*North* 33).

over time. These early “transcreations” of the local landscape are important to explore as beginnings of Wah’s later “trans-poetic” and translocal sensibility in *Diamond Grill*, which will be the topic of the next section.

Rather than accurate translations of the indigenous pictograms, Wah’s responding poems are what he calls “transcreations” of the images. The epigraph to the collection links the term directly to Coleridge: “Not the qualities merely, but the root of the qualities is transcreated.”

Speaking of transcreation as poetic praxis, Wah notes:

[I]f I was bound to translation, I would be bound to transcription in this case and a transcription of pictographs is impossible. . . . So I wanted to pay attention to all possible aspects of the ‘trans’ quality, the ‘trans’ aspect of transcreation, transliteration, transcription, trans anything. That is what I was involved in a process in which something was coming over to me, I was a mediator for it. (qtd in bpNichol 37-38)

Wah’s transcreations constellate the possible meanings found in the landscape as text. Hence, the text is not about origins, but about movement and process in the development of a *trans-local meaning* of the place in which the pictograms are found. Uniting form and content, Wah’s transcreations of meaning demonstrate that both language and place, rather than being fixed and rooted, are instead shifting and continually open to change. This concept of shifting extends to the very form of the original pictographs; since the glyphs are inscribed on rockfaces, exposed to the natural elements, the images themselves shift, change, and resignify according to the shifting conditions and processes of the local landscape. Similar “transcreations” are also found in Baraka’s *In Our Terribleness* as discussed last chapter—in that work, Baraka similarly asks the reader to oscillate between visual and textual planes, to sound Fundi’s visual images with the

particularities of black “terribleness” and its relation to the semantics of the urban landscape. Similar to Baraka and Fundi’s imagetext *In Our Terribleness*, the layered semantic and visual planes of Wah’s work suggest an ongoing interpretability of place. As with the weathering of the rockface, both the poet’s position and the physical environment are factors of the field that are not statically located but remain open to shifting significations.

Wah’s poems, then, are playful disruptions of linear signification; rather than translate the images, the corresponding poems articulate an *imagined* experience of the images. The depth of the interpretations of the images vary; in one transcreation, Wah simply offers a word-to-image representation of the corresponding pictogram:

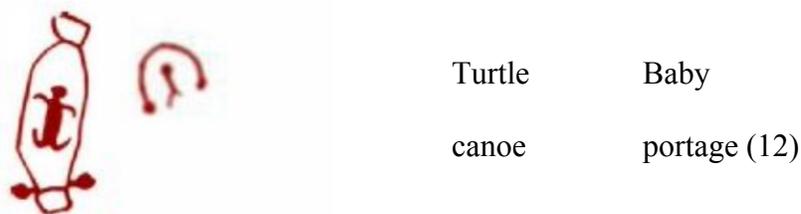
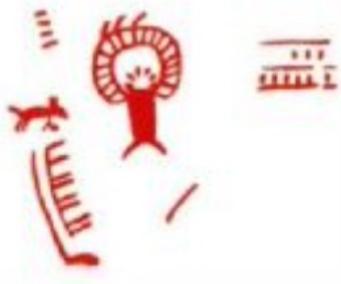


Figure 12. Fred Wah, *Pictograms from the Interior of B.C.* 11.

Here, ideas evoked by the pictogram are arranged in a deceptively simple collage of words. We see a similar hermeneutic at work in Duncan’s “The Fire, Passages 13,” wherein the grid of words allows for many semantic entrances and exits. Among these words, the interpretations and connections between them are multiple: the reader can read the words in a myriad of ways, thereby connecting the images according to one’s imagination rather than exactness.

The majority of Wah’s transcreations, however, involve a more intricate palimpsest of meanings, as seen in the below example:



The feathers of my mind increase  
 as I reach for choices  
 chance for what else  
 other than what I knew (know)  
 another talks to me (I think)  
 something (things) to see (6)

Figure 13. Fred Wah, *Pictograms from the Interior of B.C. 5*.

Wah's transcreation involves engagement and exchange with the multiple "choices"—as opposed to exact singular meaning—that exist within the landscape as a text. This attention to variant meanings and multiple experiences, I argue, sets the groundwork for his theorization of the hyphen as a marker of multiple subject positions held in co-presence. As we will also see with Marlatt, Wah emphasizes language as a hermeneutic with plural signification—such excess signification resists the singular meaning of patriarchal language that circumscribes narratives of experience.

Wah's process of transcreation involves an acutely local process of meaning-making, an interpretation of place based on proximity. In this way, transcreation is expressive of a local *nomos*, the articulation of a space-time wherein the local present resonates with the body of the observer, creating an active engagement with *felt* place. For Duncan, this process pays heed to the "aliveness" of both the poem and the poet, a vitality that is marked by movement, "exchanging material with [the] environment" (Duncan, "Towards" 3). Wah's transcreations, then, are such an exchange of material, with *trans* being the active verb. The above image-poem complex is expressive of the goal of the entire collection, for it foregrounds exchange and the

creation of a community of meanings, wherein the original meaning (itself polysemous) remains agential, but invokes a response in the poet. That is to say, Wah does not attempt to overwrite or undermine the original image, but rather, he mines the very nature of images themselves for their polysemous possibilities. Rather than seeing the pictograms as evocative of a unified, cohesive meaning, à la Pound, Wah instead multiplies the meaning by interpreting its “root qualities” according to his own experience of the images, thereby creating a semantic palimpsest. As such, the historical local of the glyphs, which signifies an indigenous connection to the land, is responded to with Wah’s immediate experience of the same local, in a different time. The resulting image-poem structure creates a contrapuntal rhythm and rime of interpretative place-making.

Although Wah’s “transcreations” invite an interpretive practice of place, it must be noted that as “found” drawings, these texts in the landscape are approached with poetic privilege.<sup>241</sup> Wah’s text was published in 1975, a time when the politics of “transcreating” Indigenous pictographs from a non-Indigenous perspective was not thought of as critically as it would be today. Some of his “mistranslations” within the transcreations are satiric or parodic—as seen in the examples quoted above, wherein he reads a “humpbacked ant” into the pictogram (35), as well as mistranslates what could be a traditional headdress for “feathers of [his] mind” (6). These parodies of the drawings he cannot understand further problematizes the gaze of the poet upon these place texts, especially given the context of the historical and present erasure of Indigenous culture in Canada by settler colonialism. Despite Jeff Derksen’s recent and generous claim that these poems are exemplary of instances in North American literature “where Western knowledge starts to be overridden by Indigenous knowledges and signs,” (“Reader’s Manual” 7) the

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<sup>241</sup> An extended discussion of this problematic of gaze unfortunately lies outside the scope of this chapter, but it is an avenue worth pursuing in further discourse.

opposite of this claim can also be made, depending on how one views Wah's act of poetic engagement. Wah invites Indigenous knowledges and signs into the landscape of these poems, but, largely due to his inadmissibility into their world of meaning, he engages with them by overwriting them with his own imagination. He is sincerely playful in his interpretations, and he creatively transforms inaccess into interaction—a poethic that, as we will see later in the chapter, relates to his later engagements with the hyphen and the nation space. However, it is worth noting this as a case of clear poetic privilege and the need to think critically of the methods of poetic engagement and the materials of poetic experimentation.

Despite the text's underlying problem of poetic gaze, these early transcreations establish a poetics of place that is left open to semantic drift, and these early attempts to read and respond to the landscape across time and space forms Wah's later understanding of his own personal trajectory of place. The different locals of Wah's personal and familial past and present, combined with the Canadian West's past and present landscape, are sutured into a collage of place wherein he may drift across and between to establish points of connection. Indeed, as Yi-fu Tuan argues, "Place is a pause in movement. ... The pause makes it possible for a locality to become a center of felt value" (138). Wah echoes this sentiment in "Strangle Six":<sup>242</sup>

Writing would have a lot to do with 'place,' the spiritual and spatial localities of the writer. I see things from where I am, my view point, and I measure and imagine a ~~world~~ from there. Who I am. Am I? Oaxaca, Vancouver, the Kootenay River a thousand years ago or today, my father's father's birthplace, become

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<sup>242</sup> Wah's "Strangle" poems come out of his concept of "Strang(l)ed Poetics," which is founded on the poetic technique of "making strange" or defamiliarization (made popular by Viktor Shklovsky). According to Wah, the "Strangle" pieces subvert hegemonic logic and control—both in terms of authorial and cultural ordering practices—to "serve some of that desire to intervent and push at the boundaries of more intentional compositions" (*Faking It* 1).

‘local’ to me and compound to make up a picture of the ~~world~~ I am native of.  
*(Faking It 186).*

These fragments serve to undermine the whole as cohesive and complete; hence, Wah crosses out “world” in the above passage, seeing the concept as too settled, too sure, too content in its wholeness. Rather, Wah establishes a TAZ, temporary pauses of felt place along a trajectory of many locals that resist the totality of “world.” As he writes in *Breathin’ My Name with a Sigh*, he is continually entrenched in a process of “Waiting ... for my body to get complete,” but this process is continually deferred. Like Duncan “at the loom,” Wah’s articulation of place forms a complex weaving that is continuously revealed through language, through the act of (re)writing.

Hence Wah’s shift, translocally, across the trees and mountains of the Kootenays to the space of his family-owned Diamond Grill diner, where the hinge of his hyphenated identity across spaces and places becomes ever more apparent. *Diamond Grill* is a later work, but it shifts backwards (or across) in time to the early spaces that informed Wah’s connections with space and familial memory. Together, the history written on the rocks of the Kootenay landscape and the hyphenated past-present memory inscribed in the swinging doorways of the family diner articulate a translocal sense of place, of practiced place. These fragments of past and present locals form a collage of place, with each fragment “a contribution to the building form” (Duncan *Bending ix*). Wah’s collages of significant fragments of relation transform closed narratives into multiple subjective thresholds:

When thinking manoeuvres the horizon by fragment rather than whole, by difference rather than by synthesis, we escape the prison of intention and denouement, of the assumed safety of settlement. This is a moment of friction, in

and out of language that ponders the ‘door’ as a threshold and a site of passage.  
*(Faking It 185).*

As the next sections will demonstrate, over the course of his poetic career, the local becomes less fixed and sure; needing to become unhinged from metanarratives of belonging “in place,” Wah adopts a poetics of unsettlement as a key mode of spatial resistance. Before discussing the significance of the door(way) in Wah’s *Diamond Grill*, however, I would first like to contextualize the spatial metaphor of the hyphen-door as reflective of Wah’s guiding poetic principle of constellatory identity articulation: synchronous foreignicity.

### **“never pure, never sure”: Synchronous Foreignicity in the Hyphe-Nation**

I want to focus here on the scene of the *hyphen* as a crucial location for working at hybridity’s implicit ambivalence.<sup>243</sup>

—Fred Wah

Against the “law of origin,” Stuart Hall insists, “[c]ultural identities are the points of identification, the unstable points of identification or suture, which are made within the discourses of history and culture. Not an essence but *a positioning*” (226; original emphasis). Hall’s characterization of cultural identity as “a positioning” releases it from discourses of “pure origin” and emphasizes identity as a construct imbued with movement, fluidity, and contingency of articulation. This understanding opens the conception of identity as not a fixed marker, but a field of possible particulars that are gathered and articulated in an ongoing process of possible re-articulations across time and space. Accordingly, both Wah and Marlatt spatialize the self along multiple sites and cites, experimenting with various positionalities along a processual trajectory of identity and place. These various influences and locals create a complex space-time from

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<sup>243</sup> *Faking It 73*; original emphasis.

which to draw an experience of the self in the world, *translocally*. For Wah, this process of articulating a translocal identity is rooted in his hybrid identity, which allows him to hold different subject positions—Chinese-Scottish-Irish-Swedish-Canadian—in tension with one another. Each of these spaces of identity is particular in its enunciation of “difference,” and the overlaps between and among them signify the body in myriad ways. An especially particular overlap is Wah’s Chinese-Canadian identity toggle, which holds his body in visual-linguistic contradiction by the gaze of the other. As he explains in *Diamond Grill*, his name is Chinese in spelling and in sound, yet his body can “pass” as white; as a result, Wah’s body is disorienting to the “Canadian” gaze, which seeks and assumes a seamless, dominant, singular signification upon the body:

The name’s all I’ve had to work through. What I usually get at a counter is the anticipatory pause after I spell out “H.” Is that it? Double U AY AYCH? I thought it might be Waugh. What kind of name is that, Wah? Chinese, I say. I’m part Chinese. And she says, boy you could sure fool me. You don’t look Chinese at all. (169)

While the assumptions underlying the hybrid body can create such awkward tensions, Wah sees this disorienting hinge of identity not as a marker of limitation, but as a space of variant enunciation wherein he can articulate different subject positions. Typically, the grammatical marker of terms held in tension is the hyphen, and that is the metaphor Wah uses to articulate his hybridity. However, before delving into the hyphen towards the end of this section and into the next, setting the context of hybridity will help to contextualize this significant poetic metaphor in Wah’s oeuvre.

Since hybridity identifies a variant space of heterogeneous identities, it can thus be related to the concept of the translocal as I've discussed. Situating hybridity alongside the translocal, especially as lenses upon Wah's work, emphasizes the inherent mobility in hybridity, that a hybrid subject is a composite of multiple sites and cites. Wah relates this moving composite of identity to the act of writing, for "[t]o write is to move. Dispersal of a presumed and constructed world. To get back, home (unmarking history so memory can re-cite and re-situate)" (*Faking It* 18). The terms hybridity and translocal will become clearer in their relation in the following sections, but I will briefly outline their significance here as co-productive terms in order to contextualize the discussion of hybridity leading up to the hyphen. Wah's various racial identities can all be said to "cite" and "site" his body and how it is identified by the gaze of the other. The signifiers "Chinese" and "Swedish," for example, mark the body in radically different ways visually, as demonstrated in Wah's quoted passage above.

Moreover, these signifiers can also denote a set of "sites" within one's memory: landscapes, language, food, beliefs all come together to signify a space that may not be "here," per se, but exists in tension with the body in its present place across both time and space. Again, this concept will be developed further in my discussion on *Diamond Grill*, a hybrid site in itself where Salisbury steak and fried rice share menu space. Through familial memory fused with the present moment, sites and cites can become fused; hence the multivalent sign of "[b]oth British Victorias" in Wah's familial imaginary: "I know, for example, the coagulation of Victoria on Hong Kong Island and Victoria on Vancouver Island have become, in my inheritance, planetary junctures of deep emotion" (*Diamond* 22). The hinge between Wah's "Chinese-Canadian" identity allows him to oscillate between different sites of his past and present, to toggle between temporalities, desires, and landscapes, to construct and interpret his present place. Or, as Wah

puts it, “These straits and islands of the blood can be recognized as those very shores and lands we encounter in our earthly migrations” (*Diamond* 22). Each migration—either in memory, ancestry, or present movement—leaves a trace or mark upon one’s place; the sum total of which becomes a microcosmic rendering of one’s journeys in poetic collage. This process of articulating identity across the “straits and islands of the blood” does not diminish origin, but rather makes it a hybrid construct that may be established and experienced *translocally*.

In order to contextualize the terms “hybridity” and “translocal” in poetic discourse, we can go back to Duncan’s conception of correspondences in the open field. The translocal is akin to Duncan’s view of the self as “multiphasic,” comprised of passages that extend, rather than close, the self to outer reaches of possibility. As Duncan writes in *Bending*:

Statistically insignificant as a locus of creation

I have in this      my own

intense

area of self creation,

the Sun itself

insignificant among suns. (15)

Duncan’s passage here is significant, for he revises the “locus of creation” of the self as an “intense / area of self-creation,” thus broadening the parameters of the field of the self to a dynamic area of creation as opposed to a fixed locus. Duncan registers this broadening of the self formally in the extended gap between the words “this” and “my own”—a visual representation of the open area of self-creation that supplants the notion of a fixed “locus” in the previous line. In

this “intense / area” the particularity of the one (the Sun) is insignificant in the face of the many. Whereas “locus” bears connotations of fixity and immobility, the concept of an area is more commensurate with the fluidity of the open field. Moreover, a locus imparts a monadic sensibility, whereas the area, in line with open field poetic sensibility, imparts relationality, multiplicity, and the interactive exchange between objects and ideas.

Duncan’s conception of the self as multiphasic area relates to Wah’s conception of synchronous foreignicity, which he defines as “the ability to remain within an ambivalence without succumbing to the pull of any single culture (resolution, cadence, closure)” (*Faking It* 83). Resisting the pull in any one direction results in the hybrid self that is a nexus between multiple points along a network of identity relations. Synchronous foreignicity also bears resemblance to the Deleuzoguattarian rhizome, for in its constitution of the self via unstructured offshoots of possible identities, synchronous foreignicity resists the closure of linear, vertical determination. Importantly, Wah uses the term “synchronous” as opposed to “synthesized,” and this distinction is paramount: in synchronous foreignicity, multiple identities do not dissolve into one another in a synthesized whole, but remain separate, coinciding articulations held in productive tension. Fittingly, the mark of synchronous foreignicity is the hyphen, the grammatical tool that is itself marked by ambivalence and hybridity. The hyphen is examined in relation to Wah’s *Diamond Grill* in the next section; however, I would first like to contextualize the hyphen in terms of discourses of hybridity that ground its function as a tool of both containment and mobility.

Perhaps the most comprehensive discussion of hybridity in the (post)colonial context comes from Homi K. Bhabha in his book *The Location of Culture* (1994). Although an exhaustive discussion of Bhabha’s theory is beyond the scope of this chapter, a brief outline of

his stance on hybridity will prove useful as a lens for my discussion of the hyphen in Wah's work.<sup>244</sup> Since my entire discussion throughout this project generally centres upon how place is articulated within space, and how these spatial knowledges and practices are variously articulated, Bhabha's discussion of hybridity is exceptionally apt, for he founds his exploration of hybridity along spatial lines. Bhabha underscores hybridity with the concept of cultural difference, which is evocative of "a disposition of knowledges or a distribution of practices that exist beside each other" (232). Cultural difference is marked by an articulation of difference that is inextricably linked to space, the "from which" one speaks. As Bhabha argues,

Cultural difference ... changes the position of enunciation and the relation of address within it; not only what is said but where it is said; not simply the logic of articulation but the *topos* of enunciation. The aim of cultural difference is to rearticulate the sum of knowledge from the perspective of the signifying position of the minority that resists totalization—the repetition that will not return as the same, the minus-in-origin that results in political and discursive strategies where adding to does not add up but serves to disturb the calculation of power and knowledge, producing other spaces of subaltern signification. (162; original emphasis)

In cultural difference, Bhabha observes more than a shift in racial discourse: he identifies cultural difference as a disrupting factor in the homogenous articulation of identity under the nation. Hybridity's "minus-in-origin," where "adding to does not add up," serves to unsettle the dominant ideology of singular origin underlying the nation-state, which relies upon the repetition of similarity in its narrative. As Wah notes, "the national aesthetic ... continually attempts to

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<sup>244</sup> Wah also briefly uses Bhabha's work to ground his poetic (*Faking It* 73-74). Wah focuses on Bhabha's concept of hybridity in general terms, but I would like to draw out the concept's overtly spatial concerns in order to examine the hyphen in Wah's work as a site and territory of geographic resistance to static identity categorization.

expropriate difference into its own consuming narrative” (Wah, *Faking It* 75). This narrative is one of containment, of keeping bodies in place, under a banner of belonging that attempts to diminish difference. The founding of one’s subject formation in a plural topos, however, allows access to alternative spatial production outside of received forms and categories, wherein “other spaces” and “new structures of authority, new political initiatives” (Bhabha 211) are built.

Bhabha’s identified strategy of cultural difference, “adding [that] does not add up,” becomes especially significant in terms of Wah’s articulation of his hyphenated plural identity. Just as Duncan responds to containment by means of establishing alternative households of creative freedom, and as Baraka contests containment by means of reformative groundwork from within the community, so Wah responds to the dominant narrative of containment by the nation by insisting on the hyphen as an open, uncontainable space of identity. According to Bhabha, hybridity is marked by the hyphen and opens the space of identity to a field of plural and negotiable cultural identifications, what he calls a “Third Space” of subject formation. “The process of hybridity,” Bhabha contends, “gives rise to something different, something new and unrecognizable, a new area of negotiation of meaning and representation” (211). Hybridity opens a place wherein these multiple identities can be constructed, deconstructed, and reconstructed in an ongoing process of shift and evolution. Third Space identifies a multiscalar process of identity formation and articulation—as opposed to a hierarchical expression of identity, wherein one expression emerges as singular and dominant, it proposes a view of identity wherein subjects can articulate a variety of positions and views held in tension with one another.

For Wah as for Bhabha, the marker of this Third Space of enunciation is the hyphen. Under Wah’s hand, the hyphen functions both as a grammatical rendering of multiple identities held in tension, and as a spatial metaphor for these borderlands as a multiscalar place. In his essay “Half-

Bred Poetics,” Wah invokes Yasmin Ladha’s conception of the hyphen as “not a border-restraint between words but a trans-evoker” (qtd. in *Faking It* 87). Wah then adds: “the elusive migrational floating carpet hyphen offers a literal ‘place’ where the racialized writer can define her own occupancy of this ‘no man’s land’” (*Faking It* 87). By “no man’s land,” Wah is referring to the fluid living space of the hybrid subject, his or her vantage point of being both outsider and insider, not “belonging” fully to any one place. Since the hybrid subject “stands in that undetermined threshold place where she constantly drifts in and out,” (Minh-ha, qtd. in Wah, *Faking It* 87), the hyphen allows the subject to articulate and occupy place *across and between* this landscape of (un)belonging. Like McKittrick’s conception of the demonic ground discussed last chapter, the hyphen creates a mobile Third Space of unset pluralities—unlike the static fringes of the margin that limit movement, the in-between subject of hyphenated space is always (and continually) border-crossing. As I will discuss in the following section, for Wah, this border-crossing facilitated by the hyphen is not a passive state of being tossed around by various identities, but involves an active choice of border-crossing depending on different contexts in which the individual finds him/herself.

The concepts “centre” and “margin” have been the primary spatial metaphors with which subaltern subjects are placed within postcolonial theory and discourse for the past couple decades. While critics such as bell hooks have argued for the space of the margin as a “radical perspective from which to see and create, to imagine alternatives, new worlds” (*Yearning* 149-50), other critics such as McKittrick challenge the validity and agency of these spatial terms. Along with Patricia Hill Collins, who argues that the margin has become “a flattened theoretical space,” (129) McKittrick denies the legitimacy of the margin based on its precarious geographical locality and critical potential:

The trouble with the margin is also connected to its geo-conceptual spatial stasis; theoretically, the margin is always already marginal, peripheral, because it also carries with it—in its metaphorical utterance—the materiality of real margins and real centers ... This language, the where of the margin, shapes it as an exclusively oppositional, unalterable site that cannot be easily woven into the ongoing production of space because the bifurcating geographies—margins are *not* centers—prohibits integrative processes ... The margin ... is a site of dispossession, it is an ungeographic space. (57-58)

Indeed, this concept of the other as “outside” or “marginal” is exhaustively and dangerously overused in its demarcation of oppressed subject positions, since the positionality of being “outside” of the centre disallows agency and movement towards the centre. However, as a spatial metaphor, the hyphen imbues this discourse with a terrain of identity that is variant, fertile, and resistant to dominant ideologies of homogenous belonging. Although as a grammatical tool the hyphen seems to point outward from a centre, as a marker of identity it focuses back on the individual at the centre who holds these various edges in tension and is able to toggle between, to articulate a multi-positional identity *from within* this place of being.

Wah is certainly aware of these spatialized tensions between centre and margin, dominant and nondominant identity groups, in the North American context from which he writes. Accordingly, he is careful not to reify the hyphen as a space that evades these categorizations or exists outside of them; as he plainly points out, “though the hyphen is in the middle, it is not in the centre” (*Faking It* 73). He follows this statement with a prolific and incongruous catalogue of what the hyphen *is*, including signifiers such as “a bastard, a railroad ... a rope, a knot” (73). These various signifiers testify to the difficult ambivalence of subjectivity that one bears while

living in the hyphen. That the hyphen can be both “a bastard” and “a railroad” means that in different contexts, the mark of hybridity can be a hindrance or a passageway through. As an ambivalent spatial metaphor, then, the hyphen offers Wah a means of processing and thinking through the ambivalences of the multicultural state. The hyphen, as its grammatical use suggests, marks a “middle” space between multiple s/cites and signs; although Wah imagines a vast and variant spatial imaginary out of this multiplicity, he is also aware that to be both multiple and partial in one’s identity, according to the ideals of the nation-state, is always to be marginalized and barred from the normative, dominant centre.

Nonetheless, for Wah, the ambivalence of the hyphen affords it great creative potential as a generative poetic space. In this way, the open space of the hyphen recalls Duncan’s meadow as a “made place” and a “field folded” (*The Opening* 7). Akin to the meadow, the hyphen is both a created and creative place, at once constructed and capable of being reconstructed and reterritorialized into different articulations. For Wah, this made place of “something new and unrecognizable” opens a terrain of self-determination that resists the closure and circumscription of origin or nationhood. The hyphen thus disrupts the metanarratives of sameness upon which discourses of the nation rely to categorize bodies, to keep them “in place.” In response, as Wah proposes, his “half-breed” hyphenated identity becomes an articulation of resistance:

My hybridity obliges me to locate by difference, not sameness. ... That’s the mix  
 ... the breed true demi-semi-ethnic polluted rootless living technicolour snarl to  
 complicate the underbelly panavision of racism and bigotry across this country.  
 (*Faking It* 47; *Diamond Grill* 53)

The hyphen opens the self to the possibility of articulating the “others” within—the composite “living technicolour snarl”—a plural identity that unsettles the “containment” ideals of the

nation. Moreover, for Wah, to locate “by difference” as opposed to sameness undermines the “panavision” of cultural homogenization under the nation-state, and calls into question “the authority of cultural synthesis in general” (Bhabha 52).

Indeed, Canada’s claim to multiculturalism is marked by ideals of singular origin and the preservation of this cultural purity through the continuation of “original” customs and culture. Such a metanarrative feigns the celebration of difference, but does not account for the integrity of cultural hybridity, the embodiment of multiple racial origins. As Wah observes: “[T]here’s a difference between a race and a country ... Race makes you different, nationality makes you the same. Sameness is purity. Not the same anything, when you’re [as Wah himself is] half Swede, quarter Chinese, and quarter Ontario Wasp” (*Diamond Grill* 36). The hyphen opens the terrain to multiple touchstones of identity that don’t necessarily add up to a singular and cohesive whole that can be categorized. As Wah warns, the hyphen thus poses “a real problem for multiculturalism; it’s usually a sign of impurity and it’s frequently erased as a reminder that the parts, in this case, are not equal to the whole” (178). The various parts articulated by the hyphen become significant as markers of particularity in the face of the singularity of the nation. Moreover, these often “minute particulars” become crucial sites of place-making in “the landscape of this large and hypothetical country ... best known and valorized by the singular” (*Faking It* 47).

In the face of multiculturalism, which Wah criticizes for its attempts to homogenize the experience of “others” into a cohesive narrative, the hyphen offers a space for the articulation and enactment of identity difference(s). Once, while attempting to cross the border into the United States in 1968, Wah was denied entry due to his Chinese surname and was told to apply “under the Asian quota.” However, when Wah tells an official at the Consulate that he is half-

Swedish and “less than fifty percent Chinese,” he is told that this “makes all the difference” and is immediately granted entry (*Faking It* 77). Through an alternate positioning of his identity that betrays the visual signification of his surname—by “faking it,” a positionality and stratagem of place-making that I will discuss in a moment—Wah is able to navigate around North American racist discourse that places restrictions on movement for certain bodies. With the swing of the hyphen, Wah is able to switch on and off his affinity with his respective racial subject positions. In this instance, Wah can “pass” as white despite his Chinese name, and this grants him mobility within the racist system. To be sure, this mobility is granted in large part due to the fact that Wah is male, and that he is able to swing between unequal power positions in the Canadian racial makeup, from a nondominant (Asian) identity to a dominant position (White).<sup>245</sup> In other words, if Wah was swinging between two minority identity groups, his strategy of “faking it” would not grant him such mobility. Tellingly, in response to the ways in which the nation chooses to situate and articulate cultural difference, Wah insists that hybrid subjects must “relocate the responsibility for their own subjectivity within themselves” (76). Wah’s ability to swing the hyphen in different contexts and circumstances offers him a means of articulating a self-determined identity. (The implications of this mobility is discussed in the following section that discusses the trope of the “door” in *Diamond Grill*. The door’s hinges express this ability to both mobilize and/or silence different parts of a fluid hybrid identity.)

The hyphen thus highlights the constructed, performative nature of identity that is intensified by the polyvocality of hybridity. As Bhabha suggests, hybridity “is not a third term that resolves the tension between two cultures” (162); it does not emerge from a space of synthesis but of encounter and cross-transformation. From this in-between space, a line of flight

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<sup>245</sup> As Wah admits to Frank Davey, regarding his earlier work that is less concerned with racialized identity, “I was white enough to get away with it, and did” (Wah and Davey 112).

surfaces: the “mimetic or narcissistic demands of colonial power” are unsettled by “other ‘denied’ knowledges [that] enter upon the dominant discourse and estrange the basis of its authority” (Bhabha 159, 162). The hyphen thus allows one to speak from the demonic ground, from knowledges “other” to dominant discourse, as I discussed in my last chapter. As Wah insists, “I don’t want to be inducted into someone else’s story, or project. . . . Sorry, but I’m just not interested in this collective enterprise erected from the sacrosanct great railway imagination dedicated to harvesting a dominant white cultural landscape” (*Faking It* 125).

The hyphen, then, disrupts the false collectivity of the multicultural metanarrative fostered in Canadian identity discourse. As Smaro Kamboureli argues, this metanarrative aims to forge an “ideal community” of racial difference that “recognizes a subject’s ethnic difference only insofar as that subject identifies herself with a given, coherently structured community” (112). As such, in this “ideal” community, “Diversity is respected and supported only insofar as it is presumed to articulate subjects rehearsing collective identifications that are determined categorically and not relationally” (112). The Canadian multicultural agenda, then, recognizes difference and plurality in ethnic groups without recognizing that these groups can be plural—indeed, hyphenated—in and of themselves. The end goal of this “ideal community” is to create a smooth space of identity, a homogenous plane of clearly demarcated categories of being. Enter the hyphen, which acts to striate the plane of identity, enunciating and articulating the particulars of one’s existence. The hyphen thus forms “site and sign” of what Wah calls “[a] hybrid borderland poetics” (*Faking It* 74). It signifies an explicit engagement with the borders of the nation-state as well as an articulation of the contested borders of multicultural identity therein. As such, for Wah the hyphen at once identifies and facilitates a practice of living within the borderlands of the self and the nation. In his exploration of the many spaces of his identity, Wah uncovers the hyphenated

nature of the “nation” collective, wherein Canada stands, paradoxically, as “the impediment, authority and, above all, the possibility of place” (*Diamond Grill* 20). As will be discussed over the following sections, the hyphen—whose resistance lay in its ambivalence and undetermined place—is also a TAZ *par excellence*, for it allows for articulations of autonomous identity that can be temporary, drifting, and negotiable.

**“swing the gate, hyphen the blood”: The Door(way)s of chineseHYPHENcanadian Identity<sup>246</sup>**

The hyphen, even when it is notated, is often silent and transparent. I’d like to make the noise surrounding it more audible, the pigment of its skin more visible.<sup>247</sup>

—Fred Wah

let me declare doorways,  
corners, pursuit...<sup>248</sup>

—Dionne Brand

In line with his Black Mountain influences, Wah explicitly grounds the hyphen as a projective and corporeal poetic praxis: “My own interest in the site and sign of the hyphen is essentially from a blood quantum point of view, that is, as a ‘mixed blood’” (*Faking It* 74). The hyphen becomes an extension of Wah’s mixed race identity; it is fundamentally projective, in that it speaks from and through the semantics emanating from his specific identity configuration. In this way, the hyphen ushers in a particular spatial knowledge, practice, and articulation that extends the Black Mountain local by extrapolating it, revealing the multiple sites and processes underlying one’s connection to a grounding identity. The hyphen quite literally mobilizes the field of identity by activating its particulars, demonstrating its ability to “enable a particular residue (genetic, cultural, biographical) to become kinetic and valorized” (Wah, *Faking It* 51).

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<sup>246</sup> Wah, *Diamond Grill* 175.

<sup>247</sup> *Faking It* 73.

<sup>248</sup> *thirsty* 23.

As a suture that connects the local with the constellatory, the hyphen connects the body with its here(s) and there(s) while mobilizing the space in-between.

Along with the hyphen, the door is an important spatial trope and metaphor for Wah—indeed, the hyphen and the door can be read synonymously in his work. As he explicitly confirms in *Diamond Grill*, “the hyphen is the door” (16). The hyphen-door is a passageway that allows Wah to move between “here” and “there”—both backwards and forwards, from local place to local place—by virtue of his hyphenated identity. In *Diamond Grill*, Wah meditates on the many doors and doorways that mediate the diner’s spaces—from its coded internal spaces of the kitchen and dining room, outwards to the great Canadian landscape. Between these spaces, as I will demonstrate momentarily, doors swing as hyphens, permitting him to move fluidly between racialized spaces that often compete for enunciation. This poetic interest in doors as coded spaces of permittance and restriction continues in Wah’s work through to his more recent collections, such as *is a door* (2009).

There is a wealth of criticism surrounding *Diamond Grill* that views the long prose poem as a “biotext,” a term related to autobiography that Wah appropriates from George Bowering to describe the text in his acknowledgements. Joanne Saul’s scholarship deals most explicitly with the form and trope of the biotext in Canadian literature. As she elucidates, the term “captures the tension at work between the thematic content and the linguistic and formal content of the texts, between the fragments of a life being lived, the ‘bio’ (with its emphasis on the self, family, origins, and genealogy), and the ‘text,’ the site where these various aspects are in the process of being articulated in writing” (“Displacement” 260). For Wah, the term “biotext” allows him to enact a textual border crossing, to prevent his text from “being hijacked by ready-made generic expectations” of autobiography and life writing (*Faking It* 97). Citing a mistrust of fiction’s

“master position” (98), Wah credits bpNichol with challenging him to “overwrite [his] fear of the tyranny of prose” (*Diamond Grill* x). Identifying the text as “biotext” extends the utility of the hyphen to the form of the text, for *Diamond Grill*’s genre-mixing of poetry and prose narrative defies the expectations of the long poem, autobiographical life writing, and fiction all at once by occupying a nexus that borrows from each of these genres but remains between these textual spaces.

There is a marked lack in scholarship on *Diamond Grill* that deals with these overtly spatial concerns. I thus propose an alternative focus in my reading of the text, one that does not ignore the text as “biotext,” but that reorients it, as Wah does himself near the end of *Diamond Grill*, as an exploration of “*biopaths*” (175; my emphasis). Since the hyphen so often is made material in the form of doors and passageways between the spaces of the text, I find this lens to be productive in terms of drawing out the spatial concerns of a hyphenated racial identity—how that corporeal identity (bio) becomes “pathed,” traced across different locals, different landscapes, held at once in the biotext of the body. “Biopaths” as opposed to “biotext” emphasizes subjective choice of movement and transition between different passageways, which is a crucial strategy of resistance for Wah. Further, redefining the “text” as “paths” also calls attention to the translocal nature of Wah’s writing, his ruminations on the multiple locals existing in the “contact zone” of racialized identity.<sup>249</sup> After all, the body is “S/place” (*A Genealogy* 77) as M. NourbeSe Philip puts it, a space of multiple, occurring, and possible place(s).

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<sup>249</sup> The term “contact zone” was coined by Mary Louise Pratt and is used explicitly by Wah in *Diamond Grill* (69). As Pratt explains, contact zones are sites of both cultural conflict and mutual influence: “‘Contact zone’ is an attempt to invoke the spatial and temporal copresence of subjects previously separated by geographical and historical disjunctures, and whose trajectories now intersect. By using the term ‘contact,’ I aim to foreground the interactive, improvisational dimensions of colonial encounters so easily ignored or suppressed by diffusionist accounts of conquest and domination. A ‘contact’ perspective emphasizes how subjects are constituted in and by their relations among colonizers and colonized . . . not in terms of separateness and apartheid, but in terms of copresence, interaction, interlocking understandings and practices, often within radically asymmetrical relations of power” (7).

The term “biopaths” also calls attention to the ways in which the doorways of the hyphen are mediated by the “blood quantum” of the body. As explored in the previous section on Wah’s early work, it is evident that Wah is interested in the ways in which the body responds to place; accordingly, “biopaths” is an apt term to describe Wah’s creation of place in interchange with geographies both physical, imagined, and remembered. On the first page of the text, the memory of the diner’s swinging doors ignites a journey of “heterocellular recovery” for Wah:

I pick up an order and turn, back through the doors, whap! My foot registers more than its own imprint, starts to read the stain of memory. Thus: a kind of heterocellular recovery reverberates through the busy body, from the foot against that kitchen door on up the leg into the torso and hands, eyes thinking straight ahead, looking through doors and languages, skin recalling its own reconnaissance, cooked into the steamy food, replayed in the folds of elsewhere, always far away, tunneling through the centre of the earth[.] (1)

The term “heterocellular” denotes a cell that is composed of multiple types of cells—this is an apt image for the process of recovery that *Diamond Grill* undertakes. Wah’s foot through the diner’s doorway initiates a heterocellular response to this space, a translocal mapping of place that informs his collaged subject position. The hyphen-door, then, becomes reflective of a hermeneutic of place—a constellatory collage of past and present, local and locale, all forming the architecture of one’s identity and being. As Saul observes, “for Wah, the process of self-representation is complicated by the fact that the subject will not stay still” (*Writing* 103). There is much agency in mobilizing the hyphenated subject position, for it allows Wah to speak from multiple places and multiple subject positions. As a means of navigating place, the racial hyphen proceeds by memory as well as movement and process; in this way, Wah adapts Olson’s mode of

proprioception to speak for the role of racial memory in the formation of the subject in space. This sentiment extends to the formal interests of *Diamond Grill*, as its genre-mixing creates a hinterland of undeterminability: “The journal journey tilts tight-fisted through the gutter of the book, avoiding a place to start—or end. Maps don’t have beginnings, just edges. Some frayed and hazy margin of possibility, absence, gap” (Wah, *Diamond Grill* 1).

As a mapping of “biopaths,” *Diamond Grill* is an exploration of the psycho-geographical local of the “chineseHYPHENcanadian” diner his father owns and operates in Nelson, British Columbia. The Diamond Grill restaurant is akin to a hyphen in and of itself, for it is a multiphasic site of interaction between many processes in which Wah’s identity is steeped. Much of the narrative pays particular attention to the material hyphens within the space of the diner: the doorways and passages that separate the different areas of the restaurant. The various doorways of the narrative signify the possibilities of the hyphen as both a connector, and a marker of division. As Wah describes, the dining room and kitchen are divided by swinging wooden doors. This doorway acts as a marker of spatial containment and segregation, as the Chinese cooks in the kitchen are quite literally separated from the patrons in the dining room. For the workers in the kitchen, this doorway is, like the hyphen appears, a bar: a marker of racial containment that keeps their bodies “in place”: “A simple door shutting in the running rhythm and rush of a cafe kitchen, but with the insulated mass of a concussive jolt, of a sonar synapse, for these old brown men at least, along some other wire of their lives. The discharge of a door, electric in the nodes of memory” (127). More than just being a marker of separation between sites, the door—like the hyphen—also marks various “cites” of identity and memory. The “concussive jolt” of the door, its “discharge” upon the Chinese cooks, marks it as a clear boundary marker not just in the space of the diner but in the larger spatial context of Canada in which they are marginalized. The

electricity of the door activates a “sonar synapse” in their cultural memory, evoking the various migrations, separations, and traumas along their trajectory of place under the Canadian multicultural agenda.

However, for Wah and his father—who is also racially hyphenated—this doorway is permeable and swings both ways; indeed, both must pass through the doorway to carry out the business of the restaurant. Although this mobility is made available to him, Wah suggests that he prefers the space of the kitchen, “within the meaningless but familiar hum of the Cantonese and away from all the angst of the arrogant white world up front” (63). The space of the doorway then, of the hyphen, becomes a site of articulation wherein the particularities of racial hybridity can be either mobilized and enacted, or silenced and contained. Cynthia Sugars also highlights this ambivalence when she argues that in *Diamond Grill*, “Wah plays with the notion of place as a space that both grounds and disrupts identificatory structures” (30). As in the “border” case where Wah’s “less than fifty percent” Chineseness qualified him to “pass” as white and grant him mobility, here Wah can choose to associate with the cooks and reside in their space. In this way, he can “pass” as Chinese and turn off his whiteness—albeit partially, since the language gap prevents him from integrating fully into the Chinese site of the diner and this difference still marks him with whiteness. Wah’s father’s hyphenated identity allows him further mobility within the divided site of the diner; since he can speak Cantonese, he can fit more suitably than Wah Jr. in the space of the cooks because can communicate with them, although his appearance is still marked with whiteness. And vice versa: on the “white” side of the door, Wah’s father can communicate and move through the space as half white. The Chinese cooks, however, lack such hybridity and cannot “fake it”: they are “shut in” by the door, unable to move across its threshold and occupy space on the other side. For Wah, the hyphen in *Diamond Grill*

forms a TAZ that liberates the spaces of the restaurant with a toggle-like quality reflective of a door hinge; Wah and his father can slip seamlessly through and between these borderlands, establishing a place on either side of the door, or not. The hyphenated doorframe establishes a Third Space wherein identity is not prefixed or determined, but is negotiable.

Wah's father represents the most hyphenated character of the narrative, the one for whom the hyphen allows the most mobility and fluidity between the spaces of the restaurant. Not only can Wah's father physically move between these locales, he can communicate in both spaces seamlessly. As Wah observes:

his mouth can move with dexterity between these men-sounds, between these secret sounds we only hear in the kitchen of the Elite or in the silent smoke-filled Chinese store, between those dense vocables of nonsense, and English, which is everywhere, at the front of the café, on the street, and at home. And that he does this alone, that no one else can move between these two tongues like he does, that puts him at the centre of our life, with more pivot to the world than anyone I know. (61)

Wah Sr.'s linguistic fluidity between racialized spaces allows him to control the toggle of his hyphen; his Cantonese-English bilingual status allows him to shift with "more pivot to the world" by opening entryways into different sites of being in Canada. Like the TAZ, the hyphen works to create shifting communities (or, what Bey calls "intentional communities") that evade the regulation of the State via its formal structures such as the "ideal community" of the multicultural nation I mentioned earlier. These transitory articulations of identity relations across spaces and places allow Wah Sr. to experiment with racialized spaces, thus undermining attempts to define and categorize one's identification to space and one's articulation of place

therein. It is a localized suspension of these controls wherein one can practice and experiment with place outside conventional modes of social organization.

Like Wah, Wah Sr. is mixed-race, but he can move more fluidly across the hyphen, if only by “faking it”—a critical term for Wah wherein the power of the hyphen manifests most plainly. Wah Sr. may appear to move fluidly across the hyphen, but sometimes these movements require acute negotiation. “Faking it” is Wah’s term for the “continual theatre of necessity” wherein one negotiates place in racialized spaces and places by “bluffing” his or her way through language (*Faking It* 16).<sup>250</sup> In *Diamond Grill*, Wah recounts a representative story of his father’s ability to “fake it” in order to mobilize his fluidity between racialized spaces. In his initiation speech for the Lion’s Club, Wah Sr. is trying to impress the white “Baker Street nickel millionaires” in the audience and mispronounces “soup” as “*sloup*.” As Wah remembers,

when he hears himself say *sloup* for soup he stops suddenly and looks out at the expected embarrassed and patronizing smiles from the crowd. Then he does what he has learned to do so well in such instances, he turns it into a joke, a kind of self put-down that he knows these white guys like to hear: he bluffs that Chinamen call soup *sloup* because, as you all know, the Chinese make their cafe soup from the slop water they wash their underwear and socks in, and besides, it’s just like when you hear me eating my soup, Chinamen like to slurp and make a lot of noise. That’s a compliment to the cook! (66)

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<sup>250</sup> Wah credits his conception of “faking it” to Olson and Duncan’s influential belief of the smoke and mirrors trickery inherent in language and in the act of writing. As he reflects in his essay “Faking It,” “By the time Charles Olson delivered his lectures at Beloit and entitled them ‘Poetry and Truth,’ I was committed to the big bamboozle of writing. ‘You tell the truth the way words lie,’ Robert Duncan had admonished to us young writers. Olson had performed in Washington, in the American ‘Space,’ in our graduate seminars in Buffalo, at his readings everywhere, a rhetoric of public sleight-of-hand. Now you see it, now you don’t” (*Faking It* 14).

In response to his mishap-turned-joke, the white audience laughs and Wah Sr.'s difference is offset by humour and distraction. It is from this episode that Wah learns the very nature of “faking it” as a survival strategy that his father depends on to navigate within dominant spaces. He learns that this strategy is possible and “works,” and that improvising with his difference to mobilize himself through different encounters with dominance is a strategic mode made available to him as well. With the realization that white Canada is gullible to such trickery, this episode primes Wah's later performances of identity, his aforementioned act of “faking it” with the customs agent, for example. Through such trickery and performance of language, Wah Sr. can reterritorialize space and his position within it, creating a mobile Third Space of agency that displaces and upsets the dominant structure of identity expression.

In this way, faking it initiates the creation of fluid TAZs, for it forges spaces of autonomy, even if they are temporary and improvised. To be sure, the temporariness of faking it is, as Wah insists, “not so much fraudulent as generative” (*Faking It* 1). Wah describes faking it as a strategy of “stalling for more time” to get “that little gap of renewal” (*Faking It* 16). Thus, the spaces created and opened by faking it may be transitory; however, the agency of these spaces lies not in their staying power, but in the very process of their creation, in their nature as *created and creative* spaces. As Wah later writes in *Music at the Heart of Thinking*:

A text is a place where a labyrinth of continually revealing meanings are available, a place that offers more possibility than we can be sure we know, sometimes more than we want to know. It isn't a container, static and apparent. Rather, it is noisy, frequently illegible. ... The multiplicity can be read, should be read, even performed. But then again, perhaps meaning is intransitive and unreadable, only meant to be made” (5).

As I will discuss later, the labyrinth is the most significant spatial metaphor in the work of Daphne Marlatt. Here, Wah anticipates my discussion by outlining the proliferation of meanings and passageways made possible by the textual field. One does not navigate the labyrinth by a pre-fixed single route but rather must negotiate and improvise multiple possible paths. Rather than a linear, closed meaning, language is labyrinthine in structure, continually open to interpretability and (re)creation.

With its suggestion of blurry borders of interpretation and enunciation, the concept of synchronous foreignicity—as signified by the hyphenated doorways of *Diamond Grill*—aligns with Duncan’s *sfumato* household construction as discussed earlier. The corresponding tensions of lightness and darkness, Eris and Eros, in Duncan’s household is echoed in Wah’s synchronous foreignicity wherein “embracing antithesis, polarity, confusion, and opposition as the day-to-day household harmony, is a necessary implement in art that looks for new organizing principles, new narratives” (*Faking It* 61). The various doors of the Diamond Grill become the organizing principles of hybrid identity. The spaces of the diner are organized according to similar striations of lightness and darkness, signifying both connection and disconnection between spaces and racialized bodies. In the same manner as di Cosimo’s technique, the *sfumato* lines of the diner also blur boundaries, signifying borders that are not static but transitory and fluid. In the text, Wah refers to the “darkness of [the] doorway” that separates the main floor of the restaurant and the basement. He recalls a time when Wah Sr. takes him down the stairs, and while going down, he feels a sense of uninviting displacement: “The descent does not beckon; it is dimly lit” (118). Once down, Wah discovers a Chinese boy, a relative of the dishwasher, peeling potatoes. The boy has just moved to Canada and cannot speak English. Wah befriends the boy, who eventually “learns a little English and a couple of years later he’s out front cleaning tables” (118). The boy’s

passage from the darkness of the dank basement to the bright lights of the diner demonstrates the ability of the hybrid spaces of the diner to be reterritorialized. Like the borders of the *sfumato* painting, the doors of the diner are fluid and shifting.

Aside from the internal doorways of the diner, there is also the larger doorway that both separates and connects the restaurant with the greater Canadian landscape. The text begins and ends with doors mediating the dialectic between inside and outside, socially organized spaces and the wild frontier. On the first page of the text, Wah ruminates on the swinging doors separating the cooks and the customers, all the while “outside, running through and around the town, the creeks flow down to the lake with, maybe, a spring thaw. And the prairie sun over the mountains to the east, over my family’s shoulders” (1). Wah connects the hectic day-to-day of the diner with the larger prevailing processes of the earth. The space of the Diamond Grill is infused with the rhythms of memory, and the movement of the people within; it is also part of a larger space, set in a natural landscape with its own flows and renewals. As Wah explains, “The idea of an exterior/interior being connected or separated privileges the extremities. I want that ‘noisy hyphen’ of a door clanging and rattling the measure of such movement” (*Faking It* 104). Wah is careful not to reify the “extremities” at the ends of the hyphen, for these binaries reinforce and replicate staid power hierarchies; rather, he seeks the unsettled, noisy space *in between*. It is in this in between space of ambivalence that the noisy hyphen disrupts the perceived “calm” of homogenous multicultural scripts by offering “real engagement, not as a centre but as a provocateur of flux” (103). In the end of the narrative, Wah evokes this in-between space and makes it manifest. Wah Sr. arrives to open the diner in the early morning, and as he unlocks the back door, “he jars it open with a slight body-check, the door clangs and rattles a noisy hyphen between the muffled winter outside and the silence of the warm and waiting

kitchen inside” (176). Wah clearly plays on the term “body-check” here, for the movement of his father’s body as he crosses the threshold from outside to inside ignites a “heterocellular” response rooted in memory and the present moment. In *Diamond Grill*, Wah charts a translocal mapping of place along multiple biopaths: the immediate local and the frontier, across spaces personal, public, natural, local, national, and global.

As I mentioned earlier, the identification of correspondences between the body, the community, and various spaces and places of experience is a poetic concern that Wah developed earlier in his poetic career. As he writes in 1976,

out there is only meaningful in its correspondence to in here. ... The spaces between here and there are part of a vast similarity. ... Down and out there the exterior becomes more. Vancouver leads to other cities and countries, etc. But all of it, out there, is measured from in here. In the particularity of a place the writer finds revealed the correspondences of a whole world. And then holes in that wor()d. (*Loki* 126)

The narrative of *Diamond Grill* comes full circle, but with spokes always radiating outwards, creating projective constellations of correspondence. Wah’s sentiment here echoes Duncan’s theorization of the correspondences within the collage, wherein “[t]he old doctrine of correspondences is enlarged and furtherd [sic] in a new process of responses, parts belonging to the architecture not only by the fittings ... but by ... each part as it is conceived as a member of every other part, having, as in a mobile, an interchange of roles” (*Bending* ix). Just as the open structure of Duncan’s collage—the parts responding to and being responsible for each other—is reflective of the ethics of the commune, the particularities forming Wah’s collage of place collectively contribute to the building form of place as a site of productive conflict and harmony.

For the racially hybrid subject, the hyphen becomes a practice of living that emerges through processes of reading and writing the correspondences and gaps in the surrounding wor(d).

In the particularities of the local diner, its intricate architecture of space and place, the complex relations of the exterior world are microcosmically mirrored. As Wah traverses the various places of his identity translocally, a variety of positions emerge to manifest the hyphen of his borderland existence in both the intensely local and the broader global spheres. The “trans” of Wah’s “translocal” is explored more in depth in the next brief section that examines the ways in which Wah manifests the hyphen as “the poetics of the trans-” (*Faking It* 90), a poetics of opposition and resistance at the level of the page.

### **Signifying Hybrid Trans- Space: Resistance in Experimental Form**

h<sub>om</sub><sup>om</sup>e

—Fred Wah<sup>251</sup>

Wah’s resistance to a totalizing narrative of identity extends to the formal innovations of his work, wherein the landscape of the page becomes a site of resistance and a created space of agency. Indeed, “faking it” is a strategy that not only allows for the manipulation and reorganization of socially-constructed spaces and multiple subject positions therein, but allows for improvisation in artistic form at the level of the page. The hyphen is at the centre of a poetic process and praxis that Wah terms “*trans* poetics,” the goal of which is to “locate and indicate the blank space, both to preserve and perpetuate the passage position as well as to problematize it so that it doesn’t become static” (*Faking It* 91-92; original emphasis). *Trans* poetics deterritorializes textual spaces by establishing multiple entrances to meaning by way of innovative form and semantics—a process that mobilizes the semantic plurality and proliferation

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<sup>251</sup> *So Far* 10.

of the hyphen. It is a methodology that extends the field poetic, for as Wah affirms, “[t]he paradigm of *trans* poetics . . . offers a greater depth of field, a wide-angle lens that permits distortion at the edges” (*Faking It* 91). This section will explore instances wherein the hyphen’s presence manifests in the trans-formations and experimentations of text. Uniting form and content, these examples demonstrate that Wah’s explorations of the many spaces and places of his identity are mirrored in the spaces and places within the hybrid construct of language. Spatial and formal innovation allows the noisy hyphen to be made audible in its variety of subject positions. For Wah, (and for the other writers concerned in this project), the act of “writing through” language makes possible the creation of created spaces of resistance and agency for a subject that is “magnetized” by dominant spatial structures.

As I have demonstrated, Wah’s translocal turn can be traced from a fixed conception of the local to a constellatory, mobile conception of “place” that deterritorializes the concept of “home.” Rather than being based on origins and specific locality, Wah reterritorializes “home” as a shifting relation between and across points of signification. In “Scree-Sure Dancing,” the word “home”—a normally fixed and stable sign in our cultural imaginary—is semantically broken:

h<sub>om</sub><sup>om</sup>e

...

I want one ethnic thing here

right from the start. Dis-

orientation. (*So Far* 10, 12)

Like the hyphen, “home” is both “site and sign” (*Faking It* 74). Aside from simply defamiliarizing the sign “home” at the level of language, Wah goes further to render it

undefinable and illegible. In so doing, its centre is mobilized by decentralizing it on the page, a strategy that also renders the origins of “home” polyvocal, plural—not incomplete, but ongoing. This deferral is marked by the two “om” refrains into which the signifier home is broken on the page. In traditional yogic practice, “om” is a mantra chanted by an individual to connect them to the wider unity of the cosmos. By repeating the “om,” Wah vocalizes the sign of “home” as a space of *communitas* between individuals across places both local and cosmic. Although the sign is broken and made plural, Wah seems to suggest that there is a unity within the word “home” that we feel as human beings—as if it is a rime that signifies differently for individuals in different places, but whose essence or “inbinding,” to use Duncan’s terms, is communally felt.

Moreover, Wah’s use of the term “dis- / orientation” here is quite significant to his overall poetic project of investigating and articulating a racially hybrid identity within the field poetic he adopts from Olson and Duncan. First, the play on “Orient” in “dis-orientation” becomes a linguistic means by which Wah can interrogate his ambivalent hyphenated identity in the experience of language. Under Wah’s poetic hand, origin becomes trans-formed into a dispersed, flickering sign; hence the play on “Orient” in “Dis- / orientation” that points to Wah’s “dis-Oriented” hyphenated identity as Chinese-Canadian. In accordance with Wah’s conception of synchronous foreignicity, the hyphen between “dis-orientation” involves an active and subjective choice of identity expression among many possible positions. The hyphen simultaneously indicates both a stating of, and a refusal of *Orientation*, Wah’s Chinese identity. Not only does Wah revise the term “home” to reveal its multiplicity as a signifier, but he also disassembles—both in form and content—the notion of ethnicity and how it operates in the North American cultural imaginary. The term “Orient” is a derogatory term to refer to the “exoticism” of the eastern region of the world. By stating that “dis / Orientation” is the desired “one ethnic thing,”

Wah is attempting to negate the Western racist practice of perceiving ethnicity based on bodily visual cues—a practice that instills a fixed racial binary of “norm” and the “exotic” other.<sup>252</sup>

Second, as discussed with Olson and Duncan, engaging with the open field as poetic praxis is indeed a dis-orienting process—not in the sense that the poet goes “outside of him/herself,” as Olson warns against, but quite the inverse: the negative capability of the field reveals the multiple positions within the self, as well as the many correspondences between these others and the landscape. I will return to the quotation above from *So Far* in a moment, but first I would like to engage with a poem from Wah’s later collection, *Music at the Heart of Thinking* (1987), wherein he makes the ambivalence of the field explicit. Wah situates the field within a series of rhetorical questions: “Le mot juste or just tomatoes? / The poem as a field of carrots or stones? / You, squinting, as I tell you. / Telling you, you telling me, field waiting” (42). The process of uncovering the accordances and dissonances of the field “dis-oriens” the subject. In Wah’s metapoetic comment, the “field wait[s]” while the subjects argue between particulars; as a poetic methodology, the field situates knowledge as *practice*—as something to find out, in the manner of Olson’s *istorin*, not as a given a priori handed down from tradition.

Moreover, in the passage quoted above from *So Far*, Wah uses the page to “dis-orient” home as a stable sign, which recalls the double articulation emphasized by Duncan’s double vision discussed previously. Moreover, its written form on the page—wherein “home” is visually displayed on the page as a pictogram of sorts—is comparable to Olson’s “X” poem of place that I analyzed in the first chapter. Here, home is not an “X marks the spot” local as Olson would have it, but is rather dispersed in space, forming a constellatory map of shifting significations

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<sup>252</sup> At the time that *So Far* was published in 1991, the influence of Wah’s “dis/Orientation” poetics was spread widely across the writing community. Evidence of this can be found in the work of his students and in the little magazines created Western Canada around this time; for instance, the namesake of the *disOrientation chapbooks* out of Calgary (1991-1997), edited by Nicole Markotic and Ashok Mathur, demonstrate this widespread poetic influence (Butling and Rudy, *Writing* 112 n.6).

rather than a linear trajectory of place. Whereas disorientation typically results in loss of direction and one's impaired awareness of place and time, here Wah empowers dis-orientation as a tool for place-making along translocal lines. As with Olson and Duncan, Wah highlights dis-orientation as a crucial tool of poetic place-making that retrieves the epistemological connection between the self and landscape from assumptions of ethereal certainty to the material and experiential.

Wah's experimentations with the experiential aspect of language as it articulates the hybrid field of his identity points to a larger application of the field methodology that lies beyond the self and into the community of individuals under the unified banner of nationalism. As Wah writes in *Music*, "you're / right is what makes the nation Cabot / Champlain Moodie Winnipeg but what I want / to know is what on this moonless night were / you hollering and was there even a path?" (38). Here, Wah highlights the difference between the landscape as a "claimed" nation in discourse, and the landscape as space of immediate experiential meaning. The history of the nation—as written from the vantage of the colonizer—is undeniably a different narrative than one conjured by walking through the landscape of present. Just as proprioception, the act of moving through space, informs the self and its environment, so does walking through the landscape "on this moonless night," along an ambiguous path, imbue the self and the landscape with particularities that are excluded from overarching narratives of the nation that preclude the landscape. Articulating the self's experience of the landscape in a field of interaction "unsettles" these colonial scripts; the subjective experimentations with and through the landscape re-orient the self's experience of landscape away from static discourses of the "nation" and towards corporeal meaning in place, to the immediacy of the field where the self and the landscape form an experimental and experiential poetic matrix.

While it may seem strange to use dis-orientation as a strategy of place-making, the stance of “double orientation” within the term, as I have discussed, is used by Wah to overturn assumptions of stable origin. Language, the process by which correspondences and gaps in the “wor(d)” appear, is investigated in *Music at the Heart of Thinking* for its capacity to reveal multiple subject positions in place. Or, in other words, language offers a means by which the poet can spatialize the self and disperse it across multiple signifiers. Concerning the sequences in Wah’s collection, Jeff Derksen argues in his essay “Making Race Opaque” that “Language is the defamiliarizing, estranging, and ‘dis-orienting’ tool that, through its own hybridity and plurality, enables differentiated subjectivities to articulate multiple positions” (75). Language becomes the means by which Wah “estranges” and “dis-orient” the binaries put on to his body by scripts of national and cultural unity. As Wah writes in *Music at the Heart of Thinking*, “I was where I was / but I didn’t know where the others were” (53). As Duncan often does, Wah invokes the Zukofskian “I”s to articulate community as well as the pluralities within the individual. These variant individualities articulate a necessarily dis-oriented, yet translocal articulation of place—as the “I” that writes the poem considers his immediate place, he must also consider the “others” and “otherwheres” of his plural identity. These multiple identities and sites of being, articulated across the hyphen, indicate that the “where” of the poet is always plural and fluid, moving between the particulars of the I’s here and the Other’s there. In *Music*, Wah again plays with this emplacement of “I”s across multiple sites: “Everywhere I go here, here I go again. / But even if I worked it out ahead of time / I’d do it” (51). These competing “I”s articulate different desires in different places and times; together, they dis-orient and disrupt the singular self, but at the same time, they also orient the self within and across many positions. The negative capability of the

field of language allows for these accordances and discordances within the multiscalar self to surface.

Since so much of identity formation occurs in the ways in which the subject is dispersed in space and place, Wah's insistence on the hyphen's nomadic spatiality is exceptionally apt. As Wah writes: "The 'nomadology' of the ethnic writer, that is the figuring out where she is, where to go, how to move, not just through language but in the world, is an investigation of place, as well as a placement in said place" (*Faking It* 56). Deleuze and Guattari's conception of nomadology has its origins in the concept of *spatial distribution and dispersal*, which identifies the two main ways in which people are distributed in space: that of the State, which functions to "parcel out a closed space to people," and that of nomadic spatiality, which "distributes peoples (or animals) in an open space" (Deleuze, *Difference* 420). Drawing on the etymological background of "nomad," Deleuze and Guattari observe that "[t]he root 'Nem' indicates distribution, not allocation" (*A Thousand* 621). Whereas movement along statist lines is limited to preset paths, movement in the in-between, in unlimited nomad space, is borderless: it can be entered at any point and is non-hierarchical in organization.

This conception of nomadology applies twofold to Wah's adoption of the field poetic upon the page as a methodology of articulating both self and place: first, his non-hierarchical articulations (or dispersals) of multiple subject positions within the self spatialize the self as nomadic and rhizomatic, ongoing in its articulations of self and place. Second, nomadology underlies Wah's reconfiguration of the boundaries of "home" as a plural space, a condition of being that is not limited to a singular site or meaning. In this way, Wah's formulation of a plural disunity between selves forms a resistant approach to poetic place that opposes the coherent narrative of the nation. As Derksen has recently pointed out in his introduction to Wah's

collected earlier poems, *Scree: Collected Earlier Poems, 1962-1991*, there was a marked search in the 1960s in Canadian literature for an authentic Canadian identity—“fabulously constructed out of historical exclusions, contingent inclusions, and denials of a colonial present” (“Reader’s Manual” 3). Wah’s early poetry responds to this Eurocentric paradigm of imagining the space of the nation. Under Wah’s hand, we see “the transformation of this cultural quest of a national unity to a productive resistance that produced difference within and against an imagined national coherence” (Derksen, “Reader’s” 3). Rather than seeing home, and the greater nation, as a “preset” space or condition, he renders it nomadic: it is a place subject to shift and change, where the “in-between” is a space of multiple significations.

While he would only later identify the hyphen as an “instrumen[t] of disturbance, dislocation, and displacement” (*Faking It* 73), in this early poem from *So Far*, quoted and discussed above, we see the hyphen at work. Although the repeated “om” refrain in the middle of “home” does not appear as a visual hyphen, it nonetheless functions similarly as an in-between space that joins and separates. He hyphenates the word “home” at its centre, indicating the hyphen’s ability to not only indicate an intersection or a compound, but to identify a borderland in and of itself, a volatile, dynamic site. The bounded system of “home” as both a spatial and discursive construct is re-created, its boundaries re-drawn. The “h” and the “e” of the word—its origin and ending—are downplayed by the active middle space of “om om,” but they are nonetheless important in for Wah’s polemic as functioning *borders*. Phonetically, the “h” is a voiceless fricative and the “e” is silent; the focus of the breath is on the centre line, the voiced “om.” Wah is acutely aware of the projective poetic of this word, its line matching its breath pattern in speech. Further, the phonetic make up of the word suggests the nomadic poetic polemic at hand: the “h” and “e” form silent borders that put the emphasis on what is in-between;

as such, the porous origin and ending of the word “home” points toward a larger conception of all borders as porous and imaginary.

As I have shown, Wah reterritorializes the local from being singularly “here or there” to being both at once, nomadic, “here/there.” The self emerges in the movement *between* spaces past and present. As Andy Weaver observes, subjective place in Wah’s work emerges from this dialogic relation between selves:

Wah views subjectivity not as a series of discrete static moments, but as a constellation of gentle, fluid continuums, where the individual is constantly in dialogic communication with both earlier and later versions of herself: these continuums work in many directions at once, and so something that might be reified in one situation or context can be vital in another. (“Synchronous” 318)

For Wah, the local is at once a process and experiment in and through space in which various versions of the self are enunciated along different points of relation. These constellatory points spatialize the self along nonhierarchical “fluid continuums” that, as Weaver notes, allow for a shifting set of articulations within different contexts. Wah’s flickering selves allow him to “fake it” while transgressing borders both psychic and spatial: his “dis-orienting” experience with the border agent discussed earlier allows him to mobilize his whiteness against his “less than fifty percent” Chinese identity and permit him into the United States. On the other hand, his Chineseness allows him to navigate both sides of the swinging door in the Diamond Grill and seek comfort in the “meaningless but familiar hum of Cantonese and away from all the angst of the arrogant white world out front” (*Diamond Grill* 63).

For Wah, the “making complete” of the self is subordinate to “faking it,” a process of selving undertaken by means of an ongoing becoming through fragmentation, through the act of writing. As the opening of *Waiting for Saskatchewan* reads:

Waiting for Saskatchewan  
 and the origins grandparents countries places converged  
 europe asia railroads carpenters nailed grain elevators  
 ...  
 my body to get complete  
 it still owes me, it does (3)

The collaged words of the second and third lines of this passage signify multiple spaces and places that defer a sense of the self as “complete” and final. In the composite, the local as a sign is dispersed into narrative markers such as “origins,” “countries,” “places,” woven together with particular sites of memory and present being. Hence the irony of the last line: Wah’s body does still “owe” him—indeed, it will continue to—because bodily subjectivity is not a given, but is nomadic, always in the process of becoming. In the following section, this discussion of nomadic subjectivity—the self distributed within and across multiple spaces and sites of memory and of the present—is continued in the context of Daphne Marlatt’s place-based poetic of the labyrinth, as well as in her rumination on the megaliths of the Avebury stone circles that suture the porous borders of her present self with nomadic past(s).

**‘her not here’: Marlatt’s (Re)covery of the Local in Language<sup>253</sup>**

but if we can’t see where we’re coming from, how see where we’re going?<sup>254</sup>

—Daphne Marlatt

A path is always between two points, but the in-between has taken on all the consistency and enjoys both an autonomy and a direction of its own.<sup>255</sup>

—Deleuze and Guattari

Redrawing the boundaries of home—from a fixed sign “in place” to a ground of ongoing becoming—is also a project that concerns the work of Daphne Marlatt, to whose work this chapter now turns. This section will root Marlatt’s translocal articulation of place within her reterritorialization of patriarchal language, an act that corrects the erasure of a female subject position within language. Building from this understanding, I will then move to a discussion of the labyrinth, which is Marlatt’s metaphor for female spatial and ideological resistance and survival—a ways and means of (re)covering the female presence in historically organized space. In the last section I turn to a comparison of Olson’s and Marlatt’s treatment of the megalith to demonstrate her revision of Olson’s rooted local. The squat stone mothers that feature in Marlatt’s *How Hug a Stone* (1983) become an integral metaphor for the negotiation of female translocal positionality within striated patriarchal space.

In many ways, Marlatt’s poetic journey has been similar to Wah’s in terms of a focused early interest in the local and a significant later shift to a translocal sensibility. In the 1960s Marlatt studied alongside Wah at the University of British Columbia under the tutelage of Warren Tallman. She also attended classes taught by Olson and Duncan, which gave the early Marlatt a sense of a deeply local poetics. However, over the course of her career, Marlatt, like

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<sup>253</sup> Marlatt, *Readings* 194.

<sup>254</sup> *Readings* 141.

<sup>255</sup> *A Thousand Plateaus* 380.

Wah, began a process of “heterocellular recovery”—finding the inherited local poetic too singular and rooted in its articulation, she ventures out in her later works to investigate a translocal understanding of place. Whereas Olson and Duncan’s projects are strongly focused on forward projection, preservation of origin, and contribution to lineage, Marlatt’s is more concerned with (re)covery. Rather than feeling fixed in place, Marlatt’s concern is the *recovery of space by practicing place*.

De Certeau’s concept of practiced place, which I have drawn from throughout this project, provides a critical lens with which to view Wah’s and Marlatt’s translocal spatial practice. I will return to this point throughout the following sections, but at the outset it is necessary to point out that both Wah’s and Marlatt’s conception of place is closely aligned with de Certeau’s, as “an instantaneous configuration of positions” (*The Practice* 117). Such a definition denies singular origin as a basis for place; under this model, place is fluid and contingent on context and circumstance, and thereby applies to both Wah’s hyphen and Marlatt’s labyrinth, two spatial metaphors that are used to practice place within the poetic field.

For Marlatt, practicing place within literary tradition became a necessary strategy of subjective survival. Marlatt’s early writing, like Wah’s, is deeply ensconced in the local geography of British Columbia, as demonstrated in her early *Vancouver Poems* (1972) and *Steveston* (1974).<sup>256</sup> However, as she has stated regarding her poetic “masters” Olson and Duncan, although they have led her down meaningful paths of influence in terms of the “local,” she has struggled to read herself in their masculinist geography:

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<sup>256</sup> Marlatt’s later writings emphasize a need to “Salvage” (the name of her 1991 poetry collection) her older writings that were vested in the patriarchal systems she inherited. After she came out as a lesbian she did just that: her early Vancouver poems were (re)visited and (re)visioned in 2013 as *Liquidities: Vancouver Poems Then and Now* (2013). This act of re-vision relates to my discussion of Marlatt’s connection to the French feminist school of thought as well as the ideas of Adrienne Rich, to which I turn shortly in this section.

My own ‘masters’ (in the sense of mentors) were Charles Olson, Robert Duncan, Robert Creeley, and their masters, William Carlos Williams, Ezra Pound, Louis Zukofsky. Somehow reading ‘the poet, he’ to include me, i trained myself in that poetic, the injunctions to get rid of the lyric ego, not to ‘sprawl’ in loose description or emotion ungrounded in image, to pay strict attention to the conjoined movement of body (breath) and mind in the movement of the line, though it didn’t occur to me then to wonder whether my somewhat battered female ego was anything like a man’s or whether my woman’s body had different rhythms from his or whether my female experience might not give me an alternate ‘stance’ in the world (one that wasn’t so much ‘in’ as both in & outside of a male-dominated politic & economy). But there were cracks, fissures that led me to another writing world. (*Readings* 136)<sup>257</sup>

As Marlatt states, although the tutelage of Olson and Duncan taught her to fuse the movements of the body with the poetic line, she didn’t acknowledge until later how her body, gendered female, would inflect this poetic process. Accordingly, her poetic developed in such a way that she began to realize that the topography of the ground from which she speaks—both in terms of tradition and view/stance—might be articulated differently than the ways in which she was taught by Olson and Duncan.<sup>258</sup> Although she would not break away as clearly from Black Mountain as Baraka, Marlatt’s later work sees her developing an alternative spatial practice both

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<sup>257</sup> In this and other quotations from Marlatt in this chapter, I have preserved her original uncapitalized writing style.

<sup>258</sup> Marlatt articulates her “anxiety of influence,” to use Harold Bloom’s term, in terms of an almost intoxicating power that she often tried to escape as an early writer. As she admits to Pauline Butling in an interview, “I was terrified of Duncan . . . I was trying to write these short line poems for *leaf leaf/s*, really trying to escape his influence, though at the same time I was influenced by H.D.’s work and Cid Corman’s and Zukofsky’s” (qtd. in Butling, “Magazining” 119).

in her choice of created poetic community and in her construction of said community across different spaces and places.

As with the other writers in this project, Marlatt is wary of overarching narratives of belonging that seek to categorize bodies “in place.” As such, she urges that a sense of one’s grounding as a female writer must incorporate the peripheral “fringes”: “Becoming aware of dialogue on the (many) fringes, listening to other women’s words, realities, is to engage in a delicate balance between recognition of difference and recognition of shared ground” (*Readings* 137). In many ways, Marlatt’s response to the local extrapolates it through intensification of what she has learned from Olson—his projective hermeneutic, which focuses on the expression of the “particulars” of one’s experience, is adapted by Marlatt in that she aims to intensively particularize her local by inflecting it with a “shared ground” of female experiences of space and place.

Marlatt situates her alternative view and alternative spatial practice within the tradition of feminist writers and scholars such as Hélène Cixous, Luce Irigaray, and Adrienne Rich, who propose (re)vision and (re)covery as a means of survival. These modes of (writing) survival, known as *l’écriture féminine* or “feminine writing,” are centred around Cixous’s infamous insistence that “woman must write herself” (245). This process involves looking back to the past, acknowledging the male lineages and influences containing female voices, and revising and reinterpreting these stories anew. Rich refers to this process as literary “re-vision,” and here the hyphen in the term is significant: going back and reinterpreting the past is not so much an act of overwriting the past, but quite literally *re*-visioning it anew to break with patriarchal influences and traditions. “Re-vision,” Rich explains, is “the act of looking back, of seeing with fresh eyes, of entering an old text from a new critical direction ... Until we can understand the assumptions

in which we are drenched we cannot know ourselves” (18). This act of return is necessary to ground the female poet in an understanding of the ways in which male influence has circumscribed the female imaginary in and through language. Marlatt’s realization of the different “stance” she occupies from Olson and Duncan is a realization of such assumptions latent in place-based poetics and the projective mode, with its focus on the male body as precedent. As she questions in *How Hug a Stone*, “what if history is simply a shell we exude for a place to live in? *all wrapped up. break out before it buries us. stories can kill*” (*How Hug* 51; original emphasis). Comparing history to a shell, Marlatt grounds history as a natural extension of ourselves, representing our individual and communal desire for place; however, she warns against the use of history as a totalizing narrative, as homogeneous historiography. Such a singularized narrative suffocates the particular, and so she recommends going “against the script” (45).

Marlatt’s project of recovery bears significant similarity to Wah’s strategy of “faking it,” since she stresses improvisation and creativity as a key narrative strategy of survival. Just as Wah Sr.’s pivoting between multiple subject positions is at once an experiment with space and an act of survival, so the female writer must also experiment with narratives of place. As she commands: “be unnamed, walk / unwritten, de-scripted, un-described. or else compose, make / it say itself, make it up” (*How Hug* 35). Marlatt’s felt need for improvisation in space and place comes from her articulated immigrant imagination, which eschews the concept of “belonging” as the sole access point to place.<sup>259</sup> Rather, writing “de-scripted, un-described” allows her to articulate subject positions that are made unavailable by such static metanarratives. The process is akin to hyphenation and synchronous foreignicity, for as Marlatt concedes, to write place is “to

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<sup>259</sup> Marlatt was born in Melbourne, Australia and lived with her family in Malaysia and England before immigrating to Canada in 1951. I return to this discussion of her immigrant imagination—which is complicated by her family’s ties to the colonial administration in Malaysia—in the following section in my discussion of *Steveston*.

knit ... two places together, two (at least!) selves somehow” (223). This writing-as-knitting strategy will be examined further in the last section in my discussion of *How Hug a Stone* as a complex labyrinth of place. As with Olson’s paced-out local, Duncan’s meadow and households, Baraka’s New Ark, Wah’s strategy of “faking it” through the hyphen and door, Marlatt’s trajectory of place in the labyrinth is an intensely *created* ground; as such, it exposes place as a “constructed” concept first and foremost. This view of place does not diminish the significance of place, but instead proves to demonstrate its shifting nature and its ability to adapt to the particulars of one’s existence and experience.

By moving backward and forward through the multiple pasts and presents of multiple locals past and present in *How Hug a Stone*, Marlatt resists fixity and origin as markers of place; rather, she constructs a constellation of place through multiple s/cites that shift with the flows of memory and feminine being. I will discuss the particular landscapes of these shifting local sites later, but I would like to first situate these sites as “cites”—that is, her explorations of flows in place begin with an interrogation of the linguistic landscape from which she writes. In order to articulate the shifting nature of space and place, Marlatt goes back to the ground of language, to the etymology of words, to open a space for feminine place within patriarchally-structured language. Although her early works express a deep interest in the ground of language, this early interest was later reimagined after encountering the spirit of feminist revision from the work of the French feminists. More particularly, Marlatt’s earlier work is less concerned with etymological origins in particular and more with linguistic breakage—it was only in her later works that etymological deferral became pronounced in her work. For example, in her second work *leaf/leaf(s)* (1969), words are often broken into two across lines so as to gesture toward the inherent multiplicity within units of language. For example, the word play in the lines “tem pest

as tem / pratures measure ...tempura rest, ‘rant, gulpt” (15) and “ab / sent ab / sunt” (49) break words into their parts—not in an attempt to get at the origin or purity of words, but to undo their singular cohesiveness by forming a fluid network of multiple meanings from their fragments within the space of the poem. These early attempts to undermine a linear, patriarchal system of meaning-making becomes intensified in her later works; as I will demonstrate in a moment, in later works such as *How Hug a Stone* (1983) and *Touch to My Tongue* (1984) this concern for multiplicity becomes tied to Marlatt’s desire for a homosexual female community and a particular female experience within and through language. As such, in these works the “mothertongue”—manifest as an etymological flow of meaning and prolific deferral—becomes characteristic of her writing.

This process of feminine (re)covery in language thus corresponds to her development as a writer, for after being exposed to French feminist writing and coming out as a lesbian in the early ‘80s, Marlatt felt the need to reassess and redefine her relationship to her Black Mountain influences. In her influential essay “Musing with Mothertongue,” Marlatt articulates her transition, both personally and poetically: “It was a time of transition for me as i tried to integrate my feminist reading with a largely male-mentored postmodernist poetic, at the same time coming out as a lesbian in my life as well as in my writing” (*Readings* 1). For Marlatt, the process of coming out simultaneously involves going back, a journeying to the ground and source of language: “the beginning: language, a living body we enter at birth ... placental, our flat land, our sea, it is both place (where we are situated) and body (that contains us), that body of language we speak, our mothertongue” (*Touch* 45). As a “placental ... flat land,” language is the originary textual ground, a space within which one can practice and experiment in place. The

process of writing, or going back to this maternal ground of articulation, allows Marlatt to recover a subjective female place within language that was overwritten by patriarchal influences.

Indeed, both Olson and Marlatt are interested in etymology as a means of recovering community within language across time and space; however, whereas Olson's use of etymology demonstrates his search for a pristine origin in language, Marlatt's sees its opposite: in etymology, she uncovers a prolific network of interrelated meanings. For Olson, etymology is a return to "roots," as he writes to Larry Eigner in 1956, "so one can feel that far back along the line of the word to its first users—what they meant" (*Selected Letters* 237). Marlatt's interest, however, lay not in language's roots, but its *routes*, if you will, in recovering the web of possible connections and relations. These various "routes" within language extend to become a *poethic* understanding of one's place. As she later writes in *The Gull* (2009),

It seems to me that the various ways in which words connect, from semantic links to the variety of musical links that poetry has always worked with—that these links form a verbal analogue for the ecological webwork we actually live within. Just as we tend to be unconscious about the extent of the connective tissue between words because we are so intent on getting our immediate meaning across, so we tend to be unconscious about the vast extent of the ecological webwork that supports us[.] (28)

For Marlatt, the "webwork" of language does not connect one to pure origin, but to the prolific network of relations that reflects the relations between the self and others in the environment. Since people use language more often than not as a given, Marlatt sees etymological work as a practice of refamiliarizing oneself with the deeper connections inherent in language that get covered over through connotative usage. Moreover, her concept of the "webwork" of language

that mirrors the network of ecological connections to which the self is a part anticipates my discussion of translocal place to follow. As we will see in *How Hug a Stone*, Marlatt's explorations through the multiple geographical sites of her past and present are accompanied by an odyssey within and across terrains of language.

Marlatt's journey of (re)covery is specifically centred upon the female body, often at the risk of asserting an essentialist account of female experience.<sup>260</sup> For Marlatt, the female bodily experience forms the foundation for a community of women that collectively struggle against patriarchal constructions of globalized experience through language. Arguing that "etymology often remembers the feminine sensibility of our inner landscape" (*Readings* 35), Marlatt insists that it is imperative for language to be *inhabited*, for inhabiting place as a nexus of verbal relations is the female writer's way of surviving. Further, as Marlatt observes, there is a manifest discrepancy between what "our patriarchally-loaded language bears (can bear) of our experience ... how it misrepresents, even miscarries, and so leaves unsaid what we actually experience" (47). Since for Marlatt—as for the other writers concerned by this project—place is a hermeneutic text that is interpretable and alterable, these other narratives of place provide correctives to patriarchal assumptions of homogenous experience.

Deleuze and Guattari's two competing models of spatial configurations—the smooth and the striated—is exceptionally apt when thinking of Marlatt's exposing of language's inherent patriarchal structure. To be sure, grammar is the most obvious example of the ways in which language is striated, as it controls the flows of language and codes meanings into fixed and enclosed relations. According to Marlatt (via the French feminists), language is organized in grammar and syntax according to phallogentric rules. Cixous writes that "Nearly the entire history of writing is confounded with the history of reason ... it has been one with the

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<sup>260</sup> In the following section, I will return to this "problem" of essentialism in criticism of Marlatt's work.

phallogocentric tradition” (249). The masculine tradition of writing reproduces linear hierarchies and systems of logic meant to striate and circumscribe experience within the “all knowing” bounds of the mind. As Marlatt writes in *Touch to My Tongue*, this masculine tradition of language is inadequate to express the corporeal experiences of the female body:

how can the standard sentence structure of English with its linear authority, subject through verb to object, convey the wisdom of endlessly repeating and not exactly repeated cycles her body knows? or the mutuality her body shares embracing other bodies, children, friends, animals, all those she customarily holds and is held by? (47)

Feminine writing, on the other hand, is akin to smooth space in that it focuses on the becoming and flows of the body as not complete but continuous. As opposed to the rigid hierarchies of the masculine writing tradition, the feminine mode of writing celebrates unchronological, uncontained language that engenders blurred and porous boundaries. In other words, writing in the feminine makes language more inclusive of other places from which people speak—its language disrupts the all-knowing “He” that sums up all experience, thereby opening spaces within language for the community of women to feel “in place” in their experiences and expressions of being.

Since the projective poetic mode challenges the logocentrism of traditional knowledge, it is an appropriate praxis for Marlatt to adopt in her resistant poetics of place. The projective functions primarily to reorient language back upon the body as a site of knowledge; the breath and movements of the body moving through space form the means by which the self comes to “know” and express the world and his/her place within it. As I have discussed in the first chapter, the negative capability of the field situates the projective as an epistemology that counteracts the

patriarchal tradition of absolute knowledge by expressing experience as unmediated by existent categories of thinking and being. As Olson's concept of *'istorin* demonstrates, the body is the primal site of knowledge production, of "finding out for oneself." Or, as Don Byrd puts it, "Evidence arises in the completely alogical factuality of living" (*The Poetics* 355). Thus, as discussed in the first chapter, Olson's prose poem "Place; & Names" situates the cell as the organic site of human experience: "these places or names / ...as parts of the body, common, & capable / therefore of having cells which decant / total experience—" (200). The knowledge of one's place does not come by way of exacting data or given coordinates, but by means of actively being in that place, by being in the immediateness of the body as it moves through space. Marlatt's poetic understands place as being similarly alogical and organic in nature; however, her poetic goes one step further in its particularization of the body by revising Olson's dictum of "cells which decant / total experience" as "language, a living body we enter at birth ... placental" (*Touch* 45). In so doing, Marlatt offers a feminine revision of *'istorin* by means of situating the female body, in particular, as a means of gaining access to and knowledge of one's place. Indeed, both Wah and Marlatt confront the white male body in Projective Verse with otherness and particularity.<sup>261</sup> By linking the language of place to the female body in particular, Marlatt demonstrates her adaptation of the projective mode's resistance not only to logocentrism but also how it can be also adapted—with some particularization—to resist *phallogocentrism*.

This discussion of the feminine mode of writing within language that Marlatt adopts and sutures to her projective poetic primes the following discussion of the labyrinth, Marlatt's spatial metaphor of place-making. Marlatt's project of dispersing the local, of de-striating it, is founded on these concerns of the feminine place within language. Just as the feminine subject moves

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<sup>261</sup> However, as I argue in the conclusion to this chapter, both Wah's and Marlatt's challenges to this body politic are made possible by the spatial mobility inherent in white privilege.

through language according to continuous, open flows of meaning, so she moves through space in a manner that spatializes the local across multiple sites and cites of being.

**‘on the absent ground of her literal’: Place-Making in the Labyrinth**<sup>262</sup>

To write from where we stand, her(e) in the labyrinth...<sup>263</sup>

—Daphne Marlatt

In order to deterritorialize language and make room for female place therein, Marlatt employs the spatial metaphor of the labyrinth as poetic praxis. Indeed, the labyrinth adds significant semantic depth to the spatial tropes of passages and passageways that permeate this entire project. In many ways, the labyrinth is an alternative response to the concept of “passage,” for movement across and through the grounds of tradition and language is not always linear and unimpeded, especially for the female writer. Marlatt puts it plainly when she argues that the labyrinth is a textual structure wherein “passageways pose no easy passage” (*Readings* 183). At its very literal core, the concept of the labyrinth refuses a singular access point or view; in keeping with its plural spirit, Marlatt provides a manifold definition:

labyrinth: a structure consisting of a number of intercommunicating passages arranged in a bewildering complexity. labyrinth: ‘not a maze we get lost in; it had only one path, traversing all parts of the figure’ (Walker 523). labyrinth: a continuous walking that folds back on itself and in folding back moves forward. Labyrinth: earth-womb, underground, a journeying to the underworld and back. ... intercommunicating passages circling back. (*Readings* 33)

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<sup>262</sup> Marlatt, *Readings* 191.

<sup>263</sup> *Readings* 195.

What is most obvious arising from the image of the labyrinth is the element of disorientation, which has also been a recurring trope throughout this project. As I will demonstrate, the disorientation initiated by the labyrinth expresses the erasure women have inherited through patriarchal language that excludes them; under Marlatt's hand, this lack of grounding in patriarchal tradition is mobilized into an empowering strategy of survival for the female writer. As Méira Cook argues, such a strategy "avoids a one-track end-of-the-line trajectory," instead substituting "the slippage and play of reading between the lines" (183). Writing from the labyrinth of language, then, opens a space of excess signification wherein the female writer can explore alternative meanings that speak to her experience. This crucial spatial metaphor in Marlatt's work establishes the context for her translocal poetic practice as discussed in the following sections.

At once a poetic methodology, a practice of place, and a feminist negotiation of tradition, the labyrinth becomes the central trope of Marlatt's poetic oeuvre after she discovered French feminism in the 1980s as part of her "re-visionary" poetic process, as initiated by her coming out as a lesbian, and also coming into her own as a feminist writer. As I will discuss later in this section, there were earlier manifestations of the labyrinth in her earlier work *Steveston* (1974), but this spatial metaphor certainly came to the fore concomitantly with her coming out in the early 1980s. To be sure, her early writings are invested with a feminine sensibility, as her explorations of childbirth and parenting in *Rings* (1971) suggest. However, in these early writings, Marlatt articulates her longing for a female, maternal community. In *Rings*, Marlatt's pregnant experience is expressed as one that is solitary and inward—the males surrounding her are outside of this circle (or ring) in which her body-as-mother creates between herself and her unborn child. When Marlatt is going into labour, her husband Al is "still reading," and the doctor

tells Marlatt, “I beg your pardon ... I am perhaps / a little jealous since you use your language to communicate with yourself and not with us...” (n.p.). Both Marlatt’s husband and her male doctor are oblivious to the corporeality of maternity, the language it speaks. This inability of patriarchy to understand mothering is expressed as an inarticulate darkness in the text: “Mother is inarticulate dark? / (Smothering)” (n.p.). The speaker responds to these statements on the following line with a defiant “No.” Indeed, the experience of pregnancy and motherhood is expressed as creative and generative in its feminine particularity. The act of nursing her newborn child is expressed as a creative exchange: “Amazed, / at the interconnection still. Those first days how, with / every suck, I could feel the walls of uterus contract. You, / isolate now, & born, healing my body for me” (n.p.). Although the child is now separate from the body of the mother, their bodies are nonetheless engaged in a continuing symbiotic relationship that illustrates the nurturing abundance of the feminine community through motherhood. As I will demonstrate, in her later works such as *How Hug a Stone* (1983), Marlatt explores her homosexual desires for this feminine community of maternal language and creativity in the “stone mothers” of Avebury.<sup>264</sup>

As students of Olson and Duncan, the Tish poets were certainly influenced by the etymological interests underlying the Black Mountain poetic. In the early 1980s, however, with the publication of *How Hug a Stone* (1983) and *Touch to My Tongue* (1984) specifically, Marlatt deeply investigates a female trajectory through the ground of language—her poetic remains firmly projective, rooted in the body and the breath, but it is now a specifically female body and

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<sup>264</sup> In *Touch to My Tongue* (1984), Marlatt continues her rumination on the corporeality of verbal language through tropes of motherhood and birth: “matter (the import of what you say) and matter and by extension mother; language and tongue; to utter and outer (give birth again); a part of speech and a part of the body; pregnant with meaning; to mouth (speak) and the mouth with which we also eat and make love; sense (meaning) and that with which we sense the world; to relate (a story) and to relate to somebody, related (carried back) with its connection with bearing (a child); intimate and to intimate; vulva and voluble; even sentence which comes from a verb meaning to feel” (46).

breath from which she articulates her place in language, in tradition, and in the landscape. Nowhere is this more apparent than in “Musing with Mothertongue,” (1984) an essay that fuses her newfound feminist theoretical view with poetic experimentation in the “mothertongue” of language. The role of “this new woman writer,” she writes, is as an “inhabitant of language, not master, not even mistress . . . inside language she leaps for joy, shoving out the walls of taboo and propriety, kicking syntax, discovering life in old roots” (*Touch* 48-49). Wayfinding in the labyrinth of language, which is not an attempt to “master” language but to dwell inside and alongside it, risking the violation of patriarchal syntax, becomes the means by which Marlatt experiments with the place of the female writer both on and off the page. Marlatt takes this project of female reinscription quite literally; as I will demonstrate in the following sections, in her texts she often moves through complex, labyrinthine etymological associations. As I stated earlier, Olson’s poetic expresses a deep concern for etymology, which gives “fact” and grounding origin to language. Marlatt’s intentions are vastly different, however: in uncovering the (his)tory of words, she uncovers a vast field of plural meaning that has been erased by the singularity of patriarchal grammar.

Indeed, for Marlatt, the field is not necessarily a smooth space such that Olson and Duncan celebrated, but is striated by patriarchal language that seeks to circumscribe and silence female experience within its bounds. Asserting one’s place within origins, within the teleological “fact of place” as Olson has it, is not always a possibility for the female body contained by a language that is structured to articulate a masculine worldview, what Nicole Brossard calls “patriarchal one-way sense” (*The Aerial Letter* 109). Whereas for Duncan, passages allow for passageways—access points through language by means of chrestomathy, Marlatt revises this spatial metaphor as a labyrinth where the passages through are multiple, where wayfinding requires more

conscious negotiation. As Cixous writes of *l'écriture féminine*: “Woman must write herself: must write about women and bring women to writing, from which they have been driven away ... Woman must put herself into the text—as into the world and into history—by her own movement” (245). Paradoxically, as a structure the labyrinth is circumscribed yet limitless in its possibilities for movement and way-finding. Putting herself into the labyrinth of language and of poetic tradition, Marlatt moves proprioceptively as a woman through its multiple passageways, opening passageways previously undiscovered and/or ignored.

In the light of French feminist writings, Marlatt came to the realization that her female body might experience and conceive not only of language but of *space*—and local “place” therein—quite differently than did her male predecessors. The labyrinth is thus an apt spatial metaphor for Marlatt’s revisionary poetic process, for it incorporates the tenets of Olson’s concept of proprioception, the gathering of immediate environing sensory data into a space-time specific of the moving body, and revises it to speak for the moving female body. Marlatt’s works are pervaded with a sense of the body as a textual space in and of itself, and this is undoubtedly due to Olson’s influence. However, as she tells Pauline Butling and Susan Rudy, proprioception is in need of revision as it “never took into account gender difference” (Butling and Rudy, “On Salvaging” 37).<sup>265</sup> There is thus a need to reclaim proprioception to make it speak for the particulars of different bodies, other than that of the white male. We see this concern surface in Marlatt’s observations in *Steveston*, which I will turn to shortly. As Marlatt outlines, this process of adapting proprioception involves a writing process that is labyrinthine in nature:

it seems crucial to reclaim language through what we [female writers] know of ourselves in relation to writing. writing can scarcely be for women the act of the

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<sup>265</sup> Marlatt follows this comment by stating her concern over a double standard inherent in the concept of proprioception, that, for female writers, “If you talk about the body you run the risk of being labelled right away as an essentialist” (37). I respond to this criticism of Marlatt’s “essentialism” in the following sections.

phallic signifier, its claim to singularity, the mark of the capital I (was here). language is no 'tool' for us, no extension of ourselves, but something we are 'lost' inside of (Warland 1987). finding our way in a labyrinthine moving with the drift, slipping through claims to one-track meaning so that we can recover multiply-related meanings, reading between the lines. finding in write, rite, growing out of *ar-*, that fitting together at the root of reading (we circle back), moving into related words for arm, shoulder (joint), harmony ... using our labyrinthine sense, we (w)rite our *ar-* way, reading and relating these intercommunicating passages. (*Readings* 34-35)<sup>266</sup>

To find out for oneself: the labyrinth redefines Olson's *'istorin* by inflecting it with a wayfinding (and way-making) that is particular to the female experience. It is a symbol for female passage through language *par excellence*, for it defies linear closure and a fixed centre of meaning, opting instead for multiple access points to signification.<sup>267</sup> In the passage above, Marlatt digs into the constellatory etymology of the word "to write" and finds related terms for reading, which is then further connected to the physical process of reading and writing through the arm and shoulder. This disorienting process, the uncertainty of negative capability brought forth by moving through the labyrinth, is harnessed by Marlatt as a means of finding out for the female self by "moving with the drift."

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<sup>266</sup> In this essay, "Writing Our Way Through the Labyrinth," Marlatt explains the etymological origins of the words "writing" and "reading." As she explains, "writing goes back to the Germanic word, *writan*, meaning to tear, scratch, cut, incise. it is the act of the phallic singular, making its mark on things (stone, wood, sand, paper). leaving its track. "I was here," the original one in the world. reading goes back to Indo-European *ar-*, to fit together, appears in Old English as *raedan*, to advise, explain, read. ... always there is this relating to others. ... writing, the act of the singular, and reading, the act of the plural, of the more than one, of the one in relation to others" (34).

<sup>267</sup> It lies outside the scope of this chapter to discuss at length, but it is worth noting that Nicole Brossard, a Quebecoise writer and Marlatt's close contemporary, uses a similar spatial metaphor to discuss a feminist relation to language and place: that of the spiral. Like the labyrinth, the spiral refuses a fixed origin and centre. As Brossard observes, "The spiral pattern opens out onto the unwritten. And the unwritten circulates, round and round, producing emanations like those at the door to an initiatory pathway" (*Surfaces of Sense* 14).

Due to patriarchal language's "claim to singularity" through writing, reading thus becomes a mode of resistance in the labyrinth, for it involves navigating "intercommunicating passages" and "reading between the lines" to recover multiple meanings within language. Whereas Wah's hyphen allows him to "dis-Orient" himself, so the labyrinth allows Marlatt to "disorient" herself from such singularity within language by using her "labyrinthine sense." By means of reading and relating within language, the labyrinth's disorientation becomes a critique of patriarchal rationality and linear, one-way sense. It thus becomes Marlatt's poetic praxis of resistance, as well as her hermeneutic of place-making in the feminine, since without a map, movement through the labyrinth requires the individual to learn from her own individual past movements, her own personal experiences within space, in order to chart and test an uncertain future. As Marlatt writes, regarding the female author: "What she wants to work is her own passage, serially lost in the traverse of language-working-text where walls, the images theron, keep shifting ground depending on perspective—no orthodox (single-doxa) compass, no universal destination, only the thread of where she's been travelling, travailing, unravelling behind (her)" (*Readings* 184).

As a figure for feminist (dis)orientation to language and place, the labyrinth also stands in for Marlatt's relationship to tradition, to the textual ground she inherits from her Black Mountain predecessors, among others. As with Duncan's "passages," the labyrinth is also a reading practice and strategy: "To write is to oscillate in the space between self and other, to move out from inside that which is not yet even privately read/said through the already read/said that is public (published) and back again. This back-and-forth movement across boundaries is a sort of testing, even contesting perhaps, of the necessity of what is being written" (Marlatt, *Readings* 218). For Duncan, only one possible passageway is opened to the individual at a given time and

place; that is, the “right” passage opens up organically to the individual who attends to the moment of writing and reading. Over time, however, these individual paths gather into a multiple whole of plural “passages.” For Marlatt, the labyrinth implies that at any given time or place, there are always multiple passageways (and multiple entryways) held in tension.

Indeed, the labyrinth is origin-less, and lacks a centre. There is no repeated cycles of departure or return to the source—there is only departure and re-direction in the way-finding. It thus articulates a different relationship to the spatial metaphors of literary tradition, such as Olson’s upward thrust from out of the past and Duncan’s passages. Whereas Duncan follows a path of linear derivation to the “centre” of tradition and builds passageways through the wisdom of those who came before, a clear source or “centre” of tradition is not as clearly determinable for Marlatt. Rather, her groundwork in the labyrinth requires a more imagined and experimental relationship to tradition and the reading of texts that have come before. Doing so creates a community that responds to the containment of the female body by tradition, language, and the canon. Whereas Duncan builds and experiments with a chrestomathy from the solid ground of literary tradition, a process that teaches him how to write “properly,” Marlatt’s ground is more experimental within language and its *processes* than in a given tradition. This is not to say that Duncan is not experimental in his chrestomathy, for his architecture of place is indeed processual and is fundamentally a creative and experimental process, as I discussed in my second chapter. However, as a woman encountering a predominantly male literary tradition, Marlatt must build her place not so much through derivation and construction/contribution but through *deconstruction and departure*. That is, Marlatt’s experimentations with etymology—her “musing with mothertongue”—offers her more than a linguistic chrestomathy in terms of an authoritative, stable source; rather, it offers her a strategy of deferring origin, thus demonstrating the

processual nature of language at its core. There are passageways through language, Marlatt's work suggests, but unlike Duncan's passageways, they do not lead to or from a stable centre of tradition and knowledge. Her "musings with mothertongue" signify her attempts to learn how to articulate by means of establishing a chrestomathy out of the mothertongue of language itself and experimenting with it. As such, Marlatt's work in the 1980s is devoid of quotations from Eliot or Pound as a means of establishing oneself in the linear hierarchy of tradition; for in the mothertongue, the community of female voices in language, there are no masters, only dwellers. In this way, Marlatt's labyrinth metaphor contests the hierarchical ground of tradition by opening multiple access points of connection and exchange. Rather than represent the "facts of place," place-making in the labyrinth is "never sure" but involves experimentation, redirection, multiple entrances and exits along a mobile journey of finding out for oneself.

In order to develop this idea further, I would like to compare Marlatt's view of the local in *Steveston* (1974) with Olson's "view" of the polis of Gloucester in *The Maximus Poems*. In these works, both Olson and Marlatt choose fishing towns for their exploration of the ways in which capitalist exploitation transforms the "self-reliant" individual's relation to the local. *Steveston* demonstrates the early presence in Marlatt's work of the labyrinth as a spatial metaphor that explores "local" place both in terms of landscape, and also the "local" of language as a system of marking and articulating place. In *Steveston* we see Marlatt articulating a sense of place as labyrinthine, multiphasic, and interconnected in past and present. Olson's sense of the local in Gloucester is founded in Sauer's theory of intertwined human and earthly processes. Marlatt's sense of local is also sedimented over time and interaction between humans and landscape, but in this process of sedimentation, plural realities and the entrenched politics of a colonized history surface.



Changes air now wet as the sea, The city

Comes walking up thru humor in the way of

Vision, salt. Cedar all over. Cedar for headdress.

Beaver or bear, what is there to the touch of,

You said. Come well back into view. (n.p.)

For Marlatt writing in the United States at the time, her physical location was simply a coordinate within space; Wisconsin lacked the quantum connection she felt between her body and the landscape of Vancouver. In the opening poem, these paratactic, layered perceptions of place, as well as the articulated effect of her moving body through the landscape (“sand I walk, footsteps suckt”) bears obvious resemblance to Olson’s and Duncan’s field poethic. Olson’s influence is especially obvious within these poems that catalogue her immediate perceptions of the environment as her body moves through it in an attempt to “locate herself” and practice place in the cultural and physical geography of the area. Moreover, her archaic spellings of the verbs “suckt” and “jumpt” in this opening poem recall Duncan’s practice of the same throughout his work; doing so renders the verbs more dynamic as a present happening, rather than simply existing in past tense. The the abrupt endings of these words also signals—both in sound and in orthography—the immediacy of perception; Marlatt thus marries form and content in the poem as she writes in Wisconsin while attempting to bring Vancouver “back into view.”

Just as Wah uses the swinging door as an indicator of racial mobility and containment, so the door features in *Vancouver Poems* as a marker and containter of sexual difference. As she writes:

Alcazar, Cecil, Belmont, New Fountain, names

stations of the way, to

Entrances

    speak doors that swing under

*men's, women's (& escorts, escorted by an era*

gone a little later than the sawdust, smashed glass

...

    o little man, o little man with dull eyes

with 3 full glasses at closing time, I take you in. (n.p.; original emphasis)

First, her mention of several Vancouver beer parlours in the first line as “Entrances,” followed by a description of their segregated structure, anticipates her metaphor of the labyrinth as a spatial form with many entrances that enable a sort of restricted access through the gendered spaces of language, mapped here onto the landscape of Vancouver’s night scene. From 1942 to 1963 in Vancouver, the British Columbia Liquor Control Board mandated that all beer parlours be segregated with separate entrances bearing the signs “Men’s Entrance” and “Ladies and Escorts” (Clément 43). The logic of this segregation was founded on accusations of promiscuity and drunken aggression; naturally, segregating the women from the men would diffuse the men, tempt them less, and therefore cause less trouble. The doors feature in Marlatt’s poem as entrances to a labyrinth, markers of geographical (non)permissibility. Being gendered female, Marlatt must move through the public spaces of the beer parlours through alternative pathways. It is significant that beer parlours were a common site of literary salons and readings in the poetic community. Although gendered segregation of these spaces stopped in 1963 (with some bars continuing to segregate for years after), by alluding to this historical time and space in the

present of her writing, Marlatt signals that although the physical doors have been removed, the rhetoric of exclusion remains within these spaces of literary production.

I will touch upon the masculinist criticism Marlatt's work has received later in the chapter, but it is worth noting here John Bentley Mays's extreme example in his "review" of *Vancouver Poems* in *Open Letter*, "Ariadne: Prolegomenon to the Poetry of Daphne Marlatt." I place "review" in quotation marks because, in the 28 pages of Mays's piece, Marlatt's work is only directly engaged with in three pages. The rest of the review is comprised of a near-unreadable and overtly masculine rambling through a curtain call of the great men of literature, religion, and civilization writ large. The slight mention of Marlatt's work is almost completely lost within a "prolegomenon" that does little but showcase Mays's own bibliographic prowess: "But it is not my purpose here to work out the whole typology of Literary history, but rather to suggest the manner in which that history is created" (11). He also grossly misinterprets Marlatt's use of the labyrinth in the poem; in his allusion to Ariadne and in his proselytizing on the great condition of men being their homelessness (via Hiedegger), he situates her poetry as exemplary of localized dwelling, an "authentic living" (33) within the "visionary possibility of a centre" (19). Mays usefully explains the allusion in the poem to the Kwakiutl legend of BaxbakualanuZsiwe, a cannibalistic creature with mouths all over his body. One of his attendant slaves was a woman who was rooted to the floor of his cabin, and she would lure men into his house for him to eat. One day, she took pity on three brothers who had wandered into the cabin and devised a plan for them to trick BaxbakualanuZsiwe and kill him (thus connecting her with Ariadne as a helper of men to avoid certain doom). In his review, Mays holds up the position of the "grounded" female as a figure of ideal dwelling in the face of man's condition of homelessness: "the voice we hear is that of the woman who, grounded in the acceptance of materiality and finitude, now sings the

song of dwelling” (33). He then quotes the ending of this section in *Vancouver Poems*, “O little man, o little man with dull eyes, / with 3 full glasses at closing time, I take you in” as Marlatt “opening to each of us this new possibility of intelligent love” (33).

In his masculinist intellectual haze, Mays mercilessly misses the point here. The woman facing segregated entrances at the beer parlour is clearly not “grounded in the acceptance” of her material place in the world; when Marlatt alludes to the rooted woman who addresses the man and “takes him in,” it is not to rescue him from his “homelessness,” but to occupy a female place of fierce knowing—a consumptive and proprioceptive “taking in” and taking stock of the situation in which she finds herself. Marlatt imaginatively transforms the segregated space of the bar into the cabin occupied by the rooted woman, whose limited abilities and mobility allow her to transcend the subject of her oppression. Inside the bar, she imagines that the “floor caves under” and “[w]ith a violent gesture [the rooted woman] wipes out the / bar, the primitive order of barkeep, bouncer, copcar, court” (n.p.). Thus, although she is “rooted to the floor with a root so deep he cannot / shovel it,” (Marlatt, n.p.) the rooted woman nonetheless possesses the keen power of perception—a different epistemological system not based on the masculine politic of physical movement (and the ability to move between spaces), but in an alternative form of conscious and empowered mobility that lies outside the male gaze. Mays’s critical misinterpretation and masculinization of Marlatt’s poetic labour is an archetypal example of the patriarchal systems of thought and literature that she so carefully critiques in her prose and poetry.

But I digress. Getting back to the form and content of *Vancouver Poems*, Marlatt’s poetic labour is the result of her extensive archival research into Vancouver’s history of its present. As I describe momentarily in the context of *Steveston*, this poetic methodology of “drilling” into the

local to create a collaged history of a place in conjunction with the body's movement within and through it testifies to Olson's influence on Marlatt's early poetry. Despite this obvious influence, Marlatt uses the archive in significantly different ways than Olson. As she writes, "(Vancouver: charts & instruments take over, or, 1890, / Robert M. Fripp, "Our object on this trip was to / spy out the land" (n.p.). Robert M. Fripp was an architect and settler to the Vancouver area who, accompanied by Indigenous peoples of the area, set out on a journey in 1890 to find the source of the Capilano River and scout out the land for its commercial potential (O'Donnell 7-8). The quotation Marlatt pulls from the archive is from Fripp's journals recording the six-day voyage. Like Olson in *Maximus*, Marlatt intersperses these quotations from the archive alongside her present-day perceptions of the land. Moreover, like Olson, Marlatt makes a commentary on the commercialization brought upon the land, but in Marlatt's case, she critiques the settler as the assailant upon the land's resources, "spy[ing] out the land" for profit. In bringing to the fore the "buried" settler colonial histories of the land, and in her identification with the Indigenous myths of the Kwakiutl people, Marlatt emphasizes the fact that Vancouver is, fundamentally, an immigrant city that exists on stolen Indigenous land.

The difference, then, between Marlatt's and Olson's use of proprioception and archived materials is traceable to these early poems. Her collaging of perceptions of the land—its morphology, people, and culture—are less a means of validating her presence within the landscape (as it is with Olson) and more of a questioning and challenging of the very notion of belonging to a place. Her proprioceptive collages of place in *Vancouver Poems* and *Steveston*, especially, situate the local of Vancouver as a site of converging narratives of belonging, articulated by a community of mostly immigrants and outsiders, who make connections to the landscape not by claims to origin, but through forging relationships and translocal connections.

Her scattered perceptions in these early poems thus betray a practice of place that is shifting and alterable; after all, she is famous for revising her work, as the collection *Liquidities: Vancouver Poems Then and Now* and *Salvage* demonstrate. Rather than simply reissue poems, Marlatt rewrites them; in the process, she records the disparities and congruences made over time and space in one's perspective on the local. She thus adds to the *creative* archive of the city while also destabilizing the very authority of the archive and the singular historical narrative as a source of truth and knowledge upon a place.

The collective memory of place brought forth in *Vancouver Poems* comes more alive in *Steveston* since the text was born out of a series of interviews with the Japanese-Canadian inhabitants of the town. During these talks, the local people recalled their early life in the booming fishing and canning town as well as their post-Pearl Harbor upheaval and internment by the Canadian government.<sup>268</sup> Whereas in *Maximus* Olson attempted to naturalize the movement of colonial explorers across the Atlantic, much to the erasure of the Indigenous presence in early Gloucester, Marlatt's examination of the local in *Steveston* is much more entrenched in the sociopolitical struggles of the land's history, especially in the postwar context. Olson appeals to geological processes to naturalize the migration of humankind from east to west; as I discussed earlier, he refers to Gloucester as a "terminal moraine," the geological term that marks the point of maximum movement of a glacier. He connects the passage of explorers across the Atlantic with this natural process, thereby naturalizing the movement of imperialism. Further, as I discussed in the first chapter, Olson's "Letter, May 2, 1959," wherein he paces out an area within Gloucester, contains a numerical charting that resembles a fish-finder on a boat. These numbers

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<sup>268</sup> To be sure, it is worth noting that unlike Olson, who grew up in Gloucester and knows the place intimately, Marlatt's speaker is not "at home" in Steveston—she is, rather, an outsider looking in. This would explain Marlatt's avoidance of the speaking "I" perspective, which is predominant in Olson's *Maximus* as the speaking voice of and for Gloucester. This could also explain why Marlatt is more objective in her view of the place and focuses on the sociopolitical underpinnings of the landscape as opposed to speaking for the land and its inhabitants.

measure the depth of the Gloucester harbour as mapped by Champlain in 1606 in order to facilitate the movement of ships safely ashore. As Butterick explains, this map marks the place where Champlain “discover[ed] the savages” (*A Guide* 221-222), and in Olson’s poem, the Indigenous presence is met with the similar nonchalance of the imperialist gaze: “the river and marshes show clearly and no Indians along the Beach        forest on Fort Point    wigwams again at Harbor Cove” (*The Maximus* I.151). In Olson’s “pacing” of his local, the colonist’s gaze is naturalized in geological processes, while the Indigenous vantage remains merely ornamental to the landscape.

Although Marlatt focuses on the Japanese-Canadians living and working in Steveston, and not on the Indigenous peoples living in the region, she nonetheless articulates the tensions of ongoing colonization in Canada and situates this process acutely in the landscape. However, in *Steveston*, the vantage point of the local is focused primarily on the colonized, not the colonizer (although her self-reflexive status as a colonizer descendant certainly plays into the tension, as I will discuss shortly). In the poem “Ghost,” Marlatt also employs the metaphor of the depth finder on a boat. Olson uses Champlain’s depth measurements as an example of subjective measures of space, of pacing out the landscape based on an individual vantage point, but this process is also laden with imperialist intentions of “knowing” the virginal land for safe passage. Marlatt, however, links the depth finder directly with the violence of colonial history that is not resolved but continually recurring. In “Ghost,” Marlatt addresses a fisherman who continues to be haunted by the Japanese internment by the Canadian government during World War II:

There are no territories. And the ghosts of landlocked camps are  
all behind you. Only the blip of depth sounder & fish finder,  
harmonic of bells warning a taut line, & the endless hand over

hand flip of the fish into silver pen—successive, infinite—

What do the charts say? Return, return. Return of what doesn't  
die. Violence in mute form. Walking a fine line.

...

to return to a decomposed ground choked by refuse, profit, & the  
concrete of private property; to find yourself disinherited from  
your claim to the earth. (Marlatt and Minden 52)

Throughout *Steveston*, Marlatt connects the lives of the fish with the Japanese-Canadian inhabitants of the land. (As I discuss shortly, the fish in *Steveston* becomes a symbol of the oppressed not only in the sense of the Japanese-Canadian fishermen by the government of Canada, but also, the eviscerated bodies of the fish in the canneries is paralleled with the experience of women under patriarchal control). Unlike Olson's narrative of the depth finder, which represents the westerly progress of "man," here the depth finder resists any narrative of progress; rather, it becomes a haunting marker of traumatic "return." Upon returning from internment to his "home," the fisherman is caught in a continuous traumatic cycle of memory in which he is "lost, over & over" (88). Even though the fisherman may be out to sea in his boat, with the "landlocked camps" behind him, the fish finder haunts him as a reminder of the past "violence in mute form." As in Wah's earlier work, wherein the self and the elements of the environment are involved in an ecosystem of exchange and productive co-influence, here the lives of the salmon and the lives of the fishermen are intertwined, suggesting that human experiences in the local environment are crucial to understanding the landscape as "place." The repetition of "return" in the above passage connects the post-internment return of the fishermen

with salmon, whose biological memory system ensures they return to their spawning site for each reproductive cycle. Like the salmon returning to its originary stream, the fisherman returned to his “origin” in Steveston only to find himself “disinherited / from [his] claim to the earth.”

Marlatt’s centralized focus on the violent marks of colonialism may be due, at least in part, to her anxiety surrounding her family’s ties to the colonial administration in Malaysia. In a letter to Roy Kiyooka in “Month of Hungry Ghosts,” Marlatt relates her experience of Empire and class in Malaysia as a “tourist experience compounded with colonial history. Europeans don’t live here: they camp out in a kind of defensive splendour that’s corrosive to the soul” (*Ghost Works* 100). Andrea Beverley has also noted that Marlatt “experiences a disquieting sense of colonial complicity as well as an anticolonial, feminist desire to articulate that complicity and to cultivate relationships that move beyond colonial scripts” (298). Marlatt’s uneasy relationship to British colonization in Asia thus provides the background for her exploration through the spaces of Steveston in its pre and postwar settlement state. This “feminist desire” to articulate her colonial complicity manifests as an *ecopoethic* sense of locality that sees the physical land as inseparable from the sociopolitical forces acting upon it. Like Wah, Marlatt is less interested in the “old stories” of elsewhere and more interested in mining the past of the local in British Columbia to unravel its multiple layers.

Marlatt has insisted that *Steveston* is a “cycle-poem,” a term that unites the shifting development of the place with the compositional process of the poem. As she reflects,

It seemed to me that the form I was interested in wasn’t linear but cyclical. ... So what I tried to do was arrange the poems in a way that would respect that. Now, it had an obvious beginning piece because that entrance piece is very initiatory, and then it had an obvious conclusion. But the conclusion—and I wrote it as a

conclusion piece—was really an attempt to recreate the cycle all over again. (qtd. in Miki, “Syntax” 31)

Like most of Marlatt’s work, the text is purposefully anti-linear in construction; over the course of the narrative, the river, the town and its people, and the economics of the place are woven together in a non-hierarchical, cyclical arrangement. The beginning section of *Steveston*, “**Imagine: a town**,” immediately announces the local place as a nexus of imagined space and geographical location mediated through language. The section announces the collaged *poethic* of the collection: similar to Duncan’s collage, none of these local access points are privileged, but contribute to the “building form” of the place. This is best demonstrated when Marlatt attempts to “define” Steveston toward the end of the long poem:

Steveston: delta, mouth of the Fraser where the river empties, sandbank after  
sandbank, into a muddy Gulf.

Steveston: onetime cannery boomtown: ‘salmon capital of the world’: fortunes  
made and lost on the homing instinct of salmon.

Steveston: home to 2,000 Japanese, ‘slaves of the company’: stripped of all their  
belongings, sent to camps in the interior away from the sea, wartime, who  
gradually drift back in the ’40’s, few who even buy back their old homes,  
at inflated prices, now owning modern ranchstyle etc, & their wives,  
working at the cannery, have seniority now, located.

Steveston: hometown still for some, a story: of belonging (or is it continuing?)  
lost, over & over . . . (Marlatt and Minden 56).

Here, Marlatt again engages with place on the level of language and signification—its multiple “definitions” and angles of interpretation—in the same manner as she will later define the

“labyrinth,” as quoted earlier. Her definitions of the local Steveston are necessarily many in kind: beginning from the river as a central geographical presence, through to the colonial history of the land, and then to the metanarrative of belonging, Marlatt traces a view of the local that is constellatory. Each of these interactive elements of Steveston both exert and derive equal force and influence on the land’s being as she views and experiences it in the present.

Moreover, Marlatt displays a proprioceptive relation to place here and throughout *Steveston*—her perceptions are immediate and correlate to her body moving through the space. As she observes of the town’s rhythms: “hands full of beans & fingers in the heart of, ‘well I live here,’ / lettuce, children, friends, you find a self, under the trees that sway like / underwater weeds, connecting things” (55). These immediate, staccato apprehensions of the townspeople form a collage made of the particulars emanating from the place. Significantly, for the local people, Steveston’s history is a journey of recovering their own local, for the Japanese-Canadian community was uprooted from the town by the government during the internment, and then when some returned afterwards, they discuss being able to recover some sense of being “located” back in the landscape.<sup>269</sup> As the passage in the previous paragraph states, Steveston is a “hometown still for some,” but the town’s narrative exposes the fallacy of the metanarrative of belonging “in place.” A narrative of belonging is too neatly teleological in light of Steveston’s history; the upheaval of the community initiated a cyclical narrative of trauma and ongoing memory that permeates the local space. Since the Japanese-Canadian community—the majority of the town’s population—was uprooted from the town, their sense of belonging to that local was necessarily compromised by the wartime and postwar racist protocols of the Canadian

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<sup>269</sup> Throughout the *Steveston* poem cycle, Marlatt tends to associate the local with the Japanese-Canadian community. However, as Robert Minden’s pictures reveal, the town was not wholly comprised of Japanese-Canadians. Marlatt’s centralizing of this community is likely tied to her own colonial concerns and anxieties projected onto the place, as discussed throughout this section.

government. Hence Marlatt's substitution when she writes: "story: of belonging (or is it continuing? / lost, over & over . . .)" to describe the townspeople's relation to their "home." Although some Japanese-Canadian residents relocated to the town and were able to "buy back their old homes, / at inflated prices" (88), their sense of this local is nonetheless marked by a haunting feeling of return to that trauma, of being "lost, over & over." By means of the upheaval and eventual return of some, the town's "place" in the local imaginary is one that has shifted, and continues to shift in accordance with the cycles of loss, memory, and recovery.

One of the starkest spatial features of *Steveston* is Marlatt's adoption of the long poetic line; throughout the collection, this long line winds through, mimicking the great Fraser River that was the fruitful source of the early local's intertwined sense of purpose and place. The river becomes the line that weaves through the narrative, connecting past and present in a structure that cannot be stilled: hence the beginnings and ends of lines of the text appear jagged and unpredictable, mimicking the uncontained force of the river. Following this trope of fluidity and flow, Marlatt destabilizes her authoritative subjectivity in a cycle of assertions and negations of "meaning" and "what matters":

multiplicity simply there: the physical matter of  
the place (what matters) meaning, don't get theoretical now, the cannery.  
It's been raining, or it's wet. Shines everywhere a slick on the surface of  
things wet gumboots walk over, fish heads & other remnants of sub/ or  
marine life, brought up from under.

...

That's not it. It's wet,  
& there's a fish smell. There's a subhuman, sub/marine aura to things. The

cavernous ‘fresh fish’ shed filled with water, with wet bodies of dead fish,  
 in thousands, wet aprons & gloves of warm bodies whose hands expertly trim,  
 cut, fillet, pack these bodies reduced to non-bodies, nonsensate food *these*  
 bodies ache from,

...

No, that’s not it. There’s a dailiness these lives revolve around, also immersed.

(19-20; original emphasis)

The long lines of this section serve to emphasize the continuous, flowing significations emanating from the place. Moreover, just as the flow of the Fraser changes the morphology of the landscape through erosion, so the flowing of these lines erodes the surety of the authoritative subject’s point of view. This section is cleverly titled “**Steveston as you find it:**,” as if the local, in all its varied significations and manifestations, becomes mobilized when one comes into contact with it, according to one’s stance. However, unlike Olson’s conception of place, wherein the local “facts of place” are brought into the single view of the individual Maximus, here Marlatt’s view is far from singular: rather, through her collaging of the intertwined views of the relation between the fish and the fishmongers, as well as her own authorial interruptions and undermining of the “I” view, she constructs a view of the place that is but one view among many in a multiphasic construction of place. Although the “you” in the section’s title can be read as an address to a reader who encounters Steveston only through the mediated view of the author, the flickering sign of the local, its dispersal along long lines of perception and contradiction, undermines any singular perspective. These gaps between often contradictory perceptions—“that’s not it”—replace the authority of the archival process with a fluid poetic praxis that involves readerly intervention and participation.

The above passage describing the cannery demonstrates Marlatt's adoption of the projective model, since the collaged images and viewpoints articulate a moving image of place that is influenced by Olson's famous dictum of layered perceptions: "always one perception must must MOVE, INSTANTER, ON ANOTHER!" ("Projective" 240). In the passage, we see Marlatt again interested and concerned with the interpretability of language, as she plays with definition and authorial authority over signification. As with Olson, her view of place is based on "what matters" to the perceiver—neither theory nor logos are accurate to describe the place, since they are too cohesive in their implied closure of ideas. So, her perspective catalogues "the physical matter of / the place": "wet gumboots," "fish heads," "wet bodies," "wet aprons & gloves." In this way, "**Steveston as you find it:**" becomes an interrogation of place akin to *'istorin*, the process of finding out for oneself. The progression of each layered perception suggests Marlatt's proprioceptive movement through the space of the cannery, and each of her revisions (or further perceptions) suggests this process of "finding out" is never complete but is ongoing. As Douglas Barbour has observed, Marlatt's "punning structure of language leads the poet further into the net of perceptions she seeks to speak" (185). As such, throughout the passage she combines the place's sense of "wetness" with the slipperiness of language: "It's been raining, or it's wet." She plays with the *sense* of wetness as oscillating between the actual result of rain versus the wetness felt in the working bodies of the workers coming into contact with the slick bodies of the dismembered fish, together imparting "a subhuman, sub/marine aura to things."

Indeed, the goal of Marlatt's view of Steveston is not to be precise and exacting in her apprehensions but to uncover the network of multiple relations immediate to her experience. Significantly, this results in a disoriented narrative perspective at times, which recalls the

disorientation evoked by Duncan's double vision. In Marlatt's case, however, more than offering another layered perspective or view, this disorientation is a redemptive act of recovery. Her negations of the authorial "I" throughout *Steveston* (and throughout her other works) exposes a double existence in language for the female writer who is at once born into the patriarchal system of language and is also excluded from it, having to therefore negotiate her way through. As such, for Marlatt, proprioception through language is a strategy for survival:

the labyrinth of language (through its walls echoing with other texts) requires an inner ear, a sensory organ i feel my way by (sentence, sentire, to feel), keeping my feet by a labyrinthine sense of balance as the currents of various meanings, the unexpected 'drift,' swirl me along. of course the labyrinth is filled with fluid, as the membraneous labyrinth of the inner ear is, women know the slippery feel of language, the walls that exclude us. (*Readings* 33)

Rather than claiming a fixed foothold in the ground of language, Marlatt articulates her relation to language as a fluid labyrinth whereby her body moves through by "unexpected 'drift'." In this way, Marlatt's relationship to language is metonymic of her relationship to place: just as the reader/writer in the labyrinth contends with the drift and "balance" of "currents of various meanings," so, as she tells George Bowering, "you can only locate by putting yourself in the context of all the relative points that surround you" (qtd. in Bowering, "Given" 63).

Many critics have noted the resemblances and dissimilarities between *Steveston* and Olson's *The Maximus Poems*. In her article outlining Marlatt's uneasy relation to Olson's influence, Sabrina Reed argues that while "Marlatt in *Steveston* clearly shows her allegiance to Olson and his poetics, she also challenges his confidence in the physical body and its ability to claim a space for its poetry and its possessor" (para. 2). Reed analyzes the "uncertainty" Marlatt

expresses in her perceptions of Steveston as indicating Marlatt's view that "a woman's experience of her body is not always as optimistic or as open as Olson's" (para. 2). I disagree with Reed that Marlatt thinks a woman's proprioceptive view is less optimistic or open; although as I shall argue shortly, Marlatt equates the disembodied bodies of the fish in the cannery with a woman's body as circumscribed through patriarchal language, I nonetheless view Marlatt's proprioceptive "finding out" as one that is open. Indeed, in light of her critique of patriarchal language through connecting the fish with women's experiences, it seems that Marlatt's layered perceptions in "**Steveston as you find it:**"—which are paratactic and revisionary, open and subject to change—form part of this critique of male circumscription. Hence her disavowal of theory (or logos) as an accurate mode of representation: "don't get theoretical now, the cannery" (19). Marlatt's proprioceptive probing of the cannery, then, is less an attempt to get at the "facts of place," as Olson would have it, and more an attempt to read its immediate resonances—to be open to them as they are revised in the process, even at the risk of being "inarticulate." As Marlatt admits to George Bowering, "I have to be in my body. And I have to be in the inarticulate. *The inarticulate is ground*" (qtd. in Bowering, "Given" 59; my emphasis).<sup>270</sup> As in Wah's hyphen, Marlatt finds freedom in the multiple subject positions made available through the "inarticulate" language she has inherited as a woman working within a predominantly male literary tradition. Her repeated assertion in "**Steveston as you find it:**"—"No, that's not it"—demonstrates a radical openness to language. Navigating her way through the labyrinth, Marlatt finds her articulations of place along the way, in the process.

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<sup>270</sup> In this same interview, Marlatt points out her early conflicts with Frank Davey, who refused to publish some of her earlier poems, accusing her of being "romantic," "falling into [her] imagination & failing to sort of live up to the Williams criteria of literalism, & precision, & accuracy to geography & place" (qtd. in Bowering, "Given" 35). In many ways, this conflict echoes the same accusations that Olson had towards Duncan's "romanticism" and his reluctance to place surety in language and in space, as I have earlier discussed.

I do, however, find Reed's assertion that Marlatt challenges Olson's "confidence in the physical body and its ability to claim a space for its poetry and its possessor" to be compelling. In light of Marlatt's challenges to patriarchal circumscription by remaining open and drifting in her labyrinthine significations, I would suggest that this "challenge" is rooted not in the "less open" experience of a woman in her body, but in the fact that Olson's persona—as his name "Maximus" suggests—claims to be an authoritative voice and view that extends beyond the individual to speak for the place as a collective whole. That is, Marlatt is wary of Olson's confidence in his body's ability, to use Reed's words, to authoritatively "claim a space" for all. Marlatt's perceptions of place, rather, remain highly subjective to her body and its movements within and through space. Accordingly, throughout "**Steveston as you find it:**" (and in Steveston as a whole), Marlatt avoids the speaking "I" perspective—it is too sure, too authoritative in its view.<sup>271</sup> As she tells Bowering, "All the reader has of Steveston is how I see it. I mean you've got to get familiar with the grid of my consciousness, because that's what's transmitting it. There's nothing outside of that" (qtd. in "Given" 78). By refusing to totalize the experience of the local beyond her individual view, Marlatt articulates a view of place as speculative. In so doing, she resists circumscribing the town's complex history within a patriarchal framework in which her own experiences have been circumscribed.

To be sure, Olson was born and raised in the Gloucester area, and perhaps his sense of rootedness and authority of place stems from this deeply local connection, whereas Marlatt is always sensitive to the fact that she is an immigrant. As such, there can be no central authority of view according to Marlatt, as evidenced by her repeated attempts to describe the place, only to reply, "No, that's not it." Refusing to impart an overtly theoretical and authoritative "I" view on

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<sup>271</sup> Throughout Marlatt's poetry and prose, she utilizes the lower case "i" as her preferred first person pronoun. As she writes in "Difference (em)bracing," this indefinite typography indicates her discomfort with instilling a universalizing, monolithic identity, which is always "full of holes a wind blows through" (*Readings* 138).

the place, Marlatt instead focuses on “what matters” to the place: the inner workings of its central cannery that is at the heart of the town. Therein, she identifies with the dismembered bodies of the fish, as well as the dismembered bodies of the workers who are reduced to their parts, “wet aprons & gloves of warm bodies whose hands expertly trim” (Marlatt and Minden, *Steveston* 19). The hands of the female workers of the cannery and the bodies of the fish are united in a system of capitalist labour and exploitation. In so doing, Marlatt makes a connection between “these bodies reduced to non-bodies” (20) and the ways in which her own female body is dismembered by dominant discourses of the universal male perspective.

Part of Marlatt’s resistance to such circumscription is rooted in her efforts to establish a collective view of place—“collective” not in the sense of Maximus who speaks for all, but in terms of articulating multiple perceptions and voices from the environment held in tension. In order to create this collage of local particulars in *Steveston*, Marlatt gathered information from the town archives and from the townspeople themselves. Like Olson, Marlatt goes “digging” into the history of the place, but unlike Olson, she does not do so to validate her own existence there, or to discover the “facts,” but to unravel the various complexities of past and present that signify the layered experiences of the local people. Marlatt certainly adopts Olson’s process of *istorin* as a poetic practice of knowing place by “finding out for oneself” as opposed to relying on hearsay or received second-hand information. And, like Olson, she doesn’t rely solely on stale accounts of genealogy and history, but instead fuses this history with the present act of moving through the landscape and acquiring sensory data. In order to gain a view of the place, Marlatt—like Olson—relies not on the linear surety of historical discourse, but on the negative capability of the field. In the first poem she announces the presence of the town as “a town running before a fire” (11). This is a reference to the fire of 1918 that gutted most of the town and devastated the

central canneries that were the backbone of the fishing boomtown. Echoing Olson's process of "digging" into the local, Marlatt describes her process of "drilling" into the history of Steveston to unravel its layers:

It's as if I was drilling, like thru the present, & the immediate present was the people that I knew; down from that into a larger collective present, which was the streets, the city, things I was seeing on the streets, like the English Bay poem; down deeper into, quote, history, the fire & so on; deeper still, prehistory, which was before the written records that we keep, native Indian. (qtd. in Bowering, "Given" 72)

Marlatt's digging is not an attempt to "know" the space and express it surely, but to weave her own experiences together with other particular experiences and events beyond her scope. Hence the form of the text, which wavers back and forth between personal, immediate perceptions and the spirit of the "collective present" as she walks through the town's streets.

As I mentioned previously, Olson's tireless digging of the local area produced a living geography of place—so much so that Duncan claims, when reading Olson's paced maps in "Letter, May 2, 1959" that "the area of a township appears in my reading" (*Bending* vi). Similarly, as Robert Lecker remarks of *Steveston*, "It is difficult to read Daphne Marlatt's poetry without seeing the river" (56). In her collaged explorations of place, Marlatt is able to accomplish a "pacing" of Steveston without imparting authority of view upon it. Whereas the opening of *Maximus* uses the authoritative I to address the reader, "I, Maximus of Gloucester, to you," the opening lines of *Steveston* at once invite an imaginative and collaborative engagement with place on behalf of both poet and reader: "**Imagine: a town.**" Olson's sense of polis is, in many ways, packaged and delivered in the vertical persona of Maximus, by "root person in root

place” (*The Maximus* I.2). Over the course of the narrative, Maximus stands in as a narrative authority whose prevailing presence encompasses the city and its inhabitants as “property.” The first poem of the collection sees Maximus claiming authority of view over “my city” (I.1) and “my people” (I.2), as if the city is awakened, like the giant of Williams’ *Paterson*, by his presence. Moreover, as I stated in the first chapter, Olson’s registering of the Indigenous presence in Gloucester—scant as it is—is always circumscribed by the European gaze and its narrative of migration. Marlatt, however, refuses such authority over the local; in her collaged attempts to articulate her sense of the place, she repeatedly cycles through tentative propositions and revisions.

These cycles of revision extend to the subject matter of the work, for the Fraser River is a powerful force that quite literally shapes and reforms the local geography in accordance with the cycles of its current. Whereas Olson’s local materializes from the stable composite bedrock of Gloucester, Marlatt focuses on the ever-changing conditions of the local, the force of the river upon the shore. Although Olson is keen to the geological shifts that bedrock undergoes, he is also interested in its permanence through these subtle shifts; he connects the hardness of Gloucester’s stone grounding with the endurance of Maximus, “stand[ing] on Main Street like the Diorite / stone” (II. 51). Marlatt’s choice of Steveston as a representative local is thus significant, for it is built upon the downflow of silt from the river, and is continually shaped by its natural forces. The town of Steveston is located south of Vancouver at the mouth of the Fraser—as such, the shores of the town are continually shifting with the ebb and flow of the “ever eroding & running river” (*Steveston* 14). The flows of the river are significant to the local landscape in two significant ways: first, as a fishing town, the townspeople depend on the rhythms of the salmon that flow in the waters of the river for their industry. As Marlatt notes,

“the / Fraser gives of itself, incessantly” (14) but she also observes “how the river washes them bare, roots trees / knotted & twining into the wash of the Gulf, tidal ... clumps & knottings of men’s nets / wash out to” (29). Just as Marlatt relates the oppression of women with the disembodied fish, she again relates the experiences of the environment to the oppression of the people who inhabit it. While the river’s rhythms sustain the town, it also “washes” the fishermen bare as they struggle to “make it” (30).

Secondly, the cycles of the river itself actually shape the shorelines of the geography, as the contours of the town are continually being swept away and rebuilt by the silt of the river. As Marlatt observes, “Steveston: delta, mouth of the Fraser where the river empties, sandbank after / sandbank, into a muddy Gulf” (56). The town was built upon the moving silt of the river, and it is continually reshaped by these flows. Again, she relates the experiences and hardship of the fishermen to the geographical shifts of the landscape: “But it continues, this westward drift. / Islands of it moving west, 1000 feet per century. & this is not the end, / this accumulation along the way, deposits (in a bank, in the Richmond / Credit Union, in shares in BC Packers, in) a town whose main street moves” (30). By punning on “deposits” to mean the building up of the riverbank and the flow of money from the fishing industry upon which the fishermen depend, Marlatt connects the conditions of the landscape directly with its inhabitants: together they form an ecosystem of continually changing relations. As she notes, Steveston’s “main street moves”—its coordinates continue to shift, albeit slowly, with the erosion of its riverbanks. Within this passage, however, is also a commentary on the politics of “westward drift.” Olson was also concerned with the drifting of continents, but he situates these geological shifts as a means of naturalizing the migration of humans westward. In uniting the plight of the Japanese-Canadian fishermen—not only the hardships of their trade, but also the oppression they received at the

hands of the Canadian government—with the shift of the landscape, Marlatt is more critical of the process of the nation as a shifting force upon the land and its people.

It is at the hands of the nation, after all, that the Japanese-Canadian residents of Steveston were uprooted and washed out of their lives. In a section recalling a conversation with the daughter of a disinherited Japanese-Canadian fishermen, Marlatt writes:

To live in a place. Immanent. In  
place. Yet to feel at sea. To come from elsewhere & then to discover  
love, has a house & name. Has land. Is landed, under the swaying  
trees which bend, so much in this wind like underwater weeds we think  
self arises from. (53)

Marlatt maps the experiences of the townspeople onto the nature of the place: while the Japanese-Canadians feel rooted “immanently” in the town, they are also “at sea” not only because of the nature of their industry, but because of their forced upheaval and disinheritance by the government. However, the daughter’s continued presence in Steveston, her survival of the ebb and flow of colonial currents, provides Marlatt with a sense of imagined place grafted onto a sense of uprootedness. The daughter separates herself from the Japanese community, telling Marlatt “I’m not really in / the Japanese community, I don’t belong to Buddhist Church, I don’t / send my kids to Sunday school” (54), but she also adamantly proclaims, “well, I *live* here” (55). Despite her family’s history of upheaval, the daughter has “landed,” has discovered that place is an ongoing process of reimagining roots and routes: “Unseen, how lines run / from place to place” (53).

As I have noted, Olson’s history of Gloucester is entirely male-centric and focuses on the bravado and stealth of adventurous men such as James Merry. Women are largely absent from

his chronicles of the local. As I discussed in the first chapter, Olson's view of place tends toward what Mary Louise Pratt calls the imperialist "monarch-of-all-I-survey" (201) trope of colonial travel writing that characterizes the tendency for a man's privileged view of the landscape to indicate rhetorical possession and knowledge over it. Marlatt critiques the totalizing, masculinist gaze as a vehicle of knowledge production; accordingly, in *Steveston* there are no overarching narratives of discovery that affirm colonial presence. Rather, Marlatt's repeated self-questioning, her exposure of her own representative stance, as well as her personal identification with the bodies within the landscape, situates her as an observer within the landscape, not an authority that objectifies or circumscribes it. Pratt contrasts the masculine trope of surveying with the female perspective in travel narratives of the same period, exemplified by those of Mary Kingsley, whose accounts of traveling through Africa are far from heroic but are laden with ironic and self-effacing critiques of the imperialist gaze. Marlatt's accounts of the Steveston local similarly critique the unquestioned gaze of the white male upon the land by identifying the limits of her view and by making colonial violence markedly visible in the landscape.

These concerns of the female observer in the landscape negotiating a masculine view of the past come full circle in the following section, which examines another of Marlatt's revisions of Olson: that of his megalith "Diorite Man," to which she responds in *How Hug a Stone* with the image of the squat stone mothers of the Avebury henge. This response further addresses the need to revise projective place as not always sure and rooted, but as constellatory and drifting. Marlatt's nomadic practice of place in *How Hug a Stone* opens a space of resistance from which she can articulate her experience of place *translocally*, outside the bounds of patriarchal language and spatial structures that I have been discussing.

### The Monumental, the Translocal: Marlatt and Olson's Megaliths

Heterogeneous, this place here, so overlaid with other places: this self here sieved through with other selves when there was here and you were, you are, me.<sup>272</sup>

—Daphne Marlatt

[F]or me, this Diorite figure is the vertical, the growth principle of the Earth.<sup>273</sup>

—Charles Olson

In her 1983 long poem *How Hug a Stone*, Marlatt embarks on a psychic-spatial journey of self-discovery through the landscapes of her familial past in England. Marlatt's journey in *How Hug a Stone* is similar to Wah's in *Diamond Grill* in that it takes her through the gaps of memory, and across oceans; rather than a linear development of the self, the text enacts a nomadic, rhizomatic trajectory wherein a cohesive, rooted self is continually deferred. For Marlatt, movement and motion create a nomadic spatiality of resistance, a way of reterritorializing space to incorporate the slippery co-presence of a polyvocal identity marked by sexual difference. As we have seen in *Steveston*, however, this articulation of place developed over an uneasy and arduous journey of self-discovery for Marlatt. As she admits to Brenda Carr, "It has been a long journey for me to come into my body, to be centred in, the *subject* of, my desire and not the object of someone else's" ("Between" 99; original emphasis).

Marlatt's work in *How Hug a Stone* deepens the concept of nomadic space in the translocal poetic. "Home" becomes a moving TAZ wherein place is felt and experimented with among a collage of different times and places held in co-presence. Her collection *Ghost Works* contains three of her travel narratives—*Zócalo*, *Month of Hungry Ghosts*, and *How Hug A Stone*—in which she goes back to the different locales of her childhood, from Penang to England. The narrator travels both in space and in time: as she moves across oceans and continents to Mexico,

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<sup>272</sup> "Preface," *Ghost Works* viii.

<sup>273</sup> *Muthologos* 173.

Malaysia, and England, she also moves back in time, searching through her memories to exhume the ghost of her mother who continues to haunt her. As the title of this collection suggests, Marlatt articulates a composite of “home” in which the spectral spaces and places of her past are mediated through her present consciousness. As she reflects regarding these travels, “both returns were incomplete, filtered always through my present Canadian consciousness” (*Readings* 21). In *How Hug a Stone*, “home” is spectral—it appears and then vanishes, only to reappear elsewhere and in a different context. In the in-between, the journeys and returns, Marlatt articulates a nomadic identity *through* space. She (de)constructs the gendered local she has inherited from Olson so that place is not a situated polis but a moving site of connection along a translocal trajectory.

As I have demonstrated in the last section, Marlatt’s early writing was steeped in an attention to the local that she inherited from Olson. However, after her exposure to French feminism in the late ‘70s, and after having come out as a lesbian in the early ‘80s, there is a deeper shift in Marlatt’s view of the local: she becomes more critical of the “root person in root place” (Olson, *The Maximus* I.16) ideology that upholds false narratives of belonging. As a female writer in a dominantly male poetic tradition, as well as an immigrant to Canada, Marlatt sees her rootedness in Canada as necessarily expressed across different locals, times, spaces. Whereas Olson’s spatiality in *Maximus* is based on a “vertical growth principle” upwards from the local geological bedrock of Gloucester, Marlatt’s sense of place is more nomadic in its sensibility, more mobile, more labyrinthine in its articulation—at times, it is even spectral in its flickering signification.

This deviation from the Olsonian local to a translocal feminine relation to place is made apparent when considering the treatment of megaliths in Olson’s *The Maximus Poems* and

Marlatt's *How Hug a Stone*. In the text, Marlatt's exploration of the mother stone circles exists alongside her explorations of her own family circle, and together these circles intersect, revealing a longstanding female living tradition in both life and language. In his poem "Astride the Cabot Fault," (*The Maximus* III.37) Olson pictures Maximus straddling the fault lines of continents in an attempt to hold the two halves together underneath him across space and time. While visiting her motherland in England, Marlatt's "crossings-over" attempt no such coherence, but emphasize the gaps in-between as a moving, fluid centre of being. In the text's opening pages, Marlatt immediately identifies a translocal sensibility, as she describes her movements between places in England—all of which are "grounded in the family / narrative continuity"—as "Crossings-over" (*How Hug* 13). The term is purposefully plural, as there are multiple ways of crossing over, demonstrated when she repeats the term to describe her family's journey from Malaysia to Vancouver (19). Throughout the travel narrative, Marlatt's search for place involves many crossings-over through spaces of her past and present, articulated through the vast territories of language and landscape. These crossings-over appear in the poem "narrative continuity," wherein Marlatt visits the home of her relatives in Reading. She describes the "familiar" house as full of "relics ... photographs & habits from a family life that was" (19). Her present experience of the home takes her backward through her memory to her childhood—the familiar oldness of "kept clothes" and the "fruity vinegar smell" of her grandmother's pickles permeate the space. However, Marlatt's crossings-over are not relegated to material "relics" but extend to the relics of language as well: "relics i recognize, even family phrases i've heard from his [her step-brother's] / mother in Canada. crossings-over. as my childhood family / had its language, covert because 'so English' in North Van" (19). The scent of pickles and the residue of "old habits" in this maternal home invoke translocal returns to two sites of Marlatt's childhood that are held in

tension: that of her days as a child in England, and also to her childhood in Vancouver, where her family moved. In her local Vancouver, her “covert” accent becomes a drifting signifier of her past local in Reading, a local that remains continuously resonant within her breath and in her language.

These translocal “crossings-over” between the material and linguistic sites of Marlatt’s memory are fundamental to her understanding and articulation of the “from which” she writes. Accordingly, in *How Hug a Stone*, Marlatt embarks on a translocal journey in search of two mothers that mediate her self-development: the spirit of her deceased mother, and the “parent material,” (26) the mothertongue excavated in language.<sup>274</sup> Olson repeatedly equates Maximus with the earthly-validated “Diorite Man” in order to root his local in a historical and mythological male universal perspective. As I discuss in the first chapter, “Diorite Man” is Olson’s constructed mythological megalith that is adapted from the Hittite myth of Ullikummi. Whereas Olson’s narrative is centred upon Diorite Man’s monolithic “vertical growth principle,” Marlatt’s stone mothers are multiple and represent a contrasting cyclical and rhizomatic narrative of the local. As I will develop further in a moment, my analysis of these two texts stems from an exploration of the physical space taken up by these respective megaliths—whereas Olson’s Diorite Man is tied to the earth and rises vertically from it, the squat stone mothers are displaced stones arranged in a constellatory pattern, and their presence in the henge is as a result of uprooted movement across space. Further, whereas Diorite Man is singular in number and

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<sup>274</sup> Indeed, the mother figure is a common trope in Marlatt’s later writings of the ‘80s, a time when she was heavily influenced by French feminist thinkers such as Cixous and Irigaray. Marlatt articulates the struggle for articulation that led her to focus on the mother-daughter relationship in her work: “an area i’ve been investigating for some time now, mother-daughter relationships, particularly fraught when the daughter is lesbian & the mother committed to self-definition through conventional notions of femininity” (*Readings* 214-215). For Irigaray, the mother-daughter relationship is a paramount strategy of resistance to patriarchal structures of control, as it allows women to restructure familial and social relationships. As she writes, “In our societies, the mother-daughter, daughter-mother relationship constitutes a highly explosive nucleus. Thinking it, and changing it, is equivalent to shaking the foundations of the patriarchal order” (50).

phallic in shape, the stone mothers are multiple and dispersed cyclically throughout the landscape. These objects in the landscape, then, thus become exemplary of Olson's and Marlatt's subjective approaches to knowing the local: whereas Olson's narrative is constructed vertically from the bottom-up (the facts of place to a unified public voice), Marlatt's stone mothers symbolize her labyrinthine journey of self-exploration.

Building the local from multiple points of arrival and departure, rather than from the bottom-up, recalls Deleuze and Guattari's discussions of reterritorialization. Given that Olson and Marlatt's narratives of the local take place on vertical and horizontal planes, respectively, and centre upon dichotomies of the absolute and the multiple, viewing these narratives through the lens of Deleuze and Guattari's discussion of similar dichotomies sheds light on the unique spatial, temporal, and linguistic parameters of the local as figured in these writers' works. As I have already discussed, Deleuze and Guattari differentiate between a statist notion of space as vertical hierarchy (in which the upwards growth of a tree is symbolic) and a nomadic, open-ended plane where space is negotiated horizontally by arriving and departing between various paths. Marlatt's nomadic local reimagines place along multiple paths and trajectories, for as Deleuze and Guattari argue, in nomadic movement, "[a] path is always between two points, but the in-between has taken on all the consistency and enjoys both an autonomy and a direction of its own" (419). Such nomadic drift challenges the singular absolutism of place by means of a "local absolute" wherein locality is not delimited and the absolute "does not appear at a particular place but becomes a nonlimited locality" (422).

Marlatt's speaker in *How Hug a Stone*, whose local is constructed in a processual and improvised narrative, undermines the historical surety with which Olson roots his megalithic local. For indeed, as Marlatt asserts regarding Olson's influence, a stable and vertical narrative of

the local is a *patriarchal* local that does not speak for all narratives of place. As she writes in the poem “continued”:

...that is the limit of the old story, its ruined circle, that is not how it ended or we have forgotten parts, we have lost sense of the whole. left with a script that continues to write our parts in the passion we find ourselves enacting, old wrongs old sacrifices. & the endless struggle to redeem them, or them in ourselves, our “selves” our inheritance of words. wanting to make us new again: to speak what isn’t spoken, even with the old words. (*How Hug* 73)

The “old stories” told in the language of patriarchy—the same stories valorized by Olson and Duncan—are “limited” in that they silence the female experience; Marlatt’s project is to “redeem” the female self within the primordial motherland of language. As she tells Bowering, “*the inarticulate is ground*” (qtd. in Bowering, “Given” 59; original emphasis). In her experimentations through the labyrinth of language, Marlatt redefines the inarticulate not as lack, but as a radical openness to the feminine flows of language beyond the “old words.” Her experimentations with “what / isn’t spoken,” therefore, attempt to ground the female subject in place. Inventing these new stories gives women “a place to / land at the end of all this to, to...” (*How Hug* 15). Marlatt purposefully defers the completion of this phrase; her inarticulateness signals a hesitancy to prescribe closed meaning onto place. She is unsure exactly what landed place will look like “at the end of all this.” This is partially due to the fact that place in *How Hug a Stone* is constructed as a s/cite where “memory and the imagination conspire” (Marlatt, *Readings* 202). As the travelogue of *How Hug a Stone* suggests, however, the point is not the origin or the end point, but the journey in between.

As ancient texts, the Avebury stone circles and Diorite Man offer different approaches to narrative, and this distinction sheds light on Marlatt's project of recovery in place. The stone mothers provide Marlatt not only with a female muse in the landscape, but they also provide a textual model for the expression of female experience. As she writes of the mothers:

[...] *she lives* stands for nothing  
 but this longstanding matter in the grass, settled hunks of  
 mother crust, early Tertiary, bearing the rootholes of palms.  
 they bring us up, in among stone-folds, to date: the enfolded  
 present waits for us to have done with the hiding-&-seeking  
 terrors, territories, our obsession with the end of things.

how hug a stone (mother) except nose in to lithic fold, the  
 old slow pulse beyond word become, under flesh, mutter  
 of stone, *stane*, *stei*-ing power. (75)

The "longstanding matter" of the stone mothers validates their pre-patriarchal historical presence in the landscape, and their embrace gives the female speaker of the present a material touchstone to this ancient female presence. To be sure, the stone mothers cannot physically return the embrace, as the title of Marlatt's work suggests. However, the title's question articulates the project of Marlatt's work: how to come into the local proximity of the mother in language. Or, as Susan Knutson proposes, "*How Hug a Stone* can be translated to mean how can we be closer to the earth, our mother? How can we build a more dialogic world?" (93). This ancient female text thus becomes a "dialogic" model narrative "strategy for survival" (75) since these "settled hunks of mother crust" emanate an "old slow pulse beyond word." Here, Marlatt hints towards the

stone mothers as an alternative linguistic presence that lives “beyond [the] word” of the overarching text of patriarchal language. In the lines, “mutter / of stone, *stane*, *stei*-ing power,” Marlatt puns on “mutter” and “mother,” suggesting the feminine ground of language within etymology that produces a current of “muttered” meaning: “stone, *stane*, *stei*-.” Although she can never receive a returned embrace from the stone mothers, she can nonetheless come into an intimate embrace to the mother’s body in language, where she becomes proximal and local to the mother/matter/mutter. As she writes, “like the mother’s body, language is larger than us and carries us along with it. it bears us, it births us, insofar as we bear with it” (*Readings* 11). Thus, the “*stei*-ing power” of the mother stones, their capacity to live and “stan[d] for nothing but this longstanding matter in the grass” represent, for the female speaker, their symbolic presence as the “enfolded present.” At the “centre” of the circles is “earth, only earth” (75)—the mothers do not console the female speaker with answers to her existential questions, for there exists within them no overarching narrative of domination or supreme being, only life and earth *process*, the strength of a specifically female continuity outside patriarchal bounds.

That this narrative is a “strategy for survival” becomes apparent in the long poem when paralleled with the narrative fragments given about Marlatt’s mother, who, at the hands of patriarchal scripts of female gender roles, “had her wings clipped growing up” (67). The given fragments piece together a narrative of a “subversive” (67) woman who had dreams of being a dressmaker and designer, of going “against the script” she was expected to follow. However, she was soon married off, her dreams of individuation dashed, eventually submitting to the prescribed role of wife, “lapsing, controlled, into silence” (67). However, Marlatt looks upon her mother’s narrative not as a failure, but as a glimmer of resistance and hope for all women:

[...] Tino, my mother, small

in a henge of emotion, removed somewhere. no stars to plot  
 this course, only foreboding & hope against her father's  
 words, against the script. learning how to fly. (45)

Her mother's attempts to escape patriarchal "script" become a model narrative for survival for the speaker. Just as the ancient narrative of the stone mothers predates patriarchal England and evades its circumscription, so Marlatt sees in her young mother the capability to exist "de-scripted" (35) outside of patriarchal narratives. Marlatt's traversal of her motherland, and her encounters with the ancient nurturing presence of the stone mothers connects her with the space-time of her mother and creates a cyclic narrative of familial memory and continuity that resists linear closure. Significantly, Marlatt's mother's closest friend, whom she encounters while in England, tells her that she should visit Avebury over Stonehenge (66). This seemingly minor detail becomes significant to the theme of narrative multiplicity and cyclicity. Marlatt traces her mother's memory through her "innermost circle" of friends. The friend, "Jean," is described as "tall, sane ... childless," which connects her with the subversive nature of Marlatt's mother, both women attempting to go "against the script." The inner circle of connected women that the stone mothers represent is replicated in the circle between Jean and Marlatt's mother, and so the circles of Avebury prove to be a better access site than Stonehenge for Marlatt to understand the subversive dynamics of her mother. Like Wah's pictograms, the mother stones of the Avebury henge represent an inscribed textual landscape. The community of multiple stone mothers, their gathered "*stei*-ing power," becomes a natural landscape model that is reflected in the recovered, living matriarchal community that Marlatt finds within her mother's memory.

On the other hand, Olson's Diorite Man is also associated with the earth and stone, but Olson does not revere the masculine stone's presence for its "*stei*-ing" power, but for his

exceeding beyond natural laws in his capacity for movement. As I have mentioned, despite his eventual defeat, the figure of Ullikummi is of interest to Olson as a monadic poetic subject because his immense strength and power serves as an oppositional force to both gods and humankind, and because he represents an anarchic threat to the order of the universe. As Olson explains in his essay “Causal Mythology,” he upholds Diorite Man “Because he had a growth principle of his own, and it went against creation in the sense that nobody could stop him and nobody knew how far he might grow ... this creature is nothing but a blue stone and the *stone* grows ... for me, this Diorite figure is the vertical, the growth principle of the Earth” (*Muthologos I* 72-73). Diorite man’s enigmatic presence intrigues Olson, for he possesses “no condition but stone” while at the same time he grows vertically. Whereas the Diorite Man harnesses the energy of the earth within his being, and exceeds the natural, the stone mothers possess “earth, only earth,” and simply exist within and among natural processes. For Olson, the Diorite stone goes “against creation” and dissolves cosmic order in its very growing, which suggests that the “local” from which this archetype springs is an active event—a verb rather than a noun. Thus later, when Olson concludes a poem musing on the early settlement history of the Massachusetts bay area by stating “I stand on Main Street like the Diorite stone,” he situates Maximus—and himself by extension—as a similar megalithic force in the construction of the local. Standing in the heart of Gloucester, Maximus unites the present and past of the local while representing the need for upward, vertical action from out of that past. It is significant that Olson directly identifies himself with Diorite Man as a singular figure that spans place and time, whereas Marlatt locates herself within the collective “inner circle” of her mother and her friends. As I mentioned previously, when Marlatt visits her mother’s friend Jean and recognizes her as “there in this innermost circle” of her mother’s friends, Jean tells Marlatt to visit Avebury over

Stonehenge (*How Hug* 66), as if the site is more indicative of their bonds of female friendship and community. This maternal inner circle becomes metonymic of the mothers of the Avebury circles, thereby creating a network of feminine community that spans place and time.

Conversely, the local for Marlatt is mapped with a drifting cartography wherein the coordinates of “here” are elliptical and constellatory. As she reflects upon her multiple “returns” to the landscapes of her family’s history in the preface to *Ghost Works*, “Each time I travelled in the company of different others but always, it turned out, in the company of my mother who had died in 1975, a few months before that first journey” (vii). Marlatt’s journeys take her through multiple paths between the different sites of her familial memory, and together these traversals build a composite of her own local place. Further, traveling alongside the ghostly presence of her mother in multiple spaces and times situates the local as a psychic and affective place, as opposed to a purely physical location. In *How Hug A Stone* the narrator travels to England with her son to visit her mother’s side of the family, and to uncover details of her deceased mother’s life. Once in England, however, she is confronted with multiple signifiers of her own past, and she struggles to amass these fragments into a cohesive whole. As the speaker laments, “i feel lost. layer on layer of place, person. dramatis personae. the nameless creature i am at the heart of this many-chambered shell is getting overlaid, buried under” (65). Olson’s masculine surety in Diorite Man, his belief in his “vertical growth principle,” is avoided by Marlatt’s disoriented speaker who consistently wavers between multiple signifiers of the local. However, for Marlatt (as for Wah), such disorientation produces multiple subject positions from which to speak; as with Wah’s visual dispersal of home into multiple semantic access points, Marlatt’s sense of her “home”—a local formed from sutured sites both personal and familial, past and present—forms a map of shifting significations rather than a linear trajectory of place.

The layering motif in Marlatt's work extends beyond the content to the structure of the poems, which complicates the traditional travel narrative with heavy parataxis and fragmentation. As the speaker travels to different locations throughout England, she discovers "*this* is the adventure, & the familiar, strangely dislocated, bits & pieces of a town to be put together from a geography that doesn't quite fit, living on in spirit" (44; original emphasis). While at first Marlatt may have believed that she could access her mother's memory directly via a linear genealogy, over the course of her "crossings-over," she encounters a fractured store of fragments both familiar and unfamiliar, and her journey takes the form of a labyrinthine wayfinding. Hence the title of this poem, "to Ilfracombe," which becomes a pun: as a title for a poem, it signals Marlatt's address to the geographic site, but it also implies the process of traveling "to Ilfracombe," the place where she spent time as a child. By embracing the disorientation of the labyrinth, Marlatt emphasizes that the point is in the process—like Duncan's bending bow, the contradictions and harmonies of the field create a composite of place.

Marlatt's collage of place resists the "shell" of history by articulating a subject position through the articulation of "small histories" (51). Her narrative thus establishes a smooth space—Deleuze and Guattari's term for a space in which movement is not directed or controlled by instrumental reason or geometry, but is determined by the journey underhand—to narrate her navigations in her ancestral land. In smooth space, monolithic hierarchies are abandoned in favour of multifarious experiences in which, to use Deleuze and Guattari's words, "one 'distributes' oneself in an open space, according to frequencies and in course of one's crossings" (530). In this way, her journey "to Ilfracombe" creates a smooth space wherein her passage is not determined by set points along a map, but by means of directions and points within her memory of the place. On the page previous to the poem, there is a map that traces her journey to

Ilfracombe drawn in pen over the route lines, with new locations added to the existing map. Beneath this figural map, Marlatt remarks that “the overall terrain is different,” but that “bits of intact memory” guide her on her journey to the site (42). These two maps—the objective, measured map of the area, and the approximate map created by memory and the somatic relation between body and space, together form a composite of the place. As such, each of the micronarrative poems of *How Hug a Stone* resist individual cohesion and must be considered in the context of the woven composite Marlatt constructs throughout. As Marlatt disperses herself in the “open space” of her personal and familial memory, the gathered sites of meaning therein form a nomadic, moving network of place. In the smooth space of this moving network, Marlatt relies on a multidirectional map of affective “bearings” rather than accurate and measurable coordinates in order to navigate her way.

Indeed, what most strikingly distinguishes Marlatt’s local from Olson’s is the “geography that doesn’t quite fit” (44): whereas for Olson the local is necessarily tied up with geology and scientific fact as much as personal and cultural influence, for Marlatt, the local is much more fluid, based on invention and improvisation more than on facts. In one of the first poems of the series, entitled “departure,” the narrator articulates place in terms of a drifting, improvised perspective: “so as not to be lost, invent ... invent (how we get here) ... a place to land at the end of all this” (*How Hug* 15). As I discussed earlier, a similar rhetorical move is made in “**Imagine: a Town**” from *Steveston*, wherein Marlatt attempts to “define” the site of “Steveston” by inventing and imagining multiple signifiers for the place, signifying her belief that singular definitions are not accurate or useful. Whereas Olson looks to established narratives from which he can gather a polis, Marlatt suggests that such narratives are necessarily patriarchal, and so are misrepresentative for the female subject. She thus insists that new stories must be told; since a

“linear version of our lives / unravel[s] in a look, back” (15), Marlatt insists that these new stories be told in paratactic collage, where past and present productively collide in the moment of writing:

invent (how we get here) flying along a sunset’s brilliant flush,  
 intricate music in one ear to dull the engine roar,  
 its possible heartbeat stop, inventing still (to keep us aloft)  
 ...  
 & yet, left open, flapping, wide to the wind, without narrative  
 how can we see where we’re going? or that—for long  
 moments now, we happen. (15)

In this passage, Marlatt unites form and content in her theory of new stories: the first few lines of paratactic perceptions and observations are summed up with the lines “without narrative / how can we see where we’re going? or that—for long / moments now, we happen.” In this way, these concluding lines refer back to the previous lines of the passage, as if the catalogue of perceptions *is* the narrative, the many “long moments” of happening that trace a nonlinear path to “where we’re going.” Like Wah’s narrative strategy of “faking it,” which also articulates the body’s place through invention and imagination, so Marlatt initiates new narrative strategies for articulating one’s self and one’s place outside the circumscription of “old stories” which are too sure and singularly authoritative. As she writes in *Touch to my Tongue*:

how can the standard sentence structure of English with its linear authority,  
 subject through verb to object, convey the wisdom of endlessly repeating and not  
 exactly repeated cycles her body knows? or the mutuality her body shares

embracing other bodies, children, friends, animals, all those she customarily holds and and is held by? (47)

Marlatt's experiences in and of England, which transport her into cyclical oscillations between affective sites in her familial memory, cannot be articulated within "linear authority" because, as she writes in "departure," the "linear version of our lives unravel[s] in a look, back" (*How Hug* 15). The parataxis of memory, its fleeting movements between multiple times and spaces, cannot be expressed in a grammar of flat linearity but must be held together by the contrapuntal rhythms and textures of their various tensions. Hence the fragmented, improvised structure of her long poem, which favours cyclicity and collage as narrative strategies over linear cohesion. For Marlatt—and for the community of female writers—such invention is an *imperative* "strategy for survival" (75), since the old language and old stories are incommensurate with female experiences of and in place.

Some brief historical notes to the Avebury henge will prove useful in contextualizing the unique spatiality of the stone mothers that Marlatt uses to articulate her nomadic, translocal sense of place. The Avebury henge was constructed in multiple stages, beginning around 3000 BCE. The individual stones were not changed or shaped by humans, but exist in their natural state (Mann 29). Among many theories and explanations, the site is linked with the expression of fertility rites wherein the stones likely mark the cycle of birth, life and death; correspondingly, the columnar and triangular stones are paired together in the space of the site, with the phallic pillar stones representing masculine energy and the triangular stones representing femininity. These shorter, triangular, "squat" stones take the focus of Marlatt's book, for she imbues them with a matriarchal presence. The columnar and triangular stone shapes are visible in the figure below:



Figure 14. Avebury Stone Circles. [www.english-walks.co.uk](http://www.english-walks.co.uk).

Materially speaking, the very nature of the rocks used in Olson and Marlatt’s narratives sheds light on their unique relationship to the local geography. As discussed in the first chapter, Olson’s use of diorite as exemplary of the local bedrock is geologically accurate and supported by Shaler, who notes its prominent presence in the bedrock of Gloucester. Like the boulders of Stonehenge, the Avebury stone mothers are sarsen stones comprised of sandstone. The Neolithic people carried these sandstone boulders to Avebury from places several miles away, over a lengthy period of “perhaps over a thousand years” (Mann 26). Unlike Diorite Man, who rises upward from his naturalized place in the local bedrock, Marlatt’s megaliths are “displaced”—and thus, are creatively and actively situated in place, which suggests the text’s concern for translocal movement and drift. Whereas Diorite Man is singular and grows vertically, the stone mothers are multiple and are “carried” across a horizontal geographic plane. Just as the nomadic Neolithic peoples improvised on the landscape of Avebury in this way, Marlatt’s speaker must deal with the lacunae and accumulations of past and present materials, “the familiar, strangely dislocated, bits and pieces” in order to map “a geography that doesn’t quite fit” (44). Such narrative

improvisation, I argue, situates Marlatt's Avebury as a Deleuzian "nonlimited locality" *par excellence*. The speculative origins of the henge, its constellatory spatial construction, as well as its layered mythological purpose together form a networked local with multiple semantic access points.

According to Doreen Massey, places are not defined by their fixed geographical boundaries, but by their ongoing shifting relationship to a network of other places. As she argues, rather than "thinking of places as areas with boundaries around, they can be imagined as articulated moments in networks of social relations and understandings" (*Space, Place* 154). She notes that place gains specificity through "a particular constellation of social relations, meeting and weaving together at a particular locus" rather than "some long internalized history" (154). Massey's point is that the identity of places lies not in their geographic boundaries, but in their relationship in a network of meaningful, interactive connections with other places. This understanding of place accounts for Marlatt's uneven local geography, the fragmented sites that form a disorienting and sometimes conflicting whole. In order for her to understand the "where" from which she writes, she must travel to other spaces and places and form a collaged map of understanding wherein the parts must be considered in relation to the created, subjective whole of place, which is always shifting and in process. Rather than a geographic given, Marlatt's local is pieced together from many dislocated pieces, both familiar and strange, of her remembered past and immediate present.

Further, Marlatt's construction of a translocal map that drifts between space and time extends to her enquiry into language as a multiscalar site of being, where words become multiply meaningful in themselves or when placed in networks among other words. Critic Julie Beddoes insists that Marlatt's "search for a mother who is both ghost and muse is a search for identity in

language” (87). In her search to reconstruct “home” through her mother’s presence, Marlatt searches among the squat stone mothers and at the same time excavates the structures of language. Marlatt is interested in the sedimentary nature of language, for she repeatedly revisits the narrative of “old words” as the “ground & source” (73) or “parent material” (26) for the evolution of one’s identity. Marlatt often layers resonances within language in free association, with the etymological meanings of words forming an evolving palimpsest. As she writes in *How Hug a Stone*: “parent, to get, beget, give birth. *parcae*, the Fates, / who allot what you get” (141). Language is the “parent material” out of which other words are born, creating a universe of interconnected meanings that span space and time. In this way, words and the Avebury stones have a similar function—they provide historical trajectories through which one can understand and record one’s shifting relationship to place: “how hug a stone (mother) except nose in to lithic fold, the old slow pulse beyond word become, under flesh, mutter of stone, *stane*, *stei*-ing power” (75). It is through touching the stone mothers that the speaker communes with her local in language—mining the “old slow pulse beyond the word” she finds rootedness and “staying power” in this parent material while also being confronted by her own deterritorialized, nonlimited locality. Further, Marlatt extends this understanding of her personal origin and evolution to that of the female collective, since the “parent material” of language produces multiple networks of meanings that evade the singular one-way sense of patriarchal language structures. As she writes in “Musing with Mothertongue,” “in etymology we discover a history of verbal relations (a family tree, if you will) that has preceded us and given us the world we live in” (11). Ultimately, Marlatt’s discovery of her mother’s multiphasic self leads her to the same discovery of her own self—that it is constellatory and nomadic.

The squat stone mothers thus become a symbol for Marlatt's cyclic narrative strategy, which she identifies as a female *practice of living*. Her ambivalence towards a narrative of place is articulated throughout; she admits wanting to break free of "the plot we're trapped in" (15) but also expresses the necessity of narrative as a mapping of place: "without narrative how can we see where we've been? or, unable to leave it altogether, what we come from?" (19). Marlatt's issue with narrative lies in its received patriarchal forms; thus, throughout the text, she sets out to disrupt linear forms of narrative that a female sense of place eludes. The text is interwoven with maps and journal entries, but these objective and measured representations of place exist as interspersed fragments and do not form a cohesive itinerary. Moreover, the intricate lines of the "official" maps figured in the text are overwritten with the lines (often cyclic in shape) and added cities of the speaker's own journey through the geography of her past. Aside from laying bare the very constructed nature of narrative, her nomadic traversals of space also forefront an alternative mode of mapping in the labyrinth. In the end of the narrative, she reflects on her journey to find her mother and writes:

Although there are stories about her, versions of history that are versions of her, & though she comes in many guises she is not a person, she is what we come through to & what we come out of, ground & source. the space after the colon, the pause (between the words) of all possible relation. (73)

The elusive mother is dispersed throughout the narrative, but her presence as a linguistic sign unites women in an enunciated *communitas*. As an elusive sign "that we come through to & what we come out of," the mother identifies a resistant female reading and writing process that recalls Marlatt's labyrinth: "reading between the lines. finding in write, rite, growing out of *ar-*, that

fitting together at the root of reading (we circle back) ... using our labyrinthine sense, we (w)rite our *ar-* way, reading and relating these intercommunicating passages” (*Readings* 34-35).

In her journey through the places of her ancestral past, Marlatt confronts the gaps and contradictions in the local significations of place. Her writing of place echoes Massey’s observations that the foundation of place is not imposed boundaries or entrenched history but the *connections made between places*, the “particular constellation of social relations, meeting and weaving together at a particular locus” (*Space, Place* 154). Thus, in the above passage Marlatt uses the “space after the colon” in a similar way that Wah uses the hyphen: to signify a meeting place or nexus between such relations. She evokes the “space after the colon” as the “pause ... of all possible relation,” thereby evoking the “blank” space between points as a dynamic one wherein multiple subject positions can be held at once.

Thus, although Olson’s archetype of the local is complex and imbued with cleavages, it is nonetheless grounded in a cohesive mythological narrative that situates the local as masculine and stable. In contrast, Marlatt’s spatio-linguistic local is mapped with improvisation and narrativized with gaps and multiple entrance sites—not unlike the setting of the Avebury henge itself. To be sure, both writers imbue their local with hybrid discourses; however, in terms of the very territorialization of the local from which the poet writes, Olson’s ground is firmly situated in Gloucester whereas Marlatt’s local is traced across multiple plateaus. In her book *What Matters*, Marlatt sums up the matter of the local when she writes: “who is me but a complex of other (objects & object-events) & maybe a little bit of memory, or speculation, or a little wanting” (150). Here she reformulates Olson’s dictum of the poet as an object among a field of other objects. The dynamic process of the field methodology is retained in Marlatt’s revisioning, but she incorporates the non-material elements of her experience, such as memory and desire.

These subjective tenets of being are as crucial to place-making, to coming to terms with the “from which” you write, as the physical objects of the field.

In *How Hug a Stone*, Marlatt develops a mythology of place wherein the female body is equated with the feminized landscape in order to demonstrate at once the exploitation and empowerment that the two share. In going back to this feminine grounding, Marlatt engages in groundwork—the process of selving through “reading writing and writing reading”—that she learned from Duncan. As with Duncan’s ground, Marlatt’s investigation of the Avebury mother stones is an extended commentary on the ground of literary tradition; however, rather than preserving the mastery of the patriarchal past therein, Marlatt investigates the feminine aspects of the landscape in order to (re)cover and preserve their presence through her writing. Hence Marlatt stresses the importance, for the female writer, of “Keeping her hand in, waving, *wavhering* through walls of the already read, reaching for traces of another woman’s hand, vivid and present, to write her way here” (*Readings* 196; original emphasis). “Writing in monumental stones” (*How Hug* 75) allows Marlatt to address the lacunae of the ground she inherits, and allows her to redress the lack of female-centric experiences of place-making therein.<sup>275</sup> Her poethic proceeds from intense improvisation—she does her groundwork and improvises within the physical and semantic s/cites of place in order to exhume and mobilize the erased feminine processes that so much inform her translocal sensibility.

Thus, although Marlatt was heavily influenced by Olson’s emphasized foothold in the earth, she nonetheless sees necessity in the project of revision and rereading. This realization leads Marlatt to articulate a sense of place-making that is attentive to the sociopolitical concerns

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<sup>275</sup> For Marlatt, this process of healing the lacunae of female-centric tradition extends to the lacunae of historiography writ large. Thus, in *Ana Historic*, Marlatt rewrites the history of a woman known only by her husband’s last name, “Mrs. Richards,” in order to give voice to her erased female presence.

of the world and the fractured and uneven structures that organize and fix people in place. As Marlatt puts it:

the old monoliths of selfhood are crumbling apart in the acid rain of new theories of representation . . . the rational and singular self we were taught to emulate—so out of reach, so imperial in its sense of control—is a fantasy of the first order/First World. That the so-called ‘self’ is a product of discourse, a fractured site of various identities and memberships on both sides of the rift of dominance. A site that shifts as point of view shifts. Interlocutive as much as locative. (*Readings* 207)

Indeed, as Marlatt remarks, the process of being located in place is as much a discursive and dialogic undertaking as an “x marks the spot” locative act. As such, Marlatt revises Olson’s singular local by shifting it—making it multiple and translocal, always responsive to the shifting view of the individual in concert with the shifting landscape. She also makes the local respond to the hierarchies, static structures, and false claims to “origin” to which metanarratives of “belonging” cling.

### **Through and Between the Door and the Labyrinth: A Conclusion**

There is a door other than that which opens to the known world.<sup>276</sup>

—Daphne Marlatt

In her essay “The Point of View: Universal or Particular,” Monique Wittig argues that “[t]he minority subject is not self-centered as is the straight subject. Its extension into space could be described as being like Pascal’s circle, whose center is everywhere and whose circumference is

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<sup>276</sup> *Salvage* 26.

nowhere” (61-62).<sup>277</sup> The work of Wah and Marlatt explores the extension into space of bodies that are othered by dominant narratives of belonging “in place.” The hyphen, the doorway, and the labyrinth are poetic spatial practices of living that open spaces of communal resistance and access to place. Wah’s and Marlatt’s narrative strategies of survival resist exhausted narratives of a stable center of identity; instead, these writers inflect the field methodology they have been influenced by with a *translocal poethic* of a moving, shifting centre that interacts with the borders of various textual landscapes across time and space. For those whose “circumference is nowhere,” space becomes delimited, the local becomes a non-limited locality, and place can be articulated across multiple locals along a mapped trajectory.

The traversed textual landscapes of Wah’s and Marlatt’s poethic exceed beyond the layered territories of the self, to include the borders of nations within and through which they move in body and in memory. Indeed, Derksen’s recent claim that “Wah’s poetry, no matter how localized it is in the particulars of life, landscape, language, and perception, has also always been transnational and globalized” (“Reader’s Manual” 4), supports my own claims here for Wah’s translocality and his extrapolation of the local from the open-field poetics of Olson and Duncan to the far reaches of locals elsewhere and elsewhen. Wah’s poetry, Derksen continues, expresses “syntactically compressed narratives” that oscillate between “a grounded localness that carries a weight in its details of place” to the distant memories of one’s past, both personal and familial (4). So sums up the translocal trajectory from Wah’s earlier poems, rooted in the local landscape, to his explorations of the shared landscapes of his family history in *Diamond Grill*. Derksen’s comments can also be equally applied to Marlatt’s journey, her delicate handling of the Steveston and Avebury landscapes always mediated by her familial past in colonial Malaysia.

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<sup>277</sup> By “straight subject,” Wittig refers to the universalized white male subject position that subsumes “othered bodies”—racialized and gendered bodies—within its position of the “One.”

Wah and Marlatt thus inflect their inherited sense of the local by extrapolating it—both remain loyal to the earth as a point of entrance or passageway to the self, but both are weary of imposing false “origins” upon the local. Moreover, both are weary of overarching metanarratives attributed to the local as a marker of identity; as such, the translocal poethic revises the singularity of the local by opening it to its inherent fluidities and dispersals.

Both Wah and Marlatt’s spatial imaginaries present ways of entering into spaces where they do not “belong” according to dominant narratives of place. Their conceptions of Canada as a nation are marked by hesitancy towards overarching, homogenous identity narratives that fix people in place. Upon moving to Canada with her family from Malaysia when she was nine, Marlatt “wanted to ‘belong,’ to be ‘from’ here but found there were differences not easy to bridge” (*Readings* 19). As she argues in her essay “Entering In: The Immigrant Imagination,” however, this sense of unbelonging can be transformed through the writing process:

It seems to me that the situation of being such an immigrant is a perfect seedbed for the writing sensibility. If you don’t belong, you can *imagine* you belong and you can construct in writing a world where you do belong. You can write your way into the world you want to be a part of ... even as, from the outside, you witness its specific characteristics. (222; original emphasis)

As with Duncan’s “building architecture” of place, both Marlatt and Wah emphasize the importance of constructing intervening creative and created spaces. The hyphen and the labyrinth all signify resistant poetic spatial practices that establish these alternative spaces. Using these spatial practices, subjective place can be articulated within the demonic grounds created by rereading and revising through language. This poetic methodology evolves from the field poetic

by transforming geographic, cultural, sexual, racial, and linguistic displacement into *emplacement* along multiple lines of meaning.

While both Wah and Marlatt have the voices of the “other” in mind when articulating place outside of dominant narratives, they nonetheless are sure to point out how their spatial imaginaries are also applicable to those *within* dominant subject positions. “[L]iving in the hyphen” (Wah, *Diamond* 53)—as a practice of living through reading and writing—does not only apply to racialized bodies/subjectivities, but is a tool that can be used to articulate many other subjectivities that seek to resist being circumscribed by homogenizing narratives of identity and belonging. As Wah confirms:

The contradictions, paradoxes, and assumptions active at the hyphen, all indicate a position and a process that are central to any poetics of opposition (feminist, sexual, racial) and that is the poetics of the ‘trans-,’ methods of translation, transference, transposition, or poetics that speaks of the awareness and use of any means of occupying a site that is continually being magnetized. (*Faking It* 90)

Writing in the in-between—while being a narrative strategy of survival for some—is also a means by which oppositional communities can be built and fostered in real and imagined space and place. These communities exist within the self, extend to other selves, and also migrate across the page to other readers and writers, moving from a process of self-understanding to a communal identification along “trans-” lines.

It is therefore necessary to note that the spatial metaphors of synchronous foreignicity/the hyphen and the labyrinth do not essentialize the minority position, but open spatial knowledges beyond the binaries of the linear and rational, to “new organizing principles, new narratives” (Wah, *Faking It* 61). Despite the hyphen’s deep connection to his multiethnic identity,

synchronous foreignicity is not restricted to any type of body, but is available to subjects within dominant culture. “The ethnopoetics toolbox,” Wah argues, “isn’t ever only ‘ethnic,’ at least in the sense of racial. These tools are shared by writers who are marginalized, invisible, experimental, political, and in need of any tool that might imagine a culture that could recognize an alien identity and construct a common language of the other” (*Faking It* 66). Both synchronous foreignicity, and writing within the labyrinth, are poetic praxes stemming from projective field poetics that points to the very fluidity of all subjectivities and the fluid relations between subjects and local place. These poethics respond to the uneven geographies within literary tradition by recognizing that one’s relation to place, and one’s movement through space, is not a totalizing narrative for all—there are gaps and dissonances within these dominant narratives. As the work of Wah and Marlatt demonstrates, these lacunae within received metanarratives of place foster a productive disorientation for those interested in “imagin[ing] a culture that could recognize an alien identity and construct a common language of the other.” Whether it is the language of Cantonese meeting English through the rush of a closing door, or the language of motherhood mediated across the Atlantic, the language that emerges is one of translocal bordering.

However, it is significant to note, as I have noted throughout the chapter, that such “bordering” by Wah and Marlatt is an ability bestowed upon them by their white privilege—Wah being a half white male, and Marlatt a white woman. The very mobility with which Wah is able to “swing the gate” of his identity (*Diamond Grill* 175), or “walk unwritten, de-scripted, undescribed,” (*How Hug* 35) in Marlatt’s case, is a strategy made available to them by their whiteness. To be sure, it is possible to see Wah’s and Marlatt’s critical engagement with whiteness and colonialism as exposing and destabilizing whiteness as a *construction*—as a

floating signifier, something that can be turned on and off. Nonetheless, it needs to be said here that their translocal mobility is undergirded by their ability to place themselves—indeed, walk within—the territories of white space and place. In my coda to follow, I take up these issues of whiteness, permissibility, and place in further detail.

While many critics have viewed Marlatt's focus on the female body as essentialist, such criticisms miss the potential of *l'écriture féminine* as a resistant poetic praxis of place. Lola Lemire Tostevin has gone so far as to accuse Marlatt of reinforcing gender binaries by replacing "phallogocentrism" with "vulvalogocentrism" (201). Moreover, fellow Tish writer Frank Davey argues that *How Hug a Stone* "places against the categorizing and collecting masculine, an essential feminine" ("Words" 45). However, in light of the essentialism of Olson's masculinist Maximus/Diorite Man persona—and the male-dominated tradition of place-based poetics within which she works—it seems that Marlatt's evocation of the stone mothers rights the balance of the field and allows her to articulate an alternative stance or view. I disagree with Tostevin and Davey that the assertion of a female voice simply replaces patriarchal discourse—as I have demonstrated, the female voice undoes the binary assumptions of patriarchal language by threading a narrative that is not closed, but remains open and various in its access points.

In identifying the archetypal mother as "what we come through to & what we come out of, ground & source" (*How Hug* 73), Marlatt resists binaries by identifying an inclusive community of the "we"—a community of both men and women, who all "come through" the mother. Indeed, the collective community built within language is one out of which the "we" of the world collectively emerge and with which we all articulate our "from which" we stand. Although Marlatt's work is marked by the search for a female community within language—and later, a homosexual desire for that community—her project nonetheless encompasses the "we" of

experience, thereby avoiding the binaries it challenges. As the beginning of “Musing with Mothertongue” reads, “The beginning: language, a living body we enter at birth, sustains and contains us ... placental, our flat land, our sea, it is both place (where we are situated) and body (that contains us), that body of language we speak, our mothertongue” (*Readings* 9). Language, then, is not a “no man’s land,” but a flat land from which we all collectively emerge as articulate subjects in our own right. While Marlatt figures the ground and source of language within the feminine mother, her formulation of the collective “we”—connecting the place of human *communitas* within the womb and within language—creates a “powerfully inclusive human generic” that “unambiguously includes both women and men” (Knutson 47). Conceiving of language—and one’s place within and through it—as a labyrinth resets the precedents of universalized perspectives, the dominant male “I,” that common usage has instilled. Although Marlatt does not explicitly state that the labyrinth is a praxis inclusive to everyone (as Wah does for his “ethnopoetics toolbox”), her figuration of its origin within language, as well as her communal “we” with which she articulates this community grounded in language, implicitly implies that the labyrinth is a poetic praxis that can be productively employed by both men and women alike. The labyrinth thus marks an extension of Olson’s proprioceptive poetic which, although it centres upon a universalized white male perspective, nonetheless opened rhetorical and experimental spaces within the breath and within language for female writers to articulate their subjectivity as grounded in the particularities of their bodies, their movement through space and through the breath of language. As a poethic, the labyrinth calls for the undoing of linearity and universality when speaking of and in place; accordingly, when a writer, male or female, writes within the flows of language not tied to a specific source or usage but within a matrix of possible entryways, he or she is writing within the labyrinth, and in so doing, is acknowledging

the feminine presence that has been erased by patriarchal structures within language. In this way, Marlatt's poethic of the labyrinth accounts for the multiple passageways through language with which one can articulate a sense of place and body within the "language we speak."

The inclusivity of Marlatt's project is also founded upon her theoretical underpinnings within the French feminist tradition that also views language as inherently non-binary. Indeed, the concept of *l'écriture féminine*, while focused on the specific energies of the female body and female experience, is a narrative strategy that is meant to dissolve the hierarchical binaries of gender. As an intervening strategy, it can be opened to all "who have known the ignominy of persecution" (Cixous 258). Barbara A. Biesecker argues that as a form of writing, *l'écriture féminine* is a "rhetorical strategy" and not an attempt to essentialize (93). As a rhetorical strategy, the fragmentations and flows of such writing exceed beyond the reconfiguration of individual subject positions; indeed, the goal is to reform the language within which all subjects are situated so that it is more accessible as a medium of experience and self-articulation. Cixous thus praises male writers like James Joyce and Jean Genet for their *l'écriture féminine* that reinscribes feminine presence within their texts by means of utilizing non-hierarchical, cyclic flows of language and meaning. *L'écriture féminine*, the labyrinth, and the hyphen, are all poetic praxes that bear no gendered signature in their practice; after all, at their core, the labyrinth and the hyphen are spatial metaphors for articulating writing that disrupts dominant narratives of place. By extension, these poetic models critique the social structures in place that perpetuate and mimic universalized discourses of being and place—discourses that thereby govern the "proper" place for bodies—by opening aesthetic and political spaces for culturally "othered" bodies and consciousnesses to articulate their particulars of place. As Cixous argues, this resistant form of writing "will do more than modify power relations or toss the ball over to the other camp [but]

will bring about a mutation in human relations, in thought, in all praxis” (253). Marlatt’s translocal investigation of place can thus also be considered a rhetorical strategy of place: in its unstable and fragmented structure, its overlain maps, and its unsure, shifting point of view, *How Hug a Stone* initiates a disruption in phallogentric language and narrative. Her adoption and revision of Olson’s projective poetic does not reinforce its opposite in an essentialist feminine, but opens projective verse to the mutability of a variety of human relations and praxis.

Thus, I would argue that critics of Marlatt’s “essentialism” miss the crucial point of *How Hug a Stone*: that the journey in search of her local, through her mother’s presence and memory, is not a journey for origins or a cohesive meaning of the feminine principle; rather, Marlatt’s nomadic trajectory reveals an anti-reductive framing of female experience and presence as plural and shifting. Throughout *How Hug a Stone*, the narrator and her mother are never fixed in their female identity but rather occupy many subject positions at once. Joanne Saul puts it plainly when she argues that “Essentialism is balanced by multiplicity” in the text (*Writing* 77). Or, as Barbara Godard confirms, “While many women poets use condensation, the paring away of self to give space to the other, Marlatt attempts to give birth to an extended self immersed in something vaster than the individual” (481). This comment recalls Marlatt’s association between the flows of the landscape in Steveston with the uprooting of its Japanese-Canadian inhabitants: she witnesses the survival of those who endure not only the larger processes of nature, but the larger systems of oppression and control in which they are caught. Working within an inherited male topography, wherein the particular is emphasized over the universal, Marlatt digs deep to resurrect and recover the particularities of the female experience in place. In so doing, she uncovers a spatial hermeneutic that does not impose gender binaries on spatial experiences and

practices, but rather opens the field to the fluidity of subject positions available for individual and communal expression.

As transgressive modes of spatial awareness and spatial knowledge that seek to identify uneven geographies and provide alternative means of place-making, the hyphen and the labyrinth can be united by what de Certeau calls *practices of place*. The resistance of the hyphen and the labyrinth to overarching spatial narratives lay in their creation of alternative access points to place and to their attempts to form an alternative spatial grammar that accounts for their othered experiences. These spatial knowledges are particular to the body; however, “the body,” like the local, is a sign that can be dispersed across a field of signifiers, and the hyphen and labyrinth are but two models for understanding this *poethic* of dispersal. In their opening of creative and created spaces of resistance within language wherein one may practice place, the hyphen and the labyrinth are rigorous forms of spatial rhetoric.

Both Wah’s and Marlatt’s translocal *poethic* aligns with de Certeau’s conception of place that I have been discussing throughout this project. As de Certeau argues,

A place (*lieu*) is the order (of whatever kind) with which elements are distributed in relationships of coexistence. It thus excludes the possibility of two things being in the same location (place). The law of the ‘proper’ rules in the place: the elements taken into consideration are beside one another, each situated in its own ‘proper’ and distinct locations, a location it defines. A place is thus an instantaneous configuration of positions. (117)

De Certeau’s conception of place helps to illuminate the ways in which the rhetoric of the hyphen and the labyrinth work in terms of spatial metaphor—by identifying alternative pathways to place along indeterminate trajectories that bring multiple places and spaces together in

productive tension, these spatial imaginaries resist circumscription by dominant, linear systems of power, such as the nation, the state, and patriarchy writ large.

As Foucault points out in *Discipline and Punish*, the spatial orders of society are determined by power structures set in place to govern the collective movement and spatial practices of the populus. As such, spatial practices that go against these imposed structurings of space open spaces to the formation of transgressive places of resistance. De Certeau's theory of spatial practice responds to Foucault's concept of disciplinary power as a tool of managing and controlling human relations within space. Practiced place is an attempt to articulate the ways in which individuals can reappropriate spaces for their own purposes: de Certeau's model of the pedestrian in the street emphasizes the moving subject as one that cannot be contained or determined according to the tools of administrative organization and control, such as city maps and grids. Rather, the pedestrian who walks through streets wandering and short-cutting transforms the space of street into a place that reflects his/her own desires for movement. In this way, de Certeau's analysis makes connections between material and linguistic spaces as interpretable texts; his example of the pedestrian walking through the streets, transforming the prescribed "place" of the street into a space of subjective desire, is paralleled with the experience of a reader encountering a text: "an act of reading is the space produced by the practice of a particular place: a written text, i.e., a place constituted by a system of signs" (*The Practice* 117). As a reader "moves through" a text, he/she interprets it according to his/her subjective wants and desires.

Wah's and Marlatt's sense of practiced place, then, extends the latent concept of negative capability within the field poetic by emphasizing uncertainty, flux, and movement within the self and within the landscape as a means of forming creative spaces and sites of resistance to

totalizing narratives of place. These “everyday” articulations of place—from Olson’s “pacing” of Gloucester, Duncan’s creative and communal households, Baraka’s grassroots, community place-building, Wah’s hyphenated expression of identity, and Marlatt’s wayfinding through the labyrinth—cross borders both psychic and material, and in so doing, they disrupt the configurations of place as determined by the agenda of the nation-state that are meant to control and organize bodies. To inscribe the multiple subject positions of the self upon the ordered, rigid script of the nation is to undermine its authority. Both Wah and Marlatt’s wanderings through the various sites of their identity—whether enacted through a border crossing while passing as white, or by drifting in the multiple sites of familial memory—renders a conception of place that is uncharted by any system outside the body and thus allows for subjective agency in the process of one’s spatial ordering of the world.

Indeed, both Wah and Marlatt articulate a disorienting sense of place within a “geography that doesn’t quite fit” (*How Hug* 42). However, both harness such estrangement not only towards a revision of the field poetic of their forefathers, but also towards a new *poethic* of place wherein the fragmented memories and residues of places far and beyond the resident local come into play in an imagined figuration of place that spans multiple places and times, sites and cites. These ideas, however, all stem from the projective concept of “stance,” the subjective articulation of place that comes from the proprioceptive body moving through space, establishing connections and disconnections with the landscape. By opening the local to the particular inflections of memory and desire, the translocal *poethic* testifies to the power of the imagination to influence immanent spaces and places as well as the felt relations between them. The translocal *poethic* creates a smooth space wherein identity may be accessed and negotiated along multiple s/cites that connect the body to a textual landscape, whether that landscape be natural and physical, like

the mountains of B.C., the Fraser River, and the Avebury henge, or the landscape of language and tradition from which one writes and to which one responds. The translocal is a fluid concept that underscores and speaks for the multiscalar (or, “multiphasic,” as Duncan would have it) nature of all identities and subjectivities. Although the “*inarticulate is ground*” (Marlatt, qtd. in Bowering, “Given” 59; original emphasis) for bodies and subjectivities othered by dominant narratives, this does not mean that these grounds are without sense; rather, the inarticulate ground is “never pure, never sure” but signifies a space of resistance that does not “cohere” to a centre or origin. Rereading and rewriting the local through experimentation with multiple subject positions is thus a key narrative strategy of survival wherein the othered writer “bargain[s] for a position of the potent in the reterritorialization of inherited literary forms and language” (Wah, *Faking It* 203).

While it is important to not over-romanticize these anti-establishment articulations of place as ultimately liberating for everyone, everywhere, the polemic of the field poetic nonetheless disallows binaries from governing the articulation of bodily subjectivity. However, what matters most is not so much this disavowal of binary thinking—for that would reify these polarities—but to emphasize the in-between as a place of ongoing possibility wherein one may locate oneself along many lines of identity in place. The work of Wah and Marlatt allows for a conception of place that exceeds individual places as markers of identity—conceiving of spatial trajectories in this multiscalar way allows for the acting subject to relate to space in ways that exist outside those predetermined by power relations governing human geographies. Their work extends beyond the place-based poetics of their forefathers to identify a spatial *poethic* that fosters spatial awareness and innovation towards the extrapolation of place beyond its singular and originary underpinnings. The translocal *poethic* not only opens space within the North American literary

tradition of place-based poetics for othered bodies, but it opens the concept of place itself to new spatial organizations and ways of interacting with dominant scripts—those that attempt to contain bodies under homogenous banners of belonging and lead to the continuance of uneven human geographies. Thus, from these imagined poetic places, real reformations of space and spatial configurations may emerge. And from within this network of material and imagined sites and cites, a practice of living *in place* materializes wherein we may “form a universal language underlying the specifics of the local” so that we can “se[e] the world as multidimensional as possible and ourselves present in it” (Marlatt “Entering” 223).

### Place With(out) Permission: A Coda

After unmasking the norms of race, gender, sexuality, and nationality, where can we turn but to space itself, to that named and unnamable anchor that seems to moor both nations and bodies in place?<sup>278</sup>

—Patricia Yaeger

So on this ground,

write;

...

on this ground

on this broken ground.<sup>279</sup>

—Kamau Brathwaite

This project proposes that place is never a static given or ahistorical emergence; rather, it is a created and creative construct of personal and collective experimentation, one that is continually inflected by the sociopolitical spatial climate *from which and for which one writes*. Writing in the open field allows for a material and imagined engagement with the “facts” of one’s geographic and psychic environment to create new articulations of place beyond hegemonic scripts of belonging—those imposed by the State, by multiculturalism, and by patriarchy, in particular. As a means of articulating place, the open field thus extends beyond poetic methodology to become a poethic wherein social practice and poetics are coproductive. For the writers I have considered throughout this project, this poethic is a means by which identity and place can be articulated through locales, histories, and memories, across trajectories spanning the past and present. By practicing place within the spatial controls of their unique political environments, Olson, Duncan, Baraka, Wah, and Marlatt have carved creative and created places of resistance and

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<sup>278</sup> *The Geography of Identity* 13.

<sup>279</sup> *The Arrivants* 265-266.

community. Their adaptive place-based poethic thus continues to be a means by which we can come to understand and form continuing practices of place in the contemporary milieu.

In this coda, I continue along this path to uncover the potential extensions in contemporary poetics of the ideas around space and place I have been discussing. Taking the existing work of my dissertation as a starting point, this coda acts as a roadmap to my future research on place and placelessness. Accordingly, my goal here is not to linger through a trite conclusion of the thoughts so thoroughly examined throughout the project, but rather, to further refract the poethic of place through the lens of permissibility, place, and State rhetoric—common themes that arose in my previous chapters. These concepts have created a political dialectic throughout this project—one that reveals the geographies, both privileged and uneven, from which poetics of place (continue to) arise. By “permission,” I mean to suggest that the ways in which people articulate the “here” and “there” of their place and experience in the landscape—within the local and the greater nation—are enforced through the rhetorics of permissibility expressed through the State’s archives of treaties, law documents, and cultural texts. These documents determine who belongs and who doesn’t—and who is permitted to practice place and who is not—within the imagined boundaries and community of the nation.<sup>280</sup> As critical geographer Gearóid Ó Tuathail argues, “Geography is about power. Although often assumed to be innocent, the geography of the world is not a product of nature but a product of histories of struggle between competing authorities over the power to organize, occupy, and administer space ... [and] the ability to impose order and meaning on space” (1). As I have discussed throughout this project,

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<sup>280</sup> Certainly, Donald Trump’s recent rhetoric around borders and “building a wall” to insulate and preserve the “imagined” community of Americans from the “dangerous” invasion of immigrants testifies to the ongoing interconnectivity of permissibility, place, and State rhetoric. The logic of this national discourse underscores the dangers when imagined sociopolitical tensions are made material within the space of the nation. In Trump’s regressive logic and rhetoric, whiteness is synonymous with citizenship, community, and “proper” place, while the other is marked by danger, the threat of takeover, and unbelonging within the space of the nation.

the ways in which space and place come to be lived, ordered, and articulated is through specific imaginaries, whether they be poetical or political. It is through these imaginaries that people come to understand, “read,” resist, and reconfigure the economic, social, and political correspondences between the landscape they inhabit and the formation of place therein.

Following my work herein, the dialectic of permission and refusal that often permeates discussions of place has led me to orient my questions around poethics in a new direction: specifically, toward the contested s/cite of the nation of Canada, where all seem to be permitted access to place under the guise of a multicultural agenda, yet it is a space wherein the land itself (and its first peoples) remains unfree. Questions of “permission” lead me to think more deeply, as I have begun to do in these chapters, of place as a spatio-political rhetoric, one that is used to control bodies in and through space. Recently in Canada, there has been a surge of experimental poetry that engages with language as a site of public domain, on the one hand, and as a tool for the State to hold the land and its people hostage, on the other. These experimental works of revisionary place-breaking and place-re-making are many; those that come to mind as the most explicit engagements with the question of place and permission are Jordan Abel’s *Un/inhabited* (2014), Shane Rhodes’s *X: Poems & Anti-poems* (2013), NourbeSe Philip’s *Zong!* (2008), and most recently, Laurie D. Graham’s *Settler Education* (2016). These writers span a continuum of stances, from the settler-descendant, the immigrant, and the Indigene, to engage with place in the contemporary Canadian moment—primarily through the archive and its language of dispossession—from a prismatic lens of (un)belonging.

Before getting to the work of the poets to which my research will turn, it will be helpful to briefly root the discussion of permissibility, place, and rhetoric in the project thus far. The first instance of this dialectic is discussed in terms of Olson’s polis as a place of permission; for

Olson, the polis is a place carved out of the capitalist space of America—it gives permission to its citizens to live in accordance with the local culture and community as a shore against the invading spatial politics of the State. As I have demonstrated, however, there are gaping holes in Olson’s polis—although it is held up as an inclusive community of individuals, Olson refuses entry (or acknowledgement) to women and Indigenous peoples into the poethic act of producing space. According to his rhetoric, the white male settler views the land with open permissibility; in many ways, Olson writes himself as if he were indigenous to the land he writes from and about. Despite his blind spots, however—and they are many—Olson remains largely aware and critical of the State’s far-reaching rhetoric of permission, for he accuses America of being a nation “that never lets anyone come to shore.”

For Duncan, permission is less about the individual pursuit of place, and more about finding a common ground to land on through language. In his work, poetry—and the language from whence it springs—is foremost a common ground and a “place of first permission.” In the face of postwar containment strategies aimed to keep bodies “in place,” poetry, using the common materials of language, offers a grand household of creative community that can be created and called to mind. As he writes in the opening poem of his first major collection, *The Opening of the Field*:

Often I am permitted to return to a meadow  
 as if it were a given property of the mind  
 that certain bounds hold against chaos,  
  
 that is a place of first permission,  
 everlasting omen of what is. (7)

Undoubtedly, Duncan's sense of permission here stems from his understanding of the literary ground he tills; the poem is "a place of first permission" wherein he is granted the responsibility of learning from past traditions, and contributing back to them anew. However, as I have discussed throughout this project, Duncan's statement also points to the spatial politics of his postwar environment; as a meadow and dance ground of untethered movement and expression, the poem is also a space whereby a community can create its own permission to act against the containment and surveillance of the State. To be sure, as with Olson, Duncan's poethic of place is not without its blind spots; although his project is more inclusive in its anarchist rhetoric of "the commons," he nonetheless speaks from (and to) a white and male-centric point of view.<sup>281</sup> Namely, his central metaphor of the dance-ground is, primarily, a symbol for homosexual freedom and jouissance. For instance, Duncan's spiritual meditation on the naked male body, its parts meticulously catalogued in "The Torso," (Passages 18, in *Bending the Bow*), holds the generalized male body as the site of civilized perfection, pleasure, and divine Truth: "His body lead[s] into Paradise" (63). In the poem, both "Being" and the pronoun "Him/His" are capitalized, and the male body becomes "a trembling / hieroglyph" (63)—maleness cut in stone as a model of human perfection. Although this upholding of the homosexual male body can be seen as reclamatory, in that it praises that which has been deemed by the State to be the site of abjection and deviance, it nonetheless places masculinity and manhood at the centre of "the commons."

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<sup>281</sup> Duncan is certainly not immune from critique in terms of his treatment and figuration of race, either. Although it lies outside the scope of my discussion of "place" per se, it is worth noting Aldon Lynn Nielsen's critique of Duncan's poem "An African Elegy" from *The Years as Catches* (1966). As Nielsen notes, the poem centres upon a "dramatic extension of the tropes of African barbarism, in which Africa comes to serve once more as the heart of the poet's own darkness" ("In the Place" 4). The problematic ways in which Duncan uses African imagery to express "his metaphysics of divine savagery" (5) is a subject that very few critics have focused on—or even mentioned in their work. It is thus very worthwhile fodder for examination and critique in future discourse.

The root of my project grew from an early interest in Olson's and Duncan's work at Black Mountain—I was intrigued by their practice of place that united landscape, history, and the moving body into a quantum present. I wanted to examine the field poethic in depth—identify its gaps and extensions in its theory and practice, and test its model of place-making practices for different bodies in and across different spaces. While I discovered that the field remains an effective place-based poethic methodology, I also demonstrated the need for the field to be decolonized from its conceptual roots as a white and male frontier. My work throughout the later chapters of this project began this line of inquiry, and ultimately led me to focus on questions of permission, place, and rhetoric that inform my future research. As David Sibley inquires, “The simple questions we should be asking are: who are places for, whom do they exclude, and how are these prohibitions maintained in practice?” (Sibley x). As my project has demonstrated, these questions are far from “simple,” since their answers are encoded in cultural, political, and geographic scripts that dictate how people move through space. Using this project as groundwork for further inquiry, then, I am interested in how place has been and continues to be produced *from within* the rhetorical practices of the State and the nation in contemporary poethic practice.

Such questions as Sibley's initially brought me to the work of Baraka, Wah, and Marlatt in my analysis of the field poethic's anxiety of influence. The spatial metaphors used by these authors are means by which permissive boundaries—material and imagined, linguistic and geographic—are negotiated, challenged, and reconfigured. For Baraka, permission and place are linked such that State controls must be overridden for place to be made anew. The ghettoization of urban spaces where black communities live, for example, must be transformed through active, communal practice from being spaces of restriction to places of access and empowerment. For Wah, the poetics of “faking it” through the hyphen is a strategy of survival that responds to the

“multicultural” State’s swinging door politic of permission and restriction. The hyphen, while being a tool that facilitates a translocal articulation of place and belonging, also indicates multiculturalism’s clearly-defined border between who belongs and who does not, who is and is not permitted to practice place within its parameters. For Marlatt, while language opens permissible paths through place, being female and seeking place necessitates a labyrinthine journey through the patriarchal thicket of language’s historical usage. Being an immigrant and a woman, Marlatt feels doubly removed from place-making, and so she must imagine new paths to create subjective place. For Wah and Marlatt, the hyphen and the labyrinth are spatial fields that refuse singular origins; rather, they are shifting grounds that open multiple pathways to place. From these material and imagined poethic spaces, actual reformations of space and spatial configurations can emerge.

For these poets influenced by Olson and Duncan, the field poethic offered a way of writing (through) place such that the specifics of the landscape topography are brought into the poem to interact with the localized spaces, culture, and embodied experience of the writer. In so doing, this innovative practice gave them permission to break with previous poetic forms, while creating a fused aesthetic and ethical practice. Recently, Wah confirmed this poethic influence in his 2013 Garnett Sedgewick Memorial Lecture, *Permissions: Tish Poetics 1963 Thereafter*, which commemorates the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the 1963 Vancouver Poetry Conference, a seminar series featuring Olson, Duncan, and Robert Creeley, among others. Speaking of the coterie of young Tish poets, Wah credits their time spent with Olson and Duncan for revealing a new way of approaching writing from and for place. Reflecting on Duncan reading his poem “Often I am Permitted to Return to a Meadow” in Vancouver in the early 60s, Wah recalls:

When I heard Duncan read that poem in 1962, I didn't recognize that hyphen of equivocation implicit in the permission: the space between permission and restriction, what lies between the two. At that time, I took Duncan's poem as a call to recognize the 'disturbance of words within words.' I heard this as a permission to 'disturb the words,' as in jazz, to play around with the music, to move into a poetry beyond the restrictions and weight of tradition and authority. (*Permissions* 12).

As Olson and Duncan taught Baraka and the Tish poets, the poem is a place for productive dissonance and breaking with traditions, but it is also a space wherein a consciousness of one's subjective place can be formulated and articulated. This practice allowed the poets to realize "a poetry specific to ourselves," as Wah puts it, as well as an ability "to live our particular lives with a particular consciousness" (10).

However, Baraka's uprising of an empowered and self-sustaining "terrible" black community in the underprivileged Newark ghetto, Wah's image of the hyphen and "faking it" as ontological necessity, and Marlatt's labyrinthine journey to female expression and justification through language, haunt this pastoral scene of place-making in the meadow where all is permitted. With permission there is restriction, and with access there is refusal; but always, there is the ability, through language and the poetic act, to create places of resistance within the nation's false rhetoric of belonging. In her essay "Entering In: The Immigrant Imagination," Marlatt explores the ways in which people relate to their local geographies through an imagined sense of permitted entrance: "If you don't belong, you can *imagine* you belong and you can construct in writing a world where you do belong. You can write your way into the world you want to be a part of ... even as, from the outside, you witness its specific characteristics"

(“Entering In” 222). This is only one articulation of the ways in which imagined places of belonging and resistance can be formed; to be sure, the fact that Marlatt is a white woman enables her to “write her way” into the world with greater ease than writers such as Baraka and Wah (albeit with the opposite caveat: Baraka’s maleness, and Wah’s maleness and half-whiteness, gives them greater licence to practice place under patriarchal systems of spatial organization). Wah’s process of “faking it”—a strategy of both resistance and survival in the hyphen—demonstrates the visibility of his unbelonging in the national imaginary, and so his pathway to place is rockier than Marlatt suggests for herself.

Similarly, as Baraka’s trajectory of resistance has demonstrated, the “particularity” of the black urban experience is at once a spatial hindrance and a source for communal uprising. By traveling to revolutionized Cuba and witnessing the people taking control of their own place, Baraka overrode the rhetoric of the American State that organized black bodies into segregation and poverty; looking to the Third World for inspiration, Baraka imported this spirit of resistance on the ground in New Ark in order to force spatial reforms and reclaim self-determined place for the black community.

These spatial metaphors that respond to the State’s rhetoric of displacement with a *poethic* of resistance brought me to the more contemporary work of Abel, Rhodes, Philip, and Graham. Their work extends the place-based practices traced throughout this project into our contemporary moment of marked protest and contestation around issues of land ownership, property, and place in Canada. All of these works engage with the historical archives of settler colonialism in the contexts of Indigeneity and the slave trade in Canada and greater North America. By engaging with the language of State laws, treaties, and historical accounts as generant texts, these writers (re)examine practices of place in the present moment by mining

places of resistance and self-determination within these rhetorics of control and oppression. Each work articulates place through an experimental writing process whereby the artifacts of history and of the State—its oft forgotten documents and memories—are dismembered and defamiliarized in the glare of the present moment. These practices are reclamatory, but they are also regenerative—the texts, like fields, produce new places and practices from the “found” archive of the past. Most of these writers engage with the archive through traditional digging, but some enter through digital modes of mapping, searching, and compiling. All these writers, however, engage with what it means for language to be a site of public domain, and also a tool for controlling the space and place of disenfranchised peoples within that domain—namely, Indigenous and Black peoples. Using poetic experimentation within the *s/cite* of language, these writers expose the ways in which the ongoing colonial project, in Canada foremost but also abroad, is legitimized and made “permissible” through the seemingly impenetrable fabric of the State’s textual rhetoric. On the other hand, the poethic labour of these writers demonstrates how the public domain of language—and in turn, the rhetorical structures of settler colonialism—can be reshaped, reorganized, and reimagined to create demonic grounds of community, allyship, and resistance.

These works continue my interest in Bey’s theory of the TAZ, especially in their destruction of archives, both traditional and digital, to forge new places of understanding and empathy. Aside from historical artefacts, the archive houses an uneasy landscape of language that is used to permit people’s access to place; in these poetic works, the writers unseat the authority of the document over the lives and lands over which they presume to prevail. As a result, these newly created textual landscapes become TAZs that commit poetic crimes against permission and create illicit places of community beyond the reach and knowledge of the State

apparatus. In conjunction with the TAZ, Bey discusses the transformative powers of what he calls “Poetic Terrorism.” Like the TAZ, poetic terrorism brings about fleeting liberation from statist codes of logic, propriety, and ownership in a poetic “game” that attempts to bridge the gap between material and imagined realities. Without defining poetic terrorism outright, Bey offers some examples of its execution:

Pick someone at random & convince them they’re the heir to an enormous, useless & amazing fortune – say 5000 square miles of Antarctica ... Later they will come to realize that for a few moments they believed in something extraordinary, & will perhaps be driven as a result to seek out some more intense mode of existence. (*T.A.Z.* 14)

In this particular example, Bey’s poetic terrorism emphasizes that the boundary between what is permissible and not is a rhetorical fabrication; for this instant, to this someone, the right to land ownership is realized through the language and trickery of possibility. As with the TAZ, Bey resists defining this process fully; however, he does note that poetic terrorism involves “creation-through-destruction” (11). So describes the work of writers such as Abel, Philip, Rhodes, and Graham, who commit poetic terrorism on historical and present discourse by unsettling the language and logic of the State, of patriarchy, of the nation, and of codified language itself. In realizing the destruction of these authorities in a poetic instant, new and possible places are created wherein reclamations, rearticulations, and reparations may occur.

Nisga’a poet Jordan Abel’s *Un/Inhabited* (2014) (as well as his latest work *Injun*, published in 2015), engages with language as “public domain,” and interrogates the ways in which land ownership and the knowledge of othered bodies become practiced through the violence of Western fictional romance. To create the text, Abel first copied and pasted the text of

91 Western novels (all taken from the Project Gutenberg digital archive) in their entirety into a single Word document, which he then cut up, sampled, and plundered. For example, in the first section, “Pioneering,” Abel used the Ctrl+F command to search the entire document for terms relating to land, territory, and property, such as “Uninhabited,” “Settler,” and “Treaty.” He then copied and pasted the sentences containing these terms into a new document and then deleted the search term leaving a gap of silence in the text where the word once stood. By divorcing these original texts of their key words and contexts, Abel’s poethic process “unsettles” the space of the colonial frontier and the place of the Indigene within it; and in the gaps left by his authorial erasure, he asks us to reimagine a landscape that has been, and continues to be shaped by interruption and (un)permitted entrance.

In the section entitled “Cartography,” the page is reimaged as a margin-less field of uninterrupted text. As the reader turns its pages, lakes of white space spill onto the source text, interrupting and obscuring its authoritative presence. Visually, the borders created by the seeping whiteness begin to take the appearance of maps, with lakes and rivers of white cutting through textual land. The interrupting whiteness upon the text thus serves a double rhetorical purpose: it represents the invasion of white settlers upon the land and their attempts to control and permit access to it, and it also reformulates whiteness, controversially, as white space, a potential frontier of (un)meaning and an alternative borderland of creative possibility. By reforming these textual maps that attempt to “manage” and “know” the place of the Indigene in Western cultural consciousness, Abel renders the cartography of settlement unreadable and unknowable. His poetry engages with the concept of language as a commons that cannot be contained—an idea that was foundational to Duncan’s anarchist poethic. Rather than be an impenetrable source of authority on place, Abel’s work demonstrates that “the public domain [is] a discoverable and

inhabitable body of land” (“Un/inhabited” n.p.). Moreover, in playing with the concept of the “common ground” of the archive, Abel also challenges how the nation, as a multicultural “common ground” of identity and belonging, overwrites its historical erasures.

Whereas Abel looks to the popular romance genre of the Western to question and resist the cultural circumscription of Indigenous people, M. NourbeSe Philip’s *Zong!* (2008) interrogates dispossession through a different archive of power: that of insurance law. Philip’s work complements this project by providing an interrogation in the ways in which State rhetoric has enabled and facilitated settler colonial relations in the (continuing) context of the North American slave trade. Philip’s text is written using the language from *Gregson v. Gilbert*, a 1783 insurance settlement case in which the owners of the slave ship threw a large number of slaves overboard in order to claim insurance money for the loss of “property.” This decision of the court—the only public document in existence that testifies to the Zong massacre—cloaks the violence and injustice of the event in the logic of expense and proprietary loss. Equal parts eulogy and revisionary archive, Philip’s text dismembers the logic-locked rhetoric of the law into a fragmented word store that mourns and gives voice to its overwritten voices. As the language and logic of the legal decision break down and fragment over the course of the text, a fugue of submerged voices, sounds, silences and stories surface in a visceral language of memory and affect.

Philip’s central poethic question, as identified in the “Notanda” to the text, is “What marks the spot of subaquatic death?” (201). Here, she refers to the resting place of the overthrown slaves—there are no markers in the ocean, which is presumed in our cultural consciousness to be a vast, yet empty and abstract space without place. While graves mark loss on land, there is no possible place-marker in the sea; however, the ocean is the only repository to which Philip can

turn to mark the histories and memories of those lost. Specifically, the sea and the slave ship are agential places that serve a significant role in the black North American spatial imaginary. While my project has centred on narratives of place on land, Philip's work brings to light the narratives of place that are offshore. Whereas Abel shows us that the common ground of "here" is underwritten with an entrenched erasure of Indigenous presences, Philip suggests that for black people whose origins in the West are in the Middle Passage, there is a common groundlessness, a ghostly trace that lies beneath the surface of the law. The text pits the compulsive rationality of the maritime law of the ocean's surface—symbolized through the profitable order and balance of ship ledgers—with the fragmented poetic of its depths, which seeks to untell this silencing logic and uncover the voices of humanity lost within it. In so doing, her text situates the archive of the sea as a fluid and shifting site of living memory and history, despite the land and law's attempts to silence it. As Philip reveals in her "Notanda," the underlying reasoning or ratio of the legal decision in the *Zong* insurance case is "that the law supercedes being, that being is not a constant in time, but can be changed by the law" (*Zong!* 200). Philip thus interrogates the law, "its order, which hides disorder; its logic hiding the illogic" (197). Such order is bent towards the preservation of profit and property; by bringing the concealed disorder of the language to the fore, she articulates a community of fragmented yet united human voices brought forth against their silencing.

Whereas the land enfranchises the production of nation-state structures of spatial control and containment, the sea represents the undoing of such geographical determinism: with its uncertain depths, multi-directional currents, and uneasy history of passage, the sea records an alternative archive of place for those whose local is unownable and, in many ways, unknowable by dominant structures of geographic knowledge. Although these spaces are bound up in

narratives of slavery and human injustice, they can be called upon and (re)covered in the present moment as autonomous places that present a necessary correlative to land-locked Western historical narratives. Whereas the “local” of historiography is generally located on land, Philip’s odyssey through history and through the language of the law relocates the local of that same history in the archival space of the ocean, letting its histories speak from its depths through the law’s undoing. Although Philip acknowledges the impossibility of retrieving bones from the ocean floor, she nonetheless views her aesthetic interventions upon the law as an attempt to “re-transform” these bones “miraculously, back into human” (196). Thus, her textual collages mark the place of loss, and register the mayhem and disorientation of the tragedy, but they also reveal submerged human places of love and community. The voices of the families, friends, and lovers that speak to each other surface throughout the text to form a powerful, collective untelling of displacement, thus converting the rhetoric of impermissibility into one wherein love and community are not only permitted within the language and practice of refusal, but are created through it.

Following in kind with Abel and Philip, Shane Rhodes’s 2013 collection *X: Poems & Anti-Poems* takes colonial discourse as grist for revisioning the relationship between history, the present, and the land caught in between. For his “found” poetic fodder, he looks to the “unbeautiful” documents that have upheld and continue to progress the colonial project on Canadian soil. Rhodes plunders a vast terrain of documents, including the Post-Confederation Treaties, language from the registration forms used under the Indian Act (as well as the Act itself), the Government of Canada’s Apology for the Indian Residential School System, and the online reaction to the Idle No More movement. In dismembering the language of the settler colonial landscape, Rhodes “unsettles” the discourse upon which the cultural myths of Canadian

society are founded and continue to flourish. As Abel does with the Western romance novel, and Philip with insurance law, Rhodes breaks down the grammar of the treaties, the prepositions and articles of their constitution separated from their legal bodies and strewn into new fields of (un)meaning.

Rhodes's work (and Graham's, to which I turn to momentarily), with its obvious and conscious awareness of the settler gaze from which it writes, recalls Marlatt's feeling of the same in *Steveston* as discussed in Chapter Four. Like Marlatt, Rhodes and Graham articulate their uneasy relation to the Canadian landscape through a settler poethic of permission and place. In the opening poem of *X*, appropriately titled "You Are Here," Rhodes opens with an admission of his own authorial uneasiness as a writer of settler descent. As he writes,

I would like to acknowledge the Secwepemc, the Cree and the  
Algonquin nations, upon whose territories this book was written

The land was "shovel ready"

I would like to acknowledge I did not ask for permission, that I  
felt too uncomfortable to ask and didn't know how to, that I don't  
know if asking is the answer because I barely know the questions  
I would, however, like my acknowledgement to be acknowledged

...

This book is about where I live, a place still settling, still making  
the land—law by law, arrest by arrest, jail by jail—its own

snow blown

...

This book was written in the gaps between words written  
and words spoken, words meant and words meant only to fill the space  
of meaning

This book I will continue to write until I get it right, and I will  
never get it right (8-9)

While the Black Mountain field poethic gave the Tish writers permission to break with traditions—to break the verse and reform it to articulate their subjective place in the world—this poethic becomes troublesome, for Rhodes, when the poet is white and is writing from a “stolen place” to begin with. In an interview with *The Toronto Quarterly*, Rhodes responds to the question of what compelled him to write on such “uncomfortable” subjects as the nation’s history of colonial settlement. “Discomfort is culturally created and maintained,” Rhodes responds. “As a feeling, I don’t trust it – so I wrote into it” (“Shane” n.p.). Rhodes is conscious of the fact that his is a settler point of view. Rather than allow his discomfort with the source material to prevent him from engaging with history and the myths it has generated—those that underlie the cultural consciousness of our present society—he writes through his feelings of cultural displacement to attempt to educate himself and others on the discourses of power and place to which the land and its first peoples continue to be held hostage.

As Rhodes argues, the place from which he writes (on unceded territory) is caught up in a rhetoric of permissibility and false negotiations of territorial ownership—it is “a land held by therefore, herebys and hereinafters” (X 9). In the landscape of his poems, Rhodes registers the ulterior motives of Statist rhetoric—its “treaties” of belonging and understanding cloaking a continuing violence of erasure—as well as his own discomfort as a settler writer of place in this

context. In one of his striking visual poems, Rhodes organizes language taken from Treaty 8 into hexagonal units intertwined in a stunning intricate circle that spans the text's spine:

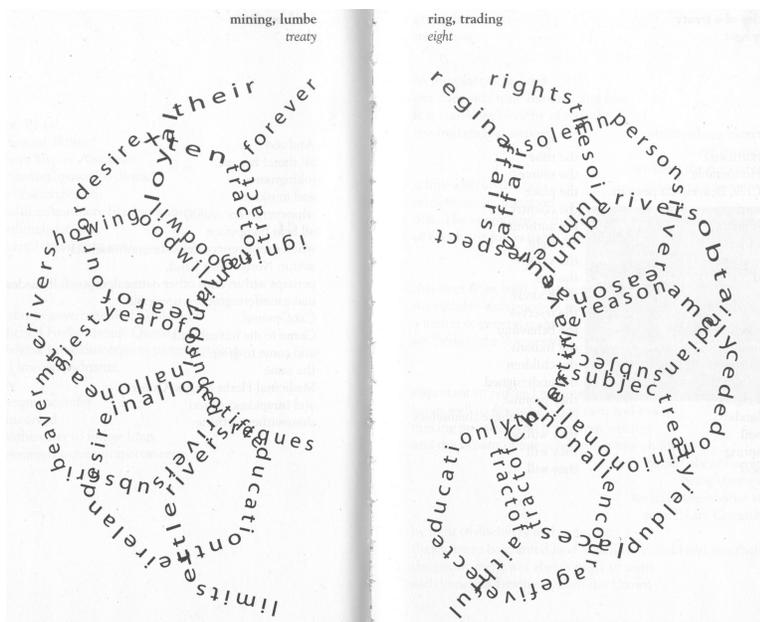


Figure 15. Rhodes, “Treaty 8,” *X: Poems and Anti-Poems* 48-49.

On the page, the poem beautifully suggests interconnectivity, unitedness, and a sense of harmony; however, the language used is taken from the treaty that covers the site of Canada’s tar sands, and the structure of the poem is arranged to mimic the molecular structure of Coronene, one of the toxic hydrocarbons present at the mine site used to extract oil. Moreover, the structure encircles the white space within it, as if to suggest that it either protects or inhibits access to the land at its centre. Rhodes marries form and content beautifully here, for in reformulating the treaty’s language as a beautiful, intricate, yet poisonous form, he critiques the rhetoric that the State uses to forge “benevolent” ties with Indigenous peoples while exploiting their land and place within it.

Along a similar vein, Laurie D. Graham’s recent book of poetry, *Settler Education* (2016), is a personal meditation on the (im)possibility of producing a personal sense of place in the

present using a troubled archive of the past and a land still caught in the rhetoric—both material and imagined—of dispossession. At a recent reading at York University, Graham remarked that the book stems from a personal lacuna of historical knowledge about place—her mother’s hometown of Derwent, Alberta. Derwent was the home of W.C. Cameron, the supposed lone white survivor of the Frog Lake Massacre, which occurred as part of the Cree uprising during the Northwest Rebellion in Western Canada in 1885. Using direct archival material mixed with personal photographs from the sites where the massacre and its aftermath took place, Graham parses the complex history of land ownership, place-making, and place-undoing through collage. As the title suggests, Graham’s book is a project of “settler education,” but it is also a poetic bildungsroman, a narrative of personal place-making with an acute awareness of the limits of such an endeavour. Although Graham does not use an entire documents from the archive as generant texts, as in the case of the other writers of this coda, her poethic mixes direct archival material with personal accounts and recollections of the sites of history; in so doing, she interrogates the “living” archive of history from the vantage point of the settler. Her personal interruptions upon the archive destabilize it as “Truth,” and situates any archive of place-making as changeable, alterable, and multiple in its telling.

According to Graham, there was a gaping hole in local awareness (especially in her hometown of Derwent, but in places throughout Canada as well) surrounding the Northwest Rebellion, and so her book is the result of painstaking research and fieldwork to bring the place of the massacre into present consciousness. As an act of “self-education,” Graham’s poethic is not an attempt to overwrite the histories of the place, but to record her perceptions as she moved through the sites of the massacre physically and psychically in the present. In this way, her efforts mirror Marlatt’s documentarian lens in *Steveston*—both are white women of settler

descent who wish to see, experience, and articulate their experiences of places in which they don't "belong" or cannot begin to understand firsthand. Both *Settler Education* and *Steveston* feature site photographs of the landscape, and an accompanying insecurity about the gaze of the authorial "I" (and photographic eye) upon a place that continues to be erased from historical memory to better suit the rhetoric of the ongoing colonial project. While walking through the present-day Frog Lake, its grassy knoll of unmarked graves of settlers and indigenous warriors, Graham writes, "Little connection but to the hills, the contours, the low cows, the light. / Same refrains opening each interpretive sign, skidding / over land I don't belong on without permission" (23). The resonance of "permission" here is twofold: as she explained in her talk at York, the site of the massacre is presently on privately held land, and Graham had to hop over fences and ignore signed boundaries to trespass onto the site. She thus does not "belong" on the land without permission because it is cordoned off from the public, and was "really hard to locate" in the deserted prairie flatland ("A Reading"). But also, despite the material boundary of fences, Graham knows that she does not "belong" on this land without the permission of the Indigenous peoples who owned it before its settlement. The place itself is held between these two permissions, both historical and present, material and imagined, and her poethic labour cautiously traverses these illicit boundaries.

Graham also articulates permission and place translocally, as her poems migrate from the plains of Alberta, the site of historical violence, to the present-day voices of the Idle No More movement and the singing and drumming of Indigenous panhandlers on the corner of Spadina and Bloor in Toronto (one of Graham's past locales). The reverberations of historical displacement continue to sound over these places and the narratives that run through them, and the primary lesson of Graham's education is a call to listen:

This song they sing at night, on the corner, Native centre bastioned up  
 Spadina,

This song—slow down, just listen—this song, here being sung, of

This corner, this creek, this road, this place you live. Listen. (*Settler* 85)

Like Duncan and Wah, Graham learns the importance of listening to the “correspondences” in the field of place at the moment of the writing; through the journey from Frog Lake to Toronto, her poetry creates translocal rimes of dispossession and continual struggle across time and place in this vast country. The (settler) poet’s role is to read these correspondences, the silences they uncover, and to establish spaces of creative resistance and alliance that write through State lines of propriety and property, place and placelessness.

Both Rhodes and Graham identify as settler poets who have identified the radical fictions and mythologies upon which their own relation to their “place” in Canada has been spoken for. In this way, they both engage with the central question Tim Lilburn asks as a white settler poet: “How To Be Here?”<sup>282</sup> Using poetry as a means of opening permissible fields for the exploration of forgotten histories in the present—and as a place for *listening* to those histories—Rhodes and Graham explore the (im)possibility of being a settler and considering Canada a knowable and inhabitable “place.” Traversing the landscape “unsure and untrained how to walk rightly,” (Graham, *Settler* 57), these hesitant explorations reveal the ongoing entrapment of place at the hands of the nation and its rhetoric for all people (albeit unevenly) within its boundaries, and question whether place is permitted for anyone on stolen land. As such, the poems become s/cites for engaging with settler forgetting in the present, and are attempts to forge ties and alliances between and across lands and peoples of the nation through a combined poethic of

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<sup>282</sup> “How To Be Here?” is the title of Lilburn’s essay that appears in *Poetry & Knowing: Speculative Essays and Interviews* (1995).

social action and aesthetic expression. Their poetic interventions continue the place-based project I have been discussing throughout these chapters: to establish creative and created spaces of permission, listening, and empathy wherein practices of place can emerge outside of the nation's structures of control and belonging.

In the work of Abel, Rhodes, Philip, and Graham, we find a common experimental poethic of place, one that seeks permissibility into the (im)penetrable project of Canada's ongoing settler colonial project. All works engage with the present and historical "forgetting" that stakes claim to land and to place; by breaking open these fictional fields of our collective amnesia, these works begin the imperative project of rupturing the language and rhetoric of permission and place. Through practicing poetic terrorism, these writers destroy to rebuild anew—or, as McKittrick puts it, they "question the limits of existing spatial paradigms and put forth more humanly workable geographies" (*Demonic* xxvii). Moreover, their work takes fieldwork—a poethic concept that has been threaded throughout this project—to the elemental level of language, the "place of first permission." In opening grounds of resistance through, with, and in language, their work offers a promising sense of roving "place," wrest from the shackles of fixity, a common and communal ground that can be made or called to mind. Such discussions of place continue to be paramount to pursuing the projects of recovery, justice, and alliances that endure in and across the landscapes of our contemporary world. This project, and its continued manifestation in the work still to come, demonstrates that the practice of place is an ongoing project, one that is expressed through a poethic labour traceable not to one person or group or idea, but to the commitment of finding a place to land individually, communally, in resistance, in love, and for love.

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