"Last scientists of the Whole" : the poetics and politics of deep image

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“LAST SCIENTISTS OF THE WHOLE”:
THE POETICS AND POLITICS OF DEEP IMAGE

by

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A Dissertation

Submitted to the University at Albany, State University of New York

In Partial Fulfillment of

The Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

College of Arts & Sciences

Department of English

2012
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For my mother...
Abstract

This dissertation focuses on how poetic vision, as it is considered in experimental and investigative American poetry, functions as a mode of critical discourse aimed at illuminating and reconsidering the role of the poet and the nature of her work in relation to the post-World War Two milieu and what I deem the “long 20th Century.” As U.S. Cold War and contemporary ideology blurs the distinction between the public, private, and academic spheres, I argue that investigative and experimental poetics, specifically the work of the deep image poets, for whom the nature of language and its relation to and active participation in the formation of individual and collective identities, is engaged with material political struggles that emerge in the postmodern era. By simultaneously exploring new modes of critical discourse on the function of language that develop out of the historical avant garde, I argue that the deep image poets recognize a need for a new “world picture” in the wake of totalitarian and fascistic world visions. The poetic vision associated with deep image engages in a poetics of heterogeneity, contingency, experimentation with form and content, as well as forays into previously debased discourses of knowledge ranging from Renaissance era occult sciences to Jerome Rothenberg’s insistence on an “ethnopoetics” which resuscitates and re-visions primordial, pre-modern, and global indigenous poetic forms. Previous studies on American poetry after the Second World War have focused on the rise of New Criticism and the development of academic modernism and “official verse culture,” as well as the shift in governing assumptions in contemporary poetic practice. These studies also address the political and aesthetic impact of contemporary criticism on poetry readings, publishing, and the rise of
accredited creative writing programs in colleges and universities. “Last Scientists of the Whole” contributes to this body of scholarship by offering an approach to theorizing poetic vision and the poetic as critical discourse with “political” agency, in opposition to the space that poetry is relegated to in popular and academic culture.
Acknowledgements

I would like to express my sincerest thanks to Pierre Joris for assigning Novalis’ *Hymns to the Night* when I was twenty, and for asking me to consider looking closely at deep image when I was twenty-three: “What a long, strange trip it’s been.” Thank you to Don Byrd and Tomás Urayoán Noel for their feedback and commitment to this project; alongside Pierre, you are all “Last Scientists of the Whole.”

To my friends and colleagues who have endured this journey, thanks to Cullen Kerekes and Shahrul Ladue for constituting the “Infamous Three” and letting me live on their couch during my comprehensive exams, to Luke Gaul and Eddy P. who were there at the very beginning, to Luis Paredes for our intellectual meanderings on the CDTA, and to Kristen Swaney for smiles, wine, and Jenny Lake.

My gratitude and love to my wife Jennifer; you have taught me more than you’ll ever know, and each day I am more exhilarated at the prospect of spending my life with my best friend. Special thanks to my mother Kathryn for standing by me in all things, and for being loving, generous, patient, and understanding, and to my late father, who is now the cosmos—you both taught me to question, fostered my creativity and intellectual curiosity, and never denied me great things to read.
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Introduction

This dissertation project begins with the premise that the zeitgeist or paradigm in which we are currently engaged is best considered the “long 20th Century.” The narratives which define the current epoch socially, politically, and economically, as well as those which frame questions regarding spirituality and social and scientific “progress,” can be traced from the years that close the final decades of the 19th Century to the present. Though the major interrogations of this project are grounded in the historical moment in the United States immediately following the Second World War, there are always already resonances that consider what is at stake for the “Whole,” the “Whole” of the global community, species, and ecology, since it is my assertion that concern for the “Whole” (broadly defined) is inscribed in deep image poetics during both its brief moment in the history of American poetry, as well as the work that follows in contemporary experimental and innovative poetics.

I argue that deep image poetics, as a part of a significantly longer line of visionary, experimental, and innovative poetics, demands active participation from readers in the act of composition. By participating in the act of making “meaning,” readers are implicated in the way in which “reality” is perceived and experienced, and this process demonstrates the materiality of language and its ability to traverse the fluid boundaries between the physical and psychical spaces which conjure, for humans, the material “world” and cosmological reality. As “Last Scientists of the Whole,” Jerome Rothenberg and Robert Kelly actively “respond” to the demands of the “world” around
them, while surrounded by competing forces which passively “react” to these demands and seek to conserve and limit the potential for difference and creation. To emphasize my argument, I turn to an interview with Robert Duncan titled “Then You Live in the Spirit,” conducted by David Melnick in 1985. When the discussion turns toward the difference between a poetics of “response” vs. a more “reactionary” poetics, Duncan asserts:

Response should be vividly kept, because it is the only cure to reaction.

Reactionary responses we usually stick with the extreme right, but they’re really all those responses that we have that simply bounce off of things and don’t go into them. A response means if it offends, you go in to find out what it is. It is investigatory. Then, the imagination comes into action in response. In a reaction, imagination doesn’t have to come in. Old habits govern (Duncan 40).

Deep image, as I will argue, is investigatory; Rothenberg and Kelly “go into” things via “vision” and imagination as an attempt to discover or “mine” for a poetics that meets the demands of, and more fully explores, both their everyday “reality” and the cosmological world. And in doing so, they demonstrate the materiality of language in the space of the poem’s composition, a space which traverses the border between the physical and psychical realms. As Duncan asserts later in the same interview:

In poetics, if you’re concerned with poetics, you’re concerned with what is happening…Poetry is in an area that we can’t put on a table even for ourselves, so in a sense the poem, and the writing of the poem, the construction is the putting out on the table of, the materialization, and once it’s materialized there,
now we can ask what is happening…Our imagination has to extend even beyond its intelligible limits in order to imagine the existence of some things…(40-41).

The historical moment out of which deep image emerges in the U.S., the late 1950s and early 1960’s, is marked by a number of competing narratives, each a response to a changing world-view emerging from the ashes of the two world wars. On the surface level, marked by the explosion of televisions in the home, the rise of the suburbs and the “nuclear” family, and the economic rise of the “middle class,” is the narrative that suggests social, economic, and scientific “progress.” However, peel back the veil and the time period is also marked by the rise of the military industrial complex, the Korean War, the Cold War and the threat of nuclear proliferation, the struggles for racial, sexual, and gender equality, and a world in the throes of resistance to colonialism and the rise of post-colonialism, which will dictate U.S. foreign policy in places like South East Asia and Latin America. American poetry is not immune to the existence of these competing narratives. There is the emergence of a more “conservative” based poetics that make strange bedfellows out of “academic” or “official verse” poets as evidenced by the rise of New Criticism and the very White Anglo-Saxon Protestant confessional poets, where one celebrates the return of formalism and the other celebrates the individual poet’s ego. There is a fragmentary nature to radical, innovative and experimental poetics as well, with poets associated with seemingly disparate “groups” including the Beats, San Francisco Renaissance, Black Mountain, and New York School. However, I argue that just as there never was a specific group-approach to deep image poetics, the innovative and experimental line is also fluid and permeable, much like the poets associated
historically with this line, Ezra Pound, William Carlos Williams, and Gertrude Stein, cannot be placed in some neat and tidy box. Rather, the so-called innovative “line” is broken—it is more a chaotic collection of psychical and imaginative “energy” that seeks a charged poetics, a charged, living, material, and not “conservative,” language.

In order to engage most fully with deep image poetics, and my assertion regarding the charged, living, materiality of poetic language, I juxtapose poets and “theorists” from across a broad spectrum of so-called “schools” and “traditions,” in keeping with what I consider the “spirit” of Jerome Rothenberg and Robert Kelly’s work. Neither poet adheres to some kind of strict poetic or theoretical “program,” as will be evidenced across this project, and thus readers will find the “theoretical” work of poets such as Charles Olson, Robert Duncan, Robin Blaser, and Jed Rasula sharing a space with disparate “theorists,” philosophers, and “writers” including Martin Heidegger, Maurice Blanchot, Jacques Derrida, Guy Debord, and Herbert Marcuse, alongside so-called “fringe” writers including Peter Lamborn Wilson and Daniel Pinchbeck.

Chapter one comprises a longer meditation on the state of American Poetry in the years immediately following the Second World War; however, more importantly, this chapter looks closely at the function of poetic language as means of calling the “world” into being. In order to argue this point more fully, I move from the historical “moment” out of which deep image emerges, to a reading of Plato’s Timaeus through the lens of Jacques Derrida’s essay “Khora,” in which I argue that Plato’s deference to poetic language, or “mythos,” in a “philosophical” dialogue concerning the creation of the world, charges poetic language with the task of mediating between the physical and psychical arenas which comprise both thought and action in the act of creation. In this
instance, I associate Derrida’s demand that “a well composed logos must look like a living body” with the demands Rothenberg and Kelly make on the deep image in their initial explorations, as an attempt to access a primordial, living language that reveals itself in the space of the poem’s composition, much like Derrida reveals Plato’s need for a “bastard logos” that is always already both poetic and philosophical.

The second chapter argues that Rothenberg and Kelly’s “coming into” deep image begins with an acknowledgement of the significance of “vision” and “prophecy” as legitimate approaches to philosophical inquiry via poetic language. By looking closely at the work of William Blake, Federico García Lorca, the Surrealists, and the influence of the troubadour tradition on the development of deep image poetics in interviews and exchanges with Robert Creeley and David Ossman, and the publication of little magazines including George Economou and Robert Kelly’s Trobar, I assert that deep image is a contemporary expression of the visionary and prophetic tradition in both American and Continental poetry. More significantly, this chapter traces the politics inherent in the visionary and prophetic poetic tradition as it exists on the margins or at the limits of what is considered “acceptable” modes of political and philosophical discourse. This is done through a long meditation on Robert Duncan’s “The Truth and Life of Myth.” I argue that by acknowledging the legitimacy of these rejected or so-called “occult” approaches to philosophical and/as poetic discourse, Rothenberg and Kelly are most fully able to engage with their immediate reality and attempt to enact change and transformation, as opposed to more literal, political poetry whose energy wanes with the passing immediacy of its particular political moment in time. By “opening the field” of “acceptable” philosophical and speculative thought, I argue that there is a political
immediacy to Rothenberg and Kelly’s work that hinges upon the reader’s implication in
the making of meaning in the space of composition. As Kelly reminds readers, “…I do
sense reality as a task.”

Chapter three explores the work of Jerome Rothenberg from his earliest attempts
at “deploying” deep image poetics, and his work as both poet and anthologist.
Rothenberg’s work is viewed through the lens of the shaman, more specifically, his role
as poet-shaman in the contemporary national and global landscape. I argue that much
like the global, tribal shaman’s role is to simultaneously be healer, prophet, poet, spiritual
and ritual leader of the tribe, Rothenberg takes up the mantle of poet-shaman in order to
both commune with readers, and help guide their explorations into self and interrogations
of the cosmological “world” around them. By looking closely at Rothenberg’s
development of ethnopoetics in his groundbreaking Technicians of the Sacred, I argue
that Rothenberg’s body of work is politically charged, since it acknowledges the need to
not only “save” primordial languages and poetics from “extinction,” but the need to
access these compositional spaces in the contemporary moment so as to re-articulate the
need for “Wholeness” in a fractured, postmodern world in which psychical, linguistic,
physical, and geographical “spaces” are under threat of destruction via competing,
“conservative” social, political, economic, and aesthetic forces. Rothenberg implores his
readers to actively engage in “poesis” not solely for the sake of the “poem,” but for the
very survival of the richness, complexity, and charged “wild spaces” of language, people,
the ecological landscape, and the political necessity of acts of imagination and creativity.
The chapter ends with a meditation on Rothenberg’s Khurbn. I argue that Rothenberg
quite literally descends to the “underworld” in an attempt to commune with the
disembodied voices of those who perished under Nazi persecution; and by writing out of this space, Rothenberg affirms the need for the material and philosophical space of poetic composition as a response to literal, material reality, as a site of resistance, and as a space in which the potential to enact change in material reality is conjured.

The final chapter focuses on Robert Kelly’s “armed descent” into the space of poetic composition. I argue that although Kelly moves beyond the supposed “limits” of deep image, deep image always already informs his work. By focusing on Section Nine of his book length poem, The Loom, I argue that Kelly’s work is also an “Orphic dissent/descent,” since it is in the moment of the poem’s composition that the “work” is most fully charged with potential energy. I read The Loom through Maurice Blanchot’s meditation on Orpheus, positing the poetic “process” (Rothenberg’s “poesis”), the movement into the dark or “deep,” as constituting the most significant aspect of the poem. To further emphasize the inherent and potential “energy” created in the process of poetic composition, I explore Kelly’s likening poetics to alchemy. Focusing on selections from Kelly’s Finding the Measure, I argue that Kelly engages in an act of transmutation in which he attempts to transform the base elements image, language, and sound. However, akin to Blanchot’s reading of the myth of Orpheus, it is in the act of transmutation, the compositional space of the poem, where the poem’s energy resides. Subsequently, a Robert Kelly poem is never “finished;” it is re-composed and recharged with each subsequent “reading.” Readers of Kelly’s work are implicated in the act of the poem’s composition; that is to say, he demands that the energy inherent in the compositional space must reverberate out into the “world” as action and as a means of enacting transformation in material reality.
The following study on the poetics of deep image does not attempt to “explicate” an approach to poetic composition; nor are my meditations an attempt to “read” material reality through the lens of deep image. Rather, this study asserts the immediacy of philosophical and investigative discourse in the space of the poetic. Jerome Rothenberg and Robert Kelly are “Last Scientists of the Whole,” poets who move seamlessly across the implied and imposed boundaries between, among other genres, poetry and philosophy. Their work demands active participation on the part of the reader, laying bare the assertion that our world is perceived, composed, and experienced through language.
“I connect ‘deep image’ with perception as an instrument of vision, i.e. a visionary consciousness opening through the senses, grasping the phenomenal world not only for its outward form (though this also, of necessity) but winning from a compassionate comprehension of that world a more acute, more agonizing view of reality than by rational interpretation” –Jerome Rothenberg, Pre-faces

“(Imagination, too, must be free to overcome the merely rational order of perception and drive it toward vision)”—Jerome Rothenberg, Pre-Faces

“In World War II it was discovered what sort of complexity entails mind. And, since that discovery, we know that: wherever in the Universe we encounter that sort of complexity, we are dealing with mental phenomena. It’s as materialistic as that.

Gregory Bateson, “Conscious Purpose vs. Nature”

This first chapter will situate deep image poetics from an historical perspective in relation to how American poets are seemingly split into a number of, at times “competing,” factions in the years immediately following the Second World War. Much of the progressive and experimental poetics that bore the signature of High Modernism begin to lose favor among academics and publishers, under the influence of the rise of New Criticism. Likewise, a number of poets whose work corresponds to either a return to formalism, or that which appropriates and in terms of content, sanitizes Modernist poetic techniques such as the use of free verse and collage, gain critical acclaim and widespread publication. Much of this is a direct result of the confluence of New Criticism and Cold War ideology on the academy, and subsequently, this confluence participates in a larger, cultural ripple effect that follows the same path of flight that many take from cities to new suburban pastures.
Beyond demonstrating the historical and sociological moment out of which deep image poetry emerges, this chapter will also introduce readers to some of the poetic and philosophical strands that will emerge over the course of this dissertation. The body of research dedicated to the primary work of deep image poets is sparse. In light of this, I will use the work of several poets, theorists, and philosophers to develop and articulate my inquiry into deep image poetics. Some of these texts were composed long after the brief historical time period associated with deep image (approximately 1959-1962), and cannot be said to have been an “influence” on the development of deep image poetics. However, as I will demonstrate over the course of this dissertation, the energy and imagination that initially fuels deep image poetics is consistently prevalent in much of the poetry and critical theory that has since developed, as much as the roots of deep image poetics can be traced backward through Pound, Zukofsky, Olson, Stein and Plato.

The history of Postmodern American Poetry, particularly regarding work which eschews the confessional lyric and performs the function of investigation and exploration, is contextually situated against the backdrop of the zeitgeist that develops from out of the ashes of the Second World War. As a result, there are a number of competing narratives which portray the history of Postmodern American Poetry following the War. What is at stake for each of these narratives is a desire to “save” poetry by demonstrating its agency in everything from the exploration of the depths of the human psyche to a reevaluation of formalist measures including traditional meter and verse for the benefit of memorializing mom’s apple pie and the deceased family dog. What often gets left out of this push to “save” poetry (as if to suggest that it can ever “disappear” or that it has ever occupied the attention of more than a small and often select group of readers in the U.S.) is a
(de)historicized look into the materiality of the poetic text as it relates to philosophical or critical inquiry. Although the history and study of “thought” is left in the hands of philosophers, it is the poetic that comes before philosophy, and perhaps even before the ontological logos. It is my assertion then that before there is “logocentrism” or “humanism” there is the poem, broadly defined. Perhaps it is not inscribed in a book or read aloud in a small cafe, or composed for the benefit of an Emperor that wishes to meld myth and “history,” yet it is as real as the fossil evidence that proves the existence of primordial humans as well as the complexity of the living Universe itself. As an extension of the act of seeing and perceiving the natural world, I wish to argue that the poetic is the language of thought, as a necessary function of the body, even on the unconscious levels that remind us to breathe. When poets like Blake or Whitman or Waldman speak of the PROPHETIC and VISION in poetry, they are not New Age hipsters engaged in an act of ego-driven self-affirmation via “occult” knowledge; they are instead as Robert Kelly insists “last scientists of the whole.” The “complexity” that entails any investigation of the mind and its relation to the larger “natural” or cosmological world picture must account for the materiality of that which makes thought possible, language. And if we are serious about this, then we must assume a materiality of poetic language.

By examining the work of the poets once associated with the deep image “movement,” and the texts which they composed during and immediately following the deep image moment, the primacy of the poetic and its relationship to the discourse of philosophy will be slowly unveiled. Similarly, it is my intention that by returning to the deep image moment, it is possible to acknowledge the poetic as a viable philosophical
discourse. It is not poetry that needs to be “saved” in the U.S. of the 21st Century, but the
ACT of critical thinking and investigation, and we must then ask ourselves to what extent
by “historically” relegating the poem to the margins of society and the academy, have we
opened ourselves up to an internal quasi-fascistic coup of the mind—or as Blake would
suggest, have we thrown away the key to the “mind-forg’d manacles”?

In October of 1958, Robert Kelly “vowed” to spend his life “writing in service of
that Brightness [he] intuited as like or beyond the intense blue autumn sky” (Kelly 180).
For Kelly, poetry came like a vow. Although his first poems are said to have been
composed almost twenty years earlier as a young boy in the borough of Brooklyn, Kelly
makes a literal vow to poetry, “To write everyday. For the sake of the world [...] For the
truth that language tells” on that fall evening in New York, 1958. (180) In his
autobiographical statement for the Contemporary Authors Autobiography Series, Kelly
revisits this moment with the clarity that only the passing of time can demonstrate.
However, the commitment to poetry has not shifted or waned in the preceding decades;
Kelly has, in fact, been one of the most prolific American writers of the Post-War
generation. One of the reasons for this takes us back to that October evening, when Kelly
determined, in his own words: “To listen...by hanging out in languages and enduring
overdetermined desires...To listen, and say what I heard(181).

In the preceding passages of his “autobiography,” Kelly insists that “Real
autobiography is the life that writes itself. That is what a writer’s works are, in truth
(180). Kelly’s poems simultaneously explore his sense of self and personal history and
move from “inside” out to the larger world of “Other”. This has been accomplished as
the sheer number of volumes to his name attests via a continuous return to language as
the vehicle for thought, perception, and at times transformation. While many of his contemporaries earned fame and praise for their tight lines, ironic turns, and subjective “depth”, Kelly performed an act of heresy, bypassing “official verse culture”\(^1\) for the very dangerous and revolutionary practice of blurring the lines between self and other, poetry and philosophy. “The life that writes itself” suggests a sacrifice to language as material, as a living breathing part of the Universe. Rather than have the audacity to claim mastery or control over language, Kelly chooses to speak with it and through it in a complex dialectical relationship. He is admittedly a linguistic subject and one who recognizes that he must use that which calls him into being in order to navigate the world around him. The relationship to language presents itself as a double-bind, as the snake that eats its own tail—there is no outside to language. As poet then, Kelly views his role as one part of a long standing tradition of poets who have through the centuries engaged in acts of literal exploration in an attempt to demonstrate the existence of a larger, more infinitely complex “reality” that exists beyond the symbolic veil that is the “World” as defined in the Western Humanist Tradition.

Ten years before Kelly’s vow to poetry, seventeen year-old Jerome Rothenberg had, according to his Pre-face to Revolution of the Word (1974) “been coming into poetry” for two years prior (Rothenberg xi). His explorations took him through the work of Williams and Pound, the French Surrealists, Blues, “Jewish liturgies. Dali and Lorca were ferocious possibilities...The thing was to get off on it, to hear one’s mind, learn one’s voice. But the message clear and simple was to move. To change”(xi). For Rothenberg then, poetic language has the propensity to bring one into a state of ecstasy, to get one “off.” The ecstatic possibilities for poetic language signal a profound sense of
pleasure at Rothenberg’s recognition that he too, like Kelly, is a linguistic being. The poem’s language provides a necessary bridge between the self and body, and the “World.” He recognizes that the movement between the poem and thought as a material function of the Real is a “natural” process engaged in the literal construction of both self and world. This was a far cry from the conservative anti-Modern backlash of “official verse culture” that sought to filter out the “experimental & visionary” that linked body and mind, language and world. (xi) The natural, visionary mode was “to be replaced by a return to the old forms, to conventional metrics, diction, a responsible modernism... & goodbye to the madmen of language” (xi). This reflection on his own coming into or “vow” to poetry is more fully described in Rothenberg’s Pre-face to Revolution of the Word, in which he attempts to “reconstruct” the history of Postmodern American poetry that inaugurates the rise of the gods of New Criticism, who insisted that “the body of the poem must stay untouched. A virgin...along the [inherited] line of what was called the ‘great tradition.’ Western. Christian. White” (xi). However in the decades to come, Rothenberg too makes the heretical move away from this tradition and its discourse of “mastery” and control; instead he chooses to “get off,” to allow language to constitute him, but not the Humanist discourse of the “great” Western tradition. The language that Rothenberg yields to is organic material, the language of “thought,” itself an integral and literal part of the Real.

Both Kelly and Rothenberg come into language; they recognize and simultaneously dwell inside its space. When narrating their initiation into poetry, each seems to cast off the structure of language as it has functioned for centuries in the Western Humanist tradition. This tradition foolishly limits language’s power and
potential to that of an act of communication or literal description. The Western Humanist tradition refutes the inescapable material base of subjectivity and thought itself.

Martin Heidegger has written a number of contemplations on the relationship between poetry and philosophy. For the sake of this preliminary discussion of deep image poetics, Heidegger’s essay “…Poetically Man Dwells…” from his book Poetry, Language, Thought (1971) provides a means of further articulating how Rothenberg and Kelly consider the relationship between poetic language and the construction of “reality” as a function of language. In his reflection on the work of Holderlin, specifically the phrase “…poetically man dwells,” Heidegger attempts to articulate that space which is language and thought, that material place in which both poem and poet “dwell.”

Heidegger insists that “dwelling rests on the poetic...we are required to think of dwelling and poetry in terms of their essential nature” (Heidegger 212). This dwelling is of course both a literal, and for Heidegger, a metaphysical location, a “building” in which the acts of poetic composition and thinking “dwell” side by side. Language is the building; it is the material structure in which the human is made aware not of his “mastery” of the universe, but her intrinsic relationship to its various parts. Heidegger insists that there is a “nature” to language, and that “Man acts as though he were the shaper and master of language, while in fact language remains the master of man” (213).

In their coming into poetry, Kelly and Rothenberg take up residence in the “dwelling” that is language’s essential nature. They do not wish to manipulate or control language. On the contrary, and what I will argue in subsequent chapters, is that the impetus behind deep image poetics is a discovery of the nature of language, of its materiality. Furthermore, unlike “official verse” poets, the deep image poets’ work is
inherently political because of their concern for the relationship between language and self and Other, and more specifically, how this tenuous relationship is disfigured into a means of exercising power and control over both other beings as well as what constitutes “truth,” “Nature,” and at times, even the origins of the Universe itself. As Heidegger insists in his late work, after the “rationalized” and “scientific” homicidal madness of the first half of the twentieth century, “Is there thinking, too, going on in a poem? Quite so—in a poem...thinking is going on, and indeed thinking without science, without philosophy” (Heidegger 61). Heidegger insists that “Poetry and thought, each needs the other in its neighborhood...But because we are caught in the prejudice nurtured through centuries that thinking is a matter of ratiocination, that is, of calculation in the widest sense, the mere talk of a neighborhood of thinking to poetry is suspect” (70). The most poignant aspect of Heidegger’s conception of space and how poetry literally occupies such space, in tandem with philosophical thought, is indicative of the literal spaces that poetry occupies in the United States after the Second World War.

Poet Jed Rasula, in his groundbreaking study *The American Poetry Wax Museum* (1996), develops a socio-historical model for Postmodern American Poetry; he is particularly invested in situating the band of heretics, counted among them are Kelly, Rothenberg, and the other deep image poets, who march against the grain of “official verse culture.” Rasula’s study argues quite vividly for what is at stake for Postmodern American poetry and poets, how Postmodern American Poetry is situated within academic discourse and debate, and most strikingly, how Postmodern American Poetry comprises a literal grouping of “bodies,” both poets and their work, that simultaneously exist as living, material, and linguistic beings. In *The American Poetry Wax Museum,*
Rasula concerns himself with the question of “custodianship.” Who, he argues, is responsible for the excess that a poet and her work leave behind? What is the significance of this trace, this evidence of a linguistic corporeal existence, and in what ways is the struggle over the concept of “custodianship” a more overtly political struggle bound up with the debates surrounding language and discourse at the end of the Second World War? Each subsequent figurative “wing” of Rasula’s poetry wax museum is indicative of “training populations in the art of reassembling fragmentary evidence into coherent narratives” (33). Rasula is concerned with how these narratives are “assembled” and under whose guidance.

In the United States, the end of the Second World War signals both a military and economic “victory” for the Allied forces, as well as a violent imposition of bourgeois ideology at the level of the symbolic. The rise of new political orientations tied ever more fervently to global capitalism (including deflated “revolutionary” positions such as Communism and democratic socialism) cast a much more impenetrable “Iron Curtain” or “veil” than the more historically “visible” one that shrouds the borderland between East and West, initiating the Cold War. According to N. Katherine Hayles, in her book *Chaos Bound* (1990), by 1960 new questions arose concerning interdependent systems and networks of communication and power. She writes “…important was the growing realization that the world itself had become (or already was) a complex system economically, technologically, [and] environmentally” (Hayles 5). Small events in distinct parts of the world could, and often did, lead to shifts and changes within the domestic and psychical “space” of the U.S. Hayles uses the example of a revolution in the Middle East leading to rising oil prices and a major shift in the global economy, as
well as how those invested in the ecological movement are aware of the “large-scale
effects” of a “seemingly small” or local event like an oil spill(5). Most poignantly,
however, Hayles recognizes that “…as systems became more complex and
encompassing, they could also become more oppressive…as the Cold War brought
totalitarianism home to Americans…the new technology promised a level of control
never before possible”(5). Hayles line of inquiry proceeds from work done on the
relationship between cybernetics and systems theory and how the concept of “literature”
relates to the rise of complex networks in the Post-war decades. In Rasula’s The
American Poetry Wax Museum, a central line of inquiry concerns how poetics and the
pedagogical and publishing “institution” of poetry is situated against the backdrop of the
Cold War era. William Paulson, in his book The Noise of Culture (1988), explores the
tenuous place literature occupies in relation to the new networks of power and
information in the Postwar U.S. Paulson is concerned with how the “business” of literary
study could be co-opted into reaffirming truth and validity to what are essentially
contingent narratives based in controlled networks of communication and perception. He
writes “In research and teaching, our most important task may be to preserve literature’s
potential as a source of noise and difference, to avoid containing its perturbations in
reassuringly ordered theoretical and pedagogical constructions” (Paulson 181).

“Advancements” made in the physical and social sciences, as well as
communication technologies during the war by intellectuals recruited for the effort
produced a social atmosphere that was, according to Steve Joshua Heims in his
compelling study Constructing a Social Science for Postwar America (1993), “conducive
to a ready acceptance of the political status quo and to a technological or technocratic
optimism” (Heims 2). The working relationship between the government and intellectuals during the war produced a general mood suggesting “[a] harmony of the ideological stances of the government with that dominant among the intellectual community” (3). Natural and physical scientists, as well as intellectuals working in the “human sciences” were regarded as heroes in an age of increased anxiety and tension provoked by nuclear proliferation and shifting social systems. As a result, social and philosophical conservatism sweeps across the American landscape, unconsciously reinforced by a steady period of economic prosperity, the results of which include the rise of the American middle-class. This steady reinforcement comes at the level of the symbolic, by the strict and steady organization of what Guy Debord calls, in his major work, *The Society of the Spectacle* (1967), the “the society of the spectacle,” something that is “not added to the real world—not a decorative element so to speak. These new networks of information weave an intricate tapestry that on appearance is perceived as “reality.” On the contrary...the spectacle epitomizes the prevailing model of social life [and] serves as total justification for the conditions and aims of the existing system”(Debord 13). The “spectacle” for Debord is “a world view transformed into an objective force” (13).

In the universities, the “spectacle” develops within the humanities marked by the rise of New Criticism. Rasula’s concept of the wax museum demonstrates how modern experiments with language, image, symbol, and poetic form that marked High Modernism in the work of poets like Pound, Williams, Stein, and ironically the early work of T.S. Eliot (“Father” of New Criticism), become emblematic of the “dissolution” of “traditional” values as well as the social, political, and economic turmoil of the
Twentieth Century. New criticism establishes a “quasi-scientific” and politically and socially vapid approach to literary study, publishing, and reception. At all levels of Postmodern American society, according to Debord, the “spectacle…is inseparable from the modern State.”(20); subsequently all activity, including the reading, writing, and reception of poetry, is “forcibly channeled into the global construction of the spectacle” (21).

For Rasula, poetry plays an integral role in the development of this “society of the spectacle,” and via the rise of a series of anthologies, awards, and writing workshops, all in some way affiliated with the academy and/or the State, poetry as a seemingly “harmless” discourse participates in the defense of the symbolic that frames the postmodern “spectacle” that is the “everyday.” He writes:

The society of the spectacle engineers these elements into a coherent ideological motif, that of the nation, which is therefore less a polity than a fantasy. The fantasy is certified in its purity as a hegemonic ‘voice’ at that point when individual members of the society or group appear to spontaneously exhibit the rules of order, the principles of cohesion, and reiterate in almost ritual fashion a miraculous unity of individual utterance and collective sentiment. This is the birth of the poetry workshop(Rasula 31).

Rasula contends that Americans seek a homespun or authentic literary past that is simultaneously imitative and original: “Driven by a taste for novelty, Americans seem intent on celebrating as sublimely original only those achievements that are servile imitations”(9). He defines then a kind of cultural anxiety prevalent in the institution of
American poetry, and as a major fixture in his image of the wax museum, this cultural anxiety is directly linked to the political landscape in the U.S. after the war.

Rasula’s use of the trope of the “wax” museum specifically, as opposed to the traditional museum, unmasks and betrays the ways in which “official verse” poets construct a social and political institution of American Poetry intrinsically linked to Cold War ideology. The museum is not only a site of cultural preservation, but also a pedagogic institution. Museums bring together seemingly different or exotic cultural images, relics, etc. in order to not only narrate a specific past, but to reveal the distinct nature of each object in its collection. These cultural “relics” are not only organized and displayed, but inscribed in the rhetoric of the museum is a sense that what is inside is being preserved, presumably from extinction. There is an understanding that what is found in the museum’s collection is not only an original and authentic “piece of the past,” but also an object that is either no longer found “outside” of the museum’s walls or is no longer recognizable in its current incarnation. The museum then serves as a site of cultural presentation/preservation and a pedagogic institution because it attempts to demonstrate how one locates these “objects” according to specific markings or attributes “outside” of the museum walls. As Rasula contends, “the museum is a pedagogic institution...what it teaches is aesthetic aptitude as a requisite in the social transition from production to consumption”(13). In a sense, the museum dictates how something produced “outside” that claims to be authentic must meet the institutional (read: “inside”) demands of the museum before it is consumed as cultural capital. The push for a conservative modernist poetics is an attempt at erasing or censoring the living, breathing counter-poetics that develop after the war. These counter-poetic movements and their
affiliations with the “dangerous” experimental modernist lineage disrupt poetry’s utility as a cultural and pedagogic institution. The contents of a museum are tangible and have form and substance, but museums have literal structures or barriers in place that prohibit the public from handling the objects in its collection.

Rasula’s trope of the wax museum operates under a distinct set of cultural assumptions. Wax museums are often found along the margins of what is deemed “high” culture. They are an oddity, a side show attraction that one pays admission to enter, in anticipation of meeting the sublime gaze of a familiar yet “strange” disembodied figure. Wax museums often evoke the uncanny, what Rasula refers to as “the repetition compulsion, the return of the repressed, premature burial, and the disturbing realism of wax figures” (9). The figure of the poet enacts a familiar gaze in direct opposition to the “strangeness” of both poetic discourse and poetry as a marginalized literary genre. The figures in Rasula’s wax museum stand awkwardly at attention, and his evocation of the uncanny suggests a specific gaze via which the cold “shell” of the poet’s body demands recognition as a substitution for the “work” itself. The figures in the wax museum appear, from a distance, lifelike and animated. However, upon closer inspection the figures appear pale, morbid, and lacking.

Rasula uses this trope to identify poetry as on the fringe or margins of a larger cultural discourse. In opposition to a museum proper, an institution that inscribes a certain cultural relevancy to the objects that make up its “collection,” the wax museum is always already inscribed in “side show” rhetoric. It is a collection of cultural oddities that do not, and as such, cannot narrate a larger and substantial cultural discourse.

According to Rasula’s revision of the history of Postmodern American poetry, the literal
poem has become a side note, filler in magazines like the *New Yorker*. Rasula narrates the rise of the institutionalization of poetry via the trope of the wax museum to imply that the social, political, and cultural immediacy of poetic discourse, of the “work,” is sacrificed to a poetics of leisure that privileges the ego—the public personality and “figure” or image of the poet the same way the wax museum privileges the almost “real” yet inanimate figure of the celebrity or oddity. Postmodern American poetry had become separated from the everyday and the immediacy of the “outside” world. Poetry became an exhibition of sorts, merely a representation of representation, distinct from the materiality of the “world” around it.

The poets in the wax museum are *figures*. They are bodies, complete with ego and persona, and they stand in for the poems themselves. Thus what is missing is the actual material poetic language. The figure of the poet is an empty signifier, representative of the emptiness in content and progressive poetics in those poets privileged by the curators of the American Poetry Wax Museum. The wax museum’s “figures” imply a reliance on evoking the relevancy of the poet’s literal body and persona over the text or material language of the poem. Without the material that is the literal poem, what is the relevancy of the image or *figure* of the poet? Rasula highlights the use of “voice-over,” recordings of the poet reciting her work in the wax museum, in an attempt to add substance to its collection in addition to displaying the artificial *figure* of the poet. The voices too are still distinct from the literal materiality of the language of the poem. As each poet’s voice is inscribed in these recordings, the poet’s ego is re-inscribed as the guiding principle, which determines the nature of the wax museum’s collection. The poet’s figure stands in place of the “work,” and the poet’s “voice-over” stands in place of the
materiality of the poem’s “language,” its images, reflections, and ideas. In the wax
museum, there is no real participation; “reading” as such does not occur. Perhaps, active
participation is not encouraged? One must keep the line of paying customers moving
through, briskly, barely skimming the surface of the poem’s language. Rasula contends
that:

...the seemingly autonomous ‘voices and visions’ of poets themselves have
been underwritten by custodial sponsors who have surreptitiously turned down
the volume on certain voices, and simulated a voice-over for certain others.

Nothing defines the situation more succinctly than the police phrase protective
custody (33).

The disembodied ‘voice-over’ in the space of the wax museum may provoke a response,
yet the space of the museum itself does not allow for a dialectic to flourish. The wax
museum with its various wings is an ideological and pedagogical institution that
corroborates the testimony or discourse that serves to strengthen the ideology of the
spectacle. For Rasula, “Unity is achieved by maximizing disunity and aestheticizing it as
spectacle (for the masses) or fetishizing it as art (for the elite)” (294). As a way of
developing a discourse of correspondence with post-war ideology, “The collectivizing
impulse in the postwar American poetry establishment invariably appealed to images of
plurality drawn from the image bank of identity rather than difference, familiarity not
alterity, recognition not estrangement”(295).

Rasula’s trope of the wax museum attempts to situate a discourse on not only the
literal and figurative “bodies” of poetry in Postwar America, but also the question of
“space.” The competing histories on Postwar American Poetry each attempt to mark or inscribe contemporary American poetics into a container, operating almost under the assumption that American poetry is fluid and will thus “take the shape” of whatever glass into which it is poured. Rasula’s narrative demonstrates how while on one level certain historical narratives claim to celebrate the immense diversity and complexity of American poetry in the postmodern epoch, they often rely on “recognition” and “familiarity,” so that difference comes under erasure and is more readily absorbed into a pre-fabricated “space” for American poetry. This can be said for any number of poetic movements that on some level enter the field as radical, experimental, and avant garde in terms of both form and content. A clear example of this would be the Beat poets’ segue from marginal figures who challenged postwar ideology into the confessional poets of the 1960’s, and the “official verse poets” who continue their residency to this day. It is my contention, however, that deep image poetry and poetics inherently resist being contained because the socio-political, national, historical, psychical, and “textual” material base to their work is always already inscribed as “contaminated,” and subsequently devalued and dismissed on the stage of conservative poetics, philosophy, and more recently, critical theory. Whether their work is casually dismissed as the over-intellectualized ramblings of “orientalist” Americans clamoring for a poetics of “difference” or neo-Platonists and Jungians searching for structure in a fractured Postmodernity, the power and intensity of the deep image project stems from a recognition of no “place,” of no boundaries in terms of what discursive realms constitute a legitimate “location” for poetic investigation and practice.
Perhaps the most telling indication that the deep image project cannot be contained or re-appropriated like some of the other radical and experimental poetics that came from the same historical moment is that, unlike their contemporaries, the way in which the deep image poets locate the “I” or speaking subject in the poem is not at the center or “top” of the poem. Instead, the “I” or speaking subject is located at the surface or base of the poem, and it is figuratively “below” this surface that the real work begins. This model inverts the standard among the postwar generation that more often than not seeks to establish a fixed identity in the chaos of postmodernity. In opposition to this push, deep image poets seek to dissolve the self or fixed and stable identity in the space of the poem in exchange for a new conception of the “I” as a mode of vision.

Alongside Jed Rasula’s provocative re-reading of the historical narrative surrounding poetry after the Second World War stands David Antin’s landmark essay dealing more exclusively with the poetics of the postmodern, “Modernism and Postmodernism: Approaching the Present in American Poetry” (1972). Antin not only supports a similar air of discontent at the course of Postmodern American Poetry as a certain strand becomes a core fixture within the academy, but he also simultaneously calls for a poetics that meets the demands of the experimental/investigative line (Pound/Stein/Williams) for a form of “Modernism” that is “to be finally and forever open” (Antin 99). Antin not only highlights the differences between “open” and “closed” poetic forms, but the variety of “open” poetics that exists among the Postwar generation, with an emphasis on the performative nature of poetic discourse.

A significant part of Antin’s critique of Postwar academic Modernism, from the likes of figures like Robert Lowell and W.D. Snodgrass, specifically, is the validation of
a certain poetics which takes for granted the “initiating impulses” of core areas of the experimental poetic tradition. In a sense, the philosophical and conceptual framework which figures into the aesthetic practice of Pound’s Cantos and Eliot’s Wasteland, has been divorced from the work of the so-called Postwar “Modern” poets. What remains then is a kind of “Modernist innovation,” like the use of collage, stripped clean of the energy and antagonism inherent in the initial use of collage as an antidote to the sanitizing methods of traditional rhyme and meter.

In terms of the work of academic “Moderns,” collage is the experimental form most readily deployed. Collage was a response to the recognition by avant garde artists that there was an inherent lack of logical order or structure to the excess produced by history, subjectivity, ideology, and changes in technology. In its Post-war academic, bastardized form, collage becomes a ready-made logical order which, according to Antin, “…yield(s) a relatively tame sort of disorder” to the excess of reality and the human condition (107). The generation of Post-war academic poets manages to create a faux lineage between their tame version of Modernism and the groundbreaking experimental tradition via a co-option of the form of collage. This then opens a two-front struggle: one dedicated to rescuing the “open” content and forms inherent in the Modernist tradition, forms like collage, and the second—defining a rich and vibrant Postwar generation that maintains the “initiating impulses” of the experimental tradition. However, Antin, like Rasula, will further irritate the notion that there is a binary distinction between academic and innovative postmodern poetics. Whereas Rasula's approach via the trope of the wax museum argues more firmly toward expanding issues regarding inclusion and exclusion, canonicity and the inheritance of Modern innovations, Antin’s essay simultaneously
narrates the history of the Modern/Postmodern split and functions as a manifesto toward a poetics that privileges action, antagonism, and performance—participation.

As Antin relates, in 1958, critics John Crowe Ransom and Delmore Schwartz reviewed the state of American Poetry at mid-century for the Library of Congress. Antin maintains that the oversight regarding the work of Charles Olson (arguably one of the most significant theorists and practitioners of experimental and investigative poetry) is no mere coincidence. He contends that they “…were apparently unaware of every significant younger poet in the country” when they declare “…‘newest poets appear much more often than not to be picking up again the meters, which many poets in the century had thought that they must dispense with’”(116). In contrast to Crowe and Ransom’s conclusions, Antin cites the variety of work already published by the burgeoning “New American Poets” in 1958, two years prior to the publication of Donald Allen’s anthology which solidified the group’s name and reputation as proof of a set of viable alternatives to the academic “Moderns.” His point is that even before Allen “canonized” the work of poets like Charles Olson, Robert Creeley, and Jack Spicer, the existence of a living, breathing American Postwar avant garde was well underway and deliberately ignored by the New Critics in an attempt to maintain an established, sanitized, and consequently safe version of Postmodern American Poetry. Part of this version of Postmodern American Poetry included a series of moral and ethical stances, conservative stances that charged Postmodern American Poetry with a quasi-religious duty to help propagate an ideology and aesthetic “appropriate” for the Postwar/Cold War zeitgeist. As Antin explains, in a series of statements regarding Postmodern American poets, Tate intrinsically links formal approaches to meter and rhyme with quasi-
religious/moral imperatives in poetry. Tate writes in defense of formal structures “…‘the religious occasion is a very formal one, with its appointed place in the visible temple, and the community of worshippers congregated visibly’” (117). For Tate then, the Postmodern American Poet uses formal methods in order to first stress the seriousness or “devotional” task of the poet to illuminate the “‘inexpressible, or metaphysical’” to readers, and to maintain a poetics of transparency. In a sense, according to Tate, formal methods allow unmediated access to the poem’s content, which communicates, and therefore dictates a specific ideology for the readers’ “own good.” Formal methods make moral and ethical concerns digestible in a transparent form that requires little to no sense of a critical consciousness or active participation with the poem on the readers’ part. Simultaneously then, the reader is essentially discouraged from allowing the language of the poem to be taken at other than face value.

Antin’s response to Tate is a direct reference to Jesus’ “Sermon on the Mount,” a religious occasion that he gleefully reminds Tate “…wasn’t delivered in meter” (118). This begins the true crux of Antin’s argument—the reason why the New Critics ignore the “New American Poets” is that their work does not occupy some “trivial moral space”(120). Instead, the work of the “New American Poets” provokes new areas of thought which in both form and content reinvigorate the structure of the poem and the material language of the poem.

Although Antin will suggest that the work of Olson and Zukofsky, for example, revise Pounds concept of culture or his expressivist theory, they still rely on certain formal conventions. To the extent that Olson will call for an open, progressive, and inherently experimental poetics in essays like Projective Verse, he will also, according to
Antin, be essentially “renovating and deepening the ‘modernist’ tradition of Pound and Williams”(125). What Antin seeks then is an “approach toward the present,” a “postmodern” poetics, the form of which will reflect the expansive content of the Post-War Generation. This can only be accomplished via a reevaluation of the Modernist tradition from both the angle of new content (Duncan’s Gnosis and interest in alchemy, Olson’s theory on the relationship between the line and the breath, etc.) and new forms which privilege participation. Antin revises the inherited Modernist tradition to stress the importance of the work of Gertrude Stein and John Cage, as well as the work of dada and Surrealist poets, the work of Vallejo, Lorca, and Rimbaud, in order to forge a truly postmodern poetics that is “finally and forever open.” Antin strongly concludes that, “…poetry [is] made by a man up on his feet, talking” (131).

The deep image “group’s” push for a new poetics that includes explorations into the function and nature of language, the human individual and collective unconscious, and alternative modes of thought and perception in postmodern society developed along with a kind of Mythopoetic Revolution. In his unpublished monograph titled The Traffic of Names: On Robert Kelly’s Poetry (2000), Edward Schelb contends that by the time Kelly and Rothenberg were writing in the early 1960’s, “…the mythopoetic revolution was in full swing” (Schelb 9). Charles Olson, as the dominant figure in postwar poetics, expanded on and intellectually charged the “…mythic sources that had become the paideuma of the counter-tradition” under poets like Pound (9). As Schelb insists, by the early 1960’s “Robert Duncan was forming his grand collages of hermetic doctrine…Kenneth Rexroth and Gary Snyder had worked within the contemplative forms
of Buddhism ... Allen Ginsberg chanted mantras [and] Louis Zukofsky quietly worked through intricate Pythagorean and kabbalistic forms”(9). This Mythopoetic Revolution sought to disrupt traditional perceptions of concepts like meaning, history, the function of myth and the nature of self. (11) Perhaps one of the clearest contemplations of the mythopoetic revolution is Robert Duncan’s long essay “The Truth and Life of Myth” (1968); in it, Duncan articulates the energy and impetus that fueled this groundbreaking assemblage of counter-poetic movements. Similarly, Duncan recognizes the literal and figurative violence of the first-half of the 20th Century as being indicative of a breakdown in Cartesian thought, particularly as it relates to the development of a world view.

Duncan, by reevaluating the Hermetic world view and taking into consideration its encapsulation of interdependence, opposition, chaos, and contingency, uses the material language of myth and other “fictions” to conceive of a new, global and post-humanist “world picture.”

Duncan asserts that “…many a young poet comes to his vocation today the product of a demythologized education” (Duncan 18). What this “demythologized education” stresses in regards to myth, according to Duncan, is that it may function unquestionably “…as an element of personal expression in creative art, but myth as an inherited lore of the soul-way of Man has been put aside”(18). Myth, as the ancient form of story telling used throughout time to explain or describe that which is not fully perceptible to the human mind and body, for Duncan, is the foundation of a poetics that is itself a living entity. However, the demythologization of the “Modern” world not only empties the poem of a kind of transcendent power towards the articulation of truth, it simultaneously devalues and disperses myth as a kind of theoretical speculation that
ironically is inseparable from theories used in the arenas of scientific, political, and economic “research.” Without the ability to theorize from the standpoint of myth, or other “fictions” for that matter, the very act of critical and theoretical inspection itself is dismantled.

According to Duncan, in its insistence to exorcise the world of angels and demons, Modernity has amputated the human limb of the/a “cosmological” landscape. We are further from any ability to ask questions concerning “truth” or “origins” now more than ever. The so-called rejected knowledge(s) of the world rely implicitly on the existence of mythos in its continued grasp towards a logos; this rejection is also at the heart of all other areas of knowledge. Duncan insists, “…modern man...has labeled whole areas of human thought and feeling sentimental and over-charged with improper emotion” and has managed to use this charge of sentimentality to establish “a self-protective world of facts and problems stripped of their sympathies, in the real business of making money...and exploiting the profitable waste”(20). These protected facts impose an intellectual barrier that carries over into all areas of physical and psychical life. Therefore, advancements in the arts as much as in the sciences, philosophy, and politics have become commodities at their very core. Interest in these areas of inquiry only extends so far as how much money can be made from new ideas and material objects. The ends of labor are devoid of spirit as much as global capital is devoid of center, therefore, there seems to be a psychical sense of growing uneasiness in the West. The pleasure taken in the acquisition of commodities, which advanced significantly in the years immediately following the Second World War, does not seem to be able to keep up with the increasing levels of disenchantment with labor practices. So then, what appears
to be a crisis for “poetry,” what Duncan calls the “…ready suspicion and accusation that the poet has not really *earned* or *deserved* to have wonder manifest in the poem, as if wonder came from some power of the writer’s and was not a grace recognized by the writer in the reality of things,” is in fact a crisis that extends to all areas of human relations within a larger “cosmological” and for some “ecological” landscape (25).

“The Modern mind,” according to Duncan, “has not only chickened out on God...but it has chickened out on the common things of our actual world, taking the properties of things as their uses” (22). In this sense, there is a disruption inherent in Modernity that silences the language, always of course in a state of perpetual translation or “becoming,” between humans and the rest of the “world.” By chickening out, by deploying “common sense” to combat the presence of “stones, trees, animals, and even men as spiritual beings,” the modern mind has accelerated the rate at which the schism between humans and the ecological world grows, as though nature cannot at any moment become exhausted by its human presence and re-negotiate our relationship and indebtedness to it without asking permission (22). It is the poet then who explores this relationship, and takes steps toward preserving it, by calling attention to and demanding participation with the everyday presence of a real, ecological and cosmological world.

Duncan begins to locate this demand by returning to Western literary and philosophical origins. He writes: “But the fullness of Plato’s knowledge, in the mixture of his story telling and vision, lies in his poet’s experience of such fictions and illusions as the fabric of his own work”(4). Duncan re-reads Plato with a sense of passion and urgency. Plato banishes poets in Book Ten of *The Republic*, yet his own reliance on the poetic in his dialogues accentuates to what extent the definition of “poet” radically shifts
over the course of his work. The urgency and passion with which Duncan returns to Plato is an effort to resuscitate “Plato the Mage, Plato the Magician,” who uses a kind of “creative magic” which “moves behind the dialectic” and creates action and “living” participation, or in this case, fosters a “sense of the drama of life”(4). In the dialectic that frames Plato’s philosophical inquiries, he consistently, and through the voice or “I’s” of other speakers, concedes to myth and storytelling since these modes animate the debates as the world itself is animated. The poet, as well as the philosopher who uses myth and story-telling, occupies a virtual yet organic space that is as alive as the subjects to which it speaks. As Duncan insists, and Plato demonstrates across the Dialogues, the question of “the truth of the mythopoeic” is not answered, not even by the religious wars of the Seventeenth Century that sought to mark all aspects of the mythopoeic as “irrational”(4). Instead, the mythopoeic is driven further into the heart of philosophical inquiry; since it is inherently contingent, it is always free to disrupt singular “rationalizing” forces.

Throughout history, as Duncan explains, “there is a drive to clear away the mythopoeic, the areas of creative and fictional contamination, and to establish a text in the light of what modern man is reasonably convinced is the likely or likeable truth of things”(5). When Duncan wrote “The Truth and Life of Myth,” nuclear proliferation haunted the global landscape. The physical and psychical response to this “event” in human history is that—“men labor to exorcize all the old stories” (5). However, the mythopoeic or “old stories” that constitute a part of the lost history of the West are de-valued since they rely more on a sense of cosmology, a way of looking at the world not as divided but as intricately woven. In Duncan’s work, as it is in Plato’s dialectic or “drama of Truth,” the simultaneously revered and mistrusted mythopoeic is the force that
drives the *unending* or processional quest for Truth. For Duncan, the elimination of this force from the philosophical or poetic landscape signals grave repercussions for the global social, political, and ecological landscape.

Duncan asserts “I seek in Poetry to go as deep into ‘the passionate and fitful temper,’ as Plato calls it, of the soul as the sense of relations and ratios can carry me”(7). The relations that are developed over the course of the poem’s composition create what Duncan calls a “melody of events” that “enters the generative memory and the history of man” (7). The powerful force or impulses associated with the act of composition and imagination create patterns along the lines of what Duncan calls “felt relationships and equilibrations” (7). These relationships combine with other forces to call the world into being, therefore, by going as “deep” as possible into the “soul” or “I” the poet’s work has as much to do with creating and transforming the exterior world as it does the interior of the human soul or psyche. By not relying on ideological positions that dictate a hierarchy between “World” and “soul”, the cosmological map stays intact and neither the individual nor the world is sacrificed in order to maintain or sustain the other. Again, these two arenas are intricately woven across the same cosmological landscape and cannot be severed as they have been during the course of Modernity. Their separation along the lines of “reason” for the purposes of a pseudo-pragmatic approach to “real life” or “real world” issues always already undermines those very social or political projects, and guarantees levels of inequality among cultures, religions, individuals, species, and ecology. The push then for poetry and philosophy is indeed to go as “deep” as possible to a point that precedes the discursive schisms that have come to define Modernity, in order to truly, simultaneously transform the landscape of the “world” and the individual.
psyche. As Duncan reminds his readers, William James lists “the realm of fiction” as one that the philosopher must “take into account” (9). Duncan insists “…in the psychopathology of daily life, the still more real world of the actual begins to be a text of meanings, actions that reveal ritual intention, symbolic functions, words and appearances that are not what they seem” (9). The everyday world “speaks in tongues,” and by exploring the world at this deeper level, “the true nature of things” will begin to reveal itself. However, I must insist that the process that Duncan aligns his work with is just that, a process, an unending action that will never reveal all “Truth,” but has the propensity to truly explore, shape, and transform a “global” or “cosmological” landscape. According to Duncan, it is the mythopoeic that allows this cosmological view to come into focus, and this focus must be at the root of any social, political, or psychological project that seeks transformation out in the “world.”

Myths are living beings; they have, according to Duncan, “a primary reality” and “volition” (13). The mythopoeic is a means by which an organic, material logos can emerge. Duncan writes:

The poem that moves me when I write is an active presence in which I work. I am not concerned with whether it is a good or a bad likeness to some convention men hold; for the Word is for me living Flesh, and the body of my own thought and feeling, my own presence, becomes the vehicle for the process of genetic information (15).

For Duncan, the composition process itself is an “active presence” of thought and feeling that is an integral part of a larger piece of “cosmological” “genetic information.” Merely writing the poem to satisfy the demands of the “critic” shifts the poem from the creation
of cosmological “genetic information” to commodity. There is indeed a tremendous difference between these two concepts of the poetic. The poem as a commodity plugs into the same human-made system that fosters varying degrees of inequality, deployed across a wide spectrum of relations, whereas the poem that is created in an “active presence” works toward enacting a moment of transcendence of all relations back to the cosmological level where “genetic information” can lead to a positive transformation in the real world. Duncan asserts:

It has never seemed to me that the true form of a poem was a convention or an ideal of form, but as in life, a form having its information in the language of our human experience, as our bodies have their information in the life-code of the species, and our spirit in the creative will(16).

The “active presence” of the poetic is part of a larger, infinite process of mapping out the cosmological landscape. Any question regarding being, the nature of things, the events of “history,” the ecological landscape, and the nature of language itself are all given form in the poem, as the poem is the poet’s “concept of the meaning of form itself.”(16) For Duncan, the poet’s “concept of form...where it is serious at all arises from his concept of the nature of the universe, its lifetime or form, or even, for some, its lifelessness or formlessness”(16). Moving from the literal text of the poem into the larger cosmological landscape, according to Duncan, begins with a reconsideration of myth as a core element, as a living part of reality that brings human beings together as a species within the cosmological landscape: “Man’s myths move in his poetry as they move in his history, as in the morphology of his body all his ancient evolution is rehearsed and individualized
...all mankind share the oldest gods as they share the oldest identities of the germinal cell” (16).

The act of poetic creation, for Duncan, is as alive and vibrant as a philosophy that is itself a living being, a part of the cosmos. In both poetry and philosophy, *writing and seeing are simultaneous events*. This includes the close and careful inspection of the world, both inner and outer realms of the living reality of the world, and the individual psyche. Duncan claims that “We recognize an image in the process of the poem not because of some device of speech, not as a descriptive arrangement of words or a striking word, but because we see as we write” (21). Poetry and philosophy as arenas for thought, perception, contemplation, and meditation are living matter. It is the process of poetic and philosophical work that adds a different and necessary addition to the discursive field. To eliminate the mythopoeic in poetry and philosophy from the discursive field is to inflict a very violent rupture in the “global” linguistic and psychical landscape. This violence creates a serious void into which pours fundamentalist and oppressive concepts of reason and “Truth” that make the world appear as “it is,” as opposed to what it “could be.”

Many conservative literary critics, as well as those who subscribe to Humanist based forms of critical inquiry, often argue that through time, the evolution of human history and science has shown the inherent discrepancies between the discursive modes of poetry and philosophy. The poem gets to keep its relationship to fiction, only if poetry maintains its existence within the realm of the aesthetic. Philosophy, on the other hand, must give up its leanings toward fiction or myth if it is to do any kind of “real work” *out in the “world.”* Duncan takes the opportunity of writing “The Truth and Life of Myth”
in order to show that throughout the course of human history, any time certain excesses resonate, ring loudly in the composition of the poem, any time this resonance seems to suggest a larger connection between discursive fields and living organic reality—conservative forces work to silence them. If this resonance is truly “dangerous,” it is because it demands an answer to the question: dangerous to whom or what? What are or could be the effects of an awakening in what Duncan refers to as “the mythological reality in the actual” (30)? Who or what fears the reality of a living cosmology that gives form to the “world,” not as a form that “the poet gives to things but something he receives from things” (30)?

Rather than producing mimetic poetic forms, the poet seeks, according to Duncan, to pay “…an insistent attention to what happens in inattentions, a care for inaccuracies...to go deeper and deeper into the experience of the process” (34). “Inaccuracies” in poetic composition often lead to new thoughts or ideas. Therefore, staying attuned to the possibility of new ideas in “inaccuracy” leaves discursive fields of inquiry “open,” as opposed to the “closure” of conservative thought. Likewise, the inherent dangers in closing systems of discursive inquiry include the ascendancy of certain forms of fundamentalism. Fundamentalists always seek a return to a purity that does not exist. Often, the search for this purity in form contains a physical and/or psychical violence. Robert Duncan reminds us that “truth” lies in the fact that events, which include poetic composition, belong to the “evolution of forms;” an event corresponds to, shapes, and is part of “truth” as it is received through time (37).

The poem, for Duncan, finds its authenticity not “in the poem itself,” but the authority of “a universal authenticity that arises from the store of human experience
acknowledged in the language that gives whatever depth to my own experience, a feel of
form acknowledged in its inception to be no more than a feel” (38). Thus the poem is an
event, an extension of Duncan the poet, as authentic as the complex range of “universal”
experience that comes to define language itself through time. The poetic is no more or no
less important than the political or the scientific, since each is indebted to this same
complex “universal authenticity” of language. Moving investigations and explorations
from the stagnant waters of static thought that continues to insist on a close-minded and
“fundamentalist” point of view from which to read and engage the world, to one that
recognizes hints toward a concept of “truth” as it exists in processes and relations is
absolutely essential for the future. The poem is significant to this process, and Duncan’s
essay is as much a call to arms for contemporary poets as it is a call to arms for other
modes of critical inquiry.

The relationship between the deep image poets and Duncan’s work as part of a
larger mythopoetic revolution transcends aesthetic and poetic influence. More
significantly, the mythopoetic project, significantly “unpacked” in Duncan’s work as well
as Olson’s theory of Projective Verse⁵ is one of the most significant and distinct political
positions taken by poets after the Second World War. Although the deep image poets are
seldom remembered for political praxis that has come to define the 1960’s and 70’s in the
form of street level protest and affiliation with various student, anti-war, and civil rights
movements, their work is extremely “political” nonetheless since it deals most
specifically with the intelligible and sensual perceptions of the real beyond the everyday
world. For deep image poets like Kelly and Rothenberg, a sharp focus on the role of
language and discourse on the construction and perception of the everyday (in Lacanian

terms, the symbolic order which gingerly holds together the concept of “reality” over the chasm of chaos and the unknown) is essential to the development of tangible political alternatives. The same holds true when considering the residual effects of European and American Colonialism and Imperialism; in *Minding the Underworld* (1991), Paul Christensen declares the work of the deep image poets an expression of “the anguished white conscience in the post-imperial age”(115).

For deep image poets, tangible political praxis begins with the individual and how that person perceives the everyday world, their relationship to the “Other” or “Outside” of their own psyche, and how the everyday is constructed by the language we speak and the discourses which routinely shape and transform societies and cultures. Crucial to the process of perceiving and shaping the everyday is an awareness of what has been left behind or “buried” deep below the shallow surface of everyday discursive realms. According to the deep image poets, over the course of time and history two significant premature burials have occurred. The first is that of the number of Gnostic, Hermetic, Occult and Other “rejected” texts, as well as the role of the poetic in the everyday lives of communities and cultures throughout the globe that, although proving crucial to the development of modern conceptions of science, psychology, theology, and other discourses, have been de-legitimized over the decades and centuries by powerful “institutions.” Among the fiercest opponents to these texts and traditions is the power and resources deployed across the globe throughout Modernity under the guise of exploration, colonization, imperialism, Capitalism, and religious conversion. The second, and for early deep image poetics most significant, premature burial that takes place by the mid-twentieth century is that of the “human” relationship to the larger
“cosmological” world. Recognizing this disconnect is crucial to understanding how the
deep image poets view the power and sheer force that both literal/conscious and
individual/collective unconscious language and thought pervades the construction,
maintenance, and possible transformation of the world. Taking these two prematurely
buried concepts in tandem, one begins to develop a poetic/theoretical project that seeks to
redefine the significance and role of poetic language to the construction of perceived
reality, as well as reconsider the significance of de-legitimated texts, traditions, and
discourses from a variety of Western and Non-Western sources to this construction and
transformation as well.

The poetic projects taken up by deep image poets seek to transform “reality” by a
participation with and direct treatment of the very language that constructs the everyday
world. The “image” in this case is fore grounded as the vessel that makes “reality”
possible. This is much more than a mere “recovery” project, in which texts are re-
presented to the contemporary world after centuries of being buried under dominant
cultural forces. Although translation and the re-discovery of subjugated poetic traditions
is a key part of deep image poetics, more importantly, each of their projects attempts to
participate with and transform the literal Logos that has figuratively and literally
dominated the globe for centuries. Other poets associated with deep image, including
Armand Schwerner, Clayton Eshleman, and Rochelle Owens, use their work to irritate
the ontological, Western tradition Logos, to force it to bend and open itself up to the
power of vision and imagination. This kind of a “political” project waves no banners and
takes to no streets. Rather, this is a painstaking and close interaction with language at the
level of reading, writing, and thinking. Each deep image project depends wholly on
focusing in on the strange and unexplored linguistic regions that define the interactions between thought, composition, and reception. Poet and reader are always participants in the development of thought and deployment of ideas in the transformation of the literal Logos that has come to define the world over the centuries. Therefore, deep image poetry demands active participation with language and image on the part of both poet and reader. In fact, both are intricately woven together in an attempt to lay bare to what extent the world comes into being via the acts of thought, writing, and perception.

In order to take on such a monumental task, the deep image poets cannot look to any one specific philosophical or poetic tradition, nor can they ignore the language and images that reveal themselves in the individual and collective human unconscious in dream and that strange undefined space consistently labeled the “poetic.” Instead, deep image poets consistently participate in the “becoming reality”, in the on-going process that calls the world and all of those “connected” to it into being. This is not Structuralism. The deep image poets do not recover literal patterns or force unconscious thought and image into a predetermined, structural discursive space. Rather, the deep image poets consistently participate in the investigation and development of a more “authentic” logos—not one of exclusivity and/or connectivity, but a new hybrid/bastard logos that indiscriminately embraces all language and thought in the process or construction of the “becoming reality.”

The coexistence of structure and event implies an impasse or perhaps impossibility. Can a poem “be” and be part of a “becoming” in the same discursive space? This question leads back to the concept of participatory poetics, specifically the idea of irritating and contaminating the Logos with the hybrid, bastard logos that is the
poetic. Jacques Derrida meditates at length on this opposition in his “Khora” (1993) essay. The essay itself is a meditation on Plato’s *Timeaues*, the dialogue in which Plato resorts to myth and storytelling in order to detail the world’s creation (itself “called” into being by Logos—in the beginning was the Word). In the *Timaeus*, the term “khora” comes to represent both space/structure and action/event simultaneously. Plato not only accentuates “philosophical” discourse with mythology and poetry, he calls the world into being via a discursive space/simultaneous mode that does not dismiss or differentiate between Logos and mythos. Rather, the *Logos itself* is a contaminated one, one that is “alive” with, among other things, myth and poetry. This “living logos” is both the content and structure of the deep image poem. The text of the *Timaeus* is composed, writes Derrida, in a mode that is the “…alternation between the logic of exclusion and that of participation” (Derrida 90). In other words, this Other logos “participates” in the Logos (Plato’s text is predicated on the two), and yet, it “does not proceed from the natural or legitimate logos” (90). For Derrida, this is not a troubling aporia for Plato’s text; it is an issue for Platonism. One must then go back to Plato’s text in order to recognize the “event” of the *Timaeus*; it demonstrates, as Rothenberg desires, “a special kind of poetic act” in which structure and event occupy the same “natural” space.

Derrida’s careful reading and writing through the *Timaeus* reveals Robert Duncan’s Plato of “creative magic”, the “textual” Plato who conveniently endorses mythos as an appropriate way of responding to the ever shifting features of an always indeterminate and “becoming” world, in his own dialectic. Derrida’s reading of this particular portion of Plato’s *Timaeus* aims to give a body and a location/place from which the inscribed opposition of Logos to mythos may present itself. The poetic allows for this opposition
to exist within the Logos, within a genre that defies categorization particularly in light of Antin and Rasula’s sense of post-War American Poetry. If the poetic field is “open,” or continues to open in both Duncan and Olson’s sense, certainly the argument can be made that by the late 1950’s and into the 1960’s, the deep image poets emerge and participate in the creation of a “living logos,” an organic poetics located in a reconsideration of the first-person singular “I” that is itself a living, breathing, acting part of the real. The poetry of the deep image group interrogates and challenges the symbolic, forcing a direct engagement with the Other. This Other transcends polarities, just as the name Khora is untranslatable—since its name is not an exact word, since the poetic is not an exact Logos, it cannot be Logos or WORD, but rather a “well composed logos that looks like a living body.” (93) For Derrida, there is always a process of translation occurring; it is an “…experience or experiment [that remains] caught in networks of interpretation” (93). This network of interpretation is the power and intensity of poetic engagement, the radical descent/dissent of deep image poetics in an effort to continuously irritate and transform the Ontological Logos.

In In Time, Robert Kelly reminds readers that poets are now “…last scientists of the Whole,” that at this moment in Postmodernity the poet remains invested in an organic or living logos that pre-dates philosophical reason. The khora then, in terms of the poetics of deep image, is as Derrida suggests: “…this name does not designate any of the known or recognized or, if you like, received types of existent, received by philosophical discourse, that is, by the ontological logos which lays down the law” (96). Instead, the khora puts in question and under erasure presuppositions and distinctions like genus, species, individual, type, and genre. (96) And, according to Derrida, it is “…khora’s”
formlessness, this *nothing* that must be preserved, “what *must be kept for it, what we must keep for it*” (97). Deep Image poetics maintains within “reality,” or the daily, material world, a necessary disorder and absence of an ontological Logos.

Poet Robin Blaser’s essay “The Practice of Outside” (1975) elucidates the necessary link between deep image poetic “theory” and “practice,” between Derrida’s concept of the “khora,” and the relationship of poetic practice to the transformation of the Real or “outside.” Although Blaser’s essay is a long commentary on the work of poet-friend Jack Spicer, his “comments” solidify the foundation of deep image poetics. Spicer’s language, like the work of the deep image poets, according to Blaser, “…pushes us into a polarity and experienced dialectic with something other than ourselves. It involves a reversal of language into experience, which is not a dial
exis between ourselves or a discourse true only to itself, but a broken and reforming language which composes a ‘real’”(Blaser 275). This “reversal of language into experience” accentuates the relation between human and world; it reconnects the poet’s language and vision with the materiality of the “real” world. The poet’s language becomes event; the poem’s structure is a natural articulation of thought and image. This “logos” is different from Derrida’s sense of an Ontological Logos, what Blaser calls “public language,” that which “has closed itself in order to hold a meaning” (275). In the social, “language …is displaced to a transparency and becomes an imposition rather than a disclosure” (275).

Blaser demands a “reopened language,” a processual language of event that “lets the unknown, the Other the outside in again as a voice in the language” (276). The presence of this Other is named under Plato’s “Khora.” Plato’s *Timaeus* is a poem and the creation of the cosmological universe in a hybrid, bastard logos. The Ontological
Logos, Blaser’s “public language,” breaks open under the weight of Jack Spicer’s and the deep image’s “participatory poetics.” The idea of a return to the “creation” of the world is metaphorical for a return to what Blaser calls the “beginning of a language that is full of the world” (279). Poetry then is “…a necessary function of the real, not something added to it” (283).

The main connection among Rasula’s reading of Modern American Poetry, Antin’s consideration of the split between Modern and Postmodern American poetry, and Derrida’s reading of Plato’s *Timeaus* is the relationship between image, myth, and ritual. What each of these writers consider is the place/space of the poetic in relation to the real. More specifically, each confronts the ritual spaces of the poetic, and thus simultaneously interrogates the borders between these ritual/participatory spaces and the composition of reality predicated on a re-visioning of the possibilities of the “I.” Before proceeding to a close meditation on deep image poetics in the work of Jerome Rothenberg and Robert Kelly, a re-conception of the function of image in poetry must be explored, alongside the concept of poesis which claims that language is a function of poetry and not the reverse. The significance of the concept of poesis for the experimental tradition in Postmodern American poetry cannot be understated, for beneath the veil of the everyday, images as concrete, linguistic material structures (regardless of their discursive space in dream, myth, religious ceremony, television broadcast, political propaganda, or the cup of coffee from the local Starbucks) shift and move, taking on an organic life charged with power and meaning.

Likewise, the term “deep image” and its association with Postmodern American poetry must also be examined more closely. A cursory glance of most poetry
anthologies, as well as the various histories of Postmodern American poetry that have been published since the 1960’s posit Robert Bly as, according to Kevin Bushell in his essay “Leaping Into the Unknown: The Poetics of Robert Bly’s Deep Image,” being “…the groups leading theorist and spokesperson” (Bushell). With the exception of some initial interactions between Bly and Jerome Rothenberg, with Robert Kelly on the periphery, there is little in Bly’s work to suggest that he fully grasped the core theorists’ concept of deep image poetics. The deep image poetics associated with Bly, in fact, can either be considered a misreading of Rothenberg and Kelly’s statements, or indeed a serious divergence down another path. As Bushell explains in his essay, “…solitude plays an important role [in Bly’s reading of deep image as]…a notion of the poetic image which involves psychic energy and movement” (Bushell). Although Kelly and Rothenberg also allude to “energy” and “movement” in relation to the poetic image in their conception of the deep image, Bly omits the participatory aspect of the image. Bly, the hero-poet, descends to the depths of the unconscious and performs an act of recovery and articulation for the reader, as opposed to the demand for participation in the composition of the poetic space that Kelly and Rothenberg demand in their own work.

For all of the paths Bly’s deep image poetics attempts to reveal in the on-going struggle to re-connect humans to the cosmological world, the main thrust of his poetics relies instead on “plugging” the image into a pre-existing mythological system based much more firmly on Jung’s theory of the archetype and the collective unconscious. In fact, the casual way in which most dismiss the deep image as a pedestrian deployment of Jungian archetypal psychology and the latent structuralism of anthropologists like Claude Levi-Strauss, can be directly attributed to Bly’s misreading.
According to Daniel Kane in his book *All Poets Welcome* (2003), Robert Bly and James Wright (Bly’s “co-conspirator”) neglect the community-based origins of deep image poetics. Kane insists that publications like Kelly and Economou’s *Trobar,* and the various poetry readings that the core group held, imply that at the foundation of deep image poetics is the concept that each of these “spaces” constitute “temporary sites of resistance” to the absorption of Modern American poetry into the academy (Kane 100). Similarly, each of these “sites” opens up a space for on-going conversations among poets and text. By placing translations of pre-modern, esoteric, troubadour, as well as Surrealist poetry and the work of figures like Federico García Lorca alongside essays and poems which also consider the function of the “rejected knowledge” that fuels the mythopoetic revolution (Gnostic texts, alchemical treatises, ritual chant and song…) and the inherent politics of re-opening a dialogue with the “Other,” the performance spaces of deep image poetics hinge upon participation and conversation to further the opening of the poetic field, towards Duncan’s “symposium of the whole.” However, Bly and Wright initiate a deep image poetics that joins the rank of Charles Bernstein’s “official verse culture.” Bly and Wright use their misreading of deep image poetry to carve out a niche in the official (read: Norton) American poetry institution and to develop careers as “officially accredited” poets, thus re-affirming the more egocentric “hero-poet” model impertinent to Kelly, Rothenberg, and Economou’s “…community oriented theory” (100).

The remaining chapters of this study will explore how deep image poets, specifically Robert Kelly and Jerome Rothenberg, reconsider the poem as, among other things, a discourse concerning vision and how deep image poetics considers a way of charging the poem as a field of action on which self and other fold across the same
discursive space, thus allowing for the possibility of transforming Debord’s “spectacle,”
our “reality.” In doing so, Rothenberg and Kelly will transcend deep image poetics and
engage directly in their respective roles as “Last scientists of the Whole.”
Chapter Two
The Poetics and Politics of Vision

Where we were wrong was to speak of deep image when the word we wanted was depth/thing, tehom. [...] The word image botched it, when generations of critics have debased that word into an easy theory that denies intellect & denies music. It was the deep thing we meant, that the poem was itself the battle with Kur, or with the dragon of the deep waters who locks up the fertilities of earth.

-Robert Kelly, from Statement

The muse and angel come from outside us: the angel gives lights, and the muse gives forms. [...] But one must awaken the duende in the remotest mansions of the blood.

-Federico García Lorca, from Play and Theory of the Duende

There are a number of sources that can be said to have directly influenced the deep image poets. As mentioned briefly in the last chapter, both Jerome Rothenberg and Robert Kelly are voracious readers, and their collective tastes amount to a transcontinental and trans-historical “anthology” of source poetics. In this chapter I will trace the poetics of the deep image across the work of several significant poets and poetic movements, drawing from both primary theoretical sources, namely the editorial statement from Kelly and George Economou in their journal Trobar (1960), Kelly’s “Notes on the Poetry of Deep Image” (1960), and Rothenberg’s “Why Deep Image” (1961) and “The Deep Image is the Threatened Image” (1961). This chapter will also, more significantly, discuss the rich and diverse poetics that came to directly influence the development of the deep image, alongside the philosophical and theoretical discourses that walk a similar path, as well as influence the development of deep image poetics.
Finally, this chapter will explore the relationship between deep image and the politics and poetics of poetry concerned with the concepts of “vision,” “energy,” and the core connection between poetry, language, discourse, the human unconscious, and the “cosmological” “Whole” or interconnected world view.

I. *Trobar* and “The Primal Gestures of Language”

From 1960-1964 Robert Kelly and George Economou, along with Kelly’s then wife Joan, edited a little magazine entitled *Trobar*. The name of the magazine comes from the troubadour tradition in Old Provençal, a form of song associated with courtly love. The influence of the troubadour lyric extends into the 20th Century via Ezra Pound most significantly. Pound wrote extensively about the troubadours, and translated many of their works, fragments of which can be found in *The Cantos*. “Trobar” is literally defined as a mode of poetical composition in which the content is “found” or “sought out.” Thus it implies that there is a search or probing of “depths” inherent to “trobar” or “poetic composition” as a practice. However, both the magazine *Trobar* and the troubadour tradition move beyond the conception of “love songs” and “little magazines” to the extent that each occupies a more significant place in the history of contemporary poetics. Likewise, both the troubadour tradition of Old Provençal and the mimeograph “revolution” in New York’s Lower East Side in the early 1960s are an extension of a larger discourse surrounding poetry’s relationship to the “other” discourses that are commonly associated with philosophy, science, religion, and politics. Western philosophy and the history of the development and use of written language has all but relegated the poem to the margins of so-called “public language,” the modes of speech
and writing that occupy more “serious” areas of knowledge and learning. What Kelly and Economou initiate, along with Jerome Rothenberg, is a poetics that not only recharges poetry with depth and energy that their Modernist precursors developed, but a poetics that explodes how language is deployed and theorized as it has developed since the time of the ancient Greeks.

In the editorial statement introducing the first issue of *Trobar* (1960), Kelly and Economou seek the “…primal gestures of language: ox foraging on the grassland, the archer pulling his bow with all his powers” (Kelly and Economou 2). The magazine’s content, and more importantly the approach to contemporary poetics that it champions, attempts to capture the “primal” energy in language. This “primal” energy, according to Kelly and Economou, is rooted in the unconscious, not unlike a rock that is partially buried beneath the ground—“…not till the rock is pulled from the ground is its size or nature known” (2). Similarly, Kelly and Economou reconcile the material “ox” and “archer’s bow” with language; they insist on the materiality of the words themselves being as “real” and “concrete” as the “ox,” the “grassland,” and the “archer.” They reject language’s objectivity, its supposed impartiality as merely a signifier of objects and the verbal or written expression of thought and ideas. For Kelly and Economou, the poet’s role is to discover the “deep images,” what they define as “…the substance and bearings of those roots which are inescapable content of dream and discipline” (2). There is a power and intensity in poetry that calls attention to the idea that language, as opposed to being fixed, is dynamic and moving, shifting and changing, a living breathing piece of a larger “whole.” Likewise, desire, as a function of the unconscious, is reconciled with “energy” as the Blakean impetus for the poetic.
Returning for a moment to the title *Trobar* and its connection to the troubadour tradition, one must already dig deeper than a cursory understanding of Postmodern American poetry or its seemingly divergent counterpart, the troubadour poem/song. The troubadour poetry of Old Provençal is almost exclusively associated with the existence of “courtly love.” Courtly love is defined as the poet’s idealization of a specific woman who occupies an exalted or privileged position; she embodies the perfect union of body and soul. The troubadour poet thus seeks union with this woman not for the sake of quelling passion and desire, but more significantly, as a way of reaching a state of supreme moral excellence. This idea certainly complicates the nature of the concept of love in the history of Western culture, but more importantly, it charges the troubadour poet’s language with the goal of achieving a higher state of mental and physical being. The poem is not a vehicle for mere self expression, but the means by which the poet attempts to connect to an “Other,” a woman who simultaneously occupies the physical world and a more exclusive or “deeper” spiritual realm.

Although the concept of courtly love survives in histories as the major impetus of troubadour poetry, this does not do enough to explain its privileged position over the course of the history of Western poetry. For example, according to Economou, in his introduction to Paul Blackburn’s translations of troubadour poetry, the recognition of the troubadour’s influence “…begins during a serious reading of Dante, who acknowledges and manifests the importance of the troubadours for him and his work” (Blackburn XIII). The historical and literary figure of Beatrice, as the exalted “Other” fuels both Dante’s passions and his textual journey, particularly as pilgrim in the *Divine Comedy*. It is, among other things, the loss of the literal Beatrice to death which demands that Dante
make a spiritual and poetic descent into the Underworld in *Inferno*. Her death also brings about the journey that will lead to a deeper and more substantial questioning of the interconnectedness between, for Dante, the physical and spiritual realms, and perhaps for contemporary investigative poetry, the connection between material language and the language of the unconscious. The seriousness of this task is left to the poem; it is poetic language that will lead Dante and his readers through the journey. In the *Divine Comedy*, poet and pilgrim are ONE. The text intercedes between the physical and spiritual, between what is intelligible and what can only be imagined without resorting to literal death.

It is difficult to imagine the significant influence of the troubadours to contemporary poetics without looking beyond the concept of courtly love. It is necessary to explore what is best described as the two sides of the same troubadour coin: one side being that which is dedicated to courtly love, the other to the more illusive side of troubadour poetry, namely the side concerned with hermeticism and magic. In the history of troubadour poetry, there exist two versions of the same genre, though they are never mutually exclusive. A great debate raged circa 1160-1210 CE between *trobar leu* (“light” and “easy” troubadour poetry concerned with courtly love), and another version called *trobar clus*, associated with magic, hypnosis, and hermeticism. If *trobar leu* is the love song, *trobar clus* is the spell cast in lyric that allows the poet to perform a kind of Orphic descent into the darker regions of the soul. As mentioned in the above passage, these two kinds of troubadour poetry seldom appear mutually exclusive, although it would seem that the *leu* (light, “love song”) version is the one that best details a contemporary understanding of troubadour poetics. However, keeping in mind the
example of Dante’s *Divine Comedy*, his lyric surely embodies a combination in influence of the two forms of troubadour poetry, and it is this combination that brings us back now to Kelly and Economou’s own conception of poetry in *Trobar*.

Kelly and Economou declare in their editorial statement “Poetry is itself a power of life” and the poem’s strength is drawn from “…the deep image as a mode of working within the poem, as statement and vision” (Kelly 2). Just as the troubadour poet charges his work with the task of uniting with the woman as “Other” in order to transcend the physical realm, thus achieving “moral excellence,” Kelly and Economou believe that it is through the poem that contact between “the perennial strength of the deep image” and the contemporary world can be achieved, and to a particular end. In their closing statement they insist: “The purpose of *Trobar* is to publish American poetry of intensity and immediacy…articulate in power of word…moving alive and passionate” (2). Over the course of *Trobar*’s short run, a new poetics of vision, energy, and risk is established.

**II. Mining the Underworld(s): Poetic and Prophetic Vision**

Kelly and Economou assert in their editorial statement for *Trobar* that the poet “…must re-establish contact with the perennial strength of the deep image as a mode of working within the poem, as statement and as vision” (2). In order to fully explore the significance of deep image poetry, it is necessary to consider the term “image” beyond the scope of literal sight, or literal images that are conjured by the language of the poem. The “deep image” is intrinsically attached to a concept of “vision” as it relates to perception, perception as an active force, concerned with how the senses, including a “sense” of the visionary power of the unconscious, are deployed and negotiated in the
space of language. In the previous chapter, Derrida’s insistence that the logos must “look like a living body” establishes an organic and material base to language, i.e. that language is not something that exists outside of the literal body, but rather, language is something that is an inherent part of the “body” that constitutes the cosmological “world picture” that Duncan calls for in “The Truth and Life of Myth.” Likewise, in Derrida’s reading of *Timeaus*, a dialogue that is concerned with the “creation” of the physical universe, he refuses to mark a distinction between the organic and material substances that compose the physical body and the “world” or “universe,” and the unattainable or indefinable substance (i.e. the “khora” itself) of language which shares an organic, material base with other forms of matter. This leads to an understanding of the literal, material “power” of language in the creation and transformation of the physical world. The deep image poets, these “last scientists of the whole,” insist that it is poetic language that negotiates this intangible space between the material body, the material world, and the “material” space that is the realm of “language” that exists in a fluid state “inside” and “outside” the poet’s body. A number of poets that historically prefigure the deep image poets develop similar lines of inquiry into the relationship between poetic language and the composition, manipulation, and transformation of the physical world. For the remainder of this chapter, I will trace the development of deep image poetics across the work of several poets who are direct influences on the deep image poets; perhaps more significantly, I will develop a discussion of the explicit “politics” of deep image poetry by exploring the poetics and politics of “vision,” as it functions as an active presence in poetic language.

William Blake is a key figure in the development of deep image poetics, and his own sense of the political bears a striking resemblance to the politics of the deep image
poets. This is prevalent in several of Blake’s philosophical poetic treatises, most notably “There Is No Natural Religion” (1788) and “All Religions Are One” (1788), as well as his longer, prophetic poems including “The Marriage of Heaven and Hell” (1793).

In the First Series of “There Is No Natural Religion” Blake argues, regarding human desire, that the human is “…limited by his perceptions, none can desire what he has not perciev’d” (Blake 77). In his conclusion to the First Series, Blake states: “If it were not for the Poetic or Prophetic character the Philosophic & Experimental would soon be at the ratio of all things, & stand still, unable to do other than repeat the same dull round over again” (77). Blake’s conception of the “Poetic or Prophetic character” as an active presence that transcends what he calls “organic perceptions” can be immediately traced across the impetus behind the development of deep image poetics. In his “Notes on the Poetry of Deep Image,” Kelly is concerned with how the known or “perceived” world is developed, and in what ways the poet can actively participate in the “perceived” world’s transformation. He writes, in relation to actively transforming the physical and mental landscape of the “real” world “Transformation is process, involves truth as emergent from process and not distinct from it” (Kelly 14). Both Blake and Kelly establish the existence of two distinct modes of perception. One, marked as “organic” by Blake, and “effective and coherent” by Kelly, is the mode of perception that is limited by an imposition from “outside” the perceiver in the form of a passive, hegemonic, and thoroughly static “world view” that develops via privileging a discursive cocktail of reason, science, and the Judeo-Christian tradition. This mode of perception appears to most as “natural” and “true” because it is imbedded in the so-called true language of reality. According to David V. Erdman in his seminal study Blake Prophet
Against Empire (1954), Blake recognizes that there is a need to “...mine beneath the codified meanings with which kings and priests had restrained and perverted Life” (Erdman 143). These profane power brokers codify human existence and perceived reality via the exercise of law and Church edict over every aspect of human life, and the “Poetic or Prophetic character” of the poet’s vision holds the key to revealing this deliberate, and ironically “inorganic,” characterization of the known universe. Blake writes in “There Is No Natural Religion,” “Man by his reasoning power can only compare & judge of what he has already perciev’d” and “Man cannot naturally Perceive but through his natural or bodily organs” (Blake 77). In order then for this restrained mode of perception to be instigated, desire itself must be restrained, so that all “unnatural” modes of perception, specifically the “poetic” and “prophetic,” are deemed inherently “evil” and “illicit.” Desire is controlled via discourse; language is used as a restraint against the physical body, including the active presence and force of the individual imagination. Erdman writes that for Blake “…what must not be negated by rod and rule is the divinity of the creative individual” (Erdman 143). Erdman insists that the “poetic genius in every man,” recognized by Blake, allows for a restoration of “…men’s common humanity...so that cynicism and rationalism can be reclaimed by love or the mutual adoration of each other’s variety of form and genius” (144). This opening up of the possibilities of perception, and thus the viability of a new and more “true” world picture is explicitly stated in Blake’s conclusion to “There Is No Natural Religion” when he writes “He who sees the Infinite in all things, sees God. He who sees the Ratio only, sees himself only. Therefore God becomes as we are, that we may be as he is” (Blake 78).
Jerome Rothenberg emphasizes the relationship between deep image poetics and Blake’s concept of poetic vision most strongly during an exchange of letters with poet Robert Creeley, parts of which are published in Rothenberg’s *Pre-Faces & Other Writings* (1981) titled “From Deep Image and Mode: An Exchange With Robert Creeley” (1960). In the space of these letters, Rothenberg articulates how he and Kelly, specifically, are considering “image” and how their sense of image is distinct from the “imagist” poets who, as Creeley correctly notes in his letter to Rothenberg (November 6, 1960) “had in mind a sharp registration of an ‘objective’ substance, be it a tree or woman’s mouth, and avoidance of general words etc.—and that proved dull once accomplished…they could only concentrate upon the ‘quick picture’” (Rothenberg 55). Creeley takes issue with how Kelly articulates deep image poetics in his “Notes on the Poetry of Deep Image,” and Creeley is concerned that structure and form are given less consideration when the poem’s emphasis is on developing sharp, pictorial images, which he calls “an accumulation of loosely structured poems exciting mainly for their ‘content,’ their reference as ‘pictures’ of states of feeling etc. I’d hate to see that generalizing manner become dominant” (54) Rothenberg responds to Creeley in a letter dated November 14, 1960, that has become one of the core primary texts on deep image poetics. Recall the discussion in Chapter One of Debord’s concept of “the society of the spectacle.” Here, Creeley is to some extent concerned with the rise of the dominance of the image in the post-war U.S., and more explicitly, how the hegemony of the post-war period is constructed out of a series of images that create a “reality” that is not in fact “true.” In Rasula’s *The American Poetry Wax Museum*, he dedicates a good portion of the book to connecting the rise of “official verse culture” in American poetry after the
war, and how this conception of poetry works toward reinforcing and structuring the “spectacle” that is the “reality” of the post-war U.S. Creeley’s insistence that he’d “…hate to see that generalizing manner become dominant” underscores the intensity with which the Postmodern American poets work to maintain poetry’s position on the fringes, or margins of the post-war “reality,” from which they may use the power and visionary potential of the poem to shape and transform the hegemony of the post-war U.S.

Rothenberg insists that “…the ‘pictorial image’ is not what’s in mind…but something else that may start there only to emerge as different in the poem—i.e. the movement (action) of the poem” (56). In fact, his response to Creeley serves as both a defense of deep image poetics and as a means of demonstrating how deep image poetry works at devaluing the “dominant” poetic forms that Creeley rightly opposes. Rothenberg insists:

I connect “deep image” with perception as an instrument of vision, i.e. a visionary consciousness opening through the senses, grasping the phenomenal world not only for its outward form (though this also, of necessity) but winning from a compassionate comprehension of that world a more acute, more agonizing view of reality than by rational interpretation. (56)

In this passage, Rothenberg demonstrates how deep image poetics emerge from out of the literal senses of the body, both physical and psychical, and move “out” into the “world.” The specificity in a deep image poem is not concerned with simply describing what the physical senses “see,” but rather the deep image poem engages with what Rothenberg calls “…the hidden (floating) world, yet to be discovered or brought into being” as opposed to “the empirical world of the naïve realists” (57). The deep image poem is “the
movement between” these two realms, much as the concept of vision is tied to perception, specifically a mode of perception that fluctuates between the physical and psychical. This is the “true nature” of the mode of perception: not relying on the merely visual or physical senses, but also not simply over-privileged the psychical. “The phenomenal world,” Rothenberg writes, “is to be read by us: the perceived image is the key to the buried image: and the deep image is at once husk and kernel, perception and vision” (57).

Throughout the course of this exchange with Creeley, Rothenberg emphasizes the role Blake’s poetics play in shaping the concept of vision as a mode of perception prevalent in deep image poetics. Blake’s “The Marriage of Heaven and Hell” emphasizes this relationship since he too recognizes the poem as the vehicle (or movement/action) that oscillates between the world that is called “real” and the “perceived” or “floating” world which must be “read.” Blake writes “Man has no Body distinct from his Soul; for that call’d Body is a portion of Soul discern’d by the five Senses” (Blake 250). In order to fully comprehend the “outside” one must disrupt the notion that there is some kind of separation between the physical world (including the body’s physical senses) and the psychical realm. Blake emphasizes how these are deemed two distinct realms by the violent imposition of religion in its attempt to label the physical body and matters regarding the “Soul” as “good” and “evil.” According to the “religious” in “The Marriage of Heaven and Hell,” “Energy, call’d Evil, is alone from the Body…Reason, call’d Good, is alone from the Soul” (250). On the contrary, Blake insists that “Without Contraries is no progression. Attraction and Repulsion, Reason and Energy, Love and Hate, are necessary to Human existence…Good is the passive that obeys Reason. Evil is
the active springing from Energy” (250). Perception by way of poetic vision, as an active force which stems from both the physical and psychical, is always already charged with a constant energy or force capable of disrupting the “spectacle;” Blake writes “If the doors of perception were cleansed everything would appear to man as it is, infinite. For man has closed himself up, till he sees all things thro’ the narrow chinks of his cavern” (258). The “spectacle” is the collective, hegemonic “cavern” that constitutes the post-war “reality.” Rothenberg writes in his letter to Creeley:

the important thing is not to make a school, but to hope for a refocusing of concern toward a ‘deeper’ view, a departure from the merely literal, from the imitation or simple description of experience, a breaking down of perceptual limitations, a sense of urgency and desperation in the assault on reality—all matters of spirit and energy, of inner direction. (59)

The visionary mode inherent in Blake’s poetry and deep image poetics is detailed in Kelly’s “Notes On The Poetry Of Deep Image,” the source of Creeley’s protestations, yet it too functions like Rothenberg’s letters to Creeley as an integral primary statement on the development of deep image poetics as a means of disrupting traditional modes of vision and perception as they are conceived of in Postmodern American poetry in an effort to engage in what Rothenberg calls “the assault on reality” (59). Kelly’s conceptualization of the deep image in his “Notes on the Poetry of Deep Image” as well as comments on the image in Postmodern American poetry that he makes in an interview conducted by David Ossman, published in his collection The Sullen Art (1963), considers the poem as “a happening in itself,” poetic language via “vision” and “perception” acting “against” the dogmatic discursive space which constitutes the postwar “spectacle.” In
“Notes on the Poetry of Deep Image”, Kelly asserts that “The present and necessary function of poetry is the transformation of the perceived world. This transformation orders the known world into an effective and coherent universe” (Kelly 14). Thus Kelly is concerned with moving beyond the surface language, the dogmatic discourses which frame the supposed “reality” that is the Post-war milieu, to the perceived world, which requires a process of “illumination.” Kelly considers the surface world, the supposed “truth” of reality, to be in a sense, virtual, a construction predicated on the imposition of power and approved discourses of knowledge. He writes “Poetry is concerned with things transforming and transforming things, with the whole picture in mind” (14). The Post-war “reality” is a fiction; it exists only in so far as it can alienate and subsequently suppress or silence competing and multiple discourses which are always already part and parcel of the “whole picture.” The key to dismantling the imposed, virtual “reality” of the Post-war “spectacle,” however, is an understanding that the literal material of poetic language, the language of “transformation,” is also the same language by which the totalitarian and dogmatic “reality” is called into being. Both of these discursive realms, the “visionary” realm of the deep image, and the Post-war “spectacle” operate along the same linguistic system. There is a power struggle between the two, yet Kelly seems to suggest in his “Notes” that there is a mode of reading or perception that is organic. It would appear that the “virtual reality” of the Post-war milieu is in fact a construction based on the manipulation of Image into a representation of Truth, whereas Kelly sees poetry as an act of transformation that is process, it “involves truth as emergent from process and not distinct from it”(14). One cannot dictate truth; it emerges.
In David Ossman’s interview with Kelly, Ossman follows a line of questioning that attempts to link Kelly’s concept of the deep image with the publication of *Trobar*. More specifically, Ossman presses Kelly on how, in light of Kelly and Rothenberg’s then recent explorations into the deep image, image comes to bear on the process of poetic composition. For Kelly, the work published in *Trobar* was to be “…poetry that qualified by being alive in one sense or another” (Ossman 33). The image, as it is deployed in a “deep image” poem is considered the life-force or energy charged with the capability of literally, certainly in conjunction with and in response to Olson’s “projective verse,” “breathe life” into the poem, to channel the simultaneous energy of the poem’s composition and discursive space from both “inside” the depths of the poet’s psyche and “outside” into the physical matter and conceptual space that calls the “world” into being. Edward Schelb, in his monograph on Kelly’s work, locates this transfer of psychical, libidinal “creative” energy as being at the forefront of the “political” side of Kelly and Rothenberg’s exploration of the deep image; Schelb writes: “…the poetry of deep image sought to redeem the nation through returning to the primordial realms of poetic freedom”(Schelb 9). For Kelly, this primordial realm lies not buried in the literal, physical material that is the subject of traditional archaeology, but rather, this primordial realm is located simultaneously inside and outside the physical and psychical dimensions of the “Whole,” simultaneously the poet’s “body” and the “body” of the living universe. Poet and “outside” are inseparable and it is the deep image poem that provides the vehicle by which these two seemingly disparate realms are not so much “reconnected” as much as the continuous “flow” of energy between and around the two is witnessed, the
primordial realm, what Rothenberg calls the “phenomenal” or “floating world,” is made visible in the language of the deep image poem.

Although he moves in a seemingly distinct and different direction from that of Olson and his concept of “projective verse,” Kelly’s archaeological imperative stems from Olson’s own work in “scratching” away the layers of the primordial past, particularly in his life work, *The Maximus Poems*. As Schelb contends while discussing Kelly’s concept of deep image poetics, “Olson’s poetry tried to restore an immediacy to his surroundings, employing a ferocious energy to make the landscape yield a visionary meaning…Olson’s poetics were geared to destroy old orders and restore ancient visionary powers, as were the poetics of the deep image”(10). Kelly, in the Ossman interview, will bring together Olson’s “push” with Pound’s division of poetic powers into the three categories of “*logos*, or word–word-magic… *melos*, the musical gist …really—sound; and third, *phanos* …equaling for Pound, ‘throwing the image onto the mind.’” (Ossman 33). This, Kelly asserts, “is the intellectual and emotional tone of the poem” (33). Kelly does not order Pound’s “trinity” hierarchically, but rather, develops deep image poetics around how these three powers, logos, melos, and phanos, interact and engage with one another. Since “poetry deals with word, word is its ground,” Kelly calls language “the mystical hypostasis of all poetry” (33). Language is the mystical “essence” or real, material base of the poem; melos he regards as “the space-time of poetry—its line, extent, duration” (33). However, he insists that “phanos, the image, has gotten rather slighting attention” (34). In regards to deep image poetry, Kelly insists that he is not considering poetry that is dominated by image, but poetry in which “the rhythm of images…form the dominant movement of the poem”(34). Image is a vehicle, a machine
that functions as “a vehicle for Vision” into the primordial realm or “floating world.” (35) This vision is both a means of exploring and perhaps “redeeming” the Postwar American landscape. “Vision,” Kelly explains, “…discovers …explorations of the real world, discoveries through perception” (35).

In the concluding passages in his “Notes On The Poetry Of Deep Image,” Kelly charges deep image poetics with a political dimension by referring to the intrinsic importance of “The American language of today” as “the only reliable linguistic patterns for the poet of images” (Kelly 16). Likewise, Kelly refers to the “need for urgency, for tension in the work itself” as deep image poetics “restores the poetry of desperation” (16). By recognizing “American language” as the most “reliable” means of articulating the deep image in poetry, Kelly celebrates the heterogeneity of “American language,” specifically the way in which its vocabulary and linguistic patterns contain the linguistic patterns and cultural diversity of a nation composed of “others.” In direct opposition to the push for a clear, and subsequently “sanitized” mode of speech championed by both poets and politicians of the conservative post-war generation, Kelly recognizes the potential for a global poetics or “universal language” that simultaneously recognizes and applauds cultural and linguistic difference, without relying on a dissolution of this difference for the sake of poetic or political clarity. It is in the “mix” where deep image poetics finds its energy; the deep image poem becomes a “happening” or “gathering of the tribes” which directly confronts the imposed cultural hegemony of the post-war U.S. In so far as he refers to the “American language,” perhaps unconsciously Kelly is marking the way in which the United States, as a country in “North America,” so often engages in an act of linguistic violence when it dissolves the richness and diversity of the
North and South American continents and asserts its dominance in the Western Hemisphere by calling the U.S. “America.” Kelly recognizes that by developing deep image poetics “Atop the familiar linguistic patterns [of the ‘American language of today’], the images mold their own expressions. The poet charges these expressions using the full arsenal of poetics, so that the image works in all its urgency, at its maximal communicative force” (16). He concludes by demanding “…the need for urgency, for tension in the work itself” (16). This tension signifies the aesthetic and political “struggle” specific to deep image poetics. This “struggle” is an attempt to access the realm of the “unconscious,” “perceived” or “floating” world, and bring the energy of this struggle to the surface world of the “naïve realists,” where the poem’s composition, as well as its reception, shares in an act of transgression against the discursive spaces that predicate the “society of the spectacle.”

III. Lorca’s ‘duende,’ Breton’s Surrealism, and the Space and Function of the Unconscious in the Deep Image Impetus for “getting at the reality of things”

“This inside is out while your outside is in” - The Beatles, “Everybody’s Got Something to Hide Except for Me and My Monkey”

To further articulate this transgression, as well as consider the poetic origins of the deep image poets, it is necessary to explore the work of poets and artists for whom the space of composition is itself an arena of struggle with competing forces in an attempt at arriving at an authentic experience with “reality.” Often these forces are demonstrated along the lines which mark disparate aesthetic and political orientations, as well as the
fine and indeterminable line which always already fails to sever the relationship between the conscious and unconscious realms of the personal and collective psyche. Several of the major figures who directly influence deep image poetics are concerned with the relationship between language and the Unconscious. Two of these figures, Federico García Lorca and César Vallejo, work specifically with the existence of a daemonic or “spiritual” presence that is said to initiate a literal struggle between the poet and the work. For Lorca, this presence is the duende, a trans-cultural and trans-historical (yet tied very closely to the Andalusian territory of his native Spain) daemonic-like presence or earth spirit that embodies the irrational, the physical earth, and a heightened awareness of death, that he defines, in his groundbreaking lecture *Play and Theory of the Duende* (1933), as “… a power, not a work … a struggle, not a thought”(Lorca 49). Similarly, Vallejo’s poetics represent a struggle between the realm of the “spiritual” (a veritable combination of the influence of his grandmothers who were Chimú Indians, and his grandfathers, both of whom were Spanish Catholic priests) and the political and social concerns of the material world. (Rothenberg and Joris 405). Both Vallejo and Lorca appeal to a power that does not so much lie “outside” the literal poet, but rather a power or force that dwells within the poet’s individual and collective unconscious always already connected to the larger cosmological universe. The poem represents a struggle with this daemonic force or “earth-spirit” and the power and energy of this struggle can be experienced by a direct engagement with the language of the poem. The major avant garde movement that also deems the unconscious a well spring for the poetic is Surrealism. Lorca is a contemporary of the Surrealists, and had major contact with
among others, Salvador Dali; Vallejo’s major work Trilce (1922) deploys Surrealist techniques such as automatic writing prior to the historical movement itself.

For the purposes of further articulating the inherent “struggle” at work in a deep image poem, I will focus more closely on Lorca’s Play and Theory of the Duende, as well as the work of the Surrealists. For the deep image poets, vision and perception exist as an active presence in the total space of the work. To fully conceptualize this space, the “whole” or “total” must be taken into account: i.e. there are no boundaries between language, the psyche, and the material world. In this respect, perhaps the most derided and misunderstood aspect of deep image poetics is the space of the unconscious and its relation to the poem’s compositional space, as well as the space of “reception” or the “reality” in which the “meaning” of the poem, the material poem, and the poem as an event emerge. In a short essay titled “The Deep Image is the Threatened Image” (1961), Rothenberg intends to connect deep image poetics with what he considers the “true” or “real” world, or what he calls “The world as it existed before man. The primal world, not yet hardened into the mold of law” (Rothenberg 42). For Lorca, the poem is like a dance that traverses the delicate space between the known world and what can never be fully understood but felt nonetheless. There is a passion and intensity to a poetics of “authenticity,” a primal calling, which in his essay Play and Theory of the Duende he traces across the arts. Lorca calls the unknown or “unspeakable” and mysterious poetics “black sounds,” he writes “All that has black sounds has duende. And there is no greater truth. These ‘black sounds’ are the mystery, the roots fastened in the mire that we all know and all ignore, the fertile silt that gives us the very substance of art” (Lorca 49). And it is in the midst of these “black sounds” that the duende emerges, again, defined by
Lorca as “a power, not a work. It is a struggle, not a thought” (49). In “The Deep Image is the Threatened Image,” Rothenberg writes: “By an arrogant act of creation, the poet defies death and the nightmare-void: he tries to be god & fails. But his failure has taken him into new country, where the struggle continues” (Rothenberg 42). The deep image poem must have duende; the poet must engage in the struggle with the “black sounds.” The deep image poem provides the vehicle by which the poet, according to Rothenberg, can “touch reality, feel its dark outline beneath his hands, its breath against him,” and by doing so “His center has become the world’s” (42). There is perhaps an unspoken dialectic between Lorca’s talk on the duende and Rothenberg’s development of deep image poetics. Both poets recognize an intrinsic link between poetic language and the accessibility of an authentic, primal, “reality.” In Lorca’s essay he insists “This ‘mysterious power which everyone senses and no philosopher explains’ is, in sum, the spirit of the earth” (Lorca 49).

The world picture which emerges in the Twentieth Century is predicated on a false reality, on acquiescence to the world of the seemingly visible and the known. Lorca recognizes the inherent discrepancies of this “reality” and senses it at the level of physical and psychical bodies as an extension of the “whole” body that is the universe. As fascism takes root in his native country of Spain, Lorca looks inside the psychical space, the darkness, which a work that has duende reveals. There is an unspoken political dimension to Lorca’s investigation of the duende, yet it does not fall into the psychological and discursive trappings of the discourse and image which call the fascist world view into being and mark it as “reality.” On the contrary, Lorca’s brush with “reality” is a struggle with the darkness, an attempt at making the “true reality” visible
even if for just a moment in time. Lorca describes this search for the duende, his expedition into the darkness: “But there are neither maps nor exercises to help us find the duende. We only know that he burns the blood like a poultice of broken glass, that he exhausts, that he rejects all the sweet geometry we have learned, that he smashes styles” (51). Rothenberg draws upon Lorca’s influence, and in the midst of another kind of fascism, distinct from that which emerged in Germany, Italy, and Spain, one that is more heavily rooted in corporatism and the Military Industrial Complex emerging in the aftermath of the Second World War, he too engages the path of darkness in an effort to resuscitate the primal reality, the one which resists the totalizing discourse of the post-war spectacle. He writes:

The ‘deep image’ is the poetic image struggling with the darkness. The image rescued from the lie of the unthreatened. Not as a literary prescription, for writing better poems or nurturing the language, but from an impasse in the soul, in which the protective ‘reality’ & false emblems of the inherited past have drawn a blank. Not as a neurotic outcry either, from the weakness of self-pity, but in the wholeness & fitness of the poet’s vision. (Rothenberg 43).

It is important to note that for both Lorca and Rothenberg, the struggle inherent in the arts allows for a moment of clarity to emerge, and even though this act is inherently “redemptive,” neither is willing to assign value, more specifically “positive” value to the vision which emerges in the space of the poem. It is the “feeling” that emerges from an encounter with the duende where the power lies. It is the emotive recognition of an authentic experience that is most powerful. In terms of the politics of the duende or deep image, one cannot simply fall into the trap of assigning it an “orientation,” for political
orientations emerge in the same discursive “reality” in which the most totalitarian and liberal stances too emerge and are imposed by force. Rather, Rothenberg and Lorca take refuge in the mental and physical energy of the duende and the deep image. At the conclusion to his *Play and Theory of the Duende* Lorca writes: “Through the empty arch comes a wind, a mental wind blowing relentlessly over the heads of the dead, in search of new landscapes and unknown accents… announcing the constant baptism of newly created things” (Lorca 62). Rothenberg seeks “new landscapes” as well, what he calls “a return to the beginning. A struggle to shape the world through the power of the creative moment, the flash of light that overthrows the darkness & is itself a greater darkness” (Rothenberg 43). Robert Kelly also acknowledges Lorca’s profound influence on the deep image poets, as well as other poets who comprise the post-war American avant garde and investigative/experimental tradition. In the Ossman interview, Kelly asserts “I think the revival of interest in poets like Lorca…is based very largely on the enormous dark sentiment of Lorca, that darkness that ‘surrounds’ us in things… image becomes the motive force of the poem” (Ossman 34).

“Image,” for Kelly, is the force inherent to the deep image poem that allows for an exploration of the depths of this “darkness” which Lorca consistently returns to in his exploration of the duende. Although Kelly marks a difference between deep image poetry and surrealism, when he tells Ossman “The use of images constitutes a part of the poet’s Vision. It has nothing to do with technique. You can simulate a surrealist poem …Remember what Stevens said: Surrealism invents, it cannot discover,” the significance of the Surrealist’s exploration of the Unconscious and the relationship of these explorations to the transformation of the “real” world is crucial to the general framework
of deep image poetics. This connection becomes more apparent when looking closely at
how Surrealists such as André Breton theorize Surrealism, particularly in the *Manifesto
of Surrealism* (1924). The surrealist influence on deep image poetics is also articulated
most strongly by considering the responses to surrealist technique in the work of Maurice
Blanchot.

In the *Manifesto of Surrealism* (1924), Breton begins with a literal definition of
surrealism:

SURREALISM, n. Psychic automatism in its pure state, by which one
proposes to express—verbally, by means of the written word, or in any
other manner—the actual functioning of thought. Dictated by thought,
in the absence of any control exercised by reason, exempt from any
aesthetic or moral concern. (Breton 468)

The “expression” in language of “the actual functioning of thought” is akin to the deep
image poets’ concern for “getting at the reality of things.” The surrealists, according to
Breton, and via the use of automatic writing, fully engage the “energies” of language in
a process of exploration into the nature of the unconscious in the hope of revealing the
“true nature” of reality. Maurice Blanchot interrogates surrealist technique, more
specifically automatic writing, in two core essays: “Reflections on Surrealism” from his
book *The Work of Fire* (1949) and “Inspiration, Lack of Inspiration” from *The Space of
Literature* (1955). Blanchot explores automatic writing as a vehicle by which the
strange, “nocturnal” space of literature begins to reveal, or perhaps unravel, the intricate
strands of language, discourse, and thought that construct “reality” as such. Additionally,
Blanchot recognizes the core relationship between automatic writing and libidinal energy, or the way in which poetic language is “charged” with both a demand and a desire to reveal to the poet, and subsequently the reader, the limits of the human imagination. For Blanchot, this limit is “infinite,” an ongoing “work” or “struggle” with language as the very substance which both hides the truth of the real and structures the “real world” in which man dwells. In light of the impetus behind the deep image project, and the debt payable to surrealism (regardless of Kelly’s protestations in his interview with Ossman), Blanchot’s readings are essential to more fully understanding the weight, immediacy, and demands that Rothenberg and Kelly make for deep image poetry.

In the earlier essay on surrealism, “Reflections on Surrealism” (1949), Blanchot argues for the immediacy of surrealism, “it is no longer here or there: it is everywhere. It is a ghost, a brilliant obsession” (Blanchot 85). Blanchot refuses to trap surrealism in an historical paradigm, due to the immediacy and intensity of the work it attempts to perform. In this sense, he is also attempting to distinguish between surrealism and automatic writing as poetic techniques and the Surrealist group, as coming from out of dada in the historical, European avant garde, with Breton as its pope, or more fittingly: judge, jury, and executioner. 14

In his 1924 Manifesto, Breton writes “I believe in the future resolution of these two states, dream and reality, which are seemingly so contradictory, into a kind of absolute reality, a surreality” (Breton 469). For Breton, the block or impasse between dream and reality exists as an imposition; this impasse is not “naturally” occurring, but rather, the separation exists due to the way language and/as “discourse,” coupled with varying degrees of power (broadly defined), orders, structures, and composes “reality.”
Breton’s attempt at a “surreality” is an attempt to shatter language and the discourse of imposition that orders and structures conceptual “reality.” Automatic writing inaugurates an active presence in language which explodes the strictures of language as “discourse;” in “Reflections on Surrealism,” Blanchot refers to the charged language of automatic writing as “a weapon against reflection and language…it is itself a proud aspiration toward a way of knowledge, and opens a new unlimited belief in words” (Blanchot 86).

Deep image poetics takes a similar “aspiration” as its initializing impetus, and consequently, Breton’s demand for a poetic language and simultaneous compositional space which confronts the language of “discourse” and “imposition” that orders “reality” proves essential to the foundation and conceptual understanding of the deep image project. In his study on how the concept of the “primitive” informs the work of David Antin, Rothenberg, and Gary Snyder, titled In Search of the Primitive (1986), critic Sherman Paul further illustrates how the figurative and literal concepts of “interior” and “exterior” in relation to the psychical dimension of deep image poetics, makes demands for the deep image project and its confrontation with the literal and conceptual space marked “reality.” Similarly, Paul connects Rothenberg’s deep image poetics with Breton’s surrealist explorations as part of a more encompassing push toward interrogating and subsequently validating a cosmological world picture. Paul insists that Rothenberg recognizes that “…the exterior is the most interior—the deep image privileges a poetry of the deepest interiority” (Paul 80). For Rothenberg, akin to Breton’s surrealist vision directed at the “inside” of psychical space, the act of looking inward is in actuality a more thorough exploration of the “outside,” towards what Paul considers Rothenberg’s “…allegiance to …this profound sense of the cosmos and the poet’s agency
in it” (79). Paul insists that “Rothenberg proposes that we explore the dream time and include it, make it coextensive with our ‘reality’ … by means of the deep image” (80).

Returning for a moment to Blanchot’s considerations in “Reflections on Surrealism,” in light of Paul’s reading of deep image poetics and the use of poetic language as a means of interrogating and subsequently transforming “reality,” I would like to juxtapose deep image poetics with surrealism, specifically in the passage where Blanchot writes:

Surrealism was haunted by the idea that there is, there must be, in man’s constitution a moment in which all difficulties are removed in which antinomies no longer have any meaning, in which knowledge completely takes hold of things, in which language is not speech but reality itself (Blanchot 86).

The juxtaposition of deep image poetics and surrealism is not simply a matter of “reading” deep image through the lens of surrealism, nor is it a commentary on the ways in which one “modern” poetic movement is continued under the auspices of a “postmodern” movement. Rather, it is the recognition of the energy and immediacy, as well as the antagonism of the unconscious that both surrealism and deep image poetics reveal as a “natural” and “organic” part of the Whole that is the nature of language. Thus both movements do not necessarily, as I read them in light of the development of poststructuralist theories of language, claim to allow access to an “Original” or “First” Language, but rather they reveal the poly-vocal nature of language as something that simultaneously exists and is made manifest from both “outside” the subject as discourse, as well as “inside” the dark and unknown regions of the unconscious.
In his essay, “Why Deep Image,” Rothenberg asserts “…when we speak about ‘deep image’ we renew a demand that poets get at the reality of things by turning inward: that the process of self-perception be united as far as possible with our means for perceiving the world around us” (Rothenberg 3). Rothenberg considers the space of the poem’s composition as akin to “the nature of things,” a subtle and obscured realm where “…structure and event…coincide in the same space” (3). The literal poem, and the event of the poem’s composition, what Rothenberg refers to as the “event-of-a-poem’s happening,” occur simultaneously; and it is in this space, and from out of this space, that reality is simultaneously both “accessed” and called into being. So then, for Rothenberg, as much for Breton and surrealism, the “event” of the poem’s composition, this intangible “space,” is in fact the means by which the poet can begin to access the always already hidden “origins” of language and subsequently “reality.” Recalling the discussion of Derrida’s reading of Plato’s Timeaus is his “Khōra” essay in the previous chapter, by going inside the space of the poem’s composition, one can beginning to conceive of the primacy of language in the formation of “reality,” the “world,” and the “cosmos.” Derrida names this realm that is simultaneously both “interior” and “exterior,” “structure” and “event”—Khōra. He writes “in order to think khōra, it is necessary to go back to a beginning that is older than the beginning, namely, the birth of the cosmos” (Derrida 126). He insists “we must go back toward a preorigin…an impure philosophical discourse, threatened, bastard, [and] hybrid”; to this space and to this “bastard” and “hybrid” discourse, Rothenberg gives the name “deep image” (126).

In “Why Deep Image,” Rothenberg writes:
…the direction of seeing in this kind of image is into a man rather than outside him: not a habit of the eye so much as a penetration of the self to refocus on the world through the eyes-of-feeling […] we have to try to see the world in all its natural and contemporary detail as if no differences existed between the seer and the things he sees (Rothenberg 3).

Subsequently, the material language of the poem must meet this demand; like Derrida’s demand for the discourse/language of philosophy, poetic language must recall and recognize the reality of its organic nature, as per Derrida “…a well composed logos must look like a living body” (Derrida 127). The deep image is charged with the energy necessary to bridge the abyss between what the poem purports to say or articulate about “reality,” and the organic and material base in language that calls “reality” into being. Rothenberg claims that “the power of the deep image is its ability to convey a sense of two-worlds-in-one: directly: with no concept to come between the inner experience and its meaning” (Rothenberg 4). In “Reflections on Surrealism,” Blanchot describes the living, organic nature of language as being “…confused now with man’s ‘thought,’ [and, in terms of deep image poetics, the composition of a deep image poem] is linked to the only real spontaneity: it is human freedom acting and manifesting itself” (Blanchot 88). Blanchot continues “The rational constructions are rejected…the freedom of words means that words become free for themselves…they act on their own account” (88). Rothenberg celebrates the emancipation or “freedom of words” in terms of “…their free re-association in a manner that would be impossible to descriptive or logical thought” (Rothenberg 4). Once again, juxtaposing deep image poetics to surrealism, Blanchot insists that under the auspices of surrealist automatic writing “rational constructions are
rejected” (Blanchot 88). In other words, and for both surrealism and deep image, the “reality” or “world picture” that language calls into being is, and must always, be interrogated and investigated. The rationalist and totalizing discourses, the “Grand Narratives” of history that supposedly illuminate, shape, and “truthfully” articulate “reality” are, under the weight of deep image poetics, cast into doubt. Rothenberg asserts that the deep image poem initiates a demand for:

a new attack on the mystery of the real, in which all our habitual perceptions are continually being put in question. The poet discovers the unknown by creating it from the vast resources of his inner life, the savings of an experienced world still rich in meaning: he delivers as deep image, the life giving vision […] The deep image brings with it a demand for new visions of the world for new creations into thought (Rothenberg 4).

This passage by Rothenberg is crucial to understanding the relationship between deep image and the interrogation and transformation of “reality,” and how this relates to the unconscious. Granted, the deep image poets, in their work in the early sixties, owe a tremendous debt to C.G. Jung’s theories of the collective unconscious, as well as his investigations of archetypes, it is my intention, however, to demonstrate that the deep image poets engage in a post-Jungian mode of investigation, one that can work alongside poststructuralist theories of language propelled by the work of figures like Derrida and Blanchot. Returning for a moment to the last passage by Rothenberg, note that he does not appear to appeal to a transcendental figure, a creator or Logos for that matter that calls “reality” into being. For Rothenberg, it is the process of poetic composition, allied with the reader’s faculties, that continuously makes and re-makes “reality.” He notes that
“...our habitual perceptions are continually being put in question;” this process and continuity suggests that the deep image project must always already be enacted, and certainly, it does not end. There is no endpoint or final recognition of a “true” real. When Rothenberg declares that the poet relies on “the vast resources of his inner life, the savings of an experienced world,” he is referring to lived experience as well as the competing discourses in language as such and the “language” of image, which come together and constitute this thing marked “reality.” He demands that poets continually explore “inner life,” in essence, how these discourses are read and interpreted, and how they then transfer from out of the conceptual space of the poet’s “interior” and subsequently are demonstrated “outside,” culminating in an understanding of and creation of “reality.” The deep image demand for “new visions of the world for new creations into thought” is a demand for action at even the level of perception. Rothenberg is not saying ‘find the true real;’ he is demanding that the real be made new infinitely, which is also captured frequently in the writings of Blanchot who is always exploring how writing never reaches a limit, but rather continuously pushes limits, explodes limits, and keeps the waters of discourse and language from growing stagnant and settling into a habitual and clearly marked “true reality.”

Although Jung’s work will be more fully explored in relation to Kelly’s work on alchemy in subsequent chapters, it is necessary to briefly engage with the strand of post-Jungian analytical and reading practices which both inform my own thinking of the deep image project, but more importantly, this brief introduction to the “poststructuralist” Jung may begin to exorcise the demons—i.e. clear a (left hand) path in which Jung’s work may gain some level of acceptance in the larger discourse of contemporary literary theory.
and textual analysis. To accomplish this, perhaps monumental, task, I turn to the work of Susan Rowland, a contemporary literary theorist whose primary goal is making a place for Jung at the theoretical table which he has been banished from since the cresting of the structuralism wave several decades ago. In her book *C.G. Jung and Literary Theory* (1999), Susan Rowland explores post-Jungian clinical practices and how they evolve and reconcile with post structuralist reading practices. She argues that Archetypal Psychologists “abandon the theory of archetypes as such, and thereby refuse to posit a logocentric theory of psyche…they explicitly reconsider the concept of fiction in relation to theory” (Rowland 24). The Archetypal Psychologists in the post-Jungian vein do not speculate on the existence of a transcendental signified for the archetypal image. This, she writes “is a rejection of the authority of Jung’s theory of archetypes with its crystalline metaphors. Archetypal Psychologists claim that the provisional image can always be considered as archetypal and refuse to posit anterior transcendent archetypes as an ‘author’ for them” (25). Thus, the post-Jungians recognize the function of “writing” in relation to psychic imagery; the action takes place in the inner realms of the subject and not “outside” as the over-writings of either a transcendental creator or a “Grand” or “Master” discourse that is the one, true real. Rowland argues that “…the unconscious image refer[s] to psychic reality and not to any prior formation process. It does not have any meaning or logos, separate from itself, that can be captured by consciousness” (25). And in this sense, Rowland concludes that “Archetypal Psychology joins the project of deconstruction in order to challenge the binary oppositions that try to promulgate the structural inferiorities of the Other and which are grounded by transcendental signifieds that make up phallogocentrism” (27). This is where the Jungian impetus is most
thoroughly grounded in the deep image project; the “experienced world still rich in meaning” that Rothenberg refers to is not tied to a transcendental meaning or logos. Rather, the “experienced world” and its relationship to the poet’s “life giving vision” articulates the ways in which poetic language interrogates discourse and the very notion of transcendental meaning as it relates to “reality” as such. In the act of writing, deep image poetics puts the transcendental discourse under erasure, substituting a more organic, living, and charged language that accentuates lived reality and the cosmos against the backdrop of the post-war rationalist and “Master/Historical” discourses that devalue the cultural, social, and political Other. Finally, the energy and intensity of poetic language demands that the project is itself a “timeless” act; there is no conclusion, no end in sight, and no transcendental “nail” on which to hang the discursive hat of a “true reality.” “Reality” exists for Rothenberg and the deep image poets in the “floating world” of signifiers, not in the transcendental signified.

IV. The Politics of Vision, or “The Deep Image is the Threatened Image”

There is, of course, a political dimension to deep image poetics that corresponds to the “politics” inherent, yet not always made explicit, in the work of poets including Blake, Lorca, and the Surrealists. The deep image concern for the investigation and transformation of reality comes, to a large degree, from the work of many influential poets, some contemporaries like Robert Duncan and Charles Olson, while others are figures who blur and shatter the contemporary “image” of the figure of the poet. In fact, this study operates with an understanding that the philosophical discourse of many contemporary theorists, among them Blanchot and Derrida, is itself a kind of poetic
language, an “opening of the field,” and part of a larger “symposium of the whole” (as per Duncan). In keeping with this concept, it is the philosopher Giordano Bruno who makes a profound argument for the necessity of deep image poetics, and it is via a brief exploration of his work in Ioan P. Couliano’s *Eros and Magic In The Renaissance* (1987), that I conclude this chapter which has been concerned with not only recognizing some of the poets and poetics that influence the deep image poets, but more importantly, makes the case for Rothenberg’s declaration that “The Deep Image is the Threatened Image.”

In the immediate aftermath of the Second World War, in the midst of the rise in prominence of Cold War rhetoric and Debord’s sense that there is now a “society of the spectacle” taking shape, there is a danger in the degree to which language and image are manipulated as a means of establishing and subsequently controlling what is “true” or “real.” The “reality” of the Post-War moment, to which I would securely place even the opening decades of the twenty-first century, is constantly in flux and subject to debate. Yet there are competing powerful interests, among them burgeoning and established liberal democracies, the increasingly prevalent post-colonial and post-imperial nations and cultures of the globe, as well as multinational corporate interests, which all claim a stake in the establishment of “reality” in order to solidify everything from global power to increasing profits and expanding markets. To simply state that “power” or the “State” wishes to control how language and image correspond in the creation and maintenance of the “real,” is itself too limiting a notion. It is Bruno’s explorations of the power and function of “magic” during the time period of the Renaissance that articulates the contemporary necessity for deep image and investigative poetry. Couliano’s work
considers the relationship between the concept of eros and magic; this connection, Couliano argues, comes from depth psychology and the notion of phantasms. He argues that, whereas the Renaissance magician seeks to control phantasm, which Couliano relates to the (personal and collective) unconscious, the “contemporary” magicians are those that seek to manipulate discourse and image as a means of controlling the individual and group’s sense of reality. As Couliano explains: “Bruno is the first to exploit the concept of magic to its ultimate conclusions, envisaging this ‘science’ as an infallible psychological instrument for manipulating the masses as well as the individual human being” (Couliano 88-89).

Couliano reveals, by comparing analytical psychology to the study of magic during the Renaissance, that all mental states in some way involve imagination and the unconscious. More explicitly, according to Renaissance magicians, all mental states involve eros, or love/desire. Thus the magician must “bond” with the manipulated in order to enact control; they must exercise control at the level of desire. In terms of the politics of magic, by comparing Bruno’s work De vinculis to Machiavelli’s The Prince, Couliano asserts:

But only today can we appreciate how much De vinculis outstrips The Prince in depth, in timeliness, and in importance—today when no head of state of the Western world would any longer dream of acting like the Prince but would use, on the other hand, methods of persuasion and manipulation as subtle as those the brain trusts are able to place at his or her disposal. […] the magician of De vinculis is the prototype of the impersonal systems of mass media, indirect censorship, global manipulation, and the brain trusts that exercise their occult
control over the Western masses (90).

In keeping with Couliano’s reading of Bruno’s work and its relationship to deep image poetics, and more explicitly the politics inherent in a poetics concerned with the individual and collective psychical spaces out of which a conception of “reality” emerges, I turn to Peter Lamborn Wilson’s essay “Hieroglyphics and Money” (1998). Wilson attempts to trace the influence of occult knowledge and the Free Masons across the history of the United States. More significantly, Wilson’s essay demonstrates the literal and figurative “power” that Masonic and occult influence has on American politics. In doing so, Wilson argues for a direct poetics of engagement, critically self-aware of the Masonic and occult influence on image and discourse in the U.S., and a poetics that is itself concerned with the power of vision, manipulation, and transformation. This, he argues, is necessary to subvert the “magician-like” sway that the ruling elites, beginning with the so-called “Founding Fathers” (read: Logos), have over the general populace of the U.S. Over the course of his troubling yet fascinating essay, Wilson draws from examples of Masonic and occult influence on American politics from the U.S. flag being the Washington family coat of arms, the Masonic patterns that emerge in the literal geography of Washington D.C., and how the iconography of the American eagle, the unfinished pyramid topped with an all-seeing “eye” that adorns the back of the dollar bill, and the like, have easily seeped into the collective social and political unconscious of the country, and more significantly, how the power and influence of this Masonic and occult influence has become part of the American ideological project of bringing and safeguarding democracy and freedom (or “free markets”) around the globe.
Wilson is convinced that the power invested in this iconography, coupled with social and political rhetoric and discourse, mirrors the “magic” that Hermeticists and Renaissance alchemists and magicians, including Giordano Bruno, sought to discover and control for the sake of, among other ruling institutions, the Catholic Church and the British Monarchy during the reign of Elizabeth the First. In order to prove the feasibility of the deployment of “magic” via a contemporary appeal to eros or desire, Wilson uses the example of contemporary advertisements; he argues that the linguistic rhetoric of the advertisement, coupled with an icon or emblem, signals a transformation that appeals to the consumers’ unconscious desire. The Renaissance magicians and alchemists sought to capture and deploy the power that they felt inherent in particular symbols, as well as hieroglyphs. Wilson argues poignantly in the following passage:

if you think of the emblem…as propaganda or advertising or brainwashings, and you compare it, let’s say, with modern advertising which is always made up of words and images; then you’ll begin to see that the Hermeticists do have descendants in the modern world. The spin doctors. The propaganda masters …the entire system of global capital is based upon this idea of the creation of need though advertising…An advertisement is an image. There are words with the image that tell you how to interpret it. Then it creates in you a desire for the product, and you (zombie-like) go out and buy it (274).

Returning for a moment to Couliano’s text, in many ways one of the main catalysts for Wilson’s work, Couliano, echoing the above passage by Wilson, links manipulation and “zombie-like” adherence to image and rhetoric to the deployment of power, yet not in relation to any specific government or transcendental theistic deity. Couliano writes:
For theology, there is a true religion and false beliefs, there is good and evil which are largely ideological in nature. There can be no question of the manipulation of individuals and masses, but simply of a mission with the goal of converting to the one and only truth. On the contrary, for Bruno, there is only one sacrosanct principle, only one truth, and that is: everything is manipulable, there is absolutely no one who can escape intersubjective relationships, whether these involve a manipulator, a manipulated person, or a tool…Theology itself, the Christian faith, and all other faiths are only beliefs of the masses set up by magic processes (Couliano 93).

There is then, a sense that the “reality” demonstrated and imposed during the post-war era in the U.S. is in fact one of darkness. That is to say, the energy and intelligence inherent to the imaginative faculty, and subsequently, the ability to critically “read” and “interpret” the discourse and images which give shape and substance to “reality,” is shrouded in a sense. The masses or populace must take the present “reality” as “true” with blind faith, i.e. blind faith/darkness/ignorance via an acceptance that the present “reality” is the only possible “reality,” the “spectacle” in Debord’s sense, is “real,” material, “organic.” Deep image poetics is a poetics of engagement with the very forces which impose this “spectacle;” deep image engages with these forces at their core—specifically, the psychical space of the collective unconscious and the language of manipulation and control. In “The Deep Image is the Threatened Image,” Rothenberg writes:

The world as it existed for the first man still exists. It taunts us & breaks
into our dreams. The poet dares to face it without hope & to create from pure desire, from pure love. The world as it existed before man. The primal world, not yet hardened into the mold of law, but a new law to be imposed on it in the daily encounter. A return to the beginning. A struggle to shape the world through the power of the creative moment, the flash of light that overthrows the darkness (Rothenberg 43).

The “poet’s vision,” according to Rothenberg, works methodically against the “protective ‘reality’ & false emblems of the inherited past” (43). Deep image poetics is a struggle for literal and figurative survival against the imposing force of the “spectacle,” the reality of the “naïve realists.” This process of “looking” and more importantly, the predilection for the imaginative faculty is discounted, conveniently and purposefully, in the post-war era in the U.S. According to Dan Featherston, in his essay “On Visionary Poetics, Robert Kelly, and Clayton Eshleman” (2002), the necessity for a poetics of vision is more politically viable and necessary when one closely reads the contemporary “postmodern” epoch, against the backdrop of the 20th century. Featherston writes “…postmodern theory dictates that all ideologies are provisional, culturally constructed, and involve complex power relations. The popularization of such a perspective may help keep in check totalitarian visions, but it has also led to extreme skepticism toward the visionary mode in general” (Featherston 409). The complex and intertwined “power relations” are nearly impossible to disentangle, as opposed to the ability to critically engage with the totalitarian ideologies of the Modern era. The poet’s “vision” and its free-play with the reader’s imaginative and critical faculties are measures which can work toward the on-going process of disentangling the discursive strands that make up the
complex global power relations working at the creation and defense of so-called “reality” in the postmodern era. Ironically, however, Featherston points out that postmodern theory and literature’s push toward dissolution of the totalizing discourses in the wake of the Modern era inscribe an exclusion of the visionary mode in, among other discourses, poetry, philosophy, and politics. In referencing Robert Duncan’s vision for a “symposium of the whole,” Featherston writes:

There is an important distinction, however, between the total vision of a ‘superior paradigm’ and Duncan’s vision of a ‘whole symposium.’ Total means all-inclusive, but the so-called ‘total’ visions of totalitarian states and religions are based on strategic exclusion: Plato’s vision excluded the poet, Nazi Germany’s vision excluded the Jew, and Judeo-Christian vision excludes the heretic… While desires are undoubtedly controlled by shifting power relations (i.e. cultural forces), visionary poetics must question the very foundation of these forces. Duncan’s ‘symposium of the whole’ is one model of vision as the critique of culture, stressing plurality, compassion and coherence by cooperative design against the exclusive, alienating visions of fascism and orthodox religion that made the twentieth century the bloodiest in human history (409).

Featherston suggests that a critical revision of the concept of the “Whole,” taken in tandem with a renewed urgency and admission of the visionary mode in contemporary poetry, is essential. The postmodern reality may be composed of fractured and at times competing power relations, yet these forces are no less “dangerous” or influential than the totalizing discourses of the 20th century. And any effort to confront these forces, on any
of the many discursive fronts on which this confrontation may take place, a “united front” that takes as its impetus Duncan’s “symposium of the whole” is necessary. Deep image poetics, and Kelly’s assertion that they are in fact the “Last Scientists of the Whole,” engages in the inclusive, plural, cooperative, and visionary critique of the fractured and dispersed exclusionary discourses which compose the postmodern reality. As Featherston notes in the visionary poetics of Robert Kelly and Clayton Eshleman, as well as the deep image poets, they all engage in a poetics that is “…‘boundary-crossing’: breaking down the self/other dichotomy, viewing reality instead as a vast web of interdependency…the rationalist mind has failed us, and in the next millennium survival will increasingly mean global survival” (412).

The rhetoric of “survival” and “urgency” in Kelly and Rothenberg’s theorization of the deep image is tied intrinsically to the visionary mode in poetry in general, and its relationship to the “urgency” of postmodern critique in the work of philosophers like Derrida and Blanchot. In “Notes on the Poetry of Deep Image,” Kelly proclaims “The need for urgency, for tension in the work itself, cannot be exaggerated. The language of deep images restores the poetry of desperation” (Kelly 16). Although deep image poetics develops out of the post-war American landscape, the struggle, “tension,” and “urgency” in the project is a global concern, a “cosmological” concern. Cultural forces and their discursive regimes invent, impose, and secure a “reality” that purports to explain the “nature of the universe,” how it functions, what are its “origins,” and more dangerously its “boundaries.” These forces do not act in harmony; often they compete and cancel one another out via exclusion, censorship, and shifts in narrative perspective, as well as environmental, social, political, and economic conditions. The dissolution of the
dichotomy self/Other at the heart of the deep image project is always already as Robert Duncan notes in his response to Kelly and Rothenberg’s work “…the quest for wholeness (the whole self and the whole world lie in the same event—we find ourselves as we find the world)” (Duncan 300).  

Deep image poetics is predicated on process, on active and charged physical and psychical spaces as the “Center” of the act of creation. The work of the deep image is the act of “Creation,” much like in primordial and indigenous cultures in which the world is consistently re-made in every act of creation. The space of the poem’s composition is the repetition of a cosmological act of creation that always already re-creates the world, subsequently disrupting and dismantling the imposed “reality” structured and ordered by competing powerful discursive forces. The poet always returns to the realm of “Creation.” Mircea Eliade’s explorations of the act of creation and its relation to archetypal hero quests, juxtaposed to the concept of the poet as the “hero,” consistently entering the primordial chaotic darkness in an attempt to always already re-create the world, demonstrates the significance of the poetic act of “Creation” inherent in deep image poetics. In his study The Myth of the Eternal Return, or, Cosmos and History (1949, 1954), Eliade explores the path of the “hero” or “seeker” in mythology, and this “personal” or “individual” path’s relationship to the larger, cosmological “Whole.” The active “quest” in mythology, as well as the action of the poem’s composition, is a perilous, arduous, and “desperate” necessary task, that often involves the “seeker” exploring the passage from Self to Other, or more importantly, from Self to “World.” Eliade writes that “…the road is arduous, fraught with perils, because it is, in fact, a rite of the passage from the profane to the sacred, from the ephemeral and illusory to reality
and eternity” (Eliade 18). And through the act of poetic composition, and the initiatory role the seeker’s quest plays, according to Eliade, “…yesterday’s profane and illusory existence gives place to a new, to a life that is real, enduring, and effective…the act of Creation realizes the passage from the nonmanifest to the manifest or, to speak cosmologically, from chaos to cosmos” (18). Finally, the two propositions that Eliade explores across his entire study echoes Derrida’s reading of Plato’s *Timeus*, and where poetic composition, specifically deep image poetics, stands in relation to the “creation” of the “world” and more importantly the action of shaping, transforming, and “deconstructing” “reality.” Eliade insists “1. Every creation repeats the pre-eminent cosmogonic act, the Creation of the World [and] 2. Consequently, whatever is founded has its foundation at the center of the world” (18).

The material, organic, “center” out of which the “world” is created is language. This is the sentiment expressed adamantly in much of Robert Duncan’s critical work; and it is through Duncan’s work that this chapter on the poetics and politics of vision in deep image poetry begins to arrive at an end, or more appropriately, the “beginning” of the real, organic “meat” of this study’s concern, the work of poets Jerome Rothenberg and Robert Kelly. Returning to Duncan’s “Truth and Life of Myth,” he writes “…there is a drive to clear away the mythopoeic, the areas of creative and fictional contamination, and to establish a text in the light of what modern man is reasonably convinced is the likely or likeable truth of things” (Duncan 5). Poetry, deep image poetry, is the “contaminated,” “bastard” and “hybrid” discourse that Derrida demands in his *Khōra* (the essay) and for his khōra, the discourse that “exceeds the polarity…of the *mythos* and the *logos*…Giving place to oppositions” (Derrida 92). In locating the individual, the subject who is poet, in
relation to this discourse, Duncan writes, in his essay “Towards an Open Universe,” “Each poet seeks to commune with creation, with the divine world; that is to say, he seeks the most real form in language. But this most real is something we apprehend; the poem, the creation of the poem, is itself our primary experience of it” (Duncan 78). The poet’s vision, as deployed in the space of the poem’s composition, is the making of “reality,” and it is the dismantling of reality as such, in opposition to the “reality” presented, imposed, and in the “society of the spectacle,” consistently re-presented in competing images, discursive realms, and power relations.

The chapters which follow interrogate how as a “base” the deep image project informs and illuminates the work of Jerome Rothenberg and Robert Kelly. More importantly, the chapters which follow demonstrate the politics inherent in a poetics of vision, and how each of these poets engage with the concept of “whole,” or to put it another way, how the poetics of the deep image make it possible for the poet to maintain her position in the world throughout the course of human history as the “Last Scientist of the Whole.” To inaugurate the true “body” of this dissertation, and to conclude this chapter, I turn once more to Robert Kelly’s “Statement” (1968), in which he inaugurates the work to “come” of the deep image poets, more specifically, the switch from “image,” or at least to a more fully developed “deep image” poetics that intrinsically interrogates language as the chaotic prima materia at the root of the discursive spaces which call “reality” into being:

Our several adventures thereafter would have to do with word, only earth of the poem. From which everything comes, from everywhere. Past the limits of our in-
intentions. The hard work of attention begins. *Trobar* stops
meaning to find & begins to mean: make.

Last of the materialists,
the poet salutes the morning alone

(Kelly, 1968).
“Write in order not simply to destroy, in order not simply to conserve, in order not to transmit; write in the thrall of the impossible real, that share of disaster wherein every reality, safe and sound, sinks.” – Maurice Blanchot, from *The Writing of the Disaster*

“So, something more than literature is going on here: for ourselves, let me suggest, the question of how the concept & techniques of the ‘sacred’ can persist in the ‘secular’ world, not as nostalgia for the archaic past but (as Snyder writes) ‘a vehicle to ease us into the future.’” – Jerome Rothenberg, from *The Poetics of Shamanism*

This chapter will explore Jerome Rothenberg’s work as poet, performer, translator, and anthologist in regards to how his initial work in theorizing the deep image lays the foundation for a commitment to the poem as a political act. This will be achieved beginning with an exploration of the archaic shaman, and how Rothenberg re-envisions and embodies this figure for the postmodern global landscape. Through his work, and through the relationship forged between language as an organic substance, and literal “bodies” as the subjects which compose the global landscape. This chapter will consider Rothenberg as poet-shaman, subsequently reinforcing this project’s assertion that language is organic, physical and psychical material in reality, and thus poetic language asserts tremendous power and influence on the creation and transformation of the material “world.”

In his study titled *The World of Shamanism: New Views of An Ancient Tradition* (2007), Roger Walsh addresses how shamanism and shamanistic practices extend to various regions and peoples of the world. He poses the question: “…would shamanic practices remain so remarkably stable in so many cultures, while language and social
practices change so drastically?” (Walsh 17). Furthermore, he insists that “…some recurring combination of social forces and innate abilities led to the repeated discovery of shamanic practices and states of consciousness in diverse times and cultures” (18).

Walsh considers how shamanism “moves” or “journeys” across time and cultures. Although his study is more concerned with tracing the origins of global shamanism and how it continues to represent itself against a global Capital Empire that seeks to dissolve primordial cultures into a more homogenous global consumer culture, Walsh presents an argument for a re-consideration of shamanism and shamanic practices which he considers vital to the literal survival of humans as a species as well as the preservation and protection of the natural environment. In doing so, Walsh illuminates the way shamanism “moves” or “flows” across cultures and regions. As this chapter will demonstrate, Rothenberg is also concerned with shamanic practice and the shaman as the proto-poet as an extension of his demand for a poetry of difference and heterogeneity. In his poetry, as well as his anthologies and translations, Rothenberg, like Walsh, discovers networks of figurative and literal “bodies’ which continue the work of the global shaman.

Walsh concedes that traditionally, shamanism and shamanic practices “…occur primarily in particular types of societies: nomadic and hunting and gathering tribes. These people have little agriculture and almost no social classes or political organizations” (18). If, as I argue, there is a political dimension to Rothenberg’s development of deep image poetics, it is predicated on this kind of reading of the political and social fabric of not only the U.S. in the post-war moment, but the transformations that occur on the global landscape in the years following the Second World War. The effects of emerging global Capital, the struggles for independence and the postcolonial
moment, and the development of new economic and political realities in the world all inform deep image poetics and Rothenberg’s deployment of the poet-shaman in his poetry and anthologies. As Walsh insists, “As societies become fixed rather than nomadic, agricultural rather than foraging, and socially and politically stratified rather than classless, then shamanism as such, dwindles” (18). However, as Rothenberg’s work demonstrates, certain strains of poetry and poetics represent a direct engagement with new global societies which are not fixed, are heterogeneous and not homogenous, and offer up a new reading of the shaman and her role, without making a reductive attempt at “resurrecting” an outmoded, historically or culturally specific model of the shaman or poet-shaman.

I. The Poet as Shaman

In the many forms that his work takes, Jerome Rothenberg argues poignantly for a poetics of “sanctity,” to the extent that each act of poetic composition is in itself a “sacred” act, owing its power to the very power that language is imbued with in its role as “creator” of the living world we call “reality.” The key concept demonstrated in Rothenberg’s earliest writings, poesis, begins to lay bare the relationship between the sacredness of language, and subsequently the way in which poetry is simultaneously a charged “spiritual” space and a secular act. In his book, In Search of the Primitive, Sherman Paul illuminates Rothenberg’s coming to the concept of poesis. According to Paul, it is in the editorial statement in the first issue of New Wilderness Letter, where Rothenberg:
…joins Antin and Snyder, using Breton as a link. From Antin he takes a definition of poesis: ‘those linguistic acts of invention & discovery through which the mind explores the transformational powers of language & discovers & invents the world & itself.’ This fundamental work of mind is ‘sacred action’ (Breton), what Snyder, himself so much an explorer of consciousness, defines as ‘the real work of modern man: to uncover the inner structure & actual boundaries of the mind’” (Paul 76).

By recognizing the linguistic material inherent in consciousness, and then tracing this linguistic space across the very foundation of the known (and infinitely unknown) world, Rothenberg demonstrates the centrality of the subject, specifically the individual’s psychical and physical actions, and the resulting transformations that these acts incur upon the landscape of reality. More importantly, rather than emphasizing the individual’s power as hierarchically structured or ordered, he levels the proverbial playing field by demonstrating the power and effectiveness of the total web of individuals, i.e. “the mind (which) explores the transformational powers of language & discovers & invents the world & itself” is a collective human act. This is important to note; as the discussion of Rothenberg as “shaman” progresses, it is essential to understand the ways in which the poet/shaman’s powers are predicated on the reader/recipient’s “belief” in the power and efficacy of poesis. To clarify, the work of the poet-shaman is two-fold: first, to help the reader come to the self-realization that the physical and psychical are structured, ordered, and called into being by language, and second, to have the reader participate in the language event or poesis (the creation of meaning, what the poem illuminates, the activity that the poetic work seeks to initiate, etc.) to ensure that the charged energy of poetic
language comes to full fruition. This dance or interplay between poet and reader, conscious and unconscious, mind and “world,” is reflected in Rothenberg’s early poems, coinciding in his and Kelly’s theorization of the deep image. The figure of the shaman begins to emerge in these early poems too, in particular the shaman’s use of both voice/breath in linguistic utterances, but also, the quasi-Surreal images that emerge in the dream like space that poet-shaman and initiate/reader enter into in the dance of poesis.

Likewise, it is in these early poems where Rothenberg most clearly attempts to differentiate deep image from Surrealism, and he seeks to answer Creeley’s concerns that a poem based entirely on “image” can simply fall into “pictorialism” vacant of any real poetic “power” of transformation. Two poems from this early period, “A Poem for the Weather” from _White Sun Black Sun_ (1960), and “Words” from _Between_ (1960), demonstrate Rothenberg’s own initiation into the role of poet/shaman.

In “A Poem for the Weather,” a series of Surreal-esque images come together in an effort to describe the literal “atmosphere” or zeitgeist of the emerging Post-War decades. Here Rothenberg uses the absurd conjunction of disparate images to evoke the dream-like state that is 1960, as well as demonstrate that this “dream reality” is in itself as absurd and contingent upon language and image as the “dream state” engaged in the unconscious mind of the sleeping dreamer.

In the eye of my needle
everything sprang into life:
a dog, a town
and an ocean.
Roses grew tigers

100
and someone spilled rain on my scarf.

Over the moon we could hear
the voice of the president,
clear as a church bell,
simple as ether:

under the oranges,
summer sat without moths (Rothenberg 8).

The first two lines of the poem indicate the poet’s role as visionary and creator. The first line “In the eye of my needle” combines vision and creation, the “eye” being both the literal, physical “eye” which sees and aids in the interpretation of reality, and the “mind’s eye” associated with prophecy and vision. The poet’s vision is sharp and poignant, located on the tip of a needle, not visible to the naked literal eye. Instead of relying simply on the literal sense of sight, the poet contemplates, meditates on the tip of the needle; he knows it is there even though he cannot physically see it, yet he can sense it and “see” it under the microscope of poetic mediation. The “eye” too is “I” the poet as subject and speaker; he is participating in creating the world. The “I”/ “eye” of the needle threads strands of language together to form the “whole” world or picture. And it is a much more “real” world than the fabricated reality of the Postwar moment, crafted by ideologues, professors, presidents, and businessmen in tweed jackets. “Everything sprang into life” in the moment of the poem’s composition, in a direct assault on the other absurd “reality” of Rothenberg’s much despised “naive realists.” Behind the post-
enlightenment face of the supposed progress of the post-war world of the “naïve realists” lies the Judeo-Christian narrative of the origins of the world. While on the surface, the “naïve realists” insist on a narrative in which reason and science have triumphed in the post-war decades, they rely on an adherence to the Genesis creation myth in which God calls the world into being via language, or to paraphrase, “in the beginning was the word.” The clean, efficient way the world was created in the Genesis myth, even allowing a little time off on Sunday for church and “rest,” is re-articulated and revised in “A Poem for the Weather” in the lines “everything sprang into life:/a dog, a town/and an ocean”(8). Rothenberg insists on the creative force of poetic language to call the world into being, from the individual “dog” to the vast enormity of the “ocean,” on the page. He argues that if the Genesis creation myth as text or narrative can prove to be so charged with “truth” and “value” in the creation and defense of the everyday world of the “naïve realists,” then certainly the same power can be encapsulated in the deep image poem. However, in the lines immediately following: “Roses grew tigers/and someone spilled rain on my scarf,” Rothenberg demonstrates that the creative force in the making of the “world” as it occurs in the deep image poem is not a singular deity, but the word itself. Whereas the God of the Genesis myth is the maker, the controller of language’s creative force: “and God said ‘Let there be…,” the language of the deep image poem imagines its own reality, and it often resists the confines of what the literal “eye” sees, namely “a dog, a town/and an ocean.” Rather, the imaginative, un-tethered language of the unconscious, closely regarded as the origins of the deep image, spring to an other “reality” in which “Roses grew tigers.”
These two lines also demonstrate the influence of Surrealism, namely its visual manifestation, on the development of deep image poetics. Similarly, the occult influence on Surrealism and subsequently deep image, and the attraction of occult knowledge as a means of resisting the Judeo-Christian base in the post-war period, are made manifest in the remaining lines of “A Poem for the Weather.” Nadia Choucha, a writer and lecturer on magic and art argues in her book *Surrealism and the Occult: Shamanism, Magic, Alchemy and the Birth of an Artistic Movement* (1992) that “…the surrealist approach to knowledge is an essentially occult approach, for it aimed at a universal, coherent synthesis of different forms of thought that would then enable the subversion and transformation of reality” (Choucha 65). Rothenberg locates shamanism as a part of the larger universal occult synthesis. The energies inherent in occult knowledge, particularly as it is practiced by primordial societies, does not adhere to the hard and true boundaries that modernity has constructed between, among other realms, the physical or “natural” world, consciousness, and the body. Historically, in ceremonial states and in the very act of initiation itself, it is the shaman that traverses the fluid boundaries and engages in an act of synthesis that can be referred to as poesis in relation to contemporary American poetry in the vein of deep image. The surreal absurdity of Rothenberg’s language in his early work is a testament to his coming into a poetics of shamanism, particularly in light of Mircea Eliade’s edict, from his groundbreaking seminal work *Shamanism* (1964), that “shamanism = technique of ecstasy” (4). Rothenberg’s “A Poem for the Weather” delights in an ecstatic dismantling of language’s utility in the modern world view, and instead subverts and corrupts language in what Choucha referred to as “…the subversion and transformation of reality” (65).
Rothenberg writes: “Over the moon we could hear/ the voice of the president,/ clear as a church bell,/ simple as ether:” (8). The moon is a charged “image”; it is the celestial body that has profound sway over the physical earth and the bodies that inhabit it. The moon dictates oceanic tides; it determines menstruation. Yet in the historical context from out of which Rothenberg is writing, the moon’s mysterious powers are swept aside. Instead the moon will become a “destination” in the 1960’s, a literal place where the U.S. and Soviet Union can attempt to assert their symbolic dominance by the cunning use of flags. Rothenberg, on the other hand, re-enchants or recharges the moon. For it is “the voice of the president” that is merely figurative and vacant, juxtaposed to the supposed clarity of the “church bell” that is only good for lulling the masses to sleep, “simple as ether.” The moon figures prominently in other poems from *White Sun Black Sun*, most notably “The Night The Moon Was A Spider,” in which the moon bears witness to an unnamed terror and by doing so, participates in the poet-shaman’s initiation from “The scraping of/ wheels over rock/in the dark of the moon” to the moon’s light piercing and entering the poet’s “heart” in the shape of “an icicle [that] broke from the sky” while the poet’s lover fails to dream (5). Earlier lines of the poem suggest the poet and the lover’s inability to “sing,” his hands are even “bound behind,” but when the poet gazes at the moon and is pierced by its light, one is given the sense that the moon, first as image, as spider, has now empowered the poet since the poet is now cognizant of a connection or symbiotic relationship with the moon’s power over both physical reality and consciousness. This is much more powerful than the profane “scraping of/wheels” that occurs as “the soldiers drove by” (5). And this occurs during “dream time,” which is significant to the shaman’s technique of ecstasy. Rothenberg’s foray into the space of
shamanic initiation in *White Sun Black Sun* is the deep image in action. As Sherman Paul notes in *In Search of the Primitive*, “Rothenberg proposes that we explore the dream time and include it, make it coextensive with our ‘reality’ …The boundary between dream and ‘reality’ is nullified by the deep image [which is] the first instance of the *poesis* that opens the door” (80-81).

Where as the poems in *White Sun Black Sun* demonstrate Rothenberg’s struggle to write “deep image poetry” in which the image is charged like an energy cluster, it is in *Between* where Rothenberg more fully realizes the juxtaposition and symbiotic relationship between word and image that he has been synthesizing alongside Robert Kelly. Rothenberg will later note in his *Poetics of Shamanism* (1968), “the shaman can be seen as proto-poet, for almost always his technique hinges on the creation of special linguistic circumstances” (186). By juxtaposing Rothenberg’s notes on the poetics of shamanism, with the poem “Words” from *Between* (1960), one can sense that Rothenberg’s foray into deep image is also his initiation into the role of shamanic proto-poet. He writes:

Terror of words
positions &
dispositions
around a burning
center

Words on paper
in the wounded light
of trees
& undercurrents (14).

The “words” of Rothenberg’s poem are living, breathing organisms; and there is a “terror” associated with this concept. However, the “terror” can be considered from two mutually exclusive positions on this concept of a living, organic dimension to word and language. One sense is that “terror” lies in language as seeming opaque; that for some there is nothing visible beyond the material word itself. The word is referential and there is no inside, and no outside, there is only the WORD. This is the terror of “positions,” unyielding and unwavering, in a word—dogmatic: “Terror of words/positions” (14). In the same opening lines, Rothenberg gestures toward the “dispositions” of words which hover “around a burning/center.” The words’ “dispositions” may appear, on the surface, habitual and programmatic. However, Rothenberg accentuates the “burning/center” around which the words dance, and it is from this “burning/center” that shamanic illumination and initiation develops. Sherman Paul remarks that “Deep image…carried the hope, like poetry in general, of ‘finding the center’” (88). Here, Rothenberg does not hint at a single center or focal point, so much as he locates the “center” in language itself. It’s as if he is dismantling the Logos and instead locating language’s center in the dark, unexplored spaces including “the wounded light/of trees/& undercurrents,” “uncut bread/in curves of uncut bread,” and the physical “curve of words/of uncut space” (14). Rothenberg dismantles the monotheistic Logos of WORD and brings it “down to earth” in physical and psychical spaces. He illuminates what lies at the heart of the deep image, what he will later define as “…the central image of shamanism & all ‘primitive’ thought,
the intuition…of a connected & fluid universe, as alive as a man is—just that much alive” (Rothenberg 188).

In his guise as poet-shaman, Rothenberg traverses the cultural and spiritual poetics of global cultures in an effort to play the “medicine man” to an increasingly ailing and fragmented “world,” and he does so most profoundly in his development of ethnopoetics. However, Rothenberg eschews the follies of some of his peers by not ever being the affective poet in some indigenous ceremonial dress, donned in the back rooms of college auditoriums, as he waits to meet his gathered supplicants. Rather, Rothenberg remains true to his own ethnic, geographical, and other paths of “origin.” He is always the Jewish kid from the Bronx, turned on by and tuned into the pulse of a global poetics that somehow speaks in communal tongues toward a larger, cosmological “Whole.”

Jerome Rothenberg’s landmark anthology, *Technicians of the Sacred*, first appeared in 1967. *Technicians* is a gathering of “primordial” and “primitive” poetry gathered from several regions of the globe. Its publication not only announced the arrival of what would later come to be called ethnopoetics, but more importantly, Rothenberg’s Pre-Face reconceived the concept of “primitive” for postmodern poetry in the shadow of Cold War era U.S. foreign policy. Rothenberg’s concept of the primitive dismantles prior concepts regarding “primitive” or “primordial” cultures including the figure of the shaman, the role of the poetic in both primordial and contemporary cultures, and re-visions the poetic and role of the poet-shaman.

Rothenberg’s reputation is far reaching as both poet and anthologist. Unlike many of his contemporaries, the anthologies that Rothenberg assembles are not designed to demonstrate the best or most highly regarded poetry of a particular region, capture the
mood of a specific literary or historical time period, or canonize a specific “school” of poetry. Rather, Rothenberg’s anthologies are events; they announce not only the work contained within, but more significantly, a set of poetic and philosophical concepts designed to “shake-up” and disrupt standard modes of thinking and conceptualization. *Technicians of the Sacred* is a first of its kind gathering of global “primordial” or “primitive” poetry. More importantly, *Technicians* explores the role of the poetic and the everyday, as it is incorporated into the rituals, ceremonies, and daily meditations of people from across the global-historical spectrum.

Rothenberg announces in his Pre-Face “There are no half-formed languages, no underdeveloped or inferior languages. Everywhere a development has taken place into structures of great complexity” (xxv). So-called historical and contemporary “primitive” cultures continue to live beneath a veil of inferiority in the eyes of many Westerners. However, what Rothenberg adeptly points out is that “primitive means complex,” and even a cursory study of any “primitive” language demonstrates a web of complexity that immediately shatters the Western assumption that “primitive” cultures are somehow backwards or culturally lacking. For Rothenberg, “What is true of language in general is equally true of poetry & of the ritual systems of which so much poetry is a part. It is a question of energy & intelligence as universal constants &, in any specific case, the direction that energy & intelligence (=imagination) have been given”(xxv).18 “Energy” and “intelligence” traverse socio-political, historical, and geographical boundaries. As Rothenberg edits and compiles *Technicians of the Sacred*, he is not playing archivist but rather bringing to fore what lies buried beneath a tremendous deluge of historical and ideological narratives.
The ritual systems of primordial cultures weave intrinsic links among poetry and art, ritual and ceremony, as well as the social, political, and economic fabrics of societies. For Rothenberg then, a re-articulation of the poetic as it pertains to everyday life is not a matter of arriving at a “space” for poetry and song, but rather the development of a virtual yet organic, cognitive space that is always already a direct link between the poetic and the everyday as well as an intrinsic piece of the “real world” as it is experienced daily. Like dada, Futurism minus its predilection for fascism, and other movements in the historical avant garde, it would appear that by the 1967 Pre-Face to *Technicians*, Rothenberg declares it time to toss out the old Western Eurocentric Vision, and start from scratch, more specifically from the rearticulated and complex “primitive.” The reader, Rothenberg will argue, is as significant a part of creating meaning and developing new more inclusive and self-reflexive poetic, philosophical, and socio-political forms. And it is in this relationship between reader and poet, global shaman and global ‘tribe” where the poetic engages directly with the contemporary “landscape,” the literal and figurative “bodies” which compose the world and “reality.”

Energy and intelligence, Rothenberg reminds us, are universal constants; the imagination is alive and well, but it tumbles about in a myriad of directions, some of which develop under coercion and others under the sway of apathy and boredom. In Rothenberg’s *Technicians*, “gnosis” is the impetus or direction intended for many of the “primitive” poems from the human archaic and beyond. In his commentaries, Rothenberg refers to “gnosis” as “(=knowing) in the sense of ‘enlightenment’ or ‘illumination’(587). Although the term comes directly from Gnosticism, a contemporary of and at times a part of early Christianity, Rothenberg defines it more readily as “the last
outburst of the about-to-be-subterranean pagan world [which includes] a sense of myth as process & conflict, & a virtual clash of symbols (P. Ricoeur) in contrast to the fixed imagery and single vision of orthodox thought, whether religious or scientific”(587).

Emerging from the orthodoxy and ashes of the tumultuous 20th Century is a sense that “gnosis” has been sacrificed on the altar of finality, finale, END. Rothenberg takes his readers back to the complexity of the “primitive” in all its glorious chaos: the potential inherent in that unbounded, open space and formless matter that existed before the creation of the universe. Rothenberg’s foray into creating anthologies is analogous to his work as shaman-poet. From his aforementioned participation in the poetry community on the Lower East Side of New York in the late fifties and early sixties, to his dedication to translation as an inherently political means of keeping languages and cultures that run the risk of becoming extinct with each passing decade, Rothenberg engages in a kind of shamanic dance. In his exploration of contemporary shamanic practices, Breaking Open the Head: A Psychedelic Journey into the heart of Contemporary Shamanism (2002), Daniel Pinchbeck demonstrates a significant link between 19th and 20th Century poetry and the shamanic tradition. Many of the poets that Pinchbeck identifies are major figures in Rothenberg’s development as a young poet. Pinchbeck writes:

Like tribal shamans, the artists saw themselves, in Ezra Pound’s phrase, as ‘the antennae of the race.’ In a secular culture, they were the ones who journeyed into the land of the dead, who crafted images of an elusive sublime, who went into ecstatic states of inspiration…Writers like Gertrude Stein, Tristan Tzara, or James Joyce explored private languages or languages explicitly made out of nonsense—similar to the shaman’s
common practice of glossolalia, speaking in tongues during trance. The
shaman’s songs were taught to him by the spirits; the chants of the
Modernist poet were expressions of alienation from a dehumanized and
demystified world (114).

Even the commentaries found in Technicians of the Sacred and his other anthologies
do not fit the model of traditional “criticism.” The commentaries celebrate the vibrant
life and spirit inherent in the work of each tradition, as well as juxtapose primordial
poetry and song to other figures and movements that traverse history, culture, language,
and artistic medium. As is the case with his poetry, and his dedication to gnosis as
“(=knowing) in the sense of ‘enlightenment’ or ‘illumination,” Rothenberg opens the
anthology as a genre, demanding that the reader too make connections and recognize the
fluidity of poetics, language, and world cultures. A juxtaposition of a selection from
Technicians, “The Round Dance of Jesus,” with Blake’s “Introduction” to The Songs of
Innocence and Experience demonstrates the mode of vision that Rothenberg takes to his
work as an anthologist. It is a continuation of the poetic vision that inspired his
explorations into the poets and poetics “neglected” by his formal teachers; however,
Technicians and Rothenberg’s other ethnopoetics anthologies also demonstrate a
continuation of deep image poetics, well beyond the initial formalizations and subsequent
departure from the term. From “The Round Dance of Jesus” (Syriac: the Ancient Near
East):

all Grace Sweet Mind the Dance is round

I blow the pipe for

all are in the Round Dance
I will pipe
all dance along (Rothenberg 337)

Both of these poems, though separated across cultural and historical boundaries, consider the role of “participation” within the act of making meaning. Similarly, the figure of the poet is the figure of the musician, leading the readers in a dance, or interplay of the sensual and intellectual faculties. The Syriac poem is in the first-person, presumably narrated by the “Jesus” of the title. The narrator plays the pipe and gives sound and rhythm to the “Round Dance” in which all are participating. The proper name “Jesus” indicates the poem’s probable inclusion in a religious ceremony of some sort, but unlike the mythical Pied-Piper who leads the single-minded rats, this “Jesus” is both literally and figuratively a pre-textual “Jesus.” This is the rebellious, anti-dogmatic “Jesus” that pre-dates his inscription in the New Testament, and the literal age of the “text,” in this case an oral transmission, comes before the “inscription” of the figure of “Jesus” as the godhead of a new religion which, when fully developed and deployed as the “Church,” dictates rather than invites ritual participation. The only room left in the “Church” for participation is the repetition of pre-inscribed responses. One should consider the Syriac Ancient Near East, “Round Dance,” more in line with the “call and response” traditions that traverse the Near East and African continent, which value improvisation and celebratory participation, as opposed to dogmatic and subservient repetition.

Blake’s Introduction to the Songs of Innocence and Experience comes centuries later, yet validates a similar poetics and the act of ritual participation in the act of making meaning. From “Introduction” to Songs of Innocence:
‘Piper, sit thee down and write
In a book, that all may read’
So he vanished from my sight,
And I pluck’d a hollow reed,

And I made a rural pen,
And I stain’d the water clear (Blake 7)

Presumably, Blake is the narrator of the *Songs* and readers know him as both their author and performer. However, although Blake is known as the “author,” it is also known that Blake literally sang these songs, which leaves open an interesting space whereby Blake can also serve as the songs’ “translator,” also leaving open the question of poetic inspiration. If the “Round Dance of Jesus” is “narrated” by Jesus and sung by the Syrian poet via an act of translation or transmission, then the same must be considered when “reading” the textual inscriptions of Blake’s “oral” based songs. In these lines from the introduction, the poet instructs the piper to “sit thee down and write,” but it is the performer who plucks the “hollow reed” and constructs the “rural pen.” Also, there is an interplay between the sounds made from the piper’s “reed” and the literal act of “reading” Blake’s *Songs*. The piper is asked to write a book that “all may read,” which is indicative of the oral tradition to which Blake is alluding. The text of the *Songs* is meant to be distinct from the songs themselves, which come to full fruition when sung, or in Blake’s terminology, when “all may read.” Blake demands that the reader participate in the act of creating meaning out of the *Songs*, yet he also suggests that the very act of reading the *Songs* is analogous to singing or performing the songs.
When taken alongside the Syrian “Round Dance of Jesus,” both poems reconsider the role of the poet for the contemporary audience, and both indicate Rothenberg’s role as poet-shaman and how his foray into ethnopoetics is a continuation of the deep image “project.” Rothenberg, as poet-shaman, aims at a sense of unity, a community coming together, but without the dissolution of difference for the sake of unity. For the sake of Rothenberg’s role as poet-shaman as it pertains to ethnopoetics specifically, one need not look further than the “Pre-Face” to *Technicians of the Sacred*. In *Technicians*, recall that Rothenberg is stressing the diversity of so-called “primitive” poetry; more importantly, he is demonstrating the breadth and complexity of the work which is also in and of itself a political statement. The collecting and publishing of the work, the translation and performance of the work, is the political act. As demonstrated in chapter two, Rothenberg’s coming into poetry, including his significant interest in poetry in languages other than English, as well as the avant garde tradition, pre-dates both deep image and ethnopoetics. However, these interests, as well as his own familial religious and cultural history as evidenced in the coming meditation on Khurbn, draw him to the “primitive” traditions of the past. Although an intellectually suspect statement, Rothenberg can certainly be said to have personally “connected” to the material. However, he is not simply “identifying” with the proverbial “other” in a vague celebration of cultural difference; it is the inherent energy and potential of these “primitive” modes of poetry that drives Rothenberg and it is his recognition of these “archaic” modes as they represent themselves in modernity that also draws him to them. In the Pre-face to *Technicians*, Rothenberg reminds his readers that “it’s very hard to decide what precisely are the boundaries of ‘primitive’ poetry…what we would separate as music & dance &
myth & painting is also part of that work, & the need for separation is a question of ‘our’ interest and preconceptions, not of ‘theirs’” (70). In modernity, lines have been drawn among the artistic disciplines, as deep as ideological and geographical lines have been drawn politically, religiously, and spatially. By drawing attention to “primitive” poetry, Rothenberg demands that his readers re-engage with a “world” before these divisions were made known, in an attempt to positively affect the future and atone for the mistakes of the past. This is not to say that he does not consider the history of human strife and warfare or the attempt to manipulate and control the natural world over thousands of years. To do so would be a haphazard and intellectually flat and worn critique of his work, as well as an immediate, if not unconscious, dismissal of the primary “primitive” texts. Rather, consider Rothenberg’s project from a much broader, or “whole” perspective, in which he is attempting to access a physical and psychical realm (his “floating world”) that has always been, even when relegated to the dark and mysterious recesses of the individual and collective unconscious of the human and all of the cosmological universe itself. There is no “separation” in the “floating world” between myth and dance, poetry and song, or for that matter—thought and action. These separations are an imposition and a barrier to accessing the larger whole that the so-called “primitives” accessed, or what Rothenberg refers to in his title (using Mircea Eliade’s language) the “Sacred.” And it is the boundary between the “real” world and the “sacred” realm that Rothenberg as poet-shaman attempts to move between. He solidifies this position in a long passage from the Pre-face to Technicians and here I quote him at length:

The poet (who may also be dancer, singer, magician, whatever the event
demands of him) masters a series of techniques that can fuse the most seemingly contradictory propositions. But above all there’s a sense-of-unity that surrounds the poem, a reality concept that acts as a cement, a unification of perspective linking poet & man
man & world
world & image
image & word
word & music
music & dance
dance & dancer
dancer & man
man & world
man & world
etc.
all of which has been put in many ways—by Cassirer notably as a feeling for ‘the solidarity of all life’ leading toward a ‘law of metamorphosis’ in thought & word (72).

The poet-shaman strives for unity “leading toward a ‘law of metamorphosis’ in thought & word,” in which thought and word are always changing and enacting a transformative power upon the physical and psychical world. In the Pre-face, Rothenberg defines the poet-shaman “as poet & seer through the control of … an open ‘visionary’ situation prior
to all system-making (“priesthood”) in which the man creates through dream (image) & word (song), ‘that Reason may have ideas to build on’ (W. Blake)” (74).

Diane Wakoski’s short essay “Jerome Rothenberg’s Deep Image” further draws strong connections between Rothenberg’s role as poet-shaman, and how a direct link can be made between deep image and ethnopoetics, and the development of Rothenberg’s role as poet-shaman. Wakoski writes, regarding Rothenberg’s translations of “The 17 Horse-Songs of Frank Mitchell,” found in *Technicians of the Sacred*:

Going inward, he finds reasons other than personal autobiography to identify with Native Americans. This is…a step deeper on the inward journey to find the self which can ‘refocus on the world through the eyes-of-feeling.’ This descent into the depth of racial, ethnic and psychological self in Rothenberg’s poetry goes to a place where language becomes more and more abstract, less personal in a sense, thus more universal…Going even deeper and deeper into the tunnel of self, so that seeing this way, as he describes in the essay [“Why Deep Image?”], ‘results in certain necessary changes on the material’” (4-5).

Whether she intentionally overlooks the very political immediacy of Rothenberg’s poetry aside (she goes so far as to state that “this is no political act”), Wakoski’s reading of Rothenberg actually reinforces the relationship between deep image and ethnopoetics to the energy and political immediacy of the work of the poet-shaman. Regardless of the form the poem takes, oral or written, painted or sung, it is always a descent into “the depth of racial, ethnic, and psychological self,” particularly a descent toward a universal
or unified “language” of the self. What is missing or lacking in Wakoski’s consideration of this descent is a “cosmological self” that also accounts for the material world and universe. As demonstrated in the passage from the Pre-face to Technicians, Rothenberg’s descent will reconcile not only racial or ethnic “difference,” but it will go so far as to reconcile “poet & man/ man & world/ world & image.”

The “Conversation With Jerome Rothenberg” (VORT 7, 1975), functions like many other interviews with Rothenberg; he uses the mode of dialogue/conversation not only as a way of articulating or clarifying his ideas, but of strengthening previous notions and creating new pathways and connections. In this exchange, Rothenberg reflects on deep image after he has gathered the collections in Technicians of the Sacred, Shaking the Pumpkin, and with George Quasha America, A Prophecy. While reflecting on these anthologies and deep image, he inadvertently defines his role as poet-shaman, and defines the political immediacy of his work. Rothenberg states that deep image was “an attempt to bring the objective & subjective world together & to try to irradicate [sp] the differences between them” (140). This was done by recognizing the poem as the movement between perception and vision; Rothenberg states that the deep image poets had a “gnostic sense of a myth of lost meanings: of a ‘merely’ eternalized world without resonances: a mechanized world whose lost resonances the poem, the activity of making the poem, both discovered and created” (140).

In keeping with Rothenberg’s movement toward a poetics that is “alive” and part of a larger “connected & fluid universe,” so too is his foray into ethnopoetics an expression of his role as a poet-shaman. More specifically, his work in developing ethnopoetics is centered around a more significant concept, that of a communal or
community-centered poetics that relies on ritual and participation in the making of meaning. Daniel Kane also makes this point in his book *All Poets Welcome*, when he discusses early deep image poetry and how the aesthetics of the deep image are as much deployed, if not reinforced, in the space of the poetry reading. He writes that “…in much of the poetry associated with the deep image group, the authorial persona does not appear as a primary narrative presence” (Kane 95). He goes on to imply that just as deep image and other Lower East Side poetry groups eschew the confessional mode that was popular, and academically sanctioned, during the late 50’s and early 60’s, so too the space of the poetry reading itself functions within the poetic as an alternative space that demands ritual and communal participation in the making of meaning in the poem. This Kane refers to as another example of the “authorial persona” being re-imagined as “…A redirection of the individual toward the ‘other’ [which] can be seen as a metaphor for the redirection of the isolated poet toward the ‘other’ of a larger poetic community” (95).


As is evident in previous mediations in chapters one and two, there is a direct link between the experimental, innovative, and avant garde tendencies in certain Modernist
artists and Rothenberg’s coming into deep image and then, fluidly, ethnopoetics. Each, I argue, serves as vehicles or perhaps together function as a poetically charged talisman that assists Rothenberg in his role as poet-shaman. And just as a certain line of Modernist inquiry had a direct impact on deep image, so too Rasula points out, does ethnopoetics. Rasula contends “The…crucial—element in the background that spurred Rothenberg’s interest in non-Western poetries came directly from the American modernist line from Pound to Olson to Duncan” (Rasula 172). And just as a talisman must be charged in order for it to manifest its powers and assist the practitioner in achieving their intention, in this case Rothenberg as poet-shaman seeks a poetics that has material effects in psychical and physical “reality;” ethnopoetics as a mode of inquiry is “charged” by the work of Olson, Pound, and Duncan, as channeled through Rothenberg. 

*Technicians* as an anthology, and ethnopoetics as a mode of inquiry, succeeds because it is more than as Rasula insists “…the mere recovery of forgotten writers” (166). 
*Technicians* and ethnopoetics are an amalgamation of the charged poetics of both the aforementioned American modernists whose work activated Rothenberg’s coming into poetry, as evidenced in his pre-face to *Revolution of the Word*, as well as the energy, intelligence, and complexity of the source material itself. As Rasula contends:

*Technicians of the Sacred* is unique among compilations of world poetry because of its insistence on the primacy of the poetics of its own (rather than its source) language. The initial aim of 1968…was unwavering: to demonstrate by concrete example that the modern poet’s quest for the sacred paralleled quests in other societies, and further, that the ‘techniques of ecstasy’ *being* technical, could constitute a poetics (171).
Both deep image and ethnopoetics represent a poetics that is a living, breathing part of the larger “Whole” which, as evidenced in this dissertation’s title, is simultaneously the realm and the “material” which Rothenberg strives toward, yet knows he will never reach, in the development and deployment of his work. By the late sixties, in this case, Rothenberg already holds those who would claim to know reality, and what constitutes “truth” in the arts, sciences, politics, and the “quest for the sacred,” as suspect. While moving forward, then, he looks back to the shamanic tradition and primordial ritual and poetics, understanding as Rasula states, that “Language usage, vitally energized, collapses the distinction between natural and social order” (175). And by this collapse, the “Whole” or “quest for the sacred” which Rothenberg (as well as Kelly) strives toward is brought ever closer into view or at the very least, perception. Language usage, language broadly defined (image, symbol, chant, song, linguistic utterances, “writing”), calls the world into being; consider Rasula: “The point of engagement thus invoked is, for poets, the code of signals, the fabric of signification” (175).

Language usage to this degree is what explodes the distinction between Rothenberg’s work coming after the territory mined by Pound, Olson, and Duncan, and the conservative impulses of the Eliot, New Critic, confessional modes that came to dominate American poetry and the academy, and its collective imposition on the social, political, and economic imagination of the United States in the Post-War era. Rothenberg is the poet-shaman. In his commentary in *Technicians* on “How Isaac Tens Became A Shaman,” Rothenberg writes of “…a consideration of coincidences between ‘primitive-archaic’ & modern thought…the shaman can be seen as proto-poet” (Rothenberg 485). And regarding the degree the poet-shaman must engage in “techniques of ecstasy” and
the demands this makes upon the individual, Rothenberg writes, and here I quote him at length:

Anything, in fact, can deliver a song because anything—‘night, mist, the blue sky, east, west, women, adolescent girls, men’s hands & feet, the sexual organs of men & women, the bat, the land of souls, ghosts, graves, the bones, hair & teeth of the dead,’ etc.—is alive. Here is the central image of shamanism & of all ‘primitive’ thought, the intuition (whether fiction or not doesn’t yet matter) of a connected & fluid universe, as alive as a man is—just that much alive.

And all this seems thrust upon him—a unifying vision that brings with it the power of song & image, seen in his own terms as power to heal-the-soul & all disease viewed as disorder-of-the-soul, as disconnection & rigidity. Nor does he come to it easily—this apparent separation of himself from the normal orders of men… (487).

Coming after Technicians, Rothenberg worked on another ethnopoetic gathering that would most fully form his sense of becoming poet-shaman; this time he would mine the same primordial yet living “past” via a gathering of ancient, modern, and contemporary writings, as well as explore his own sacred heritage, under the title A Big Jewish Book (1978), later re-worked and re-presented with Harris Lenowitz under the title Exiled in the Word: Poems & Other Visions of the Jews from Tribal Times to Present (1989). In Exiled, Rothenberg writes in the Pre-Face of his desire, after the conclusion of the first edition of Technicians:
…to break into that other place, ‘my own…a world of Jewish mystics, thieves, &
madmen.’ From that point on, it opened up in stages. Images, once general &
without particular names, now had identified themselves. I let my mind--& the
words of others, for I had learned as well to collage & assemble –work out its
vision of ‘fantastic life,’ as Robert Duncan had called it for all poetry: an image in
this instance of some supreme yiddish surrealist vaudeville I could set in motion
(Rothenberg 4).

Rothenberg identifies the work gathered in *Exiled* as that which takes into full account
“…the idea of *poesis* as a primary human process,” but also the idea of poesis as “…the
re-invigoration of the bond between ourselves & other living beings…the exploration of a
common ground for ‘history’ & ‘dream-time’ (myth)…[and] the ‘re-invention of human
liberty’ (S. Diamond) in the shadow of the total state” (4-5). Rothenberg is forging an
inarguable politics to ethnopoetics, and in so much as the roots of ethnopoetics can be
traced back to deep image, deep image too is now a political project as much as a poetics.

*Technicians* and *Exiled* solidify the contemporaneous energy and vision of deep image,
ethnopoetics, “primitive” poetry, the quest for the sacred, and “*poesis* as a primary human
process.” However, these two anthologies, and ethnopoetics as a mode of inquiry, also
dissolve the boundaries of human history, as Rothenberg recognizes that the poet, or
poet-shaman, must always work in and against “the shadow of the total state.” He writes
in the Pre-Face to *Exiled*:

The poet, if he knows his sources in the ‘sacred actions’ of the early shamans,
suffers anew the pain of their destruction. In place of a primitive ‘order of
custom,’ he confronts the ‘stony law’ & ‘cruel commands’ Blake wrote of—‘the
hand of jealousy among the flaming hair.’ Still he confirms, with Gary Snyder, the presence of a ‘Great Subculture…of illuminati’ within the higher civilizations, an alternative tradition or series of traditions hidden sometimes at the heart of the established order, & a poetry grudgingly granted its ‘license’ to resist. No minor channel, it is the poetic mainstream that he finds here: magic, myth, & dream; earth, nature, orgy, love; the female presence the Jewish poets named Shekinah (5).

The destruction of the early shamans is always already replayed through the course of human history, regardless of time period, geography, politics, and the like. Rothenberg will most fully develop the universal nature of this struggle and destruction by interrogating the very destruction after which, some go so far as to suggest that poetry is impossible.19

II. “Digging in the dirt;” Communing with the Dead

In the introduction to Khurbn & Other Poems (1989), Rothenberg writes: “The absence of the living seemed to create a vacuum in which the dead—the dibbiks who had died before their time—were free to speak. It wasn’t the first time that I thought of poetry as the language of the dead, but never so powerfully as now” (3). Later, in his collection A Book of Witness: Spells & Gris-Gris (2003), in the poem “51: I COME INTO THE NEW WORLD,” he writes:

Voices are dumb until

I speak for them.
Knowing the sound
I know myself between
two fires. One
is dark green, one
the color of my mind
asleep. I come into
the new world
where the thought of death
no longer rankles.
It will be good to be
a stranger always
to know the terms by which
we visit back & forth
& sideways.

Khurbn is Rothenberg’s long meditation on the events of the Holocaust, a term
Rothenberg chooses to replace since it speaks of “sacrifice.” He prefers the Yiddish term
“Khurbn,” meaning “destruction.” Khurbn can be said to be haunted by the dead; it is an
attempt for the “living” poet to give voice to the dead, so that they may speak and bear
witness to the events that led to their total destruction. In A Book of Witness, Rothenberg
uses the “I” in each poem, as he contemplates the passing of the Millennium (the first
fifty poems were written in 1999, the second fifty over the two years after). In the book’s
Postface he writes, regarding the term “witness” in poetry “In its twentieth-century usage
it had a meaning—pathetic but real—that spoke to the horrors, great & small, that marked
that time & that persist today” (117). Rothenberg then turns his attention to the use of the first-person in poetry, most notably in poetry of “witness.” All too often dismissed as too “confessional” a mode of writing, Rothenberg argues that it is “the instrument—in language—for all acts of witnessing, the key with which we open up to voices other than our own” (118). From his earliest explorations into the poetic traditions of the great, experimental Moderns, dismissed from the books he was assigned in school, to his consideration of the deep image, to his work as anthologist and ethnopoeticist, Rothenberg has taken on the role as the poet-shaman. In doing so, he allows the dead, or the disembodied voices of the figures who “haunt” his poems, to speak. They bear witness through his poetry. As poet-shaman, Rothenberg works in communion with these voices, and together, they bear witness.

Rothenberg’s work as poet-shaman also has him take on the role as healer. He is the “medicine man” for a global tribe of “naïve realists” who have lost their way, their connection to a larger psychical, cosmological, organic “whole.” Whether he helps bring forward the voices of Navajo Indians in his translations of the Horse Songs of Frank Mitchell, or he searches for the voices of his ancestral dead when in Khurbn he searches for “a recognition of those other voices & the scraps of poems they left behind them in the mud,” Rothenberg is trying to “heal” the fissure between the human world and that “other,” larger and more complex reality. This final meditation on Rothenberg’s work will posit him fully as poet-shaman, in an effort to re-connect the human “reality” to the real, organic cosmological world, but also, it will become apparent that Rothenberg’s work also makes demands upon the reader, that we participate in his project, and as a “tribe,” open up new lines of resistance to the totalizing and homogenizing physical and
psychical discourses ascribed to the so-called “real world” by men of politics, business, faith, and science. Alongside Rothenberg’s *Khurbn*, I will draw on the work of Blanchot and Rasula in order to fully develop the means by which Rothenberg continues the energy of the deep image in his work, as well as demonstrate how Rothenberg’s work as poet-shaman (r)evolves around the demands placed on the physical/organic and psychical world.

Rothenberg comes full circle between the initial impulse of deep image and forays into ethnopoetics and shamanism in *Khurbn*. *Khurbn* signals the ultimate descent to the underworld, the final step toward a fully developed program of communion with the dead and spirit world. If the poem is thought that cannot be articulated in language, as it is conceived of daily—then the poem is the language of the dead, figuratively speaking. In the naiveté of the walking, living, breathing world—the “dead” (including organic matter that cannot conventionally “speak”) have nothing to say, since they (or it) cannot physically speak. Rothenberg gives voice to the “dead” and simultaneously demands that the reader listen to what occurs in the gaps between the deafening silence of “reality”—those gaps in which the poem speaks and reveals the hidden truth of the “Floating World.” In the inaugural poem from *Khurbn*, Rothenberg writes:

IN THE DARK WORD, KHURBN

all their lights went out

their words were silences,
memories
drifting along the horse roads
onto malkiner street

a disaster in the mother’s tongue

her words emptied

by speaking

returning to a single word

the child word

spoken…(5)

The shaman works in communion with physical/spiritual “nature” and the realms of both the living and the dead. If deep image was an attempt to bring to the surface (reality) the “true” (or as in the case of this study, “organic”) language, then Khurbn is Rothenberg’s penultimate manifesto—it is a poem that both declares his poetic intentions and aspirations most fully, and it simultaneously carries out the work that has been and will continue to be his guiding poetic, visionary, and political principles. In his essay titled “Deep Image” in Daniel Kane’s Don’t Ever Get Famous: Essays on New York Writing after the New York School (2006), Jed Rasula contends that “It’s by way of his fusion of a performative transfiguration of ‘found’ material that deep image came to fruition in Rothenberg’s long poem ‘Khurbn’”(44). Rasula continues to describe the poem as consisting of “…almost entirely of litanies and lists, but the historical context renders them not only successful but even suspenseful, unencumbered by any sense of automatism” (44). Finally, Rasula declares “‘Khurbn’ is a cry of pure loss…It is only by
its exuberantly declamatory means that ‘Khurbn’ emerges as an affirmative encounter with the blackest of black suns” (44-45). Rasula’s description of “a cry of pure loss” is confirmed in the final stanzas of “IN THE DARK WORD, KHURBN” when Rothenberg concludes:

redeyed on
the frozen pond

was how they spoke it,
how I would take it from your voice
& cradle it

that ancient & dark word

those who spoke it in the old days
now held their tongues (Rothenberg 5)

Perhaps one of the reasons why Khurbn is such a powerful and exemplary poem is that although one could easily (and quite erroneously) label it simply a “poem about the Holocaust,” it instead concerns all who have been touched by exile and destruction. And though it is a powerful testimony to the suffering of those in the Nazi extermination camps, and the suffering that will always haunt the Jewish people, Rothenberg adroitly inscribes within the poem’s lines all suffering linked to exile and destruction, namely an exile from the organic and cosmological real, and the literal destruction of the natural and
psychical worlds (under the banner “cosmological”) at the literal and figurative hands of corrupt, naïve power. This exile and destruction is not specific to the 20th century, rather the struggle has been in existence since the dawn of the modern human which has been attempting to exorcise and silence the “tongues” of the “old days,” the “ancient and dark word.” In his ecopoetic study *This Compost* (2002), Jed Rasula attempts to trace the violence of this exorcism of the “dark word” and how the (Olsonian) “unburied dead/crossed stick, wire-led, Blake Underground” American poets share a communion with the literal and figurative “dead,” as well as how the layers of organic literal and linguistic compost continue to enrich poetics that share an aim akin to Rothenberg’s. In his chapter titled “Necropoetics,” Rasula asserts, after citing lines from Robert Duncan’s “Nor is the past pure” that “The fantastic anomaly of culture is that the living are exiles or outsiders, the most isolate of all minorities. The small community of the living extends to the past only by trafficking with the dead, whose mounds are ‘mulch for covetous burrowing thought’” (Rasula 65). And perhaps by “trafficking with the dead,” one can read this as meaning “possession” by the dead, by which the dead continue to speak through the living? Rasula implies that it is the living that are disconnected from the larger “whole,” the larger real, and this separation occurs not at the boundary between the literal living and the dead, but rather this is a wound imposed upon the living, by the living. This imposition upon the living by the living is consistently spoken of by Rothenberg in the many sections of *Khurbn*. In part 7, titled “Der Gilgul (The Possessed),” Rothenberg writes:

he picks a coin up

from the ground
it burns his hand

like ashes it is red

& marks him as it marks

the others    hidden

he is hidden in the forest

in a world of nails

his dibbik fills him (Rothenberg 16)

In the section immediately preceding the above, Rothenberg writes about the physical objects left behind by the dead; among these objects he names the gold coin, he writes “Those who are dead have left it, & the living bend to pick it up” (15). And much like gold’s literal properties as the best conduit for the transfer of electricity, of energy, the gold coin is the conduit that enables the dead to possess the living, and to speak or expound their energy out into the world of the still living. However, the gold coins would not litter the field leading to the showers if not for the imposition of the living, in this very literal case, the Nazi guards who strip the Jews of their possessions. And there is certainly a connection here between the “possession” of the living body via the conduit that was once a “possession” of the once living dead. Furthermore, not only does the gold coin function in Khurbn as the conduit by which possession occurs, as an image
explored via the lens of the deep image, this “gold coin” is also loaded and charged with
the very language and thought brought to bare upon the Jews by those who would blame
them and persecute them for the social, political, and economic conditions which led to
the rise of Nazism in Germany in the 1930s.

The “gold coin,” as it is re-presented in Khurbn, is the return (to or ghost) of the
deep image in Rothenberg’s later work. The deep image still functions as the conduit by
which Rothenberg will engage the community of the living as poet-shaman, and a final
meditation on Khurbn, alongside Blanchot’s The Writing of the Disaster (1980), will
reveal further connections among deep image, ethnopoetics, and the politics of
Rothenberg’s role as poet-shaman in the moment of the post-war U.S. reality which
underscores this larger dissertation project.

**Conclusion: The Writing Of (Against) the Disaster**

Maurice Blanchot’s long meditation on the literal events of the Holocaust and the
place of “writing,” The Writing of the Disaster, helps to fully realize Rothenberg’s aims
as the poet-shaman and the work which Rothenberg would argue must always come
regardless of the immediacy of destruction. That is to say, “destruction” has always
already come and will continue to come, be it the destruction of indigenous cultures and
the erasure of whole languages, the eradication of whole species due to human
encroachment and/as well as ecological disasters, or the twentieth century’s definitive
human disaster since it is the most systemic, calculated, “rational,” human-driven
destruction: Khurbn. In The Writing of the Disaster, Blanchot deploys his ongoing
meditation on “writing” to the scene of the Holocaust, and to the scene of writing itself—
as in his other work, he advocates a position in which “writing” as both an act and a meditative space transcends literal inscription, which Blanchot seems to suggest implies finality, stability, and conclusion, or in this instance “final solution.” Blanchot insists that, contrary to Adorno, the event that is the literal disaster demands “writing,” that is in opposition to “inscription.” He writes:

The disaster, unexperienced. It is what escapes the very possibility of experience—it is the limit of writing. This must be repeated: the disaster de-scribes. Which does not mean that the disaster, as the force of writing, is excluded from it, is beyond the pale of writing or extratextual (Blanchot 7).

The literal violence that is the disaster “de-scribes” or disrupts the literal inscription that is writing, which Blanchot argues, opens the space for “writing” as a process and as a chaotic energy that resists the very inscription that brought the disaster to fruition. That is to say, this “writing” brings with it the promise of never arriving at a fixed point or conclusion. And it is this absence of “writing” as a means to an end that is inherent in Rothenberg’s work in deep image and ethnopoetics. Like Blanchot, Rothenberg enters into a space in which language is not fixed; it is a living material that traverses physical and psychical “reality.” Language is not a fixed and stable system, and should never be mistaken as such, less disaster is imminent. Blanchot writes:

The horror—the honor—of the name, which always threatens to become a title. In vain the movement of anonymity remonstrates with this supernumerary appellation—this fact of being identified, unified, fixed, arrested in the present. The commentator says (be it to criticize or to praise): this is what you are, what
you think; and thus the thought of writing—the ever-dissuaded thought which disaster awaits—is made explicit in the name…(7).

The literal disaster of the khurbn takes lives, destroys the living, and rather than creating a space out of which writing can never again happen, it is for Blanchot the zero point in which confusion and disruption arrive and announce the need for “writing.” Blanchot refers to the literal destruction as “…dark disaster that brings the light.” and he insists that “The fragmentary promises not instability (the opposite of fixity) so much as disarray, confusion” (7). And this “confusion” brings “writing” from out of the ashes of inscription which is aligned with the deployment of power, or in Blanchot’s sense, the imposition of a “name.”

Rothenberg, like Blanchot, recognizes that the dead transcend the name, and in this transcendence there lies the propensity for poetry, Blanchot’s “writing.” In Khurbn, “12 Der Vidershtand (The Resistance)” Rothenberg juxtaposes his own response to the “disaster” with Charles Olson’s The Resistance, itself a response to Adorno’s claim that no writing may come after the Holocaust. Rothenberg writes:

began with this in olson’s words it was
the pre/face so much fat for soap
superphosphate for soil fillings & shoes for sale
such fragmentation delivered by whatever means
the scrolls of Auschwitz buried now brought to light
again…(Rothenberg 29).
The destruction, the disaster has brought about the dissolution of the totalizing discourse that was the proper name—“Final Solution.” And it is in the mud and the ruins of the camps where the literal Rothenberg is possessed by the dead, like the shaman communing in possession with the spirits of the ancestors, where he locates the real demands of poetry, or “the resistance beginning with the writing down” (29). In an earlier section of Khurbn, Rothenberg comes to terms with his role as poet-shaman; he admits that:

It was in Poland that I realized I was haunted. Yes. ‘A dibbik is in me. A dibbik is in me.’ It is the condition of our lives for forty years now. Hijikata confirms it for us, that poetry is the speech of ghosts. The shamans in your books confirm it. In my books I meant to say. And didn’t (28).

The ghosts, the dibbiks which “haunt” Rothenberg do not speak as one; they represent a multitude of voices, a singularity of victims that speak in fragments and disarray. And the desire of the dead to speak, though without the poet-shaman they cannot, is the “un-power” that Blanchot insists with which “writing” is charged. This “un-power” Blanchot holds in opposition to “Power in the broadest sense—capacity, ability…like the power of the group leader: always related to domination” (Blanchot 8). Instead, he desires “un-power” which “…has always departed from the groove already, and is always already derailed; it belongs to the outside…[un-power is] Power over the imaginary provided the imaginary be understood as that which evades power (9). Rothenberg echoes Blanchot to a degree; he charges poetry with this “un-power” when he writes:

the poetry is there too

it is in the scraps of language
by which the century is read to us the streets the dogs
the faces fading out the eyes receding
they are the dead & want so much to speak
that all the writing in the world will not contain them
but the dead voice crying in the money field
declares it makes its resistance still
he says I want to tell you
what my name is my name is buried
in the ashes my name
is not a name (Rothenberg 30)

Though *Khurbn* is on the surface a response to and meditation on literal historical events, the cold, calculating deployment of power in the service of destruction is also made manifest in the poem as the very thing that drives Rothenberg’s work as poet-shaman. His work in deep image and ethnopoetics are the “resistance” to totalizing and conservative forces which seek to enact finitude and conclusion on the world via a conservative and finite use of language. Though Rothenberg is writing of specific historical events, the language of the poem *Khurbn* is haunted with an excess that Rothenberg channels so that its “un-power” or its “force” can be deployed against other material, historical impositions of Power. Consider the following lines from section 10:

THE DOMAIN OF THE TOTAL CLOSES AROUND

THEM for there is even
totality here a parody of telos of completion
in the monstrous mind of the masters those who give themselves authority
over the rest of life who dole out life & death proportioned
to their own appetites as artists they forge a world a shadow image of our own
& are the artists of the new hell the angels of the possible the vision
passed from them down to the present of what art can do what constructs of the mind are thinkable when power assists their hands in the delusion of the absolute (21)

In the preceding passage, Rothenberg speaks of the “world” of these “artists of the new hell” as being a “shadow image of our own.” Rothenberg’s “quest for the sacred” then as a poet-shaman is a connection to the “Whole,” to a real that is not a “shadow image,” but rather one that takes into account the cosmological “Whole” in all its chaos and fragment that constitutes the living, breathing cosmos of which language is a part. This “Whole” cannot ever be fully “named;” the preceding lines speak to a broader destruction via language and power imposed in an effort to quell the “natural” chaos of the cosmos, the only “reality.” Perhaps it’s best to let Blanchot have the last word concerning what is at stake for Jerome Rothenberg, poet-shaman? All that “energy & intelligence” that constitute ethnopoetics, and the energy inherent in mining the deep image so it may
provide a means of perceiving “a visionary consciousness opening through the senses, grasping the phenomenal world…winning from a compassionate comprehension of that world a more acute, more agonizing view of reality that by rational interpretation” (Rothenberg 56) may be best expressed in the following passage from *The Writing of the Disaster*:

> Between the man of faith and the man of science, there is little difference: both guard against destructive chance and reconstitute the requirements of order; both appeal to a constant which they pray to or theorize about; both are men of accommodation and of unity for whom the other and the same are complementary. Speaking, writing, calculating, they are eternal conservers, conservers of eternity, always in quest of something stable, and pronouncing the word ‘ontological’ with confident fervor” (Blanchot 90).
“Working with deep image is the development of a ‘basic imagination.’ […] The present and necessary function of poetry is the transformation of the perceived world. […] Poetry is concerned with things transforming and transforming things, with the whole picture in mind. We are given: 1 world to transform, 1 language to transform it with.”

–Robert Kelly *Notes on the Poetry of Deep Image*

“Every night I tell myself ‘I am the cosmos/I am the wind’”

–Chris Bell (Big Star) “I am the Cosmos”

The following chapter will explore the work of Robert Kelly through the lens of several philosophical and theoretical strands via the work of Blanchot, Jung, Duncan, and Olson, as well as Henry Corbin’s work on Avicenna. The gathering of these artists and theorists under the guise of a dissertation on Robert Kelly’s work, and the work of deep image poetry, will demonstrate the prevalence of so-called occult, hidden, or purposefully excluded bodies of knowledge that underscore Kelly’s work and much of the most significant art objects that appear in the second half of the 20th Century and the opening decade of the 21st. Each of these poets and theorists join Kelly and Jerome Rothenberg in exploring the process of personal, collective, and global transformation toward what Jung deems a “greater wholeness” against the backdrop of a global social, political, and economic landscape that continues to strive toward an abolishment of difference and poly-vocality. By re-reading Jung’s quest for a “greater wholeness” through the lens of deep image poetics, it is my intention to demonstrate the continual relevancy and immediacy of deep image poetics not only in Kelly’s work, long after he has moved away from the concept, but also how in the era of postmodernity and post-structuralism, one can still consider the “Whole” without deference to a transcendental deity or singular
definition or perception of Truth or “reality.” It only seems fitting that in order to even begin to talk about the work of Robert Kelly, and in light of his being influenced by the practices that fall under the “alchemical process,” that more than one artist or point of view be brought to the compositional space of this dissertation chapter. As Kelly writes regarding his writing “into” Shelley’s *Mont Blanc*:

Any decent poem has room in it for us all. The process of ‘writing into’ someone else’s poem is an act of reading, of listening, talking. Though formally it is a transgression, and may strike the reader as an arrogance, or an irrelevance to the sweet original design, in fact this writing-into turns the act of reading into an act of conversation” (Kelly “About this Mont Blanc”).

This is a dissertation chapter, part of a study, research on deep image poetics; however it is also a “writing into” Kelly’s *Notes On The Poetry Of Deep Image* and his formidable body of work. As such, it is my intention to present this “research” as a conversation between Kelly, his work, and the work of others who tread in the same dark waters. More significantly, this chapter will consider Kelly an “Orphic poet,” risking it all in his demand for a poetics of process, energy, and transformative power. I take then, before I begin this conversation, refuge in Maurice Blanchot’s conception of how to approach “research” from *The Infinite Conversation* (1969), and I quote him at length:

The unknown that is at stake in research is neither an object nor a subject. The speech relation in which the unknown articulates itself is a relation of infinity. Hence it follows that the form in which this relation is realized must in one way or another have an index of ‘curvature’ such that the relations of A to B will never be direct, symmetrical, or reversible, will
not form a whole, and will not take place in a same time; they will be then, neither contemporaneous nor commensurable. One can see which solutions will prove inappropriate to such a problem: a language of assertion and answer, for example, or a linear language of simple development, that is to say, *a language where language itself would not be at stake* (6).

**I. Roots/Routes on the Making of or “becoming” Poetry of Deep Image**

Two of the key figures in American poetry that factor significantly in Kelly’s coming to deep image (with the obvious exception of Jerome Rothenberg with whom he shares the literal journey/descent) are Charles Olson and Robert Duncan. Each seems to have both feet intellectually and poetically straddling the tenuous divide between the Modern and the Postmodern. Olson and Duncan make demands for a new poetics, coming out of the fruitful and invigorating period of Modernism, yet each also can extend their intellectual and inspirational “roots” back thousands of years, and their concerns for, to steal a phrase “Why Poetry Matters,” well into a future that is still to come. Olson and Duncan will both inspire Kelly greatly, but he will reconsider or read Olson through a “Duncanian” lens. In this first section, I will discuss the influence of both Olson and Duncan, alongside selections from Kelly’s early, most “deep image influenced” work, as well as trace this moment, historically, using Kelly’s own words in his “Autobiography.” Finally, I will consider the early theoretical work of Maurice Blanchot, as a means of anticipating Kelly’s desire for a poetry that is an active descent into the depths of the human unconscious, experience, and the cosmos itself.
Olson writes, in *Human Universe* (1965), “…we are ourselves both the instrument of discovery and the instrument of definition” (155). It is here that Olson locates the bodies of poet and reader as mutual participants in the act of creation. He dissolves the poet’s ego in an insistence upon the co-creative and perceptual faculties inherent in the compositional space of the poem. Olson is always opening the compositional space as a total and inclusive inheritor of the American poetry tradition that can be traced most readily to Whitman and further back to the energy and imagination of the literal people (bodies) of those who have carved out the perceptual landscape of America, be they Native Americans, European explorers, or victims of the African diaspora. However, as we know from reading Olson’s great life work, *The Maximus Poems*, his scope dives deeper into the realm of the unconscious and the faded border between history and myth, as he peers out upon the deep, dark waters of the North Atlantic on the shores of his beloved Gloucester. For Olson, “we” the people, the bodies are the ultimate tool of discovery; it is the people who define not only country and land, but God and Universe. Geography as well as the constellations of stars that dot the sky only comes into being when pronounced by human tongues, or, as will be demonstrated via a closer look at his seminal essay *Projective Verse* (1950), in the canals of the human ear.

*Projective Verse* announces the coming of Donald Allen’s New American Poetry, and it charges that all poets working after the fully and dangerously loaded gun “1950,” must locate their work either in complete opposition to Olson (confessional poetry, anti-intellectual MFA “sandbox” poems, unquestioning faith in the cult of New Criticism and its priests, etc.) or poets must make/do something with Olson’s propositions, working them into a larger, open field as well as working out of his concepts, in a oft borrowed
phrase: “MAKE IT NEW”  For Kelly, Olson will prove significant in so far as he is inspired to work out of Projective Verse, particularly a re-consideration of “objects” and the primacy of the ear. In regards to “objects” in the compositional space of the poem, Olson writes:

The objects which occur at every given moment of composition (of recognition, we can call it) are, can be, must be treated exactly as they do occur therein and not by any ideas or preconceptions from outside the poem, must be handled as a series of objects in field in such a way that a series of tensions (which they also are) are made to hold, and to hold exactly inside the content and the content of the poem which has forced itself, through the poet and them, into being (243).

Olson insists that “objects” must be considered in the order in which they appear in the compositional space of the poem, and they must not waiver, they must “…hold exactly inside the content and the content of the poem which has forced itself, through” (243). Kelly, in contrast, reads “objects” as “images” and if an object/image is considered in terms of the compositional field as equaling a single line in the poem, “This denies the independent existence of line, and is a quasi-solution that produces poetry of blandness, no matter how great the initial force of the images: the images are not being articulated, urgency is lost,” and subsequently, the “series of tensions” that Olson demands are lost. Kelly considers the image his “prima materia,” and thus argues that if the image (read:object) “is lacking” as it occurs or comes into the field of composition, then “the verbal gesture is quickly emptied: the poem elapses instead of happening,” against the
very release of energy that Olson demands of the space of poetic composition. Kelly then
does not so much as move against Olson, as he demands a pause during which the
object/image that enters the compositional space is explored more fully, is probed more
deeply, is given more than a single line to breathe, so to speak. The images must not
simply be recognized, they must be mined for what they have yet to fully disclose. And
for Kelly, this disclosure at its greatest depths is what binds one image to the next as it is
revealed in the compositional space of the poem. And just as Olson is concerned with
physical breath as it pertains to the natural rhythm of the poem’s composition, Kelly adds
the “…fundamental rhythm of the images…a rhythm which is at once intellectual and
sensuous, and also the structural, more directly sensual, rhythm of the breath expressed in
line” (Notes). For Kelly, working out of Olson, it is “the counterpointing of these two
rhythms [which function as] principal sources of fullness and complexity in the poem”
(Notes). More than simply allowing the objects/images to be “treated as they actually do
occur,” Kelly demands more perceptual labor: “The deep image must be transferred to
the paper, BUILT into the poem, in language which gives it its fullest spatial, temporal,
sonic & kinetic properties…Supplying the image in its fullest force is thus partially a
function of language” (Notes).

In another sense, Kelly works out of Olson’s Projective Verse by juxtaposing
Olson’s demand for rhythm and breath in the poetic line and their relation to the “ear,” or
rhythm associated with the naturally occurring syllables pertaining to the poets breath,
with the “fundamental rhythm of the images (fundamental because more complexly
present), a rhythm which is at once intellectual and sensuous, and also the structural,
more directly sensual, rhythm of the breath expressed in line” (Notes). He goes on to
argue that the rhythm of images as they occur in the field of composition, alongside the “rhythm of the breath expressed in line” is fundamental; it is “the counterpointing of these two rhythms [that serves as] the principal sources of fullness and complexity in the poem” (Notes). And it is in the final passage of Olson’s *Projective Verse* where one can trace the fullest and most immediate influence on Kelly’s coming to deep image. Olson writes: “…as I say a projective poet will, down through the workings of his own throat to that place where breath comes from, where breath has its beginnings, where drama has to come from, where, the coincidence is, all act springs” (Olson 249). Both Kelly and Olson are searching for roots/routes, the source of the poem’s composition from somewhere “inside” the body, that then arrives during the act of composition, and its force is transmitted “outside” the body to the poem, which is ultimately for both, an extension of the body. Be it expressed in terms like eye, or ear, or breath, the poet’s body is the vessel through which the language of the poem emerges from that dark, unconscious, and unknown space. By integrating Olson’s emphasis on breath and rhythm, with the arrival of the image in the compositional space, Kelly is able to locate the poet’s body in the act of poetic composition.

Like *Projective Verse*, Olson’s *Human Universe* (1965) also seeks to underscore the need for a physicality to poetic language, in other words language and action occurring simultaneously as in physical speech, what he refers to as “a shout” (155). So then, if one was to recognize a cartography of poetic composition across the body, the tongue and the ear in Olson’s work, in his consideration of the deep image, Kelly will take the body further by his reading through Robert Duncan. It would be too simple to suggest that the “image” in deep image is tied exclusively to the realm of literal sight. As
will be evidenced, Duncan gives Kelly a language with which to move beyond the Imagists and Objectivists, to a concept of sight and vision and perception that explodes the traditional “image” in poetic composition, and like Olson, involves the body in the act of composition.

In his essay *Poetry Before Language* (1955, published 1985), Robert Duncan seeks to rediscover poetry’s roots in the body before conscious thought, to a time which he describes as when “The brain in those days was of ordinary service, a mere clearing house for parts of the body” (Duncan 60). He argues that before what he refers to as the development of “…the minding brain…in the happy concourse and democracy of what we do not mind, hand, arm, leg, foot, finger, stomach, bowels, liver, heart, lungs, brain, skin and bone made their way together. There was no sense of anything, not even common sense; all sense was in the senses” (61). In short, Duncan is reaching back to a moment in human development when the body and the world around it were perceived, defined, understood, and most importantly *made* through the physical senses. More importantly, he reaches back before the Word, before a name, and subsequently a “definition” was given to all sensory perceptions and feelings. As Self develops, there is a demand for meaning to be made of simple physical desires as well as the desire for an understanding of the world, and meaning is produced in the act of naming. Duncan feels that much like the imposing Self’s desire to name bodily functions and desires, so too it gives poetry a “name.” Thus by *naming* the poem, which like Olson and Kelly too insist, comes from the body, the poem is no longer action; it is no longer physical; it becomes a thing. This concept will prove fundamental to an understanding of Kelly’s coming to deep image.
In *Poetry Before Language*, Duncan writes:

I want to describe Poetry as it was before words, or signs, before beauty, or eternity, or meaning, were. Poetry would not allow the brain to falsify what it was in giving it a word or a ‘meaning’; and so the ‘meaning’ of the word ‘poetry’ or name ‘Poetry’ is a making. The organs of the body not only communicated but all the organs made things. The act was dancing, the product of the act was the dance, poetry. In one kind of dancing the hand and the eye danced together. Thus the hand ‘saw’ the stones and sticks, and the eye ‘felt’ them…The happy brain—this was the brain before it grew upon its self—and the heart danced in concourse, and as the brain danced, hand no longer determined, nor eye determined, nor ear determined, but all became attentive to the full complex of the sum of all their dance” (60-62).

Movement, process, and Duncan’s “dance” make their way into Kelly’s development of deep image. More importantly, each of these actions involves a “whole;” in Duncan the entire body, physical and psychical, is involved in the “dance” that is Poetry. In an interview published in his book, *The Sullen Art* (1963), David Ossman presses Kelly on the origins of his *Notes*, when he asks about the relationship between image in poetry and film montage through the work of Russian director Sergei Eisenstein. Kelly’s answer will not only illuminate his coming to deep image; it will also bring together the significance of Duncan’s “dance” and Kelly’s insistence that “image” is
action, or in his words “process.” Kelly insists that in film, it “…starts out with a known reality: the reality the camera faces” (Ossman 37). The images that come together in a filmic montage, like those employed by Eisenstein, are at least situated against the backdrop of the “known reality” as seen through the lens of the camera. As the images are received, there is still a semblance of order and a known reality that will emerge in the art object. However, as Kelly states “There is a Mystery in poetry, and I really mean this with a capital M, a darkness, an atmosphere in which the author composes the Images before he really knows what those Images amount to” (37). He then connects this “darkness” and “Mystery in poetry” to process: “The poetic Image is not a thing. It is process and a discovered identity. It discovers its being in its function… Image is the rhythm of poetry” (37). So then, one can bring together Kelly’s assertions and Duncan’s observation that “the product of the act was the dance, poetry” by considering image as not simply something that comes across the literal field of vision related to the eyes. Image, for Kelly, is Duncan’s “dance” of the total body; image is perceived by the entire body; the poem is composed by the very rhythm of the image. Kelly states “the Image itself, in its development, constitutes the fundamental, basic rhythm of the poem, which all other rhythms—sound rhythms, stress rhythms and so forth—must subserve” (38).

As noted, both Duncan and Olson locate the body in the space of composition; however, they also recognize a more expansive horizon for poetry that is expressed in their inquiries into the relationship between the physical body and the cosmos, broadly defined to include SPACE broadly conceived. Duncan’s essay, Towards an Open Universe, locates the physical body and the body that is the poem within the larger framework of SPACE or cosmos. After spending a few moments taking a closer look at
Duncan’s *Towards an Open Universe* (1982), I will trace the preceding readings of Olson and Duncan through some of the poems most closely associated with the deep image “time period,” namely Kelly’s *Armed Descent*.

In the opening passages of his essay, Duncan relates the very moment of his birth, citing both date and time of day, as well the domestic objects that line his sight and make up his SPACE, his surroundings; he goes so far as to launch from the hour of his birth and “…the tree at the window, the patterned curtain, the table and chair…” all the way out to “The shining planets and the great stars, the galaxies beyond us…” (Duncan 76). This identity with the “cosmos” alongside the specificity of images provides a powerful indoctrination of the “imagination” as conceived in Kelly’s coming to deep image. Duncan continues:

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 the magnitude of the cosmos, as I have taken my being in what I know of domestic things (76).

Duncan raises the issue of consciousness, and he asserts that “…the poem as a supreme effort of consciousness, comes in a dancing organization between personal and cosmic identity” (78). Toward the conclusion of his *Notes*, Kelly locates this “dancing organization” in “verbal expression,” and reading Kelly through Duncan suggests that both “personal and cosmic identity,” as well as consciousness itself can only be fully expressed or communicated through language. He writes that “Verbal expression of the image demands an urgency and directness that only the spoken language of poet and reader can supply, the language of here and now” (*Notes*). Ultimately, the “Open
universe,” including “personal and cosmic identity” for Kelly is expressed through the deep image, which is itself expressed in language. The deep image is linguistic: “In the poem built from the deep image, the image itself bears an enormous weight, for through it and its connection with the rhythmic sequence of images, the flow of the image-conditioned word and music, the meaning of the poem exists, all communication takes place [my emphasis]” (Notes). Both personal and cosmic identity are joined in language, and consciousness is also structured in language; for Kelly and Duncan, the poem then is the ultimate expression of creation, of the interconnectedness of all things. Thus the radically charged space of the poem, what Kelly refers to as the “tension in the work itself” which “cannot be exaggerated” means that “The language of deep images restores the poetry of desperation” (Notes). This “desperation” can be understood when Duncan writes in Towards an Open Universe: “Each poet seeks to commune with creation, with the divine world, that is to say, he seeks the most real form in language,” since communing with creation through the compositional space of the poem ultimately means having the potential to transform the “world.” (78) Kelly: “Poetry is concerned with things transforming and transforming things, with the whole picture in mind. We are given: 1 world to transform, 1 language to transform it with” (Notes). As Duncan declares in Towards an Open Universe: “To answer that call, to become the poet, means to be aware of creation, creature, and creator coinherent in the one event” (Duncan 81).

Finally, in reference to the new poetic forms and the space of composition, including Olson’s demands in Projective Verse, and certainly inherent in Kelly’s Notes on the Poetry of Deep Image, Duncan writes: “Perhaps we recognize as never before in
man’s history that not only our own personal consciousness but also the inner structure of
the universe itself has only this immediate event in which to be realized” (88).

To more fully comprehend Kelly’s dedication to “the poetry of desperation,” and
how this vow extends to the preceding readings of Kelly’s Notes through Duncan and
Olson, a closer look at several passages in his autobiography from the Contemporary
Authors Autobiography Series, Volume 19 is in order. In section 10 of his autobiography,
Kelly writes:

At twenty-three I dedicated my life of work to God. To benefit the world
was how I thought about it. At forty-six I dedicated it to the
enlightenment of all beings. It seems ambitious and possibly pretentious
to want these things, but I mean them with everything I have that can
mean anything. My search in ‘flesh, dream, book’ has been for ways of
saying, ways of saying that benefit beings. Searching now in language to
unsay my ‘self,’ and thereby say the truth, or say towards it (183).

The literal religious conversion alluded to in this passage is seamlessly juxtaposed,
between the literal lines, to Kelly’s coming-into a poet who is concerned with dissolving
his own “self” into language itself, the very structure that orders our personal and
collective identities, our cosmology. As will be demonstrated in subsequent sections of
this chapter, the “poetry of desperation” and the demand for a poetry that “transforms”
found within the few pages which constitute Notes on the Poetry of Deep Image will
follow Kelly in one form or another through to the work he continues to produce without
fail. In section 17, he writes:
Here is the story I have tried to tell: Armed descent, into her body which is my talisman, my weapon against time. Against time these round dances, the movement around the core of myself that is my entasy—the opposite of the ecstasy people are always raving about or hoping for. I wanted entasy, to stand inside, to be incarnate as myself, in all the full intensity of feeling in full consciousness from this place outward. Above me the stages of the moon declare their lunes, which are their measures in us too, the tuneful amazements of the soul’s calendar. Words are forever in service of this going that is my knowing…I can admit it now—my work has a meaning to declare (186).

A closer look at some of the poetry that comes during the immediate moment of deep image poetry further reveals how time and again, Kelly will return to the poetic and intellectual spaces out of which the deep image first emerged, as if to say “often I am permitted to return to deep image.” Echoes and reverberations of his later work, and the preceding discussion which sought to begin to trace the origins and future returns to deep image, can be felt in the poems which come in Kelly’s first collection Armed Descent (1961). From “Measure Those Distances,” in the section titled “Of this night:”

Here and now she becomes alive

a roar of things out of the streets

for the first time covered with skin

moving for the first time with the train of waters

here this body is me (15)
Kelly announces the arrival of the poem, its coming to life of its own accord. He gives no indication that the poem was necessarily something of his own creation, but rather, a complex gathering of individual charged particles, of “things out of the streets” coming together as a living, breathing animal “covered with skin” moving steadfast “with the train of waters.” And the poem takes its own shape, one image following another; the image of “the train of waters” suggests that the poem arrives and takes the shape of its vessel, much like water taking the route of a predetermined path. The body of the poem, the poem itself, is also poet: “this body is me,” here in the compositional space. Kelly is, from Duncan, “coinherent in the one event.” The poem continues in a series of lines each beginning with “being:”

being out in the open without terror
being out in the parklands hunting for meat
being atlantis unresurrected and carelessly swimming
being navies and heavily-armed convoys
being decked out with banners being
sudden in an animal, being dark (15)

The repetition of the word “being” in these lines works on a number of levels. The first two uses of “being” denote a literal place; they locate poet and poem first “out in the open” and “out in the parklands.” However, beyond this literal use of “being,” there is a deeper resonance that locates “being” as also pertaining to a state of mind or consciousness. The poem/poet is exposed “out in the open,” yet it also stands physically and emotionally fearless “without terror,” and “out in the parklands hunting for meat.”
This is significant for a number of reasons, beginning with the personification of the poem; it is an animal following its unconscious “natural state.” Kelly then has allowed the poem to take a physical form, and stemming from the preceding inquiry into personal and collective identity, as well as the cosmos, as coming from language and the literal space of composition, Kelly blurs the “distance” between human and animal as well as personal and collective identity. Also, the poem is “hunting for meat;” this ACT can be read through Kelly’s Notes when he discusses “force” and the order of images as they appear in the poem. When Kelly writes in his Notes that “The final quantum will vary with the rearrangement of the images and of the images’ fields of force,” he is setting the speed and purpose of Of this night. This is the deep image poem in action; it is a physical (thus “armed”) descent into the very discourse and debates surrounding post-war poetics. In other words, the poem is a “dissent” against the prevailing language used in more conservative poetry at the time. Kelly, instead, composes in a vernacular that is both human and animal, that blurs the distinction between the two as much as it blurs the distinction between poetic and “everyday” speech. As he writes in Notes, “Only in the native linguistic PATTERNS can the deep image communicate at full strength” (Notes).

Kelly is heavily “armed” in his “dissent;” he is “navies and heavily armed convoys,” and he is a “thirsty and savage…animal” (15). However, he is also “atlantis unresurrected,” an allusion to his willingness to engage the myth of Atlantis as readily as any other so-called rejected or occult knowledge. He does not distinguish between myth and reality since he has already determined that both are constructs of language; all being and understanding occurs in language. He will not subscribe to the notion that some discourses are “true” and others “false.” Instead, like Duncan in Truth and Life of Myth,
Kelly will assert that these discourses, alongside literal experience, are all relevant to the compositional space.

Another way of considering the lines in *Of this night* which begin with the repetition of the first word “being” is one that considers the lines as marking, in the space of the poem, the evolution of the “poem” as a discursive space that is as much alive and breathing as the poet who composes it. As noted at length in the preceding discussion, Kelly’s concept of deep image is predicated on the charged, living percepts that “rise from the unconscious or from the retina of the awakened eye…the percepts, in order to be communicated, are fleshed in language” (*Notes*). The descending lines beginning with the word “being” are each examples of how Kelly attempts to achieve the “continuum” of “the ACT of relating word to percept, image to image” (*Notes*). Each line contains a montage of percepts that come to full energy and full dimension through their simultaneous presentation. Thus the line “being steps and an entrance to a living house” weds the more literal images, “steps” and “house,” to the conceptual “living,” achieving a continuum that attempts to operate at “maximal communicative force” (*Notes*).

Serving as both Kelly’s first collection of published poems, as well as, alongside Rothenberg’s *White Sun Black Sun*, an inaugural work in the push toward a poetry of deep image, *Armed Descent* reads much like a series of canvases or filmic montages. The poems come at the reader, and they make demands upon the reader: that they be fully engaged as a co-contributor to the space of composition. Often, one must read and read again, only to come to the realization that each subsequent glance at the poem changes how it is perceived. One can argue that so-called “outside” mediating factors, such as a change in season, mood, or weather, coupled with the charged energy
emanating from each line, will affect how the “fundamental rhythm of the images” is perceived during the act of reading. *Armed Descent* by no means “fails” as an expression of deep image, but it will become apparent over the course of this chapter, that the concept of the deep image will morph and change, and grow in complexity and form over the course of Kelly’s work, and that *Armed Descent* captures an ephemeral snapshot in time.

II. “Eye, Orpheus, sing!”

If the poems in *Armed Descent* represent the initial energy behind deep image, it is in the work that develops over the course of the 1960’s and 1970’s, after Kelly distances himself from deep image literally and figuratively (Kelly accepts a teaching position at Bard College in upstate New York, and deep image is morphed into Deep Image in the work of two establishment poets, James Wright and Robert Bly) that a more fuller exploration of deep image’s charged space is fleshed out. It is in the those two decades that Kelly shift his attention from being concerned more forcefully with the image as a poetic unit of movement, time, and energy, to language and music as co-conspirators in the underlying political potential of poetics in the years following the Second World War. Beginning with a meditation on Blanchot’s reading of the myth of Orpheus, alongside Kelly’s work, Ovid’s telling of the myth of Orpheus, and Herbert Marcuse’s reading of the psychological/political energy represented in the myth of Orpheus, I will trace Kelly’s coming to a poetics of language and music, in conjunction with his concerns regarding the deep image, particularly evident in books such as *Axon Dendron Tree* (1967) and *Finding the Measure* (1968). Finally, I will look closely at a
chapter in Edward Schelb’s as yet unpublished monograph on Kelly titled “The Blade of Seth and the Peacock’s Tail: Towards the Poetics of Alchemy,” which traces the development of Kelly’s interest in the alchemical process as an approach to poetics during Kelly’s mid 60’s to early 70’s output, including his ambitious *The Loom* (1975) and the influence of Henry Corbin’s *Avicenna and the Visionary Recital* (1960).

Kelly’s *Notes* consistently returns to the idea of image as process, or more poignantly, how the composition of the deep image poem is movement, a physical, psychological, and potentially spiritual journey into the depths of the unconscious, as well as a mining beneath the surface that so delicately rests atop the Real, creating the illusion of “reality” as such. For the sake of this exploration of Kelly’s work, the figure of Orpheus becomes a trope by which the intensity and risk of Kelly’s work can be read. As told by Ovid in his *Metamorphoses*, Eurydice, “went walking/Across the lawn, attended by her naiads,/A serpent bit her ankle”, and she is lost to the underworld (234). Orpheus, determined to bring Eurydice back to the upper world, uses his song, his poetry, to descend to the underworld “and he swept the strings and chanted: ‘Gods of the world below the world, to whom/All of us mortals come…Weave over Eurydice’s life, run through too soon (234-35). As is well known, Orpheus is not to look back, to gaze upon Eurydice until they have reached the upper world. Yet, in a moment of fear that she may be trailing too far behind, Orpheus turns, only to lose Eurydice forever. The lines from Ovid’s poem are not necessary to this discussion; the myth is well known. However, considering Orpheus as a lens through which to read Kelly’s work, the lines take on new meaning. It is a serpent that bites Eurydice, much as it is a serpent that tempts Eve in the myth of the Garden of Eden to eat of the tree of knowledge. And there are two ways to
consider this scene; those who prescribe to literal, biblical language locate this as the origin of the sins of man, the catalyst of the great fall that dooms humanity to a life outside of the earthly paradise that is Eden. Others read this figuratively as the moment at which free will and the quest for knowledge are initiated. The banishment, rather than being read as punishment, is read as a release from the perpetual solitude and subservience that life in Eden demands. However, with this release comes the danger associated with the quest for knowledge, or to put it in other terms, to work hard against time/death. Kelly’s *Her Body Against Time* (1963) can be read as locating the figure of the woman’s body as the portal between servitude and acquiescence, and freedom and risk, since outside the gates of Eden, death is inevitable. Consider “The Law” from *Her Body Against Time*, Kelly writes:

your body stands silent
I can feel the space of air
between the curved line of your back
and the rough brick you stand against

...  

pivoting

your body sways

a true solid

never balanced,

force & battle & the sweetness of this hour (36)

Against a prescriptive poetics in the post-war moment that promises that with allegiance comes success, adoration, book sales, and awards, Kelly dissents and chooses to take
risks in his work. The poem is the body of the woman, of the women represented by Eve who are so often charged with seducing man into sin, into his banishment. Yet Kelly celebrates her body, her figure that stands against “the rough brick,” whose “body sways” with “force & battle” against The Law and against the established and sanctioned poetic, philosophical, and spiritual institutions. To quote once more from his autobiography, Kelly engages in “Armed descent, into her body which is my talisman, my weapon against time. Against time these round dances, the movement around the core of myself that is my entasy—the opposite of the ecstasy people are always raving about or hoping for.”

In a similar vein, it is interesting to note how Ovid describes Orpheus as begging “Weave over Eurydice’s life,” intimating that her life is composed of a series of strands, woven together to form the very fabric of her being, and that she may not be simply returned to life in a single act, but that it is a process, the figurative movement of the shuttle across the loom, an image that Kelly will take up, and I will soon address, in one of his longest and most ambitious poems. To reiterate, poetic composition is process, and it mirrors the very process that creates life on all levels, and this is at the heart of deep image poetics, even as Kelly is moving forward in his work.

Orpheus is given the opportunity to cheat death, to bring Eurydice back, and it is his power of song that allows him to make the journey to the underworld as a living mortal, yet as Maurice Blanchot suggests in his reading of the myth of Orpheus titled Orpheus’s Gaze, it is when Orpheus fails that writing begins, and his reading of the myth of Orpheus works tangentially to Kelly’s poetics.²⁴
Blanchot reads Eurydice as representing the limit of art, “Eurydice is the furthest that art can reach. Under a name that hides her and a veil that covers her, she is the profoundly obscure point toward which art and desire, death and night, seem to tend” (Blanchot 171). He goes on to suggest that Orpheus, as poet, is charged with not just descending to the underworld, to the limits of the poem, but “His work is to bring it back to the light of day and to give it form, shape, and reality in the day… The deep does not reveal itself directly; it is only disclosed hidden in the work” (171). Consider Kelly’s Notes, “Plucking things from the street or from the unconscious is comparable to the digging of ore. Images do not necessarily proceed directly from the pitchblende….The deep image must be transferred to the paper, BUILT into the poem (Notes). Kelly further considers the process by which the poem is BUILT in Hui-neng Chops Bamboo, when he writes:

To know it is to know everything
bamboo itself is used to make

especially that four-holed flute
with a note like wind under water

few Westerners can play (28).

The stanza operates on two levels; one demonstrates to what degree something must be farmed, and then processed, before it is capable of becoming an art object. And on another, deeper level, the stanza is suggesting that the bamboo as raw material must be
recognized in the wild; it must be chopped in such a way so as not to splinter, thus even the harvesting of the “image” of the bamboo must be done with precision, and then, only a skilled craftsman can make the bamboo into a wind instrument. However, once made along these specifications, it is only a particular artist that can make the flute work in the service of the art, or music which flows forth. Kelly insinuates that it is the “Easterner,” implied to have reached a higher level of understanding and (albeit a bit of an Orientalist assumption) meditative and physical mastery over the delicate breath which playing the bamboo flute necessitates. The “Easterner” is placed in opposition to the “few Westerners [who] can play.” This is read as a critique of conventional American poets, for whom the subjective self provides the poem’s object of inquiry, and either the confessional or some formal mode is the vehicle by which the poem is expressed, vs. the deep image poet, or perhaps meditative and innovative poets (names like Blake, Lorca, Blackburn, Rothenberg, Snyder, Owens, and McClure come to mind) who work into the poem by first working outside their literal selves in deference to the other, recognizing a larger universal, cosmological, or ecological “Whole” that is so often indicative of or associated solely with “Eastern” poetry, art, music, philosophy, and spirituality.

Returning to Blanchot’s essay on Orpheus, in light of the above passage, Blanchot writes that “…by turning toward Eurydice, Orpheus ruins the work…he betrays the work, and the night” (Blanchot 171). The night, for Blanchot, is not unlike the language of deep image, and what Kelly says a poetics of deep image demands “…that the image works in all its urgency, at its maximal communicative force…the language of deep image restores the poetry of desperation” (Notes). Kelly’s language of deep image,
expressed as Orpheus’s “night” in Blanchot is the truth that underlies Orpheus’s turning toward Eurydice in desperation:

Not to look would be the infidelity to the measureless, imprudent force of his movement, which does not want Eurydice in her daytime truth and her everyday appeal, but wants her in her nocturnal obscurity, in her distance, with her closed body and sealed face—wants to see her not when she is visible, but when she is invisible, and not as the intimacy of a familiar life, but as the foreignness of what excludes all intimacy, and wants, not to make her live, but to have living in her the plentitude of her death. That alone is what Orpheus came to seek in the Underworld. All the glory of his work, all the power of his art, and even the desire for a happy life in the lovely, clear light of day are sacrificed to this sole aim: to look in the night at what night hides, the other night, the dissimulation that appears (Blanchot 171).

The poet, for Kelly, like the figure of Orpheus, does not come to the deep image in order to write a poem, but rather, the poet “charges” the expression of the deep image, “using the full arsenal of poetics, so that the image works in all its urgency, at its maximal communicative force” (Notes). The poet is only poet when “the deep image works in all its urgency,” as Blanchot says of Orpheus: “He is Orpheus only in the song…He has life and truth only after the poem and because of it” (Blanchot 171). The myth of Orpheus is about letting go, of allowing the song itself to find expression; the journey to the Underworld to resurrect Eurydice is not the song, it is the vehicle by which the song comes, just as for Kelly, the poem is not about “deep images” or what they “reveal,” the
poem is the movement inward and outward simultaneously, “Poetry [is…] the ACT of relating word to percept, image to image until the continuum is achieved” (Notes). As Blanchot insists:

Writing begins with Orpheus’s gaze. And this gaze is the movement of desire that shatters the song’s destiny, that disrupts concern for it, and in this inspired and careless decision reaches the origin, consecrates the song… To write, one has to write already. In this contradiction are situated the essence of writing, the snag in the experience, and inspiration’s leap (Blanchot 176).

In an as yet unpublished monograph on Kelly’s work, poet and critic Edward Schelb takes on the extraordinary task of working through Kelly’s seemingly impenetrable body of work, as well as the many areas of inquiry that inform the work. In doing so, Schelb not only demands that Kelly be considered among the most accomplished of all American poets, but also, Schelb inaugurates what should be a body of scholarship on Kelly’s work and on the many areas of inquiry that make their way into his work, and are purposefully excluded by an American academe that refuses to admit speculative theories and controversial writers and thinkers into its exclusionary canon. Moving out of how Kelly follows an Orphic tradition in his work, it is now necessary to develop a discussion of how his work is informed by, among others, alchemy, mysticism, and the occult. There have been a few studies of modern and contemporary poetics dedicated to occult influence on the work of figures including H.D., Pound, Yeats, and Robert Duncan. However, these studies are few and far between, and often it is writers
and thinkers that are engaged in discussions from outside the margins of contemporary scholarship who are unafraid to address the prevalence of occult knowledge, alchemical discourses, and the like. These individuals generally do not have university teaching posts or tenured careers in professional academe; with this said, I am not surprised that Edward Schelb’s monograph is visibly absent from published, contemporary scholarship. Although Kelly himself has had a teaching career at Bard College for over forty years, it is likely that he has been able to do so because of Bard’s reputation as a forward thinking, intellectually curious and challenging atmosphere. Likewise, Kelly’s tome of published work is found among some of the most forward thinking, and fearless small, and independent publishing houses in the country, not university presses who move away from work that deals with occult and other related themes or innovative poetics, obviously with a few exceptions. The following discussion relies heavily on Schelb’s work for two major reasons, the first being that many of his insights into the occult and alchemical aspects of Kelly’s work mirror my own, and more importantly, using it as a lens through which to read some of Kelly’s most difficult poems allows for a dialogue to develop, the very “participation” in the making of meaning that Kelly demands from his readers.

In the chapter titled “The Blade of Seth and the Peacock’s Tail: Towards the Poetics of Alchemy,” Schelb writes, regarding Kelly’s late sixties work, up to and including *The Loom* (1975), and here I quote him at length:

…the surface of his poetry increasingly fragments, and melodic structures, which gradually transformed images through repetition,
are replaced by discordant image-clusters and isolated hermetic references.

Posing as the alchemist Giordano Bruno signaling through the flames, Kelly is garbed in the robes of the Magi and armed with an arsenal of occult symbols. His alchemy is the pinnacle of excess as he ravages countless texts and traditions to feed an enormous appetite for song and provide the splendid props for his operatic artifices. He is not only Bruno, but Cain the Wanderer stealing an amulet from Mecca, a mask from Port au Prince, a mandala from Tibet. Everything from Sumerian glyphs to the cylinder-seals of Mohojendaro was suddenly raw material for his alchemical forge (Schelb 46).

Kelly brings all of these, at times disparate, elements into his work under the auspices of alchemical research. He is looking well beyond “image” to song, spirit, and language at both the verbal level, as well as the physical materiality of words inscribed on pages, palm leaves, cylinders, and tablets. This phase of his work is developed over a series of poems and longer collections, but it is *Finding the Measure* (1968), and its “Prefix” that comes closest to a manifesto of sorts:

> Finding the measure is finding the mantram

> is finding the moon, as index of measure,

> is finding the moon’s source;

> if that source

> is Sun, finding the measure is finding

the natural articulation of ideas.
The organism
of the macrocosm, the organism of language,
the organism of I combine in ceaseless naturing
to propagate a fourth,
the poem,
from their trinity.

Style is death. Finding the measure is finding
a freedom from that death, a way out, a movement
forward.

Finding the measure is finding the
specific music of the hour,
the synchronous
consequence of the motion of the whole world.

“Finding the measure is finding the mantram” or sacred words used in meditation, on
language, the body, the poem, and world and their synthesis as the true real. For Kelly,
the poem becomes, over the course or process that is its composition, an investigation,
examination, and provocation of the above mentioned “material” that constitutes reality.
It is in Finding the Measure and elsewhere, where Kelly’s writing and the reader’s
interpretation converge in an act of call and response that together constitute and actively
engage the very discourses (including language, image, and sound broadly defined) that constitute a perceptible reality. To perform the “mantram” of writing and reading is to admit that there is no “outside” to the language of the poem; the text is as much a part of the literal, tangible material that constitutes reality as such. And the texts that inform Kelly’s work, in this case the Prefix, are often at odds with so-called “sanctioned” discourses. For example, for Kelly, finding the measure “is finding the moon, as index of measure,” and from a Jungian perspective, the moon acts as literal “prima material” in the alchemical process. The moon, according to Jung, “…represents the unknown substance that carries the projection of the autonomous psychic content” (Jung 317). And although it is named, or “marked” as “moon,” it is, according to Jung, “…impossible to specify such a substance (what constitutes ‘moon’ as prima material in the individual psyche) because the projection emanates from the individual and is consequently different in each case,” inferring that each, individual reader will always create new knowledge in the collaboration with Kelly in the making of “meaning” (317). Thus, meaning is not fixed, it is dynamic and changing; it explodes beyond the confines of time, history, memory, space, geography, and the like. Considered against a socio-political-religious backdrop that demands allegiance to a single narrative or “truth,” dynamic meaning is a threat and must be suppressed whether it be via enforcing a strict interpretation of what constitutes a “poem,” relegating poetry to a space of leisure, or censoring and devaluing a series of writings or the work of unsanctioned writers and thinkers. This is evident when considering the line “index of measure.” An “index” can refer to a reference or operative symbol, yet it can also be read as the list of books that were forbidden to be read by the Roman Catholic laity.
Kelly argues in the *Prefix* that the measure is not fixed: “if that source/ is Sun, finding the measure is finding/ the natural articulation of ideas,” ideas which speak, are expressive, yet “articulation” can also refer to the connecting of different parts. The “articulation” is the joint; it is the moveable hinge which links together the ideas and gives them life and mobility, action. “The organism/ of the macrocosm, the organism of language,/ the organism of I combine in ceaseless naturing/ to propagate a fourth,/ the poem,/ from their trinity” writes Kelly. It is here that Kelly locates the physical body and the mythological origins of the human body and universal soul in the act of composition, in the act of making. In Jung’s most elaborate and at times overwhelming study on alchemy (much more esoteric and demanding than *Psychology and Alchemy*), and perhaps the culmination of his life’s work, *Mysterium Coniunctionis* (published in 1963, and his final work which took him from 1941 to 1954 to compose), in chapter five titled “Adam and Eve,” he explores the figure of Adam as both first “man” and first, or potentially, universal soul. Adam has a “polarity,” according to Jung, that “…is based on the contradiction between his physical and spiritual nature…in the Islamic view…Adam’s soul was created thousands of years before his body and then refused to enter the figure made of clay, so that God had to put it in by force” (408). According to Jung, Adam is both “from whom the macrocosm arose, or who is the macrocosm. He is not only the prima material but a universal soul which is also the soul of men” (409). That is to say, Adam rejects his less than suitable clay body, perhaps incapable of fully expressing and experiencing the sensuous dimensions of a physical presence in the material world, and he is eventually forced into a physical form, and so it is potentially with great pleasure that he, with Eve, eats of the tree of knowledge. In fact, according to
Jung, “According to the teachings of the Bogomils, Adam was created by Satanael, God’s first son and the fallen angel, out of mud…Adam’s inner connection with Satan is likewise suggested in Rabbinic tradition, where Adam will one day sit on Satan’s throne” (409). So then, in Kelly’s Prefix, “the organism of the macrocosm” or Adam as both physical body and spiritual/universal soul, and “the organism of language” and Kelly’s individual psyche or soul, his “I,” are the trinity by which the poem emerges. The reader is the macrocosm, is language, is body, as is poet—all are essentially one and the same in the making of knowledge. Also, in just this single stanza, by going much deeper than a cursory glance, Kelly’s poetry takes a left hand, or rebel stance against any and all institutions and boundaries which prohibit the movement, energy, and dynamism of thought and language. Thus he declares “Style is death,” since style constricts and delegates that the image (not of the deep variety) must be consistent and maintained. Adam as “first man” is also “macrocosm”/universal soul, and simultaneously the figure of Satan’s son, rebel angel who defies God, the transcendental deity or figurative force that, albeit veiled and unspoken, often underlies the demands of conservative aesthetic, religious, and political institutions.

Schelb too considers the freedom and energy inherent in Kelly’s poetics, as he activates alchemy and occult knowledge as lightning rods for his poetics. Schelb writes “By offering him a philosophical basis for his experiments with syntax, alchemy provided him with a poetic methodology that grounded his anarchic energies,” and in reference to another key text in Kelly’s alchemical/occult transition, Axon Dendron Tree (1967), “His early Provencal lyricism and deep image experiments had been developing into more elaborate musical structures with complex clusters of hidden meanings”
Axon Dendron Tree is published just one year before Finding the Measure, and it reads as a long preamble to the tight, sharp edges produced by the former. Kelly uses the space of Axon Dendron Tree to contemplate his transition from an image-centric based poetics, into the meditative space inaugurated in Finding the Measure. Also, Axon Dendron Tree is a formal response to Louis Zukofsky’s A (1963); its lines imitate Zukofsky’ short lines which often contain only one to three words. The title, Axon Dendron Tree, is an allusion to the mythic trees that populate the world’s ancient religious traditions, including the tree of knowledge in the Garden of Eden, to Yggdrasil, the tree in Norse mythology that connects heaven, earth, and hell. Schelb contends that Axon Dendron Tree and “…its polysyntactic grids and word-chains are indeed an approximation of ‘total syntax,’ and esoteric texts rewarded [Kelly] with a Nibelungen hoard of images, granting him permission, in a sense, to deepen his understanding of the body and its relation to words” (Schelb 47). Critic Patrick Meanor, in his reading of Axon Dendron Tree from his entry in the Dictionary of Literary Biography: American Poets Since World War II (Fourth Series, 1996) also heavily influenced by Schelb, describes the poem as “…a poetics of the Word as word and not representational of any specific entity but instead the root, the ground of all of them” (Meanor 129). In the poem, Meanor insists, “Kelly strives to ground his poetics in natural rhythms,” and quoting Schelb at length he writes that: “The result, as Schelb points out, is that ‘instead of the visual image or the allegory of depth, the word is foregrounded. The visual axis no longer dominates. Instead, the linguistic play offered by phonemes and morphemes offers a musical, processual structure devoid of a dominant ethos of objective representation…Instead of isolated images, there are multiple linkages of sound and
metonymic associations. Discourse on the structure of language now redefines the nature of Kelly’s poetics. The self and the body are seen as linguistic structures’’ (129).

As Schelb and Meanor insist, Kelly’s poetics take a radical turn in the late sixties work, away from simply a consideration of the image, into a poetics that considers the very material that structures material reality, namely, language, image, and sound. The alchemical process and exploration of occult knowledge allows Kelly to more adequately address his desire for a poetics that can consider the harmonious poly-melodies that order reality, even if often those melodies seem chaotic and disjointed. It is as though Kelly is reacting against the assumed lack of totality or “whole” ushered in by postmodernity, while simultaneously arguing for a “wholeness” that can be considered without deference to a transcendental deity or the supposed “truth” of linear history. Kelly’s “whole” is fragmented and disjointed, yet it maintains a kind of harmonious structure since, as opposed to grand narratives and totalizing discourses, this “whole” permits everyone, and everything. All bodies, psyches, narratives, physical material, etc. are, as Meanor observes and Schelb demonstrates in his reading of *Axon Dendron Tree*, “linguistic structures.”

III. Composing An “Other” World: Ta’Wil and Orphic Dissent in *The Loom*

In a conversation published in *Vort 5* (1974) entitled “Ta’Wil or How to Read,” Kelly insists, and here I quote him at length:

I’ve talked before about why poems are hard and have to be hard

and have to get harder; that if they’re not hard they’re no good, and
about how ‘poem’ replaces ‘religion,’ I mean as its enemy—that it represents the development of the growth of our consciousness that we can transcend the religion that purports sacramentally or magically to perform an act for us, and instead forces to the point of performing it for ourselves, transmutatively (115).

Reading Kelly’s work is a process that allows the reader to enter other or disparate concepts, images, and melodies into the space of the poem. Each reading should produce something else; it should create an extension into other areas of inquiry. The poet does not do the work for the reader. In Kelly’s poetry, reading and writing are intrinsically linked—two actions that pervade the event of the poem’s reading and composition. As he insists in the preceding passage, the word “poem,” as a designation, becomes the ‘enemy’ in the compositional process. What Kelly aims for are poems that are “events” that must be attended by reader as well as poet. “Poem,” like “religion,” determines that something has value; when an object is presented under the guises “poem” or “religion,” it proclaims or purports its own value as inherent. However, the “poem” as an object holds little value as such; it is a poetics of process, a communion between reader and poet that “sanctifies” the space of poem and creates meaning in Kelly’s work.

The real or perceived world exists in such a way so as to suggest that its origins, natural laws, social structures, and the like, have already been “figured out” or approved by post-Enlightenment reason or religious dogma. However, the very languages that constitute and compose reality produce an excess that cannot be contained or conceptualized according to the above schemata. This excess discourse locates itself within the gaps, aporias, and margins of contemporary reason and religious dogma—the
very spaces out of which poetic discourse emerges to engage so-called “reality.” In these cracks and crevices in the surface of the real, hidden and suppressed languages and marginalized discourses of thought and intuition, philosophy and speculative science, political and social theories, are brought to light via the poet’s engagement with these “others” in the act of poetic composition. The poetic process provides the means for a direct conversation and mediation with these alternative discourses, these poly-vocal “others.” The existence of this excess other demands interpretation; however, this demand does not and cannot conform to rational modes of thought already weighed down by the very language it employs in order to seek an understanding of the world. Instead, this demand calls for another mode of thought, one that simultaneously charges readers with the responsibility of both interpreting these discourses of “otherness” and developing the very mode of thought or process by which these discourses are to be engaged. In a sense, poetic discourse, in its direct conversation with the other, subverts on one level and calls into being on another, the reader and poet’s “I” or subjectivity. This “I” is the critical consciousness that calls the subject into being and allows the subject access to and demands responsibility for the creation of what is referred to as “reality.” Without this delicate balance, both subject and “world” are susceptible to totalitarian and dogmatic modes of thought based in prevailing ideology.

In “Ta’Wil or How to Read,” Kelly continues to contextualize his relationship to the poem and the reality in which it enters, reflects, and transforms. The poem, according to Kelly, “doesn’t ask anything of me, except to write it or drive it or use it or whatever. Because I do sense reality as a task” (118). In this sense, Kelly as poet becomes the medium for a language that will transform what he refers to as the “perceptual world.”
Understanding or making the “perceptual world” intelligible is the task of the poet or according to Kelly “anybody else who wants to play that game” (118). Designating “reality as a task” raises the value of the poem from the placid drudgery of object to the intense field of things. Also, Kelly begins to distance or disrupt the relationship between the poet’s ego and with it an individual desire to objectify reality and the poem, which takes on a collective desire to admit all things simultaneously into the space of its composition. The poet’s responsibility is to “drive” the poem, meaning Kelly must maintain a consistent level of intensity during the act of composition. This intensity forces an incision into reality; it creates an additional or alternative space from which to view and engage the “perceptual world.” In this respect, Kelly’s poetics not only “MAKE IT NEW” but MAKE IT POSSIBLE for a myriad of alternative discourses to commune in the task of perceiving the “real” world. His poetics initiate both the reader and writer’s critical consciousness, creating spaces for new thought and subsequently action.

Kelly’s reflections on process in *The Loom* celebrate the spontaneity of narrative and his inability to stall or subvert the process, the composition. The “recital” of the poem, borrowing from the Ta’Wil in the work of Avicenna, selects one “seed” to grow, and Kelly insists it often appears during the composition of the poem that “the other seeds do not” (122). At the conclusion of the poetic composition, Kelly stands in awe. Although it appears the “Recital” has only allowed one seed to develop, nevertheless, “it’s all there” (122). He reflects:

> And I stand in awe of that narrative process. Because that’s [writing the sections of *The Loom*] really the first time that I came to know about the
spontaneity of narrative. I mean of course certain kinds of narrative do
tell themselves—fantasies or dreams or whatnot—but to have the power
expressing itself right in the moment of one’s conscious, most alert
activity, where I’m thinking about vowels and its thinking what’s
going to happen, seems to me so extraordinary (122).

Kelly’s poetics allow the narrative to “happen,” and because of this, the poem not only
allows marginal discourse or “other seeds” to enter the composition, it also develops its
own method of attending to all of the possible “seeds” in a single poetic field without
boundaries.

The poetic process is not to be confused with “procedure,” or something that can
necessarily be directly applied to other acts of writing and reading. Kelly insists that the
terms used to describe his poetics, “the Recital,” are “nonparaphraseable” (130). This
attempt to paraphrase poetic process, Kelly warns, “gets painfully close to the problem
where process becomes procedure. Or where, in talking about one’s process, one could
seem to be talking about a procedure that would be transferable as a method, to
somebody else” (130). Turning “process” into “procedure” stifles the composition by
setting up arbitrary boundaries or a prescribed method that must be followed in order to
achieve a so-called “successful” poem. The poem would retreat back into object, into
“enemy,” if the process of its composition is no longer a task. If the action that the poetic
process implies is limited by the restrictions of method, the arenas of potential risk,
discovery, and inquiry are also then limited or disengaged. In short, the potential of the
field or space of the poem is short circuited; the energy of its language falls flat on the white, cold page.

Kelly’s poetics should not be approached like the many ways contemporary literary theory is approached, as a set of tools to be learned and then applied to creating a new text. Rather, Kelly admits that the “terms of the Recital…are exegetible” (130). His use of the term “exegetible” implies more than “capable of being interpreted or understood;” “exegetible implies an act of interpretation more akin to sacred or religious texts. The sense here is that the “spirit” of the process and its language can be studied or interpreted, but the “letter” or “Law” of the process cannot be taken literally or used to exercise power over the composition. Following the “Law” of any approach to composition or interpretative reading devolves into a kind of fundamentalism. This fundamentalism leads to an unflinching and unchanging method that disallows the free flow of concepts to enter the poetic process. The “spirit” of Kelly’s poetics is such that a concept or idea may be introduced to the compositional space, but it may not be necessarily carried through to fruition. It may change, shift meaning, contradict what was already written, but it will never devolve into “Law” or METHOD. Fundamentalisms produce concepts and modes of thought that become dull and uninspired, particularly over time. At its worst, a fundamentalism proves debilitating and often dangerous to any process be it poetic, artistic, spiritual, or political.

Actively reading Kelly implies active participation with the poet and an approach to the poem and the world which it passes in, through, on, and about as “task.” In his Autobiography, Kelly admits “…and I am with you reader, really, for writing and reading are the same act, only different phases (Kelly 186). He implies that reading and writing
require the same energy because both produce the potential for thought and action. Also, both reading and writing occupy the same psychical space. The reader bends and shapes the poem around their own subjective experience, interaction with the world, and the multifaceted development of their sense of perception. Similarly, the reader engages the poem in a specific instance in time, different from that of the poet, and may recognize varying linguistic, discursive, and melodic aspects of the language of the poem. Any time a reader returns or re-visits a Kelly poem, their relationship to the text, their reading “experience,” and their active engagement with the poem as an event, will change.

Kelly’s act of composition and the reader’s initiation into the act of reading, another “phase” of the writing process, allows access, via the aesthetic dimension, into an underworld, into a direct communion with the other that often proves to be new, strange, and revelatory. Exploring the depths of Kelly’s work explodes reality and loosens imposed shackles on the critical consciousness. The effects of this process of reading, and thus composing, alongside the poet extend then beyond the aesthetic dimension and permeate other discursive fields. In short, something, a process, a “task,” occurs as Kelly and reader share in the making of the poem’s knowledge. The process is a literal descent into the un-mediated underworld where the other emerges with the potential to shake the very foundations of the discourses that are deployed to create the “reality” that supposedly exists on the “outside” of the poem.

This sharing of the making of knowledge in the poem can be demonstrated strongly by looking closely at Section 9 of Kelly’s The Loom, titled “Sonata in A b, op.110 Essay on Form.” The poem begins in the right hand margin, where it is called a sonata or a musical composition in contrasted movements. Although there is a table of
contents at the front of *The Loom* intended to index each section using sentences that function, according to Kelly as “more in the nature of one-line commentary than title,” Section 9 is the only one to have its “one-line commentary” appear as an inscription on the poem itself. Does Kelly include the section’s title in an effort to mark or determine its “content” prior to the reader’s arrival, or does he include the title because it is, in fact, part of the literal language of the poem? It seems to announce Section 9 as an event, not to be confused with an object. Kelly writes:

I want to say a language
the way lovers learn,
names of their parts first,
shaky on rules (109).

The desire then, to speak a language the way a musician seeks and experiments through her instrument and base knowledge of certain musical forms in order to transform raw sounds into “things” (riffs, phrases) to fill silent gaps and become her composition. Similarly, Kelly attempts to transform the poem from marks on a page to a literal space where the action of his composition, the explanation of his approach to form becomes the space of the poem itself. Kelly desires an approach to language in Section 9 that is awkward and inexperienced, one that risks the possibility of pleasure, pain, gratification or embarrassment. “The world,” for Kelly, is made up of permitted “words” that slowly create reality over time. There is always the possibility of “song,” of what he refers to as an additional “(division/of tones over time,/stepwise)/ if Time/ were all at once,/ no melody” (110). The song, or poem, serves as an incision into the language of the
everyday and therefore draws specific attention to words as that which create the “real” of objects from the “world” of things. Kelly’s desire is not in the final form the poem takes, but the poetic process. He insists that “Nothing amounts to much/except in time./I mean go slow” (110).

The desire for a language of inexperience and the repudiation of inherited concepts regarding Time and melody are the first two movements in Kelly’s “sonata” and are also indicative of the kind of space he both enters and begins to map during the course of his “Essay on Form.” Kelly’s essay is not unlike Gertrude Stein’s Composition as Explanation (1926), where Stein does not set out to explicate her approach to composition, but rather initiate her readers into the kind of space where her writing finds form and takes shape. Stein insists that the language she uses “makes a composition, it confuses, it shows, it is, it looks, it likes it as it is, and this makes what is seen as it is seen” (Stein 523). The language of Stein’s “Composition as Explanation” creates its own melody over time, across the page in sentences and phrases that start and stop, repeat and deliberately turn and question what it has just permitted itself to speak.

Like Stein, Kelly refuses to be inhibited in his approach to poetic form and process. Stein insists “the creator of the new composition in the arts is an outlaw until he is a classic” (521). This concept of the composer as outlaw suggests writing as an act of transgression, one that determines an antagonistic relationship to the language of the poem. Stein’s composition resists its own METHODS by becoming process over the course of the essay, whereby she transgresses the reader’s idea that this piece, by the very nature of its title, must prescribe a compositional methodology, rather than demonstrate it. In a similar move in Section 9 of The Loom, Kelly writes:
I mean to make
love to you too.
If that’s not permitted.
If not,
well, under some bridge (110).

Kelly engages in several “transgressions.” He announces his desire not for intimacy, but for a scene of seduction in which the reader and perhaps the language of his poem has no option but to submit. He announces his position as outlaw or outsider; he will choose to act from the margins “under some bridge” without consent. The “bridge” also affords him invisibility, a space from which to launch a guerilla maneuver against both language and reader, disrupting the melody of this poem at any point. This serves, perhaps, as a warning to those who will simply pass lightly through the poem and emerge beyond its boundaries unmoved by the sharp contrasts in melody and tone occurring along the way. He will take his time, “slow as day” in the compositional space.

As Kelly insists in the stanza which follows, his desire to “make love” stems from un-relinquished desire, “long years festering/ in virginity” only to come to a recognition that the world the poet inhabits is one of “loss” that is not to be “made up” for, but “re-visioned” from the release of his “festering” desire for “intimacy.” There is a desire to act upon, and with, an other which is located beyond the boundaries of the literal body, or the “body” that comprises the poem as object. Kelly measures his experience with that of the “world” through language. “Virginity,” or inexperience, must be sacrificed in order to enter into the poetic process and the world, in order to take up the task of
transforming both. He is moving toward the goal of seduction, to lead the poem into forms it resists, to have it speak what it did not initially intend to “say.” Kelly writes, “the pain was real/ and warps me still” (111). The loss of “virginity,” gaining entrance into experience and all its sensuousness, produces “pain” because the safety and solitude afforded the poet who shields his senses, remains chaste, and views the world as “reality” is lost, or physically torn in the process. Initiation into experience shatters the world into “things” and begins to slow the artificial speed of progress, the false symbolic order of the real displayed on the surface. The process demands re-enchantment of the language that shapes the world.

Kelly discovers that “the connection/ is too delicate/ to stress” (111). The “connection” between language and the way it shapes the world must be recognized in order to use poetic language to transform the world. Failing to recognize the connection means failing to recognize the power and potential of languages ability to transform and create reality.

The physical world
yields its unity
to our metaphysical fact:

To listen
when it does not speak.
To determine
the exact distance
between any word & any other
& by skill to map
the landscape between.

Then coax the word to speak (112).

Kelly insists that the poet must alter her perception, hear the dissonance in the world amidst the awkward silence of the everyday. The “metaphysical fact” is the world’s transformation and change that occurs behind the veil of unity presented by the visual reality of the material world. The spaces between individual words only bridge gaps in the delicate fabric of the real. Mapping the landscape between individual words allows the poet to measure the potential of the poetic field, the poetic process, for creating additional words, thoughts, and concepts within the gaps. Reading and writing, engaging in the poetic process forces a recognition, an attempt to “coax the world to speak” an alternative, a new concept, or something repressed and hidden from view.

Section 9 of *The Loom* continues to develop Kelly’s concept of form through continuing shifts in context and image. Although the title of the section, “Essay on Form,” certainly brings Kelly’s poetics into sharper focus, the Section as a “Sonata,” in contrasted movements, determines the action of the poem’s compositional space. Section 9 becomes a performance by which the language of the poem is intricately woven with competing textures in sound and image, becoming a meditation on the very nature of language and its ability to call the poem, the body, and the world into being.

Melody
especially when it grieves

(arioso dolente)
takes your hand.
Leads you
willing or unwilling
to the pine-lit
wedding chamber (112).

The melody of the poem simultaneously creates a scene and a space of seduction between the poet, reader, and itself. Its ability to do so, to create both a physical action and a meditative space relies on the ability of the melody, the poet, and the reader to grieve. This grief signals a loss, the recognition of the void that underlies the language that calls the melody, the poet, and the reader into being. The poet and reader’s physical bodies, and the “body” of the melody in the music of the poem, in this scene of seduction, enter into the same psychical space mediated by language. The awareness of the void underlying the language that constitutes reality is unavoidable:

you are married
to the fact of it
the light goes out
on all you’ve felt
or failed to feel (112).

Felt and lived experience are mediated by language, and “grief is the distance,” the extent to which one recognizes the void (112). “Grief,” as a concept, is used to
measure the distance and nature of a possible course of action beyond the limits imposed by language. Kelly warns not to be caught “in statement or story” (112). “Statements” can become prescriptive and develop specific PROCEDURES and METHOD, and “story” orders experience into a specific narrative. These create boundaries preventing the “spontaneity of narrative” crucial to poetic composition. Instead, Kelly proposes an open ended “flow” of language which moves “over the contours” of the compositional field, like the “liberty of light” freely moving across the lover’s body (113).

This same compositional space in Section 9 of *The Loom*, re-evaluates the concept of time.

Truth is a day
& every day.
Refute that
& be wiser
than your eyes (113).

“Day” is used to mark increments in time; it orders the world into seemingly progressive units. The truth that each day arrives bears false witness to the truth of the infinity of the real, its natural resistance to a man-made unit of measure suggesting progression. Kelly asserts that the reader mistrust the eyes, the sense of sight, and rely on more progressive modes of perception.

Writing and reading are slow moving; the poetic process is a difficult task. The transformation of the world takes time and does not come to a conclusion. These acts occur over time, and in time. Transgressing the boundaries of thought and perception, as
well as time, is necessary to create the space, the open field where potential action may take place:

I want to take your time
linger
is the shape of it,

an hour
is to go through.

Gate after gate.

That is what the form of words
(forming a place for words)
lets in,

& what the Matter is

of our work,

to let the time

speak itself through (113).

Perceiving in order to act, to transform the world becomes automatic; the poem moves itself along for both poet and reader. As Kelly insists, “we’ve been making love so long/ we almost forget/ we’re doing anything” (113). Section 9 accelerates in speed and intensity in a display of call and response. Like the double quartet of Ornette Coleman’s *Free Jazz,* the two bodies of Section 9 respond to each other’s movements as the process continues toward a kind of collectivity, at which point, the two will come together to produce a new word, thought, or image into the fabric of the world:
& then an acceleration
begins in my throat
to find some word
shaped like what is
to be me in you,
that might answer
all the subtle
information
to which your body
all this while
subjects me (114).

The process produces “subtle information,” something that may lay in waiting between the words of the poem; it hints at possibility and potential, calling for a response from poet and reader. The specific word, the thought or image, must contain all that is poetic process—“(it must sound like you).” The process accelerates, widening the field of potential so that “a word begins to travel,” but it is unintelligible yet full of energy, enough to burn: “the word catches fire,” and it is “aching to sound” (114).

All of these images determine the relationship between the poetic process and unconscious desire. The word, image, or concept will not be repressed, and it will not allow itself to be censored or sublimated in an act of psychic defense. It will find its expression in the poem, in its compositional space:

the precise shape
of what must come
now
    leaping to fill it
& louder than I could
ever have imagined
it suddenly speaks (115).

The “Essay on Form” does not end abruptly; it reverberates in the minds of both poet and reader. There is a release of libidinal energy that occurs at the end of Section 9 of The Loom that seeks to find something to work in, for, or against. Is the final push a word, a thought, an action, or an image? In a sense, what remains at the conclusion of Kelly’s “Essay on Form” is excess. It is the potential for something beyond the limits of the poem. Yet it is inspired by the process of composition; the end of the poem announces itself, “here I am…do something with this…”

Returning to the concept of Kelly as an “Orphic” poet is an inherently political gesture. In his “Philosophical Inquiry into Freud” titled Eros and Civilization (1955), Herbert Marcuse positions the figure of Orpheus, and subsequently the figure of the poet, as belonging to the realm of “sensuousness,” and thus antagonistic to traditional concepts based on reason. This, Marcuse explains, follows accordingly with the philosophic tradition’s approach to human existence: “whatever belongs to the sphere of sensuousness, pleasure, impulse, has the connotation of being antagonistic to reason—something that has to be subjugated, constrained” (Marcuse 159). Classic modes of thought are dominated by repressive reason, and the suppression of the poetic as
antagonistic to prevailing social, political, intellectual, and economic structures, moves fluidly across Plato’s *Republic* (Book Ten) and the oppressive regimes which earmark the pages of human history.

Using Freud’s term for imagination, phantasy, Marcuse insists that “in the realm of phantasy, the unreasonable images of freedom become rational” (160). Imagination (phantasy) gives breath and substance to a number of “strange truths” in literature and art, myth and folklore, and yet the ability of these “strange truths” to make an impact beyond the realm of imagination, “the effort to derive from these truths the content of a valid reality principle surpassing the prevailing one has been entirely inconsequential” (160). The imagination, as a space from which to reconsider the Truths that structure the real world, is relegated to the level of “childish phantasy,” and disregarded, According to Marcuse (160). He insists that what does move into the real, beyond the so-called limits of the imagination are archetypes, symbols whose meanings are accepted and “interpreted in terms of phylogenetic or ontogenetic stages, long since surpassed” (161). One such archetype Marcuse aligns with prevailing “reality principles” is that of Prometheus, who is identified as the “culture-hero of toil, productivity, and progress through repression” (161). All of these so-called traits work against those associated with the realm of the imagination, which gives rise to sensuous and antagonistic modes of thought. For Marcuse, the figure of Orpheus emerges as the symbolic vessel that links the imagination with critical thought, and provides a viable approach toward acknowledging and incorporating the imagination in real world praxis.

The symbol of Orpheus represents both a threat to and the possibility of an alternative to the prevailing reality principles in the West, and certainly the contemporary
United States. His voice, remarks Marcuse “…is the image of joy and fulfillment; the voice which does not command but sings…literature has preserved [this] image” (162). Poetry relies on a necessary return to another sense of Time, or more importantly, a necessary forgetting of all that surrounds so-called reason which orders “reality.” This sense of “negative capability” recalls in the Present a primordial world for Marcuse that is “… not to be mastered and controlled but to be liberated…” a release, Marcuse argues, from “…the repressed and petrified forms of man and nature” (164). The expression and reception of Orphic modes of thought do not strengthen “reality”—they disrupt it. Likewise, these expressions seldom teach what can best be characterized as a set of morals and values associated with prevailing reality; as Marcuse insists, they do not “…promote and strengthen this reality…they explode it” (165). This is the reason why thought derided from the imagination is dismissed as “child-like phantasy” and removed from the process of so-called rational thinking which defines reality—not due to its “simple” or “childish” nature, but its inherent danger.

In mythology, the Orphic song can awaken potentialities in animate and inanimate things, what Marcuse refers to as “Orphic Eros,” the ability to liberate what has been repressed in “un-erotic reality” (165). This implies, symbolically, the recognition that all things have an “other” potential, that in all things exists contraries that, when unlocked, may significantly alter or permanently displace “reality” as such. As Marcuse insists: “Orpheus is the archetype of the poet as liberator and creator: he establishes a higher order in the world…In his person, art, freedom, and culture are eternally combined” (170). In the aesthetic dimension, the Orphic “reality principle must be sought and validated” (171). Marcuse, philosopher, uses the myth of Orpheus to mark a necessary
path toward entering into the aesthetic field in order to not emerge from it with new modes of thought, but to incorporate the aesthetic dimension into the thought processes which define reality both inside psychical spaces, and outside in the material world. This is the same demand that Kelly’s “Essay on Form” in *The Loom* demands as well—“here I am”—ACT. The work of Robert Kelly attempts to bridge the gap between the aesthetic dimension and the outside, or reality beyond the borders of the poem, by engaging in a compositional space that both makes meaning and challenges the psychical and literal boundaries of the discourse that makes “the world.”

Kelly’s poetics demonstrate that both the alchemist’s quest for ‘gold” and Orpheus’ descent to the underworld in an attempt to return Eurydice to the realm of the living share in Derrida’s demand for a “well composed logos,” from the initial chapters of the dissertation. That is to say, both Orpheus and the alchemist work with a living, organic language in an attempt to achieve their goals. And thus it is this process that is the work, not the conclusions. When the alchemist fails to transform base metals into gold, and Orpheus fails to return Eurydice to the realm of the living, the figurative works succeed.

Akin to the historical backdrop regarding deep image in the Postwar era discussed in Chapter One, there is always already a continuous social, political, theological etc. conservative and incorporeal *force* which attempts to disrupt and dismiss the poetic process or material and active imagination deployed in alchemical, orphic, and other endeavors. I deem this force “incorporeal” because it takes its disembodied form from so many different and disparate discourses which come together under the guise of a single, shadowy entity. Consider the striking and baffling similarities shared among
conservative and fundamentalist dogma in strands of reactionary Christianity, Islamists, right wing political systems in the U.S. and other countries, far left ideology as defined in China and North Korea, Neo-Nazism, and even to some degree—a few adamantly dismissive professionals in the natural, social, and human sciences. It is my assertion that Kelly’s work, while never pledging allegiance to a specific “movement” or ideology, is inherently “political.” However, the political nature of Kelly’s work is made manifest in that which has stood for all cosmological time: recognition of the eternal and simultaneous existence of chaos and order, creation and destruction, evolution and devolution, life and death. Robert Kelly’s poetics is an acknowledgement of these infinite, competing material and psychical forces in the cosmological universe, and his work demonstrates how poetic language, as defined in the work of Duncan, Olson, Blanchot, and others, is the means by which the human attempts to navigate physical and psychical “reality” via the vehicle of language, broadly defined.
Conclusion: “Last Scientists of the Whole”

This final, brief meditation will serve as an opportunity to weave together the strands which constitute the tapestry that is a study of the deep image, its moment in the historical landscape of the post-war United States and its relation to the visionary tradition and politics inherent in experimental poetics. Contemporary strains of visionary and experimental poetics share roots in deep image, yet they also share in the larger cultural/socio-political moment that has fueled the interests and imaginations of a 21st Century global community of poets, theorists, and activists. It is without a doubt that Kelly’s poetic explorations as orphic poet, alongside Rothenberg’s communion with the past, present, and future as poet-shaman share in, and at times influence, the growing interest in consciousness and cosmology, deep ecology and ecopoetics, and new ways of reading both “history” and “evolution” that are becoming prevalent in the 21st Century. It is my intention to present this not so much as a traditional conclusion, but rather, an “opening of the field.” Bearing in mind that Rothenberg views his anthologies as manifestos, I turn to the Introduction of the anthology Poems for the Millennium Volume Two (1998) written by Rothenberg and Pierre Joris, as a means of inaugurating the end of the dissertation. In the introduction, Joris and Rothenberg articulate the concerns of experimental and innovative poets working within the post-war moment, and a good number of these emphases can trace a lineage to deep image, share in the energy inaugurated by deep image, and demonstrate, in my consideration of contemporary poetry and poetics, what is truly at stake, namely, according to Rothenberg and Joris: an exploration of new forms of language, consciousness, and social/biological relationships, both by deliberate experimentation in the present and by
reinterpretation of the ‘entire’ human past” and “a widely held belief that poetry is part of a struggle to save the wild places—in the world and in the mind—and a view of the poem itself as a wild thing and of both poetry and poet as endangered species (Joris and Rothenberg, 11-12).

Let us move now toward the “end” of the beginning, toward a final look at Kelly and Rothenberg as “Last Scientists of the Whole.”

Language and image. Rhetoric and symbol. Slogan and advertisement. These are the very things that both conjure the “world” as some would have us see it, since language and symbol, along with sound, compose and transform our everyday reality. Part of the strength and push behind deep image poetics was/is the impetus to dig to the bottom of this “reality well,” to uncover the secret material—the genetic building blocks or “cosmological code” which compose the Real. For Rothenberg and Kelly, this process begins with poetry as such, the first literal and figurative guttural utterings and songs of primordial humans—whether they take the form of ritual chants, evocations to the gods, hunters mimicking their prey, cave paintings and drawings of Upper Paleolithic art, or the rhythmic pounding and shaking of dried gourds, hollow reeds, and animal skins tanned and taught across primitive (complex) drums. Deep image poetics, as a mode of inquiry, recognizes that it is from all these “beginnings” that what is named “history,” “philosophy,” “politics,” and “ideology” emerges. In the world view prevalent in the wake of the Second World War, the connection amongst these modes, specifically the materiality of language and thought as living, breathing, evolving matter, has been severed.
The title of this study and conclusion comes from the “(prefix:)” to Robert Kelly’s book of “essays” titled *In Time* (1971). In the “(prefix:),” Kelly celebrates the search, the quest for some sense of “truth” that is always already out of grasp, yet the “chips or flakes” of poetry mined from a complete and total descent into the physical and psychical material that is language, may one day be wrestled into “prose”—into something seemingly solid so as to reflect historical and scientific “truth” in the face of prior experimentation. However, Kelly is aware of the limits of prose, and he is speaking of the prose to come, a prose that will always be beyond the horizon. Thus the poets’ quest toward an understanding of the “Whole” is predicated on failure, and it is the very process, poesis, that matters most. Kelly writes:

…these gists in time, ours, these

as

(& thus as)

chips or flakes

from our latest pleistocene,

craft,

the poets (now)

last scientists of the Whole

busy at their work

so

these now, from us all,

nothing personal,

shall precede some
Kelly’s marking of the 20th Century, and I would argue to also include the present century as an extension or continuation of the previous, as “universal century & frontier time” demonstrates a lack of specificity and thus openness that is the poetic process as inquiry broadly defined. It is not mapped, nor held to any specific discursive boundary, and it is a function of poetic language, which I have argued in the previous chapters is as Derrida demands, a “living” and thus “well composed logos” subject to change, or more importantly conscious “evolution.” In opposition to poetic language, Kelly speaks in *In Time* of the language used to “name” or to inscribe. He contends: “The least important fact about the Roman Empire is that it fell, i.e., isn’t here now under its former name. Closed for alterations as often as it likes, it reopens under new management & does not
importantly change. I’m not talking about cycles. This is a continuity” (2). He goes on to conflate the Roman Empire with a “republic,” which one cannot help but identify as the U.S. in the postwar era, comprised of “…(clean white churches, snow, maple syrup, sleighs, the poets hidden, disguised as schoolmasters & divines, poetry tolerated as masturbation is tolerated, laws against it too hard to enforce” (2). Instead Kelly demands a new “Empire,” and in the passages of In Time he alludes to a figurative reading of “New York,” the “New York” of his peers, artists, poets, musicians, vagabonds, a “New York” comprised of Other, of difference, in opposition to the “republic” which Kelly reminds us “…evaporates, ulcerates out in the suburbs; the City is the Empire” (3).

Kelly’s plea in 1971 resonates in the above passage from Rothenberg and Joris’ introduction: “…poetry is part of a struggle to save the wild places—in the world and in the mind…” (Rothenberg and Joris 12). These struggles ultimately take place in the arena of language, and it is a struggle between those who would seek to control and constrain, to limit the “wild place” that is language, and the poets, the “Last Scientists of the Whole.” This is where the political dimension which resists politics as such is located in deep image: Kelly once more: “A deep breath then. Poets out in the open? The shadowy aimlessness of the poet’s motive the driving force of everything that moves? Which is close to the real burden of our responsibility” (Kelly 3).

As the opening chapter contends, the post-war years, in which we still find our human universe struggling, framed Kelly and Rothenberg’s desire to interrogate the “deep image,” and this is opposed to the “image” to which many still aspire. The “image” of “health,” “success,” “stability,” “freedom,” “security,” “peace,” etc. drives the human universe, though these “images” are comprised of language, a language
composed and manipulated to appear fixed and stable, an unchanging and unchallenging “reality.” These are the “images” that call Debord’s “Society of the Spectacle” into being, and these “images” are the figures in Rasula’s “American Poetry Wax Museum,” and these are the images one is bombarded with when they confront Charles Bernstein’s “Official Verse Culture.” In opposition to these closed “images” stands the deep image, as Rothenberg defines it in “The Deep Image is the Threatened Image,” “The ‘deep image’…struggling with the darkness…not as a literary prescription…but from an impasse in the soul, in which the protective ‘reality’ & false emblems of the inherited past have drawn a blank” (Rothenberg 43).

Robert Duncan writes in his *H.D. Book* “…I did not realize my own human life was an image, that my self was the persona of a poem in process of making, in which many levels of meaning were to be incorporated before the form of that life be realized” (Duncan 43). Duncan recognizes the poem, and language more broadly defined, as the organic material that calls himself and the world around him into being. He writes, and here I quote him at length:

But simple ends, direct uses of possible things, closing the opportunity in one, threatened the realization of some wholeness beyond. I thought not of the fruit of the tree but of the life of the tree, turned ring upon ring, the years gathered toward the spread of its roots and branches. I felt I must be, the world must be, something more various and full, having more of flux and experience than the immediate terms of achievement around me disclosed…

The poem had something to do with keeping open and unfulfilled the urgencies of life. Men hurried to satisfy ends in things, pushed their minds to
make advances, right answers, accomplishments, early maturations…They grew round and fat upon the bough in the heat that kept them where they were, and they prayed that they not fall from their success, that no wind come to break them loose (43).

The urge to “satisfy ends in things,” toward “accomplishments,” and the fear of falling from “success” is antithetical to deep image poetics, and to the compositional space Rothenberg and Kelly inhabit as “Last Scientists of the Whole.” Returning to my reading of Kelly as orphic poet, consider Jed Rasula who writes in his essay “Poetry’s Voice-Over” (1997),

Poetic inspiration is a tautology that challenges the foundations of poetry. That is, the mantric or divinatory energy that provides the literal force of inspiration leads mind down into body…

Not surprisingly, then, Blanchot sees in Orpheus a necessary resistance to accomplishment and completion…To return to the surface is to efface the trail leading down to the underworld and the subconscious (Rasula 293).

Jerome Rothenberg and Robert Kelly continue to write, to search, to compose, to investigate and irritate the Logos that claims to call us and the world into being. Their body of work is best described as accomplished beyond a doubt, but it is not “polished” or “refined” and ready to take its place in the Wax Museum. Their work makes demands upon the reader each time it is accessed; time and time again their work demands that the reader participate in the making of meaning, in the journey to the underworld, to the
heights of the “floating world.” The historical moment that preceded their meditations on
the concept of deep image was bursting at the seams with “Movements” and
“Manifestos.” Contrary to the results of a Google search, or the musings of those who
claim to be associated with it: there is no deep image “movement.” There is no fixed and
stable center to “deep image” as a poetics, as a grouping of poets, or as an “approach”
that came at a certain historical epoch and is now relegated to the dusty stacks of the
literal past. However, deep image was a “community,” and here I return once more to
Blanchot, for Rothenberg and Kelly, and those who for a brief time shared in elements of
their journey into deep image, can best be described as an “unavowable community.”
Blanchot’s “unavowable community:” “…should not entrance itself, nor should it
dissolve its constituent members into a heightened unity which would suppress itself at
the same time that it would annul itself as community” (Blanchot 8). That is to say, by
never flying the flag of “Deep Image” as a program or methodology, or traditional
community, the charged energy of deep image is eternal rather than ephemeral. This
energy is part of a universal, cosmological “Whole” that is always beyond the limits of
language or perception, or as Kelly reminds us on the final page of In Time: “Language is
Space.” Now, go “save the wild places.”
“Official verse culture” is the term coined by poet Charles Bernstein to designate poetry that appears most frequently in publications such as *The New Yorker* and *American Poetry Review*, work that conforms to the hegemonic stance developed after the Second World War. “Official verse culture” celebrates content and a post-Romantic idealization of the poet, often at the expense of innovative poetic forms. According to Bernstein, “official verse culture” “denies the ideological nature of its practice while maintaining hegemony in terms of major media exposure and academic legitimation and funding.” See Bernstein, Charles. *A Poetics*. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1992. (248-9)


The Hermetic world-view states, according to Frances A. Yates (1964), that the cosmos is ordered in such a way that the earth is located at the bottom level, and in accordance with the various levels of reality which encapsulates the physical, mental, and spiritual, what happens on any level happens on every other. See Yates, Frances. *Giordano Bruno and the Hermetic Tradition*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1991.

Charles Olson’s seminal essay, *Projective Verse*(1950), calls for a poetry of "open field" composition replacing traditional closed poetic forms with an improvised form that “accurately” reflects and engages the content of the poem. This poetic form is based on the length of line; each line coincides with a unit of breath and linguistic utterance. According to Olson, the content of the poem should hold to the axiom: "one perception immediately and directly (leading) to a further perception". See Olson, Charles. *Projective Verse. Collected Prose*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997. (239-249).

See Ezra Pound’s work on the troubadours as detailed in Hugh Kenner’s *The Pound Era*, University of California Press, 1971. Kenner notes that for Pound, “A binding, a having-to-do-with, that joins in likeness, in difference and in modulation all the poem’s materials, through which interactive web the syntactic movement flows, abandoning nothing: […] is the deepest, the most persistent Provençal intuition”(Kenner 84). Pound’s influence on Kelly and Economou is tremendous. However, Pound is most interested in the more formal elements of the troubadours, where as Kelly and Economou will develop a more “Gnostic” reading of the troubadours work, in which “desire” functions beyond the scope of courtly love to more strongly reveal its relationship to language and thought.


Tracing the pattern that emerges in U.S. foreign policy at the end of the 19th Century, particularly the declarations of the Monroe Doctrine which states in no uncertain terms that an attack on any country located within the Western Hemisphere will be considered an attack on the U.S. specifically, it is important to note how the U.S. pursues its own economically fueled imperialist program in Latin America in the 20th Century under the guise of curtailting the expansion of “Communism” into the Western Hemisphere. This is also the key determining factor in the “conflicts” the U.S. engages in overseas in the years immediately following the Second World War, namely the Korean and Vietnam Wars. In my opinion, the same rhetoric
employed in developing a cultural hegemony that “supports and defends” U.S. foreign policy “bleeds” into the discursive space of the arts in the U.S. in the post-war period. Although in the visual arts the avant garde will flourish in a movement such as abstract expressionism, in the “language arts,” specifically poetry, the very notion of an avant garde will be confined to the “ghettos” of small presses, independently produced little magazines, and local reading series, much like the way in which social, political, and economic imperatives will relegate more ethnically and racially diverse populations of U.S. citizens and new immigrants from parts of Latin America to “urban ghettos.” Finally, the same process continues the 19th Century program to eradicate the American Indian by relegating rich and diverse tribal groups to poor, economically and politically vapid “reservations” throughout the U.S.

10 See The Beatles, White Album, Capitol Records, 1968. Curiously, this album also includes the collaboration between John Lennon and Yoko Ono, a sound collage titled “Revolution Number 9,” itself an experiment in bringing to the surface of the space of the “rock album” the dark, unexplored, and libidinal regions of the unconscious. This track represents the alchemical wedding of LSD, Ono’s Fluxus influence, and Lennon’s search for a more powerful, organic texture which he deems visibly absent in the space (literal and figurative) of contemporary “pop” or “rock” songs.

11 The deep image poets incorporate the work of C.G. Jung, namely archetypal psychology, the existence of the collective unconscious, and his research and writings on alchemy. How Jung functions more specifically for the deep image poets, as well as how Jung is reconsidered from the vantage point of poststructuralism in the work of Susan Rowland will follow toward the conclusion of this chapter.

12 For Lacan, the real is the state of nature that exists prior to the individual’s passage into language. Although there may be a connection between Rothenberg’s “primal world” and the Lacanian Real, what seems to be a point of digression is the development of language. Lacan argues that the real is defined as the primal space in which the infant demands the fulfillment of its basic needs and desires, and the infant is unable to differentiate between itself and the external world. This realm is lost, according to Lacan, upon the entrance into language. For Rothenberg, it would seem that the infant is always already a linguistic being, that she is always “in language” since he seems to suggest, along with Kelly, that language is a material (read: organic) part of the “whole” or cosmological universe. Lacan differentiates between the Symbolic and the Imaginary, the former being the realm of language and narrative structures that dictate the rules and LAW of society, and the latter being the realm of fantasy which the infant develops in an effort to articulate the “loss” of access to the Real. According to Lacan, the Symbolic and the Imaginary are entwined in ego formation against the backdrop of the Real. In my estimation, it would appear that Rothenberg does not recognize a division between the Real and the Imaginary, since he considers “energy” and “intelligence” “universal constants.” In his Pre-Face to Technicians of the Sacred he writes: “What is true of language in general is equally true of poetry & of the ritual-systems of which so much poetry is a part. It is a question of energy & intelligence as universal constants &, in any specific case, the direction that energy & intelligence (=imagination) have been given. No people today is newly born” (XXV).

13 Automatic writing is an activity developed by Breton and the Surrealists that attempts to directly access the realm of the individual unconscious. Taking the work of Freud on the Unconscious, particularly his work on the significance of dream, automatic writing is done by suspending the ego’s demand for control via narrative and conventional grammatical structure and word choice. Automatic writing is also vaguely influenced by similar techniques employed by spiritual mediums in an effort to contact the dead, as well as communicate with “angels” and other metaphysical contacts. On the contrary, the source of the material produced by the surrealists is the Unconscious. Celia Rabinovitch argues that the surrealists “offer a new theory of the imagination that balanced Freud’s seemingly scientific use of free association, with a lyrical, intuitive vision that emphasized the mystery and the visual moment of epiphany.” See: Rabinovitch, Celia. Surrealism and the Sacred. Boulder: Westview Press, 2002. (147).

14 Breton famously decided, in an ironically dogmatic fashion, who was and was not a “surrealist.” When one found themselves out of favor with Breton, or if one’s work seemed to move beyond Breton’s
conception of “surrealism,” he was not adverse to excommunicating “members” of the movement’s inner circle. One could easily make the assumption that by the time surrealism as a historical movement comes to its “conclusion,” Breton was the “last surrealist standing.”

15 Although Rowland and Andrew Samuels, among countless others, demonstrate that Jung certainly comes with a good deal of excess baggage, particularly regarding feminism, anti-Semitic discourse, and Jung’s sense that there is still a transcendental figure (God, et. al.) calling the shots, I will limit my dealings with him to his work in alchemy and other theories which the deep image group read and explored. Although performing a close, reexamination of Jung’s work is an important task, this dissertation is not the arena in which I would like to begin such an undertaking. It is interesting to note that both Rowland and Samuels are from the UK, as if to suggest that the stronghold that is Freudian psychoanalysis in the U.S. in clinical practice has to a degree carried over into psychoanalytic reading practices in the humanities. This, of course, is not to say that the prevalence for Lacan’s work in the humanities, and his commensurability with poststructuralist reading practices, does not also play a significant role in the devaluation of Jung’s work in theoretical discourse in the U.S. If the reader wishes to begin without me, then I direct your attention to Rowland’s C.G. Jung and Literary Theory. New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1999. and Jung: A Feminist Revision. Malden: Blackwell Publishers, 2002. For an excellent consideration of post-Jungian theory in relation to the contemporary political sphere, see Samuels, Andrew. Politics on the Couch: Citizenship and the Internal Life. New York: Other Press, 2001.

16 Duncan responds to Kelly and Rothenberg’s statements during his correspondence with Denise Levertov. At times both are critical of the concept of deep image, and often consider the relative youth and inexperience of Kelly and Rothenberg. However, over the course of their correspondence, it becomes evident that as Duncan re-considers deep image, he recognizes that Kelly and Rothenberg’s sense of urgency in their work further articulates his own demands for a poetics of the “Whole” that in every sense of the word is entirely open and inclusive. See The Letters of Robert Duncan and Denise Levertov. Bertholf, Robert J. and Albert Gelpi eds. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004.

17 Eliade’s work proves to be very influential for Jerome Rothenberg. In the next chapter, Eliade’s work on shamamism will figure prominently as both a direct influence on Rothenberg’s development of, among other poetic innovations, ethnopoetics, and how he seems to figure his role as poet in the contemporary world. Eliade’s presence in this dissertation is also interesting considering the fact that Couliano was a student of Eliade’s, and Eliade’s work is deeply rooted in Jungian analysis. Although I have focused briefly in portions of the dissertation on Eliade’s work, I will not be mounting a critique of his concepts or intellectual history, particularly some of the pro-fascist texts he wrote as a young scholar. In terms of Eliade’s Jungian tendencies, I ask that the reader consider his work and my use of it in light of the revision of Jung’s work by Susan Rowland discussed earlier in this chapter.

18 Many of the Pre-Faces that Rothenberg uses to introduce his various anthologies are less proper introductions so much as they are arenas for the dissemination of his poetical/theoretical concerns and concepts. Much of the language and thinking that informs Rothenberg’s statements can be traced to William Blake’s poems which outline his thoughts on, among other concepts, “imagination,” “energy,” “vision,” and “prophecy.” Blake closely aligned himself with the Gnostic tradition as well as other pre-orthodox and pagan influenced forms of early Christianity. Blake’s work is also an interesting point of reference for Rothenberg since he is in many ways a multi-media artist, as his lush engraved poems reveal. Critic Terence Allan Hoagwood in his study of Blake and Shelley (Prophecy and the Philosophy of Mind, University of Alabama Press, 1985.) demonstrates that perhaps the most significant of Blake’s long prophetic books, Jerusalem “[...] begins by recalling the primeval state in which Wisdom, Art, and Science were unified,” and that Blake “[...] wishes to exercise his readers’ minds, to rouse their faculties to activity”(59). Blake, according to Hoagwood, refers to this “arousal” as “mental war”(59).


22 In 1912, Pound, alongside Richard Aldington and H.D. developed “Imagism” as a means of exploring the space between language and the object it describes. Pound “…defined the image as the presentation of ‘an intellectual and emotional complex in an instant of time.’” Though the rhythmic presentation of images was also of concern, this was a much more literal treatment of the visual image in poetic language, in opposition to Kelly and Rothenberg’s deep image, though “Imagism” and its goal to recover what Peter Nicholls calls “…a stylistic purity” does resonate with some of their initial impulses. However, “Imagism” is also what Creeley was concerned the deep image would collapse into, in his correspondence with Rothenberg. See Nicholls, Peter. *Modernisms*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995. Thirty years later, enter “Objectivism,” associated with poets Louis Zukofsky, George Oppen, and Charles Reznikoff, among others, as another meditation on the “image” in the poem in a much less literal fashion. The “Objectivists” treated the entire poem as an object, or vehicle by which the poet is able to view the “world” and its competing elements in the space of the poem itself. Keeping in mind Kelly’s determination to be a “Last scientist of the whole,” it appears that the concerns of the Objectivists make a stronger link to deep image. See Rothenberg, Jerome. and Pierre Joris. *Poems for the Millennium Volume Two*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995. (525-526).


24 Ornette Coleman once remarked: “It was when I found out I could make mistakes that I knew I was on to something.”

25 Zukofsky’s “A” was begun in 1927 and became his long, life work on par with Pound’s *Cantos* and Olson’s *Maximus Poems*. It is separated into twenty four sections, and stylistically it grows in complexity over time. The sections are comprised of sonnets, free verse, and at times, nods to Bach’s musical compositions. See: Zukofsky, Louis. “A.” New York: New Directions Press, 1978.

26 For his album *Free Jazz* (1961), Ornette Coleman assembled a double-quartet. One drummer played a straight rhythm, while the other played in double-time. Each quartet played off of their respective energy, culminating in a forty minute single track album. As the composition progresses, there is a heightened sense of urgency, and a series of accelerations in time. The cacophony that is Kelly’s “Essay on Form” resonates as a kind of “linguistic” composition in which the alternating stanzas act as though Coleman’s double-quartet. See: Ornette Coleman. *Free Jazz*. New York: Atlantic Records, 1961.
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